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## The Topos of Childhood in Modern Poetry (1939–1989)<sup>1</sup>

**Robert Mielhorski**

Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz, Poland

ORCID: 0000-0002-8655-1828

**Abstract:** The paper problematises the literary image of childhood in poetry in relation to external historical and socio-political events. The material analysed covers Polish poetry from 1939 – 1989 (a clearly distinguished segment of the historical-literary process). The choice and ordering of the case studies results from the application of two research paradigms: (i) the paradigm concerned with autobiographical motifs, which refers to such topics of 20<sup>th</sup> century writings as exile (poetry of return by Łobodowski, Wierzyński etc.) immigration (nostalgic [pansentimentalism] and emotionally neutral motifs), Holocaust (motifs of fear, division between now and then, the role of imagination) and (ii) a generation-related paradigm, which allows us to follow the topos of childhood viewed from the perspective of history according to the order of generations entering Polish literature (from the 1920 Generation to the New Wave Groups) up to the succession of consecutive literary trends in the second half of the 20th century (e.g. soc-realism and soc-plans). Poetic texts concerning childhood in the light of history are viewed as records of “rites of passage” operating from the child’s phase of the pre-personalisation area - the child’s sense of being one with the world, experiencing the harmony of being - to the period of personalisation - when history leaves its mark on this period; characterised by the sense of one’s distinctiveness from reality, individual alienation, the need for rationalisation of one’s own existence and the existence of the surrounding reality. The role of history is to lead the child from the pre-personalistic period to the experience of personalisation.

**Keywords:** childhood in literature, poetry of the second half of the 20th century, childhood of the geographic borderlands, Jewish and war childhood, childhood of the PRL period

### Basic assumptions and questions

The 20<sup>th</sup> century is a perfect example of the difficulties children had to face in the turmoil and confusion of historical events to find a place for their

<sup>1</sup> The article in the version published in *Tematy i Konteksty* 2012, No. 2, appeared also in the author’s monograph „*Zawsze niezakończona przeszłość. Dzieciństwo i jego sąsiedztwa w poezji polskiej drugiej połowy XX wieku* [The Past Always Unfinished. Childhood and Its Environs in Polish Poetry of the Second Half of the 20th Century] Bydgoszcz 2017, pp. 283 – 310, titled “Topos dzieciństwa w świetle historii (ogólny zarys problemu w poezji polskiej 1939-1989)” [The Topos of Childhood in the Light of History (an Overview of the Problem in Polish Poetry 1939-1989)].

own development. Examples can be found in various types of prose (fiction, journalism, essays or documentary) but this paper will focus on poetry. The child's painful confrontation with history gives rise to texts that are often shocking, and – in many cases – written by poets for whom childhood experiences shape their whole further life, including their artistic activity. Some would describe their early experiences as a permanent wound, a traumatic event, as was the case with authors who experienced the Holocaust in their childhood. It became almost their obsession to communicate what happened in their childhood. Things are presented in a similar way when childhood covers the years of exile from Arcadia, the years of wandering. It needs to be stated at this point that exile appears to present itself in two dimensions: a) exile from the child's innocence (the pre-sinful life) and b) exile from a world that is geographically and empirically delimited and – for many of us – a world that provides a source of inspiration for the active work of the artist's imagination: a lost world. The two examples referred to at the beginning exemplify the connection, chain, confrontation and collision of childhood and history. The current discussion aims at presenting a preliminary and general systemic account of these issues.

What is in my field of interest is the phenomenon of childhood, as presented and represented in poetry, with the form, final shape and its internal complications being the direct result of the historical conditionings in the period covering the time of childhood. By "childhood" I mean not only the image of a child involved in historical events, but also a somewhat wider perspective including the whole array of issues connected with being a child, that is the issues affecting "the first period of one's life" that were decided upon by the external events.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, I assume at the outset that childhood itself is directly affected by its context,<sup>3</sup> (the circumstances in which it was realized), although on the other hand, I maintain that history as such seems important perceived from the specific cognitive perspective of a child, and thus partial and radically different from the more mature stance developed later in life.

This paper focuses on poetry written between 1939 and 1989, although – in some respects – it relates to the whole turbulent times of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In this period, childhood was subject to difficult tests and

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<sup>2</sup> An "internal," cultural perspective of this problem is presented by G. Leszczyński in his work entitled *Kulturowy obraz dziecka i dzieciństwa w literaturze drugiej połowy XIX i w XX wieku. Wybrane problemy*, Warszawa: Wydział Polonistyki UW, 2006. The image of childhood presented from various perspectives is found in the work *Dzieci*, Vol. 1, 2, selected and edited by M. Janion, S. Chwin, Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Morskie, 1988.

<sup>3</sup> When I signal the significance of context in the description of the phenomenon I refer to the methodological solutions of literary anthropology. See E. Kosowska, *Antropologia literatury*, Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2003. For the anthropology of literature see W.J. Burszta, "Nauki o kulturze wobec literatury. Przypadek antropologii," *Teksty Drugie* 2005, No. 4. See also relevant passages in: *Antropologia słowa. Zagadnienia i wybór tekstów*, edited by G. Godlewski, A. Menewel, R. Sulima, introduction by G. Godlewski, Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2004.

was undeniably affected by external pressures. There was a need to revise the traditional cultural and artistic image of childhood stemming from earlier periods, not only from a historical and cultural perspective but also – and in particular – from the historical and literary perspective. The outbreak of World War II started a course of events that shaped Polish history until the political breakthrough in 1989. This categorisation of Polish literary history corresponds to a number of historical and literary accounts in point.<sup>4</sup>

In the period under discussion, childhood was presented from a number of perspectives and against the background of a range of thematic circles. We need to bear in mind that several generations of writers focused on the theme of childhood or at least made it an important motif in their literary output. Thus, the thesis posed in this discussion is as follows: The analysis of successive literary works (in our case lyrics) of the period covering the years 1939–1989 shows changes in the image of childhood in the writing of the authors who belong to the “generation of Columbuses (1920),”<sup>5</sup> but also taking into consideration those who made their debut earlier. We need to remember that childhood comes to be presented in the literary works written at different stages of the writers’ literary careers, including what can be called their period of decadence, in a period of artistic summations and farewells. Such “decadent” returns to the youngest years may be found after the cut-off point of 1939 or 1945 in the works of the authors who made their debut in the interwar period or were already artistically active at that time.

The discussion of childhood (sometimes referred to as “the unclassified world”) conducted against the background of history will be presented according to two paradigms corresponding to specific perspectives of perception.

- a. a paradigm concerned with autobiographical motifs, which will disclose how childhood is entangled in history against the light of the autobiographical reflections included in the work and against the emerging thematic tendencies in lyrics after 1939.
- b. a generation-related paradigm that enables us to examine the images from childhood connected with history from the perspective of the experiences of a generation. Here we should see varied images of childhood resulting from distinct experiences shared by a group of artists (born around the same time and making their literary debut around the same time).

<sup>4</sup> See, among others, W. Maciąg, *Nasz wiek XX. Przewodnie idee literatury polskiej 1918–1980*, Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich, 1992; M. Stępień, *Pięćdziesiąt lat literatury polskiej (wprowadzenie)*, Kraków: Oficyny wydawnicze “Impuls” & “Text,” 1996; M. Dąbrowski, *Literatura polska 1945–1995*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo “Trio,” 1997; S. Stabro, *Literatura polska 1944–2000 w zarysie*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2002; T. Drewnowski, *Literatura polska 1944–1989. Próba scalenia: obiegi – wzorce – style*, Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> The term refers to the generation born in the early 1920s, who were on the verge of adulthood at the outbreak of World War II. The name comes from *Kolumbowie, rocznik 20* [Columbuses, born in 1920], by Roman Bratny, a novel very popular in Poland. Columbus is the nickname of one of the protagonists. (Translator’s commentary)

What is the nature of childhood, with particular emphasis on our century when it is plunged in the turmoil of historical events? In what way do the more or less brutal manifestations of history burst into the reality of childhood? How deep is this interference and what historical aspects leave an indelible mark? Finally, are there pockets in a child's psyche that remain unaffected by external factors?<sup>6</sup>

Another equally important question regards the nature of history in general and its impact on human life, especially in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Perhaps the existence of worlds of childhood in literature provides evidence for the fact that children are extremely resilient and that no historical event, however violent and traumatic, can fully annihilate children's will to survive. By history, I do not mean an abstract term, but rather the obsessive, external circumstances that leave their mark on the fate of an individual.

### **The poetry of return**

If we focus on thematic parallels, we can identify a few specifically distinct and clearly visible tendencies in the domain of poetry and prose in Polish literature after 1939; most of these fit into the paradigm concerned with autobiographical motifs. I leave aside the domain of the belles lettres genres of prose fiction, essay writing and drama, and focus on poetry alone, where we can identify specific trends that are significant in terms of their representation. It needs to be emphasised, however, that it is difficult to present a given literary trend without reference to various phenomena in the literature of a given period. Notably, presenting the image of poetry without relevant references may be considered to be some (even serious) degree of research oversimplification.

This is, for example, the case with the borderland motifs<sup>7</sup> which is perfectly manifested in prose and essays. Let me mention the literary output of Polish and emigrant writers such as A. Kuśniewicz, J. Strykowski, W. Odojewski, C. Miłosz, J. Wittlin, A. Jurewicz, T. Konwicki, S. Vincenz, L. Buczkowski and F. Czarnyszewicz, to mention but a few.<sup>8</sup> It is mainly in these prose works

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<sup>6</sup> The topic of childhood can also be perceived in its tragic dimension. See the relevant passages in: *Problemy tragedii i tragizmu. Studia i szkice*, edited by H. Krukowska and J. Ławski, Białystok: Instytut Filologii Polskiej Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> It was diagnosed on many occasions in the tradition. See the data for the interwar period, for example, M. Bielanka-Luftowa, "Znaczenie terytorium w tak zwanej szkole ukraińskiej," *Pamiętnik Literacki* 1936, issue 2.

<sup>8</sup> For this see, for example, *Kresy w literaturze. Twórcy dwudziestowieczni*, edited by E. Czuplejewicz, E. Kasperski, Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1996; J. Jarzębski, "Exodus (ewolucja obrazu kresów po wojnie)," in: idem, *W Polsce czyli wszędzie. Szkice o polskiej prozie współczesnej*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo PEN, "Exodus (ewolucja obrazu kresów po wojnie)," in: idem, *W Polsce czyli wszędzie. Szkice o polskiej prozie współczesnej*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo PEN, 1992; E. Wiegandt, "Austria felix, czyli o micie Galicji w prozie współczesnej," in: *Modele świata i człowieka. Szkice o powieści współczesnej*, edited by J. Świąch, Lublin: Wydawnictwo Lubelskie, 1985.

in which the topic of “loss”, breaking bonds with one’s past located in the borderlands, plays a leading role. Still, a similar topos can also be found in poetry: The topos of the borderland emerges in poetry, both with regard to the northern borderlands (Lithuania) and the southern borderlands (Ukraine) of the first half of the past century. The examples in point include, J. Czechowicz and B. Leśmian. Also, let me draw attention to the so-called Ukrainian School, which was followed by the Romantic tradition and – as already mentioned – is represented in the poetry of the interwar period. The Literary Group Wołyń<sup>9</sup> contributed a lot to this literary trend at that time with the poetry of J. Łobodowski, J. Śpiewak, C. Janczarski and W. Iwaniuk. Some members of this group also belonged to the so-called Czechowicz Circle.<sup>10</sup> For some of them (Łobodowski, Iwaniuk) the domain of childhood in the borderlands would become a significant component of the poetic world, including in the years of their full artistic maturity, in poetry after 1939. It will prove to be an important element of the reality “replicated” in the literary work which comes back obtrusively, sometimes obsessively in the recollection or it will find its own place in the poem as a result of the activated poetic imagination of the author that transforms and transfigures history.

The poetry of J. Łobodowski (1909–1988) is – as we know – an example in point here. In his lyrical works from the years of his post-war wandering, the author continuously relates to his youth and childhood in the borderlands, a bridge between the tradition of the Iberian culture of Madrid, where the author lived permanently, and the recollection of the past.<sup>11</sup> His writing brings back the landscapes and motifs related to Ukrainian, Belorussian and Samogitian themes. *Łobodowski* is interested in a naturally wide circle of tradition: starting from Antiquity, through the Bible and the Romantic inheritance up into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is, however, the borderland nostalgia that intensifies his imagination.

There the night bushes of hackberry smell even sweeter,  
Stars move like golden apples rolling over the moss  
On the green shingles  
And Czarna Hańcza<sup>12</sup> in the sunset  
Comes across as an increasing blazing wave  
To the scared eyes of Acheron.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> See the monograph of J. Sawicka, *Wołyń poetycki w przestrzeni kresowej*, Warszawa: “DiG”, 1999.

<sup>10</sup> See: S. Gawliński, “Szkola Czechowicza” - poeci awangardy?, *Pamiętnik Literacki*, 1982, No. 3–4.

<sup>11</sup> See: I. Szypowska, Łobodowski, Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 2001. Earlier: J. Łobodowski, *Wiersze i poematy*, selection, introduction and editor’s note by I. Szypowska, Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1991.

<sup>12</sup> The largest river in the Suwałki Region (in the north-eastern part of Poland). (Translator’s commentary)

<sup>13</sup> *Przyczynki do życiorysu* from the volume *Jarzmo kaudyńskie* (1969). Quoted after J. Łobodowski, *Wiersze i poematy...*, p. 166. All quotations from the Polish sources have been translated by Edyta Więclawska, unless stated otherwise.

The world presented by Łobodowski is imaginatively and mythologically transfigured. It is subdued to the transforming power of a word. What we get from his works is referred to as a “contribution to life history” and – in principle – it is a reference to biography and thus a kind of poetic reminiscence of autobiography as well as a record of spiritual life. It is about presenting the internal projections of the recollections and imaginations balancing somewhere between reality and dream, between a fairy tale and crude reality.<sup>14</sup>

Łobodowski emphasises the fairy-tale character (and its questioning) on many occasions. He comes back, for example, to themes from Lublin, to the surrounding landscape, as a result of more or less ostentatious references to the patronage of J. Czechowicz on two levels: a) to Czechowicz as an artist (related mythologies and poetic fascinations); b) through the purely literary, technical inspirations, through the intertextual relations visible in Łobodowski’s works (for example, pastoral issues). Let us consider the long *Ballada lubelska* [*Lublin Ballad*]<sup>15</sup> which includes two levels of reference and describes the settling of one’s accounts. The poet states it is a “painful settlement” and – occasionally – presents exceptional cases of poetic lines combined with the lilt typical of Czechowicz. Another case in point is the poem *Na śmierć Czechowicza*, [On the occasion of the death of Czechowicz]: a poem with quotations or crypto-quotations referring to specific textual fragments from Czechowicz’s *Ballada z tamtej strony* [The ballad from the other side]. Czechowicz as a patron of Łobodowski’s artistic activities imposes on the latter a “specific” way of transfiguring reality: a unique creation of the world and landscapes presented, as well as a visionary element. Notably, Łobodowski is known to imbue his poems with a visionary quality, growing from the recollections of the borderlands.

In the case of Łobodowski, the process of transfiguration of reality stems from a mix of mythologisation and imaginary projection: with overlapping layers of myth, concepts and recollections of real events. In contrast, in the works of W. Iwaniuk (born 1915) the decisive role is played primarily by real recollections<sup>16</sup> and their imaginary projection. We may even talk here about

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<sup>14</sup> As the poet himself states in the work quoted – that world “develops into a fairy tale”; however it is only to fall into danger in the future, which was foretold by the poet (“The storm is coming! It was the poet who anticipated and introduced you!”). The world is born out of the pastoral (idyllic) reality; the past is also strengthened by regional references (*bandros, odszpuntowywanie*), bringing in associations with the tradition of antiquity (Acheron, Pontic wind), which somehow “triggers” this reality and takes it into a long-lasting area. This emphasises the universal character of the experiences, the romantic tone of the lyrical relations and the romantic “apparel” of the poem. Further on, we witness the reverse procedure: what “was developing into a fairy tale” changes into “the reality emerging from the dream.”

<sup>15</sup> J. Łobodowski, *Wiersze i poematy...*, p. 217.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, *Opis miasteczka Ch.* – horses like ships, etc. in: W. Iwaniuk, *Zanim znikniemy w opactwie kolorów*, selection by K. Lisowski, introduction by J. Kryszak, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1991, p. 43.

the magical properties of the poetic word. However, reservation should be made in advance that in the case of this author it is one of the two trends in practising poetry, because the other wing corresponds to the tendency to stick to the realistic, direct, even reportage-like or journalistic record.<sup>17</sup> Notably, when describing the return to childhood Iwaniuk primarily evokes recollections by employing the magical properties of poetic language. Among the younger poets the same applies to Czaykowski (born 1932). The intervention of history into the world of childhood causes thorough confusion in a child's spiritual field and thus causes a release of the hidden and awaiting forces of imagination. It is the recollection as a vision, having its source in autobiographical reflection that contributes to the image, including the surrealistic image. Specifically, Iwaniuk has a predisposition to treat poems in this way. For Czaykowski it is one of the possible poetic conventions that the poet uses.<sup>18</sup> The concept of borderlands is also worth noting in the lyrics of J. Śpiewak (born 1908) who similarly produces the effect of transformation of the image of childhood as a result of history "being in operation". Another case in point is the "poetry of return" by K. Wierzyński (born 1894). Śpiewak construes his poetic reality from scratch and on the basis of his recollections. Borderlands are a starting point for lyrical imagination here. The target is a synthesis of culture and civilisation, where the echoes of history can be heard in the grassland, which is the imagined infinity of existence. At the same time the magical imagination of Wierzyński creates a mythical domain from recollections, a domain sometimes suspended in a kind of timelessness, which history intrudes upon to the degree allowed by the author. Wierzyński will be discussed in more detail further on.

The case in point here is the extensive catalogue of literary works that are written from inspiration derived from the past of childhood in the borderlands. The writers were totally cut off from this past as a result of historical events.

<sup>17</sup> We need to remember here that Iwaniuk comes from the Czechowicz school. The creation-oriented approach to lyrics is typical for him from the very beginning. J. Kryszak writes about the evolution of Iwaniuk's lyrics in the work entitled *Zanim znikniemy...* The researcher pays attention to the role of poetry in the post-war poetry of Iwaniuk and the role of "the category of memory": "in the poems it triggers sequences of images of the irretrievably lost world of childhood and early youth (including the geographical dimension). It not only sustains the emotional explicitness of the experiences of those times and systems of values; a strong sense of identification of a man with a place, but by virtue of confrontation with the current status quo it primarily informs us about the dramatic split of the structure of individual fate". *Wacław Iwaniuk – poeta ciemnego czasu* in: W. Iwaniuk, *Zanim znikniemy...*, p. 14. For information on Iwaniuk see also M.E. Cybulska, *Wacław Iwaniuk poeta*, London: Oficyna Poetów i Malarzy, 1984; J. Wolski, *Wacław Iwaniuk. Szkice do portretu*, Toronto–Rzeszów: Polski Fundusz Wydawniczy w Kanadzie, 2002.

<sup>18</sup> The multimodality in this poetry was emphasised on many occasions. I wrote about it in: "Jedynie autentyczna terażniejszość..." *Dzieciństwo w poezji Bogdana Czaykowskiego*, in: *Poezja polska na obczyźnie. Studia i szkice*, Vol. II, edited by Z. Andres, J. Wolski, Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, 2005, p. 7.

## **Fate of a stranger**

Another important theme is Polish literature written in exile from 1939 to 1989. This refers primarily to the literature of expatriation and emigration, to the works of writers who settled abroad after the outbreak of World War II. With regard to this area there are two trends in exile literature that touch upon the topic of the confrontation of childhood with history.<sup>19</sup>

The first one bears a distinct nostalgic tone. It was practised by the writers of many generations; however, it is best articulated in the writing of earlier writers. It is worth mentioning here, among others, the works of J. Wittlin (born 1896) and C. Miłosz (born 1911).<sup>20</sup> The essays and poetry written by Miłosz after 1951 raise the problem of disinheritance, being away from one's country and native language, away from one's roots, childhood and early adulthood. He also discusses the costs of freedom of speech. We might say that this is one of the most important experiences that shaped his mature writing and affected his specific style, choice of themes and his poetic diction. These facts influence the emigration poetry of L. Wierzyński equally significantly, as already stated. Wierzyński comes across as a poet who relates the reader to his early years in Karpaty or Drohobycz. The author of *Kufer na plecach*, [The bag on the back] seems to share the conviction that without a permanent return to this past as a point of support, including in the existential dimension, he would find himself in the vacuum of a foreign, dehumanised, contemporary world. Hence, Wierzyński increases the awareness of his own identity for which memory plays a crucial part. We may state that with the multitude of themes discussed in Wierzyński's post-war writing, the problems of memory, history and exile are of utmost importance. Notably, this holds true both for collective memory, *amnesis* connected with the historical experiences of the community contemporarily, and for individual memory, *amnesis* as the subjective memory of one's own roots. In the best of their realizations the authors belonging to this literary trend carefully tried to balance the proportions between the nostalgic and general cognitive elements when they were describing their own returns. The achievements of the older generations of poets mentioned here seem indisputable in this respect.

We cannot formulate strong charges against the artistic quality of the texts of such authors as J. Tuwim, S. Baliński or A. Słonimski, where the expatriate's longing dominates over the attempt to generalise the expe-

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<sup>19</sup> The topic of childhood and history in the works of the emigrant writers is found in some poems included in *Antologia poezji polskiej na obczyźnie 1939–1999*, selection, edition and introduction by B. Czajkowski, Warszawa–Toronto: "Czytelnik," Polski Fundusz Wydawniczy w Kanadzie, 2002.

<sup>20</sup> J. Wittlin, "Blaski i nędze wygnania," in: idem, *Pisma pośmiertne i inny eseje*, selection, edition and introduction by J. Zieliński, Warszawa: Biblioteka „Więzi,” 1991; C. Miłosz, "Noty o wygnaniu," *Kultura*, Paris 1981, No. 3.



rience of an exile in the 20th century. Apart from the commonly known *Kwiaty polskie* [Polish flowers], disseminated very early in fragments among emigrants in war time, there were less known lyrics by Baliński and – finally – the interesting narrative poem *Popiół i wiatr* [Ashes and wind] by Słonimski (born 1895), published alongside spectacular drawings by Feliks Topolski, in 1942 in London, where the poet lived during the war years, and in 1962 in Poland. The narrative poem plays with the recipient who is subject not only to the nostalgic atmosphere of the work but also to its stylisation – it is a humorous tale. Notably, it seems that the humorous effects are to defend this poem against the charge of excessive sensitivity. However, the perspective of longing for the past world felt by an exile dominates over the rest: starting from the recollections of a father presented against the background of life in a city, with city life acting as the hero of this work, as was the case with *Lalka* [The doll] by Prus. It is about the longing contained in the recollections of Warsaw, the family tenement house in Niecała street, where we find a “Small child’s heart full of love.”<sup>21</sup> However, in the case of the poets under discussion the theme of childhood against the background of history is not so significant.

The necessity to balance the proportion between “pan-sentimentalism” (which weighed heavily on emigrant lyrics for years, but – admittedly – yielded very beautiful fruits) and universalism (as an attempt to generalise individual experiences) was also known to younger writers. The only difference here is that we are dealing with sentiment addressing something like a child’s “subconsciousness recollections,” referring to a certain colour scheme, to the aura of events remembered from childhood years.

It is worth noting that among the writers of the older generations A. Wat (born 1900) mastered almost to perfection the ability to keep such proportions in *Odjazd Anteusza* [Departure of Antaeus] which is a record of exile from his own homeland but – at the same time – it is exile from the “playgrounds of childhood.”<sup>22</sup> The recollection of childhood by Wat is dark and filled with bitterness, as beautifully exemplified by *Dzieciństwo* [Childhood] from the 1957 collection *Dzieciństwo poety* [The poet’s childhood]:

It was a sad childhood.  
Sounds, recollections, dreams  
In which he was wandering one inch over the ground  
Until he fell.  
The fall of a child ...  
A poet’s levitation ....<sup>23</sup>

This text, like all the other literary works by Wat, relates to the author’s personal experiences and provides us with yet another perspective on the

<sup>21</sup> A. Słonimski, *Popiół i wiatr*, graphics by F. Topolski, Warszawa: “Czytelnik,” 1962, p. 18.

<sup>22</sup> A. Wat, “Odjazd Anteusza,” in: idem, *Poezje zebrane*, edition by A. Micińska, J. Zieliński, Kraków: Wydawnictwo “Znak,” 1992, p. 328.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 232.

topic. It has a totally autobiographical perspective. (Miłosz talks about the “shameless autobiographism” of Wat).<sup>24</sup>

The theme of exile may also be found in texts written by authors who were children during war time. They were educated and started their life in these times. They are forever marked with the autobiographic and authentic character of their experiences. It is worth mentioning at this point, first of all, the literary works of the authors associated with the journal *Kontynenty* in the 1950s. The unquestionable leaders of this group, which had scarcely any programme, include: A. Czerniawski (born 1934) and the already mentioned artist B. Czaykowski. Their biographies are model examples of what is being discussed.<sup>25</sup> Exile from the homeland, from the language of childhood and the culture of one’s place of origin, from the living speech, causes a need to establish a proper attitude not only to one’s own tradition, with which the connection can be somewhat loose, but also to oneself, that is to the person who is torn apart, internally conflicted as a result of being expatriated (see the poem by Czaykowski entitled *Argument*) and belonging to a few cultures at the same time. Their poetry is an example of this process, which is laborious and long-lasting. This is poetry witnessing the internal struggles of the literary persona who is often displaced, alienated and suspended in a foreign space. These poets often wrote about the role of childhood entangled in the course of historical events and continuously opposing history. We find relevant examples in the commentaries and community discussions. The most popular example in point is the work entitled “discussion on language,” published in the journal “Continents.”<sup>26</sup> It was a discussion among authors who were at the point of joining the literary circles. A. Czerniawski discussed this issue years later:

I am a refugee, an exile, a run-away. I was assigned such a fate already in **early childhood** [emphasis added by R. M.]. One can never break free from this state. Even if it is no longer war time, I keep on changing address, wandering to various places, running away somewhere, hiding. I am a hermit, a lonely man, paranoid and agoraphobe. This personality has its various manifestations and it haunts me. It is a torture and a salvation at the same time.<sup>27</sup>

The necessity to be in exile for one’s entire life and adopt a “stranger’s fate” in one’s own world emerges in early childhood. We need to pay attention to the fact that the exile’s fate is at the same time a justification for many auto-creations. It is a way to raise interest in one’s own distinctiveness.

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<sup>24</sup> It is referred to, among others, in the introduction to *Poezje zebrane* by Wat, as mentioned above.

<sup>25</sup> Czesław Miłosz postulated writing a biographical anthology of the representatives of the Continent Group that would throw proper light on their works and thus enable their proper interpretation.

<sup>26</sup> “Cena wolności? Dyskusja o języku,” *Kontynenty* (London) 1960, No. 13.

<sup>27</sup> A. Czerniawski, “Wielopis,” *Twórczość* 2004, No. 5, p. 126.

It needs to be admitted at the same time that this issue might not have been exposed and articulated clearly enough in this quotation. However, it remains obvious that it is not only the drama of a writer but also of a man.

Moreover, it needs to be noticed that the autobiographical horizon also covers other, younger, emigrant writers from before 1989. For them exile is conditioned by history and it is connected with the turn of thought and poetic sensitivity towards childhood. A. Zagajewski (born 1945), an artist affiliated with the New Wave, is an example here.

## Afterlife

The conflict of childhood with history is presented in particular in the literature of the Holocaust,<sup>28</sup> specifically in the poetry connected with the – not exclusively literary – theme of annihilation. In this case the theme under discussion is evidenced both by writers living in the country after the war and those who – for various reasons and at different stages of the post-war period (including the consequences of the events in 1968) – settled down abroad, for example, making their way through the Soviet Union to the Middle East. In this case it is worth paying attention to the authors living in Israel, artists writing in Polish or in a few languages who published their works in periodicals such as *Nowiny-kurier* and the almanac “Kontury.”<sup>29</sup> What is specifically striking in these texts and in the books published in Israel is the prevalence of the Holocaust theme. The writers under discussion are placed by R. Loew in the so-called third variant<sup>30</sup> of Polish literature (alongside the national and emigration trend). The almanac “Kontury” includes a note “A selection of prose and poetry by authors writing in Israel in the Polish language.” It is one of the most representative publishing houses.

Irit Amiel (born 1931 in Częstochowa) was active in this periodical as a poet, prose writer and translator. The theme of wartime childhood is focal in her writing. Amiel describes the world and mourns for the world she comes from. It is the world of her own Jewish roots and the war that brutally intruded on her childhood. At the same time she presents the image of the current loneliness of those who survived the annihilation, those who are aware of the fact that for others it is only a historical fact. This is the case of the titular poem *Egzamin z Zagłady* [A Holocaust exam] from the collection bearing the same title.<sup>31</sup> The granddaughter of the hero treats

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<sup>28</sup> See, for example, K. Sokółowska, “*I dziś jestem widzem*”. *Narracje dzieci Holocaustu*, Białystok: TransHumana, 2010.

<sup>29</sup> For information on the Polish press in Israel see R. Loew, “Rozpoznanie. Rzecz o izraelskiej prasie w języku polskim,” *Kontury* (Tel Aviv) 1995, No. VI.

<sup>30</sup> It is referred to in the essay of R. Loew, as mentioned above.

<sup>31</sup> Translation available from: <https://books.google.pl/books?id=93ecDwAAQBA-J&pg=PA161&lpg=PA161&dq=Egzamin+z+Zag%C5%82ady.%27+annihilation&source=->

the annihilation of the Jews exclusively as material for a school exam. In turn, the author herself feels very lonely:

We are the remaining few.  
Slowly departing and disappearing,  
Taking down to the bottom  
Our silences, our screams.

We are the remaining few.  
Only a handful of days left  
In which to testify, in them the horror and bitter  
Scores to settle with men and with God.<sup>32</sup>

The protagonist/lyrical I of these poems is a girl who is still captivated by the wartime reality. She:

is betrayed by everybody and by everything, the 11-year-old [...] still lives in the body of Irit Amiel. She works with her, plays with her and with her grandchildren at the seaside. The sensitivity of the tragic childhood which is full of despair is associated with the wisdom of the mature woman. And there is nothing she is certain about. She is even unsure whether a bit of her world will survive in its past form, from the time before it went mad.<sup>33</sup>

Hence, the child is marked by history for life and it imprisons her in a hellish world, isolating her from the present. History leaves its mark on the child with its fear.<sup>34</sup>

The drama of Jewish childhood is also described by Arnold Ślucky (born 1920). He was a poet whose work underwent a few significant metamorphoses, starting from social realistic statements to surrealist fascinations and in-depth lyrics of culture and religion. This author was born in Tyszowice. He belongs to the generation of Różewicz.<sup>35</sup> In his works Ślucky emphasises his loneliness as a poet in exile, banned from the homeland as a consequence of the events in 1968. In his works we also find motifs from Israel and West Germany where he lived. The image of childhood is presented, for example, in the narrative poem *Szagalewo*. It needs to be emphasised at this point that in his program-related enunciations Ślucky stressed his connections with surrealism. The mythology of childhood returns in *Szagalewo*:

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bl&ots=BSNwjleAgf&sig=ACfU3U3AlN5dLPfNSrWQscVLQ3dMYrTnNA&hl=pl&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjOnaLk8ITIAhXu-ioKHSeeCSgQ6AEwA3oECAkQAQ#v=onepage&q=Egzamin%20z%20Zag%C5%82ady.%20annihilation&f=false

<sup>32</sup> I. Amiel, *Egzamin z Zagłady*, Łódź: Oficyna Bibliofilów, 1994. Irit Amiel published three other collections of poetry and two prose volumes.

<sup>33</sup> A. Koziół, "Wielokrotna podwójność," *Dziennik Polski* 1998, No. 129.

<sup>34</sup> In "Zbzczeszczeni, osmaleni, ocaleni," *Kontury* 2005, No. XV B. Olech discusses the issue of fear in the prose of J. Bau, I. Amiel and J. Maurer. In the afterword to the volume of prose entitled *Osmaleni* M. Głowiński pays attention to the fact that "the metaphor used by Irit Amiel has the opportunity to become part of the linguistic repertoire and define the existential situation of those who survived but remained its victims" (I. Amiel, *Osmaleni*, Izabelin: Świat Literacki, 1999, p. 109).

<sup>35</sup> Tadeusz Różewicz, a distinguished Polish poet, was born in 1921. (Translator's commentary)

[...] the fragmentary recollections started coming from the bottom of memory – as stated by Anna Kamieńska. The town. Father carrying water on the carrying poles. Mother with a tadpole over a brook. A goat – the food provider of the poor. Friday fish. And this miracle happened again. Childhood came back with its own primary wisdom. The dead and the murdered started to request the right to vote. The Wisła as the symbol of generality withdrew at the splash of the familiar Huczwa – the river from childhood. There came the vision of Szagalewo and still it existed. It was rooted deep inside, hidden, not admitted, as if forbidden.<sup>36</sup>

*Szagalewo* is not the only text in which the recollections from childhood come back. The work *Urwany psalm* [A broken psalm] is equally artistic. There are recollections of the river Huczwa in *Apokryf*, [Apocrypha] and also \*\*\* *Góry stały* [The mountains stood there].

The works of Henryk Grynberg (born 1936) feature dominating imaginary and visionary elements. Like Irit Amiel he survived the war with “Aryan papers.” The narrative poem entitled *Zmartwychwstałe miasteczko* [The Shtetl resurrected] was published in London in 1989 as part of the volume *Pomnik nad Potomakiem* [The Monument at the Potomac]. It is one of many works that describe the annihilated world. The annihilation – resurrection antonymy is the organising force of the conceptual and compositional structure of the work. This elegy about a small Jewish town that brings about Słonimski’s words “You no longer have, you do not have, any Jewish towns in Poland”<sup>37</sup> is also a protest against history, its aggression targeted against both the material, objective, empirical world and the subjective domain of our thoughts, the recollections from childhood.

The shtetl taken away from me forever  
The shtetl that was not to exist  
Is alive and well after death  
By God’s mercy in the other world  
On the other side of the ocean<sup>38</sup>

Grynberg brings up the concept of “afterlife” because this state corresponds to the situation of an annihilated entity. The poet talks to it because he knows that “there is no world outside the shtetl/ and there never was.” The writer finds in it the only reality, and thus, the centre for his own mental reality. The word refers to two worlds, two realities: a small shtetl and the poet’s contemporary world, the American world, over the ocean. Only the first world has its *raison d’être*. Most importantly, however, at the end Grynberg states that the shtetl, not God, is resurrected as a result of the act of the imagination-based reconstruction that is poetry. The poetic imagination favouring childhood and opposing history acquires

<sup>36</sup> A. Kamieńska, “Poeta środka wieku,” in: A. Słucki, *Poezje wybrane*, selection, introduction and note by A. Kamieńska, Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1982, p. 8.

<sup>37</sup> A. Słonimski, “Elegia miasteczek żydowskich,” in: idem *138 wierszy*, Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1984, p. 175.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted from *Antologia poezji polskiej na obczyźnie...*, p. 520. The English version of the poem is a previously unpublished translation by the author and Katarzyna Jerzak who were kind enough to make it available for the purpose of this article.

extraordinary power: it brings order to things thanks to the presence of God “who has been saved” in spite of all the odds.

It emerges from the examples quoted above that the literary worlds focus on such thematic centres as fear (the child’s fear of annihilation) and imagination (which shapes the recollections). We need to pay attention, however, to the aspect of literature related to themes of childhood and the Holocaust as a way to provide evidence.<sup>39</sup>

The following works provide relevant examples in point: the narrative poem entitled *List do Marc Chagall* [Letter to Marc Chagall] by J. Ficowski (born 1924), relating to the book by M. Hochberg-Mariańska and N. Grüss: *Dzieci oskarżają* [The children accuse]; and his poems from the 1979 volume *Odczytywanie popiołów* [Reading from the ashes]. It is worth referring to the poem *Siedem słów* [Seven words] relating also to a specific document (to the words of “a child closed in the gas chamber in Bełżec 1942”). The narrative poem entitled *Wielki Tydzień* [Holy Week] from the volume *Polsku* [In Polish] from 1955 deserves special consideration.

The characteristic motif of the eternal Jewish danger is employed in the poem by Ł. Gliksman (born 1913) entitled *Czteroletni* [A four-year-old]. The poem shows contrasts and similarities of the two worlds – the concentration camp (a four-year-old boy learns how to survive) and the six-day war. The four-year-old boy will die in the future having learned the words of wisdom “Sometimes we need to know how to die.”<sup>40</sup> The division into then and now that proceeds in this way is reflected in many texts from this circle. Leaving poetry itself behind for a moment, it is worth noting the concept of division in the short story by A. Rudnicki, entitled *Lew Świętej Soboty* [The lion of Holy Saturday].<sup>41</sup> The said concept is symbolically expressed in the form of stairs joining two districts of a town known from childhood. One of the districts, the lower one, is Jewish. It is deserted for ever. The dying Weiss, who rejected his origin, recalls the past days. It is from there that the characters come, emerging from his memory with the aim of verifying the contemporary times.

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<sup>39</sup> The insightful study of the Polish annihilation literature by J. Błoński emphasises two perspectives of the said problem: the perspective of a victim and the perspective of a witness. The first one relates to the literary form of diary notes and the second one – to the concise literary forms written “on the spot” (works by Miłosz, Buczkowski, Andrzejewski, Nałkowska and others). The latter is dominated by the motifs of incomprehensibility, lack of contact and shame. J. Błoński, “Ofiary i świadkowie. Obraz Zagłady w literaturze polskiej,” *Kontury* (Tel Aviv) 1996, No. VII. See also T. Łyszak, “Okrucy dzieciństwa. O dziecięcych świadectwach Zagłady,” *Teksty Drugie*, 2003, No. 2–3.

<sup>40</sup> The poem is quoted from *Kontury* (Tel Aviv) 1999, No. X, p. 5. The documentary character of the text is emphasised by including the dedication to Robert Szarezewski. Jewish themes are further employed in the poetry of A. Rozenfeld, S. Wygodzki and other authors who cooperated with the Polish-language literary press in Israel.

<sup>41</sup> See the interpretation in the essay by R. Szenfeld, “Pisarze na pograniczu,” *Kontury* (Tel Aviv) 1996, No. VII.

## Between catastrophism, wonders and urban slaughter

The theme of a child's annihilation obviously does not exhaust the problem of wartime childhood. We need to have a wider look at it; that is, we need to consider the literary works of various generation-related groups. Surprisingly, for the readers at that time (1943) Czesław Miłosz took up the child's theme in the cycle *Świat. Poema Naiwne* [The World. Naïve Poems] which will be discussed further on. I say 'surprising,' because neither Miłosz nor anybody else could imagine that during the most turbulent times and occupational terror poetry could present such a world at all.

Childhood issues can be found in the works of writers belonging to the 1920 Generation, of which the already mentioned A. Słucki is a representative. K. K. Baczyński (born 1921) is the best example here. The poet treats the theme of childhood in a very personal way, which is connected with his attitude towards the contemporary days and to the past. The author is reserved when it comes to childhood issues. J. Święch<sup>42</sup> claims that K. K. Baczyński presents childhood from the perspective of "miniaturisation" and "diminishment." This is connected with a child's illusions about the world. The author of *Idylla kryształowa*, [The crystal idyll] juxtaposes childhood with dramatic knowledge about reality that is acquired by virtue of reflections and experiences on what is around, which is the consequence of becoming an adult rapidly and too early. The idyllic character of childhood is undermined and brought into question. Surely, it is war time that enforces such an attitude to the past and to one's childhood recollections. Childhood cannot be retrieved in such circumstances. The idyllic reality becomes an artificial entity. "Everything that is the product of evocation and recollections is an artificial entity."<sup>43</sup> It may be said that at this moment the attitude of the evocator, memoirist and – as noticed by J. Święch – aesthete loses its significance. Notably, it all happens as a result of the confrontation of illusions from childhood with history.

T. Różewicz (born 1921) presents the image of childhood along the same lines, dispelling the childhood idyll.<sup>44</sup> The idyll of childhood is located in heaven which – as we can notice – does not have an extraordinary character. It reminds us of an ordinary family house, as in the poem *Powrót* [Return],<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup> These notes are based on the research findings included in the introduction of J. Święch to K.K. Baczyński's *Wybór poezji* [Selected poems] published within the National Library series, Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich, 1989, pp. XXIX–XXXII.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. XXX.

<sup>44</sup> This was discussed in the essay "Trzy dyskursy o dzieciństwie i przeszłości w poezji Tadeusza Różewicza," *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 2011, No. 3.

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, the interpretation of this work by K. Nowosielski, "Już czas wracać" (O jednym wierszu Tadeusza Różewicza), in: idem, *Troska i czas. Szkice o poezji i przemijaniu*, Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 2001. For the full picture of childhood lyricism one needs to include references to his reflections in the works by T. Gajcy or T. Borowski, who do not exceed the framework of the generation-based approach when formulating their diagnoses.

where the mother crochets and the father takes a nap on Sunday after the week's work. It is characteristic that childhood is presented by the poet already from a short distance by a representative of his own generation, a former partisan and soldier for whom the annihilation of the "pre-sinful world" is equivalent to the annihilation of values in general. Although Różewicz would return to the reality of childhood on many occasions and it had a few other functions assigned there (see the elegiac and farewell literary trend in *To jednak co trwa ustanowione jest przez poetów* [What continues has been established by the poets] or the literary trend verifying the image of the contemporary times by virtue of childhood myths) it remains an area of confrontation of the early years of one's life with history. It is where the early years from the times before the cataclysm collided with what followed. The poem *Niebo dzieciństwa* [The heaven of childhood] from the poet's second volume, from 1948, entitled *Czerwona rękawiczka* [The red glove] provides illustrative material in point. Special attention is drawn to the play with the word "palate" [*translator's note*: "palate" operates here in the sense of "the roof of the mouth" but the morphological structure of the Polish term that is equivalent to "palate" as heaven and thus it brings the connotation with the area right below the celestial dome]:

Heaven  
Sweet palate  
The taste of almonds and honey  
Poppy seeds and vanilla

I who had the chance to taste  
Of blood and fire  
Spread the wafer on the palate  
Fragile little angel  
With a faint white face.<sup>46</sup>

The problem of childhood in war time can be also found in the poetry of T. Śliwiak (born 1928). *Poemat o miejskiej rzeźni* [Narrative poem about urban slaughter] is worth discussing individually here. This literary work has an autobiographical character: it arises from the experience of the trauma of a little boy who survived the wartime slaughter of Lvov, which was a place of work for "Jews doomed to annihilation."<sup>47</sup> He was confronted with death every day. This gives rise to the following conclusions:

The death that was omnipresent in these walls brought the tragic vision of a community built by all the creatures that were alive, people and animals. **The idyll of childhood was literally drowned in blood** [emphasis added by R.M.]. The world lost its innocence once and for all and it was at the very beginning of its cognition. Human nature revealed

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<sup>46</sup> T. Różewicz, "Niebo dzieciństwa," in: idem, *Niepokój. Wybór wierszy*, Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1995, p. 48.

<sup>47</sup> For relevant information see J. Pieszczachowicz, "Zagrożone przymierze (O poezji Tadeusza Śliwiaka)," *Twórczość* 1996, No. 9.



the darkest and gloomiest nooks and crannies and at the same time the longing for the unpolluted primal sources of life increased.<sup>48</sup>

The importance of this moment in Śliwiak's writing is also emphasised by A. Sandauer in his essay on this author, entitled *Poezja tragicznego ładu* [Poetry in tragic disharmony]. Sandauer writes that "the narrative poem *Poemat o miejskiej rzeźni* (1964) constitutes a time barrier in [Śliwiak's] writing and it presents the other side of the harmony, favoured from the very first moment."<sup>49</sup> Another type of confrontation of childhood with history may be found in the poetry by J. Harasymowicz (born 1933), in particular in the highly appreciated début collection *Cuda* [Wonders], published in 1956. It seems that the poetic reality of this author adopts a specific form as a reaction to the social and political situation of the contemporary days rather than as the recollection of a wartime childhood. Admittedly, the critics saw traces of the poet's personal experiences in this collection. For instance, in A. Kaliszewski's monograph we read that in this volume:

One can hear the echoes of regrettable events: a broken home, war, religious belief which was lost, love. As a result the volume encompasses wonderful things and the sweetness coexisting (in a special way) with the longing for feelings, the atmosphere of varied danger, metaphysical fear.<sup>50</sup>

In turn, S. Grochowiak (born 1934) is closer to the earlier findings on the relations between childhood and history. The cycle entitled *Zabawy chłopięce* [Childhood games]<sup>51</sup> presents wartime scenes, transformed by stylisation, which is typical of his style. The same may be said about T. Ferenc and her vision of annihilation. To sum up, we may say that the confrontation of childhood with history affects the literary output of the writers who made their début around 1956 in the country (in *Współczesność*) and those in exile (in *Kontynenty*) in terms of their ideology and philosophy. This confrontation gave rise to:

- an attitude of rebellion (S. Grochowiak and A. Bursa who articulated the issues distinctively and on different levels),
- an awareness of annihilation of harmony, including the extra-human world (T. Śliwiak),
- a need to find justification on the grounds of religion (T. Ferenc),
- a turn to cultural roots (J. Harasymowicz, including the Lemko culture).

We do not know whether the philosophy of this group of generation-related poets is shaped mainly by their experience of wartime childhood or rather by any later youthful spiritual unrest, triggered by social and

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> A. Sandauer, "Poezja tragicznego ładu (Rzecz o Tadeuszu Śliwiaku)," in: idem, *Poeci czterech pokoleń*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1977, p. 348.

<sup>50</sup> A. Kaliszewski, "Brama dzieciństwa," in: idem, *Książę z Kraju Łagodności (O twórczości Jerzego Harasymowicza)*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1988, p. 35.

<sup>51</sup> See my paper "Przebisnu rówieśnik! O cyklu 'Zabawy chłopięce' Stanisława Grochowiaka," *Literaturoznawstwo*, 2007, No. 1.

political events (for example, the turn of 1956).<sup>52</sup> It may be a similar case to those of the emigrant artists referred to above, B. Czaykowski being an example in point.

## **Happiness and anger: ideological instrumentalisation**

Two other literary perspectives relating to the confrontation of childhood with history are referred to as “soc-perspectives,” not only because of the common prefix. Let us start from the social realistic perspective<sup>53</sup> which is precisely problematised in E. Balcerzan’s book that touches in the 1950s upon the issue of childhood. This perspective is found in the works of the writers involved in building a new socialist state, both by the representatives of the so-called Generation of “the spotty”<sup>54</sup> (Szymborska, Wirpsza) and by artists of other generations (for example, Broniewski, Tuwim, Przyboś, Różewicz, Pollak, Kamińska). The findings formulated by Balcerzan in the course of his research evidence that the motif of childhood is significant in this literature and it is particularly functional when it is used for propaganda purposes within this type of poetry. A child appears in both trends of literature: in the “lyrics of anger” and in the “lyrics of happiness.” In the first case its image is interconnected with “images from the child’s martyrology and it aims at the intensification of hatred towards the enemy.”<sup>55</sup> In the second trend we see that “fantasising of a child, small, naive utopias, fairy tales about happiness were presented by the agitator as a dream about socialism.”<sup>56</sup> Hence, it needs to be noted that childhood does not have its own autonomy in literature. It is interesting for writers as long as it can be used for their ideological tasks and purposes.

In the majority of these agitational texts, as noted by E. Balcerzan, the image of a child is only a set of rhetorical functions and not an object of cognition. The propagandist is interested only in the dreams that can be transferred to the domain of childhood in the ideological space – and which can be stored as being right.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> S. Burkot states: “It is youth not childhood that is a related identification mark in the works of Bursa, Grochowiak and Harasymowicz. The youth of the writers being the representative of this Group covered the beginnings of the 1950s and their childhood – war time. It is characteristic that the motifs of childhood, let us add – wartime childhood, are reflected most intensively in the first poetic manifests of the debutants of the year 1956.” S. Burkot, *Spotkania z poezją współczesną*, Warszawa: WSiP, 1977, p. 148.

<sup>53</sup> A transparent characterisation of the period of so-called socialism is provided by Z. Jarosiński in his book *Nadwiślański socrealizm*, Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 1999, pp. 105–136.

<sup>54</sup> The term was coined by Zofia Nałkowska and was used with reference to the group of young writers-activists, who thoughtlessly implemented the principles of social realism into literature. (Translator’s commentary)

<sup>55</sup> E. Balcerzan, *Poezja polska 1939–1965*, part I: *Strategie liryczne*, Warszawa: WSiP, 1984, p. 175.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 176–177.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178.

Thus, with regard to literary childhood and its relation to history, I primarily emphasise here the fact that soc-literature takes away from childhood rights and privileges that it had in the literary tradition. It deprives childhood of sovereignty. As a result, the poetic image becomes totally instrumentalised.

The discussion of the second soc-plan (soc-context) will be organised strictly according to the criterion of the generation-related paradigm used above. In this case, the relationship between childhood and history is determined by placing the subject in a specific generational socio-political context and in the light of historical events. The recollection of the world determines the image of childhood.

The “socialist plan” covers literary texts that were written by writers whose childhood and early youth covered the years of the People’s Republic of Poland. History in its most down-to-earth and horizontal form invaded their biographies and their childhood years, in the form of enslavement.

In the first alternative we need to mention the perspective of the so-called “soc-parnasism”<sup>58</sup> (Orientation, the Generation of “Grandchildren”). Finally, the term generation here defines a group of writers who were born at the turn of the 1930s and 1940s and who are not much younger than the representatives of the generation of 1956 (possibly being affected by the same situation and sharing the same programme). Contrary to the group called “Contemporary Times” whose members treated wartime childhood as the object of reflection and as themes of their works, here we are dealing with the full acceptance of the times directly following the war and with the reality that came somewhat later. This poetry fully accepts the existing social and political circumstances in which the artists belonging there reached maturity and it also accepts what they wrote about in their lyrics, occasionally with the use of sophisticated stylistics which are complex and incomprehensible from a conceptual perspective.<sup>59</sup> In this context, childhood does not come across as a literary topic in isolation. This holds particularly true for the childhood that was presented and portrayed in literature against the background of history. If that was the case then the world was filled with complexes towards those who were fighting with weapons in their hands and lost their lives writing poems while others were opening their eyes to the surrounding reality and were awakening to life. This explains the large number of references to the generation of Columbuses and its mythology in the lyrics of the poets belonging to the Orientation.

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<sup>58</sup> A term introduced by M. Głowiński “Socparnasizm,” in: idem, *Rytuał i demagogia. Trzyście szkiców o sztuce zdegradowanej*, Warszawa: OPEN, 1992. For more information in point see: G. Wołowicz, *Nowocześni w PRL. Przyboś i Sandauer*, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Leopoldinum, 1999, p. 253.

<sup>59</sup> See: L. Szaruga, “Orientacja,” in: idem, *Walka o godność. Poezja polska w latach 1939–1988. Zarys głównych problemów*, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo “Wiedza o Kulturze,” 1993.

It seems that the domain of the pre-sinful years in this poetry is presented from a somewhat different perspective as the child's subconsciousness, its unconscious images included therein and established in childhood. We are encouraged to claim that the references to Freud's and Lacan's theories are a convenient key to the interpretation of this poetry, including poems by J. Żernicki and E. Stachura. The first years are presented by these authors not only with the use of untypical stylistics which – not mentioning the experiments with elements of jargon and local dialect (Milczewski-Bruno) – can relate to a child's wordplay. It seems that for the authors in point the world around them is a source of complexes (for example, towards the groups that experienced the historical events of the 1920s and are thus referred to as the 1920 Generation), or it gives rise to the need to run away into hermetic aesthetics, Baroque ornaments and the employment of sophisticated words. In the poems relating to the theme of childhood, the poets searched for a way to be anchored in the world. They were persistently looking for ways of self-definition.<sup>60</sup> Unfortunately, this often triggered empty concepts, clothed in empty words. It is worth emphasising, however, that the lyrics of the group of poets in question evolved and sometimes they obtained a convincing form against the background of existential reflection, specifically in the poetry of K. Gašiorowski, where the child's topics serve as an instrument of settlement with the past.

In turn, the horizon of "the childhood of the six-year plan" may be related to the New Wave Generation, that is, the writers born in the mid-1940s. The hero of the novel by B. Zadura (born 1945) entitled *Lata spokojnego słońca* [The years of peaceful sun] aspires to be representative of this generation. According to M. Dąbrowski we find there:

A description of childhood years spent under the influence of the three-year plan and later on – the six-year-plan, the programmes of the "American voice" which were secretly listened to, the songs about Nowa Huta, a school year period at the beginning of which the hero heard the bad news about Stalin's death, the time of maturation and – finally – studying in Warsaw in the 60s.<sup>61</sup>

Similar references can be found in the autobiographical prose of J. Kornhauser (born 1946), *Dom, sen i gry dziecięce* [Home, dream and childhood games]. The representatives of the New Wave Generation do not present childhood specifically as a separate, mythopoetic epoch but they rather focus on how ideology invades it and how the communist, everyday life with its intransparencies and distortions affects childhood. It is not

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<sup>60</sup> See the statements on childhood in the works of M. Dąbrowski, *Literatura polska 1945–1995...*, p. 135.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 144–145. The author categorises the prose of the New Wave Generation according to a few strategies. The novel by Zadura is claimed to be representative of the literary direction referred to as "the confession of the child of the generation." We need to note that the themes under discussion also appear in the prose after time has passed by. See, for example the theme of childhood in the context of history in the prose of F. Netz (born 1939), *Urodzony w Święto Zmarłych*, Katowice 1995 (here the hero starts his studies in 1958).

what is individual but what is collective that is of interest to the writers of the Generation of '68. The mythologising themes are employed after many years, as is the case with the myth of the land of wild cherries – in Adam Zagajewski's case of Lvov, where he was born in 1945, not of Gliwice, where he was raised. The landscape of Silesia is presented in poems by B. Urbankowski (born 1943) in *Śląsk mojego dzieciństwa* [The Silesia of my childhood]. The poem presents childhood as “a land [...] similar to the light”<sup>62</sup> and at the same time as an area of gloomy Silesian landscape which – by the employment of poetic devices – is upgraded to the position of background for artistic creation. In the poem *Kindertotenlied* [Funeral dirge for children] by K. Karasek (born 1937), the child becomes an addressee of the poet's monologue. Notably, the ethical dimension of the complaint is exposed in particular, which is characteristic for generation-based lyrics.

The child, who walks away  
You take our hopes with you  
Our dormant recollections

And further the persona asks:

Is the world better for the better ones  
Is it worse world for those who are worse  
Borders are guarded  
Encircled with the wall of suffering  
We are not given the chance to follow you  
We are at lost words  
In order to express our parting  
Eternity without a voice<sup>63</sup>

Ewa Lipska (born 1945) voiced similar anxieties and these were shared by other artists of her generation. The figure of a child and the domain of childhood played a key role in her lyrics. It was the figure of a child that allowed the poet to present her own relations to the time in which she lived. The child becomes brutally plunged into communal life and also in the turmoil of history. The poet is very interested in what emerges from this fact. It usually turns out that its result is a permanent withdrawal of the persona into the times of childhood and childishness (eternal immaturity). Adulthood is only a guise, a facade, a mask which covers the eternal child and pervasive infantilisation of life. Lipska presents the complex of childhood and the early youth of her own generation (*We*) who did not have to face such challenges as the generation of Baczyński or Różewicz. Ob-

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<sup>62</sup> B. Urbankowski, “Bytom,” in: idem, *Chłopiec który odchodzi*, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, 1991, p. 81. In the case of B. Urbankowski we take into account not only the connections with the New Wave Generation but also the date of birth. This poet was a creator of the rival New Romantic Movement.

<sup>63</sup> K. Karasek, “Kindertotenlied,” in: idem, *Lekcja biologii i inne wiersze*, Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1990, p. 18. The title is telling of the educational issues (initiation) and it recurs through the whole collection.

viously, the poet herself would later state that this diagnosis was somewhat premature. The contemporary history was soon to revise this statement.<sup>64</sup>

It is worth noting that the anthology comprising the works of this generation was assigned the telling title *Poeta jest jak dziecko* [A poet is like a child] because the representatives felt emptiness in the period of the PRL,<sup>65</sup> being devoid of the values that were offered to them in their childhood, which gave rise to various nostalgias.

Childhood went away suddenly and it took with itself the belief in the permanent harmony of the world, in the bright and clear system of values. The world of adults did not prove to be a natural continuation of the childhood world which was suddenly taken away. First of all, this world no longer felt safe and did not believe in good overcoming evil.<sup>66</sup>

When the prophets of childhood left – as stated by M. Chrzanowski – there was practically nobody who could lead them, in whom they could believe.<sup>67</sup>

All the literary works authored by the representatives of this generation were consciously subjected to mythologisation and they bear traces of poetic elements. We may identify a few directions in the “mythologisation” process: (1) the borderland mythology exemplified, among others, by the lyrics of A. Jurewicz (including his *Lida* which was granted an award by Cz. Miłosz) and the works of P. Ciesiesz, including *Ikony rodzinne* (*Family icons*) and his next collections; (2) family mythology (picturing private and household reality); (3) the artist’s mythology<sup>68</sup>; (4) autobiographical mythology and – finally – (5) the domain of adding poetic elements (modality), where some topics become promoted by the employment of classical, linguistic and civil diction as well as mystification and existential penetration.<sup>69</sup>

Childhood presented in these lyrics was always found in opposition to the dictatorship of history. It was born out of the feeling of lack of common consolidating experience among the writers who found their mission only in the poetry exercised undercover, but also in the events of the times of martial law.<sup>70</sup> This relates, among others, to the poetry of such writers as T. Jastrun, J. Polkowski, J. Bieriezin and A. Pawlak. It is characteristic that it is in the lyrics of the times of martial law and the internment that we identify childhood motifs, in particular the motifs of returning to school. The interrogation from the work by A. Pawlak entitled *Przesłuchanie* [Inter-

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<sup>64</sup> The figure of the child in the lyrics of the New Wave Generation is used in many ways. It is also manifested in language, which is emphasised by R. Krynicki in the poem entitled *Język to dzikie mięso*,

<sup>65</sup> See: M. Chrzanowski, “Przeżyć i być czystym,” in: *Poeta jest jak dziecko. Nowe Roczniki. Antologia*, selected and edited by M. Chrzanowski, Z. Jerzyna, J. Koperski, Warszawa: MAW, 1987, p. 374.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 367. Further, I refer to the statements made in the critical texts included in this anthology.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 370.

<sup>68</sup> For more information in point see – *ibid.*, p. 394.

<sup>69</sup> I refer to the statements of W. Zawistowski after A.K. Waśkiewicz, *ibid.*, p. 402 who proposes other ordering mechanisms (including S. Sterny-Wachowiak).

<sup>70</sup> Martial law was introduced in Poland in December 1981 and ended in July 1983.

rogation] changes into an examination and it is to be understood as an exam in life matters. Likewise, in *Dziennik internowania* [The internment diary] by W. Woroszyński from the Generation of “The Spotty” we find the following sample reference: “Old boys / we have teachers again.”<sup>71</sup>

## Double existence

Let me sum up, somewhat preliminarily, some of the reflections made so far. At the beginning, I pose the question about the ultimate image of childhood in history and against the history of the 20th century. Polish literature of the period 1939 – 1989 shows that in order to reconstruct the reality of childhood poetics we need to take into account the way in which it was affected by external circumstances. We need to start from the childhood world of the writers who made their *début* as early as in the interwar period (the examples here include Miłosz, Łobodowski and Iwaniuk)<sup>72</sup> and analyse the relevant material up to the writers who published their first books in the second half of the 1970s and in the 1980s and who – at that time – to some point participated in underground literary life, thus contributing to the end of the epoch that started with the outbreak of World War II.<sup>73</sup>

There is another, additional aspect that contributes to the image of childhood in the time span in question, and it particularly concerns narrative prose. Specifically, it is about childhood as a “double existence” in the world. The first example comes from Miłosz and the second from Ważyk. Let me make a few digressions with regard to the childhood prose of these authors and specifically to the findings relating to their lyrics.

Since the years 1939–1989 are a period that is rich in important historical events, the two writers establishing childhood themes in their literary output could not omit this background, although – admittedly – it is not exclusively history that has the most significant influence on how this stage in the human biography is presented by them. This is true in the case of Tomasz, the hero of *Dolina Issy* [*The Issa Valley*] by Czesław Miłosz. He discovers and discloses his soul, his spirituality which is awakened to the world, but at the same time his childhood existence is affected by history.

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<sup>71</sup> W. Woroszyński, “Dziennik internowania,” in: idem, *Z podróży, ze snu, z umierania*, Poznań: Wydawnictwo a5, 1992, p. 180.

<sup>72</sup> We may notice here that the topic of the child is extensively present also in the prose of the interwar period.

<sup>73</sup> The discussion conducted so far did not mention the contemporary elegiac lyrics of authors such as, for example, M. Jastrun or Cz. Miłosz, who – in their late poems – addressed the reality of childhood with the aim of summing up their own biographies. The overviews of their attitudes to the challenges of the times in which they were to live, that is towards the history, also served the same purpose, which is most interesting to us. On the other hand, the said overviews show how history affected childhood from which they were expelled for ever. See my essay “Późne elegie Mieczysława Jastruna,” *Przegląd Humanistyczny*, 2005, No. 2.

In such a case the persona can be defined as a person on which the double tension is focused. This is how Tomasz is created as a character on his way to maturity, being at the crossroads of what is intimate, unique and determined by history. There are actually three levels on which the maturing person is construed. The three levels link the child's sensitivity with the emotional sphere, with the awakening of intellect and – finally – with the attempt to assess the reality in which we live (including the historical events) respectively. In the first case Miłosz discusses the issue of his hero's ecstasy:

Various forces were observing Tomasz in the sun and among the greenery and they judged him according to the scope of their knowledge. Those of them who could exceed the limits of time were nodding their heads melancholically because they were capable of coping with the effects of the ecstasy in which he lived. These forces knew, for example, the works of the musicians who were trying to express happiness but such efforts prove clumsy when you squat next to the bed of a child who wakes up on a summer morning [...]. Happiness is also a touch. Tomasz was running barefoot on the smooth wooden panels, through the chilly stony floor of the corridor up to the round cobbles when the dew gets dry.<sup>74</sup>

What is important with regard to the second level are Tomasz's arising doubts: "Why am I me? How is it possible that having a body, warmth, hand, fingers one has to die and stop being me?"<sup>75</sup> In the third case, we need to take into account the fact that his childhood could have had a different image if he had not been surrounded by people involved in the post-war events in Lithuania and the events after World War I.

Hence, when discussing "childhood in history" I mean here some type of double existence of a child in the world (at the crossroads of unique distinctiveness and historical impact). This is the case with the cycle *Świat* [The World] by Miłosz.<sup>76</sup> Both the poet and numerous commentators on this lyrical work<sup>77</sup> paid attention to the circumstances in which the work was read for the first time. Miłosz presents reality as Arcadia. He remembers well what remains untold when talking about the world and it is a reality where the rights governing the area of "naivety" become nullified. The character of the father acts as a link between these areas. Hence, Miłosz as a witness of history addresses childhood – to be more specific – he addresses what can be called "childhood in history" with some kind of premeditation. He hopes that by pushing aside the problems of history as they are at the time of writing *Świat* he may be even more explicit about history. In turn, in the final period of Miłosz's literary activity, history does not play the primary role in his reflections on childhood. It is another background that clarifies

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<sup>74</sup> C. Miłosz, *Dolina Issy*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1981, p. 21.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>76</sup> See: J. Łukasiewicz, "Przestrzeń Świata naiwnego. O poemacie Czesława Miłosza 'Świat,'" *Pamiętnik Literacki* 1981, issue 4.

<sup>77</sup> See, for example, the notes of J. Święch in: *Literatura polska w latach II wojny światowej*, Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1997, pp. 128–130; the statement of Miłosz (quoted from *Podróżny świat*) referred to in the note "Akt magiczny z roku 1943," *Rzeczpospolita* 1999, No. 147.



the world presented to the readers. We may, after S. Dygat, refer to childhood as a period of an unclassified world. What is meant here are today's: recollections of the things that I saw in my childhood, in the period when thinking does not help, when everything around does not let itself be classified in terms of geography or geology, coming across as a vast field of manifold possibilities.<sup>78</sup>

Thus, the world is here the "river of any possibilities." This is how it is presented to a child. And it is not only as an ecstatic experience of existence, as was the case with Tomasz, but it is the crossroads of the fate determined by history.

A. Ważyk's 1938 novel *Mity rodzinne* [Family myths] can be treated as analogy to Miłosz's *Dolina Issy*. It is the history of three siblings presented against the background of significant historical events. The action is set in the period of World War I. The times of war are presented with reserve, from the perspective of a civilian. The reason for this also lies in the fact that the results of war for those who stay in Warsaw, as is our case here, are not always possible to assess, which constitutes an object of interest for Ważyk. The "family myths" that are included in the wording of the title do not seem to be fully adequate to capture the whole message communicated by a literary work that presents the intelligentsia, proletariat and lower levels of society of this period and focuses on the ideological discussions of society in transformation and on the influence on social difficulties of the protagonists who are pushed to suicide. These are not myths but rather problems, dilemmas and taboos. It needs to be noted that the title proposed by Ważyk is better justified when we treat this work not only as a result of psychological realism and following the model of the family saga,<sup>79</sup> but also as an example of the prose of initiation. Admittedly, the whole issue discussed in the novel and perceived from the perspective of Albin, whose spiritual transformations are traced starting from the time when he is ten to the period directly proceeding his maturity and the years of his early maturation, comes across as a myth. Albin is to be treated as an ally of Tomasz with the reservation that he is imprisoned by the city, sensitised to social injustice (thus expressing the attitude of Ważyk himself) and oversensitive. When discussing various issues related to the contemporary lyrics it is worth referring to this work because it shows the maturation of Albin simultaneously on two levels. Such an approach is characteristic of the problem areas in poetry, in particular with regard to the poetry addressing the psychological knowledge of the artist. Albin wants to be a poet. He prepares himself for this role. He enters life by various types of initiation: erotic, "metaphysical," social and this makes him search for asylum in an unfriendly, discouraging and

<sup>78</sup> S. Dygat, *Jeziro Bodeńskie*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1994, p. 47.

<sup>79</sup> See: J. Kwiatkowski, *Dwudziestolecie międzywojenne*, Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 2000, p. 314.

strange world. Hence, the novel, which – for those times – is daring in terms of manners, presents to us the world of the sexes (the relationship with Florka) and the forefeeling of some kind of empiricism in the domain of existence, bitterness, the feeling of being lost in the field of communal life. Becoming an adult is commented on by the auctorial narrator with the following words referring to the moment after the suicide attempt: “the sense of reality was established firmly in him; however, there was a place where the tendency was coming to life to ascribe extraordinary and fairly-tale features expelled from the child’s home.”<sup>80</sup> Both Albin and Tomasz describe reality as displaying extraordinary features. They are, however, successively made aware of the fact that from a certain moment their perception of reality is frozen, which delays the moment of them becoming mature. The historical background affects the world that attracts them and this becomes operative in particular by virtue of them “becoming increasingly aware of” a “sense of reality.”

We need to notice that in *Poemat dla dorosłych*, [A narrative poem for adults]<sup>81</sup> by Ważyk the dialectics in the domain of immaturity – maturity constantly recurs. Let me recall at this point the pre-war *Mity rodzinne* (introducing a “ground-breaking” criticism of the middle class), which was reprinted in 1947 with the aim of drawing attention to the fact that the social diagnosis included in *Poemat dla dorosłych* in a sense reminds us of the one included in his prose. The only difference here is that it refers to another epoch. Analogies may also be found with regard to realism, lack of opposition in touching upon sensitive topics, both visible, open ones and those which are related to the “underground” life which is secret and shy. This is specifically important for the Warsaw-based episodes of the narrative poem. The narrator himself states:

I got off at the yard  
In the working-class neighbourhood  
Where the grey walls were beaming with recollections  
People were hurrying home  
I did not dare to ask where I was.  
Was it the place where I used to go to the pharmacy when I was a child?<sup>82</sup>

Albin from *Mity rodzinne* may be Ważyk himself. The older Albin may be the narrator in *Poemat dla dorosłych*. He returns to the place where Flora comes from, as well as her sister Aniela, who is close to being involved in prostitution and other characters. It can be noticed how some literary themes become extended in Ważyk’s writing.

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<sup>80</sup> A. Ważyk, *Mity rodzinne*, Warszawa: “Czytelnik,” 1947, p. 195.

<sup>81</sup> For *Poemat dla dorosłych* see: J. Łukasiewicz, “Poemat dla dorosłych – obrachunkowy,” in: idem, *Oko poematu*, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 1991.

<sup>82</sup> A. Ważyk, “Poemat dla dorosłych,” in: idem, *Poemat dla dorosłych i inne wiersze*, Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1956, p. 7.

## Acceptance, escapism, fear: personalisation

The analysis of the texts related to the literary phenomenon of childhood leads to the conclusion that the writers are usually affected by three factors. Firstly, recalling the domain of childhood may constitute a declaration of an “accepted life philosophy”<sup>83</sup> and this is the case in returning to the Arcadia of childhood. Secondly, it may also reflect a need to escape (escape from the severities of the contemporary time into the idyll of the early years of life). Thirdly, referring to childhood may result from the need to present a catastrophic Genesis or pessimistic vision of the world, for example, in the world of Różewicz or Czaykowski, with the vision being born in a childhood immersed in the horror of historical events. It is the third aspect that is of primary interest to me here.

Let us sum up: the literary confrontations of the world of childhood and history has gone in a few directions, covering the areas of borderlands literature, emigration and exile literature, the literature of the Holocaust (annihilation), the literature of the war and PRL-times (soc-perspective and horizons of the generation-related experiences). The paradigms discussed here acting as perspectives for the analysis of the poetry written between the years 1939–1989, and as forces that organise and systematise writing according to the dominating thematic strands, autobiographic experiences written down in the artistic texts and generation-specific experiences, are directly connected with historical themes. As was already mentioned, the

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<sup>83</sup> This term has been coined by J. Kwiatkowski in his work *Dwudziestolecie międzywojenne...*, p. 228, where the researcher refers to *Uśmiech dzieciństwa* by M. Dąbrowska. He quotes the meaningful words from the book which perfectly define the essence of a child's spirituality: “everything is always wonderful, but never the same way as it was when we were small. Then life touched directly our hearts.” Let us quote further words that were skipped by Kwiatkowski: “Every bit of a day and every inch of space witnessed dreadful and wonderful things. There occurred thousands of utterly insignificant events; however, they gave rise to extreme hatred, tricks and sudden love.” M. Dąbrowska, *Uśmiech dzieciństwa*, Warszawa: Iskry, 1956, p. 43. It is worth noticing that Dąbrowska introduces her own vision of a child's anthropology. The words quoted come from the short story entitled *Drzewa na wiosnę*, which may be treated as a kind of poetic prose (especially with regard to the omnipresent lyricism) which brings to the fore the internal world of a child. Furthermore, the use of the collective persona is characteristic there and it points to a belief in the lack of individualisation of a child's psyche, which can be verbalised in the following way: I am part of the world that surrounds me, a group of children, etc., I do not feel my distinctiveness so intensively .... Let us call this mechanism a psychological “child's pre-personalism.” The concept “personalism” – from the perspective of psychology, not the philosophical direction – is treated as a descriptive term that expresses the belief in the congruity of human personality, all its elements that are assigned to a mature man. The concept in question, which is interesting for us in the light of what is in our focus, becomes questioned and liquidated as a result of the intervention in the child's spiritual domain. The child enters in the phase of personalisation. Moreover, Dąbrowska emphasises childhood by setting the action of the short story in wartime (spring as childhood, childhood as spring: according to the symbolism of the seasons of year).

cognitive value of the two texts can be assessed from two perspectives: history defines childhood and enlightens it while – in turn – the texts about childhood present the image of history not always accounted for in the description of historical events, thus creating new epistemological optics.

This relation can also be presented as the effect of the shock to a child's "pre-personalism" that is operative by force of external, historical events, which – as a value in itself – guarantees a peaceful process of maturation and awakening to life. What is characteristic of a child's pre-personalism is the feeling of unity with the world, the feeling of harmony and identification with existence. However, when we focus on the world we inhabit instead of on ourselves we make our distinctiveness more explicit and thus personalised as a result of experiencing historic drama. The fact that a child participates in historic drama in the annihilation of the harmony of the world causes him/her to start thinking and recognising the events happening around from an ever-increasing distance and he/she ceases to identify with them. Children thus develop their own personalities, notice their distinctive existence, unity (congruity of personality), the things that make them different from other entities. In this context, the examples of the phenomena of the 20th century discussed in this paper show that the role of history boils down to moving the child to the stage of personalisation, which is often identified with maturation. It takes the child from the world of Arcadia, from the domain of household safety, from the harmony of the garden and other places that are very significant culturally (symbolic, topical) and which put the child in a trap that is usually a shock for him, often acting as a trauma. Earlier in the discussion we mentioned the concept of exile from the natural environment and the evidence of wartime fear, genocide, etc.

Hence, the analysis of the image of childhood in contemporary poetry must take account of the following facts: one of the fundamental factors that affect childhood is its historical dimension (*sensu largo*). The role of history is to be understood as a factor "taking" the child from the area of pre-personalisation (childhood detached from the external conditionings and not aware of its internal organisation or congruity) to the area of personalisation that models the child's world under the influence of external stimuli. In the latter case we need to consider what is happening with the child preceding his maturation or at the beginning of the stage of maturation. We may say that the period of exceeding the limits of childhood (crossing the symbolic boundary), entering the world of adults, takes place when the child is fully aware of the historical events occurring around them (the rationalisation procedure).

The literary texts on which this discussion is based often focused on the experiences of the protagonist standing at the border between the area of pre-personalisation and personalisation. It is this very moment that seems to be most exploited in the literature. It is the moment of transfer, opening

and closing.<sup>84</sup> The issues that we seem to be familiar with are not unfamiliar. It is time that gives rise to the unrepeatable quality of spiritual life that – in its vagueness, indefinite character and unpredictability – poses interest to writers, including prose writers and poets, and encourages their reflection on the level of psychology, existence and anthropology alike. It also seems to justify the researcher’s use of the term “metaphysics of childhood.”

Translated by Edyta Więclawska

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<sup>84</sup> *Uśmiech dzieciństwa* which ends the collection includes an image of children’s departure to the town. Dąbrowska presents the moment of closing and opening as something “that is lurking behind what we longed for during such a long time, something that is dangerous and beloved, something that is lurking over the future,” that is to say – the moment that is a play of contradictory emotions, dialectics of feelings. M. Dąbrowska, op. cit., p. 127.

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