

CROSS-ROADS. POLISH STUDIES IN CULTURE,  
LITERARY THEORY, AND HISTORY 14

Małgorzata Czermińska

# The Autobiographical Triangle

Witness, Confession, Challenge



PETER LANG

Małgorzata Czermińska

## The Autobiographical Triangle

This book presents a universal theory of autobiography, defined as a “triangular” form of utterance involving three different stances. It is a personal testimony to experiences lived through, a confession of intimate inner experience and a challenge addressed to the reader to engage in dialogue, enter into an argument or join in a game. The stances of witness, confession and challenge are always present, though usually one of them overshadows the other two. Polish memoirs, diaries and letters, as well as novels of a clearly personal character, are interpreted here in the context of the most important autobiographical texts of European literature. In the background, also, the historical events which have powerfully stamped Polish culture in the last two centuries are discreetly shown.

### The Author

Małgorzata Czermińska is a Professor at the University of Gdańsk, Poland, and specialises in non-fiction, theory and history of autobiography, geopoetics and links between literature and visual art. She has lectured in Polish literature at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor (USA) and Cambridge University (UK).

## The Autobiographical Triangle

**Cross-Roads.**  
Studies in Culture,  
Literary Theory, and History

Edited by Ryszard Nycz

Volume 14



**PETER LANG**

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Critical revised edition and translation by Jean Ward

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Bibliographic Information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek  
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche  
Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available in the internet at  
<http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

The Publication is funded by Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the  
Republic of Poland as a part of the National Programme for the  
Development of the Humanities.

This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Ministry cannot be  
held responsible for any use which may be made of the information  
contained therein.



NATIONAL PROGRAMME  
FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF HUMANITIES

Critical revised edition and translation by Jean Ward

Printed by CPI books GmbH, Leck  
Cover Design: © Olaf Gloeckler, Atelier Platen, Friedberg  
Cover photograph: © Izabela Szymańska

ISSN 2191-6179  
ISBN 978-3-631-67427-7 (Print)  
E-ISBN 978-3-653-06835-1 (E-PDF)  
E-ISBN 978-3-653-70860-6 (EPUB)  
E-ISBN 978-3-653-70861-3 (MOBI)  
DOI 10.3726/b15550

PETER LANG



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Peter Lang – Berlin · Bern · Bruxelles · New York ·  
Oxford · Warszawa · Wien

This publication has been peer reviewed. Reviewer: Adam Dziadek

[www.peterlang.com](http://www.peterlang.com)

*For my husband Jurand and our sons: Michał, Adam and Jan*





## Translator's Foreword

Many of the literary works discussed in this book have not been translated into English. In order not to give the impression that a published translation exists when it does not, I have adopted a slightly unusual policy. In the first instance, the Polish title of the work is given, followed by a translation in square brackets. If this is not simply an explanation of what the original title means but refers to a work which really exists in English, italics (for books) or inverted commas (for poems, short stories etc.) are used, and from then on I use the English title. If no published translation exists, in most cases I continue to use the Polish title. In the case of works entitled *Pamiętnik* [Memoir], as for example those by Stanisław Brzozowski or Janusz Korczak, I have used the word Memoir with a capital letter but without italics, to indicate that I am referring to a specific work published in Polish but not translated into English. I have not translated the titles of critical works documented in the footnotes, unless it seems important to the argument to do so. Unless otherwise indicated, passages from the literary and critical texts referred to in the book are quoted in my translation. However, when an appropriate published translation is available, I have generally used it.

I have tried as far as possible to supply place names, names of publishers and dates of publication for the literary works and studies referred to in the book, but in some cases this information is not obtainable – for example, texts produced by the underground “second circulation” during the communist period were often not furnished with a place of publication, for obvious reasons.

Place names involve some difficulty because of the way that Poland “moved” on the map after World War II, so that many places which had been in pre-war Poland and had Polish names are now in other countries and are known by other names. This consideration applies particularly to places which today are in Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine but which before World War II belonged to Poland's Eastern Borderlands. To refer to present-day Lviv, for example, as “Lwów”, or present-day Vilnius as “Wilno”, as I frequently do in this book, is not, of course, to suggest that Ukraine or Lithuania have no claim to these cities. It is simply to give the place name with which the memory and imagination of the writers discussed here is associated. Where present-day names are different, I indicate this in the text. Except in the case of Warsaw, I do not anglicise the spelling of any Polish cities.



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# Introduction

## The Theory of the Autobiographical Triangle as Work in Progress

The theory of the three autobiographical stances, witness, confession and challenge, took shape gradually as the outcome of interpretative studies of literary phenomena situated on the border between the novel and various forms of non-fiction prose. Although it is Polish literature that has supplied the vast majority of the material considered, my study is not limited to this alone. I also make reference in many places to European literature as an essential context for the particular literary pieces and genre forms analysed in this book, which are connected with a variety of aesthetic trends. If European tradition is understood more broadly than it was by Ernst Robert Curtius in his monumental study *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, in other words if it is not confined to the culture of Western Europe, then Polish literature undoubtedly belongs to this tradition. In this matter I stand firmly with Czesław Miłosz as the author of *Native Realm*,<sup>1</sup> that is to say I understand the West as including the countries of Central and Eastern Europe as well as Russia, because the culture of this whole area arises from Mediterranean roots (though we should remember that Russia's origins are connected above all with the tradition of Greece and Byzantium). I see the particular differences between the literatures of individual nations and languages in the context of history, while literary theoretical conclusions (including the theory of the autobiographical triangle) are tested with reference to a variety of different literary phenomena which are all to be found within one cultural sphere, understood as European in the widest sense.

The literature of the twentieth century saw a series of experiments which went beyond the genre forms still practised (more or less distinctly) by prose writers of the nineteenth century. The rebellious experiments of the avant-garde in various fields of art during the first decades of the twentieth century led to a search in literature for new thematic areas and new forms of expression. Writers found material for their work in the sphere earlier defined as the border between art and life. This gradually turned out to be fertile soil for the development of autobiographical writing, which in any case had a tradition in European culture almost as long

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1 Cz. Miłosz, *Native Realm: A Search for Self-Definition*, trans. Catherine S. Leach (London: Penguin Books, 2014).

as that of literature itself. My studies, at first devoted to individual phenomena such as the relations between the letter and the novel, the intimate diary and the novel, or the novel and autobiography in its various versions, set me travelling along a road that led to the formulation of a literary theoretical hypothesis: that there is a phenomenon common to all written expressions whose origin is in the area between fiction and direct accounts of oneself and one's own life experience. Many years of thought led me to the conviction that this phenomenon is universal in European culture; it is not dependent on the literary historical period or the language in which a work is written. Of course works that arise on the border between fiction and literature of personal document are subject to countless individual modifications along with changes in artistic trends and styles. But the thing that they all share, that is their functioning in that intermediate space between the freedom of fiction and the document that claims to be a faithful presentation of reality – this I named the autobiographical stance. To begin with I was persuaded that it appeared in two opposed versions: witness and confession. Further study, however, directed my attention to the existence of a third stance, which played a smaller role in the literature of past ages, but which was discerned even by theoreticians of ancient times, as can be seen in ancient rhetoric. I called this third stance “challenge”: challenge addressed to the reader. Since the modernist era, this stance has continued to evolve, and it now plays an increasingly important role.

Three stances, witness, confession and challenge, are always present, in varying proportions, in autobiographical texts. The universal character of these stances results from their grounding in the three functions of speech described by Karl Bühler, which also stand behind the distinctions made in ancient handbooks of rhetoric between presentation of reality, expression by the sender and appeal to the receiver. I discuss this in the first part of the book, where I present the theory which I metaphorically named the autobiographical triangle, at the same time revealing the stages of the journey by which I gradually arrived at this hypothesis. The texts which make up the book, originally written over the course of many years and then revised under the influence of new observations emerging in theoretical and interpretational studies, record that journey. I do not, of course, draw from the fact that all autobiographical texts can be written into the triangle of the three stances the exaggerated conclusion that every possible way of interpreting literature of personal document must also fit into these categories. Outside them, on their fringes and beyond, extensive fields remain to be investigated.

Before I arrived at the theory of the triangle, I concentrated particularly on the paradoxes connected with the presence (obvious or concealed) of the reader in various forms of autobiographical texts. As an epilogue to this book, I decided to



include two studies devoted to these questions, because distinguishing the problem of the reader was a very important factor in the process by which I was able to discern and describe the stance of challenge, which is less obvious than those of witness and confession. These two studies, of epistolary writing and of diary writing, were a kind of laboratory in which I observed the way that the stance of challenge took shape. The third part of the epilogue, in turn, is the most recent of all the texts in the book. It was written after the theory of the autobiographical triangle had been completely formulated and made public. I nevertheless include it in this version of the book out of a sense that it grew out of my earlier work, although it opens on to new territory. The triangle holds firm (or so I hope), but work on the problem of autobiography continues; it is still “work in progress”.

This book was written in Polish; the first edition, entitled *Autobiograficzny trójkąt. Świadectwo, wyznanie i wyzwanie*, was published in Kraków by Universitas in 2000, in the series *Horyzonty Nowoczesności* [Horizons of Modernity]. The English-language version retains the basic five-part structure of the whole, but has undergone very significant changes in relation to the original. I have not only revised the footnotes to take account of recent scholarship, but have also considerably modified the contents of the book. One chapter has been removed; two others have been re-arranged and combined into one; yet another has changed its position; and two new chapters have been added which were written after the book's original publication. All of these texts have been thoroughly re-worked and extended (sometimes with very considerable insertions) with a view to the English-speaking reader for whom the new version of the book is intended. These editorial transformations owe a great deal to the inspiration and suggestions of the translator, Jean Ward, a graduate of Oxford University who has worked for many years in Poland, is a scholar of two literatures and the author of academic texts in Polish as well as English. Her bilingual, comparatist and bicultural competences have been an inestimable aid to me, and for this I wish to express my unflinching gratitude.

Full bibliographical information about all the publications cited in this study can be found in the footnotes. A selected bibliography is included at the end of the book, listing only those primary and secondary texts which were of most importance to me in formulating and justifying the theory of autobiography as a “triangle” of three stances: witness, confession and challenge.

The earlier versions of individual chapters were published in the following books and journals:

- \* “The field of non-fiction prose”, as “Obszar prozy niefikcjonalnej”, Part I of “Badania nad prozą niefikcjonalną – sukcesy, pułapki, osobliwości”, in: *Wiedza*

*o literaturze i edukacja. Księga referatów Zjazdu Polonistów, Warszawa 1995*, ed. T. Michałowska, Z. Goliński, Z. Jarosiński (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 1996).

- \* Fragments of “The Autobiographical Triangle: Witness, Confession, Challenge” as “Autobiografia jako wyzwanie (O „Dzienniku” Gombrowicza)”, *Teksty Drugie* 1994, no. 1 (25).
- \* “The Spiritual Autobiography in Twentieth-Century Polish Literature”, as “Autobiografia duchowa w dwudziestowiecznej literaturze polskiej”, in: *Proza polska w kręgu religijnych inspiracji*, ed. M. Jasińska-Wojtkowska and K. Dybciak (Lublin: Tow. Nauk. Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, 1993).
- \* “Intertextual Connections in the Spiritual Autobiography”, as “Nawiązania międzytekstowe w autobiografii duchowej”, in: *Między tekstami. Intertekstualność jako problem poetyki historycznej*, ed. J. Ziomek, J. Sławiński, W. Bolecki (Warszawa: Polskie Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1992).
- \* “Autobiographical Places and the Topographic Imagination: on the Relations Between Place and Identity”, as “Miejsca autobiograficzne. Propozycja w ramach geopoetyki”, *Teksty Drugie* 2011, no. 5.
- \* “Home in the Autobiography and the Novel About Childhood”, as “Dom w autobiografii i powieści o dzieciństwie”, in: *Przestrzeń i literatura*, ed. M. Głowiński and A. Okopień-Sławińska (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1978).
- \* “Larders of Memory: Transformations of the Borderland Theme in the Autobiographical Novel”, as “Przemiany tematu kresowego. Idylla, tragizm, groteska w twórczości Zbigniewa Żakiewicza”, *Tytuł* 1999, no. 1 (33).
- \* “The Centre and the Borderland Periphery in the Prose of Writers Born after World War II”, as “Centrum i kresy w prozie pisarzy urodzonych po wojnie”, in: *Pogranicza, granice, ograniczenia*, ed. E. Rzewuska (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 1996).
- \* “Space Disturbed. Testimonies to the Post-Yalta ‘Migration of Peoples’”, as “Poruszona przestrzeń. Autobiograficzne świadectwa okresu przełomu”, in: *Konteksty polonistycznej edukacji*, ed. M. Kwiatkowska-Ratajczak and S. Wysłouch (Poznań: Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne, 1998).
- \* “‘Speaking a Memoir’: Janusz Korczak’s Autobiographical Stance”, as “‘Mówić pamiętnik’ (o postawie autobiograficznej Janusza Korczaka)”, in: *Janusz Korczak. Pisarz – wychowawca – myśliciel*, ed. H. Kirchner (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich, 1997).
- \* “How to Write About the Sins of One’s Youth, or A Year with Konwicki, A Year with Miłosz”, as “Rok z Konwickim, rok z Miłoszem”, *Teksty Drugie* 1995, no. 5 (35).

- \* “The Provocative Testimony of Leopold Tyrmand”, as “Leopold Tyrmand – głos świadka”, *Rocznik Towarzystwa Literackiego im. A. Mickiewicza*, XXVIII/1993.
- \* “The Letter and the Novel”, as “Pomiędzy listem a powieścią”, *Teksty* 1975, no. 4 (22).
- \* “The Role of the Reader in the Intimate Diary”, as “Rola odbiorcy w dzienniku intymnym”, in: *Problemy odbioru i odbiorcy*, ed. T. Bujnicki and J. Sławiński (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1977).
- \* “Metaphors of Autobiographical Writing in the Perspective of Co-Humanism”, as “Autobiografia i metafory”, in: *Projekt na daleką metę. Prace ofiarowane Ryszardowi Nyczowi*, ed. Z. Łapiński, A. Nasiłowska (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2016).



## **Part One Three Autobiographical Stances**



# 1. The Field of Non-Fiction Prose

What became of literature in the twentieth century? What became of the stories for which listeners and readers have always longed, the tales that, by the mouths of their bards, their novelists and storytellers, people from time immemorial have always told?

In his *Social History of Art*, written in the mid-twentieth century, Arnold Hauser described his times as the age of film. From today's perspective, we can surely see that he was right: the twentieth century was indeed the age of film and television. Electronic audiovisual media have come to eclipse literature, yet they nevertheless still need it; they continue to draw on its heroes and on shreds of its storylines. For the literary scholar, the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth is the era of the novel. After that, rivals enter the stage and as time passes they become increasingly dominant. The documentary appears in large circulation press and subsequently enters the book market, where it competes successfully for readers' attention, along with other genres of non-fiction prose such as biographies and memoirs. In the system of connecting vessels that is culture, it is impossible not to notice the pressure exerted by these so-called border or paraliterary forms on the traditional centre where the genres of high literature are concentrated.<sup>1</sup> The novel, undoubtedly the leader among prose genres, is undergoing deep inner transformations which are partly linked with what is happening on the fringes of literature.

The need to examine non-fiction prose more closely, with regard to both the mutual relations with traditional literary genres and the intrinsic worth of this kind of writing, has long been acknowledged. The English distinction between *fiction* and *non-fiction* is one of the most basic, as much in academic textbooks as in the practice of literary life. A similar dichotomy is assumed in film theory and criticism, which distinguishes between documentaries and feature films (with a tacit identification of the "feature" aspect with fictionality).

How is one to find one's way in the domain of non-fiction literature? Is it reasonable to consider it as a whole, given that we have no positive term to describe its characteristic features? The expression we use is a negative one, telling us what this kind of prose literature *is not*: it is not fiction. One might of course recall

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1 For a discussion of this phenomenon, see R. Nycz, *Sylwy współczesne. Problem konstrukcji tekstu* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1984) and Z. Ziątek, *Wiek dokumentu. Inspiracje dokumentarne w polskiej prozie współczesnej* (Warszawa: IBL, 1999).

that nothing unites so well as a common enemy, an adage which proves its relevance not only in relation to the name, but also in explaining the history of the thing itself. As far as this is concerned, there is almost universal agreement: non-fiction prose in the twentieth century is defined in a certain sense in opposition to the novel. Its success is connected with “the crisis of the novel”; it is nourished by “the death of the novel”; it is read “instead of the novel”<sup>2</sup> Equally, studies of such prose frequently define themselves in relation to the theory of the novel (including the general generic problem of narrative forms) and theories of fiction and fictionality. Indeed, there is perhaps no real need for one single definition conceived in such a manner as to cover the whole multiplicity and variety of phenomena that go by the name of non-fiction prose. Undoubtedly, rather than attempting to provide an all-embracing definition, a more important thing is to describe the field in question and the varieties and distinctions within it. In the field of non-fiction prose, we can discern three areas that border on one another, but differ in character and in the way they function in literary communication. These are literature of fact, literature of personal document and essays.

### Literature of Fact

This term, which first appeared in the interwar period, initially had a kind of manifesto character, being connected with the proletarian literature agenda drawing on ideas proclaimed by “Nowyj LEF” in Russia, by the “New Objectivity” (“Neue Sachlichkeit”) programme in Germany and by the “authenticity” movement in Poland. While this tendency had its consequences for the poetics of the novel, the definition itself (“literature of fact”) came gradually to be associated with documentary. Later, in post-war journalism, literary criticism and subsequently literary theory, the term was applied to documentary writing of various kinds, as well as to other forms of a documentary character, such as chronicles and reports.<sup>3</sup>

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- 2 W. Kayser, “Entstehung und Krise des modern Romans”, in *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschriften für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* XXVIII, 1954.4; T. Burek, *Zamiast powieści* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1971), especially the part entitled “Rąbek pamiętnika”; E. Balcerzan, “Powracająca fala autobiografizmu” and “Wtajemniczenia reporterskie” in his: *Kręgi wtajemniczenia. Czytelnik. Badacz. Tłumacz. Pisarz* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1982); J. Kandziora, *Zmęczeni fabułą. Narracje osobiste w prozie po 1976 roku* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1993).
  - 3 A. Wat, “Literatura faktu”, *Wiadomości Literackie* 1929. 35; K. Kąkolewski, “Wokół estetyki faktu”, *Studia Estetyczne* 1965 vol. 2; A. Hutnikiewicz, “Autentyzm”, in his *Od czystej formy do literatury faktu. Główne teorie i programy literackie XX stulecia*



Where historical events are concerned, it is not uncommon for documentary writings to become embroiled in some entirely independent drama not invented by the writer but caused by the extraordinariness of the situation in which he or she is involved. In such circumstances, the tension vested in the events can impart a social importance to the text, making it capable of functioning among a wider public audience. Examples of this phenomenon would include Emmanuel Ringelblum's *Kronika* [Chronicle] (a collection of records documenting life in the Warsaw ghetto, which were hidden within it and fortunately survived), Władysław Bartoszewski's *1859 dni Warszawy* [Warsaw's 1859 Days] (reconstructed after the war from documents chronicling daily life in the city during the Nazi occupation) and Kazimierz Moczarski's *Conversations with an Executioner*. (As an officer of the Polish underground army, Moczarski was imprisoned by the communists after the war. He found himself in the same cell as SS general Jürgen Stroop, the "executioner" of the Warsaw ghetto, and after his release he wrote a record of his conversations with this war criminal.)<sup>4</sup> Accounts collected by sociologists or ethnographers concerning everyday life could also become attractive as literature, if we look at social processes not from the point of view of public history, but in relation to the story of ordinary daily life.<sup>5</sup> Above all, however, the extremely dynamic and distinctive development of documentary,<sup>6</sup> which shaped a range of new varieties, attaining at its best a remarkable

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(Warszawa: "Wiedza Powszechna", 1974, III edition); J. Jarzębski, "Kariera autentyku" and "Powieść jako autokreacja" in his *Powieść jako autokreacja* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1984); Z. Ziątek, "Autentyzm rozpoznai społecznych" in *Literatura polska 1918-1975*, ed. A. Brodzka and S. Żółkiewski (Warszawa: "Wiedza Powszechna", 1993), vol. 2.

- 4 E. Ringelblum, *Kronika getta warszawskiego: wrzesień 1939 - styczeń 1943*, edited with introduction by A. Eisenbach; translated from Yiddish by A. Rutkowski (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1983); *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto: the Journal of Emmanuel Ringelblum*, translated and edited by J. Sloan (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1958); W. Bartoszewski, *1859 dni Warszawy* (Kraków: Znak, 1974); K. Moczarski, *Rozmowy z katem*, foreword by F. Ryszka (Warszawa: PIW, 1977); *Conversations with an Executioner*, ed. Mariana Fitzpatrick (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1981).
- 5 See M. Głowiński, "Dokument jako powieść", in *Studia o narracji*, ed. J. Błoiński, S. Jaworski, J. Sławiński (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1982).
- 6 J. Maziariski, *Anatomia reportażu* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1996); Cz. Niedzielski, *O teoretycznoliterackich tradycjach prozy dokumentarnej (podróż - powieść - reportaż)* (Toruń: TNT, 1966); E. Kraskowska, "O międzywojennej kobiecej prozie reportażowej", in her: *Piórem niewieścim. Z problemów prozy kobiecej dwudziestolecia międzywojennego* (Poznań: Wydaw. Naukowe UAM, 1999).

literary level, powerfully affected the situation of the novel and assured an increasing role to literature of fact.

## Literature of Personal Document

This term, as a definition of the whole field of autobiographical writing in all its generic variations, was coined by Roman Zimand, who adapted a term taken from sociology, “personal document”, for the use of literary studies.<sup>7</sup> This term is more accurate than others that were in use earlier, but were similar in range and meaning, such as “autobiographical writing”, “intimate writing”, “autobiographical and epistolary forms” or “personal writing”.

The “documentariness” of diaries, memoirs, autobiographies and letters draws them towards literature of fact, while the personal elements that they contain pull in the opposite direction. For literature of fact by definition tends towards impartiality, and strives to avoid subjectivity by concentrating on the object of interest. However, the line that separates literature of fact from literature of personal document cannot be drawn with complete certainty, as scholars – as well as writers – on both sides of this border admit. There are reporters, like Melchior Wańkiewicz, whose temperament leaves an ineradicable personal mark on every sentence. There are diary writers, like Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, whose ideal is to conceal themselves behind the text of the journal.

The inner tensions in the literature of personal document were already a matter for discussion even before the name itself emerged. Attention had been drawn to the difference between the stance of the witness (usually very clear in recollections and memoirs) and the attitude of introspection and confession (observable especially in the *journal intime* and certain kinds of letter). However, there was no attempt at any strict generic categorisation of the defined types of stance. The authorial stance makes itself felt above all in the shaping of the narrative perspective and may be modelled to a certain extent independently of genre convention.

Roman Zimand, like earlier scholars, distinguishes two stances, which he calls “eye-witness” and “writing directly of oneself”. However, he does not trace the consequences that flow from the huge range of possibilities latent in the stance of the witness. Meanwhile, to read a variety of autobiographical testimonies is to become aware that the more the personal note is muted and the more strongly

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7 R. Zimand, “O literaturze dokumentu osobistego w ogóle a o diarystyce w szczególności”, *Diarysta Stefan Ż.* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1990), 6–45.

the accent falls on the conveying of facts, the more the eye of the witness tends to be replaced by the “camera eye”. As a result, what is created becomes documentary rather than diary or memoir: in other words, literature of personal document turns into literature of fact.

The stances of confession and of witness are thus situated at two opposite poles of one line, where “I” stands facing “the world”. In the mid-twentieth century this opposition (which in fact is simple only in theoretical generalisation, never in writerly practice) became more complicated, especially in the field of the diary. If we keep to the geometrical analogy, we might say that a third point appeared, apart from the two opposed ones, and so instead of a line we must imagine a triangle, in which the apex, which differs from both “I” and “the world”, is “you”: the reader. Of course it is not the case that this figure emerged out of nowhere and only in recent times. In epistolary writing, a reader, openly present in the structure of the text, was implied from the very beginning; a reader was also inscribed in the memoir or autobiography, for example as the heir to whom the writer of the memoir or autobiography addressed his or her reflections. There was also always a reader latent in the diary, in the eternal paradox of intimate expression, which rests in the fact that absolute confidence is possible only in silence. Verbal expression, even when hedged about with every kind of reservation, by definition entails a risk of falling into unfriendly hands, and must therefore in some way take account of a reader.

The new thing that we are concerned with here, then, is not a matter of *introducing* the figure of the reader to personal writing, but of drawing this figure out of the shadows, and indeed right into the foreground. Most generally, the climate that favours this development is connected with those trends in twentieth century art that treat the work as an open whole, as for example in the sense in which Umberto Eco speaks of the poetics of the open work. This way of understanding art transfers the burden of attention from the artefact to the artist's contact with the audience, opening up fields for play, provocation, and finally for happenings which draw the audience into co-creation. So far, perhaps, it is the creators of interactive art who have gone furthest down this road.<sup>8</sup>

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8 The technical possibilities offered by electronic media allow the audience endless opportunities to intervene by freely choosing between alternative combinations designed by the creator of the work projected (in the fields both of image and of sound). See R. W. Kluszczyński, “Interaktywność – właściwość odbioru czy nowa jakość sztuki/kultury?”, in *Estetyczne przestrzenie współczesności*, ed. A. Zeidler-Janiszewska (Warszawa: Instytut Kultury, 1996); P. Zawojski, “O sztuce interaktywnej”, *Opcje* 1999.2;

What proved to be the turning point in the development of the diary was the custom of publishing it during the author's lifetime. In Polish literature, the first to reveal the consequences of this decision was Gombrowicz, and under his direction a new stance emerged in literature of personal document, alongside witness and confession. This new stance is provocation, a challenge issued to the reader, who is drawn into the very course of the text as it is being created. The fact that this is not only an individual feature of Gombrowicz's writing, but a developing new stance in personal literature, is confirmed by the manner in which later diarists, such as Tadeusz Konwicki, Zbigniew Żakiewicz or Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, engage in a game with the reader in a variety of different ways. The functioning of literature of personal document in the "autobiographical triangle" of witness, confession and challenge (this last will be presented in more detail in the next chapter) is the theme of this book. The two remaining areas of non-fiction prose, that is literature of fact and essays, will remain only as an understood frame of reference, outside the main focus of the book.

## The Essay

The third area within the field of non-fiction prose, that is the essay, remains outside the scheme of witness, confession and challenge. Essayists, even if they write about events that they have witnessed, and even if they underline the personal character of the judgment and address themselves to an audience, for example by demanding their involvement in interpreting irony, do not do this simply in order to describe the world, to make a confession or to interact with the reader. The essay's province is reflection; its domain is thought, the supra-individual world of culture, the world of the spirit.<sup>9</sup>

These elements, proper to the essay, are also of course to be found in the two areas of non-fiction prose discussed earlier. In so far as literature of fact and literature of personal document, which present what goes on in the triangle between "I", "you" and "the world", inevitably involve generalising reflection, the element

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A. Cameron, "Dissimulation – Illusion of Interactivity", <http://www.min.ac.uk/media/VD/Dissimulation.html>.

9 W. Głowala, "Próba teorii eseju literackiego", *Prace Literackie* 1965, vol. 7; T. Wroczyński, "Esej – zarys teorii gatunku", *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 1986, no. 5/6; A. St. Kowalczyk, "W kręgu poetyki eseju", in his *Kryzys świadomości europejskiej w eseistyce polskiej lat 1945–1977 (Vincenz – Stempowski – Miłosz)* (Warszawa: Eterna, 1990); *Polski esej. Studia*, ed. M. Wyka (Kraków: Universitas, 1991); R. Sendyka, *Nowoczesny esej. Studium historycznej świadomości gatunku* (Kraków: Universitas, 2006).

peculiar to the essay, the element of interpretation, of intellectual control of phenomena, is necessarily present in them, too.

In observing the areas on the fringes of literature, in which we have already encountered utilitarian<sup>10</sup> and journalistic texts, we come, with the essay, to another border region, that is to literary and art criticism and to academic texts (above all, of course, from the field of the humanities). It is on just this particular border that the essay, understood as a genre, is situated. It is the essay that dominates in criticism and at the point where literature and scholarship meet (the historical or philosophical essay<sup>11</sup>). Without the essay, it is not possible fully to describe the field of non-fiction prose; not only because it forms the third constituent part of this territory, but also because it enters in a particular way into the life of many (though of course not all) works of literature of fact and of personal document. Without the category of the essay, no viable theory or history of the letter, journal, or autobiography, or of certain types of documentary or travel writing, can be proposed. However, the “essayising” tendency seems to steer in a direction that takes it away from the world not only of the private and intimate, but also of the documentary, for its essence lies in intellectual organisation of raw data, in the movement towards interpretation. By travelling further and further along this road, towards freer thought that is ever more boldly accompanied by imagination, we may leave the province of the essay and move towards that of fiction. Thus we may cross, over a different border, out of the domain of non-fiction prose and return to the ancient centre, to the literature of invented worlds.

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10 See *Teksty* 1975. 4 (22), special issue entitled *Formy użytkowe*.

11 A. Zawadzki, *Nowoczesna eseistyka filozoficzna w piśmiennictwie polskim pierwszej połowy XX wieku* (Kraków: Universitas, 2001).



## 2. The Autobiographical Triangle: Witness, Confession, Challenge

In the long history of European autobiographical writing we can identify at least two different and opposed narratorial stances: one that recounts external events in which the narrator has personally taken part, and one that looks introspectively inward, penetrating the depths of the individual soul. I call the first stance witness and the second confession. Although not much significance has previously been attached to this, the existence of these two different stances is confirmed at least indirectly by the observations of various scholars of literature of personal document. Georges Gusdorf, for instance, in his study *La découverte de soi*, a work regarded today as presenting one of the classic conceptions of diary-writing, distinguished two sub-types: the “external” and the “intimate”,<sup>1</sup> while Henri Gouhier somewhat later described the diary of witness as an exact report of observed facts, conversations overheard and so on, as distinct from the diary of the “egotist”, which is a record of the daily reflections of the diarist on himself or herself.<sup>2</sup>

This distinction proves to be well-founded not only in relation to the diary. It functions equally well in all genres of autobiographical writing. The remaining traditionally differentiated genres of the literature of personal document, such as memoir, autobiography, letters and travel writing, incline to one or the other of these stances, for the stance is connected not with any defined genre, but with

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1 G. Gusdorf, *La découverte de soi* (Paris: Les Presses universitaires de France, 1948), 39–40.

2 Henri Gouhier distinguishes several kinds of diary on the basis of their contents: the artist’s diary (the case of Eugénie Delacroix); the writer’s diary (André Gide); and the philosophical diary (Gabriel Marcel); but he also mentions the possibility of differentiating between two types of diary in a manner that corresponds with my understanding of witness and confession as two stances, one turned outwards towards the world and one turned inwards towards the heart of the personality. When writing of the testimony-diary and of the diary of the “egotist”, Gouhier emphasises that he uses the term “egotist” in the sense given to it by Stendhal. “Egotism” understood in this way is a daily study conducted by the person writing in relation to his or her physical and moral essence. See H. Gouhier, “Autobiographie et Philosophie: le “journal” de Maine de Biran”, *Formen der Selbstdarstellung: Analekten zur einer Geschichte des literarischen Selbstportraits (Festgabe für Fritz Neubert)*, ed. G. Reichenkron and E. Hasse (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1956), 95–96.

the position of the “I” of the document in relation to the subject of the utterance. Roman Zimand assumes a distinction based on an identical principle when he writes that literature of personal document “consists of two cosmoses: the world of writing directly of oneself and the world of the eye-witness”.<sup>3</sup>

We may speak, however, of a certain tendency of traditional genres of personal writing to gravitate towards one or the other stance. Witness appears most often in memoirs devoted to events of historical significance and to people whom the author has met in his or her lifetime and considered sufficiently important to convey an image of them to future generations.<sup>4</sup> This stance also plays an important role in one particular type of diary, that is in chronicles of events, as well as in descriptions of travels that concentrate on places visited and people encountered, without exposing the personal impressions and experiences of the author.

Accounts written from the point of view of the witness have a typically epic character: the narrator tells the reader about a world, people and events that are known to him, hence the centre of attention is what is presented. In contrast, both the narrator and the addressee are situated somewhere in the background.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the clearest example of this kind of factually presented testimony is *De bello Gallico*, Julius Caesar’s memoir of the Gallic war. In Polish literary tradition a variety of examples can be found in memoir-writing from the Sarmatian epoch to the years of World War II and immediately afterwards.<sup>6</sup> The stance of the witness has a long and rich tradition, known not only to the creators of Polish autobiographical writing, but to its readers also.

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3 R. Zimand, “O literaturze dokumentu osobistego w ogóle a o diarystyce w szczególności”, *Diarysta Stefan Ż.*, 17.

4 Philippe Lejeune compares the typical memoir author to a witness who may testify to events (*L'autobiographie en France* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1971), 15). This formulation provides a further indirect confirmation of the validity of the distinction between two autobiographical stances: witness and confession.

5 I am thinking here of sender and receiver as categories within the text, not in the sense used by Lejeune as participants in a process of literary communication who enter into a pact or contract of a defined kind (“The Autobiographical Contract”, in: *French Literary Theory Today*, ed. Tzvetan Todorov (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 196–222. Original: “Le pacte autobiographique”, *Poétique* 1973. 14).

6 See J. Leociak, *Text in the Face of Destruction: Accounts from the Warsaw Ghetto Reconsidered*, trans. E. Harris (Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2004). Further evidence of the vitality of this stance is to be found in the autobiographical notes of Artur Międzyrzeczki, covering the years 1962–87. The author defines the meaning of his writing as that of bearing witness. A. Międzyrzeczki, *Z dzienników i wspomnień* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sic!, 1999).



The stance of confession is characteristic of the intimate diary, concentrated as it is on the daily life of the individual. Here the clearest examples are undoubtedly personal diaries, in which French literature abounds.<sup>7</sup> It was not until the Romantic era that the Polish intimate diary properly began, and it only appeared on a wider scale towards the end of the nineteenth century. Its popularity, however, rose slowly but surely, and in its wake there followed a gradual shift from purely personal notes made for the writer's own use towards more and more evident literariness. One sign of this was that authors began to admit the thought of later (usually posthumous) publication. In the area of autobiography, with its characteristic focus on the writer's inner life rather than on events connecting the individual with the surrounding world, the situation developed similarly. This kind of literary self-portrait can imitate the pattern of the spiritual autobiography, a genre which tells the story of the fall and conversion of a sinner. While it took particularly clear shape and is represented on a large scale in Anglo-American Protestant tradition, it also has a Catholic analogue, known as the mystical autobiography.<sup>8</sup> The philosophical diary, which tells the story of intellectual adventures, and the artist's autobiography, presenting the history of a vocation, should also be mentioned here, since both these forms of literature of personal document are directed towards the inner life.

In writings of a confessional character the narrator bears a resemblance to the "I" of lyric poetry. His attitude has sometimes been defined as egoistic or narcissistic. The process of writing is sometimes compared to vivisection; it can be a difficult and risky labour to acquire self-knowledge, leading to surprising results. Introvertive writing can be a form of auto-therapy and self-creation. Sometimes the imaginative process of studying one's own self, examined in the process of writing as in a mirror reflection, turns into conscious posing. In such cases, alongside the self-absorbed author, we find that another figure emerges: that of the reader for whose benefit these poses are struck. The record of self-analysis automatically divides the "I" into that which is analysed and that which analyses. In the notes entitled *Moralia*, which the publisher included in *Dziennik bez samogłosek* [Diary without Vowels], Aleksander Wat wrote:

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7 See the classic monographs: A. Girard, *Le journal intime* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1963); B. Didier, *Le Journal intime* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1976); also L. Łopatyńska, "Dziennik osobisty, jego odmiany i przemiany", *Prace Polonistyczne* (VIII), Łódź 1950, A. Milecki, *Forma dziennika w literaturze francuskiej* (Lublin: Instytut Wydawniczy Daimonion, 1994).

8 For further references to studies on this subject, see the chapter in Part Two of this book on the spiritual autobiography in twentieth-century Polish literature.

I think, that is: I conduct a dialogue with myself. So all thinking assumes a split between “I” and another level of “I”: “Not-I”. The interior monologue, or the one spoken aloud, is only a certain kind of rhetorical dialogue – I try to convince someone, I argue with someone, I submit to someone, I enter into an agreement with someone – this is what thinking is, whether in its ancient and magical forms or on the Socratic heights.<sup>9</sup>

Even the most solitary act of looking at oneself in the mirror leads to the observation of two orders: one the face with the eyes that look, the other the face that is looked at. Going further along these lines, we find that the person writing either comes to create a second self (in which case the autobiographical record becomes a tale of a *doppelgänger* or double), or enters into an open dialogue, now not only with his or her other “self”, but also with the external reader. These two possibilities do not have to be mutually exclusive; they may exist side by side, not only in the work of one writer but also even in one and the same text. It is only when the witness stance is dominant that “other self” constructions are unlikely to arise. These are matters to which it will be necessary to return.

The thought of the “other self” also leads to the thought of one who is *truly* “other”: the possible intruder; the other, future reader of the confessions that at the outset were written only for oneself. Even the most narcissistic narrative also contains some traces pointing to the existence of the external world, to which it inevitably bears witness, intentionally or not. All the same, in the typically introspective record dominated by the image of the “I” who is writing, the reader (the intruder) and the surroundings remain somewhere in the background. The two types of autobiographical narrative, witness and confession, represent opposite poles, corresponding to extrovert and introvert stances. Meanwhile the presence of a third pole in the history of literature of personal document has been so unobtrusive as to be almost imperceptible, although of course this pole has always been there in hidden form.

This third type of autobiographical stance, situated outside the line at whose extremes we find the original opposites of witness and confession, did not appear in Polish literature of personal document until the middle of the twentieth century. If we imagine the formerly hidden third pole as a point situated above or below the line running between the pole of extroversion (the stance of the witness) and introversion (the confessional stance), we obtain the “autobiographical

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9 A. Wat, “Moralia”, in his: *Dziennik bez samogłosek, Pisma wybrane*, vol. II, ed. K. Rutkowski. Originally published in 1987 in the so-called “second circulation” by the underground publishing house *Oficyna Literacka*, (1987), 35. Place of publication not identified. Reprinted London: Polonia Book Fund Ltd., 1986.

triangle". The speaking subject is situated at one apex of the "triangle", while at the second we have the external world presented in the autobiographical record, and at the third the reader. Though witness and confession were both also always intended for a reader, in these forms that figure remained largely hidden. Certainly the presence of an addressee was sometimes made explicit (in letters, for example, whose generic origin is in rhetoric), but this figure was never allowed to become dominant or to appear on a broader scale. It was left to Witold Gombrowicz, in his *Diary*, to make the revolutionary discovery of a type of autobiographical narration in which neither the "world" nor (despite appearances) the "I" figure dominates. Instead, both these poles are subordinated to the "you" figure towards which the narrative is angled.

This autobiographical stance, which I distinguish from both witness and confession, I call CHALLENGE: challenge issued to the reader.<sup>10</sup> If an element of the epic can be seen in the situation of witness and of the lyric in that of confession,

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10 When I put forward the hypothesis at the end of the nineteen-seventies of Gombrowicz's new and exceptional concept of the diary as challenge (a conception that must be considered in the context of the philosophy of "interhuman" relations formulated by the author), I presented no more than a preliminary outline of the problem. The hypothesis stood the test of time, however, and developed into a thesis as an element in the concept of the "autobiographical triangle". See the sub-chapter entitled "Paradoxes of intimate expression" in the study "The role of the reader in the intimate diary", in *Problemy odbioru i odbiorcy*, ed. T. Bujnicki, J. Sławiński (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1977) (revised text of this article in Part Five of this book), and "Autobiografia jako wyzwanie (O Dzienniku Gombrowicza)", *Teksty Drugie* 1994. 1 (25). Kazimierz Adamczyk, in a valuable interpretative study entitled *Dziennik jako wyzwanie. Lechoń, Gombrowicz, Herling-Grudziński* (Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza Parol, 1994), uses the category of "challenge" in an entirely different manner completely unconnected with my conception. Adamczyk is concerned not with the type of autobiographical stance chosen by a particular author, but with the "challenge" posed to every writer by the tradition of the genre. He writes: "Lechoń, Gombrowicz, Herling-Grudziński are faced with a problem that every diarist must resolve. They make different decisions and each in his own way marks out the boundaries of frankness and 'conversation with oneself'. All three writers, however, each in a different way, feel the pressure exerted by the conventions of the diary entry and by the tradition of the genre" (16–17). According to my terminological proposition, in Lechoń the confessional stance (though subject to peculiar limitations) is the dominant, while in Gombrowicz it is challenge and in Herling-Grudziński witness. If I have understood Adamczyk's argument, his interpretations lead towards similar conclusions, though without making use of the same terminology. (His discussions of these writers are also considerably fuller and more detailed than mine.)

then the address to “you”, which is at the heart of the stance of challenge, is characteristic of drama (dramatic dialogue) and of rhetoric. The discovery made by Gombrowicz opened up a new way, but did not of course in the least eliminate the possibility that texts would arise in which one of the two earlier known stances is the dominant. Many works of literature of personal document which have arisen since the publication of Gombrowicz’s *Diary* testify to this.

It is only in theory that the three stances of testimony, confession and challenge can be described as unambiguous, separate poles. They are ideal models, which we may imagine as the apexes of the “autobiographical triangle”. Every autobiographical record is situated somewhere between these abstract poles. In the material of any particular work we can speak at most of the domination of one pole over the others, but never of the exclusion of any one of them. The two that are subordinate may be disregarded by the author and not perceived by the reader, but nevertheless they are always present. Even if they do not seem to have a visible influence on the character of the utterance, they are always there, operating as if “below the surface”.

### The Rhetorical Sources of the Three Stances

A parallel with the “triangle” of speech functions proposed by Karl Bühler and later developed by Roman Jakobson in his study on linguistics and poetics naturally suggests itself.<sup>11</sup> Contrary to appearances, however, my description of the three autobiographical stances is not connected in a detailed manner with this theory (and certainly was not derived from it). The analogy with Bühler’s “triangle of speech functions” (referential, expressive and appellative) remains on the same level of generalisation as the previously mentioned comparison between the “autobiographical triangle” and basic images connected with the three literary genres, or the possible reference to the “three functions of speech” (*tria officia dicendi*) in classical textbooks of rhetoric.<sup>12</sup> For Bühler, the point of

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11 R. Jakobson, “Linguistics and poetics”, in *Style in language*, ed. T. A. Sebeok (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960), 350–377. See also the important polemical article by Janusz Lalewicz, “Krytyka teorii funkcji mowy Bühlera-Jakobsona”, *Teksty* 1973.6.

12 Mirosław Korolko reminds us that the “three functions of speech” derive from the Aristotelian categories of *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos*. “In textbooks they are most commonly expressed with the help of the three Latin infinitives *docere*, *movere*, *delectare* [...], while in contemporary speech they correspond to the informative, persuasive and aesthetic functions. These three functions, analysed in textbooks conventionally as parts of one whole, admit all the components of rhetorical persuasion: sender, receiver and subject

departure is the declaration in Plato's *Cratylus* in which an utterance is described as a tool by whose aid someone tells someone else about something. A similar statement is to be found in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, in which three factors, speaker, subject and listener, are identified in every act of speech.<sup>13</sup>

When in the second chapter of Book I, Aristotle considers the theoretical foundations of the art of rhetoric, he distinguishes three kinds of persuasive "proofs", oscillating round three poles. These are proofs oriented above all towards the person speaking (*ethos*), towards moving the hearers (*pathos*) and towards the very logic of the facts presented in the utterance (*logos*). First of all:

Proofs from character are produced, whenever the speech is given in such a way as to render the speaker worthy of credence (...) Unlike some experts, we do not exclude the speaker's reasonable image from the art as contributing nothing to persuasiveness. On the contrary, character contains almost the strongest proof of all, so to speak (74–75).

The first group of proofs is connected primarily with the person of the speaker. Then, in turn, "Proofs from the disposition of the audience are produced whenever they are induced by the speech into an emotional state" (75); and "Finally, proof is achieved by the speech, when we demonstrate either a real or an apparent persuasive aspect of each particular matter" (75).

One Polish translator of Aristotle and commentator on his thought, Henryk Podbielski, draws attention to the fact that the third type of proof, being "not particularly clear to the contemporary reader", requires interpretation today. He therefore advances two new proposals by Aristotle scholars which say that the point here is "proving on the basis of arguments" and "the message of the facts themselves".<sup>14</sup> One may then say, with no less justification than in the case of the analogy with Bühler, that a certain symmetry of stances discovered in literature of personal document can be discerned in relation to the Aristotelian division of figures of persuasion in the art of rhetoric, which were grouped with regard to

of the rhetorical communication" (*Sztuka retoryki. Przewodnik encyklopedyczny*, Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1990), 45–46.

- 13 Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, translated with introduction and notes by Hugh Lawson-Tancred (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), 80. All remaining references in the text are to this edition. The page numbers are supplied in the main text.
- 14 Podbielski refers to the views of J. H. Mc Burney, later developed by W. M. Grimaldi. See his introduction to his translation of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1988), 41.

their reference to speaker, person addressed and the logic of the facts from the external world presented in a given utterance.<sup>15</sup>

Every autobiographical record has its own proper proportions as regards the degree of importance and the visibility of each of the three poles. No one of the three is ever completely excluded. The subordinate ones sooner or later make themselves felt, even if only as traces. Scholars of rhetoric note an analogical phenomenon. After defining the “three functions of speech”, Mirosław Korolko explains the “Rule of unity of function”, declaring that all are “mutually dependent and it is only the manner of their combination that decides practically the effectiveness of persuasion”.<sup>16</sup> Podbielski describes Aristotle’s position similarly:

Full understanding between speaker and listener can come about only when this process embraces the whole of their personality. In this context it becomes clear why the philosopher attaches such great importance not only to logical argumentation, but also to the question of credibility, with regard to the ethos of the speaker and the mental attitude of the listener.<sup>17</sup>

At the same time, however, it turns out that something like a hierarchy of functions did establish itself in the rhetorical tradition. Podbielski writes:

In his lecture on the subject of *inventio*, Aristotle devotes most attention, of course, to problems of logical argumentation, which are connected with credible presentation of the subject itself.<sup>18</sup>

In a similar way, Korolko presents the position of Cicero as regards the informative-didactic function:

The most outstanding theoreticians of rhetoric give first place to the sphere of reason. Cicero’s opinion is that the speaker should concentrate attention on the lessons that he conveys, whereas the two remaining functions, that is persuasive and aesthetic, should not be noticeable in the act of speech, but should be hidden, so that they can function effectively.<sup>19</sup>

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15 The analogy graspable on the level of the three functions of speech (*tria officia dicendi*) cannot be drawn with reference to the three kinds of rhetoric (*tria genera dicendi*) which divide oratory into judicial, deliberative and epideictic types. See Korolko, 47. The reference is justified only in relation to the three literary genres of epic, lyric and drama, which though derived from rhetorical principles also have other bases.

16 Korolko, 46.

17 Podbielski, 46.

18 Podbielski, 46–47.

19 Korolko, 47.

When illustrating a rule it is always useful to refer to extreme instances. Here, then, let us examine some situations which on the surface look like pure examples of the presence of one single autobiographical stance. Maine de Biran's *Journal*, for instance, has traditionally been regarded as a classic *journal intime*, completely uniform in its stance, focused entirely on the personal life of the diarist and written only for him. It appears to be an example of exceptionally consistent introvertism. But even here the presence of both the remaining stances is discernible. Gouhier found in the entries of this diary, which he defined as "the diary of an 'egotist'", not only the element of intimate confession which is visible on the surface, but also elements of the "testimony-diary";<sup>20</sup> and even a minimal trace of thinking about the future reader. Though Maine de Biran never intended to publish his diary, Gouhier supposed that towards the end of his life he was thinking of showing his notes to a few of his closest friends. As evidence of this, Gouhier referred to a short comment by de Biran about "three or four close friends" to whom he wanted to "reveal" who he really was, in the depths of his soul.<sup>21</sup> However, this trace of awareness of a reader (real, not virtual) seems too insubstantial to enable us to describe it as a challenge addressed to some YOU who is clearly inscribed in the text. One does not, after all, issue a challenge to "close friends", and "three or four" is still a small and intimate circle, infinitely far from the anonymous audience of a printed book. Nevertheless, the diarist's note, found by Gouhier, is sufficient to demonstrate that the closed, introspective attitude of the intimate diarist (who is sometimes also a witness) does not preclude the possibility that the reader may discern, as if through a crack, the third, hidden apex of the "autobiographical triangle".

In turn, documentary writing might seem to be an example of a type of utterance almost entirely dominated by the epic stance of witness. To begin with it was regarded as a genre of prose in which facts should speak for themselves so completely as to ensure its complete separation, within the sphere of documentary literature, from the category of "personal document". Gradually, however, the illusion of the impartiality of the witness melted away, and the developing self-reflection in the craft of writers of documentary brought to light the inevitable presence of an "I": that of the reporter. We find a particularly clear expression of this truth in some words by one contemporary master of the genre, Ryszard Kapuściński. Speaking of his three books about Africa (*The Soccer War*, *Another Day of Life* and *The Shadow of the Sun*), he declared:

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20 Gouhier, 96.

21 Gouhier, 97n.

Everything I write is about myself, about what has happened to me and what I have seen. And I never take even a single step beyond this, beyond direct, personal experience. There is not a single word in anything I have written which is not a description of a personal experience or adventure (...) Once someone asked me, all right, but who exactly is the hero of *Imperium*? As if to say that it has no hero. But what do you mean – it has no hero? *I am the hero*. Who is the hero of *Heban*? *I am the hero of Heban*, I write about myself, it's my story.<sup>22</sup>

Such broad consistency in favouring one “apex of the triangle” as we find in de Biran (or in Amiel) is by no means the rule among writers of literature of personal document. The inclination to privilege the stance of the witness, or of the person who makes confessions of an intimate nature, or who challenges the reader to an intellectual and emotional duel, is surely psychologically conditioned, but to seek any kind of typology of personality corresponding to the three types of autobiographical stance would seem a risky and oversimplifying enterprise. On the ground of literary studies, the autobiographical stance should be consistently understood as an intra-textual relationship, not as one linked with personality or world-view. Many writers of literature of personal document seem eager to make use of the possibilities of choosing, and therefore also changing, the dominant. It is by no means rare for one and the same author to take different stances in different autobiographical records.

### Interchangeability of Autobiographical Stances

Józef Czapski's *Wspomnienia starobielskie* [Recollections of Starobielsk] and *Nanieludzkiej ziemi* [*The Inhuman Land*], for example, are principally the reports of a witness. The first of these books speaks of the author's confinement in a Soviet prisoner-of-war camp for Polish officers who were later murdered on the orders of Stalin in the event of 1940 known to historiography as the Katyń massacre. The second of the two books presents Czapski's subsequent fortunes when, as one of very few survivors, he set out to look for his fellow-prisoners, whose death did not become known to the world until the Germans discovered mass graves in the woods near Katyń in 1943. Czapski's search was carried out on the orders of General Władysław Anders, who after Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union, on the strength of an agreement between the Soviet powers and the Polish government

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22 “Od historii do antropologii spotkania. Z Ryszardem Kapuścińskim rozmawia Gabriela Łęcka”, *Opcje* 1999. 2: 36.

Translator's note: *Heban*, literally ebony, has been translated by Klara Głowczewska with the title *The Shadow of the Sun* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001)



in emigration, was given charge of forming a Polish army on Soviet territory as an ally in the struggle against the Germans. Very many Poles who had earlier been deported into the depths of Russia, during the short period of co-operation between Hitler and Stalin immediately after the outbreak of World War II, volunteered for this army, known colloquially as the Anders Army. However, more than 20,000 officers, who had been held separately in three different camps, did not appear. One of these camps was Starobielsk, where Czapski had been imprisoned. The reason why his search proved futile did not become clear until after the Anders Army had left the Soviet Union, when the Germans discovered the graves near Katyń.

The author himself, rejoicing thirty-five years later in the prospect of a Polish edition of his *Wspomnienia starobielskie*, had this to say of his aim: "Of course I wrote this book above all for Poland, for the families of my companions, whom I knew from their stories on the plank beds of our camp."<sup>23</sup> The first of the two books focuses mainly on Czapski's fellow-captives; it is a kind of portrait gallery, in which each figure, though only outlined, is highly distinct (evoking a comparison with the thumbnail sketches known from the author's drawing books, for Czapski was a visual artist as well as a writer). At the same time, the author of these recollections, as a witness, is clearly visible, not only because he sometimes tells of his own fortunes and his own states of mind, but much more because he incorporates into his account a clear hierarchy of values, to which he relates the events described. The personal perspective is revealed also in the emotional warmth with which he talks about most of his companions, as well as in the critical tone of some of his comments. Most discreetly of all, but no less meaningfully for that, his attitude to people is revealed in the way that, while describing conduct that he condemned, he omits to mention the names of those of his fellows who perpetrated it.

In the volume *The Inhuman Land*, the perspective of the presented world broadens considerably. On the whole, the author of these recollections presents himself as a witness to twentieth-century history, and not merely as a chronicler of a single closed community caught in the trap of collective events, as was the case with the earlier recollections of Starobielsk. When he describes the time of his involvement in the Anders Army, Czapski does not abandon his portraits of

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23 J. Czapski, "Od Autora" [Author's Note], *Wspomnienia starobielskie* (Wrocław: Niezależne Warsztaty Wydawnicze "Ogniwo", 1990), 4. Because of the dictates of censorship in communist Poland, both this book and *Na nieludzkiej ziemi* were first published only abroad.

the people with whom fate has brought him together, whether they are passing companions of a railway journey or people whom he knows will make their name in history. But alongside this, time and again he takes a more panoramic view, formulating generalisations concerning the life of the Soviet Empire whose enormous territories it has been his lot to traverse. While here he is above all a witness of history, he does not cease to make his own values known or to reveal his individual judgments, any more than he did earlier.

In the pages of Czapski's diary, in turn, the proportions between expression of the individual self and witness to the external world are completely reversed.<sup>24</sup> While it is true that we know only "torn-out pages" of this huge, handwritten whole, whose piles of notebooks cover their author's life over several decades, this is nevertheless enough to assure us that the autobiographical stance assumed in the diaries is completely different from that of the wartime recollections, written for instant publication. Although the world in which the author lives certainly does not disappear from the field of view in the diary, the attention paid to it is of an entirely different kind. This difference is not an inevitable result of the discontinuity of the diaristic record, which is so much more radical than the hidden discontinuity in the memoir narration of Czapski's recollections. Instead, it is the outcome of the writer's stance. Czapski's interest is focused on his own and others' paintings, on things he has just read, on religious experiences or conversations in which something has moved him. Sometimes it is a passing recollection that he notes, sometimes an epiphanic moment born unexpectedly of some quite ordinary sight which nevertheless unlocks his imagination, acting like a mysterious sign or touch of grace. External reality is perceived as a stimulus evoking a variety of echoes in consciousness, imagination and memory. The only frame of reference for these echoes, the only instance deciding whether they are recorded or ignored, is the "I" of the writer. In the record that we know from selected pages of Czapski's diaries, the external world has no such independent and coherent existence as we glimpse through the accounts of the witness who recorded his recollections of the Starobielsk camp and his later wanderings over the "inhuman land". In the diaries, the dominant perspective is that of inner experience; the stance is that of confession. This confession made to oneself is understood as self-knowledge and examination of conscience, as a task undertaken daily and as the foundation of identity:

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24 J. Czapski, *Wyrwane strony* [Torn out pages], ed. J. Pollakówna and P. Kłoczowski (Lausanne: Les Editions Noir sur Blanc, 1993).

May 1979. What does it mean that I can't get round to doing anything without at least a couple of minutes with my diary (a refuge for memory, the imperative to organise and order), the only inner form that saves me? (...) This scrap of a moment in the morning when I wake up – this diary, is this what saves me? Some kind of charge for the whole day. Later on, through contact with people the morning air breathed into the lungs evaporates (...) But people? Serve them? Live for them? YES. But you have to have your secret world, in order to be, in order to give them something more than appearances. A mirror? Narcissism? NO. The necessity, the duty of reaching the fundamental impulses in myself, otherwise my life becomes like a pile of rubble, in which even work is a sham [...] You need to keep observing yourself.<sup>25</sup>

A differentiation of stances may also be discerned in the autobiographical writing of Aleksander Wat. In *My Century* the stance of the witness plays a leading role, but Wat, though he is no less a witness to the crimes of the twentieth century than Czapski, nevertheless bears witness also, to a considerably greater degree than his fellow-writer, to his own individual lot. Beginning with his childhood and family home, he unfolds the story of his life through the succeeding decades: the shaping of his poetic vocation, his brief political flirt with communism in his youth, his detention in Soviet jails, his religious experiences and the story of his illness. He interprets his fortunes in terms of guilt and punishment for his passing involvement with communism, understood as an absolute evil. Wat treated the work on his spoken memoirs as both a way of bearing witness to the century which was the same age as he (he was born in 1900), and as an act of self-interpretation, focused on his personal lot as a human being who had experienced evil and been marked by suffering. Both stances, that of witness to the history of the twentieth century and that of self-analysis, are inseparably intertwined in Wat's narration. Although it is difficult to define the proportions, it would seem that the stance of witness is the dominant one in *My Century*.

It is a different matter, in turn, with *Dziennik bez samogłosek* [A Diary Without Vowels], written partly before and partly after work on the memoir. These notes, which were found after the poet's death, are written as if in code, for the vowels are missing. They consist of short essayistic passages, fragments of recollections, accounts of conversations about poetry and meetings with people. Certain themes, those of evil, pain and death, recur constantly in these reflections. Religious motifs are also prominent: the approach to Catholicism and then the loss of faith; an ever-present metaphysical unease; questions about

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25 Czapski, *Wyrwane strony*, 155. See the interpretation of Czapski's diary-writing in Maria Janion's study "Dziwaczny wzrost", *Czapski i krytycy. Antologia tekstów*, chosen and edited by M. Kitowska-Łysiak and M. Ujma (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 1996).

the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. It is only the reference to the “I” of the writer that imposes order on these questions, which are often formulated in metaphorical or aphoristic shorthand, hardly more than sketched. It was along these lines that the first reader of the text, the poet’s wife, interpreted the notes when she deciphered them for publication. She saw them as “an encoding of intimate experiences connected with the difficult and painful years of his life [...]. The coarse, rough, pulverised words were both a symbolic and a very concrete expression of his state at the time.”<sup>26</sup>

### Gombrowicz Throws Down the Gauntlet

The third stance, which expresses itself in a dramatic and rhetorical turn towards a YOU (though it is not always linked with the use of the second person grammatical form), made its presence felt only occasionally and incidentally before Gombrowicz turned the spotlight on it, as it were.<sup>27</sup> In the history of diary writing, it was undoubtedly connected with the increasingly literary direction of the genre’s development. In the situation that confronted Gombrowicz when he started writing his diary, the possibilities of the two stances discussed earlier, witness and confession, had to a large extent already been explored. The first had an incomparably longer tradition in Polish autobiographical literature and was strongly rooted in readerly consciousness. Although the second seemed to have been less fully exploited and had not appeared until the Romantic era, Gombrowicz was well acquainted with it in many of its naïve versions. The clarity of the introspective stance in French diary-writing, with which he was thoroughly familiar, made the idea of going down the same road intolerable to him. One place where Gombrowicz speaks of this is in an entry in the very first year of his *Diary*, where he rejects the “dishonest honesty” of the *journal intime*:

For whom am I writing? If I am writing for myself, then why is it being published? If for the reader, why do I pretend that I am talking to myself? Are you talking to yourself so that others will hear you?<sup>28</sup>

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26 O. Watowa, \* \* \* [untitled introduction], in: A. Wat, *Dziennik bez samogłosek, Pisma wybrane*, vol. II, ed. K. Rutkowski ([place of publication not identified]: Oficyna Literacka, 1987). Reprinted in London by Polonia Book Fund Ltd., 1986, VII.

27 The early study, “Rola odbiorcy w dzienniku intymnym” [The role of the reader in the intimate diary], which appears in revised form in Part Five of the present volume, presents a kind of “prehistory” of the stance of challenge.

28 W. Gombrowicz, *Diary*, translated by Lillian Vallee (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), 41. For later quotations from the *Diary*, page references are provided in the main text.

These remarks concisely express the paradoxical nature of the situation that arises when the *journal intime* is turned into literature. Gouhier distinguished three types of diary on the basis of the author's intentions as to publication: the diary written with no intention at all of publication; the diary which may be published posthumously; and the diary which may be published during the author's lifetime or which is even published in installments while it is being written.<sup>29</sup> The effect of Gombrowicz's questions is to expose the fact that in the third case (the one famously initiated by André Gide), the diarist usually pretends to be keeping to the principles of a diary of the *first* type, intending by this means to attract an audience. Gombrowicz rejects the concept of the diary as a situation involving speaking without form, not so much because authentic frankness on the part of the diarist who is writing to be published seems not to be possible, but rather because even if he could attain to such frankness, the absence of mediation caused by the lack of form would lead him to "a too embarrassing contact" with the reader:

Writing is nothing more than a battle that the artist wages with others for his own prominence.

Yet if I am incapable of making this thought real here in the diary, what is it worth? Yet somehow I cannot, and something bothers me because there is no artistic form between me and people and our contact becomes too embarrassing. I ought to treat this diary as an instrument of my becoming before you. I ought to strive to have you understand me in some way, in a way that would enable me to have (and let this dangerous word appear) talent. Let this diary be more modern and more conscious and let it be permeated by the idea that my talent can arise only in connection with you, that is, that only you can excite me to talent or, what's more, that only you can create it in me (42–43).

Evidently, then, Gombrowicz was searching in his *Diary* for an entirely new formula. In August 1952, at a time when his intention was only just beginning to take shape, he wrote in a letter to Giedroyc that he was writing "something like a *Diary*". (In response to this, Giedroyc immediately offered to publish it and a few months later the first extract appeared in the Paris emigré monthly *Kultura*). At the same time, in the same letter Gombrowicz defined his attitude to the *journal intime* that is turned into literature:

Gide's *Journal* didn't so much inspire me as show me the possibility of overcoming certain basic difficulties that had until then prevented me from putting my plan into

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29 Gouhier, 95.

practice (because I thought that a diary must be “private”, and he revealed to me the possibility of a private-public diary).<sup>30</sup>

Gombrowicz, of course, very soon afterwards perceived that this version of the private-public utterance is a trap: “Are you talking to yourself in such a way that others can hear you?”. Thus he had his precursors and his contemporaries, and it was in a battle with them that he sought his own uniqueness. What is the context in which we as readers, from our own perspective, can approach Gombrowicz’s *Diary*? The easiest thing to do is to identify those of his literary forebears whom he most categorically rejected. These, of course, include above all the whole French tradition of the *journal intime*, culminating in Gide’s literary diary. As regards Polish diary-writing, in turn, when Gombrowicz began sending his *Diary* to *Kultura* in the nineteen-fifties, there were only three texts in the genre that functioned in literary consciousness: the *Diary* of Stefan Żeromski, whose publication can be said to have begun the public life of the genre in Polish literature; the *Diary* of Jan Lechoń; and Andrzej Bobkowski’s *Szkice piórkami* [Sketches with a Quill].

Żeromski’s youthful exaltation amused Gombrowicz. This emerges unintentionally, when the latter is telling the story of his disputes with Argentinian “puppydom” about the decadence of Europe and the prospects of Latin America. One of his young friends, a student called Roby S., is described in the following way:

He [...] was ready to talk the night through, and it was evident that “brilliant, crazy student talk,” as Żeromski puts it in his journal, had entered his bloodstream. Generally speaking they sometimes remind me of Żeromski and his colleagues from the 1890s: enthusiasm, faith in progress, idealism, faith in the people, romanticism, socialism, homeland.

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30 Letter of Gombrowicz, 6 August 1952, in J. Giedroyc, W. Gombrowicz, *Listy 1950–1969*, chosen and edited with introduction by A. Kowalczyk (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1993), 59–60. Giedroyc’s reply is on page 60. Gombrowicz’s polemical relation with Gide is also mentioned by Alejandro Russovich, who lent his friend a French edition of the *Journal*: “I didn’t manage to finish it, because Witold couldn’t put it down. His comments were about the significance of the diary as a literary genre. He discovered a new model of expression in it, a new instrument, and wondered about how it could be used [...] whatever he read, he read as an artist, a writer. But this brought about a particular result: it gave energy to a thought that he had entertained for a long time, of writing his own diary, one that would be completely different from Gide’s”. See R. Gombrowicz, *Gombrowicz w Argentynie. Świadczenia i dokumenty 1939–1963* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1991), 116.

My impressions from this conversation? I left discouraged and disturbed – bored and amused – irritated and resigned – and as if dressed down, as if they had taken me in. This dummy hadn't appropriated a thing for himself since I had last seen him in Santiago. (475)

Indeed, Gombrowicz read a great many naïve autobiographies, and traces of this can be found in the *Diary*, as Russovich notes.<sup>31</sup> Once or twice he graciously complimented Lechoń on his acuteness of observation and cutting wit, describing the latter's diary as "excellent writing and luminous with a natural intelligence" (429), but he distanced himself decidedly from its basic conception, adding immediately that the text is "compromising because of a pathological, almost complex like, narrowing of intellectual horizons (...), a melancholy diary, a pitiful incarnation of the Warsaw bourgeois spirit and the cafés of that day" (429). For Gombrowicz, Lechoń was one of those diarists who were unable to find in their confessions a way out of the dilemma of dishonesty and embarrassment. Bobkowski's diary of the war years in France interested him very much more ("a broth made of the taste of reality", 363), but outside any kind of reference to his own conception. *Szkice piórkem* to him seemed to be far too much dominated by the mission of the witness, and much too earnestly directed towards external events (363–366).

Gombrowicz dealt extremely successfully in direct polemic with those of his predecessors whose achievements he rejected and surpassed. Today's reader of his work, however, also sees another context: that of the precursors and contemporaries of whose diaries he could not be aware, because at the time that he was writing, they had not yet been published. Unknown to him, the extensive diaries of Zofia Nałkowska, Karol Irzykowski and Maria Dąbrowska, covering periods of many years, were already in existence. Today they are part of the canon of Polish diary-writing, but at the time they had still not made any appearance on the literary stage, and were indeed destined to remain hidden in the backs of drawers for many years to come.<sup>32</sup> Gombrowicz would probably

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31 "Besides history and philosophy, Gombrowicz liked biography best, or rather autobiographies, especially if they were naïve and 'written with feeling'. He borrowed them from the bank library and summarised them for me (they were written in Polish), adding his own comments" (R. Gombrowicz, *Gombrowicz w Argentynie...*, 115).

32 In the twenty-first century, these and countless other diaries of Polish writers have long since been available to the public and have received a great deal of critical attention. Paweł Rodak's monograph, written from the perspective of cultural studies, is particularly noteworthy: *Między zapisem a literaturą. Dziennik polskiego pisarza w XX wieku (Żeromski, Nałkowska, Dąbrowska, Gombrowicz, Herling-Grudziński)* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2011).

have taken issue with Nałkowska and Dąbrowska in the same way as he did with the model practised by Gide and Lechoń.

However, there are other authors whom he would perhaps not have been able to dismiss so lightly. Irzykowski can be treated to a certain extent as a precursor of Gombrowicz in Polish diary-writing because of the tone of intellectual and moral provocation evident in his personal notes. Most of all, though, it is Stanisław Brzozowski's *Pamiętnik* [Memoir] that needs to be mentioned here, along with Henryk Elzenberg's *Kłopot z istnieniem* [The Trouble with Existence] and Karol Ludwik Koniński's three volumes of notes, *Nox atra*, *Ex labyrintho* and *Uwagi* [Comments]. At the beginning of the nineteen-fifties, the only one of these that was in existence as a published text was Brzozowski's diary (which he called *Memoir*); and since it had been printed before the First World War, it had already been largely forgotten. Koniński's handwritten notes were still reposing among his posthumous papers, and though Elzenberg was still writing his "chronological aphorisms" (as he later called them), it was without any idea or possibility at the time of printing them.

Gombrowicz noted in the *Diary* that he had not read anything of Brzozowski; his knowledge of the latter was as mediated by Czesław Miłosz's book *Człowiek wśród skorpionów* [A Man Among Scorpions] (561). The situation recalled by Gombrowicz refers to the years of Brzozowski's youthful rebellion, mentioned in his diary, against the mindlessness of worn-out family tradition. Gombrowicz, however, although in many respects he might have recognised a kindred spirit in Brzozowski, this time behaves in accordance with his motto, which proclaimed that among country bumpkins he was an artist, and among Bohemians an aristocrat. Instead of siding with the rebellious son, he stands up for the father and his parochialism, spiting both Brzozowski and Miłosz – as also himself, in a certain respect. It looks as if he had concluded from Miłosz's argument that he might seem similar to Brzozowski in some way, and had therefore decided on an evasive tactic, drawing readers into a long train of reflections intended to convince them that the truth was quite the opposite.

As regards the stance of Koniński and Elzenberg, however, Gombrowicz was not to be able to deny that there were points of contact. It is true that he did not read their diaries, but nevertheless, there were coincidences of thought that were caused by the presence of all three writers within the same field of possibility, subject to the workings of the same intellectual gravitational force. The philosophical diaries conducted over a period of many years by all three, each entirely independently of the others, were the result of this shared situation. Similar questions kept appearing in all their diaries, about the incomprehensible phenomenon of pain, about the undeserved suffering of every living being,



whether human, fly or helpless beetle lying on its back on the beach. Time and again thoughts of the non-existence of God, or doubt of His existence, thoughts of existential dread, return.

Elzenberg and Koniński, unknown to Gombrowicz, and also independently of each other, moved in the area of problems which were later to become his particular domain, within whose borders he felt himself to be the undivided ruler. What differentiated them from Gombrowicz, however, was their consistently introspective and reflective stance, in which the thought of the reader played no part. The stance of the chronicler or witness to the times certainly did not enter into the equation for Gombrowicz, for fundamental reasons: for him the subject of his writing was always his own “self”. But what was left for him, since he did not want to speak of himself in the way proper to the introspective *journal intime*?

The search for a “more modern and more conscious” form, one based on his own earlier novelistic experiments, led Gombrowicz to transcend the alternatives of witness and introspection. He found a third way which had only been faintly sensed by some earlier autobiographers, and had not been raised by any of them to the dignity of a revealed principle. In one of the passages quoted earlier, Gombrowicz calls his diary an “instrument of becoming” in relation to us as readers. To take the place of introspection, which he had deemed impossible for him because it was false and embarrassing by turns, he invented a form of self-creation directed towards the reader. He replaced Narcissus’s solitary (and in the end suicidal) contemplation with a spectacle which he himself directed. But this was no monodrama, recited before a silent audience. Gombrowicz began drawing his readers into participation in a game, provoking them to write letters and incorporating his disputes with them into the diary.<sup>33</sup>

The new, third way into which Gombrowicz propelled Polish autobiographical writing in the mid-twentieth century consists precisely in this assumption of the challenger’s stance in relation to the reader. Challenge differs from witness and introspection principally in that instead of the “I – WORLD” or “I – I” relation, it

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33 Gombrowicz’s idea for a new form of diary is of course connected with his dramatic and theatrical idea of personality, of which much has been written, among others by Janusz Goćkowski (“Świat wieczystych aktorów (Gombrowicza antroposocjologia formy)”, *Teksty* 1976.4–5), and in the context of the *Diary* by Zdzisław Łapiński (*Ja, Ferdynurke*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1997). Space does not allow me to expand further on this matter, but it is certainly a related problem, as is the category of the game promulgated by Jerzy Jarzębski (*Gra w Gombrowicza*, Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1982).

foregrounds the relationship “I – YOU”. Of course some thought of the addressee has always been present in personal writing. The form that laid the foundations for European autobiography, the *Confessions* of St Augustine, assumed the silent presence of a listener to whom the confession was made. At times a direct “you” even appeared, addressed to someone listening. In Augustine this listener is God, present in the text from its first sentence to its last. This is why in describing Gombrowicz’s autobiographical formula as confession, I do not suggest that he was the one to introduce the figure of the reader, only that he assigned to that figure a specific role. For Gombrowicz was by no means the first diarist to think of his readers and address himself to them. He was, however, the first (at least in Polish literature), to make the reader the evident and principal point of reference, without whom the diary would not exist. His *Diary* is in equal degree writing *for someone* as writing *of himself*. In spite of its title, it is in effect a letter, spread over more than fifteen years, addressed to the author’s contemporaries and to those who were to follow after.

The re-shaping of confession into challenge and provocation was of course possible because of Gombrowicz’s philosophy of the “interhuman”. One cannot help but think here of Martin Buber, who singled out the relations I – THIS and I – YOU. The first concerns the Cartesian understanding of the relation between subject and object, in which the other person, from the point of view of the cognising subject, is only an object. Buber’s philosophy of dialogue goes beyond the Cartesian *cogito*, seen in its lonely movement towards the object, revealing the relation of person to person as a special kind of relation of two subjects.<sup>34</sup>

Gombrowicz’s philosophy of interaction, however, though formed at the same time, is independent of Buber’s thought. It is known that Gombrowicz read the latter’s writings and even attempted to correspond with him.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, in

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34 See, for example, M. Buber, *Between Man and Man* (London, New York: Routledge 2002), first published 1944.

35 Two letters of Buber to Gombrowicz (and a short note of recommendation concerning translation of his works). See R. Gombrowicz, *Gombrowicz w Argentynie...*, 124–126. Russovich writes of reading Buber’s writings together with Gombrowicz: “One day a book entitled *The Problem of Man* came into my hands. Buber defined the concept of ‘between’ with incomparable precision and clarity, using almost exactly the same words as Gombrowicz. The difference between them was of an existential nature. Witold experienced Buber’s thought at first hand, and transformed it into a work of art. I gave him this book in great excitement; he read it with some suspicion at first, but then with growing enthusiasm. I still have the copy of the book, heavily underlined by him.” See R. Gombrowicz, *Gombrowicz w Argentynie...*, 115.

contrast to the renowned philosopher, the Polish writer understood contact with the Other as predominantly a matter of conflict rather than of dialogue. To describe Gombrowicz's formula for autobiographical writing as challenge is also to place it appropriately within the field of his preferred vocabulary of combat, especially of duelling, which appears in so many versions, beginning with *Ferdydurke* (1938) and continuing through *Trans-Atlantyk* and the plays, right up to *Wspomnienia polskie* [*Polish Memories*], composed for Radio Free Europe during the nineteen-fifties. The ritual of the duel, from throwing down the gauntlet, through the choice of seconds and their negotiations of place, time and rules of combat, right up to the moment when the opponents stand face to face with each other, seems to have exerted a particular influence on Gombrowicz's imagination.

### Then Who Is the Addressee of the Diary's Challenge?

First of all, it is the readers of *Kultura*, whose letters and expressions of disagreement provided a starting point for the author to engage with in successive diary entries. The readers of the monthly, however, with their direct responses, played only the role of skirmishers, scuffling before the beginning of the battle proper. The diary's real quarrel is with us, the readers of the book edition, who cannot influence its development by writing letters, and whose questions and objections will not be addressed in any "next episode". For the whole point of the *Diary* is that the last word should not belong to us, that the chain of provocations, surprises and changes of point of view should give the text the structure of a net in which in the end we will be caught, however much we might flutter about and try to escape.

The first loop in this net is the diarist's use of apparently innocent grammatical forms. Besides the typical diary "I", Gombrowicz introduces the second person. He addresses himself to us by the pronoun "you", singular and plural,<sup>36</sup> using these forms in a variety of tones, from the jocular irony of a columnist provocateur, through all kinds of persuasion, instruction and rebuke to genuinely angry summons and questioning. The harshest definition of the addressee of his work is in the *Diary* of 1958: "I wrote for my enemies" (314). Gombrowicz also makes use of the third person pronoun, speaking of himself as "he" in insertions written in a style purporting to be that of a comment added *ex post* by a biographer or

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36 Translator's note: Gombrowicz uses both singular and plural forms, which in Polish are different.

publisher to explain to the reader some imprecision or incompleteness in the record.<sup>37</sup> The effect of such devices is to mingle ways of speaking characteristic of diaries and letters with those of commentaries in a critical edition, while each of these styles is sometimes placed under the pressure of parody. All that the reader can be sure of is that with every page that is turned, with every new paragraph, a surprise may be waiting. Something that at first glance we might be inclined to take as a nightmare turns out to be a joke. Elsewhere, a ludicrous tale of meeting a cow transmutes into a serious philosophical argument about the alienation of human beings from nature. The strategy of ceaseless changes of tension forces the reader into unceasing watchfulness, as he or she is forever being challenged and abused anew, even where the form of direct address as “you” disappears.

Gombrowicz described all his writing as a “long letter” (314); but the epistolary character of his work is more obvious in the *Diary*, as writing both of himself and to someone, than in any other of his writings.

The second person grammatical form had also already appeared in diaries before Gombrowicz, but then it had a different character. Brzozowski sometimes addressed his remarks to himself, as a kind of self-persuasion, an appeal to his own self with some encouragement or consolation or demand. Żeromski's work contains several sentences which are addressed to a woman whom he loved and to whom he gave his diary to read. In Nałkowska, in the early years of her writing, there are rhetorical addresses to an unknown, future reader. But these are sporadic cases; before Gombrowicz, it had never entered anyone's head to elevate them to the status of a method.<sup>38</sup>

Narrational tactics for involving the reader are only preliminary ways of making contact and arousing attention; they are a kind of warm-up. But once we have allowed the writer to take hold of a finger, the joking stops, and we may find a whole arm ripped off, or sometimes even our whole self torn apart. Gombrowicz draws the reader into a world of fantastic micro-plots, a world full of tense situations, exploding with scornful mockery and dread. These micro-plots are played out only in the thoughts that some trivial detail suddenly awakes. Very occasionally it is reading a book, sometimes it is a note in a newspaper, often it is simply the sight of some object or of some situation as insignificant as pouring water into a glass. Nothing has really happened, and yet the veil of

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37 See for example *Diary*, 391, 397.

38 I return to this matter in Part Five of this book when discussing the role of the reader in the intimate diary.

reality has been torn in two and the dread of existence yawns through the gap. The only thing that cannot be avoided is fear of pain.

The sharpness and seriousness of the questions that Gombrowicz-the-philosopher draws out from these intellectual adventures work like a trap that snaps shut on the reader. The tension between the triviality of the cause and the weight of the question raised becomes unbearable; a serious way out is blocked by absurdity, while the prospect of the fundamental existential questions that have been inferred from what began in jest, makes it impossible to wave them away. The diarist brings the reader to the point he intended and then abandons him to the bewilderment of an unexpected punchline or a thread that is broken off unfinished.

Apart from these adventures, which constitute a peculiar variant on the philosophical micro-tale, the *Diary* also contains other experiments with the reader in the shape of a variety of mystifications on the level of anecdote. Sometimes mystification is signalled only by a parodying style, and sometimes it is de-mystified by a later commentary. The opposite also occurs: behind the simple version of an event there may really be an authentic fact, and it is only the commentary that questions it that leads the reader “up the garden path”.

This whole complex strategy of provocation would have remained only a one-off discovery, rather than the beginning of a new stance in autobiographical writing, if it had not been taken up and transformed by other authors. The impact and inspirational power of Gombrowicz’s conception is much more visible from today’s perspective, in the context of his successors rather than only that of his forebears.

## Diaries after Gombrowicz

A comparison with Herling-Grudziński’s *Dziennik pisany nocą* [Journal Written at Night] seems on the one hand essential – because Herling took over the place in *Kultura* that had so long been occupied by Gombrowicz’s *Diary* – while on the other it is rendered unnecessary by the immediately audible difference in the diary’s tone, as well as by its different subject-matter and world view. It is worth recalling here a remark by Konstanty Jeleński, who as the most penetrating of experts on Gombrowicz’s work was peculiarly entitled to make this obvious comment:

I always start reading *Kultura* from the *Journal Written at Night*, just as in the past I started with Gombrowicz’s *Diary*, though there is nothing to link them besides their form, which imparts a complete freedom of expression. It is surely no accident that Gustaw Herling-Grudziński began writing his *Journal* when Gombrowicz fell silent.<sup>39</sup>

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39 K. A. Jeleński, “Portret dekady z wizerunkiem autora w lewym rogu”, *Kultura* 1981.3;

Herling already contrasts decidedly with Gombrowicz in his very conception of the diary as a chronicle or fresco of the life of the epoch. The most often quoted self-interpretation, at the end of the entry for 3 February 1979, speaks of the presence of historical events in the diary, “sometimes on stage, sometimes in the background”, and defines the diarist as an “observer and chronicler”, discreetly present as a “miniature and only faintly sketched self-portrait”, placed on the sidelines “in the bottom left-hand corner, after the manner of some Renaissance paintings”. It would seem hard to find any more obvious embracing of the stance of the witness, especially when we consider that earlier (3 November 1976), the diarist had firmly excluded the opposite possibility: the stance of challenge. Commenting on a passage from the diary of Lev Chestov, who had written that inner experiences are always too “sacred” or too “paltry” to be unveiled to others, Herling adds:

Sacred or paltry, in both cases they are allergic to the written page. But they have a form of their own, on the order of a disorderly fragmented confession whispered in thought. These admissions, like the shreds of dream after waking, are not lodged in articulate language. So what are they? A semi-devotional stammer aimed in darkness at a single invisible and silent listener: in periods when it is intense, a diary remains untouched.<sup>40</sup>

Certainly, the prevailing stance in Herling’s Journal is that of the witness-chronicler; but it is not the only one.<sup>41</sup> The diarist himself is conscious of this, as

I quote from *Herling-Grudziński i krytycy. Antologia tekstów*, selected and edited by Z. Kudelski (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 1997), 324. In fact Herling had started writing his diary before this, but he only began publishing it “when Gombrowicz fell silent”. Compare the information about the writer in *Rozmowy w Dragonei*, interviews conducted and edited by Włodzimierz Bolecki (Warszawa: Szpak, 1997), 333. Ryszard Nycz sums up the constant clash of worldview between Herling-Grudziński and Gombrowicz by distinguishing between their approaches to the phenomenon of epiphany. For the former, epiphanies are “an artistic form of the experience of *epistemological lack of transparency* that is linked with the sense of the certainty of existence of a permanent ontological base”, a sense which leads to “ceaseless attempts to find hidden meaning. Gombrowicz’s anti-epiphanies, in turn, are more a form of experience of *ontological instability*. They pose the problem of the right to existence of one fundamental base”. See R. Nycz, “‘Zamknięty odprysk świata’. O pisarstwie Gustawa Herlinga-Grudzińskiego”, *Etos i artyzm. Rzecz o Herlingu-Grudzińskim*, ed. S. Wysłouch and R. K. Przybylski (Poznań: Wydawnictwo a5, 1991), 139.

40 Herling, entry for November 3, 1976, trans. Ronald Strom, *Volcano and Miracle* (New York: Penguin, 1996), 66–67.

41 One of the first studies of the chronicle as Herling’s favourite narrative model, not only in the diary but in his short stories, was Włodzimierz Bolecki’s article “Ciemna miłość” [Dark Love], which also analyses the opposite pole of the writer’s imagination: figures

is evident from the fact that he begins the self-definition quoted above with the declaration that the ideal of the chronicle is “unrivalled, to be sure”. The author’s disputatious temperament, the sharp distinctiveness of his views (especially with regard to politics), his vehement dislike of many symptoms of Western contemporary social life, his passionate love of art and tenderness for the Italian landscape, all imparted a huge element of the personal to his supposed “chronicle”. As a result, the diarist’s self-portrait is gradually transformed from a miniature sketch to a painting of vast proportions, saturated with intense colours. There are also rare moments when the veil of silence cast over inner experiences is drawn back. Herling’s hand reaches out for the diary which was supposed at that moment to lie “untouched”, and happily, however, some “shreds of dream after waking” are articulated (though also at once removed to the distance of a generalising interpretation), as on 4 March, 1975 in Maisons-Laffitte. The whole entry reads as follows:

A linguistic dream, I don’t know what else to call it. A sudden walk (or more precisely run) into the landscape of childhood and youth is a common motif in dreams, though among emigrants it has a special flavour. The new thing was that I did not go into my own landscape alone, but in the company of friends who were foreign; and that at the same time, on the jetty in S., everyone started talking to me in Polish. A dream that I suppose was connected with my visits to Laffitte; which in my life, spoken in Italian, are also violent leaps of language.<sup>42</sup>

It is usually in such extremely important, though short, descriptions of dreams that the note of intimacy, which Herling so seldom permits to enter his diary, makes itself heard. The chronicler and observer, the witness to history, then changes for a moment into the chronicler of dreams and the unconscious – the most inward part of the human interior, often hidden even from a person’s own sight. But the third possibility, the Gombrowicz-style game, the gauntlet thrown down in front of the reader – did that hold the slightest interest for Herling?

Every reader of *Dziennik pisany nocą* remembers the story of the journey to Prague on 3 June 1976, which in reality did not happen at all. It is not until the entry for the following day that the mystification is uncovered. For many years, this did not interfere with the judgment that Herling was a model of the

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of dream and memory. W. Bolecki, *Ciemny staw. Trzy szkice do portretu Gustawa Herlinga-Grudzińskiego* (Warszawa: Plejada, 1991), 73–88.

42 Translator’s note: Maisons-Laffitte was the seat of the most important of Polish emigré publishing houses, the Polish Literary Institute (Instytut Literacki) founded by Jerzy Giedroyc. “S” stands for Suchedniów, where Herling spent his childhood and youth. This fragment from Herling’s Journal translated by Jean Ward.

“chronicler and observer”. It seemed that if he went beyond the matter-of-fact tone of the witness, it was to ironise or deride, rather than to play games with the reader. The “Prague expedition”, however, intrigued those who wrote about Herling’s Journal. Many readers’ reactions draw attention to its significance. These testimonies are in themselves worthy of attention, for they constitute readers’ responses to the challenge issued by the writer.

Michał Głowiński, a highly experienced reader, begins by admitting that he read this passage as if it were “an ordinary entry in the diary, as if it recounted a real adventure of the author in one of the countries of real socialism. I was astonished that (...) fascination with the work and person of Franz Kafka had propelled him into taking such a risk – and I was nervous along with him.”<sup>43</sup> It was only in the course of continued reading, when he perceived the elements of the grotesque in the picture of the events presented, that Głowiński’s suspicions were aroused and he was led to conclude that the diary entry allegedly written in Prague was fictional. The later part of his sketch is a precise analysis of the novellistic character of Herling’s text.

Krzysztof Pomian, for his part, mentions the invented Prague escapade in the very first paragraph of his introduction to the French selection from *Dziennik pisany nocą*. He draws a whole chain of questions out of this situation, imagining the dilemmas that may be generated in the mind of the reader when once he or she has been subjected to such misleading.<sup>44</sup> Roman Zimand recalls the “Prague episode” in an extensive and very precise argument concerning invention and truth, in which he draws attention not only to mystifications that are unambiguously clarified by the author, but also to devices that seem to be of the opposite kind. For the story of the journey to Prague looks at first like an authentic fragment of the diary; whereas “Święty smok” [The Sacred Dragon], which most interests Zimand, although it is included in the diary as an entry for November 1984, is distinguished by a title which should immediately suggest to the reader the fictional character of the story. The interesting thing is that Zimand found references in the earlier volumes of the diary (for 1971 and 1976) to an event that constituted the base for the plot of the dragon story: the conversion to Judaism of a group of boys from a tiny village in southern Italy. Hence, to

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43 M. Głowiński, “Muza zmyślonych podróży”, article written 1988, first published in *Teksty Drugie* 1991.1–2, reprinted in *Herling-Grudziński i krytycy*, 291.

44 K. Pomian, “Manicheizm na użytek naszych czasów”, trans. Ewa Wende. The French original was published in 1989, and the Polish translation as part of the home edition of *Dziennik pisany nocą 1971–1972* (Warszawa: Res Publica, 1990).



his astonishment, the reader, who is led by the title to believe that a fictional story has been inserted into the diary record, finds elements that he has already met earlier within the diary's documentary frame. In addition, Herling makes use of narrative devices which strengthen the sense of ambiguity, in that they fit as well into the factographical narrative arrangement of a diary as into the convention of a first-person fictional narrative.<sup>45</sup>

In later volumes of the diary, Herling develops and complicates the passages between story-telling and the diarist's authentic narration. Autobiographical stylisations are incorporated into the fiction, stylisations which are sometimes highly sophisticated and constructed with great evocativeness, inlaid with details whose authenticity is not in doubt, but which border directly on obvious inventions. In this way, the writer keeps his readers in a constant state of uncertainty, tempting them to check various pieces of source information, dates and names. A still more radical provocation is to be found in the combination of carefully worked-out documentary stylisation and ostentatiously obvious fictionality. The writer achieves this by detailed use of dates. Their presence is one of the external and most distinct generic markers of the diary (and of the chronicle beloved by Herling). The writer used a pseudo-chronicle date as a manifest sign of fictionality in the diary for 1987, in which he incorporated a short story entitled "Pożar w Kaplicy Sykstyńskiej A. D. 1998" [Fire in the Sistine Chapel A.D. 1998]. And immediately after this title, in the first sentence of the narrative, he sets off with some of his well-known probability-making devices, rendering credible events supposed to be taking place in a time that was only to come eleven years in the future! The story is described as a "statement" taken down on the orders of the police; it is supplied with typical documentary data such as the time and place of the statement's recording and the personal details of the witness, who presents his account in an autobiographical manner.

A slightly different way of playing with dates is to be found in the diary for 1996. It begins (after the first few entries for January) with something entitled "Don Ildebrando", which is undoubtedly a short story. In spite of the first-person form of the narration, the reader will easily recognise in it the convention of the "story overheard" to which the author so often resorted in earlier volumes of his Journal. The next entry after "Don Ildebrando" begins with a return to pure diary narration, since it has no title, only the formula of place and time.

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45 R. Zimand, "Prawda, 'zmyślenie' i 'Dziennik pisatielja'", *Etos i artyzm...*, 197–209.

Except that this formula contains something extremely surprising: “Moscow, 15 May, 2000”! If the reader who remembers the mystification of the famous “journey to Prague” had only “Moscow, 15 May” to go on, without that “2000”, recorded in 1996, he or she might be too quick to conclude, on the basis of that earlier reading experience, that this is an analogical case. Herling, then, does not even propose a balance between document and fiction, for readers of the *Journal* are already too familiar with that. By supplying a date which was not to come until four years later, he at once casts his readers into what is self-evidently invented, reminding us of the convention of political fiction. The stark grotesque in which Lenin’s mummified body mysteriously disappears from the mausoleum might have assumed the form of a story, like the “narrational *divertimento*” “Rosyjski niedźwiedź” [The Russian Bear] of 1993. Here, however, the reader instead encounters the typical diary form: a series of entries without titles, dated from 15th to 30th May, 2000. The entry that follows this, headed “Naples, 12 March, 1996”, signals the return from the grotesque world of political fiction to the authentic calendar.

Gombrowicz made literature of his whole diary, but literature that was in the highest degree personal. All the time he wrote I, I, I, yet he made confessions to no-one. He created a persona for himself as a diarist, but not the kind of diarist who writes only for himself, not a mirror-writer like Leonardo da Vinci, and not someone like Tolstoy who kept the intimacies of his diary manuscript hidden in a bootleg to conceal it from prying eyes. No: Gombrowicz speaks directly to the reader. Herling enters the territory already conquered by Gombrowicz and goes a step further, forcing the reader to perform two mutually exclusive roles at the same time: as reader of both fact and fiction. The author of *Dziennik pisany nocą* works on two tracks, interweaving a chain of stories with the narrative sequence of a diary. Between the two tracks he builds ever new bridges, crossroads and interpenetrations, leading readers down blind alleys from which they have to withdraw, or opening out new prospects in front of them which turn out to be an illusion, like a baroque painted ceiling pretending to be the open sky. From scraps of authenticity he creates fictions, while carefully stylising pure fiction to look like something authentic.

Among the diaries written after Gombrowicz, Tadeusz Konwicki’s *Kalendarz i klepsydra* [The Calendar and the Hourglass] occupies an important place. This “lie-diary”, written in Warsaw in 1974, in which the author leads the reader on a wild-goose chase, repudiating on one page what has been said on the previous one, and sometimes presenting as a fiction or dream something that later turns out to be a verifiable fact, is undoubtedly descended from Gombrowicz. Konwicki flirts with readers and makes fun of them by turns, always addressing himself

directly to them.<sup>46</sup> *Nowy Świat i okolice* [*New World Avenue and Vicinity*] and *Wschody i zachody księżyca* [*Moonrise, Moonset*] are further variations on this theme.<sup>47</sup> The peculiarity of Konwicki's autobiographical formula of provocation has been thoroughly and precisely examined by Jerzy Kandziora.<sup>48</sup> His analysis of the reception of Konwicki's personal narratives, and then of their poetics, perfectly corroborates the hypothesis of the third autobiographical stance and the role played by Konwicki in its establishment.

Zbigniew Żakiewicz's *Dziennik intymny mego N.N.* [*Intimate Diary of my N.N.*] presents a completely different challenge to the reader. Here, the writer creates the figure of his anonymous double and incorporates into his own diary accounts of the thoughts and experiences of that mysterious N.N., who has very many characteristics in common with Żakiewicz. N.N., like his creator, is a writer, a Russian scholar and a Pole from near Vilnius who lives in Gdańsk; hence it is a fluid border that separates the two. More than once readers must ask themselves whether it is the writer or his double that they are dealing with; it is often difficult to know when they are in the embraces of the latter rather than the former. The figure of this double continues to appear in successive volumes: *Pożądanie wzgórz wiekuistych* [*Desire for the Eternal Hills*] and *Ujrzone, w czasie zatrzymane* [*Seen, Arrested in Time*]. These undated diaries comprise a sequence of miniature prose pieces furnished with titles that are mostly also their opening words. The diary character of the whole is determined above all by the author's decision to make use of this generic name in the main title of the first volume and in the subtitle of the second. These miniatures contain sometimes an anecdote, sometimes a thumbnail sketch of a person, often a reflection aroused by reading or by a religious experience. Sometimes they are limited to a note so concise as almost to be an aphorism.

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46 It should be remembered that the game played by Konwicki involves one more instance than was the case with Gombrowicz. In the "lie-diary", there stands between the text and the general public the scarcely perceptible but always present shadow of the first reader: the political censor. What part of the game is carried on for his benefit is a separate question with which I cannot deal here, any more than with other cases of diaries written for publication within Poland in the communist era.

47 T. Konwicki, *Nowy Świat i okolice* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1986), published with the censor's permission; English translation by W. Arndt (*New World Avenue and Vicinity*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991); *Wschody i zachody księżyca* (Warsaw, "second circulation" and London, 1982); English translation by R. Lourie (*Moonrise, Moonset*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1987).

48 J. Kandziora, *Zmęczeni fabułą...*

The oscillation between what the diary's "I" says about himself and what he says about N. N. as a third person creates a ceaseless uncertainty in the reader as to the ultimate identity of the diarist. In Żakiewicz there is not a single trace of Gombrowicz's ironic play; it is in something else that the stance of challenge reveals itself. Gombrowicz wrote that when there was no "artistic form" between him and the reader, their contact became "too embarrassing" (43). By summoning "my N.N." into existence, Żakiewicz, as a diarist who publishes his entries as they are written, can always hide behind his double and so avoid that "too embarrassing" contact with the reader.

All these authors, whatever the detailed differences among them, find themselves in a similar situation, one that was not known to earlier diarists. For them, writing a diary that is intended at once for publication, and is even published as it is written, is not merely possible; it is something that can be taken for granted. Before Gombrowicz, Polish writers did not publish their diaries during their lifetimes, although they were aware of the example of Gide. Only the publication of some fragments of Jan Lechoń's diary in a journal (the London emigré publication *Wiadomości*) falls within the period contemporary with Gombrowicz. Whereas after him, after Gombrowicz – Herling, Konwicki and Żakiewicz all appear. Jerzy Zawieyski prints selections from his diary in book form, Jerzy Andrzejewski places fragments of his *Z dnia na dzień* [From Day to Day] in a weekly, Anna Kamińska publishes the two volumes of her *Notebook*, and over a period of ten years, Kazimierz Brandys makes public successive volumes of his *Miesiące* [Months].

Forty years earlier, when Gombrowicz's *Diary* was coming into being, such a development in Polish literature would have been unthinkable.

## **Part Two Confessions, Confidences, Dreams**



# 1. The Spiritual Autobiography in Twentieth-Century Polish Literature<sup>1</sup>

Anyone who reads the literature of personal document – diaries, autobiographies, memoirs, letters, commonplace books – will be forcibly struck by the sense that twentieth-century Polish writing of this kind includes a significant though perhaps not numerous group of texts in which problems of a philosophical and religious nature play an essential part. However, if we attempt to investigate what constitutes the identity of this whole, bearing in mind the clear inner differentiations within it and striving to define where its borders lie – in a word, if we try to interpret this phenomenon and ask whether the spiritual autobiography really exists in Polish literature, some fundamental difficulties immediately emerge. The situation recalls St Augustine's paradoxical statement in the *Confessions* about time, that he knows what it is until someone asks him to explain it.

Let us take a look at the uncertainly defined whole formed by such diverse writings as Stanisław Brzozowski's *Pamiętnik* [Memoir] and *Listy* [Letters]; Henryk Elzenberg's *Kłopot z istnieniem* [The Problem with Existence]; Jerzy Liebert's *Listy* [Letters]; Karol Ludwik Koniński's *Ex labyrintho, Nox atra* and *Uwagi* [Comments]; Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński's *Zapiski więzienne* [Prison Notes]; Aleksander Wat's "spoken memoir" *Mój wiek* [My Century]; Jerzy Zawieyski's diary and his essay "Droga katechumena" [The Catechumen's Way]. Then we should consider Czesław Miłosz's *Ziemia Ulro* [The Land of Ulro]; Zbigniew Żakiewicz's *Dziennik intymny mego N.N.* [The Intimate Diary of my N.N.] and its continuations; the two volumes of Anna Kamińska's *Notatniki* [Notebooks]; the second part of Zbigniew Jankowski's *Szkice do oceanu* [Sketches to the Ocean]; and Roman Brandstaetter's *Krąg biblijny* [The Bible Reading Circle].<sup>2</sup> On the one hand, this list might seem to be very far from complete,

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1 I was supported while working on this chapter by a grant from the Oxford Colleges Hospitality Scheme for Polish Scholars, which allowed me to spend a month at Oxford University in September 1988.

2 S. Brzozowski, *Pamiętnik*. Extracts from the author's letters with annotations by O. Ortwin (Lwów: Księgarnia polska B. Połonieckiego, 1913; reprinted Kraków-Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1985); *Listy*, vol. 1: 1900–1908; vol. 2: 1909–1911, edited with foreword and commentaries by M. Sroka (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1970); H. Elzenberg, *Kłopot z istnieniem. Aforyzmy w porządku czasu*, ed. M. Woroniecki (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 1994) (first edition: Kraków 1963);

while on the other, quite the contrary, one might wish to remove some of the items from it in the interests of greater uniformity. And if we accept this set of texts as a basis, it will still be necessary to refer to other writings by the same authors, which, although they will not be the direct subject of study, are like satellites circling around it and must be kept constantly in the field of view. Bearing these reservations in mind, then, let us assume what seems obvious, if only intuitively: that the religious subject-matter of twentieth-century Polish autobiography is contained principally in the texts I have listed, and that we can therefore distinguish them as a whole that requires to be investigated. In all these texts, the writers' focus is on their inner world: the work of the intellect, the things they have read, their spiritual experiences. In this sense we may say that the stance of confession is the dominant in their writings.

Polish literature of the twentieth century and beyond has so far not produced a spiritual autobiography of a kind to rank with the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, St. Teresa's *Diary of a Soul*, the *Apologia pro vita sua* of Blessed John Henry, Cardinal Newman or Thomas Merton's *The Seven Storey Mountain*. In the group of texts of interest here we find utterances of such diverse types as diaries, letters, collections of notes, aphorisms and essays. Diary-type records displaying various degrees of detail (dated by day, month or even year), can be found in

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J. Liebert, *Listy*, in his *Pisma zebrane*, vol. 2, collected and edited with commentaries by S. Frankiewicz (Warszawa: Biblioteka „Więzi”, 1976); K. L. Koniński, *Ex labyrintho*, foreword by K. Górski (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, 1962); *Nox atra*, foreword by H. Bednarek (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, 1961); *Uwagi, 1940–1942*, selection, introduction and notes by B. Mamoń (Poznań: “W drodze”, 1987); S. Wyszyński, *Zapiski więzienne* (Paris: Editions du Dialogue, 1982); Wat, A. *Mój wiek. Pamiętnik mówiony*, Part 1–2, ed. Rafał Habielski (Kraków: Universitas, 2011); J. Zawieyski, *Kartki z dziennika 1955–1969*, selected, edited and introduced by J. Z. Brudnicki and B. Wit (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, 1983); J. Zawieyski, *Dzienniki*, selected and edited by A. Knyt, vol. I selections from 1955 – 1959 (Warszawa: Ośrodek Karta, 2011), vol. II selections from 1960 – 1969, Warszawa 2012; J. Zawieyski, “Droga katechumena”, *Znak* 1958. 10 (43): 14–35; Cz. Miłosz, *Ziemia Ulro*, (Warszawa: Ośrodek Karta, 2012) (first edition: Paris 1977); Z. Żakiewicz, *Dziennik intymny mego N. N.*, Warszawa: Biblioteka „Więzi”, 1977); *Pożądanie wzgórz wiekiuistych* (Poznań: Pallotinum, c. 1987); *Ujrzone, w czasie zatrzymane* (Gdańsk: Marabut, 1996); A. Kamieńska, *Notatnik 1965–1972* (Poznań: “W drodze”, 1982); *Notatnik 1973–1979* (Poznań: “W drodze”, 1987); R. Brandstaetter, *Krąg biblijny*, in *Dzieła wybrane*, vol. 2, *Krąg biblijny i franciszkański* (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, 1981) (*Krąg biblijny*, third edition, extended); Z. Jankowski, “Tworzyć statek”, in his: *Szkice do oceanu* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Morskie, 1981).



the writings of Brzozowski, Elzenberg, Wyszyński, Zawieyski, Kamińska and Jankowski, regardless of what generic title or subtitle these writers gave to their texts. It might be “memoir”, “aphorisms in chronological order”, “notes” or “note-book”. It is essential to keep in mind the fact that scarcely half of the texts we are considering possess a form that was finally given to them by the author. The rest are available to the reader in a shape determined by other factors than the author’s wishes, such as the decisions of heirs, addressees of letters or editors, simple chance or the scattering and destruction of pages of the manuscript by the operations of time. This is an extremely common situation in personal writing.

We may assume that Brzozowski’s Memoir was published in the form in which the author agreed that it could be presented to the reader. The same undoubtedly applies to Elzenberg’s *Kłopot z istnieniem*, Wyszyński’s *Zapiski więzienne*, Zawieyski’s “Droga katechumena”, Miłosz’s *The Land of Ulro* and the books of Żakiewicz, Jankowski, Brandstaetter and Kamińska. Koniński’s texts are faithfully reconstructed from drafts, but it is difficult to say what ultimate shape the writer would have given them if time and health had permitted him to work on them for longer. Wat’s spoken memoir was written down from a tape recording, and one fragment was typed out by the author, but there are some completely accidental gaps (because of poor recording). Besides that, the peculiar openness of this text results from the author’s decision as to the way in which the autobiography came into being. There is a strong element here not only of improvisation (speaking live), but also, and even more importantly, of the dialogic. Miłosz, in conversation with Wat, is extremely reserved and discreet, but there is no doubt that he is the co-author, interrupting the train of thought with his questions.

The case of Zawieyski is a particularly difficult one. His diary, which arose in the last fourteen years of his life, is the closest of the texts mentioned here to the general formula of the diary as embracing the most heterogeneous aspects of life: the writer’s work; his religious experiences; his contact with art and nature; historical events. The author himself published two book selections during his lifetime: *Brzegiem cienia* [By the Shore of Shade] and *W alei bezpożytecznych rozmyślań* [In the Avenue of Useless Meditations]<sup>3</sup>). There, however, he limited himself almost entirely to notes on his reading and on the activities of Warsaw theatres of the time. The volumes published after his death constitute no more than a selection from the whole. The essay “Droga katechumena”, which I treat as a short spiritual autobiography, written from the perspective of his return to

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3 J. Zawieyski, *Brzegiem cienia. Kartki z dziennika* (Kraków: Znak, 1960); *W alei bezpożytecznych rozmyślań*, (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1965).

faith, was published in the form given to it by the author, without the intervention of the publisher, who would have made a selection from it.

When speaking of texts that are marked to such a high degree by external intervention (of accident or someone else's wish), texts that are in the most literal sense not ready, we may doubt more than ever whether we are justified in referring to the category of genre. In this situation, the only way out is to assume the perspective of the reader. All that we can say of the works collected here applies to the form of them that is available to the reader, not to a structure with a meaning intended by the author. This allows us to focus on two fundamental problems. First of all, there are the contexts in which these writings might be understood with regard to their autobiographical quality and religious subject-matter; secondly (and more importantly), there is the question of the writings themselves not as something for *us* to read, but as testimony to what their *authors* read.<sup>4</sup> These very different writers, whose ways of speaking differ profoundly, who can perhaps only with difficulty be set alongside one another as autobiographers and as individuals thinking about God, nevertheless reveal themselves to us as bound by countless threads of the same net, weaving itself outside time and space, when we look at them as people who read. We can then see that the shared home ("shared" in the sense also of "theirs and ours") in which we can gather them all together is – the library.

We need to deal first with the first problem, that is the question of how to read this collection of texts in the traditions of autobiographical and of religious literature. These two traditions meet in the genres known as mystical autobiography (above all in Catholic spirituality) and spiritual autobiography (which is mostly Protestant). In our investigation, it will be helpful to place these alongside secular literature of personal document, especially memoir-writing, with its historical and social ambitions and its aspiration to bear witness to its times through personal experience.

## The Mystical Autobiography

In thinking about mystical autobiography, we encounter the difficulty of distinguishing it from mystical writings in general (for instance from the mystical treatise) or the problem of the linking of both forms, mystical autobiography and mystical treatise, with mystical poetry. Within the field of Polish religious culture,

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4 See M. Głowiński, "Świadectwa i style odbioru", in his: *Style odbioru. Szkice o komunikacji literackiej* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1977), 116–137.

the strongest influences were the writings of St Teresa of Ávila and St John of the Cross, partly through the texts themselves, and partly through quotations from them and critical commentary on them. Vernacular writing in the field of mystical autobiography (or more broadly, of reference to the inner life in a spirit of asceticism and prayer) is represented rather modestly. Thanks to Karol Górski's research, we can date the beginnings of the Polish ascetic-mystical school to the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>5</sup> Models were drawn from Spanish mysticism, whose influence, first through the Benedictines and Jesuits and then through the Carmelite order, completely dominated the Polish religious spirit of the first half of the seventeenth century. It is from this time that the first Polish autobiography of a woman comes – this being the mystical autobiography of Mother Teresa of Jesus.<sup>6</sup> In Carmelite archives still other records of more modest proportions and lesser importance have been preserved; for the practice of describing the states of one's soul (usually on instruction from a confessor) was nothing unusual. Despite the presence of meditative motifs, these texts are not ascetic tracts; they do not have a theoretical character but report the religious life of an individual, frequently presenting it in quite fine psychological detail.

Among later phenomena of this kind, Górski distinguishes the autobiographical notes of Bogdan Jański (1807–1840), who in his youth was an atheist and then a Saint-Simonist, only to return in the end to Catholicism. Semenenko and Kajsiewicz, his religious “brothers” and pupils, were the later founders of the Congregation of the Resurrection. Jański's notes were to have appeared as a volume in the Ascetic and Mystical Writers series, with the title *Dziennik wewnętrzný* [Inner Diary], However, only fragments have actually been

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5 *Pisarze ascetyczno-mistyczni Polski*, vol. 1: *Pisma ascetyczno-mistyczne benedyktynek reformy chełmińskiej*, ed. K. Górski (Poznań, 1937); vol. 2: *Autobiografia mistyczna M. Teresy od Jezusa*, ed. K. Górski (Poznań, 1939) (foreword by K. Górski, reprinted in his book *Studia i materiały z dziejów duchowości* (Warszawa: Akad. Teol. Katol., 1980), 13–16). *Autobiograficzne zapiski M. Barbary od Najś. Sakramentu, karmelitanek bousej (zm. 1670)*, introduced and edited by K. Górski, *Nasza Przeszłość* 1961.14; K. Górski, *Od religijności do mistyki. Zarys dziejów życia wewnętrznego w Polsce, cz. 1: 966–1795* (Lublin: Tow. Nauk. Katol. Uniw. Lubelskiego, 1962).

6 See H. Popławska, “Autobiografia mistyczna”, in *Religijność polskiego baroku*, ed. Cz. Hernas and M. Hanusiewicz (Lublin: Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski, 1995); J. K. Goliński, “Mistyka i laska. Życie wewnętrzne Marianny Marchockiej w świetle ‘Żywota’”, in *Pisarki polskie epok dawných*, ed. K. Stasiewicz (Olsztyn: Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczna, 1998).

published.<sup>7</sup> There is no record in them of mystical states; rather, this is a diary of the inner life, devoted in large part to the religious practices of a new convert.

A separate position in the chain we are examining here is occupied by the *Dziennik Sprawy Bożej* [Diary of the Circle of God's Cause] of Seweryn Goszczyński, the "chronicler and bard of Towianism".<sup>8</sup> Possibly, after all, this text is less a picture of the religious life of an individual than a document of the state of collective consciousness of those supporters of Polish Romantic messianism who formed the Circle, founded by Andrzej Towiański, to which the title refers. This movement owed its social impact in large degree to Adam Mickiewicz, who was active in it for several years.

Among the newer writings touching on the inner life, the extensive *Diary* of Sr Faustina Kowalska,<sup>9</sup> now canonised, calls for attention, in that its style and brand of emotionality are somewhat reminiscent of the *Story of a Soul* of St Thérèse of the Child Jesus. The author concentrates on her spiritual states, describing her visions and her inner conversations with Jesus, very often quoting His words to her. She also interweaves small details from the daily life of the convent into the narrative, as well as the texts of prayers composed by her, sometimes presented in the form of naïve, rather unsatisfactory verse.

The Polish "mystical autobiographies" mentioned briefly here thus form a clearly distinguished, separate current, shaped by the tradition of spiritual exercises carried out according to a defined rule, or simply defined by the authority of the Church (in the case of life within a religious order), or at least referring to traditional models of asceticism, prayer and contemplation. The fact that these texts arose in manuscript over a long period of time limited their influence to their immediate surroundings, that of the community within the religious order. The links between them are explained by their relation to one and the same tradition, a tradition which shaped them all and included not only the most exalted spheres of reference (the Bible, the writings of the Church Fathers

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7 K. Górski, "Religijność Bogdana Jańskiego przed nawróceniem" and "Rekolekcje Bogdana Jańskiego u Trapistów w r. 1837", in his: *Studia i materiały*, 286–303 and 304–318; and B. Jański, *Mądrość służby: myśli* (Wrocław: Wydaw. Wrocławskiej Księgarni Archidiecezjalnej, 1991).

8 S. Goszczyński, *Dziennik Sprawy Bożej*, edited with introduction by Z. Sudolski, vol. 1–2 (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, 1984); see M. Król, "Smutna książka" and W. Weintraub, "Goszczyński kronikarz i wieszcz towianizmu", *Tygodnik Powszechny* 35.40 (1985).

9 *Dzienniczek Sługi Bożej S. M. Faustyny Kowalskiej* (Kraków-Stockbridge-Rzym: Zgromadzenie SS. Matki Bożej Miłosierdzia, 1981).

and the great mystics), but also the world of ordinary popular religious culture, found for example in prayer books and hymns.

## The Spiritual Autobiography

The spiritual autobiography, as a peculiar kind of personal writing, has been the subject of extensive study.<sup>10</sup> It took shape in seventeenth-century England, whose religious troubles and unease also found expression in remarkable metaphysical poetry. At the same time, it developed apace in America, thanks above all to the advance of Puritanism. Some scholars believe that the most distant prototype of the Anglo-Saxon spiritual autobiography was that work of significance throughout the Christian world and beyond it, whose influence exceeds the bounds of both particular national literatures and particular trends within Christianity: a work that belongs to Western culture as a whole, while at the same time it is recognised as the first modern autobiography in the broadest sense of the term. I am talking, of course, about the *Confessions* of St Augustine. However, some scholars are of the opinion (to which I shall return) that the wider impact of the *Confessions* in Anglo-Saxon tradition cannot be dated to earlier than the mid-nineteenth century.

The spiritual autobiography differs from every other kind of autobiography in its very inception. For the matter at issue here is never the originality of the person and his or her affairs. Quite the contrary, the point is to give expression to an attitude which ought to be general. Every Protestant (and most especially every Puritan) should feel himself to be a sinner and testify to the grace that has descended on him.<sup>11</sup> Stories of repentant sinners arose in such numbers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that the rules of the genre came to be practically codified, and a kind of recipe for the “diary of a grateful Christian” was drawn up. Among a huge mass of mediocre texts, many outstanding works also came into being. The most important of these is considered to be John Bunyan’s autobiography *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666), a landmark in

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10 An extensive selection of studies is presented by R. Bell, “Metamorphoses of Spiritual Autobiography”, *ELH* (Journal of English Literary History) 1977. 44: 108–126. The Polish scholar A. Cieński presents a collection of writings on English autobiography of the eighteenth century in “Interpretacja dzieła pamiętnikarskiego”, *Zagadnienia literaturoznawczej interpretacji*, ed. J. Sławiński and J. Świąch (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo PAN, 1979), 191–204.

11 G. A. Starr, *Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 3n.

the tradition of the genre. Bunyan's text rehearses the fundamental features of St Augustine's story: a worldly life of sin, followed by repentance and the service of God. However, in Bunyan's case the past, fallen "I" is not separated as finally and unambiguously from the present one, devoted to God, as happens in the *Confessions*. Bunyan and other Puritans live in the torment of constant uncertainty, struggling with all their might for the city of God and its ideal unity, but unable to renounce entirely the kingdom of man with its complexity and variety. While remaining firmly in the tradition of Puritan sentiment, Bunyan at the same time created the foundations for a new way of understanding personal identity in a first-person narrative, a way that was later developed by two eighteenth-century secular autobiographers: Benjamin Franklin and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. It is from the latter, in turn, that a new discovery derives, one different from that in Augustine: a principle of unity based on the idea of the artist's vocation and of salvation by art. The influence of this idea makes itself felt in such very different autobiographical writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as Wordsworth, Goethe, Ruskin, Joyce, Proust and Nabokov.<sup>12</sup>

Scholars of all kinds are generally in agreement as to the fact that the vitality of spiritual autobiography far transcends the Anglo-Saxon tradition of the seventeenth century in both time and space, though later it undergoes various transformations in accordance with the spirit of the passing ages. We no longer encounter the old didactic model that expatiates on the problem of grace. However, the idea of the artist's mission and of the moral, spiritual or political leader who feels responsible for his community means that numerous autobiographies of the succeeding centuries fall into the same broadly understood tradition of religious literature. Thus in American autobiography, for example, many different aspects of the stance of the prophet (as a teacher and leader who exhorts and admonishes his community) have been discerned in authors as varied as Franklin, Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, Henry Brooks Adams, Frank Lloyd Wright, and even Gertrude Stein. The mode of autobiographical utterance represented by these writers has been described as prophetic.<sup>13</sup>

### **Protestant and Catholic Traditions Meet: John Henry Newman**

Inspirations derived on the one hand from Protestant spiritual autobiography and on the other from Catholic tradition came together in an altogether extraordinary

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12 Bell.

13 G. T. Couser, *American Autobiography: The Prophetic Mode* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1979).

way in John Henry Newman's *Apologia pro vita sua*. Many scholars, analysing this work in its original context of the sixties of the nineteenth century, deem it to be one of the truly outstanding achievements of English autobiographical prose.<sup>14</sup> There can be no doubt either of its deep roots in that tradition or of its exceptional position, for Newman wrote his autobiography twenty years after his move from Anglicanism to Catholicism and in a situation in which he was forced to take very grave account of readers from both sides. The *Apologia* was written, as is well known, in reply to a pamphlet by the Anglican Charles Kingsley, in which Newman had been accused of perfidy and deceit; it was intended to clear its author of guilt in the eyes of his former co-religionists. However, it was obvious that the defence must weigh every argument also with regard to Catholics, many of whom were still suspicious of the convert and undoubtedly prepared to note the slightest remaining trace of Anglicanism in Newman's thinking and way of feeling. The double audience to which he addressed himself and the dual traditions which had been his lot make Newman's religious autobiography a remarkable field for the reader's observation. One British scholar has taken a particular interest in this very aspect. In the chapter on Newman's *Apologia* in her study of autobiography of the Victorian period, Linda H. Peterson focuses on the dilemmas of a Catholic autobiographer who has been formed by and who writes within the English literary tradition of spiritual autobiography.<sup>15</sup> Newman made a choice within a varied tradition, partly continuing it and partly re-shaping it. The fact that he knew it well is clear from his early writings, from the eighteenth-twenties, when he enumerated the phases of the process of conversion that were characteristic of the spiritual autobiography, such as deep conviction of one's own sinfulness; the experience of dread and despair; discernment of the hope of liberation and salvation; understanding of Christ; the experience of forgiveness; certainty of salvation, joy and peace. He abandoned the dominant and most popular form derived from Bunyan (which was marked by strong emotionality and

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- 14 See R. A. Colby, "The Poetical Structure of Newman's 'Apologia'", *Journal of Religion* 1953. 33.1: 47-57; M. A. Svaglic, "The Structure of Newman's 'Apologia'", *PMLA* 1951.66.2: 148-158; W. R. Siebenschusch, "Art and Evidence in Newman's 'Apologia'", *Biography* 1980.3.4. See also *Approaches to Victorian Autobiography*, ed. G. P. Landow (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1979).
- 15 L. H. Peterson, *Victorian Autobiography. The Tradition of Self-Interpretation* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1986). The chapter entitled "Newman's 'Apologia pro vita sua': the Dilemma of the Catholic Autobiographer" was published earlier with the title "Newman's 'Apologia pro vita sua' and the Tradition of the English Spiritual Autobiography", *PMLA* 1985.100.3: 300-314.

emphasised the suddenness of the moment of conversion) in favour of the moderate, rational model found in Thomas Scott's work *The Force of Truth* (1779).

Describing his passage from Socinianism to Anglicanism, Scott lays emphasis on his struggles, not with angelic messengers or demonic voices, but with Scriptural and ecclesiastical texts. He does not write of impressions, visions or revelations, but of the books he has read and the doctrines he has pondered. In the first two chapters of the *Apologia*, Newman makes use of the techniques of Scott (whom he had been reading since he was a boy, admitting that he was strongly under the latter's influence) by reporting his encounters with theological texts in the manner of a chronicler, listing the successive sources of the beliefs, doctrines and dogmas that he had learned from books and from his teachers in Ealing and Oxford. Peterson's view is that the deliberate repetition of Scott's methods and arguments (whether or not readers contemporary to Newman recognised the allusion to *The Force of Truth*) suggests clearly that Newman felt a need to use the tradition of English spiritual autobiography and alter it to his own ends. Scott was also very popular as the author of Bible commentaries in the circles in which Newman moved in his early Oxford period. Peterson thinks that *The Force of Truth* appealed to Newman while he was writing the *Apologia* not only because of the person of the author, but also because of the solution furnished by this book in regard to the form of the genre. Scott's model allowed Newman to write within the English autobiographical tradition without accepting (with regard to the narrative models) the scheme so popular in Protestant spiritual autobiography, which involved describing a sudden conversion.<sup>16</sup>

But while he kept to Scott's narrational structure, Newman parted company with his model over a fundamental principle of interpretation. Scott as a

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16 In the chapter on conversion in his book *The Art of Autobiography in 19th and 20th Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), A. O. J. Cockshut writes, without reference to any particular examples: "The Catholic view is that conversion is the beginning of a journey; or, perhaps better, a decisive change of direction, so that what before may have been a wandering journey becomes a journey with a goal. The Protestant view tends to telescope several different stages of Catholic experience into a unique, momentary action. The old Protestant question, 'Are you saved?,' places in the past what the Catholic tradition sees as in the future" (178). Peterson disagrees with this generalisation, arguing that "many Protestant autobiographers, like Scott, view their conversions as a sequence of gradual changes and (...) the metaphor of the journey is as common among Protestant autobiographers as among Catholic" (208). Peterson perceives an important difference in the choice by Protestant autobiographers of the hermeneutic method of biblical typology.



Protestant believes above all in the Bible, while Newman, in accordance with Catholic doctrine, thinks that the interpretation of Scripture belongs to the teaching office of the Church. Peterson emphasises that this is not merely a matter of dogmatic differences, but of the different ways of writing autobiography that result from them. English Protestants from Bunyan to Scott were dependent on the hermeneutic method of biblical typology. Bunyan treated the wanderings of the Israelites as a prefiguring of his own experience of seeking salvation. His use of Exodus as a pattern exerted a deep influence over later authors, becoming a classic model followed by hosts of anonymous autobiographers. Successive authors write of the affliction of Israel in Egyptian captivity, of the crossing of the Red Sea to the shore of liberation, of the promise given to the Israelites that God will lead them through the wilderness. The aim of Bunyan's imitators was not to reveal their own personality, but to hide it, to dissolve it in an impersonal model. The resultant text was addressed to all who pass through the wildernesses of this world on their way to the heavenly land of Canaan. In American literature it was actually impossible to write a spiritual autobiography without the Old Testament model.

In place of biblical hermeneutics, Newman introduces something that might be called an ecclesiological hermeneutic, and moves his *Apologia* in the direction of Augustine. Writing of this, Peterson takes issue with those scholars who point to the *Confessions* as the work from which the English spiritual autobiography originated. In her view, English tradition before Newman drew very little on Augustine. Although the English writers who created the first models of spiritual autobiography had two seventeenth-century translations of the *Confessions* to draw on, there is evidence that these translations were very little read. It was left to Newman, still in his Oxford period and taking inspiration from the writings of the Church Fathers, to facilitate a new translation and bring it to a wider readership, and then later, through his *Apologia*, to remind English autobiographers of Augustinian stylistic figures and make it possible to deploy them as alternatives to Bunyan's. Newman's abandonment of the latter is most clearly evident in the absence from the *Apologia* of a specific group of allusions to Exodus. Although he had used them in his earlier writings, in the *Apologia* the figure of the spiritual pilgrimage did not appear, despite the author's experience of years of wandering and losing his way before he found peace in the Catholic Church.

Peterson reminds us that in chapter IV, Newman refers to the Augustinian *topoi* of a medically understood crisis (including the sick man on his deathbed and the dead man who was raised, taken by Augustine from the New Testament). These figures allow Newman both to reveal and to avoid revealing something in his account of the years in which he wavered between the Anglican and the

Roman Church: to reveal why he had erred in his actions in these years, moving in two directions and in none at the same time; but to avoid the Protestant language in which conversion is described by the use of the figure of wandering in the wilderness. The employment of Augustinian figures also had a key significance in that it allowed Newman to interpret his Anglican past in a manner that was both true and tactful. He could recognise the doctrines he had espoused as heretical, as spiritual death, but without even once using the word “heresy”.

Petersen finds another trace of the *Confessions* in the *Apologia's* conclusion. Instead of finishing in accordance with the pattern characteristic of the Bunyanist autobiography (the so-called “Pisgah vision” of the Promised Land, seen by Moses from Mount Pisgah), Newman writes an elegiac address of thanks to his brother-priests in the Birmingham Oratory. Petersen finds in this a transformed echo of the text in Book IX of the *Confessions* which forms a substitute for an epitaph for Augustine’s mother, who had died in Ostia. Augustine concludes Book IX with a prayer for both his parents, and in the hope of meeting all his brothers in Christ in the eternal Jerusalem. Newman closes the *Apologia* with a similar prayer for salvation and reconciliation. The biblical metaphor that he uses, of one flock and one shepherd, would seem to turn towards Protestantism, but paradoxically it is a declaration of Newman’s fidelity to Augustine, for the Protestant autobiography born in the seventeenth century focused in its conclusion on the salvation of the individual soul, while the Augustinian form points to the communion of saints.

## The Memoir

In looking for contexts in Polish personal writing for twentieth-century autobiographers concerned with religious themes, we should give prominent place to the epistolary writing of the Romantics, especially Krasieński and Słowacki, as well as the latter’s *Raptularz* [Commonplace Book]. However, it is much easier to find contrasting than analogical material. The vast majority of writings in Polish memoir tradition appear to belong to a quite different element, one that is indifferent to the idea of spiritual autobiography. Polish memoirs, numerous, diverse and culturally important as they are, owe their meaning mainly to their presentation of an image of life in an outward-facing perspective. Wars, travels, family customs, the passage of life in the rhythm of the seasons and the changes of nature, the liturgical and ceremonial year – all this is played out in the social sphere, and even if the focusing lens is the figure of the memoirist, even if he draws attention to his own actions and achievements, the point is to admire them against the background and in the perspective of temporal history,

in the surroundings of family and the wider society. The memoirist is above all a witness to his times.

I shall not enter here into any more detailed discussion of memoir-writing; instead I shall use the shorthand of an image which is certainly an oversimplification and therefore unjust, but is also extremely telling. The observation made by Wiktor, the hero of Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz's short story "Panna z Wilka" [The Maid from Wilko], might be applied to many of the Polish manor houses so colourfully described by memoirists who revelled in detailed accounts of household customs, feasts and hunting expeditions. Looking at the shelves running round the extensive larder of the house in Wilko, Wiktor jokes that they are a substitute for the non-existent library. Descriptions of preparing and eating food, with its smells, shapes and colours, play a prominent role in the image of customs, family and home presented in Polish memoir writing. Predominantly, these descriptions are of the kitchen, larder and festive table in two great ritual acts of the mystery of eating: in the preparation of dishes for Christmas and Easter.

The opposition between physical and spiritual food present in the images of larder and library rises to the rank of a symbol of two stances towards culture, two models of tradition, two visions of the past. Exposing the spiritual emptiness and moral decay hidden behind the walls of those homes that were devoid of a library and concentrated on celebrating the rite of food, was a personal passion for Stanisław Brzozowski. Iwaszkiewicz, by painting in his autobiography an image of a harmoniously united home "where one not only ate, but read and thought, too",<sup>17</sup> rebuked Brzozowski in a fatherly manner for this extremism.

The autobiographical texts discussed in this chapter have one thing in common: their lack of interest in the possibility of the unity of which Iwaszkiewicz speaks. They had no desire even to notice the larder. The library was enough for them.

## The Library

I treat the letters, memoirs and autobiographies of writers here as a testimony to their reading. The author of intimate writings is shown here as a reader who delves into his memory, imagination and conscience with someone else's book in his hand. He carries out a vivisection of his own soul by looking at the same time into thoughts, opinions and words recorded by someone else. When confessing

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17 J. Iwaszkiewicz, *Książka moich wspomnień* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1975), 24.

something about himself, he uses the confessions of others as an aid. In the many voices of tradition, in the intertextual space of reflections and allusions, in the renewal of the act of reading carried out by each successive reader, we find a connection between individual autobiographical texts which cannot be made on the plane of genre. Unfortunately there is no space here to reconstruct the individual style of reading of each of our authors or the generational, historical frame of this style. However, I shall try at least in general terms to indicate the scope of their reading, identifying both the shared fields and the excursions into separate territory.

Methods of drawing on Scripture are particularly significant for the problem under consideration here. Another important thread is the relation to Augustine, whom Elzenberg reads “with impatience, anger, painful resentment”<sup>18</sup> because of the saint’s attitude to the Manichaeans, which Elzenberg regards as intolerant. Koniński, too, took violent issue with Augustine on many occasions, whereas others, such as Liebert, Zawieyski and Kamińska drew on him with reverence. For Kamińska, Pascal and many contemporary Christian existentialists were also important; for Koniński, it was Origen who mattered particularly, while for Elzenberg, major influences were Indian mysticism and Gandhi, along with a wide range of Christian texts. The most important thing to grasp, however, about the loose whole that we are discussing is that our autobiographers *read one another*. It was not only that they read many of the same things, such as the Bible, the Church Fathers, Pascal, Newman, William James, and contemporary creators of existentialism. They also read one another’s writings, making notes of their responses, commenting on and incorporating threads from their predecessors into their own spiritual territory, developing some strands, raising objections to others. Because the texts that they read were not always, perhaps not even often, autobiographical ones, we also need to include other works in this whole. Their reading of one another was not always directly connected with philosophical or religious themes, but sooner or later these themes would also always prove important. Possibly this internal criss-crossing of mutual reading is the most important thing to grasp in our attempt to form an image of the whole; perhaps by taking it into account, we may be able to construct a meaningful whole out of what is otherwise a rather loose collection of non-uniform building materials.

Chronologically, it is Brzozowski who stands at the beginning. Not, however, only as writer, philosopher and critic, as the author of *Pamiętnik* [Memoir], *Idee*

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18 Elzenberg, 299.

[Ideas] or *Głosy wśród nocy* [Voices in the Night], but also as a passionate reader and translator of Newman and a commentator on his writings. While he was arranging the material for *Idee* in the first months of 1910, Brzozowski wrote to Ostap Ortwin:

Finally, in order to justify reprinting old articles, and in general to sum up the whole publication, I shall write a concluding article entitled “The History of a Certain Mind”, which will be my own autobiography, of course entirely philosophical and theoretical.<sup>19</sup>

Ortwin perceived in *Pamiętnik* a partial fulfilment of this intent.<sup>20</sup> Today we may attempt to reconstruct this unwritten autobiography of Brzozowski (or at least the chapters touching on his religious life) from three diverse testimonies: the Memoir, the Letters (especially the second volume) and the commentaries to a selection of Newman’s writings, translated by Brzozowski and entitled by him *Przyświadczenia wiary* [The Assents of Faith]. The diary of Brzozowski’s last months, which he called a Memoir, is largely a commonplace book of reflections on things read and ideas and plans for his own future work, recorded in the hope that his health would improve. It also bears witness to the constant inner transformation of his personality, the moral reckoning he conducted, his efforts at self-improvement. This is visible in the persistent recurrence of jocular addresses to himself: “Don’t let yourself be hypnotised, be firm, don’t forget.” All the time there is this remonstrating with himself, rebuking, challenging, instructing; always the categorical tone, the imperative mood, the exclamation marks. “My God, let me endure!” The imperative of intellectual and moral self-improvement is inscribed in deepening philosophical and religious reflection. There are also many elements scattered over various parts of the text which hint at the contours of his whole life, as he strives to grasp it by looking back at himself in this memoir. Most importantly, there is the description of the family environment, a description marked by a sharp sense of alienation with respect to the conservative and aristocratic formation of Brzozowski’s father, as well as by the memory of his mother’s destructive influence and finally by some “accursed” recollections of youth.

The foreword and extensive footnotes to Newman’s writings in the *Symposion* edition are appropriate to the requirements of a scholarly edition of a philosophical text.<sup>21</sup> But this did not prevent Brzozowski from lending them in many places

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19 S. Brzozowski, *Listy*, vol. 2, 221.

20 O. Ortwin, introduction to footnotes and glosses, in: S. Brzozowski, *Pamiętnik*, 169 n.

21 J. H. Newman, *Przyświadczenia wiary*, translated with foreword by S. Brzozowski (Lwów, 1915).

the tone and weight of personal confession. He discovered here a way of writing of inestimable value, which though possible is rarely to be found in the humanities: a way of writing in which the convictions and stance of the commentator combine with the thought commented on to create a harmonious-sounding whole, yet without lapsing into the bias and limitation characteristic of the stance of confession. The story of Brzozowski's association with Newman's thought is a separate and important strand in Polish philosophy of religion as represented in twentieth-century literature.<sup>22</sup> Here all that is necessary is to interpret what Brzozowski said about himself in the margins of his translation or between the lines of his footnotes, and to discover what trace of his own spiritual experience is present even in the terminological reflections that justify his use of the word "przyświadczenia" [assents] rather than "przeświadczenia" [convictions] in the title.<sup>23</sup> The translator's foreword, read today in the context of later letters, allows us to overhear, at the heart of the judgments applied to Newman, an echo of Brzozowski's own situation as a writer, philosopher and moralist who at the end of his life was deeply alone and yet did not give up work on his own spiritual world. The letters from his last years lead us to guess that it was not merely intellectual acuity but also personal experience that enabled Brzozowski to formulate the following commendation of Newman's heroic isolation in the face of truth:

He spent his whole life alone with God, listening in to the voice of his own soul and her growth, unfalsified by any imposed schemes of feeling or thought. He knew the whole bitterness of the problem that the inner life poses when it leads one to part with everyone we honour and love, when it leaves us only our own conscience, without the support of words and approved models, when it tells us to draw from our own lonely, nameless depths – so, left alone with himself, he discovered the fullness of reality and learned how not to doubt it, though he was not able to name it or express it in any way that commanded approbation or support.<sup>24</sup>

Letters occupy a special place in Brzozowski's unwritten autobiography. For many years they simply did not exist in the consciousness of the reading public, and hence for around sixty years the image of Brzozowski's religious stance was effectively poorer by a third. This is confirmed by the response that was at once aroused when the letters were published in full. Although they

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22 See K. Nadana-Sokołowska, *Problem religii w polskich dziennikach intymnych. Stanisław Brzozowski, Karol Ludwik Koniński, Henryk Elzenberg* (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2012).

23 See Brzozowski's footnote on page 157.

24 Brzozowski, "John Henry Newman. Przedmowa tłumacza", in: J. H. Newman, *Przyświadczenia wiary*, 50–51.

did not reveal anything that was essentially different from the views known from Brzozowski's earlier published writings, they nevertheless dramatised the image of the writer's personality, broadening and immeasurably enriching it. Despite the fact that they repeat countless religious motifs from the Memoir, they are often more direct, like thoughts formed spontaneously, sometimes more colloquially. The record in the letters is at times more emotional than in the Memoir and there is less theorising in them. But the most important difference is in the context. The Memoir records only intellectual and spiritual life, whereas in the letters, threads from the "history of a certain mind" are incorporated, alongside reflections on reading, requests for new books, information about work carried out and plans for further studies, into the parallel current of practical affairs, the daily reality of financial problems and the gradually intensifying trial of illness.

Brzozowski's spiritual autobiography, as constructed from these three sources, forms a story of a conversion that took place gradually, and at first seemed to be imperceptible even to the very person in whom the process was at work. It started from an interest in Newman purely as a philosopher, only to develop, as Brzozowski became acquainted with the latter's thought, into a form of study that deeply engaged his whole personality as translator and commentator. Brzozowski constantly emphasises the intellectual plane of his dialogue with Newman. For a long time he maintains that he feels only an intellectual conviction of Catholicism as a philosophy and as the one system capable in his view of meaningfully explaining the existence of the world. This purely intellectual conviction grows and changes in the final paragraphs of the Memoir. In his last letters, Brzozowski finally begins to talk of the reality of faith. His stance, as expressed in his late autobiographical writings, possesses certain features that have been discerned in many masterpieces of spiritual autobiography. This reader of Franklin, Whitman and Thoreau (all of whom he also intended to write about) undoubtedly felt himself to be most deeply embroiled in the fortunes of his national community. He toiled with all his might for its spiritual development and paid a high price for his endeavour to direct that development on to other tracks than those towards which it was impelled by inertia and spiritual sloth. He was a prophet who was rejected by his own. His Memoir, especially when interpreted through the prism of his surviving letters and in the context of his work on Newman, reveals that the unwritten "History of a Certain Mind" could have been a remarkable achievement of Polish spiritual autobiography. Illness and premature death prevented Brzozowski from creating this work, yet in spite of this unfulfilled potential, we know today that his spiritual endeavour and prophetic zeal began very quickly to bear fruit.

One enthusiastic reader both of Brzozowski and of Newman in his translation was Jerzy Liebert. In his letters to Agnieszka, his dear friend and spiritual guide, who was preparing to enter a convent and who had encouraged him to read the writings of the English thinker, there is a chain of references to Newman from July 1924 which allows us to trace the way that Liebert's gradually increasing interest grew into fascination, a sense of ever deepening understanding and finally complete absorption and full acceptance of Newman's concept of faith in general and of Catholicism in particular. The process noted by Liebert is strikingly similar to the one whose traces can be discerned in Brzozowski's letters, though these were not known to the young poet. There is the same gradual growth of the whole experience and the same underlining of the mood of inner calm which came about in the course of a longer acquaintance with Newman's thought. Of course there are important differences between the two Polish readers of Newman. At the very outset Liebert was already far closer than Brzozowski to the thinking of the English priest, and throughout the course of his communion with Newman's thought, the accents of dramatic unease are less marked. Besides that, Brzozowski himself, as translator and commentator, played a mediatory role in Liebert's response to Newman. Liebert did not set out his attitude to the Cardinal-philosopher's conceptions in such a broad and coherent way as did Brzozowski, but we do find an expression of his retrospective opinion of the great spiritual adventure which reading Newman in Brzozowski's translation was to him, written when this adventure had already lasted more than three years. Both writers played a substantial role in the development of Liebert's spiritual life, which involved a return to religious practices after many years of indifference and of keeping his distance from the Church. In September 1927 he wrote as follows, in a letter to Maria Leszczyńska, whom he had come to know after Agnieszka became a nun, of his intellectual encounters with both converts:

Some time after Nietzsche I turned my attention to Brzozowski. And truth to tell, it was this person who converted me. It was thanks to him that I noticed for the first time the real importance of Catholicism, its eternal, universal significance. I read Brzozowski's books from the time when he was still battling with the Church. He didn't lead me to the Church himself, but he drew my attention to Cardinal Newman and his *Przyświadczenia wiary* [The Assents of Faith, the title given by Brzozowski to his selection from Newman's writings]. I read this book, much of it I didn't understand, but much I did. Brzozowski wrote the introduction, but in fact it was Newman who engendered it. Later, after my conversion, I returned from time to time to Brzozowski, and to this day reading him stimulates me more than anything else. How often his opinion on Catholicism has aroused me to fury! And then just recently his *Memoir* came into my hands. I already knew before that Brzozowski had started to come close to the Church, and very clearly was a believer even without knowing it, but it was the *Memoir*, written



in the hardest time of his life, that really showed me the greatness of his mind. I don't know if there is anyone else to be found in Poland who has come to Catholicism in such an honest and yet critical way.<sup>25</sup>

This train of thought did not of course develop in isolation. Liebert's letters furnish abundant evidence of his inner life, the things he read, the subjects he studied or discussed, the various intellectual tasks that he set himself, the spiritual exercises and religious practices that he undertook. By this time the poet had already come under the influence of Fr. Władysław Korniłowicz, whose circle was inspired by the ideas of French Catholicism of the nineteen-twenties. The views of the Korniłowicz group, known as "Kółko" [Little Circle], were presented in the columns of the quarterly *Verbum*, which appeared during the years 1934–1939. It was not only practising Catholics who found themselves inside Fr. Korniłowicz's orbit of influence. The group's meetings and discussions were equally open to people who were far from the Church or entirely unconnected with it, but who had a lively interest in philosophical and ethical problems. The "Circle", however, was something more than just a debating society. Most of its members also took part in religious practices which were an integral part of their daily lives and were based on a conscious living out of their individual involvement in the community. This kind of deeply personal participation in a liturgy that was characterised by simplicity constituted an alternative to the traditional Polish stress on ritual, with its strong accentuation of a wealth of external forms at the expense of personal experience of the sacred. The "Circle" group met in the small village of Laski near Warsaw, where Fr. Korniłowicz lived and worked as a chaplain to a centre for the blind run by nuns. This aspect of the Circle's activities was a reminder that care for the needy is an inseparable element of a Christian approach. Making the acquaintance of Maritain through the Circle played an important role in Liebert's spiritual development, as also did his conscientious philosophical study of Aquinas and Augustine, his interest in mysticism, and his discovery of Berdyaev.

Liebert's letters are still awaiting interpretation. The block of correspondence addressed to Agnieszka, especially in the years 1925–26, effectively forms an intimate diary, kept (particularly in 1925) with almost daily regularity, except that the "entries" were not intended exclusively for himself, but also for the addressee. The writer appeals to her as to a confidante, a companion and guide who is a step ahead of him on the same road. She precedes him especially clearly from the moment of her decision to enter a convent.

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25 Liebert, 425.

Liebert's letters remained in manuscript for fifty years until their publication in the two volumes of the Collected Letters in 1976 made them available to the reading public. They made a huge impression and were regarded as a true discovery, a new masterpiece of Polish epistolary art worthy to be set beside the letters of Słowacki, Krasiński, Chopin and Norwid. Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz wrote: "Liebert's letters are a reflection of his intense moral and spiritual life, a scheme that presents the development of his personality, and at the same time they are a history of remarkable human experiences". Jerzy Andrzejewski suggested that "it would be worth thinking of publishing the letters to Agnieszka in a separate volume (...) they are still very full of life and may remain so for a long time into the future, as an extremely significant work in the history of Polish writing, deeply moving in the purity of their moral radiance." This suggestion was not fulfilled until after several more decades had passed, but thanks to the passage of time it was possible to include in the new edition fragments that had earlier been omitted out of regard for persons who were then still alive.<sup>26</sup>

In his letter-confidences, Liebert tells the story of his soul's religious awakening, the painstaking labour of self-improvement and growth in grace. The one hundred and seventy-three letters to Agnieszka read like a dazzling upward flight, like a fierce youthful flame in which everything burned out too quickly, too intensely. For it is at this point that the chapter of Liebert's spiritual autobiography known to us comes to a close. We know considerably less about the poet's reflections in the last three years of his life, overshadowed as they were by the progress of the tuberculosis that led to his premature death. With only a few exceptions, we do not know the letters of those final years, spent largely outside the circle of his Warsaw friends, the letters of a person whose personal life, because of the impossibility of contracting a sacramental marriage with Maria Leszczyńska, had come to involve an insoluble complication, and this in a matter that had been the very axis of his life up to that point. The decision he made forced him into a position outside the sacramental community of the Church. This chapter of Liebert's spiritual autobiography – if in any way recorded – is closed to us today. However, if we wish to trace the testimonies to religious experience in his personal writings, we must not forget this period in the poet's life, unattested though it is in his correspondence. This finale to the life of the mature man, unknown to the youth who wrote the letters to Agnieszka, remains as a

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26 Liebert, *Listy do Agnieszki*, prepared from the manuscript with introduction and notes by Stefan Frankiewicz (Warszawa: Biblioteka "Więzi", 2002). Extracts from the writings of Iwaszkiewicz and Andrzejewski quoted after Frankiewicz's introduction, 7.

dark question mark hovering over the sentences that speak of his approach to the source of all light.

Two contemporaries of Liebert have also left traces in their autobiographical writings of their reading of Brzozowski and acquaintance with his thought. These are Elzenberg and Koniński. However, the encounter with this hermit who died in Florence did not have the same importance for either of them that it had for the young poet. Liebert's letters show that the impact on him of reading Brzozowski's personal experiences was not only intellectual; it also affected his attitude to life and contributed to the revival of his faith and religious practices. Elzenberg, tracing the intellectual life of the time and the development of literature, especially poetry, reacted animatedly to Brzozowski's *Legenda Młodej Polski* [The Legend of Young Poland], writing of his agreement with the author in many fundamental questions, but at the same time indicating a critical distance. He valued Brzozowski for his uncompromising honesty and intellectual courage, for his ability to discern the ethical aspects of purely cognitive, intellectual work. This was not a youthful fascination on Elzenberg's part, or a passing interest in a well-known phenomenon. Elzenberg returned to Brzozowski years later, finding judgments in the latter's work that were identical with his own entirely independent way of seeing things. This does not give the impression of the influence of one mind on another, but rather of analogies and concurrences. For Elzenberg's philosophical diary combines features that are rarely found together: on the one hand, a modest reserve in expressing his own convictions, on the other, the effort to think independently, the labour to be himself.

These notes, begun in his student years, arranged in chronological order, cover almost half a century (from 1907 to 1963). Despite the clearly imposed historical frame (the individual parts are entitled *Przed pierwszą wojną światową i w czasie jej trwania* [Before and During World War I], *Dwudziestolecie* [Twenty Years Between the Wars], *Druga wojna światowa i po niej* [World War II and After]), this external calendar does not govern the course of the intellectual life to which the diary testifies. However, the great turns of history which divide Elzenberg's diary are not purely mechanical in character. Although the course of events which it fell to him to witness and participate in, is not reconstructed on the surface as a series of events, it is nevertheless the subject of historiosophical and moral reflection. The writer's involvement in collective life is most noticeable on the threshold of Polish independence at the end of World War I. Fighting in the Legions is noted as a fundamental experience, without which the whole world of values, the whole construction of his spiritual life, would have lost its sanction. Today Elzenberg's insight, in the entry for February 1938, in foreseeing the nature of the approaching Second World War is startling. But it is only at

rare moments that the historical reality is the direct subject of his attention in the diary. Elzenberg's real material is the world of thought. *Kłopot z istnieniem* as a whole is a consistent record of the author's inner life: his reading, studies, association with art and extensive intellectual work. Unassumingly, he writes that by arranging his aphorisms in chronological order, he has assembled those crumbs of philosophy for which there was no room in his studies and dissertations, and that he has kept to the convention of dates in order to indicate the relativity of many of his judgments. He was afraid that they would sound too categorical if they appeared in a systematic, problem-based order. But quite apart from the author's declared intention, the system of dating maintained in *Kłopot z istnieniem* seems also to have another significance. In the diary arrangement, the reader finds a fulfilment of an age-old cultural pattern in which human life is seen as a road or a journey.

The time of Elzenberg's life was not one of fundamental change. In this sense his diary stands at the opposite pole from the religious model of the spiritual autobiography. It does not tell a tale of conversion dividing the course of life into two separate stages: sin and grace. In the final note which closes the diary, now prepared for publication, the writer describes the road he has travelled as a circling movement around a centre which both attracts him and fills him with trepidation. However, in this movement we can grasp the difference between the youthful point of departure and the point of arrival half a century later: "(...) from aestheticism, through perfectionism to some kind of self-critical *quasi*-mysticism, from the religion of culture to 'religion' in general, and in some vague sense from ethics and its values to 'salvation' and soteriology".<sup>27</sup>

In many respects, Elzenberg is an exceptional phenomenon against the background of Polish philosophical thought. In considering the phenomenon of religion in general (but not declaring himself as an adherent of any known system), he bases his thoughts on the one hand on Mediterranean tradition (ancient and Christian), and on the other on Buddhist philosophy. He was particularly interested in mysticism, both Eastern and Christian. But his impressive erudition does not burden the diary entries; the comments on what he has read are circumspect, limited to grasping the essence. The precision and conciseness are evidently appropriate to the demands of aphoristic style. But Elzenberg does not make the task easy for himself with flashy conceits. For him, intellectual honesty is a moral value. Where a philosophical difficulty arises, he does not hesitate to place a question mark and admit to uncertainty; he has the courage to subject

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<sup>27</sup> Elzenberg, 461.

to the test of doubt even those things in which it would be more convenient to believe. Intellectual courage and an insight which one might almost call merciless are interwoven in his thinking with respect for values that deserve to be defended. His conviction of the tragic nature of being and a bitterness devoid of illusions combine with a peculiarly stoic sense of humour and the expression of a stance full of dignity, which can constantly be read between the lines.

Elzenberg makes no mention in his diary of Brzozowski's Catholicism, or in general of the latter's attitude to religion and the Church. Koniński is a different case. He devotes a separate and critical argument to Brzozowski's translation and interpretation of Newman, accusing him of bias and of bending Newman's thought to his own way of imagining. It is in this context that he writes of Brzozowski's influence on the circle of what he termed "young neo-Catholics". However, he does not deny his own one-time fascination or the fact that still, more than twenty years after his first youthful encounter with Brzozowski, he continues to read him. What is more, he considers this to be an essential intellectual experience and a peculiar test of philosophical stance, even of writerly temperament: "(...) tell me how you read Brzozowski, indifferent and bored or moved to the depths, and I will tell you who you are".<sup>28</sup>

For Koniński, who himself attempted in his notes to outline a special, metaphysical understanding of the concept of work, Brzozowski's philosophy in this respect was particularly important. He wrote many times of God's work as the highest form of creative energy, of the Christian conception of civilisation, which cannot do without a metaphysic of work. These threads in Koniński's reflections should undoubtedly be interpreted afresh in the context of John Paul II's encyclical *Laborem exercens*, which speaks of the dignity of work not only in the formula of an official Church document, but also in relation to the earlier formed philosophical views of Karol Wojtyła.

Alongside Koniński's reflections on the working God, two other motifs recur particularly often in his notes: the mystery of the existence of evil and the mystery of holiness, which he movingly considers, especially in the passages addressed to St Teresa of Avila. Yes indeed: in passages not speaking *of* Teresa, but addressed *to* her, and this in the form not of prayer, but rather of challenge and questioning, in a dialogic response to her work. From the account presented here of the questions that occupied Koniński, it might seem that we are dealing with a philosophical treatise. This, however, is not the case. It is only the first part of *Ex labyrintho*, completed in May 1939, with its subtitle "A very superficial and

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28 Koniński, *Ex labyrintho*, 98.

unsatisfactory sketch of my *Weltanschauung*”, which approaches the systematic presentation appropriate to a treatise. The main text of this, as well as of the two remaining volumes, entitled *Nox atra* and *Uwagi* [Comments] 1940–1942, consists of notes written during the war years. It has become customary to speak of them as a spiritual memoir and it is probably worth keeping to this understanding. The first two books comprise hundreds of paragraphs or passages which in some cases contain only one aphoristic sentence. The majority, however, have the form of a brief consideration of some idea, while occasionally a sequence of several fragments forms a narrational chain in which successive elements are pondered or in which an idea is illuminated from various different angles. These books are unusually marked with the stamp of personal utterance – not in the details of private life, for there are none of these, but in things that are difficult to describe theoretically, though they can be strongly felt, such as the intellectual or emotional atmosphere of the text as a whole. Even where the grammatical form does not betray the presence of an “I”, the sentences are stylised in such a way that they must without doubt be read as the views of a particular, individual person. They have the sanction of a deep conviction of their justice, a conviction that everyone may share, but at the same time they are expressed mainly on the author’s own responsibility, by right of his own conclusions and experiences.

The stance expressed in these notes might be described as one of personal empathy. Every suffering inflicted on a living being, whether human or animal (today, indeed, some passages suggest a presentiment of ecophilosophical ethical sensitivity!); every real individual injury, physical or moral, even when inflicted on someone entirely unknown except as from an indifferent remark in a newspaper, touches Koniński personally, moving him like a physical pain suffered in his own body. There is nothing in this of the hysterical or of mawkish sentimentality. The sensitivity that torments his imagination is transformed into cognitive energy, driving him ceaselessly to plumb the problem of evil, the mystery of the presence of evil in a world created by an almighty and loving God. Augustine’s reasoning does not satisfy him; Origen, who drew on the gnostics, seems closer to him. The war years in which he wrote undoubtedly imparted a particular and terrible here-and-nowness to the eternal question, “*unde malum?*”. This question might also have been founded in his personal experience of chronic illness: back pain would immobilise him and force him to lie in a plaster corset for months on end. But he did not write about this. Neither history nor his own external biography finds any place in these notes. The only thing preserved in them is the life of the soul calling out from the depths of the labyrinth, striving through the dark night towards the ever unguessable God. Koniński’s moral unease seems to flow from sources similar to those of Elzenberg’s pessimism, from the vital awareness

of the existence of evil and the refusal to accept it. The third book, which repeats some of the themes present in the earlier volumes, is an appendix and a selection from a considerably longer manuscript. It has the form of extensive diary entries, which the author himself described as follows:

If someone some time were to look through this memoir, the mixture of public and private things, of great and small, secular and theological, would probably make him laugh, or perhaps even disgust him. But (...) public things are private – Poland is my private affair, God is my private affair; no more and no less than private; they should be private, the private is so important (...).<sup>29</sup>

In the years 1941–43, at the same time – almost to the month – as Koniński, confined to bed by illness in a small town near Kraków, was writing his diary, a young Warsaw poet and student of the secret university, active in armed conspiracy and underground literary life, was doing the same thing. Andrzej Trzebiński's *Memoir*<sup>30</sup> can scarcely be classed as a spiritual autobiography, though a thread of religious reflection on sin appears in it once or twice, and it outlines a certain plan for inner self-improvement. But these remarks are so scattered and marginal that they play no part in the subject-matter as a whole. Trzebiński's notes bear the mark of the time in which they arose, a time peculiar both on the level of individual life and in relation to the affairs of the nation. In almost every sentence of this diary of a young man scarcely out of boyhood, this diary of a debutant poet, dramatist and journalist, we sense the enormous pressure of history, bearing down on even the trivial details of daily life. I mention Trzebiński's diary here, however, because it testifies to a reading of Brzozowski that is entirely different from those discussed so far, though it is in no way exceptional. For Trzebiński, a member of the grouping known as the Confederation of the Nation, which was active in the underground political life of occupied Warsaw, reads Brzozowski in the context of the nationalist doctrine of this formation and comes close at times to the overinterpretation and misreadings that were characteristic of it. Later, this way of reading Brzozowski was to meet with a sharply critical response from Czesław Miłosz – not, however, in the latter's spiritual autobiography, which we shall consider shortly, but in another book devoted specifically to Brzozowski,

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29 Koniński, *Uwagi 1940–1942*, 114. Adam Fitas presents an outstanding interpretation of Koniński's diaries in the context of his philosophical and religious views in *Głos z labiryntu. O pismach Karola Ludwika Konińskiego* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2003).

30 A. Trzebiński, "Pamiętnik", in his *Kwiaty z drzew zakazanych. Proza*, edited with introduction by Z. Jastrzębski (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, 1972), 77–290.

*Człowiek wśród skorpionów* [A Man Among Scorpions].<sup>31</sup> Venomous criticism of the right-wing-nationalist current in Polish Catholicism is evident also in Miłosz's novel *The Seizure of Power*, in the thread involving the figure of Michał (in this respect at least, the novel presents itself very clearly as a *roman de cleft*).<sup>32</sup>

We should now mention another reader, not of Brzozowski, but of Newman himself, of the spiritual autobiography *Apologia pro vita sua*. This reader, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, the author of a diary with a clearly religious focus, differs from all the others so far mentioned because of his institutional situation as a member of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. His *Zapiski więzienne* [Prison Notes] cover a three-year period (from September 1953 to October 1956) distinguished from the rest of his life by highly particular circumstances which require to be defined on at least two planes: existential and political. From the very outset, the external situation of a political prisoner is present in the diary and co-determines its philosophical and religious subject-matter. Wyszyński was imprisoned during these years by the communist authorities, whose aim was to subjugate the Church in Poland to themselves. The diary entries are only in part a record of spiritual life. The whole external world is there in them, delineated with the clarity of a witness with an undoubted gift for sharp and disciplined observation. The field of the diarist's attention contains not only the people in his immediate surroundings, the events that made up his daily life as a prisoner and the small scrap of nature accessible to him, but also, and above all, the situation of the Church in Poland, the Church of which he thought constantly and for whose good he never ceased to strive. Members of his closest family are also noticeably present, because parts of his correspondence with them are incorporated into the text. Their letters thus become an integral part of the prison diary.

The dramaturgy of spiritual life presented in these notes is linked with the passage of time as measured by the rhythm of the liturgical year. The course of the writer's religious experience is inseparable from the history of salvation as renewed in ritual. Interference is forever making itself felt: the prisoner, physically excluded from participation in the collective life of the Church, must maintain spiritual contact with it by a daily effort through liturgy and prayer. Wyszyński treats his imposed isolation as an impulse to spiritual activity, transforming it

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31 Cz. Miłosz, *Człowiek wśród skorpionów. Studium o Stanisławie Brzozowskim* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1982), first published Paris, 1962. Parts of this book can be found in English translation in Miłosz's article "A Controversial Polish Writer: Stanisław Brzozowski", *California Slavic Studies*, Berkeley 1962. 2.

32 Cz. Miłosz, *Zdobycie władzy* (Paris, 1955); *The Seizure of Power* (New York, 1955 and 1982; London: Abacus, 1985).



into new moral and religious experiences in which Marian elements are dominant, along with submission to the will of God and a commitment to forgive his persecutors. There is no doubt that the writer's priestly formation distinguishes this record sharply from the other texts discussed in this chapter. Wyszyński's personal diary is firmly maintained within a framework of what one would probably have to term institutionality. Even in descriptions of a walk or of work in the garden, in letters to his father or sister, we are always reading the opinions of the imprisoned Primate, who subordinates his private life to this role. It is always a dignitary of the Church who speaks to us, most often in the style of a clear and precise account, favouring the use of impersonal forms, with the maximum possible objectivism and distance. Wyszyński chooses his words carefully, weighing every expression in order to avoid any kind of extremism. We recognise the pen of someone practised in writing official documents and formulating statements intended for public use. This is the prevailing tone. Only rarely does the reader detect some slight irony or reserved sense of humour in descriptions of the various events of daily existence. A kind of lyricism combines with the rhetorical in the prayerful, meditational notes. The sense of a bond with the community and of responsibility for it imparts to this unusual diary certain features of the kind of spiritual autobiography that the earlier mentioned American scholar G. Thomas Couser called "prophetic".

Two more texts from among those mentioned at the beginning of this chapter present an extensive image of external activity incorporated into the current of public life. These are Zawieyski's diary and Wat's spoken memoir, entitled *My Century*. Although Zawieyski's full text has not been published, it is necessary to mention it at this point, because the writer's religious outlook after the war was to a considerable extent formed within the personal orbit of influence of Cardinal Wyszyński. There is also a certain aspect of the stance of the "I" that inclines us to set these diarists alongside each other. The reader of Zawieyski, as of Wyszyński, finds the stamp of institutionality in his diary. The social role of a writer and activist make themselves felt even in passages that at first sight seem to have only the character of personal confession. This is true even when the diary's speaker stands facing the mirror of public opinion – not only in the sense that the diary is written with a view to posthumous publication, but even more because the writer is constantly focused on the question of how others see and judge him. He never ceases to feel the eyes of others upon him.

Paradoxically, there is considerably more transparency with regard to Zawieyski's inner spiritual life in a text that was by definition public, because intended for immediate printing: "Droga katechumena" [The Way of the Catechumen], written for the monthly *Znak* as part of a survey on Catholic

formation in the interwar period. The paradox seems to lie in the fact that the distance assumed towards his own self as a representative of a certain generation, and the decision to inscribe the record of his own life into a history of collective consciousness, leave no room, so to speak, for that wearisome exposure of himself before the mirror of others' judgments and opinions. There is only room for the pure "history of a certain mind". This brief sketch contains in outline elements of the classic spiritual autobiography: years of unbelief or even opposition and resistance, then the circle of friendships, encounters with people and texts which ground the still unbelieving person more and more firmly in Christian culture, until finally, with the sacramental return to the Church, the moment of decision comes.

Zawieyski's personal spiritual story is played out against the background which we have already outlined here, especially in discussing the texts of Liebert, Elzenberg and Koniński. He himself considers his journey to have begun with the influence of the philosophy of Marian Zdziechowski, especially the latter's book *Gloryfikacja pracy – myśli z pism i o pismach Stanisława Brzozowskiego* [The Glorification of Work: Thoughts from and on the Writings of Stanisław Brzozowski]:

It is to Professor Zdziechowski that I owe my introduction to Christianity in its true depth, which leads humanity through "the evil of the world" to heaven. The greatest impression made on me was by Zdziechowski's discussion of Manichaeism and gnostic theories and the theories of Secretan and Renouvier, combined with the whole of modernism.<sup>33</sup>

On top of this came his reading of Augustine and Pascal. Zawieyski had his own intellectual encounters and arguments directly with Brzozowski, as a socialist and then a Catholic. He spoke of this later in his book *Korzenie* [Roots], in which he described Brzozowski as one of the roots from which he himself, also as a socialist and later a Catholic, had grown. Not less important than the things he read were his encounters with people, especially with those who, like Korczak and Gandhi, were formally outside the Church but seemed to Zawieyski to bear clearer witness to God than anyone else. Zawieyski called them "pagan saints". In later stages he read Mounier, Maritain and the pre-war annuals of the journal *Verbum*, inspired by French Catholicism. Maritain's thought, and friendship with Rafał Blüth, Jerzy Liebert's companion from the time of his association with the Kornołowicz circle, were particularly important. It is worth adding that Zawieyski, after he found himself in the Laski circle, was one of the first readers

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33 J. Zawieyski, "Droga katechumena", 14.

of Liebert's letters to Agnieszka, thanks to the fact that the addressee herself allowed him to see the manuscripts in 1948. Reading them moved him greatly, indeed they made a similar impression on him as they did on later readers of the book edition in 1976. He wrote of Liebert: "His inner life is compelling in its purity and depth (...) In the future they will need to be published without any abridgements. It will be an extraordinary book."<sup>34</sup> In spite of his fascination with Liebert, however, Zawieyski was highly critical in his judgment of the pre-war impact of the current in Polish Catholicism associated with Kornilowicz, considering it elitist and of such narrow range that its operations were imperceptible to many people who, like him at the time, were still outside the Church.

This same background of inter-war Polish Catholicism is discernible in the margins of Aleksander Wat's religious reflections. He too came into contact with the *Verbum* circle through Rafał Blüth, but was put off by the exultantly rapturous attitude that he perceived in one of the newly converted female participants. He thought Maritain's influence derivative and superficial. It was not until after the war, in a now changed atmosphere, that he found himself within the orbit of influence of the Franciscan convent at Laski, where Fr. Kornilowicz's circle had formerly been based. However, Wat immediately appreciated the social and national significance of religion. He perceived the strength of Polish Catholicism, especially in the post-war world, in its universality and ritual character and its deep penetration into national culture, customs and collective ways of feeling. However, he lamented the fact that Polish Catholic thought had not produced its own Newman, that the work of Norwid and Brzozowski had not resonated more widely, and that there was no phenomenon equivalent to the Russian Orthodox idea of "*bogoiskatelstwo*".<sup>35</sup>

There are two main dimensions to the religious subject-matter that appears in Wat's writings: one in relation to individual, personal experience, and the other as an element of historiosophy. It is this second aspect that justifies including *My Century* in a chapter on spiritual autobiography. For in its themes this is not a memoir of inner life, but a tale of Wat's own life, understood in terms of events and history, of other people, literature and politics. Most of all it is a tale of

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34 I quote here from Frankiewicz's introduction to *Listy do Agnieszki*, 7.

35 The name of this powerful movement in Russian philosophical and religious thought means "the search for God". It began to develop in Russia before the Bolshevik revolution and continued later in emigré circles. Its main idea was to find the foundations of being and history in the Christian East. Its representatives included N. Berdyaev, S. Bulgakov and W. Rozanov, and it influenced many outstanding Russian poets and writers, among them Anna Achmatova and Osip Mandelstam. In Poland, Józef Czapski took an interest in this movement of thought.

imprisonment. Does this narrative of people and events, as full of striking, particular details as a well-written novel, with its careful drawing of clear psychological portraits and its vivid local colour, have anything in common with a spiritual autobiography? It turns out that there is indeed a certain shared feature: in the philosophical interpretation sketched in the background, by which the presence of evil in the human world is treated as the presence of Satan. By interpreting his fortunes (both the times spent in Soviet jails and the dramatic course of an acutely painful illness) in terms of guilt and punishment, the author of *My Century* incorporated his own life story into the whole order of human affairs, so that the barrier between secular and sacred history disappeared. Everything that he himself or his contemporaries experienced is interpreted as the consequence of the Fall: the fruit of sin and the operations of Satan in history.

Wat speaks of himself as a Christian who was converted as a result of a revelation that came to him one night during a walk over the prison roof, when he heard Bach's *St Matthew Passion* being broadcast somewhere on the radio. However, the story of his personal conversion is not the most important thing here. The point is that the subject-matter is characteristic of the spiritual autobiography: the account of the fall and conversion of one soul expands until it is transferred to the historiosophical plane. In striving to describe and interpret the phenomenon of totalitarianism, Wat draws on both his own personal experience and the theoretical generalisations with which his all-round erudition furnished him. At a certain point, however, psychological, sociological and historical explanations prove to be insufficient, and Wat resorts to metaphysics in order to answer the question: why evil? The emergence of the diary is its own kind of supplement to and expression of the expiatory meaning of the suffering endured in prison and in his later illness. The author of *My Century* speaks repeatedly of the necessity to make amends for his participation in what he regarded as the greatest evil of the twentieth century, and it is in respect of this, rather than of the strictly religious experiences recorded in the memoir, that Wat revives the original, Augustinian model, the autobiography of the converted sinner.

Czesław Miłosz's *The Land of Ulro* has usually been read as an essay speaking of the author's relationship to Gombrowicz, Oskar Miłosz, Mickiewicz, Blake and Swedenborg. If we are to find an autobiography in the poet's work, it would seem that the first place to look would be *Rodzinna Europa* [*Native Realm: A Search for Self-Definition*], and this is the approach to the book taken by Tomasz Burek.<sup>36</sup> However, the autobiographical formula adopted in *Native Realm* has

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36 T. Burek, "Autobiografia jako rozpamiętywanie losu. Nie tylko o 'Rodzinnej Europie'", *Pamiętnik Literacki* 72.4 (1981): 123–141.

different proportions from those we are concerned with in this chapter. The threads of collective history are not less important here than the course of an individual life, and the external turns of fortune are presented as extensively as the spiritual development. Meanwhile *The Land of Ulro* presents one integrated message, whose main theme, even from the very first sentence, is not in doubt:

Who was I? Who am I now, years later, here on Grizzly Peak, in my study overlooking the Pacific? I have long deferred the telling of certain spiritual adventures, alluding to them until now only discreetly and grudgingly. Until I noticed that it was getting late – in the history of our shrinking Earth, in the history of a life (...).<sup>37</sup>

It is in this way that Miłosz begins his most important tale about himself, giving voice to what is the foundation and outer contour of his personality, the whole world of achievement and experiences in which the meaning of existence is contained. On the final pages, looking back on the road he has now travelled, Miłosz writes:

I hope, however, that by alluding to this other, more hidden stream in my spiritual biography, I will have upset certain fixed and blanket opinions about myself. This is a matter of personal importance, since we strive to communiante the part of ourselves which most closely approximates our real selves – without indulging any illusions that we can ever achieve anything more than an approximation. Still, I must guard against what I would regard as the hypocrisy of undue modesty. My adventures are of more than just personal consequence, when, as here, a Polish poet from the Land of Ulro tries to deal with a wide range of inconsistencies and self-contradictions.<sup>38</sup>

The inconsistencies and self-contradictions of which Miłosz speaks here include those circles of problems in which the writers earlier mentioned also moved. The crowning question is that age-old, unfathomed riddle: where does evil come from? For Miłosz, the thoughts that troubled the gnostics and Manichaeans are not a closed chapter in philosophy. They return in the traditions of Slavonic literatures and in Russian Orthodox thought, especially in the work of Dostoevsky. Miłosz's interest in Swedenborg, Blake and Mickiewicz required a study of mysticism. It angered him to think of the shallowness and cloudiness in the treatment of religion in more modern Polish literature, in which, as it seemed to him, it was difficult to find any serious consideration of religious problems. Instead, one was more likely to encounter an undefined mood combined with a chaotic mix of

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37 Cz. Miłosz, *The Land of Ulro*, trans. Louis Iribarne (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1985), 3.

38 Miłosz, *The Land of Ulro*, 268.

philosophical concepts or else a strongly politicised, nationalistic understanding of religion which identified Catholicism with Polishness. He wrote:

I look around the literature of the twentieth century and I cannot see either a poet or a prose writer who has managed to escape this classification [of the “Catholic writer” as a lower class of minor writer, identified with the political right], with the possible exception, to some small degree, of Jerzy Liebert. There was Marian Zdziechowski, but he was more a professor than a writer; there was Ludwik Koniński, but he was little known, a thinker more of a private kind; perhaps Bolesław Miciński would have contributed something, but he died young.<sup>39</sup>

Miłosz himself was among those who treated religious questions seriously and this inclined him to draw conclusions from Blake’s criticism of rationalism. He believed that Blake’s warning against the limitations of Reason, which had begun to triumph in the Enlightenment era, was still relevant in the twentieth century, perhaps even more so than in Blake’s own times. The Land of Reason – the land of Ulro, the waste land of Ulro, which we continue to inhabit, need not always remain the homeland of humanity. At the end of his book, the poet settles his account with catastrophism, that is to say with the stance of his youth. He distinguishes his own outlook from that of Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, who predicted an ultimate and irrevocable disaster. Of himself, of Józef Czechowicz, of his contemporaries from his student years in Vilnius, Miłosz wrote that they believed in the existence of some kind of farther shore, on the other side of the catastrophe, so to speak, and he repeats that after the passing of almost half a century, in the nineteen-seventies, his conviction of the existence of that farther shore had grown stronger, even though it was certainly not attainable either for the generation to which he himself belonged or for future generations. However, he believes that humanity will one day find the road to Blake’s Land of Imagination and be set free from the closed circle of Ulro – the land of reason, numbers, growth and progress. Miłosz does not construct a utopia, has no wish to formulate any strict prophecies, and seeks no comfort in easy illusions. And yet this catastrophist speaks of hope, of a future civilisation free from lies and the use of force.

Miłosz’s book does not tell a tale of conversion; it contains no confessions made to God or in the face of God. It is not the story of a soul; rather, it is a story of the spirit incarnate in the poet; it recalls Brzozowski’s unfulfilled formula of

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39 Translator’s note: This passage is considerably abbreviated and altered in the English translation referred to earlier. I have therefore quoted it in my own translation from the Polish original (Cz. Miłosz, *Ziemia Ulro* (Kraków: Znak, 1994), 142).

“the history of a certain mind”. An image of approaching catastrophe closes this story, but the image is not so much a prophecy as a warning – and hence a cry for the catastrophe to be turned aside. Or, if it takes place – a cry to reach the farther shore and begin everything anew, only better this time, as if after a new birth. This openness towards hope, this deep conviction that rescue is possible (though only in some unforeseeable future) is a kind of equivalent of the recovery of the state of grace in the traditional spiritual autobiography.

Zbigniew Żakiewicz's *Dziennik intymny mojego N. N.* [The Intimate Diary of my N.N.] is a collection of notes of experiences, of meetings with people and books, of dreams and recollections. In part it is the commonplace book of a writer, in which he assembles material from various trivia for his stories and novels; but in part it is also the self-analysis of someone who wants to distance himself from the diverse affairs of his own inner life, and does this by creating a fictional double – that “N. N”. He tries out various experiences on this figure like outfits on a tailor's dummy. In these writerly quests and in the personal self-analyses, also of course helpful to the work of a writer, Żakiewicz reveals the metaphysical unease that continually troubled him. This writer, so deeply sensitive to local colour, striving constantly to build the mythology of the lost Wilno<sup>40</sup> homeland with the help of a strong imagination and a sensual feeling for particular detail, constantly unveils, beyond the material form of objects and phenomena, the existence of a spiritual world which governs the other, visible one. Whether it is an anecdote about an old woman who wanders by night on a harbour shore, or a reading of Dostoevsky, or a recollection of an underground expedition to a salt mine, Żakiewicz finds in these crumbs of reality the trace of another order: a creative and providential wisdom for which nothing is meaningless or unnecessary. This lover of Russian literature, especially of Dostoevsky, is well acquainted with Orthodox religious culture; the circle of his interests included mysticism. He too is not at home in the land of Ulro; he does not accept the greedy domination of Western rationalism. *Dziennik intymny mego N. N.*, in accordance with its name, is an open composition, part of a greater whole that is later developed in the following volumes: *Pożądanie wzgórz wiekuistych* [Yearning for the Eternal Hills] and *Ujrzone, w czasie zatrzymane* [Beheld, Arrested in Time]. We find here no watershed stage of life, no such decisive turn as in the typically shaped spiritual autobiography. The writer notes the flow of thoughts, impressions and observations, which more than once are called up by external events, but in all

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40 Translator's note: this city is now known as Vilnius, but in Żakiewicz's memory it has its pre-war name, Wilno.

this variety we can grasp an order which assembles all the individual fragments around a core of religious values.

A deep immersion in Christian concepts and symbolism is also characteristic of the work of Anna Kamińska, even in the years when she was an agnostic, when in terms of her inner convictions she was completely outside religion. But this did not get in the way of her attachment to Christian culture, Mediterranean and Western, understood with full awareness of its Jewish and ancient heritage. Thus, after she experienced conversion and returned to the Church, Kamińska's work did not need to undergo any literary transformation, but continued to flourish on the ground in which it had long been firmly rooted. In a philosophical sense, of course, a great deal changed in it, but what matters in the present reflections is not the changes in her poetry or the biographical fact of her conversion, but the way in which this inner change of direction found expression in the two volumes of her autobiographical *Notatniki* [Notebooks].

In terms of style, these Notebooks, being a collection of aphorisms, bear a resemblance to Henryk Elzenberg's philosophical diary. Indeed, Kamińska feels an affinity with Elzenberg's thought, as can be seen in her choice of a quotation from his work as the epigraph to the first volume: "To face being with courage". The spirit of this motto really is present in both these books by Kamińska. However, her style is based more on images than Elzenberg's; she uses metaphor and word play as well as poetic symbolism. Her Notebooks can be read as a poet's commonplace book, but the entries are also clearly ordered according to another principle as well: that of the spiritual autobiography. This chain of fragments, one-sentence aphorisms, and crumbs of thought and poetry adds up to a moving story of conversion, reminding the reader of the revelation experienced by Saul on the road to Damascus. Not so violent, for it was not the conversion of a persecutor, cutting the ground from under her and blinding her, but a conversion nonetheless, a flash of understanding and illumination, the shining of a great light around her. Kamińska speaks in precisely such images, reviving an ancient tradition and incorporating it into the material of her own poetic words. Yet this conversion began in the black night of bereavement, in the darkness not only of unbelief, but also of despair. "I was looking for the dead, and I found God", writes the poet in the first volume.<sup>41</sup> "I was looking for the dead": certainly, the early entries are in large part dedicated to the memory of Kamińska's deceased

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41 A. Kamińska, *Notatnik 1965–1972*, 99. See *Astonishments. Selected Poems of Anna Kamińska*, edited and translated by Grażyna Drabik and David Curzon (Brewster: Paraclete Press, 2007), 116.



husband. Her notes from these two years, like the volume of poems also written at this time, *Biały rękopis* [The White Manuscript], are essentially a ceaseless conversation with him, encountered in dreams, photographs and poems; they are an unending celebration of her own version of the ritual mourning rite in which the dead, the “forefathers”, are summoned.<sup>42</sup> Kamińska’s stance is one of refusal to accept death; she calls the departed back to life in the language of love. “I was looking for the dead, and I found God”. Besides the *topos* of sudden illumination, Kamińska also uses that of birth, which is equally firmly rooted in the most ancient Christian traditions. She speaks frequently of her new birth after conversion, breathing life once again into this ancient *topos* with original poetic images. Besides all this, her way of writing is sparing, concise, devoid of affectation. Her choice of words is rich and beautiful, though there are so few of them and even though they have a transparency tending right to the point of silence.

Yet another, and different, story of conversion is recorded by Roman Brandstaetter in his *Krąg biblijny* [The Bible Reading Circle]. Though the book is about reading the Old and New Testaments, it is also an autobiography. For the principle of Bible reading adopted by Brandstaetter assumes that Scripture should be read not only, and not even mainly, by thinking, conceptualising and reasoning, and not even only by entering into the sacred text emotionally, but also simply by an identifying way of “living into” the words and sentences of the Bible. One has to enter into Scripture oneself and bring it into one’s life. This way of reading and understanding, derived from Jewish hermeneutics, is developed by Brandstaetter into a complete programme and illustrated from his own life, that is to say with accounts of his own reading of the Bible. This fine equation is conducted with great consistency, beginning with stories of the author’s childhood and of how he identified members of his own family with the biblical figures. The most important person in his early life was his grandfather, a rabbi who taught him to read the Bible, and on his deathbed made the command to do this his last will. Through his childhood and youth, Brandstaetter is led on a journey from the Old Testament to the New and to the discovery of Christ. As

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42 The rite of the forefathers, that is the ritual summoning once a year of the spirits of dead forebears, is of ancient origin and plays an extremely important part in Polish culture, in which the cult of the dead and the sense of communion with them forms an essential element of collective identity. The most important work of Polish Romanticism, Adam Mickiewicz’s drama *Dziady* [Forefathers’ Eve], grows out of this tradition and at the same time reinforces it, transferring it into the sphere of myth.

he wrote: "For me the God of both Testaments is Christ, who wrote the story of himself in two inseparable parts."<sup>43</sup>

Brandstaetter interprets the link between the Old and New Testaments in accordance with Augustinian thought and concludes by calling the Bible "God's own *curriculum vitae*". And there is no contradiction in the writer's reasoning when he speaks of the necessity for everyone to enter into the Bible personally and to read it with his or her own life – for where can we place and make sense of an individual human life, if not in God? Brandstaetter, reading the Bible as his rabbi grandfather had taught him, as the Book of Books in which everything is contained, drew from this the most far-reaching consequences: he added the Gospels to his grandfather's heritage and wrote his own *curriculum vitae* as a story of successive readings of Scripture. This example confirms more clearly than any other the justice of the opposition we have drawn between the memoir of manners and the spiritual autobiography; the opposition between the larder and the library. For Brandstaetter the library was sufficient; the library was his home, and life was reading.

Between November 1970 and April 1979, Zbigniew Jankowski wrote the diary entries that formed the second part of a slim volume entitled *Szkice do oceanu* [Sketches to the Ocean]. The first part, entitled "Rozpędzone morze. Z dziennika rejsów rybackich" [Driven by the Sea. From a Diary of Fishing Trips], is filled to bursting with real details gathered from observation of daily life while fishing in the Baltic. However, the second part is played out entirely in a symbolic dimension, although it has a "maritime" title: "Tworzyć statek" [Creating a Ship]. The particulars of the world known to the senses, the elements of air and water, views of cities, events from family life, are recalled only in so far as they constitute a starting point from which their hidden spiritual meaning can be read. The details of observation have a place here only as a means to moral reflection or expression of cognitive unease. But the anchorage in the sensual, even if it is only a pretext, seems nevertheless to be indispensable. This is evident from the consistency with which the writer gathers, recalls and extends the symbolic meanings of the huge semantic fields connected with the element of the sea, with its space and depth. Sailing is linked with a wealth of ancient *topoi* involving the secret life of the sea's depths and the frailty of the human being in the face of the elements (obviously well known to the author); but these are called to mind here only rarely. What seems to be more important to Jankowski is the very principle of symbolisation, by which he strives to discern the "metaphysical sea" though

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43 R. Brandstaetter, *Krag biblijny*, 289.

the phenomena of the real one known to him. His imagination usually moves on the border between the literal and colloquial and the symbolically generalising meaning of words. It is not word-play or punning that interests him, but a return to the sources of lexicalised, hackneyed metaphors in order to find images that will speak to the imagination as signs of some state of the spirit that is difficult to capture, some vague inner experience or abstract problem. In touching on such philosophical matters, Jankowski of course also has to make use of the language of concepts unconnected with the concrete, but he always strives not to rest content with this, but to find images and emotional correlatives for such concepts. This is the poetic that governs the two main threads of “*Tworzyć statek*”: reflections on reading, which permit us to include Jankowski’s diary in the “library” reconstructed in this chapter, and notes that picture (with extreme restraint) the successive stages of the author’s return to a full religious life after a period of abiding completely outside the Church.

Jankowski’s fervent and deeply personal reading and continual re-reading of Koniński is an exceptionally important aspect of this diary. It provides a convincing reader’s testimony to Koniński’s chances of ceasing to be “a thinker more of a private kind”, as Miłosz described him. He has begun to be a presence. Simone Weil, so important also to Miłosz and Kamińska, recurs frequently, as does Teilhard de Chardin. Elzenberg also appears, while Kamińska is present as the addressee of letters (the only ones included in the diary), the inspirer of reading and finally as the careful and understanding reader of the diarist’s poetry. Self-irony is a notable characteristic of Jankowski’s personal writings. Often there is a punchline to his diary entries, in which he pokes fun at himself, as if to ward off sentimentalism on the one hand and exaltation on the other. In this context, his concise accounts of religious unease take on a distinctiveness that is all the greater: the long search for God, sometimes found and sometimes eluding him, encountered in the Old Testament and in the Gospels, in his reading of philosophers of religion, in the poetry of the Psalms as translated by Brandstaetter, in the whole natural world, and in his love for his wife and daughters. The story of a return, of a conversion that comes about slowly, with hesitations and resistance, is the main, underground current of this spiritual diary.

## Conclusion

Each of the books mentioned in this chapter has its own distinct individuality. When placed together, the differences among them stand out all the more clearly, but at the same time certain shared characteristics can be discerned. They have been discussed here in an order that more or less corresponds to their appearance;

this is of course an external criterion and in many cases entirely irrelevant as far as the content is concerned. But one has to adopt some kind of order; and this one is at least partly justified by the principle of treating these texts as testimonies to reading, a principle which allows us to lay bare a whole network of intertextual relations. A side-effect of arranging the material in this way is that a kind of collective history of the religious consciousness of the Polish intelligentsia emerges, beginning with the reception of the thought of Cardinal Newman, as translated and commented on by Brzozowski, and continuing through the spirituality of Fr. Korniłowicz's "Circle" and the Laski community, the spirituality that lies behind Liebert's work and returns after the war in Zawieyski's writings. Later come the difficulties, dangers and trials of the Stalinist years, shown from different angles by Cardinal Wyszyński and Aleksander Wat; then the testimonies of Miłosz and Żakiewicz, arising independently of each other in the nineteen-seventies, and followed by the phenomena of Kamieńska's and Jankowski's conversions.

All the possibilities of understanding the texts analysed here, and all the further interpretations which require to be carried out on the plane of literary studies or the history of consciousness, are situated entirely outside the phenomenon of the religious; they open no access to those existential experiences to which the individual authors gave expression. Any attempt to reach the essence of those experiences would have to follow a completely different course than the one outlined in this chapter. No integration into a common current; quite the opposite. One would have to decide on a separate hermeneutical approach to each text and conduct a series of close readings of particular accounts of religious experience, viewed in its uniqueness and individuality. This would also entail referring to the authors' life-stories, to what we know of the formation of their personalities and in some cases of the circumstances in which a given text arose. One would need to ask, for example, how personal experiences of illness, the prospect of death or experiences of physical suffering stamped themselves on the religious subject-matter, as in Brzozowski, Koniński or Liebert. It would also be necessary to look at two of the different ways in which the phenomenon of conversion is presented: as an experience that precedes the emergence of the text, which then itself becomes one of the forms of response to conversion's challenge and call; or as a process taking place in the course of successive stages of writing, in which case the conversion appears as part of that dramatic course. The variety of forms that this vitally important element may take in different spiritual autobiographies is great. There is the question of the experience of the death of someone close and the role of this event in forming attitudes to the prospect of eternal life. And there is the dialectic of belief and unbelief; and a whole host of theological problems, such as the development of Christology and the great

theme of evil, inscribed mostly in a Manichaean context. There is the relationship with the Church and its changes, seen in a historical perspective, beginning with the modernist crisis and proceeding through the current of Franciscanism and the neo-Thomist revival from the nineteen-twenties on, right up to the post-Vatican II transformations. There is the relationship of Catholicism to Jewish tradition and to other Christian confessions, such as Protestantism and Eastern Orthodoxy with its twentieth-century *bogoiskatielstvo*, and to non-Christian religions such as Buddhism. There is the supra-institutional relationship to the sacred: the interest in mysticism in Koniński, Liebert, Elzenberg and Miłosz. And the question of philosophy of religion – not on the plane of intellectual reflection, however, but in relation to a personal stance, attesting to faith by the labour of one's life, by personal engagement in the order of events, not merely by some work of the intellect. Each of the problems listed here would be sufficient for a separate study. Having looked around our “library”, we find ourselves standing only at the point of departure in our study of the twentieth-century spiritual autobiography. But even this superficial survey is sufficient to convince us that in Polish literature of personal document, in which the memoir-witness tradition has always been the dominant, there is also a clearly identifiable strand of writings which choose the stance of confession. The present chapter, moreover, deals with only a small part of the material that might be examined.



## 2. Intertextual Connections in the Spiritual Autobiography

The network of textual connections, forming a kind of “library” of the spiritual autobiography, makes it easier to discern what distinguishes this group of texts from other works of literature of personal document written from the stance of confession, especially from the typical intimate diary, with its characteristic egotism. In the spiritual autobiography, the problems of the person writing are not confined to purely psychological self-analysis within the circle of the personal and private. Rather, they are grasped in a universal perspective and related to the sphere of ideas.

### Four Types of Intertextual Allusion

The allusions to the “already said” that we encounter in autobiographical writings can be simply divided into four categories, which can easily be distinguished logically, but are unequal in terms of size and significance. They can be found in all kinds of literature of personal document, not only within that area of spiritual autobiography where they are most common and have particular importance. The four categories of textual reference mentioned involve:

- 1) autocommentary, or reference to one’s own text in the heat of the moment of writing;
- 2) references to other people’s diaries, memoirs or autobiographies;
- 3) references to one’s own non-autobiographical texts;
- 4) references to other people’s non-autobiographical texts.

The first category applies to an intratextual situation. The stratification into auto-commentary and the text that is its object is particularly clear in the diary because there it is frequently reinforced by a difference of time. Earlier phases of a diary quite easily gain a relative autonomy. Diarists fairly quickly acquire a certain distance towards what they wrote earlier, and begin to regard their past diary entries, now separated from them in time, as someone else’s text, different and “other” in relation to the one that is now coming into being, when the text crystallises, like cooling lava flowing from the crater of a volcano. The practice of re-reading and commenting on earlier parts of one’s own diary is widespread among diarists. I know of none who does not at least at some point reveal that he or she has done this. Even such an “un-self-centred” diarist as Henryk Elzenberg

intimates once or twice that he has re-read the entries in his diary and speaks of their cognitive, ordering and even self-creating character. This kind of reflection on one's own text is usually accompanied by self-definition, frequently juxtaposed with remarks on other people's diaries, memoirs or autobiographies.

In precisely this way, the first category dovetails with the second. The significance of references to other people's autobiographical texts lies mainly in the fact that they bear testimony to a sense of a special kind of continuity of genre. They indicate the existence of something that might be called an awareness of a tradition of autobiographical writing. Memoirists, autobiographers and diarists (diarists especially) read other memoirists, autobiographers and diarists. They read them and comment on them, and sometimes compare them with their own writing. This is confirmed by countless examples. Irzykowski is fascinated by Hebbel's *Diaries*, the young Nałkowska by those of Marie Bashkirtseff; Lechoń takes issue with Gide's conception of the diary; Zawieyski reads and comments on the diaries of Green, Gombrowicz, Lechoń, Gide, Mauriac, Kafka and Merton. Elzenberg, Miłosz and Koniński are avid readers of Brzozowski, while they in turn are all read by Kamieńska, who then writes the introduction to the second volume of Żakiewicz's diaries...

The third category is made up of links between the diary and other texts by the same writer. Here, two-way relations are possible. The original may be a literary work which the author recalls, comments on or quotes from in the diary, but it is often the other way round. The diary may be the source text, from which certain extracts are taken in order for them to be reworked, transformed and developed in novels, short stories or poems. This function of the writer's diary as a rough book, commonplace book or storehouse of ideas is among the most well-known as well as the most significant of its roles.

The fourth group of references is "everything else": in other words the open, infinite "multi-text" of every possible kind of reading material. Here it is difficult to speak of theoretical rules. The choice made from this *universum* can be examined only on the plane of literary history, which describes and analyses the group of references that appear in any given case. In drawing up such a record and outlining the interactions among particular texts, we may venture to reconstruct the convictions of the writer in regard to his or her relation to the *universum* of other people's texts. The particular writer's understanding of tradition and his or her place within it then reveals itself, as does the conception of reading as a way of participating in tradition. Sometimes writers give direct expression to their convictions; sometimes one has to read between the lines, looking at the method of quoting or alluding to other writers and the choice of some and not other references.



The work of describing intertextual connections is not merely a matter of the horizontal relation between paralleled sequences of texts. It is the reference to a certain kind of “third power” that has decisive significance, when we move beyond the *universum* of mutually associated texts to the world outside signs and codes, to the personality that creates the autobiographical record and examines itself within it. Of course we have no other access to this personality than by way of this record and the texts connected with it, and we can only get to know that form of it whose trace has been recorded. Hence this personality is only a hypothesis for us, but it is a hypothesis that – to refer to Jerzy Ziomek’s convincing term<sup>1</sup> – is unavoidable. Without the essential extra-textual point of reference, it would be futile to engage in any study of autobiographical writings. The intertextual links that we come across in the field of literature of personal document merit description as a certain stage of research only when we keep in mind that further perspective: the existence of the person of the author, of which the texts are the trace.

It is within this framework that the four categories of allusion mentioned above turn their other, so far invisible, face towards us. The first category is linked with the third (in both cases it is a matter of reference to one’s own texts), while the second is connected with the fourth (reference to other people’s texts). Instead of the distinction between the autobiographical and the literary, another one appears: I am the person speaking – it is another who speaks. To refer to an earlier part of one’s own autobiographical record or one’s own literary work is not merely to present a critical reading of an earlier draft or of some already published work which comes as if from the outside. It is also to engage in an act of renewed self-recognition, of self-therapy and self-defence in the face of passing time. Quotations from and reflections on other people’s diaries, novels, poems or philosophical works are not merely evidence of awareness of genre conventions or of one’s place in tradition; they are also a dialogue with the person of the other who is hidden in his or her diary, novel, poem or philosophical work.

The testimony to reading that the autobiographical work bears is often set within the frame of existential experience. A quotation may acquire the status of a life motto, a confession of faith or a writer’s manifesto. In this way it becomes rooted in the life experience of the person who quotes it. It may be a summarising expression, a generalisation of what has already been played out in the sphere of

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1 J. Ziomek, “Autobiografizm jako hipoteza konieczna (‘Treny’ Jana Kochanowskiego)”, *Biografia – geografia – kultura literacka*, ed. J. Ziomek and J. Sławiński (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1975), 41–60.

facts and events. It may be a signpost, a justification for acts that are so far merely imagined or planned. Even if it refers only to dreams or recollections, it remains part of someone's spiritual life, which is governed by other laws than those of texts and the connections among them.

### A Case of a Dense Network of Allusions

In gathering material to observe the intertextual links in autobiographical writings, it is important to bear in mind the broadest possible understanding of types of reference. It is not merely a matter of paraphrases, travesties or parodies – for there are not many of these and it does not seem that they play any fundamental role. We need also to take account of even the most elementary indications of any kind of reference: every smallest trace of things read, allusions, quotations, discussions, commentaries, polemics, even a simple mention of an author or a title. Often these references are related to a certain idea rather than to the text as a whole, to the subject of the utterance rather than the mode of speaking employed, or to the person of the author rather than to the code which he or she employs.

In this chapter we shall be considering direct allusions that are indicated on the surface of the text. I exclude hidden and deeper links such as the imitation in an autobiography of novelistic rules of text construction, because this would be a subject for a separate study. I therefore confine myself to empirical quotations, ignoring *quasi*-quotations, that is quotations of structures.<sup>2</sup> I concentrate mainly on the quotations and discussions characteristic of the reading diary, because this type of reference plays a prominent role in spiritual autobiographies, especially in those that make use of a diary, or diary-like, convention.

My main examples will be the two volumes of Anna Kamińska's *Notatnik* [Notebook], which cover the years 1965–1972 and 1973–1979, because of their almost ostentatious connections, extremely visible on the surface, with a huge constellation of other texts.<sup>3</sup> This Notebook on one of its levels is an anthology of

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2 D. Danek, *O polemice literackiej w powieści* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1972), 75.

3 A. Kamińska, *Notatnik 1965–1972* (Poznań: "W drodze", 1988), second edition; *Notatnik 1973–1979* (Poznań: "W drodze", 1987). Page references and volume numbers (in Roman numerals) in the body of the text are to these editions.

Translator's note: Some extracts from these Notebooks are translated in *Astonishments. Selected Poems of Anna Kamińska* (Brewster: Paraclete Press, 2007). A selection of Kamińska's poetry in translation is also to be found in: Anna Kamińska, *Two darkneses*, selected and translated from the Polish by Tomasz P. Krzeszowski &

quotations of quite ample proportions in comparison to Kamińska's own text; and the fact that the quotations are often commented on further increases the space taken up by links with other people's writing. I know of no other Polish diarist who quotes so extensively. Perhaps one might put the young Żeromski in second place, for the first volume of his *Dzienniki* [Diaries] includes long passages of quotation, but in this case they have a different motivation: a schoolboy's effort to educate himself by treating his diary in part as a reading record kept on the instigation of a teacher. Other diarists note the fact of having read something and record their comments, reflections or disagreement (for instance Brzozowski, Irzykowski, Zawieyski and Nałkowska, who at the end of a year sometimes simply writes a list of titles of what she has read), but they do not quote – or at least not so systematically and not to such an extent.

As a counterweight to all this copiousness, Kamińska's ability to eliminate and to exercise discipline in selection give to her way of employing quotation in the Notebook the appearance of a precise art. This impression is strengthened by the visible drive towards aphoristic conciseness which is also characteristic of her poetry.

In looking for references of the first, intratextual, type, we reach the conclusion that while Kamińska is reserved in her self-commentaries, she does not avoid them altogether. Common to them all is the effort to emphasise that the entries in her Notebook are not literature; they have no form, and are characterised above all by spontaneity and shorthand; they are "inept" and do not render what is most important. This sense of the inadequacy and insufficiency of the text in the face of the wealth of life is accompanied by a kind of authorial dissatisfaction, a lack of mastery of the text, which refuses to be controlled and is not directed by a conscious creative intent. Born of impulse, it does not lend itself to re-working, but only to elimination. The spontaneity of the record, eluding conscious intent or purposeful revision, makes for distance, leading to a surprising sense of the author's lack of identity with the text. The Notebook, which so often identifies itself with someone else's quoted text, proclaims its difference, its foreignness, its non-identity with its *own* text! The elemental and spontaneous character of the record has two faces: identity with "life" and lack of identity with the author. An astonishing reversal comes about: it becomes possible to identify with a quoted text by another author, while one's own text is felt as something foreign, written or dictated by someone (or something) else. Kamińska writes:

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Desmond Graham (Jesmond: Flambard, 1994). Unless otherwise indicated, all extracts from Kamińska's Notebooks and poetry quoted here are in my translation.

It is life that writes this notebook, using me. Its author is not I (110, II).

While preserving the whole difference between notebook and poetry, Kamińska sees her creative stance in both cases similarly. She says that someone else writes her poems with her hand, that she herself is only a medium. She collects the confessions of other writers who speak of the text as something given to them from the outside, so that the process of writing is simply a translation into words of a shape that is wordless, but already prepared, existing before it is written down.

A reconstruction of the authorial self-consciousness inscribed in the Notebook must also embrace the question of its genre character. The title itself contains a genological qualification and the author also emphasises in the text that what she writes is not, in her conception, either a memoir or a diary. At most, it is a commonplace book, and hence a series of notes made on the spot, in the heat of a given moment. The main reason why the author denies that her Notebook has a memoir or diary nature is that it is a shorthand and fragmentary record which declines to recreate the course of life and events. She asserts that her entries do not cover the whole, but concentrate only on a certain current of inner life. As we recall, these are precisely the characteristics of a spiritual autobiography. In this way we already find ourselves within the circle of the second category of intertextual reference.

Kamińska's allusions in the Notebook to her reading of autobiographical writings are not numerous to begin with, but become increasingly frequent as the years go by. Diaries of various kinds are the most prominent. Besides Koniński and Elzenberg, we find Maine de Biran, Nałkowska, Anna Kowalska, Claudel, Guitton, Lechoń, Korczak and Herling-Grudziński. Alongside a quotation, we sometimes find a reflection related to this type of writing, or to the attitude of the diarist or the readerly reception of intimate writings. There are analytical and critical comments containing factual statements. More than once an awareness of the tradition of the genre provokes Kamińska to battle the temptation to be narcissistic and allow the Notebook to become a "mirror".

The third group of intertextual references involves the autobiographer's alluding to his or her own literary output. Three possible kinds of links between the Notebook and Kamińska's essays and poetic texts can be observed. The Notebook may be either the secondary or the primary text, and there are also sequences which seem to bear witness to the simultaneous writing of a poem and of a certain part of the diary, where what has already been said and what is only just being said change places, each exerting an influence over the other. I do not claim here to be recreating the real course of the creative process, but only its recorded traces.

The first situation is the most commonplace, especially when the allusion is merely a matter of a commentary or a mention of a theme, without involving stylistic or lexical similarities. Usually such cases concern principally the plane of content, as in the following two examples, in which the Notebook simply refers to the writing of a poem:

One day – 16 March – I wrote “Biały rękopis” [The White Manuscript] (37, I).  
Of course what came out of my “Szczęścia Hioba” [Job’s Happinesses] was only a lyric, not a drama or long poem. A short breath, everything tied just into the knot of a short lyric. (201, I).

In the second situation, the movement is in the opposite direction: we may suppose that the entry in the Notebook is the original text, to which a poem later makes reference.

11 October 1970:

A prayer book in the hands of an old woman in a church – it’s poetry. Swollen, brown from the touch of fingers and lips, cracked, with large print already almost rubbed out. How many generations have prayed from it... (135, I).

10 January 1971:

A prayer book, covered in spit, rotting, swollen. Huge letters. The Book of Life. Should write about this (156, I).

The poem “Litania” [Litany] in the volume entitled *Herody* [Herods], published in 1972, is the fulfilment of the intention mentioned in these two passages from Kamińska’s diary. It makes use of lexical material included in both of them.

In contrast, the relation between the text of the poem “Ciało” [Body], from the same volume (*Herody*), and the equivalent fragments of the diary is reversible, falling into a pattern in which they seem to exchange roles as source and alluding text. In December 1969, two years after the death of her husband, Kamińska notes:

The myth of Antheus, who regained his strength by touching the earth. For humans, the earth is another human being. It is only from there that a person can draw strength. Otherwise we wither, grow old and die (56, I).

In a fragment dated “Spring 1970”, she writes:

The body is an Anthean earth. Blessing comes to the whole person. One shouldn’t despise the dead just because they don’t have a body. I pray for His [Kamińska’s husband’s] body, that it might live and come back to life (82, I).

The date of writing of the poem “Ciało” is not recorded in *Herody*; but it contains a passage about the body of Antheus as the only earth. The poem concludes with this stanza:

It all goes on like an old mystery play  
 There's man death angel and satan  
 Satan comes for the soul with a sword  
 But the wise angel agrees to take only the body  
 For he knows that with that he takes all.<sup>4</sup>

Already in the autumn of 1970, the author's own interpretation of the finished poem appears in the Notebook:

The poem "Ciało", on the surface so blasphemous, does not stray from the idea of the world's sacredness. The body is also holy, and its affairs are holy (...) The touch of love sanctifies, it brings with it the "justification" and salvation of the body. It's only this that makes the resurrection of the body conceivable (128, I).

A little later, in another context, Kamińska again quotes from her own poem. She writes of a meeting with an acquaintance who is blind:

I say – I'd like you to look at the world more clearly – and suddenly I realise how stupid these words are. I am speaking to a blind person. He takes me by the hand. For it is only my hand that he can see. "Only by touch can compassion be conveyed" – from my poem "Ciało" (142, I).

In discussing this example, I have not so far mentioned the fact that the poem has an epigraph:

Soul has flown the body's nest  
 In a green meadow come to rest.

The same lines are quoted in the Notebook right next to a long passage about Antheus. Kamińska took this couplet from a piece of medieval verse whose roots reach down to the literature of antiquity, and which yet remains popular in Polish poetry to this very day. It recurs in countless quotations and paraphrases, as shown in a memorable study by Kazimierz Wyka,<sup>5</sup> and finds a fulfilment and continuation in the work of such writers as Leśmian, Różewicz, Herbert, Rymkiewicz and Szymborska.<sup>6</sup>

4 A. Kamińska, *Herody* (Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1972), 14–15.

5 K. Wyka, "Dusza z ciała wyleciała...," in his *Wędrując po tematach*, vol. 2, *Puścizna* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1971), 5–50.

6 I have written of this more extensively in the study "Topos duszyczki we współczesnej poezji polskiej", *Topika antyczna w literaturze polskiej XX wieku*, ed. A. Brodzka and E. Sarnowska-Temierusz (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1992), and in "Wędrówki duszy, ciało i 'zielona łąka' w poezji współczesnej", in: *Dusza*, ed. A. Czekanowicz and S. Rosiek (Gdańsk: Słowo/Obraz Terytoria, 2002).

Here we now pass on to the fourth category of references, which embraces the widest group of texts: the non-autobiographical ones. Earlier we spoke of the choice of the Notebook as an example because of its nature as an anthology of quotations. Before we try to describe Kamińska's practice and method of quoting, let us pause a moment to consider the "theory" of quotation formulated by her. One might even say that the Notebook records something like a personal philosophy of quotation. While this is connected in a sense with the self-commentaries already discussed, it does not stop there. What I call, perhaps with a little exaggeration, Kamińska's "philosophy of quotation", is part of the writerly and existential self-consciousness inscribed in the Notebook and emerges directly from a certain philosophy of reading to which this diary also bears witness:

What I read is directed to me, only to me, in my particular situation (139, I).

I am hurrying home, to the book that is waiting for me on my desk. Mauriac's *Blocnotes* (...)

These are words that were written for me and were waiting for me. Mauriac wrote them on 17 December, 1966 (275, II).

This identifying style of reading is linked with an identifying style of quoting. Kamińska writes of her relation to another person's text on a page written *ex post*, in October 1981, to precede the first volume of the Notebook which she had just prepared for publication:

Quotations from reading are an integral part of my own text, for I only note the things that overlap with my own thoughts, that resonate with them or formulate them more exactly (6, I).

The sense of something's being "addressed to me", of its "resonating together" with me, "being integral", grows out of the awareness of the author's own thoughts and her own text as being grounded in one common, greater whole:

I am copying this, because I could not say it better myself. I'm walking over already beaten tracks. How deep these ruts are, like the wheel ruts on the Via Sacra in Rome. We walk on roads that someone else has traversed before us (265, I).

Despite the reference to Rome, I do not think that a feeling of purely Christian or European tradition must necessarily lie behind the identifying stance here, for in other places Kamińska treats parts of the *Bhagavad Gita* as integral to her own text. In this case it is more a matter of the identity of the human condition, understood existentially, as independent of circumstances of culture, time and space.

One more rut, from Shakespeare even: "All's well that ends well".

"The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together; our virtues would be proud, if our faults whipped them not; and our crimes would despair, if they were not cherished by our virtues" (265, I).

The words “from Shakespeare even” are not so much a reference to the several centuries of history separating the writer from the era in which the bard lived, as a metonymy of the distant past, indicating the sense of the permanence of the human condition in spite of the passage of time.

Kamieńska’s “philosophy of quotation” seems to arise out of Christian existentialist circles of thought, out of the personalist philosophy whose concepts find their way into her most basic, “definition-like” formulations, those which reveal how she understands the workings of literature:

The function of writing is not means of expression, not style or even thought, but association with the person of the author, the recognition of a person (67, II).

This entry is from 5 January, 1974. Ten years later, the poet was to repeat a similar thought:

(...) in poetry there is truly nothing at all, when there is no biography (...) Brzozowski said: “What is not biography is not anything at all.”<sup>7</sup>

Alongside the sense of closeness, of understanding and identifying with another that Kamieńska reveals by using quotations, and by using so many of them, there is also a certain kind of admiration (“I could not say it better myself”), as well as joy in the encounter. Her decision to quote is a gesture of humility. The eagerness with which she does this is the outcome of openness to dialogue, without the egocentric need to translate everything into, or insist on, her own words.

So much for Kamieńska’s “theory” of quotation. What about her practice of incorporating it into her own writing? From comments scattered over the whole, one may conclude that the text of the Notebook has gone through at least two rounds of sifting. First – only some of the writer’s own and others’ thoughts are noted in the rough book. Second – only some of these jottings find their way into the version of the notes published by the poet. Quoting is in itself an act of repetition, of taking steps along “already beaten tracks”, as Kamieńska puts it. But the choice of these and not other fragments leads to the creation of something that is quite new. A piece of foreign material is cut out of its original context and then incorporated into the writer’s own text in such a way that it fits the whole exactly. Scraps of other people’s texts, noticed, overheard, chosen, accepted, and transferred into Kamieńska’s own text, are woven into its intellectual fabric, though they remain distinct, either graphically, through the use of inverted commas, or by the noting of the author’s name and often the title of the source. It is a most precisely chosen anthology.

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7 A. Kamieńska, “Autointerpretacja”, in *Na progu słowa* (Poznań: “W drodze”, 1985), 10.



Very often the quotations that appear in the Notebook are not simply small one-off particles, but short sequences made up of several elements, in which connected fragments, usually from the same source, appear. Although this might be considered as reinforcing their autonomy by making their origin visible, at the same time the linking of these fragments works to counter the atomisation and discontinuity that is an inevitable aspect of every collection of thoughts, comments or aphorisms. The tendency to join small wholes that are separate but juxtaposed can also be observed in two other spiritual autobiographies of a similarly aphoristic style as the Notebook, those of Koniński and Elzenberg. Kamińska's spiritual autobiography, though constructed in considerable degree from fragments of other people's texts, is certainly not a collage, but a collection that clearly integrates its varied wealth.<sup>8</sup> Besides quotations from the author's reading, it includes accounts of dreams, plans for poems, commentaries on already finished poems, fragments of conversation, records of experiences and states of mind. In spite of the open time perspective that is characteristic of diaries, strong hidden bonds govern the development of the paragraphs of the Notebook, though they are discontinuous from a formal point of view.

Offsetting the "centrifugal" stylistic orientation of a collection of aphorisms is the integrating operation of two main themes in the Notebook, which clearly dominate the varied whole and often complement each other, though in terms of composition and style they do not stand out from the rest. The only thing that singles them out is their intellectual content, their reference to two existential problems which were fundamental for the writer of the Notebook. Both grew directly out of events that Kamińska shows to be crucial for her life during the time in which the Notebook was being written. These were her husband's death, and then her return to religion two years later. Each of these threads has its own dynamic and its own intellectual transformations, whose logic and continuity can only be grasped in the context of personal reference. The compositional effect of a *leitmotif* is the result not of some precedent choice of a convention, but of the fact that these existential problems never lost their importance for Kamińska, despite the passing years.

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8 On the concept of collage see for example R. Nycz, "O kolażu tekstowym. Zarys dziejów pojęcia", in his *Tekstowy świat. Poststrukturalizm a wiedza o literaturze* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 1993 and Kraków: Universitas, 2000). The principle of construction of Kamińska's Notebook can be related to the generally understood rules of construction of *silva rerum* texts as they can be observed in twentieth-century literature. See R. Nycz, *Sylwy współczesne. Problem konstrukcji tekstu* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1984), 116.

The two great themes of this autobiography are widowhood and conversion; the loss of the man she loved and the recovery of faith. “I was looking for the dead, and I found God” (99, I).<sup>9</sup> This sentence is a poetic figure, a precise and laconic antithesis. But from another point of view, it is a summary of several years of extraordinarily dramatic inner experience; it does not relate to a fictional presented world, but to the real experience of the person who formulated the sentence.

After the death of her husband, the poet turned to Jan Kochanowski's *Laments*.<sup>10</sup> She singles out one especially: “that undervalued *Lament I* of Kochanowski, with its reference to Heraclitus and Simonides” (38, I), and later she includes the poem's two first lines (“All Heraclitus' tears, all threnodies / And plaintive dirges of Simonides”) as an epigraph to the first poem in *Herody* [Herods]. But there is little point in merely noting these allusions to the Renaissance poet and his ancient forebears if we limit ourselves to the question of the choice of conventions, without taking into account the existential situation which lies behind them. The illness and death of Kamińska's husband, the poet Jan Śpiewak, is not described at all in the Notebook; these events do not exist on the plane of the “presented world”, either in the entries for the end of 1967, when Śpiewak died, or in any other place. And yet only the knowledge of this unrepresented fact existing somewhere outside the text allows us to integrate what is scattered over the years: sentences, accounts of dreams, fragments of Kamińska's own poems and mentions of her husband's, shreds of recollections to which some new, small detail unexpectedly accrues, astonishingly clear in spite of the years that have gone by.

After her conversion, Kamińska resorts to the *topoi* of illumination, second birth and washing in the water of life. She makes use of the language of mystics, of the New Testament *Epistles* and of the writings of the Church Fathers. The reference to Saul, blinded by excess of light, the image of new birth, of a fountain springing forth – none of this is new to literature, and it can certainly be analysed in terms of stylisation. But we cannot rest content with observing stylistic devices, because in this text they only have meaning in reference to the conversion experienced so particularly, and so clearly founded in the writer's life that the Notebook provides its exact date: 13 January, 1970. And then recalls the event exactly one year after its occurrence.

In the background to the problem of the relation between another person's text (quotation) and one's own is the problem of the relation between another

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9 A. Kamińska, *Astonishments*, 116.

10 J. Kochanowski, *Laments*, translated by Seamus Heaney and Stanisław Barańczak (London: Faber and Faber, 1995).

person's and one's own way of speaking (code); and still further in the background there is the problem of the relation between one's own and another person's experience. The Notebook records its author's awareness of the existence of these tensions. On the one hand, there is the sense of the inexpressibility of one's own deepest experiences in the language generally available, while on the other there is the knowledge that other people have also loved those close to them, have suffered because of their loss, and have regained their faith in God. It is only in this perspective of identity with the human condition that the thought of tradition appears, of the need to use for one's own individual experiences words that have been sanctioned by ancient tradition. But tradition, which allows one to enter those "already beaten tracks", is not understood as an anonymous repertoire of possibilities awaiting their literary reiteration. Instead, it is revealed as a certain milieu (within which the chorus of quotations that resounds in the Notebook can be formed), as a zone of encounter with other people as they speak of their unique (though similar) experiences in words that refer to a shared, universal system of ideas and values.

This is why I believe that describing the mechanisms of textual reference would be a barren exercise if one only intended to stop at this. Their meaning is not exhausted on the horizontal plane of series of texts and the codes represented by them. Concurrences, repetitions, self-quotations or employment of cultural codes are not only played out between texts, but refer to a factor that cannot be grasped on the level of intertextual relations. The genre context of other spiritual autobiographies that make use of the method of a reading diary is also not a sufficient plane of reference and does not explain the peculiar way in which Kamińska's anthology of quotations is combined into a whole.

This record gains coherence only when it is referred to the extra-textual and extra-generic plane: to such an intertextual category as the subject, the person of the diarist. It is only by resorting to this category that we can elucidate the paradox of Kamińska's identifying quotation of other people's texts, the manner of her progress along well-worn furrows. Repetition takes place in a person's thoughts. It is only because of that person that texts communicate with texts, quotations with quotations. It is only a person who makes the connection and interplay of texts and quotations possible. Mere connections, if they develop between texts, also perish between texts. It is only the thoughts of a person that gather them together and rescue them. It can then be seen that repetitions in autobiography are not only echoes of texts or waves that spread out over the surface. They penetrate to the depths and there change direction, becoming modified as they bounce off some mysterious, invisible deep: the consciousness and memory of a person.



## **Part Three Witness Inscribed in Place**



# 1. Autobiographical Places and the Topographic Imagination: On the Relations between Place and Identity<sup>1</sup>

Autobiographical writing that takes the stance of witness reveals the person writing in the context of the external world, devoting attention in various proportions to events going on in historical time, to the social surroundings and to the topographical space in which the autobiographer functions. In the present chapter I shall concentrate on this last aspect.

Although the link between an individual's identity with the place of his or her origin and the changes that accompany migrations is one of the most fundamental of anthropological problems, it is not one that we can discuss here. Nevertheless, one needs to keep this context in mind when examining the spatial references of autobiographical writing. These references are important for very many personal documents as well as for literary works that are deeply permeated by autobiographical elements, though not all the authors who write in various ways, open or camouflaged, about themselves, make mention of the topographical space which provided the background to the events of their lives. For writers to do this, the essential condition is the possession of a certain type of imagination, which I would call topographical. Authors endowed with this kind of writer's temperament share a great sensual sensitivity and an interest in the wealth of the particular; they have a sense of the significance of the material detail. They are captivated by landscapes and objects; they are curious about the value and meaning that shapes and colours, sounds and smells, movement and light can conceal within themselves. They are fascinated by the visible world, which they interpret in all its variety, finding it either beautiful or bizarre and terrible. Or else they search for the hidden traces of the past that the world contains. This kind of imagination can be discerned, for example, in the work of writers who in other respects differ greatly from one another, such as Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz,

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1 Translator's note: A translation of a version of this chapter, entitled "Autobiographical Sites. A Proposition within Geopoetics", translated by Jan Szelągiewicz, appeared in a special issue of *Teksty Drugie* 2014. 2: 55–74. The text as presented here is an entirely new translation from a revised original. The key concept rendered as "site" by Szelągiewicz is here translated as "place", because of the author's allusion to Yi-Fu Tuan's distinction between space and place, as well as to Marc Augé's concept of the non-place.

Czesław Miłosz, Tadeusz Konwicki, Miron Białoszewski and Adam Zagajewski. All of these writers created distinctive visions of their autobiographical places. Miłosz described the principle of the imagination's topographical orientation both precisely and vividly, from the perspective of his rich and varied experience:

“Imagination, always spatial, indicates north, south, east and west from a certain central, privileged place, which, we may suppose, is the hamlet or local district of our childhood [...]”<sup>2</sup>

Miłosz's own work was an outstanding example of the practical fulfilment of this principle, partly in his poetry, but above all in such prose works as the novel *Dolina Issy* [*The Issa Valley*], the book-length essay *Rodzinna Europa* [*Native Realm*] and the diary *Rok myśliwego* [*A Year of the Hunter*], which are all permeated through and through with autobiographical experience.

The peculiar character of the topographical imagination is clearly visible when it is set against its opposite. The writer who possesses this kind of imagination can be compared to a painter who makes use of a rich palette of different colours. His antithesis would be the graphic artist or draughtsman, who can only operate in black and white, although his technique also offers a wealth of possibilities and can lead to masterly results. If in the poem “Kuznia” [“Blacksmith Shop”],<sup>3</sup> Miłosz twice repeats the word “patrzę” [“stare”] and concludes that he has been called “To glorify things just because they *are* [emphasis added]”, then the opposite pole of the imagination attracts writers who might describe themselves as being called to a study of ideas so penetrating that they might be trying to turn them inside out, as a tailor might do with some garment that is well worn, but still serviceable. And they behave like this simply because ideas *are*. Such writers on the whole do not possess any great sensitivity to the material stimuli of the three-dimensional visible world, though they are not necessarily only interested in their own inner life. Their attention may be drawn either towards abstract intellectual worlds or towards other people, their mental life and social relations. However, they are usually indifferent to the material background in which their heroes move, converse and act.

Such writers as Teodor Parnicki, Sławomir Mrożek, Aleksander Wat or Witold Gombrowicz, who were all privileged to live not only in the country of their birth

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2 Cz. Miłosz, “Noty o wygnaniu” [Notes on Exile], *Zaczynając od moich ulic* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 1990), 49. The English collection of essays with the same title, *Beginning with My Streets: Essays and Recollections* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991), does not contain this essay.

3 Cz. Miłosz, *Selected and Last Poems 1931-2004* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 213.



and not only in Europe, but also on other continents, could not complain of a lack of stimuli from their external surroundings. They spent years in different countries and might all have become either bards of their own lost place in the world or travellers absorbing exotic impressions. But none of them considered topographical detail worthy of prolonged or concentrated attention. They did not create autobiographical places. To take one example: Parnicki, born in Berlin in 1905, spent his early childhood in Moscow, only to find himself while still a boy as far away as Vladivostok and later Harbin in Manchuria. Then, after spending not much more than ten years in Lwów (present-day Lviv),<sup>4</sup> he was arrested after the outbreak of World War II by Soviet security services and deported into the depths of Russia once again, only later to join the II Corps of the Polish Army formed in the Soviet Union. With them he travelled via Jerusalem to London and finally to Mexico, where he settled as an emigrant for many years. Yet apart from geographical names, there are almost no spatial references in either the fictional threads of his historical novels or in their autobiographical allusions, which become increasingly dense as time goes by. Parnicki's few mentions of the characteristic outlines of volcanos in the vicinity of Mexico City make this general lack all the more noticeable.

I propose to distinguish the category of autobiographical places as imaginative wholes which arise in relation to three frames: the writer's work; the course of his or her life experiences; and real places in geographical space, considered along with their cultural symbolism. The phenomena involved here are situated on a border between literature and geography, and their description requires the simultaneous use of a variety of tools connected with literary studies, anthropology, cultural studies and humanist geography. To be more precise, we are dealing here with the points of contact between a given writer's life and his or her work, the latter being understood broadly, as an assemblage of all the existing utterances of a given author, not only those pieces traditionally classed as literature, but also journalism, private notes, spoken utterances preserved in sound recordings or films, as well as works of other kinds of art, if the writer engaged in them. I still remain convinced that the hypothesis positing the existence of one collective, integrated subject uniting all the works of one author is ontologically justified and its application cognitively fruitful. The idea of distinguishing the autobiographical place as a category is based on precisely this assumption as to

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4 Translator's note: The present-day city of Lviv in Ukraine was known to the authors discussed here as Lwów, and where it seems appropriate to the material, the latter form is used in this book.

the author, with reference to his or her life and taking into account the geopoetic perspective. The elements that make up an autobiographical place may be concentrated in one work which is in essence devoted to the theme of localisation in space, but they may also be scattered over several different texts which successively complete or modify the vision of a place. In spite of the many possible literary shapes it may take, the autobiographical place is always related to a toponymically defined territory that is known from the life of the writer. It is of key significance that the reader may have his or her own access to this territory, independently of the vision created by a given author, since it has an existence outside words, as a geographical entity furnished with its own particular cultural symbolism.

The possibility of discerning and distinguishing the category of autobiographical places has come about mainly as a result of inspirations derived from the so-called “spatial turn” in the humanities, also known as the topographical turn. This development has enabled many scholars to find links between the lives and work of writers. The various possibilities that have emerged either directly from humanist geography (for example from the work of Yi-Fu Tuan<sup>5</sup>), or from attempts to modify it and apply it to literary studies, whether in the spirit of geopoetics, as proposed by Kenneth White,<sup>6</sup> or under the banner of Bertrand Westphal’s geocriticism,<sup>7</sup> are an encouragement to further study.

For a scholar interested in works with a clearly marked autobiographical stance, whether it is a case of literature of personal document in the strict sense or of texts in which the autobiographical is only one of the components, the perspective of geopoetics is an exceptionally valuable ally. It helps to counter the tendency to treat autobiographical writing as no more than a literary construct, a composition not essentially different from the free inventions of fiction. For some scholars, in their flight from over-simplified psychologizing and naïve understanding of representation in autobiography, have gone to precisely this extreme. Paul de Man, for example, by concentrating on the rhetorical character of autobiographical writing, created the neologism *de-facement*, punningly

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5 Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977).

6 See K. White, *Geopoetics : Place, Culture, World* (Glasgow: Alba Editions, 2003), in which the author discusses various aspects of his understanding of geopoetics, which in his view is not so much an investigative method as a kind of philosophy of life, a cultural practice and literary programme.

7 B. Westphal, ed. *La géocritique. Mode d'emploi* (Limoges: Presses Universitaire Limoges, 2000).

translated into Polish by the word *od-twarzanie*, which might mean “re-construct, re-produce”, “playback”, or “un-face”.<sup>8</sup> In essence de Man’s theory aims to show that writing an autobiography depends on a process of depersonalisation of its author and hero, who loses his or her own face as the individual countenance dissolves into the linguistic material of tropes subject to the laws of rhetoric. Although the Polish translation of de Man’s title term creates the illusion that some game is going on between the two meanings of “od-twarzanie” (suggesting either being deprived of face, or re-construction as imitative action), de Man’s reasoning does not in fact suggest any such perspective. No counterweight to this tendency in literary studies, either, is provided by postmodern methodological quests in the study of history, since Hayden White, for instance, describes the work of the researcher in this field as historical writing, whose results are ordered according to the rules of literary genres and aesthetic categories such as tragedy and comedy. In contrast to these conceptions, humanist geography provides an impetus in the search for the frames of reference outside literature which are essential to the investigation of autobiographical writing, without at the same time catapulting the researcher back into naïve psychologising.

## Individual Places of Memory

Of key significance in marking out the category of autobiographical places is the distinction between space and place made (or better, more precisely defined) by Yi-Fu Tuan. Put in the most straightforward terms, geographical space is simply a given, and as such constitutes the material object of research in the natural sciences. Place, in turn, is an isolated part of space, a part which we distinguish not only in relation to its material characteristics, but above all with regard to the cultural symbolism ascribed to it, which is created, passed on and modified in social tradition. It is important to remember that this understanding of place is close to a way of thinking that has functioned in culture since time immemorial, whether in primitive religious imaginaries in the form of the idea of the centre of the world and the distinction between sacred and profane space, or in ancient Rome in the shape of faith in the protecting spirit known as the *genius loci*, which watches over a given place and is treated in later cultural tradition as a way of symbolising the literary myth of place. Imaginaries of this kind took on new energy in modern times in the Romantic concept of local colour and later in the

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8 P. de Man, “Autobiography as De-facement”, *Modern Language Notes* 94 (1979): 919–930.

broader ideas of regionalism. The era of globalisation, in which the concept of globality has arisen, has placed further challenges in the way of the idea of place.

The autobiographical place as a concept useful to the study of literature fits within Yi-Fu Tuan's understanding of place as applied in humanist geography, yet it exists on another plane. It retains its essential reference to geographical place, but it is not a piece of physically existing, real space, nor is it even an assembly of the cultural meanings and images associated with that space. Its two basic distinguishing features are its individual character and the fact of its being formed mainly in the material of works which can broadly be described as literary. The likelihood that autobiographical places could be satisfactorily identified in other art forms, too, especially in painting, photography and film, means that the proposed category could be transferred to the fields of cultural studies and art history. However, I shall not develop this thread any further here.

When we say that the inalienable attribute of the autobiographical place is its individuality, that is its reference to the individual person, we must of course remember that in very many cases the defined geographical place has its own cultural particularity, shaped over the ages into a distinct local myth. The examples of such ancient cities as Babylon, Jerusalem or Rome show this clearly. In modern times, the case is similar with the myth of Paris, as analysed for instance by Roger Caillois,<sup>9</sup> and with St Petersburg as understood by Vladimir Toporov.<sup>10</sup> The same phenomenon may also be observed in relation to chosen natural spaces, such as mountains, forests or steppe. In the case of places which already have their own distinct cultural symbolism, the image of a particular writer's autobiographical place emerges in part out of existing tradition. In part, however, it also enriches and changes the received image, imparting its own, new tone to it, on a principle similar to that described by T. S. Eliot in his account of the relation between "tradition and the individual talent". Regardless of whether this new, individual tone is really original, or simply rehearses known, stereotypical conceptions, it always adds something that changes tradition. Even an image of an autobiographical place that is not especially creative in the artistic sense contains by definition some elements that are connected exclusively with the fortunes of this and only this person.

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9 R. Caillois, "Paris, mythe moderne", *Nouvelle Revue française*, mai 1937: 682–699.

10 See, for example, the discussion of Todorov's myth of St Petersburg and his concept of the Petersburg text of Russian literature in: Julie A. Buckler, *Mapping St Petersburg: imperial text and cityshape* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

There are also writers who have founded a literary myth of place where there was earlier no clear feature to distinguish this place and nothing to allow it to be compared with the giants of age-old tradition. Bruno Schulz played this kind of role with respect to Drohobycz. One needs to remember here that the discovery by critics of an autobiographical place in Schulz's stories, which do not contain real topographical names, was a relatively late one. The work of Jerzy Ficowski and Jerzy Jarzębski is particularly important in this context.<sup>11</sup> Some of the writer's drawings and engravings are also significant for his creation of an autobiographical place in relation to pre-war Drohobycz. Another example is the private mythology of Sanok and its surroundings, created in the poetry of Janusz Szuber in the context of his personal experiences of childhood and boyhood as well as of the past history of his family, neighbours and other inhabitants of the town.

If we refer to the category of a place of memory (*lieu de mémoire*), as distinguished by Pierre Nora,<sup>12</sup> with respect to the past of some group, such as a nation, we can see that autobiographical places constitute an analogical category, an equivalent in the sphere of an individual's existential experience. I would consider them to be individual places of memory. They require no social sanction and are not grounded in collective consciousness or mentality. While they quite frequently draw on collective images within which they then situate themselves, and while they can become an element that is present in the historical place of memory (for example in the case of an outstanding artist connected with a given place), they nevertheless possess their own peculiar autonomy as a result of being referred to the individual fortunes of a particular person and of existing in that person's individual work. Their most important difference from places of memory as understood by Nora lies in their ontological status, for autobiographical places exist within the world of *literature*; they are images formed from descriptions, from topographical names mentioned in the text, from metaphors and literary allusions. Yet they also frequently have objective, material, topographically located equivalents: museums set up in a writer's former home; statues; memorial plaques; tourist trails which pass through areas associated

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11 J. Ficowski, *Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice: Bruno Schulz i jego mitologia* (Sejny: "Pogranicze", 2002). The very rich iconography of J. Jarzębski's book *Schulz* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 1999) presents the real topography of the town which in Schulz's stories is reshaped as an entirely mythical space. See also J. Jarzębski, *Prowincja centrum: przypisy do Schulza* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2005).

12 P. Nora, "Mémoire collective", in *Faire de l'histoire*, ed. Jacques Le Goffand (Paris: Gallimard, 1974).

with the writer's life and/or the setting of his or her work. Compilations such as guides and maps, which show the rootedness of a literary autobiographical place in geographical space, also forge a link between literary depictions and the real places to which they relate; and this link suggests an association with the historical place of memory as Nora conceives of it. Examples of this link are to be found in guides to James Joyce's and Leopold Bloom's Dublin, to Miron Białoszewski's Warsaw, or to Paweł Huelle's or Stefan Chwin's Gdańsk. Other examples are town plans and maps with tourist trails marked, such as the Mickiewicz trail in a region of today's Belarus, which takes in both places where the poet lived and the supposed prototypes of places that he described, especially in *Pan Tadeusz*. Quotations engraved on plaques and placed on the entities to which they refer have a similar function; one instance is the series of plaques relating to "Gdańsk writers" which were once placed at various points around the city, such as the wall of Oliwa station, where at one time there was an extract from a description of this building in a text by Stefan Chwin. Even fictional situations and characters from novels have come to be localised in real space, as has happened in Warsaw with respect to Bolesław Prus's novel *Lalka* [*The Doll*]. Plaques inform passers-by where the fictional Wokulski kept his shop (by the Castle Square) or where he lived (on the street called Krakowskie Przedmieście). This was only possible because of the precision with which Prus wrote the adventures of his invented hero into the map of the real city.

It is also worth confronting the category of the autobiographical place with the findings of the French anthropologist Marc Augé, who identified a new spatial phenomenon, the "non-place", which he considered to be characteristic of the most recent phase of Western culture, named by him "supermodernity". In Augé's view, stations, airport lounges and supermarkets, with their complete lack of individuality, or hotels maintained in the uniform style of a worldwide chain, are examples of such anonymous non-places. These are "spaces which are not themselves anthropological places and which, unlike in Baudelairean modernity, do not integrate the earlier places: instead these are listed, classified, promoted to the status of 'places of memory', and assigned to a circumscribed and specific position".<sup>13</sup> We find one example of the creation of a non-place in Polish prose of the early twenty-first century in the international airports where the narrator of Olga Tokarczuk's *Bieguni* [*Flights*] spends her time. I apply the concept of autobiographical places to contemporary literature, in which they have

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13 Marc Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, second edition, trans. John Howe (London and New York: Verso, 2008), 63.

an anthropological character; they are “relational, historical and concerned with identity”,<sup>14</sup> as Augé writes. They constitute the antithesis of the non-place. The literary autobiographical place is a meaningful, symbolic equivalent of an authentic geographical place and the cultural images and notions associated with it. It does not refer to a geometrical space that is universal and empty, but is always connected with something topographical, material and particular, even if it remains subject to the literary re-shapings proper not only to realistic description, which may make use of metaphor, but also even to texts which operate according to the laws of dream and fantasy.

### The Topographic Imagination

For an autobiographical place to come into being, the writer needs not only to be inclined to take an autobiographical stance, but also to possess a developed topographic imagination. We find the elements that constitute an autobiographical place both in texts whose nature is evidently that of personal document, such as autobiographies, diaries, memoirs and recollections or correspondence, if a given author created such texts, and in fictional narrative texts, poetic works, essays, literary critical writings, commentaries by the writer on his or her own work, interviews and so on, though of course in all cases we must take account of the conventions governing these different kinds of utterance. At the same time we make use of published biographical information not only in textual but in visual form. This includes photographs (along with signatures recording dates and places) which contain significant topographical elements, such as background details that help us to identify the place or characteristic accessories visible in the photograph. In a word, we take everything into account which allows us to re-create the spatial setting of events from the writer's life and which can provide a context to facilitate understanding of elements that appear in his or her literary work, such as details of regional colour or allusions to defined cultural phenomena. For instance, Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz's photographs, especially those of Zakopane and the Tatra mountains, as well as the countless photographs that present the writer himself in these surroundings, cast an additional light on certain details of scenery in his novels, as well as underlining the autobiographical elements present in them and Witkiewicz's use of techniques typical of the *roman de clef*.

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14 Augé, 63.

In examining autobiographical places, it is important to pay attention to the varied circumstances and places which make up the writer's existence: place of birth, childhood home, places associated with school and student years, places of work, places connected with travel or movement or encountered on journeys, as well as changes in place of residence which have left significant traces in the writer's work. Most literary creations of personal territory of course relate to the surroundings of birth and childhood, and here an archetypal subtext is usually at work, a peculiar kind of atavism connecting the identity of the individual with his or her birthplace. But there are also exceptions. Zofia Nałkowska lived all her life in Warsaw, but the autobiographical place created in *Dom nad łąkami* [The House in the Meadows] referred to her parents' summer home in Górki in the countryside outside the city. Adam Zagajewski, besides his imagined Lwów and remembered Gliwice, devoted his fullest attention to Kraków, which he came to love when he was a student and in which he settled for good when he returned from emigration. For Ryszard Kapuściński, the countries that he most often visited led him to make of Africa an autobiographical place alongside his lost homeland of Pińsk; of the latter, indeed, he did not in the end manage to write fully, leaving only plans and sketches. The most obvious raw material for an autobiographical place, however, is provided by permanent, lifelong residence in one place, as in the images of Warsaw presented by Miron Białoszewski or Małgorzata Baranowska.

In examining autobiographical places, we need to consider not only the given writer's own literary texts, but also other textual and visual materials (such as photographs and pictures) which provide evidence of interest in other people's descriptions of the writer's place or region and knowledge of its tradition and mythology, its "spirit of place". For the creation of an autobiographical place does not rely solely on one person's own existential experience, but involves coming to know the tradition of a place and participating in it – even if the links with other people's testimonies are hidden and merely allusive. Often, however, precursors' texts are not only recalled as a source of knowledge of a writer's own place, but are also cited and incorporated into that writer's own text, as for example with the ancient documents from the days of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the footnotes to Miłosz's long poem *Gdzie wschodzi słońce i kędy zapada* [From the Rising of the Sun to its Setting].

It is also important to take account of evidence of a writer's interest in other people's descriptions (and visual representations) of journeys to places either chosen by him or her or imposed by fortune, places which are re-shaped as the writer's own, but in a manner that is nevertheless inlaid with intertextual



allusions. One example here would be the countless references Iwaszkiewicz makes to descriptions of travels in Italy – a canonical element of European literature – as well as to the oral tales of Karol Szymanowski, who instilled a fascination with Sicily into his younger cousin. Another example would be the many traces of a deep knowledge, drawn by the author from history books, of the affairs of the Bernese region in Jerzy Stempowski's essays on this subject. Mediation of this kind plays a significant role in familiarising a foreign territory and re-shaping it into a writer's own autobiographical place. The predecessor who introduces a writer to knowledge of a place, or whom the writer himself or herself discovers while looking for suitable reading material, is an aid in the process of making a new territory one's own, acting as a guardian spirit, familiarising the new arrival with the spirit of a given place. In this way we examine not only the individual relation between the work of the writer who interests us and other authors who are important to him or her, but also the shaping of a holistic cultural symbolism of a defined topographical area.

## Types of Autobiographical Place

In surveying the variety of types of literary autobiographical place, I discern in the background the outlines of a dichotomy between settledness and mobility, a dichotomy that points us to basic distinctions known from cultural anthropology. The distinction between autobiographical places that are stable and those that are disturbed is of fundamental significance. Stable places are places in which a person is rooted, native places in which one remains all one's life, observing only the passage of time. All other places are migrant places, grasped from a distance, seen after displacement. Stable places have the character of a given, of something in a certain sense inherited, whereas disturbed ones are connected with going out into the world, travelling a road and perhaps reaching some other point where movement stops. This is the situation of what is chosen, acquired or imposed; to live in it is thus completely different from living in the original place, which one simply has, in which one simply *is*. We also need to refer to one other distinction, between the spatial literary *topoi* of home and road, which is linked with the distinction between closed and open space and which we know from the methodologically varied but cognitively fruitful semiological, phenomenological and mythographical research on which the most recent cultural studies draw (without always acknowledging that they have done so). In turn, we find in the social sciences a basic distinction that is relevant to the subject of our interest, between closed, settled societies (originally usually agricultural) and open, mobile ones (originally nomadic or pastoral, or occupied with trade

and consequently often with ships and the sea).<sup>15</sup> Thus from the point of view of human ways of relating to space, two fundamental possibilities emerge: settled life and life in motion. Movement may take three basic forms: it may be a matter of leaving (even repeatedly) the point of permanent settlement and returning to it (travelling); or of removal to another point (re-settlement); or, finally, of continual re-settlement (nomadism). All these three forms are known to literature.<sup>16</sup> Movement never ceases to be a way in which human beings relate to space and we must bear it in mind in reconstructing literary autobiographical places.

With respect to the biographical situation from which localisation in space results, and in connection with the way of telling chosen by a given author, a series of types of autobiographical place can be distinguished. I identify the following: native, remembered, imagined, transferred, elective and visited.

The **native** autobiographical place is shown in the perspective of the HERE and NOW, or possibly the HERE and THEN, but in any case without spatial distance, without remoteness. The subject is in principle always there at this moment in his or her real surroundings, viewing them day by day and creating their literary image while actually living in them. He or she writes of the place from the standpoint of one constantly present in it, usually with a feeling of permanent rootedness, most often also as one born in it and settled in it throughout a lifetime.<sup>17</sup> Model examples of this in post-war prose are Miron Białoszewski's and Małgorzata Baranowska's Warsaw and Paweł Huelle's and Stefan Chwin's Gdańsk. These are settled places, taken for granted as one's own; they are the diametric opposite of the migrational situation. Yet the unease of the epoch of migrations and historical upheavals made its mark also on such places of permanent, settled habitation. The Warsaw presented by Białoszewski with such striking precision and in such detail is a place that has been gashed through and through by forces of destruction, so that the appearance, fate and character of the city as it was before the Warsaw Uprising have been cut off once and for all from its present

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15 See the now classic synthesis by Howard Becker and Harry Elmer Barnes, *Social Thought from Lore to Science*, 1938.

16 See J. Abramowska, "Peregrynacja", in *Przestrzeń i literatura*, ed. M. Głowiński and A. Okopień-Sławińska (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1978).

17 Vasilii Shchukin used terms inspired by humanist geography in his study of classic Russian literature, in which he analysed the settled place lived in for generations as a typical myth of the gentry tradition. Original 1997, translated into Polish by Bogusław Żyłko, *Mit szlacheckiego gniazda. Studium geokulturologiczne o klasycznej literaturze rosyjskiej* (Kraków: Universitas, 2006).

state. In the daily trivia, among the “denunciations of everyday life”,<sup>18</sup> or among the recollections of ancient children’s toys, for example in the theatre set up by a boy in the kitchen of a pre-war apartment on Leszno Street – at every step one hears echoes of that watershed time of the Uprising, as for instance in the grotesque piece of gossip about some old women living a buried life in a cellar, who for several decades failed to realise that the war was over. They fed on the fungus growing on the walls and turned a mangle to kill time. *Zawał* [Heart Attack], an autobiographical tale of heart disease and a stay in hospital in 1974, casts a new light on Białoszewski’s *Pamiętnik z powstania warszawskiego* [A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising], written fifteen or sixteen years earlier, revealing the latter as a tale of the “heart attack” suffered by the city. Warsaw has moved not horizontally, on the surface of the earth, but vertically, for it has given way (its heart has given way); it has collapsed (into ruins).

Gdańsk, as the place of their birth and childhood which forms the autobiographical, allusive background to the novels and stories of Huelle and Chwin, allows them to acknowledge the palimpsest text of this city, with its complex and many-layered history, as their own, accepted place. However, a significant constitutive element in their image of places, though created in the perspective of the here, is their emphasis on the fact that they are only the first generation of permanent inhabitants. The recollective perspective of the previous generation is also present in their writing, which contains the memory of the fate of their parents – migrants who were forced to leave Vilnius, Lviv or Warsaw after the destruction following the Uprising, and who were unable to accept Gdańsk fully as a place that was really and truly theirs.

All the other types of autobiographical place besides the native are disturbed in the sense that they are directly marked by the situation of migration. **Remembered** places are native places that have been lost. Once they seemed to be something permanent, a once-and-for-all given, but they had to be left behind, most often as a consequence of exile or flight. The remembered place is usually the place of birth and childhood, sometimes also of youth; the place of happy, once settled life, forcibly abandoned in the historical catastrophe of the mass resettlements from east to west after World War II. In the image of the remembered place, use is made in various ways of the Mickiewicz model, recalling a lost idyll, a model continued by Sienkiewicz in “Latarnik” [“The Lighthouse Keeper of Aspinwall”] and brought up to date again in 1942 by the editors of a

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18 Translator’s note: This phrase alludes to the title of one of Białoszewski’s works, *Donosy rzeczywistości*.

collection of recollections by wartime emigrants whose title, *Kraj lat dziecińczych* [The Land of Childhood Years],<sup>19</sup> unambiguously recalls this tradition. Though wide open to stereotypical treatment, as evidenced by much popular literature of recollection, the model has proved extremely robust; one example of its vigour is the parodic, subversive response that it provoked in the work of an author descended in the third generation from post-war migrants. I am thinking here of the long poem by Tadeusz Różycki entitled *Dwanaście stacji* [Twelve Stations] (a clear allusion to the twelve volumes of Mickiewicz's romantic epic). Despite the ironic, mocking perspective adopted by this young poet at the beginning of the twenty-first century, under the amusingly ribald surface there is an undercurrent of nostalgia. The recollection model of the autobiographical place, most extensively represented – though certainly not inevitably stereotypically – in literature on the borderland theme, which is the subject of the next chapter, goes back as far as the direct aftermath of World War I, with images ranging from Iwaszkiewicz's Ukraine to Melchior Wańkowicz's vision of his childhood on the family estates in today's Belarus, presented in his book of recollections *Szczenięce lata* [The Puppy Years]. After World War II, continuations appear in Stanisław Vincenz's Hucul region, as well as in the Vilnius locality of Czesław Miłosz, Tadeusz Konwicki and Zbigniew Żakiewicz, the Podolia of Zygmunt Haupt and Julian Wołoszynowski, and the Dniester valley and Volhynia of Jerzy Stempowski. This is to name only some of the many examples. They are certainly of crucial interest to our subject, but I mention them only in passing as they are too well known and too well described in countless monographs and articles to merit any further attention in the present context.

Interestingly, one writer who attempted to create a remembered place of his own was Ryszard Kapuściński, a writer whose topographic imagination was directed towards movement in space rather than towards images of settled life. Perhaps there is something significant in the fact that he did not manage to bring into being the repeatedly promised book about his native Pińsk in Polesie. The remembered autobiographical place of this journalist is present in no more than a loose assembly of sketchy fragments: the first documentary in *Busz po polsku* [Nobody Leaves]; the beginning of *Imperium*; the documentary film of his travels with Anders Bodegård; and some of his remarks in interviews from various occasions.

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19 *Kraj lat dziecińczych*, ed. Mieczysław Grydzewski and Ksawery Pruszyński (London: M. I. Kolin, 1942); second edition edited by Z. Czermański et al. (London: Puls, 1987).

In the creation of autobiographical **imagined** places, that is formed in relation to a geographical area that the writer does not know personally and in which he or she has never had the opportunity to be, a key role is played by the tradition passed on by previous generations for whom it was a native place. Genealogy, which is important for remembered places, becomes quite simply essential to the construction of imagined ones. This applies above all to second and third generation migrants, for whom the past is not accessible through their own memory, but only through an imagined rootedness in an inaccessible space, whose image emerges from the operations of a familial and cultural myth, without being confronted with personal, non-verbal experience. Imagined places arise perhaps more in a manner similar to the methods of archaeological research, for they belong more to genealogy than to autobiography in the strict sense; and because they are created in a sense as a counter to the reality of migration, they are perhaps more prone to being idealised than the remembered places created through the work of memory of first-generation migrants. The most important example in this context is to be found in the image of Podolia in Włodzimierz Odojewski's novel cycle, as well as in some of his later short stories and in episodes from the novel *Oksana*, although it is known that this image is based to some degree on the writer's recollections of one short journey in his boyhood. Another example is the world of the great-grandfather in Anna Bolecka's *Biały kamień* [The White Stone], a novel that is distinctly marked by an autobiographical context, in which, however, a rather uncertain and incomplete knowledge of authentic genealogy mingles openly with free invention.

Adam Zagajewski's Lvov (Lviv), as presented in his essay "Two Cities" (in *Two Cities: On Exile, History and the Imagination*) and his poem "To Go to Lvov", clearly belongs to this type, especially to the time of the writer's first visit to the city, when the imagined place shaped over decades was confronted with the personal experience of staying in the real one. However, Zagajewski's Lvov does not assume the features of a remembered place. The image of the city is considerably enriched by a sketch asking the question "Should we visit sacred places?" (*Obrona wrażliwości* [A Defense of Ardor]), written after Zagajewski had spent some time in the city, and it might seem that this would be the end of the subject in his work. Yet Zagajewski's later book, *Lekka przesada* [Slight Exaggeration], continues his reflection on the imagined Lvov as a place recollected by his parents' generation. Here there is a new element, in that the role of his father, as one of the more important heroes of the personal narrative in this book, becomes highly significant. Like the earlier volume *W cudzym pięknie* [Another Beauty], *Slight Exaggeration* is not only a book about poetry; it is also

about the poet, and not only about the poet in general, but about the one particular poet who is Adam Zagajewski. For the autobiographical element becomes increasingly strong in his essays, though it remains within a framework of intellectual, spiritual autobiography. *Slight Exaggeration* even invokes the patron of this formula of personal writing: Henryk Elzenberg, as the author of the philosophical diary discussed in Part Two of this book: *Kłopot z istnieniem* [The Trouble with Existence].

The **transferred** place appears when an emigrant finds some kind of “second homeland” in which he or she settles and which he or she accepts, at least in so far as to find in it a place for his or her work. Quite often (though not always) this is accompanied by the creation of a remembered place which was once native. This is how I see the case of Jerzy Stempowski as the author of *Ziemia berneńska* [The Bernese Land], a volume of essays devoted to the landscape surrounding the Swiss capital, in which the writer finds traces of the history and culture of the region, interpreting it through his wealth of knowledge of European literature, philosophy and painting. His *Listy z ziemi berneńskiej* [Letters from the Bernese Land] and some of his *Eseje dla Kasandry* [Essays for Cassandra], for example “Nad wodospadem w Szafuzie” [By Schaffhausen Waterfall], also fit into this picture. Stempowski tells little directly about the events of his own life, presenting himself instead as merely the person speaking in the text, a participant in the shared heritage of Europe who sees himself as an inhabitant both of Switzerland, where he studied before the war, and of his ancestral Ukrainian homeland where he spent his childhood and youth. He sketches an image of the latter as a remembered place in such texts as “W dolinie Dniestru” [In the Dniester Valley], “Esej berdyczowski” [Essay after Berdichev], “Bagaż z Kalinówki” [Luggage from Kalinówka] or “Dom Strawińskiego w Uściługu” [Stravinsky’s House in Ustyluh]. Possibly also one might discern the presence of a transferred place in Miłosz’s *Widzeniach nad Zatoką San Francisco* [Visions from San Francisco Bay], as well as in some parts of *A Year of the Hunter* and in the allusions to the landscape of California scattered through his poems. In his essay “Noty o wygnaniu” (dated Berkeley 1975), cited earlier in the context of defining the personal spatial reference point that is crucial for orientation and grounding in a settled life, Miłosz also defines the situation that I call transference: “Though it is common, the literature of yearning is only one of the variant ways of dealing with being cut off from one’s own country. The new point which organises space in relation to one’s self cannot be eliminated, in other words one cannot abstract oneself from physical presence in a defined place on Earth. This is what gives rise to the strange phenomenon by which two centres, and the two spaces created

around them, overlap with each other, or – and this is a happy solution – grow together into one”.<sup>20</sup>

The situation pondered with so much effort and at such existential cost by Herling-Grudziński appears not only in countless entries in his Diary, but also, even more obviously, in a series of stories whose background is the scenery of Naples and its surroundings: from “Pieta dell’Isola” of 1959, through “Most” [Bridge], “Gruzy” [Rubble], “Cud” [Miracle], “Dżumę w Neapolu” [Plague in Naples] and many others, to “Podzwonne dla dzwonnika” [Death Knell for the Bell-Ringer], completed in 2000. In one interview about life in the “city on a volcano”, the writer explained that the choice of Naples as a place to live after his marriage to Lidia Croce (Germany might also have entered into the calculations) was dictated by the desire for at least one of the spouses to be at home rather than living in emigration. Over many decades, he wrote of not feeling accepted by the Neapolitans, and perhaps it was only at the end of his life that he came to acknowledge the little house in Dragonei near Naples, where his study was, as his own place on earth. But this was not before he had achieved great success among readers in Poland and had made a visit to his own country. For his work, in turn, the Naples region and a few other chosen places in Italy, with their landscape, history, customs, folklore and various peculiarities, became an inexhaustible treasure-house of themes and ideas. Given Herling-Grudziński’s vision of human existence, it is perhaps not entirely appropriate (for various reasons) to speak of the situation as a “happy solution”, but from the point of view of his writing, his discovery of a second homeland, and one that provided highly fertile ground for the imagination, was undoubtedly felicitous. In turn, we also know this author’s remembered place thanks to a penetrating interpretation by Włodzimierz Bolecki in the study *Ciemna miłość* [Dark Love]. Making use in the title of Mickewicz’s description of the country of his childhood, Bolecki brought together a series of small and scattered, but moving and extremely meaningful references in Herling-Grudziński’s Diary to his original homeland, near Suchedniów<sup>21</sup> in central Poland. Another example of a transferred place

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20 Cz. Miłosz, “Noty o wygnaniu” [Notes on Exile] in *Zaczynając od moich ulic*, 49. A wider context for this method of self-identification, which is expressed by Miłosz’s figure of the new arrival who possesses the ability to make himself at home in a new place, is presented by R. Nycz: *Osoba w nowoczesnej literaturze: ślady obecności*, in his *Literatura jako trop rzeczywistości. Poetyka epifanii w nowoczesnej literaturze polskiej* (Kraków: Universitas, 2001), 73–77.

21 Włodzimierz Bolecki, *Ciemna miłość. Szkice do portretu Gustawa Herlinga-Grudzińskiego* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2005), 141–165.

is the place of asylum that Andrzej Bobkowski created for himself, writing of Guatemala as the place he discovered to live and write in after consciously and decidedly abandoning Europe.

In the next generations of emigrants, nostalgia mingles with a quite different feeling. This can be seen in the work of those fugitives from the Polish People's Republic who "chose freedom" in the West in various different periods, like the Poles of Jewish origin who left the country because of antisemitism in 1968, or those of the post-Solidarity wave who left in the 1980s because of martial law. In the case of both these groups, the removal to another place involves a sense of loss, but one which is also strongly mixed with feelings of rebellion and anger towards the rejected world of the People's Republic. Now seen as foreign and deceitful, in these writers' work that world has at least partly lost the character of the native place that grounds identity.

**Elective** places differ from transferred ones in that they are places of temporary rather than permanent habitation. They are chosen because of something of value that they are perceived to possess, but for various reasons it is not possible to settle in them for good. They need not in principle be connected with migration in its most painful form, that of exile, though in twentieth-century Polish historical and social circumstances it was generally in this context that they were discovered and chosen. However, they may also simply be an outcome of travel. An elective place may be a temporary sanctuary for a migrant, which existential circumstances prevent from being a place of permanent residence, but in which he or she may from time to time find a world that is better and more beautiful than that of the everyday lot. It is usually travel-lovers who find such "homelands of the soul", and while they describe a variety of interesting corners of the world, they also have their favourite spots, places to which they keep returning and which they present with special care, making them part of their lives and work. For Iwazskiewicz, it was Italy and Sicily (and on a smaller scale, Sandomierz, on the banks of the Vistula) which had this kind of significance, as elective autobiographical places. He made various parts of his chosen Italy and Sicily the subject of his work in travel writing and poems, and they afforded the background to events in his stories and novels (in his series of "Italian novellas" and in *Śława i chwala* [Fame and Glory]). But he also made them part of his life, frequently writing and spending time there. Although the texts penned in Italy were generally not thematically linked with the country ("Panny z Wilka" [The Maids of Wilko], for instance, is dated "Syracuse, April 1932", while "Cienie" [Shadows], on the events of the 1917 revolution in Ukraine, is signed "Rome, May 1963"), nevertheless the provision at the ends of these texts of information on the place and time of writing builds a link between the literary order and the



factual order of Iwaszkiewicz's life. In Stawisko near occupied Warsaw, he wrote of Venice, Florence and Sicily; while in Rome and Syracuse before and after the war, he created pieces whose heroes inhabit the scenery of Mazowsze or Ukraine. In this way Iwaszkiewicz binds into one peculiarly complex knot his own, presently observed or remembered autobiographical place, and the autobiographical place of his choice, the "homeland of the soul" that he can only sometimes visit. He also reinforces the link between his own life, shaped by him, and the untrammelled world of literary imagination.

In the poetry, essays and letters of Zbigniew Herbert, Greece is treated similarly. Herbert singles her out particularly in his image of the Mediterranean "garden" visited by the "barbarian" from the North. To begin with, and for many years, this choice of Greece was a matter only of imagination and reading, but later it came to involve the museums of France and Italy, until finally the time came for Herbert's first encounter with *Magna Graecia* in the Doric temples of Paestum. It was only after this that the poet had the opportunity to travel to Athens, to the Peloponnese and the islands of the Aegean Sea, journeys which bore fruit in the pieces that we know from *Labirynt nad morzem* [Labyrinth on the Sea] and *Król mrówek* [The Ant King]. Drawings and sketches made by the poet while travelling also contribute to Herbert's creation of his elective autobiographical place.

Since it might sound odd to describe the whole of one huge continent as a "place", let us say that over a period of many years, Ryszard Kapuściński gradually came to discover Africa as his own elective autobiographical *territory*. He emphasises, of course, that there is no such thing as one Africa, for this vast land contains a whole host of different countries, landscapes and peoples, all thoroughly dissimilar. Yet though he travelled to other continents, it was this one that attracted Kapuściński above all. He returned to it many times and wrote several books connected with it, of which the *summa* of his African experience, the novel *Heban* [*The Shadow of the Sun*], deserves particular mention. He knew Africa incomparably better than the parts of the world presented in other of his books, such as *Szachinszach* [*Shah of Shahs*], *Imperium* or *Wojna futbolowa* [*The Soccer War*]. This is also confirmed by his last book, *Podróże z Herodotem* [*Travels with Herodotus*], which is an autobiographical account of the story of his professional calling, and from the point of view of defining autobiographical places tells the story of his life's journey to Africa. His photographs, too, alongside his writing, contribute to his creation of that continent as an elective autobiographical place.

Finally, the **visited** place is one that is also known through travel, but only in passing. It is a place that is merely touched on, so to speak, perhaps even visited

only once, yet in some way and for some reason it is perceived as worthy of attention, and the writer commits its name to memory along with its characteristic objects and details. Descriptions of these things may then appear not only in diaries, travel letters, documentaries or memoirs, but also in literary pieces, in which they are incorporated into the writer's own creative work. A visited place has not yet been transformed into an elective one, a place to which the person who chooses it keeps returning; but it has been noted and has come to exist in the writer's work.

It is in this way that we might define, for example, the image of Switzerland in Zofia Nałkowska's work. In her diary, this writer noted a series of observations from her stay in a mountain sanatorium from February to April 1925. Two years later, she published *Choucas*, subtitled "an international novel".<sup>22</sup> Here she presents her own personal drama, involving the first symptoms of ageing, and the tensions being played out in an international society that includes patients from various countries of Europe after World War I – all against the background of an Alpine winter that is melting into spring; and she imparts an intrinsic value to her observations of nature and the life of the mountain-dwellers. In this novel, the local colour of an Alpine health-resort is recreated, and when we compare it with the episode as described in her Diaries, we see that Nałkowska's stay in this out-of-the-way corner of Switzerland has left significant traces in her life and work, making a particular mark on the development of her style. Through several of the figures of patients in *Choucas*, the novel touches on the subject of the Armenian massacre carried out by the Turks in 1914, and thus a decade before Nałkowska's stay in the Swiss sanatorium. Her way of writing of these events seems to foreshadow, for the present only as an early possibility, that reserved style, all the more shocking because of its simplicity, which the writer was to bring to perfection after World War II in *Medaliony* [*Medallions*].

In the life and work of Miłosz, the fenland region of Żuławy acquired the rank of a visited place, though encountered only briefly through the link with his mother, who came to live there as a result of the post-war resettlement from Wilno (Vilnius), and who died there in 1945. The image of this low-lying plain under a cloudy sky recurs several times in poems dated by the poet, written in America at various stages of his work: "Grób matki" [My Mother's Grave] (1949), "Żuławy" (1950), "Z nią" ["With Her"] (1985). This last has a decisive significance with respect to the autobiographical place, because the death of his mother

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22 This novel has been translated into English by Ursula Siebenschusch (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2014).

in a village near Gdańsk is recalled on the poet's own birthday. A prose note to the poem (in the original) recounts the circumstances of Miłosz's mother's death (she contracted typhus from a lonely old German woman whom she cared for in her illness). Miłosz also referred to this many times in letters and interviews, most extensively in a conversation with Krystyna and Stefan Chwin in Kraków in 1992.<sup>23</sup> The context which reveals the village of Drewnica as one of Miłosz's visited places is presented in a book on this episode in the poet's life, *Miłosz na Żuławach. Epizod z biografii poety*.<sup>24</sup>

In the case of the place visited by Herling-Grudziński in the story "Wieża" [The Tower], the incident we are dealing with cannot be so clearly distinguished as an individual drama as the death of Miłosz's mother can. Instead, the situation is made up of several factors: the unexpected discovery of Xavier de Maistre's tale, *The Leper of the City of Aosta*, in the mountain home of Benedetto Croce (the writer's father-in-law), the fact of reading it amid Alpine scenery permeated through and through with powerful symbolism, and then the connection between the existential problems involved in the Savoyan writer's tale and the real life experiences of the Polish author, who had been a prisoner in one of the Soviet GULAG camps. Herling-Grudziński's story has an extremely subtle Chinese box composition. The summary of Comte de Maistre's story is enclosed within the frame of events that were played out in the Aosta Valley towards the end of the Second World War.

The ground for Herling-Grudziński's description of an autobiographical visited place is the extraordinary impression made on him by reading the Count's story of the loneliness and suffering of a leper imprisoned in one of the towers of Aosta's medieval walls. Even after forty years, this author speaks of the book he found in that mountain home not so much as a writer speaks of a work by another writer, but almost as an adherent of some religion speaks of its founding holy text. He speaks of it as something to which he constantly returns in his effort to understand the phenomenon of exclusion and the ultimate loneliness symbolised by leprosy.

The tower described by Comte de Maistre and then by Herling-Grudziński has a real topographical existence; it has its own address on Via Torre del Lebbroso, and is marked on the town plan. Two plaques attached to the tower, which

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23 Transcript of this conversation in *Miłosz. Gdańsk i okolice. Relacje, dokumenty, glosy*, ed. K. Chwin and S. Chwin (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Tytuł, 2012), 361.

24 *Miłosz na Żuławach. Epizod z biografii poety*, ed. M. Czermińska and A. Kasperek (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 2013).

provide information about the two stories and their authors, give additional cultural significance to this material place. At the same time, it has acquired an intertextual existence through being described in two interconnected pieces. Herling-Grudziński gave it the status of an autobiographical visited place that left an unusually permanent trace, and that not only on his writing, but through his writing also on the space of Aosta.

In Ryszard Kapuściński's work, all the countries of the world in which he spent time, incorporating these travels into his own life experience and describing them in a personal way, have the character of visited places. With the exception, of course, of Africa, which, as I have already said, over the years gained the status of an elective place.

Migrational situations, which are typical of contemporary civilisation, contribute to the fact that in creating their autobiographical places, writers are usually not content with one model alone. One model would be enough in the stable situation of a settled life, though it does also happen, especially among authors of the emigration generation of World War II, that writers who have been deprived of this security become obsessed with the creation of a one-and-only lost and remembered place. Frequently, however, movement and change incline writers to reach for different ways of presenting their placement in the world. Within one writer's work and life a hierarchy usually forms: a certain model dominates, while others are subordinated to it and complement it or compete with it. I have tried to show this in my account of the work of the writers discussed above. Here there is no longer any rule that can be theoretically grasped; there are only the individual decisions of particular writers.

## 2. Home in the Autobiography and the Novel about Childhood

The experience of space that is significant in shaping our identity is defined by the opposition between settledness and mobility. Many possibilities lie between the two poles of this opposition. At one end of the spectrum, the sense of rootedness may be so deep as to prevent movement altogether, while at the other, the ceaseless movement of nomadism may preclude the possibility of developing any kind of permanent point of attachment. In the modern era of migration there are many variants of nomadism, but even in extreme situations there is the reference to a Beginning that has a spatial location, though this reference may be only a negative one: a sense of lack of a place that is one's own; of lack of knowledge of any such place; of oblivion. The basic existential question, who am I?, is inevitably linked with other questions: who gave birth to me? where do I come from? Identity is defined both in temporal and in spatial dimensions. And just as cultural ways of imagining space are shaped by reference to real geographical space, so the temporal course of a life, told in the signs of culture, has for its background the biological chain of successive phases of existence beginning with birth and childhood.<sup>1</sup>

The different variants of stories about human lives are matched by different types of autobiographical place (as discussed in the previous chapter), among which only one, the native place, unambiguously accentuates the dominance of settledness. In all the other types, an inevitable constituent is a change of place, whether already accomplished or only a possibility. It may be something expected, or even already certain, as an unavoidable future prospect. It may be deeply desired, or it may arouse fear and anxiety. It may be brought about by a person's own choice, or it may be enforced by violence. In autobiographical texts, the starting point for the narrative about the course of a life is most commonly childhood, while the spatial imagining that answers to that phase of life is home and its surroundings. The image of the childhood home seems to have the power of an archetype, which, however, does not limit individual invention but makes itself visible in a great number of variants.

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1 The link between the cultural and the biological order of phases of life is shown in Charlotta Bühler's study *Der menschliche Lebenslauf als psychologisches Problem*, 1933.

I have tried to trace the image of home created by writers who represent three successive generations. Their dates of birth range from 1881 to 1928, and hence their individual fortunes fit into an extensive frame of historical experience. I deal with those of their works which were written and published only after World War II. I set aside the matter of the difference of genre between the novel about childhood (which often, though not always, draws on the real experiences of its author) and the text that is plainly defined as a recollection of the writer's own experiences. The primary category is the image of the childhood home, without regard to whether it was created as a piece of literature of personal document or whether it belongs to the world of literary fiction. The images of childhood presented in these various works have one distinctive feature in common: it is a world irrevocably lost, not only because of the ordinary passage of time, but also because of a violent cataclysm of history in which the home of childhood was burned to the ground, and the garden cut down.

I also refer to two books written earlier, in the inter-war period: to part of Paweł Hulka-Laskowski's *Mój Żyrardów* [My Żyrardów], because it presents a certain peculiarly interesting and clear version of the link between the space of childhood and the landscape of paradise, and to Melchior Wańkowicz's *Szczenięce lata* [The Puppy Years], mentioned also in the previous chapter, in which the events of World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 played the same role as was played by World War II in many autobiographies written later: that of a cataclysm which destroyed the Arcadia of childhood. Wańkowicz's book is particularly important because of the outstanding clarity of its image of the space of the childhood home, and also because of its strong, vital and distinctly visible link with the Sarmatian gentry tradition of storytelling, particularly developed in the Romantic era, as well as even with literature of the Old Polish period in its praise of the charms of country life.

Besides the historical background, in which the deciding role is played by the caesura of World War II, the consequences of sociological distinctions are also important. In the case of families from the gentry, the childhood space is the country manor house and its surroundings, which are usually drawn quite wide.<sup>2</sup>

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2 I mention the books discussed here in the chronological order of their first publication: Melchior Wańkowicz, *Szczenięce lata* (1934); Czesław Miłosz, *Dolina Issy* (1955); Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, *Książka moich wspomnień* (1957) and *Sny, Ogrody, Sérénité* (1974); Zbigniew Żakiewicz, *Ród Abaczów* (1967); Andrzej Stojowski, *Podróż do Niezajny. Opowiadania leodyjskie* (1968); Władysław Jan Grabski, *Blizny dzieciństwa* (1971).

For the ordinary country family it is the cottage and its surroundings,<sup>3</sup> while for townspeople it is an apartment in a townhouse and the immediate urban space around it, with its streets and park.<sup>4</sup>

It is also necessary to mention differences that are explicable in the context of the literary tradition chosen. Here, three different ways of writing about childhood appear. The first involves a group of works which in various ways respond to tradition, whether it be the tradition of the idyll, or that of Sarmatian storytelling and the memoir, or that of the novel of society and manners. For this stance, the image of the space of childhood as Arcadian is an essential component. We find variants of this in Wańkowicz, Iwaszkiewicz, Miłosz, Grabski, Sztaudynger, Parandowski and Czernik, and even to a certain degree in Hulka-Laskowski. Although this last author's autobiography makes a dramatic presentation of the poverty of a working-class family's life, the archetypal model which decrees that childhood should be happy can nevertheless be sensed somewhere in the background. The second stance towards childhood consists in taking up the same tradition, but in an ambivalent manner: not only as continuation, but in order to question it in various ways. Here the most important writers to mention are Żakiewicz, Stojowski, Lem, Sandauer and Żylińska. The third stance involves a search for ways of speaking in which the Arcadian myth of childhood is only and entirely a negative point of reference, an object of polemical rejection. This is the approach taken, for example, by Brandys and Kijowski.

One way or another, one has to tell some kind of story of one's beginnings: in other words, of one's childhood, home, family and family surroundings.<sup>5</sup> Even if this is done in a manner as concise as in Sandauer's *Zapiski z martwego miasta* [Notes from a Dead City], the space of childhood (in Sandauer's case, the part of the town called Targowica, half-way between the Jewish district of Blich at the foot of the hill, and the Polish Rynek at its top) must be marked, because it is the point of departure for the writer's whole later life, especially in the intellectual and spiritual sphere. The topography of Sandauer's native Sambor indeed plays

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3 Stanisław Czernik, *Dom pod wierzbami. Opowieść autobiograficzna* (1960).

4 Paweł Hulka-Laskowski, *Mój Żyrardów. Z dziejów polskiego miasta i życia pisarza* (1934); Jan Parandowski, *Zegar słoneczny* (1954) and *Luźne kartki* (1967); Artur Sandauer, *Zapiski z martwego miasta. Autobiografie i parabiografie* (1963); Stanisław Maria Saliński, *Ptaki powracają do snów* (1964); Stanisław Lem, *Wysoki Zamek* (1966); Jadwiga Żylińska, *Dom, którego nie ma* (1967); Andrzej Kijowski, *Dziecko przez ptaka przyniesione* (1968); Kazimierz Brandys, *Mała księga* (1970).

5 See R. Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960), especially the chapter entitled "The Autobiography of Childhood", 84–94.

a fundamental role in the wartime fortunes of the hero both in the part of the book that the writer describes as autobiography and in the part with fictional elements, which he termed “parabiography”. It seems that outlining the space of childhood is one of the autobiographer’s most essential gestures. School, in contrast, though it is another important stage in life and plays a significant part in the writings of Lem, Parandowski and Brandys, for instance, does not inevitably acquire autonomous meaning in the account of childhood. Sometimes it is a space marked only negatively, as for example when writers describe their return home from school to parents and grandparents for the summer holiday.

The image of home is exceptionally rich in varied meanings.<sup>6</sup> In Polish literature it is among the most important, mainly because it frequently makes its appearance as a *pars pro toto* of the homeland. A sociologist will easily notice the link between the increase in the value placed on home, family and family tradition and the political situation of a nation subjected during the time of the partitions to the domination of three neighbouring imperial powers. All institutions of public life in this situation became instruments of oppression and destruction of national identity by foreign invaders. The cultural historian will add that the conviction that “every doorstep will be our fortress” (as Maria Konopnicka’s nineteenth-century hymn-poem “Rota” [Pledge] has it) was built on the still more ancient, Old Polish pattern of the noble patriarchal family safe in its nest of generations. In literature, it is of course the pastoral idyll which sings the charms of country life. Kazimierz Brodziński added another, chivalric ideal to that of the landed gentry, creating a conception of the idyll on the model of Cincinnatus, the Roman who wielded both sword and ploughshare. Writing of Brodziński in the title article of her book *Sławianie, my lubim sielanki...* [We Slavs, we love the idyll], Alina Witkowska also showed how the genre developed, describing its rejection by the Romantics, the new values imparted to it by Mickiewicz and its criticism by Żeromski and Brzozowski, who pointed to the degradation of the

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6 See *Dom we współczesnej Polsce. Szkice*, ed. P. Łukasiewicz and A. Siciński (Wrocław: “Wiedza o kulturze”, 1992); D. and Z. Benedyktowicz, *Dom w tradycji ludowej* (Wrocław: “Wiedza o kulturze”, 1992); M. Eliade, *Images and Symbols. Studies in Religious Symbolism* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961), especially the chapter “The Symbolism of the ‘Centre’”; “The World, the City, the House”, in his: *Occultism, Witchcraft and Cultural Fashions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); A. Legeżyńska, *Dom i poetycka bezdomność w liryce współczesnej* (Warszawa: PWN, 1996).



Arcadian ideal that sometimes took place. A later, far-reaching transformation of this tradition appears in the work of Marek Zaleski.<sup>7</sup>

Both in the autobiography and in the novel about childhood, the space presented is ordered in a peculiar manner. It takes the form of four concentrically arranged areas, of which each successive one is larger than the one that precedes it. The house – which ideally is also the place of birth – is at the centre. The second area, closely linked with the house, includes outbuildings and garden, orchard or park. Between these two areas there is a constant intimate contact. Using the terms of Gaston Bachelard, one might say that their mutual relations are expressed in a dialectic between the inner and the outer. The country manor house, surrounded by trees, is a space that is half-open: the light, views and smells that reach in from the outside through open doors and windows have the effect of making the close, friendly and familiar outer space pour into the interior of the house, while the house itself, seen from the outside, forms a part of the landscape that has grown into one with it over the years. If the described house is located in a town, then the role of the immediate surroundings is taken by the yard, with its sounds of daily life, or by the neighbouring streets and their attractions, such as displays in shop windows, and of course the park. Here home is an apartment, whose inner space, in contrast to that of the country house, is enclosed and clearly bordered. For the rural home, the third circle is formed by the immediate and well known surroundings of a village or nearby small town, while for the urban home, it is the familiar part of the town, which comes to possess its own distinctive physiognomy. The fourth circle is space that is really not presented: the huge, infinite remainder, the great unknown world that surrounds the land of childhood. This is already the domain of youth, the phase of life that follows childhood. It is a space cultivated by a different literary genre: not the novel of childhood, but the novel of growing up, the *Bildungsroman*.

## Inside the House

The interior space of the home is presented in most detail in texts that describe especially old houses, in which a long family tradition has ascribed permanent and clearly demarcated functions to the individual parts of this space. This kind of established, almost age-old division, which is received as a given, possesses a clarity

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7 A. Witkowska *Sławianie, my lubim sielanki...* (Warszawa: PIW, 1972); M. Zaleski, *Echa idylli w literaturze polskiej doby nowoczesności i późnej nowoczesności* (Kraków: Universitas, 2007).

that does not fade.<sup>8</sup> We find it in works by Wańkowicz, Miłosz, Stojowski and Czernik. Wańkowicz's *Szczenięce lata* [The Puppy Years] is a good example. The true heroes of this book are really Nowotrzeby (in today's Belarus) and Kałużyce (in Lithuania) – the two homes and two places in which the “puppy years” are passed – rather than little Melchior himself. The manor house of Nowotrzeby is governed by customs that have lasted without significant change since the beginning of the eighteenth century. Each part of the house has its own peculiar purpose, each is the scene where the events ascribed to it are played out, according to the normalising order of a rhythm of life measured by changes of season and the calendar of church festivals and family rituals. Each of these domestic interior enclaves has its own peculiar quality, its particular furniture designed to serve distinct ends: veranda, vestibule, dining room, grandmother's bedroom, cloakroom and drawing-room. This space is rigorously hierarchised by divisions into more and less dignified places, with a whole gamut of intermediate degrees stretching between the most and the least dignified. This becomes clear when we look at Wańkowicz's accounts of the customs of hospitality connected with receiving and entertaining visitors in his grandmother's house:

The millionaire buyer of forestland, clad in his wonderful beaver-fur boots, with a huge diamond on his finger, who would send wine and a gateau for Easter, would be given dinner in the dining room; not, however, with everyone else, but only afterwards (...) Guests like the organist, the sachrist and so on were received in the butler's pantry. But Stankunowicz, a simple, scarcely literate leaseholder (...), but whose father, a member of the impoverished nobility from Ibiiany had had his land confiscated for taking part in the uprising [the January Uprising of 1863], would sit down to table with us all (...) Srul, a tenant, was not received either in the butler's pantry or even in the kitchen. He stood in the lobby, (...), where a glass of tea was placed on the dresser for him (...) There was only one class of visitor who was not received anywhere, either in the dining room, or the butler's pantry, or the kitchen or even standing by Srul's dresser: Russians.<sup>9</sup>

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- 8 The descriptions of these homes are closest to the images analysed by Gaston Bachelard in the study “The house of our birth and the oneiric house”, in his: *Earth and Reveries of Repose: An Essay of Images of Interiority*, trans. Mary AcAllester Jones (Dallas, Texas: Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 2011).
- 9 M. Wańkowicz, *Szczenięce lata* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1957), 60–63 (first edition 1934). All further quotations from this work are taken from the same edition. Page references are given in brackets in the main body of the text. The translations of extracts from Wańkowicz are by Jean Ward, who unless otherwise indicated is also the translator of all the other passages from literary texts quoted in this chapter.

After the January Uprising of 1863, the Polish gentry did not entertain Russians in their homes. It was of course necessary to maintain some dealings with imperial officials, but they would be received in some less dignified part of the house. In Wańkowicz's grandmother's home, they were invited on to the so-called balcony, which was a place for single men, where "trays of vodka and snacks would be sent out for the various kinds of imperial functionaries that the steward would receive" (63).

By coincidence, the house in Nowotrzeby had remained for several generations in the hands of women. It had passed from mother to daughter and as a result, the strongest border of all those established by tradition was the division into two separate zones: male and female.

Two rooms upstairs were referred to as the balcony, and were intended as bachelor apartments. Downstairs, no single man was tolerated for the night at all. If any persons of the male sex spent the night there, it was those who themselves must have had grave doubts as to their manhood – a variety of canons, bald and short-winded doctors, attorneys and hopeless lawyers three quarters dead (...). Only Grandma, the highest sovereign, the arch-priestess of the household, the summit of the hierarchy, in whom the two camps came together, the male upstairs and the female downstairs, would have the right to visit the balcony and would frequently threaten to inspect it, only the old lady would not be able to drag herself up the stairs (31–33).

The passage from childhood to boyhood has its spatial equivalent in the move from downstairs up to the balcony, a "moving house" which is a miniature act of initiation.

You went up to the balcony when you graduated to secondary school. The first journey home – for Christmas – was associated with this move, which was like a kind of ritual hair-cutting [a ritual that only concerned boys] (33).

The fact that the division into male and female zones is a vertical one here is not a matter of much significance. Instead of the "balcony", it might just as easily be a separate wing or an annex. The division has an exact equivalent on the horizontal level: the house and garden are the domain of women. It is when the boy runs away to the woods that he becomes a man – a hunter.

The sun played on the walls of the house; from the whole surroundings, from those shouts here and those squeakings there, those clankings, those callings out, from kitchen smoke and smells, from the industrious banging with a knife somewhere in the kitchen – the quiet melody of the Nowotrzeby day seeped out. This melody stopped right outside the garden; only run down the steps, skip over the road – and man, you fell into the wood – into another world, probably at the Antipodes. There you could only count on your faithful rifle and on your Finnish knife strapped to your waist (39).

The fundamental opposition between childhood in the domestic space governed by women, and the open space of the wilderness, which is the domain of grown men, is conveyed here with the help of a spatial concept: the Antipodes. This opposition, however, is by no means absolute, firstly because the home space has a half-open character, so that crossing the boundary which separates it from the world of the forest, though it is not without certain difficulties, is always possible; and secondly because the surroundings of the house are also a paradisaical space, in which the human being is a part of nature, enjoying an unconstrained freedom, bathing in the river in just the same suit that his first parents wore before they tasted the apple from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

In contrast, Stanisław Lem's *Wysoki Zamek* [*Highcastle. A Remembrance*] supplies one of those conceptions in which home is not the mainstay of an age-old order established by successive generations. Lem's description of the six-room apartment is presented from the perspective of individual experience, on the scale of the "brief span" of one life, in which it is not the permanence of the order guaranteed by tradition that is emphasised, but rather the qualitative and functional differentiations within the terrain of the apartment. The most important matter here is probably the division into areas where the child is allowed and where he is not (such as his father's laryngologist's consulting room). This is connected with the division into objects that are accessible and those that are forbidden, for the space of the home of childhood in *Highcastle* is marked mainly by the presence of objects: books that the boy looks at, toys that he destroys with a passion, unscrewing them and taking them apart, furniture in which he guesses that there are secret hiding places requiring to be examined. Lem builds his tale in contrapuntal relation to the autobiography and memoir: he uses some ways of speaking that are proper to these genres, only after a moment to enter into a dispute with them, as for example in this reference to Norbert Wiener's autobiography:

Norbert Wiener begins his autobiography with the words "I was a child prodigy." What I would have to say is "I was a monster."<sup>10</sup>

Brandys, unlike either Wańkiewicz or Lem, does not refer to any model of description of a domestic interior. *Mała księga* [A Little Book] does not tell of a home. It is partly a family saga in miniature or better, a portrait gallery, and

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10 S. Lem, *Highcastle. A Remembrance*, trans. Michael Kandel (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1995), 25.

partly a tale of growing up, concentrated mainly on a psychological process, and hence on what is sometimes metaphorically named inner space.

Andrzej Kijowski makes an original use of the convention of the novel about childhood in *Dziecko przez ptaka przyniesione* [The Child the Bird Brought]. To begin with he introduces the reader to the traditional patriarchal order of a wealthy family of the Kraków bourgeoisie (there are no autobiographical references in the novel). The symbol of this order is the imposing town house, which reminds one almost of a fortified castle. It is the mainstay of certainty and proof of lasting success, in which the child has a central place as the beloved and only grandson and heir. Gradually, however, disturbing symptoms of decline begin to make themselves felt. Kijowski employs the stereotype of childish innocence to polemic purpose. He builds a tension between the poetic style of the story, with its slight archaism, lyricism and abundance of metaphor, and the character of the first-person narrator, who is a child of remarkable intelligence, but of even more perversity, who carries on a sophisticated game in his search for the truth about some dark family secret that the adults strive at all costs to conceal from him. The narrator is in fact the embodiment of the story's ironic spirit, rather than a boy portrayed according to the rules of psychological probability. This device enables Kijowski to present the convoluted knot of debates on Polish identity in a series of poetic images and allusions, in a manner that allows him to avoid journalistic over-simplifications. In this work of the nineteen-seventies, the antagonism between reason and feeling, between the cult of wartime heroism and the instinct for life, is still bound up with Romantic mythology in spite of the passage of time. Faithfulness to tradition reveals its dark, dangerous power; the love of tradition can turn into captivity to it. In the end, the disaster has no tragic greatness about it, only the tawdry ridiculousness of grotesque. Like the cruelty of the waywardly capricious child who is the novel's hero.

## The Garden of Childhood

The home of childhood should always stand in a garden. The image of childhood as life in the happy landscape of Eden derives from at least as early as the medieval topos of the enclosed garden (*hortus conclusus*), in which the Holy Child plays under the eye of the Madonna.<sup>11</sup> The permanence of the link in the

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11 See the discussion of this topos by J. M. Rymkiewicz in his book *Myśli różne o ogrodach. Dzieje jednego toposu* [Various Thoughts about Gardens. The Story of a Single Topos] (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1968). J. Cieślowski also writes of this in the sketch "Okolica dzieciństwa", in *Literatura i podkultura dziecięca*, (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1975).

imagination between childhood and the garden is clear when we observe that none of the autobiographical texts discussed here passes over it. However, there are significant differences in the way it is interpreted.

Let us first consider those writers whose own lives seem simply to impel them to engage with this traditional image. Wańkowicz, Iwaszkiewicz, Miłosz and Grabski, for instance, all spent their childhood (or at least its most memorable part) in a country manor house surrounded by a garden. While the course of this part of their lives is similar in all cases, the differences in literary renderings of the experience are striking. In Wańkowicz's account, the garden surrounding the house is only a narrow ring, while beyond it a meadow, river and wood at once stretch out – the enormous valley of the Niewiaża (Nevėžis) river; untamed nature, a paradise for the hunter, fisherman and rider. The contours of the carefully cultivated garden with its idyllic arena where little miss Agata feeds the tame starlings, are presented only in passing, during the boy's flight to the forest. This flight is conditioned by the situation of initiation mentioned earlier: the boy's passage from the circle of the child and his mother to the space of grown men's activity. The patron of Wańkowicz's work is less the pastoral idyll than the novel of manners, the oral tale or memoir that enjoys the coarse anecdote and the element of the facetious.

Iwaszkiewicz's description of the garden of childhood, in turn, has at least two versions: the first is the concise sketch that opens *Książka moich wspomnień* [The Book of My Recollections], the second the essay "Ogrody" [Gardens], written thirty years later, which repeats certain details of the first version and develops them into an extensive composition. This is above all the mother's garden, a kind of medieval *hortus conclusus*. In spring she plants flowers, in summer she makes preserves, receives guests in the summerhouse, and indulges in conversation in the surroundings of the garden, which is full of flowers, bushes and fruit-bearing or merely decorative trees. But at the same time, in his daydreams and in his nightmares, the child is haunted by apparitions of the dead. Not, however, by such figures as wander in Persephone's underground garden. In Iwaszkiewicz, what can be glimpsed outside the garden is not Elysium, but a graveyard. That lush, green Ukrainian garden, full of flowers and fruit, the chirrup of birds and the hum of bees, turns out to be a land of burial mounds and graves, like that of Antoni Malczewski's *Maria*.<sup>12</sup>

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12 A. Malczewski, *Marya: A Tale of Ukraine*, trans. A.P. Coleman and M.M. Coleman (New York: Electric City Press, 1935). This is a poetic novel in a "black Romantic" style, expressing a deeply tragic vision of the world. The landscape of the Ukrainian steppe is painted here with truly Byronic melancholy.

Aroused by these simple views, my imagination would form complex pictures. In the grass and under the hammock I would see some little wooden Orthodox churches (...), churches that were little tombs covering the corpses of insurrectionists, and all the insurrectionists were very young, very beautiful and had bare breasts as in a Grottger drawing (...).

At night in dreams I would wander over this meadow. Sometimes my father would be leading me by the hand. But I tried hard to resist, I hated my father and didn't want to go where he wanted to lead me. I knew very well that there was an ordinary green burial mound there and under it, asleep in a beautiful, youthful pose was my uncle Zygmunt, my father's brother.

But sometimes these night-time wanderings over this strange meadow became a torment that could not be borne. I would seek help from my mother. She would soothe me and take me by the hand too. But I loved my mother. I was not afraid to go further and further, following her.<sup>13</sup>

Jan Sztaudynger's book *Szczęście z datą wczorajszą* [Happiness with Yesterday's Date], especially the first part, "Dom na Rzeczkach" [House on the Streams], is proof that rustic models retain a constantly lively attraction. It is a tale of the author's grandfather's house in Myślenice, the small place near Kraków where Sztaudynger used to spend the summer holidays. His parents' house in the city, where the rest of his time was passed, has no significance.

In Kraków we lived on the second floor. I remember my astonishment, my enormous astonishment, when I realised that it was possible to live on brotherly terms with a garden, almost "in the heart" of the garden.<sup>14</sup>

Myślenice to us was paradise, it was the most beautiful place in the world.<sup>15</sup>

The chapter of Sztaudynger's recollections devoted to the garden which bears fruit from spring to autumn, supplying appropriate delicacies for successive family name-days, beginning with early cherries and strawberries and continuing to the latest ripening damson plums – draws abundantly on the Polish tradition of the idyll.

The setting of Paweł Hulka-Laskowski's recollections, at the beginning of his book *Mój Żyrardów* [My Żyrardów], in turn, presents a diametrically opposite

13 J. Iwaszkiewicz, *Ogrody* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1974), 35–36.

14 J. Sztaudynger, *Szczęście z datą wczorajszą* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1974), 18.

15 Sztaudynger, *Szczęście...*, 33. The idyllic model of childhood reminiscence is also taken up by W. J. Grabski in his autobiography *Blizny dzieciństwa* [The Scars of Childhood] (Warszawa: PAX, 1971), though this writer's approach is much more passive towards tradition.

image to that of the paradise landscape of childhood. The one window of the room in Żyrardów in the 1890s where the working-class weaver's family lives opens on to a yard with a gutter and rubbish heap. But there is another aspect of this scene which Hulka-Laskowska also presents:

The yard was not large, and was closed off on the left by another house, the Zysers', with a garden that was out of bounds to children. Through the railings you could see the red flowers of poppies in this garden, and I looked at those flowers with a beating heart, as if they were an inconceivable mystery (...) There were also trees growing in Mr Zyser's garden, and on them the same sour cherries came to red ripeness that I would see in the basket of Sura, the daughter of the tailor Fizon, who lived in the Zysers' other house. Those cherries on the tree were far more interesting than the cherries in the basket. More mystery. Once there was nothing on the tree, then it flowered, then there were little green balls, then red cherries. What did it matter that my mother brought just the same cherries from the market, when I so badly wanted the ones in Mr Zyser's garden! An enclosed paradise with the red poppy of mystery and the cherry tree of the knowledge of good and evil.<sup>16</sup>

The accusatory social meaning of this autobiography, conceived in a manner which parallels the writer's own history with the history of his town, is brought out in this passage by the reference to the topos of the Garden of Eden. The necessity of linking childhood with the garden is obvious here, for it is precisely the fact that Paradise is closed and the child finds himself shut outside it which is the subject of protest. In these circumstances, in an autobiography which shows the poverty of childhood in a working-class family, there is no possibility of developing the model preserved in the tradition of the idyll, in which childhood memories are of a golden age.

An example of a treatment of the topos of the garden at a completely different extreme can be found in Kazimierz Brandys's *Mala księga* [Little Book]. This childhood is also spent in an urban environment; but if in Hulka-Laskowski's autobiography the garden squeezed between the houses, with its cherry trees and flowering poppies, could be Paradise, there right next door even if it was inaccessible, why could the city park in *Mala księga* where the boy goes for a walk every day with his grandmother not also be Eden? This park is paradisaical in that it is a domain of complete freedom – but the landscape in which that uninhibited freedom is enjoyed is the antithesis of the scenery of Arcadia. Brandys's description of the main part of the park breathes irony and contempt: fountain, flowerbeds, smooth avenues – all of this is dismissed as “artificial charm”. The

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16 P. Hulka-Laskowski, *Mój Żyrardów. Z dziejów polskiego miasta i z życia pisarza* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1958), 11 (first edition 1934).



area that the boys choose to play in, the place that is really accepted by them, is the part by the wall at the back of the park, outside the bounds of this “artificial charm”. This is a sandy place with no trees, which they call “Sahara”.

There, by the wall, it was bare and poor; the sharp smell of animals, the hot, dirty sand and the sun attacking without the protection of trees – I felt the brutal truth in this, truth that contained despair and madness. Here you could rule and inflict harm, the desolation and misery guaranteed impunity, it was only here that I was not hampered by the artificial charm of the park, the most filthy name-calling sank into the kicked-up sand, where we dug up whitened bones of dogs. No one else but us came here, anything could happen here.<sup>17</sup>

The images foregrounded in Brandys’s description are the polar opposites of those we associate with Eden: sand instead of lush green; and instead of nature’s abundance – a desert that is barren like the Sahara. The only crops this soil produces are the “whitened bones of dogs”. A stench, probably from the monkeys in the menagerie which once stood here, takes the place of the scent of flowers. Instead of gentle shade, we find “the sun attacking without the protection of trees”. There is not even a glimpse of an enclosed paradise from the outside, like the inaccessible garden behind the fence in Hulka-Laskowski’s recollections. Here there is only anti-paradise. Brandys’s tale of childhood is an anti-idyll, like Sartre’s autobiography.

## The Land of Childhood

The lost paradise of childhood is not only home and garden. It is also the beloved landscape of the familiar, the circle of the immediate surroundings, which have their “Swann’s way” and “Guermantes’ way”. The wonder of this landscape, seen in memory, is frequently linked with the fact that it is the landscape of summer holidays or of the festivals for which children come home from school. Whatever the case, it is the domain of freedom and holiday, where joy and fullness hold sway and are continually renewed in the familiar rituals of arrivals and greetings. This aspect is revealed most clearly in descriptions of the journey back home from the world. The sight of familiar landmarks is the first herald, the first sign telling us that we are now in the sphere of the known, the sphere of the radiant warmth of home, which is its sun and centre. We shall deal separately with the peculiar significance of this arrival-return movement, but meanwhile let us

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17 K. Brandys, *Mala księga* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1970), 11.

attempt to reflect on the significance in autobiography of the extensive space surrounding the house and garden.

What exactly is “the land of childhood years”? This phrase from Mickiewicz’s *Pan Tadeusz* has become a common formula used universally, without regard to time or place. In the autobiographies of writers we find only a small fragment of a vast problem on which Polish literature has fed, especially since the Romantic age. During the time of the partitions, when Poland was divided among three imperial powers, Russia, Prussia and Austria, successive waves of emigrants left the country after the failure of armed uprisings to restore the independent state. The largest and most important of these waves, from the point of view of Polish history and culture, was the so-called Great Emigration after the November Uprising of 1830. It was in this situation that the literature of the Polish Romantic writers took shape. Their nostalgia created a model for living one’s life in which the point was to overcome by imagination not only the past years that always separate the adult from childhood, but also the distance in space, since for the emigrants there was no possibility of a real return. It was only in thought that they could transfer themselves to the land of childhood. Twentieth-century history presented Poles with an analogical situation.<sup>18</sup> In the autobiographies analysed here, the recreation of the land of childhood years is usually carried out in two dimensions simultaneously: the individual and the socio-historical. Personal experience, the story of the events of the writer’s own life, works like a prism, refracting the individual ray of light into the multitude of its separate colours. Before the eyes of the reader, a picture of the surroundings of childhood is unveiled, an image of that small local homeland, in which the author strives to capture something that we might call the geographical and cultural personality of the region. Even if only sketchily and incompletely or only in the margins, the majority of writers’ autobiographies recreate the unique climate of a region, with its aura of time and place. The Romantic discovery of *couleur local* continues to bear fruit, though in a variety of very different ways.

Lem’s and Stojowski’s Galicia; Iwaszkiewicz’s Ukraine; Miłosz’s Lithuania; Wilno (Vilnius) and its surroundings, and Belarus, in Wańkiewicz, Żakiewicz and Konwicki; Żylińska’s Wielkopolska; the Sandomierz countryside in Czernik;

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18 A collective publication mentioned in the previous chapter, by writers and journalists living in emigration during World War II (*Kraj lat dziecińczych*, ed. Mieczysław Grydzewski and Ksawery Pruszyński (London: M. I. Kolin, 1942)), provides clear evidence of the vitality of the Romantic model; as does the fact of the book’s subsequent reissuing, forty five years after the first edition, by PULS publishing house in London in 1987, in the series “Świadectwa” [Testimonies].

the town of Żyrardów in Hulka-Laskowski – all are presented as if through a lens focused on just one family, one home; but these lives, these family traditions, these homes, are inconceivable without the local colour that animates them. Landscapes and people, customs and seasons of the year, places and characteristic objects, place names, lexical and stylistic peculiarities – all of this contributes to the geographical and cultural individuality of the region, which makes its presence felt not only in direct descriptions, but also in passing references, or sometimes even single words. In reading autobiographies which reconstruct childhood, we are led to see that there are two factors above all which decide the degree to which space is saturated with local colour: first, the sense of rootedness that the autobiography reveals, the sense of being at home in a defined place on the earth (one that is usually strongly connected with family tradition); and second, the disaster of the irrevocable loss of home, the ultimate parting from the surroundings of childhood. It seems, however, that the real contours of the region's personality, as they might be seen by a historian of culture and customs, are of minor importance.

The significance of local colour in the surroundings of childhood can be interpreted fully only when we look at an autobiographical work in the context of a writer's whole oeuvre, that is when we inscribe it in the "autobiographical space", to use Philippe Lejeune's term: a space which embraces the given text in itself, along with all the writer's other works.<sup>19</sup> It is only in this light that the full clarity of the image of the surroundings of childhood is revealed. One need only recall what Ukraine means for Iwaszkiewicz throughout all his work, or the significance of the valley near Wilno whose topography is so insistently recreated in novel after novel by Konwicki, finally to be mentioned by name as Nowa Wilejka in *Kalendarz i klepsydra* [The Calendar and the Hourglass].<sup>20</sup> There are many different ways of portraying the face of a region, recreating the character of the landscape and the way of life of the land of childhood. It may be the completely enclosed domain of the familiar, clearly separated from the rest of the world, as in Wańkowicz's *Szczenięce lata*, Żakiewicz's *Ród Abaczków*, Czernik's *Dom pod wierzbami* or Stojowski's *Podróż do Nieczajny*. By fencing off the land of childhood, by treating it as an enclave distinct from the whole of the rest of the world and associating it with positive values, such authors cause the land that is

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19 Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, edited and with a foreword by Paul John Eakin, trans. Katherine Leary (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

20 I discuss the peculiar construction of the autobiographical in Konwicki's work in Part Four of this book, in the chapter on Konwicki and Milosz.

conceived in this way to take on features of the sacred space of myth. This kind of image appears when the model posing for the portrait is the culture of the gentry or peasantry, which holds to tradition as the mainstay of the familiar world and a defence against the foreign. The essential thing here is the immersion in the collective memory of the past, an immersion which the time of the narrator-hero's childhood cannot alone assure.

The guarantors of the world that (until the time of disaster) is permanently enclosed within the established boundaries of the known neighbourhood are the persons of the grandmother (in *Szczenięce lata* and Miłosz's *Dolina Issy* [*The Issa Valley*]) and grandfather (in *Dolina Issy*, *Ród Abaczów*, *Podróż do Nieczajny* and Kijowski's *Dziecko przez ptaka przyniesione*), along with the homes which are their places of residence, inherited through countless generations. In Czernik's *Dom pod wierzbami*, the case is different. The writer clearly feels the lack of this depth of tradition as a value consciously cultivated and internalised by successive generations. He sees the continuity of peasant culture as something natural and spontaneous, similar to a process like breathing, rather than as a conscious acceptance of tradition. Recognising its vulnerability to change and its defencelessness in the face of the pressure of immediate needs, Czernik strives to graft on to peasant culture the historical consciousness of its continuance, so that its legacy is not scattered. He dreams of turning the house that his father built into a small museum devoted to the history and culture of his home surroundings. The many autobiographical accents in Czernik's novel *Ręka* [*The Arm*] testify to how strongly the image of the family home is involved with that of family tradition. The half-legendary figure of the grandfather, caught up by chance in the January Uprising of 1863, the writer of a memoir, plays the principal role in this. His gravestone in the village cemetery functions almost as a historical monument, thereby introducing an exceptional accent to peasant culture, shaped as it is by the cyclical order of natural time, by the repeating rhythm of seasons and religious festivals, rather than by the one-way, linear course of history.

The social advancement of Czernik, the son of peasants, who acquired an education and became a writer, was nothing unusual in the inter-war period, though it was still no mean achievement. Czernik remained faithful to his home environment and was active in promoting the development and popularisation of folk culture. In his writing, the radical difference of status between two social layers, the gentry and the peasantry, fades in the face of the new processes of urbanisation and modernisation. On this level of generalisation, the traditions of landowners and ordinary people turn out to be close to one another. In both cases, the vision of the world is defined by a deep sense of the human bond with nature, a sense of life lived according to the rhythm of the seasons, with a distinct

awareness of the continuity of generations. Czernik strives to draw out this similarity, emphasising it above the sharp differences resulting from material and social status.

The surroundings of childhood may also be a point of reference and a standard of measurement for all other landscapes, as in the case of Ukraine, the autobiographical place remembered by Iwaszkiewicz in relation to the landscapes of Italy, his chosen place. A sociologist would perhaps say that the emergence of the possibility of comparing one's family parts with others is accompanied by a transformation of certain values of the gentry culture into the mobile and open culture of the intelligentsia. The process of coming to know other places, other countries, coincides with a young man's initiation, bringing the discovery that the surroundings of childhood are not the only world, but a small part of an unmeasured universe. Sztaudynger is one writer who deals with this kind of confrontation, as we see in the passage below:

The sea put a strain on the wonder of Myślenice, and Garda Lake, that sapphire miracle in the mountains, killed it completely, it dislocated the earlier hierarchy, moving up above Myślenice (...). It became clear that mountains, rivers and valleys, besides being marked by different colours on the map, have the quality of being suited to a certain kind of world. The two-track life of Kraków-Myślenice, already once undermined by Zakopane, came to an end. Myślenice, from being an enormous, independent world, became suddenly just a small point.<sup>21</sup>

Here, the sacred space of the paradise of childhood is inscribed in real geographical space and loses its mythical character. Time, too, takes on a historical value. This is the experience of which Jadwiga Żylińska also writes:

One year I saw the world anew, and my part in its affairs. It was the discovery of space, the globe and *Wielka historia powszechna* [The Encyclopedia of World History] in my uncle's crowded study that led to this (...) Brought up in a town, accustomed to streets that were enclosed by the walls of houses and by the park, which was bordered on one side by the railway track and on the other by railway workshops, I became aware of the existence of a horizon that was round and of space that gave the impression of infinity. It came on me like a revelation that my hometown, with its Third of May<sup>22</sup> Park and road to Wysocko, its Rural Dean's house by the lake and old nut tree near the chapel, its iron

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21 Sztaudynger, *Szczęście...*, 90.

22 Translator's note: the name of the park celebrates the establishment of the Constitution of the Third of May, 1771, Poland's first democratic constitution and one of the first in the world. It thus indirectly indicates the time frame of Żylińska's reminiscences, the inter-war period; for neither before 1918, under the partitions, nor after 1945, under Soviet domination, could a park in Poland recall this Constitution.

pump called “Petronela”, its abandoned windmill and view out of the window of the train, constituted a small part of some huge, one and the same (as could be seen from the globe) whole, where great human dramas (as the captions under the illustrations in the Encyclopedia of World History bore witness) are played out, dramas in which I immediately longed to take part.<sup>23</sup>

The surroundings of childhood are at the same time an initiation into the land of her fathers and an acquisition of a measure which can be applied to the rest of the world. Żylińska writes thus of Wielkopolska:

It was here, on this little piece of earth, that I experienced my first interpersonal relations and my first contacts with art and history (...) the parish church in Ostrzeszów, once a Bernardine abbey, (...), the Gothic, rose-coloured brick tower from the days of Kazimierz the Great, the ruins of Przemysław's castle in Poznań, the Market Square with the pillory and the Gniezno Gate – were an initiation into my later response to Notre Dame and Hradčany, King Roger's fortress in Sicily and the ruins of Minos's castle on Crete.<sup>24</sup>

Jan Parandowski, as he worked on the autobiographical tales which made up the sequence *Zegar słoneczny* [The Sundial], noted in his diary in March 1952:

I am now writing tales of my childhood at various intervals of time, whenever some recollection tempts me and whenever I feel the desire to part from Homer for a day or two (...) Then I run straight out from Ithaca, Sparta or Scheria into the streets of Lwów (...) During my university studies I tried to remedy my ignorance of the city's history, looking for help to Professor Bołoz-Antoniewicz, who turned out to be an enchanting hindrance to my efforts. He conducted a course in Lwów architecture by walks round the city with his students (...) burning with limitless enthusiasm, he would lead us on the wild goose chase of his erudition, so that without leaving St Bernard's Abbey, where the group meeting point was, in the space of two hours we would travel through Italy, France, Germany, stupefied by palaces, sculptures, stained glass, churches, without devoting a single moment's attention to the one thing that we were standing in front of and which was the modest goal of our expedition.<sup>25</sup>

And again, recalling the old well in Dąbrowski Square, from which the maid used to bring water in a huge watering can, Parandowski writes:

In the evening the well would enter the land of the Bible, of Grecian urns, of Persian poetry, the immortal land of trees, water and dusk, with a bevy of women laughing and talking.<sup>26</sup>

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23 J. Żylińska, *Dom, którego nie ma* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1967), 37–38.

24 Żylińska, *Dom...*, 68–69.

25 Parandowski, *Luźne kartki* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1965), 88–89.

26 Parandowski, *Luźne kartki*, 89.

In Stanisław Maria Saliński's *Ptaki powracają do snów* [The Birds Return to Dreams] we find an extremely interesting intersection, in which images of familiarity cross with images of foreignness in tales about the land of childhood. This is a novel about the early life of a Polish writer, spent on the Pacific coast in Krai Ussuriysk. The neighbourhood of the Yanchihe settlement, which lies at the mouth of a little river of the same name, is defined consistently as "the land of my childhood" – even from the perspective of not very distant Vladivostok. This local homeland of childhood is really the other hero of the autobiography, alongside Saliński himself. The author's recollections cover a large swathe of time: from the experiences of a six-year-old up to the time of writing, almost sixty years in total. And yet the events of youth and manhood appear only in so far as they are connected with events, people and objects from Yanchihe on Posyeta Bay. The whole of a long and colourful life, whose countless episodes find a place in this book, is referred to childhood, because it was in childhood that the two most important experiences in Saliński's consciousness were contained at once and completely: the knowledge of happiness and the knowledge of death. Childhood became the measure of a whole life, and the land round Yanchihe the measure of every other space. How does Saliński speak of the landscape of Podolia in the Ukraine? "Pines, sisters of my Ussuriysk cedars."<sup>27</sup>

Saliński's account of the space of childhood imposes a clear hierarchy on it. The two first circles, home and the surrounding garden, mean little. They are his mother's domain. The real terrain, on which the most important events of childhood are played out, is the area round about, the remarkable Krai Ussuriysk, to whose secrets the boy is introduced by his father. It is notable that the scene which begins the first chapter is the morning escape "from my mother's eye", out of the house to the bay, to go hunting with the old Chinaman called Pu O. Saliński usually speaks of the interior of the house only in connection with details connected with the region, such as his father's collection of figures of Buddha or the mysterious stone whose changing shades of colour forecast like a barometer the approach of the hurricane wind known as the *suyfun*. The image of home and garden, along with its most precious part, the rose-garden, appears in Saliński's autobiography only when the writer wishes to present its loss. The experience of a bond with the surroundings of childhood and of becoming familiar with the cultural individuality of a region depends to a considerable degree on the writer's awareness and internalisation of a family

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27 S. M. Saliński, *Ptaki powracają do snów* (Warszawa: PAX, 1974), 100 (first edition 1964). Later page references in the main text are to the 1974 edition.

tradition connecting the individual with the territory known as the land of one's fathers. But can this dependence function in any way in the case of a boy whose father, a native of Płock on the Vistula, set off for the Far East after completing his studies in St Petersburg, to look for work in distant Vladivostok, because he was not permitted to occupy any government position in the "Land on the Vistula" (as the part of Poland that he came from was known under the Russian partition)?

It turns out, however, that a bond like this can be built even as early as in the second generation. Saliński presents Krai Ussuriysk not only as the space of his own childhood, but also as the world of his father, in which this new arrival had firmly rooted himself. A lawyer by education and a judge by profession, he was a passionate amateur ethnographer who collected legends and accounts of the tribes that inhabited Krai Ussuriysk. He was also a friend of Vladimir Arsenyev, the renowned scholar of the taiga, and of Professor Spalwin, the Chinese specialist at Vladivostok Institute of Eastern Studies. Saliński writes of his father's links with this land in a way that suggests a desire to build a kind of spiritual tradition, assembled from recollections of events and of people who were his father's friends, from fragments of his own and other people's books, in which traces remain of the time he spent there and of the activities of his father and his friends. In particular, the fragments of quoted books, his own earlier-written ones as well as other people's, become something like a "family tree", in which instead of the breadth of age-old tradition, what counts is the spiritual value and the sentimental significance of the links with land and people. Krai Ussuriysk appears in Saliński's recollections as his own chosen autobiographical place and his father's.

Saliński's text strikes yet another important note in the scale of experiences that can be heard in autobiographies devoted to childhood. The space surrounding the home is not only the place in which people experience their first enchantments and live through their first happiness. Saliński shows childhood as initiation into death. His two first chapters are concentrated to a considerable degree on accounts of just this experience. In the first chapter, "Śmierć ma osiem takich..." [Death Has Eight Such....], the death of the old Chinaman Pu O, pulled out of a boat by the arm of an octopus, and the accidental drowning of little Chang, are the events around which the child's earliest recollections are organised. The second chapter, "Makata z Chun Chunu" [The Tapestry from Chun Chun], is constructed contrapuntally from two different threads. In parallel with the vibrant, noisy farewell ceremony that takes place in his parents' house before their departure from Yanchihe to Poland, in the little Korean village



over the river a funeral celebration is in progress, involving the translation of a body already buried several weeks ago to another place deemed to be better by the *toin*, the spiritual leader.

I had witnessed this kind of ritual many times. I did not understand, and I will never understand, the dark soot-blinding that ordered us little boys to wait for hours to join in a macabre journey, uneasily waiting to discover the place where some mysterious remains, fascinating in their dark unease, would be buried (53).

Also in chapter three, “Hua-lu”, which tells of the two greatest revelations that thanks to his father, Saliński experienced in the land of childhood (the lotus flowers on Goose Lake and the reflection of Halley’s comet on the screen of the mist over Posyeta Bay), the recollection of the child’s experience of the ultimate things is present. The sense of powerlessness and despair in the face of the accidental, meaningless death of Dybowski’s beautiful deer, called *hua-lu* (deer-flower) in Chinese, is linked into one whole with the image of some unknown bird swimming over the lake, which is overgrown with lotus flowers:

Not a swan, not a Siberian goose – similar, but a grey steel colour. Father doesn’t know what bird it is either. Some arrival from unknown parts, maybe from a dream. Because it is all like something from a dream, because later it comes back in dreams. And that silent mirror of water shaded by cedars comes back in dreams, and that flowery carpet on it, and that phantom grey-steel bird, moving soundlessly through the golden-rosy abyss of silence. And my father – huge, strong, severe, looking at that bird over the abyss (94).

Finally, the thought of death, uniting the beginning and the end of life, wending its way between the experiences of fear and happiness, is inscribed in the very title of the book, drawn from an old local folktale which says that:

happiness once caught comes back like a shadow-recollection to a person’s dreams. And the death of a man is a great dream, to which all the silver birds, all the shadows of the silver birds of happiness that have flown to that man while he was alive, come back (213).

In an extended interview with Czesław Miłosz conducted by Aleksander Fiut, the poet admitted that the novel *The Issa Valley* has an autobiographical background, partly with regard to the figure of the hero, the thirteen-year-old Tomasz, but much more because of the space in which the action takes place, which is a precise mirror-image of the space of the author’s childhood. Miłosz emphasised unequivocally that the characters in the novel and the events of the plot, in contrast to the faithful presentation of space, had been subjected to extensive changes and mingled with elements that were entirely fictional. In the same interview he also mentioned that his novel had been described as a

theological treatise.<sup>28</sup> Although Miłosz is also the author of a long poem, written half a century later, with precisely this title, it might seem odd to think of a novel of childhood in such terms as these.<sup>29</sup> Yet when reading the book, one quickly becomes convinced that the description is appropriate, even though the novel does not make use of professional theological terminology. Looking through the curtain of the novel's events and the fortunes of the characters, one can glimpse the presence of questions about the existence of God, his relationship with the created world (is he indifferent, like the God of the deists?), the nature of evil (is it as powerful as the Manicheists say?) and many other such matters. Miłosz presents fundamental theological questions, not in systematic discourse, but through images, combining the perspective of the narrator with that of a teenage boy or of a simple person from the lower social levels.

The village boy named Dominik, tormented by misery and his own and his mother's humiliating poverty, decides to carry out an experiment which is supposed to test whether heaven is empty, since unjustified suffering exists. In a desire to offend God so deeply that he compels a response – even if it is to be thunder from a clear sky and the perpetrator of the sacrilegious act is to be killed on the spot – he carries out a profanation of the eucharistic host. The narrator tells of this event by linking his own horizon with the point of view of the hero of the scene and its terrified witness, the not much younger Tomasz. The thread involving the shooting of a single Russian soldier in the woods is presented in a similar manner. The soldier is most likely a runaway prisoner returning from war, trying to find his way home over the trackless wilds. Baltazar, the village strongman, carries out this killing for reasons not entirely clear to himself, and the narrator does not explain his action. It is a little similar to the situation in Albert Camus's *L'Étranger*, when Mersault shoots an unknown Arab on a beach “because of the sun”. In *The Issa Valley*, however, the motivation is not presented in terms of the absurd. The metaphorical images of conversations between the devil and Baltazar, who is falling into madness, refer us to the category of metaphysical evil. The oscillation between the intellectual horizon of the narrator, situated above the world of the novel, and the imagination of a child who is learning to know the world from the inside, imparts an original shape to *The Issa*

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28 See Czesława Miłosza *autoportret przekorny*. Rozmowy przeprowadził Aleksander Fiut (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1994), 36–39.

29 “Traktat teologiczny” [“A Theological Treatise”], in *Druga przestrzeń* [*Second Space*] (Kraków: Znak, 2002). This is the third of Miłosz's poems within the genre convention of the treatise, after *Traktat moralny* (*Światło dzienne*, Paris 1953) and *Traktat poetycki* (in the collection of the same name, Paris 1957).

*Valley*, placing it within the movement in modern prose in which free indirect style is prominent.

Alongside the figure of the principal character, the thirteen-year-old Tomasz, the presentation of space has fundamental importance for the novel's autobiographical background. This factor is already indicated at the very beginning. For the eponymous heroine of the novel is the river valley,<sup>30</sup> one of the most important of spatial topoi in literary tradition, along with mountains, sea, wilderness, city and others. The first sentence of the novel makes a unity of the main character and the place where he was born and bred, in which the whole plot develops. "I should begin with the Land of Lakes, the place where Thomas lived".<sup>31</sup> The last paragraphs, in turn, show Tomasz's journey, when his mother comes to take him away from his grandparents' home. This is where the presented events and the narrative that presents them come to an end. Though in fact they do not completely end (because that would denote some form of closure) and the story of Tomasz is clearly intended to have its continuation beyond the pages of the novel. This is what is suggested by the final paragraph. It is written in the second person and is an apostrophe by the author addressed to Tomasz, wishing his hero happiness as the unknown wide world opens before him. As he journeys with his mother, Tomasz drives the horses, and it is as engaged in this activity that the last sentence finds him: "You raise your whip – and here our tale is ended."<sup>32</sup>

From numerous remarks and written recollections by Miłosz it is known that the titular river Issa is really Niewiaża, one of the largest rivers in Lithuania, familiar to us from Wańkiewicz's work, too. The maternal ancestors of the poet had lived in these parts as far back as anyone could remember. He himself was born and christened there; the family graves were in the local cemetery. The manor house of his mother's parents, precisely described in the novel, surrounded by a garden, stood on the Niewiaża. The Tomasz of the novel is twelve or thirteen years old, so the events of his life are mostly played out in the wider vicinity, in a wooded land of lakes, in a landscape in which the presence of human beings has little significance. Life flows among events regulated by the rhythm of the seasons and of household activities. This is the stage for the dramatic turns of existence, the dramas of love and death; but they too are written into the immemorial order. The daily life of the novel is full of particular details

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30 Translator's note: Polish "dolina", valley, is of feminine gender.

31 Cz. Miłosz, *The Issa Valley*, trans. Louis Iribarne (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1982), 3.

32 Miłosz, *The Issa Valley*, 288. A closer translation here would be "here our tale breaks off".

of customs and images of nature, presented in an extraordinary expert manner, including the Latin names of flora and fauna. The narrative and the utterances of the characters are permeated through and through by the names of objects and actions proper to places and times which had long since disappeared irrevocably from the world outside the novel.

Although the war that was going on somewhere in the wider world also makes its menacing presence felt in the valley of the Issa, its sinister consequences for the lives of the novel's heroes are seen as closer to the cataclysms of nature, against which human beings are powerless, than to history as created by people. However, the growing Polish-Lithuanian conflict adumbrated in the novel is clearly rooted in the real world.

Though the story breaks off with the scene of the hero's departure from the place of his childhood, we have seen that this represents an opening up rather than a closing down of perspective. But there is another reason for this, too: the work of Miłosz, though it is marked by an unusually strong bond with the autobiographical place mentioned in the novel, nevertheless does not transform vital memory into barren nostalgia and melancholy. *The Issa* [Niewiaża] Valley developed into *Native Realm* and *Visions from San Francisco Bay*.

### Arriving – Homecoming

As indicated earlier in this chapter, in many of the tales of childhood discussed here, one particular motif stands out in the link between home and the external world: the motif of return. If one were to present this in an exhaustive manner, it would certainly be necessary to relate it to anthropological examinations of rites of passage, because it is impossible to return without first leaving. This must be left for a different occasion, however, in which the centre of interest would not be autobiographical writing as such, but the existential rhythm of successive phases of life which is told in this kind of writing.

Up to the moment when home is left for the first time, it is the absolute axis, the centre of the world. The later course of life may deprive it of this status, but that status may also be retained permanently. After all, there are autobiographies which cover only the period of childhood and youth, coming to their end at precisely that moment when the hero goes out into the world and home loses its central position. However, as long as home exists, the open space outside it is the terrain of journeying, of travels which one may undertake by leaving home and returning to it. In autobiographies of the period of childhood, it is this second direction of movement that is most important: coming home from one's travels. Arriving is in essence returning; there should not after all be any first arrival,

because in the ideal, archetypal image of home, it is the place of birth, a place where one does not arrive, but in which one automatically and simply *is*.

Returning home usually takes the form of arrival for the vacation. Simultaneously, the state lost while abroad in the town is restored: the state of paradisaical happiness, the complete freedom of life in nature. A recovery of lost childhood follows. The same thing happens when it is not a matter of a vacation, but of the arrival of an adult. In *Dom pod wierzbami* [The House Under the Willows] Czernik constructed a whole mythology around these departures and returns to the family's cottage home. He calls his parents' house a nest, and compares himself to a migrating bird that flies away and comes back.

The arrival-return event has its spatial arrangement, whose main elements are the arrival from afar; the recognition of the characteristic views which testify that one is drawing closer to home (sometimes this includes noticing changes which have taken place in one's absence); and at last the entrance to the house through the porch and hall. In some texts the whole description of the interior space of the house is organised in just this way. However, for autobiography this is nothing out of the ordinary. Polish literature has known this kind of description of home at the moment of arrival from at least the time when Mickiewicz's Tadeusz, after driving up to the porch in Soplicowo in a two-horse carriage, opened the door into the vestibule, greeted the familiar walls, furniture, portraits and chiming clock, and finally "ran through the whole manor and sought out the chamber / Where he'd lived as a child, and for ten years remembered" (*Pan Tadeusz*, Book I, lines 73–74).<sup>33</sup>

Sztaudynger's description of the ritual of arriving and greeting his grandparents' house in a small town, and all its surroundings, is a significant element in his conception, since he acknowledges this house, where he spent his holidays as a boy, as his true childhood home. Żylińska describes returning home only near the end of her book, in connection with the account of her father's death when the war was already over and her mother had also died. Her manner of presenting the homecoming is similar to her way of dealing with other elements of the space of childhood. Żylińska inclines to submit to the forms of imagining passed on by tradition, recognising their existence and powerful weight, yet at the same time she does not fit within these bounds. She counterposes images drawn from the idyll with a treatment of problems that is proper to the essay genre. Thus she describes the ritual of the return home only when the prospect of its ultimate

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33 Trans. Marcel Weyland (Blackheath NSW: Verand Press, 2004).

loss has already become close and clear. The dread of loss becomes the dominant accent and destroys the vision of the happy homecoming that soothes and consoles. This dread:

lurked quietly like a sleeping monster, at rest, ineluctably, in the lowest level of consciousness, like the hidden bottom of all phenomena, like a trapdoor that would some day open.<sup>34</sup>

The return home is presented most fully and colourfully in Żakiewicz and in Stojowski. In the latter's collection *Podróż do Nieczajny. Opowiadania leodyjskie*, the title story, [Journey to Nieczajna], presents us with the following passage:

A journey was still awaiting us, the happiness not so much of arriving, as of returning under my grandfather's roof, to a home that was more real than our own, because it was built of older components – so stronger and more permanent.<sup>35</sup>

In Żakiewicz's novel *Ród Abaczów* [The House of Abacz], in turn, the *leitmotif* of a long tale of arriving at the grandparents' home, Niżany, is the return to the right place on the earth, the one place where it is possible to be one's real self:

My God, Niżany, lost in linden trees and alders, gazing into ponds and streams, Niżany, waking with the birds flying in, and dying with the last cry of the wild goose, Niżany, lying low under a high sky – here was my real cradle, here was the place of my triumphs and disasters!<sup>36</sup>

I would enter Niżany like a fiddle finding its case (18).

For Żakiewicz, arriving at his grandfather's home is simultaneously a return to genealogy, a descent into the past, reaching further and deeper than the mere return to the place of his own birth. It is a return to the mythical epoch before the beginning of time. However, the author adds, "Here alone could I understand the secret of the fall of the House of Abacz" (15). For the space of home, garden and the Niżany neighbourhood is not, as might seem, merely a landscape that belongs to the Arcadia of the nobility and the landed gentry. It is the seat of a house touched by a curse, the terrible sin of incest. Oedipus, not Cincinnatus, is the patron of this manor house. The appearance of "iron birds", the aeroplanes that fly in from the west in September, sowing fire and destruction, in other words the outbreak of World War II which concludes the novel, will be no more

34 Żylińska, *Dom...*, 166.

35 A. Stojowski, *Podróż do Nieczajny; Chłopiec na kucu* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1974), 46.

36 Z. Żakiewicz, *Ród Abaczów* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1968), 15. The remaining passages from this work are quoted from this edition. Page references are given in the body of the text.

than the seal placed by history on the sentence of annihilation passed on the House of Abacz. The destruction born inside the house is embedded in their own family tradition like a curse in ancient tragedy.

## The Death Knell for the Home of Childhood

The space told of in autobiography is a space that is accessible primarily, and often even only, in memory. It was Stanisław Lem who drew the most far-reaching conclusions from this fact, writing a book that is more about memory than about childhood. To a considerable degree, *Highcastle* is a tale of hopeless attempts to conquer time. Lem, involved in a permanent conflict with the convention of the memoir, with those “worn out, false devices of a balding memoirist”,<sup>37</sup> which were too naïve for him, alludes to the inventions of the twentieth-century novel. A thread of authorial self-reflection is inscribed in his narrative, in which he casts doubt on his own writing and strives to find new rules and methods for it. This wavering as to ways of speaking is largely motivated by the fact that the world told is divided from that of the teller by a space that cannot be overcome: the chasm dug by history. There is nothing any more on its other side. It is not only that the adult’s own childhood is inaccessible to him because of the passage of time, but also that everything of which that childhood was a transient small part, has ceased to exist.

And what avalanches descended on that world. How was it they did not wipe it out completely, erasing every trace? And for whom exactly do the traces survive? For whom does memory preserve them, reluctant memory, opening its treasury only at night, in insensible sleep, to the blind dreamer?<sup>38</sup>

The full meaning of these sentences becomes clear in Agnieszka Gajewska’s book *Zagłada i gwiazdy. Przeszłość w prozie Stanisława Lema* [The Holocaust and Stars. The Past in the Prose of Stanisław Lem].<sup>39</sup> Gajewska uncovers the long undiscerned autobiographical background to the work of a writer perceived for twenty years merely as a creator of science-fiction literature. By studying extensive archival material and interpreting Lem’s writing with great insight in this

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37 S. Lem, *Wysoki zamek* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej, 1966), 77. Translator’s note: I have used my own translation here so as to ensure correspondence with the author’s argument.

38 Lem, *Highcastle*, 144–145.

39 A. Gajewska, *Zagłada i gwiazdy. Przeszłość w prozie Stanisława Lema* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza, 2016). An English translation of this book is in preparation.

context, the author discovered a whole network of metaphorical references to the Holocaust, which Lem lived through in Lwów in his youth during World War II. The stars in the title of Gajewska's book refer both to the cosmos, as the scenery of science-fiction, and to the star of David, the sign of Jewish identity transformed by the Nazis into a badge of contempt which was really a stamp marking out those sentenced to death. The trauma of wartime youthful experience which accompanies the writer unceasingly (in the depths of memory, in dreams) was never directly voiced, even in Lem's autobiography, which concerns only the times of his pre-war childhood and youth.

The death knell for home sounds in each of the autobiographical accounts discussed in this chapter. This is how Iwaszkiewicz began his autobiographical reflections in 1941:

The present moment, both internally and externally, is the appropriate one – in my opinion – in which to begin writing my recollections. Externally we seem to be separated from past years by cataclysms which have transformed times not so long ago into distant history.<sup>40</sup>

Of the house in which Iwaszkiewicz was born, all that is left is a “trace” in the garden, “thick and greener grass, defined by the contour of the house that had disappeared”.<sup>41</sup> In his description of the garden, the writer singles out one tree: an oak, the only woodland tree in the orchard. And though no honey flows from its bark, as according to the Ovidian and Virgilian topos it ought to, nevertheless its cutting down is a visible sign of the devastation of Arcadia, and the writer speaks of it again thirty years later in the sketch called “Ogrody” [Gardens]. The image of the felled tree as a mark of annihilation appears frequently in Iwaszkiewicz's work. For example, writing in *Książka o Sycylii* [A Book about Sicily] about the storms of history that blew through the Ukraine, he says: “cultures rubbed against one another here and stratified, but they left no bright monuments of splendour, only underground currents, the roots of felled trunks”.<sup>42</sup> Ola, one of the main characters of *Sława i chwała* [Fame and Honour], has a disturbing, desperate dream after the war has ended and she has lost all three of her children; in the dream she sees oak trees that have been cut down. In Wańkowicz's work, too, the same meaning is attached to the tidings that the trees around the house in Kałużyce have been felled during World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution.

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40 J. Iwaszkiewicz, *Książka moich wspomnień* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1975), 5 (first edition 1957).

41 Iwaszkiewicz, *Książka...*, 17.

42 Iwaszkiewicz, *Książka o Sycylii* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1956), 57.



Kazimierz Brandys, who never described the home of his own childhood, nevertheless wrote of the destruction of a house in Warsaw in which a Jewish family lived. He presented the way that war destroyed the very idea of home, which has its material roots in the house's interior and the objects that fill it:

During the war the family was scattered. In the course of a couple of hours the uncle's family had to leave their home, change their address and take another surname. Not only furniture and carpets were lost, but photographs, letters, trifles that had piled up over the years, souvenirs of the past, in a word the whole uniting fabric that filled the drawers of the house and created the culture and continuity of family bonds.<sup>43</sup>

In this context, the testimony of Jan Parandowski is extremely important. *Zegar słoneczny* is the only book known to me of the autobiographical works written after the outbreak of World War II in which the home, garden and surroundings of childhood are not eclipsed by even the smallest shadow of recollection of that war. The house with its cellar smelling of wood and its high, light attic, the garden where Robinson's shed stood, the streets and green parks of Lwów – all remain untouched, as much alive in the pure images of memory as in the present of the childhood of the author's youngest son. The sundial is the visible measure of a time in which there is no place for the dark years of history separating the childhood of young Piotruś from the author's own childhood spent in royal and imperial Lwów. And yet elsewhere Parandowski did pay the tribute required of that peculiar kind of writing which is Polish autobiography of the twentieth century. In his fragmentary diary, entitled *Luźne kartki* [Loose Leaves], to which we have already referred, we find the following page:

Ciechanki, 28 February, 1945

In the end we received news of our home in Warsaw – very sad. P. Kreczmar, who had arrived there, found the house little damaged on the outside, but a total ruin within. A little plate with my surname hung on our door. In the apartment only ash from the burnt furniture and bookshelf. So the thugs had destroyed my bookshelf, my faithful companion since I was fifteen, which had grown and matured along with me and with my work. They had destroyed all the things that held memories, beginning with the green upholstery of the armchairs that I had jumped on as a child and the table where I had been christened and where the blessed Easter food was always placed, and ending with those trivial and of course priceless things like little souvenirs and photographs. We have nothing any more. Continuity, family tradition, has been broken once and for ever.<sup>44</sup>

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43 K. Brandys, *Mala księga*, 115.

44 Parandowski, *Luźne kartki*, 12.

The annihilation of Arcadia is most fully told in Stojowski's already mentioned collection *Podróż do Nieczajny* [Journey to Nieczajna]. The grand and at the same time charming world of the great manor houses in Galicia, still living an extension of the good old days of the Emperor Franz Joseph, is described by Stojowski with a mixture of tenderness and irony. The whole majesty and beauty of the past, with its attendant foibles, fissures, great idiocies and small absurdities, shines out in Stojowski's book in its full glory just before the cataclysm that was to put all this to death. Here the landscape of the nobleman's Arcadia is pure and lovely. Only some of the figures, perceived in the book with the eye of an ironist, remind one more of an operetta farce than of a pastoral idyll. Many different chords are struck in the finale of this world, from tragifarce in the story "Którędy, panie, na Zaleszczyki?" [Which way, ladies, for Zaleszczyki?] to the rending scene of the extermination of Nieczajna's Jews, a scene whose helpless witnesses are the little narrator and his grandfather, who tells him: "Watch and remember... You will tell it one day." The story ends with the sentence: "And a year had not passed before the SS-Galizien division burned Nieczajna to the ground."<sup>45</sup>

The book does not end here, however. There is still the last story, "Anteusz" [Antaeus], which closes the book like an epilogue that is dissonant, harsh, and pitiless in its bitterness. Nothing links it with the closed autobiographical cycle of the collection as a whole. All the other stories are written in the first person (with the exception of the battle story, "Apel poległych" [Roll of Honour], whose action cannot fit within the perspective of the child narrator), and concern the same figures, events and places, coloured with the warm colours of a happy childhood. In "Anteusz" no figure from the autobiographical cycle appears, and there is not a single event or known name from the vicinity of Lwów, Winnica or Nieczajna. The story's position at the end of the book can be explained only by the fact that it reverberates with a distant echo of the world that perished when Nieczajna was burned down. The voice of this echo is mocking and derisive, but at the same time it mourns in secret. It is in this way that Brzozowski might have described the fall of the Kosecki family, if the finale of his novel *Dębina* [Oak Wood] were to have been played out after World War II.

The titular Antaeus of Stojowski's story, who perishes far away from his land, is Edward, a descendant of a family of the minor gentry, a poor and ridiculous figure. He vegetates in a small town as a "working intellectual". I wish to devote a moment's attention to this story here, because we can see in it, as in a crooked

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45 Stojowski, *Podróż...*, 238 and 239. References from here on are to this edition and are given in brackets in the main body of the text.

mirror, the most important elements in the Arcadian space of childhood, now stripped of all beauties. After the grand destruction of Arcadia, which might leave behind it only lacerating but pure sorrow, some poor remains have appeared, whose miserable vegetation interferes gratingly with the melody of mourning.

The story begins with the motif of an arrival from the town to the country home for Christmas. However, this is not a return to the childhood home which brings happiness, but a reluctant visit to disagreeable and mean relations, for whose hospitality it will be necessary to offer some discreet payment. In autobiography, the joyful homecoming consists in the passage from the foreign, distant space of the wide world to the known, the close and the familiar. In Stojowski's story, Edward experiences a feeling of disturbing cold and alienation throughout his journey, whether it is by train or by horse-drawn vehicle. Even the sledge that comes to the station "was a country sledge of clumsily cut runners, harnessed to a half-starved horse" (251). On Christmas Eve, home should greet guests from afar with its brightly lit windows, and from close up with its warmth, sound of talk and friendly embraces. Meanwhile a snow drift lies in front of the verandah, and behind, on the kitchen door side, there is scattered ash and a frozen puddle of slops. No one comes running out to greet the visitor. The interior of the house is presented in such a way that every trifle testifies to abandonment, dirt and neglect. Not even a single detail escapes this disheartening combination: walls, ceiling, stairs, furniture, all the objects that fill the domestic space, which ought to make it cosy and charming, which should arouse joy or delight – all here are signs of corruption, collapse and ruin. On such an evening, home should be filled with the smell of tasty delicacies and the resinous aroma of the Christmas tree. Here "a burnt smell wafts through, steam, a suffocating kitchen stench, sour yeast, rye bread" (258). Flashes of recollection from Edward's childhood call only distressing, bad moments to mind. "The word was always missing that would open the old warm, golden world of the familiar" (255). Right to the very end, Edward will not hear that word and will not be able to find it himself.

The story which closes the collection entitled *Podróż do Nieczajny* had to be placed outside the autobiographical cycle. It is not a matter here of destroying Arcadia, but of showing that it never really existed – since after it is gone, what remains are not ruins that move to romantic dread, but a stinking and repulsive rubbish-heap. The home described in this story, in comparison with the one in which the narrator of the remaining stories passes his childhood, is like the filthy tavern that Henryk finds instead of his family home in Gombrowicz's *Ślub* [*The Marriage*]. The two stories placed next to each other at the end of the book, "Apoteoza" [Apotheosis] and "Anteusz", show the two possible endings to the Arcadian myth of childhood: tragic and grotesque. But does autobiography

today know no other ways of writing about childhood, besides this alternative of nostalgia or mockery? The demolition of Arcadia introduces an elegiac tone to works that continue the pastoral tradition. The anti-idyll ironically overturns the sentimental stereotypes of childhood. The essay strives to raise individual experience to the rank of a problem in order to understand it. It is just this endeavour that Jadwiga Żylińska makes, when instead of passing from mourning the loss of home and the reminders of family life to mockery of that lost past, she strives to build a new, non-material circle of values, which allows migrants to feel at home wherever fortune casts them:

When I left the family home, I took with me all the books of my childhood, so that they would accompany me for the rest of my life. Every one of them got lost. There must be some truth, though, in the saying that the spirits of people who die a violent death linger to do penance among the living, instead of enjoying eternal rest like those who finished their lives in the right time and place, because the remains of my home, so suddenly and strangely lost, disturbed my peace for a long time afterwards.

Żylińska goes on to describe the destruction of her home, of her beloved books and souvenirs of the past:

But although in its time that sight caused me such great pain that – as I thought – I would never recover from it, it was not wasted. At any rate, I became convinced that one shouldn't become too attached to possessions, and certainly should not ascribe metaphysical content to them. "For everywhere you can find a step on the stairs or a trunk that you can sit on." It doesn't have to be the family sofa, the mahogany table that stood in front of it, with the photograph album lying there in its gilded leather cover.<sup>46</sup>

The passing bells for the home of childhood ring out in the historical world. This is the twentieth century in Central and Eastern Europe. These are the lands that Timothy Snyder calls "bloodlands".<sup>47</sup> Small and medium-sized nations squeezed between two totalitarian powers: Nazi Germany and communist Russia. And it is precisely these external circumstances which decide that the autobiographical places presented in the tales of the home of childhood discussed in this chapter are almost exclusively remembered places. Stable native places, such as the homes of grandmothers and grandfathers so clearly drawn by Wańkiewicz, Miłosz, Żakiewicz and Stojowski, appear only with reference to previous generations. These writers and their parents were now only fugitives from the old manor houses located in the geographical territory of the former Borderlands. The same cataclysm rendered the autobiographical places

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<sup>46</sup> Żylińska, *Dom...*, 34–35.

<sup>47</sup> T. Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

of Sandauer's and Lem's childhood in Borderland cities accessible only in recollection, while the homes of Parandowski, Żylińska and Brandys perished in towns reduced to rubble in the territory of contemporary Poland. Against this background, the remembered autobiographical place of Saliński's childhood, passed amid the exotic scenery of the Far East, is distinguished by its different mood. Saliński's father found himself there not only under the pressure of laws imposed by the Tsarist empire, but also partly by his own choice. In turn, it was the choice of the author himself to come to Poland and become a Polish writer in spite of his Russian debut. The writers of the next generation will already be the children of migrants and will create their descriptions of autobiographical places only with the help of the memories passed down in family tradition. They will also seek other languages to describe the other worlds and other places of their own childhood in the post-war world. Sometimes they will rebel, creating a mocking distance in relation to the nostalgia of memory; but from below the surface of this mockery, if one looks carefully, a hidden tenderness frequently shines through. We shall say more about this in the subsequent chapters.



### 3. Larders of Memory: Transformations of the Borderland Theme in the Autobiographical Novel

For Polish collective consciousness, the myth of the Eastern Borderlands was (and to a certain extent still is) something like the myth of the American South so compellingly portrayed by William Faulkner, or the melancholy following the loss of Algeria that remains in the memory of many of the French, as observed by Albert Camus. The Polish Borderland myth also resembles the deep, lacerating nostalgia of the Portuguese for the country that once was: a vast maritime power, a land of conquerors and great sailors. To this day, that nostalgia supplies the emotional context for the unique musical and poetic phenomenon known as *fado*. In all these cases, in other respects so different from one another, there is a certain common feature: the acute pain caused by the loss of an important part of collective identity leads to a sacralisation of the past. In the Polish version, it is significant that two different elements are united: the idyll of country life, in harmony with nature, and the heroic chivalric legend.

The territories known as the Borderlands were located in the eastern reaches of the Noblemen's Republic, which today belong to Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania. From the Middle Ages these lands were exposed to the expansive claims of the Tartar Khans, whose armies penetrated deep into Europe, right as far as Vienna. Because of her position, Poland was the first to come into contact with the invaders, and as a result began to form a conception of her exceptional historical role as the "bulwark of Christendom". In time, once the Tartar invasions had ceased, conflicts within the Slavonic world began to make themselves felt. To a certain extent these were connected with religious differences between Catholicism and the Eastern Christianity that flourished in Kievan Rus. The civilisational attractiveness of the Western world and the noblemen's liberties of the Republic contributed to a gradual polonisation of the magnate families and wealthy noblemen in the Borderlands, while the country folk kept to their own language and religion. Then there were the conflicts that began to surface between Poland and the increasing power of the Duchy of Moscow, which had thrown off the Tartar yoke and transformed itself into an immense Russian empire. The rivalry between these two great states fuelled startlingly bloody conflicts of social as well as religious origin in the borderland territories. Gradually Russia came to dominate, absorbing the Ukrainian and Belarussian

elements and crowding out Polish influences. Nevertheless, in spite of Poland's loss of independence towards the end of the eighteenth century following the partitions made by Russian, Austria and Prussia, the character of the Borderland territories continued to be profoundly shaped by the presence of Polish culture (also in the sense of material culture). At the same time, the poetry of the Romantic period shaped a myth of the Borderlands in which they were raised almost to the role of an icon of Polishness. After World War II, the shifting of Poland's borders to the west removed this lost world once and for all into regions that were exclusively mythical. The Polish population that had lived there for generations was resettled in the west, but while these people found themselves physically within the borders of the new Polish state, they remained mentally within the Borderland tradition. At the same time, the sense of real loss was radically deepened by force of a symbolic kind: in the first decades after the war, during the Cold War period, the policies of the Communist authorities relegated even the memory of the past to the sphere of enforced, complete and deliberate silence.

A full restoration of memory could only come about after the changes of 1989. Then, too, ideas tending to demythologise the Borderland legend began to emerge. As long as it had been subject to political oppression by the authorities, this legend had been sacrosanct in Polish culture. One of the first attempts to reconsider its mythical idealisation was a book entitled *Kresy – dekonstrukcja* [The Borderlands – Deconstruction],<sup>1</sup> which was the outcome of an academic conference at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. A little later, a broader-based reevaluation began, aided by the introduction of the tools of postcolonial criticism,<sup>2</sup> which gradually made it possible to recognise the dual complication, unknown to the West, in the situation of Central and Eastern Europe. For in this part of the world the roles of coloniser and colonised were interchangeable; and beyond that, the process of colonisation did not concern overseas territories and peoples whose skin was a different colour or whose religion and cultural traditions were radically different. Instead, it affected neighbour nations with shared Mediterranean roots (though in two versions: Latin and Greek), which were all Christian (despite the differences between Catholicism and Orthodoxy),

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1 *Kresy – dekonstrukcja*, ed. K. Trybuś, J. Kałużny and R. Okulicz-Kozaryn (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskiego Towarzystwa Nauk, 2007).

2 A. Fiut, "Polonizacja? Kolonizacja?", *Teksty Drugie* 2003.6; H. Gosk, *Opowieści skolonizowanego/kolonizatora: w kręgu studiów postzależnościowych nad literaturą polską XX i XXI wieku* (Kraków: Universitas, 2010); D. Skórczewski, *Teoria – literatura – dyskurs. Pejzaż postkolonialny* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2013).



and which all spoke languages that belonged to the same Slavonic family and drew on the same source.

To recapitulate the story in as simplified a version as possible: the territories of today's Ukraine were subject to Polish expansion in the day of the First Republic (up to the end of the eighteenth century), gradually becoming the arena of rivalry with the growing power of Moscow, which ultimately, now as the Russian empire, not only completely subjugated these lands, but had already in the nineteenth century transformed Poland, until then a hegemony, into a subsidiary power, deprived of political independence in consequence of the partitions. It was then that Romantic literature shaped not only the myth of the lost Borderlands, but also the self-image of Poland as a victim overcome, in spite of her cultural and moral superiority, by the brutal violence of Moscow. At the same time, the memory of her earlier role as coloniser in the Borderlands was thrust deep down into the sphere of the collective unconscious. This state of affairs was strengthened and perpetuated in the twentieth century as a result of oppression by two totalitarian empires (Nazi and Soviet) in the lands which, as mentioned earlier, Timothy Snyder named "bloodlands", whose centre was Poland.<sup>3</sup>

After World War II, within the terms of the post-Yalta order, the Borderland theme was for long subject to taboo. Nevertheless, in the sixties and seventies of the last century a beginning was made, if a cautious one, to a gradual recalling of the role of the Borderlands in Polish culture and history. At first this was unconnected with any critical revision. One very important factor in the vitality of the Borderland theme is its link with the personal experience of writers and with the family traditions passed on by previous generations. It was the autobiographical element that enabled this theme to return to the surface of literary life in spite of years of enforced immersion in silence. The stance of witness predominates in the overwhelming majority of autobiographical texts involving the Borderlands, for they are driven above all not by the desire to express inner experiences or intellectual reflections, but by the urge to re-create a lost world, with its culture, history and landscape. This is why I allude here to the distinction between the "library" and the "larder", which I outlined in Part 2 of this book. Where the library symbolises the spiritual autobiography, the larder opens up the perspective of stories of manners and images of daily life and material culture. The autobiographical writings of many authors who come from the lost Eastern Borderlands might well be described as "larders of memory" – but one needs

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3 T. Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

to remember that the contents of these larders are not always tasty or heartening. Sometimes they are bitter; sometimes they even conceal a little poison. The number of texts that fall within the orbit of the Borderland theme is enormous. With the passage of time and of generations, there has been a succession of new and changing conceptions. Much critical attention has been paid to them, and some scholars have attempted to create a literary historical synthesis.<sup>4</sup> In the present chapter I take account of little more than a few examples, and these by less well-known authors, not with regard to their greater or lesser role within the field of literature on the Borderlands, but in order to illustrate certain characteristics of the stance of the witness in autobiographical writing and to display a range of stylistic conceptions of various kinds.

### Idyll and Tragedy: the Memory of the Borderlands

In prose on the Borderland theme, whether novelistic or non-fictional, which arises from an autobiographical base, four different styles can be identified: idyllic, tragic, grotesque and documentary (objectified). The first two perspectives are the most strongly represented and frequently they are present simultaneously, intermingling in one and the same work. They also appeared at once in the current of Borderland literature that began to revive in Poland in the nineteen-seventies (in emigration, literature on the Borderland theme developed freely even in the war years). With time, the oscillation between these two poles, the idyllic and the tragic, led to the emergence of a grotesque mode. Understandably, because the autobiographical experience of loss cannot but involve emotion, it is rare to find writing of this kind which assumes an objective stance.

In Zbigniew Żakiewicz's *Dziennik intymny mego N. N.* [Intimate Diary of My N.N.], a highly personal approach is evident in his observations on his reading of Leopold Buczkowski's *Wertepy* [Rough Ground], *Dorycki krużganek* [The Doric Cloister] and *Czarny potok* [Black Torrent], three novels which deal with the war years in Volhynia, today in the territory of Ukraine.

As I read him, I unearth from the layers of memory that "borderlandness" that once existed in me, but camouflaged and in hiding, and I divest it of all its conventionality.

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4 See E. Wiegandtowa, *Austria felix czyli o micie Galicji w polskiej prozie współczesnej* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 1988); J. Jarzębski, "Exodus (ewolucja obrazu kresów po wojnie)", *W Polsce czyli wszędzie. Szkice o polskiej prozie współczesnej* (Warszawa: PEN, 1992); J. Olejniczak, *Arkadia i małe ojczyzny. Vincenz – Stempowski – Wittlin – Miłosz* (Kraków: Oficyna Literacka, 1992); M. Czermińska, "Temat kresowy w prozie polskiej", *Polonistyka* 1992.10.

My experience was a little different, more northern (and not so bloody), but at its root, in its shameless nakedness – it was the same. The memory and the vividness of the descriptions – simply dizzying. Here, too, I uncover and recall something that had fallen deep into my consciousness. Unfortunately, my borderlands cannot help but be mythologised and stylised (Burek has criticised me for this), because I left them when I was only thirteen. My return to the borderlands in *Ród Abaczów* [The House of Abacz] is an elegy, a swan song.<sup>5</sup>

Żakiewicz himself was born in Vilnius and spent his childhood and early youth partly in the countryside surrounding the city and partly in what is now Belarus. After the war he moved several times within Poland before finally settling in Gdańsk. His autobiographical novel about his childhood, *Ród Abaczów* (1968), was written ten years before the diary entry above, in which it is mentioned. It might seem that with this novel, the phantoms of the past had been finally and unambiguously exorcised, that in this “elegy”, this “swan song”, the past had been celebrated and brought to a close. But when we read Żakiewicz’s next novel, *Wilcze łąki* [Wolf Meadows], also woven around recollections of childhood, and dated in a note at the end of the text “January 77 – January 80”, we realise that *Ród Abaczów* was by no means Żakiewicz’s final farewell to the borderlands. Time and again as the years went by, Żakiewicz returned in imagination to the land of his childhood, to those “wolf meadows” inhabited by young Ryś Wołk-Wołczacki – a figure astonishingly similar to the youngest child of the house of Abacz in the earlier novel. And so the past could not be shut out or brought to a conclusion or bid a last farewell. This was the experience not only of Żakiewicz, but of very many Polish writers contemporary to him. Memory, sometimes long ago placed under wraps, seemingly pacified and lulled to sleep, cheated by its incorporation into the restless present and its owner’s successful accommodation to a new place, would suddenly burst out after years of being hidden, like that treacherous fire stealing under the turf that Żakiewicz described in one of his diary entries from a journey to Moscow. When drought is severe, forests burn, and even water cannot then stop the fire from spreading:

The flames tear through under the surface of the water and the turf ground and – a geyser of steam and fire that no-one expected. There comes a moment when, as in front of Moses, a bush begins to burn from its root and shrivels like a candle.<sup>6</sup>

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5 Z. Żakiewicz, *Dziennik intymny mego N. N.* (Warszawa: Znak, 1977), 61. Tomasz Burek, mentioned here, was an influential literary critic who specialised in the contemporary Polish prose of the time.

6 Żakiewicz, 139.

Many writers whose youthful or even only childhood world collapsed irretrievably when World War II broke out in September 1939, experienced outbursts of memory similar to what Żakiewicz describes. For all of them, the experience was of a violent shattering of continuity, but it was those for whom the disinheritance was a matter of space as well as time who were affected most strongly by the turn of historical events. I am thinking here mainly of those whose heritage was the culture of the Borderlands: whether of the south-east, as for Julian Strykowski, Leopold Buczkowski, Andrzej Kuśniewicz and Włodzimierz Odojewski, or of the north-east, as for Tadeusz Konwicki, Zbigniew Żakiewicz and Róża Ostrowska. In the works of each of these writers, we find presentations of autobiographical places recollected with the aid of their personal experiences of childhood and youth. They have their spiritual fathers in the preceding generation, also banished, but by the previous world war, from the places of their youth, which were removed from them into a time lost forever, into the sphere of reminiscence, as with the Ukraine of Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz and the Vilnius countryside of Melchior Wańkowicz. And of course Iwaszkiewicz and Wańkowicz, too, were by no means the first writers in Polish literature to be exiled from the land of their childhood. There is no doubt that their writing was partly influenced by the Romantic traditions of pilgrimage and of regionalism, and by the Romantic sense of the powerful sway that every spirit of place holds over those born under its dominion. They were surely also influenced by the Romantic idea of memory as something from which there is no escape, something like the hydra-head that Mickiewicz imagined in the sestet of one of his *Sonetny krymskie* [Crimean Sonnets], “Cisza morska” [Calm at Sea]:

O sea! Amidst your carefree living creatures  
The polyp on the sea bed sleeps when skies are clouded,  
But when all's calm its long arms flail out thrashing

O thought! Deep down in you is memories' hydra,  
That sleeps amid ill fates and bitter storm;  
But when the heart's at peace, sinks into it its teeth.<sup>7</sup>

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7 Translator's note: I have not found an entirely satisfactory translation of this sonnet. For comparison with mine, given in the body of the text, here is Anita Jones Debska's version, entitled “The Silence of the Sea”, which attempts to preserve the rhyme scheme of the original poem:

o sea! Among the creatures on your floor  
A polyp sleeps when clouds blot out the sky,  
But in calm weather puts out groping paws.

The autobiographical nature of the literature that emerges from this circle of writers is usually hidden, deeply submerged in the matter of the plot and in the background to the presented world. It is a mythologised, phantasmal, transformed kind of autobiographical writing. Indeed, one might doubt whether there is any point at all in considering prose on the Borderland theme from the autobiographical angle, precisely because in this regard it is not exhibitionist or egocentric; there is generally nothing overtly or provocatively autobiographical about it. However, as time passed, an autobiographical element became more and more noticeable, until finally in the 1980s and 1990s, with the appearance of a younger generation of writers, there was an explosion of writing on the Borderland theme, both in the literature of personal document and in fiction. The younger authors imparted a new character to this writing, since for most of them the Borderlands had become no more than a family myth; they belonged to the category of the autobiographical place that is only imagined, rather than to the realm of direct, personal experience. Also at this time, novels and recollections of the Borderlands written in emigration began to be available within Poland. Earlier, such writing had been subject to exceptionally severe censorship.

In some post-war Polish prose, the past is felt as a presence like a kind of phantom or werewolf, a spectre that comes like a nightmare, recalling faces and voices of the dead and bringing visions of burnt-out houses and felled trees. In other cases it is the opposite: reminiscence is salvific and therapeutic; it offers an escape into the garden of childhood, a rescue from the intolerable concrete and plastic world of the present. Memory, then, could be either a curse or a blessing. There were writers, such as Tadeusz Konwicki, to whom it revealed both its faces: one idyllic, the other spectral and haunted. Sometimes it would hold its tongue for years, leading a concealed life deep below the surface of the present, in a new place or time in which a triumphant socialist realism (“so realism”, as it was known), was the order of the day. These were the conditions under which Konwicki wrote *Przy budowie* [On a Building Site], and Strykowski *Bieg do Fragalà* [A Race to Fragalà]. Several years would have to pass, and something would have to change in the world and in society, before the first of these authors would be able to write *Sennik współczesny* [A Dreambook for Our Time] and the second *Austeria* [The Inn].

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O thought! deep memories like a hydra cower,  
That sleeps through storm and harsh calamity,  
But when the heart is still digs in its claws.

(*Crimean Sonnets*, trans. Anita Jones Debska  
[Attic Angel Press, Kujawsko-Pomorska Biblioteka Cyfrowa].)

However, it was not only the dictates of socialist realism that were responsible for the prevailing silence concerning the past. Even when those dictates ceased to be binding, many writers, for a variety of reasons, continued to maintain this silence. At the beginning of his *Pamiętnik powstania warszawskiego* (*Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising*), Białoszewski recalls how he sought for years to find a language capable of uttering the experience of this time. Although the war did not drive him away from the place where he was born, his life nevertheless involved a peculiar kind of adventure with place, one that, despite its differences, bore analogies to those of the Borderland writers. Although his city did not move on the map, in the sense that it remained within Poland, its face was so thoroughly ground into the dust that in the years that followed World War II, he, like other writers concerned with Warsaw, found it necessary to re-root himself in the same place through his poems and prose, returning again to the streets and suburbs he had known and going into homes in new districts, living among the people who had streamed into the city from all directions, transforming its life and character.

For those who not only lived through a cataclysm that turned all to rubble and ash, but who, after being forced to move west, finally found themselves among the ruins and ash of *another* city from their own, writing required a double effort. It became a matter of building a completely new world from the beginning; and sometimes after a few years the new roots would turn out to be only superficial or partial. The case of Konwicki seems to have been something like this. Although in his writing he could never leave behind the fenlands and valleys of the Vilnius countryside, he nevertheless wrote of Warsaw in a way that Białoszewski might well envy. In *A Dreambook for Our Time*, *Wniebowstąpienie* [Ascension] and other, later catastrophic visions, life in Poland under Gomułka and Gierek found a penetrating observer who spoke from the very heart of that world.

Towards the end of the nineteen-fifties, Róża Ostrowska, who was born in the Vilnius area but came to live in Gdańsk after the war, wrote a novel, *Wyspa* [The Island], which proved to be a no less successful exercise than Konwicki's in putting down roots in what for her was a new region: Kashubia, with its culture, language and customs. The love story of the novel is played out amid scenery recreated with such feeling for local colour that the island, instead of being merely the title of the novel, becomes its hero. The landscape of the lake and the fishing village, the old cottage and the furniture inside it, the view from the window and the little garden round the house, but above all the people, the events that form their lives, their way of thinking, their speech – all these fill the world of the novel with concrete details that are almost tangible. The story of the novel's fictional actress, Monika, is based in various ways on real experiences drawn

from the circles in which the writer moved; Ostrowska shared her time between the working year in the theatre in Gdańsk and holidays in the Kashubian village of Wdzydze. In the account in the novel of the production of *Kłamstwo* [The Lie], on which the director Jakub is working, there is a recognisable allusion to the vicissitudes involved in the attempt to stage Roman Brandstaetter's *Milczenie* [Silence] in Gdańsk's "Wybrzeże" Theatre during the time of the October thaw following the death of Stalin in 1956. In the subject-matter of Ostrowska's writing, it was her present life that triumphed. The rare allusions in *Wyspa* to her pre-war and wartime youth in an immeasurably distant town in the hills, and the fleeting thought of how the slopes, lakes and woodland of Kashubia recall another landscape, loved and lost for ever, could be treated here as tiny background details. Yet when Ostrowska's next book, *Mój czas osobny* [My Separate Time], was published posthumously in 1977, these details proved to be not background, but a code for the initiated, indicating that the distant town among the hills was Vilnius and the landscape that was like Kashubia was the Vilnius countryside, an autobiographical remembered place. To read what Ostrowska wrote as she worked at the end of her life on a new novel is to be convinced that these few reminiscences were actually like those wisps of smoke breaking out from under the turf that Żakiewicz described.

In *Mój czas osobny*, an unfinished novel about Kashubia's Wygoda and Lithuania's Wołczynki, the flame of memory flared up in all its glory. Seen from the perspective of this last work, the short story called "Itka Fejgus" which was Ostrowska's literary debut takes on new meaning. In the light of her final work, it is clear that this piece, published in a volume of seventeen stories awarded prizes in a writing competition organised by Polish Radio just after the war, was already a "wisp of smoke" from the ceaselessly burning fires of memory.

Of course the first-person form of this story and its focus on childhood memories could be perceived as simply literary devices, equally appropriate to a purely fictional plot. However, when "Itka Fejgus" is read in the light of *Mój czas osobny*, the small hints scattered through the text link the account of the friendship with Itka unambiguously with the autobiographical space of Ostrowska's writing. The details of landscape seem not to be very precise, but they are sufficient to enable us to locate the little Jewish town where Itka has her shop as somewhere in the vicinity of Wołczynki in the area around Vilnius, which Ostrowska described exactly almost thirty years later. The moment in time is equally important. The very first sentences of the story open the perspective of a past that is irrevocably closed, and yet will not let itself be forgotten. This elegiac note reverberates later in the background, muted, without ostentation, only to make its dark echo heard more clearly in the final sentences, in a tone that was then still inaudible to the

childish heroine, but is now heard unmistakably by the narrator as she looks back: the presentiment of the Holocaust reaching out to engulf Itka, her children and her grandchildren. The concluding sentences convey that same aura, so many times described, of the last days of the last pre-war summer, “almost incomprehensible in its untroubled sunshine, in its days saturated to the core with a golden and intense silence”,<sup>8</sup> that appears in both Ostrowska’s *Mój czas osobny* and in Żakiewicz’s *Ród Abaczów*. That goldenness and silence, we may suppose, were simply the weather of the last days of childhood for a certain group of people, in a certain epoch and a certain country that had been newly born after a hundred years of captivity, only to be propelled again after a short twenty years of independence into the abyss of war.

On the other side of September 1939, time belonged to another order of measurement. The war was not to be one of Ostrowska’s subjects. The second time frame of her prose is contemporaneity, more or less coinciding with the years in which *Mój czas osobny* was written; and the novel’s construction does justice to both the pre-war and the contemporary frames. By the time of writing it, Ostrowska’s new roots had become a fact; the new world had become known and familiar; it had become by now really her own, far more than was the case when she wrote *Wyspa*. The plane of the past is introduced with the help of the time-honoured device of the re-discovered manuscript, and it might seem that this in itself would diminish the chances of past time in competition with the present, suggesting that what is past has become no more than words: recollections, literature, fiction. And yet it is not quite like that. Evidently this bracketing, this use of quotation marks, is necessary because the world that is contained in the pages of the rediscovered manuscript is still dangerously alive; Ostrowska seems to feel it as something against which one needs to protect oneself, something to be somehow disarmed and weakened. A sense of humour turns out to be of first importance in this; grandiloquence and sentimentalism cannot be allowed to rule the day. Thus the manuscript is found in a privy, a wooden lakeside privy in a village named Wygoda. It is worth noting that this word, which means “comfort” or “convenience” in Polish, really is the name of a village in Kashubia. Gentle irony and self-irony reverberate constantly in the way that the first-person narrator tells the story – in her declaration, for example, that this was not the first literary discovery to be made in the privy in Wygoda; Mickiewicz’s epic *Pan Tadeusz* was once found there, too! This playful tone saves the contemporary

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8 R. Ostrowska, “Itka Fejgus”, in *17 opowiadań* (Radiowy Instytut Wydawniczy [no place of publication supplied], 1948), 23.



plane of the novel from excessive bombast. However, the heroine really does interpret the discovered pages with a passion and a sense of losing herself to them that call to mind only one situation: Sienkiewicz's story "Latarnik" ["The Lighthouse Keeper of Aspinwall"]. Ostrowska plays her game in masterly style, keeping to a fine line between maximum emotional tension and a humour that relieves everything. A touch of earthiness and an atmosphere of the most straightforward and authentic simplicity allow her to avoid the danger of falling into melodrama while at the same time maintaining that deeply moving tone of nostalgia, of heartfelt yearning that nothing can appease, that despairing and passionate feeling that accompanies the heroine in the scenes when she reads the manuscript. The comparison with *Pan Tadeusz*, which would certainly be pretentious if it were not so facetious, can later be employed as conscious auto-stylisation: Mea of Wolczyński, playing in the garden with peasant children, is mockingly compared by Agromow to Zosia in Soplicowo.

Neither the disaster that hung over the world of Wolczyński in September 1939, nor that other, less dramatic, but equally inexorable fate that seemed to threaten the crumbling old cottage in Wygoda, really overshadows the presented world. It still contains within itself sufficient brightness and strength to be a source of comfort. The mood of consolation decidedly outweighs the catastrophic, but the idyllic character is kept from becoming insipid by the discreet humour. Memory puts on a mask of melancholy; it does not show its vampire face, though one can guess at that hidden presence from the disquiet that the manuscript arouses in the narrator. It both tempts her and inspires fear in her from the moment that she reads its first sentence about the path planted with *Nicotiana*, which some call tobacco. Though the path belongs to a world of more than thirty years before, often it seems more real than anything that exists within reach of hand or eye in the present. Far more real, thanks to the power of memory and imagination.

It was imagination and memory more than anything else that nourished Borderland literature. Among the most widely known achievements of this literature, which include Mickiewicz's seminal masterpiece, there are many other depictions of Lithuania, painted in that same peculiar perspective unknown to any theory of art: that is to say, the perspective of loss. Both Wańkiewicz's *Szczeniące lata* [The Puppy Years], which drew on the gentry tradition of storytelling, and Miłosz's *The Issa Valley*, with its combination of elements of the psychological novel with philosophical reflection, and with its love of the particular, so characteristic of the novel of manners, take this perspective. Similarly, in the novels and films of Konwicki, whenever an image of the valley of his childhood appears, it is shown in this perspective of loss. The image of a life's beginning amid the scenery of the Valley recurs obsessively, and the use of the capital letter

endows this place with mythological significance that transcends any individual experience. At the same time, however, thanks to the recurrence of certain topographical details, it refers the reader to a particular space in a particular historical time. Later the sequence of events develops in such a way as to illustrate the dramatically convoluted course of the lives of the war generation.

### **A Hint of the Grotesque and the Invasion of History**

This same perspective of loss defines Żakiewicz's *Ród Abaczów*. In the plot of this novel, however, the curse weighing on the family like an ancient *fatum* is a thread that greatly attenuates the Arcadian atmosphere of the land of childhood. We already know from Miłosz's novel, discussed in the previous chapter, that in the Issa Valley the demons work hard at the education of the boy Tomasz. Żakiewicz mythologises the childhood of his hero, in order to lead him through the experiences of love and death, of evil, sin and destiny; but counterpointing this mythical tale is the novel's lightly ironic and humorous tone. In his down-to-earth style, and in the coarse bluntness of some of the novel's descriptions and vocabulary, the author reveals a penchant for the gently grotesque and the comically fantastic. The poetic cadences of his rhythmic prose sometimes lean towards self-parody, while the style of the first-person narration passes from the lyrical to the self-ironic. The tones of Gogol may perhaps be heard in this narrator's manner of speaking, in his love of the varied keys of oral narration, his sense of humour and taste for grotesquely fantastic imagery.

While this way of speaking about the world is only hinted at in *Ród Abaczów*, in the author's later work it becomes the dominant, as for example in the novel *To sen tylko, Danielu...* [It's Only a Dream, Daniel].<sup>9</sup> The autobiographical background to this novel is the period of Żakiewicz's boyhood spent in Łódź, soon after he left the Borderlands. Here, also, another context of great importance to his way of seeing the world becomes clearly visible: the oneiric. In Żakiewicz's writing, the world of dream shimmers with almost every possible shade of colour. Undoubtedly the palest of them is that of nightmare, for true dread remains outside the boundaries of the world presented here. Fear in Żakiewicz never has the choking intensity that characterises surrealist images of cruelty. But other surrealist elements remain: the liberation from the laws of matter and time; the mixture of lyricism with physiological earthiness of detail; the pleasure in overturning proportions; the perversity and unflinching sense of the ridiculous. To

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9 Z. Żakiewicz, *To sen tylko, Danielu...* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1973).

a considerable degree this is linked with the situating of the presented world on the time plane of childhood and boyhood, within a perspective of Gombrowicz-like immaturity; the hero is in a state of being still unformed, unshaped.

The ways of presenting childhood described above came to fullest expression in *Wilcze łąki*. The childhood of Ryś Wołk-Wołczacki complements and simultaneously re-interprets the childhood of little Żubrowicz in *Ród Abaczków*: complements it, because the action takes place mainly in the parents' rather than the grandparents' home, as in the earlier volume of the family saga; but reinterprets it, because here the lyrical style and the mythical pattern of a family curse give way to fantasy, the grotesque and the coarse ribaldry of the amusing anecdote. *Wilcze łąki* recalls other contexts that earlier were less important for Żakiewicz's work or that no one thought of connecting with it at all. Undoubtedly the most important thing here is the way the figure of the narrator is shaped. Perhaps in all Polish prose presenting the world from the point of view of a child narrator, there had been nothing since Bruno Schulz's *Sklepy cynamonowe*<sup>10</sup> to rival this text in terms of originality and boldness, simultaneous freshness and sharpness, grace and humour.

Literature long ago discovered the cruelty and hideousness of the adult world; but it is indeed worth pondering how eager and ready we are to forget the various bitternesses of the world of childhood, its dark, or at least embarrassing, sides. To a certain extent these are preserved in children's folklore, in their various counting rhymes, nicknames, curses, jokes, songs and drawings; but such folklore in its authentic form is probably little known. Evidently children keep it quite well hidden, and as they grow up, they forget who they once were. Portraits of children in Polish literature form a not particularly varied gallery: the miracle child, the child poet, the suffering child. In adult literature, it is somehow easier to find examples like that of the poet Orcio in Zygmunt Krasiński's *Nie-boska komedia* [*The Undivine Comedy*], the angelic orphans of Jan Lenartowicz's poems, the wasted musical genius of Henryk Sienkiewicz's novella *Janko Muzykant* [Little Johnny Musician] or the preternaturally intelligent Litka of his novel *Bez dogmatu* [Without Dogma], than it is to find a portrait of a child as deliciously realistic as that of Colas Breug, the good soldier Svejik or *Till Eulenspiegel*. It is easier to find an injured child than a spoiled, cunning or evil one like the one described by Sartre in his autobiography, or like those

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10 Translator's note: The literal meaning of the Polish title is "The Cinnamon Shops". In Celina Wieniawska's translation the book is named *The Street of Crocodiles* (1963), after one of the stories in the collection.

invented by William Golding in *Lord of the Flies* or by Günter Grass in *The Tin Drum*. In Polish postwar prose, Andrzej Kijowski's novel *Dziecko przez ptaka przyniesione* [The Child the Bird Brought], discussed in the previous chapter, was an undoubted breakthrough in its irony and perception of the evil and deceit of which the child is capable.

Thus both on the thematic plane and on that of the genre of autobiographical prose devoted to childhood, *Wilcze łąki* occupies a rather exceptional place. When one looks to literary tradition for something to compare with this book, it is difficult to point to anything other than Schulz's tales of the half-remembered, half-dreamed adventures of little Józef. The grotesque and the fantastic, seen by an imagination that is both childlike and poetic; the sensitivity to sensual detail; the boldness in exposing ugliness and the ridiculous; the sense of humour that softens the asperity; and of course the peculiar perspective of mythologised autobiography – these are the things that link the otherwise distant worlds of Schulz's prose and of *Wilcze łąki*. Some aspects of Żakiewicz's narrative, however, are entirely foreign to Schulz: the echoes of the Sarmatian gentry storytelling tradition, the element of the facetious and the descriptions of the customs of daily life. The ribald character of Wołk-Wołczacki's tales is probably closest to the children's folklore that we have mentioned, in its regional version from the Oszmiana district of Lithuania. The autobiographical aspect, because of the refusal of any identity of name between the author and the hero, a refusal which is possible within the novel convention but not in a memoir, takes on an air of freely ranging fantasy.

In relation to his autobiographical novels of childhood, Żakiewicz's *Dziennik intymny mego N. N.* conveys an impression of being written by a different person. Probably this impression is not far from the truth, and not only because the work is not essentially an autobiographical novel but a diary, though not without fictional elements. The difference from the novels seems to be suggested by a comparison of the books' covers, where in three cases, photographs of the author appear. The dustjacket of the first edition of *Ród Abaczów* displayed a photograph of a thin boy with a triangular, fox-like face. The photograph of the author of *To sen tylko, Danielu...* presents a young man with an abundant head of shaggy hair. From the cover of *Wilcze łąki* a balding, elderly gentleman looks out at us. His large ear is discreetly hidden in shadow, reminding us of young Rysio Wołczacki's sad remark that in infancy his ears spread out like pancakes and his mother did not bother to ensure that they did not stick out. In contrast to all of these, there is no photograph on the cover of *Dziennik intymny mego N. N.*; Z. Ż., who wrote the book, is just as bodiless and elusive as his mysterious double, N. N. Though these observations concerning the photographs on the

covers of a few of Żakiewicz's books, mentioned in the chronological order of their emergence, are not very serious, they nevertheless help to illustrate to a certain degree the differences between two ways of engaging with autobiography in his work. The novels so far discussed, in which the recollections, phantoms and dreams of childhood permeate the presented world, are very clearly different from the diary that covers the present of a mature writer and is a form of spiritual autobiography.

Żakiewicz returned once more, a third time, to the Borderland world of his childhood. Twelve years after completing *Wilcze łąki*, on 15th May, 1992, he wrote the last sentences of the novel that at first was to have been called *Wilcze jary* [Wolf Canyons], but whose title in the end was an adaptation from Mickiewicz: *Wilio, w głębokościach morza* [O Wilia, in the Depths of the Sea]. Along with *Ród Abaczów*, these books cover the whole of the remembered time of childhood: from its earliest period, when the hero is a small boy only a few years old, and we can recognise in the background of the presented world the everyday objects of pre-war Poland (*Wilcze łąki*); through later childhood, when the boy's erotic curiosity begins to awake, and in the adult world everything is destroyed by the outbreak of war (*Ród Abaczów*); to adolescence during the occupation, school years in what was already Soviet Belarus and the "repatriation" journey by train to Poland (*Wilio, w głębokościach morza*).<sup>11</sup> This was what things looked like on the biographical plane that forms the subtext of the presented world. As can be seen, the order in which Żakiewicz told the story is not the same as the order in which the events occurred. *Ród Abaczów*, the earliest novel to be written, deals with the middle time period, yet in its generic and stylistic form it occupies a quite separate place from the others. The two remaining parts, devoted to the earliest and the latest years, are so closely linked to each other artistically that they might seem to be two separate volumes of one whole. It is important to pause a moment on this difference between *Ród Abaczów* and the two works written later, because it allows us to perceive something more general: namely, how the current of the Borderland theme altered its course over the decades in which Żakiewicz was writing.

*Ród Abaczów*, written at the end of the nineteen sixties, remains one of the loveliest achievements of the mythologising approach to the Borderland theme, an approach which offered a wide range of possibilities, from visions of a lost paradise to stylisation in a catastrophic vein. Somewhere between these two

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11 *Ród Abaczów* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1968); *Wilcze łąki* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1982); *Wilio, w głębokościach morza* (Kraków: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1993).

poles, a place could be found not only for Miłosz's *The Issa Valley*, but also for Konwicki's novels, for Włodzimierz Odojewski's Podolian cycle, for the novels of Józef Mackiewicz, for the tales of Andrzej Stojowski, for a whole series of Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz's writings, for Stanisław Vincenz's epic, devoted to the life of the Huculs, the highland people of the Carpathian Mountains on the Ukrainian-Rumanian border, who created their own highly original culture, as well as for many, many other pieces.

Żakiewicz's mythologising devices in *Ród Abaczów* are no mere external ornament. They plumb the very foundations of the novel's world. This story of how a clan was wiped out, though it comes to a close with the outbreak of World War II in the autumn of 1939, is only very loosely linked with history. Instead, the background to the plot is the Oedipus myth, the names of whose heroes are directly recalled. It turns out that the great-grandfather of old Abacz once committed a sin like that of the son of Laius, who fathered a child by his own mother Jocasta. From that time on, the curse of incestuous love hangs over every generation of the house of Abacz. The hero and narrator of the novel is the last heir of the house, but an heir through his mother, with the surname Żubrowicz. In the previous generation all the other descendants of Abacz have died without issue, although there were six of them, if an illegitimate son is included. Critics have perceived similarities in the threads of this family drama to William Faulkner's work, and certainly the tensions among the characters may remind the reader of the novel *Absalom, Absalom*.

In Żakiewicz's work, however, the quest for the truth behind the terrible secret of the House of Abacz is carried out in different surroundings and circumstances than in Faulkner. It is presented through the eyes of a child, who is unaware of many things; and its background is the idyllic life of a country manor house in a place that the reader must surely recognise as the land of Mickiewicz's Soplicowo, since the larder is piled high with Lithuanian sausage, and the neighbours have surnames like Jundziłł or Dziedziejko and go riding to Buturyszki. However, no geographical name is mentioned in the novel that would enable us to define its spatial setting any more precisely than this. The final disaster is also told in such a way that without external knowledge of the autobiographical references it would be difficult to decide whether it alludes to World War I, the events of the Russian Revolution, or the autumn of 1939.<sup>12</sup>

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12 Extensive information on the autobiographical subtext of Żakiewicz's prose can be found in an interview with the author conducted by Henryka Dobosz, "Wszystkie rzeki wpadają do morza... Ze Zbigniewem Żakiewiczem rozmawia Henryka Dobosz", *Tytuł* 1993. 4.

Żakiewicz stylises *Ród Abaczów* in such a way as to incorporate the scale of experience of an early teenage boy while simultaneously allowing the spirit of the tale to speak through him, by this means also revealing the allusion to both the original myth of Oedipus and to its Freudian interpretation, which is a clear point of reference for the narrator-hero's relations with his mother. The mythical, ballad-like harmony of the novel's atmosphere is also slightly disturbed by an unexpected note: the child-hero is not an innocent being. He has already felt the first stirrings of erotic unease; his curiosity is drawn by evil and he senses the temptation to perversity and corruption. This touch of irony might not be audible, however, if it were not for the two later books. It is the gravity of a tale of love and death which is the dominant in *Ród Abaczów*, so that the irony is still muted; the novel's proper perspective is indicated from the very beginning by an epigraph taken from the *Song of Songs*.

In both later books the mythical perspective is also present, but it comes from a different source and is different in character. It does not draw directly on universal references or sources common to all European cultures, such as Greek myth and the Bible. In *Wilcze łąki* and *Wilio, w głębokościach morza*, Żakiewicz constructs his own private mythology, and when he does refer to collective mythology, it is by turning to local rather than universal sources, drawing on the legends, folk tales and yarns of the region, which can now, in relation to these two novels, be precisely located on a map. Żakiewicz's remembered autobiographical places refer to towns and villages that can be found within the territory of today's Belarus, such as Mołodeczno, Oszmiana, Smorgonie, Łosk or Krewe, Wolkowysk and Lida. Both novels also have an epigraph, but it is taken from Mickiewicz rather than from the Bible, as was the case with *Ród Abaczów*. The epigraph to *Wilio, w głębokościach morza*, which explains the novel's title, is particularly important. It consists of two stanzas of the Song from *Konrad Wallenrod* which speak of the river Wilija (Wilia), the largest tributary of the Niemen:

The Wilija scorns her valleys and flowers  
 For her heart is set on Niemen, her lover;  
 The Lithuanian maid seeks other strands,  
 For she loves a youth from a distant land.

The Niemen's arms will seize his love,  
 O'er rocks and wilderness will they rove;  
 To his wintry breast his love clasps he,  
 And together they die in the depths of the sea.<sup>13</sup>

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13 Translation adapted by Jean Ward from "Konrad Wallenrod" and other Writings of Adam Mickiewicz, translated from the Polish by Jewell Parish, Dorothea Prall Radin,

In his manner of alluding to this epigraph in the title of his novel, Żakiewicz made a small but highly significant change to his original: he shortened it and used the vocative instead of the nominative case. In this way a sentence that spoke *about* the river Wilia was reshaped as an invocation addressed *to* her. Furthermore, by writing “Wilio” in his title, Żakiewicz also echoed Mickiewicz’s address to his homeland, “Litwo” [Lithuania!], in the first line of his epic masterpiece *Pan Tadeusz*.

Both in *Wilcze łąki* and in *Wilio*... we once more find a first-person narrative presented from the point of view of a child, but Ryś Wołk-Wołczacki, the hero of the two later novels, differs from young Żubrowicz in the same way as the swift, predatory wolf differs from the herbivorous, majestic bison, though both are creatures of the wilderness. In both of the later novels, the narration keeps with incomparably more consistency as close as possible to the viewpoint first of a five-year-old, and then of a twelve-year-old. Instead of lyricism, here we find stylisation reminding us of the folk-tale-grotesque imagination of a child, his fascination with the material shapes of his surroundings, the mysteries of his own body and its physiological phenomena, as well as with dream images and fairy-tale figures. Drastic or crude details are perceived from a naïvely natural point of view; the coarse language is used in a humorous and disarming way. Love does not appear in the guise of destructive passion or perversion. It is presented either in a tone of ribald facetiousness or as an alluring mystery that is full of unease, but has more in it of promise than of threat.

The tragic tone of *Ród Abaczów* remains entirely within the overall frame of myth and existential reflection; whereas both of Żakiewicz’s later books have clearly been invaded by history. The fact that in *Wilcze łąki* this is on a limited scale is surely the consequence of the decision to make the world of this novel fit within the horizons of a five-year-old. There was enough of history, however, for the realities of life among people of many nations and religions to appear in the background, as in the passage below:

I saw a mosque in Daubuciszki, where the Tartars keep their God. That would make the fourth Lord God – after the Catholic, Uniate and Orthodox ones. But then there are also the Jews in Mołojcewo swaying in their synagogue. God is one, though in the Most Holy Trinity – they taught me that a long time ago. – But could he be One in Five? (92)

Despite the idyllic perspective of *Wilcze łąki*, growing national and social conflicts are not excluded from the picture. The consciousness of the child narrator is



penetrated on the one hand by the knowledge that the Roman Catholic parish priest quietly supported the burning down of an Orthodox church, and on the other by the awareness that the student who arrived from Warsaw is opposed to anti-semitic excesses and to the polonisation of Belarussians. And besides the internal conflicts, almost everyone is afraid of the Bolsheviks. History intertwines here with elements of regional mythology; and in the novel's finale, the reader is carried back to the private family mythology, now unexpectedly involving a dim and distant perspective of annihilation. Death enters the home of Ryś Wołczacki, looking grotesque at first, for it is a figure in the nativity play that is taking place, as it happens to be Christmas time. Soon, however, it turns out that Mańka the maid is really dying and a feeling of dread begins to sound in the twice repeated reminder of the Last Judgment. This is what the suddenly frozen world, where up to now the days have passed in happy and careless childhood, is to await.

The presence of history is most obvious in the third and last written of Żakiewicz's autobiographical novels. Here, the daily realities of life during World War II are mentioned on almost every page. It is the greater maturity of the narrator-hero which makes it possible to take in this wider horizon. In spite of the changes to the novel's place names and surnames, we can recognise both the family members – the grandfather and his brother-in-law, as well as the hero's mother – and the manor house described earlier, in *Ród Abaczów*. Some situations are also analogical: the grandson's arrival at the manor house, the visit to the grandfather's illegitimate son, the pig-killing, the raid by the peasants and the plundering of the manor house in autumn 1939. But instead of the exalted (lyrical or tragic) tone used by the writer in *Ród Abaczów*, here the tone is grotesquely comic and down-to-earth. Sometimes one of the background figures is allowed a voice, with a consequent colloquial stylising of the narration. Instead of hieratic Greek myth and a brooding *fatum*, we have a tale of a country girl seduced by her master. She recalls what happened to her calmly, because she thinks it is inscribed in age-old custom, and her attitude disappoints the young lord who had expected to hear a dramatic story of betrayed passion.

And yet Żakiewicz's last book seems to have a livelier rhythm and a higher temperature than the first, in which there is so much metaphorical language and other elements of poetic style. In *Ród Abaczów*, even the scene of butchering the pig after its killing is as beautiful as the chiaroscuro paintings of the Flemish masters, full of a mysterious harmony of colours and radiance. The novel *Wilio, w głębokościach morza* turns away from ostentatious aestheticisation and from the dangerous tendency to lofty grandiloquence which might have emerged if the stylisation of *Ród Abaczów* had been taken a step further. But it does not abandon either metaphorical richness in its descriptions or lyricism in small

moments of exaltation. It also introduces a fantastic element of dream visions and childish daydreams, already known from *Wilcze łąki*, as well as a stylisation based on vigorous spoken language, full of colloquial and coarse expressions, densely packed with local phrases, proverbs, sayings, whole anecdotes and the texts of songs taken from Belarussian folklore and regional Borderland Polish.

All these different tones, the lyrical, the grotesque and the ludicrous, are concentrated into one whole which reveals daily life in a forgotten corner of the district of Oszmiana. However, this is ordinary life which has been invaded by grander history, bringing fear, suffering and death. In Żakiewicz's last novel, history is now clearly and painfully present; the novel's heroes are in the grip of its pincers. We hear of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, of deportation to Siberia, then of the invasion of the Germans and the extermination of the Jews. We hear, too, of the death of the Tartar mullah, tortured in front of his mosque by Soviet partisans, and of the death by starvation of Russian prisoners-of-war in a German camp. Then there is the return of Soviet power and the illusions of the Belarussian teacher who imagined – until the NKVD<sup>14</sup> came for him – that the moment of liberation for his country and language had arrived. Finally, the long struggle to obtain repatriation papers to Poland is described, and the terrifying inspection at the border when guards came in search of those who had hidden in the train because they had not managed to obtain the required documents.

Until 1989, in the literature written within Poland, daily life in the Borderlands in the war years, and the post-war drama of repatriation, were a so-called “blank spot”. The crimes committed by the NKVD during the war, and Soviet rule in Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine, were taboo subjects. However, it seems that there were other factors at work, in addition to political ones, in this silence on forbidden matters. The pressure of an ingrained way of writing was very strong, both in literature of personal document and in the autobiographical novel, stretched between the poles of Arcadia and the Apocalypse. Arcadia could be accommodated only in images of life before the war. Apocalyptic images of the destruction of the Borderland world were so strong in the collective memory that they could be brought to mind with only one short stroke of the pen. The force of annihilation can be seen most dramatically when after the Arcadian world has been trampled to pieces, the curtain falls. Besides this, the Arcadian myth was first of all simply necessary, just as Sienkiewicz's programme of “sustaining hearts” had been necessary.<sup>15</sup> Even if the memory of disaster accompanied it, if it

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14 The all-powerful and universally feared Soviet secret police, later renamed KGB.

15 Henryk Sienkiewicz's historical novels, written in the 1870's and 1880's, when Poland was still partitioned, presented the glorious aspects of the nation's past. The writer's aim

was remembered that it was a tale of paradise lost, then it was still a tale of paradise. Whereas the daily life which continues after disaster does not easily lend itself to the alternative of idyll or tragedy; it is more suited to that strange mixture of these two categories that leads to the grotesque. Unless, of course, like Józef Mackiewicz, writing in emigration, one simply prefers a factual presentation by a narrator who appreciates the documentary value of the tale, even if it is one that reveals the total ruthlessness of history. What was Żakiewicz's response to the situation? Several different factors all played a part here.

First of all, while he was working on the novel *Wilio, w głębokościach morza*, the restrictions censoring free speech about the Borderlands during and immediately after the war began to disappear. Secondly, the mythical-Arcadian stylisation played a role that was at least partly consolatory. Then there was the fact that the prose of the decade preceding the novel's publication decidedly encouraged free expression and a loosening of the literary norms of language. Thanks to Miron Białoszewski, areas of language that had previously been little valued in literature, such as living speech, children's language and colloquial language, came into their own. Many customary taboos defining what was decent and what not, also underwent fundamental changes. And finally, the writer now had behind him the experience of *Wilcze łąki*, in which, while still maintaining the tone of a pastoral idyll, he had successfully introduced the grotesque, and even ensured its dominance over the lyrical element. However, he did not reduce this formula to the plane of mere jocularity. The use of childish and colloquial language in both the last novels is not mere superficial stylisation; it is incorporated into the deeper scheme. Through the fantasising of the child, metaphysical questions concerning evil and death are posed. Belarussian folklore is not simply an element of local colour; instead, it more than once expresses the profound folk wisdom that the Romantics had already discovered in it.

## **An Attempt At Epic Distance: Towards a Deconstruction of the Myth**

Józef Mackiewicz, whom we have mentioned above, is one of the most important writers in the field of literature on the Borderland theme, and undoubtedly has his own particular and unique place within it. However, I shall not deal with

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was to "sustain hearts" at a time when Poland was deprived of independent political existence and literature provided the most important means of maintaining collective identity.

his work here, since his writing is not of an autobiographical character. He saw himself as part of the tradition of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and knew the history, culture and landscape of the Vilnius area from personal experience, but he wrote novels with fictional plots in which no autobiographical echoes can be heard. His poetics belong within the tradition of realist prose that is close to documentary. I mention him here, however, because we could place another writer beside him in terms of style: Jan Józef Szczepański, who touched on the borderland theme in an autobiographical perspective only once and for a very short time, but in a manner that can be described neither as idyllic, nor as tragic, nor as grotesque. His short autobiographical story “Biwaki” [Camping] from the volume *Rafa* [The Reef] maintains a matter-of-fact, reporter-like tone, preserving a calm distance from the situation presented. Szczepański describes his visit, during one of his travels, to the country manor of the Śniadecki family in Jaszuny near Vilnius.<sup>16</sup> The situation is a model one: a journey to the seat of his forebears. The writer is a relative of the Śniadecki family, whose members have included two outstanding nineteenth-century professors of the universities of Vilnius and Kraków, who did great service to Polish science and learning; and though it is a rather distant connection, it is sufficient to justify Szczepański's boasting of it. He mentions a clear memory from his childhood of a photograph of the manor house in Jaszuny. It stood on the table in his grandmother's room, along with some mementoes of Ludwika Śniadecka, who was known to have been Juliusz Słowacki's youthful love. He also remembers his grandmother's stories of times when she stayed at the manor house.

A similar situation forms one of the *leitmotifs* of the imagination of writers exiled in childhood from the Borderland paradise. The journey home, the happy return there, has countless variations in Wańkiewicz's *Szczenięce lata* as well as in Żakiewicz's and Konwicki's writings. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this is a model which refers us to the scene of Tadeusz's welcome to the manor house in Soplicowo in Mickiewicz's epic poem *Pan Tadeusz*. In the film *Lawa* [Lava], Konwicki gave a tragic turn to this kind of homecoming. One of his key images is a reshaping of the motif, not, however, as it is found in *Pan Tadeusz*, but as it appears in Part IV of Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve*, whose principal character, Gustaw, recalls his journey home after his mother's death. Konwicki, as the film's director, had Gustaw recite the lines from Mickiewicz's play while standing under the white porch columns of a manor house that was crumbling into ruin.

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16 J. J. Szczepański, “Biwaki”, *Rafa* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1974).

In “Biwaki”, Szczepański’s thinking runs on a different track. He articulated the difference very clearly in his essay “Przed nieznanym trybunałem” [Before an Unknown Tribunal], where he wrote that in his youth between the two world wars, his own and his friends’ imagination was formed by the influence of Joseph Conrad, who opened up universal perspectives. Though Conrad himself was the son of a participant in the January Uprising who had been deported to Siberia, he went out into the world after his father’s death and wrote of existential problems and dilemmas common to humankind as a whole, rather than working within the horizons of Polish Romanticism.<sup>17</sup> Conrad thus pointed to other perspectives than that of embroilment in the vexed questions of nationalist messianism. Konwicky, in turn, mentions a quite different writer as the patron of his boyhood years: Żeromski, in whose imagination the trauma of the failed January Uprising which had affected the previous generation was still very much alive. In turn, the repressions following this Uprising, considerably harsher than had been the case with the November Uprising, were the lot of Żeromski’s own generation. These two different masters of Szczepański’s and Konwicky’s youth indicate their differences of attitude in relation both to literature and to Poland.

Szczepański describes his life in the Vilnius region, at a time when it was still in Soviet hands, concisely and matter-of-factly. It was important to him to see the manor house in Jaszuny and he went to great lengths to achieve this aim. It was far from easy, yet the local people found ways to take the foreigner who had become their friend to places where from the official point of view of the authorities he had no business to be. In his story, the manor house from his grandmother’s photograph stands there as it always stood; all that is lacking is the entrance gate and the fence, and there is no trace of the flowery lawn at the front of the house. Inside are the administrative offices of a Soviet state farm: neglected floors, cheap furniture, people in ugly rubber boots and quilted working jackets. The friends who have brought the writer here show him round with embarrassment and sympathy. Szczepański notes, with a touch of friendly irony, that their behaviour is tense with caution, as if they were dealing with someone who had been severely injured, whose suffering might be worsened by any trivial movement. But he realises that he does not in the least feel what they expect of him, or what perhaps he ought to feel on seeing the sad state of the former family home. In spite of a lively sense of his link with his grandmother and her one-time

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17 J. J. Szczepański, “W służbie Wielkiego Armatora”, in his: *Przed nieznanym trybunałem* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1975). See also Szczepański: “Conrad mojego pokolenia”, *Życie Literackie* 1957. 14.

world, he feels nothing at all of tearful melancholy or rending sorrow for what is past. Though his attitude is far from indifference, it nevertheless represents a calm and courageous response to the brutality of history, which breaks the continuity of existence experienced in a peacefully passing way of life.

Szczepański, because of his approach, stands out against the background of the totality of prose on the Borderland theme, emerging as it does from direct experience and marked as it is by the trauma of loss. Writers formulated their response to this trauma in three different keys, idyllic, tragic and grotesque. In Szczepański, the link with the Borderlands appears on a rather distant plane of family tradition, in fact it is really only an element of Polish collective identity rather than a deeply personal experience. His temperament as a writer for whom intellectual discipline played an important role is closer perhaps to that of the essayist than of the novelist. Because of this, he adds a different note to the scale that can be heard in the work of the other, earlier discussed authors, and though this note is not very loud, it contributes something which complements and enriches the scale. At the same time, it opens a perspective of which no one at the time had yet thought, that of later attempts to deconstruct the myth of the Borderlands.

## 4. The Centre and the Borderland Periphery in the Prose of Writers Born after World War II

It might have been expected that the theme of the Borderlands, discussed in the previous chapter, would play itself out and be brought definitively to an end in the work of the last generations of writers who were born and brought up there (such as Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, Andrzej Kuśniewicz or Tadeusz Konwicki) or who retained at least an early childhood memory of this world (such as Zbigniew Żakiewicz, Róża Ostrowska or Aleksander Jurewicz). Some have even said that Polish “literary geography” has moved into other regions and that the new Polish poets no longer come, as they once did, from romantic Lithuania or Podolia, but from sensible and practical Wielkopolska, like Wisława Szymborska (who was born there, though she later made her home permanently in Kraków) or Stanisław Barańczak. The work of a new generation of writers who came to prominence in Gdańsk during the last decade of the twentieth century is taken to be one of the more recent proofs of the way that the centres of literary activity have moved westwards.<sup>1</sup> It looks as if this represents a permanent change, for the authors to whom I refer here have gone on writing, and have been joined by a new generation which did not enter literary life until the twenty-first century. Here, however, I deal only with the opening phases of the trend, which initiated a significant transformation of the literary landscape. At the same time I concentrate on the more or less visible autobiographical contexts. Their function in the novels and short stories discussed is not evident on the level of the plot, but they play a background role as testimonies to events, and provide elements of local colour.

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1 I am thinking here above all of the following books: P. Huelle, *Weiser Dawidek* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Morskie, 1987); *Opowiadania na czas przeprowadzki* (London: Puls, 1991); *Pierwsza miłość i inne opowiadania* (London: Puls, 1996); A. Jurewicz, *Lida* (Białystok: Wydawnictwo Versus, 1990); *Pan Bóg nie słyszy głuchych*, (Gdańsk: Marabut, 1995); S. Chwin, *Krótką historią pewnego żartu (Sceny z Europy Środkowowschodniej)* (Kraków: Oficyna Literacka, 1991); *Hanemann* (Gdańsk: Marabut, 1995); *Esther* (Gdańsk: Tytuł, 1999); W. Hryniewicz, *Tej rzeki nie przejdę* (Gdańsk: Atext, 1992); S. Esden-Tempski, *Łowca orchidei. Romans emigrancki* (Gdańsk: Polnord – Oskar, 1994); *Kundel* (Warszawa: W.A.B., 1999).

## Polish Writers Whose Home Is the City of Günter Grass

Gdańsk, the city of Günter Grass, lived to see the emergence of new Polish prose writers, nourished by the fertile soil of this northern borderland. In this coastal city with its multinational and multilingual tradition, even the individual districts have their own distinct character. Paweł Huelle, whose stories are set in Upper Wrzeszcz, and Stefan Chwin, whose focus is Oliwa, both spent their childhood in these places; it was here that they grew up and came to maturity. Their holiday Arcadia was not the Ukrainian steppe, as for Iwaszkiewicz or Włodzimierz Odojewski, and not the wilderness and Lithuanian river valleys, as for Miłosz or Konwicki, but the beaches of Gdańsk Bay or the lakes and wooded hills of Kashubia. And yet... and yet not everything had changed. If Grass was read with such attention and enthusiasm by Polish prose writers born in Gdańsk after the war, it was not only because they heard the voice of the *genius loci* speaking in his work, and not only because he was an important German writer who made Nazism look ridiculous. It was also because the post-war generation of Polish “newcomers to Gdańsk” identified the same pattern in his writing and in the course of his life as was known to them from their own most recent tradition, from the lives of their parents or slightly older friends: the pattern of exile, of banishment by war from a childhood that had been spent somewhere in the eastern reaches of the country, on a border where cultures and languages had intermingled.

One of these “older friends” is Zbigniew Żakiewicz, a post-war citizen of Gdańsk who came from Mołodeczno, whose *Ród Abaczów* and *Wilcze łąki*, discussed in the preceding chapters, were reissued under one title as *Saga wileńska* [The Vilnius Saga] and have long been part of the canon of Borderlands literature. Far less well known is the unfinished and posthumously published novel by Róża Ostrowska, *Mój czas osobny*, also mentioned in the previous chapter, of which only the heartbreakingly beautiful opening remains. It was left unfinished when the author died in 1975 – long before recollections of Vilnius became fashionable. The nostalgia which echoes audibly through it is muted by humour and by self-ironising stylisations drawing on Mickiewicz’s *Pan Tadeusz*.

Among the new prose writings that emerged during the nineteen-eighties, Paweł Huelle’s *Weiser Dawidek* [Who was David Weiser?] occupies a special place. The setting of the action in the real cityscape of Upper Wrzeszcz, Brętowo, Zaspą and other districts of Gdańsk can be traced on a town plan with topographical

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2 P. Huelle, *Who was David Weiser?*, trans. A. Lloyd-Jones (London: Bloomsbury, 1995).



precision. Yet the eponymous hero is not from here. This mysterious orphan boy comes from an unknown Jewish family, whose origins, it is suggested, are somewhere in the Borderlands. But he could just as easily be from Gdańsk, and this would not in the least interfere with the novel's air of probability, for the Jewish community in the city before the war was numerous and had been for centuries. Indeed, it left its trace in literature in the figure of Markus, the shopkeeper of Grass's novel, from whom Oskar buys his drum. But in Huelle's tale everyone knows that Weiser is not from Gdańsk, any more than the old Jewish tailor who looks after him, who came to the city only after the war. The parents of the narrator of Huelle's novel are also newcomers from the Borderlands. In the author's next book, a collection of short stories entitled *Opowiadania na czas przeprowadzki* [*Moving House and Other Stories*],<sup>3</sup> the situation is similar and its importance is even more evident, for one of the most influential figures in the life of the narrator is his grandfather, who comes from Lwów (today Lviv) and thinks highly of Galician tradition.<sup>4</sup>

Stefan Chwin's *Krótką historią pewnego żartu* [The Short History of a Certain Joke], like Huelle's tales, speaks of a childhood spent in post-war Gdańsk, though in a slightly earlier period, the nineteen-fifties. However, the "joke" of the title refers us to the quite different sphere of the adult world. For that joke is the irresponsible whim of a despot, the moustachioed *generalissimus* Stalin, whose hand traced out on the map the routes that would determine the post-war migration of peoples, decreeing that the narrator's father must leave the city he knew as Wilno, today's Vilnius. He alighted from the train in Gdańsk as if by accident – or perhaps not by accident, but in order to ensure the success of that joke of history embodied in the uniformed potentate. For this young man from Vilnius

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3 P. Huelle, *Moving House and Other Stories*, trans. A. Lloyd-Jones (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1994).

4 The name Galicia refers to the south-eastern region of the pre-partition Republic. During the time of the partitions (which included the whole of the nineteenth century) this region found itself under Austrian rule. In comparison with the other two partitioning powers, Russia and Prussia, Austria's policy was relatively liberal. Especially during the reign of the Emperor Franz Joseph, the nations that made up the Austro-Hungarian Empire enjoyed a certain autonomy and openness to Europe, with the possibility of cultural development. Lwów, along with Kraków, was Galicia's main centre and remained in close contact with other cities of the Empire such as Prague, Budapest and Vienna. This was the time when the myth of a happy Central Europe under the good Emperor Franz, the father of the nations, took shape. It was a world that disappeared, never to return, with the outbreak of World War I.

was to settle permanently in Gdańsk; it was here that he would start a family and spend the rest of his life, and here that he would live to see the birth of a son who years later would obtain an apartment on Vilnius Street – where else could it be? – where, precisely, he would record the “short history” of that “certain joke”.<sup>5</sup>

Aleksander Jurewicz's *Lida*, which is a kind of autobiographical long prose poem, tells of a boy who was brought up in a small seaside town not far from Gdańsk, but whose birthplace was in what is now Western Belarus – in the titular Lida, to be precise. He came to Poland as part of the “repatriation” after 1956 and found himself an object of mockery among his schoolmates because of his lilting accent and the Belarussian expressions that intruded into his speech.

In 1992, a short novel by Wojciech Hrynkiewicz entitled *Tej rzeki nie przejdę* [A River I Cannot Cross] was published in Gdańsk. This writer's output also includes another, unpublished novel, *Brama* [The Gate], written with a penetrating gaze that promised much, and with an outstanding feeling for contemporary spoken Polish. The daily life of a large port town (and of its suburbs), and the sudden overtaking of the ordinary by the extraordinary in the events that went on behind the gate of the striking shipyard in August 1980, is shown from the point of view of an eighteen-year-old “Svejk”, a soldier doing basic military service in the army of the People's Republic who cares little about the grand course of history, though it was at that very moment invading the city.

The novel *Tej rzeki nie przejdę* speaks of a slightly later time in Gdańsk, the beginning of the period of martial law introduced by the Communist government to suppress the protest being carried out by the Solidarity movement. Here, too, the atmosphere of ordinary life is powerfully conveyed, but on another level of language and thought. The narrator is a pre-war-style, reflective member of the intelligentsia blessed with a discreet sense of humour. After the arrest of his son following the announcement of martial law on 13 December 1981, this older man, who has been a widower for some time, struggles alone with the difficulties of daily life in the earlier nineteen-eighties. But alongside this element of the quotidian, there is another that is equally important: a past that is constantly

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5 The “short history” of the title is of course an ironic allusion to the publication of the *Short Course on the History of the All-Union Communist Party* (1938), which was the official version of the history of the Bolshevik party and presented the foundations of Stalinist doctrine. It was translated into many languages and issued in tens of millions of copies, fulfilling a role similar to that of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* in Nazi Germany. It was required reading for party members in all countries of the Eastern bloc. When the Stalinist period ended, it lost its meaning and became synonymous with propagandist deceit; no longer a “holy book”, it was reduced to an object of mockery and derision.

present, imparting a significant depth to the narrator's monologue. This is the past of the Home Army generation,<sup>6</sup> the past of a short, happy pre-war youth spent in Volhynia or Podolia, followed by the bloodily tangled events of the war, which were perhaps more complex and confused in that part of the world than anywhere else. And the autobiographical context? Listen to the sound of the writer's surname: Hryniewicz, "just h, not ch". That is the way they pronounce it in Ukraine. The hero (who is also the narrator; the novel is written in the first person) is older than his author by a whole generation; it is the person to whom the novel's monologue is addressed, the narrator's imprisoned son, who is the same age as the writer. Nevertheless the novel captures the pre-war and wartime experiences of the father in the Borderlands with great feeling for their landscape and culture. They are an essential and distinctive feature of the narrator's story, even though references to them are not numerous.

Gdańsk's *genius loci* thus reveals itself once again as extremely ready to lend an ear to the whispers of the newcomers from the Vilnius area, from Volhynia and Lviv, whom war has cast up on the shores of this ancient Hanseatic city. Slowly and over a long period, Borderland influences seeped into the spiritual atmosphere of Gdańsk, until they became a living and persistently fruitful presence. This is only one of the factors and certainly not the most important, but in the history of the Borderland theme in Polish literature it is undoubtedly significant. The youngest of the writers mentioned here, especially Huelle, Chwin and Hryniewicz, seem to me to be placed in relation to the Borderland syndrome very much as Jan Józef Szczepański, of whom I wrote in the previous chapter, was earlier. They appear to be as free from the dangers of sentimental idealisation of the past as they are from any derisive impulse to settle accounts with its legacy. They might have been condemned to such an alternative if they had wanted to delve into the Borderland theme from the point of view of the previous generation while being deprived of its experiences. Though at home in the world of their times and preoccupied with its concerns, they do not cut the cord that binds them to their family mythology. Instead, they strive to relate to that mythology in such a way as the point of view available to their generation makes possible. The link with the tradition of the previous generation is not, however,

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6 The Home Army belonged to the Underground Polish State, operating in conspiracy in Poland during World War II. It came under the same authority as the Polish armed forces fighting with the Allies on various fronts in Europe. The name "Home Army generation" is applied above all to the young people who were entering adulthood at the time of the outbreak of war.

something that ties their hands; they know how to draw on it in their own way. At the same time, they undoubtedly need this tradition in order to rebuild the cultural identity that had been streamlined and rendered barren by years of official ideology under the Polish People's Republic (PRL).

These writers ensured the continued vitality of the Borderland mythology of the previous generation by incorporating it into the spiritual terrain of their own "small homeland", a terrain which they themselves defined. Taking issue with Adam Zagajewski's essay "Dwa miasta" ["Two Cities"] in a sketch entitled "Nigdy nie jechałem do Lwowa" [I've never been to Lwów], Paweł Huelle writes both of his reciprocal love for Gdańsk and of the fact that thanks to his grandmother, Lwów was always part of his life, too. Not, however, as a limiting presence or one from which he had to liberate himself. Instead, it was a complement to Gdańsk, "a deep background, nothing more and nothing less".<sup>7</sup>

### Describing Childhood after Yalta

If what is not described does not exist, then for many years there was no such thing as the phenomenon of post-war childhood. For a long time after the war, it seemed to be of no interest to anyone, being entirely eclipsed by the war itself, which constituted an inexhaustible plot source, or by the pre-war period – the landscape of a lost paradise. And of course one simply also had to wait for the generation born after the war to grow up and begin writing, because childhood most easily finds its way into literature through autobiography.

The variety of images of childhood in the work of these writers is clearly visible from examples such as Małgorzata Baranowska's *Pamiętnik mistyczny* [A Mystical Memoir]<sup>8</sup> or Huelle's earlier-mentioned novel *Who was David Weiser?* (both books published in 1987). Other already cited examples are Jurewicz's *Lida* (1990), Chwin's *Krótką historią pewnego żartu*, Huelle's *Moving House and Other Stories* and Zagajewski's *Dwa miasta* [Two Cities] (all three in 1991). In the case of the last, the title essay, which is also the longest, taking up around a third of the book as a whole, is the most important.

The first thing that can be seen is how different these books are from one another, and therefore how difficult it is to see them as elements of a single

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7 A. Zagajewski, "Dwa miasta", in his *Dwa miasta* (Paris-Kraków: Oficyna Literacka, 1991); P. Huelle, "Nigdy nie jechałem do Lwowa", *Tytuł* 1992.2: 43. I shall return to this polemic later.

8 M. Baranowska, *Pamiętnik mistyczny* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1987); second edition with different illustrations (Gdańsk: słowo obraz terytoria, 1998).

constellation. Baranowska's highly idiosyncratic book is a kind of hybrid, combining features of the intimate diary with those of reflective poetic prose. The author leads the reader at once into the very centre of her consciousness, without any kind of introduction, as if she were beginning her story in mid-sentence. The reader must place complete trust in the narration, passing from one association to another; sometimes, because of the sudden shortcuts of thought, the task of reading is more a matter of making mental leaps than of following a chronological or logical order. The orientation point is entirely internalised, yet, as the reader soon perceives, what is presented is not the capricious and chaotic meandering of a stream of consciousness, but a rich and varied, though precise, symbolic construction. In the time perspective of a memoir suggested by the title, the distant, forgotten secrets of childhood gradually open up in a real private mysticism of the deep memory. Jurewicz's book, in turn, which incorporates some actual poems, is a memoir written in highly lyrical prose. Chwin and Zagajewski sit somewhere on the border between autobiography and essay writing. Huelle's novel and collection of short stories both clearly belong to the sphere of fiction, yet in both cases the autobiographical subtext shows through clearly. The point here, however, is not to arrange these different works by genre. If we ignore the chronological order of publication and move the texts of Jurewicz and Zagajewski into the foreground, placing Chwin directly after them; and if we also keep Huelle in the background and pass over Baranowska altogether, the focal point of the constellation shifts noticeably. We can then see clearly that all these books tell us something about the genealogy of the new arrivals from the Eastern Borderlands.

Jurewicz's hero, born in the Grodno area, in Lida, remembers his childhood there well and tells of his first return, after thirty years, to the autobiographical space of a remembered place. Zagajewski, born in what was then Lwów but deported from there as an infant, recreates in his essay a city that is purely mythical, known from stories he has been told; a city that, as an autobiographical imagined place, floats like a mirage over the sensually recognisable space of Gliwice as it was in his childhood. Similarly, Chwin's essay and Huelle's stories portray the figures of fathers and of grandfathers who came from cities known to them as Wilno and Lwów, recreating around these figures an imagined atmosphere of Borderland family tradition. The elements that link the whole constellation and therefore allow us to restore Baranowska's book to a place within it are the focus on childhood, the autobiographical stance and the external background of time and space. If we take these elements into account, we discover an important frame of reference, to which we may apply the term "childhood after Yalta", as used in a discussion published in the Gdańsk literary and artistic periodical

*Tytuł* in 1991,<sup>9</sup> alluding, of course, to the treaty concluded at the famous health resort in the Crimea, in which the victorious Western Allies and Russia divided post-war Europe into two separate spheres of influence. Shortly after this, the “iron curtain” descended over the border between them.

This historical situating allows us also to classify our group of five writers as the “post-war generation” (Baranowska and Zagajewski were born in 1945, Chwin in 1949, Jurewicz in 1952 and Huelle in 1957). The term “generation” is understood loosely here, of course, for the biological difference in age between the oldest and the youngest of these authors amounts to twelve years. In turn, from the point of view of their debut or birth as writers, the difference is fifteen years (Zagajewski – 1972, Huelle – 1987).

The problem of “childhood after Yalta”, apart from the time aspect to which the term draws attention, also has a spatial aspect, which indeed is strictly connected with the historical moment. For the space of post-Yalta and post-war childhood is one that might be called disturbed, a matter to which I shall return in the next chapter. The books discussed present either a situation in which childhood and later life are spent somewhere away from the place of birth, or one in which the birthplace is the same as the place where childhood and later life are passed (the case of only Huelle and Chwin), but birth occurred, as it were, immediately-after-arrival-in-the-new-place. And the later consciousness of being a newcomer and a newborn is sharply outlined as an element in the family situation and a significant aspect of the relationship between parents and children.

In the case of all five writers, the space of childhood is defined in a peculiar way by place. By place as stirred up, as if affected by an earthquake. Two places and the moving between them, as in the “moving house” that Huelle records in the title of his collection of stories. Childhood in constant movement. Split between past and present, with the persistent sense that the present state is temporary and no-one can tell how long it will last; endlessly striving to put down roots or being reluctant to do so. Enticed and allured by the spirit of place, which reveals itself to children above all. Or marked by the trauma of exile, refusing to assimilate, forever suspended as it were above some place, like the narrator at the end of Zagajewski’s essay “Two Cities”, who looks down over the roofs of Paris, where he has ended up after infancy in Lwów, childhood in Gliwice and youth in Kraków.<sup>10</sup>

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9 *Tytuł* 1991.3.

10 The particular features of the literary image of the space of childhood in the prose of the generation “born after Yalta” show up even more distinctly when we compare this

Let us take a closer look at the symbolic space of post-war childhood as it is conveyed in the constellation of texts considered here. They all show the symbolic topography of a post-Yalta childhood as a space involving movement between two points. Each writer, however, presents a different variation on this pattern. Jurewicz and Zagajewski indicate their concern with spatial categories in the very titles of their books, Jurewicz's *Lida* naming a particular town and Zagajewski's *Two Cities* alluding to the two cities of Lwów and Gliwice. Each of these titles points with poetic precision to the existential experience that is told in the book. *Lida* recounts the tale of a small boy's departure from the town of the title and of a mature man's return there thirty years later. It is only a visit, however; the man has not come back for good, and his stay in Lida is both an encounter with the past and with place, and a failure to make this encounter. The book consists of a sequence of memoir fragments, interspersed with poems and the texts of authentic letters written by the narrator's grandmother, who did not leave the town and whose Borderland dialectal Polish betrays the influence of Belarussian and Russian.

In fact, however, the narrator of *Lida* tells of *two* places of his childhood, as if Zagajewski's title might equally be applied to Jurewicz's book. For we find in the latter not only a remembered autobiographical place, in the image of the house in the suburbs of Lida and then in the scene of the train's departure to Poland, when we hear the desperate weeping of the boy as he is torn out of the embrace of his grandmother, who remains behind on the platform. Other pages of Jurewicz's slim volume present scenes from childhood spent in a poor family in a small town in Pomerania at the turn of the nineteen-fifties and sixties. This account draws attention to the loneliness and humiliation experienced by a boy with a lilting, Borderland accent, contemptuously nicknamed "Kacap" by his schoolmates. Jurewicz stresses the mood of uncertainty and the family's fear of their Ukrainian neighbours, who had also been forcibly resettled by the communist powers from their original home area in south-eastern Poland. The reason for these resettlements was the policy of imposing uniformity on ethnic groups in order to create a totalitarian state. Thus the Ukrainians were also foreigners in Pomerania, but not less foreign to the immigrants from Lida. They were also divided by the unspoken memory of bloody Polish-Ukrainian conflicts. Jurewicz reveals the atmosphere of hypocrisy of the Gomułka days, after the watershed of 1956 following the death of Stalin, which ended the darkest period of Soviet

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image with the one created by authors of the previous generation, discussed in the earlier chapter on the motif of home in autobiographies and novels about childhood.

totalitarianism, but also quickly put paid to any hopes of a democratisation of social life. Although a huge wave of so-called repatriates, who were unable to come to Poland immediately after the war, were allowed to leave the Soviet republics after 1956, they were nevertheless in various ways given to understand that there was not much room for them in the Polish homeland, now shifted to the west, and that perhaps it would be better if they did not all take up the opportunity to move.

But Jurewicz's book does not present only unhappy moments after the family settled in Pomerania. It is also full of the fascinations of boyhood, and there is great vitality in the recollection of how electricity was brought to the cottage of the new arrivals from Lida and one had to turn the ebonite switch, not press it in the way that later became general. Without extensive description, with the aid of only a few details, an image of daily life in that modest home emerges, and it is an image full of warmth: sour milk in a chipped fajance mug, wooden logs, chopped by the narrator's father, being dried out on the stove. There is also a passing glimpse of the world of the People's Republic, which unexpectedly corresponds with a perfectly analogical scene in Lida when the narrator visits it thirty years after his departure: a littered graveyard with broken headstones. In Pomerania it is the old German cemetery, desecrated by Poles, while in Lida, now under Soviet rule, the Polish cemetery is treated in the same way by Belarussians and Russians. Jurewicz writes of this vandalism in only a few sentences, without moralising comment; the image appears as it were in the margin of the main story about the "repatriation" from Lida, but it seems to be an extremely important part of the book's message, extending outside the frame of historical and sociological reflection on sovietisation.

Jurewicz's book includes a scene at a cemetery in a small Pomeranian town in which the narrator, now an adult, comes to the grave of his recently deceased father. *Lida* is dedicated to the author's daughter Justyna, and this scene leads one to reflect that for the little girl born and brought up in Gdańsk, that small-town cemetery containing her grandfather's grave may become something just as mythically distant as Lida is gradually becoming for the narrator himself, her father. In this short scene, time stretches out and stratifies: the childhood of the narrator who is cold-shouldered by his schoolmates, the present of his adult years, when he sits by the grave of his father, and the future of his little daughter, who herself chose the cypressus plant for her grandfather's grave.

One can clearly sense the narrator's hesitation here, and his reluctance to assimilate the territory of adult life to a degree that would permit him to acknowledge it as his own autobiographical place, albeit transferred rather than native. Perhaps the possibility of such assimilation is indicated as a prospect available



only to the next generation, while *Lida's* narrator refuses to accept unequivocally the historical realities of time and place. The story of Lida and of the fortunes of childhood after Yalta, besides its personal and historical plane, also has a more universal frame of reference. It is a tale of childhood and of maturity. The death of the father, far from Lida, in a country in which he has never put down roots, is an event not so much in the historical as in the existential order. The echo of the son's crying, when he was deported from Lida as a little boy, can be heard throughout the story, and it is audible even in this cemetery, where that little boy, now a grown man, is silent over his father's grave. And the book's unceasing weeping is a lament not only for Lida and childhood, but also for the author's father, whose death meant the loss of childhood for the second time, and this time for ever. Maturity, long since attained, then becomes irrevocable, more effectively cut off from childhood by this death than by the departure from Lida, or by the passage of time or by any border.

Zagajewski's Lwów, in turn, is a mythical image, an autobiographical imagined place that emerges from the tales told by adults. The landscape of Gliwice which stands before the eyes of the narrator ought in his understanding to turn out to be a mirage, one which will some day disappear, revealing the characteristic shapes of places in Lwów, the only truly real places: High Castle and the Łyczaków district of the city. Zagajewski's essay tells of the yearning of an adult for the lost world of the pre-war city; it recreates the phantom that accompanied the boy's imagination. However, there is one element in the essay that is by no means phantom-like, but fully embodied: this is the world of Gliwice under Stalin and Gomułka, which formed the visible landscape of Zagajewski's childhood. The figures of family and acquaintances, their characters and lives, the objects that they managed to bring with them from the mythical Lwów – this is the substance which gives material form to the spirit of the city left behind in the East. In the image of his environment, Zagajewski also incorporates a description of society: the Gliwice Lvovians portrayed in "Two Cities" belong above all to the intelligentsia: former officials, doctors, teachers. Their presence in their new place of dwelling thus has a social aspect; it is marked by a distance in relation to the officially proletarian style of their new surroundings.

Inscribed in Zagajewski's image of this imagined autobiographical place are problems that extend beyond the concrete historical details of a defined here and now. For the author introduces the motif of adolescence, telling the story of a boy's emergence from childhood, of his rebellious phase and his dawning poetic vocation. In this way he reaches maturity, the time when a person recognises the pattern of his fortunes. In order to present this pattern, at the very beginning of *Two Cities* he constructs a classification of types of people with regard

to their attitude to place. The first are settled people, the second are emigrants who after moving from one place to another, in the second generation become settled, while the third are the homeless, who put down no roots in any physical or geographical region, whose homeland is entirely in the non-material, spiritual realm. Zagajewski considers himself to belong to the third group. Following this classification, one might say that the earlier mentioned book by Jurewicz recreates a trauma that can never be wholly left behind, the trauma of emigration, while Chwin and Huelle present various versions of the birth of a new form of settled life – one, however, which is ambivalent and critical, not so much in the spatial as in the historical dimension. The process of becoming a settled person is hindered not so much by the foreignness of the region and its landscape or by the strange accents and customs of its inhabitants, as by the foreignness of the new political regime, in which no one, on principle, was meant to feel at home, private life having been excluded – one might say by definition – from the totalitarian regime. Zagajewski, Chwin and Huelle all show this process, though in slightly different ways and with varying degrees of intensity.

The socio-biographical situation that models Chwin's text is highly reminiscent of the one in Zagajewski's. There is a similarity in the east-west migration of the narrator-hero's father, though this time the movement is not from Lviv but from Vilnius, and it is not the whole family who set out, but only the father and his brother. Also, they bring nothing with them, no souvenirs of the past, no furniture or objects of beauty, but only their empty hands. And it is really a matter of chance that they end up in the city that became known after the war as Gdańsk. The joke of the title, whose short history the essay tells, is a rather cruel one, as we have mentioned. The writer's imagination creates a map of Europe seen from the perspective of Yalta, and the hand of the moustached *generalissimus* in whom history, juggling with human pawns, has become incarnate, points a finger towards a spot at the mouth of the Vistula. It is here, in Gdańsk, that the fugitive from Vilnius who is at that moment travelling west by train, is to stop, and here that some time in the future his son will settle, finally obtaining an apartment on Vilnius Street.

For the boy in *Krótką historią pewnego żartu*, the city his family call Wilno, unlike Lwów in *Two Cities*, remains entirely beyond the horizon of imagination. Its faint echo can be heard in the songs that his father and uncle hum to the mandolin on Sundays; but his father is reluctant to recall the past and speaks of it little and seldom. The boy is absorbed in his immediate surroundings and in his personal daily discoveries of the world around him. If he is interested in the past at all, it is in the past of the place where he lives and where he was born, though he knows that it is not the birthplace of his parents. There are witnesses to and traces

of the past in objects: in houses, their interiors, in window frames and stair rails. The childhood territory recreated by Chwin is old Oliwa, undamaged by war, a district of Gdańsk that historically was a separate town, situated to the north of the centre. The war, which transformed Gdańsk's historic heart into a pile of rubble, passed over the leafy villas near the park surrounding the cathedral. On the other side of the railway line, too, heading towards the sea, the workers' estate remained undamaged. These neat little homes were built before the war for the employees of the great Schichau shipyard, the same that would be made famous years later by the strike of August 1980, the event that marked the beginning of the end of communism. In creating the native autobiographical place of his childhood, Chwin's imagination circles principally around descriptions of objects. They symbolise the tension between past and present, between the familiar and the strange, the given and the desired. In the descriptions of the things that the boy finds, examines and collects, the writer traces the ambivalence of values.<sup>11</sup> Through them he tells the story of a child's initiation into evil. In fact, these objects tell the boy more than his silent father does. The past of the surviving homes and objects of old Oliwa forces one to guess at a different picture of the Germans than the one conveyed by film chronicles and war films. This difference, however, can be extremely hard to grasp and in the child's world presented by Chwin, most of the questions are left without answers.

The tangible, material reality of the People's Republic in which the essay's hero goes to pre-school and then to school, to the cinema and out to play with his friends, is essentially a stage set, behind which three past and present powers loom: Germany, America and Russia. They are present in the child's world through objects, which are as it were the delegates or ambassadors of larger history to ordinary life: shreds of pre-war German newspapers sticking out from under the wallpaper in an apartment in Oliwa; packets of American chewing gum of fairy-tale brightness; the white silhouette of the Palace of Culture erected in Warsaw by Soviet builders.

Zagajewski's imagination rested suggestively, but only fleetingly, on objects from his boyhood, in order to divide them into three categories: the "aristocratic" ones which stretch back to the Lwów past, the "bourgeois" ones, which represent mainly German influences in Silesia, and the "socialist" ones, which embody the

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11 See M. Brzostowicz's article "Rzeczy mówią o człowieku: o prozie Stefana Chwina", in *Człowiek i rzecz. O problemach reifikacji w literaturze, filozofii i sztuce*, ed. S. Wysłouch and B. Kaniewska (Poznań: Instytut Filologii Polskiej, 1999), which deals with a similar theme. It was only after finishing this chapter that I became acquainted with this study.

whole cheap vulgarity and ugliness of the People's Republic. One might say that in Chwin's book, in contrast, the solid but graceful bourgeois products of pre-war Gdańsk craftsmanship in Oliwa are given an aristocratic allure. It is this which makes them stand out so clearly from the vulgarity and especially the poverty of the socialist world. In Chwin, however, the objects of the People's Republic and the whole atmosphere of social-realist taste have a certain perversely seductive aura. Ugliness has a tempting appeal about it, like the bone from the dustbin that Gombrowicz talks about in *Pamiętnik z okresu dojrzewania* [Memoir from Adolescence]. What is more, evil and hatred reveal their darkly attractive power, especially in the theatrical-sacred ritual of the May Day parade. Chwin mentions something here that Zagajewski's hero also recalls: the President Truman puppets carried in the parade as the obligatory symbol of "American imperialism".

Chwin's book focuses on two highly symbolic buildings. One is the Palace of Culture, as contemplated in newspaper illustrations, that "gift from our Soviet comrades" that was under construction in Warsaw at the time. It draws the boy's imagination powerfully. In the nineteen-fifties, there was a plan to erect a similar building in Gdańsk. The writer makes his boyhood *alter ego* dream of this utopian wonder, whose image in his longings soars above the fields stretching down towards the sea, surrounding the home of his childhood. This child's vision of a future social-realist Palace that was never to come into being is the other side of the coin, so to speak, of that lost past which was constantly present to the imagination of the adults described by Zagajewski, in which High Castle and the baroque churches of Lwów loomed phantom-like over the town houses of Gliwice. The second building described by Chwin is set in opposition to the Stalinist palace. It is the Gothic cathedral of Oliwa, where the boy attends Mass each Sunday with his parents. Eventually it rids his imagination of thoughts of the social-realist "masterpiece". Zagajewski mentions at the beginning that one of the reasons for his spiritual homelessness was undoubtedly the ugliness of the industrial town in Silesia where the exiles from Lwów ended up. Thanks to a despot's whim, Chwin, the boy who lived in Oliwa, had better luck. Besides this, he was not told much about the beauty of Vilnius's churches, and so Oliwa's "aristocratic" cathedral, as Zagajewski might call it, had no rivals to compete for his admiration.

Oliwa, untouched by the war, is the scene of Chwin's myth of childhood, whereas for Huelle it was the neighbouring district of Upper Wrzeszcz. However, the topography of the latter's native autobiographical place involves somewhat more than this. Anyone pedantic enough to trace the action of Huelle's novels and stories on a map of Gdańsk would find other districts mentioned, too: Oliwa, Jelitkowo, Zaspą, Brętowo, as well as all the other smaller

places between the sea and the wooded hills of the murrain to the south. It was not only in *Who was David Weiser?* and *Moving House* that Huelle wrote of his acceptance of the place that his family, originally from Lwów and Galicia, had come to. He also pondered this, as we have mentioned, in a short sketch devoted to Zagajewski's essay "Two Cities": Huelle's title, "Nigdy nie jechałem do Lwowa" [I've never been to Lwów], is an oppositional travesty of the title of Zagajewski's most well-known volume of poems, *Jechać do Lwowa* [To Go to Lwów]. Like Zagajewski, though somewhat more briefly, in this sketch Huelle traced his genealogy, which was socially identical with the genealogy of the intelligentsia recounted in *Two Cities*.

There are noticeable differences, however, between Chwin, Huelle and Zagajewski in respect of the symbolism of their individual fortunes. Zagajewski regards his situation as one of permanent homelessness, rather than seeing himself as an emigrant, defined by the trauma of losing his own place of dwelling. Huelle, as we have said, writes of his mutual love for Gdańsk and of the fact that thanks to his grandmother, Lwów was always a presence in his life, though never in a manner that confined him or from which he felt the need to break free. As we now know, in his imagination that city was the complement to Gdańsk, constituting "a deep background, nothing more and nothing less". From the pages of Huelle's writings a hero emerges who is conscious of his family tradition, who cares about it and is in a certain way proud of it, but who is as free of uncritical, sentimental nostalgia as he is accepting of his present place of living. Behind this acceptance, moreover, lies no such bitter sense of irony as led Chwin so repeatedly to underline, most obviously in his title, that the fate of his autobiographical hero is the outcome of a whim of the potentates of this world. The reader of Chwin's text is constantly confronted with the writer's conviction that the individual is no more than a helpless mite, blown about over the surface of the stormy waters of history; at any moment he may be destroyed by a hurricane or sucked into some underwater whirlpool. He is happy if for the moment he is floating calmly on top of the waves.

In Huelle's world, where so many figures bear the marks of history's tragedies, another perspective – which probably ought to be described as metaphysical – can nevertheless be glimpsed, one which in spite of everything makes possible a deep sense of meaning and an affirmation of the world. Beyond the plane of the phenomenal, we are constantly made to feel the presence of another dimension. From it, a mysterious light may at any moment break through and be reflected in the surfaces of objects, proclaiming that beyond the bloody chaos of the visible world a harmonious order exists, which can be sensed even though it cannot be fully known.

This perspective is perceptible behind the vision of the symbolic space of childhood created in *Who was David Weiser?* and *Moving House*. Especially in the latter, through the figures of both parents and grandparents, the Lwów past, with all the values it represents, is always there. A motif similar to one in Zagajewski also appears in these stories, that of family arguments over who behaved worse during the war, the Germans or the Soviets. There are many other similarities, too, resulting, obviously, from the identity of environment, culture and tradition which shaped the ground on which both writers grew up. Above all, however, there is the shared sense of the past's being torn into two halves: the "there" and the "here". This is the split of which Zagajewski writes, which is symbolised in *Huelle* by the motif of moving house. If we combine the keywords of the two writers (the motif of moving house in *Huelle*, and of settled people, emigrants and homelessness in Zagajewski), we might say that in *Huelle*, after his father's banishment from the Borderlands, after he moves house, we see the birth and growth of a new generation of settled people. In his sketch on Zagajewski, *Huelle* speaks of how he feels completely at home in the place of his birth, in which his parents were always newcomers. In his novels and short stories, the memory of the family genealogy is a vital part of his own sense of identity. But this identity also extends to the past of the autobiographical native place in which he was born and in which he lives. The past and present of this place are free from the sense of foreignness so dramatically articulated in Jurewicz's *Lida* and so clearly stated in Zagajewski's essay "Two Cities". *Huelle*'s image of Gdańsk is also free from the disturbing unease that hangs over Chwin's, for the latter is always haunted by fear: if it once pleased History by the hand of a uniformed leader to decree that a man must live in a city different from the one he was born in, then perhaps in the future she might also banish that man's son, forcing him to find another abode at the mouth of a different river.

### **The Disturbance of the Borderlands Reaches the Centre**

How does Baranowska's book fit into this picture? In creating an autobiographical native place in her *Pamiętnik mistyczny*, the imagination of this author draws on historical objects of post-war life in Warsaw as well as on the more distant history of the city. However, it is only shapes and colours that suggest the historical world, and these are employed by the writer's poetic imagination as the carriers of metaphorical meaning. The main interest of *Pamiętnik mistyczny*, as announced by the book's title, lies in the story of a soul's adventures. It is a soul that inhabits a particular body (sometimes ailing and in pain), but also reveals itself in encounters with certain places and objects. Baranowska's

*Pamiętnik* is also intended to speak of the “soul” of the city, which is indestructible, continuing to exist in spite of the annihilation of its material shell. If Jurewicz’s, Zagajewski’s, Chwin’s and Huelle’s books can be read as different fragments of the story of the post-war exodus from the East, the breach of continuity and the attempts (successful or otherwise) to restore it, then the lives of Warsaw’s inhabitants as told by Baranowska turn out to be unexpectedly similar to those broken Borderland lives. Without any movement in physical space, the history of the capital is shown in her memoir as interrupted by the total destruction of the city. We find a similar feeling in Miron Białoszewski’s *Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising*, of which I shall say more in the next chapter. After this destruction, time begins to be measured anew, *ab urbe destructa*, as it were. In the individual life of the heroine of *Pamiętnik mistyczny*, we also find the same violent rupture and relocation with regard to her place of birth as in Jurewicz and Zagajewski. She lived all her life in Warsaw; she belonged to this place and the place belonged to her, though she was not born there, but transported there at the age of three. She was brought from somewhere else, just like Zagajewski and Jurewicz, though not from as far away as the Borderlands. Warsaw should have been her birthplace, but war exiled her from the city before that came about. Consequently, through her return as a child and throughout her later life, it was as if she had to regain her right to the city as her native place-not-of-birth. It was indeed her right, for immediately after the war her parents brought her back, a tiny child still unaware of the external world, and they returned not only to their own city (though it was a Warsaw completely in ruins), but even to the very same district, Ochota, in which they had lived, and even to that same home, which they gradually rebuilt. It took all of the writer’s conscious life to make this “place-not-of-birth” truly home, beginning with *Pamiętnik mistyczny* and continuing right up to her last book, which is suggestively entitled *Wracam na Ochotę* [Going Back to Ochota]. It deals with the process of her family’s and her own enrooting, not simply in the city, but even in one of its particular districts.<sup>12</sup>

I shall consider *Pamiętnik mistyczny* once again in the next chapter, but from a different point of view. For the moment, what is important is that the childhood recalled by Baranowska in *Pamiętnik mistyczny*, with its important *leitmotif* of playing in the rubble, is also childhood after Yalta. For the collapse of the Warsaw Uprising and the destruction of the city that followed, which forced the parents of the heroine to leave Warsaw and made it impossible for her to be born there,

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12 M. Baranowska, *Wracam na Ochotę* (Warszawa: Ośrodek Kultury Ochoty, 2011).

brought about a situation similar to the one in which, as Zagajewski wrote in “Two Cities”:

In 1945 almost our whole family packed our bags and boxes and prepared to leave Lwów and the surroundings. At exactly the same time, countless German families also packed their bags because they had been ordered to abandon their houses and apartments in Silesia, in Gdańsk, in Szczeciń, Olsztyn and Królewiec. Millions of people squeezed their bursting suitcases shut with their knees. All this because it was the wish of those three old men who met at Yalta.<sup>13</sup>

Zagajewski’s phrase permits us also to note something that has long waited to be said: that the books of Jurewicz, Zagajewski, Chwin and Huelle tell of journeys from one set of Borderlands to another, from those of the east to those of the west. This is a matter on which Polish literature had remained largely silent until these four writers made their appearance. Of course for a long time it *could not* speak of such things; but it is also true that for a long time it had no wish to. We shall discuss this in the next chapter. Here it is important to observe that though the spatial focus of Baranowska’s Memoir is Warsaw, a city at the heart of the Polish lands, whose name did not change, the book nevertheless fits in a certain sense (through the situation of a “post-Yalta childhood”) into the “Borderland” model.

After Yalta, the tragedy of the Borderlands – the rending pain of being uprooted – penetrated right to the very centre.

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13 Zagajewski, *Dwa miasta*, 12 (this passage translated by Jean Ward). Zagajewski gives the cities mentioned their Polish names. Although they remained in the same places geographically and on the map, borders, inhabitants and languages changed, and consequently so did the names of these cities, which are different in German, Ukrainian and Lithuanian: Lwów (Ukrainian Lviv); Gdańsk (German Danzig); Szczecin (German Stettin); Olsztyn (German Allenstein); Królewiec (German Königsberg, Russian Kaliningrad).



## 5. Space Disturbed: Testimonies to the Post-Yalta “Migration of Peoples”

### The End and the Beginning

The last decade of the twentieth century was a period of deep and complex changes in mentality, brought about by the radical and often very difficult social transformation connected with the collapse of communism in 1989. It might have been expected that in such conditions, the collective consciousness would focus mainly on current events and would turn its gaze, in a spirit of hopeful anticipation, mixed with considerable uncertainty and fear – towards the future. However, as proved to be the case, reflecting on the past was also a prominent element of spiritual life in these critical times. New assessments of the era that had just passed, in which new reckonings were made with the evil that had been experienced, played an important part in the change of consciousness, as did the recovery of areas of memory that had previously been ravaged, lied about or denied existence. An urgent desire to fill in the blank spots on the map of the most recent history became the necessity of the moment. From the modest reach of the opposition publishing houses of the so-called “second circulation”, which operated from 1976 outside the control of censorship, the undoing of lies about the past flowed in a broad wave into book and press publications from the beginning of the nineties, now in the democratic conditions of freedom of speech.

One of the blank spots was the period of 1945–49, when a true “migration of peoples” took place in Europe as a consequence of the treaty concluded in Yalta by the allied powers which had gained the ascendancy over Hitler and were designing new borders. But to begin with, while much attention was devoted to new readings of recent history, this period was not a focus, and it remained for a considerable time in the shadows. These years of emergence from the shock of war, years preoccupied with the humdrum daily struggle to organise a new life amidst the rubble, evidently must have seemed rather unimportant and undramatic in comparison with the war years that preceded them and the fiercest period of the Stalinist terror that followed after them, which for Polish literature began with the imposition of an obligatory style of “socialist realism” at the congress of the Union of Polish Writers in Szczecin in January 1949.

As far as the immediate post-war years are concerned, the situation is aptly summed up in the following passage from Wisława Szymborska's poem "The End and the Beginning":

After every war  
 someone has to tidy up.  
 Things won't pick  
 themselves up, after all.  
 Someone has to shove  
 the rubble to the roadsides  
 so the carts loaded with corpses  
 can get by.  
 Someone has to trudge  
 through sludge and ashes,  
 through the sofa springs,  
 the shards of glass,  
 the bloody rags.  
 Someone has to lug the post  
 to prop the wall.  
 someone has to glaze the window,  
 set the door in its frame.  
 No sound bites, no photo opportunities,  
 and it takes years.  
 All the cameras have gone  
 to other wars.<sup>1</sup>

The half-century which separates the end of the Second World War from the publication of this poem was full of "other wars" begun and ended or continued still in various corners of the earth. Invariably they involved mass migrations of civilians, terrified, desperate refugees, dying from the hardships of flight. By the time the twentieth century, called the century of two world wars, came to a close, it had earned another name: the century of exile. This many times repeated experience certainly also contributed to the development by which, after publications devoted to the greatest dramas of the war years (the Katyń atrocity, the extermination of the Jews, the Warsaw Uprising, the Gulags) and to the Stalinist terror in the fifties, attention also began to be paid to the drab, "unphotogenic" period of clearing up the rubble.

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1 W. Szymborska, *Koniec i początek* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo a5, 1993), 10. *View with a Grain of Sand. Selected Poems*, trans. Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh (London: Faber and Faber 1996), 178–180. The quoted piece is only part of the poem.

However, when we move from the poetic generalisation encapsulated in the metaphor of the end of war and the beginning of peace to the historical particularities contained in autobiographical accounts of the second half of the nineteen-forties in Poland, the image becomes more complex and multi-layered. Szyborska's poem ironically exposes the difference between the spectacularly destructive force of war and the arduous and unglamorous labour of reconstruction. It also emphasises the passage of time, during which wars rage and then die down (only to break out somewhere else, as the poet adds with bitterness). However, there is no mention of the fact that sometimes the last little gust of the winds of war blows people into other places, where it falls to them to clean up the rubble of other people's homes, whose inhabitants have also by now been forced to leave them. And after this end, they all build their beginning in a completely different place. The experience of migration was an important factor, though not the only one, in the appearance of the theme of homelessness in post-war Polish literature.<sup>2</sup>

### Written Now, Written Then

A considerable number of the texts that deal with the first years after the war did not come into being until nearly half a century later, that is already in the period of transformations in the early nineties, or not much before this. It was not merely communist censorship that was responsible for this situation. Sometimes there were also substantial psychological barriers at work, barriers which took decades to break down. In many texts, the awareness of the passage of time and the change of perspective in looking at past events is a direct focus of attention.

Let us consider a few examples. This is the case with some of the accounts included in the volume *Danzig/Gdańsk 1945. Wspomnienia 50 lat później* [Recollections After Fifty Years]. The very emergence of this book, which is a collection of statements in two languages by twenty Polish and German inhabitants of Gdańsk,<sup>3</sup> would not have been possible without the fall of the Berlin Wall and without the process of Polish-German reconciliation. Similarly, Zofia Posmysz in her book *Do wolności, do śmierci, do życia* [To Freedom, to Death, to Life], described by the author herself as "a semi-chronicle tale of May 1945", recalls that

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2 See A. Legeżyńska's study of the themes of home and homelessness in contemporary Polish poetry, *Dom i bezdomność w liryce współczesnej* (Warszawa: PWN, 1996).

3 *Danzig/Gdańsk 1945. Erinnerungen nach 50 Jahren/Wspomnienia 50 lat później*, ed. Z. Choderny, J. Głowacka, M. Korczakowska and P. O. Loew (Gdańsk: Marpress, 1997).

she began to record her account soon after returning from captivity in Germany, but completed it only after fifty years had passed.<sup>4</sup>

From the beginning of the nineteen sixties Posmysz was known mostly for her novel *Pasażerka* [Woman Passenger], published in 1962 and based on her recollections of living through the German concentration camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau. A film with the same title (1963), based on the novel, won awards at the Cannes festival and was shown almost throughout the world. It was also nominated for an Oscar in the foreign-language film category.<sup>5</sup> The novel has been translated into at least fifteen languages (though these do not include English). However, it was not possible either in the novel or in the film to present the last, post-war act in this Auschwitz history. This final part of the story was the return to Poland of the women from Auschwitz-Birkenau who had been evacuated deep into Germany when the Nazis began to dismantle the camp just before the war ended. It was precisely these events that were presented in Posmysz's "semi-chronicle tale of May 1945". During the thousand-kilometre return journey, several of the women fell victim to acts of gang rape carried out by soldiers of the Red Army. Similarly, before the turning point of 1989, it was impossible to publish descriptions of many other scenes observed by the author, since they did not fit the officially sanctioned image of the activities of the so-called "liberating army". At the end of the book, however, Posmysz makes a remarkable confession, in which she makes it clear that she strove against the tendency to oversimplify and did not blame everything entirely on the prohibitions of censorship. This is how she comments on the reasons for her long silence: "But that would be another story, a contribution to the history of opportunism, or perhaps – to resort to the milder term coined by a certain outstanding scholar – 'positive conformism.'"<sup>6</sup>

At the end of 1950, Czesław Miłosz, having decided that he had no intention of agreeing to any further act of conformism, even "positive", succeeded in escaping to the West and sought asylum in France. Shortly afterwards, he explored his experiences of the immediate post-war years in Poland in the book *Zniewolony umysł* [*The Captive Mind*], composed of essays on the intellectual temptation of his fellow-writers by communism. The novel *Zdobycie władzy* [*The Seizure of*

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4 Z. Posmysz, *Do wolności, do śmierci, do życia*, Warszawa: von borowiecky, 1996), 100.

5 The novel is also the basis of an opera by Mieczysław Weinberg with libretto by Aleksandr Medvedev. The work was completed in 1968 but premiered in Moscow only in 2006.

6 Posmysz, 100. I return to the reasons for writers' silences, to the questions of fear, courage and conformism in the chapter on Miłosz and Konwicki in Part Four of this book.

*Power*], whose action takes place partly during the war and partly immediately after it, when the Soviets brought their totalitarian order and organisation to Poland, contains a remarkably suggestive image of those dark times.<sup>7</sup> The figure of Piotr Kwinto, one of the main characters of the novel, and the experiences he undergoes, also seem to owe much to the personal experiences of Miłosz himself, and to the conclusions the novelist drew from them. Although the principal model for Kwinto was someone else, as Miłosz himself mentions,<sup>8</sup> nevertheless the final sequences, presenting a plane's dramatic take-off to Paris which succeeds almost miraculously, clearly recall the circumstances in which the novel's author left Poland at the turn of 1950 and 1951. Yet it was not until near the end of the nineteen-eighties, in a book mentioned earlier, that Miłosz made this period in his life the subject of an openly autobiographical account. *Rok myśliwego* [*A Year of the Hunter*], written in the form of a diary, corresponds in time with the events presented in *The Seizure of Power*; and it was only here that Miłosz presented in detail the history of his work in the diplomatic service of the Polish People's Republic, work that he described as "a pact with the devil".<sup>9</sup> The account of this short phase in his life, which causes Miłosz to speak of shame, takes up almost half the book, relegating to the background the current events noted in the diary.

For the sake of comparison, alongside texts written after the passage of decades, with all the consequences of this lapse of time, we should mention accounts which arose in those years at the same time as the events were taking place, in other words diaries and collections of letters. They remained in manuscript form for many years, only gradually being published at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Among the sources that were made available relatively early are fragments of the diaries kept by Anna Kowalska, published at the beginning of the nineteen-seventies in the weekly *Literatura*,<sup>10</sup> and especially the book edition of Maria Dąbrowska's *Dzienniki* [Diaries].<sup>11</sup> But even this last

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7 Cz. Miłosz, *Zniewolony umysł* (Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1953); *Zdobycie władzy* (Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1955).

8 Miłosz recalled this in an interview with Renata Gorczyńska about *The Seizure of Power*. See E. Czarnecka [R. Gorczyńska], *Podróżny świata. Rozmowy z Czesławem Miłoszem. Komentarze* (Wszechnica Społeczno-Polityczna, 1984 [no place of publication supplied]), 100.

9 Cz. Miłosz, *Rok myśliwego* (Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1990). This book is discussed in more depth in Part Four of this book.

10 A. Kowalska, *Dzienniki*, in *Literatura* 1972, no. 23–33. The book edition of the whole appeared considerably later: *Dzienniki 1927 – 1969* (Warszawa: Iskry, 2008).

11 M. Dąbrowska, *Dzienniki (1914–1965)*, vol. 1–5, selection, introduction and footnotes by T. Drewnowski (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1988); *Dzienniki powojenne*

record, though it is essentially a direct testimony to “the beginning and the end”, is marked in certain ways by the turning point that came about only after the fall of communism, after the 1989 “peoples’ autumn”. For there is a striking difference between the two editions of Dąbrowska’s Diaries: the first, which appeared while censorship was still in operation, in 1988, and the second, published in the nineties. When they are read in parallel, it can be seen that the first was ruthlessly cut. The censors excised from it not only every critical comment addressed to the authorities of the People’s Republic and the Soviet powers that mandated them, and not only all the political jokes that Dąbrowska liked so much to note, but also even simple statements of facts, devoid of commentary, which according to the Orwellian principles of Newspeak had no right to a written existence.

### **Time and Space after Yalta**

It was not until after the disappearance of communist censorship both in journalism and in scholarly reflection (historical and sociological) that it became possible to compare three turning points in the life of Central and Eastern European societies: the end of World War I (1918), the end of World War II (1945) and the end of communism (1989).

Each of these turning points involved a fundamental change in social life, but the way this change was felt in the collective consciousness varied: sometimes there was a strong sense of a peculiar kind of continuity in spite of change, while sometimes change was perceived as a complete abandonment of continuity. The post-Yalta period is different from the period of transformation both after World War I and after 1989. The end of the Great War broke the link with the period of oppression and swept away the monarchic regime that had prevailed in all three of the partitioning powers on Polish lands, but the awareness of these changes was secondary to the sense of restored independence. For that sense depended on the revelation of the connections with the past tradition of the pre-partition First Republic, a tradition that had remained hidden during the partitions. A similar thing happened after the fall of communism: the term “Third Republic” builds an obvious bridge over the half-century of the People’s Republic, associating the present of the nineteen-nineties with the inter-war past of the Second Republic. The post-Yalta period, in contrast, was perceived as a phase of radical and total metamorphosis. This was how it was understood both by those who welcomed it

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(1914–1965), vol. 1–4, selection, introduction and footnotes by T. Drewnowski (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1996).

with enthusiasm and by those (incomparably more numerous), who were filled with horror at the break with historical continuity.

The years following the Yalta treaty were distinguished from yet another point of view from the two other periods of transformation. The sense of a break with the past was accompanied by an experience which powerfully deepened that sense – an experience that may be defined as a disturbance of space. Mass migrations of populations, along with changes in the political system and reconstruction after wartime devastation, were among the most characteristic phenomena of Polish life in the five years following the end of the war. The effects of what happened then were to make themselves felt over the succeeding decades. This is the subject of the present chapter, which traces some of the various scattered testimonies to that experience as they were recorded in memoirs and diaries and in autobiographical novels about the end of war and the beginning of peace.

As the war drew towards an end, the treaty signed in the Crimea at the summer residence of the former Russian Tsars, on a peninsula full of reminders of Oriental luxury, established a new world order. But when the beginning of peace came and new national boundaries were set, Europe was shaken once again. Masses of people were scattered over her lands like frightened ants. For Poles, this was mainly a movement from east to west. From the Eastern Borderlands, which had ended up behind the Curzon line and been incorporated into the Soviet Republics of Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine, millions of people were resettled, in the course of so-called acts of repatriation, in Silesia, Pomerania and what had been East Prussia. The cultural policy of the state at the time demanded that writers glorify the return to the ancient Piast lands, the cradle of Polish nationhood. In the official scenario there was no room for descriptions of the tragedy of being uprooted or for laments over the lost, small local homelands; while to express any sympathy for the German population who met a similar fate was even more inconceivable.

In these times of mass movements of people, monuments also shifted from place to place. Huge, heavy statues departed from squares and market places; not, however, in the way that the statue of the Commodore who accepted Don Juan's invitation to supper moved, for that was to avenge a personal insult. When monuments wandered over Central Europe after the war, it was always in the name of a nation and at the command of history. King Jan III Sobieski, who rode to defend Europe from the Turks at Vienna, this time set out on a horse made of bronze, leaving Lviv for the west. While the ordinary inhabitants of the city packed up their possessions and loaded them on to cattle trucks, the statue of the king made its way first to Wilanów, the monarch's favourite Warsaw residence.

After a time it reached Gdańsk, to stand in the place from which another monument had earlier disappeared: a German obelisk, erected in honour of those who fell in defence of their Prussian homeland in wars of the nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup>

### From East to West and to Other Corners of the Earth

Maria Dąbrowska's Diary is not concerned with the personal experience of being uprooted, for she was one of the few fortunate survivors of the war to return to her pre-war home and find it still standing. The fact that this happened in Warsaw borders on a miracle and Dąbrowska notes that she knew this. She was aware, however, of the problems of those who were subjected to resettlement – not least because she was the closest witness to the fate of the family of her greatest friend Anna Kowalska, deported from the city that had been Lwów to the one that had become Wrocław (formerly Breslau). For Kowalska this was the source of deep suffering. Though she said little about it in the fragments of her diary published in 1972, what she did say is extremely moving.

Among many different observations of Polish life as it surrounded her, Dąbrowska notes repeatedly and with great sensitivity her encounters with resettled inhabitants of the Borderlands, for example her conversation with a person from Vilnius whom she met in Mazury. When he was asked why he had chosen this place to live, he answered that “in case anything happened”, he would not have far to return. The feeling that a third world war must be about to break out was widespread at the time, regardless of whether the prospect inspired people with hope or with fear.

Many writers emerged from among those resettled from the eastern lands. As they grew older and explored their own memories and their family tradition, they were to become the co-creators of the wide Borderland current that flows through Polish prose. In their autobiographies, which arose later than that of the older Dąbrowska, the transitional phase between the war and Stalinism constitutes only part of the time presented. This is the case, for example, with two books of interviews with writers, one with Tadeusz Konwicki (*Pół wieku czyśćca* [Fifty Years of Purgatory])<sup>13</sup> and the other with Julian Strykowski (*Ocalony na Wschodzie* [Saved in the East]).<sup>14</sup>

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12 See R. Hirsch, K. Krzempek and P. Popiński, *Gdańsk. Dwa oblicza miasta* (Gdańsk: Holm, 1997), 28–29.

13 S. Nowicki [S. Bereś], *Pół wieku czyśćca. Rozmowy z Tadeuszem Konwickim* (London: Aneks, 1986).

14 *Ocalony na Wschodzie. Z Julianem Strykowskim rozmawia Piotr Szewc* (Montricher: Noir sur Blanc, 1991).



The autobiographical novels of authors who originated from the Borderlands, such as Zbigniew Żakiewicz's *Wilio, w głębokościach morza...* and Aleksander Jurewicz's *Lida*, both discussed in previous chapters, as well as Wilhelm Dichter's *Koń Pana Boga* [God's Horse], published in the nineteen-nineties, reveal things that had for long been the unuttered experience of millions of repatriates who had left the Borderlands in the forties.<sup>15</sup> The uprooting was painful and the flight sometimes full of dangers. The journey towards the places of an unknown future was chaotic and disorganised. Putting down roots in a new space proved to be a slow and difficult process, which was sometimes not completed until decades had passed, and often only in the second generation.

The post-war "disturbance of space" was not in the least limited to the phase of repatriation from the Borderlands, though that was the largest mass movement. The map of the post-war world was criss-crossed with roads running in all directions, and traces of this have been preserved in a variety of autobiographical testimonies. In the westerly direction, identified with freedom, people facing the threat of imprisonment fled through Scandinavia or Czechoslovakia and Austria, while others took the risk of crossing the so-called "green border" (in other words, crossing illegally in places far from border posts, for example in forests) simply because they dreamed of living a normal life in security and plenty. We can find examples of many different ways of crossing the border in the mentioned account by Zofia Posmysz, in Wilhelm Dichter and Czesław Miłosz, as well as in Barbara Toporska's novel *Siostry* [The Sisters], written and published in emigration, and based on her experiences of the Vilnius area and the post-war flight to escape Soviet power.<sup>16</sup>

Some made trips to the West which were entirely legal, not to emigrate, but to spend a few years abroad on the strength of an official Polish People's Republic passport. In this way, on diplomatic service, Julian Przyboś was able to travel to Switzerland and Miłosz to the USA. Julian Strykowski, in turn, went as a journalist to Rome, acting as a correspondent of the Polish Press Agency. The period of his life spent in Italy is known from two of his books. Some of his impressions of the time, recorded in 1949 while he was living there, appeared in a volume entitled *Pożegnanie z Italią* [Farewell to Italy].<sup>17</sup> Then, more than forty years later, further reflections on this time found their way into his autobiography, *Ocalony na Wschodzie*, mentioned above. Written in the form of an extended interview,

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15 W. Dichter, *Koń Pana Boga* (Kraków: Znak, 1996).

16 B. Toporska, *Siostry* (Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1966).

17 J. Strykowski, *Pożegnanie z Italią* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1956).

it contains a whole, long chapter devoted entirely to the years in Italy, entitled “Where the lemons blossom”.

Travel writing always speaks not only of the country visited, but also of the traveller, even if he or she strives to hide behind the written record. In *Pożegnanie z Italią* Strykowski, so far from trying to conceal himself, expresses his opinions at every step, so that his book seems to be more a description of the spiritual state of a Polish writer at the beginning of the cold war than an account of his travels in Italy. By this time Strykowski had already written *Głosy z ciemności* [Voices in the Dark], the most important book in his whole output, though he was still unable to publish it because of censorship. It is based on personal reminiscences of his childhood in a Jewish community in Volhynia and was written on hearing the news of the extermination of the Warsaw Ghetto, as an attempt to save at least part of the memory of the world that perished in the Holocaust.

At the time that he wrote of his stay in Italy, Strykowski had already begun to recover his Jewish roots, but he was still a fervently believing communist, as can be seen not only from the enthusiasm with which he talks of Togliatti and other Italian comrades. Every glance at paintings or sculptures or at the panorama of Rome is accompanied by a persistently intrusive, propagandist commentary, like a tribute paid to compensate for moments of weakness. Even viewing Raphael's Stanzas, Strykowski discerns a battle between progressive and regressive tendencies.

Forty years later, the perspective is reversed. Strykowski includes several passages from the earlier written book *Pożegnanie z Italią* in the text of *Ocalony na Wschodzie*, but now he seems embarrassed by the recollection of his communist rhetoric. He writes of Renaissance frescos and statues in the rather lofty tones of a graduate of a classical *gymnasium* and of the pre-war University of Lwów, which was renowned for its outstanding art historians and its learning in the field of Mediterranean culture. Despite the convention of an extended interview conducted live, in some places Strykowski incorporates whole sentences and even paragraphs from those earlier descriptions. However, this time he makes a different use of inverted commas, which once imposed an ironic distance, and of question marks, which after the passage of time now cast doubt on the certainty of his earlier, “one and only right” judgment of Western art.

In those post-war times, some also made journeys from west to east. Among them were Poles who had been deported to forced labour in Germany and prisoners liberated from Nazi concentration camps, whose return was so dramatically described by Zofia Posmysz. Soldiers of the Polish army who had fought in the West also came back. Some of them even had to travel still further east, as Barbara Skarga's book shows. It is entitled, with bitter irony, *Po wyzwoleniu...*

[After Liberation... ] (1944–1956). The author tells of the years after the war that she spent in NKWD prisons, along with many other soldiers of the Home Army centred on Vilnius, and then of her exile to Siberia and the Gulag labour camps. The book, which she published first in Paris in 1985 under the pen name of Wiktoria Kraśniewska, is among the testimonies recorded late, with difficulty and not without hesitation. Skarga did not begin to write it until twenty years after her release from the Soviet labour camps and her return to Poland; and it took her around five years to complete it. In 1984, when the book was ready, she confessed: “Many times I gave up working on it, and whenever I sat down to it again it was a miserable task. If it hadn’t been for my friends, I don’t think I would ever have finished it. And in fact I don’t know if it *is* finished. A lot more could be written, but isn’t what it contains as it is enough?”<sup>18</sup> Most Polish literature of the Soviet labour camps covers the period from 1939 (after the Red Army invaded Poland on 17 September) to 1942 (the liberation of huge numbers of Poles from exile and labour camps, thanks to the agreement with the Polish government in exile in London after Hitler’s attack on the Soviet Union).<sup>19</sup> Against this background, Barbara Skarga’s account of the post-war years is one of a much smaller number of examples (though what happened to her was by no means exceptional).

## Encounters with Foreignness

All this journeying in different geographical directions entailed risks to life and involved a degree of physical hardship in overcoming space that is unimaginable today. But still more than this, it led to encounters, in some cases even collisions, with the foreign: with strange people, strange landscapes, strange customs and languages. In autobiographical accounts of the nineteen-forties, a sense

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18 Barbara Skarga (Wiktoria Kraśniewska), *Po wyzwoleniu... (1945–1956)* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Polskiej Prowincji Dominikanów, 1990), 5.

19 The fullest monograph is Izabella Sariusz-Skąpska’s *Polscy świadkowie GULagu: literatura łagrowa* [Polish Witnesses to the GULAG: Labour Camp Literature] 1939 – 1989 (Kraków: Universitas, 1995, 2002, 2012). Tadeusz Sucharski, drawing attention to images of Russians who were opponents of communism and showed solidarity with its victims, points to a peculiar element in this literature which appeared alongside the dominant trend presenting the totalitarian Soviet system. *Polskie poszukiwania „innej” Rosji. O nurcie rosyjskim w literaturze Drugiej Emigracji* [Polish Quests for “Another” Russia: On the Russian Current in the Literature of the Second Emigration] (Gdańsk: słowo obraz terytoria, 2008).

of national foreignness is frequently expressed. For Poland, the most dramatic situations involved relations with Germans and Russians.

The stereotypes of Polish-German and Polish-Russian hostility are generally quite well known. The circumstances of the years immediately after the war very much encouraged their perpetuation, so it is all the more interesting to find traces in autobiographical accounts of a different way of seeing things. In the recollections of citizens of Gdańsk – both Poles and Germans – the memory of mutual hostility from 1945 is the dominant, yet some also recount incidents in which members of the two groups behaved towards the other simply as people affected by the common misfortune of war.

Dąbrowska spent the post-war years in Warsaw, though she made frequent trips to Wrocław. However, the bounds of her observations reached somewhat beyond the horizon of life within Poland. It is clear from her diaries that at this time she still had reasonably independent access to opinions that were current in the Western world, and she was critical in her comments on these, more than once concluding that the attitude of the West to matters Polish showed indifference or lack of understanding. One example of this for her was precisely the problem of the resettled Germans, whose fate was sometimes compared in the West with the fate of the nations that had earlier been subjugated by Hitler. Dąbrowska, who had been through six years of German occupation and the Warsaw Uprising, writes bitterly of the painful lack of proportion of this comparison.

In the immediate post-war years, probably no Pole found it possible either emotionally or morally to consider the question of whether Poland in any way shared the guilt for the fate of the German civilian inhabitants of Silesia and Pomerania. The only writers at that time who dared to ask, in their short stories, whether the victims of the crimes committed in a total war had been co-participants in those crimes, were Tadeusz Borowski and Jan Józef Szczepański, and both of them met with a violently critical reaction. The memory of the sufferings of occupation was still too painfully alive, and the conviction too deep that for Poland, the Allied victory had turned into an utter disaster at Yalta. Though in Dąbrowska's diary entry for 28th June, 1948, the question of Polish co-responsibility for the fate of the deported Germans is raised, Poland's conduct is immediately justified, or at least her guilt reduced, by the author's pointing to the deciding role of Russia.

It was not until the generation of writers born after the war came to maturity that a book such as Stefan Chwin's *Hanemann [Death in Danzig]*<sup>20</sup> could

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20 S. Chwin, *Hanemann* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Marabut, 1995); *Death in Danzig*, trans. Philip Boehm (London: Vintage Digital, 2011).

appear, a novel about a German who feels so attached to Danzig because of a personal tragedy that occurred in his youth that he decides to stay there after it becomes Gdańsk, since he no longer expects anything more from life. Chwin's novel is not written in a realistic convention, despite the meticulous care the author takes to keep to the real city plan and to supply descriptions of such fine detail that a seventeenth-century Dutch painter might envy them. He created his own version of a myth of place, framed within a poetic tale of love and death. But it is a sign of the times that this Polish writer, born in Gdańsk, where his father came in the mid-forties on a train carrying repatriates from Vilnius, wrote a novel about a Gdańsk German who was not an enemy. The case is similar with Adam Zagajewski, only a few years older than Chwin. As discussed in previous chapters, in the autobiographical essay "Dwa miasta", he presents a vision of the mythical Lwów that remained in the imagination of its former inhabitants, resettled in Silesia. However, he does not confine himself to nostalgic stereotypes of his own loss. There is also an image in this essay of the Germans who met a fate similar to his own.

The wartime stage of relations with Germans concluded soon after Yalta, but a new stage opened in relations with Russians – a stage which in the Polish mentality and the sphere of collective emotions has still not come to a complete end. For too long these relations were founded on violence and deceit. Among the most recent taboos to be overcome were those concerned with the conduct of the victorious Red Army on the post-German lands conceded to Poland. Almost all the writers of recollections centred on Gdańsk, both Poles and Germans, speak of countless acts of plunder and gang rape. This is also the main motif of Zofia Posmysz's account of the return journey of a group of women from Germany to Poland, discussed in the previous chapter. Nevertheless, her book also contains the story of a great love between a Polish woman and a Russian man, presented in the romantic convention of faithfulness to death, in spite of parting.

Barbara Skarga's account of the prison and labour camp experiences which fell to her lot in the period after so-called "liberation" supplies observations that concur in many respects with those earlier recorded in *Inny Świat [A World Apart]* by Gustaw Herling-Grudziński. Skarga not only reveals the terror of the Soviet "prison civilisation", but also shows how the utter absurdity of its organisation sometimes provoked even its unhappy victims to laughter. This laughter had enormous importance as a means of maintaining a sense of inner freedom. Skarga writes with respect and sympathy about many members of the Russian intelligentsia whom she met in labour camps, but she also notices the terrible spiritual devastation brought about by sovietisation, which instilled into successive generations a lesson of unthinking subservience and fear.

## Jews Who Survived

Another thread in the story of the post-war “migration of peoples” concerns the fortunes of Polish Jews. The same direction of movement from east to west could mean different things in different autobiographical accounts. Strykowski’s own interpretation of what happened to him, presented honestly and profoundly in the interview with Piotr Szewc referred to earlier,<sup>21</sup> could be summarised as follows: “I avoided the Holocaust because I was in Russia, I avoided Soviet prisons and labour camps because I was a faithful communist. That was why I was able to work in Moscow with a Polish newspaper issued on Stalin’s orders, and return to Poland after the war.” Aleksander and Ola Wat also avoided the Holocaust because they were in the East, but they survived and returned only after he had spent the whole of the war in Soviet prisons and she had been deported to Kazakhstan with their son.<sup>22</sup> Jan Kott survived, though he was not in the East, but in the Generalna Gubernia, and not in the ghetto but in the left-wing partisan forces of the People’s Army.<sup>23</sup> Though Wilhelm Dichter was also in the East, he was in the surroundings of Lviv and so too close, within reach of the Holocaust. Almost all the Jewish children in the area perished, but he escaped: hiding under the bed, in the attic and in the well. After the war his family, too, found themselves among those sent more than two hundred miles to the west for resettlement in Silesia, where his stepfather became the director of a mine taken over from the Germans. This chapter of Dichter’s autobiographical novel *Koń Pana Boga*, mentioned above, has the self-ironising title “The Son of an Oil King”, because it points to the material privileges in the daily life of the family of a mine director, whose status stands out sharply against the general background of the immediate post-war years, in which poverty bordered on the abject. For a long time the young Dichter was afraid of other children because he remembered that they were capable of taunting him for being a Jew and might even denounce him. Many of his relatives and acquaintances fled even further to the west.

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21 See footnote 14.

22 A. Wat, *Mój wiek. Pamiętnik mówiony*, Part 1–2 (London: Polonia Book Fund Ltd., 1977); O. Watowa, *Wszystko, co najważniejsze* (London: Puls, 1984).

23 J. Kott, *Przyczynek do biografii. Zawał serca* (London: Aneks, 1990).

Translator’s note: Generalna Gubernia is an abbreviated version of the name given by the Germans to the occupied territories of the central and south-western Polish lands which had not been incorporated directly into the Reich.

## Disturbances in the Centre

It was not only in the eastern and western Borderlands that disturbances of space occurred. As suggested at the end of the previous chapter, these upheavals reached even to the very centre. Baranowska's *Pamiętnik mistyczny* and Białoszewski's autobiographical writing show that Warsaw moved, too, within her very self. Baranowska (who is also the author of a book about the capital, entitled *Warszawa. Miesiące, lata, wieki* [Warsaw: Months, Years, Centuries]), declares that her *Pamiętnik mistyczny* is not only her own memoir: "This book is my own memoir and the city's. All my life I have done nothing else but write her memoir for her".<sup>24</sup> Images of Warsaw in ruins, summoned from her childhood recollection of the years immediately following the war, form an important part of the book.

Baranowska, as she descends into the depths of her own and collective memory, creates an astonishing image of a city in which those homes, streets, trees and monuments that were visible to everyone at the time (the end of the nineteen-eighties) are juxtaposed and interpenetrate in the imagined space with those that existed in the immediate post-war years, in the author's childhood and even further back in time, before she was born, before the war destroyed the city. These shapes, now non-existent in physical space, capable of being recreated only in imagination, rise up invisibly, like tunnels and mine paths hollowed out in the air, criss-crossing with the shapes of tangible material. Baranowska, imparting her individual, poetic expression to a generation's experiences of post-war childhood, reveals a clear grasp of the difference between ruins and rubble. Ruins are a monument, a memorial; they have their own philosophy and aesthetics. After all, in the absence of real ruins, it has been known for artificial ones to be built, as a picturesque adornment, creating a gothic atmosphere in romantic parks. But no one has ever thought of building rubble; it was only ever the result of devastation, and Warsaw was full of it, not only in the parks of the aristocracy but on every ordinary street of a post-war childhood. Untidy piles of bricks overgrown with weeds, with rubbish and filth in its nooks and recesses; threatening perhaps to hide an unexploded bomb in a cellar below. After night-fall one would be afraid to go near it.

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24 M. Baranowska, *Pamiętnik mistyczny* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1987). The quoted passage comes from the author's note on the inner flap of the cover. *Warszawa. Miesiące, lata, wieki*, in the series "A to Polska właśnie" (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 1997).

Białoszewski, describing in *A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising*<sup>25</sup> how the cityscape changed as a result of bombardments and artillery fire during the 63 days of the Uprising, notices that Varsovians functioned then on three levels, one on top of the other. First of all on the surface, in buildings at street level, where it was dangerous to move about because of firing. Secondly in cellars transformed into provisional shelters, with underground passages hollowed out between them. And thirdly, lower still, in the sewage canals, which without ceasing to carry out their usual role as sewers, unexpectedly served as connecting routes between the various districts controlled by the insurrectionists but separated from one another by terrain where the Germans were. Bombardments unpicked buildings from attic to cellar; the city fell apart, revealing its secrets. But this movement, as remarked earlier, was a vertical one. Bombed buildings collapsed; people sheltered in cellars which were also collapsing. In the post-war years which Białoszewski described in a later book,<sup>26</sup> movement took place on the horizontal plane, too. Here, too, the migration of peoples went on, only the movement was centripetal, directed towards the centre. Gradually the Varsovians driven out by the Germans after the Uprising began to return, and as the city began to rise again from the rubble, it drew “new people” to the capital in pursuit of a career, people to whom socialism promised social advancement. Even streets moved: in many places, the recovery of the city from the ocean of ruins did not recreate the topography of pre-war Warsaw. All that remained of some streets were plaques with their names, bricked into the paving of the largest square in Europe, where a present from Józef Wissarionowicz – Stalin – had appeared: the Palace of Culture.

Then comes the time when the post-war “migrations of peoples” cease, when borders are secured with barbed wire and there is no longer any “green” way to cross them. At the very last minute, Czesław Miłosz succeeded in his winter flight to the West. The image of this escape in his novel *Zdobycie władzy* is Piotr Kwinto, taking off from Warsaw’s airport in thickly falling snow. Afterwards, for many long years, space shut down and all movement died into stillness.

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25 M. Białoszewski, *Pamiętnik z powstania warszawskiego* (Warszawa: PIW, 1970); *A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising*, trans. M. Levine (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Ardis, 1977).

26 M. Białoszewski, *Szumy, zlepy, ciągi* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1976).



## **Part Four Testimonies Inscribed in Historical Time: Challenges**



# 1. “Speaking a Memoir”: Janusz Korczak’s Autobiographical Stance

## The Role of the Personal in Korczak’s Writing

It is frequently said that the autobiographical element is ubiquitous in Janusz Korczak’s writings. All readers of his work experience its presence. However, there are many different ways in which a writer’s own experience and inner self can be exploited in writing, ranging from a deep concealment or masking of the personal element to full, sometimes ostentatious clarity of personal reference. Often the individual works of one and the same author are situated at various different points on the scale between these two extremes. Of course, for the interpretation of a writer’s whole oeuvre, the publication of a text in which the author clearly proposes an autobiographical pact is of crucial importance. In these circumstances, an inescapable frame of reference arises, which operates on other works like the photographic developing agent of traditional analogue technology, making the exposed paper darken, revealing an image that was formerly invisible.

Sometimes that image can be discerned earlier, even before the publication of an openly autobiographical text. This happens when the figure, life and personality of a given writer form spontaneously in the minds of readers, because of factors from outside his or her texts. In such cases, rather than bringing autobiographical elements out of a state of concealment, the publication of a personal document re-shapes and complements an image already discerned. This is precisely the situation with Korczak. Renowned in his lifetime as a teacher, doctor and writer, he also created his own social persona, partly in the sphere of words and partly in that of action. His own image of himself as the “Old Doctor” imprinted itself powerfully on the minds of readers and of listeners, especially through the radio chat programmes of the years 1934 – 1936, in which he popularised his pedagogical ideas. After he died, a legend immediately began to form, even still in the Warsaw Ghetto.<sup>1</sup> His death immortalised him at once in the public memory. Even those who have never read a single line of his writing know about his death. Korczak was offered the opportunity to escape from the

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1 An example is to be found in Mary Berg’s *Warsaw Ghetto: A Diary*, first published in 1945. See *The Diary of Mary Berg: Growing Up in the Warsaw Ghetto* (Oxford: One World Publications, 2006), 169–170.

ghetto, but he refused to take it. He remained with the children in his orphanage, and was deported along with them to the extermination camp in Treblinka, where all of them perished in the gas chamber. And even that short account of his end also embraces the main work of his life, for the death that exists in collective memory as the death of Janusz Korczak (whose real name was actually Henryk Goldszmidt, Korczak being only his pen name) inevitably entails the image of this death *with the children*. The key to what we think of the life of Korczak and to the way we read his autobiography lies in what we know about his death. Before the *Pamiętnik [Ghetto Diary]*<sup>2</sup> written in the ghetto was found and published, knowledge of the figure and life of Korczak existed in social consciousness and created the frame within which each of his readers moved. The Memoir extended this frame and presented it in sharper contours, imparting a greater richness and complexity to it, in many cases changing details, but essentially confirming its outlines.

In his novels and short stories, and also in a sense in his only surviving drama, Korczak confirmed the presence of autobiographical material, which is always there to a greater or lesser degree, and though subject to all kinds of remodellings and transformations of genre, is unfailingly recognisable. All these works taken together (and also together with many journalistic texts) create a peculiar kind of “autobiography in installments” which should be read as a complement to the main outline, recorded at the very end of his life, now in the ghetto.

Literary writing, however, even if it is “autobiography in installments”, is governed by its own laws. The Memoir written shortly before Korczak’s death makes it easier to discern the limitations to which the author subjected the material of personal experience, as he shaped it in a variety of ways to various ends. In the context of the Memoir it can clearly be seen that the first-person hero of the earlier novellas, both *Dziecko salonu* [The Child of the Drawing Room] and *Spowiedź motyla* [A Butterfly’s Confession], was to a considerable extent formed by Korczak’s exploitation of his own experience. The similarities are visible even at a mere glance: the early attempts at writing; medical studies; interest in teaching, manifested in reading about children and in contact with them, including work as a coach (not a harsh one, however, but an understanding one who helps the child to develop); familiarity with the poorest children; love of

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2 Translator’s note: the word “Pamiętnik” is better translated as “Memoir” and therefore this is how the work is referred to throughout the chapter – though, as discussed towards the end, its generic status is not constant, the later part being more of a diary than a memoir.

nature and passionate criticism of school as an institution (unhygienic for the body and imprisoning to the soul). Finally, there is a young man's passion for reading and reverie, as well as a deep sense of solitude, of the separateness of one person's existence, though this is spoken of only indirectly and with great reserve.

However, a more important thing to observe than these points of convergence is the variety of ways in which the material of personal experience is given literary shape. Simply noting the concurrence of "facts" would seem to be a futile occupation. Turning one's own experience into literature is not the peculiar preserve of Korczak alone; he is not the only one to have transformed the events he observed and in which he was involved into episodes in novels, or to have given clearly autobiographical features to his heroes. This is an extremely widespread practice; the Bildungsroman or coming-of-age story nearly always has an autobiographical subtext. This is almost a rule of the genre to which both of the texts by Korczak mentioned above allude (though in different ways). The suggestion of the autobiographical is reinforced by the first-person form of narration, which in *Spowiedz motyla* is additionally strengthened by the use of the diary convention. However, this choice of narrative and generic forms also needs to be viewed in a historical stylistic context. The novel of the "Young Poland" period (the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the period known in Europe by the names secession, modernism and Art Nouveau), in which the naturalistic preference for the "human document" was still strongly alive, readily referred to the novel-diary or novel-memoir.<sup>3</sup> Critics have also found numerous analogies in the background and atmosphere of the two novellas' events, as well as in the relations linking their narrator-hero with the background figures; and there are clear concurrences between the observations presented in the documentary piece "Nędza Warszawy" [Warsaw's Poverty] and many episodes set against the background of Powiśle and the historic centre of the city in *Dziecko salonu*.<sup>4</sup>

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3 M. Głowiński, "Od dokumentu do wyznania. O powieści w pierwszej osobie", *Powieść młodopolska. Studium z poetyki historycznej* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1969), 190–230.

4 J. Korczak, "Nędza Warszawy", *Miesięcznik Kuriera Polskiego* 4: 10 (1901). See also H. Kirchner, "Miejsce Korczaka w literaturze", in *Janusz Korczak. Życie i dzieło* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1982), 229, and in the same book, T. Walas, "Emocje i forma (*Dziecko salonu* Janusza Korczaka na tle ówczesnej powieści)".

## The Veiling/Unveiling of Personal Experience in the Stories

Korczak not only left traces that make it possible to find connections between his personal experience and the world presented in his novels, but also, conversely, carried out a series of operations that were intended to hide or break these connections. In *Dziecko salonu*, this is the double point of the introduction of a plane of authorial self-reflection. The situation of “writing a novel” on the one hand places the events within the inverted commas of fictionality, while on the other it endows the narrator-writer, who after all is identical with the hero, with an unexpected authenticity. In *Spowiedź motyla*, in the figure of the grammar school pupil who keeps a diary and makes his first attempts at literary writing, who is aiming towards a future as a doctor or teacher, we find signs that point towards the real life of the author, while the form of publication attempts to turn the attention of the reader away from this. For *Spowiedź motyla* appeared first in the volume *Bobo* [Baby], whose subtitle (*Trzy powiastki* [Three Tales]) assigned it to a particular genre.<sup>5</sup> In its original context, it formed the last link in a three-part chain which presented three stages of development. The first of these, named, like the volume as a whole, *Bobo* and subtitled *Studium-powiastka* [Study-Tale], concerns infancy, and even begins with a story of prenatal life, as if from the moment of conception, the emergence of the Beginning from cosmic, infinite potentiality, in which at a certain time and in a certain place the human being begins its individual existence, while still aware of nothing and infinitesimally tiny. Incidentally, there had probably been no precedent in Polish literature for presenting the life of a literary hero *ab ovo*. In grammatical terms, *Bobo* is narrated in the third person, while as regards the point of view it is maximally impersonal. The Someone who tells of embryonic and infant life reveals himself for a moment in a self-referential confession at the end of the first part of the story:

No one would want to read a many-volume novel about a baby. Well, let them not read it then! But no one would want to print such a novel either. I decided to write only a short story about a baby.

Dim the lamp and read slowly in a quiet whisper – for I am going to speak of something mysterious and full of wonders: the ancient prehistoric stage in a baby’s life.<sup>6</sup>

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5 Korczak’s approach to genre terminology, however, is rather loose: “powiastka” is not a term used in Polish classifications of fiction. We may assume that it means perhaps something between “novel” (powieść) and short story (opowiadanie).

6 *Bobo. Studium-powiastka*, in: J. Korczak, *Wybór pism*, vol II (Warszawa: Nasza Księgarnia, 1958), 8.

Later that Someone, the narrator-writer, strives to be completely transparent and absent, certainly not looking from the point of view of the parents, for they are also heroes of the story alongside Baby and are seen from the outside, from a somewhat jocular distance.

The second tale in the volume is *Feralny tydzień* [Feral Week], with the subtitle “Z życia szkolnego [From School Life]”. *Feralny tydzień* is the story of Staś, a pupil in one of the younger classes of a grammar school. The narration of this story about a child is clearly personal, conducted from inside his perspective, within the framework of the ideas, way of feeling, powers of judgment and association available to him. The dialogues are full of phrases from schoolboy slang, which also penetrates to the narrative parts through free indirect speech. The third text, *Spowiedź motyla*, which completes the volume, finally weighs down this wavering scale on the side of the hero. It makes use of a direct first person narration and has the form of a diary whose author is an unnamed grammar school pupil, but considerably older than Staś and already going through adolescence.

The composition of the volume thus corresponds to the successive phases in the development of a child and youth, not only on the plane of the plot, but also in terms of the choice of narrative techniques. First, when the consciousness of the human being is not yet shaped or distinguished, an omniscient narrator appointed by the author tells that human being's story. Then, as the process of individuation progresses, the writer gradually cedes his competences to the hero, who is finally allowed at the end to speak in his own voice. From this point of view, it would be futile to discuss whether the story of Staś at the beginning of his grammar school years is more or less autobiographical than the confessions of the “butterfly” who is just emerging from his chrysalis as he approaches the end of school. What is important is the “psychological truth” of the material of the young hero's inner life – truth that comprises the omnipresence of a child's inner perspective and the external perspective of an adult (writer and teacher). As I shall try to show, this is a much more worthwhile subject of investigation in considering the phenomenon of Korczak's writing than the question of how, on the level of factual details, he employed material from his own life.

Korczak kept a diary from his youth.<sup>7</sup> The text has not survived to our times, so there is no possibility of deciding how *Spowiedź motyla* relates to it: whether

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7 Compare Korczak's article “Pamiętnik (pogadanka)”, signed with the initial G. in *Czytelnia dla Wszystkich* 1901. 3, in which he confesses: “I will add here that I have been writing a memoir since childhood and that today it has entered so deep into my habits that I would not be able to get to sleep if I did not write at least a few lines about the past day” (1–2).

the latter is a literal quotation of some part of the diary, or a choice of certain fragments, edited by the adult author for the purposes of publication in the volume *Bobo*, or whether perhaps it is a text written with the support of the diary, but starting afresh, with a careful preservation of diary style, yet making use of the knowledge of a writer, doctor and teacher now over thirty years old, as Korczak was at the time that the book was published.

Though theoretically possible, the hypothesis that *Spowiedź motyla* has no connection at all with the authentic diary of the young Henryk (assuming that that diary was kept from as early as the third class of grammar school) seems the least probable. So if *Spowiedź motyla* remains in some significant relation to the writer's youthful, irrevocably lost diary – does that make us helpless to interpret the autobiographical element of the text or limit our perspective merely to a comparison with the Memoir, written at the age of sixty or so? Undoubtedly, the later text is of fundamental significance in confirming the authenticity of many moments, but it does not provide a basis for determining the character of the whole: is *Spowiedź motyla* the writer's own diary (and thus a personal document), or is it an autobiographical novel in the form of a diary? It seems to me that Korczak presented a clear indication, not in the Memoir, but in the very manner of publishing *Spowiedź motyla*, of how that text should be read.

The composition of the volume as a whole, composed of “three tales”, establishes as the main centre of gravity the problem of human maturing from conception to adolescence, the question of the development of a child and youth in general, rather than that of Henryk Goldszmidt in particular. Seen from this perspective, even if *Spowiedź motyla* is the authentic diary of the young Henryk, we should read it as a piece of fiction (a “tale”), and not as a factual document. The compositional frame and the subtitle make of the factual document (if that is what it really is) a literary work. This is a mechanism which seems similar to what Marcel Duchamp did when he brought everyday utilitarian objects (“readymades”) into exhibition rooms and declared that giving them a title and placing them in the space of an art gallery endowed them with the character of works of art. By making use of his diary (if he really did make use of it), Korczak perhaps exploited it more as an *authentic* diary than as his *own*. It might have been a matter of little importance to him that it was *his* personal record. It seems that for the meaning of the whole, it was necessary to show the process of maturing from the inside, as experienced by a boy growing up, rather than from the point of view of an outside observer. The child's or youth's scrapbook revived a past time – not in the sphere of events, for in that area nothing particularly significant or important happened, but in the sphere of the spirit: moods, inner experiences, feelings, ways of reacting. Korczak attached great value to



documents of this kind. Even when he was still in his student years, working as a tutor on a children's camp, he encouraged his young charges to write memoirs; and he made use of these in the book *Józki, Jaśki i Franki* [Joeys, Johnnies and Frankies],<sup>8</sup> about boys from poor Warsaw families, written several years before the publication of *Spowiedź motyla*. Later, in the Orphans' Home and in the second orphanage that he founded, Our House, he was always interested in the memoirs of his charges, and he mentions them also at the very end of his life, in his own Memoir.

Korczak's encouragement to children to write memoirs should probably be seen in a broader context, that of his concept of a children's newspaper, edited by children and filled with their own writing. Obviously there is a difference between an article written by a child which is intended for publication and a memoir which is only shown to the child's closest friends and to "Mr Doctor", as the children in Korczak's charge called him; but it is a difference which at this moment is of secondary importance. The significant thing is Korczak's interest in *the child's own utterance as opposed to utterances about the child*. The latter seems to him to be impossible without the support of the former. One would want to say that his constant call for "the child's right to respect", as the title of one of his most famous publications puts it, is implemented also on the plane of language. The adult writer, when speaking of the child, takes account of the child's point of view, way of feeling and judging, as well as of the child's style with all its lexical and syntactic peculiarities. It has often been emphasised that Korczak, if he makes use of a third-person narration, most often resorts to free indirect discourse, and in general very readily lends a voice to his characters in direct speech, as if in this way respecting on the level of narrative structures the full, sovereign individuality of every human being.<sup>9</sup> Probably *Spowiedź motyla* is just one such long quotation, a self-quotation, but also (with regard to the form of publication) a cryptoquotation. This being said, however, we must leave the subject for the time being.

## A Network of Four Oppositions

Tracing the forms of the autobiographical in Korczak's writing seems a more interesting enterprise than resolving questions concerned with the "material", factographical level. The peculiarity of this writer's stance, in my view, lies in the

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8 Translator's note: the names in the title are plural forms of diminutives of boys' names.

9 M. Głowiński, "Literackość jako działanie pedagogiczne", *Janusz Korczak. Życie i dzieło*, 224–227.

fact that it takes shape at the intersection between various different perspectives, each of which faces in two opposite directions at the same time. Let us list these various “crossroads”:

- 1) duality of narrative voice (I – the other),
- 2) duality of temporal plane (now – then),
- 3) dual status of the presented world (reality – dream),
- 4) duality of the form of utterance (monologue – dialogue).

This last distinction concerns not only the basic sense, that is the linguistic and stylistic markers of the forms of utterance, but also the non-literal sense, when monologue and dialogue are treated as symbolic categories, referring to the situation of an individual who is either enclosed within his or her own separate world or turned towards the other and open to contact. These four pairs of oppositions, taken together and in their differently developing relations to one another, create a network which enables us to describe the ways that Korczak reshapes the element of existence into a written record, the methods by which he unveils the meaning in private experience, enabling it to be communicated.

The duality that is fundamental to autobiography in general (I-the-writer and I-the-subject-of-writing), as well as the very frequent duality of time (I-remembering and I-remembered), is related by Korczak to an anthropological duality that for him is fundamental: child – adult. When Korczak recalls himself as a child, he recreates himself as a child, at the same time, inevitably, passing this through the prism of adult knowledge, experiences and concepts. This is a normal autobiographical perspective; but Korczak strives to do something else as well: to “reverse the opera glasses”, as it were, and present himself as an adult, seen through the eyes of a child. Thus, for example, in both his little books about children’s summer camps, telling the story of various little Mosieks, Josieks and Sruls or Józek, Jasięks and Franęks, there are a few small but extremely significant moments which present us with a portrait of these children’s teacher that is touched with characteristic self-irony (for though he loved to tell stories and encouraged boys to write memoirs, he could not play football properly and his stories sometimes turned out to be less interesting than the sight of a flock of rams passing by).<sup>10</sup> This image, in spite of being outlined with only one or two strokes of the brush, is very clear, but most importantly, it reveals what “sir” found out about himself from the children, through their reactions and behaviour, in whole

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10 Translator’s note: Korczak refers to an occasion when, as he was telling some boys a story, they noticed a flock of rams passing by and immediately ran off to look at them instead of listening to the story.

days spent in their company. This kind of microscopic self-observation can be found scattered throughout many of Korczak's writings. It is shaped by constant contact with his charges, as well as by single chance encounters with other children, which he lived through with the same total involvement. It confirms the hypothesis put forward in the reflections above on the style and point of view of his prose. Korczak's narrator is not an observer who tells a story, but a participant who joins in conversation, who listens to what others say, who remembers it and records it.<sup>11</sup> This point is especially relevant to the situation in which the adult perceives, remembers and notes down what children say to him (of him). A frequent indication of Korczak's approach is the use of free indirect discourse, in which the speech of an adult and the speech of a child meet and intermingle with each other.

The same approach is also visible in the use that Korczak makes of his recollections of his early years and his family home, as recorded in his Memoir. From this we can see that the memory of his own childhood was an important key to his understanding of the other children with whom he came into contact as a doctor and teacher. We can see how much his ability to talk to children was dependent on his memory of himself as a small boy. Besides this, the figures of certain heroes of his novels and short stories, especially those from whose point of view the world is presented (*Feralny tydzień*; *Kiedy znów będę mały*; both tales of King Maciuś), have a string of characteristics which were later recorded in the self-portrait on the first pages of the Memoir. Korczak's approach of remaining in communication with the world of childhood through personal experience is excellently symbolised by the title of the novella *Kiedy znów będę mały* [When I'm a Little Boy Again]. An even more obvious piece of evidence of his attitude is the photograph from his own boyhood which he placed in *Król Maciuś*. The very idea of the photograph, along with the several-sentence commentary that accompanies it, appears to be an exceptionally important autobiographical gesture – perhaps, along with the Memoir, the most important in his writings. As a result of this gesture, Korczak's tales of King Maciuś take on the significance of a phantasmatic autobiography. (I refer here to the sense in which Lejeune writes of the phantasmatic contract or pact as an intermediate form between the novel contract and the autobiographical, applicable to the kind of novelistic work

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11 The obvious comparison with the writing of Miron Białoszewski was noted earlier by Hanna Kirchner ("Miejsce Korczaka w literaturze") and Marta Piwińska ("Senat szaleńców – dramat Janusza Korczaka"), both studies in *Janusz Korczak. Życie i dzieło*, 59 and 245–246.

in which the reader is encouraged to discover phantasms which lay bare truths about the personality of the author, though these truths are not reducible either to particular facts or to general truths about “human nature”.<sup>12)</sup>

So when I was like the person in this photograph, I too wanted to do everything that is described here (...) And I added this photograph because the important thing is when I really wanted to be a king, and not when I'm writing about King Maciuś (...).<sup>13</sup>

The duality of narrative perspective in Korczak's work has an important temporal aspect, which emerges because of the autobiographical stance. The difference between I-the-adult and I-the-child is not only a difference of experience and knowledge, but also one of time, which flows between the two stages of the same life, the two states of formation of the same personality. This difference thus proves to be a derivative of continuity, of continuation; the fruit of memory. Although the distance exists, and time flows inexorably and irreversibly, memory and imagination make the effort to transcend that distance and recover the lost perspective of the child. However, the point in Korczak's books is never to cancel time, to make it run backwards or immerse oneself again, and utterly, in what has passed. The utopian perspective of many autobiographies is foreign to this author. In all of his writings, the effort of memory is directed towards recovering the time of childhood without giving up the present even for a moment. It is an attempt to rediscover the past in such a way as not to lose the present. Not to become completely engrossed in the past, but to reach for that past from a position that preserves a clear awareness of everything that happened later. Not to “be a child again”, but with the aid of the memory of oneself as a small child to “be-together-with-the-child”.

A deep sense of the separateness of one's individual existence usually lies at the root of the autobiographer's endeavours. Without this sense, to undertake the labour of telling the tale – essentially, of delivering a monologue about oneself – would seem to be impossible. We find this awareness of his own separateness, of course, also in Korczak. At the beginning of the Memoir, where he lists his future intentions as a writer, point 10 reads as follows: “Autobiography. Yes.

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12 P. Lejeune, “The Autobiographical Contract”, in: *French Literary Theory Today*, ed. Tzvetan Todorov, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 196–222. See also Maria Janion's discussion of the Freudian origins of the category of phantasm as applied in literary studies in *Projekt krytyki fantazmatycznej. Szkice o egzystencjach ludzi i duchów* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo PEN, 1991).

13 J. Korczak, *Król Maciuś Pierwszy* (Warszawa: Nasza Księgarnia, 1955), 8.

About oneself. About one's small and important person."<sup>14</sup> A few pages before this, constructing "an account of one's own life" is compared to digging a well, penetrating to ever deeper levels, "looking for the underground springs". And at once the metaphor is dramatised, developing into a scene in which an old man takes a spade to this laborious task and refuses someone's offer of aid, saying, "Oh no, my dear, we all have to do this alone. No one can lend a hand and no one can take your place. Everything else we can do together, if you still believe in me and have some respect for me, but this final job of mine – I have to do it alone" (321).

Here, once again, we can see those characteristic Korczak "crossroads" of antinomy and paradox: the idea of the autobiographer's aloneness is expressed in dialogue. If there is no real person to talk to, then he carries on an imaginary dialogue, with some anonymous figure summoned simply for the purposes of that one moment. Korczak makes his own peculiar distinction between speaking and talking:

I spoke with many people (...)

I talked only with myself.

For speaking and talking are not the same... Changing one's clothes and getting undressed – they are two different actions.

I undress when I am alone, and I talk when I am alone (...) When I write a memoir or an account of my life I am obliged to speak, not talk (387–388).

To speak with people, to people. To speak to people about oneself. Out of the depths of one's solitude, but still not to oneself. Korczak knew and valued solitude; he devoted a good deal of his attention as a writer to it, to mention only the volume *Sam na sam z Bogiem* [Alone with God] (subtitled "Prayers of those who do not pray"). He distinguished the solitude of the child from that of youth and of old age. He dreamed, even when he was already in the ghetto, of building a huge children's home in the mountains of Lebanon, imagining, alongside "enormous barrack dining rooms and bedrooms", little "hermits' cells" as well, while for himself, he dreamed of "one small room", on the terrace of a flat roof, "with transparent walls, so that I would not miss even a single sunrise or sunset, and so that when I wrote at night I could keep looking at the stars" (330). He treated solitude as a value that was not accessible to everyone, perhaps as a mystery that only the chosen could read and interpret. But even in this he discerned the beginning of some kind of centrifugal movement, towards others: "My greatest

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14 J. Korczak, *Pamiętnik*, in his *Pisma wybrane*, vol. IV (Warszawa: Nasza Księgarnia, 1986), 325. Page references for further quotations from the Memoir are to the same edition, and are given in the body of the text.

concern is to build hermitages. For those who have earned the right to solitude, who can read her and translate her into a language that can be understood – *orbi et urbi* – (...)” (331).

What arises in solitude requires solitude for its birth and growth, but this is not the end of the matter, for what a person does in solitude is not for himself or herself, or at least not only; it is also for others. Korczak understood autobiography in this way – as a work that arises in solitude, but is not for oneself.

There is the same duality in Korczak’s conception of dreams. Here the Memoir in particular, but also the earlier work, seen through the prism of that Memoir, supply important material. A separate study should probably be written of Korczak as a dreamer, of the role of the phantasm (in Freud’s understanding of the term) in his imagination and his spiritual life. He wrote of his established habit of giving himself over to reverie, especially in the evenings before he went to sleep (or sometimes instead of going to sleep), of whole stories spun in solitude, of utopian projects of social reform or technical discoveries, of travels to China and Palestine. He mentions that he returned repeatedly to some ideas, altering them, developing and reshaping them. Some of this he wrote down, some perhaps he spoke about, as we may guess from the dedication of his story about planet Ro to a boy called Szymon Jakubowicz who, according to Igor Newerly, was an avid listener to his tales and stories.<sup>15</sup> Much has certainly disappeared and never been brought to light.

There are only faint traces of this fantasising creative activity in the Memoir. Korczak compared the ideas that appeared in his dreams and reveries to subjects for stories and novels which required to be worked on, giving them the general title *Rzeczy dziwne* [Strange Things]. Elsewhere he named the chain of reflections that came to him during long nights in prison “chapters of a story” (344). He adds to this, as if incidentally, an astonishing remark which seems to testify to the powerful therapeutic effect of that solitary dreaming. It turns out that it frequently helped him to resist the temptation to suicide:

There were years when I had mercuric chloride and morphine pills hidden deep in the corner of a drawer. I only took them with me when I went to the cemetery to my mother’s grave. It was not until the war started that I kept them in my pocket all the time, and curiously, they were not taken from me during inspections in prison.

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15 An untitled text is included in Part Two of the Memoir, preceded by a note declaring it to be taken “from the *Dzieje dziwne* [Strange Happenings] cycle”. The text is dedicated to Szymon Jakubowicz (377), who, as Igor Newerly’s footnote tells us, was “one of Korczak’s last young charges, a pleasant, clever boy, the most rewarding of listeners to his tales and stories” (440).

There is no more repulsive event (adventure) than an unsuccessful suicide. Such a plan should grow to complete maturity, so that its execution gives absolute certainty of success.

My plan was thought out down to the last detail. If I continually put it off, it was because always at the last moment some new dream would come to me, which I could not abandon without working it through. They were like subjects for novels and stories. I gave them the general title: "Strange Things" (343).

Korczak's Memoir contains a series of such sketches of evening and night-time reveries. Often, alongside past and present, they introduce a third plane of time: the future. Temporal distinctions cross with distinctions between what is real and what is not, between the real world and the world of sleep and dreams. The alternation of reality and dream is present not only in Korczak's recollections of the past and reflections on the present, but equally in his plans for the future. Indeed his fantasising about "strange things" is often directed towards the future, but it is usually a "future" that approaches a utopia, running out beyond time, to a place where it meets with dreams recalled from childhood or encountered in sleep. Korczak recorded some of his reveries as an element in the present he was living through at the time.

The future also has its real side, in the form of plans and intentions for the immediate or distant time to come. Some are noted with the thought of himself as a task to be carried out, others with a view to the life of the next generations. The tasks to be carried out include plans for writing books and articles. Korczak's notes in some places remind the reader of Brzozowski's Memoir, discussed in Part Two of this book, written shortly before the author died. In spite of the huge difference in external conditions, there is something similar in the existential situation. In response to the immediate danger of death, each records his intentions as a writer, his duty towards problems requiring to be considered. Each outlines these plans with the same flourish as if he were looking forward to many undisturbed years in which to carry them out. As if Brzozowski's illness were not making terrifying progress from week to week. As if the ghetto surrounding Korczak were not the thing it was.

## **Autobiography Read Through Obituary**

Korczak's Memoir begins as an autobiography: a clearly sketched idea, a vision of the whole of the past sixty years of his life. It finishes as a diary: broken off at some point, laid aside at a certain moment without the knowledge that it would no longer be possible to return to it, that its author would never again sit down to continue writing.

It is known, also from the very text of the Memoir, that it was typed out as it arose by one of Korczak’s older charges. Thus it is clear that Korczak intended from the outset to preserve the entries, while at the same time accepting their partly rough draft, open character by not removing from them the traces of moments that were sometimes full of haste or hesitation. This text, at first leaning towards the past of recollection, very quickly metamorphoses into a testimony to the present moment. That moment is shown not only by *what* is said but by *how* it is said. However, it would be an oversimplification to interpret this text (because of the open, varyingly shaped nature of the entries) as the outcome of mere impulse or caprice, written without reflection under the dictates of the moment, as if mirroring a stream of consciousness. Written by night in the little room that Korczak shared with several sick children, these diary entries also bear witness to the writer’s struggle to find a form in which he could somehow enclose the meaning of his experiences. The first part of the Memoir concludes with an attempt at recapitulation:

I read it. I understood it with difficulty. And the reader? Don’t be surprised that the memoir is incomprehensible to the reader. Can anybody understand someone else’s recollections, someone else’s life? It seems that I should know without difficulty what I write. Not at all! Can one understand one’s own recollections? (374).

This problem of difficult and uncertain communication with the reader was one that troubled and absorbed Korczak. The recalling of Słowacki’s letters to his mother (“They present a vivid image of his experiences over several years. Thanks to these letters, a document of his transformation under the influence of Towiański has survived”, 374) suggested to him the idea of writing his own memoir in the form of letters to his sister, an unsuccessful idea which he gave up after the first attempt. Then he wondered if a faithful picture of a person’s life could be attained by an attention to detail similar to, or even greater than is to be found in Proust’s style of narration:

Every hour – is a thick notebook, is an hour of reading (...) And we want to live through a whole long life in the space of a few hours, at the price of a mere few hours of our own. It can’t be that easy. You will discover things in a vague shorthand, a careless sketch – one episode in a thousand – in a hundred thousand (375).

This reminder of the fundamental incompatibility between the element of experience and the letter of the text might be expected to strike the memoirist’s pen from his hand. But that is not what happens. When the next reflection comes, it causes a complete turnabout. From the previous observation about the excess on the side of life, an excess difficult or even impossible to accommodate in words, even at the price of a Proustian level of detail, Korczak passes to the thought that



there is also a peculiar kind of excess on the side of words, caused by the multitude of languages divided by “God’s error or God’s punishment” (374). After all, for one and the same object, each language offers its own name, one that is different from the name in other languages. The whole of this piece of discussion, which concludes the first part of the Memoir, was noted down during a Hebrew lesson in the ghetto, in the classroom of the Orphans’ Home. The sight of the children, for whom an hour spent learning a language had passed without their noticing it, suggested to Korczak the conclusion that “You can fill not one, but three lives” (375).

In the second part of the Memoir, reflection on the theme of writing itself returns only twice more: once after a week’s break, in a moment of doubt that this writing serves any kind of purpose, and again after a few days, when Korczak, as mentioned above, distinguishes “talking with oneself” from “speaking with people”, and acknowledges the latter as appropriate to a memoir. The writer’s thinking also now no longer turns towards his own past life (with the exception of a few sentences about the fear of inherited mental illness that haunted him, or about his boyhood passion for reading and the family tradition of his father and grandfather). The pages of this part, written in July and the first days of August 1942, are filled by turns with snapshots of daily life and with four more extensive threads, constituting relatively separate wholes, sometimes furnished with their own title. These are, first, the already mentioned untitled story, described as being from the “Strange Happenings” cycle and dedicated to Szymon Jakubowicz; then a piece entitled “Euthanasia” and the entry for 27 July, often given the title “History’s Manifesto Speech” by critics, and finally, immediately after this, “Why I clear the dishes”, the text of Korczak’s last article for the Orphans’ Home newspaper. Then there is only a sequence of aphoristically short entries for the days between the first and the fourth of August.

Every memoir or diary which survived the ghetto is at one and the same time both a testimony to the Holocaust and a trace of some one person’s individual existence, so Korczak’s Memoir needs to be viewed not only in relation to his own life and creative work, but also in relation to other records, such as those of Mary Berg, Adam Czerniaków, Emmanuel Ringelblum and tens of other more minor accounts.<sup>16</sup> Set against these, which provide a sense of the historical and

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16 M. Berg, *Warsaw Ghetto: A Diary; Adama Czerniakowa dziennik getta warszawskiego 6 XI 1939–23 VII 1942*, ed. M. Fuks, (Warszawa: PWN, 1983), E. Ringelblum, *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto: the Journal of Emmanuel Ringelblum*, translated and edited by J. Sloan (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1958); *Pamiętniki z getta warszawskiego. Fragmenty i registry*, ed. M. Grynberg (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe,

existential context, the nature of Korczak’s document is more clearly visible than when we read it mainly against the background of his own writing. His well-known colloquial style, his way of sketching lively portraits of people, his manner of building a scene and giving it some startling reflection as a punchline, as well as his drive towards dramatisation of the narrative, turn out to have an unexpected cognitive power and significance in the completely new situation in which these means were used to bear witness to the experience of life in the ghetto.

In Korczak’s account it can be seen that his aim was not to capture an image of the passage of daily life. He did not strive to embrace fully even that small fragment that was directly accessible to him, that on which the value of many individual accounts is based, to say nothing of the broader, more chronicle-like notes of a Czerniaków or the archive of a Ringelblum. The incidentally recalled details connected with acquiring food for the children, with their state of health, with his own exhaustion, which meant that even dressing and eating anything seemed to him an effort almost beyond his strength to make – these are the trivial little things which unveil the dread that human consciousness refuses to embrace. At the end one can no longer even believe what the thermometer or the weighing machine says. That world, which we know more broadly from other accounts, presses in on the text of the Memoir and squeezes its way into its current, which the writer nevertheless tries to turn in another direction, as if in the conviction that his task is not to write a chronicle, but to project a design, to cast the mind upwards and forwards. In this way he also testifies to what he is silent about, but which others beside him uttered plainly.

As we think of what is not present in Korczak’s diary entries, and yet belongs to their meaning and message, we return to the observation made at the beginning, that this autobiography is read and must be read through the prism of the story of his death.

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1988). A bibliography of memoirs is provided by B. Mark in: *Męczeństwo i walka Żydów w latach okupacji* (Warszawa, 1963). See also: I. Maciejewska, “Getto warszawskie w literaturze polskiej”, in: *Literatura wobec wojny i okupacji*, ed. M. Głowiński, J. Sławiński (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1976), and her “Pamiętnik Janusza Korczaka”, in: *Janusz Korczak. Życie i dzieło*. The most remarkable interpretation of the notes that arose in the ghetto is to be found in Jacek Leociak’s already mentioned monograph, first published in Polish in 1997, *Text in the Face of Destruction: Accounts From the Warsaw Ghetto Reconsidered*, trans. Emma Harris (Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2004).

There are human fortunes whose basic shape is formed by some achievement: a discovery, the creation of a masterpiece, conversion, a victorious war. If the person living through such a life, to whom such fortune is given, writes an autobiography and has a sense of the meaning of his or her experience, then he or she imparts a shape to it which is recorded in the autobiography. The later course of the person's life may or may not confirm this shape – the trace of this person in history remains as that part which has been accomplished, that shape which has been recorded. There are also people who enter history above all by their death, which becomes their principal symbol. Even if it was the outcome of their whole life, its crowning moment, still it overshadows that life or carries it into another dimension.

Although Korczak put his whole life and everything he did into his work as a teacher and writer, he would not have become the symbol that he has become if he had not gone to Umschlagplatz together with the children on 6 August, 1942. And this is true regardless of whether they marched under the unfurled banner of the Orphans' Home, as some say and as legend would have it, or whether, as in the account of Marek Rudnicki,<sup>17</sup> the event did not look so spectacular. The dominant note in autobiographies varies: any interpretation of St Augustine's *Confessions*, for example, must give pride of place to the experience of conversion described in them, but can really manage without what we know of the death of the Bishop of Hippo.

Whereas a reading of Korczak's Memoir is inconceivable without what we know of the fate that met the author two days after he wrote the last sentence that has survived in it.

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17 M. Rudnicki, "Ostatnia droga Janusza Korczaka", *Tygodnik Powszechny* 1988. 45.



## 2. How to Write about the Sins of One's Youth or a Year with Konwicki, a Year with Miłosz

*To the memory of Roman Zimand  
(who also had his part in Stalinism, and later paid all his life  
for the error of his youth)*

How, and in what kind of language, can one recall in intimate writings one's part in the public affairs of the nineteen-fifties? Tadeusz Konwicki, annoyed by the interest taken by young people in the Stalinist episode of his life and that of many writers of his generation, more than once described that interest as pornographic. But although this is certainly an ingenious polemical device and Konwicki's argumentative dexterity is undeniable, one cannot concede that he is right when he attributes the questions asked about the compliant attitude of writers towards the authorities in the fifties of the last century to unhealthy curiosity and a salacious appetite for looking at the indecent. There is a generational aspect to the posing of such questions. Some writers, who in their youth had become tangled up with Stalinism and had later abandoned it, who had crossed over to the democratic opposition and were often persecuted by the authorities for this temerity (for example by bans on publication of their work or by the refusal to issue them a passport), considered that they had already paid sufficiently for the errors of their past and did not wish to return to it. Yet younger writers and critics emerged for whom this was not enough and who insisted on further explanations. At the same time, the government was keen to recall the compromised past of artists who wrote during the era of socialist realism, and then from the nineteen-seventies became the moral authorities of the opposition. In this way, paradoxically, the harsh questions of the young, posed in good faith, coincided with the perfidious accusations of the secret services in their battle with the opposition.

### **The Long Shadow of Stalinism**

Włodzimierz Bolecki, still using the pseudonym of Jerzy Malewski, argued extensively and highly convincingly with Konwicki in a publication issued at the very end of the existence of the Polish People's Republic, outside the reach of the

system of censorship that had operated within it.<sup>1</sup> The generational dimension makes itself felt both in Bolecki's polemics here and in two books of interviews which were mentioned in Part 3 of this book: Stanisław Bereś's interviews with Konwicki, entitled *Pół wieku czyśćca* [Fifty Years in Purgatory, London 1986] and Piotr Szewc's with Julian Strykowski, published as *Ocalony na Wschodzie* [Saved in the East, Montricher 1991]. Bereś's exchanges with Konwicki resemble a boxing match more than anything else, usually concluding in a clinch when the critic asks about the author's early work, written within the conventions of socialist realism. Meanwhile, although Szewc is not aggressive in his questioning of Strykowski, there is a moment when the latter, feeling his back against the wall, responds with a half-joking but half-serious question: "Is this an interrogation?" Even so, he still answers. When his interlocutor remarks, "I have to admit that not everything you have said in connection with communism seems clear to me," Strykowski retorts: "That's because clarity is not a feature of communism."<sup>2</sup> Strykowski does not refer to what Czesław Miłosz called the "Hegelian bite"; but the problem of the guilt of intellectuals and writers, the question of how far they were responsible for the way that minds had been "taken captive", and how far they themselves were the victims of this process, is constantly present to both parties to the discussion. Strykowski does not deny what happened, but he neither carries out any kind of self-flagellation nor makes ingenious attempts to justify himself. At one point he says, "I lived in fear and delusion" – as if speaking of something from which he has escaped and of which he has to tell a person who is two generations younger.

Miłosz introduced the term "Hegelian bite" in an essay of 1976 on Dostoyevsky's novel *The Devils*, where he wrote of a student who, after reading this book, unexpectedly pronounced it a revelation of the truth about the universal laws of historical necessity. "So the student had suffered what I would call the "Hegelian bite", which today is possible, even when a person has not read any philosophers at all." A little later in the essay, Miłosz referred the term he had just invented to his own book: "A long time ago, twenty years ago, I wrote a book called *The Captive Mind*, in which I tried to present examples of the

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- 1 J. Malewski [W. Bolecki], "Pornografia (Wokół jednego zdania Tadeusza Konwickiego)", *Widziałem wolność w Warszawie. Szkice 1982–1987* (London: Polonia, 1989), 80–99.
  - 2 *Ocalony na Wschodzie. Z Julianem Strykowskim rozmawia Piotr Szewc* (Montricher: Les Editions Noir sur Blanc, 1991), 84; S. Nowicki, *Pół wieku czyśćca [czyli rozmowy z Tadeuszem Konwickim]* (London: Aneks, 1986). Stanisław Nowicki is the pen name of Stanisław Bereś, who published the interviews under his real name in 2003, with the Kraków publishing house Wydawnictwo Literackie.

“Hegelian bite”.<sup>3</sup> The term made a huge career for itself, almost independently of its creator, and is frequently used without any reference to him. The capacity of the metaphor grew with the passage of time and the temperature of discussion. In *The Captive Mind*, Miłosz had analysed the phenomenon of the fascination with the Hegelian category of “historical necessity” and had seen in it the intellectual and psychological explanation to the puzzle of the co-operation of intellectuals and artists with totalitarian regimes. Meanwhile his critics, among them Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, treated this view as a devious justification of this co-operation, which also included Miłosz’s own stance during several years of work in the diplomatic service of the Polish People’s Republic, up to the time when he abandoned this work and asked for political exile in France in 1951. In *Rok myśliwy* [*A Year of the Hunter*], and thus at the end of the nineteen-eighties, Miłosz wrote several times of the “Hegelian bite”, using the term as one already generally known.

### A Public Confession in a Private Diary?

In various kinds of personal document related to the first two decades after the war, the problem of the relationship between literature and the authorities is one of the most convoluted, painful and difficult to express in words. It is not only a matter of facts, events and dates; there is also the question of the trace of a mentality that is imprinted on the text – a trace that is always somewhat modified by the rules that govern the text and by the circumstances in which it came into existence. If one wants to state one thing, merely hint at another, and pass over something else again in complete silence, one has to think carefully about how and in what language to speak of the fifties of the last century.

In essence, Konwicki’s situation is simply one element in a sensitive and much larger problem, that of the relation between artists (including writers) and the authorities in a totalitarian system. Extensive studies of this problem have been conducted, in various forms and from various points of view, presenting individual aspects of the way that Polish writers positioned themselves in relation to communism; later I shall give two examples of books in which we may find the background (historical, psychological and moral) to the autobiographical writings of Konwicki’s *Kalendarz i klepsydra* [*The Calendar and the Hourglass*]

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3 Cz. Miłosz, “Biesy”, *Kultura* 1976. 12. Reprinted in his essay collection *Ogród nauk* (Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1979, Kraków: Znak, 1998) and in his *Rosja. Widzenia transoceaniczne, tom I, Dostojewski, - nasz współczesny* (Warszawa: Zeszyty Literackie, 2010).

and Miłosz's *A Year of the Hunter* which are the centre of interest in this chapter.<sup>4</sup> The former is linked with the latter first of all by being an attempt to settle accounts with that episode in the writer's own life which was connected with the Stalinist period in Poland, in other words the end of the nineteen-forties and the beginning of the nineteen-fifties. Secondly (and this may seem surprising, as a phenomenon from a completely different sphere), the two works are linked by similarities in the generic shaping of the utterance. Both Miłosz and Konwicki chose the form of a diary, and one that covered only one year (though a full year); and both stylised their diaries in a peculiar way. On the surface of it, they distance themselves from the stance of confession that is traditionally proper to the intimate diary and introduce certain elements of the stance of witness to the times, but nevertheless in both of their texts a note of acknowledging the sins of youth, and hence a note of confession, is sounded. Besides this, both of them made use of the poetic of challenge practised by Gombrowicz, playing a game with the reader, before whom they both veil and unveil their relations with Stalinism: their involvement, their compromises and their rebellion.

Attention to the poetics of the text encourages us to compare the two diaries, in spite of the great difference in respect of their time of writing. If one were to keep exclusively to the historical and moral aspects, the book to place beside Miłosz's *A Year of the Hunter* would probably not be *Kalendarz i klepsydra*, but the previously mentioned record of Bereś's extended interview with Konwicki, which, like Miłosz's book, came into being at the close of the twentieth century, at a similar distance in time from the Stalinist years in Poland. Konwicki and Miłosz were not the only ones to return at that time in thought to their part in the events of half a century before; Julian Strykowski, mentioned above, is another example. My decision to place *A Year of the Hunter* alongside Konwicki's book of three decades earlier is based on a different criterion, however, this being the two diary writers' choice of a startlingly similar narrative frame.

Of course there are notable differences between the two diaries in respect of the situation in which they arose. Konwicki wrote in the People's Republic, at the beginning of the nineteen-seventies, and had to play a game, not only for artistic purposes with the reader, but also for political reasons with the censor. Miłosz wrote while still in emigration, at the end of the eighties, when communism had already begun to fall apart, and the authorities of the People's Republic were

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4 T. Konwicki, *Kalendarz i klepsydra* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1976); Cz. Miłosz, *Rok myśliwego*, first published by Instytut Literacki, Paris 1990. *A Year of the Hunter*, trans. Madeline Levine (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994).



forced to take account of him as a Nobel Prize Winner, tolerating his growing popularity and his visits to Poland. If any kind of censorship operated on him, it was his own inner standard and his eye to his readers' opinion of him. Konwicki lived through the Stalinist years as an unfeathered fledgling, an emerging writer of the "spotty" generation, whose every step betrayed the immaturity and impetuosity that favoured an uncritical acceptance of Marxist literary doctrine. Miłosz, older by a generation, was a poet whose position had already been acknowledged before the war and who had become firmly established in conspiratorial literary life under the German occupation of Warsaw. His university education and knowledge of foreign languages helped him to gain a position in the post-war establishment, working in the diplomatic service, which he treated mainly as an opportunity to escape outside the borders of communist Poland.

The two books that I mentioned above as useful for understanding the background to the two diaries by Miłosz and Konwicki are Miłosz's *The Captive Mind* and Marci Shore's *Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw Generation's Life and Death in Marxism, 1918–1968*.<sup>5</sup> Though these books differ considerably, they also complement each other in a remarkable manner. Miłosz abandoned communist Poland during the time when Stalinism was at its peak there. He wrote *The Captive Mind* soon after, taking advantage of political asylum in France. His point of view recalls the position that anthropologists and sociologists call "participant observation". The duality of perspective lies in the fact that he analysed phenomena occurring in the circle of writers to which he himself had only recently belonged, so that he knew it well from the inside, while at the same time he had completely separated himself from it by his political decision to remain in the West. Because of this there is a certain distance in his way of referring to his former fellow-writers, who were more or less his contemporaries. In spite of this, one can sense below the surface of the text the tension of someone who has rubbed shoulders with mortal danger. Miłosz writes of others, but the reader constantly wants to ask: but what about *you*? After all, you were there, before you managed to save yourself and get away. The author, however, keeps to the limits that he has assigned himself, those of a political treatise. It was to be several decades before, in *A Year of the Hunter*, he was to describe his personal experience. Shore, meanwhile, looks entirely from the outside, as a professional university historian and a foreigner, an American, as well as someone younger by around two generations

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5 Cz. Miłosz, *The Captive Mind*, trans. J. Zielonko (London: Secker and Warburg, 1953); M. Shore, *Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw Generation's Life and Death in Marxism, 1918–1968* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

than the heroes of her book, who are no longer alive, and whom she could get to know only indirectly from written documents and from conversations with the few remaining witnesses to their lives.

Besides this, *The Captive Mind* differs from Shore's analysis in terms of its temporal scope and chosen way of presenting the phenomena described. Miłosz concentrates on the few years of Stalinism in Poland. Shore covers half a century of the activity of one generation, born around 1900, the generation which created the literature of the avant-garde in the twenty years between the wars. They were mainly writers who were in various degrees connected with the communist movement or who at least sympathised with the leftist views of this period. Some of them perished as victims of the Stalinist purges in what was then the USSR, while others, who survived the war and became involved in post-war Stalinism in Poland, later also fell into disfavour with the communist authorities within the country. Some of them joined in with the later activities of the opposition, in a gesture of disillusionment, having come to understand the true, criminal face of communism.

For the situation presented in the diaries of Konwicki and Miłosz, Marci Shore's book provides the background of the earlier tradition that took shape after World War I, but retained its continuity through several succeeding decades and influenced the activity of leftist-minded writers of the next two generations, right up to those who made their debut after the war, who fall outside the frame of Shore's investigation. In *The Captive Mind*, in turn, Miłosz refers mainly to the situation of those writers who formed the middle generation during the Stalinist period. Konwicki, who is not mentioned in either of these books, is the next link in the chain that is the consequence of the preceding decades. Shore presents a rich gallery of figures and takes account of the background of historical events. Miłosz works by the method of case studies. By describing the stances of four known Polish writers, he analyses various forms of operation of the mechanisms of indoctrination, ideological persuasion and manipulation, which he compares to conversion to a "New Faith" and defines by the book's titular formula of "the captive mind". The anonymous silhouettes presented in the book are drawn in the style of a *roman à clef* in a manner that the Polish reader has no difficulty in decoding. At the same time, by omitting surnames, Miłosz gave these figures a generalised quality, addressed to Western readers, especially those from the rather numerous circles in which illusions about communism were determinedly nourished. In *The Captive Mind* he created in essence one of the first and most penetrating analyses of the operations of totalitarian ideology, revealing its most important characteristics as if in a magnifying glass. Shore, in her extensive synthesis, frequently follows in his footsteps and makes reference to him. The Polish

translation of the subtitle of her book introduces an element not directly present in the original, which nevertheless very accurately conveys the meaning of the diagnosis posited by the author: *Życie i śmierć oczarowanych i rozczarowanych marksizmem* [The Life and Death of Those Enchanted and Disenchanted with Marxism]. For “enchantment”, being put under a spell or charm, with its suggestion of the charm of love, and its opposite, “disenchantment”, entailing the loss of illusions, of course have one and the same root. To be enchanted is to be charmed and allured, but also to be placed at the mercy of the operation of magic, of the treacherous and dangerous power of an “evil spell” which transgresses the bounds of the real and is hence delusory. The sound consonance achieved by rhyme (*oczarowanych – rozczarowanych*) powerfully underlines the inseparable link between enchantment and disenchantment, the inevitable cross-over from one to the other which was the experience of many modern twentieth-century artists who found themselves within Marxism’s orbit of influence.

Both diaries, *Kalendarz i klepsydra* and *A Year of the Hunter*, especially when read in the context of the writers’ other autobiographical texts, in other words the extended interviews they gave (I shall return to these later), reveal the personal dimension of the historical process in which their authors took part. The general features discernible in the fortunes of a whole intellectual formation, visible with the passage of successive decades of the twentieth century, constitute a context which makes it easier to perceive the individual marks of the existential experiences that both writers had to confront.

### **A Diary of One Year as a Closed Form**

Both of the diaries discussed have a rather peculiar shape; they constitute something like an episode, which even if it is extended, is still enclosed in a limited time period. In the rich history of the diary as a genre, we recognise forms that cover only a certain phase, distinguished from the whole of a life in inner or outer respects, such as the period of adolescence (the youthful diary of Stefan Żeromski, which he did not continue in adulthood); a journey (Seweryn Goszczyński’s description of a romantic hike to the Tatra mountains); imprisonment (the famous diary of Anne Frank); illness (Stanisław Brzozowski’s Memoir); war (Andrzej Bobkowski’s extensive diary, kept from the outbreak of World War II right through to its end). They may be contrasted with diaries kept over many years, stretching like a *roman-fleuve* up to the death of the diarist, like those of Zofia Nałkowska, Maria Dąbrowska or Jan Lechoń.

In the case of a diary covering a limited period of life, the distinguishing element may be not only the existential situation prevailing during this time (as in

the examples recalled above), but also the very fragment of time, with its symbolic quality – for example a year. In Leopold Tyrmand's title *Dziennik [Diary] 1954*, the date evidently not only denotes the passage of some period of twelve months (actually the reader quickly realises that the important thing is the first quarter of the year, rather than the whole of 1954), but also points to a significant historical moment. That moment was the time after the death of Stalin, when scarcely perceptible symptoms of the "thaw" that was to come were beginning to appear, such as the proposal made to Tyrmand by the publishers that he might write a novel. A comparable example of a diary's placement by reference to a historical event might be Daniel Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*, if it actually were the authentic record from the time of the Great Plague of London that it was long taken to be. Indeed, if we recall Herling-Grudziński's parable, describing totalitarianism as a plague, Defoe would be an extremely useful patron to invoke in our considerations of the diaries analysed in this chapter. Were any recollections from the time of the totalitarian "plague" in Poland included in those two diaries of a single year written by Konwicki and by Miłosz? We shall return to this question later.

These two diaries make a different use of the symbolism of the year than do Defoe and Tyrmand. Konwicki and Miłosz do not suggest, either by their titles or by the composition of these works, that they treat the year as a synonym for some fragment of historical time. Nothing remarkable happens either in 1974 (Konwicki) or in the period from the second half of 1987 to the first half of 1988 (Miłosz). In both these diaries, the year is a random cycle of twelve months, and though it is counted differently, from January in Konwicki's case and from August in Miłosz's, both diaries preserve the calendar order. Yet the superficially identical form of a diary covering a single year is treated in completely different ways by the two authors.

Konwicki, as mentioned earlier, calls *Kalendarz i klepsydra* a "lie-diary" or "false diary". Miłosz, in turn, in the Foreword to *A Year of the Hunter*, says that he tried to present an image of himself that was as true as possible (bearing in mind what is possible if one is writing a diary not exclusively for oneself, but thinking also of publication). Thus one of these two authors tells us that he is deliberately going to lead the reader "up the garden path". The other confesses that he is curious (feeling that he is an enigmatic figure even to himself) to know what a future biographer will make of his writing. So both set the reader a puzzle and in both cases it is a puzzle about themselves.

One cannot fail to notice, however, that in their construction both books are marked by a certain feature that is clearly foreign to the diary as a form of personal document. In a study which today has become a classic, Michał Głowiński

considers that one of the basic differences between an authentic diary and a novel in the form of a diary is that the former, in contrast to the latter, is a “non-work”.<sup>6</sup> It is not subject to any compositional logic, and its ending in particular is not a completion but a breaking off. In the case of *Kalendarz i klepsydra* and *A Year of the Hunter* it can clearly be seen that each of them only pretends to be a non-work. Since the time when Gombrowicz elevated the immediate publication of diaries, in the manner of novels, plays and poems, to the dignity of a principle, the intensifying process by which the diary has been turned into literature brought this genre to a certain critical point at which the possibility emerged of erasing the border between the diary and the novel cast in the form of a diary.

Both *Kalendarz i klepsydra* and *A Year of the Hunter* make ostentatious display of their carefully conceived composition as works of literature. They have distinctly finished, “rounded off” endings. A year with Konwicki, a year with Miłosz. And not a single day more. The diary narrative is enclosed by both writers within the definite external frame of the calendar. From the ceaseless passage of time, this frame cuts out one defined segment, whose beginning and end, separated from each other by the space of a whole year, form symmetrical brackets around that period of time. “From August to August”, says Miłosz. While Konwicki, who begins precisely on New Year’s Day, later informs the reader several times of the passage of successive seasons of the year: spring, summer, autumn. The last is obviously exposed to view by the key word “Zaduszki”. This colloquial name for the Feast of All Souls on 2 November, devoted to prayers for (za) the souls of the dead (*dusze*), is a sign of the writer’s private mythology, and this on two planes. On the personal level it is a sign of his unflinching memory of those who perished during the war. On the cultural level it indicates the constantly living tradition of an ancient folk ritual, that of the forefathers, the ritual of communion with the spirits of one’s ancestors. Konwicki wrestles with the Romantic understanding of patriotism that Mickiewicz imparted to this tradition, parodying it and yet in the end remaining unable entirely to break free of it. *Kalendarz i klepsydra* concludes with the approach of Christmas, so it covers a full year, in its unshaken, age-old order – an order that none of the madnesses of the modern world that Konwicki so much decries, calling himself old-fashioned and provincial, is capable of overthrowing.

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6 M. Głowiński, “Powieść a dziennik intymny”, in his *Gry powieściowe. Szkice z teorii i historii form narracyjnych* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1973), 79. Reprinted in his *Prace wybrane*, vol. 2: *Narracje literackie i nieliterackie* (Kraków: Universitas, 1997).

Miłosz begins and ends as if in the middle, for he writes from August to August, but he nevertheless dates everything with perfect exactitude by day and month (written with a Roman numeral, something that today is no longer taught in schools), while the year is given its full four-figure formula. The first entry is dated 1 VIII 1987, Berkeley; the last – 30 VII 1988. Only the next day, 31 July, would be required to complete the calendar order. But because the entries are not always daily ones, this gap fits into the principle that has been assumed, and the year is unquestionably full and complete.

Placing *Kalendarz i klepsydra* alongside *A Year of the Hunter* makes this matter of completion, of closing the year, all the clearer in that in both cases the reader cannot fail to notice that there is another paraliterary pattern to the utterance, besides that of the diary: the calendar, a genre that is not in the least personal. In Konwicki this genre is exposed to view in the very title. In Miłosz the situation is similar, and the author adds an explanation in the Foreword, telling the reader that he took the title of his diary from one of his favourite books from childhood, a book by Włodzimierz Korsak, a forester and writer of novels for the young:

*The Year of the Hunter* is a calendar of things that need to be done by months; it is, quite simply, a hunting handbook, although, to be sure, it is geared mainly to the forested expanses of Northern Europe. My book has nothing at all in common with this topic, I assure you, but it has a great deal in common with the calendar form. It is the diary of one year in my life: from August 1987 to August 1988. But since I repeatedly returned in these entries – which I recorded daily or every few days – to distant events and people whom I once knew, the past and the present are interwoven in these pages.<sup>7</sup>

Further on, Miłosz adds another, metaphorical, sense by calling himself a hunter, because he goes in quest of the visible world and strives to capture it in words.

*Kalendarz i klepsydra*, though it does not allude to any particular example, is nevertheless in its very conception even closer to the paraliterary genre of the calendar than Miłosz's book, which takes its title from Korsak. It is closer if only by the fact that Konwicki keeps to the order of the year, beginning on 1 January, and alludes in several places to the ritual dimension (he mentions New Year, All Souls and Christmas). The rhythm of the four seasons is also distinctly present in his book, whereas in Miłosz's, written under the uniformly sunny sky of California, the changes of season almost completely disappear from view.

Thus the essentially loose diary narration is enclosed by both writers within an external frame: that of the calendar, which imposes definition on the stream of time, marking out three hundred and sixty five days in all, and bringing them

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7 Cz. Miłosz, *A Year of the Hunter*, v–vi.

at their end back to the start of a new year. Konwicki, who began on New Year's Day and finished before Christmas, speaks in his final sentences of the "hourglass of memory". For the essence of the hourglass is that it can be turned over *ad infinitum* and always the same sand in the same vessel will pour through to the other side in the same way.

## Flaw, Shame, Reckoning

Both authors construct their tale in a manner that allows the cyclical movement of a closed circle to break through the scheme of time's linear, inexorably forward passage, so that one "turn" of the circle can be described and shown in such a way as to suffice for the whole of a life. And thus, imperceptibly, this one year, chosen in order to write a diary, includes within itself, on the principle of *pars pro toto*, the remainder of the writer's life, captured (though imperfectly and selectively) in memoir-like leaps into the past. It is memory that allows the writers to triumph over the irreversible passage of time. Thanks to memory, both diarists, following the calendar order, moving in the present of a single year, can escape freely into the past decades, using the method discovered by Proust and later perfected over many years by successive creators of stream of consciousness novels. And that distant past turns out to be astonishingly more important than the present proper to the diary. Indeed, both writers conclude by speaking of their sense of the inadequacy of the efforts undertaken in the diary they have just completed.

Konwicki:

Insomnia. The hourglass of memory. Snowflakes falling with a crash on the lifeless ground. A rubble heap of things that once were and that never were. Who cares about it. What do I care about it.<sup>8</sup>

Miłosz:

All these individuals exist simultaneously in their various phases, but it is impossible to capture that temporal dimension in linear fashion, in an unfolding plot, despite the ever more frequent use of the flashback technique. (...) where are those exceptional virtues of literature? No doubt they, too, are modest. But the impotence of literature when it attempts to capture and preserve reality in words is a separate topic entirely.<sup>9</sup>

Both endings, quoted above, supply arguments of yet another kind to support the thesis that these two diaries cannot be treated, using Głowiński's definition,

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8 Konwicki, *Kalendarz i klepsydra*, 392.

9 Miłosz, *A Year of the Hunter*, 285–286.

as “non-works”. Alongside the basic motivation for concluding the text, which is the external fact of having kept the diary for one whole year, an intratextual motivation appears, one which is in a sense rhetorical, alluding to time-honoured ways of consciously, rather than accidentally, concluding an utterance. In his last paragraph, Konwicki presents a lightning summary of his whole oeuvre, and there is a self-ironic, distinctive punch in his consideration of how he might conclude the diary he has just written:

This book might be my last book. The last truth-untruth, fear-pretence, coquetry-groan. It might close with the manly conclusion: *omnis moriar*.<sup>10</sup>

The last sentence of Miłosz's book, in turn, makes use of the “but that's another story” formula. His ending is a version of a topos already known in the Middle Ages (Ernst Robert Curtius mentions it in his classic study *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*), which allows the writer to justify concluding the text by saying that the theme has been exhausted and so if one were to go on, it would have to be the beginning of something completely different.

Inside the clear compositional frame enclosing their narratives, both diarists placed a wealth of different things, freely jumbled together. In this respect they remained in accord with another feature of the calendar as a genre, its capacity to accommodate within the unchanging lattice of days and weeks a miscellaneous hotch-potch of matters of different kinds. Both diarists write about the weather, about their health, about other people, about the scene of their youth, the place they called Wilno; about their own and foreign literature; about politics, alcohol, travelling. A little (not really very much) about the women in their lives. Konwicki also writes about boxing and football, Miłosz about the pleasures of driving a car and of swimming. At a certain moment Konwicki mentions Miłosz, and Miłosz Konwicki.

And among all these harmless details of their lives, both also write about Stalinism and their part in it. Their taking up of this theme adds yet another dimension to these books. If they had been simply and only diaries, perhaps it would not have been necessary for one author in 1974, and the other in 1987 and 1988 to return in such a significant way to the nineteen-fifties.

There are important differences between the two books, resulting not only from differences in their authors' personalities, but also from the situations in which they were written. Konwicki's manuscript had to pass through People's Republic censorship and was severely mutilated in the process because it

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<sup>10</sup> Konwicki, *Kalendarz i klepsydra*, 392.



emerged during a period when real socialism seemed still to be very much alive and well. Miłosz's book, on the other hand, arose in the circumstances of emigrant freedom. Additionally, at the time he wrote it, communism was visibly crumbling even in the Soviet Union; *glasnost* had already begun, and in Poland the independent publishing life of the "second circulation" was already flourishing. Besides this, earlier books in which Miłosz had thrown light (though in a considerably more reserved manner) on the Stalinist episode in his life were already known: *The Captive Mind*, and two volumes of interviews with the poet, conducted in the first instance by Aleksander Fiut and in the second by Renata Gorczyńska (then publishing under the pseudonym Ewa Czarnecka).

In spite of these differences, however, there is a certain fundamental correspondence between Miłosz's and Konwicki's diaries. Both writers work, so to speak, against the rules of the diary. In essence, their books furnish a holistic, perspective-based self-interpretation of their own lives, something that is not in the least characteristic of the diary, but belongs instead to the autobiography or the autobiographical novel. This is especially clear in the case of Konwicki, who published *Kalendarz i klepsydra* as his first evidently personal book. At the beginning, as in a memoir or autobiography, we find information about his parents. Then, alternating by turns with anecdotes about the Warsaw community and recollections of his travels (here to China, there to America), episodes continually surface from his boyhood in Kolonia Wileńska outside what is now Vilnius, and from the immediate post-war years. At one point even the diarist himself remarks somewhere, as if without meaning to, that there is not much in the diary about the year 1974 that was passing at the time. Indeed there is not much. But to tell the truth, this is not to be wondered at, given that the hourglass of memory was expected to recall more than four decades. Nevertheless, in all this highly condensed text, we can still see a clear line marking the course of his life. It is a life broken in two by war, divided between two homelands (the original one in Vilnius and the new one in Warsaw, where the writer always feels himself to be "a foreigner in transit", as he frequently calls himself). It is a flawed life, marked by the blemish of that one short, "spotty" youthful episode: "I was a Stalinist."

In contrast to the author of *Kalendarz i klepsydra*, Miłosz, when he wrote *A Year of the Hunter*, did not begin, but added yet again to the material of his autobiography, spread over many separate volumes. Partly he added new experiences from the time of writing in successive months of 1987 and 1988, but he devoted incomparably more attention to a variety of events from the past, especially to those which he had not found sufficient time to ponder earlier, in *The Captive Mind*, *Native Realm* or *The Land of Ulro*. Most of the space in the diary is taken up by telling about that same blemish or flaw to which Konwicki turned his

attention in the interview with Stanisław Bereś. Konwicki makes a full confession, burning with shame, with regret and with fury. Miłosz, too, speaks of shame. And he tells us that he was perfectly well aware that he was signing what Jerzy Putrament had warned him was “a pact with the devil”.<sup>11</sup> Putrament was a highly placed party official, and a close associate of Miłosz from his student days, who had played a key role in the poet's trip to Washington as a representative of the diplomatic service of the Polish People's Republic. It is not difficult to see that the story of the years from 1946 to January 1951, spread over several tens of daily entries, takes up almost half of *A Year of the Hunter*. This is the period from the moment that the diarist entered into, to the moment that he broke off, a pact that he admits was “devilish” indeed. No other thread in a life that had by then lasted more than seventy years received such extensive treatment. As with Konwicki, so with Miłosz, the diary arrangement of the record is a narrational and compositional device, perfectly mastered and exploited, but clearly subordinated to another, non-diary end. That end is the settlement of accounts with the writer's own self and with the course of his life, conducted from a large temporal distance – a reckoning that is proper to the memoir, the autobiography or the autobiographical novel.

A year with Konwicki, a year with Miłosz. Both these diaries report on the details of daily life, such as the Warsaw sparrow caught by Ivan's cat in Konwicki, or the heliotrope flowers eaten up by deer in Miłosz's garden in California. But both diaries also go far beyond the flow of everyday events. Time passes, everything has changed, it might seem that the memory of a few short years lived through long ago can now be blotted out. But evidently they could not. Both the Warsaw “lie-diary” of the novelist and the Californian year of the poet-hunter in quest of the beauty of the world, turn out to be autobiographies with a secret, stories of a shameful blemish. They reveal the outline of the lives of two people caught up in the trap of compliance with the Stalinist powers; and even if it was only for a short time and to a relatively small degree (neither of them got fat on caviar), it nevertheless was a compliance that could not be doubted. They were involved enough at least for us to be able to say (resorting to hunting imagery, this time from Korsak's rather than Miłosz's *Rok myśliwego*) that though both of them managed to escape from the traps that had shut on them, the scars from those snares' iron teeth never completely disappeared.

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11 *A Year of the Hunter*, 80.

### 3. The Provocative Testimony of Leopold Tyrmand

At the beginning of the nineteen-eighties, Leopold Tyrmand's *Dziennik 1954* [*Diary 1954*] acquired enormous popularity. Tyrmand was known at the time to readers of middle age as the author of *Zły* [Bad], the first sensational crime story to appear in Poland after the war. After the crashing boredom and pompous seriousness of the period of official socialist realism, Tyrmand's novel, published in 1955, with its lurid, sensational plot, set in the realities of post-war Warsaw, became an instant bestseller (three editions in the course of two years, not to mention the publication in English in 1959 as *The Man with the White Eyes!*). Everyone read *Zły*: from schoolchildren to retired people, from cleaners to professors. None of the later books of this author was anything like so successful. Yet soon after the writer's departure from the country in the mid sixties,<sup>1</sup> and after his decision to remain in the West, the censor's prohibition obliterated his name from print, and as a result, not much later, from the memory of readers. The copies of *Zły* that had been so eagerly read became only a legend, which also faded with time.

#### Tyrmand's Triumphant Return In *Diary 1954*

A quarter of a century after the success of *Zły*, the appearance of *Dziennik 1954* again created a sensation among readers, though now of a somewhat different kind. What was repeated, however, was the remarkable way in which the book fell in with the interests and needs of readers. The moment of the book's publication (London 1980, and immediately afterwards in Poland in 1981, where it appeared of course in underground circulation, by the good offices of NOW publishing house)<sup>2</sup> coincided with the start of a build-up of interest in the nineteen-fifties. Copies of the *Diary* were passed from hand to hand, borrowed sometimes for scarcely a day or two because of the queue of readers waiting.

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1 Two dates appear in publications on this subject: 1965 and 1966.

2 L. Tyrmand, *Dziennik 1954* (London: Puls, 1980). The first Polish edition published by NOW (vol. 1 and 2, 1981, no place of publication supplied) was followed by five editions by different publishers up to 1989. Page references for quotations apply to the NOW edition. Pagination continuous over the two volumes. English translation by A.J. Wróbel and A. K. Shelton (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2014).

The reasons for this interest were at least three, and they were reasons which each fed into the others. First, readers searched Tyrmand's book to find a restoration of the true image of Polish life during the Stalinist period; second, they wanted gossip about known artistic figures from the life of the capital; and third, they hoped for a scandalising chronicle of the manners of the time. Each of these reasons taken individually would have been sufficient to guarantee the book's success with readers; but in *Diary 1954* they all came together at the same time. How then did they present themselves at the moment of the book's publication, and how do they look from the vantage point of later times?

As regards the scandal of manners, many works presented to the Polish reading public at the beginning of the nineties had already very much sidelined Tyrmand. During the time of martial law, however, when the underground circulation issued mainly patriotic-pious literature (books such as Grass's *The Tin Drum* or Witkiewicz's *Pożegnanie jesieni* [*Farewell to Autumn*] were really exceptions), some of the descriptions of erotic experiences in *Diary 1954* seemed startlingly bold.

Tyrmand's Diary certainly furnishes plenty of gossip (and facts) about known figures. However, the idea that it represented a radical dismantlement of a false image of the fifties should be viewed with some caution. First of all, it is a testimony to the experiences of an individual. The field of observation is limited to a very small circle and an extremely short period of time (the record covers scarcely three months – not even the whole year suggested by the title). On the other hand, however, in the particular circle in which Tyrmand moved (literature, film and journalism), the character-breaking (though usually here not actually bone-breaking) mechanisms employed in the workings of totalitarian power were quite clear.

Unlike Miłosz in *The Captive Mind*, Tyrmand did not construct a few distinctive models endowed with the generalising power of allegory. Instead, he painted in great detail (and often with hard-hitting epithets) a large portrait gallery of well-known figures from Warsaw's artistic life, frequently mentioned by first name and surname. Many people were presented in an extremely critical light because of their one-time compliance towards the communist powers. Against this background, some of the diarist's friends, such as Stefan Kisielewski, Zbigniew Herbert or Jan Józef Szczepański, made their appearance as the "few righteous". These belonged mainly to the circle of the weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny*,<sup>3</sup> which had at that time recently been taken away from the rightful editors because of

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3 This weekly, with its subtitle "Catholic Journal of Society and Culture", was edited by a group of lay journalists operating under the auspices of the Catholic Church, which gave them independence from the communist powers, although the journal

their refusal to publish an obsequious obituary after the death of Stalin. They were then forbidden to print anything and consequently condemned to cultural non-existence. Deprived of the possibility of work, they made a living by random and occasional means.

At the beginning of the nineteen-eighties, many artists and writers found themselves in a similar, though certainly not such a dramatic, position as their predecessors in the fifties. The reminder of the repressions of the Stalinist years took on an astonishing relevance immediately after the publication of Tyrmand's *Diary 1954*: life itself simply wrote a parallel, in the shape of martial law, to what the diarist had presented, while he himself rose unexpectedly to the rank of a precursor of the oppositionists of the "Solidarity" era. In fact *Diary 1954* turned out in one or two places to be a two-edged sword: it recalled the "spotty" youth of several outstanding writers such as Tadeusz Konwicki, discussed in the previous chapter, and Wiktor Woroszyński. These, as twenty-year olds beginning their career, had played their part in creating socialist realism, before joining in the October revolution of 1956 and later permanently crossing over to the opposition and becoming its moral authorities. Tyrmand, meanwhile, pulled out his old, half-forgotten bills, which seemed still not to have been paid. The double-sided character of this recalling lay in the fact that it came to the surface at the moment when people like Konwicki and Woroszyński had begun to be active in the opposition, and the Security Services themselves, intent on destroying their influence, were calling to attention the long past sins of their youth.

Many readers, especially the young, delved into *Diary 1954* as one might delve into a historical source, looking for the accounts of witnesses to the age. For the Stalinist period had long remained in the domain of deep silence. Its only established image (in literature, journalism, the visual arts and architecture) was

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was subject to censorship. The censors interfered frequently, but still with considerably less ferocity than was the case with other publications in the Polish People's Republic. This was a certain concession towards the Church, whose influence on Polish society was such that the communist authorities had to take account of it, even if reluctantly. It has been said, and with some justice, that *Tygodnik Powszechny* was the only journal between East Berlin and Vladivostok that did not have to declare its allegiance to the prevailing materialist world-view. During the time from the death of Stalin up to the journal's official condemnation in 1956 as a promotor of a "cult of the individual" and of "errors and distortions", it was edited by a group of journalists who were totally subordinated to the communist powers. It returned to proper editorial hands after the changes of October 1956. The weekly continues to appear, presenting an open brand of Catholicism in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council.

what the epoch said of itself: an image that had been cut to the calculated measures and rules of socialist realism. It was not until Andrzej Wajda's film *Człowiek z marmuru* [*Man of Marble*] (1976) that anyone made an attempt to challenge this image, so that at the time that the Diary was published, almost no description of the period existed that looked at it from any distance, in a historical perspective.

The testimony left behind by social realist art fell into oblivion for at least two reasons: almost as soon as the "thaw" began, the creators of this art very quickly started to feel ashamed of it, while the audience that had been forced over a period of several years with the plaster pulp of socialist realism, was only waiting for the chance to spit out this foul mush as fast as it could and reach for better nourishment for the spirit. Thus both artists and audience, though for different reasons, co-operated, as it were, to forget socialist realism. It is true that society in general was keen to remember this era – not, however, for its unsuccessful art, but in order to learn the truth about its crimes and to punish the guilty; and for political reasons this was not entirely possible. The right moment did not come until after 1989, when the investigators who entered the scene, because of when they were born, were no longer embroiled in any personal way with the world of the fifties.<sup>4</sup>

After Krushchev's report on Stalinist crimes and the consequent "thaw" that spread in the countries dependent on the Soviet Union, many victims were rehabilitated, but still not many of those responsible for the crimes were brought to justice, and very soon the official tactic became one of pushing Stalinism away into oblivion. Slowly this came to be accepted by the general social consciousness, as if from the feeling that the most important thing was that the nightmare was over, and in the hope that it would not come back. The political shocks of the eighties made the whole affair relevant once more, and once again people became convinced that freedom could only be regained by returning to the truth about the crimes of the not very distant past and by punishing the guilty.

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4 See: W. Tomasiak, *Polska powieść tendencyjna 1949–1955. Problemy perswazji literackiej* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1988); D. Tubielewicz-Mattsson, *Polska socrealistyczna krytyka literacka jako narzędzie władzy*, (Uppsala: Uppsala University Library, 1997); W. Tomasiak, *Inżynieria dusz. Literatura realizmu socjalistycznego w planie „propagandy monumentalnej”* (Wrocław: Fundacja na Rzecz Nauki Polskiej, 1999). However, the first scholar to study the Stalinist period, Michał Głowiński (born 1934), knew this time from his own youth. His individual studies of socialist realism from the mid-eighties were later collected, with the addition of newer work, in the volume *Rytuał i demagogia. Trzytności szkieł o sztuce zdegradowanej* (Warszawa: OPEN, 1992).

It was in this context that *Diary 1954* made its appearance. Its narrator, Leopold Tyrmand, as a journalist of thirty-two or thirty-three and also an aspiring writer, told of the private war that he waged with the world of the People's Republic that surrounded him. His aim was to preserve intellectual and spiritual independence, to save his privacy and live within its space in his own way, maintaining a sense of freedom at least in this sphere. The price of this spiritual luxury was material poverty, but it led him neither to asceticism nor to abnegation.

Tyrmand wrote of a model of life whose principle was not to allow oneself to be tempted by the privileges that were available to artists who harnessed their art to the service of propaganda. At the same time, however, and this was no less important, the hero of the *Diary* had no intention of letting himself be pushed into the position of a shunned and failed pariah. Tyrmand constantly repeats his motto: to live according to one's own standards, both avoiding the vengefulness of the powerful enemy and despising the favours that the same enemy so willingly (though capriciously) showered on his flatterers. Tyrmand's weapon was the practice of elementary principles of decency, such as faithfulness in friendship, and keeping in daily life to the modest standard of "virtues of the western world". These included good taste, neatness, elegance, looking after one's own personal cultural preferences and other private values and setting them in opposition to the all-powerful moloch of what was public and shared, and hence controlled by the authorities. It was an ideal marked by deep hatred of the Communist codex. Though Tyrmand stood no chance in a full-on collision with the gigantic machine of power and though he was not made of the stuff of a warrior or martyr, he nevertheless carried out something of a guerrilla war: the only kind that a dandy such as he was capable of waging on the monumental ugliness and boredom of social realist style in art and manners. Resorting once more to a metaphor from the hunting language of Włodzimierz Korsak, mentioned in the previous chapter, we might say that Tyrmand explained why he did not fall into the snares set for artists by the communist powers: the bait simply did not seem to him in the least attractive.

### **The Great Debate on the Authenticity of *Diary 1954***

The question of the value of *Diary 1954* as a historical source is closely connected with another problem. Immediately after its publication in 1980, an argument broke out over whether it was an authentic diary of the first months of 1954 or a mystification in terms of literary genre, that is to say a text that really was a memoir of Warsaw life of the time, but written *ex post*, not until the seventies when Tyrmand was living in emigration, and merely stylised as a diary

in terms of narration and composition. A similar though less passionate controversy arose at one time over the already mentioned war diary of Andrzej Bobkowski, *Szkice piórkciem*. (*Francja 1940–1944*) [Sketches with a Quill. France 1940–1944]. In Bobkowski's case, the status of the record as an authentic diary was not questioned; it was simply supposed that when he published the diary in Paris in 1957, he "corrected" his text in one or two places involving political commentaries on the course of wartime activities (especially on the Eastern front) and on the possible solutions after the war ended. To a surprisingly great extent, Bobkowski's predictions turned out to be accurate. *Szkice piórkciem* repeatedly contradicts the opinions that were current in the days when the diary was written, whether it is a matter of the judgments voiced by Western journalists or of the conceptions of outstanding leaders.

Thus it began to be suspected that the startling accuracy of Bobkowski's political commentaries was due to the book's having been completed in part only after the war, when it was clear what the course of events had been. In a word, it was assumed that the diarist, while preparing the text for publication, gave in to the temptation to introduce certain improvements and additions that showed his political insight in a better light. However, the opposite view was also expressed: not that Bobkowski "touched up" his diary before publication, but that he simply knew the Russian mentality better than the people of the West, so that when he wrote it, he was able to make a more accurate assessment of the Katyn atrocity and to foresee the situation that was later created after the conclusion of the Treaty of Yalta.

As regards Tyrmand's text, in turn, the argument over its authenticity as a record that came into being in 1954 concerned not the accuracy of the author's political prognoses, but the coincidence between his way of seeing and his hierarchy of values and judgments with those espoused by the majority of his readers almost thirty years later. The two opposed views in the argument are exemplified by the opinions of Tadeusz Konwicki and Roman Zimand.<sup>5</sup>

Konwicki devoted almost half of his book *Zorze wieczorne* [Northern Lights] (1991) to Tyrmand, telling of the varying course of his association and then friendship with him. He reveals that the thread of nostalgic recollections of a friend called Lolo who emigrated for good, which wends its way through the

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5 R. Zimand, "Tyrmand '54", *Literatura źle obecna (rekonesans)*. *Materiały z konferencji naukowej IBL PAN 27 X – 30 X 1981* (London: Polonia Book Fund, 1984). Published in Poland in independent circulation by X publishers, Kraków 1986; T. Konwicki, *Zorze wieczorne* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Alfa, 1991).



whole plot of *Wniebowstąpienie* [Ascension into Heaven] (1967) is dedicated precisely to Tyrmand. For this novel was written immediately after Tyrmand's defection to the West. Konwicki is convinced that *Diary 1954* was not written until Tyrmand was in America, some twenty years after the events presented in it. The crowning arguments are twofold: it cannot be true that Tyrmand managed to carry out of the country the manuscript of a diary that was carefully hidden in a car, because the "special services" of the time at the border must have been keeping a particular eye out for him. Such contraband, declares Konwicki, was absolutely impossible at the time of Tyrmand's defection. Secondly, the pseudo-diarist is betrayed by a small but characteristic mistake, which any memoirist, writing from the perspective of time, may make, but which never appears in a diary kept at the time that things are happening. This is the fact that Tyrmand writes of an event involving Konwicki that he could not have known about in 1954, for the simple reason that it did not happen until two years later. Konwicki, as a writer, also looks at things from the technical point of view, in the light of his own book *Kalendarz i klepsydra*, which had the form of a diary conducted over the space of one year, and which with evident self-irony he named a "lie-diary", as we have noted. He was working on it in 1974, and thus during the time when the London-based emigré journal *Wiadomości* was starting to print parts of Tyrmand's *Diary*.<sup>6</sup>

Literary historical knowledge confirms the accuracy of Konwicki's observations on the growing role of the diary form in the mid-nineteen-seventies and on the significance that this development might have had for Tyrmand. The genre convention of the intimate diary did indeed undergo a revival and transformation, a truly remarkable flowering, in Polish literature of this time. Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, taking the place vacated by Gombrowicz, began publishing his diary "written at night" in the Paris-based journal *Kultura*. As discussed in Part One of this book, Gombrowicz's experiments followed to their logical and extreme conclusion the implications of the observation that even the most intimate of diaries, kept in secret and only "for oneself", really arises with a view to establishing oneself in the public domain; and now these experiments began to bear lasting fruit. Gombrowicz showed that the very assumption on which the intimate diary is founded is ambiguous, in that while it pretends to be written for the author alone, it is conceived essentially as a challenge to the reader. By the nineteen-seventies, too, the novel in diary

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6 Extensive extracts from *Dziennik 1954* were published in *Wiadomości* from 1974 to 1978.

form had been in existence for a considerable time. Applying various devices that stylise the narration as spontaneous, such novels give the impression of developing without any preconceived plan and concluding at some accidental moment (like Tyrmand's confessions, which break off in mid-sentence). This whole tradition was known to the writer at the time when he was preparing his *Diary* for publication and might have inclined him to choose a diary rather than memoir form, if indeed he did write the book only in the seventies. And if this is really what happened, Tyrmand's *Diary* would not be the first example in Polish literature of a memoir that is stylised as a diary record. Waław Kubacki, a literary historian and acknowledged expert in Romanticism, especially the work of Mickiewicz, and himself a writer of novels and dramas, though these were generally considered of less value than his scholarly achievements, was once proved to have indulged in just this kind of mystification. He published a *Diary* in three volumes, dated 1944–1968. Critics noticed that sometimes mention was made of things that happened at a later time than the dates given as the time of writing the diary. They concluded from this that the work was in fact a memoir, written *ex post*, rather than a diary. Kubacki began publishing his so-called diary in the seventies, when the diary form, treated somewhat snobbishly and surrounded with an aura of subtle intellectualism, unlike the honest old memoir with its Old Polish, Sarmatian tradition, had become fashionable. However, we cannot exclude the possibility that Kubacki's case is closer to that of Bobkowski, whose diary was genuine, but polished up a little before publication.

Roman Zimand, the author of an extremely precise and penetrating study of *Diary 1954* and one of the first to write about this book, was of a different opinion than Konwicky concerning Tyrmand's work. He reminds us that the latter undoubtedly kept a diary at the beginning of 1954; there is unassailable evidence of this, in that a fragment was published in *Tygodnik Powszechny* in 1957. Besides this, there is the testimony of people with whom the diarist was friendly at the time and to whom he showed the diary. This of course does not yet prove that he managed to carry the manuscript out of the country. Did he then have to re-create the text from memory while in emigration, *de facto* writing a memoir of his life in Warsaw? Zimand is convinced that the evident traces of later minor corrections are only the result of editing work done on the text before it was printed. We may add that the inaccuracy questioned by Konwicky could have emerged in just this way. Zimand calls attention to the fact that is common practice when a diary is published for the author to introduce editorial changes immediately before printing (and this is something that Tyrmand undoubtedly did), while the precision of many details and the remarkably faithful way that the

atmosphere of Warsaw life in the fifties is conveyed argue that the record arose as a diary, in which events are noted as they occur.

The debate over whether Tyrmand's *Diary* originated in 1954 or only in the seventies, contrary to what might appear, is not merely a philological debate over the date when the text came into being. The background to this discussion has a direct moral reference. The reader who considers the book to be a diary may be more inclined to take a severely condemnatory approach towards those who were stained by any kind of cooperation with the Stalinist authorities. Such a reader will find it impossible to exonerate such people by reference to any such concept as that of the "Hegelian bite" presented by Milosz in *The Captive Mind*. If Tyrmand really wrote his diary in 1954 and already at that time made the judgment of the Stalinist period that appears in this book; if he was not afraid, either, to express his opinions so openly in his diary, though this could have had serious consequences for such an "enemy of the people", if the text had got into the wrong hands<sup>7</sup> – then it *was* possible at the time not to let oneself be "bitten" and not to allow one's "mind" to be "taken captive". And furthermore, one did not even need to have the virtues of a hero in order for this to happen. It was enough to have a small sense of dignity, a little character and resistance to temptation. And perhaps a little contrariness. Zbigniew Herbert might have added that it was a matter of the power of taste.<sup>8</sup>

The "memoir option", on the other hand, somewhat blunts the blades of accusation. It does not question the authenticity of the text's autobiographical character, but warns us to be wary of making over-harsh judgments. If the self-awareness expressed in *Diary 1954* is only a reconstruction of a state of spirit, carried out with the help of memory twenty years after the fact, then the narrator applies two different standards: he is in essence richer by two decades of experience and wants us to think that he knew and understood all this in just this and no other way, already in Warsaw, only a year after the death of Stalin. At the time of publication of *Diary 1954*, many of the people described by him were already

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7 The fact that such things happened even later, even after the thaw, is clear, for example, from the fate of Szymon Szechter and Nina Karsov, who were arrested in 1966 and deported on the charge of keeping a diary that contained "false and hostile contents". See N. Karsov and Sz. Szechter, *Nie kocha się pomników* (London, 1970); *Monuments are not loved*, trans. P. Stephenson (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1970).

8 Z. Herbert, "Potęga smaku", in: *Raport z oblężonego miasta i inne wiersze* (Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1983), first edition in Poland in underground circulation, Oficyna Literacka 1983. "The Power of Taste", translated by Alissa Valles in: Z. Herbert *The Collected Poems 1956-1998* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007).

in a situation that was intellectually and morally completely different, but the use of the device of diary narration allowed him to pass over their change of stance in silence, while enabling the narrator to make use in a covert manner of the privilege of knowledge gained over the next twenty years.

In the scheme of diary tradition, Tyrmand's record presents itself as a diary-episode, conducted over a limited time for some particular reasons, but standing in evident opposition to the diary extended over a period of many years. Tyrmand gives it to be understood that he began writing in response to something like a sickness of the spirit: he describes the feeling of being thrown out on to the margins of life and the appalling sense of being hemmed in that communist Warsaw gave him. He dreams of writing a novel and feels he could do it, but he cannot make himself write something that would only have to be hidden in a drawer. This thirty-year-old, like Józio in Gombrowicz's *Ferdydurke*, had not yet achieved anything, and yet already felt that his youth was passing. On the first page he wonders whether the diary will bring him any relief in this situation. This is a way of beginning a diary that is known to tradition and is also readily copied in novels written in diary form. And the ending? It is more of an abandonment, since the text breaks off in mid-sentence. The openness of this ending is so ostentatious that it even looks like a stage-managed effect, especially as this unfinished sentence is followed by the author's Afterword, from which we learn how the episode of spiritual hopelessness, the episode of writing the diary, ended:

On the last evening, weary with writing, as often happened, I broke off the sentence, intending to come back to it the next day. But I never did come back to it. The next day *Czytelnik* [publishing house] offered me a contract to write *Zły* (273).

In the light of these words, the broken sentence that ends the diary seems only to be a mask laid over a clear and firm compositional code, while the Afterword itself sounds like an epilogue, a classic *Nachgeschichte* assuring the reader that the period of spiritual malaise is definitively over and thus there is no further purpose in writing the diary. The impression of a non-accidental and significant conclusion is strengthened by the fact that on the last pages of the *Diary* a self-presentation can be discerned, beginning with the words "My name is Leopold Tyrmand" and containing a description of his outward appearance and personal characteristics, as well as concise information about his family circle and school, and his later, changing fortunes right up to the time of writing the diary. This finale looks like a clever game with convention, a deliberate, because symmetrical, overturning of the traditional way of beginning an autobiography or memoir. Thus a tale that on the narrative level is stylised as unfinished, is

completed and rounded off as a work whose shape was preconceived and only seemed to be accidental. The impression of a carefully thought-out composition, more characteristic of a novel than of a diary, is also increased by such devices as the division into two volumes of almost ideally equal length, each furnished with an epigraph, and by the fact that the first volume ends like a sensational novel, with a threat hanging over the hero that keeps readers in suspense in order to sharpen their curiosity.

Regardless of the debate (made heated by the political and moral context) over whether the character of Tyrmand's *Diary 1954* is more that of a diary or of a memoir, the observation made above concerning the significance that developments in the genre of diary-writing had on the shape of the published version, remains valid. At the time that the text was being prepared for publication, Gombrowicz's formula of the diary as challenge, composed for the reader in a precise and carefully thought-out manner, and retaining only the semblance of spontaneity and openness, had already become fully assimilated and been taken up and transformed by other authors, such as Konwicki in *Kalendarz i klepsydra*. The editing of Tyrmand's *Diary* for publication bears the clear stamp of these discoveries.



**Part Five On the Fringes of the  
Autobiographical Triangle: An  
Epilogue in Three Parts**





# 1. The Letter and the Novel

This chapter is not mainly concerned with the letter in its utile function, but with that whole territory stretching between the letter as a text that comes into being for authentic correspondence purposes and a text that is literary in the strict sense. It is very difficult to mark out precise boundaries within this territory. The letter – or better, let us say the art of letter-writing – is a historically changing phenomenon and one that is various in genre; the area that it comprises is regarded as the domain of both the historian and the sociologist. Literary scholars have generally treated a writer's letters either as a biographical document or as a laboratory for his or her strictly creative work. It is usually only in the case of authors who were either exclusively letter-writers, like Madame de Sévigné, or who left an extensive and stylistically distinguished legacy of correspondence, like Zygmunt Krasiński, that letters as independent works are an object of interest to literary historians.

The reading and interpretation of correspondence as a historical source, as a document of the writer's life or as a commentary on his or her creative work, has a richer tradition in Polish scholarship than the treatment of epistolary texts as worthy of attention in their own right. Interest in letters as a literary genre usually appears in places where epistolography developed into an art form, as happened for example in the ancient world, when it was close to rhetoric, or in the modern world in seventeenth-century France or in Germany during the *Sturm und Drang* era. However, we also find this kind of interest in a monograph by Stefania Skwarczyńska, published in 1937, in which the letter is considered to be an autonomous literary genre and is classified as a form of so-called applied literature.<sup>1</sup>

Conceived of in this way, the letter has its own rich history, reaching back to antiquity. It has developed a variety of types and possesses its own kind of normative poetics, recorded in various kinds of letter-writing guides and manuals containing general rules and models of correspondence for different occasions. The significance of such guides declines in the mid-nineteenth century, a development that is undoubtedly linked with the Romantic concept of the letter as the most personal and intimate of utterances, the concept of the letter-confession, and generally with the breakdown of the ideas of classical poetics. The contemporary

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1 S. Skwarczyńska, *Teoria listu* (Białystok: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, 2006). First published Lwów: Towarzystwo Naukowe, 1937).

equivalents of the manuals and guides that gained popularity in the eighteenth century are usually strictly professional handbooks of business correspondence.

Thus we have three options: to treat the letter as a handy source of information about the author, environment or epoch, occasionally interrupting the discussion with a compliment on the writer's epistolary style; or to respect the autonomy of the genre as an utterance in letter form, but at the price of excluding it from so-called pure literature; or, finally, to reach the conclusion that tracing the contacts and overlap between utile texts and pure literature is more interesting than trying to draw a strict dividing line between the two. Indeed, there have already been attempts to penetrate this terrain: the book by Skwarczyńska mentioned above devotes a long chapter to the topic of "the letter as the germ of literary forms."

Recognition of the autonomous literary qualities of the letter has most readily emerged in studies of correspondence whose intellectual and stylistic excellences are indisputable. In the field of Polish literature, this is most clearly evident in commentaries on the letters of Zygmunt Krasiński.<sup>2</sup> Zbigniew Sudolski reminds us that Juliusz Kleiner, writing in 1913, was the first to break away from the traditional stance established by nineteenth-century commentators and publishers of this correspondence. Kleiner wrote that Krasiński's letters were "not only a collection of biographical and psychological material, not only a commentary on the writer's life and work, but also (...) an area of his creative work in their own right".<sup>3</sup>

Every serious study of the eighteenth-century epistolary novel has had to confront the question of the relationship between letters and literature. However, this question requires reconsideration for at least two reasons. First, it is now possible to treat the letter from a completely different methodological standpoint, in the context of a given writer's poetic, novelistic or dramatic work. Secondly, contemporary literature, which has drawn the most far-reaching conclusions from the Romantic overthrow of genre distinctions, has accustomed us to hybrid works and has sanctioned the encroachment into literature of forms drawn from the element of the colloquial, or, on the other hand, of forms proper to scientific or

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2 See M. Janion, *Zygmunt Krasiński – debiut i dojrzałość* (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1962), especially 152n; also her "Tryptyk epistolograficzny", in *Romantyzm. Studia o ideach i stylu* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1969); Z. Sudolski, *Korespondencja Zygmunta Krasińskiego. Studium monograficzne* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1968); A. Kubale, *Dramat bólu istnienia w listach Zygmunta Krasińskiego* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 1997).

3 Quoted after Sudolski, *Korespondencja Zygmunta Krasińskiego*..., 11.

scholarly discourse, which are of course the domain of the most strictly conceived utility.

In speaking of a methodological approach that allows us to abandon the ancillary, documentary treatment of letters and to look at them as texts of equal value with those traditionally classed as literary, I have French *critique thématique* in mind. According to the assumptions of that school of criticism, whatever emerges from a writer's hand, including the tiniest note in the margin of a book that he or she read, is a particle in the indivisible whole of his or her work and may reveal some aspect of a hidden theme that organises and imparts meaning to that whole. Generic distinctions, in this view, are entirely external and superficial in relation to the authentic, individual kind of order which the interpreter must establish in the act of identifying, sympathetic understanding. This methodological perspective can only be applied if we take the work of a single writer (without regard to the epoch in which he or she lived) as the object of inquiry.

A further reason, besides recognition of the autonomous literary qualities of the letter, for taking an interest in the relations between letters and strictly literary pieces is the situation of contemporary prose. It is this consideration which is the deciding one for my reflections here.

## The Letter and the Epistolary Novel

As far as mutual influences between epistolography and literature are concerned, everything that is most important and interesting takes place in the area of contact between the letter and the novel, where we can observe effects that operate in two opposite directions. First, the art of letter-writing affects the novel, and as a result analogies emerge between collections of authentic correspondence and the epistolary novel, especially of the eighteenth century. Second, the influence operates in the other direction, so that collections of authentic letters are interpreted from the perspective of a reader's experience of the novel – not necessarily epistolary. The conventions of the epistolary novel had an enormous impact on the ways of letter-writing cultivated by real correspondents in the entirely non-fictional world, while in the other direction of influence that we have distinguished, we can observe an interest in authentic intimate letters, letter-confessions, which coincides with the psychologising and inward turn announced by the novel at the beginning of the twentieth century. It is important to note that in the first direction of influence (the letter's impact on the epistolary novel) we are on the whole dealing with a dependency seen from the standpoint of genesis, broadly understood, the standpoint of the author's intention, which imparts to the fictional literary utterances the form and appearance of authentic

letters. In the other direction of influence (the impact of novel conventions on the interpretation of the letter), the analogy is conducted from the point of view of the audience, rather than of the letter's genesis, in other words by the reader who interprets the published collection of letters in the manner to which he or she, as a reader of novels, has become accustomed.

The great significance of eighteenth-century epistolography for the emergence and development of the romance in letters was demonstrated by Ian Watt in three chapters devoted to Samuel Richardson in *The Rise of the Novel*. Watt analysed the change in the character and role of correspondence in the eighteenth century. In place of the courtly letter, in which the rhetorical tradition was still alive, which more often concerned official matters than personal ones and whose hallmark was etiquette rather than intimacy, the private letter came into being. As the circle of those who wrote letters widened and became more democratic, personal subject-matter acquired a significance never seen before.

Analysing in a broad context the link between *Pamela* and *Clarissa* and the widespread fashion for letter-writing that was contemporary to these novels, Watt recalls the small detail that the idea of writing about Pamela's adventures emerged initially from Richardson's intention to create a kind of letter-writing manual, a collection of "Familiar Letters" written, in accordance with the suggestion of some "bookselling associates", "in a common style, on such subjects as might be of use to those Country Readers, who were unable to indite for themselves".<sup>4</sup>

It is worth adding here that the imitation of letters in a literary work has a tradition probably just as ancient as the very existence of epistolography and literature. In her monograph, Skwarczyńska reminds us that Odysseus' greeting of Nauzicaa bears all the marks of a welcome speech that is identical with a rhetorically shaped letter (this identity was possible because speeches in the ancient world were *written down*). We find there all the *topoi* characteristic of both the welcome speech and the letter, namely the address *ad personam*; *salutatio*; self-presentation, which is the equivalent of the signature in a letter; and the statement of the speaker's case by flattery and the attempt to move the person listening.<sup>5</sup> The novel in letters is obviously an example of formal mimetism (in the sense that Michał Głowiński gave to this term<sup>6</sup>). This mimetism appears not

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4 I. Watt, *The Rise of the Novel. Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (London: Random House, 2000), 190. First published 1957.

5 Skwarczyńska, 240–241.

6 M. Głowiński, "O powieści w pierwszej osobie", in his: *Gry powieściowe...*, 63 and 63n.

only in the fact that individual parts imitate the form of a letter (letterhead and signature, addresses in the second person and a stylistic convention generally typical of the epistolography of the given era), but also in the fact that the whole frequently takes on the shape of a collection of letters, published by a third party with a foreword or comments supposedly by the publisher but actually by the author.

Głowiński indeed ascribes a broader meaning to the formal mimetism of the first-person novel, seeing in it a sign of the expansion of utile texts into the territory of literature. While it has various meanings and various functions in successive historical periods, “nevertheless it is always characterised by one thing: with its aid the novel relates as it were to the empirical; it is supposed to be one utterance like all the others known from daily experience”.<sup>7</sup> Analysing a particular case of this kind of mimetism, that is the relation between the intimate diary and the novel in the form of a diary, Głowiński underlines more closely the limits of the new assimilation of the literary piece to utile utterance. As mentioned in Part Four of this book, for this critic the literary text is always a work, that is a significant whole, whereas the diary’s composition is always governed – alongside a certain conventionality – by authentic fortuitousness. It is not a work in the sense of a purposely organised and meaningful whole.<sup>8</sup> This distinction, clearly, applies also to the epistolary novel as a work, as contrasted with a collection of authentic letters, which is a non-work, because its ultimate shape is influenced by factors completely independent of the internal logic of the course of the correspondence. Only an individual letter may be a work; a collection of letters, usually published by a third party, is not a work. A collection of letters may only be a work when, as for example with some ancient writers, it is arranged by the author into a defined whole according to certain rules of composition which dictate, for instance, that texts addressed to outstanding people be placed at the beginning and the end.<sup>9</sup>

In his discussion of the intimate diary and of the novel in the form of a diary, Głowiński demonstrated that the novel-diary is always more closely linked with the genre conventions of the novel than with those of the authentic diary. The relation between the epistolary novel and the collection of letters presents itself similarly, especially as far as the conception of time is concerned.

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7 Głowiński, “O powieści w pierwszej osobie”, in his: *Gry powieściowe...*, 68.

8 Głowiński, “Powieść a dziennik intymny”, in his: *Gry powieściowe...*, 79 and 79n.

9 Skwarczyńska, 35.

From the moment that Richardson's romances and Rousseau's *New Heloise* laid the ground for the epistolary novel as a genre, its dependence on authentic correspondence was considerably weakened. Formal mimetism remained the general principle, while other, strictly novelistic compositional rules operated within this overall frame. Later sentimental novels imitated *Pamela*, *Clarissa* and *The New Heloise* rather than authentic letters. Even authentic correspondence became subject to stylising on the pattern of Richardson and Rousseau. The literary stylising of the Romantic letter is a separate, large problem, to which it will be necessary to return when we consider the question of the reader of a collection of letters. The epistolary novel gradually became emancipated from models of actual correspondence. But while the popularity of the genre declined along with the decline in the fashion for letter-writing, epistolary novels did not die out altogether. After the period of sentimentalism, the genre revived once more in the literature of the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, though its significance was small in comparison with the novel in the form of a diary or memoir. Głowiński writes of this at greater length in the study *Powieść młodopolska* [The Novel in the Young Poland Era], in which he describes the epistolary novels of Ignacy Dąbrowski (*Felka*), Alfred Konar (*Oazy*) and Andrzej Niemojewski (*Listy człowieka szalonego*).<sup>10</sup>

In contemporary literature, the lack of strict dependence on the character of correspondence really conducted in the era of the author's life is visible for instance in the fact that the epistolary novel has more than once been used as a means of historical stylisation, especially in relation to times in which letter writing flourished. We find stylising on the pattern of an ancient letter in Teodor Parnicki's *Słowo i ciało* [Word and Flesh] and *Koła na piasku* [Wheels on the Sand], and on the pattern of eighteenth-century and Romantic letters in Kazimierz Brandys's *Wariacje pocztowe* [Postal Variations]. The form of letter that was still popular in less educated social circles in the twentieth century retained its characteristic composition: the phrase "in the introduction to my letter" is followed by assurances that the writer is in good health and expressions of hope that the addressee is too. Skwarczyńska draws attention to the fact that this is an echo of a fossilised form: the *salutatio* which opened the ancient letter.<sup>11</sup> There is a separate problem here which we can do no more than touch upon: the penetration of ancient letter patterns into the court culture of the Renaissance and their

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10 M. Głowiński, *Powieść młodopolska. Studium z poetyki historycznej* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1969), 200–204.

11 Skwarczyńska, 241.

later reshaping, along with the democratisation of the custom of letter-writing. Some unique material, also from the point of view of the history and sociology of the letter, is provided by a collection of letters by peasant emigrants, written in the United States and Brazil in the years 1890–91, and published thanks to the efforts of Witold Kula.<sup>12</sup>

These examples also enable us to see the point at which the resemblance between the literary text and authentic correspondence ceases. The basic difference lies in the shaping of the text's addressee. The virtual reader inscribed in the epistolary novel is more similar to the reader of any kind of novel, whether written in the first or the third person, than to the fictional addressee of fictional letters. The latter, whose existence, just like that of the fictional author, is within the presented world, has a status analogical to that of a partner in a dramatic dialogue. This is obvious particularly in the composition, which relies on an exchange of letters. The reader of such a novel does not identify with any one of the particular addressees of the letters; instead, he or she is the reader of the whole. His partner is not the fictional letter-writer, but the implied author hidden behind the work as a whole. The situation of the reader of a collection of letters presents itself quite differently.

## The Reader of a Collection of Correspondence

Reading someone else's correspondence in a published form creates an unusual situation for the reader. First we need to distinguish two pairs of persons. The first is the sender of the letters and their addressee. When I speak of the author or sender of a letter, or of an epistolographer, I always have in mind the role that the real author, as a particular individual, fulfils when he or she conducts correspondence within the frame of the epistolary conventions of his or her times. It is necessary to distinguish the "role of the epistolographer", because in this area we can observe the extremely interesting stylisations carried out by writers. Krasiński's correspondence will serve as an example of this. Maria Janion has analysed the whole gamut of the various "epistolographical roles" taken in his letters, indicating how the author's stylisation of himself depends on the person of the addressee.<sup>13</sup> Krasiński's father, General Wincenty, was a powerful and dominating personality not only within his family but in the wider social world.

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12 *Listy emigrantów z Brazylii i Stanów Zjednoczonych 1890–1891*, prepared for printing and introduced by W. Kula, N. Assorodobraj-Kula, M. Kula (Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1973). See Skwarczyńska, 241.

13 M. Janion, "Tryptyk epistolograficzny", *Romantyzm...*, 209–215.

His patriarchal authority commanded his son's enormous respect, in spite of the deep differences between them in regard to their philosophy of life. The General had been formed culturally in the previous era and was a declared classicist in his literary tastes, who reacted with dislike to every kind of Romantic novelty. His son's engagement with poetry caused him deep unhappiness. He was suspicious of imagination, regarding it simply as a weakness unworthy of a man. Consequently, when Krasiński wrote to him, he did not let him know of his moods of melancholy or his *Weltschmerz* and tried to keep his fancies reined in. He felt a stranger to his father, and yet at the same time he was strangely fascinated by him. This complex knot of feelings defines the peculiar writing strategy employed in his correspondence with him. In his letters to his friends, Krasiński presents himself differently; and he is different again when he writes to Delfina Potocka, a renowned beauty and a woman of outstanding intelligence and strong personality, with whom he was united by a powerful and long-lasting passion whose background involved the vicissitudes of his unhappy marriage. It is estimated that he wrote about five thousand letters to her. From the correspondence, an image of him emerges as a romantic lover and a poet composing a love story.

The image of the author is as immanently inscribed in the text of his or her correspondence as the image of the addressee.<sup>14</sup> The situation between them is shaped in a similar way as in every other simple situation of social communication. But when correspondence is published, another pair of persons is introduced: the editor and the reader who is supposed to buy and read the book. The editor collects the letters, sometimes searching out scattered items with much toil. He establishes their chronology, which is sometimes doubtful because of the absence of dates, and arranges the whole either chronologically, or by the addressee, or by theme (political or philosophical letters, love letters, official correspondence); finally, he adds editorial features such as introduction, afterword or footnotes. One may then say that the whole arrangement of the collection of letters and the whole critical apparatus contains an implied image of the editor and a proposal as to the role of the reader of the printed correspondence, who, like the editor, is a third party in relation to the original sender and receiver of the letters.

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14 See E. Balcerzan, "Perspektywy 'poetyki odbioru'", in: *Problemy socjologii literatury*, ed. J. Sławiński (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1971); M. Głowiński, "Wirtualny odbiorca w strukturze utworu poetyckiego" in his: *Style odbioru. Szkice o komunikacji literackiej* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1977); A. Okopień-Sławińska, "Relacje osobowe w literackiej komunikacji", in *Problemy socjologii literatury...*



Let us now take a closer look at two relations: the first between the epistolographer and the editor of the letters, and the other between the addressee and the reader of the published correspondence. The epistolographer is the creator of the individual letters, but the shape of the whole is the work of the editor. Even if an author himself or herself prepares the correspondence for printing, two different roles are involved, though carried out by the same person. The editor's role is especially important in the case of correspondence that is scattered or that survives only in fragments, or correspondence that comes from a distant era and requires historical comment. It is also important in the publication of letters by various authors, such as the love letters edited by Ryszard Ganszyniec<sup>15</sup> or Hanna Malewska's *Listy staropolskie z epoki Wazów* [Old Polish Letters from the Vasa Era],<sup>16</sup> as well as in the case of selections of letters by one author, such as Jan Kott's selected letters of Krasiński to Delfina.<sup>17</sup>

Contrary to what might seem, it is not so easy to separate the roles of the addressee and of the reader as a third party. For it is quite common not only for the editor's footnotes to be directed to the reader, but also for this external figure to be implied in the text of the letters themselves, even though they have a different, particular addressee. This is what happens above all in the case of authors who either intend to publish their correspondence themselves, or hope that someone else will do this for them. Many writers may be suspected of such intentions, especially in their correspondence with other outstanding people. In these circumstances, behind the "you" addressed to the recipient of the letter some other, future, anonymous "you" is hidden, to whom the author of the letter addresses himself over the head of his correspondent. The situation here is reminiscent of an exchange of dialogue in a play: though the responses appear to be directed exclusively to the other figure within the world presented in the drama, they are really calculated to engage the audience, who remain outside that world. In his analysis of the functions of language in theatre, Roman Ingarden distinguished those that operate within the presented world from those that are directed towards the audience.<sup>18</sup> When a letter is an element of an epistolary novel, it is always directed more "to the audience", that is to the reader,

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15 R. Ganszyniec, *Polskie listy miłosne dawnych czasów* (Lwów, 1925).

16 *Listy staropolskie z epoki Wazów*, ed. H. Malewska (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1959).

17 Z. Krasiński, *Sto listów do Delfiny*, ed. J. Kott (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1966).

18 R. Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art: An Investigation on the Borderlines of Ontology, Logic, and Theory of Literature, with an Appendix on the Functions of Language in the Theater* (Michigan: Northwestern University Press, 1973).

than it is to the fictional addressee in the presented world; whereas in the case of authentic correspondence, when the author's intention to publish it has been revealed or seems highly likely, the proportion between the turns towards the letter's addressee and the signs of the presence of a reader as a third party may vary from one correspondence to another and even within one correspondence. When writing to a friend, the author sometimes clearly remembers that the letter may one day be published and is then careful about the way he or she will look to the eyes of the future public and anonymous reader. Sometimes, however, this perspective is forgotten and the author writes to the addressee without regard to the way that those who come after may understand the letter. This may be difficult to grasp, but it seems that in authentic private correspondence, one and the same author sometimes poses more to a future public and sometimes is more spontaneous, thinking only of the close and trusted addressee who will open the envelope, read the letter and then put it away in a drawer.

When the editor adds *ex post* footnotes to a collection of letters, this may reinforce the address "to the audience", explaining certain fragments which might otherwise be incomprehensible to them, for example because of the private meaning of some expression that is understandable only within the author's social circle. In such situations, the editor introduces the reader to the circumstances of the author's personal life, sometimes even on the level of gossip. It is somewhat different when the commentary concerns the context of public events that are mentioned directly or alluded to in the correspondence. This kind of historical explanation does not generally involve moving from the intimate to the public sphere, since it usually fits within the frame of what is intended for third parties. It is only necessary in order to "readdress" some piece of information towards one audience group rather than another, towards a later generation rather than the contemporaries of the writer.

It is often difficult to grasp the positioning towards a future reader. A case in point is the misunderstanding associated with the interpretation of Stanisław Brzozowski's letters. Andrzej Werner, who discussed them in the weekly *Polityka*, declared categorically: "There is no trace of the convention of epistolary art here, none of the dual consciousness that is not only typical of the correspondence of the Romantics, but can also be found, for example, in the letters of Thomas Mann: the sense that what they are writing is going to be read not only and not mainly by the addressee, who is not the most important thing here."<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile Brzozowski himself not only hoped to publish his letters – and hence must have

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19 A. Werner, "Brzozowski w świetle listów", *Polityka* 1970. 48.

written them, at least from a certain point in time, with the awareness of their public destiny – but even defined the principles to which their editor should adhere. In the foreword to his Memoir, dated Florence, 12 February, 1911, he wrote: “If this diary or any other which I may yet write and leave behind me, including my letters, is ever printed – and I hope that it will be – I forbid anyone to make random abridgements or omissions, etc.”<sup>20</sup>

Complete separation between the addressee and the reader exists only in the case of correspondence that is clearly not intended for third parties. In such cases, the “you” refers exclusively to the addressee, and no place at all is envisaged for the reader. At times this can make it completely impossible to understand the text; in such circumstances, only an editor’s footnote can open up the allusion to the uninitiated reader or explain the obscure abbreviations, sobriquets and so on involved in some peculiar kind of “private code”.

The phenomenon of censorship of letters may also be considered in terms of the distinction between addressee and reader. The censored edition, *editio castigata*, is precisely the result of the intrusion of a reader-editor into a text intended only for the addressee. In practice it is most often the editor, the addressee or the family of the author who removes things from the text. As far as the author is concerned, the distinction between the proper addressee of the letter and the future external reader may be approached in a variety of ways. Brzozowski, for instance, forbade excisions of any kind, with the exception of any that his wife might want to introduce. Krasieński repeatedly begged his friend Adam Soltan (let us not inquire whether ingenuously or otherwise) never to let their correspondence out of his hands, adjuring him “by the love of God”. He was also indignant at Henrietta Willan’s idea of publishing their love letters. Letters that the writers expected to be seen by prison or monastic censors, or that were exposed to political censorship, in turn, might consciously introduce the role of a reader, by the use of a peculiar code similar to the one used by Polish literature under the partitions.

The earlier mentioned edition of letters written by economic emigrants to Brazil and the United States at the end of the nineteenth century furnishes an example of the situation in which an author’s failure to take account of the undesired reader (and consequent failure to make use of any code) has extremely drastic consequences. Correspondence with the families left behind under the

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20 The editor of Brzozowski’s Memoir did not include this foreword. I quote from vol. II of the Letters, edited by M. Sroka. S. Brzozowski, *Listy* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1970), 586.

Russian partition was subject to strict imperial censorship. Officials confiscated letters that brought news of successes in the new world, since they might have contributed to a rise in emigration. Their writers were undoubtedly unaware that the first readers of the letters were the censors, and thus were helpless in the face of this unforeseen instance of reception. The impounded letters never reached their addressees, who waited in vain for news from over the ocean from their husbands, fathers and sons. The letters were discovered by accident in archives investigated by historians and were published eighty years after the time of writing.

In pondering the situation of the reader of a published correspondence, we pass to the second of the earlier distinguished fields of contact between the letter in its utile function and the literary text. In this field, the most interesting question concerns the significance that the experience of a reader of literature, especially of the novel – and not only the epistolary novel – may have for the reader of a published correspondence.

### **The Collection of Letters as an Autobiographical Novel**

The interest in reading letters, especially letters by outstanding people, did not in the least diminish after the wave of epistolomania, which had maintained a consistent height from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, began to fade. In the contemporary situation, it seems to be part of a general interest in literature of personal document: diaries, memoirs, and different kinds of undated written reflection, diaries “without dates”. If it is true that today the art of letter-writing has died out, then perhaps reading the letters of other people, written in times gone by, is a kind of recompense for the fact that no-one any longer corresponds in a manner that serves any deeper purpose than the fastest possible exchange of information. However, I shall not attempt here to argue anything concerning either the flowering or the fading of the art of true correspondence. Among some interesting and sometimes amusing responses to a holiday opinion poll in the weekly *Polityka* in 1973 which asked “Do you like letters?”<sup>21</sup> the most apt seems to me to be this remark by Kazimierz Brandys:

What we call the epistolary art of former epochs is the outcome of selection; the correspondence that has been passed down to us is the most striking, while other correspondence is ignored. I do the same thing with the letters I receive: I put the most interesting ones in a separate drawer. Perhaps someone will find them in fifty years’ time and then

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21 *Polityka* 1973, numbers 30, 33, 35, 39.

it will turn out that in my day people were passionate and fascinating letter-writers. We normally think of the past from the perspective of choices that have been made, and when we speak of “seventeenth-century letters”, what we mean by this is a selection from a century; tradition also has its drawers.<sup>22</sup>

In the light of this remark, it seems best not to enter into any debate on the state of epistolography today and keep instead to the reading of letters from earlier times. I shall now concentrate exclusively on collections of correspondence by individual authors, since this is the area in which the contact between literature and the letter in its utile function is most clearly visible.

Let us recall the basic conditions that make it possible for readers to take a stance in relation to a collection of letters that is like the stance they take in relation to a work of literature. First, there is the activity of the letters’ editor, who supplies commentaries to individual texts and arranges them into a whole, thus imparting to them, if not the character, then at least the appearance, of a work (in Głowiński’s sense). Second, there is the emergence, also as a result of editorial activity, of the general category of the reader, alongside the individual and particular figure of the addressee (in cases where letters already contain this concealed general address in their very text, the editor only confirms it and exposes it more obviously). The collection of letters is of course closest to the epistolary novel, and just as in that form of novel we discern formal mimetism – imitation of epistolary utterance – so also in authentic correspondence the same principle of *mimesis* appears, but in the opposite direction, as in a mirror image. This is how Henry Reeve, in one of his letters to Krasieński, interpreted their exchange of letters: “our correspondence contains within it a novel no less proper than *La nouvelle Héloïse*, though certainly a little more true in what concerns human hearts, and a little more moral in what concerns our souls, since we are its authors.”<sup>23</sup> Krasieński’s epistolography is a particularly rewarding subject of study in this context because the presence of literary stylisation within it is exceptionally clear. The Polish author does not confine himself, of course, merely to imitating Rousseau, but draws on a considerably larger circle.

In a monograph devoted to the poet’s debut and maturity, Maria Janion argues that during the years of his sojourn in Geneva, Krasieński’s poetry took shape on

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22 *Polityka* 1973. 35.

23 Quoted after Z. Sudolski, *Korespondencja Zygmunta Krasieńskiego...*, 14. The correspondence was originally conducted in French. Original and Polish translation in *Korespondencja Zygmunta Krasieńskiego, Listy do Henryka Reeve*, vol. II, trans. A. Olędzka-Frybesowa, ed. P. Hertz (Warszawa: PIW, 1980).

the border between utile and poetic forms. The letters to his friend Reeve and the diary written for Henrietta, the poet's youthful love, are utile. However, these texts cannot be treated exclusively as autobiographical documents, because their author presents himself as a lyric "I" stylised in a manner that is distinctly literary.<sup>24</sup> Although the presence of conscious literary stylisation makes the "literary" reading of correspondence easier, it is not an essential condition for such reading. However, it does favour the kind of interpretative treatment that Jan Kott, for example, applied in his edition of Krasiński's letters to Delfina Potocka, where he described this correspondence as follows: "It forms an astonishing epistolary romance, something that we might call the greatest novel of Polish Romanticism – that novel that never existed. The correspondence has its own dramatic construction, its plot sequence and its heroes."<sup>25</sup> Kott even saw similarities with the novels of Balzac, Stendhal, Dostoyevsky and Proust.

We should note here that discussion of the literary character of Krasiński's correspondence constantly revolves around the problem of the autobiographical. If we attempt to define more closely what kind of literary quality the letters have, the most obvious point of reference is the already cited comparison with an epistolary romance. But it is not the only one: Maria Janion, for instance, calls the youthful correspondence "a semi-utile *autobiographical lyric*", and its subject the *lyric "I"* [emphases added]. Ignacy Chrzanowski, in turn, in an article on Krasiński's personality, remarked:

If we can regard Słowacki's letters to his mother as a marvellous autobiographical poem, composed not only of *Wahrheit*, but also of *Dichtung*, then many of Krasiński's letters could be described as an autobiographical psychological novel.<sup>26</sup>

"A novel no less proper than *La nouvelle Héloïse*", "epistolary romance", "autobiographical lyric", "autobiographical psychological novel" – this series of definitions, though distinguished with the aid of non-uniform criteria, throws light from various angles on the character of the phenomenon and makes it easier to seek further analogies. This is a matter of placing collections of correspondence in two contexts. On the one hand, there are various types of intimate writings, while on the other there is the kind of novel that took shape by contact with this very type of writing – which includes collections of letters.

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24 Janion, *Zygmunt Krasiński – debiut i dojrzałość...*, 152.

25 Kott, 10.

26 I. Chrzanowski, "Osobowość Krasińskiego", in: *Krasiński żywy*, ed. Władysław Günther (London: Świdorski, 1959), 22–23.

Of all the forms of intimate writing, it is certainly the diary, because of its episodic conception of time and exclusively present perspective, which is closest to the collection of letters. The autobiography and the memoir differ from the collection of letters in being apprehended from a larger distance. They concern events that are past, and remain true to the past time of epic; whereas the diary and the letter approach the form of temporality typical of the lyric. In Krasiński's letters to his father, Maria Janion saw "the diary of a Romantic, worthy to stand beside the masterpieces of that genre penned by Lamartine, Chateaubriand or de Vigny".<sup>27</sup> However, there is of course a fundamental difference between the diary and the collection of letters, in that in the latter an addressee is explicitly present.

And the relation with the novel? Through what novelistic form can the reader look at the collection of letters as a meaningful whole? What novel convention can impose a significant unity on a collection of letters, which is usually fragmentary and breaks off at a random point? In his edition of the letters of Brzozowski, Mieczysław Sroka arranged the correspondence chronologically instead of dividing it according to the people addressed. In doing so, he created the outlines of an autobiography which demands to be placed beside not only the author's Memoir, but also his novels, especially *Książka o starej kobiecie* [A Book About An Old Woman]. The result of an edition that extracted Stanisław Witkiewicz's letters to his son from his correspondence as a whole was to produce a self-portrait of an artist and father. Both these sets of letters, like those of Krasiński, are also autobiographies through which, as Jan Błoński was to put it in a context to which we shall shortly refer, the epoch looks at itself. We can describe the shades of colour more precisely. Brzozowski's correspondence is also a philosophical and political novel, while Witkiewicz's is a *Bildungsroman*, a novel of upbringing in which the narrator-mentor teaches his pupil about life. At the same time, it is not without its colouring of manners and details of daily life. Krasiński's letters to his father, to Reeve and to Delfina can be seen as constituting not one, but three novels: one about a romantic person, another about a Romantic poet and the third about a romantic love. Jan Kott believes that we can interpret these letters in the light not only of the Romantic novel but also of texts that are closer to us in time.<sup>28</sup> In this context, Kott calls Dostoyevsky to mind, and he concludes: "finally, in these letters, there is, at least for us, their readers today, Proust's 'way'".<sup>29</sup> This last analogy, of course, is based on the experience

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27 M. Janion, "Tryptyk epistolograficzny", in *Romantyzm...*, 215.

28 Kott, 13.

29 Kott, 14.

of time and the role of memory in Krasiński's epistolography. However, the condition for readings like those considered here, which bring out a certain inner meaning in a collection of letters as a whole, is that the reader does not look in the collection for finished and closed composition, but accepts the poetic of the fragment, the value of what is not said or is incompletely said. The reader needs also to acknowledge the writer's right to the abandoned thread, to the accidental, and to the mingling of lofty affairs with ordinary ones. The series of conventions operating in the twentieth-century novel not only allows such a stance, but even requires it.

The twentieth-century novel is a hybrid form which has been invaded by many different kinds of discourse: the philosophical treatise, the academic dissertation, the historical sketch, the essay, the poetic vision, the record of a dream, authorial reflection on the art of writing, the diary, the memoir, emotionally coloured lyrical expression, reportage, travel writing and the political manifesto. New possibilities, not yet exploited, are concealed in all these areas; as Tomasz Burek writes, a hidden novel is always lurking there.<sup>30</sup> The growth of the lyric element and the increasing subjectivisation, the attempt to tell the intimate experience of the individual, in other words the "turn inwards", have particular significance for the hybridisation of the novel. This is what Jan Błoński says of the difficulties connected with this, in his afterword to the Polish translation of Michel Leiris's *L'Age d'homme*:

The novel today is a palsied genre: it is incapable of absorbing the knowledge, especially psychological knowledge, that contemporary doctrines supply. Its way of telling is in conflict with the intellectual experience that we have gained.<sup>31</sup>

Błoński describes *L'Age d'homme* as "a document, though perhaps in a different sense than the one that Leiris originally had in mind", because "in this childhood the whole epoch looks at itself". He calls the work "a frontier book, symptomatic of the development of prose", and concludes as follows:

In *L'Age d'homme* the point is precisely that literature should not become stupefied, that it should reach boldly into those areas that are reserved, as it were, for non-artistic thought. The paradox of Leiris, how to deduce the form of a story out of frankness, is the dream and paradox of the whole genre; *L'Age d'homme* summarises the experience of

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30 T. Burek, "Powieść utajona", *Odra* 1973. 10.

31 J. Błoński, Afterword to: M. Leiris, *Wiek męski wraz z rozprawą „Literatura a tauromachia”*, trans. T. and J. Błoński (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1972), 184.



the intimate diary; but also – out of an excess of frankness – it flies off on psychoanalytical wings into a mythological fairy tale.<sup>32</sup>

Błoński touches here on two matters that are important for the contemporary novel: its concentration on inner experience and the necessity of confrontation with extra-literary sources of knowledge about the human being. He also points to the nature of the solution to which Leiris resorted: making use of the tools of psychoanalysis, he chose himself as the object of investigation. He made the autobiographical the test of the worth and meaning of literature.

By what route did the contemporary novel arrive at the analysis of inner experience as the only area in which the individual can make sense not only of himself or herself, but also of other people and the whole external world? Ian Watt directs us for an answer once more to the first-person epistolary novel of the eighteenth century. At the end of the chapter entitled “Private Experience and the Novel”, he describes Joyce’s *Ulysses* as “the supreme culmination of the formal trend that Richardson initiated”,<sup>33</sup> because:

There is nothing heroic about Bloom, nothing outstanding in any way; it is difficult at first sight to see why anyone should want to write about him; and there is, indeed, only one possible reason, which is also the reason by which the novel in general lives: despite all that can be said against Bloom his inner life is, if we can judge, infinitely more various, more interesting, and certainly more conscious of itself and its personal relationships than that of his Homeric prototype. In this, too, Leopold Bloom is the climax of the tendencies we have been concerned with here: and Richardson, who is surely his spiritual kin, must be explained and, perhaps, justified by the same reasons.<sup>34</sup>

The pre-romantic epistolary novel not only turns towards the inner experience of the figures presented, but also prepares the way for the abandonment of the dramatic intrigue and the extensive external action required by the picaresque novel and the nineteenth-century historical novel, which is one of the most popular variants of the genre. Thus the preference for external action, so important for nineteenth-century novel poetics, is placed in brackets, so to speak. Watt suggests that a kind of backward jump takes place, to the eighteenth century, although rather to the deeper principles of construction of the characters than simply to the conventions of the epistolary novel.

In his article on the first-person novel cited earlier, Michał Głowiński writes of this resort to earlier tradition, drawing on the reflections of Senancour

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32 Błoński, 184.

33 Watt, 206.

34 Watt, 207.

that precede his epistolary novel *Obermann* of 1804. An analysis of *Pamela* and *Clarissa* also reveals these novels' attempt to convey inner time. But the twentieth-century novel, though often deeply concerned with inner experience, rarely makes use of the form of the novel in letters. This technique has become too conventionalised to satisfy writers who are looking for a precise instrument to analyse semi-conscious mental states, dreams and daydreams, in order to give the impression of a spontaneous flow of associations and images or to create possibilities for wandering the depths of memory. What the epistolary novel once found a way to tell, the interior monologue now tells. But the prototype of the epistolary novel, that is the collection of letters, has not become outdated. On the contrary, it enjoys greater and greater interest in times when readers are looking for the novel that is hidden beyond the novel and when the autobiography is perhaps set to become the measure and guarantee of the existence and purpose of literature.

## 2. The Role of the Reader in the Intimate Diary

The question of the situation and role of the reader, so obvious in the case of the letter, might not seem to be relevant in relation to the diary (especially the intimate diary). In fact, however, it is highly relevant. In spite of the evident and basic differences between epistolography and diary writing as two separate phenomena within the literature of personal document, they have two things in common. First, each has its own peculiar (and often half-hidden) links with the novel. Second, the presence of the reader in the diary constitutes a certain paradox which cannot be described without resort to the context of both epistolography and the novel.

Undoubtedly we can observe the operation of two parallel processes, which remain closely linked with each other, although they have their own order and dynamism. One of these is the rise of the modern novel, with its developments and transformations from the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries onwards. Among the effects of this process are such varied phenomena as the modification of novel style by the introduction of poetic and lyrical elements. As regards the shaping of the point of view, in turn, the modern novel moved away from the objectivism of the omniscient narrator towards the subjective perspective of the characters – resulting in a new poetic, that of the stream of consciousness, with its free flow of associations. Because of the “essayising” of the novel, it also became saturated with authorial self-reflection on the subject of writing itself. Michał Głowiński dubbed this phenomenon the novelistic methodology of the novel.<sup>1</sup> As indicated at the end of the previous chapter, much importance also comes to attach to polymorphousness, that is the inclusion in the text of the novel of a variety of forms of utterance conventionally not considered to belong to this genre of writing, such as dramatic dialogue, reportage sequences, essayistic sections, references to scholarly or scientific works, poems and even music, as well as to documents, newspaper articles and so on.<sup>2</sup> This whole process can be viewed as an intrinsic aspect of the novel genre’s development, regardless of whether it is judged to be a symptom of crisis and a tendency towards

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1 M. Głowiński, “Powieść jako metodologia powieści”, in his: *Porządek, chaos, znaczenie. Szkice o powieści współczesnej* (Warszawa: PIW, 1968).

2 See for example M. Głowiński, *Powieść młodopolska. Studium z poetyki historycznej* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1969); T. Burek, *Zamiast powieści* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1971) and *Dalej aktualne* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1973).

disintegration, or considered as an expression of expansiveness and vitality. An important vantage point from which to examine this process is to analyse the particular kind of virtual audience in texts of this type, which assume an actively co-operating reader. His or her consciousness is the plane on which the heterogeneous work, conceived as “incomplete”, as a “work in progress” which comes into being only in the course of being read and as a result of being read, is integrated into a whole.

The second of the mentioned processes takes place as it were outside the history of novel conventions, and concerns changes in the attitudes and interests of the reading public. This is a process of constantly growing readerly fascination with the non-novel, with non-fiction prose from the territory that I described in the introduction to this book. I shall limit myself here to a passing glance at the opinions of just one group of readers: those “experts” (to use Sławiński’s term<sup>3</sup>) who express their views in writing from a position of professional authority, in other words critics and literary scholars. Their readings show that various genres of autobiographical writing are interpreted through the prism of customs and habits learned from reading novels. Readers who turn from the novel to the diary, memoir or collection of letters bring to this reading matter a way of looking at a text that familiarity with novel conventions has taught them. This is clearly visible even in the early phase of the process, beginning in the nineteen-sixties, in what was then written about the letters of Stanisław Brzozowski, Zofia Nałkowska’s *Dzienniki czasu wojny* [Wartime Diaries], Maria Kuncewiczowa’s *Fantomy* [Phantoms], Tadeusz Breża’s *Nelly*, Kazimierz Brandys’s *Mała księga* [Little Book], Jerzy Zawieyski’s and Wilhelm Mach’s collections of sketches, or Kazimierz Wyka’s essays.

The way in which the reader’s reception of the intimate diary is defined in many cases by the habits learned from novel-reading is gradually becoming visible. The diary, in spite of its unfinished form, which is the essence of its day-to-day method of construction, is beginning to be treated as a meaningfully organised whole. As a result, the diarist emerges as both the hero of the events related and as the authorial personality whose manner of arranging them is

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3 J. Sławiński, “O dzisiejszych normach czytania (znawców)”, *Teksty* 1974.3. Sławiński is not concerned here with the norms of reading in general, which are investigated by the methods of literary sociology through questionnaires, surveys of reader choices on the book market and so on. He is concerned only with those who express their opinions directly, as critics and reviewers of new literary publications. Their (more or less authentic) professional authority influences reception by the wider public.

novelistic. It should be noted that not all intimate diaries lend themselves equally easily to this kind of interpretation.<sup>4</sup>

It is probably strictly intellectual diaries like Henryk Elzenberg's *Kłopot z istnieniem* [The Problem with Existence], to which the author gave the apt subtitle *Aforyzmy w porządku czasu* [Aphorisms in Chronological Order], which are most resistant to attempts at such readings. Zofia Nałkowska, on the other hand, records her confessions in a quite different way, with the result that the text of her diary readily lends itself to being read through the prism of novelistic reading habits. A good example is to be found in the ending of her youthful diary, where her manner of writing seems to encourage the future, hypothetical reader to interpret the diary almost as if it were a novel. The way she declares her intention to give up the diary at a certain moment testifies to this. With time it was to turn out that the abandonment of the diary was not complete, though there was in fact a two-year gap in her writing. After explaining the reasons for which (as she then thought) she could see no point in continuing the diary, she tried to compose a finale:

I would like to say something important in conclusion, but I am afraid of being bombastic. But anyway it doesn't matter. Novels usually end with marriage. And I'm getting married in a couple of months.

The end.<sup>5</sup>

It will be easier to see the relationship between the novel and many diaries if we compare them to the stream of consciousness model rather than to the style of omniscient narration that is most common in the realist novels of the nineteenth century such as those by Balzac, Tolstoy or Sienkiewicz. In Polish prose of the second half of the twentieth century, with its quest for new forms of expression, a deep opposition to the earlier imposed poetics of socialist realism played an important role. The changes that took place after 1956 loosened the tight corset of ideological doctrine that had hampered the development of culture. Writers on the one hand looked for inspiration to the native avant-garde prose of the twenties and thirties, which had for long been condemned to oblivion, while on the other they reached out towards the new aesthetic quests evident in the literature developing in the West, especially in the French and American contexts. However, not all the experiments were successful; sometimes the uncritical relish for formal innovations led nowhere. The reaction of literary critics was

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4 M Głowiński, "Powieść a dziennik intymny", in his: *Gry powieściowe...*, 105n.

5 Z. Nałkowska, *Dzienniki 1899–1905*, edited with introduction and commentary by H. Kirchner (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1974), 348.

malicious at times; some declared that in the case of some novels that strove for originality at any price, the term “difficult” meant no more than “boring” – words that in Polish conveniently rhyme. Accusations of barrenness, tedious emptiness and monotony appeared. The rush to catch up with contemporary aesthetics proved to be a two-edged sword. Michał Głowiński, who was the first to introduce literary theoretical reflection on the form of the modern novel to Polish literary scholarship, in his discussions of the novel methodology and theoretical problems of the French *nouveau roman*, wrote:

The phenomenon of the novel about nothing took shape, but it was not the nothing that Flaubert had dreamed of writing about a century earlier. It is as if our contemporary Polish novel “nothing” were devoid of self-awareness. It represents a phenomenon that I would define as “socparnassianism”.

Głowiński goes on to say:

The novel has essentially ceased to integrate the experiences of readers, partly because it has become too self-absorbed, partly because it has become pure poetry, or pure entertainment.<sup>6</sup>

The neologism “socparnassianism” invented by Głowiński is of a doubly ironic kind. It was modelled, of course, on the pattern of the contemptuous shorthand term “socialist realism”, the movement known colloquially as “sorealism”, or even simply “soc”; but it also alludes to Parnassianism, associated in Polish tradition with poetry of rather poor quality, in which sophisticated form covers inner emptiness. The rather dismissive valuation of this trend is also linked with the fact that it is only a derivative of French Parnassianism, which in turn bore no more than a superficial resemblance to the poetry of the great symbolists who were writing at the same time, and came nowhere near rivalling them. The combination of references, to Parnassianism’s not very successful attachment to the slogan of art for art’s sake, and to the crude propagandist poetics of literary socialist realism, makes Głowiński’s neologism sound contemptuous and snubbing. It indicates that the novel to which he applies it is just as far from Parnassianism – in itself not a complimentary frame of reference – as socialist

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6 M. Głowiński, “Tak jest dziwnie, tak jest inaczej”, *Teksty* 1973.4. Nałkowska’s Wartime Diaries, which turned out to be a true revelation, were published at this time as the first extract from the extensive whole of the writer’s many-volume diary. This edition preceded the later, complete edition, covering fifty-five years, where the Wartime Diaries appeared again in their proper chronological position, this time without the censor’s cuts, which had mutilated the first edition in several places.

realism is from realism. It is empty and barren; essentially it is about nothing. It strives for refinement of form, but conveys no significant message.

One way out of the stalemate for the novel has been to look for inspiration in the field of literature of personal document, and hence also in the formula of the diary. The diagnosis cited above was framed by Głowiński as an introduction to his discussion of Zofia Nałkowska's *Wartime Diaries*. In opposition to the inadequacies of the novel, he presents the enlivening impulses flowing from the intimate writings which were being published with increasing frequency. This development gave reason to suppose that writers' diaries, even if they did not push their authors' novels entirely into the shade, would from the perspective of modernity be perceived as more readable and more vital than fine literature, which would quickly come to be seen as outdated. Julian Rogoziński draws attention to a similar example in his afterword to the Polish translation of Julien Green's *Diary*:

When Andre Gide began to publish fragments of his personal notebooks in the thirties, a radical change took place in the way his work was viewed: his novellas, novels and plays turned out to be mere contributions, in varying degrees, to his altogether more interesting diaries. Gide put together an overwhelmingly fascinating commentary to his sometimes rather tedious books.<sup>7</sup>

But of course it is not only the case that the novel is becoming outdated, that it is beset by problems that tell readers to turn away from it. The point is that readers, even when they leave it behind, move in the direction that the novel itself pointed out. For who or what, if not the novel of the early twentieth century, teaches us to take pleasure in open form, in the absence of plot, the mixing of styles, and the blurring of genre divisions? Who or what, if not the modern novel, has accustomed us to the mingling of lyricism with ironic reflection, or daydreaming and fantasy with scientific argument? Who or what, if not this novel, has taught us to discern value in the incomplete text, the text that is in the process of becoming; to interpret the meaning of the rough draft and understand chaos as a form of meaning?<sup>8</sup> Is it not the interior monologue which has

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7 J. Rogoziński, "Kilka uwag o czytaniu zwierzeń w ogóle, a w szczególności Julien Greena", in J. Green, *Dziennik*, selected and translated by J. Rogoziński (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy "Pax", 1972), 776. Konwicki writes similarly of Gombrowicz in *Kalendarz i klepsydra* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1976), 130, where he admits to being disappointed, as a reader, in the novels and plays after the fascination of reading the *Diary*.

8 I refer here to Michał Głowiński's book *Porządek, chaos, znaczenie. Szkice o powieści współczesnej* (Warszawa: PIW, 1968).

reinforced our interest in subjectivity, the intimate experiences of the individual; and is it not the philosophical novel, the novel-parable, that encourages us to abandon plot in favour of the “romance of consciousness”, the intellectual adventure that the essay offers? The novel, as a result of this, becomes a model example of the open work as understood by Umberto Eco.

Let us then render to the novel what is the novel’s: perhaps the career of these various non-fiction genres of prose is nourished not only by the weakness of the novel but also by its strengths and inventiveness. The interdependencies between the novel and various autobiographical genres are revealed most interestingly when we look at the intimate writings of professional authors. This is the reason for the particular choice of examples in this chapter. Of course it is not a matter here of tracing links that are “material”, so to speak (when defined motifs from a diary or notebook are exploited in a novel), but of the dynamics of inter-genre influences. Polish diary-writing began to develop later than memoir-writing or epistolography. However, even in the Romantic period, it is not a completely blank spot on the map of Polish literature, as we can see by looking, for example, at the diary of Zygmunt Krasiński, written for Henrietta Willan (although the text has been lost, we know that it was written), the diary of Słowacki for the year 1832 or his notes from his travels to the Holy Land, Egypt and the Greek islands, even if these writings are mere trifles in comparison with the huge epistolary output of both poets. Brzozowski’s Memoir from the turn of 1910 and 1911 turned out to be similarly slim in comparison with his later collected letters, though of no less significance than they are. Published in 1913, for many years the Memoir was a lone island; the other writers’ diaries that were coming into being at the time, like those of Stefan Żeromski (kept from 1882), Karol Irzykowski (from 1891) and Nałkowska (from 1899), led a “secret life”, as it were.

It was only when an edition of Żeromski’s Diaries, one of the most important of all Polish achievements in this field, was begun in 1953 that a whole range of writers’ diaries began to appear in print. Taken together, they created a fascinating phenomenon whose contours with time became clearly visible. An impressive gallery of critical work continues to grow around them.<sup>9</sup> After

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9 These studies are based on a variety of methodological assumptions, To mention only some of the most outstanding: Grażyna Borkowska’s chapter on the Diaries of Zofia Nałkowska and Maria Dąbrowska in her book *Alienated Women: A Study on Polish Women’s Fiction, 1848-1914*, trans. Ursula Phillips (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2001); Z. Łapiński, “Posłowie do metody: ‘On ja’ czyli Dziennik”, in his: *Ja, Ferdynurke* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1997); M. Marszałek, “*Życie i papier*”. *Autobiograficzny projekt Zofii Nałkowskiej: “Dzienniki”: 1899 – 1954*,



the process of posthumous publication of writer's diaries had begun, the second important development, which was a major breakthrough, was the writing of diaries straight for printing. As we recall from the first part of this book, this led to the emergence of the "third apex" of the autobiographical triangle, that is the evident crystallising out of the previously undiscerned stance of challenge, to which Gombrowicz gave canonical expression. It was a stance that completely changed the earlier construction of the reader in the intimate diary.

In order to take in the consequences of such a distinct change in the position of the reader, and to do so in the context of the diary – novel relationship, one needs to begin with the most general possible understanding of the projected reader inscribed in the diary utterance. As essentially the most distinct form of confession in the literature of personal document, the intimate diary seems to be pure self-expression. In practice, however, a paradoxical situation arises, because it is inevitably "expression that is communicated".<sup>10</sup> And communicated to a reader who is not in the least fictional. The gradual spread of the custom of publishing diaries, which transformed private, personal notes into a literary genre, is the basic problem in the history of the intimate diary from its emergence at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, above all in French literature. During the period when Żeromski's diary was being written, the *journal intime* was already a fully recognised genre in European literature, one that had flourished exuberantly in the Romantic era. As a result, a new period in the development of the novel-as-diary began in Poland as well.<sup>11</sup> Its popularity testifies at the same time to the existence of a climate of thought that favoured the rise of diaries, both factual and fictional.

A particular role in this process was played by Henryk Sienkiewicz's novel *Bez dogmatu* [*Without Dogma: A Novel of Modern Poland*], cast in the form of a diary by a young man named Leon Płoszowski, who conducts an analysis of his inner

introduction by G. Ritz (Kraków: Universitas, 2004); P. Rodak, *Między zapisem a literaturą. Dziennik polskiego pisarza XX wieku (Żeromski, Nałkowska, Dąbrowska, Gombrowicz, Herling-Grudziński)* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2011). The most recent diary publications, by Sławomir Mrożek, Jan Józef Szczepański and Miron Białoszewski, are still awaiting study.

10 M. Głowiński's term. See the chapter entitled "Odbiór, konotacje, styl" in his: *Style odbioru* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1977).

11 On the modernist novel-diary see Głowiński, *Powieść młodopolska*. L. Łopatyńska ("Dziennik osobisty, jego odmiany i przemiany", *Prace Polonistyczne* (VIII), Łódź 1950) argues that the rhythm of development of the novel in diary form is linked with the rhythm of changes in the authentic *journal intime*.

experience. He strives to understand the crisis of world-view and morals that he is going through, and his attitude is marked by deep pessimism and a sense of the meaninglessness of life. In the language of the time, a person with this attitude was called a decadent. Sienkiewicz fascinated his readers by presenting his hero from the inside, using the methods proper to the psychological novel.

In the entries made by Żeromski in the summer of 1890, there are frequent references to his reading of *Without Dogma* and to conversations about this novel. At the time, it aroused a great deal of interest because of the obvious difference in its themes and style when compared with its author's earlier, famous work as a writer of historical novels. Żeromski's diary also contains many half-ironic, half-serious comparisons of some threads of *Without Dogma* to the real-life situation in which he himself had become embroiled through his affair with a married woman. It is also interesting in this context that it is his life rather than his diary that Żeromski stylises on the model of Sienkiewicz's fashionable novel; the form and style of the diary bear no traces of the older author's influence. The other book which absorbed Żeromski's attention at the same time was also a novel-diary, Aleksander Mańkowski's *Hrabia August* [Count August], which Żeromski reviewed for the Warsaw literary, social and political weekly *Głos*.<sup>12</sup>

Karol Irzykowski's diary, like Żeromski's, contains countless traces of his reading of *Without Dogma*:

I say goodbye to keeping a diary properly in the way I would like. I've tried so many times: it did not work. Let it be just a note of these and other thoughts and ideas of mine, but not an up-to-date chronicle of my soul. I exaggerated in wanting to treat myself scientifically, I exaggerated in wanting to write a diary in the way that Płoszowski did.<sup>13</sup>

The development of readers' interest in the novel in diary form seems to be a process that runs parallel to another, by which authentic diarists begin to think about the possibility of future publication of their intimate writings. Nałkowska's diary quite quickly reveals that its young author is thinking along these lines; Brzozowski's Memoir, too, contains an expression of his decision to allow this work to be published. With such writers, we reach a stage of development with regard to the diary that is described thus by Tomasz Burek:

the era of naivete is over (...) the diary effectively exploits the ambiguity of its predicament, (...) it dramatises the tension between the original intention of the conspiratorial conversation with oneself, far from the rest of the world, and the more and more feverish

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12 *Głos* 1890.37.

13 K. Irzykowski, *Notatki z życia, obserwacje i motywy* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1964), 135 (entry for 5 May, 1893).

endeavour to make oneself better known to people, between non-literature and beyond-literature, between revelation and the mystification of linguistic truth”<sup>14</sup>

The ambiguous predicament of the diary that is written with a thought to its possible publication, and the accompanying tensions, are precisely the signs of a gradually emerging stance of challenge.

## The Reader of the Letter and the Diary

The letter and the private diary are distinguished among all the forms of literature of personal document by the particular shaping of the reader inscribed in the text. Janusz Lalewicz, outlining the bases of a functional typology of forms of expression, distinguishes utterance *to* someone from utterance *for* someone.

In general, we may define the communication *to* someone as that kind which with regard to its meaning implies and manifests a defined dramatic relation, in which I perform as *I* in relation to *you* (singular) or *you* (plural). A communication in which that relation is neutralised or suspended is a communication *for* someone.<sup>15</sup>

The letter and the diary, in this understanding, represent utterance *to* someone (to you, to oneself), whereas autobiographies, recollections or memoirs are utterances *for* someone, since in this kind of “tale of oneself” (to coin a phrase),

the “speaker” appears as a point of reference, but not as a person in relation to another. To see this, one only has to compare a confidence with a confession, which is also an utterance on a personal subject, yet at the same time is an expression of the person speaking in relation to the person of the addressee.<sup>16</sup>

Yet both the letter and the diary can undoubtedly be described as “an expression of a person in relation to a person”. They differ only in the kind of addressee. “The diary is *I*, while the letter is *you*”; this succinct formulation appears in the response of Kazimierz Wyka to the survey in the weekly *Polityka* mentioned in the previous chapter, “Do you like letters?”<sup>17</sup> Wyka’s formulation presents in a nutshell the most elementary understanding of the differences between the

14 T. Burek, “Dziennik nie straconych złudzeń”, *Twórczość* 1975.9.

15 J. Lalewicz, *Komunikacja językowa i literatura* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1975), 57.

16 Lalewicz, 58. Although Lalewicz formulates these categories in a chapter devoted to communication in speech, he discerns similar oppositions in written communication, for example between the letter, the directive or public notice and all kinds of other publications, such as essays, scientific dissertations, textbooks, works of philosophy or literary works.

17 *Polityka* 1973.33. See also numbers 30, 32, 35 and 39.

genres and is undoubtedly in agreement with popular intuition concerning the nature of the letter and the diary and the person to whom they are addressed. The private diary, essentially not intended for publication, at least during the author's lifetime, and sometimes also long after his or her death, assumes mainly a receiver who is identical with the sender. Whereas the letter, even the most egocentric, even the letter-confession, the self-expression letter, is directed *ex definitione* to some "you", to someone else.

This difference is exposed most sharply when we refer to Lotman's distinction between two models of communication in the system of culture.<sup>18</sup> In Lotman's view, the most typical situation is the one in which a communication is conveyed from *I* to *he*, where *I*, obviously, is the subject of the message, the one in possession of the information, and *he* is the addressee. In this case it is also essential that at the beginning of the act of communication, the information should be known to "me" but not to "him". But our culture knows another direction in the conveyance of information: from *I* to *I*. Lotman observes that this situation, in which the subject communicates something to his or her own self, that is to someone who already knows it, seems paradoxical, but yet is not so rare as it might seem, and plays no small role in the general system of culture. Lotman is most interested in those cases in which the purpose of conveying information from *I* to *I* is not solely the mnemonic one of committing that information to memory. For in such cases the receiving *I* becomes functionally similar to a third party, and the difference comes down simply to the fact that in the system *I – he*, information moves in space, while in the *I – I* system it moves in time. From the point of view of the diary and the letter, this matter, which for Lotman is only secondary, has considerable significance, to which it will be necessary to return.

In describing the situation in which the communication is conveyed from *I* to *I*, Lotman writes that it refers to all those cases in which a person addresses himself or herself, especially those diary entries that are made not in order to record particular information, but in order, for example, to explain the inner state of the person writing, in a way that would not be possible without the entry's being written. Lotman argues that the fact of addressing oneself in speeches, deliberations and so on has an existence not only on the psychological plane but also on the plane of cultural history. It thus enables us to examine the problem of the therapeutic function of the intimate diary in the cultural context.

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18 J. M. Lotman, "O dvux modeljax kommunikacii v sisteme kul'tury", in: *Trudy po znakovym sistemam*, VI (Tartu, 1973). I am grateful to Bogusław Żyłko for drawing my attention to this text.

Recapitulating this thread of his argument, Lotman concisely describes both ways of communicating in culture:

In one case we are dealing with information given in advance, which moves from one person to another, and with a permanent code within the borders of the whole act of communication. In the other it is a matter of the accumulation of information, of its transposition and reformulation in different categories; it is not new communications that are introduced, however, but new codes, while the sender and receiver are located within one person. In the process of this kind of self-communication, a transformation of the personality itself occurs, and with this a wide range of cultural functions, from the sense of one's separate existence which is essential to human beings in certain types of culture, to self-recognition and self-therapy.<sup>19</sup>

If we apply Lotman's distinctions to our particular purposes, we can say that the letter is a simple example of communication within the *I – he* system, while the diary written to aid self-recognition or self-therapy involves conveying information within the *I – I* system. Diary entries made for the purpose of recording something resemble communication in the *I – he* system, and hence also bear similarities to the letter, but to one sent in time rather than in space. The aphorism of Julien Green, noted in his *Journal*, would be in agreement with this conviction: "A diary is a long letter which the author writes to his own self, and the most surprising thing in this story is the fact that he informs himself how he is getting along".<sup>20</sup>

When applying Lotman's conception of two models of communication in culture to the study of intimate writings, one or two observations need to be made. First, the grammatical form of the second person in the letter does not represent any modification here: the conveyance of information from *I* to *you* fits entirely within the frame of the *I – he* model; it does not represent any kind of intermediary third form. The specific character of the letter utterance can be grasped only on the level of the more detailed relations between the sender and the receiver inside this model, set in opposition generally to the auto-circulation of information in the *I – I* system. Second, in interpretative practice it is usually difficult to separate the elements in a diary that fulfil the function of preserving memory from those that serve the goal of self-recognition or self-therapy, because it is the very recording of the events of one's life that is often an element of self-recognition. The conveying of information to oneself in time which takes

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19 Lotman, 237.

20 J. Green, 14 January, 1946. Translated from the Polish selection from the *Journal*, ed. J. Rogoziński, 405.

place when a person reads his or her own diary from past years (and as we know, this is an activity that diarists commonly engage in), may be considered as a communication within the *I – he* system in so far as we can acknowledge that the *I* reading the text after a lapse of time is in fact different from the *I* who once wrote it. It is probably in just this sense that Lotman speaks of the functional similarity of the receiving *I* to a third person. It seems, however, that this problem simply does not interest him, since it cannot be resolved (or even posed) in the terms of a semiological theory of culture. The question of the existence of the personality and its changes over time can only be pondered in the language of a philosophy of the human being, whether Bergsonian, existentialist or other. It is not without significance that Lotman reduces the problem of memorialisation to mnemonics. He does not write either of memory or of identity and the mutability of the self in time.

Yet another qualification concerns the difference between the conveyance of information in space that is proper to the letter, and its conveyance in time which is proper to the diary. This difference seems to Lotman of less importance than the basic question of the identity or lack of identity of the sender and the receiver. But from the point of view of genre differences between the letter and the diary, this matter is sufficiently important to deserve separate attention. For time as a structural element is differently shaped in the diary utterance than it is in the letter. Michał Głowiński has written extensively, in his already mentioned study of the novel and the intimate diary, about the focus on the moment in diary time and the exclusive sway of the present.<sup>21</sup> This is how the matter presents itself from the point of view of the speaking subject. From the point of view of the reader it looks the same, as long as the undoubted identity of the *I* writing and the *I* receiving is preserved, that is in those parts of the diary in which, as Lotman argues, self-recognition and self-therapy take place. “When I write this, I understand my own self”, says Brzozowski in his *Memoir*.<sup>22</sup> “Writing all this, I liberate myself a little, but that is not yet a solution”, writes Green.<sup>23</sup> Self-therapy is felt here as incomplete, but it is there nevertheless. The present time is also clearly distinguished. Self-understanding comes about *in the course* of writing (“when I write this”). Liberation occurs *in the course* of writing (“Writing (...),

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21 See also Głowiński’s study *Powieść młodopolska*, 205 and 205n, which draws on the work of A. Girard, F. F. J. Drijkoningen and G. Gusdorf.

22 S. Brzozowski, *Pamiętnik*. Extracts from the author’s letters with annotations by O. Ortwin (Kraków-Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1985), 82. Originally published 1913.

23 J. Green, 29 January, 1929. *Dziennik*, 31.

I liberate myself"). But for the reader assumed in the diary, the *I* later in time, reading his or her own record from years gone by, the perspective of the past is also discernible.

From the remarks of many diarists it emerges that they see important reasons for keeping a diary in what Lotman modestly calls the mnemonic function. Green: "I submit to that incomprehensible passion for making the past keep still, the passion that makes us keep a diary."<sup>24</sup> Andrzejewski, lamenting the loss of his youthful diaries: "I wish I could see myself as I was in those years."<sup>25</sup> Nałkowska in the volume for the years 1899–1905:

I always hate my past self for what I write in the diary; I am so artificial and pompous, I use such unfitting words to express ideas that apart from myself, no one could form an image of reality from reading them.<sup>26</sup>

In the wartime volume, Nałkowska repeatedly refers to reading earlier parts of her diary. She writes movingly of her sorrow at the loss of one notebook, which she set fire to in a moment of panic when the Germans came to search a nearby apartment. She was afraid that they might enter her home too, and the contents of the diary were certainly not ones that ought to fall into the hands of the occupiers. She equates forgetting the past events of her own life with an irrevocable annihilation of the past in general. The breach in the diary that arose after one notebook was burned is treated as a breach in her own existence.

The experience of the past as a certain continuity that is proper to the diary, can make itself felt during the reading of a letter only secondarily, when it is read as part of a chronologically ordered collection of correspondence. Otherwise, in the construction of the virtual reader of an individual letter, it is not present, for in the letter, the time perspective is experienced differently. It is only a side-effect of the conveyance of information in space, and in this form it becomes an element inscribed in the text, for example when the distance in time between the moment of writing the letter and the moment of reading it is called to mind, when the writer tries either to overcome that distance or to exploit it, or when he or she simply senses it as painful. In the individual letter, as well as in collections of correspondence, the focus on the momentariness of time, the obsession with the present, is exposed to view by the provision of the date, as in a diary; but this is nevertheless a momentariness that extends into the future, towards the envisaged time when the letter will reach its addressee, be opened and read.

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<sup>24</sup> Green, 4 December, 1928. *Dziennik*, 29.

<sup>25</sup> J. Andrzejewski, "Z dnia na dzień", *Literatura* 1975.2.

<sup>26</sup> Z. Nałkowska, *Dzienniki 1899–1905*, 249.

In describing the intimate diary, or at least those parts of it that are devoted to self-recognition and self-therapy, as an example of information conveyed from *I* to *I*, Lotman conceives of the diary in its pure form, so to speak, as a certain theoretically distinguished kind of communication or model. The confrontation with the empirical that occurs during the reading of particular diaries remains outside the sphere of his interests. Writers' diaries, as already implied in this chapter, are usually written with the intention of publication, or at least this possibility is envisaged. The custom of reading parts of one's diary aloud to friends is also far from uncommon. This means that the thought of an audience – the future reader – is more or less distinctly outlined in the text. In Lotman's terms, the process of conveying information from *I* to *I* is accompanied by a modifying thought that this information will also be conveyed from *I* to *he*.

In his analysis of the various ways in which the reader may be present in the structure of a poetic work, Głowiński outlines a range of possibilities stretching from the poem-soliloquy to the poem-appeal.<sup>27</sup> Although the reader to all appearances seems to be absent in the poem-soliloquy, it is nevertheless “always meant to be overheard by other people” (Głowiński draws here on T. S. Eliot's essay “The Three Voices of Poetry”<sup>28</sup>). The poem-appeal, in contrast, constructs a completely visible reader; it is entirely concentrated on the lyric *you*. If by analogy we were to apply these terms describing phenomena discernible in poetry to various genres of intimate writing, we could see the diary as its own kind of *soliloquium*: a text written for oneself, but almost always with the idea that others will read it (or at least with the fear that they might). The individual letter, in turn, would be the equivalent of the lyric of appeal. And if we could call the diary a *soliloquium*, then an exchange of letters in a correspondence would be a *colloquium*.

## Paradoxes of Intimate Expression

The intention of reaching other people's ears which Eliot discerns in the poem-soliloquy, and which is also inherent in the diary, makes itself felt in various ways: from a loosely noted idea of the possible reader in some undefined future, to behaviour that actively seeks the fulfilment of the intention of being read. Looking at the matter very broadly, we can observe that in the intimate diary, four kinds of receptive situation may be projected:

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27 M. Głowiński, “Wirtualny odbiorca w strukturze utworu poetyckiego”, in his: *Style odbioru*, 15.

28 T. S. Eliot, “The Three Voices of Poetry”, *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), 97.



- 1) An actual, particular reader, from among the circle of those close to the diarist, who reads the diary as it is being written;
- 2) Future, anonymous readers of the published *journal intime*;
- 3) The diarist's address to himself or herself as the reader;
- 4) The personification of the diary as a friend and confidant.

The first possibility, in which an actual reader is made present in the diary, is by no means so rare as one might expect it to be. Żeromski's youthful diary bears traces in certain parts of having been read by Ludwika Dunin-Borkowska and Helena Radziszewska, who even added their comments to the text. The young Nałkowska notes in her diary that she read some parts of it to her friend Hela Radlińska (Boguszewska), as well as to Leon Rygier during their engagement. In later years, Nałkowska gave her diary to Zofia Villaume-Zahrtowa to read. Andrzej Trzebiński, too, read fragments from his Memoir of the occupation of Warsaw aloud to his friends. Green's Diary was read by André Gide even before its publication. And these are not in the least unusual situations. As Lidia Łopatyńska writes:

Examples of the diary that in a way has an addressee are by no means lacking: Leo Tolstoy looks into his wife's diary and sometimes writes answers in it to questions concerning their mutual relationship; Eugenia de Guerin and Barbey d'Aurevilly write for Maurice de Guérin, and after his death Eugenia writes a diary for her brother's friend.<sup>29</sup>

The existence of an actual reader who has access to the diary while it is still being written does not always leave a visible mark on its construction. From this point of view, Nałkowska and Żeromski stand at opposite poles from each other. Some parts of the latter's diary, for example during the time of his love-affair with Helena, are so strongly directed towards this particular reader that they take on a distinctly dialogic character:

Helena quite often reads my diary and then says that I condemn her. No – there is not a single word of condemnation here.

Sometimes the *you* of the letter appears, and because of the presence of the addressee's annotations, the text takes the forms of a real *colloquium*, as here:

Will you forget me, Helena? Will you forget me now?  
(Helena's pencil note):  
Never.<sup>30</sup>

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29 Łopatyńska, 254n.

30 S. Żeromski, *Dzienniki*, vol. 1: 1882–1886 (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1953), 393, 360.

In the first volume of Nałkowska's diary there is no such direct, letter-like dialogising *you*. The address to a second person, which appears no more than occasionally towards the end of this volume, is directed only to future, anonymous readers:

I have written all this so that you may realise that I am not so stupid as I might seem from this diary.

I envy you, whoever you are who read my diary: at this moment you can see how much is left before your reach the end of this thick book, in other words – how long I still have to live.<sup>31</sup>

There is no trace in the entries here of the presence of those actual readers (her friend and her fiancé) to whom Nałkowska read fragments of her diary. She writes *about* them but not *to* them. She only mentions the fact that she read certain parts to them (especially those that referred to them), and she notes their reaction, but the narration remains consistently first-person. The actual reader is only the object of the diary's interest, not a subject speaking in a continuing dialogue in direct speech.

The behaviour of the diarist who makes his or her diary available to someone else can be compared with the behaviour of the epistolographer who sends a letter. But, as it turns out from the example of Nałkowska, making a diary circulate like a letter does not necessarily involve the introduction of letter-type addresses to the reader. This behaviour in itself has a dialogic character, but it is rare for the *verbal text* of the *journal intime* to be dialogised in the way that it is in Žeromski.

The second aspect that shapes the situation of the diary's reception concerns the diarist's attitude to possible future readers of his or her confidential notes, readers who form an anonymous audience. Between the intimacy of the personal diary and the curiosity of its public there is a tension which is the source of play between sincerity and insincerity, spontaneity and studied performance. This question has been quite thoroughly analysed in discussions of intimate writings and so I shall devote a little less attention to it here. The indications of an attitude towards a future anonymous reader appear, of course, not only in direct address to this figure. That address is an element in a whole complex strategy whose methods range from discretion to exhibitionism. While a diary is being written, the confrontation with the reader may be softened and relegated to the background by the decision to publish the diary only many years after its author's

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31 Z. Nałkowska, *Dzienniki 1899–1905*, 196, 298.

death, as was once a widespread custom. But a writer who makes the decision to print the diary as it progresses may also evade the problem of the reader's reaction: by making a selection. This is what Jerzy Zawieyski, for example, did when he published fragments from his diary in his books *Brzegiem cienia* [By the Shore of Shade] and *W alei bezpożytecznych rozmyślań* [In the Avenue of Useless Meditations]. In a foreword to the first of these books, he defined outright the criteria that governed his choice.

Julien Green, as he published successive volumes of his diary, prepared them himself for printing and added his own forewords. In his work as a whole he concentrates to a high degree on the reader. "Each volume of my diary is an answer to all the letters that I receive".<sup>32</sup> He not only makes a selection when he chooses material for publication, but at a certain moment he also dreams: "I'd like to double this diary, I mean keep another one in which I could write everything that I can't write or don't want to write in the first".<sup>33</sup> Or else he comments: "My real diary is in my novels".<sup>34</sup> This is a situation in which the diarist is completely dominated by the thought of his anonymous audience. Intimacy, the private, whatever is most personal – right down to the depths of the unconscious – have escaped from the diary, which is turned into a conventionalised literary genre, only to seek a symbolic, coded expression in the novel.

As we recall, Gombrowicz found an exceptional solution to this problem when he placed at the centre a consciously sought confrontation between his own private life and the judgment of the anonymous reader. Instead of looking for a way to sidestep the problem, he met it head on with the bold challenge that he issued. He also avoided the opposite danger: exhibitionism. His dialectic is complex and subtle, functioning in the context of a perverse understanding of the autobiographical and of mystification and game-playing. Gombrowicz rejects entirely the conventional problem of sincerity and insincerity in intimate writings, regarding it as a question based on false premises:

But listen, nitwit, what good will it do you to know whether I am "sincere" or "insincere"? What does this have to do with whether or not my thoughts are right? I can utter a soaring truth "insincerely" and say the stupidest thing "sincerely". Learn to judge the thought independently of who says it or how.<sup>35</sup>

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32 Green, 5 May, 1950. *Dziennik*, 486.

33 Green, 25 August, 1940. *Dziennik*, 275.

34 Green, 15 October, 1948. *Dziennik*, 452.

35 W. Gombrowicz, *Diary* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), 507.

The third possibility for projecting a reception situation involves the diarist's use of the form of the second person in reference to himself or herself. This fits within the assumptions of intimate expression (that is, when the addressee inscribed in the text is the diarist himself or herself), but at the same it uncovers the paradox that is immanent in the idea of an utterance intended only for the person who utters it. The diarist's self-portrait, inscribed in the text, is then divided into two images, and these lack the symmetry of a mirror image. They are more a matter of two roles, or perhaps even two figures bound together in a relationship of dependency: one speaks, the other listens. The use of the second person is particularly frequent, especially in proportion to the slender dimensions of the text, in Brzozowski's Memoir (the infinitive as an imperative has a similar significance in Trzebiński). In Brzozowski's diary the writing *I* turns to himself – the addressee – as if to a person responding to a call. The writing *I* instructs, challenges, asks, reprimands, orders. The receiving *I* is instructed, challenged, asked, reprimanded:

Don't let yourself be hypnotised, [...] don't be afraid of the paradoxical, but be firm [...] Don't forget, never forget, that in spite of everything you have really tried in every spare moment to lift your head above the sandpit covering your soul and mind – to search, examine, get to know things. This is your pride, this is your dignity. You were born a thinker and you found no place for people like this in society.<sup>36</sup>

The intensity of the tone reminds us sometimes of the mentoring relation to the “you” that reveals itself time and time again, in the constantly repeated phrase “Be healthy, good, wise and straightforward”, in the letters that Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz received from his father. In Lechoń's Diary, this kind of reprimanding relation to “you”, directed to the writer himself, appears rarely, but it occurs in particularly important moments and has a clearly therapeutic significance.

In the diary, the presence of appeal, apostrophe or persuasion directed to the writer himself or herself unveils the existence in the text of two “images of the author”, of which one (the listening *I*) represents the way the diarist currently sees himself or herself, while the other (the speaking *I*) represents his or her idealised self-image. A full interpretation of this phenomenon in a particular diary would need to refer to the whole reconstruction of personality that is inscribed in the text.

Freud, in his analysis of a childhood memory of Leonardo da Vinci, gave examples of the writer's use of the second person in his diary, commenting on this in a footnote as follows: “Leonardo thus behaves like one who was in the

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<sup>36</sup> S. Brzozowski, *Pamiętnik*, 134–135.

habit of making a daily confession to another person whom he now replaced by his diary.<sup>37</sup> Bearing in mind the fact that Freud accentuates the purely personal character of these diary entries (“he made entries in his small hand, written from right to left which were meant only for himself”), we may discern here a symptom of the same situation as Eliot noted in relation to the *soliloquium*. The intimate diary in practice is not entirely pure expression. Even if the author builds a barrier between himself or herself and the possible reader by writing in a code that can only be read by looking at it in a mirror, the interpreter sees in this diary the need to confess “to another person”, the need to communicate.

Finally, the fourth type of address to the reader known in the convention of the *journal intime* is the personification of the diary, which is treated as the friend and confidant of a lonely soul. In the texts of the writer’s diaries considered in this chapter, a serious treatment of this situation occurs only a few times, in the youthful notes of Żeromski and Irzykowski. In Lechoń and Gombrowicz, the “dear diary” address only appears as a jocular reference to a convention which was very popular in diaries as a utile form practised by authors who were not professional writers.<sup>38</sup>

The paradoxical situation of the reader in the diary thus lies in the fact that this figure is present in places where at first sight no such figure has a right to be, and furthermore appears in four different roles. Following the comments presented above, these projections may be compared with regard to the time when the reader figure appears and to whether this figure is real or fictional, external to the text or internalised within it. First, then, this figure may be a real and particular reader, external to the text but made present within it by name and surname, a reader who belongs to the circle of people close to the diarist, who are invited by him or her to read the diary and are present in the course of its writing. The second type of reader figure, equally real and external, enters the stage only after the text is published, and is anonymous, being simply the generality of the public to whom the printed diary is made available as a publication on the literary market. In the modern diarist’s way of writing, there is

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37 Z. Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci: A Psychosexual Study of an Infantile Reminiscence*, trans. A.A. Brill. Footnote 42. Originally published by Moffat, Yard and Company (New York, 1916). Project Gutenberg EBook 2010.

38 Philippe Lejeune carried out an examination over many years of autobiographies and diaries outside the perspective of literature, focusing on the written records created by “ordinary people” in their practice of writing in daily life. *‘Dear Diary--’: Stories of Personal Journal Writing*, trans. Julie M. Plovnick (Monterey, Calif.: Monterey Institute of International Studies, 1993).

always a sense of the reader's presence, in one of two variants: either the diarist writes with an eye to the future reader of the posthumously published work, or he or she makes the diary available to the public as it arises, thus taking account of a reader living at the same time. In the second case, readers may take matters into their own hands: standing out of the anonymous crowd by writing a letter to the diarist and even receiving a reply from him or her, they may come to exist within the diary. The challenge given out by the author is then taken up by the reader and a duel – a dialogue – is played out between them. With the third type of reader figure, it may be the diarist himself or herself who is inscribed in the diary in the course of its being written, a figure who is simultaneously both real and internalised within the text by the addresses of the writer to himself or herself. In the fourth possibility, that is the personification of the diary, the reader is fictional and entirely internalised in the text, enclosed in time within the period of the diary's writing.

### The “Theoretical Consciousness” in the Intimate Diary

Self-reflection on the subject of the diary and the necessity, purpose and manner of its writing appears to a greater or lesser extent in the work of all the authors considered here. There is a need for a reconstruction, based on a suitable range of detailed observations, of the whole theory and philosophy of the *journal intime* that is inscribed in these texts, taking account of the different variants and their dependence on the historical period and on individual features of personality. Here I mention only a few of the most clearly outlined threads.

Who am I writing all this for? This is what I read on the blackboard of my brain: perhaps in fifty years' time, when I die famous, someone will be found to publish my diary, as Bamberg published Hebbel's. Thus I, but with full awareness, am making a cynical confession to my readers who are not yet born. But I will never cheat them.”<sup>39</sup>

As we recall, Irzykowski's fascination with Hebbel's Diaries is expressed in the frequently repeated references to them in his own personal diary entries. But there was also a lasting intellectual bond which bore fruit in a dissertation on the German author and finally in a translation both of the drama *Judith* and of the admired Diaries. Irzykowski's relation to Hebbel is nothing exceptional; it fits within the frame of the phenomenon of intertextuality which is widespread in literature. But in literature of personal document, such references have their own peculiar character, as I have discussed in the chapter on intertextual connections

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39 K. Irzykowski, 60.

in the spiritual autobiography in Part Two of this book, where, among four different types of intertextual reference, I drew particular attention to allusions to other writers’ diaries, memoirs or autobiographies. The reading by diarists of earlier published diaries written by other people sometimes seems to be one of the characteristic features of the diary as a genre. Below I mention some further examples of this, beginning with Andrzej Trzebiński, whose tone of exceptional personal involvement resembles Irzykowski’s.

Brzozowski’s Memoir was always the most powerful temptation. Not only to write its equal – my own memoirs. Also to write Brzozowski’s equal – my own life.<sup>40</sup>

This formulation, however, is something much more than an allusion to the tradition of the genre cultivated by its writer, for it has the weight of an ideological declaration. This is especially clear with regard to the particular interpretation of Brzozowski’s thought presented by Trzebiński. However, we can also find in this author’s work observations of a narrower, more specific nature:

I have always been interested in the question of the various bills in Baudelaire’s Memoirs. I was inclined to take it as a bit flippant or scheming. It is only now that I see – it is simply frankness. Bills – I perceive this now – are one of the most intimate things about a person.

Nałkowska’s youthful fascination with the personality and Diaries of Marie Bashkirtseff, Lechoń’s polemic with Gide’s concept of the diary, and finally Zawieyski’s perhaps most extensive reading within the genre – these are only a few selected testimonies to the way in which the authors of the diaries discussed in this chapter find a place for themselves within the tradition of the *journal intime*. A similar role is played by the references to the novel in diary form cited in relation to Żeromski and Irzykowski. When he published fragments of his diary, Zawieyski chose above all those threads that added up to a diary of the intellect: books read, theatrical events, reflections on art, impressions of travels and encounters with people, notes concerning his own practice as a writer. The second of his books in particular, *W alei bezpożytecznych rozmyślań*, is in essence almost exclusively a reading record and thus reveals something significant about Zawieyski’s preferences. He remarks especially on his reading of plays, but also of books on philosophical and religious themes, recollections – and of course

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40 A. Trzebiński, *Pamiętnik*, in: *Kwiaty z drzew zakazanych. Proza*, edited with introduction by Z. Jastrzębski (Warszawa: Pax, 1972), 186, 251. Other significant traces of Trzebiński’s reading of Brzozowski’s Memoir are noted in Part Two of this book, in the chapter on the spiritual autobiography in twentieth-century Polish literature.

diaries. He reads those of Green, Gombrowicz, Lechoń, Gide, Mauriac, Kafka, Kasprowieżowa, Semenka, Merton. Gombrowicz provokes him to a comparison with his own diary as well as to many comments and observations; one or two quotations are also noted. The most significant matter, however, is his attitude to Zofia Nałkowska. The volume *Brzegiem cienia* is dedicated to her, and in the introduction Zawieyski acknowledges that it was she who prevailed on him to write it. This problem must have been one of the important motifs of their friendship, for Zawieyski writes of her insistence also in his recollections of her and in the volume of essays entitled *Korzenie* [Roots], in which most of the texts were dedicated to her. He ascribes great significance especially to the conversation which ended with her reminding him to start writing a diary, and to do it "from tomorrow". This conversation turned out to be the last that Zawieyski had with her before her death. Thus her request took on the weight of a last will and testament. This testimony is significant not only with regard to Zawieyski's diary, but perhaps even more with regard to Nałkowska. For it is a moving confirmation of the great importance that the latter must have ascribed to diary writing in the inner life and intellectual development of a writer. After fifty-five years of writing her own diary, Nałkowska inspired another one, which was begun only a few weeks after her death. The situation described by Zawieyski imparts to the personal diary a peculiar kind of value: the gift of friendship, the passing on of important intellectual experience, the living seed of a spiritual tradition that bears fruit in a new work.

On the plane of the genre tradition of the intimate diary, one may then speak of a particular kind of dialogue between texts. The diary that is read by another diarist is set in motion, as it were; it communicates something, conveys something. It presents itself to us from the point of view not of its expressiveness, but of its capacity to influence. Even if it was only written for the purpose of self-understanding, when it is read it comes to serve someone else's understanding.

The "theory and philosophy" of the diary that is inscribed in the text of every more extensive and ambitious diary, of course embraces a much broader range of problems than those mentioned here, which are mainly connected with the projected reader. But even these can only be fully interpreted when they are incorporated into the whole of a given author's convictions on the subject of relations among individuals and the possibilities and ways of understanding one another.



### 3. Metaphors of Autobiographical Writing in the Perspective of Co-Humanism

Can the art of autobiography continue to be cultivated today? In the age of posthumanism, when the turn towards the non-human world in the social sciences and in cultural studies has become more and more obvious, and when things, animals and machines have begun to absorb the attention of scholars, is it any longer possible to read or interpret autobiographical writing? In times when the humanities have begun to call themselves post-humanities and when their most influential trends are developing along the lines of ecological humanism through contact with the natural sciences, reflection on the phenomenon of the autobiographical finds itself at a critical moment. Nevertheless, let us try to see this situation in perspective. The name posthumanism is in a sense misleading, in that it conceals a self-contradiction. *Who* speaks of posthumanism, if *homo* disappears from the field of view of intellectual reflection? Perhaps, after all, the point is not to exclude questions about human beings, but instead to understand them in a different way than has so far been done? In this new way of thinking, humans are not examined in a vacuum, in isolation from the world, but are considered together with all that surrounds them; the human is not placed hegemonically at the very centre, but exists alongside animate and inanimate nature, in line with the assumptions of posthumanism, in which no single and absolute centre exists. Posthumanism emphasises the complexity and fluidity of reality, its many-centredness, depending on the point from which questions about the world are asked and on the focus of the questions. To say that in the humanities, the human has disappeared from the intellectual horizon might be compared with understanding the Copernican revolution not as removing the Earth from its central position in the solar system and proving it to be merely a planet circling round the sun, but as taking Earth out of the picture altogether.

Of course posthumanist thought does not lead to such absurdities. Human beings do not disappear from the field of view. Instead, like the Earth in the Copernican system, their position changes. From being in the centre, the human being moves to take its place among other planets in orbit round the sun. At this point, however, we shall have to abandon the comparison with the solar system, which is only an image, not a serious argument, and one whose usefulness is limited. To continue the discussion, we need to resort to a different spatial image: not that of a system of concentrically arranged circles but that of a straight line, which runs from an invisible beginning to an unknown end. As

such, it offers an image of a temporal category, that of chronological progression. Thus from Copernicus we pass to Darwin; from comparison with the image of the planetary system to the material reality of the theory of evolution. The situating of human beings of which posthumanism speaks is not so much a move from the centre to the periphery, as a recognition of the place of the human in the evolutionary chain of development along with other living beings, beginning with the simplest and most primitive and stretching to the most advanced link in the chain of development. This development, however, is not a matter of straightforward progress like climbing stairs. The “line” that I have in mind here is not an ideal geometric straight line; it is more like a sequence with a variety of branches, many of which end as blind alleys. Paleoarchaeology is constantly making new discoveries, and although they do not lend themselves to unequivocal interpretation, they are acknowledged by many researchers as sufficient to call into question the idea that there is a qualitative difference between the human being and other living beings, or at least to make it difficult to pinpoint where the border is that separates the two – in other words to define our species.

The term “posthumanism” seems to me to have more the character of a manifesto than to be an adequate presentation of the present intellectual ferment. A more precise term in my view would be “post-anthropocentrism”, or “decline of the anthropological paradigm”. Both these terms have the advantage of suggesting, not that the concept of the human being has disappeared from the field of view, but only that the position of this category has changed, or (to refer once again to the comparison with the heliocentric system), that it has moved out of the centre and taken its place among other planets. The disadvantage, in turn, of both terms is their backward-lookingness, their anchorage in the thing from which we are trying to break free, but which, as can be seen, still binds us in some way. Both of these terms, whether post-anthropocentrism or decline of the anthropological paradigm, lack positive semantic potential. They do not offer any kind of original, future-oriented project, turned towards new issues and new investigative methods, in spite of the fact that they are postulates which are forever being repeated. The name I would propose instead for the new intellectual situation with which we are now dealing is “co-humanism”. This term does not imply the disappearance of the human being from the field of view, but the continued presence of humans, *together* with other living beings. “Co-humanism” is a term that includes rather than excludes. We are not in the *post*-human age, but in a situation in which we see that our whole planet is an inconceivably complex whole. We, human beings, have come to understand that we have our place *within* that whole, but not somewhere outside it or above it. What that place is continues to be debated; but we are there. Beside other beings, together with

them. I shall return to some details of this conception at the end of this chapter, but it was necessary now, at the outset, to indicate the existence of this very general frame of thought, because it is of great significance for the writing, reading and understanding today of texts written from an autobiographical stance (in all its three variants).

Fortunately, the practice of writers does not give grounds for any fear that autobiography as a manifestation of human existence is likely to disappear. While it is true that people today do not write about their deeds and achievements in the way that Julius Caesar did in *De Bello Gallico*, or about their inner experiences in the manner of St Augustine's *Confessions*, autobiographical writing has not ceased to flourish. In fact, it is in constant quest of new means of assuring that human beings leave a trace of themselves behind.

Modern studies of the literature of personal document for long concentrated on the problem of fictionality / non-fictionality. This opposition led to many important conclusions, but in the end it exhausted its cognitive potential. Philippe Lejeune's clear conception of the autobiographical pact (1975), to which we have frequently referred in the course of this book, brought order to the field, but it did not exhaust all the possibilities.<sup>1</sup> Serge Dubrovsky took the discussion further when he formulated his notion of autofiction, based on a generalisation of his own autobiographical practices in *Fils* (1977) and later books, which he himself classified using precisely this name.<sup>2</sup> Certainly this was a development of Lejeune's theory, and one that Lejeune himself recognised as justified. However, Dubrovsky overestimated the novelty of his idea and did not appreciate that Lejeune's concept of the "phantasmatic pact" already makes room in general terms for the phenomenon that he describes. For what Lejeune defined as the phantasmatic pact is really an intuition that leads straight to the discovery of the possibility of autofiction. In Polish literary studies, independently of the discussions conducted by French scholars, Ryszard Nycz drew attention to the same phenomenon, proposing the name "autonovel" to describe it. This idea first

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1 See P. Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, edited and with a foreword by Paul John Eakin, trans. Katherine Leary (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988); "The Autobiographical Contract", in: *French Literary Theory Today*, ed. Tzvetan Todorov, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 196–222.

2 S. Dubrovsky, *Fils: roman* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 1977); see J. Lis, *Obrzeża autobiografii. O współczesnym piśarstwie autofikcyjnym we Francji* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza, 2006).

appeared in an article published in 1982. In later discussions he developed a separate conception of sylleptic subjectivity.<sup>3</sup>

The term proposed by Dubrovsky made an instant career not only in theory but also in literature itself, stimulating an intensive development of the new genre (at once furnished with awareness of its origins) in postmodern autobiographical writing, most of all in the French context, in which works belonging to this trend were still being written at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.<sup>4</sup> However, though Dubrovsky's conception has proved fertile as an inspiration to successive generations of authors of autofictional works, it opens up no new theoretical perspectives. Rather, it is a conclusion which closes a certain strand of theory. The case is similar with the proposal put forward by Paul de Man (1979), to which I have referred earlier in connection with autobiographical places and the topographic imagination. Starting from the assumptions of deconstruction, de Man defined autobiography on a linguistic plane, with reference to rhetoric. He considered the trope of prosopopeia to be the key, by means of which in an autobiographical utterance we only hear a voice from beyond the grave. The image of the author is also absent, because the use of language inevitably deforms him; it is not the real voice of the autobiographer that we hear, but his "de-facement", as Man calls it in the title of his study.<sup>5</sup>

It appears that the only new opening in view is provided by the category of experience in the new humanities and by the conception of the "poetics of

- 3 R. Nycz, "Współczesne sylwy wobec literackości", in: *Studia o narracji*, ed. J. Błoński, J. Jaworski and J. Sławiński (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1982); R. Nycz, *Sylwy współczesne. Problem konstrukcji tekstu* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1984); R. Nycz, "Tropy 'ja'. Koncepcje podmiotowości w literaturze polskiej ostatniego stulecia", in his: *Język modernizmu. Prolegomena historycznoliterackie* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Leopoldinum, 1997).
- 4 Clara Zgoła, "Współczesna autofikcja jako gatunek afektywny", in *Kultura afektu – afekty w kulturze. Humanistyka po zwrocie afektywnym*, ed. R. Nycz, A. Lebkowska and A. Dauksza (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2015). Zgoła used the tools of the affective turn to analyse French autofictional texts published at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and marked by radical expression of negative affects such as anger, fury, shame, trauma and revulsion. She presents this work as an expression of opposition to the main current of cultural production, made from the standpoint of a minority community based on affect and identifying itself as a "handful of infuriated cranks". However, Zgoła notes the huge publishing success achieved by this group, a success which reached as far as the "literary salons of Paris", so one may wonder whether it is really authentic affects that are at issue here, or whether it is more a matter of a marketing device.
- 5 P. de Man, "Autobiography as De-facement", *Modern Language Notes* 94 (1979): 919–930.

experience” in literary studies. This term had already appeared in reference to literature in 1982 in Janet Verner Gunn’s investigation of important works of autobiography in the literature of the West, entitled *Autobiography. Toward a Poetics of Experience*.<sup>6</sup> However, Gunn did not set this term into the context of any more general methodological or theoretical framework (although, following Clifford Geertz, she did allude to developments in cultural studies); nor did her work tend towards the creation of any system of classification of different variants of “poetics of experience”. In contrast, Ryszard Nycz, who proposes exactly the same term, defines the particular character of the category of experience with reference to the discipline of literary studies.<sup>7</sup> He argues that the experience recorded in the text, which then activates itself in the reading process, has a hybrid character, for it is bodily and sensual, social and cultural, conceptual and linguistic, all at the same time; it is “co-troped” (as a paradoxical union of the experiencing and the experienced person) and transformative towards both the object and the subject. Nycz suggests that experience should be understood as its own kind of feedback between the individual and his or her surroundings. This feedback consists in the fact that what is recognised, itself draws the experiencing individual towards itself, and then this individual experiencer does not remain a neutral observer, but internalises something from the surroundings, and finally is able to avoid captivity by calling on the community’s *universum* (of language, images, conceptions), which furnishes tools to articulate and understand what has been experienced.

The question of whether and how it may be possible to make effective use in interpretational practice of Nycz’s proposed three variants of the poetics of experience (epiphanic, crystallising and apophatic) remains a matter for further thought. Nevertheless, the introduction of the category of experience to literary studies is of crucial importance if reflection on autobiographical writing is to emerge from the now exhaustively exploited deconstructionist perspective. Most of all it is necessary to think through the question of whether we are justified in speaking of some particular poetics of autobiographical experience or whether we should first concentrate on the record of experience and its activation through reading, by reference to the “feedback between the individual and his/her surroundings”.

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6 J. V. Gunn, *Autobiography. Toward A Poetics of Experience* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982).

7 R. Nycz, *Poetyka doświadczenia. Teoria – nowoczesność – literatura* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL, 2012). The term “co-troped” is introduced on page 142.

I discern some lively impulses in studies of an interpretative character, for example in the work of Jacek Leociak, who used the hermeneutic tools of a historian and literary historian to examine texts that arose within the Warsaw Ghetto.<sup>8</sup> Only some of these records can be regarded as autobiographical forms in a traditional understanding of the term, and yet some of Leociak's observations have a value which it would be difficult to overestimate for scholars of literature of personal document. The extreme situation in which the ghetto writings arose meant that the investigator found himself in a peculiar kind of laboratory, in which he was compelled to carry out experiments under pressure (if a comparison of this kind can be allowed). The texts that speak of the Holocaust turn out more than anything to be testimonies to the paradox of inexpressible experience that is nevertheless written down. Leociak also drew a separate chain of meanings from his study of the material form of the surviving documents, many of which bear physical traces of the circumstances of their writing. Some are crumpled and dirty, written on paper not in the least designed for this purpose, but simply available, as for example on a piece of a paper bag found in a cellar. Clearer evidence of the link between reality experienced and reality recorded would be hard to find. The author presented a development and confirmation of his views in a later book devoted to the representation of extreme experience, in which he radically opposed the abstract discourse of philosophy because it "transfers the problem of extreme experience into the area of speculation (...) and tears it away from the empirical".<sup>9</sup>

A similar understanding of autobiographical writings as correlatives of experience was proposed by Paweł Rodak, who in any case drew on Leociak's work.<sup>10</sup> The perspective of cultural studies was of deciding significance for Rodak, as it enabled him to show the textual character of the writers' diaries that he examined in the context of writing practice and with attention paid to the meanings that could be read, in the manner of Leociak, from the material form of the written record. Support for this kind of interpretation can be found in the work of historians who appreciate the non-verbal components of sources, understood with regard to the time and place in which they came into being, the material

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8 J. Leociak, *Text in the Face of Destruction: Accounts from the Warsaw Ghetto Reconsidered*, trans. Emma Harris (Warsaw: Jewish Historical Institute, 2004).

9 J. Leociak, *Doświadczenia graniczne. Studia o dwudziestowiecznych formach reprezentacji* (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2009).

10 P. Rodak, *Między zapisem a literaturą. Dziennik pisarza polskiego w XX wieku (Żeromski, Nalkowska, Dąbrowska, Gombrowicz, Herling-Grudziński)* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2011).

used, the recording techniques, and so on.<sup>11</sup> Rodak looks at diary writing in a performative perspective, regarding it as an activity situated in the area both of literature and of existential praxis, which plays an active role in the life of the writer. This way of thinking can fruitfully be applied to personal writing of all kinds, writing focused on the author, which accomplishes something in the identity and life of that author. As Ewa Domańska argues, “the concentration of attention on the question of performativity, causativity, enables us to return to discussions connected with practice and action (and generally with reality as such)”<sup>12</sup>.

Scholars of the psychoanalytical school are also concerned with the territory between experience and the personal text, though from another point of view. Among the more recent work of this kind, a good example is the study by Danuta Danek on four texts that the nineteenth century novelist Eliza Orzeszkowa wrote about herself.<sup>13</sup> Danek’s precise interpretation reveals layers of childhood experiences and sufferings that had not been noticed by earlier researchers and of which the author herself was not conscious. These experiences resulted in the states of deep melancholy that oppressed Orzeszkowska throughout her life, producing a sense of complete inner emptiness that for long periods paralysed her will to live and her creative powers.

As far as feminist criticism is concerned, the autobiographical has been a subject of interest since its beginnings; a great deal of attention has been devoted to personal writing because of its emancipatory potential. From the point of view of literary history, in many national literatures it is precisely from some form of personal record that women’s writing began. The very fact that utterances with features of autobiography came into being created a situation in which women’s voices became directly audible. Regardless of the content of the text, this fact in itself became an expression of women’s experience. For the feminist understanding of the autobiographical stance, it is also important to take account of the connection between the meaning of the text and the experience of the body.

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11 E. Domańska, *Mikrohistorie: spotkania w międzyświatach* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1999).

12 Domańska, “Zwrot performatywny we współczesnej humanistyce”, *Teksty Drugie* 2007.5.

13 *Melancholia i poznanie. „Autobiografie Elizy Orzeszkowej”*, introduced and edited by Danuta Danek, photographs by Krzysztof Hejke (Warszawa: Terra Nova, 2014).

The translation into empirical social reality takes place in the passage from the private to the political, which gender categories encompass.<sup>14</sup>

And what of the situation now? Writing an autobiography is a peculiar kind of audacity. How can one translate into words in a language accessible to the community at large the material of one's own experiences, the magma of the pre-verbal and extra-verbal reality that one has realised and divined only intuitively, grasped intellectually and touched with one's senses, experienced with one's very self as a psychosomatic whole, to use Danuta Danek's term? Perhaps we may end this book with a glance at one or two metaphors which signal various possible directions for thinking about writing with an autobiographical strain. This kind of writing is still alive and well; more than that, it is in a constant process of evolution, sloughing off its old skin at every turn like a snake. One example of this is the emergence of the blog, a form which adapts the diary to the conditions of the internet. Autobiographical writing never fails to find an enthusiastic readership; and there has been no slackening of interest on the part of scholars, either, as the founding of journals and associations devoted to the phenomenon of personal writing indicates.<sup>15</sup> Not to mention the fact that older autobiographical texts, which one might think had been thoroughly examined and described already, continue to reveal sides that were previously hidden.

## Autobiography as Translation

Let us assume that the novel (and literature in general), in being invented by its author, is original work in the sense understood by basic concepts of translation studies, while all forms of writing about oneself are translations from the original which is one's own life, experienced but not invented by oneself. Whereas creators of literature may draw not only on any phenomena they wish from those that make up the world around them, but also on their imagination, the writer whose subject is himself or herself has an already existent (and

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14 A. Galant, *Prywatne, publiczne, autobiograficzne. O dziennikach i esejach Jana Lechonia, Zofii Nałkowskiej, Marii Kuncewiczowej i Jerzego Stempowskiego* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo "DiG", 2010). The historical and social context is emphasised by Anna Pekaniec in her book *Czy w tej autobiografii jest kobieta?: kobieca literatura dokumentu osobistego od początku XIX wieku do wybuchu drugiej wojny światowej* (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2013).

15 In Poland, the Polish Autobiographical Association was founded in 2013. Its activities include the journal *Autobiografia: literatura/kultura/media: Aa@*, published since 2013 by the University of Szczecin (with chief editors Inga Iwasiów and Jerzy Madejski).



constantly evolving) text to “translate” into an autobiographical utterance. This “text” is the life that a person is living through, which is only a certain small part of the whole magma of reality. It is a part that belongs to the author, seen from an inner perspective that is accessible to no one else, just as no one else can hear the sound of our own voice as we ourselves hear it inside our own heads. We experience the course of our own lives in relation to successive biological phases which are inescapably anchored in the body. Both autobiographical and biographical writing share this biological frame of reference.<sup>16</sup> One can reminisce, invent, and tell stories outside chronology and violating chronology, but the body and the phases of its psycho-physical development exist inexorably outside the text and after the text. It is from just this source, as an original written in a foreign language, that the autobiographer translates – fallibly, unfaithfully, often incompetently, sometimes without even the full awareness of what kind of betrayal this is. And yet without this creative betrayal nothing would exist, so let us as readers not hold it against the autobiographer. Let us not condescendingly tell him that he has only constructed a text that accords with the scheme of convention and with the dictates of language; that he has deformed his own face, as Paul de Man would have it. In the voice from beyond the grave there is the echo of the living voice that sounded in the ears of the reader at the moment when he or she began reading. Below the surface of the words and sentences pulses a once existent affect that the reader goes out to meet. For of course we read other people’s autobiographies in order to find out something not only about the absent hero and author of the autobiography, but also about ourselves; it is the opportunity to measure ourselves against someone else that enables us to come to know ourselves. Autobiography is thus not only translation, but also encounter and recognition. We shall say more of these in a moment.

### Autobiography as Ekphrasis

To acknowledge one’s own life (anyone’s life) as a work of art, and hence an object worthy of an ekphrasis, is no doubt a risky venture. But nevertheless, let us see what use we can make of the way the theory of ekphrasis deals with problems of representation. Michał Paweł Markowski, and after him Adam Dziadek, have

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16 Recently Anita Całek took account of this aspect in her book *Biografia naukowa: od koncepcji do narracji. Interdyscyplinarność, teorie, metody badawcze* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2013), where she recalled the anthropological work of Charlotte Bühler, which, though written in the nineteen-thirties, has not ceased to be relevant.

written of the fundamental aporia which is always associated with descriptions of works of art.<sup>17</sup> It is the ambition of a successful ekphrasis to bring the objects of its attention so much into presence as to create the illusion that they are really, directly *there*. Yet at the same time the ekphrasis sets out to draw attention to its own poetics as an effective, perfect instrument by which the object is made real. It is common for the autobiographer not only to strive to tell the “romance of life” in a completely honest way, but also, even when declaring that this honest telling is his or her only intention, to try narcissistically to please the reader, even without necessarily being aware that this is what is going on. Sometimes autobiographers are more concerned to show off their story-telling art than their virtues of character or the value of their achievements. Or, conversely, to wax lyrical about their depravity and impress with the boldness of their self-accusation.

In some cases, the reader may have some at least partial access, through knowledge from other sources, to the object of the autobiographical ekphrasis on the plane where it concerns the external course of events of the autobiographer’s life. Obviously such access is often possible with texts which adopt the stance of witness. Where the stance is one of confession, with a consequent focus on the autobiographer’s inner life, the reader may approach the object of the ekphrasis in so far as the psychoanalytical tools used within literary studies permit. The stance of challenge, however, precludes the possibility of the reader’s formulating any sensible questions at all about the object of the ekphrasis. The person writing creates only its illusion, building not a description but merely a construction directed towards dialogue with the reader, provocation and sometimes scandal. Perhaps here the use of categories from affect theory would be helpful? Challenge merely parodies the principle of ekphrasis for a moment, in order at once to knock the cheated reader from the perch of his expectations.

## Autobiography as Cognition and Therapy

To what degree can Maria Janion’s well-known formula concerning the humanities understood as cognition and therapy also be applied to investigation of the self-expression of the individual, of his or her self-awareness and identity? Writing about oneself can sometimes be both cognition (as a condition and at the same an effect of the testimony) and self-recognition, acquired by way of

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17 M. P. Markowski, *Pragnienie obecności. Filozofie reprezentacji od Platona do Kartezjusza* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo słowo obraz terytoria, 1999), 13; A. Dziadek, *Obrazy i wiersze. Z zagadnień interpretacji sztuk w polskiej poezji współczesnej* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2004), 40.

self-analysis and the recording of one's confessions. The category of experience may be useful here in thinking about the work done by those whose purpose in writing about themselves is to confront the surrounding world and extract themselves from it, and thus recognise who they are. It does not matter whether in later years of life a person creates an autobiographical *summa*, or whether he or she keeps a daily diary, successively creating the individual links in a chain of self-recognition. Autobiographers write in order to ask themselves the question, "Are you going to know what you experienced?" as the title of Janion's 1996 book significantly puts it. They write because they aim, even if partly intuitively, towards a "conscious living through of their own existence".<sup>18</sup> The process of self-recognition may be carried out differently at the extreme ends of life. It is rare for people to write autobiographies in youth; instead, they write novels about growing up, with an autobiographical subtext. At this stage of life, the process of writing can simultaneously be a process of maturing on the existential plane. Writing can become a catalyst for growing up; it can take on a performative character. The maturing in experience takes place at the same time as, and as a result of, maturing in writing practice, which thus takes on an active role in the life of the person writing. In ripper years, or in old age, in the lengthening perspective of past life, when identity and self-knowledge seem to have their own known shape, there may be a turn-about in self-recognition; an epiphany may take place which no longer requires an extensive form.

Above all, autobiography can be therapeutic for the person writing (often in the form of a diary), for example as an antidote to loneliness and thoughts of suicide (the case of Jan Lechoń's diary), or as a way of dealing with the pressure of an extreme situation (diaries written during a time of imprisonment or illness, or the ghetto notes analysed by Leociak). Reading other people's personal notes can also be therapeutic for the reader, in which case the autobiographer becomes a kind of scapegoat for us, in the sense understood by René Girard. Other people's sufferings and joys can bring catharsis to us as readers.

## Autobiography as Encounter

Thus we read other people's autobiographies, among other reasons, in order to get to know ourselves and sometimes also to find healing with the help of other people's experience. Is there sometimes an element in this of gossiping curiosity

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18 M. Janion, "Czy będziesz wiedział, co przeżyłeś" (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sic!, 1996), 36, and *Humanistyka: poznanie i terapia* (Warszawa: PIW, 1982).

about other people's lives? An element of voyeurism? Our voyeurism as a response to the exhibitionism of the autobiographer? Baudelaire articulated this extremely clearly, even provocatively, in his well-known title *Mon coeur mis à nu*. An encounter between the exhibitionist and the voyeur – this is what autobiography can be, when a reader's own weaknesses meet those of another, even if that other strives to cover up these weaknesses. Or, if the autobiographer is someone out of the ordinary, whose life follows a different course from the usual (even if this is partly the writer's embellishment), then the autobiography offers the reader a chance to get away from the run-of-the-mill dullness of the mundane in which he or she is embroiled. Could it be that in every reader who devours the autobiography of someone they admire, there lurks a Madame Bovary, dreaming of escape from the hopeless everyday? Whatever the case may be, there is no doubt that autobiographer and reader have a mutual need each of the other. Each is in search of the other; and though sometimes they pass each other by in misreading, they do sometimes also meet. And that meeting is always a person-to-person encounter through a meaningful text, taken along with the experience brought by the autobiographer, which the reader, through reading, can compare with his or her own.

It is my conviction that in reflection on personal writing and on its reception, an essential context is the philosophy of encounter, the philosophy of the person. This does not have to be understood as a historical monument from before the days of posthumanism, an element in a departing paradigm which will not return. By building continuity, rather than breaking with earlier forms of thought, the discussion of the autobiographical may preserve important concepts of subject, dialogue and community in a broadened framework. The idea of the ecological humanities (fitting within an affirmative stance), described by Ewa Domańska as an emerging new paradigm of learning, tends towards a utopia which reveals the symbiotic co-operation of "communities of human and non-human persons". In this approach, "theories of conflict are replaced by theories of co-operation [...] while the concept of trauma which has up to now held sway everywhere as the foundation for creating individual and group identity is replaced by the concept of empathy and of the subject that is capable of adaptation, revitalisation and self-regeneration."<sup>19</sup>

I treat the category of non-human persons and Domańska's whole way of thinking about symbiotic co-operation as one confirmation of the appropriateness of the term "co-humanism" which I have proposed for the new paradigm now emerging in science and learning. At the same time, we need to remember

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19 E. Domańska, "Humanistyka ekologiczna", *Teksty Drugie* 2013.1/2: 31.

that within the framework of the basic assumptions of the philosophy of dialogue as formulated in the first decades of the twentieth century, for example by Martin Buber, it would be difficult to envisage such a concept as non-human persons. The non-human only appears in Buber's thought in the relation *I – it*, in accordance with the conviction that the Cartesian *ego cogitans* comprehends only itself as subject, while it treats everything outside it, including other human beings, as objects of cognition. Buber's acknowledgement that encounter constitutes the other human being as *Thou*, that is as a second subject, overturns the Cartesian understanding of the status of that other human being as an object of cognition. As a result, the two types of relation are mutually exclusive. The non-human must remain outside the personal relation *I – Thou*. In Buber's thought, the border between people, who are capable of the *I – Thou* relation, and all other living beings, remains impassable. Yet the philosophy of dialogue, because of its criticism of the Cartesian *cogito*, turns out to be useful in seeking a way through for co-humanist thinking. All forms of the twentieth-century crisis of subjectivity tend to loosen the grip of the corset surrounding that Cartesian concept. Pressure from the natural sciences concurs with this philosophical process.

In the new humanities, the dynamically developing field of animal studies has been especially influential, profoundly changing understanding of human beings and their place in the chain of other living beings.<sup>20</sup> This is particularly clear in studies of extreme situations, such as war. By referring to the more general assumptions of the French scholar Éric Baratay, Piotr Krupiński has drawn attention to previously unnoticed aspects of the literary image of the Holocaust in Polish literature. Baratay (as a historian, not a literary scholar) examined documents concerning the use of animals during World War I and formulated the concept of “extending human history”.<sup>21</sup> I emphasise: extending, not replacing by a history of non-anthropological beings. Krupiński traces in novels and poems the thread of kinship between human beings and animals, living and dying on the same planet. At a certain point in his discussion he concludes: “Thus people would be reminded of a truth that they would much rather not admit to themselves, the

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20 Let us also note that the kind of ideas found in animal studies do not fall on totally barren ground in the “old”, anthropomorphic humanities. In the first half of the twentieth century, Arthur Lovejoy elaborated on an ancient idea in his book *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (1936), presenting the conception of the great chain of being as corresponding with the conception of evolution in biology.

21 P. Krupiński, “Dlaczego gęsi krzyczały?”. *Zwierzęta i Zagłada w literaturze polskiej XX i XXI wieku*, (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2016); É. Baratay, *Le point de vue animal. Une autre version de l'histoire* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2012).

truth of the embarrassing kinship so convincingly articulated by Charles Darwin, but also by ... the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes. We would then be – as can never be sufficiently repeated – representatives of the same community.”<sup>22</sup> For us humans to think in the terms of animal studies within ecological humanities is to teach ourselves a lesson in humility. And also, unexpectedly, to be reminded of an age-old wisdom, in evidence of which Krupiński quotes the biblical maxim: “For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity” (Ecclesiastes 3: 19. King James Version). What is more, ecological thinking finds support in a place where only a few decades ago it could hardly have been envisaged. I am thinking here of the way that ecological movements worldwide have begun to draw on the distant tradition of St Francis of Assisi, recalling the saint and his idea of treating animals as “little brothers” of human beings.<sup>23</sup> The teaching of Pope Francis has also unequivocally corroborated the presence of this current in Christian thought. The encyclical *Laudato si* written by the Argentinian Pope was a great surprise. Never before had an official document by the head of the Catholic Church taken up, and in such a fundamental way, the subject of ecology, broadly understood. For my reflections, the attention turned by the Pope to “the human roots of the ecological crisis” (the title of chapter III of the encyclical) is particularly important, as are two observations made in the Introduction. One rebukes the claims made by human beings to be masters of the Earth: “We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will.” The other reminds us that the origins of the human being are linked in the most elementary way with the order of nature: “our very bodies are made up of her [the earth’s] elements.”<sup>24</sup>

Understanding of the human being is constantly changing; but in successive versions, the concept of the human remains within the horizon of thought. Its persistent presence continues ever and anew both to give warrant to the efforts of autobiographers and to justify their being committed to readers in the act of encounter.

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22 Krupiński, 75. Here the author recalls a term introduced by Janina Abramowska, a scholar of Old Polish literature: this is a “community of the mortal”. See J. Abramowska, *Pisarze w wierzyńcu* (Poznań: Wydawn. Poznańskie, 2010), 165.

23 In Polish intellectual tradition we find allusions of this kind in the collective monograph *Bestie, żywy inwentarz i bracia mniejsi. Motywy zwierzęce w mitologiach, sztuce i życiu codziennym*, ed. P. Kowalski, K. Łeńska-Bąk, M. Sztandara (Opole: Uniwersytet Opolski, 2007).

24 *Laudato si*. Papal Encyclical Letter, 24 May, 2015 (w2.vatican.va).

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