

Handbook of Polish, Czech and Slovak Holocaust Fiction: Works and Contexts



Štěpán Balík – Agata Firlej – Elisa Hiemer –

Jiří Holý – Hana Nichtburgerová

This handbook project is the result of a long-term cooperation between Polish, Czech, and German researchers in the field of Slavic and Comparative Studies. During the last 10 years, this team has published about a dozen books in various languages and organized eight international workshops concerning the Holocaust in Central European literatures and cultures. Throughout these years, our team has noticed a gap between the literary production in countries where the Holocaust mainly took place and their response in the non-Slavic world. For this reason, we are going to edit a handbook with works originally published in Polish, Czech, or Slovak that are of importance not only within the context of their respective national literary traditions but also for research on Holocaust literature worldwide. Additionally, this project has been joined by Slovak researchers. The handbook includes novels, short stories, poems and plays within the scope of 750 standard pages. The table of contents currently lists 53 Polish, 41 Czech, and 22 Slovak texts. The editors provide an introduction about the main developments of Holocaust literature in the broader context of the countries of interest (main topics and motifs, periodisation based on political changes, reception processes in national and transnational context).

We aim at making these literatures visible for non-Slavic recipients in order to overcome their underrepresentation in Holocaust Studies (and to improve the visibility of ‘small’ literatures in order to encourage publishing houses to commission translations). This underrepresentation is apparent in the existing anthologies: *The Reference Guide to Holocaust Literature* (ed. T. Riggs, 2002) presents 225 authors but only two of them are of Czech origin, three Slovak. Polish authors fare slightly better, at 23. Out of 312 texts in *Holocaust Literature: An Encyclopedia of Writers and Their Work* (ed. S. L. Kremer, 2003), we count 31 Polish, three Czech, and not a single Slovak entry. Of the 43 articles featured in *Holocaust Novelists* (ed. E. Sicher, 2004) three are by Polish and four by Czech authors. *Holocaust Literature I-II* (ed. J. K. Roth, 2008) presents 109 works, of which only three are by Polish and two by Czech authors (there are no Slovak authors). The entry on Holocaust literature in the *Oxford Handbook of Holocaust Studies* (eds. P. Hayes and J. K. Roth, 2010) mentions three Polish authors but none of Czech or Slovak origin.



All entries in our handbook will be edited in accordance with academic standards, but also written in a way that encourages the broader public to learn more about this topic. Each entry contains practical information (about translations, film adaptations, the author) but mainly focuses on a short summary of the plot and a review of the main issues and problems. We pay particular attention to the comparative aspect, providing cross references to other entries in the book (marked by an arrow signed →) as well as motifs, topics, characters, situations and literary devices mentioned in others books (→ ‘Aryan papers’, aryanisation, Jewish nose, postmemory, Jozef Tiso, grotesque, *shtetl*, etc.). In addition to this overview, each article deals with the specific national, historical background of a literary text, and with relevant discussions in its country of origin. Such contextualization will be indispensable for researchers in other fields who are not familiar with the historical and sociocultural contexts. Every entry ends with a short selected bibliography (also featured in English translation) directing the reader towards further study.

Although we focus on the three national literatures most underrepresented in current Holocaust research, the task is most urgent in the case of Slovak literature. The handbook aims to increase the visibility and versatility of all these national literatures in academic scholarship dealing with representations of the Holocaust in the arts. Furthermore, we provide both encyclopaedic knowledge about the literary output of each region and an overview of the debates that have accompanied the works, as well as pointing out similarities in narration and motif choice.

Publication of the handbook is expected in 2021 by De Gruyter, a publishing house known for its Jewish Studies Series. We intend to increase the visibility of the project’s outcome by creating an Open Access Handbook and covering the printing costs of this hybrid publication type. We present three entries below which represent Slovak and Polish literature.

THE CLERICAL REPUBLIC (FARSKÁ REPUBLIKA)

Author: Dominik Tatarka

First Published: 1948

Translations: Czech (*Farská republika*, 1949; new translation 1961); Hungarian (*A plébános köztársasága*, 1951; new translation *Reverendás köztársaság*, 1997); German (*Die Pfaffenrepublik*, 1960); Ukrainian (*Popivs’ka respublika*, 1961); Russian (*Respublika popov*, 1966).

About the Author: Dominik Tatarka (1913–1989) was born in Drienové in the Kysuce region of North-Western Slovakia into a large family of peasants. When his father was killed during World War I, his mother had to take care of him and his five sisters alone. He studied French and Czech Philology at Charles University in Prague and at the Sorbonne in Paris (1934–1939). During World War II he taught at high schools in Žilina (1939–1941) and Martin (1941–1944). In 1944 Tatarka became a member of the Communist Party and took part in the → Slovak National Uprising against Nazi

Germany. After the war he worked as a journalist and scriptwriter. His works often reflect his personal experiences. His first pieces of prose were influenced by Surrealism and the avant-garde. Tatarka translated French works (Musset, Maupassant, and Vercors) into Slovak. In 1956, he wrote a satirical short story, *The Demon of Conformism*, against Stalinism (it was published in the journal *Kultúrny život* in 1956, but was not released as a book until 1963). Tatarka protested against the Warsaw Pact occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and resigned from membership in the Communist Party. In the 1970s and 1980s he was persecuted by the Communist regime, which banned him from public life and would not allow him to publish anymore. Starting in 1970 he worked as a forest worker, later subsisting as a permanently disabled pensioner. His works were published only in → samizdat or exile publishing houses. He was one of the few Slovak signatories of → Charter 77. In October 1987 he signed the first Charter's Declaration on the deportation of Jews from Slovakia (on the 45th anniversary of the deportations organized by the Slovak government). → transport from Slovakia.

Further Important Publications: *Panna Zázračnica* (1942, The Miraculous Virgin; novelette); *Démon súhlasu* (1963, The Demon of Conformism; satirical short stories); *Prútené kreslá* (1963, Wicker Armchairs; prose); *Proti démonom* (1968, Against the Demons; essays); *Písacky* (samizdat 1979, Köln 1984, Scribbles; reflections, reports and letters); *Sám proti noci* (in the Czech translation, München 1984, Alone Against the Night; reflections); *Navrávačky* (samizdat 1987, Köln 1988, Recordings; memoir).

Content and Interpretation

The story is set in Žilina, a town in North-Western Slovakia, and its surroundings in the years 1939–1941. These years are the first of the Slovak → clerofascist republic referred to in the title of the novel. The main character is a young teacher named Tomáš Menkina, whose life in some ways resembles that of the author.

Tomáš grew up in a nearby village. His father died when Tomáš was a child. Fortunately, they had an uncle in the U.S., John Menkina, who supported the family and paid for Tomáš's studies.

The plot of the novel begins at the moment when John Menkina returns home from America after several decades. At the same time Tomáš returns from his military service in Poland, where the Slovak army has been fighting alongside the Germans in the war against the Poles. Neither Tomáš nor his uncle support the clerofascist and nationalist regime that holds power in the Slovak government, a regime that is allied with Hitler's Germany and that persecutes leftist intellectuals and workers, as well as Jews.

Portrayed as a coward and a hypocrite, Belo Kovál, the director of the high school where Tomáš teaches, enforces a clerofascist ideology. Tomáš and his colleagues — Darina Introbosová, daughter of the Lutheran pastor, and Fraňo Lašut, 'a quarter Jew' — all feel the same intense disgust and annoyance towards him. Tomáš admires Darina, but he sleeps with the innkeeper's wife Achinka. Fraňo decides to save a Jewish girl, Edita Soláni, from the persecution, convincing Darina's father to falsify her baptismal letter. → 'Aryan papers'. Fraňo wants to marry her, but they are exposed. Names of all the baptized Jews are printed in the newspapers and the pastor





is arrested. Tomáš revolts against the obligatory visit to the church, his spiritual exercises, and confession.

The real change in Tomáš' life and beliefs comes when he is imprisoned for carrying a suitcase that — unbeknownst to him — is full of leaflets, given to him by his Communist friend Lyčka. He is detained. To help Tomáš, his mother, a pious and simple Christian woman, goes to a Roman Catholic priest named → Jozef Tiso, who is also president of the Slovak Republic, pleading him for mercy. Instead, Tiso orders a rigorous investigation of the affair. Convinced that Tomáš is a member of the → Communist resistance, the police subject him to harsh interrogation and maltreatment, and Tomáš ends up spending ten months in prison. It is this turn of events, ironically, that persuades him to become a communist and an opponent of the regime.

In counterpoint to this transformation, Tomáš's uncle John Menkina becomes more and more conformist, 'aryanising' → aryanisation a hotel and pub that have been confiscated from Jewish owners, and hosting agents of the fascist regime there. Returning from prison, Tomáš distances himself from his mother and uncle. With Hitler's declaration of war against the Soviet Union, the Slovak army joins its German allies, and Tomáš receives his orders to depart for the front.

The first version of *The Clerical Republic* was written during the war (Olonovová, 1993, p. 300). In the early 1950s, when Stalinist Communists established the doctrine of → Socialist Realism, Tatarka was criticized for his 'naturalism' in the novel, and for 'underestimating the role of the Communist Party'. He was forced to eliminate some scenes of sexual intercourse between Tomáš and Achinka (Petrík, 2013). → censorship. While the novel depicts real historical characters and places, and draws on autobiographical motifs (see above), it is also a work of fiction. Some characters are depicted in ironic and caricaturesque manner, namely the Slovak president and priest Jozef Tiso, the director of the school, and military guards.

The novel utilizes modernist and avant-garde devices. The plot is not presented in a traditionally realistic fashion, but through a variety of hints, abbreviations, and metaphors, drawing as well on fantastic and imaginative elements. For instance, scenes depicting prison violence and brutality are not presented in their entirety but indicated obliquely, by virtue of this or that detail (Hudymač, 2008). Similarly, the Communist orientation of the workers is suggested by the red colour of the dirt under their finger nails (Tatarka, 1948, p. 173) and red signs marking the trails in the mountains (p. 248).

Main Topics and Problems

Tatarka's treatment of such motifs as disgust, depression, nausea, and annoyance, as well as 'hygienic love' (Tomáš' relationship with Achinka was only physical), may have been inspired by famous works of French literary existentialists: J. P. Sartre's *La Nausée* (1939, Nausea), and Albert Camus's *L'Étranger* (1942, The Stranger). Ideological formulations from periodicals, radio, and politicians' speeches are depicted in snippets, as in modernist → collages. *The Clerical Republic* also draws from official antisemitic propaganda: '[the] radical solution to the Jewish question in Slovakia, Jews were removed from public services [...] the end of international → Jewish Bolshevism [...] the Jew will always remain a Jew', etc. (Tatarka, 1948, pp. 127, 132 and 135) → Slovak clerofascist jargon.



Jewish characters play an important role in the novel. After anti-Jewish laws are enacted, most of them remain outsiders in society, ‘people without a future’ living in a ‘bubble’ (p. 125). Some resign themselves to their fate: the Klapovecs, for instance, an older married couple whose hotel and café are expropriated — or ‘aryanised’ — by John Menkina, and who are happy to have a small room in their former mansion. Or Edita Solani’s father who is a stonemason, and who gives up his job when his shop is painted with tar.

Other Jews try to save themselves. The old Jewish attorney Werner offers John Menkina a large sum for his American passport, which he considers as a guarantee of freedom. The rich family of the former factory director Friedmann converts to Lutheranism. → conversion of Jews to Christians. Edita hopes to be rescued through a false confirmation of baptism and marriage to Fraňo Lašut; see Rudolf Jašík’s → *St. Elizabeth’s Square* or Denisa Fulmeková’s → *Doctor Mráz*. She jokes with Fraňo about her large → Jewish nose, but eventually undergoes plastic surgery for fear of being found out. The narrator describes the result as a → grotesque scene.

Later, Edita, a former student of medicine, moves to Bratislava. She works in a pharmacy and is involved in the resistance.

By contrast, Slovak Roman Catholic nationalists and officers of the → Hlinka Guard (the Slovak military Fascist organisation) proclaim their struggle against the Jews. In reality, they use their services and covet their property.

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Jiří Holý (1953), Professor of Czech Literature, Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague.



THE INN (AUSTERIA)

Author: Julian Strykowski

First Published: 1966

Translations: German (*Austeria*, 1968; *Die Osteria*, 1969); English (*The Inn*, 1971); Hungarian (*Austeria*, 1971); French (*L'Auberge du vieux Tag*, 1972); Hebrew (*Austeria*, 1979); Czech (*Hostinec. Austeria*, 2011).

Film Adaptation: *Austeria* (Austeria), feature film, screenplay Tadeusz Konwicki, Jerzy Kawalerowicz and Julian Strykowski; film director Jerzy Kawalerowicz, premiered 28 March, 1983.

About the Author: Julian Strykowski (1905–1996), born Pesach Jakob Stark, was a controversial Polish-Jewish writer, playwright, and translator belonging to the 'Jewish School' in Polish postwar literature, known as a chronicler of the Jewish fate. In this context his works may stand comparison with Bruno Schulz and Isaac Bashevis Singer.

Born in Stryj, a provincial town in Eastern Galicia (the Austrian partition of Poland, modern Ukraine) into a family of Hasidic Jews, he grew up in a → *shtetl* as the son of a Jewish schoolteacher. Though he denied being of the Jewish faith, Strykowski was deeply influenced by the traditional and religious atmosphere of the Jewish *shtetl*, reconciling 'his Polish, Jewish, Communist, and queer identities' in his literary works (Hutchens, 2019, p. 57). Strykowski started studying Hebrew and became a committed follower of → Zionism. In 1932, after graduating with a doctorate in Polish Studies and Literature at Jan Kazimierz University in Lwów (Lviv, Lemberg), he found work as a Polish language teacher at a grammar school in Płock (Central Poland). He joined the de-legalised Communist Party of Western Ukraine in 1934, and was imprisoned in Lwów in 1935 for teaching Communist ideology. After his release in 1936 he moved to Warsaw to work as a journalist and bookseller, and after the invasion of Poland (1939), escaped to Soviet occupied Lwów, where he worked for the propaganda newspaper *Czerwony Sztandar*. After the German occupation of Lwów (1941) he escaped to Kuybyshev, and attempted unsuccessfully to join the Polish II Corps commanded by General Władysław Anders. With the help of the Polish Communist writer Wanda Wasilewska, Strykowski was allowed to go to Moscow, where he worked for the weekly *Wolna Europa* organ of the Society of Polish Patriots, adopting the pen name Julian Strykowski, a name derived from his hometown, Stryj. In 1946 Strykowski returned to Poland, and in 1949–1952 headed the Polish Press Agency in Katowice as well as its office in Rome, but was forced to leave Italy following the publication of his critical anti-capitalist novel *A Run to Fragalà* (1951). In Poland he worked on the editorial board of the leading Polish literary monthly *Twórczość*, where he would continue to work until his retirement in 1978. In 1966 Strykowski quit the Polish United Workers' Party in protest against the execution of Rudolf Slánský → Slánský trial and the Communist suppression of art, culture and science; he 'converted from communism to Judaism' (Kot, 1997, p. 164). Unlike Leszek



Kořakowski and other Polish dissidents, Strykowski did not leave Poland. His literary works, published underground, were officially published again after 1978. Due to his controversial political past, Strykowski remained rather unknown in the West. His collection of short stories *Silence*, in which he openly declared his homosexuality, was published in 1993. *Silence* also provoked discussions on other themes, his Jewish heritage and his commitment to communism. These discussions established him as an important Polish-Jewish writer focusing on personal moral responsibility in times of physical and psychological threats — including the mass extermination —, themes he took up starting with his very first novel *Voices in the Darkness* (1956). Strykowski died 8 August 1996 in Warsaw, and was buried in Warsaw Jewish Cemetery on Okopowa Street.

Further Important Publications: *Głosy w ciemności* (1956, *Voices in the Darkness*; novel); *Czarna róża* (1962, *The Black Rose*; novel); *Sen Azrila* (1975, *Asril's Dream*; novel); *Przybysz z Narbony* (1978, *The Stranger from Narbonne*; novel); *Wielki strach* (1980, *The Great Fear*; novel); *Milczenie* (1993, *Silence*; short stories).

Content and Interpretation

The Inn, dedicated to Strykowski's emancipated sister Maria, is a haunting description of Jewish life in Eastern Galicia at the beginning of the 20th century and outbreak of World War II. Assimilation, emancipation, acculturation, and vanishing worlds are part of reflections on different aspects of Jewish/Polish → Polish/Jewish relations, Jewish/Austrian, and Jewish/Ukrainian relations of that time. The novel chronicles the gradual demise of Jewish life in the *shtetl* as a result of various forces coming primarily from outside the community. The innkeeper Tag, similar to an apocryphal → Noah, offers sanctuary to bewildered and dispossessed people in his inn close to the Russian border. Indeed, the cast of characters represents a wide range of religious, social, and political backgrounds: a Ukrainian servant, a Hungarian Hussar, a Polish Catholic priest. While the → Hasids pray, dance and sing, others mourn, or try to find a way out of the disaster to come. The catastrophe begins on the eve of World War I with a confrontation on the village square between Jewish residents and invading Cossacks, anticipating the widespread death and devastation soon to come. Tag sets out to demand justice, with the attitude that 'one must save what can be saved' (Strykowski, 1972, p. 86). The massacre of the Hasidic Jews during their ritual bathing in the river is a harbinger of the future destruction of the East European Jews. Piotr Szewc's → *Annihilation*. It marks the end of a community organized on the basis of common traditions, values, and customs — a life characterized by unique charm and poetry. Strykowski's novel is a fitting and lasting monument of world culture and literature to a lost world and a murdered civilization. It is regarded as a metaphor anticipating the slaughter and annihilation of the Holocaust to come.

Main Topics and Problems

Three of Strykowski's most acclaimed novels: *Voices in the Darkness*, *The Inn* and *Azril's Dream* are referred to as his 'Jewish trilogy' because of their 'similarities in setting' (in Galicia), 'general tonality', 'Jewish themes' as well as their 'specific local and ethnic experience' (Pizem-Karczag, 1983, p. 89). Here 'the problem of assimilation,



acculturation and emancipation of the Jews were mainly touched' (Kornacka-Sarefo, 2016, p. 168). In a universal language of human struggle, suffering, and hope, these works commemorate the unique world of the Eastern European Jewish settlements destroyed by the Nazis. In focusing on the *shtetl*, Strykowski 'sought to render the spirit of Yiddish by employing imperfect Polish', stating that he regarded himself as a Polish writer and the Polish language as his true 'homeland' (Prokop-Janiec, 2010). But he also claimed to be a Jewish writer (like Isaak Babel, Elie Wiesel or Primo Levi). In addition to its depictions of Jewish life, Strykowski's postwar literature also deals with the Holocaust, albeit indirectly. In his historical novel *The Stranger from Narbonne*, which is dedicated to the insurgents of the Warsaw ghetto, the Holocaust is universalized as a parable of mortal danger to the Jewish communities. In contrast, his Galician works point to 'God's responsibility for evil and the suffering of innocent people' → God's omnipotence, indicating a Hasidic interpretation of suffering as a participation in an act 'benefiting humankind' and 'restoring the world' (ibid.). Strykowski's trilogy also features stories about the old prophets, kings, and heroes of Israel. His prose combines 'personal narration, techniques of oneiric literatures and polyphonic novels', and merges 'documentary prose with symbolism' (ibid.).

Struck by Strykowski's *The Inn*, the Polish filmmaker Jerzy Kawalerowicz once claimed he had made his metaphorical film with the same title in 1982 to commemorate the Polish-Jewish people and culture, and to give voice to their dreams and point of view as they faced the ultimate threat.

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Hans-Christian Trepte (1950), Dr., Doc., retired professor, scholar of West Slavonic Studies at Leipzig University, Institut für Slavistik. Research work on Literatures and Cultures of Central Europe, translator.

CONFESSION (SPOWIEDŹ)

Author: Calek Perechodnik

First Published: 1993; corrected edition 1995; first complete edition 2004.

Translations: Hebrew (*ha-Taffid he-atsuv shel ha tiud: yoman mahbo*, 1993); French (*Suis-je un meurtrier?*, 1995); English (*Am I a Murderer? Testament of a Jewish Ghetto Policeman*, 1996); German (*Bin ich ein Mörder? Das Testament eines jüdischen Ghetto-Polizisten*, 1997); Italian (*Sono un assassino? Autodifesa di un poliziotto ebreo*, 1996).

Musical Adaptation: *Am I a Murderer?* A Cantata for Bass Voice, Flute, Piccolo, Clarinet, Bass Clarinet, Violin, Viola, Cello and Piano; composed by Sylvia Glickman, poetry by Frank Fox, 1999.

About the Author: Calek (Calek) Perechodnik (1916–1944) was born to a prosperous Jewish family. Together with his older brother, Pejsach, he joined the right-wing Zionist group Bojtar. The introduction of *numerus clausus* at the Warsaw University in 1934 drastically limited the number of Jewish students who could enrol, which is why Perechodnik transferred to University of Toulouse, France, where he earned a master's degree in agronomy. In 1938, he married Anna Nusfeld, co-owner of the cinema Oasis in Otwock near Warsaw, and started running a building materials warehouse with his uncle.

After the outbreak of the war, Perechodnik together with his father, uncle, and brother left Otwock for Słonim in the east of Poland. He returned as early as October 1939, and in February 1941 joined the Jewish Ghetto Police, which was





established in → Otwock Ghetto in the Autumn of 1940. In his memoirs, he considers his position in the police with open disgust. During the liquidation of the ghetto (19 August 1942), he supervised the movement of Jews from the main square to the wagons that were destined for → Treblinka. His wife and daughter were in the group. Perechodnik's awareness of their tragic death in a gas chamber permeates the pages of *Confession*.

After the liquidation of the ghetto, Perechodnik went into hiding from 6 December 1942 to the beginning of August 1944, i.e. to the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising. → Warsaw Uprising in 1944. From 17 August 1944, he became a member of the → Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*) and joined the second unit of the 'Chrobry' II Battalion (Engelking, Libionka, 2009; Fater, 1993, p. 121). As confirmed by historical evidence, Perechodnik was active in the Home Army up to 5 September, when, as a result of contracting typhus, he was moved to the military reserve and soon later left the ranks. When the Warsaw Uprising ended in failure, Perechodnik was likely killed in a bunker where he was hiding. As Gienia, one of his comrades at the time, recalls 'he was totally broken; typhus had taken its toll' (Perechodnik, 1995, p. 270). He gave Gienia his shirt, boots, and coat, showed her a way of escaping from Warsaw, and then took refuge in a bunker, where in all probability he was killed or burned alive. It is possible that he committed suicide. As Gienia relates: 'he took a vow that in a deadlock situation he would swallow cyanide' (*ibid.*).

Genesis, Content and Interpretation

The history of the publication of Perechodnik's text's is truly remarkable. Between 7 May and 19 October 1943, while in hiding at Pańska Street, Perechodnik wrote his memoirs in Polish. Soon after, he prepared a second manuscript in which he showed 'the brutality of the invaders in most horrific colors' (Engel in Perechodnik, 2004, p. 282) and gave both texts to Czesława Fater, who in turn passed them on to a 'young Polish woman' (*ibid.*). Only three notebooks containing *Confession* survived, all of them secured by 'Magister', one of Perechodnik's Polish friends. The second manuscript, which was kept in a house bombed during the Warsaw Uprising, was never discovered. Perechodnik's last will was saved by the 'young Polish woman' — a former servant in his parents' house — who gave it to 'Stefan X' Maleszewski. The document then became the property of Cael's brother, Pejsach, who survived World War II in the Soviet Union, and after the war settled down in Otwock. Pejsach Perechodnik visited 'a Polish attorney-at-law, Błażewski', who was in possession of the manuscript of *Confession*. Błażewski's address was found in the last will, which was given to Pejsach by Maleszewski.

As the author himself wanted to get *Confession* published, Pejsach typed out the whole remaining manuscript and deposited it with the Central Jewish Historical Commission in Łódź (which later became the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw). In 1946, a contract was signed between the Commission and Pejsach Perechodnik to publish *Confession* in five thousand copies, with the stipulation that 'the text required some editorial correction'. After the war, an unidentified person prepared an altered 'censored' version of the original manuscript, which years later, in 1993, was published by KARTA as *Am I a Murderer?* David Engel's negative review of that publication led to a critical re-edition of the manuscript in 2004 (also by KARTA).



Perechodnik's text was first published in 1993, edited and with afterword by Paweł Szapiro in the series 'Polish Jews,' which draws on materials from the Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute. That particular publication was based on the typed manuscript kept in this Archive, which contained an incomplete and changed text — a euphemism, indicating the expurgation of the most brutal descriptions. The 1993 edition was slightly expanded and republished in 1995, but it retained the same structure, with eight parts: The Author's Introduction, The War, The Action, After the Action, The Camp, Warsaw, The End, and The Last Will of Calek Perechodnik.

As was suggested by the editors, the book was titled *Am I a Murderer?*, and the author's name was spelled in its official form 'Calek', from the Jewish 'Becalek'. As confirmed by Perechodnik's family, he himself used only the diminutive 'Calek'.

In 1999, in *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, Prof. David Engel called both editions 'falsifications'. His condemnation was based on the fact that a manuscript existed of Perechodnik's memoirs, which had been taken from Poland and given to Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. The 1993 and 1995 editions were based on one of the two typed manuscripts (prepared on the basis of the original document kept in the Jewish Historical Institute). The first was copied, 'almost' accurately, by Pejsach Perechodnik; the second edition was 'significantly distorted' (Gluza, 2004, p. 6). It is the second version, which deviates significantly from the original, that was used. To remedy this situation the publisher commissioned David Engel to prepare a new third edition that would be faithful to the author's intentions. Readers were asked to replace the old editions with the new one (fifty people did so).

Engel's edition was published in 2004 under Perechodnik's original title, *Confession*, and with the author's preferred name (Calek instead of Calek). It also restores a cryptic dedication and epigraph (which is also a kind of dedication), and includes a subtitle, suggested by the publisher, *The History of a Jewish Family During German Occupation*, which strongly influences the way the text as a whole may be interpreted (later, after 2004, it was dropped altogether). This third edition of the text was published in 2004, 2007, 2011, 2016, and 2018 [Spowiedź : dzieje rodziny żydowskiej podczas okupacji hitlerowskiej w Polsce / Calek Perechodnik ; oprac., posł., przypisy David Engel. Twórca Perechodnik, Calek (1916–1944). Wyd. 2. Data publikacji 2007 ISBN: 9788388288838 — Catalogue, The National Library in Warsaw]. The edition presents the contents of Perechodnik's writings in a new order, opening with The Editor's Note (by Zbigniew Gluza), and followed by Chapter I, Chapter II, Chapter III, and Epilogue — all written by Perechodnik —, Illustrations, David Engel's Afterword, and Endnotes. The title page provides the disclaimer: 'On the basis of the manuscript'. Unlike the first two editions, the third edition includes various photographs and documents, including 'A Personnel List of the Ghetto-Polizei'. David Engel's interpretation of the way Perechodnik represented the Nazi occupation of Poland differs greatly from Paweł Szapiro's.

It is important to note, as Engel explains, that the reader is given the edition 'prepared on the basis of the original handwritten manuscript' and that 'for the first time the Polish reader can have access to Perechodnik's text in its entirety, in the mode of expression and phrasing that it was recorded in a den at Pańska Street from May 7th to October 19th, 1943' (Engel in Perechodnik, 2004, p. 284). The endnote number 244 informs that the Polish text has been seriously modified in deeply philological terms (Engel, 2011, p. 323).



Confession begins with an inscription: ‘To S.N. / P.P. / T.Ż. / I dedicate these memoirs. Warsaw, May 7th–August 19, 1943. Epilogue: October 19th, 1943’ (Perechodnik, 2004, p. 7). Drawing on clues in the text, these abbreviations are thought to stand for German sadism (*sadyzmowi niemieckiemu*), Polish ignobleness (*polskiej podłości*), and Jewish cowardice (*żydowskiemu tchórzostwu*). Perechodnik’s brother, Pejsach, understands ‘T. Ż.’ to mean ‘the Jewish tragedy (*żydowskiej tragedii*)’ (Engel, 2004, p. 288), but such a reading does not seem to be justified by the text. The inscription is followed by a very personal motto, originally written in French: ‘To be born a Jew is not disgraceful, / It is a misfortune! / Anka, my dear wife, / Will you be avenged? / Athalie, my little daughter, / Will you be avenged? / The ashes of three million men / women, children burnt in Treblinka, / Will you be avenged?’ (Perechodnik, 2004, p. 7). Throughout the text, the motif of revenge links Perechodnik’s personal tragedy to the extensive losses of the Jewish nation, culminating in the Epilogue: ‘I ask for one thing only: to fulfil my last will of revenge, and remember, at least occasionally, my magnificent wife Anka and my beautiful daughter Athalie’ (*ibid.*, p. 280).

In spite of what must have been very strong emotions, the author (who was already in hiding) is guided by his awareness above all of *what* needs to be represented and *how*. Perechodnik’s literary language, in this sense, is exceptionally forceful and expressive.

The subsequent three chapters relate what the author witnessed until he went into hiding. The text begins with the invocation, ‘I, Calek Perechodnik [...] will try to describe the history of my family during the German occupation’ (p. 8), which is resumed in the Epilogue: ‘The point is not that my boat must reach the shore; the point is that I need to pursue my goal’ (p. 280). In Chapter I Perechodnik relates the history of his life and of the lives of his family members, and also characterizes the attitudes and behaviours of Polish Jews up to the time when he joined the Jewish police and took part in the liquidation of the Otwock Ghetto. He conveys his immense guilt for taking his wife and daughter to the railway ramp during the liquidation, to be transported to Treblinka and instantaneously killed. The news of the mass murders perpetrated in Treblinka quickly reached the Jewish policemen in Otwock. The fragments of his memoirs describing how Perechodnik tried to save his wife and daughter, and how he finally had to part with them have no equivalent in either documentary literature or fiction (p. 63).

In subsequent parts of the text, Perechodnik ‘vicariously’ accompanies his wife and daughter, recording their deaths as he imagines them. The first chapter is rounded off with a series of poignant apostrophes: ‘Anka / Aluška / Rachela / and you, my sisters / and brothers / in Israel! / You cannot imagine how my pained heart desires to say the prayer *El mole rachamim* for the peace of your souls’ (p. 69). The next two chapters describe Perechodnik’s wanderings after the loss of his closest family, recording his immediate experiences as well as his attempts to come to terms with his guilty conscience. In sentences pregnant with emotions and fury, there appear vivid pictures of German crimes, but also the immoral behaviour of Poles and Jews juxtaposed to examples of noble acts by members of both groups. Perechodnik records his impressions of the mass execution of Jews in an exceptionally expressive style.

Chapter III gives a detailed description of Perechodnik’s time in hiding: ‘My stay at Mrs. Hela’s, from 6 December 1942 to 19 August 1943’ (p. 175). One of the most frequently mentioned people is ‘Magister’, or Władysław Błazewski, who supported



Perechodnik and the remaining members of his family. → Jews's Aryan helper. Calek describes the opportunistic behaviour of Poles who gave assistance to Jews for personal gain — the looters and denouncers. He also describes the indifference of Jews and his own passivity in the face of German persecution, which become recurring motifs as the narrative progresses. He concludes the chapter with an imaginary farewell to Anka and Aluška in the manner of a conversation. It is here that Perechodnik speculates about the future fate of his memoir, which he calls a 'foetus' — the 'child of Calek and Anka' (p. 258).

In his conclusion, Perechodnik confesses to having committed a betrayal while in hiding. He asks his wife: 'Anka, Anka, have you really forgiven me?' (p. 265). In an epilogue, added on 19 October 1943, Perechodnik presents an account of his father's death, as well as a description of the death of his mother and his own reaction to that death. Her death, he argues, was caused by 'German vandalism and [P]olish [i]gnobleness.' Finally, the author promises he will do his best to safeguard the manuscript of his memoirs (ibid., p. 279).

Main Topics and Problems

From the very beginning of his narrative, Perechodnik stresses the unimaginable character of the events he has both witnesses and taken part in. At certain moments, the Holocaust is an apophatic, unimaginable, impossible, but none the less real event, which he conveys in the following passage through the *topos* of inexpressibility:

I need to emphasize the fact that all this is authentic. My eyes have seen, and my ears have heard what otherwise I would not have believed — how could one Jew, who miraculously escaped his own death, have been acting like a leech and harassed another Jew, one who was at the point of being killed, so as to take his jacket? (pp. 101–102).

The Holocaust is presented as a nightmare that unravels before the eyes of the witness. Perechodnik takes various stylistic approaches throughout the text, from → irony to sarcasm, and from the → grotesque to the → absurd, which combine to intensify the tragic aspect of the atrocities. At the same time, the world that he creates in his text seems unnatural, populated by grotesque puppets. Above all, his style is marked by precision fused with emotions. His use of the Polish language is also exceptional, moving as it does from one stylistic mode to another, changing tone from lyrical and pathetic to sarcastic and tragic, or to the grotesque, or more generally from a realistic description to ironic hyperbole. The text is a memoir, written in such a way that the reader has the impression of being confronted with a journal depicting events happening in the here and now. → *hic et nunc* perspective. The sequence of textual fragments is structured according to the following pattern: theme — description of events — reflections of the author.

In terms of genre, the memoir is a hybrid. In his confession and epitaph for Anka and Aluška, for example, Perechodnik draws on elements of prayer and conversation, a last will, an accusatory philippic, a threnody, a lamentation, a petition, a talk between the dead, a talk with the dead, a psalm, a tragedy, an ironic tragicomedy, a mystery play, and an intimate journal. The 'cinematic' character of the narrative → narration in its character (which, in fact, is an echo of the visits Perechodnik paid to



the cinema that his wife owned) tends to transform the Holocaust into the stuff of illusion: 'From time to time I would fall asleep and dream that I am sitting in a cinema, watching a bloodcurdling, horrible motion picture with synchronized sound' (p. 92).

Perechodnik's writing betrays his erudition in myriad cultural references that include Jewish and Christian biblical traditions (prayers, psalms → Bible, Psalms, the → Tower of Babel, the New Testament → New Testament), ancient cultures and the modern humanities (Latin *adages*, Titus Livius, Jan Hus, and Nietzsche), as well as the Polish romantic tradition (Adam Mickiewicz, Julius Słowacki).

Confession depicts the catastrophe of European civilization based on the ideas of humanism and solidarity. It starts from the collapse of the project of the Enlightenment, followed by the breakdown of religion, and later all other values, including modernity, which brought technologies that were harnessed for mass murder and not for the moral development of humankind. Perechodnik's *Confession* is not only a powerful masterpiece of documentary literature, but also a text that deserves to be republished in a critical edition that includes a facsimile of the original manuscript and in the original language (rather than contemporized syntax and vocabulary). Here the language is not only a means of expression but also an element of tradition that was lost in the mass extermination.

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Jarosław Ławski (1968), Professor, Head of the Chair in Philological Studies 'East—West' at the University of Białystok. Jarosław Ławski is a correspondence member of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences.