
 Joanna Szewczyk

Pandemiographies: Theories, Practices, Forecasts

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 DOI:10.18318/td.2025.en.1.3 | ORCID: 0000-0002-3486-9455

In a book published in 2020 after the first few months of lockdown, *Is It Tomorrow Yet? Paradoxes of the Pandemic*, Ivan Krastev noted that major epidemics change our world in a similar way to wars and revolutions, but do not leave comparable traces in our memory.¹ In making the mechanisms of memory in the face of epidemics the subject of reflection, Krastev cited Laura Spinney's publication *Pale Rider. The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How It Changed the World*. Spinney pointed out that the Spanish Flu pandemic, which surpassed both world wars in terms of losses resulting from a single event, is located on the periphery of collective memory and, particularly surprisingly, also seems to have been forgotten by historians, as evidenced by the relatively small number of works devoted to it. Following these findings, Krastev acknowledges that it is easier to count the victims of wars than the virus, but at the same time points out the difficulties

¹ Ivan Krastev, *Nadeszło jutro. Jak pandemia zmienia Europę* [Tomorrow has come. How the pandemic is changing Europe], trans. Michał Sutowski (Warszawa: Krytyka Polityczna, 2020), 12.

Joanna Szewczyk

– PhD, adjunct in the Department of Anthropology of Literature and Cultural Studies, member of the Center for the Study of Cultural Discourses of Illness, Faculty of Polish Studies, Jagiellonian University. Author of the book *Historiografia i mitologia kobiecości. Powieściopisarstwo Teodora Parnickiego* [Historiography and mythology of femininity in the novels of Teodor Parnicki] (Fundacja na Rzecz Nauki Polskiej, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, Warszawa-Toruń 2017). Email: joanna1.szewczyk@uj.edu.pl.

of narrativizing a pandemic and turning it into a good story. Recalling the findings of psychologists regarding as much the mechanisms of remembering as the elementary narrative competence, the subconscious knowledge of the essential shape of a story – with a beginning, a climax and an end,² the political scientist concludes that it is very difficult to write the story of the Spanish flu and any major epidemic into such a narrative structure.³ Krastev draws an ironic parallel between the pandemic and a Netflix series, in which the end of one season is only a temporary pause before the next. And further reaching for geological analogies, he argues that an epidemic is therefore to a war what modernist literature is to the classic novel: it lacks a clear plot.⁴

The indefinite trajectory of the pandemic, its peculiar “seriality” – its processuality, antifinality and non-conclusiveness, and at the same time the need to tame what is threatening and unknown – even in the first months of 2020 triggered an expansion of pandemiography – narratives written from within the pandemic experience. The category of pandemiography that I propose for the purpose of this text is open and inclusive. It includes essayistic, reflective projects that attempt to grasp the pandemic in both its experiential and symbolic dimensions, to take a questioning and critical stance towards it. It also encompasses possible scenarios relating to the (post)pandemic reality, narratives that are a kind of laboratory for creative writing in the period of isolation/quarantine, and finally – of particular interest to me – different varieties of non-fiction literature, auto/bio/ethnographic and reportage forms. Crossing the boundaries of genre, pandemiographies are both a search for a formula that makes it possible to descriptively describe a reality affected by an infectious disease and an attempt to produce a pandemic poetic. The subject of pandemiography is one affected directly or indirectly by the SARS-Cov-2 virus, incorporating the pandemic into the perimeter of one’s experience, projecting an individual narrative or seeking empowerment in a community story, making a gesture of defiance against pandemic reality in the act of writing/reading/acting.

Failing to fit into a clear narrative structure, the pandemic proved to be a generator of a variety of narratives – those drawn from within the pandemic experience and lacking distance, those looking for patterns in literature and culture that have long developed the theme of a humanity-affecting, spreading infectious disease, and those that are predictive, opening up a post-pandemic

2 Cf. Jonathan Culler, *Teoria literatury. Bardzo krótkie wprowadzenie* [Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction], trans. Maria Bassaj (Warszawa: Prószyński i S-ka, 2004), 98.

3 Krastev, *Nadeszło jutro*, 13.

4 *Ibid.*, 13.

perspective, prompting reflection on how the SARS-CoV-2 virus might reorient the future. As Slavoj Žižek noted in *Pandemic! 2: Chronicles of a Time Lost*, in the face of a pandemic threat, we desperately need new scenarios and new stories that can provide us with a kind of cognitive map, a realistic and non-catastrophic sense of where we should be heading.⁵

Reconstructing the cultural images of epidemics, Mateusz Szubert pointed out the previous tendency to speak of them in the past tense. The achievements of modern medicine have caused the word to cease to fit modern realities, functioning until December 2019 primarily as a historical lexeme, referring to plagues affecting humanity in the past. This trend was accompanied by the exploitation of the metaphorical capacity of an epidemic in journalistic discourse, related to its detachment from its native, medical context – for a long time, “epidemic” denoted primarily the spread of negative social phenomena.⁶

The pandemic not only intensified the process of building up the world with various narratives, but also unleashed a demand for stories endowed with myth-making potential. Janusz Barański, writing about the anthropology of the Smolensk plane crash, noted that with the beginning of the mourning rites there were immediate voices about the “mythologization” of this disaster in the colloquial sense of myth-making: lying, manipulation, falsification.⁷

The myth-making nature of the catastrophe is also revealed on the symbolic level – by suspending linear time and restoring the semi-carnival, festive time of the eternal now⁸ and the associated state of *communitas*. Considered in this perspective, the advent of the pandemic was linked to the experience of collective trauma, but also to the experience of mourning the previous life free from isolation and fear of infection. The pandemic set in motion liminal

5 Slavoj Žižek, *Pandemia! 2. Kroniki straconego czasu* [*Pandemic! 2: Chronicles of a Time Lost*], trans. Jowita Maksymowicz-Hamann (Warszawa: Relacja, 2021), 99.

6 Mateusz Szubert, *Choroba, ciało, grzech. Kulturowe studia maladyczne* [Sickness, flesh, sin. Cultural maladic studies] (Opole: Uniwersytet Opolski, 2022), 126.

7 Janusz Barański, *Etnologia w erze postludowej. Dalsze eseje antyperyferyjne* [Ethnology in the post-people era. Further anti-peripheral essays] (Kraków: WUJ, 2017), 88.

8 In terms of Polish anthropological and ethnological research, Monika Sznajderman's monograph is a pioneering work on the mythology of pestilence. Sznajderman proposes to treat pestilence as a kind of festivity, pointing out that the way of experiencing it shows similarities to religious experiences. She writes: “anthropological reflection captures the phenomenon of pestilence in terms that go beyond its empirical dimension, in terms of myth.” Monika Sznajderman, *Zaraza. Mitologia dżumy, cholery i AIDS* [Plague. The mythology of the plague, cholera and AIDS] (Warszawa: Semper, 1994), 11.

and apocalyptic tropes and evoked a sense that “nothing will be the same as before.”⁹ At the same time, it stimulated cosmogonic sentiments, hopes for a salutary, post-pandemic reboot. As Szubert noted, “countless cultural texts are built on fear and anxiety about the return of further plagues or the arrival of new ones. The salutary (world order, sense of existence) power of myth is an invaluable kind of cultural refuge.”¹⁰ The cure for pandemic fear is still the appearance of a new threat on the horizon:

SARS-CoV-2 allayed the fear of Ebola just as HIV/AIDS had previously downgraded all other infectious diseases, condemning most of them to oblivion. Cyclically, “new” infectious diseases appear in the face of which previous ones lose their original strength (not necessarily biological).¹¹

However, it seems that a contributing factor to the suppression of the fear of coronavirus and the associated media panic was not the arrival of a new biological danger, but the political threat of the ongoing war in Ukraine since February 24, 2022, as a result of which daily Covid statistics have lost ground.

Endowed with metaphorical bearing, the epidemic itself becomes metaphorical. Writing about the conceptualizations of the COVID-19 pandemic, Maciej Michalski pointed out the two-pronged nature of their development – on one side are those that see the pandemic as a surprising and unpredictable phenomenon, and on the other side those viewing it rather as the culmination of phenomena that have been growing for a long time.¹² An example of the first strategy for conceptualizing a pandemic is the figure of the black swan, coined by Nassim Nicholas Taleb, referring to unexpected and sudden events that leave a permanent mark on individual and social life, to which Ivan Krastev refers in his reflections.¹³ Michalski sees the realization of the second

9 Barański, *Etnologia w erze postludowej*, 89. If not stated otherwise, all quotations from Polish are translated by the author of this article.

10 Szubert, *Choroba, ciało, grzech*, 138.

11 *Ibid.*, 128.

12 Maciej Michalski, “Konceptualizowanie pandemii, czyli dlaczego nie będziemy wiedzieli, co przeżyliśmy” [Conceptualizing the pandemic, or why we won’t know what we’ve been through], *Jednak Książki. Gdańskie Czasopismo Humanistyczne* 14 (2022): (Re)interpretacje (post)pandemiczne: 6–7.

13 Cf. Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan. The Impact of the Highly Improbable* (London: Penguin, 2010); Tim R. Wind, Marleen Rijkeboer, Gerhard Andersson and Heleen Riper, “The COVID-19 Pandemic: The ‘Black Swan’ for Mental Health Care and a Turning Point for E-health,” *Internet Interventions* 20 (2020): 1–2.

strategy in the philosophical sketches of Slavoj Žižek and Jean-Luc Nancy,¹⁴ capturing the pandemic in turn as an assemblage of natural, economic and cultural processes, human and non-human factors, and as a magnifying glass through which the world gains the opportunity to look at itself. In his reflections, however, Michalski doubts the effectiveness of a pandemic as an epistemological metaphor. In his view, treating it in terms of the accumulation of previously occurring phenomena leads to the duplication of subsequent discursive stories and previously made diagnoses. Moreover, he explicitly refers to Susan Sontag's treatment of illness as a metaphor and writes that metaphorizing a pandemic can be considered immoral because it strips it of concreteness, invalidating what it does to people in psychosomatic terms.¹⁵

A pandemic has always been a breeding ground for literature, and recent years are a reminder that literature also functions as a breeding ground for a time of pandemic. This is evidenced not only by the interest in various stories whose narrative axis is the rapid spread of an unknown and mysterious disease, but also by the popularity of various types of dystopias. The pandemic has left its mark on literary and cultural studies reflection, as evidenced by the monographic journal issues created in recent years devoted to cultural images of the epidemic or (post)pandemic interpretations. Their guiding themes have been the textualizations of infectious disease over the centuries, its "long duration," and the interrelated representations and symbolizations of pandemics. The discursivization of the pandemic, moreover, involves methodological reflection, thinking about the usefulness of research perspectives developed in the contemporary humanities, such as the affective and memory turn, trauma and disaster studies, or reflection on the twilight of the Anthropocene, for analyzing the pandemic experience. The pandemic crisis has raised questions about the condition of the humanities and the university and the possibility of treating the COVID-19 pandemic as a tool for cultural change or reconfiguring the contemporary literary field.¹⁶ Such attempts are defined by a clear predictive attitude.¹⁷

14 Cf. Jean-Luc Nancy, *An All-too-human Virus*, trans. Cory Stockwell, Sarah Clift and David Fernbach (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2022); Slavoj Žižek, *Pandemic! Covid-19 Shakes the World* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020); Slavoj Žižek, *Pandemic! 2: Chronicles of a Time Lost* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2021).

15 Michalski, "Konceptualizowanie pandemii," 13–14.

16 Cf. Grzegorz Olszański, "Literatura współistniejąca" [Coexisting literature], *Autobiografia. Literatura. Kultura. Media 2* (2021): 159–174.

17 An excellent example of this research perspective is the published transdisciplinary monograph *To wróci. Przeszłość i przyszłość pandemii* [It will come back. The past and future

The Affective Topographies of Pandemics

Forecasting the development of pandemic literature in 2020, Inga Iwasiów predicted that “in addition to diaries, reports from empty places, poems about loneliness, narratives about isolation, sensationalist fiction will be written [...]. About the trade in masks, fraud, about transactions, smuggling, falsification of data, scams in laboratories, all-control.”¹⁸ While it is still difficult to verify the researcher and writer’s somewhat ironic predictions about the rash of post-pandemic fiction, there is undoubtedly an expansion of non-fiction literature: reportages recording the initial struggle with the coronavirus (Paweł Kapusta’s *Pandemia. Raport z frontu* [Pandemic. Report from the front]), Paweł Reszka’s *Stan krytyczny* [Critical state], and Mira Suchodolska’s *Wirusolodzy* [Virologists]), diaries and memoirs aimed at capturing the unique experience of the first lockdown. Situated within the pandemic literature of personal document are autobiographical narratives written for competition purposes, which are then the subject of sociological study, and those that were a continuation of the earlier writing practice or literary activity of their creators or authors. These include the post-competition anthologies *Wiosnę odwołano* [Spring canceled] and *Świat w grupie ryzyka* [The world in a risk group], with a sociological commentary *Pamiętniki pandemii* [Memoirs of a pandemic], as well as the polyphonic book *Jutro nie mieści się w głowie* [Tomorrow is unthinkable], initiated by writer Agata Tuszyńska,¹⁹ which consists of diaries of

of the pandemic], to which representatives of various disciplines and professions were invited to contribute. As the volume’s editors declared in their introduction: “we don’t know whether we will be talking about the pandemic in the past tense in the fall of 2022, when our book reaches readers. There is little indication of that. In view of this, perhaps the alarming warning ‘It will come back’ should not be used – since ‘it’ has not yet gone away. Yet we are sticking with the ‘It will return’ wording. For it represents a call to look at our reality from a post-pandemic perspective – as if the virus is gone. As long as we are stuck in the middle of the danger, our thinking is focused on saving lives and minimizing losses. To this necessary concern for the present, we want to add the perspective of tomorrow. This forces us to ask whether the pandemic is the only danger that threatens us in the future – so the idea is that, having taken the risk of temporarily moving out of the present, we should begin to fear differently”; Przemysław Czapliński and Joanna B. Bednarek, “Zanim wróci” [Before it returns], in *To wróci. Przeszłość i przyszłość pandemii* (Warszawa: Książka i Prasa, 2022), 11–12.

- 18 Inga Iwasiów, *Odmrażanie. Literatura w potrzebie* [Unfreezing. Literature in need] (Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Naukowe US, 2020), 143.
- 19 The anthologies of selected pandemic diaries were organized around different dominants: thematic (*Spring Canceled. An Anthology of Pandemic Diaries*), generational (*The World at Risk*), and “simultanic” (*Memoirs of a Pandemic*) – in the latter case, the sociological analysis preceding the excerpts from the pandemic diaries gave them a presentist dimension. Cf. *Wiosnę odwołano. Antologia dzienników pandemicznych* [Spring has

the time of the pandemic being a kind of creative writing exercise. In addition to these, Jan Polkowski's diary *Pandemia i inne plagi. Notatki marzec – lipiec 2020* [The pandemic and other plagues. Notes March–July 2020] or Agnieszka Taborska's *Człowiek, który czeka. Pandemia na mansardzie* [A (wo)man awaits. The pandemic in the loft].²⁰ A particular example of pandemic writing practice is Inga Iwasiów's collection of essays *Odmrażanie. Literatura w potrzebie* [Unfreezing. Literature in need], which can be described as a blurred genre, playing with the conventions of a diary and a creative writing manual, as well as being a kind of laboratory for academic and creative work in the first months of the pandemic, an attempt to develop a poetic appropriate to the pandemic experience. Iwasiów's book reveals the inextricable intertwining of reading, writing and action in the pandemic academic and social space, which are also a gesture of political resistance to the new reality. In the afterword, the researcher emphasized that the editorial work on her book took place in the fall of 2020, and thus coincided with the “Women's Strike” protests in Poland after the Constitutional Court ruling on the tightening of the anti-abortion law. Iwasiów ends her book by writing:

I have actively participated in protests and used their slogans, not seeing it as a transgression of principles, but as a practice arising strictly from theorizing about language, communication, and engagement. Protest is also a discourse inside the pandemic; it unfreezes society more effectively than weak anti-crisis shields and frail promises of a “return to normalcy.”²¹

In the case of non-fiction pandemic literature, the temporal perspective is of obvious importance; diaries and memoirs bear witness to the taming of the liminal time of the pandemic – a time of isolation, but also of proximity and

been canceled. An anthology of pandemic diaries] (Kraków: Instytut Literatury, Volumen, 2020); Walery Butewicz, Jacek Adamczyk and Miłosz Tomkowicz, *Świat w grupie ryzyka* [The world in a risk group] (Kraków: Instytut Literatury, Volumen, 2020); Maja Głowacka, Monika Helak, Małgorzata Łukianow, Mateusz Mazzini and Justyna Orchowska, *Pamiętniki pandemii* [Memoirs of a pandemic] (Warszawa: Krytyka Polityczna, 2022); Ka Klakla, Jarosław Księżyk, Marek Mzyk, Sonia Pohl, Monia Prylińska, Joanna Stryjeńska and Agata Tuszyńska, *Jutro nie mieści się w głowie. Dzienniki czasu pandemii* [Tomorrow is unthinkable. Diaries of a time of pandemic] (Warszawa: Blue Bird, 2020).

20 Jan Polkowski, *Pandemia i inne plagi. Notatki Marzec – lipiec 2020* [The pandemic and other plagues. Notes March–July 2020] (Warszawa: Instytut Literatury, Volumen, 2020); Agnieszka Taborska, *Człowiek, który czeka. Pandemia na mansardzie* [The man who waits. Pandemic on the attic] (Kraków: Lokator, 2020).

21 Iwasiów, *Odmrażanie*, 246.

equalization of individuals in the face of the threat of the virus, a time that precipitates a sense of security, but which can at the same time unleash the creativity of the writing self.²² Equally important, however, is the spatial perspective – the place from which pandemic narratives are written, challenging the notion that pandemics are egalitarian.

Iwona Boruszkowska and Mateusz Antoniuk noted that the pandemic-affected space has transformed into a large heterotopia, suspending the existing social and interpersonal relations. According to the editors, the notion of affective heterotopia, proposed by Aleksandra Wójtowicz, could become a useful tool for describing the pandemic reality:

It seems to describe well our current spatial situation, namely confinement, attempting to isolate ourselves from the disease, creating cordons sanitaires, staying in an affective sphere governed by emotions associated with a sense of danger and living in constant fear of the epidemic, in fear of what cannot be seen.²³

The category of affective heterotopia primarily emphasizes the commonality of the pandemic experience, the need to confront a new reality and the fear of the unknown. However, isolation in a specific space depends on a number of factors – personal, economic and social – which prompts us to think about the place in which pandemic narratives are fixed.²⁴ The experience of isolation initiates pandemic narratives, although at the same time the meanings ascribed to it are diametrically opposed. In the notes of the poet Jan Polkowski's *The Pandemic and Other Plagues*, isolation is a strategy of the writing subject for life and writing, an extension of his earlier choices in the biographical plan and creative activity. The title alone of the academic and writer Agnieszka Taborska's diary *A (Wo)man Awaits*, written between April 1 and June 27, 2020, visualizes the temporal and spatial state of limbo in which the author found herself, returning just before the announcement of the first lockdown

22 As one of the authors of the works submitted to the *Memoirs of a Pandemic* competition writes: "yesterday, looking for funding for people and cultural institutions in our city, I found by chance a grant for myself. Symbolic and in all likelihood unattainable, but motivating. Maybe I will finally dare to send my writing somewhere; admittedly it will not be poems, which I have been publishing in my mind for more than two years, but its most non-metaphorical part – a diary." "Memoir 323, 18.04.2020," in Głowacka et al., *Pamiętniki pandemii*, 156.

23 Iwona Boruszkowska and Mateusz Antoniuk, "Introduction," *Konteksty Kultury* 3 (2020): 250.

24 This brings to mind Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron*, in which a group of wealthy Florentines, sheltered from the plague outside the city limits, indulge in narrative activity to overcome the boredom of isolation.

to Poland from the United States and beginning a vacation dedicated to creative work: “the plan was this: first creative lofting in Warsaw, and finally time for acquaintances, friends and my ageing parents. And with the advent of spring – travel! First will come Italy: Malta and Sicily.”²⁵ The outbreak of the pandemic partially verifies these plans – the projected trip around Europe transforms into an erudite wandering in the titular loft space on the trail of literature and film, in which the current pandemic experience is reflected and broken, framed by the narrator in a highly artistic, essayistic way. “Creative lofting,” which results in a diary written during forced isolation, involves meticulous noting of daily rituals and practices of the time of the pandemic, insightful observation of the awakening – contrary to and in spite of the pandemic – of spring in the plant and animal world, and, finally, observation from the perspective of the loft of the pandemic reality, which bears the hallmarks of surrealism so close to the narrator and therefore evokes curiosity above all. Taborska’s diaries are conducted from the midst of the pandemic experience and at the same time from a distance, and are an example of narrativizing the pandemic with the help of literary and cinematic tropes, quotations and allusions. This is evidenced by the title of her pandemic diary, which refers to Georges Perec’s novel *A Man Asleep*, a story about voluntarily annulling the temporal and spatial parameters of existence, withdrawing from life and interpersonal relations, and the consequences of this decision. In addition, the narrator confronts her reflections with diaries textualizing the experience of the plague – Jonathan Harker’s diary from Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, Daniel Defoe’s *Diary of a Plague Year* or Samuel Pepys’ *Diary*, while complementing her reflections is an impressive inventory of books read during the pandemic and films watched. “The woman who awaits,” in Taborska’s terms, is at the same time a writing subject who reads, looks and constantly undertakes the act of interpreting the reality around her, exposing her own positioning: “I know, I’m writing from the point of view of a person doesn’t lose grip for lack of money, who doesn’t have remotely controlled responsibilities or children to take care of. I have the luxury I have earned through years of lectures: a sabbatical, a semester dedicated to creative work.”²⁶

A radically different narrative perspective is presented by Wioletta Grzegorzewska’s *Wilcza rzeka* [Wolf river], published in 2021, consisting of diary entries initially posted on Facebook, reporting on the writer’s stay in the United Kingdom during the lockdown and the growing Covid panic. *Wolf River* can be read as an autobiographical pandemic novel, and at the same time a road

²⁵ Taborska, *Człowiek, który czeka*, 9.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

novel, a narrative of the literal and metaphorical search for a room of one's own by Wioletta and her teenage daughter Julia. Projected by the author's alter ego, her move from the Isle of Wight to Hastings coincides with the outbreak of the pandemic, the disease affecting her, and the loss of her previous residence and ability to move freely:

It started with a chill that filled me, as if someone had injected freon into my veins or thrown me into an icy river. It was a warm noon in March 2020. The police were roaming around the town. Horse patrols slid through the center of Ryde like eels [...]. The radio broadcast a message: "stay at home," and I was getting ready to leave.²⁷

Signs of impending disaster, appearing from the first pages of the novel, take a turn for the worse when Wioletta manages to get to Hastings with her ex-husband and daughter at the last minute before the ferry crossings close. The tripartite structure of *Wolf River* reflects the movement of the narrator and her daughter between successive non-places, temporary spaces of a heterotopic nature: a squalid room in a house inhabited by emigrants, the apartment of a violent and alcohol-abusing husband, and finally a closed center for women victims of violence:

And so we ended up HERE. Here could have meant a lot. It was an unmarked place on the map, not listed in the phone books, but it certainly meant better than THERE, by the train station. Since the beginning of the pandemic, I have become adept at packing: phone, chargers, laptop and reader, toothbrushes, important documents, passports, birth certificates. Two small suitcases and one large one.²⁸

Constructed from short notes, *Wolf River* is a novel in process, accumulating the pandemic-related experiences of incapacitating illness, being stranded in a hostile, claustrophobic space inhabited by outsiders, isolation that is a source of domestic and sexual violence, loss of financial resources and a sense of security, and the temporariness of existence. The narrative of Grzegorzewska's novel is conducted from the perspective of a defective subject, struggling with psychosomatic ailments, searching for her place in space and pandemic dystopian reality. Referring to the category proposed by Arthur W. Frank, Wioletta can be described as a wounded narrator who weaves a story through her body. However, this is a narrative not only about illness,

²⁷ Wioletta Grzegorzewska, *Wilcza rzeka* [Wolf river] (Warszawa: W.A.B., 2021), 11–12.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 251.

but also about the sexuality she discovers in adulthood and the satisfaction of her own desires.

Grzegorzewska's story ultimately turns out to be a survival narrative, a scriptotherapy conducted from within a traumatic experience,²⁹ prompting a rethinking of one's own past along with a defective family structure, failed marriage, codependency syndrome and suicide attempts. However, *Wolf River* is also an (auto)ethnography conducted from the heterotopic space of a succession of boltholes, recording the laws that govern them, the experiences of female emigrants, victims of violence subjected to the supervision and judgment of welfare institutions. It is also a study of migrant loneliness exacerbated by Brexit and pandemic isolation, in which the collapse of the publishing market in the era of the pandemic also peeks out from underneath the individual and social catastrophe – canceled author meetings, long-awaited royalties confront the readers of this prose with the situation of an expatriate writer deprived of a steady income and a metaphorical and literally understood room of her own. Grzegorzewska's pandemic-autobiographical novel is set in heterotopic spaces, but also affective heterotopia is produced – it is a space built from Facebook notes, emotions, pandemic fears and hopes.

Another perspective on the Covid reality is offered by Paweł Kapusta in his reporter's chronicle of the first weeks of the pandemic. The subtitle "report from the front" can be taken as a foreshadowing of the raw reporter's account of the places that can serve as spatial metaphors for the epidemic and isolation: major hospitals, infectious wards, smear ambulances, hospital laboratories. The reporter gives voice to so-called key workers – primarily medical representatives, but also a hospice worker, a funeral parlor employee, a salesman, a letter carrier, a postal worker, a teacher. Their stories, supplemented by the perspectives of Covid convalescents (including the author of the report himself) and the mother of a cancer-stricken child, form a polyphony to which the subsequent chapters, corresponding to 23 days of the pandemic, are subordinated. In designing the pandemic polyphony, Kapusta primarily draws attention to the perspective of representatives of medical professions who, until the pandemic, were situated in the realm of social invisibility, including laboratory diagnosticians. First and foremost, however, *Pandemic. Report from the Front* is a story about the inefficiency of the health

29 I use the category of scriptotherapy from Suzette Henke's approach. In her book *Shattered Subject*, Henke described the literary strategies of women healing the wounds of psychological trauma, for whom writing from within a traumatic experience has a therapeutic dimension. Cf. Suzette Henke, *Shattered Subject. Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life-Writing* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000).

service, the pathosystem³⁰ enmeshing medical services and patients in its networks, the problems escalating in the face of a pandemic catastrophe. The picture of the health service in the first weeks of the pandemic that emerges from the accounts of Kapusta's interviewees resembles a post-apocalyptic landscape – representatives of the medical profession face chronic fatigue, a constant sense of threat to life and health, a lack of protective measures and empathy on the part of superiors, social stigmatization in the face of the threat of coronavirus, and, finally, the disregard of the epidemic threat by patients, which is largely a consequence of long waits for treatments and the fear of losing their place in line. Kapusta's report, through its subtitle, also sets in motion military metaphors, provoking thought as to whether we are dealing here only with a conventional ploy to inscribe the experience of the pandemic into a war-heroic narrative structure, or rather with a contribution to the construction of social memory of the pandemic and its victims, an attempt to reformulate the notion of heroism, associated primarily with war, in a spirit of solidarity and concern for the fate of the other. For, as one of the protagonists of the reportage confesses:

Every time I see and hear this term ["heroes without capes"], I feel that it is unnecessary. We are doing exactly what we did before the epidemic. [...] It's just that before, hardly anyone noticed our work. Hardly anyone heard our cries for help. For reform of the health system, the lack of which is now hiccupping. No one noticed that, after all, we also risked our own lives back then. [...]

For me, the heroes today are people who lose their jobs and still drive up to the hospital and drop off a cardboard box of masks. Or elderly women sewing masks. Or the ladies who bring us disinfectant fluids and gloves from beauty salons, and bankrupt themselves in the process. [...] These are the real heroes.³¹

The personal documentary literature created during the pandemic highlights the power with which catastrophic-war associations are imposed in the face of crisis. In Mateusz Pakuła's intimate dying diary, *Jak nie zabiłem swojego ojca i jak bardzo tego żałuję*³² [How I didn't kill my father and how much I regret it], the pandemic is an essential actor in the network in which the narrator writes

30 Cf. Agnieszka Dauksza, "Humanistyka medyczna: o leczeniu (się) w patosystemie" [The medical humanities: On healing (oneself) in a Pathosystem], *Teksty Drugie* 1 (2021): 38–58.

31 Paweł Kapusta, *Pandemia. Raport z frontu* [Pandemic. Report from the front] (Kraków: Insignis, 2020), 88.

32 Mateusz Pakuła, *Jak nie zabiłem swojego ojca i jak bardzo tego żałuję* [How I didn't kill my father and how much I regret it] (Warszawa: Nisza, 2021).

and acts, encompassing the institution of the hospital and the palliative care unit, as well as the space of the family home as the setting for Marek Pakuła's dying. The diaristic narrative that reveals here the intertwining of the affective and the experiential is set in motion by the affects of shame, guilt and humiliation, as well as the experience of helplessness in the encounter with the medical pathosystem whose neglect and abuse, even if related to a lack of communication and condescension, the pandemic mercilessly exposes. The pandemic context of Mateusz Pakuła's book reveals not only the invalidation of cancer and the resulting death by Covid morbidity and death statistics. Lockdown contributes to the escalation of intergenerational conflict in the narrator's family home, but also, paradoxically, offers time and space for a final emotional closeness with his dying father.

Community of Individual Experiences, or You Will (Not) Know What You Experienced

It was not only professionals who engaged in writing in the first period of the pandemic. Shortly after the lockdown was announced, there were forecasts predicting an outpouring of various forms of personal documentary literature, bearing witness to the "strange spring" of 2020 and having a clear self-reflective and self-therapeutic dimension in the process. The need to narrativize the pandemic experience was managed by institutions and research teams that announced competitions for pandemic diaries and memoirs, thus drawing on the tradition of memoir competitions and adopting the sociological method of analyzing personal documents initiated by Florian Znaniecki and William Thomas.³³ The genre of the competition diary has a long and rich tradition, and therefore requires a separate study from a cultural genealogy perspective, emphasizing its processual nature and connection to a specific historical moment. Pandemic diaries and memoirs, the outcome of competitions announced by the Institute of Literature and a group of researchers centered around the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Institutes of Sociology and Culture of the University of Warsaw, not only provide valuable research material for the sociology of literature or the sociology of everyday life,³⁴

33 Maja Głowacka, Monika Helak and Justyna Kościńska, "Konkurs 'Pamiętniki Pandemii.' Założenia, wyniki, wstępne refleksje" ['Pandemic Diaries' competition: Assumptions, results, preliminary reflections], *Autobiografia. Literatura. Kultura. Media* 3 (2020): 230.

34 Cf. Wiesław Gumuła, ed., *Dzienniki stanu pandemii (Czytane z perspektywy socjologii codzienności)* [Diaries of the state of the pandemic (Read from the perspective of the sociology of everyday life)] (Warszawa: Nomos, 2020).

but also confirm the vitality of the genre of the competition memoir, the importance of an individual, salutary and ordering narrative in the face of a collective threat. As Olga Drenda noted:

Memoirs written in the heat of the moment, from the midst of events and, more importantly, unfiltered by the reflection of the writer, who is probably inclined to look for additional contexts or stylize events so that they look more digestible narratively – are always valuable documents, especially in moments when, as a result of shock, breakthrough, disaster, surprise, there is a “dislocation of time.”³⁵

The pandemic diaries and memoirs revealed a wide spectrum of varied, and time-varying, responses to the pandemic crisis, which, being a communal experience, meant something different for each individual, and involved a different mix of affects, intensity of emotions, and experience of loss(s). The introduction to *Memoirs of a Pandemic* contains the following statement:

There was not one pandemic. At least from the point of view of the authors of this book, there were exactly 404, as many as the number of works submitted to the competition. What is known, however, is that there were actually many more of these viewpoints, as everyone experienced, interpreted and named it in a way that was profoundly their own. The contagion caused by the coronavirus showed us that a truly community-wide phenomenon can only be fully understood when one adopts the perspective of many different individuals in looking at it.³⁶

Researchers appreciating the uniqueness of pandemic diaries and memoirs as the material of sociological analysis have, on the one hand, insisted on the necessity of its immediate execution, and, on the other hand, highlighted the opportunities offered by reading them from the distance separating the period of their creation from the moment of publication, when the memory of the first months of the pandemic gradually began to dim. In this way, the pandemic literature of personal documentaries can also be treated as a creation of preposterous history³⁷, allowing one not only to reflect on the past from the perspective of the present, but also to project a future in which disaster becomes conceivable.

35 Olga Drenda, “Życie z wciśniętą pauzą” [Life with pause pressed], in Głowacka et al., *Pamiętniki pandemii*, 7.

36 “Wstęp” in Głowacka et al., *Pamiętniki pandemii*, 14.

37 Cf. Mieke Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio. Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

The pandemic literature of the personal document is a record of various survival strategies in the face of crisis, such as “building a sense of security in domestic routines, searching for universal references, seeking salvation in rationalism and science (or the opposite), creating new relationships, habits, ways of dealing with everyday life.”³⁸ In my opinion, the phenomenon of its feminization deserves special attention, since the diaries and memoirs of the competition were created overwhelmingly by women, particularly affected by the crisis, both professionally and privately, as those most often burdened by care work and the emotional baggage associated with it.³⁹ Looking at the practices of writing women’s diaries, Iwasiów emphasizes that writing revolutionizes women – the pandemic gesture of writing would therefore take on a particular significance in the context of women’s strikes on access to abortion coinciding with the pandemic, to which direct references can also be found on the pages of competition diaries, which reveal the interpenetration of the private and the public, the relationship between writing and action.

The diaries created during the first lockdown period can also be considered an important element of therapeutic culture, and at the same time a testimony to pandemic mental disorders, triggered or intensified by the fear of a global catastrophe that turns into a private one. Monika Helak, who analyzed the therapeutic diaries, distinguished in them the threads of depression resulting from isolation, anxiety and peculiarly looped time, recognizing that “these are typical feelings in an ineffective – that is: not ending in escape or rescue – reaction to a (subjectively assessed) deadly threat,”⁴⁰ inherent in the experience of trauma. The therapeutic dimension of the diaries created in the first months of 2020 is related to narrativizing the experience of crisis, and therefore to counteracting trauma. In the pandemic diaries one can see traces of struggling with the matter of everyday life and noting victories in this field, as well as struggling with space and one’s own resisting body:

I dream of pictorial cataclysms, I wake up heavy with anxiety, sadness, mourning
for the loss affecting me in my sleep. I have to get up, set a plan for the day, the

38 “Wstęp” in Głowacka et al., *Pamiętniki pandemii*, 15.

39 Monika Helak, Małgorzata Łukianow and Justyna Orchowska, “Kobiety – piszące bohaterki pandemii” [Women – writing heroes of the pandemic], in Głowacka et al., *Pamiętniki pandemii*, 84.

40 Monika Helak, “Trauma społeczna? Dzienniki terapeutyczne czasu pandemii” [Social trauma? Therapeutic diaries of a time of pandemic], in *To wróci*, 337. The researcher noted that the severe stress reaction resulting from the pandemic began to be described as a subunit of Post-COVID Stress Disorder.

next day, which must be survived and not collapse into the black, dirty and sticky. Not sink into a sense of meaninglessness, crumpled bedding, stuffiness and dust. To come up with something that can be considered a plan of action. [...]

I was supposed to write, write down the interview, create, create something worthy of attention. Only whose? Probably not mine. Attention I am currently unable to focus. So I scrub the wall, bake a cake.⁴¹

March 24, 2020

It's been a week, nine days, and my rot is still progressing, gently. The informational and ontological shock that accompanied me recently (first illnesses, deaths, bans, injunctions) is subsiding a bit, although the situation doesn't seem to be improving at all.

The apartment is made of rubber, the walls expand under my increasingly heavy body, but I also bounce off them, I can't get anywhere further. The apartment has become the center of a black hole.⁴²

Researchers analyzing the biographical material collected as part of the *Memoirs of the Pandemic* competition recognized that figures fixed in collective memory played an extremely important role in taming the pandemic experience.⁴³ The authors of the diaristic notes, in their attempt to interpret the pandemic crisis, drew on the stock of personal memories, but also family histories, passed down from generation to generation.⁴⁴ As Mateusz Mazzini notes, "collective memory, of society as a whole as a community, expressed through shared rituals, symbols and interpretations of past events, proved to be a useful tool in initially naming the threat that the coronavirus carried."⁴⁵ Both collective memory and post-memory mechanisms did not so much provide ready-made narrative structures to make sense of the pandemic, but hinted at strategies for survival in crisis situations – hence

41 "Pamiętnik 60, 15.03.2020," in Głowacka et al., *Pamiętniki pandemii*, 147–148.

42 Dominika Chmiel, "Panna Pandemia" [Miss Pandemic], in *Wiosnę odwołano*, 136.

43 Mateusz Mazzini, "Pandemia czy stan wojenny? Wirus a polska pamięć zbiorowa" [Pandemic or Martial Law? The virus and Polish collective memory], in Głowacka et al., *Pamiętniki pandemii*, 202.

44 An example is Renata Kochan's diary entitled "Niewybuch" [The unexploded] – its narrator, by means of a received photograph, returns to her own family history and difficult relations with her father, which become the background for her strained relations with her teenage daughter, escalating during the period of isolation. Renata Kochan, "Niewybuch", in *Wiosnę odwołano*, 227–252.

45 Mazzini, "Pandemia czy stan wojenny?," 203.

the frequent references to Second World War or Martial Law, evoking reminiscences of border closures, imposed restrictions on freedom of movement or shortages of supplies. Ultimately, however, the topoi of collective memory did not stand up to the clash with the unprecedented nature of the pandemic – both the metaphorization of the virus as an occupant and references to the concept of heroism, which occupies an important place in Polish collective memory, proved ineffective.⁴⁶

The lack of models to narrativize the coronavirus pandemic is related, I believe, to the Spanish flu pandemic, still unassimilated by Polish collective memory, effectively obscured by the heroic independence narrative.⁴⁷ The increasing temporal distance separating the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic from the present moment is clearly conducive to critical-revisionist readings of the pandemic abundantly building up the first months of 2020 with a variety of interpretations, stretched between forecasting the end of the existing social order and the absence of any change, among which would be the announcement of a “new normal.” At the same time, the mechanisms of forgetting that Tomasz Michniewicz wrote about in *Chwilowa anomalia* [Momentary anomaly] were activated almost immediately:

This book might as well have been titled *Unforgetting*. Our ability to forget is truly amazing. Evolutionarily, it helps us not to go crazy. Thanks to it, we push traumas and unpleasant experiences out of our consciousness and do not relive them every day. Today, one might already suggest, probably to our own destruction. [...]

The worst did not come, or perhaps it had no right to come at all. Several months have passed, after which few people remember at all what happened at the

46 In *Memoirs of a Pandemic*, for example, there is a recurring theme of talking to members of the older generation and comparing the current pandemic situation with Martial Law: “I asked my mother [...] if this time we are currently experiencing and the time of Martial Law introduced in Poland in the 1980s, which of these periods would she consider more severe. My mother’s answer was short: It’s hard to live now, my child. During Martial Law, at least you could meet people without fear and experience this difficult time together, now this fear of this invisible enemy is the worst and this isolation from others.” “Memoir 225, 13.04.2020,” in Głowacka et al., *Pamiętniki pandemii*, 232.

47 It is worth noting that Łukasz Mieszkowski’s monograph *Największa. Pandemia hiszpanki u progu niepodległej Polski* [The greatest. The Spanish flu pandemic at the threshold of independent Poland] was published only in 2020, coinciding with the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. The 1963 outbreak of smallpox recorded in Wrocław was also not etched in Polish collective memory. Cf. Łukasz Mieszkowski, *Największa. Pandemia hiszpanki u progu niepodległej Polski* (Warszawa: Polityka, 2020); Jerzy B. Kos, *Ospa 1963. Alarm dla Wrocławia* [Smallpox 1963: Alarm for Wrocław] (Wrocław: Warstwy, 2018).

beginning of the pandemic. Then again, we may still remember, but the emotional memory has faded. We think about that time as if we were replaying a movie in our heads, rather than our own experiences and emotions.⁴⁸

Polish collective memory is still resisting the pandemic, and it is now difficult to imagine pandemic memorials or anniversaries commemorating victims of the coronavirus. Whereas in the past plague columns were a votive offering for saving the population from the plague, today it is impossible to imagine their modern counterparts. What remains are pandemiographies written from inside the crisis, grounded in individual experience, seeking support from universal stories or traditional narrative structures. Considering the impact of the pandemic on literary life from the perspective of useful disasters, Grzegorz Olszański concluded that even if the pandemic was not indifferent to the literary field, still it did not directly affect literature. Olszański writes, “reportages describing the fight against the pandemic [...] and the rash of pandemic diaries [...] are far too few to note this in the category of a significant phenomenon, which we have never faced before.”⁴⁹

However, it is worth noting here the relationship between the genres of pandemiography and Chernobyl, discussed by Tamara Hundorova. Although the Chernobyl nuclear disaster is incomparable to the coronavirus pandemic, it serves as a kind of mirror. According to the Ukrainian researcher, the template for the Chernobyl genre is Svetlana Alexievich’s *Voices from Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster*. This reportage, a collection of interviews written ten years after the nuclear disaster, proposes to see this event in terms of testimony and remembrance. Hundorova points out that the English title of Alexievich’s book legitimized oral history as a current form of storytelling about the Chernobyl trauma. Alexievich avoided the classic attitude of the narrator, giving voice to her characters and not imposing her perspective on them. A similar assumption guides pandemiographies as documentary literature, especially post-competition anthologies of pandemic diaries. The experience of the Chernobyl catastrophe, suppressed and subjected to political regimes of censorship, obtained its representation belatedly, while the pandemic unleashed an immediate movement of writing and expansion of narrative autobiographical forms, in which the fundamental difference between the Chernobyl and pandemic genres should be seen. Hundorova diagnoses the emergence of a new post-Chernobyl literature, triggered by post-memory

48 Tomasz Michniewicz, *Chwilowa anomalia. O chorobach współistniejących naszego świata* [Momentary anomaly. On the comorbidities of our world] (Kraków: Otwarte, 2020), 7–8.

49 Olszański, “Literatura współistniejąca,” 171.

mechanisms. According to the researcher, “Chernobyl remains [...] a current signifier of modernity, capable of producing new artistic forms.”⁵⁰ However, it is difficult to expect that the pandemic could play a similar role if the mechanisms of forgetting were activated during its first months. This, in turn, leads to the gradual exhaustion of pandemic writing, despite encouragement to look at reality from a post-pandemic perspective.

According to Hundorova: “it is of particular importance that the Chernobyl discourse remains a post-catastrophic and post-traumatic discourse; it is not only a means of commenting on the present and real accidents, but forms new ways of thinking.”⁵¹ The researcher diagnoses that during the time of post-disaster uncertainty, new forms of expression are being created that permeate different genres and speaking styles.⁵² Characterizing the poetics of the Chernobyl text, Hundorova mentions, among other things, “the non-linear narrative method, the visualization of the moment of explosion, the introduction of parallel worlds, repetition, transgression, open ending, and the focus of the action on the narrative plane.”⁵³ The pandemic literature of the personal document seems to draw more inspiration from war or epidemic diaries than from post-apocalyptic narratives. Pandemic personal documentary literature seems to draw more inspiration from war or epidemic memoirs than from post-apocalyptic narratives. References to classic cultural texts and grounding one’s own stories in traditional narrative structures strips away the uniqueness of the pandemic experience, but can also build a sense of security in an unpredictable reality. Nevertheless, the expansion of pandemiography can be considered a large-scale writing experiment in an extreme situation, which multiplies narratives and points of view, provoking reflection on language and metaphors appropriate to the pandemic, or on the usefulness of the category

50 Tamara Hundorowa, “Gatunek czarnobylski: wyparcie realnego i nuklearna sublimacja” [The Chernobyl genre: Displacement of the real and nuclear sublimation], in *Po Czarnobylu. Miejsce katastrofy w dyskursie współczesnej humanistyki*, ed. Iwona Boruszkowska, Katarzyna Glinianowicz, Aleksandra Grzemska and Paweł Krupa (Kraków: WUJ, 2017), 66.

51 Tamara Hundorowa, “Czarnobyl, nuklearna apokalipsa i postmodernizm” [Chernobyl, the nuclear apocalypse and postmodernism], trans. Iwona Boruszkowska, *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2014): 253.

52 Hundorowa, “Czarnobyl.” Writing about the phenomenon of pandemic narratives, Inga Iwasiów notes: “this is the strangest experience of writing in pandemic – although we participate in unusual events, the massiveness takes away the uniqueness of our reactions. Our notes don’t need ciphers, we don’t hide them. On the contrary [...] we are encouraged, asked.” Iwasiów, *Odmrażanie*, 54–55.

53 Hundorowa, “Czarnobyl,” 256.

of catastrophe to conceptualize it.⁵⁴ References to Chernobyl literature can be seen not only in the diversity of pandemic genres, the non-conclusiveness of pandemiography based on narrative, but also in the reflection on human and interspecies relations, the state of nature and the end of the Anthropocene from the perspective of the pandemic.

References to the Chernobyl text are also of a more direct nature. In Sylwia Chutnik's short story "Pandemino. Dziennik czasów zamknięcia" [Pandemino. A diary of closing times], a fictional journal from the time of the pandemic first published in 2020, two realities overlap disturbingly. The first consists of pandemic snapshots: a microcosm of balconies where momentary human relationships are established, daily activities in the confined space of an apartment, rituals that give the illusion of a sense of security, and finally conspiracy theories and rumors spreading like a virus:

Yesterday, when I went out into the dumpster for a while, I heard someone warn that: "the corpses are going straight to medical examination, and those who are still alive are being deliberately poisoned so that they die faster." When asked why anyone would care about our deaths, the answer was one: they want to raze whatever is left of us to the ground and then build huge manufacturing plants. Factories and warehouses where the pandemic's survivors will work: children, the poor, perhaps robots. Goods will be shipped to Mars, where a colony for the richest is already being prepared. A mass evacuation of planet Earth – this is what the virus, which has been worked on in secret in government laboratories for years, was needed for.⁵⁵

The second level of the story opens up a post-anthropocentric perspective and reveals its post-apocalyptic dimension. The narrator of "Pandemino" draws on resources of collective memory, when she recalls a neighbor who died of a heart attack a few days after the partial closure of the city was announced: "it reminded her of the ghetto and the walls that were erected along the streets, separating people from each other. She didn't want to go on living."⁵⁶ At the same time, the narrator refers to the Chernobyl imaginary when she writes about the mass killing of animals contaminated with the

54 Cf. Anna Barcz and Jarosław Płuciennik, "Post-pandemic Nature, Crisis, Catastrophes and Their Metaphorical Discourses. Editorial Introduction," *Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich* 1 (2021): 7–18.

55 Sylwia Chutnik, "Pandemino. Dziennik czasów zamknięcia" [Pandemino. A Diary of Closing Times], in Chutnik, *Dintojra* (Kraków: Zak, 2024), 48.

56 *Ibid.*, 53.

virus or evacuations from residential buildings. The narrator chooses her own survival strategy and refuses to comply with top-down, pandemic decisions: “I will not take part in any evacuation. I’m not suitable for running down the stairs and crowding in front of specially provided buses. I refuse to take part in the last maneuvers. I have no more money, so I have no more burdens. I’m staying at home.”⁵⁷ In this way, she refuses to participate in the pandemic reality, and her pandemic survival strategy is reduced to the act of breathing, which takes on a special dimension in the face of the coronavirus. The breath that fogs up the glass makes the observed apocalyptic reality unreal. Jolanta Brach-Czaina, framing breathing in a philosophical perspective, observes:

We participate in the world through breathing, and this is what is dominant and never a form of activity that we relinquish. [...] We change interests, plans, work, we move away from places and people. Breathing is one of the few activities that we cannot abandon. Where we are is first of all, our breath. Although we take refuge in buildings, the only permanent the place of existence for us is the air.⁵⁸

The imperceptible and fleeting breath violates the boundaries between the living and the dead, the external and the internal. In the pandemic reality, breathing is the most primal survival strategy. In the case of a pandemic, “catching breath” can be a particularly eloquent metaphor, referring to what is psychosomatic, social and political, individual and collective, needed for life and potentially threatening.⁵⁹

A multitude of first-person narratives cannot (and should not) produce a monolithic story about the pandemic, just as it is ineffective to think in terms of a pandemic imagined community. If one accepts, following Ivan Krastev, that the pandemic resembles a television series, it may be worth looking at it through the lens of the observations made by Olga Tokarczuk in her essay *The Tender Narrator*. According to the writer, a series offers the contemporary viewer a kind of cognitive trance, multiplies new narrative orders, while not shying away from anachronistic solutions, since “The potential materialization of another season creates the necessity of open endings in which there is no way that mysterious things called catharsis can occur or resound fully – catharsis, formerly the experience of the internal transformation, the

57 Ibid., 60.

58 Jolanta Brach-Czaina, “O oddychaniu” [About breathing], *Kultura Współczesna* 1/2 (2000): 10.

59 Cf. Brach-Czaina, “O oddychaniu,” 14. Iwasiów compares the pandemic metaphor of the ventilator and the “iron lung” from the times of the polio epidemic, analyzing their socio-cultural and political meanings. Cf. Iwasiów, “Odmrażanie,” 57–59.

fulfillment and satisfaction of having participated in the action of the tale.”⁶⁰ Perhaps, then, it is worth replacing the word “series” with “pandemic” and recognizing that:

the *pandemic* inscribes itself into the new, drawn-out and disordered rhythm of the world, into its chaotic communication, its instability and fluidity. [...] In that sense, there is serious work in the *pandemic* on the narratives of the future, on reformatting the story so that it suits our new reality.⁶¹

Abstract

Joanna Szewczyk

JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY

Pandemiographies: Theories, Practices, Forecasts

The article discusses selected narratives written from within the pandemic experience, created in the first months of 2020, defined by the inclusive category of pandemygraphy, which encompasses both essayistic projects and pandemic autobiographical literature. The analysis considers strategies of narrativizing the pandemic in its experiential, affective, and symbolic dimensions. Based on diverse stories – including those by A. Taborska, W. Grzegorzewska, P. Kapusta, M. Pakuła, along with diaries during the first period of the pandemic – the article analyzes the described survival strategies, including the autotherapeutic dimension of the narratives. Thus, the author reflects on the mechanisms of collective memory that resists the pandemic experience.

Keywords

pandemic, pandemygraphy, affective heterotopia, pandemic diary, narration

60 Olga Tokarczuk, “Nobel Lecture: The Tender Narrator,” December 7, 2019, trans. Jennifer Croft and Antonia Lloyd-Jones, accessed September 26, 2024, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2018/tokarczuk/lecture/>.

61 Tokarczuk, “Nobel Lecture.”