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## Researching and Teaching Children's Literature. Second-generation Memory, Bloodlands Fiction, and the COVID Crisis

Anastasia Ulanowicz (University of Florida) in an Interview  
with Mateusz Świetlicki (University of Wrocław)

**MATEUSZ ŚWIETLIICKI: While your main research focus is anglophone children's literature, you frequently write about Eastern European cultural history. Has your heritage played an important role in the development of your career?**

**ANASTASIA ULANOWICZ:** I'm glad you asked this question, because it's one I've been thinking about for a very long time. The short answer is yes, my Eastern European heritage absolutely has played an important part in my intellectual career – and will no doubt continue to influence it.

As readers might suspect, my name – Anastasia Ulanowicz – gives away my Ukrainian and Polish background. My mother, a Ukrainian, was born during the Second World War in the city of Ivano-Frankivsk (then Stanisławów) and eventually emigrated with my grandparents and her extended family to the United States. My father, although he was born in the US to Polish immigrants who had largely assimilated to American culture, nevertheless made a concerted effort to learn their first language. After my parents met in Baltimore and eventually married – initially to the consternation of their own parents, who harbored bitter memories of historical conflicts between Ukrainians and Poles – they agreed to raise their children within the Ukrainian-American diasporic community, so long as these children remained equally cognizant of their Polish heritage.

Growing up in a largely post-Second World War-era Ukrainian diasporic community certainly influenced my thinking about memory – even before I had the scholarly language in which to articulate it. Since my maternal elders' generation came to the US for political rather than economic reasons and

thus imagined themselves more as exiles than as immigrants, their community jealously preserved all traces of the pre-immigration past in the hope of ensuring a smooth reentry into a lost homeland. For me, that meant attending Ukrainian “Saturday School” lessons in language, music, geography, and culture; attending both liturgy and lectures at the local church; and observing both holiday traditions and quotidian customs like mid-afternoon dinners. Of course, my Ukrainian school friends and I assimilated aspects of American culture. Not only did we *have* to do so, since we attended American schools on the weekdays, but we often *wanted* to do so, as a form of teenage rebellion (itself a thoroughly American concept). And yet, we shared our elders’ belief that we were ultimately more Ukrainian than we were American.

It wasn’t until I first “returned” to Ukraine shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union – and at the time, I really did imagine it as a return – that I realized that what I’d claimed as my Ukrainian identity was in some ways an expression of a bygone era. For example, I swiftly realized my vocabulary and diction sounded archaic to family members and friends whose spoken Ukrainian had substantially changed since the initial Soviet occupation of western Ukraine. What’s more, I began to notice how much I’d adopted my elders’ physical gestures. (“It’s like you’re a grandmother coming out of a village church,” a native Ukrainian friend once affectionately observed). I suppose the impression that I, as a diasporic subject, continue to make on contemporary Ukrainians might be similar to that made on Americans by someone affecting the voice and mannerisms of, say, Katherine Hepburn: although I may have been born in the 1970’s, I’m paradoxically something of a living artifact of the 1940s. Certainly, this experience of living betwixt-and-between – of consciously occupying one cultural and historical moment whilst unconsciously inhabiting a very different one – substantially influenced my formulation of second-generation memory, or that form of individual memory that is not predicated wholly on direct experience.

My close relationship to both my Ukrainian and Polish heritage also influenced my thinking about testimony. Like many children, I was positively entranced by stories, and the most interesting ones were always those told by my grandparents. My maternal grandmother was very forthcoming about her experiences in World-War-era western Ukraine: as a schoolteacher, she was blacklisted by the Soviets for refusing to place portraits of Stalin in her classroom. Likewise, my paternal grandmother would share vignettes of daily life in an insular and tightly-knit immigrant enclave of East Baltimore: to my delight, she’d pepper her stories with Polish words and expressions.

As I grew older, however, I became increasingly intrigued by how my elders’ habits and behaviors suggested stories they could not (or perhaps would not) yet tell. For example, as brave as my maternal grandmother might have been, she nevertheless had a crippling phobia of thunderstorms. I only now realize that the sound of cracking thunder must have elicited the same response as World-War-era aerial bombings. My own mother becomes physically distraught when she

has to enter a gated community (of which, sadly, there are not too few in Florida). It was only a few years ago that I learned that her first childhood memory was of being in a very different kind of gated community – that is, a Nazi concentration camp in which she and my grandparents were imprisoned shortly before the end of the war. Likewise, although my paternal grandparents, like many immigrant families of their own generation, attained a level of material comfort by the 1950's, they nevertheless scrupulously conserved electricity, water, and food and also compulsively saved even minor items like sugar packets. Such habits, I later learned, were those they cultivated during the Great Depression – and they were probably also those they mimicked from the example of their own Polish working-class parents. My observations of details like these have helped me recognize how testimony need not be verbal, or even conscious: rather, one's witness to the past might just well as be bodily performed. What is more, such observations have convinced me that embodied memories, just like oral or verbal testimonies, may be inherited. For example, I myself become suddenly anxious when I approach the entrance of a gated community, and my friends and colleagues make gentle fun of me when I scrupulously, if not obsessively, switch off the lights in unoccupied classrooms on campus.

It's only been recently that my research has become more focused on texts initially produced in Eastern Europe – for example, Oksana Zabuzhko's *Музей покинутих секретів* [*The Museum of Abandoned Secrets*] (2009) and Andriy Chaikovskij's *За сестрою* [*In Quest for His Sister*] (1907). I suppose, on some level, I had to first reckon with the American context in which I first received my elders' memories of Eastern Europe before I was prepared to embark on a study of texts that were actually and originally produced in Eastern Europe. Even so, for good or for ill, my readings will always be influenced by my betwixt-and-between position as a diasporic subject.

**In your award-winning book *Second-Generation Memory and Contemporary Children's Literature: Ghost Images* (Routledge, 2013) you focus on the textual representations of intergenerational second-generation memory. Would you say that reading such books can potentially lead to any form of extratextual transfer of memory?**

I would begin by saying that, at least according to Western theories of memory, all recollection is in some ways textually mediated. After all, in order for a person to give an account of themselves – and thus, what they remember – they must draw on pre-existing narrative frameworks. Moreover, what a person chooses to remember (or to forget) either reaffirms or challenges what, and how, the larger collective in which they are situated remembers and forgets. Notably, individuals often recall events or impressions through significant texts: we see this, for example, in the many allusions employed by memoirists like Augustine and Proust. And, as the cultural theorist Walter Benjamin demonstrates in *Berlin Childhood Around 1900* (1932/1938), our memories

– especially our early childhood memories – are shaped not only by literary, visual, and musical texts, but also through our engagement with everyday spaces and material objects.

One of the premises of my book is that, since all recollection is ultimately collectively and textually mediated, even individual memory need not be predicated on direct experience. That is, textual engagements allow people to forge deeply intimate mnemonic narratives of events they did not immediately witness. This is not at all a new phenomenon. For example, Jews and Christians have for centuries remembered the Exodus and the Last Supper, respectively, through the reading and performance of biblical and liturgical texts in ways that sensually connect them to their ancestors. Today, the circulation of visual and aural texts via film, television, radio, and social media permits people to incorporate events they did not directly experience into their mnemonic repertoires. For example, even though I lived hundreds of miles away from New York City during the September 11 terrorist attacks, I still claim to remember this event because I can recall exactly where I was when I witnessed it on live television – and how I perceived its immediate responses and consequences. Even my students who were infants (or yet unborn) during this event claim some memory of it because they grew up seeing images of the attacks; hearing their elders share “where-I-was-when-it-happened” stories; watching or reading 9/11-themed narratives; and attending memorial events.

The film and memory scholar Alison Landsberg has called such textually-mediated memories “prosthetic memories.” Much like prosthetic limbs, she argues, textual artifacts such as novels, films, and the materials curated in museum exhibits are not originally part of an individual’s “organic” memory, or that memory of direct experience. Even so, she continues, a person can incorporate them into their own mnemonic repertoire, just as a person might incorporate an artificial limb or a pair of reading glasses. I really like this metaphor, because it supports the social justice component of Landsberg’s argument. That is, such incorporated or prosthetic memories, much like other technological innovations (including, recently, AR, or amplified reality), permit people to sense and in turn act in radically new ways. For instance, Landsberg argues that point-of-view shots in John Singleton’s 1997 film *Rosewood* – about the 1923 massacre of citizens of an historically Black community in Florida by white supremacists – not only sears images of racist violence into the memories of white audiences but also does so by privileging long-repressed Black perspectives.

In my own book, I draw on concepts such as Landsberg’s in order to formulate my own term, “second-generation memory.” As I argue, all people – especially since the rise of mechanical reproduction – necessarily incorporate texts into their own mnemonic repertoires. What distinguishes second-generation memory, however, is its bearer’s *awareness* of such mediation, and thus of the ways such mediation leads to new perspectives of the past. Thus, the term “second-generation memory” has two connotations: it refers not only to memory

that has been passed down from one generation to the next, but also to new (or "second") productions (or "generations") of initial recollections.

To give an example, I might cite Judy Blume's 1977 semi-autobiographical novel, *Starring Sally J Freedman As Herself*. In the course of this novel, Blume's literary avatar, Sally, overhears her elders' conversations about her beloved cousin's death in the Holocaust. Although Sally grasps the basic facts surrounding her cousin's demise – she knows Lila was deported from her home to a concentration camp, where she was eventually gassed to death – she nevertheless has difficulty grasping its larger significance. Thus, she draws on the conventions of classic Hollywood cinema in order to construct a cohesive narrative of the circumstances leading to Lila's death. Later, Sally recognizes that the stories she constructs are, like the films she enjoys, simply fantasies. And yet, she also acknowledges how these narratives, however textually mediated and imagined they might be, have nevertheless permitted her a preliminary framework through which she might apprehend the conditions in which her cousin was persecuted. This in turn allows her to make crucial connections between the structures of injustice that led to her Jewish cousin's death in the Holocaust and the systemic racism she perceives in her community of Miami, Florida: she becomes more attuned, for example, to how racially-separated drinking fountains and train-cars in the US are not unlike the ethnically-demarcated spaces enforced in Nazi-occupied Europe.

Another example of how reading may permit extratextual transfer of memory is Zlata Filipović's diary of the early 1990's siege of Sarajevo, *Zlata's Diary* (1993). When the siege begins and Zlata is confined largely within her flat or her apartment building's basement for shelter, she perceives a kinship with the child-diarist, Anne Frank. Thus, she models her own diary on Anne's: for example, she addresses an imagined interlocutor she names "Mimmy" (much like Anne's own "Kitty") and she devotes her entries in equal part to the events occurring around her and to everyday domestic life. At certain moments, she appeals to Anne's memory, and that of the Holocaust more broadly, by likening the internecine warfare and ethnic cleansing in Bosnia to the Nazi persecution of Jews and other minorities during the Second World War. Crucially, however, Zlata never equates herself with Anne, nor does she imply that the conditions she faces are the same as those Anne experienced. Rather, she draws on the cultural memory of the Holocaust, as she receives it through Anne's diary, in order to contextualize and examine her own present circumstances. In this way, she posits herself as Anne Frank's heir – as a descendant in a genealogy of wartime child diarists.

In my readings of both *Starring Sally J Freedman as Herself* and *Zlata's Diary*, I thus argue that second-generation memory is *relational*. It is so, first, because it is often forged through kinship – either familial kinship, as in *Sally*, or through sympathetic engagement with an author or narrator, as in *Zlata's Diary*. Moreover, it is relational insofar as it depends on a conscious

recognition of networks of texts that at once deliver memory from one generation to the next and permit its rearticulation and reimagination.

**I am currently working on a book project about memory in North American children's literature, and I have noticed that books by diasporic authors of Eastern European heritage, such as Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch, are practically unknown here, although they deal with our local history and cultural memory. Does it mean that such literature has no mnemonic potential for non-North American readers?**

If I may, I'd like to begin to respond to this question not by immediately addressing either North American or Eastern European children's literature, but rather by citing a study of *Irish* literature and film that might place the nuances of your query into further relief.

As the film scholar Dana Och has observed – most recently in the scholarly collection I co-edited on the aesthetics and politics of global hunger – members of the North American Irish diaspora are far more likely than their Irish counterparts to offer direct representations of the “Great Potato Famine” of 1845 (*an Gorta Mór*) that devastated British-occupied Ireland and forced starving colonized Irish subjects to emigrate. This is because, Och maintains, North Americans of Irish heritage tend to perceive the Famine as a “closed” history – that is, one that eventually led to immigration to, and assimilation within, US and Canadian society. For example, she notes that Hollywood films such as Ron Howard's *Far and Away* (1992) tend to imagine the Great Famine merely as an overture to romantic stories of immigration and American settlement. By contrast, Och argues, contemporary citizens of Ireland are more likely to imagine the Famine as an “open” or otherwise ongoing traumatic history still subject to interpretation – not least because Anglo-Irish conflicts, most recently experienced during the 1970's and 80's, still survive within the living memory of a great number of Irish citizens. For this reason, she observes, Irish authors and filmmakers are less likely than their American counterparts to depict the nineteenth-century Famine as an historical event that has been resolved within a conclusive national mythology. Rather, Och maintains, they address this historical “sideways,” so to speak, through allegorical forms such as horror. She cites, for example, Neil Jordan's film *Byzantium* (2012) which uses the figure of the vampire to suggest the persistence of the (“undead”) traumatic past.

If I've offered a fairly detailed account of one film scholar's account of Irish (and diasporic Irish) memory here, it's because I suspect it may offer analogical insight into the relationship between North American and Eastern European depictions of the (pre-/post-) Soviet past. Here in North America, moments in twentieth century Eastern European history – from the October Revolution to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 – all tend to be regarded as “closed” or relatively resolved. Even beautifully written and nuanced North American children's books like Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch's picture book *Enough* (2000



[illustrated by Michael Martchenko – M.Š.]) and Ruta Sepetys's novel *Salt to the Sea* (2016) depict twentieth century Eastern European historical traumatic events as “closed” or otherwise resolved. In the former, the heroine is ultimately able to save her starving Ukrainian village during the height of the Holodomor – not least because she receives aid from a community of Ukrainian-Canadian farmers. In the latter, two survivors of the *Wilhelm Gustloff* maritime disaster of 1945 eventually emigrate to the United States, where they raise the baby of one of its victims. It could be argued that these authors were either directly or unconsciously swayed by North American readers' desire for “a good happy Hollywood ending” – and to be sure, there is good precedence for American publishers to demand such fortuitous, though bittersweet, conclusions. I do think, however, that it's not insignificant that both Skrypuch and Sepetys produced these narratives from their respective positions as members of the Ukrainian and Lithuanian diaspora: for them, and for the elders whose testimonies influenced them, mid-twentieth-century Eastern European traumas *did* result in so-called “happy endings” – or at least, in escapes from totalitarian regimes. In this way, their works are similar to those produced by the Irish-American diaspora in response to the nineteenth-century Famine, or *an Gorta Mór*.

By contrast, I've found that authors of Eastern European children's books tend to be much more wary of offering traditionally linear and conclusive depictions of these same historical themes. For example, it is only recently that Polish children's authors have published mainstream novels about the Warsaw ghetto and the Holocaust. Likewise, it was only in 2016 that Yulia Yakovleva published *Дети Ворона* (*The Raven's Children*), the first mass-market Russian depiction of the Stalinist Terror written for children – and notably, her gorgeously conceived novel relies on conventions of magical realism that render ambiguous its ostensible happy ending. This may well be because in Eastern Europe, the history of traumatic twentieth-century events – for example, Nazi and Soviet occupation, pogroms and the Holocaust, the Holodomor, the Stalinist Terror, etc. – is not yet “closed” or otherwise resolved in the way it appears to be in North America. First, these events still haunt the living memory of Eastern Europeans who, unlike their diasporic “cousins,” had no opportunity to escape – and for many of whom life under one totalitarian regime simply gave way to life under another. Moreover, Eastern Europeans' experiences of shifting borders, political allegiances, and constant surveillance have continued to provoke difficult debates about culpability, or about the distinction between “victims” and “perpetrators.”

My sense, then, is that many North American children's books about twentieth-century Eastern European traumas haven't gained traction in Eastern Europe itself because they do not adequately address the political and ethical nuances that current critical discourses in this geo-political/cultural region demand. For example, many of these texts' deployment of binaries of “good” and “evil” – or their (often unconscious) reliance on Western myths of individualism

and personal responsibility – simply don't adequately address the complexities of everyday life under totalitarian regimes. I'd venture to say that such complexities are best represented by Eastern European children's authors themselves, who possess the language and cultural references that may immediately speak to both child readers and the adult caregivers who often share books with them.

Of course, this is certainly not to say that diasporic/North American works of children's literature have no value for young Eastern European audiences. In fact, the success of Yakovleva's *The Raven's Children* in Russia may well have been influenced by the previous publication of Olga Bukhina's translation of Eugene Yelchin's *Breaking Stalin's Nose*: in this novel, the Russian-American author/illustrator draws on his own experiences of surveillance in the 1960's/70's-era Soviet Union in order to depict the moral contingencies faced by a schoolboy in Stalinist-era Moscow. And I'd very much like to see Skrypuch's *Enough* translated into Ukrainian – if not other Slavic languages – not least because its well-researched portrayal of the Holodomor, as well as illustrator Michael Martchenko's subtly drawn accompanying images, might well inspire Eastern European writers/illustrators to address an historical subject that has been largely unrepresented in children's literature. Even so, I do think it's necessary for both Eastern European readers and scholars to recognize how diasporic/North American texts such as these are mediated by the historical and cultural contexts in which they were produced. Indeed, by doing so, they may be better prepared to address the critical details of twentieth-century Eastern European traumatic experience that North Americans – or, in fact, the rest of the world – have foreclosed.

**Why is the theme of WWII – especially the Holocaust – still so popular with North American children's literature writers, such as Kathy Kacer, while other historical traumas seem to be largely forgotten?**

This is a very important question that probably deserves a longer and more detailed account than the one I can give here. But I'll try to give some responses that may invite further conversation.

I'd begin by noting that both Canada and the United States received an influx of immigrants immediately after the Second World War. These new immigrant communities solidified their identities in part by commemorating the traumatic events their European family members and neighbors experienced and that they themselves survived. They strove to ensure that the devastation wrought by the war and the Shoah would be remembered not only by their own members, but also by the citizens of their newly adopted countries. For instance, the first children's books about the Holocaust – much like those about other historical atrocities such as the Armenian genocide, Hiroshima, and the Holodomor – were written by children and grandchildren of survivors.

If immigrant narratives of the Second World War and the Holocaust gained particular traction in North America, this is in part because of the historical



and ideological context in which they were published. Throughout the course of the War, Americans and Canadians saw frightful images of bomb-pocked European cities and skeletal concentration camp prisoners in newsreels; later, they heard first-hand about events such as the storming of Normandy and the liberation of the Nazi camps from returning soldiers. And yet, the terrifying images and stories they received remained incomprehensible – as indeed they are. I'd argue, then, that North Americans' desire to return to narratives of the War and the Holocaust is something of a continued, if largely unconscious, attempt to comprehend or otherwise master the inscrutable images of devastation that they may have witnessed from afar, but which nevertheless seared their memories. Indeed, I believe Blume's novel, *Starring Sally J Freedman As Herself* – whose eponymous protagonist attempts to “make sense” of her cousin's death in Dachau through appeals to popular culture – convincingly represents this larger cultural desire.

Moreover, in North America, and especially in the US, the Second World War is often referred to as the “Good War” – that is, the war in which the standard-bearers of Western democracy triumphed over fascism. The mythology of a “Good War” was initially articulated in War-era children's books such as Esther Forbes's award-winning historical novel *Johnny Tremain* (1943) and Hollywood films such as Lloyd Bacon's *The Fighting Sullivans* (1944). More recently, it has gained expression in films such as Steven Spielberg's film *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) and the HBO series *Band of Brothers* (2001). Ultimately, texts such as these suggest that the War was fought by men and women whose local home-spun values demonstrated their commitment to American-style democracy. Not insignificantly, American-produced texts that depict the Holocaust – from Lois Lowry's Newbery Award winning children's novel *Number the Stars* (1989) to Spielberg's Academy Award winning film *Schindler's List* (1993) – also reaffirm US American ideals, not least because they celebrate individual rather than collective resistance.

Although I admire these texts' stark critiques of fascism – especially at a moment when fascist regimes resurface in both the US and Europe – I do think they have overshadowed representations of other significant historical traumas. What is more, I'd argue that a dependence on “Good War” mythology, and the discourses of American exceptionalism on which it is predicated, has long permitted North American authors, scholars, and educators to envision injustice, and even genocide, as something that occurs “elsewhere” rather than in their proverbial backyards. It is not insignificant, for example, that even as US soldiers liberated concentration camps throughout Europe, thousands of Japanese-Americans were divested of their property and corralled into “intern camps” throughout the western United States. Nor is it insignificant that the US's effort to quash Nazism was not only belated – for example, in 1939, strict immigration quotas prohibited the safe harbor of Jewish children transported by the M.S. *St. Louis* – but also coterminous with its enforcement of racial

apartheid under “Jim Crow laws” and a continued denial of the nation’s legacy of slavery. Moreover, although Canadians pride themselves on living in a “cultural mosaic,” it is only recently that Canada has begun to address its systematic persecution of Indigenous peoples, especially through a boarding school system in which Indigenous children were not only removed from their communities but also often subjected to physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. To be sure, as scholars such as Kate Capshaw, Gabrielle Halko, Michelle Martin, and Debbie Reese have demonstrated, there is no lack of aesthetically and politically sophisticated children’s books that address these North American traumas. Even so, it may be less difficult for authors and readers to reckon with injustices that occurred on another continent than it is for them to reckon with those that implicate their immediate communities.

I think this has been changing in the past few years, however. Especially since the beginning of the Black Lives Matter movement and water-rights protests begun by Indigenous activists, North American presses have been increasingly devoted to publishing works by and for people of color that challenge received national myths. Additionally, scholarly organizations such as the Children’s Literature Association and the International Research Society for Children’s Literature have been engaging in the painful but necessary work of addressing non-Eurocentric historical traumas and literary work more generally.

Of course, this does not mean that North American authors, scholars, and readers should cease to explore the legacy of the Second World War and the Holocaust. On the contrary, narratives of these events are needed now more than ever. For example, I remember walking out of the Oskar Schindler museum in Kraków – whose exhibit includes cherished belongings like prayer shawls and menorahs stolen from Polish Jews – and soon thereafter seeing on my Facebook feed photographs of Central American migrants’ rosaries confiscated by the US Border Patrol. If I found this uncanny juxtaposition of archived images especially disturbing and dispiriting, it was because many US citizens who are rightfully appalled by early twentieth-century atrocities – and who might in fact claim that they should occur “Never Again” – nevertheless overlook how they continue to be repeated, with a difference, in new historical, cultural, and geopolitical contexts. Ultimately, what I believe is needed now – perhaps more than ever – is a further effort to engage with what the Holocaust scholar Michael Rothberg calls “multi-directional memory.” That is, it is important to think about historical traumas (and their aesthetic representation) both in their specific contexts and in relation to one another – and thus to further examine not only how the past bears on the present but on how the present illuminates the past.

**While “trauma fiction” is an umbrella term, in your latest project, you are using a different notion, “bloodlands fiction.” What makes this type of fiction unlike other trauma narratives? Can you tell us something more about this project?**

I'm glad you asked this question about this book-project, which I'm currently undertaking with my colleague Professor Marek Oziewicz of the University of Minnesota.

A few years ago, at a conference sponsored by the Children's Literature Association, Marek and I observed that most of our North American students – and in fact, some of our North American and Western European colleagues – are only acquainted with Second World War-era history through Anglo-American historiography. For example, although most can easily recite the fact that the War began with Germany's invasion of Poland in the autumn of 1939, they are largely unaware that the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact ensured the Soviet Union's simultaneous invasion of Poland's eastern regions. Likewise, although most Westerners can easily identify the storming of Normandy as a substantial turning point in the War, many do not recognize the battle of Stalingrad as in fact the bloodiest and most strategically significant military event of the European theatre. Moreover, although most school-aged children in North America and Western Europe (and indeed, throughout the globe) are well-acquainted with Nazi concentration camps, many do not know that the Soviet Gulag system consumed the lives of just as many civilians, or that Stalin's forced starvation of 4–7 million Soviet peasants preceded Hitler's genocidal "Final Solution."

At the time of this conversation, Marek and I had both just read historian Timothy Snyder's recently published book, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (2012), which argues that the geo-political region we identify as "Eastern Europe" was uniquely affected by the Second World War, not least because its contestation by the twin totalitarian regimes of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Soviet Union subjected those within its shifting borders to multiple threats of deportation, imprisonment, and (mass) execution. Snyder's study thus prompted us to (re-)read works of global children's fiction that depict the experiences of young people in the "Bloodlands" of Eastern Europe between the rise of Hitler's and Stalin's coterminous claims to power and the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. Our main objective, at this initial period of our collaboration, was to identify those texts that represent moments of War-era history of which Western readers might be *least* aware: for example, Soviet (rather than Nazi) deportations of Eastern European Jews; the siege of Leningrad (1941–1944); the Katyń massacre of 1940; the sinking of the *Wilhelm Gustloff* in 1945 (the greatest maritime disaster of the war); and the Russo-Finnish "Winter War" of 1939–40.

Having conducted this preliminary study, Marek and I made the crucial decision to identify as "Bloodlands fiction" those works that specifically address Stalinist-era Soviet atrocities. In doing so, we certainly did not overlook the tremendous devastation wrought by the Nazi occupation of Eastern Europe, including the intentional construction of Nazi death camps in eastern regions beyond the proverbial pale of so-called Aryan civilization. Nor did we discount the fact that most Slavic people (including, indeed, my own family members) were as

persecuted by the Nazis as they were by the Soviets. Even so, we were mindful of how literary representations of the Nazi occupation of Eastern Europe, and in turn their scholarly discussion, have largely overshadowed those of Stalinist occupation and atrocities. Thus, we improvised on Snyder's initial conceit in order to posit "Bloodlands fiction" as a genre of War-era-themed trauma literature that is at once distinct from, but nevertheless intimately bound up with, the concerns of the well-established genre of "Holocaust fiction."

If there is one thing that immediately distinguishes Bloodlands fiction, it is its very newness. For example, although Holocaust narratives began to appear within children's fiction during the 1970's and early 1980's, most fictional depictions of Soviet atrocities – with the exception of Hergé's visually pioneering but dubiously researched *Tintin in the Land of the Soviets* (1930) and Esther Hautzig's far more historically accurate semi-autobiographical novel *The Endless Steppe* (1968) – did not emerge within global children's literature until the turn of the twenty-first century. The very periodization of Bloodlands fiction, we argue, is a key component of its analysis. It is not insignificant, for example that most literary texts that depict Stalinist atrocities – for instance, Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch's *Enough* (2000), Eugene Yelchin's *Breaking Stalin's Nose* (2011), and Ruta Sepetys' *Between Shades of Gray* (2011) – were not published by major presses until well after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

To that end, one of the objectives of this project is to argue that the historical, cultural, and political contexts in which these very recent works of Bloodlands fiction have been produced significantly inform their representations of Stalinist atrocities. For example, in our chapter on children's books about the Holodomor, we argue that the apparent belatedness of literary depictions of the Soviet famine is significantly similar to the temporal lag between the liberation of the Nazi camps in the mid-1940's and the development of Holocaust children's literature in the 1970's and 80's. Likewise, the concerns expressed by many contemporary Ukrainians in both Ukraine and the diaspora about whether it is still "too soon" to offer aesthetic depictions of this event to young people are similar to debates about the "appropriateness" of Holocaust children's fiction that took place in North America in the 70's and 80's. Thus, this chapter begins with the premise – most recently articulated by the Russian-British scholar Alexander Etkind – that there is a generational delay between the occurrence of a traumatic event and its aesthetic representation. (If the delay between the liberation of the camps and Holocaust literature was briefer than that between the earlier-occurring Holodomor and its own literary representation, this may well be because German fascism was effectively quashed in 1945, whereas Soviet Communism persisted until 1991). The remainder of the chapter, however, accounts precisely for those political, cultural, and material conditions in both Ukraine and the diaspora that have informed the first tentative efforts to depict it in books for young people.

If this chapter is concerned with issues of temporality, our subsequent study of representations of the Stalinist Terror addresses the spatial dynamics that

inform the literary strategies deployed by authors of Bloodlands fiction. Early on, Marek and I noticed that representations of the Terror produced in North America, by American authors, and for American readers – for example, M.T. Anderson's exquisitely written *Symphony for the City of the Dead* – a novelistic biography of Dmitri Shostakovich (2016) – tend to rely on elements of literary realism, including linear plotting and attempts at historical accuracy. By contrast, Terror-themed texts written by Russian authors for Russian children – for example, Yulia Yakovleva's aforementioned *The Raven's Children* – may well include historically accurate details but nevertheless challenge their readers' expectations by introducing magical elements that thwart conventions of chronology and causal logic. Interestingly, Eugene Yelchin's illustrated novel, *Breaking Stalin's Nose* – written by a Russian émigré immediately for young American audiences – for the most part observes conventions of literary realism but nevertheless strategically inserts moments of magic. (This is clearest when, in a homage to Gogol, Yelchin suddenly introduces a talking nose to his cast of characters; additionally, there are subtler moments in his accompanying illustrations that obstruct the linear progression of his narrative). Ultimately, what we've found is that, the farther geographically and culturally removed from the initial site of Stalinist Terror a text may be, the more it draws on elements of realism that in effect suggest this history is "closed" or relatively resolved. Just so, the closer to the event that a text or author may be, the more likely they are to subvert conventions of realism in order to suggest that the historical record is still "open" – that is, unresolved, affectively experienced, and open to contestation. Of course, this isn't to say that an American text like *Symphony for the City of the Dead* doesn't invite critical engagement with historical record: indeed, Anderson frequently and explicitly questions his own sources, and invites his readers to do the same. Even so, differences in literary form – e.g., literary non-fiction/biography, realist novel, magical realist novel – ultimately demonstrate different cultural and ideological modes of thinking about the traumatic past.

On a final note, I might add that, although our book is attentive to representations of discrete national and cultural traumas offered by both Eastern European and diasporic authors, it is also concerned with how these narratives intersect and inform one another. For instance, in yet another chapter, we begin by analyzing novels that depict specifically Polish-Jewish, Polish-Catholic, and Lithuanian experiences of deportation to Siberia; in doing so, we examine how these texts use certain literary strategies to present the exceptional circumstances their characters face. However, in this chapter as in others, we also call attention to recurring narrative patterns and tropes that more largely characterize Bloodlands fiction: everything from the double-consciousness endured by surveilled subjects to the processing and transport of arrested people.

Ultimately, we hope that our book may contribute not only to discrete studies of historical traumas, but also to larger scholarly conversations about how

their comparative studies might inform new ways of thinking about trauma and justice.

**Can you name any North American children's books that have not been translated into Slavic languages but are worth translating?**

When I've visited bookshops in Eastern Europe – for example, Книгарня “Є” /*Knyharnia Ye* in L'viv and Kyiv – I've been delighted to find well-wrought translations of late nineteenth-century/early twentieth-century North American classics such as Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* and L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*. Likewise, I've taken pleasure in revisiting contemporary works like R.J. Palacio's *Wonder* and Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* trilogy in their Ukrainian, Russian, and Polish translations.

However, I'd very much like to see more Slavic language translations of North American texts published between 1950–1980. This period is known in North America – as it is in Britain – as the “Second Golden Age of Children's Literature.” During this period, Anglo/American authors constructed well-wrought literary meditations on children's vulnerability during periods of substantial socio-economic change, even as they envisioned children's unique capacity to adapt to and transform their immediate conditions. For example, novels such as E.L. Konigsburg's *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* and Zilpha Keatley Snyder's *The Egypt Game* – both published in 1967 – feature street-smart protagonists who negotiate and in fact reimagine their urban environments. Likewise, other „Second Golden Age” works such as Mildred D. Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (1976) and Cynthia Voight's *Homecoming* (1981) offer nuanced depictions of racial and class conflicts in rural US America. Moreover, books like Beverly Cleary's *Ramona* series, published between 1955 and 1999, gently unsettled myths of North American suburban affluence. Until recently, works of the “Second Golden Age” have remained largely underappreciated even in North America: they've often been overshadowed by the “classics” of the First Golden Age and contemporary works published within the past quarter-century. If they are now receiving the critical attention they deserve, this is in large part because of Ada DuVernay's 2018 film adaptation of Madeline L'Engle's 1962 children's novel, *A Wrinkle In Time*. I hope that these books continue to receive popular and scholarly attention, since the social themes they often directly address – for instance, the civil rights movement, the women's and gay rights movements, the environmental movement, among others – resound in new ways in our own contemporary and increasingly globalized moment. In fact, I was delighted to learn that our mutual friend and colleague – the Ukrainian translator, writer, and social media critic Marta Gosovska – is now translating Judy Blume's “Second Golden Age” classic, *Are You There God?: It's Me, Margaret* (1970) into Ukrainian. This book was so formational for North American readers of my generation, not only because it so boldly depicted teenaged girls' anxieties about puberty



and sexuality, but also because it addressed the additionally taboo topic of religious difference. I'll be very curious to see how a new generation of young Ukrainian readers respond to this 1970s-era US coming-of-age novel from their own cultural and political perspectives.

On something of a different note, I'm also curious to learn more about Slavic-language translations of North American comics and graphic narratives. Until recently, most literary translation studies have focused on the aesthetic and cultural nuances of *verbal* language: pictorial images are conventionally assumed to be universal. Of course, as film scholars will readily note, visual imagery itself constitutes a language that cannot so easily be communicated across cultures. Even the most minute details such as bodily gestures, clothing, the bric-a-brac in the background of domestic scenes, presentation of urban and rural landscapes, and visual perspective all contribute to the cultural sensibility of a given narrative. I'm interested, then, in seeing how Eastern European translations of contemporary North American comics might attend to these texts' verbal and visual elements. For instance, how might Eastern European translations of verbal portions of American (or more generally global) comics either directly or indirectly contextualize cultural visual cues – and to what extent might they leave them up to interpretations that might transform the reading of these hybrid verbal-visual texts? For that matter, what processes of translation might be involved in the rendering of scenes that combine verbal and visual components: what subtle but nevertheless important difference might it make, for instance, to present a visitor's doorway greeting as “*stuk-stuk*” instead of the English “*knock-knock*”?

What's exciting to me about comics is how its remarkably hybrid form – it's poised somewhere between written literature on one hand and visual art and film on the other – permits new ways of imagining the limits and possibilities of translation. Of course, these questions have already been taken up by scholars of French *bandes-dessinées* and Japanese *manga*. But they may take on new resonance once they address the rich and complex shifts of meaning that occur when comics are translated both into and from Slavic languages.

**We are currently dealing with another potentially traumatogenic situation – the coronavirus pandemic. Numerous picturebooks about COVID19 have been published in the last few months, many of questionable quality. What is the value and role of such books other than their therapeutic potential?**

I believe these early picture books, regardless of their literary or aesthetic quality, will be of particular value to historians and literary scholars who wish to investigate immediate and popular responses to the pandemic. As we as children's literature scholars are well aware, children's books are nearly always written by adults who communicate their own desires and anxieties to their young readers. Thus, these recent COVID-themed books offer examples of how adults have perceived the crisis; what scientific evidence they have chosen to emphasize or overlook or deny; what ideological values or assumptions they have

drawn on to interpret or impose meaning on the event; and what notions of childhood and their intended child readers have informed their representation.

Moreover, since the pandemic is by definition, a *global* crisis, these early books will be of particular value to scholars in comparative children's literature and culture. At present, COVID-themed picture books and comic books have been published in nations within six of our seven continents: for instance, Venezuela, Canada, Spain, Rwanda, India, and Australia. The international scope of such endeavors certainly invites various questions. How, for example, have comparative infection rates, forms medical infrastructure, and cultural/political responses to the pandemic influenced the representation of the COVID crisis in picture books, comics, and other youth-oriented media produced in specific nations and/or geo-political regions? What various political/ideological institutions have mediated these texts' publication? And on what disparate or coinciding notions of their intended child readership do these various texts rely?

I'm also curious about how the youngest generation will eventually depict their own experiences of the COVID crisis, and to what extent their representations of it might at once resemble and differ from the largely adult-authored texts that have been recently published. In fact, just the other day, I had a conversation with my good friend and children's literature colleague, Jill Coste, in which we remarked that toddler-aged children like her own son will grow up with first memories of both friends and strangers wearing masks. No doubt, these young children's early impressions of the pandemic will be remarkably different from their parents' – not to mention those of young people who are currently in primary school, secondary school, university, and the workforce. I think it's important, then, for scholars of children's literature and culture to anticipate diverse representations of the COVID pandemic in a way that is as attuned to cultural distinctions of age as it is to such equally crucial factors as nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, and sexuality.

Ultimately, I think this pandemic might place into relief how we as literary scholars might revisit and reimagine such categories as "global" and "comparative" literature – especially with respect to such equally fluid categories as "childhood" and "children's literature." I might add, for that matter, that the current COVID crisis may well be the proverbial tip of the iceberg in re-envisioning global literature. Here, I intentionally use this iceberg idiom, because as traumatic as this current pandemic has been, it ultimately pales in comparison to the droughts, floods, famines, health epidemics, and political conflicts that are all consequences of the larger and ongoing crisis of global climate change. Youth activists such as Greta Thunberg, Autumn Peltier, and Amariyanna Copeny have already convincingly argued that the climate crisis, though it universally affects all sentient beings, will nevertheless be experienced differently by those in specific geo-political regions. Thus, I'd like to join scholars of comparative children's literature in exploring the convergences and divergences of literary responses to this global crisis.

**I also want to ask you about your teaching experience. Are your students interested in mnemonic narratives? What kind of topics/themes have been the most (A) interesting, (B) important, (C) difficult, and (D) challenging during your teaching career?**

I'm very grateful that, for the past 13 years, I've been able to teach at the University of Florida. I'm very aware that, in the eyes of most of the world, Florida is something of a Vacation-Land that is equal parts Disney, concrete suburbia, and alligator-infested wilderness. And to some extent it is. But it is also an ecologically- and demographically- diverse state whose citizens possess richly divergent and intersecting cultural memories and identities. The students I've taught have been Haitian and Cuban refugees; visa-holders and undocumented people from South America, Africa, Europe, and Asia; Black women and men whose parents and grandparents recall segregation and lynching and who themselves are aware of their bodily vulnerability; Anglo-Americans who struggle with racist institutions their forebears created and from which they have benefited; children and grandchildren of Jewish and/or Eastern European immigrants; and queer people who at once acknowledge their cultural heritage and improvise new kinship systems.

If I have learned anything during my tenure as a literature professor at the University of Florida, it is that my students, no matter what their specific backgrounds might be, are hungry for narratives of the past. Even if they don't yet possess the language to articulate this desire – I didn't either, when I was an early undergraduate – they still intuit that a critical acknowledgement of the past may inform their present subject-positions and thus allow them to orient the present and future interventions they might make in both scholarly debate and public policy decisions. Thus, they respond with alacrity to verse-novels such as Jacqueline Woodson's *Brown Girl Dreaming* (2014), which charts its author's coming-of-age in both the segregated South and the urban North, and Melanie Crowder's *Audacity* (2015) which depicts an early twentieth-century Russian-Jewish immigrant's participation in the US labor movement. Likewise, they are intrigued by visual texts such as Marjane Satrapi's graphic narrative *Persepolis* (2000) whose two volumes depict the coming-into-consciousness of an Iranian exile, and Jessica Love's picture book *Julián is a Mermaid*, which features a young gender-queer Afro-Latinx protagonist. Finally, they are interested in placing different versions of a shared history into critical dialogue. For instance, the students in my most recent course on children's literature were especially invested in a comparative discussion of Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie* (1935) and Louise Erdrich's *The Birchbark House* (1999) – both stories of nineteenth-century Midwestern American girlhood, but told from the perspectives of White settlers and Indigenous people, respectively.

Admittedly, the teaching of such texts presents certain challenges, and the one I've most often faced involves resistance to difficult topics that are rationalized by appeals to traditional notions of childhood. For example, a good many

of my students have taken exception to Judy Blume's 1977 novel, *Starring Sally J Freedman as Herself* – in which the eponymous protagonist attempts to understand her beloved cousin's death in Dachau by re-staging it in backyard games – because they insist that a ten-year-old child-protagonist such as Sally is far too young to be engaging in such “macabre” fantasies. Although I suspect most of my students are unaware of this fact, their objections neatly correspond with those of Blume's contemporary critics, who argued that her portrayal of Sally's games and fantasies were “ghoulish,” “unnecessarily violent” and “neither credible nor humorous.” What my students and these earlier critics have not admitted, however, is that children are not unaware of, or otherwise innocent of, various expressions of violence. The fact of the matter is that most of the world's children are, sadly, intimately acquainted with expressions of violence – whether they are direct instances of physical or sexual abuse or indirect consequences of institutionalized racism, sexism, or homophobia.

Moreover, as Blume's novel so brilliantly suggests, even those children who are shielded by their elders from past and present injustices and instances of violence nevertheless possess the critical and imaginative capacity to sound them out and return them to shared and living memory. Indeed, it is not insignificant that Blume drew on her own experiences as a sheltered Jewish-American child raised in the shadow of the Holocaust to write *Sally* – or that her novel so strongly appealed to me, an equally privileged Ukrainian-Polish-American raised in the shadow of both Nazism and Stalinism. My sense, then, is that objections to mnemonic narratives like *Sally* appeal to traditional Western myths of childhood innocence in order to deflect children's actual experiences and ways of knowing.

In some ways, however, I look forward to moments of resistance because I consider them opportunities for thinking through challenging texts and concepts along with my students. Although I begin each session with a lecture, I try to reserve time for class discussion and debate. It makes a difference, I think, for students to posit and support arguments in an environment in which they acknowledge those whose subject positions may be very different from their own, and to whom they are accountable. Of course, this practice has worked best in in-person, face-to-face settings: it's not as easily replicated in COVID-era remote formats. But if I've learned anything in my research, it is that humans are remarkably adaptable and open to intellectual and technological innovation.

**Thank you for your though-provoking answers! We are looking forward to seeing you in Poland!**

Thank you so much for giving me this opportunity to respond to your challenging questions! (Dziękuję bardzo! Щиро Дякую!) I very much look forward to returning to Poland and continuing this conversation!