

The Holocaust in Polish Prose

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Abstract This paper presents a comprehensive discussion of the Shoah in Polish prose. The author shows how Polish literature (prose, poetry and drama) has extensively preserved the Holocaust experience and has left the highest number of literary testimonies of this event compared to other world literatures. The sketch introduces the main topics explored by Polish authors (Polish-Jewish relations during the time of occupation and after the war, various strategies of recording the Shoah experience), as well as the evolution in presenting the Holocaust in Polish prose. In the conclusion, the author discusses the main issues facing Polish researchers: preliminary archival research in communist censorship resources, forming large, interdisciplinary research teams, creating a synthesis of Polish literature on the Shoah and global dissemination of knowledge concerning the richness of Polish literature on the Holocaust.

Key words Holocaust; Polish literature; issues in Holocaust research

Let us begin with an obvious issue which, nevertheless, is not necessarily so obvious for a European reader. Polish literature provides the most testimony to the extermination of the Jews. The latest research shows the multitude of texts we deal with. This enormity is most fully revealed in the publication entitled *Literatura polska wobec Zagłady (1939–1968) [Polish Literature towards the Shoah (1939–1968)]* issued in 2012. The bibliography published there lists almost 200 books only in the field of prose, while the list of poetic, remembrance and autobiographical works is considerably longer. This is an exceptionally huge heritage recorded in the Polish language.

The period of 1945–1949 is particularly rich in Holocaust testimonies. Communist censorship was not yet operating efficiently (although it formally existed since 1946). At the same time, the memory of the war remains unusually, even extremely, vivid (since the war and the occupation in Poland and Eastern Europe had a particularly brutal character, incomparable to what happened in the West). The weight

of Nazi atrocities is so heavy that it demanded almost immediate recording, reporting and condemnation of Nazism.

Polish literature occupies a particular place in comparison to all others — English-speaking, French, German-speaking, Russian or Jewish literature — not only because of the richness of literary evidence of the *Endlösung*. The Holocaust took place on land belonging to Poland. The Poles thus also had a double role — of being both victims and witnesses — and Polish authors were in direct proximity of the *Endlösung*.

From the abundant collection of Polish texts concerning the Shoah, I have selected prose. I will present it in a synthetic way, being fully aware of the absence of Polish literature in the global reflection on the Shoah. It is not a subject of discussion in significant academic journals and it seems to have been passed over. In the summary, I will discuss the subjects and problems that Polish researchers are faced with.

Texts Created *hic et nunc*

Apart from a quite numerous set of poetic works, it turns out that the prose created during the war — *hic et nunc* — is rather modest. It includes only a few works, such as *Oczekiwanie* [*Awaiting*] by Jerzy Broszkiewicz, a collection of short stories entitled *Bestia* [*The Beast*] by Władysław Kowalski, *Wielki Tydzień* [*Passion Week*] by Jerzy Adrzejewski, a moving introduction by Władysław Szlengel to the volume of poems *Co czytałem umarłym* [*What I read to the dead*]. Apart from *Oczekiwanie*, these are short forms. A much more abundant representation of poetry created during the occupation in comparison to prose should not be surprising. Poetry is often the effect of emotions and moments, while prose usually needs more time. If, in poetry, in which we can find a collection of at least some texts that can be interpreted as the projection of the Holocaust (e.g. *Koszmarny sen* [*Nightmare*] and *Księga dżungli* [*The Jungle Book*] by Władysław Szlengel), there is only one such work in the field of prose. It is a short novel by Adolf Rudnicki, entitled *Lato* [*Summer*]. The atmosphere of fear and the spectre of imminent catastrophe is hovering over the Jews spending holidays in Kazimierz Dolny.

The tragedy of the Jews was given much more thought in the writers' diaries. The majority of the preserved diaries maintained during the war include references to the fate of the Jewish population. The diaries kept by Zofia Nałkowska, Maria Dąbrowska, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, Stanisław Rembeka, Leopold Buczkowski, Karol Irzykowski and Anna Kowalska are so interesting and unusual because they present the Holocaust from the closest possible

time perspective. Events, human behaviours and choices are evaluated on a current basis. Kowalska, Irzykowski or Iwaszkiewicz do not say much about the extermination of the Jews. This is only a few single references. Perhaps, it was for safety reasons (Iwaszkiewicz gave shelter to many Jews in his house in Stawisko). After all, the history of Nałkowska's burning of a fragment of her diary concerning the events in the ghetto is known. The writer did it under the influence of emotions, for fear of being arrested since, during a Gestapo search, the notes from the diary would provide evidence against her.

Although Buczkowski — just like Kowalska, Irzykowski, Iwaszkiewicz — does not say much in his *Dziennik czasu wojny* [*Wartime Diary*] about *Endlösung*, his laconic records are highly suggestive. They touch upon the crucial issues: the loneliness of the Jews, the self-defence actions undertaken by them and stereotypical opinions concerning the cowardice of the Jews. At the same time, Buczkowski perceives the tragedy of Jews in the broader context — the tragedy of all other nationalities inhabiting the areas of Volhynia and Podolia. In his work, the Holocaust takes place against the background of total war — all with all — the disintegration of the former national community and ethnic conflicts fomented by the Nazis.

Three diaries deserve particular attention: from Rembek, Dąbrowska and Nałkowska. Apart from the first one, the other two have been well-examined in the subject matter literature. However — let us admit — the thoroughly-discussed subject of the Holocaust rarely emerged in such analyses. *Dziennik okupacyjny* [*Occupational Diary*] by Rembek provides a unique testimony because it is kept from the perspective of an inhabitant of a small town, recording events, not of the writer, but of an ordinary man. The Holocaust emerges from time to time in discussions while drinking alcohol or during a train ride. The fate of the Jews evokes in Polish neighbours fear about their own future. At the same time, Rembek is not embellishing reality; he does not want to pass over the shameful manifestation of enrichment of Polish inhabitants after the liquidation of the ghettos. His diary is a striking testimony to everyday life during the war.

For Nałkowska, the Holocaust is the epicentre of the evil of war, an event concealing the mystery of human nature. Living in Warsaw, the writer observes subsequent stages of the persecution of Jews. Her point of view is different than that of Rembek. The Shoah is, for Nałkowska — an expert in human psychology who often places the protagonists of her works in situations requiring complicated moral choices — is as much of an ethical and cognitive challenge as an artistic one. In her diary, Nałkowska finally appreciates the value of the

behavioural narration for presenting the truth about the Shoah. She will use this knowledge later on in *Medaliony* [*Medallions*] — a collection of seven short stories describing human reactions and not feelings. Nobody else in the Polish literature about the Shoah and the war so consequently rejected the author's evaluation of the presented world (even in the short stories of Borowski we can find examples of indirect judgement of the world of concentration camps, e.g. through hidden irony). But at the same time, this lack of judgement in *Medaliony* is the best judgement of the wartime period.

Dąbrowska assumed the most complicated approach towards the Jewish issue. It is hard to provide a clear-cut evaluation here. What seems to be beyond discussion — contrary to Nałkowska — is that Dąbrowska does not comprehend the exceptionality of the Jewish suffering.

Neither before the war, nor after the Shoah, did Dąbrowska free herself of the clear division into “fellow countrymen” and “strangers” (despite the aversion to nationalist circles, to which she sometimes gave expression in pre-war statements). On one hand, it is expressed in an almost obsessive indication of their “real” surnames while referring to persons of the Jewish origin, while on the other, what is meant here is a specific competition in suffering. Dąbrowska's view of the Jews has something of the traditional approach — best demonstrated in the attitude of simple people (but also in the superiority with which the noble class looked down at the Jews). It can be clearly perceived in how Dąbrowska grasps the distinctness. Cultural, religious and moral distinctness is regarded by her as the manifestation of something “worse” compared to Polish culture — therefore, inferior in essence.

As compared to the poetry or the prose originating in 1945–1949, one difference can be seen in case diaries. In so far as the most interesting poems, short stories and novels are usually produced by beginners and novices (Tadeusz Borowski, Tadeusz Różewicz, Stanisław Lem, also Leopold Buczkowski, who did not publish any book before the war and, thus, can be treated as a beginner), in the intimism, we can hear the voice of authors representing the older generation, also enjoying recognition — apart from Buczkowski — in the interwar period. This is the voice of authors shaped in artistic and ideological terms, entering wartime as adults, all representing specific views (including political ones).

Both in diaries from the war period and in short-stories and novels created in the first post-war years, evidence supporting the thesis of the exceptionality of the Holocaust can be found extremely rarely. However, this does not mean that Polish prose did not perceive particular suffering experienced by Jews. We

can find many such examples. Even Zofia Kossak in her book entitled *Z otchłani [From the Abyss]*, focused on the description of the tragedy of the Polish people in Auschwitz and devotes a large chapter to persecution, which is incomparable to anything and which the Jews suffered in the concentration camp. The failure to perceive the exceptionality of the Shoah is not surprising. Indeed, Europe and the world grasped the extent of the particular character of the crimes against the Jewish people only after Eichmann's trial. Apart from this, Polish literature was in a particular situation, since the Polish nation was one of the most affected by the war. The range of one's own pain shut out or diminished the pain of Jewish neighbours. This was a natural psychological reaction.

Writing Subjects and Strategies

From the very beginning, Polish literature — both poetry and prose — was aware of a basic dichotomy: the amount of suffering paralysed the artist, but at the same time the artist was aware of the fact that art cannot remain silent. The fear and the need to provide testimony neighboured each other. This is expressed by Rudnicki in his short story *Wielkanoc [Easter]* (completed in April 1945). The author takes the side of those who undertook the pains to record the Jewish pain using words, being aware of the imperfection of art.

Dorota Krawczyńska in her introduction to *Literatura polska wobec Zagłady (1939–1968)* distinguishes the following groups of subjects around which the Polish literature on the Shoah focuses:

- anticipation of events found in the pre-war literature;
- exclusion — existence and topography: ghetto, camp, Aryan side;
- objectification and boundaries of humanity [...];
- life in hiding (Polish-Jewish relations, property theft, denunciation, help);
- dilemmas of the survivors (the feeling of being eradicated, the questions about identity, the feeling of guilt);
 - questions posed to the literature (problems of representation, adequacy and inadequacy of traditional means of expression);
 - mission of literature, literature as testimony;
 - questions posed to culture: critics of arts and culture;
 - reflection on anti-Semitism;
 - questions about God;
 - reflection on the essence of the Shoah;
 - narration strategies (double perspective: child/adult, fragment and small narration, autobiographism, types of documents);

– dilemmas of memory (Polish and Jewish memory of the Shoah, the exceptional character of the Jewish experience, being a Jew after the Holocaust).
(416)

The problems listed by Krawczyńska show the main subjects and motifs appearing in Polish literature on the Shoah, but it can also be referred to a significant part of the global literature on the Holocaust. As we have already stated, Polish literature contains the broadest range of works concerning the Shoah and in this sense, it provides the matrix for other national literatures.

Comprehensively-examined Polish prose on the extermination of the Jews is dominated by the convention of realism. This realism seems to befit the expression of the tragedy of the Jews during the war. However, this realism has different faces. On one hand, we have short-stories by Borowski and by Nałkowska from *Medaliony* (a behaviouristic, impassive record of crimes), while on the other, at the opposite end of the spectrum — a subtle, psychological, admittedly symbolic reading of prose by Adolf Rudnicki. In a similar spirit, Stanisław Wygodzki sometimes crafted his short works (e.g. the volumes *Upalny dzień* [*Sweltering Day*], *Przy szosie* [*At the Road*], *Koncert życzeń* [*Request Program*], *Boczna uliczka* [*Side Street*]).

What is completely opposite to a realistic depiction is the mode of expression patterning on fairy tales. This technique was used shortly after the war by Ewa Szelburg-Zarębina in the short stories *Złote koźlątko* [*Golden Kid*] and *Kuropatwy* [*Partridges*] from *Ziarno gorczyczne* [*Mustard Seed*], and lately by Joanna Rudniańska in her book *Kotka Brygidy* [*Brygida's Cat*]. However, a fairy tale is extremely rarely used in the Polish prose about the Shoah. The simplest explanation of this phenomenon suggests a subconscious conviction that such measures seem grossly inadequate to the subject of description. The element of fiction, essential for a fairy tale, is here of crucial importance. An aversion to fiction stemmed from its being viewed as untruths and fabrication — morally suspicious categories.

The realistic convention does not automatically assume speaking directly about the Shoah. In Polish prose, the master of such a strategy of writing on the Holocaust is Julian Strykowski. As he claims in his *Ocalony na Wschodzie* [*Saved in the East*], the fact that he was not present during the war in the land where the Shoah took place does not permit him to talk about the events to which he was not a direct witness. “Sit down and write! But about what? About the uprising? By what right, since I did not take part in it? [...] I will write about what I know. I will put a gravestone to the nation as far as I am able. I will evoke the memory of the most remote past of my life, my childhood” (170). At the same time, the memory about the murdered nation of his ancestors does not allow him to remain silent. Therefore, he chooses the way

of immortalizing the world from before the Shoah — the shtetls, small Jewish towns, typical of the Jewish community in Eastern Europe (e.g. *Głosy w ciemności* [*Voices in the Dark*], *Sen Azrila* [*Azril's Dream*]). The Holocaust is here a *p r e m o n i t i o n*, something that will inevitably happen, but cannot be seen, something that Strykowski does not dare to describe.

After 1989, this manner of presenting the Shoah was continued by Piotr Szewc. Although for Strykowski the fear of presenting the extermination of the European diaspora results from the fact that he was not a witness to *Endlösung*, for Szewc it results from the simple fact of being born about a dozen years after the war. If Strykowski goes back in his mind to his childhood, early youth, Szewc and other authors born in ethnically-uniform, and not multi-cultural Poland, must resort to their imagination in order to reconstruct the world from before the Catastrophe. For Szewc, this is a poetic, oneiric vision (*Zmierzchy i poranki* [*Dusks and Dawns*], *Bociany nad powiatem* [*Storks over the County*]).

The Polish prose on the Holocaust can be looked at through another contrast: traditional vs. avant-garde. This first perspective is definitely predominating. But in the other — although less strongly represented — we can find at least one outstanding author who is unrecognized in the world. Perhaps one of the most important reasons for the absence of Buczkowski in the global reception is the linguistic layer of his novel, which makes its text exceptionally difficult to translate. Buczkowski reconstructs the language used by the inhabitants of the former eastern part of Poland (currently an area belonging to Ukraine). He reaches for words comprehensible only to inhabitants of those areas. Their meaning often faded away with the death of their users. Besides *Chleb rzucony umarłym* [*Bread thrown to the Dead*] (a novel by Bogdan Wojdowski about the Warsaw ghetto), *Czarny potok* [*Black Stream*] by Buczkowski is the greatest Polish novel about the Shoah. At the same time, it defines the most remote point in the evolution of Polish experimental prose on the extermination of the Jews. In Buczkowski's work, it is difficult to distinguish who is the enemy and who is an ally; who is the executioner and who is the victim. Buczkowski breaks the traditional composition of the novel and introduces time retardations. Quite frequently, we cannot answer the question of who is speaking to whom in *Czarny potok*. Chaos and confusion in narration, difficulties in determining the identity of characters, the precise time and scene of the action are used to reflect the nature of the occupation in the Polish eastern frontier region.

The writer employs the poetics of expressionism, naturalism and onirism to create a surrealist vision. However, none of these occupies a primary role. Instead, they complement one another. The density of facts, a stifling atmosphere of crime, danger and fear lurking in wait everywhere, are bordered in *Czarny potok* with lyricism.

In a strange way, brutality and cruelty meet a poetic vision in Buczkowski's work. This is the terrifying phenomenon of his prose. It has an attracting power, despite the images of crime which prevail in his book. *Czarny potok* hypnotizes the reader.

Shortly after the war, one more contrast emerged in the Polish prose, in which a documentary report collides with lamentation and despair, full of complaint and grief. Despair is sometimes combined with questions posed to God, accused of shared responsibility for the crime and is seen by many authors as the best method to express the atrocities of the Shoah. Interestingly, such an attitude emerged both in works of Catholic authors (Zofia Kossak *Z otchłani*), and those with a different outlook (Leon Cukierberg *Cień Torquemady [Torquemada's Shadow]*). Another — free from emotions — a manner of speaking about the tragedy of war was initiated by Borowski and Nałkowska. *Pożegnanie z Marią [Farewell to Maria]* by Borowski and *Medaliony* by Nałkowska did not annihilate the sublime style of speaking about the tragedy of war, but provided it with a question mark.

Literature Was First

It was usually claimed that the real discussion concerning attitudes towards the Jews started in Poland only after publication of *Sąsiedzi [Neighbors]* by Jan Tomasz Gross. Until then, nothing was to be said on this subject, or the subject was falsely presented. This is not true. Polish literature, long before the sensitive issues of Polish-Jewish relations became the subject of discussion and public debate (intensely going on for more than ten years in Poland), engaged and described almost all subjects which made it a subject of dispute. Among other sensitive problems, the writers brought up issues of post-war anti-Semitism: the taking over of Jewish property by Polish citizens and also — episodic — murders of Jews. The problem is that readers and researchers did not want to see subjects which might destroy the image of Poles as impeccable victims, who suffered during the war the same, or even more, than the Jews. And although the involvement of the Polish nation in helping Jews is true, as well as the fact that Poland belongs to those countries that suffered most during the last world war, it is also true that some Poles happened to denounce, and even murder, Jews. These were touchy issues for communists, but also for average citizens not involved in politics. On this point, the communist authorities agreed with a considerable part of the Polish society.

It is impossible to list all the short stories, novels, diaries and memories in which “difficult topics” were brought up. Besides known authors, those problems also appear in second-rate texts in terms of artistic quality. We will not find certain themes or images in writers most often associated with the Holocaust, but they emerge in artists of secondary importance or those not associated with problems concerning

the extermination of Jews. This is, for instance, the case of the short story written by Monika Kotowska *Wyplata będzie w niedzielę* [*The Payday will be on Sunday*] and a motif presented there of children who used to spot Jews leaving the ghetto and informing on them to adults.

Polish prosaists were aware of the continuity between the anti-Semitism of the twenty-year interwar period and the symptoms of hatred towards Jews in the period of occupation and shortly after the end of the war. While examining this issue, they pointed to the heritage of the second half of the 1930s in Poland (press campaigns, persecution at the universities and the vandalism of Jewish shops). Kazimierz Brandys combines these phenomena in two texts making up the tetralogy *Między wojnami* [*Between the Wars*] — *Samson* and *Antygona* [*Antygone*]. The most important, and the most extensive, comment of Polish writers and intellectuals concerning symptoms of post-war anti-Semitism is a collection of sketches entitled *Martwa fala* [*Swell*]. The articles it gathers result from direct emotional reactions to anti-Semitic attitudes coming back to life. The most shocking manifestations of anti-Jewish behaviour included the largest post-war slaughter in Kielce in July 1946, in which 42 persons were killed. It became an impulse for Julian Przyboś to speak out and protest, as strong as he could, against the “disgrace of anti-Semitism”: “Shame, sorrow, tormenting burden of disgrace — overpower, paralyse the capacity of words. This is the only subject that terrifies and which cannot be coped with” (60-61). It cannot be coped with, although everybody knows that such attempts should be undertaken and nobody should remain silent. Not only Przyboś was convinced that anti-Semitism, or even only tolerance of anti-Semitism, is something not to be underestimated and accepted after the war.

Jerzy Andrzejewski in *Martwa fala* also stated, with horror, that anti-Semitism in Poland — despite the extermination by the Germans of several million Jews — was still a current issue. Just like Przyboś, Andrzejewski saw in the hostile attitude towards Jews a shameful and, at the same time, painful issue. After forty years, the subject of shame was taken up in an essay entitled *Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto* [*The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto*], crucial for the debate about attitudes of Poles towards Jews, written by Jan Błoński, an outstanding literary critic and a lecturer at Jagiellonian University. The debate on the character of the Polish guilt dates back to its publication in 1987 in the Catholic weekly “Tygodnik Powszechny.” Błoński understood it as an unsatisfactory sensitivity to the evil against Jews. It was the beginning of the debate which would continue in a new socio-economic environment, without the participation of communist censorship.

March 1968

March 1968 was the culminating point of the anti-Semitic and anti-German propaganda of the 1960s, consequently led by the ruling communists. It was the last moment in the Polish People's Republic of understanding between the authorities and the part of the society which supported the anti-Jewish action. However, it should not be forgotten that — as Józef Hen convinces us in his *Oko Dajana [Dayan's Eye]* — the crude anti-Semitic propaganda of the authorities in March 1968 often gave rise to an opposite result than the communists intended and evoked in Poles compassion and a desire to help.

The psychology of the survivor marginalizes the truth that anti-Jewish speeches were to a large extent inspired by the communist secret service. For a person of Jewish origin, an ordinary citizen in the Polish People's Republic, who did not belong to the sphere of power, did not have any contact with it and did not know the genesis of the incidents, reviving anti-Semitism first took the form of an injustice that he experienced in his workplace, in his circle of acquaintances, hostility in the street, bitter words uttered in the environment around him. Just like during the war — in a hurry and cheaply — Jews sold out their property and observed Poles who took advantage of this. For small amounts, they bought out what the Jews had worked to gain for the last twenty years. “They are already getting ready to buy out Jewish cars dirt-cheap” — says Luiza in *Nieznany przyjaciel [Unknown Friend]* by Krzysztof Kąkolewski (183).

Trains with emigrants of 1968 departed from Warsaw's Gdańska Station. Those departing were often seen off by their friends and acquaintances: “Many persons thought that [...] going to the Gdański Station is a certain kind of moral duty” (Eisler, 430). This station was located in the direct vicinity of the place from which transports to Treblinka departed during the occupation. It is hardly surprising that association with the Shoah emerged in some minds. The Polish prose also gives voice to it (e.g. Henryk Grynberg in *Memorbuch*, Nina Karsov and Szymon Szechter in *Nie kocha się pomników [Monuments are not Loved]*, Andrzej Kuśniewicz in *Nawrócenie [Conversion]*). Such an image is presented in *Western* by Hen: “I went to the Gdański Station a quarter to seven. [...] People with flowers crowded through the tunnel. There were a few boozed up. A late person of those seeing off [...] pushed his way through the crowd, shouting: Where is this train to Treblinka?. Someone laughed, someone of those leaving” (39). Thus not only in the emigrants, but also in those who accompanied them, the associations with the occupation were subconsciously called up. Marek Nowakowski recorded how “a Jewish friend spoke about the fear which gripped her old mother. The atavism of persecution woke up, particularly in a woman who survived the Holocaust”¹ (207). Fear-arousing memories came back to life.

In 1968–1971, as a result of the March 1968 events, about 13–15 thousand

citizens of the Jewish origin left Poland. In collections of short-stories written in the 1980s, the awareness of the twilight of the Jewish diaspora in Poland prevails (*Krzywe drogi [Crooked Roads]* by Bogdan Wojdowski). Old Jews, those who managed to survive the Holocaust, live in a state of suspension between worlds, haunted by memory. The young are almost absent in Wojdowski. If they do appear — as Adam Kuczer from *Pascha [Passover]* — they want to leave and forget about the “everlasting resentiments” of the war past, which still preoccupies minds of their parents. Gutowski from *Krzywe drogi*, to the fullest extent, expresses the opinion of Wojdowski himself: “The young leave, the old die”(83). Therefore, the events of 1968 can be looked as the end of the thousand-year history of the Jewish diaspora in Poland. Polish prose starts to document this state from the end of 1980s, when many books expressed a longing for bygone times, for the impossible-to-be-recovered-colours of the past, including, among others, the presence of Jews in the Polish landscape. One of the first and most outstanding works of this trend is *Weiser Dawidek* by Paweł Huelle.

New Perspectives

The next decade — mainly due to the growing role of the democratic opposition — brought a new look at the Polish-Jewish relationship. Although the prose and journalism (as shown in the *Martwa fala* collection) of the second half of the 1940s talked a lot about “difficult subjects,” it was only in the mid-1980s that they started to be extremely loudly-voiced. With the publication of Błoński’s essay *Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto*, the process of describing the “Polish guilt” begins, in which the native prose participates — showing the character of those offences against “neighbours” in many ways (one of the last works in this collection was issued in 2008 *Pingpongista [Ping-Pong Player]* by Hen, dealing with the crimes in Jedwabne). In the era of social and political transformations taking place, the discussion about the Polish-Jewish relations became easier. At that time, a generation of writers born after the war, growing up in a time “without Jews,” took their turn to speak.

At the end of the 1980s, the canon of works on the Shoah was extended by new, important texts (e.g. *Weiser Dawidek* by Huelle, *Zagłada [Shoah]* by Piotr Szewc, *Tworki* by Marek Bieńczyk). One of the crucial works of this period, marking out the path that would be taken by many Polish authors at the end of 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, is *Umschlagplatz* by Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz. The originality and novelty of *Umschlagplatz* lies in a consistent attempt to enter the psyche of those murdered, and a desire to ease their fate and share their suffering by the Polish protagonist of the novel. Some researchers often talk about the precursory nature of *Początek [Beginning]* by Andrzej Szczypiorski (a book published almost at the same time as *Umschlagplatz*). However, a change in the perspective in the Polish prose about

the Shoah does not consist in starting the discussion about difficult Polish-Jewish relations during the occupation, but in the attempt to enter the psyche of the victims, to identify with their fate. Another more significant process also took place. Literary texts concerning the Holocaust became the subject of open, public debate which was impossible until the mid-1980s, due to the communist censorship, among others.

In 1990s there was an emergence of a huge amount of texts concerning the Shoah, comparable only to what happened in the Polish literature in 1945–1949, when the memories of the war were still very vivid. Beside novels and short stories, diaries and reports prevail. “Late testimonies” were published, the authors of which overcame a psychological barrier after years of remaining silent about their experiences in the Holocaust period. This was the case, among others, of books by Zofia Szymańska, Stefan Chaskielewicz, Adina Blady-Szwajger, Maria Hochberg-Mariańska and Halina Zawadzka. For some authors, “late testimony” becomes an element of integration of their identity as a writer (this is particularly important for those who survived the war as children: Michał Głowiński *Czarne sezony [Black Seasons]*, Janina Bauman *Zima o poranku [Winter in the Morning]*, Wilhelm Dichter *Koń Pana Boga [God’s Horse]*).

Along with postmodernist *Tworci* by Bieńczyk, the question of the possibility of updating and experiencing the tragedy of the Holocaust by authors for whom the war is not the generational experience, became valid. A new phenomenon that requires explanation emerged — the works of authors born after the Shoah, as well as the prose of the so-called second and third generation (among others, *Mykwa [Mikveh]* and *Ślicznotka doktora Josefa [Doctor Josef’s Pretty Face]* by Zyta Rudzka or *Pensjonat [Pension]* by Piotr Paziński).

One of the most important manners of talking about the Shoah after 1989 is metonymy. It was used by authors born after the war. *Sny i kamienie [Dreams and Stones]* and *Skaza [Flaw]* by Magdalena Tulla, *Ziemia Nod [The Land of Nod]* by Radosław Kobierski — provide some examples of using metonymy while representing the Shoah. However, these are not unique texts written in this style, and the issue requires separate analyses.

Tasks to Be Done

Among the numerous tasks faced by the Holocaust researchers in Poland, one of the most important is the reconstruction and discussion of the topics related to the Shoah. Polish poetry and prose provide the natural and the best context for creating the matrix of *loci communes* of the Holocaust. This is for two obvious reasons. First of all, Polish literature — as it has been already claimed — contains the richest set of texts about the Shoah in terms of volume. Among all global literatures, extermination of the Jews found in Polish prose and poetry the most numerous representation. Secondly, as the

Holocaust took place in the area and in the social, cultural and political reality of land making up the Second Republic of Poland, Polish authors were put in a specific situation: they were direct or indirect witnesses to what happened.

I would like to list a few categories of entries making up a preliminary index for the future glossary of the Holocaust literature topics: OTHER WORLD, SMOKE, QUIET, SILENCE, WALL, SZMALCOWNIK, CLOSET, HANGMAN, LITTLE SMUGGLER, ANIELEWICZ, RUMKOWSKI, CZERNIAKÓW, RUBINSZTAJN, SZMUL ZYGIELBOJM, ANGEL OF DEATH/MENGELE, FRANKENSTEIN, GROSSE AKTION, JEWISH DEATH:POLISH DEATH, DEATH TRAIN/LOCOMOTIVE, JEWISH EYES, WINDOW, ASH, JEWISH WAR, ARYAN PAPERS, CREMATORIUM, SELECTION, GOOD APPEARANCE:WRONG APPEARANCE, JEWISH FACE, JEW-COWARD, JEWISH MOTHER, JEWISH THINGS, SHTETL, MUSELMANN, AUSCHWITZ, HELL, RAMP, STAR OF DAVID/JEWISH STAR, ARYAN SIDE, UMSCHLAGPLATZ, GUARD OF JEWISH GRAVES, JEWISH GOLD.

The Polish reflection on the literature of the Holocaust lacks publications summing up the current state of knowledge. What is missing is a monograph that would make it possible to see the richness of subject matter concerning the Shoah in poetry, prose, essay and drama. The already-mentioned book, entitled *Literatura polska wobec Zagłady (1939–1968)* was published as late as in 2012. The prevailing studies are monographs showing Holocaust motifs in the works by one author. They are important, yet they would not replace a synthesis. Additionally, there are no publications of the glossary or encyclopaedic type. *Literatura polska w Izraelu. Leksykon [Polish Literature in Israel. Lexicon]* has been completed only lately. Nevertheless, one project, still in the phase of creation, should be also mentioned. A synthesis entitled *Reprezentacje Zagłady w kulturze polskiej [Shoah Representations in Polish Culture]* provides a thematic and chronological continuation of the monograph *Literatura polska wobec Zagłady (1939–1968)*. The assumption of *Reprezentacje* is — as far as possible — to provide a complete and exhaustive description of various phases and forms of expression concerning the Holocaust experience in artistic accounts, including literature (poetry, prose, personal documentary literature, essay writing and journalism), theatre and drama, visual arts, film and photography, popular culture and new media, as well as a theoretical discourse about the Shoah. This research undertaking is unprecedented in the Polish literature of the subject.

A part of the crucial issues concerning the Holocaust should be covered in larger problem groups. Therefore, the most urgent tasks in reflection on the Shoah include appointment of research teams gathering representatives of various humanistic

professions, from various research centres. This would allow completion of large, cross-sectional projects.

A separate circle of issues is created by the problem of the extermination of the Jews in the context of the communist censorship. In the article entitled *Cenzura PRL a współczesne edytorstwo* [*Censorship in the Polish People's Republic and Contemporary Editing*] published in the collective work *Autor, tekst, cenzura* [*Author, Text, Censorship*], Tadeusz Drewnowski claimed that restoration of the original author's form of works from the second half of the twentieth century, clearing them of distortions made by the Main Office of Control for Press, Publications and Shows (GUKPPiW) was one of the most important tasks for editors and publishers after 1989. Since then the situation has not radically change for the better. Due to the costs of printing, publishing houses which decide to publish most often do not care to check what the text looked like before the intervention of a meticulous censor.

An issue that has been completely omitted is the question of works withheld by censorship. Works kept in the censorship collections slightly broaden the collection of texts treating the Shoah. In *Zatrzymane przez cenzurę* [*Withheld by Censorship*] Kamila Budrowska brings to light *Dni grozy* [*Days of Fear*] by Rajmund Hemepl and *Lamus* [*Storeroom*] by Nadzieja Drucka, considerably broadening the modest collection of post-war drama texts about the Holocaust. These are not the only texts raising the problem of the Shoah that were not admitted for publication by censorship. They do not include outstanding works, although some interesting works can be found that had been considered by the censor as “dangerous” for the reader. At this point, another, more generalized thesis concerning the communist censorship should be mentioned. According to Budrowska, against the common belief, the copies reaching the GUKPPiW were relatively rarely destroyed (despite the orders from above). This raises the hope that many of them can be found in archives of publishing houses archives or in private collections and archives. This is worth remembering. Too often it is assumed that the text does not exist since it disappeared “at Mysia Street” — without an appropriate search to verify this fact.

To date, nobody has examined the activity of the censorship around 1968. The operations of the-then authorities are quite well-known — including the anti-Semitic journalism — inspired to a large extent by communist rulers (particularly circles close to General Mieczysław Moczar) and has been well-described, but we do not know anything about the influence of censorship on literary texts. Other questions ask whether, and in what way, the production of anti-Semitism works of that time was inspired. Two overtly anti-Semitic works were created at that time (the only ones in the entire Polish prose of 1945–1989). One was a novel, *Glupia sprawa* [*Stupid Thing*] by Stanisław Ryszard Dobrowolski, and one was a short story, *Dawid, syn*

Henryka [David, a Son of Henryk] by Roman Bratny.

While examining the issue of communist censorship in the Polish People's Republic, one should recall the different stages of its development: relative freedom of 1945–1948/49, the time of its largest influence (1950–1953/54), a “thaw” (1956–1958) and publication of works restrained in the first half of 1950s, tightening of censorship in 1959–1970, emergence of independent publishing circulation in the mid-1970s, freedom of the “Solidarity” era (1980–1981) and tightening of censorship during the martial law period (1981–1983). In the editorial reviews written by censors, the topic of the Shoah is not presented as a direct reason for eliminating text, but rather allegedly low artistic value or unjustified pessimism was often cited. Censoring the subject matter of the extermination of the Jews should be treated as an element of manipulating the memory of World War II (particularly important in the Stalinist times). I discussed the issue of presence/absence of the Holocaust in the Stalinist era a few years ago, in “Midrasz.”² Contrary to expectation, the extermination of Jews did appear in the prose of 1949–1954. Communists used the tactic that they followed almost throughout the entire era of the Polish People's Republic. An artist could refer to the Holocaust if he accused the opponents of the communist authorities of atrocious acts against Jews. A complete exposition of dark episodes from the Polish past was by no means the objective of the ruling communists. They were not concerned with countering lies concerning the past, but about its misrepresentation through the so-called “class interpretation” of history. And this does not mean anything more than subordination to the general idea of the enemy being the only beneficiary of the former Jewish property. The enemy also included the anti-communist opposition.

To sum up, the subjects concerning war, occupation, the fate of Polish population and extermination of the Jews were not approved by the communists if they did not emphasize a particular role of socialism in the fight against the Nazis, did not discredit political opponents or did not contain an optimistic vision of the future. The image of war detached from the political interpretation raised the suspicion of defeatism and gratuitous violence.

A separate issue requiring comprehensive presentation is the meeting of the popular culture with the Shoah (signalled already earlier in books of 1970s, for instance, in *Szczurzy pałac [Rat Palace]* by Bogdan Ruth). On one hand, in *Żydówka Noemi [Noemi the Jew]* by Jerzy Stegner or in *Agent* by Manuela Gretkowska, the context of the extermination is used to make the plot “more attractive,” on the other hand — to its unmasking (as in *Good night, Dżerzi* by Janusz Głowacki, where those mechanisms are subject to criticism), or in a perverse camp book by Igor Ostachowicz *Noc żywych Żydów [The Night of Living Jews]*). In the last decade, a considerable collection of texts appeared, in which the Shoah constitutes only a context to tell the

history about maturation or for pure provocation. Because of such works as Krystian Piwowarski's *Więcej gazu, Kameraden! [More Gas, Kameraden!]*, a need to pose again the question of appropriateness, the possibility of transferring the experience of *Endlösung* and — more broadly — its ability to be expressed emerges.

Finally, let us mention one more task faced by the Polish researchers of Holocaust literature. One of the most important tasks consists in promotion of knowledge concerning the richness of the literature concerning the Shoah. In a dynamically developing (over the past few dozen years) reflection over the Holocaust, in recognized, sometimes classic, books on this topic, Polish poetry and prose almost does not exist. A few names are usually mentioned, namely: Tadeusz Borowski, Czesław Miłosz, Henryk Grynberg, less often Władysław Szlengel, Zofia Nałkowska, Adolf Rudnicki or Andrzej Szczypiorski. Such authors as Jerzy Kosiński and Piotr Rawicz are more often referred to. However, they can hardly be recognized as Polish authors (since one of them wrote in English, and the other in French). Diaries are mentioned much more often — by Adam Czerniakow, Dawid Rubinowicz, Dawid Sierakowiak or *Pamiętnik [Diary]* by Janusz Korczak. Without Polish literature — in which the Shoah found its fullest representation — the research on the Holocaust is much more limited, and certain issues cannot be discussed without referring to Polish literature.

Notes

1. The Shoah trauma brought back to life in March 1968 is mentioned by Michał Głowiński in his interview given to Teresa Torañska (*Sq. Rozmowy o dobrych uczuciach [They exist. Talks about good feelings]*. Warszawa: Świat Książki 2007).
2. See S. Buryła, *Zagłada Żydów w prozie socrealistycznej [Extermination of the Jews in the prose of Socialist Realism]*. *Midrasz* 11(2008)26-30.

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