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Nonfiction, Reportage, Testimony

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Nonfiction, Reportage and Testimony

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Foreword

Włodzimierz Bolecki

Introduction: from the periphery to the center

There is no more universal and at the same time more problematic question posed by literary theory than the one about the relationship between the literature, the reality and the truth. This question is present in all theoretical investigations starting with Aristotle's category of probability and mimesis and going through following theories of rhetoric, nineteenth century concepts of realism and naturalism, phenomenological theory of quasi-judgments (Roman Ingarden, *Das Literarische Kuntswerk*). It ends with contemporary concepts of the objective novel, differentiations between "fiction literature" and "non-fiction literature," "literature and document" and the question of "literariness" of non-fictional genres, such as reportage, etc. These issues have been approached from many vantage points inside the realm of literary criticism – depending on literary culture in which they were being formulated. Remaining within the range of theoretical questions, for the purposes of this introduction, I will reduce them to four most general subjects.

The first one is the evolution of terminology that spans across the ages. These terms – some of which are ancient – constitute the history of poetics. At the center of this evolution there always lies the relationship between the text and the reality.

Włodzimierz Bolecki – professor in the Institute of Literary Research of Polish Academy of Sciences. Published among others *Polowanie na postmodernistów* (1999), *Rozmowy z Gustawem Herlingiem-Grudzińskim* (1997, 2000), *Inna krytyka* (2006), *Ptasznik z Wilna* (2007), *„Inny świat" Herlinga-Grudzińskiego* (2007).

The second subject is a theoretical problem of the ontology of literary texts as linguistic constructs, or a collection of questions about the possibility or impossibility of truth in literary texts.

The third is a question about the role of literary communication in establishing the status of a text (as well as its genre) or about the relations between semantics of literary texts and their recipients. These questions are concerned with criteria used by the readers treating, for example, the same text as a true story on some occasions and as a literary fiction on others.

And finally, the fourth subject characteristic for discussions on literature in the last several decades: a set of questions about whether modern literature represents reality or if it merely creates one. These questions are followed by the discussion on non-fiction genres (reportage, autobiography, documentary account), and whether by employing strictly literary means to describe the reality (such as metaphors, dialogue, composition) they lead to the destruction of their essence – the principle of "non-fiction."

Two issues keep resurging in the above described relationships between literature and truth. The first one is a specific character of the relationship between a text (language) and the reality; second one is a question about the credibility of a narrator from whose perspective we learn about that particular reality. The relationship between a literary text and the reality can be reduced to two primary dilemmas.

Firstly, if one believes that literature (fiction) and reality constitute an opposition (along the lines of "it is not reality, it is literature") than how could the so called "non-fiction" be possible at all? Following that thought, how could a fictional work of literature be treated as a representation of reality? It is not difficult to observe that the core of the issue is constituted by the historically changing term "literature." It has been formulated throughout the ages in a way that the literally understood works of "non-fiction" have remained outside of the realm of literature.

There is one more, fifth, perspective connected to the last question. It is perspective of history of literary criticism and theory. Issues tackled from that perspective are concerned not with the theoretical questions but with cultural characteristics of literature, e.g. features characteristic of particular national literatures as well as criteria employed by their readers. Hence, these are the issues concerned with a sphere of "literary culture" in which both writers and readers immerse themselves.

2.

Let us begin with those last questions.

The relationships between literature and reality, fiction and truth, document and conventionality, etc. for over a hundred years have been among the most important questions of the modernist literature. They have been formulated according to the aesthetics and variations of national modernisms – most often as concepts

that would exclude one another, contradict, oppose, and involve debate. There have been numerous different answers to the question posed by modernists about the relationship between literature and the reality. They were concerned, among other factors, with language of a given literature, themes, ways of constructing the text, its genre status, its protagonists, origin of events, means of telling the story as well as credibility and construction of the narrator and the concept of writing. It so happened that the modernist questions about relationships between literature (art) and the reality have coincided with the beginnings of a modern – that is, modernist – literary studies and criticism.

While the linguistic and formal (genre, compositional, semantic) experiments have been considered to be specifically literary tools for the description of the reality in the avant-garde tradition, the realistic tradition understood "representation of reality" as a resignation from experiments for the sake of "faithful reconstruction" of that reality. While some writers believed that the warranty of truth in literature has to lie in the personal character of the story told by the narrator (as a guaranty of objectivism in its representation of the world), others pointed to the neutralization of the "I" of the writer as a condition necessary for the truth in literature. Hence, while some searched for truth about the reality in subjects "taken from the real life" or "belonging to the other," others claimed that a writer can represent the reality exclusively from the perspective of his or her personal experience. However, this notion of experience has been rendered problematic as well. For some it had personal and individual character (or even a radically subjective one), for others – social and generational. And so, while some writers searched for the literary truth in the "raw" material taken directly from the reality (personal experiences, newspapers, documents, historical sources, witness accounts), others recognized literature itself as the only material for the future works of literature (e.g. that was the starting point for the postmodernists). Some, who wanted to speak in the languages of reality reached out for the spoken language along with all of its social variations and deviating from the norm grammatical forms. Others searched for the reality in the inter-textual play with forms, conventions and literary traditions.

These juxtapositions could be continued for a long time using examples from the universe of different modernisms' aesthetics. However, independently from the examples and concepts standing behind them, all of them have to be considered as attempts to solve two central "paradoxes" of the modernist literature. The first paradox: if the literature is fiction why would the readers approach it as truth about the reality? The second paradox: if the non-fiction work is a faithful representation of the reality (hence, of the truth about the reality), why is it treated as a literary work? In other words, how is it possible for the non-fiction works, ones that are *ex-definitione* free of fiction, to be discovered as possessing literary quality by modern readers; quality that was supposed to be exiled from non-fiction works once and for all?

The explanation for the first paradox is simple – the status of literature depends on the literary culture of its readers. Works that used to be mere documents in the past (or, alternatively, in somebody's interpretation in the past) could be read as works of literature in a new context. It is enough for their style, semantics and syntax to become archaic and, most importantly, for their references to the immediate reality to stop being meaningful to the readers. After that what has been a document turns upon reading into literature.

The explanation of the second paradox is more complicated. All of the non-fiction genres are based on the recognition by the readers of some clear norms allowing differentiation of fiction from non-fiction. These norms, however, constitute a set of hidden criteria of which existence most of the readers are not even aware. In reality, the norms thanks to which all readers recognize (accept) particular genres as non-fiction and ascribe them the status of real works are merely stereotypes of receptions – such as conviction that a reportage or autobiography are non-fictional genres. Social norms of reading – not the content, poetics, or the genre of a given text – decide about some readers preferring the non-fiction literature, while others the fantasy genre.

3.

In Polish literature of the last century all of those questions belonged to the main current of literary debate. It has been conducted for decades, hence some of the phases of the debate have been impressed with the most prominent ideas and concepts of particular periods. During the early modernism the distancing of the literature (art) from the reality has been considered the greatest virtue. The more autonomous the themes, poetics, or literary styles the higher their artistic status. Literature used to be synonymous with "fiction."

The radical change occurred after the First World War. Along the concept of literature as a completely autonomous phenomenon – one having the avant-garde as its patron – its ability to represent the reality in a non-literary or unconventional, hence true and cognitively ingenious way that collapses current understanding of literature and its markers, has become recognized as its fundamental value. It opened a world of new possibilities not only for the undertaken subjects but also, or primarily, for the ways of writing, shaping of genres, and the relationship between fiction and non-fiction.

After the year 1918 non-fiction genres such as reportage and travelogue has developed on an unprecedented scale. Experiences of the Great War and the Bolshevik Revolution resulted in numerous works and personal accounts, fundamental markers of which where their cognitive values – faithful representation of individual and collective experiences. Simultaneously in literature (fiction) the so-called authorial narration has began to emerge more and more often; a narration based on identify-

ing the role of the author with that of the narrator (and the protagonist). In truth, it introduced to literature a play designed to keep the reader uncertain about the level of reliability of the autobiographical elements of the work. It resulted, however, in a gradual change of the understanding of the term "fiction." It ceased to mean the improbability and invention and began to be understood as transformation of the elements of the real, e.g. biographical, autobiographical, sources and documents, into elements with much more general meaning. That way the meaning of what used to be specific and very concrete in a document became general and metaphorical in literature.

Yet another caesura in the literature of the Polish modernism that had a crucial meaning to the development of non-fiction genres was the Second World War and the introduction of the communist regime (as a version of the Soviet model) in Poland in 1945 that was based on the rule of the omnipotent censorship bureau.

The Second World War resulted in a drastic upsurge in the need for documentary accounts – chronicles, sources, memoirs, journals, and letters as testimonies of personal and historical experiences. That is where both historians and readers search today for knowledge and information. In short, that is where they search for the truth about the German and Soviet concentration camps, war crimes, and genocide on an unprecedented scale, including the truth about the Holocaust.

This expansion of testimonies in Polish letters has resulted in radical changes throughout the entire literary system. On the one hand, a testimony as a kind of account was a product of the need for revealing the truth about terrible war crimes of the Nazis and communists but most importantly about the sufferings and mass extermination of millions of people. On the other hand it was a result of a violent crisis of the literary conventions and their extremely rapid erosion in the form of inability to present the war crimes using forms of traditional literature (fiction).

The testimony – especially unrelated to the poetic traditions and literary conventions – became for literature both the source of its credibility and an impulse for fundamental changes in the understanding of its artistic characteristics. It is so because the testimony is a mechanism of establishing the meaning of events that – for very particular reasons – are important in culture. And even though, according to its most fundamental meaning, the category of literary testimony is tied to the category of truth – the testimony itself is a category much broader than truth. Not only literary scholars but also historians, lawyers, sociologists, and psychologists know that very well; anyone who deals with accounts of people about their very experiences – individual, collective, historical or existential, etc. has that knowledge.

The second factor that influenced Polish non-fictional literature – censorship – evoked phenomena of the opposite character. After 1945, when Poland became a part of the communist block the censorship became the main "regulator" of public life (as was the case in all of the communist countries). On the one hand, censorship has become a tool for blocking all kinds of subjects that were considered dan-

gerous for the regime (regardless whether they were concerned with the past or present of the country). As a consequence, censorship stifled the development of documentary forms and non-fiction accounts such as autobiographies, in which the truth about the past and present could be presented in a non-ideological way and against the official propaganda. That is why that particular type of literature developed strongly among the Polish émigrés and not in the communist Poland. That is what lead – especially after 1956 – to writers' interest in literary forms that were not particularly interesting for the censorship bureau. Those forms included different kinds of fiction, especially experimental and avant-garde ones. The paradox was based on the fact that the censorship bureau, by blocking content that described social, historical or political reality, triggered development of refined literary experiments ranging between different genres, types of narration, and linguistic solutions.

However, as the communist system grew weaker, numerous non-fiction genres began to develop quickly. In particular, reportage and travelogues that have been desired by readers craving for some unfalsified knowledge about the outside reality. Because the censorship still existed, however, works belonging to these genres were interested mostly in affairs removed from the Polish reality (typically of other countries or continents) or with ones that were extremely local and narrow in character.

The year 1989, with the fall of the communism and of censorship as a government institution, changed everything. A new reality resulted in an eruption of non-fiction forms that were preoccupied with everything that concerned public life and championed development of autobiographies in literature. Autobiographical writing became a reference point of literature understood as personal testimony contrasted with the literature understood as a study of social issues.

The biggest loser was an avant-garde aesthetic – itself being a product of communal optimism after the Great War – that turned out to be completely helpless facing the necessity to confront the scale of atrocities brought about by humanity in the twentieth century (Holocaust, genocide, repressions, torture). In such circumstances the weight of confronting these extreme experiences has been shifted onto the non-fiction genres.

The last decades of the communist system in Poland have been accompanied by rapid and radical changes in understanding and functioning of literature. The most important factors involved were the aesthetic concepts from western Europe justifying broadening of the term literature to all the forms of writing, a rapid influence of situation on the world's markets on the way of literature has operated and been understood and the development of new media followed by the globalization. The ever changing and more effective forms of commercializing of the book market have played increasingly important part as well.

As a result, the old oppositions between fiction and non-fiction not only lost their importance but also made the non-fiction genres the most dynamically developing and desired form of literature. Today, many literary forms that have been

doubted in terms of their merit several decades ago represent the non-fiction literature. Reportage, journals, memoirs, travelogues, document anthologies, quotes and entries from various sources, stenographic records, manuals, advertising materials, text messages, e-mails, blogs and various internet content – all those forms of communications have been moved from the literary periphery to its center. They ceased to be – according to both readers and critics – genres that merely accompany the great literature. Instead, they have become some of the most important markers of the contemporary literature and modern culture.

Translation: Jan Pytalski

Paweł Zajas

On the Nature of an Ordinary Bug: A New Perspective on Non-Fiction Research

Paweł Zajas – professor in the Department of Dutch and South African Studies of the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, research fellow at the University of Pretoria, member of the South African Academy for Science and Arts, author of numerous publications interested in 20th century Dutch literature, Afrikaans literature, Cultural Studies, and Literary anthropology among others.

During a lecture in 1999, Geert Mak, a well-known Dutch writer of non-fiction, complained that in the complex relationship between fiction and literature, there are two common misconceptions. The first is that all written works of fiction are literature. The second seems to be even more prevalent; it states that all literary texts are fiction. Hence, this leads to the question: what is the status of non-fiction, fact-based literature, literary reportage, and *creative non-fiction*? Mak, quoting Henk J.A. Hofland, a distinguished Dutch journalist, claims that in the eyes of the majority of literary critics and readers, literature (without a modifying adjective) is "a species of higher bug." All other literary composition is destined to have the status of "an ordinary bug."[1] Fact-based literature is a "Cinderella," remaining in the shadows of the supreme genre, the novel.

The Polish reader may regard Mak's opinion as anachronistic. In Poland, literary reportage, this "symbolically-realistic product,"[2] appeared almost at the same time as

1 Mak, Geert. "Enkele gedachten van een lag insect. Over non-fictie in de literatuur." Jaarboek van de Maatschappij der Nederlandse Letterkunde te Leiden. 2009, 17.

2 Zaręba, Maciej. "Dziennikarz jest świadkiem" ("A Journalist is a Witness"). "Conrad Festival," a supplement to *Tygodnik Powszechny*. 23:

the American *New Journalism*, while in the Netherlands non-fiction became wildly popular in the second half of the 1990s. In Poland, non-fiction was a paradoxical by-product of communist censorship:

> Due to the fact that they were not allowed to talk about non-constructive issues, young journalists often constructed their texts like theatrical plays, where only a diagnosis appeared, a twinkling at the meeting points of replicas and authentic scenes. This is how the office of censorship, unintentionally, played the role of matchmaker in marrying reportage, literature and theatre.[3]

Nowadays, many non-fiction writers use narration techniques developed in the field of fiction writing. We are also witnessing a reverse phenomenon where writers of fiction write books bordering on non-fiction. At the same time, an increasing number of published non-fiction books blend the literary style of writing with historical or journalistic content.

However, in his lecture Geert Mak touched upon an important quandary which is still waiting to be resolved by the field of literary theory. He questioned the point of differentiating between fiction and "not-fiction." After all, writers of both genres employ the same elements: they write about people or rather about what happens to them. Should we be concerned with the question of something happening in real life or it merely being a figment of the imagination, if the narration is impressive? Or perhaps, the division into two genres is in their mutual interest?

Let us put this issue aside for a moment and let us begin by explaining the scope of the term "non-fiction literature," which I have been using. A while ago, Małgorzata Czermińska questioned the classification of non-fiction literature into one separate genre. Following other researchers, she distinguished three primary types: fact-based literature (including reportage and its related forms, such as travelogues), "personal experience" literature (coined by Roman Zimand, including autobiography, journal, diary, and memoirs) as well as the essay[4]. Employing this rather reasonable division, I could focus on fact-based literature. The majority of texts covered by the English term *creative non-fiction*

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13 (2009) (a preface to an anthology of Polish literary reportage entitled *Ouvertyr till livet*, published in Sweden).

3 ibid.

4 Czermińska, Małgorzata. "Badania nad prozą niefikcjonalną – sukcesy, pułapki, osobliwości" ("Non-fiction Studies: Successes, Traps, and Curiosities"). *Wiedza o literaturze i edukacja (Literary Knowledge and Education),* edited by Michałowska, T., Goliński, Z., Jarosiński, Z. Wydawnictwo IBL PAN. Warsaw, 1996, 437.

certainly fit within this broad dictionary definition, which in the non-fiction category includes the "contemporary narrative fiction of a documentary character, encompassing genres blending the line between literature and journalism" and "created without a specific literary intention," in which "specific literary quality provides an added value"[5]. At the same time, the author of this definition, Michał Głowiński, notes that in many cases "the lines between fact-based literature and other literary genres are blurred" and he points to the writings of Riszard Kapuściński and Hanna Krall as examples of such genre blending.[6] Despite this example, I uphold the term "non-fiction literature" due to the fact that it seems to me that the separation of contemporary fact-based literature and personal experience literature is rather problematic. The first genre is supposed to aim at being objective, to concentrate on its subject, and to avoid subjectivity. The second one oscillates between "giving witness" (by this it may come close to fact-based literature) and "writing openly about oneself"[7]. Czermińska herself admits that it is impossible to draw, with unwavering certainty, a demarcation line between these two areas of non-fiction literature[8].

Doubts and deliberations about "non-fiction literature," understood as a separate genre that is in opposition to "the novel," stem not only from poetics but also classification dilemmas. First of all, this is supposed to be the answer to the increasingly frequently-questioned boundary between what is real and what is fictional (by this I am returning to the issue raised by Geert Mak). The narrativist turn emphasizes the constructional character of cognitive processes, indirect access to bare facts, and an unavoidable fictionalization of experience. Grzegorz Grochowski noted that increasingly more often "even texts that declare that they are true to the referential pact are treated as stories inevitably infected with the creation and confabulation virus."[9] Hence, from the point of view of the narrativists, non-fiction literature is fiction, which disavows itself, "fiction that is hypocritical, unaware and in conflict with itself." According to the narrativists, "on the other hand" non-fiction is "fiction that, due to absurd self-imposed restrictions, denies itself creative power, which

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5 Głowiński, Michał. "Literatura faktu" ("Literature of Fact"). In: Głowiński, M., Kostkiewiczowa, T., Okopień-Sławińska, A., Sławiński, J. *Słownik terminów literackich (A Dictionary of Literary Terms)*. Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich. Wrocław-Warsaw-Kraków. 2000, 285.

6 ibid.

7 Czermińska, Małgorzata. "Badania nad prozą..." ("Non-fiction studies..."). 438.

8 ibid.

9 Grochowski, Grzegorz. "Pytania o niefikcjonalną prozę dyskursywną" ("Questions About Discursive Non-fiction"). *Polonistyka w przebudowie (Polish Studies Under Reconstruction)*, edited by Czermińska, M. Universitas. Kraków. 2005. 651.

could take it to another level, towards a different form of truth. It is fiction of the worst sort, poor, timid and paralyzed."[10] For the narrativists the concept of literature being fact-based is an illusion because it entails the existence of external truth and of a text capable of reflecting that truth.

The division between real and artistic-fiction texts is of course a rather new peculiarity, which should be associated with modernism. For the romantics and the romantic consciousness it was still irrelevant whether a diary belonged to the genre of artistic writing or whether it was a non-literary text. Both types of text followed the same rhetorical norm. The expansion of nonfiction, assuming "separation of cognitive and aesthetic functions, distinction between a fictional narrator and a real author," presented a contrary trend to "the model favored by modernism, of autonomous literature that constitutes an aim in itself, and is anti-mimetic."[11] However, nowadays, a visible erosion of the above-noted distinctions is taking place; the relationships between various genres are becoming increasingly blurred. Clear oppositions are being replaced by hybrid and transgressive genres. Both writing linked to fiction and that associated with documentarism can be described as a field of "collaboration of the fact-based truth and artistic creation."[12]

Therefore, in contemporary literary theory, non-fiction is often treated as a form of textualization of experience equal to literary fiction. Grzegorz Grochowski writes about the shift of emphasis in research, as follows:

> We can assume then that currently, the dominant trend in humanities discourse is a transition from poetics to anthropology… Very little attention is paid to detailed issues of poetics, such as the way a given genre exists and the theoretical status of typological categories… Non-fiction is rarely scrutinized from its *differentia specifica* side and significantly more often appears as the main topic in monographs devoted to specific themes, cultural formations, historical experiences and processes, or in dissertations dedicated to the works of particular authors… In other words, non-fiction creates a great deal of broad and specific interest, but in most cases not as a subject in itself worth studying, but rather a kind of conduit for issues of a highly philosophical, moral, cultural and ideological nature.[13]

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10 Lejeune, Philippe. *Wariacje na temat pewnego paktu. O autobiografii (Variations on a Certain Pact: On Autobiography)* Translated by Grajewski, W., Grabowski, S., Labuda, A., Lubas-Bartoszyńska, R. Edited by Lubas-Bartoszyńska, R. Universitas. Krakow. 2001. 4.

11 Grochowski, Grzegorz. "Pytania o niefkicjonalną…" ("Questions About Discursive…"). 652.

12 ibid.

13 ibid, 653.

As an example, Grochowski provides the book, *Formy pamięci: O przedstawianiu przeszłości w polskiej literaturze współczesnej (Forms of Memory: Presentation of the Past in Contemporary Polish Literature)* by Marek Zaleski.[14] It is a work on autobiographical discourse, where the author manages without any genre specifications, while searching for signs of one common position manifested in a similar way in many texts belonging to different genres.[15] Grochowski notices a similar tendency to reject the taxonomical approach to genre research and to embrace cultural context in the works of Polish researchers, such as Adam Fitas (2003), Dorota Kozicka (2003), Maciej Michalski (2003) and Andrzej Zawadzki (2001).[16] All of them point out the progressing subjectification of non-fiction, the infusion of fact-based literature with personalized expression, the relaxation of methodological and factual rigours, and the rejection of classic forms of reportage

> in favor of structural freedom, a multitude of genres and *quasi*-artistic invention… By this they emphasize a creative attitude of the subject to the classification and order of the genre, which has been subjected

14 Zaleski, Marek. *Formy pamięci: O przedstawianiu przeszłości w polskiej literaturze współczesnej (Forms of Memory: Presentation of the Past in Contemporary Polish Literature).* słowo/obraz terytoria. Gdańsk. 2004.

15 Marek Zaleski, in his book, does not deal with the issue of the referential nature of fiction and non-fiction, despite heralding it in the preface. However, he shares narrativist doubts in the context of depiction of the past. Following in Hayden White's footsteps, he writes: "Hence, that which becomes the past in reference to the present, is not the essence of that which was. In other words, Hegel was wrong when he claimed that 'Wesen ist was gewesen ist' (Essence is what was)" (Zaleski M. *Formy pamieci (Forms of Memory)*, 7). However, these doubts take on the form of an apology of literature, which according to the author, is best suited to render the past most accurately. This is an important position in light of my deliberations on the need to separate fiction and non-fiction genres. For Zaleski, as opposed to myself, similar dilemmas of poetics are not important. He writes openly: "If I had to briefly answer the question what constitutes literature in this book, I would answer that literature is a special kind of repetition: repetition, which aims to become a rendering of reality" (Zaleski, 7). For him, the issue is clear: in a story about "the adventures of mimesis' aesthetics" classification as fiction or non-fiction is of no importance. This article is an attempt to challenge such a formulated thesis.

16 Fitas, A. *Głos z labiryntu. O pismach Karola Ludwika Konińskiego (A Voice from the Labyrinth: On the Writings of Karol Ludwik Koninski).* Wydawnicto UWr. Wrocław. 2003; Kozicka, D. *Wędrowcy światów prawdziwych. Dwudziestowieczne relacje z podróży (Wanderers of Real Worlds: 20th Century Travel Writing).* Universitas. Kraków. 2003; Michalski, M. *Dyskurs, apokryf, parabola. Strategie filozofowania w prozie współczesnej (Discourse, Apocrypha and Parable: Philosophical Strategies in Contemporary Prose).* UG Publishers. Gdańsk. 2003; Zawadzki, A. *Nowoczesna eseistyka filozoficzna w piśmiennictwie polskim pierwszej połowy XX wieku (Modern Philosophical Essay Writing in Poland in the First Half of the 20th Century).* Universitas. Kraków. 2001.

> to individual revision and transformation, and treated as a handy tool for expressing an individual point of view.[17]

Grochowski, as one of few Polish researchers, asks a fundamental question regarding the threats brought by the turn from poetics to anthropology. Is not focusing one's attention solely on subjective and cultural motivations for writing a path to "a certain type of disorientation in the universe of cultural texts"? He writes:

> The next concern stems from a potential danger to analyzed texts; a danger of completely eliminating literary dimensions and diluting literary knowledge in cultural sociology, when all writing from a given period would be read like travel guides, recipes, cover letters or ethnographic surveys. This concern should not be dictated solely by a tactical intention to defend dogmatically-drawn demarcation lines. Rather, this is about remembering that various text or genre structures (recognisable though poetics, among others) are not merely a natural conduit for positions and points of view, *but that they enjoy a relative autonomy, which ensures that they have a special impact on the character of conveyed meanings*.[18]

The above-highlighted fragment constitutes the essence of the problem, albeit vaguely formulated, that I would like to analyze in detail in this paper. There is no doubt that narration in contemporary non-fiction increasingly more often is complemented by various elements of artistic creation. Its fictionalization is increasingly visible in the area of fact-based literature, which is used to aim towards objectivism, transparency of language and faithfulness to real events. However, in my opinion the problem does not lie in reality being filtered through individual experience (to which authors have an unquestionable right), but in increasingly more frequent attempts to negate or blur the genre affiliation of texts which are offered to readers and are called fact-based literature. I am especially interested in what the outcomes are when authors break the referential pact, i.e. the unwritten agreement between writer and reader? In other words, is the non-fiction writer, who not only "casually crosses the boundary towards literature"[19], but also questions the need for the existence of this boundary, honest?

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17 Grochowski, Grzegorz. "Pytania o niefkicjonalną..." ("Questions About Discursive..."). 654.

18 ibid, 655 [emphasis mine: P.Z.].

19 Pollack, Martin. "Trzy podziękowania i jeden ukłon" ("Three thank yous and a bow"). *Podróże z Ryszardem Kapuścińskim. Opowieści trzynastu tłumaczy (Travels with Ryszard Kapuściński: Stories by Thirteen Translators*). Edited by Dudko, B. Znak. Krakow. 2007. 161.

It seems that honesty does not belong to the repertoire of literary theory terms. However, when we examine non-fiction, especially fact-based non-fiction, in the framework of a text structure, seen as a genre created by an author and received by a reader within a certain scope of expectations, then the voice of the ethical watchdog, employed by Phillip Lejeune in defining the autobiographical pact over three decades ago, will become indispensible. Fact-based literature, as autobiography, is a "contractual" genre. It aims not at straightforward similarity, but at similarity to the truth and it aims not at an illusion of reality, but a picture of reality. Fact-based literature is, as the name suggests, based on facts (for now, I am putting aside the disputable nature of facts), not on a relation to the facts, which lends itself to discussion and gradation. Fact-based literature assumes what Lejeune called a "referential pact," explicit or implicit, which demarcates the area of the investigated reality and also the rules and the degree of the desired similarity.[20] Following Lejeuene, one might claim, with the same earnestness, that the "referential pact":

> is a serious matter. It grounds the text in real relationships with others, it starts the interplay of internal and external forces, of intimate and social; it rests on the notion of honesty (bearing witness), and highlights rights and responsibilities. An individual subject is not an illusion, but rather a fragile reality.[21]

In his book about autobiography, Lejeune references the pragmatics of Paul Ricoeur, who sees the promise of telling the truth as the foundation of all social relations[22]. The pact that the author of fact-based literature makes with the reader functions in the same way; it is a promise of presenting the truth. We may, as narrativists do, acknowledge that the truth is unattainable, but the desire to convey it delineates the area of the pact between the author and the reader. The character of the proof is important for the sphere of non-fiction. The text itself does not have to be true, what counts is the engagement of the author in the promise of telling the truth. Therefore, it seems important to maintain some purity of genre. So let us return to the separation between the novel (the fictional pact) and non-fiction (the referential pact). How should one read the referential pact? When does the author sign a pledge to adhere to it? It is enough to peruse available definitions to find out

20 Lejeune, Philippe. *Wariacje na teamt... (Variations on a Certain...)*. 47.

21 ibid, 285.

22 ibid, 5.

that the discussion on non-fiction writing is dominated by an extraordinary, indeed Pirrandello-esque, ambiguity of terms. The attempt to demarcate the sphere of the genre is not, by any means, meant to discover a magic formula or to put the texts I am focusing on, into Procrustes' bed. It is rather an attempt to develop a model of analysis. It is not a secret – I am freely borrowing from Lejeune's findings on autobiography, incoherent at times and bordering on aporias, but they still fill the existing gaps well.

The difference between fiction and non-fiction is extremely difficult to precisely define. Fact-based literature, for example literary reportage, is a type of creation and construction of narration and because of this, it must include elements of fiction, even if the author's commitment to telling the truth is exceptionally strong. Looking for differences between these two genres inside the text, plot or its narration techniques is futile. Simply put, non-fiction is a particular way of reading, resulting from a bilateral pact made between the author and reader. The author of non-fiction positions himself as a real person with a personal relationship to his subject matter (he is present amongst his protagonists as a reporter, he contacts the informants, and researches a given subject by studying available sources). The reader, when picking up his book, often has some knowledge about the author in advance. The knowledge is based on previous books by this author (also from the genre of fact-based literature) or on reviews and press articles, which place the author's writing in the non-fiction genre. For the reader, this author is a socially responsible person (one that you can trust) and a creator of specific types of texts. Defining non-fiction through the reader has the advantage of freeing us from the difficult (and rather impossible) responsibility of establishing a canon of the genre. At the same time, it is an accurate definition; after all, non-fiction texts have been written for us, the readers, and by reading them we bring these texts into existence.

The pact with the reader is not just the condition of reading, but it is often announced by the author in the initial part of the read text. In this "preamble" of the non-fiction text, the author encourages the reader to join in the game and create the impression of a bilateral pact. For example, one may analyze the beginning of a text to see whether the point of view is that of a protagonist or narrator. The first technique will be closer to the genre of fiction, the second to non-fiction. The reader receives this signal even before he might have any idea about the relationship between the name of the protagonist and the name of the author. However, the reader may read the text differently than the author suggests. Many non-fiction texts also lack a clearly formulated referential pact. Moreover, on the side of the author a discord might exist between the initial intention and the intention assigned by the reader,

> because the author underestimated the effects caused by the type of presentation he chose, or because of other elements standing between himself and the reader; many elements that condition the reading of a text (such as sub-title, genre classification, advertizing, and other information) might have been chosen by the publisher and discussed in the media.[23]

Finally, various readings of the same non-fiction text and various interpretations of the same referential pact might exist simultaneously. The reading public is not homogenous after all. Despite all this, the agreement, the referential pact, the pact of truth, plays a crucial role in the reading process, because non-fiction is like a painting in a museum. "Everything depends on the label. In a museum, people spend more time reading labels than looking at paintings. Admiration is measured in doses, the look is adjusted to the author or the subject."[24]

When researching non-fiction texts, one should start from the reader's reception rather than from the way a text was written. Research should encompass the whole "dossier" of a given author so that one might discern the intentions of an author (e.g. interviews, correspondence, or an author's internet site) or those that express the reactions of readers (e.g. a critical discourse on a particular book, which develops in literary periodicals, magazines and daily newspapers). Opinions about non-fiction and about all books associated with it should be analyzed. It would be useful to note how the pact made with the reader, the form of the text and its contents enter into mutual relationships. The referential pact will play a different role depending on the text; in some texts it will be dominant and in others it will play a secondary role. An analysis of the referential pact should include the conditions of composition and the publication of a text, such as advance dissemination of information about the author (e.g. the attitude of the reader and the reading of the text depends on it), collective conventions between authors and readers (e.g. television and press interviews, the author's comments about his own writing, etc.), the publisher's policy, in which the series the book finds itself, is governed both by its composition and its reading (for example, when a publisher calls a series "Reportage," he confirms his own and the author's credibility to the book-buying public because he ensures that the product meets their expectations, while using and stimulating their attitudes). This last point seems to be particularly important; putting the referential pact in the context of the whole publishing world allows us to examine the genre requirements of contemporary literary production.

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23 ibid, 187.

24 ibid, 206.

By putting forward a new proposal for non-fiction research, I especially wish to draw attention to the emergence of new, hybrid forms; forms that mix both pacts in a conscious manipulation employed by some authors (often encouraged by publishers, because they combine a twofold motivation for reading). My main question will pertain to the pact with the reader. What happens when my gullibility and trust that a real person is telling me a story about reality, which has been researched and lived in, is broken? We can assume that a non-fiction reader is differently active; he first reacts to the type of contact established by the author. "Here a risk, which is not present in fiction, appears: a quiver of permeation…, the immediacy of emotion, and most of all a return to oneself, which is much harder to avoid when we are pretending to believe in fiction. It is a face to face meeting."[25] By protesting the recognition of the non-fiction subject as fiction (or something between fiction and "not-fiction"), I am asking, like Lejeune, and taking an ethical stand: "If I prick you, will this also be fiction?"

Let us see how this problem is dealt with by four different authors: Ryszard Kapuściński, Frank Westerman, Martin Pollack, and Claudio Magris. The choice is not random by any means. Ryszard Kapuściński is seen by the other three writers as a significant benchmark, a mentor of sorts and an inspiration for their own journalistic fascinations. First of all, for me, the issue of separation between fiction and "not-fiction" still remains interesting; the issue, is rather peculiarly understood by Kapuściński, and also referred to by the Dutchman Westerman, the Austrian Pollack and the Italian Magris. I am warning you in advance that (for the purpose of illustration) I have cast the first three writers as blackguards or negative protagonists, who toy with the pact of truth made with the reader, while Magris is an example of a positive character.

Małgorzata Czermińska, describing Kapuściński's writing as "non-fictional narration," points out that he reconstructs past events like a historian (engaging eye witnesses, written sources and other documents), yet, with regard to the way he tells the story, he acts as an omnipotent narrator of a novel, describing a fictional world: "He offers the reader an entry into a pact of suspended disbelief and acceptance of a proposed version of the events as in a classic historical novel, which builds an illusion of things past."[26] Czermińska touches here upon an important problem, although she is careful about giving her opinion.

25 ibid, 15.

26 Czermińska, Małgorzata. "'Punkt widzenia' jako kategoria antropologiczna i narracyjna w prozie niefikcjonalnej" ("'Point of view' as an Anthropological and a Narrative Category in Nonfiction"). *Teksty Drugie* 2/3 (2003): 20.

What Kapuściński offered his readers is not a "pact of suspended disbelief," but a pact of offering the truest truth. He labels all his texts as "true" and then proceeds to construct voluminous fictions. He builds his "ethnographic authority" (to quote Clifford Geertz) with great care repeating on many occasions that he writes "from his travels," that he is not "a confabulator," that he does not describe "some imaginary or personal world," but "a world that really exists."[27] Moreover, he reinforces this authority with assurances of being "an anti-tourist," distinguishing the work of a field reporter from a carefree vacation. "This is a completely different experience and a different way of perceiving the world."[28] I fully agree, however, we should remember that what we receive is not a record of experience (according to the referential pact made with the reader), but a text composed of other texts, an anthology of quotations of sorts, of which the best example is *Imperium*. The Russian critic Maxim Waldstein, who took the referential pact, made by Kapuściński with the reader, at face value and felt he was "pricked" by the truth described in the text,[29] was chastised by a Polish researcher for missing the literary aspect of the book as well as the ambiguity and symbolism associated with it.[30] It is hard to find a more explicit example of breaking "the pact of truth." Critics granted the Polish writer the right to carry two passports, which allowed him to smoothly cross the border between fiction and "non-fiction" without any consequences. In (rare) cases of criticism aimed at the representation of reality sketched by Kapuściński, non-fictionality instrumentally and temporarily gives way to fiction.

In many interviews, Frank Westerman (1964), one of the most important representatives of the non-fiction genre in the Netherlands and author of six books, emphasizes his kinship with the writings of Ryszard Kapuściński.[31] As far as the Dutchman is concerned, the breach of referential pact looks slightly different. While Kapuściński often wrote fiction, but marketed it always as the truth, Westerman does exactly the opposite; he attempts to sell real people stories as literature, although he does not label his products with the unambiguous label of "a novel." He takes full advantage of the fashionable and

27 Kapuściński, Ryszard. *Autoportret reportera (A Self-portrait of a Reporter)*, Biblioteka Gazety Wyborczej. Warsaw. 2008, 13.

28 ibid.

29 Waldstein, K. Maxim. "Observing Imperium. A Postcolonial Reading of Ryszard Kapuscinski's Account of Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia." *Social Identities*. 3 (8). (2002): 481-499.

30 Chomiuk, A. "'Nowy markiz de Custine' albo historia pewnej manipulacji" ("'The New Marquise de Custine' or a Story of a Certain Manipulation"). *Teksty Drugie* 1/2 (2006): 312.

31 Westerman, Frank. "Het hondje van Haile Selassie. Het Scherpe oog van Ryszard Kapuściński 1932-2007." http://www.nrcboeken.nl/recensie/het-hondje-van-haile-selassie. April 2009.

strong trend for books about "the truth" which currently exists on the book market in the Netherlands. At the same time, he can compete with literature, without any need for a qualifying adjective, by applying for numerous literary awards (and receiving them); he, like Kapuściński, wants the luxury of having two passports. Westerman, like Kapuściński, takes great care of his "ethnographic authority." His journalistic past is an intrinsic element of his biography as a writer. It is highlighted in almost all press interviews: work for the Dutch magazines *HP/De Tijd*, *Volkskrant's* Belgrade correspondent, a reporter in Srebrenica, who was surrounded by Bosnian Serbs, and finally, *NRC Handelsblad's* correspondent in Moscow. Westerman's first two books, *De brug over de Tara (The Bridge over the Tara River)* and *Het zwartste scenario (The Bleakest Scenario)*, may be regarded as "classic" non-fiction, sensitive to nuances, the linguistic sensibility of the writer, yet with such attention to detail in descriptions, characteristic for eye-witnesses or historians. However, from his third book onwards, the writer's ego becomes increasingly prominent. Although he still confirms the authenticity of each written scene, he emphasizes that "he staged and spotlighted the collected trophies in such a way that, with their help, he tells *his own* story, like a curator of a museum, who tells a story through his exhibition."[32] On the one hand, Westerman makes a referential pact with the reader (e.g. numerous photographs and maps included in the book, photographs of documents and people he is writing about, and a list of quotations and informants that is always included at the end of the text), but on the other, he drifts increasingly more clearly toward the fictional pact (e.g. numerous mentions of the creative aspect of the described world). In 2005, in his acceptance speech for the "De Gouden Uil" award, Westerman said that he was fed up with his books sitting on the bestseller lists next to products, such as *Lose Weight in Six Steps* or *Windows for Seniors* and he posited a separation of fiction and non-fiction. In place of the Dutch terms *fictie* and *non-fictie*, he proposed a division, which would only take into consideration a qualitative difference between "good" and "poor" literature, and which he labelled *frictie* and *non-frictie*, respectively. *Frictie* surprises, moves, and shocks us; it awakens something within. *Non-frictie* merely describes what we have already known and sensed and does not stir any other feelings apart from an effect of recognition. Westerman claimed that any other classification of literature is redundant.[33] In his last book, *Ararat* (2007), the writer persistently pursues the programme of "having two passports." He still entices readers with his

32 Westerman, Frank. *De graanrepublick*. Atlas. Amsterdam. 1999. 253 [translation and emphasis mine – P.Z.].

33 Ceelen, H. Bergeijk van, J. *Meer dan feiten. Gesprekken met auteurs van literaire non-fictie*. Atlas. Antwerpen-Amsterdam. 2007. 25.

"ethnographic experience" (e.g. information about his journalistic past and methods of collecting information, maps, drawings, and a list of sources and informants), he still publishes with Atlas, specializing in non-fiction (mainly in reportage); however, to the readers that he gained with "the promise of offering the truth"[34], he presents a vague construction, which is not necessarily the truth. He writes: "I like building words from letters and then a story from these words. I do it for the sound, rhythm and the meaning. And for sparks. When you rub two sentences together, you make fire… If you are lucky, a story will be created from loose sentences."[35]

Martin Pollack (1944), a former correspondent of *Der Spiegel* in Poland, like Frank Westerman sees in Ryszard Kapuściński "his literary master and mentor."[36] As the translator of all books by Kapuściński into German, he suspects that "Kapuściński's mastery" greatly influenced his writing technique, although he is unable to say how exactly this influence is manifested. "Others would have to analyze this, however I am assuming that such influence has occurred and still is occurring. It is not possible to avoid it when one spends a great deal of time with the author and is intensely engaged in his work."[37] Pollack calls Kapuściński's books *comfort literature*;[38] literature that is particularly close, having a calming effect (in an analogy to the *comfort blanket* used by little Linus, a character in *Peanuts* by Charles M. Schulz). The Austrian writer stresses that although it is not easy to find a relationship between himself and Kapuściński, it is clear that the Polish author gave him the courage to contribute to documentary literature. In my opinion, their far-reaching kinship lies in an equally carefree attitude to the referential pact, this agreement with the reader, in my opinion, is the most important determinant of non-fiction.

For example, let us examine the journalistic investigation that Martin Pollack conducted into the death of his father, Dr Gerhard Basta, a member of the SS, whom Pollack never met.[39] The German subtitle of the book, *Bericht über meinen Vater*,[40] constitutes an intrinsic part of the pact with the

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34 Lejeune, Philippe. *Wariacje na teamt... (Variations on a Certain...)*. 47.

35 Westerman, Frank. *Ararat*. Atlas. Amsterdam-Antwerp. 2007. 21. [translation mine – P.Z.].

36 Pollack, Martin. "Trzy podziękowania..." ("Three thank yous..."). 162.

37 ibid.

38 ibid.

39 Pollack, Martin. *Śmierć w bunkrze. Opowieść o moim ojcu (The Dead Man in a Bunker: Discovering my Father)*. Translated by Kopacki, A. Wydawnictwo Czarne. Wołowiec. 2006.

40 Pollack, Martin. *Der Tote im Bunker. Bericht über meinen Vater.* Zsolnay Verlag. Wien. 2004.

reader, in a more emphatic way than the Polish translation *(Opowieść…[The story of…])*. However, even the Polish reader is informed of the journalistic past of the writer and his other books belonging to the genre of non-fiction. *Śmierć w bunkrze* (*The Dead Man in a Bunker)* was published by Wydawnictwo Czarne, in the series "Sulina," which includes "historical and anthropological books, travelogues, reportage and essays, i.e. a broadly understood fact-based literature." This note on the inner flap of the dust jacket also belongs to the referential pact; the reader holding Pollack's book in his hands, is reassured from the start that he is not dealing with fiction. From the first day, the pact is also maintained by the author: "At the beginning of summer 2003, I travelled with my wife to South Tyrol, to the Brenner Pass, to find a bunker, where fifty years earlier the body of my father was found."[41] This sentence could easily be the beginning of a novel. However, the author ensures that his kinship with the narrator is gradually revealed (which he highlights in all interviews and meetings promoting the book). The pact is made complete by numerous traces of archival research[42] scattered in the text, such as black and white family photos, citing sources without the filter of free indirect speech, and the closing acknowledgements, which once more confirm "the truth" of the text.

However, the problem is that the scarcity of the source information, which Pollack frequently points out,[43] is supplemented by literary imagination, separation of fact and "the subsequent enhancement of the story, which 'I heard from someone, but am no longer sure from whom,'"[44] becomes blurred. The story told by Pollack is not confabulated, but is not true either. It is a *possible* story. Photographs become the main protagonists of the book; damaged photos with fuzzy contours and discovered traces, devoid of the primary context. These countless photographs are the starting point for *possible* narrations. It is an extremely convenient ploy, because photographic entropy constitutes "a permission to make a false move or a mistake; it is a recognition that there is more beauty in the journey than in the destination. It is a resigned observation: this is better than I could have imagined myself, so I will settle for this."[45] Documents of private memory, family heirlooms, reports, interrogation protocols, and file notes were set free by Pollack, but they conjured up "merely fuzzy pictures, resembling photos taken out of developer prematurely, where

41 Pollack, Martin. *Śmierć… (The Dead Man…)*. 5.

42 ibid, 113, 114, 204, 206.

43 ibid, 136, 140, 145, 176, 178, 241.

44 ibid, 76.

45 Nowicki, W. "Entropia" ("Entropy"). *Tygodnik Powszechny*. 28 (2009): 42.

only contours are visible, but *the rest* is in the realm of the imagination."[46] Pollack spins possible yarns; he often answers: "I don't know," in response to questions he asks of himself. Ignorance is a part of his "factography." Perhaps, it is a justified ignorance, because it pertains to highly personal material, i.e. his own father. But is this really the case? Can a reconstruction of one's own father's character really be free of any constraints? Are devices, such as fact-based literature that smoothly flows into fiction, conjecture, a reconstruction of fiction contained in old photographs or a creation of context for separate artefacts, fully justified?[47] Should not this book be labelled, as is customary for the German publishing market, *"Roman"* instead of "Bericht"?

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46 Pollack, Martin. *Śmierć... (The Dead Man...)*. 234 [emphasis mine – P.Z.].

47 An identical question may be raised after reading Martin Pollack's article *Gdy kobiety uśmiechają się z rowu (When Women Smile from the Ditch)* ("Res Publica Nowa," 2009 no. 8, 60-64). In the article, Pollack describes the business of dealing in historical photographs, which in his opinion is a sign of the "atrophy of shameful feelings in confrontation with the victims of WWII" (60). For the price of €28.50, the author bought two photographs of young Jewish women, taken while they were working in a forced labor camp. He participated in an auction "to find out how such auctions work and how much it costs to buy something like this" (60). A four-page article is an attempt to reconstruct a story based on two photographs lacking a broader context. This technique is a mirror image of the ploy used by Pollack in *Śmierć w bunkrze (The Dead Man in the Bunker)*, which does not necessarily have anything to do with historical truth, but rather pure imagination. (Pollack included the complete description of these "photographic confabulations" in the article *Obrazkowa historia. Fotograficzne znaleziska [A Story in Pictures: Photographic* Finds], included in the volume entitled Dlaczego rozstrzelali Stanisławów [Why Did They Shoot Stanisławów?]. Wydawnictwo Czarne. Wołowiec. 2009. 96-114). The techniques that are used, such as providing details about the size of the photographs, including their reproductions in the book, and a detailed description of the photos are supposed to give the impression of offering objective data. However, when scanning the article quickly, the reader might not notice the simple fact that the story deciphered by Pollack is only speculation and an attempt at a literary reconstruction of events. It is a presumed story; like *Śmierć w bunkrze (The Dead Man in the Bunker)*, it is only a *possible* story. There are multiple question marks in this short text, a "dismal hypothesis about the faith of women," and through phrases, such as "with all likelihood," "one can assume" Pollack speculates about the intentions of the photographer who took the photo of this mildly interesting scene: "Perhaps it was a guard who took pleasure in standing there idly, in a clean uniform, at the edge of the ditch and took photos of young women, possibly of his own age, while they were hard at work uncustomary for them" (61). However, these speculations smoothly turn into accusations, which is no longer fictional or speculative: "It is a form of humiliation, a manifestation of this man's power over Jewish women" (61). This strong accusation is based on "proof," and "the proof" is nothing else but a fruit of the writer's imagination. It is an example of non-fiction, which in its essence is pure fiction, albeit (for the reader) deceitfully labelled "true." I do not doubt, even for a moment, Pollack's good intentions when he questions the motivations of collectors of these types of photographs. Just like Pollack, I can merely speculate about the answer. I am more interested in the concession to construct fictional stories, which have become "proof" of guilt, while they simultaneously critically judge "the dark sphere of desire and pleasure, which

In comparison with the two negative characters who present fiction as fact (Kapuściński and Pollack) and fact as fiction (Westerman), another admirer of the Polish "reportage master," Claudio Magris (1939), is the most honest. Although he regards non-fiction as "the most authentic [genre]" and thinks of Kapuściński as an artist "who dives into reality and presents it with a rigorous authenticity"[48], Magris himself chooses a completely different route. He presents his writing, which pertains to historical research and the quest for the concrete and the scientific, not as fact-based literature, but rather he persistently creates his image as a writer of fiction. Although his novels are based on facts and historical figures, they remain in the realm of fiction. Magris does not make a referential pact with his readers, but a fictional one; by this he avoids the false promise of truth, contrary to Kapuściński or Westerman:

> In *Dunaj (Danube: A Sentimental Journey from the Source to the Black Sea)* or *Mikrokosmosach (Microcosms),* the journey, people, things seen, and stories collected on the way were invented and retold; they became a story of a character, who is mostly fictional. They no longer belong to that journey; they have a different dimension, different time, mixed and irregular, the *time of literature*, which is not convergent with grammatical time nor even with the time of History.[49]

In my opinion, there is a lot of honesty in this resignation from "a promise of offering the truth," honesty of a writer, who in an open way calls the pact made with the reader a fictional pact. Although Irena Grudzińska-Gross writes that Magris "does not respect the division between fact and fiction,"[50] he is not,

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also explains the success of the bloody SS-epic of Jonathan Littell" (63). I understand that for Pollack the fictional memoirs of the SS officer Maximilien Aue, who served on the Eastern front during World War II, are more dangerous than an imagined and *possible* story about victims, which turns into an accusation of *real* executioners. In the name of truth (to use exalted language), I think that it is exactly the opposite.

48 Magris, Claudio. "Podróże bez końca" ("An Infinite Journey"). Translated by Ugniewska, J. *Zeszyty Literackie*. Warsaw. 2009. 16. It is an interesting fact that Magris equally respects Martin Pollack's writing. In the preface to the Austrian edition of *Śmierć w bunkrze (The Dead Man in a Bunker)*, he wrote: "It is a book that draws attention and is balanced at the same time, even reservedly scientific. Most of all, it exudes deep humanism and restrained pain. It is a literary expression of maturity, which is not afraid of the truth and accepts it albeit with a great effort and a child-like sense of shame." (http://www.ksiazka.net.pl/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=6284, August 2009.

49 Magris, Claudio. "Podróże..." ("An Infinite..."). 25. [emphasis mine – P.Z.].

50 Grudzińska-Gross, Irena. "Z ukosa" ("On a Slant"). *Tygodnik Powszechny*. 25 (2009): 31. [A sum-

with certainty, a borderline writer with two passports, who sometimes enters into the sphere of fiction, then into the sphere of fact, depending on momentary whim or potential benefits. "There is no lie here; no lie of the language nor of the form."[51] We should also add that there is no lie of genre. The imagination of Magris as a writer of fiction fulfils our search for the truth, although we (luckily) know from the start on what rules this truth is based.

Therefore, I define a new approach to non-fiction research as the "ethical" framing of the problem; one that examines how the referential pact made between the author and the reader is perceived; the pact, which in my opinion, is the main characteristic of this type of prose. Discussions about the referential pact and its breach become interesting in the case of such non-fiction writers as mentioned above: Ryszard Kapuściński, Frank Westerman and Martin Pollack, who by virtue of their journalistic authority, usurp the genre of reportage to sell their own products as a hybrid genre, bordering on truth and fiction, and to claim the right to be called writers, without a qualifying adjective, ensuring at the same time, that everything that is contained between the covers of their books is not a confabulation (although the "wishy-washy" genre classification assigned by them, implies and allows for confabulation). These writers regard "pure" fact-based literature as being deeply inadequate for their ambitions; they usurp the referential pact, the pact of truth, camping on its territory illegally. These writers openly refer to their experience, are present in their texts under their own names and by this they toy with the curiosity and gullibility of the reader. On the one hand, they invoke their "ethnographic authority," use maps, letters from informants, authentic documents and a long lists of cited sources and, on the other hand, they drift towards fiction. Although they do not label their texts "novels," they openly declare that they move in hybrid territory, which, like all intersections, is conducive to creativity. Thanks to this, they cunningly benefit from the referential pact, without paying any dues. Perhaps it improves their self-worth as writers, but at the same time, it makes them targets for virtuosic exercises in irony.

Translation: Rafał Uzar

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mary of the laudation given on May 19, 2009 in Sejny during the ceremony of awarding Claudio Magri the title of Człowiek Pogranicza (Borderlander) awarded by the Borderline Foundation and "Borderland of Arts, Clutures and Nations" Centre established by Małgorzata and Krzysztof Czyżewski].

51 ibid.

Tomasz Majewski

Testimony: Between the Inside and the Outside of Language[1]

1.

The issue I would like to explore here is the linguistic status of testimony as formulated by Giorgio Agamben. I will not analyze testimony as a separate sort of discursive practice, neither will I explore the question of the performative character of similar forms of expression or delve into the pragmatic consequences of the act of testimony (extensively examined by the liked of Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub). The paper will also disregard the issue of belief, written or spoken accounts, predicates and referencing these forms of expression. Agamben's deliberations are of particular interest to me given their focus on abandoning the widespread conviction that testimony weighed after the Holocaust refers to unnamable and intangible realities outside the realm of language, while the act of bearing witness of the Shoah would be an extreme case of the act of speech. Agamben treats the notion of impossibility of speaking advanced by psychoanalytical discourse seriously, thus linking it with the empirical

1 The paper is an extended version of the lecture given at the 34th Theory of Literature Conference *Literary Representations of Experience*, held in September of 2006 in Gdańsk-Sobieszewo.

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fact of testimonies coming into being, their linguistic existence. The realized embodiment of the impossible is, in Agamben's perspective, more worthy of attention that the recurring thesis positing the inexpressibility of liminal experiences. Testimonies exist, they were given, and language was used to convey what once was thought impossible to recount. As a result, we cannot explore the issues revolving around the concept of testimony without reexamining the problem of language/speech and without investigating how the realization of such impossible expressions affects the issue of language. From the linguistic perspective, language reveals its aporetic character, hidden in its quotidian usage. We will not grasp "what" testimony speaks about until we come to understand what it means in their case to, as Celan put it, "just speak." Agamben writes:

In this language, a language that survives the subjects who spoke it coincides with a speaker who remains beyond it. ... so the speech of the witness bears witness to a time in which human beings did not yet speak; and so the testimony of human beings attests to a time in which they were not yet human.[2] (162)

Agamben's thesis, whose shape I will be following herein, would, at least in my opinion, argue the following: if the structure of testimony is based on realizing the radical impossibility of expression experienced by someone who is "capable of speaking," as well as on the relationship between the human and the inhuman, then the crack at its heart will not be the limit, but rather a hidden principle of the existence of language.

In 1964, during an interview aired by the German TV channel ZDF, Günter Gaus asked Hannah Arendt whether something has remained in her innermost personal experience of pre-Nazi Europe: "What remains? The mother tongue remains (*Was bleibt? Es bleibt die Muttersprache.*)" Not memories of events or even fully-formed personalities but language, both medium and message, is what remains after the identity of its speaker perishes. What, then, is that language-remnant – asks Giorgio Agamben in reference to Arendt's reply – what does it mean to speak a language that's almost entirely a relic, and how can a language survive its speakers? In his desire to reexamine the issue of bearing witness, the articulation of experience, and the linguistic structure of testimony, the author of the *Homo Sacer* triptych sketches, it its final installment, *Quel che resta di Auschwitz?* (*Remnants of Auschwitz*), an image of language as a field where anomie clashes with norm, innovation clashes with conservative tendencies inherent in the grammatical system, in which the point where tensions intersect

2 G. Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (New York: Zone Books, 2002). Unless stated otherwise, from here onwards the locations of all the quotes from this book will be placed in the main body of the article.

determines, as structural *locus*, the position of the speaking subject, i.e. the place of those who, as Agamben puts it, decide what can and cannot be said, therefore decide not only the semantics of their own speech, but also, if taken to an extreme, adjudicate as to what is expressible in language and what is not.

The end of this dialectic of the expression and the expressed, the expressible and the inexpressible, anomie and the norm would mean the death of language brought about by abrogation of the prospects for the emergence of the subject of speech. Language dies when the relationship between "norm" (Dante's *grammatica* – scholastic Latin) and anomie (the void of unnamed experience) breaks down in the subject, thus transforming *langue* into a "whole that is closed and lacking all exteriority" into a *corpus* of realized, fulfilled statements. "We thus say of a dead language that it is no longer spoken, that is, that in it it is impossible to assign the position of a subject." (160) For the author speaking a dead language, assigning himself such a position would signify a moment in which, as Agamben writes, this "curious *auctor*, who authorizes an absolute impossibility of speaking and summons it to speech," thus paradoxically giving "his voice and blood to the shadow of a dead language, so that it may return – as such – to speech." (161) This isolated act, typical for the literary praxis of Latin poets, makes it possible for language to survive the death of its subjects; its transmission, however, takes place via the *corpus* of what has been said or is evoked by the archive's records, which still does not make it a living language. In this particular case, the "archive" is neither the dust of the libraries nor the collections contained within, but rather an assortment of rules that define the event of discourse – its emergence. According to Foucault, from whom Agamben borrowed the term, it situates itself in the sphere of casual determinants, in the historical reality between pure *langue* understood as a system of constructing possible sentences and the *corpus* collecting what has already been said. The archive, the "mass of the non-semantic inscribed in every meaningful discourse as a function of its enunciation" is only the "margin encircling and limiting every concrete act of speech," while being "the unsaid or sayable inscribed in everything said by virtue of being enunciated" (143-444). Foucault calls this record of the unsaid "historical *a priori*," that is a place from which the archeology of discourse can question the already said at the level of its factual existence instead of pure linguistic potentiality.[3] The only true miracle of linguistic resurrection, as Agamben suggests, took place in the case of modern Hebrew, where a linguistic community, after experiencing a historical trauma, placed itself contemporarily in the position of a subject within a *langue* that was heretofore dead, that is it survived only as an archive and the *corpus* of traditional texts. The community

3 cf. M. Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 126.

emerged in place of the subject as a new collective identity, a collective "we" delivered from muteness (Hebrew became a living language only after its speakers experienced the Holocaust, which deprived them of their own other-language *locus*, their prior linguistic identity).

This pattern of argumentation, reconstructed here very perfunctorily, precedes Agamben's final attempt at defining testimony. Undeterred in his efforts to reinterpret the notion, Agamben writes:

> To bear witness is to place oneself in one's own language in the position of those who have lost it, to establish oneself in a living language as it were dead, or in a dead language as if it were living – in any case, outside both the archive and the *corpus* of what has already been said. (161)

Note that each of the formulations used by the writer indicates aporia inscribed into the very structure of testimony (which is not equivalent, however, with its negation), which moulds it into an articulation taking place not only from a position of inability but also a logical impossibility. The impossibility seems to primarily constitute the act of testimony by situating the witness in the role of the subject of speech "in" language, in a system of rules and grammatical norms, by establishing a relation between his/her act of speech and the unsaid (anomie). Testimony as the "possibility of bearing witness" about the unsaid places itself outside the historical accumulation of discourse layers and mutable circumstances, initially embodying a certain possibility of language, that is the existence of a purely potential *locus* of the subject of speech in the face of empirically confirmed impossibility of assuming said position by any survivor. On the other hand, the existence of that potential *locus* within language would legitimize the act of bearing witness for those deprived of their language (Muslims, victims of the gas chambers), and thus allow the positioning of oneself within language "in their place" – voiding, as I understand it, the charge of fictionalization (leveled by the more radical students of Lacan, like Claude Lanzmann) and legitimizing the testimonial role of literature and, to put it more broadly, art. The linguistic structure of "bearing witness for" does not contain and neither can it guarantee a positive reference to the "substance" of unsaid experience – given that we are dealing here with the same aporia that Jean-François Lyotard accurately diagnosed in his ironic paraphrases of arguments employed by Auschwitz negationists that he included in *Le Differend*:

> You are informed that human beings endowed with language were placed in a situation such that none of them is now able to tell about it. Most of them disappeared then, and the survivors rarely speak about it. When

> they do speak about it, their testimony bears only upon a minute part of this situation. How can you know that the situation itself existed? That it is not the fruit of your informant's imagination? Either the situation did not exist as such. Or else it did exist, in which case your informant's testimony is false, either because he or she should have disappeared, or else because he or she should remain silent ... To have "really seen with his own eyes" a gas chamber would be the condition which gives one the authority to say it exists and to persuade the unbeliever. Yet it is still necessary to prove that the gas chamber was used to kill at the time it was seen. The only acceptable proof that it was used to kill is that one died from it. But if one is dead, one cannot testify that it is on account of the gas chamber.[4]

If the structure of testimony implicitly contains something like the impossibility of bearing witness, then, as Agamben claims, it is not due to the impossibility of assuming a specific existential and cognitive attitude (of being inside the experience of death and returning therefrom) but rather due to the strictly linguistic nature of testimony. For Agamben, testimony situates itself from the very beginning within a very disturbing turning point – incongruence – between the possibility of speech and the act of speaking, between *langue* and archive, being the reverse of a situation that any subject of speech can find himself in, one that deprives him of his ability to speak, to express something, despite him being "in the right" to do so as a subject of speech situated within language. The situation demonstrates that assuming the subjective position in a language is always implicitly related to the potential divesting of language, to being alienated "within it," to the recession of one's own speech, and thanks to this structure (which allows the speaker to locate himself in the *locus* of "speaking" from inside of a dead language) the speech of the witness may bear "witness to a time in which human beings did not yet speak [...] attest to a time in which they were not yet human." (162) Bearing witness, as placing oneself in language in the position of those who have lost it results in the unearthing of the relationship between the *langue* and the contingency, the incidental character of individual existence (the real possibility of him or her not existing at all), which makes their emergence in place of the subject of speech an absolutely singular event, one that takes place outside any sort of archive or *corpus* of enunciations. Contingency as the occurrence of language in a subject, writes Agamben, "is different from actual discourse's utterance or non-utterance, its speaking or not speaking, its production or non-production as a statement. It concerns the subject's capacity

4 J.F. Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 3.

to have or not to have language" (145). It is not, therefore, simply another logical modality, alongside possibility, impossibility, and necessity; it is the "actual giving of a possibility, the way in which a potentiality exists as such." (pp. 145-146). Since "testimony" – the name given to the placement of the subject in a certain linguistic chasm, a rift in which the possibility of speech is realized as such – is the relationship between the possibility of speech and the act of speech (enunciation) – and not just the relationship between what has remained and that which went unsaid (the dimension defined by the archive) – then the insignificant human existence becomes the reason that ultimately decides, time and time again, whether or not a language will prevail.

2.

In light of the above, it should not come as a surprise that Agamben decided to associate the gesture of bearing witness with true poetic gestures, and language of the poet with the remainder, with what remains (as "scatheless is the song") after the test of possibility and impossibility of speech is through and that's why it can bear witness for us. Although the author of *Homo Sacer* quotes a sentence from Hörderlin to support his ideas of the deep identity of speech in testimony and poetry ("Was bleibt aber, stiften die Dichter" – "What remains is what the poets found"), I would rather suggest to a speech by Paul Celan delivered at the German city of Bremen in 1958, a speech touching, albeit from a different angle, upon the issue of language as the "remnant" that survived the inferno:

> Only one thing remained reachable, close and secure amid all losses: language. Yes, language. In spite of everything, it remained secure against loss. But it had to go through its own lack of answers, through terrifying silence, through the thousand darknesses of murderous speech. It went through. It gave me no words for what was happening, but went through it. Went through and could resurface, 'enriched' by it all.[5]

The secret of the poet's language lies in the state of regression, the loss of elocution, and the ease of expression. Language "enriched" with recurring periods of muteness is the language of the "stutterer," language that's constantly regressing in aphasia – therefore this is its kenosis. To put it differently, it is the salvaged (remaining, residual) impossibility of speech within language and the transition of the unsayable into the act of speech that it

5 P. Celan, "Speech on the Occasion of Receiving the Literature Prize of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen" in P. Celan, *Collected Prose*, trans. R. Waldrop (New York: Routledge, 2003), 34.

incurs. Language can testify to the impossibility of speech, because language itself bears witness to/bears the stamp of powerlessness (muteness), which is not "a rich, difficult germination," but the fringe, "a distribution of gaps, voids, absences, limits, divisions," the shift of the interior of the language in relation to its exterior.[6]

The traces of anomie withing language, as diagnosed by Celan, allow the return of the issue of subject invalidated in *The Archeology of Knowledge* and approach it again via "the event of discourse," starting from the aporia of the possibility/impossibility of speech, which is also referenced, albeit in another way, as Agamben remarks, by Foucault's famous question: "Many other forms of statement are to be found in the discourse of nineteenth-century doctors. What is it that links them together? What necessity binds them together? Why these and not others?"[7]

> In the relation between what is said and its taking place, it was possible to bracket the subject of enunciation, since speech had already taken place. But the relation between language and its existence, between *langue* and the archive, demands subjectivity as that which, in its very possibility of speech, bears witness to an impossibility of speech. This is why subjectivity appears as *witness*; this is why it can speak for those who cannot speak. Testimony is a potentiality that becomes actual through an impotentiality of speech; it is, moreover, an impossibility that gives itself existence through a possibility of speaking. These two movements cannot be identified either with a subject or with a consciousness; yet they cannot be divided into two incommunicable substances. Their inseparable intimacy is testimony (Agamben 145-6).

As the subject of speech and the paradoxical "subject of language," the poet – an author *par excellence* – does not emerge as a result of the expression of the idiom of experience, but appears as, may I risk the expression, the inner locus of the linguistic exterior, salvaging *langue* in the impossibility of speech and salvaging the impossibility of speech (anomie) in the area if language. "Can we perhaps now locate the strangeness, the place where the person was able to set himself free as an – estranged – I?"[8] Poetic testimony is a polar opposite of the expression of the "interior of the subject," therefore Celan considers bearing witness as structure (as "speaking for others," *fremder*) to be tantamount to abandoning humanity, desubjectification, or to put it more precisely,

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6 M. Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, 119.

7 ibid., 50.

8 P. Celan, "The Meridian" in P. Celan, *Collected Prose*, 46.

in the words of Celan himself: "going beyond what is human, stepping into a realm which is turned toward the human, but uncanny." Art that is familiar with the "possibility of strangeness" and contains traces of "uncanniness" (*das Unheimliche*) remains well-rooted in that particular realm.[9]

In the concept of language-as-remnant, we should also look for the "potentiality of speech" and the (im)possibility of *parole*. "On the basis of the grammar and of the wealth of vocabulary available at a given period, there are, in total, relatively few things that are said," and our fundamental questions concerning the status of testimony revolve around the particular circumstances that decide the unique character of this "non-filling of the field of possible formulations as it is opened up by the language."[10] The subjective position in the field of possibility of the *langue* is a place, where we happen upon "lowly lives reduced to ashes in the few phrases that have destroyed them,"[11] and whose resurrection via means of linguistic analysis was, according to Agamben, Foucault's greatest desire (which he confessed to only once, in *The Life of Infamous Men*). The non-filling of the field of possible formulations (the sayable-yet-unsaid, register of the archive) shown, as Agamben writes, to the gaze shifting from "the site of enunciation not towards the act of speech, but toward *langue* as such: that is, of articulating an inside and an outside not only in the plane of language and actual discourse, but also in the plane of language as potentiality of speech" (145) decides whether the enunciatory dimension will be revealed, one that extends outside the system of statements of a realized discourse. In this case, Agamben clearly follows the thoughts of Benveniste and Foucault, for whom the concept of formulation as enunciation is not based on the analysis of "the relations between the author and what he says (or wanted to say, or said without wanting to); but in determining what position can and must be occupied by any individual if he is to be the subject of it.[12] The enunciative level – to use the nomenclature provided by *The Archeology of Knowledge* – is "at the limit of language," although it is not "the enigmatic, silent remainder that it [the language – *tr.*] does not translate." The enunciation defines only "the modality of its appearance: its periphery rather than its internal organization."[13]

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9 ibid., 42

10 M. Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, 119.

11 M. Foucault, "The Life of Infamous Men" in M. Foucault, *Power, Truth, Strategy*, ed. Meaghan Morris and Paul Patton (Sydney: Feral Publications, 2006), 77.

12 M. Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, 95.

13 ibid., 112.

A remarkably similar thought can be found in the work of Paul Celan. A poem is the sort of enunciation that "holds its ground on its own margin. In order to endure, it constantly calls and pulls itself back from an 'already-no-more' into a 'still-here,'" the latter of which may "only mean speaking," "not language as such, but responding and – not just verbally – 'corresponding' to something." From the perspective of "only ... speaking" – the "possibilities ... immersed in the memory of individual" become a language "set free under the sign of ... the limits drawn by language,"[14] that is the previously discarded silent substance of experience. The poem as a singular enunciation is "one person's language become shape,"[15] which transpires only when that same language, if we look out from its interior towards the "periphery of enunciation," withdraws and recedes. For Celan, the most inner essence of the poem is its presence in the present, "unique, momentary" (being outside them archive and *corpus*, respectively), being "lonely" (which I understand as singularity, constituted by the possibility of nonexistence) and "*en route,*"[16] constantly in search of the *vis-à-vis*, "this other towards which it is heading"[17] and its need of the Other. This last characteristic, when used to describe the act of bearing witness, may translate to the "desire to speak to the Other," which Primo Levi, in his conversation with Ferdinando Camon, illustrated in the following way:

Back then, in the concentration camp, I often had a dream: I dreamed that I'd returned, come home to my family, told them about it, and nobody listened. The person standing in front of me doesn't stay to hear, he turns around and goes away. I told this dream to my friends in the concentration camp, and they said, "It happens to us too."

> And later I found it mentioned, in the very same way, by other survivors, who've written about their experiences. ... But this dream of talking about it was certainly comparable to the dream of Tantalus, which was of "eating–almost," of being able to bring food to one's mouth but not succeeding in biting into it. It's the dream of a primary need, the need to eat and drink. So was the need to talk about it.[18]

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14 P. Celan, "The Meridian," 49.

15 ibid.

16 ibid.

17 ibid.

18 P. Levi, F. Camon, *Conversations with Primo Levi* (Marlboro: Marlboro Press, 1989), 42

Clearly, the impossibility of bearing witness may be perceived in a way that is ostensibly very different from the possibility or impossibility of having a language. When it comes to analyzing the cognitive positions in situations described by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub as "events without a witness," such an interpretation seems to be an especially important alternative to solutions proposed by Agamben. Lest we forget, in his essay *An Event Without a Witness* Laub identified three possible positions one can assume towards the experience of the Holocaust: bear witness to oneself as a part of a liminal experience, being a witness testifying to an Other, being a witness of someone else's testimony. The first position, which carries the greatest amount of credibility in Western culture, that is being an eyewitness of a given event, is, according to Laub, is the most susceptible to deformation:

> In addition, it was inconceivable that any historical insider could remove herself sufficiently from the contaminating power of the event so as to remain a fully lucid, unaffected witness, that is, to be sufficiently detached from the inside, so as to stay entirely *outside* of the trapping toles, and the consequent identities, either of the victim or the executioner. No observer could remain untainted, that is, maintain an integrity – a wholeness and separateness – that could keep itself uncompromised, unharmed, by his or her very witnessing.[19]

According to the American psychoanalyst, the gradual atrophying of the ability to bear witness concerns perpetrators and victims alike, although for different reasons:

> The perpetrators, in their attempt to rationalize the unprecedented scope of the destructiveness, brutally imposed upon their victims a delusional ideology whose grandiose coercive pressure totally excluded and eliminated the possibility of an unviolated, unencumbered, and thus sane, point of reference in the witness. ... It was not only the reality of the situation and the lack of responsiveness of bystanders or the world that accounts for the fact that history was taking place with no witness: it was also the very circumstance of *being inside the event* that made unthinkable the very notion that a witness could exist, that is, someone who could step outside of the coercively totalitarian and dehumanizing frame of reference in which the event was taking place, and provide an independent

19 Sh. Felman and D. Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York—London: Routledge, 2002), 81.

> frame of reference through which the event could be observed. One might say that there was, thus, historically no witness to the Holocaust, either from outside or from inside the event.[20]

To explain the concept of a witness existing inside the murderous event, an event obliterating the fundamental capability to "be towards one another," Laub adds that the experience of the Holocaust seems to us a universe wherein imagining an Other was simply no longer possible. "The was no longer an other to which one could say 'Thou' in the hope of being heard, of being recognized as a subject, of being answered."[21] When one cannot even address an Other with a "Thou," then one cannot say "thou" even to oneself and therefore cannot "bear witness to oneself."[22] Victims are mute because their testimony to us is an account of exclusion from the world of human beings, the internalization of the non-person status. The survivors find that their experiences aren't communicable even to themselves, as speaking of these events is inherently linked with the loss of one's identity or the collapse of the basic frameworks of the human condition that allow for self-knowledge, thus rendering the narrative impossible to communicate.

> It is not really possible to *tell the truth*, to testify, from the outside. Neither is it possible, as we have seen, to testify from the inside. I would suggest that the impossible position and the testimonial effort of the film as a whole is to be, precisely, neither simply inside nor simply outside, but paradoxically, *both inside and outside*: to create a *connection* that did not exist during the war and does not exist today, *between the inside and the outside* – to set them both in motion and in dialogue with one another.[23]

The author ponders this relationship, or, in other words, this connection between the "inside" and the "outside" using the example of Jan Karski's account of the Warsaw ghetto. Later, when trying to establish what makes the strength of the testimony in Lanzmann's movie, Felman states that it "is not the words but the equivocal, puzzling, relation between words and voice, the interaction, that is, between words, voice, rhythm, melody, images, writing, and silence. Each testimony speaks to us beyond its words, beyond its melody,

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20 ibid.

21 ibid., 82.

22 ibid.

23 ibid., 232.

like the unique performance of a singing."[24] Testimony is located here between language and what's beyond it. It does not take place in the tension between the possibility and impossibility of speech, but between speech and what is displaced from it; what resurfaces not in language itself but in its pauses, inflections, intonations, in other words, as a strictly melic symptom of something mute, extralinguistic. Agamben treated this diagnosis with slight detachment, claiming it "derives an aesthetic possibility from a logical impossibility" through an illegitimate "recourse to the metaphor of song." (36) In Felman and Laub's interpretation testimony is conveyed, as we should strongly emphasize, by the strictly aesthetic qualities of language – rhythm, intonation, melody, dissonances, and assonances, and considering this a dangerous tendency towards the "aestheticization of testimony" should not be treated as an exaggeration. Contrary to the authors' intentions, this aestheticization is a direct consequence of relocating the stutter, the inhuman, and the heterogeneous outside the realm of language.

Coming back to the conclusion I anticipated in the beginning of this article, I would like to say that from Agamben's perspective, the subject of testimonial speech may communicate the impossible testimony of desubjectification, because both the subject of speech and language itself are, to some degree, constitutively fractured. In language as the area of possibility of speech, we have to – as demonstrated by the case of testimony – to learn how to distinguish impossibility as a separate part of the field. Likewise, we should have the courage to designate the indelible inhuman part in every human subject. Only then can we make some sense of the puzzling fact that "the speech of the witness bears witness to a time in which human beings did not yet speak; and so the testimony of human beings attests to a time in which they were not yet human." (162)

Translation: Jan Szelągiewicz

24 ibid., 277-278.

Maria Delaperrière

Testimony as a Literary Problem

Disputes on authenticity

Testimony as a form of literary representation is based on a paradox:[1] the notion of testimony already assumes accuracy of rendering someone's experiences by him/herself, whereas literariness (traditionally understood as a group of stylistic and fictionalizing values) seems to disqualify the truthfulness of such message in advance. However, it is a known fact that, as Georges Perec argues, "facts don't speak for themselves,"[2] hence any discussion over a possibility to present so called "naked facts" becomes futile.

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1 Bibliography concerning literary testimonies is enormous and considerably goes beyond purely literary problems, also covering the areas of philosophy and anthropology. Special attention should be paid to Paul Ricoeur's works such as *O sobie samym jako innym*, transl. B. Chełstowski, ed. and introduction H. Kowalska PWN, Warsaw 2003. See also S. Bonzon, R. Celis, M. Sierro *De l'attestation, une nuée de témoins,* „Etude de lettres" 1996, no 3-4, (*Autour de la poétique de Paul Ricoeur)* 125-139; D. Christensen, H. Kornblith, *Testimony, memory and the limits of the a priori*, „Philosophical Studies" 1997, vol. 86, no 1; R. Kearney, *Remembering the past: the question of narrative memory*, „Philosophical & Social Criticism" 1998, vol. 24, no 2-3; T. Kenyon, *Rearle Rediscovers What was not lost,* „Dialogue" XXXVII, 198, 117-130 .

2 Cf. an opinion articulated in the context of Robert Antelme's book *L'Espèce humaine*, Paris 1957. Perec frequently underlines that "the camp reality can only by expressed via literature" (*Les Camps et la littérature,* „La Licorne" no 51).

From this perspective, it is important to notice the role of a writer who, also being a witness, is not only an advocate of facts, experiences and feelings he/she is affiliated with alone, but also "a guarantor of existential authenticity."[3] The writer needs to both "testify" to what happened and "attest" the truthfulness of his/her message. In the first case, we speak about intention, the second approach could be called "attention," i.e. caution and concern about the genuineness of the message. Here, we shouldn't ignore its recipient for whom such testimony has both an informative and performative function.[4] And there appears a necessity to find the most adequate form for conveying the truth. It isn't difficult to observe that the notion of "form adequacy" goes beyond the spectrum of traditionally understood literariness and refers to any narration. We could, hence, be satisfied with such solution but for the fact that modern narratological studies strongly relativized the truthfulness of narration – regardless of its relation with literariness. The crisis of literary representation, in which facts are only "effects of reality"[5] (Barthes), while narration itself equals unceasing circulation of signs (Peirce) or an idealistic illusion (Derrida), also affected narration of scientific aspirations.

Writing about historiographic narration, Ricoeur underlines that every description of historical events is inevitably reduced to "dramatization" of reality capture in time (*mise en intrigue*)[6] – a thought affirmed by Genette who repeats after Searle that "there is no textual, syntactical or semantic (and so narratological) property which would prove that a given text is fictional."[7] The opposite situation could be defined the same way: there is no textual, syntactical or semantic (and consequently, narratological) quality which would allow us to consider a given text as non-fictional. Treating narration as a process of fictionalization is directed against testimonial literature where the problem of conveying the truth of events is particularly acute: the witness "knows" that he/she carries their traces and that the value of his/her testimony lies in its singularity, but the recipient may never be absolutely certain about it.

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3 R. Nycz, *Tekstowy świat. Poststrukturalizm a wiedza o literaturze*, IBL, Warsaw 1993, 246.

4 As acutely emphasized by Zofia Mitosek who writes about mimesis: "The only reality to which literature could refer, is obviously the real reaction of the recipient" (*Mimesis – między udawaniem a referencją,* [in:] *Sporne i bezsporne problemy współczesnej wiedzy o literaturze*, ed. W. Bolecki, R. Nycz, IBL, Warsaw, 2002.

5 Zofia Mitosek underlines that according to Barthes, "the reality effect also concerns texts directed to announcing the truth as each type of reference is influenced by linguistic and supralinguistic semantic codes camouflaging the real world", ibid., 242.

6 P. Ricoeur, *Le Temps et le Récit*, vol. 3, Seuil, Paris 1985.

7 G. Genette, *Fiction et diction*, Seuil, Paris 1991, 167-168.

This dramatic conflict between the urge to testify and the inability to completely convince the addressee of its credibility is an inherent element of every testimony. Not incidentally, the Greek word *martyros* still today means both a witness and a martyr. This is an extreme example but it allows us to seize the – characteristic to testimony – link between the word and the body, the text and the experience.[8]

This is how it is possible to define the ontological essence of testimonial literature which gained much significance after the World War II. The calamity of war exceeded the limits of not only imagination but also expressibility, not in the meaning habitually assigned to this term (expression) but in the sense of inadequacy of words trying to convey the very experience.[9] We could return here to Barthes' sceptical opinions negating the possibility of representation and formulate a thesis that theories challenging representation would have never become so radical if it had not been for the war experiences, which Adorno concludes by stating the impossibility to write "after Auschwitz".

It is impossible to write and it is necessary to write. It is a paradox faced by the post-war witness. Ricoeur formulates it in yet another way when he writes that "in reference to Auschwitz, the only possible commentary should be reduced to the biblical word 'Zakhor' (remember) taken from the *Book of Deuteronomy*.[10] Otherwise, fictionalizing narration will generate a new – this time negative – epopee which, instead of a universal legend of winners, will create a mythology of suffering. Ricoeur develops an alternative, "either will we count dead bodies, or we will become a legend."[11]

These comments, of course, are valid to every reference to the past but a witness's account is distinguished by his/her physical engagement in the described past. The very act of giving testimony can be perceived as an act of violence against oneself, not only due to the dramatic struggle with the

8 Analyzing the indexical character of a literary document, Ryszard Nycz points to an important role of "the act of subjective testifying" in learning the truth: "it is truth certain in both meanings. It results from the the very act of subjective testifying which, by pronouncing it – relativizes it at the same time. It is, thus, truth which is both prospective and interpreted. A certain, someone's, once learnt, articulated in this and not other way – truth. Truth always supported by something or someone who 'checks with oneself' and oneself – one's life, knowledge and experience – and validates the things that are told to us" (*Tekstowy świat*, 246).

9 In some languages, there is a clear opposition between the two names, e.g. in German: unausdrücklich/unsagbar or in French: inexprimable/indicible – the first one referring to internal experiences, the second, to specific reality.

10 P. Ricoeur, *Le temps*...

11 Ibid.

memory but because of inevitable antinomy between one's knowledge and the means of rendering it.

The above reveals the existential dimension of the account which seems to sufficiently legitimize the fact of separating the category of literary testimony from other forms which compose so called non-fiction. Its distinctiveness is disclosed in the very author's intention: non-fiction is a broader category and relates to all forms of presenting observed, experienced or heard facts. The foundation of testimonial literature is the experience of the speaking subject which makes it resemblant to auto-biographical forms, however there are certain discrepancies between the two. Auto-biography,[12] as we know, exhibits the writing subject and, at the same time, shows its auto-creational intentions, whereas in literary testimony, the role of the very figure of the author-witness – even if he/she is present in the text – is interior towards the described experiences.

Literary testimony, thus, oscillates between document and auto-biography, although the boundaries of these three genres are certainly liquid: journal, reportage, auto-biography may be classified as testimonial literature under the condition that their dominant trait will be the intention to provide the addressee with the testimony for the purpose of not only learning it but also experiencing it.

Let us reiterate: the writer-witness is not limited to searching for traces of the past recorded in his/her memory. The quality (adequacy) of the message, inscribed in the narrative tissue, is substantial.[13] A witness who wishes to visualize "his/her own" (as it was experienced by him/herself) story, confronts with aporia defined by Searle as a contradiction between what was said (*le dire*) and what one wanted to say (*le vouloir dire*), hence, in consequence, between the real and the fictional.

Literary testimony, therefore, is conceived out of its continuous clash with both reminiscences vanishing from one's memory and the form of the message. It's not difficult to notice that in the most thrilling testimonies written down many years after the described situations, as in the case of Białoszewski, Kertész or Semprun, this conflict concerned the choice of the language which would recreate the experience most truthfully. However, the fundamental issue here is: what is the link between those choices and literariness? Undoubtedly, literariness – due to the unlimited means of expression – makes the transmission of experience emotionally favoured. On the other hand, fiction

12 The term "auto-biography" is used here in a broad sense covering all categories of a narrative discourse included in the "auto-biographical pact" (journal, auto-fiction, diary, etc.).

13 Cf. Zofia Mitosek's analysis in *Semantyczne aspekty literatury faktu*, [in:] ead. *Mimesis,* PWN, Warsaw 1997, 267-280.

of literariness in transmitting the truth of experience requires being more precisely examined on the basis of specific texts.

I will select two radically different examples: *The Pianist* by Władysław Szpilman and Miron Białoszewski's *A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprizing.* This set of works may seem surprizing because, even though both texts present dramatic experiences of the year 1944 in Warsaw, what makes them essentially dissimilar is their narration. Białoszewski wrestles with the form. It took many years of extremely personal struggles with the language to equalize his experience and its representation. Szpilman doesn't think about the form as an unusual story of his wonderful salvation becomes most vital. Białoszewski doesn't use the anecdote. The event is constituted by the dramatic recording of his impressions and attempts to express them by means of the unbearably resistant language; the poet paves his way through its tissue in order to reach the reality and testify to the truth. Szpilman doesn't and in fact does not have to generate any distance between the story-teller and the story told. He is carried by the anecdote itself. In both texts, we can find the geography of Warsaw but it's considerably distinct: in *The Pianist,* it is subordinated to the chronology of events measured with two uprizings; in *A Memoir,* there is only space of underground canals transformed into a symbolic maze.

The above juxtaposition could be concluded with a hackneyed statement: Szpilman's story is realistic, while Białoszewski wrote a poetic piece. What seems to be more important, however, is that Szpilman, not being a born writer, mainly wanted to deliver his own story and add it to the Great Book of Holocaust containing hundreds of other stories. As every witness, he attempted to establish a thread of understanding with his reader.[14] Resorting to the traditional narrative rhetoric (dialogues, rhythm accelerations, transition from narration to description, close-ups, dramatization of events), he wrote a story which not coincidentally turned out to be an excellent script. Szpilman also fulfilled his duty towards the reader for his story reads as a written live... novel![15] Hence, he chose a form characterized by literariness close to fictionalizing effects.[16]

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14 In the introduction to the 2003 edition, the author's son specifies that the book – in spite of being mutilated by censorship – allowed the author to transcend the horror of the war and "ease his returning to life".

15 The "novel" style (romanesque) is mainly characterized by attracting attention to the very course of events.

16 Szpilman didn't have to think about those issues not only because he wasn't a writer, but also because his book was one of the first works written live. The problem appeared much later, when the increasing number of accounted war stories entailed a risk of their banalization. The question about overcoming the threat of banalization is connected with the search for new

The literariness of *A Memoir* is the negation of the novel-like narration. Białoszewski's manner of writing is a cause of misunderstandings and controversies. According to Zofia Mitosek, his chatter has stylistic traits of the "fictionalizing effect" because it takes place in the present.[17] However, we should add here that the scholar's assessment of Białoszewski is made from the non-fiction point of view – in this context, his work comes off particularly unfavourably and, in comparison with e.g. Moczarski, he turns out to be a regular chatterbox!

It is necessary then to provide a distinction between "literary document" and "literary testimony". If we assume that Białoszewski does not specialize in non-fiction but writes as a witness confirming tragic events with his own experiences, his jabbering turns out to most convincingly validate the authenticity of his testimony as the language he uses is closest to the body. Elements of logic and causality are of lesser importance. What counts is the very experience encoded in one's consciousness, rendered by the witness and destructive to the traditional narrative. Białoszewski's work could be perceived as areferential if the idea of reference was only limited to historical facts but, looking for the common ground with the recipient's emotions, the author of *A Memoir* uses his pre-reflective language so powerfully that even the reader who is not equipped with sufficient knowledge about the uprizing, may almost physically live through it.

We arrive at the essence of enquiring about the role of literariness in a testimonial text. Let us go back to the above mentioned Searle, Genette and Ricoeur's theories announcing lack of differentiation between a real (serious) story and a fictional (successful) one. The above enquiry appears to be particularly helpful for it doesn't identify literariness with fiction.

A fictional story always has its beginning and its end. It aims at arranging the world. It brings the feeling of security because it refers to stable values. On the contrary, literariness has other goals: it emphasizes the distinction between what has been said and what has been experienced. In other words, according to Shusterman, it reveals the conflict between the telling subject and the object told, introducing heteronomy (components imposed from the outside) to the narrative structure.[18]

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forms of literariness. It is clearly visible in the output of Hanna Krall who, from the very beginning, assumed a role of "a second-hand witness" and decided to tell stories of others. If these stories can be considered as belonging to testimonial literature, it is because Krall defends the unique nature of each testimony, embodying its characters who entrust her with their experiences. See e.g. a short story *Powieść dla Hollywoodu* [in:] ead. *Hipnoza*, Alfa, Warsaw 1989.

17 Z. Mitosek, *Mimesis – między udawaniem...*, 238-239.

18 J.-J. Lecerle, R. Shusterman, *L'Emprise des signes*, Seuil, Paris 2002, 229 and next.

This differentiation pertains to entire literature but it seems to be especially valuable in our analysis of testimonial literature in which the strength of the message directed to the reader is determined not by the anecdote but by the witness-addressee exchange owing to their bond of empathy which enables them to experience anamnesis. In other words, the literary act means crossing the time border dividing the teller from the recipient – and this becomes possible thanks to going beyond classic literariness and ideologically stamped narration.

In this context, we could examine the function of "literariness" in *The Pianist* and *A Memoir.* Szpilman employs the most traditional form of literariness, namely narration whose main feature is fictionalization, while the text's authenticity are guaranteed by explicit referentiality. Conversely, Białoszewski weakens referentiality and achieves a rank of literariness understood not as equivalent to fiction, but as a discussion of the writing subject with the fictionalizing features of the narration. We could suspect that *The Pianist* is only saved from oblivion by the figure of the author – the famous virtuoso (this rule also applies to the functioning of numerous contemporary diaries of important politicians or film stars). The success of *The Pianist,* however, has some other underlying reasons. Significantly, Szpilman's story, written immediately after the war, attracted public attention only today, when a German publisher combined his edition with fragments of a journal written down in the POW camp by Szpilman's defender from SS. Put together, both texts contribute to creating a shocking intertextual dialogue. They construct each other – what is striking about them for the reader is not so much the story of the miraculously rescued artist (*story*) but the clash of two types of narration: the smooth and appropriate one and the fragmented, torn one. This also signifies the birth of new literariness perfectly delineated by Edward Balcerzan who underlines that "any specific substantial quality of the text cannot be the universal distinguishing feature of literariness" but its qualifier should be looked for in "relations between components of the text". This way, Balcerzan comes up with a concept of "contradiction" literariness which does not put emphasis on the very metaphorization.[19] In this sense, literariness becomes not only a possible but almost indispensable factor validating a testimony – it simply embodies the search of the most adequate form of symbiosis between denotation and connotation; the intention of the author-witness and the intention of the recipient.

19 It could be metaphorization stemming from "the hunger of unequivocalness" as in the case of Tadeusz Borowski or resulting from the fact of challenging the norm. E. Balcerzan, *Sprzecznościowa koncepcja literackości*, [in:] *Sporne i bezsporne...*

Temoin-martyr

The examples of *The Pianist* and *A Memoir* vividly indicate that there is not one literary form applicable to the testimony. Similarly, there is not a single form assigned to literary document. The two texts are different both from non-fiction (the authors involve their own experiences in the presented testimony) and auto-biography (they do not produce self-portraits). One of them is interested in the cognitive value, the other – in empathy. Following this thinking, I will refer to yet another example of the text to which the two values are equally crucial.

One of the most outstanding models of a remarkable harmony between the cognitive value and empathy in the conveyed testimony is the already mentioned *A World Apart* (*Inny Świat*) by Gustaw Herling-Grudziński. It is hard to imagine a more authentic and thrilling document of life in a labour camp. The writer compiled his memories only a few years after leaving the camp – he made no attempts at keeping to the chronology of events. He did not tell his story. What was fundamental to him was the very account complemented *ex post* with historical commentaries about the totalitarian system in Soviet camps with whose functioning he got acquainted already after having been released. The consequence is specific polyphony of his narrative mingled with the discourse. The first voice belongs to the narrator-observer who takes up the responsibility of informing about the reality unspoken in the Stalin times. This cognitive layer of the text is subject to the referential pact. The narrator transforms into the historiographer who makes meticulous and detailed notes regarding the everyday life determined by the camp regulations: "Basically, in all brigades, working time was set to eleven hours but after the break of the Russian-German war, it was extended to twelve hours […] effectively, only due to 'overtime', our norm usually oscillated between 150 and 200%."[20]

Herling enlists everything he can in numbers: grams of daily food rations, numbers of the sick, days spent in prison. These figures have the value of material evidence but they are also a stable piece of the timeless reality. The author goes further: he locates the camp history in the context of the general history. Recalling political events, he performs tasks typical of a historiographer – with precision in providing information, "the transit barrack in our camp also had a function of the Institute of Research over the Political Situation with live updates on the prices of slavery and ideological deviations in the form of newly arriving prisoners. And so – according to my companions – in 1939, it hosted the rump of the dying out Great Purge…"[21]

20 G. Herling-Grudziński, *Inny świat*, Czytelnik, Warsaw 1996, 62.

21 Ibid., 83.

Apart from providing naked facts, the author tries to analyze and explain them, "Despite the common suppositions, the entire system of forced labour in Russia – including investigations, imprisonment and life in a camp – is directed less towards punishing a criminal, and more towards exploiting him/her economically and transforming him/her completely."[22]

First, Herling-Grudziński decides to assume a role of a chronicler who notes down historical facts, trying to maintain objective neutrality. This narrator seems to be outside the anecdote and he uses the denotative language close to the language of scientific reports. This aspect of Herling-Grudziński's text would be enough to locate it among the most valuable non-fiction documents. But the writer is not content with establishing the objective truth. He seeks to resurrect anamnesis which is a difficult task especially as he invokes memories of the "other" world from which he definitely tries to cut off. The act of story-telling becomes both an experience and its rejection; it offers sympathy and creates distance. In other words, it has to turn into a text of the rank of antique tragedy or Shakespearian theater where the horror is followed by the promise of catharsis and sublimation. This is the goal, but how to achieve it? How to preserve the memory and still surmount the nightmare?

The author of *The World Apart* frequently employs narration which illustrates experience observed from various perspectives, "At a given signal, two hundred pairs of eyes moved from the ceiling to focus on the small lens of the peephole. From under the oil-cloth peak, an enormous eye was looking at us..."[23] This opening image in Herling-Grudziński's book is charged with intentionality: its axis is perception. Intentionality here is caused by the prisoners' glimpses crossing with the glance of the guard peeping inside the cell and transmitted to the recipient without a commentary from the narrator's side. The confrontation of the recipient with the image resembles reception of a film scene. Numerous dualistic connotations immediately come to mind: dominating/dominated, freedom/prison, rebel/subordination, tyranny/helplessness, etc.

This is an antipode of Szpilman's narration. The narrative element is of the secondary meaning. Descriptive narration replaces event narration, showing ousts telling. In other words, the image itself becomes a cognitive instrument. Herling-Grudziński's metaphorical descriptions refer to the internal and external reality, preserving perception and interpreting the reality at the same time. Paradoxically, subjectivization strengthens the truthfulness of the image which escapes formal mimetic and immerses into the reality experienced and felt by prisoners. Another example: "The moon was slowly becoming dim,

22 Ibid., 91.

23 Ibid., 11.

frozen on the cold surface of the sky like a lemon ring in jelly. The last stars were dwindling, still glittering for a moment against the quickly brightening background."[24]

Herling-Grudziński does not have to remind the reader that prisoners who went to work in the forest early in the morning, suffered the most due to incredible frost. The "transsensual" metaphor visualizing experiences which nearly turn into hallucinations, make the readers feel the cold on their own skin. Simultaneously, the same vivid metaphor introduces them to the world of unreality referring to the symbolic title of the book.

Special consideration should be paid to the polyphony of the text. Although it is generally obvious "who speaks" – a question which seems redundant in an auto-biographical text – Herling-Grudziński introduces a few enunciators as if transgressing through the prism of his consciousness. This results in splitting the subject into separate grammatical forms: "I", "we", "he" – all of them still representing him.

The plurality of the subject underlines representativeness of the testimony. The narrator most often uses it to describe everyday life in the camp. It is a subject of the solidarity of hatred characterized by only one "bond" – the co-prisoners' awareness of humiliation. Also in this context, metaphorization triggers transfiguration of behaviour, vesting atavistic outbreaks in the camp with a surrealist quality, "Walking along the meandering, winding paths, we looked like tentacles of a huge, black octopus with its head in the zone, pierced with four spears of spotlights, bearing to the sky its teeth of the barrack's windows glimmering in the darkness."[25]

In opposition to the collective subject, the subjective "I" is rarely used and it never reports on intimate states or feelings of the narrator. In compliance with what has already been said about literary testimony, the writer does not expose himself. At first, his "I" plays a purely formal role of the connector between sequences of the narrative. His presence becomes meaningful only in the chapter *Martyrdom for the Faith* where the writer talks about his hunger strike which resulted in ending of his imprisonment. It's the first moment of revealing the narrator's physical suffering and it's especially moving as its description distances him from his own body, "How pitifully I must have looked, crouching on the board covered with ice in the thin Soviet army jacket with my eyes set on the plain lashed by the blizzard – crying with tears of pain and pride!"[26]

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24 Ibid., 55.

25 Ibid., 96.

26 Ibid., 272.

This act of creating distance has an unexpected effect: an image of the body reduced to a caricature contrapuntally highlights the awareness of one's own humanity. Nonetheless, the most important incarnation of the narrator is the third one, when Herling-Grudziński deliberately steps back and observes others as if he observed himself, "A dozen of wiry hands covered with batches of dried blood, black from work and blue with cold, raised above the flames, eyes lit with a sickly glare, faces mortified with pain licked by the shadows of fire."[27]

The narrator's quick glimpses at his companions, when he perfectly knows that he belongs to this group himself and while speaking about them, he in fact presents himself in the third person, are a significant method of regaining dignity by creating distance towards himself which at the same time means being identified with others. Expressive power of the collective image directly affects the recipient, without subjective mediation, as if such mediation did not exist. And precisely this negation of a grammatical person, silencing the auto-biographical reminiscences, is the reason why the text has assumed the rank of literary testimony...

Another question concerns fictionalization. It is obvious that Herling-Grudziński's work, as any other text (including the historiographic ones), cannot escape fictionalizing processes which are inherent to every narration. But this process can be overcome and its effects can be diminished by means of strategies which do not rule out "literariness" of the text. In comparison with Szpilman's text which follows the rules of classic, strictly related with fiction, narration (literary treatment helps intensify the effect of the events' extraordinariness), Herling-Grudziński softens the plot in favour of manifesting the presented reality which he tries to render to the recipient just like he remembers it. He simultaneously introduces historical references of the cognitive meaning. The visible tension between the quasi-historical document and the personal testimony generates space in which cognitive objectivity and subjectivity of the subject melt with and complement each other. As already mentioned, literary testimony faces us with a fundamental question about the truthfulness of the text conveyed to recipients.[28] Since nothing enables the reader to distinguish between truth and untruth, facts and fiction, he/she has to trust the intentions of the witness who is obliged to tell the truth and nothing but the truth. Paraphrasing Lejeune, this could be defined as the "testimonial pact"[29] which can be

27 Ibid., 65.

28 Cf. R. Nycz, *Tekstowy świat*, 246.

29 It seems that the relation between a sender and a recipient could be defined in a similar way in the "literary testimony" referring this way to the "auto-biographical pact" of Ph. Lejeune.

"verified" by the recipient against his/her own references. Regardless of the intentions of the author and even if all conditions of the pact are satisfied, the fundamental matter is: how can literary mediation strengthen the authenticity of the text?

Both Herling-Grudziński and Szpilman tell unique and original stories but while Szpilman's story remains unique and raises our interest (as any other unusual story – true or imagined)[30] and is even more satisfactory as it ends well for the author, Herling-Grudziński struggles with narration, tries to amplify the performative effect of the language through its symbolization (supported by e.g. metaphorization, interruptions in the continuity of storytelling, intertextual reflections, especially in references to *The House of the Dead* by Dostoyevsky). Owing to this treatment, the story becomes universal: it's a story which never happened to us but we experience it as if it was our own.

All three analyzed examples confirm that literariness itself is not a guarantee of the objective truth. The texts by Szpilman, Herling-Grudziński and Białoszewski are inscribed in auto-biography but at the same time transcend it because the intention of the narrator-witness is not to discover himself but "his own participation in the presented."[31] In the context of non-fiction dominated by the referential and impersonal message, the discussed works are discerned by the exceptional character of a specific experience that cannot be identical to everyone.

All those categories intertwine but their analysis in separation also sheds some light on the problem of literariness which, as the analyzed examples proved, doesn't hamper testifying – quite the opposite: it is a necessary determinant of anamnesis. None of scientific – therefore denotative – texts would manage to conceptually present suffering to the recipient who has never experienced it so intensely, as it is possible in a literary piece in which a group of connotations allows to go beyond rational cognition and face the indescribable experience.

Strategies of speaking about experiences turned out to be particularly valuable in war accounts but also challenged the traditional form of narration, especially a historical novel. Not so much the accumulation of events in the cause-and-effect order as their visualization became the source of the phenomenological approach to testimonies of the past.

Literary testimony discloses insufficiency of the linear narration by opposing to it a fragment, an understatement, blanks spots of omissions, often

30 Jean-Marie Schaeffer writes about the need for fictionalization in *Pourquoi la fiction*, Seuil, Paris 1999.

31 The expression introduced by R. Nycz (*Tekstowy świat*, 254).

being only a promise of the unachievable truth. It also contributes to the final undermining of the traditional understanding of literariness often identified with novel fiction and at the same time, it challenges the extreme theories speaking about the auto-referential nature of any literature and decline of the subject. Together with the subject, references return and literariness gives them the necessary mark of authenticity.

Translation: Marta Skotnicka

Małgorzata Czermińska

Autobiographical Sites. A Proposition Within Geopoetics

I hereby propose to establish a separate category of autobiographical sites for the purpose of diagnosing phenomena situated at the intersection of literature and geography; phenomena whose description requires the simultaneous application of instruments from such diverse fields as literary criticism, anthropology, cultural studies, and humanistic geography. To put it more precisely, it's about connecting the author's biography and his output, in the broad sense of that term, meaning the complete collection of the author's preserved *oeuvre*, that is works traditionally considered literature – including essays, private notes, audio and video recordings, and works from other fields of art if practiced by the author. I still believe that the hypothesis positing a collective, synthetic subject within an author's collected work is ontologically legitimate, while its application yields tremendous insight. The idea of establishing a separate category of autobiographical site is based on such an assumption concerning the author, with reference to his biography and taking the geopoetics perspective into consideration. Elements constituting an autobiographical site might be clustered in a single piece of work, one that is essentially dedicated to the theme of placement

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within a specific place; they can also be scattered across a plethora of texts, successively complementing or transforming the vision of a site. Despite the literary multitude of possible forms, it always refers to a territory described toponymically that features in the writer's biography. The reader can have unfettered access to that territory, unmarred by the vision outlined by the writer, because it exists in extraverbal space, as a geographic object equipped with its own appropriate cultural symbolism.

On both of these levels: output and biography, we constantly encounter methodological traps and clash with issues stemming from different methods of interpretation – not to mention the confrontation of both of the aforementioned planes. However, confronted with the impossibility of solving problems plaguing both levels, we sometimes have to face a third in hope of finding a proper solution. That's how I understand the insight available to scholars investigating the relationships between an author's output and his biography, stemming from the spatial (topographical) turn that has taken place in the humanities. Various possibilities, either rooted directly in humanistic geography (e.g. the works of Yi-Fu Tuan[1]) or attempts to transform and utilize them, whether according to the spirit of geopoetics, as proposed by Kenneth White,[2] or using the term geocriticism, as coined by Bertrand Westphal,[3] encourage further investigation. At the same time, these new ideas should not sever themselves from prior traditions of studying space, started back when structuralism still dominated literary theory and further developed within the field of cultural semiotics, phenomenology or mythography research, related to ethnology and anthropology to which the California school of humanist geography is very indebted. Out of the invoked concepts, "geopoetics" seems to be the most widely accepted in recent efforts of Polish literary theorists, particularly due to Elżbieta Rybicka, who labored relentlessly to introduce the study of space in the humanities and related issues to the Polish scholastic

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

2 K. White *Wstęp do geopoetyki* in: K. White, *Poeta kosmograf*, ed. and trans. K. Brakoniecki (Olsztyn: Centrum Polsko-Francuskie Côtes d'Armor–Warmia i Mazury, 2010). The publication also contains interviews, where White elaborates on the different aspects of his understanding of geopoetics which, according to White himself, is not just an investigative method but rather a specific philosophy of life, cultural practice, and literary program.

3 *La géocritique. Mode d'emploi*, ed. B. Westphal (Limoges: PULIM, 2000), as quoted in: E. Rybicka, "Geopoetyka (o mieście, przestrzeni i miejscu we współczesnych teoriach i praktykach kulturowych)" in: *Kulturowa teoria literatury. Główne pojęcia i problemy*, ed. M.P. Markowski and R. Nycz (Kraków: Universitas, 2006).

landscape.[4] In my opinion, the name is both convenient and accurate, therefore I agree with the position that supports its common usage.

For scholars examining work that's clearly marked with the autobiographical attitude, whether in the case of personal document literature in the strict sense of the term or in reference to texts wherein autobiographism serves a constitutive purpose, the geopoetic perspective is an especially valuable ally, since it helps counter the tendency to treat autobiographical writing as a pure construct, as something that's not fundamentally different from fiction. This radical claim, put forward by a certain group of scholars, was the result of the their attempts to distance themselves from simplistic psychologizing and a naïve understanding of representation in autobiographies. Paul de Man, for example, focused on the rhetoric character of autobiographic writing and coined the term *de-facement*, deftly translated into Polish as *od-twarzanie*.[5] In essence, his theory aims to demonstrate that writing an autobiography is rooted in the process of depersonalization of both author and protagonist, accompanied by the loss of their collective face, because individual countenance dissolves in the linguistic matter of hints and clues subject to the laws governing rhetoric. Given that the Polish translation of de Man's eponymous term creates the illusion of tension between the literal and figurative readings of the expression, [noted below in the footnotes –trans.] however, the scholar's reasoning does not suggest the assumption of such a perspective. Moreover, literary criticism will find no counterbalance to this tendency in postmodern methodological examinations of the teaching of history, given that, for example, Hayden White describes the work of the scholar in this particular profession as something akin to historical writing, arranging its outcomes according to the rules of literary genres and aesthetic categories like tragedy and comedy. Meanwhile, humanist geography is conducive to the exploration of extraliterary references, essential in the study of autobiographical writing, and refrains from pushing the scholar back into naïve psychologism.

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4 E. Rybicka, "From a Poetics of Space to a Poetics of Site: a Topographical Turn in Literary Research," *Second Texts* 4 (2008): 21-38. The first Polish book dealing with categories of humanist geography that I can think of is Beata Tarnowska's *Geografia poetycka w powojennej twórczości Czesława Miłosza* (Olsztyn: Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej, 1996), published in a very limited run.

5 P. de Man, "Autobiografia jako od-twarzanie," trans. M.B. Fedewicz in: *Dekonstrukcja w badaniach literackich*, ed. R. Nycz (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2000) [*od-twarzanie* is wordplay that combines the literal reading of the word *odtwarzanie*, that is *reconstruction* or *recounting of events* with the figurative reading of the hyphenate, which translates into *removing the face* –trans.]

Individual Memory Sites

Distinguishing between space and site, first demonstrated (or rather clarified) by Yi-Fu Tuan is absolutely crucial for the differentiation of autobiographical site as a separate category. To put it more simply, geographic space is an established fact, and as such is a tangible subject of scientific inquiry. A site, however, is a separate portion of space; a part whose singularity stems not only from its concrete characteristics, but primarily from its assigned cultural symbolism, created, disseminated, and transformed by social traditions. We should also remember that this particular understanding of the concept of site is similar to the way of thinking that has functioned in culture since time immemorial, whether as the distinction between *sacrum* and *profanum* and the idea of the *axis mundi* or the ancient Roman belief in the protective spirit of a given place, called *genius loci*, which subsequent cultural traditions appropriated as the symbol of the literary mythos of a specific place. The Romantic-era emphasis on local color and traditions coupled with the subsequent revival of regionalism infused these notions with new energy. The advent of globalization, however, presented the aforementioned ideas with new challenges, with the concept of glocalization emerging out of the upheaval.

The autobiographical site as a concept serving to augment literary theory fits the understanding of place as described by Yi-Fu Tuan in his exegesis of humanist geography, it exists, however, on a wholly separate level.[6] It retains its necessary connection to a geographical place, it is not, however, a piece of tangible, existing space or even a set of cultural meanings and notions assigned to it. It is distinguished by two basic attributes: it has individual character and is shaped primarily by literary matter (in its broad understanding, as mentioned in the opening passages of this article). It is my belief that autobiographical sites can be found also in other fields of art, especially painting, photography, and film; therefore, although this proposed category could be transposed into the realm of art history and cultural studies, I will not be developing this particular thread herein.

When claiming that its singular dimension, that is the reference to the individual, is the autobiographical site's inalienable attribute, we should also remember that certain geographical places often have their own cultural specificity, shaped over the course of entire centuries, their own colorful local mythology. We can see this quite clearly in resplendent cities of the Antiquity

6 A further development of preliminary ideas presented at the "Narracje migracyjne w literaturze polskiej XX i XXI wieku" conference held at the University of Warsaw on May 5-6, 2011 in a lecture *Kategoria "miejsca autobiograficznego" w literaturze doby migracji*, later included in the post-conference publication edited by H. Gosk and in the *Introduction* to *Czesława Miłosza "Północna strona,"* ed. M. Czermińska and K. Szalewska (Gdańsk: Scholar, 2011), 6-17.

like Babylon, Jerusalem, and Rome, as well as metropolises of the modern era, like Paris, whose mythology was scrutinized by Roger Caillois,[7] or Petersburg, examined by Vladimir Toporov.[8] The phenomenon may also be related to select spaces of nature. In the case of sites already infused with specific cultural symbolism, the notion of an autobiographical site of a given author partially stems from existing traditions and partially charges and enriches the existing imagery with original, individual tones, similarly to what T.S. Eliot described when characterizing the relationship between tradition and individual talent. The extent of the originality of that individual tone or its derivativeness with respect to stereotypes is a quantitative, rather than qualitative issue. Even the less artistically creative image of an autobiographical site by definition has to contain some elements that are linked to the life of that person and that person alone.

There are also writers who managed to create a literary mythos around a place that has never before exhibited any extraordinary personality and could not dare match the charm of ancient cities whose traditions span entire centuries. That's what Bruno Schulz accomplished for Drohobych. However, we should not forget that literary critics noticed that Schulz's work, notorious for doing away with proper topographic names, contains an autobiographical site only fairly recently. The work of Jerzy Ficowski and Jerzy Jarzębski is especially important in this regard. Also, some of Schulz's drawings and illustrations are important to his creation of an autobiographical site with regard to pre-war Drohobych. Another example: the private mythology of Sanok and its surroundings created in the poetry of Janusz Szuber, in the context of alluding to personal experiences from his childhood and adolescence, as well as the past histories of his own family, his neighbors, and other inhabitants of the city.

Invoking the category of memory sites, established by Pierre Nora[9] in reference to the shared past of communities, allows us to define autobiographical sites as their equivalent in the realm of an individual's existential experience, as sort of individual sites of memory. They require no social sanction, and are not rooted in collective consciousness or mentality. Although they often employ collective representations and notions, which they later incorporate

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7 R. Caillois, "Paryż, mit współczesny" in: R. Caillois, *Odpowiedzialność i styl. Eseje*, ed. M. Żurowski, trans. K. Dolatowska (Warszawa: PIW, 1967).

8 V. Toporov, "Petersburg i tekst Petersburski literatury rosyjskiej. Wprowadzenie do tematu" in: V. Toporov, *Miasto i mit*, ed. and trans. B. Żyłko (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2000).

9 P. Nora, "Czas pamięci," trans. W. Dłuski, *Res Publica Nowa* 7 (2001); E. Rybicka, "Venue, Memory, Literature (in the Perspective of Geo-Poetics)," *Teksty Drugie* 1-2 (2008); A. Szpociński, "Sites of Memory (lieux de mémoire)," *Teksty Drugie* 4 (2008).

themselves into to possibly become an element present in a historical memory site (e.g. in the case of a preeminent artists linked with a given place), they retain their autonomy due to a particular frame of reference involving the individual history of a specific person and existing within their individual oeuvre. The pmain difference between this new category and memory sites as posited by Nora is their existential status: autobiographical sites exist in literature, they are notions composed out of descriptions, toponyms included in the text, allusions, and metaphors. However, they also have objective, tangible, topographically situated equivalents like the writer's home turned into a musum, a monument, a memorial plaque, a tourist trail linking places related to the writer's biography and/or locations used in his work. The bond between literary notions and their reflections in reality, the bond suggesting associations with historical sites of memory in the way Nora envisioned it, is also shaped by works that reveal just how how deep the autobiographical site is anchored in geographical space: guidebooks (Joyce's and Leopold Bloom's Dublin, Białoszewski's Warsaw, Huelle's and Chwin's Gdańsk), city plans and maps that feature tourist trails (like the Mickiewicz Trail in Belarus, which covers places where the poet lived as well as locations that he allegedly used as templates for the environments he later described in his works, particularly *Pan Tadeusz*). A similar function is served by quote-laden plaques posted on objects to which the quotes refer (e.g. the "Writers in Gdańsk" series had the building of the Gdańsk-Oliwa railway station adorned with a plaque featuring the station's description taken out of one of Chwin's works); or announcing the locations of fictional sites or enterprises, like the plaques in Warsaw hanging by the entrance to Wokulski's store (by the Castle Square) and his apartment (at Krakowskie Przedmieście).

The autobiographical site category should also be confronted with the claims of Marc Augé, the man behind the definition of a new phenomenon in the spatial order, a phenomenon Augé dubbed the "non-place." The French anthropologist considered the anonymous, deindividualized non-places like the train station, airport lounges or the supermarket characteristic of the latest phase of Western culture he christened "hypermodernity" (or "supermodernity"). They are "spaces which are not themselves anthropological places and which, unlike 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."[10] I believe that one fine example of literary creation of non-places can be found in Olga Tokarczuk's *Runners*, in the form of international airports through which

10 M. Augé, *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (New York: Verso, 1995), 78.

the narrators constantly roams. The concept of autobiographical site refers to modern literature, in which they function as anthropological by nature, they are, as Augé writes, "relational, historical, and concerned with identity."[11] They are the opposite of the non-place, the latter deprived of individualism, like a hotel, decorated and furnished just like every other hotel administered by the international chain brand. The literary autobiographical site is a semantic, symbolic equivalent of a genuine geographic location and cultural notions associated with it. It does not exist in a geographical vacuum, does not pertain to geometric space, universal and empty. It is always linked with topographic, tangible matter, even if it is subject to literary transformations, typical of not only metaphors found in realistic genres, but also of the rules of the oneiric and the fantastic.

Evidently, not all writers carve out autobiographical sites in literature, just as not all writers mine their own lives for material with which to build their fictional worlds. Drawing on personal experiences does not necessarily mean including one's strictly personal affairs, the latter comprising autobiographic matter. I don't consider the radical dichotomy: between writers demonstrating a proclivity towards adopting autobiographic attitudes and those who consistently shun it, to be appropriate in this particular case. It's a spectrum, rather than a simple division, a spectrum covering the span between two extremes, on which each author can find his own place.

Topographic Imagination

Aside from a proclivity towards adopting personal perspectives in writing, the author needs to exhibit a specific sort of imagination in order to create an autobiographical site. There are authors who, for the purpose of this paper, I would define as possessing a topographic imagination, that is authors prone to observing the external world, gifted with high sensitivity to sensual stimuli, interested in the richness of the tangible, with a feeling for the significance of the material detail. Concerned with landscapes and objects, they pose questions about values and meaning that may be hidden within shapes, colors, sounds, and scents, movements and light. They're curious about the visible world, they see its diversity, either beautiful and strange or daunting. Or they probe it for traces of the past. Such an imagination can be found in the work of writers as different from one another as Iwaszkiewicz, Miłosz, Konwicki, Białoszewski, and Zagajewski. Each and every one of them managed to create a vivid reflection of their own autobiographical sites. These authors offer

11 ibid., 77.

very interesting avenues of inquiry to scholars convinced that employing the concept of geopoetics and its methods might lead to valuable insight.

If in his poem *Blacksmith Shop* Miłosz repeats the word "stare" twice and then concludes that he was called "to glorify things just because they are," then the opposite end of the imagination spectrum may attract writers who could describe themselves as called to "turning ideas inside out" just because ideas exist. Authors like these are rather insensitive to the material stimuli of the three-dimensional, tangible world; however, they are not necessarily only interested in exploring their own interior world. They tend to pursue either abstract thought constructs or other people, the latter's psychological lives and social relationships. They are rather indifferent towards the material backdrop against which their characters move, speak, and act. Writers like Parnicki, Mrożek, Wat, and Gombrowicz, each of whom managed to live all across Europe and on other continents, were in no position to complain about a lack of external stimuli. They lived abroad for years, they could have extolled the loss of one's own place or become travellers, drinking in exotic stimuli. However, none of them considered topograhic concrete realities to be worthy of focused, long-term attention.

Bronisław Świderski (b. 1946) is a clear example of a writer born after WW2 who turned his back on the sensual expressiveness of geographic reality, although circumstances seemed to push him in that exact direction and offered him a plenty of opportunity to contrast and compare. After the 1968 political crisis in Poland, Świderski emigrated to Denmark. In his pronouncedly autobiographic novel *Asystent śmierci* (*Death's Assistant*), the plot presents the narrator and protagonist in two timelines and two separate places: between his post-1968 years in Copenhagen and the memories of a childhood and adolescence spent in Warsaw. The narrative is filled with people and conversation the author had with them, writing and reading, alternately the work of Kierkegaard and the three versions of the résumé of his mother, a woman obsessed with concealing her Jewish extraction which, in her opinion, carried a death sentence attached to it. Despite the tension between the fortunes of a Jewish writer in Poland and Denmark, a tension crucial for the novel and anchored in autobiographical motifs, the space of both cities does not exist as a topographic reality. Warsaw is represented by the interior of an apartment shared with a sick, eccentric father, whereas Copenhagen is reduced to waiting rooms and employment offices, as well as the hospice where the narrator worked and an apartment, empty after his wife left him. The only thing he witnesses in the city are protests held by Muslims in response to the publication of cartoons lampooning the Prophet.

Writers indifferent towards the realities of topography can mark their autobiographical sites in other ways, namely by introducing toponyms or

referring to specific historical events or institutions whose location is known from extraliterary reality. Świderski's example perfectly illustrates this. He unambiguously identifies the two cities appearing in his narratives through frequent use of toponyms – Warsaw and Copenhagen. He avoids introducing pseudonyms, even though a similar trail was already blazed by Żeromski and Dąbrowska, the former changing the name of Kielce whereas the latter employed a pseudonym for Kalisz. Writers with reality-and-fact-sensitive imaginations also have one other way of dealing with toponyms at their disposal: they can omit them and then introduce a plethora of suggestions that facilitate the identification of the topographic original of their literary creation; such an approach was employed by Bruno Schulz in his treatment of Drohobych and by Magdalena Tulli in her portrayal of Warsaw in *Dreams and Stones*.

Secondly, Świderski invokes specific events from the histories of both cities. From sources other than his autobiographical narrative we know that the events of October of 1956, which later sealed the fate of the narrator's father, took place in Warsaw, while the student strikes of March of 1968, which led to the narrator's decision to emigrate from the country, started at the University of Warsaw. Copenhagen indubitably is Kierkegaard's hometown, and the institute dedicated to the study of the philosopher's output was the narrator's place of employment for quite some time. Additionally, in 2005, a Copenhagen-based newspaper gained international notoriety for publishing a cartoon caricature of the Prophet Mohammed, which led to violent protests breaking out across the Muslim world.

I do not consider the distinction between the two types of imagination to be dichotomous in nature, as two mutually exclusive possibilities. I believe that they constitute two ends of a spectrum, on which writers situate themselves in places they consider appropriate. That's why writers devoid of topographic sensibility sometimes exhibit glimmers of that attribute. In his book *A Journal of Return*, Sławomir Mrożek included a series of snapshots depicting his Mexican estate which he is just about to leave to return to Krakow. In the poem *Willows in Alma-Ata*, Wat managed to create memorable, incredibly rich metaphors of homeland and place of exile with no more than a few dozen words.

Therefore, the creation an autobiographical site requires from the author a proclivity to adopt an autobiographical perspective and a well-developed topographic imagination.

Elements comprising an autobiographical site can be found both in texts that could easily be considered an author's personal documents, if such materials were ever created (including autobiographies, journals, memoirs, personal letters), as well as in an author's fictional output, poems, essays, critical texts, and commentaries on one's own work, interviews, etc., obviously taking

into account the nature of conventions utilized in these declarations. Simultaneously, we use publicly available biographical information, not only textual but visual as well. It might be photographs (including captions describing the location and date the photo was taken) that feature compelling topographic elements which, in turn, facilitate the identification of a place, or distinctive accessories. In other words, we include whatever helps us to situate biographical events and provides context facilitating the understanding of elements of literary works, especially works featuring specific regional characteristics and allusions to peculiar cultural phenomena. The photographs of Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz are one example, especially pictures from Zakopane and the Tatra Mountains, as well as numerous portraits of the writer in these surroundings; these pictures shed additional light on specific details of scenery portrayed in the author's novels and emphasize the presence of autobiographical elements and devices typical for a roman à clef in Witkiewicz's work.

When examining an autobiographical site, we need to contemplate the plethora of diverse situations that comprise the writer's existence: place of birth, where he grew up, went to school, attended college, his journeys and the places he visited, as well as changes in place of residence that are important from the perspective of traces that they might have left behind in the author's oeuvre. The majority of literary creations of personal territory pertains, perhaps unsurprisingly, to places where authors were born and spent their childhoods, with archetypal subtexts usually present and operative. There are, of course, exceptions: Nałkowska spent her entire life in Warsaw but created her autobiographical site in *The House Upon the Meadows*, wherein she referred to her parent's summer cabin in Górki near Warsaw, whereas Adam Zagajewski created the most illustrious portrayal of Krakow, where he spent his college years, alongside an imaginary Lviv i Gliwice. The countries he visited as a journalist clinched the creation of Africa as Ryszard Kapuściński's autobiographical side, alongside his lost hometown of Pinsk about which he did not manage to write in the end, leaving behind only drafts and sketches. Long-term invariability in the author's place of residence may also serve as an important clue to understanding the work, as it was with the portrayal of Warsaw in the writings of Miron Białoszewski and Małgorzata Baranowska.

Aside from the author's own literary work, we should also contemplate all other textual or visual (e.g. a photograph or a painting) traces of the author's interest in other people's descriptions of his site/region, of the traditions and mythologies of these places, and elaborations on their *genius loci*. The creation of an autobiographical site is not based solely on one's existential experience, it is also related to the exploration of and participation in the traditions of a given place – even if the link to other people's testimonies is hidden or only alluded to. Often enough, however, texts authored by one's predecessors are

not only invoked or referred to, they are weaved into one's own work, like, for example, historic documents from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania appearing in the footnotes of Czesław Miłosz's poem *Where the Sun Rises and Where it Sets*.

We also need to consider the evidence of an author's interest in other people's written (and visual) portrayals of their journeys to places the author chose or was cast into by fate, only to be appropriated as his own, its images incrusted with intertextual references. Focusing on Iwaszkiewicz's multiple references to journeys through Italy pervading the European literary canon would be an example of such an approach, as would be the oral narratives of Karol Szymanowski who managed to inculcate his cousin with an undying curiosity of all things Sicilian. The same goes for Jerzy Stempowski, whose essays on Berne and its surroundings contain traces of the author's extensive knowledge of the area derived from historical records. This sort of mediation plays a significant role in the process of familiarization of foreign territories and appropriating it for one's own autobiographical site. The predecessor, either by interacting with the author directly or whose work the author explores himself, facilitates his introduction into this new territory, serves as the writer's protective spirit whose role is to initiate him into communing with the *genius loci*. This allows to examine not only the individual relationship between the output of an author prone to adopting an autobiographical perspective who we're interested in and other writers whose work captivated and engaged him, but also the shaping of comprehensive cultural symbolism of a given topographic territory.

Types of Autobiographical Sites

Through observation of the types of autobiographical sites created as part of the creative praxis of Polish writers active in the second half of the 20th century, I discerned a dichotomy between stasis and mobility taking shape in the background of the matter. The dichotomy perfectly fits the historic and social realities of the transformations our culture underwent after WW2; at its heart, it invokes the aforementioned basic distinctions supplied by cultural anthropology. Distinguishing between a permanent and shifted autobiographical sites is absolutely fundamental. The permanent place is given in nature, inherited, in a sense, whereas the shifted one is linked with coming out into the world, movement, and the arrival at some other point where the journey comes to an end. It is a situation encompassing what's chosen, acquired or imposed, therefore completely different than residing in a primal place, a place we possess, in which we simply are. We also need to invoke one other distinction, one that is not only critical but also anthropological in nature, namely the spatial *topoi* of the home and the road,

related to the distinction between open and closed space. We're familiar with the matter thanks to numerous investigations in the field of semiotics, phenomenology, and mythography, enquiries which despite adopting different methodologies all yielded fascinating results and which now serve as sources for current research in the field of cultural studies (although the tradition often goes unacknowledged). On the other hand, social sciences give us another basic distinction: between societies that are closed and static (originally usually agrarian) and those espousing openness and mobility (originally nomadic, pastoral, or mercantile and thus often seafaring).[12] Therefore, from the perspective of attitudes one can adopt towards space we see two fundamental possibilities open up: we either live statically or in motion. Movement comes in three basic forms: it's either vacating and returning to (even repeated) one's place of residence (traveling), transplanting oneself into another place (resettlement), or constant migration (nomadism). Each of these three forms can be found in literature. Motion is one of humanity's ways of relating to space, we have to take it into account when reconstructing literary autobiographical sites.

Given that one's location in space stems directly from one's biographical situation and given the writer's particular way of constructing narrative, we can identify multiple different types of autobiographical sites, namely observed, recollected, conceived, shifted, chosen, and touched upon.

Only the observed site is permanent in nature. It may be a slightly unfortunate name, because observation seems to be characteristic of topographic imagination, but I will be using it due to lack of a better way to emphasize that it is about creating an autobiographical site here and now, or, possibly, here and back then, in any event, creating it without introducing spatial distance, without detachment. The subject is basically constantly present in his actual area, observing it day in and day out to later channel the observations into creating its literary reflection. He writes about a place while being present at that particular place, usually with a sense of being firmly linked with it which, in turn, often stems from the fact that one was born and raised there.[13] A model example of this approach can be found in Miron

12 cf. Becker's and Barnes' classic study, H. Becker, H.E. Barnes, *Social Thought from Lore to Science: A History and Interpretation of Man's Ideas About Life with His Fellows* (New York: Dover Publications, 1961).

13 A permanent place of residence, passed from generation to generation, a staple among Eastern European noblemen, was analyzed from a perspective inspired by humanist geography by Vasily Shchukin in the book *Mit szlacheckiego gniazda. Studium geokulturologiczne o klasycznej literaturze rosyjskiej* [*The Myth of the Nest of the Gentry: A Geoculturological Study of Classical Russian Literature*], trans. B. Żyłko (Kraków: Universitas, 2006).

Białoszewski's portrayal of Warsaw or the way both Huelle and Chwin write about Gdańsk. It is a clear opposite of a migratory situation, it is a place that's one's own, fully accepted. However, the anxiety spawned by the era of migration and historic shockwaves eventually reached the territories of permanent residence. Warsaw, portrayed by Białoszewski with incredible precision and attentional to detail, is a place forever mauled by the experience of the Uprising, the division into a pre- and post-Uprising Warsaw constantly present in its appearance and character. In everyday trivialities, among "denunciations of [everyday] reality" arranged in "rustles, nodes, and strings," or among memories of childhood games, of a boy playing theater in a small pre-war apartment in Leszno, we constantly encounter echoes of that liminal time of the Uprising, even if they're only naïve urban legends about women buried alive under mountains of rubble who survived the Uprising and never learned that the war is over, ate mushroom sprouting from the walls, and pressed linens to pass the time. *Heart Attack*, Białoszewski's autobiographical book about the cardiac incident he went through in 1974 and his subsequent stay in the hospital sheds additional light on his earlier book, *A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising*, revealing the *Memoir* to be a depiction of a city undergoing a similar catastrophic failure of its most vital organs. The city did not move horizontally, along the surface of the earth, but vertically, collapsing in on itself, falling into ruin.

By employing the fact of being born and raised citizens of Gdańsk as an autobiographic, allusive backdrop in their novels and short stories, both Huelle and Chwin are able to adopt and fully accept the palimpsest-like text about the complex, multilayered history of the city as their own; however, emphasizing that they're only the first of their families to be assigned permanent residence in the city is a very important component of the image of the places they create from the perspective of being *here*. Their prose features a recollective perspective espoused by the previous generations, that is migrants who were forced to abandon their homes in Vilnius, Lviv and razed neighborhoods of Warsaw, and who cannot fully accept Gdańsk to be a place they could regard as their own.

All of the other types of autobiographical sites were directly marked by migratory situations. The remembered site was once permanent, a given, but was lost, often as a result of expulsion or escape. Usually it was a place where they were born and raised, where they spent their adolescence and settled into a pleasant life, which they eventually had to leave due to some unforeseen cataclysm. This image enlists, in more ways than one, the Mickiewiczian trope of lost idyll, kept alive by Sienkiewicz in *The Lighthouse Keeper*, and then updated in 1942 by a group of editors who collected the memoirs of wartime émigrés in a volume entitled *Kraj lat dziecinnych* (*The*

Land of Childhood Years), the name an unambiguous reference to the tradition.[14] This trope, very susceptible to stereotyping, found particularly fertile ground in popular reminiscent literature. On the other hand, it's incredibly resilient, as evidenced by the fact that it recently provoked a parody response in the form of a poem by Tomasz Różycki called *Twelve Stations*; even its ironic perspective, however, does not completely nullify the amusing mixture of nostalgia and bawdiness. The recollected model of autobiographical site, represented quite extensively in literature about the Eastern Borderlands, has been developing – albeit not necessarily in a stereotypical way – since World War I, starting with Wańkowicz's depiction of the "puppy years," through Iwaszkiewicz's portrayal of Ukraine, Vincenzo's descriptions of Hutsul lands, the depiction of the Vilnius region authored by Miłosz, Konwicki, and Żakiewicz, Haupt and Wołoszyński's Podolia, and Stempowski's portrayal of the Dniester River valley and Volhynia (to mention only a few of the authors). The phenomenon is undoubtedly very important to the subject, but it's too well-known and well-studied to pay any more attention to the subject, therefore I will conclude the diagnosis at indicating its existence. Kapuściński, a writer whose topographic imagination was directed towards constant motion rather than stasis, also attempted to create his own autobiographical site. There might be some significance to the fact that the book about Pinsk he so often promised to write never came about and the autobiographical site mentioned by the author comprises only drafts and outlines: the first piece in *The Polish Bush*, the opening of *Imperium*, a movie documenting his journey with Anders Bodegård, and a host of statements given here and there.

Family traditions play a key role in the creation of conceived autobiographic sites, that is created with reference to a geographic camera which the writer did not get to know firsthand, and had no prior opportunity to explore. Genealogy, important on its own for recollected sites, is absolutely fundamental when it comes to establishing conceived sites. This is especially pertinent in the case of second-generation immigrants. For them, the past is available not via their own memories but rather through an imaginary anchoring in an inaccessible space whose image is created as a result of familial influence and cultural mythos, *sans* confrontation with personal, extraverbal experiences. The conceived site is established in a process, its methods resembling archeological research; the site belongs to the field of genealogy rather than autobiography in the strict sense, while the effort required to create it, in spite of migratory realities, makes it more prone to creating utopias in comparison to the effort necessary to establish recollected sites. Podolia as portrayed in

14 *Kraj lat dziecinnych*, ed. M. Grydzewski, K. Pruszyński (London: M.I. Kolin, 1942)

Odojewski's work, including a few of his later short stories and episodes of *Oksana*, is a crucial example of this thesis (although we know from the writer's biography that his notion of Podolia was formed primarily during one short journey he was taken on when he was still a little boy). Another example can be found in Anna Bolecka's *The White Stone*, a novel with a clear autobiographic undercurrent, which, unfortunately, combines knowledge of genuine genealogy, uncertain and full of gaps, with conjecture and speculation.

Lviv from Zagajewski's *Two Cities* and his poem *To Go to Lvov* also belongs to that type of site, or at least it did before the author finally visited the city and confronted his idea of Lviv with the personal experience of visiting the city. It did not, however, develop characteristics of a recollected site in the process. The image of the city was significantly improved after the author composed the essay *Should We Visit Sacred Places?* (later included in his volume *A Defense of Ardor*). It might have seemed that the publication will put the writer's interest in that subject to an end. His latest book, however, entitled *A Slight Exaggeration*, expands his reflections and writes about imaginary Lviv as a place that parents reminisce about, insofar as the father is one of the most important characters of this personal narrative. Like his earlier publication, *Another Beauty*, *A Slight Exaggeration* is not strictly about poetry, but rather about a poet. Moreover, it's not about a poet in general, but about a specific poet, namely Adam Zagajewski; his recent essays are permeated with the autobiographic element, the latter, however, expressed through a framework of intellectual, spiritual autobiography. In *A Slight Exaggeration* he even invokes the patron saint of such an approach to personal writing: Henryk Elzenberg as author of a philosophical journal entitled *The Problem with Existence*.

A shifted site appears whenever an émigré finds a "second homeland" where he settles down and which he accepts to the extent that he includes it in his work. Often enough (but not always), that process is accompanied by the creation of a recollected site encompassing places that were familiar once. I believe that to be the case of Jerzy Stempowski as author of *Ziemia berneńska* [*The Bernese Lands*], a volume of essays on the landscapes surrounding the Swiss capital, wherein the author finds traces of the region's culture and history which he then interprets using his extensive knowledge of European literature, philosophy, and painting. His *Listy z ziemi berneńskiej* [*Letters from the Bernese Lands*] also fit that particular mould, as do some of the pieces from *Essays for Cassandra*, e.g. *At the Schaffhausen Waterfalls*. Stempowski, without bringing up facts and events from his own life, portrays himself rather as someone speaking within the text, as someone who partakes in the common heritage of Europe, in which he sees himself as both a citizen of Switzerland (where he studied before the war) as well as a native of the specific region of Ukraine where his ancestors once dwelled and where he spent his childhood

and adolescence. He portrays these lands as a recollected site in *In the Dniester Valley*, *Esej berdyczowski* [*The Berdychov Essay*], *Bagaż z kalinówki* [*Luggage from Kalynivka*], and Dom Strawińskiego w Uściługu [*Stravinsky's Home in Ustyluh*].

Maybe we should also notice a shifted site in Miłosz's *Visions from San Francisco Bay*, some fragments of *The Year oh the Hunter*, and references to California landscapes scattered among his poems. In *Notes on Exile* (Berkeley, 1975), which were already quoted herein in order to support the definition of personal point of reference in spatial orientation, crucial for the localization of person settled into a specific place, Miłosz also describes the situation which I took to calling transposition:

> Although quite popular, literature of yearning is only one of many ways to cope with being severed from one's homeland. A new point that organizes space in reference to itself cannot be eliminated, that is, you can't abstract yourself out of physical presence in a particular place on Earth. That is why we're faced with a peculiar phenomenon: two centers and two spaces around them, overlapping or – if we're lucky – fusing.[15]

Multiple passages in *The Journal Written at Night* and a series of short stories taking place in and around Naples (starting with *Pieta dell'Isola* published in 1959, through The Bridge, Ruins, The Miracle, *The Plague in Naples*, and many, many others, the last of them being *Death Knell for the Bell-Ringer*, published in 2000) painted a picture of the situation that Herling-Grudziński found himself in. In one of the interviews he's given on living in the "city under a volcano," the writer explained that he and his wife, Lidia Croce, picked Naples as their new homeland (they also considered moving to Germany) as they wanted at least one of them to be "at home" instead of both of them being émigrés. The author often wrote he hasn't felt accepted by native denizens of Naples for decades and that he himself accepted the little office in their house in Dragonea as his place on Earth only in his twilight years, long after his work brought him success and critical acclaim and after visiting his erstwhile homeland. For Grudziński, the Naples region and a handful of other places in Italy, their magnificent scenery, history, traditions, folklore, and other peculiarities became an inexhaustible treasure trove of ideas and topics. The term "fortunate solution" might be slightly inappropriate (for a variety of reasons)

15 Cz. Miłosz, *Noty o wygnaniu* in: Cz. Miłosz, Zaczynając od moich ulic (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 1990), 49. A wider context for the sort of self-identification we find expressed in Miłosz's version of the figure of he stranger, depicted as someone capable of quickly finding his bearings in new places, can be found in R. Nycz, "Osoba w nowoczesnej literaturze: ślady obecności" in: R. Nycz, *Literatura jako trop rzeczywistości. Poetyksa epifanii w nowoczesnej literaturze polskiej* (Krakow: Universitas, 2001), 73-77.

in Herling-Grudziński's vision of man's existence, however, as far as the craft of writing is concerned, the fact that he found another, fertile homeland for his imagination seems undeniably fortunate. We also know of the recollected site of *The Tower*'s author thanks to Włodzimierz Bolecki's inquisitive interpretation; the latter's *Ciemna miłość* (employing a Mickiewiczian phrase about one's land of childhood years) consolidated a series of poignant and emphatic references to Grudziński's hometown of Suchedniów scattered among the pages of *The Journal Written at Night*.[16]

In the work he has written during his stay in Guatemala, Andrzej Bobkowski established his own shifted site within the tiny South American country he had moved to after his deliberate and decisive withdrawal from the European continent.

Shifted sites present in the work of the generation that grew up in the interwar period do not displace one's memories of a permanent place that once was given and then was lost. This, in turn, is counteracted by the nostalgic perspective, typical for writers of the "second wave" of postwar emigration. Nostalgia, however, does not really carry that much weight for the younger generation of émigrés who fled the People's Republic of Poland "choosing freedom" in the West, for people who left the country after the wave of anti-Semitism that swept Poland after the 1968 political crisis, as well as for the post-Solidarity émigrés. For these three formations, the transplantation into other locations is linked with the feeling of overwhelming loss, and strongly associated with unrest and anger towards the rejected realities of socialist Poland, whose veil of lies and hypocrisy only furthered the erosion of its ability to serve as one's own place, a place underpinning one's identity.

Chosen sites are different from shifted sites in that you can only visit the former, you cannot reside in them permanently. They are chosen due to particular values they espouse or endorse, however, for a variety reasons, people who choose them are unable to reside in them. They do not have to be associated with the most severe form of migration, namely expulsion, although as a result of historical and social realities of 20th century Poland they were found and chosen primarily in that specific context. They may also function within the confines of the notion of journey. A chosen place can be a migrant's temporary asylum, where one cannot stay permanently due to certain circumstances, but where one can, from time to time, find a realm that is more beautiful and superior to one's everyday life. This adopted "homeland of the soul" is usually found by travel aficionados who in their accounts of journeying to different captivating corners of the globe

16 W. Bolecki, *Ciemna miłość. Szkice do portretu Gustawa Herlinga-Grudzińskiego* (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2005), 141-165.

always save the greatest praise for their privileged sites, to which they also frequently return and which they incorporate in their biographies and their work. Iwaszkiewicz made both Italy and Sicily (and Sandomierz, but to a lesser extent) his chosen sites, making them the subject of his travelogues and poetry, and using them as locations for short stories and novels (like his "Italian novellas" and *Fame and Glory*). Iwaszkiewicz also incorporated them in his own biography, given that he journeyed and worked there fairly often. Manuscripts he worked on in Italy weren't usually thematically related to the country itself, e.g. *The Maids of Wilko*, dated: "Syracuse, April of 1932," or *Shadows* (an account of the 1917 revolution in Ukraine), dated: "Roma, May of 1963." Providing a time and place of a given work's creation establishes a relationship between the order of literature and the factual order of the author's biography. By writing about Venice, Florence, and Sicily in Poland during the occupation and about Mazovia and Ukraine before and after the war in Rome and Syracuse, Iwaszkiewicz builds a peculiar plexus that merges his own, actually observed of recollected autobiographical site and the chosen one, his "homeland of the soul" which he visits only as time and circumstances permit him to. He also strengthens the bond between his own biography and the free world of literary imagination.

Zbigniew Herbert treated Greece in a similar way in his poetry, essays, and letters, bestowing upon it a very special position in his Mediterranean "garden" visited by the "barbarian" from the Northern wilderness. Herbert's interactions with Greece were initially limited to books and the author's own imagination, later, he communed with it in French and Italian museums, finally meeting the Great Hellas in person, in the Doric temples of Paestum. Only later did the author journey to Athens, the Pelloponese, and the islands of the Aegean Sea, the visits yielding work we know from *The Labyrinth on the Sea* and *The King of the Ants*. The process of creating Herbert's chosen site was complemented by illustrations and sketches the poet drew throughout the journey.

As bizarre as labeling an entire continent "a site" may seem, Ryszard Kapuściński spent years gradually discovering Africa as his chosen autobiographic territory. Alt hough the journalist often emphasized that there is no such thing as a unified notion of Africa because the continent's vast territory encompasses a host of very different countries, landscapes, and peoples, Kapuściński himself bestowed privileged status upon the continent and frequently returned there whenever his journalistic obligations permitted, his fondness for the land eventually culminating in the publication of *Ebony*, a *summa* of his African experiences. He knew Africa incomparably better than other corners of the globe he wrote about in his books, like *Shah of Shahs*, *Imperium*, or *The Soccer War*. That claim was seemingly confirmed by his last book,

Travels with Herodotus, an autobiographic narrative about his professional calling which, from the perspective of defining sites, can be considered an account of Kapuściński's road to Africa. His photographs complement the creation of Africa as his chosen autobiographic site.

Finally, the touched place is also one that was discovered in the course of a journey, but only fleetingly, and in most cases never visited again. It somehow drew the writer's attention, making him remember the name and the realities, forcing him to write about it not only in a journal entry, a letter or a reportage, but in his later work; it is introduced into the author's work but not processed and adopted as a chosen site, to which an author frequently, meaningfully returns, to significant personal and literary effect. This approach can be found in Zofia Nałkowska's treatment of Switzerland. In her journal, she wrote down numerous observations captured during her stay in a mountain health resort between February and April of 1925 and then two years later published her "international novel" entitled *Chaucas*. The writer's portrayal the drama of confronting the first symptoms of aging and the tensions arising in the international community of patients after World War I takes place between winter and spring in the Alps, and imparts independent value on the author's observations of nature as well as the lot of the mountain folk. A comparison of relevant episodes of her *Journals* with the novel's reconstruction of the local color of the Alpine resort reveals that this particular cozy corner of Switzerland left a very pronounced imprint on the author's biography and literary output. The episode also made a very significant mark on the development of her style. Individual patient characters in *Chaucas* allows the author to explore a wide variety of topics, including the Armenian genocide, committed by the Turks a decade earlier. Nałkowska's portrayal of these events seems a harbinger of the style that Nałkowska would develop after World War II in *Medallions*.

In Miłosz biography and oeuvre, the rank of a touched site was bestowed on Żuławy, explored only in passing, despite the region's particular importance stemming from the fact that the writer's mother lived there after her expulsion from the Vilnius region until her death in 1945. The image of the plains at the mouth of the Vistula under a permanently overcast sky reappears in numerous poems written in America, including *Grób matki* [*Mother's Grave*] (1949), Żuławy (1950), and *Z Nią* [*With Her*] (1985). The latter is of crucial importance to the autobiographical site, as the death of the poet's mother in a village near Gdańsk is remembered on the day of the poet's birthday. The poem included a footnote written in prose that explained the circumstances of Miłosz's mother's death (she contracted typhoid fever from an old German woman she cared for while the latter was sick) on which the poet also elaborated during a soiree in Gdansk in 1998.

Migratory situations often result in a decision on the part of an author creating his autobiographical site to employ more than just one model. A single model would have sufficed were the author leading a stable, static life, although some writers, especially those belonging to the "second emigration" generation, are obsessed with creating the single, unique site that was lost and now can only be recollected. Often enough, however, motion and change induce the author to try and utilize different portrayals of his own place in the world. A specific hierarchy often establishes itself within a single author's biography and oeuvre: one model is dominant, with the subordinate rest either competing with the dominant model for the top spot or complementing it. There are really no rules to this particular situation, a writer's individual decisions is what sets the stage.

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Dorota Kozicka

The Traveler's Horizon of Understanding

1.

Traveling may be analyzed on many different levels: from the existential experience of moving in space, through symbolic crossing of borders, going back in time or looking ahead to the future, to philosophical journey inside oneself.

The motif of a journey, as an element of a reflection over the condition of human life and an analogy to being in the world, has been known since the origins of human thought. In numerous philosophers' writings, traveling is frequently used to build a metaphor of searching knowledge and one's sense of life, wandering and roaming the paths of cognition as well as critical thinking which surpasses various boundaries. A travel metaphor as a specific philosophical topos was described e.g. by Anna Wieczorkiewicz[1] who noticed that its enormous semantic capacity allows it to be used by even most radically distinct philosophical schools. In this context, she referred to reflections of Van Den Abbeele's who, in his book *Travel as Metaphor,* presents similar associations related with traveling as the ones found in works of the 16th-17th century French philosophers: Montaigne, Descartes,

1 Cf. A. Wieczorkiewicz, *Podróż do kresu metafory*, "Res Publica Nowa" 1995, no 7-8.

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Montesquieu, and Rousseau. Treating a travel metaphor as a critical track Van Den Abbeele convincingly shows that, although each of the mentioned thinkers exercised a separate type of philosophical reflection, all of them still apply a comparable metaphoric system, through which practising philosophy or "critical thinking" appears similar to an unceasing effort of traveling.[2]

Rumbling complicated routes of human thought, signs of culture and reality is a metaphor often utilised by contemporary philosophers. In Nietzsche's works, travel is presented as an adventure of thought liberated after God's death, exploration of unknown areas, detachment from the steady, solid ground.[3] According to Paul Ricoeur, understanding oneself is only possible if one takes a "roundabout route among the signs of humankind preserved in cultural works."[4]

In Heidegger, Jaspers, Bloch and Sartre's theories (where traveling doesn't directly appear as a motif but – as ascertained by Pino Menzio, the author of *Il Viaggio dei Filosofi* – is hidden deeper and requires being elicited with the help of hermeneutics[5]), traveling is associated with the forward movement, tension towards the future, transgression, going beyond one's own human condition – all of them linked with the categories of a project (i.e. pro-iect, from Latin *pro iacere:* "throw ahead"), throwing, liberation, void. A journey understood this way describes an existential, theoretical and artistic experience of a person who, in his/her life "journey" has been deprived of traditional guidance of a "pole-star" and got lost in the centre-less world of multiplicity and diversity. An artist compared to a traveler is someone who starts a journey in order to identify and interpret the world but not the one that is given, known, defined and as such can be presented, imitated, but the unknown world which is still to be identified or even "discovered'. He/she is a symbol of someone leaning ahead in constant striving to cognition and interpretation of the reality, searching new points of orientation, outlining new maps of human experience.

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2 In the introduction to his book, Van Den Abbeele writes: „Faktycznie, to question the existing order (either cognitive, aesthetic or political) by means of situating oneself «outside» this order, by means of «critical distance» towards it, is to invoke a metaphor of thinking as traveling" (*Travel as Metaphor from Montaigne to Rousseau*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1992, XIII).

3 Cf. e.g. *Tako rzecze Zaratustra* and *Wiedza radosna*, aphorisms: 279, 289, 38.

4 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutyczna funkcja dystansu*, [in:] Współczesna teoria badań literackich za granicą. Antologia, vol. IV, part 1: *Badania strukturalno-semiotyczne* (*uzupełnienie*). *Problemy recepcji i interpretacji*, ed. H. Markiewicz, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Cracow 1996, 166.

5 Menzio, Il *Viaggio dei Filosofi. La metafora del viaggio nella letteratura filosofica moderna*, Dimensioni del Viaggio. IV, 1994.

In the above meanings, a travel metaphor would be close to metaphysics which "removes" the steady ground, the stable foundation of human existence.

A similar reading of a travel metaphor can also be found in works by Paul Virilio who delineates contemporary "traveling for the sake of traveling" characterised by a crazy pace, purposeless and for fear of life itself. Following his concept, traveling subordinated to increasing speed becomes a film, while a traveler turns into a filmgoer because he/she absorbs rapidly blinking images and completes them with his imagination in a similar way (i.e. from behind the glass). Both in the film and in the journey, the boundary between the real and the unreal gets blurred, both worlds are mediated and function on the same level of the recipient's consciousness. Virilio's theory seems interesting due to his continuous emphasis on the significance of speed in contemporary life, but above all, due to the underlined paradox: the faster we move, the faster we "fade"; the more images, information, fragments of reality appear in our life, the more – paradoxically – disappear from it[6].

Irrespective of individual examples, it is essential to notice the main tendency in the contemporary thought emphasising the nomadic (or even "neonomadic") traits in the human nature[7]. On the one hand, a travel metaphor still remains a crucial method of approaching the human condition and people's attempts to comprehend the world, on the other hand, sociologists and anthropologists see travel practices as a captivating and telling reflection of transformation within civilisation and outlook on life. Such interpretation of a journey makes it an excellent field for drawing comparisons between the traditional model of life and perception of the world and the modern (postmodern) one[8].

One of the examples of such reflection is a debate on peregrination and traditional comparing life to a pilgrimage, the conclusions of which show that today, it is impossible to think in theological categories characteristic to the

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6 Cf. Virilio, *Fahren, fahren, fahren*, Berlin 1978. The topic of similarity between tourism and film was also taken up by Edgar Morin who indicated that a window-pane (in a bus or on the TV screen) common to both experiences separates people form the world (cf. *Duch czasu*,transl. A. Frybesowa, Biblioteka „Więzi," Warsaw 1965).

7 Cf. e.g. H. Mamzer. *Peregrynacje – miejsce i pamięć a tożsamość*, [in:] ead. *Tożsamość w podróży. Wielokulturowość a kształtowanie tożsamości jednostki*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, Poznań 2002.

8 From the broadly understood sociological perspective, the most important theoretical readings of travel are comprehensively described by Krzysztof Podemski (*Socjologia podróży*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, Poznań 2004). From the anthropological point of view – cf. e.g. W. Burszta, *Kilka tez z zakresu iterologii*, „Borussia" 2001 no 24-25. The meaningful fact is that in both approaches, the areas of interest related with the subject of a journey clearly (although, of course, not entirely) overlap – both above mentioned researchers refer to the same authors and theories.

above view because people lack a stable and clearly defined goal they could pursue; stability and attachment to an idea are considered as unreasonable and impractical; the binding values are accidentality, present day and temporality.[9] It is also spectacularly exemplified by Zygmunt Bauman's metaphors defining postmodern personal models. As widely known, Bauman employed the "travel" categories of "stroller," "vagabond" and "tourist" (and specifically understood "player") and pronounced the (based on the freedom of choice) opposition between "tourist" and "vagabond" to be "the deepest and most momentous division in the modern society."[10] These metaphors, serving as tools to illustrate characteristic models of contemporary life, are based on sociological and anthropological observation and, in spite of being broadly (precisely: metaphorically) formulated, they show in detail specificity of given behaviour (in this case, travelers' behaviour). The most recognizable features of the two main models referred to by Bauman as "tourist" and "vagabond" are: "accidental" life, lack of "firm" identity, lack of affiliation to any place, no burden (including luggage), movability, superficial and cursory contacts with people and unwillingness to take on any commitments. What is common to both attitudes is perception of the external world and specific contacts with this world. Regardless of emotions it brings – experiencing its attractiveness (in the case of "tourist") or inhospitableness (in the case of "vagabond") – the formula of traveling, constant movement, kaleidoscopic changes of surroundings and superficiality of contacts and impressions remains similar. What is radically different is their attitudes towards the world and awareness of one's position in it: the feeling of having freedom of choice and controlling the situation[11] typical of "tourist" is equivalent to the pressure of wandering which torments "vagabond".

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9 Yet, it is worth remembering about theoretical interpretations, according to which a pilgrim appears as a prototype of a tourist. Cf. e.g. D. MacCannell, *Turysta. Nowa teoria klasy próżniaczej*, transl. E. Klekot, A. Wieczorkiewicz, Muza, Warsaw 2002. In this book from 1976, the author for the first time uses a figure of a tourist as a metaphor of a contemporary man.

10 Z. Bauman, *O turystach i włóczęgach, czyli o bohaterach i ofiarach ponowoczesności*, [in:] id. *Ponowoczesność jako źródło cierpień*, Sic!, Warszawa 2000; 151. Cf. Also id. *Dwa szkice o moralności ponowoczesnej*, Instytut Kultury, Warszawa 1994. A phenomenon of mass tourism and a figure of a tourist has a key position in the contemporary sociological and anthropological reflection. Some scholars (D. MacCannel, E. Cohen) see it as continuation of former pilgrimage, others (L. Turner and J. Ash) – colonialism, some others (Urry) – a new type of visual consumption (cf. K. Podemski, *Socjologia podróży*).

11 Bauman compares it to handling a TV remote control – similarly to a TV viewer, a tourist makes a choice and watches as long as it suits him/her. Cf. Z. Bauman, Ponowoczesność..., 144-146; Kowalski, *Odyseje nasze byle jakie. Droga, przestrzeń i podróżowanie w kulturze współczesnej*, Atla 2, Wrocław 2002.

In the (much narrower) research perspective adopted in this text, these discrepancies seem to be crucial as they significantly affect one's perception and interaction with the world. And, even if we repeat after Bauman that both behaviour models are characterised by "being closed" to the surrounding reality, there is a difference between a seemingly open, free and unaware of artificiality of the world "tourist" who doesn't realize his/her own "closure" and "vagabond" identified with the feeling of rejection, the need to escape inside oneself from the hostile world and the internal obligation to be on the road. Both the starting point (free will in the first case and pressure in the second one) and the mental maps of the two model figures are, it seems, completely unlike.[12]

2.

In this text, I will be interested not so much in a metaphor itself as in an experience of a journey as leading to understanding, achieving deeper self-consciousness. Of course, every journey interpreted as an experience of movement n space, a change and an encounter with widely understood otherness should be somehow linked with cognition and attempts to comprehend the world and oneself accompanied by the necessity to redefine one's own identity, however, not all journeys lead to such understanding. It should be added here that my analysis will not only concern the travel experience *per se* but also an authentic account – a story about the journey. In compliance with the applied historical-literary perspective, I will also concentrate on "intellectual journeys"[13]. This approach stems from the conviction that firstly, similar categories (e.g. of a narrative structure) could be deployed for interpretation of travel as experience and reading of text, and secondly, the "account from the journey" composes of the text which undergoes interpretation and a registered experience of interpreting the world as text.[14]

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12 A fundamental difference between the two behavioral models (tourist and vagabond) is exposed by Podemski, when he writes about leaving home as one of necessary elements of a journey. In this perspective, vagabond (who does not have a home) does not fit in the definition of a journey at all, while tourism is treated as a form of traveling (*Socjologia podróży*, 8-10).

13 Detailed explanation on the subject of "intellectual journeys" I included in my book *Wędrowcy światów prawdziwych. Dwudziestowieczne relacje z podróży*, Universitas, Cracow 2003.

14 Due to the length of this text, I put aside the extensive area of problems related with linguistic aspect of the experience and its important consequences. On the subject of signalled issues cf. A. Wieczorkiewicz, Podróż do kresu..., footnote 82; Van Den Abbeele, *Travel*... From another point of view, similarities between reading and wandering may be understood as pursuing the marked out trail (for example subsequent chapters of the book or the path formed by the lie of the land), deviating from the track, going one's own way, etc. Cf. e.g. N. Howe, Miejsca odczytane, "Res Publica Nowa" 1995 no 7-8. A meaningful literary example of the connection

I also believe that, regardless of the commonness of mass tourism, in spite of virtual and hyperreal travels and organised or holiday tourism but also despite the rush and the desire of collecting attractions – all of them defining the character of our contemporary life, there are still travelers who start their individual, real journey which aims at experiencing something new, a novelty[15]. The frequent effects of those wanders are travel accounts that might be read as attempts to make the unknown or partly known more comprehensible; attempts to convey one's own experience – the registered direct encounter with something new, interesting, inspiring, worth learning.

The importance of such texts does not lie in their informational value (for various media, including travel guides, provide us with comprehensive and captivating information about specific places, monuments, events) but in a clear "individual gesture," in personal, original interpretation and emotions linked with the travel experience, in recording one's encounter with e.g. a work of art, with "the other" and eventually – with oneself. Such registration seems to be based on a conviction that it is worth and feasible to get to know the world and what is more, describing this experience is possible and crucial.[16]

In this sense, "intellectual journeys" become hermeneutics of reality – implemented, of course, in many different ways and depending on intellectual predispositions of the traveling subject who records his/her experiences. Hence, those journeys might be considered an attempt or even a form of understanding.

The above thesis shouldn't evoke many controversies, if we take into account those travel accounts that deliberately refer to the traditional model of a traveler-wanderer. In this context, an excellent example might be "intellectual journeys" of Zbigniew Herbert or – radically distinct, it seems – Ryszard Kapuściński's descriptions.

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between the literary and physical aspect of a journey is Ryszard Kapuścińskis book *Travels with Herodotus*, which I shall elaborate on later.

15 Cf. L. Kołakowski, *Mini wykłady o maxi sprawach*, cz. 1, Znak, Kraków 1997. In the journey, what also seems important is – underlined by Kołakowski – aspect of "discovering" something, but such discovering in which the essence if not necessarily the knowledge nobody has acquired yet, but, for example, the experience of something new.

16 This aspect of traveling is pointed to e.g. by Leszek Kołakowski who states that the instinct of curiosity and fascination with the unknown, which is a reason for traveling, is a reflection/expression of a philosophical conviction that the world of our experiences is worth something (ibid.).

Zbigniew Herbert, the author of *Barbarian in the Garden, Still Life with Bridle* and *Labyrinth on the Sea-Shore*,[17] comprehends his role in the traditionally hermeneutical manner: as a "mediatory" or messenger who learns, tries to understand, explains "texts of culture" to himself and others, unveils the hidden and does it being deeply convinced that there exist universal values which are a measure of the human life. Out of the conviction that texts of culture enable a dialogue between generations and epochs, while humankind can be identified as entity and unity,[18] a euphoric comment of the essayist after leaving Lascaux Caves is articulated: "I have never been more comfortingly certain: I am a citizen of the Earth, heir of not only Greeks and Romans but nearly the eternity" (BO, 21).

Herbert, the traveler, is also fully aware of the fact that he travels the world of Culture and what he learns has already traces of many looks, readings, interpretations. He does not succumb to an illusion (and he does not mislead the reader) that he discovers "new lands" but carries on an open dialogue both with an artwork itself and with diverse opinions about it; with scientific elaborations, colloquial expectations, tourist guides. Being a true hermeneutist, he stands before texts of culture, and is cautious about every detail, but he also invokes broad historical contexts, he has to touch, go around and "immerse into defined space," set an artwork he comes for in a real landscape, smell, colour: "...move his face close to the stones, examine their smell, feel the column's grooves with his hand" (BO, 26). He often writes about the need of being an eyewitness: in *Barbarian in the Garden,* he manifests his enthusiasm caused by the opportunity to see with his own eyes and touch what he has only known from reproductions.

On the one hand, a journey is to him an experience indispensable for analysing history and art; on the other hand, it is a consciously chosen literary tradition.

Texts registering one's contacts with artworks resemble a process: a poet describes their fragments one by one and records the action of learning (encountering an artwork), gradually adding details associated with the artwork itself and the circumstances in which he, Zbigniew Herbert, is in contact with it. Comparatively, we should evoke here Gadamer who wrote about individual time of each work of art imposing itself on the recipient, having in mind not only transitory works such as music, dance or speech but also painting and architecture he spoke of as "passages of time". This German philosopher claimed

17 Z. Herbert, *Barbarzyńca w ogrodzie*, MŁ and AB, Warsaw 1990, quotes are marked with the abbreviation BO; *Martwa natura z wędzidłem*, Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, Wrocław 1993, Labirynt nad morzem, Fundacja „Zeszytów Literackich," Warsawa 2000.

18 Cf. M. Janion, *Hermeneutyka*, [in:] ead. *Humanistyka: poznanie i terapia*, PIW, Warsaw 1982.

that reception of paintings lies in their active reading, whereas "we learn about architecture by walking and wandering around" and added:

> One of the great falsifications which emerged due to excellent quality of facsimiles we have worked out till is that, when we look at great monuments of human culture live, we often feel slightly disappointed. They are not as picturesque as we used to think relying on photographic reproductions we have known. This disappointment in fact means that we haven't gone beyond the picteresque quality of a given edifice and we haven't reached it as a piece of architecture, of art. One should come closer and enter it. One should come out of it and walk around it, gradually "leave" it and this way achieve what this creation of architecture promises to our own experience of life and its intensification.[19]

A model example of such an encounter with a work of art is Herbert's account from his journey to Paestum,[20] where his initial disappointment with the size of Doric columns (the poet has to set himself free from the encyclopaedic knowledge and images absorbed under the influence of illustrations) abates during thorough sightseeing. The description of the current appearance of Greek edifices made (also in the form of text) in the course of the sightseeing has been assigned a dynamic perspective, in an appropriate order – from the general setting to a more detailed images: first, the outline of the temples on the plain appear from the distance; then, the basilica among other edifices; further – its massive columns, three steps "one has to climb"; and the interior described in the context of historical, architectural, anecdotal details and poetic sensual experiences.

The reconstruction – i.e. the attempt to understand a work of art – is parallel to its direct discovering, with physical and intellectual effort to blend in its literal and symbolic space. Such journey turns into an experience enabling comprehension, while the travel account will be registration of this experience.

Sources and motivations underlying travel accounts of Ryszard Kapuściński – a journalist, author of numerous travel reportages – are of a separate kind. It seems that the evolution of his writings, from early works, through *The Emperor,* to *Imperium* and *The Shadow of the Sun* reflects not only the writer's maturing artistry but also the change in his understanding of

19 H.G. Gadamer, *Aktualność piękna. Sztuka jako gra, symbol i święto*, transl. K. Krzemieniowa, Oficyna Naukowa, Warsaw 1993.

20 Chapter: *U Dorów*, [in:] *Barbarzyńca w ogrodzie*.

a journey.[21] His reporter's attitude: the conviction that thanks to eyewitnessing and directness of the report it is possible to describe the reality and show the objective truth – typical of first accounts, is gradually replaced by the experience of complexity and multi-dimensionality of the world, the search of deeper senses and the certainty that understanding is achievable through the process of posing the most elementary questions.

In his *Travels with Herodotus,* published in 2004, the author unveils significant aspects of this transformation: numerous journeys – from the first unexpected travel to India, through the visit in China, to the roaming across Africa – are presented as subsequent, intertwined with his parallel readings, stratifying experiences owing to which Kapuściński evolves from a journalist to a reporter and traveler. His initial, youthful urge to "cross the borders" of his country and move wherever slowly fluctuates into the need of learning and describing the other world as a reporter, and further – the desire to understand what is distinct and what hides under the surface of events:

> I wondered how one experiences crossing the border. What does one feel and think? It must be a very emotional, moving and tense moment. How is it to be on the other side? Surely different. But what does it mean: different? […] But, in fact, my biggest dream which didn't let me sleep, lured and tormented me, was quite modest because I only wanted this very moment, the very act, the simplest action of crossing the border. (PH, 13, author's emphasis)

> [Herodotus] is a genuine reporter: he wanders, watches, talks and listens to note down later on what he learnt or to simply remember it (PH,101)

> What is expressed by those scenes of massacre full of cries and blood? What inner and invisible but powerful and unstoppable forces led to them? […] Who will follow them? Not us – correspondents and reporters. No sooner will they bear the victims, clear the wrecks of burned cars and clean broken glass from the streets than we pack our bags and move ahead […]. Is it not possible to break through this stereotype, go beyond this sequence of images, try to reach what's inside? […] I began looking for the background and mainsprings of the attack, trying to establish what stands behind it and what it means, so I observed and

21 Cf. id., e.g.: *Kirgiz schodzi z konia* 1968; *Gdyby cała Afryka* 1969; *Cesarz*, Czytelnik, Warszawa *1978; Imperium Czytelnik, Warszawa 1993; Heban Czytelnik, Warszawa 1998; Podróże z Herodotem*, Znak, Kraków 2004. Quotes from *Podróże z Herodotem* are marked with the abbreviation PH.

> talked with people there, but also read, namely, I tried to understand. (PH, 214-215)

On the one hand, Kapuściński's wandering fulfils the desire to "be there" – learn and experience the world, try to understand it through the direct experience, hardship of traveling and contacts with other people. On the other hand, his reading of Herodotus is a thorough hermeneutics of the text, a lesson of absorbing knowledge and understanding how one can and should get to know the world in order it to make something out of it. Kapuściński, thus, writes about Herdodotus that he "is the first to discover the multi-cultural nature of the world. The first to convince that every culture requires being accepted and comprehended. And to understand it, one should first get to know it" (PH, 81).[22]

Owing to the parallel of traveling around the world and traveling as reading of a text which describes the world, the present time crucial to experiencing a journey becomes perfectly combined with the past typical of experiencing a book. Kapuściński is aware of this double dimension: reading teaches him to wander and look at the world, whereas knowledge and experience coming from his wanders allow him to be a better reader. The combination of both "journeys" means a combination (and crossing!) of many spaces, times and cultures proving to the author that it's necessary to go beyond one's time in order to comprehend that "the past and the present create the uninterrupted stream of history' (PH, 256) and beyond one's space – to see that "there are many worlds. I that each of them is different" (PH, 250). Also, that one should use others as a mirror in order to better understand oneself and that a journey is an enormous, wonderful effort "to learn everything – life, the world, oneself" (PH, 253). Thus, once he arrives where Herodotus was born and, in the local museum, he stands in front of objects retrieved from the sea bottom to look at "the world Herodotus knew," he will summarise it poetically, "We are standing in darkness, surrounded by the light" (PH, 259).

Then, he will start another journey.

3.

However, if we take into account contemporary methods of traveling and experiencing the world together with recordings of journeys inscribed in those experiences, inevitable questions emerge: to what extent these accounts

22 Kapuściński frequently refers to Herodotus as the first reporter and a master from whom one learns how to get to know and describe the world, and analyses his relations with people, his methods of gathering and recording materials, the author's comments in the text as well as the very figure of Herodotus "emerging" from outside of his work. Cf. e.g. 169-174, 203, 243-245.

oscillate between a traditional "journey" and postmodern "tourism" and whether such postmodern manner of traveling (and recording the travel) could be treated as a form or a method of understanding the world.[23]

The answer to the above questions seems neither obvious nor simple to me, therefore I will only try to outline the possible horizon of answers.

Let us begin with a fact that standard tourist behaviour lead to the loss of the basic sense of a journey which is the feeling of authenticity. The physical presence of tourists in Nature or Culture does not mean they are truly present – they rather collect impressions, not experiences and they are in no way, either creatively or re-creatively, connected with the space they consume. They arrive already "closed" in the world of their own imagination, they see "views" ("post-card" views they had been earlier "prepared for") instead of concrete landscapes, they mediate their experiences with the help of tourist guides or cameras; they initiate only momentary and superficial contacts.

The problem is not that a tourist knows what he/she will see, while a traveler goes into the unknown – this is not true because a traveler is also "burdened" (or "incited" – as in the case of Columbus who began a journey inspired by *The Travels of Marco Polo)* with earlier known images. The point is that for a genuine traveler, it is fundamental not only to watch but to experience the world, make effort to understand it, acquire knowledge. He/she does not take the world for granted, treating it as a "given" but rather as a "homework". A traveler of such kind not only has the knowledge (pre-judgements) but also the awareness of his/her own knowledge on a given subject. He also shows the need for an "encounter" – confrontation of this knowledge with the very site, space, object; he/she knows that only in this encounter, in a direct experience linking "known" with "seen," one can comprehend the world. This is often followed by an optimistic belief that "encountering," "learning," "understanding" is possible, or that the key value lies in the very (even doomed to failure from the beginning) attempt to initiate such activity.

Another issue. Security, comfort, "standardisation of services" as the basic rule of tourism[24] as well as fast and simple traveling lighten or eliminate the hardship and problems related with moving around but also deeply alter the character of a traveler's experiences: neither time and space, nor physical exhaustion is a problem anymore; the world "is not resistant," neither it demands from a tourist activeness, involvement in the contact with another space. Many contemporary "intellectual journeys" contain fear of such easy

23 If we take into consideration anthropological or sociological analyses of postmodern journeys, we can draw an obvious conclusion that due to their underlying falsifications and mediations, they are not the path to either learning or understanding. Cf. Kowalski, *Odyseje nasze*...

24 Cf. K. Podemski, *Socjologia podróży*.

traveling which eliminates the feeling of strangeness, the trouble of experiencing and learning.[25] Speed and bustle accompanying tourist tours the traveler juxtaposes to the slow pace of (most often) hiking[26] which brings a specific experience of being "in between": between the familiar but more and more distant home space and the strange but approaching world/place one is heading towards. The traveler finds him/herself on the intersection of two worlds: the new world one arrives to and the world one comes from. Such location resembles Gadamer's privileged place "between" otherness and familiarity, freedom and constraint.[27]

In today's individual "journeys" one could come across numerous attempts to find or regain the "between" dimension. One of them is "temporary roaming," "being on a trip" periodically, in the "separated" time and space, the combination – returning to Bauman's postmodern model – of the physically overwhelming experience of being a vagabond with the "tourist" feeling of freedom. Such experiences could be found, among others, in Andrzej Stasiuk's travel accounts. The writer describes his experiences related with hitch-hiking across Poland:

> The sky, trees, houses, ground – all this could be located somewhere else. I was moving in space which didn't have any past, history, achievements worth mentioning […] this sequence of images was not a country, it was a pretext. Most probably, a person feels his/her own existence only when feeling on his/her skin a touch of nameless space which unites us with the oldest of times […] when the mind was only beginning to separate itself from the world and didn't yet realize its orphanage. (JB,11)

The problem is whether being in the space "between" becomes a kind of alienation or an impulse to learn, compare and make effort to understand.

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25 For example: Jerzy Stempowski, using means of transport only to move to a place where he begins his thorough journey on foot, compares group bus trips to "Jonasz who traveled far in the whale's stomach but he didn't see a lot"(J. Stempowski, *Nowy dziennik podróży do Niemiec*, [in:] id. *Od Berdyczowa do Lafitów*, sel., ed. and introduction by A.S. Kowalczyk, Czarne, Wołowiec 2001, 197). Zbigniew Herbert, commenting on *Voyage en Italie* by Montaigne, is jealous of his long, tiring journey enabling him to melt into "the concrete otherness of landscapes of people and phenomena he passes by" (*Pana Montaigne'a podróż do Italii* [in:] id. *Węzeł gordyjski oraz inne pisma rozproszone* 1948-1998, Biblioteka "Więzi," Warsaw 2001, 43).

26 Another modern travelers' favourite means are slow trains which create an opportunity of co-participating in the life of locals, initiating contacts or at least making observations. Cf. J. Stempowski, *Nowy dziennik…*; A. Stasiuk, *Jadąc do Babadag*, Czarne, Wołowiec 2004. Quotes from Stasiuk's book are referred to with an abbreviation JB.

27 Cf. E. Kobylińska, *Hermeneutyczne ujęcie kultury jako komunikacji* [in:] *O kulturze i jej badaniu. Studia z filozofii kultury*, ed. K. Zamiara, PWN, Warsaw 1985.

Another problem stems from the fact that crucial elements of the real, traditional traveling are attentiveness and reflection. Both serve cognition and allow for noticing various dimensions and contexts of reality, for interpreting and understanding. Concrete and tangible features of the described reality: ruts on the road, cathedral steps worn out by pilgrims, single gestures, details ... they all become a necessary condition of a traveler's cognition and understanding. "Not being excessively spiritual, I always looked for material traces in order to enter into an agreement and alliance," Herodotus confesses in Labyrinth on the Sea-Shore[28]. And Ryszard Kapuściński admits that he induces his students to note down facts and travel impressions on a daily basis because this habit will force them to "concentrate and look actively" and make traveling not "mechanical moving from place to place, checking kilometres, towns, countries" but will turn it into a "form of approaching and understanding the world, other people, other cultures."[29]

In tourism, instead of attentiveness to the world, instead of insight and reflection, we have collections of the highest possible number of impressions – a fast slide on the surface. The pace mentioned by Virilio imposes perception of the world resembling a group of snapshots but also compels the reality and the world to be attractive, noticeable, ready to meet tourists' expectations. This activates double falseness: tourists perceive what they have been announced and delivered to be seen, whereas the world shows what tourists expect. Such travelers will never learn anything new on their way, they will never experience anything else than what they have expected beforehand. However, if self-cognition in the encounter with the other, new world is considered as an important element of the travel experience, and if we claim that, owing to his/her journey, a traveler "returns to him/herself" enriched with new experiences, we will consider a tourist as representing a completely different attitude as he/she mainly looks for attractions in their excursions, an image of him/herself which would differ from the everyday one. In such cases, it's hard to speak about trying to understand the world or oneself.

Nonetheless, this experience – seen not so much as habitual behaviour of mass and organised tourism but an individual experience based on the postmodern manner of traveling, a fast and unengaged way of looking at the world – allows us to discover significant aspects of the contemporary consciousness. They can be interpreted as postmodern hermeneutics aiming at clashing dissimilar senses rather than probing or explaining them. Cursory, chaotic, superficial perception uprooting things from their natural and

28 Z. Herbert, *Labirynt...*, 29.

29 R. Kapuściński, *Pochwała wędrowania*, „Nowe Książki" 2002 no 7/8, 9.

symbolic context, reminds us of the weak thought, Vattimo's *percezione distratta* (restless eyes, distracted perception).[30] Its traces can be found in the already quoted Stasiuk's account:

> Each place was good because I could leave it with no regrets. It didn't even have to have a name. Constant cost, continuous loss, prodigality unseen by the world, carnival, wastage, wastefulness and no sign of accumulation. The Seaside in the morning, forests by the San river in the evening, guys with beer mugs, like ghosts in a country bar, like phantoms freezing at my sight in quarter-gesture. (JB, pp. 11-12)

So, who is this traveler who starts a journey – seemingly fast, inattentive and chaotic but not deprived of the need to "stop," the reflection over the experience of "otherness" – in the space of postmodern habits? Is he/she a new traveler who is aware of both artificiality of the tourist world, the limits of one's own perception and the indispensability (necessity) of travel experiences, liberating a different type of the time-and-space, changing the location of the "I" in the world?

Such cases as Andrzej Stasiuk's travel accounts prove that the real value lies in the intellectual condition and sensitivity of the subject, not the time and method of traveling. The author of *On the Road to Babadag* intentionally inscribes his youth travels' narratives in the postmodern rhythm of quick changes of space, affluence of images and elements of reality, simultaneously attempting at self-cognition through such "acceleration" which in fact annihilates time and space and enables the return to first, elementary, naïve and most important questions.

His later journeys are ostentatiously planned against the current tourist fashions and methods of traveling, although not rarely does he travel with a tourist guide in his hand. Beside reporting the choice of a route and a method of traveling (roaming on the East and South of Europe far from well-known tourist trails, following the trail of the "cheapest tobacco products," driving an old car, hitch-hiking or taking slow trains), the author constantly reminds the reader that he travels "differently" and "different" things and matters are of his interest. Choosing the vagabond option, Stasiuk devotes his attention to observation of everyday life, houses, people, landscapes:

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30 G. Vattimo, *Le avventure della differenza, Garzanti*, Milano 1980, 6. The already quoted author of *Il Viaggio dei Filosofi* writes that the contemporary tourist fashion is a banalised, "weaker" variant of the "strong" experience of traveling as an experience of authenticity. (Menzio, Il Viaggio...).

> In *Gönc* he pulled up in front of *the Hussite House* but we were not interested in museums. We wanted to watch old women sitting in front of the houses on the main street. (JB, 69)

> I went with them, but I didn't care at all about the noble building. I was looking at the young Gypsies. (JB, 95)

If he sometimes tries to "inscribe" himself into the contemporary traveling habits and "feel like a tourist," he feels like "a spy doomed to superficiality" (JB, 110)

However, despite – or maybe – due to this ostentatious gesture, in his "journeys" Stasiuk does not seem to "free himself" either from the effects of the post-industrial reality or from the postmodern way of perceiving it. On the one hand, he fulfils the carnival scheme of "reversing the world" by presenting the modern European reality not through its Western façade but through its Eastern courtyard and suggesting that it is the façade that embodies the anti-world. On the other hand, assuming the role of a revolutionary and vagabond, and demonstratively cutting off from the tourist pattern, he falls into another – the anti-tourist one and neither does he try to learn and understand the reality he arrives in. He only chooses places, situations, images and motives which are radically distinct from the first "façade" tourist vision.

Consequently, he declares his "love of disintegration" and "pitiful predisposition to everything that doesn't look as it should," therefore he only looks for things he wants to see and rejects everything that is put in order, organized, stable and that doesn't match his assumptions about the reality, "I had to abandon this view because it was too unreal" (JB, 100); "I couldn't conform with space which was so irreversibly formed" (JB, 107). It appears that the writer does not want to be liberated from the "limitations" of his own expectations and fantasies, he does not intend to see anything else besides what he looks for; he does not want to "understand" or learn anything, probe into the life of local people or initiate more intimate contacts (apart from momentary meetings amplifying the impression of mental closeness). He is in search for places where he feels "as if he never left home" but he remains "an observer." He wishes to see "images" which seem to him the "reverse" of the post-industrial, organised reality, which "mock at tempting order and affluence" (JB, pp. 214-215). Meticulous descriptions of phenomena, details, bits and single characters present in his account are not tools of understanding the depicted world but of documenting the traveler's beliefs,[31] whereas

31 It is poverty, rejection, disability, dilapidation and pieces of the past are what Stasiuk considers the only tangible (and, as it seems, continuously strived for) substance as opposed

subsequent experiences pile up in a neverending kaleidoscope of various fragments, pieces, traces which liberate his imagination. It is the imagination together with the desire to "be on the move" (not the reality: visited places, landscapes, people and events) that guide Stasiuk – the traveler and Stasiuk – the writer. That is why, in his travels, he turns down places and landscapes in which he can't "find any fractures for the imagination to slip in" (FB, 50) and in his account, he may admit, "In fact I can't remember anything from this journey, so I need to make everything up anew" (JB, 106). And this is precisely why subsequent travels are solely repetitions of the imagined ones, while the non-obviousness of visited lands makes them more spacious than geography would indicate and lets them open to him "the endless space of presuppositions, the vanishing horizon of ideas and the mirage of sweet superstitions the reality could never rise to" (JB, 2019). According to this belief, Stasiuk considers traveling as "simply a relatively healthy type of a drug" (JB, 75), desired (temporary) liberation, return to childhood and a blissful feeling of freedom, respite from the reality.[32] It is nourishment indispensable for the imagination but also an individual attempt to save from oblivion things that disappear from the horizon, "to seize present day." One of the forms of saving such moments are relics: notes, coins, tickets, bills, and other scraps. Stasiuk will mention them, "I keep all those events in a cartoon shoe box. From time to time, I pull out this or that" (JB, 236).

These travel relics provoke telling new stories about memory and space, which "begin in any chosen place and never end" (JB, 236). But what is most interesting in the perspective assumed here, is the – typical of Stasiuk – awareness of the significance of traveling and moving around in the contemporary world[33] and the explicitly exposed conviction that frequent journeys, "collected" experiences, traces, relics, memories do not lead to the groundbreaking cognition, build any wholeness or arrange themselves in any higher

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to intangible ideas of the richness characteristic to the post-industrial world. Yet, the world does not have an explicit "face" one could oppose to because – Stasiuk writes in the imagined dialogue with Jakub Szela – even if one tries to do that, „the world will disperse like a phantom and one will be left empty-handed" (JB, 56). Therefore, it seems, watching, "gathering" and collecting itself is to him the most important result of the journey.

32 Cf. e.g.: „...already near Zborów, one starts to ignore his/her identity. It diminishes with every kilometer and, just like in distant childhood, our own existence leaves us as something very different from the rest of the world" (JB, 221).

33 Cf. e.g.: „...I have my border to practice transgression and it is fine and it suits the times when existence is identified by movement, changing places, kinetics, that starting from point A we don't have to reach point B – not only, we don't have to get anywhere and it is enough that we make circles". *Dziennik okrętowy*, [in:] J. Andruchowycz, A. Stasiuk, *Moja Europa. Dwa eseje o Europie zwanej środkową*, Czarne, Wołowiec 2000, 140.

senses or orders. The writer often underlines that "he comes back as stupid as he was when leaving" and that on his return "nothing has changed," and finally:

> All points to the conclusion that nothing remains: Ubla, Heviz, Lendava, Babadag, Leskovik and else – they don't leave traces that would be so vivid to believe that quantity will eventually turn into quality, one thing will couple with another and, like a wonderful machine, will produce something close to a sense. (JB, 261)

Andrzej Stasiuk's travel accounts are like his favourite places, "like peripheries without the centre, like limitless suburbs, without the culminating city," happening in "the present and constantly accomplishing time," "exhausting in the very act of existence" (JB, 249). As a result, the writer speaks about his own stories like about his own journeys: he can't make out of them any sensible story and comes to a conclusion that "the world is presence, so he doesn't care about the story"[34].

This type of "traveling" serves as a means to learn not so much the reality as the representation of the reality. Neither does it help understand the world and its rules, search for fundamental senses, deeper mechanisms, higher orders, universal and supralocal rooting (like in the case of Herbert or Kapuściński's accounts) but it rather serves collecting impressions and images, moving around the world[35] hoping that, in view of the "failure" of a story which is unable to assign senses to human life, geography can help "embrace the world" and liberate oneself from reflecting over incidental, temporary existence.

Translation: Marta Skotnicka

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34 Cf. respectively JB, 216, 227. Stasiuk also writes about the similarity between a journey and a story in Dziennik okrętowy, frequently emphasising that both in a journey and a story, he does not move linearly but he always has to meander and blunder. Eventually, he admits, "Writing is listing names. Analogically, a journey is placing beads of geography on a string of life. Neither reading nor the road make us much smarter. Borders like chapters, countries like literary genres, the epic of trails, lyric of resting, blackness of concrete roads at night in headlights brings to mind a monotonous and hypnotic line of print which crosses the reality and leads us straight to the fictitious goal. There is nothing at the end of the book, and every decent journey always resembles more or less tangled noose (99-100, also see 138).

35 In his journeys, however, Stasiuk is always aware of having a home where one can always go back, which significantly affects the character of those travels and which can be perceived as a typical feature of tourist traveling. Another "tourist" trait of Stasiuk as a vagabond would be the very act of "gathering impressions" and the fact that the wandering writer never questions his own identity.

Paweł Rodak

The Truth in a Personal Diary[1]

Truth of the Diary: Representation, Construction, and Writerly Practice

In his *Le journal d'écrivain en France dans la Ière moitié du XX^e siècle*, Jerzy Lis poses the following thesis: "Who knows if the diary is not one of the most insincere forms of writing, one in which strategies are based on the game with oneself and the readers…"[2] He adds that he is concerned primarily with diaries of writers, who are renowned for their high linguistic and literary awareness. Today, however, this kind of view on diaries, often presented by disregarding whether it addresses the works of writers, or diaries in general, is very common. They are seen as a variations of autobiographical writing whose dominating features are construction and creation that are contrasted with truth and honesty. It is usually brought down to the following judgment: because diaries, just like all

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2 Lis, J. *Le journal d'écrivain en France dans la Ière moitié du XX^e siècle*, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 1996, 40.

other literary texts, are narrational constructs, they do not express anything prior to those constructs and that is why any kind of truth in them is impossible. Diaries and, more broadly, autobiographical writing situate themselves "between the lie and creation."

I have to admit that I am opposed to this particular take on diaries and this essay will be, in a way, an expression of my opposition. First, however, I would like to take a closer look at the approach I discuss in my work by looking at a very interesting book devoted to the diaries of Zofia Nałkowska. I am thinking about Magdalena Marszałek's *Życie i papier. Autobiograficzny projekt Zofii Nałkowskiej: Dziennik 1899-1954*.[3]

In the book, the diary is treated as a literary genre in which the "hybrid combination of fictional and autobiographical narration takes place."[4] Its author recalls the modern research of autobiographical writing, which undermined the "axiom of particular referentiality of autobiographical writing."[5] As a consequence, the research strategy shifts and the "linguistic problems or the discursive conditioning issues of the construction of the autobiographical subject are brought to the forefront, as well as the textuality of the autobiographical representation."[6]

In Marszałek's book that openly refers to constructivism and post-structuralism, two models which are juxtaposed: the model of representation and of construction. She writes:

> Approaches to autobiographies that are based not on the models of representation but construction, reveal the performative character of the autobiographical writing: autobiographical narrations are not so much a reflection of "I" and its experience, but an effective instrument of subject creating operations.[7]

As a consequence of this kind of constructivist understanding of autobiographical writing, superior meaning is granted to categories of text and narration, as

3 Another work, based on similar assumptions and also concerned with the diaries of Zofia Nałkowska is the book by Anna Foltyniak entitled *Między „pisać Nałkowską" a Nałkowskiej „czytaniem siebie". Narracyjna tożsamość podmiotu w „Dziennikach"* (Cracow: Universitas, 2004).

4 Marszałek, M. *Życie i papier. Autobiograficzny projekt Zofii Nałkowskiej: Dziennik 1899-1954*, Krakow: Universitas, 2004, 7.

5 Ibid. 14.

6 Ibid. 15.

7 Ibid.

opposed to categories such as world, reality, person, or identity. That, on the other hand, leads to a gradual disappearance of differences between what is "fictional" and "real," as well as to a removal of the division between the fiction and non-fiction writing; a division that is replaced with a paradigm of pan-fictionality, or pan-textuality. The text, with its "narrational, rhetorical and discursive aspects," is now equipped with, so to speak, the first and last word in the debate over the existence of the world. The textual world precedes the real one and in the more radical concepts, it can even replace it.

Magdalena Marszałek, however, takes a slightly more moderate stand, one in which

> the textuality of the autobiographical representation does not overshadow the reality, but makes it more visible, does not negate the connection between the text and the world outside, but rather creates the connection itself. Postmodern sensitivity towards the saturation of a text and the world outside of it makes the inquiring look into the processes of subject and reality construction more astute, which does not mean, however, that it negates their existence that way[8].

In other words, reality and the subject exist to the extent that they are constructed and because they are constructed. This is why autobiographical writing, including diaries, is regarded by the author as a "strategy of the subject's self-construction," one of the "cultural techniques of producing identity."[9] A special meaning is ascribed to writing as a phenomenon that possesses the performative strength of transforming "writing about oneself" into a "writing [of] the self."[10]

Understanding the performative character of the journal (this category plays an important role in Marszałek's book) is limited to the strategy of the auto-construction of the subject, to the creation of one's own identity. It is connected to the assumption that every subject allows itself to be thought of only inside of the text, or in the relation to it and not outside of it. At the level of the text, "I" and "the world" are contextualized. The issue is that the diary, in my opinion, is not merely a text. It is a kind of writerly practice in which making entries is a kind of action fulfilling multiple functions; an action that, as its integral element, takes part in creating meaning and its functions, and has its physical dimension.

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8 Ibid. 50.

9 Ibid. 59.

10 Ibid. 63.

In the literary model of existence, words are treated in separation from the context in which they were used, their life *praxis*. The word of literature leads an autonomous life as a text without a context and a text without materiality. In a literary text, the way in which it comes to life can be (although it does not have to) treated as secondary in respect to the text as a vessel for meaning. In the autobiographical text, and primarily in the diary, this kind of action is impossible.

If the subject of the text is some "I," then the subject of action-writing is an empirically existing person, which is confirmed by the physical trace left by that person in the text, but also in the very material character of the journal. In a slightly controversial manner, we might say that today's truth has been successfully deconstructed using the category of the text, and can come back to us from the side of materiality, or textuality and materiality, mutually combined.

Let us place the material aspect to the side for a moment in order to take a closer look at the diary at work. It has multiple functions: not only the function of constructing an identity (or the function that is mentioned by Marszałek and Foltyniak, as well as most of scholars representing a similar stand), but also a therapeutic, auto-disciplinary, memorizing, bookkeeping, meditative, prayer-related and other functions as well. It also performs a function that could be called professional, for example: a diary as a tool of an intellectual work, as a workshop and a creative laboratory of the writer, etc.[11] These functions point, in my opinion, to a person who uses the diary as a tool. And using this tool, just like any other tool, is characterized by a lack of continuity – it can be observed in the lack of textual integrity of a diary that sends us back to the continuity of the life of the person writing the diary.

Let us go back to the level of the text. In personal diaries, every so often, we stumble upon longer or shorter pauses in the diary's continuity. Sometimes, the diarist will inform us about the nature of the break:

> When I'm healthy, when I'm immersed in work, chasing the *Anxious*, who have been published in installments in *Gazeta Polska*, for over a month now, when I live my life, liking my apartment, going for long autumn walks in the evenings – I put nothing in here. And this deforming shortcut – like any literary account – makes this diary into a false image of my life: only diseases and erotic failures remain. [...]

11 Concerned with different functions of the diary, I have also written "Dziennik pisarza. Między codzienną praktyką piśmienną a literaturą," in *Pamiętnik Literacki*, vol. 4, 2006.

> Empty spaces, long pauses in my here, confessions correspond with periods when I'm not sick, when I don't suffer failures, when there's peace with the rhythm of being.[12]

As opposed to the literary text, the text of a diary is discontinuous in the sense that empty spaces, designated by two dates, refer us to the continuity of a historical time on the one hand, as well as equally historical dimension of the life of a person writing it. The diary, other than literature, is a trace of the temporal being of a person that writes it.

These days, diaries are more and more often treated as literary texts. This new approach is usually applied to the diaries of writers which are, almost without exception, included in the realm of literature and analyzed by scholars using the tools from that very realm. That way, diaries gain importance and loose some of their specific character by becoming texts surrounded by other texts. But are not diaries texts, after all? Of course, they are and the textual or discursive dimension of their existence brings them closer to literary works and makes them prone to be analyzed as peculiar linguistic constructs, narrative structures, types of creative work. It does not change the fact, however, that even at the level of the text itself, diaries should not be identified with literature (except for specific situations, when they are created like a literary text on purpose – for example, the diaries of Gombrowicz). Once we compare intimate diaries with novels in the form of a diary, the difference is clearly visible. At the textual level, there exists a fundamental similarity between them, one based on the rule of linguistic mimesis[13] but from the formal and constructive point of view there are clear differences visible. The most important of these were named by Michał Głowiński:

> if we were to understand an utterance that is organized as a whole according to certain, established in advance, rules as a work of art, then the diary is not one – it is *a form without a form* – while novel is always one, even when its organization is highly loose or chaotic.[14]

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12 Nałkowska, Z. *Dzienniki*, vol. 4: 1939-1939, part 2: 1935-1939, (entries from 9/12/1938 and 10/23/1938) edited and with commentary by H. Kirchner, Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1988, 334-335, 340.

13 See Głowiński, M. „Mimesis językowa w wypowiedzi literackiej," in his *Prace wybrane*, edited by R. Nycz, vol. 2: *Narracje literackie i nieliterackie*, Cracow: Universitas, 1997, 5-18.

14 See Głowiński, M. „Powieść a dziennik intymny," 66, in his *Narracje literackiei nieliterackie*. From that basic difference, Głowniński derives more specific elements: the novel has a "global sense," "a unified system of meanings" that is absent from a diary, as well as the freedom of expression in diary ("here, the rule is there are no rules") and their submission to the narrative

Differences between a personal diary and a novel in the form of a diary are even more visible when we take into consideration the functional-pragmatic and material dimension of the diaries and literature. It does not mean, however, that the diaries are completely different from literature. In the ideal sense, we have to assume at the point of exit, hypothetically, their complete dissimilarity from the world of literature, only to later trace the levels of literariness that accumulate in diaries.

Status of the Truth in a Diary: Time, Person, and Materiality

The truth in a diary has a historical, personal, and writerly character. Travestying and slightly broadening the definition of the diary by Philippe Lejeune, one could say that a diary is a series of dated, personal traces.[15] Dated, written, and hence equally textual and material traces refers us back to the external, toward the author, order of historical dates, as well as the empirically existing person that left the trace. One could say that in the diary, history and the person meet in the materiality of the record. It is precisely the material record, with the mark of the human hand and undergoing the temporal process of obsolescence that is the warranty of truth. The truth that we are talking about here is not an oppositional category, not in the relation to a lie or falsity (these can appear in the diary), nor in the relation to creation (that has to appear in the diary). Even if the author of the diary lied and fantasized notoriously, his diary – from that assumed perspective – will be true. It will be so because it will reveal the truth about the lying person, as well as the falsified reality. It is probably obvious by now that this kind of approach is probably closer to the approach of a historian than a literary scholar. Berel Lang grasped that feature very well when he wrote the following:

> [the] diary is filled with content that has a status of the absolute truth – not in a sense that the events recounted happened the way they were related, but because the statements of the author undergo a self-verification. Even if one could prove that the author was wrong (or, in an

purposes in the novel. The active role of a diary in the life of the diarist and the lack of such direct reference between the text and the life of the author of the novel is yet another difference. In summary, the description of these three differences, the author of the essay claims that the novel in the form of a diary "fulfills the requirements of a formal mimesis perfectly, since it brings the properties of its blueprint to meet the requirements that are proper to itself as a literary construction" (72).

15 See Lejeune, Ph. „Koronka. Dziennik jako seria datowanych śladów," translated by M. and P. Rodak, *Pamiętnik Literacki*, vol. 4, 2006, 17-27.

extreme situation – lied), the diary remains, undeniably, the record of his views.[16]

In order to take a closer look at the status of the truth in a diary, I would like to make a comparison between a private diary and novel in the form of a diary, while taking into consideration three features: the construction of time, the construction of the writing subject (and of a place occupied by the diary in the life of its author), and the material, physical aspect of the text.

As far as the construction of time is concerned, it seems that in both cases we are dealing with the same series of dated entries. However, in the personal diary we are always dealing with concrete historical data (the day, month, and year) that are from the order of the calendar. In the novel in the form of a diary, on the other hand, we are dealing with dates that are simply markers of passing time, important because of the plot and its development, but not because of any order of time that is external to the novel.[17] That is why one can observe just days, or months, being marked (without a year, as in *Death* by Ignacy Dąbrowski or *Nausea* by Sartre). The novelistic diary creates its own time, which is why it is usually a short period of time, ranging most often between two and a few dozen months. On the other hand, personal diaries, written over the span of decades, oftentimes end with the death of the author. The calendar and the rhythm of everyday life of a diarist decides its shape. That is why one can often observe gaps of few months, or even few years, that are not, with few exceptions (for example, a few months break in *Bez dogmatu* by Sienkiewicz), common for novels in the form of a diary. The personal diary, which can be seen very well in its construction, is guided not by the plot order, or the order of discourse, or more broadly by the order of the text, but by the order of writerly practice, an essence which is grounded in what is historical.

It is a similar case with the personal character of truth in the diary. One could repeat here certain "truism" that Michał Głowiński recalled in one of his texts:

16 Lang, B. *Act and Idea in Nazi Genocide*, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003.

17 Michał Głowiński points to that in the aforementioned *Powieść a dziennik intymny*: "When looked at separately, the novel-diary carries within itself its concept of time; a concept – so to speak – of its construction, as well as of its philosophy. It allows time to break up into particular moments and leads to a novelistic pointillism of sorts, it places a moment what lasts, above continuity" (81-82). Głowiński also points out that time in the diary is connected to the order of events, and the present we observe in it is directed toward the future, while the time of the novel is guided by the order of storytelling in which the present is connected with the vision of the future.

> The novel tells a story of fictional events and creates fictional characters and fictionality as a fundamental characteristic of its presented world. Narrational documentary prose talks about authentic events, about times and deeds of people who are not mere creations of literary imagination.[18]

This difference between fiction and a document, between the discourse of the novel and entries of the diary can be seen in the way personal diaries and novels in the form of a diary are published. The latter do not need vast footnotes that are necessary in the personal diaries. Footnotes found in diaries, relating to specific people and events, ground its entries in the historical context that was once the context of the diarist's life. In that particular context, the appearance of certain people and events in the diary was sanctioned and understandable by itself through their connection to the author. However, taking the diary out of that context, disconnecting it from writerly practice and replacing the context with the text, results in that very text demanding a secondary contextualization – one that is not connected with life, needs and experiences of the author, but with the reading demands of a contemporary reader. That very reader should remember, however, that the truth of a diary does not exist at the level of the text, but is the truth of the life of the person leaving his or her mark on the practice of keeping a diary; a practice which is comprised of such crucial features as literacy and materiality.

The writing and its materiality is the third marker of truth's status in a personal diary. The materiality of a diary entry is completely different from the materiality of a literary text. The literary text is created, most often, on loose pages (with the exception of copybooks), it is retyped, changed, and edited many times. The literacy of a literary text loses its material identity for the sake of textual identity (which can be observed in the gesture of throwing away different versions after reaching the final one – often retyped on a typewriter, or nowadays on the computer). One could say that literature, as opposed to diaries, is characterized by a formal integrity (a total structure of sense that exists in a manuscript, typescript or print) and personal diaries are characterized by material integrity (a collection of copybooks, calendars that comprise a diary). It is not only integrity, however, but also uniqueness. Every diary, just like every individual, exists in only one copy. A diary is not a book, and it is not a book in form and not only a printed form is the proper form for its existence (as is the case for works of literature). So, if we are dealing with a diary in the form of a book (which is the most common situation), we have to recall crucial changes that accompany its existence. Print, by transforming the practice of a diary into a text of the diary, grants it a features of continuity,

18 Głowiński, M. „Dokument jako powieść," in his *Narracje literackie i nieliterackie*, 132.

linearity, and cohesion – some of which the diary may be lacking (due to the varying length of pauses in writing a diary, making comments on earlier entries or making a kind of private collection, or an archive where there is room for not only entries, but also different souvenirs, letters, and material components of the everyday, etc.). The unique materiality of a diary allows not only for the verification of the authenticity of the text and helps with establishing its reliability (a historian makes the so called narrative sources undergo such procedures in order to learn if they are true and if they are telling the truth), but also is a necessary correlate of its authenticity in the sense I am trying to propose here.

Three Truths of a Diary: Event, Experience, and Reality

Finally, I can attempt to present the three kinds of truth which we encounter in a personal diary. I would call them: the truth of events (historical truth), the truth of experience (individual or psychological truth), and the truth of reality (metaphysical or transcendental truth). Already, at the beginning, I have to add three reservations.

Firstly, all three kinds of truth are connected to one another and do not appear separately. There is not truth of event without a truth of experience (events always appear within some kind of experience and it is the very act of choosing them and of recording them that is an experience). There is no truth of experience without the truth of events, nor metaphysical truth without other truths. A diary always speaks about certain events (which could be called the external behaviors of the diarist and other people encountered along the way) and certain experiences (which could be called internal behaviors). The very act of writing a diary is simultaneously and perpetually a renewed event, as well as a continuous experience.

Secondly, the truth which I call the truth of experience could be treated as superior to the other two. The diary is, beyond anything else, a record and a trace of experience. The truth of experience is, so to speak, an irreducible ingredient of the diary. The diary can contain the truth of events in small degrees, just like the transcendental truth, but the truth of experience is embedded in the essence of diaristic practice. The gesture of writing in the diary, even if it pertains to objects, phenomena of the most common kind, or simply trivial events, is always a gesture accreted with a concrete experience.[19] At the

19 The category of "experience" that plays such an important role both in the hermeneutical tradition, as well as in the phenomenological tradition, is more and more often called upon today in the context of deliberations about modernity. It is seen as a category allowing a step beyond the limitations of textual and narrative concepts of truth, reality and the identity of

same time it is an action, a practice, that results not only (or sometimes not at all) in a cognition of the reality surrounding the diarist, as well as himself, but also in an influence on oneself and reality. That is why the recording of the experience we are dealing with in a diary also has a performative dimension.[20] Experience and action are inseparable within the diaristic practice.

And thirdly, I would like to remind readers that a diary understood as agreed upon here is not only a text, nor a kind of text, discourse, or narration. It is a writerly practice that is based on operating the word through its recording, which finds its textual and material dimension. That is why the three aforementioned kinds of truth find their own reflection in a writerly-material side of the journal (truth has its material trace here). But they also have their own, again transpiring in different ways, pragmatic dimension (truth of something, or about something is here, although not in an urgent way, a truth for something). About the pragmatic, functional so to speak, dimension of the truth that is connected with the activity of writing a diary itself, we have already provided clarification. Here, I would like to highlight the meaning of its material dimension. The truth about the diary, regardless of its kind, is a truth about the "documentary trace" that Paul Ricoeur distinguishes from the "traces in the brain and emotional traces"[21] and which I could additionally distinguish from a textual or narrational trace. A textual trace is similar to an emotional trace and different from the documentary one, in that it exists as an ideal being, potential and individual, and becomes concrete in the form of a manuscript, typescript or a printed book, arriving at its material shape and reaching its reader. A documentary trace, on the other hand, is always

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an individual that are reduced to the form of linguistic constructs. See the collection of essays *Nowoczesność jako doświadczenie*, edited by R. Nycz, A. Zajdler-Janiszewska, Cracow: Universitas, 2006. In one of the texts from the collection – *Doświadczenie – ponownie rzeczywista kwestia humanistyki* – Dorota Wolska brings our attention to the fact that the notions of "truth" and "reality," "seem to be coming back into favor, after a time in exile, among other things in the context of deliberations about 'experience'." (48) I would also like to observe these categories in this text: truth and reality are present in the diary as correlates of experience.

20 Similar to "experience," "action" and its performative character becomes more and more important in today's humanities, allowing us to speak of a "performative turn." Ewa Domańska writes that "the 'Performative turn' is a sign that postmodern currents (constructivism, poststructuralism, deconstruction, textualism, and narrativism) are exploited and do not belong to modernity any longer, but to the history of humanism. ... By focusing attention on the question of performativity, it allows us to go back to discussions about practice and action (and reality in general), that pushed the approaches connected to postmodernism into the background, focusing on the analysis and interpretation of the text (and the world seen as text)." ("Zwrot performatywny we współczesnej humanistyce," *Teksty Drugie*, vol. 5, 2007, 53-56.

21 *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*. Paris: Seuil, 2000.

material in its very nature. The materiality is its primary feature. In other words, a personal diary that moves from the form of its original manuscript to a printed book form becomes a textual trace of certain documentary trace (itself becoming a different documentary trace).[22] It allows for the perception of difference not only between printed and non-printed versions of diaries, but also between the place in which they are being stored and their points of contact. In the case of the first, it is a library; in the case of the second – it is an archive: private, family, or public.[23]

The first kind of truth recorded in a diary is the truth of events that could otherwise be called historical truth. Many of the sentences in the diary have the character of an account that could undergo verification. A diary record differs from a literary text in that it is strongly anchored in the context of its becoming, the most important markers of which are the empirically existing subject (along with its limitations, physicality, psyche, needs, etc.), as well as the world surrounding it as a space of its existence and action, and the space of existence and actions of other people. The fact that the diary entry is always of the moment and individual in its character and that there is always an element of creation and construction, a particular kind of reflexivity, in which the reality and a person appear through the diary but are also co-created by it (in that the diary influences their shape and identity), does not change the fact that it is or can be a testimony of what has happened. The meaning and functions of the truth of a witness rise in importance in extreme situations when the diary testimony is created with full awareness of the weight of the described issues, the necessity of passing on the knowledge to the next generation and its possible function of proof in the future (even today, diaries are often used as evidence in court cases).

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22 Today, documentary traces and, in general, relations between what is documentary and what is textual, play a much larger role in both printed editions of diaries, as well as in memoirs and autobiographies. Among the latter, the best example would be *W ogrodzie pamięci* by Joanna Olczak-Ronikier, where copies of different kinds of documentary traces (documents, letters, and photographs) are as important as the text itself. As far as the diaries go, documented traces can be found most often in those written by non-writers (two examples: Curt Cobain's diary that was accompanied with reprints of almost all of the manuscript pages; the edition of the so-called *DMary of Reguły Diary* with copies of of many pages of the original diary, photographs and documents). I believe that the following rule operates in this case: being a writer, and in particular an outstanding one, and a creator of meaningful literary texts, allows for the personal diary to be seen as, primarily, a text of literature.

23 Paul Ricoeur writes that "The archive appears as a physical place that protects traces that we have thoroughly distinguished from the traces in our brain, as well as from emotional traces – it protects documentary traces" (*La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*).

It is clearly visible in war diaries (quite often they almost turn into a case of a chronicle), especially written by Jewish authors. Victor Klemperer asks in his diary: "Who will bear witness to all of this?" and he answers: "I shall bear witness to the very end."[24] Similarly, other Jewish diarists, like Chaim Kapłan, do the same: "Even during the most dangerous days of war and occupation, when the enemy's planes showered us with bombs, I did not stop writing my Diary. I felt some internal need to immortalize those events on paper."[25] Jacek Leociak, when commenting this diaristic attitude, points our attention to the fact that the willingness to record and save the the truth is one of the strongest motivations here. Hence, "the notion of testimony, understood here in both legal and moral categories, becomes the key notion."[26]

For a diary understood as a testimony, a carrier of certain historical truth, or rather having a historical dimension, the category of an account and of the "archived memory" proposed by Paul Ricoeur is important:

> As far as I am concerned, I intend to honor the event by treating it as a real reference of the testimony seen as the most important category of the archived memory.[...] The event in its most primal sense is that what is being witnessed by someone.[27]

According to Ricoeur, testimony sends us back to a documentary trace, the trace sends us back to the event, as well as to the archive as a place of storekeeping of the traces of events. We could say in this way that a diarist is creating for his or her own purposes – or not only his or her own – a kind of private archive (while, as often is the case, the diary belongs to a much larger archive, where next to the autobiographical notes one can find documents, photographs, all kinds of objects and souvenirs). The diarist collects in his archive and adds to himself events just like objects. At the same time, this very archive is an object, a collection of different material objects that are vessels for texts (letters, postcards, press releases, tickets, bills, labels, etc.) or not (photographs, small objects, pieces of clothing, etc.).

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24 Klemperer, J. *I Shall Bear Witness: The Diaries of Victor Klemperer, 1933-41*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998.

25 Kapłan, Ch.A. *Księga życia* (fragmenty dziennika) [*The Book of Life*, fragments of the diary], from, „Biuletyn ŻIH," vol. 45-46, 1963, 207; after: J. Leociak *Tekst wobec Zagłady.* (*O relacjach z warszawskiego getta*), Wrocław: Leopoldinum, 1997, 101.

26 Leciak, J. *Tekst wobec zagłady*, 108.

27 Ricoeur, P., *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*.

The second kind of diary truth is a truth of experience that could also be called psychological truth. In the diary, that which is personal and within the sphere of physical, emotional and intellectual experiences that leave behind their trace comes to the surface. The person is present next to all of it in the diary through what is written down, as well as through what is not. Pauses between dates, empty spaces, silence, they all reveal the personal character of a diary and refer to a person that is as much on the outside (as the one writing a diary) as on the inside (as that which leaves behind a material and textual trace).[28]

Just like the truth of events sends us to history, the truth of experience sends us to the person writing, recording, and creating his or her diary. That is why it is necessary to introduce – following a formulation by Małgorzata Czermińska – "a category of the author understood as as a person exterior to the text," with which the theory of literature and humanities in general need to "confront anew."[29] The author of *Trójkąt autobiograficzny* calls our attention to the "intensity" and "severeness" of the experience, especially one that is an experience of a borderline situation that leads to a "creation of the text as a trace of experience." Czermińska ascribes a special role to autobiographical and documentary texts, including diary entries.[30]

In her polemic with Paul de Man, through referring to the concept of narrational identity and its creative transformation at the same time, Małgorzata Czermińska formulates her own stand in which the trace left by the person in the autobiographical or a documentary text "is not merely a relic, remnant after the absent, but [...] constitutes a new quality." She summarizes:

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28 Diarists themselves sometimes use the metaphor of trace in the auto-thematic entries in their diaries: "The diary of mine is like footsteps on a sandy shore. The well trained eye of the local will read from it who passed, will guess his height and age. For others, it will be a meaningless trace of footsteps of a passerby... If the passerby himself came back to this very place after a long time, he might not recognize his own footsteps: winds will erase them, sand will cover them, water will flood them and for a second time the traveler will meander on his old path, lost, on his way into the wide world." (Żeromski, S. *Dzienniki*, vol. 1, entry from 4/10/1885, edited by J. Kądziela, Wrocław–Warszawa: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 2006, 137-138.

29 Czermińska, M. „Autor – Podmiot – Osoba. Fikcjonalność i niefikcjonalność," in a collection: *Polonistyka w przebudowie. Literaturoznawstwo – wiedza o języku – wiedza o kulturze – edukacja. Zjazd Polonistów, Kraków, 22-25 września 2004*, vol. 1, edited by M. Czermińska, S. Gajda, K. Kłosiński, A. Legeżyńska, A.Z. Makowiecki, R. Nycz, Cracow: Universitas, 2005, 212. Further on, Czermińska observes that "after the anti-psychological approach, initiated by the formalists and phenomenologists and later on culminating in the concept of the 'death of the author' formulated within French post-structuralism, we have entered a phase of being interested in the author again; interested in him as a person existing on the outside of the work."

30 Ibid. 213.

> Instead of talking about *distortion* we should talk about *transformation*. Instead of lamenting over the loss, one should take a closer look at that which one has gained instead. [...] I would rather say that language *transforms* a person into a trace, than to say that it distorts him or her, because it not only transforms, in order to preserve, hence saves from passing, but also extracts it from silence.[31]

In her conclusion, the author proposes a concept of a "dispersed description," which seems to be a very interesting, new take on the relationship between a person and a text:[32]

> If we were to use an analogy with the notions proposed by Geertz, I would rather create, for the purposes of debate over trace, a metaphor of a description that is not condensed, but rather *dispersed*. The traces of the person in the text are the phenomena from different levels – convictions that are expressed directly, or only suggested, but also meaningful silence, the choice of the subject, a way of shaping literary material or stylistic predilections. These dispersed traces are like a code, and the key to this code is embedded in the writer's identity, as well as his existence when taken along with a social and historical context. Hence, the reader/researcher has access to only part of that key and in a varying degree, depending on the writer.[33]

The third kind of diary truth is the truth of reality, or the truth which we could call a metaphysical or transcendental. In this case, the one writing a diary reaches a discovery, an experience, an expression in the recording of such truths which transcend his accidental features. They are concerned with the human condition, the nature of reality, the presence or absence of God, or supernatural powers. The truth of reality recorded in a diary can be of a religious dimension, but does not have to be. The way in which it is expressed, I believe, can take one of three forms: epiphany, when the truth reveals itself before the diarist in a sudden and singular manner, and the diary, by its nature, is attuned to such sudden occurrences if it is allowed to record them. It can be taken up in the form of a reflection, when a diary becomes a site for the accumulation

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31 Ibid. 219-220.

32 Before her, another interesting concept was proposed by Ryszard Nycz in "Osoba w nowoczesnej literaturze: ślady obecności," in his *Literatura jako trop rzeczywistości. Poetyka epifanii w nowoczesnej literaturze polskiej*, Cracow: Universitas, 2001, 50-87. And if I read the difference between the two correctly, Nycz's proposal places the stress on text, while Czermińska's work rests on the person.

33 Czermińska, M. "Autor – Podmiot – Osoba ..." 221.

of thoughts on the nature of man and the world, and finally in the form of a desire that is embedded in a diary; a desire that is directed at what is real and the motivation reaches reality. Of course, all three kinds of appearing and recording of the truth of reality can be present in the same diary. There can likewise be diaries without any of these features.

As examples of diaries in which we are dealing with common entries of an epiphanic character, we could name those of Józef Czapski, Anna Kamieńska, or *Journal Written at Night* by Gustaw Herling-Grudziński. The best example of a diary in which the truth is a constant challenge for reflection that happens in the "order of time" is *Kłopot z istnieniem* by Henryk Elzenberg. The best representative of the third kind of record of the diaristic truth of reality, a reality that becomes the horizon of experience toward which it is directed, would be the *Diary* of Witold Gombrowicz.[34]

Lastly, I would like to take a closer look at the final example as – it seems to me – the least obvious from all of the above. Gombrowicz, whose work, including the *Diary*, is most often analyzed with the categories of "game," "mask," or "inter-human church," does not suggest a person who would be interested in truth in its metaphysical, or even transcendental, dimension.[35] And yet, it is the word "reality" that is one of the most important (if not the most important) words in the vocabulary of Gombrowicz and his *Diary*.[36] Each of the three volumes, already at the very beginning, brings entries in which "reality" or that which is "real" functions as a hero:

> If only one could hear a real voice in this kingdom of passing fiction! No– you hear either the echoes of fifteen years ago, or the rehearsed songs. [about the emigre press]

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34 I point to Gombrowicz's Diary, treating it as an example of a literary diary that posseses features of a personal one, making it something more than another literary work of the author.

35 Michał Pawel Markowski seems to be the only one who proposed a thorough existential and at the same time ontological and communicative reading of Gombrowicz in his book *Czarny nurt. Gombrowicz, świat, literatura* (Cracow: WL, 2004). His approach is close to inee in its assumptions, that is in seeing "Gombrowicz, who does not play literature, does not fiddle around with it, but petrified stares into worn out lining of the world and restlessly tries to come up with something, aware of failure that marks every text and all understanding of the Reality." (13) However, I do not share Markowski's interpretation, in which the reality of Gombrowicz, in its deepest layers, turns out to be an "existential abyss," an "ontological catastrophe" and a communicative "pulp of dark murmur," against which writing becomes an "intensive growing of horror, celebration of nonsense that describes both life and work." (17, 36, 20, 19).

36 During the reading of *Szkice piórkiem* by Bobkowski, Gombrowicz calls the diaries a "broth made of the taste of reality;" Gombrowicz, W. *Diary*, vol. 2, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1989, 80.

> [...]
>
> This singing would be magnificent if the singers were not terrified of it and if one did not sense the tremor in their voices, which arouses pity ... In the immense silence, our unconfessed, mute and gagged reality takes shape.[37]
>
> Indeed I believe that the chief goal of Polish postwar existence is getting at reality.[38]
>
> And if you have in mind even more profound moral considerations, then I will say to you, quite frankly, that in maintaining silence about these things I would be completely distorting what had come to exist between us – and this kind of sin, committed by a writer whose maxim is optimal proximity to reality, would be unforgivable.[39]

What is this reality that he so often mentions in his *Diary?* There is no simple answer to that question. One can only say that for Gombrowicz reality has a personal character, an individual, every day, biographical and spiritual reality, while, at the same time, it lends all of those categories different, more than individual, uncommon, historical and transcendental characters. The truth of reality is the result of twofold movement: on the one hand "striving for dehumanization," a willingness of man to get out of himself in order to recognize the conditions and foundations of existence, and simultaneously "a striving to humanize," a "sudden retraction into plain humanity and human mediocrity," marked with the presence of the "common man, the way we have him in our everyday experience and everyday feeling: the man from the cafe, from the street, given to us concretely." If this condition will not be met, metaphysics detaches from physics and what is human detaches from singular, concrete man: "reality falls apart like a house of cards and threatens drowning in the verbalism of non-reality."[40]

Gombrowicz aims to formulate the truth of such reality that would be every day, down to earth and penetrating human life in its most common symptoms and at the same time transcendental and speaking about the

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37 Gombrowicz, W. *Diary, vol. 1*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1989, 3-4.

38 Gombrowicz, W. *Diary, vol. 2*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1989, 9.

39 Gombrowicz, W. *Diary, vol. 3*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1989, 5.

40 W. Gombrowicz *Dziennik 1961-1969*, Cracow: WL, 2004, 232.

human condition and his place in the surrounding universe. Only once in his *Diary* does he call this truth by name:

> For reality is that which offers resistance; namely, that which hurts. And a real man is one who is in pain.
>
> No matter what we are told, there exists, in the entire expanse of the Universe, throughout the whole space of Being, one and only one awful, impossible, unacceptable element, one and only one thing that is truly and absolutely against us and absolutely devastating: pain. It is on pain and on nothing else that the entire dynamic of existence depends. Remove pain and the world becomes a matter of complete indifference…[41]
>
> *Translation: Jan Pytalski*

41 W. Gombrowicz, *Diary, vol. 3*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1989, 184.

Justyna Tabaszewska

Travelers and Colonizers: Contemporary Strategies of Describing Africa

> Journey as a source of inspiration, as a topic and as work of literature. Marco Polo, Humboldt, Goethe, Twain, and thousands of others. One needs to mature into traveling – journey represents much more than movement from place to place, more than tourism. ... A journey is a pregnant experience of the world, a way of learning its mysteries and truths, of finding answers to the question it poses. Journey understood in this manner is a reflection, it is a philosophical act.[1]

The situation of journey always entails the question of its goal. Sometimes it would seem that the wandering itself is a goal that does not require further justification. In those cases, however, there arises the question of its cause. The place that the traveler seeks to learn about is not chosen accidentally, even if the act of choice itself was not fully conscious.[2] The question grows even more pertinent when the newly encountered space becomes

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1 R. Kapuściński. *Lapidarium*. Czytelnik, Warszawa 1990. 165.

2 G. Green Transl. by H. Olędzka. Instytut Wydawnczizy Pax, Warszawa 1964. 22.

an object of description, as the reason for choosing a particular area directly affects its perception. The reason for making a particular journey is especially interesting when it results in a description that usurps the right to convey objective observations –which is what the literary reportage does.

I would like to discuss three descriptions of African journeys. The first one is part of *Rondo de Gaulle'a* [De Gaulle's Roundabout], a reportage series by Olga Stanisławska chronicling her yearlong journey from Casablanca (believed by Stanisławska to be an intermediary stage between the European culture and Africa) to Kinshasa. The second portrayal appears in the novels by Ryszard Kapuściński where he shares the years of his African experience. It was African experience, too, that resulted in two series of short stories by Wojciech Albiński. Different motivations that brought those authors to Africa and methods of description unique to each of them converge in one point: in the answer why it was this particular place that they found interesting. Why does the Dark Continent continue to fascinate and attract travelers, why does getting to know it become an experience so valuable that it is risking one's well-being and even life? What is the source of the "magic" of Africa expressed in the writing of Stanisławska and Kapuściński, one that with equal force affects those who spend in Africa large parts of their lives?

In order to answer those questions we must consider the image of the African land that attracted the writers along the possibility that they may have treated this image as a challenge to prove its stereotypical character. Such approach would be understandable especially in the case of reportage, representing a form of writing that cannot use fiction unless the conjured situation is used to express a general truth, or is necessary to introduce a (authentic) historical document.[3] This image of Africa was shaped as a result of two types of contact – the continent attracted both travelers, eager to discover other cultures, and colonizers, whose interest was motivated by search for profit. Even today, Africa's phenomenon relies on its otherness which itself has been undoubtedly affected by the failed attempts to "civilize" it. Hostile natural conditions and resistance of the native peoples prevented the changes that took place across centuries from spreading over the entire African territory, and so they were always superficial and temporary (Kapuściński speaks of Africa's "eternal persistence").

Otherness conceived in this fashion is a characteristic trait of Africa. Despite centuries of domination, European culture did not manage to reshape it. The defeat is even larger, as it created hostility toward the white man among the inhabitants of lands that were colonized most brutally.

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3 Compare: M. Wańkowicz. „O poszerzaniu konwencji reportażu." [On Broadening of the Reportage Form] *Reportaż. Wybór tekstów z teorii gatunku.* Rzeszów, 1992.

The consequences of colonization affected not only the subjugated nations – the entire perception of Africa today cannot rid itself of the colonizer's complex that burdens almost every observer. The erasure of this complex seems impossible in a situation where the debt resulting from the years of exploitation of African land remains unpaid, or rather, can never be paid back as even the insufficient attempts at material help cannot take away the disgrace of colonization.

This is an issue raised already by Joseph Conrad in *Heart of Darkness*. Marlow journeys up the Congo River following his childhood fantasy of filling "blank spaces," of learning about and, in a way, conquering the yet unknown lands. He quickly finds out that the Dark Continent is explored mostly not out of curiosity or the need to share the achievement of civilization but because of potential material gains and the need to solidify the domination over the native peoples.[4]

Another problem of describing Africa, emphasized by Kapuściński in *The Shadow Under The Sun*, is the "mosaic" nature of its space, the impossibility of placing the continent within any sort of clearly defined frame. Kapuściński's Africa is characterized by eternal persistence, but also by constant motion, as in such harsh conditions it is mobility that the local population owes its survival to. Perhaps this is the quality that attracts reporters, as their literary form, through its complexity, is best suited to reflect the incomplete character of knowing Africa.

It is also the reason why an analysis of this literary form becomes a challenge, especially as the genre remains peripheral to the interests of literary criticism. This was pointed out by Kapuściński already in *Lapidarium* almost two decades ago:

> What is the reason for the weak position of literary reportage? It is probably caused also by the fact that there are few writers practicing it. ... Why are so few interested in writing reportage? For starters, because in this case gathering information requires physical effort, good health, and often endangering one's life ... [5]

The position of the narrator is particularly problematic in interpreting literary reportage. The method of gathering materials is not without importance for their descriptive strategies. In her book, Olga Stanisławska does not desire to become someone special, convinced that this strategy will grant her

4 See: I. Watt. *Conrad w wieku dziewiętnastym.* [Conrad in the 19th Century] Transl. M. Boduszyńska – Borowikowa. Wydawnictwo Morskie, Gdańsk 1984. 266.

5 R. Kapuściński. *Lapidarium.* 178-179.

a perception of reality that is least burdened with stereotypes. But freeing oneself from the influence of stereotypes is impossible even when the narrator aim is to revise older perceptions. Reporters must take into account not only their own knowledge and experience but also the perceptions of the readers whose knowledge differs largely from theirs.[6]

The role of the media in the shaping of images of particular places leads many reporters to rely on those stereotypes so that they can be debunked after their existence had been brought to attention. Stereotypes cannot be ignored (even by the narrator), as much better cognitive results can be achieved through acknowledging the binary character of names that are used to describe space and emphasizing the difference between particular places and that which we grew used to associate with them.[7]

Already the choice of destination itself, the necessity to answer to the question why the journey takes place in this particular area is a cognition burdening factor. The specific nature of the situation of the author of *Rondo de Gaulle'a* forces to answer indirectly – her answer can be found in the reappearing recollections of the images of Africa in the works of Conrad and Blixen, as well as Greene and Forsyth. This literary context reveals the portrayal of Africa that Stanisławska tries to challenge and the conventions she enters a debate with. Her encounters with the inhabitants of the Dark Continent are both an ongoing attempt to combat stereotypes and an attempt to prove that as a reporter she did not yield to them.

Ryszard Kapuściński followed an entirely different path, admitting openly that his writing was more than an account of experiences, being a reconstruction of experiences.

> He does not invent the story but relates events that took place in a certain fashion. However, he does not always discuss them as a direct participant (witness) which means that a reconstruction takes place, either from memory or based on collected documentary memories and reports of

6 The problem of perceptions was discussed by Ewa Rewers in *Post-polis. Wstęp do filozofii ponowoczesnego miasta.* [Post-Polis: Introduction to Philosophy of Postmodern City] Universitas, Kraków 2005. 10. "Perceptions often described as public refer to the most basic features of the natural and anthropogenic environment. Perceptions described as stereotypical present a simplified and selective image, often shaped by the media."

7 See: A. Schaff. *Stereotypy a działania ludzkie.* [Stereotypes and Human Behavior]. Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 1981. "The main therapeutic (and preventive) procedure relies on making people aware of the stereotypical nature of their views and attitudes, on making them aware of the difference between notional knowledge actualized in their consciousness by the verbal stimulus of the same sound (or graphical) shape and the emotional-volitional state, related to the stereotype." 144.

other people, as well as an inclusion of other non-fictional and fictional narratives.[8]

Such approach is clearly understandable if we take into account the dramatic difference between Stanisławska's and Kapuściński's descriptions – the latter were written as a result of many years spent observing Africa. This is why in *The Shadow Under the Sun* one finds remarks requiring knowledge that exceeds the described situations. Similar differences can be noted on the level of the work's structure –events depicted by Kapuściński are connected only by two elements: Africa and the person of the narrator. His descriptive strategy is entirely different from the one in Stanisławska whose reportage cycle, despite its non-chronological order, is internally connected by the situation of journey that from its very nature requires continuity. Kapuściński, describes Africa as a mosaic of people and events, a constantly changing whole that despite its variety has certain unchangeable features. As an example, Kapuściński mentions for instance its lack of history – conveyed orally, constantly modified by each generation history eventually transformed into myth.

But the perception of Africa does not always have to expose its specificity. In his short stories, Wojciech Albiński presents the readers with a continent viewed very differently. The universal character of Albiński's writing does not stand in contrast with the rather exotic scenery. This effect results mostly from the author's frequent references to the description of family ties – for instance in the eponymous *Kalahari,*[9] portraying a father's journey through the harsh desert to see his son, suffering from cerebral malaria. The situation of illness so typical of the climate, resulting in a learning of other customs (including ones that are as strange to us as magic) is understandable even for a reader unfamiliar with African realities.

In his short stories, Albiński depicts Africa that he came to know during the years of work for the government in Botswana where he marked out land for roads, villages and mines. Biographical elements inform almost each of his stories. The author and the narrator often work in the same profession.[10] Presented events are not an attempt to create a single image of Africa, but rather present its character. The situation of searching

8 E. Dąbrowska. „Od rzeczywistości do języka i tekstu." [From reality to language and text] *Wędrować, pielgrzymować, być turystą.* [Journeying, Pilgrimaging, Being a Tourist] Ed. P. Kowalski. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, Opole 2003. 97.

9 W. Albiński. *Kalahari.* Twój Styl, Warszawa 2003.

10 W. Albiński. „Mina" in ibid.

for an executioner (almost unthinkable in the largely abolitionist Europe, especially as the choice in question is made almost through competition) in *Królestwo potrzebuje kata* [The Kingdom Needs an Executioner] introduces the reader to an entirely alien world where the belief in burdening people with bad energy is so strong that it results in expulsion of foreign visitors (which results in a diplomatic crisis) and shamanistic practices enforced by the inhabitants (and fully accepted by the state). Once again, it is hard to resist the impression that the changeable, "mosaic" character of the Dark Continent is best conveyed through short literary forms that allow for the withdrawal of the narrator and a presentation of particular situations, observed and described in the tiniest detail but not assuming the right to more general conclusions.

Participation as a Cognitive Strategy

The unique character of reportage originates in the complicated status of the narrators who on the one hand, are obliged to retain utmost objectivity (they are not allowed to use fiction), but on the other, must be aware that their works have to reveal why this and not any other object of description had been chosen. The initial choice of Africa as the goal of the journey and object of cognition bears impact on the future strategy of describing the space – a doubly subjectivized space, not only due to the narrator's pre-existent notions of Africa but also because of the randomness resulting from the situation of journey that enforces description from several positions: that of a passer-by, traveler or observer.

In the case of cultures entirely different from the one represented by the narrator, it is almost impossible to avoid the influence of preconceived notions. Stanisławska attempts to overcome their influence through direct participation in the described events, relinquishing her own subjectivity. Her role in the cultural circle she is learning about protects her both from loneliness and from subscribing to a particular social group which would hamper her contact with each encountered person: "It was a privilege – not to fit completely into any role, not to be a man or a woman only. To have access to both worlds, sitting with soldiers in the desert and with a young mother giving birth."[11] This is why we can speak of the exceptional force of literary reportage – it is an account of experience whose authenticity is granted by the narrator: the participant and observer of events. Such cognitive method, however, is not objective at all – participation is a method completely engaging a particular person, a method whose

11 O. Stanisławska *Rondo de Gaulle'a*. Twój Styl, Warszawa 2001. 114.

results bear the mark of subjectivity that the narrator may not be fully aware of.[12]

Stanisławska is conscious of the fact that her experience cannot be expressed by the word, or that it loses a lot when it is. This seems clear already from the title of her book: Stanisławska's de Gaulle's roundabout is not in France and it is not a roundabout but a flat piece of desert between large dunes. A place like many others in Africa. But even this place has a certain characteristic feature: "None of us would recognize it the next day, as there is nothing about it that would make it different in our eyes from the landscape surrounding it. But this is where trails cross."[13] A place that is difficult to find without a compass becomes the key element of every journey – it allows one to take a rest, protects one from getting lost. Words only complicate understanding, they are a burden that misshapes reality and that cannot be abandoned: "I look at the blank areas of yellow on my map, marked here and there with black stitches of letters. The utopia of maps is hopeless, the incompatibility of words and things absurd."[14]

The ability to communicate is necessary in the attempt to understand other customs, and this is why Stanisławska devotes a lot of attention to speech – it is through dialogue that she characterizes not only particular people but also a certain type of culture described precisely as a culture of dialogue, of openness to every person encountered. The incompatibility of words becomes a problem only in Stanisławska's relation with the reader, it is not an obstacle experienced in her conversations with the people met in Africa. The language she uses in her book changes depending on the events, accentuating their character, it seems to add what the author did not want to express explicitly. And language itself becomes an object of description and, at the same time, yet another factor authenticating the encounter.

The Situation of Journey and Perception of Reality

But it is not only language that determines cognition – the situation of journey as such influences the ways of perceiving reality, since every strange space is

12 Cf. H.-G. Gadamer. *Prawda i metoda.* Transl. B. Baran. PWN, Warszawa 2004. 112. „If something is called or cinsidered an Erlebnis, that means it is rounded into the unity of a significant whole. ... Thus it is quite understandable that the word emerges in biographical literature and ultimately stems from its use in autobiography. What is called an experience constitutes itself in memory." [English version based on the translation by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. *Truth and Method*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2004. 57-58.

13 O. Stanisławska.*Rondo* ... 115.

14 Ibid.

immediately internalized and assessed.[15] This is the cause of fundamental differences between descriptive strategies in Stanisławska and Kapuściński –the former is in constant motion, her reportages are an account of a wandering, and so the encountered people are met only to some degree, only to an extent. Nothing can be said about them apart from providing an account of the meeting because otherwise it would be easy to lose the sense of the journey that allows only to "brush against" another culture, not to learn about it in depth. Meanwhile, Kapuściński presents places that he had a chance to observe for a long time, noting the changes, emergence of new legal orders the activities of which he comments on. Consequently, a reater amount of commentary is not surprising – Kapuściński is an observer of Africa's "eternal persistence," its continuously changing history. Albiński's situation is yet different, in his work, the categories of time and space are usually not determined clearly, the author does not want to distract the reader from the presented events whose meaning is in no way dependent on those categories.

Defining Africa as a place is, thus, another problem that renders an objective description impossible. It is a space that cannot be contained by a classical definition, since after we abandoned the conviction expressed by Einstein that a place "is a small part of the surface of the Earth recognized by its name," its actualization being a "material object," it has been noted that a place is something more and something different at the same time. The binary character of the notion becomes problematic in itself, even when it is fully conscious. In the case of literary reportage, it becomes even more complicated – it seems impossible to separate the subjective elements, introduced by the narrator, from the objective ones, shaped directly by the described space.[16]

The value of journey lies in the attempt to learn about (and consequently, in a way, "take possession of") other cultures. It is the only chance to become aware of the differences between our preconceived notions of a place and the place itself. This is probably why travels to entirely new and exotic countries constitute perfect reportage material – both Stanisławska and

15 Cf. J. Słodczyk „Percepcja przestrzeni w badaniach geograficznych." [Perception of space in geographical research] *Wędrować, pielgrzymować...* 17. "Evaluation of particular places in the geographical environment is dependent on several factors, such as: education, previous experiences, contemporary material situation, age and location of the person performing assessment. Perception is also influenced by the social environment surrounding the described unit, by its position and belonging to a certain circle."

16 E. Rewers. *Post-polis*. 167. "The fundamental questions concern the shift from the universalist and objectivist notion of place as a point in the mathematical-cartographic systems to the discovery of place as a fragment of human experience. Put differently, it is about capturing the process of overlapping of two perspectives: the universalist-objective one and the situational-subjective one, outlining the space of human activity."

Kapuściński relate their journey as a "clash" with otherness: "People here think that one cannot live differently, that there is only one life. But those who have traveled know that there are two lives, maybe even three, maybe four."[17]

Alienation and the Experience of Otherness

Stanisławska does not hesitate to relinquish her Europeanness to be closer to Africa. She does not feel superiority and the otherness of what she encounters evokes respect and admiration, not alienation. Her own otherness is also received positively. But the consciously revoked literary contexts indicate that the problem could be conceived in an entirely different way. Joseph Conrad, believed to be the father of the myth of Apocalyptic Africa, considers the experience of unity with the dark people of Africa to be terrifying, discovering in it the element that may not create evil in itself but that calls it forth and allows it to exist. Immersion in Africa and its laws seems not only difficult but, first and foremost, dangerous. Joseph Conrad sees in Africa not only great opportunity, he sees in it the beginning of everything.

> The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there – there you could look at a thing monstrous and free. It was unearthly, and the men were – No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it – this suspicion of their not being inhuman. … The mind of man is capable of anything because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future. What was there after all? … truth – truth stripped of its cloak of time.[18]

The truth supposedly hidden in the jungle is so terrifying that Kurtz's soul, struck by it, goes mad. "Being alone in the wilderness, it had looked within itself, and, by heavens! I tell you, it had gone mad."[19] It is a truth that Marlow fears to know and tainted by it, decides not to tell anyone. For Conrad, encountering Africa is the terror of encountering oneself. But even Conrad does not believe that heart of darkness is unavoidable, suggesting rather that it is a potentiality, a kernel nestled inside each of us, one that can take

17 O. Stanisławska. *Rondo*... 62.

18 J. Conrad. *Jądro ciemności*. Transl. I. Socha. Zielona Sowa, Kraków 2004. 41. [here after the original – AW]

19 Ibid. 75.

over the entire soul and destroy it when we are left entirely to ourselves, when the only signposts are those that we carry within us, when no law nor propriety bind us. This does not mean that gain is the only factor determining our choices – some of them are its direct contradiction. Stanisławska mentions a similar problem describing young people damaged by war and cruelty (the participants of Tuareg rebellion) whose ethical system has been warped as a result.

Karen Blixen presents an entirely different approach. She resembles one of the women described by Conrad who creates her own world by adjusting everything she sees to an ideal model. Blixen's whole book is a story of her, of her perception of Africa (which is why Stanisławska describes her as the creator of the myth of Genesis-Africa), opening with a somewhat fairy-tale introduction: "I had a farm in Africa at the foot of the Ngong Hills." Blixen talks about the native people with unquestionable fondness but it is a fondness delineated and restricted by a sense of separateness. The first sentence of the novel introduces an Arcadian atmosphere and presents her main object of description: the state of possession. Or rather, as Stanisławska observes, the impossibility of possession. This element, according to Stanisławska, unifies both great visions of Africa; at some point she experiences it herself (following her own wish to break the sequence of "identical days," leaving the friendly house of Lili Makate.)

> In Stanisławska's journey, a breakthrough moment comes when her traveler status, instead of allowing her to be admitted to both the male and female circles, leads to complete separation.
> In the great square men were sitting down in a circle – I sat behind them in darkness. In the center, women danced in rows, in unison, moving their hips forward … I suddenly felt ashamed to talk to men. All women were dancing. And there I was, strange, non-existent among the people, no more than just a shadow.[20]

Her alienation is not caused by a transient emotion. Leaving the circle, she meets a man who addresses her as "madame" – from that moment on he treats her as a "ma'am," someone deserving respect and care but both of these come from her separateness. This mixture of feelings reappears throughout Stanisławska's book more than once. Earlier, the narrator evokes the interest of the native girls being a guest from a different world in the presence of whom they can pretend to be someone else. Her very name indicates exoticism, something fascinating, attractive but entirely alien. This attitude is best

20 O. Stanisławska. *Rondo*... 89-90.

seen in the reasoning of an encountered girl who is just about to be married and who pities the writer for having to travel on her own, without protection from her husband, father or brother, without a person who would solve for her potential conflicts and dilemmas.

The sense of loneliness grows stronger when her conversation partners attempt to convince Stanisławska that they know her culture which is good and valuable, and centered around night clubs, make-up, and music. This evokes resistance in the author, as – in a way – they belittle the importance of the cultural circle she represents,[21] but at the same time they are a source of knowledge about the mentality that has created this stereotype.[22]

Still, those experiences of otherness result from the separateness of cultures, not from the impossibility to understand or hostility. It is the latter that at some point becomes unbearable for Stanisławska and causes her to finish her journey. Traveling along the Congo River grows challenging, and Kurtz's words begin to sound ever more sinister:

> People here don't like strangers. One might think it is the jungle that made them so. Or perhaps it was the massacres and conquers, commerce and blessings? …
>
> – Trust me – he added – it's not easy to be a stranger here.
>
> "The horror, the horror" are the only words whispered by Kurtz, the stranger of Conrad's story, as he dies in the jungle.[23]

Otherness spares only those for whom jungle is a novelty, something different and unknown, but it defeated even Kurtz – a man "of generous mind" who entered it as if it was his own and wanted to rule it. Although he exercised absolute power over his station, he was eventually defeated, unquestionably obeyed by the native people but nonetheless a stranger.

In the discussed texts, the problem of alienation can analyzed from two perspectives. On the one hand, the narrators are treated as the Other, as

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21 E. Rewers comments on the problem: "Thus, the concept of multiculturalism not only strengthens the existing boundaries of reluctance and lack of understanding, but also helps – consciously or unconsciously – to develop ideologies basing on cultural fundamentalism, separatism, finally – racism. This is because acceptance for the multitude of cultures is not automatically accompanied by tolerance for otherness, its acceptation and true understanding." *Post-polis*... 199.

22 Cf. Z. Benedyktowicz. *Portrety obcego*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2000. 83. "Stereotypes reveal little about those they portray but a lot, even if only indirectly, about those who created them."

23 Ibid. 159.

someone belonging to a different culture, and on the other hand, they cannot rid themselves of the same attitude toward the local people. Images, multiplied by both sides, express feelings and fears related to someone radically different from us.[24] Even today, we continue to describe Africa from the perspective of the "white man," furthermore, a "white man" who recognizes not only his or her otherness, but also superiority. Ryszard Kapuściński is aware that this is what annuls the possibility of cognition and contact:

> To describe the transformation of the white man into the WHITE man. White man in Europe is unaware of his whiteness. He does not think about it, does not live for that thought. In the Third World, however, he becomes, with time, increasingly white. He is separated and isolated by the fact that he is white but he will also strengthen his whiteness, as to him, it signifies superiority (or illusion of superiority).[25]

Albiński describes the persistient racial divisions in a similar fashion, although from the position of Africa's inhabitants, which seems to weaken the division and lessen the sensed differences. "– White? – asked Jean-Luis – Look into the mirror… African sun has already darkened you! You and your friend, Glen, are our brothers from the South"[26] But Albiński's positioning is unique – his descriptions are written neither from the perspective of a traveler, nor a colonizer. The Dark Continent is much closer to Albiński than it is to Stanisławska or Kapuściński, and it is not because of the time he spent there but because Africa was where he worked. According to Ian Watt, it was work that provided protection from barbarism, brutally imposed civilization and pangs of conscience. It was through work that Marlow managed to resist the process of "nativization," it was work that protected his ethics, although it was combined with a skeptical passiveness toward other people. It was, thus, a means that prevented a complete rejection of ideals as well as their full acceptance, keeping Marlow in constant state of tension. Similar tension can be seen also in Albiński, who cannot relinquish a certain dose of superiority toward those who try to live their lives differently.

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24 Ibid. 24-25. "The image in question is not a faithful reflection of reality. It also is not an emotionally neutral systematization of exhaustive knowledge of psychology and cultural properties of neighboring groups. … In the shaping of such images, tradition plays a much bigger role than the individual experience and judgment. An image of this kind is simply a stereotype."

25 R. Kapuściński. *Lapidarium*. 17-18.

26 W. Albinski. „Obawiamy się buntu żandarmów." [We fear the gendarme rebellion] *Królestwo potrzebuje*… 46.

The Myth of Africa and the Question of Identification with the Other

The unique position of Africa as an object of description originates in the conviction that encounter with it is never aimed only to satisfy curiosity or desire for the exotic. The choice of Africa as a destination derives from the belief that by understanding the cradle of civilization one can understand not only one's contemporaneity but also the future. This approach seems to be shared by Stanisławska and Greene, a similar one can be found in Conrad – the goal of Marlow's journey was to realize the childhood dream of filling the "blank spaces," of meeting the magical, mysterious place that fascinated him as a hypnotizing snake – it is also probably the reason why Marlow remembers the entire journey as a dream and nightmare.[27]

Graham Greene explained his travel with the desire to understand the core of himself – we do not know whether Conrad's heart of darkness was supposed to be this center. However, contrary to Marlow, he begins his journey aware of its symbolic, metaphysical character. Marlow's journey has been taken to reach places never seen by a white man but we cannot forget that it also had an entirely pragmatic goal – this, perhaps, is the reason why he feels such a deep discrepancy between performed work and expectations regarding the discovery of unreachable places.

Stanisławska attempts to avoid formulating expectations regarding the places she describes. She does not hesitate to cross the boundary separating the "civilized" Africa from the "wild" one. She feels no desire to evaluate or classify that which she encounters. But even Stanisławska yields at some point. She cannot continue the journey after she realizes that what may await her, may as well be Conrad's heart of darkness. Then, words uttered by a customs official encountered earlier, dawn on her: having heard where Stanisławska was returning from, he looks doubtfully at the map depicting the river described by Conrad and says "You like monstrosity, ma'am." It is difficult to resist noticing the resemblance between this utterance and the "horror" seen by Kurtz in the moment of his death. Greene's Africa, on the other hand, is homogeneous, inherently coherent and all that fails to meet this criterion is seen as unnatural, a denial of Africa's characteristic features. It seems clear that this homogeneity results from primality, as division and differentiation concern already developed things.

Karen Blixen has a contrasting view of Africa. In Stanisławska's book, it represents an entirely different understanding of the continent. Blixen's approach is described by the contemporary author as a turn toward Genesis and Jungian archetypes. But Blixen saw in Africa exactly what she wanted to see – freedom from propriety, honesty, and selfless curiosity, attributing

27 I. Watt. *Conrad w wieku...*

all those features to the native people. Africa was supposed to be her escape and shelter, a return to the land of innocence.

Dark Continent is viewed highly subjectively not only by Blixen and Conrad whose ways of thinking about Africa influenced its contemporary reception, but also by the reporters. For an assessment of the influence of subjectivization on the reportage prose, it is important to note that it is precisely subjectivization that contributes to the unique status of literary reportage. If the latter is to be defined as a "journalistic account of real events, enriched with a detailed description of the environment, characterization of the participants and impressions of the reporter who conveys to the readers in a (not necessarily direct) way his attitude toward the portrayed reality,"[28] then we have no right to consider even an entirely subjective description of a situation to be a fault, as long as the reporter informs us about it.

Consequently, the experiences of journalists introduce the element of authenticity to the portrayed events. This does not relieve the reporters from the genre requirement to produce a "well documented account of real events."[29] The latter, however, does not exclude the possibility of turning reportage into artistic prose by adopting a chosen narrative strategy, or by focusing partly on the character of the reporter, his ways of establishing contacts with other people and gathering information.[30]

It seems that by concentrating precisely on those factors, Stanisławska tries to minimize the influence of stereotypes. Journey as an attempt to find oneself in the described world lasts as long as long she feels a sense of community with the encountered people. It would perhaps be worthwhile to consider, whether the sense of connection Stanisławska experiences is really desired by those other people, whether her participation is not an attempt to invade the area that will remain forever alien to her. Is it, perhaps, an instance of voyeurism?[31]

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28 K. Wolny-Zmorzyński. „Reportaż." [Reportage] *Dziennikarstwo i świat mediów.* [Journalism and the world of media] Universitas, Kraków 2004. 174.

29 Ibid. 181.

30 Z. Żabicki. *Proza... proza...* [Prose... prose...] Warszawa 1966. 148.

31 Compare: E. Rewers. *Post-polis*. „To identify with means, first and foremost, to identify with the Other. Often, this strategy leads as far as to affixation, to an apparent death of the identifying subject stripped of the possibility of choice. ... But to identify with may also mean: to answer the question 'who can be identified with to reaffirm one's own identity?' ... At the basis of appropriation, as well as identification, there lies the claim for recognition. The difference is in the omission of the other person, within the culture entitled to affirmation and assignment of identity, that all strategies of appropriation attempt to erase." 293-294.

The author of *Rondo de Gaulle'a* took upon herself a particularly difficult task, trying to subjectively describe the journey in a way that would debunk the stereotypes that characterize our attitude to Africa. But Stanisławska did not manage to free herself from those – even the act of overthrowing stereotypes is a testimony to their strong presence in the cognitive process. It is hard to resist the impression that the experienced events were reconstructed to reaffirm the author's position with even more force. The initial myth of otherness and separateness of the Dark Continent is juxtaposed against the experiences that contribute to another myth – the myth of complete identification and familiarization within other culture. It seems that the writer remains on the border between "identification that reaffirms identity" and an attempt to appropriate someone else's life. What Stanisławska perceives as a proof of her assimilation (the possibility to participate in situations closed to particular groups within a community) is, in fact, an argument for her otherness – not belonging to any specific group within a society means not belonging to any group, to remain a visitor, an observer that gets to see only as much as others want him to see.

Kapuściński's position was similarly complicated: as a correspondent, he was separated from the new culture from the onset, firstly as a stranger, secondly, as someone who evaluates. Hence, he was also granted special rights. But in this case, his role of a reporter was a factor enabling an objectivization of reporting (especially by separating information from commentary).[32]

The transparency of the observer and event participant is a fiction, especially when they describe the experiences as something special and rare. And this is, after all, how all of the discussed writers talk about their contacts with Africa. One clearly cannot see fault in their belief that there is a unique value in the possibility to observe Africa. It becomes equally clear why most of them yielded to the illusion of unmediated encounter – after all it is awe and admiration that shaped their perception of the described events. But while feelings such as those encourage subjectivization, it is not too high a price for giving the readers a chance for a contact with something entirely alien.

As a result of the unique position of literary reportage as a genre, described events become closer to the audience through the person of the narrator without losing their real presence. The road to understanding the phenomenon of the description of Africa is impossible for those who do not have actual contact with it. What shaped the perception of this continent in reportage prose was not an attempt to deal away with the stereotypes (destined to fail from the onset) but with the distance. The illusion of unmediated encounter

32 Cf. W. Pisarek. „Kodeks etyki dziennikarskiej." [Jorunalist code of ethics] *Dziennikarstwo i świat mediów*. 430.

seems to be retained on purpose, as it is the only way to bring the alien space closer to the readers:

> At any rate, it is not by chance that literature is the place where art and science merge. ... The written word and what partakes of it – literature – is the intelligibility of mind transferred to the most alien medium. Nothing is so purely the trace of the mind as writing, but nothing is so dependent on the understanding mind either. In deciphering and interpreting it, a miracle takes place: the transformation of something alien and dead into total contemporaneity and familiarity.[33]

Translation: Anna Warso

33 H.-G. Gadamer. *Prawda i metoda.*238. [156]

Piotr Śniedziewski

Seeing Nothing in Oneself: Melancholy in Amiel's Intimate Diary

And is there not another reason for
all this restlessness,
in a certain sense of void?

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Firstly, the world is empty. Henri-Frédéric Amiel believed that he was to live in a world filled with elegant gestures and religious injunctions that barely manage to obscure the futility of existence. That's where his "sharpest sense of emptiness of life and the flight of things" (233) stems from, along with the experience of "the emptiness of our existence" (233). There, on the outside, was Amiel's family, incapable of comprehending the philosopher's solitary way of life; his struggles with relating to other people also lurked therein. Amiel often complains of "hurtful timidity, unprofitable conscientiousness, fatal slavery to detail!" (356), which allegedly deprive him of his freedom. It seems that right before he is set to experience something, he ends up constructing numerous elaborate scenarios of the experience in his head which, as a result, deprives him of all satisfaction and stifles his movement: [1]

1 H.F. Amiel, *Amiel's Journal: The Journal Intime of Henri-Frédéric Amiel* (New York; London: Macmillan and Co., 1983), 82. (nearly all quoted passages will come from this particular edition, from here onwards the locations of all the quotes from this book will be placed in the main body of the article; quotes from the French edition of the *Intimate Diary*, translated into Polish by the author, will be located in the footnotes.

> The reason seems to be timidity, and the timidity springs from the excessive development of the reflective power which has almost destroyed in me all spontaneity, impulse, and instinct, and therefore all boldness and confidence. Whenever I am forced to act, I see cause for error and repentance everywhere, everywhere hidden threats and masked vexations. (72)

To the subject exploring it, therefore, the world, even prior to being experienced, already seems to be nothing more than a bleak reflection of itself, an artificially constructed chain of events that constitute an *ersatz* of real life. Probably for this particular reason Stanisław Przybyszewski ended up calling Amiel a "typical epigonus" and counted him among the "herd of dilettantes who, whilst possessing nearly limitless creative capabilities, cannot end up creating anything, who, despite their barren nature, cannot cease to squander their potential by engaging in fruitless attempts at binding will to emotion."[2] According to Przybyszewski, the *Intimate Diary*'s author, similarly to an entire generation of writers tainted with particular "degeneration," mires himself in his emotions, picks his scabs, thus impairing his intellect and his will to act. His life is a sham, a charade constructed by a hypersensitive, paralyzing imagination.

It should not come as a surprise that in this precise context Amiel had to notice that "the world is but an allegory" (30). The Swiss philosopher considers George Berkeley, Johannes Gottlieb Fichte, and Ralph Waldo Emerson to be patron saints of this particular revelation, simultaneously admitting that the soul is the only true substance, whereas "the world is but a firework, a sublime phantasmagoria, destined to cheer and form the soul" (31). As a consequence, reality turns out to be only a figment of the human mind and exists insofar as the latter perceives it and gives it a name: "

We are all visionaries, and what we see is our soul in things. We reward ourselves and punish ourselves without knowing it, so that all appears to change when we change" (51).

The subject stands at the center of perception, whereas the world – even if its existence cannot be disputed after the subject's death – is only important to the subject as a hypostatic object of desire. That is why the world never means what it seems it means, either intersubjectively or objectively (if those words still carry any meaning); it is only a projection of the "self," to whose obsessive presence the *Intimate Diary* is dedicated to. This idealistic assumption is what allowed Amiel to speak about the world in categories

2 S. Przybyszewski, "Misteria (o powieści Knuta Hamsuna)," in: S. Przybyszewski, *Synagoga Szatana i inne eseje*, selection and translation G. Matuszek (Krakow: Oficyna Literacka, 1997), 109.

of allegory – as correctly diagnosed by Stanisław Brzozowski in his essay on the Swiss philosopher's "subjectivity of thought."[3] This dual view of the world and the belief that it not only means more than it seems it means, but even means something else awakened in Amiel "an ironical instinct" (84). The author never stops to contemplate his view of reality because he's convinced that underneath its surface lies something that may contradict whatever is above it.

The existence of allegory and irony in one's worldview results in the inevitable treatment of reality as a vacant form whose emptiness is masked only by the subject's desires. No wonder, then, that Amiel decided to abandon active participation in the world around him, a task he formulated in the explication: "At bottom there is but one subject of study: the forms and metamorphoses of mind" (2). This belief – going against persistent interpretations that look for the reasons behind the writer's decisions in his aversion towards worldly life[4] – seems to be primarily philosophical in nature. Even the sorrow and melancholy permeating the *Intimate Diary* are primarily speculative and literary categories, and psychological categories secondarily – something already explored by Brzozowski, who saw in Amiel's work "a deep sorrow of intellectual extraction."[5] Such an attitude is encouraged even by the writer himself, particularly in his meta-reflection exploring the phenomenon of the intimate diary:

> A private journal, which is but a vehicle for meditation and reverie, beats about the bush as it pleases without being hound to make for any definite end. Conversation with self is a gradual process of thought-clearing. Hence all these synonyms, these waverings, these repetitions and returns upon one's self. Affirmation maybe brief; inquiry takes time; and the line which thought follows is necessarily an irregular one. I am conscious indeed that at bottom there is but one right expression; but in order to find it I wish to make my choice among all that are like it; and my mind

3 cf. S. Brzozowski, "Fryderyk Henryk Amiel (1821-1881). Przyczynek do psychologii współczesnej," in: S. Brzozowski, *Głosy wśród nocy. Studia nad przesileniem romantycznym kultury europejskiej*, ed. and pref. O. Ortwin, introd. C. Michalski, afterw. A. Bielik-Robson (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2007), 132-134.

4 cf. e.g. J. Vuilleumier, "Kompleks Amiela," trans. K. Ostrowska, *Literatura na Świecie* 10 (1991): 108-120. Although Vuilleumier emphasizes that the "Amielism" he describes is not limited to the medical dimension alone, his article is dominated by the pursuit of "pathology" and "timidity springing from excessive introspection, oversensitivity intensified by a pervading feeling of isolation and humiliation" (109).

5 S. Brzozowski, *Fryderyk Henryk Amiel*, 132

> instinctively goes through a series of verbal modulations in search of that shade which may most accurately render the idea. Or sometimes it is the idea itself which has to be turned over and over, that I may know it and apprehend it better. I think, pen in hand; it is like the disentanglement, the winding-off of a skein. Evidently the corresponding form of style cannot have the qualities which belong to thought which is already sure of itself, and only seeks to communicate itself to others. The function of the private journal is one of observation, experiment, analysis, contemplation; that of the essay or article is to provoke reflection; that of the book is to demonstrate. (388)

Already the genologic idea, as observed by Daniel Renaud,[6] is surprising in this particular instance. What does an "intimate diary" imply? Well, firstly, it sets forth that Amiel accomplished what Jean-Jacques Rousseau feared in his *Confessions*. Amiel managed to conduct a successful experiment on his own self, he replaced experience with writing. Rousseau preferred to gaze at greenery and roam the wilderness, because the world around him has not yet lost either its individuality or its cognitive value:

> Then, why not write them? you will say. Why should I? I answer. Why deprive myself of the actual charms of enjoyment, in order to tell others that I did enjoy them? What did I care for readers, the public, or the whole world, while I was mounting to the skies? Besides, did I carry pens and paper with me? If I had thought of all that, nothing would have occurred to me.[7]

Rousseau is fully aware of the derivative nature of narrative; the world is the only true treasure trove of experience and cognition, whereas writing is nothing more than a miserable necessity that distorts the depiction of sensual and spiritual experience of nature. For Amiel, a similar belief is based on misunderstanding, is subject to the logic of the chiasmus, as there are reasons to doubt whether he truly felt writing to be a consequence of experience. We might consider claiming the complete opposite – experience is the product of writing, as only the latter enables us to understand that the world is fiction spun by the subject. That is precisely why a habit of writing down one's emotions and thoughts is one of the more obvious virtues of having a journal. And if the world is only a fiction of the mind

6 cf. D. Renaud, *Un écrivain en marche vers sa reconnaissance non plus comme malade mais comme écrivain*, http://www.amiel.org/atelier/oeuvre/etudes (April 1, 2007).

7 J.J. Rousseau, *Confessions* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1996), 157

in the midst of experience, then the fact that a journal should by definition be "intimate" also seems perfectly clear. "Intimate," that is dedicate to the subject, its quandaries, idiosyncrasies, reflections. The "self" is the protagonist of the *Intimate Diary* – in the same way it plays a crucial role in the journal of Maine de Birana, as highlighted by Józef Czapski.[8] The point here, however, is not to engage in narcissistic self-intoxication but to gaze deep into oneself, to turn inwards and, as a result, to counteract intellectual despondency.[9]

Despite all that, it quickly turns out that the introspection Amiel proposes is made up of equal parts precision and escapism, a composition brilliantly captured by the oxymoronic phrase "dreamy meditative side." The "gradual process of thought-clearing" is not as obvious as the *Diary*'s author would like. As much as he tries to capture his own thoughts, to encapsulate the substance of his soul in a speculative way, he's constantly hindered by his own incorrigible proclivity towards daydreaming, a predilection for conditional construction and a tendency towards wondering what would happen if... Separating philosophical purpose from literary craftsmanship is very complicated in this particular instance. The element of dreaming held Amiel in its thrall, and the author suffered – like many other of his contemporaries (both fictional and real) – from the same condition that plagued Emma Bovary. It is not without reason that Amiel emphasizes that "reverie, like the rain of night, restores color and force to thoughts which have been blanched and wearied by the heat of the day. With gentle fertilizing power it awakens within us a thousand sleeping germs" (35). The Swiss philosopher also ascertains – to some extent in agreement with what I wrote about an empty world a few paragraphs above – "what a pale counterfeit is real life of the life we see in glimpses" (33). Amiel, therefore, does not place his pursuits neither in the real world (because it does not exist) nor in the world of systemic reflection (which the author does not really care about), but rather in the fairly imprecise dream world. That might seem surprising, and some of us might go as far as ponder how inner dreams might counterbalance dreams of the subject that were already

8 cf. J. Czapski, "Ja" in: J. Czapski, *Tumult i widma* (Warszawa: Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza, 1988), 167-177. This particular aspect of both Amiel's and Maine de Birana's journals was also examined by H. Elzenberg (cf. *Kłopot z istnieniem* (Krakow: Znak, 1994), p. 329)

9 This, among other things, is what the aforementioned Elzenberg was looking for in Amiel's work. In his book, *Kłopot z istnieniem* (121) he interprets Amiel's *Intimate Diary* and Rembrandt's self-portraits in the following way: "My deliberations focus on the obsession with self-portraits, on attention given to oneself and one's condition. A modern characteristic, even more so because in this approach we can sense the presence of *den Grübler*, a plumbing, probing self-analyst."

evaluated in the real world. However, we might quickly realize that the inner dream may have therapeutic purposes. It is an attempt at compensating for what is missing from the real world – the latter being nothing more than a hypostasis of the subject exploring it, and a highly imperfect one at that.[10] Therefore, we should look for the Promised Land which is "the land where one is not" (53). This, in essence, is escapism combined with unconsoled pain, the latter a result of experiencing the emptiness of the world – Michel Braud wrote extensively on the subject, highlighting that "the diarist … considers his life to be akin to ceaseless mourning: for God, for himself, for his future demise, for his hopes and dreams."[11] In such an approach, the world is just fiction, and the subject grieves for himself, because – according to previously discussed logic – he was forced to replace experience with writing and to live only vicariously, the latter a dream also for Rousseau, albeit one labeled with a very important epithet – it was a "derivative dream."[12] The author of *Confessions* could treat the dream as something that introduces a little diversity in his reality; in his *Intimate Diary*, it became Amiel's only reality.

Shifting one's gaze inwards may yield insight that is not necessarily altogether pleasant. Inside his own self, Amiel yearned to discover a radiant center that would spin a reality he inhabited. If it were to emerge that reality is empty and just a product of forms conjured up by the subject in the midst of experience, then the interior of the subject should be the source of these illusions. However, reaching that center-source seems to be nothing short of impossible. Meditation is not about "being hound to make for any definite end," and thought meanders, is lost in words, "synonyms, these waverings, these repetitions and returns upon one's self" – like in a maze devoid of both an exit and a central point. This awkwardness reveals a somewhat anti-systemic streak in Amiel's thought process, as well as – as observed by Maria Janion

10 It also seems that it is one of the reasons behind Amiel's withdrawal from active life and into contemplation, as life is equivalent to the imperfect dream directed outwards and petrified in interpersonal space; contemplation, on the other hand, is the inner dream that remains pliable, resists the element of conclusion that Amiel so deeply hated: "So the reality, the present, the irreparable, the necessary, repel and even terrify me. I have too much imagination, conscience and penetration, and not enough character. The life of thought alone seems to me to have enough elasticity and immensity, to be free enough from the irreparable; practical life makes me afraid." (12)

11 M. Braud, *Le diariste solitaire…*, http://www.amiel.org/atelier/oeuvre/etudes (April 1, 2007); on that subject see also M. Braud, "L'extase, la mélancolie et le quotidien dans le «Journal intime» d'Amiel," *Modernités* 16 (2002): 118-119.

12 On this subject, see J. Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Przejrzystość i przeszkoda,* trans. J. Wojcieszak (Warszawa: KR, 2000), 413-426.

– Amiel's "preoccupation with void reincorporated into the void."[13] What sort of void are we talking about? Well, it seems that the emptiness of the world is not a result of the fact that it is only a projection of the "self" and lacks tangibility, but rather stems from the fact that the "self" is empty. This is the place where Amiel diverges from the philosophers whose claims he championed. The substantial "self" does not exist, it is as dispersed as the world which it is destined to inhabit, and what Amiel attempts to do is nothing more than substantializing the void. A similar issue was observed in the *Intimate Diary* by Georges Poulet[14] who did not bring up melancholy, but focused instead on analyzing the inwards (toward the within) and outwards (towards intersubjective reality) shift present in Amiel's work. According to Poulet, nothing can impede the shift, and the Swiss writers ceaselessly circles between the experience of uncanny and alien nature of his own existence and the world that threatens the identity and integrity of the subject. The author of *Amiel et la conscience de soi* tries his hardest to ameliorate this sort of negative logic and, as a result, focuses on the positive mechanisms that allow Amiel to exert control over both himself and the world through reflection. Poulet's deeply humanist attitude, however, is not always defensible, and the negative element (associated with the melancholia he decided to omit) of the *Intimate Diary* cannot be easily marginalized. One of the primary reasons for this state of affairs is the literary character of the philosopher's notes, out of which a coherent system (and that's what *Amiel et la conscience de soi* had in mind) can emerge only at the expense of the anti-systemic elements; the latter, however, are indispensable for Amiel's deliberations. The intention is to celebrate the void inside the hollow subject which Poulet, on his part, refuses to acknowledge. Meanwhile, Amiel considers this to be one of the most fundamental experiences – as evidenced by an entry dated 19 December 1877:

> Two forces of contemplation: the first degree encompasses the world that evaporates and becomes pure dream; the second degree comprises the "self" that turns into shadow, a dream of a dream.[15]

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13 M. Janion, "Introduction" to the Polish edition of *Amiel's Journal*, H.F. Amiel, *Dziennik intymny*, 17. On that subject, see also A. Zawadzki, *Nowoczesna eseistyka filozoficzna w piśmiennictwie polskim pierwszej połowy XX wieku* (Krakow: Universitas, 2001), 126.

14 G. Poulet (introduction entitled) "Amiel et la conscience de soi" in: H.F. Amiel, *Journal intime*, tome premier 1839–1851, texte établi et annoté par Ph.M. Monnier avec la collaboration de P. Dido, préfaces de B. Gagnebin et de G. Poulet (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1976), 45-94.

15 H.F. Amiel, *Journal intime,* tome onzième avril 1877–juillet 1879, texte établi et annoté par Ph.M. Monnier et A. Cottier-Duperrex (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1993): 360 [Quotes from the French editions of the *Intimate Diary* are translated from Polish into English and are not

Precisely for this reason Amiel's records are permeated with the most intense melancholy, corresponding to inconsolable grief for his own self – which I already brought up after quoting Braud's work (Poulet himself labeled the same phenomenon a state of "ontological vagueness"[16]). This is the melancholy of a philosopher who became a writer in order to finally comprehend that he is neither. Only words remained of that particular journey.

That is why one of the previously quoted passages from the *Intimate Diary* focuses so deeply on words; that is also why Amiel tries explicate the way he writes, because he cannot really elaborate on what he is writing about. The penetrating feeling of inadequacy of expression appears in crucial passages in the journal:

> Tears, griefs, depressions, disappointments, irritations, good and evil thoughts, decisions, uncertainties, deliberations, all these belong to our secret, and are almost all incommunicable and intransmissible, even when we try to speak of them, and even when we write them down. What is most precious in us never shows itself, never finds an issue even in the closest intimacy. (70)

Amiel, however, does not surrender; Renaud even observes is that "what is most surprising about this opus, a piece of literary work unlike all other, is undoubtedly the author's brilliant virtuosity and mastery of language."[17] Writing simultaneously allows him to avoid descending into madness and unremittingly reminds him of melancholy.

Like Gustave Flaubert before him, Amiel is obsessively attached to stylistic perfection, to precision and aptness of his phrase. And just like the author of *Madame Bovary*, he also unhesitatingly declares that "his object is style" (389). This pursuit of the perfect phrase, or rather the obsessive envisioning of it, often paralyzed the writer:

> I have been working for some hours at my article on Mme. de Staël, but with what labor, what painful effort! When I write for publication every word is misery, and my pen stumbles at every line, so anxious am I to find

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sourced directly from English editions of Amiel's journals, therefore bibliographic information refers to French printings – *trans.*]

16 G. Poulet, "Introduction" to: H.F. Amiel, *Journal intime. L'année 1857*, éditée et présentée par G. Poulet (Paris: Bibliothèque 10/18, 1965), IX. Also in his *Amiel et la conscience de soi* (83), Poulet observes that the lack of hope and an experience whose nature we might brand schizoid caused that "Amiel loses all substantiality in his own eyes."

17 D. Renaud, *Un écrivain en marche*...

> the ideally best expression, and so great is the number of possibilities which open before me at every step. (355)

Amiel, literature's passionate lover, now stands afraid of the pen and the empty piece of paper; his prolific output sacrificed at the altar of the flawless phrase:

> I am a heifer offered to Proserpine; I stagnate, my evasions and my silence leaving me sterile. Everything moves, creates, radiates inside its own sphere, while I wither and shrivel. A wide chasm separates me rom the work, distances grow to infinity as my imagination ceaselessly enlarges the object, while distrust boundlessly diminishes the subject. Talent is nearly equal to zero, when the task becomes overwhelming. – The essay terrifies me as much as a book does, the task is fairly simple, yet it scares me as grand undertakings do, as do words that are hard to pronounce, as does any other task before me.[18]

In this entry, dated 22 December 1858, the philosopher analyzed the dissonance that on one hand exists between himself and the world, and on the other between himself and the work he dreams of. The rift – heretofore separating Amiel from what's external – is internalized, absorbed by the subject. His own dreams and projects also become impossible to realize as the distance that separates them grows ever greater. Amiel dreads intentions that are maximalist in nature, he's paralyzed by the obligation of writing a short essay or even uttering a single a word. This state of affairs seems to have been caused by his overuse of hyperbole. The withering and shriveling subject cannot embrace and control his hypostases. This disinheritance, the loss of oneself, both effectively bar Amiel from picking up the pen. The writer, then, admits his own impotence, acknowledges his inability to create, and complains about it despite having covered more than 17,000 pages of his *Intimate Diary* in ink. Amiel, however, does not consider these reams of paper to be a work of literature; it is merely meagre propedeutics, a paltry imitation of the desired text – "I am always preparing and never accomplishing" (58). Whatever work of his has found its way into print is also subject to his withering criticism:

> all my published literary essays are little else than studies, games, exercises, for the purpose of testing myself. I play scales, as it were; I run up

18 H.F. Amiel, *Journal intime*, tome troisième mars 1856–décembre 1860, texte établi et annoté par Ph.M. Monnier et A. Cottier-Duperrex (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1979): 608.

> and down my instrument. I train my hand and make sure of its capacity and skill. But the work itself remains unachieved. (58)

The same incertitude and trepidation also can be observed nearly half a century later in the reflections of Walter Benjamin, another author who clashed with challenges presented by writing the impossible opus. Staggering under the weight of papers of index cards, the author of *The Arcades Project* wrote a letter to Gershom Scholem, dated 28 October 1931, in which he admits to treating his work on the text as constant "prolegomena and paralipomena."[19] In Amiel's case, this sort of hesitation often led to two kinds of consequences.

Firstly, the author of the *Intimate Diary* clearly fears the finite perspective, dreads the accomplished task, is scared by any idea that encompasses the totality of human experience – "it is love of truth which holds me back from concluding and deciding" (356). Perfectly aware of that, in his essay on Amiel Brzozowski wrote:

> Writing is an endeavour and this endeavour, as do all others, requires one to close one's "self" to a certain degree. The decision to assume a specific point of view is never an easy one, especially when one knows that there is a veritable multitude of such points and is capable of assuming each and every one of them.[20]

According the Amiel, there is no system that would warrant relinquishing our pursuits for, there is no single point through which all modes of experience would traverse. In a sense, the Swiss philosopher defends the notion of diversity against recurrence and equivalence of phenomena. This particular choice seems especially fateful and marked with melancholy, because against prior claims and declarations, Amiel is willing to subvert his own subjective experience, and to do it *ad nauseam*. That does not mean, however, that the role of the subject is in any way diminished in this particular case, quite the opposite. We remind ourselves that Amiel's first step was to define the world as a fiction spun by the mind in the midst of experience. By remaining faithful to that statement, Amiel has to ascertain (and does so without any reservations) that there are as many worlds as there are subjects – therefore it is the task of the individual to not only comprehend that objective reality is just an illusion, but also to understand that a plethora

19 W. Benjamin, *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin 1910-1940*, ed. G. Scholem and T. W. Adorno (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 193.

20 S. Brzozowski, *Fryderyk Henryk Amiel...*, 139.

of illusions compete against one another in order to create the most exact portrayal of the world. To prevent the establishment of such a totalizing perspective, Amiel is forced to acknowledge both the validity of his own doubts as well as distinctness of other points of view. Recognizing their independence requires proper understanding – that is, empathy – which makes multiple appearances throughout the philosopher's journal.[21] This is how the philosopher's syllogism-based reflection concludes: the world is a fiction of the experiencing subject – because there are numerous experiencing subjects, the number of worlds is correspondingly high – and whatever conclusion as to their ontology we may arrive at would be fundamentally false. That is why the writer fears summaries, finished sentences, and the accomplished "work" – although it might seem that he wishes to complete his opus more than anything else.

Thus, we can now examine the second consequence of Amiel's previously described hesitations and his belief that he continues to conduct preparations which, unfortunately, is not equivalent to accomplishing anything. The "opus," that is a text encompassing the totality of experience, turns out to be impossible to create. Therein lies the greatest drama of any man venturing to spend his life writing. Amiel already discovered the void or the absence of the world, undertook to substantialize the emptiness located within himself, and now he must also recognize that the "opus" he aims to create is nothing more than proof of the absence of the "opus."[22] In the entry dated 4 July 1877, we find the following statement: "although itself not a work of art, the journal interferes with all other works of art whose place it seems to occupy."[23] The recorded text is just another mask concealing another void.

> a private journal is like a good king, and permits repetitions, outpourings, complaint.... These unseen effusions are the conversation of thought with itself the arpeggios involuntary but not unconscious, of that aeolian harp we bear within us. Its vibrations compose no piece, exhaust no theme, achieve no melody, carry out no programme, but they express the innermost life of man. (243)

21 Empathy as the crucial element of Amiel's critical method was also explored by S. Brzozowski, see ibid., 132-133.

22 On this particular subject, A. Zawadzki wrote the following: "The postulated order of the opus ... turns out to be a project that is impossible to accomplish: the text is destined to exhibit the characteristics of a fragment, a draft, a trial run. ... As a consequence, the descriptive power of intimist discourse is all but subverted, while the journal, unable to capture the essence of life, is revealed to be a sham." (*Nowoczesna eseistyka filozoficzna*..., 129).

23 H.F. Amiel, *Journal intime*, tome onzième avril 1877–juillet 1879..., 129.

Therefore, the ultimate purpose of obsessive scribbling and covering pages upon pages in ink is not to discover some abstract order, bringing some intention to life, but to preserve one's own incidental nature, to defend against the only absolute there is – against the void. Only in such a context can we comprehend the previously invoked claim that for Amiel style was the object of writing. For the sake of certainty, the philosopher adds that the journal "though it takes the place of everything, properly speaking it represents nothing at all" (366). On the other hand, there is nothing that could be represented – in both meanings attached to the definition of the French verb *représenter*. In the first meaning, representation is equivalent with depiction – a nonsensical endeavor for someone perceiving the world, the subject, and the work as nothing more than masked void. In the second meaning, to represent is to make something present once again – but that undertaking also seems unreasonable, as we do not really know what once was present and what may be present again.

Probably this type of rationale was behind another definition of "private journal" that Amiel put forward:

> A private journal is a friend to idleness. It frees us from the necessity of looking all round a subject, it puts up with every kind of repetition, it accompanies all the caprices and meanderings of the inner life, and proposes to itself no definite end. This journal of mine represents the material of a good many volumes: what prodigious waste of time, of thought, of strength! It will be useful to nobody, and even for myself–it has rather helped me to shirk life than to practice it. A journal takes the place of a confidant, that is, of friend or wife; it becomes a substitute for production, a substitute for country and public. It is a grief-cheating device, a mode of escape and withdrawal. (366)

The journal and the associated inward gaze are both melancholic in nature, as they are the site of another unresolved bout of grief, of rediscovered emptiness. The journal has no practical goal, its essence lies in meandering and constant tripping over the relentless commemoration of loss. Albert Béguin was probably right to consider Amiel a loyal follower and heir of the romantics[24] – because the melancholy of the philosopher, often colored by psychology and metaphysics, is the result of a senseless pursuit of absolute values as well as losing one's bearings in sorrowful landscapes or in a world whose image in the journal is taken straight from romantic novels and paintings:

24 cf. A. Béguin, *L'ame romantique et le rêve* (Paris: Corti, 1946), 353.

> Whence this solemn melancholy which oppresses and pursues me? I have just read a series of scientific books ... Are they the cause of this depression? Or is it the majesty of this immense landscape, the splendor of this setting sun, which brings the tears to my eyes? (272)

This aspect of melancholy in the *Intimate Diary* is decidedly derivative. I believe the way in which the reinterpretation of romanticism allowed Amiel (before Sigmund Freud) to combine melancholy with not only sadness or nostalgia, but with the aforementioned sensation of loss, to be much more important.

The logic of loss was the primary force that determined the course of Amiel's life. His biography is riddled with its painful appearances. Amiel witnessed the premature demise of his younger sister; his mother died of tuberculosis when he was only 11 years old and his father committed suicide two years later (he drowned himself in the Rhône). It seems that losing his mother was particularly hard on the philosopher, Marie Claire Grassi goes so far as to believe that this tragedy is the reason for multiple entries (for example 16 October 1864 or 9 May 1867) in which Amiel openly declares his desire to return to his mother's womb.[25] To some extent, the journal was born of the same aggressively possessive relationship. Between 11 and 12 of April 1850, Amiel discovered a cache of family documents while staying over at his uncle's house in Monnaie. Eight years later he managed to relocate the entire batch to his home; among the documents was his mother's journal. That last bit of information allowed Albert Py to claim that "another journal precedes the *Intimate Diary*, the latter provides a foundation and to some degree *authorizes* the latter, simultaneously serving as the source of its voice."[26] These, however, are not the only events in Amiel's biography that might have fueled his melancholic proclivities. The writer was engaged twice and both betrothals were broken off by Amiel due to his pervasive doubts.

We should not disregard either the traumatic experiences of the boy or the embarrassing secrets of the man, especially given their frequent reappearances throughout the journal: "I am always waiting for the woman and the work which shall be capable of taking entire possession of my soul, and of becoming my end and aim" (82). Amiel agonizes over his lost illusions and the failures of his adulthood that he believes stem from these fantasies: he did

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25 cf. M.C. Grassi, "Amiel ou l'oeuvre mélancolique" in: *Malinconia, malattia malinconica e litteratura moderna,* a cura di A. Dolfi (Roma: Bulzoni, 1991): 284-285. On the same subject, see G. Poulet's remarks in *Les métamorphoses du cercle* (préface de J. Starobinski), (Paris: Flammarion, 1979): 347-350 and "La pensée indéterminée" in *Du romantisme au XX^e siècle* (Paris: PUF, 1987), 2: 132-133.

26 A. Py, "Amiel ou l'oeuvre éconduite," *Ecriture* 18 (1982): 72.

not end up becoming famous, either as an academic or as a writer. Jealousy suffusing his phrase, Amiel writes:

> The names of great men hover before my eyes like a secret reproach, and this grand impassive nature tells me that to-morrow I shall have disappeared, butterfly that I am, without having lived.

He fears not for himself, but for his name, the latter doomed to oblivion. The fear is accompanied by this astonishingly sincere confession: "It breaks my heart to be introduced" (253). In this sense, *Amiel's Journal* is also an attempt at protecting oneself, at preserving an existence rocked by the rhythms of loss and suffering. The penetrating awareness of that fact unleashes a "melancholy of memory" (275), that is a belief that memory is just a vague reflection of lost experience. Not only individual memories are melancholic; melancholy itself is embedded deep in the essence of life which "covers, overflows, and swallows up all individual being, which effaces our existence and annuls all memory of us, fills me with unbearable melancholy" (105). Amiel abandoned active public life and fears that his feeling of loss will only be intensified – through the loss of his own name. He is bothered by the feeling that nobody will remember him after his death, and that he will be wiped off from the face of the Earth forever. The writer in Amiel is also obsessed with Saturn, the protagonist of the dreadful myth and patron of time understood as a "medium of constraint."[27] The irretrievable past opens wounds in every person suffering from bouts of melancholia, however, they also fear the approaching future and the inevitability that accompanies it. Therefore, the melancholic has to overcome the certainty of loss lurking both behind and before him. In this unfair fight, Amiel made the journal his confidant because the order of writing not only manages to evade the blandness of everyday life and painful oblivion, it also enables the author to control the overbearing and imposing future, that is death. Writing gives the author shelter, a place to work through his own failures and his anticipated – and thus mollified – death.[28] In an entry dated 21 December 1860, Amiel admits that he had placed all his faith in his journal to protect him from the evils of the world. In spite of that claim, however, the index cards he continued to cover in ink also posed a threat to the

27 S. Sontag, *Under the Sign of Saturn* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 116.

28 The Swiss philosopher repeatedly touches upon this topic; in an entry dated November 16, 1864 he notes: "Melancholy is at the bottom of everything, just as at the end of all rivers is the sea. Can it be otherwise in a world where nothing lasts, where all that we have loved or shall love must die? Is death, then, the secret of life? The gloom of an eternal mourning enwraps, more or less closely, every serious and thoughtful soul, as night enwraps the universe." (149)

philosopher – his life evaporated with each scribbled word, and writing itself is equal parts liberating and addictive. The *Intimate Diary* is, beyond all doubt, a therapeutic device, one that allowed Amiel to soothe his shivering thoughts and introduce a little order into his chaotic mind. It seems, however, that incidents from one's biography and the darkest corners of the mind are the most important elements of the modern definition of loss.

However, it turns out that philosophical renouncement or – in the words of Paul Gorceix[29] – the metaphysical nature of Amiel's melancholic proclivities turns out to be much more significant in this particular case. Because the philosopher's desires know no bounds, he tries to encompass the totality of existence and ends up falling prey to the insatiable hunger for insight and experience. Everything keeps slipping through his fingers because his mad pursuits require him to keep moving, he cannot stop to focus and explore any notion in any deeper way as other things constantly demand his attention. This is the source of his haste and the feelings of impermanence, transience, and irretrievable loss plaguing the philosopher. Life brings the "inextinguishable flame of desire, and an agony of incurable disillusion" (103). The interminable procession of forms makes him feel like something inside him has been lost, while other things vanished without ever being noticed. This is also how Amiel's obsession with the loss of an object that he cannot even name is introduced:

> I am indeed always the same; the being who wanders when he need not, the voluntary exile, the eternal traveler, the man incapable of repose, who, driven on by an inward voice, builds nowhere, buys and labors nowhere, but passes, looks, camps, and goes. And is there not another reason for all this restlessness, in a certain sense of void? of incessant pursuit of something wanting? (82)

The quoted passage clearly depicts the philosophical renouncement I mentioned before. The experiencing subject has no place of its own, has no familiar space where it could feel at home. Its life is defined by the flight of things, people, and places – in effect, the meaning of his existence lies in loss and grieving for something that the subject cannot even name. Amiel confesses:

> I feel myself then stripped and empty, like a convalescent who remembers nothing. ... I feel myself returning into a more elementary form. I behold

29 cf. P. Gorceix, *La problématique de la mélancolie chez Henri-Frédéric Amiel* [en ligne], Académie royale de langue et de littérature françaises de Belgique, Bruxelles, 2007, http://www.arllfb.be/ebibliotheque/communications/gorceix090906.pdf (April 13, 2007).

> my own unclothing; I forget, still more than I am forgotten; I pass gently into the grave while still living. (105-106)

In the grave, Amiel longs for what he failed to accomplish while still alive! – "I had failed in the task of life, and that now life was failing me" (232). Just like Emma Bovary, Amiel can never find himself in the right place at the right time. That is why he continuously cleaves himself into a present "self" that writes or reminisces and the lost "self," that is a self that already passed away or one that was never even born as a result of making wrong choices or the reluctance to pursue active public life.

Thus we arrive at the third form of loss that appears in the *Intimate Diary* – this time, the matter revolves around the consistent, homogeneous "self" of the subject. In Amiel's case, this aspect of the self is simply unachievable. First of all, its rupture appears whenever the philosopher observes reality, attempts to understand other people, or just describe objects. It is possible that his empathizing attitude facilitates his comprehension of what he is observing, however, it also poses a threat to the identity of the subject. Brzozowski accurately observes:

> This ability to reconstruct other people's thoughts and emotions may lead to significant revelations in the fields of history or psychology. It also poses a great danger to the person privileged by this capacity. It is undoubtedly corrosive to their personality, their own way of thinking and feeling.[30]

Another rupture of the subject appears whenever he takes up the pen and realizes the differences between the writing "self" and the experiencing "self." Finally, the "self" made up of flesh and blood opposes the "self" that wishes to inhabit the sphere of absolutes. This procession of oppositions leads to the disintegration of the subject, to the fragmentation of identity, and may even invalidate the facile parallels between the author and other romantic writers. Romantic melancholics to which the critics often compared Amiel had no such trouble with subjectivity. Although they fell prey to history and unforgiving nature and remained at odds with the rest of society, they nevertheless avoided the disintegration of the subject. Meanwhile, in Amiel's approach, the subject is undone right before our eyes, and the process is directly related to the modernist dominant of the Swiss philosopher's text. From this perspective, Amiel is not as much the heir of

30 S. Brzozowski, *Fryderyk Henryk Amiel…*, 136.

romantic melancholy, as he is (as correctly diagnosed by Gorceix[31]) a forerunner of modernist melancholy – especially its Viennese interpretation: Hugo von Hofmannsthal wrote a penetrating study of the *Intimate Diary*, while Amiel himself invokes baron Ernst von Feuchtersleben, the first professor of psychiatry at the University of Vienna and author of *Zur Diätetik der Seele*, in his writing.

It seems, however, that the Swiss philosopher's solution is far more radical than the one Viennese doctors, writers, and philosophers discussed throughout the entire 19th century. Amiel's goal is not as much about the disintegration of the subject as it is about depersonalization:

> I am afraid of the subjective life, and recoil from every enterprise, demand, or promise which may oblige me to realize myself; I feel a terror of action, and am only at ease in the impersonal, disinterested, and objective life of thought. (71)
> I have lived the impersonal life – in the world, yet not in it, thinking much, desiring nothing. (207)

This "craving for namelessness,"[32] as Brzozowski put it, is proof of ultimate loss and of a void that nothing will ever fill. Amiel ceases to consider himself a separate being, he loses himself – as emphasized by Renaud[33] – in order to dedicate his reflection to mankind in general. This final loss is absolutely irretrievable. There is no world (as it was just a figment of the mind), no great work (as it keeps dissolving into textual fragments), and no subject (as it is lost, both in the psychological and philosophical sense). The melancholic experience of loss and void is striking and all-encompassing in Amiel's work; it also strips him of the will to fight – because what is there to fight for? The price of ceaselessly gazing into the abyss of his own "self" turned out to be incredibly high, because the subject ultimately lost himself in the chasm:

> What is our life in the infinite abyss? ... I can scarcely breathe. It seems to me that I am hanging by a thread above the fathomless abyss of destiny. Is this the Infinite face to face, an intuition of the last great death? ... When depths of ineffable desire are opening in the heart, as vast, as yawning as the immensity which surrounds us. (273)

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31 cf. P. Gorceix, *La problématique...*

32 S. Brzozowski, *Fryderyk Henryk Amiel...*, 138.

33 cf. D. Renaud, *Un écrivain en marche...*

The emptiness of the world, the work, and the subject relentlessly swallows up whatever happens to appear on the surface. Nameless, this void, dominating both the outside world and the inner depths of the subject, the latter becoming a hypostasis of itself – a process which Amiel describes in a very poetic way: "Life is but the dream of a shadow" (173). Another time, the philosopher compares himself to a "balloon" which – akin to a soap bubble – is "a plaything of every breath of wind, surrounded by the emptiness of the atmosphere, and even more empty inside itself."[34] Leaving such a void is practically impossible, and the subject is doomed to endlessly grieve his own demise, because after withdrawing from public life and society altogether, he could not create another myth for himself that would prevent him from quivering and introduce a measure of order into his inner chaos.

Translation: Jan Szelągiewicz

34 H.F. Amiel, *Journal intime*, tome troisième mars 1856–décembre 1860, 787-788. On the subject of the "soap bubble" metaphor in Amiel's work, see G. Poulet, *Les métamorphoses du cercle*..., 335-337.

Katarzyna Nadana-Sokołowska

A Diary or a Suicide?

Béatrice Didier, renowned scholar of intimate journals, claims that writings like these can be used as a foundation upon which to construct a portrait of the average diarist.[1] She denotes that diarists often have trouble transitioning from childhood to maturity and adulthood, as if thinking that real life is still ahead of them and that they have to prepare before they enter that new chapter. "Life as school" is a preferred topos of that *milieu*. They keep learning things again and again, gear up for the never-ending series of exams that make up the life of every human, are often financially unstable, have trouble deciding on marriage, and lack self-assertiveness.

Some of these characteristics are reflected, surprisingly, in Koniński's religious writings. We recognize that the impossibility of making a choice, or a reluctance towards committing the act itself, appears in his writing, as it does in Amiel's work,[2] already on the textual level, especially in *Nox atra*. The books also thoroughly explores

1 B. Didier, *Le journal intime* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1976).

2 cf. J. Rousset, *Le lecteur intime.* De Balzac au journal, (Paris: J. Corti, 1968). The book contains, inter alia, an interpretation of repetitions found in Amiel's journal.

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the theme of choice as the most important task awaiting the author, as well as the upcoming series of exams we mentioned before.

Those familiar with Koniński's biography may find it difficult to describe the man as immature; however, we cannot simply disregard the fact that he often used to classify himself as such. In the first pages of *Nox atra*, the author poses the problem in a somewhat dramatic way:

> Choose! If not for yourself, then for others; if not for Truth that shall set you free, then for ambition that tells you that you finally know what it is you want, that you finally found something to hold onto, something you matured into, that you are no longer just an old manchild playing with ideas as if they are nothing more than soap bubbles. Choose![3]

Even the unfinished *Szkic do autobiografii* (*Autobiographical Sketch*) opens with a confession: "I am now approaching fifty, it's time to abandon this eternal «seeker» persona, this endless boyhood; it's time to grow up."[4] Immaturity is not a foreign concept to Koniński, we might even go so far as to consider him embroiled in his own struggles with immaturity, struggles which he believes to be the source of his disinclination to commit to one of two worldviews clashing within him. In *Nox atra*, he laments:

> How to live between the allure of sanctity and the appeal of normalcy – live between two fine temptations and not know which one to choose, and then to pay for that reluctance – with vagueness, an inability to draw joy from both earthly and heavenly delights, and a paralyzing fear that we will be denied salvation, later joined by contempt directed at our own self for succumbing to that fear?[5]

Didier also pondered the role played in the life of the "hesitant" diarist by the process of journaling: maybe writing is in itself a way to entrust problems to paper or a way to thoroughly examine the available solutions and make a decision within the journal, thus making it a witness of the act? She also denotes one other possibility: "We can, without contradiction, claim the opposite: he becomes hesitant due to his journaling habit. The process of writing

3 K.L. Koniński, *Nox atra* (Warszawa: Pax, 1961), 10.

4 K.L. Koniński, *Szkic do autobiografii* (*Autobiographical Sketch*) in: *Kartki z brulionów* (*Notebook Pages*), ed. B. Mamoń, M. Urbanowski (Kraków: Arcana, 2007), 42.

5 K.L. Koniński, *Uwagi 1940-1942* (*Remarks 1940-1942*), ed. B. Mamoń (Poznań: W Drodze, 1987), 83.

promotes ambivalence and ultimately transforms it into a fairly stable and somewhat pleasant state."[6] And then she observes: "Ultimately, indecision is a form of internal continuity, of prolonging the writing. It allows the diarist to remain within the prized *status quo*; it also allows the writing to develop and still retain its iterative nature."[7] According to Didier, writing about decisions in a diary can protract the state of indecision which, for some reason, can be more appealing to the author than actually making a decision.

The Persistence Trap

Even in the opening pages of *Nox atra*, Koniński places the issue of choice front and center, not only choice as it pertains to ideology, but also the choice between life and death – the question of suicide. We should also notice that the final fragments of *Ex labirynthо* are dedicated to taking one's own life. In these last pages, Koniński writes that suicide of a Christian abrogates any "reflections on a Christian God"[8] that person might have entertained, yet he simultaneously ponders the atheist argumentation for suicide that portrays it as a possible "honorable" way to end one's life. Thus we encounter a heretofore unexplored theme of *Nox atra*. In the opening passages of the book, Koniński recounts a couple of suicide stories: in fragment no. 2, he recalls the stories of a highlander who killed himself for reasons unknown and a housemaid, Agnieszka (whom we know from her appearance in *Remarks*); in fragment no. 4, the author mentions the great "honorable" suicides, including figures from the history of the Roman Empire, Rejtan, and soldiers from the 1939 Defensive War. Fragment no. 5 outlines the story of an outclassed painter from Krakow who ended up killing himself. He also mentions Witkacy. The "darkness" in which the author immerses himself in the opening passages of *Nox atra* is synonymous with the gloom shrouding human consciousness at the end of its rope – the liminal situation wherein one decides whether to ultimately end one's life or not. The aforementioned suicides were victims of terrible humiliation who suffered in solitude, their pain invisible to those around them. For Koniński, however, compassion towards the suicides does not diminish the profound importance of their final choice, the choice to preserve their dignity. Useless and discarded, they feel that an honorable suicide is the only way out that will give them at least a semblance of being whole in those last moments.

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6 B. Didier, *Le journal intime*, 99.

7 B. Didier, *Le journal intime*, 100.

8 K.L. Koniński, *Ex labyrintho* (Warszawa: Pax, 1962), 337.

Although *Remarks* pose the question: "Would it not be better to kill oneself rather than live as a disgraced pariah and a shameful beggar?",[9] only in the opening pages of *Nox atra* is the hellish alternative: commit suicide and thus admit to being an atheist or persevere in humiliation as a follower of Christianity which prohibits suicide, is displayed with such force and portrayed as a demand for the final choice between the "ethics of honor" and the "religion of perseverance."

Koniński is ambivalent towards the Christian proscription of suicide. He thinks that for a Christian, renunciation of suicide is the only true measure of humility, the virtue held by Christianity in the highest regard. However, he later adds: "If He is only a fiction dreamed up by our hearts, then we cannot relinquish the morality of the proud: let the world purge itself of imperfection, and if I am one of the imperfect ones, so be it, let me perish."[10] He has to choose between Christianity and Nietzscheanism, between the religion of humility that preaches suffering through indignities and the secular ethics of pride which considers honor to be the ultimate virtue; between the religion of Christ and the Rome of the Stoics. Sometimes, God even arouses Koniński's wrath as the one who makes it impossible to escape one's own existence:

> A night marked by rebellion against Christianity: you cannot kill yourself, you cannot even consider suicide as an option, you can only desire to persist, to live on – because Christianity approves of perseverance, the idealism and reliability of persistence, while there is no reliability of persistence to be found in the desire to leave this here outpost, on this here Earth, this here vicious swamp.[11]

Is, however, the choice between Christian humility and Stoic pride the only available choice? Koniński denotes other attitudes towards suicide one can assume.

Humans should not have to stoop down to living "meager lives" (Koniński will employ this Nietzschean phrase multiple times in *Nox atra*, which might indicate the degree to which he internalized this particular value system). The "meager man" becomes worthy of salvation by renouncing one's own eagerness in a gesture of refusal to protract one's existence. We should also recognize that not only did his ethical sensibility allow suicide as a way to honorably escape a liminal situation, but that his religious sensibility commanded

9 K.L. Koniński, *Uwagi*..., 125.

10 K.L. Koniński, *Nox atra*, 10.

11 K.L. Koniński, *Uwagi*..., 81.

him, at times, to consider suicide a condition necessary for salvation. The necessity of being utterly honest towards one's life and thus towards the dilemma: either live within the limits established by your ambitions or do not live at all, seems to him not only an ethical but a religious precept. Koniński also ponders the whether Christianity might be construed as a religion that permits suicide. Allowing suicide within Christianity might be possible only as a result of a humanizing modernist reform that would look to a free human conscience as the only place where divine transcendence, absent from the immanence of the world, manifests itself; a reform that would posit obedience to a free conscience instead of obedience to the authority of the Church as an institution dealing in salvation. In such a theology, suicide would be permissible if one's conscience considered it to be the only honorable way to escape the oppression of existence. Koniński dreams of a theology of pride that would replace the theology of humility; dreams of a God who "loves the thunderous flight of giant birds and holds the honorable decision in higher regard than devout tears," the honorable decision a clear reference to suicide.[12] A God who would permit suicide motivated by honor is the same God who – as Koniński is convinced – requires us to live in accordance with our intrinsic truth, which translates into sanctity as the only possible test of faith.

In fragment 45 of *Nox atra*, Koniński recalls Kirillov, a character in Dostoyevsky's *Demons* and writes: "Someone consumed by chronic bouts of panicked fear of death killed himself; he did not end his life because he feared some misfortune befalling him, but only because he wanted to create a piece of God inside himself; ... only because he wanted to give himself and the rest of the world a moment of Divine freedom from Fate and Fear."[13] Kirillov's situation clearly resembles that of Koniński himself: his conscience allows the existence of God, but his experiences and reason do not give him evidence to support it. Kirillov exposes the implications of the concept of a personal God, the creator of mankind, by planning a philosophical suicide: "If God exists, then everything is His will, and I can do nothing of my own apart from His will. If there's no God, then everything is my will, and I'm bound to express my self-will. ... I want to express my self-will. ... I'm obligated to shoot myself because the greatest degree of self-will is to take my own life."[14] Suicide, according to Kirillov, is an act committed by free men, one that reveals

12 cf. K.L. Koniński, *Nox atra*, 6. The first part of the quote is an obvious reference to a fragment of Book V of Słowacki's *Beniowski* (cf. J. Słowacki, *Poematy. Beniowski* (*Poems. Beniowski*) in: J. Słowacki, *Dzieła* (*Works*), ed. J. Krzyżanowski, J. Pelc (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1952), 3:117).

13 K.L. Koniński, *Nox atra*, 106.

14 F. Dostoyevsky, Devils (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 692.

no other masters above him, no one who could order him to live against his own will. Although Koniński perfectly understand Kirillov's logic, he attempts to reverse it within the framework of his own theology in a way that would facilitate employing it against the solution it suggested. In place of suicide, he proposes persevering in a liminal situation as an expression of "Divine freedom." He puts the latter idea back in the service of religion, thus making absolute freedom an argument for the possibility of transcending the constraints that biology puts on consciousness, which is an argument supporting the existence of an unconditional world of grace and sanctity:

> To be convinced that the God of the saints is nothing more than fiction while living like the saints did, without their particular comfort – and moreover to renounce the comfort of suicide: maybe this terrible absurdity, the absurdity of absolute unselfishness, would be worthy of God, would attest that there is an element of the Divine within the domain of Reality.[15]

The Scheherazade Stratagem

As evidenced above, the subject of suicide is one of the first to be raised in Nox atra; it also serves as an important pillar of Koniński's theologic constructions. Does that, however, authorize us to treat him any different than we would a certain figure of thought, resembling the one employed by Camus in the opening paragraphs of *The Myth of Sisyphus*? Is the issue of suicide, treated so harshly in the opening passages of the book, simply a rhetoric and compositional device enabling the portrayal of liminal situations as the wellspring of both religious needs and religious thoughts? Can we consider the appearance of that particular subject a symptom of the Self gravitating towards the idea of suicide? Although *Nox atra* was conceived in an autobiographical space, that fact alone is not enough for us to treat the author's every utterance as a confession. Koniński's writings, however, contain other traces indicating how often he contemplated taking his own life.

The fragment entitled *War* opens with what amounts to a written account of a conversation between Koniński and his wife during which they agree to go through with their suicide pact in the event of the situation overwhelming the both of them. Koniński returns to this particular topic a few times in September of 1939.[16] *Remarks* also contain some allusions to suicide and the

15 K.L. Koniński, *Nox atra*, 106.

16 cf. K.L. Koniński, *War* in Koniński, *Kartki z brulionów*.

intention of committing the act. Apparently, Koniński thought that the way he was forced to live during the war was unbecoming, humiliating, and decided that carrying on like this would be disgraceful: he suffered from a chronic and untreatable condition which made him unfit for work and left him unable to provide for his family, forcing him to live off the support of those who he himself should have been supporting, according to the cultural role of the man which he deeply internalized. In his own eyes, he was treated quite badly by those closest to him. He considered the fate shared by all Poles during the occupation a succession of humiliations and abasement.[17] Extreme despair, solitude, and humiliation that push the housemaid Agnieszka, the elderly painter, and the unknown highlander to suicide are a clear reflection of the situation Koniński found himself in. Therefore it is hard to doubt that the fierceness with which he described their fates was clearly related to the one particular recourse he pondered. Tellingly, while describing liminal situations that lead to suicide in *Nox atra*, he employed images of rot and decay similar to those which he used to portray his own domestic and familial struggles.

Koniński, however, treated the process of writing *Nox atra* as a sort of preparation for his upcoming test of faith. He was keenly aware which of the two alternatives, persevere or perish, he will end up choosing. He knew that stubbornly holding on to faith and confirming himself in his beliefs is the only way to deliver himself from suicide. The cycle of meditations that makes up *Nox atra* was supposed to – probably by way of self-persuasion – confirm him in his beliefs and thus reinforce his will to persevere. The process of writing, then, seems to be almost "genetically" related to the problem of suicide – as a way of refraining from committing the act. But the relationship between suicide and *Nox atra* might even be more subtle than that. Writing that particular book might have been a way of stalling, postponing his own suicide. Take note that voices urging to make the final decision appear not only in the early parts of the book but are a recurring part of its structure, resembling something of a chorus and rarely taking shapes more discreet than the raw challenge of: "Choose now!"[18] The urging infuses the meditations making up *Nox atra* with a certain rhythm while simultaneously disrupting its continuity. The attention of the Self shifts from illustrating the necessity of choosing towards visualizing the fact the questions about the existence of God remain unanswered and that in the face of this shortage, making informed, responsible decisions is still impossible. The choice between life and death cannot

17 The situation is paraphrased in *Dalsze losy pastora Hubiny* (*Reverend Hubina's Later Years*), Koniński's last published novel (cf. K.L. Koniński, *Pisma wybrane* (*Selected Writings*), introduction by M. Morstin-Górska (Warszawa: Pax, 1955)).

18 cf. K.L. Koniński, *Nox atra*, 10, 63, 82.

be made when blocked by the question about the existence of God. The call to make the choice is quickly answered with the complaint: "How can that choice be made when the sole criterion is shrouded by impenetrable darkness? Is there a Christian God?"[19]

The writing Self also does not want to acknowledge that choosing whether to believe in God also lies within its purview; it demands ultimate certitude. This certitude, unattainable by nature, pushes the issue of suicide to the background. Thus, persisting in the state of uncertainty turns out to be a delaying tactic supposed to prolong the author's life. Repeatedly questioning the existence of God, running through well-trodden theological paths calms the mind soothes despair and postpones the possibility of answering in the negative. Collecting thoughts and putting them on paper becomes a way to stop oneself from taking one's own life. The process transforms the necessity of making the ultimate choice from an existential into a purely existential exercise. Tormented by an overabundance of suffering, the mind is seduced by the logical nature of deliberations that promise to yield truth at their conclusion, it retreads the well-known, safe, even satisfying paths of thought. By adding another reminder (either implicit or explicit) to make the final choice at the end of each nocturnal segment, the writing Self employs the Scheherazade stratagem. The choice, yes, has to be made, but such an important decision can wait until next night… The promise of a final conclusion arrests the author in existence – just like the promise of finishing the story gave Scheherazade another day of life.

Nirvanic Desires

In his book *Żywioł wyzwolony: Studium o poezji Tadeusza Micińskiego* (*The Element Unshackled: A Study on the Poetry of Tadeusz Miciński*), describes the poetics of redundancy of the Young Poland movement by employing the words of Schopenhauer: such poetry lulls our will. Monotony and repetitions obfuscate the meaning of the text, thus it becomes a soothing mantra rather than an appeal meant to arouse our will and emotions: "Words are a cover, they give us a sense of safety, they touch our dormant fears and anxieties, but to pacify instead of stirring them"[20] claims Prokop, tracing the origin of that style back to lullabies.

It seems that this particular Young Poland idiosyncrasy might have been employed by the Self writing *Nox atra* in order to suppress unwelcome thoughts and emotions, as the writing process suggests a struggle against all

19 ibid., 10.

20 J. Prokop, *Żywioł wyzwolony: Studium o poezji Tadeusza Micińskiego* (*The Element Unshackled: A Study on the Poetry of Tadeusz Miciński*) (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1960), 160.

elements of the psyche that the Self might want to keep at a distance, protecting consciousness as if it's an ancient keep besieged by a determined enemy. Koniński often admonishes himself:

> The religion of angels, the religion of the Heart of Jesus, the religion of great humanist efforts, one which holds all religious and mystic effort in a special and holy place. Hold on to that, my dear thought, my spark of goodwill; persevere in that, do not renounce it, as thanks to that you're alive and above the chaotic anxiety of the mind, above the will's lack of persistence and the heart's fatal weariness.[21]

The long, rhetorical phrases, a hallmark of *Nox atra*, might be indicative of *horror vacui*, fear of the intonational pause that might suddenly give a voice to unwelcome thoughts. They were most likely related to suicidal temptations or eroticism.

In his dreams, Koniński sees himself as a dejected camel, led to the slaughter by the Kalmyk riding him; the man is quite handsome, and dressed in European fashion.[22] This particular image is an ideal candidate for "orthodox" Freudian analysis: the camel as a symbol of the *id* worn out by constant sacrifice, abused by the Kalmyk, a man simultaneously "wild" and "European" – a fitting representation of the sadistic *superego*. We might also try to interpret the figure of the camel by analyzing the meaning often attached to its hump – a burden, but one that can be a wellspring of energy: similarly, contemplating perseverance increases the burden, but at the same time rescues Koniński from death by his own hand.

Koniński is familiar with treatises written by mystics and often dream about being carried by God:

> God and religion are my own thoughts, my own wants; oh, how I would love to be carried by God instead of bearing his weight on my shoulders! ... Maybe after I pass through this desolate sphere where God weighs heavy on me shall I reach a place where it will be Him who carries me instead.[23]

He admits multiple times that it is hard for him to pray, that he considers prayer to be boring and laborious, a task which wears him down, strikes him as futile and absurd.

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21 K.L. Koniński, *Uwagi*..., 154. cf. J. Prokop, *Żywioł wyzwolony*, 214.

22 K.L. Koniński, *Uwagi*..., 137.

23 ibid., 134.

The writing Self, by sheer force of will, clings to the belief that prayer might be construed as a sort of exercise whose completion brings us closer to salvation. Such efforts are the direct opposite of the spontaneous, "insubstantial" desire to commit suicide. The Self stubbornly clings to the wearisome life, probably going against the plethora of impulses compelling it to make the final break. It perseveres despite noxious lassitude and internal indifference; it considers God a burden lugged on a journey through the void. In all likelihood, writing *Nox atra* helped Koniński suppress the most animated impulses of his Self – the nirvanic impulse to give up on life, maybe even some erotic urges. By forcing them out of the scope of its attention, the writing Self seems to be condemning itself to torture in the form of clinging to existence and faith only through sheer force of will, hence his recurring lament about the torment of "carrying God." He elaborates upon his experiences using vocabulary indicating tension and distress: "the stubborn will to persevere…," "carrying God," "how tedious it is to «live»," "the Cross is your labor, your final and only labor."[24]

Rudolf Otto noted that when mystics write about their experiences, they employ the Biblical portrayal of God as immanence. They depict him as "force, life, light, the life-giver, one who graces us with spirit, the water of life, the flame and the fire," truth, knowledge and justice, and finally, holiness itself. All these designations are linked with the renewed, supernatural life as divinity "mediating and giving itself, breaking forth in the living man as his nova vita, as the content of his life and being."[25]

Otto marvels at the dynamic style of Eckhart's writings which, according to the former, reflect the concept of spontaneity of action as opposed to actions governed by free will and reason. He describes Eckhart's thought process as full of vitality and points out the vast knowledge of unconsciousness it contains:

> Eckhart has seen that deep below the plane of our conscious spiritual life, occupied in individual, empirical acts of imagination, will and feeling, lies hidden the vast region of our unconscious life and being, into the ultimate depths of which the keenest self-contemplation seeks in vain to penetrate. … Only here at the center springs the power and the unmediated certainty of all ideals, particularly of all religious convictions. Only what has penetrated to this ground of the soul and has here proved itself, becomes truth, unshakable truth for us. Only what comes unconsidered, unmade, unwilled from this ground of the soul, whether as an "image" in

24 cf. ibid., 74, 134, 93, 192.

25 R. Otto, *Mysticism East and West: A Comparative Analysis of the Nature of Mysticism* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 148.

> the imagination or as a decision in the power of the will, is genuine, is original, is rooted and essential, is true work and life.[26]

If we compare this concept of deep Self espoused by mystics with Koniński's approach towards irrational forces of the psyche, we will quickly see that for him they are far from operating principles, rather they are something that he has to radically distance himself from. According to Koniński, the spontaneous life of the psyche is a sphere where chaos reigns supreme, and chaos, he says, is synonymous with evil. Koniński associates evil with chaos, and chaos with nature, thus opposing the latter's "peculiar order" with the "Father," whose traces are still present in our world in the form of ethics, religion, and social order, all of them based on the dictate of conscience. He contrasts the chaos of inner psychological life with "vigilance," the nucleus of crystallization of the nature-independent Self: "We need to be eternally vigilant; each gap in the barrier erected by vigilance can be exploited by thievish natural causality, splinters of chaos, the paltriness of nature, flickers of darkness. Vigilance depends wholly on me – this mindfulness – it is me, it is I severing myself from nature."[27]

Consciousness is supposed to erect a stable edifice of ordered thought and disciplined reactions above a foundation of emotions. Koniński sees the success of such an undertaking as his only chance at salvation:[28]

> Persisting means rising above nature; only that constituent of life that managed uplift itself into the supernatural world using solely its determination has the right to hope to persevere … whatever belongs to nature's boorish host cannot belong to God and thus is not subject to God's law, which spells: persist; it is, however, subject to the laws of nature, instructing everything within its purview to perish and break apart into constituent elements.[29]

Koniński also touches upon the traditional theme of Christian asceticism, agreeing that one's ability to abstain from sexual activity is a fine measure of the Self's vigilant resistance against encroaching tendrils of nature. He

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26 ibid., 222.

27 K.L. Koniński, *Uwagi*…, 149.

28 cf. T. Żukowski, *Czy śmierć w sercu spełniła swoją robotę* (*Has Death Discharged Its Duties in the Heart*), fragment of an unpublished master's thesis prepared under the direction of professor Maria Janion.

29 K.L. Koniński, *Ex labyrintho*, quoted from Koniński, *Pisma wybrane*, 310.

espouses a deep aversion towards psychoanalysis and the concept of the unconscious. Koniński associates the Freudian unconscious with the sphere of chaotic psychological life that he detested[30] and considers its exploration, especially plumbing it for meaning, both dangerous and futile.[31] In contrast to Freud, Koniński did not even consider working with the unconscious mind, did not look to establish dialogue and mediate between to conscious and unconscious spheres of the psyche – the latter a seemingly a prerequisite condition of the mustical experience, of the radical metamorphosis of an entire person, the nova vita, as understood by Otto or another of Koniński's beloved writers, William James, the author of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Koniński clearly preferred the old-fashioned version of ascetics: he separated himself from the areas of the Self that aroused fear and disgust and tried to build a new human world above them. He also worked out a new, original concept of salvation, one that required inner effort aimed at building an imperishable, immutable, and precious Self – the kind of effort that God would find worthy, the same God who would later express his appreciation of that precious self by bestowing immortality upon it (or at least some parts of it).[32] He wrote:

> What began as a value should persevere – facilitating that is a sacred obligation towards our conscience which yearns for persistence and desires to imbue things that began their existence as values with it. ... If there is a God, then God delights in perseverance, because He represents the perseverance of value – that is the ultimate meaning of the word "God."[33]

30 cf. e.g. his remarks on *Nights and Days* (K.L. Koniński, *Nights and Days* in Koniński, *Pisma wybrane*, 166)

31 In his review of Zofia Nałkowska's *The Day of His Return*, Koniński criticizes the author for lack of logic and decency, revealing his reluctance to delve into the mysteries of human relationships as unveiled by psychoanalysis, like, for example, the sadomasochistic relationship. His aversion towards the concept of the unconscious is also evidenced by his reaction towards K. Irzykowski's *Pałuba*: "Inner sincerity is necessary and healthy for whomever is *sure of what they want and determined to follow their plans through*. Such people do not fall victim to billowing, *pałuba*-like psychic waves, they look at them with amusement instead of terror: what harm to them is wretched filth, dumb snobbery, trivial vanities, surprising indifferences, inconceivable extremes of imagination and behavior, insane whims, all of them dredged up from the nooks and crannies of the human psyche and treated as if they're more important than the conscious mind – if they are already *walking onwards and outwards towards objective goals*?" (K.L. Koniński, *Katastrofa wierności* (*The Disaster of Fidelity*) in Koniński, *Pisma wybrane*, 141.)

32 cf. T. Żukowski, *Czy śmierć w sercu*...

33 K.L. Koniński, *Uwagi*..., 144.

The Self has to work on itself in order to rise above nature, to become a value and thus enter into the world of values. And allegiance towards other values, that is inner immutability, permanence, becomes the most elementary value, a fundamental value for other values acquired by the Self.

We already mentioned that Koniński considers evil as chaos, including inner chaos or as he sometimes calls it "billowing," meaning the instability and mutability of the Self. The Self, when fighting for the permanence of values, basically struggles with time inside of itself, its passage perceived as constant, involuntary changes in mood and attitude towards the world. It feels humiliated by this mutability and tries to convince itself as to the permanence of at least some of its values. In practice, it might achieve that particular goal by protecting its contents it deems valuable, by retaining them within itself in spite of a plethora of external impulses prevailing upon it to change.

We should also notice that the concept painting the identity of the Self as inner imperturbability favors iterative writing: by writing, the Self repeats that which it considers its most precious *cogitationes*, particularly these which it wants to retain and identify with them forever. Thus, writing is also a performative act wherein the Self settles in its immutability. Permanence is acquired through repeated recording of what one considers one's own substantial thought, one whose removal would change our very nature. The writing and the required iterative effort simultaneously removes any thoughts that could threaten the integrity of the Self, meaning its ethically acceptable content.

Accursed Thoughts

Koniński started writing the short story *Na dnie nocy* (*At the Bottom of the Night*) in 1933. The protagonist of that unfinished story is a man who spends one long night contemplating suicide. Fear of death and what comes after robs him of sleep, the man is plagued by insomnia. That dread, hitting him whenever he drifts from wakefulness into sleep, spurs him into extensive deliberations which he calls "the accursed thoughts, the scourge of recent years."[34] A closer look at that particular sentence, as well as the title and the deliberations of the protagonist will reveal the uncanny resemblance between the short story and *Nox atra*, the latter written nearly 10 years later. The similarity between the two, in terms of both being intimate journals, leads us to recognize that Koniński's first short story preserved for posterity was an account of the bothersome ideas and thoughts already lodged in his mind.

34 cf. K.L. Koniński, "Na dnie nocy" ("At the Bottom of the Night"), ed. B. Mamoń, *Kresy* no. 1 (1999): 235.

The protagonist ponders his lack of courage that prevented him, on that particular day, from committing suicide that he has been planning for a long time. After death, he expects to be condemned to hell, not for the act *per se* but rather for the sin of living below his own expectations. The vision of punishment appears here, actually, in relation to eroticism. He considers redemption unattainable as he cannot himself renounce Eros. God, or the notion of God he harbors, demands sexuality to be sacrificed. It is not enough to simply give up the occasional fling, the logic of the sacrifice is inescapable: "Should I give up this moment, then? In that case, should I just completely resign my sexuality? Including the lie that is marriage?"[35]

The protagonist claims that carnal bliss excludes the possibility of God, because it that particular moment, life seems absolutely perfect and sufficient and requires no transcendence to be complete and justified; thus, ecstasy implies betrayal, as it closes our mind to the idea of God so thoroughly that it makes him impossible, unnecessary, a disturbance in an otherwise peaceful life. The protagonist, however, cannot shed the lingering doubt that his God does, in fact, exist: "God is not necessary. … But that's precisely why you are above us, hanging there like a wraith, a nightmare, a vast firmament that threatens to drop right on our heads."[36] The following ruminations inform us that in order to commit suicide, the man abandoned his wife and their family home but took their child, as he wanted the boy to die along with him. He went as far as calling their domestic situation "execrable" and obliquely stating that it became a protracted, humiliating, wicked nightmare. The aforementioned shame and wickedness are related to some difficulties plaguing their marital life, but also to the issue of eroticism itself, to the tension resulting from the protagonist's inability to choose between eroticism and God and his awareness of the necessity of making that particular choice. He sees both his own incapability of choosing once and for all and succumbing to erotic desires in spite of being aware of God's condemnation of promiscuity as taints on his life.

Given its resemblance of *Nox atra*, his description of the sleepless night is of particular interest. That night should have borne witness to the protagonist making the ultimate choice between life and death, between the disgrace of returning home and suicide for which the protagonist does not really have the constitution. The situation, however, quickly becomes "irresolvable": the main character realizes that it's impossible to live on like this and simultaneously knows that he cannot take his life, at the very least because of the child he

35 ibid., 236.

36 ibid.

brought into the world: "What to do, what to do?! May this night never end, this night of gruesome deliberation."[37] Thus, the goal of his desire shifts from making the decision to prolonging the night during which the decision was supposed to be made. In this peculiar state of mind, the protagonist experiences a very vivid wave of erotic memories. The story itself does not stand a chance against the onslaught and suddenly breaks off; however, before the main character completely immerses himself in the intoxicating memory of his first tryst with the woman who later became his wife, he quite lucidly describes what is going to happen next:

> He was suddenly beset by a desire to surrender, a craving so powerful and covetous that it made him shudder. He resisted, wanted to believe in the night and in death that had to be decided upon if he was to escape the disgrace and indignity of his life. The fatigue and inertia of his soul, however, knew exactly where to hit him, how to infiltrate the deepest recesses of his will to disarm it and force it to surrender…[38]

The fragment above clearly reveals that the protagonist is already familiar with the dramatic tension pervading his nights and he know that the "night of gruesome deliberation" is just another one in a series of similar nights. A more proper name for "the night of making the decision" would be "the night the decision is again deferred."

The deliberations in *Nox atra* are an expression of the author's ambition of attaining holiness, a state of utter devotion to God, validated by his complete renunciation of sexuality and carnal desires. In *Nox atra*, the night also reveals, in all its harshness, the naked truth about the Self: that is, the insincerity of its faith and its unsuccessful enforcement of carnal celibacy. Here the author is also clearly torn. Believing that ascension to holiness is necessary, he is also repulsed by the concept. He perceives it as "terrible," "lethal," "indifferent," "like a skeleton," "empty," "black," it "freezes" life, "exudes iciness," and is "pointless"; it is "like a hot summer day, flies abuzz, the mood broken by the fact that someone close to us is on the verge of leaving this mortal coil" – the words Koniński picks to characterize holiness are clearly associated with death and its domain. Finally, on the same page, he takes to calling it the "damned temptation."[39] According to the author, the fact that the saints renounce marriage clearly indicates the evil of the

37 ibid., 238.

38 ibid.

39 K.L. Koniński, *Nox atra*, 98.

institution: "If all of this is sacrilegious to the holy, how could it be morally right for the rest of us?"[40]

Renouncing sexuality, in both *Na dnie nocy* and *Nox atra* is dictated by divine command and a test of faith following criteria established by nocturnal truths: "There is only one sin, one that is always mortal: turning one's back on God and pursuing that which is not Him."[41] Koniński also writes: "The saints never marry – and if one ever does, he is followed until the end by a pervasive belief that he committed a sin."[42] We can consider this particular sentence a confession, given that *Wojna* (*War*) contains multiple indications of sexuality being something of a problem in his marriage that often led to cruel clashes.

Friedrich Nietzsche also recognized the existence of a deep relationship between suicidal temptation and the ascetic zeal of early Christians. In his aphorism titled *Christianity and suicide* Nietzsche wrote:

> When Christianity came into existence the inclination to suicide was very strong – Christianity turned it into a lever of its power: it allowed only two kinds of suicide, dressed them up with the highest dignity and the highest hopes and forbade all others in a terrible manner. But martyrdom and the ascetic's slow suicide were permitted.[43]

Alfred Alvarez, the author of *The Savage God: A Study of Suicide*, also seems to notice a similar relationship between the prevalence of suicidal gestures in ancient Rome and the passion of early Christian martyrs and Saint Augustine's condemnation of attitudes that scorn the fact that "life itself is the gift of God."[44] Nietzsche, however, through that the Church's denunciation of suicide is a condemnation of a desire that the Church itself deeply instills in its followers by convincing them to completely renounce any notions of

40 ibid., 96.

41 ibid., 84.

42 ibid., 95.

43 F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 123.

44 A. Alvarez, *The Savage God: A Study of Suicide* (London: Bloomsbury, 2002). The author writes that St. Augustine drew up the Christian arguments against suicides because he was disturbed by the epidemic of martyrdom sweeping early Christian societies. Many pagans – as evidenced by primary sources – had no doubts that the Christian eagerness to embrace death (in some recorded cases, Christians even provoked authorities so they take a closer look at their activities) was the result of a deep-seated suicidal streak, similar to the death drive that characterized Roman civilization, where human life was cheap and people lost their lives often at their own request.

worldly ambitions or lust, which in itself might be considered a form of suicide via shunning the maelstrom of life and the forces governing its every aspects (just like Catharist *endura* is commonly considered suicide by refusing food).

The thanatological dimension of the Christian ideal of holiness and carnal purity was also recognized by theologian and psychoanalyst Eugen Drewermann. His analysis of Emile Zola's *The Sinful Priest* indicates that the eponymous priest is portrayed by the author "as a saint, that is, as a dead man." Drewermann claims that after breaking off the illicit affair with the woman he loved, Father Mouret talks about himself in a way that would suggest he desires nothing but to wither away and die: "May nothing ever disturb my immobility! May I remain forever cold and rigid, with a ceaseless smile upon my granite lips, unable to muster the spirit to descend among men! This is my one and only desire!"[45] Is not the fascination with the "purity" of the life of Simone Weil, who committed a protracted suicide by attempting to live up to her own stringent moral requirements, the strongest in people who clearly hear Christianity's siren song inviting them to commit suicide? Koniński heard that same call himself. He was disgusted with the concessions he was forced to make (marriage) but his dreadful God who demanded sacrifices of him terrified Koniński even more. He was torn between erotic desires, the allure of holiness, and suicidal temptations.

In the short story *Na dnie nocy*, the question of God was directly related to the outlook on eroticism, which simultaneously nearly pushed the protagonist to suicide and yet had the power to dissuade him from committing the final act. In the story, *sexus* leads to anguish and threatens the author's self-worth, but his erotic dreams also bring him comfort and distract him from thoughts of God and death. Insofar as God was only a mask of death drive for the protagonist of *Na dnie nocy,* in *Nox atra*, thinking of God shields the writing Self from suicide, as self-murder seems increasingly desirable due to the Self's pervasive sense of erotic guilt and a consciousness-crushing overabundance of suffering.

Na dnie nocy clearly indicates that problems bothering Koniński were more or less permanent. The protagonist of that short story and the Self whose meditations we witness in *Nox atra* have so much in common that we can easily consider the short story a sort of intimate confession which sought a method of expression different from the "formlessness" typical of intimate journaling. Suspending choice, coming back to recurring trains of thought, and repetition, the latter a distinctive characteristic of Koniński's wartime

45 Quoted from E. Drewermann, *Kler. Psychogram* ideału (*Clergy: Psychogram of an Ideal*), tr. R. Stiller, N. Niewiadomski (Gdynia: Uraeus, 2002), 525. Translated into English by this article's translator.

literary output, are here anticipated by the inability to finish the short story, to use compact narratives to portray the existential state of suspending resolution, expressed by reiterating the question of choice and weighing the existential power of a series of alternatives: perseverance versus suicide, faith versus atheism, holiness versus sexuality, "the religion of humility" versus "the ethics of pride," "orthodoxy" versus "modernism," "mysticism" or "hard effort," "God-as-Absolute" or "God-as-Spirit"…

The analyzed short story already outlines a certain existential pattern marked by the inability to finish the writing process and bestow upon thoughts their final shape. Koniński's conduct in life is anchored in the constant search for the proper attitudes and agonizing over his own incapability of confirming himself in any of his beliefs. All previous critics of Koniński's work mentioned the peculiar existential state induced in the author by the night and explored that particular subject in-depth, often referring to Karl Jasper's writings.[46] Koniński's nights – as we clearly see now – are also nights of indecision, plagued by the nightmare of being suspended between life and death: "You cannot live and cannot die"[47] – says the protagonist of *Na dnie nocy*. The theme of indecision present in Koniński's literary output allows us to acknowledge Didier's diagnosis and label his writings intimate journals.

Translation: Jan Szelągiewicz

46 cf. e.g. A. Fitas, *Głos z labiryntu. O pismach Karola Ludwika Konińskiego* (*Voice from the Labyrinth: On the Writings of Karol Ludwik Koniński*) (Wrocław: Leopoldinum, 2003), 123-130.

47 K.L. Koniński, *Na dnie nocy*, 238.

Grażyna Borkowska

How to Speak about Dying

To My Father

1. Preliminary settlements

My task, at least seemingly, is a simple one: to show how people speak about death of one of their parents and what effect it has on their own identity. In my analysis I include auto/biographical accounts – non-fiction – although I am aware of the fact that their authors' literary skills influence the way they render their experiences. I do not intend to multiply texts for interpretation – I rather aim at distinguishing primary features of narratives about dying and indicating fundamental differences between them.[1]

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1 I unevenly and selectively use a few texts: M. Dąbrowska, *Dzienniki*, selection, introduction and footnotes T. Drewnowski, vol. 2: 1926-1935. Warsaw 1999 (later referred to as MD, page number); Z. Nałkowska, *Dzienniki*, ed., introduction and commentary H. Kirchner, vol. 5: 1939-1944, Warsaw 1996 (later referred to as ZN, page number); T. Różewicz, *Matka odchodzi*, Wrocław 1999 (later referred to as TR, page number); NK . Miller, "My Father's Penis," [in:] ead. *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and other Autobiographical Acts*, New York, London 1991 (later referred to as NKM, page number); Ph. Roth, *Patrimony. A True Story*, New York 1991, I refer to the 1996 edition (later referred to as PhR, page number).

Fritz Schütze, the founding father of the concept of biographical research as it is understood today, identifies four structural processes of the life course revealed using narrative interviews.[2] Firstly, there are "institutional patterns" which refer to execution of duties stemming from specific age norms, levels of education, etc. Secondly, we speak about "biographical action schemes," i.e. intentional, deliberate behaviour chosen by the subject of a biography and compliant with his/her goals. Thirdly, we should notice "trajectories" – compact sequences of events determined by external factors independent of an individual's will. They can be compared to a calamity which unexpectedly falls on a person, destroying his/her world order and causing bankruptcy of "a certain concept of oneself."[3] Finally, experienced and initiated events often lead to a transformation, i.e. forming new elements of the identity which may mean an attempt to escape from a trajectory and enter a new action structure.

Speaking of narratives about traumatic experiences linked with dying (death) of a close person, I will rarely refer to "institutional patterns" and "action schemes" characteristic to narrators' biographies. If these patterns and schemes emerge in the accounts (and they will), they will only serve as background or areas of negative references which will help the narrator realize his/her inability (difficulty) to accept and fulfil his/her professional, social and public functions. I will concentrate on what, according to Schütze's typology, is called a trajectory which, in accordance with the adopted settlements, is a phenomenon of disorderly social processes and processes of suffering.[4] Although researchers stipulate that the meaning of a trajectory covers a broader area than death as it concerns various kinds of disintegration, loss of support in life, a term that is most commonly referred to is a trajectory of dying. A trauma related with the vision of one's own death or death of a relative, despair which accompanies this situation, feelings of helplessness and hopelessness – all this creates a border situation. On the one hand, it seems unbearable, on the other hand, it is remarkably mobilizing. It evokes diverse efforts that are preventive and organizing (the sphere of biography or

2 I learn and report Fritz Schütze's concept and its bonds with pioneering works by W.I. Thomas and F. Znaniecki and other similar interpretations, eg. R. Cavan's studies on the suicide process mainly after: M. Prawda, *Biograficzne odtwarzanie rzeczywistości (O koncepcji badań biograficznych Fritza Schütze),* „Studia Socjologiczne" 1989 no 4 (115); G. Riemann, F. Schütze, *„Trajektoria" jako podstawowa koncepcja teoretyczna w analizach cierpienia i bezładnych procesów społecznych*, transl. Z. Bokszański, A. Piotrowski, „Kultura i Społeczeństwo" 1992 no 2, r. XXXVI; M. Melchior, *Zagłada i tożsamość. Polscy Żydzi ocaleni „na aryjskich papierach." Analiza doświadczenia biograficznego,* Warsaw 2004.

3 See M. Prawda, *Biograficzne odtwarzanie rzeczywistości...*, 87.

4 G. Riemann, F. Schütze, „Trajektoria" jako podstawowa koncepcja..., 92.

creative output), most often ineffectively and fallibly, painfully clashing with the phenomenon that is stronger than our will, knowledge and desires but sustainably linked with the history of dying.

Dealing with death trajectories, we will treat them as "strictly biographical" phenomena, as defined by Riemann and Schütze,[5] but also the strictly narrative ones. Their narrative character is based on the fact that storytelling unveils the disorderly trajectory and endless suffering but it is also revealed in different life threatening situations in which various crisis strategies apply: one of them is speaking – about misery, past, future, similar stories with happy or unhappy endings, miraculous recoveries and unexpected deaths, about God, family or newly built interpersonal relationships. Storytelling makes it possible not only to reach all expressible elements of a traumatic situation but also to have some of them emerge at all. Of course, fear or suffering are not conceived within or owing to storytelling but it is the narrative structure that arranges the traumatic experience in a sequence of events, turning it into a biographical experience.

There is only one more matter to explain. A methodology of biographical research applied in the modern sociological studies was intended to provide methods of analyzing an individual's existential experience which sociologists were hitherto unable to describe. Whereas, literature has always tackled issues which sociology could not take care of: human suffering, fear, and pain. We can, thus, make assumptions about the reasons why narratology is interesting to sociology. But the other way around? Why is Znaniecki, Strauss[6] or Schütze's research attractive to a literary theoretician? Let us say the following: it is because it reminds us that text, also literary, is a recording of a human experience. A very complicated recording in which we should recognize the voice of both a suffering person and a writing artist, that is why it may (or may not) seem less credible but it is still indispensable to identify our attitude towards basic existential phenomena: birth, life, love, and death. And at least a few times in a life time, we are tempted, often due to one's own experience of someone else's dying, to read a literary text this way: as a weeping text.

2. Heralds of misery, the initial stadium

For years, symptoms of Anna Nałkowska's illness had been gently increasing. From time to time, the mother of Zofia suffered from the exhausting and

5 Ibid., 93.

6 I mainly refer here to the book by A. Strauss and B. Glaser Anguish: *The Case Study of a Dying Trajectory,* Mill Valley 1970, as well as the earlier Strauss' work *Minors and Masks: The Search for Identity*, Mill Valley 1969.

dangerous arrhythmia and she often behaved like a large child, being sulky and fussy, demanding from her daughters constant interest, attention, conversation, and care. Nałkowska's *Journals* from the 1930s, but mainly from the pre-war period, are filled with problems caused by the mother: her senile incapacity to understand the others' need for intimacy, her peculiar egoism and mood changes. The writer did not cope with this situation well: Zofia was between the devil and the deep blue sea. She loved her mother and was ready to pander to her whims but she could not give up having a young man in the house. Bogusław Kuczyński was a demanding and sombre lover, sensitive about himself, a high-principled and tough man.

Sharing life between the need for intimacy and taking care of the mother required from Zofia dexterity and patience, the more so because Anna Nałkowska was becoming even more childish and less aware of her state. If she did not receive what she wanted, she was fussy and disapproving, benignly complaining about her fate of an unloved and rejected parent. When she felt better, she gave her love and care to the daughters, expressed her worry about their health, she heroically summoned up her and her weaknesses being treated with negligence. In Nałkowska's *Journals,* particularly vividly in the war-time volume, the appearances of harmony in the family are in an unceasing interplay with endless misery the heroines are exposed to from far and near. Bogusław Kuczyński is already gone; the Nałkowski family home became a home of women. All three of them (Anna, Zofia and her sister Hanna) are getting sick, weakened, mentally burned-out; human and war misfortune stricken. And all of them try to conceal this state from each other and the world, and make yet another attempt to get out of the miserable situation.

In January 1942, the mother's condition rapidly deteriorates. For the first time, Dr. Teuchmann openly informs Zofia that her mother is debilitated, requires constant care and her illness may cause a catastrophe any moment. He advises Zofia to locate the elderly lady in an institution because her caprices and repetitive attacks prevent her daughters from having a normal work and life: "Obtaining one day for her is a waste of one week for each of you" (ZM, 345).

Even though Nałkowska does not take the doctor's advice, it does not mean that she fails to accept his diagnosis that justifies it. She explicitly feels the approaching end. Nałkowska's perception of the world characteristic to her philosophy obtains here a special dimension. This time, the spectre of a catastrophe, often accompanying the writer, is real and completely inevitable. And as always before, it is balanced with her talent to think about the causes of a disaster and her ability to face the world. The entire internal work serves as a tool for trying, partially experiencing, testing the dark future on herself. What happens when the mother is gone? What will the world be like without the one who loved and

was loved? What comes to an end together with the mother's death? What happens with the consciousness of the abandoned child?

Nałkowska knows that her mother slowly goes away and that every single day spent with her might be the last one. She makes effort to be patiently understanding towards the ill person, tries to fulfil her needs, which becomes difficult in the context of another war-time winter, when the temperature is 20 degrees below zero for several weeks and it is impossible to keep the home warm. However, what is important is the feeling of the coming end, irreversible loss, which the author tries to push away or at least make it less evident by means of taking care of the mother, being with her and indulging her caprices. At the same time, she strives for maintaining some margin of the reality which could be identified as her own: readings, philosophical reflection, notes, rare conversations with friends: "Sullenly and despite everything, I insist on keeping my identity – through diving into the world that is read (alas, how rarely written!), the world of someone else's thought which confirms that I'm right, through the conversation with people who might be indifferent but who embody the identity which persists despite everything" (ZN, 357). The way Nałkowska struggles with her mother's illness resembles the way she fights her own old age, the spectre of her own disability, the horror of the war. She does not escape from the evil; she faces it – mentally and intellectually. She verifies whether her perception of the world altered under the influence of new experiences, how it changed and if this transformation threatens the feeling of solidarity with herself: "I do not sleep at night, lacing all this terrible fate of mine and others with my flow of consciousness – all this 'depth of perdition.' I do not take any sleeping pills. I appreciate the possibility to think even the worst thoughts, to think undisturbed in the silence of the sleeping house" (ZN, 359), Nałkowska writes on the 29th of March, 1942, in the days of her mother's illness, distressed with tragic news "from the town."

What is very characteristic, but in some sense also untypical about Nałkowska's struggles with her mother's dying is that she experiences it as something taking place between her and the world – in solitude, without significant participation of other people. Hanna's presence is hardly marked in the space of the cramped flat on Madalińskiego. The relationship with the sister – always difficult – gets more complicated due to the feeling of guilt: Zofia keeps in secret the information about her bother-in-law Maksymilian Bick's suicide. She knows that once this fact is disclosed, the situation will become even more dramatic. Zofia isolates Hanna from the troubles triggered by their mother's condition and tries to inspire her sister to go back to sculpting. She encourages her to visit the atelier. And she has an overwhelming feeling of walking on thin ice, drifting on an ice floe. Nevertheless, her lonely handling death is eventually explained by Nałkowska's view on the family she calls "the

place of condensed suffering" (ZN, 369). The family cannot protect you from the evil which painfully strikes the family showing its demonic power.

The sickness of Maria Dąbrowska's mother comes unexpectedly: on the 10th of November, 1927, the writer receives a letter from her sister Jadwiga about the alarming health condition of their mother. She can't decide whether she should go directly to Białystok or attend her brother's wedding in Tyczno near Rzeszów. As the mother's state temporarily improves, she goes to the wedding, then to Białystok. The mother has her ups and downs. There is no unequivocal medical diagnosis. The suspicion of typhoid is ruled out but "the illness is strange" (MD, 81). It brings debilitation, a dramatic aversion to eat and fever. The crisis comes at the turn of November and December: "There is no fever. The doctor says that we are past the worst and we are starting a recovery. It will be very tough but not hopeless. He orders eating grapes and oranges. I buy it all. The Soviet caviare I got for Mum from Mrs Sempołowska. I go to Warsaw in the evening to earn something, gain some money, solve Jadzia's problems and organize brining Mum to us for convalescence" (MD, 81).

Dąbrowska's account presents an average image of a sickness which does not take place in the void but overlaps with other life troubles related with the dramatic need of money which requires various activities, exclusive products. They latter often play the role of magical objects: grapes and oranges in the middle of winter, caviar. They put in a better mood not so much the ill person as the whole family. This account also shows the tension which accompanies sickness: the unstable rhythm of relapses and remissions, hopes – dashing and tirelessly retrieved from the stream of current matters. Dąbrowska experiences her mother's illness surrounded by the family, supported by Jadwiga's uninterrupted presence, composure, and class.

The illness of Herman Roth, the writer Philip Roth's father is slightly similar, almost typical. The word 'typical,' of course, sounds inadequate as the sickness is always an astonishing, unwanted and appalling tragedy for one's relatives. Nonetheless, in comparison to other accounts, we can distinguish elements that are recurrent and common to various stories of a disease. During his annual winter visit in Florida, the 86-year-old Herman Roth suffers from a slight paralysis of one side of his face. Despite his age, he is generally a healthy, strong and lively man; he stays in West Palm Beach with his friend Lillian Beloff he fell in love with one year after his wife's death. A preliminary diagnosis sounds comforting: the paralysis is probably caused by the virus infection. It is so called Bell's palsy. It usually retreats automatically. Sometimes it does not, however, and one has to get used to difficulties with speaking, swallowing, or eating in general. One also has to accept the looks: distorted face, asymmetrical and grotesque, and to saliva uncontrollably dripping of the lips.

After the unfortunate trip to Florida, Herman Roth is scheduled to the tomography of the head and that is when the correct diagnosis is formulated: brain tumor. His son, who came from Connecticut, is waiting for the diagnosis in the hotel in which he usually stays during his visits in New York. He finds out the truth from a large envelope with a radiologist's description. Philip Roth precisely reports on the circumstances of getting acquainted with the fate's verdict on his father. He recalls the hotel name, the appearance of the envelope – are these details meaningful to the story of a disease? What do they add to our knowledge about the dying trajectory? Let us put those questions aside for now but we need to point out that the meticulousness is purposeful and linked with the principle of 'telling everything.'

On receiving the message, Philip Roth is alone. His friend, wife-to-be, Claire Bloom went to visit her daughter in London. The writer makes a twofold assessment of this situation: he realizes that it would be easier for him to fight depression and incapability of taking up any job if Claire was there with him. On the other hand, loneliness allows him to completely submit to the sorrow: "When I felt like crying, I cried," he writes (PhR, 16). Philip Roth repeatedly returns to the X-ray pictures he has been given. As he states, what is most terrifying is not the fact of dealing with tangible evidence of the father's illness but having a picture of his body uncovered in the act of being ill. It is not seeing the sick brain but seeing his father's brain – the presumed source of his character, temper, authority, strength, fascinating liveliness, power not overshadowed even by the talent and fame of his son. Looking at those pictures, he saw everything and nothing. He came into contact with a mystery which got exposed but not solved.

The absence of his friend does not mean, however, that Philip is forced to handle the situation by himself. He keeps in touch with the more or less close family, reaches for both specialist and less official medical advice. He talks on the phone with his friend Joanna, a Polish emigrant who grants him absolution from his professional indisposition, being lost and a very non-American feeling of helplessness and despair. You do not have to work all the time, you do not have to stay in good shape, you do not even have to comprehend what happened, he hears in the phone receiver.

There is one thing left to do: inform the father about the diagnosis and the choice of a treatment method. As the tumor is probably not malignant, doctors suggest an operation. One, maybe two, because the tumor is dispersed among vessels and will be difficult to remove.

The disease has its stigmata – it marks not only people but also the subjective world with the signs of the irreversible. They are gently introduced in his narrative only by Philip Roth: on his way to talk to his father, he incomprehensibly, remarkably and inexplicably drives off the highway and arrives at

the cemetery where his mother's ashes are. He went there only twice after her death: this mistake, hence, could have a symbolic meaning. But what meaning? Can he count on his late mother's support? Can he count on sensing her presence? Roth writes about something else: a fundamental meaning of the visit at the cemetery is connected not with sensing the presence of the dead but with the conviction that they finally left.

3. Disease exacerbation, crisis; the stadium of agony

Entering the next stage of an illness is usually related with a specific date. In Anna Nałkowska's case, it happened on the 22nd of April, 1942. Under this date, Zofia wrote: "Last Sunday – the day filled with terror which I experience as if it was the most ordinary everyday. I was torn between the mother, Hania and four doctors and I wasn't even surprised any more. The second attack was the beginning of my mother's death. She was sitting at the table on the armchair with her head thrown back, like the grandma when she was dying, pulseless hands covered with cold sweat people call 'deadly'" (ZN, 368). The author has no doubt that the disease will strike the final blow, and that her mother is close to death. And that – in the third year of the war – death is an overwhelming experience one should actually get used to and accept its offer to solve ultimate matters, its promise to bring solace. For people in the ghetto, but not only, dying in one's own bed, surrounded by the beloved family could appear as luck, luxury, destiny's gift. Nonetheless, Nałkowska heroically fights to save her mother and postpone the moment of the calamity: she strengthens her with injections of salt, *cortina*, strychnine and camphor, with drips of glucose, colon cleansing, vein injections, cupping. "Perhaps we can pull her to the shore yet one more time," Nałkowska deludes herself on her name-day, on the 15th of May, 1942 (ZN, 375).

Unfortunately, the condition of Anna Nałkowska in fact does not improve. The patient opposes to further treatment which is a torture to her. She wants to die and she wants to live. She is consumed by fever and debilitation. Medics are torn between different diagnoses because there are hardly any symptoms. The most likely cause of the condition is myocardial degeneration. "But it's not only that," Zofia adds in her journal on the 18th of May (ZN, 378). She knows that, just like everyone around, this illness is mortal, and has only one end which must happen. After a short period of improvement, comes pneumonia. Anna Nałkowska dies on the 6th; she suffers before death, having breathing difficulties.

Suffering of the mortally ill is also tormenting to their relatives. Not only Nałkowska, but also Różewicz touches upon this topic. His mother, taken from the hospital in the last phase of cancer, dies at home. Her misery makes

Tadeusz reflect upon the saint body which is elevated though pain. Only, this elevation is bitter, empty. Mother suffers like Christ but her suffering is meaningless. Either for her or the world. "Today, she only ate two spoonfuls of broth. Her skull is covered with yellow-blueish, almost transparent skin. She is afraid of being taken to the toilet. She is so feeble that she is unable to lift herself on her elbows. We put a suitcase at the foot of the bed so that she could lean on it" (TR, 104). Everything seems elusive in view of such suffering: European culture, religious beliefs, art, people. Because people, also the loving ones, turn out to be too weak to be able to accompany dying in its whole physiological sublimity and horror. Różewicz's thought escapes in various directions. He dreams of going away, he tends to be bitter about his inability to work. He wishes to take a vacation, some rest. Despite the presence of his brother, then the arrival of his father's and others, he feels lonely in his awaiting the mother's death; death which is expected to bring everyone liberation from suffering.

The progress of Herman Roth's illness was foreseen by the doctors with precision. The patient was forewarned that in case of his negative response to the idea of an operation, he will shortly experience new ailments, e.g. difficulties with speaking and swallowing. In the period of intensifying symptoms of the father's disease (Herman Roth did not subject himself to the operation), Philip's health condition deteriorated. His heart problems increased which resulted in a bypass surgery. Deterioration of health of people who take care of a sick person is not a rarity. Nałkowska experiences dangerous blood pressure fluctuation and she feels life-threatened herself; Różewicz goes through a heavy mental crisis. But the process of recovery is as rapid as falling sick: Nałkowska almost immediately returns to her everyday activities, similarly to Różewicz. Roth's operation is successful and followed by instant convalescence. Philip Roth implored the fate to let his father live until he is strong enough to handle his death and the funeral.

The father's agony had place in the hospital. According to the earlier expressed will of the patient, any respirators or drips were not supposed to be used in case of his problems with breathing or eating. Philip Roth complied with his father's request, thus he did what is very hard to do: he let his father die.

4. Tormented body

Descriptions of disease and pain reveal crucial discrepancies resulting from different levels of civilization, life standards, or even organizational systems of medical services. They exert substantial influence over the ritual of dying and the narrative about death. Differences linked with distinct cultural conditions are equally interesting. Their measure could be specific

attitudes towards the body – the body of a sick person, subject to disintegration, pain, indisposition, the fallible body incapable of keeping itself clean or maintaining hygienic regimes, the body uncovered and exposed to the public view. The Polish texts analyzed here are characterized by a more enigmatic approach towards the body. Różewicz writes about the tormented, asexual, transparent, often repulsive and ugly body. The body in Nałkowska's writings is, after all, neat and beautiful, dignified by concern and suffering: "Her face – skinny and dark – became so beautiful that it's striking to everyone" (ZN, 378). "She is lying in half-sleep – pretty, good, unfortunate, she resists food and medications – but eventually agrees to everything, trusting and thankful for everything" (ibid.).

Narratives in English present the body of a dying person as a problematic body. It will cause troubles, both physical and mental. It will be an issue, a topic to think through, a starting point for re-vindication and memories. When Roth's father stains the whole floor with his excrements and the son, tiding it, gets dirty with feces, then cleans everything and throws a whole bag of dirty clothes to the car in order to take it to the laundry, he will feel that everything he does is natural, in place. "It was exactly Patrimony. Not because cleaning symbolized something else, but precisely because it was nothing else than the experienced reality. It was my Patrimony: not money, not tefillin, not a cup for shaving, but shit" (PhR, 176).

While bathing his father, Roth will take a thorough glimpse at his penis. He will notice with certain astonishment that, among all his organs, this one looks young. He will think of pleasures it was a source of. Pleasures divided between the two of them – the father and the mother. Nothing else comes to Philip's mind. He waits for some conclusions and a thought strikes him – that he should remember this moment in order to save the father's image from spiritualization, etherealness, incorporeality. In the bathing scene a concept of a future book – an account of the father's dying – is born. He cannot forget about anything, he has to speak about everything without hiding any drastic elements which are shocking not only to the Polish reader but also to others, since English-speaking scholars – encouraged by the ethical turn in literary criticism – wondered whether Roth did not infringe his character's right to intimacy.[7] This breach of the taboo is a function of demythologizing death as a religious event, its measure being retreat from metaphysics. Death belongs to the family, generational bonds, heritage, intimate memory. Anti-metaphysics of Różewicz is of a completely different kind: for Roth, the source of power and the conviction of a special type of immortality guaranteed by

7 P.J. Eakin, "The Unseemly Profession," [in:] *Renegotiating Ethics in Literature, Philosophy, and Theory*, ed. by J. Adamson, R. Freadman, D. Parker, Cambridge 1988, 176 and next.

the generational continuum is physicality. Różewicz does not find support or consolation either in the body or the soul.

Nancy K. Miller who nurses her father, has another kind of experiences. When she was a child, a girl, he fascinated her with his strength, masculinity, his influence on her mother and the rest of the family. Sunday mornings, which he used to spend in his carelessly buttoned striped pyjamas, evoked in her unclear interpretations of the mystery of sexes. She trembled at the thought of the father's power symbolized by a vague notion of the phallus and hid her erotic and writer's experiences from him. Observing his body changed by an illness, his intimate organs, she could not find anything mysterious. It was prosaic. "My father does not have a phallus," she concluded (NKM, 145). This meant he was neither a king nor a sovereign. He is, or rather he was an owner of an ordinary human capability of procreation and erotic pleasures. Nancy Miller became an advocate of – not always honored – rights of this feeble body. By claiming her father's right to natural death, she found herself in the phallic position. She represented a ritualistic privilege to decide about life and death. Not coincidentally, the closing words of her essay are spoken by a nurse who, uncertain she understood well the author's request to switch off her father's life-maintaining apparatus, asks: "Do you want me to kill you father?" (NKM, 147).

In the case of Philip Roth and Nancy Miller, the reported experienced of the father's death means partial interpretation of Freud and Lacan's psychoanalysis. Recalling a primal horde where the sons eliminate their father and sovereign by force, the author of the novel Patrimony identifies with another type of being a son which does not permit a strike but means tender and voluntary acceptance of the father's domination. Following Paul J. Eakin, it is not a coincidence that a thought to "tell everything" is conceived in the contact of the narrator with the naked body of his father, because this thought is directly dependent on the phallic power and authority he represents. Its emergence is triggered by the phallus.[8] The relation between the father and the son is not equivalent to the conflict based on violence; it is rather composed of respect and awe experienced by the narrator also after the father's death as he is convinced that not everything has been taken care of according to the will of the deceased. The father figure appearing in a dream turns into a phantasm of the symbolic Father equipped with unchallengeable arguments received without event slight distance or reservation.

Nancy K. Miller invokes her own experience in order to reject an unclear but dominant notion of the phallus linked with psychoanalysis. It is not the phallus that rules the world but death: the right to pronounce it and execute

8 Ibid., 178.

it. Here, the phantasm of the father's strength is deprived of its sexual-authoritarian equivalent. What is left is a trace of one's own fear of the father and the memory about him. It is not friendly respect experienced by Roth. It is rather the residuum of anxiety forcing her to admit that if it was not for her father's death, she would not have considered to publicly analyze her intimate approach to him and his body.

The above presented ritual of the transformation from a man to an old man and from a girl to a phallic goddess is a symbolic interpretation of the process which invariably accompanies the dying of the parents: the exchange of the habitually played roles. Nałkowska nurses her mother as if she was a child. She makes sure her mother is clean, warm, eats diversified food. She washes, combs and dresses her. She cuddles her, calms her down and quietly sings until she falls asleep. What is even more touching than those everyday activities performed with tenderness and delicacy is the author's unchangeable conviction that hereby, the love of her life is passing away, that in her adult life there is no one else upon whom she could bestow comparable affection, and that this love sequence shall not be continued.

This also concerns Różewicz. He performs all the hygienic activities: he washes his mother, feeds her with crumbs of food like a little bird or an infant, he changes her sheets and brings her bed pan. After the funeral, under the date of the 19th of July, 1957, he writes, "I gave my love to the soil. My good suffering baby – my soul" (TR, 106).

In Philip Roth's account, this role exchange is noticed by the sick father himself who, talking on the phone with his friend, says, "Philip is like a mother to me" (PhR, 181).

What is this exchange of roles? What does it mean to take the role of a mother of one's own mother or father? Is this what the ritual of maturation, initiation into adulthood look like? Is it about experiencing the death of one's own parent, finding for oneself a new place in the sequence of existential actions, in the chain of family interconnections?

5. Mourning

Even though the authors of all the examined narratives define their attitudes towards *sacrum* as non-worshipping, they practice completely distinct forms of mourning. In Roth's book, helping someone die is truly the last service that could be given to a person in agony. As both Herman Roth and his family are (to some extent, of course) prepared for death, the funeral itself rather serves fulfilling a certain tradition. Philip Roth agrees to introduce ritualistic elements to the funeral, although he perfectly knows that burying the father in the shroud does not comply with their rejection of religion.

Nevertheless, it seems a better solution than a burial of the father wearing a suit worn by Herman Roth, an employee of a large insurance company, in his office on a daily basis. Only lack of courage restrained the writer from notifying the employees of the funeral house, "Bury him naked." We do not know whether anybody cried over the coffin, whether Kaddish was said and what the mourners did after returning from the cemetery. The story ends together with the moment of death. And it resumes again in the narrative on the subject, covering entire areas of the family story or even American history. Herman Roth's death confirms his son's sense of identity and perception of himself as an American Jew who overcame various obstacles and achieved success. Paradoxically, it also rebuilt his bond with the father blurred in the course of life: the bond between the world famous writer and the modest, ill-educated clerk. The disease enabled them to return to the ties of the body, biological ties and unveiled them as it unveiled the father's brain and his penis. For, what does it mean to be a father and to be a son? It means to literally come from this particular body, to be flesh and bone. This is why everything is important: saliva, sweat, excrement. And everything needs to be described and told. And this is why one needs to summon up an 'unseemly' book written nearly in parallel with the process of dying. And one needs to negotiate with one's own conscience the right to violate someone else's intimacy.

A few days after the funeral and the mourning mass, Różewicz noted in his journal, "Mum, my love, you are with me. I will talk to you, I will work thinking of you" (TR, 107). The process of mourning started with the mass and the note in fact has never finished. The mother's suffering in the last days of her life has been included in the theology of humanity practiced by the poet, in Różewicz's religion without God, in the saint secular history which had its executioners and martyrs. The poet's mother still passes away bringing a wound of orphanage that was insufficiently cried over. If this permanent despair does not sound more clearly in Różewicz's story, in his work, it is because it's completely deprived of pathos and the conviction that literature can fill the void left by the absentee. Andrzej Skrendo shows that the volume *Matka odchodzi* consists of not only statements formulated in the course of dying and after the mother's death but also poems written before the poet's personal tragedy. Those poems, situated in another, elegiac context, are read like post-mortem pieces. Skrendo's conclusion is the following, "In his volume *Matka odchodzi* Różewicz does not ask about the truth of life but about the truth and untruth of poetry. In view of poems surrounding *Ściana,* this piece not only stops being an erotic work and can be read as a poem about the mother, but even reveals as a poem about her dying! Does it sound reckless? I do not think so. If we agree that there aren't any non-relational features, it will become obvious that

texts take their sense from the context."[9] Literature, therefore, is not a simple gesture to bring back someone's presence, but it is a very disputable, ethically ambiguous and always engaged in literary contexts and aesthetic measures, attempt to fill the void with the writer's work.

After her mother passes away, Nałkowska leads a double life: between home and cemetery. "Hours in the cemetery, the sun, silence. I talk with her quietly, I kiss the sandstone embracing the grave with its edge. It's warm. Inside this frame, dark violet, frisé petunias are growing, every time I bring the same ones and plant them in free slots without a flowerpot. Pink hydrangea is still blooming. A woman who watches the grave remembers my mother, though the latter couldn't go there for a long time. She says that there are no such loving daughters now, that she knows everything that is happening and she saw my sister when she came alone and cried very much" (ZN, 390). Nałkowska gets more comfortable in the cemetery, comes back anxious about the grave, about the deceased. Writing about love to the one who "is underground" (ZN, 386), once again she takes the role of the mother of her mother, the role of Demeter who misses Persephone and comes to the gates of Hades to be closer to the beloved one.

In this period, the writer comes closer not only to the gates of Hades but also to folk culture. She longingly listens to fascinating stories told by the cemetery woman – stories about love stronger than death. She does not define her attitude towards these signs of folk miraculousness, but absorbs and introduces them to her own narrative. She is then closer to the other world; no matter if it is the world of the dead, the world of ballads, miracles, or strangeness.

When we take a closer glance at dying trajectories depicted in the comparable accounts, we will observe a certain regularity: the trajectory of suffering subjected to the highly artistic and literarily perfect narrative manipulation – despite all doubts – still seems less disorderly, though always equally helpless towards the ultimate. Perhaps this is the therapeutic function of literature.

Translation: Marta Skotnicka

9 A. Skrendo, *Cień matki. Zapis dekonstrukcji*, [in:] *„Matka odchodzi" Tadeusza Różewicza,* ed. I. Iwasiów and J. Madejski, Uniwersytet Szczeciński, Rozprawy i Studia T. (CDXCVI) 422, Szczecin 2002, 37.

Jarosław Ławski

Narrative and Annihilation: On Calel Perechodnik's *Testimony*

"Where are you, men of the future?"
Bohdan Wojdowski[1]

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I. Annihilation and interpretation

Interpretative reticence toward the writing from the period of Holocaust can be variously interpreted: in most cases, it is the inexpressibility of suffering that seals off the access to the text even for those readers and scholars who would like to approach it with utmost sensitivity and respect. This is because a text depicting the events of Holocaust is subjected to two types of procedures: firstly, marked with the sanction of holiness, it becomes a cultural element of the Jewish martyrologium, a relic of Shoah or Annihilation[2] – and viewed from this perspective, both for the lay consciousness and for the one

1 B. Wojdowski. *Chleb rzucony umarłym.* [Bread Thrown at the Dead] Warszawa 1990. 1960.

2 In the following essay I will interchangeably use the words Holocaust and Shoah but also *Annihilation* [Wyniszczenie], an extremely valuable term, proposed by M. Głowiński, revealing the ruthless irrationality and exceptionlessness of the Shoah. See: M. Głowiński. "Zapisywanie Zagłady. Z Michałem Głowińskim rozmawia Anka Grupińska." [Writing the Shoah. Anka Grupińska talks to Michał Głowiński] *Tygodnik Powszechny.* 2001 Vol. 1. 15.

that partakes in the realm of sacral imagery, it transforms into something "untouchable," something that "cannot be opened" also as a work of language and culture deeply rooted in the tradition it originated in.

The second "defense" mechanism isolating the writing from the days of Shoah relies on treating them simply as a "testimony" that is supposed to express the "truth" of the times of inhuman bestiality. This is, too, how Calel Perechodnik, discussed in the following essay, describes his mission: to give testimony to the truth in a text serving as a confession by a Jewish policeman, a character ambiguous at the core.[3] By its very nature, text-as-testimony implies its non-literariness, almost warning against deriving from it any kind of intellectual or aesthetic knowledge, not to mention, pleasure.[4] What seems to follow from similar reasoning is that text-as-testimony is intentionally calculated to be received as confirmation, as a "yes" from the reader who, either with respect, or terror, will refrain from an "analytical," rational review of the "testimony" … and not the heritage of the tradition that the testimony reveals.

Those two strategies of defending Holocaust writing from the "aggression" of interpretation, stained by its very nature by the blasphemy of inquisitiveness, often become intertwined. Annihilation turns out to be inexpressible: "What happened, goes beyond the limits of human imagination, goes beyond the limits of language."[5] But language is not something para-human. It is precisely ultimately human, profound and rooted in the entirety of the often centuries long tradition of a people, kin, family, it is a voice extracting that which is "substantial" although sometimes "inexpressible." The choice of language – a moment before death, as in the letters thrown from the trains

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3 C. Perechodnik. *Spowiedź. Dzieje rodziny żydowskiej podczas okupacji hitlerowskiej w Polsce.* With an introduction and commentary by D. Engel (ed.), based on the manuscript. Warszawa 2004. 94: "But this would only be a justification and I decided to write my diary not for the sake of justification but for the sake of bare truth." All subsequent quotations are based on this edition and followed with a page number. [Translator's note: Perechodnik's diary was published in English by Westview Press in 1996 as *Am I a Murderer? Testament of a Jewish Ghetto Policeman*. Transl. Frank Fox. As the following essay frequently cites sentence fragments and short phrases for the sake of linguistic analysis, several quoted passages were adjusted or translated again to include relevant features of the utterance. Whenever Fox's translation is used, quotes are marked with page numbers in square brackets (AW)]

4 M. Janion. "Coraz więcej milczenia." [More and more silence] *Rzeczpospolita. Plus-Minus.* Vol. 49. Dec. 8-9, 2001. D2. "Would, then, Hanna Krall's prose represent what Adorno warned against in the context of Schönberg's *Survivor from Warsaw*: do not ask us to derive aesthetic pleasure from the so called artistic rendering of the naked physical pain of the murdered, do not endow their deaths with a possible sense? I don't want to pose the question this way." Neither do I.

5 M. Głowiński. "Zapisywanie Zagłady…" 15.

going to concentration camps[6] – is perhaps illusory but it is a final one: that of relationship and tradition.

Calel Perechodnik (1916-1944) wrote his "diary-testimony" almost at the scene: secluded in a hidaway that offered a short but ultimately insufficient asylum, almost on the anniversary of the liquidation of the Otwock Ghetto (17-19 August 1943), he wrote down the account of how as a Jewish policeman, after he had joined the infamous organization in the service of the Germans in order to save his beloved wife and daughter, he had to personally escort them to the cattle car of that took the two-year old Aluśka and his darling wife Anka on a death journey to Treblinka. A first reading of Perechodnik's text is always paralyzing: the readers sense the hypnotic, overwhelming force of "dark captivation" that forces them to consider Perechodnik's diary to be one of the most profound testimonies to Annihilation.[7]

A second reading, however, and this should not cause indignation, reveals ethical ambiguity of both the author and the work. Perechodnik remains silent about his membership in the Ghetto Police, and the organization as a whole, about his participation in the extermination of his neighbors, he covers up the fact that "thanks to" the swindled money he managed to live "comfortably" in the ghetto for over a year and that power seemed to give him an odd kind of satisfaction. Having "recognized" the ambiguity of the author's attitude, a moralist, a reader searching for a binary, distinctive knowledge about the world, for a "truth" recognized through the "blueprint" of Good and Evil, rejects the writer and the work. And such rejection may come from both Jewish and Polish readers. But here, a different kind of "truth" is at stake. It is the "Truth" that shows how it became possible that a young, vivacious, educated person, a Polish Jew, was put in a situation devoid of good choice – and eventually, devoid of choice at all. It is a perspective encompassing his drama and his "betrayal" (of the Jewish people, of his family, and, simply, of man) but also attempting to discern Perechodnik's attempts to escape the betrayal through the labyrinth of text, via text. This is why a third reading, and more, become necessary, readings no longer revealing moralist truths but complexity of the world, language and tradition in the *Testimony*.

The following essay presents an approach to Perechodnik's witness based on assumptions that call into question the previous readings of the diary, echoing the view formulated, so far, most emphatically – although perhaps

6 J. Leociak. *Tekst wobec Zagłady. (O relacjach z getta warszawskiego.)* [Text and Shoah. On reports from the Warsaw Ghetto] Wrocław 1997. 145-149.

7 The title originally given by the editor to Perechodnik's text (*Czy jestem mordercą?* Warszawa 1993, 1995) [Am I a Murderer? – retained in the English edition (AW)] was equally intriguing and doubtful. Admittedly, it focuses on the narrator. But also on the "murder."

too hastily – by Agnieszka Holland: "[Perechodnik's] perspective is as new as Borowski's once was. Except there is no literature. There is a cruel and poignant analysis of trespasses and wrongs."[8] A similar view was expressed by another author, commenting that, in Perechodnik's diary, being and speaking are: "Not an aesthetic utterance. Not a metaphor. The despair of man who helped the oppressors is real."[9] Jacek Leociak, in his creative insight into the poetics of the text, concludes: "The author truly seeks to reveal the whole truth about himself and the world."[10]

On the one hand, there emerge classifications of the text as a "testimony," as bare "truth," and on the other, there comes into view an opposing corpus of disqualifying descriptive terms such as aesthetics, metaphor, literature, with an underlying suggestion that Perechodnik's text cannot constitute the latter, that is literature, metaphor, fantasy, and fiction in particular. Reflecting this binary, evaluative system, the distinction between text-as-chronicle and text-as-work of imagination[11] appears to be a gross simplification when applied to Perechodnik's writing. In the following essay, binary relations between the sanctity of a Holocaust text and the blasphemous interpretative gesture, between testimony to truth and creation or fictionality; finally, between the truth of confession and falseness of literature, will be crossed via references to the notion of "tradition." Analysis of Perechodnik's language and imagery, an interpretation of "topoi of erudition," both Classical and Romantic, but first and foremost, of the narrative method will be performed basing on a belief that an analysis of this kind does not undermine the "truth" of the testimony but allows to capture it on a higher, more complex level. A recognition of figures, symbols and references to Polish and other cultures, those "signs of tradition" – tradition in deepest straits and yet continuously recalled in Holocaust writing – is not meant to contrast, although this would be the easiest solution, the "inexpressible" Annihilation with outdated tropes of culture (Polish and Jewish, lay and biblical, socialist and messianist) but, on an entirely different level, to enable a look that encompasses the entire horizon and gravity of loss and destruction of culture through the Annihilation of Man.

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8 A. Holland in "Zobaczone, przeczytane." [Seen and read] *Zeszyty Literackie* 1994 Vol. 46. 130.

9 I. Sariusz-Skąpska. "Wybrani, naznaczeni, przeklęci" [Chosen, marked, cursed] *Znak* 1994 Vol. 469 (6). 79.

10 J. Leociak. *Tekst wobec...* 144.

11 K. Sokołowska. "Kronika i wyobraźnia, czyli dwa bieguny literackich narracji o dzieciach Holocaustu." [Chronicle and imagination: two poles of literary narratives on children of Holocaust] *Literatura wobec wartości.* [Literature and values] *Materiały z VI sesji z cyklu "Świat jeden, ale nie jednolity."* Ed. L. Wiśniewska. Bydgoszcz, 2003. 95-102.

Perechodnik "speaks the unspeakable" but his utterance is made complete also by the incredible, furious dance of his language around the subject the challenge of which he, surprisingly, actually did manage to meet. In the following essay, I am going to present, first and foremost, the sphere that – with the help a Greek prefix and my own, vestigial linguistic imagination – will be labeled as the domain of "*dys*-logos," meaning disintegration of the vision of the world created by Enlightenment, Romanticism and scientistic Modernism.[12] But it is not true that in the Annihilation texts one finds only *dys*-world (chaos), *dys*-logos and *dys*-truth, and – eventually – *dys*-image, anti-portrayal of the world and man. To even reach and express this register, this completeness of negativity, on needs language, one needs tradition (*pro*-logos). In Perechodnik, describing "eradication of values, entrapment and inability to defend oneself against destruction,"[13] the road to negative completeness [although even here does not become a nihilist] leads through the wholeness of tradition. Its word is summoned by the court of time, before the face of the Annihilation, this is how the *pro*-logos of tradition allows to utter the message that says: understand how much is dying with us!

Both his sentence structure and word order, as well as the passages from *Dziady* [Forfathers' Eve] quoted by Perechodnik, become a form of loss ofm perhaps, the highest order, a method of its articulation that cannot be dismissed by a gesture of respect toward "testimony" nor by rejection resulting from the ambiguous role, from unclear positioning of the author among the victims. When Perechodnik joins the ghetto police, he is accompanied, in the circumstances that we have no right to judge or forgive, at least to some extent, by that part of tradition, Polish cultural heritage which will be revealed by him on the pages of the "diary."

It is a location easy to direct accusations at but also a location where one can see much more from. One can also see, through the way the narrative is developed, through the gaps in the story and its silences, how much Perechodnik would like to get out of this situation. And with him the contents of traditions that the author carries within, eternally joined together: the Jewish and the Polish one. Traditions that are inseparable in the consciousness, although separated in their fate as Perechodnik-the-Jew is the "sentenced one," one "worse than a Pole," one subject to *final Annihilation*.

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12 I have no desire to bring new words to life. But the Greek *"dys-"* (bad, hard), or the Latiin *"dis-"* describing the disintegration into parts or elements, when placed before the certainties that encompass various dimensions of human life (history, existence, art, culture) manage to fully reflect the totality of destructive negation that the Jewish world was subject to through the barbarity of *Endlösung*.

13 J. Leociak. *Tekst wobec...* 29.

Sentence by sentence, in an intricate and not merely spontaneous manner, *Testament* reveals how Perechodnik's "old" perceptions of the world, understandably, crumble. One may not like what is to be said but the first among the spheres that were conquered, taken over and expressed by the "*dys*-logos" of Annihilation was the world of enlightened ideals and rationalism. The Enlightenment was the first to "fall."

II. Oppression – expression – organization of the text

The situation of writing. Perechodnik – and we must remember about that with every page of his text – wrote in very specific circumstances. He found a temporary shelter, but one surrounded by a pressing, hostile reality, where anyone could have brought him death: be it a German, or a *szmalcownik*. Hiding in a Polish flat, Perechednik senses the pressure of externality that will sooner or later tear through the walls of his asylum, and this shows in his writing. Sentences are sometimes long, and sometimes short, as if internally pressurized, condensed, and disciplined, and at the same time always deliberate and grammatical. The pressure of shrinking time remarkably harmonizes, coexists (…to the advantage of the text) with two other types of tension, this time of internal nature: that of memory and of mental powers. In Perechodnik, memory pressures constantly – his text becomes a revelation of its content, a justification, a confession and a testament, but never – and this needs to be emphasized – even when he describes the most horrific details of the liquidation of the Otwock Ghetto, even when he writes about the death of his family, never does he succumb to recording chaotically, to a logorrheic externalization of images and the content of memory.[14]

This is a result of two opposite factors: strong and rational organization of imagination contents on the one hand, and unstoppable element of emotion on the other. Throughout his entire work, Perechodnik's storytelling is extremely distinctive, almost "monotypic": the content of monstrous images of memory continues to be ordered by a temporal structure. With the opening moment ("May the 7th, 1943, page 8), there begins a grand retrospect of rationally ordered character. Perechodnik is aware that a narrative of Shoah would lose much without an auto-presentation, which is why he prefaces the

14 Perechodnik's text has a deliberate composition: it includes a motto, three chapters and an epilogue. One can hardly speak of an accidental arrangement of content here. Nonetheless, the first [Polish] edition of the text, entitled *Spowiedź* [Confession] introduced modernized spelling and other changes questionable to a literary scholar. See. D. Engel, footnote 241 on page 303. "Regional and dialectal expressions were *standardized*. Punctuation was *introduced* where it allowed for a better understanding of the author's utterance. Apart from those changes, presented text is a faithful transcript of Celel Perechodnik's words." [emphasis J.Ł.]

account of wartime events with a deliberate portrait of the author. Only later does he set in motion the "avalanche" or the "lava of memory." Still, writing from the perspective of a yearlong distance, Perechodnik is in a position where he can first select the content, later – portray it and eventually – which he always does – comment on it. External tension builds up, intensifies the narration without pushing it into a state of hysterical quivering.[15]

The pressure of memory sets in motion a sequence of images (ones already governed by *ratio*) but it is always accompanied, first spontaneously, later in a continuous and ordered manner, by the internal pressure of reason, imagination and emotions, that disrupt the linear, horizontal narration and later, through sentences filled with fury, resignation or sarcasm, elevate individual experience to the universal Jewish and human level. Instead of a stream of images, we are presented with a succession of seemingly allegorical image sequences, universalized by the thought encapsulated by a coda or a quasi-gnome.

Perechodnik's narrative structure, being, naturally, conducted in first-person (and, as Leociak notes, seemingly "internal"[16]) is characterized by a great repetitiveness of those sequences. Further, he is able to present newer memories while problematizing the earlier ones: each time proceeding from a question that opens the relevant "drawer of memory": "What was the attitude of Poles to the Jews around that time?" (19) "What were the opinions of individual people?" (37); oft, the opening question transforms into an ironic coda: "And what is a man to do who does not believe in God?" (219) Perechodnik's narrative reveals a significant writerly self-awareness of the storyteller. The latter, astonishingly, despite the seemingly disruptive chaotic pressures (the external one, that of memory and reason/imagination/emotion) continues to keep hold of the narrative arranging itself on a micro-scale into a reflective-visual sequence: the issue (topic) images reflection.

Naturally, this manner of storytelling does not function with mathematical precision. It does, however, have an important consequence: it allows to raise Perechodnik's perspective to the level of universal experience. [17] Or,

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15 Compare the case of Baruch Milch: From July 10, 1943 to March 24, 1944 he was hiding on a Polish farm, in a Polish-Ukrainian village near the town of Tłuste (Zaleszczyki county) near the Dnieper ... Time was the only thing he had in surplus and Baruch Milch used it to the full: in nine months he filled – in Polish – over 60 school notebooks, 1613 pages." (A. Żbikowski. *Posłowie* [Afterword] in B. Milch. *Testament* [published in English as *Can Heaven be Void*] Warszwa 2001. 281]

16 J. Leociak. *Tekst wobec...* 28.29.

17 It is one of the most interesting features of Perechodnik's story; already on the first page of his memory-tale, the author places his personal fate, his narrative, within the scope of the entire

let us perhaps phrase it differently: what the author sees and remembers is expressed in his diary as an image of the entirety of the "tragic" Jewish fate. Meanwhile, Perechodnik himself – because of his role as a policeman serving the German – "withdraws" to the position of someone "confessing sins," a repentant witness and accomplice. Paradoxically, this does not lessen the forcefulness of his text, but increases it! This is why his narrative *in toto* continues to meander between the poetics of *confessiones*¸ a confession of sins, an accusatory speech (rhetoric!), sometimes a memory or a visionary poem, even an epicedium.[18]

However, in its entirety, the narration of *Testament* is encompassed by the frame of authorial decision to write and to stop writing, the latter unexpectedly challenged: "August 18, 1943. Today I conclude my diaries! Tomorrow, I will read them to you, dearest Aneczka, and from the 19th of August my hand will touch them no more." (246) *Quasi*-rational command of the narrative matter is of limited extent in the case of Jewish accounts. Sometimes, the Jewish author who records the tragedy, weakened by hunger and exhausted by disease, cannot continue for biological reasons.[19] Sometimes, the account is broken off by emotional exhaustion of the victim: after all, to write means to add, to make permanent one monstrosity after another. To survive this state emotionally is impossible.[20] But even more frequently, the will to give heroic testimony prevails. Perechodnik's narrative, genealogically hybrid, combining several generic features, including – for instance – conversations of the dead and with the dead – remains an expression of a remarkable command over chaos of memory, over the impulse to speak and the element of emotion.

Thus, in our view, Perechodnik's story has four places of origin, referencing, renewing, recalling the most important elements of his speech act, of the "constructive word" (*pro-logos*) necessary to talk about all-comprehensive destruction (*dys-logos*). Those include: an initial auto-presentation

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Jewish history, indeed, entire civilization, but he does it as if *à rebours*, emphasizing that he is going to write only about himself and his family. "I am not writing a history of the Polish Jews, as I have not have sufficient information to do so ... It is a story of a Jew and his Jewish family." 8.

18 I am alluding here to the inspiration behind A. Lubaszewska's "Śmierć w tekście – przeciw śmierci tekstu" [Death in text: against the death of text] *Ruch Literacki* 1996 Vol. 5. 577-590.

19 Although nervous exhaustion seemed to be more common. J. Poznański *Dzienik z łódzkiego getta.* [A diary from the Łódź Ghetto] Warszawa 2002. 228. [written on October the 10th, 1944] "It is difficult to go on, even though we have enough food, enough for the next several months. But we have exhausted our minds! It is hard to describe their state. There is nothing to write down."

20 B. Milch *Testament*... 283. From the *Afterword* by A. Żbikowski: "Gradually, Milch's argument loses clarity. His notes become illegible, his thoughts confused."

containing the image of both the real recipient of the narrative (the reader) and the ideal one (Wife and Daughter)[21]; secondly, a lyrical-catastrophic poem-psalm on the death of his Wife and Daughter that reaches not as much into future as into the metaphysical sphere of "imagined narrative," the vertical sphere of apposition styled as a poem-psalm-prayer-lyrical memory-dirge.[22]

The third place of origin, which is not paradoxical at all, is the lyrical code entitled "Epilogue": "Today, August 19, is the day of my wife's Golgotha. Tomorrow is the anniversary of Her death" (191). Here, the text transforms into an intimate conversation with the Deceased whom Perechodnik tells, having lost his child, about the "other" child, one also non-living. About the diary. The process of writing transforms his words into a horrific figure of begetting, of immortalizing death, a terrible act of substitution taken up in a moment when it is no longer possible to really beget life.

> Once I wanted to have a child so that I would be remembered after death. Now, when I am completely alone, I cannot leave a creation that lives on after me; I had to beget a dead fetus into which I would breathe life. Those diaries are that fetus and I believe they will be printed one day so that the whole world will know of Your suffering. I wrote them for Your glory in order to make you immortal, so they will be Your eternal monument. Now, when our daughter no longer lives, this second baby must be nursed and protected until such time when no power can destroy it. (191-192)

A diary-fetus that will come to life when printed? But Perechodnik says that he had already breathed life into it… – as God or as a man? – Because his diary is a strange construct: one both living and dead, one commemorating death to give the memory of the deceased a life not immortal but earthly, as little and as much as that. Its author is "desperate for life," which in itself is ambiguous. He wants to live even when he takes his beloved to the cattle cars; he wants to live after Anna and Alusia have already died in Treblinka. He prolongs and justifies this life by writing, and thus – as he himself suggests – "begets," expels from himself that constructive word which reaches into the

21 C. Perechodnik *Spowiedź*… 8. In the initial part of the text, prevails the collective, future recipient although it is clear from the onset (stressed by the author himself) that he writes because of the "internal" addressee of his account – the murdered wife and daughter.

22 The entire passage can be described as an incredible vision-apposition, monstrous but full of pathos, culminating almost as a prayer, although "Amen" concludes here a promise of "bloody revenge."

horizontal distance of earthly future, human culture, although it is fully laden and overloaded with the tale of Great Annihilation.[23]

There is also the fourth place of origin: the cruel or, perhaps, wise fate caused Perechodnik to interrupt his silence and tell the story of the murder of his father, and to direct also at the father, as he did at his Wife and Daughter, words of reconcilement and justification. Perechodnik's parents are of crucial importance in the author's drama. The writer accuses them of emotional emptiness emanating from his family house: "I emphasize: 'material' [sacrifices of my parents], because there were no spiritual bonds that tied me or my siblings to our parents" (xxii). It is Anna Nusfeld, importantly – an orphan ("She was an orphan. Her parents died when she was still a child" (12).) – and, later, his daughter, Alusia, that become his emotional and spiritual "absolute."

Writing a diary in such circumstances, at least according to the author, is not an act of taking advantage of the situation but an act of therapy; the horrifying experience of the Otwock Ghetto liquidation is described as giving birth to a new man, liberated from emotional coldness and attachment to money ("I liked money" 109). Perechodnik claims to have inherited those flaws from the affluent but emotionally hollowed world of his parents. Sensing a certain "impassiveness" of the author when he describes the metamorphosis after the culmination of the tragic events, let us point to its signals: a) "After the *Aktion*, suffering shaped me and created a new man" (109) 2) "All in all, I assumed it to be God's rightful punishment for my greed and from that day a complete change of character has taken place in me." (110) The heritage of the cold house is ambiguous: it gave birth to a young man who craves for feeling and at the same time cannot stand his father, but who in the situation of Annihilation wants to "live" at all costs, who wants to exist even for the price of service in the *Ghetto-Polizei*[24] This Perechodnik is viewed with terror by the morality of the time of peace. But what is a sin (or, perhaps: a weakness, drive to self-preservation) and what cannot be overlooked in an interpretation of the text, becomes also one of its sources: it is the "flaw of the desire to live," even if only through the "second child, the diary," that triggers and orders the

23 The erotic metaphor of writing / begetting has one more surprising and rather ambiguous consequence in Perechodnik: at the end he reveals that he was physically "unfaithful" to the deceased Anka with another woman, confessing to his wife: "And you see, Anka, I was unfaithful to you. After nine months my organism gave up and It committed betrayal." (263)

24 C. Perechodnik *Czy ja jestem mordercą"* Ed. P. Szapiro. Warszawa 1995 [the latest edition does not include a photocopy of the "Instruction"] 100-101. A passage from the instructions for the Ghetto Police Otwock from November the 1st, 1940: "Service in the Ghetto Police is an *honorable* one. Those who enter it must *sacrifice* themselves and everything necessary to fulfill the tasks of the service." [emphasis J. Ł.] Naturally, this was far from reality, ghetto police was incredibly corrupt and this must have applied also to Perechodnik.

narrative. This is why the posthumous reconciliation with his father in the work's finale[25] is also a reconciliation with oneself and the true, most profound coda of the "work." A despotic father who, too, wanted to live at all costs is also an image of his son for whom writing becomes the clearest manifestation of the will to persist.

The narrative of the entire text focuses and erupts in four areas of origin, ironic-lyrical effusions of Perechodnik's mind or spirit. On the level of story about the past, the narrative is also stimulated by threefold pressure and, as a result, the text becomes – by God, this will sound so ironic – incredibly "alive." Was a text like this self-generated? Is this manner of storytelling, this way of building sentences in Perechodnik a miracle of Holocaust-born talent, and nothing more? No. It is a heritage of an extraordinary culture, literary culture, to be precise, of this Polish Jew, educated in France (who wrote his thesis on hemp farming)[26] but with a deeply internalized (deeper than by most Poles) literary culture. It was not France as a phantasm of ideals of Enlightenment, but Poland and its Romantic heritage, alongside the Jewish, Old-Testament tradition and the 20th century cultural and scientific achievement that constituted the background, a point of reference – accusation – justification. One is amazed by the strength of influence of the pre-war education that allowed for a memory-based, technical mastery of a larger part of literary tradition; similarly, although the author declares himself to be a lay Jew, from the Judaistic tradition Perechodnik retained the art (sic!) of prayer, knowledge of holy texts. Even stronger in that education than its focus on general humanities (Holocaust works teem with allusions to Polish but also German culture[27]) must have been the encouragement for individual participation in culture and reading, first and foremost, but also (as the diary proves) film watching. There are parts of the text that seem to have been written by an author possessing specialist knowledge of storytelling techniques. But as he writes – and Perechodnik makes no secret of it – he only relies on a well expressed "memory of narrative patterns," school erudition and his own talent. How does he tell stories? What – on the lower level of text organization – is the source of its incredible persuasive strength? A strength so great that we forget about the author's

25 C. Perechodnik *Spowiedź*... 271.

26 Perechodnik was a Zionist, which influenced the choice of profession that could be practiced in Palestine in the future. (See: *Spowiedź*... footnotes 4 and 5, page 288)

27 This concerns texts written by the Jewish inteligentsia who (a fact unknown to many) did not stop to listen to the German music in the ghetto and, in their writing, to make references to universal cultural code while remaining aware that it may be referring for instance to the text of *Faustus*.

role in the story he tells? Why does he describe that which is Unimaginable and Indescribable?

III. To speak – but how?

1. Why he writes

Assertion of inexpressibility of what he witnesses, of the event of Shoah, is the basic figure of thought for a Holocaust witness. The is followed by other claims, for instance, that in such circumstances also the language grows mute, helpless and, thus, the most appropriate form to label experiences or mark events is a thought untransformed into sign, withdrawing into a pre-cognitive state of numbness, paralysis, where the very act of looking/seeing the Shoah is a fullness of anti-knowledge that can only be expressed through a kind of "semantics of silence,"[28] if there is one. But even though Holocaust, by its very nature, appears to be an apophatic experience, accessible only to "negative poetics," it is the deepest and fullest assertions of inexpressibility that become a starting point, as they were for Perechodnik, for the creation of a testimony or a diary.[29]

Perechodnik sarcastically repeats the gesture of rejecting art and literature in the face of tragedy. A Pole expropriating a Jewish book collection whose "owner died in Treblinka" (119) becomes the object of bitter reflection: "And what does it matter that shots are fired outside? It's just Jews being killed, it is of no importance. What is of importance in the life of a cultured man, is literature and poetry" (120). The irony, however, cannot overshadow another fact, namely, the fact that the writer devotes to those books an entire page. Perechodnik himself, and let it be emphasized, had certain aspirations, unexpressed, perhaps, before the war, if not literary then "at least" humanist. It would be highly naïve to assume that he simply sat down and wrote, without having considered his method; that he is motivated by fury or guilt, regret or unbound despair. A text is a form of life and writing a form of its intensification, a summary, the last chance, perhaps, to "truly live" for a Jew in the time of war. Perechodnik never loses control over the arrangement of his story,

28 I am referencing *Semantyka milczenia II. Zbiór studiów.* [Semantics of silence part II. A collection of essays] Ed. K. Handke. Warszawa 2002.

29 For more on "apophatism and "apharaesis" go to: M. P. Markowski "Wobec niewyrażalnego: teologia negatywna, dialektyka, dekonstrukcja." [Regarding inexpressible: negative theology, dialectics, deconstruction]. On "negative poetics": T. Kunz. "Tadeusza Różewicza poetyka negatywna."[Negative poetics of Tadeusz Różewicz] Both in *Literaturea wobec niewyrażalnego.* [Literature and the inexpressible] ed. W. Bolecki and E. Kuźma. Warszawa 1998. 31-42 and 293-300.

sometimes ostentatiously ordering it too much, but this is also done with an ironic purpose, for instance when he writes down the 13 points of his own, very sarcastic, plan for a German Annihilation (31-32).

Already the third sentence of the text provides us with information maybe not as much about the literary ambitions of the author but about the role of literature in his tale. It has to be negated so that it does not invalidate the truth of the Inexpressible but, at the same time, it must be used to the utmost possible degree as a literally understood *arsenal* of language; it must be used, used against ... (the oppressor), used to... (give testimony to the fate of the beloved), used instead... (of weapons): "This is not a literary work; I have neither the ability, nor the ambition" (xxi). He has both, in fact. But he is also aware that "simply writing literature" would be a kind of vaguely understood iniquity. Hence a form that is semi-literary, a quasi-chronicle: Perechodnik only wants to "describe." Themes or – as we would call them discussing a writer – topoi of modesty manifest excessively already in the initial moment of the text: "I am Calel Perechodnik, an engineer of agronomy, a Jew of average intelligence, shall try to describe my family's history during the German occupation" (xxi). Everything about this passage is ambiguous. "I" is a pronoun that opens testaments, documents written by an often weakened hand.[30] Meanwhile, the "I" in Perechodnik's text will prove extremely strong and vital, shouting in fury, conversing with the dead, mourning and promising revenge.

The expression: "to describe my family's history" moves in the text from the sphere of the private to the sphere of moral duty, performed in the name of all Jews. In Perechodnik – and it is quite surprising that all his self-assertions are frequently accepted without question – there are very few statements that would not be negated somewhere else in same text. And this is not only due to the irrationality, monstrosity of the described events but also due to Perechodnik's personality. One thing remains constant: the desire to write his own fate into the fate of the Jewish nation but also to describe the fate of all Polish Jews by writing his own, if not fate then text. Perechodnik is an unusual "chronicler" whose perspective would be rejected by many Jews, and non-Jews as well. His desire to speak with the voice of "them all" (an almost Romantic gesture bringing to mind Mickiewicz's: "My name is Million, because for millions do I love and suffer agonies") seems abusive, especially when he begins to accuse: "We, Jewish men, are not worthy of being avenged! We were killed through our fault and not on a field of glory" (xxi). Already in the first

30 In its earlier edition, *Czy ja jestem mordercą?* (Warszawa 1995) the diary included *Testament Calela Perechodnika* [Last Will and Testament of Calel Perechodnik] the opening of which is almost identical to the diary's introduction-autopresentation: "I, Calel Perechodnik, son of Usher and née Sara Góralska..." (*Czy ja...* 265 [209]).

two sentences of the textPerechodnik poignantly defines, perhaps only half-consciously, the goal of his writing: it is "It is May 7th, 1943," in other words, the time of war, the time of Shoah. Followed by: "I … engineer…" – that is "me," Perechodnik, and not anyone else, the witness, and not only witness but an accomplice, too; not only "chronicler" but also "creator." Annihilation and "truth" – the latter is achieved in Perechodnik via personal writing, one that relies on his talent but, nonetheless, also on the means of language.

2. What he writes

The issue above encompasses two questions (1) does he write about/describe everything? (2) or does he write a text whose form, "genre" he defines? Let us begin with the latter, from the "genealogical" perspective, one closely tied to the question of faithfulness in its most fundamental sense, to the question of truthfulness. Perechodnik sits down to fill the paper with, as he puts it: 1) a description of "family's history"; 2) "a memoir of a Jew and his Jewish family"; 3) "To be exact this is a confession about my life a sincere and true confession"; 4) "a diary" to be treated as a "deathbed confession" (xxi). Commenting on the "difficult" issue of "the feelings of Jews at the time that the Bolsheviks entered the eastern territories," Perechodnik stresses again that he will "try to be completely honest and objective, writing the truth and only the truth" (2).

Let us highlight the number of theological appositions of the act of writing already on the first page of the text. They are a testimony to the striking self-awareness of the writer, to a formal reflection preceding the act of writing, revealing also – let it be noted – the possibility of narrative creation, of omitting entire "regions of memory" uncomfortable to the writer." Honesty as a category of reading and motivation for confession has not enjoyed the best reputation at least since Rousseau's *Confessions*. As a chronicle-report of a Jewish policeman, witness and an accomplice to the extermination of his neighbors, Perechodnik's text would not be defendable in front of any auditorium. The author remains silent (until page 41) about his police service, probably omitting the killings in the ghetto that he had witnessed before its complete liquidation (having lead a "comfortable" life at that time); he admits to lies, cowardice and "expropriation" several times and this does not add but subtracts from his credibility.[31] But he also gives his stories such a vivid, clear

31 Everyone, both Jewish and Polish witnesses confirm the generally bad reputation of the German police: respectively, E. Ringelblum *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w czasie II wojny światowej* [Polish-Jewish relations during WWII] Warszawa 1988. 68-68. ;T. Pankiewicz *Apteka w getcie krakowskim* [Pharmacy in the Cracow Ghetto], Kraków 1982. See p. 25: "With time, Ordnungsdienst ["Jewish police"] has made itself felt to the Ghetto inhabitants."

visual and linguistic shape that his own trespasses are of secondary importance to the reader separated from the events themselves.

The value of *Testament* reveals itself through the complicated (and, to some, outrageous) relation of "I," Perechodnik other Jews, most profoundly in its layer utilizing the poetics of *confessiones*, confession, sometimes of soliloquy, when the author talks to himself. Here, the first sphere of imagery is governed by the ironic, rhetorical style of Perechodnik's report-accusation (directed at everyone, Germans, Poles, Jews); the second sphere is marked by lyrical, mournful, quasi-dialogical elements that are a confession of sins committed against Anna and the Daughter, a conversation with them, a plea for support and forgiveness (which undermines the claim of Perechodnik's absolute nihilism[32]) and also a promise of revenge, since lyricism can easily transform here into sarcasm. What determines the shape of text as a whole, is the subjectivity of Perechodnik's position, his first-person perspective (usurping the right to transform into "we, Jews") as well as the matter of described events that have already become (which is typical of this act of writing) memoir material, since they happened a year ago, but also continue to happen, so that they can beget a journal, too. Both perspectives meet – unexpectedly for the author as he has already stopped writing – in the *Epilogue* – which is when they are elevated to the dimension of "other" reality in a testament of a man who is still alive but who is under no illusions regarding his fate.[33] When Perechodnik includes in his work the description of his father's fate (*Epilogue*), the memoir indeed transforms for a moment into a journal, and later shifts the perspective of the gaze into the eternal, supra-historical dimension of the testimony, testamentary disposition.

But classifying the text as a hybrid form, a "memoir-journal-testament" does not describe it fully, as Perechodnik – let me emphasize again – develops his narrative very deliberately: by including in his work an introduction, transforming it into a lyrical and tragic vision, that is, a counterfactual complement, into an imagined description of the death of his Wife and Daughter; he has the ability to transform a dry report into an intimate dialogue with the beloved ones, moreover – which is crucial and unacceptable to some – as a result of his

32 In his visionary poem-mourning, the supposed nihilist repeatedly cries out: "Let me accompany you, Anka, at least in my thoughts" (64), "Anka, Anka, do it..." (64), "Anka, Anka, why don't you do what they do?" (92), "Aluska, are you still alive or are you suffocated? Do you still have some water left, Anka? Or mayve Aluśka drinks your tears now?" (66)

33 A. Lubaszewska "Śmierć..." 589: "On the other hand, spiritual work takes place in the space of texts of mourning, expressed, perhaps, most aptly by Elias Canetti, who talked about the souls of the dead living within those who remained alive, where they die, slowly and ultimately. Keeping people alive through words – is it any different from creating them with words? Creating texts to keep someone alive?"

storytelling method constantly transforming sequences of memory images into rational, furious reflections – his diary-journalist "I" inevitably transforms into "us," that is: us – Jews, us – Jewish men, us – the nation, and this "us" is constantly confronted with "them": them – Germans, them – Poles. Surprisingly, Perechodnik's ambition is of generalizing nature: both reflection and imagination-wise.

This is also why Perechodnik's text gathers within itself and skillfully combines elements of a memoir, journal, testament, confession, accusatory speech, lamentation, supplication, conversation of the dead and with the dead,[34] sometimes, elements of ironic pamphlet, sometimes of a prayer, psalm; it contains structural elements of a tragic and "grotesque" situation as a metaphor or irrational reality but it can also be, in some of its passages, a death convict's speech, sometimes a Kaddish, the author includes in his description of the Indescribable even certain elements of the Christian mystery (his wife's "golgotha" 250). But, and I have to say this, Perechodnik's storytelling aptness also enables his auto-creation, a camouflage for deeds less honorable (toward his nation and his wife), and probably also a certain degree of manipulative shifts of emphasis, from own actions to the collective Jewish passiveness. This too, however, must be viewed as a consequence of the inhuman circumstances of the Great Annihilation, consequence of a survival strategy chosen by the victim – one we may not accept fully but one we also have no right to forgive.

3. How he writes

Precisely! There is not a single indifferent sentence in Perechodnik, not one of the kind that one so frequently encounters in Jakub Poznański: "Nothing new here, in the ghetto."[35] Perechodnik says nothing about the year of stabilization in the ghetto, placing his readers *in medias res*. Let us go back to the postulate of the pressing hell of externality surrounding the asylum of *Testament's* author. The time of hiding is a time when the hunted victim (although Perechodnik would probably have said that every Jew is a game for History) can catch a breath. And, having paused for a moment, the victim has to talk, unveil the collected "monstruary" of memory. This has an impact on sentence structure: Perechodnik's sentences are dynamic, usually short rather than long

34 In the circumstance of Holocaust, even a "conversation" of the quick with the "dead" transforms into a ghastly metamorphosis of the 17th and 18th century "dialogues of the dead." I am referencing here the classical work by Z. Sinko *Oświeceni wśród Pól Elizejskich. Rozmowy zmarłych. Recepcja. Twórczość oryginalna.* [The Enlightened among the Elysian Fields. Conversations of the dead. Reception. Original work] Wrocław 1976.

35 J. Poznański *Dziennik z łódzkiego*... 35.

but never devoid of internal tension (although often compound and complex). They are also characterized by "immediate" concreteness. The author never opens the subject / problem with figures of reflection of any kind: "perhaps it is now time to write about" "actually, I believe that… I think that perhaps…" As state before, Perechodnik had problematized the tale before writing it down; this allows him to capture in the sentences the very gist, the essence of events (usually depicting nothingness and absurd rather than "essence"). Let us juxtapose descriptions of people, by Perechodnik and Poznański, respectively:

I. [Perechodnik] Just the same, for the sake of justice, I *must* exclude from the ranks of the police the commandant of the Otwock Komisariat, Marchlewicz. I *cannot accuse* him of living off the ghetto during the war. He probably never crossed the boundary, not before the Aktion and not afterward. I *am absolutely certain* that in his home you will not find any Jewish possessions. (31)

II. [Poznański] *When one thinks about* the activities of Mr B. [Biebow] from the Gettovervaltung, *one sometimes gets the impression* that his attitude toward the Jews is not hostile, but *quite on the contrary*, rather friendly. *For instance*, his sending in once such a great amount of potatoes, his giving out coupons in some of the departments, *etc*.[36]

One immediately recognizes Perechodnik's style: the tone of categorical judgment in the quoted passage, used as an introduction to later accuse the Polish policeman of indifference. Meanwhile, Poznański is filled with doubt, incertitude. Importantly, in Perechodnik, the language – consciously or not – becomes an extension of power: it retains, as power does, its decisive force and absolute strictness. Consequently, it is characterized by a kind of "descriptive non-inquisitiveness": Perechodnik does not devote attention the marginal matters, describing individual objects and people from a distance, not aspiring to eternize photographically looks, faces, details. Those could be important outside the context of Shoah, Perechodnik seems to silently imply, but not at the time when the human being is brought to the level of an object, thing. His sentences do not circle around the subject, his phrases are not overgrown with adjectives, he also avoids the convention of the heroic-lofty prose and linguistic franticness typical of Romanticism. Such lack of overt stylization may be perceived, by a naïve reader, as a "lack of literariness" of the testimony-text. Meanwhile, his language is Perechodnik's strongest asset. His language

36 Ibid. 61. This is how Poznański concludes his analysis of the described character: "It is a hard nut to crack."

and will to survive at all costs seem to become one. This is why his Polish yields to the expression of madness, motion, change, convulsion, quivering but it never yields to chaos. They – Perechodnik and his language – are the only image of order in the world dominated by disintegration and bestiality, an image both terrifying and extraordinary, or "beautiful."

It is a language characterized by fluidity of styles: descriptive passages or reports freely transform into irony, grandiloquence, sometimes colloquialness. There are many conversational expressions in Perechodnik's style but this never makes the text as a whole seem colloquial, written in a local dialect. On the contrary: markers of order typical of written, even literary Polish, reappear throughout the entire work. Hence the presence of words and expressions such as: "meanwhile," "nonetheless," "so as to," "in the meantime," "in that," "as a matter of fact," "sadly," "and so," or "therefore." Importantly, this harnessing of madness through language does not wane in the description of the most tragic "action." The dynamism of the text comes from the type of demonstrative narrative where fluctuation of tenses plays the key role. Perechodnik narrates the events as if they have already happened but also were still happening in front of our very eyes:

1. All this we only *learned* sometime later.
2. For now, night came, a sleepless night for all the inhabitants, without exception, in the ghetto
3. Rumors *fly* from mouth to mouth, *acquiring* more and more fantastic character, people turn like ghosts in the warm, bright August night
4. Wednesday, August 19th 1942, the day of annihilation has come
5. Meanwhile, Satan *looks* on all this, surveys the living marionettes, and laughs as he has never laughed before
6. The first shots are fired; the entire ghetto *is already surrounded*…
7. The first victim is Dr Glikmanova, who *lives* near the Warsaw crossing point
8. Oh lucky woman! You *died* at the moment when you least expected it, unaware that together with you were sentenced to death your beautiful small children! (32)

Sentences above, selected from a longer report, have the incredible force of a demonstrative narration. The past becomes a living presence, as if if projected onto the screen of memory but in a way that allows the narrator to retain a highly emotional relationship to it, expressed also through the constant shifts of the perspective of his gaze. He is here, among the loved ones, but also there, among the dead – those that will be dying tomorrow. He speaks to the reader but quickly turns to address the described crowds, the single victim

and the anti-addressee who plays a special role in this narrative: "the German Satan" revealing himself to be the devil of German culture, and a metaphysical spirit of evil that – if it does not exist – should be appointed to explain the metaphysical immensity of Annihilation.

It is hard to say that Perechodnik "uses" *praesens historicum* here. No, owing to perfect memory and his great, vivid imagination, he is able to encapsulate a sequence of images in verbal figures interchangeably producing "image-report" and "reflection-fury." Being a sober engineer of agronomy, he avoids the temptation of any sort of metaphysical or symbolic multiplication of meanings, senses. No thing or fact can become a symbol of anything, because "nothing," "Nothingness" is, turns out to be, the foundation of everything. Only he, Perechodnik – the one watching and registering all of it – can become the carrier of the sole, essentially desymbolized sense of those events: things are what they are and nothing worse than that can ever exist.

Reality is heading toward monstrous visions of art, grotesque and the living dead become real. Grotesque and reality function here in a reversed order of unity, realness and not a fictional meta-world, created in the literature made of words. Perechodnik places himself in the horrifying role of the one who whispers the meaning of death to those who, like doctor Glikmanov's wife, died at the very beginning, unaware how "lucky" they are. And when "it" is already happening, also the inner strength, emotional "rebellion" (?) has to find its release, suddenly interrupted by a report, description of the "living death" and then erupts not as much with irony, as with sarcasm (the origin of the word is strange: *sarkasmos*, from *sarkadzein*, to tear the flesh (like dogs); to bite one's lips in anger; to mock – and *sarkos* – flesh; body).[37] It is a sarcasm of the strongest, worse type, sometimes changing into something irrational, when the helpless mind of the witness, his battered soul and wrecked nerves can no longer hold off bitterness and anger. But even when Perechodnik's text balances on the verge, it does not become a negative linguistic image of the word-ruin, wild howl.

This is why the sentences are infused to such a degree with ironic interjections: "truly," "really," "by no means," or the already archaic *whether.*[38] [PL *azali*] Moments of particular tension in the narrative are frequently interrupted by an ironic apostrophe to the victim: "Engineer Rotbilt! With all your connections, your wealth and your permits, you had the highest chance to save yourself, so why did you die, oh naïve man?" (50) Sarcasm erupts in the constant repetition of questions, frequently containing the question-figure itself

37 W. Kopaliński *Słownik wyrazów obcych i zwrotów obcojęzycznych.* Warszawa 1983. 377.

38 The issue of irony in Holocaust texts requires a separate analysis, so does the distinction between irony and sarcasm.

("I am asking"): "I am asking you, people, *whether* anything like that can even be believed? Women shot for no reason, innocent children, just like that, in broad daylight?" (28)

Moments where irony accumulates in a cascade of questions, introducing a kind of anti-sapiential, perhaps even a mockingly-frenzied tone, are frequent in the first part of Perechodnik's text. He constructs several parodies of enumerative order (decalogue?), listing and describing, for instance, the conditions for "murdering without exception all Jews in the General Government" (31) and the passage included in *The Warsaw Ghetto Diaries,*[39] entitled "O co Żydzi mieli prosić Boga" [And what were the Jews to ask God for], both deserving a separate commentary. What is horrifying, is the fact that the questions or enumerations are not meant to establish contact with the victims, or with the God that Calel does not believe in, which he repeats obsessively every couple of pages. They are directed at the reader and, in a way, at Perechodnik himself, at his Jewish consciousness that became a brand-sentence of death. In Perechodnik's text, the word "Jew," repeated ironically– or so it sometimes appears, begins to sound sinister rather than tender (31-35).

He conducts his narrative both on the level of microstructures, describing the most horrific events, and in its horizontal fullness, containing and expressing his life. Perechodnik's "I," revealed in the second sentence of the text against the curtain of Annihilation days, shows itself to us wearing a penitential robe of a simpleton of no literary talents or aspirations (which also means that Perechodnik does not reject "literature" as a way to express Holocaust), skillfully conducts also the macro-narrative. And it does not rely on a simple reconstruction of events that lead Perechodnik to the shelter where he writes his story. No. He enters several different roles: that of a person temporally ordering the events, collecting and encompassing the occurrences he has not witnessed himself, a visionary of his beloveds' death. Even more frequently, he becomes the person who anticipates the events of the narrative, an all-powerful narrator – alas! not an all-knowing narrator. Perechodnik continuously confronts in his imagination what he thought, and what others did, with the terrifying truth; sometimes he lets his thoughts run into the future: "Naturally, [Kestenberg] did not leave me any orders, he was, after all, a God-fearing, red-bearded Jew not without reason and as such he deeply believed he would yet return to his homestead…" (116) So speaks the steward of this testimony, its ruler – at least within the realm of his memory and wounded consciousness.

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39 *Pamiętniki z getta warszawskiego. Fragmenty i regestry.* Ed. M. Grynberg. Warszawa 1988. 258-259. See Perechodnik's biographical note included in the volume that sums up his service in the *Ghetto-Polizei* in one sentence: For some time, Perechodnik served as a member of GP in Otwock.

All that lies beyond the walls of his asylum is something that one might call a narrative of Satan-accident, or games of human wickedness. But the pages of the story lie within Perechodnik's domain and he can operate the initial signals of temporality so that they not only order his storytelling but endow it with an epic dimension:

1) "It is May 7th, 1943. I am Calel Perechodnik" (8);
2) "I was born in Warsaw on the 8th of September, 1916" (9);
3) "Suffice it to say that the cursed year of 1939, the year of tempest, the year of trials, found us in Poland, in our home town, Otwock" (13);
4) "Summer went by, then came November and with it announcements that starting with December 1st, 1940, Jewish ghettos will be founded" (23);
5) "August 19th, 1940. My wife gave birth to a beautiful baby girl" (22);
6) "In July and August 1940 they start sending Jews to labor camps";
7) "Knowing that the war wasn't going to end soon, and to be safe from the round-ups, I joined the Ghetto-Polizei in February 1941" (23);
8) "April 1942 – a miserable Easter" (29);
9) "May passes quietly, June passes quietly" (30);
10) "July 1942. What are the Germans doing?" (31);
11) "July 22th 1942. Himmler himself makes an appearance in the Warsaw Ghetto" (32);
12) "August 15th was a Saturday" (41) – the beginning of the Aktion; "August 16th, Sunday. Laundry day at my house." (42); "Monday, 17th of August. The general mood in Otwock worsens." (42); "18th of August – Tuesday. A beautiful, sunny day. The town is quiet and then, suddenly, commotion: some women run to us, shouting 'hide the children!' (43); "Wednesday – 19th of August 1942, doomsday has come" (49) "And they walk away into the dark night without a goodbye." "A long train whistle, you have departed, Anka, on your last journey. God have mercy on me!" (63) followed by a vision of Anka and Alusia's death;
13) "August 20th in the Otwock Ghetto. We are leaving the square, going home. But are we really? Does a Jew need a home?" (70)

Let us read no more – in Perechodnik, time is both a liquid mass and a fatal, monstrous structure that needs to fulfill itself. That which was has already happened; how he narratively shapes the tale, is his choice. And so he allows time to thicken dramatically until the "action," to accumulate before reaching

the inexpressible "conclusion": liquidation of the ghetto and his family; later, for a moment, he lets the "real" time of memory (but what he describes seems ir-real) transform into the supra-real time of "accompanying" the beloved ones to the place of torment. And seconds after this imaginary culmination, time opens up yet another chapter in life and in the tale – here Perechodnik again becomes truly horrifying. One has to live, one has to save oneself…

4. How he calls it

What is, then, that which lasts before the eye of memory and imagination, as only the latter can move those stony images and imbue them with force? Does the language, having unveiled Inexpressible Negativity, give up on naming it in the ghetto testimonies using terms from the realm of art, aesthetic categories, even those that have already been devalued through everyday use, such as "tragedy"? It does not. While a scholar of Annihilation, from the distance of decades, may be willing to move those events from the category of "tragedy" to the category of "absurd,"[40] but the knowledge and culture of the victims and the witnesses cause them to write down the reality the way they can. First of all, as an unprecedented "tragedy": "What will be the name given by history to this war and our, Jewish, martyrology?"[41] Poznański asks, introducting to his journal expressions such as "big tragedy,"[42] although, aware that the tragic metaphor does not sufficiently reflect reality, he also adds "comedy" as a metaphor of events. But also the minor, everyday occurrences are described in Poznański via erudite and aesthetic references: Rumakowski's visit is a "tragic farce, worthy of Gogol's penmanship"[43] and the "revue" staging (!) in the ghetto accompanied by the following commentary: "During the ticket distribution, the office witnessed grotesque scenes."[44] Tragedy – comedy – grotesque are merely a part of reality that begins to resemble aesthetic categories proper to literature only, having no designates outside the world of literature. The less an aesthetic element has in common with *mimesis*, the closer it is to the reality of the ghetto. When people and the world begin to resemble a horror film or a mask or puppet theater, hiding in a place masked with theatre masks becomes the height of cruelty of the imagination:

40 S. Buryla. "Holocaust a nowa sytuacja tragiczna." [Holocaust and the New Tragic Situation] *Ruch Literacki* 1999 Vol. 6. 633-647.

41 J. Poznański *Dziennik z łódzkiego*... 101-102.

42 Ibid. 179.

43 Ibid. 68.

44 Ibid. 72.

> Our first hiding place was an attic. Windows overlooking Żydowska St. were covered with masks and dolls from the revues staged once in our resort. It all looked rather ghastly. Weird, painted faces looked at us from dusk till dawn. Of course, we couldn't come near, not to mention open, the windows.[45]

Meanwhile, in Perechodnik's account, those meta-aesthetic categories of ghetto reality are shifted in another direction. Here, the imagination of the writer is "at work" – due to his position as "policeman," in other words, someone who will live longer than his neighbors taken to slaughter, he sees more and from a different perspective: as if from above and at the same time from within the crowd of victims. The most distinctive feature of the meta-aesthetic Holocaust descriptions in Perechodnik is his noticing not the unrealistic, but rather supra-realist dimension of the horrors for the description of which he uses the category of "puppetry" (let us bear in mind that the French *marionette* comes from *Marion*, *Marie* – Mary). Here are some of Perechodnik's observations on the "action": "It was a true marionette theatre, and what a tragic one, too!" (71) "People turn into automatons, silly dolls, not even living ones, as each and every one of them is killed." (52) "Oh, you cursed Germans! How clever you are, how quickly have we become obedient puppets in your hands!" (62)

On the opposite pole, in the world of the executioners, Germans – there is only the phantasmatic, ironic category of "divinity" that they (but not the Poles) are attributed with. Those Hunes or Vandals (terms used frequently in Holocaust testimonies) in the imagination become a nation of gods ("Nietzsche's nation," 31), with ultimate power and cruelty ruling over the Jewish "marionettes." It is a mutation of the soldier image typical of children (also, possibly, subversion of the father archetype), adorned with symbols of power, force, both terrifying and fascinating for the infantile imagination. This soldier, even when he is mortal enemy, rouses, and paralyzes imagination. A similar image of Russians can be found in Mickiewicz[46] but also in Michał Głowiński's "Burza" [Tempest], a semantically pregnant war story.[47]

In Perechodnik we have a sequence of obsessively returning phantasmatic images. Describing the very pit of hell, ghetto liquidation, he notes: "No one

45 Ibid. 225.

46 A. Mickiewicz *Pan Tadeusz czyli ostatni zajazd na Litwie.* In the "Epilogue": "And if at times a Muscovite made his appearance / he left behind him only the memory / of a fair and glittering uniform / for we knew the serpent only by his skin." (based on the translation by George Rapall Noyes – AW)

47 M. Głowiński "Burza" *Dekada Literacka* 2003 Vol. 4.

can think. The whistles of the Jewish policemen, the shots of the Ukrainians, the corpses of familiar people underfoot. Helmeted German officers, with silvery shields on their chests, resemble some demigods, in contrast with the destitute, humble crowd of Jews, with baggage on their shoulders, small children, and a terrible fear in their hearts" (35). Later: "Lipszer addresses us. His voice falls on us slowly, harshly. The German pronounces each word with care. Is he a man or God?" (38) Puppets and gods – this is how Perechodnik horrifyingly describes it – automatically and harmoniously perform the same work: elimination of the puppets the description of which reaches in Perechodnik the highest level of – what word should one use – tragic grotesque, fury, irony of monstrousness:

> The Germans stand calmly, fan themselves with helmets; they are sweating – the days are so warm and humid. They do their own "work" automatically. Aim! Fire! Aim! Fire! What's the difference whether it's at a head of an old man, a younger one, or a small child? Aim! Fire! Aim! Fire! Each bullet brings deliverance and freedom. For Greater Germany, for *Vaterland*! Ach, are there many more of these cursed Jews? They multiply like vermin that have to be utterly exterminated to save the very ancient European culture. Every bullet allows one to bravely come into possession of Jewish gold, which will enable children to life a life of luxury. Aim! Fire! Aim! Fire! (77-78)

This is not a report anymore. It is a vision the creation of which was enabled by the alliance of memory and imagination, of language and image focused on the shared hatred and revulsion toward the tormentors. The Indescribable gets described here. For this to be possible, for the vision to capture us by the throat, the puppetry was necessary, puppetry imitated even by the language: "Aim! Fire!" Fury-word mixes with the word of automatic repetition, orders images that Perechodnik nonetheless does not want to (and has no right to) attribute with the rank of explicitation, explanation, or symbol. It is not the case of "provoked thinking that makes – despite its own 'helplessness' – the effort of piercing the 'mystery'"[48]. The word takes a different goal: to write down the "absurd" that will turn into accusation and premise of revenge or vengeance. "Absurd" is a frequent word in Perechodnik's dictionary (i.e. – 45, 55).

And the last figure of the Indescribable. This time, it was a 20th century invention, the cinema, which lent the metaphor its subject. In the reports

48 C. Wodziński "W stylu prowokacji, czyli pytania Holocaustu" [In the Manner of Provocation: Questions of Holocaust] *Światłocienie zła*. Wrocław 1998. 289.

from the Warsaw Ghetto, the monstrous character of "Frankenstein" is not a doctor of Mary Shelley's novel (*Frankenstein: or the New Prometheus*) but a gruesome, cruel, human monster, a German police officer nicknamed so due to his resemblance to the famous movie character, Ringelblum believes.[49] Perechodnik's wife, Anna (Chana) co-owned "Oaza," [Oasis] a cinema in Otwock. While he guards those sentenced to death on the night preceding execution, he "joined in the familiar Psalms" (74) or challenges God with words resembling those from Konrad's monologue by Mickiewicz ("If there is a God, who is silent, let their curses reach him at last" (78)), in the moment of tension and hopelessness, Perechodnik's imagination suggests him a cinematic metaphor. He believes he is part of an ontological illusion, pseudo-reality of a movie. It is as if grotesque, irony and masquerade of puppetry stepped down from the screen, from pages in books, from the stage and became flesh and blood of Annihilation in the most excruciating amplification.

> Sometimes I fell into a semisleep, and it seemed to me that I was sitting in a movie house where some terrifying sound film was turning the blood in our veins to ice. When the cries grew loud, I woke up and looked around. On all sides, in the dark of the night, I saw the shadows of people crying, cuddling the children to their breasts. What did happen to children in that cursed night? (74)

We already know that the question, as it is typical of Perechodnik, will be followed by a report on the children and later, an eruption of questions to God. Or, rather, reproaches. Perechodnik's entire Shoah narrative is an extraordinary mark of "modern" cinematography: with its changeable perspective, use of light and shade, evoking fear and compassion. But it is a horror we do not experience in a movie theater. Yes, we experience it emotionally while its actors really die as automatons-marionettes wound up by cruel Gods who have come to destroy the Jews till the last man, to annihilate.

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The author died in Warsaw, in October 1944. Earlier he joined AK (the Home Army) and got released because of typhoid. Henryk Romanowski

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49 E. Ringelblum *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie...* 68. See also: "O Frankensteinie" [On Frankenstein] in E. Ringelblum *Kronika getta warszawskiego. Wrzesień 1939-1943*. Transl. from yiddish by A. Rutkowski. Warszawa 1983. 385. "It's a bloodhound, every day he kills some smugglers. He can't have his breakfast unless he had spilled some Jewish blood before." Ibid. 393.

reports[50]: "He perished in a bunker following the surrender of the Warsaw uprising. He was together with a group of twenty-two people. They were discovered by looters who were searching on behalf of the Germans. A friend of mine, the only one from the whole group who saved himself, found the group from our bunker by chance at night, and we took him along with us. As he told it to me, all those in his bunker came out as the bandits demanded. Calek, having just been ill, could not come out and perished in the bunker and very likely burned to death; all those who came out were shot on the spot."[51] Calel's friend, Genia, adds: "Knowing Calel's attitude, I am convinced that in that last moment, cyanide spared him a lot of suffering." Romanowski continues: "The following day, when I found out about this tragic event, I went to the place where it happened and buried the remains of my dear and good friend, whom I tried to save with all my strength during the uprising." According to Genia: "He broke down at the very end, the typhoid exhausted him completely. He didn't speak, but screamed that He had to die but he would not let me die because of him…"

Translation: Anna Warso

50 Even when reconstructing the story of Perechodnik's death from quotations and accounts, they create an image of death against death itself, a narrative against emptiness and erasure. (See: A. Lubaszewska *Śmierć w tekście…*).

51 Based on "Fragmenty listu Geni do Pejsacha Perechodnik" [Genia's letter to Pejsach Perechodnik] and Henryk Romanowski's "List do Pejsacha Perechodnika" [Letter to Pesach Perechodnik] included in *Czy ja jestem…* 268-271.

Bożena Karwowska

Baśka, Barbara, Barbarita... Exile in Postwar Polish Women's Prose

To Joasia and Jason

In his almost canonical "Reflections on Exile,"[1] Edward Said stresses that the main difference between the eternal myth of the "exile" and exile as a 20th century phenomenon is the scale of the latter. Today, exile does not concern selected individuals (such as writers, artists, or intellectuals) but has become the fate of large social groups, often deprived not only of their own place but also of "tellable history." UNHCR reports that women and children – that is, precisely persons "deprived of tellable story"[2] – constitute between 75-80% of the world "migrant" population. For many, the process of settling down in the country of exile was preceded by tragic experiences of war, loss and humiliation, violence, torture, or rape.[3] There is no doubt that male and female tales (or, in fact, histories) of exile differ significantly. The myth of the ex-

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1 E.W. Said "Reflections on Exile." *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays.* Harvard University Press, Cambridge. 2002. 173-186.

2 Compare: "The World of Refugee Women: Some Facts." *Women's International Network News* Winter 2003. Vol. 29 issue 1. 84.

3 Compare: J. Langer "Introduction." *Crossing the Border: Voices of Refugee and Exiled Women.* Ed. J. Langer. Five Leaves Publications, Nottingham. 2002. 1-19.

ile – whose presence in literature and culture is still strong – results from the image related to the male story, as it concerns mostly areas of social (intellectual) sphere that is governed by men in patriarchal culture. And while the category of exile lies at the base of the reflection on constructed, fluid identity, meeting the contemporary, postcolonial vision of the human being, several scholars emphasize that the exile/émigré experiences of women[4] are much too often marginalized or unaddressed.[5]

What can we say about the post/war exile,[6] or rather about its literary version, descriptions of émigré problems in the work of Polish writers whose texts are often based on personal experience? It is certainly different from the intellectual image of exile created by men (including figures as important to Polish émigré literature as Miłosz or Gombrowicz),[7] although it is not only this difference that deserves an analysis. What is already interesting in itself, is the signaling of the field of topics encompassed by the émigré women literature and the "female" portrayal of problems faced daily by Poles (both men and women) who were scattered around the world after the war. Not exceptional creative individuals searching for identity[8] in the cosmopolitan tradition of the "exile," not writers who concentrate on themselves, as they care mostly about personal development[9] and who are exceptional and fickle by nature, but precisely women whose gender constructs are built around their mother function, and as a result, ensure continuity (of giving birth and raising children.)

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4 Compare: H. Ghorashi "When the Boundaries are Blurred" *European Journal of Women's Studies"* August 2005. Vol. 13 issue 3. 363. D. Kay "The Politics of Gender in Exile." *Sociology* February 1988. Vol. 22 issue 1. 1-21.

5 The growing interest concerns mostly the so called Third World female exiles and emmigrants from the last decades of the 20th century. As a result, those critical works on the situation of émigré women are of limited use for the material presented here.

6 This essay focuses on the work of female emigrant authors writing directly after WWII. I refer to them as the post/war generation to stress the importance of the war experience in identity formation.

7 I discussed the evolution of the category of exile in "Kategoria wygnania w anglojęzycznych dyskursach krytycznoliterackich" [The Category of Exile in Anglo-Saxon Critical Discourses] *Pisarz na emigracji. Mitologie, style, strategie przetrwania.* Ed. H. Gosk, A.S. Kowalczyk. Dom Wydawnczy Elipsa, Warszawa. 2005. 79-95.

8 I wrote about the postmigrant identity in "Tożsamość postmigracyjna – przypadek (między innymi) Czesława Miłosza" [Postmigrant identity – the case of (among others) Czeslaw Miłosz] *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 2005 No 4. 1-12.

9 J. Langner "Introduction." 15.

In the introduction to the influential 1994 anthology, *Altogether Elsewhere*,[10] Marc Robinson divided the exile's period in an interesting fashion.[11] He describes the complex process of exile (or emigration) as stages of an identity shift that can be summarized as a change from an "emigrant" into "immigrant." However, Jenifer Langner[12] notes that it is more difficult to apply categories resulting from such divisions to the work by women writers than to that of men. This can be explained by the traditional Western division of territory into the "public" male space and the "domestic" female" one, governed by different rules, as well as by the fact that the critical interest has focused so far largely on the male exile story. Several categories related to the "stages" of exile simply do not apply to the "domestic," private perspective, do not allow for a description of the processes taking place in an e/immigrant family and thus, make the experience non-existent for criticism. In fact, even in the "exile" texts by women,[13] domestic perspective – as one that is "private" – was often viewed as unimportant and their authors presented themselves first and foremost as writers-intellectuals, that is within the frames of public sphere marked by masculinity. In the works of Polish émigré literature discussed in this essay, narrating characters represent not exceptional (creative) individuals, unique and focused on public zone activities, but the so called ordinary people shown mostly in their domestic, private space.

Let us also note that the "domestic" character of Polish émigré prose by women can be explained, among others, by the fact that in Poland, mostly due to the long period of lack of statehood, the private and public spheres were shaped in a particular way, differently than in the West. As Małgorzata Fidelis remarks, the place of the Polish woman (*Matka Polka*) was defined mostly by her national (that is social) functions and the gender divisions typical of

10 *Altogether Elsewhere: Writers on Exile.* Ed. M. Robinson. Faber and Faber, Boston-London. 1994.

11 Establishing what kind of exile one experiences and choosing an emigrant identity is the first stage. The second stage is a period of defining the new situation, forming and choosing loyalty toward the culture exited and entered. In the third stage, artists go through a period of doubt, loneliness, the established tasks appear to difficult and everyday reality far from familiar places, too hard and hopeless. The fourth stage is marked by finding one's home in language (in the sense of own identity) – whether it is the mother tongue, or the language acquired in the new country. The next stage involves slowly coming to terms with reality. The final one is also tied the question whether return is possible, when it becomes administratively allowed. This is because sometimes exile becomes a second nature, it prevents "putting down roots" while returns often result in disappointment.

12 J. Langner "Introduction."

13 M. Robinson's anthology of "canonical" texts includes the work of, among others, Mary McCarthy, Mary Antin, Marina Cwietajewa, Hannah Arendt, Madame de Staëo, Hilde Domin and Eva Hoffman.

Western middle class did not have a large impact on the Polish society.[14] While the Victorian model assumed that woman exercises her influence on man at home through "loving care" and "moral advice," and in this way also influences the social sphere reserved for men, in Poland both spheres – the public and the private – were connected by the shared involvement in the national cause. Moreover:

> independent statehood was identified with family life, and political activity often was conducted at home and included women. In Western Europe, the spheres were distinct but mutually supportive: state protection of the private sphere served to maintain bourgeois social and economic order. In contrast, in Poland, the public realm, controlled by a hostile state, was perceived as alien, while the private spphere was a source of freedom and independence ... Polish household was a state unto itself, a bastion of resistance against political and cultural domination by partitioning powers. Elevation of the roles of women as mothers and ladies of the house had implications beyond literary meanings ... women presided over the spiritual Poland at home.[15]

In other words, for Polish women, and for émigré women in particular, "home" was a territory encompassing both the private and the social sphere.

Although, according to Robinson, defining the nature of exile is important for the emigrants during the first stage of identity formation, reflections on that issue are not a typical subject in women's prose. The decisions to stay away from the home country seem almost entirely devoid of reflection and even when they are mentioned in literary texts, it is mostly an issue that men think and decide about. From the perspective of women's prose it may seem that the Polish post/war emigrants are almost deprived of subjectivity in the sense of spatial choice and they are only subjected to political-historical events that move them from one place to another, while "objectification" of women can be further tied not only to their patriarchal submission to man (his history and decision) but also to the wartime experiences.

Critics writing about literary testimonies by exile women often emphasize that e/immigration is often preceded by traumatic events which significantly influences the situation (also the family situation) of women.[16] And although

14 M. Fidelis "Participation in the Creative Work of the Nation." *Journal of Women's History*. 2001 No 1 (13). 108-125.

15 Ibid. 111.

16 J. Langner "Introduction."

Polish literature seems to separate the subject of war and occupation from the subject of emigration, women's prose often goes back to previous experiences as they have impact on the situation of literary characters. Teresa, the narrator of *Gringa,* a novel cycle by Janina Surynowa-Wyczółkowska[17] was victim of a gang rape; the husband of Mrs Dubielowa – one of the protagonists of Janina Kowalska's *Pogranicze* [Borderland] "got lost somewhere in the Sovietski Soyuz"[18] – these two examples represent the most typical events of that kind.

However, traumatic experiences seem to be a norm for the generation of post/war emigration (a subject that is interesting as such, and often discussed, but too important to treat it only "peripherally," perhaps also one bringing back memories that are too difficult?), hence it is their lack that becomes important to the characters. Teresa, the narrator of *Gringa,* translates the lack of those as "non-maturity" when she writes about her fiancé: "I have always had the impression that he is younger than I was. Younger by the war and difficult experience. He never suffered. And, by God, he certainly never went hungry."[19] In Maria Kuncewiczowa's *Tristan 46*, the eponymous protagonist whose mother spent the time of war in England while he is burdened with the experience of occupied Warsaw, observes "Mother and son, what does it even mean, when those years were so different for her and different for me."[20] A few pages later, he adds:

> I have never imagined to have such a young mother … And so, there was trouble. Were she old and flat-chested like a mattress, maybe I would cried a little, spilled my guts, argued and settled down with her like a normal son. With things as they were, I just get huffy and either play a dandy or run away from her.[21]

The experience of war and occupation caused women to grow up and grow old much faster than their contemporaries who lived in safety. I purposefully quote the opinions of a young girl about her fiancé and of a child about his mother, as it is precisely the family zone that constitutes the territory where women writers move most frequently and with most aptness. In the situation

17 J. Surynowa – Wyczółkowska *Gringa.* Polska Fundacja Kulturalna, London. 1968.

18 J. Kowalska (A. Świderska) *Pogranicze.* Instytut Literacki, Paryż. 1980. 43. [Unless indicated otherwise, all translations by AW for the purpose of this essay.]

19 J. Surynowa – Wyczółkowska *Gringa*. 95.

20 M. Kuncewiczowa *Tristan 46.* Czytelnik, Warszawa. 1968. 67.

21 Ibid. 73.

of exile, female protagonists of women's prose, regardless of the baggage of experience, attempt first and foremost to rebuild their domestic territory, by taking traditional positions of mothers and daughters. This happens regardless of the geographical territory they find themselves in.

Émigré women's prose depicts as territories of geographical "emigration" mostly England, South America (Argentina) and the United States (which does not mean that other countries, such as France or Canada are absent from it). England represents the "pioneer" period. Many years later, Janina Kowalska recalled:

> Those were the early, postwar years, we turned from war refugees to political emigrants who made the choice not to go back to Poland – a period of camps and hostels the stories of which our slightly younger generations, born and raised in England, listen to with disbelief; we put down our roots here many years ago and have since become an accepted part of the landscape. Even the most xenophobic among the English would now never think of shouting *Poles go home!* – which was common in those earlier days.[22]

Kowalska compares the situation of Poles in England in that period with the later attitude to other national (or, in fact, racial) minorities, adding:

> Our place at the foot of the social ladder was long taken by the colored and today, the same xenophobe, recalling the days of old and gagged by the act on harmonious co-existence, lacks the courage to advise the black and brown newcomers to go away. If you remind him about the time when he did that to us, who are not so different, after all, from the natives, he will only draw a sad sigh…[23]

The attitudes to "Poles" as representatives of the "lower" national group is also mentioned in works the plots of which take place in America. In the "intellectually oriented novel of exile," Polish emigrants themselves often supported their politically oriented image, and this was tied – especially in the United States – to the lack of a sense of connection with the fellow countrymen, the uneducated, pre-war financially-motivated emigration.[24] Focus on the

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22 J. Kowalska *Pogranicze*. 7.

23 Ibid.

24 Compare: H. Stephan "Introduction: The Last Exiles." *Living in Translation: Polish Writers in America*. Ed. H. Stephan. Rodopi, Amsterdam – New York. 2003.

political circumstances allowed the new emigrants to change their identity, to be included in a social group that – while still perceived as the "Others" – had an incomparably higher status in the West than the national emigrant diasporas. But the "female" story does not separate Polish economic emigrants, or rather, views them as "pioneers" struggling with the basic problems, as the older generation. In her work, Danuta Mostwin portrays the meetings of the older, "peasant" Polish emigrants and the Irish immigrants who looked down upon Poles. As a result, "otherness" of the new emigrants is viewed not only in the relation to Americans but also to "other" immigrant diasporas (mostly Irish). In a short story entitle "Stryjcio z Ameryki,"[25] even renting an apartment turns out to be a difficult task:

> They only went to modest looking houses, usually guided by the "Room for rent" sign hung in the window or nailed to the door. Usually women answered the door. It was surprising, just how many of them there were, older women, tall and angular, with a piercing, probing gaze.
> "Where are you from?" they asked. Polacks? No, no, they withdrew, closing the door. Damnit, Kramarz's companion cursed, that old witch, damnit![26]

Even after they finally manage to rent a room from a friend's mother, and with his help, entering the house turns out to be difficult:

> She didn't say "Polaks" which would be insulting but used the normal, proper term: "Pools." She then took a long time to explain something to Kramarz's companion, laughing and gesturing … As a result, Kramarz and his friend took off their undergarments and burned them ceremoniously in the backyard. Later, in a small storage room, they changed into new underpants bought by Peggy's brother and only then were allowed across the threshold.[27]

The "new," post/war wave of immigrants coming to America was not received with open arms, either. Although the United States – unlike England – was a choice made by the Polish emigrants, a place they arrived to as a result of their own decision and not only "carried by a wave of historical events," the reality awaiting them on the new continent was distant from a dream. First of all, however, the newcomers did not really feel that they were making a choice

25 D. Mostwin. "Stryjcio z Ameryki." [Uncle from America] *Kultura* (Paryż) 1959. No 5 (139). 61-88.

26 Ibid. 69.

27 Ibid. 70.

but rather that they were forced to migrate. This is what Wiśniewski, protagonist of Danuta Mostwinowska's "Córki," [Daughters] thinks about "his" choice:

> Wiśniewska sighed: To America! Where were they supposed to go back to? Poland? To ruins? He saw with his own eyes their house burning down, its walls collapsing. They stood there, looking at their flat disappearing. … He didn't have the courage to return. It was fate that decided about everything, pushed him forward. First they walked with the crowd of uprising survivors, later on a westbound train… Was he supposed to go back where people were running away from? … What to do? … Longing or fear? Indecision? … I don't want my children to go through similar nightmare. Two little fries, with smiles on their faces. He fed them, dressed them. Separated from the old and connected to the new. "Let's emigrate to America" encouraged Wiśniewska.[28]

Work available to the new emigrants did not always meet their aspirations, plans and their European education (to be more precise, Polish education, earned in Poland or England). The problem is discussed in several stories by Danuta Mostwin, who is particularly sensitive to the issue of education among the Polish community in America.[29] What also reveals itself here is the difference between Poles and Americans in their approach to women's education and professional life. Wiśniewski, whose daughter paved the way to America for their family, recalls with embitterment:

> She went to America all by herself, father Lipke said it was to university and what of that? She was a maid for 30 dollars a month. Had I known, I would have never let her go. And – he choked up – she saved up money and sent us parcels with things to Germany, and managed to save for our journey.[30]

Coming to Poland to visit her daughter, Wanda Wernerowa, one of the protagonists in "Dwanaście lat"[31] [Twelve years] cannot understand why her daughter Ewa, instead of working (as she would in the Polish model), takes care of the house and raises four children (realizing the postwar American model).

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28 D. Mostwin "Córki." *Kultura* (Paryż) 1962 No 7 (177-8). 64.

29 Compare: D. Mostwin *Trzecia wartość*. Redakcja Wydawnictw Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, Lublin. 1995.

30 D. Mostwin "Córki." 65.

31 D. Mostwin "Dwanaście lat." Ibid. 77-132.

The trouble with finding work is not a gender-marked problem. Wernerowa does not understand the situation of the exiles, which allows the author to reveal "typical" émigré issues.

> The engineer … smiled sadly… "I have changed," he said, "These days I smell of "szrympy."
> "Szrympy?"
> "You see, a friend of mine founded a factory of those tiny crabs – *shrimps*. I help him, working
> literally in a fridge, processing "szrympy." …
> "You don't work as an engineer?"
> He smiled at her with amusement.[32]

Mostwin often points out that those who did manage to find work fitting their profession, were not always eager to help out the newcomers. For instance, professor X from "Pierwszy krok"[33] [First step]:

> "Yes, I remember. How can I be of help?"
> He spread his hands.
> "I don't have any opportunities, everyone here is trying on their own" …
> "Go away now" he seemed to be saying "Can't you see that all of that is past? Do you think that the Polish Edinburgh and New York somehow overlap on the map?"
> "But you should keep trying!" he said.
> A friendly smile, his hands spread in a helpless gesture. No word of advice or guidance.[34]

Sławek, a graduate of Boston University, is another example: during his visit at Mr and Mrs Żuławscy's "lanczeneta" (eatery), he thinks" "I do like those people… but I really can't help them. Help? They don't need my help. They are the ones that should be helping me. I am their representative in higher social circles."[35] The only thing they have in common is an understanding that appears between women regarding the fact that not everyone has the

32 Ibid. 91.

33 D. Mostwin "Pierwszy krok." Ibid. 146-156.

34 Ibid. 148.

35 D. Mostwin "'Lanczeneta' przy Alei Północnej" [Eatery at Northern Avenue] *Kultura* (Paryż) 1959. No 12 (146). 56.

opportunity to "raise themselves above the rest" by obtaining education. When Sławek asks Boga:

> "What about you? Have you considered finishing school?"
>
> Boga grows angry. Here we go. They'll all be getting at her any minute now. Father will say: "Well, she missed her chance. She should have studied when she could…"
>
> "Not everyone can graduate" Dr Młodecka suddenly comes to her rescue "you can see for yourself that she's supporting her parents. You look so pale, dear…"
>
> Boga's eyes fill up with tears of gratitude and humiliation.
>
> "The children…" she defends herself feebly …
>
> Dr Młodecka's face is broad and white, her eyes follow Boga. She seems to be saying: "Look how they torment this poor girl…" And Boga feels nice.[36]

It is worth pointing out that higher education is not reserved for men only in the world described by women's émigré prose, although in the postwar period even educated Americans rarely worked after getting married. Furthermore, family (and children in particular) are an obstacle on the way to obtaining American education not only for women, but for men, too – for instance, for Boga's husband, Andrzej. In the cited examples, as well as in many other texts, university education is connected to the possibility of social promotion through professional work and is a value that women are culturally as entitled to as men are, even though one difficult to achieve in the émigré reality. We should add that, contrary to their Western European contemporaries, as Małgorzata Fidelis notes, since the 1980s, Polish women have viewed education as an important contribution not only to their own well-being but also to the well-being of the entire society. In the Polish historical conditions, daughters' education was regarded as the best kind of dowry and, at the same time, preparation for the role of lady of the house. The example of Maria Skłodowska – Curie proves that education was not an "obstacle" to marriage and motherhood.

Regardless of education and ambitions, Polish newcomers to American cities often found their themselves in poorer or "ethnic" neighborhoods that were difficult to get out of – as was the case of the protagonists of "'Lanczeneta' przy Alei Północnej" [Eatery at Northern Avenue] by Danuta Mostwin.

36 Ibid. 54-55.

> They were simply thrown here. Żuławski got his first job as a night teller. Money put aside in England was beginning to disappear and had to be invested as soon as possible. They were mostly looking for a way to protect the savings and ensure even a modest income. They knew nothing, the city seemed alien, the world hostile, people – inaccessible. Żuławska could cook, so they bought a restaurant at Northern Avenue and.. got stuck.[37]

It is worth noting that the decision to open a restaurant was based on the "domestic" skills of the woman.

American world surrounding the Polish immigrants baffled them with its complicated national and racial relations that they did not always understand and that located them usually only slightly above the "colored" – which was another thing they did not understand. For the young female protagonist of Mostwin's "Pierwszy krok," [First step] the first encounter with this particular issue was a surprise:

> "But are you aware of the fact" he said "that it is a *mixed neigborhood*?" he looked at my face probingly, waiting for reaction.
>
> But I didn't know what a mixed neigborhood was and so my look gave him no reply.
>
> "I have colored patients" he whispered with shame, as if trying to explain himself "and some of them…"
>
> "I don't mind" I interrupted.
>
> I didn't know I was touching an actual problem. I raised it lightly and without apprehension. … I looked at the doctor's face and became alarmed. He didn't believe me.[38]

For many Poles, emigration was their first encounter with the "colored," and the first opportunity to reflect on the "other." The narrator of "Pierwszy krok" describes it as follows:

> Walking down the street I looked at the Blacks passing me by. I don't know them. Is their suffering different … Maybe they hate me for being white? What kind of person is he really, that man with shiny skin, thick lips and moist and bulging eyes?[39]

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37 Ibid. 37.

38 D. Mostwin "Pierwszy krok." 150.

39 Ibid. 39.

Black Americans, because they stand for the entire "colored" world of North America described by the female Polish writers of postwar emigration, are recalled mostly to show American otherness (lack of racism) of Poles who were indistinguishable, after all, from the [white] Americans by their looks. At the same time, their reflection on the "Blacks" reveals to the contemporary readers the naivety of the new emigrants and their colonial thinking.[40] Interestingly, a different image of Poles (also as "others") is presented by Janina Surynowa – Wyczółkowska in *Gringa* whose plot takes place in Argentina. This is undoubtedly related to the fact that they are "visibly different from the natives," as Janina Kowalska would say, or – to be more precise – to their fairer skin tone, since – as it is typical of a colonial society – "each man aspiring to join the social elite wants to white his offspring and marries a white skinned woman."[41] One should add that the protagonist of the book is a young, single daughter of a rather affluent father. However, her physical otherness also entails the cultural one, behaviors that differ from the norm established for married women by the Latino culture. This must lead to a conflict with other women in a country where, as Teresa says years later, "widows do not remarry." Even her closest friend, an independent weaver of artistic rugs, cannot understand Teresa's cultural otherness, accusing her of consciously seducing men:

> Here, you dance only with your own husband and walk by the hand only with your own husband. What is it with you. What drives you, when you flirt and seduce like that? I sometimes curse, when I look at you, this grace and charm of yours, this wit, this humor, this elegance you wear your cheap fur coat with, and those slacks on those long legs.[42]

Those words, uttered in the novel by an Argentinean, describe the kind of femininity that is familiar to Polish women, different not only from the Argentinean model but also from the Anglo-American one, which, too, was a source of many misunderstandings.

Marriage was of particular importance to the generation of post/war émigré women. Describing Crowley (or, in fact, English hostels and refugee camps), Kowalska categorizes women by their marital status: there are wives (and mothers), four single girls and one spinster. A relationship between a Polish girl and an English man is viewed negatively by the "crowleyan"

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40 Compare: E.Said *Orientalism*. Vintage, New York. 1979.

41 J. Surynowa – Wyczółkowska *Gringa*. 66.

42 J. Surynowa – Wyczółkowska *Jesień Gringi*. Polska Fundacja Kulturalna, London. 1976. 157.

Polish women. Polish men are attractive to English women but the latter do not fulfill the role of "wife." While this is not a subject discussed separately by the émigré women writers, it may be worthwhile to quote an observation by Janina Kowalska, who believed that young Poles from the military camps for foreign soldiers:

> were eager to marry and quickly latched onto whatever passed through their hands, even though everyone knows that quality goods rarely jump off the shelves on their own. They clicked their heels and kissed hands, which was new and exciting… No wonder that girls were crazy about them… But in the final reckoning that came with the end of the war, there were those among the newlyweds that gossiped about one another, wondering where on earth this or that managed to dig out their precious. Everyone knows that a woman needs to know about borsch and pierogi, laundry, cleaning and babies.[43]

In the context of emigration, matrimonial talents of Polish men are a separate, and a very interesting, subject that nonetheless remains beyond the scope of this essay. But when it comes to female roles, Polish women seem to clearly prefer and highly value traditional, patriarchal domestic roles that the English women were beginning to leave behind, moving into the (more) public zone. In Kowalska's narrative, the "public" sphere recalled in the context of English women is far from its feminist version and encompasses – almost mockingly – mostly shops, pubs and streets. Remarks on the "Scottish wife" in Mostwinowa's "'Lanczeneta'…" are similar in that regard. Although there is no doubt that cultural differences (or, to be more precise, the differences in the gender constructions of femininity) did not allow Polish women to accept the "other" ones as wives of Poles, jealousy and competition should not be completely excluded either, especially as the foreigners took away the men that Polish émigré women viewed as "their" potential husbands. This could be also be explained by the fact that Polish female protagonists and narrators became more lenient in their judgments only later, toward their "American" daughters in law and – interestingly – it seems that it was easier for the mothers to accept Anglo-American marriages of their sons rather than daughters, especially when the first grandchildren were still awaited.

> The son of general's wife married a girl from *upper middle class*. She called general's wife *mother*and tried to learn Polish despite the fact that no one

43 Ibid. 98.

> really expected it from her. The moment she entered the room, conversations would immediately switch to English …
>
> "I like her" thought general's wife " but I feel tired. I like her" she confessed to her friends "she is so calm and at boyish the same time. She marches with long steps, unaware of the need for dalliance, and in her eyes there is so much thoughtful sweetness."
>
> When she was alone, she cried. Why can't I love her fully?[44]

Let us go back to Małgorzata Fidelis's remarks on the division of space (private and public sphere) and their gendered allocation. Fidelis notes that

> Western European women eventually derived their claims to participation in the public sphere from the powers granted them in the private realm. They transgressed the boundary between the spheres by bringing private issues to the public agenda.[45]

But the fact that Polish public institutions belonged for a long time to foreign aggressors and represented their interest (also cultural interest) resulted in an isolation of Polish women from the public sphere; the interwar period was too short to allow for significant changes in this respect. Besides, due to their participation in the "national cause," they did not feel this isolation and did not consider the domestic sphere a purely private one. As a result, they did not understand the need to move their own ("female") affairs into the social sphere – which is what the first (pre) feminist attitudes relied on – but at the same time, they did not understand the patriarchal, complete isolation of the domestic zone. Thus, they viewed negatively the actions of "foreign" women (both patriarchally dominated Argentineans and the "emancipated" English or American women), which is particularly visible in the case of their roles as mothers.

In the post/war women's prose, the role of a wife is directly tied to the role of a mother who is responsible for creating a home and nurturing Polishness for the next generation. Raising children "in exile" – that is, dealing with social and own "expectations" – is perhaps the most important subject related to emigration in the women's prose. The pressure of patriotic tradition was so strong that it lead to defining the house as a territory of "Polishness," regardless of the husband's nationality. This is why non-Polish women could never fulfill the hope vested in the Polish mother figure, *Matka-Polka.* Meanwhile,

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44 D. Mostwin "Córki." 68.

45 M. Fidelis "Participation in the Creative Work of the Nation." 111.

a "good" husband is one that allows to create (and physically build) a Polish home, like Jose Maria in *Gringa*, who

> believes that … children owe to their mother not only their fair hair and white complexion, but also the European thought and heritage of Polish independence. Jose is building a house in the city center under the illusion that it is a Polish house, and so the building has a steep red roof. A porch with little columns. A façade. The shutters have heart-shaped openings carved out.
>
> Thujas imitate firs around our Polish house. Patio imitates the verandah. Hallway imitates the inner court. Swimming pool imitates the pond. And the garage – carriage house and stables.[46]

It is clear both to the protagonists of *Gringa* and to other literary characters that Polishness is not restricted to language. But when the question of children and their national upbringing comes into view, it is mostly language that is the problem. This may be connected to the identification of nationality with language as an element or "mark" that clearly distinguishes the Poles from other nationalities. Let us recall again Robinson's observation that exile increases the value of language as a connection between the old and the new world. This concerns not only creative artists, as language, being one of the elements of identity, is also the key medium of communication enabling contacts with other people. Loneliness is, according to the critic, the exile's greatest fear.

Several observations on the linguistically determined change of national consciousness (and identity) contained in *Lost in Translation*,[47] an English bestseller by the Polish born Ewa Hoffman, were expressed already several decades ago in the work of Polish émigré women writers. But before the protagonists of stories and novels face the problem of their children's language, the notice it in themselves (and in other adults). Teresa, the narrator of *Gringa*, already as an unmarried young woman realizes to her surprise that she automatically inserts Spanish words when she speaks:

> Suddenly I realized that I have grown attached to that town in cordillera and that in my mind I call its smell "perfume" and its freshness "frescura." Because it was more convenient and easier to think of it this way (not in Polish).

46 J. Surynowa – Wyczółkowska *Gringa.* 224.

47 E. Hoffman. *Lost in Translation: Life in a New Language.* William Heineman Ltd. London. 1979.

"You're getting uprooted, Teresa" I think to myself as I walk to the bus.[48]

The problem of language is, in fact, neither new, nor tied exclusively to emigration, something that Teresa, daughter of a Polish woman and a German Czech, is made aware of during a conversation with her father:

I start yelling that "negocio," "asunto" or "comercio" are out of the question, because we are "muy feliz." "Dichoza."
"You mean 'happy'" he corrected. "Make up your mind, Terenia, as to the language you are going to use. As a child I would get spanked for mixing Czech and German words like that.
"For two years I've only used "castellano" I reply "sometimes English, and I'm not even aware that I forget Polish words."
"Yes" he interrupted "Uprooting comes unnoticed, and gradually."[49]

The difference between the linguistic situation of the father and the daughter is another subject deserving a separate study, one can only note here that linguistic purity demanded from children in their native countries (for instance during partitions or among national minorities) meant preserving national identity, sovereignty, cultural continuity. Meanwhile, Teresa thinks of Buenos Aires (capital city of her country of residence): "future capital of my Argentinean children,"[50] and remains aware of the inevitability of assimilation processes, as well as of the national difference between her and her "Argentinean" children.

Little children described in women émigré prose are usually taught "Polishness" – they go to Polish kindergartens, sing Polish songs, recite poems and wear folk costumes. But first and foremost, they are taught the language and this is usually a conscious decision made by the parents. This is perfectly captured by Zofia Romaniczowa in *Baśka i Barbara*, a novel describing the process of raising a daughter in a French speaking environment.

Today I offered Basia the moon. And I could have given her *la lune*.
Frankly, it was other people who pointed it out. We thought that was a non-issue.
How come? You teach Polish to your child? You isolate her from the environment… You restrict her opportunities… Breed issues into her.

48 J. Surynowa – Wyczółkowska *Gringa*. 137.

49 Ibid. 141.

50 Ibid. 137.

> As if we were in a position to make a choice. To bequeath her what we ourselves have inherited or to disown her. What would make her happier?[51]

Romanowiczowa explains the motivation behind the "decision" to keep speaking Polish at home:

> A strange world around us. Our house like a shell on the surface of ocean. Are we to drill a hole in its bottom to let it drown, to let our house disappear? So that, when you return, in a couple of years, from some school, from some trip, our daughter Barbara, you start slow down on the stairs thinking that there's a couple of strangers waiting for you inside?
> And is that what's supposed to be good for her? She will catch that other language anyway, from the kids in the playground, from people in the streets, from the shop assistant, from the air. We will not try to stop it, we won't close her eyes, on the contrary. This city, that is hospitable to us, is her childhood city.
>
> But first, she needs to have a home. One where all of us feel at home. Us – and her.[52]

Baśka i Barbara describes only the first years of the child's life and the parents' decisions regarding raising the daughter are not yet verified by the influence excercised on Baśka by peers and the culture of their country even by changing her name, stressing the final syllable of "Barbara." Before this happens, there appear questions similar to those in Mostwin's "'Lanczeneta' przy Alei Północnej":

> "Dear Lord, please give health to my mummy, daddy, granny and grandpa and allow us to return to Poland…"
> "Mummy" Marek turns around "What does it mean 'allow us to return'?"
> "To return" Boga explains "like you and Pawełek come home from kindergarten."
> "But I can't go back!"
> "And why can't you?"
> "I've never been there, mummy, I've never been to that Poland."[53]

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51 Z. Romanowiczowa *Baśka i Barbara* [Baśka and Barbara] Libella, Paryż. 1956. 51.

52 Ibid.

53 D. Mostwin "Lanczeneta..." 60.

Answering the question of their already adult children about the decision regarding language they should raise their own children in, Jose Maria, Gringa's husband, says:

> There is no certainty or guarantee for the parents in that regard. Children do what they want to. First they want a colorful ball. Then a floating swan for the pool. Then you have to give them a bank account, a car. They want. They demand. They ask. … They can't be persuaded or compelled. So whether they are going to speak this or other language, it is not because we taught them, but because Bibi kindly decides she wants to speak Spanish, Antek – English and Barbarita Polish.[54]

Let us note that women's literature did not manage provide a clear and consistent answer to the question why continuing to use Polish should be important to the émigré children. Were they supposed to return to Poland? Were they, as a result, closer to their parents? Or, perhaps, the teaching of Polish allowed the women (mothers) to locate themselves within the tradition of *Matka Polka* that fights for preserving the nation despite resurfacing doubts? Żuławska, one of the characters in "'Lanczeneta'…", is not an exception when she thinks:

> And that constant struggle to maintain the language! That tragic fight, lost like the unyielding little flame of the disappearing underground. What weapons are to be used? Who is going to help? Żuławska thinks: "His mother taught him: *dzień dobry, kiełbasa, mam cię w d…* Oh, I, too, don't give a s… about all of this.[55]

While not providing a straight answer to the question of potential advantages, several literary works by women show conflicts resulting from this fight, conflicts that resurface later, when the children begin to form their identities – often opposing their parents.

Conflicts with children are mostly portrayed as conflicts with daughters. Protagonists and narrators of post/war émigré prose are not yet aware that their problems with children are a result of a broader phenomenon that feminist criticism will later refer to as "mother – daughter relationships." They believe that the conflicts originate in the struggle to preserve Polishness, because frequently it is Polishness that becomes an obstacle for the children in

54 J. Surynowa – Wyczółkowska *Jesień Gringi*. 193.

55 D. Mostwin "'Lanczeneta'…" 48.

finding their place in their "own" country where they feel, at least to a certain degree, as "strangers." Exile – in its female version – is no longer only a gap between "self" and the country of origin, as Said identifies it, but also between one's own cultural identity and that of one's children. This means that in mixed marriages children "learn culture" mostly from the father's ancestors (as, for instance, Barbarita, Gringa's daughter) or from their peers, and do not always look fondly upon the mother's national culture:

> "Oh!" Barbarita screams "You are a horrible Gringa!"
> Here we are, standing in front of each other. Similar to each other. We both have fair hair and sweet, colorful, striped dresses. We both move the tips of our noses."
> "And you are Gringa too" I say firmly "Because you are my daughter."
> Angry look from under the tousled fringe: "I am ashamed to be a Gringa's daughter. Córką de una Polaca" she shouts.
> I look at my child with terror, just as my mother must have looked at me.
> "The greatest harm in our lives comes from our children" I thought. "From the hands with bitten nails and stained fingers."
> " I would prefer" Baśka yells "to be Argentinean, like father. Una pura cepa."[56]

An understanding with the mother – or rather, realizing the mechanisms governing the conflicts between generations – takes place only after one becomes a parent. And even though the question of national difference in the example above is of no importance, pre-feminist consciousness does not allow the émigré writers to notice the "supra-national" character of the problem.

Conflicts with daughters (on the surface) do not have to be directly related to Polishness, they can also include the question of, for instance, independence, often expressed as a marriage to an American, which – according to parents – inevitably entails "uprooting." This concerns both the "linguistic" and the gendered construction of femininity, although the linguistic changes were the easiest to describe. In "Córki," Mostwin writes:

> Daughter left first, she married a friend from college, an American. It was not a sinle departure, but one that happened as if through several consecutive gates, doors, passages. Not a goodbye, or separation, or a single stroke, a single turning of the door key – but a continuous withdrawal, a constant jarring sound of the key. Each time she seemed more distant, her Polish was tinged with American accent. More and more often she

56 J. Surynowa – Wyczółkowska *Gringa*. 215.

> would pause in the middle of a sentence, looking for the right word. General's wife listened to the American twitter of her grandchildren with effort.[57]

In the same short story, the problems of parents with their maturing daughters boil down to finding them Polish husbands. The journey from Germany to America became a necessity when "Oleńka finished high school and started to be interested in boys. What if she marries a German?" Meanwhile, in the United States, they worry that "Oleńka says she'll marry an American, a Jew, a Protestant, and just leave…"[58]

The daughters in question – Oleńka and Grażyna – belong to the group that Ruben G. Rumbault refers to as "1.5 generation,"[59] one including the children of emigrants who, changing their country of residence, were old enough to remember their culture of origin and (more or less) consciously enter the culture of the new country, but at the same time young enough to join peer groups in the new country and tie their social identity to them. As a result, they can easily move between both cultures, although émigré writers also depict their difficulties with finding a place in both. In contrast to the "first generation," immigrants belonging to this group are not characterized by the impulse for "self-justification" fueling the exile vision of their parents.[60] In the situations described by émigré writers, children born abroad (or too young to remember their native country) also display several features of the "1.5 generation." Instead of memories of Poland we have memories / fantasies of Polishness (related mostly to childhood and family home) created by the patriotic émigré tale. For this generation, Polishness of the public space is found in the émigré, Polish diasporas, often governed by their own laws and characterized by their own dynamics. Their image presented in the women's prose is often rather negative – for instance in Kowalska's *Pogranicze* or Mostwinowa's "Córki."

What is left, then – as was the case of teaching language to the children – is the question whether literary texts contain a reflection on the motivation and validity of imposing Polishness on children, especially as assimilation processes take place earlier than in the second generation. Maintaining national

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57 D. Mostwin "Córki." 67.

58 Ibid. 65.

59 R.G. Rumbault "Self and Circumstance: Journeys and Visions of Exile." *The Dispossessed: An Anatomy of Exile.* Ed. P.I. Rose. University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst and Boston. 2005. 331-357.

60 Ibid. 332.

identity is a matter so obvious for the literary protagonists, that they often do not even mention it. Let us also note that "Polishness" of postwar emigration is paused at a certain historical moment – the moment of exile – which means that it differs from the "native" identity evolving under the influence of new reality, and so – unaware of that fact – émigré families may only convey a Polish variety of migrant identity to their children. Furthermore, their only verbally formulated motivation is the need to be able to communicate with their grandchildren. This, however, depends also on the nationality of their sons and daughters-in-law.

And yet, marriage to a Pole, theoretically granting the preservation of Polishness, is not presented as a happy end. Even children born to Polish parents, who understand Polish, address them in English, which seems outrageous only to grandma who exclaims "son of a man who sacrificed so much for Poland speaks ENGLISH in his own house!"[61] Later "generations" of emigrants differ from the war exiles, their history is different from the one of those who never knew the everyday life of The People's Republic. When Barbarita (Gringa's daughter) informs her mother about her engagement to a Pole who was forced to emigrate in 1968 (due to the wave of antisemitism in the People's Republic), it is not easy for an understanding between the son and mother in law to begin to form.

Suddenly Barbarita decides to lay her cards on the table and asks:

> "So? If there is no anti-Semitism in Poland, then why are you afraid, Ricardo, that mamita, despite all the amistad (friendship) that she has for you, may be unhappy about our matrymonio? (marriage)"
> The worse has been said. Duplicity of the situation hits me on the head. The bitterness of those Polish words mixed out of nervousness with Spanish makes me choke up. "Damnit" I curse in my thoughts, as I did in the old days.[62]

Different generations of emigrants represent different worlds and different problems, and many works (especially the "American" stories by Mostwin) reveal the lack of understanding between the Polish emigrants and the "native" Poles. A comparison to the remark by Marc Robinson on the exile impossibility to return home automatically comes to mind. In case of female, "domestic" vision it is an analogous although yet unnamed problem of creating a migrant

61 D. Mostwin. "Dwanaście lat." [Twelve years] 111.

62 J. Surynowa – Wyczółkowska *Jesień Gringi*. 65.

identity differing from the one created by the fellow countrymen who remained in the home country and the one created by emigrants from other generations.

Women nonetheless seem to come to terms with émigré reality more easily than men. The latter are often unable – from the perspective of women's prose – to get rid of the titles no longer matching the external world, such as "chairman," "colonel," "general," "major" – the functions of soldiers, guerillas or patriots. They can play those roles only in the "domestic" space or in émigré societies and organizations. Consequently, they close themselves off in diasporas that allow them to retain their pre-war gender identity (of patriots fighting for independent Poland). Let it also be added that émigré social life was characterized by a narrowing of the public space, by keeping to small groups based on direct ties. In the temporal sense, "social" life of the emigrants is characterized by living in a local time (which is typical for traditional societies), or, to be more precise, by living in an identity-forming history of one's own (and at the same time, shared) war and occupation experiences. From the perspective of the country of residence, members of Polish exile diasporas found themselves on the margins of social space. No wonder, then, that the model proved unattractive for the next generation that embraced the culture of the new country as their own. In a discussion with "wujcio" (uncle), a Monte Casino veteran, Niato, Gringa's son says:

> You would like to close me forever in the Polish ghetto, uncle, and I can't be a stranger in my father's country! Please, understand! I am proud of my mum's origins … but I can't listen all the time to the stories of aunt Fafa beaten up by the Gestapo … or of you fighting at Monte Casino. Please, understand, *Dios mio*, I have obligations to the country I was born in.[63]

In Mostwin's "Córki," Grażyna critically views the émigré social space. She does not share her father's delight in the émigré ball:

> "Ball" she laughed "Ball! You call that a ball. A dance of skeletons. You think I am having fun here? That I want to belong here? You think I will let some general's wife play the matchmaker, that I care about some general? I want to live a normal life.[64]

In both instances, the young generation firmly rejects imposed social roles during conversations with men who find their own identity in that space.

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63 Ibid. 193.

64 D. Mostwin "Córki." 77.

And while the female characters are almost always shown in the domestic space and in the related functions of wife and mother, it is women who find it easier to accept the "double landscape," to use Skvorecky's term.[65] Going back to Robinson's remark, one could actually posit that it is easier for women to construct loyalty toward both cultures – their own (the culture of exit) and that of their children (the culture of the country of residence). Gender-assigned categories of private and public space become blurred in the émigré world. Men can "display" their "social" identity only in the domestic sphere while women are tied to the social sphere (of the country of residence) through children.

Women – literary characters in the works by émigré authors – experience deep and painful loneliness. Let us not forget that postcolonialism sees in exile not only the ethos of a creator but also human tragedies behind it, as exile means– according to Said – first and foremost, loneliness, lack of belonging, alienation – not a lack of identity or a cosmopolitan identity but a constant sense of one's own otherness, dissonance with the surrounding culture and customs. Emigration deprives the exiles of the dignity related to the sense of belonging, of certainty resulting from stability in place and time.[66] According to Robinson, all émigré artists go through a period of doubt and loneliness and although, with time, they get used to the new reality, they are always accompanied by a sense of alienation. For women, loneliness of exile is a loneliness within the family. It is experienced deeply even by characters such as Teresa (*Gringa*) or Boga ("'Lanczeneta'") who are surrounded by large, multi-generational families. As a result of cultural differences between parents and children, domestic space is no longer a place where women, turning with time from mothers to grandmothers, can fulfill themselves by playing the roles assigned to them by the patriotically oriented patriarchal Polish tradition. And in the émigré conditions, the house was often the only space given to women, just as family roles – of wife and mother –were the only identity. This is why over almost 25 years of marriage (and with four adult children) Teresa, from Surynowa-Wyczółkowska's novel, regrets abandoning her academic aspirations.

> Everyone … laid the so called "intellectual hopes" on me. And indeed, I devoured academic books, flew to conferences at Sorbonne and wanted to study art history.

65 O. Overland. "Visions of Home. Exiles and Immigrants." *The Dispossessed* ... 7.

66 See: E.W. Said *Culture and Imperialism.* Vintage Books, New York. 1994. 326-336.

> It is simply beyond belief that it all ended up with cosmetology, pots, cribs and English lessons.
>
> I was discovering within myself old regrets. In the final account of life, I have found myself on the side of the defeated. … My only consolation was that if I was derailed, then it was not by my own fault. … It was the war that derailed thousands of emigrants. But could that really be a consolation? Of course not. It was just – reality, one difficult to come to terms with.[67]

Thwarted plans, unfulfilled ambitions, blurred spaces – domestic and public – as well as "archaic" identity, and – first and foremost – acute loneliness are the balance of the post/war exile women's prose. Determined by the consciousness of the "pre-feminist" generation, the work by female Polish émigré writers reveals the multilayered character of otherness faced by the post/war e/immigrants. Different from (Polish and other) men, from (women, but also men belonging to) the cultures of arrival, from other immigrants, from Poles (male and female) in the old country, from the Black Americans, Indians, Metis… Different from their own parents but also from their children, still unaware that many of their daily challenges are shared by women of other races and nationalities, and not even seeking a connection with them, émigré women writers created in their works a history of those who were traditionally deprived of a "tellable story." Further chapters were added by the next generations of emigrants – chapters including disintegration of exile homes, professional problems, alcohol and drug addictions. But that is another subject for a separate analysis.

Translation: Anna Warso

67 J. Surynowa – Wyczółkowska *Jesień Gringi*. 152.

Aleksandra Chomiuk

"New Marquise de Custine," or, About a Certain Manipulation

International-level events that have infused the life of the European continent with a lot of dynamic in recent years also force us to once again ponder the question of what does it mean to be a Pole or a European in the early years of the 21st century and how should the Europe we inhabit look like. Ways to answer that question, as revealed to some extent during the fateful weeks when Poland was fervently supporting the "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine, are important not only for people living between the Oder and the Bug, choices that Poland makes may have a significant impact on the shape and evolution of the wider European consciousness.

One assertion, whose author undertook to reconstruct Polish self-awareness from outside and following the rules of scientific discourse, is presented in the article of Maxim K. Waldstein published in the English journal *Social Identities* (2002, Vol. 8, No. 3) and later revised and reprinted in one of the most important Russian literary criticism magazines.[1] The significance of this assertion

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1 М. Вальдштейн "Новый Маркиз де Кюстин, или Польский травелог о России в постколониальном прочтении", новое литературное обновление, 2003, N 60, с. 125-144. From here on-

in the context of the trouble with defining Polish identity as either eastern or western was already pointed out by Maria Janion,[2] who followed Waldstein's lead and invoked the "cardinal sins" of Polish self-identification. Waldstein's article, however, is not only importane because it contains a plethora of generalizations about Poles, Poland, and Eastern Europe. It is also a text that reveals the mechanisms of rhetorical "appropriation" of described realities[3] while simultaneously succumbing to said mechanisms.

The discussed study belongs to an extensive host of postcolonial analyses that investigate the "system of theory and practice" which has over the years shaped "the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures."[4] The author, while declaring himself an explorer of "ways in which to revise the Russian historical experience" (N, 125), does not really investigate the geopolitical and cultural awareness of the Russian people and instead undertakes to become "familiar with the perspective of erstwhile subjects or satellites of the empire" (N, 125), which is related, as the article seems to indicate, to revealing their "peculiarities," as well as contradictions and distortions that keep appearing.

This "expository" piece is focused on Ryszard Kapuściński's *Imperium*,[5] one of the more important works of Polish literature dealing with our neighbor to the East. The researcher's interest in the book is not derived purely from its aspect of "representing" Russian culture in Western travel literature (N, 125). By revealing these representations as negative points of reference for Central European identity ("the 'orientalization' and 'ethnicization' of Russia

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wards, the locations of all the quotes from this article will be placed in the main body of the article and marked with the letter N. [Translated into English from Polish quotes.]

2 M. Janion, "Poland Between East and West," *Second Texts* 6 (2003): 131-149

3 Works written in Polish that deal with the mythologized and emotionally-charged collection of images, representations, and concepts related to Russia as the "other" and "alien" include: A. Kępiński, *Lach i Moskal. Z dziejów stereotypu* (Warszawa-Kraków: PWN, 1990); W. Dzwonkowski, *Rosja a Polska* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Interim, 1991); A. Giza, *Polaczkowie i Moskale: wzajemny ogląd w krzywym zwierciadle (1800-1917)* (Szczecin: Polskie Pismo i Książka, 1993); W. Karpiński, *Polska a Rosja. Z dziejów słowiańskiego sporu* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1994); J. Maciejewski, "Stereotyp Rosji i Rosjanina w polskiej literaturze i świadomości społecznej," *Więź* 2 (1988): 183-197; E. Pogonowska, *Dzikie biesy. Wizja Rosji sowieckiej w antybolszewickiej poezji polskiej lat 1917-1932* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2002).

4 E.W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 7.

5 The first Polish edition was published in 1993. This article will use the English edition published by Knopf in 1994. From here onwards, all quotes will be taken from the latter edition, will be located in the main body of the text, and marked with the letter I and a page number.

is directly related to the imposition of certain attributes traditionally and stubbornly […] ascribed to Eastern Europe, including nationalism, fetishism, ahistoricity, and backwardness"; N, 140) Waldstein questions the permanence of the self-identification of Central European peoples as one created to be a safeguard against the East.[6] At the moment when, as the author mockingly writes, "the West is ready to embrace the chosen trio: Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary," the only significant border is the one "between 'civic' societies of Central Europe and the 'not-fully-European' […] nations of Europe's southern and eastern fringes." (N, 141-142) For Waldsten, such a reading of Kapuściński's book becomes a "symptom of incorporating 'Central Europe' with its intellectuals into the sphere of basic Western discourses and institutions." (N, 142) Waldstein's interesting study, however, one that reveals the mechanisms of "cultural translations" present in Kapuściński's book and exposes the ambiguity of the relationship between traveller and the reality he describes, on which he forces a somewhat "orientalizing" perspective, is tainted with bias and the surrender of the most basic loyalty towards the analyzed text. The author's intent to unmark the "stereotypic image of Russia" (N, 126) results in a very specific reading of *Imperium*, characterized by selective recapitulations and quotes that omit not only the literary aspect, with its ambiguity or symbolism,[7] but also the more inconvenient passages (The only "appreciated" characteristic of the book is its suggestiveness; however, even that particular trait is considered by the author to be an element of propagandistic influence of the text).

How, then, does Waldstein's attempt to replace the Polish writer in representing himself, committed to the benefit of the West and the Russians (especially significant in the context of the author lamenting the fact that no publishing house is releasing Kapuściński's books in Russia), look, an attempt that basically makes Kapuściński's text unnecessary? The reading's starting point is the exceptionless (in any case, there's no mention of any exceptions) assumption as to the inevitability of the "orientalizing" perspective in European travel writing. By effortlessly equating the author of *The Emperor* with "numerous generations of travellers from the dominant (imperial) Europe

6 Milan Kundera's essay about "two Europes," published in the early 1980s, protesting the customary inclusion of countries like Czechoslovakia, Hungary, or Poland into Eastern Europe, generally recognized as a declaration of Eastern European and Western identity is an obvious polemic context for Waldstein's article, and one which the author invokes himself. The Polish version was published under the title "Zachód porwany albo tragedia Europy środkowej (A Kidnapped West, or the Tragedy of Eastern Europe)" in *Zeszyty Literackie* 5 (1984): 14-31.

7 Treated herein unambiguously as "fetishization" of the described reality, its obfuscation at the level of words and signs. (cf. N, 131)

journeying to the subordinate, colonized East" (N, 126), already in the introduction does Waldstein paint *Imperium* as an "'Orientalist' text, emphasizing self-identification through the depiction of an inferior yet threatening Other" (N, 126) and accuse the author of perpetuating the tradition of portraying 'Them' as a certain subordinate, measurable, calculable, and predictable entity in order to, indirectly, separate oneself as an individual." (N, 127) On the other hand, the investigator deprives the Polish writer, due to him being an inhabitant of Eastern Europe, of the ability to "effectively express opinions on Russia from the perspective of West-East," an ability bestowed only on "true" Europeans.[8]

It is really baffling to see Waldstein internalize the assumptions typical of postcolonial discourse, understood as the exploration of the connections between the system of ideas explaining an object inscribed into that object and "structures of imperious domination,"[9] political and/or cultural, in order to defend against the "illegitimate appropriation" of this "orientalizing" perspective by the Polish writer. This "illegitimacy" of the point of view assumed by Kapuściński is rooted, at least according to Waldstein, in the distorted communication between the subject of the imperial "orientalizing" gaze – inhabitants of former colonies (Poland) and its object – the empire itself (Russia and the Soviet Union, cf. N, 126), as well as the inability to justify it by using the need to enact retaliatory measures ("In the last two centuries, neither Russian nor Soviet bureaucrats and intellectuals created or tried to created an 'orientalized' image of Poland," cf. N, 127; never employed the image of the 'White Negro,' cf. N, 128). This idealized picture of our relationship with our neighbor to the East is also connected to veiled doubts as to whether Poland really was a victim of imperial aggression[10] and the insistence on highlighting the differences (curiously unexplained in the article) between Russian and Western empires, differences that, as we might surmise, would include primarily Russia's lesser effectiveness in implementing the more invasive of

8 Therefore, the matter of who is writing the "orientalizing" description becomes a significant problem for the researcher. It's not a Frenchman, actually not a "true" Westerner at all, he is a Pole, and thus a representative of a nation whose cultural association is unclear. As Waldstein writes: "The word 'Frenchman' is synonymous with 'European' in nearly all possible context, but the matter is not so straightforward in the case of the word Pole." (N, 139) Later, he adds: "only 'foreigners' and 'Europeans' have a right to call Russia an empire and alien civilization in their writing." (N, 141)

9 E.M. Thompson, *Trubadurzy Imperium. Literatura rosyjska i kolonializm*, trans. A. Sierszulska (Kraków: Universitas: 2000), VI.

10 "Constructive criticism cannot be based solely on the complaints of the oppressed (or those aspiring to that particular mantle)" (N, 143)

policies. By oversimplifying Polish-Russian relations, as well as the relations between Russia and the Soviet Union and the peoples and nations it annexed, such judgments do much more than just lead to the omission of a plethora of issues revolving around the fact that at least in some of these nations, the awareness of political subordination was compensated by the feeling of civilizational and moral superiority. They also expose the researcher's lack of knowledge or his willful ignorance, which would lead him to disregard an important aspect of Russian 'orientalizing' thinking about Poland,[11] one that clearly demonstrates that we are not talking about impatient reactions related to our "inability to govern [our] country," (N, 128) but about a consistent imperial strategy of "evaluating judgements" that portray Poles as "other" and "inferior"[12] whose goal is to justify annexation of their territory through military means.[13]

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11 Here are a couple of examples of Russians assuming said "orientalizing" perspective: "Poland belongs to us, we fought for it with blade and blood and that is our claim to it." (M. Karamzin as quoted in A. Giza, *Polaczkowie i moskale*, 21. "With Poles, your manner and countenace must be gentle while your wrath must be fearful. [...] Don't try and do them any good, but emphatically convince them of your kindness. [...] You can beat them in the privacy of your home, treat them respectfully only when you have guests. (*From the notes of Prince Pyotr Vyazemsky*, as quoted in A. Giza, *Polaczkowie i moskale*, 16. "Intellectual achievement, propensity for the arts – people born of this land have none of these faculties. There is nothing to see, nothing to learn. [...] Poles are neither happy nor grateful – they can only gloat and demonstrate effusive enthusiasm." (*From the notes...*, ibid., 17) "Steeped in religion and mysticism, the Poles are not fond of our inquisitive, analytical, skeptical, positive minds, filled to the brim with bitter irony. (A Hercen, as quoted in A. Kępiński, *Lach i Moskal*, 172).
These opinions resemble judgements bestowed, in other times and places, upon "peoples not mature enough to be free": "One sees that in all things the Semitic race appears to us to be an incomplete race, by virtu of its simplicity." (E. Renan as quoted in E. Said, *Orientalism*, 149). The difference, it seems, lies primarily in the fact that Western disguised their political and economic expansion as an attempt by the European nations to civilize the Eastern peoples and spread Christian values among them (cf. ibid., 166), while Russian declarations contained naked assertions as to the right of a stronger state to employ all means at its disposal to subordinate a conquered nation to its will.

12 E.M. Thompson, *Trubadurzy imperium*, 54.

13 We should pause to add that a sizable number of Russians consider Poland to be an aggressive, imperialist-minded country, a tradition that goes back a nearly 300 years and is directly related to the dynastic plans of Sigismund III Vasa and the Polish intervention in Russia that started in 1610 and lasted for two years, as well as Poland's post-WWI foreign policy towards its eastern neighbors. The first of these events was extremely traumatic for Russians, as evidenced today by the Day of National Unity which celebrates the anniversary of reclaiming Moscow from the hands of "Polish interventionists." Such a take on these events provided the Russians with rationale for military action, including the 1794 Massacre of Praga by Suvorov's forces or the Soviet invasion of Poland launched on September 17, 1939.

Depreciating the cognitive value of *Imperium* appears to be another element of Waldstein's strategy. Let's take a closer look at a passage that contains this ambiguous assessment of the text's referential value:

> Neither the images nor facts in Kapuściński's book are false – on the contrary, they're absolutely plausible; however, this plausibility seems to be a product of a particular "power play" between the author, the narrator (traveller), the object of the reportage, and the anticipated audience. (N, 126)

Then, this "power play"-based plausibility turns out to be a manipulation on the part of the writer, one related to both, as Waldstein attempts to prove, the substance of the book as well as the narrator's own person.

Among the most effective instruments of said manipulation, Waldstein includes the way Kapuściński portrays Siberian nature in the account of his 1958 journey on the Trans-Siberian Railway. He accuses the Polish writer of using the snowy, desolate landscape as nothing but a backdrop for reflections on "terrifying images of slavery and humiliation," (N, 129) of obscuring the relationship between the image of this "primeval and inhuman nature" (N, 130) and his own prejudice, and finally, of failing to see the connection between creating an environment that would be conducive to "representing" said world and prior civilizing efforts on the part of those who, by building the notorious railway, have made that representation possible. By charging that he equates despotism with Siberia and Siberia with Russia, Waldstein claims that Kapuściński judges this system of images to be "classically Eurocentric and Orientalist." (N, 130) Without denying the obvious fact that the depiction of Siberia (and Russia) as a prison is an element of the "national and cultural self-identification" of Russians, (N, 141) Waldstein criticizes the Polish writer for adopting "on faith alone the 'self-orientalizing' discourse of its Soviet informers," by virtue of its usefulness in furthering his own goals. (N, 141) Clearly, we can admit that Waldstein's right in claiming that such a take on Siberia was more prevalent West of the river Bug, but that's only because in the empire itself it was either considered a state secret or purged thanks to the efforts of numerous authors that were supposed to propagate another image of the country in the minds of the masses, one that portrayed it as the "New Russian World," "the future of Russia," or "the land of freedom."[14] (N, 130) Waldstein's decision to omit another image of Russia, one close to the latter slogan, is rather striking. In the book, Kapuściński recounts a conversation he had with an elderly inhabitant of Siberia traveling to attend her son's wedding. The

14 cf. also E.M. Thompson, *Trubadurzy imperium*, 201-231.

woman painted a picture of Siberia as a "sanctuary" and an "island of liberty" that allowed its people to survive both the tsar and the Bolsheviks. (I, 268) Waldstein's analysis also ignores the fact that the Trans-Siberian Railways is not a "triumph of human effort" (N, 130) (the default assumption being that this effort also carried the torch of civilization into the Northern wilderness) but an undertaking built upon a foundation of murderous slave labor performed by gulag prisoners, one which required the sacrifice of innumerable human lives. Ambiguous undertones also run through charges of "racist conclusions" that Waldstein levels at Kapuściński, in which the latter supposedly reveals "'seemingly-white' Russians to be 'black.'" (N, 132) The scholar's argument ascribes the beliefs of the indigenous Siberians, linking the color white with death, that Kapuściński alludes to in passing, to contemporary "white inhabitants of Siberia" (i.e. Russians). Thus, the latter, as "accustomed to death" and "dwellers of a realm governed by nature," "undergo a transformation, like their 'wild' subjects, into 'non-whites.'" (N, 132) The question of where in *Imperium* did Waldstein find the term "wild" (дикий, дикар) he uses throughout his article is directly linked with the ease with which the scholar separates "indigenous inhabitants of Siberia" (N, 132) from civilized Russians. Even Kapuściński himself does not employ the term "indigenous inhabitants" to describe either Buryats or Yakuts. And yet, both peoples still dwell in those lands despite being decimated in the course of Russian efforts at colonization, and their bond with their homeland is rooted in the law of perpetual ownership, a charter older than any usurpations put forth by Russian colonists settling these lands since the 17th century.

The attack on Kapuściński's work is connected with the denial of the author's right to serve as a representative of Europe in his contacts with Russia. By accusing the Polish writer of projecting his own fetishistic opinions of the Other and believing in the real power of symbols, Waldstein disputes Kapuściński's "Western" rationalism. While emphasizing that even if it's true that an "overabundance of speech" and lack of disciplined thought are common traits of Russians, the author cannot deny himself the remark contemplating similarities between Russian and Polish languages, that is to say they're both "overly loquacious" and thus lacking "Cartesian" transparency. (N, 133)

On the other hand, the Polish author is accused of harboring "typically Western" inclinations, that is an aversion to hybridity and a predilection for perceiving the world from the perspective of an "us" (Occidentals) vs. "them" (Orientals) dichotomy. From that charge stems another intellectual construct formed by the scholar, one that reads the reporter's story about crossing the Soviet-Chinese border as a "consecration" and "fethishization" all "cultural and material borders." (N, 133) Careful reading of appropriate passages in

Imperium leaves no doubt that such interpretations of the book result from misunderstanding it. Kapuściński himself approaches this issue, which humanity treats in a very obsessive manner, with a healthy dose of irony: "There is no end to the cemeteries of those who have been killed the world over in the defense of borders. Equally boundless are the cemeteries of the audacious who attempted to expand their borders." (I, 20) Meanwhile, in generalized meanings ascribed to images of barbed wire, fences, and ruthless sentries, we will not observe approval for imposed divisions or pronouncements "declaring attempts to overcome them futile and even dangerous," but rather a warning of their subjugating function.

Fear of mixing cultures that Waldstein attributes to Kapuściński reappears in the context of the different attitudes displayed by those condemned to labor camps by the Stalinist regime, represented in the book by two men: the Austrian Weisler (called Weissberg in *Imperium*) and the Russian Shalamov. Is this truly great example of differences between Eastern and Western cultures, further emphasized in the Polish edition by references to the Russian philosopher Vladimir Solovyov, supposed to be a warning against the "overcoming of boundaries between civilizations," (N, 134) therefore a warning against applying "Western" thinking to evaluate "Oriental" realities? It would seem that *Imperium* is about something else entirely. At its heart lies a message that "Western thinking" leads us "astray" only when it appears as an aberration and exception among widespread acceptance of present realities, like, for example, in Ufa, where "people […] accept all misfortunes, even those caused by the soullessness and stupidity of those in power, as the excesses of an omnipotent and capricious nature." (I, 165) It is not a coincidence that the name of Herling-Grudziński, a man who managed to retain an attitude characterized by an indomitable sense of inner independence even in the depths of the gulag, is used to provide the context for the portrayal of "a world apart." Surely, this juxtaposition of attitudes features a very clear valuation element, yet it does not express a desire to reinforce and consolidate the frontiers of civilization. It is more about the crossing of boundaries, commonly associated with the spreading and fostering of highly appreciated values.

Waldstein depreciates those of Kapuściński's declarations that could possibly subvert the image of the Polish traveller that he constructed. For example, he labels Kapuściński's deliberations on the multitude of coexisting cultures "cultural relativism," while explaining the concept of a "universal culture of tolerance" as something "infringing" upon the borders of 'others,' that simultaneously enables the "West" to erect "external barriers" to separate itself from the same 'others.' (N, 135) Nothing Kapuściński writes seems neutral to Waldstein. For the scholar, even invoking the name of Bronisław Malinowski while exploring the theory of multicultural societies smacks of

the efforts of Stalinist ideologues, who managed to attribute all of the major scientific breakthroughs to Russian scientists.

It is not surprising, then, that Waldstein's interpretation one of the book's most important themes, the issue of the Russian empire's colonialist aspiration, follows to his previously discussed tactic of refusing to acknowledge uncomfortable truths, even going as far as alleging their inauthenticity. Waldstein connects the "guilty conscience" of colonizers, mentioned by Kapuściński in the context of the mass exodus of Russians from Central Asian republics in the early 1990s, with the question about whether Russians have any right "to call Siberia their home," (N, 136) ignoring the glaringly obvious problem of Russian claims to the territories of modern Azerbaijan or Georgia. He misconstrues the story of the Polish reporter's journey to Baku, introducing the theme of the Russian woman who took care of the illness-stricken Kapuściński; curiously enough, her nationality was never addressed in *Imperium*.[15] Quoting research asserting that "Soviet authorities bolstered the 'titular' nationalities of the republics, often at the expense of local Russian populations,"[16] Waldstein decides that the colonial and tyrannical "subtexts" of Russian presence in Central Asia is "more than questionable." (N, 136) Thus, in his diagnosis of Soviet imperialism, he wishes to replace the metropolis—colonies relationship with the bond between the center and the peripheries. Kapuściński is also accused of opportunism, because although the writer "lauded the efforts of Russians, whom he called masters of immense overhaul projects, as European in nature" in 1967 – by "efforts" Kapuściński meant Soviet involvement in the Central Asian republics – in 1991 he was hard at work condemning the effects of Russian endeavors. (N, 138) However, even in that last case, the harsh appraisal seems hardly deserved. Aside from the fact that fragments of *Imperium* describing the journey to Central Asia,[17] reprinted from an earlier collection of reportages, were created in a very different intellectual climate, during an era marked by belief in the rectifying power of modernity and civilization and a much lesser awareness of the environmental tolls of technological progress, and given the political mood of the late 1960s, we would be hard-pressed to find any sort of unambiguous

15 The goal, of course, is to discredit the attitude of the Polish writer who was to express his "gratitude" for the way he was looked after by treating the woman as a "case study" illustrating the terror of the "guilty conscience." Actually, the person who took care of Kapuściński certainly was not a "Russian from 17 Pouchin Street"; notice that when she gives the writer her keys to her Baku apartment while they're still in Moscow, she tells him: "I will never go back there again." (I, 132)

16 Waldstein himself admits that the empirical value of this data is questionable at best. (N, 137)

17 They were taken from Kapuściński's *The Kirghiz Dismounts* published in Warsaw in 1968.

praise heaped upon Russia's civilizing mission in Kapuściński's portrayal of the Central Asian republics.[18]

All of these observations lead us to the principal assumption of the article, one which shifts the focus of the polemic from arguing over this or another portrayal of Russia to attacking Ryszard Kapuściński, a denizen of Eastern Europe, who "usurps the right" to serve as the representative of the West in the eyes of the Russians, and not, as Waldstein suggests, into discussing the literary construct of the "'traveller' as the protagonist of his story."[19] (N, 138--139) Such a reading of *Imperium* implies that it is not a literary text but a work of propaganda that was supposed to "influence Western public opinion in hopes of being granted a voice and a seat at the table" when Poland is institutionally incorporated into Western European institutions.[20] (N, 142) The self-aggrandizing efforts of the writer are supposedly connected with his demonstrative endeavors to purge his past of any links to the imperium.[21] Depriving the writer of his biography is very important in Waldstein's argumentation. By facilitating the negation of Kapuściński's right to evaluate the reality of which he is a part of, it shifts the struggle for his own identity and the reckoning with the empire as a real threat to the world onto a plane populated with abstract (and theoretical) deliberations and temporary political interests. This denial of the writer's self-identification as Polish serves to "remove any trace of historicity" from his work;[22] a "foreigner" and a "Westerner" who

18 cf. also A. Chomiuk, "Dekonstruowanie imperium. Rosyjskie reportaże Ryszarda Kapuścińskiego," *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 6 (2003): 148-149.

19 After all, he has already been revealed to be a usurper by the Russians he meets in his travels, as they "did not consider Poland to be 'abroad,' while Kapuściński was not a 'true' foreigner." (N, 139)

20 Take note that Waldstein's article was published right before Poland was admitted into the European Union.

21 I decided against bringing up arguments indicating the personal and autobiographical nature of Kapuściński's story, extensively explored by Polish scholars in their efforts to interpret the book. (cf. *inter alia*, Z. Ziątek, "Wymiary uczestnictwa (Ryszard Kapuściński)" in: *Sporne postaci polskiej literatury współczesnej. Kontynuacje*, ed. A. Grodzka and L. Burska (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 1996), 157-178;
J. Jarzębski, "Wędrówka po Imperium" in: J. Jarzębski, *Apetyt na Przemianę. Notatki o prozie współczesnej*, (Kraków: Znak, 1997), 82-89; J. Jarzębski, "Kapuściński: od reportażu do literatury" in: *Maski współczesności. O literaturze i kulturze XX wieku*, eds. L. Burska and M. Zaleski (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2001), 209-210; A. Chomiuk, "Dekonstruowanie imperium".

22 Just as Kapuściński, according to Waldstein, ostensibly purges Russia of its historicity by not seeing the "vast political, ideological, and human gulf between the tsarist and Soviet periods" in its history (N, 134) and exposing the continuity of oppression under both systems instead.

could easily pass for a US citizen has no other identity aside from the one marked by "anti-Eastern leanings," which apparently "justifies" the scholar's reluctance to bring up any passages from *Imperium* that discuss Russian and Soviet persecution of Poles. (Mentioning these passages is unnecessary, given that "in the last two hundred years, Polish-Russian relations resembled more the relationship between Germany and France rather than the one between France and Algiers," N, 128). Putting the narrator in this ambiguous position, simultaneously internal and external, would subvert the thesis claiming that Kapuściński fostered an aversion towards liminality and hybridity. However, in light of the above, another Polish writer and author of *A Warsaw Diary*, Kazimierz Brandys, becomes a positive character in Waldstein's investigative discourse. Brandys' hypothesis about the dangerous proximity of "us" and "them" leads to author of the article to claim that the inhabitants of Eastern Europe are spiritually "tainted," which prevents them from fully becoming Westerners. (cf. N, 140) Therefore, according to Waldstein, Brandys discloses what Kapuściński will not, the latter emphasizing his position by "generalizing, throwing wild blows, erecting insurmountable barriers." (N, 142)

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Let us conclude the article by pointing out the main findings we can glean from a close and careful reading of Waldstein's work, whose novelty and innovative nature are unfortunately obscured by more important objectives. Disguising a valuating generalization as a postcolonial study offers multiple advantages and benefits to the author, the majority of them going significantly beyond describing mechanisms behind cultural "appropriation" of the world portrayed in one of many travelogues about Russia. The practicality of such actions reveals itself on multiple levels. Firstly, they are an attempt at forestalling or at least neutralizing scholarly efforts that would unveil the tendency of Russia to inscribe its subordinate nations into its own sphere of political and cultural categories,[23] an argument asserting that Russia is the first victim of "orientalizing" efforts. Additionally, it once again charges that a reflection on the complex relationship between Russia and the West, if written by a Pole, has to be biased, and that "unmasking" the obsessions reigning over any such analysis, fixations that preclude any possibility of an objective approach, leads to the inevitable disclosure of its low artistic value and its worthlessness in the eyes of the West. Finally, employing postcolonial methodologies becomes

23 cf. e.g. E. Thompson, *Trubadurzy imperium*; C. Cavanagh, "Postcolonial Poland: A Blank Space on the Map of Contemporary Theory," *Second Texts* 2-3 (2003): 60-71, A. Fiut, "Polonization? Colonization?," *Second Texts* 6 (2003): 150-156

a way for Waldstein to discredit the idea of Western European identities springing up in countries that were only just liberated from the Soviet yoke. Let us once again expose the paradox underlying Waldstein's article. Disputing Poland's right to manifest its pro-Western propinquity, justified therein by the presumed existence of a Central European "anomaly," (N, 140) reveals a basic contradiction between the author's declarative aversion towards any kind of ideological schematizations and his own "orientalizing" proclivities, which manifest themselves in his attempts to expose the "oriental" nature of the author of *Imperium.*

Translation: Jan Szelągiewicz

Paweł Zajas

Lost Cosmonauts: On Ryszard Kapuściński's Imperium and Its Critics – Once More

When writing about a book whose author is well-known all over the world, analyzed by hosts of critics and literary experts, it is good to delay – if only for a moment – the need to quote all the names and commentaries discussing the book or its author. I would like to draw the reader's attention to two texts recently published concerning Russia. The first, Yuri Afanasyev's historical essay entitled *Kamienna Rosja, martwy lud* (*Stone Russia, dead people*) was published in one of Poland's leading dailies[1] *Gazeta Wyborcza*. The second was Daniel Kalder's *Lost Cosmonaut*, a fictional account of the "rotting interior of an empire."[2] Afanasyev's essay has been afforded special status by the editorial board of *Gazeta Wyborcza* who designed the layout of the essay in such a fashion as to allow it to be pulled out of the newspaper and be kept as a brochure – a guidebook of sorts for the dark and dingy imperial history of Poland's eastern neighbor. The

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1 Afanasyev, Y. "Kamienna Rosja, martwy lud" (original Polish title). In *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 24-25.01.2009, 11-30.

2 Stasiuk, A. "Introduction" to: Kalder, D. *Zagubiony kosmonauta* (*Lost Cosmonaut: Observations of an Anti-Tourist*). Wydawnictwo Czarne. Wołowiec. 2008, 6.

author's main premise – spread over eleven richly-illustrated, newspaper format pages, replete with informative footnotes – is to show the essential unchangeability of Russia, which has, it seems, been locked into Tatar/Great Horde-like structures for aeons, creeping slowly from "bad to worse."[3]

Russia has in no way forsaken totalitarianism and its modern elites are in no way different from the depraved Stalinists of years ago. In fact, in many ways their antics were more depraved than the worse "filth" of the Soviet system. The distinguished expert on Russian ideas, Andrzej Walicki, rejected the offer of discussing the article believing it to be an attempt at "legalizing extremism" and being "grist to the mill for traditional Polish Russophobia."[4] On the other hand, the young Scottish journalist and traveller Daniel Kalder book has written a book which is a fragmentary and chaotic collection of absurd stories amassed during his wanderings around several former Soviet republics. Andrzej Stasiuk, Poland's unrivalled anti-tourist, writes in the introduction: "a thirty-year-old Scotsman who wanted to see what 'nothing' looked like, set off on a journey to the heart of Russia, or to be precise the Russian Federation, and his dream came true completely."[5] He found "old, cracked concrete buildings, shreds of plastic wraps fluttering about, stench, rust, squalor, a caricature of a culture, piss, a dead fox and cement-grey boredom."[6]

What do these two texts have in common with *Imperium*? In answer to this question I shall analyse certain aspects of both books and the opinion of critics and literary experts. I realize that this is a rather curious introduction to a text about Ryszard Kapuściński, who was without a doubt one of Poland greatest twentieth century writers and reporters. My reading of his book on Russia is not a malicious criticism, or a futile attempt to undermine his prestige. What is more, I do not want to join the throngs of "jealous devil's advocates."[7] I would like to draw attention to the fact that writing on Kapuściński often

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3 Afanasyev, Y. "Kamienna Rosja, martwy lud." In *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 24-25.01.2009, 12, 28.

4 Walicki, A. "Afanasjew, sojusznik polskiej rusofobii" (Afanasyev: Ally of Polish Russophobia"). In *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 31.01-01.02.2009, 16.

5 Stasiuk, A. "Introduction" to: Kalder, D. *Zagubiony kosmonauta* (*Lost Cosmonaut: Observations of an Anti-Tourist*). Wydawnictwo Czarne. Wołowiec. 2008, 5.

6 ibid., 6.

7 Pisarek, W. "O twórczości Ryszarda Kapuścińskiego w związku z ewentualnym postępowaniem nadanie mu tytułu Professor honoris causa Republicae Polonicae." ("On the Work of Ryszard Kapuściński in Relation to the Idea of the Author Receiving an Honorary Republicae Polonicae Doctorate"). In *"Życie jest z przenikania..." Szkice o twórczości Ryszarda Kapuścińskiego* (*Notes on the Work of Ryszard Kapuściński*). Edit. Wróblewski, B. PIT. Warszawa. 2008, 21.

equates to writing about the author himself rather than his texts and that all reservations are marked as criticism or methodological incompetence. The ubiquitous generalizations made by the author of *Shah of Shahs* which in every other situation would most certainly be seen as painfully stereotypical, are called "metaphorical generalizations, distilling the general characteristics of the world presented herein.[8] This overly cautious approach to analysing the work of Ryszard Kapuściński is visible in these two complementary works which were published at the end of 2008: the first full biography of the writer[9] and a volume of articles, thoughts and papers[10] dedicated to Kapuściński. If one reads *Imperium* (as well as the similarly-composed *The Shadow of the Sun*, which I will not be discussing here), it is worth paying attention to how Kapuściński shapes his own image as an authority on ethnography in order to later arbitrarily and wantonly make use of this "authority."[11]

Let us begin with another consideration of the critical voices, of which Maxim K. Waldstein's *A Postcolonial Reading of Ryszard Kapuscinski's Account of Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia* seems to be the most significant.[12] The importance of the Russian literary scholar's voice (who works at an American University) largely rests upon a novel line of argument (discussed later) rather than the impact of the article on the Polish research community. The only objective discussion of Waldstein is Aleksandra Chomiuk's riposte,[13] the others either recapitulate Waldstein's thesis[14] without criticizing it or believe his text to be

8 Chomiuk, A. "'Prawdziwa' rzeczywistość i 'punkty widzenia.' Ryszard Kapuściński i Mariusz Wilk o Rosji na przełomie epok" ("'Real' Reality and 'Points of View.' Ryszard Kapuściński and Mariusz Wilk on Russia...." In *Wokół reportażu podróżniczego*. (*On Travel Reportage*). Edit. Malinowski, E; Rotta, D. Wydawnictwo UŚ. Katowice. 2004, 226.

9 Nowacka, B.; Ziątek, Z. *Ryszard Kapuściński. Biografia pisarza (Ryszard Kapuściński: A Biography of the Writer*). Znak. Kraków. 2008.

10 *"Życie jest z przenikania..." Szkice o twórczości Ryszarda Kapuścińskiego* (*Notes on the Work of Ryszard Kapuściński*). Edit. Wróblewski, B. PIT. Warszawa. 2008.

11 It is worth noting that the research of Paweł Zajas was completed before the publication of Artur Domosławski's *Kapuściński Non-Fiction* (Świat Książki. Warszawa. 2010). Editor's note.

12 Waldstein, K. Maxim. "Observing Imperium: A Postcolonial Reading of Ryszard Kapuscinski's Account of Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia." *Social Identities*. 3 (8). (2002): 481-499.

13 Chomiuk, A. "'Nowy markiz de Custine' albo historia pewnej manipulacji" ("'The New Marquise de Custine' or a Story of a Certain Manipulation"). *Teksty Drugie* 1/2 (2006): 310-319.

14 See: Janion, M. *Niesamowita Słowiańszczyzna. Fantazmaty literatury* (*Amazing Slavdom: The Fantasies of Literature*). WL. Kraków. 2006, 229-235. Janion presents the main arguments of Waldstein in the context of a chapter on Polish "orientalizing" in Polish-Russian relations. Janion previously used Waldstein's line of argument in the context of the east-west division of Polish identity in her "Polska między Wschodem a Zachodem" ("Poland between East and

an example of a "caricatured interpretation" of postcolonial theory.[15] Regardless of one's opinion of Waldstein's article, it is surely symptomatic that only three people decided to reply to this important voice from outside. What is more, only one of the replies, Aleksandra's Chomiuk's, came in the form of a polemic. In her assessment, the Russian's work is "original and revealing." Chomiuk quite rightly highlights the ideological entanglement of his text. Waldstein falsely idealizes Polish-Russian relations; negates the repressive nature of Russian colonialism as well as Polish awareness of political dependency on Russia; he passes over the Russian orientalizing approach to Poland; attempts to dehistoricize Kapuściński (by smoothing away the writer's own view) and claims that Kapuściński creates an image of Russia as a pathological Other in order to minimalize the marginalization of Poland (Central Europe) in the eyes of western readers. Kapuściński, therefore, highlights the concerns of Milan Kundera and Marian Brandys regarding the dangerous proximity of "us" and "them."

However, instead of being content with obvious abuses regarding the interpretation of the text and its historical context, Chomiuk herself unnecessarily ideologizes what she says thereby weakening its polemical force. On the last page of his article, Waldstein concludes that Kapuściński wrote *Imperium* at a time when Western Europe was ready to "take over the trio of Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary," which meant there was a need to demonstrate that the intellectuals of Central Europe "did not have anything in common with the great emptiness to their east."[16] Chomiuk replies to Waldstein in the same ideological tone, accusing him of opportunism and trying to "disgrace the idea that the countries recently freed of Soviet domination had a western European identity" claiming that the date of the text's publication (2002) was of no coincidence in that it overlapped with Poland's plans to join western European political structures. Chomiuk rightly condemns Waldstein and gives numerous examples of his "particular reading of *Imperium*, his selective excerpts and quotations," however, she appears to begrudge the Russian

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West"), *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2000): 131-149. This recapitulation does not include reference to particular fragments in Waldstein that are too ideological. Janion also refers to Chomiuk in the footnotes, however, dulling the tone and real meaning. She writes "the main thesis of the author is that the Russians have been seeking to 'orientalize' Poland, not the other way around." (ibid., 252).

15 Domańska, E. *Badania postkolonialne* (*Postcolonial Research*), an afterword to Gandhi, L. *Teoria postkolonialna. Wprowdzenie krytyczne* (*Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*). Polish translation by Serwański, J. Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, Poznań. 2008, 164.

16 Waldstein, K. Maxim. "Observing Imperium: A Postcolonial Reading of Ryszard Kapuscinski's Account of Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia." *Social Identities*. 3 (8). (2002): 496.

literary scholar's critical analysis of Kapuściński's text claiming it is "an attempt to do the writer's job of representing himself... making Kapuściński's text redundant."[17] Do all disloyal interpretations deserve such an opinion, asks Chomiuk. She laments the fact that Waldstein "as early as in his introduction portrays Kapuściński's text as orientalist."[18] However, is not a clearly presented thesis a mark of a well-constructed piece of research? As always, the problem becomes one of poetics, as is so often the case when researchers begin discussing the legacy of the author of *The Emperor*.[19] Waldstein supposedly "dilutes the epistemic values of *Imperium*," by undertaking an unambiguous judgement of the text's referentiality."[20] However, two pages prior to this, Chomiuk makes a completely contrary accusation stating that the literary aspect and the ambiguity related to it as well as symbolism have been overlooked, which has therefore distorted the conclusions of the analysis.

These incoherent incriminations, after close consideration, seem to reflect the very nature of Kapuściński's (ethnographic) authority and prestige, which he so carefully and thoughtfully cultivated. His style is a combination of prestige and fictionality. As both a credible and world-famous journalist and writer, Kapuściński is like Flaubert's God present everywhere in the text, contriving various descriptions and explanations, adding personal confessions and the suchlike. He can play the role of a writer who "does not for one moment stop being a reporter."[21] This is only possible thanks to the prestige in which he is held in the sphere of ethnography, built up in *Imperium*

17 Chomiuk, A. "'Nowy markiz de Custine' albo historia pewnej manipulacji" ("'The New Marquise de Custine' or a Story of a Certain Manipulation"). *Teksty Drugie* 1/2 (2006): 312.

18 ibid.

19 A review of discussions on the poetics of Kapuściński's word can be found in the *Wprowadzenie* (*Introduction*) to Beata Nowacka's *Magiczne dziennikarstwo. Ryszard Kapuściński w oczach krytyków.* (*Magical Journalism: Ryszard Kapuściński in the Eyes of Critics*). Wydawnictwo UŚ. Katowice. 11-23.

20 Chomiuk, A. "'Nowy markiz de Custine' albo historia pewnej manipulacji" ("'The New Marquise de Custine' or a Story of a Certain Manipulation"). *Teksty Drugie* 1/2 (2006): 314.

21 Nowacka, B. *Magiczne dziennikarstwo. Ryszard Kapuściński w oczach krytyków.* (*Magical Journalism: Ryszard Kapuściński in the Eyes of Critics*). Wydawnictwo UŚ. Katowice. 23. The issue of fictionality and facts overlapping collected during "field work" is not, as Nowacka puts it, an "academic problem," limited to "empty disputes between critics." This is not enough for Nowacka who, like Aleksandra Chomiuk, understands the popularity of Kapuściński and his place in world literature. She wants to see him both on shelves with "high literature" as well as on shelves with guidebooks on sociology and social anthropology. Nowacka ends the chapter in idiosyncratically emphatic fashion: "In absolutely no way can one agree with the idea that Ryszard Kapuściński crossed the line between journalism and literature. He invalidated it!" (ibid.).

in three parts: the ethnographic signature of "being there";[22] traces of personal experience and thirdly the attitude of being an anti-tourist which is highlighted throughout by the author. As someone who respected the work of Bronisław Malinowski, Kapuściński knew full well the importance of the first part, a *sine qua non* for the credibility of field work. He knew that it is not conceptual elegance or the extensiveness of a description that convinces the reader that the ethnographic text is credible but the ability to convince the reader that the text in question is the result of an actual distortion of another way of life, a result of "being there." This feature of ethnographic texts is so clear and prominent that it is often overlooked or only marginally recognized. The forthright nature of the statements in the text remind one of those that might be found in a stolen letter – they are impossible to verify. Therefore, the reader believes everything (the given time and place, the informants and the cultural conditioning of the ethnographer) or nothing at all[23]. In *Autoportret reportera* (*A Reporter's Self Portrait*), a commentary of sorts of his own work and writing methods, Kapuściński highlights the fact that, "I write 'from my travels,' I am not a 'dreamer.' I do not describe my own world or some imagined one; I describe a world that really exits"[24]. Several pages on we read: "For me, what I have to say takes on real worth due to the fact that I was actually there and witnessed those events. There is an element of egotism in how I write: I might complain about the heat, hunger or pain but the fact that I experienced it all makes it authentic."[25]

The signature left behind by the author is intrinsically linked to the second element of his ethnographic prestige and authority in the biographical traces he leaves in the text. Elżbieta Dąbrowska notices that *Imperium* is preceded with an introduction which is some ways a "referential pact" that the author signs with the reader. The author informs us that the following text is a "personal account of his travels."[26] The stories from his hometown of Pińsk;

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22 Geertz, C. *Dzieło i życie. Antropolog jako autor* (*The Anthropologist as Author*). Polish translatioj by Dżurak, E; Sikora, S. Wydawnictwo KR. Warszawa. 2000, 13-14.

23 ibid., 14.

24 Kapuściński, Ryszard. *Autoportret reportera* (*A Reporter's Self Portrait*), Biblioteka Gazety Wyborczej. Warszawa. 2008, 13.

25 ibid., 53. Emphasis mine –Z.

26 Dąbrowska, E. "Od rzeczywistości do języka i tekstu – Ryszarda Kapuścińskiego opisywanie 'Imperium'." ("From Reality to Language and Text – Describing Ryszard Kapuściński's 'Imperium'") In *Wędrować, pielgrzymować, być turystą. Podróż w dyskursach kultury.* (*Wanderings, Pilgramages, Being a Tourist: A Journey in Discourses of Cultures*). Edit. Kowalski, Katedra Kulturoznawsta i Folkrorystyki Uniwersytetu Opolskiego. Opole. 95.

seeing the Red Army, "those savage faces, sweaty and angry," a drunken artilleryman firing at a church steeple[27] and his literary vision of the poverty of the first months of the war create an important interpretive framework and guideline for the reader: the author knows full well the empire he is describing and this gives him every right to travel across both space and time. However, Kapuściński's authority would not be complete without the third element: the idea of the anti-tourist. Kapuściński is convincing as he does not confine himself, as the author himself declares, to describing the "stage" upon which many events take place but he also continues to look behind the scenes. He is not interested in the centre of the world but he is "intent on immersing himself in the exceptions, the forgotten corners and backyards."[28] Kapuściński is a traveller but he despises tourists:

> When traveling and reporting, no tourism of any sort is involved. Reportage demands a great deal of hard work and theoretical preparation in order to collect information about the area to which one is going. This kind of travelling is never relaxing... When someone hears that a reporter has been in the Congo and he says that he's also been there and seen this and that, then they're talking about two different kinds of travelling. They are two different ways of experiencing and perceiving the world.[29]

Being a reporter is a mission in which one has to live like the people one is describing, "in order to experience and understand Africa, one has to eat and drink like an African."[30] This once again brings to mind Daniel Kalder's work which – should one have a sense of humor – could be interpreted as a caricature of *Imperium*. Unlike Kapuściński's work which begins with a great many quotations, in Kalder's we find an anti-tourist's manifesto readily adorning every page of his travels around Russia. Kalder decides to "forget about the center" and "wander around the tower blocks, take a peek inside an open window, take a photo of graffiti that decorates a grey wall, retrieve an old, worn-out teddy bear from a pile of rubbish and listen to people chatting..."[31]

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27 Kapuściński, Ryszard. *Imperium.* Czytelnik. Warszawa. 2007, 8, 15.

28 Nowacka, B.; Ziątek, Z. *Ryszard Kapuściński. Biografia pisarza (Ryszard Kapuściński: A Biography of the Writer*). Znak. Kraków. 2008, 116.

29 Kapuściński, Ryszard. *Autoportret reportera* (*A Reporter's Self Portrait*), Biblioteka Gazety Wyborczej. Warszawa. 2008, 13.

30 ibid., 39.

31 Kalder, D. *Zagubiony kosmonauta* (*Lost Cosmonaut. Observations of an Anti-Tourist*). Wydawnictwo Czarne. Wołowiec. 2008, 229.

He behaves like Kapuściński from the critical reaction of Mariusz Wilk: "a few days here, a few days there and with every hole a new chapter."[32] In comparison to the great master, the young Scotsman has a much less inferential character believing that "one can travel around in circles but one still will not understand anything." An "intellectual chaos" prevails over the need to enlighten and the reader is told that even though the writer loves truth, "he does not despise lies. Especially his own."[33]

On a more serious note, in Kapuściński's case, we have an author who is aware of the fact that the reader needs to be convinced that every word written on every page is a real description of what really happened. What does the writer do with the trust that he has so meticulously worked to gain? How does he make use of this carefully-shaped ethnographic authority and prestige? According to Zbigniew Bauer, Kapuściński was aware of the problem that "he could well have written something about the decaying state of the tsars and first secretaries solely on the basis of reference books and press articles, but he decided to experience the murderous journey ... in order to see the superpower first-hand without any go-betweens."[34] However, the problem is that the trust for and admiration of the author who "was there" is overshadowed, in the opinion of most critics, by the fact that there are few traces of "field experience" that can be found in the text. In the first part of the book we only have fifteen informants, who Kapuściński names. Their role is to create reference points for more general considerations based on previous readings (the number of people corresponds roughly to the number of sub-chapters: one person, one story). This is a poetics of "excerpts," the characters who the author meets are not fleshed out in detail. In his approach to the description of an ethnographic experience, Kapuściński reminds us not of Bronisław Malinowski whom the author greatly admired, but rather more of the allegorical title page showing an armchair ethnographer of the 1724 *Customs of the American Indians* by Joseph-Francois Lafitau. It shows a young female ethnographer sitting at a writing desk surrounded by artefacts from the New World, Ancient Greece and Egypt. She is accompanied by two cherubs helping her in her comparative work as well as the bearded figure of Father Time pointing to a painting of God, the real source

32 Wilk, M. *Wilczy notes* (*The Journals of a White Sea Wolf*). słowo/obraz terytoria. Gdańsk. 1998, 60.

33 ibid., 14.

34 Bauer, Z. *Paradoksy prawdy. Pisarskie wybory Ryszarda Kapuścińskiego* (*Paradoxes of Truth: Ryszard Kapuściński's Choices as a Writer*). In *"Życie jest z przenikania..." Szkice o twórczości Ryszarda Kapuścińskiego* (*Notes on the Work of Ryszard Kapuściński*). Edit. Wróblewski, B. PIT. Warszawa. 2008, 43.

of all truth emanating from the scientist's pen.[35] The exponent of personal experience is secondary, literary testimony and borrowed voices collected more carefully than the voices of natives. I do not for one moment doubt the empathy that Kapuściński had for the people he met and I do not doubt his personal commitment to inter-human relations. There is more than enough evidence that testifies to this fact. I do, however, wish to point out that there is next to nothing of this direct experience in his text.

In writing that the power of Kapuściński's ethnographic authority may have dulled the alertness of critics, I do not claim that they do not at all notice the "excerptive" nature of his book. However, reactions to this are restrained and are not openly critical. Zbigniew Bauer detects Kapuściński's need to "be among texts" and reminds us that Kapuściński was himself a great advocate of using quotations professing the views of Walter Benjamin in the idea that a book of quotations would be the "perfect book."[36] Kapuściński's biographers, Beata Nowicka and Zygmunt Ziątek, write (in the context of the *Lapidarium* series, although this can also be applied to *Imperium*) that in terms of poetics, the work of Kapuściński can be viewed as a cento, a literary composition made up of quotations. This crypto-criticism needs to be immediately annotated with a quotation from the author himself, who tells us that "quotations give a text plasticity" thanks to which they take on "cubist qualities."[37] Małgorzata Czermińska praises the "quoted" nature of *Imperium* calling it "interlocutory" with it being a "question as to the voice of the reporter and his relationship to other voices, which he allows to resonate in his texts"[38]. An interesting observation, albeit extremely cautious in its argumentation, is the aforementioned article by Elżbieta Dąbrowska. The excerpts, which are covered in a sixty-book bibliography at the end of his work, Dąbrowska

35 Clifford, J. *Kłopoty z kulturą. Dwudziestowieczna etnografia, literatura i sztuka* (*Troubles with Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature and Art*). Translation by Dżurak, E. et al. Wydawnictwo KR. Warszawa. 2000, 29.

36 Bauer, Z. *Paradoksy prawdy. Pisarskie wybory Ryszarda Kapuścińskiego* (*Paradoxes of Truth: Ryszard Kapuściński's Choices as a Writer*). In *"Życie jest z przenikania..." Szkice o twórczości Ryszarda Kapuścińskiego* (*Notes on the Work of Ryszard Kapuściński*). Edit. Wróblewski, B. PIT. Warszawa. 2008, 45.

37 Nowacka, B.; Ziątek, Z. *Ryszard Kapuściński. Biografia pisarza (Ryszard Kapuściński. A Biography of the Writer*). Znak. Kraków. 2008, 288.

38 Czermińska, M. *Głosy rodziny człowieczej czyli o sztuce pisarskiej Ryszarda Kapuścińskiego* (*The Voice of the Human Family or the Art of Ryszard Kapuściński's Writing.* In *"Życie jest z przenikania..." Szkice o twórczości Ryszarda Kapuścińskiego* (*Notes on the Work of Ryszard Kapuściński*). Edit. Wróblewski, B. PIT. Warszawa. 2008, 21.

calls a "particular form of polyphony of a multi-faceted foreign voice."[39] According to Dąbrowska, the presence of somebody else's observations and reflections allows Kapuściński to "compose interlocutory content" confirming the "Gadamerian conviction that we 'understand the world only when we talk about it with ourselves … and that sense in life is formed during linguistic communication.'"[40] However, Dąbrowska concludes her argumentation in vague fashion and is seemingly critical of Kapuściński's "transtextual travels." She refers to Mariusz Wilk: "Repeating the same journey loses all meaning, like searching for footprints in a swamp. The act of writing 'finds its own path, stomping on the firm ground that is language rather than tundra' and this means that 'the text is more real than the world, which is a pre-text for the world.'"[41] A criticism both delicate and measured, albeit accurate.

Let us return for a moment to Waldstein. Even though Chomiuk admits that he is "interesting" in that he "reveals the mechanisms of cultural translation" and "strips away the ambiguity of the relations between the traveler and the world he describes," the reader of Chomiuk's article will not discover which fragments of Waldstein's reading of *Imperium* are deemed by her to be valid, worthy of mention and methodologically motivated. Herein, I believe, we find a clear example of the Polish approach to writing about Kapuściński: criticism of his work will never be expressed directly and if it does appear it is always relegated to footnotes, ambiguous allusions as well as the tried and tested method of referring to foreign (as is often the

39 Dąbrowska, E. "Od rzeczywistości do języka i tekstu – Ryszarda Kapuścińskiego opisywanie 'Imperium'." ("From Reality to Language and Text – Describing Ryszard Kapuściński's 'Imperium'.") In *Wędrować, pielgrzymować, być turystą. Podróż w dyskursach kultury.* (*Wanderings, Pilgramages, Being a Tourist: A Journey in Discourses of Cultures*). Edit. Kowalski, Katedra Kulturoznawsta i Folkrorystyki Uniwersytetu Opolskiego. Opole. 96.

40 Michalski, K. "Wstęp" ("Introduction"). In Gadamer, H.-G. *Rozum, słowo, dzieje. Szkice wybrane* (*Mind, Word, Stories: Selected Essays*). Selected and prepared by Michalski, K. Translated by Łukaszkiewicz, M.. PIW. Warszawa. 2000, 13; after Dąbrowska, E. "Od rzeczywistości do języka i tekstu – Ryszarda Kapuścińskiego opisywanie 'Imperium'." ("From Reality to Language and Text – Describing Ryszard Kapuściński's 'Imperium'.") In *Wędrować, pielgrzymować, być turystą. Podróż w dyskursach kultury.* (*Wanderings, Pilgramages, Being a Tourist: A Journey in Discourses of Cultures*). Edit. Kowalski, Katedra Kulturoznawsta i Folkrorystyki Uniwersytetu Opolskiego. Opole. 96.

41 Wilk, M. *Wilczy notes* (*The Journals of a White Sea Wolf*). słowo/obraz terytoria. Gdańsk. 1998, 225. After Dąbrowska, E. "Od rzeczywistości do języka i tekstu – Ryszarda Kapuścińskiego opisywanie 'Imperium'." ("From Reality to Language and Text – Describing Ryszard Kapuściński's 'Imperium'.") In *Wędrować, pielgrzymować, być turystą. Podróż w dyskursach kultury.* (*Wanderings, Pilgramages, Being a Tourist: A Journey in Discourses of Cultures*). Edit. Kowalski, Katedra Kulturoznawsta i Folkrorystyki Uniwersytetu Opolskiego. Opole. 108.

case) devil's advocates[42]. In my opinion, it is worth returning once again to the more interesting points of Waldstein's criticism of Kapuściński: his fetishization of both wildlife and nature in *Imperium* and his persistent need to demonstrate the "stereotypical" nature of Russian thinking.

For Maxim Waldstein, an example of the fetishization of Russian nature by Kapuściński is his description of Siberia. Chomiuk refers to this part of Waldstein's work in the following way: the writer is accused of using the desolate landscape as a way of contemplating tsarist and Russian slavery; Kapuściński blurs the differences between the natural environment and his own prejudices erasing the presence of the peoples prior to this (in order to show the violation of humanity by nature). The Polish writer conducted a caricature metaphorization of the Siberian whiteness in native cultures: white as the color of approval and acceptance of what may come. In doing so, according to Waldstein, Kapuściński was able to achieve something superficially impossible and "expose the 'supposedly white' Russians who were in fact 'black.'"[43] Chomiuk thus effectively neutralizes all criticism, pointing out its absurdity and weak points, however, she passes over the Russian literary scholar's argumentation, which highlights the "orientalizing"[44] perspective of *Imperium*, therefore, Chomiuk admits that it exists but does not elaborate on it. Waldstein quite rightly notices that even though nature is not in a central position in Kapuściński's narrative, when it does appear it draws all attention to itself. Based on his impressions of the landscape, Kapuściński dreams up far-reaching historical and sociological deliberations. Russian space is contrasted with European and in delving into the white, boundless desert landscape which accompanies a "feeling of falling into nothingness and disappearing,"[45] the author remembers Blaise Cendrars' poem *Prose of the Trans-Siberian and of Little Jehanne of France* and the conviction therein that Siberia is "a long way from

42 The technique of using critical references (to other authors) in footnotes can be found in Przemysław Czapliński's "Kłopoty z nowoczesnością" ("Problems with Modernity"). In *"Życie jest z przenikania..." Szkice o twórczości Ryszarda Kapuścińskiego* (*Notes on the Work of Ryszard Kapuściński*). Edit. Wróblewski, B. PIT. Warszawa. 2008, 279. Czapliński's text is the only objective piece of research, differing greatly from the remaining texts in this nostalgic and apologetic volume. Czapliński shows that Kapuściński's stubborn attempt to find the "heart of identity" and his assumption that identity is essential and given to each and every one of us, allows us to define Kapuściński as a "successor to modernism" (ibid. 287).

43 Chomiuk, A. "'Nowy markiz de Custine' albo historia pewnej manipulacji" ("'The New Marquise de Custine' or a Story of a Certain Manipulation"). *Teksty Drugie* 1/2 (2006): 314-315.

44 ibid., 312.

45 Kapuściński, Ryszard. *Imperium*. Czytelnik. Warszawa. 2007, 38.

Montmartre."[46] The author remains under the spell of "Nikolai Berdyaev's old book" about the effect of great expanses on the Russian soul:

> The enormity of Russia, beyond volume, has an effect on the way its people think. It does not require the people to focus or concentrate their energy or to dynamically create an intensive culture. Everything disperses, is diluted in a volumeless formlessness. Russia's great expanse, on the one hand wide and boundless and on the other overwhelmingly enormous, takes ones breath away and leaves one with no air to breath.[47]

Nature becomes a tool for "Romantic anthropology" in the works of Kapuściński. Beata Nowicka and Zygmunt Ziątek write:

> Thanks to the romantics, nature has taken on a completely new meaning. Before, it was a separate entity, a self-sufficient intellectual object, able to communicate weighty ideas... [Kapuściński] has deciphered the coded details of the secrets of this space.[48]

Kapuściński's vision of nature determining the political culture of its inhabitants, connecting the belief in the power of symbols to the belief in the magical power of the expanse, does not raise any doubts in the minds of the author's biographers about the orientalizing essence of Kapuściński's portrayal of the Others. They accept in full his imagined Geography which has been abducted by History. They notice that the description of the journey on the Trans-Siberian railway fits "worthily into the romantic Polish literary topos of Siberia"[49] (although it is difficult to pinpoint what this stereotypical "worthiness" entails). The "oceanic boundlessness"[50] of Russian nature,

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46 ibid.

47 ibid., 42. It is worth noting that Mariusz Wilk, a stern critic of Kapuściński, also attempts to find the connection between typical Russian features and the mentality of the 'eastern man'; like Berdyaev, he eagerly highlights the link between the muddy expanses of Russia and the passivity of its inhabitants. [Chomiuk, A. "'Prawdziwa' rzeczywistość i 'punkty widzenia.' Ryszard Kapuściński i Mariusz Wilk o Rosji na przełomie epok" ("'Real' Reality and 'Points of View': Ryszard Kapuściński and Mariusz Wilk on Russia...." In *Wokół reportażu podróżniczego*. (*On Travel Reportage*). Edit. Malinowski, E; Rotta, D. Wydawnictwo UŚ. Katowice. 2004, 227.]

48 Nowacka, B.; Ziątek, Z. *Ryszard Kapuściński. Biografia pisarza (Ryszard Kapuściński. A Biography of the Writer)*. Znak. Kraków. 2008. 117.

49 ibid. 303.

50 Kapuściński, Ryszard. *Imperium*. Czytelnik. Warszawa. 2007, 37.

its inhuman character determines all kinds of authoritarianism, collectivism, nationalism and lack of mobility. Therefore, Kapuściński constructs his own Geography in a Hegelian fashion, underpinning it with *Weltgeschichte* as well as teleological, evolutionistic and monocentric assumptions.[51] Russia is standing in the place where once Europe found itself, on the brink of the era of enlightened maturity. Waldstein makes a great deal of mistakes and trips up on his own polemical feverishness, but in one aspect he is correct: the Russian expanse is a negative point of reference for Kapuściński for individualistic, humanistic, European values (which Russia has been excluded from in his text).

The other interesting part of Waldstein's criticism is Kapuściński's belief in a "stereotypical" Russian mentality and its resistance to the effects of time. The argument used by the author of *Imperium* matches to some extent the line of thought used by Yuri Afanasyev in the above-mentioned essay. In the opinion of both authors Russia is stuck in a "rut" and in this they discern recurrence, changelessness, and an age-old structural stability linked to the spiritual and political sphere (Orthodoxy, messianism, and expansionism). The "passage of the last half millennium," rather than being a passage towards progress and growth, is more akin to a stumbling around history."[52] As Zygmunt Ziątek notes, Kapuściński sees the "two-hundred-year-old history of the construction, demolish and reconstruction of Moscow's Christ the Savior (Orthodox) Cathedral"[53] as a metaphor for the stability and changelessness of Russian civilization. It is difficult to guess if the observations of Kapuściński's biographer and researcher are simply the superficial and simplified thoughts of an explorer looking for the alleged longevity of the structures of this civilization and culture. Are the suspension points given at the end of the sub-chapter ironic...? This may be wishful thinking on my part as the critic notices that this method is later "perfected" [my emphasis] in *The Shadow of the Sun*. Kapuściński began to more frequently explore long epochs of time arriving at great cultural formations rather than look at "current political history and events." Kapuściński performed a "natural dehistoricization of his image of Africa; he discovered a spirit of African ancientness and otherness underneath

51 Sekiguchi, T. "Azja nie istnieje" ("Asia Does Not Exist"). In *Teksty Drugie* 4 (2008): 49-60.

52 Afanasyev, Y. "Kamienna Rosja, martwy lud." In *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 24-25.01.2009, 15, 16.

53 Ziątek, Z. "Powrócić do Pińska... O przemianach pisarstwa Ryszarda Kapuścińskiego po 1989 roku" ("Returning to Pińsk: On the Transformations of Ryszard Kapuściński's Writing after 1989"). In *"Życie jest z przenikania..." Szkice o twórczości Ryszarda Kapuścińskiego* (*Notes on the Work of Ryszard Kapuściński*). Edit. Wróblewski, B. PIT. Warszawa. 2008, 113.

and outside contemporary history."[54] I do not understand how ridding Africa of history and "ancientness" or "otherness" could in any way be seen as "natural." This is probably also the case for the critic who suggests that it is enough to "believe this test of the importance of African issues which he [Kapuściński] has afforded himself over his whole life as a reporter."[55] It seems that the distinct traces of "being there," the first element in the construction of the prestige and authority of an ethnographer, is alive and well.

There is, however, a critical difference between Yuri Afanasyev and Ryszard Kapuściński in their search for the Russian stamp of changelessness. The Russian political writer seems to be conscious of the rhetorical devices he uses. He highlights the fact that the terms "Russian rut," "Russian civilization," and "Russian system" are only valid on condition that the "reader realizes the conventionality, mechanicalness, and fatalistic determinism that lies within them and does not understand them literally."[56] I do not know whether Kapuściński was aware of this conventionality, if so he did not convey this awareness adequately. In *Autoportret reportera* (*A Reporter's Self Portrait*), a commentary to his own work, he mentions his attachment to the *Annales* school, which he defines as an attempt to "build a picture of the whole from details and retrieving from history only those elements that last for long periods, unchanging."[57] He points out that he also wished to retrieve these elements in *Imperium*:

> Communism is no longer here, Gorbachev is no longer here, perhaps Yeltsin will soon be gone, but that old woman in Siberia with her wooden hut, her poverty, and her way of thinking, her attempts to find inner peace and harmony and her immunity to life's adversities was always there and perhaps, I believe, she will be there for a long time.[58]

Let us clarify, in calling himself an "admirer of Bloch, Braudel, Febvre,"[59] Kapuściński does not have in mind the emulation of a modernist marriage of history and economy, sociology or social geography (the first stage of An-

54 ibid., 115, emphasis mine – Z.

55 ibid.

56 Afanasyev, Y. "Kamienna Rosja, martwy lud." In *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 24-25.01.2009, 15.

57 Kapuściński, Ryszard. *Autoportret reportera* (*A Reporter's Self Portrait*), Biblioteka Gazety Wyborczej. Warszawa. 2008, 16.

58 ibid.

59 ibid.

nales as purported by Ferdinand Braudel), but an attempt at following in the well-worn footsteps of historical anthropology (Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre).[60] It is telling that the methodology used for research on *mentalité*, usually covering the Middle Ages and the early part of the Modern Era, is used by Kapuściński in his description of modern Russia. When Marc Bloch looked at the Middle Ages and feudalism through the eyes of an anthropologist (and archaeologist), he treated pre-scribal ethnic groups as a material and spiritual unity and drew attention to the fact that in these cultures one cannot separate economic, social and political phenomena from magic, as they are intertwined as one *mentalité primitive*.[61] The historian-cum-anthropologist so often refers to the passage of time due to the fact that primitive societies were, allegedly, static with regards to development. Transferring this episteme to the realities of modern Russia is nothing other than its ethnicization, a suggestion that we are dealing with a non-causal world, a suspended society or a pre-modern entities residing in ahistorical timelessness. I doubt that using the "old woman in the wooden hut" metaphor is fortunate here in attempting to use the *la longue durée* method, as are a series of other stereotypical characters and metaphors outlined by Kapuściński who uses them to illustrate the discrepancy between Russian and Western culture (a Muscovite democrat *versus* a western politician,[62] the sweeping phrases of the Russian language *versus* the Cartesian discipline of a western-European language[63] as well as the servility of Varlam Shalamov with respect to Stalinist terror *versus* the obligatory rationalism in the land of the absurd of the Austrian communist Alexander Weissberg-Cybulski[64]). Aleksandra Chomiuk cannot understand why Maxim Waldstein does not like this "genuinely interesting example illustrating the difference between the cultures of the east and west."[65]

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60 Wrzosek, W. "Metafory historiograficzne w pogoni za ułudą prawdy" ("Historiographical Metaphors in the Pursuit of the Illusion of Truth"). In Domańska, E; Topolski, J; Wrzosek, W. *Między modernizmem a postmodernizmem. Historiografia wobec zmian w filozofii historii* (*Between Modernism and Postmodernism: Historiography in View of Changes in the Philosophy of History*). Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM. Poznań, 9, 11.

61 ibid., 13.

62 Kapuściński, Ryszard. *Imperium*. Czytelnik. Warszawa. 2007, 113.

63 ibid., 314-315.

64 ibid., 216.

65 Chomiuk, A. "'Nowy markiz de Custine' albo historia pewnej manipulacji" ("'The New Marquise de Custine' or a Story of a Certain Manipulation"). *Teksty Drugie* 1/2 (2006): 316.

Herein lies the problem, however not with Ryszard Kapuściński himself but with his critics. A writer is afforded much, however literary scholars cannot be guided by the one criterion in their work, which is their admiration of an author. When Elżbieta Dąbrowska writes that "his [Kapuściński's] descriptions paint a picture of a country which is both absurd and difficult to fathom for someone on the outside but for someone within the 'Empire' it is normal[66]," she can only be congratulated on her gift of empathy and ability to look at the world through the eyes of a Russian. The quandary that we face is that Waldstein, a person of the 'Empire' albeit working at a western University, does not agree with this vision and protests its generalizations. His voice is ignored and relegated to the category of a distortion of postcolonial theory.

The comparison between Ryszard Kapuściński's *Imperium* and Daniel Kalder's *Lost Cosmonaut* made at the start of this article may appear nonsensical or even iconoclastic at first glance, however after consideration we are able to state, albeit loftily, that when Kalder writes about Russia he offers up a popular version of an ethnographic paradigm of subjectiveness. Kapuściński, on the other hand, wishes to show us not only the objective truth but the eternal truth. What is more, there is a critical textual difference between the two. Whereas the young Scottish vagabond has an overall ironic approach but is respectful of the truth; Kapuściński continues to construct his athoroty as an ethnographer with piety, convincing us of the "authenticity" of his experiences all the while gathering together arbitrarily-ordered metaphors and "stereotypical" characters. Whereas Kalder presents his travels as a way of constructing an amusing story, the author of *Shah of Shahs* dedicates himself to earnestly constructing a realistic, cultural fiction. However, when this earnestness and grandiloquence spread to researchers and scholars, it cannot be commended.

Translation: Rafał Uzar

66 Dąbrowska, E. "Od rzeczywistości do języka i tekstu – Ryszarda Kapuścińskiego opisywanie 'Imperium'." ("From Reality to Language and Text – Describing Ryszard Kapuściński's 'Imperium'.") In *Wędrować, pielgrzymować, być turystą. Podróż w dyskursach kultury.* (*Wanderings, Pilgramages, Being a Tourist. A Journey in Discourses of Cultures*). Edit. Kowalski, Katedra Kulturoznawsta i Folkrorystyki Uniwersytetu Opolskiego. Opole. 105.

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