



Bartosz Dąbrowski

Marian Kisiel

Katarzyna Prot-Klinger

Beata Przymuszała

Joanna Tokarska-Bakir

2 (40) | 2025

Hanna Krall

– Languages of Trauma

Choice of technique is inseparably bound to the question of whether profoundly powerful experiences – experiences that alter the very horizon of perception, understanding, and articulation – can be represented at all.

Editor in Chief

Tomasz Mizerkiewicz

Issue Editors

Beata Przymuszała

Editorial Board

Prof., PhD Tomasz Mizerkiewicz, Prof., PhD Ewa Kraskowska, Prof., PhD Joanna Grądział-Wójcik,
PhD Agnieszka Kwiatkowska, PhD Ewa Rajewska, PhD Paweł Graf, PhD Lucyna Marzec,
PhD Joanna Krajewska, PhD Cezary Rosiński, MA Agata Rosochacka

Publishing Editors MA Agata Rosochacka

Linguistic Editors

PhD Cezary Rosiński – Polish version

MA Thomas Anessi – English version

Scientific Council

Prof., PhD Edward Balcerzan (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland)

Prof., PhD Andrea Ceccherelli (University of Bologna, Italy)

Prof., PhD Adam Dziadek (University of Silesia, Poland)

Prof., PhD Mary Gallagher (University College Dublin, Ireland)

Prof., PhD Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (Stanford University, United States)

Prof., PhD Inga Iwasiów (University of Szczecin, Poland)

Prof., PhD Anna Łebkowska (Jagiellonian University, Poland)

Prof., PhD Jahan Ramazani (University of Virginia, United States)

Prof., PhD Tvrtko Vuković (University of Zagreb, Croatia)

Proofreaders:

Stanisław Wójtowicz – Polish version

Jack Hutchens – English version

Assistant Editor: PhD Gerard Ronge

Cover and logos design: Patrycja Łukomska

On the cover: Cecil Beaton (1904–1980), *The London Blitz*, 1940.

Public domain.

Editorial Office: 61-701 Poznań, ul. Fredry 10

Editor: Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland

„Forum Poetyki | Forum of Poetics” 2 (40) 2025 (39) year X | ISSN 2451-1404

© Copyright by „Forum Poetyki | Forum of Poetics”, Poznań 2025

Editors do not return unused materials, reserve rights to shortening articles and changing proposed titles..

fp@amu.edu.pl | fp.amu.edu.pl

T A B L E O F C O N T E N T

introduction

| | |
|--|---|
| Beata Przymuszała, <i>Hanna Krall — Languages of Trauma</i> | 4 |
|--|---|

theories

| | |
|--|----|
| Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, <i>Hanna Krall: Childhood as an Unfinished Sentence</i> | 6 |
| Marian Kisiel, <i>Experiencing history in Hanna Krall's small narratives</i> | 18 |
| Katarzyna Prot-Klinger, <i>Trauma in Words, Trauma in the Body: Narrating Trauma in the Works of Hanna Krall</i> | 30 |

practices

| | |
|---|----|
| Bartosz Dąbrowski, <i>Crypt, Mimicry, Genealogy: The Languages of Trauma in Hanna Krall's The Subtenant</i> | 46 |
| Beata Przymuszała, <i>Trauma and Reality: On Hanna Krall's Synapsy Marii H. (Maria H.'s Synapses)</i> | 62 |
| Ewa Bartos, <i>Tales for adult children? Hanna Krall's Co się stało z naszą bajką [What happened to our fairy tale]</i> | 76 |
| Anna Pastuszka, <i>Translations and reception of Hanna Krall's literary reportages in German-speaking countries</i> | 90 |

Hanna Krall — Languages of Trauma

Beata Przymuszała

ORCID: 0000-0002-8915-748X

The articles collected in this issue of Forum of Poetics highlight Krall's enduring presence in Holocaust literature, while also revealing the persistent and painful challenges of reception that continue to reflect deeper tensions within Polish culture.

In his opening address at a Warsaw meeting dedicated to Hanna Krall, Jerzy Borowczyk described the reporter as “a tireless interpreter of the fraught twentieth century, unfailingly attentive to others and ever prepared to grant them a voice—shaping their fate in a manner both distinctive and selfless.” He thus drew attention to the phenomenon of Hanna Krall—her extraordinary capacity to accompany others in shaping their testimonies while at the same time safeguarding her own voice.

*In a significant monograph on Krall, Joanna Roszak underscored the distinctive structure of her works: “she positions the reader alongside her heroines and heroes, who themselves often sit in an empty space. It signifies the absence of someone. Of something. By inviting the reader into this void, she enables them to touch it—this act is oxymoronic because it is intangible, yet safe because it exists within the page. (...) One might think that Krall seeks to tell all the stories (...) but her own” (J. Roszak, *Hanna Krall, Tkanie [Weaving]*. Łódź 2024, p. 34).*

The articles we invite you to read uncover multiple facets of Hanna Krall's “books that bear witness” and seek to illuminate the remarkable phenomenon of her craft as a reporter.

In a pivotal essay, Joanna Tokarska-Bakir demonstrates how clichés, stereotypes, and attempts to “smoothen” or aestheticize the reception of Krall’s books have both deflected and obstructed Polish responses to the Holocaust. Marian Kisiel, respectively, draws attention to the reporter’s technique, examining her focus on individual fates that shape the texture of her writing: biographies presented as “open wounds” become “literature that bears witness.” Krall’s choice of technique is inseparably bound to the question of whether profoundly powerful experiences—experiences that alter the very horizon of perception, understanding, and articulation—can be represented at all. The three articles that follow concentrate on the concept of trauma in Hanna Krall’s works, each exposing a different facet of its presence.

Bartosz Dąbrowski, in his reading of Krall’s Sublokatorka [Subtenant], approaches the text through the lens of mimicry, revealing the fracture and pain of the “split self”—a self “positioned” and constrained by the dominant Polish community. The trauma inscribed in this experience, at once disclosed and concealed by affective language, poses a profound interpretive challenge for that community (with Joanna Tokarska-Bakir’s essay offering essential context). At the same time, the very act of containing such experiences within a text may be understood as a form of working-through, opening the possibility of situating Krall’s writing in relation to therapeutic practice. Katarzyna Prot-Klinger develops this perspective with particular force: drawing on trauma theory as well as her clinical practice, she interprets Krall’s books as therapeutic work grounded in listening, while also acknowledging the reporter’s skepticism toward such methods. In my own dual role as author and editor, I likewise engage with the category of trauma by analyzing Synapsy Marii H. [Maria H.’s Synapses], seeking to illuminate how the world appears to those marked by trauma, what “traumatic reality” signifies for them, and how their surroundings may respond.

The next two articles examine different dimensions of the reporter’s work. Ewa Bartos, in her reading of “Co się stało z naszą bajką” [What Happened to Our Fairy Tale], shows how the use of fairy tale conventions provokes reflection on the cultural narrative patterns that continue to burden the reception of Holocaust stories. Anna Pastuszka, respectively, highlights the international interest in Krall’s writing by analyzing German translations and their reception, drawing attention to the limited awareness among German readers of what transpired during World War II.

The findings presented in these articles not only reaffirm the significance of Hanna Krall’s writing but also invite us to pursue the lines of inquiry they open, prompting ongoing reflection on the power of texts and the ways they shape us.

In a book-length interview with Wojciech Tochman, Krall remarks: “I once read that telling and listening to stories is a natural need of the human brain. Reportage, after all, is storytelling. Perhaps it should be added to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. There are five—physiological needs, belonging, recognition... The sixth natural human need would be reportage” (Hanna Krall, Pożegnanie z Narwią [Farewell to Narwia]. Interview by Wojciech Tochman. Kraków 2025, p. 155). It is a perspective that opens the deepest path into Krall’s work.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

Hanna Krall: Childhood as an Unfinished Sentence

Joanna Tokarska-Bakir

ORCID: 0000-0003-4778-0465

First, let me explain the title. In “Giving Up the Ghost,” the Irish-British writer Hilary Mantel reflects:

The story of my own childhood is a complicated sentence that I am always trying to finish, to finish and put behind me.¹

This line could just as easily be spoken by the narrators of Hanna Krall’s books. If translated into visual form, their maps would look like a child’s drawings, though not

¹ Hilary Mantel, “Giving up the ghost”, London Review of Books 1 (2003).

mere scribbles. In this context, the child appears as a prematurely formed adult, weighed down by what Alice Miller terms the “gifted child” syndrome. She characterizes this condition as follows:

a child is at the mother’s disposal. [...] A child cannot run away from her [...]. A child can be brought up so that it becomes what she wants it to be. A child can be made to show respect; she can impose her own feelings on him, see herself mirrored in his love and admiration, and feel strong in his presence.²

The child was fashioned by the culture that had nurtured them, and this culture, like a stepmother, demanded to be recognized.

Within it appeared figures who resembled the cannibalistic giants of the Brothers Grimm’s fairy tales—creatures who could sniff out the scent of human beings. They spoke as the Germans from the Radziłów region once did, quoted by Anna Bikont in *My z Jedwabnego* [Jedwabne: Battlefield of Memory]: “It smells strongly of Jews here. When we return in a few days, it must not stink like that.”³ All of this unfolded before the child’s eyes.

In his 2010 essay, “Modlitwa w komisariacie” [Prayer at the Police Station], Tadeusz Sobolewski notes that Hanna Krall speaks directly about her childhood only once. Let me quote from Władysław Bartoszewski and Zofia Lewinówna’s book *Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej* [He Is from My Homeland], specifically from the passage entitled “Gra o moje życie” [A Game for My Life]:

[...] the only text in which Hanna Krall spoke about herself directly—without the narrative camouflage she later employed in the novel *Sublokator* [The Subtenant] or in the wartime account of a Jewish girl who lived in hiding and was denied baptism, a story that would later find its way into Krzysztof Kieślowski’s *Dekalog: Eight*.⁴

Why does Sobolewski interpret every instance of the first person as a “direct statement,” despite the fact that this text, written in 1968, clearly employs an established narrative convention?⁵ A reading of *Sublokator* makes clear that Krall’s authorial voice is anything

² Alice Miller, *The Drama of the Gifted Child: The Search for the True Self* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 90.

³ Anna Bikont, *My z Jedwabnego* [Jedwabne: Battlefield of Memory] (Warsaw: Prószyński i S-ka, 2004), 281: “Andrzej R.: Three Germans arrived in a car. I was standing nearby. They said, ‘It smells strongly of Jews here. When we return in a few days, it must not stink like that.’ Then they pointed at Feliks Mordasiewicz, who was also standing there, as if he were to blame. He asked, ‘But what am I supposed to do about it?’ In response, they pulled five long, single-shot rifles from the car.”

⁴ Tadeusz Sobolewski, “Modlitwa w komisariacie” [Prayer at the Police Station], <https://kwartalnikwyspa.pl/tadeusz-sobolewski-modlitwa-w-komisariacie-o-pisarstwie-hanny-krall/>.

⁵ See: Hanna Krall, “Gra o moje życie” [A Game for My Life], first published in *Polityka* 16 (1968), reprinted in: *Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej. Polacy z pomocą Żydom 1939–1945* [He Is from My Homeland: Poles Helping Jews 1939–1945], ed. Władysław Bartoszewski, Zofia Lewinówna (Cracow: Znak, 1969), 297–299.

but linear; it emerges through dissociation and dislocation. Why, then, does Sobolewski feel compelled to simplify, to collapse ambivalence into unambiguous meaning? After all, any sentence can be written in the first person, but that does not automatically make it autobiographical. Consider, for instance, the following line—whom does it actually concern?

You know, my mother said your awareness was extraordinary. At five years old, you seemed to understand everything. Is that true?

She can't quite remember.⁶

The woman being addressed is generally portrayed as somewhat dimwitted, and the more she appears so, the greater the freedom the reserved, sensible narrator enjoys. This dynamic, in essence, defines their reciprocal relationship.

Other fans of Krall's work also demand consistency from the author. Online, some accuse her of "having at least two birth dates."⁷ Yet while disunity is a central theme in Hanna Krall's writing, the notion of an assumed or covert identity remains unacceptable to these readers. This resistance is hardly surprising: even Professor Leszek Kołakowski wrestled with the problem. Reflecting on the dual identities of Jews in hiding, he argued that from the standpoint of Kantian ethics, every lie—without exception—must be judged as wrong, regardless of circumstance.⁸

The internet abounds with similar definite opinions about Hanna Krall. For instance, *Rzeczpospolita* contributor Bartosz Marzec claims that the writer "didn't engage with the Holocaust for personal reasons."⁹ It is unclear how he could know this, since he almost certainly did not hear it from Krall. Perhaps, as a fan of Krall, he is worried that if his favorite author were to acknowledge her "personal reasons," she might not appear objective. In Poland, underground heroes and poets are readily accepted as witnesses to their own experiences—for example, Beata Obertyńska's award-winning book *W domu niewoli* [In the House of Slavery]¹⁰ (a striking example of hate speech) was even a required reading at school. Jews, however—even those who were partisans or poets—are denied that same legitimacy.

The belief that the writer "didn't engage with the Holocaust for personal reasons" allows Marzec to concentrate solely on beauty:

⁶ Hanna Krall, "Sublokatorka" [The Subtenant], in: Hanna Krall, *Fantom bólu* [Phantom of Pain] (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2024), 111.

⁷ Bartosz Marzec, "Hanna Krall", Culture.pl, October 2009, update: NMR, December 2020, <https://culture.pl/pl/tworca/hanna-krall>.

⁸ See: Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, "Tak tak, nie nie" [Yes for Yes, No for No], *dwutygodnik.com*, <https://www.dwutygodnik.com/arttykul/1816-pol-strony-nowoczesnosc-i-zaglada-tak-tak-nie-nie.html?print=1>.

⁹ Marzec, "Hanna Krall."

¹⁰ See: Beata Obertyńska, *W domu niewoli* [In the House of Slavery] (Wrocław: Siedmioróg 2021).

All of Hanna Krall's stories—written in an understated, beautifully rhythmic style—are suffused with mystery. The reporter approaches it with respect, never imposing conclusions. As I read her books, I cannot escape the sense that nothing significant in the world happens by chance. Krall's stories are too intricate, too finely woven, to be the product of fate.¹¹

I hesitate to ask how the Holocaust could have happened in such a supposedly “chanceless” world. Was it part of God's plan? Did the Jews have to die? Was it punishment for something—or, God forbid, a kind of sacrifice? These questions do not trouble Marzec, whose approach to Krall's writing is, nevertheless, insightful. Unlike factual history, which often descends into bitter disputes over details, memory—especially when infused with metaphysical overtones—does not polarize. It soothes; it allows one to believe in a better future. On the “side of memory,” there are no arch-human perpetrators of the Holocaust, no social mechanisms of stupidity, fear, greed, or obedience, and no troubling contemporary parallels. Most importantly, everything ends well. The mystery holds out the promise of an “initiation” that, if we are honest, renders history itself almost vulgar by comparison.

What remains to be explained is the role Jews play in Hanna Krall's writing. At this point, Bartosz Marzec mentions Hasidism:

In the mid-1980s, Martin Buber's *Tales of the Hasidim* allowed Krall to wander imaginatively through the old Jewish towns of Izbica, Kock, and Warka. She did not know this world, and she did not conceal that fact from her readers. Together, author and audience discovered the past, traditions, and culture of Polish Jews through her reportages.¹²

I am not quite sure what “she did conceal that fact from her readers” refers to exactly, but it seems to me that Marzec mentions Hasidism to place Krall within the “Jew with a gold coin”¹³ convention—a Polish fantasy that glosses over difficult questions. In this context, stories like “Biała Maria” [White Maria] lose their unsettling force—neutralized like a vampire impaled on an aspen stake.

What truly connects Krall to the Hasidim remains unclear. Supposedly, she and her readers are to discover this world together, supposedly on equal terms—though I would wager only one side pays the price. Marzec fails to see that Krall's reticence does not excuse his own; it may, in fact, be a deliberate literary ruse, a test designed to expose both the difference in and the depth of the misunderstanding.

¹¹ Bartosz Marzec, “Hanna Krall opowiada o Kieślowskim” [Hanna Krall Talks about Kieślowski], *Rzeczpospolita*, 12 May 2011, <https://www.rp.pl/literatura/art14531151-hanna-krall-opowiada-o-kieslowskim>.

¹² Marzec, “Hanna Krall.”

¹³ Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, “Żyd z pieniążkiem podbija Polskę” [Jew with a Gold Coin Conquers Poland], *Gazeta Wyborcza* [The Electoral Gazette], 18 Feb. 2012, <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75410,11172689,zyd-z-pieniazkiem-podbija-polske.html>.

The same strategies—let’s call them by their names: false universalization and the distortion of truth—are also employed by Mariusz Szczygieł, who writes in the introduction to *Szczegóły znaczące* [Significant Details]:

For me, the prevailing state of mind when reading these minimalist stories is one of calm. The world, the author seems to whisper in my head, has its own order. There will always be a babysitter ready to help others in a gas chamber. There will always be students who will not sit on the left. Always...¹⁴

But how can Mariusz Szczygieł be so sure? Doesn’t his claim—mysteriously attributed to the author—diminish the achievement of the student who chose to sit on the right side of the lecture hall, or the “babysitter” who comforted children in a gas chamber? Isn’t this a rather hasty attempt to turn the exception into the rule? And how can holding one’s breath possibly be mistaken for being “calm”?

Szczygieł further writes:

In Krall’s books, no one is portrayed as better or worse. Characters who assume good or bad roles are treated with the same measure of restraint—matter-of-factly, and perhaps with compassion. For she understands that good and evil are both integral aspects of the human condition.¹⁵

Is this truly the lesson to be drawn from Krall’s stories? Would Mariusz Szczygieł recount the murder of his own family in this way? History is replaced by fate. Rules give way to chance. Nothing but calm. Confession takes the place of investigation. An honorary diploma substitutes for compensation. There is no court, no judge—though priests and nuns still make their appearance. And to seal this relativization, Hayden White’s name is invoked—misspelled, for good measure.¹⁶

The melancholic tale of Father Adam Boniecki, expelled from his estate and handed a copy pencil by an NKVD soldier as he departs, is woven together with the macabre of the Holocaust. The Holocaust of some, the end of others: almost the same, yet utterly different. For Krzysztof Kieślowski, the protagonist of *Sublokator*, the essence of tragedy lies in what a Bernardine friar who missed his train says. We all suffer, life goes on, and we change the subject. What do we take from this? Only: “It’s interesting”...¹⁷

¹⁴Mariusz Szczygieł, “Ciekawe jest” [It’s Interesting], in: Hanna Krall, *Szczegóły znaczące* [Significant Details] (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2022), 19.

¹⁵Szczygieł, 17.

¹⁶Hauden and not Hayden, in: Szczygieł.

¹⁷Szczygieł, 18.

The question is why Krall continues to focus on details.¹⁸ Szczygieł seems unaware of the principle of metonymy after Auschwitz,¹⁹ yet he nonetheless claims to know the answer. His explanation is simple, almost commonsensical: “If we were constantly forced to confront the whole picture, it could be psychologically devastating.”²⁰ We do not want that. And so, we turn to the details.

The world fades in our memories—slowly, endlessly. It is like a bombed-out house from which we have managed to salvage only the doorknob. All that remains is this small brass detail. Yet the doorknob bears witness: the house was once beautiful and grand. [...] In its modest way, the detail preserves the world.²¹

Hanna Krall, then, is in essence Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński—one who rescues from oblivion. The detail saves the world, just as whoever saves a single life saves the entire world.

I apologize for this ironic remark... A decent person cannot turn away from these stories. And yet, because culture, the unbothered stepmother, offers them no support, they must find their own way to endure—perhaps by giving voice to grief.

“Is grief important?”, [Mariusz Szczygieł asks his interlocutor, Tomasz, a Polish language teacher]
“It is! An entire civilization was annihilated. No one deserves to die anonymously, without a grave or a memory. At the very least, we must mourn the murdered. As human beings, we owe them that much; that’s all we can do. Grief is fundamental.”²²

And yet this fundamental has been misdefined, for the murder of one in ten citizens demands more than grief alone. But that, precisely, is what this hopeless dialogue amounts to.

The writer had grappled with this subject since her time at the orphanage in Otwock, a place often visited by decent people burdened with grief. Though the orphanage was home for the children of Holocaust survivors, its life seemed to revolve around unsettled visitors such as Julian Tuwim. Upon arriving in Otwock, he reportedly spoke to no one; instead, he rushed

¹⁸Although, as Mariusz Szczygieł claims, regret is no longer the dominant feeling when he reads what he writes now – Szczygieł, 19.

¹⁹This philosophical position (see, for example, Berel Lang’s and Lawrence Langer’s texts; Polish translations were published in *Literatura na Świecie* [World Literature], nos. 1–2/2004) was best expressed by Philip Roth: “Please, no metaphors where there is recorded history!” (Philip Roth, *Operation Shylock: A Confession*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 142). As Grzegorz Niziołek has observed (*Polski teatr Zagłady* [Polish Theatre of the Holocaust] (Warsaw: Krytyka Polityczna, 2013), 181), a similar point was made by Henryk Grynberg, who argued that every authentic image of the Holocaust is, by definition, “non-artistic,” since reality produces far stronger effects than fiction (Henryk Grynberg, “*Życie jako dezintegracja*” [Life as Disintegration], in: Henryk Grynberg, *Prawda nieartystyczna* [Non-artistic Truth] (Wołowiec: Czarne, 2002)).

²⁰Szczygieł, 11.

²¹Szczygieł, 12.

²²Szczygieł, 18.

straight to the children and read them his poems for hours. The poet read *Ptasie radio* [The Bird Broadcast], one of his most famous poems, and—pleased with himself—left.

This time, Krall renders the scene in the second person plural:

They were all sensitive people, so your impertinence struck them with genuine horror. It took a long time to calm them, and in the end you had to stand in the middle of the room, offering loud apologies.²³

Is this, perhaps, the source of the narrator's reticence? Is that why she writes "in such a simple, almost dry, manner"? Could this be the very purpose of her taciturnity, her refusal to judge? She pleads, in the words of Sándor Márai, "Read wisely [...] looking for clues that lead into the thicket, paying attention to mysterious signals."²⁴ But who, in the end, is doing the looking—who is paying attention?

This thought carried me back to the conference marking the fiftieth anniversary of March 1968, held in the old University of Warsaw Library (BUW). The late Professor Jerzy Jedlicki presided over the proceedings. The Marshal of the Sejm at the time, Bronisław Komorowski, arrived late, took a seat in the front row, and promptly fell asleep—I saw it clearly as I was seated at the plenary table. Later still, former Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki arrived. Without hesitation, he mounted the podium and spoke in defense of his colleague Jerzy Zawieyski, who, during the parliamentary debates of April 10–11, 1968, had called for a "dialogue with students and respect for differing arguments."²⁵

Janusz Mazur, blogger behind "Oblicza ludzi. Aktorzy, duchowni, działacze, dziennikarze, filozofowie, kompozytorzy, malarze" [Human Faces: Actors, Clergy, Activists, Journalists, Philosophers, Composers, Painters] thus writes about Krall:

Hanna Krall was born into a Jewish family of civil servants, the daughter of Salomon and Felicja Krall, and spent her childhood in Lublin. The outbreak of World War II proved devastating: the German occupation decimated her family, and her father was among its victims. Krall herself survived only through the help of Poles who hid her and ultimately rescued her from a transport bound for the ghetto—a place where death was all but certain. These wartime experiences left an indelible mark on her psyche, shaping the themes and sensibilities of her later writing. After the war, she was placed in an orphanage in Otwock.²⁶

At that moment, an advertisement appeared on my screen—no doubt tailored to the presumed age of its user—asking: "How much should a hearing aid cost?"

²³Krall, *Sublokator*, 143.

²⁴Szczygieł, 5.

²⁵Jerzy Zawieyski, [https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Znak_\(ruch\)](https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Znak_(ruch)).

²⁶Janusz Mazur, *Oblicza ludzi: Aktorzy, duchowni, działacze, dziennikarze, filozofowie, kompozytorzy, malarze* [Human Faces: Actors, Clergy, Activists, Journalists, Philosophers, Composers, Painters], <https://obliczaluździ.com/hanna-krall/>.

I could not help but take it as a kind of metaphysical gloss on what I was reading about Hanna Krall online.

What art is for

Let me briefly recapitulate my observations. Grzegorz Niziołek's *Polski teatr Zagłady* [Polish Theatre of the Holocaust]²⁷—a work I regard as unparalleled in its analysis of the postwar period—confronts the question of art's capacity to grapple with what overwhelms us as a society. Drawing on Zygmunt Bauman's thesis that sociology grew blind to the Holocaust, Niziołek contends that theater, too, has been “zealously participating in ideological projects of repressing the memory of an overly painful past.”²⁸

But what, precisely, is too painful to remember? It is not the fact that some Poles participated willingly in the Holocaust—they can be dismissed as outcasts. The true difficulty lies elsewhere, in the recognition that

A critical point in defining the role of the bystander occurs when a community reclassifies a group of people as ‘unpersons’—their lives stripped of protection, and the ethical norms that once governed social relations withdrawn from them.²⁹

This reality—touching one in ten Polish citizens—constitutes the community's most obscene and carefully concealed secret.

As Niziołek observes:

When the mechanisms of representation—that is, the effort to produce clear and comprehensible images of the past—break down, whether because they are too fraught or too difficult to articulate, theater turns instead to repetition. Through repetition, it draws on shared social experience without ever naming its subject directly. In this mode, theater enters the realm of taboo: it restages suppressed histories in symptomatic and affective forms, endlessly reworking scenes of repression and the collapse of defense mechanisms. In doing so, it casts the spectator into the uneasy role of an indifferent or mocking bystander who watches the suffering of another, eliciting responses that oscillate between shock, aggression, compassion, paralysis, anxiety, and fear.³⁰

Hanna Krall's writing carries the same unsettling power. As the passages above suggest, it continues to provoke in us the reactions of bystanders rather than true witnesses to the suffering of others—even among the most discerning readers. Niziołek terms this

²⁷Niziołek, 31: “The Holocaust has more to say about the state of sociology than sociology is able to add to our knowledge of the Holocaust”; Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), 3.

²⁸Niziołek, 32.

²⁹Niziołek, 69.

³⁰Niziołek, 34.

the repetition effect: a dynamic that exposes, as he writes, the repression of “the position of the eyewitness and the ethical obligations it entails.” We remain caught in a state of uncertainty—still “not knowing what we see,”³¹ and with no assurance that we ever will.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

³¹Niziołek, 61. On page 109, Niziołek observes: “Theater is a place that best reveals the principle of the circulation of social energy in cultural space. It is a model of all types of negotiations and, at the same time, a specific, that is unique, realization of these processes and phenomena. It is a model of an event and the event itself, a repetition and an event. This is what Stephen Greenblatt claims [Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988)]. Theater reveals its social background more powerfully than any other cultural medium: it formulates collective intentions, arises as a result of collective effort, and addresses a collective audience. Theater can never be read as the work of a single author; even a play reveals on stage its multiple mediations in other texts. Theater, in its everyday practice (and not in a consciously formulated ideological message), has the ability to uncover semi-hidden cultural transactions that govern the circulation and transmission of social energy. The mechanisms of obliterating traces of these transactions can most easily be revealed in a theatrical context. These “transactions,” as Niziołek notes, are central to Greenblatt’s analysis. Greenblatt identifies the sources of such masking procedures in two dominant ideological constructs: the notion of the author as the sole, autonomous creator of a work of art, and the conception of power as a unified, coherent system. Theater, precisely because its essence lies in the circulation of energy, exposes the fragility of these constructs. For Greenblatt, social energy is not a physical or metaphysical force but a rhetorical one—a capacity embedded in cultural texts to connect individuals with one another and even with the dead. He searches for traces within these texts that retain the power to affect, to move, and to generate responses. ‘We identify *energia* only indirectly, by its effects: it is manifested in the capacity of certain verbal, aural, and visual traces to produce, shape, and organize collective physical and mental experiences. Hence it is associated with repeatable forms of pleasure and interest, with the capacity to arouse disquiet, pain, fear, the beating of the heart, pity, laughter, tension, relief, wonder. In its aesthetic modes, social energy must have a minimal predictability—enough to make simple repetitions possible—and a minimal range: enough to reach out beyond a single creator or consumer to some community, however constricted.’ There must, then, exist a community of spectators who erupt in laughter at the same instant or who, equally suddenly, fall into a stunned silence. Such reactions are not random; they must be, to some degree, predictable and repeatable. Our task, therefore, is to search the cultural field for traces capable of provoking these affects. The principle of repetition—the capacity to elicit a response again and again—informs the dialogue with the dead.”

References

- Bauman, Zygmunt. *Modernity and the Holocaust*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989.
- Bikont, Anna. *My z Jedwabnego*. Warsaw: Prószyński i S-ka, 2004.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.
- Grynberg, Henryk. "Życie jako dezintegracja", pp. 7-41. In: Henryk Grynberg, *Prawda nieartystyczna*. Wołowiec: Czarne, 2002.
- Krall, Hanna. "Gra o moje życie". First edition: *Polityka* (1968). Reprinted in: *Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej. Polacy z pomocą Żydom 1939–1945*, ed. Władysław Bartoszewski, Zofia Lewinówna, 297–299. Cracow: Znak, 1969.
- – –. "Sublokatorka". In: Hanna Krall, *Fantom bólu, ??–??*. Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2024.
- Mantel, Hilary. "Giving Up the Ghost", *London Review of Books* 1 (2003): <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v25/n01/hilary-mantel/giving-up-the-ghost>.
- Marzec, Bartosz. "Hanna Krall". *Culture.pl*, October 2009, Update: NMR, December 2020. <https://culture.pl/pl/tworca/hanna-krall>.
- – –. "Hanna Krall opowiada o Kiesłowskim". *Rzeczpospolita*, 12 May 2011. <https://www.rp.pl/literatura/art14531151-hanna-krall-opowiada-o-kieslowskim>.
- Mazur, Janusz. *Oblicza ludzi: Aktorzy, duchowni, działacze, dziennikarze, filozofowie, kompozytorzy, malarze*. <https://obliczaluodzi.com/hanna-krall/>.
- Miller, Alice. *The Drama of the Gifted Child: The Search for the True Self*. New York: Basic Books, 1979.
- Niziołek, Grzegorz. *Polski teatr Zagłady*. Warsaw: Krytyka Polityczna, 2013.
- Obertyńska, Beata. *W domu niewoli*. Wrocław: Siedmioróg, 2021.
- Roth, Philip. *Operation Shylock: A Confession*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993.
- Sobolewski, Tadeusz. *Modlitwa w komisariacie*. <https://kwartalnikwyspa.pl/tadeusz-sobolewski-modlitwa-w-komisariacie-o-pisarstwie-hanny-krall/>.
- Szczygieł, Mariusz. "Ciekawe jest", pp. 5-19. In: Hanna Krall, *Szczegóły znaczące* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2022).
- Tokarska-Bakir, Joanna. "Tak tak, nie nie". *dwutygodnik.com*. <https://www.dwutygodnik.com/artukul/1816-pol-strony-nowoczesnosc-i-zaglada-tak-tak-nie-nie.html?print=1>.
- – –. "Żyd z pieniążkiem podbija Polskę". *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 18 Feb. 2012. <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75410,11172689,zyd-z-pieniazkiem-podbija-polske.html>.
- Zawieyski, Jerzy. [https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Znak_\(ruch\)](https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Znak_(ruch)).

KEYWORDS

Hanna Krall

HOLOCAUST

ABSTRACT:

This article examines the misunderstandings surrounding the reception of autobiographical themes in Hanna Krall's writing, particularly within mainstream—and even elitist—currents of Polish literary criticism. Drawing on the categories articulated in Krall's short story "Sublokatorka" [The Subtenant], the author argues that the misreadings expose an underlying social hierarchy in Poland, one that continues to divide citizens into symbolic "tenants" and "subtenants," or first- and second-class citizens.

anti-Semitism

Jews

EXCLUSION

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:

Joanna Tokarska-Bakir – b. 1958; is a cultural anthropologist and scholar of religious studies, full professor at the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences, and a corresponding member of the Academy. Her research focuses on the anthropology of the Holocaust and the ethnography of anti-Jewish violence. She is the author of numerous influential works, including *Rzeczy mgliste. Eseje i studia* [Misty Things. Essays and studies] (Pogranicze, Sejny 2004); *Legendy o krwi. Antropologia przesądu* [Legends of Blood. The Anthropology of Anti-Semitic Prejudice] (W.A.B., Warsaw 2008; French edition: *Légendes du sang. Une anthropologie du préjugé antisémite en Europe*, 2015); *Okrzyki pogromowe. Szkice z antropologii historycznej Polski 1939-1946* (Czarne, Wołowiec 2012; English edition: *Pogrom Cries. Essays on Polish-Jewish History, 1939-1946*, Peter Lang 2017, 2019); the two-volume monograph *Pod klątwą. Społeczny portret pogromu kieleckiego* (Czarna Owca, Warsaw 2018; English edition: *Cursed. The Social Portrait of the Kielce Pogrom*, Cornell UP 2023); *Bracia miesiące. Eseje i studia* (IBL, 2020; English edition: *Jewish Fugitives in the Polish Countryside*, Peter Lang 2022); and *Kocia muzyka. Chóralna historia pogromu krakowskiego* [Caterwauling: A Choral History of the Krakow Pogrom] (Czarna Owca, Warsaw 2024, 2 vols.). |

Experiencing history in Hanna Krall's small narratives

Marian Kisiel

ORCID: 0000-0002-6752-2407

There is only one ledger for recording
misfortune: Time.

Emil Cioran¹

1

In his essay *O pamięci zbiorowej* [On collective memory], Jerzy Jedlicki wrote: "Memory scrutinizes its own biography before others begin to scrutinize it". A sentence later, he added: "Collective memory? There is no collective memory. Memory is always and only individual – though this does not change the fact that some of its contents may be shared by many people, and that there exist, as the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs wrote, 'the social frameworks of memory'"². Four paragraphs further on, Jedlicki observed: "Human memories do not add up to a collective sum; more often than not, they engage in a fierce dispute with one another"³.

I cite Jedlicki's perhaps obvious remarks in order to inquire about an equally obvious relationship, one that forms between the questioner and the questioned, and, on another level, between the person who seeks to uncover a certain truth and the one who is its custodian, transmitter, or guardian. I look for an answer to my question in Sigmund Freud's *Der Mann Moses und die monotheistische Religion* [Moses and Monotheism], in which the psychoanalyst took part in the discussion on memory and knowledge⁴. A supporter of phylogenesis, Freud argued that there is no essential difference between

¹ Emil Cioran, *Okno na Nic* [A window onto nothing], translated by Ireneusz Kania (Warszawa: Aletheia, 2020), 186.

² Jerzy Jedlicki, "O pamięci zbiorowej" [On collective memory] in *Historia a świat wartości. Wybór esejów* [History and the world of values: selected essays], introduction by Maciej Janowski (Warszawa: Towarzystwo „Więź”, 2022), 281.

³ Jedlicki, "O pamięci zbiorowej", 282.

⁴ The Polish version is based on Sigmund Freud, *Pisma społeczne*, translated by Robert Reszke, Aleksander Ochocki, Marcin Poręba, edited by Robert Reszke (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo KR, 2009). English version: *Moses and Monotheism*, translated by Katherine Jones (London: The Hogarth Press & The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1939).

what has been recorded and what has been repressed, because “the facts which the so-called official written history purposely tried to suppress were in reality never lost. The knowledge of them survived in traditions which were kept alive among the people”⁵. Elsewhere he wrote: “What has been deleted or altered in the written version might quite well have been preserved uninjured in the tradition”⁶.

Sigrid Weigel transposed Freud's observations onto the terrain of reflection on generations. She was particularly interested in what she called the “legacy of non-working-through” – that is, what was not recorded or fixed by one's ancestors, but transmitted to subsequent generations in the form of “unconscious traces of memory, contents forgotten and repressed”⁷. Recalling that Freud, in *Moses and Monotheism*, wrote of “an inheritance of memory-traces of what our forefathers experienced,” of “an assured case of archaic inheritance,” and of “inheriting a thought-disposition”, Weigel radicalizes his insights and argues that this inheritance takes place outside the act of transmission and even in opposition to it – “insofar as the transfer between generations occurs through the medium of the language of the unconscious”⁸.

In view of the fact that in Freud the unconscious intergenerational transfer of knowledge and repressed content occupies the foreground, it becomes clear why his interpretation of intergenerational relations has acquired particular significance in the post-history of the Second World War and the Holocaust. Its relevance grew especially from the moment psychoanalysis, in its work with the children of survivors and the descendants of perpetrators, increasingly encountered phenomena that could be explained only as the effects of events in which these individuals themselves had not taken part. These are, rather, the experiences of their parents or ancestors – hence the term ‘transgenerational traumatization’⁹.

Perhaps I am approaching, somewhat circuitously, what in fact will be my main concern here – namely, the question of the extent to which, to cite Jerzy Jedlicki once again, the “experienced” and the “attested” past become testimony in Hanna Krall's small narratives, and to what extent they become literature. “When [...] literature wishes to perform the function of testimony, it does not even want to call itself literature,” wrote Jedlicki¹⁰; yet he added that

[...] it is not from a conventional, learned “social” consciousness but from the writer's individual superconsciousness that testimonial literature takes its origin. Not the beautiful “lie of literature,” but – on the contrary – its striving toward a truth that is not given to us whole in the nakedness of experience, despite (or perhaps precisely because of) its inhuman excess. And if that is so, then the function of testimonial literature begins exactly where the original, documentary function of testimony ends¹¹.

⁵ Freud, 109.

⁶ Freud, 108.

⁷ Sigrid Weigel, “Pokolenie, genealogia, płęć. Historia koncepcji pokolenia i jej naukowej konceptualizacji od końca XVIII wieku” [Generation, genealogy, gender: the history of the concept of generation and its scholarly conceptualization since the late eighteenth century], translated by Jerzy Kałużny, in: *Pokolenia albo porządkowanie historii* [Generations, or the ordering of history], selected, introduced, and edited by Hubert Orłowski, translated by Izabela Drozdowska-Broering, Jerzy Kałużny, Rafał Żytyniec (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Nauka i Innowacje, 2015), 223.

⁸ Weigel, 224.

⁹ Weigel, 224.

¹⁰ Jerzy Jedlicki, “Dzieje doświadczone i dzieje zaświadczone” [Experienced history and attested history], in: *Historia a świat wartości. Wybór esejów* [History and the world of values: selected essays], introduction by Maciej Janowski (Warszawa: Towarzystwo „Więź”, 2022), 92.

¹¹ Jedlicki, “Dzieje doświadczone i dzieje zaświadczone”, 97.

I am still, though in various guises, speaking about the relation between writing and speech / speech and writing, relations that both support and oppose one another. In each variant, they also confront what belongs to the realm of knowledge and what pertains to the sphere of the unconscious. “The content of the unconscious is collective, universal, and of the same kind in all men”, wrote Freud¹². What is “repressed” returns in various forms, ultimately colliding with the limits of speech. What is certain speaks fluently; what is repressed stammers. By enclosing her small narratives in the written word, Krall wrestles with the spoken one – a word that is both a sign of knowledge (that is, of certainty) and a chain of silences, distortions, or evasions (that is, of fear before certainty). Yet each time we remain within the circle of narration – that is, a story told by someone to someone else.

2

I refer to some of Hanna Krall’s reportage pieces as *small narratives* because of their generic form. Are they different from her larger – or even medium-sized – narratives? Not necessarily. Their essence lies in their persistence within speech, in the living word that must be voiced by the protagonists. The author’s role seems secondary. Mariusz Szczygieł has written: “In a world that talks too much, [Krall] proposes reticence”¹³. Herta Müller observed: “The documented realities of the author seem to speak for themselves. But that is where her virtuosity lies: to forgo commentary and yet, through invisible intervention, stand behind every sentence”¹⁴. What appears self-evident, then, proves not simple at all.

Those who write about Krall often draw attention to the reportage form of her works. Egon Erwin Kisch maintained that the subject of reportage is “a real event”, and that the reporter’s task is to convey facts and occurrences as they are. In this sense, the reporter assumes an obligation similar to that of the critical realist. Yet while the realist deceived himself into believing he could meet the ultimate demand of truth, the twentieth-century (especially the late-twentieth-century), writer already knows that this is impossible. Language has lost its former power; the truth of literature has turned out to be a beautiful lie. Reality cannot be rendered as it is, because – as we know at least since Frank Ankersmit – it will always be a privatized image, shaped by the author’s perspective, judgments, and emotions.

The reality of reportage – if its very fabric is authenticity rather than the mere probability of events, as in artistic prose – must find expression in a new kind of language. Tadeusz Różewicz wrote that after the Second World War, the masks fell, the costumes were cast off, and the old garment of words was torn away. Hanna Krall, speaking about the first Holocaust text in Polish literature, Józef Mackiewicz’s *Ponary – “Baza”* [Ponary – “Base”], paused to reflect on language:

“Mackiewicz wanted it to be beautiful. He still didn’t know that when one writes about the Holocaust, it mustn’t be beautiful. [...] Mackiewicz was still reaching for the beauty of words – an innocent beauty of words, an untainted beauty of words, an untainted beauty of words”¹⁵.

¹²Freud, 157.

¹³Mariusz Szczygieł, “Zdążyć. Nawet przed deszczem” [To make it – even before the rain], in: Hanna Krall, *Fantom bólu* [The phantom of pain], introduction by Mariusz Szczygieł (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2024), 6.

¹⁴Szczygieł, 6.

¹⁵Szczygieł, 7.

This, after all, is an involuntary echo of Różewicz's assertion: "The dance of poetry came to an end during the Second World War, in the concentration camps created by totalitarian systems"¹⁶.

A reporter who wishes to rescue the genre from journalistic immediacy, to renew it or to carry it into the dimension of literature, must therefore turn to what lies at the very foundation of literature: poetics, with its repertoire of tropes, styles, themes, and devices¹⁷. In the gesture of renouncing the exclusive task of rendering "real events" – a gesture that, to borrow Jan Mukařovský's term, is a *semantic gesture*¹⁸ – the works of both Ryszard Kapuściński and Hanna Krall have given rise to a form of reportage that finds its connection with the twentieth-century reader not through journalistic but through literary language. This contact is achieved through another's voice, through quotation, allusion, montage. Thus, it is not the fact, the event conveyed in its factuality, but rather the manner of narration that determines the genre's impact.

3

Naturally, one must know how to tell a story. Once this ability was called talent, though today we would probably speak of creative capacity. Hanna Krall listens, and then turns the first story into a second-degree narrative, in which, between protagonist and narrator, between the questioned and the questioner, between speaker and listener, linguistic osmosis becomes a communion of words. A single fate always lies at the source of every story. And even if it does not connect with another fate, even if – as in *Zdążyć przed Panem Bogiem* [To Outwit God] – we embed it within the framework of collective memory, it nevertheless individualizes itself in its very singularity, to use a tautology.

And yet it seems to me, and I have written about this before¹⁹, that in Krall's *small* narratives, individual fates, fractured life stories, and disrupted biographies are shown within the dimension of some unifying idea and thus are transformed into parables of existence. So even if individual stories resist generalization, as a collection of narratives they blur over time, space, and individual being. They become parables, or citations, of life itself.

In *Zbawienie* [Salvation], we read:

My work as a reporter taught me that logical stories – those without mysteries or gaps, in which everything is clear – are often untrue. And things that cannot be explained at all do happen in reality. After all, life on earth itself is real, yet it cannot be logically explained²⁰.

¹⁶Tadeusz Różewicz, *Utwory zebrane* [Collected works], vol. 3: Proza [Prose], cz. 3 (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 2004), 41.

¹⁷This issue has been credibly described by Edyta Żyrek-Horodyska in the study "Reportaż literacki wobec literatury. Korzenie i teorie" [The literary reportage and literature: roots and theories], *Pamiętnik Literacki* 4 (2014): 119–131. See also Joanna Jeziorska-Haładyj, "Zawartość zmyślonej, żółtej walizki. O prozie Hanny Krall" [The Contents of an Imagined Yellow Suitcase: On Hanna Krall's Prose], *Pamiętnik Literacki* 4 (2010): 37–60.

¹⁸The "semantic gesture" "organizes the work as a dynamic unit, from the simplest components to the most general plan." See Jan Mukařovský, "O języku poetyckim" ["On poetic language"], in *Praska szkoła strukturalna w latach 1926–1948. Wybór materiałów* [The Prague school of structuralism, 1926–1948: Selected materials], edited by Maria Renata Mayenowa, translated and annotated by Wojciech Górny (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1966), 195.

¹⁹Marian Kisiel, "Los jako pamięć" [Fate as memory], *Wiadomości Kulturalne* 20 (1994): 13.

²⁰Hanna Krall, "Zbawienie" [Salvation], in: *Fantom bólu* [Phantom of pain], 583.

The experience of a single existence is the experience of history. I will recall Stanisław Brzozowski's well-known *a posteriori* dictum: "What is not biography – is not at all. Whatever ascribes to itself a supra-biographical, supra-concrete individual significance is, in fact, less real"²¹. The history of a life is a social history; an individual fate is the memory of fate itself. And even if – as Jedlicki argued – memories do not add up, by showing both great and small experiences they nonetheless create great or small narratives.

These are narratives about good and evil, virtue and vice, life and death. When a writer undertakes such themes – those for which we have only our clumsy words – there always arises the suspicion that they are consciously aligning themselves with a moralist current. Would such an assumption be accurate in Krall's case? Not entirely, or at least not in the traditional sense of the term (I will return to this later). Krall does not reveal her convictions, though we may assume they are unshakable. In her conversations, she becomes the shadow of the speaker, the medium to whom the one being listened to entrusts their experience – a story of singularity extracted from the history of the community. This trust is not without fear, for what is spoken will be written down, and what is hidden will be drawn forth by the listener from the sphere of the unconscious.

Stories that unfold in speech are authentic; they do not require external confirmation of their truth. Yet those who speak do not distinguish illusions from events, and the listener must maintain a distance from the words she hears. This is not a matter of distrust, but of vigilance. To record an experience is to preserve an existence. When necessary, one should provide a bibliographic reference pointing to the source—although the most important source is, and will remain, the human being and their memory.

The great theme of Hanna Krall – wrote Ryszard Kapuściński – is the fate of the human being entangled in the cruelties of history, caught in its crushing mechanisms, degraded and annihilated by them. And this history is not some terrifying abstraction – it takes the form of a concrete relationship between one human being and another²².

4

Let us move on to the small narratives. I will not, however, spectralize, dissect, or analyze them to fit a pre-established thesis. Instead, I wish to enclose them within a formula that might itself become the point of departure for spectralization, dissection, and analysis. Why in this way? Because each of Hanna Krall's small narratives is a distinct story and touches living tissue: a biography that resists closure, or cannot be told to the end, or remains an open wound. In order not to disregard biography, story, and wound alike, I therefore choose to construct a formula that may generalize (and generalization is always omission, separation), but which – while closing – feels ashamed of its closure, flees from wounding, and, in essence, speaks of biographies as though touching them empathically, yet without truly making contact.

²¹Stanisław Brzozowski, *Pamiętnik [Diary]*, introduction by Marta Wyka, text edited and annotated by Maciej Urbanowski (Wrocław, Warsaw, Kraków: Ossolineum, 2007), 164.

²²Ryszard Kapuściński, [excerpt from an address delivered on the occasion of the Samuel Linde Prize awarded to Hanna Krall, Göttingen, March 18, 2001], quoted in: <https://culture.pl/pl/tworca/hanna-krall>.

Krall is particularly concerned with three general issues: first, the Jewish theme (*primo*); second, the German question in its Jewish context (*secundo*); and third, the entanglement of Poles and Jews (though not only them – also of “mixed” individuals²³) in the politics and history of their own nation (*tertio*). This web of concerns naturally leads us toward what shaped the historical consciousness of the twentieth century. Since Krall's prose revolves around individual memory (life) against the background of collective memory (history), it is no surprise that the protagonists of her stories are people born in the first half of the last century. Why precisely they? Let us answer with the words of Michael Wildt, author of numerous works on terror and Nazism:

Above all, the political generations of the first half of the twentieth century once again demonstrate how dramatically they staged both world time and life time in order to establish an absolute beginning and inaugurate a new era²⁴.

In *Zdążyć przed Panem Bogiem* [*To Outwit God*], the “world time” and the “life time,” to recall Wildt's terms, are not defined by the heroism of the Warsaw Ghetto insurgents, but by their everyday reality—their human choices in the face of annihilation. When the writer asks about the rhythm of the everyday—about the conditions of life and the circumstances of dying—she is, through the voices of the murdered and the survivors, in fact asking the same questions that writers across the world have pondered for centuries and will continue to ponder for centuries to come: Where does evil begin? Is it only external to me? And when I am a victim, do I cease to be a perpetrator?

In essence, this is a repetition of the very question posed by André Malraux in 1946 at the UNESCO conference: “[...] whether, on this old European earth, man has died – or not”²⁵:

Above everything we see – above the spectres and the ruins of cities – there extends over Europe an even more terrible presence: the devastated and blood-soaked Europe is no more devastated, no more blood-soaked, than the man it believed it was creating. [...] There has been in the world a suffering of such magnitude that it rises before us not only as a human drama but as a metaphysical one. And today man must answer not only for what he has done, not only for what he wishes to do, but also for what he believes himself to be²⁶.

Malraux's statement became an extraordinarily important point of reference for the work of Tadeusz Różewicz who, it seems to me, in the context of Hanna Krall's small narratives, may be regarded as an iconic figure of the “three general issues” mentioned earlier. Różewicz wrote: “The poetry of the Resistance and the poetry of the postwar years answered that question

²³I refer here to a category introduced into reflections on the fate of generations by Teodor Parnicki, and brilliantly elevated to the level of metaphor by Jacek Łukasiewicz in *Republika mieszańców* [The republic of hybrids] (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1974).

²⁴Michael Wildt, “Pokolenie jako początek i przyspieszenie” [Generation as Beginning and Acceleration], translated by Rafał Żytyniec, in *Pokolenia albo porządkowanie historii* [Generations, or the Ordering of History], selection, introduction, and ed. Hubert Orłowski, translated by Izabela Drozdowska-Broering, Jerzy Kałużny, and Rafał Żytyniec (Poznań: Nauka i Innowacje Press, 2015), 400–401.]

²⁵André Malraux, “Czy człowiek umarł?”, [Has man died?], in *Panorama myśli współczesnej* [Panorama of contemporary thought], ed. Gaëtan Picon, selection and ed. Roland Caillois (Paris: Libella, 1967), 620.

²⁶Malraux, 621.

not in the language of the Muses, but in the language of man”²⁷. This “human language” leads Krall toward a creative stance similar to that which Janusz Sławiński described in reference to Różewicz’s poetry. It is, fundamentally and unconditionally, a matter of rendering “the situation of a man who is unable to grasp his experiences (psychological, social, or ideological) as a coordinated and meaningful whole”²⁸. Sławiński argued that Różewicz opposed the uncontrolled revival of avant-garde style after the Second World War and constructed his own lyrical speech from the perspective of someone who refused to repeat prior experiences. In his case, it was, so to speak, construction upon a rubbish heap – searching where others refused to search. “All those aesthetic reflections, volumes, lyrics, metaphors, ‘schools’ – into the garbage bin, into the sack!” wrote Różewicz²⁹. Yet he asked:

Do I have the right to present myself in such a light? After all, that’s a garbage bin. And what will happen when I throw that garbage out of myself? There will be emptiness. What will they put in place of the garbage? What will grow there, inside me? Perhaps the tree of poetry?³⁰.

Różewicz’s “poetic moralism,” that is, his “human language” rather than the “language of the Muses,” Sławiński argued, “negates the need to define its own boundaries – among other forms of speech”³¹.

And in the case of Hanna Krall? Differently, undoubtedly so. Here, the boundaries of speech expand its genres. Reportage, understood as a “real event”, becomes each time a narrative of remembrance, a parable (a parabolic allusion), a warning, and at the same time a record of experience – its trace or its clue. “Reportorial moralism”, in which emphasis is placed not on the “event” but on language itself, caught in the helplessness of articulation, thus becomes a struggle between writing and speech – something I mentioned at the beginning of this essay.

5

Józef Wróbel observed that in the novel *Sublokator* [*The Subtenant*], the title itself is of crucial importance:

The metaphor structuring the text [...] makes use of a modified motif of the double and defines the duality of the heroine’s personality – her grounding in two worlds of values, in two traditions and cultures: Polish and Jewish. The bright attitude is under the patronage of the biblical Mary, the dark one of Martha; the first determined by the history and mythology of Poland, the second by Jewish fate. [...] The bright attitude is associated with the stereotype of heroic death, for a cause deemed higher than human life; the dark one – with a senseless death that thrusts her below human dignity. [...] The heroine’s biography is rooted in two historical and biographical orders; it is a literary device that renounces the

²⁷Tadeusz Różewicz, *Proza* [Prose], vol. 3 (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 2004), 41.

²⁸Janusz Sławiński, “Próba porządkowania doświadczeń” [An attempt to organize experience], in: *Prace wybrane*, t. 5: *Przypadki poezji* [Selected works, vol. 5: Cases of poetry], (Kraków: Universitas, 2001), 292.

²⁹Różewicz, *Proza*, 285.

³⁰Różewicz, *Proza*, 285–286.

³¹Sławiński, 294.

illusion of reality, and, consequently, authenticity. The whole is an illustration of the thesis that behind the bright Mary there follows, like a shadow, the dark Martha – the Pole accompanying the Jew³².

What we are dealing with here is not simple moralism, but rather what in Yiddish is called *beshert*. *Beshert* is that which is inevitable – destiny. “A Jew will always remain a Jew. Even if he’s baptized”, says Old Tag in Julian Strykowski’s *Austeria* [*The Inn*]³³, while the naked Hasidim jumping into the river at dawn cry out: “Joy! Joy to be a Jew!”, “The nation of nations is eternal”³⁴. Thus one world came to an end, and the First World War foretold the coming of the second. After it, defining Jewish identity became far more difficult. *Beshert*. Who is Izolda R. from *A Tale for Hollywood* – a Pole or a Jew? And “the woman from Hamburg” – a Jew, a Pole, or (by choice) a German? Passport entries are misleading; the search for one’s own place is futile. And departures – are they necessary? “I went to Israel because there are no Poles there. But you know what I found out? There are Jews”, says the protagonist of the reportage *Rozenfeld*, from the collection *Hypnosis*. And he asks, with despair: “So where am I supposed to go back to?”³⁵.

What is bright is inseparable from what is dark. As in every fate, every story, we experience a duality of personality. In *Okna* [*Windows*], Krall confesses:

I intend to write a book in which there will be nothing about the war; ideally, the word itself would never appear. Nor a few other words, for example ‘Jew’. To write a book without the words ‘Pole’, ‘German’, ‘Jew’, or ‘war’ – that would not be the worst thing”³⁶.

Of her protagonist Celina, she writes:

She sometimes thought it would be good to photograph the past [...]. The source of sorrow should be visible in photographs, just as the source of light is visible in a painting. She decided to look at places where the past might have been preserved³⁷.

But elsewhere she adds, in Celina’s own words:

I should photograph the stomach. The one you weren’t in. The one in which – do you understand the word exactly? – never – you will never be. I should photograph never³⁸.

A custodian of the past, of a real event, yearning to photograph “never” – and at the same time, a reporter of a vanished world, one in which words charged with identity would not appear. And yet she knows she is a double, Celina herself, and that

³²Józef Wróbel, *Tematy żydowskie w prozie polskiej 1939–1987* [Jewish themes in Polish prose, 1939–1987] (Kraków: Universitas, 1991), 160–161.

³³Julian Strykowski, *Austeria* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1973), 173.

³⁴Strykowski, 169,

³⁵Hanna Krall, “Rozenfeld”, in: *Fantom bólu*, 377, 378.

³⁶Hanna Krall, “Okna” [*Windows*], in: *Fantom bólu*, 196–197.

³⁷Krall, “Okna”, 250.

³⁸Krall, “Okna”, 282.

she was caught by that particular strain of Polishness she felt worst about. Celina is made up entirely of doubts, while that Polishness consists of declarative sentences (except, of course, for one: 'we shall not yield our land...'). That is why Celina felt more comfortable among people whose time had passed – there was no exultation or fervor around them³⁹.

6

What is the experience of history in Hanna Krall's work? Perhaps it is the photographing of "never"; perhaps it is the search for an answer to what is inevitable. The small narratives are always demanding; their virtue lies in offering no illusions – they are not a whole, but a fragment. Walter Hilsbecher reminds us that the fragment escapes rationality and opens before the perceiving subject "the possibility of representing the infinity of the world, as well as the infinity of the path of knowledge – which in other words means: the insolubility of the world's enigma"⁴⁰. The small narrative is precisely that: non-recognition, an insoluble enigma, a literary *beshert*.

Within the space of memory – of "those whose time has passed" – their lived and attested histories, under Hanna Krall's pen, become literary: not so much testimony as, to recall Jerzy Jedlicki's term, "literature that bears witness". The experience of history becomes the transference into the world of what is true and what is merely probable. This mimetic duality shifts along with the changing community of readers. For some (the witnesses, the observers), it is an existential experience; for others (the post-generation), it is an archival one. To know history as the archive of existence, to confront "never," and at the same time to deny "never" and retrieve from time "those whose time has passed" – this, in essence, is the task of the reporter, the author of narratives that bear witness. Let us recall once more the words of Stanisław Brzozowski: "What is not biography – is not at all".

translated by Paulina Zagórska

³⁹Krall, "Okna", 231.

⁴⁰Walter Hilsbecher, *Tragizm, absurd i paradoks. Eseje* [Tragedy, absurd, and paradox: essays], selection and introduction by Stefan Lichański, translated by Sławomir Błaut (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1972), 32.

References

Brzozowski, Stanisław. *Pamiętnik* [Diary], introduction by Marta Wyka, text edited and annotated by Maciej Urbanowski. Wrocław, Warsaw, Kraków: Ossolineum, 2007.

Cioran, Emil. *Okno na Nic* [A window onto nothing], translated by Ireneusz Kania. Warszawa: Aletheia, 2020.

Freud, Sigmund. *Pisma społeczne*. Tłum. Robert Reszke, Aleksander Ochocki, Marcin Poręba. Oprac. Robert Reszke. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo KR, 2009.

– – –. *Moses and Monotheism*. Translated by Katherine Jones. London: The Hogarth Press & The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1939.

Hilsbecher, Walter. *Tragizm, absurd i paradoks. Eseje* [Tragedy, Absurd, and Paradox: Essays], selection and introduction by Stefan Lichański, translated by Sławomir Błaut. Wybór. Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1972.

Jedlicki, Jerzy. "Dzieje doświadczone i dzieje zaświadczone" [Experienced history and

- attested history], in: *Historia a świat wartości. Wybór esejów* [History and the world of values: selected essays], introduction by Maciej Janowski. Warsaw: Towarzystwo "Więź", 2022.
- – –. "O pamięci zbiorowej" [On collective memory] in *Historia a świat wartości. Wybór esejów* [History and the world of values: selected essays], introduction by Maciej Janowski. Warsaw: Towarzystwo "Więź", 2022.
- Jeziorska-Haładaj, Joanna. "Zawartość zmyślonej, żółtej walizki. O prozie Hanny Krall" [The Contents of an Imagined Yellow Suitcase: On Hanna Krall's Prose]. *Pamiętnik Literacki* 4 (2010): 37–60.
- Kapuściński, Ryszard, [excerpt from an address delivered on the occasion of the Samuel Linde Prize awarded to Hanna Krall, Göttingen, March 18, 2001], quoted in: <https://culture.pl/pl/tworca/hanna-krall>.
- Kisch, Egon Erwin. *Jarmark sensacji*. Tłum. Stanisław Wygodzki. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo MON, 1957.
- Kisiel, Marian. "Los jako pamięć" [Fate as memory]. *Wiadomości Kulturalne* 20 (1994): 13.
- Krall, Hanna. "Okna" [Windows]. In: *Fantom bólu* [Phantom of pain], introduction by Mariusz Szczygieł, 189–285. Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2021.
- – –. "Rozenfeld". In: *Fantom bólu*, introduction Mariusz Szczygieł, 373–378. Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2024.
- – –. "Zbawienie" [Salvation]. In: *Fantom bólu*, introduction by Mariusz Szczygieł, 580–584. Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2024.
- Łukasiewicz, Jacek. *Republika mieszańców* [The republic of hybrids]. Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1974.
- Malraux, André. "Czy człowiek umarł?" [Has man died?]. In: *Panorama myśli współczesnej* [Panorama of contemporary thought], edited by Gaëtan Picon, selected and edited by Roland Caillois, 620–621. Paris: Libella, 1967.
- Mukařovský, Jan. "O języku poetyckim" ["On poetic language"], in *Praska szkoła strukturalna w latach 1926–1948. Wybór materiałów* [The Prague school of structuralism, 1926–1948: Selected materials], edited by Maria Renata Mayenowa, translated and annotated by Wojciech Górny. Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1966.
- Różewicz, Tadeusz. *Proza* [Prose]. vol. 3. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 2004.
- – –. *Utwory zebrane* [Collected works]. vol. 3: *Proza* [Prose], part 3. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 2004.
- Sławiński, Janusz. "Próba porządkowania doświadczeń" [An attempt to organize experience], in: *Prace wybrane*, t. 5: *Przypadki poezji* [Selected works, vol. 5: Cases of poetry]. Cracow: Universitas, 2001.
- Strykowski, Julian. *Austeria*. Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1973.
- Szczygieł, Mariusz. "Zdażyć. Także przed deszczem" [To make it – even before the rain], in: Hanna Krall, *Fantom bólu* [The phantom of pain], introduction by Mariusz Szczygieł. Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2024.
- Weigel, Sigrid. "Pokolenie, genealogia, płęć. Historia koncepcji pokolenia i jej naukowej konceptualizacji od końca XVIII wieku" [Generation, genealogy, gender: the history of the concept of generation and its scholarly conceptualization since the late eighteenth century], translated by Jerzy Kałużny, in: *Pokolenia albo porządkowanie historii* [Generations, or the ordering of history], selected, introduced, and edited by Hubert Orłowski, translated by Izabela Drozdowska-Broering, Jerzy Kałużny, Rafał Żytyniec. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Nauka i Innowacje, 2015.
- Wildt, Michael. „Pokolenie jako początek i przyspieszenie” [Generation as Beginning and Acceleration], translated by Rafał Żytyniec, in *Pokolenia albo porządkowanie historii* [Generations, or the Ordering of History], selection, introduction, and ed. Hubert Orłowski, translated by Izabela Drozdowska-Broering, Jerzy Kałużny, and Rafał Żytyniec. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Nauka i Innowacje, 2015.
- Wróbel, Józef. *Tematy żydowskie w prozie polskiej 1939–1987* [Jewish themes in Polish 1939–1987] prose. Kraków: Universitas, 1991.
- Żyrek-Horodyska, Edyta. "Reportaż literacki wobec literatury. Korzenie i teorie" [The literary reportage and literature: roots and theories]. *Pamiętnik Literacki* 4 (2014): 119–131.

KEYWORDS

Krall

HISTORY

small narratives

ABSTRACT:

What does the experience of history mean in the work of Hanna Krall? Perhaps it is the act of photographing “never”, or perhaps the search for an answer to what is inevitable. Small narratives are always demanding; their virtue lies in offering no illusions. They are not wholes but fragments – forms of non-recognition, insoluble enigmas, literary besherts. Within the space of memory belonging to “those whose time has passed”, their lived and attested histories, under Krall’s pen, become literary: not so much testimony as what Jerzy Jedlicki called “literature that bears witness”. Experiencing history means transferring into the world what is true and what is merely probable. This mimetic duality shifts with the change of readership: for some (witnesses, observers), it is an existential experience; for others (the post- generation), an archival one. To know history as an archive of existence, to confront “never”, and at the same time to deny “never” and retrieve from time “those whose time has passed” – this is the task of the reporter, the author of narratives that bear witness.

E X P E R I E N C E

testament

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:

Marian Kisiel – b. 1961; professor at the Institute of Polish Studies, University of Silesia. Poet, translator, literary critic, and editor. Member of the Polish Writers' Association and the Polish PEN Club; President of the Upper Silesian Literary Society; Editor-in-Chief of the social and cultural monthly *Śląsk*. Initiator of the series *Światy poetyckie* [Poetic Worlds] (2014–2025) and *Śląska Biblioteka Poetycka* [Silesian Poetic Library, 2025]. He has edited, among others, *Poezje zebrane* [Collected Poems] by Arnold Słucki, *Poezje zebrane* [Collected poems] by Andrzej K. Waśkiewicz (2025), and *Dziennik 1936* [Diary 1936] by Wilhelm Szewczyk (2025). His most recent publications include the pandemic journals *Mały cmentarz* [The little cemetery] (2024) and *Czwarta nad ranem* [Four in the morning] (2025), as well as a collection of memoir essays *Radość spotkania* [The joy of encounter] (2025). |

Trauma in Words, Trauma in the Body: Narrating Trauma in the Works of Hanna Krall

Katarzyna Prot-Klinger

ORCID: 0000-0002-5202-1511

This article examines psychological and psychotherapeutic perspectives on trauma, showing how Hanna Krall's short stories exemplify the dynamics of trauma narrative.

Trauma Narratives

Since 1995, I have conducted individual and group therapy with Holocaust survivors.¹ I also carried out a series of interviews with Holocaust survivors from Poland and Romania for my book *Życie po Zagładzie* [Life After the Holocaust].² Listening to them, I was struck by how closely their speech echoed the voices in Hanna Krall's works: short, factual sentences; an emphasis on external details; narratives that at times became fragmented or incoherent.

¹ A description of the program can be found, among others, in the chapter: Katarzyna Prot-Klinger, Krzysztof Szwejca, "Późne skutki wczesnej traumy. Psychoterapia Ocalałych z Holocaustu" [Late Effects of Early Trauma: Psychotherapy of Holocaust Survivors], in: *Psychoanaliza w cieniu wojny i Zagłady* [Psychoanalysis in the Shadow of War and the Holocaust], ed. Ewa Kobylińska-Dehe (Cracow: Universitas, 2020), 301–324.

² Katarzyna Prot-Klinger, *Życie po Zagładzie* [Life After the Holocaust] (Warsaw: Instytut Psychiatrii i Neurologii, 2009).

Their emotions were rarely expressed directly, and I often had to infer what they felt. Some Holocaust survivors, however, sought a more literary form through which to tell their stories.

This focus on detail—on precise description—can be understood, in the context of the Shoah, both as an effort to preserve a world that survives only in memory and as evidence of the damage trauma inflicts on narrative form. To construct a coherent account—a “proper” story with a beginning and an end, enriched by reflections on one’s own feelings and efforts to grasp the perspectives of others—requires symbolic thinking. Jean Améry describes how this capacity for symbolic thought declines under the weight of traumatic experience:

I remember one winter evening when, after work, we trudged back to the camp from the IG Farben site, out of step, driven on by the exasperating shouts of “Left, two, three, four” from the Kapos. For some reason, I noticed a flag fluttering in front of a half-finished building. “Walls stand cold and speechless. In the wind, the weathervanes creak”³ I muttered to myself—mechanically, almost automatically, by association. Then I repeated the verse a little louder, listening to the sound of the words, trying to follow the rhythm, expecting that the emotional and intellectual resonance this Hölderlin poem had always carried for me would return. Nothing. The poem no longer transcended reality. It stood there as nothing more than a factual statement: it sounds like this, the Kapo yells “left,” the soup is watery, and in the wind, the weathervanes creak.⁴

Later, in *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne* [Beyond Guilt and Atonement], Améry recalls the words of the Austrian Jewish writer Karl Kraus on the Third Reich: “The word fell asleep when that world awoke.” His experience in the concentration camp convinced him that words wither wherever “reality makes total demands.” For the prisoners, language “has long since fallen asleep” and, as Améry observes, “not even the feeling that we should regret its passing remains.”⁵

In this light, Theodor Adorno’s dictum on “the death of poetry”⁶ emerges not as a theoretical postulate but as a stark reality, one scarcely possible to transcend. For Améry—then still Hans Mayer—even Friedrich Hölderlin had perished in Auschwitz.

An extreme example of the loss of the capacity to symbolize—and with it, of language—following traumatic experience is found in the account described by psychoanalyst and Holocaust survivor Dori Laub.

³ Quote from the poem “Half of Life”, in: Friedrich Hölderlin, *Hyperion and Selected Poems*, trans. Richard Sieburth (New York: Continuum, 1990), 189.

⁴ Jean Améry, *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne: Bewältigungsversuche eines Überwältigten* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1966), 26. The German original reads: “Ich erinnere mich eines Winterabends, als wir uns nach der Arbeit im schlechten Gleichschritt unter dem entnervenden »Links zwei, drei, vier« der Kapos vom IG-Farben-Gelände ins Lager zurückschleppten und mir an einem halbfertigen Bau eine aus Gott weiß welchem Grunde davor wehende Fahne auffiel. »Die Mauern stehn sprachlos und kalt, im Winde klirren die Fahnen« murmelte ich assoziativ-mechanisch vor mich hin. Dann wiederholte ich die Strophe etwas lauter, lauschte dem Wortklang, versuchte dem Rhythmus nachzuspüren und erwartete, daß das seit Jahren mit diesem Hölderlin-Gedicht für mich verbundene emotionelle und geistige Modell erscheinen werde. Nichts. Das Gedicht transzendierte die Wirklichkeit nicht mehr. Da stand es und war nur noch sachliche Aussage: sound so, und der Kapobrüllt »links«, und die Suppe war dünn, und im Winde klirren die Fahnen.“

⁵ Améry, 45.

⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1973).

Dori Laub is well known to Holocaust scholars as the co-founder of the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale, established in the late 1970s and early 1980s as the world's first video archive dedicated to the testimonies of survivors and witnesses of the Shoah.

In 1999, researchers discovered that among the long-term patients of psychiatric hospitals in Israel—most of them diagnosed with schizophrenia—there were 725 Holocaust survivors. Laub initiated a project to record their accounts as well; twenty-six interviews were conducted in 2002 and 2003. According to Laub, these testimonies reveal both the collapse of narrative and the raw voicing of trauma. The survivors' accounts are marked by inconsistency, silences, broken sentences, and expressive body language. Their fragmented speech can, of course, be interpreted as a symptom of mental illness, but it may also be understood as the consequence of a traumatic experience that had never been heard. For decades, these patients were dismissed as “crazy,” and their stories were not considered worth listening to. Laub's project reframed their words as traumatic narratives, a view reinforced by hospital staff who observed the project's therapeutic effect and noted the patients' calmness after giving testimony.^{7, 8, 9}

The question arises: What is trauma in the psychological sense, and why does it disrupt narrative structure? As noted above, Dori Laub argued that the Holocaust was an “event without a witness”—a rupture of the empathic dyad.¹⁰ By its very nature, trauma prevents the participant from becoming a true witness, since the event cannot be cognitively grasped in the moment of its occurrence.

Trauma overwhelms the psyche with an influx of information that cannot be assimilated into the individual's existing cognitive frameworks. Such experiences, resistant to both emotional and intellectual processing, remain unintegrated, held outside of consciousness by the strenuous work of defense mechanisms. As a result, traumatic memory is not incorporated into the personal past. It is not remembered or recalled in the usual sense; rather, it intrudes, forcing itself upon the present. Because of this, trauma resists articulation through conventional narrative forms.

The story of trauma is, in this sense, a testament to the impossibility of telling. One example of such testimony appears in Hanna Krall's portrayal of Izolda, the protagonist of *Król kier znów na wylocie* [Chasing the King of Hearts]. Izolda longs for her life to be set down in a book that would follow the familiar conventions of fiction—novels “for Hollywood.” Yet, like other Holocaust survivors, the manner in which she recounts her story—fragmented, elliptical, and punctuated by silence—resists those conventions. She talks

⁷ Dori Laub, Irit Felsen, “Traumatic Psychosis”, in: *Psychoanalysis and Holocaust Testimony: Unwanted Memories of Social Trauma*, ed. Dori Laub, Andreas Hamburger (London, New York: Routledge, 2017), 228–241.

⁸ Dori Laub, “The Israel Project Story”, in: *Psychoanalysis and Holocaust Testimony*, 193–201.

⁹ Baruch Greenwald et al., “Psychiatry, Testimony, and Shoah: Reconstructing the Narratives of the Muted”, *Social Work in Health Care* 43 (2006): 199–214;

¹⁰ Dori Laub, “An Event Without a Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival”, in: *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, ed. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (New York: Routledge, 1992), 75–92.

Precisely, matter-of-factly [...]. At times she tried to understand the person she had once been. At other times she abandoned the effort, rightly assuming that such understanding was no longer possible; what remained was only the utmost matter-of-factness. This calm distance from *that* created the impression that a transparent, invisible, stage curtain hung between her and the past.¹¹

Therapists and researchers who study trauma and its effects on the human mind distinguish three types that lead to lasting psychological change: early maladjustment in the mother-child relationship resulting in attachment disorders; abuse and violence during childhood; and large-scale traumatization inflicted by others.

This view aligns with the understanding of trauma as the absence or rupture of relationships and bonds—whether in the earliest stages of development or through their severing later in life. An early relationship with a “good enough” mother fosters the formation of an internal “good object,” which supports further development and enables survival in the face of difficult, even traumatic, experiences. Yet even the presence of such a “good object” in childhood does not suffice to withstand massive traumatization. In such circumstances, what is required is not only a “good internal object” but also an empathetic witness, or what psychoanalyst Samuel Gerson terms the “moral third.”¹² Gerson employs this concept to describe what unfolds on both personal and social levels when catastrophe goes unnoticed or unrecorded. His analysis centers on the position of the witness and on circumstances in which witnessing itself becomes impossible, exceeding both individual and collective capacities. Such failures of acknowledgment give rise to what he terms “present absences:” losses registered emotionally, somatically, and unconsciously. The resulting narratives are fractured, riddled with “holes,” and structurally impaired. Gerson traces this fragmentation to the absence of social concern and engagement at the time of the traumatic event.

During a traumatic event, relationships with others often prove vital. Such connections may take concrete forms—receiving help from someone else or even finding strength in rescuing another. For Krall’s heroine Izolda, the will to survive is fueled by an unrelenting drive to save her husband. Yet this sustaining force can also arise from a broader sense of belonging: ties to family, community, and religious or cultural rituals.

An example of a “moral third”—not a specific individual or relationship, but rather a sustaining connection to tradition and faith—emerges in the story of Ryfka, one of my interlocutors from Transylvania. Her testimony illustrates that a traumatic narrative does not encompass the entirety of lived experience. Ryfka was able to articulate her pre-war and wartime life, but the most devastating experience of the camp resisted integration into narrative form.

She evokes the traditions of her pre-war home most vividly through the figure of her father:

He understood us, even though he never allowed us to go to the swimming pool with the boys—or to do much of anything else... He would stand by the window and say: “You must give up many

¹¹Hanna Krall, “Powieść dla Hollywoodu” [A Novel for Hollywood], in: *Fantom bólu* [Phantom of Pain] (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2021), 294.

¹²Samuel Gerson, “When the third is dead: memory, mourning and witnessing in the aftermath of Holocaust”, *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 90 (2009): 1341–1357.

things for me. I forbid you everything, but it is better this way. If you remain alone, your soul stays pure.” And perhaps, in some sense, it was better that way... Yet we constantly stood at the windows, watching others walk by, because everyone around us belonged to Zionist organizations. We were not permitted to join. We stayed at home, and it never occurred to any of us to object, or to say boldly: I want this, or I want that. When our turn came, each of us received her dowry—a trunk with a trousseau—and was ready to marry. My eldest sister did marry; she was thirty-two, with three children, and her husband was thirty-five. Together with their children, they were all taken to Auschwitz.¹³

In recounting the events of the war, Ryfka turns to a form of religious storytelling familiar to her: the midrash.

We reached the gate, and my father said to them: “I built this house with great effort. Here I lived a balanced life, grounded in moral integrity and faith in God. And yet today I have not said my morning prayer. As I leave, allow me to say it now.” It was the prayer of thirteen verses of faith, recited at least once every morning. He continued: “I want to say it at least once together with my whole family. I will translate it into Hungarian, so you will not think I do not understand what I am saying.” Then he asked us to join him: “I believe with unwavering faith that there is one God, and may He be blessed and praised forever and ever.” This refrain was followed by the thirteen verses—the thirteen principles of Jewish faith. And we were allowed to pray. When we finished, we walked out, and they locked the gate behind us with a padlock.¹⁴

This narrative form begins to break down when she attempts to describe the most traumatic moment of her story: the separation from her mother on the ramp at Auschwitz.

And Mengele said to me: “Fräulein, bitte, sind Sie Geschwangene?”—meaning: “Miss, are you pregnant?” He did not use “du”... And I thought to myself: How stupid this man is. I answered him: “Nein, ich bin nicht verheiratet.”—“No, I’m not married.” He moved my arm away from my mother’s and... The world would have lost nothing if I had not been there, for what I was about to suffer in life, I suffered because of that moment. He took my arm and said: “Gehen Sie nach links, Mutti geht nach rechts.”—“You go to the left, Mother goes to the right.” And you will see each other in the evening. Then he added: “Sie geht mit dem Auto.”—“She’s older and cannot walk, she will go by car.” At that moment, very few people stopped. My mother stood alone, dressed in several layers of clothing. Her zipper came undone, and she began adjusting it. My God, I read it in her eyes: “My children, I am now all alone...” I read it in her eyes as I looked at her and followed her with my gaze. If you are condemned to live, then beyond fate, there must be something else directing you from above.¹⁵

In quoting Mengele, Ryfka slips into German, recounting the scene as if it were happening here and now.

¹³Prot-Klinger, 121.

¹⁴Prot-Klinger, 121–122.

¹⁵Prot-Klinger, 123.

Trauma Stored in the Body

Experiences that remain unspoken—or for which no words exist—become lodged in the body. For Holocaust survivors, such experiences may manifest as psychosomatic symptoms, persistent pain, or a fractured sense of integrity. The body thus becomes a repository for what Christopher Bollas has termed the “unthought known.” Coined in his book *The Shadow of the Object*,¹⁶ Bollas’s concept of the unthought known (or unthought knowledge) refers to unconscious formations that arise from experiences lived but never fully understood. While Bollas originally applied the term to early childhood experiences from the pre-linguistic stage, it also encompasses traumatic events that are registered by the psyche yet remain inaccessible to conscious memory. Trauma, by its nature, is preverbal. Neuroscientific studies confirm this, showing that when traumatic memories are activated, the brain’s speech centers are inhibited. This highlights the aspect of the psyche that exists outside the reach of language. The “unthought known” thus designates preverbal or traumatic experiences that may unconsciously shape behavior and later undergo “embodied reconstruction” throughout life.

These traumas can also be transmitted across generations.

Hanna Krall’s short story “Dybuk” [The Dybbuk]¹⁷ serves as a kind of “case study” of this process, showing how parents’ unprocessed emotions, unspoken memories, and dissociated aspects of their personalities can be passed on intergenerationally. The story is narrated by a man—the son of a Holocaust survivor—who is haunted by a spirit: his father’s child from a first marriage, a boy who “somehow got lost in the ghetto.” The protagonist, Adam, recalls that he “realized quite early on that he wasn’t alone. He was plagued by outbursts of inexplicable anger, someone else’s anger; at other times, he was gripped by sudden, unfamiliar laughter.” Adam describes visiting a monk, where he suddenly breaks down in tears like a distraught child. The monk attempts to exorcise the spirit, but Adam instead addresses it in a “rustling language:” “Stay. You are my brother, don’t go.”

Traumatic transmission, imagined as an “object” passed on to the next generation—a dybbuk—resonates with Sigmund Freud’s essay “Mourning and Melancholia.”¹⁸ In that work, Freud demonstrates how in melancholy the lost object is not let go but rather incorporated into the self through identification.

Freud’s reflections on melancholia were later developed by the Hungarian Jewish psychoanalysts Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok,¹⁹ who worked in France. They reconceptualized the incorporation of the lost object—so central to melancholia—not as mere metaphor but as

¹⁶Christopher Bollas, *The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis of the Unthought Known* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

¹⁷Hanna Krall, “Dybuk” [The Dybbuk], in: *Dowody na istnienie [Proofs of Existence]* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo a5, 1996), 5–17.

¹⁸Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia”, in: Sigmund Freud, *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia*, trans. Shaun Whiteside, ed. and introduced by Mark Edmundson (London: Penguin Classics, 2005), 201–218.

¹⁹Nicolas Abraham, Maria Torok, “New Perspectives in Metapsychology; Cryptic Mourning and Secret Love”, in: Nicolas Abraham, Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel*, ed. Nicholas Rand (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 99–176.

literal absorption: the placement of the lost object within the psyche in what they termed a “psychic crypt.” Within this crypt, the lost object persists as a kind of “living corpse.” Born of an unfulfilled capacity to mourn, this process frequently defines the experience of the first generation marked by trauma. In this sense, one might say that in Krall’s story Adam’s Holocaust-surviving parents buried his brother—the child who was “lost in the ghetto”—within such a crypt. The story of the child’s disappearance remains incomplete; it leads to a demetaphorization of language akin to that described by Jean Améry, where trauma destroys the very possibility of thought.

Holocaust Survivor Syndrome

Holocaust survivors had no opportunity—either during the war or in its aftermath—to mourn their loved ones. In her short story “Syndrom Ocalonych” [Holocaust Survivor Syndrome], Hanna Krall draws on the reflections of Henry Fenigstein, who describes the condition he terms “survivor syndrome.” He emphasizes, above all, the survivors’ pervasive feelings of guilt:

[...] They felt guilty toward their murdered parents, children, brothers, and sisters because they had not shared their fate. They had committed no other crime—they had not stolen anyone’s bread, nor had they pushed another from a bunk... Their only “sin” was survival itself, and it was a burden they could never forgive themselves.²⁰

Hanna Krall’s short story “Tylko króciutko” [Keep it Short]²¹ explores the profound lack of space for survivors to grieve. It centers on individuals like those I am currently working with—members of the “Children of the Holocaust” Association—who were adopted and rescued as young children, sometimes as infants, by Poles. Many of them know little or nothing about their Jewish families. Krall demonstrates that their situation is frequently met with incomprehension, especially within American Jewish communities. From both conversations and therapeutic work, I have come to recognize that this sense of misunderstanding and inadequacy is widely shared among Children of the Holocaust across social contexts. In Poland, many remained silent about their Jewish identity for decades; abroad, within Jewish communities, their limited knowledge of religion and tradition left them both feeling—and being perceived as—outsiders. In both settings, their war stories went unheard, and they themselves were unable to tell them. This broader social phenomenon, often referred to as the “conspiracy of silence” surrounding the Holocaust, stifled the development of survivors’ narratives.²² Silence also pervaded family life. Dan Bar-On coined the term “double wall”

²⁰Hanna Krall, “Syndrom ocalonych” [Holocaust Survivor Syndrome], in: *Fantom bólu* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2021), 334.

²¹Hanna Krall, “Tylko króciutko” [Keep It Short], in: *Fantom bólu* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2021), 472–479.

²²Yael Danieli, “Families of survivors of the Nazi Holocaust: Some short- and long-term effects,” in: *Stress and Anxiety: Vol. 8*, ed. C. D. Spielberger, I. G. Sarason, and N. Milgram (New York: McGraw-Hill/Hemisphere, 1982), 405–421.

to describe this dynamic:²³ even when Holocaust survivors were willing to speak, or their children were willing to listen, the other side was often not ready. As a result, unspoken stories were transmitted not through words but through gestures, emotional states, and indirect narratives—what can be called “embodied reconstruction.” The inability to find an adequate narrative form for Holocaust survivors’ experiences leads to what has been described as concretization: the traumatic experience becomes a tangible “object” within the second generation, carried forward in embodied and often unconscious ways.²⁴

Just as the “crypt” is the result of Holocaust survivors’ unresolved grief, so too is the “phantom” a transgenerational phenomenon. These “phantoms,” passed down to children, are sometimes referred to colloquially as “skeletons in the closet.”²⁵

Marianne Hirsch, who developed the concept of postmemory, argues that trauma can often only be processed by subsequent generations—those who did not directly experience it but instead confront its impact through the stories, silences, actions, and symptoms of their parents and grandparents.²⁶ Similarly, Vamik Volkan, a psychoanalyst who has worked extensively with traumatized groups, observes that the collective processing of trauma by descendants of both victims and perpetrators is rarely achieved by the second generation; more often, the burden is usually passed on to those who follow.²⁷

Adam, the protagonist of Krall’s story, resists this inheritance. While accompanying his wife during childbirth, he refuses to allow his lost brother to live on in his son:

He was preparing to get out—preparing to take up residence inside my child. I leapt out of bed. “Oh no,” I cried aloud. “Don’t you dare. No ghetto. No Holocaust. You will not live inside my child.”²⁸

The story implies that the brother heeded Adam’s words, yet this stands in contrast to research on collective trauma, which shows that such burdens are typically transmitted to subsequent generations.

Listening to Holocaust Survivors

Given the long-standing “conspiracy of silence,” it is worth asking how Hanna Krall foresaw the later moment when Holocaust survivors would finally be heard. Her interview with Marek

²³Dan Bar-On, *Fear and Hope Three Generations of the Holocaust* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

²⁴Maria V. Bergmann, “Thoughts on Superego Pathology of Survivors and their Children,” in: *Generations of the Holocaust*, ed. Martin S. Bergmann, Milton E. Jucovy (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 287–309.

²⁵Nicolas Abraham, “Notes of the Phantom: A Complement to Freud’s Metapsychology,” in: *Nicolas Abraham, Maria Torok, The Shell and the Kernel*, ed. Nicholas Rand (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago 1994), 171–176.

²⁶Marianna Hirsch, “Surviving images: Holocaust photographs and the work of postmemory,” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 14 (2001): 5–37.

²⁷Vamik D. Volkan, “Traumatized societies and psychological care: Expanding the concept of preventive medicine,” *Mind and Human Interaction* 11 (2000): 177–194.

²⁸Krall, “Dybuk”, 546.

Edelman, *Zdążyć przed Panem Bogiem* [Shielding the Flame], first appeared in 1976 in the magazine *Odra*, with the book edition following in 1977. The earliest psychological studies of Holocaust survivors worldwide were linked to compensation claims against the German government and, in the late 1960s, led to the identification of “concentration camp syndrome” or “survivor syndrome.”^{29, 30} Yet systematic research on larger groups of Holocaust survivors for scientific purposes did not emerge until the late 1970s and early 1980s. Strikingly, Polish psychological research addressed these issues much earlier. At the turn of the 1950s and 1960s, a Cracow team led by Antoni Kepiński conducted one of the first systematic studies in Central Europe—and among the earliest worldwide—on the chronic effects of war trauma. They carried out structured interviews with one hundred former prisoners of the Auschwitz concentration camp, laying the groundwork for later trauma studies.³¹ Interestingly, even with Holocaust survivor Maria Orwid among the researchers, the experiences of Jewish camp prisoners were not examined as a distinct category. This omission reflects the broader “conspiracy of silence” surrounding the Holocaust, a silence that extended even into the work of specialists—psychologists and psychiatrists.³² It was not until 1994 that Orwid published the first psychological study in Poland focusing specifically on the families of Holocaust survivors.³³

What unites the practices of listening to Holocaust survivors—whether in research, reportage, or therapy—is the recognition that neutrality is impossible and that one must take the survivor’s side.³⁴ Reconstructing a story demands not only attention but also an active and empathetic listener. Holocaust survivors can rarely construct their narratives on their own; they require the presence of the “empathetic third.” Some of my interviewees have requested recordings of our conversations, and the cassettes produced for the Shoah Foundation often constitute the first coherent account of their story, later shared with their families.

Trauma therapists describe listening to testimony as “embodied testimony,” a process that engages both the mind and body of the interlocutor or therapist. When working with a patient who is reliving their own trauma—or one transmitted transgenerationally—the psychoanalyst shifts from the stance of detached observer to that of witness: a present and significant other. This position resonates with relational psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin’s concept of intersubjectivity. For Benjamin, the psychoanalytic encounter is not a one-sided relation but a meeting between two subjects. It requires recognition of the analyst’s

²⁹William G. Niederland, “Clinical observation on the «survivor syndrome»,” *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 49 (1968): 313–315.

³⁰Henry Krystal, *Massive psychic trauma* (New York: International University Press, 1968).

³¹Krzysztof Rutkowski, Edyta Dembińska, “Powojenne badania stresu pourazowego w Krakowie. Część I. Badania do 1989 roku” [Post-war PTSD Research in Cracow. Part I. Research to 1989], *Psychiatria Polska* [Polish Psychiatry] 21 (2015): 1–10.

³²Yael Danieli, “Psychotherapists participation in the conspiracy of silence about the Holocaust”, *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 1 (1984): 23–42.

³³Maria Orwid et al., “Psychospołeczne następstwa Holocaustu u osób ocalałych i żyjących w Polsce” [Psychosocial consequences of the Holocaust among survivors and Polish residents], *Psychiatria Polska* 1 (1994): 91–111.

³⁴Dori Laub, “Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening”, in: Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York, London: Routledge, 1992), 57–76.

subjectivity: the analyst is not merely the “object” of the patient’s needs or drives but, like the patient, an experiencing being.³⁵

Krall is skeptical of psychotherapy, yet many of her reflections offer valuable guidance for therapists on how to listen to Holocaust survivors. She writes, “My profession is not to know,”³⁶ a phrase she attributes to Krzysztof Kieślowski. A similar idea is captured in a well-known remark by British psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion, who urged analysts to practice “without memory and desire.”³⁷ Both statements converge on the same demand: a radical openness to the patient, grounded in an attitude of not-knowing and non-judgment. Krall says she “hears better.”³⁸ I find this an apt principle for therapeutic work. The therapist does not know better; rather, she must “hear better,” attending to essential phrases, perceiving what lies beyond words, and allowing meaning to emerge in the shared space of listening. Krall argues that a reporter must possess not only a keen ear but also a genuine curiosity about the world. In psychotherapy, this same curiosity is directed inward—toward the inner worlds of our patients. The parallel between the reporter or writer and the therapist lies in the attempt to describe the reality of those with whom we speak while striving to remain “outside the frame”—all the while knowing that such neutrality is ultimately impossible. Marek Edelman does not tell his story to a reporter in the conventional sense, but to someone who, like himself, survived the Holocaust. The same dynamic shapes Krall’s encounters with her other interlocutors. What does the act of building this shared narrative mean—for them, and for her? In psychotherapy, we analyze the feelings of both patient and therapist, exploring transference and countertransference as universal phenomena. Yet it is equally important to recognize how a shared experience shapes the therapeutic process. In my own case, this means inhabiting two positions at once: that of the “mother,” a role often projected onto me by patients, and that of the “daughter,” as a representative of the second generation.

My experiences with psychotherapy for Holocaust survivors do not reflect Krall’s pessimism about its value. In “Hamlet,” she thus describes a group therapy session: “[...] one woman talked about the little brother she ‘didn’t keep an eye on’ in Auschwitz, and another about the closet she tried to enter in front of strangers. They’d been telling this story for thirty years, still shaking with fear and tears in their eyes.”³⁹ Yet in my experience, group therapy for Holocaust survivors does bring change. The most fundamental transformation lies in the opportunity to tell the story. When we began therapy in 1996, many participants would start by saying, “I’m telling you this for the first time.” For many, the founding of the Children of the Holocaust Association marked the moment they discovered that others carried stories like their own. Psychotherapy gave them the space to voice these experiences. After the initial meetings, a number of participants chose to share their stories with those closest to them.

³⁵Jessica Benjamin, “An Outline of Intersubjectivity: The Development of Recognition”, *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 7 (Supplement) (1990): 33–46.

³⁶Jacek Antczak, *Reportierka, rozmowy z Hanną Krall* [Reporter. Conversations with Hanna Krall] (Warsaw: Rosner i Wspólnicy, 2007), 34.

³⁷Wilfred Bion, “Notes on Memory and Desire,” in: *Melanie Klein Today: Developments in Theory and Practice*, Vol. 2: Mainly Practice, ed. E. B. Spillius (London, New York: Routledge), 17–21.

³⁸Antczak, 34.

³⁹Hanna Krall, “Hamlet”, in: *Fantom bólu* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2021), 635.

We came to understand that, with the group's support, Holocaust survivors were able to build a coherent narrative—one that allowed them to speak first with loved ones, and later with a wider audience, sharing their memories in interviews and written accounts. Through psychotherapy, Holocaust survivors gained greater freedom in their inner dialogue: the ability to name and understand their mental states, and thus to cope with them more effectively. As Dori Laub observes, “[t]estimony is the narrative’s address to hearing; for only when the survivor knows he is being heard, will he stop to hear—and listen to—himself.”⁴⁰

Mourning

I have the impression that Hanna Krall, in voicing her skepticism about the possibility of comprehending or accommodating Holocaust survivors’ experiences and their “healing,” may in fact be pointing to the impossibility of mourning. In “Życie” [Life], the story of a Holocaust survivor I know, a doctor returns again and again to the same question, posed in the shadow of the ghetto and the famine: “Do you want to tell me about it?”⁴¹ It is implied that the person to whom the question is addressed is either unwilling or unable to speak. I spoke many times with the protagonist of this story about the ghetto, the famine, and her other experiences. She also participated in group therapy, where she shared her story and took part in discussions about the present. Was this helpful to her? I believe it was. Did it bring the mourning process to an end? I believe it did not.

Returning to the concepts of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, the work of mourning, as they describe it, involves displacing the libido from the lost object through the creation of a metaphor. In this process, incorporation is gradually transformed into introjection—an act of appropriation and meaning-making that enables individual growth and the development of the ego.⁴²

Jacques Derrida, drawing on Freud’s theory as well as the ideas of Abraham and Torok, with whom he was personally close, speaks of the necessity of an ongoing process of mourning, which he terms *demi-deuil* (“half-mourning”). He argues that mourning for the lost object can never be fully completed but instead entails a perpetual state of “in-betweenness,” oscillating between incorporation and introjection.⁴³

To inhabit this state of “in-betweenness,” while remaining aware that mourning can never reach a definitive conclusion, is something that resonates profoundly with me.

⁴⁰Laub, “Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening”, 71.

⁴¹Hanna Krall, “Życie” [Life], in: *Fantom bólu* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2021), 735.

⁴²Nicolas Abraham, Maria Torok, “Mourning and Melancholia: Introjection versus Incorporation”, in: *The Shell and the Kernel*, 125–138.

⁴³Jacques Derrida, Élisabeth Roudinesco, *For What Tomorrow...: A Dialogue*, trans. Jeff Fort (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).

Historical Trauma

Psychoanalysts Dori Laub and Johanna Bodenstab were able to locate several of the Holocaust survivors whom Laub had first interviewed in the late 1970s and 1980s. In the early 2000s, Laub re-engaged these survivors and, together with Bodenstab, conducted a comparative analysis of their earlier testimonies alongside more recent recordings.⁴⁴ Both scholars argue that the growing public awareness of the Holocaust over those decades shaped the survivors' capacity to bear witness, reinforcing their identity both as survivors and as witnesses of the Shoah.

Alessandra Cavalli writes: "Events become experience when they become meaningful, have a name, become known."⁴⁵ Without a supportive environment, however, such events remain unrepresented—and in that form, they take on a traumatic character.

In their work with traumatized patients, psychoanalysts have developed theories of testimony. Testimony creates a space in which the "living" or "moral third" (as opposed to the "dead third")^{46, 47} can come into being. When translated into the social sphere, this highlights the essential role of telling one's story in the presence of the "empathetic listener."

Returning, in this context, to Hanna Krall's heroine Izolda, our first impulse may be to dismiss her request for a Hollywood script as naïve, childish, or even excessive. Yet this impression changes once we consider the imperative to bear witness. Perhaps she senses that her story must take on a recognizable form—that the raw material of trauma resists direct narration. And given the contemporary reception of the Holocaust, she might be right.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

⁴⁴Dori Laub, Johanna Bodenstab, "Twenty-five Years Later: Revisiting Testimonies of Holocaust Survivors," in: *Hitler's Slaves: Life Stories of Forced Labourers in Nazi-Occupied Europe*, ed. A. Plato, A. Leh, Ch. Thonfeld (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010), 426–440.

⁴⁵Alessandra Cavalli, "Transgenerational transmission of indigestible facts: From trauma, deadly ghosts and mental voids to meaning-making interpretations", *The Journal of Analytical Psychology* 57 (2012): 597–614.

⁴⁶Shoshana Feldman, Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York, London: Routledge, 1992).

⁴⁷Jessica Benjamin, "A relational psychoanalysis perspective on the necessity of acknowledging failure in order to restore the facilitating and containing features of the intersubjective relationship (the shared third)", *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 90 (2009): 441–450.

References

- Abraham, Nicolas. "Notes of the Phantom: A Complement to Freud's Metapsychology." In: Nicolas Abraham, Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel*, ed. Nicholas Rand, 171–176. Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Abraham, Nicolas, Maria Torok. "Mourning and Melancholia: Introjection versus Incorporation." In: Nicolas Abraham, Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel*, ed. Nicholas Rand, 125–138. Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- – –. "New Perspectives in Metapsychology; Cryptic Mourning and Secret Love." In: Nicolas Abraham, Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel*, ed. Nicholas Rand, 99–176. Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Adorno, Theodor W. *Negative Dialectics*. Translated by E. B. Ashton. New York: Seabury Press, 1973.
- Améry, Jean. *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne: Bewältigungsversuche eines Überwältigten*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1966.
- Antczak, Jacek. *Reporterka, rozmowy z Hanną Krall*. Warsaw: Rosner i Wspólnicy, 2007.
- Bar-On, Dan. *Fear and Hope Three Generations of the Holocaust*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1995.
- Benjamin, Jessica. "A relational psychoanalysis perspective on the necessity of acknowledging failure in order to restore the facilitating and containing features of the intersubjective relationship (the shared third)." *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 90 (2009): 441–450.
- – –. "An outline of intersubjectivity: The development of recognition." *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 7 (Supplement) (1990): 33–46.
- Bergmann, Maria V. "Thoughts on Superego Pathology of Survivors and their Children." In: *Generations of the Holocaust*, ed. Martin S. Bergmann, Milton E. Jucovy, 287–309. New York: Basic Books, 1982.
- Bion, Wilfred. "Notes on Memory and Desire." In: *Melanie Klein Today: Developments in Theory and Practice*, Vol. 2: *Mainly Practice*, ed. E. B. Spillius. London, New York: Routledge, 17–21.
- Bollas, Christopher. *The Shadow of the Object. Psychoanalysis of the Unthought Known*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.
- Cavalli, Alessandra. "Transgenerational transmission of indigestible facts: From trauma, deadly ghosts and mental voids to meaning-making interpretations." *The Journal of Analytical Psychology* 57 (2012): 597–614.
- Danieli, Yael. "Families of survivors of the Nazi Holocaust: Some short- and long-term effects." In: *Stress and Anxiety: Vol. 8*, ed. C. D. Spielberger, I. G. Sarason, and N. Milgram, 405–421. New York: McGraw-Hill/Hemisphere, 1982.
- Danieli, Yael. "Psychotherapists participation in the conspiracy of silence about the Holocaust." *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 1 (1984): 23–42.
- Derrida, Jacques, Élisabeth Roudinesco. *For What Tomorrow...: A Dialogue*. Trans. Jeff Fort. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004.
- Felman, Shoshana, Dori Laub. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. New York, London: Routledge, 1992.
- Freud, Sigmund. *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia*. Trans. Shaun Whiteside. Ed. and introduced by Mark Edmundson. London: Penguin Classics, 2005.
- Gerson, Samuel. "When the third is dead: memory, mourning and witnessing in the aftermath of Holocaust." *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 90 (2009): 1341–1357.
- Greenwald, Baruch, Oshrit Ben-Ari, Rael D. Strous, Dori Laub. "Psychiatry, Testimony, and Shoah: Reconstructing the Narratives of the Muted." *Social Work in Health Care* 43 (2006): 199–214.
- Hirsch, Marianna. "Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory." *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 14 (2001): 5–37.
- Hölderlin, Friedrich. *Hyperion and Selected Poems*. Trans. Richard Sieburth. New York: Continuum, 1990.
- Krall, Hanna. "Dybuk." In: *Dowody na istnienie*, 5–17. Poznań: Wydawnictwo a5, 1996.

- – –. “Hamlet”. In: *Fantom bólu*, 5-17. Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2021.
- – –. “Powieść dla Hollywoodu”. In: *Fantom bólu*, 289-302. Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2021.
- – –. “Syndrom ocalonych”. In: *Fantom bólu*, 326-335. Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2021.
- – –. “Tylko króciutko”. In: *Fantom bólu*, 472-479. Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2021.
- – –. “Życie”. In: *Fantom bólu*, 729-735. Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2021.
- Krystal, Henry. *Massive Psychic Trauma*. New York: International University Press, 1968.
- Laub, Dori. “Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening”. In: Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, 57-76. New York, London: Routledge, 1992.
- – –. “The Israel Project Story”. In: *Psychoanalysis and Holocaust Testimony. Unwanted Memories of Social Trauma*, ed. Dori Laub, Andreas Hamburger, 193-201. London, New York: Routledge, 2017.
- – –. “An Event Without a Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival”. In: *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, ed. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, 75-92. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Laub, Dori, Irit Felsen. “Traumatic Psychosis”. In: *Psychoanalysis and Holocaust Testimony. Unwanted Memories of Social Trauma*, ed. Dori Laub, Andreas Hamburger, 228-241. London, New York: Routledge, 2017.
- Laub, Dori, Johanna Bodenstab. “Twenty-five Years Later: Revisiting Testimonies of Holocaust Survivors.” In: *Hitler's Slaves: Life Stories of Forced Labourers in Nazi-Occupied Europe*, ed. A. Plato, A. Leh, Ch. Thonfeld, 426-440. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010.
- Niederland, William G. “Clinical observation on the «survivor syndrome»”. *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 49 (1968): 313-315.
- Orwid, Maria, Ewa Domagalska-Kurdiel, Kazimierz Pietruszewski, Ewa Czaplak, Ryszard Izdebski, Maria Kamińska. “Psychospołeczne następstwa Holocaustu u osób ocalonych i żyjących w Polsce”. *Psychiatria Polska* 1 (1994): 91-111.
- Prot-Klinger, Katarzyna. *Życie po Zagładzie*. Warsaw: Instytut Psychiatrii i Neurologii, 2009.
- Prot-Klinger, Katarzyna, Krzysztof Szwejca. “Późne skutki wczesnej traumy. Psychoterapia Ocalałych z Holocaustu”. In: *Psychoanaliza w cieniu wojny i Zagłady*, ed. Ewa Kobylńska-Dehe, 301-324. Cracow: Universitas, 2020.
- Rutkowski, Krzysztof, Edyta Dembińska. “Powojenne badania stresu pourazowego w Krakowie. Część I. Badania do 1989 roku”. *Psychiatria Polska* 21 (2015): 1-10.
- Volkan, Vamik D. “Traumatized societies and psychological care: Expanding the concept of preventive medicine”. *Mind and Human Interaction* 11 (2000): 177-194.

KEYWORDS

Hanna Krall

H O L O C A U S T

ABSTRACT:

This article investigates trauma and its psychological consequences as they manifest both in narrative and in embodied experience. It demonstrates how Hanna Krall's prose conveys the psychological reality of Holocaust survivors not only through content but also through the distinctive form of traumatic narration. Furthermore, it considers the doubts articulated within these narratives regarding the possibilities—and the limits—of psychotherapy for Holocaust survivors.

P S Y C H O T H E R A P Y

trauma

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:

Katarzyna Prot-Klinger – Doctor Habilitated in Medical Sciences, a psychiatrist, psychotherapist, and group analyst. Her research has long focused on the psychological consequences of trauma, with a particular interest in individuals who experienced childhood trauma. For many years, she has conducted both individual and group therapy with Holocaust survivors. She is the author of numerous articles on this subject as well as the book *Życie po Zagładzie. Skutki traumy u ocalałych z Holocaustu–świadczenia z Polski i Rumunii* [Life After the Holocaust: The Effects of Trauma on Holocaust Survivors – Testimonies from Poland and Romania]. She is currently a professor at the Institute of Psychology at the Maria Grzegorzewska Academy of Special Education in Warsaw. |

Crypt, Mimicry, Genealogy: The Languages of Trauma in Hanna Krall's *The Subtenant*

Bartosz Dąbrowski

ORCID: 0000-0002-0112-5847

The Subtenant as an autobiographical and autofictional narrative of a survivor takes the form of a dramatic monologue. In it, the narrator's attempt to articulate the complex process of speaking trauma recreates the immediacy and cadence of live speech typical of oral testimony, while simultaneously constructing, before our eyes, an experimental novelistic structure meant to reflect how the past continues to shape her later life. Hanna Krall seeks to tell a story whose time has stalled amid the chaos of experience and the shards of fragmented memory, calling into being a divided, conflicted self. Beyond the ventriloquial doubling of her own voice, a consequence of hiding on the Aryan side and adopting the necessary camouflage, this self also makes room for other discordant voices – those of fellow Jewish “subtenants”, whose lives she evokes. At the same time, the narrative seems to preserve within itself the internalized gaze of the Polish host, staging, as if for his benefit, the plausible variants of his own story¹.

¹ The category of subtenancy as a code of Polish culture was introduced into scholarship by Joanna Tokarska-Bakir and Elżbieta Janicka. Krall's novel serves as an important point of reference for their analyses. Drawing on Sander Gilman's observations about the double bind of hospitality, the two scholars interpret subtenancy as a kind of contract between the Polish majority and the Jewish minority, through which the latter is granted the right to conditional residence and partial protection from violence. The specificity of this arrangement lies in the subtenant's acceptance of the fact that hospitality and protection may be withdrawn at any moment. Moreover, the Jewish subtenant is expected to accept the stereotypical image of themselves imposed by the host. The ideal subtenant must also deny their own subtenant status and provide the host with an alibi whenever the latter exercises violence against them or other subtenants. The essence of the “good subtenant's” condition thus involves a doubling typical of mimicry: one must mirror the host, appear the same but never entirely faithful, in order to preserve the internalized stigma of an irredeemable otherness. See Elżbieta Janicka, Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, “Sublokatorstwo jako kategoria kultury polskiej” [Subtenancy as a category of Polish culture], *Studia Litteraria et Historica* 2 (2013): 1–2; Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, “Hassliebe. Żydowska samonienawiść w ujęciu Sander L. Gilmana (część pierwsza: od Hermana z Moguncji do Johanna Pfefferkorna)” [Hassliebe: Jewish self-hatred in Sander L. Gilman's approach (Part one: from Hermann of Mainz to Johannes Pfefferkorn)], *Studia Litteraria et Historica* 2 (2013): 27–59; Konrad Matyjaszek, *Produkcja przestrzeni żydowskiej w dawnej i współczesnej Polsce* [The production of Jewish space in past and contemporary Poland] (Kraków: Universitas, 2019), especially the subsections “Gościnność: podwójne wiązanie” [Hospitality: The double bind], “Kategoria gościa jako kod kultury” [The category of the guest as a cultural code], and “Sublokatorstwo” [Subtenancy].

For this reason, the dynamics of this staged spectacle – full of irony, apostrophes, and parabases, and above all of deep pain – extends beyond the record of an individual experience. The poetics of *The Subtenant* remain a narrative poetics of division, reflecting a wide range of psychological, sociological, and cultural dimensions of the exclusion of Jewish “outsiders” from the Polish community, both during and after the Holocaust. This exclusion also manifests itself in later moments of collective consolidation, such as the Warsaw Uprising, the Poznań June protests, or, finally, the Solidarity “carnival” and the imposition of martial law. For Krall’s narrator, an awareness first grasped almost preconsciously by the little girl she once was becomes a lasting knowledge: that each successive phase of Polish history reveals the same underlying rule of a cultural code built on the exclusion of the Other – on the continual creation of a double marked by existential darkness, a barely tolerated guest and the negative image of collective identity. The Holocaust, as the culmination of this process, thus carries its echoes and afterlives: it persists, in its own way, on other planes and in other guises. For the narrator, it remains a haunting and ever-present memory of her own experience – of cramped rooms and dark interiors, a kind of micro-ghetto of childhood, of incoherent images and irreconcilable dissociative selves. The Holocaust cannot be forgotten or denied – not only because it is bound to the memory of her murdered family, but also because the host culture is permeated by the force of its active forgetting and continual erasure: a desire to whiten the past, echoing the exterminatory gesture of eliminating the minority. It is against this impulse that the narrator sets her series of ironic counter-narratives.

It is no coincidence that the pronounced performativity of *The Subtenant*’s polylogue – based on the confrontation and counterpoint of voices – emphasizes the conflict between two communities of memory. One struggles with the lack of individual knowledge, collective dishonesty, the repression of facts, and an absence of empathy, while the other remains continually engaged in a phantasmatic effort to sustain its own self-image. For this reason, among others, what comes under deconstruction here is the discourse of Polish history and of a cultural imagination rooted in genealogy. Against this, Krall sets a counter-narrative of other histories, lineages, and biographies – usually foreign and erased – shaped through a narrative mode that employs irony, bitter sarcasm, and even deliberate subversive parody².

In my view, it is precisely the capture and staging of performativity – rooted in the experience of camouflage and mimicry – that make *The Subtenant* unique. This performativity also resonates with the Holocaust experience of survivors who had to enact Polish identity to survive, and with their later “acting out” of trauma after the war – an act often closely bound to the memory of that first compulsion. Such a doubled performance, as the outcome of the cultural phenomenon of mimicry, can be understood both as an attempt to rearticulate the process of stigmatization and as an effort to work through a traumatic event. These are two causally linked phenomena that create profound difficulties in the psychological and social relations of subjects marked by violence – especially those, like Jewish survivors or Jewish children who survived, who had to grow up within a culture permeated by antisemitism and shaped by the active repression, forgetting, and marginalization

² An important sociological context for this narrative form may be found in the Jewish, Holocaust-era experience of concealing one’s identity and performing the identity of the host, as described by Małgorzata Melchior. See Małgorzata Melchior, *Zagłada a tożsamość. Polscy Żydzi ocaleni na “aryjskich papierach”*. Analiza doświadczenia biograficznego [The Holocaust and identity: Polish Jews saved on “Aryan papers.” An analysis of biographical experience] (Warsaw: Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences, 2004).

of the Holocaust. The cultural position of the subtenant is thus marked not only by trauma and a disrupted body image (*imago*), but also by the strain of adapting to the host's gaze. For this reason, in the following sections of this article, I will interpret selected aspects of *The Subtenant* through the lens of categories drawn from Homi Bhabha's theory of mimicry, Sander Gilman's study of the Jewish "blackness" complex, the work of Joanna Tokarska-Bakir and Elżbieta Janicka, and trauma studies, while keeping in mind the historical context of Krall's novel³.

In my view, these theoretical categories also have the power to reshape the framework within which Krall's novel is placed in literary history. They allow *The Subtenant* to be understood alongside other Jewish narratives of the period – texts equally ill-fitted to the conventions of collective memory because they articulate the uneasy experiences of a "subtenant" diaspora: one that preserved the memory of the Holocaust and of Polish antisemitism, while giving voice to genealogies and "impure" family histories deemed non-normative from the standpoint of Polish culture. One of the most unexpected consequences of March 1968 was the emergence of numerous literary works that began to highlight precisely this difference of Jewish experience – often through autofictional experiments in narrative form. In many respects, Krall's *The Subtenant* thus has much in common with the earlier "parabiographies" of Artur Sandauer (and his famous essay *O sytuacji pisarza polskiego pochodzenia żydowskiego w XX wieku* [On the situation of the Polish writer of Jewish descent in the twentieth century], 1982), the autobiographical prose of Henryk Grynberg (and its lyrical counterpart, the collection *Antynostalgia* [Antinostalgia]), the novels of Julian Kornhauser (*Kilka chwil* [A Few Moments], 1975), and Kaja Holzman's stories from the volume *Krajobraz rodzinny* [Family Landscape] (1981), as well as the post-March works of Kazimierz Brandys – *Mała księga* [The Little Book] (1970), *Wariacje pocztowe* [Postal Variations] (1972), and *Rondo* [The Roundabout] (1982)⁴. What unites these texts is their reflection on the logic of Polish genealogical imagination in relation to personal and family history, their (not always explicit) references to the Holocaust, their inquiry into the status of one's own identity, and their bold use of experimental narrative forms. Against this background, Krall's *The Subtenant* stands out for the coherence of its representation and the multilingual texture of its experience. It seems to speak in the register of three intertwined forms of trauma: psychological – focused on the attempt to communicate with deep memory (in Lawrence Langer's sense); cultural – linked to the categories of mimicry and genealogy; and structural – that is, the projection of these experiences onto the existential plane through the substantiation of a specifically Jewish sense of "blackness," elevated to a metaphysical principle of the world itself.

Mimicry, Narrative Form, and Genealogical Imagination

Mimicry constitutes the very essence of the subtenant's condition. In Homi Bhabha's interpretation, this phenomenon arises from the complex properties of the colonial – or more broadly, dominant

³ See Hanna Krall, *Sublokator* [The Subtenant] (Warszawa: Iskry, 1989).

⁴ Krall's work bears a lesser resemblance to the realist prose of Stanisław Benski (*Tyle ognia wokoło* [So much fire around], 1979; *Jeden dzień* [One day], 1980; and *Ta najważniejsza cząsteczka* [That most important particle], 1982), as well as to Kalman Segal's *Jeszcze żyjemy* [We are still alive] (written 1972–1974). The trace of this post-March transformation can also be detected in the prose of Bogdan Wojdowski and Julian Strykowski. The latter, for instance, noted in his journal entry of 13 April 1983 that *Chleb rzucony umarłym* [Bread cast upon the dead] and the collection *Manius Bany* were his metaphorical responses to March '68. See Bogdan Wojdowski, "Dzienniki (fragmenty)" [Diaries (fragments)], selected by Małgorzata Bojanowska, *Podkowieński Magazyn Kulturalny* 1–2 (2008): 19–21.

– discourse and is linked to the intricate and enduring consequences of its cultural operation, both for the colonizer (the representative of the dominant culture) and for the colonized (the representative of a minority)⁵. In general terms, mimicry can be described, on the one hand, as a process in which the instability of the dominant discourse – rooted in the immanent structure of language itself – produces effects of meaning that run counter to the sender's intention, undermining their authority and disrupting the mechanism by which cultural power reproduces itself⁶. Mimicry thus emerges as a particular consequence of the discursive weakness of language and of the internal contradictions within the stereotypes whose primary aim is to sustain and reproduce the cultural difference separating the subject of the dominant culture from the minority. The authority of this dominant subject legitimizes itself through the continual construction of that foundational division – one that, in the very act of discursive differentiation, calls into being both the phantasmatic subjectivity of the cultural “host” and the equally phantasmatic, stereotyped Others. The process centers on producing racist representations of minorities, deviants, or subtenants – images driven by a phobic logic that underwrites the dominant order.

On the other hand, mimicry (understood by Bhabha as akin to adaptive defense mechanisms) is, on the side of the minority, a process of imitation and assimilation of the patterns of the dominant culture. Yet because these patterns are imbued with hostility and coded to exclude, mimicry takes the form of an ambivalent repetition with a difference. It thus becomes a partially ineffective performative, introducing into the order of discourse an element of irony, parodic destabilization of meaning, and unintended mockery – thereby turning into a mode of resistance and an expression of agency for the stigmatized. In contrast to what Sander Gilman describes as the logic of autostereotyping, which internalizes violence and harmful fantasies, thereby adopting the discriminating position and its accompanying affective structure, Bhabha's concept of mimicry introduces a strain of comic farce into representation. He relates this comic dimension both to Jews and to Parsis (the ethnic group to which he himself belongs), suggesting that both communities repeat the stereotypical jokes told about them. Yet this act of repetition always transforms the stereotype, becoming an instance of subversion and an opportunity to derail it. Emphasizing the comic aspect of mimicry is significant because dominant discourse is typically solemn, serious, imbued with pedagogical ambition – the impulse to educate, moralize, and improve. It strives to enforce conformity among all subjects, except for those belonging to minorities. The latter, while also expected to resemble their “hosts,” must never fully do so, for that would bring an end to the production of difference. They are thus to become *almost the same, but not quite*. The contradiction at the heart of this discourse is what Bhabha describes as the ironic collision between the performative and the pedagogical – an encounter enacted in every speech act⁷.

⁵ Homi K. Bhabha, *Mimikra i ludzie. O dwuznaczności dyskursu kolonialnego* [Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse], in: *Miejsca kultury* [The Location of Culture], translated into Polish by Tomasz Dobrogoszcz, Kraków 2010 – see also the chapters: *Przebiegła układność* [Sly Civility] and *Znaki poczytane za cuda: Kwestie dwuznaczności i autorytetu – pod drzewem nieopodal Delhi w maju 1817 roku* [Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree outside Delhi, May 1817].

⁶ See, among others: Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 124–127 (“Mimicry”); David Huddart, Homi K. Bhabha (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 38–51 (“Mimicry”); Leela Gandhi, „Globalizacja, hybryda, diaspora. Wzajemne transformacje” [Globalization, Hybridity, Diaspora: Mutual Transformations] in *Teoria postkolonialna. Wprowadzenie krytyczne* [Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction], translated by Jacek Serwański (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2008); Ania Loomba, „Hybrydowość” [Hybridity] in *Kolonializm/Postkolonializm* [Colonialism/Postcolonialism], translated by Natalia Bloch (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2011), 183–194.

⁷ See Bhabha, 79–88.

The strategy of mimicry thus entails both a logic of subjective division and inner split, resulting in a persistent sense of misalignment with the imposed norm, and an ironic rupture within discourse itself, within speech or narrative, which does not so much mimetically reflect stable identities as parodically imitate, theatrically produce, and simultaneously undermine their authority. In mimicry, as Bhabha observes, identity is never identical with itself: it remains only a partial presence, functioning like a line spoken by an actor who is conscious of his own doubling⁸.

The Subtenant is particularly attuned to these dimensions for several obvious reasons. First and foremost, it records the experience of the Holocaust as lived from the perspective of a child hiding – one who felt with particular intensity the contradictions inherent in the forced identification with an assumed role, while simultaneously perceiving its artificiality. In later years, that same child came to recognize the lasting psychological consequences of having adopted such a camouflage.

Second, the novel explores the experience of growing up amid antisemitic narratives that, being hostile and antagonistic to the protagonist's identity, could only deepen the process of traumatization, blocking access to the past and thus impeding the work of mourning. This impossibility is further reinforced by the pervasive repression of Holocaust memory. The operation of cultural amnesia – the collective spectacle of forgetting – precludes both the reconstruction of the circumstances of survival and the recovery of one's own genealogy or of the broader history of the Jewish community.

Third, Hanna Krall's *The Subtenant* is perhaps one of the first works to question so forcefully the presumed innocence of the community to which the narrator wishes to belong. At the same time, it casts doubt on the legitimacy of that desire itself, since this yearning for affiliation is marked by the memory of exclusion, manifesting in psychosomatically felt symptoms of "blackness," understood both as a bodily inscription of otherness and as the affective trace of Holocaust trauma. Within the dominant "post-March" codes of Polish culture, and similarly in the early years of the Solidarity period, there was little space for the expression of such experiences. There seemed to be no room either for Jews or for the memory of the Holocaust itself. In this context, the strategy of mimicry – recalling autobiographically inflected images of genocide and Jewish suffering – disrupts the imitative practices that sustained a positive self-image within Polish culture⁹.

It is no coincidence that *The Subtenant* opens with a gesture of deconstructing precisely such efforts, during the famous Kraków staging of *Sen o bezgrzesznej* [Dream of the Sinless], directed by Jerzy Jaroński (premiere: January 21, 1979, at the Stary Teatr). This theatrical montage of literary fragments by Stefan Żeromski, conceived as a counterpart to Konrad Swinarski's production of *Forefathers' Eve*, blurred the boundaries between stage and audience, between performance and the community both represented and enacted through it. Ironically, the play unfolded upon a literal stage set, presenting a particular kind of representation of history not as a sequence of facts, but as a constellation of affects, episodes, collective imaginings, and

⁸ See Bhabha, 81.

⁹ On the defense of collective self-image, see, among others: Tomasz Żukowski, *Wielki retusz. Jak zapomnieliśmy, że Polacy zabijali Żydów* [The great retouch: How we forgot that Poles killed Jews] (Warsaw: Wielka Literatura, 2018), 28–66; Elżbieta Janicka, "Świadkowie własnej sprawy. Polska narracja dominująca wobec Zagłady w trakcie Zagłady" [Witnesses in their own trial: The Polish dominant narrative on the Holocaust during the Holocaust], *Studia Litteraria et Historica* 7 (2018).

exemplary family stories. Jarocki's production was permeated with biting irony toward these very images, exposing their performative dimension in the dominant figure of the fraudulent master of ceremonies – at once trickster, director, and manipulator of those projections.

The Subtenant opens with a similarly parodic scene from the performance, built around the mechanism of acting and the performative construction of an imagined community. The scene begins when the actors enter the audience and start narrating their own genealogies, family histories, and wartime experiences, showing photographs and private mementos as they speak. Here, the collective is constructed through genealogy by means of stereotypical syntagms and morphemes – ready-made biographical clichés delivered in earnest and largely devoid of the ironic distance characteristic, for example, of Kazimierz Brandys's *Wariacje pocztowe* (a post-March satirical pastiche and mimicry-marked laboratory of the grotesque). The narrator's resistance to the effect of this gesture stems from the dissonance between her own reaction and that of the audience to Jarocki's irony, which remained unreadable to many spectators. More importantly, it becomes clear that this kind of stereotypical genealogical framing excludes her story altogether, exposing a rupture in continuity with the imagined community. There is no space within it, for instance, for the story of her Jewish father's death at Majdanek. This rift between the phantasmatic infrastructure on which the collective rests and the narrator's own experience initiates a subsequent pattern of bitter discrepancies that surface with particular force in moments of supposed historical unity. One such moment occurs during the response to the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising; another, during the Poznań June demonstrations, when the gaze of one young worker, who recognizes her as Jewish, forces the protagonist into an involuntary identification with the collective. The opposite happens in December 1981: when martial law is imposed, the narrator finds within herself no tone corresponding to the nation's martyrological empathy. Instead, she instinctively recalls the survivor's strategy of endurance. Each time, Jewish otherness asserts itself through a conscious dissonance with collective emotions and attitudes – in the uncanny (*unheimlich*) process of detaching from national scripts. This is the experience of someone who, in the eyes of others, has never been a rightful inhabitant of the house or *Heim* – someone only provisionally the same, yet always other¹⁰.

For this reason, the process of articulating community in the opening sequence of *The Subtenant* is continually disrupted by the symptoms of mimicry – from the microstructure of the initial utterance, “*proszę pana*” (“sir”), which highlights the role of accent in identifying a potential subtenant (the flattened *a* in the phrase may recall the distortion produced by a foreigner), to the scattered signs of mocking hybridization. One example is the “beautiful story” of the German grandfather Staemler, who chose Polishness in Buchenwald and later Polonized his surname after the war (to Sztemler), which, some twenty years later, in March '68, caused the family certain trouble. The narrator juxtaposes the pedagogical character of such stories with the performative act of telling them. As she writes, “the actors came down from the stage and spoke about their ancestors – it was probably meant to convey the continuity of history, or perhaps its prolongation”. Yet this narration is marked by a subtle ironic twist when she recalls a dissonant counterpoint in the sequence about the director's grandfather, who declared that his ancestor “built shithouses” only to be revealed, in the end, as Prime Minister Sławoj Składkowski (thus confirming, despite

¹⁰See Bhabha, 84.

the intended subversion, the gentry-based genealogical norm)¹¹. The director's irony therefore proves ineffective: it ultimately fails to revise the collective imaginary or to enact sublocation – that is, a displacement, a change of perspective, and a moment of critical disillusionment.

It is precisely the *pedagogical* pressure of the norm and its discursive grammar, as Bhabha would put it, that initiates the narrator's ironic play with reconstructing her own lineage and sets in motion the "writing" of an apocryphal, alternative history of her father – the prewar Major Krall. Yet the self-reflexive comedy that accompanies the creation of this family apocryphon has a bitter undertone: it is a carefully modulated record of wartime concealment, of hiding one's own identity within another's. In essence, it reenacts the phantasmatic act of fabricating a different, "proper" self from the past – the self that existed during her time on the Aryan side.

It is therefore no coincidence that, in the process of reconstructing socially acceptable versions of "Polish" (or even quintessentially Polish) biographies, traumatic images and afterimages of the Holocaust keep breaking through. The ironic story of the father-major, whose greatest tragedy was being slapped by a German soldier, turns out to be a reworking of details heard from the caretaker about the arrest of her own father – beaten with rifle butts by gendarmes. Mimicry, through its use of quotation and repetition, in fact evokes trauma itself: the genealogical rupture, the asymmetry between Polish and Jewish death – in the juxtaposed sequences about Krystyna Krahelska and the Jewish mother from the ghetto who was said to have committed an act of cannibalism¹².

In a similar way – serving as a mirror image of the minority's sense of inferiority, of being "black" and gazing down at the pavement like Borges's *Catoblepas* (a literary and erudite motif also subjected to irony) – the force of mimicry resurfaces in the parallel biography of the Jewish communist Bernard Rajnicz, whose life story does not fit into the gallery of hagiographic models of "Polish lives"¹³. Rajnicz's biography, full of ironic twists ("all those stories he tells me fill him with disbelief and laughter"), is driven by a desire akin to the narrator's own: the wish to belong and to transform Jewish "blackness" into Polish "brightness". Yet this same impulse exposes the very element of mimicry within the structure of history itself – understood *per se* as the perversity and irony of events. The level of communist conviction (belonging to the order of utterance) and that of its realization (belonging to the subject of enunciation) operate here as a mechanism of mimicry – and hence of continual derailment. The discourse of Stalinist *newspeak* often usurps subjectivity in an arbitrary manner, as during the Stalinist conference attended by a general, where the young Rajnicz, speaking incoherently, happens to utter the ritual formula of condemnation that comes to his mind by Chance, thus provoking

¹¹See Hanna Krall, *The Subtenant*, in *The Subtenant; To Outwit God*, translated by Jaroslaw Anders; Lawrence Weschler and Joanna Stasińska (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1992), 7. The irony is also reflexive: it refers to a story recorded by Stanisław Benski about a Jewish resident of a retirement home who spent the Holocaust and the German occupation in New York and, upon returning to Poland, began to "add on" a wartime biography under the pressure of survivors' stories. In this fabricated account, as the narrator relates – imitating the grammar of testimony – "Everything is just as it should be: he did not go to America, he is in Warsaw under the bombs and planning to sneak to the Aryan side to see the Wiczorek family. So far so good, but around 1941 [...]". See Krall, *The Subtenant*, 6-7.

¹²See Krall, *Sublokator*, 14-16.

¹³A similarly revealing context for the marginalization of communist biographies can be found in the section "Intermedium czyli Życiorysy alla polacca" [Intermedium, or Polish-Style Biographies] from Jerzy Andrzejewski's *Miazga* [The Pulp], as well as in those self-referential parts of the novel that depict the arduous process of composing such life stories.

both his opponent's downfall and his own promotion. The Stalinist slogans "whoever is not with us is against us" and "the enemy must be destroyed" thus recall the logic of an already familiar exclusion. A similar slippage can be observed in the ironic (and distinctly Brandysian) letters from a Stalinist prison written by Major Krall – letters that continue his imaginary biography and are permeated by the inertia of gentry clichés and martyrological platitudes.

In the biographies of Rajnicz and Werner – these genealogical counter-narratives – Krall exposes the fatalistic dynamics of Jewish involvement in communism, rooted in the attempt to transcend the difference between a stigmatized, "blackened" minority and a privileged majority. This attempt, driven by the desire to escape the fate of one's origins, reveals the tragic paradox of that endeavor. The logic of communist ideology, which initially promised the abolition of class (and racial) divisions, proves instead to be a deceptive ruse – one that propels its believers into an ambiguous form of engagement and ultimately perpetuates the very hierarchies and exclusions it claimed to overcome. The protagonist experiences this most acutely during the March 1968 events and later during his internment in the first days of martial law. In the interrogation room on Rakowiecka Street, he looks up and notices, above the heads of the police officers, the portrait of Janek Krasicki – the very man he himself had once recommended for membership in the Komsomol¹⁴.

In *The Subtenant*, Krall turns this kind of sarcastic irony into one of the key modes of articulating both history and the experience of the Holocaust – emphasizing the incommensurability between representation and event. Irony thus shapes the narrative modality of the text at the compositional level: as a metonymic collage of multiple perspectives, contrapuntal storylines, and anecdotally linked episodes. It is also on this plane that mimicry and traumatic memory converge. The narrative conveys the characteristic dynamics of trauma through apostrophes, gestures, parenthetical remarks, interruptions, silences, ellipses, and pauses – maintaining a deliberate distance from chronology, descriptive conventions, modes of character construction, dialogue, and even from the novel's usual requirement of closure (the text ends with a broken, unfinished sentence). The astigmatic quality of the narrative voice stems from the impossibility of fully articulating the traumatic event – a condition that, as we will see, results in a particular form of division, one that can be described both in Bhabha's terms and in those of psychoanalytic trauma theory.

Mimicry, Trauma, and the Split "Self"

Mimicry and trauma share a structure of subjective division. In the first case, as Homi Bhabha argues, this division concerns the instability of enunciation and stems from the performativity of the speech act itself, in which the subject of the statement (*énoncé*) is not identical with the subject of enunciation. In the second, it arises from the delayed nature of experience: the subject has no direct access to it, since, according to Freud's logic of *Nachträglichkeit* (deferred action), it is produced only in the act of repetition, taking the form of translation. A traumatic experience can neither be properly forgotten nor adequately remembered, for it inscribes itself elsewhere – beyond memory – within the unconscious and the somatic order of the body. It constitutes a kind of "non-history", which, although real and deeply affecting the

¹⁴Krall, *Sublokator*, 125.

subject, eludes articulation and lies outside the chronicle of events. In this way, it resists the desire to render it as narrative continuity.

In *The Subtenant*, trauma understood in this way seems to inscribe itself within the logic of narrative division brought about by mimicry – one that produces, on the level of narration, the presence of two distinct voices. Both belong to the same authorial, autofictional subject, yet they remain partly separated and divided between two enunciative positions: that of the observer, who adopts the internalized perspective of the “bright ones”, and that of the participant in events – the subjective subtenant, the Jewish child forever trapped in a mutilated childhood, seized by surges of anxious affect and eruptions of intense emotion such as anger, resentment, shame, and the acute sense of not belonging.

The first voice assumes toward the second the role of a disciplining double, occupying what Bhabha would call the position of the *mimic man*, one who has internalized a proper, socially adjusted alter ego after undergoing enforced socialization. The second, by contrast, remains the source of a flow of affects, fragments of diachronic events, and trauma-generating images that compose the experience of permanent misalignment and a disrupted bodily *imago*. It is she – ugly, anamorphic, and still sunk in mourning, from the painting created by the narrator in her imagined biography as a painter – who becomes the orphaned Jewish child, the bearer of metaphorical blackness and existential despair, the witness to the Holocaust and the custodian of an intrapsychic crypt¹⁵.

The split depicted by Hanna Krall seems to correspond to the mechanisms of “anguished memory” described by Lawrence L. Langer in his analyses of oral Holocaust testimonies¹⁶. In *The Subtenant*, this deep, visceral memory leaves its residue in the unconscious and in the preverbal experience of childhood which, as Jean-François Lyotard suggests, always remains open to the prelinguistic dimension – and for that very reason can only ever be told by others. This dynamic provokes, as in Krall’s text, a conflict between two narrators: the subtenant, subordinated to performativity, and the author of the monologue, who engages with her in a dialogue imbued with pedagogical insistence. While the first refuses to consent to narration, the second nevertheless continues to spin the story – devoting herself, as Joanna Roszak aptly put it, to its patient weaving¹⁷. Except for one instance, Krall has never recounted her own story of survival in the straightforward, reportorial mode of factual representation¹⁸.

According to Langer, the fundamental source of such a division lies in the impossibility, during the act of bearing witness, of reconciling the self that “does something” with the self to which “something

¹⁵At this point, Krall evokes a poem by Barbara Sadowska describing the image of a young girl. The same image also appears on the cover of the 1989 edition of *The Subtenant*. Sadowska’s poem reads: “childhood – that doll / with an eye pushed deep / into its skull the doll from the pile of dolls / in an organdy dress / with a ribbon of fear in its smoldering / hair // it is the feeling of going barefoot / through a stone mist it is the open step of darkness / of the approaching whiteness”. See Krall, *The Subtenant*, 92. First published in *Zapis* 16 (October 1980): 50–51.

¹⁶See Lawrence L. Langer, *Świadectwa Zagłady w ruinach pamięci* [Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory], translated into Polish by Marcin Szuster (Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2015), 55–84.

¹⁷Joanna Roszak, Krall. *Tkanie* [Krall. Weaving] (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2024).

¹⁸Krall wrote about this in a short article, “Gra o moje życie” [A game for my life] *Polityka* 16 (1968). The text was later reprinted in the anthology: Hanna Krall, “Gra o moje życie”, in *To z ojczyzny mojej. Polacy z pomocą Żydom 1939–1945* [This one is from my homeland: Poles who helped Jews, 1939–1945], ed. Władysław Bartoszewski and Zofia Lewinówna (Kraków: Znak, 1969).

is done”¹⁹. This also applies to moments when the witness calls upon himself to participate in the process of recalling the past, engaging in a kind of dialogue with himself, during which he seems to be listening to his own story. Langer observes that these two identity positions cannot be integrated, since the first, exposed to trauma, remains submerged in the overwhelming immediacy of images. This corresponds to the position of “deep memory”, marked by the logic of helplessness, humiliated by the absence of agency, and sunk in the “then”. The second, by contrast, attempts to speak the past, to communicate with it, and sometimes to defend itself against its pressure.

In *The Subtenant*, we repeatedly witness similar dialogues that, significantly, are permeated by a particular irony, functioning as an attempt to figure trauma: its disorder of events, temporal dislocations, disjunctive affects, and uncanny manifestations. These motifs reach their most intense expression in the description of the narrator’s annual trips to Majdanek to commemorate her father’s presumed death²⁰. Both voices undertake this journey together. During it, the subtenant literally floods her socialized alter ego with a stream of traumatic images: the re-enacted story of her mother’s uncle abandoned near Ryki; the confrontation with the interior of a gas chamber; the account of the absurdity of socks made from human hair; and the grotesque, almost surreal image of a grandfather carrying a useless samovar during the liquidation of the ghetto. She compels the second self to participate in the tragic ritual of her father’s furtive commemoration – an act performed without social sanction, in the form of transgression, a breach of museum regulations. The subtenant enters the individual gas chambers and exits them again, laying a bouquet of flowers in each of the three (since she cannot be sure which one consumed her father). An additional note of irony is introduced by the meal she eats behind the barracks (“I’m at home, I want to eat so I eat”²¹), and by the annual closing remark: “Look,” she says, “I’m out. I was lucky again”²².

The subtenant’s sarcasm is a protest against the falsification of Holocaust memory, its silencing and appropriation by the “light ones”. It constitutes a form of protest on behalf of Jewish victims and an attempt to reclaim the true image of her father’s death, which, unlike the imagined Polish death of Major Krall, resembles the Jewish death described in Władysław Szlengel’s famous poem. Her ostentatious and provocative impoliteness targets the socially acceptable image of the Jew or the stranger as someone who accepts his own self-degradation and perceives his identity as incomplete and fragmented, aspiring toward the full identity embodied by the dominant culture, that is, the Polish one. Such an attitude, as Sander Gilman observes, begins with accepting the stereotypical image of oneself as the Other and then, in a gesture akin to Lacanian *méconnaissance*, leads to illusory acts of identification with the cultural ideal and, ultimately, to self-denial²³.

The Jewish pariah figure, however, possesses the ability to practice resistance and to displace this compulsion. Her act of sublocation – the process of shifting and reconfiguring the formation

¹⁹Langer, 61–62.

²⁰According to Robert Kuwałek, the writer’s father, Salomon Krall, most likely perished in the Bełżec extermination camp. See Andrzej Juchniewicz, “Autobiografizm w twórczości Hanny Krall” [Autobiographism in the works of Hanna Krall], *Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich* 1 (2024).

²¹Krall, *The Subtenant*, 33.

²²Krall, *The Subtenant*, 33.

²³See Sander L. Gilman, *Jewish Self-hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of The Jews* (Baltimore, London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 2–6.

of identity based on false assumptions – entails a parodic repetition of the dominant model, its derailment, and a kind of ventriloquial distortion of the phrase, as the narrator repeatedly does by softening the interpellative address “*proszę pana*” (the refrain of her monologue) through the slanting of the *a*, the shifting of stress, and the introduction of rhythmic dissonance, an anacrusis²⁴. It is not accidental that sublocation, as a form of subletting, implies an alternative mode of use and, in medical terminology, a kind of displacement – of a bone, fiber, joint, or lens.

From the perspective of the mature *alter ego*, the subtenant’s trauma is loquacious, ritually repetitive, and trapped within images of the past that engulf the present. At times, however, it proves transferable – as revealed in the “improper” confrontation with Holocaust trauma and the gruesome details of the deaths of close relatives recounted to the London branch of the family, which has not experienced pogroms and refuses to listen to such indecorous stories about the samovar from the Lublin ghetto, the abandoned uncle, or the marks left by the father’s fingernails on the ceiling of the gas chamber. The only outcome of this ostensibly reparative encounter is the bitter identification of an unknown man in a photograph (“This is my father”)²⁵, marked, however, by a question mark – for this suspiciously hasty recognition rests on the stereotypical *punctum* of the “black eyes”. It therefore remains unclear whether the narrator is not once again performing a learned procedure of affiliation, this time with the Jewish family. Upon her return, she discovers that at the bottom of a random samovar, her grandfather had hidden a *mezuzah* containing a scroll with a blessing meant to ensure the multiplication of the family.

We cannot be certain which “I” participates in these scenes, nor which is the actual actor, haunted by the returns of trauma, subjected to the logic of circulation along a Möbius strip between subjective positions and between past and present. The subtenant’s ventriloquial discourse issues from the very heart of a psychic economy traversed by the geometry of an internal crypt, marked by the tendency to generate its own mirrored doubles. The trap of the past is illustrated by the descriptions of the apartments in which the protagonist once hid, with their labyrinthine passages between wardrobe and stove, the indistinct silhouettes of successive landladies, and the salvaged fragments of phrases told years later, which the narrator will go on to repeat to herself. These fragments strive to capture an experience that, although it occurred, ultimately could not be inscribed, by virtue of its excess and its liminal nature. It is no coincidence that the novel ends with a gap, a sentence cut off like Lyotard’s *phrase-affect*²⁶ – necessary to language, yet breaking its symbolic chains of association, serving as the sign of an affective state that, though mute,

²⁴“Sublocation” is a term drawn from the fields of property law and medicine. In its primary sense, it denotes a sublease or subtenancy. See, for example, the entry “sublokacja” in: Michał Arct, *Słownik ilustrowany języka polskiego* [Illustrated Dictionary of the Polish Language] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo M. Arcta, 1925), 405.

²⁵Krall, *The Subtenant*, 37.

²⁶See Jean-François Lyotard, “Zdanie-afekt” [The phrase-affect], translated into Polish by Monika Murawska, in Lyotard, Derrida, Hillis Miller i inni. *Kalifornijska teoria krytyczna. Antologia tekstów* [Lyotard, Derrida, Hillis Miller and others: Californian critical theory. An anthology], ed. Ewa Bobrowska, Monika Murawska, and Magdalena Rudkowska (Warsaw: Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences, 2019), 145–155. According to Lyotard, the phrase-affect is an inarticulable feeling that resists being linked according to the rules of any given discourse; rather, it interrupts and suspends them, producing the damage or harm that the philosopher describes as radical injustice. The phrase-affect signifies meaning without referent—it pertains to pain (or, potentially, pleasure) and is tautegorical, like aisthesis or *Empfindung*. Lyotard refers here to Freud’s distinction between affects and representations of things or words: affects bear witness but represent nothing to anyone. The phrase-affect is improper, inappropriate, even disturbing to the order of discourse itself; it resembles an attack of hysteria, a phobia, or an affective communication linked to a time before logos—to what Lyotard calls *infantia* (childhood).

resonates at the site of rupture, disturbs, and unsettles: “The book is coming to and end, who knows, perhaps it has already ended, and I haven’t even had a Chance to write about”²⁷.

Coda

The critical reception of *The Subtenant* has typically focused on its experimental form, on the problem of conflicting memories, and on the psychosocial consequences of the Holocaust and antisemitism. Yet despite the multilingual nature of trauma, the text ultimately constitutes an act of resilience, a transformation of fear into artistic creation, and thus an attempt to transcend the fatalism of cultural determinism and traumatic inscription. This transformation is made possible, in part, through the ambivalences of mimicry and its capacity to produce distance from the community. As the narrator observes, “You may recover from blackness, but brightness is incurable”²⁸.

Krall reflects the gradual stages of a working-through process that never reaches completion and that serves to articulate her own subtenant condition – so that, as the narrator emphasizes, “And now you are going to survive without rejecting sadness”²⁹. In her case, the repetition of trauma in the mode of aesthetic anamnesis entails a form of phantasmatic reparation and self-therapeutic liberation from subtenancy, achieved through an act of self-forgiveness and the symbolic granting of ownership, and thus the right to inhabit her own intimate space, in the closing scene set by the River Narew. This moment can be read as a reparative gesture of reconciliation with the subtenant aspect of her subjectivity and as an attempt to restore genealogical continuity. It takes the form of advice the narrator offers to her daughter, urging an internal reversal of the direction of cultural degradation as the fundamental condition of survival, of overcoming paralyzing shame and reclaiming love for oneself.

translated by Paulina Zagórska

²⁷Krall, *The Subtenant*, 127.

²⁸Krall, *The Subtenant*, 113.

²⁹Krall, *The Subtenant*, 104.

References

- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin. *Post-colonial Studies. The Key Concepts*. London, New York: Routledge, 2007.
- Arct, Michał. *Słownik ilustrowany języka polskiego* [Illustrated dictionary of the Polish language]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo M. Arcta, 1925.
- Bhabha, Homi K. "Mimikra i ludzie. O dwuznaczności dyskursu kolonialnego" [Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse], in: *Miejsca kultury* [The Location of Culture], translated by Tomasz Dobrogoszcz, 79–88. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2010.
- Ghandi, Leela. "Globalizacja, hybryda, diaspora. Wzajemne transformacje" [Globalization, hybridity, diaspora: mutual transformations] in *Teoria postkolonialna. Wprowadzenie krytyczne* [Postcolonial theory: a critical introduction], translated by Jacek Serwański 111–127. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2008.
- Gilman, Sander L. *Jewish Self-hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of The Jews*. Baltimore, London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990.
- Huddart, David. *Homi Bhabha*. London, New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Janicka, Elżbieta. "Świadkowie własnej sprawy. Polska narracja dominująca wobec Zagłady w trakcie Zagłady" [Witnesses in their own trial: the Polish dominant narrative on the Holocaust during the Holocaust]. *Studia Litteraria et Historica* 7 (2018): 1–82.
- Janicka, Elżbieta, Joanna Tokarska-Bakir. "Sublokatorstwo jako kategoria kultury polskiej" [Subtenancy as a category of Polish culture]. *Studia Litteraria et Historica* 2 (2013): 1–2.
- Juchniewicz, Andrzej. "Autobiografizm w twórczości Hanny Krall" [Autobiographism in the works of Hanna Krall]. *Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich* 1 (2024): 175–191.
- Keff, Bożena. *Strażnicy Fatum. Literatura dekad powojennych o Zagładzie, Polakach i Żydach. Dyskurs publiczny wobec antysemityzmu*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2020.
- Krall, Hanna. "Gra o moje życie" [A game for my life]. W: *Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej. Polacy z pomocą Żydom 1939–1945* [This one is from my homeland: Poles who helped Jews, 1939–1945], edited by Władysław Bartoszewski, Zofia Lewinówna, 411. Kraków: Znak, 1969.
- – –. *Sublokatorka*. Warszawa: Iskry, 1989.
- – –. *The Subtenant; To Outwit God*, translated by Jarosław Anders; Lawrence Weschler and Joanna Stasińska. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1992.
- Langer, Lawrence L. *Świadektwa Zagłady w rumowisku pamięci* [Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory]. Translated by Marcin Szuster. Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2015.
- Loomba, Ania. "Hybrydowość" [Hybridity]. In: *Kolonializm/Postkolonializm* [Colonialism/Postcolonialism], translated by Natalia Bloch, 183–194. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2011.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. "Zdanie-afekt" [The phrase-affect]. Translated by Monika Murawska. In: *Lyotard, Derrida, Hillis Miller i inni. Kalifornijska teoria krytyczna. Antologia tekstów* [Lyotard, Derrida, Hillis Miller and others: Californian critical theory. An anthology], edited by Ewa Bobrowska, Monika Murawska, Magdalena Rudkowska, 145–155. Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2019.
- Mandziej, Iwona. „Między reportażem a mikropowieścią: o «Sublokatorce» Hanny Krall”. *Pamiętnik Literacki* 3 (1998): 85–97.
- Matyjaszek, Konrad. *Produkcja przestrzeni żydowskiej w dawnej i współczesnej Polsce* [The production of Jewish space in past and contemporary Poland]. Kraków: Universitas, 2019.
- Melchior, Małgorzata. *Zagłada a tożsamość. Polscy Żydzi ocaleni na "aryjskich papierach". Analiza doświadczenia biograficznego* [The Holocaust and identity: Polish Jews saved on "Aryan papers." An analysis of biographical experience]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Filozofii i Socjologii PAN, 2004.

Michlic, Joanna Beata. *Piętno Zagłady. Wojenna i powojenna historia oraz pamięć żydowskich dzieci ocalałych w Polsce*. Tłum. z jęz. ang. Adam Musiał. Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2020.

Roszak, Joanna. *Krall. Tkanie* [Krall. Weaving]. Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2024.

Tokarska-Bakir, Joanna. "Hassliebe. Żydowska samonienawiść w ujęciu Sander L. Gilmana (część pierwsza: od Hermana z Moguncji do Johannesesa Pfefferkorna)" [Hassliebe: Jewish self-hatred in Sander L. Gilman's approach (Part one: from Hermann of Mainz to Johannes Pfefferkorn)]. *Studia Litteraria et Historica* 2 (2013): 27–59.

Wojdowski, Bogdan. "Dzienniki (fragmenty)" [Diaries (fragments)]. Selected by Małgorzata Bojanowska. *Podkowiński Magazyn Kulturalny* 1-2 (2008): 19–21.

Wołk, Marcin. „Ja — ona, ona — ja. Gramatyka podmiotu w autobiograficznej prozie Idy Fink i Hanny Krall”. W: *Stosowność i forma. Jak opowiadać o Zagładzie?*, red. Michał Głowiński, Katarzyna Chmielewska, Katarzyna Makaruk, Alina Molisak, Tomasz Żukowski, 285–301. Kraków: TAIWPN Universitas, 2005.

Żukowski, Tomasz. *Wielki retusz. Jak zapomnieliśmy, że Polacy zabijali Żydów* [The great retouch: How we forgot that Poles killed Jews]. Warszawa: Wielka Litera, 2018.

KEYWORDS

t r a u m a

ANITISEMITISM IN POLISH LITERATURE

ABSTRACT:

In the article *Crypt, Mimicry, Genealogy: Languages of Trauma in Hanna Krall's Subtenant*, I interpret Krall's novel through the lens of Homi Bhabha's theory of mimicry, research on genealogical imagination, and trauma studies. In my view, these categories also have the potential to reshape the framework of the novel's historical and literary positioning, as they make it possible to read *Subtenant* alongside other Jewish narratives of the same period—texts equally misaligned with the norms of collective memory, as they articulate the unsettling experiences of the “subtenant” diaspora, which preserved the memory of the Holocaust and of Polish antisemitism, and gave expression to genealogies and “impure” family histories deemed non-normative from the perspective of Polish culture.

JEWISH SELF-HATRED

mimicry

*Holocaust***NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:**

Bartosz Dąbrowski – Ph.D., Assistant Professor in the Department of the History of Polish Literature at the Institute of Polish Philology, University of Gdańsk. Author of *Mit dionizyjski Karola Szymanowskiego* [Karol Szymanowski's Dionysian Myth] (2001) and *Szymanowski. Muzyka jako autobiografia* [Szymanowski: Music as Autobiography] (2010). His research focuses on issues of postmemory and the intergenerational transmission of trauma in contemporary prose.

Trauma and Reality: On Hanna Krall's *Synapsy Marii H.* (Maria H.'s Synapses)

Beata Przymuszała

ORCID: 0000-0002-8915-748X

"This is a story about remembering and not remembering - of Maria Twardokęs-Hrabowska (based on hundreds, perhaps thousands of her letters to me) and Maria Hrabowska (based on her memoirs)," - this a note preceding the text; a note that also serves as the motto of *Synapsy Marii H.* [*Maria H.'s Synapses*].

In a conversation with Hanna Krall, journalist Katarzyna Janowska, highlighting these very words, remarks:

Memory is as much the protagonist of your book as oblivion. Often, it's unclear whether what your characters remember truly happened, or whether they only imagine it that way. You used to try very scrupulously to determine what was real and what was the imagination of memory. Is it still true today?

Krall's response offers an important interpretive clue:

Marysia often doesn't know whether she did something or whether she should have done it. But what matters isn't what actually happened in her life - it's how she remembers it, or the other way round. What kind of memory we wish we didn't have¹.

¹ Hanna Krall: dlaczego jedni ratują, a inni chcą zabić? Myślę o tym coraz częściej (wywiad). Z Hanną Krall rozmawia Katarzyna Janowska [Hanna Krall: why do some people save and others want to kill? I think about it more and more often (interview). Katarzyna Janowska in conversation with Hanna Krall], <https://kultura.onet.pl/wywiady-i-artykuly/hanna-krall-wywiad-synapsy-marii-h-o-czym-jest-ksiazka/v671ybv>, accessed: 26.10. 2023.

The statement “what matters isn’t what actually happened” does not imply a rejection of factuality. Instead, it shifts the focus and changes the lens through which we look.

Synapsy Marii H. continues the poetics characteristic of the author of *Zdążyć przed Panem Bogiem* [*Shielding the Flame*]. As Joanna Roszak insightfully revealed in her monograph on Krall, the essence of this poetics lies in weaving: interlacing motifs, layering stories, and allowing histories to overlap.

The figure of Maria already appeared in *Katar sienny* [*Hay Fever*] and in *To ty jesteś Daniel* [*So You Are Daniel*]², reaffirming the idea of writing as an embodied act, a process of weaving that is as physical as it is textual:

Krall’s reportage [...] is created as much through the precise technique of weaving as through collage and montage, resembling a hypertext - a notion that may also be linked to arachnology and Nancy K. Miller’s metaphor of women’s writing as the spinning of a spider’s web. It involves a strong symbiosis with the material - an experience of writing *through* the body, with the suspension of distance from one’s own work. [...]

The thematic threads in Krall’s reportage intertwine, gently illuminating the same motifs and characters. Krall says of each of them that they became a part of her: Marek Edelman, Apolonia Machczyńska, Adam Boniecki, Maria Hrabowska, Barbara Sadowska, Axel von dem Bussche [...]³.

Each person “became a part of her,” and at the same time, the writer’s own experiences and emotions form a “filter through which we read”⁴ her texts. Noting this biographical dimension, Roszak exposes the almost somatic - certainly deeply affective - nature of Krall’s writing about specific, chosen lives:

For Hen and Krall, writing is a form of existence through preserving the memory of existence. [...] Her texts, minimalist yet immense, unfold behind the screen of the third person: they are the reverse of oblivion.⁵

It is crucial to highlight this form of “screen”, which allows the writer’s experiences to reflect and refract through the trajectories of other lives. But distortion - the imperfect reflection - is equally essential. As Andrzej Juchniewicz observes, Krall in a sense hides behind her narratives, unwilling for readers to adopt a purely biographical mode of reading:

The invoked relationships cannot be classified according to any ready-made typology, as Krall’s works devoted to other protagonists (Izolda R., Maria Twardokęs) contain no overt references to her own life. Revealing what the protagonists might have felt or seen would inevitably fracture the delicate structure of her reportage and expose her through a first-person account. Krall hints at certain biographical traces in interviews, and through them one can reconstruct elements of her life story⁶.

² Andrzej Juchniewicz, „Autobiografizm w twórczości Hanny Krall” [„Autobiographism in the works of Hanna Krall”], *Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich* 67 (2024): 186.

³ Joanna Roszak, *Krall: tkanie* [Krall: weaving] (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2024), 174–175, 176–177.

⁴ Roszak, 200.

⁵ Roszak, 101, 110.

⁶ Juchniewicz, 187.

At the same time, Juchniewicz emphasises that this act of concealment - retreating behind the stories - not only builds a protective sphere of intimacy, into which one should not intrude, but also carries an ethical dimension. It universalises Krall's gesture, highlighting the necessity of recognising the suffering of others, not only of those directly marked by the Holocaust⁷.

In *Synapsy Marii H.*, the intertwined fates of two women named Maria - the first, a survivor of the Holocaust, and the second, her daughter-in-law raising an autistic son whose inner world remains inaccessible - reveal a subtle confrontation between two forms of trauma: the historical and the existential one. The former is culturally recognised as a turning point in the study of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); the latter arises from the ongoing, intimate reality of a child's illness.

The book opens with the story of women who chose to end both their own lives and that of their sick child. The second fragment recounts Marysia's mother-in-law's reaction upon learning that her grandson is autistic: a response framed as a distant rebuke aimed at her daughter-in-law. The third one presents the behaviour of that same mother-in-law's who continually stresses her need for isolation, even in close relationships⁸. Marysia, who cares for her son, lives under chronic stress. Her constant worry about his well-being, the fear of how others will react to his behaviour, and the dread for his future, when she and her husband are no longer there, can lead to emotional instability and over-sensitivity to others' needs (pp. 48, 70). These are reactions often seen in those who have experienced trauma. Marysia:

"...was wondering what she was supposed to feel (p. 13)

She cannot distinguish

between what she wanted to do, what she thought she ought to do, and what she actually did.

In short - she doesn't fully understand her past self (p. 33).

This inability to define her emotions may stem from personality, upbringing, cultural conditioning, or may function as a defence mechanism. In her letters, Marysia tries to reconstruct her life, yet recounting events does not necessarily equal understanding them. She supports others - her son, her mother-in-law - but rarely feels strong or confident herself. Paradoxically, she seems strongest when helping others. She researches, reads, and tries to make sense of things:

She read an article by a physicist. He wrote that, really, no one understands quantum theory.

There are equations and correlations, but nothing truly explains anything.

So she isn't the only one who doesn't understand.

You can know and not know something at the same time. How very interesting (p. 95).

This sense of simultaneously knowing and not knowing reflects not only her struggle to comprehend but also her difficulty remembering, and her inability to connect. The absence of

⁷ Juchniewicz. „The application of a third-person narrative bears the hallmarks of an ethical gesture. A recounted history becomes emblematic of wars and genocides” – Juchniewicz, 187.

⁸ Hanna Krall, *Synapsy Marii H.* [Maria H.'s synapses] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2020), 9, 10, 11. Other page citations can be found within the text.

dialogue, of mutual understanding, of any alternative perspective, is particularly painful in relation to her son. She lives in constant fear for him, forced to guess what he feels or needs:

Her son

screamed and slapped his face with his hands.

He went silent.

He walked into her room, as if he wanted to say something, as if he were searching for something.

She didn't know why he was screaming, what he was searching for, or what he wanted to say.

He left.

He lay down.

He was half-singing, half-whimpering. She was afraid to fall asleep, afraid that his scream would wake her.

She finally slept and dreamt that her son got lost and she couldn't find him.

She woke relieved it was a dream - but then he started screaming again, this time for real (p. 61).

The restrained description focuses on the son's behaviours, while the mother's fear surfaces only through her dream. The image of losing the child, being unable to reach him, is not merely a nightmare; it encapsulates her waking experience. The dream gathers her anxiety, and the boy's cry upon waking confirms that the nightmare never truly ends. What was a dream was not just a dream, because she keeps searching for some contact with her son and cannot find it.

The inability to communicate shapes not only Marysia's bond with her son but also her interactions with her mother-in-law. The latter's emotional distance manifests as a preference for solitude and self-sufficiency - a desire, as she claims, not to be a burden ("...when she visits next time, she would rather stay at a hotel. So as not to inconvenience them" - p.11). At first glance, this insistence on independence may seem cold or dismissive, but as the narrative unfolds, it appears to be a defence mechanism. Marysia maintains contact with her ("**She calls her husband's mother every day**. Like she used to call her own mother" (p. 12), she talks to her and listens to her stories about the crime novels the mother-in-law reads and fragments of memories she unexpectedly chooses to share. These recollections are fragmentary, opaque: a man with a child to whom her own mother once gave water she used to cook noodles (p. 19); the story of that mother's death in the ghetto (p. 75); and a terse recollection of the Umschlagplatz, where, by coincidence, the family narrowly escaped deportation, only to perish later in unknown circumstances (pp. 81-83).

By sheer luck the mother-in-law was not shot dead by a Ukrainian guard at the Umschlagplatz. Everything she experienced echoes inside her, strengthening her. On September 11, 2001, as she was coming down from the Manhattan skyscraper hit by a plane, she was reassuring herself ("...there's smoke, a lot of it, and the heat from the fire, but are they shooting? No one's shooting. They're not setting dogs on us. There's one dog, but it's leading a blind man" - p. 79). And yet that same memory later fed her anxiety ("...if I managed to survive then, I might not be so lucky the second time around" - p. 80). The echo of the Umschlagplatz returns when the book's protagonist talks about how her mother-in-law overdosed on sleeping pills and could not be awakened. The narrator's description captures both concern and tenderness, revealing how Marysia sees in the elderly woman traces of the frightened child she once was:

Her husband's mother spoke in her sleep, almost angrily. Her tiny fists - delicate, small, therefore „tiny fists”, not „fists” - were clenched, her legs had slipped off the bed, as if she wanted to leave. She straightened her legs and uncurled her fingers, but the mother did not wake. A few hours later, her tiny fists were clenched again and she wanted to leave (p. 107).

Perhaps this is not an image of a little girl after all? The evocative detail of the “tiny fists” conjures the vision of a little girl, yet we cannot know what that little woman is dreaming about or why her body remains tense, suspended mid-motion.

Here, one woman's story is told through another's gaze. Both are profoundly affected by experiences that have scarred their lives. As readers, we receive only fragments, taken out of context: snippets of conversations, traces of reading, glimpses of daily routine. Nothing aligns neatly, yet certain coincidences - especially in the mother-in-law's fate - are haunting. The book resembles a broken children's kaleidoscope: we hold its pieces in our hands but cannot reassemble them into any coherent pattern.

One Maria - Marysia - lives through every intentional gesture of her son, fearing the reactions of others (believing they see him as a monster, someone to be feared). She values - seemingly disproportionately - the simplest signs of kindness or politeness. Yet perhaps it is not disproportionate at all; perhaps she merely perceives how the community behaves toward those who are different. That is why she so deeply appreciates that the neighbours allowed her son to play with their cat - so much so that after moving away she sent a letter of thanks to the local newspaper for this gesture:

She sent a letter to the local newspaper. In it, she thanked Mr and Mrs Ramsey and their cat, Louis, for the time they had shared - and for allowing their cat to play with her autistic son. “I truly cannot say how much this friendship has meant to us,” the letter concluded (p. 48).

The other Maria - the mother-in-law - does not wish to impose. By refusing hospitality (perhaps not fully realising that, in doing so, she is being hurtful), she chooses her own solitude. That is why, even during her visits, she withdraws to her room, perhaps as a way of escaping the possibility of being hurt.

Both women seem acutely sensitive to stimuli; the world overwhelms them; and yet, in their own ways, they manage to function day by day. Each relies on defensive mechanisms learned long ago, survival strategies developed when reality was unbearable. But has that reality truly changed?

The first issue worth noting is the fragmentary nature of their accounts: the way impressions and scenes emerge through spontaneous associations. The older Maria, a Holocaust survivor, recalls isolated moments and sensory details, as if mentioning them in passing. She appears to live in a state of constant tension, not always aware of its source. The younger Maria, struggling to ensure her son's wellbeing, cannot “understand her own story,” nor grasp her emotional responses (“...she wondered what she ought to feel.” – p. 13). The metaphor of a children's broken kaleidoscope may also point to the experience of people scarred by trauma to such an extent that they are incapable of reporting their feelings. Research on trauma demonstrates that:

“[...] memories of trauma may lack an explicit verbal component. They may be organised at an implicit or perceptual level, without any accompanying narrative about what happened. [...]”

After listening to hundreds of children and adults recount their experiences of trauma, we have found that such memories are initially stored at a nonverbal level [...] By its very nature, traumatic memory is dissociative and is first preserved as sensory impressions without a linguistic component⁹.

Thus, intense affectivity becomes bound to recurring sensory images: flashbacks that disturb stability and unsettle perception. This perhaps explains the recurring sense of fragmentation in both Maria’s accounts: crumbs of broken caleidoscopes, which do not even attempt any coherent patterns. Research on traumatised people also shows that:

Even after a long time, and even after developing a coherent narrative about the traumatic experience, most subjects report that the trauma continues to return to them as sensory impressions and emotional states. The persistence of trauma-related intrusions contradicts the assumption - central to many therapeutic methods - that articulating trauma in words is an effective way to eliminate flashbacks.¹⁰

This insight, drawn from clinical practice, is crucial: organising one’s experiences into a narrative form does not necessarily weaken their emotional impact. Verbalisation can have therapeutic value, but it does not guarantee mastery over trauma.

Trauma alters the perception of the world: reality after trauma feels fundamentally different from what came before¹¹. As Paul Conti observes in his popular study of post-traumatic experience: “Trauma has fogged our mirrors and our windows. We no longer see ourselves clearly, and we perceive others only as threats.”¹² The metaphor captures an essential truth: trauma is not only collision with an incomprehensible reality¹³; it also reshapes the capacity to perceive reality at all. The protective mechanisms it triggers blur the sense of the real, simultaneously shielding and isolating the sufferer. Just as trauma induces the feeling that what is happening cannot be real - the dissociative reaction - so later encounters with reality are coloured by the expectation that the worst may yet return. Even when calm seems restored, dread remains latent, pulsing beneath awareness.

Trauma is like a wind-up toy that jumps about chaotically: unpredictable, impossible to control [...] “In reality, trauma works more secretly. [...] Without our awareness, it takes control of our limbic system, distorts our memories, and changes our brain. We feel, think, decide, and act differently than before. We become different people, often without realising it¹⁴.

⁹ Bessel A. van der Kolk, „Trauma a pamięć” [„Trauma and memory”], in: *Traumatyczny stres* [Traumatic stress], ed. by Bessel A. van der Kolk, Alexander C. McFarlane, Lars Weisaeth, transl. by Paweł Luboński (Warszawa: Czarna Owca, 2025), 386, 387, 388.

¹⁰ van der Kolk, 390.

¹¹ Paul Conti, *Trauma: niewidzialna epidemia. Jak ją ośwoić* [Trauma: an invisible epidemic. How to tame it], transl. by Bartłomiej Kotarski (Białystok: Wydawnictwo Kobięce, 2023), 44.

¹² Conti, 153.

¹³ Agata Bielik-Robson, „Słowo i trauma: czas, narracja, tożsamość” [„Word and trauma: time, narrative, identity”], *Teksty Drugie* 5 (2004): 25.

¹⁴ Conti, 188–189.

Losing access to reality is not necessarily conscious. For outside observers, it may seem evident, but for those who live through trauma, the sense of reality feels sharper, not weaker; they believe they perceive more clearly than others. Conti's image of the "jumping toy" captures how defence mechanisms function: the mind oscillates between moments of intense intrusion - when memories break through vividly - and periods of emotional withdrawal, when numbness sets in¹⁵. This inner pendulum creates an exhausting cycle of tension and release.

[...] both the social environment tends to withdraw from the trauma sufferer, and the sufferer turns inward, away from others. Trauma leads to diminished social engagement, reduced interest in family, and increased feelings of alienation and mistrust¹⁶.

Trauma not only closes one off from the world but it also closes the world within the boundaries of the traumatised person's perception. Reality becomes filtered through trauma; indeed, trauma itself becomes reality. When it occurs, it collides with the real, and becomes the only certain reality (when reality is not traumatic, it is not traumatic yet; trauma is merely latent, but always present).

This might explain why Marysia fears that her son's caregiver has fallen ill because of him ('Oh no,' said Mrs Scott. 'Your son doesn't cause any trouble. Quite the opposite. Because of him, I've smiled more often than usual'. – p. 70). Meanwhile, the older Maria, when watching a movie together, suddenly recalls that man and child from the ghetto; those who were given "noodle water" and who slept on a stairwell in the ghetto (p. 19).¹⁷ One can only infer the states in which the two women find themselves: the older one reveals fragments of her memories almost inadvertently, while the younger one speaks more about herself, yet her accounts never directly name her experiences or define what is happening to her.

Ewa Kobylińska-Dehe identifies various ways in which trauma manifests itself, emphasising its non-verbal dimension:

Silence, too, has communicative value and can become a space for working through trauma; if only we learn to listen to it. Speaking about trauma not only offers relief; it is also a burden. Silence can serve a containing function. Working through trauma takes place not only through speech, but also through scenes, dreams, silence, and symbolic actions. [...] There is no doubt that severe trauma resists both psychic and symbolic representation. The concepts of *scenic memory* and *body memory* assume that representation does not vanish altogether, but takes a specific form: through a scene

¹⁵Krzysztof Szwejca, „Psychiatria a trauma” [„Psychiatry and trauma”], in: Konteksty psychiatrii [Contexts of psychiatry], ed. by Bogdan de Barbaro (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2014), 258.

¹⁶Szwejca, 270.

¹⁷Researchers point to these states, recurring as a result of incidental stimuli, also in the context of involving other people in them: „In the long run dissociation leads to lack of stability and living in constant expectation of another catastrophe. Bottled memories can be released any moment and flood the psyche. Traumatised people, in their attempt at shedding that burden, involve others in their situation. This is how scenes are created, in which separated fragments of a traumatic experience manifest themselves as facial expressions, look, intonation. Scenic memory is pervasive in everyday lives of traumatised people, adopting externalised forms, which serve as warnings to the environment [...]”. Ewa Kobylińska-Dehe, „Scena i pamięć ciała – o przekazach międzypokoleniowych” [„A body's scene and memory – on transgenerational communication”], in: Psychoanaliza w cieniu wojny i Zagłady [Psychoanalysis in the shadow of war and the Holocaust], ed. by Ewa Kobylińska-Dehe (Kraków: Universitas, 2020), 465–466.

and through the body. Even that which is not verbally represented is somehow communicated as tension or withdrawal.¹⁸

Attempts to reconstruct emotional states are always risky - they can easily misinterpret or overreach - but they remain the only available path, not so much for approaching the two protagonists as for revealing their motivations, sketching their inner contours. Kobylińska-Dehe's distinction between *scenic memory* and *body memory* refers to the possibility of working through trauma, yet it is not relevant for noticing external symptoms. Her remark on trivialising bodily signs and symptoms, as a consequence of Cartesian dualism, is important. For both Marias, we can hardly speak of "working through" in the therapeutic sense. Instead, Krall presents brief, almost accidental traces of lapses of control and symptoms of tension, which are the products of trauma.

The mother-in-law can no longer recall certain facts. She knows *something* happened, but cannot, or will not, reconstruct the details:

Her husband's mother doesn't remember

how her mother died.

It's not that she doesn't know - she once did - but she doesn't remember.

Once she said that her mother died of a heart attack at the ghetto gate. [...]

Then again she said, she did die of a heart attack, but it happened the day before, and it had nothing to do with the gate or the policeman. [...]

Lately, she has said that she actually doesn't know how it was.

Everything that happened after the Umschlagplatz is as if under water: blurred and indistinct. (pp. 75-76)

Her difficulty remembering may point precisely to the event's exceptionality, to its emotional charge. The blurring of memory, its lack of sharpness, becomes a symptom in itself. This "not remembering" paradoxically confirms the existence and depth of loss of the mother-in-law's mother.¹⁹

The younger Maria's fear for her son, in turn, takes the form of obsessive analyses of his behaviours, conjecturing, searching for causes in lack of other means of communication. This burden is visible, for instance, in her helpless expectation: she does not want to be the only one who has to know what to do when her son is not at ease („What do you want me to do?", her husband asked. She didn't know what she wanted. She wanted her husband to know what to do" – p. 108). The problem is not so much her husband's helplessness as Maria's conviction that she is responsible for all decisions (which can be read from her husband's question). She is the one who has to face her son's disease alone, sensitive to every gesture, frown, change in his behaviour ("Her son didn't put back his T-shirts [...]. He always does. Always. Could this mean an approaching depressive episode?" – p. 109). She searches for clues to help her

¹⁸Kobylińska-Dehe, 474.

¹⁹As noted by Krzysztof Szewajca: „It is impossible to keep trauma away from consciousness. Traumatic information invades awareness (intrusion) and attacks as a living, tangible emotional experience (flashback), which evokes emotional experiences similar to those which accompany the act of being punched: fear, helplessness, humiliation, shame, guilt and hurt. A traumatised person oscillates between an intrusive experience [...] and a generalised withdrawal [...]" – Szewajca, 258.

understand his behaviour, emotions, thoughts. She wonders whether her son, who can read aloud but does not speak, understands the words he reads (“It’s strange: her son can read aloud, even though he doesn’t speak” – p. 113). Maria doesn’t know what world he inhabits. As Krall comments:

Marysia has an autistic son. There’s a whole chapter about him in the book. In truth, no one knows what world that boy inhabits. No one knows why he cries, screams, laughs, or scratches his face bloody. He corrects the number on a car plate, the teacher’s signature, the things in the wardrobe. He corrects the world²⁰.

The world in which Marysia’s son lives remains inaccessible to her. The world of her mother-in-law is still confined within the invisible walls of the ghetto. Marysia’s own world has condensed around the life of her ailing child.

As Anna Tatar observes in her study of Krall’s method,

For Krall, the story is the most important thing. She protects it: from readers who seek first and foremost entertainment, from her own potential fascination with dramatic events, and, not without moral dilemmas, from the protagonists of her reportages [...] ²¹.

It is hard to say whether *Synapsy Marii H.* is a story of protection. What matters, however, is Krall’s persistent effort to capture the reality her characters inhabit. Trouble is, this is a reality shaped and shadowed by trauma. In her book Krall introduces this pathway of accessing reality, which is why she says that “it’s not about what really happened in her life, but about how she remembered it; or the other way around. It’s about what kind of memory we wish we didn’t have” ²².

Marysia turns to popular science books in her attempts to understand her experiences:

Carlo Rovelli explains to her that it is the brain that has built bridges between the past and the present. The past has left traces in the synapses, in the connections between nerve cells. Synapses... Very interesting (p. 118).

The influence of experiences (particularly of emotionally charged experiences) is one of the central questions of contemporary science: research on biological consequences of trauma is ongoing²³. The title’s focus on memory inscribed in synapses highlights how Krall endows that memory with cultural meaning. Returning to Roszak’s concept of weaving in Krall’s work, we might recall a line from her earlier book *Jedenaście [Eleven]*: “Erudite memory, imprisoned in letters, archives, libraries, and documents. And the memory in synapses, in people, the most precious kind.”²⁴ This embodied memory is preserved and accessible (manifests itself) through

²⁰Hanna Krall: dlaczego jedni ratują, a inni chcą zabić?

²¹Anna Tatar, „Wobec ocalałych i ich opowieści. Elementy warsztatu reporterskiego Hanny Krall” [„In the face of survivors and their stories. Hanna Krall’s reporter tools”], *Pamiętnik Literacki* 3 (2016): 116.

²²Hanna Krall: dlaczego jedni ratują, a inni chcą zabić?

²³Szwajca, 269.

²⁴Hanna Krall, *Jedenaście [Eleven]* (Kraków: 2024), 57.

gestures, flashbacks, fragments of images. It is unverifiable yet tangible, often surfacing at the edge of articulation.

Understanding the reality of those who have endured extreme suffering demands not only empathy but also a willingness to accept that their experiences remain present, and constitute their lived reality. It matters *how* they remember, even if *why* they remember that way is beyond comprehension. This realisation also delineates the ethical boundary of access to their world.

Synapsy Marii H. is therefore a book about memory and about the reality of that memory. Maria, the mother-in-law, is fearful of who will remember the man and the child drinking noodle water. In *The Reality Is Not What It Seems*, Carlo Rovelli writes:

The essence of a human being is not their inner structure, but the network of personal, familial, and social relations. It is these that make us who we are and protect us. As human beings, we are those whom others know us to be, and those whom we know ourselves to be²⁵.

Memory and forgetting thus are forms of accessing reality. For many, the reality perceived through trauma is the only reality they know. Yet it is difficult for others, especially those untouched by similar experiences, to acknowledge such reality. Following from Krall's commentary on *Synapsy Marii H.* ("What kind of memory do we wish we didn't have?"), I would like to address the issue of reactions to the suffering of others. Recent studies on post-traumatic experience stress the role of the community in providing genuine support:

On the one hand, society resists having its illusions of safety and predictability shattered by people who are the living proof of the fragility of that safety. On the other hand, many victims struggle to translate their trauma into a language comprehensible to others. Unable to talk about their experiences, even to themselves, without re-traumatising themselves, they remain unable to articulate their needs [...] The reluctance of bystanders to engage with the emotions of the hurt people, combined with the latter's inability to express what they feel and need, makes it difficult for them to overcome the trauma's grip.²⁶

This challenging social dynamic exposes a troubling intersection between the near-inexpressibility of traumatic reality and fear of being confronted with an experience that reveals the fragility of the images of that reality. What memories do we reject? What reality are we afraid of? Which issues do we banish from conscious visions of reality? *Synapsy Marii H.* confronts these questions head-on.

Yet again, one can return to the metaphorical gesture of weaving a story. In her book *Jedenaście* Krall retells the story of „people on the move” on the Polish eastern border. She writes:

²⁵Carlo Rovelli, *Rzeczywistość nie jest tym, czym się wydaje. Droga do grawitacji kwantowej/elementarna struktura rzeczy* [Reality is not what it seems. The road to quantum gravity/ elementary structure of things], transl. by Michał Czerny (Łódź: Feeria Science, 2017), 274.

²⁶Alexander C. McFarlane, Bessel A. van der Kolk, „Trauma jako wyzwanie dla społeczeństwa” [„Trauma as social challenge”], in: *Traumatyczny stres*, 39–40.

What does an autistic boy have to do with people on the move?
Nothing. It's just that one begins to wonder – should I write about him?
As if people on the move made the autistic boy a little less important.

Foolish talk, isn't it? ²⁷

Therefore, she asks, are there better and worse traumas? The trauma of a grandma who still is/ is not at the Umschlagplatz, and the trauma of her autistic grandson... The trauma of a daughter-in-law and mother, affected by her child's illness.

The ending of *Synapsy Marii H.*:

She slipped and fell. She wasn't able to get up, she crawled to a spot which was not covered in ice and she rested on her longer leg. She didn't break anything but something hurts, ligaments or muscle.

She felt sleepy (p. 119)

Sleep signifies a disconnection from reality, an attempt to step away from it, to forget. But, as Krall demonstrated, the dreams of her protagonist and her mother-in-law offer no escape from the trauma; in fact, they can manifest it²⁸.

In Krall's book, trauma is reality: a psychological, existential, and cognitive challenge. This we seldom admit, even to ourselves.

translated by Justyna Rogos-Hebda

²⁷Krall, *Jedenaście*, 90.

²⁸„Nightmares and problems with falling asleep mean that even the path of escape into unconsciousness is closed” – Alexander C. McFarlane, Rachel Yehuda, „Odporność, podatność i przebieg reakcji potraumatycznych” [„Immunity, sensitivity and the progress of post-traumatic reactions”], in: *Traumacyjny stres*, 241.

References

- Bielik-Robson, Agata. „Słowo i trauma: czas, narracja, tożsamość”. *Teksty Drugie* 5 (2004): 23–34.
- Conti, Paul. *Trauma: niewidzialna epidemia. Jak ją ośwoić*. Transl. by Bartłomiej Kotarski. Białystok: Wydawnictwo Kobiectwo, 2023.
- Hanna Krall: dlaczego jedni ratują, a inni chcą zabić? *Myszę o tym coraz częściej (wywiad)*. Z Hanną Krall rozmawia Katarzyna Janowska. <https://kultura.onet.pl/wywiady-i-artykuly/hanna-krall-wywiad-synapsy-marii-h-o-czym-jest-ksiazka/v671ybv>. Accessed: 26.10.2023.
- Juchniewicz, Andrzej. „Autobiografizm w twórczości Hanny Krall”. *Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich* 67 (2024): 175–191.
- Kobylińska-Dehe, Ewa. „Scena i pamięć ciała – o przekazach międzypokoleniowych”. In: *Psychoanaliza w cieniu wojny i Zagłady*, ed. by Ewa Kobylińska-Dehe, 439–479. Kraków: Universitas, 2020.
- Kolk, Bessel A. van der. „Trauma a pamięć”. In: *Traumatyczny stres*, ed. by Bessel A. van der Kolk, Alexander C. McFarlane, Lars Weisaeth, transl. by Paweł Luboński, 375–406. Warszawa: Czarna Owca, 2025.
- Krall, Hanna. *Jedenaście*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo a5, 2024.
- – –. *Synapsy Marii H.* Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2020.
- McFarlane, Alexander C., Bessel A. van der Kolk, „Trauma jako wyzwanie dla społeczeństwa”. In: *Traumatyczny stres*, ed. by Bessel A. van der Kolk, Alexander C. McFarlane, Lars Weisaeth, transl. Paweł Luboński, 35–67. Warszawa: Czarna Owca, 2025.
- McFarlane, Alexander C., Rachel Yehuda. „Odporność, podatność i przebieg reakcji potraumatycznych”. In: *Traumatyczny stres*, ed. by Bessel A. van der Kolk, Alexander C. McFarlane, Lars Weisaeth, transl. by Paweł Luboński, 210–245. Warszawa: Czarna Owca, 2025.
- Roszak, Joanna. *Krall: tkanie*. Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2024.
- Rovelli, Carlo. *Rzeczywistość nie jest tym, czym się wydaje. Droga do grawitacji kwantowej/elementarna struktura rzeczy*. Transl. by Michał Czerny. Łódź: Feeria Science, 2017.
- Szwajca, Krzysztof. „Psychiatria a trauma”. In: *Konteksty psychiatrii*, ed. by Bogdan de Barbaro, 255–274. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2014.
- Tatar, Anna. „Wobec ocalałych i ich opowieści. Elementy warsztatu reporterskiego Hanny Krall”. *Pamiętnik Literacki* 3 (2016): 93–117.

KEYWORDS

the Holocaust

trauma

ABSTRACT:

Drawing on the structure of Hanna Krall's texts, the article demonstrates how *Synapsy Marii H.* [*Maria H.'s Synapses*] renders the experiences of people affected by trauma. The long-term effects of traumatic events penetrate multiple dimensions of life. Krall's protagonists have endured different forms of trauma: one survived the Holocaust, while the other, her daughter-in-law, struggles with her son's chronic illness. Both encounter difficulties in social functioning, shaped by their ways of coping with post-traumatic stress; at the same time, the communities around them rarely manage to understand their perspective. The narrative's focus on how these women perceive reality underscores the need to recognise such perspectives and to raise collective awareness of the process and consequences of trauma.

MEMORY

Hanna Krall

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:

Beata Przymuszała – Ph.D, Professor at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. Her research focuses on literary theory, Holocaust studies, and the exploration of trauma and emotionality in contemporary culture. She is the author of *Szukanie dotyku. Problematyka ciała w polskiej poezji współczesnej* [Seeking Touch: The Problem of the Body in Contemporary Polish Poetry], 2006); *Smugi Zagłady. Emocjonalne i konwencjonalne aspekty tekstów ofiar i ich dzieci* [Traces of the Holocaust: Emotional and Conventional Aspects of the Texts of Survivors and Their Children], 2016); and *Smugi Zagłady – książki przeoczone. Borwicz i inni* [Traces of the Holocaust – Overlooked Books: Borwicz and Others], 2019). Co-author of *Ekspresje buntu. O wyznaniach poetek* [Expressions of Rebellion: On the Confessions of Women Poets] (2025, with Agnieszka Czyżak and Agnieszka Rydz).

Tales for adult children?

Hanna Krall's

Co się stało z naszą bajką

[What happened to our
fairy tale]

Ewa Bartos

ORCID: 0000-0003-4156-0162

Mariusz Szczygieł, reflecting on the role of the protagonist in a reportage, wrote that “there are many editors who won’t greenlight reporters’ stories unless they have distinctive, interesting, and emblematic protagonists.”¹ Szczygieł notes that this rule does not apply to literary reportage. Life can resemble fiction, and fiction can resemble life. In “non-fiction, the protagonist is not required to shape destiny; [...] literary reportage is not a genre governed by strict rules.”² Hanna Krall often stressed in interviews that her aim was to tell true stories.³ “Reportage is an account of what really happened, and everything

¹ Mariusz Szczygieł, *Fakty muszą zatańczyć* [Facts must dance] (Warsaw: Dowody, 2022), 235–236.

² Szczygieł, 238.

³ *Reportaż. Rozmowy z Hanną Krall* [Reporter. Conversations with Hanna Krall]. Selection, composition, supplementation, and documentation by Jacek Antczak (Warsaw: Marginesy, 2007), 49.

I write about really happened,”⁴ she confessed. At the same time, she acknowledged that language can never be entirely objective.⁵ Many of the stories she recounted seemed “hard to believe,”⁶ yet she meticulously followed the “significant details”⁷ of her subjects’ lives over many years, recording and preserving narratives that, to her readers, often read like fiction. This makes Krall’s foray into fiction all the more intriguing. She attempted only once to write specifically for young readers: *Po bajce* [After the fairy tale] is a short play published in issue 4 of *Scena* [Stage] in 1987. The work won third prize in a youth theater competition, was staged several times, and then quickly slipped into obscurity.⁸ Drawing on classic Brothers Grimm tales, Krall explored the theme of narrative exhaustion, imagining fairy-tale characters who have grown weary of endlessly repeating their prescribed roles. The Big Bad Wolf, Baba Yaga, and the Two Ugly Stepsisters are tired and overworked; they abandon their fairy tales, leaving the “heroes” without the villains. As Magdalena Bednarek observes, reworking the plots of fairy tales and fables is hardly new,⁹ yet Hanna Krall’s approach presents a particular challenge for readers. She disrupts the familiar structure of the classic children’s story, compelling reflection on the role of evil in the world. Initially published in a magazine, the short play went largely unnoticed. Seven years later, Krall revised and republished it, introducing significant changes—most notably a new title. The original title, *Po bajce* [After the fairy tale], suggested closure: it pointed either to events unfolding beyond the story once the reader had finished, or to the definitive end and disappearance of the fairy tale itself. In the 1994 edition, Krall removed the stage directions, transformed the dialogue-driven text into a continuous narrative, and retitled the work. *Co się stało z naszą bajką* [What happened to our fairy tale], as Zofia Beszczyńska observed, was published by *Twój Styl*, and its deluxe collector’s edition received an honorary IBBY award for both text and illustrations. “Indeed, they are unique—so unique that the critic might feel helpless when confronting both the text and the images,”¹⁰ one reviewer remarked. The book featured twelve full-page illustrations by Maria Ekier.¹¹ As Joanna Olech noted, “[t]he

⁴ Reporterka. Rozmowy z Hanną Krall, 44.

⁵ “When describing people, when describing events, one always describes something more than the literal event.” Reporterka. Rozmowy z Hanną Krall, 47.

⁶ Reporterka. Rozmowy z Hanną Krall, 25.

⁷ “That war destroyed the worlds that once existed in Poland. When the worlds ceased to exist, they disappeared after the war. The world of officers and knights, the world of courts [...], the Jewish world, the world of the intelligentsia and the bourgeoisie, they all disappeared. And significant details remain as remnants. They are proof that the worlds existed.” Wydawnictwo Literackie, “Szczegóły znaczące” – Hanna Krall w Nowym Teatrze [“Significant details” – Hanna Krall at Nowy Teatr], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HG2DBDfxJg4>, date of access 30 Feb. 2024.

⁸ See notes and reviews in *Encyklopedia Teatru* [Encyclopedia of Theatre], <https://encyklopediateatru.pl/sztuki/9277/po-bajce>, date of access 30 Feb. 2024.

⁹ Magdalena Bednarek, *Baśni przeobrażone. Transformacja bajek i baśni w polskiej prozie po 1989 roku* [Transformed fairy tales: The transformation of fairy tales and fables in Polish prose after 1989] (Poznań: Adam Mickiewicz University Press, 2020).

¹⁰ Zofia Beszczyńska, “Ucieczka od bajki” [Escape from a fairy tale], *Nowe Książki* [New books] 2 (1995): 60.

¹¹ Zofia Ozóg-Winiarska states that the “International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) award is [...] the most distinguished award for children’s books. National sections award a book of the year prize and an illustrator prize. *Co się z naszą bajką* received a literary award in 1994, and Maria Ekier was recognized twice for her illustrations: in 1994, she received a distinction from the Polish Section of IBBY, and in 1999, she received an award at the The Biennial of Illustration Bratislava (BIB). See: Zofia Ozóg-Winiarska: “IBBY. Nagrody za twórczość dla dzieci i młodzieży” [IBBY Awards for Books for Children and Young People], in: *Literatura dla dzieci i młodzieży* (po roku 1980), vol. 2, ed. Krystyna Heska-Kwaśniewicz (Katowice: University of Silesia Publishing House, 2009).

characters have the faces of sad Pierrots, and the Big Bad Wolf looks like a stray dog. The touching illustrations capture the dark and enigmatic nature of the fairy tale.”¹² The revised title, too, underscores this sense of ambiguity. The question it poses—what happened to the fairy tale—suggests not its total destruction, but rather its transformation in the wake of some unnamed event. The change of title passed largely unnoticed, and the fact that Krall’s fairy tale had first appeared as a play titled *Po bajce* was soon forgotten. Yet the new title invited different associations. As Marta Rusek observes:

This is “our” fairy tale; emphasis is placed on communal storytelling. Since we acknowledge that fairy tales have an archetypal dimension, the question posed concerns our own story, that is, the story told by humans about human fate: what is it like? Has it changed? Has its model been exhausted? Does it still have the value/power to shape the world?¹³

In his review of Wojciech Kobyński’s 1992 production—transformed from a play into a fairy tale¹⁴—Andrzej Ponowa wrote

The villains no longer wish to devour children, speak in rhyme, or serve as cautionary examples. Their rebellion unsettles the very foundations of the traditional fairy tale, whose structure collapses once its characters refuse their assigned roles and set out in search of a gentler, more peaceful story.¹⁵

When the villains rebel, the structure collapses, and this collapse is the main theme of the play:

[...] The play asks: “what, exactly, happened to our fairy tale?”... Doesn’t this, by any chance, imply a question about our world; the whole world? The world of our feelings? The world of ideals? The world of our heroes? One of the actors, by the way, says that there are four heroes and four villains in the play. But... Who is... who?¹⁶

This text is neither a fairy tale (as one character reminds readers, in fairy tales people speak in rhyme), nor entirely not a fairy tale (since everyone has encountered a narrative fairy tale at least once). It is not a fable—though it draws inspiration from the Brothers Grimm and is often described as such—nor is it a play. As a result, it resists easy classification. But who,

¹²Joanna Olech, “Co się stało z naszą bajką?” [What happened to our fairy tale], The Polish Section of IBBY (International Board on Books for Young People), http://www.ibby.pl/?page_id=258, date of access 1 Apr. 2024.

¹³Marta Rusek, “(Roz)poznawanie? Baśnie w odbiorze uczniów” [Recognizing/discovering? Fairy tales as perceived by students], *Filoteknos* 10 (2020): 257.

¹⁴Co się stało z naszą bajką (Hanna Krall), Białystok Puppet Theatre, premiere 24 Oct. 1992, directed by Wojciech Kobyński, set design by Ireneusz Salwa, music by Krzysztof Dzierma, <https://encyklopediateatru.pl/przedstawienie/5678/co-sie-stalo-z-nasza-bajka>, date of access 26 Mar. 2024.

¹⁵Roman Pawłowski, “Mistrzowie i uczniowie” [Masters and students], *Kurier Poranny* [Morning Courier] 229 (1992), <https://encyklopediateatru.pl/artykuly/208860/mistrzowie-i-uczniowie>, date of access 26 Mar. 2024.

¹⁶Andrzej Ponowa, “Co się stało?” [What happened?], *Gazeta Współczesna* [Contemporary Newspaper] 209 (1992), <https://encyklopediateatru.pl/artykuly/208858/co-sie-stalo>, date of access 26 Mar. 2024.

then, is its intended audience? The form and theme of the work were less ambiguous. Joanna Papuzińska advised parents to “hide this philosophical tale¹⁷ in a closet and only take it out to read to children on appropriate occasions and in the right mood. Then the book will last for a long time, and the child, rereading it from time to time, will discover new meanings as they grow up.”¹⁸ After all, it was a demanding, complex text, issued only in a limited, deluxe edition.¹⁹ Zofia Beszczyńska complained in her review that this book, “which is at least theoretically addressed to children,” “is difficult to read; it should not be so serious, let alone so sad.”²⁰ A fairy tale without a happy ending is surprising:

The premiere audience was hardly ideal. It consisted mostly of adults—connoisseurs, specialists, a few friends, and family members. And the children? There were some, too. I asked them: WHAT HAPPENED TO OUR FAIRY TALE? But the children remained silent—perhaps they did not know. The play offered no ready-made moral lesson; it was unsettling, demanding thought and the search for answers. There was no happy ending. That, in itself, was extraordinary.²¹

According to adults, children are not the intended audience for this story; they must first be prepared for it.²² Yet it is worth asking whether young readers truly struggle with the text, or whether this difficulty is merely projected by adults unsettled by the absence of a happy ending. For them, the story is so disturbing that they register its conclusion with a kind of relief: “[...] A post-traumatic worldview drove the narrative to the brink of annihilation, erasing the world of fairy tales along with their familiar value judgments. **Fortunately**, some children, intuiting this hidden design, supplied their own resolution—**imagining a happy ending where none had been offered**.”²³ A more optimistic interpretation of the play’s ending brought adults a sense of relief. Piotr Adler chose to alter the original ending, which was deliberately ambiguous and resisted an unequivocally positive reading. In his staging at Mr. Hilary’s Academy of Arts, the children in the audience were offered a “surprise at the end.” The actors broke the fourth wall, calling out: “We’re going to present a different ending, children—what do you think?”²⁴ Adler’s production thus introduced a happy ending. What prompted this decision? Was the fairy tale, perhaps, too realistic? The paradox is striking: Krall’s reportages are often criticized as too “fairy-tale-like” and

¹⁷Joanna Papuzińska, “Demontaż bajki i kuma śmierć” [Dismantling the fairy tale and Godfather Death], *Guliwer* [Guliver] 1 (1995): 11.

¹⁸Papuzińska, 12.

¹⁹The book was issued in a limited edition of 1,000 copies, presented as a booklet in a cardboard folder and accompanied by 12 illustrations by Maria Ekier.

²⁰Beszczyńska, 60.

²¹Ponowa.

²²Marta Rusek, in collaboration with two primary school teachers, conducted a study with children aged 9–11. The teachers found that reading the fairy tale required a careful introduction, “since Krall’s text—because of its length and intertextual references—might be difficult for the students to grasp in its entirety. To aid comprehension, they divided the work into sections, pausing whenever the children identified a familiar fairy-tale character or plot.” Rusek, 261.

²³Rusek, 264. Emphasis mine, E.B.

²⁴Co się stało z naszą bajką? Teatr Niezbędny V2, directed by Piotr Adler, available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KemfUOQ9jG0>, date of access 30 Mar. 2024.

improbable,²⁵ while her fairy tale is judged too realistic, insufficiently “fairy-tale-like.” In an interview with Jacek Antczak, Krall explained:

Everything we see in TV shows, music videos, and horror films is fake. Fake fear, fake death. But in the stories I tell, there’s real death, real fear, real courage. Perhaps readers are tired of made-up stories, simple truths, and perhaps they want to be confronted with unanswered questions.²⁶

The reception of *Co się stało z naszą bajką* suggests that readers are far from weary of such invented tales. Framed in the guise of a fairy tale, the story provokes a sense of “real fear:” what if the fairy-tale characters were to “really” die? A sharper, more unsettling question arises—but only adult readers, familiar with Krall’s literary concerns, are equipped to pose it:

It is no coincidence that I recall here a short story for children by the author of *Zdążyć przed Panem Bogiem* [Shielding the flame]. [...] Yet it is difficult to deny that Krall’s tale—by a writer renowned for her Holocaust narratives—is itself also a Holocaust story. I read it not so much through the lens of “liquid modernity” as through a vision of the contemporary world, held back from ultimate disintegration only by the fear of death. We pause, holding our breath, before extinguishing the candle. The ending echoes the now-classic metaphor of rebellion that Krall employed in *Zdążyć przed Panem Bogiem*. But whereas in that work life was cherished above all else, here it no longer carries the same weight.²⁷

Małgorzata Wójcik-Dudek, in her reflections on children’s narratives addressing death and the Holocaust, argued that Hanna Krall’s book should not be given to young readers; the shadow of the Holocaust, she noted, is simply too overwhelming. Inevitably, associations with Holocaust narratives arise. In 2011, *Co się stało z naszą bajką* appeared in a new edition. The earlier collector’s version was replaced by a volume in Krall’s *Collected Works* series, published by Świat Książki. This edition brought together three texts: *Co się stało z naszą bajką*, *Król kier znów na wylocie* [Chasing the King of Hearts], and *Różowe strusie pióra* [Pink ostrich feathers]. Although the volume concludes with the short fairy tale, its title dominates the cover, printed in larger type than the other two works. The back cover also features an excerpt from the fairy tale:

²⁵ Marta Cuber (Tomczok) recalls Stefan Chwin’s findings: he described “Hanna Krall’s books [...] as the ‘gilded’ prose about the Holocaust, characterized by the themes of miraculous survival and familial emotionality” (p. 39). The scholar further notes that “in *Różowe strusie pióra* [Pink ostrich feathers], [the text] relegates the Holocaust to a marginal perspective, juxtaposing it with scenes of everyday life or with events that appear absurdly incongruous. One of the protagonists, Katarzyna G., wrote to Krall in 2002 and asked about the sadness found in *To ty jesteś Daniel* [You are Daniel]: ‘Is it even possible to write about the smell of basil in Canadian supermarkets after the Holocaust?’ In 2009, Hanna Krall challenged the rhetoric of distance and drama. She managed to silence the Gorgon, restore scents and flavors to the world, and maintain discretion” (p. 52). Marta Cuber, “Od stosowności do dosadności. Wokół przemian polskojęzycznej prozy o Zagładzie w latach 1989–2009” [From appropriateness to explicitness. On the transformations of Polish Holocaust prose, 1989–2009], in: Marta Cuber, *Metonimie Zagłady. O polskiej prozie lat 1987–2012* [Metonymy of the Holocaust. Polish prose, 1987–2012] (Katowice: University of Silesia Publishing House, 2013), 39, 52.

²⁶Reporterka. Rozmowy z Hanną Krall, 51.

²⁷Małgorzata Wójcik-Dudek, *W(y)czytać Zagładę. Praktyki postpamięci w polskiej literaturze XXI wieku dla dzieci i młodzieży* [Reading the Holocaust. Postmemory practices in 21st-Century Polish literature for children and young adults] (Katowice: University of Silesia Publishing House, 2016), 166–167.

"This dress used to be so much more beautiful," Cinderella murmured thoughtfully. "I don't know what became of it. And what became of the Stepsisters? Of the ashes? What has happened to our fairy tale?"

A cry suddenly rose from every corner of the forest:

"What happened to our fairy tale?!"

Gretel, Hansel, Cinderella, and even the old goat called out together. Then the wind—an infamous gossip who hears and knows everything—rustled through the trees and whispered loudly:

"Your fairy tales are no more... You can step out of them... Come closer... There are no fairy tales..."²⁸

To believe that every story can end happily is unthinkable in a world marked by the Holocaust. By adopting the fairy-tale form, Krall constructs a metatextual reflection directed at the readers of her reportages—readers who often overlook that *Zdążyć przed Panem Bogiem* [Shielding the Flame] provides a profound "educational lesson for schoolchildren"²⁹ and reminds us that childhood is not invariably a time of joy.

On January 18, 1945, freedom, so to speak, began for me. And so they sang: "Oh, it doesn't matter / that the wounds hurt so much, / for how sweet it is now to go / to those heavenly glades..." It was sweet to go out into the snow. Into the sun. It was sweet to know that the war was over, that I had survived the war. How old was I? Nine and a half years old. I was a grown man.³⁰

"Children of war must be wise and mature,"³¹ and they are not the only ones. Krall placed her trust in young readers. "I love meeting young people, and if we are earnestly talking about accomplishments, this is my greatest achievement," she remarked in an interview.³² It is only adults, bound to traditional yet now degraded norms, who may harbor doubts about the book. As an allegorical, meta-literary tale, *Co się stało z naszą bajką* holds up a distorting mirror to the readers of Krall's prose. The Big Bad Wolf has "ruined his stomach by eating baby goats and grandmothers,"³³ while Baba Yaga is "bored" by the endless repetition of her role. Both abandon their stories to wander into other fairy tales. Their absence—like that of the Two Ugly Stepsisters—disrupts the lives of characters traditionally cast as heroes. The "villains" must return if the "heroes" are to act at all. In this sense, the story exposes the radical relativism of values. Marta Rusek noted that "the Big Bad Wolf [...] understands that fairy tales are schematic and conventional. After all, he ironically states: 'This is what undoes us: a sense of duty. We are the villains, but we want to fulfill our duty.'"³⁴ This statement has a deeper meaning. The characters believe that their behavior—regardless of whether it is considered good or evil—is appropriate because it is determined by something more important. The only character who defies this rule is Baba Yaga. Moreover, only her tale is told to the end. Magdalena Bednarek writes:

²⁸Hanna Krall, *Co się stało z naszą bajką. Król kier znów na wylocie. Różowe strusie pióra* [What happened to our fairy tale. Chasing the king of hearts. Pink ostrich feathers]. (Warsaw: Świat Książki, 2011).

²⁹Mariusz Szczygieł, Wojciech Tochman, Krall (Warsaw: Dowody, 2015). The book has no pagination.

³⁰Szczygieł, Tochman.

³¹Reporterka. Rozmowy z Hanną Krall, 11.

³²Reporterka. Rozmowy z Hanną Krall, 130.

³³Krall, *Co się stało z naszą bajką*, 311.

³⁴Rusek, 258.

As Propp observed, Baba Yaga represents a remnant of initiation mysteries, serving as the master of initiation (a role also hinted at in the etymology of the word “witch”). Krall recalls one of the strangest fairy tales—one in which the protagonist, unusually, suffers defeat; where cunning brings no reward, where poverty and youth offer no advantage, and where no leniency is granted. [...] Godfather Death, at first a positive character, ultimately reveals himself to be the antagonist—perhaps that is why Baba Yaga calls this story a “truly beautiful fairy tale,” for here the antagonist prevails. Unlike conventional tales governed by the law of the happy ending, this story is ruled by a harsher principle: simple justice, in which evil—deception and theft—is punished. From this perspective, Godfather Death may be seen as an anti-fairy tale.³⁵

Let me add that Krall’s reinterpretation of *Godfather Death* does not presuppose the triumph of justice. Baba Yaga—who appears as Baba Yaga-Death in another tale—summarizes the first part of the Grimms’ fairy tale, saying that “she will tell you what happened next” when the circumstances allow it. Her choice to continue the tale depends on the characters’ actions. Baba Yaga emerges as the driving force of the entire narrative: she conceives the idea that it is worth exploring what unfolds in other stories, and she quietly shares this plan with the characters she encounters: “Has it never occurred to you not to try on the slipper?,” Baba Yaga smiled. This surprised both Stepsisters. [...] ‘That’s enough,’ Baba Yaga decided. ‘We shouldn’t waste time complaining, we have a plan...’”³⁶ More bored characters join Baba Yaga in her quest to destroy classic fairy tales, and although it seems like they might succeed, the characters’ sudden and justified rebellion dies down:

At this point, the Big Bad Wolf could no longer restrain himself and burst into a harsh, grating laugh.

“And who are you going to save now?” he jeered at the Goat.

“You’d better get on with your supper—the grass is already withering,” the Stepsisters chimed in. The Goat turned her head toward the voices but saw no one; the junipers concealed them completely. “Alas, my dear,” Baba Yaga entered the scene, “you are no longer a heroic mother. You’re nothing more than an old goat...”

“And from a dull fairy tale, at that!” the Stepsisters added. “A tale of a Goat who goes out to eat grass and returns. Tell us—do you know a single child who would want to hear such a story?”

It was Baba Yaga who first silenced them.³⁷

There can be no “heroes” without “villains.” A goat who fails to protect her young—neither good nor evil—becomes a dull and lifeless figure. Krall, with irony, holds up a distorting mirror to the reader: real life, stripped of sudden upheavals, resists the very shape of storytelling. The interlocutors in Hanna Krall’s narratives of the Holocaust and the War often reflect on the function of storytelling in much the same way as characters in fairy tales do:

“This novel is terribly short, Ms. Krall,” she said abruptly. “It was meant to be a long book, but it turned out to be just a booklet.”

³⁵Bednarek, 113.

³⁶Krall, *Co się stało z naszą bajką*, 315.

³⁷Krall, *Co się stało z naszą bajką*, 316.

"It should be that way," I replied. "The book about Marek Edelman was even shorter. It was sixty pages shorter—one third shorter. And that was a book about the ghetto insurgents..."
 "It was all so dreadful," she went on, as if she hadn't heard me. "My despair, my heart, my tears. And what do we have in your book? Just a few sentences—and that's all?"
 "The greater the despair," I answered, "the fewer sentences are needed, Ms. R."³⁸

Izolda R. from *Hipnoza* [Hypnosis] demands greater drama, as does the editor preparing the volume for publication: "I have only one comment," she said. "A compositional one. Shouldn't the husband have abandoned her earlier? It would have been much better for the story."³⁹ Indeed, it might have been better for the story—and better, too, for the fairy tale, had the "villains" remained. This very thought prompts Baba Yaga to continue her tale: "Tired of fairy tales in which nothing ever happened, they listened instead to Baba Yaga's strange story about a poor man who invited Death to be Godfather to his child."⁴⁰ Yet for the Big Bad Wolf, Cinderella, the Stepsisters, and the other characters, the moral of *Godfather Death* remains elusive.

"And what happened next?" asked Cinderella, leaning forward, intent on the story.
 "As always," came the reply. "The man tried to deceive Death. He gave the herb to the young, beautiful princess, even though the Godfather stood at her feet. And so he had to be punished."
 "Shouldn't we step into that fairy tale at once?" the Big Bad Wolf broke in.
 "Why?" Baba Yaga asked, startled. "What would you change?"
 "I'll make Death leave."
 "Why? He gave his godson a marvelous gift—a healing herb."
 "Then I'll make the godson leave."
 "He only wanted to save his beloved princess."
 "But he betrayed Death."
 "Out of love..."
 "Tell me," the Big bad Wolf pressed, "is it possible for a fairy tale to hold neither good nor evil?"⁴¹

The desire to enter this fairy tale is driven by the conviction that something is wrong with it, too. The characters' doubts and discussion resemble another dialogue, from *Tam już nie ma żadnej rzeki* [There is no river there anymore]:

"And what then?" the director asked.
 "Nothing. A film would have to be made, that's all."
 "About what?"
 "About Grandma Waleria. About uncles and aunts, a handsome brunette, the gardener Onufry, frozen trees, swallows, and a grandson."
 "I mean—what is the film about?"
 "About Grandma Waleria, uncles, trees..."

³⁸Hanna Krall, "Hipnoza" [Hypnosis], in: Hanna Krall, *Fantom bólu. Reportaże wszystkie* [Phantom of pain. Collected reportages], introduction by Mariusz Szczygieł (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2024), 299.

³⁹Krall, "Hipnoza", 302.

⁴⁰Krall, *Co się stało z naszą bajką*, 319.

⁴¹Krall, *Co się stało z naszą bajką*, 319.

“But what is it really about? About punishment? About chance? About God?”

“I don’t know. It was your schoolmate who used to say: my job is not to know.”⁴²

Hanna Krall proves in *Co się stało z naszą bajką* that a black-and-white world can only exist in fairy tales, perhaps only in some of them. Baba Yaga will not permit her companions the comfort of a simple, or simplistic, view of reality:

[...] You always like the good guys. “Sometimes I don’t know what to be good even means,” Baba Yaga repeated the sentence they had just heard, and the “good guys” blushed. Hansel and Gretel recalled their gluttony, Cinderella remembered her vanity...⁴³

Leading her companions on a journey through other fairy tales, Baba Yaga seeks to teach them a lesson through story. Yet just as swiftly as the characters recognize and admit their flaws, they just as swiftly forget them. Tearing apart the very tales from which they are meant to draw meaning ultimately leads nowhere.

“You must understand,” the Goat broke the silence. “If evil is necessary in fairy tales, then someone must be evil. Someone must play the villain in every story. And we are grateful that you agreed to take on that role.”

“Goat,” the Big Bad Wolf replied, “you lived your whole life in fear of us. We terrified you. We devoured you. And now we offer you a chance—you could live in peace.”

“Live in peace?” the Goat echoed. “Without sorrow? How can you be so sure that peace is what we truly want?”

“You sound strange, Goat,” the Big Bad Wolf said, taken aback. “Not like a Goat at all.”

“But what you say is beautiful,” the Stepsisters whispered. “Speak, Goat—speak.”

“We must embrace everything that is given to us,” the Goat continued. “All the joy, but also all the sorrow. We must not turn away from it. And even if we try, it will do us no good. The sorrow we refuse to face will one day find us anyway.”

“This is the first time I’ve heard anyone ask for such things—for sorrow... for fear...”⁴⁴

The Goat and the other characters yearn to return to their fairy tales, unaware that their desires are nothing more than empty formulas—at once “strange” and unsettling. For them, the beauty of words matters more than their meaning. The Goat’s “beautiful” speech becomes a kind of justification for what they ultimately want: the characters insist that “they have no right to alter the fairy tales; they must remain as they are, forever.” Their exchange is abruptly broken off by Baba Yaga, who once again turns to the story of *Godfather Death*. The words—“Death grew angry and addressed his godson [...]”⁴⁵—are true both for Death and Baba Yaga. She cannot listen to her companions. Leading them into a cave, she commands:

⁴²Hanna Krall, “Tam już nie ma żadnej rzeki” [There is no river there anymore], in: Hanna Krall, *Fantom bólu*. Reportaże wszystkie, 747.

⁴³Krall, *Co się stało z naszą bajką*, 320.

⁴⁴Krall, *Co się stało z naszą bajką*, 321.

⁴⁵Krall, *Co się stało z naszą bajką*, 322.

"These are your lives," said the Baba Yaga-Death. "The lives of animals, the lives of people..."

"And of goats?" the Goat whispered.

[...]

"Listen," the Goat murmured. "Couldn't you light a taller candle for me? I'd like to live a little longer."

"Alas," the Baba Yaga-Death replied, "each creature is given only one candle—no more, no less. But I am surprised it is you who asks, Goat. You, whose days have been steeped in sorrow and fear..."

"Because I love sorrow, and I love life," the Goat confessed. "Look—I accept every kind of fear, every wolf. So give me a taller candle, won't you?"⁴⁶

Potential danger and narrative harm are easy enough to accept. The Goat may deliver "beautiful" speeches about the necessity of suffering and evil—so long as they do not touch her directly. Yet outside the plot, beyond the frame of the story, one truth remains: death is relentless and spares no one. Until the very end, Baba Yaga-Death strives to make the characters grasp the true value of life—something far more important than the mere beauty of the tale itself. "It is never quite proper to write eloquently about horrors, yet without form I would drown in a pit of corpses."⁴⁷ Agata Tuszyńska observed that Hanna Krall "does not fear that the need to tell and the need to listen are vanishing. It is a need akin to hearing a fairy tale—except that the devouring of Little Red Riding Hood must truly take place."⁴⁸ In *Co się stało z naszą bajką*, Baba Yaga, driven to the edge of despair, threatens the characters with death in order to make them grasp her story. The Big Bad Wolf, Hansel and Gretel, the Princess, and the other fairy-tale figures behave much like readers of reportage, in which—as Wiesław Kot remarked—"the documentation of individual life is complicated by the fact that the wartime biographies of Jews so often border on the improbable. [...] At times this confusion approaches absurdity, which, however, proves to be an element of historical truth."⁴⁹ Hanna Krall's reportages often unsettle and bewilder readers, which is why Michał Cichy describes them as "documentary fairy tales."⁵⁰ Marta Rusek observes that the characters refuse to believe Baba Yaga-Death: "Instead of joining the *danse macabre*, they long to dance at a wedding and blow out the candles on a birthday cake—bidding farewell to what has passed and ushering in a new beginning."⁵¹ Readers respond in much the same way: they yearn to hear the truth, yet still crave a version shaped into a story with a happy ending. This tension renders Baba Yaga-Death's cry all the more haunting and terrifying:

⁴⁶Krall, *Co się stało z naszą bajką*, 232.

⁴⁷Reporterka. Rozmowy z Hanną Krall, 110.

⁴⁸Agata Tuszyńska, "Żeby zapisać. Spotkanie z Hanną Krall" [To write down. A conversation with Hanna Krall], *Więź* 3 (1988): 56.

⁴⁹Wiesław Kot, *Hanna Krall* (Poznań: Rebis, 2000), 102.

⁵⁰"Hanna Krall's 'documentary fairy tales,' when examined closely, rarely end well. Though written in the gentle, almost enchanting language of fairy tales, they align more closely with the tragic structure of myth—which, as Bruno Bettelheim observed, differs from the fairy tale in that it always ends badly. But does not Krall's choice of the fairy-tale convention risk softening the Holocaust to the point where the Holocaust itself becomes a 'Hollycaust'?" Michał Cichy, "Baśnie dokumentalne Hanny Krall" [Hanna Krall's documentary fairy tales], *Gazeta Wyborcza* [The Electoral Gazette], 23 Jan. 1999, available online: <https://classic.wyborcza.pl/archiwumGW/646475/Basnie-dokumentalne-Hanny-Krall>.

⁵¹Rusek, 259.

"That's not a cake!" cried Baba Yaga.

"If it isn't a cake," the Goat remarked, "if it is our lives, then surely the candles will be lit again when the fairy tale begins anew."

"Oh no! If you blow out the candles yourselves, they will never be lit again. And then there will be no more fairy tales!"

They only laughed, amused by Baba Yaga-Death's terror, and began to dance once more. Then they halted, drew in a deep breath...

"People!" Baba Yaga shouted with all her might. "What are you doing? There will never be fairy tales again!"

And so they stood, lungs filled, poised for the Great Blow, looking at the candles that still burned.⁵²

When asked if describing pedestrians was boring, Krall replied:

Perhaps it was once boring, but not anymore—because now I know how it ends. And knowing the ending changes everything. Each detail becomes an elegy for the vanished world. [...] Since I already know what came after, they will always exist. The wild woman will go on dancing on the carpet rack, the wine wholesaler's wife will never gain weight, and the commune secretary will never cease to love her. These figures are frozen, fixed forever in that moment—at least in my books.⁵³

In *Co się stało z naszą bajką*, the characters freeze in the final scene; suspended between life and death, they mirror the figures Hanna Krall portrays in her reportages. The true drama lies not in the threat of death itself, but in the dancers' reaction toward its inevitable approach. The final cry—"People! [...] What are you doing?"—is directed both at the fairy-tale characters and at readers, who expect reportage to be both a documentation of life and a narrative shaped with cinematic intensity.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

⁵²Krall, *Co się stało z naszą bajką*, 323.

⁵³Reporterka. Rozmowy z Hanną Krall, 76.

References

- Bednarek, Magdalena. *Baśni przeobrażone. Transformacja bajek i baśni w polskiej prozie po 1989 roku*. Poznań: Adam Mickiewicz University Press, 2020.
- Beszczynska, Zofia. "Ucieczka od bajki". *Nowe Książki* 2 (1995): 60.
- Cichy, Michał. "Baśnie dokumentalne Hanny Krall". *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 23 Jan. 1999. <https://classic.wyborcza.pl/archiwumGW/646475/Basnie-dokumentalne-Hanny-Krall>. Date of access 29 Mar. 2024.
- Co się stało z naszą bajką (Hanna Krall)*. Białystok Puppet Theatre, premiere 24 Oct. 1992. Directed by Wojciech Kобрzyński, set design by Ireneusz Salwa, music by Krzysztof Dzierma. <https://encyklopediateatru.pl/przedstawienie/5678/co-sie-stalo-z-nasza-bajka>. Date of access 23 Mar. 2024.
- Co się stało z naszą bajką?* Teatr Niezbędny V2. Directed by Piotr Adler. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KemfUOQ9jG0>. Date of access 30 Mar. 2024.
- Cuber, Marta. "Od stosowności do dosadności. Wokół przemian polskojęzycznej prozy o Zagładzie w latach 1989–2009", 33–56. In: Marta Cuber, *Metonimie Zagłady. O polskiej prozie lat 1987–2012*. Katowice: University of Silesia Publishing House, 2013.
- Encyklopedia Teatru*. Entry: "Po bajce". <https://encyklopediateatru.pl/sztuki/9277/po-bajce>. Date of access 30.02.2024.
- Kot, Wiesław. *Hanna Krall*. Poznań: Rebis, 2000.
- Krall, Hanna. *Co się stało z naszą bajką. Król kier znów na wylocie. Różowe strusie pióra*. Warsaw 2011.
- – –. *Fantom bólu. Reportaże wszystkie*. Introduction by Mariusz Szczygieł. Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2024.
- – –. "Hipnoza". In: *Fantom bólu. Reportaże wszystkie*. Introduction by Mariusz Szczygieł. Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2024.
- – –. "Tam już nie ma żadnej rzeki". In: *Fantom bólu. Reportaże wszystkie*. Introduction by Mariusz Szczygieł. Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2024.
- Olech, Joanna. "Co się stało z naszą bajką?". *Polska Sekcja IBBY*. http://www.ibby.pl/?page_id=258. Date of access 1 Apr. 2024.
- Ożóg-Winiarska, Zofia. "IBBY. Nagrody za twórczość dla dzieci i młodzieży". In: *Literatura dla dzieci i młodzieży (po roku 1980)*, vol. 2, ed. Krystyna Heska-Kwaśniewicz, 72–98. Katowice: University of Silesia Publishing House, 2009.
- Papuzińska, Joanna. "Demontaż bajki i kuma śmierć". *Guliwer* 1 (1995): 10–12.
- Pawłowski, Roman. "Mistrzowie i uczniowie". *Kurier Poranny* 229 (1992). <https://encyklopediateatru.pl/artykuly/208860/mistrzowie-i-uczniowie>. Date of access 26 Mar. 2024.
- Ponowa, Andrzej. "Co się stało?". *Gazeta Współczesna* 209 (1992). <https://encyklopediateatru.pl/artykuly/208858/co-sie-stalo>. Date of access 26 Mar. 2024.
- Reporterka. Rozmowy z Hanną Krall*. Selection, composition, supplementation, and documentation by Jacek Antczak. Warsaw: Marginesy, 2007.
- Rusek, Marta. "(Roz)poznawanie? Baśnie w odbiorze uczniów". *Filoteknos* 10 (2020): 255–266.
- Szczygieł, Mariusz. *Fakty muszą zatańczyć*. Warsaw: Dowody, 2022.
- Szczygieł, Mariusz, Wojciech Tochman. *Krall*. Warsaw: Dowody, 2015.
- Tuszyńska, Agata. "Żeby zapisywać. Spotkanie z Hanną Krall". *Więź* 3 (1988): 53–58.
- Wójcik-Dudek, Małgorzata. *W(y)czytać Zagładę. Praktyki postpamięci w polskiej literaturze XXI wieku dla dzieci i młodzieży*. Katowice: University of Silesia Publishing House, 2016.
- Wydawnictwo Literackie, "Szczegóły znaczące" – *Hanna Krall w Nowym Teatrze*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HG2DBDfxJg4>. Date of access 30.02.2024.

KEYWORDS

fairy tale

Hanna Krall

ABSTRACT:

Co się stało z naszą bajką [What happened to our fairy tale] is Hanna Krall's only text intended for children and young adults. This article attempts to interpret it, paying particular attention to the changes in the subsequent editions and the impact these have on reception. To believe that every story can end happily is unthinkable in a world marked by the Holocaust. By adopting the fairy-tale form, Krall constructs a metatextual reflection directed at the readers of her reportages—readers who often overlook that *Zdążyć przed Panem Bogiem* [Shielding the flame] provides a profound educational lesson for schoolchildren and reminds us that childhood is not invariably a time of joy.

H o l o c a u s t

RECEPTION

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:

Ewa Bartos – holds a habilitation degree in literary studies and is a professor at the University of Silesia, where she works at the Institute of Polish Studies. Her research focuses on the intersections of literature and psychology, the themes of collecting and seduction in literature, popular literature and culture, as well as the works of *émigré* writers and twentieth-century Silesian poets. She is the author of several books, including *Skiroławki. O powieści erotycznej Zbigniewa Nienackiego* [Skiroławki. Zbigniew Nienacki's erotic novel] (2013), *Motory. Szkice o/przy Zegadłowiczu* [Motors. Essays on/by Zegadłowicz] (2013), *E/P. Szkice o literaturze 'elitarnej' i 'popularnej'* [E/P. Essays on 'elite' and 'popular' literature] (2014), *Figury braku. O prozie Stanisława Dygata* [Figures of absence. Stanisław Dygat's prose] (2016), and *Miejsca (w) wyobraźni. Studia i szkice o poetach z Górnego Śląska* [Places of/in the imagination. Studies and essays on poets from Upper Silesia] (2019).

Translations and reception of Hanna Krall's literary reportages in German-speaking countries

Anna Pastuszka

ORCID: 0000-0002-9492-1104

The question of translations and the reception of Hanna Krall's literary reportage in German-speaking countries relates to a specific cultural space, language, historical experience, and role in history. Most of the author's literary reportages focus on the stories of Holocaust survivors and the extermination of European Jews carried out on Polish soil by German occupiers. The Germans who appear in her work – Nazis employed at various administrative levels, SS members, Wehrmacht soldiers, reservists from the 101st Police Battalion in Hamburg – are depicted as perpetrators of crimes. The policies of persecution and extermination of Jews are attributed to Adolf Hitler and National Socialist strategists, Germans, and Austrians. The German language is therefore “die Sprache der Täter,” the language of the perpetrators¹. How

¹ See Stephan Braese, „Einführung”, in: *In der Sprache der Täter. Neue Lektüren deutschsprachiger Nachkriegs- und Gegenwartsliteratur*, ed. by Stephan Braese (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1998), 7–11. The German language is referred to as “the idiom of Shoah par excellence” for millions of Europeans “concentrated” in the East for the purposes of forced labour and extermination; it is a language still alive in the memories of survivors.

then were Hanna Krall's literary reportages received in Germany and Austria? How is her „non-fiction”², largely portraying Jewish fates, received?

The Jewish experience as a particularly challenging area of translation in modern Polish and German literature was explored in a special issue of the Cracow magazine *Przekładaniec*, titled *Przekład żydowski. Żydowskość w przekładzie* [*A Jewish translation. Jewishness in Translation*] (29/2014). Writing about the revival of Jewish culture and the fascination with Jewish identity in Poland and Germany, Magdalena Waligórska asserts:

After all, the character of a German plays a major role in the Polish vision of Polish-Jewish relations during World War II, and Poland is an important point of reference in the German memory of Jews – as the cradle of Eastern European Jewry, whose portrait, as presented by Martin Buber, Joseph Roth, and Alfred Döblin, left a longlasting mark on the German-language literary tradition; it is also the space of the Holocaust. But are memory and literary narrative structures in this Polish-German-Jewish triad mutually translatable? How does the memory of the Other serve a self-cognitive function?³

Waligórska highlights the success of authors like Hanna Krall and Henryk Grynberg on the German book market, as well as the recognition of popular literature, like Maria Nurowska's *Listy miłości* [*Letters of Love*] (1991). The scholar is interested in the translatability of the Jewish experience in Poland for German readers and in the challenges that German or Austrian narratives pose to Polish audiences.⁴

In my paper, I will focus on selected academic works related to Hanna Krall's writing and on literary reviews of her works. It should be noted that the most popular of Krall's reportages were published in Germany in the 1990s, sometimes coinciding with their release in Poland⁵. They received praise from the critics and were widely discussed. The first publishing house to promote Krall's books in Germany was the Neue Kritik, which in

² Hanna Krall, *Literatura faktu* [Non-fiction literature]. (Vol. Tam już nie ma żadnej rzeki [There is No River There Anymore]), in her: *Fantom bólu. Reportaże wszystkie* [The Phantom of pain. All reportages] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2017), 667–674. The title features the author's characteristic irony: writing about a few Jews settling in a "northern town", she thus describes the mayor's openness: „The mayor was preparing communal flats. During the Nazi period the northern town distinguished itself by enthusiastic book burnings, so the mayor cared about the reputation of his people, who were tolerant and hospitable” (672). Nachum Klajner from Riga, a surgical oncologist, thus explained to Krall the make-up of her meet-the-author: here is a local fascist, there is also a woman who is a local anti-fascist, and an elderly couple („our Jews”): „And the rest of the audience who were listening to your reportage so politely, are our ordinary Germans. Cultured lovers of non-fiction” (674).

³ Magdalena Waligórska, „Granice przekładu: polsko-niemiecko-żydowskie pogranicze literackie” [„Limits of translation: the Polish-German-Jewish literary frontier”], *Przekładaniec* 29 (2014), 259–264, here: 259–260.

⁴ M. Waligórska's analyses and conversations concern Joanna Bator's *Piaskowa Góra* (Sandberg, transl. by Esther Kinsky), Robert Schindel's *Rodowody* [Genealogies], transl. by Jacek St. Buras), Bożena Keff's *Utwór o matce i Ojczyźnie* [A Piece on Mother and Fatherland] (transl. by Michael Zgodzay) and Erica Fischer's *Aimée & the Jaguar* (transl. by Katarzyna Weintraub). They all problematise Jewishness. Waligórska's interviews cover aspects of cultural translation, the role of public debates on Polish-Jewish or German-Jewish relations, and that which is lost or particularly controversial in translations.

⁵ One of the signs of a growing interest is a collection of materials concerning the author and her books published in Germany (Dem Herrgott zuvorkommen, Legoland, Tanz auf fremder Hochzeit, Existenzbeweise): Hanna Krall, ed. by Eugeniusz Piliszek (Leipzig: Polnisches Institut Leipzig, 1996).

1986 released *Sublokatora/ Die Untermieterin* [*The Subtenant*].⁶ Run by Dorothea Rhein in Frankfurt am Main, the small enterprise grew out of student protest movements of the 1960s and specialized in Eastern European literature, women's literature, topics related to the National Socialist dictatorship, Jewish persecution, and testimonial literature. Krall's later books, however, i.e., *Rosa Straußenfedern / Różowe Strusie Pióra* [*Pink Ostrich Feathers*], published in 2012, and *Weißes Maria / Biała Maria* [*White Maria*], published in 2014 (both translated by Bernhard Hartmann), did not resonate with critics. I have not been able to identify any German translations of Krall's most recent books published in Poland: *Pola i inne rzeczy teatralne* [*Pola and Other Theater Things*] (2018), *Synapsy Marii H.* [*Maria H.'s Synapses*] (2020), *Smutek ryb* [*The Sadness of the Fish*] (2020), and *Szczegóły znaczące* [*Significant Details*] (2022). This is surprising, in light of the author's earlier popularity. In contrast, more recent books by Krall have been published in France, alongside translations of her older works.⁷

When I asked Bernhard Hartmann about his experience working on Krall's books, he described the challenges of translating her distinctive style as follows:

I translated *Różowe strusia pióra* and *Biała Maria*, two most recent books by Hanna Krall, which are a kind of résumé of her work, and perhaps of her life. In formal terms, these books feature a concise and condensed narrative, which presupposes the reader's familiarity with the author's earlier works. Since I did not know everything, one of the challenges of the translation process was recognizing references to earlier texts and finding relevant passages in existing translations (by Hubert Schumann, Esther Kinsky, and Renate Schmidgall) to help the German-speaking readers follow these traces. Dorothea Rein, Hanna Krall's long-time German publisher, was very helpful in this endeavour. Another challenge was to achieve the aforementioned conciseness and brevity in the German text. Here, my experience in translating poetry came in handy.

Hartmann confirmed the loss of interest in Krall's reportage among German-speaking readers:

To put it mildly, the books I translated were not popular with readers. On the one hand, this can be attributed to the fact that the texts require a great deal from the reader. Secondly, the peak of Krall's popularity in Germany ended in the 2010s. The book about Mark Edelman was a revelation in the 1980s, and subsequent volumes also enjoyed great interest from literary critics right up till the 1990s. Then the interest waned. The issue of the Holocaust was no longer as important to many readers, and Krall's texts on other topics were perhaps less interesting to German-speaking audiences. It is also possible that the effect that Hanna Krall's style initially exerted on German audiences reading the first volumes of her works petered out over time⁸.

⁶ Later pocketbook editions (Taschenbuchausgabe) were based on the licence of the Neue Kritik publishing house, e.g. *Tanz auf fremder Hochzeit* (btb in Goldmann Verlag 1997) or *Hypnose* (btb 1998).

⁷ Les fenêtres were published here in 2021, in 2022 – Les Synapses de Maria H. (both from Noir sur Blanc), largely thanks to Krall's translator, Margot Carlier.

⁸ The author's private correspondence, in her translation.

Let us see how Hanna Krall's prose was received in Germany at the height of her popularity. Krall is a well-known and recognizable author there, having won several major awards, such as the prestigious Leipziger Buchpreis zur Europäischen Verständigung in 2000 (laudation by Dan Diner), the Samuel Bogumił Linde Award in 2001 (laudation by Ryszard Kapuściński), the Gottfried Herder Prize in 2005, the Würth-Preis für Europäische Literatur in 2012, and the Ricarda Huch Prize in 2008 for lifetime achievement. The latter is awarded for independence of thought and courage in action, for humanitarianism and fostering understanding between nations. The motivation for the award was that Krall "restored history to Polish Jews." At the time, the author responded that since the end of the war, many writers—Tadeusz Borowski, Zofia Nałkowska, Julian Strykowski, Henryk Grynberg, Adolf Rudnicki—had written on that subject. "I think that the Jewish fate exists in memory. And I am just another baton in this relay race of remembrance."⁹ In his laudation, Marcel Reich-Ranicki emphasized that when he reads Hanna Krall's books, he is actually reading a reflection of his own life and experiences in the ghetto in the occupied Warsaw. "Most of what is written is unbelievable and unimaginable. Unfortunately, it is all true...."¹⁰ Ranicki made Krall's acquaintance when she was working with his wife, Teofila Reich-Ranicki, whom he married in the Warsaw ghetto. In 2000, Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt in Stuttgart published an album edition of a book featuring Teofila Reich-Ranicki's watercolours and Roswitha Matwin-Buschmann's translations of Krall's texts, titled „Es war der letzte Augenblick. Leben im Warschauer Ghetto" [„It Was the Last Moment. Life in the Warsaw Ghetto"¹¹]. This book has not been published in Polish, although Teofila Langnas (Reich-Ranicki's maiden name), was introduced to the Polish audiences in Piotr Rypson's article on her drawings („Album rysunków Teofili Langnas-Reich w Archiwum Ringelbluma" [„An Album of Drawings by Teofila Langnas-Reich in the Ringelblum Archive"¹²].

The book *Es war der letzte Augenblick*, edited by Krall, consists of five parts: *Die Gazeta Żydowska. Die Jüdische Zeitung im Warschauer Getto* [*Die Gazeta Żydowska, The Jewish Paper in the Warsaw Ghetto*], a collection of Teofila Reich-Ranicki's watercolours from the ghetto with Hanna Krall's captions (*Aquarelle aus dem Warschauer Getto*), Krall's literary reportage *Die Aquarelle der Teofila L.*, a series of opera heroines in stage costumes (*Heroinnen der Opernbühne*) by Teofila Reich-Ranicki, and notes about both authors (*Biographische Notiz*). Simultaneously with *Die Aquarelle von Teofila L.*, the Polish version was published

⁹ Niemiecka nagroda dla Hanny Krall – DW – 03.10.2008 (accessed: 26.04.2024).

¹⁰ Marcel Reich-Ranicki: „Das, was geschrieben ist, ist zum großen Teil nicht glaubwürdig, man kann es sich gar nicht vorstellen. Es stimmt leider alles". „Ricarda-Huch-Preis für Hanna Krall", *Taz*, 4.10.2008, unterm strich - *taz.de*, accessed: 26.04.2024. „Le vrai n'est pas toujours vraisemblable", „The truth is not always probable" - that is he motto of Annette von Droste-Hülshoff's 1842 short story *Die Judenbuche* (A Jewish beech tree).

¹¹ Teofila Reich-Ranicki / Hanna Krall, *Es war der letzte Augenblick. Leben im Warschauer Getto*, transl. by Roswitha Matwin-Buschmann (Stuttgart, München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2000). This is what Hanna Krall said in *Tygodnik Powszechny* about the circumstances of the book's creation: „They say she illustrated my book. This is not true. I captioned her drawings, that's all. We talked every day for two weeks. It took a long time because she got tired easily". <https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/teofila-168559>, accessed: 26.04.2024.

¹² Piotr Rypson, „Album rysunków Teofili Langnas-Reich w Archiwum Ringelbluma" [„The Album of Teofila Langnas-Reich's Drawings in the Ringelblum Archive"]. *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 18 (2022): 366–402. doi.org/10.32927/zssim.963, accessed: 26.04.2024.

in *Tygodnik Powszechny* as „Akwarele” („Watercolours”)¹³. The painter and her husband, a well-known literary critic, are also the subject of a short prose piece, *Teofila* in Krall's latest book - *Szczegóły znaczące* (2022).¹⁴

The first book by Hanna Krall published in Germany was *Zdążyć przed panem Bogiem* [Eng. title: *Shielding the Flame*], available in two translations. In 1979, Hubert Schumann's *Dem Herrgott zuvorkommen* was published in East Berlin, and a year later, Klaus Stemmler's *Schneller als der liebe Gott* was published in West Germany by Suhrkamp. The book was a great success, just like other collections of Krall's reportages, which became bestsellers in Germany in the 1990s. The first German edition of *Zdążyć przed Panem Biegiem* even featured an introduction by Willy Brandt, the chairman of the SPD party and former German chancellor.

An account of the struggle against extreme despair in the Warsaw ghetto, even in literary form, can really only be a documentation of a nightmare, an image of extreme cruelty, unspeakable suffering, and countless deaths. [...] And yet: I did not perceive Hanna Krall's account, with its focus on Marek Edelman, solely as a book about dying. Rather, I read it as a book about life, for life¹⁵.

Zdążyć przez Panem Bogiem, translated into 17 languages, remains Krall's best-known literary work abroad. However, it does not feature in German curricula (*Bildungskanon*) as a compulsory reading for secondary school students. Marita Meyer, comparing Polish and German readings on World War II and the Holocaust, writes about the lack of centralised exams and an official high school reading list in Germany.¹⁶ She focuses on three Polish authors and their works: Tadeusz Borowski, Czesław Miłosz, and Hanna Krall, noting that in the case of the German educational system, one can only speak of a “secret canon” (*der heimliche Kanon*)¹⁷.

Describing the reception of *Zdążyć przed panem Bogiem*, Meyer emphasizes its innovative narrative style, which challenges the official policy of remembrance: “Following Aleida

¹³Hanna Krall, „Akwarele” [„Watercolours”]. *Tygodnik Powszechny* 26 (2000). To ty jesteś Daniel [And So You Are Daniel] contains a short story about Teofila Reich-Ranicki: Marzec 2000. Frankfurt nad Menem [March 2000. Frankfurt am Main (Krall, *Fantom bólu*. Reportaże wszystkie [The Phantom of pain. Collected reportages], 759–760). „I visit her daily. I sit in the same armchair, she sits opposite me. Germans will publish a book with her drawings and I will write a short story about her”. The protagonist of the text remains nameless; only her husband Marcel is called by his name. „Her husband Marcel was with her her whole life; he would narrate books to her or read poetry aloud”. She is only named in footnotes at the end of the book (Krall, *Fantom bólu*. Reportaże wszystkie, 805).

¹⁴Hanna Krall, *Teofila*, in her, *Szczegóły znaczące* [Significant details] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2022): 71–76.

¹⁵Willy Brandt, „Vorwort”, in Krall's: *Schneller als der liebe Gott*, transl. by Klaus Staemmler (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1980), 7–8, here: 7.

¹⁶Marita Mayer, „Deutsche und polnische Lektüren über den Zweiten Weltkrieg und den Holocaust. Eine vergleichende Untersuchung zur schulischen Kanonbildung und zum kulturellen Gedächtnis”, *Convivium. Germanistisches Jahrbuch Polen* (2009): 213–243. https://cejsh.icm.edu.pl/cejsh/element/bwmeta1.element.ojs-doi-10_18778_2196-8403_2009_17, accessed: 24.04.2024.

¹⁷Mayer, 216. Her research shows that the German youth read few books on the topic; the most popular ones are Anne Frank's *Diary* and *Damals war es Friedrich* by Hans Peter Richter, *Als Hitler das rosa Kaninchen stahl* by Judith Kerr and *Der Vorleser* [The Reader] by Bernhard Schlink. Meyer sees in those choices a preference for easy readings; good intentions combined with a desire for displacement and passing on to the third generation an idealised image of the past. Mayer wishes for school curricula to include Peter Weiss's documentary *Die Ermittlung* (1965) and Ruth Klüger's autobiographical prose *weiter leben* (1992).

Assmann, it can be said that Krall and Edelman attempt to transform frozen memory into fluid memory. This fluid or living memory permits uncertainty about the course of events.¹⁸ Meyer silences controversies concerning the deconstruction of the story of a heroic uprising (and questioning witness authority¹⁹) by invoking the postmodern distrust of “grand and uninterrupted narratives” and presenting individual stories of people whose courageous or humanitarian behavior does feature in such a grand narrative.²⁰ Mayer, following Geoffrey Hartman, sees the role of the author-interviewer, recounting someone else’s story, as one of “intellectual testimony.”²¹

The website of the Deutsches Polen-Institut in Darmstadt features downloadable lesson modules, which can be used during German as a Foreign Language classes, but can also help acquaint German students with Polish-German relations and authors with Polish literary and biographical backgrounds.²² One of such modules concerns survival strategies and mechanisms of coping with trauma (*Bewältigungsmechanismen*) in *Zdążyć przed panem Bogiem*.²³

Probably the most comprehensive and accurate analysis of Hanna Krall’s literary reportages is Daniela Bode-Jarsumbeck’s dissertation *Die literarischen Reportagen Hanna Kralls. Gedächtnis an die ostjüdische Lebenswelt und die Shoah*²⁴. The researcher focuses on *Zdążyć przed Panem Bogiem* and on what she terms “reportages about the *Shtetl*” (“*Schtetel-Reportagen*”). She is interested in the “textures of memory”: the reportage about Edelman and the ghetto uprising as a “medium of collective memories” is followed by an attempt at reconstructing the destroyed world of Jews in Eastern Europe (the architecture of the *shtetl*, everyday life, religiosity, mysticism), and concluded with a description of stylistic elements (interview and conversation, lexicon, narrativity and intellectual testimony, temporal planes, repetitions). The researcher uses Jan and Aleida Assmann’s categories of knowledge about memory to analyze Hanna Krall’s reportages – for the memory of witnesses to survive, it must be transferred from communicative memory to cultural memory.²⁵ Krall externalizes the experiences of survivors: “In the spirit of Assmann, literary reportages should be assigned both to storage and functional memory,²⁶” which means that they both accumulate knowledge and, through the act of their publication, become part of the educational canon and social discourse.

¹⁸Mayer, 232–233.

¹⁹Barbara Breysach, *Schauplatz und Gedächtnisraum Polen. Die Vernichtung der Juden in der deutschen und polnischen Literatur* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2005), 375.

²⁰Here Mayer quotes Tzvetan Todorov’s afterword on „ordinary virtues”, juxtaposed with „heroic virtues” – resisting acts of humiliation and taking care of others. Hanna Krall, *Dem Herrgott zuvorkommen*, transl. by Hubert Schumann (Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 1992). 163.

²¹Geoffrey Hartman, „Die Ethik des Zeugnisses. Ein Interview mit Geoffrey Hartman”, in: *Zeugenschaft des Holocaust. Zwischen Trauma, Tradierung und Ermittlung*, ed. by Michael Elm, Gottfried Kössler (Frankfurt am Main, New York: Campus Verlag, 2007), 52–76, here 73.

²²Deutsch/Literatur – Polen in der Schule, accessed: 26.04.2024.

²³Deutsch/Literatur – Polen in der Schule, accessed: 24.04.2024.

²⁴Daniela Bode-Jarsumbeck, *Die literarischen Reportagen Hanna Kralls. Gedächtnis an die ostjüdische Lebenswelt und die Shoah* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009).

²⁵Bode-Jarsumbeck, 43.

²⁶Bode-Jarsumbeck, 43.

Bode-Jarsumbeck aims to examine whether Krall refrains from a stylisation of suffering, how she presents authentic material, if she refrains from commentary, and what linguistic means she uses to find “the right form for the literature of memory”²⁷. She classifies Krall’s reportage, along with Henryk Grynberg’s short stories (*Drohobycz, Drohobycz*, 2000), as “secondary testimonies,” and considers the hybrid narrative²⁸ format as characteristic of later Holocaust literature. It should be noted here that Hanna Krall belongs to the generation of survivors, but her use of a restrained form of expression in describing other people’s dramatic fates and her reliance on interviews and documents endow her prose with features of the post-memorial trend, characteristic of the literature of subsequent generations.

Dan Diner, professor of modern history in Jerusalem and former head of the Simon Dubnow Institute for Jewish History and Culture in Leipzig (1999-2014), delivered the laudatory speech in honor of Hanna Krall in 2000, when she was awarded the Leipzig Book Prize for European Understanding (Leipziger Buchpreis der Europäischen Verständigung). In his laudation, he emphasized the “radical poetics of understatement” and the “absence of monstrosities” in Krall’s texts. Diner interprets this not as a mere stylistic device, but as a consequence of the unimaginability, groundlessness, and abstractness of mass extermination: “The murder of European Jews is a statistic rather than a narrative.”²⁹ The absence of the actual process in the author’s texts therefore stems from the nature of the Holocaust, from the unimaginability of that event as it was taking place: industrial death prevents the creation of a narrative corresponding to the event.³⁰ Diner contextualises Krall’s prose within the problematic Polish-Jewish relationships, exacerbated by the crimes committed by the Germans. The Jews described in *Dowody na Istnienie* – Jewish children saved by the Poles – are modern-day Marranos, having become Poles without even knowing about it. The stories described by Krall are a biographical vestige of the Polish-Jewish drama: as Diner writes, “from her anthropologically oriented introspection of the fate of the individual, [Krall] enters the realm of complex and complicated collective histories that have taken hold of the individual without their participation.”³¹ However, Krall does not spin collective epics; she shows individuals thrown into unusual situations and circumstances, examining universal humanity with the “eye of an incorruptible observer”:

²⁷Bode-Jarsumbeck, 5. Bode-Jarsumbeck invokes Henryk Grynberg (*Prawda nieartystyczna* [The Non-artistic Truth], Czeladź 1990) and James E. Young (*Beschreiben des Holocaust. Darstellung und Formen der Interpretation*, Frankfurt am Main 1992). Grynberg emphasises the role of Polish writers as witnesses who were in the epicentre of the crime and now they are supposed to bear witness through a scant usage of literary techniques, refraining from commentary and depicting individual suffering of victims. Young believes that aiming for the greatest objectivity in the approach to the Holocaust is the task of historians. At the same time, in order to attract the interest of a wide range of readers, it is important to create an appropriate artistic form for the literature of memory. Bode-Jarsumbeck, 4–5.

²⁸Bode-Jarsumbeck, 3. Thanks to temporal and spatial distance „objective truth beyond a personal horizon” may be conveyed in the literature of the Holocaust differently, and the artist’s style plays a much bigger role than in the case of witness texts from the time of persecution.

²⁹Dan Diner, *Laudatio auf Hanna Krall*. Leipziger Buchpreis zur Europäischen Verständigung. Dan Diner: *Laudatio auf Hanna Krall* (leipzig.de), accessed: 24.04.2024.

³⁰See Hanna Krall’s statements on „mass death”, e.g. in her *Reporterka* [She-reporter]: „Ryszard Kapuściński once wrote this wise sentence that there is no such thing as «mass death». The Holocaust is referred to as death of a nation, but it meant that many people were dying at the same time, or even in the same place, like in Auschwitz, in the ghetto or in Babi Yar near Kyiv. But each of those people was dying a singular death of their own, there is no such thing as collective death. Entire groups of people were dying, entire families, communities, but even within a family each person was dying their own death. And this is how one should tell their stories and remember about every individual person.” Jacek Antczak, *Reporterka* (Warszawa: Agora, 2015), 141.

³¹Diner.

She found her unique, masterful narrative in a retrospective account from the land of the dead, staged by people for people, with economical stenographic restraint and camouflaging as simple reportage. Edelman's way of speaking also permeates, as a primary narrative, subsequent stories from times of horror, traced by Hanna Krall with an almost archaeological obsession with detail. By using fragments and seemingly marginal miniatures of everyday life, she manages to create an even more realistic reflection of the nightmare. A gaze that bypasses what is truly terrifying allows for a depth of focus for which Hanna Krall is praised³².

Irmela von der Lühe highlights two aspects that fascinate German reviewers of Hanna Krall's works: the first is her ability to engage in socio-political criticism under censorship, revealing the discrepancy between the socialist ideal and everyday mediocrity; the second is her literary form: the use of hypotheses, stories told in the subjunctive mood (which is interpreted as a postmodernist feature), and a restrained, laconic, and discreet style. Using the interview format, Krall is able to reveal the dubious, ambiguous nature of what is supposedly authentic, indisputably personal, and experienced by her protagonists³³. The third important reason for Krall's recognition in Germany is her role as an "archivist" and "archeologist" (terms used by the author herself in her reportages), searching for traces of the destroyed Jewish world in Poland. Lühe sees the Polish author's literary work of memory as a challenge to literary attempts and scientific research in Germany and beyond: the progressive radicalization of the scientific position on the possibility of literary representations of the Holocaust means that Krall's works, written in full awareness of the impossibility of conveying the Holocaust in words, are a modest but determined protest against the theorisation of this topos and a meticulous discussion of the inexpressible.³⁴ A characteristic feature of the reportages is their objection to verbosity and kitsch, reflection on carefully selected words, and the hidden meaning of episodic occurrences.³⁵

Lühe also points to literary parallels in other literary works, e.g. by Maxim Biller, the Dutch author Carl Friedman, and the Austrian literary scholar Ruth Klüger. Klüger (1931–2020), who as a teenage girl survived the Theresienstadt ghetto and the Auschwitz and Gross-Rosen (Rogoźnica) camps, saw in "ghost stories" ("Gespenstergeschichten") a solution to the aporia of literary representation of mass murders. One such ghost story in *Dowody na Istnienie* is *Dybuk* [*The Dybbuk*] – the titular dybbuk is in the Jewish tradition a restless soul of the dead. The author renounces any attempts at an "interpretative neutralization of the improbable," "theoretical-psychological" or "philosophical-reflective" explanations, which is justified by the reporter's experience with the untruthfulness of logical stories.³⁶ The German researcher sees the uniqueness of Krall's texts in the combination of the fragmentariness of her characters' biographies, as she sketches their possible or desired life stories in her reportages, while the

³²Diner.

³³Irmela von der Lühe, „Interviews gegen das Verschweigen. Hanna Kralls Reportagen“, in: „... wortlos der Sprache mächtig“. Schweigen und Sprechen in Literatur und sprachlicher Kommunikation, ed. by Hartmut Eggert, Janusz Golec (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1999), 95–110, here: 97–101.

³⁴Lühe, 101–102.

³⁵Lühe, 104.

³⁶Lühe, 105. She recalls Krall's comment from the reportage *Zbawienie* [Salvation] from her *Dowody na istnienie* [Evidence for existence]: „My job as a reporter has taught me that logical stories, which have no mysteries or gaps, the ones in which everything is understandable, tend to be untrue. And things which are inexplicable really do happen.“ Krall, *Fantom bólu*. Reportaże wszystkie, 583.

linguistic and literary means she uses allow her to preserve their individuality. Krall does not use a specific “Verfremdungstechnik” - alienation technique, which destroys the viewer’s illusion by creating an effect of strangeness and allowing them to maintain critical distance. She does without linguistic sophistication and elements that increase tension, incorporating comedy and absurdity³⁷.

Reviews published in serious, influential German newspapers emphasize that Krall’s literary reportage is characterized by “the art of words” (*Sprachkunst*³⁸) and focuses on the Holocaust. It should be noted that the vast majority of reviews mistakenly cite 1937 as Hanna Krall’s year of birth. The transformation of the reportage into literature (in Germany, the former is considered a journalistic genre) or the use of minimalist prose with its own poetics and rhythm are repeatedly praised. Heinz Ludwig Arnold notes that, unlike in German documentary literature, the characters remain the subjects or even “co-authors” of the stories: although the German edition of *Hipnoza* [*Hypnosis*] bears the subtitle *Opowiadania* [*Short Stories*], the stories are those of survivors and witnesses. But these are not “tearful stories” (*Betroffenheitsgeschichten*); the author does not psychologize to explain something or make it easier to understand. “Her seemingly detached narrative evokes a closeness that pierces through and through³⁹.” As Arnold emphasizes, Krall’s books are worth more than monuments made of stone or bronze. For Cornelia Geissler, Krall’s texts are “an unprecedented library of the literature of memory.”⁴⁰ The writer does not invent stories or transport readers to foreign worlds, but instead leads them into the past. She does not stereotype Poles, Jews, and Germans, nor does she divide people into victims and perpetrators; she is always interested in individual cases. Geissler refers to Krall as a “documentarian of memory,” and in the structure of her narrative—the mixing of time frames and achronology—she sees the very manner in which the human brain functions⁴¹.

The theme of Hanna Krall’s prose is survival in terrible times, as noted by Kerstin Hensel, who emphasizes the intriguing originality of the texts: “No matter how gruesome the circumstances are, they also show their comical and grotesque side, and thus – a true abyss.”⁴² Krall does not present a “cosmic view”, suggesting that the world has some absurd order, but uses detached language to filter out from her characters’ biographies “those moments when they become fate”. The difficult balance that Krall’s prose maintains between a documentary and literary style creates “true images of history” with an existential dimension⁴³.

³⁷Lühe, 107–108. As for the reportage, Lühe recalls the times of the Weimar Republic (Egon Erwin Kisch, Maria Leitner, Lili Körber, Alfred Polgar, Joseph Roth) and the postwar period (Alexander Kluge, Erika Runge, Max von der Grün, Günter Wallraff) with their ideals of matter-of-factness, truth, authenticity and social criticism.

³⁸Jakob Hessing, „Eine Poetik der Erinnerung. Die Geschichten der Zeugen: Hanna Kralls erzählte Berichte über Opfer und Täter“, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 10.07.1999, Rezension: Belletristik: Eine Poetik der Erinnerung (faz.net), accessed: 26.04.2024.

³⁹Heinz Ludwig Arnold, „Im Schnee, da saß ein Mädchen. Mehr als ein Mahnmal: Hanna Krall berichtet von polnischen Juden“, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 4.11.1997, Rezension: Belletristik: Im Schnee, da saß ein Mädchen (faz.net) (accessed: 27.04.2024).

⁴⁰Cornelia Geissler, „Dokumentaristin der Erinnerung“, *Berliner Zeitung* 25.03.2000, Dokumentaristin der Erinnerung (berliner-zeitung.de), accessed: 27.04.2024.

⁴¹Geissler.

⁴²Kerstin Hensel, „Vom Überleben in mörderischen Zeiten. Die Kunst des Weglassens und der Distanz: «Hypnose» von Hanna Krall“, *Tageszeitung* 31.05.1997, Vom Überleben in mörderischen Zeiten - taz.de, accessed: 27.04.2024.

⁴³Hensel.

According to Katharina Doebler, the concept of literary reportage is not appropriate for stories about the dead, the survivors, and the empty spaces left behind by the deceased.⁴⁴ Treating Hanna Krall as a “narrator of the Shoah”, documenting the memories and biographies of survivors, fails to capture the essence of her prose: “With minimalist language and narrative conciseness that shifts the focus of the story to the empty spaces of the unwritten, [Krall] describes a state of loss, the ever-incomprehensible absence of the dead – not only those who died in the Holocaust.” In the dispute between two positions on the representation of the Holocaust: apologists of pure documentation, who reject any drama as trivializing the Holocaust, and those who seek a narrative that would reflect the fate of those murdered, Krall follows the path of meticulous work on details, imposing concrete form to biographies and episodes from the lives of characters. She writes about family holidays, dyed hair, maids in love, typewriters (the title of the review is *Duchy konkretności – The Ghosts of Concreteness*). Doebler wonders whether it is even possible to grade such writing. “The language and gaze are increasingly focused on the crystalline edges that have formed around empty spaces, on remnants such as stray abandoned objects, like ghosts on Nalewki Street or like the river in the titular story.”⁴⁵

Reports about Germans as the subjects of stories are of particular interest in Germany. They remain the perpetrators (occupiers or terrorists), but there is a human side to them: opposition to mass extermination, membership in a conspiracy group, social ostracism because of a Polish father. Among Hanna Krall’s reportages, there are two stories whose main characters are Germans: the first is *Dno oka* [*The Back of the Eye*],⁴⁶ a story about Stefan Wisniewski, a terrorist of the Rote Armee Fraktion and co-perpetrator of the assassination of Hanns-Martin Schleyer; the second is *Fantom bólu* [*The Phantom of Pain*], the wartime story of Axel von dem Bussche, a Wehrmacht officer who was one of conspirators planning an assassination attempt on Hitler.⁴⁷ When asked by a German journalist, Julia Kospach, if she did not want to portray German perpetrators as monsters, Hanna Krall replied: “They were monsters. I am afraid of them. That is why I avoid getting close to them. In my story about the Hamburg police battalion, there is an episode about a group of artists from Berlin who want to take part in the shooting of Jews. I would be afraid of these people.”⁴⁸ She admits in her conversation with Kospach that when Axel von dem Bussche told her how his friend had died beside him on the first day of the war, she felt sympathy for a German soldier for the first time. “I was disturbed by this feeling myself,” the writer confesses.⁴⁹ Axel von dem Bussche was the first German of the war generation with whom she spoke.⁵⁰ The reason for writing these stories, as the author declares, was a desire to understand:

⁴⁴Katharina Doebler, „Die Geister des Konkreten. Wie Hanna Krall aus Tatsachen Literatur macht”, *Die ZEIT* 23.09.1999, *Die Geister des Konkreten* | ZEIT ONLINE, accessed: 27.04.2024.

⁴⁵Doebler.

⁴⁶Hanna Krall, *Dno oka* [*The Back of the Eye*] (vol. *Taniec na cudzym weselu* [*Dancing at Someone Else’s Wedding*]), in her: *Fantom bólu. Reportaże wszystkie*, 418–433.

⁴⁷Hanna Krall, *Fantom bólu* (vol. *Taniec na cudzym weselu*), in her: *Fantom bólu. Reportaże wszystkie*, 434–455.

⁴⁸Julia Kospach, „Ich habe Angst. Der Holocaust, das Mitleid und die Literatur: Ein Gespräch mit der polnischen Autorin Hanna Krall über ihre schriftstellerische Arbeit”, *TAZ*, 24.04.1999, <https://taz.de/!1291696/>, accessed: 27.04.2024. See: Hanna Krall, *Pola* [*Fields*] (vol. *Tam już nie ma żadnej rzeki*), in her: *Fantom bólu. Reportaże wszystkie*, 654–663.

⁴⁹Kospach.

⁵⁰Gerhard Gnauck, „Ich will verstehen. Gespräch mit Hanna Krall, die in Leipzig den Preis für Europäische Verständigung erhält”, *Die Welt* 25.03.2000, *Ich will verstehen* – WELT, accessed: 28.04.2024.

In *Dno oka* (from the volume *Hipnoza*), I try to understand Stefan W. His father Stanisław, was a Polish forced laborer in Germany. He was in Dachau, and later stayed in Germany. Stefan joined the RAF and was sentenced to life imprisonment for the kidnapping of Schleyer. He had read my book *Zdążyć przed Panem Bogiem* and wrote to me from prison. I wanted to know what drove him to terrorism. I think it was revenge. Revenge for the humiliation he suffered at the hands of those around him, because his father was a Polish prisoner, while the fathers of his schoolmates were war heroes.⁵¹

The alienation from the German fate, the insurmountable distance from the German participant in the war remains, as in the case of the “Nordic baron” who, in *To ty jesteś Daniel* (*So You Are Daniel*), through the power of the author’s imagination, becomes an afterimage of the Jews shot by the SS-members in Dubno: “That the world will show them a beautiful autumn landscape with a young man on a horse as a farewell.”⁵² The Germans’ ignorance concerning the Third Reich, the National Socialist terror, and the so-called Eastern Front in the occupied territories of Central and Eastern Europe is manifested, for example, in the reactions of mothers in Krall’s reportage *Dno oka*⁵³. This ignorance, which also concerns subsequent generations, certainly hinders the reception of Hanna Krall’s reportage and, more generally, books about World War II and the Holocaust. Translator Bernhard Hartmann also points out the following: German readers do not know and do not understand the details of Polish history and the German occupation; they lack historical knowledge. A different cultural memory and culture of remembrance of the neighbors, therefore, stands in the way of a wider reception of Polish literature.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, the list of translations of Hanna Krall’s reportages into German is the longest⁵⁵, featuring a total of fourteen of her books, including separate translations of *Hipnoza* by Wanja W. Ronge (*Legoland*, 1990) and Roswitha Matwin-Buschmann (*Hypnose*, 1997) respectively.⁵⁶

The question of the reception of Hanna Krall’s “Holocaust reportages,” to borrow a term from Anna Dobiegała⁵⁷, encompasses not only the issue of the translatability of literary texts and historical and cultural realities, but also the genre context – what is reportage or literary reportage? What position does it occupy in both linguistic areas? Also of interest are the broad issues of research and literary description of the Holocaust: memorial and post-memorial

⁵¹Gnauck.

⁵²Hanna Krall, Styczeń 1991. Lehrensteinsfeld [January 1991. Lehrensteinsfeld] (vol. *To ty jesteś Daniel*), Fantom bólu. Reportaże wszystkie, 790–792, 792.

⁵³„– Besides– other mothers said to other children – if his father was in a camp, he was there for a reason. Hitler or not, he would not have been imprisoned without a cause.” Krall, *Dno oka*, 423.

⁵⁴See Mirosława Zielińska, „Auf dem Weg zum Monolog im Schatten des Zweiten Weltkriegs zum Polylog der global citizen. Kulturtransfer der polnischen Literatur im deutschsprachigen Raum (1989/1990-2010)”, *Erwachsene Nachbarschaft. Die deutsch-polnischen Beziehungen 1991 bis 2011*, ed. by Dieter Bingen et al. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2011), 377–372, <https://depot.ceon.pl/handle/123456789/2971?locale-attribute=pl>, accessed: 30.04.2024.

⁵⁵See the list of Hanna Krall’s translations available at Polish Institute’s website. The Polish Book Institute (instytutksiazki.pl), accessed: 30.04.2024.

⁵⁶Both volumes differ in the selection of texts and go beyond the reportages from *Hipnoza* (Warszawa: Alfa, 1989). The titular *Legoland* is *Spotkanie w Dolinie Białego* [A Meeting in the Valley of Białe].

⁵⁷Anna Dobiegała, „Rzecz jako język dyskursu memorialnego w holokaustowych reportażach Hanny Krall”, [„Things as a language of memorial discourse in Hanna Krall’s Holocaust reportages”] *Teksty Drugie* 1-2 (2013), 224–238.

discourse (memory and post-memory), issues of representation and its limits, eyewitness and secondary literature, and cross-sectional studies. However, these issues require separate readings and comparative studies.

translated by Justyna Rogos-Hebda

Hanna Krall's translators (in alphabetical order):

Bernhard Hartmann: Różowe strusie pióra [Pink Ostrich Feathers] / Rosa Straußenfedern (Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 2012), Biała Maria [White Maria] / Weiße Maria (Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 2014).

Esther Kinsky: Dowody na istnienie [Evidence for Existence] / Existenzbeweise. Sieben Erzählungen (Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 1995).

Anna Leszczyńska: Sublokatorka [The Subtenant] / Die Untermieterin (Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 1986), Unschuldig für den Rest des Lebens. Frühe Reportagen (Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 2001) with Roswitha Matwin-Buschmann, Johanna Österreich and Hubert Schumann.

Roswitha Matwin-Buschmann: Hipnoza [Hypnosis] / Hypnose. Erzählungen (Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 1997), Tam już nie ma żadnej rzeki [There is No River There Anymore] / Da ist kein Fluß mehr (Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 1999), To ty jesteś Daniel [So You Are Daniel] / Ach du bist Daniel (Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 2002), Wyjątkowo długa linia / [An Exceptionally Long Line] Eine ausnehmend lange Linie (Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 2005).

Hubert Schumann: Zdążyć przed Panem Bogiem [Eng. Shielding the Flame] / Dem Herrgott zuvorkommen. Ein Tatsachenbericht (Berlin: Volk und Wissen, 1979, reprint Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 1992), Unschuldig für den Rest des Lebens: literarische Reportagen aus Polen (Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 1983), Tanz auf fremder Hochzeit (Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 1993).

Renate Schmidgall: Król kier na wylocie [Chasing the King of Hearts] / Herzkönig (Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 2007).

Klaus Staemmler: Zdążyć przed Panem Bogiem / Schneller als der liebe Gott (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980)

Wanja W. Ronge: Hipnoza / Legoland (Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 1990).

References

- Antczak, Jacek. *Reporterka*. Warszawa: Agora, 2015.
- Arnold, Heinz Ludwig. „Im Schnee, da saß ein Mädchen. Mehr als ein Mahnmal: Hanna Krall berichtet von polnischen Juden”, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 4.11.1997, Rezension: Belletristik: Im Schnee, da saß ein Mädchen (faz.net).
- Bode-Jarsumbeck, Daniela. *Die literarischen Reportagen Hanna Kralls. Gedächtnis an die ostjüdische Lebenswelt und die Shoah (Opera Slavica. Neue Folge, Bd. 51)*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009.
- Braese, Stephan. „Einführung”. In: *In der Sprache der Täter. Neue Lektüren deutschsprachiger Nachkriegs- und Gegenwartsliteratur*, ed. by Stephan Braese, 7–11. Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1998.
- Brandt, Willy. „Vorwort”. In: Hanna Krall. *Schneller als der liebe Gott*, transl. Klaus Staemmler, 7–8. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980.
- Breysach, Barbara. *Schauplatz und Gedächtnisraum Polen. Die Vernichtung der Juden in der deutschen und polnischen Literatur*. Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2005.
- Deutsch/Literatur – Polen in der Schule. Diner, Dan. *Laudatio auf Hanna Krall*. Leipziger Buchpreis zur Europäischen Verständigung. Dan Diner: *Laudatio auf Hanna Krall* (leipzig.de). Dobiegała, Anna. „Rzeczy jako język dyskursu memorialnego w holokaustowych reportażach Hanny Krall”. *Teksty Drugie* 1-2 (2013): 224–238.
- Doebler, Katharina. „Die Geister des Konkreten. Wie Hanna Krall aus Tatsachen Literatur macht”. *Die ZEIT*, 23.09.1999. *Die Geister des Konkreten* | ZEIT ONLINE.
- Geissler, Cornelia. „Dokumentaristin der Erinnerung”. *Berliner Zeitung*, 25.03.2000. *Dokumentaristin der Erinnerung* (berliner-zeitung.de).
- Gnauck, Gerhard. „Ich will verstehen. Gespräch mit Hanna Krall, die in Leipzig den Preis für Europäische Verständigung erhält”. *Die Welt*, 25.03.2000. *Ich will verstehen - WELT*.
- Hanna Krall. The Polish Book Institute (instytutksiazki.pl).
- Hartman, Geoffrey. „Die Ethik des Zeugnisses. Ein Interview mit Geoffrey Hartman”. In: *Zeugenschaft des Holocaust. Zwischen Trauma, Tradierung und Ermittlung*, ed. by Michael Elm, Gottfried Kössler, 52–76. Frankfurt am Main, New York: Campus Verlag, 2007.
- Hensel, Kerstin. „Vom Überleben in mörderischen Zeiten. Die Kunst des Weglassens und der Distanz: Hypnose von Hanna Krall”. *Tageszeitung*, 31.05.1997. *Vom Überleben in mörderischen Zeiten - taz.de*.
- Hessing, Jakob. „Eine Poetik der Erinnerung. Die Geschichten der Zeugen: Hanna Kralls erzählte Berichte über Opfer und Täter”. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 10.07.1999. Rezension: *Belletristik: Eine Poetik der Erinnerung* (faz.net).
- Kospach, Julia. „Ich habe Angst. Der Holocaust, das Mitleid und die Literatur: Ein Gespräch mit der polnischen Autorin Hanna Krall über ihre schriftstellerische Arbeit”. *TAZ*, 24.04.1999. <https://taz.de/!1291696/>. Krall, Hanna. „Akwarele”. *Tygodnik Powszechny* 26 (2000): 5.
- – –. *Dem Herrgott zuvorkommen*. Afterword by Tzvetan Todorov. Transl. by Hubert Schumann. Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 1992. – – –. *Fantom bólu. Reportaże wszystkie*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2017. – – –. *Hipnoza*. Warszawa: Alfa, 1989.
- – –. *Szczegóły znaczące*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2022.
- Lühe, Irmela von der. „Interviews gegen das Verschweigen. Hanna Kralls Reportagen”. In: „... wortlos der Sprache mächtig”. *Schweigen und Sprechen in Literatur und sprachlicher Kommunikation*, ed. by Hartmut Eggert, Janusz Golec, 95–110. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1999.
- Mayer, Marita. „Deutsche und polnische Lektüren über den Zweiten Weltkrieg und den Holocaust. Eine vergleichende Untersuchung zur schulischen Kanonbildung und zum kulturellen Gedächtnis”.

- Convivium. Germanistisches Jahrbuch Polen (2009): 213–243. https://cejsh.icm.edu.pl/cejsh/element/bwmeta1.element.ojs-doi-10_18778_2196-8403_2009_17. Niemiecka nagroda dla Hanny Krall – DW – 03.10.2008.
- Piliszek, Eugeniusz (ed.). Hanna Krall. Leipzig: Polnisches Institut Leipzig, 1996.
- Reich-Ranicki, Teofila, Hanna Krall. Es war der letzte Augenblick. Leben im Warschauer Getto. Transl. by Roswitha Matwin-Buschmann. Stuttgart, München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2000.
- „Ricarda-Huch-Preis für Hanna Krall”. Taz, 4.10.2008. [unterschied.de](http://www.unterschied.de).
- Rypson, Piotr. „Album rysunków Teofili Langnas-Reich w Archiwum Ringelbluma”. *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 18 (2022), 366–402. doi.org/10.32927/zsim.963.
- Waligórska, Magdalena. „Granice przekładu: polsko-niemiecko-żydowskie pogranicze literackie”. *Przekładaniec* 29 (2014): 259–264.
- Zielińska, Mirosława. „Auf dem Weg zum Monolog im Schatten des Zweiten Weltkriegs zum Polylog der global citizen. Kulturtransfer der polnischen Literatur im deutschsprachigen Raum (1989/1990–2010)”. In: *Erwachsene Nachbarschaft. Die deutsch-polnischen Beziehungen 1991 bis 2011*, ed. by Dieter Bingen, Peter Oliver Loew, Krzysztof Ruchniewicz, Marek Żybura, 377–392. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2011 (Veröffentlichungen des Deutschen Polen-Instituts Darmstadt 29), <https://depot.ceon.pl/handle/123456789/2971?locale-attribute=pl>.

KEYWORDS

Hanna Krall

literary reportage

ABSTRACT:

Since the publication of *Zdążyć przed Panem Bogiem* [Eng. *Shielding the Flame*] in East Germany (1979) and West Germany (1980), Hanna Krall's reportages have enjoyed popularity among readers and recognition among critics. However, no new translations have appeared in the last ten years. This article discusses the reception of Krall's literary reportages on the Holocaust in books, academic articles, and the German press, analyzing them to reveal the characteristic features of the author's narrative (the poetics of understatement, minimalist language, details) and the contexts of reading: the work of memory, testimonial literature, literary representations of the Holocaust, Polish-Jewish relations and fates, and the genre of the reportage. The paper concludes with a list of names of translators of Hanna Krall's reportages into German.

German translation

GERMAN-SPEAKING COUNTRIES

the Holocaust

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:

Anna Pastuszka – Dr. habil. (Assistant Professor), born in 1971, literary scholar, head of the Department of German Studies at the Institute of Linguistics and Literary Studies at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin. Research interests: memoir literature, space and places in literature, travel literature, cultural landscapes in literature. Author of publications on Esther Kinsky, Ruth Klüger, Ilse Rakusa, Monika Maron, Hanna Krall, Andrzej Stasiuk, Monika Sznajderman, among others. Her habilitation monograph was *Die Reise nach Ost- und Ostmitteleuropa in der Reiseprosa von Wolfgang Büscher und Karl-Markus Gauß* (Berlin: Peter Lang 2019) DOI: 10.3726/b15395. Selected recent publications: *Die Kunst des Sehens und das Naturschreiben. Die Landschafts- und Naturdarstellung im Roman Am Fluss von Esther Kinsky. Porównania* Vol. 31, No. 1 (2022) DOI: 10.14746/por.2022.1.9; co-edited collective monograph (with Jolanta Pacyniak) *Narrative der Grenze. Die Etablierung und Überschreitung von Grenzen*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2023 and article *Über Grenzen und ihr Überschreiten in "Lapidaria I-VI" von Ryszard Kapuściński* doi.org/10.14220/9783737015554.97; editor of the volume *Kulturlandschaften Ostmitteleuropas in der Reiseprosa*. Lublin Studies, Vol. 48, No. 1 (2024) and the article *Kulturlandschaften Europas in Reiseliteratur*. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17951/lsmll.2024.48.1.1-18>; *Die Angst vor dem Fremden und ihre Überwindung. Die kosmopolitische Haltung von Ilija Trojanow*, in: *Transfer. Reception Studies*. Vol. 8 (2023). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1696/trs.2023.08.04>.