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AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL CULTURE

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Christine Brooke-Rose's *Remake*: Constraints as Modes of Loosening the Author

Abstract

The author analyses Christine Brooke-Rose's autobiographical novel *Remake* in light of three notions devised by cultural theorist Lauren Berlant: "loosening," "inconvenience," and "infrastructure." Brooke-Rose was a multilingual writer of fiction and non-fiction, a translator, literary critic, and academic teacher. She created peculiar lipograms as well as other kinds of constraints in her novels long before they became markers of the French group OuLiPo. The author of the article argues that the experimental, autofictional narratives she developed towards the end of her life – among them *Remake* – stemmed from her experiences of cultural and geographical exile, and as such may be interpreted through the lens of affect theory.

Keywords
Christine Brooke-Rose, *Remake*, Lauren Berlant, inconvenience, infrastructure

"To loosen an object is to make it available to transition," states Lauren Berlant in their posthumous book entitled *On the Inconvenience of Other People*.[1] What Berlant calls "loosening" in their essay devoted to dealing with the pressures of everyday life, the novelist Christine Brooke-Rose intuitively called "remaking" in her autobiographical – or anti-biographical, as

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1 Lauren Berlant, *On the Inconvenience of Other People* (Duke UP, 2022), 12.

she put it[2] – novel *Remake*.[3] The publisher's note prepares us for an affective *magnum opus*: "What happens when you try to find not only meaning but pattern and form in seventy years of a life? It's not a simple process of chronological remembering. It entails a *Remake*, to capture not facts but the contents of those facts, the feelings of a war-time child, the textures of her clothing, the tastes and smells, the tones and the touch of her mother, the felt absence of her father, and the gradual transformation into womanhood."

What Brooke-Rose delivers, though, is a treaty on the affective inconveniences that are generated when an author of experimental fiction who is highly fluent in the language of literary theory takes up the task of narrating their own life in the third person and present tense. The result resembles a manual on dealing with both memory and life-writing, as well as a very difficult book market – how do you make your own experiences "available to transition"? How do you create a linear narrative and offer it to the reader without distorting the contents of your life's facts until they become unrecognizable? How do you bear the emotional inconvenience that is generated when you rearrange your memories into a readable structure? These are all questions that concerned Brooke-Rose and Berlant throughout their careers, although the former never explicitly dealt with affects in her theoretical writings while the latter never wrote their own fiction.

By referring to the notion of inconvenience, I am drawing a link between the innovative prose of Brooke-Rose, whose last novel, *Life, End Of*, appeared in 2006, and Berlant's daring essay published posthumously in 2022, concluding the scholar's twenty-year-long career as a cultural theorist. Berlant argues that "'inconvenience' describes a feeling state that registers one's implication in the pressures of coexistence." They go on to say: "The biopolitical politics of inconvenience increases the ordinary pressure of getting in each other's way, magnifying the shaping duration of social friction within the mind's echo chambers and the structuring dynamics of the world."[4]

I argue that the linguistic constraints Brooke-Rose explores in *Remake*, such as the lack of possessive pronouns, and her characteristic approach to disguising life-writing as fiction, aim to make this state of inconvenience palpable – to the characters and, in consequence, to the readers themselves. The resulting "objectified narratorless mode,"[5] akin to the narrative style developed by authors of the French *nouveau roman* in which "no-one seems to

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2 Christine Brooke-Rose, "Remaking," *PN Review* 23, no. 3 (1997).

3 Christine Brooke-Rose, *Remake* (Carcanet, 1996).

4 Berlant, *On the Inconvenience*, 3–4.

5 Brooke-Rose's signature narrative style. See Christine Brooke-Rose, *Invisible Author: Last Essays* (Ohio UP, 2002), 58. Quoted in Karen R. Lawrence, *Techniques of the Living: Fiction and Theory in the Work of Christine Brooke-Rose* (Ohio State University Press, 2010), 177.

be speaking and the stories seem to be telling themselves,"[6] is the basis of Brooke-Rose's experiments. She was notoriously focused on silencing the voice of the central consciousness in the text, making narrative as self-sufficient as possible – sometimes to the point of creating something unreadable, as in the case of the Cockney-stylized dialogues in the novel *Next*.[7] I suggest that Brooke-Rose's narrative experiments and her proclivity for autofictional[8] storytelling are narratological counterparts to Berlant's concept of inconveniencing oneself, struggling to make something valuable out of an unnamed sense of apprehension experienced in various mundane contexts. Thus, both theorists were interested in working out strategies to metabolize inconvenience, the most mundane contemporary affect. To that end, Berlant states they produced "transitional figures for violently unequal normative experience that both make it vivid and refuse to reproduce its worst-case scenario as the Real, using phrases as objects to open the ordinary to transformation by shifting its associations and resonance."[9]

Although Brooke-Rose is referred to as a representative of the British neo-avant-garde, she was raised in Brussels and spent half of her life in France, while most of the research devoted to her works was produced in the US. This enthusiastic reception of her output in the States most likely developed as an effect of the American fascination with French Theory and poststructuralism. Although Brooke-Rose deemed herself bilingual, she actually spoke three languages fluently – French, English, and German.[10] She translated the works of Alain Robbe-Grillet, most famously his novel *In the Labyrinth*, and made a living as a literary critic and academic teacher. More importantly, she developed peculiar lipograms as well as other kinds of constraints in her prose long before they became the markers of the OuLiPo.[11] Born in Geneva to a Swiss-American mother and a British father, she was raised by her maternal grandparents in Belgium. She graduated from Oxford and UCL and, at the invitation of Helene Cixous,[12] took a post at the experimental University Vincennes-Saint-Denis in 1968.

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6 Tom Boncza-Tomaszewski, "Christine Brooke-Rose: The Texterminator," *The Independent* 27 (2005), https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/christine-brookerose-the-texterminator-8427.html.

7 Joseph Darlington, *Christine Brooke-Rose and Post-War Literature* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 107.

8 I use the term "autofiction" after Max Saunders. See Saunders, "Autofiction, Autobiografiction, Autofabrication, and Heteronymity: Differentiating Versions of the Autobiographical," *Biography* 43, no. 4 (2020): 763–80, https://doi.org/10.1353/bio.2020.0078.

9 Berlant, *On the Inconvenience*, 12.

10 Maria del Sapio Garbero, "A Conversation with Christine Brooke-Rose" [1991], *Festschrift Volume One: Christine Brooke-Rose* (Verbivoracious Press, 2014), 144. Quoted in Joseph Darlington, *The Experimentalists. The Life and Times of the British Experimental Writers of the 1960s* (Bloomsbury, 2022), 12.

11 Brooke-Rose, *Invisible Author*, 183.

12 Darlington, *The Experimentalists*, 134.

She would remain in France until the end of her life, first in Paris, then in the southern regions of the country.

Some of these experiences of nomadism and non-belonging are described in one of Brooke-Rose's best-known essays, "Exsul."[13] In a typical tour de force, she starts off with the etymology of the word "exile," pointing out that contrary to widespread belief, "to exile" originally meant to "spring forth," but also to ransack and ravage. The ambivalence of exile, its creative and destructive effect, is then examined in various literary contexts, at some point becoming a strange ode to Brooke-Rose's ex-husband, the Polish bilingual writer Jerzy Pietrkiewicz. I mention this essay because it shows how deeply interested she was in the notion of cultural and linguistic in-betweenness, and how directly she discussed the link between intimacy, foreignness, and mundane, affective inconvenience. "I too am astride two languages and cultures, but since this fact is usually dealt with by the few who write about me as an expatriate in France, I shall say nothing of myself, except the following: exile is an immense force for liberation, for extra distance, for automatically developing contrasting structures in one's head, not just syntactic and lexical but social and psychological; it is, in other words, undoubtedly a leaping forth. But there is a price to pay."[14]

Especially important in light of the quoted passage from "Exsul" are Berlant's remarks on self-loosening, or loosening of the author, since the practice of dislodging oneself from old habits and negotiating difficult attachments is one of the most important tenets of Brooke-Rose's output – both scholarly and literary – and a driving force of her career as a writer and narratologist. "To loosen an object is to look to recombining its component parts. Another way to say it: to unlearn its objectness," Berlant argues. It appears that both researchers emphasize the possibility of remaking the self through language in the process of juggling the pressures of coexistence. In *On the Inconvenience of Other People*, Berlant riffs on concepts expounded in their groundbreaking essay *Cruel Optimism*[15] to discuss the proxemics of living in relation to various people and phenomena that force us to reshape our own perception of ourselves. I would argue that Brooke-Rose's late writings offer an inspiring and rarely discussed take on autotheory due to the author's complex cultural background, her extensive theoretical knowledge and her interest in deconstructing the authorial figure through original, and beautifully executed, linguistic constraints.

Thus, I argue that the diversity of Brooke-Rose's interests – especially the radical literary experiments she undertook as author of avant-garde novels and short stories – stemmed

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[13] Christine Brooke-Rose, "Exsul," *Poetics Today* 17 (1996): 289–303.

[14] Brooke-Rose, "Exsul," 299.

[15] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Duke UP, 2011).

from her experiences of cultural and geographical exile, which she forged into a series of daring autotheoretical texts[16] once she settled in France. Today, the writer's transnational output remains largely forgotten – especially the archival materials deposited in the Nicolaus Copernicus University Library in Toruń, Poland. I believe that studying the works of Brooke-Rose in light of affect theory and intersectional studies will cast new light on the cultural survival strategies adopted by those 20th-century expat authors who migrated between two or more homelands – juggling both academic and literary careers – and their autotheoretical life-writing practices.

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Remake may be read as a "memoir of inconveniences" in which the author interlaces autobiography, literary criticism, and fiction to recount the very peculiar life of an intellectual thriving at the intersection of three languages in postwar Europe. In most of her works, Brooke-Rose adopted formal constraints to rid the text of the most stable elements of language: the constative tenses, the verb *to be*, and personal as well as possessive pronouns.[17] The bizarre, uncanny narrative she aimed to create through such formal play became all the more visible in her life-writing practices, that is, in her autotheoretical works. Although seemingly straightforward in terms of plot, *Remake* is far more structurally complex than it appears. Apart from the pronoun constraints, the author decided to name all of her characters a variation of "John" in homage to Noam Chomsky's John, who keeps recurring in textbook examples of various grammatical problems. Moreover, the name of the protagonist, Tess, the same character who is referred to as "the little girl" and "the old woman," is a play on the word "text," since "only a name and memory can tesselate and texture all those different beings, the baby in Geneva, the little girl in Chiswick, Brussels, Folkestone, London and all the others to the old lady in Provence."[18] The major difference between *Remake* and the rest

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16 Max Cavitch, a student of Lauren Berlant, aims to employ autotheory not as a "neatly circumscribed 'subgenre' of autobiography but the signifier of a contemporary disturbance in the autobiographical field. Autotheory more and more commonly evokes ways of 'doing' (i.e., both writing and reading) autobiography that, thanks in large part to the queer and feminist genealogies that inform them, upset the autobiographical apple-cart of masculinist (and hegemonic feminist) subjective universalism." See Cavitch, "Everybody's Autotheory," *Modern Language Quarterly* 83, no. 1 (2022): 81–116, https://doi.org/10.1215/00267929-9475043.

17 In *Remaking*, an essay describing the various constraints she employed in her novels, the author emphasized: "Now the constative tenses, the verb 'to be' and pronouns, are the most stable elements of language (they don't, for instance, get replaced by foreign words, even after the thorough invasion of English by French after the Norman Conquest), and to omit one of them involves a certain floating instability of the narrative". Brooke-Rose, "Remaking."

18 Brooke-Rose, *Remake*, 41.

of Brooke-Rose's ten or so novels lies in its focus on WWII and the numerous references it contains to the author's difficult experiences at the Bletchley Park intelligence center. It is the portrait of a protagonist who looks back on her passage through times of crisis.

Brooke-Rose claimed to have developed a fascination with writing fiction after becoming a code-breaker at the age of eighteen: "Perhaps the most profound experience, at that early age, was psychological: reading the whole war, every day, from the other viewpoint (we were the enemy), which may well have formed me as a novelist who learns to imagine the other."[19] In a late interview, she rephrased the same experience: "I became very aware of the Other, with a capital 'O'. I was patriotic, as every one is in wartime, but I suddenly realized that there was an enemy, and for him we were the enemy. I always think now that it helped me become a novelist because I loved creating other characters. I didn't want to write about myself. I didn't write these self-narratives that everyone seems to be writing now."[20] The inconveniences ("I became aware," "I suddenly realized," "profound experience") that arise in these short statements stem not only from Brooke-Rose's literal engagement in war-time duty but also from the choice she made to rewrite her experiences in a hermetic form, relinquishing the bestselling "I."

Remake recounts, in flashes, various pivotal moments in the narrator's life from a micro-historical perspective, including her first sexual encounters, her first marriage, and the condition of an ailing writer. Brooke-Rose keeps things simple in the chapter devoted to the war, in which the theme of suffering is as distant as the author herself: "All action seems to be at sea, like battles in history-books. And despite watching mummy dramatic over headlines, Tess becomes even more withdrawn into a parallel world of woolly wonder and titillating trivia."[21] And a few pages later: "Tess is still only eighteen and seems to be having a good war."[22] Even directly taking part in the war effort is described in a flat, understated tone: "Tess is now reading the stuff in German, much more fun. Only a small proportion is translated and sent, so Tess also reads all kinds of human and humorous detail."[23] The novel closes with the following remark on memory, a phenomenon the old lady had tried to define all along: "Memory is more like intercepting and decrypting, thousands of messages missed […] Memory intercepts the messages of a mysterious invented enemy unseen, giant knight or flaming dragon, the intercepter [*sic*] a speck in time facing the immensity

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19 Brooke-Rose, *Remake*, 25.

20 Boncza-Tomaszewski, "Christine Brooke-Rose."

21 Brooke-Rose, *Remake*, 89.

22 Brooke-Rose, 101.

23 Brooke-Rose, 107.

of confrontable selves."[24] Thus the Bletchley Park lingo makes its way into wider narrative loops and marks the entire discourse of the book, becoming the driving metaphor of the most important, concluding metalepsis. The author does, after all, take a peek at us from behind her numerous constraints.

Joseph Darlington, one of Brooke-Rose's monographers, suggests that her two last novels, *Remake* and *Life, End Of*, are works focused on the author's "complex thinking about death and its impact upon life and living."[25] Just like Lauren Berlant's posthumous book, these novels offer a conclusion to a large body of work, becoming literary wills of sorts. In an interview conducted in 2005, right before the publication of her last novel, Brooke-Rose drew an interesting parallel between writing techniques and self-knowledge:

> I once had a class in Vincennes where we were teaching creative writing. I asked the students to produce a first sentence, any sentence, and somebody produced this: 'He sat on the chair kicking the bed.' I got them to see that every word, especially in the first sentence – but really in all sentences – gives the writer a choice of how to go on. 'He': who's 'he'? Are you going to describe him? Or are you going to talk about the chair or the bed? Is someone in the bed? And of course you have to decide who's speaking. Is it someone looking in at the window or is it someone else in the room? That's what I call technique. It's nothing to do with oneself. How can anyone find their identity if they're always writing about themselves?[26]

Brooke-Rose believed that perfecting one's writing technique and searching for new styles of expression is at the core of a writer's self-awareness. In her view, technique was synonymous with narrative detail – the precision with which a writer sets up their characters in an outer world, with attention to perspective and focalization.

Her argument for a style of writing focused on formal innovation instead of content, on the patterns that organize the literary structure, resembles Berlant's understanding of infrastructure "as a measure of the material and affective dynamics of relation."[27] The theorist references the British psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas to explain how creating certain

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[24] Brooke-Rose, 171.

[25] Darlington, *Christine Brooke-Rose*, 9.

[26] Boncza-Tomaszewski, "Christine Brooke-Rose."

[27] Berlant, *On the Inconvenience*, 182–183. A helpful take on Berlant's approach to infrastructure is offered by Ann Cvetkovich in "Format as Infrastructure: Ann Cvetkovich on Lauren Berlant," *Capacious* 3 (2021): i–iv, https://capaciousjournal.com/cms/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/cvetkovich-format-as-infrastructure.pdf.

infrastructures can bring about non-traumatic change.[28] "To achieve a transformational infrastructure is to loosen up at the moment when everything in me would prefer not to, would prefer for there to be a moving walkway between where I am and another place I can already see." In Brooke-Rose's case, this loosening is enacted in the transformational infrastructure of a narrative devoid of possessive and personal pronouns, peppered with Chomskyan Johns as if to highlight the textual, artificial status of its "real-life" characters. Hence, "reading for infrastructure" becomes a new approach in narratological study, as the participants of a seminar held at the University of California Humanities Research Institute remarked when they decided to apply the notion of infrastructure as a methodological tool for reading poetry.[29]

Brooke-Rose's writing became more and more experimental and focused on deconstructing the so-called central consciousness of the text following a particularly severe bout of kidney illness the writer – and Tess, Brooke-Rose's alter-ego – had suffered from since she was a child.[30] In *Remake* the narrative voice observes: "Apart from the new flat, the only two good points about the sixties are first, Tess's literary turning point, after illness and meditation, in a more experimental, less popular direction, as if near-death had let the near-past die and strained backwards to early poetry and forwards towards renewal, inviting, inventing the future in a deep anxiety."[31] Illness allows Tess to accede to various temporal planes at once. The title of the novel, *Remake*, suggests how the book itself was created – its autobiographical subject matter was cut up and remixed by the author in a gesture of anti-autobiographical subversion:

> I went all the way back to my beginnings, not only as a person but as a writer. I wrote down my life as I remembered it, in a conventional order, and the result was dreadful. […] It was my own life, my own experience, but even I couldn't re-read it. […] as I finally rewrote it, I describe a bare memory, more or less in the same form as in that first version, except that I say 'the little girl' at this stage, instead of 'I'. […] I decided to scrap all personal pronouns and all possessive adjectives: no I, you, he, she, it, we, they, no her/hers, his, its, our/ours, your/yours, theirs. Now this was a real challenge. An autobiography without personal pronouns. […] Once I had found these constraints, I forgot all about my prejudice against autobiography. Why? Because now I could have fun with it.[32]

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28 Christopher Bollas, "Moods and the Conservative Process." In *The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis and the Unthought Known* (Columbia UP, 1987), 99–116. Quoted in Berlant, *On the Inconvenience*, 133, 150.

29 Arbona et al., "Reading for Infrastructure," https://uchri.org/foundry/reading-for-infrastructure.

30 Brooke-Rose, *Remake*, 50–51.

31 Brooke-Rose, 34.

32 Brooke-Rose, *Invisible Author*, 60.

Brooke-Rose describes the development of a transformational environment, to reference Bollas once again, designed well enough to support the retelling of traumatic life experiences using a new infrastructure aimed at pleasure. The final, formally innovative version of the novel was developed on the basis of four drafts, one of which was a conventional, first-person "rememoration." Brooke-Rose then rewrote it as if it were one of her books of criticism – in a depersonalized form, using a careful poetics of constraint.

The narratorless mode she perfected in the novel consists in a gradual disappearance of the writing "I" in favor of the so-called "old lady" who remembers various scenes from the past and puts forth two parallel modes of thinking – one rooted in the now, imbued with metatheoretical reflection and abstract ideas, and the other one deeply affective, a conglomerate of childhood bodily impressions and emotionally meaningful vignettes from later years. As a result, such sentences as the following are formed, purveying the novel of all "possessiveness": "Ian stutters out some phrase about supposing Tess knows, well, Ian is in love."[33] The syntactical circularity that arises from such repetitive word patterns brings to mind what Berlant calls "dissociated consciousness," a state in which syntax and grammar get garbled or simply become increasingly difficult to follow. Such glitches leave the narrative open to readerly doubt, demonstrating at the same time that "survival [in this case, of the speaker] depends on cultivating receptivity styles that can attend to the unequal price of vulnerability."[34]

Brooke-Rose's multilingualism was emphasized in the introduction because she belongs to a very specific group of 20th-century transnational expat authors whose works remain to be studied in light of their autotheoretical life-writing practices rooted in what Berlant termed the "crisis ordinary." The prolonged state of modernity in crisis entails, in Berlant's view, the production of a dissociative aesthetics, a version of which Brooke-Rose presents when she decides to create a narrative devoid of the idea of possession or simply literal attachments of ownership. As Berlant puts it, dissociation is an "unconscious process that manages potentially self-disintegrating intensities by separating them out so that one does not feel, for example, an overwhelming conflict among one's needs, vulnerabilities, aggressions, perceptions and habits of being."[35]

Remake stages this separation of intensities, and the constraints used by the author become what I would call a logistics of inconvenience – World War II hinges on sexual maturation; the Blitz is described on the same page as Tess's early painful sexperiences and resulting

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[33] Brooke-Rose, *Remake*, 42.

[34] Berlant, *On the Inconvenience*, 144.

[35] Berlant, 118.

illnesses.[36] The narrative in *Remake* may be called "logistics" because it reflects, in Berlant's words, the "condition of dispersed, multiple awarenesses that can present in any number of ways but crucially are present in ordinary managerial situations." This ordinary setup for Brooke-Rose is old age and her need to reorganize readily available material – memories. The narrative voice reflects on the problem of writing autobiographically in spite of oneself by drawing a technological metaphor:

> In this long span of misery resulting from the century's parlor-tricks, dogma tricks and polemic games the old lady can't decide, imagine, invent, select the life-file to call up first, if at all, even if re-treated as something else, inputting the databank of culture, attaching personal experience to collectivities, great events, significant mutations, at least as memory-joggers. But is that how experience is lived?[37]

In the quoted passage, the narrative voice emphasizes the gap between language and experience to justify the use of constraints and the lack of a stable central consciousness. The formal inconveniences Brooke-Rose creates through the use of technique mirror the crisis condition of daily life in the second half of the 20th century. The lived experiences of Tess, the little girl, and the old lady develop in the state of a crisis ordinary, which only becomes palatable once the characters loosen their attachments to one another and their memories. The pressure of moments and personas coexisting in one body is levelled by the pronoun constraints adopted in the process of theorizing the self through play, generating a kind of loose memoir whose principle is discontinuity and dissociation. Only by effacing herself from the narrative does the author herself gain a new perspective on intimate and traumatic experiences, slowly ploughing through layers and layers of memories.

Berlant creates the metaphor of a wormhole to illustrate the creative potential of inconvenience and infrastructural complexity: "The worm creates a space of movement that becomes form. If it is form it becomes social, that is, of the world; at this stage it is movement and singular. In the wormhole the worm creates an infrastructure to hold itself in the world: the hole fits the worm, but only as it moves."[38] Brooke-Rose moved along expertly in her writing, using complex techniques to channel her memories and derive pleasure from the whole process. She was able to do so through autotheoretical reflection, which became the mode of life-writing she used most often to counter what she called "the loneliness of the long-distance

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[36] Brooke-Rose, *Remake*, 50–53.

[37] Brooke-Rose, *Remake*, 165.

[38] Berlant, *On the Inconvenience*, 93.

experimenter."[39] As many other writers who settled in between countries and languages, the author of *Remake* developed autofictional work at the end of her life as a way to manifest experiences of foreignness. The strategies of cultural survival encoded in these hermetic texts are a testament to the innovative thinking of a writer who started off as a linguist and gradually moved towards describing complex, nonlinguistic forces: affects.

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[39] Brooke-Rose, *Invisible Author*, 3.

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Streszczenie

Artykuł jest próbą odczytania jednej z ostatnich powieści Christine Brooke-Rose, *Remake* (1996), w świetle trzech pojęć wypracowanych przez Lauren Berlant: *loosening*, *inconvenience* i *infrastructure*. Brooke-Rose konsekwentnie zacierała granice między fikcją, teorią literatury i autobiografią w poszukiwaniu oryginalnych form życiopisania, w tym celu stosując różnego rodzaju lipogramy. Autorka artykułu wskazuje, że nowatorskie, autofikcjonalne narracje, które Brooke-Rose tworzyła pod koniec życia, wynikają z wielokulturowości powieściopisarki i akademiczki, i jako takie mogą zostać poddane analizie w kontekście teorii afektów.

Słowa kluczowe
Christine Brooke-Rose, *Remake*, Lauren Berlant, infrastruktura, inconvenience

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AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL CULTURE

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Your Illness: Second Person Narrative in Non-Fictional Stories of Health Crises

Abstract

In the article I examine the phenomenon of non-fictional second person narratives frequently used to describe the experience of illness. Three case studies are analyzed: the ICU diaries, written by nurses for patients with impaired consciousness, a flash non-fiction story *Handwashing Dishes* by Melissa Olson-Petrie, and Marya's Hornbacher's autobiography *Wasted* about the author's struggle with eating disorders. Behind each of the narratives stands a different motivation to adopt the second person. I focus on various meanings and functions of the "you," trying to figure out how the "unnatural" form suits the "unnatural" situation of a health crisis.

Keywords
non-fiction, second person narrative, illness, diary

The history of research on second person narratives – at least three decades of increased academic interest in that form[1] – has been undoubtedly fiction-centered. The same applies, of course, to narratology in general; only recently are non-fiction texts being seriously taken

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1 The famous special volume of *Style*, "Second-Person Narrative," edited by Monika Fludernik, was published in 1994.

into account.[2] Second person narratives, long considered as emblematic for fiction, mark their presence in reportage, autobiography, biography and other non-fictional genres. The form is employed for various reasons and purposes, but I would venture to say that it is frequently used to describe difficult, disturbing, extreme, even, experiences. The narrative *you* is puzzlingly often miserable, traumatized, or torn apart – which can be tentatively explained by the unique, dialogical nature of the form, which enables the rendering of ambivalent emotional states. The second person is still considered an out-of-ordinary narrative tool, reserved for special purposes, and apparently it suits out-of-ordinary, life-changing situations. I would like to briefly consider three different second person non-fictional accounts of health crises. Obviously, my approach owes a lot to health humanities, especially studies on illness narratives,[3] but my main focus is on narratological issues.

There is a long methodological tradition of interpreting the second person as an "unnatural" form of narrative.[4] Telling someone their own story is considered unusual in terms of communication: real life situations justifying it are exceptional. Readers still describe their experience of reading a second person narrative as uncomfortable or uncanny. On the other hand, the last decades have seen a number of autobiographical second person books, among them Paul Auster's dilogy – *The Winter Journal* and *The Report from the Interior* which contributed to the "naturalizing" of the convention. It is an important context for my case studies: the tension between the "unnatural" situation of illness and the choice of the "unnatural" form to tackle it.

Diaries Of and For Survivors

One of the most stirring examples of the use of the second person in narrating illness are the diaries of nurses in intensive care units. These are part of Intensive Care Unit (ICU) treatment in Scandinavia, where the idea was born; later it spread to other European countries, Australia, and some parts of the US. ICU patients in a state of medically induced coma or suffering from impaired or decreased consciousness are not capable of rendering their experience. Care providers take over and write diaries addressing the patients. The guidelines for these documents vary; some hospitals have templates, while others give the nurses

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2 *Narrative Factuality: A Handbook*, eds. Monika Fludernik and Marie-Laure Ryan (De Gruyter, 2020).

3 See Thomas G. Couser, *Recovering Bodies: Illness, Disability, and Life Writing* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), Arthur W. Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller*: *Body, Illness, and Ethics* (University of Chicago Press, 2013), Anne Hunsaker Hawkins, *Reconstructing Illness: Studies in Pathography* (Purdue University Press, 2004).

4 Jan Alber, *Unnatural Narrative*, in *Handbook of Narratology*, *Vol. 2*, eds. Peter Hühn et al., (De Gruyter, 2014), https://www-archiv.fdm.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/node/104.html; Brian Richardson, *Unnatural Voices. Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction* (Ohio University Press, 2006).

free rein. Sometimes the diaries are multi-authored: family and friends are also encouraged to participate. Generally the aim is not to focus on test results and health parameters: the diaries are not medical reports, but personal documents describing the patient as a human being in challenging circumstances. The nurses write about the patients' behavior (facial expression, gestures, sounds or words uttered), visitors, and their own bedside care tasks. Diaries are handed to the patients with other discharge documentation or during a follow up visit. In some hospitals, the patient reads them together with the nurse who wrote it and has the chance to ask questions.

For obvious reasons, access to authentic ICU diaries is limited. Studies usually focus on small samples of anonymized texts. One of the patients who decided to share excerpts from her diary (and details of her journey) is Louise Gallie, author of the blog *From Delirium to Reality*. In 2018, Louise spent weeks in the ICU at University Hospitals in Plymouth, UK, after complications following a medical procedure. Today she is, in her own words, a "passionate patient advocate of ICU Delirium, rehabilitation and the patient experience,"[5] and a volunteer planning a career in healthcare. Louise describes the diary as "unbelievably significant" and "one of [her] most treasured possessions."[6] She emphasizes that the story of her ICU struggle could be told thanks to the diary kept by nurses. One of the entries reads: "You had an awful day and was [*sic*] so upset by everything. You haven't slept in many days and you are totally fed up." Another day was better: "You've had a lovely hair wash and full bed bath today so are looking gorgeous (and feeling much fresher). You have also sat out in a chair today and seem much more settled today."[7] Recalling those events after recovery, Louise was able to fill in the gaps in her memory, reconstruct, and write down her story.

The diaries have been a subject of study in medical journals, with the authors focusing mainly on the impact they have on the mental health of the patients. They are intended to help the patients recover from trauma, and their aim is to provide the survivor with a sense of continuity of their experience. Recently a meta-analysis proved their role in reducing the risk of PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), anxiety, and depression.[8] However, there are also voices emphasizing the potential hardships of reading such a diary and re-confronting oneself with the distress, pain, and dependency on others.

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5 https://fromdeliriumtoreality.com/about-me/.

6 https://fromdeliriumtoreality.com/2020/04/28/my-patient-diary/#more-270.

7 https://fromdeliriumtoreality.com/2020/04/28/my-patient-diary/#more-270.

8 Xihui Sun et al., "Effect of Intensive Care Unit Diary on Incidence of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Anxiety, and Depression of Adult Intensive Care Unit Survivors: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 77, no. 7 (2021): 2929–2941, https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.14706. The article contains an extensive bibliography of the subject.

The problem has also been considered from a narratological perspective. Pioneering studies by Ingrid Egerod and Doris Christensen[9] have focused on the structure of the diaries, identifying the stages of crisis, turning point, and normalization. The authors have also pointed out a significant aspect of diaries: that they can be read simultaneously as the nurses' stories. Of course the patient is the center of interest, but it is the care provider who becomes the sole focalizer. She or he chooses the events, finds appropriate words, draws conclusions, makes assumptions, and interprets gestures or sounds. The responsibility can be overwhelming; the nurses interviewed indicate that they expect precise guidelines and do not want to be left alone with the process of writing in order not to harm the future of the most important recipient – the patient. Sometimes the diary entries resemble letters, a more "natural" genre, one the authors feel comfortable with. They start with a salutation and introductory information ("I have been looking after you today"), and finish with greetings and wishes of speedy recovery. A recent study by Cindie Aaen Maagaard and Eva Laerkner, also conducted on Danish material,[10] focuses on specific linguistic choices the authors make. They use euphemisms, omissions, and other forms of understatement to avoid direct depiction of especially difficult moments: uncontrolled behavior, involuntary agitation and aggression, or certain hygienic procedures.

What is most important for me is the specificity of the narrative "you" in the diaries. They are exceptional examples of speaking on someone's behalf, which seems in their case obvious and natural: the experiencing subject is simply unable to tell their story because of the severe medical condition. The patient's ability to recount their experience and make sense of it is suspended. Just as the ventilator takes over the task of breathing, a designated person takes over the task of narrating in the hope that it will help rebuild identity in the future. The patient becomes the addressee of probably the most difficult story of their life, an addressee oblivious to the act of narrating. There is, of course, no doubt that the second person pronoun refers exclusively to the unconscious or partly conscious patient, yet their actions and feelings are ascribed to them by the subject, observing and writing.[11] A certain interpretation is imposed, and some assumptions are made based on professional expertise, but personal traits and sensitivity are also ascribed. This vicarious narrating is inevitable and performed

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[9] Ingrid Egerod and Doris Christensen, "Analysis of Patient Diaries in Danish ICUs: a Narrative Approach," *Intensive and Critical Care Nursing* 25, no. 5 (2009): 268–277, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iccn.2009.06.005.

[10] Cindie Aaen Maagaard and Eva Laerkner, "Writing a Diary for "You" – Intensive Care Nurses' Narrative Practices in Diaries for Patients: A Qualitative Study," *International Journal of Nursing Studies* 136 (2022), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2022.104363.

[11] It happens from time to time that the "I" takes over and the authors express their own thoughts in the first person, but usually they stick to the "you" forms.

in good faith; however, Maagaard and Lerkner see it as a signpost of the "asymmetry of the nurse-patient relation" which "to some degree relegates the patient to a secondary position in their own narrative."[12] This seems to me a crucial trait for all second person non-fiction where the "you" designates another person.

Flash Non-Fiction You

An entirely different use of "you" in an illness narrative can be observed in Melissa Olson-Petrie's micro-story *Handwashing Dishes*.[13] The author is an American writer and journalist, and the text was published in 2021 in the literary magazine *The Southeast Review*. It is an example of *flash non-fiction*, a new genre of factual narratives, where unexpected points of view are often chosen. In his introduction to an anthology of these "very brief essays"[14] Dinty W. Moore traces their origins to ancient Greece, but emphasizes the influence of the "older cousin," the *flash fictions*. The first collections of those *short-short stories* were published in the late 20th century,[15] which is when the term *flash* became commonly used. Owing its existence to social and technological changes, and intended to be read on smartphone screens, *flash non-fictions* capture glimpses of everyday life. They often have an autobiographical background or are miniature documentaries. These narrative snippets are complete, but the events depicted often serve as synecdoches of more general issues. The micro-plots are frequently centered upon defining moments, turning points, with the past and future only suggested. Sometimes they limit themselves to observations or fragmentary depictions. The reader is invited to imagine the rest according to their own experience and knowledge. *Flash non-fictions* are often taught on creative writing courses as an exercise in narrative discipline and an introduction to longer prosaic forms.[16]

Olson-Petrie's second person non-fiction begins *in medias res*: "You find yourself in Phoenix in your mother's dark kitchen amid piles of dirty dishes, glasses, pots, and baking pans."

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12 Maagaard and Laerkner, "Writing a Diary," 7.

13 https://www.southeastreview.org/single-post/nonfiction-by-melissa-olson-petrie

14 Dinty W. Moore, *On Fire and Ice. The Pleasing Sting of Flash Non-Fiction*, in *The Rose Metal Press Field Guide to Writing Flash Nonfiction*, ed. Dinty W. Moore (Rose Metal Press, 2012).

15 *Sudden Fiction: American Short-Short Stories,* ed. Robert Shapard and James Thomas (Gibbs Smith, 1983), *Flash Fiction: 72 Very Short Stories,* ed. James Thomas, Denise Thomas and Tom Hazuka (W.W. Norton and Company, 1992), and *Micro Fiction: An Anthology of Fifty Really Short Stories,* ed. Jerome Stern (W.W. Norton and Company, 1996).

16 The first important anthologies of *flash non-fiction* are *In Short: A Collection of Brief Creative Nonfiction*, ed. Judith Kitchen and Mary Paumier Jones (W.W. Norton and Company, 1996), *In Brief: Short Takes on the Personal,* ed. Judith Kitchen and Mary Paumier Jones (W.W. Norton and Company, 1999), *Short Takes: Brief Encounters with Contemporary Nonfiction*, ed. Judith Kitchen (W.W. Norton and Company, 2005).

A young woman tries to clean up a terribly messy kitchen. It turns out to be her childhood home, where her elderly mother lives alone, suffering from depression, alcoholism, and PTSD. She refuses help and is impatient for the daughter to leave. Scrubbing away the grease and mold and throwing out the containers with left-over spoiled food, the daughter reflects upon the past and the "different kitchen and a different version of Mom." The embroidered kitchen towels and baking sheets are the same, but stained and torn. The baking pan is no longer used to make cookies, and the smelly goo turns out to be rice pudding that was always made for Christmas. The objects themselves speak of the sad change.

For what reasons has the second person been employed here? It is not the mother, holed up in her room, who is the narratee. Instead, the daughter addresses her monologue to herself, as if observing the whole heartbreaking scene from a certain distance. It might trigger associations with a state that psychology describes as depersonalization: a temporary feeling of detachment from oneself, perceiving one's behavior from an external point of view. I do not, of course, intend to diagnose the protagonist, but rather to tentatively describe the narrative situation and the motivation behind the unusual choice: The author tries to adopt an external perspective towards the scene without losing the emotional engagement. Olson-Petrie herself, commenting on the choice of the second person, claimed that it offered a balance between the affective distance of the third and the experiential mediacy of the first.[17] Another important aspect is the metatextual dimension of second person autobiographical narratives. Deciding to tell a story in this (still) unusual way and dealing with the dialogical split of the "I" enhances self-reflexiveness. This is also visible in the direct, meaningful remarks the daughter makes: "[…] You're doing stacks and stacks of dishes amid rotting food, a scene worthy of a squalor documentary," or, "In the movies, this story would involve rehab or social services. None of that is here." Being stuck in the difficult moment, she already reflects upon the ways of rendering her experience; or maybe these conclusions came later, but it is the second person narrative that enables her to include this meta-textual perspective.

Reading Disorder?

The metatextual perspective, crucial in my view for second person non-fiction in general, is also apparent in Marya Hornbacher's *Wasted: A Memoir of Anorexia and Bulimia* (1998),[18] an openly autobiographical account of the author's struggle with eating disorders (an autopathography, to use the term from illness narrative studies). The author is an

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[17] https://melissaolsonpetrie.com/2021/10/14/flash-nonfiction-good-news-and-a-field-guide-recommendation/

[18] M. Hornbacher, *Wasted: A Memoir of Anorexia and Bulimia* (Flamingo, 1998).

American journalist; the book was her debut and a great publishing success in the US. It was also translated into several languages and commented upon, especially in France. It began Hornbacher's career as a writer, and in her later works she continued to explore the subject of mental health.

The title is deliberately equivocal, as it can refer to the protagonist but also to wasted chances, wasted years, or wasted food. Hornbacher's decision to publish her book was driven by a strong sense of mission; she wanted to share her difficult experiences for the sake of other people suffering from anorexia and bulimia and for their families and friends. In interviews, she mentioned the thousands of messages she had received from people affected by eating disorders and expressed a deep belief that the book had helped others to understand the struggle. The primary narrative choice in the book is the first person with all its obvious advantages in autobiographical non-fiction – it enhances the effect of a testimony, a private account of a personal battle. However, in the most disturbing parts of the book, where the deeply traumatic events are depicted, Hornbacher resorts to the second person.[19] What is the motivation behind that?

Based on other recent cases of autobiographical second person narratives, I would start with the hypothesis that the "you" can be perceived as part of the person's identity, the part "responsible" for the illness. Quite often, the "you" is a specific version of the self (the former, the future, the desired, the ill); addressing oneself in the second person can serve as a tool to question or challenge identity. In *Wasted,* the medical condition does not fully define the individual. Addressing "you" throughout the narrative is in fact addressing the temporarily suffering self; after recovery, an all-encompassing "I" might become possible again. This potential use of the second person was initially, and to a certain extent intuitively, foreseen by Michel Butor, who elaborated on the subject after the publication of his famous *La Modification*. He believed that the second person was particularly suitable for rendering non-typical, alternative ways of perceiving reality.[20] In *Wasted* this strategy is visible, yet not consistent.

The other reason for replacing the "I" with the "you" might be a willingness to universalize the experience of illness, to present it as shared by many. In *Wasted,* the second person is used to show the common, traumatizing procedures that patients are subjected to in psychiatric hospitals; procedures that are often humiliating, aimed not at long-term healing, but only at weight gain. Here is a passage written in the future tense that captures the hospital routine:

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[19] After *Wasted* was published, Hornbacher was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, which became the subject of her next book *Madness: A Bipolar Life* (Mariner Books, 2008). The first person also co-exists there with the second, but it is more the impersonal *you* than proper second person narrative.

[20] Michel Butor, "The Second Case. Use of Personal Pronouns in the Novel," *New Left Review* 1, no. 34 (1965): 60–68.

> One of these beds is for you. It will be a hard bed, but you are exhausted. In the hospital you will sleep deeper than you ever have, or ever will again. There will be a little table by your bed with buttons on it. You can turn on the radio, call a nurse, flip the light. […] There will be a window in your room that will look out over rooftops and winding streets. Depending on what time of year you are there, the trees will either be full or bare. […] You will carry your pillow with you everywhere, in its rough white case. You will sit on it, because the floor will hurt the bones poking out through your ass. Or you will lie on the floor on your belly and move the pillow frequently, from under your rib cage to under your elbows to under your pelvic bones.
>
> […] In the morning, if you are me, you will wake up very early. This will get you in trouble because they will think you are waking up early to have unmonitored time to yourself, to exercise. You are simply used to waking up early, but you take their suggestion nonetheless and spend these early hours listening to the sheets hiss as your legs move up and down. (*Wasted*, 146–148)

Hornbacher was hospitalized several times, so this passage can be explained as summarizing her experiences in the room with the rooftop view. Yet, the lack of more personal detail, the unspecified (changing) seasons of the year, the focus on repetitive, ordinary activities, and a high level of generality may suggest a shared perspective: the description can fit an "everypatient." In contrast, the last episode (prohibited exercise under the duvet, paradoxically inspired by the nurses) clearly refers to the narrator's particular, individual experience.

The hospital reality is somehow timeless; days have a repetitive schedule indicated by iterative verbs. In the following passage the time and place are specific; it is early November, Marya is at her father and his second wife's house:

> Your brothers are home, everyone is at home. People are eating. Your stepmother will hand you something, you don't remember what now. She'll say: Try this. You, terrified – when the hell am I going to have a chance to puke, with all these people around? – will try it. You will eat a pretzel, a carrot stick. You will become increasingly, noticeably agitated. Finally you'll leave, take a bus into town on the pretense of going to the library. You will walk, fast and hard, down the street, breaking into a run, it's a brisk day, it's sunny. You rush through the drugstore, thinking: ipecac, ipecac, ipecac. It's a syrup used to induce vomiting, that's all you know. You've never used it before, you don't know how it works, you don't give a flying fuck, you have to find it. You pace the aisles, pulling at the cuffs of your shirt, your hands rough and cold. You can't find it. It's nowhere. You are wearing overalls. You arch your back and stick your stomach out as far as it will go, put your hand on your faux pregnant belly. You sidle up to the prescription counter, put on your face, smile, and

> calmly ask the pharmacist if he has some ipecac? You'd like to have some in your first-aid kit at home, you know, in case the kids swallow something awful. You, sixteen, praise God for the time-elapse aging process of your face. You look old enough to have kids and be pregnant. He nods, Oh yes, he says, those kids'll eat anything. You both laugh. As he rings it up, you can't take your eyes off the little brown bottle on the counter. How old are your kids? he asks pleasantly, taking your money. Two and three, you say. It rolls off your tongue, you pat your belly, say, "And zero." He laughs, congratulates you, and you pocket your change and the ipecac, take your receipt, thank him, he thanks you. (*Wasted*, 170–171)

The protagonist drinks the whole bottle of the emetic and almost dies. The story is left without comment, even from the later, "healthy" point of view. It is one of the numerous acts of self-destruction that are rendered in a moderate, restrained way, which creates a stirring effect. Again, as in *Handwashing Dishes,* the second person narrator seems to observe herself from a distance, as if it was a film scene from the past.

Hornbacher's autobiography raised certain concerns. Contrary to the author's declared intentions, it was considered by some critics a dangerous read, fitting into the so-called pro-ana movement. Nicole Johns, author of *Purge: Rehab Diaries*, another autobiographical account of a battle with eating disorders, recalls herself and other patients of a treatment facility reading smuggled copies of *Wasted* as an "eating disorder bible,"[21] a source of *thinspiration* and encouragement in losing weight. What Hornbacher intended as a warning – and was understood as such by most readers – was taken by some as an affirmation of self-destructive behavior. In her study on *Wasted* in the context of other *illness narratives,* Emma Seaber[22] refers to those examples of reader experience and introduces a concept of *reading disorder*: a distorted reception of certain texts by vulnerable individuals who tend to perceive the person suffering from anorexia or bulimia as a role model and copy her actions. What is particularly interesting from a narratological point of view, is that Seaber blames the author's *writing disorder* for that. She finds the "you" narration particularly disturbing,[23] claiming that Hornbacher "consistently addresses the reader as a confidante, a fellow anorexic – beckoning to readers with her extensive use of the second person."[24] The "you" is thus

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[21] Nicole Johns, *Purge: Rehab Diaries* (Seal Press, 2009), 10.

[22] Emma Seaber, "Reading Disorders: Pro-Eating Disorder Rhetoric and Anorexia Life-Writing," *Literature and Medicine* 34, no. 2 (2016): 484–508, https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/lm.2016.0023.

[23] Seaber claims that apart from the second person, there are also other textual indices breaching the convention of traditional autobiography that prove that Hornbacher herself suffers from *reading disorder*. One of these would be including a vast bibliography to bring the book closer to academic style, and position the author as an expert on eating disorders.

[24] Seaber, 495.

automatically interpreted as designating the actual flesh and blood reader. A longer quote from Seaber (where she quotes Hornbacher) presents her argument:

> Some of these passages work to induce a "disordered" identity in the reader. For example: "The problem in your life is your body. It is defined and has a beginning and an end. The problem will be solved by shrinking the body. Contain yourself," (42) and "You will lift the toilet seat, carefully slide your fingers inside your mouth and down your throat, and puke until you see orange." (61) Ordinarily, being forced to assume such an identity is alienating, foreign, uncanny; it coaxes from readers a dysphoria between mind and body, a corporeal sense of wrongness.

In my view, those assumptions are founded upon a major misunderstanding. The first passage cited by Seaber ("The problem in your life is your body") is clearly ironic; its aim is to show how distorted Marya's thinking and self-assessment was in the times of her eating disorder. The second one ("puke until you see orange") is obviously not a tip; it mocks the style of how-to guides. Returning to my examples, the first passage I quoted is ambiguous in terms of the meaning of "you." It clearly refers to the protagonist's hospital stays, but is partly universalized to encompass the experience of fellow patients. In the second "ipecac" episode, there is absolutely no possibility of such an interpretation; the "you" is undoubtedly Marya, who tricked the pharmacist in her obsessive need to purge. Interpreting these excerpts as addressed to the real reader seems to me to be an analytical trap, a misreading, resulting maybe from the lack of context of other second person narratives. The actual reader's temptation to feel partially addressed by the "you" is, of course, a phenomenon recognised by narratologists. Probably the first to pinpoint it was Irene Kacandes,[25] who compared the reader to a passer-by in a crowded place, automatically turning his head when someone cries, "Hey, you!" Most studies, however, consider the phenomenon as an initial, temporary, and above all, supplementary effect. David Herman coined the term "double deixis" to emphasize the ontological difference between "the entities invoked by the textual *you*."[26] Both virtuality and actuality are involved, and it is the ambiguity that lies in the heart of second person narratives. Moreover, as I have shown before, the principal function of the "you" in autobiographical writing is to address oneself; the reader address can be thought of as the secondary dimension of the text. It should be also noted that Hornbacher is highly

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[25] Irene Kacandes, "Are You in the Text?: The 'Literary Performative' in Postmodernist Fiction," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 2, no. 13 (1993): 139–153, https://doi.org/10.1080/10462939309366039.

[26] David Herman, "Textual 'You' and Double Deixis in Edna O'Brien's 'A Pagan Place,'" *Style* 28, no. 3 (1994): 378–410, https://www.jstor.org/stable/42946258.

self-reflexive as a writer; in her recent essays on non-fiction she expresses particular interest in the form. She states, "Structure and form are not always pleasing to the eye,"[27] which is a particularly interesting comment in the light of the "writing disorder" diagnosis.

As I have tried to prove, the "you" in illness narratives deserves a thorough analysis in each case separately, an analysis rooted in the context of the second person convention. Fixed notions cannot be taken for granted; the "unnatural" form can be the only one possible in patients' diaries, but it may become disturbing when readers expect a "proper" first person autobiography. Recounting a health crisis seems to require special narrative devices. The ambiguity provided by second person narratives and their transitional, indeterminate status seem therefore perfectly adequate.

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[27] Marya Hornbacher, "All We Do Not Say. The Art of Leaving Out," *Assay*: *A Journal of Non Fiction Studies* 10, no. 1 (2023), https://www.assayjournal.com/marya-hornbacher-all-we-do-not-say-the-art-of-leaving-out-assay-101.html.

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Twoja choroba. O kryzysie zdrowotnym w drugiej osobie

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest próba odpowiedzi na pytanie, z czego wynika zwiększona frekwencja form drugiej osoby w niefikcjonalnych narracjach poświęconych chorobie. Analizie poddane zostały dzienniki chorych na oddziałach intensywnej terapii, pisane w ich zastępstwie przez pielęgniarki, autobiograficzna miniatura *Handwashing Dishes* Melissy Olson-Petrie oraz książka Maryi Hornbacher *Wasted* dotycząca zmagań autorki z zaburzeniami jedzenia. W każdym z przypadków narracyjne "ty" pełni różne funkcje, różne są też motywacje użycia tej nietypowej formy. „Nienaturalna" sytuacja narracyjna zdaje się odpowiadać „nienaturalnej" sytuacji kryzysu zdrowotnego.

Słowa kluczowe
non-fiction, narracja drugoosobowa, choroba, dziennik

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AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL CULTURE

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"Like an Object Pushed from Place to Place"[1]: Resilience in Time of War and Exile in *Those We Throw Away Are Diamonds* (2021), by Mondiant Dogon

Abstract

The article discusses the form and functions of Mondiant Dogon's memoir *Those We Throw Away Are Diamonds: A Refugee's Search for Home.* After a short introduction on the position of the author/narrator/protagonist of the memoir as well as the trauma and grief of the genocide survivors, the analytic attention is directed to the memoir as a genre that enables personal testimony and the commemoration of the perished. Dogon's memoir is also an act of resilience amidst the legal and psychological crisis of belonging (statelessness). As a genre where the personal becomes the public, the memoir participates in the formation of collective consciousness, shared values, and civic attitudes. The literary devices typical of the memoir enable the representation of individual traumatic experience in relation to its historical, cultural, and political conditions. In his personal narrative Dogon analyses cause and effect sequences, pinpoints the issues that demand intervention, and shows the direction of change.

Keywords
memoir, Rwanda genocide, trauma, testimony, resilience, *Agaciro*

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1 Mondiant Dogon, *Those We Throw Away Are Diamonds* (Penguin, 2021), 61.

To bear witness in writing to genocide – the "crime of all crimes"[2] – means venturing into an entangled wasteland of loss and conflict. On the one hand, it demands the work of memory that is tantamount to the traumatic work of mourning[3] as the memoirist engages with violent loss, wounds, and death. The survivor remains with the ruins: the hollow absence of family members, friends, the destroyed home, the broken nation. Also mourned are the stifled potential for growth and the obliterated sense of safety that the butchery has wrecked. The writer exposes themselves to vulnerability as they will encounter more than they are able to brace themselves for. The voluntary recollections of violence and the overwhelming destruction are unbearably painful, but so are the involuntary recollections, activated by writing, of what has been forgotten or repressed.

On the other hand, by default, the memoirist engages themselves in the current discourse on war and genocide itself. These are implicated in the collective negotiation of meaning and values[4] and the practice of the commemoration of the dead. The faithfulness in testifying to mass atrocity; the duty, indebtedness, and guilt in relation to the dead and to the survivors; and the ethics of giving an account of oneself and of portraying the other all guide the acts of composing the genocide survivor memoir. The inherently subjective account is then exposed to assessment of its accuracy and authenticity in reference to the available information and interpretations regarding the narrated events.

The new memoir, as Patrick Madden writes, "offer[s] insight into the experiences and inner workings of […] individuals extraordinary for their success or suffering,"[5] or for both, as in Mondiant Dogon's case. As Julie Rak points out, crucial is that this "public form where private lives circulate" enables forging community, citizenship, and social action.[6]

"*The Wounds of Dumb*": Memoir as a Testimony and Confession

Experience and intent determine the form of the memoir. Mondiant Dogon's memoir grew out of his poem of many stanzas, each finished with the refrain "Those we throw away are diamonds," which became the title of his personal narrative. He wrote the poem while in

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2 See Nicole Rafter's *Crime of All Crimes: Towards a Criminology of Genocide* (NYU Press, 2016).

3 See Camille B. Wortman and Laurie A. Pearlman, "Traumatic Bereavement," in *Techniques of Grief Therapy. Assessment and Intervention*, ed. Robert Neimeyer (Routledge, 2016), 25–29.

4 See Gillian Whitlock, *Soft Weapons: Autobiography in Transit* (University of Chicago Press, 2007).

5 Patrick Madden, "The 'New Memoir,'" in *The Cambridge Companion to Autobiography*, eds. Maria DiBattista and Emily O. Wittman (CUP, 2014), 222.

6 Julie Rak, *Boom! Manufacturing Memoir for the Popular Market* (Wilfried Laurier UP, 2013), 31.

exile to "keep [his] soul from dying."[7] The individual effort went on to include other Congolese Tutsi in the Rwandan Gihembe refugee camp and their traumatic ordeals as unwanted people. Besides its most immediate purpose of a personal life-line, the poem aimed to give presence to those others who are not listened to.

Dogon is a Bagogwe Tutsi, born in 1992, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (from 1971 to 1997 known as Zaire). His nomad tribe used to wander the lands of both the DRC and Rwanda; the division between the countries is a demarcation imposed by the colonialist and not a natural border. Bagogwe Tutsi were forced out of their homes to escape death by the Hutu extremists who fled from Rwanda to the neighboring DRC in fear of persecution and punishment for the 1994 ethnic cleansing of Rwanda's Tutsi. Hutus' fear of retaliation soon instigated the urge for the total annihilation of the Tutsi, aptly rendered in Alison des Forges's title of the Rwanda genocide report *Leave None to Tell the Story*. The violence thus spread and continued, soon leading to the First Great Congo War of 1996–1997.

In 1995, when Dogon was three years old, his family and other Bagogwe Tutsi, warned by their Hutu friend, hid in caves near their village of Bikenke in the Masisi Territory. The group was discovered and decimated. Some managed to flee further through the forests to Rwanda, escaping to the Mudende Refugee Camp. Recognizable by the UNHCR white tents and aided by the Red Cross, it promised shelter, only to explode from repetitive attacks that culminated in the bloody Mudende massacre, in December 1997. The remaining survivors were rushed to Gihembe refugee camp, where most still remain, in limbo.

There is hardly any sense of rooted belonging when a person's country of birth does not recognize them as its own and the current state refuses citizenship and thus denies them the basic human rights to work and move across borders. The status of the Bagogwe, a small subgroup of Tutsi, is peculiar. They share the same language, Kinyarwanda, and their lineage overlaps with that of Rwanda's President, Paul Kagame, yet they are not permitted to integrate into the nation of Rwanda. As refugees from the DRC they are considered foreign, even though they belong to the same ethnic group and suffered from the same atrocities and persecution as Rwanda's Tutsi before 1995. While the Bagogwe Tutsis' story has been wiped from Rwanda's official history, Dogon's memoir brings it back into the global archive of testimonial records.

"The Wounds of Dumb," the working title of Dogon's memoir, foregrounds the desolate silence in which and because of which the trauma of the survivors is perpetuated. Erin Jessee writes about silence as "a survival tactic of *ceceka* or keeping silent widely practiced by

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7 Dogon, 1.

Rwandans."[8] Jennie E. Burnet clarifies the reason why silence matters in Rwanda: "Silence at times serves as a culturally appropriate coping mechanism of survival, when silence is mandated by an external state authority, it undermines ordinary men's and women's abilities to cope."[9] Yuko Otake notes that suffering is exacerbated by this silence of "unspeakability," as individuals cannot freely narrate their losses and thus cannot properly mourn or make sense of them.[10]

Dogon's memoir counters the suppression of the genocide's horrors and its repercussions. His effort has collective aims: to recover hope, forge connections, and find meaning in experiences of his people.[11] Writing the memoir demands acute self-scrutiny, which makes it possible for Dogon "to be representative of more than any particular set of experiences."[12] His work is for the living and for the dead: Patience, his sister, younger by 2 years; his aunt Florence who, a teenager herself, saved his life numerous times, the final one during the Mudende massacre as she directed the murderers' attention away from the 5-year-old Mondiant and onto herself, providing him with the opportunity to run and hide; his (also) 5-year-old best friends, Patrick and Célestin who perished at Mudende and left Mondiant with only their own dreams of becoming a pilot and a doctor (or a police officer), respectively.

It is these prematurely deceased children as well as survivors of genocide as a whole for whom Dogon wishes "to reimagine everything […] wipe everything clean."[13] In his testimonial narrative, the duty to remember and the wish for obliteration are not contradictory. They are conjoined endeavors that discriminate between affirmative commemoration and deleterious perpetuation. Dogon wishes to delete the denotations and connotations that the word *refugee* commonly carries. The real diamonds of Congo are not the gems it is known for and which connote theft, slavery, and exploitation, but the people the country has ousted. It does not escape the reader's attention that his given name, Mondiant, is itself a derivation of the word diamond. His full name is Mondiant Nshimiyimana Dogon. While the middle name, Nshimiyimana, is a Rwandan surname, he reveals his last name to be a derivative of his nickname Kadogo, a child soldier.

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8 Erin Jessee, *Negotiating Genocide in Rwanda: The Politics of History* (Palgrave, 2017), 109.

9 Jennie E. Burnet, *Genocide Lives in Us: Women, Memory, and Silence in Rwanda* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2012), 109.

10 Yuko Otake, "Suffering of Silenced People in Northern Rwanda," *Social Science & Medicine* 222 (2009): 171, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2019.01.005.

11 Dogon, 1–5.

12 Gilmore, Leigh, *The Limits of Autobiography* (Cornell University Press, 2001), 19.

13 Dogon, 2.

Dogon's memoir is the account of a former child soldier. Lured back to North Kivu by nostalgia for their lost homelands and by the authorities' threat that in their absence their land would be taken away, Dogon, his father and brother Faustin ended up in another camp, this time becoming refugees in their country of birth. In the turmoil of the ceaseless strife in the DRC (Second Congo War, Kivu conflict), the male members of the family became separated; they were imprisoned or used as fighting forces. After two years of homeland exile, the three of them managed to escape back to Gihembe.

While it recounts the violent events, Dogon's linear narrative is paced by instances of luck: narrow escapes facilitated by helping hands, favorable circumstances, chance encounters, serendipity. Yet, during his lonely stay in the DRC, survival is not presented as unequivocally fortunate – his rescue comes from the killers. Tutsi rebels provide him with food and shelter in exchange for his contribution. In a twisted way they stand in for his family. At the age of 12, Dogon starts eating well and soon assists in battle. His *kadogo* experience is discussed in two chapters where he relates his general involvement that consisted in cleaning the camp, carrying and loading guns, plundering, and stealing. He zooms in on the most shocking and self-reflexive moments: when the bodies he removes from the battlefield (his major duty) reminded him of his dead sister and murdered friends, or when he was forced to witness the execution of a boy for stealing, a boy who was roughly his age and like him spoke perfect French. These vignette-like, symbolically laden episodes are accompanied by passages of sharp introspection: "Even animals ran away when they saw me […] even the dangerous animals from my grandmother's stories," and self-discovery: "I wanted to be someone who wasn't afraid of killing someone else […] But I was afraid."[14]

In the memoir that follows the chronological order of events, his time as *kadogo* is preceded by a three-week incarceration in a Congolese jail. The crime is not what he has done, but who he is – his looks have marked him out as Tutsi. The internment exposed him to appalling war crimes and made him part of it – he stole, reported Tutsi rebels, and pointed out girls the soldiers then raped and killed. Dogon's release came with the chaos of a pro-Tutsi rebel attack. The jail stint is foregrounded as a decisive moment, an impasse when political changes directly affected Dogon, narrowing his life options in the DRC to a choice between two evils. Opting for the Tutsi rebels instead of Congolese soldiers seemed safer.

After the reunion with his family in Gihembe, Dogon discloses his deeds and guilt to his mother. He emplots their interaction as a confession within confession (of the entire memoir) revealing also the reaction of his closest interlocutor. Aware of the possible misconstructions, should Dogon share his traumatic story of survival, Eugenie, who cherished her son's return,

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[14] Dogon, 196, 199.

urged him to stay quiet. Dogon feared expulsion from Gihembe, but was more concerned with ruining his family's chances of resettlement. His memoir, from an oceanwide distance and forward in time, breaks this promise – he literally and literarily confesses to the world.

Dogon's memoir is his coming-of-age story. War, genocide, and exile were his extreme apprenticeship instead of the regular Bagogwe rite of passage ritual of being sent to the thick forest of the DRC to learn essential skills and prove himself. The narrative's integrative potential[15] – to unify the disparate, sometimes conflicting, aspects of his self – operates fully only when all crucial constituents are present, hence the confession. The details of Dogon's story, where events and facts are interwoven with his motivations, emotions, and reasoning, are laid bare to comprehend the reality of a war child and to forge coherence and continuity in time for himself: from child to teenager to adult.

"We lived on top of graveyards"[16] – Memoir as a Monument

The tender sensitivity with which he approaches the peacock he has named Mubarikiwa, the only living creature he could save from death in the DRC, equals Dogon's dedication in language as he attends to people who are beyond his powers to save. With care and attention he composes the rather short, unrushed sentences. Even in traumatic moments, his balanced pace emanates a calmness that seems to emerge from pain and resilience, as well as from his sense of cadence and rhythm.

The narrative voice and its idiosyncratic timbre are also the result of Dogon's collaboration with his editor and co-author Jenna Krajeski, as is, apparently, the structure of the 35-chapter-memoir. Preceded by an Introduction and concluded with an Epilogue,[17] it is divided into three parts of similar length, each headed by a stanza from his poem and circumscribed by crucial threshold events. The first part opens with the radical moment of Dogon's becoming a refugee: his father is standing at the door – literally and metaphorically at the threshold – bleeding from the head. It ends with the Mudende massacre. The second part spans his life in Gihembe and the two years back in the DRC, while the third part starts with the return to Gihembe and ends with his graduation from high school.

As G. Thomas Couser writes, the contemporary memoir develops "summary" and "scene" and patterns of their interrelations.[18] Summary consists in a retrospective assessment of

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15 See Jefferson A. Singer and Pavel Blagov, "The Integrative Function of Narrative Processing: Autobiographical Memory, Self-Defining Memories, and the Life Story of Identity," in *The Self and Memory* ed. Denise R. Beike, James M. Lampinen and Douglas A. Behrend (Psychology Press, 2004), 117–138.

16 Dogon, 54.

17 It covers his studies in Kigali and relocation to the US.

18 G. Thomas Couser, *Memoir: An Introduction* (OUP, 2012), 71.

experience to extract the gist[19] of what occurred, how it affects the involved, and what these mean. Dogon's memoir intertwines storytelling with commentary. His sequentially ordered journey is augmented by passages that provide cultural and historical context, e.g., "One hundred forty-eight Tutsis were killed that night in the first of two massacres in Mudende refugee camp [...] the genocide in Rwanda was not yet over. The Hutus who attacked us that night used their machetes to kill us."[20] In self-reflexive passages Dogon embeds his own lines of reasoning – what he knew at the time of the event is supported with his understanding that comes with the benefit of hindsight, e.g., "If you were lucky enough to survive [...] your reward was never having to talk about your experience ever again [...] I've mistaken silence for bravery. I learned that in refugee camps."[21]

In the explanatory passages, Dogon often relies on metaphors and similes: "The camp begins as an oasis and becomes like quicksand."[22] His perpetual survival mode is signalized in sentences such as: "I looked for signs of danger."[23] Trauma is often approached with figurative language, yet in some instances, such as, "Blood ran through the camp like a river in the rainy seasons,"[24] the simile in fact literally describes the situation. Most of the time he appeals to the reader's imaginative and associative skills, e.g., "Escaping was a dance they have been rehearsing," and in so doing Dogon deflects the direct gaze and cushions the major shock that the reality of genocide may induce. To steady the emotions after recounting highly traumatic deaths, he interpolates sentences outside of the recounted timeframe, e.g., in meta-narrative remarks: "More than twenty years later, as I write this, these deaths have become details in my story, which has a happy ending."[25]

The expository parts of Dogon's memoir introduce and are alternated with performative passages that show events as they unfolded. Couser defines scene as more a domain of fiction, its quintessential element being "dialogue, especially verbatim quotation of characters."[26]

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19 Couser, 68.

20 Dogon, 81.

21 Dogon, 85.

22 Dogon, 67.

23 Dogon, 61.

24 Dogon, 78.

25 Dogon, 62.

26 Couser, 68. Throughout his book, Couser makes no mention of Dorrit Cohn; however, one may here bring up her emphasis on referentiality in non-fiction writing, of which she writes in *Signposts of Fictionality: A Narratological Perspective* (1990). I consider this referentiality to the outside world (also stored in archives and documents which contain traces of the world as it once was) as what constrains the memoirist in his narrative acts of emplotment. What he selects to narrate and how he arranges the material is a matter of invention. However, the material itself needs to refer to the world he has acted within as its citizen (and

Reporting conversations verbatim verges on the impossible and surely involves the inventive skills employed in fiction; yet the memoir as a genre also makes use of dialogue. As he zooms in on crucial encounters with others, Dogon switches between telling and showing. His dialogues contain the gist of meaning as he remembers particular conversations; they are short, simple, and of a general nature. As such, the dialogues make his rendition of events more intense and dynamic. Thus, even in chapters that recount events he could not possibly have witnessed, they serve the purpose of a greater immersion and immediacy. For example, chapter 24 contains a third-person, concise yet detailed, narrative of his brother's escape to Rwanda that includes short dialogues between him and their mother that Dogon could not possibly have heard as he was still in the DRC. Dialogue is also present in chapter 27, which interweaves character sketches of his father and Sedigi's lone escape back to Rwanda.

The father's and brother's stories are retellings of what Dogon was told and as such are braided with his own story of escape. As he writes not only in his own name but also in the name of his family members and companions, their experience complements and enhances his personal narrative. By devoting several pages of his memoir to the retelling of others' accounts he also shows their testimonies' entanglement with his own story of survival as well as the intricacies of reciprocal dependence in the narrative process of ordering and making sense of what happened among people bound by bonds of attachment. Eventually, all these accounts stand as a collective corroboration of the cruelty dealt to entire families and – by a relatable extension –the entire Bagogwe Tutsi population in the DRC and Rwanda.

Dogon's memoir foregrounds a pattern emerging from events in his life – not only is it paced by luck, but also is poignantly punctuated by traumatic losses. The close calls and the serendipitous encounters are overshadowed by too many deaths of others. Beside Patience, Patrick, Célestin, and Florence, he witnessed the beheading of his uncle and the countless deaths of Bagogwe Tutsi. As Laura Eramian writes, "The dead are by no means absent from the world of being, but their presence is a terribly partial one that survivors struggle to maintain."[27] In his memoir, Dogon guards names, deeds, and personalities against erasure. His text performs the work of grief, where writing about the dead "assists the bereaved in maintaining the relationship to the deceased loved one as an internal presence." As Jeanine

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thus is liable in law; see also Gilmore, *Limits of Autobiography*, 43). Moreover, referentiality is also the basis of Philip Lejeune's 'autobiographical pact' (4), of which the parts "the author (whose name refers to the real person), and the narrator are identical […] the narrator and the principal character are identical" are valid and operative in terms of the memoir as a genre.

[27] Laura Eramian, "Personhood, Violence, and the Moral Work of Memory in Contemporary Rwanda," *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 8, no. 1 (2014): 18, https://doi.org/10.4119/ijcv-3042.

M. Vivona continues, this writing directed to living others "is both sharing and symbolization, it helps to connect (and reconnect) the mourner to the community."[28]

The thoughtfully crafted narrative provides what is missing in Rwanda – the common space where individuals can freely do justice to those whose death, as he writes about Patience, "lasts so much longer than her life."[29] Already published, Dogon's story becomes a vehicle of public commemoration where "surviving families [can] claim *Agaciro* for themselves and their loved ones through remembrances [...] the articulation of their biographies provides an opportunity for catharsis, or a temporary release, for those who remain."[30] In Rwanda, *Agaciro*, as David Mwambari explains, "can speak to one's self-worth, asserting one's agency and dignity, but it can also be used to explain the value given to humans: the living, the missing, the dead."[31] These values are not given, but have to be fought for.[32] Dogon's memoir is a soft weapon[33] that makes the collective calamity visible; he fights for the presence of his people's history and current situation in the official records of Rwanda genocide.

Not all those killed in the genocide have graves. The emotional suffering suffusing the memoir results also from the fact that the dead were not properly buried and/or there is no way to find and/or visit their resting places. Patience died of hunger in a DRC forest. Her small body, bound up in a kitenge, was put into a hole in the ground and covered by leaves. Dogon's memoir is where his sister and others who perished in the genocide are figuratively laid to rest. His book is a monument for the beloved that secures the dead with "autonomous membership in the living community."[34]

"War surrounded us like weather"[35] – Memoir as an Act of Resilience

Dogon's text is an act of vernacular remembrance and commemoration expanded into what Mwambari calls "the expression of a political struggle in the present for *Agaciro*."[36] The most

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[28] Jeanine M. Vivona, "Nothing Gold Can Stay?," in *Grief and Its Transcendence*, ed. Adele Tutter and Léon Wurmser, (Routledge, 2016), 128.

[29] Dogon, 42.

[30] David Mwambari, "Agaciro, Vernacular Memory, and the Politics of Memory in Post-Genocide Rwanda," *African Affairs* 120, no. 481 (2021): 627, https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adab031.

[31] Mwambari, 621.

[32] Mwambari, 614.

[33] See Gillian Whitlock, *Soft Weapons* (University of Chicago Press, 2007).

[34] Scott H. Becker and Roger M. Knudson, "Visions of the Dead: Imagination and Mourning," *Death Studies* 27, no. 8 (2011): 694, https://doi.org/10.1080/713842339.

[35] Dogon, 173.

[36] Mwambari, 627.

urgent matter for the Bagogwe Tutsi in Gihembe is their statelessness. They cannot cross international borders or those within Rwanda itself. Their work opportunities are scarce, the wages much lower. For them, the war continues. The omnipresent hunger, at once visible and invisible suffering, denied in conversation yet manifested in the bloated stomachs of children, is the true major cause of death.

When he was already living in the USA and an MA student of international education at NYU, Dogon had the opportunity to meet the President of Rwanda, Paul Kagame. He asked him to grant the Bagogwe Tutsi refugees citizenship. Kagame offered citizenship but only to Dogon, which he refused. His indefatigable collective spirit is in line with the Rwandan *Agaciro* as well as *Ubuntu* – the ethical concept of common humanity that "connect[s] the dignity of an individual to the collective."[37]

Integral to Dogon's memoir are Bagogwe cultural values and common principles that (used to) guide daily interactions and resonate with his character. Resilience is both his personal trait and a muscle, best trained in motion. As a teenager in the Gihembe camp, he started a study group with the aim of preparing children to take the Rwanda national exam, the only way to enter high school education. Incredibly, over half of his group of 52 students passed. Still, most of them, including himself, struggled financially (withheld scholarships) and emotionally (bullying) to attend school. Dogon initiated *I Am You* (related in meaning to *Ubuntu*), an organization "meant to highlight and celebrate the school as a place for people of all ethnicities, tribes, genders, and cultures."[38] He also founded *Seed of Hope*, devoted to collecting the stories of refugees, particularly women, and to connect refugees across Rwanda's refugee camps. Resilience in Dogon's memoir is relentless perseverance rooted in his wish to belong and his sense of indebtedness: helping others is also honoring the people he loved who had been killed.

Moreover, his activities are instinctive ways of healing trauma. Collective trauma seems best treated in a genuinely collective way: resilience is a joint effort; ghosts are driven out in common undertakings. As a Bagogwe Tutsi, Dogon never took part in *gacaca* courts. By initiating grassroots community endeavors, he connects and activates people, which counters withdrawal inclinations that trauma instigates. By involving others in common projects with common goals, he rekindles their (and his own) sense of hope and self-agency.[39] Such

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[37] Mwambari, 614.

[38] Dogon, 302.

[39] Dogon has been engaged in endeavors now acknowledged in trauma and resilience studies. Within the socio-ecological paradigm, resilience is considered to be a dynamic and variable trait of communities, where collective endeavors and communal processes are what enables "reclaiming collective action, trust, and efficacy," Gail Theisen-Womersley, *Trauma and Resilience Among Displaced Populations* (Springer, 2021), 14.

engagements do not erase loss, but facilitate growth around it by turning wounds into scars that may no longer determine or obstruct movement.

Education has always been Dogon's first priority. What began with no desk, pens or books, with him scratching notes into his thighs with broom bristle, finalized at NYU. He underlines the help without which his endeavors would not have withstood the pull of Gihembe, which he fears no matter what he achieves will draw him back into its orbit. Dogon emplots the life-altering phone call from Tim Armstrong, then CEO at AOL, as a miraculous intervention at a very desperate moment in his life. He uses his lifeline to forge such for other refugees.

As Dogon notices, refugees are usually written about. Already in the US he first read memoirs written by Rwanda genocide survivors. As "memoir makes people feel connected,"[40] he brought these to Gihembe to let his people know that refugees are vocal about what happened to them and their accounts circulate in global awareness. Dogon's memoir joins these in testimony. Foregrounding acts of resilient self-determination, he aims to foster self-agency among refugees in Rwanda and beyond. In writing about how authorities and citizens failed Bagogwe Tutsi refugees, Dogon's memoir calls for reappraisal of the insufficient legal provisions and it contributes to the global cultural and political revision both of refugee stereotypes and of the denigrating rhetoric used by the national and international public.

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[40] Rak, *Boom!*, 33

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„Jak przedmiot spychany z miejsca na miejsce" – rezyliencja w czasie wojny i wygnania w memuarze Mondianta Dogona „Those We Throw Away Are Diamonds" (2021)

Streszczenie

W artykule podjęto dyskusję na temat formy i funkcji memuaru Mondianta Dogona „Those We Throw Away Are Diamonds: A Refugee's Search for Home." Wychodząc od krótkiej charakterystyki pozycji autora/narratora/bohatera memuaru oraz specyfiki traumy i żałoby ocalałych z ludobójstwa, autorka koncentruje się na kwestii memuaru jako gatunku, w którym możliwe jest osobiste

oddanie świadectwa przetrwania oraz upamiętnienie zamordowanych. Memuar Dogona odczytany jest również jako akt rezyliencji w obliczu prawnego i psychicznego kryzysu przynależności (bezpaństwowości). Memuar jest gatunkiem, który łączy to, co osobiste z tym, co publiczne, i tym samym bierze udział w kształtowaniu świadomości zbiorowej, wspólnych wartości oraz postaw obywatelskich. Zabiegi literackie charakterystyczne dla memuaru pozwalają na przedstawienie traumatycznego doświadczenia jednostki wraz ze wskazaniem jego historycznych, politycznych oraz kulturowych uwarunkowań. W autorefleksyjnej narracji osobistej Dogon analizuje ciągi przyczynowo-skutkowe oraz wskazuje zarówno kwestie wymagające interwencji, jak i kierunek zmian.

Słowa kluczowe
memuar, ludobójstwo w Rwandzie, trauma, świadectwo, rezyliencja, *Agaciro*

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AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL CULTURE

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A Polish Scholar in Europe and America: Florian Znaniecki's Autobiographical Essay

Abstract

Florian Znaniecki, co-author of the famous book *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America,* was also an emigrant himself. He went to America from Poland and described his experiences in an autobiographical text he wrote for a project on Americanization. This time, however, he did not participate in the study as a researcher but as a research participant. Thus, one of the founders of the biographical method became the subject of a sociological analysis carried out in this manner. The article tries to point out the elements common to both Znaniecki's autobiographical essay and his scholarly work on the theory and methodology of sociology (or more generally of the cultural sciences).

Keywords
Florian Znaniecki, biographical method, personal documents, autobiography

In emphasizing the significance of employing the humanistic coefficient in social research, Florian Znaniecki expressed his fundamental belief that the world can be adequately described only through understanding how individuals perceive it in their own experience. This strong methodological statement was based on the ontological conviction that reality is a product of human actions. Znaniecki viewed these actions as processes through which subjects

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correlate fragments of reality with values, thereby assigning meaning to these fragments and transforming them into things.[1] Consequently, culture does not provide an external image of the objective world;[2] rather, it constitutes the manner in which this world is being constructed. What is more, the consequence of such a statement was also the conviction that the entirety of the knowledge produced through academic inquiry is also an inherent aspect of the cultural reality. Making this assumption was a pivotal moment for modern cultural sciences (Znaniecki's term[3]). More generally, Znaniecki's epistemological and methodological program can also be treated as part of a larger debate, which posed the problem of perspective, points of view (e.g., in literature),[4] or the observer's position in scientific research.

Znaniecki became known as the co-inventor of the (auto)biographical method in sociology. He regarded autobiographies as a rich source of insight into the social reality revealed when individuals engage in unstructured reflection on their actions and experiences. "Personal life records, as complete as possible, constitute the perfect type of sociological material,"[5] he wrote. That conviction served as a starting point for Znaniecki's subsequent idea of organizing contests for diaries written by members of various social groups.[6] In the following decades, the idea was continued by Znaniecki's pupils and other prominent sociologists, especially in Poland.[7]

The current era has made it abundantly clear that the notion of maintaining a neutral stance in the face of reality is untenable. Conversely, the study of cultural phenomena is increasingly perceived as an investigation of nothing else than ourselves. Moreover, this conceptual shift is becoming pervasive, with cultural researchers deliberately situating

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1 The philosophical background for this kind of thinking had already been set out in Znaniecki's first and second books: Florian Znaniecki, *Zagadnienie wartości w filozofii* [The Problem of Value in Philosophy] (Wydawnictwo *Przeglądu Filozoficznego*, 1910) and Florian Znaniecki, *Humanizm i poznanie* [Humanism and Cognition] (Wydawnictwo *Przeglądu Filozoficznego*, 1912).

2 A systematic model of culture, based on this particular approach to the understanding of terms such as value and action, together with a proposition for how this model might be utilised for sociological research purposes was presented by Znaniecki in his first single-author book in English. Florian Znaniecki, *Cultural Reality* (University of Chicago Press, 1919).

3 Florian Znaniecki, *Cultural Sciences: Their Origin and Development* (University of Illinois Press, 1952).

4 Znaniecki also employed the phrase "the point of view" [punkt widzenia]: Florian Znaniecki, *Socjologia wychowania* [The Sociology of Education], vol. 2 (Naukowe Towarzystwo Pedagogiczne, 1930), 19.

5 William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America: Monograph of an Immigrant Group,* vol. 3 (Richard Badger, 1918), 6.

6 Florian Znaniecki, "The Importance of Memoirs for Sociological Studies," *Sisyphus Sociological Studies*: *vol II: The Polish Memoir Sociology. Origins – Dilemmas – Hopes* (1982): 9–15.

7 Paweł Rodak, "Past, Present, and Future of Autobiography Competitions and Archives in Poland," in *Life Writing Matters in Europe*, ed. Marijke Huisman et al. (Universitätsverlag Winter, 2012).

themselves as both subjects and objects of observation (as in the autoethnographic approach). This represents the next step, possible thanks to the methodological innovations of Znaniecki's time, although he himself never did autoethnographic research *per se*. Not only because the concept is much later, but also because, like many others at that time, he was focused on making social and humanistic studies as scientific as possible, which meant rational, reliable, conducted in a clear, systematic way, using coherent theoretical models and precise language. In this scientistic paradigm, the dividing line between the researcher and his object of investigation was drawn very clearly. Apparently, however, this did not make it impossible to change sides.

In 1920 Znaniecki was not only a young ambitious Polish scholar hired by the prominent American sociologist, William I. Thomas, whom he convinced to add the famous methodological note to *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America: Monograph of an Immigrant Group* (1918–20);[8] he was also the anonymous author of a lesser-known work written in English – an autobiographical piece presenting the viewpoint of a European scholar trying to find his place in America. This essay was commissioned by Thomas, for his project on the processes of Americanization. In this way, Znaniecki, who developed the principles of the biographical method in sociology, became the subject of research in which the same methodology he had formulated before was to be applied to his own life writing.

The essay was a classic example of an elicited source, i.e., Znaniecki was aware of the thematic scope and purpose of the whole project. He also knew that Thomas was likely to use the same biographical approach they had applied together in their monograph on Polish peasants. It appears that Znaniecki took all of these factors into account while narrating his story of leaving Europe for the US. There was also an additional element that contributed to the complexity of the case – by the time Znaniecki wrote his essay, he already had excellent expertise as a researcher of (Polish) migration. His proficiency in the field preceded the collaboration with Thomas,[9] which additionally allowed Znaniecki to deepen his understanding

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8 From the outset, Znaniecki was interested in a more theoretical approach than most of the empirically oriented American sociologists of that time, especially those representing the Chicago school. He managed to convince Thomas to add a special methodological preface to the publication. Thomas was so impressed by Znaniecki's work that he offered him co-authorship of the book. The note served as a general methodological introduction to the collection of letters and other personal documents cited and analysed, as well as to documents such as brochures, newspaper articles, parish, and court documents: Zygmunt Dulczewski, *Florian Znaniecki: Life and Work*, (Nakom, 1992). In writing about other facts of Znaniecki's life, I also rely on Dulczewski's monograph.

9 Znaniecki was the director of the Warsaw-based Polish Emigrants' Protection Association (Towarzystwo Opieki nad Wychodźcami) and the editor of its journal (*Wychodźca Polski*). Meeting Thomas resulted in an invitation to America and eventually to a five-year stay in Chicago (1914–1919). Znaniecki worked as

of migration and acculturation processes. Yet of the two of them, it was of course Thomas who was a prominent sociologist and a well-known figure in both academic and administrative circles in the United States.

The next project Thomas conducted (following the one on Polish migrants) was commissioned by the Committee of Studies in Methods of Americanization. Its purpose was to study the Americanization of various immigrant groups. There were very practical reasons behind this: the American government was endorsing and welcoming the process of integration of migrants into society, and therefore seeking tools to aid the assimilation of newcomers to the country. The research outcome of Thomas's project, funded by the Carnegie Corporation, was published in 1921 as part of the Americanization Studies series, under the title *Old World Traits Transplanted*.[10]

Thomas used Znaniecki's autobiographical essay, along with other anonymized records, to distinguish 'the intellectual' as one of the specific types of immigrants coming to America. A surprising conclusion was that "documents show that the 'educated' immigrant is usually more misadapted to American society than the workman."[11] Testimonies such as Znaniecki's writing allowed Thomas to distinguish some typical characteristics of 'the intellectual,' as well as to understand why his ways of making sense of the social world (ascribing values to its elements) might clash with American culture.

While Thomas was working on his analysis, the editor of "The Atlantic Monthly" magazine selected an excerpt of Znaniecki's piece from the research project's records collection. The essay, entitled "Intellectual America," was first published in February 1920 and was signed "by the European," which might have signaled that though the author was presenting his personal experience described in his own words, his way of perceiving American culture represented patterns typical for a certain kind of European – that approach would be in line with the biographical method).[12]

All of these events and circumstances are described in the submitted piece. The article from "The Atlantic Monthly" focuses on how the European intellectual experiences his

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a research assistant for Thomas and also taught Polish history and institutions in the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago.

10 Robert. E. Park and Herbert A. Miller, *Old World Traits Transplanted* (Henry Holt, 1921). The book's cover lists Robert E. Park and Herbert A. Miller as authors, despite the research being conducted by Thomas. This was due to Thomas's dismissal from the University of Chicago at the time, following an accusation of immoral behaviour described in the Mann Act. The funding institution was hesitant to include Thomas's name in the book (he had even been arrested by the FBI). It was later proven that the case had been fabricated as part of a witch hunt. Thomas held progressive political beliefs and was a pacifist. Sadly, the false accusation marked the end of his academic career.

11 Park and Miller, *Old World Traits Transplanted*, 104.

12 Florian Znaniecki, "The Intellectual America: By a European," *The Atlantic Monthly* (Feb. 1920).

migration to the US. The author, a young scholar, describes the challenges encountered in attempting to establish an academic career in America. The decision to emigrate is shown as a result of deliberate career planning. Nevertheless, the picture is much bigger – the same was expected from the participants of Znaniecki's diary contests. It was possible to see not only the objects and the actions but also the meanings given to them, by gaining access to the extended life story told from the perspective of the self (the storyteller's point of view had the same significance as the facts he had stated[13]). The aim was not only to understand the explicit motivations that led to certain decisions and shaped behaviors but to capture the whole specific system of values that determines the way people think and act.

Accordingly, in the initial section of Znaniecki's autobiographical essay the author provides a comprehensive account of his formative years, offering a very detailed insight into the circumstances that had shaped his personality and influenced his education. He emphasizes, for example, his passion for literature and recalls his dream of becoming someone special, preferably an influential writer. It is an indication that such cultural activities were of great importance to him and that there must have been a very strong belief in their significance in the cultural background he represented.

> I do not remember in detail the process by which my active ambition became gradually absorbed by poetic productivity, but between seventeen and eighteen my dream became very definite: it was to become the great poet whom Poland needed (...) I actually began to think that I was going to discover, by a half-philosophical, half- aesthetic intuition, some new all-wonderful meaning of life – reveal a new ideal which would give Poland a new spiritual energy.[14]

Later, Znaniecki recalls his lack of success in poetry and literature (he managed to publish some of his work, but thought he was not good enough to pursue it as a career). Despite the failures and disappointments, his conviction that he was capable of great things had not wavered. In fact, his ambitions had even grown.

> I not only did not cease to believe that I was able and destined to bring a great 'revelation' to men, but I wanted and hoped that this revelation should regenerate, not only Poland, but all mankind. (p. 189)

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[13] This was the difference between autobiographical materials and questionnaires, forms or similar sociological research materials, and their main advantage.

[14] Znaniecki, "Intellectual," 189.

And finally, the author describes in detail the process of deciding to become a scholar:

> I was then twenty-eight years old. During the five years of my studies, partly under the influence of my marriage, but chiefly perhaps because of very hard and continuous intellectual work, all my tendencies became in a large measure redefined and stabilized on the basis of intellectualism. I settled definitively upon purely theoretic aims and decided to lead a purely intellectual life, without letting any external or internal factors disturb my activities. (p. 190)

He focuses on explaining his motivations and beliefs. He writes that he finally came to the conclusion that he was passionate about intellectual life as such and that he had all the talents needed:

> The only organization which appeared compatible with cultural progress was, in my opinion, an institutionally guaranteed rule of a freely recruited intellectual aristocracy, taking the term 'intellectual' in its widest significance. But I had no ambition whatever to play a leading social or political role; on the contrary, I decided carefully to avoid all temptation to obtain any kind of practical influence upon social life. Neither did I return to literary activities. I was, indeed, more than ever determined to achieve greatness and fame, but exclusively in the theoretic line. (p. 191)

This paragraph shows that its author treated intellectual life not only as a sufficient area of reality (no "practical influence" is needed) but as a crucial sphere of human activity – thanks to which both the individual and society are able to evolve.

What is notable about these passages is that they correspond to the way Znaniecki perceived the methodological principles of the biographical method (described in the note to *The Polish Peasant…* or in *The Method of Sociology*[15]). In his autobiographical piece, he visibly tries to reflect on the events that should enable the identification of motives and values that defined his actions. We are also able to see the origins of Znaniecki's strong belief in the role of scientific work making it possible to determine the types of people whose actions could have the greatest and most beneficial impact on society. He elaborated on this idea of pulling the development of culture in a desired direction in the book *Ludzie teraźniejsi a cywilizacja przyszłości* [Contemporary Man and the Civilization of the Future, 1934[16]]. This

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[15] Florian Znaniecki, *The Method of Sociology* (Rinehart & Company, 1934).

[16] Florian Znaniecki, *Ludzie teraźniejsi a cywilizacja przyszłości* (Książnica-Atlas,1934).

example demonstrates the coherence between the assumptions Znaniecki was making in his scholarly works, the ideas he was developing, and the approach he decided to take while narrating his own life trajectory.

In his autobiographical work, Znaniecki also reflects on his relationships, the social roles he played and his personal character. He demonstrates self-awareness, being both very confident and critical of those traits, which he considers to be vices. The author also describes the extreme measures he took to break away from the privileged social class he came from. He felt that his class background and the lifestyle to which he was accustomed were holding him back and preventing him from developing both as an intellectual and as a human being:

> What I wanted was a quick, direct, strongly emotional influence upon the masses, easily reaching everywhere. (...) But it was evident to me that, particularly after the time spent in luxury, flirtation, and revelry in aristocratic circles, I needed a preparation for such a task. And from the histories of religious movements I drew the conclusion that one of the chief obstacles to the success of such an enterprise was the initiator's social bonds, the social group of which he was a part, and the habitual conditions of his life. I resolved therefore to break off entirely all my social connections. (p. 190)

The way of "resolving" the problem was to fake his own death in the waters of a Swiss lake. Znaniecki does not elaborate on these sensational events or his other juvenile adventures as they must have been irrelevant for his way of understanding his biographical trajectory. The important thing was, however, to put an end to the old ways of life. The scholar aimed to achieve success based on his own merits (and indeed a few years later he described himself as a *self-made sociologist*[17]). The idea of the American self-made man was one of the things that attracted him when he was considering possible directions of emigration in order to find a good place to develop his academic career. Additionally, he was highly self-assured and confident about his potential:

> I felt that the success of my aspirations was almost entirely in my own hands, dependent on my conscious will alone I knew that in the theoretic field the objective importance of human products was due at least as much, if not more, to the intensity, persistence, thoroughness, and good method of intellectual work than to original talent, and I knew that I had enough of the latter to develop a new philosophical system on the basis of the leading ideas which I already had, and which certainly were not commonplace. (p. 191)

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[17] Florian Znaniecki, *Znaniecki's Life History (Letter to Father Mulvaney)*, in Dulczewski, *Florian Znaniecki*, 234.

The decision to immigrate to the United States represented an opportunity to embark on a new phase of life. Znaniecki's choice of destination was deliberate, with the expectation that the American context would provide optimal conditions for his personal growth and the realization of his scientific aspirations. His paper reflects a high level of anticipation and an idealized vision of life in the US:

> I expected to find here a fresh enthusiasm for intellectual progress, an intense faith in the unlimited possibilities of future scientific productivity, which would give this country the leading place among the nations of the world in science, literature, and art; a desire to raise higher and higher the standards of intellectual values, and a ready welcome for every new worker who could contribute in some measure to create this wonderful future. (p. 192)

The second part of Znaniecki's entry on Americanization is devoted to his lived experience of the United States. He writes that his initial impression was positive, but that his final opinion is one of disappointment. He describes himself as being disillusioned by the lack of intellectually challenging company among the Americans, including those with higher education and academic qualifications, as well as members of the American Polonia elite, whom he criticizes the most. What particularly disappointed him was the apparent lack of enthusiasm for intellectualism *per se* and the limited mental horizons of the people he encountered.

> The better I became acquainted with American conditions, the more I realized that my first impressions of American society were not sufficiently accurate. I saw that the group of university men whom I happened to meet first was really a select but small minority; that the majority of professors and – what seems to me even more discouraging – the majority of students lack either intellectual freedom or intellectual idealism; are either narrow-minded and unreasonably conservative, or interested, not in science but in jobs, or in both. (p. 195)

The author also recalls feeling surprised and disappointed by the way American society treated newcomers, creating a sense of superiority and failing to recognize the potential of the migrants' talents. Despite being well prepared to pursue an academic career and having a considerable number of contacts and social capital (thanks to his association with Chicago scholars), Znaniecki encountered significant challenges in becoming a member of the American scientific community. He was able to publish in English after only six months, but he still faced difficulties fitting in socially.

How Znaniecki describes this experience is once again significant. He concentrates on the same elements that he will subsequently elaborate upon in his scientific books, which present the theory of the social system. So when he describes his years in Chicago, he is not concerned with the events themselves, even such tragic ones as his beloved wife's death.[18] He instead elaborates on the relationships he had, the roles he played, and the types of social groups he encountered or belonged to (an important one was the well-established American family of Znaniecki's second wife, as well as her own social circle and the skills she had as a highly educated woman[19]). In his essay, Znaniecki devotes much space to the types of people he encountered in the US, including those involved in science. Here we can see the initial stages of the well-known typology of scholars from Znaniecki's later work.[20] In his essay from 1920, he singles out those who have an excellent academic background but lack a bold vision; as a second group, he mentions the intellectuals that are aesthetically sophisticated but blasé. Finally, he distinguishes a third type: activists who are committed to their cause and very effective in their actions but narrow-minded.

According to Znaniecki's concept of cultural reality, the values with which an individual is confronted influence their attitude and explain the formation of new attitudes. This is the reason why Znaniecki provides such comprehensive descriptions of the personality types he encountered in America, as well as the values that guided the representatives of the communities he dealt with and how these related to his own attitude. The manner in which Znaniecki describes different social communities he encountered as an emigrant aligns with his understanding of the tasks of sociology and the object of its study. Znaniecki defined social phenomena as a result of the interaction between the individual mind and social reality. This is why in his sociological theories he paid so much attention to human personality. He saw it as the driving force behind human actions and, at the same time, a result of how the environment affects the individual. The study of human personalities was to provide insight into the laws governing society.[21]

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[18] Znaniecki mentions her death in a car accident, but does not elaborate on it. We might see it as proof of insensitivity, but on the other hand, as he reflected on Americanization, describing all the matters associated with marrying an American woman is probably more important than sharing the tragedy of losing a spouse.

[19] Eileen Znaniecki had a doctorate in law from the University of Chicago. She gave up her own academic career to assist her husband as a consultant, editor, proofreader and secretary. Znaniecki valued her input and considered her his "collaborator," as the dedication in the book *The Laws of Social Psychology* suggests. However, it still shows only one name on the cover (F. Znaniecki, *The Laws of Social Psychology* (University of Chicago, 1925)). Z. Dulczewski, "Eileen Markley Znaniecka 1886–1976," *Przegląd Socjologiczny* 29 (1977): 405–407.

[20] Florian Znaniecki, *The Social Role of the Man of Knowledge* (Columbia University Press, 1940).

[21] Thomas and Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant*, 5.

Znaniecki regarded autobiography as a particularly comprehensive genre among other biographical forms. He noticed it allows to investigate both individual lives and cultural values and, as such, is a valuable source of insight into a multitude of sociological questions. It is therefore unsurprising that he readily consented to provide Thomas with a personal account of his own experiences as a Polish scholar in Europe and America.

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Uczony polski w Europie i Ameryce – o autobiograficznym eseju Floriana Znanieckiego

Streszczenie

Florian Znaniecki, współautor słynnej książki *Chłop polski w Europie i Ameryce*, sam był emigrantem, który przybył z Polski do Stanów Zjednoczonych. Doświadczenia te opisał w autobiograficznym tekście stworzonym na potrzeby projektu, którego tematem był proces amerykanizacji. Tym razem jednak Znaniecki nie uczestniczył w badaniu jako uczony, ale jako jego uczestnik.

Tym samym, jeden z twórców metody biograficznej sam stał się przedmiotem prowadzonej tym sposobem analizy. Artykuł jest próbą wstępnego wskazania elementów wspólnych dla eseju autobiograficznego Znanieckiego oraz jego prac naukowych z zakresu teorii i metodologii socjologii (czy szerzej nauk o kulturze).

Słowa kluczowe
Florian Znaniecki, metoda biograficzna, dokumenty osobiste, autobiografia

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AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL CULTURE

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Between Political and Personal Crises: The Life Writing of Leon Getz[1]

Abstract

The article deals with the phenomenon of shaping Ukrainian national identity in artistic works of an autobiographical nature, created in conditions of life crisis and an oppressive socio-political situation. My case study is Leon Getz (1896–1971), a painter raised in a Polish-Ukrainian family in Lviv, who decided to identify with the Ukrainian minority, oppressed both in pre- and post-war Poland. After WWII, he was subjected to surveillance by the Polish Security Office because of his Ukrainian identity. That led him and his wife (also a Ukrainian) to attempt suicide – unsuccessful in his case, but fatal in his wife's. Getz wrote his memoirs twice: for the first time in the second half of the 1930s, then after his wife's death in the 1950s. The first memoir expressed his loneliness in a predominantly Polish environment, but he did not keep it secret, even though he was not planning on publishing it. The second memoir dwelled on his personal tragedy and was created in secret, because the Security Office sought to intercept Getz's notes as documents incriminating the officers. Both memoirs are subject to my analysis. I consider them in the context of the artist's other personal documents and works, shaping his Ukrainian identity because, in his opinion, the main reason for his and his wife's tragedy were their Ukrainian affiliations. I interpret these memoirs in two different yet complementary ways. First, as life writing at the

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time of a husband's life crisis following his wife's suicide. Second, as life writing in a situation of extreme oppression in a totalitarian state, under surveillance of the Security Office, whose deadly and erroneous moves put the very subjectivity of the individual in crisis. The paper is based on Getz's unpublished memoirs and works which are held in archives in Krakow (Poland) and Rome (Italy).

Keywords
Ukrainian national identity, Second Polish Republic, Polish People's Republic, autobiographical writing, memoir, Leon Getz

Introduction

Leon Getz was a Ukrainian painter who came from a mixed Polish-Ukrainian family living in the city of Lviv. Despite Getz's relatively limited fame, especially in present-day Poland, his masterpieces – and not only his paintings, but also his writing – deserve attention both for their artistic value and for their interesting propensity to different interpretations. First, Getz's works can be perceived as a difficult entanglement of Ukrainian and Polish cultural elements, as he not only lived in pre- and post-war Poland, but also thematically linked many of his works with Polish locations of particular importance to him.[2]

Secondly, Getz's works can be interpreted as a manifestation of a deliberate choice and a construction of national self-identification in progress. Understood in this way, they shed light on choosing a national identity as a process that may follow a peculiar, unusual path, on the one hand, and be very consistent, on the other. This, in turn, nuances the picture of a larger process, which is the nationalization of the Polish and Ukrainian communities, especially their intelligentsia, in the 20th century.[3] Third, finally, some of Getz's works, especially

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2 See *Wystawa obrazów i rzeźby w Sanoku. Maj 1930 r.* (Nakładem Komitetu – Druk Fr. Patały, 1930), 7–10; Bronisław Jaśkiewicz, "Działalność artystyczno-malarska i muzealna Leon Getza ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem Ziemi Sanockiej," *Materiały Muzeum Budownictwa Ludowego w Sanoku*, 15 (1972): 49–56; *Dawne dziedzińce i podwórza Krakowa w rysunkach Leona Getza*, introduction and ed. Jerzy Dobrzycki (Wydawnictwo Artystyczno-Graficzne RSW *Prasa*, 1958). Getz donated 446 of his drawings illustrating Krakow, in seven portfolios, to the Presidium of the National Council of the City of Krakow – the Department of Culture of the Presidium of the National Council. Along with the collection, he also donated 22 press clippings, a catalogue of his exhibition and five photographs. The donation ceremony took place on July 12, 1966. On the following days, the local press frequently reported on Getz's valuable gift to the city, e.g., Eo, "446 rysunków prof. L. Getza darem dla Krakowa," *Gazeta Krakowska* 164, no. 5721 (July 13, 1966): 4; bz, [no title], *Echo Krakowa* 163, no. 6511 (July 13, 1966): 13; PAP, "Piękny dar prof. L. Getza dla Muzeum w Krakowie," *Trybuna Ludu* 193, no. 6302 (July 15, 1966): 4.

3 I analyzed Getz's works in such a context in another article: Jagoda Wierzejska, "Artistic Forms of Shaping Ukrainian National Identity by Leon Getz," *Nationalities Papers* (2024): 1–20, https://doi.org/10.1017/

his late autobiographical writing which constitute a grief memoir, can be seen as a testimony to the painter's life crisis or even trauma experienced in a deeply oppressive situation, in the totalitarian state of post-war Poland. In the subsequent sections of the article, I primarily follow the latter interpretive direction. This will enable me to present the artist's late memoirs as life writing practiced both in a personal crisis caused by the loss of a loved one and in a harsh political situation, under the surveillance of the Polish People's Republic's Security Office, which put an individual in an extreme jeopardy. The sources of the article comprise Getz's particular artistic works and his unpublished memoirs held in the Archive of the Main Chancellery of the Basilian Order of St. Josaphat in Rome (Italy) and the Archive of the Institute of National Remembrance in Krakow (Poland). The additional source and context for Getz's works are the files of the Security Office, which surveilled the artist and collected thousands of documents on him, currently disclosed and located in the Archive of the Institute of National Remembrance, in Krakow and Rzeszów (Poland).

Choice of Identity and Tragedy

Leon Getz was born on April 13, 1896, in Lviv, at the time the capital of the crown land of Galicia, which constituted part of the Habsburg Monarchy. He came from a family with a complicated genealogy. His mother was raised in a Greek-Catholic but Polish-speaking environment, while his father grew into Ukrainian identity in the Eastern Galician countryside where – as an illegitimate child – he was given away by his mother. Getz spoke fluent Polish and Ukrainian and was brought up in both cultures, but ultimately identified himself as Ukrainian. After graduating from school, he was trained in the art of painting by two Ukrainian artists, the architect Ivan Levinsky and the painter Aleksander Novakivsky.[4] Getz met many more helpful people on his educational path; he had a lot of luck and, above all, talent. Ultimately, in 1924 he graduated with honors from the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow. A year later, he became a drawing teacher in Sanok, a town on the San River that

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nps.2024.41. Fabian Baumann, studying the split within the Kievan Shul'gin/Shul'hyn family in the late imperial Russia, shows the analogous phenomenon as an example of the bifurcation of the Little Russian patriotic intelligentsia into self-defined Russians and Ukrainians. See Fabian Baumann, *Dynasty Divided: A Family History of Russian and Ukrainian Nationalism* (Northern Illinois University Press and Cornell University Press, 2023).

4 Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej oddział w Krakowie [Archive of the Institute of National Memory, Krakow Branch] (AIPN-Kr), IPN-Kr 010/10948, vol. 4, Leon Getz, [*Wspomnienia* lub *Maria i moje życie*], 17/50–18/51. In the case of Getz's memoirs in Polish (unlike in the case of the files produced by the Polish People's Republic's Security Office), I first give the page according to the numbering in Getz's document, then (after a slash) according to the archival numbering. All quotes from Getz's documents, both Polish-language and Ukrainian-language, are my translation.

had been part of the former Eastern Galicia prior to 1918 and then became part of the Lviv Voivodeship in independent Poland. He left Sanok only in July 1944, escaping the Red Army.

After World War II, Getz returned to Krakow. In 1948 he married a Ukrainian, Maria Drymałyk, and in 1950 he started working at the Academy of Fine Arts as an assistant professor. In the meantime, he became an object of interest of the Polish People's Republic's Security Office. Getz had already been arrested earlier, in January 1946, on suspicion of organizing the Ukrainian Central Committee in Sanok and collaborating with Germans during the occupation.[5] He was imprisoned in Rzeszów Castle jail and even threatened with the death penalty but he was finally released from prison on April 17, 1947.[6] However, in 1953, his life situation deteriorated sharply. First, Getz started having problems at work, then, on March 18, he was arrested again. He was accused of collaboration, subjected to brutal interrogation and finally forced to sign a pledge denouncing the representatives of the Ukrainian national circle in Krakow. His wife Maria, who was trying to save her husband from the Security Office, was also forced to do the same thing at the same time. For the couple these events marked the beginning of what Getz would always call "a terrible tragedy."[7] They could not come to terms with the surveillance of their own milieu and, simultaneously, were unable to free themselves from the oppressive obligations, so they grasped what they thought was the only way out of the trap, which was joint suicide. They decided to take that step on May 12, 1953; they turned on the gas, took some barbiturates, Maria said, "Za Ukrajinu i jeji wolu,"[8] then they both fell asleep. He woke up; she did not. She was buried in Rakowicki Cemetery in Krakow, on May 19. Getz spent 142 days in a psychiatric hospital. Although he married again (in 1955, to Anna Meckaniuk[9]), and returned to his work and social life, he never reconciled himself to what had happened to him and Maria. Until his death, on December 16, 1971, he remained a subject of interest for the Security Office. No longer, however, as an informant, but as a target.

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5 AIPN-Kr, IPN-Kr 010/10948, vol. 1, Sprawa operacyjnej obserwacji dot. Leon Getz, 10. Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej oddział w Rzeszowie [Archive of the Institute of National Memory Branch in Rzeszów] (AIPN-Rz), IPN-Rz 050/1653, Plan obserwacji figuranta sprawy ewidencyjno-obserwacyjnej z 4 listopada 1958 r., 1v.

6 AIPN-Rz, IPN-Rz 190/48, Skorowidz do księgi głównej więźniów więzienia w Rzeszowie, 1947, 102.

7 AIPN-Kr, IPN-Kr 010/10948, vol. 4, 44/101.

8 This is the original record. See AIPN-Kr, IPN-Kr 010/10948, vol. 4, 142/304.

9 AIPN-Kr, IPN-Kr 010/10948, vol. 4, 233/ 41 [part 2].

War in the Drawings of Getz and his Compatriots

The process of reinforcing Getz's Ukrainian identity over the course of his life is crucial for understanding his work, with particular emphasis on his autobiographical writing, especially in the later period of his personal life crisis. The artist's Ukrainian identification was initially shaped in his Lviv family home during his upbringing and through contact with the Greek Catholic Church, including personal relations with the Metropolitan, Andrey Sheptytsky. At the beginning of Lviv's occupation, in the autumn of 1914, his Ukrainian sympathies increased after he had been arrested by the Russians for having bricked up a part of the Metropolitan's archive in a hiding place.[10] All these experiences prompted the artist to join the Legion of Ukrainian Sich Riflemen [USS] in 1915. The USS Legion, a military unit within the Austro-Hungarian Army, brought together Ukrainian soldiers who were not only well-trained, but also relatively well-educated and hence, of all the Ukrainian troops in the Habsburg forces, most devoted to Ukrainian national and state-building aspirations.[11] As a painter, Getz was active in the Press Department, dealing with the cultural, educational and ideological formation of the Legion. Together with his colleagues from the Department, he compiled the *Antolohija striletskoi tvorchosty* [Anthology of Riflemen's Work], a collective volume of drawings, short texts and musical notations depicting frontline deeds and hinterland experiences of Ukrainian soldiers during the Great War.[12] The handmade masterpiece was presented in the autumn of 1918 at the exhibition of the Ukrainian Sich Riflemen at the National Museum in Lviv. On the one hand, it served as an early commemoration of the achievements of the Ukrainian soldiers. On the other, it became a showcase of artistic skills and strong proof of Getz's Ukrainian affiliation. His self-portrait as a fatal victim of fighting became one of the symbols of Sich Riflemen's sacrifice.

The next pivotal stage in the process of the consolidation of Getz's Ukrainian identity was his stay in a Polish internment camp in Dąbie, a district on the outskirts of Krakow. He was taken there following his participation in the Battle of Lviv on the Ukrainian side. The battle broke out on November 1, 1918, shortly after Getz had returned to his home town from the fronts of the Great War. The battle raged for three weeks in Lviv and then transformed

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10 Orest J. Maciuk, "Archiwum metropolity Szeptyckiego we Lwowie," in *Metropolita Andrzej Szeptycki: studia i materiały*, ed. Andrzej A. Zięba (Polska Akademia Umiejętności, 1994), 213.

11 See Lev Schankovskyj, *Ukrainska Halitska Armiia. Voyenno-istorychna studiia* (Dmytro Mykytiuk, 1974), 36; Mykola Lazarovych, *Legion Ukrainskykh Sichovykh Striltsiv. Formuvannja, ideja, borotba* (Dzhura, 2016), 15–50.

12 Lev-Osyp Getz and Bokhdan Volodymyr Kryzhanivskyi, *Antolohija striletskoi tvorchosty*, ed. I. Hakh (Chervonohrad: Yueks, 2021). The original is in the Arkhiv Holovnoj Upravy Basylijanskoho Chynu sv. Josafata (AHUBCJ) in Rome.

into the Polish-Ukrainian War over Eastern Galicia, eventually won by the Poles in the summer of 1919.[13]

Before these events took place, Getz had been drafted for Ukrainian military service in the Battle of Lviv with the Poles. He was seriously wounded as early as November 2, 1918 – he was shot in the knee of one leg and had torn muscles in the other. He was treated in Polish hospitals: first in a field hospital in the building of the Lviv Polytechnic, then in a hospital in Dziedzice Śląskie. Immediately after recovery, Getz was sent to an internment camp in Dąbie, where 239 Ukrainian prisoners of war and 2,288 Ukrainian internees from Eastern Galicia were being held.[14] Getz did not specify the exact time of the imprisonment (however, it must have been in the first half of 1919), while in his memoirs he noted his release from confinement on November 29, 1919.[15]

During his time in Dąbie, Getz created a remarkable work, the album *Dombie 1918-9*, which documented his and his compatriots' life in the camp. The volume constituted a comprehensive collection of drawings created mainly by Getz but supplemented by a number of texts by Ukrainian prisoners of war and internees. The drawings primarily comprised portraits of Getz's Ukrainian comrades and, in addition, landscapes, genre scenes and sketches of space development. They were accompanied by poems, short stories, memorial entries, and above all hundreds of signatures of the artist's fellow prisoners. Getz drew on random scraps of paper due to the lack of paper suitable for drawing. The prisoners released from the camp transported the illustrations from Krakow to Lviv. When Getz himself was released from Dąbie and returned to his hometown, he collected his drawings from the people who had kept them safe and he compiled the volume.

In the introduction to the album written in Ukrainian, Getz explained that as soon as he had got used to life in the camp, he "decided to create a memorial book under the title *Dombie* – to record all that was in the hearts of many during the hard time of captivity."[16] Indeed, the volume played an important role for the Ukrainian community and Getz himself.

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13 See Christopher Mick, *Lemberg, Lwów, L'viv, 1914–1947: Violence and Ethnicity in a Contested City* (Purdue University Press, 2016), 137–207; Michał Klimecki, *Polsko-ukraińska wojna o Lwów i Galicję Wschodnią 1918–1919* (Volumen, 2000); Maciej Kozłowski, *Między Sanem a Zbruczem. Walki o Lwów i Galicję Wschodnią 1918–1919* (Znak, 1990).

14 Zbigniew Karpus, *Jeńcy i internowani rosyjscy i ukraińscy w Polsce w latach 1918–1924* (Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 1991), 41.

15 AIPN-Kr, IPN-Kr 010/10948, vol. 4, 41/94.

16 AHUBCJ, the archival unit does not have a reference number, L. Getz, *Dombie 1918–9*, 2/5. I first give the page according to the numbering in Getz's document, then (after the slash) the archival numbering. I would like to thank Fr. Jakiv Shumylo from Basylianum for making the archival unit available. For mediation in making the unit available, I would like to thank Dr. Martin Rohde.

As a collection of dated drawings and texts put down on random pieces of paper, the album captured the circumstances of the camp inhabitants, i.e., the integral, not frontline but everyday dimension of the Polish-Ukrainian War. On the other hand, as a thoughtfully composed collection, it sought to commemorate the imprisonment of many Ukrainian intellectuals as a particularly painful experience in the collective life of a national minority in Poland. The album was also a record of the important and specifically Ukrainian life experience of Getz himself. It was an expression of his Ukrainian identity and proof of his solidarity with the Ukrainians during the Polish-Ukrainian War, in which they lost not only Eastern Galicia but also the dream of national independence.

Memoirs (out) of Loneliness

Getz made two efforts at life writing. His first attempt came after his participation in the fights of the USS Legion, the forced stay in Dąbie and his studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow. It began to be written in Sanok in the mid-1930s. By that time, Getz was already a fully qualified teacher at the State Gymnasium in Sanok. He described his work at the gymnasium as onerous, since he was constantly reproached for his Ukrainian identity. Anonymous letters were written against him, he was attributed a "mischievous-Ukrainian conscience" and accused of undertaking "anti-state actions" at school and "Judas-like behavior."[17]

The two Ukrainian-language volumes of memoirs written in the second half of the 1930s, were, above all, testimony of Getz's increasing loneliness and growing stigmatization on the basis of his nationality in a provincial environment dominated by Poles. The work also constituted an expression of his Ukrainian national identity, which he consistently corroborated in the interwar period. In his memoirs he recalls certain demonstrative gestures such as wearing a black shirt on November 11, Poland's Independence Day, as a sign of mourning and a reminder that Ukraine was still not free. Above all, however, Getz's attachment to the Ukrainian cause was evidenced by the figure of the projected reader created in the text. Getz began his memoirs with an idealistic description of such a reader: "My memoirs can only be read by a man who has a soul and a heart, a thinking and kindly man, a good and sympathetic man. // My memoirs cannot be read by a materialist, devoid of soul, heart and reason, indifferent to the needs and sufferings of people."[18] This passage revealed Getz's sense of

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[17] All citations AHUBCJ, the archival unit does not have a reference number, L. Getz, [spomyny], vol. 1, -/50. I first give the page according to the numbering in Getz's document, then (after the slash) according to the archival numbering. I would like to thank Fr. Jakiv Shumylo from Basylianum for making the archival unit available. For mediation in making the unit available, I would like to thank Dr. Martin Rohde.

[18] L. Getz, [spomyny], vol. 1, -/2.

marginalization, but also his desire to come into contact with an environment more friendly to him in national and social terms, and more open to art that did not serve ideological purposes. He did not state this directly in his memoirs, but the language he used and its content left no doubt that the projected reader could be only another Ukrainian, representing the same national minority as Getz.

Memoirs (out) of Trauma

Getz undertook the task of recording his life for the second time in 1954, after his wife's suicide. By that time, he had been treated in a psychiatric hospital, had withdrawn from public life, was living alone in an apartment in Krakow that had been his and Maria's home, and was traumatized by the loss of his wife and the constant surveillance. Later he returned to work and social life, but kept writing his memoirs, which over time turned into a diary.

Getz's deep personal crisis reflected in the memoirs written after Maria's death can be observed in the obvious subordination of the text – entitled in Polish *Maria i moje życie* [Maria and My Life] – to its commemorative and consolatory function. Such functionalization of the work allows it to be qualified as an example of grief memoirs, i.e., textual forms of mourning and self-therapy created by the bereaved, which have become objects of interest of bibliotherapeutic studies focused on self-help and affective literature.[19] Getz's memoirs – according to his declaration – constituted an attempt to "preserve the memory"[20] of his beloved wife and to heal "from the wounds inflicted"[21] on the husband. In his work, Getz repeatedly said goodbye to Maria, paid tribute to her personality and character, and asked that his prospective readers remembered the couple and reflected upon their woes. He also repeatedly emphasized that writing memoirs had a remedial effect on him. "I am slowly recovering from the tragedy and the harm done [to me – J.W.] with the help of this book,"[22] he declared and added: "I lock my memories in this book and free myself from the oppressive

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[19] See Michael Robert Dennis, "The Grief Account: Dimensions of a Contemporary Bereavement Genre," *Death Studies* 32, no. 9 (2008): 801–836, https://doi.org/10.1080/07481180801928980; Katarzyna A. Małecka and Jamison S. Bottomley, "Grief Memoirs: The Familiarity of Helping Professionals with the Genre and Its Potential Incorporation Into Grief Therapy," *Death Studies* 46, no. 4 (2022): 842–850, https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2019.1705938; Katarzyna. A. Małecka, *Grief Memoirs: Cultural, Supportive, and Therapeutic Significance* (Routledge, 2023). The most recent studies also take into account grief memoirs that incorporate objects ("material grief memoirs"); see Marina Deller, "Outside the Box: Reading Material Grief Memoir as Grief Archive," *A/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 39, no. 1 (2024): 73–91, https://doi.org/10.1080/08989575.2024.2342104.

[20] AIPN-Kr, IPN-Kr 010/10948, vol. 4, 152/321.

[21] AIPN-Kr, IPN-Kr 010/10948, vol. 4, 165/337.

[22] AIPN-Kr, IPN-Kr 010/10948, vol. 4, 169/344.

burden of experience."[23] However, his compulsive textual returns to Maria's case did not fully confirm this optimistic self-diagnosis. They instead displayed all the features of a severe melancholic fixation on the past, which seemed overwhelming, overloaded with negative emotions and closed the subject's time horizon, making it impossible for him to distance himself from what had been lost. Thus, the aforementioned returns allow us to hypothesize that Getz was still far from completely healed from the psycho-emotional shock that betrayed the characteristics of trauma.[24] His memoirs manifested a number of therapeutic dimensions which, following Michael Robert Dennis, can be called restorative, evaluative, interpretive, affirmative and affective, but they did not explicitly exhibit a transformative dimension that could be linked to working through the trauma.[25]

The testimonies of the oppressive socio-political situation which had fatally affected Getz's life since the early 1950s, seem more complex in the memoirs. Getz described the circumstances whereby he and Maria were forced to cooperate with the Security Office; he also gave hints that the surveillance was continued, even though after Maria's death the officers had declared that they would exempt him from the obligation to invigilate the Ukrainian national circle in Poland. These aspects of the memoirs were of particular interest to the officers who wanted to intercept the work so that it would not incriminate them and put the Polish People's Republic and its security apparatus in a negative light. For a life writing researcher, equally intriguing is what the Security Office functionaries did not reflect on, namely the fact that Getz wrote his memoirs in Polish.

The memoirs constituted not only an expression of the author's deep Ukrainian self-consciousness. They were also a manifestation of his passionate patriotic feelings and his will to defend his identity in a situation of national oppression. "The more oppressed Ukraine is, the more I love it. […] I love my nation as other nations love theirs, and I believe that I can live safely among those who know how to love,"[26] claimed Getz and then continued: "I did not disown you Ukraine, in even the worst hour, I gave my life for you and with this I paid

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[23] AIPN-Kr, IPN-Kr 010/10948, vol. 4, 171/346.

[24] See the following classic literature on the subject: Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. from the German under the general editorship of James Strachey, in collaboration with Anna Freud, assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson, vol. XIV: *On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Meta-psychology and Other Works (1914–1916)* (The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1957), 243–258; Melanie Klein, "Mourning and Its Relation to Manic-Depressive States," in *Essential Papers on Object Loss*, ed. Rita V. Frankiel (New York University Press, 1994), 95–122; Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon Roudiez (University Press Group, 1992 [1987]).

[25] See M. R. Dennis, "The Grief Account," 801–836.

[26] AIPN-Kr, IPN-Kr 010/10948, vol. 4, 179/356.

my duty on earth."[27] If his declarations of strong Ukrainian identification were sincere – and there is no reason to think otherwise, given the development of his national identity – why did he not write his memoirs in the language he considered his own native tongue?

Using third person singular forms, Getz explained his choice of Polish as follows: the author "writes in the language of that land where he lives and perhaps he does the right thing writing in Polish, thus repaying the debt of memory of the years lived in this country."[28] He did not elaborate on this point, but two features of the memoirs make it possible to understand the meaning hidden in the phrase that ends the quoted sentence. First, although the memoirs were kept in secret due to the threat from the security apparatus, Getz hoped that the text would be made public in the future. Second, he had a clear idea of the text's intended reader. This time it was not meant to be a Ukrainian, but Poles, directly addressed as "you"[29] and referred to by Getz as "brothers."[30] It must be considered a bitter irony, since it was mainly Poles who had directly or indirectly contributed to his and his wife's disastrous fate. Thus, in choosing "the language of that land," the author was above all using the language of those responsible for his and Maria's tragedy. He was writing in such a way that those responsible could not fail to hear, comprehend and remember the tragic story. According to Getz's reminiscences, the security officers sought to persuade him to forget about Maria's case and diminished it as – in their words – a "mistake" that could have happened to a "young power."[31] Getz, therefore, decided to write about the events that ruined his life in the language of Mickiewicz and Słowacki, so that all Poles, including the authorities of the Polish People's Republic, would understand his suffering. This subversive way of "repaying the debt of memory" reveals an additional – apart from the commemorative and consolatory – function of the painter's memoirs. They form an accusation against the Polish People's Republic, those in power, as well as all Pole-xenophobes, because, according to Getz, the crux of his and Maria's tragedy was that "they were Ukrainians and therefore they were abused."[32]

Given the personal and political context of Getz's memoir and later diary entries, one can interpret his work written since 1954 in two different but complementary ways. According

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27 AIPN-Kr, IPN-Kr 010/10948, vol. 4, 193/370.

28 AIPN-Kr, IPN-Kr 010/10948, vol. 4, 5/24.

29 The author addressed the projected readers (Poles) with numerous apostrophes and signaled that the story was intended for them, also provocatively, for example, asking: "Are you not tired of the truth – the truth tires," AIPN-Kr, IPN-Kr 010/10948, vol. 4, 87/197.

30 AIPN-Kr, IPN-Kr 010/10948, vol. 4, 91/203.

31 AIPN-Kr, IPN-Kr 010/10948, vol. 4, 159/328. The metaphor referred to the socio-political order introduced in Poland after World War II.

32 AIPN-Kr, IPN-Kr 010/10948, vol. 4, 142/304.

to both interpretations, the painter's Polish memoirs appear as an expression of his ardent self-awareness as a Ukrainian. The first interpretation, however, puts more emphasis on the private dimension of the text, the second – on the socio-political aspect. The memoirs, therefore, can be understood, first, as commemorative and consolatory life writing undertaken during the time of life crisis of the husband after his wife's suicide. Second, they can be read as accusatory life writing in a situation of extreme oppression from the totalitarian state and its infiltration system, whose deadly and faulty moves put the very subjectivity of an individual in crisis. The former interpretation seems more obvious when reading the memoirs. However, their history has shown the accuracy of the latter interpretation. The Security Office functionaries were indeed highly concerned about the memoirs. They were afraid that Getz would try to send them abroad,[33] so they conducted operations to seize them. It is difficult to say unequivocally under what circumstances the officers came into possession of the artist's voluminous notes, but it is certain that they eventually managed to obtain them.[34] Today, the manuscript of Getz's work written in Polish can be found in the Krakow branch of the Archive of the Institute of National Memory, together with three volumes of files produced by the Security Office.

Conclusions

The works analyzed are documents of Getz's personal experience set against the background of the collective life of the Ukrainian community originating in Eastern Galicia, both during the Great War and in interwar Poland, and then during and after World War II. The anthology of the Riflemen's work and the album from Dąbie demonstrate the hardship of frontline and hinterland life in the wartime period for Ukrainians in general, and Getz in particular. Memoirs from the second half of the 1930s show the loneliness but also the frustration of a marginalized representative of the Ukrainian minority in the Second Polish Republic. The memoirs written after Maria's death provide an insight into the life situation, attitudes and decisions of a member of this minority, who found himself in danger from the oppressive and often dysfunctional institutions of the Polish People's Republic. In all of these works,

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[33] Cf. AIPN-Kr, IPN-Kr 010/10948, vol. 2, Materiały operacyjne dot. Leon Getz, 3.

[34] Marta Superson-Haładyj puts forward a hypothesis according to which Getz's memoirs were seized by officers during a search of Tyrs Venkhrynovych's house. An informant with the pseudonym "Hare" reported to the Security Office that the painter had planned to hand over his personal documents to Venkhrynovych because he considered him a trustworthy person. Superson-Haładyj speculates that the memoirs may have been handed over to Venkhrynovych by Anna Getz (*de domo* Meckaniuk), and then ended up in the hands of the security apparatus. See Marta Superson-Haładyj, "Leon Getz (1896–1971) w aktach bezpieki," *Krzysztofory: Zeszyty Naukowe Muzeum Historycznego Miasta Krakowa*, 26 (2008): 244.

the author, in drawings and words, portrayed himself in difficult or traumatic moments of his life, in war and political crises that, on the one hand, undermined his sense of personal security and, on the other, consolidated his national identity.

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Między kryzysem politycznym a osobistym: życiopisanie Leona Getza

Streszczenie

Artykuł podejmuje problematykę kształtowania się ukraińskiej tożsamości narodowej w dziełach artystycznych o charakterze autobiograficznym, powstających w warunkach kryzysu życiowego i opresyjnej sytuacji społeczno-politycznej. Studium przypadku dotyczy Leona Getza (1896-1971), malarza wychowanego w polsko-ukraińskiej rodzinie we Lwowie, który postanowił utożsamić się z mniejszością ukraińską, represjonowaną zarówno w przedwojennej, jak i powojennej Polsce. Po II wojnie światowej został on poddany inwigilacji przez Urząd Bezpieczeństwa PRL ze względu na swoją ukraińską tożsamość. Doprowadziło to go i jego żonę (również Ukrainkę) do próby samobójczej – nieudanej w przypadku artysty, śmiertelnej w skutkach w przypadku jego żony. Getz spisał swoje wspomnienia dwukrotnie: po raz pierwszy w drugiej połowie lat 30., a następnie po śmierci żony w latach 50. Jego pierwsze wspomnienia wyrażały samotność w przeważająco polskim otoczeniu, nie były opracowywane w tajemnicy, mimo że autor nie planował ich publikowania. Drugie wspomnienia skupiały się na jego osobistej tragedii i powstały w sekrecie, ponieważ Urząd Bezpieczeństwa starał się przechwycić notatki Getza jako dokumenty obciążające funkcjonariuszy. Oba dokumenty wspomnieniowe są przedmiotem mojej analizy. Rozważam je w kontekście innych osobistych dokumentów i prac artysty, kształtujących jego ukraińską tożsamość, ponieważ jego zdaniem głównym powodem tragedii jego i jego żony były ich ukraińskie powiązania. Interpretuję te wspomnienia na dwa różne, ale uzupełniające się sposoby. Po pierwsze jako pisanie o życiu w czasie kryzysu życiowego męża po samobójstwie żony. Po drugie jako pisanie o życiu w sytuacji skrajnego ucisku w państwie totalitarnym, pod nadzorem Urzędu Bezpieczeństwa, którego skrajnie niebezpieczne i błędne posunięcia sytuują samą podmiotowość jednostki w kryzysie. Artykuł opiera się na niepublikowanych wspomnieniach i pracach Getza, które znajdują się w archiwach w Krakowie (Polska) i Rzymie (Włochy).

Słowa kluczowe

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AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL CULTURE

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Doing Research in Times of Crisis: An Auto/Biography

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the process of struggling with thoughts, emotions and experiences that emerged in the course of and as a result of my research during the Covid-19 pandemic. By referring to Liz Stanley's notion of "auto/biography," I strive to explore the meanings and implications of researching a researcher's autobiography. I am interested in the epistemic discussion on the interrelationship of what is personal, political and/or institutional in the context of feminist studies. My aim is to reflect on such issues as the effect of research on the trajectory of my own auto/biography.

Keywords
auto/biography, research, academia, experience, sweaty concept

Knowing is painful because after "it" happens I can't stay in the same place and be comfortable. I am no longer the same person I was before.[1]

* Contact with the Author: a.ostaszewska@uw.edu.pl; ORCID: 0000-0002-3220-3289.
1 Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands La Frontiera: the New Mestiza* (Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 48.

In this paper I employ what Sara Ahmed called "sweaty concepts," a metaphor for intellectual work that makes bodily and sensory experiences of difficulties and discomfort understandable and visible/legible in the process of writing.[2] Sweaty concepts serve as a starting point for finding language that does not ignore the embodied experience of being "not at home in the world,"[3] but instead can contribute to the discourse by giving a description of a situation that produces the experience. For me, it is a descriptive tool that connects me to feminist authors (e.g. Ahmed and Audre Lorde[4]) and thus it empowers me to embrace what is uneasy, elusive even, to be articulated, because it is closely related to emotions and body experience, and for this reason often underrepresented in my writings. As Ahmed puts it, "The task is to stay with the difficulty, to keep exploring and exposing this difficulty. We might need not to eliminate the effort or labor from the writing."[5] It is particularly important, because as academics we are taught to eliminate the effort of our work:

> […] we have been taught to tidy our texts, not to reveal the struggle we have in getting somewhere. Sweaty concepts are also generated by the practical experience of coming up against a world, or the practical experience of trying to transform a world.[6]

Therefore this paper delves into the process of struggling with the thoughts, emotions and experiences that emerged in the course of and as a result of my research work during the Covid-19 pandemic.[7] It is my deliberate attempt to describe what I have experienced, but I have never put it into words. Thus, by referring to sweaty concepts, I am trying to frame my descriptive work in conceptual work. For me, it is an extremely reflective, highly autobiographical work because it refers to real life events and my embodied emotions. Therefore, I draw on Liz Stanley's term "auto/biography" to explore the meanings and implications of researching the researcher's autobiography.[8]

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2 Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Duke University Press, 2017), 12.

3 Ahmed, *Living*, 13.

4 Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Crossing Press, 1984).

5 Ahmed, *Living*, 14.

6 Ahmed, *Living*, 14.

7 The experiences I refer to in this paper come from research projects I conducted on the feminization of the Covid-19 pandemic during the pandemic period itself, over the years 2020–2022. The projects were online, using individual and focus interviews with women working at universities as the main techniques.

8 Liz Stanley, *The Auto/Biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/Biography* (Manchester University Press, 1992).

Autobiography is understood here broadly as a practice of living,[9] "a dialogue of the self with itself in the present about the past for the purpose of self-understanding."[10] I am interested in the epistemic contexts of research work that, on the one hand, actively involves what is personal and, on the other hand, goes beyond what is exclusively personal – it relates to other people (for instance, interviewees and research partners) and the social worlds one lives in (most importantly, the academic environment). Thus, the subject of this paper is the interrelationship of what is personal, political[11] and institutional[12] in the context of feminist research.[13]

I start by framing the theoretical ground that influenced my feminist imagination,[14] the schema of interpretation of my research work and its implications for my "auto/biographical I." In her writing on "the auto/biographical," Stanley discusses the impact of personal experiences on research. I am interested in reflecting on the opposite: What is the impact of research on the researcher's biography? How does research affect the trajectory of my auto/biography? Conducting research influences the researcher's auto/biographical I. In my situation, research work became a transformative experience that led me to understand my own position as a feminist researcher and a woman in academia.

Theoretical Framework and Inspirations

Liz Stanley uses the term "auto/biography" to signalize the impossibility of separating a single, individual life from its local and global contexts. Stanley argues that the "I" is always something unique, and at the same time, it remains social and connected to the lives of other people, without whom this "I" would be a completely different "I." Recounting the life of an individual entails telling the stories of others as well. This mutual interaction takes place in the course of conducting research since research is part of social life.

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[9] Paweł Rodak, *Między zapisem a literaturą. Dziennik polskiego pisarza w XX wieku* (Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2011). See Aneta Ostaszewska, *Becoming Bell Hooks: A Story About the Self-Empowerment of a Black Girl Who Became a Feminist* (Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2023), 50–51.

[10] John-Raphael Staude, "Autobiography as a Spiritual Practice," *Journal of Gerontological Social Work* 45, no.3 (2005): 252, https:/doi.org/10.1300/J083v45n03_01.

[11] Carole Hanisch, "The Personal Is Political", in *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation: Major Writings of the Radical Feminists*, eds. Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt (Radical Feminism, 1970), 76–78.

[12] Sara Ahmed, "Introduction: Sexism – A Problem with a Name," *new formations: a journal of culture/theory/politics* 86 (2015): 5–13, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/604486.

[13] Compare Gayle Letherby, *Feminist Research in Theory and Practice* (McGraw-Hill Education, 2003); Liz Stanley and Sue Wise, *Breaking Out: Feminist Consciousness and Feminist Research* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983).

[14] Vikki Bell, *Feminist Imagination: Genealogies in Feminist Theory* (Sage, 2000).

Conducting research based on interviews, narratives or life stories is about (re)constructing the lives of others. However, the process involves and affects us as the authors of these (re)constructions, and in the course of writing in particular, it becomes part of our own life both as researchers and individuals. For Stanley, the social life that we research and our own biography form an intertextual whole. Referring to Clifford Geertz, one can say that auto/biography is a blurred genre that encompasses both autobiography and biography.[15] The same pertains to my paper, since, as a researcher who writes about other people's experiences, I cannot avoid telling a story about myself in the process as well.

Of great importance for my understanding of auto/biography on research practice are also works by other feminist researchers, such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Shulamit Reinharz, and Pamela Cotterill and Gayle Letherby. The (autobiographical) works by these authors are centered on the shared dilemmas of feminist researchers that I encounter as well, for example, the relations of a person and the research she conducts. Reinharz, like Stanley, notes that research work has an impact on the lives of researchers. She states, "Researchers are likely to grow and change throughout the research process,"[16] while Cotterill and Letherby postulate a closer look at the biographical changes that occur in researchers after completing their research. "For the definition of the intellectual and personal biographies of the researcher needs to be further extended to include post research experience and change."[17]

Others also emphasize the importance of an open, reflective approach to one's own experiences that are part of or result from research work. For Frederick Steier, "We understand and become aware of our own research activities as telling a story about ourselves,"[18] whilst Liz Stanley and Sue Wise believe that, "All research is grounded in consciousness and capitalizing on this personal involvement adds strength to the research."[19]

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15 Clifford Geertz, "Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought," *The American Scholar* 49, no. 2 (1980), 165–79, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41210607.

16 Shulamit Reinharz, *On Becoming a Social Scientist: From Survey Research and Participant Observation to Experimental Analysis* (Routledge, 1984).

17 Pamela Cotterill and Gayle Letherby, "Weaving Stories: Personal Auto/Biographies in Feminist Research," *Sociology* 27, no. 1 (1983): 67–79. https://doi.org/10.1177/003803859302700107.

18 Frederick Steier, *Research and reflexivity* (Sage, 1991), 3.

19 Stanley and Wise, *Breaking Out,* 61.

The Pandemic as Experience of Co-Presence

The pandemic, along with the transition to online work and remote communication, has validated a new social situation, including research space.[20] There was a transfer of research field to our homes and, more precisely, to our computers. The transition to online interviews as video conferences, as occurred in my projects, was conducive to the opening of various themes and threads regarding both methodology and ethics in research.[21] Therefore, I outline below a few dimensions of online research that I acknowledged while conducting research during the pandemic.

Marnie Howlett argues that online research, and in particular online interviews, shift interaction from offline co-location to online co-presence.[22] It is a communication space where the interlocutors can stare at screens within their respective homes and at the same time be part of some temporal social relationship in virtual space. This space can be entered by clicking on a link. In this way, it becomes possible for both sides of the interaction to construct a new digital and socially significant space that is neither the current location nor the physical environment. The pandemic made the shifting of the boundaries between what is "mine" and "private/personal" (home) and what is "common" and "public" (research space). "What is mine" was available to others, or shared with others via camera. In this way the virtually mediated communication made the division into private/public space blurred.

The interviewer and the interviewee were located in their own specific, concrete and physical places, which could be revealed via camera; this could create the feeling of being simultaneously both in one's own home and in the other person's. By conducting an online interview I had insight into someone's space, but I also raised the topic deliberately, asking about their space and their experience of working from home. The images that appeared in the camera from behind the interviewee constituted the background that was the story of her life or the particular part of life my interlocutor did not necessarily intend to reveal. This situation also concerned me – the camera also revealed "my story." Thus, as I looked into the camera, I could follow two stories, my interlocutor's and mine.

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[20] Research using various online tools was conducted before the pandemic, however the pandemic "moved" research and teaching activities to the Internet on an unprecedented scale. See Aneta Ostaszewska and Marta Pietrusińska, "Wywiad online jako nowa rzeczywistość badawcza w kontekście badań nad feminizacją pandemii," *Studia Socjologiczne* 3, no. 250 (2023): 37–58. https://doi.org/10.24425/sts.2023.147160.

[21] Ostaszewska and Pietrusińska, "Wywiad online."

[22] Marnie Howlett, "Looking At the 'Field' Through a Zoom Lens: Methodological Reflections on Conducting Online Research During a Global Pandemic," *Qualitative Research* 22, no. 3 (2022): 393, https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794120985691.

Doing research from home meant to me that my private space was no longer personal as it had been before the pandemic. My bookshelves, visible in the background, were my representation; it was an extension of who I was and how I presented myself in my professional role. I suppose that all these books confirmed my image as a scholar and researcher. Thus, by doing online interviews from home I could see myself in a professional role but in a private setting. At first this caused a feeling of discomfort; however, I quickly became aware of how home and the research field are unstable categories that are designated by research conventions and researchers themselves.[23] For example, I deliberately used no virtual background during the online interviews because I wanted to be honest and credible to my interviewees, and "real" as much as I wanted them to be real and authentic. At the same time, online conversations allow us to hide something; for instance, we may participate in formal meetings and "wear" a professional face visible on the screen while wearing pajama bottoms, invisible to the camera. What is visible and invisible (overt and covert) has acquired a meaning previously unknown to me. This is a "theater of embodied self-representation" in which being on camera is part of a pact of showing up, as written by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson[24] and elaborated by Lisa Ortiz-Vilarelle when discussing online teaching/learning.[25]

However, participating in video-conference communication is not only a question of being seen/watched by others, but it is the experience of being visible to oneself in a specific social context (being my own witness and voyeur). This dimension of online research refers to the process of becoming aware of one's embodied self. Because of the camera, as a researcher I became (more) visible to myself at every stage of the research interaction. The very fact of turning on the camera is significant because on the one hand, it makes me, as a researcher, recognize myself in a specific situation and verify or confirm my professional role – I might adapt my appearance and facial expression to the situation. I could see my face while talking to my interviewee and by seeing the mimicry I might read my own facial emotions, their presence or absence, so in a way I was in control of my reactions and behavior.

What is of particular importance for me as part of the visibility/invisibility of my body during online interviews is the experience of discomfort with being a face/body that is seen on the screen. Online interviews are specific because the first thing one sees while turning on the camera is one's own face. Therefore, the camera could be seen as a tool of "control

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[23] Karen E. Till, "Returning Home and to the Field," *Geographical Review* 91 (2001): 46, https://doi.org/10.2307/3250804.

[24] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Interfaces: Women/Autobiography/Image/Performance* (University of Michigan Press, 2009), 5.

[25] Lisa Ortiz-Vilarelle, "(Life) Writing to Belong: Teaching and Learning on Camera during a Pandemic," *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 37, no. 3 (2022): 497, https://doi.org/10.1080/08989575.2022.2154450.

gaze"[26] that stiffens and imposes some standards of behavior, including gender stereotypes, accepted as normal or appropriate. Watching myself on screen was for me like a step towards self-objectification, which made me feel self-conscious. I found myself making a checklist: looking at my hair (messy?), at my face (frowning?), and checking whether I generally looked "OK." This "OK" meant for me that I met socially imposed expectations regarding my role in the research situation but it was also an issue of being self-disciplined in terms of gender role (wearing an appropriate outfit and being a polite, smiling woman). I realized that during online interviews my awareness of my gender and body increased. My self-image, as part of my identity, was challenged and re-confirmed by me through repeated performances that included research.[27]

Concluding this part, conducting research during the pandemic, especially online interviews, revealed the performativity embedded in the research encounter, including the ambiguity of the researcher's role.[28] It was also a memento of simultaneously experiencing myself as insider and outsider of the research situation; Sandra Acker depicts this positionality as in/out/side.[29] For me it was a situation where I could experience what it is to be positioned as a person being watched or scrutinized during the interview, i.e., to be in the position of an interviewee. In a way, because of the pandemic our situation (interviewer and interviewee) has balanced out to some extent and as a researcher I became an object of my own scrutiny as well. This meant, for example, not ignoring my body experience when being on camera.

The online interview focused my attention on the research situation in the sense that it triggered reflections on my attachment to certain conventions within gender and the role of the researcher. By experiencing myself in a specific context of co-presence (caused by forced lockdowns), online research became part of my pandemic home life, thus influencing my auto/biographical I. I became interested in what the research situation means to me, how it influences my positioning as a feminist researcher and how my understanding of co-presence is influenced by others.

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[26] I use this term analogously to the notion of male gaze depicted by Ann Kaplan; see Ann E. Kaplan, "Is the Gaze Male?," in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality,* eds. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson (Methuen, 1983), 309–327.

[27] See Gillian Rose, "Situating Knowledges: Positionality, Reflexivities and Other Tactics," *Progress in Human Geography* 21, no. 3 (1997): 305–320, https://doi.org/10.1191/030913297673302122.

[28] Compare Laurel Richardson, *Fields of Play* (Rutgers University Press, 1997); Norman K. Denzin, "The Reflexive Interview and a Performative Social Science," *Qualitative Research* 1, no. 1 (2001): 23–46, https://doi.org/10.1177/146879410100100102.

[29] Sandra Acker, "In/Out/Side: Positioning the Researcher in Feminist Qualitative Research," *Resources for Feminist Research* 28, no. 1–2 (2000), link.gale.com/apps/doc/A80881203/AONE?u=googlescholar&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=e3a3b29b.

A New Perspective on Auto/Biographical I

The projects conducted during the pandemic were of auto/biographical significance for me because both the research questions as well as the final project conclusions concerned me not only as a researcher but as a woman working at a university. The very idea for research – the impact of the pandemic on women working at universities – was motivated by my personal observations and experiences of being a woman working online from March 2020. My situated knowledge was somehow limited due to the fact that I am a feminist researcher and an academic teacher, located in a specific intellectual realm that are women's rights and gender (in)equality.[30] Therefore, during my projects, by engaging in conversations with women working at different academic or administrative positions at the university and, consequently, various experiences and their situated knowledges, I was able to recognize, verify and even change some of the ways in which I was thinking about other women at the university. I listened to the stories told in interviews and compared them on an ongoing basis. Within the team researchers we could also compare these stories with our experiences and discuss some of the stereotypes and prejudices we had. It was an experience that deepened my sense of being in/out/side, that is, as Acker claims, of being someone who has insider knowledge, but at the same time is "not at home" at the university because s/he refuses to be part of the patriarchal system at the university.[31]

For me, conducting research during the pandemic was a new experience both in terms of the topic and in the context of communication and online work of the research team. The two projects carried out at different waves of the pandemic (2020–21 and 2021–22) were both completely remote and conducted with international partners/cooperators. I worked with people I had not had the opportunity to work with before the pandemic; in fact, had it not been for the pandemic, we would not have worked together at all. We were an all-women group, whose family, personal and professional backgrounds were very different.

Working in an all-women group was nothing new for me, because most of the projects I participated in were co-created by women. What was new and challenging, though, was leading and coordinating the work of an international team remotely. It required skills that I had not needed before during remote work (managing the work of an international team); at the same time, building and maintaining virtual relationships was not without emotional tensions, stress and anxiety. The relations with foreign partners during our collaboration

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[30] See Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575–599.

[31] Acker, *In/Out/Side*.

(each project lasted a year) were dynamic, from the initial uncertainty and enthusiasm to a sense of fatigue or even discouragement at the end.

Relationships with collaborators outside my home university turned out to be a considerable communicational and psychological burden, where the issues of the responsibilities in the project, language competences, professional priorities, as well as personality traits did not allow for satisfactory cooperation. These difficulties were related to many factors, including overwork, stress, and working conditions caused by the pandemic. But there was a further complication: we differed in our motives and attitudes. We represented various academic centres and research fields, and had a range of work ethics. The projects we implemented were my research ideas, and therefore from the very beginning (the application stage) the foreign partners were not as involved as I was. There were times I felt anger, a sense of misunderstanding and disappointment. The limited time available to my partners and their postponement of meetings led to team meetings becoming a source of discomfort for me; I became discouraged and disoriented in the enjoyment of my research work. I started to prepare a script for what I would say at the team meetings, just in case I became time anxious under pressure and did not know what to say. At that time, I was not ready to reflect on the arguments of Rachel Chadwick, who writes about discomfort as "an affective intensity that matters in feminist methodological praxis."[32] Due to the lack of enthusiasm and time on the part of the project partners there was no discussion on our mutual expectations about research collaboration.[33] Emotional distance and silence became part of an unwritten contract between us, thus limiting our communication and cooperation only to the fulfilment of our research tasks. Therefore when the projects ended, there was a feeling of relief and satisfaction at the end of the cooperation.

Additionally, there was a lot of emotional labor, which is usually invisible and underestimated.[34] This involved not only displaying the expected and accepted emotions but also processing and negotiating my own feelings and reactions in relation to the collaborators and the university power structure.[35] In the end, I experienced a sense of failure as a project coordinator. I felt deceived when the responsibility for preparing the report and the articles

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[32] Rachel Chadwick, "On the Politics of Discomfort," *Feminist Theory* 22, no. 4 (2021): 557, https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700120987379.

[33] See Gabriele Griffin, Katarina Hamberg, and Britta Lundgren, eds., *The Social Politics of Research Collaboration* (Routledge, 2013).

[34] Arlie Russell Hochschild, "Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure," *American Journal of Sociology* 85, no. 3 (1979): 551–575.

[35] See Gabriele Griffin, Annelie Bränström-Öhman and Hildur Kalman, eds., *The Emotional Politics of Research Collaboration* (Routledge, 2013).

suddenly became mainly "my concern." I also felt deceived in the context of the "further fate" of the research conclusions. Both projects were intended as interventions, responses to urgent social crises. However, the reports did not gain interest among the university authorities to whom particular recommendations in the area of women's work were addressed. Therefore, the end of the latest project was also a time for me to withdraw from research activities and look for a way to enjoy working alone.

A Study About Ourselves in the Crisis

The outbreak of the pandemic and the closure of the university opened new research ideas for me that, from a feminist perspective, seemed to be of great political significance; I had the opportunity to research the feminization of the pandemic, in my own work environment, that is, the social world, which I have been a part of since my master's studies.

The projects I conducted have marked a critical point in my academic career. It was sort of a rite of passage, a symbolic and material closure of one biographical path (being an Assistant Professor) and a manifestation of a new chapter (the promotion to Associate Professor position). Were it not for the pandemic, these projects along with the change in my academic biography would not have been possible.

However, there is also another part of my auto/biography and this one applies to the transformative praxis of my research work. Through my projects, I have come to understand that I have become someone who, although possessing insider knowledge, is also its hostage. I experienced what it meant to be "not at home in the world,"[36] i.e., the university is still a world designed for men.[37] The research conclusions, the most important of which is the lack of equal opportunities and gender equality at universities despite the official approval and endorsement of Gender Equality Plans, along with the events following the projects (e.g., a lack of recognition and interest from the university authorities) left me with an overwhelming sense of discomfort, or even dissonance. Clare Hemmings writes about "affective dissonance" as:

> a disconnect between our experience of self, agency and epistemic standpoint and the norms, values, scripts, narratives and authoritative knowledges of our broader societies, institutions and communities. As such, there is a disjuncture or misfit between our embodied sense of self and the self we are expected to be in social terms.[38]

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36 Ahmed, *Living*, 14.

37 See Caroline Criado Pérez, *Invisible Women: Data Bias in a World Designed for Men* (Vintage Books, 2020).

38 Clare Hemmings, "Affective Solidarity: Feminist Reflexivity and Political Transformation," *Feminist Theory* 12, no. 2 (2012): 149, https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700112442643.

My reading of these words is that being a feminist researcher in academia assumes constant tensions and conflicts, thus requiring navigating in/out/side, particularly by trying to resist or even deconstruct the neoliberal subject that I have become with academic tenure.[39] Conducting research in and about academia during the pandemic revealed or even deepened my alienated embodied self but also freed my story in the form of this article.[40] This story is about knowledge that after it "happens", one "can't stay in the same place and be comfortable."[41] The feeling of bodily discomfort and affective dissonance sparked reflection on my research experiences and opened up a new space for the "emergence of feminist forms of knowing, being and resisting."[42]

More than a year after completing the last project, I decided for the first time to speak about my experience of doing research during times of crisis. I composed personal narrative in this paper to trace the ways in which my research experience functions as an entry point for thinking about the auto/biography of research practices. To illustrate my points, I referred to some of my observations, reflections and embodied emotions that emerged through and from the research projects, in particular the online interviews. My aim was to focus on understanding my "auto/biographical I" through the prism of research experience. I conclude that the resulting auto/biography reveals the interwoven relational, material, embodied, even discursive dynamics of co-presence with others. This co-presence, based on intentional and conscious interaction with others, is the space where auto/biography may emerge as a co-construed and lived story, a story shared by both sides biographically, in particular, in the contexts of time and history.

In the end, reflecting on my research experience also allowed me to reach this dimension of my work that is transformative as I understand it now. I am back to reading Chadwick's essay on discomfort as a way of resistance and knowledge production. I am back home.

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[39] Compare Alpesh Maisuria and Svenja Helmes, *Life for the Academic in the Neoliberal University* (Routledge, 2019); Yvette Taylor and Kinneret Lahad, eds., *Feeling Academic in the Neoliberal University. Palgrave Studies in Gender and Education* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-64224-6_1.

[40] Compare Anne Maydan Nicotera, "The Woman Academic as Subject/Object/Self: Dismantling the Illusion of Duality," *Communication Theory* 9, no. 4 (1999): 430–464, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.1999.tb00207.x; Richard Hall, *The Alienated Academic: The Struggle for Autonomy Inside the University* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

[41] Anzaldúa, *Borderlands La Frontiera*, 48.

[42] Chadwick, "On the politics of discomfort," 557.

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Prowadzenie badań w czasach kryzysu. Auto/biografia

Streszczenie

Artykuł ma na celu „wejście w głąb" procesu zmagania się z myślami, emocjami i doświadczeniami, które pojawiły się w trakcie i w wyniku mojej pracy badawczej w czasie pandemii Covid-19. Odwołując się do terminu „auto/biografia" Liz Stanley, staram się zgłębić znaczenia i implikacje badań nad autobiografią badacza. Interesuje mnie epistemologiczna dyskusja na temat wzajemnych powiązań tego, co osobiste, z tym, co polityczne i instytucjonalne w kontekście badań feministycznych. Moim celem jest otwarcie przestrzeni na pytanie typu: W jaki sposób badania wpływają na trajektorię mojej auto/biografii?

Słowa kluczowe
auto/biografia, badania, akademia, doświadczenie, sweaty concept

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AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL CULTURE

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The Life Behind the Books: Reconstructing the Przeworskis' Biographies

Abstract

Adopting critical and feminist archival approaches, this article reconstructs the dis/continuous biographies of the Przeworskis, intertwined with the activities of the Wydawnictwo J. Przeworskiego (J. Przeworski Publishing House), which excelled in innovative life-writing and fiction, avant-garde aesthetics, works of progressive intellectuals, and bestsellers by women writers. As the Przeworskis were cultural mediators active in the global transfer of modernist works in Central Europe and in the UK, select UK and US archives act as substitute repositories, allowing some gaps in the scholarship on J. Przeworski to be filled. The article focuses on marginalized women publishers whose role in modernist publishing networks are only now being uncovered. Drawing on publishing correspondence, the biographical reconstruction is supported by recollections of family, other people in the literary marketplace, and Holocaust survivors. The research findings highlight the need to re-investigate previous assumptions on interwar print culture, frequently based on limited data and reproducing the mechanisms of systemic violence.

Keywords
J. Przeworski Publishing House, the Przeworskis, women publishers, modernist publishing networks, interwar print culture

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This article explores publishers' biographies intertwined with the activities of the Wydawnictwo J. Przeworskiego (J. Przeworski Publishing House), which excelled in innovative life-writing and fiction, experimental aesthetics, works of progressive intellectuals, and bestsellers by women writers, along with classics and children's literature illustrated with meticulous care. In the 1930s, a decade of political crisis and anti-Semitism culminating in the Second World War, the Przeworskis turned their Polish Jewish press into an established publishing house with a London branch, Minerva, circulating experimental works and aesthetics across Central Europe and the UK. And yet, little is known about the life of the publishers behind J. Przeworski's books and even less about the women who co-developed the publishing house. The approach used in this research emerged from scholarship within the thriving new field of critical feminist studies. As Marika Cifor and Stacy Wood delineate, critical feminist interventions in archives "expose blind spots within the archival literature and provide us with theoretical tools to tackle what we take for granted," along with "new sets of sources for historians."[1] Following this transformative practice and responding to Joanna Degler's postulate, this research draws on Polish Jewish auto/biographical and family history sources rooted in the tradition of *Megillat Esther*,[2] along with a variety of supplementary materials.

Adopting critical and feminist archival approaches, this article reconstructs the dis/continuous biographies of the Przeworskis, full of omissions and oscillating between subsequent books offered by their publishing house. I begin by questioning the traditional local and paterfamilias image of the J. Przeworski Publishing House – reinforced by its brand, since the company was based in Poland and named after its founder Jakub Przeworski – in order to replace it with a more complex and diverse picture: a small modernist press, shaped by diverse members of a large Polish Jewish family active in transnational and transatlantic cultural transfer via the main office in Warsaw and its Minerva branch in London. In their recently published collection *The Edinburgh Companion to Women in Publishing, 1900–2020* (2024), Claire Battershill, Alice Staveley, and Nicola Wilson argue that challenging a well-established narrative requires a "prismatic" approach that "brings together lots of different voices, perspectives, approaches and experiences"[3] – such methods are offered, among

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1 Marika Cifor and Stacy Wood, "Critical Feminism in the Archives," *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 2, no. 3 (2017): 5, https://doi.org/10.24242/jclis.v1i2.27.

2 Joanna (Lisek) Degler, "W lustrze pamięci – problemy żydowskiej literatury autobiograficznej," *Autobiografia Literatura Kultura Media* 1, no. 8 (2017): 14. https://doi.org/10.18276/au.2017.1.8-01.

3 Claire Battershill, Alice Staveley, and Nicola Wilson. "General Introduction: Making Fields: Women in Publishing", in *The Edinburgh Companion to Women in Publishing, 1900–2020*, eds. Claire Battershill et al. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2024), 4.

others, by intersectional feminism and critical feminist studies. Indeed, the use of a critical feminist framework for the current research reveals a new dual focal point for a re-writing of the narrative about J. Przeworski: the biographies of the female members of the Przeworski family, Estera and Ada, who played an important part in the company's development, yet were marginalized and erased by the double standards employed for Polish Jewish women in print culture. Consequently, my reconstruction of the Przeworskis' biographies follows and critically examines several micro-narratives dissected from new or neglected archival sources – as varied as literary agents' letters, the Holocaust survivors' testimonies, and censors' reports.

Correspondingly, the article is based on many archival sources that are for the first time critically examined to provide a more inclusive narrative about J. Przeworski – from the publishing correspondence held in UK and US repositories to family history interviews and documents. Since the Przeworskis were cultural mediators engaged in the global transfer of modernist and avant-garde works, select archives outside Poland act as substitute repositories, allowing us to fill in some gaps in the scholarship on J. Przeworski, which were severely impeded by the loss of interwar publishing archives in WWII. My research – in the Archive of British Printing and Publishing at the University of Reading in the UK and in the Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library at the University of Georgia in the US – unveils the activities of women publishers – Estera Przeworska (née Estera Lejbkowicz, adopted name Emilia) and Ada (Adela) Przeworska (*primo voto* Lindenfeld, adopted name Szymańska).[4] The reconstruction of the Przeworskis' lives was significantly enhanced by the biographical interview with Julia Zduńczyk, wife of Jerzy Zduńczyk (né Sirota, adopted name Zduńczyk), the last owner of J. Przeworski.[5] Additionally, the article uses the auto/biographical writings of various people active in the interwar literary marketplace, documents related to the Holocaust, and post-war censorship reports. As far as I am aware, the photographs of the Przeworskis are published for the first time (with a notable exception, since there appear to be no photographs of Jakub), both bringing further questions about their visibility in publishing studies and accentuating new findings.

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4 The author later uses one name for each member of the Przeworski family, selected on the basis of its prevalence in the family history interview and documents.

5 The author is deeply grateful to Julia Zduńczyk for her generosity in sharing her recollections of the Przeworskis, as well as a permission to publish archival correspondence, along with selected photographs and documents from the family archives.

Fig. 1. Estera Przeworska

Fig. 2. From left to right: Liwazer (Felicja's father), Felicja, Marek Przeworski, Unknown

Fig. 3. Jerzy Zduńczyk

Fig. 4. Ada Przeworska

Source: Family archive. By permission of Julia Zduńczyk.

In the light of all these sources, it can be seen that J. Przeworski was a family venture active in global publishing networks, in which women frequently played vital roles. At least five Przeworskis navigated the company: its founder Jakub, his wife Estera, who acted as *de facto* finance director, along with their children Marek (né Markus) and Ada, and finally their grandson Jerzy. Since the scholarship presents J. Przeworski as a father-to-son company, there is a crucial gap that this article seeks to address: marginalized women publishers whose role has now been discovered through archival research into the Przeworskis' endeavors as cultural mediators within global modernist networks.[6] The lacuna is caused predominantly by the lack of records documenting the activities of many interwar publishers (including J. Przeworski) since their archives were lost during WWII.

Consequently, the scholarship on J. Przeworski is limited to Jan Okopień's chapter in the Polish Book Publishers series, several dictionary entries, and brief mentions in articles that focus on books rather than their publishers. Okopień metonymically described the company as "a father and a son. The former created a publishing house, the latter developed it into a company rival to the largest Polish contemporary publishers."[7] Major biographical dictionaries had only entries for Jakub and Marek Przeworski, and yet, they mentioned in passing that Jakub was "supported by his wife"[8] while Marek was "aided by his mother and sister – Adela Lindenfeld."[9] Tellingly, Estera was described in relational terms ("wife" and "mother") in the accounts of her publishing work. Only Irena Treichel recognized Ada's professional status by describing her interwar activities as publishing "cooperation."[10] However, many recent sources fail to include the women publishers at J. Przeworski – for example, the *Polish Judaic Dictionary* makes no mention of Estera and closes Marek's entry with the cryptic statement, "After the war, his [*sic*] company was managed by a sister until 1950,"[11] although Ada died in 1947. All these blind spots indicate that there is a need for more gender-balanced and globally informed research on the family behind the J. Przeworski publishing house – the following biographical reconstruction is supported by archival sources and family history interviews.

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6 Paulina Pająk, "Absent Presence: Virginia Woolf and British Polish Jewish Publishing Networks," *Modernism/modernity*, forthcoming.

7 Jan Okopień, "Jakub i Marek Przeworscy," in *Poczet wydawców książki polskiej*, contrib. Joanna Czarkowska, vol. 5 (Inicjał, 2015), 214. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

8 Irena Treichel, "Przeworski Jakub," in *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, eds. Emanuel Rostworowski et al., vol. 29 (Ossolineum, 1986), 30.

9 Feliks Pieczątkowski, "Przeworski Marek," in *Słownik pracowników książki polskiej*, ed. Irena Treichel (PWN, 1972), 722; Okopień, "Jakub i Marek," 216.

10 Treichel, "Przeworski Jakub," 31.

11 Małgorzata Naimska and Rafał Żebrowski, "Przeworski Marek," in *Polski Słownik Judaistyczny*, eds. Zofia Borzymińska and Rafał Żebrowski, ŻIH, https://delet.jhi.pl/pl/psj?articleId=15932.

The story of J. Przeworski starts with its founder Jakub Przeworski, a Jewish bookseller who supported clandestine educational organizations in partitioned Poland. In September 1903, he opened a bookshop and second-hand bookstore at Świętokrzyska Street in Warsaw. From 1906 onwards he organized a wide network of peddlers, who may well have looked like "drunkards with the faces of criminals" according to the bibliophile Jan Michalski, and yet they widely distributed banned Polish classics and history books among educationally disadvantaged people living away from cultural centers.[12] Przeworski participated in the first Congress of Polish Booksellers and co-founded the Union of Polish Booksellers in 1908. In an interview for the weekly *Wiadomości Literackie*, Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński paints a contradictory portrait of the publisher as "the old book shark from Świętokrzyska Street" and a sensitive reader who "cried over" Żeleński's translation of Joseph Bédier's *Le roman de Tristan et Iseut*.[13] However, the image of a crafty salesman is not supported by the bookseller Ludwik Fiszer's anecdote about the publisher Herman Altenberg, who supposedly swindled Przeworski out of money.[14] In late 1933, Jakub transformed his company into a publishing house with a modern bookshop at Sienkiewicz Street. J. Przeworski started with Axel Munthe's memoirs *The Story of San Michele* and Stefan Zweig's fictionalized biographies. In 1934, Jakub was attacked for publishing Louis-Ferdinand Céline's experimental novel *Voyage au bout de la nuit*. The alleged reason was that of "youth demoralization" but reviews disseminated anti-Semitic propaganda that recurred in stories about J. Przeworski. For instance, the priest Ignacy Świrski accused the "Jew" Jakub Przeworski of destroying another publisher.[15] Although as family history has it, Estera managed the finances, Jakub's health problems prevented him from participating in the company's success. Przeworski died in February 1935 – an obituary in *Przegląd Księgarski* emphasized his heroic fight against Russian censorship and lifetime dedication to the Polish book.[16]

After Jakub's death, J. Przeworski was developed by the widowed Estera, her son Marek, who was announced in *Przegląd Księgarski*'s obituary as the new director of J. Przeworski, and daughter Ada. The Przeworski siblings had scientific interests: Marek graduated in electrical engineering from the Warsaw University of Technology, Ada received a degree in pharmacy

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12 Okopień, "Jakub and Marek Przeworscy," 214–215.

13 "Setny tom biblioteki Boy'a," *Wiadomości Literackie*, December 22, 1929, 2.

14 Quoted in Okopień, "Jakub and Marek Przeworscy," 215.

15 Grzegorz Nieć and Grażyna Wrona, "Walka z lekturą zakazaną," *Toruńskie Studia Bibliologiczne* 2 (2014): 150–151, https://doi.org/10.12775/TSB.2013.026.

16 "Z żałobnej karty," *Przegląd Księgarski*, March 23, 1935, 2.

from the University of Warsaw and was working with her husband Kazimierz Lindenfeld[17] in the Department of Applied Pharmacy at her *alma mater*.[18] Though both Marek and Ada wanted to pursue academic careers, rising anti-Semitism and *numerus clausus* at universities in Poland prompted them to work for the family company – another possible factor for Ada was her divorce from Lindenfeld in ca. 1937. Yet, the scope of J. Przeworski's publications shows that Jakub's continuators had the publisher's intuition. In an interview for *Wiadomości Literackie* in April 1935, an unnamed director at J. Przeworski – presumably Marek – presented the company's plans and publishing profile with passion and erudition. The politically-engaged works that Przeworski enumerated – from Ludwig Lewisohn's *The Case of Mr. Crump* that attacked "bourgeois American morality" to Erich Kästner's *Fabian* which offered "a valuable image of post-war and pre-Hitler Germany"[19] – have survived the test of time.

In the years 1935–39, Marek, Estera, and Ada turned J. Przeworski into a modernist press that circulated experimental works in Central Europe (and later in the UK), along with carefully bound and illustrated classics, encyclopedic volumes, and children's literature. The Przeworskis cooperated with renowned graphic artists and designers: from the pioneering animator Halina Bielińska (then Krüger) and the design duo Lewitt-Him to the painter Feliks Topolski. The company also introduced "boovies," comics inspired by movies, including Walt Disney's series. Importantly, J. Przeworski offered works by women writers, including Zuzanna Ginczanka's poems *O centaurach* (1936), Adrienne Thomas's anti-war *Die Katrin wird Soldat* (1937) and Vita Sackville-West's *Pepita* (1939), along with whole series by popular authors Hedwig Courths-Mahler and Ethel M. Dell. The publishing profile was more gender balanced than that of Rój – possibly it was inspired by the women publishers Estera and Ada, who have come to the foreground in the previously unexamined archival sources.

Estera Przeworska is remembered by her family as the *de facto* finance director of J. Przeworski. The company founder Jakub developed a network of contacts with various writers who dined at the Przeworskis' household while Estera operated behind the scenes and managed their finances. After Jakub's death, most of the Przeworski children (with the exception of Bernard) transferred their company shares to Estera, who became majority shareholder.[20] Przeworska must have worked closely with J. Przeworski accountant Henryka Długosz, who supported the Przeworskis during WWII, selling publishing rights on their behalf and smuggling

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17 Some publications confuse the chemist Kazimierz Lindenfeld (1897–1941) with the publisher Ignacy Lindenfeld (1901–1969).

18 [Note], *Farmacja Współczesna* 3 (1933): 186.

19 js, "Dorobek i plany Wydawnictwa J. Przeworskiego," *Wiadomości Literackie*, April 21, 1935, 3.

20 Interview with Julia Zduńczyk.

money to the ghetto.[21] Even though no contracts documenting Estera's role survived in the family archive, this story is supported by publishing correspondence found in the US.

Estera Przeworska has a cameo appearance in the reception of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*. In 1938, the literary agent Marion Saunders was touring Europe to secure contracts for the bestseller. In a letter to Mitchell, she recounted a visit to J. Przeworski Publishing House and informed the writer that the publisher had bought the Polish rights to the novel. In the adjacent bookshop, Saunders met a woman with snow-white hair who politely greeted customers and – as the agent was told by another publisher in Krakow – she was Marek Przeworski's mother who, in fact, managed the company. After the outbreak of WWII, Saunders believed that Mitchell's saga was doomed in Poland, even though it had already been translated. "We must obviously forget about your Polish edition," she wrote to Mitchell in September 1939, "It is all too, too sad and I wonder if your Polish publisher and his eighty-year-old mother are still alive."[22] Despite these predictions, Mitchell's novel was translated by Celina Wieniewska – bound in decorative leather covers, it became a bestseller in wartime Poland. The writer's correspondence shows that while Mitchell tentatively transferred the rights to her novel to Gebethner and Wolff, she was concerned about the fate of J. Przeworski's publishers and made several inquiries about them until 1946.[23]

The lives of Marek and Estera Przeworski were indeed coming to a dramatic end. During WWII, the Przeworskis were forced to live in the Warsaw ghetto while their publishing house and books were systematically destroyed. In September 1939, book warehouses were burnt down in air raids. Although J. Przeworski was selling books at reduced prices, many bookkeepers were afraid to buy them – Fiszer heard from Marek that he was their last client.[24] In May 1940, the Nazis appointed Paul Peter Kostrzewa as administrator of the Union of Polish Booksellers (co-founded by Jakub Przeworski in 1908). Kostrzewa forbade Poles to purchase books from Jewish publishers; a month later he barred Jews from their professions. J. Przeworski's books were confiscated, while its main office was turned into a *Deutsche Buchhandlung*. In spring 1941, the authorities permitted the opening of bookstores in the ghetto – Przeworski ran a bookshop with a reading room at Leszno Street, supporting Jewish booksellers. According to Julia Zduńczyk, both Marek and his nephew Aleksander Leszno

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[21] Henryka Długosz, "Oświadczenie," June 13, 1991, family archive.

[22] Quoted in Ellen F. Brown and John Wiley Jr., *Margaret Mitchell's Gone With the Wind* (Taylor Trade Publishing, 2011), 191.

[23] *Gone with the Wind* papers, ms3518, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia.

[24] Ludwik Fiszer, *Wspomnienia starego księgarza* (Czytelnik, 1959), 249.

(who died in the Warsaw Uprising) were engaged in resistance against Nazi rule – Przeworski was smuggling weapons.

In early 1943, Marek and his second wife Felicja (née Liwazer), along with his sister Helena Sirota (née Przeworska, adopted name Zawadzka) and her son Jerzy escaped to the "Aryan" side of Warsaw – they went to Marek and Felicja's former house at Wąchocka Street. On March 8, Marek was shot by *szmalcowniks* – according to Paulina Hirsch, the Przeworskis were aided by Zofia Bandurska-Hermanowa who was murdered a week later.[25] Julia Zduńczyk recalled that the family buried Marek's body in the garden and came back to the ghetto by tram. Both testimonies emphasized that Przeworski recognized his murderer – Hirsch believed that it was a fellow Jew, while Jerzy Zduńczyk thought it was a person from the Polish resistance movement.[26] After Marek's death, Felicja was devastated and refused to leave the ghetto, where she died with her father. However, Ada Przeworska and Helena Sirota made further attempts to escape from the ghetto. Convinced that she might slow down their rescue, Estera died by suicide – Jerzy Zduńczyk remembered that she said her farewells to him, took a bath, dressed beautifully, and went to bed. A few days later, the remaining Przeworskis left the ghetto – they survived the war in Wawer, aided by a family that wanted to stay anonymous.[27]

The Przeworskis' fate might have been different if the British literary market had been more welcoming. In 1939, Marek founded a London branch of J. Przeworski, Minerva Publishing, run by the publisher and J. Przeworski manager Ignacy Lindenfeld. For Przeworski, the late 1930s must have been hectic – in one of his 1938 letters, the leading Polish Jewish poet Julian Tuwim enumerates all the reasons that prevented a conversation with his own publisher: from Marek's stay in London and his military training to "Hitler, the Sudetes, Cieszyn and all that pre-war mess."[28] The publishing correspondence and family history interview indicate that Marek and Ada visited London in the late 1930s, possibly preparing the ground for a new branch of their company. Marek was staying at 55 Belsize Park, near the final home of the exiled Freuds and corresponded with the Hogarth Press about the Polish translations of Virginia Woolf's works – he bought the rights to *The Years* and planned to publish Woolf's feminist pacifist essay *Three Guineas*.[29] In contrast with Mitchell, Woolf

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[25] Paulina Hirsch, "Relacja," Rel. 301/453, [ca. 1945], c. 5–6, 12–13, Archives of Emanuel Ringelblum, ŻIH.

[26] Conf. "Mąż twierdził, że rozpoznany musiał być z AK, bo z nimi Marek zawierał transakcje kupna broni do Getta – dla kogo nie wiemy, Marek nie chciał narażać rodziny na tę wiedzę." [„My husband claimed that the man identified must have been from the Home Army (AK) because Marek had made deals with him to buy weapons for the Ghetto - we don't know who for, as Marek didn't want to expose the family to it."] Interview with J. Zduńczyk.

[27] Interview with J. Zduńczyk.

[28] Julian Tuwim, *Listy do przyjaciół-pisarzy*, ed. Tadeusz Januszewski (Czytelnik, 1979), 173.

[29] A letter from M. Przeworski to the Hogarth Press, June 25, 1938, MS 2750/C/14, Archive of British Printing and Publishing, University of Reading. (Permission of J. Zduńczyk.)

– struggling with her health – showed no interest in the fate of her publishers *in spe*. Due to strained finances, Przeworski came back to Poland in the autumn of 1939.

Minerva published English translations of J. Przeworski's authors, including Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, Janusz Korczak, and Feliks Topolski. It tried to enter the children's literature market with Tuwim's poems *The Locomotive. The Turnip. The Birds' Broadcast* (1939), considered "the most fully modernist of the Lewitt-Him picture books," in which "modernist emphasis on speed, energy, time, machinery, internationalism, and transportation is matched by its geometric, highly patterned, brilliantly colored illustrations."[30] Lindenfeld managed Minerva through WWII – it was closed after the war by Bernard Przeworski, the eldest son of Jakub and Estera, who then represented Czytelnik publishers in London.

Despite numerous difficulties, the Przeworskis tried to revive J. Przeworski in the Stalinist period – a vital role was played by Ada and her nephew Jerzy. Though struggling with cancer, Przeworska attempted to manage the family company, the office of which was now located in her flat at Joseph Stalin Avenue. She cooperated both with Wiedza publishers in Poland and her brother Bernard. The documents from the UK archives show that Ada contacted several British publishing houses, including Allen & Unwin and Macmillan, to renew pre-war contracts and secure new ones. For example, she tried to settle matters concerning the translations of Charles Langbridge Morgan's novels with Macmillan publishers, explaining that "the translations manuscripts of the three books [...] [were] burnt by the Germans and now we have to translate it all again."[31] In all post-war letters, Przeworska appeared as a skilled professional, versatile and determined publisher.

After Przeworska's death in October 1947, the publishing house was managed by her nephew Jerzy Zduńczyk until 1950. Though Zduńczyk was then in his twenties, J. Przeworski was not his first publishing house. Born in 1926, Jerzy was regarded as the heir to the family company – he is believed to have studied in Leipzig, a city with an established tradition of publishing and bookmaking. As an adolescent he even "managed" a small company, which specialized in books for children.[32] It was most likely the Księgarnia Literacka (Literary Bookshop), registered in 1938 by Helena Sirota and Mieczysław Postbrif at Zielna Street,[33] where Helena's dental surgery was also located. In the years 1938–39, the company published a well-received series, "Biblioteczka Książek Radosnych" (A Little Library of Joyful

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[30] Kimberley Reynolds, *Left Out: The Forgotten Tradition of Radical Publishing for Children in Britain 1910–1949* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 126.

[31] Ada Przeworska to Macmillan Publishers, April 18, 1947, Records of Macmillan, UoR. (Permission of J. Zduńczyk.)

[32] Interview with J. Zduńczyk.

[33] "Punkty Sprzedaży," *Przegląd Księgarski*, August 15, 1938, 191.

Books), described by Joanna Papuzińska as "arising from ambitious artistic and educational ideas" and "supporting the child's imagination."[34] The Second World War brutally ended Zduńczyk's publishing dreams – in his testimony, Jerzy enumerated some occupations that were essential for his survival: button maker, porter, and brush maker.[35]

In this short post-war period, Ada Przeworska and Jerzy Zduńczyk managed to publish A. J. Cronin's novels, P. L. Travers's *Mary Poppins,* and Zweig's biographies, among others. The last chapter of J. Przeworski was impacted by oppressive Stalinist censorship. Even when a publication was permitted, censors' reports were hostile and contemptuous. For example, J. Przeworski could publish Leon Pasternak's collection of satirical poems, although it was assessed as a waste of paper. Fannie Hurst's novel *Great Laughter* was less fortunate – since the heroine conspiring to regain family fortune was not a proper role model for the socialist state, the report concluded: "There is no place for such a book in 1948 Poland."[36] Despite such reviews, Zduńczyk sent book proposals until 1950, when all independent publishing companies were either closed or turned into state-owned institutions – in response to his last requests, he was only informed that publications were denied due to the alleged lack of paper.

While reconstructing the Przeworskis' biographies, it is necessary to approach their lives intersectionally, acknowledging various forms of oppression that impacted their existence, from the most obvious such as anti-Semitism, Nazism, and the patriarchal system to the subtler violence reproduced in the knowledge system that marginalizes some biographies while privileging others. As Michelle Caswell emphasizes, "critical approaches to archives not only reveal how power is imbricated in archival theory and practice, but seek to create a transformative praxis that liberates rather than oppresses"[37] – hence, the article provides detailed information on the various names and surnames adopted by the Przeworskis during their lifetime, instead of offering any conclusions about their Polish Jewish identities – unjustified without their auto/biographical writings on this matter.

The current research findings highlight the need to re-investigate previous assumptions on print culture in the interwar years – frequently based on limited data and reproducing systemic violence. In the light of new archival sources, the interwar world of books appears as more hybrid, gender-inclusive, multicultural, and transformative than presented in some mainstream academic narratives.

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34 Joanna Papuzińska, *Mój bajarz: Studia i szkice o literaturze młodzieżowej* (SBP, 2010), 10.

35 Jerzy Zduńczyk, "Oświadczenie," June 13, 1991, family archive.

36 GUKPPiW Records (1947–1951), Ref. no. 2943, AAN.

37 Michelle Caswell, *Urgent Archives: Enacting Liberatory Memory Work* (Routledge, 2021), 12.

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Życie za książkami: rekonstrukcje biografii Przeworskich

Streszczenie

Przy pomocy krytycznych i feministycznych podejść archiwalnych, artykuł rekonstruuje nie/ciągłe biografie Przeworskich, ściśle związane z działalnością Wydawnictwa J. Przeworskiego, które specjalizowało się w innowacyjnym pisarstwie auto/biograficznym i fikcji, awangardowej estetyce, pracach progresywnych intelektualistów i bestsellerach pisarek. Ponieważ Przeworscy byli mediatorami kulturowymi aktywnymi w globalnym transferze dzieł modernistycznych w Europie Środkowej i Zjednoczonym Królestwie Wielkiej Brytanii, wybrane archiwa w Wielkiej Brytanii i Stanach Zjednoczonych stanowią zastępcze repozytoria, pozwalające wypełnić pewne luki w piśmiennictwie dotyczącym Wydawnictwa J. Przeworskiego. Artykuł koncentruje się na zmarginalizowanych kobietach wydawczyniach, których rola w modernistycznych sieciach wydawniczych została niedawno odkryta. Rekonstrukcja biograficzna, czerpiąca z korespondencji wydawniczej, jest poparta wspomnieniami rodziny, innych osób związanych z rynkiem literackim,

oraz ocalałych z Holokaustu. Wyniki badań wskazują na potrzebę weryfikacji uprzednich założeń dotyczących międzywojennej kultury druku, często opartych na ograniczonych danych i odtwarzających mechanizmy przemocy systemowej.

Słowa kluczowe
Wydawnictwo J. Przeworskiego, Przeworscy, kobiety wydawczynie, modernistyczne sieci wydawnicze, międzywojenna kultura druku

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AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL CULTURE

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SHHH $\frac{ITTY}{OAH}$: Raymond Federman's Autobiographical Strategies

Abstract

The article is an analysis of the posthumously published *Shhh: The Story of a Childhood* by Raymond Federman. In the book, Federman revolves around the primary scene of his writing, when his mother pushed him into the closet and, whispering "Shhh," hid him from the Gestapo. I examine how the author, while undermining the supposedly autobiographical narrative of his survival, simultaneously disarms the discourse of the sublime that has weighed on many reflections on Shoah. For this reason, I analyze the intertwining of scatology and the blunt representation of sexuality present in Federman's writing.

Keywords
Raymond Federman, Shoah, testimony, postmodernism

The reflection on the possibility of literature "after Auschwitz from the very beginning revolved around the question of whether the experience of the Holocaust is at all effable. Over time, an interpretation that gave the Shoah the status of an Event (with a capital E), that is, a negative Absolute, became particularly important. According to this strategy, the only adequate way of witnessing the Holocaust was silence (Blanchot, Jabès, Lyotard). It was against such a model of writing that Raymond Federman spoke out with his works. The writer

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exposes the problem of the impossibility of accessing past events (including the story of the death of his loved ones); at the same time, however, he attempts in various ways to violate the sublimity of silence. He does so, moreover, through numerous transgressions of the post-Holocaust discourse of appropriateness. Within its framework it was decided which way of depicting the Holocaust could be considered suitable. Federman in turn disarms the sublime logic of appropriateness through numerous gestures of profanation. Profanation understood, however, not only as blasphemy, but in its root sense, as the attempt to restore the objects which are too elevated in their sacrality and therefore inaccessible to the human sphere.[1]

Federman, this classic and one of the founders of the theoretical underpinnings of the prose of American postmodernism was born in France, where as a child he miraculously survived the Holocaust.[2] However, his entire family, including his parents and both sisters, perished at the hands of the Nazis. The Holocaust is the central event of Federman's existence, which annihilates his past and everything associated with it – family, identity, country and language. Although Shoah becomes for Federman a kind of demonic analogue of Yahweh, whose name in Jewish tradition is not permitted to be said as the all-powerful and the ineffable, and while he "refusing to name it explicitly, it is there everywhere, allusively."[3] All of Federman's books revolve in various ways around this indelible hole that those closest to him left behind in his biography, a hole that is also a hole in language – the most recognizable sign of the Holocaust and its explicit evocation in his books would be the sequence of four Xs, where each character is the designation of one of the family members killed.[4] This notation (XXXX) makes visible the absence of loved ones, makes it a kind of seam left behind by those whose lives were erased by history. Thus, Federman gives voice to the silence of those whose voice had been snuffed out forever. Characteristically, it is a typographic, and therefore non-letter notation, as if signaling a traumatic moment of language jamming.[5]

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1 Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*, trans. J. Fort (Princeton University Press, 2007).

2 Jerzy Kutnik, *The Novel as Performance: The Fiction of Ronald Sukenick and Raymond Federman* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1986); Thomas Hartl, *Raymond Federman's Real Fictitious Discourses: Formulating Yet Another Paradox* (Mellen Press, 1995); Susan Rubin Suleiman, "When postmodern play meets survivor testimony," in *Federman's Fictions. Innovation, Theory, and the Holocaust*, ed. Jeffrey R. Di Leo (State University of New York Press, 2011); Marta Tomczok, "Postmodernistyczne wymazywanie Zagłady (Raymond Federman, Georges Perec, Anatol Ulman)," *Poznańskie Studia Slawistyczne* 12 (2017): 299–315.

3 *Jewish Writers of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Sorrel Kerbel (Taylor and Francis Group, 2006), 278.

4 For more on the importance of Xs in Federman's writing, see *Federman A to X-X-X-X: A Recyclopedic Narrative*, ed. Thomas Hartl, Larry McCaffery, Doug Rice (San Diego State University, 1998).

5 Federman's strategy reminds us of the writing gestures of Georges Perec who, in *La Disparition*, signaled the death of loved ones in the Holocaust by erasing the letter e, the most common letter in the French language.

Against the background of Federman's corpus of texts in which this notation has become a recurring leitmotif, one book, however, differentiates: the last.

At first glance, *Shhh: The Story of a Childhood*, published posthumously (2010), may confuse readers familiar with Federman's work. Here, a classic author of American postmodernism, who owed his status to his formally sophisticated experiments with typography, presents us with a book that is all too blatantly traditional and old-fashioned. This results in the complete marginalization of the text in studies devoted to Federman. In accordance with the instructive subtitle, we get a supposedly autobiographical story in which the work of memory allows the past to be salvaged by extracting childhood memories. Nothing could be further from the truth, however. Spreading the illusion of good-naturedness and wanting to convince us that he will tell the story of things "as they happened," finally without any obscuring formal experimentation, Federman nevertheless takes us for a ride, with an intricately woven unreliability of the message and a metatextual questioning of its status. What is shattered here is the very basis of the classical autobiographical construction, that is, the self-aware and self-transparent subject who, with knowledge of his fate, can give a coherent account of it.[6] Federman himself realized this when, in a letter to Ronald Sukenick, he wondered how to write a book about his own life, when that life is full of "gaps, lies, deceptions, fantasies and falsifications." As a masterpiece of *marrano* autobiography or rather autofiction, *Shhh* performs a set of gestures characteristic of the genre.[7] It presents an internally split self, a "split within itself."[8] It is to this, I think, that the meta-narrative voice countering Federman's memoiristic argument serves, a kind of inner "second self."[9] This voice, graphically delineated (in italics), interrupts the autobiographical argument, asks Federman questions, enters into a dialogue with him, mocks him, and finally ultimately undermines credibility of his words.

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6 In *The Two-Fold Vibration* Federman even writes that if readers consider the story presented there as a camouflaged autobiographical tale, they will come to a "misleading and false" conclusion. Raymond Federman, *The Two-Fold Vibration* (Harvester Press, 1982), 172.

7 Piotr Sadzik, *Regiony pojedynczych herezji. Marańskie wyjścia w prozie polskiej XX wieku* (Austeria, 2022).

8 Yirmiyahu Yovel, *The Other Within: The Marranos: Split Identity and Emerging Modernity* (Princeton University Press, 2009). *Split Within Itself* is the title of the novel by one of the great *marranos* of Polish literature, Teodor Parnicki, but this figure cannot be limited to a single case. The figure of the "self," shattered into two parts, is the greatest hallmark of authors who express their Jewishness through non-Jewish cultural forms, simultaneously belonging and not belonging to each side of this opposition.

9 "*Shhh*, despite its already assumed autobiographical character, has little in common with a traditional testimony, which can be exemplified by the various interventions of a second voice that draws, in an ironic way, the attention of the Federman narrator." Sabrina Costa Braga, "Fiction, Postmemory and Transgenerational Trauma: Literary Possibilities through the Shoah Paradigm," *Práticas da História* 17 (2023): 273, https://doi.org/10.48487/pdh.2023.n17.28468.

In light of this, it would be quite legitimate to raise questions about the reliability of the accounts contained in *Shhh*, which, although given in the form of the author's authenticated personal recollection, may well be also the result of projection and speculation. More important, however, than facing up to this inconclusive question, is what role they play in the string of Federman's plot. In other words, it is not important whether *Shhh* presents us with a testimony about what really happened to a boy who miraculously escaped the Holocaust, it is more important to answer the question of how the components of the allegedly autobiographical story of childhood and subsequent salvation function in the narrative order and what kind of role the author assigns to them. *Shhh* thus promises a collection of memoirs, but in fact turns into a brilliantly constructed, literary superconscious parody of autobiographical testimony, which also becomes a desperate protest against the inaccessibility of past events to language. This becomes all the more paradoxical as the injunction to remain silent is already contained in the title – the "Shhh," refers to it, after all.

Federman promises an autobiographical story in which childhood memories revolve around the primary scene of this writing, a scene around which, in different ways, this work has always revolved, a scene that took place in a Parisian suburb at 4 Rue Louis Rolland in the author's family home at 5.30 am on July 16, 1942. It was then that the French police, acting on orders from the Gestapo, came to arrest the Jewish Federman family. It was then, too, as the family heard Nazi boots on the stairs, Raymond's mother dragged her sleepy son out of bed and, thrusting clothes into his hands, pushed him into the closet, whispering "Shhh," to him. As Raymond stood naked in the darkness, it was only through what he heard that he oriented himself to further developments of events. When the policemen reading out the names of those to be arrested said "Raymond Federman," his mother replied quickly that was in the countryside on vacation: "The policemen didn't say anything. Then I heard them tell my parents to take some warm clothes because they didn't know where they were going to be taken and that the journey could be long, and that it could be cold there."[10] All the members of the Federman family arrested that day would die in Auschwitz. "Shhh," is thus the last word spoken to Raymond by his mother, the last umbilical cord linking him to his childhood, and the order to remain silent as a way to be saved: "With that *shhh* my mother was saying to me: If you keep quiet. If you say nothing. If you remain silent. You will survive." [17] A "Shhh," which "has been resonating ever since," in his head. [17] Terrified and stunned, Raymond remained in the darkness of the closet all day and night, until the next morning. It was only then that he dared come out. It is at this point that the period of

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[10] Raymond Federman, *Shhh: The Story of a Childhood* (Dzanc Books, 2010), 28. All other quotes from the book I give in the main text, in square brackets. All text emphases are mine.

the boy's permanently exposed wandering begins. Raymond will live to see the liberation of France and then, in 1947, by now an orphan, set off for lifelong emigration to the United States. The act of his mother, who shoved him into the closet is thus the great cut off point of Federman's biography, the saving yet traumatizing kernel around which all of this work will revolve and from which it will grow.

The injunction of silence issued by his mother, however, is based on an obvious paradox. Little Raymond is supposed to be silent "now," sitting in the closet, so as not to give himself away to the police and be sent to death, but it is thanks to this silence that he is able to talk about the situation in the future. As he suspects, this course of events was also assumed by his mother, who supposedly saw him as a future writer. "Shhh," is not only the closure of childhood, it is the beginning of writing: "That *shhh* was not my mother's last word. It was the first word of the book my mother knew I would write some day." [23]

But what can Raymond write about? Despite the promise already expressed in the subtitle, that of a story about childhood ("But my story, I can tell it. The story of the thirteen years I spent with my parents and my sisters. My childhood," [44]), he is not a subject who has a comprehensive narrative of his past, affirming through it his own identity integrity. He emphasizes that when he heard his mother's "Shhh," "the thirteen first years of my life vanished into the darkness of that third floor closet." [16]

Even worse is the case of access to what followed: "That's when the story of my parents and sisters stopped. That's all I know of their story. I know nothing of what happened to them after." [35] The thought of writing down a recollective account of childhood is driven by a lack of access to knowledge about the future fate of his loved ones, where only their death is certain. Instead of a complete story at the disposal of an integrated subject, there is a great "black hole," which cannot be written down but which simultaneously sets in motion the work of fantasy and the multiplication of words, providing a screen onto which any projection can be projected. The "black hole," representing Federman's lack of knowledge, constitutes the key theme of the book, which is the over-represented fecality of the author's memories.

Of course, such a theme should not be surprising to readers of the author of the first American monograph of Beckett's works and one of the greatest experts on Beckett,[11] whom

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[11] See Federman's works devoted to Beckett: *Journey to Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Early Fiction* (University of California Press, 1965) – one of the earliest monographs in English on Beckett; (with John Fletcher) *Samuel Beckett: His Works and His Critics: An Essay in Bibliography* (University of California Press, 1970) – the most important early bibliographical study of Beckett; *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Raymond Federman, Lawrence Graver (Routledge, 1979); *Samuel Beckett*, eds. Raymond Federman and Tom Bishop (Fayard, 1997). Federman's writing is full of echoes of Beckett and references to his work; for example, Beckett is the most important voice in *Voice in the Closet* but also when it comes to style, Federman shares characteristics with the writing of its predecessor: "A cryptic, elliptical, use of language; neologism; repetition; the mixing

Federman considered the patron of his own literary project and who appears in *Shhh* as the author of one of the mottoes that begin the books,[12] and last but not least, Beckett, in whom scatology plays a huge role (quite literally, the word becomes shit in his texts, "wordshit," as he himself put it[13]). Yet Federman adds new layers of meaning to this figure.

The closet – the basic prop of Federman's universe – is not just a location that served his mother as a hiding place to save her son, as Federman argued in *Shhh* and in other texts, even highlighting it in the title *The Voice in the Closet* (*Shhh* would be a perverse repetition and mockery of this much more famous book). Especially in the face of the excrement recurring in "memories" and the defecation that happens to the terrified Raymond in the closet, it is difficult to lose sight of another meaning. Not the one that refers to the piece of furniture, but which refers to the place where excrement is excreted, the toilet. Especially if we consider the fact that the closet becomes for Raymond a place of salvation and at the same time defecation. And when, years later, the now-elderly writer decides to recount his childhood in the mode of an autobiographical memoir, he finds that he can only do so by phantasmagorically returning to the closet. And this time, too, there will be a defecation. The story "blocked in me" [47] can only be told from the place of "that black hole," [49] which the closet has become. However, keeping in mind the fecal figures of Federman's story, these fragments can be read simultaneously in a second way, complementary to the first. Here the past is left blocked in Federman, like constipation, and in order to release it, one has to enter the closet as toilet, where it will only be possible to expel the story like stomach contents

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of registers; density of reference and allusion; wordplay; an ambiguous and uncertain narrative voice; and prose that creates its own syntactic units and sequences without punctuation." Obviously, another important feature of Federman's prose is its bilingualism which he explicitly links with that of Beckett. For more, see Raymond Federman, *The Sam Book*, trans. Sharon Blackie (Two Ravens Press, 2008), 5.

12 This is a quote from Beckett's short story *L'Expulsé* (in English *The Expelled*), a text of particular significance to Federman, who titled the last chapter of *Journey to Chaos* 'The Expulsion': "I don't know why I told this story. I could just as well have told another. Perhaps some other time I'll be able to tell another. Living souls, you will see how alike they are." [14] As Alsop notes, in the English version of *Voice in the Closet* "the 'voice' wants to be 'extricated from inside.' But the French, here, has 'expulsé du dédans,' another of the many allusions to Beckett. […] Federman's family has been brutally expelled (from their home to their death, literally); but his experience, too, is one of expulsion, from a truth that cannot be extricated by fiction. He has been born again many times into "symbolic" unreality. The expulsion, in Federman's case, is a matter of both place and language." Derek Alsop, "Federman's Beckett: Two Voices in the Closet," *Modernism/modernity* 20, no. 1 (2013): 18–19. In *Voice in the Closet* and *Shhh* we find a poem *Tongue* in which Federman describes himself as "ex-pelled/ from mother tongue/ ex-iled/ in foreign/ tongue." Federman used similar terms to describe Beckett: "For more than twenty years, Beckett . . . lived and worked exiled from his native land and tongue." Federman, *Journey to Chaos*, 204.

13 Nathalie Camerlynck, *Raymond Federman and Samuel Beckett: Voices in the Closet* (Anthem Press, 2021).

from an anal hole.[14] And while Federman wants to gain access to knowledge of the past of loved ones, as the recurring "nothing" reminds us, he knows as much as nothing about it or, put it differently, he doesn't know shit about it.

The accumulation of fecal topics suggests an important context for reading the title phrase. I would claim that it is worth treating "Shhh" not only as an onomatopoeic form of the injunction of silence, but also as an unstable polymorphic figure that, in the course of repeated encoding, enters potentially different contexts of meaning, while also being a formant of words crucial to Federman's experience as a Holocaust survivor. This process occurs here both on a semantic level and the visual level of materiality of the graphic. "Shhh" is, after all, a cluster of consonants and a potential component of the utterance of words such as "shit," "she" (it is his mother to whom the book is dedicated) and finally, last but not least, "Sh-oah." The multiplication of the 'h' creates a string that replaces other potentially addable letters here, and at the same time produces the effect of a word broken in half. "Shhh" is a figure of the simultaneous swelling of the word and its splitting. In addition to this, the master of typography, in whose compositions the spatial arrangement of the characters on the page played an important role, and thus an artist overly sensitive to the issue of the materiality of language and the ambiguity of words, could not fail to pay attention to the visual aspect of "shhh." The number of letters in "shhh" corresponds to the number of members of Federman's family who will perish in the Holocaust and whom he sees one last time just before his mother throws him into the closet, uttering "Shhh." In this sense, this figure becomes the spelling equivalent of a sequence of four Xs, a kind of seam of the text with which the writer has hitherto marked the wound and absence left behind by loved ones, and which also appears once in *Shhh*: "The story of my parents and sisters stopped when they went down the staircase. From that moment on they became absences. They were erased from history: X-X-X-X." [S, 43].

The disturbance of the stability of language by its once-activated polysemy, however, raises legitimate questions about the whole status of this autobiographical quasi-confession. The appropriateness of language to events is undermined here at the point absolutely crucial for the whole story, that is, in the very formula by means of which Federman's mother orders him to stay quiet, and whose importance is, after all, emphasized by its inclusion in the title. To put it another way, the point is that, despite the appearance of authenticity in the autobiographical confession, his mother did not say "Shhh," at all. The status of this phrase is

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[14] The story of the death of loved ones in the Holocaust, compared to the feces that must be expelled from one's body in order to grow new life, brings to mind Leo Lipski's scatological profanities from his novel *Little Peter* and *The Restless*. Here also, constipation as a blockage of the excretion process serves as a metaphor for the blocked story of a traumatic event that annihilated others.

called into question in the very first pages: "It took many years for me to understand what my mother meant with her *shhh*. I can still hear that word in my ear. But I always hear it in French: *chut*. To write *shhh* falsifies what my mother meant. But since I am writing this version of my childhood in English, I have to practice hearing *shhh*." [16–17] Not only did Federman remain bilingual for the rest of his life, he even produced some of his works in two language codes split into two parallel columns (*La voix dans le cabinet de débarras/The Voice in the Closet*).[15] Although in *Shhh* he emphasizes his mother's phrase in the title, he does so in the language of his own post-war rooting, that is, English, a language which his mother did not speak. The authenticity that we may reflexively believe when we read a story with the subtitle "Story of a Childhood" turns out to be an illusion if the author translates the most key phrase of his entire story.

To this, let us add another remark. Not only was Federman bilingual, but his vigilance also allowed him to see the meanings of words arising from each other.[16] He could see such a multilingual play on words in his own name. The German "Feder" means "quill," so "Federmann" means "man of the quill." Hence one of the many pseudonyms he used: "Featherman" – a kind of "Quillman" or "Homme de Plume," as he put it in his mother tongue. This circumstance leads us to note that the French "chut" allegedly uttered by his mother is almost a homophone of the word for loo – "chiottes." This "sewageness," unsurprising in a Beckett commentator and monographer, an author also steeped in scatology, remains in *Shhh* in feedback with the other parallel strand.

His mother's injunction of silence that saves him from being a victim of the Holocaust consistently intersects with another injunction of silence, the sexual taboo. By intersecting these two threads, Federman seems to enter into a dialogue with the legacy of psychoanalysis, highly familiar to him as an academic scholar of literature. The story of little Raymond overlaps with one of Freud's most famous cases, the so-called "case of little Hans," to whom the "father of psychoanalysis" devoted his study when researching childhood neuroses. Here,

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15 "'Closet' is more interesting in French: the 'cabinet de débarras,' or a 'small lumber room' – 'débarras' also means 'riddance'; 'débarrasser' means 'to clear,' 'to relieve'; and 'se débarrasser' 'to get rid of' or to 'extricate oneself from.'" Alsop, "Federman's Beckett: Two Voices in the Closet," 18.

16 That is another common denominator with Beckett: "When reading Beckett it is absolutely irrelevant to ask which text was written first. His twin-texts – whether French/English or English/French – are not to be read as translations or as substitutes for one another. They are always complementary to one another. In many ways, I consider my own work, my bilingual work to be somewhat the same. Whether written in English or in French first, the two texts complement and complete one another." Raymond Federman, "A Voice within a Voice: Federman Translating/ Translating Federman," http://www.federman.com/rfsrcr2.htm; "Beckett taught me that to rewrite yourself into one of the languages […] is to clarify what you wrote in the other language. […] The two languages *se complètent*, and complement each other. They become inseparable in their interplay." Federman, *The Sam Book*, 5.

infantile sexuality turns out to be the site of a surprising interweaving of the genital and fecal spheres. In creating a theory of infantile sexuality, Freud demonstrates the fluidity of the transition between these two zones. Here, the excretory complex shows connections with the interest in the genitals,[17] and genital pleasure overlaps with the pleasure of excretion.[18] On top of this, the activity of dressing and undressing – central to the situation of sexual arousal – belongs for the child to the context associated with pooping.[19] This interlacing finds its source in the initial castration threat that comes from the mother's side. When Hans's mother learns of her son's interest in his penis, she threatens to cut it off; the child responds that he will then urinate with his "bottom."[20] Raymond's mother, on the other hand, threatens her son with the removal of his penis the moment he discovers masturbation. Freud argues, however, that castration anxiety has roots earlier than this kind of verbalized threat: "It has been urged that every time his mother's breast is withdrawn from a baby he is bound to feel it as castration (that is to say, as the loss of what he regards as an important part of his own body)."[21] However, we can go back even further: "The regular defecation, indeed the very act of birth, cannot be valued by the infant other than as a separation from the mother with whom it has hitherto been one." In this way, the act of birth, perceived by the child as a form of being excreted (hence Hans's belief that children are born as pieces of poop), sets in motion a whole series of similar events, in which this time it is the child who excretes during defecation. It is excretion as a reproduction (with role reversal) of the act of birth that must therefore, according to Freud, be regarded as the "preimage of all castration."[22]

If we transpose these considerations into Federman's universe, they make us put the key prop of Raymond's survival in a new light: the closet. His mother guarantees his salvation only by separating him from herself; in this sense, the scene of her pushing him into the closet replicates the act of birth. At the same time, however, it is also its inversion: here, little Raymond lands back in the darkness from which he emerged at birth, while the closet becomes the distorted figure of his mother's belly. Emerging from it into the world, which will already be a world without a mother, becomes a form of excretion that, as it were, only now

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17 Sigmund Freud, "Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy," in *Two Case Histories ('Little Hans' and The 'Rat Man')*, transl. J. Strachey (The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1955), 23.

18 Freud, "Analysis," 97.

19 Freud, 56.

20 Freud, 8.

21 Freud, 8.

22 "The castration complex is the deepest unconscious root of anti-Semitism; for even in the nursery little boys hear that a Jew has something cut off his penis – a piece of his penis, they think – and this gives them a right to despise Jews." Freud, "Analysis," 36.

closes the process of separation initiated at the birth. "The expulsion is described as being metaphorically both a birth and a death."[23] The closet, which becomes the place where the narrator buried his past, also turns out to be a place of re-birth, a kind of "tomb-womb." [186]

And let us also recall that a penis also becomes involved in the scene of defecation in the closet. Raymond, "holding his penis with two fingers not to wet himself, … defecated" on the newspaper. The shit "becomes the fertilizer" of Federman's re-birth.[24] Raymond says he defecates out of fear of being exposed by the Nazis; at the same time, excretion here is a form of triumphant survival – the child defecates on the "photos of smiling German soldiers" posted in the newspaper. Raymond, as it were, throws shit in the faces of those who wanted him dead. On top of all this, there is another circumstance that forms a hinge between the scatological thread and the issue of the discovery of sexuality. For the elements of the injunction of silence associated with the child's discovery of sexuality consistently form complex entanglements with the maternal injunction of silence with which she saves her son from the Holocaust. The scene in the closet is intricately woven with threads that we later recognize in narratives about the discovery of childhood sexuality, specifically the initiation into the genital sphere. This constant intersection of the two dimensions thus results in an interweaving in which the fecal and genital spheres intersect: the fear-driven defecation perpetrated by little Raymond in the closet is finely woven with the microelements of the performances in which the child's penis will play an overarching role. In a dizzyingly profane gesture, it is in this way that Federman also undermines and abrogates the ineffability of the Holocaust experience. In the face of the impossibility of testifying to the fate of those closest to him, he formulates, as it were, the competing figure of speech-blocking. In doing so, however, Federman weakens the absoluteness of the former, while at the same time allowing himself to cunningly intrude into it, to give himself the possibility of its circular utterance. For every time sexual initiation is mentioned, it is hedged in with the injunction of silence, which nevertheless points to the events behind it. Sexuality here contains a traumatogenic factor, in which it finds a common point with the experience of Shoah. Federman sees each of these as a sphere of traumatogenic realness that resists the possibility of its full expression, which can only be hinted at. Each scene of genital initiation, i. e., when red-haired neighbor, Yvette, masturbates him, touching his "little thing" [210–213] or when Raymond sees his cousin, Salomon, masturbating, who then tries to force the child to have oral sex [268] or when Raymond plays doctors with his sister, future victim of the Holocaust, "playing with Jacqueline's little thing," [368] each of these scenes

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[23] Alsop, "Federman's Beckett," 21.

[24] Kerbel, *Jewish Writers*, 279.

is written out according to a similar pattern. They are accompanied by the verbal equivalent of the maternal "Shhh" – the injunction to remain silent. The initiation into sexuality has the character of a surreptitious practice, giving access to a taboo sphere, the validity of which is restored in the final of each scene, when the injunction to remain silent is formulated and then respected. "Don't tell anyone," Yvette tells Raymond after she masturbates him with her own hands. Cousin Salomon "just shouted, if you tell my father, you'll pay for it. Keep your mouth shut *petit con*. […] I didn't say anything to anyone." [268–269] Respect for the injunction to remain silent thus manifests itself through repeated denials that deny an account of the event by categorically stating that nothing happened. When Raymond returns to the courtyard from his neighbor Yvette's, his sister Sarah asks him: "'What did she want to show you?' 'Oh, nothing,' I replied. 'Just a photo of her when she was little.' 'Did she show you anything else?' Sarah asked. 'Nothing.'" [214] On the farm, on the other hand, a dialogue like this took place: "'What were you doing there?' Maman asks when she almost discovers the children playing doctor. 'Nothing. We were just playing a game […].' 'What kind of game?' 'We were looking for something in the hay.' 'What sort of something?' 'A little thing Jacqueline lost,' Raymond explains." [366–367] "'What are you holding in your hand?' asks the teacher of a class jester who is participating in a masturbation session with a colleague: Gaston blushed and said, 'Nothing Madame, nothing.' 'I can see that you have something in your hand, and that you are playing with it. Bring it here immediately." [224]

"Nothing" is always a buzzword intended to make the sexual experience, or more precisely masturbation, unspoken. Each time "nothing" must be understood entirely literally as the "no" word about "the Thing." The penis, moreover, is indicated by the pronoun "it" ("It was not very big at that age," "You never touch it?," "I hold it when I go pipi."). As if the discovery of the sexual sphere here belongs to the reality of the thing at which language can only hint but which it cannot grasp, the penis is quite literally a "thing" ("my little thing").[25]

And in the context of these recurring figures of "nothing" let us not forget that Federman knows nothing about the fate of their loved ones during the war ("I know nothing of what happened to them after"). Thus, although there is a penis in the scenes of sexual initiation in the role of the "it," they all, as Federman convinces us, temporally precede and mark the story of another "It," of "the Thing," around which the entire narrative of *Shhh*, "the Thing," which is the Holocaust, revolves. The injunction to be silent about the initiation of sexual

[25] Moreover, there is an accumulation of multilingual tensions. After his cousin is caught masturbating by little Raymond, he threatens him: "Keep your mouth shut, *petit con*." The French expression here conceals a form similar to that used to refer to the penis in the quasi-comment about Yvette's neighbor: *petit con* means "little prick," "little thing," little "it," which is also not insignificant in the context of the proximity of the "sh" pronoun revealed in the novel's title.

experience, that "don't tell anyone" repeated in various ways, again becomes quite literally an injunction to be silent about the "it" - the "shhh of it," the "shhh-it." 'Shhh' is thus a prelude to saying: "keep silent about it," where we already lose certainty about what this "it" refers to. As if the violating of the one injunction of silence, so far completely effective, automatically entails an analogous process on the second plane subordinated to a similar command. And as if one's own survival and the lives of those who did not survive the Holocaust could only be told here omnisciently through a collection of scenes from one's childhood, including what constituted one of its important elements, that is, one's awakening sexuality. The silence belonging to the sphere of the Holocaust experience ("Shhh" – "Keep quiet, because that's the only way you'll survive") intersects with the silence with which the sexual-scatological sphere is circumscribed in the child's experience ("just don't tell anyone"). It is as if it is only with the input of the second register of prohibition, by juxtaposing the two taboos, by crossing them with each other, that the violating of one begins to undo the other. It is as if it is only by doubling the injunctions of silence that the taboos inscribed in each begin to be unraveled, opening the floodgates to inadequate, but finally witnessing, language. It doesn't take any particular care to notice, either, that underlying both of them is a kind of prohibition of representation. Thanks to the accumulation of silences, thanks to the density and multiplication of taboos, the injunction of silence is paradoxically and subtly abolished. For, after all, *Shhh* is the proof that Federman violates the injunction of silence. He tells the story of what was supposed to remain a secret forever, but in telling it, he tries to intrude into the world of people whose fate he in turn can say nothing about, except that they died. And in this way, by a circuitous route, he makes something of their past fates available to us.

An incredible sequence of incestuous exploration of sexuality immediately precedes an even more stunning finale in *Shhh*. Here is a son receiving a gift from his mother and he is ordered to keep quiet: "Here, for your birthday, but eat it now, and don't tell your sisters." [375] The scene of the offering of the *éclair*, which the sisters will not receive, forms a structural analogy (prefiguration?) of the scene of Raymond's salvation from the Holocaust, when the mother decides that it is the boy, not his sisters, who should be pushed into the closet. It is also at this point in the book that the final order to remain silent rings out, one of the supposed "Shhh"s from which Federman weaves the tale of his survival ("Don't tell your sisters"). And it is at this point, in order to further call into question the credibility of this autobiographical account, that the author allows a countering "inner voice" to speak one last time:

– Federman…
– Yes? What?
– Nothing…" [375]

"Nothing," which has always appeared in little Raymond's responses to questions concerning the taboo spheres, resounds here in the voice of his adult, sober "second self" as a kind of resignation in the face of Federman's potentially mythomaniacal or rather strictly plot-driven inclinations, thus declaring to us: You were expecting a good-humored autobiographical confession, but who knows, maybe you were fooled from beginning to end? Maybe the whole story of Federman's salvation, including the scene in the closet, is just a string of well-crafted scenes straight out of a cheap thriller script? You thought to yourself: At last, this well-known opponent of directness in literature has abandoned his disbelief, his conviction about the inevitable plagiarism of words, his typographical experiments, and finally he will simply tell us how it really was. And in the meantime, we have learned nothing, or rather, the object of this knowledge is nothing itself – pure crap! And only then there are the words that conclude the book:

"Shhh.....
Chut." [377]

On the next page Federman includes a photograph stripped of subtitle. As it depicts a woman with three young children, two girls and one boy, it seems natural to assume that this is a photograph of the author with his mother and sisters. But is it really them? *Shhh* turns out to be a thunderous proclamation of the triumph of life – it was only thanks to the silence from the past that one could survive to now violates all orders of silence and taboos, exploding with an excess of vitality against those who wanted little Raymond dead.[26] The only testimony to those who died, thus breaking the sublime silence about the Holocaust, becomes possible only because Federman listened to his mother when she (allegedly) whispered "Chut."

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[26] I refer here to the notion of *sur-vivre* from Jacques Derrida's analysis of Shelley's *Triumph of Life*, in Jacques Derrida, *Parages* (Galilée, 1986).

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Streszczenie

Artykuł stanowi analizę wydanego pośmiertnie Shhh: The Story of a Childhood Raymonda Federmana. Federman krąży w książce dookoła sceny pierwotnej swojego pisania, kiedy to matka wepchnęła go do szafy i szepcząc „szzz," ukryła go przed Gestapo. Przyglądam się temu, w jaki sposób autor, podważając rzekomo autobiograficzną narrację o ocaleniu, rozbraja zarazem dyskurs wzniosłości, który zaważył nad wieloma dyskusjami o Zagładzie. Z tego powodu analizuję obecne w pisarstwie Federmana sploty skatologii i dosadnego przedstawiania seksualności.

Słowa kluczowe
Federman, Zagłada, świadectwo, postmodernizm

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AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL CULTURE

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Life-Writing in the Works of Polish Critics: Situated Knowledge or an Epidemic of Narcissism?

Abstract

This article explores the evolution of life-writing within Polish literary criticism, examining the shift from narcissistic tendencies in the 1990s to contemporary forms of exposing the reviewer's "I." The author references the works of Karol Maliszewski, Dariusz Nowacki, and Maciej Jakubowiak to discuss the implications of personalism and autoethnography in literary criticism, with special focus on the intersection of subjectivity and sociological reflection. The author also considers the historical context of autobiographical criticism in Poland, particularly the impact of socio-economic changes after 1989.

Keywords
Polish literary criticism, narcissism, autoethnography, situated knowledge

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Narcissism in Polish Book Reviews of the 1990s

Contemporary Polish literary criticism[1] grapples with the intricate balance between personal expression and postulates of critical objectivity. Since the 1990s, this struggle has been apparent in the ways of showing the authorial "I" in reviews and articles about literature. This article delves into the evolving landscape of literary criticism, exploring the transition from intensely subjective criticism – prevalent in the nineties and often labelled as "narcissistic" – to the current trend of life writing in literary analysis.

Reflecting on the problem of narcissism in contemporary Polish literary criticism, Dorota Kozicka wrote:

> There is a fundamental difference between the personal signature of a critic trying to convey their views on literature, and, on the other hand, attempting to penetrate and understand a literary work, the author's intentions, or the expectations of the literary audience, and a narcissistic attitude that arises when the text plays the role of a mirror reflecting the desires of the critic himself.[2]

In doing so, she made a distinction between clarity of style or a literary program and egocentrism, i.e., a critic's focus on the self. The latter model, extremely subjective and limited to presenting an individual perspective, gained popularity in the Polish criticism of the 1990s. According to Kozicka, Witold Gombrowicz was chosen as the patron of this approach to literary criticism. It was the assumption, expressed by the author of the *Diaries*, that the right to speak is limited only to demonstrate the position and perspective of the one who speaks, which constituted the motto of the critical work of Dariusz Nowacki, among others. As Kozicka added,

> such patronage [of Gombrowicz] and such a project of writing, however, testify not only to the great ambitions of critics entering literature after 1989 but, above all, to the invalidation of the fundamental differences between a personal (autobiographical, intimate) statement and a critical one. If critical-literary strategies are too literally based

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1 "Literary criticism" is a term that in Poland – contrary to the Anglophone tradition – mainly refers to non-academic book reviews or essays on literature. Therefore when I write about "literary criticism" in the following article I mean book reviews, popular essays on literature, columns and longer sketches published in the press.

2 Dorota Kozicka, "Czy krytyk musi być kochany, czyli o narcystycznych skłonnościach krytyki literackiej," in *Krytyczne (nie)porządki: studia o współczesnej krytyce literackiej w Polsce* (Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych UNIVERSITAS, 2012), 67 [emphasis mine]. Unless otherwise noted in the bibliography, I am the author of all cited translations.

> on Gombrowicz's formula of "writing about myself" and a peculiar understanding of what a critic's "expressiveness" is supposed to be, they can lead to a false identification of subjectivity with narcissism.[3]

The author of *Krytyczne (nie)porządki* [Critical (Dis)orders] was commenting on Nowacki's book *Zawód: czytelnik* [*Profession: Reader*], but her analysis could also pertain to many active young critics of the 1990s. Jarosław Klejnocki, Karol Maliszewski, and Jerzy Sosnowski provide examples of how criticism became subjectivized and personalized after the 1989 breakthrough.

However, when we take a closer look at the texts of these critics, the purposes of making the critical literary "I" visible in the text becomes quite obvious. For instance Maliszewski, who is often associated with the "personalist" tendency, uses it remarkably often in his reviews and articles; however, he usually focuses not on bringing in his own experiences to essays, but rather on describing his peculiar encounters with the text.

Maliszewski's critical-literary self reflects upon and agonizes over poetry books. Sometimes, he feels so wracked that he has to go out for a cigarette, but these are always emotions triggered by an act of reading. Maliszewski does not refer to himself as a private person, he makes no mention of personal or professional endeavors. His role is limited to being a function of the text.

The strategy of describing one's reading impressions stems from the critic's reading objectives. These, in turn, are described in the very short methodological essay that opens the book *Nasi klasycyści, nasi barbarzyńcy* [Our Classicists, Our Barbarians].[4] Maliszewski writes about an empathetic mode of reading; reading as a method of encountering another human being on the other side of the text. Although this approach to criticism can be successfully accused of naïvety (the problem of the medium disappears, the question of literary programs becomes transparent, etc.), the basic consequence of Maliszewski's aim and method should be recognized. Starting from personalist convictions, the critic, considering the act of reading as an encounter between two persons, must presuppose his participation in that encounter (but precisely as a reader, not necessarily as a private person, e.g., Karol, living

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3 Kozicka, 77.

4 The book *Nasi klascyści, nasi barbarzyńcy* [Our Classicists, Our Barbarians] is titled after Maliszewski's famous essay published in the magazine *Nowy Nurt* in 1995. In this text, the critic distinguished and contrasted two dominant tendencies in Polish poetry after 1989: the barbarians (i.e., authors inspired by the New York School, introducing various innovations to Polish poetry) and the classicists (understood here as paying homage to traditional forms and historical-literary conservatism). Maliszewski unequivocally sided with the "barbarians," since in his view they were closer to conveying to individual experience.

in Nowa Ruda, husband, father, teacher, etc.). If the critic has ethical obligations, they are imposed first and foremost on himself:

> I cannot afford to construe a specific program (…) for the time being, this is merely a rough outline. I address them, of course, to myself. Our times are individualistic. So I would like to respond to myself for the poems I applaud.[5]

Moreover, the critic himself, in these encounters with poetry and its authors, can be helpless or suspicious:

> I have never encountered such difficulties before. I wanted to say something about the poems, but I couldn't. I moved my lips. Flashes of lightning flew through my head, vague noises, associations, equivalences, but it did not articulate itself into something coherent.[6]
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> As far as I am concerned, I don't feel seduced: I am somewhere in the middle. (…) still with my eyes as much as possible open to sensitive, self-serving diction (…).[7]

In such situations, this helplessness or suspicion determines both the reading horizon and the appraisal of the text itself. Recognizing the author as "sly" (as Maliszewski does in the case of Darek Foks) automatically distances the critic from the analyzed text. If the point of the reading is to meet the author, creating a negative image of the author automatically weakens the reviewer's urge to delve into the text itself.

Although the consequences of the reading model applied by Maliszewski and other critics of the 1990s are problematic, they cannot be described as inconsistent. Personalism implemented in this way has already been argued against on many occasions: Maliszewski has been criticized for his naïve approach to literary criticism, for his mannered language, and for his excessive emotionality.[8] There is no doubt that this model of "narcissistic" – as

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5 Karol Maliszewski, *Nasi klasycyści, nasi barbarzyńcy: szkice o nowej poezji* (Instytut Wydawniczy "Świadectwo," 1999), 59. Citation from *Acentric Labyrinth* – an article on the poetry of Jacek Podsiadło.

6 Maliszewski, 38. Citation from *Precision of Chaos* – sketch on the poetry of Andrzej Sosnowski.

7 Maliszewski, 115. Citation from *He has an eye, he read a bit and he's sly* – review of Darek Foks's poetry book.

8 See e.g., Anna Kałuża, "WSTĘP: Poezja, krytyka, estetyka," in *Wielkie wygrane: wspólne sprawy poezji, krytyki i estetyki* (Mikołów: Instytut Mikołowski, 2011), 7–38; Jarosław Klejnocki, "Trochę czytał, ma tupet i lubi pouczać," in *Barbarzyńcy, klasycyści i inni: spory o młodą poezję w latach 90.*, ed. Marcin Jaworski, vol. 7, Polemika Krytycznoliteracka w Polsce (Wydawnictwa Poznańskiego Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk, 2018), 185–193; Dawid Kujawa, "Czy barbarzyńca może bełkotać? Karol Maliszewski," in *Pocałunki ludu. Poezja i krytyka po roku 2000* (korporacja Ha!art, 2021).

Kozicka would like to call it – literary criticism is on the wane. One searches in vain for young proponents of the personalist line, and Maliszewski's approach is now a fairly easy (though not very contemporary) target for attack.

I do not mean to suggest, however, that the phenomenon in which Kozicka recognized "the obliteration of the fundamental differences between personal (autobiographical, intimate) and critical expression"[9] has ceased to exist. On the contrary: life writing in literary criticism is doing remarkably well and is no longer reduced to merely describing the situation of confronting a text or experiencing it in the process of reading. Critics expose themselves in reviews or essays precisely as private individuals: with all the background of private experiences and anecdotes.

Autoethnography in Contemporary Polish Literary Criticism

In this paper, I will discuss an emblematic example of a contemporary critical-literary autobiographer, Maciej Jakubowiak. I would like to draw attention to an important shift that is taking place in the aims of contemporary critics. Jakubowiak's texts are first and foremost attempts to think about literature in a sociological way. For the author, it is no longer the intimate encounter with a text or the ethical obligation to oneself that becomes the goal of his critical endeavors. He reads in order to better understand the changes taking place in social reality – literature becomes, in a sense, a "laboratory of society."[10] Critical literary objectives are structured around key categories (which often make a great career in the humanities and/or journalism), such as the people's turn [*zwrot ludowy*], masculinity studies, engaged literature and transculturalism.

In the text *Literatura zaangażowania* [Literature of Engagement] (published in *dwutygodnik.com*), Maciej Jakubowiak begins his reflections with very long autobiographical comments. They serve as a prelude to a consideration of the changes taking place in the literature. The personal story of how he changed his attitude towards the idea of protest and protesting becomes a metonymy for social change – Jakubowiak considers the position in which he finds himself to be socially exemplary and universal. In this way, his personal story represents a more than individual stake: the critic is not so much a narcissist (reflecting the work from his subjective perspective) as an autoethnographer, trying to understand and

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[9] Kozicka, "Czy krytyk musi być kochany, czyli o narcystycznych skłonnościach krytyki literackiej," 77.

[10] See the use of this concept in the critical-literary writing of Przemyslaw Czaplinski, e.g., Przemysław Czapliński, *Polska do wymiany: późna nowoczesność i nasze wielkie narracje* (Wydawnictwo W.A.B., 2009); Przemysław Czapliński, *Poruszona mapa: wyobraźnia geograficzno-kulturowa polskiej literatury przełomu XX i XXI wieku* (Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2016).

describe himself against the background of a broader cultural context, or vice versa, trying to understand the broader context through the use of what he can actually experience. However, the prefix "auto-" must be emphasized in this method, for it is symptomatic of the fact that, although Jakubowiak is interested in the social diagnosis, he does not carry it out by resorting to objectifying or intersubjective tools. The intended diagnosis is made exclusively through the prism of the "self." The reader can learn from Jakubowiak's text that many more activists have emerged in Poland after 2015; this is not evidenced by any numbers/statistics, but only by the declaration that activist work has begun to become increasingly popular in the critic's social circle.[11]

In investigating the origins of this method, it may be useful to look at one of Jakubowiak's journalistic texts that does not deal with literature. The manifesto-like article *Koniec epoki dystansu* [The End of the Age of Distance], published in *Tygodnik Powszechny*, emphasizes the author's strong opposition to a culture based on the pretense of objectivity and impartiality, one that favors ironic distance. The critic's demands for literalism and individual involvement are inspired by the works of Timothy Morton.[12]

While I do not intend to argue with the political dimension of Jakubowiak's appeal (for it seems to be an interesting voice in defense of some kind of left-wing populism), I would like to underline the problematic nature of transferring these demands to the critical-literary field. Indeed, having cited the main tenets of Morton's thought (that the privileged position of the distanced observer is currently untenable), Jakubowiak draws far-reaching practical consequences out of it. If we confront the theses contained in *Koniec epoki dystansu* [The End of the Age of Distance] with Jakubowiak's essays on literature, we can easily understand the principles behind his position. If the critic cannot be a "distanced observer," then his reflections necessarily have to include the position he occupies. However, since the critic (probably by taking into account the assumptions of intersectional theory) places himself as a subject entangled in multiple conflicts and sociological categories, the postulated transparency becomes necessary. In this way, honesty in the choice of subject categories becomes the primary goal of critical literary expression.

It is precisely this method that allows Jakubowiak to begin with a lengthy account of his own experiences while choosing to reject other voices in a long-standing debate on engagement in which he participates with a single paragraph that reads:

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11 Maciej Jakubowiak, "WRAŻLIWOŚCI: Literatura zaangażowania," *dwutygodnik.com* 2, no. 327 (2022), https://www.dwutygodnik.com/artykul/6358-schematy-nie-na-temat.html.

12 Maciej Jakubowiak, "Koniec epoki dystansu," *Tygodnik Powszechny* 14 (2021), https://www.tygodnik-powszechny.pl/koniec-epoki-dystansu-166948.

> Literature has changed with us. Some part of it. Although to tell the truth, I don't want to get involved in a discussion about the engagement of literature at all. It's long, it's boring and it's usually used by various academics to emphasize how important their work is.[13]

This passage sets up a rather clear opposition: the tedious, academic debates that only serve to bolster the position of those who take part in them versus the voice of the critic, who, as a private person, is a kind of metonymy of society and can therefore speak about supra-individual issues, even though he constantly returns to the personal.

As an aside, it is worth noting the parallel between Jakubowiak's quoted statement and the rhetorical endeavors of Dariusz Nowacki, in which the latter also distances himself from participating in complex discussions. "Frankly speaking, I don't want to reach for arguments that are repeated ad nauseam,"[14] he wrote in *Zawód: czytelnik* [Profession: Reader], attempting to establish an informal contact with the recipients of his texts by distancing himself from academic disputes. Given this resemblance, one could say that a critique that privileges a strong presence of the self in the text often implies a reluctance to engage in complex discussions. However, this reluctance would not stem from a lack of competence (both Nowacki and Jakubowiak have degrees in literary studies), but from a conviction about the meaninglessness of these debates (as opposed to the importance of personal reading in Nowacki's case or autoethnographic reflection in Jakubowiak's writings).

The similarities between the "narcissistic" personalist criticism of Nowacki or Maliszewski and Jakubowiak's autoethnographical practices with a sociological bent are striking. All three critics ultimately use very similar methods: working with the text involves confronting personal experience with fiction. However, while this method corresponds with the assumptions of personalist criticism (that is, it is adequate to the ambitions of the project of empathetic literary criticism, "reading as encounter," etc.), it seems debatable whether it satisfies the ambitions of sociological literary criticism.

Changed Aims, Same Methods

Thus, the autobiographical reflex in literary criticism influences much more than the way the critic's subject is situated. The strong fixation on the literary self also imposes, to some extent, criteria of evaluation. When we practice autoethnography, it is the changes within the researcher himself that we consider most relevant – even if the "ethnographic" frame situates these changes within broader shifts in society and culture.

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[13] Jakubowiak, "WRAŻLIWOŚCI: Literatura zaangażowania."

[14] Dariusz Nowacki, *Zawód: czytelnik : notaki o prozie polskiej lat 90*. (Znak, 1999), 90.

The Canadian writer and essayist Jason Guriel has noted and critiqued similar shifts in Anglophone literary criticism. In a text tellingly titled *I Don't Care About Your Life: Why Critics Need to Stop Getting Personal in Their Essays*, he points to the autobiographical nature of contemporary literary criticism as a kind of critical response mechanism to the dryness of the New Criticism style. Guriel sees David Foster Wallace as the patron of critical life writing in English-language essays (i.e., as in the case of Gombrowicz's Polish patronage, primarily a writer, only secondarily a cultural commentator). After pointing out the weaknesses of confessional criticism, the author concludes with a postulate:

> None of this is to suggest that critics should sink a dentist's sharp into their prose, inject artificial chill into their voice, aspire to the frozen state of Eliot, Adorno, and the like. But they should want to be wary of the zeitgeist. If criticism has reached peak confession, critics would do well to simply scrutinize the cultural product at hand (as well as its influences, social context, and, yes, tradition; we need to read beyond ourselves) and put a temporary moratorium on the memoir – especially if the picture painted is of a quirky, sincere, self-deprecatory soul.[15]

It is interesting that Guriel perceives the increasingly autobiographical character of literary criticism as the "spirit of the times." On Polish soil, this argument seems even more relevant, as these changes were amplified by the caesura of 1989. In his book *Gry z autobiografią* [Playing with Autobiography], Artur Hellich meticulously reconstructed the historical conditions of a specifically Polish aversion to non-fiction narratives focused on individual experience. Partitions, wars, debates about the shape of new forms of statehood, and the censorship restrictions of the People's Republic of Poland were all factors that effectively diverted writers, essayists, and critics away from introspective ambitions and toward (more or less direct) participation in social discussions. The autobiographical breakthrough came after 1989, when:

> On the one hand, governments restricting freedom of speech came to an end; on the other hand, Poland adopted a liberal-capitalist system, which contributed to the popularization of the Anglo-Saxon culture of individualism. From then on, publishing autobiographies in print became popular on a mass scale. Confessions began to be published by writers and literary scholars, as well as politicians, scholars of various disciplines and celebrities.[16]

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15 Jason Guriel, "I Don't Care about Your Life," *The Walrus*, April 14, 2016, https://thewalrus.ca/i-dont-care-about-your-life/.

16 Artur Hellich, *Gry z autobiografią: przemilczenia, intelektualizacje, parodie* (Instytut Badań Literackich PAN Wydawnictwo, 2018), 65.

Pointing to the discursive shift that enabled the appreciation of the individual perspective, the researcher rightly linked it to the socio-economic context. These recognitions, however, call for additional comment: whereas autobiography (due to political demand) was an unwanted genre in Poland for most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, after 1989 it became a foundation of literature and literary criticism, and this is also due to the ideological need produced by liberal democracy.

The matter becomes more complicated when the broader phenomenon of autobiographism is discussed beyond the narrow framework of the genre. Diagnoses by critics and researchers such as Tomasz Burek,[17] Małgorzata Czermińska,[18] and Jerzy Jarzębski[19] demonstrate that autobiography thrived in Polish prose during the 20th century. However, Hellich's recognition of an autobiographical breakthrough can further strengthen these tendencies to establish autobiography as a framework for other forms of writing. It is essential to examine these phenomena broadly, considering the influence of both autobiography and non-fiction genres on literary development. This issue has been addressed in recent years by literary critics. It was Maciej Jakubowiak who, in the article *Nie na temat* [Not on Topic], proposed a thesis on the expansion of reportage mechanisms beyond non-fiction, suggesting a growing importance of "dominant topics" in fictional genres.[20] Let me narrow down Jakubowiak's concept and take it further: alongside the desire for non-fiction, readers' expectations began to include an appreciation for the uniqueness of individual experiences. These phenomena are observed and discussed in literature, but they also seem to have an impact on journalism and literary criticism.

However, while critics in the 1990s accepted the conformity of their stance towards the individualist "order" of the time – such declarations appear both in Maliszewski's or Nowacki's books – the most recent critics who use the autobiographical mode declare themselves in opposition to this "order." Their strong critical literary self is to become a point of reference for social criticism and sociological reflection. The method has not changed. What has changed is the ideological justification – Jakubowiak's (and those of other critics representing a similar approach) political point of view can be described as liberal-left. For this reason, among others, the expansion of "narcissistic" or "autoethnographic" criticism

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17 Tomasz Burek, *Zamiast powieści* (Czytelnik, 1971).

18 Małgorzata Czermińska, *Autobiograficzny trójkąt: świadectwo, wyznanie, wyzwanie*, Wydanie 2, zmienione (Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 2020).

19 Jerzy Jarzębski, "Kariera «autentyku»," in *Powieść jako autokreacja* (Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1984), 337–364.

20 Maciej Jakubowiak, "SCHEMATY: Nie na temat," *dwutygodnik.com* 1, no. 177 (2016), https://www.dwutygodnik.com/artykul/6358-schematy-nie-na-temat.html.

cannot be directly linked with the position of white, heterosexual, privileged men. Moreover, paradoxically, the drive to show a "subjudged" perspective may support this trend.

In the aforementioned critical shifts, one can recognize attempts to translate Donna Haraway's postulate of "situated knowledge" into reflection on literature. However, this concept – which is a voice not that much against objectivity, but above all against relativism – presupposes a suspicion towards individual strategies of seeing. Haraway wrote about the dangers of preferring the "subjudged" positions, which are likely to slip into "modes of denial through repression, forgetting, and disappearing acts – ways of being nowhere while claiming to see comprehensively."[21] The supposed "situatedness" of the critical subjects addressed in my paper would be based on something similar. The attempt to "see comprehensively" through an individual perspective that reflects social change does not ultimately make us see more than the "narcissistic" critique of the 1990s. It only makes it easier to "claim" that we do.

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[21] Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 584, https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066.

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Life-writing w polskiej krytyce literackiej

Streszczenie

Artykuł omawia zmiany w obecności i formie life-writingu w polskiej krytyce literackiej, analizując przejście od narcystycznych tendencji w latach 90. do współczesnych form eksponowania krytycznoliterackiego „ja". Autorka, odwołując się do prac Karola Maliszewskiego, Dariusza Nowackiego i Macieja Jakubowiaka, omawia konsekwencje przyjmowania perspektyw personalistycznych i autoetnograficznych w krytyce literackiej. Artykuł dotyka także historycznych kontekstów popularności krytyki wprowadzającej elementy autobiografizmu, związanych ze zmianami społeczno-gospodarczymi w Polsce po 1989 roku.

Słowa kluczowe
polska krytyka literacka, narcyzm, autoetnografia, wiedza usytuowana

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AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL CULTURE

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Crisis and *Passio*: Encyclopedists and the Creation of an Encyclopedic Work

Abstract

In the article I discuss that in encyclopedic works, from the Roman beginnings of encyclopedic discourse, there are noticeable textual traces that refer to the experiences and affective conditions of their empirical authors, and that the *zoe* of the empirical encyclopedist sometimes shines through from behind the *bios theoretikos* of the encyclopedic self. Moreover, the author's decision to create an encyclopedic work is sometimes caused by a real or discursively assumed catastrophe as its justification.

Keywords
encyclopedism, encyclopedia, empirical author, *zoe*, catastrophe, crisis

The self-expressive mode of writing as a socio-cultural practice does not only occur in literary and autobiographical genres. It can also be traced in the discursive space of encyclopedism. The extra-textual experiences of the authors are recorded in various epitexts (letters, memoirs, diaries) which form the *discours d'escorte* of a given encyclopedic work. But the traces of those experiences can also be found in the paratexts of the encyclopedic works themselves (prefaces, introductions, epilogues, subscription notes in the colophons of manuscripts) as textual spaces with a weaker codification of style and content, and even in their main text

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(in entries). Often written in an impersonal style, they unexpectedly contain signals of the personal position, experience and affective condition of the empirical encyclopedist. Often, they do not provide abundant (auto)biographical content, but offer the necessary minimum of material. However, if the *zoe* of the empirical encyclopedist shines through from behind the *bios theoretikos* of the encyclopedic self, then capturing and isolating such signals makes it possible to destabilise the image of encyclopedic works as impersonal archives of knowledge, compendia of information, and to look at them as a space in which traces of the extratextual presence of the empirical author are negotiated. Encyclopedic works were created for a variety of reasons and resulted from various affective factors, such as curiosity, a desire for complete knowledge, or melancholy,[1] among which a particular reason is the fulfilment of a past, hypothetical or real impending catastrophe. The encyclopedist wishes to remedy the consequences of this catastrophe – this is the subject of the latter section of my article.[2]

Placed in the paratexts of encyclopedic works, signals of the authorial presence of an empirical author can be found in as early as Roman sources. Pliny the Elder, in his dedication to the Emperor Titus Flavius Vespasian, which opens *Natural History* (*Naturalis Historia*, 77–79 CE), noted the process of creating the encyclopedic work (reading some 2,000 volumes, 20,000 "noteworthy facts" included, not counting the information added by Pliny himself – all contained in 36 volumes), and wrote:

> Nor do we doubt that there are many things that have escaped us also; for we are but human, and beset with duties, and we pursue this sort of interest in our spare moments, that is at night – lest any of your house should think that the night hours have been given to idleness. […] to be alive means to be awake.[3]

"Profecto enim vita vigilia est" – indeed, the encyclopedist's existence is a nocturnal vigil dedicated to the accumulation of all knowledge (in this case, mainly Greek and Roman),

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1 *Curiositas*, the desire for knowledge, and other affective factors have been mentioned as the sources of modern encyclopedic works by many authors. Compare Robert John Weston Evans and Alexander Marr (eds.), *Curiosity and Wonder from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Routledge, 2016); Michał Paweł Markowski, *Anatomia ciekawości* (Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1999), 11–51; Joanna Partyka, *Między "scientia curiosa" a encyklopedią. Europejskie konteksty dla staropolskich kompendiów wiedzy* (Instytut Badań Literackich PAN Wydawnictwo, 2019), 15–39; Krzysztof Pomian, *Collectionneurs, amateurs et curieux. Paris, Venise: XVI^e^-XVIII^e^ siècle* (Éditions Gallimard, 1987), 61–80.

2 Richard Yeo, *Encyclopaedic Visions: Scientific Discourse and Enlightenment Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 83–86, 95–97.

3 "[…] nec dubitamus multa esse quae et nos praeterierint; homines enim sumus et occupati officiis, subsicivisque temporibus ista curamus, id est nocturnis, ne quis vestrum putet his cessatum horis. […] profecto enim vita vigilia est." Pliny, *Natural History in Ten Volumes vol. I*, trans. H. Rackham (Harvard University Press; William Heinemann, 1967), praef. 18–19, 12–13.

a life dedicated to the impossible and infinite task of describing the entire world.[4] There is an awareness of the superhuman scale of the undertaking in this confession; there is also fatigue. Aulus Gellius, too, in his preface to *Attic Nights* (*Noctes Atticae*, c. 177 CE), emphasised that they were written during the long winter nights he spent in Attica – hence the title. Gellius, unlike Pliny, mentioned the rather playful nature of his activities ("ludere ac facere exorsi sumus").[5]

Pliny's "night vigil" and Gellius's note-assembling activity undertaken "during the long winter nights" suggest the empirical encyclopedist's split between the temptation to embrace all knowledge and that of private life. A caricatured image of the scholar escaping from everyday life into a sterile space devoted solely to scholarly activity can be found in Erasmus of Rotterdam's dialogue *Ciceronianus* (1528). One of the characters, Nosoponus, tells us that he only works "at dead of night when profound quiet and deep silence reign over all." He then locks himself in a room separated from the rest of the house by thick walls, doors and windows so that, even during the day, neither the sun's rays nor the sounds of "workmen's hammers" or "women's quarrels" can enter, not even a fly can get in. He has decided not to marry because a wife and children disturb the peace, he eats lightly so as not to overburden his mind with too much matter, and he drinks no wine, sometimes eating raisins instead.[6]

Echoes of the nocturnal activities of Pliny and Gellius and the lifestyle of the humanist scholar described by Erasmus can be heard in the title of the encyclopedic work by the Flemish scholar, mathematician and astrologer Joachim Sterck van Ringelbergh, *Lucubrationes vel potius absolutissima kyklopaideia* [*Lucubrations, or Rather Absolute Cyclopaedia*] (1538), devoted mainly to trivium. The Latin word "lucubrationes" means laborious or intensive study, and at the same time connotes night-work by lamplight, nocturnal study, lucubration.[7] This is also how Johann Heinrich Alsted described his encyclopedic activities in the *Præfatio ad Lectorem benevolum* which opened *Encyclopædia Septem tomis distincta* [*Encyclopedia in Seven Distinct Volumes*] (1630): "For in this way I have always organized my reasons, that

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4 Pliny also wrote, "[…] there is not one person to be found among us who has made the same venture, nor yet the one among the Greeks who has tackled single-handed all departments of the subject" ("[…] nemo apud nos qui idem temptaverit invenitur, nemo apud Graecos qui unus omnia ea tractaverit"). Pliny, *Natural History*, *vol. I*, praef. 14, 8–11.

5 Aulus Gellius, *The Attic Nights of Aulus Gellius*, trans. John C. Rolphe (Harvard University Press; William Heinemann, 1927), vol. I, XXVI-XXVII, 4 [and] XXVIII-XXXI, 10.

6 Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, *Ciceronianus or A Dialogue on the Best Style of Speaking*, trans. Izora Scott (Teachers College, Columbia University, 1908), 28–30.

7 Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary Founded on Andrews' Edition of Freund's Latin Dictionary* (Clarendon Press, 1969), 1082.

I might serve the interests of others, and magnify the glory of the one God. Hence were born to me various lucubrations: many of which saw the light at different times."[8] [transl. by ŁW]

A common reference can be found in John Amos Comenius's *Visible World: Or, a Nomenclature, and Pictures of All the Chief Things that Are in the World* (*Orbis sensualium pictus*, 1658). It is a textbook for learning Latin, and at the same time a universal encyclopedia in 150 chapters, presenting knowledge of the whole world for the purposes of a six-year-old pupil. As Adam Fijałkowski points out, Comenius's extant working diary and precisely *Orbis pictus* allow us to assume that he worked mostly at night.[9] Chapter 99 of the textbook, entitled *Museum – The Study*, is significant in this context. Comenius writes: "The *Study* is a place where a Student, apart from Men, sitteth alone, addicted to his *Studies*, whilst he readeth *Books*." It is a place where one works during the day and spends long hours at night. It is here that the student, the scholar, devotes himself to his lucubrations, the result of which may be, for example, an encyclopedic work in the genre modality of a school textbook. "Being to sit up late, he setteth a *Candle*, on a *Candlestick* […], before the Candle he placeth a *Screen*, which is green, that it may not hurt his eye-sight." He who works long after sunset must use "a *Lanthorn* or a *Torch*" when he finally decides to go outside.[10]

An encyclopedist who often works through the night rarely expresses strength, rather the lack of it, and certainly fatigue. The Polish encyclopedist and priest Benedykt Chmielowski made a dramatic confession at the beginning of *Nowe Ateny* [*The New Athens*] (1745). Writing of his work as his "lucubration," he addressed the reader (*Do czytelnika*) with the following words: "[…] do not be the Censor of my sweat bloody and overexertive […] There *nocte dieq* [at night – ŁW], *desudans* until I lost my eyesight, all my sweat dedicating to [the Holy – ŁW] Mary, *Immenso* to GOD and to you, Reader *ad usum*."[11] [transl. by ŁW]

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[8] "Sic enim semper institui rationes meas, ut aliorum commodis inservire, ac unius Dei gloriam amplificare possem. Hinc mihi natae sunt variae lucubrationes: e quibus multae diversis temporibus lucem aspexerunt." Iohannes-Henricus Alstedius, *Encyclopædia Septem tomis distincta…* (Herbornæ Nassoviorum: [Georg Corvinus; Johann-Georg Muderspach], 1630), [lack of pagination].

[9] Adam Fijałkowski, *Tradycja i nowatorstwo w "Orbis sensualium pictus" Jana Amosa Komeńskiego* (Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2012), 258–259. In the context of the "museum" described in the textbook, the author recalls Erasmus's dialogue *Ciceronianus*.

[10] "*Museum* est locus ubi Studiosus, secretus ab Hominibus, sedet solus deditus *Studii*, dum lectitat *Libros* […] Lucubraturus, elevat *Lychnum* (*Canelam*), in *Candelabra* […] ante Lynchum collocat *Umbraculum*, quod viride est, ne hebetet oculorum aciem." John Amos Comenius, *The Orbis Pictus*, trans. Charles Hoole (Syracuse, New York: C.W. Bardeen, 1887), 120–121.

[11] "[…] nie bądź krwawego potu mego y wiele kosztuiącego Censorem […] Tam *nocte dieq*; áź do utraty wzroku *desudans*, wszystek pot moy *Mari Immenso* BOGU dedykuiąc, y Tobie Czytelniku *ad usum*." Benedykt Chmielowski, *Nowe Ateny albo Akademia wszelkiey scyencyi pełna…* (Graf_ika Usługi Wydawnicze Iwona Knechta; przy współpracy Gopher u.r.p. Andrzej Famielec, 2018), cz. I, b2 verso.

It is possible to regard the above complaints as typical realisations of the rhetorical figure of *excusatio propter infirmitatem*, i.e., the topos of excessive modesty, expressed in the gesture of acknowledgment and emphasis of one's own ignorance, incompetence, being overwhelmed by the scale of the undertaking,[12] but also to see here the traces of the empirical author's *passio*, the expression of genuine fatigue and torment of creation. Writing an encyclopedic work is a modality of scientific as well as social and existential practices. From the traces of their authors' experiences preserved in the encyclopedic works, it is clear that the encyclopedist's existence is one of working during the day and late into the night, probably at the expense of his personal life and health. It is not the disembodied subject of encyclopedic knowledge situated on the level of *bios theoretikos* who speaks here, but the empirical author who gives – from the dimension of his *zoe* – signals of exhaustion with work that exceeds the capacity of a single human being.

Are there other justifications for encyclopedic efforts besides didactic aims? There are encyclopedic works in which one finds the entanglement of what notions of "crisis" and "catastrophe" refer to, with signals referring, for example, to the motives that drove the empirical encyclopedists. There is a discernible resonance between life-writing practices (in both Greek senses of "life": *zoe* and *bios theoretikos*), the writing strategy of (un)veiling the self, and real or potential, or discursively assumed catastrophe.

First of all, it is necessary to highlight the tension between what can be called a "catastrophe" and what the concept of "crisis" refers to. The encyclopedic works address the relationship between the past or future (inevitable or probable) catastrophe (its effect is the loss of knowledge) and the encyclopedic work as an archive of knowledge. Whether it has happened in the past, will happen in the near future or is simply considered possible, a catastrophe is a reason for creating encyclopedic works. In this way, the concept of "crisis" implied by the figure of the catastrophe regains its etymological meaning of something that separates, a turning point that forces a decision to be made and specific actions to be taken.[13] From the perspective of encyclopedic ideas, a catastrophe is the cause of a crisis that leads to the decision to archive knowledge. This is evident from the very beginning of the history of encyclopedism. In Plato's encyclopedic dialogue *Timaeus* (c. 360 BCE), one of the local priests tells Solon, who is visiting the city of Sais in the Nile Delta, about numerous natural disasters (earthquakes, fires, floods) from the past, as a result of which all the accumulated knowledge, skills and cultural identity of the Greeks were destroyed many times, but have been preserved in temple archives in Egypt, where such tragedies do not occur (21e–23b).

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[12] Roland Barthes, "L'ancienne rhétorique. Aide-mémoire," *Communications* 16 (1970): 208.

[13] Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Clarendon Press, 1973), 997; Lewis and Short, 482.

Alsted, for his part, from a millenarian standpoint, placed his own encyclopedic work in the context of a near-future event, that is, the imminent end of the world. Three years before the publication of *Encyclopædia…*, he wrote a millenarian treatise, *Diatribe de Mille Annis Apocalypticis* (1627), in which he predicted the near Parousia and Last Judgment. The new millennium was to begin before the end of the century, in 1694 to be precise.[14] It is in the shadow of the predicted Apocalypse that Alsted's encyclopedic activity should be regarded. The accumulation of all available knowledge was to help humanity, struggling with the consequences of original sin, to improve its condition. The tool for this improvement was supposed to be the *Encyclopædia…*, with its title page connoting a millenarian web of meanings. At the bottom of the page the Last Judgment is depicted; the surrounding illustrations show that, from the fall resulting from the sin of the first people, the path to salvation leads along the paths of sciences and arts, whose representations form the frame for the title. In the lower left corner, the mechanical arts (*Mechanica*) are located; above there is the personification of Medicine. The field in the lower right corner (*Varia*) is filled with symbolic representations of the sciences included in the *quadrivium*; above, the personification of Philosophy can be found. The central panel with the title is surrounded by allegorical representations of piety (*Pietati*) and refinement or erudition (*Humanitati*). The culmination of the former is the Theology personified above, and the culmination of the latter is the allegory of the rule of law (*Iuris Prudentia*). Religious and secular paths lead to the Garden of Eden, shown centrally at the top of the page, which awaits the saved, above it are the sun and stars, and above all the Tetragrammaton representing God.

A 17th-century Polish encyclopedist and author of agricultural treatises, Jakub Kazimierz Haur, began one of his encyclopedic works *Skład abo Skarbiec Znákomitych Sekretów Oekonomiey Ziemianskiey* [*The Storage, or Treasury of Excellent Secrets of the Landed Gentry's Economy*] (1689, I refer here to the reprint of the third edition from 1693) with a woodcut depicting Noah's Ark with all the animals boarding. The caption under the illustration read:

> The LORD GOD […] during the General Flood over all the World, for the crimes of Humanity, […] had decided to preserve Human Kind for posterity, and every living thing, in the Vessel: wherein, all the Economic order was kept, so let it be the fortunate beginning of the Summary, and this Book of Economy."[15] [transl. by ŁW]

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14 Howard Hotson, *Johann Heinrich Alsted 1588–1638: Between Renaissance, Reformation, and Universal Reform* (Clarendon Press, 2000), 182–208.

15 "Pan BOG […] pod czás Generálnego ná cáły Świát zá zbrodnie Ludzkie Potopu […] Rodzay Ludzki ná potomne czásy y wszelką rzecz żyiącą raczył záchować w Korabiu: w którym, że wszystek Oekonomiczny znáydował się porządek, tedy niech będźie Summáryuszu, y tey Xsięgi Gospodárczey, szczęśliwym początkiem." Iakub

In this case, the real, situated within the framework of sacred history, God's punishment and the catastrophe of the fall of the human race, are both historical and discursive causes and allegorical factors of the knowledge compiled in the encyclopedia.

Jean Le Rond d'Alembert, in his *Preliminary Discourse* (*Discours préliminaire*, 1751), also placed the efforts of the French encyclopedists in the context of a catastrophe, not so much real as potential, taken as a conditional justification for the creation of the *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers* (1751–1772):

> May the Encyclopedia become a sanctuary, where the knowledge of man is protected from time and from revolutions. […] Therefore, let us do for centuries to come what we regret that past centuries did not do for ours. We daresay that if the ancients had carried through that encyclopedia […] and if that manuscript alone had escaped from the famous Library of Alexandria, it would have been capable of consoling us for the loss of the others."[16]

Denis Diderot also wrote in the entry *Encyclopedia* (*Encyclopédie*, 1755):

> The most glorious moment for an opus of this nature would be that which immediately follows some great revolution which has suspended the progress of the sciences, interrupted the labours of the arts, and plunged a portion of our hemisphere back into darkness. What gratitude the next generation following such troubled times would feel for the men who had feared them from afar, and taken measures against their ravages by protecting the knowledge of centuries past! […] The same voice that recalled these supporters would not forget to evoke as well the burdens the authors had to bear and the affronts to which they were subjected.[17]

Kazimierz Haur, *Skład abo Skarbiec Znákomitych Sekretow Oekonomiey Ziemianskiey* (Graf_ika Usługi Wydawnicze Iwona Knechta; przy współpracy Gopher u.r.p. Andrzej Famielec, 2015), a recto.

16 Jean Le Rond d'Alembert, *Preliminary Discourse to the Encyclopedia of Diderot*, in *The Encyclopedia of Diderot & d'Alembert Collaborative Translation Project*, trans. Richard N. Schwab and Walter E. Rex (Michigan Publishing, University of Michigan Library, 2009), http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.did2222.0001.083. "Que l'Encyclopédie devienne un sanctuaire où les connaissances des hommes soient à l'abri des temps et des révolutions. […] Faisons donc pour les siècles à venir ce que nous regrettons que les siècles passés n'aient pas fait pour le nôtre. Nous osons dire que si les anciens eussent exécuté une Encyclopédie […] et que ce manuscrit se fût échappé seul de la fameuse bibliothèque d'Alexandrie, il eût été capable de nous consoler de la perte des autres." Jean Le Rond d'Alembert, *Discours préliminaire*, in *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers (articles choisis), vol. I*, ed. Alain Pons (Flammarion, 1986), 176.

17 Denis Diderot, *Encyclopedia*, in *The Encyclopedia of Diderot*…, http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.did2222.0000.004. "Le moment le plus glorieux pour un ouvrage de cette nature, ce seroit celui qui succéderoit immédiatement à quelque grande révolution qui auroit suspendu les progrès des Sciences, interrompu les travaux des Arts, & replongé dans les ténèbres une portion de notre hémisphère. Quelle reconnoissance

The above examples reveal the internal dichotomy of the compiling of encyclopedic knowledge – the archive is inseparable from the fact or possibility of its loss. The cyclicality of natural disasters (Plato) and socio-political catastrophes (d'Alembert, Diderot), as well as the singularity of events in sacred history (Alsted, Haur), are balanced by the concept of knowledge accumulation (one must preserve the sum of knowledge of previous generations for oneself and for future generations). The practices related to the encyclopedic accumulation of knowledge arise from moments of cultural rupture and loss of continuity of knowledge experienced in the past, expected in the future or assumed as possible. The Egyptian temple (Plato), Noah's Ark as an allegory for the archive of knowledge (Haur) and the *Encyclopedia…* as sanctuary (d'Alembert) perform functions analogous to "time capsules" enabling the preservation and recovery of collective knowledge after a catastrophe, and thus the rebirth of the human world. Alsted, on the other hand, treats the Apocalypse and Last Judgment as temporal and imminent events, placing in them the reason for writing the *Encyclopedia…* – not as an archive or sanctuary of knowledge, but as an instrument for the relative correction of the consequences of original sin and thus for the salvation of humanity. In each of the above cases, the concept of "crisis" regains its etymological meaning of a turning point.

A catastrophe, past, future or merely possible, whether natural, religious, socio-political or discursively assumed, generates a rupture or the risk of a rupture of any continuity in the world. As such it requires encyclopedic action, the creation of an archive of knowledge, but also consistency and conscientiousness in carrying out such an undertaking, even if the implementation of this task is beyond the power of a single person. Because the catastrophe itself remains one of the elements of the encyclopedic narrative, the encyclopedic whole and its loss remain intertwined and, in a sense, occur simultaneously, since the information about the catastrophe as a reason for creating an archive of knowledge is in the depository of that archive. The empirical author remains an element of this nexus. To be an encyclopedist is to be in a state of crisis caused by a specific catastrophe and, in order to remedy it, to create in solitude, at night, losing health and experiencing great fatigue.

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la génération, qui viendroit après ces tems de trouble, ne porteroit-elle pas aux hommes qui […] qui en auroient prévenu le ravage, en mettant à l'abri les connoissances des siecles passés ? […] La même voix qui rappelleroit ces secours n'oublieroit pas de parler aussi des peines que les auteurs auroient souffertes, & des disgrâces qu'ils auroient essuyées." Denis Diderot, *Encyclopédie*, in *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire…*, vol. II, 51.

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Crisis i *passio*. Encyklopedysta a tworzenie dzieła encyklopedycznego

Streszczenie

W artykule wskazuję, że w dziełach encyklopedycznych, od rzymskich początków dyskursu encyklopedycznego, dostrzegalne są tekstowe ślady odsyłające do przeżyć, stanu afektywnego ich empirycznych autorów, że zza *bios theoretikos* podmiotu encyklopedycznego wyłania się czasem *dzoe* encyklopedysty. W dodatku autorska decyzja o tworzeniu dzieła encyklopedycznego bywa powodowana realną bądź dyskursywnie zakładaną katastrofą jako jej uzasadnieniem.

Słowa kluczowe
encyklopedyzm, encyklopedia, empiryczny autor, *dzoe*, katastrofa, kryzys

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AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL CULTURE

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When Reality Breaks into Parts, Islands, Pieces: Yevgenia Beloruset's *War Diary*

Abstract

This article focuses on Yevgenia Belorusets's *War Diary*, which she kept during the first 47 days of the Russian invasion on Ukraine in 2022. The diarist, a Ukrainian photographer, writer, and artist describes how the war affects every aspect of her life. She uses various strategies to distance herself from traumatic events happening all around her – events that evoke a range of emotions. This distancing is necessary to narrate her experience and appeal to international readers, as she strongly believes that her voice must be heard. In this article, I present the author, examine her diary as a text intended for publication, and consider how trauma shapes its content and structure.

Keywords
war, Ukraine, diary, trauma

"Many things have a beginning. When I think about the beginning, I imagine a line drawn very clearly on a white surface. The eye observes the simplicity of this trace of movement – one that is sure to begin somewhere and end somewhere. But I have never been able to imagine the beginning of a war."[1] This quote is from the diary of Ukrainian photographer, writer, and artist Yevgenia Belorusets who, on February 24, 2022, woke up in her Kyiv

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1 Yevgenia Belorusets, *War Diary* (Pushkin Press /Isolarii, 2023), 13–14.

apartment to a new reality – the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Even before she could look outside, several missed phone calls warned her that something terrible had happened. The first day of the war brought visible changes to the usually lively streets of central Kyiv (her apartment was near St. Sophia's Cathedral). There was "an emptiness" in the streets, and silence everywhere ("no children yelling, no voices in the air." The war, described as "an intruder, something strange, alien, and insane," had begun.[2]

This article focuses on Belorusets's *War Diary*, which she kept during the first 47 days of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The author describes how the war impacts every aspect of her life – daily routine, time, distance, space, and her senses of sight, hearing, and smell. To convey this, she focuses on details rather than the geopolitical situation or the so-called "big picture." This is necessary, because, as she writes: "In war, reality breaks into parts, islands, pieces."

The diarist uses various strategies to distance herself from the traumatic events happening around her, which elicit a range of emotions: fear, anger, frustration, disbelief, and despair. The distance is essential to narrate her experience and connect with international readers, as she strongly believes that her voice – that of an artist, daughter, and unarmed, helpless Ukrainian civilian stuck in Kyiv – must be heard. Before discussing how trauma influences the text of the diary, I will briefly introduce the author and examine her diary as a text intended for publication, which inherently shapes its content and form.

In writing this essay, I was guided by Amos Goldberg's methodological approach to the study of autobiographical texts.[3] Even though Goldberg, in his study *Trauma in First Person: Diary Writing During the Holocaust,* analyzes Holocaust diaries, his theoretical model can be successfully applied in the context of other traumatic events, such as war. Goldberg defines trauma as "the encounter with the excessive dimension that escapes all structure of meaning and therefore can never be fully accessible to the consciousness of the subject experiencing the trauma."[4] He argues that when faced with traumatic events "the narratives recounted by the victims as the events unfold help to create a framework for traumatic experience that protects them from breaking down."[5] The act of writing or keeping a diary prevents the writer from collapsing into one of the two deaths (the natural death and the symbolic death). The symbolic death occurs when the "catastrophic disintegration of the network of meaning" takes place, which causes the inability to find appropriate words with

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2 Belorusets, *War Diary*, 14.

3 Amos Goldberg, Shmuel Sermoneta-Gertel and Avner Greenberg, *Trauma in First Person: Diary Writing During the Holocaust* (Indiana University Press, 2017).

4 Goldberg, *Trauma*, 91.

5 Goldberg, 89.

which to represent it what is happening. More importantly, this symbolic death happens when "language is paralyzed and the power of speech completely lost."[6] I will show that the act of writing daily entries, of narrating what is happening around her, protects Belorusets from breaking down, even though she often finds it difficult or impossible to express what she is witnessing, to find the right words.

What Belorusets could hardly have imagined, even though she had traveled as a photographer to war-affected Donbas, was now happening right before her eyes. In Donbas, she had been a somewhat naïve and inexperienced outsider, arriving with her camera to document the Russian invasion. Back in 2014, the war in Donbas was often not recognized as a war but instead referred to as a "conflict," perhaps because the word "war" suggested something definitive.[7] People may have used the euphemism to deny to themselves that war had once again broken out in Europe, even though after the Balkan Wars they reassured themselves with "never again." After witnessing the consequences of the war firsthand – seeing death and experiencing fear – Belorusets came to understand that war "devalues everyday life to the point of negation."[8] She felt the need to rethink her existence: "For the first time in my life, I felt myself changing with each passing kilometer. Me, taking pictures, reading, writing, thinking, laughing – almost all my traits and abilities lined up and slowly vanished from sight. Nothing mattered anymore; my biography contracted to the fragile assertion of my existence."[9]

The Russian invasion she witnessed in Donbas in 2014 became, eight years later, a full-scale war engulfing her entire country. As it unfolded before her eyes, she found herself in the midst of it, inside her Kyiv apartment. This time, however, Belorusets did not enjoy the protected status of a guest – a journalist, observer, or outsider – who could leave the war zone at any time. She was one of millions of Ukrainians subjected to constant air strikes, artillery bombardments, and rocket fire. She was part of the civilian population, which should have been protected under international law but was not.

Yevgenia Belorusets began writing her diary on February 24th, the first day of the invasion, and kept it for 41 days, until she was able to leave Kyiv. In addition to daily entries, written in German, she included photographs taken in her surroundings – the streets, squares, and parks

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6 Goldberg, 77.

7 See Belorusets, *War Diary,* 9: "When the war first started in 2014, it wasn't clear that it was actually a war. It dressed itself in the form of a revolution, a protest mounted by the newly invented *people of Donbas*. […] Here in Germany, a blind eye was turned to the tanks and the heavy artillery. At that time, the news doubted whether the weapons existed at all. And this. Doubt resembled a denial in practice. As if it were so uncomfortable to admit that at this very moment in Europe an aggressive war had been created out of thin air […]"

8 Belorusets, 11.

9 Belorusets, 12.

of the Ukrainian capital. The diary was commissioned by the German weekly *Der Spiegel* and was published in weekly installments to offer German readers, overwhelmed by news reports and political analysis, a personal perspective from a witness. Simultaneously, an English version of the diary, translated by Greg Nissan, was posted on the website of the publishing company *Isolarii*. In 2023 a German book edition was published under the title *Anfang des Krieges. Tagebücher aus Kyjiw,* followed quickly by an English-language version, *War Diary.*

Today, Belorusets' diary, along with her photographic documentation, is one of the most prominent personal testimonies documenting the beginning of the war in Ukraine. Selected diary entries and photographs were exhibited at the 2022 Venice Biennale as part of the exhibition *This is Ukraine: Defending Freedom*. In September and October of the same year, an installation titled *One Day More*, a metal table made in a war-torn Kharkiv on which the artist engraved her March 7 diary entry, was displayed in the Citizens' Garden of the European Parliament in Brussels.[10] A month later, an exhibition of her work, *Next Door/Close,* curated by Kristina Volke, opened at the German Bundestag.

Belorusets' diary was conceived from the start as a publication, and as such it adheres to the standards required of a magazine text in terms of content, style, and language. Its purpose was to provide the perspective of a witness, but not just any witness. One might assume that *Der Spiegel* was seeking someone who was critical of the invasion and who represented views shared by the majority of Ukrainians. The fact that the author divides her time between Kyiv and Berlin, knows German language and culture (her father, Mark Belorusets, is a well-known translator of German and Austrian literature, including the poems of Paul Celan, into Russian), and had prior knowledge of the expectations of German readers[11] made her uniquely qualified for the task. Still, Belorusets had to convince her readers that she had the authority to speak about the invasion –both as an individual *I* and a collective *We* (a Ukrainian citizen of a country invaded by Russia).[12] She establishes this in the preface, where she

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10 The EU National Institutes for Cultures Brussels and the Culture of Solidarity Fund Ukraine organized the event.

11 Belorusets' book *Glückliche Fälle* (Lucky Breaks) was published by Matthes & Seitz Berlin Verlag in 2019. Together with Jurij Ihorovyč Andruchovyč she edited *Euromaidan: Was in Der Ukraine auf dem Spiel Steht* (Suhrkamp, 2014). Her essay "A Room of My Own: Bilder von LGBT-Familien in der Ukraine," was published in *Osteuropa* 63, no. 10 (2013): 107. The correspondence between her and Martin Pollack was published in the journal *Die Horen* (2017). Her text "Zukunft ohne Vergangenheit. Kann die Zukunft anbrechen, wenn es die Vergangenheit gar nicht gegeben hat?" was included in the volume *Project of Ruins,* ed. Nikita Kadan, Momok, 2019, and "Die Neuordnung der Welt" in *Erklärung Für Alles: Neue Texte Aus Mitteleuropa, Osteuropa, Südosteuropa Und Dem Schwarzmeerraum*, foreword by Karl-Markus Gauß, was published by Residenz Verlag in 2021.

12 Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith argue that readers of autobiographical texts including diaries have expectation as to who has the cultural authority to tell a story. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 36.

recounts her trip to Donbas in October 2014, underscoring her experience as both a witness and a war photographer. Her narrative draws on an array of opinions and experiences: her own eyewitness account, conversations with neighbors or strangers she meets in the city, and descriptions of phone calls with acquaintances from other towns. As an "insider," she can offer a deep knowledge of her homeland, its people, culture, and history. The distinction between the position of an outsider and that of an insider becomes evident in an anecdote in which she describes an encounter with a famous foreign photographer:

> The store was full. With some amazement, I discovered a group whom I took to be foreign military personnel. They spoke English and needed help translating. Then I realized that they weren't soldiers. Rather, they were unarmed but well-protected escorts of a war photographer who was also shopping in the store. I tried to help her choose a detergent. The small group exuded enthusiasm, humor, and inspiration. My mood suddenly darkened. One of the three escorts proudly said to me, "Do you know who is standing next to you? This is one of the best photographers in the world!" The photographer laughed and shrugged it off. "Please," she said. "I'm embarrassed." Then she told me her name. I can't remember it. I've been having a hard time concentrating lately. Then she said, "You can follow me on Instagram."[13]

For the photographer this is just another war that she is documenting For Belorusets, however, this war is deeply personal and affects every aspect of her life; she feels it with every part of her body.

While the photographer enjoys the protection of security personnel, Belorusets faces hostile reactions from strangers who accuse her of spying for Russia while she photographs her neighborhood: "[…] I found an empty street to take a photo. As I took the camera out of my pocket, a car stopped next to me. Four armed men jumped out. They took my cell phone, searched my bag, and asked me who I worked for. […] One of them said, "I understand it's your job, but please don't take pictures!"[14]

Philippe Lejeune argues that the very nature of a diary is that it is not polished; it is "a form of raw art," a flow of thoughts put down on paper. Therefore, when a diary is turned into a book (or published in a journal), it is "polished, cut, and reorganized" either by the author or by an editor. Lejeune calls this edited form "a shadow of its former self."[15] The original

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13 Belorusets, *War Diary*, 38.

14 Belorusets, 40.

15 Philippe Lejeune, "Diary on Trial," in *On Diary* (University of Hawaii Press, 2009), 154.

manuscript of Yevgenia Belorusets' diary is not available, so we do not know what changes were made before it was printed by *Der Spiegel*. However, we can trace changes between the online versions (German and English) and their book versions. The following paragraph appeared on the Isolarii website on March 5th, and as we can see, only minor stylistic changes (as noted in brackets) were made for the book publication:

> I remember an elegant lady I saw earlier today. She was wearing a long black coat with fur [trim], high boots, and a hat, and was waiting in line in front of a pharmacy. My mother had also waited, [commas replaced with dashes to mark the break in the sentence] for five hours, in this line. The air was cold, so my mother walked around to warm up. At some point I joined her and we decided to go for a little walk ["~~and we decided to go for a little walk~~"]. No one in line, including my mom and I [replaced by "my mother and me"], looked particularly fancy. Businesslike, ["maybe"] but [still] dressed somewhat casually. So the lady in the fur coat stood out a little. Her eyes looked worried, but for me, at that moment, she was a kind of beacon. [period replaced by dash] One that reminded me, and perhaps the others in line, of a bygone Kyiv.[16]

War diary combines elements of a journalistic report and a personal diary, and as such it contains features rarely found in intimate journals. First, the text is enhanced by background information on the history and geography of Ukraine: "I found out that a kindergarten near the city of Sumy, in the northeast of the country, was shelled today"[17] or "I learn that the Regional History Museum – in the settlement of Ivankiv, in Kyiv Oblast – was destroyed. In it were works of Maria Prymachenko, one of the most famous twentieth-century artists in Ukraine."[18]

Second, in addition to her own observations and comments, the diary offers numerous testimonies from other witnesses: her neighbors, passersby whom she meets in the city, and friends and acquaintances. Whenever Belorusets refers to people or places, she provides additional context for her readers: "The well-known economics professor Oleh Amosov, chair of the Department of economic Theory and Public Finance at the Kharviv Regional Institute of Public Administration"[19] or "I walked down Andriyvskyy Descent, a tourist street where the writer and satirist Mikhail Bulgakov once lived and his museum now stands."[20] When she

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16 Belorusets, *War Diary*, 43. When comparing the German original published in *Der Spiegel* with the German book edition, we come to the same conclusion.

17 Belorusets, 17.

18 Belorusets, 25.

19 Belorusets, 30.

20 Belorusets, 79.

talks about her family members or friends, she is careful not to include any disparaging or negative comments. In some cases, due to security reasons, she uses only their first names or periphrasis ("A well-known teacher, eighty-six years old, spends most nights in the basement of a school next to her house").[21]

Third, in contrast to a personal journal where the diarist can freely decide how often to write, these entries had to be made daily, even on days when the author states that she would have preferred not to: "I'm having a hard time concentrating today and keeping track of what's happening."[22] Despite the difficulty, the journal helps her maintain a routine, something that gives her comfort in times of chaos und unpredictability: "A day feels like a self-contained unit in a diary. An entry feeds the illusion that conclusions can be drawn – the illusion of logical narrative."[23] In addition to her struggle to concentrate, the author has to overcome her inability to express precisely what is happening and to convey exactly what she feels: "I don't want to say, 'contrary to normality.' I'm searching for a more appropriate word but cannot find it. This word should describe total destruction but at the same time keep open the possibility that so much can still be saved."[24] Referring to an interview with a somewhat naïve journalist, she mentions her frustration at offering an adequate description of "a catastrophe on this scale," in order to prove its existence.[25]

In some entries, the author's personal reflections are replaced by observations and testimonies of other Ukrainians, as well as reports from different towns and geographical areas. She weaves these accounts into her narrative, thereby presenting her personal experience as part of the universal collective experience of the entire nation. The *I* becomes *We*; her story becomes part of the collective story. This creates a sense of belonging and enables the story to be told:

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[21] Belorusets, 36. Another example: "During the day I met an old friend, an historian and sociologist who lives far away, on the other side of the city", 50.

[22] Belorusets, 49.

[23] Belorusets, 58. This is one of the instances where the poetic style of the German original gets lost in translation and sounds much more prosaic in English.

[24] Belorusets, 52.

[25] Belorusets, 53. In an interview with Eugene Ostashevsky, Belorusets said: "It's not about seeing new reality, it's about saying something about it. The reality of war is incapacitating on two levels. It strips my past life and personal history of any worth, but it also erases my country's complex experience of collective living. No language can be mobilized against the tremendous violence offered by war against a culture and its ways of speaking, when acts of terrorism, mass murder and nonstop crime become a part of everyday life. No particular language – neither one that is foreign or native – can by itself show us how to keep our voices, and how to speak." "'The Complaint Against Language' in Wartime Ukraine: A Conversation with Yevgenia Belorusets. Conducted in English and Russian and translated by Eugene Ostashevsky. January 24–February 24, 2023," *Asymptote,* April 2023. https://www.asymptotejournal.com/visual/the-complaint-against-language-in-wartime-ukraine-yevgenia-belorusets/

"The catastrophe must be represented – only as part of a narrative can it be recognized as catastrophic. Communication can offer a way out. The hope is that once everything is reported and everyone is informed, those who receive our message can end the catastrophe."[26]

At times, it seems the need for self-protection – the necessity to maintain distance from the events of the day – constrains the diarist, and she is unable to fully share her inner thoughts: "It's getting harder and harder to write with regularity."[27] In such situations, her narrative shifts to a more detached, journalistic report: "Is today only the third day of the war? Mariupol: fifty-eight civilians wounded. Kiev: thirty-five people, including two children."[28] This corresponds with what Dominick LaCapra states in his studies on trauma, memory, and history: "[…] silences may also speak in their own way, having a performative dimension that is not devoid of objective significance and moral force. The very breaks or gaps in an account such as a testimony may attest to disruptive experiences and relate to a reliving of trauma."[29]

Finally, the diary was written with the intention of describing and explaining the beginning of the war to international readers. Therefore, the author conveys a sense of helplessness and, on several occasions, appeals to the world to act: "I ask all those who keep us in their thoughts – commit to memory the names of these unknown places in Ukraine. […] All that has not yet been attacked must be saved. We must prevent any further distraction. This machine of annihilation threatens the whole world, and it is time to stop it. The sky over Ukraine must be closed. And if international politicians and heads of states are too cautious to do it, they can at least provide us with the means to do it ourselves."[30]

As I mentioned in the introduction, Belorusets uses distancing strategies, or in other words narrative devices, to create the necessary emotional distance from war. These strategies allow her to continue writing despite the bomb and rocket attacks, the constant fear, and news of atrocities. One could argue that these strategies resemble Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienaton effect), which was meant to emotionally distance theater audiences from the production so they could observe and analyze it intellectually. In the case of *War Diary,* the alienation is necessary both for the author and her readers. It enables her to write and empowers them to change the course of the war.

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[26] Belorusets, 42–43.

[27] Belorusets, 115. She often shares her difficulties: "I went home as well, wanting to write a diary entry, but felt a great exhaustion that I couldn't fight. I fell asleep without having written a word," (81) or "I am trying to write, but I can't start. The air raid warning has been blaring for two hours." (85)

[28] Belorusets, 22.

[29] Dominick LaCapra, "Trauma, History, Memory, Identity: What Remains?," *History and Theory* 55 (2016): 377.

[30] Belorusets, *War Diary*, 121.

From a psychological point of view, people facing extreme stress, such as a war that affects all aspects of human existence, often use different coping mechanisms. Belorusets reflects on this, claiming that it gives her strength and sense of control over how the war impacts her. With each passing day, the trauma grows, and the distance between her writing self and her written self grows, due to the difficulty of associating the *I* with the war situation: "Today, a sense of alienation came over me: I felt a strange remove from everything."[31]

In the entry from March 16, entitled *Tactical Retreat*, the diarist contemplates what it means to be a witness. For a moment, she shifts her perspective and, rather than photographing, describes a ruin: shattered glass, scraps of metal, "a giant trace of an inhuman force." Taking the position of an observer looking at this ruin gives her some distance from the events. When, in the same entry, she describes the bombing of the Drama Theater in Mariupol, where around 1,000 people had taken refuge, she is no longer able to maintain emotional distance. Instead, she expresses her outrage that such an atrocity was allowed to happen.

Belorusets often focuses on facts, listing names of towns, numbers of casualties, and facts surrounding their deaths. In doing so, she creates a new landscape – a new map of Ukraine, with cities and towns such as Mariupol, Bucha, Irpin, and Chernihiv. Foreign readers, to whom this diary is addressed, had probably never heard of these places before. Now, their names will be linked to war crimes and will become synonymous with death and destruction. The new map of Ukraine no longer consists of historically important places, landscapes, and sights but of ruins, injured and dead. Everything that had previously determined the reputation of these places lost its importance: "In Bucha, a city northwest of Kyiv that has just been "liberated," the dead bodies of residents are lying in the streets. A mass grave with 280 bodies has just been discovered. Bucha is drowning in blood. When you hear of someone who has survived there, it is a miracle.[…] when you see what the Russian army is doing here – dead women who were raped on the side of the road in Bucha and Irpin, along with dead children – you understand immediately: This is a genocidal crime against all who have been dehumanized."[32]

Similarly, Chernihiv, which the author describes as one of the most beautiful cities of Ukraine, with cathedrals and monasteries dating from the Middle Ages, is now without food, electricity, and water. The beauty of the city is linked with an attack on a civilian convoy bringing bread and medicine to the besieged city.

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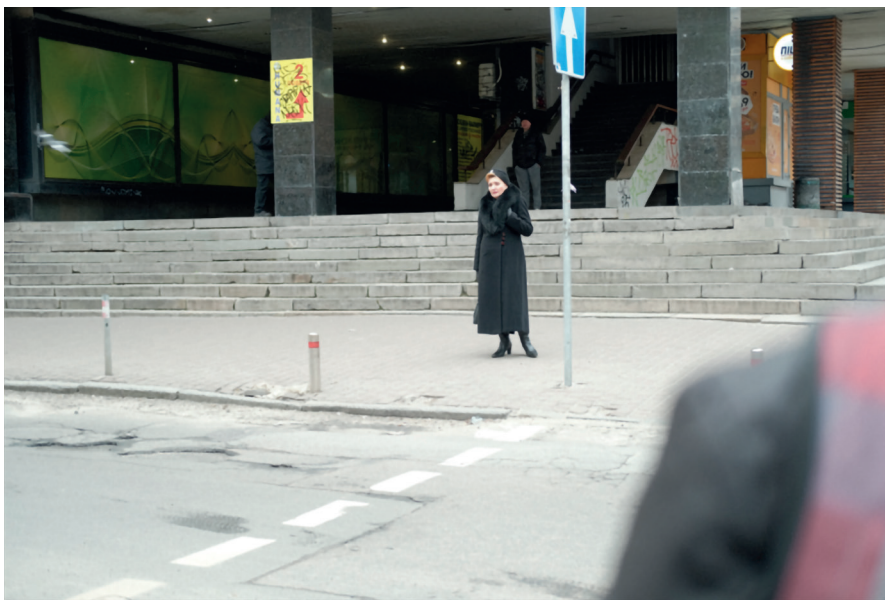
[31] Belorusets, 135.

[32] Belorusets, 121–123.

Phillipe Lejeune compares a diary to lacework, "a net of tighter or looser links that contain more empty space than solid parts."[33] Photographs, which are an integral part of this war diary, fill those empty spaces. For Belorusets, photography can hold together sequences and memories. It captures something irrefutable, and it seems that in times of war, a witness needs to provide something that cannot be disputed. Photography completes the written text, as I will show in the following example. I previously cited this paragraph to highlight differences between the two versions of the diary. Now, I would like to compare it to the photograph it describes:

> I remember an elegant lady I saw earlier today. She was wearing a long black coat with fur trim, high boots, and a hat, and was waiting in line in front of a pharmacy. My mother had also waited – for five hours – in this line. The air was cold, so my mother walked around to warm up. At some point I joined her. No one in line, including my mother and me, looked particularly fancy. Businesslike, maybe, but still dressed somewhat casually. So the lady in the fur coat stood out a little. Her eyes looked worried, but for me, at that moment, she was a kind of beacon – one that reminded me, and perhaps the others in line, of a bygone Kyiv.



[33] Philippe Lejeune, "Diary on Trial," in *On Diary,* 154.

This photograph appears in the German edition of the diary. It was also chosen for the Bundestag's gallery with the following caption: "Like that lady who waited in front of the pharmacy for hours. She had drawn number 34, which was not a lucky number." The curator decided it to place it centrally, so during the opening and closing of the exhibition, it served as the backdrop to the speakers' podium. The image is striking as it focuses on the contrast between the dark figure of an impeccably dressed elderly lady and her surroundings. The lady, a symbol of a bygone Kyiv, stands alone on the pavement. Behind her is a shabby staircase leading to a dark building covered in graffiti. Everything around her appears rather unkempt, including the two men in the background. A newish building, currency exchange, and a secondhand store, "Humana," though not in perfect condition, are signs of change and offer a glimpse of hope for a brighter future. The contrast between the dark figure and the light gray pavement underscores her vulnerability at this moment. A lock of hair visible under her black hat is carefully arranged. Her black polished boots, her cleaned, ironed, and brushed wool coat, black leather gloves, handbag, and lipstick reveal the care with which she has prepared for a simple trip to the pharmacy. Even her posture – standing straight, her right hand placed under her fur collar, her feet slightly apart – emphasizes refinement. She seems sad and hesitant, somehow confused by the circumstances. Yet, even in a situation she might not entirely grasp, she retains a certain pride in being an old-school Kyivan. This is her way of showing defiance in the face of the invasion. It seems nothing can make her give up her way of life – not the Russian invasion nor the uncertain future. In the German original, the author compares the elegant lady to a lighthouse (translated by Nissan as "a kind of beacon"), symbolizing hope, strength, and steadfastness. Its guiding lights protect sailors and steer them safely to shore.

In conclusion, Yevgenia Belorusets, in her *War Diary,* describes the unimaginable – the beginning of the war in her home country, Ukraine. The war affects every aspect of her life and the life of the city: the sense of security vanishes, replaced by fear and chaos. Despite the trauma, which overwhelms her, she continues to write, documenting what is happening around her. The task of informing international readers about the atrocities committed in Ukraine, and appealing to the Western world, is too important for her to remain silent.

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Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

"Jest 15:30 i jeszcze żyjemy". Dziennik z czasów wojny Yevgenii Beloruset

Streszczenie

W artykule omówiono *Dziennik wojenny* ukraińskiej fotografki, pisarki i artystki Jewgieniji Belorusets, który prowadziła przez pierwsze 47 dni rosyjskiej inwazji na Ukrainę w 2022 roku. Diarystka, stosując różne strategie dystansowania się od traumatycznych wydarzeń dziejących się wokół niej, opisuje wpływ wojny na każdy aspekt swojego życia. Dystans ten jest konieczny, aby opowiedzieć historię i poinformować międzynarodowych czytelników, gdyż autorka jest głęboko

przekonana, że jej głos musi zostać usłyszany. W artykule przedstawiam autorkę, analizuje jej dziennik jako tekst przeznaczony do publikacji i rozważam, jak trauma wpływa na tekst dziennika.

Słowa kluczowe
wojna, Ukraina, dziennik, trauma

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AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL CULTURE

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Against Confession: Negation of Commodity Form in Anna Adamowicz's Book of Poems *zmyśl[ ]zmysł* (*nonsense[ ]sense*)

Abstract

Drawing inspiration from Nicholas Brown's work on the social ontology of art under capitalism and Anna Adamowicz's book of poetry *zmyśl[ ]zmysł (nonsense[ ]sense)*, the article explores the implications of anti-confession literary strategies and how they negate the work's commodity status. The author argues that literary confession may be intertwined with the commodity status of a literary work, reflecting broader economic and ideological mechanisms that increasingly commodify literature.

Keywords
commodification, LGBTQ, autonomy of literature, Anna Adamowicz, modern Polish poetry

The title of my article suggests two things, each of which demands a thorough explanation. First, using the example of Anna Adamowicz's book *zmyśl[ ]zmysł* (*nonsense[ ]sense*),[1] I will demonstrate how literary strategies of anti-confession may imply or lead to the negation of

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1 Anna Adamowicz, *zmyśl[ ]zmysł* (Kołobrzeg: Biuro Literackie, 2021).

the commodity status of a given literary work. This statement, however, contains a second suggestion: that literary confession is connected to the commodity status of a literary work, with the mechanisms (ideological, but mainly economical) that make literature more and more like any other commodity available on the market. It is clear, then, that before I can explain what I mean by the very technical-sounding term "negation of commodity form" and why I am linking it to Adamowicz's book of poems, some preliminary clarifications are needed.

My understanding of the situation of literature (and more broadly: art) under contemporary capitalism[2] is heavily influenced by Nicholas Brown's book *Autonomy: The Social Ontology of Art Under Capitalism*.[3] I consider Brown's three basic theses (on commodification, commodity, and artwork) relevant for further argument.[4]

I. "Commodification" means the production process subjugated to the logic of the market, not the social circulation of the product (i.e., its commercial/cultural success or failure).

Much could be said here about Marx's distinction between formal and real subsumption of labor under capital,[5] which is central to Brown's argument. But for the purpose of this article, we should remember this much: whether a work of art is interested in fulfilling a market demand can only be determined by a close examination of the object in question, not by data concerning sales or other factors that contribute to the cultural and symbolic position of the work in question (how many awards/awards nominations a given work received, which/how many media outlets published articles on a given work…). Commodification is a question of ontology (what is produced), not epistemology (how the product is perceived).

II. A commodity is an object that came into being because of an external purpose, and all its properties are determined by that external purpose.

Thus, a commodity is an object with socially determined use value, whose properties correspond to the presumed needs, desires, etc., of a specific group of consumers, but its only purpose of existence is to be bought (i.e., to realize its exchange value) – by anyone, for whatever reason. According to Brown, if I'm making a bowl for the market, all of its specific

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2 And contemporary capitalism only, by which I mean not that literature is only becoming a commodity in the 21st century (the work of the Frankfurt School and Fredric Jameson strongly contradict such position), but that a consideration of the contemporary social ontology of art cannot be "applied" to a reflection on phenomena such as the 19th century novel in episodes.

3 Nicholas Brown, *Autonomy: The Social Ontology of Art under Capitalism* (Duke University Press, 2019).

4 Out of necessity, I skip the ladders of Brown's argument, based on a convincing interpretation of Karl Marx's *Capital*, Immanuel Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's concept of exteriorization.

5 See Karl Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Volume I: The Process of Production of Capital* (Polish edition), trans. Mikołaj Ratajczak (PWN, 2020), 1; Karl Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy Vol. I* (Polish edition), trans. Henryk Lauer, Mieczysław Kwiatkowski, and Jerzy Heryng, (Książka i Wiedza, 1951), 549.

characteristics are not of my own choosing and the only intention that is being realized is an intention of market exchange.[6]

III. A work of art is an object that has an immanent meaning identical to authorial intent.

Of course, Brown's understanding of intent is informed by Walter Benn Michaels and Steven Knapp's seminal article *Against Theory*[7] and books by Michaels such as *The Shape of Signifier* or *The Beauty of a Social Problem*[8] (as well as Stanley Cavell's[9] and Michael Fried's[10] essays on art). It is worth noting that we should not mistake this understanding of intention – shared by the so-called "nonsite School"[11] – with Monroe Beardsley and William K. Wimsatt's concept of intention as an event in the artist's/writer's mind, which still informs the default understanding of intention in contemporary literary studies.[12] Following the bowl example: if I'm making a bowl for myself, my artistic intention is "inscribed in the thing itself."[13] And because of the obvious contradiction between the logic of the commodity (driven by external purpose) and the logic of the work of art (driven by "purposiveness without an external purpose"[14]), the commodity status of the latter – the fact that nowadays it must function in the marketplace alongside other commodities – poses a problem for its status as a work of art.

With this in mind, I propose to look at a short comment on the relationship between a work of literary fiction, the author's identity, and the market.[15] It will help place Anna Adamo-

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6 Brown, 7.

7 Walter Benn Michaels and Steven Knapp, "Against Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 4 (1982): 732–742.

8 Walter Benn Michaels, *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History* (Princeton University Press, 2007); Walter Benn Michaels, *The Beauty of a Social Problem: Photography, Autonomy, Economy* (University of Chicago Press, 2018).

9 Stanley Cavell, "A Matter of Meaning It," in *Must We Mean What We Say?: A Book of Essays* (Cambridge University Press, 1976), 213–238.

10 Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (The University of Chicago Press, 2011). Fried's distinction between "art" and "objecthood" roughly translates into Brown's distinction between "work of art" and "art commodity". See Nicholas Brown, „Introduction. On Art and Commodity Form", w *Autonomy: The Social Ontology of Art under Capitalism* (Duke University Press, 2019), 6–7.

11 The term "nonsite School" refers to the online journal nonsite.org, co-founded by Michaels, Brown, Jennifer Ashton, Ruth Leys and Todd Cronan.

12 William K. Wimsatt Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," *The Sewanee Review* 54, no. 3 (1946): 468–488.

13 Brown, 7.

14 Brown, 13. According to Brown, this is a Hegelian revision of Kantian formulation of „purposiveness without purpose".

15 For a more historical outline of the discussions concerning the relationships and conflicts between market, literary criticism and literature in Poland in the 90's, see: Przemysław Czapliński, *Powrót centrali. Literatura w nowej rzeczywistości* (Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2007).

wicz's book of poetry in a context that is suitable for further interpretation and, hopefully, draw attention to phenomena beyond the specifics of Polish culture. The quote comes from an interview with non-binary person Anouk Herman, author of the young adult novel *You Will Never Walk Alone*.[16] It is a response to the question of their attitude to publishers' marketing strategy (using the phrase "the first Polish novel written by a non-binary person" in the book's advertising):

> (…) Commodification is the price we pay for representation, for being able to reach out to and support people with similar experiences, which is the mission of literature today (…). Capitalism will commodify any opposition anyway, it will absorb and digest it, and we don't have an alternative world, so we have to transform this one.[17]

Of course, the view on representation expressed by Herman is by no means their own idea. After all, "representation matters" is a slogan we can stumble upon in academic monographs[18] as well as in the daily liberal press or Instagram infographics. What I find startling about Herman's statement is not the repetition of this cliché, but the falseness of the opposition between "the mission of literature today" and the market. Isn't advertising profiled for a specific consumer niche precisely the most effective way to carry out the same mission, which Herman presents as anti-capitalist, albeit necessarily realized within the logic of the market? The logic would be as follows: the main goal for Herman is to reach a certain audience with a book. Reaching this specific audience for whom the book was written implies an interest in having someone buy *You Will Never Walk Alone* because their identity is represented in it (or they consider buying the book to be a part of good ally ethics). And this interest is not something that the market hijacks in order to capitalize on queer identities; it is simply an instance of commodity logic.

I feel obliged to stress the fundamental and irreducible difference between my line of critical analysis and the right-wing critique of "woke capitalism." For the right, the fact that, for example, contemporary LGBTQ literature is published by large publishers and sells in huge numbers serves as an evidence of modern capitalism's privileging of sexual minorities at the expense of "normal" consumers with "normal" identities. By contrast, for me (and for Brown), so-called "woke" or "rainbow" capitalism is simply late capitalism: a system of production in

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16 Anouk Herman, *Nigdy nie będziesz szło samo* (Wydawnictwo W.A.B., 2023).

17 Wojciech Szot, "«Gdy jakieś kłiry to przeczytają, pomyślą, że to też o nich». Polska literatura niebinarna," Wyborcza.pl, 2 April 2023, https://wyborcza.pl/7,75517,29535749,polska-literatura-niebinarna.html.

18 For more on "representation matters," see the articles at: https://scholar.google.com/scholar?start=0&q=%22representation+matters%22&hl=pl&as_sdt=0,5.

which, thanks to on-demand manufacturing, all identities – both majority and minority – are potential consumer groups. Nor do I believe that simply writing from a minority perspective about one's experiences necessarily leads to the subordination of the work to the logic of commodity form. From the outset, we can never decide if a given literary work is similar to every other commodity. But because the field of limited cultural production, as Pierre Bourdieu would call it,[19] no longer exists, and there is no space outside of the market, we can never dismiss the possibility that a given literary work resembles any other commodity.

I believe that in contemporary literature (not only) in Poland, we can find examples of literary works that try to defend themselves from this subordination to commodity form by emphasizing their autonomy as literary works. However, I understand the autonomy of literature not as "metaphysical independence from external circumstances,"[20] but as the subjugation of these external circumstances (market-consumer demand) by actively taking them into account, rewriting them into the form of the work. According to Brown, this is what the negation of commodity form is: not a flamboyant announcement by the artist that he does not create commodities for the masses, but a productive negation translated into formal solutions.[21] But can commodification apply to Polish poetry, which occupies a marginal position in the publishing market? The Polish reception of the phenomenon initiated by Rupi Kaur's *Milk and Honey*, so-called Instagram poetry or instapoetry, proves that niche literary works are also affected by the same mechanisms as the rest of the literary market.

The most recognizable Polish instapoet is Anna Ciarkowska, author of *Chłopcy, których kocham* [*The Boys I Love*]. Interestingly, Anna Adamowicz wrote a critical essay on Ciarkowska's book and Instagram poetry as such entitled *Kukułcze jajo poezji* [*Poetry's Hot Potato*].[22] This text deserves special attention – firstly because Adamowicz does not usually write critical essays, so we are dealing with a statement of special importance; and secondly, because for Adamowicz, the phenomenon of Instagram poetry is an opportunity to describe how she understands the difference between poetry and what she calls "pseudo-poetry" (for Adamowicz, the works of Kaur and Ciarkowska are part of this trend). I believe that the phenomenon of "pseudo-poetry" constitutes the negative horizon of *zmyśl[ ]zmysł* – the social context against which Adamowicz constructs her book. In her opinion, Kaur's and Ciarkowska's poems are

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19 Pierre Bourdieu, "Le marché des biens symboliques," *L'Année Sociologique* 22 (1971). See Brown, "Introduction. On Art and Commodity Form," 17–18.

20 Brown, "Introduction. On Art and Commodity Form," 30.

21 Brown, 30.

22 Anna Adamowicz, "Kukułcze jajo poezji. Opis przypadku," *KONTENT* 4 (2018), http://kontent.net.pl/czytaj/6&arubalp=de0f7161-712a-4f40-9394-09faf1d799#Kukucze_jajo_poezji. Instapoetry was widely discussed by the critical-poetry community in Poland; see Rafał Różewicz, "Barbarzyńca w ogrodzie. Próba rekonstrukcji," Mały Format, March 20 2018, https://malyformat.com/2018/03/barbarzynca-w-ogrodzie-proba-rekonstrukcji/.

focused exclusively on building various kinds of affective relationships with readers. At the same time, they rely on a very strong identification of the poem's speaker with the author's identity. In a way, Kaur and Ciarkowska's goals would be quite similar to "the mission of literature today" in Anouk Herman's understanding. They would differ only in appealing to different demographic groups (queer/non-binary people in Herman's case, cishetero women in Ciarkowska's case). For Adamowicz, the form of Ciarkowska's poems – minimalistic sketches made of direct emotions and experiences – enhances the effect of confessional authenticity, thus helping to realize the book's external purpose. In fact, a closer examination proves that the form is motivated solely by this purpose: "Ciarkowska does not offer literature. She offers warmth, understanding, empathy, shared emotions and sensitivity."[23] Towards the end of the essay, Adamowicz is quite straightforward:

> Ciarkowska's goals are not my goals. I would like two things: to write good poems and to distribute them so effectively that they unerringly reach those five people in the world who actually have a keen interest in what I do. The former depends on me, and the latter, unfortunately, does not.[24]

"Good poems" are poems that Adamowicz herself qualifies as well-written, i.e., poems that satisfy her as a writer. Whether these poems reach "five people in the world" is an issue of distribution, independent of her actions (at least in principle). In other words: Adamowicz would like to reach people with her poems, but when she writes, she tries to write "good poems," not poems created for the purpose of satisfying *any* specific audience's needs, even "those five people." Going slightly beyond the poet's remark, one would say that "good poems" are poems made to be interpreted (whose quality is open for discussion), as opposed to Instagram poetry, which, according to Adamowicz, can only be the subject of a sociological study[25] (for example, a sociologist might be interested in asking what needs/desires of her audience Ciarkowska is trying to fulfill when she combines poetry with self-help slogans).

In the same issue of KONTENT in which her essay on Instagram poetry appeared, Adamowicz also published a poem under the pseudonym Laura Osińska. One of the first pieces of information she gave in Osińska's biogram was: "Lesbian."[26] In 2018, Adamowicz had not

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[23] Adamowicz, "Kukułcze jajo poezji. Opis przypadku."

[24] Adamowicz.

[25] "(…) in my opinion, considering the situation [Ciarkowska's poems and her media personality] as a literary phenomenon is pointless and meaningless, when we are dealing with a psychological and sociological phenomenon." Adamowicz.

[26] Laura Osińska [Anna Adamowicz], "Marność," *KONTENT* 4 (2018), https://kontent.net.pl/czytaj/6&arubalp=de0f7161-712a-4f40-9394-09faf1d799#marno.

yet come out publicly (she did so two years later), but under her pseudonym, she published poems concerning her lesbian experience without making – at that time – an unwanted confession about her sexual orientation. After Adamowicz's coming out Osińska should have disappeared, since she was no longer needed. However, in 2021 a collection of poems titled *zmyśl[ ]zmysł* was published. As the cover, title page and imprint note, the volume contains poems allegedly written by Laura Osińska, the selection of which was made by Adamowicz – a piece of information which quite obviously points to her as the real author. From a pseudonym hiding her identity, Osińska became a heteronym: an element of the structure of the entire book. What intent motivated this artistic decision?

In a "double" interview with Osińska and Adamowicz, the former gives the following explanation: "Natural division of labor: I'm dealing with sobbing onto the page, she's dealing with making literature and being critical."[27] Osińska experiences, while Adamowicz transforms these experiences into poems that form a book with a fairly coherent plot (Adamowicz speaks about composing a "plot" in the same interview). By using a fictional character, Adamowicz creates a certain necessary distance from the autobiographical theme central to the book: her first romantic relationship with another woman. While reading *zmyśl[ ]zmysł*, it is hard to forget the meta-reflection implied by the heteronym: we are reading poems by Adamowicz, who pretends that their author is a fictional character (and lets us know that she is pretending). But perhaps Osińska also functions as a reminder of the period during which Adamowicz had to hide her sexual orientation. The author's double signature would thus point to homophobia, forcing thousands of Poles to remain closeted. However, such an interpretation is not supported by the book itself, in which the injustices experienced by LGBTQ people are not thematized at all. In fact, the only poem directly evoking the political subject matter is a conceptual erotic, based on the structure of a *quasi*-litanical enumeration of all the phenomena related to contemporary crises but irrelevant to the moment of intimacy between two women:

(...)
I forget about the state of the Polish judiciary
I forget about police brutality
I forget about the famine in Yemen
I forget about the war in Rojava
I forget about palm oil
I forget about cocoa plantations
(...)

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[27] Anna Adamowicz, Laura Osińska and Agata Puwalska, "[jesteśmy przezroczyste]," biBLioteka. Magazyn literacki, January 2022, https://www.biuroliterackie.pl/biblioteka/wywiady/jestesmy-przezroczyste/.

I forget about rape culture
I forget about hate speech
(…)[28]

Moreover, towards the end of the poem, forgetting about the "wine in the refrigerator" and "dinner on the table" seeps into the enumeration and subverts the tone of grim pathos of the earlier verses. It is not a list of all the bad things she cannot truly forget. She simply fell for this girl: "I'm in bed with you/ my hands are full of you my mouth is full of you/ my head is full of oxytocin."

Hence, the heteronym seems to have little to do with reminding the reader of homophobic violence, and more with a signal of distance from the effect of communicating direct emotions and experiences that Adamowicz wrote about in *Kukułcze jajo poezji*. But this also implies that Adamowicz distances herself from the public's expectations surrounding the collection of lesbian love poems published in 2021. Indeed, in *zmyśl[ ]zmysł* Adamowicz does not construct a representation of the lesbian subject which centers on the experience of trauma, homophobic violence or the expression of anger against right-wing power, a representation that would respond to the demand of a part of the intelligentsia audience for literature that symbolically attacks the current state of affairs. What's even more important is the fact that the poet is equally *not* interested in actively cutting herself off from these issues. After all, Osińska does not mock or cancel the term "hate speech," she only "forget[s] about" it at this particular moment of elevated intimacy. One could say that this double disinterest – both in emphatically affirming public's expectations and denying those expectations – is precisely what makes this depiction of intimacy compelling.

Interestingly, being absorbed[29] (in an action, a gesture, another person) to such an extent that one does not pay attention to the outside world, to whoever might be looking at us from the outside, is thematized repeatedly in the book in various ways. For example, in a poem in which

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[28] "(…) nie pamiętam o stanie polskiego sądownictwa/ nie pamiętam o brutalności policji/ nie pamiętam o głodzie w Jemenie/ nie pamiętam o wojnie w Rożawie/ nie pamiętam o oleju palmowym/ nie pamiętam o plantacjach kakao (…) nie pamiętam o kulturze gwałtu/ nie pamiętam o mowie nienawiści (…)". Adamowicz, *zmyśl[ ]zmysł*, 17. Translation mine.

[29] I use the term absorption in the sense attributed by Michael Fried. In a nutshell, it points to "an (…) effort to make paintings [or photographs] that by one strategy or another appear – in the first place by depicting personages wholly absorbed in what they are doing, thinking, and feeling (…) – to deny the presence before them of the beholder, or to put this more affirmatively, to establish the ontological fiction that the beholder does not exist." Michael Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* (Yale University Press, 2008), 40. My point, of course, is not that Adamowicz achieves an effect reserved to the reception of visual works, but that she also tries to deny the presence of us, readers of her poems.

Osińska "pays homage" to CCTV cameras that "note in their little mechanical brains" moments of subtle erotic tension between women.[30] Or in the immediately preceding short piece:

> when we lie half asleep, fuzzy, cuddled into each other,
> sometimes it seems to me that we are stuck in a grave,
> tickled by the tender brush of an archaeologist.[31]

Although an archaeologist can be interpreted as a figure of a dangerous outside meddling in the private world of two female lovers, what seems significant is that "tickling" does not affect their absorption in each other. It is also worth noting that this particular scene is obviously reminiscent of Gustave Courbet's painting *The Sleepers*, which is directly evoked in one of the poems from *zmyśl[ ]zmysł*, titled *Gustave Courbet, The Sleepers, 1866*.[32] Of course, the scenes of absorption first and foremost help to characterize the relationship between Osińska and Olga Litwin (for that is the name of her lover). But as we are being reminded by the heteronym, this relationship is deliberately constructed. The fact that Adamowicz decided to focus on this particular aspect of the characters' relationship, which implies disinterest in acknowledging the "outside," seems to stress the author's formal commitments: her own absorption in writing literature ("good" poems) and not a literature-like commodity. In *Kukułcze jajo poezji*, the postulate of seeking a language suitable for capturing specific experiences was a hallmark of contemporary poetry. In *zmyśl[ ]zmysł*, this postulate is already evoked by the book's opening motto, "No one has ever imagined us," taken from one of the poems in Adrienne Rich's *Twenty-One Love Poems* (the similarities and differences between *zmyśl[ ]zmysł* and Rich's book could be a topic for a separate paper). One solution to this formal problem – having to invent poetic language almost from scratch – seems to be poems that draw inspiration from discourses we rarely profess love to, such as medicine or anatomy:

> (...)
> your face in profile and tight as a string
> sternocleidomastoideus

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30 Adamowicz, *zmyśl[ ]zmysł*, 20.

31 "kiedy leżymy półsenne, rozmyte, wtulone w siebie,/ czasem wydaje mi się, że tkwimy w grobie,/ łaskotane czułym pędzelkiem archeologa." Adamowicz, 19.

32 The fact that Fried analyses this painting in detail in his book on Courbet is evidence not of Adamowicz's familiarity with Fried's writings, but of the fact that the moments of lesbian intimacy which she finds interesting in *zmyśl[ ]zmysł* are at the same time examples of absorption that is of interest to Fried and the artists he appreciates. See Fried, *Courbet's Realism* (University of Chicago Press, 1992), 205–209.

stretched from your head to your sternum like a strong rope
(…)[33]

(…)
name the features of inflammation
rubor dolor calor tumor

every bone at your command
every fiber at your beck and call
every neuron at your service

(…)[34]

In this case, creating a "good poem" means defamiliarizing the language of anatomy to express an erotic fascination with a partner's body – it means making "literature," which Adamowicz in her essay contrasted with "direct, untreated (…) emotions and experiences" as both the means and ends of pseudo-poetry.[35] For Adamowicz, writing a book that does justice to her first relationship is equivalent to writing a book that proposes an adequate language for poetry concerning lesbian experience. In turn, the achievement of this artistic goal is possible only under the condition of writing "good poems," not poems that fulfill external (actual or imagined) expectations of the audience – which, at the level of the situations depicted in the book, corresponds to the partners' absorption in each other. In *zmyśl[ ]zmysł* Adamowicz cares about style, composition, the network of internal motives, and pace of the "plot," but does not care about us – the consumers.[36] And that is why her book is not a commodity like any other: although it can be used for many purposes (such as a Tinder hook up[37]), above all it compels us to reflect on its meaning.

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[33] "twoja twarz z profilu i napięty jak struna/ sternocleidomastoideus/ rozpięty od głowy po mostek jak mocny sznur." Adamowicz, 12.

[34] "wymień cechy zapalenia/ rubor dolor calor tumor/ każda kość na twoje rozkazy/ każde włókienko na twoje skinienie/ każdy neuron na twoich usługach." Adamowicz, 21.

[35] Adamowicz, "Kukułcze jajo poezji. Opis przypadku."

[36] Which is not the same as hostility towards actual readers who empathize with the depiction of lesbian romance. On her quasi-official Facebook profile, Adamowicz repeatedly expressed joy at the fact that after author meetings on *zmyśl[ ]zmysł*, teenage girls came up to her and thanked her for writing a book about experiences that were also close to them. "Not caring about consumers" means only that "What the readers want is irrelevant to what I do." Brown, *Autonomy*, 188n37.

[37] Anecdote posted by Adamowicz on her Facebook profile.

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Wimsatt Jr., William K., and Monroe C. Beardsley. "The Intentional Fallacy." *The Sewanee Review* 54, no. 3 (1946): 468–488.

Przeciw wyznaniu: negacja formy towarowej w tomie poetyckim Anny Adamowicz *zmyśl[]zmysł*

Streszczenie

Czerpiąc inspiracje z pracy Nicholasa Browna dotyczącej społecznej ontologii sztuki w kapitalizmie oraz książki poetyckiej Anny Adamowicz *Zmyśl[ ]zmysł*, autor analizuje implikacje literackich strategii anty-spowiedzi i tego, w jaki sposób negują one status towarowy dzieła. Autor przekonuje, że literackie wyznanie może być spleciona ze statusem towarowym dzieła literackiego, odzwierciedlając tym samym szersze mechanizmy ekonomiczne i ideologiczne, które w coraz większym stopniu utowarawiają literaturę.

Słowa kluczowe
utowarowienie, LGBTQ, autonomia literatury, Anna Adamowicz, współczesna polska poezja

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CONVERSATION

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The Poetics of Crisis in Life-Writing Experiments: A Conversation[1]

Honorata Sroka: Topics like sorrow, grief, pain or sickness are not widespread in the life writing of avant-gardes. Would you agree with this? I assume that among the classic Polish literary vanguard art the sole work would be Tadeusz Peiper's auto-patographical prose and Aleksander Wat's post-war life-writing records about his illness. However, both examples are rather classical in their poetics. Instead, I would like to talk today about literary works that are embodied in crisis (specifically suffering, grief, illness, or loss) and reflect on that in an experimental way. Is this a vast tradition in contemporary literature?

Wojciech Drąg: Literary avant-gardes tend to be associated with experiments for experiments' sake. Their intense preoccupation with form seems to leave little room for serious content.

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Although this may often be the case, there are many instances of formally experimental works that effectively represent experiences of crisis and the themes that you have mentioned.

One of the most acclaimed works of the postwar avant-garde in the UK is B. S. Johnson's *The Unfortunates* (1969) – a book-in-a-box composed of 27 loose sections, each of which gives the reader an insight into the author's close friendship with Tony Tillinghast, an academic who died of cancer at the age of 29. This book of commemoration and grief serves as an urn for Tony's earthly remains – the vivid memories he left behind. Forty years later, Canadian poet Anne Carson celebrated her prematurely deceased brother with a book-in-box titled *Nox* (2010) – an elegiac work whose contents are not loose but glued to one another in such a way as to create a 25-metre scroll. As those two examples demonstrate, the radically disruptive and all-encompassing nature of grief calls for literary representations that deviate from conventional patterns of expression.

There is also a handful of experimental works attempting to represent trauma by adopting a nonlinear, fragmentary and hybrid structure. The intense turmoil of a traumatized mind is often conveyed through the stream-of-consciousness technique. Anglophone examples date back to Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and include Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and Eimear McBride's *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing* (2013). McBride's novel, narrated by a victim of child abuse, combines radical fragmentation with linguistic ingenuity and was awarded the Goldsmiths Prize for experimental fiction. It is one of many instances of the convergence between traumatic content and unconventional form. Other acclaimed instances are Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled* (1995) and Tom McCarthy's *Remainder* (2005), both bizarre but excellently written narratives filtered through the unreliable perspective of a mind enveloped in trauma. The last example I would like to mention is Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005) – a best-selling novel about a boy who has lost his father in the attack on the World Trade Center, rendered in a form that experiments with layout, font and color and incorporates multiple images.

Finally, there are also many formally unconventional works – particularly in the field of life writing – that address the crisis of living with an illness. David Wojnarowicz's *Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration* (1991) gives an account of a struggle with AIDS; Hilary Mantel's *Giving up the Ghost* (2003) chronicles the author's life with endometriosis and the consequences of various medical errors made in an attempt to treat it; and Ellen Forney's graphic memoir *Marbles: Mania, Depression, Michelangelo, and Me* (2012) reports on the long and arduous process of overcoming the crisis triggered by the onset of bipolar disorder. All those works, which can be classified also as autopathographies, are marked by fragmentation, non-linearity and generic hybridity.

HS: Let's talk about experimental strategies used to reflect on existential crises. I attended your panel ("Experiences of Grief, Experiments with Form") at the IABA Europe 2023 conference in Warsaw, where you presented examples of experiments with some elements of literary compositions such as time, medium or relational aspects. Instead, I would like to discuss the same from a different point of view and ask not about "experiments with" but about ways of dealing with crises. Could you point out exemplary conventions of presenting physical pain, grief, suicide, funerals, etc.? How in those cases is the form related to the content?

WD: As for dealing with crisis, I would say that what most often distinguishes an "experimental" from a "conventional" literary treatment of the experience is the renunciation of a narrative together with the comfort of its linear development and the reassurance of its closure. In that respect, experimental responses to crisis appear truer to the experience because they do not need to conform to the teleology of healing. They leave room for unresolved tensions and unprocessed grief.

In the earlier mentioned *The Unfortunates*, Johnson's decision to present the memories of his friend as loose sections to be reshuffled can be interpreted as a refusal to adopt the timebound, orderly logic of mourning, whose ultimate "success" consists in processing the loss over time and "moving on." Johnson's unwillingness to let go of his friend and complete his mourning is also signaled by his decision not to provide a full stop on the final page of the book, which ends with the words: "the loss to me, to us" (Although the book's sections are not bound and can be read in an order of the reader's choice, Johnson introduces a frame, whereby one section is marked as "First" and one as "Last.").

A very different way of dealing with a crisis – that of losing one's father to suicide – is portrayed in Joan Wickersham's *The Suicide Index: Putting My Father's Death in Order* (2008). In contrast to Johnson, Wickersham settles for a structure that offers a cold, detached scaffolding for expressing the utter disorientation she feels in the aftermath of a family tragedy for which she was completely unprepared. Although Wickersham ends up taking many liberties with the rigid strictures of indexing, the presence of a compositional formula that organizes her thinking and writing proves extremely helpful to her. Most tangibly, it helps her complete the book 11 years after embarking on this creative process.

I would like to comment on one more strategy of coping with crisis – embarking on a project aiming to understand the broader cultural context of a certain aspect of one's experience of crisis. Maggie Nelson's *Bluets* (2009), for instance, is an investigation of blue – a color widely associated with sadness and depression, inspired by the extremely painful dissolution of a romantic attachment and a close friend being rendered tetraplegic. Likewise, Heather Christle's *The Crying Book* (2019) examines cultural representations of weeping in response

to the loss of a dear friend and her post-partum depression. Both works interweave intimate elliptic confessions with detached essayistic entries, many of which contain quotations from philosophers, scientists, poets and other artists.

I fear I cannot satisfactorily answer the question about exemplary ways of representing pain, grief, etc. in experimental literature. It seems to me that in order to deserve the label of experimentalism, a given work needs to deviate from received models of representation. Having said this, I believe it would be fair to state that a great many avant-garde treatments of crisis adopt a poetics characterized by the earlier mentioned trio of fragmentation, non-linearity and generic hybridity.

HS: What about war? Of course, it is a different embodied crisis; however, it could be represented in an experimental way as well. Could you reflect on some examples and their poetics?

WD: Yes, there is a tradition of formally experimental attempts to represent the extremities of wartime experiences. The first example that comes to mind is Tim O'Brien's famous short story *The Things They Carried* (1990). It revisits the Vietnam War, in which its author fought, to give an account of the objects that various American soldiers "carried" with them (or in them) at the time. Each combatant is described solely through catalogues of "things," which include matches, M&M's, morphine and M-16 rifles, as well as their fear and sense of guilt.

Harry Parker's *The Anatomy of a Soldier* (2016) – a novel by a veteran of the war in Iraq – tells the story of a young British soldier who has lost both legs after stepping on a mine, a tragedy that befell the author himself in 2009. The experimental aspect of this book hinges on Parker's decision to allow each consecutive stage of the narrative to be recounted by the imaginary voice of a different object involved in the scene. Among the many inanimate narrators featured in the novel are a hand grenade, a drone, a flag of Afghanistan, a tourniquet, a surgical saw and a wheelchair.

The atrocities of World War I and their traumatic aftermath are the focus of Dave McKean's *Black Dog: The Dreams of Paul Nash* (2016) – a graphic biography of one the most acclaimed British Great War painters. Although ostensibly in the form of a comic, the book is very painterly in its aesthetics, which draws a lot on Nash's oeuvre. Its latter part emphasizes the ineradicable legacy of trauma that haunts the artist long after the war ends.

HS: Your current research is focused on fragmentary forms of life writing, especially records such as lists and indexes. Do you agree that those genres, by definition without narrations, strengthen the significance of crisis? Or do you hold an alternative perspective on the correlation between crises and elliptical genres?

WD: Yes, indeed – my main research project at the moment is devoted to auto/biographical works that adopt the form of an archive rather than a narrative. This means that they renounce the natural inclination to present life experiences as connected, meaningful and bound by a cause-and-effect order. Instead, these works offer repositories of memories, data and documents, which are arranged in the arbitrary order of the alphabet or delivered without any discernible order. The former strategy can be observed in such formal principles as the bibliography, encyclopedia or the index; the latter in the list (or catalog), the inventory or the portfolio. The database, which I also examine for its capacity to represent a life, could function in both ways. Although crisis is not the focus of this project, some of the works I analyze address experiences of loss (Wickersham's *The Suicide Index* and Carson's *Nox*), financial ruin (Mathew Timmons's *CREDIT* [2009]) etc. I would say that what you have called "fragmentary genres" could be said to – apologies for the cliched idiom – "cut to the chase," zoom in on the raw experience, its essence, without bothering to cloak it in an explanatory narrative. Such works are direct, brutal and more honest in their commitment to conveying a comparably unprocessed experience and foregoing a sense of closure.

My previous book project was concerned with the poetics of collage in contemporary literature. My aim was to assert a firm connection between the form of collage and the notion of crisis. The premise was that collage – composed of incompatible elements that have been wrenched from their original contexts – is a form that celebrates disorder, dissonance and tension, all of which are attributes of crisis. Therefore, I argued, collage – a compositional principle that embraces disequilibrium – is predisposed to represent various experiences of crisis. Among the best illustrations of this are Lance and Andi Olsen's *Dreamlives of Debris* (2000) and Steve Tomasula's *VAS: An Opera in Flatland* (2003) – literary responses to contemporary social and technological challenges rendered in a radical form that relies on unconventional layout, typographical experimentation and an artful combination of text and image.

HS: What you said reminds me that the popularity of collage among Dadaists was strongly related to their experience of crisis during the First World War. Andrés Mario Zervigón (in his book *John Heartfield and the Agitated Image: Photography, Persuasion, and the Rise of Avant-Garde Photomontage*) argued that the technique of photomontage – and further collages as well – arose from the practice of artists sending one another postcards during wartime. This practice, which was in between life writing and vanguard art, was aimed at providing relief. Of course the theory of crisis in the avant-garde art is certainly massive and diverse, and it's obvious that postcards are really not fundamental to point out in this issue. More relevant, from my point of view, is how this genre has been changing according to different historical contexts. Thus, my last question is about collage as a "crisis genre" in a wider

perspective. Could you make some remarks about the shifts in its poetics which you observe from the first wave of its popularity in the 1920s to contemporary examples, which you are particularly interested in?

WD: Thank you, I didn't actually realize the importance of postcards to the rise of photomontage.

As for your question, yes, I would say that some shifts are certainly visible across the century of collage's artistic legacy. The poetics of collage was quite diverse since its very inception. In the 1920s and 30s, it was practiced by the Cubists, Surrealists, Dadaists and Futurists, each movement contributing its own aesthetics and agenda. The link between collage and crisis was particularly important to the work of John Heartfield, who you have mentioned, and of other Berlin Dadaists, such as Hannah Höch and Raoul Hausmann. They believed in the primacy of politics over aesthetics and saw collage as a tool to militate against capitalism, nationalism and Nazism. The crisis of World War One and its long aftermath (especially in Germany) was certainly one of the founding contexts of collage, alongside the rise of mass production.

Although David Antin observed that Europe after World War Two was no more than "a readymade rubble heap (a collage)," collage lost much of its earlier popularity in the postwar decades, some critics even declaring it dead. Whereas in the visual arts collage fell out of fashion in the 1950s and 60s, it became a more popular literary principle, especially in the United States. Brion Gysin and William S. Burroughs's invention of the cut-up method, practiced in its most radical form in Burroughs's *The Ticket That Exploded* (1962), demonstrated that fragmentation, hybridity and the reliance on found material were also possible in literary works. Moreover, Burroughs argued that literary collage is a form of realism capable of capturing the essence of modernity. He went so far as to declare that human consciousness is itself more of a cut-up than an orderly stream (as implied by the notion of the stream of consciousness). The belief in a special connection between collage and the modern world continues to be professed in the twenty-first century: American experimental novelist Lance Olsen said, in 2010, that collage "is still the realism that best captures much of our culture's sense of the world."

In the US, collage was practiced by a number of Burroughs's contemporaries, among whom the most acclaimed were the New York School Poets Frank O'Hara and John Ashbery, the short-story writer Donald Barthelme and the experimental novelist and playwright Kathy Acker. Acker's semi-autobiographical *Blood and Guts in High School* (1978) – an arbitrarily arranged repository of drawings, handwritten fragments and annotated diagrams – could be called a life-writing collage. Burroughs and Acker shared a poetics of provocation meant to shock its readership with explicit descriptions of non-normative sexualities and vulgar language.

The desire to scandalize and outrage the reader is much less present in contemporary literary collage. Instead, in the works of authors such as Steve Tomasula and the earlier mentioned Lance Olsen, we find the prevalent atmosphere of angst about the political, ecological and technological crises of the new millennium. While many American collagists in the heyday of postmodernism challenged hegemonic systems, such as capitalism and patriarchy, Tomasula's *VAS: An Opera in Flatland* (2002) and *The Book of Portraiture* (2006) and Olsen's *Head in Flames* (2009) and *Dreamlives of Debris* (2017) evoke the epistemological and ontological chaos of our epoque and envisage its grim consequences. Experiences of severe personal crisis were the basis for Maggie Nelson's already mentioned *Bluets* and Jenny Offill's *Dept. of Speculation* (2014). David Markson's *The Notecard Quartet* (1996–2007) and Evan Lavender-Smith's *From Old Notebooks* (2010) are pervaded by a sense of exhaustion and the acute awareness of their authors' mortality. The poetics of collage and the thematic concern with death are very compatible, as I tried to demonstrate in an article where I proposed classifying Markson's and Lavender-Smith's works as "collage autothanatographies."[2]

Purely on the level of form, I would say that twenty-first-century literary collage is characterized by an abundance of voices colliding with one another. One of the most effective examples of this structural principle is *Head in Flames*, where Olsen juxtaposes speech fragments – real and imagined – by Vincent van Gogh, the assassinated social activist Theo van Gogh and his murderer Mohammed Bouyeri. Another characteristic feature of contemporary collage literature is its much greater than ever before reliance on images, largely appropriated. The popularity of images is one of several aspects that contribute to the exuberant multimodality of literary collages; the other include typographic experimentation and unconventional and varied page design. Twenty-first-century collages are also more visually explicit about their reliance on stolen or plagiarized content: whereas Burroughs used to retype his cut-ups, Graham Rawle's *Woman's World* (2005) – a 400-hundred page novel created out of approximately 40,000 textual fragments cut out of British women's magazines – exposes the visual trace of scissors that wrenched the cuttings from their original context.

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[2] See: Drąg, Wojciech, "Collage Autothanatographies: David Markson's *Reader's Block* Quartet and Evan Lavender-Smith's *From Old Notebooks*." *Orbis Litterarum* 77, no. 1 (January 2022): 19–36.

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