

Jewish Childhood, Holocaust and Twenty-First-Century Literature

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The Holocaust Literature for Children in Translation into Polish

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The collection of books that can be described as Holocaust literature for children is relatively extensive, even though the exceptional over-representation within the topic was initiated in the first decade of the twenty-first century. This collection is also significant reception-wise, in terms of the number of analyses devoted to the topic: reviews and articles on individual works, but also more extensive problematic discussions, covering a larger number of publications and cognitively significant research areas. Małgorzata Wójcik-Dudek writes that the Second World War, but also the Holocaust, were present in children's books basically "from the beginning," that is from the first post-war years¹. It is difficult, however, to speak of even a relative balance between the number of literary representations of the Polish and Jewish wartime experience. The Jewish fate was treated marginally and selectively during the People's Republic of Poland (1944–1989), hence today's search when it comes to the

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¹ See Małgorzata Wójcik-Dudek, *Reading (in) the Holocaust. Practices of Postmemory in Recent Polish Literature for Children and Young Adults*, trans. Patrycja Poniatowska (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2020), 38–43.

first traces – stories addressed to children and telling the fate of their Jewish peers,² is a collection of rarities.³ The situation of translations of texts about Holocaust was similar at the time.⁴ The state of affairs that prevailed in literature in principle until 1989 is not surprising if one considers the social, political or socio-literary situation at that epoch. The problems of the time, moreover, have already been thoroughly described.⁵ Chronologically, the dynamics of change within this corpus would be as follows: after years of silence, of being overlooked, the Holocaust as a phenomenon appears in the Polish culture and literature in the 1980s,⁶ becomes important in terms of reception.⁷

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- 2 "Holocaust was never the plot axis in literature for a young readership, and Holocaust victims (who are often treated with compassion or offered help in defiance of lethal risk) and/or witnesses were consigned to the margins of the narrative world. It is precisely because the Jewish theme is absent from the national pantheon of heroic twins or valiant teddy bears ..." (Wójcik-Dudek, *Reading (in) the Holocaust*, 39–40).
 - 3 This collection certainly includes the short story *Przełomowy dzień Buraska* by Sophia Petersowa from the volume *Odwet. Opowieści okupacyjne* (Łódź: Księgarnia Naukowa, 1947), 43–49. The work tells the story of the friendship between the dog Burasek and Lucia, a Jewish girl who was hiding outside Warsaw with her parents. She was executed together with her mother. Several other books are cited by Wójcik-Dudek.
 - 4 *The Diary of Anne Frank* was translated into Polish in 1957, but it is a reading for teenagers rather than children.
 - 5 See Piotr Forecki, *Od "Shoah" do "Strachu." Spory o polsko-żydowską przeszłość i pamięć w debatach publicznych* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2010); Bartłomiej Krupa, *Opowiedzieć Zagładę. Polska proza i historiografia wobec Holocaustu (1987–2003)* (Kraków: Universitas, 2013); Marek Kucia, *Auschwitz jako fakt społeczny, Historia, współczesność i świadomość społeczna KL Auschwitz w Polsce* (Kraków: Universitas, 2005); Michael C. Steinlauf, *Pamięć nieprzyswojona. Polska pamięć Zagłady*, trans. Agata Tomaszewska (Warszawa: Cyklady, 2001).
 - 6 Przemysław Czapliński, "Prześladowcy, pomocnicy, świadkowie. Zagłada i polska literatura późnej nowoczesności," in *Zagłada. Współczesne problemy rozumienia i przedstawiania*, ed. Przemysław Czapliński and Ewa Domańska (Poznań: Wydawnictwo "Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne," 2009), 155–156.
 - 7 See more on this topic *Męczeństwo i zagłada Żydów w zapisach literatury polskiej*, ed. Irena Maciejewska (Warszawa: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1988); Władysław Panas, *Pismo i rana. Szkice o problematyce żydowskiej w literaturze polskiej* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Dabar, 1996); Jacek Leociak, *Tekst wobec Zagłady* (Wrocław: Fundacja na rzecz Nauki Polskiej, 1997); *Literatura polska wobec Zagłady*, ed. Alina Brodzka-Wald, Dorota Krawczyńska and Jacek Leociak (Warszawa: ŻIH, 2000); Sławomir Buryła, *Prawda mitu i literatury. O pisarstwie Tadeusza Borowskiego i Leopolda Buczkowskiego* (Kraków: Universitas, 2003); Aleksandra Ubertowska, *Świadectwo – trauma – głos. Literackie reprezentacje Holocaustu* (Kraków: Universitas, 2007); *Ślady obecności*, ed. Sławomir Buryła and Alina Molisak (Kraków: Universitas, 2010); *Literatura polska wobec Zagłady (1939–1968)*, ed. Sławomir

In 2009, the work *Doświadczenie Zagłady z perspektywy dziecka w polskiej literaturze dokumentu osobistego* [Their childhood and the Holocaust. A child's perspective in Polish documentary and autobiographical literature]⁸ was published, where Justyna Kowalska-Leder analyses the wartime diaries and memoirs of child victims of the Holocaust: Renia Knoll, Dawid Rubinowicz, Dawid Sierakowiak or Rutka Laskier. By reading them and placing them in the field of research reflection, the author gives children a voice, appreciates their importance and "brings out their specificity when confronted with the diaristic messages that have come out of the hands of adults."⁹ The end of the first and the second decade of the twenty-first century have brought in Poland an interest in the wartime fate of women, also in the context of the Holocaust.¹⁰ Children and their experiences are presented as in passing and through the prism of the specific situation of mothers and caregivers – pregnant, giving birth, bringing up, protecting, trying to save loved ones when taking into account the so-called boarder conditions. Alongside, though not completely separate, developments were taking place within children's literature.¹¹ Since the turn

Buryła, Dorota Krawczyńska and Jacek Leociak (Warszawa: IBL PAN, 2012); Bartłomiej Krupa, *Opowiedzieć Zagładę. Polska proza i historiografia wobec Holocaustu (1987–2003)* (Kraków: Universitas, 2013); Marta Cuber, *Metonimie Zagłady. O polskiej prozie lat 1987–2012* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2013); Sławomir Buryła, *Wokół Zagłady. Szkice o literaturze Holocaustu* (Kraków: Universitas, 2016); Beata Przymuszała, *Smugi Zagłady. Emocjonalne i konwencjonalne aspekty tekstów ofiar i ich dzieci* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2016); Beata Przymuszała, *Smugi Zagłady – książki przeoczone. Borowicz i inni* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2019).

- 8 Justyna Kowalska-Leder, *Their Childhood and the Holocaust. A Child's Perspective in Polish Documentary and Autobiographical Literature* trans. Richard Reisner (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015).
- 9 Sławomir Buryła and Justyna Kowalska-Leder, "Doświadczenie Zagłady z perspektywy dziecka w polskiej literaturze dokumentu osobistego. Wrocław 2009," *Pamiętnik Literacki* 4 (2010): 180–184; 180.
- 10 See publications from this time by Agnieszka Nikliborc, Joanna Ostrowska, Joanna Stocker-Sobelman, Aleksandra Ubertowska, Agnieszka Weseli, among others.
- 11 See on the changes in the representation of war and the Holocaust in children's literature: Ewa Teodorowicz-Hellman, "Pamiętnik Dawida Rubinowicza na tle polskiej literatury dla dzieci o czasach wojny, okupacji i Zagłady," in *O tym, co Alicja odkryła... W kręgu badań nad toposem dzieciństwa i literaturą dla dzieci i młodzieży*, ed. Alicja Ungeheuer-Gołąb, Małgorzata Chrobak and Michał Rogoża (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego, 2005), 227–233. Krystyna Zabawa and Grzegorz Leszczyński, among others, have written about changes in the situation and themes of the historical novel for children. See on this subject Krzysztof Rybak, "Zagłada i ideologia w polskiej literaturze dziecięcej XXI wieku," *Narrations of the Shoah* 1 (2021): 155–173; and Agnieszka

of twentieth century, genres such as a detective fiction and romance have been present in this literature. In addition, topics previously absent, tabooed and reserved for adults have appeared, such as human anatomy and physiology, existence and difficult, borderline situations and phenomena, such as homophobia, disabilities, illnesses, death or, last but not least, war and Holocaust.¹² Moreover, taking a broader perspective into account, it should be said that in the first half of the twenty-first century, ideas and practices of the new humanities are beginning to appear on Polish ground, including posthumanism, encompassing “the study of things, materiality, the natural environment, the plant and animal worlds,” making it possible to cross borders, overcome barriers and enlarge the “area of anthropological cognition.”¹³ Within literature, including Holocaust literature,¹⁴ these inspirations are reflected in the gesture of empowerment of hitherto marginalized beings and entities, be it animals, objects or children, endowed with a model of transmitting and receiving sensitivity, tenderness but also sincerity.

The Holocaust (Not Only) in the Polish Language

The books translated into Polish are certainly an example of a selected collection,¹⁵ which “would be a selection from a list of works that are widely available, and this is where the real choices, dictated by different needs,

Karczevska, “Pamięć i empatia. O dziecięcej literaturze Zagłady,” in *Pamięć o Zagładzie w polskojęzycznej i niemieckojęzycznej literaturze autorek i autorów drugiego oraz trzeciego pokolenia post-Szoah*, ed. Irmela von der Lühe and Sławomir J. Żurek (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego Jana Pawła II, 2019), 265–300.

- 12 Aleksandra Sikora writes about this in the article “W jaki sposób mówimy dzieciom o wojnie? Charakterystyka prozy o tematyce wojennej na podstawie wybranych książek dla dzieci,” *Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Librorum* 2 (2014): 25–44; 25–26.
- 13 Ryszard Nycz, “Nowa humanistyka w Polsce: kilka bardzo subiektywnych obserwacji, koniektur, refutacji,” *Teksty Drugie* 1 (2017): 18–40; 28.
- 14 Marta Tomczok, “Getto łódzkie we współczesnej literaturze dla dzieci i młodzieży. Krytyka ‘nowej wrażliwości,’” *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 16 (2020): 665–684.
- 15 On the mechanism of publishing selection of foreign books see Katarzyna Biernacka-Licznar, Elżbieta Jamróz-Stolarska and Natalia Paprocka, *Lilipucia rewolucja. Awangardowe wydawnictwa dla dzieci i młodzieży w Polsce w latach 2000–2015. Produkcja wydawnicza. Bibliografia* (Warszawa, Wydawnictwo SBP, 2018), 30–40. What is translated and when, is important, but also (perhaps above all) what has not (yet) been translated. The translations make literature transnational, international, but not universal – the differences in experience and the multiplicity of perspectives seem particularly important cognitively in the context of the Holocaust and its representation.

come into play.”¹⁶ It is worth noting, however, that the translations primarily include items for a younger audience (young readers), rather than for a group that could be described as adolescents or teenagers (young adults, 12–18 years). The children’s (picture) books in question include, among others, Antón Fortes’s *Smoke*, translated from Spanish,¹⁷ from the English language: *My Dog Lala* by Roman Kent¹⁸ and *Otto. Biography of a Teddy Bear* by Tomi Ungerer,¹⁹ from the Italian language: *Bruno. The Boy Who Learned to Fly* by Nadia Terranova,²⁰ as well as several publications by Batsheva Dagan translated from Hebrew, such as: *What Happened in the Shoah? A Story in Rhyme for Children Who Wish to Know*,²¹ *Czika, the Dog in the Ghetto*²² and *If the Stars Could Only Speak*.²³ These books are not available in public libraries, as they are in the possession of one selected title. Instead, these are publications which can mostly be purchased online. Although the reception of

16 Jerzy Świąch, “Burze wokół kanonu/kanonów,” in *Kanon i obrzeża*, ed. Inga Iwasów and Tatiana Czerska (Kraków: Universitas, 2005), 16.

17 Anton Fortes, *Dym*, trans. Beata Haniec, il. Joanna Concejo (Toruń: Tako, 2011). No pagination. Further quotations from *Smoke* are marked D. in the main text, without page numbers. English version: *Smoke*, il. Joanna Concejo (Ponteverda: OQO Editora, 2009).

18 Roman Kent, *My Dog Lala. The Touching True Story of A Young Boy and His Dog During the Holocaust*, il. T. McWilliams (Auburn Hills: Teacher’s Discovery, 2006). Polish version: *Mój pies Lala*, trans. Katarzyna Łaziuk, il. pupils of the Municipal Art School in Minsk Mazowiecki (Warszawa: Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich POLIN, 2015).

19 Tomi Ungerer, *Otto: The Autobiography of a Teddy Bear*, il. Tomi Ungerer (New York: Phaidon, 2010). Polish version: *Otto. Autobiografia pluszowego misia*, trans. Michał Rusinek, il. Tomi Ungerer (Łagiewniki: Format, 2011).

20 Nadia Terranova, *Bruno. Il bambino che imparò a volare*, il. Ofra Amit (Roma: Orecchio Acerbo, 2012). Polish version: *Bruno. Chłopiec, który nauczył się latać*, trans. Joanna Wais, il. Ofra Amit (Wrocław: Format, 2016).

21 Batszewa Dagan, *Co wydarzyło się w czasie Zagłady. Opowieść rymowana dla dzieci, które chcą wiedzieć*, trans. Szoszana Raczyńska, il. Ola Cieślak (Białystok: Opera i Filharmonia Podlaska – Europejskie Centrum Sztuki, 2012). English version: *What Happened in the Shoah? A Story in Rhyme for Children Who Wish to Know*, il. Shraga Heller (Cleveland: Kay Teen, 1992).

22 Batszewa Dagan, *Czika, piesek w getcie*, trans. Szoszana Raczyńska, il. Avi Katz (Oświęcim: Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau, 2012). In the second edition of 2018, the book was illustrated by Aleksandra Cieślak. English version: *Chika, the Dog in the Ghetto*, il. A. Katz (Cleveland: Kay Tee, 1993).

23 Batszewa Dagan, *Gdyby gwiazdy mogły mówić*, trans. by the author, il. Avi Katz (Oświęcim: Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau, 2012). English version: *If the Stars Could Only Speak*, il. A. Katz (Notts: Holocaust Centre, 2006).

these works has been miscellaneous – ranging from being fully accepted, receiving favorable voices, to criticism, sometimes harsh opinions, each represents in its specificity an added value and deserves receptive attention.²⁴ Apart from the publications by Dagan and Kent, there are no publications written by Survivors in the Polish children's collection about Holocaust. Ungerer tells the story of the war and the Holocaust, giving voice to a plush toy, which is also a kind of novelty. Fortes' plot is set in the camp, culminating in a scene in the gas chamber. The translation of the book by Nadia Terranova introduces the fate of Bruno Schulz to a Polish young audience. This is one of the few works within a collection of children's books about the Holocaust published in Poland (apart from the very numerous Polish publications devoted to Janusz Korczak²⁵) whose plot is based on the biography of a well-known and recognizable Jewish victim of the Holocaust. *My Dog Lala* and *Czika, the Dog in the Ghetto* are the books whose title characters are the dogs, it is from the perspective of their fate that the Holocaust is related. In the area of the Polish corpus of children's books about the Holocaust, they can be compared with the Ryszard Marek Groński's *Szlemiel*²⁶ – a book for older audiences (over 12 years old), in which first-person narrative is conducted from the perspective of a dog. Translated works seem particularly valuable because they written from a different perspective than the Polish one – one that dominates, appropriates and nationalizes the war experience, even when it comes to the Holocaust and its Jewish victims. Children's books about the Holocaust translated into Polish from other languages,

24 Often only the titles of translated books are mentioned contextually. In addition to the studies cited below, more extensive analysis can be found in the following articles: Hanna Dymel-Trzebiatowska, "Krótka lekcja latania. Werbalno-graficzna biografia Brunona Schulza," *Schulz/Forum* 8 (2016): 171–175; Ilona Klimek, "Nie potrzeba skrzydeł," *Znak* 12 (2016): 105–197; Angela Bajorek, "Zabawka jako historyczny artefakt w niemieckiej literaturze i kulturze dziecięcej," *Filoteknos* 9 (2019): 300–308; Katarzyna Slany, "Zabawka jako medium pamięci o Holokauście na przykładzie picturebooka *Otto. Autobiografia pluszowego misia* Tomiego Ungerera," *Ruch Literacki* 4 (2018): 441–456.

25 Beata Ostrowicka, *Jest taka historia. Opowieść o Januszu Korczaku*, il. Jola Richter-Magnuszewska (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Literatura, 2020); Iwona Chmielewska, *Pamiętnik Blumki*, il. Iwona Chmielewska (Poznań: Media Rodzina, 2011); Anna Czerwińska-Rydel, *Po drugiej stronie okna. Opowieść o Januszu Korczaku*, il. Dorota Łoskot-Cichocka, Tomek Głowacki (Warszawa: Muchomor, 2012); Adam Jaromir, *Ostatnie przedstawienie panny Esterki. Opowieść z warszawskiego getta*, il. Gabriela Cichocka (Poznań: Media Rodzina, 2014); Adam Michejda, *Skarb getta*, il. Tomasz Woody Borawski (Warszawa: Oficyna 4eM, 2019); Michał Rusinek, *Powieki: bajka dedykowana pamięci Janusza Korczaka*, il. Ola Cieślak (Białystok: Opera i Filharmonia Podlaska – Europejskie Centrum Sztuki, 2012).

26 Ryszard Marek Groński, *Szlemiel*, il. Krzysztof Figielski (Warszawa: Nowy Świat, 2010).

however, are scarce; a number of interesting foreign-language works are awaiting to be translated.²⁷

I would like to take a closer look at just three of the books translated into Polish and their Polish reception. This is also a good opportunity to discuss problems related to expressivity, appropriateness and form, taboo areas, or genological classifications, pointed out by (older) audiences of Polish Holocaust literature for children.

Antón Fortes's *Smoke* – Can Children Read about the Camp and Death in the Gas Chambers?

Smoke is certainly a unique, distinctive publication on the Polish children's and adolescent's publishing market. It's a picture book – it has illustrations, a format and form that might indicate that we are dealing with a book for non-adult readers. This is what the publisher intended for the book's target audience, which is between eight and ten years of age,²⁸ as indicated in the description of the Spanish-language edition.²⁹ Also, the Internationale Jugendbibliothek in München – which has recognized *Smoke* as a White Raven and therefore one of the most important and remarkable books of international children's and young adult literature – indicates that it is an item for slightly younger readers – above the age of nine.³⁰ Interestingly, in the context of the

27 Among the items that emerged as readings in the seminars of the project *21st-Century Literature and the Holocaust. A Comparative and Multilingual Perspective* noteworthy include books for both children and young adults: Reinhard Kleist, *The Boxer. The True Story of Holocaust Survivor Harry Haft* (London: SelfMadeHero, 2014) [German original published as *Der Boxer* (Hamburg: Carlsen, 2011)]; Iris Argaman, *Bear and Fred. A World War II Story*, il. Avi Ofer (New York: Amazon Crossing Kids 2020) [Hebrew original published as *HaDoobi Shel Fred* (Bnei Brak: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2016)]; Tamar Meir, *Francesco Tirelli's Ice Cream Store*, il. Yael Albert (Minneapolis: Kar-Ben Publishing, 2020) [Hebrew original published as *טירלי סקו'י פרנצ של הגלידה חנות*, (Jerusalem: Keter 2017)]; Eve Bunting, *One Candle*, il. K. Wendy Popp (New York: Joanna Cotler Books, 2004); Ruth Vander Zee, *Erika's Story*, il. Roberto Innocenti (Mankato: Creative Editions, 2003); Jennifer Elvgren, *The Whispering Town*, il. Fabio Santomauro (Minneapolis: Kar-Ben Publishing, 2014); Benny Lindelauf, *Fing's War* (New York: Enchanted Lion, 2019) [Dutch original published as *De hemel van Heivijis*, Amsterdam: Querido, 2010].

28 This can be found in the National Library catalogue, accessed February 28, 2023, www.bn.org.

29 Anton Fortes, *Humo* (Pontevedra: OQO Editora, 2008). The book was published in Galician (Galego) and Spanish and translated into many languages: Italian, Portuguese, English, French and Polish.

30 See *The White Ravens 2009. A Selection of International Children's and Youth Literature* (München, 2009), 45.

discussion that this publication has provoked, on the website of the Tako Publishing House, which has launched the book on the Polish market, one can find information that the publication is intended for children above the age of twelve.³¹ I refer to these issues quite extensively because some Polish reviewers³² of the book pointed out that *Smoke* does not have a clearly defined audience. They had in mind as much the figure of the implicit reader³³ of this particular work, but also wondered about the age range of the potential child reader in a situation of perceived lack of verbal and visual reticence.³⁴ In addition to very firm statements that this publication should not get into the hands of children at all,³⁵ there have been voices pointing to reflection on this issue. Jędrzej Wijas wrote:

31 Accessed: February 21, 2023, <https://tako.biz.pl/p,92,dym.html>.

32 Wójcik-Dudek, *Reading (in) the Holocaust*, 203–204; Jędrzej Wijas, "Mała opowieść o wielkiej historii. Refleksje na marginesie książki *Dym*," in *Dziecko i baśnie świata w kontekście wczesnej edukacji*, ed. Urszula Chęcińska (Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego, 2016), 252; E. S., review. "Dym. Anton Fortes," [*Smoke*. Anton Fortes.] *Ryms* 15 (2011): 33.

33 "[...] I am assuming that the implied reader is reading the novel or picture book in question for the first time, has certain limited background knowledge the author can draw upon, and is willing to try to adopt the position directed by the work, that is, a non-resistant reader." Lydia Kokkola, *Representing the Holocaust in Children's Literature* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003): 28–29.

34 "Framed silences are quite unlike the active decision to withhold information. They provide a means of writing about the Holocaust which does not obscure or mislead young minds, yet at the same time protecting children from understanding more than they can cope with knowing. As adults, we are understandably reticent when it comes to telling the full history of the Holocaust. Reticence, the avoidance of expressing all one knows or feels, is a form of silence. [...] Withholding information from children can be considered an even more complex matter than withholding it from adults. Filling in missing information in reticent texts is left to the responsibility of the reader, but young children are likely to lack the requisite historical knowledge. Thus children's literature that is reticent is, in a way, doubly reticent – and perhaps even dishonest. On the other hand, such indirection may also be an adult strategy to protect young minds that are not yet prepared for history's grimmest truths, while simultaneously preparing them for it. In brief, the decision to withhold information walks the thin line between the desire to protect the child reader and confusing them." (*Ibid.*, 26–27).

35 "By contrast, in the artistically beautiful book *Smoke* by Antón Fortes, we find no consolation. Let no one be misled by the childish language of the several-year-old narrator. This is not a book for children." See Agnieszka Makowiecka-Pastusiak, "Holokaust i współczesne dzieci," *Cwiszn (pomiedzy) – żydowski kwartalnik o literaturze i sztuce* 1–2 (2013), accessed February 24, 2023, <http://psychoanaliza.org.pl/kultura/>.

I indicated earlier that I cannot answer the question about the minimum age threshold for the reader of this book... However, I am convinced that it is a valuable publication to read also (or perhaps especially) for a young audience.³⁶

Magdalena Sikorska, however, pointed out:

If we decide to read this book together with middle school [12–14 years old – author’s note] or high school [about 14–18 years old – S. K.] youth, we have to take into account the enormous emotional charge of the message, the power of despair and helplessness of the viewer increasing with each page, because there is nothing left to do in this story.³⁷

Where does the controversy come from³⁸ as well as the doubts of literary researchers (and librarians³⁹)? There are at least several reasons for this – some, which I would describe as internal, that is, those that have their origin in the book itself and stem from its content, others are due to external conditions: the specificity of literary works addressed to children, also or perhaps especially in the context of the Holocaust issues – the demands placed on it, the restrictions imposed, which are reflected in the content of the book collection of interest here, but also in the symptomatic discussion about whether children’s books about the Holocaust may not have a happy ending.⁴⁰

36 Wijas, *Mała opowieść o wielkiej historii*, 260.

37 Magdalena Sikorska, “Czy literatura piękna może pomóc w edukacji dotyczącej Auschwitz i Holokaustu?,” in *Auschwitz i Holokaust. Edukacja w szkole i w miejscu pamięci*, ed. Piotr Trojański (Oświęcim: Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau, 2014), 159.

38 About *Smoke* as “perpetually arousing controversy” has been written many times by Krzysztof Rybak, already quoted here. See Rybak, “Traumatyzować czy tabuizować? Narracje holokaustowe w literaturze dziecięcej,” in *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska IV* (2021), 251–264; 258; also: Rybak, *Zagłada i ideologia w polskiej literaturze dziecięcej XXI wieku*, 155–173.

39 I will refer to the theses of literary scholars later in the sketch. I believe, however, that doubts may also apply to a wider range of librarians, as I experienced individually when I borrowed *Smoke* in one library. It turned out that the publication – “that sad book” – had been positioned on the shelf in such a way that young readers would not notice it. Purchased as an item for children, it was judged inappropriate and hidden.

40 See on this subject the article by Krzysztof Rybak, “I (nie) żyli długo i szczęśliwie. Konstrukcje zakończeń w polskiej literaturze dziecięcej o Zagładzie,” *Literatura Ludowa* 1 (2019): 10–23.

It has already been pointed out that in Polish⁴¹ literature for children,⁴² it is difficult to find a work where plot would cover the second phase (after March 16, 1942) of the Holocaust. A similar situation exists in contemporary Hebrew literature. Dutch literature is different in this regard, where, in addition to the hiding places that were the main surroundings of the Holocaust, one can also find children's books set in the camps, including the Westerbork transit camp. English-language publications are also worth citing in this context, including *Luba*, *The Angel of Bergen Belsen* by Michelle R. McCann⁴³ (for six–nine-year-olds), *The Magician of Auschwitz* by Kathy Kacer⁴⁴ (for seven–ten-year-olds), or *The Harmonica* by Tony Johnston⁴⁵ (for seven–ten-year-olds). It is

41 Krzysztof Rybak wrote about this in the articles cited here: "I (nie) żyli długo i szczęśliwie," 10–23; "Zagłada (nie) dla dzieci. Nadużycia w polskiej literaturze dziecięcej XXI wieku," *Zagłada. Studia i Materiały* 17 (2021): 376–398; 387; "Traumatyzować czy tabuizować? Narracje holokaustowe w literaturze dziecięcej," in *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska* IV (2021), 251–264.

42 Also in publications for young adults, apart from just two examples: *Ta potworna wojna* by Grażyna Bąkiewicz and *Rutka* by Zbigniew Białas. Both approaches have met with public approval as well as critical readings. In the context of the former, Krzysztof Rybak wrote that "the Holocaust in Bąkiewicz's book is in fact neither named nor described. The scenes it contains, showing hostility towards Jews and their exclusion from society, are an anticipation of ghettoisation and extermination. The presentation of further stages seems problematic, as there is a significant shift in the characterisation of the victims – they are 'the people,' with no indication of specific national or ethnic groups." See Krzysztof Rybak, "Zagłada (nie) dla dzieci. Nadużycia w polskiej literaturze dziecięcej XXI wieku," *Zagłada. Studia i Materiały* 17 (2021): 376–398; 387. However, Marta Tomczok wrote about *Rutka*: "A falsely conceived empathy that violates the ethical boundaries associated with the depiction of the Holocaust leads the author to a final scene that, in my view, ends in disaster (and not in a historical or existential sense, but in a total sense). Białas creates a para-religious discourse in which he revisits repeatedly contested attempts to understand the Holocaust according to its Greek etymology (the chapter on Auschwitz is entitled "Fire cleanses better than water"). Taken to the crematorium in a wheelbarrow, the typhoid-sick protagonist meets an SS dog just before her death, escorting her to the gate with sympathetic eyes. The novel ends with her closure and the disappearance of Rutka." See Marta Tomczok, "Polecieć tam, gdzie nie ma getta, szopu..." *Diennik Rutki* Laskier między nekroestetyką a nekropolityką," *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 14 (2008), 421–439; 432–433.

43 Michelle R. McCann, *Luba, The Angel of Bergen Belsen*, il. Ann Marshall (Berkeley: Tricycle Press, 2003).

44 Kathy Kacer, *The Magician of Auschwitz*, il. Gillian Newland (Toronto: Second Story Press, 2014).

45 Tony Johnston, *The Harmonica*, il. Ron Mazellan (Watertown: Charlesbridge, 2004).

worth adding, in the context of further analysis, that these publications have “a happy-endings.”

Polish literature is dominated by narratives dealing with the first phase, that of concentration – the ghetto. Authors do not go further, do not extend the perspective to the extermination phase, and this is regardless of the defined ages of the potential readers. The omission of the camp as a space of the Holocaust has significant consequences. Firstly, this stage is not presented as if the tragedy took place exclusively in the ghettos, which leads to an obscured picture of the entire Jewish experience. Young readers do not receive information about what was the most common fate of the inhabitants of the ghettoized districts, what happened to the people whose fate is covered in the plots of the Łódz or Warsaw ghetto books they are familiar with. Secondly, the omission also means in the context of the decisions made by authors who tell children about the first phase of the Holocaust, and explains why they choose the ghetto as the space for their works. For it is clear that a story set in the ghetto can have a happy ending, with being rescued – one can leave the ghetto, escape, find shelter on the so-called Aryan side. Another aspect is that such a scheme, reproduced in many works, may suggest that was the wartime standard.⁴⁶ In the reality of the camp, it is more difficult to find such “salvific” plot settlements, especially in accordance with the historical truth in the case of the fate of Jewish children. The omission we face in the Polish Holocaust publications of interest here is due, among other things, to this very aporia – irrevocable impasse, insurmountable difficulty in reasoning. The absence and the omission of the camp as a space where the Holocaust takes place, further reveals the weakness and impotence of this literature. It could be said that the camp and the gas chamber, constitute the taboo of Polish children’s literature on the Holocaust.

Smoke seems particularly interesting in the context of the considerations made here, as none of the mitigating procedures we are familiar with from other children’s books (also about Holocaust) are used in this publication: there are basically no color illustrations, no wonderful, fantastic twists and turns and no atmosphere-relieving or distracting dialogues, no references to saving cultural patterns. The protagonist is in a state of permanent danger, which finds its climax in the final stages of the story. The friendship born in the camp between him and Vadi, a Romani child, does not save him, however, neither does it lead to a happy ending, but we see the end scene

46 See in this context: Justyna Kowalska-Leder, “Okupacyjne dzienniki i pamiętniki w konfrontacji z dyskursem o polskich Sprawiedliwych,” in *Zapisywanie wojny. Dzienniki z lat 1939-1945*, ed. Maciej Libich and Piotr Sadzik (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2022), 99–116.

in the gas chamber. In *Smoke*, the illustrations are kept in shades of grey, black, sepia. Color appears only occasionally and is used as a form of contrast to emphasize the beauty of nature (bushes, sunflowers). The camp is portrayed as a bleak place.⁴⁷ Another issue is that we are dealing with an attempt to illustratively reflect what is seen and sensually experienced by the child in the camp – the sender of the message. This complements Fortes' narrative – the overall vision is very consistent and the impact of text and image is immense. The story is told from the perspective of a child whose perception is juxtaposed with the realities of the camp. This brings to mind *Fatelessness* – as an anti-Bildungsroman⁴⁸ by Imre Kertész. This type of cognition is in the form of a protagonist-narrator and is precisely the camp's anti-education: "It is not good to have to stand for so many hours / in the cold and snow at assembly" (D.), "I never cry, / because when one boy cried at night, / they took him away" (D.), "They beat Vadi because he was too weak / and he dropped the bucket" (D.), "When the guards come with guns / and bad dogs, I always put my hands up" (D.). This dimension of Fortes' story has received attention. Magdalena Sikorska wrote that "*Smoke* does not teach about life, because there is hardly any life left in it."⁴⁹ The anti-educational dimension of the camp is also the truth about the Holocaust.

In *Smoke*, the camp is portrayed as a hostile, alien, frightening place which it is impossible to escape from. Reality has been compressed, confined within the camp, which is the only available space of existence for the main character and his parents. Here, life can only continue under certain rules, certain inhuman conditions prevail, which are depicted in the book: written and drawn out. Fortes and Concejo's book reveal the reality of the concentration camp: being cramped, the drama of the everyday assembly, starvation, beatings, selections, smoking crematoria, and finally death. However, there are more signals that we are dealing with a German extermination camp, as researchers have pointed out. The title itself refers to a symbolism that is recognizable and familiar, not only to literary scholars. One wrote: "The text [...] is rough, lacking literary panache, as if 'naked!'"⁵⁰ At the same time, it has been argued

47 Magdalena Sikorska and Katarzyna Smyczynska write more about the illustrations in the book. See "Visual Narrative of Death and Memory. The Holocaust in Two Contemporary European Picture Books," in *Global Perspectives on Death in Children's Literature*, ed. Lesley D. Clement and Leyli Jamali (New York: Routledge, 2016), 177–190.

48 Arkadiusz Morawiec, "Dwie lekcje: Kertész i Borowski," *Polonistyka* 4 (2011): 35–42.

49 Sikorska, *Czy literatura piękna może pomóc w edukacji dotyczącej Auschwitz i Holocaustu?*, 159.

50 *Ibid.*

critically, referring to the book as a whole (visual and verbal communication), that we are dealing with “an attempt at a visual and linguistic metaphorization of the Holocaust, which consequently leads to the creation of a plot devoid of context, incoherent; although suspended in an unspecified time and in a symbolic space, it nevertheless ends in a gas chamber,”⁵¹ but also approvingly that “the poetic power of the story is enshrined in the metaphor, but also in the decontextualization of events. They take place outside history, outside a geographically defined space, outside a specified time.”⁵² These recognitions led to important conclusions. From a position of negation:

Such decontextualization risks, on the one hand, the universalization of the theme of the Holocaust and, on the other, an excessive identification with the protagonist, who becomes simply a representation of Everyone. The latter phenomenon would even be desirable, were it not for the obvious fact that the young reader is in no way guided out of the trauma that the reading leads him or her into.⁵³

From a position of acceptance:

We come with our historical knowledge and encounter a nightmare of human cruelty, encapsulated in a story where we easily identify with the characters... Nothing separates us from the characters who pass into the shadows. Therefore, it is not an easy encounter.⁵⁴

While one can discuss the function, legitimacy and consequences of metaphorization (on a visual and verbal level, since the text itself is definitely not metaphorical), it is difficult to agree at the point of departure with the thesis of the universalization of the topic of the Holocaust – precisely in *Smoke*. The protagonist is certainly Everyone, but his story reveals “the fate of the vast majority of child victims of the Holocaust who were exterminated in the gas chambers”⁵⁵. In this sense alone, it is universal.⁵⁶

51 Wójcik-Dudek, *Reading (in) the Holocaust*, 254–255.

52 Wijas, *Mała opowieść o wielkiej historii*, 254.

53 Wójcik-Dudek, *Reading (in) the Holocaust*, 255.

54 Wijas, *Mała opowieść o wielkiej historii*, 254.

55 Rybak, “I (nie) żyli długo i szczęśliwie,” 14.

56 Magdalena Sikorska and Katarzyna Smyczyńska, “Visual Narrative of Death and Memory,” 178.

Thus, a certain (ir)resoluble impasse arises when one wants to tell children about the Holocaust as it was. It seems necessary to broaden the perspective and see that there is another insurmountable difficulty here, which was pointed out in the context of another cultural text by Maria Janion, who was quoted, by the way, many times just in discussions of Fortes' book: "The salvific narrative attempts to make the events of the Holocaust coherent, to arrange them in such sequences as to derive from them a conclusion that saves the sense of history and universal human morality." The author of the introductory sketch to the volume *Porzucić etyczną arogancję* [Giving up the ethical arrogance] added, quoting Claude Lanzmann: "The question of salvation did not arise at Treblinka or Auschwitz."⁵⁷ *Smoke* is certainly a book about the Holocaust, not a tailor-made consolation project – there is no colorful final scene in which life prevails. If we accept that death (in the gas chambers) cannot be shown in children's books, then it is impossible to present the Holocaust as it was. As Marta Tomczok wrote in the context of *Smoke*:

Well, yes, one would like to say, but this is, after all, a story about the Holocaust of thousands of children in the death camps. How else, if not precisely in this way, would its ending look like?⁵⁸

***My Dog Lala – The Story of the Dog is the Story of the Holocaust*⁵⁹**

While *Smoke* received many reviews, Roman Kent's *My Dog Lala* received little attention from Polish researchers. I have only found one discussion about this short story.⁶⁰ In view of this receptive lack, I will try to briefly present it, also in

57 Maria Janion, "Porzucić etyczną arogancję," in *Porzucić etyczną arogancję. Ku reinterpretacji podstawowych pojęć humanistyki w świetle wydarzenia Szoa*, ed. Beata Anna Polak and Tomasz Polak (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Wydziału Nauk Społecznych UAM, 2011), 20; 21.

58 Marta Tomczok, *Anna Mach, Świadkowie świadectw. Postpamięć Zagłady w polskiej literaturze najnowszej* (Warszawa–Toruń: Fundacja na Rzecz Nauki Polskiej, 2016); Małgorzata Wójcik-Dudek, *W(y)czytać Zagładę. Praktyki postpamięci w polskiej literaturze XXI wieku dla dzieci i młodzieży* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2016); *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 13 (2017): 795–801; 800.

59 I am paraphrasing here the title of one of the chapters of Roman Kent's biography *Jedynym wyjściem była odwaga*, trans. Dariusz Dekiert (Łódź: Centrum Dialogu im. Marka Edelmana, 2020), which I will write about later in the discussion. English-language version: *Courage Was My Only Option. The Autobiography of Roman Kent* (New York: Vantage Press, 2008).

60 Anna Sałatarow, "(Nie)szczęśliwe zakończenia we współczesnej literaturze dziecięcej podejmującej temat Zagłady," *Paidia i Literatura* 4 (2022): 1–10.

the context of the author's silhouette, and then relate these findings to existing literary studies on the function of animal heroes in children's literature (with regard to the Holocaust). Researchers have primarily looked at two, very different works that share a canine protagonist: *Schlemiel* by Ryszard Marek Gronski, written in Poland and well received when it comes to reviews, and rather criticized by researchers, *Czika, the Dog in the Ghetto*. Kent's *My dog Lala* is a kind of transitional link, an intermediate form between the first-person narrative led by the first-person character – the English bulldog from Gronski's book – and the strongly didactically oriented perspective of the third-person narrator present in Dagan's text. These publications are also linked by the high status of the animal protagonists, important for their human guardians.⁶¹

Roman Kent (surname is Kniker), whose short story about the dog Lala I want to analyze, died on May 21, 2021 in New York. He was a Survivor of the Holocaust. He was born on April 18, 1925 in Łódź,⁶² in Poland, then departed to the United States in 1946. Kent's biography is thus divided into parts, the war and the experience of the Holocaust becoming the fundamental caesura. It can be said that with its outbreak, and then – as a consequence of the successive tragic events of 1939–1945 – the *Lala* author's childhood ends. Marian Turski in the *Foreword* to Kent's autobiographical book *Jedynym wyjściem była odwaga*, writes: "Here you have, Readers, four chapters of his life: childhood, ghetto and camps, new American life and business career, social and philanthropic activities."⁶³

The first stage covers growing up in the home of the owner of a Łódź textile factory, Emanuel Kniker, and Sonia (maiden name Lifszyc), surrounded by her siblings: two elder sisters, Reni and Dasha, and a younger brother, Leon. As Kent himself writes, "It was a wonderful, carefree life,"⁶⁴ filled with love and fun, providing a solid moral foundation: "These values became a part of my life, and were guidelines that helped me survive during the Holocaust and shape my future."⁶⁵

61 The dog begins to become an important, valuable animal at the beginning of the twentieth century. It is then incorporated into the "modern family." See Patrycja Pokora, "Człowiek mówiący psim głosem. Psie życie Józefa Wilkonia w świetle studiów nad zwierzętami," in *Czytanie menażerii. Zwierzęta w literaturze dziecięcej, młodzieżowej i fantastycznej*, ed. Anna Mik, Patrycja Pokora and Maciej Skowera (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo SBP, 2016), 192–193.

62 Such a date appears in the *About the Author* note included in the book *My Dog Lala* (5). Roman Kent's erroneous year of birth (1929) appears on many websites.

63 See Marian Turski, *Foreword*, in Kent, *Jedynym wyjściem była odwaga*, 7.

64 Kent, *Courage Was My Only Option*, 13.

65 *Ibid.*, 21.

The second phase of Roman Kent's life begins when the Germans entered Łódź, on September 9, 1939. His family soon lost their flat and all their possessions, Emanuel Kniker's factory was confiscated, the synagogues in Łódź were burnt down. The move to the ghetto took place in March 1940. Shortly afterwards, Lala was handed over to the Germans. On November 13, 1942, Emanuel Kniker died of starvation. The surviving family was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1944, when the Łódź ghetto was being closed down. Sonia Kniker died in one of the concentration camps.⁶⁶ Roman Kent and his brother Leon were sent to Gross-Rosen concentration camp and Flossenbürg concentration camp, where they lived to see liberation. A few months after the war, as a consequence of extreme exhaustion and tuberculosis, Dasha died in Sweden. The brothers soon decided to move to the United States, where they lived their post-war lives. The children's book that interests me here was published in Auburn Hills, Michigan, in 2006 by Teacher's Discovery.⁶⁷ It also became the basis for a short animated film produced by the University of Southern California Shoah Foundation.⁶⁸ Translated into Polish in 2015, it was published by the POLIN Publishing House of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews. The illustrative material consisted of drawings by students of the Municipal Art School in Mińsk Mazowiecki.

The eponymous Lala joined the Kniker family in the early 1930s. However, Kent tells the dog's story in the biography, including a dedicated chapter *Lala's Story is a Story of a Miracle*⁶⁹ already during the war period, because it was then that all the inhabitants of the ghetto were forced to surrender their dogs to the Germans.⁷⁰ This extremely painful loss anticipated another – the death of his father: “The loss of Dad left an indelible mark on our entire family. It made the brutality and death in the ghetto a personal matter; until then, I had only lost Lala,”⁷¹ both – will be characterised by an extremely strong injury potential: “Interestingly – and I have no logical explanation for this – the same thing

66 Ibid., chapter: *Reunion at Last*, 126–134.

67 Roman Kent, *My Dog Lala. The Touching True Story of A Young Boy and His Dog During the Holocaust*, il. T. McWilliams (Auburn Hills: Teacher's Discovery, 2006).

68 *Lala*, accessed March 17, 2023, https://iwitness.usc.edu/sites/360/lala?clip=859&entry=o_734cpui1.

69 Kent, *Jedynym wyjściem była odwaga*, 48–55. In the English-language version of the book, the chapter title reads differently: *My Dog Lala, a Child's Best Friend*, 37–44.

70 Karolina Wróbel-Bardzik writes engagingly about the situation of dogs in the ghetto, “Odwrócone zoopolis. Zwierzęta towarzyszące w getcie warszawskim,” *Przegląd Kulturoznawczy* 4 (2019): 450–465.

71 Kent, *Jedynym wyjściem była odwaga*, 71.

happened to me at the time as that day when we had to hand Lala over to the Germans. I have repeatedly tried to recall the details of that turning point in my life, but my brain refuses to dig up those memories.”⁷² The importance of the dog in the boy’s life is also highlighted in the children’s book. Indeed, Kent writes:

I must admit that Lala was more important to me than my brother or my sisters. She deserved such a privileged position with her patience, understanding and affection. I could cuddle with her while she listened to my complaints about my siblings, parents or classmates. She comforted me. ... Was anyone in my family able to do that much for me?⁷³

In fact, the entire pre-war part of the story is filled with the memory of the extremely close relationship between the children and the dog. The parents’ attempt to return the animal to its previous owner fails, as it is met with determined resistance from the youngest members of the family⁷⁴. This brief separation foreshadowed the next, which proved inevitable and irreversible: “The loss of the house and the move to the ghetto were material losses. The loss of Lala was felt as the departure of a family member. My love... Lala was the first to teach me the true meaning and understanding of the word.”⁷⁵

Kent’s narrative is an example of a *pet memoir*, “a specific genre in contemporary American memoirs,” where the “emotional bond with the family pet” is highlighted, and the story of the pet’s life becomes “a so-called family autobiography (*relational life writing*), as the pet plays the role of a full-fledged family member, becoming a ‘significant other’ for its carer.”⁷⁶

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Kent, *My Dog Lala*, 15.

⁷⁴ As Ewelina Rąbkowska points out, it is only at the turn of the twentieth century that the child begins to be seen as a causal subject. Before then, interestingly in the context of the analyses conducted here, it was considered “more ‘animal’ than the adult.” In Poland, this analogy was challenged by Janusz Korczak, who wrote that the child “is a human being, not a pinscher on a satin cushion” and thus questioned another recognition: “My child, my property, my slave, my peace dog” (Janusz Korczak, “Jak kochać dziecko,” in *Pisma wybrane*, compiled Abraham Lewin, vol. 2 (Warszawa: Nasza Księgarnia, 1984), 138, 184. Quoted Ewelina Rąbkowska, “Śmieciowe zwierzęta (trash animals) i dzieci śmieci. Relacje dziecka i zwierzęcia w literaturze dla dzieci i młodzieży,” in *Czytanie menażerii. Zwierzęta w literaturze dziecięcej, młodzieżowej i fantastycznej*, 33.

⁷⁵ Kent, *My Dog Lala*, 48–49.

⁷⁶ Małgorzata Rutkowska, *Psy, koty, ludzie. Zwierzęta domowe w literaturze amerykańskiej* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2016), 19; 135–175.

Interestingly, in the context of *My Dog Lala* and the history of the Holocaust, such works also analyse “ways of experiencing mourning after the death of a beloved pet.”⁷⁷ In Kent’s book, the dog is narrated as a member of the (human) family, sharing a fate, co-sentient. Strongly emphasised by the first-person narrator here is the ‘we,’ signifying the community of human and animal. At the same time, there are individualising strategies.⁷⁸ Thus, Lala gains subjectivity, which in this case, however, does not manifest itself in giving her a voice, but in making her the central point of the story. In Kent’s narrative, Lala is undoubtedly the title character, but also the main, foreground one, presented as a being endowed with wisdom, intelligence, willing to make sacrifices, patient, devoted, capable of love. As if at the same time, in the face of this shared human-animal history, there is a History taking place, in which the Holocaust is set. What Kent wants to talk about is the great love that united humans and the animal. At the same time, however, he talks about his family’s wartime experience. The story of the dog becomes the filter through which the tragic history of the Jews of Łódź unfolds. Placing love in the foreground, Kent shows what hatred and death are in the background. It is fair to say that it is the ‘sensitive narrator’ who guides the children through the story, without omitting or euphemizing the realities of the move to the ghetto.

The accents were distributed differently in the book by Bathsheva Dagan. This item, unlike Roman Kent’s book, has received quite an extensive reception. The most extensive coverage of *Chika...* was written by Piotr Krupiński, who pointed to the clearly educational profile of the book, conceived as a proposal for early childhood education, which was to explain the content limitation – the omission of those elements of the extermination reality that “could prove too difficult for a young reader, also in the moral aspect.”⁷⁹ Such a broadcasting strategy also has its consequences with regard to the most crucial plot point of the books analyzed here – the forced separation from the beloved animal, which, according to the cited researcher, “constitutes a kind of plot ‘spark,’ a priority moment of internal tension for the further development of the plot.”⁸⁰ Dagan explains, contrary to historical truth, that “the Germans

77 Ibid., 19.

78 Anna Barcz, “Posthumanizm i jego zwierzęce odgłosy w literaturze,” *Teksty Drugie* 1–2 (2013): 60–79.

79 Piotr Krupiński, “Dlaczego gęsi krzyczały?” *Zwierzęta i Zagłada w literaturze polskiej XX i XXI wieku* (Warszawa: IBL PAN 2016), 286.

80 Ibid., 282–283.

did not want the Jews in the ghetto / to have dogs to guard their homes”⁸¹. As Krupiński points out, “the merciful narrator – also to the perpetrators – proposes an argument [...] that does not go beyond the threshold of the young reader’s perceptual capacities, while at the same time initiating him into the unambiguously sinister intentions of the aggressors.”⁸² Anita Jarzyna takes a different view of this procedure, writing that the prohibition on dogs in the ghetto “is justified very clumsily (and, worse, not in a way that indicates the deliberate imitation of the indirect speech of a few year old boy).”⁸³

Dagan’s publication is also criticised as a whole, as an item which is unsuitable when it comes to the needs of a contemporary audience. Despite the clear profiling of the message, aimed at the youngest children, it is not able to defend itself neither in terms of words nor illustrations. Researchers have claimed the text being biased,⁸⁴ too much of an infantile nature,⁸⁵ and when referring to Avi Katz’s drawings they are considered as archaic.⁸⁶ Aleksandra Sikora furthermore negatively assesses the way in which Dagan’s characters are constructed, how the narrative is conducted and the language of the stories. The characters are “paper,” making their fates “indifferent to the viewer.” Dagan does not try, according to Sikora, like other authors – especially if they are much older – to create a platform of understanding with a young audience. The introduction of third-person narration, and the perspective of speaking post – “speaking from the here and now” – also has a negative effect: “The monotonous flow of the narrative is rarely interrupted by dialogues, with expressions that differ little from the descriptive parts, while the general linguistic boredom is further emphasized by pathos, which makes the whole story seem even more distant to the child.”⁸⁷

Agnieszka Makowiecka-Pastusiak, on the other hand, points out that there is no death in *Chika...*, even though it is clear who the perpetrator of evil is. According to the quoted researcher, thus “the basic truth of the Holocaust

81 Dagan, *Czika, piesek w getcie*, 12.

82 Krupiński, “Dlaczego gęsi krzyczały?,” 287.

83 Anita Jarzyna, “Szlemiele. Zwierzęta wobec Zagłady w literaturze dla dzieci,” *Narracje Zagłady 2* (2016): 235–256; 241.

84 Jarzyna, *Szlemiele*, 241.

85 Sikora, *W jaki sposób mówimy dzieciom o wojnie?*, 33.

86 Krupiński, “Dlaczego gęsi krzyczały?,” 288.

87 Sikora, *W jaki sposób mówimy dzieciom o wojnie?*, 34–35.

remains unspoken.”⁸⁸ In the context of the ending of the Dagan story, Piotr Krupiński writes of a “miraculous *happy ending*,”⁸⁹ which facilitates identification with the characters, as does the fictional exploitation of the child-animal relationship⁹⁰. He further points out that if the truth about the causes and consequences of the prohibition on Jewish ownership of animals were conveyed in the Dagan’s book analyzed here, we would be dealing with an “(anti-) fairy tale... that should not necessarily be applied to children at bedtime.”⁹¹ I would like to pause for a moment at these identifications, as they point to further significant places of narrative encounter between the Holocaust and literature for younger audiences.

The presence of animal heroes, as Krupiński rightly points out, refers back to tradition – the fairy tale and fable convention. Alicja Baluch wrote that animals are those characters “which are the first to appear in a child’s literary experience.”⁹² The path of this reading encounter leads from the simplest representations involving “appearance and basic life functions,” through animal characters anthropomorphized and endowed with human traits and features, to stories in which “animals remain animals and this existential situation becomes the subject of the story.”⁹³ Jerzy Cieślowski has pointed out that “the animal in a children’s work appears equipped with attributes of its appearance and its ‘character,’” usually with a humanizing epithet, for example faithful as a dog.⁹⁴ Ryszard Waksmund wrote about the evolution of children’s animals – from traditional depictions in fairy tales and fables to the presence in poetry of “concrete representatives of the world of animals and birds, not only in the rights of decorative, static motifs...”⁹⁵

The pedigree of animal protagonists, including the canine characters, is therefore not in doubt. Unlike the role that animals play in these works, the

88 Makowiecka-Pastusiak, *Holokaust i współczesne dzieci*.

89 Krupinski, “Dlaczego gęsi krzyczały?,” 289.

90 In other contexts, Jarzyna has written about these recognitions in *Szlemiele. Zwierzęta wobec Zagłady w literaturze dla dzieci*, 239.

91 Krupinski, “Dlaczego gęsi krzyczały?,” 287.

92 Alicja Baluch, *Dziecko i świat przedstawiony, czyli tajemnice dziecięcej lektury* (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Nasza Księgarnia, 1987), 62.

93 Baluch, *Dziecko i świat przedstawiony, czyli tajemnice dziecięcej lektury*, 63.

94 Jerzy Cieślowski, *Literatura i podkultura dziecięca* [Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1975], 276.

95 Ryszard Waksmund, “Wstęp,” in *Poezja dla dzieci. Antologia form i tematów* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Waclaw Bagiński, 1999), 22.

possible transformations that are taking place in the ways which they are represented in literature (including the Holocaust literature) under the influence of “posthumanism and its animal noises,”⁹⁶ and attempts to name or (genologically) classify the stories analyzed here.

Krupiński wonders to what extent in this type of representation we are dealing with “the allegorical model of depicting animal creatures characteristic of anthropomorphizing fairy tales,” or whether we can discern, under the influence of posthumanism, a break with this type of depiction.⁹⁷ The purely instrumental treatment of animals, which are supposed to make it easier for children to identify with the protagonists (I would only add that identification itself and its ‘facilitation,’ based on the introduction of happy solutions, is also ethically debatable), as well as the reference to fairy-tale and fable conventions in works on the Holocaust, are also questionable to researchers.⁹⁸ This issue has been the subject of extensive literature abroad,⁹⁹ less frequently studied by the Polish researchers.¹⁰⁰ This aspect certainly deserves a separate discussion. At this point, I would only add that the term ‘Holocaust fairy tale’ is meant to refer to narratives that feature plot resolutions and motifs, images and themes familiar from fairy tales and fables, as well as to one that treats Holocaust stories for the youngest as “stories to be told.”

96 I refer to the title of the article by Anna Barcz cited earlier.

97 Krupiński, “Dlaczego gęsi krzyczały?,” 289.

98 *Ibid.*, 289; Jarzyna, *Szlemiele. Zwierzęta wobec Zagłady w literaturze dla dzieci*, 239.

99 See, for example, E. R. Baer, “A Postmodern Fairy Tale of the Holocaust: Jane Yolen’s *Briar Rose*,” *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 24 (2005): 145–152; Daniela Carpi, “Fables of the Holocaust: Hansel and Gretel,” in *Fables of the Law: Fairy Tales in a Legal Context*, ed. Daniela Carpi and Marett Leiboff (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2016), 309–330; Philippe Codde, “Transmitted Holocaust Trauma: A Matter of Myth and Fairy Tales?,” *European Judaism* 1 (2009): 62–75; Anna Hunter, “Tales from Over There: The Uses and Meanings of Fairy-Tales in Contemporary Holocaust Narrative,” *modernism / modernity* 20 (2013): 59–75; Margarete Landwehr, “The Fairy-Tale as Allegory for the Holocaust: Representing the Unrepresentable in Yolen’s *Briar Rose* and Murphy’s *Hansel and Gretel*,” in *Fairy Tales Reimagined: Essays on New Retellings*, ed. Susan Redington Bobby (London: McFarland & Co., 2009), 153–167; Olivia Marsh, “Following the Breadcrumbs: Young Adult Holocaust Novels and Their Intertextual Use of Fairy Tales,” *Cambridge Educational Research e-Journal* 7 (2020): 125–140; Maria Jesus Martínez-Alfaro, “The Broken Voice of History: Fairy Tales, Anti-Tales, and Holocaust Representation,” in *Contemporary Fairy-Tale Magic. Subverting Gender and Genre*, ed. Lydia Brugué and Auba Llompart (Brill: Rodopi, 2020), 201–210.

100 See Kinga Anna Gajda, “Bajka dla dzieci o wojnie i Holokauście,” *Rana. Literatura – Doświadczenie – Tożsamość* 2 (2021), lack of pagination, <https://journals.us.edu.pl/index.php/rana/issue/view/1321>, accessed March 24, 2023.

The fundamental difference between a “bedtime story” and a story that one nevertheless does not want to tell children is also pointed out by Roman Kent (as well as Krupiński, quoted earlier, writing about the [anti-]fairy tale), who says in the film *Lala*:

My children’s favorite bedtime story, even when they became grown-ups was the story of the dog we had when we lived in Poland. [...] This is the story my kids wanted me to repeat many times, but it has a moral. It told me something too: that love is stronger than hate. But there is another part of this story, which I did not want to tell my children about.¹⁰¹

The first part of the *Lala* narrative analyzed here is, according to this recognition, a children’s story, a story about the relationship between man and animal (like many others, including classic fairy tales and fables). However, the second one, which consists of the events concerning *Lala* that took place after the German announcement that the dogs had to be surrendered, its inevitability, the death of the dog and the suffering it caused – no longer. What constituted the essence of the Holocaust experience according to Kent is not suitable for telling children. In his book, however, he does not save his beloved dog, he does not suspend the story, but presents the story to its painful end.

Conclusion

The books analyzed here, both Fortes’ *Smoke* and Kent’s *My Dog Lala*, and their Polish reception, provide a critical look at Polish-language children’s literature about the Holocaust. They force to ask questions about the reality of the Holocaust experience as represented in Polish publications and the limits of this representation, to think about the function of silences and omissions and their consequences in the context of historical events and the truth about the Holocaust, as well as the validity of adapting existing formulas to describe Holocaust literature. *Smoke* and *My Dog Lala*, read in the context of a Polish collection of children’s books about the Holocaust, but also works that have been translated into Polish so far (such as Dagan’s *Chika...*), encourage reflection on specific issues: the reasons and consequences of the author’s decisions not to show death, omitting the space of the camp as a place of action, as well as the legitimacy and appropriateness of introducing both the fairy-tale and fable conventions, and of treating Holocaust stories for children as “stories to be told” and referring to them as

¹⁰¹ Words spoken in the film *Lala*.

'Holocaust fairy tales.' They reveal the many challenges facing Polish authors who want to tell children about the Holocaust – as it was.

Abstract

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The Holocaust Literature for Children in Translation into Polish

In the article the image of the Holocaust contained in Polish books for children is subjected to critical analysis in the perspective of works translated into Polish from other languages. Two works are particularly interesting in this context: *Smoke* of Anton Fortes, which is considered controversial in Polish and focuses discussions, and *My Dog Lala* by Roman Kent, which is basically absent from analyses and discussions. The polemical point of reference becomes *Chika, the Dog in the Ghetto* by Batszewa Dagan, which is rather criticized by researchers. The analysis of the Polish reception of the translated works makes it possible to point out the problems of domestic children's literature about the Holocaust, related to expressivity, appropriateness and form, taboo areas, or genological classifications. Polish authors spin a salvific narrative, but do not allow young audiences to confront with the experience of the Holocaust, its tragedy and uniqueness. Fortes and Kent, on the other hand, avoiding pusillanimous didacticism, tell the story of the war without removing from the narrative what is indicative of the specificity and paradigmatic nature of the Holocaust.

The article examines the reception of literary texts, which are analysed comparatively, using the tools of narratology, with references to other methodologies of Holocaust literature studies.

Keywords

Holocaust, children's literature, translations, reception, camp, ghetto