Małgorzata Wójcik-Dudek

Reading (in) the Holocaust

Practices of Postmemory in Recent Polish Literature for Children and Young Adults

Studies in Jewish History and Memory

PETER LANG

The book deals with the issue of the Holocaust in the Polish literature for children and adolescents. Drawing upon some of the leading Polish authors of the twentieth and the twentieth-first centuries, the author reveals the historical, ideological, and cultural entanglement of their works. The main focus of the book is to search for reasons behind the outpouring of interest in the Holocaust noticed in the most recent Polish literature for younger readers. Among these reasons, the author lists the Polish local and historical context, the new approach to issues traditionally seen as taboo, the development of memory and postmemory narratives, and the postmodern shift from a discursive totality and universalist explanations.

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Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich

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Table of Contents

Chapter One Mount of Remembrance

> Radio: And then the Germans marched into Warsaw and said that Poland wasn't Poland anymore, and Warsaw wasn't its capital but a rubble-filled hole in the ground …
> Little Metal Girl: Dead right, a hole! A shithole. I hate this city. The tube, wrrr, the trams, bruu, stinking buses, and wherever you're headed, you go over dead bodies, dead bodies, dead bodies!
>
> Dorota Masłowska*: Między nami dobrze jest*[1]

Aleksandra Ubertowska argues that the above passage from Dorota Masłowska's play is an affirmation of posthistoricity in the sense of "the atrophy of 'grand narratives' […] which lay claim to imposing order on the magma-like, amorphous reality, to forcing it into a coherent shape and meaning."[2]

Ubertowska is right, but her remark deserves some elaboration. The point is that the words of the Little Metal Girl reverberate with the *summa* of contemporary Polish socio-national projects, whose implementation is far from successful. The methodology of parochial, nationalistically-coloured patriotism has apparently failed, along with the concept of ethical-aesthetic education, if aims and destinations are only reached "over dead bodies" and in the rhythm of Julian Tuwim's celebrated "Locomotive."[3] As "dead bodies, dead bodies, dead bodies"

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1 Dorota Masłowska's *Między nami dobrze jest* (literally: *Things are Good Between Us*) has been translated into English by Artur Zapałowski as *No Matter How Hard We Tried, or We Exist on the Best Terms we Can* and published in *(A)pollonia: Twenty-First Century Polish Drama and Texts for the Stage*, eds. Krystyna Duniec, Joanna Klass and Joanna Krakowska (London: Seagull Books, 2014). The quotation here does not come from this translation.

2 Aleksandra Ubertowska, "Historia bez Ojca. Postmemorialne kobiece narracje o wojnie i Holokauście," in Aleksandra Ubertowska, *Holocaust: Auto(tanato)grafie* (Warszawa: IBL, 2014), pp. 182–210, on p. 197. Throughout this book, quotations from non-English sources are provided in translation by the translator of this volume, if not indicated otherwise.

3 Written in 1938, "Locomotive" is an extremely popular children's poem which set the standard of Polish poetry for children for many years. The rhythm, rhymes and onomatopoeic devices used in it perfectly capture the movement of a speeding train. The poem would later be referenced by Stanisław Wygodzki, a Polish poet of Jewish

replace the poem's original devices: the rhythmic "rail track, rail track, rail track" and the onomatopoeic "clickety, clickety, clickety click," we are witnessing a cultural change of the guard and a concomitant revision of several paradigms which have been institutionally inculcated into the consciousness of the young generation.[4]

The components of any memory-centred project change in parallel to ideological, political and aesthetic transformations. Consequently, "Project Memory" should primarily be examined in terms of the generation, i.e. of the community as well as of the agendas and roles of institutions which cast the past in desirable moulds. Such pursuits result in fostering postmemory, as proposed by Marianne Hirsch, who pointedly distinguishes between the memory of those who experienced certain events (the Holocaust in this case) and the memory of those who were born later and thus had no such direct experiences. Postmemory makes up not only the space of a given generational community[5] or a locus of the constant negotiation of meanings, but also a site of oppression by institutions that develop strategies of remembering. Because of its specific flexibility, postmemory, which is distributed over multiple postmemorial narratives ascribed to various generations, becomes an "interpretation of the narrated events, a cultural representation which is taking shape here and now."[6]

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descent, who lost his wife and daughter in truly tragic circumstances (realising what was awaiting them at Auschwitz, all of them took luminal on the train from the Będzin ghetto to the camp; Wygodzki himself survived). His bitter poem "Locomotive," which alludes to Tuwim's popular pre-war text, is a heart-rending elegy for his lost child.

4 Masłowska (born in 1983) uses the topos of the train, one of the most popular images shaping Poland's historical landscape. In Polish culture, the train is associated both with the Holocaust (as the Nazi "technology" of the Holocaust accorded a very special role to railways) and with the year 1968, when Polish citizens of Jewish origin were forced to leave the country. An estimated twenty thousand people emigrated from Poland then. The enforced exodus was symbolised by the Gdańsk Station in Warsaw, from which trains had been departing to the Treblinka extermination camp during the war. The train topos also features profusely in the tradition of Polish martyrdom linked to Soviet oppression. The train route to Siberia has been re-cast as a symbolic Calvary. Masłowska's rhythmical reiteration of "dead bodies, dead bodies, dead bodies" insists that the history of Poland is founded on suffering and death.

5 See Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago, IL, and London, UK: Chicago University Press, 1992).

6 Aleksandra Boroń, "Holocaust i jego reprezentacje w przestrzeni pamięci i tożsamości," in Aleksandra Boroń, *Pedagogika (p)o Holocauście. Pamięć. Tożsamość. Edukacja* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2013), p. 93.

Given this, examining the postmemorial representations of the Holocaust in literature for a young readership is expedient not only in order to catalogue the images of the Holocaust but also, primarily perhaps, in order to identify the topoi and the narrative modes which formatively affect the memory of children, i.e. of the so-called fourth generation.

The Predicament of Postmemory

As postmemory, the notion coined by Hirsch, simultaneously refers to the present and to the future, it is invaluable in exploring the history of Holocaust representations, supporting in this way the construction of a history of historiography which encompasses the narratives of several generations of historians and artists. Ironically speaking, the Shoah has a future, as it were, which Norman Finkelstein showed quite uncompromisingly in his controversial *The Holocaust Industry*, where the Holocaust – or, more precisely, the memory of the Holocaust – was envisioned as an effectively working, profit-generating mechanism. Things being the way they are, Finkelstein appealed to his (our) contemporaries to perform "the noblest gesture" for the six million Holocaust victims, that is, "to preserve their memory, learn from their suffering and let them finally rest in peace."[7]

This is quite a radical suggestion and it stands a rather slim chance of being followed,[8] although researchers agree that while the powerful appeal which the Holocaust testimonies initially had has not subsided perhaps, the ways in which this potency is hoarded and used have profoundly changed. Berel Lang, who sharply criticises the subjectivity and figurativeness of literary discourse, which is after all a testimony to the second generation's altered attitude to the memory of the Holocaust, insists that "the most valuable […] writings about the Nazi genocide appear in the form of historical discourse,"[9] and though this discourse will continue to develop, "admittedly, a second and third generation of memories

7 Norman Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (London and New York: Verso, 2000), p. 150.

8 Finkelstein's book provoked some quite sharp responses, for example from Alvin H. Rosenfeld. See Alvin H. Rosenfeld, "The End of the Holocaust," in Alvin H. Rosenfeld, *The End of the Holocaust* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011), pp. 238–270.

9 Berel Lang, *Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003), p. 123.

[…] have since added their identities to the event itself […] an incentive to art and reflection."[10]

The strict position adopted by Lang, who basically denied all those who have not experienced the Holocaust personally any right to narrative, could not but invite incisive criticism. Hayden White, one of Lang's most vehement polemicists, insisted that there were no objective facts and historiography was always an interpretation. His famous dictum that "[t]here is an inexpungable relativity in every representation of historical phenomena"[11] initiated explorations of historical prose, or rather of a postmodernist genre of the (neo)historical novel which produces historiographic metafiction that typically shows the historical embedment of fiction and the discursive structuring of history.[12] According to White, the chief (if not the only) purpose of the narrative form is to facilitate the absorption of information.[13] Consequently, if historiography is inescapably figurative, there is no avoiding metaphorisation in any accounts of the Holocaust experience.[14]

The concept of the narrativity of history proved revolutionary vis-à-vis Holocaust representations; it also invaluably contributed to the idea of the ethical shift which was taking place in historiography and was embodied first and foremost in a heightened alertness to the positioning of the knowing subject and his/her attitude to the object of knowing.[15] Specifically, White's theory undermined the belief in the objectivity of depictions of the past and in the transparency of language as a medium, instead offering reflection on the narrative structures underpinned by metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony.

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10 Berel Lang, *The Future of the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 175.

11 Hayden White, "Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth," in *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution,"* ed. Saul Friedlander (Cambridge, MA, and London, UK: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 37–53, on p. 37.

12 Linda Hutcheon, "Historiographic Metafiction: Parody and the Intertextuality of History," in *Intertextuality and Contemporary American Fiction*, eds. Patrick O'Donnell and Robert C. Davis (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), pp. 151–170.

13 Hayden White, "The Practical Past," in *The Practical Past (Flash Points)*, ed. Ed Dimendberg (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2014), pp. 3–24, on p. 19.

14 Hayden White, "Figural Realism in Witness Literature," *Parallax*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (2004), pp. 113–124, on pp. 117–118. http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals. DOI: 10.1080/1353464032000171145. Accessed 11 Apr. 2019.

15 Kellner, Hans, "Etyczny moment w teorii historii," in *Historia: O jeden świat za daleko*, trans. and ed. Ewa Domańska (Poznań: IH UAM, 1997), pp. 71–100, on pp. 81–82.

Frank Ankersmit, a practitioner of late narrativism, has gone a step further. The Dutch philosopher has developed a concept of historical experience which originates in contact with an object that offers direct access to the past. Thereby, Ankersmit proposes going beyond narrative and becoming receptive to a specific revelation of the past. This means that post-postmodernist history should focus on experience comprehended as a sublime relation with the past. Such a concept of history demands that accounts of the past use aesthetic categories rather than epistemological ones, a notion that triggered immediate criticism from historians.[16]

Undoubtedly, postmemorial practices can also easily be accused of appropriating the past because, as Hirsch explains, the link between postmemory and the past is established through imagination, projection and creation, rather than through recollection.[17] It is precisely the concept of recall that will exert a considerable, differential influence on the shape, or rather shapes, of memory, because "in the model Hirsch proposes, it is essential to register the temporal and qualitative difference between the memories of the first and second generations of the Holocaust. *Postmemory* is memory which is in a sense belated, even vicarious, as Hirsch puts it, in relation to the memory of the Survivors, for one of its goals is to work through the parents' trauma anew, something they have failed to do themselves."[18]

According to Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, the definition of postmemory should be extended to include displacement as its vital factor, because memory is concretised in a symbolic space and time, which turn out to be, as it were, a replacement of the past. Tokarska-Bakir claims that this displacement is caused by the fact that the actual Holocaust survivors,[19] who have instilled certain models of Holocaust representations in the second generation, are inevitably passing away. Consequently, the depositaries of such interpretations of the past are understandably challenged to remember the Shoah otherwise than it

16 See Dorota Wolska, "Doświadczenie," in *Modi memorandi. Leksykon kultury pamięci*, eds. Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska and Robert Traba, in collaboration with Joanna Kalicka (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2014), pp. 94–99.

17 Marianne Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory," *Poetics Today*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (2008), pp. 103–128, on p. 106.

18 Małgorzata Pakier, "'Postmemory' jako figura refleksyjna w popularnym dyskursie o Zagładzie," *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów*, No. 2 (2005), pp. 195–208, on p. 196.

19 See Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, "Jedwabne – historia jako fetysz." *Gazeta Wyborcza* (16 Feb. 2003).

was transmitted to them.[20] Multiple synonyms of postmemory are invented in repeated attempts to capture this transfer of narrative from parents to children; notable examples include absent memory, belated memory, inherited memory, prosthetic memory, memory of ashes and the like.[21]

In the course of time, principles channelling intergenerational communication were established and endorsed in the space of postmemory; consequently, the necessary conditions of mutual understanding were met, such as the development of the same system of meanings for communication participants; attentive listening to the sender of the message; and the negotiation of an agreement among the communication participants. Of course, in the context of the second generation's postmemory, these principles of Luhmann's communication model could not be expected to be accurately implemented, because the survivors, as a rule, tended either to be silent or to rely on severely restrictive narrative practices. What was needed was a new model of writing that was compatible with the experiences of the second generation and, at the same time, addressed to the subsequent one. Aesthetically shocking tales of the children of survivors were primarily supposed to fulfil a therapeutic function.

This process is perfectly encapsulated in David Grossman's novel *See Under: Love*. One of its parts, entitled "Momik," is a profound analysis of relationships between a child who has been raised in complete ignorance of the Holocaust, which directly affected his grandfather, and the adults entangled in the conspiracy of silence. Momik endeavours to release the "Nazi Beast" all by himself in order to deal with it once and for all. For this purpose, he hurts the animals he keeps shut in the basement of his house, yet as cruelty does not bring him any closer to the truth about the Holocaust, Momik attempts to grasp it by reading. However, even though he reads avidly and assiduously, he still cannot comprehend the passivity of his grandfather and other victims of Nazi oppression. He grows alienated from his loved ones and eventually goes away to school, losing contact with them, which ultimately precludes the discovery of truth.

According to Shoshana Ronen, Grossman's novel includes an array of topoi which were later mandatory in the literature of the second generation: a child protagonist who grows up in a traumatised family, the silence of adults which forces him/her to construct a biography of his/her own, being named after a murdered family member, the feeling of estrangement and a sense of the loss of

20 See James Young, *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 3–4.

21 See Saryusz-Wolska and Traba, eds., *Modi memorandi*.

childhood.[22] These thematic concerns seem universal and can also be found outside of Israeli literature, which Ronen examines.

In Poland, books by authors who survived the Holocaust as children have also been published, particularly after 1989, side by side with the texts produced by such writers as Henryk Grynberg, for whom the Holocaust has always been the axis of literary narrative. Among them are Michał Głowiński and Wilhelm Dichter, members of so-called generation 1.5.[23] Still, crucial to investigations of postmemory are rather the voices of the second generation: Magdalena Tulli, Ewa Kuryluk, Agata Tuszyńska and Bożena Keff. It was actually in the new trends of representing the Holocaust that Przemysław Czapliński noticed an opportunity for forging a new language,[24] even if it were to involve a risk of profanation, for profanation actually makes inquiry into the *sacrum* of the Holocaust possible.[25] Therefore, the writings of the second generation can be considered to have broken the parental monopoly on the Holocaust narrative. Today, we are

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22 Shoshana Ronen, "Od zmagań z bestią nazistowską w piwnicy do zmagań z tą bestią w nas samych," trans. from English Stanisław Obirek, trans. from Hebrew Michał Sobelman, in *Porzucić etyczną arogancję: Ku reinterpretacji podstawowych pojęć humanistyki w świetle wydarzeń Szoa*, eds. Beata Anna Polak and Tomasz Polak (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Wydziału Nauk Społecznych UAM, 2011), pp. 81–112, on p. 94. Ronen also comprehensively discussed this theme in her book *Polin – a Land of Forest and Rivers: Images of Poland and Poles in Contemporary Hebrew Literature in Israel* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2007), pp. 246–247. According to Avner Holtzman, David Grossman's writing is groundbreaking in that he gives up on portraying the Holocaust in order to explore the impact of the Holocaust on the next generation. See Avner Holtzman, "Holocaust w literaturze hebrajskiej," trans. Tomasz Łysak, *Teksty Drugie*, No. 5 (2004), pp. 142–152, on p. 145.

23 According to Przemysław Czapliński, generation 1.5 founded the literature of "belated confession." See Przemysław Czapliński, "Zagłada – niedokończona narracja polskiej nowoczesności," in *Ślady obecności*, eds. Sławomir Buryła and Alicja Molisak (Kraków: Universitas, 2010), pp. 337–381, on p. 359.

24 In his polemics with Richard Rorty's *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity*, Czapliński stressed that "only our own suffering, to express which we are looking for adequate means, enables us to lend our expression to the suffering of others." Przemysław Czapliński, "Zagłada – niedokończona narracja," p. 378. At this point, it is helpful to recall Jean-Luc Nancy, who rejected the prohibition of representing the Holocaust, at the same time abiding by the ethical injunction to bear witness to the truth. See Jean-Luc Nancy, "Forbidden Representation," in Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2005), pp. 27–50.

25 Przemysław Czapliński, "Zagłada i profanacja," *Teksty Drugie*, No. 4 (2009), pp. 199–213, on p. 212.

rather faced with the representations fashioned by the third generation – people of both Jewish and non-Jewish descent (e.g. the work of Piotr Paziński, Mariusz Sieniewicz or Igor Ostachowicz).

Pondering the changes in writing about the Holocaust, Michał Głowiński distinguishes three stages, which were dominated, respectively, by documentary writing, narratives akin to the literature of a personal document, and counterfactual, highly conceptual, post-Holocaust literature.[26] This trajectory of aesthetic transformation has been compellingly captured by Czapliński: "We live on […] the sublimity we remember from literature. And as we produce history modelled on the books we have read, the past we have matches the library we hold in our minds."[27]

Thus, if Czapliński announces the end of grand narratives, his proclamation would seem to herald the waning of the communal historical narrative which has engendered a sense of group identity.[28] Yet Czapliński states that small narratives, published with increasing frequency and read with increasing eagerness, as they are, can gain in significance only if society is permeated by an urge for expiation, that is, for articulating one's own individual truth.

It is thus no coincidence that the beginning of the new millennium abounded in literary writings about the Holocaust, many of which were to prove extremely important. This discourse was joined by survivors and members of the second and third generations, as well as historians, which certainly boosted the popularity of this theme and enhanced the diversity of its literary representations. This tendency was especially vividly manifested in shortlists for Poland's prestigious literary prizes. In 2000, as many as three out of the eight books shortlisted for the NIKE Literary Award, one of the most coveted distinctions in Poland, addressed

26 See Michał Głowiński, "Oczy donosiciela," *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały*, Vol. 2, No. 10 (2014), pp. 853–860, on p. 857; Sławomir Buryła, Dorota Krawczyńska and Jacek Leociak, eds., *Literatura polska wobec Zagłady (1939–1968)* (Warszawa: IBL, 2012).

27 Przemysław Czapliński, "Przesilenie nowoczesności. Proza polska 1989–2005 wobec Wielkich Narracji," in *Narracja po końcu (wielkich) narracji. Kolekcje, obiekty, symulakra*, eds. Hanna Gosk and Andrzej Zieniewicz (Warszawa: Elipsa, 2007), pp. 34–55, on p. 46.

28 According to Lech Nijakowski, grand narratives have profoundly affected the "mentality" of Poles, whom the mythologisation and heroisation of the past helped continue resisting assimilation over several generations. Lech Michał Nijakowski, *Polska polityka pamięci. Esej socjologiczny* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, 2008), p. 139.

the vicissitudes of Polish-Jewish history: *Osmaleni* (*Scorched*)[29] by Irit Amiel, *Tworki* (*Tworki*) by Marek Bieńczyk and *Szkoła bezbożników* (*The Atheists' School*) by Wilhelm Dichter. The following year's shortlist was similar: out of its twenty titles, no fewer than five concerned the Shoah or other Jewish themes: *Sąsiedzi* (*Neighbors*) by Jan Tomasz Gross, *Memorbuch* by Henryk Grynberg, *Z Auszwicu do Belsen* [*From Auschwitz to Belsen*] by Marian Pankowski, *U progu Zagłady* (*On the Threshold of the Holocaust*) by Tomasz Szarota and *Zmierzchy i poranki* [*Dusk and Dawn*] by Piotr Szewc. In 2002, a year when biographies and autobiographies proliferated unprecedentedly, the NIKE shortlist included *Wspomnienia wojenne* (*Those Who Trespass against Us: One Woman's War against the Nazis*) by Karolina Lanckorońska, *Postać z cieniem* [*The Figure with a Shadow*] by Bożena Umińska, *Nożyk profesora* [*The Professor's Penknife*] – Tadeusz Różewicz's volume of poetry and *W ogrodzie pamięci* (*In the Garden of Memory*) by Joanna Olczak-Ronikier.[30] This seems to be a well-entrenched tendency as, year in and year out, books exploring Jewish themes abundantly make their way to the shortlist of the NIKE Literary Prize, with recent nominees including *Rejwach* [*Uproar*] by Mikołaj Grynberg, *Sendlerowa. W ukryciu* [*Irena Sendler: In Hiding*] by Anna Bikont and *Duchy Jeremiego* [*Jeremy's Ghosts*] by Robert Rient.

In all probability, the novels listed above represent "memory regained"[31] (as distinguished and thoroughly discussed by Michael C. Steinlauf), which is capable of engendering cultural memory.[32] For literature about the Holocaust

29 The Polish titles of literary works cited in this book are accompanied by an English translation, which does not always mean that respective texts have actually been translated into English. To help the reader distinguish between translated and not translated works, different punctuation marks are used. Specifically, the titles of translated texts are parenthesised, while the titles of those which have not been translated are square-bracketed.

30 Bartłomiej Krupa, *Opowiedzieć Zagładę. Polska proza i historiografia wobec Holocaustu (1987–2003)* (Kraków: Universitas, 2013), p. 364.

31 See Michael C. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997). Based on historical events, Steinlauf divides Polish memory into a series of periods and discusses them in consecutive chapters of his book entitled: "Poles and Jews during the Holocaust," "Memory's Wounds," "Memory Repressed," "Memory Expelled," "Memory Reconstructed" and "Memory Regained," (the last timeframe, which spans between 1989–1995, is tellingly accompanied by a question mark).

32 See Aleida Assmann, "Przestrzenie pamięci. Formy i przemiany pamięci kulturowej," trans. Piotr Przybyła, in *Pamięć zbiorowa i kulturowa: Współczesna perspektywa niemiecka*, ed. Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska (Kraków: Universitas, 2009), pp. 101–142.

is on the one hand an original product of the new generation and, on the other, an outcome of the experiences of the parents' generation. In these knotted circumstances, references to the past warrant cultural continuity, although the modifications ushered in by the new generation attest to their exceptional input into the structures of memory. In this sense, cultural memory is a variety of collective memory,[33] which primarily performs identity-related functions and, as such, calls for modes of preservation[34] which make it transmittable to the following generation.

The topography of Jerusalem's Mount of Remembrance (*Har Hazikaron*), as its very name suggests, seems to be perfectly in tune with the dialogicity of cultural memory. Founded in 1953, Yad Vashem together with the Holocaust History Museum established in 2005 occupy only a part of its area. The rest of the terrain is to be handed over to the next generation in order to construct a new narrative about the Holocaust. This venture perfectly exemplifies the transposition of cultural memory onto space.

What seems evident in this context is that the smoothness of transmission within cultural memory is immensely affected not only by art,[35] but also by education.

Educational Practices vis-à-vis the Holocaust

An overwhelming impression is that the Holocaust has always been associated with memory, as the imperative to remember has invariably been intertwined with all Shoah-related practices. In her superb book, *Israel's Holocaust and the*

For the German original, see Aleida Assmann, *Errinerungsräume: Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Geddächtnissen* (München: C. H. Beck Verlag, 1999).

33 Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*; Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

34 Aleida Assmann, "O medialnej historii pamięci kulturowej," trans. Karolina Sidowska, in Aleida Assmann, *Między historią a pamięcią*, ed. Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2013), pp. 127–143. This volume is a collection of Assmann's texts translated from German. For corresponding ideas, cf. Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

35 Pierre Nora, "Czas pamięci," trans. Wiktor Dłuski, *Res Publica Nowa*, No. 7 (2001), pp. 37–43; Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les lieux de memoire*," trans. Marc Roudebush, *Representations*, No. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring 1989), pp. 7–24.

Politics of Nationhood, Idith Zertal observes that the Holocaust was inscribed in the Israeli project of remembering not simply as an incomprehensible event, but above all as an embarrassing one. However, the trial of Adolf Eichmann, which Zertal refers to as "Ben-Gurion's last great national project," transformed the awkward silence into a heated debate on the Event, inaugurating a period of conscious critical examination of "the numinous event of the Holocaust" and the attitudes of people, both the perpetrators and the victims.[36]

The Holocaust ceased to be solely the problem of the survivors and began to capture passionate attention not only in Israel but also all over the world. This development was largely precipitated by the reports from Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem, published in *The New Yorker* by Hannah Arendt, who was deeply conflicted with Gershom Scholem and accused by him of not loving Israel and hating Zionism.[37] That the Holocaust found itself at the centre of public interest was undoubtedly helped by Arendt's famed *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1961), where she developed her seminal, albeit profoundly criticised, concept of the banality of evil.

Given this, it is hardly surprising that the 1960s saw the first attempts to teach about the Holocaust in Israel, which were inspired by Theodor W. Adorno's radio talk symptomatically entitled "Education after Auschwitz." In Adorno's view, the primary responsibility of education was prevention, that is, making sure that the Holocaust would never happen again. His vision of education was emphatically anti-authoritarian, as it excluded pedagogy from any participation in building a totalitarian state. In Adorno's framework, Holocaust education was essentially underpinned by empathy.[38]

As a matter of fact, empathy still seems to be axial to education today, even though the methodology of teaching about the Holocaust has already developed mechanisms that promote going beyond the emotional level towards intellectual generalisation and historical knowledge. With these three learning levels in place, didactic practices, which lead from emotions to understanding, to

36 Idith Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 6.

37 Scholem considered Eichmann's execution ill-advised and claimed that, with such a criminal, the death penalty had produced an illusion of law and wrongly suggested that the Holocaust could be comprehended and find closure through punishing the guiltiest individuals.

38 Robert Szuchta, "Refleksje o nauczaniu historii Holokaustu w polskiej szkole," in *Tematy żydowskie*, eds. Elżbieta Traba and Robert Traba (Olsztyn: Wspólnota Kulturowa Borussia, 1999), pp. 259–272.

embedding events in the historical context, guarantee safe, non-traumatising Holocaust instruction at school.[39]

Notably, besides the obvious task of teaching about the event, Holocaust education today has other responsibilities ascribed to it. The more remote the historical period of the Holocaust grows, the more frequently Holocaust education gets inscribed in discourses which are only tangentially related to its original pedagogical purposes. Bogusław Śliwerski contends that postmodern pedagogy dispenses with the traditional question "By what methods and for what aims must we educate today?" and supplants it with a new one: "What social function does education still perform today?"[40]

Consequently, contemporary Holocaust education does not stop at fostering empathy or providing knowledge about the past, but is instead incorporated into the modern project, which is fundamentally informed by the concepts of intercultural and/or postcolonial education. The former, which makes Holocaust education part of efforts aimed at educating society to be prepared for living in the realities of cultural diversity, is based on intercultural learning in contact with the Other. The latter, while safeguarding the memory of the Holocaust, also evokes other narratives which call for inclusion within cultural memory. Such a model of education promotes flexible thinking and the authentic and profound experience of encounter with the Other. Crucially, a shift in the educational approach to the Holocaust entails adopting a multidirectional model of memory, one inclusive of and legitimising the multiplicity of narratives without promoting any of them to be a dominant one.

In the model of education derived from Emmanuel Lévinas's philosophy, "encounter does not involve asking 'who am I?' or 'who are you?'; instead, encounter takes place when we are faced with 'where are you?' and when responding 'I'm here' we engage in a relationship with the Other."[41] Such a

39 This model also underlies the educational practices of Israeli schools, where teaching about the Holocaust begins in the earliest grades. Older children are expected to subdue emotions and acquire an intellectual grasp of the events, while adolescents are encouraged to link their emotional and intellectual experiences to the historical narrative with the support of teachers. This does not mean, however, that Holocaust education is an already settled issue in Israel. On the contrary, the Israeli memory of the Event is by no means an expression of national unity, which results in multiple curricular arrangements.

40 Bogusław Śliwerski, *Współczesne teorie i metody wychowawcze* (Kraków: Impuls, 2010), p. 363.

41 Admittedly things can look rather different in practice, as it is difficult to avoid the pitfalls of the "diversity festival" which favours quick and superficial contacts with the

relationship demands that we constantly negotiate the positions from which we address each other. This seems to be a fundamental task of education because without it our contact with the past will inevitably be limited to repeating the same gestures all over again.

To better grasp this, we can usefully draw on the insights of Ernst van Alphen, who is apprehensive of repetition as, in his view, it fosters acting out the Holocaust instead of working through it, since the hunt for the most archival, i.e. allegedly the purest representation (e.g. a list or a chart), can mutate into a replication of the perpetrators' practices, whereas the goal of education is not to multiply repetitions, but to make change through conscious reiteration.[42] Importantly, Van Alphen recommends a limited trust in knowledge about the Holocaust. His teaching experience suggests that students are tired of what could be called the etiquette of Holocaust education, which dictates the rules and norms of conduct. They want to experience the memory of the Holocaust in different ways, first and foremost through emotions. Advocating the reinstatement of affects in Holocaust education may imply that there is a surfeit of facts and data, an overdosing which paralyses action, breeds stagnation, induces apathy and turns against memory.

Such learning experiences can result in a refusal to participate in the "theatre" of memory, which is exquisitely shown in *We Won't See Auschwitz* by Jérémie Dres (born in 1982).[43] With the title sounding like an emphatic statement of counter-memory, Dres's popular comic book tells a story of a thirty-year-old man who goes with his brother on a trip to Poland to look for his Jewish roots. When travelling across the homeland of their ancestors, the young men deliberately steer clear of Auschwitz, convinced that the truth about the past and simultaneously about their identity cannot be found in the extermination camp museum.

Other. They easily breed complacency, stirred by the misguided belief that we are all similar to each other. Tomasz Szkudlarek, "Postkolonializm jako dyskurs tożsamości: w stronę implikacji dla polskich dyskusji edukacyjnych," in *Spory o edukację. Dylematy i kontrowersje we współczesnych pedagogikach*, eds. Zbigniew Kwieciński i Lech Witkowski (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych, 1993), pp. 301–314, on p. 310.

42 Ernst van Alphen, "Afekt, trauma i rozumienie: sztuka ponad granicami wyobraźni," an interview by Roma Sendyka and Katarzyna Bojarska, *Teksty Drugie*, No. 4 (2012), pp. 207–218, on p. 210.

43 Jérémie Dres, *We Won't See Auschwitz*, trans. Edward Gauvin (London: Self Made Hero, 2012).

The Polish School of Memory

In Poland, the memory of the Holocaust is shaped in young people chiefly at school. Without examining the role that history lessons play in this process,[44] I will focus on the obligatory reading lists for Polish classes. The school canon of texts about the Holocaust has been comprehensively discussed by Sylwia Karolak.[45] In her examination of opulent literary and didactic resources, Karolak distinguishes two moments of particular relevance to the presence of writings about the Holocaust in Polish language education. One of them is 1947, when Seweryna Szmaglewska's *Dymy nad Birkenau* (*Smoke over Birkenau*) was put on the obligatory reading list for primary schools as the first literary text about the Holocaust. The book had a long and powerful formative impact on the post-Holocaust imaginary of the following generations of Poles. The other crucial moment came in 1991, when the inclusion 77777of Hanna Krall's *Zdążyć przed Panem Bogiem* (*To Outwit God*) on the reading list proved to be the last essential change in the school canon. Karolak additionally enumerates a few minor turning points marked by the addition of new titles to the list, such as Zofia Nałkowska's *Medaliony* (*Medallions*) in 1950, Tadeusz Borowski's Auschwitz short stories in 1972, Jerzy Ficowski's poems in 1982, and Leopold Buczkowski's *Czarny potok* (*Black Torrent*) alongside Janusz Korczak's *Pamiętnik* (*Ghetto Diary*) in 1984.[46]

Interestingly, Karolak's exploration of the "scholastic" history of literature about the Holocaust concludes with the observation that until 1991 there hardly was any tolerably fixed Polish canon of texts about the Holocaust, and that the reasons for this failure of canonisation processes are to be attributed to combined

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44 See Robert Szuchta, "Edukacja o Holokauście AD 2013, czyli czego uczeń polskiej szkoły może się dowiedzieć o Holokauście na lekcjach historii w dziesięć lat po 'dyskusji jedwabieńskiej'?" in *Auschwitz i Holokaust. Edukacja w szkole i miejscu pamięci*, ed. Piotr Trojański (Oświęcim: Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau, 2014), pp. 23–48.

45 See Sylwia Karolak, *Doświadczenie Zagłady w literaturze polskiej 1947–199: Kanon, który nie powstał* (Poznań: Nauka i Innowacje, 2014).

46 See *Ibid.*, pp. 33–34. Karolak also lists the titles of texts read at schools between 1947 and 1990, i.e. when the Holocaust was consigned to the peripheries of Polish language instruction. They are, for example, *Dzieciństwo w pasiakach* (*Childhood behind Barbed Wire*) by Bogdan Bartnikowski, *Samson* and *Miasto niepokonane* [*The Invincible City*] by Kazimierz Brandys, *Rozmowy z katem* (*Conversations with an Executioner*) by Kazimierz Moczarski, *Ślady* [*Traces*] by Ludwik Hering, "Campo di Fiori" by Czesław Miłosz, "Warkoczyk" ("Pigtail") by Tadeusz Różewicz, "Żydom polskim" ("To Polish Jews") by Władysław Broniewski and *Niemcy* [*The Germans*] by Leon Kruczkowski.

political and social factors.[47] This would suggest that after 1991 a canon of texts about the Holocaust was eventually forged.

In another study, Agnieszka Rypel analyses the topos of the stranger/foreigner in Polish language textbooks and notices that the ethnic identity of writers (actually not only those of Jewish descent) was long ignored in educational policy: "Paradoxical though it may sound, the vision of an ethnically homogenous Poland […] which was forged in the interwar period to tout the Polish nation as the only creative agent was actually sustained under the People's Republic of Poland and still holds sway today. Polish textbooks frame the great aristocratic families (e.g. the Wiśniowieckis and the Czartoryskis) as Polish, obscuring their Ruthenian or Lithuanian background. The same strategy is applied to German bourgeois families, therein Cracow-based printers. […] Textbooks for primary schools and now for junior secondary schools as well are very careful not to highlight the contributions of Jews or people of Jewish origin to Polish culture. Many generations of students know Bolesław Leśmian, Antoni Słonimski, Julian Tuwim and even Janusz Korczak as writers, but are entirely ignorant of their ethnic background. In and of itself, this might not be very controversial, were it not for the fact that the contributions of people of Polish origin to the culture and scholarship of other nations are at the same time propagandistically spotlighted."[48]

Rypel also points out that, interestingly, while information about the descent of an author or an artist may be included in the textbook, it tends to be so implicit that students can easily miss it; for example, Bruno Schulz's biographical note mentions that he was shot dead in the ghetto, and Anna Frailich's says that she left Poland in 1969.[49] Rypel registers positive changes with satisfaction, noticing that although textbooks still stress religious devotion as the primary feature of the Jewish nation or community, they no longer perpetuate many other stereotypical features of the Jew.[50]

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47 See *Ibid.*, p. 38.

48 Agnieszka Rypel, "Toposy kształtujące nacechowaną ideologicznie zbiorową tożsamość narodową i społeczną," in Agnieszka Rypel, *Ideologiczny wymiar dyskursu edukacyjnego na przykładzie podręczników języka polskiego z lat 1918–2010* (Bydgoszcz: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kazimierza Wielkiego, 2012), pp. 175–244, on p. 209.

49 What is alluded to, but not articulated explicitly, is that her migration was one of the enforced departures of Jews from Poland under a government-orchestrated campaign which reached its peak in 1968. Citizens of Jewish descent were stripped of Polish citizenship and coerced to leave the country without the right to return.

50 For compelling examples of anti-Semitism ingrained in Polish culture, see Bożena Keff, *Antysemityzm: Niezamknięta historia* (Warszawa: Czarna Owca, 2013).

The Ethical Challenge of Reading about the Holocaust at School, or on the Importance of Context

It seems that despite the recent changes in classroom approaches to teaching about and addressing the Holocaust, no corresponding literary canon has taken a recognisable shape yet. Moreover, I believe that such a canon, if too firmly structured, might in fact curtail the "freedom" of the formation of postmemory which, to repeat, is produced within a particular generation – here and now – in response to the emotional needs of contemporary people and in accord with the aesthetic frameworks which are currently valid.

I am afraid that the difficulty in addressing the Holocaust which besets Polish schools does not result from the lack of a canon or from its instability, but rather from the fact that the Holocaust has been dissociated from other issues of Jewish culture and history and turned into the only pivot for the school narrative about Jews. As a consequence of such sustained uncoupling, literature probing Jewish themes (other than the Holocaust, that is) is only poorly represented in the classroom, while texts about the Holocaust are fetishised.

The claim that the canon of readings about the Holocaust cannot be fixed in contemporary school education begs some clarification. Actually, we would be hard pressed to talk of any canon today; at best, if we want to salvage the notion in the first place, we might refer to a multiplicity of canons, which often hinge on teachers' quite arbitrary choices. This is where both the weakness and the power of reading literature at school lie. It is the Polish teacher who becomes a depositary of texts, and his/her literary knowledge and competence determine the ways in which literature is presented. This need not be a fault, provided that the teacher receives conceptual and methodological support as regards not only perfecting the skills of reading texts about the Holocaust, but also learning about the process and the history of such readings (whereby universities that train Polish teachers have a crucial role to play). The inclusion of such competences into the teacher education curriculum is necessary to prevent classroom literary analyses from being reduced merely to the historical context or to the emotional response, and to promote interpretations of the Holocaust meta-text. The latter invites reflection not only on what is conveyed, but also on how it is conveyed. Such aesthetic explorations may crucially affect the understanding of the distinctiveness of individual codes of remembering.

However, the reading of texts about the Holocaust at school usually eschews the "dramatic" facet of their production, even though a context-embedded evocation of disputes on or historical negotiations of Holocaust representations

would be extremely useful in interpreting the fortunes of postmemory.[51] It will not be an exaggeration to posit that in this context postmemory is reminiscent of Derrida's *différance*, for it can be defined and interpreted only in relation to prior postmemorial structures. The difference in their meanings harbours the generation's attitude to the Event that was the Holocaust.

It is rather obvious that the texts listed in the Polish *Core Curriculum* (*Podstawa programowa*… of 23rd December, 2008)[52] will not be enough to glean such insights from, even though the policy document is admittedly quite revolutionary as far as "Jewish issues" are concerned.

The Holocaust is first addressed in junior secondary school,[53] and the *Core Curriculum* recommends reading a selected short story by Ida Fink for this purpose. At the upper secondary education level, the Holocaust is fundamentally represented by Borowski's selected short stories, Krall's *To Outwit God* and Amiel's *Scorched*.

As can be seen, the reading list has been expanded by titles which have not been discussed at school before and which effectively augment the ways of presenting the Holocaust (*Scorched* is obviously particularly relevant to the concept of postmemory). Nevertheless, the problem is that none of these books are obligatory reading; they are all introduced in the "recommended" category. Practically speaking, this means that they may not be studied in Polish lessons at all. Scholastic Holocaust transmission is likely to still be shaped by the canonical

51 I mean the perennial conflict between the imperative to bear witness and the distrust of style, as expressed for example by Elie Wiesel, whose words have already become a metonymy of the inexpressibility of the Holocaust: "One generation later, it can still be said and must now be affirmed: There is no such thing as a literature of the Holocaust, nor can there be. The very expression is a contradiction in terms. Auschwitz negates any form of literature, as it defies all systems…" Alvin Hirsch Rosenfeld, *A Double Dying: Reflections on Holocaust Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), p. 14.

52 *Podstawa programowa kształcenia ogólnego dla gimnazjów i szkół ponadgimnazjalnych, których ukończenie umożliwia uzyskanie świadectwa dojrzałości po zdaniu egzaminu maturalnego*. Annex No 4 to the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 23rd December 2008 on the core curriculum of pre-school education and general education in particular types of schools (JoL of 15th January, 2009, No 4, item 17).

53 Between 1999 and 2016, Poland had a tripartite education system, including elementary school (6 years), junior secondary school (3 years) and senior secondary school (3 years). The Law of 14th December 2016 on the reform of education revoked this system, reinstating the prior two-tier system of elementary schooling (8 years) and post-elementary schooling (4 years).

texts which have "always" been there, such as Krall's reportage or Borowski's short stories. They tend to be chosen by teachers almost without exception as the familiar and methodologically mastered ones, and as representative of the Holocaust themes. Yet, emphatically, essay topics for the 2012 (advanced) "Matura" exam[54] included an assignment based on Ida Fink's short story; specifically, the assignment read: "Everyday life in the times of the Holocaust: Analysing and interpreting Ida Fink's 'In Front of the Mirror,' discuss the construction of the protagonist figures, their situation and the meanings of the eponymous mirror."

Still, the most interesting thing about the *Core Curriculum* is that it strives to place the texts about the Holocaust in a broader discourse on Jewish culture and the position of Jews in Poland. Consequently, at the basic level, the reading list has been expanded to include mandatory short stories by Bruno Schulz and optional readings, such as Isaac Bashevis Singer's *The Magician of Lublin* and Julian Stryjkowski' *Austeria* [*At a Roadside Inn*]; at the advanced level, two recommended, but non-compulsory readings – a reportage by Henryk Grynberg and a selected essay by Jan Błoński – have been added to the list. In practice, authors of textbooks indeed make use of selected passages from these texts, which improves their chances of actually being discussed in classroom. In this context, Błoński's "Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto" ("The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto")[55] seems to enjoy the greatest popularity.

With such recommended readings, there is a considerable chance of generating a basic, tolerably coherent structure of school narrative not so much about the Holocaust alone as about Jewish tradition per se. The optional choice of these

54 In broad lines, the *Matura* exam is taken at the end of secondary education (in high schools and technical high schools). Students must sit written tests in three obligatory subjects (Polish, mathematics and a foreign language) and in at least one elective subject. The obligatory exams are taken at what is referred to as the basic level, while the elective ones at the advanced level, with the levels differing in terms of knowledge and skills which are expected of students. The Matura exam scores are (usually) the only criterion of admission to university degree programmes, with universities, faculties and programmes autonomously determining their own score thresholds and required subjects. Importantly, in case of Polish, students must take their Matura exam at the basic level, but can choose to take the exam at the advanced level. Reading lists for the two levels differ, as do the respective standards regarding students' scope of knowledge, competencies and interpretive skills.

55 Published in the popular Polish weekly of the Catholic intelligentsia *Tygodnik Powszechny* in 1987, the essay by the eminent literary critic has ever since been an effective trigger of public debate on the moral responsibility of Poles for the fate their Jewish neighbours suffered during the Second World War.

texts is certainly a downside of the curricular decisions, but at the same time, the learning outcomes defined for the advanced level of Polish instruction include the capacity to recognise literary allusions and cultural symbols (e.g. biblical, Romantic, etc.) as well as their ideological and compositional function, together with signs of traditions, including antiquity, Judaism, Christianity, Early Modern Poland, etc. This entails the expediency of selecting texts which promote meeting the requirements stipulated in the core curriculum.

Given this, it seems that the Minister's regulation which came into effect in 2009, while altering the reading list, first and foremost modifies the ways of talking about the Holocaust. As far as the transformations of the reading canon are concerned, I can see three areas in which truly relevant changes can happen.

Firstly, texts by authors as yet not discussed in schools, such as Fink and Amiel, have been included in Jewish discourse. Such readings may foster reflection on the generation of the Scorched, i.e. on the categories of witness and second generation. Secondly, literature which addresses painful themes of the cohabitation of Poles and Jews (Błoński and Grynberg) has been introduced to schools. Thirdly, and finally, what seems to be the most radical, or even revolutionary, intervention is that while the Holocaust may not have been removed from the centre of the school's textual world, its peripheries – which have been neglected in Polish language education so far – have been considerably bolstered. Before the new core curriculum was introduced, the Holocaust had been the overriding "Jewish theme," which commanded, if not entirely eclipsed, all other issues related to Jewish culture, among which anti-Semitism and the assimilation of Jews had been the most pronounced, if not the only points on the agenda. Such questions had mainly been tackled "on the margins" of discussions about Adam Mickiewicz's *Master Thaddeus*, Positivist short stories, Bolesław Prus's *The Doll* or Stanisław Wyspiański's *The Wedding*, serving primarily as an introduction to the narrative about the Holocaust.

The major thrust towards dismantling the classic arrangement of "scholastic" texts about the Holocaust for Polish instruction came not so much from an attempt to adjust literature to the emotionality and knowledge of contemporary readers as from the demands of interdisciplinary humanistic discourse, into which the core curriculum incorporated Polish instruction. When discussing writings about the Holocaust, it is difficult to ignore the historical contexts and even more difficult to fail to discern and appreciate the methodological revolution initiated by *Holokaust – zrozumieć dlaczego* [*The Holocaust: Understanding Why?*], a textbook developed by Robert Szuchta and Piotr Trojański in 2003.

The authors sought to outline an inclusive political, sociological and cultural context of the Holocaust. Though they are both historians, the textbook quickly

proved not only useful in their field, but also seamlessly aligned with the interdisciplinary investment expected of schools in the wake of the reform of the core curriculum. As a result of the ministerial policy document (which invited criticism from historians for shifting Holocaust-related issues from junior secondary school to the later stage of education), the textbook became helpful to teachers of other subjects than history as well and turned out to perfectly correspond to the needs of upper secondary education.

It seems therefore that the current concept of teaching about the Holocaust in Polish lessons is geared towards constructing a narrative in which "other Jewish themes," which have been treated merely as a functional background so far, will no longer be accessory, if not entirely subordinated, to the central issue of the Holocaust. This of course does not mean that the Holocaust is divested of its unprecedented status.[56] The Event has been embedded in a historical-cultural space and, most importantly, such emplacement does not herald the end of the Holocaust narrative, but marks an explicit change in the structure of this narrative as consciousness-raising about the irreversible loss of that world is accorded a special place in it.[57]

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56 Among a multitude of didactic ideas, there is also an approach in which the narrative about the Holocaust serves as an excuse for addressing other instances of genocide. See Arkadiusz Morawiec, "Zagłady," *Polonistyka. Czasopismo dla Nauczycieli*, No. 11 (2014), pp. 9–12.

57 Unfortunately, most textbooks do not live up to the ambitious provisions of the core curriculum. Apparently, a diversified, if not always coherent, approach can rather be found in textbooks from before the education reform. Some of their ways of handling "Jewish themes" certainly deserve attention. In *Przeszłość to dziś* [*The Past is Now*], a textbook by Jacek Kopciński, the Holocaust is represented by Bronisław Linke's painting *Egzekucja w murach getta* [*An Execution within the Ghetto Walls*] and Józef Szajna's installation *Ściana butów* [*The Wall of Shoes*]. The former is accompanied by the assignment: "Explain the symbolism of this work," while the latter comes with information about the artist's camp experiences and an interpretation which simply states that "Perishable things remained while life perished." The authors of the textbook *Między tekstami* [*Among texts*] explicitly refer to Theodor Adorno's famous words by devoting two pages to "Art after Auschwitz." Their brief survey of works of art proves the thesis about diverse approaches to representing the Holocaust. Students have an opportunity to see Władysław Strzemiński's *Moim przyjaciołom Żydom* [*To My Jewish Friends*], Józef Szajna's *Ściana butów*, a drawing by Marian Kołodziej and, finally, on the following page, Art Spiegelman's comic book *Maus* and Zbigniew Libera's *LEGO Concentration Camp Set*. Such an original compilation of cultural representations produces a specific tension between the narrative of the Holocaust generation (of victims and witnesses) and the narrative of the post-Holocaust generation, which attempts to fashion a new

The experience of the present should incorporate an awareness of the lack of something that could be, but will evermore not be.[58] After all, the ethical goal of lessons about the Holocaust lies in breeding nostalgia rather than trauma through the texts read at school. Perhaps the didactic triumph, so difficult to imagine in this context, can be aptly encapsulated in the confession: *I miss you, Jew*.[59] Perhaps the memory frameworks of the third and fourth generations should be demarcated by the vectors of nostalgia and loss.

To remodel students' sensitivity, which, though individual, could integrate with the communal affective framework, is certainly a formidable challenge for Polish language education.[60] One reason why it is so daunting is that navigating

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language for telling about the Holocaust, one accommodated to popular culture. The idea of confronting various narratives about the Holocaust was not picked up in other textbooks.

Post-reform textbooks are slightly disappointing as most of them just tend to replicate the cultural representations which have been referenced in Polish instruction for years. The selection of works offered in the *Świat do przeczytania* [*A World to Read*] seems interesting. The textbook includes works which help incorporate the narrative of the Holocaust in a rich context of Jewish culture and history, such as Singer's *The Magician of Lublin*, Amiel's "Kartka z pamiętnika" ("Leaf from a Diary"), Krall's *To Outwit God*, Głowiński's "Przeżycie Zagłady" ["Experiencing the Holocaust"], Wiesław Kot's "Pomnik z popiołu" ["The Monument of Ash"], Aleksander Gierymski's *Święto trąbek* [*Yom Teruah*], Bronisław Linke's *El mole achmim*, Libera's *LEGO Concentration Camp Set*, Spiegelman's *Maus* and "the reading of films," encouraging the students to see Bob Fosse's *Cabaret*, Steven Spielberg's *Schindler List* and Roman Polański's *The Pianist*.

58 Anna Ziębińska-Witek, *Holocaust. Problemy przedstawiania* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2005), pp. 9–10.

59 I refer at this point to a social campaign initiated by performance artist Rafał Betlejewski. Betlejewski took pictures of passers-by whom he chanced upon in former Jewish neighbourhoods and wrote *Tęsknię za Tobą, Żydzie* (*I miss you, Jew*) on walls as a gesture reversing anti-Semitic graffiti.

60 One of art education textbooks is also an interesting case. *Spotkania z kulturą* [*Encounters with Culture*], a textbook which is frequently selected by teachers, features two contemporary references to the Holocaust. They are Joanna Rajkowska's *Pozdrowienia z Alej Jerozolimskich* (*Greetings from Jerusalem Avenue*) and Zbigniew Libera's *LEGO Concentration Camp Set*. The authors of the textbook stripped Rajkowska's work of the Holocaust allusions: the photo of the palm tree is described as "This installation in the form of an artificial palm tree is located in the centre of Warsaw" and is followed by the assignment: "Have a close look at the picture and read its description. Then discuss how, in your view, such art affects the appearance of the city." Everything implies that the Charles de Gaulle Roundabout (where the installation is placed) will not enter

the textual world of the Holocaust at school requires discipline which is not simply extorted by an ideological "corset," but is essentially an injunction of responsible reading in which students benefit from the teacher's assistance. In the case of such texts, the freedom of reading should be abandoned for the sake of reading with the Other,[61] which means that young readers' reading is supported by an adult. For the same reasons, a Polish lesson marked by an encounter with a text about the Holocaust transfigures into an ethical event.[62]

DS804.34 and PZ

If anything, an even greater sensitivity is required of a writer who decides to tell a young readership about the Holocaust. This is a difficult art involving utmost responsibility because it entails bearing witness to the past in a way that is attuned to the present. The Shoah Library[63] meticulously catalogues narratives among which children's literature is certainly pivotal in terms of educational import. Children's literature, which offers readers their "first exposure to the meaning of history, is catalogued in D804.34 for nonfiction or in PZ for fiction."[64]

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the students' consciousness as a space that opens up to the no-longer-existing Jewish world of Warsaw, and the plastic palm tree will be remembered just as a (possibly) kitschy embellishment in a European capital. The description of Libera's work similarly trivialises its meanings, stating simply that it suggests a possibility of constructing a concentration camp of toy blocks, while the *Pozytywy* (*Positives*) series are photos which refer – with a twist – to the most recognisable photos representing contemporary history.

61 The expression is borrowed from Krystyna Koziołek's book *Czytanie z innym: etyka, lektura, dydaktyka* [*Reading with the other: Ethics, Reading, Teaching*] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2006).

62 It is difficult to predict what the reformed Polish lessons on Jewish themes will look like. As yet, the reform has only been implemented in elementary schools, and it will start applying to post-elementary schooling on 1st September, 2019. The core curriculum has been devised, but new textbooks have not yet been written. While the list of compulsory reading has been expanded, the number of books regarding Jewish themes has been reduced, as not only modern narratives, by authors such as Amiel and Fink, but also canonical texts (e.g. Błoński's essay mentioned above) have been removed.

63 See Przemysław Czapliński, "Zagłada jako wyzwanie dla refleksji o literaturze," *Teksty Drugie*, No. 5 (2004), pp. 9–22, on p. 22.

64 David G. Roskies, "What is Holocaust literature," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, Vol. 21 (2005), pp. 157–212, on p. 159. Roskies refers to the classification system used by the Library of Congress in Washington.

We could easily imagine a catalogue of Polish books about the Holocaust bearing the PZ library classification, that is, those addressed to a young readership. Such a catalogue would not be very extensive. The Polish tradition of post-Holocaust tales for children does not boast a long history, though admittedly it has developed rather vigorously over the first two decades of the 21st century. The robust interest of literature for children and young adults in the Holocaust, which has been observable in the 21st century, is certainly a very complex and multifaceted development. Whether or not the seismographic sensitivity of "the fourth literature"[65] is its genetically inherent property (weighty inspirations from adult texts can easily inundate and fertilise it), as literature's younger sibling it has taken upon itself the obligation to bear witness.

Where the readiness of the fourth literature to tackle the Holocaust-related themes comes from is hardly a puzzle. For one, the reasons can be found in transformations which, for lack of a better term, can be described as methodological and cultural. They include the engagement with what had previously been taboo issues, memory studies, postmemorial narratives, experiences with modern Whitean redefinitions of historical prose and/or postcolonial disenchantment with the single-discourse totality.[66]

At the same time, the growth of interest in the Holocaust observable in Polish literature results from the vernacular context that stirs a mental ferment, undoubtedly leading to a recasting of the awareness of the young generation. The events of the past fifteen years have undeniably had a considerable impact on the shaping of a new vision of Polish-Jewish relationships, a vision which is also – primarily perhaps – conveyed by texts for a young readership. It is sufficient to

65 In Poland, literature for a young readership is often referred to as the fourth literature (Polish: *literatura czwarta*). The term was coined by literature researcher Czesław Hernas, who classified literature into high, folk and entertainment. The fourth type which he distinguished was comprised of children's literature. To avoid the deprecating overtones of the fourth literature, Jerzy Cieślikowski proposed that children's literature should be referred to as "separate literature" (Polish: *literatura osobna*) in order to showcase its specific aims and storytelling practices. In this book, I use the two terms interchangeably.

66 It can be assumed that "new" themes in literature for a young readership and the interdisciplinary approach to old and contemporary texts for children were precipitated by the increasing popularity of children's studies. While the term itself was only coined in 1991 by Gertrud Lenzer, the founder of Children's Studies at Brooklyn College of the City University of New York, Polish research into childhood, whose tenets dovetail with children studies, was launched as early as in the 1960s by Jerzy Cieślikowski and his books *Literatura osobna* [*Separate Literature*] and *Wielka zabawa* [*Great play*].

mention the debates around Tomasz Gross's *Neighbors* and *Golden Harvest* or Anna Bikont's *My z Jedwabnego* [*We from Jedwabne*]. The transformations in the generation's consciousness are immensely affected by the studies carried out by the Polish Centre for Holocaust Research at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, which are mirrored in the stipulations of the *Core Curriculum* and thus shape the school narrative about the Holocaust to a degree.[67] Even a cursory look at the circumstances in which the fourth literature has found itself makes it obvious that sooner or later it could not but respond to the challenge of bearing witness to the past in the broad sense of the expression.[68]

Given the different intensities with which the Holocaust is experienced by Jews and non-Jews, it is understandable that the Polish fourth literature does not boast an author comparable to Israeli author Bat-Sheva Dagan, who is a prolific writer of versatile Shoah-related texts. A survivor of extermination camps (first Auschwitz-Birkenau and then KL Ravensbrück) and, in Israel, a psychologist and the founder of a method of Holocaust teaching to children, she has earned a special right to mould the young generation's postmemory. Three of her books for children have been published in Poland: *Czika, piesek w getcie* (*Chika the Dog in the Gehetto*), *Gdyby gwiazdy mogły mówić* (*If the Stars Could Only Speak*) and *Co wydarzyło się w czasie Zagłady. Opowieść rymowana dla dzieci, które chcą wiedzieć* (*What Happened during the Holocaust: A Rhymed Tale for Children who Want to Know*). The former two are conspicuous in that they are the only publications for younger readers released by the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum. While perceived as testimonies "bound up" with a particular place of memory and thus never widely popular with readers, they have certainly

67 Representations of the Holocaust in art, pop-culture and media deserve a separate study of their own. Particularly the latter two communication channels enormously affect the development of young people's awareness of the Holocaust. See Marek Kaźmierczak, *Auschwitz w Internecie: Przedstawienia Holokaustu w kulturze popularnej* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza, 2012).

68 The question arises as to whether texts about the Holocaust belong in the category of historical fictions for children and young adults. It seems that the answer is "not yet", probably because the victims and witnesses of the Event are still alive. It would be more accurate to refer to historical novels about the war as non-fiction. This may be why Gertruda Skotnicka's monumental study of historical prose for children and young adults does not mention texts about the Second World War. See Gertruda Skotnicka, *Barwy przeszłości: O powieściach historycznych dla dzieci i młodzieży 1939–1989* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo słowo/obraz terytoria, 2008).

influenced the modes of Holocaust narrative in the writings of Polish authors. The third book was in fact Dagan's debut on the children's literature market. It appeared in Israel in 1991, and in Poland it was published by the Podlasie Opera and Philharmonics – European Art Centre in Białystok twenty years later. The rhymed story with eye-catching illustrations by Ola Cieślak reads like the credo of the author, who has resolved to engage in dialogue about the Holocaust with a child.[69]

Hana's Suitcase by Karen Levine is a book which is extremely popular in the West and which certainly works beyond the educational setting of the museum. It seems to offer methodological guidelines for arranging a young person's encounter with the Holocaust narrative.[70] The book tells the story of Fumiko Ishioke, who organises an exhibition at the Tokyo Holocaust Museum and applies to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum to lend out a few items for the show. Among the exhibits she receives there is a suitcase with Hana's address scribbled on it. Fumiko starts a private investigation aimed at restoring the memory about the owner of the suitcase. As history is being retrieved, an educational project focused on the scrutiny and personalisation of the trace comes into being. The micro-history which is generated as a result of reading the trace produces a friendly climate for the child's encounter with the Holocaust narrative.

When this volume was being submitted to the publisher, a book entitled *Mój pies Lala* (*My Dog Lala*) had just made its way into bookshops. Similarly to Dagan's works, it is a specimen of Holocaust non-fiction, an entirely new phenomenon in writings for a young readership. It was authored by Roman Kent, who was born in Lodz in 1925. He spent his childhood in the Lodz ghetto, where he lost his father. After the war, he left for the US, where he has lived ever since. His book tells the story of an extraordinary friendship between a boy and a

69 As early as in the introduction, Dagan stresses the importance of knowledge about the past and defines the conditions for its successful transmission. Specifically, knowledge should be adapted to the age and sensitivity of children in order not to overburden them. In other words, any tale should be addressed to children who want to know. The responsibility of adults is to assess the needs of children as well as to control and systematise knowledge available through media. The educational dimension of dialogue with the child is showcased in CDs with lesson plans attached to Dagan's two books. The ending of the tale is particularly interesting as the book, whose primary target audience were Israeli children, foregrounds armed combat with the enemy and symbolically caps the narrative about the Holocaust with a vision of a new home in Israel.

70 K. Levine: Hana's Suitcase. A true Story. Toronto: Second Story Press, 2002.

dog which sneaks into the ghetto to visit its Jewish owners. The publication is embellished with illustrations designed by students from Mińsk Mazowiecki.[71] Clearly, the publication, as with many books of this type, presupposes an active involvement of young people who contribute to the narrative (as in books by Kent and Levine) or take part in lesson projects (Dagan's works).

The Faultlines of Memory

In reflecting on the Polish fourth literature about the Holocaust, we should focus on two essential questions: "What are its purposes?" and "What should it be like?" Of course, such questions enmesh texts for children in ideological and aesthetic suspicions. Yet "Project Postmemory" should abide by a set of principles, and in this particular case the writer's creative freedom can be subjected to a certain restraint in order to make sure that broadly conceived propriety is observed, a criterion which anyhow turns out to be very flexible in fact.

Admittedly, Holocaust literature for young readers has attracted considerable scholarly attention; however, as a relatively novel development represented by a limited number of contemporary literary texts, it has not yet been comprehensively examined in one, methodical monograph. Still, several researchers have displayed a considerable commitment to such investigations, producing a range of shorter but compelling studies in which multiple Holocaust-related issues are addressed. Obviously, a real memory boom is observable in publications for a young readership which depict the Warsaw Uprising or the Second World War in general[72]; they add up to an opulent, diversified and, most importantly, continuous body of texts which make it possible to construct a coherent narrative.

Post-Holocaust literature for children makes an impression of serving as a preparatory stage for the encounter with school readings about the Holocaust. Of course, the ascription of such an utilitarian function to "that" literature and literature in general is hardly a novel or surprising discovery. Nevertheless, texts

71 Importantly, Kent's book was published by the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. The publication is part of a project launched by the King Matt's Family Education Area (the name alluding to Janusz Korczak's popular 1922 book *Król Maciuś Pierwszy – King Matt the First*), which was founded by the POLIN Museum Education Centre and is committed to educating children aged 4–9 years.

72 For a detailed bibliography of such texts, see Agnieszka Sikora, "W jaki sposób mówimy dzieciom o wojnie? Charakterystyka prozy o tematyce wojennej na podstawie wybranych książek dla dzieci," *Acta Universitatis Lodziensis*, Vol. 2, No. 19 (2014), pp. 25–44.

for children seem to have a slightly different and more important role as well. They contribute to evoking the sense of lack, comprehended as nostalgia for what is irretrievably lost, which in and of itself may be viewed as a blueprint of remembering. In this framework, the trace should be the paramount category of postmemory, as the trace proves that what is not there now was there once. The work of the trace is never done because the trace requires constant movement, transmission and continuous narrative which enable it to bear witness to the past.

The problem is that, in the history of Polish memory about the Holocaust, there have been moments when interest in the Holocaust subsided nearly to the point of non-existence. These faultlines of memory, demarcated by the timeframes of 1948–1968 and 1968–1970,[73] entrapped the post-war generation of readers, who were not provided with any Holocaust education. These were the parents of the third generation, the generation that is now comprised of forty-year-olds, who learned about the Holocaust partly at school, but most probably outside it and who are today getting actively engaged in reclaiming that lost memory. Nonetheless, a hiatus in the intergenerational dialogue still remains, while the category of the trace has been made hardly tenable as a result of the gigantic destruction of Jewish culture effected by the Nazis on the occupied territories and by the policies that the USSR-dependent Polish state adopted towards Jews, which culminated in 1968.

The fourth literature attempts to emplot the Holocaust narrative and, consequently, to "sort out" and organise memory,[74] though what the reader navigates is rather the space of the *imaginarium* of the Holocaust. It is understandable, considering that only two of the books which I discuss below were written by witnesses, whereas the remaining ones belong in the narrative of the "second" and even the "third generation."[75] Sławomir Buryła suggests that Polish researchers

73 Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*. The two timeframes correspond to Steinlauf's periods of repressed memory and expelled memory.

74 See Roskies, "What is Holocaust literature," pp. 199–200.

75 Such a multigenerational reading enterprise is well exemplified in the continued endeavour to scrutinise Janusz Korczak, undertaken by women from the well-known Polish family of Mortkowicz, pre-war publishers and booksellers. Most of the works of the Old Doctor came from the printing press of Jakub and Janina Mortkowicz. Contemporary writer Katarzyna Zimmerer continues the family tradition of spreading the knowledge of his life and pedagogical ideas, with her *Zwyczajny dzień* [*An Ordinery Day*], a book about Korczak for children, being just one instance of her work. Zimmerer's daughter starred in Andrzej Wajda's film *Korczak*. Her mother, Joanna Olczak-Ronikier, wrote a monumental book entitled *Korczak. Próby biografii*

of Holocaust literature should first attend to the topoi of the Holocaust, which he meticulously enumerates in his article "Topika Holokaustu."[76] Although I was deeply inspired by this article, I did not build on it extensively. One reason for this was that, as I was working with only a handful of texts, the frequency of motifs turned out to be limited. Another reason was that I was exploring literature for children, which expectedly did not contain some of the topoi listed by Buryła. Last, but not least, had I closely followed his guidelines while examining the fourth literature, the outcome would probably have been an unbearable composition more akin to a dictionary than to a coherent narrative.

That is why in my study of the imaginarium of the Holocaust, I chiefly paid attention to explicit repetitions and reiterations of motifs, images and metaphors. This study yielded an account of the literary representations of Janusz Korczak, observations about the oft-employed narrative patterns, a depiction of space and the topoi of mother and child. By demarcating these areas, I was able to discern other phenomena relevant to postmemory. I can only hope that I have managed to capture and adequately articulate them all. Straying from the title, I commence my narrative of the Holocaust by discussing Jan Brzechwa's *Akademia pana Kleksa* [*The Academy of Mr Inkblot*], which was published directly after the war. This was the only choice I could possibly make because, in my view, *Akademia* actually incorporates the foundational myth of the Holocaust narrative addressed to young readers. I only hope that my readers will share my fascination with the trilogy by Brzechwa and condone this narrative inaccuracy of mine. This book does not offer a complete survey of texts about the Holocaust written between the *Academy* and the beginning of the 21st century, because the Holocaust, if mentioned in them, is usually relegated to the peripheries of their main thematic concern, that is the Second World War.[77]

[*Korczak: Towards a Biography*], her grandmother, Hanna Mortkowicz-Olczak, wrote the first post-war biography of Janusz Korczak, and her great-grandmother Janina, fascinated, as she was, with Korczak's innovative pedagogical notions, made it her mission to have his works published by the family publishing house.

76 Sławomir Buryła, "Topika Holokaustu. Wstępne rozpoznanie," *Świat Tekstów. Rocznik Słupski*, No. 10 (2012), pp. 131–150.

77 Krystyna Kuliczkowska identifies four dominant styles of war-time narratives in Polish children's literature: (1) stories which celebrate adventure and in this way dilute the tragic quality of war-time events (e.g. *Krystek z Warszawy* by Janina Broniewska, *Tajemnica wzgórza 117* by Janusz Przymanowski and *Kaktusy z Zielonej ulicy* by Wiktor Zawada); (2) narratives in the fairy-tale convention (e.g. *Mali bohaterowie* by Zofia Lorenz, *Porwanie w Tiutiurlistanie* by Wojciech Żukrowski and *O chłopcu, który szukał domu* by Irena Jurgielewiczowa); (3) factual records, testimonies and "real life"

With a few exceptions, most pre-2000 books for a young readership dwell first and foremost on Polish history and martyrdom, whereby they either entirely pass over or, at best, marginalise Holocaust-related issues. In fact, earlier texts for young readers only rarely featured a Jewish protagonist. In an acutely insightful essay written in 1966, Joanna Papuzińska recounts the process of stereotyping the Jew in pre-war works for children and young adults. She demonstrates that young-adult readers were afforded no opportunity for a neutral literary encounter with Jewish culture because before the war they were encouraged to read anti-Semitic texts (with Eugenia Kobylińska's novel *Rysiek z Belmontu* [*Dickie from Belmont*] standing out as an infamous example thereof), which ultimately were not included in the canon, and after the war everyday Jewish themes were overshadowed by the Holocaust. Even though the war was an important turning point in the reception of Jewish motifs, it indisputably fixed the stereotype of "the Jew as one who is beaten."[78]

To get a closer idea of typical Holocaust motifs, I propose taking a short glimpse at the texts produced in the immediate aftermath of the war and throughout the 20th century which I will not explore below, instead focusing on literature written over the last fifteen years. The post-war novels *Wojtek Warszawiak* [*Wojtek the Varsovian*] by Andrzej Perepeczko and *Wrócimy razem* [*We'll Return Together*] by Maria Niklewiczowa clearly imply that the Holocaust was never the plot axis in literature for a young readership, and Holocaust victims (who are often treated with compassion or offered help in defiance of lethal risk) and/or witnesses[79] were consigned to the margins of the narrative world. It is precisely

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accounts (e.g. *Kamienie na szaniec* by Aleksander Kamiński and *Dywizjon 303* by Arkady Fiedler); and (4) psychological fiction dwelling on the destructive impact of war (e.g. *Pałac pod gruszą* by Jadwiga Korczakowska, *Chłopcy ze Starówki* by Halina Rudnicka, *Dzieci Warszawy* by Maria Zarębińska, *Sprawa honoru* by Maria Kann and a series of war stories by Jerzy Szczygieł). Of course, the list of books which tackle war-related themes is much longer, yet these four basic narrative tendencies are perfectly applicable to the titles which are not catalogued here. See Krystyna Kuliczkowska, *W świecie prozy dla dzieci* (Warszawa: Nasza Księgarnia, 1983), p. 82.

78 Joanna Papuzińska, "'My' i 'oni', czyli stereotypy narodowe w polskiej literaturze dziecięcej," in Joanna Papuzińska, *Dziecko w świecie emocji literackich* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe i Edukacyjne SBP, 1996), pp. 99–111, on p. 105.

79 A characteristic example is provided by Cezary Leżeński's war-time novel series about Jarek and Marek, brave twins, sons of a German woman and a Polish officer. With a perfect command of both Polish and German, the boys become successful spies. Their improbable adventures resemble the exploits of Hans Kloss, a Polish secret agent (codename J-23) in the Abwehr, the protagonist of a cult TV series of 1965, as well as the protagonists of exceptionally popular historical novels by Henryk Sienkiewicz. In

because the Jewish theme is absent from the national pantheon of heroic twins or valiant teddy bears[80] that special attention is due to Anna Kamieńska's novel *Żołnierze i żołnierzyki* [*Soldiers and Toy Soldiers*], which is as brilliant as it is ignored by schools.[81] Woven into the texture of the novel is a "Jewish thread" which accompanies the protagonist and irregularly surfaces in the narrative. Although it appears intermittently, its intensity is invariably harrowing, so that the passages concerning the Holocaust will stick for ever in the reader's memory. The murder of Mr Seidel, a Jewish artist who has forged papers and hides "on the Aryan side," is the climax of the novel. Mr Seidel is shot dead in his own study next to an easel on which there is an unfinished portrait of his mother, who has

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Leżeński's novels, war is an adventure, especially for adolescent boys who for the sake of defending their motherland give up on scampish horseplay without regrets and commit to the grand cause. One of the novels, entitled *Jarek i Marek bronią Warszawy* [*Jarek and Marek Defend Warsaw*] includes a symptomatic episode in which the boys meet Józek, their Jewish peer. Józek explains to them why he has to wear an armband with the Star of David on it. Suddenly, a German officer comes along and brutally slaps Józek across the face because the boy failed to see him and bow to him. Upset, Marek threatens in his perfect German to report the officer to his superior for hitting the Jew who "belongs" to Marek.

The construction of the Polish boy figures deserves some attention. The Pole is nearly impudently courageous and although he defends the victim, there is something perverse in his idea to pretend to be German. He seizes control not only of the German officer but also of his Jewish acquaintance, who in this way becomes objectified, deprived of any possibility to respond and, worst of all, doomed to victimhood. He humbly observes the order to wear the armband and calls his oppressor "Mr Governor" with an obsequiousness which does not sound ironic. The arrangement of a rebellious Polish hero juxtaposed with a Jewish fugitive victim tends to be upheld and replicated in many contemporary children's texts about the Holocaust.

80 See Bohdan Królikowski, *Ten dzielny miś. Wojenne przygody pluszowego niedźwiadka* [*The Brave Teddy Bear: A Fluffy Bear's Adventures in War*] (Lublin: Werset, 1995). The book is a continuation of *Bohaterski Miś* [*The Valiant Teddy Bear*], a 1919 bestseller by Bronisława Ostrowska. The fluffy toy is taken prisoner, falls into the hands of a German soldier, fights in the Polish air forces in England, turns guerrilla soldier, is jailed by the Gestapo and, finally, takes part in the Warsaw Uprising. The plot of the novel offers no opportunity to introduce the Holocaust theme. Tomi Ungerer's popular *Otto: The Autobiography of a Teddy Bear* embodies an entirely different distribution of weighty war motifs, including those related to the Holocaust.

81 Joanna Kulmowa's interesting autobiographical novel *Trzy* [*Three*] deserves to be mentioned at this point since its teenage protagonist – a Jewish girl in hiding – can be viewed as indicating that the text is addressed to adults and adolescents alike.

remained in the ghetto. At the moment of his death, the artist is playing the *Dąbrowski Mazurka* (the national anthem of Poland), which attests to his "Polish Jewishness," a well-established device known from *Master Thaddeus*.[82] Stach, the novel's protagonist, who witnesses the crime by chance, vows that he will forever remember the victim.

The list of mandatory Holocaust readings should not omit books which shift the Holocaust to the foreground. One such text is Maria Zarębińska's unfinished novel *Dzieci Warszawy* [*The Children of Warsaw*], which tells a story of Polish kids who feel responsible for Szymek, a fugitive from the ghetto, and help him survive on the Aryan side. Maria Kann approaches the Jewish motif in an equally engaging way. Notably, Kann wrote *Na oczach świata* [*Before the Eyes of the World*], a brochure which informed Polish society of the 1943 uprising in the Warsaw ghetto and appealed to Poles to help Jews, which she herself did by hiding fugitives from the Jewish Quarter.[83] Kann's books produce an extraordinary effect which could be called the communality of space. As one of few authors, she portrays the community of suffering of Jews and non-Jews, abolishing all divisions between them. The depiction of space in *Niebo nieznane* [*Unknown Sky*] is particularly evocative in this respect. Undergoing historical transformations, Długa Street in Warsaw turns into a dramatic and simultaneously democratic palimpsest whose narrative is spun by the residents of Krakowskie Przedmieście and Nalewki alike.[84]

The space of Długa Street brims with Polish-Jewish history, whose discourse is not built around the our-vs.-foreign opposition, but is founded on the similarity of the fates of people on either side of the wall. Kann resorted to the same device in her brilliant novel *Sprawa honoru* [*A Matter of Honour*], which offers a synthesis of problems that persistently recur in Polish-Jewish narratives. The book is written with remarkable honesty, starting from the inclusive presentation

82 Among its important characters, the Polish national epic poem *Master Thaddeus*, written by Adam Mickiewicz in 1834, features Jankiel, a Jewish inn-keeper who has been perpetuated in the national imaginary not only as the assimilated Other, but also – primarily in fact – as a patriot whose wisdom and commitment to the cause of national independence make the Polish gentry blush for their own shortcomings. In one symbolic episode, Jankiel plays a cymbal concert whose music recounts the tragic history of Poland.

83 The "Quarter" (Polish: *Dzielnica*) was the name given to the ghetto which was set up by the Nazis.

84 The two street names symbolise two worlds: Krakowskie Przedmieście epitomises the Polish world while Nalewki stands for the Jewish one.

of the entire spectrum of attitudes of Polish society to Jews and ending with the structuring of the texts underpinned by the concept of a mirror reflection, which results in the portrayal of similarities and differences between the Polish and Jewish characters of the novel. The ghetto wall[85] can be construed as the axis of symmetry of the world the novel depicts, a world which is divided into the Aryan and Semitic parts by the oppressive system, but which at the same time is united by human solidarity imaged in the tunnel through which aid can be extended to Jewish friends. The ghetto uprising, deportations and hunger belong to the Jewish narrative of Rut and Jurek, while minor sabotage, the Pawiak prison, razzias and street executions form part of the Polish narrative of Łucja and Leszek. The two strands are woven into a unified tale about the past, as each of them refuses to appropriate Polish or Jewish memory, which results in the elimination of all divisions. The imperative to retain memory in its communal shape is most emphatically expressed in Jurek's letter to his Polish friend:

> You can't even guess how much we were comforted by the thought that somebody was waiting for us on the other side, that they worried about us and wouldn't let the memory of what we'd achieved die along with us.
> Thank you for everything!

In the worst moments, I took refuge in the memories of "our times," our childhood days.

> Farewell, Leszek. […]
> Remember me. Your Jurek.[86]

Undoubtedly, the concept of memory has been inextricable from Holocaust literature since its very beginning. To see how this concept works in contemporary literature for a young readership, I have examined the following texts: *Arka czasu* [*Rafe and The Ark of Time*] by Marcin Szczygielski, *Kotka Brygidy* [*Brigid's She-Cat*] and *XY* by Joanna Rudniańska, *Bezsenność Jutki* [*Jutka's Insomnia*] by Dorota Combrzyńska-Nogala, *Ostatnie piętro* [*The Top Floor*] by Irena Landau, *Wszystkie moje mamy* [*All My Mothers*] by Renata Piątkowska, *Szlemiel* [*Schlemiel*] by Ryszard Marek Groński, *Wojna na Pięknym Brzegu* [*War at the Jolie Bord*] by Andrzej Marek Grabowski, *Jest taka historia* [*There Is a Story*] Beata Ostrowicka, *Pamiętnik Blumki* [*Blumka's Diary*] by Iwona Chmielewska, *Po drugiej stronie*

85 The wall whose construction was ordered by the Germans separated the ghetto from Warsaw's Aryan-populated area. In 1940, the total length of the wall was eighteen kilometres.

86 Maria Kann, *Sprawa honoru* (Warszawa: Nasza Księgarnia, 1969), p. 167.

okna [*Across the Window*] by Anna Czerwińska-Rydel, *Zwyczajny dzień* [*An Ordinary Day*] by Katarzyna Zimmerer, *Ostatnie przedstawienie panny Esterki* [*Miss Esther's Last Performance*] by Adam Jaromir, *Wszystkie lajki Marczuka* [*All the Likes of Marczuk*] by Paweł Beręsewicz and the Mr Inkblot trilogy by Jan Brzechwa.[87]

I believe that these books for young readers can effectively serve as an introduction to later reading practices involving the junior and senior secondary school "canon," which should not be reduced to a catalogue of texts about the Holocaust. Rather, it should be augmented with a historical and cultural context of Polish-Jewish co-presence, which may encourage young readers to include the category of the trace into their individual and cultural experiences of the past. Only then will the history of Jews – and not only of the Holocaust – cease to be a footnote to Polish history, becoming an integral part of it instead.

If this indeed happens, Masłowska's macabre "twist" on the canon – in her "over dead bodies, dead bodies, dead bodies" – will stand as a challenge that postmemory poses to literature and education. And then, poets will appeal in vain to open windows and air rooms[88] because even nurseries will have already been infected with the virus of Auschwitz.[89]

87 The next chapter examines three parts of the Mr Inkblot series: *Akademia pana Kleksa* [*The Academy of Mr Inkblot*], *Podróże pana Kleksa* [*The Travels of Mr Inkblot*] and *Tryumf pana Kleksa* [*The Triumph of Mr Inkblot*].

88 I refer here to Marcin Świetlicki's poem "Dla Jana Polkowskiego" ("For Jan Polkowski"), which urges that grand national themes be discarded and the strategy of privacy be adopted instead.

89 The term is borrowed from Czapliński, who claims that "none of the values of contemporary life can be severed from the Holocaust." Przemysław Czapliński, "Wirus Auschwitz," *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały*, Vol. 2, No. 10 (2014), p. 884.

Chapter Two Jan Brzechwa's *Pan Kleks* Series: An Alternative Reading

Games with *Akademia pana Kleksa*

Postmodern practices have considerably unsettled the ontological status of the modern fairy tale. Authorial freedom in manipulating tradition, which is expressed in intertextual games, blends of various conventions and amalgams of compositional methods, has been legitimised by the notion that "we have seen it all."[90] Having done its postmodernist homework, the contemporary fairy tale interrogates its own generic boundaries, which amounts to undermining both its own existence and the entrenched canon from which it hails. For the "playful daughter of myth," as Friedrich von der Leven calls the folktale, can not only precede myth, interlace with or seep into it, giving it a new lustre, but also ask questions about its own being.[91] In this sense, the contemporary fairy tale, as opposed to the traditional one, not so much talks about the "eternal *praesens*, the eternal now that is actualised in individual human lives, in people's experience of life,"[92] as calls into question the universality of the fabular message by continually decontextualising fairy-tale narratives.

Though symptomatic of contemporary texts, these postmodern shifts within the fabular substance certainly did not commence when postmodernism was proclaimed. If we consider the self-referentiality of the fairy tale to be a defining feature of postmodernity, we should date the beginning of revolutionary changes within the genre back to Bolesław Leśmian, an eminent Polish poet of Jewish descent, who wrote in the interwar period but derived inspirations from modernism.

Mise en abyme is one of Leśmian's favourite teleological contrivances, which forms a richly layered score in *Przygody Sindbada Żeglarza* [*The Adventures of*

90 See Janusz Sławiński, "Postmodernizm," in *Słownik terminów literackich*, ed. Janusz Sławiński (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1998), pp. 413–414.

91 German: *verspielte Tochter des Mythus*; see Friedrich von der Leyen, "Mit i baśń," trans. Ryszard Handke, *Pamiętnik Literacki*, Vol. 64, No. 1 (1973), pp. 293–309, p. 307 (for the original German text, see Friedrich von der Leyen, "Mythus und Marchen," *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift fur Literatur und Geistesgesichte*, Vol. 33, No. 3 [1959], pp. 343–360).

92 Grzegorz Leszczyński, "Wstęp," in *Rozigrana córa mitu. Kulturowe konteksty baśni*. Vol. 1, ed. Grzegorz Leszczyński (Poznań: Centrum Sztuki Dziecka, 2005), pp. 7–12, on p. 12.

Sindbad the Sailor]. At the centre of the textual world, which is woven of multiple writing-related motifs, stands one of the protagonists – uncle Tarabuk, a poet obsessed with the idea of eternally preserving his works, whose body covered in his verses becomes the message in and of itself. The impact of the poetry inscribed on uncle Tarabuk's skin is limited, which puts an end to the writer's dream of poetic fame. At the same time however, such an inscription warrants an intimate encounter between a potential reader of Tarabuk's texts and Tarabuk himself. The commitment to recording and to preserving the record leads thus to a "double" transubstantiation as poetry becomes body and body becomes poetry. Whoever wants to partake of it should join the elitist community of reading during which a reading communion occurs. The seriousness of testifying to literature by means of one's own body is undercut by Leśmian's irony. Uncle Tarabuk must eventually acknowledge the superiority of the narrative in which he is himself implanted and submit to the rules of the fairy tale, which dictate that the ending should involve the conquest of a woman. As Tarabuk must get married, the finale of the twists and turns of his manoeuvres with the script leaves no illusions as to his lot, for it turns out that "under his sign-overwritten skin a new story is already being written, one far more effective than his poetry."[93]

The storm of self-referentiality also sweeps across the narrative of Brzechwa's Pan Kleks (Mr Inkblot) trilogy,[94] billowing – like in Leśmian's fairy-tale – with the motifs of script and writing. The interdependence between the motif of writing as part of the plot in the texts about Mr Inkblot and the generic "wobbliness" of the fairy tale has been very insightfully grasped by Papuzińska, who observes that Brzechwa produces a sense of distance between the reader and the world of the text, which dismantles the literary illusion incorporated in the structure of the work. The application of these novel devices in *Akademia pana Kleksa* [*The Academy of Mr Inkblot*] is perhaps their first occurrence in the history of the literary fairy tale.[95]

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93 Ryszard Koziołek, "Wuj Tarabuk i nędza pisania," in Ryszard Koziołek, *Znakowanie trawy albo praktyki filologii* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2011), pp. 203–213, on p. 212.

94 Brzechwa, whose real name was Jan Lesman, was a cousin of Bolesław Leśmian, who invented the pseudonym for him ("brzechwa" is Polish for "a vane," as in the rear part of an arrow). Brzechwa is known not only for *The Academy of Mr Inkblot,* which has been a compulsory set book in schools for several generations of children, but also for his extraordinarily popular, wordplay-peppered poems for children.

95 Joanna Papuzińska, "Autotematyzm baśni," in Joanna Papuzińska, *Zatopione królestwo: O polskiej literaturze fantastycznej XX wieku dla dzieci i młodzieży* (Łódź: Literatura, 2008), pp. 226–227.

The Academy of Mr Inkblot is a modern fairy tale about an oddball who runs an Academy situated in Chocolate Street and accepts only boys whose names start with an "A" as his students. The Academy building is located in a picturesque park neighbouring the fairylands with which Mr Inkblot and his pupils are on cordial terms. Under Mr Inkblot's tutelage, the boys experience several adventures and take part in blotting lessons. The main child protagonist of the book is Adaś Niezgódka (Adam Stroppy), for whom Mr Inkblot cherishes high hopes and who he views as his successor. Mr Inkblot himself is a scholar, a wizard and an inventor who often chooses to stand on one leg and dispatches his eye into outer space. He is friends with Mateusz, a talking starling, who is in fact a prince who was turned into a bird. Since his transfiguration into a bird, Mateusz has been looking for a button from the magic cap of Doctor Paj-Chi-Wo,[96] which will enable him to regain his human form. Mr Inkblot possesses secrets, which he guards cautiously and that is why he forbids the boys to enter his study. The Academy's idyll is disrupted by the arrival of Alojzy, a mechanical doll constructed by Filip the barber, who asks Mr Inkblot to make it into a real boy. Alojzy rebels and destroys the Academy as Mr Inkblot, overwhelmed by the evil perpetrated by the doll, steadily diminishes, only to eventually shrink into the button for which Mateusz has been searching. When the starling regains his human form, he turns out not to be a young prince, but a forty-year-old man, the author of *The Academy*, who explains to Adaś that the entire story in which he has been involved is a dream or perhaps a fabrication.

Though Papuzińska's insights about the book are certainly apt, the reasons behind furnishing the tale with an ending which, like postmodernist narratives, invites at least two different interpretations deserve a more thorough examination. One of the interpretations is indeed convincingly spelled out by Papuzińska, who focuses on the text's reliance on oneiric conventions to construe the dream as envisaging the fall of civilisation, as the book ends with the boys' departure from the secure space of the Academy. At the same time, the ending in which Adaś Niezgódka wakes up from the dream of the Academy in the study of the author of *The Academy* himself, implies that the entire story was just a child's reverie, while the awakening rationalises the envisioned events, exposing their illogicality. Nevertheless, the oneiric is not the only convention employed by Brzechwa in the story, and its ending can be located in an entirely different context. The demystification of the fairy tale and emptying it of wonder by having magic supplanted with the banality of sleep come across as a cruel experiment

96 Doctor Paj-Chi-Wo (pron. Pai-Chi-Vo) was the master and teacher of Mr Inkblot.

on the reader, who craves fabulous marvels. Reading in this fashion is difficult for anybody, and it is particularly challenging for a child. The disappointment it occasions may admittedly be attributed to the modernist penchant for playing with conventions, but it is by no means necessary.

Therefore instead of the postmodernist, oneiristically underpinned take on *The Academy*, I propose to read the adventures of Mr Inkblot "in spite of all." Of course, the idea of such a reading is mediated, and its primary *locus* is Georges Didi-Huberman's seminal book *Images in Spite of All*. Didi-Huberman studies four photographs taken in Auschwitz and sides with those who do not agree to be silent about the Holocaust even though silence has long been the major mode, or perhaps anti-mode, of representing the Holocaust. As argued by Beata and Tomasz Polak, "the French researcher is in league with those who took those pictures in order to say something through them rather than not saying anything through them."[97] Pondering whether or not "to snatch the image from that hell in spite of all,"[98] Didi-Huberman's answer is a resounding "yes." He discerns in the photographs not only a form of "aesthetic" representation which is supposed to give a shape to the unimaginable, but also an ethical challenge which must be accepted for the sake of remembering the victims and the witnesses, all the more so as producing such evidence of the crime by the latter was undoubtedly an act of heroism.

I agree that locating the reading of *The Academy of Mr Inkblot* in the context of the Auschwitz pictures, which are a unique document of the crime, may be regarded as methodologically scandalous. Mindful of such charges, I place Brzechwa's fairy tale on the margins of Holocaust discourse, at the same time remembering about its implied child reader and about its literariness, which is in no way compatible with the ontology of Holocaust testimony. At the same time, the "images-in-spite-of-all" formula prompts me – both as a researcher and as a reader – to embrace an interpretation of *The Academy* that diverges from the conventional, "schoolish" one.[99] What I perceive in Brzechwa's book is primarily

97 Beata A. Polak and Tomasz Polak, "Fantazmaty wokół Szoa," in *Porzucić etyczną arogancję. Ku reinterpretacji podstawowych pojęć humanistyki w świetle wydarzeń Szoa*, eds. Beta A. Polak and Tomasz Polak (Poznań: Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Wydziału Nauk Społecznych UAM, 2011), pp. 189–236, p. 215.

98 Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, trans. Shane B. Illis (Chicago, IL, and London: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 15.

99 The career of *The Academy* at school is an interesting development in its own right. It is rather surprising to find that "two thirds of teachers believe that Brzechwa's wonderful and playful work, carrying the message of 'goodness, serenity and joyful, exhilarating fantasy' serves primarily, if not exclusively, as an aid for exercising language,

a test run or a trial of a "form" that could harness a narrative which had no literary representation of its own in "separate literature" before. Brzechwa seems to strive – "in spite of all" – to fashion an image of something that has up to now been searching for its form.

Ostensibly, *The Academy of Mr Inkblot*, the flagship work of the children's writer, has already been examined from all possible angles. Its first critics gave it an enthusiastic welcome. For one, the laudatory reviews of Wanda Żółkiewska and Wanda Grodzieńska set the tone for the later interpretive approaches to the book: fantasy, a surrealist riot of characters, the spirit of adventure – this is what the modern fairy tale feeds to young readers by the spoonful.

The development of research into Brzechwa's tale was greatly boosted by the scintillating career of the grotesque in contemporary literature, which was incorporated into and essentially affected the formation of school discourse. Preoccupation with the grotesque entailed paying closer attention to the language of the Mr Inkblot trilogy. Riding the wave of this "linguistic turn," scholars first and foremost highlight the wealth of verbal devices, the ubiquitous grotesque and the self-referentiality of the book. These components, they argue, imply that the tale presupposes two varieties of implied reader. This dual readership was also eagerly expounded by the writer himself, who stressed that especially *Tryumf pana Kleksa* [*The Triumph of Mr Inkblot*] would be an experiment, with its fair-tale layer designed for children and its satirical investment devised for adults.

Considering the two target groups, we cannot possibly ignore the time when *The Academy* was written, as in 1946 the post-war chapter of children's literature opened with a fairy tale, which suggests escapism from brutal realities. Such a therapeutic proclivity of the story was touted by Janina, Brzechwa's third wife, who argued that *The Academy* was in fact an escape from reality.[100] One of the writer's female friends recalls the community of reading under the Nazi

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consolidating forms of expression, learning literary-theoretical terminology, drafting plans and identifying generic properties." See Anna Janus-Sitarz, *Groteska literacka: Od diabła w Damaszku po Becketta i Mrożka* (Kraków: Universitas, 1997), pp. 116–118.

100 A similarly escapist undertone might have pervaded another war-time book by Brzechwa which, however, never went beyond the planning stage. Brzechwa entertained the idea of an illustrated *Fantastic Encyclopaedia*, in which remote associations would be combined to redefine cultural topoi, e.g. Pegasus and the airplane. The writer survived the occupation on the Aryan side, using forged documents. Recollecting those times, he stated that he had not noticed the war because he had been head over heels in love.

occupation in this way: "We all huddled up in a tiny room, four people within ca. twelve square metres. Janek [an endearment of Jan] would bring his poems and stories: *Akademia pana Kleksa*, 'Pan Drops i jego trupa' ['Mr Mint and his Troupe'] […]."[101] Because of this contiguity of the narrative and the war-time reality, the fairy tale does not eschew autobiographical allusions. For example, Janina Brzechwa recognises herself in the caretaker Weronik and deciphers the old trickster Mr Inkblot as the writer's self-portrayal.[102]

More recent approaches carry Brzechwa's trilogy in somewhat different directions, which probably results from the exhaustion of the grotesque-linguistic interpretation model. Currently, critics prefer to emphasise the work the writer put into processing the phantasm of the teacher, one of the fundamental myths of the fourth literature. In this context, special attention should be paid to the insights offered by Anna Szóstak, who is one of the few scholars to scrutinise what has already become a classic of children's literature from a non-standard angle. The originality of her framework lies in that instead of making the absurd, the grotesque or the linguistic the cornerstone of her reading, she dismisses these concepts altogether for the sake of exploring intuitive feelings which have not yet found a legitimate excuse to enter scholarly discourse on the tales about Mr Inkblot. Szóstak makes at least two compelling comments which have not been further examined so far. Namely, she remarks that the motif of Mr Inkblot producing or upsizing food by means of a small pump may be a travesty of Christ's feeding-the-multitude miracle in the Gospel, where Christ multiplies bread and fish.[103] Her other innovative concept is that the Academy itself embodies the Platonic world of ideas.[104]

An equally original interpretation of *The Academy of Mr Inkblot* is offered by Adam Lipszyc. In his article on the cyborgisation of pop-culture protagonists "Roy, Alojzy i inne chłopaki" ["Roy, Alojzy and Other Lads"], Lipszyc argues

101 Władysław Rymkiewicz, "Wierny przyjaciel," in *Akademia Pana Brzechwy: Wspomnienia o Janie Brzechwie*, ed. Antoni Marianowicz (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1984), pp. 27–32, on p. 30.

102 See Janina Brzechwa, "Coś z kuchni," in *Akademia Pana Brzechwy: Wspomnienia o Janie Brzechwie*, ed. Antoni Marianowicz (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1984), pp. 96–113, on p. 113.

103 See Anna Szóstak, "Baśniowa fantastyka, futurologia, groteska i elementy lingwistyczne w powieściowym cyklu o panu Kleksie," in Anna Szóstak, *Od modernizmu do lingwizmu: O przemianach w twórczości Jana Brzechwy* (Kraków: Universitas, 2003), pp. 242–270, on p. 246.

104 See *Ibid*., p. 247.

that Brzechwa's book should actually be studied within Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical paradigm and Jacques Lacan's mirror-stage framework. Read in this way, *The Academy* tells a story of maturation which equals the expulsion from the fairy tale, while Alojzy is a sinister form of the "self-consciousness" of the fairy tale because he is constructed and the appearance of such a mirror within the tale explodes it from the inside. The fairy tale cannot go on anymore, and its Author must appear. In this way, the artificiality of Alojzy exposes the artificiality of the fairy tale and, even before that, the artificiality of the Academy.[105]

Building on Lipszyc's observations and Papuzińska's already cited study about the self-referentiality of Brzechwa's fairy tale, as well as on the findings about its biblical inclinations, we can adopt a novel, inspiring interpretive approach which posits that the fairy tale bears witness to the war and the Holocaust. In this sense, *The Academy of Mr Inkblot* marks a turning point in the history of literature for a young readership. It tells about the Event, but it long predates the post-traumatic frenzy that has imprinted itself on 21st-century separate literature. Given this, Dominick LaCapra's injunction that "Those born later should neither appropriate (nor belatedly act out) the experience of victims nor restrict their activities to the necessary role of secondary witness and guardian of memory"[106] does not really apply to the post-war readers of *The Academy*. One reason for this is that the first young readers of Brzechwa's fairy tale were not "secondary" witnesses, but simply *the* witnesses of the Holocaust. Another reason is that *The Academy* represented an unobvious narrative whose fairy-tale trappings made it decipherable as an escape from the memory of war.

The pertinence of the dates 1945 (the writing of *The Academy of Mr Inkblot*) and 1946 (the first edition of the fairy tale) makes it next to impossible to abstract the book from the war- and Holocaust-related context. Hence, I will use my hermeneutic right of self-interest and, seeking authorisation in the Derridean metonymicity of the date,[107] I will take a date as a point of departure for my journey across the textual world of Brzechwa's fairy tale.

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105 Adam Lipszyc, "Roy, Alojzy i inne chłopaki," *Kwartalnik Filmowy*, Nos. 31–32 (2000), pp. 116–125, on pp. 123–124.

106 Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 198.

107 Cf. "The metonymy of the date (a date is always also a metonymy) designates part of an event or a sequence of events by way of recalling the whole." Jacques Derrida, "Shibboleth: For Paul Celan," trans. Joshua Wilner, in *Word Traces: Readings of Paul Celan*, ed. Aris Fioretos (Baltimore, MD, and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), pp. 3–72, on p. 22.

Between the See-Saw and the Scaffold: 1946

Symptomatically, the playground topos undergoes a distinctive reversal in the imaginarium of the Holocaust. A secure, fenced space filled with playthings and resounding with the voices of frolicking kids is one of the canonical instances of childhood imagery. The paradisal site of childhood is replaced by an inverted space – the isolated ghetto, where a place for children to form a community is lacking and toys are lost. The expulsion of the child from the space of play entails not only robbing it of opportunities to satisfy its most natural need, but also pushing it into the adult world, in which it is ruled, as adults are, by the ruthless war-time jurisdiction.[108]

Considering changes the war made in the rhetorical topoi of childhood, we can usefully draw on two projects aimed at studying and describing the metamorphoses of children's codes. One of them was initiated by the editors of *Przekrój*, Poland's very popular weekly, in 1946, when a competition for children's drawings of their experiences of the war was announced.[109] Two years later, Stefan Szuman, an educational scholar, carried out extensive research on a sample of 2,388 children's drawings. The pictures were an iconic form of responding to two questions Szuman asked: "My personal memories of the war and occupation" and "What happened to my family and relatives during the war and occupation?"

The war-focused iconographic resources also include an album entitled *Wojna w oczach dziecka* [*The War in the Eyes of a Child*], which contains children's drawings based on reminiscences of their experiences during the war.[110] The

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108 Such a reversal of childhood codes is perfectly exemplified in *Ivan's Childhood* (also *My Name Is Ivan*) directed by Andrei Tarkovsky in 1962. The director skilfully juxtaposes dazzling retrospective sequences of holiday images epitomising the protagonist's happy childhood with his mother and terrifying shots of twelve-year-old Ivan's death. The boy was killed by the Nazis.

109 Several experts claim that the child has proved the most credible narrator of the Holocaust (as posited by Henryk Grynberg), because, as Aharon Appelfeld insists, the children of the Holocaust can best tell about it, for the Holocaust was the beginning of their world and their only point of reference. See Aharon Appelfeld, *Beyond Despair: Three Lectures and a Conversation with Philip Roth* (New York, NY: Fromm International Publishing, 1994), p. 37. See also Jacek Leociak, *Tekst wobec Zagłady* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo "Leopoldinum," 1997), p. 44.

110 The publication includes works produced by elementary-school students in spring 1946 following the request issued by the Minister of Education on 13th April 1946. About six thousand children's drawings were placed in Warsaw's Central Archives of Modern Records. A portion of the drawings were first put on display at the *Children*

thematically divided pictures are grouped in the following sections: "September," "Displacement", "Everyday Life," "Camps" and "Liberation." Some of the pictures are accompanied by texts in which the children themselves describe what they lived through during the war. One cannot avoid the impression that the editors of the volume in all probability ignored the actual proportions of drawings concerning respective thematic fields to compose a dramatic but, emphatically, happily ending children's narrative which unfolds following the fairy-tale sequence of *exodus*, quest, humiliation, rescue and homecoming. The guiding idea of the volume deserves to be appreciated, for, though perhaps not entirely successful, the book is certainly an original attempt at integrating into official discourse a group of victims and witnesses who have lingered on the peripheries of official narrative. We could even somewhat exaggeratingly refer to this experiment as postcolonial narrative because it opened up a space of memory onto a democratic polyphony of memories in which voices of children could be heard as well, expressive of an inclusive array of symptoms, from the war syndrome and the KZ-syndrome to the trauma of the Holocaust child and the "exiled child" syndrome.[111]

Even the most cursory look at the album is enough to see that it mercilessly exposes the post-war changes in the spaces of childhood. The idyllic topography is reduced nearly to the point of non-existence, ousted by new war topoi, such as the wall, barbed wire, execution and the gallows. The spaces of war-time childhood as distilled from the drawings leave no room for playgrounds or adult carers – mothers of the playing children. The playground is replaced by the execution square, with the gallows at its centre.[112]

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in the Times of War and Occupation exhibition, which was held by the Central Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland in 1979.

111 It is difficult, if not downright impossible to find out about the background of the children. Information as to whether any (and if so, which) of them were Jewish was not provided, probably due to political considerations. Hence we do not know whether the drawings which present concentration camps, ghettoes or executions of Jews were done by Jewish children as victims and witnesses or by non-Jewish children who reproduced scenes they had witnessed or images of "mediated" memories (the latter would mean that the children absorbed the stories they had heard and made them their own, albeit "prosthetic" experience).

112 Many of the drawings show neighbours or family members, most frequently parents, being shot dead, with the most severe trauma apparently accompanying the death of the mother. This could be indicated by two contradictory elements: either such drawings would be frequent, resulting from the necessity to work the event through, or there would be few representations of it, resulting from trauma and silence. As the

Children's texts, which often complement picture narratives, also provide interesting material to explore. The texts specify what can only vaguely be inferred from the shapes, colours and/or moods of the drawings. Such small narratives offer an opportunity to articulate details which, though irrelevant to adults, may be vital to children. War-time narratives of children have their young protagonists who populate erstwhile spaces of childhood: "I was crying terribly because auntie didn't want to take my toys along, nor Bobek my puppy, nor Maciuś, my kitten. Auntie said that we'd leave it all behind, not taking anything with us. When I cried terribly, auntie allowed me to take two dolls, my little black boys, elephants and a few toys," recalls a young girl named Jadwiga.[113]

Writing essays about the war not only reminds the children about the loss of their nurseries. It also forces the children to self-referentially revise their narratives as they are being produced: "I can't write any more, for I miss my daddy so much and I must cry. Why didya [sic] give me such a writing assignment that makes me cry?"[114]

Was *The Academy of Mr Inkblot* written for children such as Jadwiga?

Growing up, or "the Disenchantment of the World"?

The Academy of Mr Inkblot seems to be exceptionally committed not only to creating modern, post-war children's literature and to deconstructing the prior models of the fairy tale, but also – if not predominantly – to providing an exegesis of the Event of the war and the Holocaust. I emphatically rely on the term "exegesis" here because, in my view, Brzechwa not so much spins a pacifist tale of an interrupted childhood which was idyllic and happy before the disaster, as rather goes a step further to re-interpret the Event and to incorporate it into

selection of drawings in the publication is arbitrary, the dilemma cannot be conclusively resolved. We can only qualitatively examine respective visual representations of the war and occupation. In 1961 another album was published, which triggers reflection on children's drawings. The plates were made by children aged five to twelve (one drawing was made by a fourteen-year-old), who were born towards the end of or just after the war. In the drawings, if soldiers are presented, they are excluded from the war context, e.g. they are wearing uniforms and saluting against the backdrop of nature. See *Malujemy. Album sztuki dziecka*, compiled and edited by Bolesław Zagała, with an introduction by Stefan Szuman (Warszawa: Nasza Księgarnia, 1961).

113 See Katarzyna Iwanicka and Marek Dubas, eds., *Wojna w oczach dziecka* (Warszawa: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1983), n.p. An essay by Jadwiga Malinowska, a second-grade student.

114 *Ibid*.

historical-philosophical reflection. Hence, the tale about Mr Inkblot was not designed as a form of escape from working through the disaster of war, but compelled reflection on the devastation effected by the war.

Given this, in all probability the text was not only written in protest against the cruelty of the world, as this cruelty had just been perpetrated, but perhaps in order to explain the principles of the Spirit of History. Such a para-Hegelian observation about Brzechwa's trilogy should not come as a surprise, because it is not an isolated example of such a tale, although chronologically it is its first iteration. Other notable instances include the Narnia series, which has come to be regarded as a historical-philosophical and theological interpretation of the Second World War,[115] which Clive Staples Lewis began to write in 1950. Marek Oziewicz, a Polish researcher of Lewis's work, argues that Lewis found the war and the new political arrangement it had produced deeply worrying and considered literature instrumental in fending off the threat of totalitarianism, which instils in people the belief they are helpless and that their efforts for change are pointless.[116]

Indeed, the historical totalism of the Second World War and the fictional totalitarianism of the rule of the White Witch seek to remodel the existing order of the world. In this respect, the White Witch resembles Brzechwa's Alojzy – a mechanical product which is a technological representation of the authoritarian power he aspires to wield over the free world of the fairy tale.

These insights help us understand what the good-vs.-evil opposition, which is the essential generic cornerstone of the fairy tale, looks like and how it works. The fairy-tale tradition demands that good be embodied in a sage, while evil should be represented in a de-humanised dummy. Yet the innovative and at the same time terrifying final twist of *The Academy* divests the tale of a happy ending. Mr Inkblot turns out to be the loser in this fabular contest, and his continually diminishing physique serves as an extraordinarily vivid metaphor for the demise of the researcher, who retreats in the face of the forces of evil and darkness. The menacing quality of the finale of *The Academy* cannot be alleviated even by the meta-literary investment which Lipszyc highlights in his interpretation. The tale is after all supposed to lead the reader out of the space of childhood and towards adulthood, driving home the message that the fairy tale

115 See Marek Oziewicz, *Magiczny urok Narnii. Poetyka i filozofia "Opowieści z Narnii" C.S. Lewisa* (Kraków: Universitas, 2005).

116 *Ibid*., p. 288. Oziewicz draws here on the findings of Jack David Zipes. See Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1991), p. 171.

was but a literary game orchestrated by the writer with a pronounced proclivity for prattling away: " 'I am the author of the story about Mr Inkblot,' replied the grizzled man. 'I wrote this tale because I love telling fantastic stories, and I have superb fun when writing them.' "[117]

The fairy tale owes its existence to the imagination of the writer. It was invented and written only in order to bewilder readers, who must now come to their senses and return to normality the way they do after twirling around or riding a merry-go-round. The only thing that remains when a wild *ilinx* is over is dizziness.[118] One of the fairy-tale's major protagonists, Adaś Niezgódka confesses: "I had buzzing in my ears, and red spots were fluttering in front of my eyes."[119] The lonely and confused boy is surrounded by darkness, lit up by mysterious moonlight. It is the Saturnian night: "gloomy and ominous, when malevolent and baleful demons are unleashed. It is illuminated by the Moon, a natural ally of the vampire and the werewolf."[120]

On such a night, the lunar time signifies a time of inverted meanings, with what has been there so far vanishing, and what was not there during the day rising. This principle is also embodied in the ontology of the Academy building itself, "which no longer was the magnificent edifice of old. Somehow, it eluded me completely that it had shrunk by half and kept shrinking as I was looking at it. The same had happened with the park and the wall around it."[121]

Of course, the transgression of the fairy-tale world into the non-fairy-tale space of the fabulist's study can be explained by the oneiric convention which is framed as "adventures of the eye," with the protagonist probably waking up from or trying to fight the drowsiness which is stealing upon him.[122] However, it seems that Adaś is not awakened from a nightmare, although the swapping of the Moon for a round lamp in the writer's study is a clear indication of the transition from

117 Jan Brzechwa, *Akademia pana Kleksa* (Wrocław: Siedmioróg, 1995), p. 116.

118 *Ilinx* is one of the categories of play identified by Roger Caillois. For details, see Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (1961) (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

119 Brzechwa, *Akademia*, p. 114.

120 Maria Janion. *Wampir: Biografia symboliczna* (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2008), p. 135.

121 Brzechwa, *Akademia*, p. 114.

122 The eye motif is extensively used in the last chapter of the book. Here is but a handful of examples: "The Moon dazzled my eyes"; "I did not notice at all"; "Red flakes were fluttering in front of my eyes"; "I could barely keep my eyes open"; and "When I opened my eyes a moment later…". *Ibid*., pp. 114–117.

the dream to reality and the victory of light over darkness. All the signs imply that the world has regained its form, which is founded on the library: "There was a bookcase where the wall once was, and the gates in the wall had changed into book spines with titles imprinted on them in gold lettering. The bookcase held all the fairy tales by Mr Andersen and Brothers Grimm […] and many, many others."[123]

However, it is precisely at this point that a real child nightmare begins, for in front of him Adaś sees Mr Inkblot diminishing and ultimately transfiguring into the button of Doctor Paj-Chi-Wo. Snatched by Mateusz the starling, the miraculous object effects another transformation as the bird morphs into the writer himself. It turns out that it is not Mr Inkblot, but the writer, who is a specific *homo magicus*, performing a double closure on himself – transfiguring into a button and Mateusz. The ending of the story marks the real birth of its author. In order for the author to appear, two conditions must be met: the protagonist (Mr Inkblot) must be declared "dead," and the creator must be divested of the attributes of divinity. For this reason, Mr Inkblot must vanish and the metamorphosis of the bird (Mateusz) – the Horatian symbol of poetry – into a human (the writer) restores the lost order, or more precisely restores the order that reality lost for the benefit of the fairy tale.

What Max Weber referred to as "the disenchantment of the world" comes to pass.[124]

Is there a difference between the disenchantment of the world and the exit of child readers from the fairy-tale space of childhood? It seems that the question concerns the processual mode in which the fairy tale operates. The narrativity of the fairy tale is supposed to employ the maturation-centred plot coupled with the recurrent, well-known fabular motifs and fairy-tale patterns in order to prepare the reader to abandon the secure space of childhood. Relinquishing the fairy tale is a natural process which is sequentially distributed over time. Though dislodged by adulthood and incorporated into the mythical code of childhood, the fairy tale still retains its ontological identity.[125] Given this, interpreting the

123 *Ibid*., p. 115.

124 Max Weber, *Max Weber's "Science as a Vocation,"* trans. Michael John, eds. Peter Lassman and Irving Velody with Herminio Martins (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp. 3–31, on pp. 13–14, 30.

125 Between eleven and twelve years of age, children are no longer satisfied with the fantastic alone, but they still need happy endings. This is why literature for a young readership responds to this readerly challenge by offering novels which are based on fairy-tale patterns. Cf. Dorota Simonides, "Fantastyka baśni i innych tekstów

ending of *The Academy* in terms of maturation should not be viewed as a surprising venture.

However, the culmination of Brzechwa's narrative does not dovetail with canonical farewells to the fairy tale, for the ending of *The Academy* is total and irreversible. The reader finds out that the story of Mr Inkblot is invented, and its producer owns up to having performed a prestidigitating trick. The knowledge of there being or rather not being a fairy tale comes out all of a sudden to possess the reader by violence and disenchant the world in which the child has been immersed so far, while the fairy tale is by definition supposed to alleviate the pain caused by the brevity of our worldly life and to channel real satisfaction that comes from bonding with other people.[126]

In Brzechwa's fairy tale, the admission of the writer, who appears in a *deus ex machina* mode, abruptly puts an end to all speculations about the tale the child is experiencing. Reduced to an act of fabrication which caters to the ludic needs of the artist and the audience, it no longer possesses the therapeutic capacity of comforting and supporting readers. It is no more than a beautiful deceit by which sensitive readers get fooled.

Construed in this way, *The Academy of Mr Inkblot* represents one of the most ruthless fairy-tale endings, as the revelation of it fictionality shatters the child's world. This fabular self-exposure certainly suggests that Brzechwa's text is an embryo of the postmodernist fairy tale. Nevertheless, to avoid abusing notions specific to the developments which *The Academy* predates by a few decades, I propose to view it as an anti-fairy tale, not because of the above generic reinterpretation, but due to its dedication to interpreting history.

An Academy or a Cheder?

It is next to impossible to read *The Academy of Mr Inkblot* in disjunction from its historical context. As argued by Mariusz Urbanek, historical associations are practically unmissable: "On 1st September[127] […] Filip brings to the magical school the doll he has constructed. […] Krzysztof Gradowski, the writer

folklorystycznych w życiu dziecka," in *Baśń i dziecko*, ed. Halina Skrobiszewska (Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1978), pp. 110–133.

126 Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2010), pp. 10–11.

127 Germany invaded Poland on 1st September 1939, a day regarded in Poland ever since as the beginning of the Second World War. At the same time, 1st September is traditionally the first day of classes in Polish schools.

and director of a film based on Brzechwa's novel, interpreted *The Academy* quite unambiguously. The doll made by Filip the barber is no longer Alojzy, a future jewel of the academy, but... Adolf. The king's herald summons to defend the country and not to surrender a single button to the wolves […]. Wearing black uniforms and carrying torches aflame, the wolves that invade the kingdom of Mateusz march to the rhythm of 'Strong jaws, strong will and we shall conquer the world,' a hit by the heavy-metal band TSA, a scene redolent of Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*, a famous apotheosis of fascism."[128]

Many readings of *The Academy* have referenced the war, which proves that the historical moment when the fairy tale was written and published has been recognised as one of its interpretive keys. It has been suggested that the character of Mr Inkblot was modelled on Janusz Korczak,[129] Franc Fiszer, a popular Warsaw bon-vivant, Brzechwa himself or his father.[130] A range of real-life antecedents have also been marshalled for Adaś Niezgódka, though more often than not he has been regarded as Brzechwa's *alter ego* because, like the writer

128 Mariusz Urbanek, *Brzechwa nie dla dzieci* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Iskry, 2013), p. 121.

129 This analogy is discussed in more detail by Piotr Ruszkowski, who argues that despite initial failures, Mr Inkblot finally succeeds in bringing Alojzy up, because in the final part of the trilogy he is an exemplary young man. See Piotr Ruszkowski, "Korczak znany, lecz nie do końca poznany… Próba przypomnienia osoby w jej bogactwie wewnętrznym," in *Czytanie Korczaka. Książki, bohaterowie, postawy*, ed. Katarzyna Tałuć (Katowice: Biblioteka Śląska, 2013), pp. 115–129.

As the following chapter is devoted to Janusz Korczak, at this point I will only briefly mention by way of introduction that the Old Doctor or Mr. Doctor, as he was known, was a Polish-Jewish physician, educator and social activist, the author of several educational studies and novels for children and young adults. Fascinated with the New Education movement, he was an advocate of children's emancipation. Together with Stefania Wilczyńska, he ran the Children's Home, an orphanage for Jewish children in Warsaw, which was relocated to the ghetto in 1940, and he co-founded Our House, a home for Polish orphans. During the *Grossaktion Warschau* in 1942, about 200 children from the orphanage, accompanied by Korczak, Wilczyńska, Natalia Poz, Róża Lipiec-Jakubowska and Róża Sztokman-Azrylewicz, were transported to the extermination camp in Treblinka. They were all murdered.

130 Urbanek, *Brzechwa*, p. 121. Yet another hypothetical model for Mr Inkblot was Wolf Popper, a 17th-century merchant and financier from Cracow, who was called "the Stork" for his unusual habit of standing on one leg. This is what Mr Inkblot does when deep in thought. The founder of a synagogue in Cracow's Kazimierz district in 1620, Popper was a well-known figure and Brzechwa might have heard about him.

himself, he does not like barley soup and carrots, and he collects buttons from coats, jackets and blazers.[131]

These interpretive shreds, spectacular and interesting to readers as they are, sorely lack the coherence which could be expected in the case of a text as central to the history of children's literature as *The Academy of Mr Inkblot* is. For *The Academy* is not merely a formal and rhetorical experiment performed on the literary fairy tale, but also, given the moment when it was written, an interpretation of history or, more precisely, of the Event, which, though disastrous, leads to the renewal of the world. This is why Mr Inkblot can be viewed not just as a master and a teacher who attempts to reclaim a world deformed by the disaster, but first and foremost as a wise melamed, a rabbi perhaps, who re-institutes the lost order.

א Aleph = Academy

The Academy, Adam and all the "A-boys" make up the space which is controlled by Mr Inkblot, the mentor. To assume that amassing protagonists whose names start with an A is a pure coincidence would be quite a stretch of the imagination. Of course, Mr Inkblot himself explains this onomastic elitism by citing his reluctance to memorise and litter his mind with other letters. However, Mr Inkblot's reverence for the letter A – *aleph* in Hebrew – cannot but prompt further inquiries. Although in the phonetic transcription this vowel is just a variety of aspiration, it means more than all the other letters of the alphabet.[132] The point is that, according to kabbalists, *aleph* is the sum of the three fundamental geometrical forms which are the cornerstones of the Hebraic alphabet. Specifically, these forms are: the point (corresponding to the letter *yod* from which everything took its beginning), the line (corresponding to the letter *vav* and symbolising erect posture) and the plane (two lines forming an L and corresponding to the letter *dalet*). With its shape formed by these three letters, *aleph* itself means the unity of God.[133]

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131 See *Ibid*.

132 Tadeusz Zaderecki explains that *aleph* refers to the mystery of being and is the proto-foundation of all things, while the remaining Hebraic letters come forth from and are embedded in it. Tadeusz Zaderecki, *Tajemnice alfabetu hebrajskiego* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo AGADE, 1994), pp. 55, 57.

133 See Marc-Alain Ouaknin, *Mysteries of the Kabbalah*, trans. Josephine Bacon (New York, NY: Abbeville Press, 2000), pp. 284–285. One midrash describes the timidity of the first letter. When all the letters assembled before God and boasted about their virtues, *aleph* was the only one that was silent almost till the end. When God listened to its

Władysław Panas insists that the Hebraic sign for *aleph* is similar to the Greek χ (chi), the first letter in *chiasmos*, i.e. the crossing. Panas understands it as tantamount to meeting the Other. If so, *aleph* is a record of encounter as it symbolises God and man with one hand gesturing up at the sky and the other down at the ground, the point of beginning.[134]

The idea of attending to the script and hidden meanings may by particularly germane to the story of Mr Inkblot. The dense fabric of evocations of writing (including inkblotgraphy lessons, the spinning of letters, the recording of dreams, china tablets with secrets inscribed on them, an expedition for ink and the very name of the eponymous character) makes this interpretive perspective particularly compelling. Importantly, Hebrew is a holy tongue (*Lashon Hakodesh*), for the letters of its alphabet possess such an extraordinary power and energy that they served as the primary tools of creation. It should be remembered that Jewish kabbalists dismissed the idea of the creation of the world out of nothing and argued that because God had created the visible world in emulation of the invisible Torah, all the creatures of this world imitated the letters of the invisible, mystical Torah.[135]

As a consequence of this doctrine, a specific approach to the interpretation of the world was developed in which the central axis is provided by philosophical reflection on individual letters of the visible Torah, while their order is believed to be reflected in the surrounding world.

Let us focus on another series of letters, one that lines up into a name. In Hebraic tradition, to relinquish the name means to give up on life and language because, as Jacques Derrida reminds, following Scholem: "Speech is name. In the names, the power of language is enclosed, in them its abyss is sealed."[136] Jews

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humble speech, he said: "א, א (*Alef, alef*)! Although I will create the world with the letter ב (bet), you will be the first of all letters. Only through you do I become one. With you all counting begins and every deed in the world. No union is actualized except by א (*alef*). *The Zohar*, Vol. 1, trans. Daniel C. Matt, ed. Margot Pritzker (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 16.

134 Władysław Panas, "Zamach pióra," in Władysław Panas, *Pismo i rana: Szkice o problematyce żydowskiej w literaturze polskiej* (Lublin: Dabar, 1996), pp. 75–90, on p. 77.

135 Michał Paweł Markowski, *Polska literatura nowoczesna. Leśmian, Schulz, Witkacy* (Kraków: Universitas, 2007), p. 185. Markowski's remark may need a commentary. In Judaism, all creatures of the world *are* letters of the mystical Torah. I owe this insight to Professor Sławomir Jacek Żurek.

136 Jacques Derrida, "The Eyes of Language: The Abyss and the Volcano," in Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, ed. and trans. Gil Anidjar (New York, NY, and London, UK: Routledge, 2002), pp. 189–227, on p. 213.

believe that God will use their names to call them to rise from their graves on the day of resurrection, and the Talmud suggests that God's judgment can be revoked by changing one's name.[137]

Adaś is certainly a prominent name in *The Academy*. Adaś in Polish is an endearing diminutive of Adam, and Adam is the term for the human being in Hebrew.[138] Gematria ascribes to the letters used in this name the numeric value of 45, which is represented in *ma*, that is, "what?"[139] The human being is thus a question about what s/he is or perhaps of what s/he becomes and what s/he intends to be. Within such an interpretive framework, the human being is potentiality itself, a pure possibility which is usually attributed to the child alone.

Adaś is twelve years old when he enters the Academy in order to be changed, improved and mended so as to turn from a loser into a man of success. He is to be helped by Mr Inkblot, the mentor of the boys. However, Mr Inkblot immediately explains what rules apply at his Academy: " 'Remember, boys,' Mr Inkblot told us right at the start, 'that I will not teach you your multiplication tables, nor grammar, nor calligraphy, nor all those sciences which are usually taught at schools. I will simply open your heads up and put some brains inside.' "[140]

What does it mean to "open the heads up" and "put some brains inside" in the context of Mr Inkblot's "educational" interventions? His Academy is not a cheder, contrary to what the age of his students could imply.

The magnificent building of the Academy, situated amidst a park which borders with fairylands, does not resemble a cheder at all. The stately three-story edifice with its halls for study and play, the mysterious room which belongs to Mr Inkblot alone and the huge garden which is surrounded by a wall with a glass gate and innumerable gates leading to various fairy tales, resembles a well-organised institution, even though the Academy is free of an oppressive system

137 See Wojciech Kuć, "Dziecko w judaizmie," in *Antropologia religii: Wybór esejów*. Vol. 2, selected by Mariusz S. Ziółkowski, ed. Arkadiusz Sołtysiak (Warszawa: Zakład Antropologii Historycznej Instytut Archeologii UW, 2001), pp. 55–71.

138 The word is derived from *adamah* ("ground, earth"), which means that man is an "earthling." This implies not so much "an inhabitant of earth as rather a product made from the dust of the ground. […] At the same time, *adam* is […] an acronym of *efer*, *dam* and *marah* (i.e. 'dust,' 'blood' and 'gall'). As earth produces crops, so man must be creator and producer through labour […]. Earth is the destiny of man – a creature made of the dust of the ground." Paweł Jędrzejewski, *Judaizm bez tajemnic* (Kraków: Stowarzyszenie Pardes, 2012), p. 45.

139 Ouaknin, *Mysteries*, p. 232.

140 Brzechwa, *Akademia*, p. 37.

of instruction. Bringing to mind a palace rather than a school, the building substantiates the fairy-tale status of Brzechwa's narrative. When the students pass through the glass gate, they enter a space of promise which by no means exhorts them to "abandon all hope," instead encouraging them to develop self-confidence.

Or is it a yeshiva perhaps? Under the First Republic of Poland (i.e. between the 15th century and the third partition of Poland in 1795), such schools were called Talmudic academies. They admitted thirteen-year-old boys after their bar mitzvah. The biggest yeshiva in pre-war Poland was situated in Lublin (Chachmei Lublin Yeshiva/Yeshiva of Wise Men in Lublin) and taught boys from fourteen years of age.

Mr Inkblot establishes a hybrid institution which performs a range of functions. It is certainly a school, an extensive playground and a therapeutic facility in which the boys are helped to develop self-reliance, paralleling the worn-down appliances repaired by Mr Inkblot. The path to repair leads through a revolution in consciousness, a unique metanoia. The transformation is triggered by dialogue between the student and the teacher. In this sense, Mr Inkblot's school is reminiscent of Plato's Academy combined with a cheder or, considering the age of the boys, with a yeshiva.

As a result, the typical cheder *rebbe* comes across as merely a poor caricature of what a real teacher and guide should be, which is what Mr Inkblot professes and is considered to be. His exceptionality does not solely reside in his magical abilities, obvious attributes of the fairy-tale protagonist as they are, but first and foremost in his approach to learning and studying. Mr Inkblot becomes a second father to his boys,[141] improving their minds and opening them up to dialogue.

Unlike in the cheder, his methods primarily appeal to the unfettered imagination of children. Instead of calligraphy lessons, he offers classes in inkblotgraphy. To grasp the meaning of his actions, we should examine the contrast between an inkblot and a calligraphed character. The teacher repudiates repetition, imitation and replication of the ancient pattern, instead prioritising activeness, dynamism, creation and naming. Like images in Rorschach tests, the shapes of inkblots compel the Academy students to be actively involved, enthusiastic and committed to constructing stories, all of which would be impossible without the

141 Jewish tradition tends to frame the Talmudic teacher as a father of his student, a custom justified by the same grammatical root from which both nouns derive: *horeh* ("parent") and *moreh* ("teacher"). See Amos Oz and Fania Oz-Salzberger, *Jews and Words* (New Haven, CT, and London, UK: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 24.

work of their imaginations. A spot of ink on paper is submitted to imaginative interpretations, which presupposes creative freedom.

In Hebrew, the verb "to study" is symbolised by the letter *lamed* – ל. As the only one of the twenty two characters in the alphabet, *lamed* extends above the line of script. Therefore, to study means to rise, to go beyond oneself and to open up to infinity. This process is usually dynamic; rather than wordless, silent and associated with the asceticism of individual study, it is captured in a metaphorical image of a battlefield. It is enveloped in motion and noise, takes place in the company of other learners and above all involves the presence of the master. Knowledge is acquired in this way not only by students at batei midrash, but also by the pupils of Mr Inkblot's Academy.

The transgression of boundaries in emulation of the letter *lamed* is supposed to develop an open mind, to foster a creative imagination and to unblock intellectual capacities. Steeped in such an educational milieu, the individual "becomes," and the teaching process never ends. Mr Inkblot insists that interpretation is not a given but a possibility which sets thinking in motion. Thus the task that Mr Inkblot devises for himself is to put thoughts in constant motion.

Stretching beyond the ruling, the letter *lamed* points to what forms the bedrock of studying. Studying is a continual "ascent towards" which defies any ultimate definition. It ensues from a creative refusal to answer the question lying at the core of the human being: *Adam* – "what?". To answer it would mean the end of the quest and the achievement of stabilisation, which opposes the human calling to self-fulfilment through "being on the way."

Therefore Mr Inkblot activates the imagination of his students in the belief that the teacher-student encounter is grounded in trust and an "honest" flow of knowledge. Such a relationship is well conveyed by a tale about Zeno of Citium and the meaning of his gestures. The philosopher would show his open hand and say "A visual appearance is like this." Then, folding his fingers a little, he would explain: "An act of assent is like this." Afterwards, he would clench his hand into a fist and say that this was what comprehension was like. Finally he would firmly press his left hand around his right hand and "say that such was knowledge, which was within the power of nobody save the wise man."[142] However, the

142 Cicero, *De Natura Deorum: Academica, with an English Translation by H*. Rackham (Cambridge, MA, and London, UK: Harvard University Press/William Heinemann LTD., 1967), Book II, xlvii, 145, pp. 653–654. https://archive.org/stream/denaturadeorumac00ciceuoft/denaturadeorumac00ciceuoft_djvu.txt. Accessed 19 Feb. 2019.

Talmudic master critically reinterprets this tale. He starts by releasing the right fist from the left hand. Then he slowly extends his fingers, shows his hand resembling an open flower and comments that this is how intelligence blooms. In the following step, the open hand with stretched-out fingers expresses an invitation to encounter. This is the hand of the wise man who knows that dialogue is the greatest of gifts. Finally, his hands cross at wrists, forming wings of a bird. This bird ascends…[143]

This is the way in which Mr Inkblot opens up his students' minds because he knows that only such an intellect mirrors transcendence, while restraints imposed on it produce stabilisation, which halts free thinking, a guarantee of life. Mr Inkblot seems to rely on characteristic yeshiva methods as by surprising his students he forces them to constantly reflect on the world. Specifically, his approach is reminiscent of *pilpul*, a method in which Biblical contradictions are studied and reconciled by recourse to various works of Talmudic literature.

Such a "flow" of ideas is vividly emblematised in the tablets of stone (*luchot avanim*). *Eben* means "stone." The word can be parsed into *av* and *ben*, which denote respectively "father" and "son." So what actually takes place in "stone" is a symbolic encounter of two generations. Given this, it is not in the static matter of stone but in the process of intergenerational transmission that the value of the stone-engraved record of the commandments itself lies.[144]

At the heart of studying lies an encounter with another human being (the face) and an exchange of thoughts in which a new meaning originates, briefly *khidush*.[145] For this reason, studying is a loving exchange, and the Book transfigures into the master.[146]

Alojzy's arrival marks the beginning of the Academy's end. Certainly neither the boy nor his guardian Filip seeks an encounter or the self-development it is supposed to entail, let alone the values inherent in dialogue and communication. As a matter of fact, Jewish tradition envisages and even encourages a student's rebellion against his teacher. However Alojzy is patently not the representation of the Other with whom it is possible to cohabit provided that the word appears in the space between him and those who are "at home." The function of the word

143 See Ouaknin, *Mysteries*, p. 406.

144 Ouaknin, *Mysteries*, 257.

145 It means something new, an innovation, for it is not enough only to repeat, ask questions and listen. One must also offer a new interpretation, a fresh view of what might seem a hackneyed problem.

146 It is thus no coincidence that in Judaism authors of religious books are called by the titles of their books.

is to bind and to ensure the continuity of transmission. It is not a coincidence that "one" and "other" in Hebrew "bear the secret of peaceable existence: One is *echad* (*aleph*, *chet*, *dalet*). Other is *acher* (*aleph*, *chet*, *resh*). Both words […] start with the letter *aleph*. As the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, *aleph* has the numeric value of one. In Rabbinic tradition, *aleph* is associated with God, who is one. […] Neither I nor you can usurp the right to superiority because both one and other, all of us receive life from God."[147]

This is not the only similarity of the two words. Importantly, they share the same root, which means a "brother," which is itself etymologically related to the verb "to sew."[148] This produces a vivid image of brotherhood which is founded on sewing together – bringing people closer and building strong communal bonds.

Alojzy's natural element, however, is destruction rather than construction. Being a mechanical doll, his artificiality prevents him from embracing dialogue and from being incorporated in the concept of brotherhood. He brazenly announces his intentions: "I will be destroying everything because that's what I fancy doing!"[149] He is bored with the company of the boys and would like to acquire the whole of knowledge quickly and almost "mechanically." Mr Inkblot takes notice of the inhuman pace at which his pupil learns and finds it difficult to accept: "Basically, he has outdone all of us. He is simply a wonderful creation. He has learned everything there is to learn at the Academy, and he can even speak Chinese. It seems to me that he literally devoured my Chinese dictionary, for I cannot find it anywhere."[150] The fact that Alojzy devours books is however not coupled with any love of knowledge: "I didn't ask Mr Inkblot to teach me thinking. I could do very well without it."[151]

He that can do very well without thinking chooses to take shortcuts. He gulps books unreflectingly and unemotionally, and seeks to defeat his master by destroying his secrets inscribed on china tablets. What meanings are conveyed in the name Alojzy? It is a name of Germanic origin and means "omniscient," deriving from *al-wis*, *all-weisse* ("all-knowing/wise").[152] He that is called so is also

147 Philippe Haddad, *Mądrości rabinów,* trans. Ewa Burska (Warszawa: Cyklady, 2012), p. 88. For the original French edition, see Philippe Haddad, *Paroles des rabbins* (Paris: Seuil, 2010).

148 See *Ibid*.

149 Brzechwa, *Akademia*, p. 98.

150 *Ibid*.

151 *Ibid*., p. 99.

152 Henryk Fros and Franciszek Sowa, eds., *Księga imion i świętych*. Vol. 1 (Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM, 1997), p. 118.

branded with pride, which makes him ignore the truth that study, i.e. interpretation, is inextricable from patience and readiness for encounter. He embodies an aversion to constant hypothesising and inferring. The rebellion of Alojzy, the rebellion of a machine, puts the time of free imagination and dialogue to an end.[153]

This "exchange" of values inevitably brings to mind the birth of fascism and the outbreak of the Second World War. The destruction of the community which Mr Inkblot and his students have formed results in deconstructing the ancient order reflected not only in the relationship between the student and the teacher, but also in the relations among individual signs – letters that form the text. The cracking of the china tablets with the secrets recorded on them reverberates with a range of cultural references, both bringing to mind time-honoured thought traditions and offering a historical context-specific topical allusion. For one, it re-enacts *shevirat ha kelim* (the shattering of the vessels), and for the other, it evokes the burning of books in Germany in 1933 and, more generally, the destruction of dissenting works by totalitarian systems.

As Alojzy wrecks books and the china tablets, language is also annihilated, because "if in the name of God, *Shaddai*, one single point, the tiny letter *Yod*, were lacking, there would remain the word *Shod*, that is to say, devastation. It is by virtue of this dot that the awful power of God, which at any moment could utterly devastate and annihilate the world, brings about the world's redemption instead. This dot is the primeval originating point of creation."[154]

Alojzy violates not only the order of letters, but also the order of law; he does not follow the letter of the law, so to speak. If books have not escaped annihilation, the end of the Academy is also possible. And without the Academy, all the points of reference which have so far provided the children in Mr Inkblot's care with a sense of security will be gone. Consequently, the eradication of the Academy can be construed in several ways: as the end of childhood, the loss of the Temple or the outbreak of war. Still, all of these interpretations entail one

153 Importantly, Alojzy can also be interpreted as a golem. The diabolic barber Filip, the constructor of Alojzy, demands that Mr Inkblot humanise his mechanical invention. Gershom Scholem explains: "[I]n the twelfth century at the latest a set procedure for golem-making developed on the basis of the conceptions set forth above. This procedure, if I am not mistaken, was a ritual *representing* an act of creation by the adept and culminating in ecstasy." Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1996), p. 184.

154 Martin Buber, *Gog and Magog: A Novel*, trans. Ludwig Lewisohn (New York, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999), p. 48.

common ramification; namely, Adaś and the other boys are doomed to be exiles and their journey will become a real test of the values which their master sought to instil in them.

One of the final episodes of *The Academy of Mr Inkblot* deserves closer scrutiny. Filip, the constructor of Alojzy, steps into the building and uses his razor to cut off, one by one, the candleflames glimmering on the Christmas tree. Darkness descends upon the Academy, and with it upon the entire world.[155] Alojzy's rebellion is not only an act of defection from ancient principles, but also an expression of the desire to obscure fundamental meanings which are metonymically rendered in letters that form continuous sequences of words.[156] Therefore Adaś must go and gain light, read: ink, which will make it possible to record the world as letters are guarantees of its existence. Ultimately then, his quest will be a restitutive one, which means that its aim is to restore to the world the shape it had before the disaster. Mr Inkblot and Adaś face the difficult task of leading the world out of darkness, which epitomises stagnation, ignorance and the impossibility of writing, and into light, which is identified with freedom, knowledge and the writing of a narrative.

That Adaś is predestined for this mission is certain. After all, Mr Inkblot has access to the dreams of his boys, which offers a very interesting interpretive

155 The motif of Mr Inkblot gradually diminishing is intriguing. As Alojzy enters the Academy, the professor slowly loses his strength and shrinks. He seems to be undergoing *tzimtzum*. *Tzimtzum* means the contraction, or self-withdrawal of God. Alan Unterman, *The Jews: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 104. Of course, the plot of Brzechwa's narrative does not suggest that Ambrosius Inkblot wields any divine attributes, yet his "self-zeroing" in order to give freedom to others is an exceptionally interesting motif for interpreting this character as a teacher and a mentor.

156 I view Alojzy as a figure of a self-appointed messiah who makes a promise of change or, rather, who challenges the world. The artificial human seeks to liberate the world from the true sage. Should Alojzy be regarded as a pseudo-messiah? Władysław Panas relies on Isaac Luria's kabbalistic doctrine to argue that "the coming of the Messiah refers […] to the end of times, the end of history, the absolute end of the world. It is apocalyptic and eschatological. […] Yet the world which emerged from the cosmic catastrophe […] needs mending and the return to God's original, ideal intent." Władysław Panas, *Księga blasku. Traktat o kabale w prozie Brunona Schulza* (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 1997), pp. 215–216. Unlike Ambrosius Inkblot, whose name comes from Greek and means "immortal," Alojzy as a pseudo-messiah will not contribute to the renewal of the world, instead causing its destruction. See Fros and Sowa, eds., *Księga imion*, p. 138.

option. The master sees the world right through because his eye furnishes him with both a micro- and a macro-perspective. He can inspect dreams and dispatch his eye to the moon. Interpreted in this way, Mr Inkblot boasts the attribute of the Seer, a tzaddik from Lublin.[157] Inkblot the "Seer" sees and knows more than other people do. As his sight pierces Adaś through, he realises the impending destruction of the Academy. After all, he teaches his pupils how to see things which others fail to perceive.

Adaś strives to adopt the perspective of Mr Inkblot, his master. He begins to fly and reaches the dogs' paradise. Particularly interesting are not so much his sensations as his observations from the flight: "I noticed that I had already flown over the wall around the Academy of Mr Inkblot, and I expected to see from above all the neighbouring fairy tales to which I had so often got through the gates in the park. However, I did not see anything beyond the wall, except a few green hills, a birch thicket and flower-strewn meadows. There was not a single trace of the fairy tales, and the wall, as any other wall, surrounded the Academy buildings in the most ordinary way."[158]

The discovery of emptiness where there should be fairylands constitutes knowledge that other boys do not possess. Before, it was the monopoly of Mr Inkblot, but now Adaś has also become its depositary. This means that he has touched the mystery which has brought him closer to the position occupied by his master. And even though the master tells Adaś to promise not to fly ever again, he views the boy as his successor.

These are not the only signs of the mission which Adaś is predestined to fulfil. When interpreting the dreams of his students, Mr Inkblot discerns in Adaś's dream something that makes him believe that writing and the world will be

157 Władysław Panas, the author of *Oko cadyka* [*The Eye of the Tzaddik*], a book about Yaakov Yitzach HaLevi Horowitz (the Seer of Lublin), a visionary and the spiritual leader of Hasidism in pre-war Poland, describes the empty space where Szeroka Street, the main thoroughfare of Jewish Lublin, once was. The house where the tzaddik lived was situated at 28 Szeroka Street. After the Second World War, the street disappeared and Zamkowy Square was built in its place. The shape of the Square resembles the eye and at the same time the upper part of the matzevah that marks the grave of the Seer of Lublin. However, to notice this unusual topography, one must adopt an entirely different viewpoint: "This is where my aerial bedecker which I mentioned at the beginning of these notes starts. A guidebook combined with exercises for the eye, which requires, as its basic precondition, opening all the eyes, external and inner alike. […] I mean the eye that hears and the ear that sees." Władysław Panas, *Oko cadyka* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2004), p. 7.

158 Brzechwa, *Akademia*, p. 55.

salvaged by this boy alone. Specifically, in his dream, Adaś repeatedly rescues Mr Inkblot, who freezes, burns or literally loses his head. Brave and devoted to his master, the boy saves Mr Inkblot after an explosion splinters him into pieces, each of which is a miniature of the teacher. Adaś salvages one of such particles and preserves it in a glass. Analysing Adaś's dream, Mr Inkblot begins to realise that the boy's visions are prophetic and herald both the disintegration and the triumph of the Academy. This can usefully be read against the backdrop of Luria's doctrine of "the shattering of the vessels" (*shevirat ha-kelim*) and them being made whole again in an act of mystical redemption (*tikkun*). As a result of the disaster, the world disintegrated and nothing finds itself in its proper place anymore. Because Alojzy violated the rules of the game,[159] all things are ruptured: "Everything is in some way broken, everything has a flaw, everything is unfinished"[160] and will remain so until this crack is rectified.

Such a flaw and incompleteness afflict language, which has been incoherent and defective since the disaster. Examples of maimed language in Brzechwa's trilogy proliferate: Mateusz the starling utters only word-endings; the captain in *The Triumph of Mr Inkblot* struggles with language when solving a crossword puzzle, because being deaf he cannot hear the responses of his crew to his questions about the clues; Adaś's father defaces books by removing their printed pages with a razor and replacing them with his own stories, which he anyway quickly burns in a stove; and, finally, Adaś himself, as a graduate of the Academy, is a proud holder of a degree in Animal Philology since the human language is in decline. The catastrophe of the Academy also commences from Mr Inkblot's interrupted tale about the moon people. Alojzy brutally disrupts the continuity of the fairy-tale narrative: " 'We're not done yet, Mr Inkblot! Soon you won't feel like telling your little stories! Your Academy'll turn into sawdust, no more!' […] 'It's a pity, boys, that I couldn't finish the tale about the moon people. I'll have to hold it back for another book.' "[161]

Thus, the restitution of the world amounts to the restoration of coherence to language, which can be achieved only by gaining ink. However, the mission of Mr Inkblot is not reducible to recovering ink for the world and, consequently, re-introducing the medium for writing down the code which guarantees the cosmic order. His task also involves securing the continuity of the interrupted

159 Interestingly, when playing together, Israeli children cry "the tools are broken" to indicate a lie or a violation of the rules of the game. See Oz and Oz, *Jews and Words*, p. 47.

160 Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 113.

161 Brzechwa, *Akademia*, p. 104.

narrative, with Brzechwa seeking to resume it in two consecutive volumes of Mr Inkblot's adventures: *The Travels of Mr Inkblot* and *The Triumph of Mr Inkblot*.

The gap in the narrative means the expulsion from the paradise of the Academy. Mr Inkblot has the power of creation taken away from him, and this loss equals inarticulateness and darkness.[162] The demise of the Academy is best captured in the concluding image of the boys who are leaving the safe place: "Anastasius opened the gate and, like in a dream, I saw elongated shadows of my friends passing in front of me. I wanted to shout out: 'See you, boys,' but my voice stuck in my throat."[163]

Only silence remains in confrontation with what has happened. The incapacity of articulation also afflicts the main protagonist, who has been the narrator – a guide through the fairy-tale world – so far. Now, he suffers a narrative defeat as well. The poetics of "lump in the throat" (to use an expression coined by and associated with the work of the Polish poet Tadeusz Różewicz) embodies the impotence of language that has come upon the narrator, but it is not an effect of maturation and of the growing out of the fairy tale which maturation involves. If it were so, we could rather expect a cacophony of various discourses which come along with maturity and herald the end of the kingdom of the fairy tale.

The voice is taken away both from Mr Inkblot, the ruler of the fairy tale, and from Adaś Niezgódka, the narrator. Then the author appears in their place. Let us thus return to the demystification of the fairy tale.

The point is that the tale interrupted by Alojzy also represents the ontological crisis that beset the fairy tale as a genre in the aftermath of the Second World War. Expulsion from the Academy is a dramatic farewell to the fairy tale, which does not ensue from maturation but results from the destruction of fairy-worlds and the infection of children's imaginations with the wartime germ of evil. The

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162 The moon motif also signals another meaning. In Judaism, time is closely linked to night and the moon rather than to day and the sun. On the first day of the month, i.e. Rosh Chodesh, Jews pray outdoors in the belief that God will restore Israel to its former glory and the moon will receive a new brightness. Because of this specific form of rituality, Jews were called the "sons of the moon." See Sławomir Jacek Żurek, "Zastygłe w polszczyźnie. O świętach żydowskich," in Sławomir Jacek Żurek, *Z pogranicza: Szkice o literaturze polsko-żydowskiej* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2008), pp. 22–37, on p. 23. For the English translation, see Sławomir Jacek Żurek, "Frozen in Polish: On Holidays in Polish-Jewish Poetry of the Interwar Period," in Sławomir Jacek Żurek, *From the Borderland: Essays on Polish-Jewish Literature*, trans. Thomas Annesy (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2007).

163 Brzechwa, *Akademia*, p. 113.

experiences of war make it impossible to retain the status of the fairy tale as a universal narrative which supports the needy ones. Read as a collection of voices about the collapse of the textual world, the disappearance of the master, the darkness that descends on earth and the debacle of literature, whose fictionality is asserted by the author himself, *The Academy* strays far away from the optimistic ending of a comforting fairy tale.

What Is Erasure?

When the author makes his appearance in *The Academy of Mr Inkblot*, something more happens than just the unveiling of the secret of the fairy tale. The figure of Jan Brzechwa seems, as it were, to have a grander significance than the character of the Wizard of Oz, who eventually turns out to be just an ordinary man trapped both in the realm he rules and in the form he has adopted. As the structure of the fairy tale is unveiled by the maker of Mr Inkblot, one thing at least is proved beyond reasonable doubt. Namely, the narrative is not just an escapist extravaganza that strives to bracket off the realities of war. The self-revealing author is certainly not evidence of there being a separate fairy-tale domain which spreads itself before readers as soon as they go through an old wardrobe. On the contrary, he testifies to there being no fairy tale whatsoever and by the same token affirms that should readers have any opposite impression, it is an effect of trickery. The fabulist discards the robe of a *homo magicus* for that of a *homo trickster*, with wonder and magic replaced by a swindler's con aimed at offering entertainment alone. Such a disenchantment of literature strips it of its power to protect readers against the demons of the real.

Although the fairy tale as such is not forbidden, it is supplemented with a critical commentary which emphasises its conventionality. Glossed in this way, it not only heralds the victory of adulthood over childhood, but also trumpets the triumph of reality over fiction. In the real world, children abandon reading in order to draw the gallows. What will it take then for the much later third instalment of Brzechwa's book series to transfigure the defeat of the fairy tale into a coup of its ruler?

To answer this question, we must tackle the important issue of authorial phantasms, the addressing of which is like wading into quicksand. In other words, we will have to risk asking a highly unprofessional question which inevitably invites a barrage of speculation rather than yielding one reliable answer. Does the author's self-unmasking produce any other meanings than the one evoked above?

My answer will be related to the phenomenology of writing. I propose to read the ending of *The Academy of Mr Inkblot* in the context of meanings which are generated by the notion of "erasure." This concept is rooted in the domain of memory and forgetting and, as such, also of anti-biography. In the words of Monika Muskała, an anti-biography is "an autobiography which is written against everything that has gone into the making of its author, it is written against itself."[164]

What if we switch the notion of "biography" for that of "fairy tale"? If the fairy-tale narrator is replaced by the author who, additionally, casts doubt on the narrative which the reader has trusted for so long, what results is not an "anti-fairy-tale" (as this verifies the existing fairy-tale canon, as I have shown), but rather the conviction that the fairy tale is just a fabrication and neither provides the beginning nor even forms an element of the postmodernist system of literary references. That is not the end of the story, however.

It is in fact difficult to resist the impression that the *Academy* narrative is fashioned only in order to be written down and then forgotten and erased. For this reason, I believe that there is a similarity between the act of negating the fairy tale and the underlying idea of *Wymazywanie*, a performance directed by Krystian Lupa in 2001. In the play which is based on a likewise titled novel by Thomas Bernhard,[165] the protagonist named Franz finds out that his parents and brother are dead and decides to write about it in order to shake off the traumas of the past: "Just don't think of any stupid novel. It'll be a text only. Do you get it? Just a text to balance off my negative life. All that crime and atrocity that went rampant here, in this hotbed of evil, and are shrouded in silence now, impudently and with impunity … I'll put this silence to an end, if I only manage."[166]

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164 Monika Muskała, "Testament pisarza," *Didaskalia*, No 42 (2001), p. 11.

165 Bernhard's novel is originally titled *Auslöschung*. It was translated into English as *Extinction* and into Polish as *Wymazywanie*, which literally means "erasure" or "wiping out." The publication of the novel and, especially, Lupa's theatrical production which it inspired belonged among the most impactful and most widely discussed cultural events in Poland in the early 2000s.

166 The passage comes from the manuscript of the stage adaptation of *Wymazywanie*, qtd. in Anna R. Burzyńska, "Unicestwić, wymazać, przepisać, odbić, wyzwolić. *Wymazywanie* Krystiana Lupy i *Mała narracja* Wojtka Ziemilskiego wobec historii i Historii," in *Zła pamięć. Przeciw-historia w polskim teatrze i dramacie*, eds. Monika Kwaśniewska and Grzegorz Niziołek (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Instytutu im. Jerzego Grotowskiego, 2012), pp. 55–54, on p. 59.

In my view, the author who appears at the end of *The Academy* is out to settle a score not so much with history but with the fairy tale. It turns out that it is the fairy tale that must be ousted and erased in retaliation for the harm it has done to children. Namely, the fairy tale made children believe that there was a world of justice, yet the vision of this world proved to be as brittle as china. The fairy tale was put to the test, while grotesque and irony – the permanent parabasis – turned it into a site of play which reveals the disparities of reality and literature.

The fairy tale first and foremost clearly marks the passage from mythical narrative to historical narrative. The self-exposure of the author stamps the entry into history, where the resumption of the fairy-tale order is no longer possible. This transition is patently analogous to the Judaic concept of the exchange of the Biblical code for the historical one, for as Adam and Eve are expelled from and leave the Garden of Eden, history commences, historical time sets in, and the way back is sealed once and for all.[167]

Interrupted and consequently destroyed by the cataclysm of war, happy childhood mutates into narrative, into a tale about the mythical past which, though a reminder of the origin of the visible world, does not offer any possibility to return to it. The last chapter of *The Academy of Mr Inkblot* performs a definitive break with the fairy-tale narrative, which from now on can pass for a Hassidic tale in the realm of the textual world. After all, the threads from which it is woven are spun both by literary tradition and by Jewish lore: the Bible and the Kabbalah. Its central character is "the singular, almost mythological, charismatic personality of the zaddik, the saint. […] The zaddik struggles to remain optimistic even in the valley of death. His concept of eternal time enables him to surmount the brutal reality of his temporal surroundings. He is determined to believe that evil is transient and good must ultimately triumph."[168]

The character of Mr Inkblot is not fully compatible with such a model of the zaddik. Although he comforts his pupils and insists that he has seen such an ending coming ("Don't let it bother you, boys. I've guessed that our fairy tale is bound to wind up like that […] Instead of being worried, we'd better sing a carol. How about that?"[169]), he admits that he has lost his magic powers. Readers

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167 Yosef Hayim Yerushalami, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle, WA, and London, UK: University of Washington Press, 1996), p. 8.

168 Yaffa Eliach, "Foreword," in *Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1988), pp. xv–xxxii, on p. xviii. Besides, the zaddik comes from the world to come (*Olam haBa*), which is confirmed by the ultimate victory of good in *The Triumph of Mr Inkblot*.

169 Brzechwa, *Akademia*, p. 112.

will have to wait no less than nineteen years to find out that good must eventually prevail. This will be when *The Triumph of Mr Inkblot*, the last volume of the trilogy, is published. But its readership will not be comprised of the readers of *The Academy* from twenty years ago. Although no happy ending was in store for the war generation of children, their offspring will be encouraged to work through the trauma of their parents.

Younger Siblings of the *Academy*, or, on the Books That No One Reads

What the next generation of readers were offered was *Podróże pana Kleksa* [*The Travels of Mr Inkblot*], a specific treatise on language. The unfolding of Mr Inkblot's peregrinations served as an excuse for crafting a philological dissertation with words and script placed at its centre. Assisted by his faithful followers, Mr Inkblot embarks on a dangerous mission to find ink, which is needed to write down fairy tales invented in Bajdocja (Fableland). The land acutely lacks the blue liquid, and its native language displays a peculiar defectiveness as the vernacular phonetics do not include the vowel "u." Readers of the continuation of *The Academy of Mr Inkblot* should not be surprised by such plot developments. If the fairy tale was vanquished by the machinery of evil, in the literal and metaphorical senses of the term, its language could not but suffer demise as well. Reminiscent of the chaos that was unleashed upon the world after the fall of the Tower of Babel, the disintegration of codes is the leitmotif of the second instalment of Mr Inkblot's adventures.

The first stop during the linguistic expedition of the Fableland team is Abecja (Abeland). The language of Abelanders is anything but complicated, as the simple sounds "a" and "b" are emitted from two orifices in their heads with an irregular rhythm. This meagre language cannot possibly function as a code for creative beings who think for themselves. If the limits of the language spoken by Abelanders are demarcated in the Wittgenstainian vein by two letters, their worldview is also severely circumscribed. Hence, unlike the community of the Academy, Abelanders do not study texts, but fill the philological chasm with violence, the only form of activity they have at their disposal that results in contact with the Other. Ink is not used by the population of Cape Apothecary, either. Alojzy Bąbel,[170] Admiral General of the Fleet, explains: "Writing is good for

170 Bąbel is a telling name as in Polish the word means a liquid-filled bleb (which, even if not painful, is certainly a nuisance) and a small, air-filled bubble that forms on the water surface, at the same time serving as a term of endearment for a toddler.

penpushers, but not for pharmacists. Simply, each of us knows twelve hundred prescriptions in his department by heart. It's enough for us."[171]

The would-be graduate of the Academy represents the rule of engineers, savvy at using hermetic formulas which are known exclusively to them. The pharmaceutical code is reduced down to recommendations, instructions and regulations. In such a collection of language forms, there is no room for spontaneity, subjectivism, or idiolect. Language is surgically precise, and every utterance has a clear intention ascribed to it. This is how the sanitarians of language make sure it continues in good shape.

The quest for the "inky fleece" leads further to totalitarian Patetonia. Its citizens wear glasses in which all their thoughts are reflected. Consequently, images supplant language, and such an exchange of codes entails relinquishing the possibility to interpret one's thoughts, for what can be seen are merely images devoid of any commentary from the person who produces them. Within such a communication model, revealing oneself is as indispensable as it is impossible to engage in dialogue. All Patetonians are doubly ensnared in this totalitarian and totalising system as they all constantly watch others and are watched by them simultaneously. This is not the kind of story, nor the kind of written record that Mr Inkblot demands.

Memory is thus a machine which dehumanises. Brzechwa revisits here the motif of a doll endowed with a superhuman aptitude for learning, which was employed in *The Academy*. Alojzy is Mr Inkblot's most talented student even though he has never engaged in authentic dialogue with his master. The knowledge and secrets that Alojzy has mastered and made his own at a staggering pace make him a unique self-made man, with no past of his own, no obligations towards others and most importantly no lived rather than simply picked-up history.

Constructed in this way, the machine easily lends itself to being construed as a rebel against the system, teaching or the Academy,[172] all the more so as there is

171 Jan Brzechwa, *Podróże pana Kleksa* (Wrocław: Siedmioróg, 1990), p. 96.

172 This is how this character is interpreted by Magdalena Radkowska-Walkowicz, who writes that Alojzy "becomes perfect and consequently less human just the way the well-behaved boys of the Academy, boys before the initiation, were less human. In fact, we could ask who was artificial. Adaś Niezgódka […] and his fellows or Alojzy?" Magdalena Radkowska-Walkowicz, "Sztuczne dzieci," in Magdalena Radkowska-Walkowicz, *Od Golema do Terminatora. Wizerunki sztucznego człowieka w kulturze* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, 2008), pp. 95–134, on p. 125.

To view Alojzy as more natural than the other boys seems a legitimate conclusion if we ignore the ironical overtones of *The Triumph of Mr Inkblot*. On such a reading, the machine-man indeed corresponds to the Foucauldian concept

an astonishing metamorphosis in store for him in the third part of the trilogy. He will be assembled anew, or rather re-deconstructed, and the change in his conduct will make him truly human. Humanity thus is framed, like in *Pinocchio*, as a reward for the exertions of self-perfection. Similarly to the wooden puppet, the mechanical doll has earned humanisation. However, Mr. Inkblot himself, though proud of his work, seems to be slightly sarcastic, especially when recalling Alojzy's past: "[…] men of science know that the past of every human being changes as needed and not infrequently is forgotten. Mr Alojzy Bąbel has become an entirely different person, and only what I've just said about him matters."[173]

The word has power to do things, but equally it has power to invalidate what has been said. In such a framework, it is natural to believe that every story can be written all over again, but such a notion is hardly attributable to Mr Inkblot, a veritable guardian of the order of the script. His articulation rather results from the extratextual context. Specifically, published in 1965, the book may be read as a commentary to what has come to be called small stabilisation.[174] In this sense, Alojzy, is a perfect product of his times, which flout the rules of historical narrative and generate their own principles that allow the production of a new-old member of the well-oiled system.

Such a historically inflected reading is authorised by Brzechwa's own announcement that *The Triumph of Mr Inkblot* would be an experiment, with "the fairy-tale layer intended for children and the satirical component designed for adults."[175] The linguistic problems with the code which are signalled in *The Adventures* are profoundly re-cast in *The Triumph*, as a treatise on the impotence of language transmutes into a discourse on language manipulations which

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of oppression, being "both a materialist reduction of the soul and a general theory of *dressage*, at the centre of which reigns the notion of 'docility', which joins the analysable body to the manipulable body. A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved." Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1995), p. 136.

173 Jan Brzechwa, *Tryumf pana Kleksa* (Wrocław: Siedmiorόg, 1991), p. 90.

174 Small stabilisation is the name given to the period between 1957 and 1970 in Poland, when repressive measures against anti-communists subsided, agriculture and industry developed, and a demographic boom took place. Small stabilisation was a surrogate of prosperity and freedom, encouraged conformism and made the enslaved society dormant.

175 See Urbanek, *Brzechwa*, p. 259.

were so pronounced under the People's Republic of Poland.[176] Nowhere is this more straightforward than in the official address delivered by Kwaternoster I (Quarternoster I), which sounds like a verbatim quote from the dignitaries of the day: "Every year we export fifty million eggs and use the hard currency procured in this way to import one hundred thousand watches."[177]

Yet before Mr Inkblot comes up with an ironic and self-ironic commentary, he must accept another defeat. He was once defeated as a teacher, and now he has failed as a traveller and a conqueror. The conquest of imagined realms has not yielded the coveted ink. For this reason Mr Inkblot must sacrifice himself and transform his body into ink. This transubstantiation sanctifies the act of writing.[178] The covenant with the script and history has been renewed, and harmony has been restored to the world. Although Mr Inkblot metamorphoses, as he did in *The Academy*, and turns into a bottle of ink, the ending of *The Adventures* does not feature a demystifying ploy reminiscent of the first part of the trilogy, one that would expose the fiction and assert the conventionality of the story. As the master performs the act of sacrifice, the world is firmly contained within the fairy tale. Mr Inkblot himself may disappear and be replaced by the Great Fabulist, but he in fact still remains within the bounds of the tale. This is a crucial difference from the ending of *The Academy*, where the author himself appears to supplant Mr Inkblot.

Ryszard Koziołek observes in his study on uncle Tarabuk, a key character in Leśmian's *Przygody Sindbada Żeglarza* [*The Adventures of Sindbad the Sailor*] that the "letter-man" fails because "even though he has discovered the body – his own one and those of others – as an object of subjectivation through discourses, he knows very little about it. He treats it as a *tabula rasa*, with a naivety matching that of Enlightenment moralists, while under his sign-overwritten skin a new story is already being written, one far more effective than his poetry."[179]

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176 The official name of the Polish state in 1952–1989, popularly referred to as PRL (the acronym of *Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa*). PRL governments heavily relied on propaganda which was pervaded with language manipulation.

177 Brzechwa, *Tryumf*, p. 28.

178 Sanctification refers to the Jewish mystical concept of writing in which "for anything besides [God] to exist, [He] had to become word. Thus He breathed his Name, comprehended as presence, into the letters and words in the text of the Torah." Sławomir Jacek Żurek, *Synowie księżyca: Zapisy poetyckie Aleksandra Wata i Henryka Grynberga w świetle tradycji i teologii żydowskiej* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2004), p. 90.

179 Ryszard Koziołek, "Wuj Tarabuk," p. 212. The phrase "letter-man" is also borrowed from this article.

Clearly, family relations do not oblige, as Mr Inkblot – a veritable ink-man fashioned by Brzechwa, Leśmian's cousin – dismisses Tarabuk's example and, while giving up his human form, does not allow the letter to be immobilised in the sign. Stagnation is incompatible with the history recorded in ink, whose narrative spills over like a river and its meanders prevent the reader from getting used to the route of the reading cruise.

One more difference is that whereas uncle Tarabuk replaces his humanity with the text he creates, Mr Inkblot surrenders his humanity, paradoxically, in order to bear testimony to it.

History, Mr Inkblot seems to aver, is not written by us, but through us.

The Difficult Case of *Tryumf pana Kleksa*

> *And as if it were not enough, Brzechwa-Lesman sought to make Polish children idolise a certain Ambrosius Inkblot, a man of unknown origin, unknown denomination (though the black gaberdine coat and the long beard he is sporting suggest quite a lot) and unknown profession (his would-be Academy where inkblotgraphy is taught cannot possibly be taken at face value), who on top of that professes to be a doctor of occult sciences. Inkblot has dubious connections with the East and is equipped with state-of-the-art technological devices which are an inventory of foreign intelligence services (the eye that can be dispatched to spy in outer space is nothing else than a next-generation espionage probe, and the glasses that change into a bike on demand would be a coveted gadget for James Bond).*[180]

The passage comes from Mariusz Urbanek's column entitled "Precz z Brzechwą" ["Away with Brzechwa"], which was published in *Odra* in 2007. Intended as a journalistic prank, the text caused extraordinary commotion among Internet users, most of whom were vocally indignant about the ludicrous charges levelled against the cult book for children. The most zealous defenders of the fairy tale tried to advance well-reasoned arguments against the journalist's slanderous accusations. The experiment was successful because the satirical text spawned a discussion which not only exposed Polish fears and prejudices, but also attested to the controversial status of Brzechwa. After all, despite his partiality for the

180 Urbanek, *Brzechwa*, p. 312.

governing party, Brzechwa designed *Tryumf pana Kleksa* [*The Triumph of Mr Inkblot*].

Originally, the last part of the trilogy opened with an ironic reference to socialist newspeak:

> As is well known, years ago there was the Academy of Mr Inkblot in our country, a university which was deservedly respected and acclaimed all over the world. It has produced our most eminent scholars, such as Professor Bedlam, the author of the celebrated *On the Influence of the Full Moon on the Size of Cats' Tails* and Glue, MA, the famous inventor of shark-killing powder.[181]

Eventually, Brzechwa went for a different beginning:

> This year, among the graduates of the Academy of Mr Inkblot there are three Alexanders, two Anastasiuses, four Albins, two Agenors, three Alexes, one Andrew, one Apollinaire and myself. […] After our ceremonial dinner, we sang the anthem of the Academy together, and then Mr Inkblot, standing on one leg as is his habit, delivered a farewell talk to us: "[…] From now on, each and every one of you will walk their own path, and I… I must travel to a realm which is called Alamakota on my map. You will remember that sailors of Fableland were stranded there years ago. It is my duty to find them."[182]

It seems that the continuity of the narrative has been disrupted. While *The Travels of Mr Inkblot*, albeit missing Adaś, has a plot-line connection to *The Academy*, *The Triumph* seems to be affixed to the already existing story without any attention to narrative consistency. The last part of the trilogy suggests that the operations of the Academy ceased in a natural way as the master himself decided to disband it. If the model of campus novel – or, perhaps, campus fairy tale – has run its course, it must be relinquished. But how can we reconcile the dramatic and demystifying ending of *The Academy* with the entirely incongruous beginning of *The Triumph*?

One possible solution is to conclude that the last part was addressed to a completely different readership than *The Academy*, which, as already mentioned, heralded the end of fairy-tale narratives. Published in 1965, *The Triumph* – a disguised satire on the realities of the People's Republic of Poland – tackles the themes sourced from the narrative of small stabilisation. The opening itself is bathed in typically socialist optimism as the boys leave school in order to make the world a better place. Knowledge acquired at the Academy should be properly used and, indeed, that aim is achieved. However, the epic drift of *The Triumph* is worlds apart from the cohesive and compact narrative of *The Academy* and

181 *Ibid*., p. 259.
182 Brzechwa, *Tryumf*, p. 6.

even of *The Travels*. In a somewhat far-fetched but vivid comparison, *The Triumph* bears more likeness to *The Manuscript Found in Saragossa*[183] than to the adventure novel.

Readers feel that Mr Inkblot begins to totalise his operations, turning them into a system of coercion. He wants to force the world's oldest tree to talk and devises the Inkblotian Intrabrain Infuser in an effort to perfect the methods of remembering and teaching. The scholar turns the study or the library into a laboratory, so to speak, where he hatches his homunculuses. Alojzy falls victim to such an oppressive education as refined wiring transforms him into an exemplary boy. This improbable metamorphosis should perhaps be deciphered as the author's commentary on the extra-literary reality, in which the new schooling system envisions its ideal as a young man rehabilitated by an Anton Makarenka-like educational regime. Importantly, the 1960s is a time of increasing anti-Semitism…

The Triumph makes room for themes previously not addressed in the fairy tale, such as digressions about women, their nature, their beauty and their right of self-determination. Mignonette, the beloved of Adaś and an incarnation of a weak and helpless female, falls into slumber and, like Sleeping Beauty, is sidelined in the fairy-tale narrative for a long time. Her opposite is portrayed in Peony, who craves an artistic career and resolves never to get married, for, as she claims, a true poet must be free. Peony is an exceptional character since in the world of Mr Inkblot women are hardly appreciated. Having neither flair nor imagination, they are doomed to be expelled from the space of poetry. Mr Inkblot promises to help Adaś, observing: "Be assured, I'll help you find your father. I say father, for I'm not worried about your mother. Such women are never in for avian adventures […]"[184] Nonetheless, Peony not only marches boldly into the male world of literature, but also withstands the imperative of love, unlike uncle Tarabuk, who gave up poetry at his wife's request.

The character of a feminist poet makes *The Triumph* re-engage with the theme of writing and creative practice time and again. These repeated self-referential relapses indicate a sustained preoccupation with the motifs of artistic creation. The control of the tale is again handed over to Adaś Niezgódka, for he is the narrator of the trilogy's last part as he was in *The Academy*. Adaś is a "democratic" narrator and, as such, he establishes contact with readers and explains his choices to them: "I bet you're surprised that in the previous chapter Mr Inkblot appeared

183 A well-known picaresque by Jan Potocki, based on a Chinese-box structure. Its first chapters were published in 1805.

184 Brzechwa, *Tryumf*, p. 65.

only for a short while at the very beginning only to be absent throughout the rest of it. Your astonishment is fully justified, for Mr Inkblot, as the protagonist of this book, should indeed be here all the time. But you need to take it into account that the scholar went to Alamakota, and it is far away from here, so we had to make a long journey to get in touch with him."[185]

"A Farewell to Adventure," the last chapter of *The Triumph of Mr Inkblot* with all its optimism seems to be an opposite of the pessimistic "Farewell to the Fairy Tale" at the end of *The Academy of Mr Inkblot*. Adaś has been tested and shown his capacity to be a worthy successor of his master. Adam/man/"what?" has demonstrated that he is ready to take up the challenge, which means that he will take part in the process of becoming and mediate abandoning, accepting and transmitting. There is every reason to believe that the world has regenerated after the disaster, light has vanquished darkness, the lost Temple has been regained, and Ambrosius Inkblot offers another interpretation of his teachings: "Do not discount fantasy. Nothing great can ever be accomplished without fantasy. […] A true scholar won't come up with anything against humans."[186]

Unworried about the fortunes of the world, he flies off to Alamakota in order to help others, like Faust. The land whose name encapsulated the first sentence of the Polish primer[187] attests to the durability of the alphabet, which in turn guarantees the continuity of the story. This is of particular importance as the gesture Mr Inkblot performs to transform his arms into wings brings to mind the Talmudic commentary on Zeno of Citium cited above. The hands of Mr Inkblot, the sage, wait for an encounter with another man and, when changed into wings, symbolise the liberatory gift of an open mind, which propels one towards eternity.

Yet I believe that the ending of the Inkblot trilogy lends itself to an entirely different interpretation as well. Readers should not be deceived by the finale of the fairy tale. Happy newly-weds, Adaś's successful doctorate campaign and his promotion to the "director" of the Academy are all topoi of small stabilisation, which lulls people and makes them stop wanting anything more. Complacency prevents any change-channelling effort, and the peace one achieves turns out to be an enemy of memory. After all, the world is not as perfect as it may seem. Mr Inkblot leaves the Academy, but his departure involves a clear signal that

185 *Ibid*., p. 21.

186 *Ibid*., p. 105.

187 "Ala ma kota" (literally: "Little Alice has a cat") is the simplest sentence in the Polish alphabet book, as it is built of only two vowels and four consonants.

"a change of the guard" is underway in conceptualising education, which is bound to involve mass-production rather than an exchange of free thoughts. Mr Inkblot's intention is to multiply the artificial human who will mechanise everyday life in Alamakota. A factory of Bąbels is about to start its operations, and its products will support people and help them out with daily chores. In this way, the Academy is replaced with an assembly line of a school, and magic is supplanted with science and experience. There is however more to it than that.

While, admittedly, the storytelling effort is resumed, the story itself is emptied out of lucidity. The scale of the narrative, the proliferation of characters and the multiplicity of motifs and extratextual references, all produce a cacophony of voices which radically eschews the narrative "purity" of the Academy. This can hardly be an effect of the compositional and stylistic loosening of the tale. Rather, it is a ramification of the destruction of language caused by the collapse of the fairy tale. The annihilation of the fabular world changed literary strategies once and for all. Although Brzechwa gives the second post-war and post-Holocaust generation a story that ostensibly re-instates the fairy tale, its narrative is defective and flawed, not to say crippled. For it was ambushed by history – if not the war-time history, then certainly the anti-Semitic history of the 1960s. Or perhaps Brzechwa's trilogy is not a fairy tale in the first place, but rather a midrash that comments on the Biblical text through a grand parable.

Mr Inkblot abandons his work, and his disciple strives to separate the light from the darkness anew. He is likely to achieve this difficult feat, but the lost language of the fairy tale will never be restored, although other, definitely non-fabular discourses attempt to replace it to a degree. That Adaś is a doctor of animal philology is not a random choice as the tale suggests that human codes have been exhausted. Mr Inkblot himself flies off to Alamakota, a realm named after the first sentence, a proto-text which ushers the reader into the textual world. This sentence is a sine qua non of all subsequent narratives because the constitution of the reader would be impossible without it. On the one hand, the "quest" for the first sentence in the alphabet book highlights the urgency of returning to the origin, which is text and script at once. On the other hand, the expedition to Alamakota implies that, after the disaster, it is exigent to go back to basics, to the first things an attentive scrutiny of which, while not exactly bringing back the lost meanings and links between words and their designates, may at least keep the textual world accessible in a purely philological way.

When read in this way, Mr Inkblot is a figure that stirs ontological and consequently philological anxiety. He is in the process of constantly becoming – becoming a button, a bottle of ink or a bird. He eludes not only forms but also designations. Except one perhaps, as a spot of ink on paper was once called a

"Jew" in Poland. In this way, Jewishness was incorporated into the ontology of Mr Inkblot. Hence it makes sense to view him as a Jew whose natural element is the language of the order of the Book. The task of healing the mutilated code is taken up by the Wandering Jew, who believed that the fall of the Temple was literally the fall of the world and thus that it could be restored by rebuilding the Temple. And the other way round: that the rebuilding of the world could restore the Temple.[188]

The Fairy Tale that Does Not Uplift

Brzechwa's trilogy tends to have geniality ascribed to it. *The Academy of Mr Inkblot* has a reputation of being an easy and pleasant little book, an effective and attractive classroom staple that readily lends itself to celebrations of fairy-tale adventures in which the dramatic quality of its ending is as a rule overlooked.

The fairy tale is thus distorted and misrepresented. One reason for such a misuse is that the over sixty-year-old literary text is interpreted within a hackneyed framework as if nothing new could be said about it. Another is that the first part of Brzechwa's trilogy is usually read as an island entire of itself, that is in total isolation from the traditionally neglected *Adventures* and *Triumph*. More (and worse) than that, it is approached in the vein of tales for kids produced by Brzechwa.

Such an aura, which has surrounded Mr Inkblot stories of old, does not promote alternative readings. Additionally, as generations of readers quickly follow upon each other and equally quickly grow out of "books for children," Brzechwa's fairy tale has been petrified in an interpretive immobility. While child readers are exposed to a warped and institutionalised interpretation which is apparently adjusted to their sensitivities, adult readers who boast more cultural competence rarely, if ever, revisit the book. As a consequence, in the readerly consciousness Mr Inkblot is just an innocuous lunatic whose uncanny world tends to be compared to the fantastic realms fashioned by Joanne Kathleen Rowling. This seems to be the lot of books which are ostensibly well-known and readily appropriated.

188 Mariusz Prokopowicz, "Wprowadzenie," in *Księga Jecirah: Klucz Kabały* (*Sefer Yetzirah*), trans. Mariusz Prokopowicz (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Semper 1994), pp. v–xxix, on p. xix.

Chapter Three The Architecture of Biography: The Case of Korczak

Between Memorials and Literature: From Mapping the City to Mapping Memory

Literature is often put in an awkward position where it is expected to mediate the creation and transmission of the image of those who are referred to as "great people." The challenge is all the more daunting when such a responsibility is thrust on children's literature. In what way is one supposed to write about a man who went to his death with children who were not "his"? Interestingly, artistic forms of commemorating Janusz Korczak,[189] such as films, memorials and posters, as a rule have a child figure incorporated in them. The unification of the guardian and his charge is especially pronounced in sculptural images of Korczak.

Statues of the Old Doctor are indeed plentiful. One of the most widely recognisable of them was made by Boris Saktsier and placed at Yad Vashem. The sculpture shows Korczak surrounded by a crowd of children. His frame is hidden among them and hardly visible from behind the group of kids whom the Old Doctor is holding in a protective embrace. To bring Korczak into relief in such a compositional arrangement, his figure must be given some emphatically pronounced trait. Saktsier chose to highlight Korczak's hands and his face, which is lined up with the children's small heads. Both these elements are sized-up in an attempt to underscore Korczak's pedagogical approach, which was founded on dialogue, intimacy and contact with the "face" of the Other.

It is the Lévinasian authentic relationship that seems to be the defining feature of most memorials of Janusz Korczak and the Children (as it is put in an inscription on one of the stones in Treblinka). Among the best known Korczak monuments are sculptures by Stanisław Kulon, a work by Bolesław Marschall, Elsa Pollak's representations in which the figures seem to melt away in torrential rain, and figurines by Jan Markowski which allude to the saints carved from linden wood which populate Polish roadside shrines. In most of these works, Korczak bears a considerable likeness to Christ, though not in all of them is this resemblance as conspicuous as in Zofia Woźna's sculpture in which the Old

189 For a short note about Janusz Korczak, see Chapter Two.

Doctor merges, so to speak, with a child he is hugging, while his lowered head directly suggests Christ's martyrdom.

Korczak's memorials serve not only as forms of remembrance, but also as hallmarks on the map of Warsaw, a city which in a sense belongs to Korczak and his children as well. The mapping of Korczak's places marks an attempt at embedding the narrative of the past in the contemporary memory of the metropolis. In this framework, the memorial at 6 Jaktorowska Street reminds passers-by of the Orphans' House, which was situated at 92 Krochmalna Street; a commemorative stone at Władysław IV High School points out that Korczak was a graduate of the Praga Gymnasium; and a memorial at the Jewish cemetery in Okopowa Street functions as a symbolic tomb of the Old Doctor. The latest monument mentioned by Katarzyna Stachowicz, the author of a Korczak biography,[190] was designed by Zbigniew Wilma and shows Korczak surrounded by children. The group are assembled under a withered tree whose boughs form a menorah of eight branches. The tree stands both for the *axis mundi* of the world which is no more and for the centre of the world which is still there.

Given this, it is indeed astonishing that Korczak, who is invariably represented as accompanied by children, in fact remains inaccessible to children. Contained within motionless statues, the life history of Henryk Goldszmit (Korczak's real name, abandoned by him for a pseudonym on his literary debut in adolescence) makes it possible to shroud the tragic end in obscurity. But when handed over to literary narrative, this history demands closure. This poses a considerable challenge to writers who seek to make a young readership familiar with the Old Doctor. The figure of the educator has apparently been enclosed within a "protected zone," which forestalls articulating the finale of his story.

Such problems with the format of the narrative plagued Andrzej Wajda while filming *Korczak*. When he was trying to raise funds for his venture, an American producer advised him not to bother, because a film about Korczak would never be made in the US, as the man who had led 200 children to the gas chamber would never be an American hero.[191] As Grzegorz Leszczyński observes: "Korczak's vision of life and humans is utterly divergent from the fairy tale. There are no magical helpers, nor is there any bill of wrongs. While protagonists do climb glass

190 Katarzyna Stachowicz, *Korczak* (Warszawa: Buchmann, 2012).

191 "Andrzej Wajda na festiwalu w Gdyni," Andrzej Wajda interviewed by Maria Malatyńska, *Kino*, Nos. 11–12 (1990), p. 15, qtd. in Joanna Preizner, "Sprawiedliwy i Święty. *Korczak* Andrzeja Wajdy," in Joanna Preizner, *Kamienie na macewie: Holocaust w polskim kinie* (Kraków and Budapest: Wydawnictwo Austeria, 2012), pp. 361–392, on p. 367.

mountains, when they reach the top they are not rewarded either with a princess or with a crown. Unrewarded good is true good. Only when there is no prospect of reward is human freedom brought to full realisation. As is the freedom of the child who is essentially superhuman."[192]

Wajda's film includes an episode in which the Old Doctor delivers a bitter prayer, articulating his boundless loneliness. The audience will find it difficult not to associate the moment with Christ's prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. In her interpretation of the film, Joanna Preizner convincingly reconciles Jewish and Christian themes, arguing that the director succeeded in constructing a character who, though poised at the intersection of cultures, does not fully belong to either of them. Wajda's Korczak is namely a fervent believer in one religion – in the child. Preizner analyses the visual layer of the film to explain the ways the director uses to convey the heroism (and sanctity) of his protagonists. She notices that Robby Müller's cinematography is devised to capture Korczak against the backdrop of darkness and dirt while he himself emanates a glow which departs from the ghetto aesthetics.[193] She also interprets Korczak as a

192 Grzegorz Leszczyński, *Literatura i książka dziecięca. Słowo – obiegi – konteksty* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo CEBiD, 2003), p. 101.

193 Cf. Preizner, "Sprawiedliwy." (Allan Starski, a production designer who worked with Wajda on many films, remembers that it was when filming *Korczak* in black-and-white that he realised that textures of objects were more important than colours in productions of this kind. Different textures prevent the objects filmed in black and white from merging with each other. Importantly, his experience with *Korczak* led him to collaborate with Steven Spielberg on *Schindler's List*. See Allan Starski and Irena A. Stanisałwska, *Scenografia* [Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Wojciech Marzec, 2013]).

Notably, Wajda's film is not the only film about the life of the Old Doctor. In 1974, Aleksander Ford made *The Martyr: You Are Free Dr Korczak*, which was not a particularly good film and did not invite a lot of critical response. There were also other screen interpretations of Korczak. *The Ambulance*, a few-minute-long film made by Janusz Morgenstern in 1961, refers to the tragic history of the Old Doctor and his children though the space shown in the film, divested of typical Korczak topoi, seems to deny that. An ambulance with a Red Cross sign on it drives into an area fenced off with barbed wire. There is a group of children with their teacher in this "other world." They all get into the car which has been re-made into a gas chamber. I believe that this extremely evocative short film eliminates biographical indicators. It may be an attempt at producing an "Aesopian" expression (the film was made in 1961, when Jewish victims of the Second World War were not talked about in Poland and only the loss of Polish lives was mentioned) or at giving the problem a universal twist. The silence in which the event is enveloped is highly suggestive, for it not so much conveys the horror of the situation as invalidates any speculation which words could possibly

Christ-like figure in his decision to stay with the children in an act of voluntary martyrdom for a higher cause. Yet such an approach to the episode stands in opposition to Judaic tradition, in which manifesting martyrdom and suffering connotes blasphemy and useless vanity. Given this, the sacrifice of life makes sense only when it affects the quality of social bonds, that is, when it has the human being at its centre.

The ending of Wajda's film incited soaring emotions: a carriage of the train transporting Korczak and the children to Treblinka is unhinged, the kids and the Old Doctor get out of it, run towards a meadow and slowly disappear in the fog. The scene on the one hand suggests salvation (whether Jewish or Christian it is difficult to tell) and on the other is a harbinger of the establishment of the state of Israel. The most fierce critique was levelled at Wajda's film by Claude Lanzmann and Danièle Heymann, who claimed that the director endeavoured to inscribe Korczak into the Christian code and thereby to absolve Poles of anti-Semitism.[194]

Tadeusz Sobolewski argues that if Korczak was a saint, Wajda could not but portray him in this way.[195] Anna Sobolewska sides with him:

> Wajda's film made me think of a special variety of icons which were once revered in Bulgaria; specifically, images with the figure of a saint in the middle and a sequence of his deeds depicted along the edges. The image is engirdled by the protagonist's successive feats and his martyrdom, all shown accurately and meticulously, frame by frame like in a film. Wajda's film re-constructs the figure of the protagonist, piecing together

provoke. Morgenstern's film is a flagship educational resource in projects developed by Yad Vashem. None of them suggests an analogy between the film and Korczak's story.

194 See Tadeusz Lubelski, "Filmowy wizerunek Janusza Korczaka," *Kwartalnik Filmowy*, Vol. 35, No. 81 (2013), pp. 111–132, on p. 127. Joanna Papuzińska offers an interesting interpretive approach to this episode which solves the argument. In her article "Pieczątka z aniołem" ["An Angel Seal"], she writes about what we would today call a gadget used in pre-war schools: a small seal shaped like an angel's head was fastened with a piece of ribbon to a copybook. In Korczak's short story "Sława" ["Fame"], the protagonist cherishes such a seal as her greatest treasure. Generally, in Korczak's handling, the angel is a childhood topos and frequently appears even in texts for adult readers. See Joanna Papuzińska, "Pieczątka z aniołem," in Joanna Papuzińska, *Mój bajarz odnowiony: Studia i szkice o literaturze młodzieżowej* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo SBP, 2014), p. 157. Papuzińska argues that the ending of the film embodies this kind of sensitivity and aesthetics. The episode in which children run out of the carriage into the meadow circumvents identity disputes as a consistent reference to Korczak's poetics and phantasms of childhood.

195 See Tadeusz Sobolewski, "Trudny Korczak," *Życie Warszawy*, No. 271 (1990), p. 3.

his words and action translated into images. Korczak's entire life is presented as a "sacred text" which calls for a focused reading.[196]

The Year of Korczak, or on the Troublesome Invasion of Memory

The hagiographic slant is particularly relevant to the ways in which Korczak is present in contemporary literature for a young readership, due less to the "wonder-centricity" of the tales about the Old Doctor, and more to the transformations in framing Korczak's miraculous pedagogical feats. Their scrutiny can be helped by four texts which were published in the second decade of the 21st century in conjunction with the celebrations of the Year of Korczak. The texts are *Pamiętnik Blumki* [*Blumka's Diary*] by Iwona Chmielewska (2011), *Jest taka historia. Opowieść o Januszu Korczaku* [*There is as Story: A Tale about Janusz Korczak*] by Beata Ostrowicka (2012), *Po drugiej stronie okna. Opowieść o Januszu Korczaku* [*Through the Window: A Tale about Janusz Korczak*] by Anna Czerwińska-Rydel (2012) and *Zwyczajny dzień* [*An Ordinary Day*] by Katarzyna Zimmerer (2012). The publication of biographies for children was paralleled by the release of books for adult readers which supplement the classic biographical studies by Hanna Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, Marek Jaworski, Alicja Szlązakowa, Kazimierz Dębnicki and Aleksander Lewin, adding a new quality to Korczak scholarship. The new volumes were *Korczak. Próba biografii* [*Korczak: Towards a Biography*] by Joanna Olczak-Ronikier (2011) and *Janusz Korczak. Fotobiografia* [*Janusz Korczak: A Photobiography*], a conceptually compelling album by Maciej Sadowski (2012).

The literary legend of the Old Doctor was eminently shaped by Igor Newerly, one of Korczak's collaborators.[197] Crucial in this regard was Newerly's *Rozmowa w sadzie piątego sierpnia* [*A Conversation in the Orchard on the Fifth of August*], a book published on the centenary of Korczak's birth in which the author seeks to dismantle the stereotype of the Old Doctor: "Believe me or not, but in my

196 Anna Sobolewska, "Do ostatniej chwili życia," *Film*, No. 43 (1990), p. 11.

197 The duty to transmit the canonical narrative about Korczak passes down from the father to the son. Jarosław Abramow-Newerly, Igor Newerly's son, recounts in his autobiographical *Lwy mojego podwórka* [*Lions from My Backyard*]: "My mum lived and studied at the Orphans' House. When she was getting married to my father, Dr Korczak reportedly said: 'I entrust my most beloved daughter to you. You must be good to her and never do her any harm." Qtd. in Maciej Sadowski, *Janusz Korczak. Fotobiografia* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Iskry, 2012), p. 117.

memories Korczak, who on the occasion of his birth centenary is portrayed in such didactic, pedagogical and martyr-like rhetoric, remains serene, lighthearted and not at all old."[198] Yet, for all such protestations, the book, which is structured as a conversation with children about Korczak, has enough of a catechetical aura about it to admonish against unsettling the ingrained system of the Korczak narrative.

Nevertheless, the contemporary biographies of Korczak for young readers depart from the manner of depicting Korczak proposed by Newerly. Instead of a monumental – and pedestalising – story, they rather offer intimate, customised tales which are geared to a young readership and take into account the current research on Korczak's life and educational ideas. Symptomatically, the person, or rather the legend of the Old Doctor seems to have effectively relegated his writings for children to the margin. Even the Year of Korczak, with its anniversary re-editions of Korczak's works boasting modern graphic design, did not fuel an expected "Korczak revival." Yet there is some hope still, for while readers are not likely to pick up *King Matt the First* spontaneously, they may be spurred to do so having "met" Korczak and his biography. This is an important change that bespeaks a shift which has taken place in the reception of Korczak's work. According to Ryszard Waksmund, Korczak's novels for children, which certainly do not enjoy worldwide renown, could easily and successfully compete with Mark Twain's *The King and the Pauper*, André Lichtenberger's *Le Petit Roi* or Antoine Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince.*[199] The analogies of *King Matt the First* to these literary hits of all time are not random, because the fortunes of the young king are perfectly suited to conveying visions of an ideal state and can easily be construed as prefiguring existentialism. Despite these parallels, the popularity of Korczak's books does not even come close to that of the worldwide literary bestsellers for children.

Paradoxically, Korczak's novels were discovered and ideologically adopted by socialist thinkers on and practitioners of education. In 1951, a talk on "the situation of literature for youth" was delivered at the Expanded Plenum of the Executive Board of the Polish Writers' Union, which was devoted to literature for children and young adults. The Plenum made decisions which resulted in "purging" library collections of pre-war texts pervaded with 19th-century

198 Igor Newerly, *Rozmowa w sadzie piątego sierpnia* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1978), p. 87.

199 See Ryszard Waksmund, "Od nobilitacji do degradacji," in Ryszard Waksmund, *Od literatury dla dzieci do literatury dziecięcej* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2000), pp. 344–347.

aesthetics.[200] The rhetoric of Plenum speeches expressed a very definite attitude to the past, in which "trumpery and potboilers" turned children and adolescents into "faithful janissaries of capitalism."[201] The new political climate effectively promoted writings by Soviet authors, but it also made the vernacular leftist literature initiated before the war by Wanda Wasilewska and Halina Górska thrive and flourish. In such circumstances, Korczak's work came to be seen as attractive because of his attitude to proletarian children.

As a matter of fact, although the legend of the Old Doctor may call for sustaining the belief that his books are timeless, the truth about them is quite painful. Contrary to what the supporters of his literature might wish, Korczak as a writer for children has long been past his prime. Pervaded by a publicist's passion with its unstoppable urge to respond, intervene and comment, the style of Korczak's writings makes the reading of his texts more of a scholarly venture than an emotional experience. This is also a ramification of his, so to speak, nearly Byronic fidelity to his pedagogical mission. Korczak's literature was in fact thoroughly bound up with his work with children and served him chiefly as a pulpit from which to preach his pedagogical concepts.

The recent changes in interpreting Korczak's achievements are associated primarily with an interest in his life and educational work, both of which come across as more attractive, more resonant and highly ethical in comparison with his literature. Biographical research seems to have long been on the hunt for tropes capable of matching the demands of the literary representation that is the life of the Old Doctor.

Closer scrutiny of the biographies of Korczak for young readers helps capture some of their recurrent narrative sequences. It seems that the "anti-systemic" character of Korczak is the key to all four texts as they frame him not only in terms of rebellion against reality, but also in terms of repudiating the uncritical social acceptance of the fantasy of idyllic and angelic childhood.

In fact, Korczak does not indulge in an easy affirmation of childhood; on the contrary, he demythologises childhood and its culturally imagined Arcadian quality: "There seem to be two kinds of life: theirs – serious, worthy of respect, and ours – as if a joke. Because we're smaller and weaker, it's like a game. And this

200 See Stanisław Kondek, "Wycofywanie literatury popularnej z obiegu szkolnego w latach 1949–1955," in *Retoryka i badania literackie. Rekonesans*, ed. Jakub Z. Lichański (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 1998), pp. 223–243.

201 Grzegorz Lasota, "O sytuacji w literaturze dla dzieci i młodzieży," *Twórczość*, No. 8 (1951), p. 118.

is the source of neglect. Children – these are future people. And so it is a matter of their becoming, it's as if they don't exist yet. But indeed we are; we live, we feel, we suffer."[202] The passage from *When I Am Little Again* belies our culture's vision of childhood, in which the child wants to be a child as long as possible. Childhood is disclosed as a time of oppression and violence from adults. Consequently, the belief that "no one can escape childhood"[203] must make adults responsible for the quality of life of children and exhort them to support children as they live though the period of specious sanctuary, the experience of a slave rather than of a king.

King Matt the First, Korczak's flagship book for children, tells the story of a boy who accedes to the throne and as a ruler strives to make his subjects, children in particular, happy. In the course of time, he realises that his decisions do not bring about satisfying outcomes. The second part of the narrative, *Król Maciuś na wyspie bezludnej* [*King Matt on the Desert Island*], concludes with a hagiographically stylised scene in which the young monarch dies of wounds sustained in defence of his friend. *King Matt*, which contains numerous autobiographical references, is a tale about the oppressive harshness of childhood. Included in the book, Korczak's photo as a child channels an encounter with his and the reader's own self from the past. In this sense, the meanings produced by the novel situate it among the texts that deal with the phantasmagoria of childhood. We could posit that, to a degree, Matt is an *alter ego* of Korczak himself. At five o'clock one morning in May 1942, nineteen years after the publication of *King Matt the First*, Korczak wrote in the diary he kept in the Warsaw ghetto: "I was only five then, and the problem was perplexingly difficult: what to do so there wouldn't be any dirty, ragged and hungry children with whom one was not allowed to play in the backyard (where under a chestnut tree, in a candy box, wrapped in cotton, was buried my first dearly beloved creature, then only a canary)."[204]

Such a concept of childhood patently suggests that its founder thinks against the grain, ignores current fads and takes no heed of endorsed cultural codes. To be of a piece with its protagonist, his literary biography should employ narrative ploys which render the character of a rebel, exploding traditional biographical

202 Janusz Korczak, *When I Am Little Again*, trans. E. R. Kulawiec. https://ia600400.us.archive.org/16/items/WhenIAmLittleAgain-English-JanuszKorczak/janusz-little.pdf. Accessed 23 Apr. 2019.

203 Joanna Kulmowa, *Topografia myślenia* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Iskry, 2001), n.p.

204 Janusz Korczak, *Ghetto Diary*, trans. Jerzy Bachrach and Barbara Krzywicka, with an introduction by Betty Jean Lifton, n.p. https://archive.org/stream/GhettoDiary-English-JanuszKorczak/ghettodiary_djvu.txt. Accessed 25 Apr. 2019.

frameworks. Such a strategy of narrativising Korczak can be gleaned from the words of Olczak-Ronikier, the author of the latest and as yet most comprehensive biography of Korczak, whom she met when she was a child: "Family stories suggest that I wasn't very fond of him. I liked to be taken seriously, and he tried to amuse me, telling me surrealist stories, like: 'When you fall asleep, your granny turns into a bird and flies around the flat.' To which I would reportedly reply: 'Cut that nonsense, Doc, or I'll turn you out of the house.' "[205]

The biographer adopts a child's perspective and pays off her debt to the man whose greatness she did not anticipate as a young girl. The biography is her obligation to her grandparents, Janina and Jakub Mortkowicz[206] from the same generation as Korczak, and to her mother, Hanna Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, who wrote the first post-war book about the Doctor. At the same time, it is a form of repudiation of the post-Korczak reality from which he himself seems to be conspicuously absent:

> I spent spring days in 2011 cruising Cracow's bookshops and asking about Korczak. I found *King Matt*. Nothing more. Neither *Kajtuś Czarodziej* [*Kaytek the Wizard*], a predecessor of *Harry Potter*, nor "Sława" ["Fame"], nor *Pedagogika żartobliwa* [*Playful Pedagogy*]. Four years ago they still had *How to Love a Child*. Three years ago, *Prawidła życia* [*Principles of Life*] flashed by. And last year, *Sam na sam z Bogiem* [*Face to Face with God*]. *The Diary* appeared for a while. In English. How about biographies? Or perhaps memoirs? None, nothing, gone. No re-editions. Why? Nobody knows. What about second-hand bookshops? Not a single volume. Do people inquire about it? Rarely.[207]

From a Tactician to a Strategist: A Modern Take on Korczak

Biographical narratives for a young readership have given the tale a certain rhythm which is certainly not founded on chronology, but which props itself with selected details that help grasp the essence of Mr Doctor's life history without wallowing in its tragic ending. Such details form the centre of the story of the defiant protagonist, or, better still, multiple centres which are scattered everywhere and nowhere. This results in episodic, anecdotal, orally-underpinned narratives which stray from the mainstream because they belong with an individual who himself remained outside the centre. Such biographical practices are

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205 Joanna Olczak-Ronikier, "Nie opowiadaj głupstw, doktorku," an interview by Anna Bikont, *Książki. Magazyn do Czytania*, No. 1 (2011), pp. 10–12, on p. 10.

206 Warsaw-based publishers and booksellers who specialised, among others, in books for children and young adults. They published most of Korczak's literary texts.

207 Joanna Olczak-Ronikier, *Korczak. Próba biografii* (Warszawa: W.A.B., 2011), p. 9.

deliberately fragmentary and founded on residual confession, which is arranged into a representation and as such into one of many possible narratives.

Biographies for a young readership tend to meet an important condition posed, or rather dictated, by our times. The generation of young literature aficionados who have no wartime experiences of their own are equipped with postmemory, which Marianne Hirsch deems "a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation."[208] Hirsch developed the notion of postmemory from her studies of pre-war photographs which embellished the American living room of her Jewish neighbours, Holocaust survivors. According to Hirsch, photographs are very specific instruments of memory because they reside between memory and postmemory.[209] And, indeed, the photograph is the most popular metonymy of Holocaust postmemory in separate literature.

It is no coincidence that the cover of *Po drugiej stronie okna. Opowieść o Januszu Korczaku* [*Through the Window: A Tale about Janusz Korczak*] by Anna Czerwińska-Rydel features a photograph of the Old Doctor taken before the war, in 1938. The graphic design of the book, developed by Dorota Łoskot-Cichocka, Małgorzata Frąckiewicz and Tomek Walkowicz, includes other pictures as well, which show the building of the Orphans' House at 92 Krochmalna Street in Warsaw, children playing around a swing, the Doctor himself, etc. The photographs have been modernised by, among others, introducing colours to monochromatic images, retouching the background and adding descriptions in the stylised child-like handwriting associated with lesson notes in copybooks. In this way, the documentary resources acquire a new quality, for they are incorporated into a modern narrative which, essentially, re-invents objects, exhibits and documents. Rather than consigned to a museum cabinet, artefacts dynamically operate as their activity warrants an authentic encounter with the past. The photograph is processed, for in and through processing it is appropriated and transferred into a new order, which keeps it in circulation and sustains its power to compel reflection. The price to be paid for memory involves consenting to modifications in the old narrative, such as the inclusion of notes scribbled on the margins of the authorised story by one generation after another.

In an interview, Czerwińska-Rydel recounts the difficulties with which she grappled when trying to find an interpretive key to the figure of Henryk

208 Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p. 22.
209 *Ibid*.

Goldszmit: "Finally, I found it, the window! 'My great-grandfather was a glazier,' wrote Korczak in *The Diary*. 'Glass is warmth and light,' he adds. Elsewhere he notes: 'A child needs movement, fresh air, light – absolutely, but there's something more. A glimpse into a distance, the sense of freedom – an open window.' "[210] Actually, the biographer uses the last sentence as a motto for her book.

The decision to make the window a leitmotif of the story has its narrative consequences, which are inseparable from melancholy. Watching the world through the windowpane rather than through the window – what with the ghetto's windows failing to fulfil the promise of freedom – explicitly signals the melancholic gaze. Although Mr Doctor's engagements in the ghetto have nothing melancholic about them, his *Ghetto Diary* is not as free of such overtones. The melancholic gaze suggests wisdom it has acquired, for "it belongs to […] the subject who looks at people and things the way he looks at himself: as an absence, a loss, something beyond reach."[211]

The idea Czerwińska-Rydel had, i.e. to render Korczak by means of the window metaphor, represents one of the more insightful interpretive takes on his personage. As the window, a barely relevant detail of the biographical narrative, becomes its centre, so to speak, the activities undertaken by Korczak morph into "masked" anti-system operations.

Such a reading can be usefully supported by Michel de Certeau's classification of actions into two groups: strategies and tactics.[212] In Certeau's concept, strategies belong to the ruling ones, to colonisers; and, allied with the imposed law as they are, they have their own defined place and their institutions, which grant or refuse others the right to place. Tactics, which as Certeau reminds are "an art of the weak," are operations which are characteristically undertaken by the colonised. Since they are concentrated within "the enemy's field of vision," they have no proper locus of their own, and even if they have a terrain, it has been imposed by the coloniser and is not linked to the space of freedom altogether. Hidden and undercover, tactics cannot devise an overall action plan which would entail stabilisation and rootedness, qualities contradictory to tactics. To

210 Anna Czerwińska-Rydel, "Po drugiej stronie okna widział człowieka," an interview by Ewa Skibińska, *RYMS*, No. 19 (2013), pp. 14–15, on p. 14. The quotation from *Ghetto Diary*, after Korczak, *Ghetto Diary*, trans. Bachrach and Krzywicka.

211 Marek Bieńczyk, "Błękitne spojrzenie i anamorfoza," in Marek Bieńczyk, *Melancholia. O tych, co nigdy nie odnajdą straty* (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 2000), pp. 79–84, on p. 81.

212 See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, Los Angeles, CA, and London, UK: University of California Press, 1988), especially pp. 34–39.

remain ungraspable, tactics must be flickering, diffuse and devoid of one fixed *axis mundi*, consequently "producing" several ephemeral centres.

These theoretical insights are translated into a Korczak topography[213] in the biography by Czerwińska-Rydel. This topography corresponds to Korczak's ideas about actions which put the child at the centre of things.

The foregrounded window is of course part of a bigger whole. Having moved to the ghetto, Korczak arranges his Orphans' House anew in the school in Chłodna Street. The building quickly proves to be unsuitable for his purposes. This does not stop Korczak, who intends to restructure it:

> "We'll brick up the entrance and the windows facing the German side. I want the children only to have a view of the other side. We need to fence them off from the Germans," Korczak decided when he'd come back and inspected the new house
> "But, it's impossible anyway to separate them from everything that's going on here," said Miss Stefa softly.
> "You'll see we'll make it," replied Korczak with steel resolve in his voice.[214]

Unable to adopt a suitable strategy and act through official channels, Korczak resorts to tactics. Building, that is erecting from the foundations up, and tearing down, that is destroying, are opposed to (re)construction. The practice itself has something rebellious and at the same time deceptive about it. To (re)construct means to alter, to modify, but only as far as common sense permits. The prefix conjures up spatial changes caused by movement, by an activity whose aim is not a revolution but a (re)modelling of what is already there. In the ghetto, which is an imposed rather than a chosen space, settling down that involves bricking up the old windows and making new ones is an impudent deed, a gesture which is redolent of a strategy-opposing tactic. Korczak's idea to wall himself and the children off against Germans reverberates with his absurd sense of humour, which is recalled by Olczak-Ronikier. Erecting a wall in the ghetto which is separated from the world (and that by the wall, no less) may be a tactical ploy. If a tactician intercepts strategies characteristic of the occupier, they are mocked; seized by the colonised, they are exposed as devoid of proper jurisdiction.[215]

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213 See Marta Brus-Łapińska, "Topografia krainy dzieciństwa. Kategoria przestrzeni w wybranych powieściach Janusza Korczaka," in *Janusz Korczak. Pisarz*, ed. Anna Maria Czernow (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo SBP, 2013), pp. 113–130.

214 Anna Czerwińska-Rydel, *Po drugiej stronie okna: Opowieść o Januszu Korczaku* (Warszawa: Muchomor, 2012), p. 154.

215 Symptomatically, when Korczak built the Orphans' House before the war, he became a strategist himself. His role consisted specifically in protecting the space which was designed so as to foster good relationships among the children. Korczak's idea of

The window appears several more times in connection to Korczak. The recurrence of this "motif" is stamped as particularly dramatic in his last diary entry of 4th August, 1942:

> I am watering the flowers. My bald head in the window. What a splendid target.
> He has a rifle. Why is he standing and looking on calmly?
> He has no orders to shoot.
> And perhaps he was a village teacher in civilian life, or a notary, a street sweeper in Leipzig, a waiter in Cologne?
> What would he do if I nodded to him? Waved my hand in a friendly gesture?
> Perhaps he even doesn't know that things are – as they are?
> He may have arrived only yesterday, from far away …[216]

The ordinary activity of watering the flowers on the windowsill in the Warsaw ghetto is doubly absurd. First, people in the ghetto grew all kinds of edible plants in crates on their windowsills. The extreme situation was not exactly conducive to aesthetic thinking, even though aesthetic thinking had a therapeutic potency.[217] Second, looking or bending out of the window was punishable with death. Hence Korczak's astonishment at the "politeness" of the soldier who, for

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space had a lot in common with his pedagogical concepts as the deliberate "refusal" to get used to the place corresponds in a way to accepting constant changes to which the child is exposed: "If the dogmatic sphere suits the upbringing of a passive child, the ideological is compatible with active children. I think that the roots of many painful surprises are to be found precisely here: one child is given the ten commandments carved in stone while he wants to see them branded by his own fire upon his own breast; another is forced to seek truths that should have been offered him. One may fail to see this if one's approach to the child is in 'I'll make a man out of you,' rather than in searching question: 'What are you going to make of yourself, man?'" Janusz Korczak, "How to Love a Child: The Child in the Family," in *Selected Works of Janusz Korczak*, trans. Jerzy Bachrach (Warsaw: Central Institute for Scientific, Technical and Economic Information, 1967) p. 139. https://archive.org/stream/TheSelectedWorksOfJanuszKorczak-English/janusz-korzak-selected-works_djvu.txt. Accessed 23 Apr. 2019.

216 Korczak, *Ghetto Diary*.

217 Józef Włodarski explained Korczak's fondness of flowers in the following way: "Well, he said that he could manage food somehow, but children needed to be kept busy, to be kept interested, to have their attention diverted from what was going on around them, and that could basically be done by one thing only – by cultivating blooming plants. 'This is absorbing and helps you forget about your worries'… That's what he said. I was shocked. I can't remember anymore where we got those seedlings of geraniums and petunias three years into the war." Maria Kownacka, "Sadzonki pelargonii," in

reasons known only to himself, does not follow the order. Watering his flowers, Korczak takes an enormous risk. But even while performing such a seemingly prosaic activity, he is analysing the scene of which he is part. This short impressionistic vignette and others of a similar character add up to a generalised reflection on human nature and the origin of evil.

When reading about Korczak, we get a glimpse into his pedagogy of looking. It is brilliantly illustrated by his perceptive observation of sparrows on the windowsill (window again!): "I can still see the sparrows knocking on the window panes. And I remember Korczak saying: 'People think that it's how sparrows ask for food, but in fact they knock because they're collecting husks which got stuck to the windows.' He taught us to look at things carefully."[218]

Korczak's tactics, aimed against the strategies in force, were rooted in the banal, the small, the inconspicuous, in things which are thought of as vulnerable. And thus, the orphanage building, relegated to the position of vulnerability (determined and imposed by the occupiers) as it was, was restructured by its dwellers in order to remove evil and threat from their field of vision. Another detail – i.e. cultivating flowers – bracketed off the realities of the ghetto.

A tactician who takes a weak position is a man of detail who is capable of generalising individual observations. This is an obvious choice. As a changeable practice without any fixed principles and eluding all classifications, a tactic must inevitably be based on a detail which, if the rules change, can quickly be abandoned for an entirely different, new centre. This was skilfully grasped and conveyed by Czerwińska-Rydel, who constructed the figure of Korczak by

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Wspomnienia o Januszu Korczaku. Vol. 1, ed. Ludwika Barszczewska and Bolesław Milewicz (Warszawa: Nasza Księgarnia, 1981), pp. 320–322, on p. 321.

218 Józef Łazarkiewicz, "Byłem jednym z Józków," in *Wspomnienia o Januszu Korczaku*, pp. 42–43, on p. 42. Korczak was especially fond of birds, which can be seen even in *King Matt the First*. Canaries, which appear in the book time and again, are an autobiographical reminiscence of Korczak's first traumatic experience of loss in childhood: the death of his canary. The body of the beloved bird was respectfully placed in a candy box and buried. Birds alighting on the windowsill, in Korczak's view, resembled a group of children. These behavioural perceptions were probably related to Korczak's background in medicine: "Look! Up there, you can see sparrows and down below children are playing in the backyard. You'll find various types among children: quiet ones, roguish ones, spoilers and helpers, resourceful and wimpy, shy ones and born leaders. The same with sparrows – there are such and other ones. I call them by the names of children who correspond to their characters. […] If sparrows could cry, they would certainly burst out in tears." Edward Poznański, "Fotografia z tamtych lat," in *Wspomnienia o Januszu Korczaku*, pp. 254–262, on p. 259.

highlighting particular "biographical" details and amalgamating them into a unique character. Instead of producing a "child-tailored" Korczak adjusted to the cognitive capacities of young readers, she offers "miniatures" of his life which retain their specific "locality," but at the same time aspire to form a complete narrative about the protagonist. This approach is exemplified in a vignette of Korczak's extremely popular lectures on education:

> Completely filled with students. the X-ray room was dark and crowded.
> "I'm scared," whispered Kocyk, who came to the lecture along with Korczak.
> "So am I," smiled the doctor. "But we'll handle it fine! Take off your shirt." He winked at Kocyk and set the X-ray unit.
> "Is it a lantern?" asked the boy.
> "Something like that," replied the doctor. "When we light your back and chest, we'll see everything you've got inside you."
> "Wow," gasped Kocyk with admiration.
> The doctor switched the machine on, and the students saw on the bright screen the image of the boy's heart, which was beating quickly, irregularly, timidly.
> "Look at it and remember it for ever," said the doctor in a soft, emotional voice. "This is what the heart of a child who is scared looks like. In the department of feelings, a child is different from an adult. That is why we must co-understand with a child in a childlike way, and, like a child, rejoice, love, be sad, feel angry, get offended and trust. So when you're tired and irritated, when you get angry and yell, when you feel like meting out a punishment or becoming offended, think back on that heart of the child."[219]

A very concrete image – the heart of the scared Kocyk – serves as a starting point for reflection on relationships between adults and children. The demonstrative method applied by Korczak is underpinned by extraordinary sensitivity and loaded with moral implications. If an X-ray is thought of as a photograph, Roland Barthes's insights about photographic images, their centres and peripheries can provide a useful interpretive framework for this episode.[220] Namely, Korczak focuses attention on the *punctum* – an ostensibly insignificant fragment of the photograph – in order to proceed to a generalised view (the Barthesian *studium*), i.e. the principles derived from the analysis of a specific case.

In Korczak, *punctum* involves not only the focalisation of attention around imponderabilia but also, as Czerwińska-Rydel insists, "private" working methods:

> "Children's handkerchiefs are a source of invaluable knowledge," said Korczak and looked at the girl. "It's amazing what you can find in them. It's not even that, in medical

219 Czerwińska- Rydel, *Po drugiej stronie okna*, pp. 110–111.

220 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1981), especially pp. 25–60.

> terms, the colours of the secretions are interesting. Besides, a handkerchief is where children hide their treasures. Only today, I've found two beads, a glistening candy wrapper, a seashell and a feather… And how about the fact that the handkerchiefs of some children are crumpled and dirty while those of others neatly folded and clean? It can tell us so much about the personalities of the owners of these unremarkable nose-wiping pieces of cloth…"[221]

Czerwińska-Rydel digs deep to recover biographical shards, in which she seems to refer to the diary kept by Korczak in the Warsaw ghetto. Jacek Leociak describes the Doctor's last piece of writing as "an open-ended work, an unfinished, marred or crippled form, which is ridden with discontinuities, abandoned promises, interrupted threads."[222]

If the diary is a tactician's memoiristic enterprise, it cannot have a centre, nor a beginning or an end, for that matter. The narrative must compulsively meander and remain notoriously elusive. Of course, such manoeuvres are out of the question in the fourth literature. In its case, the story must be accommodated within a certain plot framework. And indeed, instead of frazzled vignettes of reality, which are so typical of Korczak's *Ghetto Diary*, young readers receive an accurately moulded tale which does not stray into any major compositional detours. This does not mean that the account produced by Czerwińska-Rydel gives up on interpretive surplus. Back to the window then.

The very title of the biography – *Po drugiej stronie okna* [*Through the Window*] – may suggest transposing the history of Korczak and his children into a mythical timelessness. As Alice falls into a rabbit hole, the Doctor and his charges are plunged into the labyrinth of history only to remain behind the looking glass – the window – for ever. The story ends in the railway carriage, and whatever happens later is only speculative. The narrative draws on the performance of *The Post Office* by Rabindranath Tagore,[223] which was staged at the Orphans' House on 18th July 1942, i.e. a few weeks before the termination of the facility, in order to prepare the children for the worst.[224] Similarly to Amal, the protagonist of the play, who is kept indoors by disease and only communicates with

221 Czerwińska-Rydel, *Po drugiej stronie okna*, pp. 112–113.

222 Jacek Leociak, "Posłowie," in Janusz Korczak, *Pamiętnik i inne pisma z getta* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo W.A.B., 2012), pp. 279–300, on p. 299.

223 Korczak was fascinated with educational ideas developed by Tagore, an Indian scholar and Nobel Prize winner.

224 For more details about the performance, see "Micronarratives from the Peripheries of the Holocaust" in this volume.

the world outside by looking out of the window, Korczak's children must "turn upside down and inside out" the space in which they are enclosed. And so:

> Korczak lifted children in his arms one by one, putting their faces to a small, barred-up window for a breath of fresh air.
> The train pulled out.

"Do you remember Amal, who was waiting for a letter from the king," the doctor asked.

> The children nodded.
> "This letter was supposed to set him free. We're also waiting for a letter. Or perhaps we've just got it?"
> Outside the window, the blue August sky was bright and cloudless.[225]

This ambiguous ending can be read as a reproach against insensitive nature, which is entirely indifferent to suffering. In this sense, the figure of a man who holds a child in his arms in order to "feed" it with air can be a symbolic harbinger of the tragic ending, reminiscent of Celan's metaphor of black milk. At the same time, it also makes for an astonishing image that counterbalances the traditional pictorial representations of Madonna.

Yet, the ending can also be construed similarly to the closing scene of Wajda's film, that is, not so much as deconstructing the bounded space, but rather as re-organising or re-structuring it. Like the carriage door that opens up to a lit-up meadow, the cloudless August sky replaces darkness to emblematise the ultimate moral victory.

Naïve though it may sound, I opt for the latter reading in the belief that Korczak the tactician – a clear-sighted, detail-mindful observer of reality who opened up infinite spaces – in fact lived under the roof of the sky, since "Whichever way

225 Czerwińska-Rydel, *Po drugiej stronie*, p. 163. The tale about Korczak culminates in opening up to vast expanses. The lifting of children to show them the sky forms a rite of passage, which grants ultimate liberation. Michał Rusinek used a similar device in his booklet *Powieki* [*Eyelids*] which was appended to the programme of *Korczak*, a musical written by Chris Williams and directed by Robert Skolmowski at the Podlasie Opera and Philharmonics in Białystok. The booklet was dedicated to the memory of Korczak. Rusinek composed a "fairy tale" about little mice who run up a mound to flee a fire. Although they know they are bound to die, they gaze at the sky with admiration: " 'And when you are done looking,' a grizzly mouse said, 'close your eyes. You'll keep these images under your eyelids for ever.' " Michał Rusinek, *Powieki*: *Bajka dedykowana pamięci Janusza Korczaka*, illustrations by Olga Cieślak (Białystok: OiFP ECS, 2012), n.p.

we turned, it seemed that the heavens and the earth had met together, since he enhanced the beauty of the landscape. A blue-robed man, whose fittest roof is the overarching sky which reflects his serenity."[226]

Pamiętnik Blumki [*Blumka's Diary*], a multiple award-winning picturebook by Iwona Chmielewska[227] is another interesting book for a young readership. The starting point for its narrative is provided by a "family" photograph showing twelve children with Korczak standing behind them. Alluding to class photos, a staple of school rituals, the photograph calls for some theoretical scaffolding. As Susan Sontag argues, "[p]hotographs state the innocence, the vulnerability of lives heading toward their own destruction, and this link between photography and death haunts all photographs of people."[228]

However, the photograph drawn in the book and the very activity of photographing – with the children lined up in two rows faced with a photographer opposite to them – do not only signal death. The image horrifies adults because, unlike young readers, they know what happened to the group of children in the photograph. The author immediately resorts to the device called the "Holocaust photograph" by Hirsch,[229] who argues that the onlookers are inevitably positioned as those who know that all the people in the picture will die and their world will be destroyed. As such, Holocaust photographs represent what is no more. Consequently, they are "uniquely able to bring out this particular capacity of photographs to hover between life and death, to capture only that which no longer exists, to suggest both the desire and the necessity and, at the same time, the difficulty, the impossibility, of mourning."[230]

Portraying the very activity of photographing, the illustration which opens the story serves as the foundational myth of the children's community. It brings to

226 Henry David Thoreau, *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2012), p. 174.

227 Iwona Chmielewska, *Pamiętnik Blumki* (Poznań: Media Rodzina, 2011). The book has been comprehensively analysed as a picturebook by Magdalena Sikorska and Katarzyna Smyczyńska in "Ewangelia według Korczaka. *Pamiętnik Blumki* Iwony Chmielewskiej," in *Wyczytać świat – międzykulturowość w literaturze dla dzieci i młodzieży*, eds. Bernadeta Niesporek-Szamburska and Małgorzata Wójcik-Dudek, in collaboration with Aleksandra Zok-Smoła (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2014), pp. 151–160.

228 Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, electronic edition (New York, NY: Rosetta Books, 2015), p. 55. http://www.lab404.com/3741/readings/sontag.pdf. Accessed 19 Feb. 2019.

229 Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p. 20.

230 *Ibid*.

mind the class photo-like memorial in Yad Vashem, described at the beginning of this chapter. Yet it is also, first and foremost perhaps, a tale about Korczak, whom a child's diary relegates to the margins of the narrative. No adult, not even the Old Doctor himself, stands at the centre of a child's narrative. He appears incidentally, serving as a backdrop against which the stories of children unfold.

There are twelve children, not a random number which Magdalena Sikorska and Katarzyna Smyczyńska decipher as an allusion to the twelve apostles, highlighting the mixture of Judaic and Christian symbolism in what they believe is a deliberate multicultural gesture.[231] The scholars insightfully analyse the illustrations, which they view as an iconographic articulation of that which cannot possibly be uttered with a lump in one's throat. By doing this, they crack the postmemory code offered to young readers and split it into the picturebook's two necessary components – word and image – also fathoming their in-between.

What I find their most important contribution to the Korczak scholarship is that they insist that reading *Pamiętnik Blumki* requires unique archaeological effort and the unearthing of superimposed layers of meanings.

This insight primarily concerns the illustrations, but I would like to extend it to include the way in which the narrative about the Old Doctor is constructed. Just as in Saktsier's memorial in Yad Vashem, Korczak is hardly visible behind the children. This is his choice, rooted in the way he understood sacrifice. This is how he explained why he tended to take the back seat: "One that says that he sacrifices himself for something or somebody lies. […] Some people like cards, others women, still others never miss horse races, and I love children. There's no sacrifice on my part, what I do, I do for myself, not for them."[232]

With such an exegesis of sacrifice, children's stories must inevitably be pushed to the foreground. If children are "most important," the tale must be narrated by a young girl – Blumka, who stakes a claim to chronicling her community, though the tragic ending of the story prevents her from being its depositary. Blumka becomes a demiurge of the written world. Outlining the figures of children, she reveals a portrait of their guardian. By employing the original device of giving voice to the child, Chmielewska emphatically builds on the notion of bearing witness, which is deeply ingrained in the topoi of the Holocaust. Blumka keeps a diary, in which she follows Anne Frank and young Jewish chroniclers of the

231 Sikorska and Smyczyńska, "Ewangelia," pp. 151, 158.

232 Ida Merżan, "Podziw i kontrowersje," in *Wspomnienia o Januszu Korczaku*, pp. 116–133, on pp. 117–118.

Holocaust from Poland, such as Renia Knoll, Dawid Rubinowicz, Rutka Laskier and Dawid Sierakowiak.[233]

Children's diaries imbue testimony with a unique quality. Stories told by children, including Blumka, defy authorised narrative patterns and rather belong among postcolonial accounts, which have not been viewed as part of serious discourse so far. The young annalist writes her entries in a lined copybook, which underscores the informal character of her testimony though, paradoxically, a child's account is fitting indeed if Korczak is its object. If people shall be known by the "fruits" of their labour, the mini-tales about Regina who loses her hair when sick, about little Kocyk who uses his chamber pot to help carry coals, or about kind-hearted Zygmunt who lets out a goldfish bought for the money he has saved to swim free in the Vistula add up to an image of Korczak as a great pedagogue of small things – nose-wiping handkerchiefs and X-rays of a scared boy's heart.

The most difficult part of the story about the Old Doctor and his children is its ending. Krystyna Heska-Kwaśniewicz is somewhat disappointed that young readers are not given a reliably and honestly written story because instead of an ending they just get a drawing of a railway carriage.[234] However, this is the only ending that seems viable in such a narrative. Firstly, Blumka cannot step out of the world she describes in her diary; secondly, she, too, is part of the narrative which is going to be ruthlessly broken; and, thirdly, as Sikorska and Smyczyńska explain:

> The last page of the diary where Blumka promises "I'll write about the rest tomorrow" includes a note taken at a German lesson, featuring the word "they" which is smudged as if by tears, scribbled – hurriedly or perhaps anxiously – in capital and regular letters at the same time, and ultimately crossed out, which evocatively suggests to the onlookers the impending violence.[235]

Choosing to finish the tale in this way, Chmielewska does not exclude extratextual questions about "what happened later" being possibly posed by children. At the same time, she does not indulge in empathy, which could traumatise young

233 Knoll was the only survivor of the four children, but nothing is known about her later life. She described the Cracow ghetto. Rubinowicz wrote about everyday realities of the village of Bodzentyn under occupation, Sierakowiak about the ghetto in Łódź, and Laskier about the closed Jewish quarter in Będzin.

234 Heska-Kwaśniewicz, "Literacka legenda Janusza Korczaka," in *Czytanie Korczaka. Książki, bohaterowie, postawy*, ed. Katarzyna Tałuć (Katowice: Biblioteka Śląska, 2013), pp. 13–26, on p. 23.

235 Sikorska and Smyczyńska, "Ewangelia," p. 154.

readers. The Aristotelian principle that "pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune, fear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves"[236] is still at work. In this context, we can meaningfully revisit LaCapra's insistence on the expediency of freeing the memory of later generations from the trauma of other people's experiences because: "Those born later should neither appropriate (nor belatedly act out) the experience of victims nor restrict their activities to the necessary role of secondary witness and guardian of memory."[237]

We can also usefully recall Sobolewska's commentary in which she associates Wajda's film with the Bulgarian icon in which the saint was centrally positioned and engirdled by the deeds that testified to his greatness. In *Pamiętnik Blumki*, Chmielewska employs a different strategy. If Korczak, as suggested above, relied on an array of tactics, and the detail – even an ostensibly irrelevant one – was his natural element, a story about him should also appreciate the flickering, the unobvious and the unimposing. For this reason, Korczak, as rendered by Chmielewska, is a background character surfacing only here and there from behind Blumka's stories about individual children. Chmielewska contrives an icon of Korczak as a palimpsest whose top layer is composed of a child's narrative about other children.

In her choice of the ways to portray the Old Doctor, Chmielewska is in league with Czerwińska-Rydel. Korczak is consistently shown as a tactician who, while fighting for "access to the window," himself suggests how narratives about him should be spun. One is tempted to say that they should be told "through" the child and "because of" the child. The principle of the importance of the child and the non-importance of the teacher was propounded by Korczak himself after he had read essays in which prospective educators described their childhood memories:

> "I've read sixty candid, real memories of childhood," he said, pointing at sheets of paper stacked in front of him. "Interestingly, fifty eight of them are sad memories. […] What does it imply? That this is what a child's life is like. Sad. Tough. From birth on. […] Children feel bad in the world. They need help. This is where the teacher's responsibility lies."[238]

Po drugiej stronie okna and *Pamiętnik Blumki* are open-ended works, the way Korczak's *Ghetto Diary* is. Czerwińska-Rydel's story culminates in a scene in

236 Aristotle, *The Poetics of Aristotle, Edited with Critical Notes and a Translation by S. H. Butcher*, 3rd edition (London: Macmillan and Co., 1902), XIII.2, p. 45.

237 LaCapra, *History and Memory*, p. 198.

238 Czerwińska-Rydel, *Po drugiej stronie*, p. 113.

the railway carriage and the Doctor's words which turn the children's thoughts to the fairy tale; Chmielewska's book is capped by an illustration in which a *yad* (a ritual Torah pointer) touches a train sketched on a page of a lined copybook, with the image accompanied by Blumka's "promise" to write about the rest tomorrow; and Korczak's text concludes with a flower-watering episode. I believe that the compositional "open-endedness" of these stories is not a matter of coincidence. As they lack definitive closure, these narratives produce an impression of notes and drafts, rather than of completed, chiselled stories. Tilting towards infinitude, their unfinishedness, or rather incompleteness, dovetails with the idea of Korczak relying on tactics rather than on strategies. If the protagonist himself is a tactician, tales about him should also be stamped in this way.

Following Korczak himself, who sought to restructure the Orphans' House in the ghetto, all the three narratives construct their own space of the text which wields power over reality. The sovereignty of this space is founded on three pillars: a page from the diary/tale viewed as a site of liberation from time and from the univocity of the world; the text as a trajectory of words which produce new meanings so divergent from those "implicated" in the extratextual reality; and play with reality as a self-expression of the diarist or the narrator, who processes external inputs in order to manifest his/her own desires.

If this is indeed the case, the biography is a record of struggles for power over memory, because retaining things in memory is not the only point. It is equally important to know how things should be remembered. Let us think again about the windows of the Orphans' House. Firstly, if, as already suggested, Korczak's *Ghetto Diary* can be regarded as "a place" where freedom is allowed, another space constructed by the Old Doctor is also sovereign. It is obviously the Orphans' House, a unique text which was subjected to "textual" adjustments, i.e. bricking up the old windows and making new ones. Secondly, if words in a text produce new meanings, education bears a strong likeness to writing, even though education as conceived by Korczak has little to do with the "blank slate" of the Enlightenment. As Korczak claimed, "to educate" means to elevate the child in his/her own eyes, that is, to generate and elicit new meanings which will make the child love him/herself. Thirdly, if writing is play whose aim is the writer's self-expression which to an extent changes the world, be it ever so little, writing can be regarded as a form of memory about times and people.

This grid of interplays between *Ghetto Diary* and biographies of Korczak for a young readership could be rendered in the following way:

one's own space → diary page → Orphans' House
↓
text → writing, expression of meanings → education
↓
play → subjectivism, reworking → memory

The arrangement of the Orphans' House-education-memory shows the trajectory along which Korczak transforms from a tactician to a strategist. His fleeting observations, notes and fondness of detail add up to an absolutely monumental structure, something that aspires to be the principle in force. This process is most vividly illustrated by two children's books: *Jest taka historia. Opowieść o Januszu Korczaku* [*There Is a Story: A Tale about Janusz Korczak*] by Beata Ostrowicka and *Zwyczajny dzień* [*An Ordinary Day*] by Katarzyna Zimmerer, a granddaughter of Hanna Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, the author of the first post-war book about the Old Doctor, and a daughter of Joanna Olczak-Ronikier, who wrote a biography of Korczak.

The plot of *Jest taka historia* is set in present-day realities, with Korczak appearing in flashbacks occasioned by the memories of the great-grandmother of nine-year-old Jasiek (Johnny). The grandma's tale recurs time and again in the rhythm of a narrative ritual which informs the relationship between the old woman and her great-grandson:

> There is a story I've heard so many times. I like it a lot. There're places in it when I laugh, and other ones when I feel a lump in my stomach and my throat. This is a story my grandma tells me. And I'm sure I'll get to hear it many more times yet. Sometimes I ask the same questions because there're things in it I don't understand, and granny patiently explains them to me. And sometimes she surprises me with new passages.[239]

Jasiek is perfectly acquainted with the narrative devices his great-grandmother uses; after all, as White claims, history finds expression is particular plots. When the grandson listens to the tale of recollections told by the old lady, a guardian of memory, his imagination is activated. The children from the Orphans' House come to life then:

> I close my eyes. And I see Frania again. She's sitting at the table in the big hall. Różyczka next to her, wearing a red jumper. They're playing dominoes. The hall's full of children. Some are busy doing their homework, others are reading, and still others playing or doing nothing, just hanging around.[240]

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239 Beata Ostrowicka, *Jest taka historia: Opowieść o Januszu Korczaku*, illustrated by Jola Richter-Magnuszewska (Łódź: Literatura, 2012), p. 5.

240 *Ibid*., p. 24.

What is crucial here is not evoking such images from the past, but juxtaposing them with the present. Jasiek ponders not only the fates of Korczak's children, but also the relevance and viability of his ideas. The present times bear this comparison poorly, as Mr Doctor with his boundless devotion to children, his sensitivity and delicacy has hardly any followers. Jasiek's own teacher does not deserve much respect for humiliating plump Zuzia by addressing her "fatty pumpkin." His great-grandmother's tales furnish Jasiek with prosthetic memory, which he appropriates although he is not its legitimate "inheritor" as "prosthetic memories are […] not strictly derived from a person's lived experience. […] Prosthetic memories thus become part of one's personal archive of experience, informing one's subjectivity as well as one's relationship to the present and future tenses."[241]

In a sense, the boy feels he is an heir to the memory of the Old Doctor but first and foremost considers himself a depositary of his "principles of life."[242] Korczak's word has become law, and his tactics have turned into strategies, if not authorised then at least idealistic ones.

The "nebulous" texture of the Korczak figures in *Po drugiej stronie okna* and *Pamiętnik Blumki* is re-cast into certainties. A similar transformation is discernible in *Zwyczajny dzień* by Zimmerer, which tells a story of the everyday life of Szymek (Simon), whom experiences compel to reflect on the world. Interestingly, each chapter of Szymek's adventures is preceded with a quotation from Korczak's works. For example: "The teacher can roll a book up into a tube, but if only any of us tried to do so… They'd say right away that we've got no respect. Because in children everything must be exemplary"[243]; or "Boy, are we always ashamed! Always dreading that we'll do or say something silly. Always uncertain if we do things the right way. Lest they laugh at us."[244]

It can be easily guessed that the adventures of the boy only serve as a convincing exemplum of the truths professed by Korczak. Symptomatically, "quotations from Korczak" supplant his biography in Zimmerer's book. To make this possible, a necessary condition had to be met; specifically, a new narrative had to be forged in which Korczak the tactician was converted into Korczak the

241 Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformations of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York, NY, and Chichester, UK: Columbia University Press, 2004), pp. 25–26.

242 To cite the title of one of Korczak's pedagogical books.

243 Katarzyna Zimmerer, *Zwyczajny dzień*, illustrated by Aleksandra Woldańska-Płocińska (Warszawa: W.A.B., 2012), p. 41.

244 *Ibid*., p. 53.

strategist, and a song about his deeds transformed into recommendations about loving the child wisely.

In this way, the reading of *Po drugiej stronie lustra* by Czerwińska-Rydel and *Pamiętnik Blumki* by Chmielewska, biographies which are "hazy" and self-doubting, for they emerged from tactics, leads to texts such as *Jest taka historia* by Ostrowicka and *Zwyczajny dzień* by Zimmerer – books in which the Old Doctor engages in "underground," practices but becomes a full-fledged strategist while his pedagogical remarks, which bore more affinity to poetry than to scholarship, acquire the power of universal rules. In a sense, these narratives for young readers offer an answer, albeit probably an inadequate one, to the desperate question asked by Samuel D. Kassow in *Who Will Write Our History?*[245] The book concerns Emmanuel Ringelblum's conspiratorial Oyneg Shabes (Hebrew: *Oneg Shabbat*) Archive, which was committed to gathering materials about the Warsaw ghetto. Convinced that nobody would survive, its initiator resolved to leave documents and evidence of the crime to posterity. The last of the messages which were hidden in milk cans and stashed in the ground was written by nineteen-year-old David Graber, a member of the organisation and a former student of a Ber Borochov school, whose principal was also involved in compiling the documentation of ghetto life: "What we were unable to cry and shriek out to the world we buried in the ground… I would love to see the moment in which the great treasure will be dug up and scream the truth to the world… But no, we shall certainly not live to see it, and therefore I write my last will. May the treasure fall into good hands, may it last into better times, may it alarm and alert the world to what happened… in the twentieth century."[246]

The four books discussed in this chapter take part in retrieving once-recorded histories from the non-being of oblivion. Just like diaries, memoirs and notes from the Holocaust, salvaged from darkness by a miracle, scooped out of the ground, from closets, from cracks in the floor, they go out towards the light not only to bear witness to truth, but also to consolidate individual voices into the foundation of the narrative about the past. Crucially, these four narratives managed to steer clear of kitsch, which so pervasively plagues contemporary popular culture when it sets out to address the Holocaust and is so frequently encountered in the fourth literature. For kitsch, as Lisa Saltzman warns, "transforms […] traumas into fictional melodramas, renders its [history's] catastrophes sites

245 Samuel D. Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History? Rediscovering a Hidden Archive from the Warsaw Ghetto* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2009).

246 *Ibid*., p. 3.

of catharsis," consequently making the Holocaust "all too assimilable, digestible, consumable."[247]

The books about Korczak for young readers avoided this pitfall. They resisted the temptation of simplifying the story and capping it with neat closure. At the same time, they found original narrative forms which both did justice to the gravity of the Holocaust and channelled its representations in ways adjusted to the age of their readers.

247 Lisa Saltzman, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch Revisited," in *Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art*, ed. Norman Kleeblatt (New York, NY/New Brunswick, NJ: The Jewish Museum/Rutgers University Press, 2001), pp. 53–64, on p. 55.

Chapter Four Micronarratives from the Peripheries of the Holocaust

Micronarratives and Counter-History, or on Overcoming Oppression

The production of "endorsed" Holocaust narratives was certainly fuelled by the testimonies of victims and witnesses, therein also children. As children's experience of the Holocaust mainly involved adventures of the body and affects, Henryk Grynberg insists that they are credible witnesses of the Holocaust.[248] Polish studies which assemble testimonies of children certainly deserve close attention. They are very well exemplified by *Dzieci Holocaustu mówią* [*Children of the Holocaust Talk*][249] (1993), a multi-volume publication containing childhood memories as recalled by adults years later. An entirely different, very powerful approach is represented by *Dzieci żydowskie oskarżają* [*Jewish Children Accuse*],[250] which, though also published in 1993, features immediate accounts offered by children in the direct aftermath of the war. These testimonies have the most poignant impact because they register reality "naively," without being filtered by the rationality typical of an adult perspective.

The recently published *Dzieci żydowskie w czasach Zagłady* [*Jewish Children in the Time of the Holocaust*] alongside children's relations includes a questionnaire which was used when collecting testimonies of survivors. Symptomatically,

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248 Joanna Sobolewska, "Dzieci Holokaustu," in *Tematy żydowskie: Historia, Literatura, Edukacja*, eds. Elżbieta Traba and Robert Traba (Olsztyn: Wspólnota Kulturowa Borussia, 1999), pp. 173–187, on p. 186. The number of texts written *post factum* by the surviving Children of the Holocaust is indeed sizeable. Literary autobiographies and memoirs essentially affected the establishment of Holocaust topoi. Texts of this kind are so numerous that listing them here would be counterproductive. The best known ones include novels by Henryk Grynberg, *Dziewczynka w czerwonym płaszczyku* (*The Girl in the Red Coat*) by Roma Ligocka, *Chleb rzucony umarłym* (*Bread for the Departed*) by Bogdan Wojdowski, *Sublokatorka* (*The Subtenant*) by Hanna Krall, *Koń Pana Boga* (*God's Horse*) by Wilhelm Dichter and *Czarne sezony* (*The Black Seasons*) by Michał Głowiński, to name but a few.

249 Wiktoria Śliwowska, ed., *Dzieci Holocaustu mówią* (Warszawa: Stowarzyszenie Dzieci Holocaustu w Polsce, 1993).

250 Kazimierz Czarnota, ed., *Dzieci żydowskie oskarżają* (Warszawa: Amerykańsko-Polsko-Izraelska Fundacja Shalom, 1993).

the compiled resources were not generated by children's spontaneous narratives, but resulted from answers to questions asked by interviewers who had been trained for the purpose. The questionnaire itself is discussed, and the relevance of the questions explained as followed: "Past experiences can be reproduced only through asking questions which directly target the most intimate feelings of children, often inflaming their yet-unhealed wounds."[251] The questions were divided into: Personal Data, The First Stage of the German Occupation, The Ghetto, The Liquidation of the Ghetto, The Camp, The Prison, Living in the Woods and Shelters (Bunkers), Children's Involvement with the Guerrilla, Living among Aryans.[252] The intention behind the study poses no riddle: it was meant to amass individual accounts in order to grasp the Nazis' criminal plan for children and thus for the entire Jewish community.

The unique morphology of the Holocaust is clearly a recurrent focal point of research into Holocaust narrative, including children's narratives. The thematic fields specified in the questionnaire which was completed by the youngest Holocaust survivors and which provided the resources for *Dzieci żydowskie oskarżają* point to an ensemble of leitmotifs in the memories of the Holocaust, which surface in the narratives of victims and witnesses long after the war. These recurring elements have proved deeply inspirational for literary representations of the Holocaust, including contemporary Holocaust literature for children.

If, as Hayden White insists, historical narrative requires emplotment, separate literature (i.e. literature for children) which dwells on events of the past must be regarded as a plot multiply amplified. As a result, the contemporary fourth literature produced by the second – or, as a matter of fact, already the third – post-war generation uses narrative which coalesces testimony and fictional story, both of them tempered in order to accommodate the sensitivity and perception capacity of young readers. There is a child protagonist at the centre of this narrative, as this kind of literature demands a young character whose age approximates that of readers.

Holocaust narratives by a child or about a child can be regarded as a species of counter-history,[253] which Michel Foucault defined as "disinterring" something

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251 Olga Orzeł, ed., *Dzieci żydowskie w czasach Zagłady. Wczesne świadectwa 1944–1948. Relacje dziecięce ze zbiorów Centralnej Żydowskiej Komisji Historycznej* (Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2014), p. 296.

252 *Ibid*., pp. 298–305.

253 See Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, trans. David Macey, eds. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana (New York, NY: Picador, 2003), the Lecture of 28 January 1976, pp. 65–86.

that had been "deliberately misrepresented" rather than just forgotten.[254] For a long time, children's experience of the Holocaust was subsumed under universal experiences, and distinctive modes of children's trauma were disregarded. It took time to realise that children's stories are narratives in their own right, with plots correlated with the narrative capacities of the story-tellers. Since then, fragmentary tales by children, which are often dubbed "naive" and were long excluded from the mainstream narrative, have made their way to the site of negotiating Holocaust representations. Micronarratives of children form a counter-history which is positioned on the opposite end of the spectrum to monumental official history. Talking about counter-history today, one can no longer omit testimonies of child diarists from the times of the Holocaust.

The Holocaust According to Anne Frank

Justyna Kowalska-Leder, a pioneering researcher of Polish personal writings by children during the Holocaust, claims that these writings "attempt to give a verbal expression to the experience that eludes language but is evoked or intimated by means of words in a variety of manners."[255]

So far, the unrivalled number one of children's Holocaust diaries has been Anne Frank's *Diary*. Popular culture has completely appropriated Anne Frank, fixing the image of the hiding and ultimately murdered child. Films have been made about her, plays have been staged with her as the protagonist, and generally she has been framed as a timeless symbol of the Nazi crimes. At the end of the 20th century, a popular American periodical selected her as one of the most important people of the century, and in 2004 she was a candidate for "history's greatest Dutch person." Her soaring popularity contributed to initiating public debate which swayed the Dutch parliament to grant her citizenship posthumously.[256]

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254 Ewa Domańska, " 'Niechaj umarli grzebią żywych'. Monumentalna przeciw-historia Daniela Libeskinda," in *Narracja i tożsamość (I). Narracje w kulturze*, eds. Władysław Bolecki and Ryszard Nycz (Warszawa: IBL, 2004), pp. 221–247, on p. 240.

255 Justyna Kowalska-Leder, *Doświadczenie Zagłady z perspektywy dziecka w polskiej literaturze dokumentu osobistego* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2009), p. 322.

256 At the time of her death, Anne Frank had no residency permit from the Netherlands and, consequently, was not a Dutch citizen. For other manifestations of the popularity of Anne Frank, see Diane L. Wolf, *Beyond Anne Frank: Hidden Children and Postwar Families in Holland* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, CA, and London, UK: University of California Press, 2007), p. 7.

The popularity of the Anne Frank House with Western-European young people was well captured in *The Fault in Our Stars* by American writer John Green and its film adaptation directed by Josh Boone. The teenage protagonists, who are in love with each other, arrive in Amsterdam to meet the author of books they like. They visit the Anne Frank House, a place which is special both in term of the plot of the novel (terminally sick Hazel starts choking in its claustrophobic rooms) and in terms of, so to speak, cultural competence. Emphatically, for Americans and Western-Europeans, the Anne Frank House has become a place of memory in the sense of Pierre Nora's *lieu de memoire*, that is, a site where history and memory intersect. To Nora, elevating the place of memory to an object of historical research gave a thrust to a renewal of historiography.[257]

Besides the generic uniqueness of the diary itself, which is a form of schizophrenia, because "[w]riting is always a kind of imitation talking, and in a diary I therefore am pretending that I am talking to myself. But I never really talk this way to myself. Nor could I without writing or indeed without print," what should be considered special about the testimony we have obtained from Anne Frank?[258] The powerful impact of this document seems to originate in two factors. One of them is the young age of the diarist, and the other is the extraordinary literary maturity of the teenager, with whom young readers can feel an affinity. But there is more to it than that. Specifically, there is also what Leo Spitzer refers to as "nostalgic memory,"[259] which always determines the conditions under which a representation of the Holocaust becomes encoded by so-called later generations. The point is that childhood is usually portrayed as a unique, protected zone – a "paradise lost" whose memory must be guarded. Two years spent in hiding, in an annex to the building where the girl's father had run his company, were in a sense a "closed time" during which Anne did things she could also have been doing had there been no war: she studied, read, dreamed, felt angry and finally fell in love with the son of the other family with whom hers shared the annex.

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257 See Kornelia Kończał, "Miejsce pamięci," in *Modi memorandi. Leksykon kultury pamięci*, eds. Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska and Robert Traba, in collaboration with Joanna Kalicka (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2014). Se also Andrzej Szpociński, "Miejsca pamięci *(lieux de memoire)*," *Teksty Drugie*, No. 4 (112) (2008), pp. 11–20.

258 Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), p. 100.

259 See Leo Spitzer, *Hotel Bolivia: The Culture of Memory in a Refuge from Nazism* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1998), p. 153.

In her generally moving diary, the entry dated on 23rd February 1944 sounds particularly poignant. The passage is a confession and at the same time a daring declaration of faith in the justice of the eternal order of nature:

> But I looked out of the open window, too, over a large piece of Amsterdam, over all the roofs and on to the far distance, fading into purple. "As long as this exists," I thought, "and I may live to see it, this sunshine, the cloudless skies, while this lasts, I cannot be unhappy." […] As long as this exists, and it certainly always will, I know that then there always be comfort for every sorrow, whatever the circumstances may be.[260]

Nostalgic memory is evoked differently than traditionally rendered recollections. Instead of referring to events of happy childhood from before the war, it concerns the time when Anne, trapped in her hideaway though she was, did not succumb to despair. The confined flat is dislodged from historical narrative to linger in mythical timelessness even though an informed reading of the text cannot but be steeped in alarm.

The narrative of the Amsterdam-based diary has taken command of the modern imagination to such a degree that it has become *the* paradigm of a child's story of the Holocaust,[261] with Rutka Laskier of Będzin and Renia Knoll of the Cracow ghetto[262] – who wrote affecting diaries of their own – being dubbed "Polish Anne Franks."

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260 Anne Frank, *The Diary of Anne Frank: The Critical Edition*, eds. David Barnouw and Gerrold van der Stroom, trans. Arnold J. Pomermans, B.M. Mooyaart-Doubleday and Susan Massotty (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2003), p. 498.

261 The narrative paradigm on which Anne Frank could have drawn is an interesting issue. Apparently, her diary is indebted to *Joop ter Heul* by Cissy van Marxveldt, a popular four-book series of the 1920s. Joop writes letters to her friends, but her father, who fears that prolific correspondence can interfere with her studies, forbids her to communicate with her friends. Therefore, the girl starts writing a diary in letters. This is also how Anne Frank structured her own diary: as letters to Kitty, an imaginary friend. Sally Charnow, "Critical Thinking: Scholars Reread the Diary," in *Anne Frank Unbound: Media – Imagination – Memory*, eds. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Jeffrey Shandler (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012), pp. 291–308, on p. 305.

262 Rutka Laskier kept her diary in the Będzin ghetto. It was preserved because when her older friend, Stasia Sapińska, was leaving her family house situated in the neighbourhood to be turned into the ghetto, she showed Rutka a place under the staircase where her copybook could safely be hidden. Sapińska had been in possession of Rutka's diary for 60 years before it was eventually published in 2006. See Rutka Laskier, *Pamiętnik* (Będzin: Magic, 2008); for the English translation, see Rutka Laskier, *Rutka's Notebook: A Voice from the Holocaust*, eds. Daniella Zaidman-Mauer and Kelly Knauer (Yad Vashem and Time, 2008). The diary of Renia Knoll was found

However, there is a risk that the normalised and "domesticated" narrative will throw readers off guard, and that forcing an illusion of coming to terms with the difficult past will bring forth narrative fetishism. To avoid the effect of easy control of the past articulated in a narrative which is familiar to readers, White recommends "antinarrative nonstories" which employ narrative-rupturing devices such as deformation and fragmentation.[263] Manoeuvres of this kind can reduce the risk of narrative fetishism, which was described by Sigmund Freud in his essay "Fetishism" of 1927. Freud claims that, because of fetish, while the representation of the trauma remains planted in memory, its presence does not affect the person's functioning in post-traumatic reality. Various forms of social life related to the memory of the Holocaust can be fetishised. This involves the risk of passive participation in multiple forms of commemoration which attract attention due to specific media – images, exhibits, memorials and museums – but at the same time forestall confrontation with a real traumatic memory and, as such, prevent working it through.[264] Given this, the ubiquity and nearly pop-cultural popularity of Anne Frank may preclude an authentic encounter with her history. The girl turns into a total product,[265]

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at a paper mill in Jeziorno near Warsaw in March 1943. A worker noticed the notebook in a stack of wastepaper collected by the Germans. It was only handed over to the Jewish Historical Institute in 1958. See Renia Knoll, *Dziennik* (Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2012).

263 Hayden White, "The Modernist Event," in Hayden White, *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), pp. 66–86, on pp. 81–82.

264 See Jakub Mikurda, "Fetysz," in *Modi memorandi*, ed. Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska and Robert Traba, in collaboration with Joanna Kalicka (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2014), pp. 127–128.

265 Cf. e.g. stickers and small graffiti with Anne's face made by American artist Rachel Schreiber. Schreiber leaves them at "random" locations in urban spaces. Squeezed among adverts, neon lights and other graffiti, they effectively explode contemporary industrial narrative. Another issue involves the artificial generation of *lieux de memoire*, i.e. places where history and memory intersect. In Berlin, the Anne Frank Centre was founded at 39 Rosenthaler Straße. A partner institution of the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam, the Centre is devoted to educational projects preventing anti-Semitic and extremist attitudes among adolescents. Inside the Centre, boards with ample photographs present the timeline of the Frank family juxtaposed with the history of the rise of Nazism. The two narratives, each stemming from a different order (of monumental history and family micro-history) illuminate each other, producing a model of memory for contemporary young people. At the same time, young people

with her diary – her testimony – forming but a small particle of it.[266]

Yet the point is, as Ágneš Heller insists, that readers should rather confront a moment of the absolute ungraspability and inconceivability of the Holocaust experience, facing up to the paradoxes of the "sense of senselessness."[267] However, such texts may not be desired items on a child's bookcase, which should be exempt from the Holocaust trauma. Given this, the books with deeply horrifying contents resort to a variety of forms of manipulation which are specifically designed to alleviate the effects of alienation and dread. They are best exemplified in the very form of memoirs or diaries as most of the writings produced by young diarists concern daily routines and adventures of the body rather than incisively relating images of the Holocaust. For this reason, it is a Jewish child – a writing Jewish child, let us add – that becomes a safe metonymy of the Holocaust for young readers, all the more so because such children, as "members of the people of the Book" are "autochthons only of speech and writing."[268] The child's connection to philology, religion and culture is reason enough to make him/her into a diarist, a narrator or a protagonist of texts for young readers.

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are offered an array of workshops aimed at counteracting violence and xenophobia. Generally, the versatility of Anne Frank's *Diary* promotes its incorporation in several educational settings. Nowhere is Anne Frank's diary as popular as in the American school, where it proves "useful in discussing important historical personalities, lessons for the future generations, understanding the parents, art of self-expression, and sexual education." See Ilana Abramovitch, "Teaching Anne Frank in the United States," in *Anne Frank Unbound*, pp. 160–177, on p. 160.

How thoroughly Anne Frank's history has been mined for educational purposes in Western Europe can be gleaned from reactions of adolescent foreign visitors to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum. The guides report that the youth are usually surprised to see the name of Frank in several exhibitions in the belief that it designates Otto Frank, Anne's father, instead of Hans Frank, the general governor of the occupied Polish territory.

266 One of the characteristic practices is the metonymisation of the diary, that is ascription to it of meanings which shape the attitudes of readers. In a typical gesture, the diary is called "a message in a bottle," which obviously inspires a sense of responsibility for the message in its recipients. See Fuyuki Kurasawa, "A Message in a Bottle: Bearing Witness as a Mode of Ethico-Political Practice," *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2009), pp. 95–114; qtd. in Leshu Torchin, "Anne Frank's Moving Images," in *Anne Frank. Unbound*, pp. 93–134, on p. 108.

267 Ágneš Heller, "Remembering and Forgetting – The Sense of Senselessness (the Holocaust)," *Sinn und Form*, Vol. 53, No.2 (March 2001), pp. 149–160.

268 The coinage used by Jacques Derrida in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2001), p. 80.

So far, we have taken a glimpse at authentic testimonies of the Holocaust, in which the text is both a verbal creation and a social act: in promising to tell the truth and telling the truth about reality, it engages in human relationships.[269] The promise of truth establishes what Philippe Lejeune famously called the autobiographical pact between the text and the reader. It embeds the text in the reality of human relationships, brings the external in harmony with the intimate and the social, is based on the notion of truthfulness (testimony), and spells out rights and obligations. As a result, the individual subject is not an illusion, but a fragile reality.[270] Importantly, reading also takes place in this autobiographical space, which means that the reader "consents to" the reality evoked by Lejeune. With an autobiographical attitude to reading in place, even fiction is approached as being dictated by life itself.[271]

Furthermore, the generic texture of autobiographical forms, such as diary or memoir, helps manipulate the "fragile reality" to a greater or lesser degree. As a result, pseudo-diaries are composed as contemporary phantasms of personal narratives. They are predominantly phantasms of women, for it is mainly women that keep their records at the edges of male – historical and official – discourse. Paradoxically, women's stories were afforded a privileged position by the war because "in keeping with bourgeois, West-European cultural models, a published autobiography was not an admissible form of expression for women because it involved exposing the Self. […] It was only the war and the imperative

269 Philippe Lejeune, "Aresztujcie mnie!" trans. Regina-Lubas Bartoszyńska, in Philippe Lejeune, *Wariacje na temat pewnego paktu: O autobiografii*, ed. Regina Lubas-Bartoszyńska (Kraków: Universitas, 2001), pp. 283–287, on p. 285. For the French original, see Philippe Lejeune, "Arrêtez moi!" in Philippe Lejeune, *Pour l'autobiogaphie: Chronicles* (Paris: Seuil, 1998), pp. 123–126, on p. 125.

270 *Ibid*.

271 Cinema endeavours to envisage Anne's later life. The most popular of such films, tellingly entitled *The Whole Story*, presents scenes in the camp in which the girl, though certainly not a person with a Lager-mentality, shows loathing and aggression, for example, kicking a woman who tries to steal her food. In this way, the film strives to "disenchant" the customary image of a sensitive adolescent, a would-be intellectual. The title of the film suggests that, as compared with her camp experiences, Anne Frank's diary primarily concerned pre-camp (if not pre-war) realities and, as such, produced an idealised vision of the world. The whole truth about the world and the human is only revealed in the camp. Such a vulgarisation of meanings seems to convince the viewer that truth only comes to light in extreme situations.

of bearing witness it urged that promoted overcoming those cultural prohibitions."[272] At the same time, it should be stressed that Jewish culture has actually long boasted a rich tradition of women's intimate writings. The popularity of authors such as Glüeckel of Hameln and Paulina Wengeroff may be a token of ideological changes which were ushered in by the Haskalah.

Girls' Narratives: Intimist Writing and the Holocaust

In the section devoted to the biographical strategies used to construct the figure of Janusz Korczak, I discussed one example of girls' narratives. *Pamiętnik Blumki* [*Blumka's Diary*] is a "beautiful counterfeit," an imaginary Holocaust memoir. A pseudo-diary that emulates authentic narratives by Jewish children, it is at the same time a *chanson de geste* of Korczak who, mediated by Blumka's descriptions of his charges, becomes the central character of the narrated and painted tales. In this way, the picturebook form acquires an additional quality as it fosters a democratic reception; namely, the illustrations turn the book into a species of the Biblia pauperum for children who cannot yet read and make the history of the Old Doctor available to them as well. Blumka's memoir narrative is circumscribed by the voice-over, which weaves a different code into the story told by the Jewish girl:

> Blumka lived in the Orphans' House which was run by Doctor Korczak. Blumka kept a diary. She stuck photos into her diary, too. One of them shows Mr Doctor with twelve children. Why there are twelve children is unclear because as many as two hundred children lived in the House. This is how Blumka described this picture: […]
> Then war came and took away Blumka's diary alongside other things. So how do we know what she wrote in it? Because diaries are there so that we do not forget …[273]

Such passages belong to an entirely different time-space order, and the voice that delivers them is a voice of the living and the contemporary. The commentaries on the relationship between writing and remembering help read the story of Blumka as an exemplum of memory theory. If the formulaic ending of Holocaust texts has nothing in common with the "they-lived-happily-ever-after" conclusion of fairy tales, the culminating phrase of *Pamiętnik Blumki* – "diaries are there so that we do not forget" – may against all odds serve as a comforting closure of the tale provided by the frame narrative.

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272 See Aleksandra Ubertowska, " 'Niewidzialne świadectwa.' Perspektywa feministyczna w badaniach nad literaturą Holokaustu," *Teksty Drugie*, No. 4 (2009), pp. 214–226, on p. 224.

273 Iwona Chmielewska, *Pamiętnik Blumki* (Poznań: Media Rodzina, 2011), n.p.

The inner narrative is in the command of Blumka, who includes into her mini-narrative, dominated by other children's stories and Korczak's deeds as it is, her own dreams inspired by Stefania Wilczyńska,[274] who tends to be removed from stories about the Doctor:

> When I grow up, I'd like
> To be an educator.
> Like Miss Stefa.[275]

Symptomatically, Stefania Wilczyńska only appears once in the book; moreover, she is evoked in the context of Blumka's dreams, which inspires awe in readers as they know these dreams will never come true. Chmielewska seized an opportunity to reach beyond the towering figure of Korczak and allow a momentary appearance of the housemistress without whom he would not have been able to run his Orphans' House. In all probability, pulling her to the foreground, for a brief moment at least, does not only ensue from the historical pact guaranteeing "truth," but also speaks to a general tendency of including in Holocaust discourse various groups which have so far been denied the right to their own narratives. The feminist turn in Holocaust research, which was initiated at a New York conference on women in the studies of the Shoah in 1983, has helped introduce some equality among their various paradigms of representations.[276]

Therefore, a girl decides to affirm her teacher, who may also be her surrogate mother to a degree. The short "like Miss Stefa" powerfully expresses the

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274 Stefania Wilczyńska was a devoted collaborator of Korczak, whom she helped run the Orphans' House. She studied in Belgium, frequently went to Palestine and had plans for permanently emigrating from Poland. She gave up on those plans, guided by her attachment to the children, and her sense of duty and loyalty to Korczak. She was murdered with Korczak and the children at Treblinka. In 2015, her excellent biography entitled *Pani Stefa* [*Miss Stefa*] by Magdalena Kicińska was published.

275 Chmielewska, *Pamiętnik Blumki*.

276 The emancipation of women's themes included in the topoi of the Holocaust provoked fierce opposition. The new methodology was accused of pitting two forms of identity against each other in an ambiguous rivalry and of trivialising the Holocaust. Another objection was that feminism applied contemporary perspectives to the past, when such frameworks were unknown and non-existent. See Ubertowska, "Niewidzialne świadectwa." In Poland, the concept fell on fertile soil, but it only inspired valuable studies about two decades later. One of the most popular publications in this field is a study by Joanna Stöcker-Sobelman. See Joanna Stöcker-Sobelman, *Kobiety Holokaustu: Feministyczna perspektywa w badaniach nad Shoah. Kazus KL Auschwitz-Birkenau* (Warszawa: Trio, 2012).

distinctiveness of her character. This indirectness of Wilczyńska's description is in tune with the way she is remembered by Szlom Nadel, a former resident of the Orphans' House: "'She lived so that we knew little about her, she was so…,' he tries to find a proper expression. […] 'So… not-there. Nothing was left of her, as if she'd never been there at all.'"[277]

Magdalena Kicińska, a biographer of Wilczyńska, managed to find an anonymous diary kept by "girl no. 56" during the First World War I, where the arrival of Esterka, Wilczyńska's favourite,[278] at the Orphans' House is reported: "[Esterka] was a pupil of the Orphans' House. Just like me, Surka, Łajcia and Helenka, and just like us she wore numbered dresses, shoes and stockings. She always dreamed of becoming an educator, like Miss Stefa, and working with children all her life."[279]

The similarity of Blumka's dreams and those of "girl no. 56" is all the more surprising as they revolve around Miss Stefa, whose difficult temper and severity prevented her from being universally beloved by the children. Though she symbolically performed the mother-role, her profession as a teacher inspired respect and could hardly be emulated by girls from the Orphans' House. Miss Stefa is defined as a teacher rather than in terms of femininity or maternity. Kicińska illustrates the inseparability of the vocation and the person by relating a revealing episode from the time when her protagonist started to learn Hebrew: "Hebrew has no present-tense form for the verb 'to be.' She is learning the language with no word to render one's own presence. This can be done by using a noun, such as a term for one's occupation. She writes down in her notebook: 'מורה'. A teacher."[280]

The memory of "Dear Miss Stefa" has been retrieved. One line in *Pamiętnik Blumki* may not contribute to writing the history of the Orphans' House, anew but it may have its role in re-writing this history, as a result of which the memory of the educator will be rebuilt following new principles.[281]

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277 Magdalena Kicińska, *Pani Stefa* (Wołowiec: Czarne, 2012), p. 22.

278 Young educator Esterka, who is frequently mentioned in the diary, can easily be confused with Esterka Winogronówna, who supported Korczak and Wilczyńska at the Orphans' House in the Warsaw ghetto.

279 Kicińska, *Pani Stefa*, p. 48.

280 *Ibid*., p. 121.

281 The memory of Wilczyńska was fleetingly included in the official rhythm of celebrations. During the Year of Korczak, Women's Day was devoted to Miss Stefa. Despite all attempts to commemorate her in any other ways, the Committee for Municipal Nomenclature of the Council of Warsaw decided that Wilczyńska should not be given any distinction alone, without Janusz Korczak.

Girls' notes put a woman at their centre. That it is no coincidence can be seen when reading and looking at *Ostatnie przedstawienie panny Esterki. Opowieść z getta warszawskiego* [*Miss Esther's Last Performance: A Story from the Warsaw Ghetto*], a picturebook by Adam Jaromir and Gabriela Cichowska. The book first appeared in Germany as *Fräulein Esthers letzte Vorstellung* and was published in Poland in 2014. Despite favourable reviews, it has not been as successful as *Pamiętnik Blumki*.

The team of Jaromir and Cichowska offer to the public a summa of imaginaries of ghetto memoir-writing, as the book is woven of quotations and/or paraphrases form Korczak's "real" *Ghetto Diary* and a fictional memoir of a child: Gena, a resident of the Orphans' House. The two narratives – by the guardian and the charge – unfold simultaneously so that they encourage combining them into a democratic discourse on the life at the Orphans' House.

This is not the only structural parallelism, since the very genre of the picturebook entails a bivocality of the word and the image. Cichowska's suggestive, monochromatic, brown-tinted illustrations bring to mind pre-war photographs. Such a palette, while painting a world which does not engender positive associations, will certainly not terrify young readers. As the two stories are printed in different fonts to make them easily distinguishable and are interspersed with illustrations, the narrative is a somewhat chaotic collage of various texts. Readers are hurled, so to speak, into the textual world of the ghetto which consists of information posters, advertisements, signboards, excerpts from newspaper write-ups, calendar pages, physicians' notes, postcards, letters to and from Palestine, plates illustrating the performance and children's drawings. The oppressiveness of German information posters is muffled in the cacophony of other texts which seek to create a substitute for normalcy in the ghetto. At the same time, the makeshift quality of this normalcy is made clear to the reader as it is contrived of paper, a substance of utter fragility and ephemerality, and thus helpless vis-à-vis violence.

Nonetheless, because immortality is another, opposite feature of paper, Gena decides to write a *herstory*,[282] recording the memory of her beloved tutor Esterka Winogronówna,[283] who was entrusted with the extraordinary task of staging

282 As opposed to *history*, the point of *herstory* is to produce a narrative about women's activities and pursuits in the past which have as a rule been relegated to the margins of historical studies written by males. See Anna Burzyńska, "Feminizm," in Anna Burzyńska and Michał Paweł Markowski, *Teorie literatury XX wieku. Podręcznik* (Kraków: Znak, 2006), pp. 389–437, on p. 401.

283 She was a student of the Faculty of Natural Sciences at the University of Warsaw and one of the assistants helping Korczak and Wilczyńska. The process of memory retrieval

with the children a play based on Tagore's *The Post Office*.[284] Bed-bound Amal, the protagonist of the play, yearns to leave the stuffy room, but his doctor forbids him to stir outdoors. The boy is impatiently awaiting a letter from the king which is supposed to give him his freedom. In the performance, Gena's part is episodic, but she is anxiously excited to play Sudha, a girl who lays flowers on the chest of the dying Amal.[285]

The description of the preparations for the play serves in *Ostatnie przedstawienie panny Esterki* as an excuse for sketching vignettes of everyday life at the Orphans' House and primarily for illuminating Miss Esther among the group of educators overshadowed by Korczak. In Jaromir's story, Mr Doctor represents male narrative, which is dominated by observations and commentary. In parallel, Gena's childlike tale unfolds with Korczak's assistant as its central character, who though rarely speaking herself, is constantly "analysed" by the girl.

Gena's account compensates for the rather hazy glimpses of Esterka scattered across *Ghetto Diary* by the Old Doctor, who mentions her arrest during a razzia: "All the efforts to get Esterka released have come to nothing. I was not quite sure whether in the event of success I should be doing her a favor or harm her. 'Where did she get caught?' somebody asks. Perhaps it is not she but we who have gotten caught (having stayed)."[286] The chronicler of the Orphans' House anticipates the tragic ending of the young woman's life: "Miss Esterka. Miss Esterka is not anxious to live either gaily or easily. She wants to live nicely. She dreams of a beautiful life. She gave us *The Post Office* as a farewell for the time being […]. If she does not come back here now, we shall meet later somewhere else."[287]

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is ridden with the risk of omission. This is what happened with another educator at the Orphans' House, Ryfka Boszes, who may have been one of the few survivors and who settled in Saratov (USSR), as suggested by scant sources.

284 The work on the staging of Tagore's play with the children is usually attributed to Korczak, probably as a result of affinities between the educational concepts developed by the two experimenting pedagogues. In his diary, Korczak recounted a dream he had had in which he met a bearded sage who invited him to his school in India. This passage from the diary is included in *Ostatnie przedstawienie panny Esterki*.

285 For more information about the performance and its significance, see the chapter on play in this volume.

286 Korczak, *Ghetto Diary*.

287 *Ibid*.

Indeed, while Mr Doctor pursues a wise life, Miss Esterka opts for beauty. And beauty is presented as axial to the preoccupations of the young educator by the authors of *Ostatnie przedstawienie panny Esterki*. It is with her, not with the pragmatic Miss Stefa, that Genia can talk about her feelings, about cinema, screen lovers and dance. It is from her that she can obtain the promise of a choreographic arrangement for her Sudha part. It is Miss Esterka that adorns the Orphans' House with geraniums, which Korczak will refer to as "the poor orphanage plants, the plants of the Jewish orphanage."[288] It is her that takes care that the girls' hair is nicely done and playfully addresses them in French. Her attitude is a counterbalance to the rationality of Miss Stefa.

If Miss Stefa safeguards order and security, Miss Esterka champions the vitality of beauty and art. This juxtaposition invites comparisons with the Biblical sisters Mary and Martha from the Gospel. With her resourceful bent, Esterka is committed to arranging entertainment for the children ("It's not that easy to fill your time […] Miss Esterka said/she'd come up with something./She always comes up with the best ideas./In the morning, she said/she had a surprise for us"). Given this, it is only fitting that she is the initiator of the performance. Miss Esterka becomes deeply engaged in preparations for the play: she tells the children about India and practices elocution and dancing with them. Her activity does not escape Korczak's notice, who comments on the preparations for the performance in "his" narrative.

Gena is impatiently waiting for her costume, which is made of Miss Esterka's best summer dress. Thoroughly immersed in arrangements for the performance, the educator unpicks the dress even though she intended to wear it on the day the war would finish. While she is not involved in spinning a diaristic narrative in which she is elevated into a protagonist, when pulling the seams and sewing costumes, she is shown in acts of creation or, better, of re-making.

In both narratives – that of Korczak and that of little Gena – Esterka comes across as aware that "being a woman inevitably entails re-enacting the fate of the forgotten nymph Echo in the myth of Narcissus, who was doomed to repeat other people's words even after death."[289] Consequently, instead of creating, she compiles grand narratives, whereby she re-works culturally sanctioned male myths. As such, she tends to be a *bricoleur*, to use the metaphor of Claude Lévi-Strauss,[290] i.e. a do-it-yourselfer who processes the resources at hand into a new

288 *Ibid*.

289 Joanna Bator, *Feminizm, postmodernizm, psychoanaliza. Filozoficzne dylematy feministek "drugiej fali"* (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2001), p. 201.

290 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (London: Weidenfled and Nicholson, 1966).

quality, or a thieving bird[291] that steals words from the language in which there has been no room for her in order to construct a new language of her own.[292] When staging a male – male-authored and male-selected – performance, she transforms it into a female tale which is first and foremost governed by beauty, a value she cherishes herself.

In their enunciations in the book by Jaromir and Cichowska, Korczak and Gena – the characters who are also narrators – enjoy the privilege of their own language on which to rely, with Miss Stefa and Miss Esterka having no such codes at their disposal. Gena includes the two women in her narrative and ascribes to each of them a fitting idiolect: the language of duty to the former, and the language of metaphor and symbol, signs of art as they are, to the latter.

Central to the interpretation of the character of Miss Esterka is, in my view, the symbolic gesture of unpicking her dress, a sacrifice she makes to make a stage costume. The woman surrenders herself to art and in the process renounces her previous defining features. If the dress was merely a symbol of cultural enslavement, Miss Esterka reveals her own self and eventually becomes visible through relinquishing it. She also gets noticed by Korczak, who in his diary links his assistant closely to the performance she staged and erects it into an *exegi monumentum*: "She gave us *The Post Office* as a farewell for the time being."

This episode can be usefully illuminated by the Barthesian metaphor of the text as a tissue/veil/texture, which crucially presupposes the death of the author.[293] In a counter-gesture, the feminist theory of creation upholds the author's right to presence. Hence, "[Nancy K.] Miller proposes replacing Barthes's 'hyphology' – the study of the text as a spider's web in which the spider of the author has dissolved – with 'arachnology' – the study of the female author who has her own forgotten name, forgotten past and forgotten tradition."[294]

Similarly to Miss Esterka, Gena practises arachnology because, by means of her diary, she re-installs in memory not only her own name, a metonymy of all the murdered children from the Orphans' House, but also the name of forgotten Esterka. Given this, *Ostatnie przedstawienie panny Esterki* is a title that

291 A metaphor crafted by Hélène Cixous; see "The Laugh of the Medusa," trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (1976), pp. 875–893, on p. 887.

292 See Bator, *Feminizm*, p. 216.

293 See Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1998), especially p. 64.

294 Kazimiera Szczuka, "Prządki, tkaczki i pająki. Uwagi o twórczości kobiet," in *Krytyka feministyczna. Siostra teorii i historii literatury*, eds. Grażyna Borkowska and Liliana Sikorska (Warszawa: IBL, 2000), pp. 69–79, on p. 77.

discourages readers from reading the text mimetically because the performance it addresses means more than the play she stages. Another meaning of performance here is showing and presentation. In this sense, Gena's diary, as well as the book by Jaromir and Cichowska, marks the first and the last "showing" of Esterka and offers an opportunity to bring her out of oblivion and into the memory space of the next generation.

Young readers are spared the tragic ending, but its spectre haunts the title. The word "last" suggests more than just the death of the eponymous protagonist; it heralds the destruction of the entire world, which performs its last roles. Paradoxically, Miss Esterka's performance, the last one for her as it was, proved irresistibly enduring in contemporary theatre. In 2009, eminent Polish stage director Krzysztof Warlikowski produced *(A)pollonia*, a play which opens with a recollection of Tagore's *The Post Office*. The salient play-within-the play motif speaks to the persistence of what is referred to as the past in the present. This persistent presence cannot possibly be ignored as it generates questions which vocally demand that we answer them.[295]

In this way a specific counter-history is produced which, as Michel Foucault insists, concerns both the past and the epistemology of resistance.[296] Memoirs and diaries become front-running stories of counter-history whose aim is to expose the official narrative as a fabrication. In this sense, there is a political dimension to them, for according to Aleida Assmann, their narrative is supposed to build a future model of a tale which will abolish the one currently in place.[297]

Therefore, both the authentic diaries of Anne Frank and Janusz Korczak, as well as fictional memoirs of Blumka and Gena, are the property room of a history which stands up against the power of official narrative. The notes typed or jotted down in pencil on hard-won paper, on receipts, cement wrappings or in school copybooks,[298] all attest to the contingency of writing in the time of the Holocaust. Their fragmentary and haphazard character, and their predilection

295 For more information about *(A)pollonia* directed by Warlikowski, see the Chapter Five in this volume.

296 On the tools for analysing the role of power in society, see Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*. On counter-memory, see Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 139–164.

297 See Assmann, "Przestrzenie pamięci," pp. 101–142.

298 Maria Zarębińska-Broniewska worked on her unfinished novel *Dzieci Warszawy* [*The Children of Warsaw*] in the camp and wrote its passages on empty cement bags.

for non-finite clauses seem to testify to the hurried scribbling which so spectacularly deviates from official, systemic historiography.[299]

It is not insignificant that Korczak encouraged his children to keep diaries. His incitement, I believe, had less to do with instilling habits of regularity in them and more with inviting them to systematically work on themselves, an enterprise which is impossible without introspection. The diary can effectively replace a philosopher's hermitage and Matt's island.[300] The texts addressed in this chapter are replete with meta-literary digressions that rationalise the registering of reality. In this context, the following passage from Gena's diary in *Ostatnie przedstawienie panny Esterki* is particularly poignant:

> Crouching in the silence corner,/I'm trying to make up for the recent days./These diaries… /they're Mr Doctor's idea./He says it's important to write down/from time to time what's in our hearts./Some kids were ashamed/and didn't know how to begin,/but Mr Doctor/had clues for them./A few questions for them/to answer./Are you glad that you were born?/How many children do you want to have when you get married?/What names will you give them? Would you prefer/to be rich, learned or famous?[301]

These questions that provide anchorage for intimate confessions reveal Korczak as an educator who attempts to identify the morphology of diaristic narrative. He seems to wield patriarchal rule as, based on the law of the father, which Jacques Lacan calls "the symbolic order," he determines the structure of linguistic meaning on which culture is founded.[302] But does Korczak really establish the model for children's narratives? Not in the least. The pattern of storytelling which he proposes only invites children to open up to their own, self-produced

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299 Importantly, somnambulic incoherence, the blurring of contours, temporal retardations and blind spots which are characteristic of the phantasmatic novel are also almost inseparable from novels for women. Maria Janion argues that the phantasmatic novel is a genre particularly aligned with feminine sensitivity, feminine writing and male ideas of femininity. See Maria Janion, *Kobiety i duch inności* (Warszawa: Sic!, 2006).

300 In Korczak's novel *Król Maciuś na wyspie bezludnej* [*King Matt on the Desert Island*], the eponymous protagonist is confined to a desert island and abundantly indulges in thinking. He notices that solitude and reflection do not wear him down: "So many different questions cross Matt's head, but he tries to answer them all by himself. And it looks as if Matt is a student and a teacher at once" (Łódź: Res Polona, 1990), p. 61.

301 Adam Jaromir and Gabriela Cichowska, *Ostatnie przedstawienie* (Poznań: Media Rodzina, 2014), p. 27.

302 Cf. Judith Butler, "The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva," in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY, and London, UK: Routledge: 1999), pp. 101–118.

histories. Using the right of creative freedom, the individual crafting her confession puts at its centre the figure who is consigned to the periphery of official discourse.

Free expression is the cornerstone of Freinet's concept of education, which is informed by the belief that children's experience engendering self-awareness is the supreme educational event. Liberty of self-expression was advocated by such giants of New Education as Maria Montessori and Korczak as well. Indeed, there are few, if any, more unmistakable forms of manifesting freedom and individuality than keeping a diary. There are also few, if any, more effective tools of introspection. Anne Frank, a student of a Montessori school, was well aware of this, when going over her own entries from months before, she was struck by how much she had changed:

> When I look over my diary today, 1½ years on, I cannot believe that I was such an innocent young thing. I cannot help but realize that no matter how much I should like to, I can never be like that again. I still understand those moods, those remarks about Margot, Mummy and Daddy so well that I might have written them yesterday, but I no longer understand how I could write so freely about other things. I really blush with shame when I read the pages dealing with subjects that I'd much better have left to the imagination. I put it all down so bluntly! But enough of that.[303]

However, the auxiliary questions formulated by Korczak to aid intimist narratives bear another important meaning which is particularly relevant to the historical conjuncture when the children's/girls' diaries were written. The queries diverted their attention from the realities of the ghetto and made them look into the future, kindling hope for shaking off oppressive childhood and marching triumphantly towards conscious adulthood. In other words, they directed the children's minds towards the future, conveyed through the metaphor of the window.[304]

Discussing the diary as a specific form of autobiography, we can also usefully examine biography as another form of representing the Holocaust. In this respect, *Pamiętnik Blumki* is functionally syncretic as it is both a fictional diary of a Jewish girl and an ideological biography of Korczak.

Approximating non-fiction and seeking legitimation in the right to shape postmemory, separate literature presents to its readers an entire collection of authentic characters who are protagonists or protagonists and narrators in one of the recorded stories. The series of *Wojny dorosłych – historie dzieci* [*Wars of*

303 Frank, *Diary*, p. 304.

304 For the window metaphor as related to Korczak's biography, see "The Architecture of Memory" in this volume.

Adults, Stories of Children], which is published by the Warsaw Rising Museum and the Łódź-based Wydawnictwo Literatura, responds to the contemporary demand for counter-histories related by children. The volumes which have been released so far include[305]: *Czy wojna jest dla dziewczyn?* [*Is War a Girls' Thing*] by Paweł Beręsewicz, *Asiunia* by Joanna Papuzińska and its sequels *Mój tato szczęściarz* [*My Lucky Dad*] and *Krasnale i olbrzymy* [*Dwarfs and Giants*], *Zaklęcie na "w"* [*The "W" Spell*] by Michał Rusinek, *Wojna na Pięknym Brzegu* [*War at the Jolie Bord*] by Andrzej Marek Grabowski and *Syberyjskie przygody Chmurki* [*The Cloud's Adventures in Siberia*] by Dorota Combrzyńska-Nogala. Wydawnictwo Muchomor in collaboration with the Warsaw Rising Museum has published *Halicz* by Roksana Jędrzejewska-Wróbel and *Mały Powstaniec* [*The Little Insurgent*] by Szymon Sławiński as volumes of the *Warsaw 1944* series. All these books are fictionalised memories of war-time childhood.[306]

This tendency is also represented by three books which deal with the Holocaust:[307] *Bezsenność Jutki* [*Jutka's Insomnia*] by Dorota Combrzyńska-Nogala, *Wszystkie moje mamy* [*All My Mothers*] by Renata Piątkowska and *Ostatnie piętro* [*The Top Floor*] by Irena Landau, all published by Wydawnictwo Literatura. In the first of them, the history of a fictional girl is used to recount the annihilation of the Łódź ghetto; the second tells the story of real people, children saved by Irena Sendler[308]; and the third provides a parallel narrative to Papuzińska's war-time, yet non-Jewish, dilogy of *Asiunia* and *Mój tato szczęściarz*.

This narrative trend evinces the teleological character of Holocaust biographies for young readers, who find out about the lives of individual children against a broad historical backdrop. In this way, the history of Jutka, who managed to escape from the ghetto in Łódź – complete with all the typical topoi of

305 I list the titles which were published by November 2015.

306 The number of children's and young adults' books which verge on non-fiction and respond to the "hot issues" of the world is growing in Poland. For example, a dozen or so texts addressing migrant-related problems have been published recently.

307 After this volume's Polish version went to print, new books which employ the topoi of the Holocaust discussed here have appeared, for example *Rutka* by Joanna Fabicka, *Bombka babci Zilbersztajn* and *Pan Apoteker* by Katarzyna Ryrych, and *Mirabelka* by Cezary Harasimowicz. For obvious reasons, they are not included in my explorations of postmemory.

308 Irena Sendler was involved in Żegota (the Council to Aid Jews). She saved many Jewish children by helping them escape from the ghetto and arranging homes for them on the Aryan side. The youngest children were sedated and hidden in carts or vehicles transporting various items to and from the ghetto. She also kept an encrypted card index of the children for them to find out about their identities after the war.

the Holocaust, such as the hideaway, the wall, *Wielka Szpera*,[309] the phantasm of Rumkowski[310] and the camp in Chełmno on the Ner[311] – becomes an exemplum of the lot of Jewish children. The tale about Szymon who is hidden by five women is capped with a biographical note on Irena Sendler,[312] which is accompanied by commentaries of Lili Pohlmann, a campaigner for the Nobel Peace Prize to be awarded to the woman who was saving the lives of Jewish children, and of Elżbieta Ficowska, a girl rescued by Sendler. Landau's *Ostatnie piętro* seems the most interesting of the three as its author not only bravely reveals her own life, but also takes up the double novelistic challenge of portraying the microworld of a Jewish child who hides from the Germans and conveying the entire array of gentiles' attitudes and behaviours vis-à-vis a Judaic girl.

Yet, in my view, the special value of Landau's book lies elsewhere. Specifically, as *Ostatnie piętro* is an autobiographical narrative with a writer for children and young adults as its protagonist, the book fashions – alongside the books by Papuzińska (*Asiunia*, *Mój tato szczęściarz*), a renowned author of the fourth literature – an alternative history which is part of the Jewish narrative. Thus, grand historical events, such as the Warsaw Uprising, have their reflection in the

309 While, generally, *szpera* (from German *Allgemeine Gehsperre*) was an absolute ban on leaving homes, the *Wielka Szpera* (Great Szpera) was a special operation which was launched in the Lódź ghetto on 5th September 1942. It consisted in the compulsory delivery of all children younger than 10 and the elderly over 65 years of age to the Nazis. According to Rumkowski, a dutiful execution of the order was supposed to save the lives of thousands of adults. On 4th September, he delivered a dramatic public speech, urging his compatriots to obey the order.

310 Chaim Mordechaj Rumkowski was the head of the *Judenrat* (Jewish Council) in the Łódź ghetto. He is a controversial figure. His detractors accuse him of collaborating with the Germans and making a fortune as the "Chairman" in the ghetto. Rumkowski's defenders explain his conduct as being an endeavour to delay the Germans' decision to liquidate the Łódź ghetto.

311 A German extermination camp to which Jews from the Łódź ghetto were transported. The victims were poisoned by fumes in purposely designed cars. An estimated 250,000 people were murdered in this way. Four people survived.

312 The popularity of Irena Sendler was boosted by *The Courageous Heart of Irena Sendler*, a 2009 television film directed by John Kent Harrison. In Poland, the film was shown in cinemas as *Dzieci Ireny Sendlerowej* (literally: *The Children of Irena Sendler*); its premiere was accompanied by the publication of a likewise titled book by Anna Mieszkowska. Sendler's daughter was involved in writing the book, e.g. revealing how wartime activities affected the later life of Sendler herself and her loved ones. That the memory of Sendler is still being worked through can be seen in the award-winning *Sendlerowa. W ukryciu* [*Irena Sendler: In Hiding*], a 2017 book by Anna Bikont.

uprising in the Warsaw ghetto, and personal tragedies, such as the loss of home and bereavement, afflict all child protagonists, whatever their religious denomination. Resulting from different historical processes, their parallel stories should certainly trigger reflection not so much on the similarities of the Polish and the Jewish lot as rather on their disparities.

This is, as a matter of fact, the role the genres discussed here perform in shaping postmemory. In diaries, autobiographies and biographies, which in a sense have a therapeutic function, readers can recognise themselves but, better still, they can also obtain an insight into the fate of the Other whom it is their responsibility to remember.

The Fairy Tale and the Holocaust

The fairy tale as a tool of cultural transmission has undergone changes aimed at adapting the genre to the needs of successive generations of young readers. Inevitably, the "fable-zone" is amenable to constant pressures which expand its primary premises and goals.

As the most important outcome of the impact of contemporary factors on the paradigm of the fairy tale, a new type of the genre – the postmodernist fairy tale – has been fashioned. According to Weronika Kostecka, the postmodernist fairy tale is "a literary work which, unlike adaptation, reinterprets the classical fairy tale, that is, deconstructs it, proposing new readings, and then incorporates it into the field of intertextual games with tradition and revises the existing interpretations. The postmodernist fairy tale not only urges reinterpretations, but first and foremost is a reinterpretation of the traditional fairy tale in and of itself."[313]

The postmodernist fairy tale demands that young readers possess comprehensive cultural competence, as to appreciate it fully they must be familiar with the fairy-tale genotype, versed in deciphering irony and capable of appreciating parodistic devices. It is legitimate to say that the postmodernist fairy tale is a meta-literary genre which employs an array of manoeuvres in order to constantly put its generic capacities to the test.

Is such a fairy tale about the Holocaust at all thinkable? On the one hand, texts of this kind develop a narrative which is founded on fairy-tale morphemes which are recognisable to readers but transform them in ways which preclude too much affinity with the traditional species of fairy tale. On the other hand, they attempt

313 Weronika Kostecka, *Baśń postmodernistyczna: przeobrażenia gatunku. Intertekstualne gry z tradycją literacką* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Stowarzyszenia Bibliotekarzy Polskich, 2014), p. 19.

to inscribe events which are plausible or did indeed take place into the universal order, even though these events are entirely unrelated to the experiences of the young generation. Such an interplay spawns stories which seem familiar at first glance, because they are fairy tales but, at the same time, remain strange – or rather undomesticated – because they address the Holocaust, which resists such appropriation procedures.

Joanna Rudniańska's *XY*, which the writer refers to as a fairy tale,[314] calls for adopting a dual perspective which helps identify two mutually exclusive tendencies in the text which turns the Holocaust into a fable and eradicates the fable in one gesture. The former results of course from searching for an appropriate form capable of meeting the demands placed on Holocaust literature for a young readership. Stories must be told without traumatising readers. The fairy tale, which by definition is supposed to work through childhood anxieties, can be expected to live up to such expectations. And thus *XY* opens in a traditional fairy-tale manner:

> Once upon a time, there were two girls. They were completely identical, like two chicks hatched from the same egg. Their mother gave birth to them in the woods and really could not go back home with them. So she went to an old woman who lived in a hut at the edge of the woods, one of those old women one could meet on rural roads: small, stooped, wrapped in scarves and skirts. Her eyes were the only unusual thing about her: clear, amethyst eyes with a gaze one could barely forget.
> The girls' mother gave the old woman a gold ring and asked her to take care of her little ones. The old woman told her to go back home and have no worries. She also said that they were exceptionally pretty children and that she would make sure they had beautiful lives.[315]

The storytelling narrator relies on the structures identified and described by Vladimir Propp in his *Morphology of the Folktale*. The narrator outlines the space and defines the time of the story, which is set "in 1939, in Eastern Europe, in Poland, on a river called the Bug."[316] With the time and location specified in such

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314 Rudniańska often employs traditional genres to build her war narratives. Her *Bajka o Wojnie* [*A Fable about War*] begins with what comes across as a typical fairy-tale opening: "Once upon a time, there was a beautiful city which grew on the bay-coast where seven rivers flowed into the sea." However, because the story deals with dropping the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, the phrase comes to sound surprisingly authentic. Interestingly, "War" is the name of the protagonist, who had long believed in the magic potency of armed conflicts to introduce a new, justice-based order.

315 Joanna Rudniańska, *XY*, illustrations by Jacek Ambrożewski (Warszawa: Muchomor, 2012), p. 9.

316 *Ibid*.

detail, the text gravitates towards a legend, but the folktale morphemes abundant in the narrative indicate its closer affinity with the fable. The narrator introduces the protagonist, with whom the reader will identify. In doing this, the narrator relies not only on the word, but also on symbolic illustrations reminiscent of images associated with the Japanese *kamishibai* method, which divide the story into narrative sequences and facilitate memorising the whole tale.

The tale concerns twin sisters. The plot starts with the loss of the mother, or rather with the children being abandoned by her and left to the mercy of an old woman. The old woman turns out to be a witch and a fairy rolled into one, who functions as Propp's donor (or provider)[317] and appears whenever the girls need her help.

The girls are Jewish. Separated, one of them is placed in a Polish family while the other is given to a Jewish one. Both are named Hania (Hannah), but to distinguish them the narrator dubs them X and Y. They are loved and happy, but neither knows that she has a twin sister. When war breaks out, the Polish parents of one Hania conceal her identity; the Jewish family of the other Hania must abandon their house and move to the ghetto.

The motif of double loss is an interesting device as, having lost the mother, the girl who lives in the ghetto suffers another bereavement. She is once more compelled to leave her home and must go to the Aryan side to seek help. Rudniańska disrupts the flow of the fairy-tale narrative by introducing topoi typical of the Holocaust imaginarium, such as the resentment and ruthlessness of Polish children, the child's dramatic parting with her pet dog, a hiding place in the closet, hunger and the crossing of the wall which illuminates the contrast between the darkness of the ghetto and the bright Aryan side of Warsaw.

This contrast is as a matter of fact the principle informing the entire text, for it offers young readers an opportunity to "experience" two different lives – that of the Jewish child and that of the Polish (though in fact also Jewish) one. Additionally amplified by the fact that the protagonists are twins, the "doubleness" motif is not a novelty in literature addressing the co-existence of the Polish and Jewish worlds. "The sons of the sun" and "the sons of the moon," though side by side, in fact inhabit distinct realms, which the wall encircling the Warsaw ghetto only dramatically emphasises. The separateness of the two cultures is candidly examined by Jan Błoński:

317 Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. Laurence Scott, ed. Louis A. Wagner, 17th edition (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2013), pp. 39*pass*.

> Why was Poland once regarded as a Jewish paradise, *paradisus Judeorum*? Because Jews could live there in greater isolation than anywhere else. It was particularly true about the areas situated east to the Vistula, where the proportion of Jews was the largest, the social structure loose, contact with gentiles limited and specialised and the vast spaces and total internal autonomy of the Jewish community made the shtetl, a ghetto as it was, into a site of freedom and familiarity, all the more so that Jews could in fact live outside it as well. […] Briefly, traditional anti-Semitism separated or, at most, banished, which was the case in England and France. Contemporary (especially totalitarian) anti-Semitism annihilated because the Jew was as noxious to it in California as he was in Berlin.[318]

Similar views concern the topography of the Jewish world, both metropolitan and provincial,[319] which lingered on the margin of the mainstream narrative of space. Jacek Leociak describes the pre-war Jewish orthodox space as: "[…] This area became the promised land of Warsaw's Jews. All our associations cluster here, in its unique local colour, in its one-of-a-kind multilingual din. The Jewish Warsaw was a microcosm. It encompassed an infinite diversity of life forms and manifestations, accommodated huge social and moral contrasts and formed a peculiar phenomenon of a city within a city."[320]

Epitomising two different worlds, the two girls meet for the first time in the ghetto, each of them having another status in it. While Hania X remains enclosed in the ghetto space, Hania Y enters her world as she crosses the German-instituted Jewish quarter when riding on a tram. The girls spot each other and experience an *anagnorisis* – the recognition moment of ancient tragedy. From that moment on, the children will only think of each other. The Doppelganger arrangement of characters, used for example in *Sublokatorka* (*The Subtenant*)

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318 Jan Błoński, "Polak-katolik i katolik-Polak. Nakaz ewangeliczny, interes narodowy i solidarność obywatelska wobec zagłady getta warszawskiego," in Jan Błoński, *Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2008), pp. 49–74, on p. 72.

319 Agnieszka Sabor explains that Polish memory of Jewish towns has been reconstructed owing to popular culture which, paradoxically, came to Poland from across the ocean. The popular musical *Fiddler on the Roof,* based on Sholem Aleichem's stories of Tevye the Dairyman, has played a crucial part in this process of memory retrieval. See Agieszka Sabor, *Sztetl. Śladami żydowskich miasteczek. Działoszyce – Pinczów – Chmielnik – Szydłów – Chęciny. Przewodnik* (Kraków: Austeria, 2005). See also Eva Hoffman, *Shtetl: The Life and Death of a Small Town and the World of Polish Jews* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1979).

320 Jacek Leociak, "Krochmalna," in Jacek Leociak, *Spojrzenia na warszawskie getto* (Warszawa: Dom Spotkań z Historią, 2011), p. 5.

by Hanna Krall[321] (which is narrated by a beautiful, fair, Resistance-involved, insurgent Pole and a dark, fearful, constantly hiding Jewess[322]), promotes identification with the suffering Other and, like ancient drama, prompts readers to recognise the protagonist's fate as their own and to rehearse their alternative life stories.

The motif of going through the ghetto on a tram is frequently used in texts about the Holocaust as it is useful in exposing the ominous quality of the place. The fourth literature also tends to abundantly employ it to arrange episodes of empathy-stirring encounters which breed responsibility for the fate of those doomed to ghetto life. To see means to know, and knowledge entails the loss of innocence, for if one could hope that the stories one heard were invented or rhetorically hyperbolised, now one sees that they are true. A tram ride is a descent to hell, which must take place for the witness to bear testimony to the truth (this is how the motif works in *Kotka Brygidy* [*Brigid's She-Cat*] by Joanna Rudniańska[323]). This is the way in which children's literature introduces the category of bystander,[324] i.e. witness or observer, which has recently become one of the focal points of Holocaust research.

The two girls must meet and unite. The donor, a good lady, helps Hania X move to the countryside, to the home of her twin sister. Taking advantage of their physical likeness, the girls decide to pretend to be one person. Although it is common for Holocaust topoi to brandish the motif of role-playing – donning a disguise, dyeing hair, teaching Christian prayers to a Jewish child – this case is more complicated. A Jewish girl pretends to be a gentile, and additionally she and her sister pretend that one of them does not exist. The children treat this

321 Written by the renowned writer and journalist Hanna Krall, *Sublokatorka* (*The Subtenant*) tells a story of the acquaintance of two women – Polish Maria and Jewish Martha – which stretches from the war into the 1980s.

322 This opposition is also emphasised by Sarah Kofman, who notices a conflict between her mother, a "smothering Jewish mother" whom she paints in "dark, unforgiving colours" as epitomising "unenlightened" Jewishness, and a Catholic woman who saved her. Dorota Głowacka, "Philosophy in the Feminine and the Holocaust Witness: Hannah Arendt and Sarah Kofman," in *Different Horrors, Same Hell: Gender and the Holocaust*, eds. Myrna Goldenberg and Amy Shapiro (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2013), pp. 38–58, on p. 47.

323 For a discussion of this motif, see the chapter devoted to *Kotka Brygidy* in this volume.

324 Alongside the perpetrator and the victim, the bystander is the third category in Raul Hilberg's canonical study, making it possible to adopt another perspective on the Holocaust. See Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933–1945* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992).

dramatic *qui pro quo* as a game, but in this game the stakes are impossibly high. It is a game of and for life.

The fairy tale promises a happy ending and, indeed, this is what happens in *XY*. Both girls survive and never part again, but Hania X never ceases to miss her murdered parents.

Papuzińska writes that "as evil is eradicated, the fairy tale ends with the attainment of the coveted prize; having won a wife, gained a throne or been amply compensated for a prior loss, the protagonist can 'live happily ever after.' "[325] Yet, this Proppian morpheme of the folktale is at odds with *XY*, and by the same token it is impossible to make the Holocaust into a fairy tale because any narrative about it bursts the generic model of the fable. What readers normally look for in the fairy tale is a protagonist who is a translator explaining the principles of proper conduct, or a transforming character questing towards victory, or an archetype providing a sense of identity. None of these options is to be found in *XY* because, firstly, the world into which both Hanias are hurled is not governed by any discernible rules; secondly, nobody offers advice on how to live; and, thirdly, the tale does not generate any archetype in which the stability of the moral canon could be grounded.[326] In contrast to the traditional fairy tale, which "always puts at the centre a traumatised individual who is alienated from the world, but doomed to live in it, and eventually finds his/her own place in it,"[327] *XY* does not allow such a neat ordering of the world. Methodologies of the fable come to naught as the Proppian protagonist does not defeat the antagonist nor does the heroine develop a fixed, fully fledged identity along the Bettelheimian lines.

Given this, I am inclined to view Rudniańska's tale as an undoing of the genre of the fairy tale, even the postmodernist one which, according to Kostecka,

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325 Joanna Papuzińska, "Opowiadanie baśni – piękne teorie i proza życia," in Joanna Papuzińska, *Dziecięce spotkania z literaturą* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Centrum Edukacji Bibliotekarskiej, 2007), pp. 77–100, on p. 88.

326 Given this, the narrative cannot perform the compensatory function because it does not meet the conditions described by Jolanta Ługowska: "[the fairy tale] especially […] promotes the listener's identification with the protagonist and endorsement of the vision of reality suggested by the world the fairy tale describes, which seems to explain why the genre has had a long and rich tradition of servicing first adult readers and only then the children's community." Jolanta Ługowska, *Ludowa bajka magiczna jako tworzywo literatury* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1981), p. 24.

327 Marta Karasińska, "Sam na sam. O samotności bohatera baśni magicznej," in *Kulturowe konteksty baśni. Vol. 2: W poszukiwaniu straconego królestwa*, ed. Grzegorz Leszczyński (Poznań: Centrum Sztuki Dziecka, 2006), pp. 163–175, on p. 164.

"implies that 'everything has already been said,' "[328] and we are doomed to "linger on in 'the library of motifs,' play with them and juggle with our reading consciousness."[329] However, Rudniańska herself rather seems to believe not only that not everything has been said, but that very little has in fact been said, and that the traditional forms are no longer fit to serve as felicitous vehicles for Holocaust stories. Besides, her anti-fable was given the opposite vector of intergenerational communication, for the tale concludes with the following dedication and revelation: "I dedicate this fairy tale to the memory of a girl, of Hania Rotwand, who in a sense was both Hania X and Hania Y. And when she grew up, she became my mum."[330] Giving this personal tangibility to the story may come across as surprising, but its title – *XY* – justifies thinking of it as of a universal tale, which enables all those whose experiences are aligned with the Jewish fate to recognise themselves in it.

The point is that whereas the story is inspired by real-life events, the obligation to hand it down is imprinted in the consciousness of the daughter rather than of the mother, who took part in those events herself.[331] The narrative seems to be an outcome of the already classical post-Holocaust relationship between mother and child where the parent-survivor sees in the child "the source of security and confirmation of coming back to life,"[332] but who is burdened with the load of unforgettable loss. By telling (non)fairy-tales, the post-war generation of the "scorched"[333] give voice to the victims on the one hand and yield to the therapeutic power of the tales on the other. At the same time, the genre is exposed as already exhausted because it can neither accommodate Holocaust histories nor offer relief. Therefore, Rudniańska's fable should perhaps be read as associated

328 Kostecka, "Baśń postmodernistyczna," p. 54.

329 Grzegorz Leszczyński, *Bunt czytelników. Proza inicjacyjna netgeneracji* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo SBP, 2010), p. 201.

330 Rudniańska, *XY*, p. 61.

331 Rudniańska acknowledges that she was inspired by the wartime experiences of her mother, who prefers not to talk about them. It may not be a coincidence that in order to fill this gap of silence, one daughter became a writer and the other a psychoanalyst. Rudniańska cites her sister to conclude that if the mother had talked about the past, the children could have avoided the burden of the war trauma.

332 Katarzyna Prot, *Życie po Zagładzie. Skutki traumy u ocalałych z Holocaustu. Świadectwa z Polski i Rumunii* (Warszawa: Instytut Psychiatrii i Neurologii, 2009), p. 87.

333 The title of Irit Amiel's stories metaphorically refers not only to Holocaust survivors, but also to their loved ones and offspring who cope with the traumatic memory of the Event.

with the developmental stage of the genre, at which it was primarily addressed to an adult readership, with children as only its secondary audience.

As can be seen, Rudniańska does not simply take advantage of the fairy tale in search of a form to make the Holocaust history bearable. Importantly, she offers an assessment of traditional literary paradigms, concluding that they are impotent in confrontation with Holocaust-related themes. It must be admitted that such an approach to Holocaust representations in the fourth literature is quite exceptional because writers tend to forage the fantastic convention for opportunities to dislodge the reader from the realism of historical narrative. This makes it possible to shroud the dangerous points of the Holocaust narrative in silence or to replace them with a metonymy.

The Trap of Meanings

The Holocaust is still a common point of reference because, as Winfried Georg Sebald slightly ironically put it, "No serious person thinks of anything else."[334] Given this, it is not surprising that how to represent the Holocaust is a challenge to literature not only for children but also for adults. To cope with this challenge, experiments are launched in thinking and writing about the Holocaust – the Event which essentially reveals something fundamental about and transformative of the human species.[335] If so, the existing paradigm of narrating history must transform as well. As Sarah Kofman insists, "about Auschwitz and after Auschwitz no story is possible, if by a story one means: to tell a story of events which makes sense."[336]

Holocaust narratives for a young readership cannot radically execute this imperative, just as they cannot confront the vulnerable reader with the question "What would I have done if I were the Other?" It is not the point to treat the Holocaust Event as one's own or to incorporate it into the realm of one's own experiences. The point is to remain empathetic and at the same time develop a critical and self-preserving distance.[337] These are necessary requirements to be

334 Martin Amis, "Amis w Auschwitz," an interview by Łukaszz Grzymisławski," *Książki. Magazyn do czytania*, Vol. 4, No. 19 (2015), pp. 30–33, on p. 31.

335 See Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, *Eksperymenty w myśleniu o Holocauście. Auschwitz – nowoczesność i filozofia*, trans. Leszek Krowicki and Jakub Szacki (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2003), pp. 11–12.

336 Sarah Kofman, *Smothered Words*, trans. Madaleine Dobie (Swanston, IL: Northwestern University Press), p. 14.

337 LaCapra, *History and Memory*, pp. 184–186.

met when engaging with this literature. As Martha Nussbaum insists, distance, i.e. "the awareness that one is not oneself the sufferer. This awareness of one's separate life is quite important in empathy."[338] The narrative forms discussed in this chapter – the diary and the fairy tale – foster awareness and empathy, allowing for both the age of the reader and the gravity of the theme.

338 See Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 327.

Chapter Five Motherhood in the State of Emergency

Between the *Yiddishe Mame* and Medeą

In his essay "Judaism and the Feminine," Emmanuel Lévinas contemplates the responsibilities that religion appoints to the Jewish woman in her relations with the world. She should "[l]ight eyes that are blind, … restore to equilibrium, and so overcome an alienation which ultimately results from the very virility of the universal and all-conquering *logos* that stalks the very shadows that could have sheltered it"; this "should be the ontological function of the feminine, the vocation of the '*one who does not conquer*.'"[339] Given this, it is not surprising that the Jewish mother plays an extremely important role in family life and is primarily an ethical guide for her children, in which she emulates the archetypes embodied in the Biblical figures of Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel.

Yiddishe mame has become such a distinct model of womanhood that the image is readily recognised outside Jewish culture as well. She tends to be pictured as an overprotective mother who is prepared to sacrifice everything for the good of her children. The *yiddishe mame* motif has been widely used in Jewish theatre, where *shund*, i.e. a popular stage form for less-than-sophisticated audiences, has effectively buttressed the image of the ideal female parent fashioned in Judaism. Obviously, the theatrical convention of the Jewish mother was nurtured by the recurring literary stock character of a predominantly pious and humble woman cut out for conjugal life. The popularity, if not utter conventionality, of such portrayals was borne out by poetic homages paid by the offspring.[340]

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339 Emmanuel Lévinas, "Judaism and the Feminine," in Emmanuel Lévinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Seán Hand (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), pp. 30–37, on p. 32 (italics mine).

340 Notable examples of literary tributes to Jewish mothers include Julian Tuwim's poem "Matka" ("Mother") and his dedication to "My Żydzi polscy" ("We Polish Jews") (1944), which reads: "For my Mother in Poland or her most beloved shadow" (in *Polacy – żydzi / Polen – Juden / Poles – Jews 1939-1945: Wybór źródeł / Quellenauswahl / Selection of documents*, trans. Krystyna Piórkowska, ed. Andrzej Krzysztof Kunert [Warszawa: Rytm, 2001], pp. 452–455, on p. 452. See also Monika Adamczyk-Grabowska, "Trudne tematy w twórczości Juliana Tuwima," *Midrasz. Pismo Żydowskie*, Vol. 5, No. 175 [2013], pp. 36–39). Other well-known expressions of this kind are Nuchim Bomse's "Modlitwa mojej matki przed zmrokiem" ["My mother's prayer at dusk"], trans. Czesław Miłosz, in *Żydzi w Polsce: Antologia literacka*, ed. Henryk

Understandably, the representations of mothers which deviated from such acknowledged commonplaces tended to stir considerable controversy. What I mean here are primarily scandals around literary and theatrical Medeas as protagonists in Yiddish culture. The very gesture of tackling the mythological theme in Jewish culture was perceived as a revolution, both in terms of worldview and in terms of aesthetics. *Medea* by Jacob Gordin appeared in 1897, and one year later the writer published another drama, *Di vilde printsessin oder Medeas yugend* (*The Wild Princess, or Medea's Youth*), which he prefaced with a text by Meszores Bukański in order to pre-empt accusations of immorality which he had feared would be levelled against the play. Agata Dąbrowska explains: "Bukański wrote that, admittedly, Yiddish literature extolled a beautiful and emotional woman as a model to imitate, but Medea had such features as well. Her beauty was not limited merely to her appearance. She was exceptional because of her personality as well, due to strength and power which she never abused."[341]

Portraying mothers in such a way was a novelty in Jewish culture and, despite the controversies it fuelled, it shows that elements of Western culture were trickling into Yiddish culture. Notably, even though Jewish culture increasingly frequently "expressed itself" in the Polish language (one reason being that Jews attended Polish schools), over 80 % of the Jewish population in Poland spoke and read Yiddish in the interwar period.[342] Unsurprisingly, Yiddish literature and

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Markiewicz (Kraków: Universitas, 1997), p. 165; and Stefan Pomer's "Przyśpiew purymowy" ["A Purim Song"], *Ibid*., p. 166.

341 Agata Dąbrowska, "Żydowskie Medee. Wizerunki dzieciobójczyń w wybranych dramatach jidysz," in *Zabójstwo dziecka w literaturze i kulturze europejskiej*, eds. Kazimierz Ilski, Małgorzata Chmielarz, Zbigniew Kopeć, and Ewa Kraskowska (Poznań: UAM, 2014), pp. 129–144, on p. 132.

342 See Chone Shmeruk, "Literatura jidysz w Polsce w okresie międzywojennym," in Chone Shmeruk, *Historia literatury jidysz. Zarys* (Wrocław, Warszawa and Kraków: Ossolineum, 1992), p. 86. Yiddish, i.e. jargon, was an informal, even embarrassing, language associated with the kitchen: "I learned about jargon literature as a child in the kitchen of my family home. In other rooms, we read other literature. My sister read books in Polish and Russian. My brother-in-law only read books in Russian, and my father in Hebrew. Perla, our cook, read folk legends in Yiddish and sometimes short stories by Mojcher Sforima." Ela Bauer, "Kochanka, niania czy służąca: dysputa o jidysz w żydowsko-polskim środowisku fin de siécle'u," in *Żydowski Polak, polski Żyd. Problem tożsamości w literaturze polsko-żydowskiej*, eds. Alina Mosak and Zuzanna Kołodziejska (Warszawa: Elipsa, 2011), pp. 102–111, on p. 111. At the same time, a robust movement developed which was dedicated to sustaining Jewish culture by learning and studying Yiddish. One of its champions was Abraham Gołomb,

theatre had a very strong impact not only on Yiddish speakers but also on assimilated Jews, who continued to uphold the traditional ideal of the mother, despite having entered another language domain,[343] i.e. Polish.

Ghetto testimonies and Holocaust literature did not take long to amply demonstrate their predilection for the Jewish mother motif. With the emphasis put on the mother's self-sacrificial devotion to her children, ghetto-inhabiting Medeas were not portrayed as ruthless murderers, but as women who denied themselves poison to feed it to their offspring in a gesture of motherly love.

I realise that applying ancient topoi to the study of the ghetto can be objected to as overly facile, even though mythological and biblical motifs have been marshalled in disputes on the possibility and forms of representing the Holocaust. Alvin H. Rosenfeld ponders:

> [W]e lack a phenomenology of reading Holocaust literature, a series of maps that will guide us on our way as we pick up and variously ty to comprehend the writings of the victims […] [In literature] There have been attempts to find analogies – with Job, with the destruction of the Second Temple, with the *Akeda* [the sacrifice of Isaac], with the concept of *Kiddush ha-Shem* or the Thirty-Six Righteous Men who uphold the world – and to the extent that such allusions and antecedents have allowed certain writers at least a partial grasp of the tragedy, it would seem that we must qualify the notion that the Holocaust was altogether without parallels.[344]

Instead of making Medea a metaphor for the "ghetto mother," my point is to evoke the ancient character to show that, as Zbigniew Kadłubek asserts following H.D.F. Kitto, "Medea is a saint in as far as she IS (because the 'tragedy of Medea is that such a character should exist at all')."[345]

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the founder of *integrale Yiddishkeit* ("integral Jewishness"), a pedagogical concept in which an array of elements of Jewish life were integrated in the educational process.

343 For example, Henryk Merzbach's poem "Do matki Izraelki" ["To the Israelite Mother"] of 1861 enjoyed extraordinary popularity. The poem paraphrased Adam Mickiewicz's famous "Do matki Polki" ("To the Polish Mother"), a patriotic injunction to mothers which urged them to prepare their children for suffering and sacrifice for the sake of the enslaved homeland. In Merzbach's poem, the Jewish mother was called upon to bring up her "son" to be a patriot seeking integration with Poles. Merzbach was perfectly aware that, as a Jew, in order to be acknowledged by Poles, he had to join the heroic discourse as crystallised in Romanticism.

344 Rosenfeld, *Double Dying*, pp. 19–21.

345 Zbigniew Kadłubek, *Święta Medea. W stronę komparatystyki* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2010), p. 63. Quotation from H.D.F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy: A Literary Study* (London, UK, and New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), p. 168.

Therefore, ghetto Medea is a "barely thinkable" character whose extremely dramatic nature makes her inclusion in children's literature basically impossible. For this reason, the mythological figure that ghetto mothers in the fourth literature tend to replicate is Hecuba, the prototype of the mother of the people and a wailer who, losing all her children, comes to be a symbolic incarnation of unworked-through pain.[346] This is the mythological reference that most frequently appears in Holocaust testimonies and literature, though in books for young readers it is toned down, as the loss of the child through death is mitigated into the parting with offspring who find shelter on the Aryan side of the wall.

The Metonymy of Mother: The Sliska Street Case

The child is an expressive metonymy of the two mother figures since it is evidence of the mother's existence or non-existence. Whereas a metaphor is crucial in the transmission of meaning (and this is the function the mother figures perform), a metonymy is a sign of presence/absence: "A metonymy is 'presence in absence' not just in the sense that it presents something that is not there, but also in the sense that in the absence (or at least the radical inconspicuousness) that is there, the thing that isn't there is still present."[347] This relationship is suggestively depicted by Korczak in "Two Coffins: On Smocza Street and on Sliska Street," a vignette consisting of two tableaux which capture everyday realities in the ghetto. Though each of them is a genre scene, the meanings that Korczak infers from them far exceed a purely mimetic view of the world.

In one of the tableaux, a mother who is standing by her dying son implores time and again: "People, help! People, help."[348] This image is juxtaposed with the other scene, in which the mother's presence is conjectured out of a detail:

> A child, a small child, maybe three years old! I only saw his little feet, his tiny toes. […] He lay at the foot of a wall, wrapped in paper. He was also lying on the snow. I didn't notice, I don't remember whether the paper was gray or black. I only know that the

346 In this context, Sławomir Buryła writes about the topos of Niobe, whom he interprets as a metaphor for the parting with the child who is hiding on the Aryan side. See Buryła, "Topika Holokaustu," p. 142.

347 Eelco Runia, "Presence," *History and Theory*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (February 2006), pp. 1–29, on p. 1.

348 Janusz Korczak, "Two Coffins: On Smocza Street and on Sliska Street," trans. Uri Orlev, in Marc Silverman, *A Pedagogy of Humanist Moral Education: The Educational Thought of Janusz Korczak* (New York, NY: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2017), pp. 63–66, on p. 64.

> wrapping in gray or black paper was done with devotion, with great attention, with concern and feeling, and it was tied up with twine, straight and precise – from below, from the sides, and from above. […]
> Someone had wrapped the package and tied it neatly, the package of the little boy, before taking him out and putting him on the snow.
> Evidently it was his mother. […]
> The mother was afraid that some passerby would make a mistake and think that someone had thrown away something dark, or maybe put it down and forgot it, or lost it, or left it in a moment of confusion and rush, to come back and pick it up again, and to bring it to its destination under his arm. […]
> [T]his passerby […] might have noticed the package, and, without thinking, just to check whether there was something valuable in it, something he might need, and so as not to bend over in vain, he might have kicked the paper to see whether it was something hard or maybe something he could take.
> The mother wanted to prevent that, and that's why she left his foot naked, so that people would see that there were no shoes or socks there, nothing to take. And she did that for her dead child, her little child.
> It's not pleasant if someone kicks something you love.[349]

It seems that by dwelling on the natural interdependence of mother and child, Holocaust literature, including texts for children, highlights the incompleteness of the mother and thus the incompleteness of the child when they are atrociously severed from each other. The Holocaust means the destruction of the most intimate and at the same time the most primaeval relationship that motherhood is. Consequently, in the Holocaust setting the notions of "child" and "mother" express more than just the elementary denotations determined by the age criterion and by having progeny, respectively. They become symbols of the greatest suffering. Reciprocally defining before, the concepts of mother and child have lost their point of reference, because their designates have been deprived of mutual presence.

The World without Mother: Patterns of Storytelling

The extremity of death scenes and/or emotions stirred by the parting of mother and child prevent such episodes from taking the central position in the fourth literature, but at the same time the fact that a child is the protagonist or the narrator precludes marginalising a loss of this kind. The loss of the mother obviously entails the child's loneliness, and moreover, as she is associated with the child's moral growth, her absence also suggests the disintegration of the former

349 *Ibid*., pp. 64–66.

world order. Consequently, any attempt to implement a literary *Bildungsroman à rebours* in texts for a young readership is fraught with representational difficulties. It is a serious challenge to depict a protagonist who is afflicted by the cruelty of the ghetto and forced to abide by its rules to survive, but simultaneously is not a figure with a ghetto mentality.

The pattern of the children's Holocaust tale was established by Uri Orlev, and his patently autobiographical *The Island on Bird Street* provided the paradigm of such narratives for a long time. In the novel (which was superbly translated into Polish by Ludwik Jerzy Kern as *Wyspa z ulicy Ptasiej*), his mother is intensely present in the memories of eleven-year-old Alex (the author's own mother was shot dead in 1943), who imagines her as a guardian that makes sure he is safe. The recollections of the boy, who is hiding in the ruins of a townhouse in Warsaw and waiting for his father, go back to pre-ghetto times. As a matter of fact, the displacement of Jews to the closed quarter tends to function as a major turning point in Holocaust stories, and this is unsurprising, as the resettlement caused a tectonic change in their lives. Another painful turning point is associated with deportations from the ghetto. Such a moment reignites heated debates in which Alex's mother and father had engaged even before the war. Unlike his father, his mother wanted to emigrate to Palestine, because, as she confessed, she had never felt at home in Poland. She propped up her arguments with a tree metaphor, which the boy remembers with utmost clarity: "It may make no difference whether you were born a Chinese or an African or an Indian, but once you've been born, you can't deny your roots. [...] People don't die when they deny their past, but they can't be themselves. They grow up sad and twisted, and so do their children."[350]

The notion that people have a relevant existential need for roots reverberates with the ideas expounded by Simone Weil[351] and is reminiscent of the philosophical position espoused by Józef Tischner, who viewed rootedness as instantiated in four areas: family, work, religion and ancestral legacy.[352] All these four factors coalesce here in the mother figure, for even her private, domestic life, which is represented in topoi of the kitchen, cannot be interpreted only literally. The woman as a guardian of the hearth is not only an incarnation of Hestia,

350 Uri Orlev, *The Island on Bird Street*, trans. Hillel Halkin (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin, 1984), pp. 13–14.

351 See Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties toward Mankind*, trans. Arthur Wills (London, UK, and New York, NY: Routledge, 2003).

352 See Józef Tischner, *Filozofia dramatu* (Kraków: Znak, 2006).

but also a keeper of ashes and consequently of the memory of the forebears. In contrast, Alex's father feels that Poland is his homeland and seeks to prove his Jewish right to Polishness at any cost. His identity is founded on the phantasm of war as derived from Sienkiewicz's *With Fire and Sword*.[353] While Alex's mother dislikes the novel, his father encourages the boy to read it. Their manliness, to resort to Pierre Bourdieu's insights, amounts to "the capacity to fight and exercise violence."[354]

Alex's father has a gun, is strong and knows Sienkiewicz's novels, which in the boy's view is more than enough to outmanoeuvre the Germans. He does not find his mother's reasoning convincing, because she does not use the language specific to male discourse and is as such doomed to inarticulateness.[355] With her dream of moving to Palestine, which she claims is her true homeland, Alex's mother feels entirely alienated. Admittedly, the boy sides with her when she disputes with his father, but this gesture only ensues from his loyalty to her, as he can usually count on her support. In fact, the mother, like other women, is "doomed to symbolic homelessness, a lack of representation, […] [women] share Antigone's fate and are buried alive in masculine culture, just as Oedipus's daughter was buried alive in the name of values she did not uphold."[356]

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353 Henryk Sienkiewicz was a popular Polish writer at the turn of the 19th century. A Nobel Prize laureate for his novel about early Christians in Rome, entitled *Quo vadis*, he wrote to "uplift the hearts." Specifically, he revisited the glorious past of the Polish nation in his novels, by doing which he sought to exert a therapeutic influence on his readers and to salvage the national spirit in the situation of the loss of sovereign statehood under partitions. In Sienkiewicz's novels, Poles, albeit differing widely from each other, are capable of uniting and joining forces to vanquish enemies who threaten not only their motherland but also the whole of Christian Europe. In this sense, Sienkiewicz draws on and perpetuates the myth of Poland as a bulwark of Christianity, which was deeply ingrained in Polish mentality. In his Trilogy (*With Fire and Sword, The Deluge* and *Fire in the Steppe*), Poles fight and defeat Cossacks, Swedes and Turks, respectively.

354 Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 51.

355 See Anna Nasiłowska, "Feminizm i psychoanaliza – ucieczka od opozycji," in *Ciało i tekst w literaturoznawstwie. Antologia szkiców*, ed. Anna Nasiłowska (Warszawa: IBL, 2001), pp. 206–214, on p. 210. Luce Irigaray claims that the woman is inaudible to herself as well, which puts her in the position of oppression in society as a person who is neither understood nor listened to. Luce Irigaray, *The Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter with Catherine Burke (Ithaca, NY, and New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 111–112.

356 Bator, *Feminizm*, p. 186.

The mother is a tragic character, and her death has consequences for the plot. It marks the onset of a literal and symbolic collapse of the family and home, because it is the "woman [that] creates a dwelling place, neutralises alienation and contrives the inner space of the world."[357]

With the mother gone, the child is beset by loneliness: Alex is alone, hiding in the ruins of a townhouse. He is waiting for his father, and upon his return the two join a guerrilla group. Even though they are involved in action which is underpinned by the male paradigm of war, Alex deeply believes that his mother was right when trying to persuade the family to leave and championing the value of "roots." The boy's wartime balance of gains and losses suggests that although the mother's values seem universal, they diverge from the male world. Unlike the man, the woman is not destined for transcendence and is merely a subsidiary in frontline operations.[358]

Mother as a Pretext

In contemporary Polish writings for young readers, the relationships of mother, father and child do not achieve this level of complication since they usually serve to trigger empathy in readers. Although it is the mother's rather than the father's presence or absence that is central to the texts, the loss of the family as such is supposed to function as a universal sign in the war code. War is "comprehensible" to young readers if it is articulated in the register with which they are familiar, and "mother" is obviously the very first word in the child's lexicon.

The body of texts addressed to a young readership I have compiled implies that the mother topos appears in three basic varieties and is embodied in the figure of:

- a Jewish mother who as a rule suffers war oppression and is depicted in the ghetto space;
- an absent Jewish mother who either is dead or has left Poland. In such cases, the child is either taken care of by other people (e.g. grandfather) or animals (e.g. dogs) or alternately left to fend for him/herself;
- a Polish mother who puts her own life on the line to help a Jewish child.

These mother categories have become incorporated in a broader postmemorial project, because this topos is used not only in order to inscribe the Holocaust

357 Bożena Umińska, *Postać z cieniem: Portrety Żydówek w polskiej literaturze od końca XIX wieku do 1939 roku* (Warszawa: Sic!, 2001), p. 310.

358 *Ibid*.

in the contemporary Polish post-Holocaust narrative, which allows for multiple perspectives and methodologies of reading the Shoah, but also – first of all perhaps – in order to find a universal site where young readers can encounter a literary text which is explicitly inspired by the memory of the Holocaust.

Hunger/Satiety: Mother and Affect

The list of books which conspicuously revolve around the motherhood topoi opens with *Wszystkie moje mamy* [*All My Mothers*], a biographical story by Renata Piątkowska. The book was heavily inspired by the remembrances of Szymon Bauman, who was rescued as a child from the Warsaw ghetto by Irena Sendler.[359] Evolving from a background character into a towering presence, Sendler so to speak ousts young Szymon's mother from the narrative. This is an understandable device, given that, first, the idea behind the book was to disseminate the memory of Sendler (her biographical note complete with photographs concludes the book), and second, the boy's mother did not survive the ghetto and his elder sister and father died in a camp. While abiding by "biographical truth," Piątkowska avoided traumatising her readers with the loss of the mother by replacing her with a series of women who took care of the boy. This, however, did not make the Jewish (ghetto) mother unimportant.

Although the boy's love for his mother is boundless, he misses his father, who was arrested in a razzia. As the mother incarnates vulnerability and passivity, the boy time and again repeats: "I want dad to come and take us from here […] Dad would know what to do."[360] With the strong and healthy father present, the pre-war order could be reinstated. In this context, the way of presenting the mother is particularly interesting, as she is associated with food and its opposite – hunger.

For the boy, hunger is more than just a somatic experience, since it also provides a specific code through which the passage of time can be conveyed. As Barbara Engelking observes, because the ghetto is situated beyond time and culture, previous temporal gauges are distorted. Time is measured by hunger, which "isolates the starving ones from the world and compels them to focus on their own biology and physiology. Hunger also serves as an individual measure

359 I discussed Irena Sendler in the previous chapter as well.

360 Renata Piątkowska, *Wszystkie moje mamy*, illustrated by Maciej Szymanowicz (Łódź: Literatura, 2013), p. 17.

of time, as it is capable of protracting a regular hour so much that it seems to extend into eternity."[361]

Unappeasable hunger is a constant reminder that one has found oneself in an abyssal situation,[362] where none of the previously known languages can possibly communicate reality. That the depiction of hunger becomes a "zero language" of the victim's account is exemplified in an interesting study of children's diaries by Katarzyna Sokołowska.[363] In her exploration of the notes of Dawid Rubinowicz,[364] Sokołowska concludes that his Holocaust narrative explicitly abandons its initial Biblical topoi and its later focus on fear to morph into a somatic tale. Physical pain and hunger supply the alphabet of the victim, who reports his own sufferings. In this way, a micro-history of the Holocaust is constructed which is anchored in emotional memory or sense memory, which is accessible first and foremost to children.

Sense memory concerns the somatic discourse of the past[365] which appears in the story. Since children's remembering oscillates around the body and its adventures, children's accounts of the Holocaust will dwell on the bodily emaciation,[366] the story of which will certainly accommodate traumatic events involving the loss of mother or family.

Because hunger perfectly captures the situation of individuals imprisoned in the ghetto, it could be expected to dominate in narratives for young readers. It is "safe," for, as a trauma of the body, it is not an extreme experience, despite being potentially lethal. As such, it indicates the dramatic nature of the situation but does not necessarily enforce a tragic ending. However, all these opportunities the experience of hunger carries notwithstanding, the topos is not at all widely used.

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361 Barbara Engelking, *"Czas przestał dla mnie istnieć…": Analiza doświadczenia czasu sytuacji ostatecznej* (Warszawa: IFiS PAN, 1996), p. 59.

362 An "abyssal situation" is a term coined by Engelking to refer to the abyss (*abyssos*) of the Holocaust. See *Ibid*. Cf. also Ziębińska-Witek, *Holokaust*.

363 See Katarzyna Sokołowska, "Opowiedzieć cierpienie. Nad dziennikiem Dawida Rubinowicza," *Ruch Literacki*, Nos. 4–5 (2005), pp. 407–422.

364 I also mentioned Rubinowicz in the previous chapter.

365 Jill Bennet elaborates on sense memory on the basis of the literary testimony of Charlotte Delbo. It is understood as speaking from the depth of affective experience or as the sensory trace ("the physical imprint") of the past event. See Jill Bennet, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma and Contemporary Art* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), especially pp. 25–26, 39–40, 57.

366 Notably, Głowiński proposed referring to the Holocaust as "*Wyniszczenie*" in Polish (English: emaciation, wasting away, cachexia).

The low frequency of this affect[367] probably results from its close association with the mother figure. Satiety is linked to the presence of the mother. While the depiction of hunger is not traumatising in itself, the reason why the child goes hungry, i.e. the death or absence of the mother, is one of the most severe – if not simply *the* most severe – traumas of childhood.

Let us examine a reverse situation. If the mother is a depositary of food, her personal drama consists in being unable to feed her child. In this perspective, the child's hunger is particularly acutely felt by the mother not only because she suffers starvation with her child, but also because she cannot perform her basic biological function. The incapacity to feed the child involves more than just hunger, as being a nourisher entails an intimate, security-warranting bond with the offspring. When this bond is ruptured, chaos is unleashed, and mother and child descent into solitude and are dislodged from the natural order.

This correlation was masterfully captured in *Remember Your Name*, a Polish-Soviet film of 1974. A Russian mother who is sent to the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp with her young son knows that the child must be fed well to stand any chance of surviving. Her camp time is measured by the rhythms of feedings, as the woman brings potatoes to the children's barracks and gives them to her son through a narrow crack in the wall or, whenever possible, sits with him on a bunk, hugging him and putting pieces of bread into his mouth. The woman seems to suffer from a compulsive disorder which forces her to incessantly feed her son. Feeding is not only a purely biological activity: a woman with a child in her lap is an established cultural topos, which the film seems to pointedly recontextualise, framing the protagonist into a striped uniform-clad Madonna whom history denied the right to regular motherhood. This right was restored by nature. This is a relevant observation in terms both of storytelling practices and of conceptualising the human being in the concentration camp. The point is that the defeat of culture by nature usually means devolving into bestiality, but in this case the triumph of the maternal is promoted by the unchangeable laws of nature which, paradoxically, nearly sanctifies the mother-child bond, as opposed to civilisation, which brutally destroys it.

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367 Certainly, depictions of Holocaust experiences prompt reflection on the possibility of representing description-defying affects in literature. The revolutionary affective turn in the humanities may help establish registers for conveying affects. See Ryszard Nycz, Anna Łebkowska and Agnieszka Dauksza, eds., *Kultura afektu – afekty w kulturze: Humanistyka po zwrocie afektywnym* (Warszawa: IBL PAN, 2015).

The story of Zinaida Vorobyov and her child culminates in a happy ending, even though after the liberation of the camp their ways part for over twenty years. When she eventually finds her son, he is already a grown-up man, raised by another woman. Symptomatically, their deeply moving reunion takes place at the table, which serves as a relationship-cementing site on the one hand and as the *axis mundi* of every home on the other. As the camp barracks, bunks, striped uniforms and stale bread are replaced by a well-furnished flat, a table, smart clothes and a wholesome dinner, the pre-war order of the world is restored, with the roles of mother and child no longer disturbed by any intrusion. Therefore, the re-inclusion of the table into the narrative of war is an attempt at re-instituting the lost order.

When Mother Is Far Away

…monsters are produced, one is tempted to say. Yet in view of the young age of prospective readers, fear mediated by reading should be moderate. For this reason, Rafał (Rafe), the protagonist of Marcin Szczygielski's novel *Arka czasu* [*Rafe and the Ark of Time*],[368] is looked after by his grandfather, who was a violinist before moving to the ghetto. The boy's parents have allegedly left for Africa, but attentive readers will certainly be alerted by the following passage:

> My parents have also gone away, very far away, to Africa no less. And it was so long ago that I barely remember them. Of course, I would like to be there with them, but I am not because things didn't pan out that way. But in Africa they're certainly far better off than they'd be if they'd stayed here, in the Quarter. So it's not a reason to be sad, but rather to be happy! Sometimes, when it's really tough for me, I think of mum and dad, that they're safe in this faraway Africa, and I immediately feel happier. I told Ms Aniela about it, but she said I was young and didn't understand anything, and then she started to cry harder.[369]

The exoticism of Africa juxtaposed with the monochromatic ghetto is deliberate aesthetic nonsense, which implies that in fact Rafał's parents are dead or have not been heard from at all. Although at the end of the book the family are happily reunited, its multiple experiments with temporal perspectives (e.g. the boy moves forward into the future) suggest that the meeting with his parents is made

368 For a more detailed discussion of this book, see "Space Management and Postmemory" in this volume.

369 Marcin Szczygielski, *Arka czasu, czyli wielka ucieczka Rafała od kiedyś przez wtedy do teraz i wstecz*, illustrated by Daniel de Latour (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Latarnik, 2014), pp. 20–21.

possible by relativity theory rather than by the actual fortunate conclusion of the war story: "My grandfather found me later, and afterwards I met with (or rather simply met) my parents. But that is an altogether different story."[370]

As the narrative unfolds, the memory of the parents is evoked by sundry surrealist objects whose absurdity contributes to the uncanny character of the ghetto. A kitschy exotic oval-shaped landscape embellishes the headboard of the bed in which the grandfather sleeps after another forced relocation in the ghetto. The painting shows camels and palm trees, which make the boy think of his parents in remote parts of the world. The mother is, or rather the parents are, supplanted with a phantasm of an exotic paradise which seems to be a substitute for happiness, as longed for as it is distant and impossible. At the same time, the painting anticipates the future, for it prefigures two events: Rafał hiding in the zoo after he escapes from the ghetto[371] and a walk he takes at the zoo as an old man sixty years after the war.

Rafał is looked after by his grandfather, who wants to save the boy by sending him to the Aryan side. He is guided by a young woman who is not coincidentally named Stella. She places the boy in a hideaway and provides him with food. The simplest food items – bread rolls, milk and cheese – not only rehearse the breakfast ritual, but also highlight the milk kinship of mother and child.

Rafał and other children who live in the concealment of the Warsaw zoo form an extraordinary community, half-family and half-tribe, in which each child begins to perform his/her own role. Their hiding places offer a sense of security, but do not protect them against hunger. With the mother lacking, children are barred from the safe realm of satiety. The nurturer role is taken over by a woman who, like many other people at that time, cultivates a makeshift garden set up in the area of the former zoo, which was shelled by the Germans. Although she is an old woman, she looks like Pomona amidst the plants she grows. Having noticed that her vegetables are disappearing, she leaves a basket with food for the children. This turns into a habit, and the children in return help the woman in ways that allow them to remain unnoticed. It is not a coincidence that the nourisher function is performed by a woman, and that the "horn of plenty" which she supplies helps the children survive. Later, the old lady lets Rafał live with her and takes care of him until the war ends.

The lack of a mother, or parents, tends to be compensated for by the presence of a grandfather. Similarly to Szczygielski's story, *Bezsenność Jutki* [*Jutka's*

370 *Ibid*., p. 276.

371 For more details, see "Space Management and Postmemory" in this volume.

Insomnia] is a story marked by the absence of loved ones: "Mum and dad had disappeared somewhere. Nobody knew where exactly. Jutka had no idea where they had gone this time. Previously they had travelled a lot, but they'd never gone away for so long before."[372]

The deficit of intimacy empties Holocaust stories of the foundational myth or rather furnishes them with an anti-myth. The commencement of the plot with a ghetto-set scene invalidates everything that had been there before the walled quarter was established. To highlight the importance of this change, we can usefully draw on Engelking's insights about what she calls time rifts in ghetto narratives. Specifically, the hallmarks of stories about the Warsaw ghetto are: everyday life in the Quarter, the *Grossaktion*,[373] the post-*Grossaktion* period, the ghetto uprising and life in hiding. This narrative rhythm originally concerns the Warsaw ghetto, but it is universal enough to be applicable to the plotlines of narratives about the Łódź ghetto as well, as long as the uprising is removed and the *Grossaktion* is replaced with the *Szpera*.[374] The mythology of the Łódź ghetto was constructed around an unprecedented event that was labelled the *Szpera*, that is, the delivering of children and the elderly to the Germans for the sake of saving the rest of the ghetto community. The pivotal figure in this narrative is Chaim Rumkowski,[375] an extremely controversial figure whom historians tend to contrast with Adam Czerniaków, the head of the Warsaw *Judenrat* (Jewish Council), who committed suicide after refusing to sign the document announcing the mass deportation of Jews to Treblinka.

Rumkowski enjoyed a reputation as a guardian and benefactor of children. Before the war, he was referred to as *Avi yetomim*, an honourable title of Biblical origin, meaning the "Father of orphans." Reportedly, he was also dedicated to

372 Dorota Combrzyńska-Nogala, *Bezsenność Jutki*, illlustrated by Joanna Rusinek (Łódź: Literatura, 2012), p. 3.

373 The *Grossaktion* was an euphemistic term for the mass deportations of Jews from the ghetto to concentration camps.

374 The word "szpera" is derived from the German expression *Allgemeine Gehsperre*, denoting a total ban on leaving homes. It was proclaimed several times in the Łódź ghetto. The often capitalised *Szpera* or *Wielka Szpera* (Great Szpera) predominantly refers to the operation during which the Germans deported over 15.5 thousand Jews from the Łódź ghetto to the camp in Chełmno on the Ner. For more information about the event, see "Micro-narratives from the Peripheries of the Holocaust" in this volume.

375 For more details about Rumkowski, see "Micro-narratives from the Peripheries of the Holocaust" in this volume.

children in the ghetto, where he would organise festive dinners for them and where he took pains to place them in the most favourable dwellings, for example in Marysin with its wealth of urban green areas. At the same time, he carefully recorded his activities and was in the habit of having pictures taken of himself surrounded by grateful children. The children, of course with the help of their parents, sent grateful letters to "the Father of the Ghetto."

Yet when the same father and guardian of Jewish children was ordered by the Germans to hand over twenty thousand children and old people for deportation, he delivered a dramatic speech, addressing the residents of the Łódź ghetto:

> A great sadness has come upon the ghetto. They demand that we yield to them that which we hold most dear: children and old people. […] And it is my lot to stretch out my hands to you and beg you: brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers, give me your children […] I must carry out this bloody operation. I must cut off limbs to save the body. I must take your children away from you, lest others should perish with them.[376]

Whereas the chairman of the *Judenrat* does not directly appear in *Bezsenność Jutki*, a story of a girl in the Łódź ghetto, the *Szpera*, which was in a way an outcome of the tragic decision he made, lies at the heart of the narrative. The girl's father does not entrust her to the institutionally established system of childcare and seeks to make sure she is safe through individual rather than institutional effort. Jutka survives the *Szpera*, but many other children were not equally fortunate. The reactions of mothers who were separated from their children are relevant to our argument here. Understandably, such emotionally charged episodes are not frequent in the book. Basically, it features two passages of this kind.[377] One of them is incorporated in a report from Esterka, Jutka's aunt: "'They're taking children away, mothers are screaming so terribly, so terribly,' the aunt was crying, and even she could not sleep that night." The other one appears in an account delivered by Josek, the girl's friend: "And they were taking children and old people away. They grabbed such a little snot, and they weren't after his mother

376 Robert Szuchta and Piotr Trojański, *Zrozumieć Holokaust: Książka pomocnicza do nauczania o zagładzie Żydów* (Warszawa: Ośrodek Rozwoju Edukacji, 2012), p. 179. Interestingly, after the *Szpera*, Rumkowski took special care of the children who remained in the ghetto without parents.

377 The third episode is a gentile's relation: "They're as good as gone! People say that to wind up near Koło is the worst thing of all. There's only death there. Only death. A mechanic told me, he repairs trucks for the Germans." Combrzyńska-Nogala, *Bezsenność*, p. 75.

at all, because she was still young and healthy and could work, but she followed him, because he was crying so hard."[378]

These two points of view, that of an adult and that of a child, offer a complex insight into the events in the Łódź ghetto. The aunt repeats the sensory record of the episode in a mantra-like way, focusing on the screaming and lamenting of mothers. Their individual suffering amalgamates in a collective remonstration against the inhuman experience of the forceful severance of mother and child. This breach of nature also takes place in Josek's account. Yet this time, it is a child, whom the boy slightly contemptuously calls "a snot," that cries, dreading being parted from his mother. Instead of a general lament, the reader is presented with an individual story, a genre picture of the Łódź ghetto, with a lonely and helpless child at its centre.

Among diversified mother figures, the character of a young and strong woman deserves particular attention. Josek's words suggest that the boy despises the "little snot," because his egoistic behaviour resulted in the deportation of a healthy woman (children probably do not know what was actually intended for people who volunteered for deportation or were caught during the *Szpera*). The boy seems to have been infected with Nazi rhetoric[379] and to have revised his worldview by subconsciously submitting to its principles. This phenomenon is aptly described by Victor Klemperer: "even if everybody adopted the language of the victor in Jews' houses, it was merely an unthinking enslavement, and certainly didn't amount to an assent to their teachings or a belief in their lies."[380] In Josek's view, the woman squandered her potential of young age and good health by remaining with her child. The simple calculation made by the boy who grew up in the ghetto did not square up with the equation of motherly love.

What could not be conveyed in words about the mother-child relationship is expressed in photographs annexed to the book and a short note which explains to readers how the September *Szpera* ended: "The szpera began on 4th September 1940. The elderly, the sick and children younger than ten years of age were selected. People tried to conceal themselves in various hideaways, but only few managed to do so. Whoever attempted to escape risked being shot to death.

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378 *Ibid*., pp. 67, 68.

379 A similar example is described by Adam Czerniaków, who noted in his diary that he had heard a young boy say: "I'm not wearing the armband yet, but when I grow up, I will." Adam Czerniaków, "*W nocy od 12 do 5 rano nie spałem*". *Dziennik Czerniakowa. Próba lektury* (Warszawa: IBL PAN, 1982), the entry dated to 11 October, 1941.

380 Victor Klemperer, *The Language of the Third Reich: LTI – Lingua Tertii Imperii*, trans. Martin Brady (New York, NY, and London, UK: Continuum, 2011), p.186.

Fifteen thousand people, therein 5,862 children were then deported to a camp in Chełmno on the Ner. All of them were killed."[381]

The three pictures accompanying the note show mothers with children. The photographs are supposed to build a narrative of the Łódź ghetto. And so, readers are given a glimpse of a girl at work in a workshop manufacturing straw covers for horse's hooves, a dramatic farewell of children and mothers divided by a wire mesh through which they kiss each other good-bye and – in perhaps the most recognisable picture – a group of mothers and children crowding by a cattle wagon.

The images can be appreciated as "perfect" not only because they leave out the perpetrators and place at the centre the mother-child relation, which is treasured by modern readers, but also for the reason explicated by Agnieszka Pajączkowska: "The photographs of the Holocaust which are regarded as 'good' are in a sense those images which swamp 'the visual field,'[382] circulating in the media, reproduced in scholarly and popular-science books, put on display in museums."[383] This observation indicates that the criterion of a "good picture" is met by those which present the essence of the events and fit the currently implemented politics of memory. Given this, photographs of mothers with children are always "good," no matter what strategy of remembering is applied, for they appeal to emotions and as such capture the horror of the Holocaust most adequately.

However, the fetishisation of a good photograph may engender a confusion of orders. This is what happens with the third photograph in *Bezsenność Jutki*, which actually does not show Chełmno on the Ner, where, as young readers find out, the residents of the Łódź ghetto were deported. It presents a ramp in Birkenau and was included in the famous Lili Jacob album, which was called so after Jacob – a Slovakian Jew and Auschwitz survivor – found it in the Mittelbau-Dora concentration camp when it had already been liberated. The album contains nearly two hundred pictures taken by the Germans. They record various stages

381 Combrzyńska-Nogala, *Bezsenność*, p. 83. The camp was made popularly recognisable by Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah*.

382 The term used by Judith Butler. See Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London, UK, and Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2009), p. 64.

383 Agnieszka Pajączkowska, "Dobre, złe i 'nowe' zdjęcia Zagłady," *Konteksty. Polska Sztuka Ludowa*, Vol. 3, No. 302 (2013), p. 164. Repeated reproduction of images and the NBC series *The Holocaust* which was broadcast in 1978 contributed to the commercialisation of the Holocaust. See Janina Struk, *Photographing the Holocaust: Interpretations of the Evidence* (New York, NY, and London, UK: Tauris, 2004).

of the "work" of the camp, starting from the unloading of the wagons, to the selection and transformation of free people into KL prisoners, to the storing of stolen property. The camera only failed to capture the murder stage for the simple reason that Germans were forbidden from being in the direct vicinity of gas chambers.

Of course, the inclusion of an image which comes from a different order speaks to the appropriation of the memory of Auschwitz, an issue encapsulated in an extremely pertinent question which was asked by Imre Kertész: "Who owns Auschwitz?"[384] By multiplying photographs linked to Auschwitz, Auschwitz is being turned into the symbol of the Holocaust which is widely recognisable and consequently often exploited in popular culture. This tendency is best exemplified in Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus*. Marianne Hirsch observes that the title of the books not only sounds like the English word "mouse," but also echoes the Nazi command *Juden raus!* and the beginning of the name "Auschwitz."[385] Importantly, in the second volume of Spiegelman's book, the concentration camp is called "Mauschwitz."

That an Auschwitz photograph concludes a story about a child from the Łódź ghetto is meaningful. Jutka managed to cross to the Aryan side and was saved, but she was in the minority. The ending of this tragic tale is not directly given, but instead conveyed by the image which has already become so deeply embedded in the public awareness that it is as easily identifiable as the closure that it indicates. The image is derived from the extratextual space, as young readers are bound to (have) come across it in textbooks, documentaries and above all on the Internet. While in such settings it usually comes with a historical commentary, in *Bezsenność Jutki* it acquires a new, individual dimension as a component of the intimate discourse of the mother-child relationship. The noble-minded forgery of re-contextualisation can therefore be forgiven.

The Animal Point of View: Another Version of Motherhood[386]

Literature for a young readership does not shy away from wartime stories in which animals are ascribed central roles. The reasons behind a partiality for such tales do not need any elaborate explanation, as the difficult themes call for

384 Imre Kertész, "Who Owns Auschwitz?" trans. John McKay, *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Spring 2001), pp. 267–272.

385 See Marianne Hirsch, "Mourning and Postmemory" in Hirsch, *Family Frames*, pp. 17–40.

386 The heading is inspired by the title of a book by Éric Baratay.

various sublimation techniques. While the transfer of war experience from the realm of children to the realm of animals does not subtract any intensity from the plot, it is only advantageous in shielding young readers against the risk of trauma.

Holocaust stories about animals are vividly represented by Ryszard Marek Groński's *Szlemiel* [*Schlemiel*], a tale about an English bulldog owned by a Jewish family. The pet is also the narrator that spins the tale of life before and during the war. The pre-war idyll in Warsaw was interrupted by an incomprehensible cataclysm which separated the dog from his owners, who had to move to the ghetto. Szlemiel, whose name means a clumsy and unlucky person in Yiddish, ends up in the hands of several different people and is eventually taken care of by his former owners' daughter, herself a lucky escapee from the ghetto.

Groński's tale is something more than just another Holocaust story related by a protagonist that is positioned below the child on the existential ladder (an animal, a toy, etc.). Rather, it is fuelled by the animal turn, a project which fosters re-examination of the history of animals. The movement dates back to 1978, when Robert Delort made a case for the history of animals as a new research discipline in his PhD dissertation. He later refined the concept in his seminal book *Les Animaux ont une histoire* [*The Animals Have a History*] of 1984, which has since come to be regarded as the foundational text of zoo history.

Éric Baratay argues in his *Le Point de vue animal. Une autre version de l'histoire [The Animal Point of View: Another Version of History]*, a breakthrough publication in animal studies, that to consider the animal to be an object of research which ultimately aims to explore not so much animal as rather human behaviours is both a scholarly and an ethical aberration. Baratay insists that the human history of animals, in which animals are in fact a transparent film through which human history glares, should be abandoned.[387] Our pervasive erroneous assumption is that the human-animal relationship is "a simple liaison with only one pole (the human) and one-directional flow of meanings (from the human to the animal), in which [the human] transposes his representations, his knowledge and practices onto a transparent object which merely serves as a pretext for them."[388] Instead, we should realise that "this relationship is far more complex: it

387 Éric Baratay, *Zwierzęcy punkt widzenia. Inna wersja historii*, trans. Paulina Tarasewicz (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo w Podwórku, 2014). For the original, see Éric Baratay, *Le point de vue animal. Une autre version de l'historie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2012).

388 Éric Baratay, *Bêtes des tranchées. Des vécus oubliés* (Paris: CNRS, 2013), p. 8.

has two poles and dual meanings, and animals are agents in it, as they act, react and build real interactions and real communities with humans."[389]

Szlemiel, who is not the Baratay-exorcised "anthropological projection" but a dog that "acts, reacts and builds a real community" with a human being, bringing into it his "miscomprehensions, adjustments, aggression, resistance, empathy, etc.,"[390] is an exemplum of the animal mythology of loss. As his owners move to the ghetto, the dog loses his appointed place in the human order, but unlike people he does not overhaul his value system, controversial though the term may sound. This "ethical constant" of animals can serve as a point of reference for the world of the reversed Decalogue. In one of his essays, Lévinas tells a moving story of canine-human relations. He recalls an episode from the time of his forced labour as a forestry commando, when a stray dog wandered one day among the group of inhumanly treated prisoners. The animal would later appear at morning assemblies and wait for the prisoners after work. Lévinas concludes his story by observing: "For him, there was no doubt that we were men."[391]

Although Szlemiel admits that he differs from humans in that, among others, his sense of time diverges from people's, he continues – in the semblance of the Lévinasian dog – to see a human being in Joasia (Joan), a Jewish girl. The recognition the dog made years earlier has not been affected either by ideology or by the profit motive, or by common (human) malice. The bulldog does his best to protect the girl. The paradox is that during the Shoah a helpless child must be defended against people, while under regular circumstances a child would be jeopardised by animals, including "unpredictable" dogs. Yet as the mother is trapped in the ghetto and unable to protect her child, the Aryan side declares a willingness to help but is vulnerable itself, and as *szmalcownicy*[392] lurk around ready to pounce on defenceless creatures, the animal becomes a guardian of the tender and the weak.

The story of Szlemiel is a perfect illustration of the hackneyed Polish simile "as faithful as a dog" (Polish: *wierny jak pies*), for the bulldog follows Joasia back to the ghetto when no one on the Aryan side wants to help her anymore. Having

389 *Ibid*.

390 *Ibid*.

391 Emmanuel Lévinas, "The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights," in Emmanuel Lévinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Seán Hand (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), pp. 151–153, on p. 153.

392 *Szmalcownik* (plural: *szmalcownicy*) was a pejorative term used to denote blackmailers who extorted pay-off from Jews who were in hiding or from people who helped Jews during the war.

realised how little human solidarity there actually is, the girl returns to the hell of the ghetto to stay with her parents till the bitter end. When a policeman[393] tries to stop her, warning her that the liquidation operation is in progress behind the wall, Joasia replies: "My parents are over there […] I must be with them. Let us through, sir."[394]

While the story is formally open-ended, its understatements are barely deceptive:

> The policeman stepped back, even more astonished at what he had just heard. I could smell the stench of his sweat. I knew that he was gazing at us as we were nearing the WALL step by step.
> One more step forward, another one…
> A German reloading his rifle. His face shaded by his helmet.
> This is where we part.
> I just want to wave you good-bye with my paw and remind you that the white spot against the WALL is me, Schlemiel.[395]

Joasia wants to return to her parents at any cost, for the gentile world has proved to be exceptionally inhospitable. Consequently, the infernal ghetto seems a paradise, be it only because her loved ones are there. The tranquillity of the child who is entering the gates of hell brings to mind the relation of Simha Rottem, the last surviving fighter in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising: "At one point I recall feeling a kind of peace, of serenity. I said to myself: I'm the last Jew. I'll wait for morning, and for the Germans."[396]

Polish Mothers and the Rituals of Hospitality

The plural number in the heading perfectly anticipates an especially important issue concerning Holocaust motherhood. The point is that, besides his/her mother, the Jewish child also belongs to a few other women, each of whom is a depositary of a fragment of his/her history. The life story of the Jewish child is perhaps best rendered in the patchwork metaphor, as a nexus of threads, some

393 He is a member of the so-called blue police, a force established by the Nazis in occupied Poland. Blue policemen were recruited from among the pre-war Polish police, often under pain of death.

394 Ryszard Marek Groński, *Szlemiel*, illustrated by Krzysztof Figielski (Warszawa: Nowy Świat, 2010), p. 94.

395 *Ibid*.

396 Claude Lanzmann, *Shoah: An Oral History of the Holocaust* (New York, NY: Pantheon, 1985), p. 200.

of them contingent and others "programmed" by others, which either make up the texture of the story or only inconsequentially linger on its fringes. The major difficulty lies in the fact that the Holocaust stamped out the motherly occupation of writing the history of the child. Keeping notes, compiling albums, taking pictures and incorporating them into the family history were no longer possible. Even if the enterprise had been technically possible, its outcomes would have contradicted the desired effects. The photos would have registered a tragic regression rather than a growth and recorded dying rather than maturation.

The motif of multiple mothers is axial to the plot of *Wszystkie moje mamy* [*All My Mothers*], which features a chain of people of good will who contribute to saving Jews. In Piątkowska's narrative, Irena Sendler is the first link in this chain, and the story itself was deliberately designed to make young reader familiar with Sendler and her activities. Therefore, Szymon Bauman, the child protagonist of the book, is unsurprisingly merely accessory to spinning the tale of "sister Jolanta."[397]

The figure of Sendler can be most fruitfully read through the lens of her biographies for adults. As mentioned in the previous chapter, in her most popular biography, Sendler is referred to as the "the Mother of the Children of the Holocaust." Sendler herself certainly should not have the idiolect supporting such a narrative attributed to her. This story is rather dictated by the expediency of inscribing "sister Jolanta" in post-Romantic heroic discourse, in which the woman could function either as a fighter or as a self-sacrificial mother devoted to her children.[398] Sendler perfectly meets the criteria of such discourse, because as a Pole she opposes the inhuman law instituted by the aggressors, and as a woman she cannot turn a blind eye to the suffering of children. The Mother of the Children of the Holocaust recalls that when Jewish mothers parted with their children, tears welled up in their eyes, and they could barely let go of the tiny hands of their little ones, yet the hope of saving their babies' lives prevailed: "Some Jewish mothers would spend months preparing their children for the Aryan side. They changed their identities. They would say: 'You're not Icek but Jacek. You're not Rachela, but Roma. And I'm not your mother, I was just the housemaid. You'll go with this lady and perhaps over there your mummy will be waiting for you.' "[399]

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397 Sendler was called "sister" because she worked as a nurse in the ghetto. Jolanta was her codename.

398 This monolithic image is dented by Janina Zgrzembska, Irena Sendler's daughter, who remembers her as a mother rather than as a heroine.

399 Anna Mieszkowska, *Irena Sendler: Mother of the Children of the Holocaust*, trans. Witold Zbirohowski-Koscia (Praeger, 2011), p. 75.

The mother of little Szymon in Piątkowska's book enacts the same ritual when she makes him repeat his new name and teaches him the *Our Father* and the *Hail Mary*. Reminiscent of the Derridean *Shibbolet*,[400] the flawlessly recited prayers may actually save the child's life.

Piątkowska's portrayal of Sendler depicts not only the "mother" of Jewish children, but also a trickster whose most urgent task is to divert them from the nightmare of the war:

> "Look, I'll show you a trick." She took her coat off.
> I saw that she had a few cardigans and three thick skirts on. She left a brown, buttoned cardigan and a checked skirt to mum and tucked the rest of the clothes under her coat again.
> "I'm as big as a walking wardrobe," she winked at me. "But by the time I go out of the ghetto, I'll have distributed all the things and will be thin again," she grinned.[401]

A prominent role in the story of "sister Jolanta" is ascribed to accessories which belong to what can be called the ethnography of motherhood. All of them are linked to child topophilias[402] which are associated with care and the sense of security. They are expressed in the image of enclosure, which means isolation from the dangers of the outside world. However, instead of a cradle that offers a refuge from the world, a Jewish child obtains from the other mum a box in which s/he will be carried to the Aryan side; and instead of a lullaby, a sedative is applied to put the child to sleep.[403] In this way, the mythology of childhood, which is encoded in the phantasm of peaceful sleep, undergoes a profound reinterpretation. The cradle can at any moment morph into a casket, and the artificially

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400 Jacques Derrida, "Shibboleth: For Paul Celan," trans. Joshua Wilner, in *Word Traces: Readings of Paul Celan*, ed. Aris Fioretos (Baltimore, MD, and London, UK: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), pp. 3–72.

401 Piątkowska, *Wszystkie moje mamy*, p. 24.

402 The term is used here as defined by Alicja Baluch. In this framework, topophilias are "simple images that attract and produce the spaces of felicity which are safeguarded against hostile forces. This field of imagination includes, for example, images of the home, representations of the big-small relation and the phenomenology of roundness." Alicja Baluch, "Topofilie porządkiem dziecięcej lektury," in Alicja Baluch, *Od form prostych do arcydzieła. Wykłady, prezentacje, notatki, przemyślenia o literaturze dla dzieci i młodzieży* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Pedagogicznej, 2008), p. 83.

403 This procedure was applied when rescuing very young children. One of them was six-month-old Elżbieta Ficowska. Her Jewish parents put a silver spoon with the girl's name and date of birth engraved on it into the box in which she was hidden.

induced slumber into very real death. While the lullaby context should reveal the presence of the archetypal nursing mother who rocks the child in her arms or in the cradle, it lays bare the emptiness of the designate. The cultural code seems to demand the impossible, i.e. that the pattern be complemented with the mother figure.

These are only two of the various ways of transporting Jewish children to the Aryan side. In *Wszystkie moje mamy*, this motif is given a very elaborate treatment as being closely intertwined with the depiction of Sendler. Szymon meets other children saved by "sister Jolanta" and listens to their stories of getting across the wall. Some of them were carried out of the ghetto hanging from the belt and hidden under the coat of the man who smuggled them out; others were escorted through the court building while the bribed court ushers were looking the other way.[404]

In the case of Sendler, the role of the mother of Jewish children also involved finding safe homes for the little rescuees. More often than not, several homes formed a network within which the hiding child circulated. As a result, young Szymon had five mothers: his real mother who died in the ghetto, Irena Sendler, mum Maria, mum Ania and the last one – his own aunt Pola, one of the very few survivors in Szymon's family.[405]

The second mother on this list was perfectly aware how crucially important the identity of the rescued child – his/her name in particular – was. Realising this, she took care of the memory of the past and noted down the rescued children's real and assumed names, together with the encrypted addresses of the families that took them, on narrow slips of tissue paper. She put the slips into canning jars which she buried under an apple tree at 9 Lekarska Street. As such, the contents of the jars are a specific substitute for Jewish children's family albums and sometimes the only evidence of the existence of their ancestors.

Joanna Rudniańska's book *XY*, which I discussed in the previous chapter, addresses a very important issue which ties in with my insights about motherhood. Without dismissing my previous interpretation of the story, I believe that it makes sense to examine it for other meanings that go beyond the framework of a fairy tale about twin girls brought up separately in a Polish and a Jewish

404 The court building was situated at the boundary between the Warsaw ghetto and the rest of the city. Bribed policemen would lead fugitives through the court corridors from the ghetto to the Aryan side.

405 Ficowska had three mothers: the Jewish one, of whom not a single photo was preserved; the Polish one – Stanisława Bussold, who raised her; and the third one – Irena Sendler, who rescued her.

family. Crucially, the text appoints the central position to two mothers, a Polish and a Jewish one, who make similar decisions about adopting one of the Hanias. The Warsaw-set tale is informed by principles of symmetry and features, alongside the identically beautiful twin sisters, two young mothers who love the girls from the moment they set eyes on them. At the zero-point of the story, fate is equally generous to each of the families: "The women stopped, looked around and only then did they notice the girls – two infants lying on the grass! They rushed towards the children and picked them up in their arms, entirely without thinking, one of them one twin, and the other the other twin."[406]

Though the families have different backgrounds and the girls do not keep in touch, they all form a unity. Their paradoxical co-existence is emphasised by the symbolic diagraph XY. Its cohesion is put to the test when the Jewish family has to move to the ghetto, but even the wall cannot prevent them from thinking about each other. In an inexplicable way, the twin gene continues to make the girls feel that each of them has a double. Such feelings occasion joy for the ghetto girl, as she hopes that somebody is thinking about her, while they breed anxiety in the girl from the Aryan side, who fears that she will be confined to the ghetto because of her similarity to her ghetto double. The Doppelganger motif helps the author convey essential ideas. Bitterness brews in Hania from the ghetto, who resents her adoptive mother: "'I wish you had taken the other girl instead of me,' said Hania X, 'I wouldn't be Jewish then, and I wouldn't have to be here, in this terrible ghetto.' 'You're right. I also wish I hadn't taken you. I'd give anything not to have you here with me, but in safety. I love you more than anything in the world, and I can't even bear to think that you may come to harm,' said mother."[407]

What the Jewish mother says is not just an ironic answer to her daughter's cruel, but rational, reproof. Her words anticipate the developments to come, for the woman will part from her child, hiding her in the closet. She will die, but her daughter will survive. The decision she makes mirrors the Old-Testament story in which the mother prefers to renounce her rights to the child and yield him to another woman rather than to see him die. Yet unlike in the Biblical tale, Solomon's verdicts are not pronounced in the ghetto. Hania will be saved, but she will never be truly happy, because she has lost her faith in the justice of the world. The symmetry on which the story is initially founded has been unsettled. The Jewish mother, dark-eyed and olive-skinned, is doomed to live in the ghetto, to abandon her child when leaving the closed quarter and, finally, to die. She is

406 Rudniańska, *XY*, p. 13.
407 *Ibid*., p. 30.

starkly contrasted with her Aryan counterpart, blue-eyed and fair-skinned, just as Jewish Shulamith differs from German Margareta in Paul Celan's celebrated poem "Death Fugue."

The Polish mother welcomes a new daughter and loves her as her own child, although the girl continues to grapple with the memories of the past: "Sometimes Hania X missed her mum and her dad so badly! She would then cuddle up with her dog Gipsy and weep, and he knew why his mistress was weeping, because he remembered everything: the parents of Hania X […]."[408]

In texts for children motherhood abolishes the division into the Jewish and the Aryan side. If non-Jewish mothers do not aid Jewish children, they are at least filled with compassion and instil empathy into their own offspring. Of course, such an arrangement is purposeful, as it is designed to make narratives accommodate the important and at the same time controversial issue of Poles' attitudes to Jews.

In all fairness, the texts under discussion here cannot be accused of promoting an idealised image of Polish-Jewish relations. The relationships between Poles and Jews are shown with quite surprising honesty, despite all the constraints on difficult themes in the fourth literature and the prevalent belief that the dominant culture always idealises its relations with minority groups. Given that a broad debate triggered by publications by Jan Tomasz Gross,[409] Anna Bikont[410] and, recently, Jan Grabowski[411] has not yet contributed to working through the issue of Polish-Jewish relations during the German occupation, literature for a young readership does indeed make an effort to address this problem in Holocaust narratives, and it seems that such attempts are exceptionally judicious and steer clear of generalisations. In texts for young readers, Polish society, though by no means free from anti-Semitism, is capable of heroic acts in rescuing Jews. What

408 *Ibid*., p. 57.

409 For example *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* and *Golden Harvest: Events at the Periphery of the Holocaust*, written in collaboration with Irena Grudzińska-Gross.

410 *My z Jedwabnego* [*We from Jedwabne*], a book-length reportage on the massacre in Jedwabne, where Poles burned their Jewish neighbours in a barn.

411 In his famed book *Judenjagd. Polowanie na Żydów 1942–1945. Studium dziejów pewnego powiatu* (*Hunt for the Jews: Betrayal and Murder in German-Occupied Poland*), Grabowski outlined the history of both saving and murdering Jews by the population of Dąbrowa Tarnowska, thereby initiating a new, albeit infamous, field of historical research which can be called the topography or regionalisation of murders of Jews.

is rather difficult for adults to accept[412] seems to come across as an entirely natural thing to the young reading public. Children are not usually "biased" readers, because they have not yet been steeped in cultural contexts in which Polish society tends to be deemed incapable of "doing any evil." While the Romantic paradigm has long enough forestalled any ways of presenting the Polish nation other than as martyred victims, young readers perceive literary characters simply as either good or bad individuals.

The heated dispute between the parties involved in the Polish-Jewish dialogue[413] certainly should not predominate in narratives for young readers. This does not mean that the issue should be neglected; on the contrary, it should be addressed in ways and with an emphasis that are adjusted to the age of the readers, while at the same time avoiding pitting the victims and the survivors

412 Vocally expressed opinions and evidence-corroborated accusations could not but provoke vehement responses from those who would prefer to regard Poles as first and foremost victims of Nazi violence. Hence, an "outbreak" of, admittedly much-needed, publications about Poles who rescued Jews, risking their own and their loved ones' lives (they are epitomised by the Ulm family, who were hiding eight Jewish fugitives at their home in the village of Markowa. When reported to the Germans, all the hiding Jews, Józef and the pregnant Wiktoria Ulm, together with their six children, were murdered). See, e.g. *Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej: Polacy z pomocą Żydom, 1939–1945* [*This One is from my Homeland: Poles who Helped Jews, 1939–1945*] by Władysław Bartoszewski, *Ratowanie: Opowieści Polaków i Żydów* [*To the Rescue: Accounts of Poles and Jews*] by Jacek Leociak, *Sprawiedliwi; Jak Polacy ratowali Żydów przed Zagładą* (*The Righteous!: How Poles Rescued Jews from the Holocaust*) by Grzegorz Górny and *"Kto w takich czasach Żydów przechowuje?..."*; *Polacy niosący pomoc ludności żydowskiej w okresie okupacji niemieckiej* [*"Who Keeps Jews in Times Like These?": Poles who Helped Jews under the Nazi Occupation*] edited by Aleksandra Namysło.

413 It must be admitted that the major hallmarks of this dispute are on the one hand Polish trauma and feelings of guilt caused not so much by the passivity of Poles in the face of the sufferings borne by their "older brothers in faith" as by the apparent satisfaction Poles felt regarding the Nazi policies for Jews or even their active involvement in murdering Jews, and on the other hand resentment against the accusations of anti-Semitism and complicity in crimes against Jews which, facts as they are, cast a long shadow over Polish society. Historically speaking, there was a clear split among Polish intellectuals when it comes to the "Jewish issue." There were those who in their diaries did not even notice that there was a ghetto, let alone reflecting on the lot of their pre-war Jewish acquaintances. That this issue was not dwelled on can of course be explained by a fear of possible ramifications, should such a diary be confiscated (well-known writer Zofia Nałkowska, the author of *Medallions*, recounting Nazi crimes in Poland, is an excellent case in point, as she burned the bulk of her memoirs).

in competition with one another. Consequently, depicting relationships of Polish mothers and Jewish children, along with the choices the women make concerning children who are not theirs and who additionally have a "ban" on them,[414] seems to be a suitable form of tackling the notoriously difficult issue of Polish-Jewish contacts.

In terms of the plot, when a Polish family takes care of a Jewish child, the child is removed, for a time at least, from the death zone of the ghetto and incorporated into an entirely different context. In this way a new environment is produced, which affords an opportunity to examine the responses of both parties involved.

The motif of Polish-Jewish relations is classically employed in Irena Landau's explicitly autobiographical book *Ostatnie piętro* [*The Top Floor*]. The story opens with a genre scene in which mother tells Krysia (Christine) that a Jewish girl will come to live with them. Concomitantly, in the ghetto, Cyrla's mother is preparing her daughter for passing to the Aryan side by altering her appearance to be less Semitic and making her look a little older. The woman performs a series of activities which are deemed inappropriate for girls: she cuts her plaits, curls her hair into adult locks, dresses the girl in her own clothes, persuades her to put on high-heeled shoes and makes her face up, all in order to make Cyrla look older than she really is. These manipulations are necessary because if the girl is to leave the ghetto, she must blend in with a group of women who are escorted to work on the Aryan side. The proper looks fabricated for the girl are capped with the change of her name from Cyrla into Cesia.

Krysia's family warmly welcome the daughter of their casual acquaintances. The new mother inaugurates the girl's stay at her new home with a series of rituals: greeting her, assuring that everything will be all right and feeding her. The child undergoes another transformation as Ms Teresa, so to speak, "decodes" her appearance and returns her to her previous form. The girl must also go through the ritual of purification, but instead of being immersed in a mikveh, she takes a hot bath in the bathtub. All these rituals are prescribed by the ethics and etiquette of hospitality, which is so overwhelming that it may be difficult to

414 A very special place in the narrative about Polish mothers during the Holocaust is taken by Apolonia Machczyńska who was shot dead in front of her three children for helping Jews. The history of Pola of Kock inspired *(A)pollonia*, a celebrated theatre production directed by Krzysztof Warlikowski in 2009. See Małgorzata Dziewulska, "Ukryte/odkryte. Gry pamięcią w teatrze obiecanym," in *Zła pamięć: Przeciw-historia w polskim teatrze i dramacie*, eds. Monika Kwaśniewska and Grzegorz Niziołek (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Instytutu im. Jerzego Grotowskiego, 2012), pp. 117–128.

believe that Cesia has arrived from the ghetto. The Polish mother behaves as if she was hosting a travel-weary wanderer. As a mother, she endeavours to give the guest a sense of security which is founded on two components – warmth and satiety: "The girl was really very tired. She enjoyed the bath, changed into a checked skirt and a beige cardigan, put on brand-new slippers, which Krysia had bought at the bazaar the day before, and then she ate delicious potato soup and a genuine chicken leg."[415]

Hiding with the Polish family helps Cesia regain her faith in humanity. Although she misses her real parents, she grows very attached to her foster family and believes that when the war ends she will go to law school with Krysia and then promulgate "a law forbidding anybody to ever kill another human being."[416]

Teresa brims with quite different sentiments. As she takes care of Cesia and ensures a safe shelter for her, whereby she risks the lives of her own kin, she feels contempt for the world which dooms an innocent child to such unmerited cruelty: "Ms Teresa gently stroked the girl on the head and thought that it was not a place either for Cesia or for any other child. And people who forced a person into hiding, only because this person had black hair and was Jewish, Gypsy, Greek, Chinese or Martian, were not human at all."[417]

If the Other is "the Stranger who disturbs the being at home with oneself [le chez soi],"[418] the Other at the same time compels one to think by asking disturbing questions that demand answers. Commenting on Lévinas's thought, Tischner concludes:

> The presence of the other – the one who asks by questioning and questions by asking – is the presence of a poverty. Poverty in and of itself calls for charity. Therefore, should answering a question be an act of charity? […] An exile, a widow and an orphan are not only manifestations of human misery, but also signs of human greatness. It is from them that truth and wisdom flow to the one who has been asked. […] The question is a true admonition.[419]

Undoubtedly, the presence of a Jewish child in the life of a Polish family means the inclusion of Otherness into the easily recognisable familiar Sameness, because, although Teresa already is a mother, she has never been forced by the

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415 Irena Landau, *Ostatnie piętro*, illustrated by Joanna Rusinek (Łódź: Literatura, 2015), p. 31.

416 *Ibid*., p. 34.

417 *Ibid*., p. 40.

418 Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: A Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alfonso Lingis (The Hague, Boston, and London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979), p. 39.

419 Tischner, *Filozofia dramatu*, pp. 74–75.

relationship with her own daughter to demand justice for another human being. With Cesia entrusted to her, the individual – the care for the particular Other – expands into a dream of good for all. Lévinas stresses that the potential of social relations is inscribed in every I-Other relationship: "the […] relation of the I with the Others moves into the form of the We, aspires to a State, institutions, laws, which are the source of universality."[420]

This principle is also espoused by Urszula, the mother of Teresa and the grandmother of Krysia. She offers help when hiding Cesia becomes even more dangerous than at the beginning. Her rural home proves to harbour many secrets, as it is there where Golda, Cesia's true mother, is hiding as well, aided by Krysia's grandmother. The three women lodge under one roof, which becomes a very suitable metaphor for hospitality.

A very interesting variation on the hospitality principle is woven into Andrzej Marek Grabowski's *Wojna na Pięknym Brzegu* [*War at the Jolie Bord*], a book on the subject of the war in which "Jewish themes" only surface now and then. Nine-year-old Krysia and her family experience various "adventures" in the midst of the chaos of war, one of them being the help they extend to Jews: Maria and her young son. In this respect, the story is rather exceptional, because in the fourth literature Polish martyrdom and Jewish martyrdom are all too often delimited, as a result of which narratives are produced in which the focus is on one of the two, while the other tends to be overlooked. Specifically, the books whose thematic concerns oscillate around the war, or more precisely the Warsaw Uprising, display hardly any interest in the ghetto or the uprising of 1943; and the other way round, the stories devoted to the Holocaust dwell on the experiences of the Aryan side exclusively as the point of reference for producing contrast between the two worlds, one of which is circumscribed by the wall.

Therefore, the inclusion of the Jewish theme in a tale about the "Polish" lot can be construed as an instance of hospitality, even though the term will certainly sound presumptuous, given the complicated nature of Polish-Jewish relations. To talk of the one-thousand-years' worth of Jewish presence on Polish soil in terms of privilege rather than of right is quite a risky enterprise, but the truth is that the intersecting of Polish and Jewish narratives is a rather rare occurrence.

In *Wojna na Pięknym Brzegu*, the Polish-Jewish fates of women and children merge in a way which adds the dimension of Jewish suffering to Krysia's experience of the occupation. Importantly, Holocaust topoi which structure the fourth literature primarily attribute aiding the Jews to women. It is understandable, as

420 Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 300.

the rescuing of Jews takes place in the private space of a flat or a house, which is looked after by a woman as a housemaker.

The encounter of Polish and Jewish mothers and their children serves to expose the mechanisms of the language of propaganda and thereby to restore the lost harmony to the world:

> One day, mum returned from work and said that we were going to have new lodgers: Mrs Maria and her little son Janek, who had come from Warsaw to Łódź. […] Mummy was telling grandma that "she" had "the right looks," but her "son" didn't have "the right looks." […] I was staring at Janek and was more and more confused. […] The boy was simply cute. Perhaps two years younger than me, with coal-black, dreamy eyes and curly hair so black that it looked navy-blue in the lamplight.[421]

The category of "wrong looks" is put in doubt. In her childlike understanding of the world, Krysia interprets wrongness or evil in ethical and aesthetic terms, equating the bad and the ugly. But Janek is simply different. As time passes, the girl realises that the new lodger is highly talented. Confined to the home, the boy spends all his days drawing. When examining his works, Krysia predicts an artist's career for him.

All the while, the girl's mother is committed to enacting the traditional Polish principle of hospitality, which takes on new meanings in the context of the Holocaust. The model of an open house is inverted, as the woman hosts a Jewish family under her roof but commands her daughter to be absolutely silent about it. The presence of the new lodgers precludes engagement in any other forms of social life, though if this inconvenience is compared with the punishment which the Polish family may suffer for helping Jews, the withdrawal from social intercourse with acquaintances no longer seems like much of a sacrifice.

The passage which presents the advantage that the Polish mother has over the Jewish mother, who does not seem to fully realise what position she has found herself in, is intriguing. Unlike Maria, Krysia's mother knows the rules of the occupation-instituted game and has prepared for possible risks beforehand. The narrative situation is quite confusing, because Maria and her son Jan come to Warsaw from Łódź, a city where the ghetto was established in February 1940, that is, a few months before the ghetto in Warsaw. Temporal markers are few and far between in the plot, but they suggest that the Jews arrived in Warsaw as early as in October 1939, so in all probability they could not have experienced the realities of the closed quarter. The decree of Governor-General Hans Frank

421 Andrzej Marek Grabowski, *Wojna na Pięknym Brzegu*, illustrated by Joanna Rusinek (Łódź: Literatura, 2014), p. 57.

which made helping the Jews punishable by death was issued on 15th October 1941. All these factual details are not meant to expose the plot's departures from "the historical truth"; rather, they are supposed to highlight the rules that govern Holocaust narratives. "Professional" memory, which attends to the chronology of the Holocaust, will primarily be inculcated in young readers in history lessons. Literature, even literature inspired by historical narrative, is founded on different rules and works with topoi which are so deeply ingrained in model Holocaust stories that narrative rituals dispense with fastidious dating or mapping.

The Polish mother prepares the place for the Jewish lodgers. In the world of the reversed canon, the major criterion of a good abode is security rather than comfort or redundant luxury, although that may be captivating for the guest. A shelter that guarantees safety is the new definition of luxury. In this way, the home is dislocated from the space of culture and plunged into the space of nature, where the perennial fight for survival is going on. The flat mutates not so much into a site of a lethal game of hide-and-seek, as into an arena of a bloody hunt. In such circumstances, the traditional rules of hospitality must be revised. In order to honour the law of hospitality, Krysia's mother violates the sacred space of the home by "re-cellaring" it and turning it into a reversed code of hospitality. The hideaway which is arranged in the closet is a non-place, a space which the laws in force prohibit, but which exists anyway against the interdiction. More than that, it turns into the central locus of the lives of all the inhabitants. Paradoxically, the hideaway outplaces the drawing room, for it is the former that guarantees the safety of both families. Krysia's mother has spatially re-appraised the place which is called home. She has made its former centre – the drawing room – peripheral and transmuted the previously unacknowledged space of the closet into a site of encounter which is real because its underlying premise is care for the Other.

This insight brings us to Heidegger's concept of dwelling. If we agree with Heidegger that "[d]welling is the manner in which mortals are on the earth,"[422] the hiding place in the closet functions as a symbol of dwelling. On the one hand, the hideaway suggests that the world has become inhospitable, yet on the other it attests to the extraordinary care of the righteous, who view building, i.e. the erecting of locations, as the establishing and fusing of spaces.[423]

422 Martin Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," in *Poetry, Language, Thought,* trans. Alfred Hofstadter (New York, NY: Harper Perennial Classics, 2001), pp. 141–161, on p. 146.

423 See *Ibid*., p. 156.

Other examples of thus-conceived hospitality can be found in two episodes of *Kotka Brygidy* [*Brigid's She-Cat*] by Joanna Rudniańska.[424] Helena's mother and her housemaid Stańcia decide to help a Jewish girl. The metamorphosis of the Jewish child in which she is successively stripped of her "wrong looks" is the major motif which structures an extended sequence of events. The girl is given a bath, taught her new name and even baptised. Unexpectedly, the child herself invokes the context that fits the situation in which she has found herself. The little Jewish girl catches a glimpse of Helena, who is watching her through a pane in the bathroom, and she takes what she sees for the face of Virgin Mary. From this moment on, all the hopes the young convert has for survival depend on her, which makes Stańcia, devout Catholic as she is, almost ecstatic. The situation is ludicrous indeed, because the sudden zeal with which the Jewish girl professes her new faith is perceived as a miracle by the simple woman:

> "The Virgin Mary is looking at me," she repeated, "The Virgin Mary sees me."
> "There's a good girl," said mother.
> "Because she was baptised. It's how baptism works," said Stańcia.
> "What nonsense, Stańcia, It's been barely three minutes since she was baptised."
> "The Holy Ghost works without delay, the priest said so on Sunday."
> "Well, that's fine, Stańcia," mother shrugged her shoulders.
> "Is the Virgin Mary coming here? Let the Virgin Mary come," said the girl.
> "What did I tell you? A veritable little saint," cried Stańcia.[425]

The conversation between the two women who have decided to take the child under their roof mercilessly reveals Poles' attitudes to Jews. While some treated baptism, a bath, a change of name and the teaching of prayers as a game to be played in order to reduce the risk of a Jewish child being recognised and reported, others viewed them as an opportunity for converting a child to the true faith. In fact, Stańcia reappears a few more times in the story, including as an epitome of a mild species of Polish anti-Semitism. Her attitudes seem to be a typical outcome of poor education and strong Catholic influences. Stańcia impassively watches a crowd of Jews go across the bridge to the ghetto, yet she is indignant on finding out that Miss Róża, her mistress's friend, must wear an armband, and she emotionally argues that Róża is not a Jew at all, but "one of our folk."

Whatever the motives that guide the two women, they certainly consider the child's life the most important value. Strikingly, the writer opted for a very

424 Other important aspects of this book are discussed in various chapters of this novel.
425 Joanna Rudniańska, *Kotka Brygidy* (Lasek: Wydawnictwo Pierwsze, 2007), p. 67.

dramatic ending of the subplot involving attempts to rescue the Jewish girl. The resolution of the action in this respect forms a counterbalance to narratives which end happily, such as Piątkowska's *Wszystkie moje mamy*. Despite all the dedication of people of good will, Ania does not make it. Together with other children, she is denounced and consequently murdered. The news about the child's death is paralysing to Helena's mother, sends Stańcia into hysterics, and breeds feelings of guilt in Helena since little Ania took her for the Virgin Mary who should protect her. Helena is deeply influenced by her mother, with whom she has never been truly close, but whom she nevertheless admires for the support she offers to her Jewish friends and neighbours. Helena is also indebted to Stańcia for the painful education she receives when the woman reveals to her the truth about what is actually going on beyond the wall. While Helena's mother is reticent about it, common-sensical Stańcia believes that the girl should know the truth and does not deceive her as to the fate of the Jews. Helena's father, who espouses this position as well, takes the girl on a tram ride through the ghetto for her to forever remember its images. The knowledge that Stańcia and her father share with Helena enables her to understand the desolation felt by a Jewish mother who appears one day in the girl's family home. The woman and her husband are in hiding on the Aryan side, while their daughter has been placed in another family for the sake of security:

> "I also have a girl, one like you," she whispered into her ear.
> "And where is she?"
> "Far away. She is fine. She has a new mum, a very good one."
> "I wouldn't like to have a new mum."
> "You don't have to. But for her, that mum is the best thing in the world."
> "Why?"
> "Because that's the way it is. Because she's safe," said the lady.
> Tears were swelling in her eyes.
> "Please, don't cry," said Helena. "Some day she'll come back to you. When the war ends. And she'll have two mums."[426]

However all three characters – the mother, Stańcia and Helena – no longer have that certainty since the rituals of hospitality, which the presence of a Jewish child in a Polish home exacted, have simply failed.

The care for a Jewish child is not exclusively the realm of grown-up women. As another episode in Rudniańska's novel amply makes clear, it also concerns Helena. Her childhood memories profoundly affect the decisions she makes

426 *Ibid*., p. 78–79.

in adult life. Single and childless as she is, she believes that it is her vocation to cherish the memory of Brygida, a Jewish girl whom she has never met, but whose cat was entrusted to her. The memory of her Jewish peer becomes a substitute of motherhood for Helena, because recalling Brygida brings back the remembrances of all Jewish children. As a witness, Helena takes up the obligation of remembering, and as a woman – and a symbolic mother – she assumes the responsibility for telling people about the past and including the lost loved ones into the order of family narrative. As an adult, she continues to look for traces of the friend she never met. One day, when visiting an exhibition of pre-war photographs of Warsaw in Zachęta,[427] she sees a picture which she is certain shows Brygida. She buys the exhibition album, cuts out the picture, puts it into a frame and places it on the dresser-top among other family photographs.

Helena completes the work of her mother, who failed to save a Jewish child. Carrying a symbolic scar of a symbolic pregnancy, she inscribes the memory of Brygida into a narrative which is the realm of women: "*Ple-ple* [blah-blah] or *pla pla* [twiddle-twaddle], *plotkowanie* [gossiping], *plecenie* [babbling/plaiting] (neither rhyme or reason) are all traditionally associated with feminine modes of verbal expression. The verbs and sounds imitating such talk seem to stem from one root which brings to mind the English 'plot' – a conspiracy or a novelistic fable, action or intrigue, of which we often say that it was woven or spun. […] We deal with a dense knot of weaving, twining, speaking and writing."[428]

Helena's fabric-narrative resembles the work of Arachne, because Helena, who is a Holocaust witness, emulates the mythological heroine by daring to portray evil which our times seem not to remember anymore. When walking across present-day Warsaw, Helena tries in vain to bring back the memory of the victims with her stories. Nobody appreciates her efforts, and she is perceived as an innocuous lunatic. The narrative which Helena spins falls on deaf ears, so, like Arachne, she commits suicide and, like Arachne, she is transfigured, into a cat though rather than a spider. In this way, she is excluded from the human order, which seems to be the price Helena has to pay for the symbolic and real loss of the mother. As her mother's efforts to save a Jewish child failed, her self-appraisal of her maternal "competences" plummeted. The loss of the child who,

427 Zachęta (literally: encouragement) is a national cultural institution which was founded over one hundred years ago with a mission to collect works by Polish artists and support young artists. Currently, Zachęta functions as the National Gallery of Art and counts among the most important Polish institutions devoted to promoting contemporary art.

428 Szczuka, "Prządki," p. 69.

though not her own, was entrusted into her care, caused a specific emotional paralysis, which contributed to her estrangement from her husband and her abandonment of her own daughter. At the same time, Helena's metamorphosis into a cat stamps her manifest withdrawal from the human world and joining of the animal community, whose sensitivity exceeds people's. Nevertheless, Helena remains a depositary of the trace of the mother, whom it befell to experience the liminal situation of losing her/not her child. The obligation to bear witness to the past befell her daughter. Helena is a Polish wailer whose lamentation is supposed to recall the tragedy of Jewish neighbours.

The texts discussed in this chapter vividly exemplify an interesting tendency which is making its mark on the fourth literature. This tendency consists in constructing mother figures that spawn meanings which tie in with the concepts of trace and memory, two distinctive components of the stylistics of Holocaust representations. The pronounced presence gives way to the emphatic absence. The lack of mother is a "universal" deficit which is felt by all young readers, whatever their age and experiences in life. In the perspective of postmemory, a very significant shift is observable in texts dealing with the loss of a mother, as the heroism of taking care of a Jewish child is replaced with the obligation of remembering this child.

The third, or even the fourth, generation of readers born after the Holocaust have not gone through the trauma which parents who survived the Holocaust imparted to their children. Given their experiences, the generation of the "scorched" needed entirely different representations of Holocaust mothers than contemporary readers do. For the former, their contacts with parents were as a rule shrouded in silence. This silence made it exigent for the second generation to work through these issues, which was reflected in the constantly recurring mother figure. A child – most frequently a daughter – and his/her Jewish or Polish foster mother establish an extraordinary bond whose durability and nobleness are in stark contrast with the wartime rules of the game. In the microcommunity which is built by mother and child, there is no room for rivalry between the adult woman and the growing-up girl, because they have an entirely different mission to perform. The odds are high as the future of the world is at stake. Their relationship in the time of the Holocaust is in fact both a fossil which testifies to the old, pre-war order and a seed from which a new world will germinate after the hecatomb of the Holocaust.

Chapter Six Space Management and Postmemory

Sacred Landscape

In his famed book *The Final Station: Umschlagplatz*, Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz ascribes a special meaning to the eponymous venue in Warsaw: "Umschlagplatz denotes not only a defined, tangible place near Stawki Street in Warsaw but also a special realm of the spirit or, more aptly, a specific human destiny: Umschlagplatz signifies limbo, gate to the underworld, antechamber of death."[429] This topographical location interpolates in the urban space not only the symbolism of the place, but also the memory of the past. The naming of space entails more than simply infusing it with symbolic meanings; the fundamental significance of this act lies in the inscription of symbolic meanings into the living fabric of memory. Consequently, when space is being mapped, various meanings which cluster around one place, accumulate and overlap. Once – before the war – Umschlagplatz was an ordinary place for handling train cargo, but during and after the war it acquired a tragic relevance, because it was from here that Jews were transported from the Warsaw ghetto to Treblinka.

If contemporary young readers are acquainted with the topography of Warsaw and have a sound knowledge of history, they ascribe to Umschlagplatz the meaning it took on during the war, sometimes not realising at all that the place was named thus by the Nazis. However, if Umschlagplatz is for them merely a name of a place without any connotations with the past, they are also likely to perceive the city as a transparent structure devoid of historic hallmarks.

The reading of space offers literature a unique opportunity of filling the blank spots on the map of memory, because literature can perform a very important function in teaching about the geography of the past. Literature legitimises the Halbwachsian "sacred landscape," in which symbols and collective representations of the past are anchored.[430]

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429 Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz, *The Final Station: Umschlagplatz*, trans. Nina Taylor (Farrar Strauss and Giroux, 1994), p. 47.

430 While the expression "sacred landscape" as such does not appear in Halbwachs's monumental *On Collective Memory*, the term is commonly used in conjunction with and the heightened scholarly interest in the notion is commonly attributed to his study "The Legendary Topography of the Gospels in the Holy Land." See, Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, pp. 168–192.

In separate literature, space promotes not so much the spinning of didactic discourse as rather the devising of a coherent project of memory which can foster intergenerational understanding. For this aim to be accomplished, the two parties to the dialogue should acknowledge the uniqueness and importance of the "sacred landscape," the code of which the young generation must yet learn.

I believe that literary texts for young readers have crafted shared topoi of Holocaust space which primarily activate phantasms of it. As a result, the young generation are acquainted with a phantasmagorical tale about a space from behind which the real topography of the city only occasionally peers. To observe that writers transform the concrete map into a symbolic cartography of the Holocaust is not an accusation. Actually, the point of literature is to differ from history or geography textbooks and to build a universal and thus "human" narrative which oscillates around particular places of the "sacred landscape." The problem is that this landscape becomes a palimpsest combining Jewish space and post-Jewish space.

Beautiful Deceit

Stories about the Holocaust are based on the contrast between the bright prewar past and the darkness of the ghetto, which is a space of suffering and death. Nearly all narratives contrast the idyllic life before the disaster of the war with the gloomy existence in the ghetto. The wall serves as the line of demarcation between the two realms and is an important factor in sequencing the time of ghetto residents. It functions not only as a spatial division, but first and foremost as a temporal turning point which splits people's lives into those before and those in the ghetto.

Plots present child protagonists who together with their families are displaced into the ghetto. Their memories dwell on the time when they lived on the Aryan side of the wall, which they associate with the sun, freedom and life. The protagonist of Joanna Rudniańska's *XY* must abandon her huge apartment in Piękna Street in the proximity of the Ujazdów Park and move to her grandparents' flat in Twarda Street in the ghetto.[431] Her language is revelatory about the space; moving from Piękna Street in Warsaw's luxurious neighbourhood near a park to Twarda Street must have been a painful experience, all the more so that the new

431 Besides being factually correct in terms of Warsaw's topography, the names of the streets are metaphorically meaningful as in Polish *piękna* is beautiful and *twarda* is hard.

flat is cramped and most importantly belongs to the grandparents, of whom the girl is not very fond.

Szymon, the protagonist of Renata Piątkowska's *Wszystkie moje mamy* [*All My Mothers*], also experiences a shattering change. Defined by carefree leisure, the pre-war space is brutally replaced by a tiny room in the attic, which must house four people. And as if this were not enough, his aunt's big and comfortable apartment is taken over by Germans. The space which had so far belonged to the boy's family is violated before his very eyes.

Rafał, in Marcin Szczygielski's *Arka czasu* [*Rafe and the Ark of Time*], is the most lucky of them all, because he is dislodged from the flat in Saska Kępa, where he lived with his parents before the war, to his beloved grandfather's flat in one of the neighbourhoods which were incorporated into the ghetto by the Germans. Still, even though he is "at home" there, he is compelled to reorganise not only his space but also his thinking:

> All the rooms and the kitchen in our flat once belonged to grandpa. When I think of it today, it seems completely improbable, because there are three rooms – what would one person actually need so much room for? […] Now, the biggest room is taken by Ms Brylant with her husband, two sons and sister-in-law. […] Another room is taken by Mr Boc, his two sisters, the children of these sisters, and a cousin. There are four kids of different ages. […] The kitchen is taken by Miss Aniela, a teacher. […]I share the smallest room with grandpa […].[432]

Stylistically speaking, the ghetto space is predominantly conjured by enumerations and hyperboles. These devices produce a sense of crampedness, limitation and confinement. All these features highlight the fact that the location where the protagonists are situated is entirely alien to them, because even though it has already been topographically mastered, it will never belong to the order of natural space. It was produced by oppression, which means that it was made part of the urban landscape by force. Additionally, the presence of the ghetto is highlighted by German toponyms, as, for example, Łódź has been re-named Litzmannstadt.[433]

The ghettoisation of space transforms the gesture of creation into a caricature of the Genesis motif, for creation in this case brings forth evil and ugliness instead of good and beauty. The created environment bespeaks the intentions of the creator. In her analysis of the experience of time in the ghetto, Barbara Engelking coined the notion of the "abyssal situation" to convey the circumstances in

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432 Szczygielski, *Arka czasu*, pp. 17, 19, 20, 21.

433 Combrzyńska-Nogala, *Bezsenność*, p. 4.

which a terrifying chasm gapes open for the human being.[434] In confrontation with this void, it becomes obvious that if there is *sanctum*, i.e. the experience of Divine goodness in another human being, on the opposite pole there is also *samaelanctum*, i.e. the sense of the Satanic presence in an encounter with another human being.[435] The ghetto is a devilish creation, and hence *samaelanctum* ceases to be just a feeling and mutates into a tangible experience of evil triggered by the oppressive space which was created by people for their fellow human beings.

The contrast between the tranquil life from before the displacement to the ghetto and the dwelling in the closed quarter is thus one of the major techniques for constructing the Holocaust imaginarium for children. The reasons for such a choice are quite obvious. The loss of home and nostalgia for the happy place are universal narratives which abolish temporal boundaries. Contemporary readers can easily relate to them. Nevertheless, the removal of differences in the Other comes at a price, and the price tends to be rather high. The point is that literature seeks to induce a moving act of empathy in which the Jewish protagonist is appropriated by the contemporary reader, who can effortlessly insert him/herself into the story about the loss of home, displacement or resettling. It does not take outstanding cultural competence to understand what it means to lose one's home and to fear the unknown. Practices of postmemory take advantage of this topical ease in order to read the young generation's awareness in Holocaust narratives.

However, the bright and beautiful Jewish space lost in war is clearly mythologised, just as the past itself is.[436] Separate literature somewhat exaggeratingly assigns to both of them concepts which suggest that in the past space was democratic. This implies that the same space was once peaceably and

434 Engelking, *"Czas przestał dla mnie istnieć…,"* p. 11. Cf. footnote 24 in Chapter Five.

435 *Ibid*., p. 176.

436 The contemporary attempts at, as well as effects of, such mythologisation are addressed by Elżbieta Janicka. She discusses the house designed by Jakub Szczęsny, who undertook to reclaim the memory for post-Jewish spaces. He designed and constructed the Keret House in a gap between a townhouse and a block of flats on the corner of Chłodna and Żelazna Streets in Warsaw. The house was supposed to recall the Jews who were in hiding during the occupation and to inscribe the memory of the Holocaust into the urban space. The opening of the house was attended by Etgar Keret, a popular Israeli writer whose parents had gone to Israel from Poland. Janicka deciphers the host's ostensible hospitality as informed by his sense of superiority and hypocrisy. Elżbieta Janicka, "Kryjówka w wersji demo," *Autoportret. Pismo o Dobrej Przestrzeni*, Vol. 4, No. 43 (2013), pp. 48–57.

amicably inhabited by Jewish and non-Jewish residents of Warsaw.[437] It should however be remembered that before the war the vast majority of Warsaw Jews, especially the unassimilated ones, inhabited the areas which metropolitan goys associated with squalor and poverty.

In an already evoked passage, Błoński convincingly discusses the complete separateness of Jewish neighbourhoods, which were predominantly stamped with destitution:

> Why was Poland once regarded as a Jewish paradise, *paradisus Judeorum*? Because Jews could live there in greater isolation than anywhere else. It was particularly true about the areas situated east ofthe Vistula, where the proportion of Jews was the largest, the social structure loose, contact with gentiles limited and specialised, and the vast spaces and total internal autonomy of the Jewish community made the shtetl, a ghetto as it was, into a site of freedom and familiarity.[438]

While certainly not only a literary invention, the image of Poles and Jews as neighbours who live in luxury flats in Warsaw's rich districts is largely an effect of topical narratives about the Holocaust, which aim to generate readers' empathy. While such an approach is justifiable in texts for children, its prevalence in narratives for adults cannot but invite censure.[439] Yet the pronounced motif of Polish-Jewish co-existence is an inalienable feature in literature for a young readership, be it only for the simple reason that it is highly functional in narratives about the disintegration of the community.

An appealing portrayal of such co-existence can be found in an episode in Joanna Rudniańska's *Kotka Brygidy* [*Brigid's She-Cat*], where the future oppressiveness of the ghetto is amply demonstrated and transposed in a micro-scale onto a flat on the Aryan side to make a Polish child experience it. Helena's mother invites her Jewish acquaintances for the Epiphany festivities. One of the guests is the elegant and beautiful Ms Róża, her best friend. Helena sneaks out of the room to cuddle up to Ms Róża's white fur coat. While doing so, she feels an

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437 Jewish neighbourhoods and ghetto streets are masterfully described by Jacek Leociak. See Jacek Leociak, *Spojrzenia na warszawskie getto* (Warszawa: Dom Spotkań z Historią, 2011).

438 Błoński, "Polak-katolik i katolik-Polak," p. 72. See also Chapter Four in this volume.

439 The mythologisation of Polish-Jewish cohabitation is exemplified in Jolanta Dylewska's film *Po-lin. Okruchy pamięci* [*Po-lin: Shards of Memory*] (2008), which was supposed to prove that Poland does not have to be associated solely with Jedwabne stories and the ghastliness of the "golden harvest." However, scholars insist that the film epitomises philosemitic violence in which two narratives – the Polish and the Jewish ones – are merged into one, even though they have never in fact been close.

unpleasant texture graze against her skin amidst the softness of the coat's sleeve. It is an armband with the star of David on it.

The episode is a variation on the changes which are about to occur in space. They are momentous in that they do not only affect the topography of the city, but also penetrate into all spheres of life, including the most intimate ones. The luxury coat is a reminiscence of the idyllic past, which is associated with security; hence the child's need to snuggle up to the softness and warmth of the fur. Although Helena re-enacts the gesture of fairy-tale protagonists, such as Kai in *The Snow Queen* and Lucy in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the reality of war proves too obtrusive and devastating to be forgotten. The armband is not only a stigma of oppression, but also a metonymy of the wall, which separates, bothers and disables. For now, it is only a sign of an incomprehensible division but, as it soon transpires, the touch of the armband anticipates Helena crossing the boundary that separates the ghetto from the rest of the world.

Philosemitic Postmemory

In texts for young readers, the ghetto space, which is part of imagined geography, employs literary representations to produce the imaginarium of the Holocaust, an extraordinarily significant category in building coherent postmemory. It is obvious that children's literature takes over clichés of general literature about the Holocaust; as it is also obvious that they are, so to speak, "censored" when it comes to themes and images. Their many differences notwithstanding, what ghetto landscapes in these two literary fields share is a hunger-ridden and fear-fraught enclosed space marked with important hallmarks of respective urban topographies, such as Stawki, Leszno, Miła, Karmelicka and Krochmalna Streets for Warsaw[440] and the Bałuty district for Łódź.[441]

The Jewish space of the ghetto is subject to manipulation in texts for a young readership, which influences the shaping of the historical narrative that is imprinted onto the awareness of the contemporary generation. This is probably an effect of some understandable simplifications without which postmemorial narrative would be difficult to comprehend. There is also a risk that, in their focus on conveying the dramatic situation of entrapment in the ghetto, writers juxtapose it with the idealised space from before the ghetto was established. As a result, readers receive the following message: before the war, Polish-Jewish

440 The streets which were included in the Warsaw ghetto.

441 A district in Łódź where the ghetto was established in 1940.

relations were better than tolerably good, which is inferable from the shared space inhabited by one Polish-Jewish community.

The term "Polish-Jewish relations" seems inadequate in the context of postmemory which is generated in separate literature, since the community of Poles and Jews as pictured in this literature is so closely knit that Jewish children only find out they are of the Judaic denomination after the Germans issue orders which force Jews to live in the ghetto. With such a concept of society and community in place, we could slightly sarcastically conclude that Polish-Jewish relations are actually Polish-Polish relations. This cultural monolith is only destroyed as a result of the establishment of the ghetto, which divides members of the community into Poles and Jews.

In such a narrative, anti-Semitism and the *szmalcownik*[442] as its personification are foreign and entirely unintelligible elements. Children's literature actually quite often addresses this embarrassing issue. Of course, *szmalcownicy* are contrasted with noble protagonists who risk their lives to save Jews. Such a counterbalance is fully justified because the fourth literature, while tackling the Holocaust theme, must take into account young readers' sensibilities and their need to believe in good redressing evil, if not in the outright victory of good over evil.

Although undoubtedly Polish, the *szmalcownik* seems to come from a completely different world, as it is difficult to locate him in the idealised pre-war Polish-Polish community. As such, he is the product of the war-time hecatomb, which comes across as another stage in historical evolution, producing an unheard-of, new species. The *szmalcownik* character and manifestations of anti-Semitism appear all of a sudden, just as Jews are spatially displaced. The destruction of the community, the closing of Jews in the ghetto and the Germans' inhumane treatment of them activate in their former Polish neighbours mechanisms which no one could have suspected in them before and reveal their complete ignorance. For example, Ms Szewczyk, Stańcia's friend in *Kotka Brygidy*, praises the Germans for walling Jews off in the ghetto, but at the same time she commiserates with Mr Kamil, the only Jew of her acquaintance, who always rushed with greetings to her friend on the day of her patron saint, in spite of his own religion.[443]

442 A blackmailer exploiting the vulnerability and the desperate situation of Jews for financial gains. Cf. footnote 54 in Chapter Five.

443 Rudniańska, *Kotka Brygidy*, p. 55.

This abrupt change is blamed on the war rather than on pre-war Polish-Jewish relations, which were in fact far from cordial and found revealing manifestations in highly humiliating forms of Polish oppression against the Jewish community, such as *numerus clausus* and what came to be called the classroom ghetto or the desk ghetto.[444]

Playing with Space

The briefly signalled philosemitic bias in depicting the pre-war space of Polish-Jewish society aside, I see two major fields in which postmemorial narrative addressed to the young generation unfolds: the Jewish space (the ghetto) and the post-war post-Jewish space.

The Jewish Space

In the chapter on how the figure of Janusz Korczak is constructed in literature for children and young adults, I observed that the space of the Holocaust is predominantly represented by the ghetto as a site where strategies and tactics incessantly clashed (the concentration camp is largely absent from Polish children's literature).[445]

The relations delivered by a child protagonist who is ensnared in the Holocaust space are a particularly interesting aspect of children's literature. While Korczak is an adult and an educator of deserved authority, a child who finds him/herself in this space is a figure of double exclusion: s/he is young, helpless and often orphaned, and additionally s/he bears a stigma, i.e. the star of David. Because of all these factors, his/her view of reality is diametrically different from an adult's. The child, excluded as s/he is, is positioned in a space which becomes a (no-) place,[446] demarcated by strategists on the official (totalitarian) map of the city.

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444 The terms denote forms of oppression exercised on students of Jewish origin in pre-war Poland. *Numerus clausus* means the limits on the admission of Jewish students to universities, while the classroom/desk ghetto refers to designating Jewish-only sectors in lecture rooms, with Jewish students unable to choose their seats.

445 The division is borrowed from Michel de Certeau's classification of forms of action. Strategies, which are part of the space of power and institutions, are oppressive and work to subordinate individuals. Tactics are devised by individuals in order to change or loosen up the strategies in place. Cf. Certeau, *Practice*, especially pp. 34–39.

446 The term "(no-)place" as used here does not refer to the "non-place" as defined by Marc Augé, whom I discuss below. Rather, it denotes a space which was produced through applying a strategy and which is doomed to destruction, just as the strategy is doomed to shortness and, consequently, to failure. A (no-)place is sustained through constantly

The "practising" of the ghetto space by such protagonists has at least two aspects to it, to explore which we must resort to Heidegger's metaphors of the forest and the clearing and to his categories of beings and Being.[447] One of these aspects involves the emphatic "continuity" of the ghetto space: its façade is densely cohesive, like the wall of forest in Heidegger, but there are cracks in it – clearings – through which glimpses of a different world can be caught. This different world is where escapees from the ghetto head. A gap in the text – i.e. in the ghetto wall – is a gate to a better world, which is sometimes discovered anew by the fugitives. Such a device is used in Szczygielski's *Arka czasu* [*Rafe and the Ark of Time*], in Renata Piątkowska's *Wszystkie moje mamy* [*All My Mothers*] (a story of a Jewish boy rescued by Irena Sendler), in Dorota Combrzyńska-Nogala's *Bezsenności Jutki* [*Jutka's Insomnia*] (a tale about a girl who is carried out from the Łódź ghetto) and in Joanna Rudniańska's *XY* (a history of Jewish twin girls).

Another aspect of practices related to the ghetto space concerns the identity of the main protagonists. If they are not Jewish and live on the Aryan side of the wall, they are furnished with quite a different view of reality. It is characteristically continuous in a way redolent of the Heideggerian forest, in which clearings appear to unveil the truth. More often than not, the truth is revealed as a result of an unexpected storming into the ghetto space, which happens, for example, in an episode in Rudniańska's *Kotka Brygidy*, in which the protagonist and her father take a tram ride through the Warsaw ghetto.[448] What the girl sees there, precisely in the clearings of the official narrative, is radically transformative of her. The truth can also be brought to light when a sign from behind the wall appears in the "safe" Aryan world. Telling examples thereof are again to be found in *Kotka Brygidy*, when the protagonist's non-Jewish home is visited by characters from across the wall: Mr Kamil, a Jewish girl whom the protagonist's mother fails to rescue and finally eponymous Brigid's cat.

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changing tactics. Though the (no-)place exists on the official map of the city/ghetto, efforts are made to obliterate all traces of it, which in turn promotes the generation of yet another space of memory – the palimpsest. See e.g. Beata Chomątowska, *Stacja Muranów* (Wołowiec: Czarne, 2012).

447 See Martin Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, eds. and trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

448 "Aryan" trams passed through the ghetto, following the shortest route to Warsaw's northern districts, e.g. Żoliborz and Powązki. When crossing the ghetto, trams went at maximum speed and did not stop to prevent the "Aryan" population from contacting the Jewish population.

a) The Continuity of the Wall

All these texts make the wall and/or the barbed wire which delimits the ghetto a pervasive leitmotif of ghetto narrative. The crossing of the barrier that is the wall can be construed as a symbolic exodus from the Biblical house of slavery, which, though not a guarantee of rescue, increases the chances of survival. A child who leaves the ghetto is exposed to the danger of being recognised and, as such, enters a space in which s/he engages in a game of survival, which can be compared to hunting. At the same time, such a child is overawed with the beauty of the Aryan side,[449] which, unlike the ghetto, seems a normal and thus wonderful world, all the horrors of war notwithstanding.

Building on the testimonies of fugitives from the ghetto, writers clearly spice up one of the major Holocaust topoi to make it resemble the passage to a wonderland, a motif readers know from *Peter Pan*, the *Narnia* series or *The Neverending Story*. At the same time, the fear of denunciation effectively dims the delight of freedom. Anxiety and being smitten with beauty are two affects on which the literary construction of the protagonist's experience of the Aryan side is founded in *XY* and a number of other texts:

> HERE was completely different from THERE.[450]
> She went out from among shrubs onto a lawn. There was a tram stop nearby, and all around it, a city, a normal city on a summer evening, when the sun is about to set. Calm people were walking on the pavements; it must have been Sunday, for they were all nicely dressed. Hania X thought that they would all see she had fled from the ghetto, and someone would surely hand her over to the German police.[451]

Below, I will focus mainly on Szczygielski's *Arka czasu*, because nearly the whole of its narrative is built of ghetto space topoi, including the home, the wall, the

449 Confinement experienced by Jews who were displaced to the ghetto was a factor in their experience of oppression. It was a challenge to explain to children what vast space was or what the forest and animals looked like. Diane Ackerman, *The Zookeeper's Wife: A War Story* (New York, NY, and London, UK: W.W. Norton & Co., 2007), pp. 137–138. In his well-known poem "Rozmowa z dzieckiem" ("A Talk with a Child"), Władysław Szlengel points to the limitations imposed on children in the ghetto. As the adverbials of space ("afar") and time ("long ago") had fallen into disuse, children live in a world with no past and no future. See Władysław Szlengel, "A Talk with a Child," trans. Halina Birenbaum, ed. Ada Holzman, in *We Remember What He Read to the Dead: Selected Poems of Władysław Szlengel, the Ghetto Poet*. http://www.zchor.org/szlengel/child.htm. Accessed 20 May 2019.

450 Combrzyńska-Nogala, *Bezsenność Jutki*, p. 80.

451 Rudniańska, *XY*, p. 22.

hiding place, empty space and time. The child protagonist of the book, who is excluded due to his Jewishness and additionally abandons the ghetto, puts himself in the Heideggerian situation of "ek-sistence," which is defined as "standing out into the truth of Being."[452] By abandoning beings, the human embarks upon ek-static dwelling in the proximity and the "truth of Being." This decision is steeped in dread, which Heidegger explains as relinquishing the certainty which we are afforded by the familiar reality. What is left is just "pure *Da-sein*," which can no longer prop itself up with anything.[453] The story of Rafał in *Arka czasu* perfectly exemplifies the intersecting of two spheres of space and existence, as his decision to pass through the crack – the clearing – in the "wall" of the ghetto is tantamount to abandoning existence for "ek-sistence."

Initially, however, the ghetto is the boy's home, even though Rafał at moments remembers what was his home before the war – the "good address" in Saska Kępa. In this respect Szczygielski's book is quite an exception, for it frames the ghetto as the boy's familiar and domesticated space. Paradoxically, he feels safe in it. A special place on his personal map of the ghetto is taken by the library, a location to which he could find his way even if blindfolded. Rafał superimposes his personal map organised around this central point of the library upon the ghetto territory as charted by strategists. Subordinated to reading, the child's mapping of the Warsaw ghetto abolishes or at least undercuts the official extrapolation of the place, whose chief aim is to enslave and consequently exterminate its residents. The ghetto as represented by Rafał does not resemble a terrifying labyrinth; the boy reaches its innermost point, i.e. the library, unperturbed. His love of books makes the boy view the space of the ghetto itself as a text to be read. The facades of the buildings he passes are legible, and if so, they look familiar and safe: "That's how you get to the library: first you cross our backyard, then the street and another backyard on the other side. […] Here you […] run up the stairs and there you are. In the library. That's my favourite place in the whole of the Quarter."[454] The "text" of the ghetto seems vivid and brimming with signs. There are no gaps in it. When he is at the centre of it – in the library – the boy transfers his sensations of space onto his perception of the city. The lined-up

452 Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," trans. Frank A. Capuzzi, in *Basic Writings: From 'Being and Time' to 'The Task of Thinking,'* ed. David Farrell Krell, 2nd edition (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), pp. 213–266, on p. 230.

453 Martin Heidegger, "What Is Metaphysics," trans. R. F. C. Hull and Alan Crick, in Martin Heidegger, *Existence and Being*, ed. Werner Brock (Chicago, IL: Henry Regnery Company, 1949), p. 353–392, on p. 367.

454 Szczygielski, *Arka czasu*, pp. 8–10.

bookshelves correspond to rows of townhouses, the titles on the spines of the books match the signs of shops and workshops, and literary tales are mirrored in the narratives in which the city abounds. By calling his favourite place "his," Rafał on the one hand appropriates it and on the other demonstrates that he has no grasp of the "politics of space" to which he himself is also subjected. The boy's grandfather uses various tactics against the strategies in place to shield the boy from the painful truth. For this purpose, the grandfather tries to arrange a better flat for them, organises lessons of Polish and history, and teaches the boy to play the violin. All these endeavours are designed to sustain the impression of normality at any cost. Even Rafał's window gives the boy a privileged vantage point for looking at the ghetto, because he can see the junction of Sienna and Sosnowa Streets from it. Rafał lives in the prettiest of the ghetto's streets, the only one which reportedly boasted a few trees during the war.[455] Yet the view from the balcony proves that Warsaw is beginning to morph into a metropolis of death. Its space undergoes a progressive degradation, and Rafał's territory in it is rapidly shrinking. The boy is a witness of domicide,[456] which is only a prelude to mass murders. The ruined houses remind Rafał of the real space-time, the atrocities of which he tries to alleviate by reading his beloved books. In vain, however. Literature fails to give him comfort. Herbert George Wells' *Time Machine*, which the boy is reading, delivers a terrifying commentary on the war reality. Comparing what is going on around him with the division of humanity into the Morlocks and the Eloi in Wells, the boy perceives similarities between his own "now" and the year 802701. Even though his historiosophical reflection is inspired by a fantastic novel, the boy comes to discern very explicit analogies between the two distant worlds. The Morlocks bring to mind the Germans, while the Eloi bred by the Morlocks resemble Jews. Rafał views this similarity as a kind of historical fatalism that holds its actors in a tight grip which turns into

455 According to relations of witnesses, there were trees in two locations in the Warsaw ghetto: in Sienna Street and at the graveyard.

456 See Marta Cobel-Tokarska, *Bezludna wyspa, nora, grób: Wojenne kryjówki Żydów w okupowanej Polsce* (Warszawa: IPN, 2012), p. 226. Cobel-Tokarska borrows the notion of domicide from Madeline G. Levine, who herself draws on the insights of John Douglas Porteous. Cf. Madeline G. Levine, "Home Loss in Wartime Literature: A Typology of Images," in *Framing the Polish Home: The Postwar Literary and Cultural Constructions of Hearth, Homeland and Self*, ed. Bożena Shallcross (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2002), pp. 97–115; John Douglas Porteous, "Domicide: The Destruction of Home," in *The Home: Words, Interpretations, Meanings, and Environments*, ed. David N. Benjamin et al. (Aldershot, UK: Avebury, 1996), pp. 151–161.

a deadly clamp at times. The boy and his grandfather have the misfortune of inhabiting one of the moments in which the machinery of history is operating in the crushing mode.

Once the mills of history started grinding, space is exposed to further changes. The boy's grandfather is forced to find a new flat for them, because the Germans gradually shrink the area of the ghetto by excluding consecutive streets from it. The new flat is situated in a building which was damaged by a bomb, but it looks bigger than the previous one. However, it is not located in an equally good street and additionally bears traces of its former inhabitants. Rafał starts reading the new space. His attention is absorbed by a huge bureau, an object which is quite paradoxical in those times of contempt, symbolising the lost meanings and no longer likely to serve as a site of intellectual activity. Its gigantic size is a remnant of the past glory of the study, which used to belong to people who are probably no more. The sense of absurdity is only reinforced by the headboard of the bed, embellished with an oval painting of an exotic landscape with palm trees, camels and pyramids in it. When juxtaposed with the snapshots of the Warsaw ghetto, this full-blown pseudo-Egyptian kitsch produces veritably grotesque effects. Rafał's reading of the interior of the building is complemented with literary fictions. In the new flat, Rafał is busy reading *Profesor Przedpotopowicz* [*Professor Antedeluvianer*] by Erazm Majewski, a science-fiction novel published in 1898 which was a genuine bestseller of children's literature in Poland. The boy compares the book with Jules Verne's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*, because in both texts travellers descend underground and experience extraordinary adventures there. This aficionado of sci-fi does not yet know that the books he adores will be prophetic for him.

Namely, the boy is helped to sneak out of the ghetto. From this moment on, he lives outside its bounds. Equipped with a new Polish identity, which is, as one of the protagonists puts it, "a story for the Morlocks,"[457] he knows that his name is Rafał Mortyś, that he lives in Grójec, and that he is just on his way to his aunt Hania in Gocław. In this way, Rafał abandons the legitimate, albeit German-controlled, space and enters the sphere of illicitness. For the occasion of his escape from the ghetto, the boy invents his own "fable": "I imagined that I was a Traveller in Time Land. I've just arrived by time machine in a mysterious, extraordinary future. Nobody must find out that I am not from here and now, so I must pretend to be one of the natives."[458]

457 Szczygielski, *Arka czasu*, p. 87.
458 *Ibid*., p. 95.

The literature-fuelled compensatory power of the imagination is effective enough for Rafał to behave in a very natural way while going out of the ghetto, despite being utterly terrified. Such an attitude increases his chances of survival in the space outside the Quarter. His guide – a young woman who is meaningfully named Stella (in Latin *stella* means a star) – decides to spend the night at a park, under the wooden stage of the amphitheatre. It is a special location whose symbolic import becomes clearer if we recall an earlier episode in the ghetto, when Rafał watched a street performance of a puppet theatre. While the plot of the play did not matter much for the boy, he was seized by immense sadness when looking at the puppets. He sympathised with their condition of imprisonment and then began to pity himself. The cathartic shock he experienced then afflicts him again and even more powerfully on the horrible night spent under the amphitheatre stage.

The place "beneath" which Rafał occupies in the park hideaway stands in contrast with the space of the ghetto, which, though the site of hunger and death, was domesticated by the boy and most importantly marked by reading. Its centre was provided by the library. When hiding under the stage, the boy descends into an illicit realm, where he is doomed to loneliness, darkness and ugliness. Rafał experiences an aesthetic shock there: "It is so dark in the pit that I can hardly see anything. I don't know whether it's deep or not. I lean on the ground and feel straw, pieces of cardboard and rugs under my fingers. It smells of basement and piss."[459] Rafał's position is symbolic. Finding himself under the stage of the world, he realises that neither histrionic glitter nor the lead role is available to him.

Rafał soon finds another hiding place. It is a cellar under what was the stable for zebras in Warsaw zoo which was shelled by the Germans.[460] This marks another stage of his descent into hell; while the amphitheatre, his former shelter, was situated at ground level rather than underground and in spite of everything belonged to the artistic sphere of human activity, the zoo hideaway is simply located in the basement. Consequently, Rafał is forced to go down, below the surface of the earth, and join the order of nature. Paradoxically, the zoo, which is the world of animals, seems to provide more security than the human world.

The cramped and ugly space of the hideaway is a particular challenge to the boy. It is certainly a mental challenge, because Rafał must cope with solitude and

459 *Ibid*., p. 111.

460 During the German occupation, the former director of the zoo Jan Żabiński and his wife lived in an office building inside the zoo. They helped the Jews who were hiding there.

fear. Yet it is also an aesthetic challenge, as the boy, who is a sensitive reader, must bear the ugliness of the world without having any literary support at hand.[461] Furthermore, Rafał faces a philosophical challenge as well, for the place of his concealment, which must be a replacement home for him, becomes an active party in their encounter and "touches" the experiencing one in its unique way.[462] This means that the place, as Elżbieta Rybicka claims, is not a ready-made being, but an event[463] which makes the participants in the encounter behave in certain ways.

Consequently, the refuge of the zoo hideaway generates sequent events. They can be divided into two fields of encounter – with the Other and with the self. Rafał's encounter with the Other is an outcome of his loneliness and his longing for intimacy with another human being. It soon transpires that Rafał is not the only one hiding in the zoo, which is full of people like him – Jewish Robinsons. A special bond emerges and develops among the excluded people who live their illicit lives. Rafał teams up with Lidka and Emek, other young fugitives from the ghetto, and they try to survive together. As their time is paradoxically filled with conversations and carefree play, it seems that the young protagonists have managed to reclaim some of their lost childhood.

Confrontation with one's own body, comprehended as a site where the world is experienced, is an even more momentous dimension of the event that is hiding. According to James Gibson, the human experience of the environment is defined by the medium (water, air, light, transparency), substances (solid objects, limitations) and surfaces (the liminal spaces between the medium and the substance).[464] When Rafał is hiding in the cellar, he experiences only the substance and the surface, and he yearns for the medium, i.e. for that which is inaccessible to the hidden and illicit "beings" – for water, air and light. This longing pushes him to take risks. Together with his companions, he decides to flee using a primitive raft. The river with its open space gives him a chance of freedom and, though it is shrouded in the darkness of the night, affords him an opportunity to fully experience the world. Buried under leaves, the children on the raft bring to mind castaways who can build a new and better world if only they reach a safe shore.

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461 Kaloymus Kalman Shapira, the last rabbi of the Warsaw ghetto, encouraged focusing on beauty in the face of the Holocaust. A fascination with literature and the arts can be subsumed under this appeal. See Ackerman, *The Zookeeper's Wife*, pp. 158–159.

462 Elżbieta Rybicka, *Geopoetyka: Przestrzeń i miejsce we współczesnych teoriach i praktykach literackich* (Kraków: Universitas, 2014), p. 184.

463 *Ibid*., p. 184.

464 In Cobel-Tokarska, *Bezludna wyspa*, pp. 132–133.

Similarly to its Biblical counterpart, the ark which carries Rafał, Emek and Lidka away salvages the world and offers a chance of rebirth. The rebirth even proves to be literal, for Lidka and Rafał will get married years later. There is one more extremely important aspect to Rafał's escape. Namely, it would not have been possible without the thrust it receives from the boy's confidence about surviving the war, which is buttressed by a fantastical experience. The time machine, or maybe the protagonist's imagination, transports him to 2013, where he sees an elderly couple strolling at the zoo together with a young girl. Only later does he recognise himself in the man and Lidka, his wife-to-be, though still only a friend, in the woman, realising that the girl is their granddaughter.

This is a very important observation, as it shows that breaking free from the ghetto space or the hiding place outside the ghetto requires the conquering of time. This inevitably entails building an alternative world beyond the jurisdiction of the terrifying reality. The boy in hiding invents a niche story which paradoxically helps him go out of the darkness and discover what genuine "dwelling" is.

The rudimentary primitiveness of the hideaway emphatically attests to shifts in the phenomenology of dwelling. Warsaw's townhouses, which epitomise bourgeois luxury, are destroyed, so: "The human character of dwelling is doubly constrained: firstly, because the structure of the house resembles the outcome of natural erosion processes […] and secondly because humans discover animals as their fellow creatures […]."[465]

Rafał derives a sense of security not from the human world, but from the animal world, or more precisely, from its remnants. If the townhouse has lost its status as a domesticated space, the definition of the home is re-cast as well. To dwell is to descend to the cellar, to be prepared to abandon the known and the familiar, and consequently to "re-cellar" one's space. Of course, such "boldness" comes at a price. Specifically, it is paid for in anxiety: "[W]e 'hover' in anxiety. More precisely, anxiety leaves us hanging because it induces the slipping away of beings as a whole."[466] Anxiety is inseparable from the (no-)place, and the hiding place is one such. The experience that makes the child perform an act of "re-cellaring" also makes it possible to start forming the home structure anew.

Rafał takes up the challenge and leaves behind one familiar space after another, starting from the flat in Sienna Street and the room in the partly-destroyed

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465 Tadeusz Sławek, "Przeciw swojskości. Piwnica i studnia," in Tadeusz Sławek, *Żaglowiec, czyli Przeciw swojskości: Wybór esejów*, ed. Zbigniew Kadłubek (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2006), pp. 103–134, on p. 127.

466 Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?" p. 367.

townhouse, to the ghetto as such, to the hole under the amphitheatre stage and ending with the cellar under the zebra paddock. His katabasis-like wandering is reminiscent of the peregrinations of a fairy-tale protagonist: having departed from home, he goes through humiliation, but he finally prevails.

Szczygielski's tale culminates in a happy ending. The protagonist is allowed to start a family and grow old, although Jewish children from the time of the Holocaust were rarely able to enjoy such a privilege. Notably, however, the novel conjures up two spaces simultaneously, and while in one of them time is traditionally measured, in the other, parallel one the hands of the clock stand still. In the latter, Rafał is still a young boy who jumps into the present by means of a magical time machine. This temporal arrangement may be more than just a simple device which is popularly used in fantasy literature to connect two parallel worlds through a tunnel of sorts. The repeated returns to the past which refuses to be forgotten are conspicuous, with the grandpa Rafał meeting with himself from many years ago rehearsing the symbolism of the relationship between the pilot-narrator and the Little Prince. If "the Little Prince personifies the latent states of the deep 'self,'"[467] little Rafał is a persistently recurrent image which recalls the childhood trauma. To arrive at an understanding with him and also to dispatch him back into the past for good are necessary conditions of working through the experience of war. Another, equally important condition is met by telling the story which enables the "visitors from the past"[468] – the survivors – to recall the world which is no more but which, as time boundaries are obliterated, constructs an entirely different space – a space of dialogue between generations.

In *Wszystkie moje mamy* and *Bezsenność Jutki*, the plots which involve stints of hiding provide opportunities for depicting affects involved in such an experience. In the former book, Szymon is utterly petrified when escaping from the ghetto in a truck that is transporting washing powder. Darkness, confinement and the intense smell of the powder add a suffocating quality to his fear. In the latter book, Jutka, who lives in the Łódź ghetto, hides in a hole under the floor which her grandfather has prepared for her to wait out the *szpera*. The dark and narrow hideout terrifies the girl, who would prefer to stay with her loved ones, but is persuaded to go into hiding by the myth of Theseus and the labyrinth which her grandfather tells her.

The motifs of the hideaway and hiding as such have an impact on the construction of Jewish protagonists by situating them on the side of darkness. This on the

467 Leszczyński, *Literatura i książka dziecięca*, p. 106.
468 Szczygielski, *Arka czasu*, p. 286.

one hand enhances the effect of the traditional representation of Jews as sons of the Moon and on the other inscribes such characters in the chthonic space, which is terrifying as it is associated with death. The "dark" Jew in Holocaust literature functions in seclusion, entrapment and secrecy, frequently underground or in unpeopled areas, such as the forest or, like Rafał, the zoo. Even if hiding does not involve remaining within concealed confinement, protagonists adopt new identities and pretend to be somebody they are not. They occupy spaces which are located UNDERNEATH or BEHIND. These "invented" places are excluded from the traditional order and embroil those in hiding in a paradoxical situation, because the more such places "do not exist," the more the ones who are hiding exist since their chances of survival increase.

The darkness and hiddenness of the illicit space shelter life, whereas revealment, light and coming out of darkness are puzzlingly tantamount to death. Apparently light and darkness have exchanged their perennial meanings in the world of the inverted Decalogue. If the cultural code has been emptied out of lucid oppositions, new guidelines and reference points must be found.

The nearly canonical narrative based on the ultimate victory of good is subverted in Ryszard Marek Groński's *Szlemiel* [*Schlemiel*], in which the hiding motif is given up for the sake of returning behind the ghetto wall. Joanna, the protagonist of the book, who is taken out of the ghetto with utmost exertion and plenty of luck, hides in various gentile homes, but her looks, which betray the long-lasting starvation and diseases she has suffered, as well as her nostalgia for her family, who have stayed behind in the ghetto, prevent her from enjoying freedom. The girl realises that she will not be able to hide for much longer and resolves to go back to "her folks," even though this decision inevitably means death. She crosses the boundary demarcated by the wall for the second time, yet this time it is a decision she makes on her own. Before, her parents decided for her in order to save their child whatever it took. The cruelty of the ending is enhanced by the scene in which a soldier, astonished as he is at the child's return to the ghetto, aims his rifle at her. Readers part with Joanna at the climactic moment, and the tale which is cut short at this point leaves no hope, not only for any happy ending but even for the girl's final meeting with her parents, be it at least in the ghetto space. The loneliness of the child who goes back to the ghetto and the suspension of the scene which determines her fate are a risky choice as it traumatises readers. The arrival within the familiar space and/or back to the family is not a simple enactment of the usually optimistically coloured homecoming motif. It equals death.

In the context of Groński's book, it can indeed be surprising to notice that when literary texts about the Holocaust raise the problem of parting with or

losing one's family, which is what getaways from the ghetto involve, they prioritise young protagonists' good and life over their need to be with their loved ones. It seems difficult to imagine that a character who is readers' (near) peer and with whom readers have already identified is killed or decides to return to the ghetto, which amounts to a death sentence. When hiding on the Aryan side, protagonists are forced to manage the hiding space, which effectively prevents them from pondering the past or brooding over the family in the ghetto. With the gravity points shifted in this way, living on the Aryan side, though illicit and in hiding, turns into an adventure, and narratives about it come quite close to adventure novels.[469] Although, thankfully, books for young readers cannot be accused of turning the Holocaust into a survival game, the predominance of adventure fosters the production of postmemorial narratives.

b) Clearings of Truth

Rudniańska's *Kotka Brygidy*[470] features a non-Jewish child protagonist and her experience of space. Initially, Helena comfortably believes that the world she knows will go on existing unchanged forever. When she climbs her favourite tree, she can see the panorama of Warsaw, in which an Orthodox church, a synagogue and a Roman Catholic church[471] guarantee divine protection. However, it does not take long before the space to which she is accustomed undergoes a profound overhaul. The Jewish family of Istmans, who have been renting an apartment in the building where Helena's parents live, are forced to move to the ghetto, and a valued employee of Helena's father escapes from the ghetto and goes into hiding in a hole which is dug in the backyard of his former employer's company. The space around Helena has been thoroughly reorganised, as people with whom she was close were removed from it. Although Helena knows that they were resettled to the ghetto, she cannot imagine the place itself.

In an exceptional manoeuvre, the ghetto wall is replaced by a bridge spanning Praga and Muranów[472] in the role of a pivotal image in Rudniańska's book.

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469 Notably, there is a book for adults in which life in a camp is framed as an adventure novel. See Marian Pankowski, *Z Auszwicu do Belsen: Przygody* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 2000).

470 The character of Helena is modelled on Irena Moryson, daughter of Ignacy and Leokadia, who during the war were hiding Beniamin Komar, the author's future father-in-law.

471 Rudniańska, *Kotka Brygidy*, p. 11–12.

472 Praga and Muranów are districts of Warsaw. Muranów was incorporated into the ghetto. A passage in *Kotka Brygidy* depicts a crowd of Jews walking towards it from other parts of Warsaw where they lived before the war.

This rare device in literature for a young readership is intimately related to the category of the witness. While most Holocaust texts for children are based on the narrative of or about a Jewish child, who sees the ghetto from inside, the protagonist of *Kotka Brygidy* is a gentile girl who is cast in the role of a bystander. She is an onlooker and a witness, so her perspective conveys an outsider's view. As Helena is watching the enforced exodus of Jews heading for the ghetto, their walk over the bridge between the two parts of Warsaw seems a pointed allusion to the Biblical passage through the waters of the Red Sea. This crossing, however, has no miraculous allures around it, because against the Scriptural promise of freedom, the wanderers are doomed to imprisonment and death. Adult readers will certainly notice another distressing analogy in this scene, as going over the bridge can be construed as veiled anticipation of death in gas chambers: "Helena saw Jews go from Praga to the ghetto across the Vistula. […] There were very many of them, adults and children, some were carrying suitcases and various other things. […] Jews were entering the bridge, which was encased in metal grids, as if they were going inside a long, low, narrow cage. This was when Helena lost sight of them, but other Jews following those before them kept entering the bridge. That day the sky was grey and heavy; it hung over Warsaw so low as if it were about to plunge into water. […] Jews kept walking, entering that long, low cage and moving on to the other side of the river, who knows where to."[473]

Helena will have an opportunity to see for herself what the ghetto is like. She is prepared for this experience by her father, who tells her what he saw when passing close by the wall. His reports are disturbing and apparently quite unsuited for a child. Yet Helena's father quite deliberately exposes her to these accounts as preparation for a tram ride through the ghetto. He is resolved that his daughter should be a witness. Consequently, the girl knows more that her own mother, who withdrew from life when her beloved friend was displaced to the ghetto. Her husband shields her from tales which could tip her into utter depression. Consequently, the duty of bearing witness is delegated to the youngest generation. As part of memory education, the father takes Helena on a tram ride. The route of the tram runs through the ghetto. In a breach of the rules which make it imperative to protect children against trauma, the father expressly tells his daughter to look and to remember. The paternal injunction of remembering may be cruel from the child's point of view, but it is certainly invaluable for the witness that Helena will become as an adult woman. In a way, the girl was inscribed by her father in the memory project whose overriding function is the obligation

473 Rudniańska, *Kotka Brygidy*, pp. 52–53.

to bear witness. This obligation necessarily entails living in truth. Therefore, the ride though the ghetto teaches Helena a difficult lesson in ethics, and the girl will prove an exceptionally diligent student in the future. Indeed, some of the "poor Poles who look at the ghetto"[474] grow up into individuals who apply themselves to fulfilling the duty of confronting truth and bearing witness to it.

The Post-Jewish Space

Rudniańska's *Kotka Brygidy* is one of the few books about the Holocaust whose ending does not coincide with the end of the war. Out of the one hundred and fifty-five pages of the book, the war and the Holocaust take up exactly one hundred and twenty four pages. The rest of the plot concerns Helena's post-war life, which, as can easily be guessed, is fully determined by the past. The girl, later the woman, will have to live in the post-Jewish space, which will again undergo changes, this time as a result of the rebuilding of the capital.

Helena seems to be the only person in present-day Warsaw who remembers the city's topography from before the war. She strives to assert the memory of places and people, although she realises they have been irretrievably lost. Even as a child, she had a feeling of the totality of this loss, which marked the end of her childhood, of a time of innocence: "And suddenly she saw Gods follow in the footsteps of Jews, old, huge grey-haired Gods in long garments entering the bridge and disappearing, melting in the Jewish crowd, all three of the Gods of Praga. They will never come back, neither the Jews nor the Gods. There is no bridge anymore, there is no return."[475]

The founding myth of post-war Warsaw is the lack of Jews, even though this myth is Helena's own "private initiative." The girl has an impression that nobody remembers their Jewish neighbours. The only people who were interested in the "Jewish issue" are either dead or gone. Helena's mother has left Poland to start a new life with a new man, a German in fact – "uncle" Eric who lives in Munich; the old housemaid dies, and when Helena is a student at university, her father dies as well.

For a long time, the woman does not realise how Warsaw's space has changed. Only when she works for the radio and goes to Praga to do research for her reportage about a puppet theatre does she notice that the synagogue which stood quite near her home no longer exists. Where it once was, a playground has

474 The phrase refers to the title of an important essay by Jan Błoński, which I mention in Chapter One.

475 Rudniańska, *Kotka Brygidy*, p. 122.

been built. The realisation that the space previously occupied by the synagogue has been turned into a site of play is devastating to Helena. The sacredness of the place has been replaced by carefree leisure, which invalidates the past and seems to mock the locations which were once important landmarks on the urban map.[476] The cartography of memory has been thoroughly re-cast, distorting the previous meanings of places. As we know, urban anthropology relies on the "typology of relations between the space of a location and cultural memory, which is governed by three metaphorical concepts: palimpsest, trace and battlefield."[477] However, the Warsaw space is not likely to involve such a multiplicity of negotiations, because two of these three categories are basically not to be found in it. If no trace of Jews has been preserved, with the synagogue replaced by a playground, the post-Jewish space all the more so cannot function as a battlefield,[478] for it has neither the necessary material resources (nothing was left of it) nor the support of the community (the past is of no interest to anybody). Palimpsest is therefore the only remaining figure, but it resembles arcane, occult knowledge which is accessible only to the chosen few, such as Helena.

Following the reasoning of Paul Connerton,[479] the woman possesses the memory of emplacement, which is bodily memory, distinctive of those who have long inhabited a place and experienced it from inside. The memory of the synagogue, which as such becomes a metonymy of the Holocaust, is imprinted in Helena's awareness and is therefore indelible. Realising that the contemporary generation of people younger than herself do not have a similar experience of the past, Helena only wants them to be supplied with a different form of memory whose aim is commemoration. Driven by this urge, she talks to mothers who are watching their children at the playground and tells them about the past of

476 The process of redefining places is best exemplified in the Poznań synagogue, which was turned into a swimming pool. See Katarzyna Kuczyńska-Koschany and Joanna Roszak, "Upominanie-odpominanie. Poznańska synagoga w tekstach poetyckich," *Polonistyka*, No. 6 (2005), pp. 48–50.

477 Elżbieta Janicka, "Zamiast negacjonizmu. Topografia symboliczna terenu dawnego getta warszawskiego a narracje o Zagładzie," *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały*, Vol. 1, No. 10 (2014), pp. 209–256, on p. 211.

478 Besides official and "canonical" places, the map of Warsaw contains at least two sites which in a somewhat avant-garde fashion recall the city's Jewish community. They are two artworks by Joanna Rajkowska which are placed respectively at the Charles de Gaulle Roundabout (*Greetings from Jerusalem Avenue*) and at Grzybowski Square (*The Oxygenator*).

479 Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

the place where the sandpit is now located. The women are reluctant to listen to stories about the burnt-down and demolished synagogue, and eventually call Helena a lunatic.

Helena believes that the space left by the synagogue, which for herself forms a *milieu de mémoire* (a natural environment of memory), should be transformed into a place of memory – a *lieu de mémoire*[480] (defined by Pierre Nora not only as a place of memory, but also as events, processes and people in whom the national legacy is crystallised) – accessible to contemporary generations. Until this happens, it will not be possible to generate postmemory, for there is no space which could be referred to when building dialogue between the war generation and the post-war generation.

Deprived of the space which once belonged to Jews as well, Helena feels dispossessed of memory and a stranger in the city which was restructured in compliance with a new agenda. The capital was not rebuilt; rebuilding would have entailed regenerating the lost space, which though no longer inhabited by its former dwellers, would have symbolically testified to their existence. Instead, the restructuring of the capital is supposed to herald the emergence of a new, better world with no trace of the traumas of the past, which could leave undesirable marks on the healthy surface of the city. The newly constructed streets which meet the requirements of *milieux de memoire* no longer form a Jewish space. They belong to an entirely different – Polish – collective memory, and as such they produce an entirely different narrative, one of heroic struggle, honour and the loss incurred in the Warsaw Uprising.[481]

The post-Jewish space cannot count on the comfort of remembrance, which admittedly may induce indifference and the repetition of trained, empty gestures. In the opinion of contemporary people, this place is not even Jewish or

480 See Szpociński "Miejsca pamięci."

481 There is a notable example of the "overlap" of the Polish-Jewish space. Monika Kowaleczko-Szumowska's book about child heroes of the Warsaw Uprising tells a story of Jewish brothers who managed to escape from the burning ghetto. On the Aryan side, they joined a battalion of insurgents. Only then did Miki (the codename of Zalman, one of the brothers) think of himself as a real soldier. He carried messages and reports and even volunteered to deliver to the Germans who had barricaded themselves in a bank building a letter calling on them to surrender. Miki strays from the typical Jewish protagonists with whom readers of the fourth literature are acquainted, as he is not a scared victim in hiding, but fights with a Polish-Jewish "gang" of Varsovians against their common enemy. See Monika Kowaleczko-Szumowska, *Fajna ferajna*, illustrated by Elżbieta Chojna (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo BIS, 2015).

post-Jewish, for it is part of the order which from the very beginning was drained out of the presence of the Other. Consequently, the very act of calling it "post-Jewish" can be regarded as a success of postmemory.[482]

Helena, the protagonist of *Kotka Brygidy*, who practices an archaeology of memory, realises that commemoration of the past through rituals ascribed to particular places may be a way to retrieve the memory of post-Jewish space. For this to be accomplished, a vital condition must be met. Namely, the symbolic gestures of commemoration must be informed by specific knowledge about the past, something which no one seems to have time or inclination to acquire.

This is why Helena re-invents her mission of memory retrieval. She abandons the ineffective format of talking to people for the sake of micro-history which incorporates the Jewish past in her Polish present. As part of this pursuit, she cuts out pre-war photographs of Jews from an album published by Warsaw's Zachęta, because she believes that one of them shows Brygida, her Jewish peer whom she never met, but whose she-cat she looked after when Brygida's family were forced to move to the ghetto. Helena lives her life in the shadow of the memory of Brygida, and throughout her adult years tries to find the girl. The image cut out from the album is a substitute for the lost person; Helena puts it into a frame and places it among her family photographs in an attempt to rebuild her private space. This is only a tiny gesture when compared to the magnitude of the loss, but a massive venture in re-formulating memory by an individual.

In this way, the post-Jewish space in *Kotka Brygidy* is thoroughly re-invented. It disappears from the topography of the city and from the cultural memory of the post-war community, but it unexpectedly re-surfaces in the private space of memory, which takes it in possession and integrates it with the Polish-Jewish narrative. Rudniańska obliterates the division between Polish and Jewish memory, thus promoting the continuation of postmemorial narrative based on a new set of principles. The two varieties of memory neither rival each other nor negotiate meanings, but attentively listen to their narrative, looking for shared places in it.

Helena's actions are part of her private project of postmemory. Yet this is not where the author chose to conclude her tale. The protagonist of the book decides to change her own form and the place where she wants to be. The fantastic convention enables Helena to transfigure upon her death into a she-cat, to be relocated to Jerusalem and to face the Wailing Wall. In this way, Helena bears

482 "Post-Jewish space" is a term coined by Konrad Matyjaszek in discussion with Diana Pinto's concept of Jewish space. See Konrad Matyjaszek, "Przestrzeń pożydowska," *Studia Litteraria et Historica*, No. 2 (2013), pp. 130–147.

witness to the past not only with her entire life, but also with her death, a mission for which she was already predestined as a child.

Non-place: The Disneyland of Memory

Post-Jewish space, together with the memory of the past, can be transferred to the virtual world. In this case, it will be situated in a non-place as theorised by Marc Augé.[483] In his framework, non-places are ahistorical, inauthentic and commercialised. While Augé himself counts airports, highways, shopping malls and venues produced by the tourist industry within this non-place category, the virtual space displays typical features of a non-place as well. Importantly, the virtual space is also a site where the imperative of commemoration is realised.

The transfer of memory from the real to the virtual space of the Internet occurs in Paweł Beręsewicz's *Wszystkie lajki Marczuka* [*All the likes of Marczuk*]. In the novel, its protagonist, Adam, is a contemporary junior high school student in Warsaw who sets out to win a school contest for a project on a local hero. The memory boom inspires the teenager to work on a project devoted to an obscure Marczuk, who as a young boy allegedly saved Jews during the war, although he was not very fond of them. Bent on winning the contest, Adam sets up an account for Marczuk on Facebook, where he posts information about the hero of Choszczówka.[484] Young Internet users "like" this public account by clicking – often thoughtlessly – the characteristic "hands." It does not take long before a vogue for Marczuk and for the theme of rescuing Jews during the war soars at the school and in the area. However, it soon turns out that this idol of Polish youth never existed, except as Adam's invention. The boy's coherent story has fooled everybody: the students, the principal, the Ministry of Education and the private sponsor who, delighted with another Righteous found in Poland, offered to fund a trip to Israel for the students of Adam's school.

Beręsewicz's book embodies a very original and subversive interpretation of the fashionable slogan of postmemory, which is perhaps abused today. On the one hand, it addresses the need for grand returns to the past and even more emphatically articulates the temptation of having another Jew-saving hero in the national pantheon, and on the other it quite mercilessly diagnoses the condition of our memory and the forms of celebrating it.

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483 Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London, UK, and New York, NY: Verso, 1995).

484 Choszczówka is a residential estate in the north-eastern part of Warsaw.

Beręsewicz's analysis indicates that history is being commercialised, and the likenesses of historical heroes are being reduced to embellishments on t-shirts, key-rings, fridge magnets and other patriotic gadgets. In this way, they are part of the folklore of memory rather than of the culture of memory. As a consequence, the heroes, while ubiquitously remembered, at the same time remain commonly unknown. When memory is reduced to a vignette, an emblem, the proverbial and rightly criticised "Jew with a coin,"[485] empty gestures begin to proliferate beyond measure and, worse perhaps, they are mistaken for remembering. Generated and spreading in this way, the "Disneyland of memory" may indeed be attractive, but it is primarily founded on simplifications and stereotypes. Such practices may offer a glimpse of the past, but they do not offer any real knowledge of the past, which is presented in an easily digestible and non-committal version.[486]

Such pseudo-rituals of remembering are enacted in the space of the non-place which, having no previous models of its own, has not developed suitable strategies concerning the history of the space and resulting from the evolution of reflection on modes of commemoration. As a place disconnected from the model, the Internet always relies on the same ritual, which is valid while buying a product, evaluating a posted photograph or commenting on somebody else's opinion. The icon of a hand giving a thumbs-up is the expression of acceptance in the virtual code, but when it is transplanted into the discourse on the Holocaust, it violates principles of decorum and reflects the flippant ease with which the young generation communicate both criticism and approval.

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485 Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, "Żyd z pieniążkiem," in *PL: Tożsamość wyobrażona*, ed. Joanna Tokarska-Bakir (Warszawa: Czarna Owca, 2013), pp. 8–31. "The Jew with a coin" refers to images and figurines which are popular good-luck talismans in Poland. They present the Jew as an elderly man wearing traditional garments and holding a coin in his hand. Such items are sold not only at popular fairs but also at post-Jewish venues (e.g., Cracow's district of Kazimierz) as "official" souvenirs. They are often found as ornaments in restaurants which serve Jewish cuisine. "The Jew with a coin" exemplifies the longevity of the stereotype of the Jew in Polish culture and the illusoriness of Polish-Jewish dialogue.

486 The commercialisation of the Holocaust worries Jacek Leociak: "What I fear most is that the Holocaust will be McDonaldised and will forever remain the lifeblood of mass culture. This would mean on the one hand that the Holocaust cannot be forgotten and erased from consciousness, but on the other that it is 'served' in ever lighter forms, 'concocted' for the consumers of pop-cultural pulp. Such a Holocaust is bound to become light, easy and pleasant." See http://www.otwarta.org/jacek-leociak-lekcja-ktorej-nie-mozna-odrobic/. Accessed 10 Oct. 2015.

As Dariusz Czaja writes, non-places are all the locations which "are antithetical to home, the domesticated and personalised space which has an orientation (nearly like a temple), its own history and accumulated memory."[487] Additionally, non-places "not only express the contemporary mindset, but also enhance its obsessions. They encompass anonymous spaces, areas without qualities; they not only engender but also amplify our sense of uprootedness and alienation,"[488] despite ostensibly building a community of memory.

Czaja demonstrates that the concept of the non-place has proven universal enough for Giorgio Agamben to employ it for depicting death camps.[489] In *Remnants of Auschwitz*, Agamben portrays the camp as a system of concentric circles with the *Muselmann* at its centre.[490] The *Muselmann*, whom Primo Levi called the complete witness of the Holocaust in his *The Drowned and the Saved*,[491] occupies a non-place, a space that belongs to the anti-world.

Books whose action is set in a concentration camp are extremely rare in literature for children and young adults (John Boyne's well-known *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* is addressed to a dual readership). Importantly, between 1972 and 1984 selected passages from Bodgan Bartnikowski's excellent *Dzieciństwo w pasiakach* (*Childhood behind Barbed Wire*)[492] were included in the obligatory reading list for elementary schools, even though the book was intended for adult readers, as expressly stated in the cover inscription.

Another attempt at incorporating the topos of the camp into children's imaginarium of the Holocaust can be found in a collaborative project of a Spanish writer and a Polish illustrator. *Dym* (*Humo/Smoke*) is a picturebook for

487 Dariusz Czaja, "Nie-miejsca. Przybliżenia, rewizje," in *Inne przestrzenie, inne miejsca. Mapy i terytoria*, ed. Dariusz Czaja (Wołowiec: Czarne, 2013), pp. 7–26, on p. 10.

488 *Ibid*., p. 11.

489 See *Ibid*., p. 22.

490 Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York, NY: Zone Books, 2008), pp. 51–52.

491 Cf. "[…] they are the 'Muslims' [*Muselmänner*], the submerged, the complete witnesses." Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York, NY: Summit Books, 1988), p. 84.

492 Bogdan Bartnikowski, *Dzieciństwo w pasiakach* (Warszawa: Nasza Księgarnia, 1977). For the English edition, see Bogdan Bartnikowski, *Childhood behind Barbed Wire*, trans. Tomasz Pobóg-Malinowski (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2009). The protagonist of the clearly autobiographical novel is not Jewish, but he was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau as part of the Nazi reprisals against the population of Warsaw in the wake of the Warsaw Uprising. The protagonist's friendship with Roma children is among the many interesting motifs of the book.

an unspecified readership[493] which laconically presents a boy's life in a concentration camp and his eventual death in the gas chamber. As the story metaphorises the Holocaust both pictorially and linguistically, the plot is incoherent and dissociated from any easily identifiable context: though suspended in indefinite time and symbolic space, it culminates in the gas chamber. Young readers stand no chance of understanding the fundamental circumstances, as they do not know who the protagonist is and why he finds himself in the camp. At the same time, they are exposed to the tragic ending, complete with a terrifying scene of the separation of the child from the mother and consequently the child's death.

Such a decontextualisation potentially universalises the theme of the Holocaust and at the same time provokes excessive identification with the protagonist, who simply becomes Everyman. The latter might even be a desirable effect, were it not for the fact that young readers are not provided with any means of overcoming the trauma caused by the reading.[494]

Unfortunately, kitsch plays a not insignificant role in the fourth literature, which mediates "contact" with the past. Resorting to kitsch is associated with attempts to accommodate the crime of the Holocaust so as to make it explainable and describable.[495] Kitsch, which is an "art of happiness,"[496] proposes the "unbearable lightness of emotion" which is induced by simple devices. Located at the intersection of the high and the low, kitsch is often infantile, more often flatly realistic and most often trashy and tacky.[497] The fourth literature is no stranger to

493 See Antón Fortes and Joanna Concejo, *Dym*, trans. Beata Haniec (Toruń: Tako, 2011). For the original Spanish edition, see Antón Fortes and Joanna Concejo, *Humo* (Pontevedera: OQO Editora, 2008); for the English edition, see Antón Fortes and Joanna Concejo, *Smoke* (Pontevedera: OQO Editora, 2009).

494 Similar objections can be advanced against probably the first book for a young readership which describes the Romani genocide (*Porajmos* – the Devouring). See Natalia Gancarz, *Mietek na wojnie*, illustrated by Diana Karpowicz (Tarnów: Muzeum Okręgowe, 2013).

495 Paweł Śpiewak, "Kicz i estetyzacja polityki," in Saul Friedländer, *Refleksy nazizmu. Esej o kiczu i śmierci* (*Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death*), trans. Marcin Szuster (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2011), p. 22.

496 Abraham Moles, *Kicz, czyli sztuka szczęścia. Studium o psychologii kiczu*, trans. Anita Szczepańska and Ewa Wende (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1978). For the original French version, see Abraham Moles, *Le Kitsch, l'art. du bonheur* (Paris: Maison Mame, 1971).

497 Kitsch is deeply embedded in pop-culture, as is the "Holocaust industry" together with its signature cinematic products: Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* and Mark Herman's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. The mushy effect of these film narratives is produced by the idealisation of the protagonists, a comforting message about the

the aesthetics of kitsch, but Polish writers thankfully seem to have steered clear of it. How deeply readers desire kitsch and how profoundly pop-culture shapes the needs of writers, which are expressed in contriving to give the Holocaust an appearance of sense, can be inferred from the stunning success of Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief*. One of the narrators in the book is Death, who according to Małgorzata Chrobak, "rather [r]esembles an Angel of Death, a quiet and delicate envoy who is subordinate to another principal – war (which he depicts as a bad boss)."[498]

I consider such a rendering of death to be quite a disturbing phenomenon. In the times of the Holocaust, death is turned into a noble guide through the hell of war, affably explaining to readers what they see and at the same time assuring them that the "witnessed" scenes carry a secret meaning which is not available to common mortals. Death is sometimes moved by human suffering, but most of the time indulges in historiosophical musings. In this way, readers receive a total Holocaust product: a maturation story of young Liesel in the time of the Holocaust, a tale about a German Jew in hiding, a treatise about the incredible potency of reading and finally a sermon on good and evil. Fashioned in this way, the narrative about the Holocaust is not only a coherent story of the past, but also a "convenient" read for contemporary readers. They can indeed feel complacent, for they have read, found out, understood and felt emotional. More than that, in all probability, they have also had an opportunity to feel emotional about their own emotion.

Space Talks

Space in the fourth literature is a very important vehicle of memory. Since it tends to be employed for its illustrative function, its rendering contributes considerably to the construction of literary representations of the ghetto. This is obviously its fundamental function.

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triumph of good over evil and scenes which are tailored to move mass audiences, who then become "emotional about their own emotion." Even though only tenuously related to reality, the films became blockbusters, and their admirers were inclined to believe that they faithfully pictured the events of the Holocaust.

498 Małgorzata Chrobak, "*Złodziejka książek* Markusa Zusaka – obraz inicjacji w 'mrocznych czasach,'" in *"Stare" i "nowe" w literaturze dla dzieci i młodzieży*, eds. Bożena Olszewska and Elżbieta Łucka-Zając (Opole: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 2010), pp. 189–200, on p. 192.

Nevertheless, the interpretation of space after the shift from the war context to the present seems to be far more interesting as regards research on postmemory. In this process, it first and foremost becomes the post-Jewish space, which is partly a predicament and partly an obligation. The two books discussed in this chapter – *Kotka Brygidy* and *Wszystkie lajki Marczuka* – engage in discourse on the post-Jewish space with a great deal of honesty vis-à-vis readers. This discourse primarily serves to explore and perhaps also take to account attitudes to, feelings about and opinions on the past. Rudniańska and Beręsewicz stirred up a proverbial hornet's nest. It may be a way to heal what has been ideologised, infected with kitsch and consequently misremembered or to reclaim what has fallen into total oblivion. Their books argue that caring for memory involves laborious efforts not only of communities, but primarily of individuals in these communities. It is for individuals that books about the Holocaust are intended as part of the groundwork of postmemory, because "schools in Poland scarcely sustain the ruptured generational transmission concerning Jewish culture. Good books which are read at home can fill this gap."[499] It takes honest dialogue with the past, one that while shielding from trauma is founded on truth, to include young readers in intergenerational discussion.

499 Maria Borzęcka, "Mały antysemita," *Ryms*, No. 11 (2010), pp. 10–11, on p. 10.

Chapter Seven The Dybbuk Versus Facebook

In an interview with Roma Sendyka and Katarzyna Bojarska, Ernst van Alphen voiced his doubts about the notion of "postmemory." Specifically, Van Alphen takes issue with Hirsh's suggestion that the original trauma of survivors can in a sense be transmitted onto their offspring, and that this transfer takes the form of memory. While he does not object to the meaning of the prefix ("post"), he believes that "memory" as such is a fallacious term in this context, for the problem of the second and third generations does not lie in a surfeit of memory, but altogether elsewhere. In his view, it is caused by practices of subjectification and identification, by talking about things which were silenced and interpretations of such silencing. Given this, the core of the matter is a lack of memory, rather than memory as such, and the sense of guilt associated with this lack.[500]

At another point, Van Alphen adds that even acquisition of knowledge, the repeated rehearsals of which often cause young people to feel bored, is not identical with memory. After all, unlike Primo Levi, who believed that forgetting the Holocaust would be disastrous for the world, Charles Maier claimed that our predicament was "a surfeit of memory," and that it caused the canonisation of memory and an addiction to remembering.[501]

Literature about the Holocaust for a young readership grapples with the problem of memory. While, in our cultural circle, an adult reader who is entirely ignorant about the Shoah is a hardly imaginable specimen, children's literature cannot count on adult-like competences in its readers or expect them to be fluently conversant with the past. The texts which are addressed to a young or very young reading public are up to a daunting, if not gruelling, task, and by default too, for their readers are defenceless, in the sense of not being shielded either by historical knowledge or by habituated clichés. As a result, children's literature attempts to fashion representations of the Holocaust which furnish readers with necessary knowledge and, importantly, move them (hopefully not by means of kitsch), but without traumatising them. The narrative energy is primarily carried by universal topoi, even mythologems, of childhood, which the reader has not been aware of before. It is only their Holocaust-triggered deconstruction that terminates their transparency and makes children recognise them as values.

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500 Alphen, "Afekt," p. 215.

501 Charles S. Maier, "A Surfeit of Memory? Reflections on History, Memory and Denial," *History and Memory*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Fall-Winter 1993), pp. 136–152.

Among the texts I have explored, there are two which distinctly veer from the entrenched canonisation of the Holocaust in the fourth literature and above all from the already more or less precisely defined manner of constructing memory.

The Dybbuk: A Case Study of *Kotka Brygidy* by Joanna Rudniańska

Joanna Rudniańska's *Kotka Brygidy* [*Brigid's She-Cat*] seemingly embraces the "safe" paradigm of the literary representations of the Holocaust; however, as it revolves around the protagonist's unprocessed trauma caused by the loss of her Jewish double of a friend, it may emotionally overwhelm readers. Helena is emotionally attached to Brygida, her Jewish peer, even though the girls have never met face to face. Helena constantly senses Brigid's presence, all the more so that the she-cat which she is looking after in Brigid's absence strengthens the bond between the girls. Helena knows that Brigid is in the ghetto, but when the cat suddenly disappears, she believes that the animal has returned to the ghetto, found Brygida and led her out of the closed quarter to save the girl's life. Even after the war, Helena cherishes this vision of events and misses her never-seen friend throughout her adult life, time and again making attempts to seek her out.

The twelve chapters of the novel have cardinal numerals for their titles, which arrange the narrative in an orderly sequence. This is certainly a meaningful choice, with the numbers in all likelihood referring to months. The penultimate and ultimate chapters have also subtitles, respectively: "Jedenaście. Potem" ["Eleven: Afterwards"] and "Dwanaście. Przyszłego roku w Jerozolimie" ["Twelve: Next Year in Jerusalem"]. The ten previous chapters of the book make up the whole war-time chapter of Helena's life, which still lacks closure, despite the passage of time. The final two chapters provide this conclusion, capping Helena's life, which is redolent of the twelve months of mourning (*shneim asar chodesh*)[502] observed after the death of a father or mother, i.e. the closest kin. Instead of for a parent, the already grown-up Helena grieves for her childhood sweetheart Tomek, for Brygida and for the entire world which she once witnessed crossing over to the other side of the Vistula.[503] Nevertheless, the title of the last chapter evokes the words uttered at the end of the Seder: "Next year in Jerusalem," which suggests that the feast of Pesach is associated not only with

502 See Jędrzejewski, *Judaizm*, p. 257.

503 In one episode in the book, Helena watches Jews enter and go over the bridge to Muranów, a neighbourhood of Warsaw where the ghetto was established.

the memory of the past, but above all with the promise of the miracle happening again. For this reason, Helena on the one hand is doomed to loneliness as a wailer who never starts a family, but on the other attains fulfilment by joining the world which was lost in the past. She has come to believe that she is a guardian of Holocaust memory.

Helena dies, but at her express wish she is transfigured into a she-cat by an angel. This metamorphosis can obviously be attributed to the fantastic convention, but the daring tale of Helena's struggles with memory encourages the interpretation of her transformation as a reincarnation. Jewish mysticism perpetuates the belief in the return of souls, because the souls of righteous people come back to carry on the mending and bettering of the world. Reincarnation is also cited to explain "instances of particular fondness of Judaism which is felt by some non-Jews."[504]

Who had Helena been before she became Helena? A Jewish girl perhaps? Or had her identification with Brygida – her Jewish double – grown so strong that Helena lived her own life for her ghetto-bound double? These questions are not easy to answer. The fact is that in her feline form Helena "comes back" to Jerusalem as if she had actually been there before. This is where she eventually feels at home, for it is the birthplace of the world which earlier fell to pieces before her eyes: "Two old women are talking at dusk. Three Gods are waiting for the world."[505]

The ending of the story does not offer solace; instead it demands interpretive toil. We do not know who Helena met at the Wailing Wall. Was it after all Brygida, who, as readers learn, had left Poland and settled in Jerusalem? With Helena finding Brygida after so many years, such an ending would sound an optimistic note, the tragedy and pain of the story notwithstanding. But another viable interpretation is that the person she encounters is the narrator, which is suggested by the italics used in the last Jerusalem-set episodes of the novel. The change of font, which clearly demarcates these passages from the rest of the text, suggest the onset of another narrative order. Consequently, it may imply that the story of Helena and her trauma of loss already belongs to the past, memory and literature. In this way, personal pain is incorporated into a universal narrative, which ascribes a witness's status to Helena, who is now being told about, rather than herself telling about things. With Helena transformed from a teller into the

504 Jędrzejewski, *Judaizm*, p. 26.
505 Rudniańska, *Kotka Brygidy*, p. 155.

subject of a tale, the woman who accompanies her becomes "a witness of a witness," an interesting but as yet underexamined category.

My concern with the novel's traumatising impact on its readers arises from my observation that the protagonist not so much remembers the sufferings of Others, as rather transfers them upon herself. Memory paralyses her and prevents her from engaging in any action other than brooding over pain. In other words, Helena assumes not only the responsibility to remember, but also the Jewish identity, and in a sense adopts the role of a survivor who is tragically scarred by the Holocaust. The idea of the Holocaust affecting a Polish child on the Aryan side as strongly as a Jewish child in the ghetto is a fairly rare one.

Because of the specific context in which the transference of suffering takes place, Helena's absorption of pain echoes the story of a dybbuk, which evolved as part of the kabbalist faith in the transmigration of souls. In Hebrew, "dybbuk" means adherence and clinging. In Jewish folklore, it represents the spirit of a murdered or unburied person that enters the body of a living person. A dybbuk chooses the body of a noble and pious individual, who consequently forfeits his/her identity and displays symptoms of insanity and frenzy. The victims of dybbuks can only be liberated from their power by a zaddik.[506]

Helena seems to be possessed by a dybbuk of memory. Admittedly, this can be an understandable situation, especially if the Holocaust is comprehended as a trauma, that is, as "a history of nonmastery."[507] Consequently, "teaching a history of trauma means teaching knowledge that is not in mastery of itself. […] Holocaust teaching confronts us with the problem of how to master by means of teaching a past that has not yet been mastered and cannot be mastered."[508] As such, *Kotka Brygidy* could be a perfect read within the canon devoted to exposing the "lack of mastery."

However, if we follow Shoshana Felman, who argues that "[i]n the era of the Holocaust, of Hiroshima, of Vietnam – in the age of testimony – teaching […] must […] *testify*, make something *happen*, and not just transmit a passive knowledge, pass on information that is preconceived, substantified, believed to

506 The dybbuk motif was popularised by Szymon Anski, who in his popular play *Dybuk* [*The Dybbuk*] (1914) combined the themes of possession and unrequited love. In this way, he peculiarly integrated Jewish folklore and the Romantic tradition.

507 Ernst van Alphen, "Holocaust Toys: Pedagogy of Remembrance through Play," in *Impossible Images: Contemporary Art after the Holocaust*, eds. Shelley Hornstein, Laura Levitt and Laurence J. Silberstein (New York, NY, and London, UK: New York University Press, 2003), pp. 157–178, on p. 166.

508 *Ibid*.

be known in advance, misguidedly believed, that is, to be (exclusively) a *given*,"[509] then *Kotka Brygidy* does not change anything in our "understanding" of the Holocaust, despite being an excellent novel which tackles multiple educationally invaluable issues and encourages engagement in relevant discussions. On this take, although Rudniańska's novel is an incredibly honest book, since it addresses difficult and inconvenient themes as directly and emphatically as the age of the implied reader permits, it is nothing more than a summa of Holocaust narratives.

As I am fascinated with the novel, I do not offer these remarks as an objection against it, but rather share reflections which I cannot shake off as a teacher. I more subscribe to the concept of teaching as access rather than as transmission: "As far as the great literary subjects are concerned, teaching must itself be viewed not merely as *transmitting*, but as *accessing* the crisis or the critical dimension which […] is inherent in the literary subjects. Each great subject has a turning point contained within it, and that turning point has to be met. The question for the teacher is, then, on the one hand, how to access, how *not to foreclose* the crisis, and, on the other, how to *contain it*, how much crisis can the class sustain."[510] Consequently, contemporary education – against the radical insistence that the memory of the Holocaust should not aim either to overcome the past or to come to terms with its nightmares[511] – should face up to the trauma of the Holocaust.

Kotka Brygidy is a book which certainly does not foreclose the crisis about which Felman writes, because it is unviable to deny something that constituted the generational experience of war-time children, at least of the more attentive and sensitive among them. It is likewise unviable to offer to the contemporary young generation the trauma of survivors and missed mourning, that is, experiences to which they can in no way relate and which are mediated solely by prosthetic memory.[512]

509 Shoshana Felman, "Education and Crisis, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching," in Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (London, UK, and New York, NY: Routledge, 1992), pp. 1–56, on p. 53.

510 *Ibid*., p. 54.

511 Franklin Rudolf Ankersmit, *Historical Representation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 193.

512 For a thorough discussion of prosthetic memory, see Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*.

Facebook: A Case Study of *Wszystkie lajki Marczuka* by Paweł Beręsewicz

The title of Beręsewicz's novel – *Wszystkie lajki Marczuka* [*All the Likes of Marczuk*] – may come across as rather surprising for a book which addresses the theme of the Holocaust.[513] The opening sentence of the story – "Marczuk didn't like Jews" – sounds truly scandalous. Readers who have been exposed to the practices of intercultural education, exorcised with "the encounter with the Other" and raised in the age of political correctness are bound to feel uncomfortable. They immediately fall back on the mechanisms of shameful stereotypes and hit upon a proper moniker for Marczuk right away: he is an anti-Semite. However, the very next sentences read: "Two Jews specifically: Josek Wyszkower and Aaron Goldberg. They pissed him off. Josek had once called Marczuk a rotten pear, and Aaron had said that Marczuk was so ugly that no girl would ever want to kiss him. But Marczuk also liked Jews. Three Jews, precisely: Heniek, Dawid and Berek. […] He held no fixed opinions about other Jews."[514]

This is how this real rollercoaster of a novel starts. Beręsewicz evokes stereotypes, images and topoi associated with the Holocaust to which we have already become accustomed. One of them is anti-Semitism, which is presented in educational discourse as one of the causes of the Holocaust. All students know it for certain, as this is what they have been taught at school. Soon enough, however, this lead is proved wrong, because the depiction of Marczuk hinges not on his aversion, but on the right to have one's purely human likes or dislikes, even if a Jew is their object. As early as on the first page of his book Beręsewicz ticks two crucial boxes: anti-Semitism and philo-Semitism, at the same time showing that either of them can be a nearly perverse transgression.

As if this were not enough, Marczuk, "who didn't like Jews," saves a Jewish mother and her two daughters. He helps the Jews hide in a barn which is owned by the very man who unleashed hell by reporting the attorney Mielnikowski for concealing Jews on his estate. Marczuk, an unruly lad, unexpectedly turns hero.

Yet another twist of the plot comes straightaway. It is revealed that Marczuk has never existed. He is just a phantasm, a figment of the imagination, a composite invention based on books, films and testimonies of survivors and brought forth by Adam Zieliński, a contemporary student of a junior high school in Choszczówka (a neighbourhood of Warsaw), and an anti-biography of the

513 I discussed the plot of this book in more detail in the previous chapter.

514 Paweł Beręsewicz, *Wszystkie lajki Marczuka*, illustrated by Olga Reszelska (Łódź: Literatura, 2012), p. 5.

same scale as the fabrications of Binjamin Wilkomirski, a Holocaust forger. Adam creates a hero with whom he can identify as a peer. But his phantasmatic adventure is not fuelled by the need for either compensation or self-therapy; the invented hero is a purely commercial product and an instrument for getting even with the boy's biggest and most hated rival. This is the motive that drives his forgery of history. His iteration of the Holocaust narrative is equipped with all the necessary trappings. Adam is perfectly versed in the basics of the Holocaust and skilfully utilises his knowledge. Consequently, his story by default features a victim, and one that is multiplied and heightened to boot. Mother and daughters are Jewish, feminine and young, which makes them particularly pitiable victims. Other signature literary Holocaust paraphernalia are not lacking, either, as the plot involves hiding, searches, denunciations, escapes, traitors, brutal German soldiers, a noble-minded Jew who pardons a Pole who has harmed him, and a little house which becomes an ark for help-seeking Jews.

Adam, a contemporary junior high school student, cynically takes advantage of the topoi of the Holocaust to become popular with his peers. Marczuk's Facebook account, which the boy sets up, receives more and more likes, which implies that the homework on the Holocaust has been conscientiously done. Students recognise as their own the images instilled during Polish and history lessons. Marczuk is fashioned in the way that caters to the demands of the embarrassing history of Polish-Jewish relations, about which they have certainly learnt at school as well. The narratives of the past require heroes, because they need alternatives and antidotes to unbearable tales.

Therefore Marczuk is a perfect product of the postmemory industry. His inventor views him as an opportunity to make his mark. Memory does not matter here, as the cynical utilisation of Holocaust narratives lies at the centre of the enterprise. The history of a Jew-saving hero, which is woven of plausible events, second-hand words and borrowed literary devices, becomes a postmodernist tale which is aware of its own artificiality. It has a saving grace to it, since it continues to inquire into its own ontological status. It asks "what are you?" and "are you for real?" Honesty calls for admitting to falsifying the truth.

This is what Adam does when he confesses the truth, even though the principal urges him to adhere to the initial version of the Marczuk story. The boy has understood the difference between the probable and the true.

In my view Beręsewicz's book is a variation on the theme of postmemory. Its plot contains a warning against the contemporary temptation to be offhand about the memory of the Holocaust. Not only does it not engage with trauma the way *Kotka Brygidy* does, but it also lacks compassion for the protagonists of the invented story. It is saturated with cold detachment with undertones of cynicism,

and the tale itself is powered by the pursuit of fame or perhaps only of publicity. In all honesty, "practising" and instrumentalising the Holocaust in such a way are no longer shocking today.

In fact, Beręsewicz has far more to say. The book itself is an excellent lead-in to talking about the Holocaust, without ascribing to the fourth generation trauma, a category which does not concern children. Instead, we are offered a tale about truth, about the honest way of relating the past and about our intentions in transmitting the past. The form – that is, the representation of the Holocaust – as Beręsewicz seems to argue, can be negotiated.

Given this, *Wszystkie lajki Marczuka* is a book which attests that, as far as the Holocaust is concerned, we have not yet seen it all; far from it, indeed. I feel that Beręsewicz shares the sentiments expressed by Van Alphen, who states that "painful places," such as Auschwitz, must receive their artistic rendering which engages interpretive efforts, imagination and understanding, instead of repeating procedures and re-producing (inflicting) pain by constantly acting out the same uncanny symptoms. Beręsewicz also appears to subscribe to Van Alphen's appeal that we cultivate awareness so as to avoid multiplying repetitions or, if we do repeat, to repeat consciously in order to bring about change.[515]

Beręsewicz's book offers an entirely new narrative – one that derails the postmemorial mode of reading, which children's literature is incrementally inculcating in its young readership. The revolutionary feat of this narrative consists in that instead of asking "How does the story of the Holocaust affect you?" it asks "What are you going to do with your knowledge of the Holocaust?"[516] Memory which is built on such foundations does not immobilise and does not isolate, but is formative and educates for taking responsibility.

515 Alphen, "Afekt," p. 210.

516 This leads us to an interesting project by Mikołaj Grynberg, who photographed visitors to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum and asked them why they had come to the place. The project resulted in an album which was tellingly titled *Auschwitz. Co ja tu robię?* [*Auschwitz: What Am I Doing Here?*], which in our argument here could be paraphrased as: *Auschwitz. What Are You Going to Do with It?* See Mikołaj Grynberg, *Auschwitz. Co ja tu robię?* (Auschwitz: Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau, 2009).

Close Strangers: An Attempt at a Conclusion

The texts I have been analysing have made me realise that there was an imaginarium of the Holocaust which was read in the minds of the fourth generation. I deeply appreciate the value of this cultural undertaking, which plays an inestimable role in shaping the image of the Holocaust and consequently the memory of the following generation. The masterful employment of selected topoi derived from literature for adults has produced some interesting effects, which have nothing in common with trivialising simplifications, steer clear of kitsch aesthetics and, as such, evince the writers' and illustrators' ethical sense and respect for the sensibilities of young readers.

Writing this book was an experience replete with surprises. One of them came when I simultaneously discovered the propinquity of the fourth literature about the Holocaust and literature as such and the difference between the two, which results from a special reworking of Holocaust topoi in view of the age of the implied readers.

I guess that I expect too much of literature which has been published over the last years, because some attempts have been made to inscribe the history of the Jews into the history of Poland, but their outcomes are not exactly satisfactory. Contemporary narratives for children about the Holocaust seek, partly at least, to bridge the literary gap, a deficit which becomes particularly pronounced in comparison with the relative profusion of children's and young adult's literature addressing the Warsaw Uprising or the Second World War in general. The fact that literary representations of the Soviet occupation of Poland are even scarcer and even less internalised by today's children is very meagre consolation; the only children's books on this theme are *Syberyjskie przygody Chmurki* [*The Cloud's Adventures in Siberia*] and *Wysiedelni* [*The Displaced*] by Dorota Combrzyńska-Nogala. Yet the number does not matter here, while the modes of representation do.

Jewish children are as a rule depicted as passive characters and victims, which would not raise serious objections, were it not for the fact that their non-Jewish peers, equally exposed to the oppression of the war as they are, are framed as active, rebellious and sometimes even militant. Of course, one must be true to the historical facts and understand the difference between the daily reality of the ghetto and that of Nazi-occupied Warsaw. I would not expect Jewish children to be fashioned into superhuman heroes, but when I think of their situation,

reading about the heroic exploits of their peers on the Aryan side of the wall leaves a sour taste in my mouth.

But perhaps this very approach is actually most justified. Perhaps it is most honest, given that the two worlds on either side of the wall each have their own heroic, yet separate narratives? Occupied Warsaw is looking at the burning ghetto, although this view does not seem to belong to the Polish story. The fighting ghetto found its way into and perhaps even grew into a topos of the fourth literature only in *Ostatnie piętro* [*The Top Floor*] by Irena Landau. Jurek-Chaim sneaks back into the ghetto to fight and die there. The ghetto uprising is also mentioned by Andrzej Marek Grabowski in *Wojna na Pięknym Brzegu* [*War at the Jolie Bord*], where the gentile protagonist is gazing at the glow of flames over the burning ghetto and listening to the shots and explosions, whereby she discerns the absurd contrast between the trees in blossom and the tragedy unfolding at the other side of the wall.

Yet my most interesting finding concerns the awareness of Jewish identity. On being forced to move to the ghetto, Jewish children find out that they differ from their playmates regarding religious denomination. This device is repeated over and over again, which is understandable, because postmemory narratives are to a large extent propelled by the imperative of encounter with the Other. Paradoxically, the Other tends to be surprised by its own otherness. This happens in order to make young readers believe that differences do not concern us, and we are all in fact the same. Regrettably, such a handling of the problem offers only an illusion of understanding and fosters complacency at the specious ease with which relations with other people are established. The truth is, however, that we do differ – which is a beautiful thing in and of itself– and one could wish literature for a young readership would make an effort to engage with this theme. I realise that this is a challenging task, but it is certainly not unachievable.

Jewish protagonists are usually stripped of any context. They are placed in the ghetto, and readers only see them in extreme situations. Whatever "before" there was (and sometimes "after" as well) is hardly ever mentioned. I understand the intents of the nonfiction (and some of the texts can be classified as such, at a certain risk) which primarily aims to capture the problem of the Holocaust. This is in and of itself a daunting enterprise. But here our predicaments multiply, since by trying to bridge the gap in children's literature, we risk filling it with a stereotype instead of with a topos, as the latter could only be forged by a greatly diversified body of literary material inviting varied readings. A similar process is observable at schools, where Jewish themes are as a rule discussed in the context of assimilation and the Holocaust.

Perhaps the day will come when children's texts about the Holocaust (and not only the Holocaust) will be able to incorporate into their narratives Jewish children who are fully aware of their separateness, but neither anointed by it nor victimised because of it. Young readers would then have an opportunity to discover themselves in the Other as well as the Other in the Other. In this way, postmemorial literature would not be limited to the compulsion of reminding, but would also be food for thought.

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Index

Studies in Jewish History and Memory

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