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**QUEERING THE WARSAW UPRISING
(WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MIRON BIAŁOSZEWSKI)**

The essay calls for filling a gap in the studies on Warsaw Uprising concerning the place of queer people. A recent play, *Snakepit* by Joanna Oparek is considered, and the “scandal” surrounding Elżbieta Janicka’s academic work *Festung Warschau* is analysed, but the main source of understanding non-normative masculinities and sexualities is Miron Białoszewski’s *Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising*. The author offers a “paranoid” reading of traces, suggestions, allusions, and “illogical” fragments to build a working metaphor of queer acquaintances as an alternative “map” without the map. Finally he invokes the role of the picaresque narrative convention in representing such paranoid queer relationships.

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**A QUEER HISTORY OF A WORLD WAR II
AND A QUEER HISTORY OF THE WARSAW UPRISING**

A queer history of the Warsaw Uprising is yet to be written. In her recent monograph *Płeć powstania warszawskiego [Warsaw Uprising’s Gender]* (Grzebalska 2013), written from a feminist viewpoint, Weronika Grzebalska calls for the recognition of the role women played in the Uprising, and includes analysis of interviews with living female participants. Yet in terms of love or sexual relationships this analysis subscribes to a heteromatrix narrative: it suggests that all the relations women engaged in were heterosexual, and there is no mention of dissident sexualities among men which would oppose the dominant military model of masculinity. In a discussion on one chapter of the book in question, at the Gender Studies Department at the Polish Academy of Sciences in 2012, I asked the author this inconvenient question and she replied that the female survivors, her interviewees, never mentioned it, which shows this is a taboo. On the other hand, she did not ask them about it either. My critical arrow would not be able to fly had I not seen the Uprising through the (queer) lens of Miron Białoszewski. This poet and prosaist, together with one of the greatest Polish poets of the 20th century, Anna

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Świrszczyńska, for me provides the prototypical narrative and point of reference on the topic of the Uprising, although they both represent marginal voices as opposed to dominant narratives. The Uprising seems to be an untouched island, although there have been Polish attempts to show WWII from a queer perspective, especially in the interviews and literary works of Marian Pankowski (*Rudolph, Matuga idzie [Matuga walking]*). Also documentary writings of Polish concentration camps' gay prisoners have been published (Karwacki 1999)¹ and *Lesbiche Liebe*, the memoirs of Wanda Póltawska, is a recurrent topic in several female documents on concentration camps (albeit it is usually referred to in insulting and homophobic terms): *Lesbiche Liebe spread as an epidemic. Women who in the beginning flinched with repulsion, slowly succumbed. It was like a pestilence, like a flame... like passion. I was watching it with horror* (Póltawska 2009: 55)². There are also the memories of Irena Ciośnińska (1989), less expressive in outrage toward female homosexuality. A similar instance of an account on male gay sex in the camps, very different from the accepting (and even invested) gaze in Pankowski is that of Stanisław Grzesiuk and his *Pięć lat kacetu [Five years in the concentration camp]* (1958). The dominant convention of representing homosexuality in these narratives was its pathologisation, i.e. inscribing it in one line with many Nazi pathologies such as medical experiments and the Holocaust, as a behaviour no "healthy Pole" would ever undertake. It was under these horrible circumstances that some did because they were weak, yet it was the Germans' fault (note also that the authors tend to keep the German expression *Lesbiche Liebe* in its original, as if it was a German phenomenon exclusively, not to be found in Poland). As recently as in 2011 in the Stutthof Museum in Poland, I saw a museum explanation of homosexual behaviour in the concentration camps based on this stereotype. In 2012 Kampania Przeciw Homofobii [Campaign Against Homophobia] published the long-needed book *Różowe trójkąty (Różowe trójkąty 2012)*³ [*Pink Triangles*] on a topic already recognised and researched outside Poland, but here disregarded.

In 2013 an affair broke out in Poland sparked by a piece of literary criticism by Elżbieta Janicka⁴, a specialist on the literature of WWII, who suggested that in the classic book by Aleksander Kamiński, *Kamienie na szaniec*, about the engagement of Polish scouts in the resistance movement, a book that for years had been on the list of school lectures, the relation between Jan Bytnar (pseudonym Rudy) and Tadeusz Zawadzki (nickname Zośka) might have been queer and invested with male-male desire. She drew a parallel between them and

¹ The book was probably self-published and went unnoticed; it is not mentioned in the sparse works on homosexuality during World War II.

² Póltawska is a religious publicist now, boasting about her friendship with Karol Wojtyła – which probably also (unfortunately) influences her attitude. The diary discussed has recently appeared in English as: *And I Am Afraid of My Dreams*, transl. Mary Craig, New York: Hippocrene Books, 2013.

³ The book includes an overall review of the Nazi attitude toward homosexuality written by Robert Biedroń, the first openly homosexual Polish deputy and the first openly homosexual Polish mayor, and the former president of Kampania Przeciw Homofobii; a talk with Stefan Kosiński, a gay man imprisoned as a "pink triangle"; general remarks on doing queer history, also with the example of the Warsaw Uprising; and much graphic material.

⁴ Curiously enough, the book was published two years before the "scandal". The affair was sparked after she gave a press interview where she popularised some of her theses (Janicka 2011); ("*Kamienie na szaniec*". *Reaktywacja* 2013).

Achilles and Patrocles. The accepted code of representing sexuality in general in the Uprising falls under the category of sublimation. Romantic flirting between soldiers and connecting ladies, orderlies and civil girls was accepted, and marriages even exalted (such as the marriage of Krzysztof Baczyński with Basia). However prostitution, incidental sex, and sex in the cellars were repressed – in representation, which should be emphasised⁵. Homosexual sex was a “secondary” layer of “degeneration”. Yet while the sublimated romantic straight relations admitted the possibility of sexual intercourse, the sublimated male romantic bonds absolutely did not, and this is the difference. As usual in Polish culture and its sublimations, the official voice was distilled from what people in those times actually felt. The public discussion around Janicka’s book, reaching even suggestions the researcher should lose her position at the Polish Academy of Sciences, tended to the idea that she “offended” the memory of the dead heroes and inscribed to the dichotomy between Polishness/homosexuality (where “Polishness” is at times also named “patriotism”)⁶.

⁵ Białoszewski notes this on several occasions, the first (probably shocking to many readers) being Irena’s suggestion that she would “get laid” by the first uprising soldier she spotted. (Note this is a “sylleptic” moment, for it suggests Irena does not consider Miron nor Staszek, who she is with at that moment, as possible lovers; instead of the first illusion of a straight “romantic” romance we have libidinal ambiguity). The second sex scene takes place in the cellars and between an unmarried couple, *They were relatively young, fairly good looking and pleasant, and through all this they were in love. We got to know them.* (Białoszewski 1977: 47). From this moment on quoted as MWU with a correspondent page. I use this translation when it is necessary, but it is very imperfect (I devoted a text to this translation [Sobolczyk 2006]). In this quotation there is a significant mistake: not “they were in love” but “they were making love regardless of it all”. The most important passage which shows that there was no “moral outrage” among people is when Białoszewski describes how the benedictine nuns killed the animals to feed soldiers and civils, and amidst the horrible smell the soldiers were having sex: *In this stench I remember partisans lying side by side under shared blankets with girl couriers and nurses after a nighttime action. Some of the women were offended, but only slightly, by the whispering and ogling. I think mainly they were surprised. That in such a situation a person could think about something like that. The rest was perfectly indifferent* (MWU: 67). Finally, in the prisoner of war camp Halina says that the Polish prisoners were bathed by the Ukrainians (who served with the Nazis) and they appointed them for dates (MWU: 229–230). See also Anna Świrszczyńska’s poem which opposes the notion of “heroic virginity” and shows – what in psychological terms is well known – that at times the drive to have sex went out of anxiety and trauma: *A Woman Said to Her Neighbor / A woman said to her neighbor: / “Since my husband was killed I can’t sleep, / when there’s shooting I dive under the blanket, / I tremble all night long under the blanket. / I’ll go crazy if I have to be alone today, / I have some cigarettes my husband left, please / do drop in tonight”* (Świrszczyńska 1979: 59). See also the poem *The Girls Says to the Boy* (Świrszczyńska 1979: 201). Weronika Grzebalska came to the conclusion that the male soldiers also expected a certain dress- and performance-code from female soldiers or connecting ladies or nurses – namely, that they be neat and that they take care a bit about their looks so that they can please, but women who “exaggerated” in taking care of themselves or in makeup were put under the suspicion that they sell themselves to the Germans. Moreover, the allowance of sexual intercourse was different for men and women: one of Grzebalska’s interlocutresses told her a female soldier was kicked out of the army for having sex with her male colleagues from the regiment, while none of those boys was kicked out (Grzebalska 2013: 47).

⁶ See also queer advocacy in the queer magazine “Replika” written by a Polish postmodern queer writer Bartosz Żurawiecki, *Pranie brudnej historii [Washing up Dirty History]* (Żurawiecki 2013: 13); in the same edition a short commentary by Krzysztof Tomasik, the author of *Homobiographies*, was also published. Żurawiecki quotes from the “secret diary” by Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, who states that the Uprising is commemorated in a very asexual way, while it must have been full of sex; and then quotes from the Polish song-writer Jeremi Przybora’s memoirs about an episode of straight sex during the Uprising.

In 2014, clearly as a reaction to this “scandal”, but also with allusions to the LGBTQ politics of “visibility” which uses gay writers as exemplified by the book *Homobiografie* [*Homobiographies*] by Krzysztof Tomasik, and with a “queered” reference to Benjamin Wilkomirski’s “scandal”⁷, Joanna Oparek, a Polish writer, wrote the theatre play *Weżowisko* [*Snakepit*] staged in Teatr Nowy on the 29th November at Teatr Nowy in Krakow (directed by Janusz Marchwiński). In the play an elderly and rather forgotten writer writes an “autobiographical” novel about his gay love affair during the Warsaw Uprising and instantly regains his fame and is also put on LGBTQ banners; however, a PhD candidate in literary studies and a sensitive young boy, both admirers of the writer (and both gay), discover that the novel is all fiction and that the writer never had gay interests, which coincides with the murder of the writer.

The explanation used by Janicka is not new in academic queer studies (although she does not refer to this methodological project) – it is based on the historical rhetoric of (un)speakability and on the thin line between the impossible representation of queer desire and “romantic friendships” which in the XIX century and even later at times served as a “safe closet” for sexual dissidents, and at times represented just a specific code of less macho and more sentimental masculine bonds⁸. Polish WWII literature offers several interesting examples of different kinds of “romantic friendships”, such as Jerzy Andrzejewski’s friendship (or love) with the mythically straight young poet who died in the Uprising, Krzysztof Baczyński; Andrzejewski’s and Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz’s friendship(s) with Czesław Miłosz; and Andrzejewski’s friendship with Iwaszkiewicz. The latter is interestingly represented in epistolography. Both writers were queer – and both were married and they did not have sex together. Their letters never mention homosexuality in their private lives, instead they abound in cordial greetings and declarations of love, as well as greetings from their wives. See e.g.: *Dear Jarosław. I regret very much I won’t be able to hug you on Sunday and give my birthday wishes in person, but lately I’ve been sick and I can’t travel yet. [...] Moreover, as you know, when you give your wishes in person – you kiss the friend and mumble several not exactly coordinated platitudes, this is difficult to be done in a letter, and it’s even more difficult to account everything I wish you. I will just say then that I truly love you cordially and that’s it. Moreover I remind you Marcin is going to be five months old soon, so it’s high time you came to see this young man, and his parents as well by the way. [...] I hug you strongly, I kiss the hands of Mrs. Hania and greetings to your daughters* (Andrzejewski, Iwaszkiewicz 1991: 14)⁹.

⁷ In 1995 Bruno Dössekker published the Holocaust “memories” under the nickname Benjamin Wilkomirski (*Fragments. Memories of a Wartime Childhood*). In 1999 it was proved that the “memories” were invented and fictive; at that time the book won several prizes and was translated to several languages. The scandal unmasked several assumptions that governed the dominant culture, such as the status of the victim, the status of autobiography, the sublime in the poetics of expressing Shoah etc., and now remains an often quoted example in the postmodern historiography and metahistorical accounts on the Holocaust.

⁸ And also female bonds. Actually the classical study of “romantic friendships” covers women (Faderman 1981). See also (Ueno and Adams 2007: 216–219; Rosenberg 2000: 234–236; Parfitt 2000: 515–517).

⁹ Jerzy Andrzejewski’s letter to Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz from 15th February 1944.

Given that this line of “friendship” and “romanticism” is thin and slippery, and not forgetting the narrative turn in historiography which blurs the idea of “seeking truth in history”¹⁰, an uncontroversial methodological prescription would be that in several cases where the code is recognisable as that of “romantic friendships”, one should not at least reject the idea of queer intimacies. This text is an attempt to deheterosexualise the dominant masochistic and militant visions of masculinities in one segment of World War II representations which seems to have been untouched in this respect, the Warsaw Uprising. The ever-undefinable term “queer” will designate in this text (male) homosexuality, but also various kinds of dissident masculinities, and also the cultural practices of challenging the dominant modes of speaking (war mythisations especially). All that said, I repeat: a queer history of the Warsaw Uprising is yet to be written; is it not, however, already there to be found in Białoszewski? Can a future historian of the uprising take Białoszewski’s account as a certain “matrix” to rethink masculinity, the military and the queer?

QUEER READER; OR THE *COGNOSCENTI*

A *Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising* reveals its queerness – or, better, offers possibilities of queer reading – on several levels, although none of these readings is possible unless the reader is already “initiated”: knows he or she might expect a hidden message for the *cognoscenti*¹¹. “Queer reader” is certainly a simplified and generalized concept as any concepts in non-empirical studies of audience are condemned to be¹². For today’s reader with an already “accustomed” eye (and therefore “biased” and necessarily “awry”) to queer messages in culture

¹⁰ Janicka was not trying to “prove” as a historian that the prototypes “actually were” gay; she analysed the literary convention and its function in culture(s). My disbelief in “truth” as such and in history specifically is explained on theoretical grounds in my book (Sobolczyk 2013a). Never, while writing on historical personas, have I been interested in delivering judgments nor “disclosing” the hidden truth of who “was” and who “was not” (gay).

¹¹ I described this rule in my text (Sobolczyk 2013b) (the original Polish version appeared in 2006); see also (Niżyńska 2013: 47–48).

¹² See especially my book (Sobolczyk 2013a) where I describe the “official”, i.e. published as reviews and articles, reception of Białoszewski’s work. Queer reading is almost never performed but for two texts: the critic Artur Sandauer knew Białoszewski personally very well and intended his essay to be an allusive denouncement of Białoszewski’s homosexuality because he disagreed with the writer’s aesthetical choices. Wojciech Żukrowski’s review of the *Memoir* discusses queerness with the use of stereotypes like “sissy” and “coward”; the critic also knew Białoszewski privately. In both cases the alluded homosexuality is an invective. Among the other critics who read Białoszewski’s works there were people who knew him personally very well and probably understood sexual allusions and innuendos, yet abstained from mentioning them, because such were the rules of the public discourse. This is one way of understanding the concept of *cognoscenti*. Another way would be the testimonies of queer people from those times who did not know Białoszewski and were not informed about his sexuality, the question would be did they see the “hidden” messages at all – there are no such testimonies however, and only empirical research could help nuance the idea of *cognoscenti*. Since I cannot do it, I use a simplified and generalized concept of *cognoscenti*. It should also be noted that not everyone among the contemporary readers is automatically a *cognoscenti*, as there are still many people who do not see and do not want to see any queerness in culture.

in general, it is very hard to put themselves in a position of a Polish reader in the 1960s and 70s (what for some would appear as the myth of the return to “innocence”). The publication of the *Secret Diary* changed the methodological frames of reading Białoszewski, because the sphere of speculation, gossip and conjectures is now foregrounded by data and on the whole this lessens the “paranoid reading”, making queerness an indispensable paradigm while re-reading the body of works of Białoszewski¹³. *Memoirs* was published after four poetry books and after several theatrical plays which also reveal – or offer a possibility of reading – queerness, so the eye might have got accustomed to the *Memoir*, yet the question remains whether this eye could have discovered queerness in the very texts that preceded *Memoir*, which I doubt; the informed eye must have been the one that had biographical knowledge, and since biographical sources were published as early as in the 1990s and later, the major biographical source must have been “gossip”, paranoid knowledge, or – “enigmatic signifiers”. I shall try to balance my reading between the historically uninformed and today’s conscious. Once we assume that Białoszewski had known gay men, we might apply the rule I have mentioned above while discussing “romantic friendships”: without deciding “yes or no”, we should not neglect (at the very least) the possibility that “acquaintance”, “my familiar” or “friend” might have been the language of gay men. Note first that, if I have not missed something in the book, in the whole of the *Memoir* Białoszewski does not make any new “acquaintances” with men, so all the cases in question are people whom he knew from before the Uprising and at times perhaps even from before the war; second, not all these men he meets while surviving the Uprising must have necessarily been his lovers (in fact, most of them probably were not, because once we learn how to read the general “code”, we find some signals that suggest the degree of “knowing”). Therefore, the question of queer history of the Warsaw Uprising in *Memoir* is not answered as actual romances and sex life during the 63 days, but rather as a subtext of the survival of a “secret community”, as dispersed as the families and other more visible kinships and bonds also were at that time (Białoszewski’s own family, because he spent these months away from his mother with the family of a friend, and then they moved to Białoszewski’s father’s family). This is one of several queer messages in this book: that “regular” kinships (such as familial or professional) were loosened and dispersed during the Uprising, just as the queer ones were¹⁴. Any meeting of an “acquaintance” – queer or not – was a recognition, a recognition of a kind of a “miracle”¹⁵. This implies also the rearrangement of the bonds and

¹³ I described these methodological consequences in a text devoted to four “secret diaries” and a general cultural shift in Polish culture (Sobolczyk 2014a).

¹⁴ Niżyńska noted something similar while analysing the post-*Memoir* autobiographical stories: *Positioned in the center of a circle that includes his friends and blood relatives, the narrator privileges no one. Friendships in Białoszewski’s representation have the same status as blood ties and present a full-fledged alternative to biological clans* (Niżyńska 2013: 168–169). I dare say, not only out of my personal experience (or my friends’), but also out of other literary sources, that this is quite common among queer people, only at times the friends become more important to the families (and then it’s usually the fault of the families).

¹⁵ See: *Here you could meet someone you hadn’t seen for ten years. Suddenly. As I did. Also. I met Count Franio Ż. From school. After so many years. Then someone else* (MWU: 174). This last sentence with its “someone else” might be seen as an emblematic syllepsis of the “thin line” described above: it might suggest a queer

kinships. A different light might be cast upon an exclamation of the narrator, surprising in the context of the horror of war: *My God! How much kindness there was in Warsaw then! Simple kindness. So much!* (MWU: 201). It is a well-known topos to represent the war experience – the war world – as a “world contrariwise” (Sobolewska 1997: 103–105), as in the popular culture of the Middle Ages, when a peasant could become a king. Białoszewski opposes the strictly horizontal vision where the “normal” (= good) world becomes downgraded and the “low world” becomes uplifted, and not for provocation. There is the idea of “normalcy” as the “quotidian”, and also of sexual normativity. Although Białoszewski obviously notes his desire to come back to quotidian “normalcy”¹⁶, he dares to see also some good points in the collapse of the world with settled rules of “normalcy” especially in terms of human bonds¹⁷.

fellow (because its context is undefined as opposed to the school context in Franio) or might not (because it just indicates a lapse in memory). My “queering” use of syllepsis is different than Elżbieta Winięcka’s in her book (Winięcka 2006), because in this analysis there are no sexuality or gender issues at all. I would like to propose the term “paranoid syllepsis” – it sounds catchy.

¹⁶ Compare: *It was believed that nothing dreadful awaited us; people wanted to believe in that, because they’d had enough of the uprising and of the war in general and of hatred and killing and dying. Suddenly – everyone – wanted – to – live! To live! To walk! To go outside! To look around! At the sunlight. Normally* (MWU: 208). But this “normalcy” was clearly utopian and people knew that. People see that there is no easy return to “normalcy” when the Uprising is over: *Well, unexpectedly there’s a return to normality, and suddenly there is no city, there are no houses... despair...* (MWU: 209).

¹⁷ I do not think Białoszewski’s experience was so unique – or that it pertained only to queer people – or, enlarging the scope – only to people who belonged to the invisible or oppressed minorities. I rather think many civil people would confirm this blurred axis of judgement. It is that the Polish narrative in literature, historiography and culture in general, based on the “romantic paradigm”, favored such an “all or nothing” ethical judgement. This contravention was instantly recognised in the reception of the book and recognised also with its “queer background”. I refer to the most infamous review by Wojciech Żukrowski. In the accessible language of the times he attempted a homophobic critique (the problem of the times was: how to express homophobic statements without mentioning homosexuality which was a “banned representation”, how to “erase” homosexuality without mentioning it, which would certainly confirm its existence?): the complicated line of argumentation actually boils to the suggestion that Białoszewski did not engage in the Uprising because the reversal of norms that the war entails offered him and other degenerates like him the possibility to look at the people’s asses while they shit (in fact *Memoir* is full of moments of defecation, but in this case the clue is not the association of shit-homosexuality). Compare: *While on the other hand he likes to do things for fun, e.g. he describes how a girl fears the bombing, so she plugs her ear, but she needs to put her baby on the pot, so she hold her one hand on her ear and the other on the pot’s ear, maybe this is funny... Also when he mentions meeting the poet Wojciech Bąk from the ass-side in a loo. In these instances Białoszewski is capable of an associative sequence, of thinking, yet there where it was really necessary and he must have thought this, the process was studiously erased, obliterated* (Żukrowski 1970: 1193). In fact the recognition of the poet Wojciech Bąk in the *Memoir* falls under the category of “possible queer recognitions” as I discussed above. Compare also the sylleptic-paranoid phrase by Białoszewski about Bąk: *Whom we knew from his poems, his slim volumes. A friend had pointed him out to me. That he was here. During the war* (MWU: 158). The translation does not help; I am thinking of the phrase which should sound: “...pointed him out to me. That he is”. Żukrowski knew Bąk was gay because it was an “open secret” in literary circles (Bąk was interrogated and also sent to a mental hospital in the Stalinist years, however not just because of homosexuality). The question is, had Białoszewski known that during the Uprising, or did he consciously introduce this information twenty years later while writing and recording the book? He mentions knowing his poetry to make clear (what otherwise Żukrowski imputed) that Bąk was not known to him from gay milieu. On the reception of the *Memoir* and Żukrowski’s review in particular see my book (Sobolczyk 2013a: 200–205).

A WEB OF QUEER ACQUAINTANCES?

I shall count out several moments where such double-status “acquaintances” are mentioned¹⁸. One of the first seems to be Wojtek, a colleague from the secret university. Miron and Swen (who would later become not only a poet and writer but also a professional stage actor) staged a play for friends, and Białoszewski, who later would become famous for his acting skills, confessed that he was so shy that he acted “like wood”. Yet *Wojtek, who perished in the uprising, in Zoliborz, said that he’d really enjoyed it. I told him why I acted that way. “It doesn’t matter; it was very nice”* (MWU: 29). There is a possibility that Wojtek had a feel for avant-garde theatre and acting by Witkacy’s method and had a taste for it (which is the least queer possibility); there is also the possibility that the whole play, including Białoszewski’s “wooden” acting, was campy and Wojtek winked he was one of the *cognoscenti* (and now Białoszewski re-winks to his readers); or perhaps he was just saying something as romantic as “no matter how you act, you are simply beautiful to watch”. There is actually no “logical” narrative sense in mentioning (for the first time and the last time) Wojtek and his reaction, which might suggest this is an “invested” mention, there is some surplus in it. Another man, Leonard(ek), is suddenly recognised by Miron and Swen in a cellar when after several days of bombing the friends decided to go for a walk (MWU: 45–46). The mention of Janek Markiewicz (MWU: 148–149, 191–192) is similar. This Janek is not the same Janek who was Białoszewski’s love and was in Częstochowa at that time.¹⁹ In this case there is no surplus information nor context.

In the case of Zdzisław Śliwerski the surplus is more clear than in Wojtek’s case: *Before Wilcza, I think, we dropped in on my schoolmate Zdzislaw Sliwerski. What of his being a schoolmate? I could say a lot about that* (MWU: 163)²⁰. Miron is told by Zdzisław’s family that their son engaged in the Uprising; Miron then undertakes an expedition to the place where his unit resides. Białoszewski suggests mutual sacrifices and silent understanding: Zdziś understands Miron undertook a risky escapade to find him, and Miron says that when Zdziś gave him a sugar cube, it was a very meaningful act in that semiotic system (i.e., the war semiotic system): *We spoke very little to each other. Although we were relaxed. Zdzisio gave me a lump*

¹⁸ I already noted several moments when I was writing a biographical text about Białoszewski before new sources such as the *Secret Diary* appeared. Yet due to the genre, i.e. “homobiography”, that text did not include much literary analysis, rather a collection of facts and suspicions (Sobolczyk 2008). In that text I mention one scene which I do not analyse in the present text – a scene where Białoszewski describes a cruising place (“that ridiculous later place”) from the postwar perspective. My analysis inspired Niżyńska who based her epilogue (entitled “*Ridiculous Places*” and *Queering Memory*) on that quotation and my analysis of it, expanding it to the coda of her book, where the traumatic meets the queer (Niżyńska 2013: 176–186).

¹⁹ The Museum of the Warsaw Uprising registers Jan Markiewicz but Białoszewski suggests his character was “really young” while the register holds Markiewicz was born in 1923, one year after Białoszewski. They might not be the same people then... or, if we become a bit more paranoid, Białoszewski actually says something about the looks of Janek (he seemed “ephebic”).

²⁰ In passages like this I feel the translator herself had no idea of the homoerotic subtext so she just treated them as loose or strange. The last two sentences should sound more like this: “Schoolmate is not everything. Much more could be said about that”. This sounds like a promise (someday I will), but not fulfilled in the *Memoir*. Should we think of it as a forecast of a secret-diary-like-text Białoszewski had in mind to write in some future? Or is it just a typical *reticentia* figure? (Or, sylleptically, both).

of sugar. “Here”. I began sucking it immediately. At that time treating someone to a lump of sugar was significant (MWU: 202)²¹. Again this is a syllepsis – treating one to a sugar cube might have been an act of sharing a hard-to-get treat in times of war shortages (indicating that someone likes or sympathies with someone); it might, however, have been commonly understood then as a confession of love as well; perhaps the few words spoken between the two (and they were at a military unit) is also telling in this context – the sugar cube says what cannot be said aloud. The publication of the *Secret Diary* introduced another complication to this example. While we recognise the very same person at the beginning of Białoszewski’s account of his love relationships (Zdzisław would be the first “romantic love”, but not the first sexual adventure, because in the early days the writer seemed to detach these categories)²², when giving personal information his name is rendered as “Zdzisio Ś”. Should that suggest that Białoszewski was conscious that very few readers would understand the erotic context in the scene from *Memoir*, so he could “out” Zdzisław, as opposed to the explicit *Secret Diary*? (If so, the secrecy agency in the posthumous diary would be more complicated than a full coming out and writing openly). Another problem is why did Białoszewski not give a clue (such as “I wrote about Zdziś in the *Memoir*”)? Did he project his reader as a detective or is it just a sign of writing for himself (only inconsequently implemented²³)? “I who write” can abbreviate names because I know who it refers to, or – as in so many queer contexts – I do not want to hurt somebody²⁴. I shall come back to this doubt.

²¹ I have a problem with the phrase “relaxed”, it’s rather something like “we felt / the atmosphere was / it was familiarly [homely]”. Białoszewski then goes on to say this was the last time they saw each other, but he knows Zdzisław lives, only he’s stayed on exile. Note this was also a politically “suspicious” fragment, but it was not censored. Compare also the moment in the *Secret Diary* that I analysed in the text on queer diaries (Sobolczyk 2014b) when Białoszewski starts his “confession” about love affairs, Zdzisław included, with the image of standing in line to get sweets which the writer does not like anymore and then jumps to the sweets he used to trick his mom with, as a way to conceal his gay adventures. A sugar lump also appears as salvatory in the sewers scene when a nurse gives one to a sick lieutenant’s “favourite”, Miron carries this on when the boy is so thirsty he could drink water from the sewer. This is an important context to understand why in “old age” Białoszewski does not like sweets, and how the reality of the communist lack of supply and the presentiment of “war” are connecting him with WWII.

²² Compare: *I got involved in a feeling unnecessarily. A school friend, Zdzisio Ś., provoked me once and again to become interested in him. I had no courage to go the whole hog. I got my satisfaction from adventures with the adults, with Zdzisio I proceeded romantically. Holding hands, grasping hair. A few years later I tried something more, but then there was resistance. I broke this resistance. But it cost me too much. Zdzisio sometimes yielded to me. He was nonetheless interested in some chick. That was in the beginning of the [German] occupation. I gave up on him finally* (Białoszewski 2012: 752). This confession comes directly after the “entrance” passage I analysed in detail in the essay on “secret diaries”. From Zdzisio Białoszewski moves to Swen and other colleagues mentioned in the *Memoir*. This “supplement” also throws new light onto this *Memoir* scene because it shows the Uprising scene happened after Miron “gave Zdziś up”, it could have been a new opening – but it was a goodbye. The wish Białoszewski expresses in the *Memoir* is that one day when they meet again (after 23 years) it will all add to the “romantism” of the affair.

²³ Note that it is the other way round with Stanisław Prószyński (see also above on him). In *Memoir* he appears as “Staszek P.” or “Staszek”. In *Secret Diary*, just after “Zdzisio Ś.”, he appears as “Staszek Prószyński” in one line with “Swen” and “Ludwik”. The latter are a different case because [Stanisław] Swen [Czachorowski] was known under this pseudonym as a writer, and Ludwik [Hering] was known from Białoszewski’s writings.

²⁴ Still, why would he care? If he already knew Swen was offended by the *Memoir* and it did not stop him from revealing even more in the *Secret Diary* (see below)? Or he was “just” negligent – or “just” selective?

But the most “out” moment happens by the end of the book (note that I actually go chronologically with these encounters and they are step by step more open as if they tended toward a “coming out” *denouement*, yet this does not happen; I shall come back to this idea in a while). Białoszewski meets Kuba, a young Jew who survived the Uprising along with 25 members of his family. The meeting indeed is something of a miracle because after the Ghetto Uprising, concentration camps deportations, and the horrors of the Warsaw Uprising it was hardly expected to meet Jews, and, what is more, Kuba is happy and laughing. But from the queer perspective it is even more interesting that Białoszewski for the first time and the last time in *Memoir* – and in his “official” writings as well, at least in a serious tone – describes male beauty with a clear fascination, not to say desire. The allusions that Kuba was gay are almost explicit (“I knew him, and the others”) and that he “liked to use life” to say it euphemistically, but was not a prostitute (note the passage on being “coquettish but not too much” and the telling substitution in the phrase “znał się na sobie” which evokes the phrase “znał swoją wartość”, the use of which would imply “love for sale”): *Kuba was a charming, handsome, simply beautiful young Jew. He wore a cap and high boots. And he was tall, had splendid black hair and splendid white teeth. I knew him. I and others. He was extremely well-liked. He walked around, smiled. He was very seductive. But not excessively. He knew how to make an impression. [...] I look to the side. Those white teeth smiling. That same splendid profile. I look and don't believe it. But he smiles. Runs up to us* (MWU: 212)²⁵.

Białoszewski achieves the effect of charm, enchantment. Kuba suggests that Miron and his company do not go to the German soldiers in an act of surrender (which was required after the fall of the Uprising), but stay with them. Miron is very eager, his family less, so Białoszewski even considers leaving his father and company to stay with Kuba, which finally does not take place and after this event we read nothing more of Kuba's family and their further history. This might also be telling. If this “silencing” means the family did not survive, then Białoszewski would be half-saying that he himself might have survived because he did not fall under their charms, and stuck with his “family” instead. Is this “silencing” used because the writer did not want an unqueer “moral”? Or for some other political reasons concerning Jews in communist times? I leave these questions open.

There is also another “thin line motive”, this time not concerning someone Białoszewski had known before, and this time even more provocative from the “traditional” Polish point of view, for it suggests a queer relationship in the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*), the mythicised (and thus desexualised) Polish bastion of war ethos. The whole sequence starts with a sudden meeting between Miron and Swen and Henio, their mutual friend, who is also not

²⁵ This translation calls for much explication. Instead of “he knew how to make an impression” it should read something like “he knew what he was worth”. After that there should have been a phrase the translator just omitted (“And he was charming”). Then in the last sentence it should be “I ran up to him”, not that Kuba runs! Note there is also a phrase with Ludwik saying that was primarily censored (after “those white teeth smiling” there is: “Like corn – says Ludwik”). I do not understand the reason why. I doubt that it is for its queer meaning, which nevertheless it might have been – Ludwik (Hering), a gay mentor of Białoszewski and the boyfriend of Józef Czapski from before the war, might have been among those who “knew Kuba”. It is not clear whether Hering's expression dealt with Kuba in person or it was just his comment on people with nice teeth. Although if I am not wrong, corn is yellow.

outside the “paranoid” lecture (this is one of “weaker” contexts, just like Leonard and Janek Markiewicz, although the information that both Swen and Miron knew somebody is already a kind of a signal)²⁶. Henio fights in the Uprising and wants to help the boys and Swen’s cousin to get out of the bombarded district through the sewers, but it is not so easy to be let into the sewers, as this route is highly selective, and Henio offers protection²⁷. If, then, acceptance into the sewers was highly hierarchical and required “znajomości”, then the question of “criteria” does not seem out of place. And with Henio we might suspect that also a “secret” web of gay acquaintances, alternatively with soldier’s rank, other personal issues, might have also worked. This suspicion is strengthened when Miron, Swen and Zbyszek, Swen’s cousin, learn that they will be “smuggled” into the sewers as helpers to in carrying a wounded boy soldier, who is the lieutenant Radosław’s “favorite” (MWU: 133)²⁸. It seems probable, then, that the lieutenant accepted civil men (instead of Home Army soldiers which would be more obvious a choice given such strict selection) to carry his “favorite” through the (gay) Henio protection because he himself was gay, the favourite was gay, and because Henio introduced Miron and Swen as “one of them”²⁹; I am suggesting, then, a kind of “gay solidarity” as one of the structures of informal hierarchical organisation.

“ROMANTIC FRIENDSHIP” AND ITS SLIPPAGES

Yet the most “visible” – and at the same time mistaken, as I intend to prove in a moment – instance of “romantic friendship” is that between Miron and Swen. That it is a close friendship is apparent even without any additional biographical background. In fact, due to Białoszewski’s greater popularity as a writer perhaps, and also due to the well-known fact that Swen Czachorowski was married, the homosexuality of the former was more known (as a paranoid “open secret”) than the latter’s. When the first major book of biographical knowledge, a collection of memories (not by Swen, however) was published, we learned from the recollection of Irena Prudil (who herself appears in the opening parts of the *Memoir*) that *Swen was offended to death with the “Memoir”* (Prudil 1996: 71). It has to be noted that the discourse on homosexuality (of Białoszewski and the others) in these memories ranges from euphemisms and allusions to half-open statements which are usually one or two sentences without further contextualisation; this is also telling about the taboo status of queerness even in the 1990s. We do not know, then, why Swen was so offended. I might hypothesize

²⁶ Tadeusz Sobolewski in Białoszewski’s biography says that Henio lived with a boy during wartime and lost this lover in the uprising (Sobolewski 2012: 228).

²⁷ Compare: *The legend of the sewers, of entering with passes obtained through friendships and only in the highest circles, has made its impression* (MWU: 130–131). “Friendships” is very obfuscating in this context. It should be “acquaintances” or “connections”, or “protections”.

²⁸ When Miron meets in passing Radosław, he mentions that he was blonde and over 30. I read it as a sylleptic message.

²⁹ Białoszewski adds one piece of information which might explain why the lieutenant also might have preferred men who would understand his sentiment. The “favorite” was too heavily wounded for the criteria of admission into the sewers. The carriers also needed to pretend he was only slightly wounded (MWU: 131).

paranoiacally that Swen as a *cognoscenti* certainly understood the subtext and assumed it was both apparent to anyone (i.e., there is no distinction between *cognoscenti* and *ignoranti*), and that it was apparent to *cognoscenti*, but he was frightened even of such a marginal “outing”. Swen might have also been offended because Białoszewski had actually set a trap with this employment of “romantic friendship” convention: with the publication of the *Secret Diary* it became clear³⁰, but could have been deduced also out of the text by a really meticulous *cognoscenti* reader, that Swen and Miron were actually both gay, but “only” friends; something that nowadays is called “homomance”, or the gay “bromance”: an affectionate sentimental male-male relationship which does not involve sex. Something like the relationship between Andrzejewski and Iwaszkiewicz I mentioned before. And here is the proof, a moment in the text where Białoszewski passingly makes a certain distinction: On the very first day Białoszewski notes that he slept in the same bed with Staszek while Irena [Prudil] slept in a different room. In the book of memoirs *Miron* suggests that Staszek was gay but he was not with Miron (and Miron had somebody else), which on the other hand does not preclude sex³¹. We have already seen that the sexual culture of queer people in those times indeed constituted alternative kinds of relationships and bonds, a complex web, and this complexity I am trying to untwist as I might through the example of the *Memoir*. But later on Białoszewski evokes a similar scene from pre-Uprising times with Swen: the former visited the latter and stayed long into the night, so it was decided he would spend the night, and Swen started nervously searching for a sleeping gown, which was “trouble” for him. Once again this information is not “logically” indispensable in the narrative. Curiously enough, the “official” version differs from the “uncensored” one (published in 2014) by one word, but it is also significant. Białoszewski explained to the readers that staying the night was customary (note, however, that he did not care to mention it in the opening pages with Staszek, only later with Swen), and this is his original phrase: *I had gone to Swen's for the first time one night and naturally, like most people who visited friends in those days, slept over* (MWU: 60). The editor added one word, “wtedy”, meaning “in those days”; would reading it as a “Freudian slip” be too paranoid? I mean: Białoszewski actually meant what he said, but his generalisation probably concerned a specific group, queer people, as mentioned above, an alternative sexual culture, which implies this was his prototype reference of kinships, and so he did not care too much on adjusting his message to the ears of the “straight/universal” (and this is of importance); while the editor's/censor's intervention suggests that before the war people in general had

³⁰ *Secret diary* makes clear that queer relationships and kinships at that time (and not only) were more complex than monogamous relationships or promiscuity. Compare: *[In giving up Zdzisio] helped me the sudden friendship with Swen, vivid, but devoid of eroticism. At least on my side. It appeared that in friendships there are also dramas. I had no siblings, I had been waiting for a big friendship for a long time, but friendships before Swen had been partial, incomplete. Here – for the first time absolute frankness, identical homo taste and passion for writing, art. This filled life instantly. In that case there was no necessity of love. Adventures were just enough, and one had someone to talk about them* (Białoszewski 2012: 752). Now, there is another explanation possible of Swen's offence. If Swen had some erotic interest in Miron, and Miron did not share it, now the *Memoir* suggested publicly it had been love.

³¹ *Secret Diary* made it clear that Staszek belonged to the same category as Swen and Ludwik Hering, gay friendships without sex (Białoszewski 2012: 752).

a different understanding of intimacy than after.³² This scene with Swen shows a thin line between Swen's "erotic panic" to distinguish friendship from eroticism and "hospitality"³³. One of the first things we learn about Swen is that there was a complicated sentimental triangle with Miron involved: *On the whole I simply ignored the fact that first Teik and Swen had broken off relations with each other over an insignificant matter, that I had then broke off relations with Teik out of solidarity with Swen, and finally I had broken off relations with Swen and made with Teik (let me remind you – Teik from Staszic street) (MWU: 37)*³⁴. The word "break up", "zerwać", wrongly rendered as "break off" in this translation, is used instead in the context of love relationships; however, if we consider what we know from the *Secret Diary*, that Miron and Swen shared a friendship but not a bed and that Miron came to understand from this relationship that such "platonic" friendships might also cause as much torture as "regular" love affairs, we can conclude that most probably Teik was Swen's "boy-friend" at that time (which does not preclude that Miron might have had sexual relationships with Teik), and that jealousy in queer relationships at that time might not only have been (or even: seldom) caused by sexual infidelity, but also by intellectual "selective affinities". Without the *Secret Diary* as a guide the *ignoranti* reader reads this passage in the *Memoir* as "complications in a circle of friends", and the *cognoscenti* reader probably as a tale of gay jealousy in a triangle. Soon after that, when Miron joins Swen and his family in the asylum or cellar we learn that Swen has a fiancée, Celinka³⁵; perhaps this chronological sequence of informing (first – a suggestion Swen was gay, second – he had a fiancée) was supposed to serve the *cognoscenti* readers to "recognise the real deal"³⁶. Later in the text Swen's attitude

³² This also inscribes to a specific ideology, namely of opposing the communist times as "more decent" to the pre-war democracy as "degenerate". However in this case I am not sure if this is what the editor/censor wanted to imply; if there is a "Freudian slip" in this one-word change, it is not in Białoszewski's version, but in the edited one.

³³ By way of digression, note that this very thin line is the interpretive axis of modern readings of the myth of Sodom: was Sodom's sin sexual advances or the lack of hospitality? Modern readings tend to the latter. Note also that in *Secret Diary* Białoszewski claims he himself had no sexual interest in Swen, yet he is not sure if this was mutual. The reader of both texts (and the memories collection with the information that Swen was offended) cannot judge where the "truth" lies, but might suggest the alternatives that Swen's "panic" was supposed to conceal his erotic interest (this is the most faithful to Białoszewski version) or that Białoszewski after years (in the *Memoir* or in the *Secret Diary*) manipulated the information.

³⁴ "Break off relationships" is an explicit straightening up of the phrase Białoszewski uses – I do insist it should be "break up", without "relationship". Also "I ignored..." is misleading, the narrator means that in this situation (uprising) such previous quarrels lost their significance. Teik would later become a priest, Białoszewski says in the *Secret Diary* it was because he had no meaning in life.

³⁵ Little is known of her in the book. Białoszewski suggests that Celinka was alone in Warsaw, she had no family there, therefore Swen took her with his family. Grzebalska quotes several interlocutresses who say that in the war codes many girls rejected boys who did not adhere to conspiracy, i.e. that male sex-appeal was "militarised": *A boy who wasn't in conspiracy didn't count at all, wasn't taken into account, says Mme Barbara, For me it was inconceivable for a boy not to be involved, says Mme Irena (Grzebalska 2013: 35–36)*. Białoszewski consciously plays on this stereotype in the opening with Irena.

³⁶ In the uncensored version of the *Memoir* there was a scene that would have been very telling for the *cognoscenti* readers about Swen. When Jadźka was reading the cards for Miron and Swen. The censored version ended with the information that her readings were accurate. This is my translation of the original version: *I don't remember about me, but with Swen – very, very characteristic concurrences of figures, and that she blabbed out straight from the shoulder to him, risking eventually this flagrancy of information about him (from the cards) (Białoszewski 2014: 35)*. This is actually the only moment of all the interferences where we might suspect homosexual suggestions have been censored.

is shown as complicated when we learn that he actually preferred the company of Miron – yet this might be the effect of the narrator’s subjectivity – when the two went on walks arm in arm or when in the cellars Swen slept closer to Miron than to Celinka (both pieces of information might have been “neutralised”, the former with the explanation that such was the custom at those times, and the latter that the war conditions coerced such a composition, i.e. that men had to occupy less comfortable places or that a straight romantic couple needed to maintain keep their chastity³⁷).

There is a tricky counterpart to Swen’s straight coupling: Miron’s relationship with Halina. I must revise my own previous reading in this instance. I read the *Memoir* for the very first time alongside the book of memories *Miron* where Halina’s testimony is included and leaves no doubt – regardless of the “homophobic” language of the so-called epoch – that she had some feelings for him, but not vice versa, that she knew he was gay, and that the two were “concocted siblings” (Miron’s father had a relationship with Halina’s Aunt Zocha)³⁸. This knowledge overshadowed some nuances and even led me to a critique of a school crib sheet where Halina was called Miron’s fiancée³⁹. My current reading of the *Memoir*, however, leads me to the conclusion that Białoszewski actually played with the code of straight romance as a commentary to Swen’s story and queer kinships in general. Miron and Halina were supposed to meet on August 1st but the Uprising broke out; they meet after Miron,

³⁷ The latter has been a well-known “closet” technique for many gay men, sometimes combined with religious hypocrisy (“we cannot have sex before marriage because I’m religious”).

³⁸ Halina Bocianowa’s memoir is significantly called *Rodzinna przyjaźń* [*Familial Friendship*]. In the first sentences Bocianowa hints upon their meeting that she was “informed”, however she desexualises the “objects” of Miron’s affection: *In this period of life [wartime – P.S.] apart from writing, the only thing that mattered for him was love. He lived through many affairs and loves which gave him impulses for writing* (Bocianowa 1996: 87). When describing Miron’s insistence to go to Częstochowa she uses the expression “somebody Miron missed” (Bocianowa 1996: 88). Bocianowa also mentions a situation when Miron says Halina would be the only woman he could marry, but she replied she does not want a marriage with someone who has nighttime adventures (p. 89), a euphemism for gay cruising. The memory was written in 1985, only two years after the writer’s death, perhaps Bocianowa was not sure how much Miron would want her to “out” him, or it was difficult to publish it without euphemisms due to censorship, note also that in these years the “Hyacinth action” (a secret service campaign arresting gay people and collecting their data) was at its peak. Niżyńska (Niżyńska 2013: 12) accurately observed that the authors of memories in *Miron* actually repeat Białoszewski’s strategy of introducing homosexuality into the text: *The reader of the interview senses that the two men speak primarily to those who already understand what they are talking about. Their pattern of speaking resembles, to an extent, the double gesture of Białoszewski’s writing: it says everything to the knowing reader while not saying much to the “naive” reader. This double gesture is particularly striking where the theme of homosexuality is concerned [...]*.

³⁹ See my book (Sobolczyk 2014a: 210 n. 110). I repeated the critique of this “straightening up” in my lecture on the place of homosexuality in the contemporary school at Festiwal Nauki [Science Festival] in Warsaw in 2013. My critique in general is justified, for queer writers, Białoszewski included, are not recognised by the school system as queer or gay, and wherever it is possible, schoolbooks try to “straighten up” if not exactly their biographies (these are “sexless”), then the readings of their works. One of my academic colleagues who does queer studies and wrote a book on contemporary literature for schools tried to “smuggle” some information and even quotations from Gombrowicz’s *Kronos*, but the publisher censored it. Yet now I tend to think that my criticism was a bit precipitated in this case, because now I see that Białoszewski consciously employs the frame of straight romance; yet in the end he rejects it and this was not recognised by the author of the school I criticised. The booklet in question is (Polańczyk 2004: 32).

Swen (without Celina) and Zbyszek⁴⁰ emerge from out of the sewers in a safer part of the city where people are able to even live in the buildings, not in cellars. The meeting is sentimental: *Stacha, Halina's mother, and Halina awaken. On beds. We rush over to them. In the dark I bend over Halina. I am the one from the sewers; she is the one under the quilt, clean. I kiss her. "We were supposed to see each other August 1", I say, "Well it's exactly one month later"* (MWU: 145). However soon after that there is a wink to the *cognoscenti*, as Halina suggests they practice their French, reading together André Gide's *La symphonie pastorale* (MWU: 147)⁴¹, and the mentioning of this as if "in passing" is not accidental, just as it is not an accident when Białoszewski mentions in the beginning that he and his colleagues are reading Rabelais just before the Uprising breaks (the *Memoir* is rabelaisian in short because it often shows how the "lower half of the body", excretion especially, becomes less taboo during the war), or evoking Jean Valjean's passing through the sewers in Victor Hugo. The choice of a queer text of a queer author might then suggest that Halina "knows" and "accepts". There might be, however, another context both to this particular choice and the explaining of Miron's attachment to Halina: she was Jewish (she used "Rybińska" as her family name, but actually it was Zancberg). It is not said anywhere in the book, neither in the uncensored version⁴², and even the *Secret Diary* kept it secret; it was revealed by the editors of that diary and it was mentioned in a "foreword" Białoszewski once wrote for one of the editions of the *Memoir* which he eventually withdrew⁴³. Gide's text treats the complicated situation of a blind girl who stays with a protestant family and the arising love triangle complications with the problem of religious conversion. Alongside the illusion of a straight romance, the names of male friends keep on appearing and, as I noted above, they intensify in their queer contexts (albeit visible only to a few), as if leading to a "coming out" denouement. And here comes the biggest trick of the narrator: in the place of the expected "coming out" (in the eyes of the *cognoscenti*), and to the surprise or even dismay in the eyes of those who got seduced by the literary convention of the (straight) romance, one scene – at the very ending of the book – cuts both expectations, redirecting them completely. The whole group is already in the hands of the Germans and they are deciding which transportation they should take, and where to go. Halina wants to go to Vienna and sings a song about having her heart broken by somebody in

⁴⁰ According to the rule I introduced, one should not neglect the question of Zbyszek's, as any other man's, sexuality, although it would be "logically" a bit surprising if Swen had a gay cousin, if the three boys in one cellar actually were gay; but is "logic" equated with "statistics"? or "stereotypes"? Białoszewski gives a "paranoid hint" that justifies also this "suspicion". He says that after passing the sewers Zbyszek's mother never saw him again, he emigrated to England. *But... His wife (he got married) sent letters* (MWU: 132). In original it is rather something like: "But... Wife, for he got married, letters sends". This interjection which after saying "wife" would not need – according to the heteromatrix logic – explanation, suggests it might not have been obvious that Zbyszek would marry.

⁴¹ Misguided translation "our French studies" – as if French philology, no: French language simply.

⁴² In brief, the censorship cut or rearranged mostly the passages that suggested Polish collaboration with Germans, including "szmalcownictwo" (selling Jews in hiding to the Germans), a note that the Germans behaved righteously after the evacuation of Warsaw citizens, and one but telling note on how the Polish people called the Soviets. Apart from the "reading cards" scene I noted above, there are no cuts of "erotic" content.

⁴³ See also the explanation in the only "biography" (a very personal one) of Białoszewski (Sobolewski 2012: 83–84).

Vienna; Miron pushes to stay in the General Government (i.e. Polish territory under German occupation): *But I want to go there and that's all; you're drawn to Czestochowa because of your love affairs*, says Halina (MWU: 232)⁴⁴. Finally Miron and Zenek, his father, go one way and Halina with her relatives (also Zocha, Zenek's partner) go the other. This figure of "disappointed expectation" also throws some light on Swen's relation with Celina, but in general Białoszewski is trying to blur the apparent obviousness of "straight" relationships. From his perspective, which he generously opens to the readers, there are no "normal" relationships.

EMBODIED MAN AND THE PICARESQUE

In terms of a more general conclusion on queering the Warsaw Uprising I shall propose an allegory or a metaphor. I have read the *Memoir* about twenty times so far, but the last reading was unique for me, more full. I am not from Warsaw, yet I started working there two years ago, and therefore I got to know Warsaw better. In my previous readings the mass of street names was unmetabolised in me, I settled it with the frame "he moves from one place to another". It is now that I understood what it meant to move from the Old Town (Rybaki street) to Chmielna, and then to cross Marszałkowska (to meet Zdziś), I had the topography in me (I am also aware that pre-war Warsaw was a bit different from today's). This is how the *Memoir* is written: it does not usually bother to explain to non-Varsovians the details of the topography. Note this paragraph: *On the other hand I didn't add (and this is important for the people who don't know the history of the uprising) that part of Mokotow, both Upper and Lower, was always ours. Southern Powisle was ours (the so-called part near Czerniakow) and Żoliborz, including Marymont* (MWU: 162–163)⁴⁵. The implied reader, then, is not expected to know the history of the Warsaw Uprising – but how is he or she to understand this paragraph without knowing Warsaw? I think there is a "psychological" explanation of this on Białoszewski's part – when he says people thought this Uprising shall be known as the "August Uprising" (there had already been a "November Uprising" and "January Uprising" in the XIXth century), but this new Uprising was "local", it did not include or even concern the whole of Poland under occupation⁴⁶. I am suggesting that Białoszewski is making

⁴⁴ Then "somebody from Czestochowa" comes to Opole (Oppeln) to help Miron and his father escape to Czestochowa. This fragment was slightly censored. This "somebody" is "the matter of the heart". As we learned from the book of memories and then from the *Secret Diary*, his name was Janek Gładysz and he was the figure that resembled the most archetypical "boyfriend" of Białoszewski in those times (which, as we saw, did not preclude sexual relationships with other men nor intellectual affinities with others, not to mention sentimental relations with a girl). In the *Secret Diary* Białoszewski sets him as his first serious relationship: *The first serious long-term love relationship, with Janek from Czestochowa, started just before the very uprising. After the uprising Janek came for me to Oppeln and organised an escape for me and my father through the green border to Czestochowa* (Białoszewski 2012: 753).

⁴⁵ A note on the translation. The interjection in original does not appear in brackets. The topographical names (of the districts) are not written in Polish. The original ones are: Mokotów, Powiśle, Czerniaków, Żoliborz. This complicates even more topographical recognition.

⁴⁶ Compare: *Let us return to the uprising. Of August. As we thought then. That it would be called the August Uprising forever. Throughout Poland. But even as near as Młociny, as Włochy, Warsaw was not Poland; Poland lived her own life. [...] Well, to gets back to Poland..., Warsaw was not Poland. And the uprising remained the*

a plea to “live it” in reading. But I was also thinking of international readers of the *Memoir*, how difficult it might be for them to get the idea of what was going on. On this occasion I would like to make a statement about a hidden genealogical structure⁴⁷ in the *Memoir*; this suggestion has never been made. This book is one of the very few examples in Polish literature of the picaresque narrative (other famous examples from the XXth century would be Gombrowicz’s *Ferdydurke* and *Trans-Atlantyk*, and this allows the question of this narrative for some reason – and what precisely? – was attractive to queer writers, queer experience). The picaresque narrative is utterly unknown and unrecognisable in the Polish context⁴⁸, and whenever it appears, not only is it unrecognised, but the works that employ it somehow are also treated as belonging to a “second category” (in comparison with “fiction *bien faite*”, I dare say) or disregarded. In this case the “pícaro” is the whole of civil Warsaw that has to survive no matter what, suffers hunger, has to move often and change housing if there is no food etc. (The only question remains who is the “master”: the “hidalgo” in this context, remains opaque, the Home Army?, the Germans?, the Soviets?!). The following definition of the picaresque also explains well the instances which I called “in passing” or “surplus” as going against the dominant “logic” of narration: *purposefully fragmented, episodic, and anecdotal and make what is left unsaid as important, or more so, than what is actually related* [the last quality in terms of the erotic representation] (Gerli 2009: 196). Another of the picaresque qualities is humour, often black, or, nicely phrased, [the] *use of irony to open windows on the precarious illusions of life* (Gerli 2009: 198), and the acceptance of come what may. The pícaro has also a very different ethos than the soldiers (at least in Polish mythology, though perhaps not in the Czech – is not Švejk a pícaro?; and historically the picaresque novel was also supposed to respond to the idealism of chivalric romances), he is more pragmatic than the *honra*-led *hidalgos* (which would be soldiers with their honour in this context), and this is exactly what is recognisable in Białoszewski’s book. Yet this smell of adventure got somehow lost in the influential and excellent study by Maria Janion, who rather saw empathy (to the civil) and “matriarchal” categories in the *Memoir* (Janion 2007: 25–139)⁴⁹. This is correct, yet Białoszewski blurs as usual. Far from conceiving war as a western or a male

Warsaw Uprising (MWU: 68). Again Białoszewski’s great concept was killed in this translation. There should be: „...as Wlochy, [Poland] was no-Warsaw, it lived her own life”.

⁴⁷ I abstain from deciding whether Białoszewski knew the genre and employed it consciously or that the circumstances “imposed” it. The “picaresque” narrative I am thinking of is not exactly a Spanish creation, i.e. Białoszewski did not have to read *Lazarillo de Tormes*, this structure is to be found in Petronius’ *Satyricon* or Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*. In Northrop Frye’s well-known classification of narrative archetypes the “picaresque narrative” would fall under the category “romance” (while the love stories of today are called “romances” actually represent the archetype of “comedy”).

⁴⁸ The picaresque narrative is central in Spanish literature and probably also in Latin American literature, and definitively not downgraded (for that reason these readers even without understanding topography perfectly might read the book quite comprehensively on the basis of the structure recognition).

⁴⁹ See also my thorough analysis of this essay (Sobolczyk 2014a: 78–86) and my analysis of the reception of the *Memoir* (Sobolczyk 2013a: 200–211). Only one reviewer, Barbara Otwinowska (Otwinowska 1970: 118–120), otherwise a specialist on baroque literature and herself a participant in the Warsaw Uprising, noted the employment of “male talk” (scatological, straightforward) in some places of the book. Other somehow “gendered” readings (and “gender” was rather an invisible category in the Polish literary criticism in the 1970s) were the already quoted Żukrowski who animadverted everything as “feminine” and Janion who exalted everything as “feminine”. It is oversimplified, but perhaps what is in between the “male” and “female” poles here is the “pícaro”?

adventure⁵⁰, it might be suggested he conceived it as a queer adventure via the picaresque: *Throughout the entire occupation I regretted that I hadn't been there on September 25 [1939 – P.S.] during that famous bombardment from eight in the morning until eight in the night. [...] So now I got what I'd wanted. Yet I wanted to flee. But had I fled, I repeat, I would have regretted not having experienced what I was about to experience. That's why I feel so sorry for those who died in the bombardment. The joy of experience passed them by. That one might not survive – that's another question entirely* (MWU: 48)⁵¹.

Now, similarly to the mass of street names, the names of many people appear in the book without any context or at best with little context, so that the reader gets lost in the mass of names which are presented as if the reader knew them in person and who they were for the narrator⁵². I conceive of this blurring as intended – and queer. But there is a significant difference to this allegory. An inquisitive reader might have bought a map of Warsaw, borrowed it from a library (even a historical one), and nowadays, certainly, also use internet maps (or a book on the “official” history of the Uprising, which is also why the implied reader did not have to confront necessarily the official with the “private history”)⁵³. There is no parallel “map” to the web of personal relationships of Białoszewski, queer or not⁵⁴. Are we supposed to assume, then, that this map is the literary conventions, the romance convention (while the picaresque applies only to topography?), and romances were straight? Are we supposed to assume that this map was to be – and today we have it – the *Secret Diary*? But does that imply that while writing the *Memoir* Białoszewski already had in mind that one day he shall provide such a map? Did he want more to “varsovianise”⁵⁵ the reader than to queer him or her?

CONCLUSION: SUBVERSIVENESS OR MISFIRE?

Given all this: is it justified to call this text “subversive” on queer grounds? (It was and remains subversive in several other aspects). Can any text which distinguishes the *cognoscenti*

⁵⁰ Compare also the analysis of this myth of “male adventure” and its (regulatory) influence on masculinity and femininity (Grzebalska 2013: 36–39).

⁵¹ The last phrases convey the message, but they overlook several language games and effects.

⁵² Compare also a “sylleptic” example of Teik, a quotation I already analysed: (“let me remind you – Teik from Staszic street” [MWU: 3]). Staszic street is recognisable with a map. Teik’s position in the web of acquaintances – in this context – is not.

⁵³ There is an academic response to the topic of “Białoszewski’s Warsaw”, a collection of essays “*Tętno pod tynkiem*”. *Warszawa Mirona Białoszewskiego*. Here especially Igor Piotrowski’s analysis of the topography of Chłodna street, where Białoszewski spent the five first days of the Uprising (Piotrowski 2013a: 32–55); and of the same author an analysis of the buildings Białoszewski stayed in during the Uprising (Piotrowski 2013b: 204–206). The book also abounds in photographs of Białoszewski’s places; these were also shown in a Museum of Literature exhibition “Warszawa Białoszewska” in 2013.

⁵⁴ Curiously enough, in a text published only in the press, an account of the September 1939 campaign experiences called *Rajza*, Białoszewski mentions that women laundered linen maps and people used them as clothes. In this juxtaposition the topography becomes written on the bodies. If the country was soon to vanish (the topography colonised), people wanted to “remember” it on their bodies – or it suggests that with the disappearance of the general macrostructure, i.e. the state, now everyone needs to focus on keeping the body alive. See also Sobolewska’s analysis of this motive as an alchemical transmutation (Sobolewska 1997: 97–98).

⁵⁵ I.e., put him in the position of Warsaw citizens of the moment.

and the *ignoranti* be subversive? With respect to my recent proposal on the scale or degrees of subversion, where I adapted Bloom's phases, the *Memoir* – as probably other texts of “half disclosure” – would place itself in the *kenosis* phase, i.e. not exactly subversion, yet neither “hegemony”, not a performative misfire, but neither a bullseye (Sobolczyk 2014b).

Now, some part of gay and queer (literary) criticism, inspired by then-fresh poststructural theories, has tried to render the specific gay or queer voice (style, poetics) as an intensification of textual strategies, metacommentaries, metaliterary concepts (including metafiction), ironic open form, hybridisation, splitting of narrators, mirrors and doubles, hyperintertextuality, in short, complications (which I attributed to the mannerist aesthetics and I sustain this recognition)⁵⁶. I would like to make a suggestion now that this point of view – as an intensification or complication, making something textual, as artificial, also in the etymological sense – might represent rather the straight gaze, or the “outside” gaze, while for queer people, especially of that epoch, it might have seemed quite “mimetical”: it represented their world of a semiotic forest-labyrinth which requires special recognitions, trials and errors, awry glances, passwords, and seems a labyrinth without a map overwritten on the official map recognisable to anyone⁵⁷. In this respect the *Memoir*, which has commonly been understood as innovative realism, personal reportage or documentary, especially with the inclusion of “secondary” (yet perhaps “primary”, this is one of the mirror games) sources, *Secret Diary* emblematically, suddenly stands – thanks to the queer gaze – in one line with such openly and recognisably metafictional works as Jerzy Andrzejewski's *Pulp*.

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⁵⁶ (Edelman 1994: xiv, 6, 9; Bergman 1993: 93–94; Martin 1993: 282–298). Pioneer studies on Polish gay literature which follows such thinking are those of German Ritz, see especially (Ritz 2002: 54–60). See also my critical resumé which inscribes such “poetics” to the aesthetics of mannerism (Sobolczyk 2013c). Białoszewski's style was one of the examples quoted in that text.

⁵⁷ Also as an initiatory school of life which Białoszewski received from older (gay) men when as an adolescent he was cruising or dating. He suggests the secret gay web of acquaintances was his alternative education in the *Secret Diary*. This idea seems connected to tricking mother and rhetorical tricks as well. I analysed this in my essay on queer diaries.

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QUEEROWANIE POWSTANIA WARSZAWSKIEGO (Z DROBNĄ POMOCĄ MIRONA BIAŁOSZEWSKIEGO)

Szkic ma na celu wypełnienie białej plamy w badaniach nad powstaniem warszawskim przez zwrócenie uwagi na udział w nim osób nienormatywnych seksualnie. Wzmiankowane są nowsze fakty kulturowe: sztuka *Węzowisko* Joanny Oparek, skandal wokół książki *Festung Warschau* Elżbiety Janickiej czy *Różowe Trójkąty* wydane z inicjatywy Kampanii Przeciw Homofobii. Jednak głównym źródłem jest *Pamiętnik z powstania warszawskiego* Mirona Białoszewskiego, zarówno jego dotychczasowa usankcjonowana postać, jak i nowa, nieocenzurowana edycja, a także *Tajny dziennik*. Procedura lektury jest tu programowo „paranoiczna”, obejmuje ślady, wzmianki, aluzje i „nielogiczne” fragmenty i prowadzi do metafory queerowej sieci kontaktów jako alternatywnej „mapy” bez mapy. Poruszona jest ponadto rola konwencji pikareskiej w reprezentacji tego typu paranoicznych relacji.

Słowa kluczowe: powstanie warszawskie, queer, historia Polski, Miron Białoszewski, *Pamiętnik z powstania warszawskiego*

