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Theory and Practice of Memory in the Culture of the Present from the Perspective of Research on Literature for Young Readers

The contemporary “multidirectional and multifaceted interest in the past” and thus also research on memory plays a huge role in the individual perception of reality and in the collective perspectives of communities, societies, and nations (Tarkowska 2016: 121–123). The interdisciplinarity of the phenomenon of collective memory provokes methodological challenges not only in the fields of historical, cultural, and literary studies but also in the context of psychological (cognitive and social) explorations (Maruszewski 2005: 20–25; cf. Barlett 1995) and sociological, historical, and biographical research, already well established in Poland¹.

The perspective of combining theory and practice has also played a significant role in Polish research on memory for many years, present in the analysis of the results of empirical studies such as surveys and interviews combined with the methodology of quantitative research like opinion polls, interpretations of historical sources, archival materials, photos, memorials, oral accounts, and analysis of the content of media messages. The didactic perspective, especially the analysis of the content of school history textbooks, and pedagogical concepts is also of great significance in the Polish context (cf. Szacka 2006; Szpociński 2004, 2005; Topolski 1981; Maternicki 1998; Pomorski 2017).

Most of the studies are guided by the perspective of the culture of the present. Elżbieta Tarkowska writes that “the exceptional place of the present in contemporary culture allows it to be called ‘culture of the present’” (2016: 121). Hence it becomes a type of catalyst for changes, a determinant of the description of variables in the research on memory, and an important perspective for discussing the issues of transformation, continuation, and references.

¹ Based on diaristic material (Znaniński, Chałasiński, Szczepański), as well as a good tradition of folklore studies (e.g. Hajduk-Nijakowska, Kadłubiec, Simonides) (cf. Majewski and Napiórkowski 2018: 11–13; Saryusz-Wolska 2009).

Many researchers both in Poland and abroad refer to the analysis and interpretation of the material relating to the theory and practice of memory in the perspective of the present, emphasizing that the past can be “named” and “understood” better only in this “temporal arrangement” of speaking about the transformations of the social time and relations between the past, present, and future – with regard to the notions of the past and present or tradition and the present – in the context of intergenerational dialogues, oral and written family histories, and “adult memory” of childhood (cf. Szacki 2011; Saryusz-Wolska and Traba 2014).

Assuming a sociological perspective of research on memory and drawing on the thought of Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) and then Maurice Halbwachs, the Polish academic discourse on social memory includes the work of Stefan Czarnowski, a Polish cultural scholar and sociologist not sufficiently recognized abroad; although Czarnowski did not introduce the concept of “memory” to his research, in the interwar period (1918–1939) he published a significant book monograph titled *Kultura (Culture)*² in which, independently of the result of research by Halbwachs, he used the concept of collective representations of the past, which corresponded fully with the research on memory (cf. Traba 2009; Tarkowska 2011; Tarkowska 2016; Saryusz-Wolska 2009).

In a broader socio-cultural perspective, in his pioneering works Czarnowski described, among other things, the changing and varied dimension of time, space, and history and addressed the issues of tradition, consciousness, and historical culture (Tarkowska 2016: 124). Kornelia Kończal and Joanna Wawrzyniak even write about the “problem of substitution,” claiming that Polish research on tradition, identity, and historical consciousness replaced research on memory for many years (Kończal and Wawrzyniak 2011: 11).³ They also argue that in the context of representations of the past, Czarnowski focused on an insightful look at the subject of “past in the present” (Czarnowski 1956b), a discussion of the mechanisms and social function of the heroization of characters, in this case, St. Patrick in Ireland, with the related cult of “sites of memory” (*lieux de mémoire*), and “an explanation of the relationships between the cult of heroes and the social system” (Czarnowski 1956c: 11).

According to Kończal and Wawrzyniak, these scientific perspectives can be seen as a kind of precursor to the research that was conducted in the 1980s by the French historian Pierre Nora, where Czarnowski’s “past in the present” is simply “second degree history” (*histoire au second degré*), which: “does not study determinants but effects; it does not study actions that remain in memory or that are commemorated but their traces and the rules of the game governing

² Notably, the full edition of Czarnowski’s work, consisting of five volumes, was published only in the 1950s.

³ Kończal and Wawrzyniak write about “the problem of substitution,” arguing that Polish studies on tradition, identity, and historical consciousness for years functioned as “substitutes” for memory studies (cf. 2011).

the forms of their commemoration” (Kończal and Wawrzyniak 2011: 14–15). Moreover, they argue that this type of history “does not study the events in themselves but their construction over time” and “does not study what the past really was but rather its constant utilization, use, and abuse and its significance for individual, successive present moments” (Kończal and Wawrzyniak 2011: 16). Hence instead of focusing on traditions, second degree history centers on “the way they were created and passed on” (Kończal and Wawrzyniak 2011: 16).

In this context, it should be pointed out that in “almost all theories that societies created about themselves, in processes of self-determination of social groups, classes, nations, and separate cultural circles, these systems of ‘self-knowledge’ or ‘self-representations’ most often [...] include certain forms of ‘incorporating’ the past to the current social consciousness” (Assorodobraj-Kula 1963: 5). Perhaps it is also worth considering to what extent a representation of the social past influences the theory of cultural/collective/historical memory and how this memory manifests in the field of exploration of cultural texts intended for the young reader.

A special role in mnemonic texts is played by, among others, a type of parabolic, metaphorical, oneiric, postmodern, poetic, and fairy-tale narrative, especially in the works whose themes focus on traumatic experiences during the Holocaust, the memory of the Shoah, and the difficult Polish-Jewish relations (Czapliński 2010: 357; cf. Błonski 1994, Jadźewska-Goldsteinowa 1995: 9). The books are rooted in individual experiences of children and adults, combining documentary narrative with lyricism; these fragmentary, sketchy, and “torn” fictional micro-stories are detached from the main events; they reflect the concept of imagination as defined by Gaston Bachelard; they are immersed in existential problems and refer to ethical representations of reality, including ethical attitudes.

These works are filled with “silence of emotions” and reflect the unique anthropological sensitivity of the narrative, which sometimes is expressed not in words, but through a “feeling” of “duration of time,” simple gestures, and looks (cf. Ubertowska 2007). The time felt by the characters can be individual and psychological; it also takes the form of “intersubjective specific time” (cf. Bartoszyński 1987: 220; Engelking 1996: 9–10), creating questions “about continuity, durability, and identity in the time of the human individual [...] and the relationship between individual memory and the permanence of the self” (Bartoszyński 1987: 220). Shifts in time and returns to the past also bring out in the stories poetic images of a happy childhood. They are based on the Arcadian tradition and aesthetics and allow characters to temporarily forget about the ongoing nightmare. Such a narrative strategy allows to emphasize the psychological aspects of the characters and the problems of resilience of the human psyche.

The analysis of literary testimonies concerning the experiences of survivors allows us to conclude that they reach the audience in a structure corresponding

to the anthropological or cognitive perspective (Young 1988). They can therefore show “a certain representation of cognitive processes taking place in the human mind” (Owczarek 2001: 15). Literary narratives based on the theme of the Holocaust “imitate the imperfections of memory and the limited cognitive perspective” but most of all they show “the function of disintegration of the image of the world, dissolution of the foundations on which life rested before the war, before the Holocaust” (Ubertowska 2007: 151). The choice of such a description strategy also corresponds to the very nature of survival and biography, which does not form a coherent, meaningful self-narrative but shows a specific pattern of battered life as defined by Adorno (1999)⁴.

“[T]he events of the Holocaust are not only shaped *post factum* in their narration, but [...] they were initially determined as they unfolded by the schematic ways in which they were apprehended, expressed, and then acted upon,” writes James E. Young in his book *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust* (1988: 5).⁵ Following in the footsteps of Aleksandra Ubertowska, one of the ways of describing a traumatic experience and its aftermath would be individual micro-incident, micro-narratives, micro-stories, not always cohesive and coherent, often fragmented and segmented. Such strategies of presenting the world are associated with the issue of inexpressibility and refer the reader to the category of deconstruction of language, subject, and reality (Ubertowska 2007: 151).

Literary testimonies of extermination by contemporary authors allow us to explore the phenomenon of memory from a modern perspective, which enables researchers to take into account the changing and dynamic nature of memory (cf. Ulanowicz 2013: 4). Thus, they assume “discontinuity” of the narrative, its incompleteness, and lack of a logical cause-and-effect structure of the story, while highlighting poetic and mental images ostensibly unrelated to the overall statement (cf. Rembowska-Płuciennik 2009; Jahn 2005).

An important perspective in the interpretation of works considered from the point of view of contemporary young audience and, more broadly, humanities education, will therefore be the issue of cultural memory and historical aspects of its “use” in building social awareness, analyzed in the contexts of historical politics, cultural anthropology, and history of communication (cf. A. Assmann 2012), the issues of post-memory (Hirsch 1999, 2008), the subject of the relationship between history and memory of place (Nora 1998), collective and individual memory (Halbwachs 1992), memory and popular culture (Landsberg 2004), and, clearly exploited in recent years, the issues of historical

⁴ This type of narrative, used in the context of the social community, is mentioned by Maria Janion in her discussion of *A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising* by Miron Białoszewski: “What is usually treated as a set of features of poetic imagination—perceived as dreamy, oneiric, and somnambulistic—suddenly becomes the shared experience of the entire insurgent population” (Janion 2007: 76).

⁵ Ubertowska (2007: 151). Cf. Owczarek 2001: 15.

memory discourse in the perspective of texts on the Holocaust (Czapliński 2009; Ubertowska 2007; Żurek 2021), the issue of figures of memory, and intergenerational dialogue in research on cultural texts for children and young adults. Unquestionably, memory – frequently associated with traumatic historical events – has become a significant theme in global children’s and young adult literature and children’s literature studies (cf. Kertzer 2002; Bosmajian 2002; Kokkola 2003; Vice 2004; Shavit 2005; Kidd 2005; Ramos 2010; Scerbo 2012; Ulanowicz 2013; Gangi 2014; Snell and Hutchison 2014; Oziewicz 2016; Kania 2017; Dean-Ruzicka 2017; Michułka 2018; Wądolny-Tatar 2018; García-González 2020; Dudek-Wójcik 2020; Kamińska-Maciąg 2020; Herrera-Cortés and Pertúz-Bedoya 2020; Świetlicki 2020; Kachak 2021)⁶.

There are many scholarly points of view on the phenomenon of memory, which translates into multifaceted perspectives and interdisciplinarity of tasks in literary and cultural research practices, and thus creates problems even with the classification of concepts and naming of methodological tools in this evolving post-discipline of memory studies. These issues are “arranged” by Jan and Aleida Assmann, who introduce methodological criteria for examining the phenomenon of memory divided into three categories: (a) individual memory, rooted in personal biographical experience; (b) communicative memory, passed on in the course of intergenerational dialogue; and (c) cultural memory, embedded in symbols and artefacts, reinforcing collective identity (2012). On the other hand, Halbwachs in his classic sociological study of memory (*Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, 1925) devotes a lot of space to the issues of location and storage of memories as well as reconstruction of the past. He also considers the concept of collective memory, which in his opinion manifests and becomes active in various communities, such as social classes or families. Halbwachs states that only a community can provide a subject, including the child audience, with a specific framework in which the subject places the remembered facts (cf. 1992). All three categories of memory discussed by Jan and Aleida Assmann as well as the issues of “storage of memories” and reconstruction of the past within communities as defined by Halbwachs are also present in works intended for the young reader and are discussed in articles published in this volume.

Moreover, it seems that the above considerations linking literary studies with the anthropological and cultural approach to the phenomenon of memory present in the works for children and young people, considered in the perspective of “culture of the present,” may also reflect current social problems, provoking discussion on difficult issues (including, for example, the issue of historical and cultural baggage of the difficult heritage of the past and the related activities of historical politics) and promoting “agency”/actions and

⁶ Also see the eighth volume of *Filoteknos* (2018) focused on Russian and Eastern European war childhood (editors: Larissa Rudova and Dorota Michułka).

active participation in culture; they are part of a wider “educational project” of engaged humanities called by Ryszard Nycz “humanities of social usefulness” which “should confront and solve topical social and civilization problems instead of locking itself in an ivory tower of anachronistic, hermetic issues” (2017: 21).

This volume of *Filoteknos* showcases a variety of challenging approaches to the theme of memory in children’s and young adult literature and children’s culture. The authors study various cultural texts, such as YA novels, picture-books, poems, autobiographies, and graphic novels representing different cultures and literary traditions. The contributions have been arranged into thematic clusters.

The first part includes articles presenting the different approaches towards the depiction of the Second World War in narratives for young readers. In the opening article titled “*Noc żywych Żydów [Night of the Living Jews]*” by Igor Ostachowicz – *Judaic and Shoah Topoi*, Sławomir Jacek Żurek examines the role of various Shoah topoi in contemporary Polish literature. Farriba Schulz in “*Sois gentil et tiens courage!*” *Reshaping “Anne Frank’s Diary” Through New Imagery* demonstrates how the graphic novel adaptation of Frank’s diary engages with the figures of Holocaust memory and fictionalized war references. Monika Graban-Pomirska’s *Tragizm, codzienność i przygoda. Pamięć o wojnie w powieściach “Dzieci Warszawy” Marii Zarebińskiej i “Dzieci wśród nocy” Ireny Krzywickiej* focuses on the depictions of memory in two widely forgotten Polish novels published right after WWII. Finally, Krzysztof Rybak in *Shaping the Memory of Irena Sendler in Polish Children’s Literature* discusses the ways in which the image of Irena Sendler, the famous Polish humanitarian, is constructed in books for young readers.

The second cluster is devoted to the relationship between memory and migration. Both Katarzyna Wądołny-Tatar in *Migration as an Experience of Speech and Communication in Polish Children’s Literature* and Małgorzata Wójcik-Dudek in *Pamięć domu. Polska literatura dla dzieci o migracjach* focus on analyzing the various ways in which the theme of migration is portrayed in Polish literature. The authors seem to agree with Hartmut Lutz who concurs that “the traumas of emigration and exile are indeed transgenerational” (2007: 19).

The third cluster focuses on visual narratives. In *Memory Visualized. A Comparative Analysis of Iconotexts in Selected Nordic Picturebooks*, Hanna Dymel-Trzebiatowska analyzes Nordic picturebooks. Justyna Zajac writes about the images of war and children in contemporary picturebooks in *Obraz żydowskiego dziecka oraz pamięć o wojnie w książkach obrazkowych dla młodego odbiorcy. Dotknięcie człowieka – wskrzeszenie obrazu. Studium narracji pisanej fotografią Krzysztofa Millera* by Anna Włodarczyk contains a detailed analysis of the role of memory in Krzysztof Miller’s photography. The last article in this cluster, Tzina Kalogirou’s *Time Lost and Time Regained*

in *Contemporary Children's Literature*, focuses on showing the various depictions of time in picturebooks.

Articles in the fourth cluster address childhood memory in poetry and autobiography. Paweł Mackiewicz in *Dzieciom, którymi byłem. Przestrzenie pamięci Dariusza Suski* deals with the depiction on children and childhood in poetry. Dagmara Tomczyk in *Pamięć wpisana w przestrzeń miasta. O Podróży w krainę dzieciństwa Horsta Bienka* examines the relations between memory, history, and space in Horst Bienek's autobiographical book. Finally, Kamil Nolbert in *Dlaczego Otwock rymuje się z sosną? Przestrzeń, czas i pamięć w Piotra Sommera wierszach dla dzieci* examines the relationship between space, time, and memory in Piotr Sommer's children's poetry.

The themes of memory, generations, values, and education appear in the fifth cluster. Dorota Michułka and Mirosława Wawrzak-Chodaczek address all of these issues in *Meetings with the Past: Figures of Memory, Values, and Education in Contemporary Polish Narratives for Children and Young Adults*. Jolanta Ługowska in *Pamięć rodzinna w cyklu powieści Małgorzaty Musierowicz Jeżycjada* focuses on memory and family dynamics in the classic series of novels of Musierowicz, one of Poland's most popular children's books author. Wojciech Browarny in *Turystyka literacka na Dolnym Śląsku i pograniczach regionu (zarys badań dziedzictwa kultury literackiej i współczesnych zasobów turystycznoliterackich)* writes about literary heritage tourism and the role of places of memory (Nora 1998) in the transfer of cultural memory. Finally, Justyna Mętrak in "We Make Our Own Familia" – *The Transfer of Memory in Patricia Nell Warren's "Billy's Boy" (1997)* points to the role of objects and customs in the generational transfer of memory in a little-known American novel, the sequel to Warren's bestselling *The Front Runner* (1974). Mętrak examines the traumatic impact the death of the protagonist's father has on his family.

The sixth thematic cluster includes two articles devoted to distinctive figures of memory and the ways in which children respond to them. In "We Go on Adventures..." – *How Children Deal with Golem Representations in Literature and Popular Culture*, Caroline R. Wittig writes about the attitudes of German children towards selected popular depictions of the Golem. Justyna Kowal in *Figures of Memory in W.G. Sebald's "Austerlitz" – Reception of Young Readers* investigates the reading reactions of a group of thirteen and fourteen-year-old students asked to read *Austerlitz*.

The last cluster contains two articles. In *Historycy i historia wobec pamięci. Refleksje na marginesie wielkich dyskusji*, Małgorzata Ruchniewicz overviews various theoretical approaches towards memory expressed by historians. In her analysis of Yulia Yakovleva's *The Raven's Children*, Sylwia Kamińska-Maciąg explores the representation of the Great Terror in contemporary Russian historical fiction.

Traditionally, this issue of *Filoteknos* includes VARIA section, this time featuring articles by Maria Kwiatkowska-Ratajczak (*One Student, Two Schools*

– *About the Problems of Combining Education in Poland and Abroad*) about education and Inna Sergienko's study on the depictions on boyhood in Soviet-Russian children's literature ("Boys with Swords" – *The Heroes of the Last Soviet Generation and the Models of Masculinity in Vladislav Krapivin's Fiction*).

This issue contains an interview with Anastasia Ulanowicz, an eminent American scholar of children's literature and memory studies, conducted by Mateusz Świetlicki. In the interview, Ulanowicz talks about her past and present research, as well as the ways in which her Ukrainian-Polish heritage has influenced her work.

Furthermore, this issue includes two reviews of recent scholarly publications on children's literature. In *Nostalgia, the Distorted Mirror, and the Problem of Translations*, Mateusz Świetlicki discusses Małgorzata Chrobak's *Bohater literatury dziecięcej i młodzieżowej z okresu PRL-u. Między kreacją a recepcją* (2019). Bogumiła Staniów in *Contemporary Popular Science Books for Children and Youth in France – An Example of Model Development Strategies on the Publishing Market* writes about Agnieszka Wandel's *Przemiany współczesnej książki popularnonaukowej dla dzieci i młodzieży (na przykładzie francuskiej oferty wydawniczej)* (2019).

We are thankful to all the contributors to this issue for their commitment to this editorial venture. We would also like to thank the external reviewers for their comments and insightful suggestions.

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