

About the Writer's House. The communicative and cultural nature of Joanna Olczak-Ronikier's memoirs (Back then. About post-war Krakow)

Wokół Domu Literatów. Komunikatywny i kulturowy charakter wspomnień Joanny Olczak-Ronikier (Wtedy. O powojennym Krakowie)

Marta Bolińska

UNIwersYTET JANA KOCHANOWSKIEGO W KIELCACH

Magdalena Płusa

UNIwersYTET JANA KOCHANOWSKIEGO W KIELCACH

Keywords

autogynography, communicative and cultural memory, memoirs

Słowa kluczowe

autogynografia, pamięć komunikatywna i kulturowa, wspomnienia

Abstract

Autogynography is a type of writing that reveals the sex of the author and her way of perceiving the world as the narrative is shaped primarily by her own experiences. On the one hand, when reading the memoirs of J. Olczak-Ronikier (*Back then. About post-war Krakow*, 2015) we are being told the history of the Mortkowicz family as the book sketches portraits of the residents of 22 Krupnicza Street in Krakow in the post-war years (1945-1949); on the other hand, it recreates the living memory passed from generation to generation in the author's family. The narrative intertwines the history of the Mortkowicz family with information about art, culture and human attitudes in the trying post-war times. The work is dominated by the concept of cultural memory, supported by technique of *feature* and autogynographic character.

Abstrakt

Autogynografia to typ pisarstwa, które odsłania płéć autorki oraz jej sposób postrzegania świata, ponieważ narracja kształtowana jest przede wszystkim przez kobiece doświadczenia. Lektura wspomnień J. Olczak-Ronikier (*Wtedy. O powojennym Krakowie*, 2015) pozwala z jednej strony na ukazanie historii rodziny Mortkowiczów, nakreślenie „portretów” mieszkańców Krupniczej 22 w Krakowie w powojennych latach (1945-1949), z drugiej zaś na odtworzenie żywej pamięci przekazywanej przez kolejne pokolenia w rodzinie autorki wspomnień. Historia rodziny Mortkowiczów splata się w tej narracji z informacjami o sztuce, kulturze i ludzkich postawach w trudnych powojennych czasach. W utworze dominuje koncepcja pamięci kulturowej, wspierana przez technikę *feature* oraz autogynograficzny charakter.

MARTA BOLIŃSKA

MAGDALENA PŁUSA

**About the Writer's House. The communicative
and cultural nature of Joanna Olczak-Ronikier's memoirs
(*Back then. About post-war Krakow*)**

The rhetorical device of the stone thrown into the water has its reflection both in social (e.g. psychological) and humanistic (e.g. historical, literary, linguistic) research. On that basis, thanks to Zygmunt Gloger, it is used when learning about the past is like circles on water, forming after a stone is thrown into it. The first circle includes the family and memories of the past, the second concerns the immediate surroundings (e.g. settlement, village, town), the third is a known region with the adjacent town or nearby village, and finally the fourth opens to a further space, i.e. the world. On the other hand, Radosław Poczykowski believes that these waves overlap and when crossing, they signal that it is not one object, but several of them in the water. Overlapping, the waves/ circles provide the opportunity to meet autobiographical (individual) memory, the memory of a generation as well as the historical memory (understood as general knowledge of the past). The above mentioned metaphor – of a few stones – testifies to the dynamics of collective memory; it also allows us to notice the power or weakness of the phenomenon (the waves of memory)¹.

Suffice it to recall that autobiographical memory as the individual's personal memory, embedded in the experience and emotions of the individual, contains memories that have an episodic and semantic dimension and, according to Francis Galton, primarily a visual character (quantitative limitations and the dominance of memories of a visual nature simultaneously affect the shaping of the plans for the future²). Given the above, in this text we wish to present the Krakow Writers' House³ and its closest vicinity recorded

¹ R. Poczykowski, *Local dimension of memory: collective memory and its transformations in north-eastern Poland*, Białystok 2010.

² See: A. Rybak-Korneluk et al, *Autobiographical memory and its significance in mental disorders*, „Psychiatra Polska” 2016, nr 5, s. 950. Por. also M. A. Conway, Ch. W. Pleydell-Pearce, *The Construction of Autobiographical in the Self-Memory System*, “Psychological Review” 2000, vol. 107, no. 2, pp. 261-288.

³ See. A. Grochowska, *All roads lead to Krupnicza. About the Writers' House*, Kraków 2017.

in the memories (mainly visual sensations) of Joanna Olczak-Ronikier⁴ as well as the book itself in the context of communicative and cultural memory.

The Circles of Memory

The metaphor of waves caused by the stone was used by Małgorzata Czermińska, when formulating the concept of childhood circles⁵. According to her, the childhood space is characteristically ordered. It has the form of four areas, each of which is larger than the previous one. The first is the house, the second is the nearest places, including a farm homestead or yard or garden, the third circle is either a well-known area within a village, or an adjacent town, or a familiar area of the city. The fourth circle is “actually a space no longer represented: a huge, infinite residue, a great unknown world surrounding the land of childhood”⁶.

The presence of the childhood circles (as the circles of memory) in the aforementioned story *Back then. About post-war Krakow* we shall trace selected but representative examples. It is worth noting that the work is dominated by the images observed. Their dispersion can be seen in the composition treated chronologically, not entirely linear, but rather associative. The research attitude – literature-centric – allows one mainly to indicate what the work contains and what is not directly the memory of the author. Therefore, in the analysis we record how the narrative is shaped, what position the narrator assumes, what the language of the writer is, to what she pays attention in her perception of the world, etc. It is also worth noting that the circles of her childhood are cross-shaped (the so-called waves overlap). Let us recall, using the proposal of Z. Gloger and M. Czermińska, that first the family home of Joanna Olczak was located in Warsaw, where she lived with her immediate family (mother and grandmother and cousins), and where her earliest childhood was spent. Then, thrown into the vortex of war wanderings that led her ultimately to Krakow, she found there a second,

⁴ Heuristics, which Daniel Kahneman calls thinking traps, are also important here. See. D. Kahneman, *Thinking traps. On fast and slow thinking*, transl. P. Szymczak, Poznań 2012.

⁵ M. Czermińska, *A house in an autobiography and childhood memory novel*, [in:] idem, *Autobiographic triangle. Certificate, confession and challenge*, Kraków 2000, op. cit., p. 300. Compare also J. Cieślowski, *Childhood*, [in:] idem, *Children's Literature and Subculture*, Wrocław 1975, p. 172.

⁶ M. Czermińska, *A house in an autobiography and childhood memory novel*, [in:] idem, *Autobiographic triangle. Certificate, confession and challenge*, Kraków 2000, p. 300.

post-war haven (The Writers' House⁷ at 22 Krupnicza Street), which proves the possibility of wave interference, i.e. memories recorded by her mind (especially episodic), as suggested by R. Poczykowski. To that secondary wave of childhood is essentially devoted that memory story *Back then. About post-war Krakow*. The writer confesses: "I am trying to remember my first meeting with Krakow. I came here in June 1945. Ten-and-a-half years old, small, thin, with a boyish hairstyle. How was I dressed? I have no idea. (...) Krakow seemed to me a place from a gingerbread fairy tale"⁸.

The Circles of Childhood

Published in 2015, the book is presented by its author, Joanna Olczak-Ronikier, in the following way: "I should start this story from the beginning"⁹, she confesses in her introduction. And in a rhetorical way, enumerating, explains why it does not start that way:

From pre-war Warsaw, where I was born. From the publishing house of Jakub Mortkowicz – my grandfather, that, after his death, was run by my grandmother and mother. From the bookstore at Mazowiecka Street. From the apartment at Okólnik Street, where the war found us. Describe the Germans' entry. Anti-Jewish Regulations. Escaping to the province. And so on and so forth. But I have already told this part of the story in the *Garden of Memory*. So I start from Krakow¹⁰.

⁷ ZLP is considered (like SPP) as a continuator of the tradition of the Polish Writers' Trade Union, which was founded on the initiative of S. Żeromski in May 1920. during the Congress of Polish Writers in Warsaw. The organization was reactivated after the occupation, actually creating a new one in September 1944 at the General Assembly in Lublin. At that time, the Interim Board was elected, consisting of: Julian Przyboś (president) and M. Jastrun, K. A. Jaworski, J. Pleśniarowicz, J. Putrament, J. Wasowski, A. Ważek. A branch of the Polish Writers' Trade Union was founded in Krakow when this organization was created in 1920. After the war, he received a tenement house at 22 Krupnicza Street from the authorities. In this building, known since then as the Writers' House (or the so-called writer's collective farm), apart from the office and club rooms, library, canteen and canteen, there were flats allocated to writers, especially those who came to Krakow after the Warsaw Uprising and the post-war change of borders. See: ZLP, https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zwi%C4%85zek_Literat%C3%B3w_Polskich; access: 19.03.2019.

⁸ J. Olczak-Ronikier, *Back then...*, op. cit., p. 60, 63.

⁹ J. Olczak-Ronikier, *Back then. About post-war Krakow*, Kraków 2015, p. 9.

¹⁰ J. Olczak-Ronikier, *Back then...*, op. cit., p. 9.

And on the neighboring page there is information: “On Thursday, January 18, 1945, the first Soviet tanks entered the streets of Sławkowska and Szewska on the Main Square in Krakow”¹¹.

The book by Olczak-Ronikier is built on the principle of so-called selective memory. It is a successful attempt to organize events over time. The story consists of 22 ‘pictures’, in which the main principle is, like Proust’s madeleine, a crumb of memories (e.g. a letter, a note, another note) evoking the scene, character, emotions. So, for example, the chapter *June will show what it brings as its gift*¹² that begins with the words: “That’s what the note in the wall calendar said, announcing June 1945. Grandmother – a compulsive optimist – tore a note from a calendar pad and stuck it on the door of a post German wardrobe”¹³.

The author appears in various roles; she is a chronicler, observer, witness, reconstructionist, collector of facts and souvenirs, heroine narrator, who presents both her point of view and the opinions of others supported by appropriate documentation. For example, on the fourth page of the cover, in information from the publisher¹⁴, we read:

March 1945. Janina Mortkowiczowa, co-creator of the famous publishing house, and her daughter, Hanna Mortkowicz-Olczakowa – writer, after the occupation experiences find a haven in Krakow. Soon, Hanna’s daughter, the author of this book, also finds herself there. In burned out Warsaw everything was lost: flat, bookstore, publishing house. They start a new life at the Krakow Writers’ House in Krupnicza Street. We watch the post-war four years from a double perspective: the memories of Joanna, who was 10 years old at the time, and from the documents carefully kept by her mother and grandmother. An unusual image is created: colorful and saturated with emotions, yet precise as the work of a historian, moving and beautiful¹⁵.

Pointing to the sources of data from which she drew, Joanna Olczak-Ronikier recalls the house (first circle) when she states: “*Time locked in wicker baskets*. That’s how I titled the text that appeared on March 9, 1997 in *Tygodnik Powszechny*. I wrote then about some quirk of my grandmother and mother that also affected my life. From 1945, when after the defeat of the Warsaw Uprising, after months of wandering, they settled down with me in Krakow, none of them threw away any written scrap until their death. They kept

¹¹ J. Olczak-Ronikier, *Back then...*, op. cit., p. 11.

¹² J. Olczak-Ronikier, *Back then...*, pp. 97-116.

¹³ J. Olczak-Ronikier, *Back then...*, p. 97.

¹⁴ The book was published by the Krakow Publishing House “Znak”.

¹⁵ J. Olczak-Ronikier, *Back then. About post-war Krakow*, Kraków 2015, 4. Cover page.

everything. Letters above all¹⁶. In another place we learn that “documentary messages create a background on which scenes from memory are drawn. The whole is arranged in a multidimensional story¹⁷. Olczak-Ronikier explains:

Thanks to the family correspondence gathered in my archive, I still find some fragment of memories lost long ago in the sand of the time passing by. Sometimes the recorded fact is no longer associated with anything, does not evoke any emotions. But on occasion it happens that words, sentences begin to shine, come alive and through them there appear a distant landscapes, interiors, people. You have to focus very hard, squint your eyes to see images clearer like on an old photographic film. Then you have to go to a lot of trouble to check with historical sources what is true in those delirious scenes and what is imagination¹⁸.

Separating what is certain from what is doubtful, the writer creates a kind of bricolage¹⁹. The work embedded in the post-war years even through the title indicates just that particular time and perspective which the author uses. The *then* pronoun itself, according to the PWN Polish Dictionary, refers to a certain point in the past, which was already mentioned in a given statement. It can also be a pronoun referring to such a situation whose occurrence depends on the fulfillment of a certain condition²⁰.

Therefore, she presents the very first meeting with the city that will become her second home. She saves from oblivion numerous figures from the artistic, scientific and economic world, including Jerzy Szaniawski,

¹⁶ J. Olczak-Ronikier, *Back then...*, op. cit., p. 5.

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 117.

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 117.

¹⁹ The author recalls for example contents of wardrobes reproduced by her mother and grandmother in connection with the need to indicate war losses. J. Olczak-Ronikier, *Back then...*, op. cit., pp. 170–172. It is a kind of cross between the poetics of quodlibet (glass drawer) with bric-a-brac (jewel box, with an individual sketch in a different content mixture – bricolage). Comp. *Quodlibet* – shallow drawer, similar to those in which butterflies are enclosed. The concept illustrates the introverted, subjective nature of the relationship. See. M. Wolska, *Memories*, Warszawa 1974, p. 76. *Bric a brac* – form saturated with objectivity; focuses on service / certification, not survival (as opposed to quodlibet). Comp. H. Ostrowska-Grabska, *Bric a brac 1848–1939*, Warszawa 1978. W. Kopaliński explains this term as follows: “A collection of antiquarian objects (furniture, works of art, porcelain, etc.) of various values, of different periods; junk, lumber, shuffles; mixture, conglomerate”, See: *Bric a brac*, [in:] idem, *Słownik wyrazów obcych i zwrotów obcojęzycznych*, Warszawa 1983, p. 63. Compare also C. L. Strauss, *An untamed thought*, transl. A. Zajączkowski, Warszawa 1969.

²⁰ See: ‘*then*’, [in:] <https://sjp.pwn.pl/szukaj/wtedy.html>; access 15.05.2018 r.

Leopold Staff, Tadeusz Różewicz, Henryk Wereszycki, Stanisław Liwzyc, Waclaw and Kazimierz Fajans, Klara Telzowa, Konstanty Ildefons and Kira Gałczyński, Antonina née Kolbergów Brzozowska²¹. In the work *All roads lead to Krupnicza*. Anna Grochowska confirms:

After the takeover of the building at 22 Krupnicza Street by the Writers' Union, the tenement-house quickly filled up with literary tenants. Information about them comes from four registration books kept in the Archives of the City of Krakow, covering the years from 1945 to – approximately – 1963²².

The author lists, among others, the residents of apartment No. 3 in the first post-war years: Tadeusz Peiper, Janina Mortkowiczowa, Hanna Mortkowicz-Olczak, Joanna Olczak-Ronikier, Michał Rusinek, Jerzy Pleśniewicz, Jerzy Korczak²³.

Recalling the so-called good moments, Olczak-Ronikier situates her story in the second circle – the immediate vicinity, when she recalls the birth of the Krakow theater “Grotesque” (a building located near 22Krupnicza Street), her own portrait titled *Child of War*, displayed in the window of the photo studio at 60 Starowiślna Street²⁴, or time spent between the dustbin and the carpet beater²⁵. She confesses: “Having become accustomed to home, house rules and the yard, I began to explore the immediate vicinity”²⁶.

In the third circle we can put situations in which, for example, she depicts the first post-war vacation. When returning to the memory of a few weeks spent in Nagłowice (at the manor house which at that time belonged to the Union of Polish Writers) with her grandmother, Janina Mortkowiczowa, she says:

My grandmother, in search of the written word, went up to the attic, taking me with her. Someone from the local servants probably told her that there she would find some old papers. Indeed, on the floor, stacked in piles, lay tons of dusty treasures: nineteenth-century illustrated magazines bound in colorful canvases, black office books written in careful calligraphic writing, morocco leather portfolios full of documents, sealed with red wax, boxes full of photographs, postcards, letters²⁷.

²¹ See also A. Grochowska, *House of the Polish Writers' Union and Literary tenants*, [in:] *All roads...*, pp. 37-54 and pp. 57-73.

²² A. Grochowska, *Literary tenants*, [in:] *All roads...*, p. 57.

²³ Halina Poświatowska was also registered under the “three” in 1962. See: A. Grochowska, *Literary tenants*, [in:] *All roads...*, p. 58-59.

²⁴ J. Olczak-Ronikier, *Back then...*, p. 105.

²⁵ J. Olczak-Ronikier, *Back then...*, pp. 72-85.

²⁶ J. Olczak-Ronikier, *Back then...*, p. 87.

²⁷ J. Olczak-Ronikier, *Back then...*, p. 124.

She recalls her meetings with Szaniawski and walking in the park in Nagłowice. She says: “He liked my company because I didn’t speak to him and we walked in silence through the green alleys”²⁸. Above all, she remembers the letters they found in the attic of the Nagłowice manor house. She writes:

The dazzle to me were the multi-colored butterflies that flew out of one portfolio – small envelopes and pages folded in half, written in careful children’s writing. Today there are no more delicate colors like those. Lavender, pale blue, lemon, celadon, tea, lilac-pink. The thin, silky sheets of children’s writing paper, custom-made at the best companies in the world, they all had watermarks: coats of arms and the owner’s initials. City views of Paris, Berlin, Vienna and London were embedded in the background. Sometimes there were genre scenes like from Dutch tiles, flower garlands, pictures from La Fontaine’s fairy tales. I’ve never seen anything so beautiful in my life²⁹.

All these documents contribute to the atmosphere of the book. Being aware of this, returning to the children’s correspondence found in Nagłowice, the author reflects:

What were these magical beings? Little princesses? Little princes? I thought they exist only in Andersen’s fairy tales. Did they really live? Letters were the proof. What years did this correspondence come from? Probably from the childhood of the last owner of Nagłowice, Michał Karol Radziwiłł. He was born in Warsaw in 1904, so he was ten years old when the First World War broke out. His cousins were the Bourbons, the Hohenzollerns, the Habsburgs, the Zamoyscy, the Potoccy, and the Czartorscy. When he moved to the Nagłowice estate, he took his archive with him. But when escaping from the Russians, he tried to save documents more important than these childish letters³⁰.

That correspondence has become a sign of the times and part of the history of not only the Mortkowicz family. A huge, unknown world is a world from which the mother writes letters when she travels to America for business and family matters. It is a world where the author of *Back then...* will lead her adult life.

²⁸ Ibidem, p. 122.

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 125.

³⁰ J. Olczak-Ronikier, *Back then...*, op. cit., p. 126.

Towards autogynography

The book by Joanna Olczak-Ronikier is primarily autogynographic. Autogynography itself, which is a variation of autobiography³¹, is perceived as writing that not only reveals the author's sex, but also indicates the way in which the world is perceived, because, as research shows, the autobiographical narrative³² is shaped primarily by female experiences. It requires revealing the truth about yourself and the environment, while allowing emotions and selectivity of the relationship³³. The narrative flow, modeling the story strategy, controlling the subject, navigating family matters, intertwining what is private with what is public, juxtaposing generals with individuality³⁴ are important features of autogynographic works. The convention and features of autogynography are presented in, among others Anna Pekaniec³⁵, situating it in the orbit of personal documentary literature and women's prose³⁶, and she also claims that the aforementioned "texts cover a wide spectrum of issues, their binder is the narrative identity constituted in them. By connecting the past with the present through (often critical) repetition, they try to answer the questions: who was I/ am I/ will I be? Thus, autogynography turns into a guarantee of identity (...)"³⁷.

Susan Stanford Friedman also draws attention to the fact that feminine identity in autogynographies sometimes blur between individuality and

³¹ R. Lubas-Bartoszyńska, *Identity and autobiography*, „Przestrzenie teorii” 2003, No. 2. Compare also P. Lejeune, *Variations on a theme of some pact*, transl. W. Grajewski et. al., (ed.) L. Lubas-Bartoszyńska, Kraków 2001. In autogynographic texts, the author's gender is clearly defined and becomes an indicator of their identity.

³² See: L. Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice*, Manchester 1994.

³³ M. Czemпка-Wiewióra, *Autobiographical memory as a basis for identity formation based on examples from contemporary autobiographical literature*, „Świat i Słowo: Filologia, Nauki Społeczne, Filozofia i Teologia” 2011, No. 2. Also compare Anna Cierpka, *Identity and narratives in family relationships*, Warszawa 2013.

³⁴ Compare: *Literary representations of experience*, (eds.) W. Bolecki, E. Nawrocka, Warszawa 2007; B. Skarga, *About experience*, [in:] idem, *A metaphysical quintet*, Kraków 2005.

³⁵ A. Pekaniec, *Literature of women's personal document: evolution of theory, changes in reading practices*, „Autobiografia. Literatura. Kultura. Media” 2014, No 1 (2), p. 28.

³⁶ Sidone Smith and Julia Watson list fifty-two genres of literature on the personal document. In this context, autogynography deserves special attention. Comp.: S. Smith, J. Watson, *Reading Autobiography. A Guide of Interpreting Life Narratives*, Minneapolis–London 2001, s. 10-187. In the autogynographic texts, the author's gender is clearly defined and becomes an indicator of the identity.

³⁷ A. Pekaniec, *Literature of women's personal document: evolution of theory, changes in reading practices*, „Autobiografia. Literatura. Kultura. Media” 2014, No 1(2), p. 26.

community. In her opinion, authors often identify with other women, moving away from displaying themselves as individuals. This does not happen in the referenced work. On the one hand, Olczak-Ronikier tries to capture still vivid memories, so she uses communicative memory and on the other hand, by drawing from individual frames and at the same time many sources, she builds a space for cultural memory, but from her own, individually approached perspective.

It is also appropriate to mention that in her book the cited author uses a reporting convention, but the text, more than traditional reportage, gravitates towards shortness, reporting and sketchiness, so it acquires the character of a *feature*. This fact corresponds well with the formula of an autobiographical memory. It also justifies a compositional strategy. The authors applying the *feature* technique³⁸ can present events in a selective way. For example, instead of using elaborate descriptive parts, they focus on lapidary terms, instead of recalling scenes accurately, they merely sketch their outlines, highlighting a single fact, a feature of a person.

In the cited text, because of the way people, places, situations are presented, the position of the writing person is noteworthy. The economic approach to the facts prevails here (without fiction), yet the story sometimes gains in value. This is important because it is quite clear that the thematic material is subject to hierarchy, which is associated with a specific artistic idea – the concept of a memoir. The author also – as in a classic document – points to difficulties, ways of overcoming them and experience gained from working on books, both this particular one and the previous one – *In the Garden of Memory* (the story of the Mortkowicz family). In her earlier work she confessed:

And when I finally started writing, miracles began to happen. There were helpful people I didn't know existed. Letters came from people who had long since disappeared from my life. Among the piles of dusty family papers were fragments of memories of my mother, sometimes printed after the war, sometimes started and abandoned halfway. I was most surprised when from my grandmother's old black notebook, in which she was pedantically writing down expenses, a faded checkered paper fell out. She wrote on it exactly, with dates, all the places where we hid during the occupation, together or separately. It was a sign that I had to take care of the details. I could now faithfully reconstruct accidents, locate places on the map where the history of the occupation took place, recreate the heroic roles played in this drama by friends but also by people completely strange before the war³⁹.

³⁸ Each genre allows certain types of activities and excludes others.

³⁹ J. Olczak-Ronikier, *In the Garden of Memory*, transl. Antonia Lloyd-Jones, Kraków 2002, p. 275.

Olczak realizes that memory can be unreliable⁴⁰, which is why when creating *Back then. About post-war Krakow*, she uses documents or photos, as well as her own and someone else's memories (vivid memories refer us to the concept of communicative memory, defined by Jan Assman⁴¹, which – as Nina Assorodobraj⁴² explains – transforms into cultural and collective memory⁴³, complex – according to the findings of Maurice Halbwachs⁴⁴ – from a set of individual memories about the family, class/ social group and church and nation).

Let us add that in the interwar period memories were one of the most important trends in prose. Irena Furnal points out in her work *Spectacles of Remembrance*:

Magazines and memory mechanisms began to play an incredible role in the literature of the early twentieth century, mainly thanks to Henri Bergson, Zygmunt Freud and Carl Gustav Jung. The content and form of most of the decades was influenced by Bergson's view that memory overcomes the passage of time and awakens the seemingly dead past, as well as the statement of psychoanalysis and the psychology of the depth that explains the mysteries of unconscious life. Memory and art based on it have become the modern equivalent of Hades (...) that the living could enter⁴⁵.

⁴⁰ See: D. Kahneman, *Thinking traps. On fast and slow thinking*, transl. P. Szymczak, Poznań 2012.

⁴¹ With the departure of people who have experienced certain events about which they testify to their descendants, communicative memory disappears, or – as a result of various social factors – transforms into cultural memory. The conventional term “cultural memory” means an interpretative and cognitive category that can be used to reinterpret cultural texts. It is a form of supra-individual memory, which is the domain of research of cultural historians. See: R. Traba, *What is cultural memory?*, [in:] J. Assmann, *Cultural memory: writing, remembering and political identity in ancient civilizations*, transl. A. Kryczyńska-Pham, Introduction and scient. ed. R. Traba, Warszawa 2008.

⁴² N. Assorodobraj, *Living history. Historical awareness: symptoms and research proposals*, „Studia Socjologiczne” 1963, No. 2.

⁴³ See: *Collective and cultural memory: contemporary German perspective*, (ed.) M. Saryusz-Wolska, Kraków 2009. Also compare: M. Golka, *Social memory and its implants*, Warszawa 2009; R. Poczykowski, *Local dimension of memory: collective memory and its transformations in north-eastern Poland*, Białystok 2010.

⁴⁴ The memory of an individual is a form of memory of a collective member. M. Halbwachs, *Social memory framework*, transl. M. Król, Warszawa 1979. Also see: B. A. Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering*, Philadelphia 2003, p. 17.

⁴⁵ I. Furnal, *Memory spectacles. On Polish autobiographical prose of the first half of the 20th century*, Kielce 2005, pp. 49–50.

We have also been observing the phenomenon of an intensified memory revival since the mid-1970s, hence the text of Olczak-Ronikier seems to be quite representative both due to its autobiographical and autogynographic nature, and the convention of memory closely related to the way of functioning and transmitting memory. This reactivation of the past in the modern era is revealed through, among others, an increase in publications of a memoir nature, which may indicate that the witnesses of various events of the 20th century are gradually disappearing. Some of them also “end their professional activity and, entering the final period of life, want to consolidate and pass on to their next generations their record of these events”⁴⁶ (generative script). *In the Garden of Memory* Olczak-Ronikier is already acquires that awareness (one can think that it was a contribution to writing *Back then...*):

I did not try to resurrect the accidents buried in oblivion, were it not for the feeling that I must tell about people to whom we owe our salvation. I waited too long anyway. Anna Żeromska, Henryk Nikodemski, Maria Jahnsowa, Irena Grabowska, Nun Wanda Garczyńska, Maria and Antoni Żurkowski are already dead⁴⁷.

That recall of the past seems to be of particular importance in the writing of the chronicle of the Mortkowicz family.

Autobiographical contexts

Types of autobiographical places⁴⁸ are usually combined with both sedentary and dynamic life. Movement is treated as a derivative of the human relation to space, due to the fact that it is associated with three important planes: travel (leaving and returning), resettlement (moving to another point) and nomadism (constant repetition of displacements). Hence, the places acquire the character of observed places (only the place is permanent in its character), remembered places (it was once permanent, but was lost, e.g. departure, exile, escape), imaginary places (no longer known, associated with family tradition), shifted places (situation when an emigrant finds the so-called second homeland), selected places (visited place, in which one does not stay permanently), affected places (met during travel, briefly, usually once). The authors, creating autobiographical places, usually do not stop at

⁴⁶ R. Traba, *What is cultural memory?*, [in:] J. Assmann, *Cultural memory: writing, remembering and political identity in ancient civilizations*, transl. A. Kryczyńska-Pham, Introduction and scient. ed. R. Traba, Warszawa 2008, p. 14.

⁴⁷ J. Olczak-Ronikier, *In the Garden of Memory*, Kraków 2002, p. 274.

⁴⁸ M. Czermińska, *Autobiographical places. Geopoetics proposal*, „Teksty Drugie” 2011, No. 5, pp. 183-200.

one model, but mix conventions and give places a heterogeneous character. These places fit into these concepts. These are the observed, remembered, selected and shifted places.

Krakow acquires both an individual and symbolic character. As a place that really exists, it was simultaneously shaped in the matter of the text constructed according to the artistic order – so-called *ordo artificialis* which means that the place itself, as a separate part of space with its cultural symbolism, is located within the social tradition embedded in the created, shown and transformed locum. It gains the features of a memorial site (according to Pierre Nora). In the discussed work, next to the factographic layer, the lens of the writing inclinations also included landscapes, shapes, colors, sounds, smells, objects, but also people. The listed components of the presented world are the attributes of women's autogynographic writing⁴⁹. Its exponents are also revealed in the linguistic sphere of the text.

At this point, we want to focus on one more issue, i.e. biographies of female writers. When reflecting on the nature of autobiographical identity, Eliane Lecarme-Tabone and Jacques Lecarme introduced a rather peculiar division. Namely, they distinguished between autobiographies of writers and non-writers. It turns out that writers subordinate other spheres of their literary work, due to the fact of them being –much more than non-writers – immersed in the world of culture⁵⁰. In this group there are texts written by both women and men. The conclusion leads to the observation that women writers divide their lives between writing and family life; more than just drawing from the world of culture, they also enjoy the world of nature. Women's autobiographies also reveal interest in the body (including one's own), relationships with others (including men), and respect for social and moral standards.

Also in Olczak-Ronikier, the awareness of origin from families with deep cultural roots, has an impact on the nature of relationships. After all, Olczak-Ronikier is the heir to the famous Warsaw family of Mortkowicz booksellers. The more so because, as Violetta Julkowska proves:

Family history, being a component of private history, is written into the contemporary research on historical memory. At the same time, as an area of historical, social and cultural research, it creates an opportunity to expand its own domain with new problems and methodological approaches⁵¹.

⁴⁹ A. Pekaniec, *Autobiography in the family, family in the autobiography. Historical sketch*, „Państwo i Społeczeństwo” 2013, No. 3, pp. 129-151.

⁵⁰ R. Lubas-Bartoszyńska, *Identity...*, op. cit., p. 152.

⁵¹ V. Julkowska, *Between memory and history. The case of family stories*. „Sensus Historiae” 2012/1, vol. VI, s. 78. Also see: V. Julkowska, *Family stories. Narratives-narrators-interpretations*, Poznań–Bydgoszcz 2018.

The writer's attitude is therefore interwoven into communicative and collective memory, demonstrating a relationship with so-called living history. This memory persists in families with strong bonds, covering up to three or four generations, and, as Nina Assorodobraj⁵² believes, it relates to memories situating a family story within conventions related to the cultural role of women (personal memories of women often resulted from family stories)⁵³. It is a story that – especially after World War II – changes its character⁵⁴, from the memory model into a commemorative one⁵⁵.

Some remarks on the linguistic means of expression in female writing by Joanna Olczak-Ronikier

The issue of women's style and women's language is closely related to the problem concerning the specificity of women's literature. To this day, numerous articles, studies and materials have been devoted to this topic⁵⁶. Aleksander Wilkoń placed that language within the diversity of functional varieties of contemporary Polish and described it as a *biolect*⁵⁷ and pointed out the differences in the language of women in relation to the language of men. However, Kwiryna Handke is actually recognized as the precursor of research

⁵² N. Assorodobraj, *Living history. Historical Awareness...*, op. cit.

⁵³ After World War II, a cultural turn took place here, because personal and family memories largely became a space for men.

⁵⁴ See: B. Szacka, *Past tense, memory, myth*, Warszawa 2006.

⁵⁵ K. Kończal, J. Wawrzyniak, *Polish memory research: traditions, concepts, (non) continuities*, „Kultura i Społeczeństwo” 2011, R. LV, No 4, pp. 11-63.

⁵⁶ Both linguists and literary scholars devoted attention to the extraction of certain characteristic features of women's writing. It is difficult to make a comprehensive review of sciences. Discussion of research positions on the subject of cultural (including language) determinants of sexuality was made by Z. Kloch. See: Idem, *Language and gender. Different research approaches*, „Pamiętnik Literacki” 2000, No. 1, pp. 141-160. Other works addressing the subject of linguistic and cultural distinctiveness of the female style include, among others E. Sławkowa, *Feminist stylistics: an outline of research issues*, [in:] *New times, new languages, new (and old) problems*, (ed.)E. Jędrzejko, Katowice 1998, p. 210-217; B. Walczak, *Women's Polish – historical prolegomena*, [in:] „Język a Kultura”, vol. 9, *Gender in language and culture*, (eds.)J. Anusiewicz, K. Handke, Wrocław 1994, pp. 85-96. The literary perspective is adapted by the works of G. Borkowska: *Yeast metaphor. What is women's literature / poetry*, „TekstyDrugie” 1995, 3-4, pp. 31-44; *Foreign women. Studies on Polish women's prose*, Warszawa 1996; and A. Pekaniec, *Is there a woman in this autobiography? Feminine literature of a personal document from the beginning of the 19th century until the outbreak of World War II*, Kraków 2013.

⁵⁷ A. Wilkoń put the differences in the language of men and women. See: A. Wilkoń, *Typology of language variants of contemporary Polish*, Katowice 1987, pp. 105-106.

into the relationship between language and gender, as well as the determinants of the language of women⁵⁸. In the repertoire of language phenomena she identified, in which a special emotionality of women was confirmed, the scholar pointed out the following: diminutive forms, hypocorisms, complex word formation of proper and animal names, higher frequency of phraseological relationships, exclamation marks, interludes, sonic expressions (used mainly in communication with children), augmentatives (in the function of baby-talk and diminutives), word-formation neologisms and neo-semanticism⁵⁹. To the significant distinguishing features of “sexuality” Zbigniew Kloch also adds, referring to Luce Irigaray, a tendency for women to use the form of a question⁶⁰.

The language layer of the work by Joanna Olczak-Ronikier is marked by the presence of certain means of expression assessed in the research literature as linguistic behaviors occurring with particular frequency in the language of women. What are these language and stylistic elements? From the ones identified above, in the studied text there are the following:

– diminutive forms: *candy bars-y* (p. 91), *buns-ies* (p. 89), *tiny* (p. 140), *hat-y* (p. 105), *little card* (p. 24), *cardboard-y* (p. 39, 107), *little flowers* (p. 105), *dollies* (p. 133), *cape-y* (p. 103), *coat-y* (p. 100), *little room* (p. 253), *pullover-y* (p. 100), *socks-ies* (p. 100, 105), *skirt-y* (p. 105), *sweater-y* (p. 105), *clothes-ies* (p. 100), *clothes-y* (p. 228), *wagon-y* (p. 153);

– hypocorism: *Halinka* (p. 7), *to Beloved Waluś* (p. 160), *sister Lalutka* (p. 210), *Magdusia* (p. 21), *Mareczek* (p. 7), *Marianka* (p. 7), *Piotrusia* (p. 7), *Waluś* (p. 150);

– epithets: *carefree delight* (p. 229), *dark-haired boy* (p. 253), *very thin*, *grayed-out copies* (p. 11), *wooden pencil case* (p. 184), *colored papers* (p. 184), *blue*, *air-mail envelopes* (p. 156), *collars spotlessly clean* (p. 183), *incredible boldness* (p. 223), *huge*, *bright red*, *yellow*, *green candy* (p. 184), *final loss* (p. 154), *captivating colors* (p. 149), *waffle bears* (p. 184);

– forms of questions: *Why didn't they throw away scraps they no longer needed? Maybe they wanted the story of "Aryan papers" [...] to be told once* (p. 40); *Did we send photos to ourselves? Probably yes* (p. 160); *Where were*

⁵⁸ K. Handke, *Language and gender determinants*, [in:] „Język a Kultura”, vol. 9, *Gender in language and culture*, (eds.) J. Anusiewicz, K. Handke, Wrocław 1994, pp. 15–29; Idem, *The impact of emancipation on women's language*, [in:] *A Woman in Culture and Society*, vol. 1, (ed.) B. Jedynak, Lublin, 1990; Idem, *Feminine style in contemporary colloquial Polish*, [in:] „Studia z filologii polskiej i słowiańskiej”, vol. 26, Warszawa 1989, pp. 5–24.

⁵⁹ K. Handke, *Language and gender determinants...*, pp. 16, 20, 26.

⁶⁰ Z. Kloch, *Language and gender. Different research approaches*, „Pamiętnik Literacki” 2000, No. 1, p. 150.

they hiding? Did they change their last name? How did they survive? Thanks to whom? How much can a child remember? How much later does he remove from memory? (p. 162); Maybe I should not quote this letter? Why hurt the dead? But since this correspondence was preserved in the family archive? And so precisely shows the opposite reasons? (p. 220), Who made the drawing inscribed in the golden circle in 1910? Not known. Maybe Franciszek Siedlecki? Or maybe Zdzisław Eichler? (p. 224) If I trusted him then? He was my godfather after all. Maybe somehow he would take this burden off of me? Mocked? Or taken it seriously? (p. 252).

In addition, the author's inclination towards the use of calculations draws particular attention. It can be assessed as a sign of feminine meticulousness, but it can also result from great attention to detail: *And he lost everything there: house, apartment, books, manuscripts, archives, bookstores, magazines, paper stores – the achievements of three generations (p. 14); Pillows, duvet covers, sheets, towels, cadged from friends (p. 24); Another attraction was the Ferris wheel, swings, shooting galleries, slot machines (p. 154); English, German, French works, yearbooks, artistic monographs, original graphic portfolios, decorative Polish and foreign publications. Dictionaries, encyclopedias. Polish classics. Poetry. Books with valuable dedications. Set of Japanese woodcuts (p. 169).*

Towards the conclusion

In the discussed work we get to know the viewpoint presented by the author and a fragment of reality, namely – of the post-war four-year period 1945-1949 spent with her mother and grandmother in Krakow.

Reading the memoirs of Olczak-Ronikier allows us to state that the story *Back then...* becomes a form of cultural journey conducted from a female perspective in order to search for traces of memory, a journey in which family and holiday residences of manor houses, houses, churches, cemeteries and parks are explored. It seems that it is also a journey in search of documents and memoirs related to the history of the family and of the nation. Strengthening the past in the form of photography also allows one to refer to images from earlier times, supplementing the memory record and documenting, as well as constituting, a somewhat epic account and an emphasis on the category of post-memory.

Let us add that presenting oneself from the past, requires objectivity. This is possible only to a limited extent and only if the author looks at him- or herself from the past as someone else, a stranger. As Maria Czempka-Wiewióra writes, “changing viewpoints by changing the focus, which allows

many possibilities when it comes to memory narration. The mechanisms of continuous interweaving of the subject and object of focusing and the way of looking at the whole are often seen in retrospective discourse⁶¹. At this level, the author's self is reconstructed, which is not always the same as the self from years ago. In an earlier Mortkowicz family chronicle, the author openly writes:

I have never talked to my loved ones about the period of occupation. Not about the years when we were still together, or about the next ones that we spent separately. I didn't want to hear about their experiences, I didn't talk about my own. I avoided family gatherings during which miraculously saved relatives reported their lives. When someone from our war benefactors came to visit, I would run away from home or lock myself in my room. Apparently, the emotions associated with the recent past were still too vivid⁶².

In the story of the post-war years in Krakow, she also shares a valuable statement. She remarks: "Today, when I look more closely at the reality in which I lived, I begin to understand better what happened to me and I understand that I really was a witness to history, although I did what I could not to see it"⁶³.

It is also worth mentioning that Olczak-Ronikier as a writer and screenwriter again and again immerses herself in history and culture. She is the author of a monograph on *Piwnica Pod Baranami*⁶⁴ (1994) and the biography of Piotr Skrzynecki (1998). For her memoir *In the Garden of Memory* (2001) dedicated to the Mortkowicz family, she was honored with the Nike Literary Award in 2002.

Bibliography

- Assorodobraj N., *Living history. Historical awareness: symptoms and research proposals*, „Studia Socjologiczne” 1963, No 2.
- Cierpka A., *Identity and narratives in family relationships*, Warszawa 2013.
- Culler J., *Convention and taming*, [in:] *Sign, style, convention*, (ed.) M. Głowiński, Warszawa 1977.

⁶¹ Ibidem, p. 64. Also compare: M. Czempka-Wiewióra, *Autobiographical memory as a basis for identity formation based on examples from contemporary autobiographical literature*, „Świat i Słowo: Filologia, Nauki Społeczne, Filozofia, Teologia” 2011, No. 2.

⁶² J. Olczak-Ronikier, *In the Garden of Memory*, Kraków 2002, p. 274.

⁶³ J. Olczak-Ronikier, *Back then...*, p. 118.

⁶⁴ It was a literary cabaret established in Krakow in 1954, its name based on the location – the cellar under the castle “Pod Baranami” (Under the Rams).

- Czempka-Wiewióra M., *Autobiographical memory as a basis for identity formation based on examples from contemporary autobiographical literature*, „Świat i Słowo: Filologia, Nauki Społeczne, Filozofia, Teologia” 2011, No 2.
- Czermińska M., *Autobiographic triangle. Certificate, confession and challenge*, Kraków 2000.
- Czermińska M., *Autobiographical places. Geopoetics proposal*, „Teksty Drugie” 2011, No 5, pp. 183-200.
- Furman W., Kaliszewski A., Wolny-Zmorzyński K., *Information genres [in:] Journalism genres. The specificity of their creation and editing*, Rzeszów 2000.
- Furnał I., *Memory spectacles. On Polish autobiographical prose of the first half of the 20th century*, Kielce 2005.
- Golka M., *Social memory and its implants*, Warszawa 2009.
- Grochowska A., *All roads lead to Krupnicza*, Kraków 2017.
- Halbwaschs M., *Social memory framework*, transl. M. Król, Warszawa 1979.
- Handke K., *Language and gender determinants*, [in:] „Język a Kultura”, vol. 9, *Gender in language and culture*, (eds.) J. Anusiewicz, K. Handke, Wrocław 1994, pp. 15-29.
- Julkowska V., *Family stories. Narratives-narrators-interpretations*, Poznań–Bydgoszcz 2018.
- Julkowska V., *Between memory and history. The case of family stories*. „Sensus Historiae” 2012/1, vol. VI.
- Kahneman D., *Thinking traps. On fast and slow thinking*, transl. P. Szymczak, Poznań 2012.
- Kloch Z., *Language and gender. Different research approaches*, „Pamiętnik Literacki” 2000, No. 1, pp. 141-160.
- Kończal K., Wawrzyniak J., *Polish memory research: traditions, concepts, (non) continuities*, „Kultura i Społeczeństwo” 2011, R. LV, No. 4.
- Lejeune P., *Variations on a theme of some pact*, transl. W. Grajewski et.al., (ed.) L. Lubas-Bartoszyńska, Kraków 2001.
- Lubas-Bartoszyńska R., *Identity and autobiography*, „Przestrzenie teorii” 2003, No. 2.
- Łoziński J., Introduction, [in:] M. Łozińska, *In the manor house. Everyday life, customs, holidays, fun*, Warszawa 2011.
- Marcus L., *Auto/biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice*, Manchester 1994.
- Literary representations of experience*, (eds.) W. Bolecki, E. Nawrocka, Warszawa 2007.
- Misztal B.A., *Theories of Social Remembering*, Philadelphia 2003, p. 17.
- Olczak-Ronikier J., *In the Garden of Memory*, Kraków 2002.
- Olczak-Ronikier J., *Back then. About post-war Krakow*, transl. A. Lloyd-Jones, Kraków 2015.
- Collective and cultural memory: contemporary German perspective*, (ed.) M. Saryusz-Wolska, Kraków 2009.

- Pekaniec A., *Autobiography in the family, family in the autobiography. Historical sketch*, „Państwo i Społeczeństwo” 2013, No. 3.
- Pekaniec A., *Literature of women’s personal document: evolution of theory, changes in reading practices*, „Autobiografia. Literatura. Kultura. Media” 2014, No. 1 (2), p. 28.
- Poczykowski R., *Local dimension of memory: collective memory and its transformations in north-eastern Poland*, Białystok 2010.
- Sendyka R., *Towards the cultural theory of the genre*, [in:] *Cultural theory of literature. Main concepts and problems*, (eds.) M.P. Markowski, R. Nycz, Kraków 2006.
- Skarga B., *About experience*, [in:] idem, *A metaphysical quintet*, Kraków 2005.
- Smith S., Watson J., *Reading Autobiography. A Guide of Interpreting Life Narratives*, Minneapolis–London 2001.
- Spyra P., *Between reportage and feature. Theory and practice*, DOI: 10.15503/onis2015.421.426, p. 425.
- Strauss L.C., *An untamed thought*, transl. A. Zajączkowski, Warszawa 1969.
- Szacka B., *Past tense, memory, myth*, Warszawa 2006.
- Traba R., *What is a cultural memory?*, [in:] J. Assmann, *Cultural memory: writing, remembering and political identity in ancient civilizations*, transl. A. Kryczyńska-Pham, Introduction and scient. ed. R. Traba, Warszawa 2008.
- Wilkoń A., *Typology of language variants of contemporary Polish*, Katowice 1987.