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DP camp – literary accounts of the life “in between” An invitation to the topic

Landscape After the Battle (1970) by Andrzej Wajda opens with a visually intriguing and hastily shot view of the camp reflected in the window pane of a half-opened barrack window, accompanied by the sounds of a series of gunshots. One sees, i.a. a snow-covered area, and a stationary American tank near the wires. Next, text screens appear. That is followed by a change of mood. The sounds of shooting are substituted with Antonio Vivaldi's *Autumn*; in the following takes, there appears a group of internees dressed in striped clothes running towards the fence. They stop at it for a moment only to, using picks, shovels, and hoes, to break the barrier and run into the field. Tripping in the snow, jumping, and dancing, they laugh, embrace each other and the soldiers, and then... in a drilled trot return behind the wires, into the camp. Liberation rituals occur there: burning the striped clothes, breaking barrack windows, compulsive eating, and finally a ritual murder of the camp kapo. Amidst political disputes, re-emerging animosities and jealousy, and ensuring mainly that they eat or, rather, gobble until full, there unravels the film's plot, and the story of the tragic love between young Tadeusz (Daniel Olbrychski) and a Jewish girl Nina (Stanisława Celińska in her debut role). As proposed by Melchior Wańkiewicz in a very personal review, or rather an essay, that “love's embrace of the boy and girl liberating (not to be confused with liberated) themselves” could be treated as a symbol of a rebirth from humiliation.¹ A rebirth which, let me add, will never occur.

That is to be the theme of this study: that apparent freeing, the special inability to exit the camp, the fact of being infected with Lager morality, and the fact of being lost and one's attachment to excessively patriotic rituals. Also, the condition of people, recorded in literature, enclosed in DP (*displaced person*) camps in Germany immediately after WWII. The study does not pretend to offer a complete and holistic discussion of the topic. Due to length limitations, it rather constitutes

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¹ M. Wańkiewicz, “Sercem gryzę”, *Kultura* 1970, issue 40, p. 5.

an invitation to the subject, and an indication of the main problems, rather than an exhaustive description.

Polish literature offers very little about the lives of DP-internees despite the fact that it has been estimated that that fate applied to approximately seven million people. Their situation was summarised well by the title of a book by Andreas Lembeck – *Wyzwoleni, ale nie wolni* [Liberated Yet Not Free] (Warsaw 2007). Katarzyna Person devoted a few texts to the history of those interned at DP camps.² Journalistic activities at the camps were studied by Jolanta Chwastyk-Kowalczyk.³ The fortunes of displaced persons in Germany, mainly soldiers, were the topic of a book by Arno Giese entitled *Polskie orły nad Renem* (2013). Then, the area of Austria was studied by Andrzej Pilch.⁴ There was also the important study by Tamar Lewinsky entitled *Żydowsky uchodźcy i przesiedleńcy z Polski w okupowanych Niemczech*.⁵ The researcher focussed, however, almost solely on the American and the British zones, and she mentioned the French zone briefly stating that it included “a small and gradually shrinking number of approximately a thousand Jewish DPs”.⁶ We learn about the fates of the interned/imprisoned (in the case of the displaced, these terms become ambiguous) mainly from literature.

Tadeusz Nowakowski

Probably the most important prose text, the story of which unfolds in a displaced persons’ camp is the 1957 (published by Libella in Paris) autobiographic novel by Tadeusz Nowakowski entitled *Obóz wszystkich świętych*.⁷ Actually, the

² Vide, e.g. K. Person, “«I am a Jewish DP. A Jew from the eternal nowhere». Jews from Poland in displaced persons camps in the occupation zones of West Germany: encounters with Poles and memories of Poland, 1945–1946”, *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów* 2013, issue 2, pp. 312–318, and *ibid.*, “Szkolenia zawodowe ORT-u w obozach dla DP w Niemczech, Austrii i Włoszech”, *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów* 2010, issue 2, pp. 194–206.

³ Vide J. Chwastyk-Kowalczyk, *Katyń, dipisi, PKPR ma lamach polskich czasopism uchodźczych*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Humanistyczno-Przyrodniczego Jana Kochanowskiego, Kielce 2011.

⁴ Vide A. Pilch, *Losy Polaków w Austrii po drugiej wojnie światowej 1945–1955*, Ossolineum, Wrocław-Warsaw-Krakow 1994.

⁵ Vide T. Lewinsky, “Żydowsky uchodźcy i przesiedleńcy z Polski w okupowanych Niemczech”, in: *Następstwa zagłady Żydów. Polska 1944–2010*, F. Tych and M. Adamczyk-Garbowska (eds.), Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, Żydowski Instytut Historyczny im. Emanuela Ringelbluma, Lublin–Warsaw 2012.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 100. To learn more about Polish internees in that zone, vide P. Sękowski, “Francja wobec polskich uchodźców wojennych i dipisów w pierwszych latach po drugiej wojnie światowej”, *Dzieje Najnowsze* 2014, issue 2, pp. 71–83.

⁷ Vide T. Nowakowski, *Obóz Wszystkich Świętych*, Libella, Paris 1957. [English version translated from Polish]. The Polish edition was suspended once it was revealed that the emigre author collaborated with Radio Free Europe. The just finished layout of the novel was destroyed,

author was interned in the camp in Haren-Ems (Maczków) in the Netherlands, which was discussed by Lembeck,⁸ where he taught at a Polish high school. Despite the fact that the novel was branded with a note “All the characters presented herein were exclusively created in the author’s imagination, and possess no specific prototypes in actual persons. Any similarities are accidental” (p. 4), the atmosphere in the camp was reproduced accurately enough, additionally confirmed by other texts,⁹ that quickly we, the readers, become certain that the novel, filled with satire, grotesque, saturated with sarcasm and elements of a pamphlet did not diverge much from reality.

The title was derived from the name of one of the barracks, which upon liberation were assigned the names of Catholic saints (the internees did not want numbers as they associated those with the Lager), while the entire camp was dedicated to the Sacred Heart “in appreciation of regained freedom”, which initially met with opposition. As Major Kosko, the camp commandant, said:

What is this? So we’re supposed to have a St. Anthony barrack? A barrack “Under the Virgin Mary”? Isn’t that blasphemy? Or maybe you don’t know, dear father, that our rogues steal like ravens, get hammered with moonshine, rip their gut with knives, and, excuse my language, fuck in the bunks from dawn to dusk? (p. 18)

The condition of the “KL remainders” gathered in the camp was not perfect, to put it mildly. “People squatted in the rubble in a circle of unhealed memories and still live feelings and did not know, because after the years of cruelty they could not possibly know such exquisite feelings as forbearance and generosity” (p. 8), said the narrator, at another instance adding that he oozed “the leftovers of the barbed wire”:

POW psychoses, ingrained habits, the hump of yesterday, the mental crippling of the majority of Papenburgers. So often he saw in the street serious staid liberatees who at the sight of a policeman behaved like wanted thieves, plunging at the last moment into the nearest door, disappearing behind a heap of coal, moving in a quick nervous pace onto the other side of the

yet in the press it had already been discussed. Vide, e.g. J.P. [Julian Przyboś], “Świątlna powieść”, *Przegląd Kulturalny* 1957, issue 20; Z. Starowiejska-Morstinowa, “Dwa lata po wojnie”, *Tygodnik Powszechny* 1957, issue 21; H. Wandowski, “Obóz Wszystkich Świętych”, *Tygodnik Zachodni* 1957, issue 51/52; J.J. Lipski, “Uczeń klasyków i jego kompleksy”, *Twórczość* 1958, issue 2. The first Polish, released via second circulation, edition of *Obóz Wszystkich Świętych* was only published in 1989 by the Warsaw-based Pokolenia publishing house, while the first official – by the Czytelnik publishing house in 1990. Soon afterwards (1991) a theatre adaptation was developed. I used the first official edition of 1989. I provided all the quotations from that edition.

⁸ 5,000 Poles liberated from labour camps and POW camps were interned at the camp. They included Warsaw Uprising combatants, including 1,728 women, the Uprising combatants, liberated from the camp in Oberlangen.

⁹ NB, Tadeusz Nowakowski was also the author of a collection of stories entitled *Szopa za jaśminami* (1948), which included his recollections from German camps.

street. Others still, though no one asked them to, readily pulled out their IDs from their pockets. Infected with the camp epidemic of passes, certificates, permits, and identity cards, they offered their documents completely voluntarily (p. 19).

The new life of the DPs was nothing to be jealous about. As the narrator stated:

Two years after the war, a live person, without a court sentence, in his prime, sits in the barracks, and cannot get out. He felt in the damp Papenburg like a fish in a fish tank. International charities drop for the fish one fly each so that they don't die. And that is all that today's man in his great nobility can come up with. Initially, he knocked on the glass with his head, but he soon noticed that the walls are made of thick glass. Now he lies, dead in the muck, at the bottom. Covered in seaweed, waiting – no one knows what for. Supposedly free because liberated. Yet, in reality, a prisoner, interned in the All Saints' barracks. What a pretentious name! (pp. 16–17)

Therefore, the characters raved “about the incessant temporariness of their existence” (p. 16), and gradually “spruce” (p. 20; become more eccentric, fall apart mentally), fall into hygienic manias, issue absurd brochures “from the edges of politics and occultism”, they collect empty food cans, tell the future from dregs, or are fascinated with ruins.

The novel, full of acute satire, grotesque, and sarcasm presents the community of Polish DPs as people completely lost and degenerated with camp experiences, who at the same time nurtured their lofty patriotic rituals, incessantly politicising (e.g. camp elders held their most important disputes in the latrine), and viewed the world as either black and white. The entire camp is possessed by “national masochism” and “naked patriotism [...] the motherland raised her skirt, and showed her bruised buttocks”. (p. 25) The interned, as Aleksander Fiut wrote, created the “little Polish hell”.¹⁰ Thus second lieutenant Stefan Grzegorzcyk, combat code name “Mściciel”, former Uprising combatant and camp history teacher, who married a German Urszula Heinemann, was considered a traitor:

“Colaborator”, they shouted in front of the chapel.
 “Lieutenant renegade!”
 “He disgraced the uniform of a Polish soldier!”
 “He put a permanent fence in front of the motherland! He joined the side of the eternal enemy!”
 “After everything that the Germans did in Warsaw and Oświęcim, he married a Kraut, that, excuse my French, Kraut skank!” said the scandalised women in the line for bread. “The war has taught him nothing!”
 “Worse than the Volksdeutsche, because in the Volksdeutsche there at least flows a drop of German blood, while he's Grzegorzcyk, Polish Grzegorzcyk, as his father before him and his father before him!”

said about him the scandalised women in their kerchiefs (pp. 11–12).

¹⁰ Vide A. Fiut, “Polskie piekielko”, *Teksty Drugie* 1991, issue 1/2, pp. 169–176.

Nowakowski’s “excellent novel”, as it was evaluated by Julian Przyboś in one of the first reviews,¹¹ is a brutal yet excellent, in terms of the language, superb and intense image of the mental condition of the survivors.

Tadeusz Borowski

Tadeusz Borowski found himself after WWII in a situation similar to that of Nowakowski. The writer, interned in a DP camp in Freimann (suburbs of Munich)¹² upon being liberated from Dachau–Allach, included his experiences from that period in an exceptionally bitter story entitled *Bitwa pod Grunwaldem*, included in the later editions of *Pożegnanie z Marią*. It actually served as the basis for Andrzej Wajda’s *Landscape After the Battle* (1970).

The narrator of *Bitwa pod Grunwaldem*, the cynical poet Tadek, was interned in the building of a former SS barracks, guarded by American soldiers: “By the stone walls of the barracks, on narrow strips of grass, between disordered heaps of rotting trash, which infected the entire yard with its smell, there crawled upwards anaemic maples, and there thickened a hedge blossoming in red immediately above the concrete”.¹³ Tadek dressed in an SS uniform thus commented upon his fate:

“It’s nice in the world, dear brothers”, I sighed gloomily, “but, oh well, man: you sit imprisoned like under the Germans, they won’t give you a pass to the world, because you don’t know how to lick yourself, you won’t get out through the hole in the wall, cause they’ll shoot you, obviously – a Häftling. And how should you sit? If someone’s son brings them a ram or a German woman, then he can sit. And you? Sit when food is scarce, and you’re far away from home. If only they didn’t steal! It would be easier if everyone had the same fate... But someday, someday...” (p. 259)

Borowski’s story, just like the previously mentioned Nowakowski novel, presents an image of a refugee camp as a land of tragedy/farce – a place full of animosity, cynicism, pouncing on each other (“our Pole, our brother, always stupid. Wants to drown his brother in a spoon of water”; p. 257), earth-bound life, in which what is most important is to fill one’s stomach, and acquire cheaply women for the night. Those who did not experience the concentration camp will not understand “the liberated”.

¹¹ Vide J.P. [Julian Przyboś], “Świetna powieść”, *Przegląd Kulturalny* 1957 issue 20.

¹² The writer’s internment in Freimann, and the works he wrote there, i.e. stories, poems, a diary and the poetic report entitled *Koniec wojny*, were discussed by, e.g. Tadeusz Drewnowski in a monograph entitled *Ucieczka z kamiennego świata. O Tadeuszu Borowskim*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1977 (2nd edition), pp. 94–101 and 233–237.

¹³ T. Borowski, “Bitwa pod Grunwaldem”, in: *ibid.*, *Utwory wybrane*, A. Werner (ed.), Ossolineum, Wrocław–Warsaw–Krakow 1991, p. 258. [English version translated from Polish] I included the following quotes from that collection.

He was throughout the war somewhere in the wide world, what do you know – heroism and Motherland, and a bit of God. And we lived elsewhere, where there’s neep, bedbugs, and phlegmon. He is surely full, I am hungry. He views today’s celebration through Poland – I through goulash and tomorrow’s fasting soup. His gestures will be unintelligible for me, mine will be too ordinary for him, and both of us despise each other a bit (p. 260)

said Tadek about the archbishop.

Thus the protagonist evades “national and divine mystery”, “does not build [...] the foundation of the spar of the national banner, assembled from the spirits of the fallen and others” (p. 266). In the meantime other fellow internees, within the background of a national feud, organise an excessively inflated patriotic celebration of the anniversary of the battle at Grunwald, in which they, gathered in the barracks, to used Borowski’s own phrase, “onanise using the Motherland”.¹⁴ At the end of the story, the celebration concludes in a ceremony of burning straw effigies of SS men.

Mainly, though, the DP camp is not much different from the recently experienced KL, along the lines of *Pożegnanie z Marią*: “And I think that there will also be a ghetto on the Arian side [...] But there won’t be any way out of it”.¹⁵ The protagonist often offers a similar analogy saying, e.g. “This is still just the quarantine. It’s neither a KL, nor freedom” (*Bitwa pod Grunwaldem*, p. 270). In addition, one cannot freely leave the camp. Behind the wall there is “a world into which you were let for marching well, for a good report, for cleaning the corridor, for loyalty, steadfastness, as well as for the Motherland...” (p. 258). When commenting upon the action, Andrzej Werner even wrote in that context that “the reality of a DP camp is a simple continuation of a Nazi camp. The same people, the same relations between them – despite altered circumstances”.¹⁶ This prose image could be supplemented with Borowski’s poetry from the Munich period, e.g. the scathing poem entitled *Dary demokratyczne*, which I shall quote in its entirety:

Democracy gave the uniform of the Gestapo,
a flat in SS-Kaserne,
clad my youthful poetic fervour
in a ribby, bony, gaunt body.

Democracy gave felt in June,
not a single shirt. Happy as a deity
is man without a shirt (Andersen). Unwaveringly
is happy for the lice, fleas, and bedbugs.

Democracy gave Unra, in Unra – beer
and a sixth part of bread each day (three hundred grams).

¹⁴ I refer to Borowski’s poem *** [Onanizują się Ojczyznę...], in: *Utworthy wybrane...*, p. 43.

¹⁵ T. Borowski, “Pożegnanie z Marią”, in: *ibid.*, *Utworthy wybrane...*, p. 148.

¹⁶ A. Werner, *Zwycząjna apokalipsa. Tadeusz Borowski i jego wizja świata obozów*, Czytelnik, Warsaw 1981, p. 188.

Long live democracy! It's a good thing we survived,
one needs to leave a trace for those who will come, the ages.

Democracy gave everything, it wants nothing itself,
Churchill said: “we're fighting for an idea, not profit”,
I would like to give democracy something... more than time and space,
I would like to offer democracy punch in the face!¹⁷

Jerzy Zagórski

The reports by Jerzy Zagórski in the series *W południowych Niemczech*, based on his experiences during a few weeks' trip through Bavaria in the autumn of 1945 are a good commentary to those literary accounts, and valuable, because written “on the spot”, historical testimony.¹⁸ In them, Zagórski described the population inhabiting Germany as a society divided into five castes (*Indie w środku Europy*). The highest caste were American soldiers, and the members of auxiliary units; lower castes included: Bavarians, DPs, physical labourers, and former party members and SS men. The lowest caste, the pariahs, were the German repatriates wandering through the country. Zagórski compared a DP camp, on the one hand, to an etching by Henry Moore presenting a group of trunks, seemingly human figures sleeping in a tunnel, and, on the other, to a caricature of Fourier's phalanstères – a community of equal and free people, who were supposed to inhabit a building in the shape of a palace, which would include study rooms and eating rooms, and places for work and living.

Zagórski thus wrote about the operations of UNRRA: “it seems, however, that the activities of that institution might only be improvised. It is an attempt to patch up the world/convalescent using methods aimed at temporary results”,¹⁹ and about refugees: “in those people, tossed into strange conditions, in the awkward situation of a part-prisoner, part-informer, part-vanquished, part-vanquisher, the sense of life has been limited to a few basic functions: eating and sleeping with all its accessories [refers to sex – note B.K.]”.²⁰ The final element was also discussed by Julian Wiecech, a former internee at Gross-Rosen and Bergen-Belsen, in an interview by Agnieszka Dauksza, included in a recently published book entitled *Klub Auschwitz i inne kluby. Rwane opowieści przeżywców*:

¹⁷ T. Borowski, “Dary demokratyczne”, in: *ibid.*, *Pisma w czterech tomach*, T. Drewnowski, J. Szczęsna and S. Buryła (eds.), Wydawnictwo Literackie, Krakow 2003, vol. 1: Poezja, p. 205. [English version translated from Polish]. More on poetic works by Tadeusz Borowski, vide J. Szczęsna, “Tadeusz Borowski – poeta”, *Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne Seria Literacka*, Poznań 2000.

¹⁸ J. Zagórski, “W południowych Niemczech”, in: *ibid.*, *Szkice z podróży w przestrzeni i czasie*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Krakow 1962.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

They took us to Wolfsburg. I wrote somewhat differently about that in my book, as you will see, because I distorted some events there, unfortunately. So in Wolfsburg there were those barracks without beds, without doors, windows, without anything. And they gathered a lot of people. What orgies occurred there; women with men, but not exclusively, the end of the world in that barracks. Orgies went on throughout the night – they made love, and beat each other, and basked in bedbugs. There were so many bugs that they dropped on us like locust. When we lay at night, we scraped handfuls of bugs, and lice, and everything.²¹

Ida Fink

The final literary record of life in a DP camp which I would like to refer to was offered by Ida Fink. WWII's end found the writer and her sister in the village of Auerbach, almost in the suburbs of Karlsbad in Baden-Württemberg, where the author of *A Scrap of Time and Other Stories* worked for a farmer Emil Denninger, a baker. The village was seized by the French army on 8 April 1945. Later, both sisters – as Fink described it to the Yad Vashem Institute – ended up in an UNR-RA camp²² near Ettlingen in the Karlsruhe regency, only a few kilometres from Auerbach.²³ In the camp in Ettlingen, at the gateway of the Black Forest, Ida and Elza remained almost a year, until February 1946, being the DP members of the considerable community of *Sh'erit ha-Pletah* – those who avoided the catastrophe.²⁴ One can only speculate that it was a difficult period for the writer. She did not know either what had happened to her father or her boyfriend. She remained at the mercy of the American camp authorities. In addition, the status of a refugee entailed a limited ability to leave the camp, which meant living in high population density. In an interview she gave to Stanisław Bereś, she said that “there was a period of time, immediately after the war, when I hated those crowds, and I feared them. Today it's no longer the case”.²⁵ Surely, then, it was not a comfortable period for the writer.

²¹ A. Dauksza, *Klub Auschwitz i inne kluby. Rwane opowieści przeżywców*, Wydawnictwo Słowo/Obraz Terytoria, Gdańsk 2016, pp. 109–110.

²² United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration was an international organisation established in 1943 in Washington, DC, through the initiative of the USA, Great Britain, China, and the USSR to provide aid to the liberated areas of Europe and Asia after the end of WWII. As indicated by the authors of the popular *Historia PRL*, nearly 70% of the provisions for the UNRRA came from the USA. Vide “Prezenty od «cioci UNRY»”, in: *Historia PRL* (in the series *Wielka Kolekcja 1944–1989*), vol. 1, pp. 1944–1945, J. Cieślowska (ed.), New Media Concept, Warsaw 2009, p. 87.

²³ Yad Vashem Archive, O3/1839, account by Ida Fink.

²⁴ Cf. D. Michman, “On the Definition of «She'erit Hapletah»”, in: *ibid.*, *Holocaust Historiography. A Jewish Perspective. Conceptualization, Terminology, Approaches and Fundamental Issues*, Vallentine Mitchell, London–Portland 2003, p. 330. The term *Sh'erit ha-Pletah* was derived from the Bible (Ezra 9:14 and I Chronicles 4:43) meaning the survivors – both those in DP camps and other Jewish refugees – as well as the Jewish world in general, which survived the Nazi disaster.

²⁵ “Blizna pamięci”. Ida Fink interviewed by Stanisław Bereś, *Kresy* 2005, issue 4, p. 141.

I am not sure to what extent the situations of the mentioned writers, i.e. Nowakowski, Borowski, and Fink, were similar to one another. The author of *A Scrap of Time and Other Stories* did not offer any more extensive descriptions of the camp, and in *The Journey* she only mentioned the moment of receiving word of her loved ones:

And even when Martine, from the UNRRA, told her to sit down, and she thought she was telling her to sit down because the news was bad, she just sat down obediently in the former officer's room that was now her room (the former SS quarters were now the UNRRA camp for displaced persons); and even when, after a brief silence, Martine said in a trembling voice, in French, “Your father is alive, your father has survived”-not even then did she cry. *Elle est devenue très pale, mais c'est moi qui avais des larmes aux yeux...* The same thing happened shortly afterward-the messages came almost simultaneously, after the other, one good, the other bad, both after long months of waiting – when she tore open the envelope and read the name, Marian, and another, unfamiliar name, Majdanek. She was standing by the window. Outside were the pines of the SS forest. Mme. Durand, the secretary of the refugee camp, was walking under the pines, and when she saw her, waved cheerfully. Majdanek. She had never heard that name before. She knew: Auschwitz, Treblinka, Belzec. She knew: Bergen-Belsen, Mauthausen, but not Majdanek. She had never heard of Majdanek.²⁶

Some light on the circumstances of received the news, and the return was shed by the writer's sister, Elza/Hela in an interview I conducted with her on 9 March 2013 in Tel Aviv:

Stefan Askenase (the pianist, from Belgium, because there are two Askenases) was the brother of a very close friend of my mother's, and later we saw each other several times, but he managed to return to Belgium. She was Belgian. She worked with us, at UNRRA we were together, and she was going to Belgium. We begged her that if he is alive, and if he knew something about the sister, she will know what happened to father. Some time later, the Belgian returned with a letter in which he wrote: “Dear Cousins [...]”, to us. He knew my mother very well, and wanted to bring us to Belgium, to go there. And he was very happy. He said that he knew that our father was alive yet he did not know his address. He wrote to his sister, and through her we received news, but there was some discrepancy, they were in Gliwice, while that was Gleiwitz or something like that, but we thought that it was something else, so we didn't know. Only later when we went on a transport back to Poland – because there were transports after the war, we returned to Wrocław. Earlier, we found no one. We are from the East, and that was already Russia, Ukraine then, and we could not go back home, so we searched. So when we were coming back, we got this newspaper with people searching, and classifieds which went like this: “Searching for:...” And we saw: “Doctor Ludwik Landau is searching for his daughter, he lives in Kłodzko.” But without any other surname, no date, where, which street – we didn't know. We decided to take the first transport to that Kłodzko that was departing that day. And so we came.²⁷

²⁶ Vide I. Fink, *Podróż*, 2nd edition, W.A.B., Warsaw 2004, pp. 257–258. [English version: Fink I. *The Journey*. New York 1992]

²⁷ Interview with Elza (Hela) nee Landau, conducted on 9 March 2013 in Tel Aviv.

Therefore, there is little information concerning the months Ida Fink spent in Ettlingen.²⁸ Due to the lack of research on the subject, we do not even know the basic details regarding, e.g. the demographics of the DPs in that region. Other zones displayed an almost three-time higher number of men. “An adult man was a typical survivor. There were few women; children and the elderly were almost absent in the demographic composition of the first Jewish communities of survivors”,²⁹ noted Tamar Lewinsky. What is significant is that it was in the camp in Ettlingen that the author wrote her main works. Ida Fink mentioned that many times in interviews. In a documentary by Roni Abulafia *Ida Fink: Rishumim Le-Korot Hayyim (Ida Fink: Traces)* of 2004 in response to a question by Uri Cohen whether she wrote during WWII, the writer said that at the end, at the second Bauer, she took a piece of paper, and wrote one line: “I would like us to survive until peace”, and she did not add a single word for the next two years. In fact, her approach to Shoah was extremely cautious. She was afraid to touch the topic with words, and she did not. Only later did she understand that she needed distance. She discussed the beginning of her writing in more detail in the interviews by Justyna Sobolewska and Piotr Szewc in 2003. Let me quote both:

“You also started writing late in your life”.

“That is both correct and not. I had already tried before the war. Early in my youth, I wrote very bad poems. Then the urge to write vanished. I did not think about it throughout the war. Yet the urge returned immediately after the war, when I was still in Germany, in the Unra camp. It was located in a former SS school. One day, suddenly, a thought came to me in the form of an order: «Write about what happened». I grabbed a piece of paper and a pen, and I locked myself in a room. I stayed there for several hours. When I emerged, it was already dark, but the pages remained blank. I didn’t write a single word. I explained it to myself that the past time is still too close, and everything that I had seen was too chaotic;³⁰

I perfectly remember the moment when suddenly and unexpectedly I was overcome with the urge to write about that what had occurred so recently. It happened in the first days of freedom, during my stay at the UNRRA camp – upon escaping from the ghetto in Zbarazh my sister and I, we survived using Arian papers, as Polish women sent for work to Germany, which I described years later in *The Journey*. So when I became overcome with the urge to write, I took a piece of paper and a pen, and I sat at a table. I sat there for several hours. But the pages remained blank, unstained with ink. I didn’t write a single word. Only later did I understand that it

²⁸ Having completed this text, I found the few existing issues of the camp magazine *Nasz Głos* (unrelated copies can be found at the National Library, and Biblioteka Towarzystwa Chrystusowego dla Polonii Zagranicznej in Poznań). They shed new light on everyday life in Ettlingen. They also include the début celebratory text by Ida Fink (!) for the first anniversary of the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising, which she published under her “Arian” assumed name of Maria Włoch. Vide M. Włochowna, “Dzień czci i chwały...”, *Nasz Głos. Pismo obozu Polaków w Ettlingen, U.N.R.R.A. Team 94 1945*, issue 10, p. 1. I shall discuss this in more detail in the monograph devoted to the writer that I am currently working on.

²⁹ T. Lewinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

³⁰ “Piszę szeptem”, interview with I. Fink by J. Sobolewska, *Gazeta Wyborcza* issue of 13.05.2003, p. 14.

was for fear of touching the topic with words – the time of Shoah was a huge painful whirlwind of events and experiences. It was too close, too fresh, it still terrified me. Thus began the period of writing without writing, which lasted in my case a few years.³¹

The above statements indicate one element characteristic of interviews with Ida Fink. Individual interviews contain variations of the same stories, slightly, if at all, altered, and supplemented with minor details. It seems that the quoted statements caused one of the basic fallacies, which was repeated in many studies of the writer’s output. For example, Henryk Grynberg in an essay *Pokolenie Shoa* wrote: “she sat down to write immediately upon liberation, in the DP camp, and she sat for five hours, yet she could not write a single word. Later, when the wounds partly healed, she began to write, but only in her memory. It was only in Israel, where she emigrated in 1957, that she drew from within her soft yet turgid voice”.³² Marta Rutkowska performed an even greater distortion by writing: “The writer debuted very late – Fink was nearly sixty then. The first text that she wrote was a story entitled *The Threshold*”.³³ A similar piece of information was even included in a high school graduation examination task in 2005.³⁴ Actually, Ida Fink debuted as a writer much earlier, i.e. in 1948,³⁵ the origins of which should be sought in the DP camp.

Instead of a conclusion

To conclude, one should also mention other autobiographical texts. The period of life in a DP camp was often depicted in the final pages of camp accounts. Sometimes, the authors devoted a considerable portion of their texts to it. The most

³¹ “Ocalić pamięć”, interview with I. Fink by P. Szewc, *Nowe Książki* 2003, issue 5, p. 4.

³² H. Grynberg, “Pokolenie Szoa”, in: *ibid.*, *Prawda nieartystyczna*, 3rd edition, Wydawnictwo Czarne, Wołowiec 2002, p. 282.

³³ M. Rutkowska, “Podróże pamięci. Twórczość Idy Fink”, in: *Proza polska na obczyźnie. Problemy – dyskursy – uzupełnienia*, Z. Andres, J. Pasternski and A. Wal (eds.), Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, Rzeszów 2007, vol. 2, p. 202.

³⁴ The students taking the advanced high school graduation examination in Polish could read: “Ida Fink—born in 1921 in Zbarazh in Ukraine; studied at a Lviv conservatory. In 1941–42, she was interned in a ghetto; she saved herself by escaping onto the Arian side. She has been living in Israel since 1957. She debuted aged almost 60, writing in Polish almost exclusively about her Holocaust experiences”; the document is available on the website of the Central Examination Committee: <http://www.cke.edu.pl/index.php/egzamin-maturalny-left/arkusze-z-lat-2005-2014> [accessed on 08.10.2014].

³⁵ If one were to exclude the celebratory text in *Nasz Głos*, her first published literary text was *The Threshold* (though, initially, the story was entitled *Elza*), describing the story of the writer’s sister – Hela (Elza). Contrary, however, to what Rutkowska wrote, the story was first released in 1948, in actually very interesting circumstances. The writer, thanks to the help of her family in Shanghai, went to a sanatorium for TB patients in Switzerland, where she had the time to write. Also there, in the French-language press, *Elza* was published (trans. Maria Wloch i Laurence Belleme, *Action* 1948, issue 205).

noteworthy examples include the obscure account by Waław Sterner entitled *Gefangeni i dipisi* (Warsaw 1979), and *Byłam dipisem* (Szczecin 1997) by Maria Trzetrzewińska-Rosicka, as well as *Zanim zasypie piasek ślad. Ich los przestrogą i przesłaniem* by Krystyna Leonowicz-Babiak and Zenon Babiak (Dortmund–Lublin 2005). They all share a record of a specific experience, which would be best described as the extension of life in the camp. Even though for some authors (most emphatically for Borowski) that period was the time of proper literary initiation, most described it negatively.

When, several years ago, I was preparing a book devoted to camp recollections (Krakow 2006), I wondered about the condition of the liberated. I mean the moment when the internees, upon completing the rite of passage, found themselves in a camp. Having become accustomed to fighting for their spot in the hierarchy, to a different flow of time, and the overwhelming presence of death and corpses in their lives, they had to leave the Lager to meet the unknown. At that time, I came to a conclusion that the closing of the period of life in a camp did not conclude in any lifting ritual. Any act of freeing proved spurious, possessing the nature of deferment. I wrote:

In Franz Kafka's *The Trial*, the protagonist Josef K. met the painter Titorelli to receive help from him. The painter asked him what sort of acquittal he wanted: "There are three possibilities; absolute acquittal, apparent acquittal and deferment." It seems that apparent acquittal was obtained by those released from a camp, and those who escaped. A short time later they found themselves free, yet they continued to live in fear for their lives. Deferment befell those who were sent to other camps, or walked in the "death marches", before them laid much more pain and suffering. Absolute acquittal was only obtained by those who were liberated within a camp, yet they were so tired or severely ill then that they did not experience that fully. Maybe only death offered true acquittal from a camp? We will never know that as those who obtained it did not leave any testimony.³⁶

All the above descriptions, referring to the life *in between*, of the internment at a DP camp, indicated not only that the condition of those "infected with death" was terrible, but also that upon surviving the camp (Nowakowski and Borowski) or Shoah (Fink), there was no returning to the world "from before". There was no *postliminal rites* (Van Gennep), while the works created inside a camp did not offer solace. Pretending life from before the camp became its own caricature, which was perfectly understood by the astute observers of reality: Nowakowski, Borowski, and Fink. A complete description of the condition of refugees, so current now, is still pending.

³⁶ B. Krupa, *Wspomnienia obozowe jako specyficzna odmiana pisarstwa historycznego*, Universitas, Krakow 2006, pp. 143–144.

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DP camp – literary accounts of the life "in between"
An invitation to the topic

(Summary)

The article constitutes a preliminary attempt at reading from literature the condition of the survivors – people interned in German displaced persons' camps immediately after WWII. In that context, the author considers the saturated with satire, grotesque, and sarcasm novel by Tadeusz Nowakowski entitled *Obóz Wszystkich Świętych*. Nowakowski's vision is supplemented with Tadeusz Borowski's story entitled *Bitwa pod Grunwaldem*, as well as his poems, e.g. *Dary demokratyczne*, and Jerzy Podgórski's reports in the series *W południowych Niemczech*, in which DP camps were compared to an etching by Henry Moore presenting human-like figures sleeping in a tunnel. A separate consideration was applied to the fortunes of Ida Fink, interned in the Ettlingen camp. The writer reminisced on the time in her novel entitled *The Journey*, and in interviews. The analyses of the texts led the author to the conclusion that the discussed narratives indicate the inability to experience solace during (apparent) acquittal, and the inability to return to pre-WWII times.

Key words: Polish literature; DP camp, survivors; Tadeusz Nowakowski; Tadeusz Borowski; Jerzy Nowakowski; Ida Fink, rite of passage