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Testimony as a Literary Problem

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Disputes on authenticity

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

11 *Ibid.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Temoin-martyr

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

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

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

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

21 *Ibid.*, 83.

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

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

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

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

22 *Ibid.*, 91.

23 *Ibid.*, 11.

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

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

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

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

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

24 *Ibid.*, 55.

25 *Ibid.*, 96.

26 *Ibid.*, 272.

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

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

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

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Translation: Marta Skotnicka