

# Between History and (Distorted) Memory.

## Hidden Monograms of the Past in *The King of Two Sicilies* by Andrzej Kuśniewicz

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*The King of Two Sicilies* (1970), alongside *Lessons in a Dead Language* (1977), is perhaps the most widely known and most appreciated (also in terms of reception outside of Poland) novel by Andrzej Kuśniewicz. These two widely commented works have often been described as part of the trend in Polish literature which focuses on the exploration of the irretrievably lost world of Imperial and Royal Austro-Hungary, especially during its slow decay. In this sense, they are thematically and structurally similar to the works by Piotr Wojciechowski or Andrzej Stojowski. Therefore, a statement made by Kazimierz Wyka seems applicable in this context; he claimed that Kuśniewicz, with the use of a fluent narrative and a considerate amount of nostalgia, wrote two I.R. ballad-novels picturing Austria-Hungary as a beautiful, multicultural mosaic<sup>1</sup>. However, it is hard to accept such an interpretation of these novels. Neither the conservation of I.R-ish myth<sup>2</sup> nor apology of the 'dead kingdom' (or its 'resurrection'<sup>3</sup>) could have been the writer's purpose. Leaving aside the fact that it would hardly be possible, the stake here is much higher. These writings seek to capture a world at the very moment of it

<sup>1</sup> Kazimierz Wyka, 'C.K. ballado-powieści' [I.R. ballad-novels], in *Nowe i dawne wędrówki po tematach* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1978), 284–96.

<sup>2</sup> See Ewa Wiegandt, *Austria Felix, czyli o micie Galicji w polskiej prozie współczesnej* [Austria Felix: about the myth of Galicia in Polish contemporary prose] (Poznań: Bene Nati, 1997); Alois Woldan, *Mit Austrii w literaturze polskiej* [The myth of Austria in Polish literature], trans. into Polish by Krzysztof Jachimczak and Ryszard Wojnakowski (Kraków: MCK, 2002); Claudio Magris, *Mit habsburski w literaturze austriackiej moderny* [The Habsburg myth in Austrian modernist literature], trans. into Polish by Joanna Ugniewska and Elżbieta Jogała (Kraków – Budapeszt – Syrakuzy: Austeria, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> See Barbara Kazimierczyk, *Wskreszanie umarłych królestw* [Resurrection of dead kingdoms] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1982).

dying; to seize the decay of an epoch of the 'long' 19th century<sup>4</sup>, resembling its own, faded *images d'Épinal*. Austro-Hungary, with its poses, grimaces and props, is in fact ironically depicted by Kuśniewicz, with a chronological distance that is always carefully marked:

We are in the era of the late Art Nouveau, of fading modernism; it might be therefore be worthwhile to mention a few books in the glass-fronted mahogany bookcase that in style is closer to Maria Theresa than to Biedermeier. [...] the latest editions of the dramas of Frank Wedekind; several issues of the magazine *Die Fackel*; *Die Farben* by Hoffmannsthal; *The White Manor* by Hermann Bang [...]<sup>5</sup>

Kuśniewicz defies the conventions of the reality effect, regularly reassuring the reader that the world depicted is artificial, contractual, thus suggesting its similarity in this respect to the "factual" Austro-Hungary. Hence, it seems accurate to suggest that the main character of *The King of Two Sicilies*, Emil R., is a metacharacter<sup>6</sup> (similarly to Kiekeritz from *Lessons in a Dead Language* he is rather a metonymy of the inglorious death of the epoch<sup>7</sup>), while the novel itself bears the hallmarks of a pastiche and is certainly characterized by a multitude of intertextual references. Besides the motifs taken from such masterpieces as *The Man Without Qualities*, *Radetsky March*<sup>8</sup> or *Sól ziemi* (*Salt of the Earth*), Kuśniewicz was inspired by the hyperaesthetic prose and dramas written by such prized writers of the Young Poland period as Hermann Bang (the preface to the Polish edition of *Białe dwór* [*The White Manor*] was written by Stanisław Przybyszewski himself) and Frank Wedekind. It is not without reason that Emil finds their books on the shelves of his family home.

Like *Lessons in a Dead Language*, when analyzed from a structuralist perspective *The King of Two Sicilies* appears to be a fascinating collection of quotes<sup>9</sup>, portraits and literary figures. In taking this into account, however, we should not assume that its meaning is limited to an archive of cultural codes, hardly alive, somehow postmodern, and created with an ironic distance. It is simply a fragment of a much wider reflection on the dialectics of the historical apathy and the process of memory aimed at reworking both particular experiences and life itself in general. The latter provokes questions about the function of personal aspects of the experiences of specific actors on the stage of

<sup>4</sup> In the *Puzzles of Memory* Kuśniewicz says: 'For me the 19th century ended in 1918. It was the time of a breakthrough in both arts and politics. It was the time when the biggest number of events happened: the revolution in Russia, disintegration of the monarchy (which was the price it paid for the war), the emergence of new states, regaining independence by several nations'. *Szcześniak Grażyna and Kuśniewicz Andrzej, Puzzle pamięci. Z A. Kuśniewiczem w marcu i kwietniu 1991 rozmawiała G. Szcześniak* (Kraków: Eureka, 1992), 51. The following quotations and references to the novel will be located by PM acronym and appropriate page number.

<sup>5</sup> Andrzej Kuśniewicz, *The King of the Two Sicilies*, trans. Celina Wieniewska (New York – London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), 17. The following quotations and references to the novel will be located by KTS acronym and appropriate page number.

<sup>6</sup> Ewa Wiegandt, *Andrzeja Kuśniewicza mit Androgyne* [Andrzej Kuśniewicz's myth of Androgyne], in Wiegandt, *Austria Felix, czyli o micie Galicji w polskiej prozie współczesnej*.

<sup>7</sup> Krzysztof Rutkowski writes about Kiekeritz's typicality in one of the most insightful analyses of *Lekcja martwego języka* [Lesson in a dead language]: Krzysztof Rutkowski, 'Martwy język', in *Ani było, ani jest: szkice literackie* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1984), 49–52.

<sup>8</sup> Dirk Uffelmann, "'Lekcja martwego języka' Andrzeja Kuśniewicza i 'Marsz Radetzky'ego" Josepha Rotha. Próba paraleli' [Lesson in a dead language by Andrzej Kuśniewicz and *The Radetzky march* by Joseph Roth. Parallel attempt], in *Kresy. Syberia. Literatura. Doświadczenia dialogu i uniwersalizmu*, ed. Eugeniusz Czaplejewicz and Edward Kasperski (Warszawa: TRIO, 1995), 135–49. Below, I try to show that there are also parallels between *The King of Two Sicilies* and Roth's novel.

<sup>9</sup> See Elżbieta Dutka, 'Lekcje i kolekcje. O "Lekcji martwego języka" Andrzeja Kuśniewicza' [Lessons and collections. About Lesson in a dead language by Andrzej Kuśniewicz], in *Proza polska XX wieku: przeglądy i interpretacje*, ed. Marian Kisiel and Grażyna Maroszczuk, vol. 1 (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2005), 69–85.

history (no matter if they recognize themselves as such or push this into their subconscious) in a synthesis of the epoch's experience provided by the book. It is created (and maintained) in a narrative whose goal is less to resist the disintegration of life itself than to enhance the distance between its particular, spatio-temporally conditioned forms, thus turning them into something akin to a display at a museum exhibition. The subject of Kuśniewicz's prose seems to carry on (though perhaps on a very deep level of psychological topology) an unequal fight to preserve a vivid part of its very own identity which cannot be reduced to an allegoristic ornament. The question I want to discuss in this paper is: does this subject freeze entirely in the manner of this narrative or are there dimensions of its existence which escape a historical macro-perspective and, at the same time, as artifacts of disturbed memory, remain inaccessible to itself, to the narrative's 'I'? In answering this question, I will refer to the ideas of Siegfried Kracauer, Maria Török and Nicolas Abraham. I will also try to prove that *The King of Two Sicilies* can be read as a meditation on (post)memory and a haunting of sorts, which reveal the thanatical lining of *the belle époque*. I will also analyze the work's narrative structure, as it carries some elements characteristic of cinematic ways of presenting diegetic reality.

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Researchers of Kuśniewicz's prose show a keen interest in the opening sequence of the novel, which consists of four paragraphs, each of which is an attempt at a different – in terms of style, theme, and perspective – beginning for the narrative. This technique has its own meaning for the world presented in the book, as it marks the point of intersection of the four main themes of the story's plot: the history of the R. family (including the novel's main character Emil R.); very first hours and days of World War I; a chronicle of the events that took place in the town of Fehértemplom (Bila Tserkva); the murder of a Romany woman, Marika Huban, which is investigated in the story<sup>10</sup>. The technique is also crucial for establishing the work's extra-diegetic order as it immediately confirms the relevance of the metaliterary or even metanarrative component of the novel. It also prefigures later experiments with literary conventions and plays with cultural clichés depicting a specific spacetime (in the preface to the French edition of the novel Piotr Rawicz writes about 'secondary clichés'<sup>11</sup>). As Julita Wiktoria-Zapała states, the four beginnings of *The King of Two Sicilies*

[...] can be interpreted as a manifestation of cultural memory, consisting in this case in the parodic use of four varieties of a novel intertwining in the text. Such treatment of the multiplied incipit leads to the perception of the novel's characters as products of literary convention<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>10</sup>Paul Coates suggests that 'the initial instead of the surname being an advance signal of the crime [...] and underlines the typicality of the main protagonist Paul Coates, 'Hofmannsthal and Kuśniewicz: The Soldier-Aesthetes of the Austro-Hungarian Army', in *The Double and the Other. Identity as Ideology in Post-Romantic Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988), 140. Coates is referring to the murder of Romany woman Marika Huban, which may have been perpetrated by Emil, although Kuśniewicz decides to leave only circumstantial evidence in this case, not deciding whether the main character is or is not guilty. The plot of this crime requires a separate study; here only, slightly ahead of further findings, we can say that Marika's death is symbolic in the structure of the text and is both a repetition and a reverse of the forbidden, secret desire that Emil harbors for Lieschen. See interpretation by Kazimierz Bartoszyński, 'Ironia i egzystencja. Uwagi o "Królu Obojga Sycylii" Andrzeja Kuśniewicza', *Teksty Drugie*, no. 1–2 (2006): 253–69.

<sup>11</sup>Rawicz Piotr, 'Préface', in *Le Roi des Deux-Siciles*, by Andrzej Kuśniewicz, trans. Christophe Jezewski and François-Xavier Jaujard (Paris: Albin Michel, 1978), 20.

<sup>12</sup>Wiktorska-Zapała Julita, 'Między wspomnieniem a fantazją: sposoby ocalenia podmiotowości w powieściach Andrzeja Kuśniewicza' [Between memory and fantasy: ways to save subjectivity in Andrzej Kuśniewicz's novels], *Sztuka i Filozofia*, no. 20 (2001): 145.

The above-mentioned statement is quite similar to some of the concepts of literary postmodernism, according to which the works written in that trend are (at least partially) ‘a commentary on the aesthetic history of whatever genre it adopts’<sup>13</sup>.

The novel by Kuśniewicz can thus be read as a statement on the conditions and orders governing the construction of literary depictions of the past, which are situated in a dynamic relation between (distorted) memory, understood as a product of intra-subject processes of shifting and overlapping, often motivated by affects, and a panorama of inter-subjective processes that tend to shape the subject rather than be created by it. It seems that not only reflection on what is singular (and what structures this singularity is inserted into) is important for Kuśniewicz; he also wants to consider the way in which the past is revealed in a contemporality – as a phenomenon with its own meaning, part of the time stream devoid of any essential hermeneutic property or as a mystery that calls for the exploration of one’s or foreign past. *The King of Two Sicilies* can be called (as Linda Hutcheon calls it) a “historiographical metanovel” which uses intertextuality and parody as a mean to expose or dismantle rhetorical orders of representations of the past<sup>14</sup>. Like E.L. Doctorow’s *Ragtime*,<sup>15</sup> evoked by Hutcheon, Kuśniewicz negates the objectivity of historiographical representations. With the use of fluent, structurally cinematic narrative (I will return to this issue in a moment), he undermines the hierarchy of the events and blurs the difference between facts and fictional speculation. This is why a ‘methodological’ commentary follows the four openings of the novel. It is somehow ironic, as it suggests the integrity of the past, which is yet freely supplemented by the author:

These facts appear to be logically unconnected and surely not interdependent. Nonetheless, each of them occurred at a strictly defined time, and therefore has been lastingly preserved. Nothing can be changed that happened in the past, nothing can be erased or left out. The past is indivisible. It is possible, perhaps, though there is no proof of this, that the absence of any element might have affected the course of future events in the public or private sphere. This assumption is not as absurd as it seems. What is or is not important is relative (KTS 4)

[...]

We repeat: all these facts, which are of different objective significance, yet subjectively important and therefore of equal weight, form an inseparable whole from which nothing can be omitted, because each component is crucial. However (although this might strike some as strange and even shocking) the demise of His Imperial and Royal Highness on June 28, and the death of the young gypsy girl Marika Huban precisely a month later, on July 28, 1914, will be equally important. Such a trivial occurrence as the leap of a dog from the door of a gypsy shack toward the dust-covered acacia bushes in which something suspect had moved, and the rustle of a laburnum twig that exercised an indefinable influence on the thinking of Emil R. – everything counts, everything at a given moment is extremely important for someone, therefore nothing can be excluded or dismissed (KTS 9-10)

<sup>13</sup>Charles Newman, *The Post-Modern Aura: The Act of Fiction in the Age of Inflation* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1985), 44.

<sup>14</sup>Linda Hutcheon, ‘Historiographic Metafiction. Parody and the Intertextuality of History’, in *Intertextuality and Contemporary American Fiction*, ed. Patrick O’Donnell and Robert Con Davis (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 3–32.

<sup>15</sup>Edgar Lawrence Doctorow, *Ragtime* (New York: Modern Library, 1997).

Kuśniewicz wants to present the events outside of a cause-and-effect sequence, and at the same time, resigns from the assumption that each element of the past has a meaning clearly established from a contemporary perspective. Instead, he establishes the horizon of a panoramic, complex 'presence' – sensual, often superfluous – focused on registering multiple textures of life in a given epoch. By describing only short periods of time, the writer shows their richness and offers us a reflection on the coherency of the objects and phenomena appearing in them<sup>16</sup>. His approach can be thus associated with the works of such researchers of 'presence' as Eelco Runia<sup>17</sup> and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, the author of a brilliant mosaic book about the year 1926 – *In 1926. Living on the Edge of Time*<sup>18</sup>. In a conversation with Zbigniew Taranienko, Kuśniewicz states that:

It is extremely easy for me [...] to put myself in such a situation as if I lived in the 18th century. Or even in the 17th century. I can imagine it perfectly. [...] It is connected with everything that was in that era, with what clothes were worn, what perfumes were used and what the furniture was. I grew out of this very story at a different time. Now it seems to be less so, because many traces of the past were destroyed by the war. Objects made a story, not only based on facts, a very specific extension of the previous generation<sup>19</sup>.

Taking into account all the findings mentioned above, we can assume that in *The King of Two Sicilies* two methods of constructing a fictional world compete with one another: a simultaneous, quite spontaneous flux<sup>20</sup> of events (Kuśniewicz himself speaks of a 'stream of parallelism'<sup>21</sup>) with the author portraying himself as a textual *deus otiosus*<sup>22</sup>, not interfering with the world he created,<sup>23</sup> and (this is the second method) anachrony in which the author is a supervisor-allegorist projecting a network between pieces of a dying world and examining not the life itself but its forms or, to evoke a distinction provided by Walter Benjamin, not a cosmos but a library<sup>24</sup>. If we remove any part of the composition created that way, then

the whole film now in incessant movement would stop and freeze. We would behold a kind of film in which life has been trapped; persons in motion would stop with one leg in the air, with a piece of choco-

<sup>16</sup>For this purpose Kuśniewicz uses the slightly less fortunate image of a whirlpool of water in the bathtub drain (KTS 11). See analysis of the problem of 'random non-randomness' of the chaos of events – Maria Medecka, 'Efekt motyla a dekonstrukcja formy powieściowej w prozie Andrzeja Kuśniewicza' [The butterfly effect and the deconstruction of the novel form in the prose of Andrzej Kuśniewicz], in *Fabularność i dekonstrukcja*, ed. Maria Woźniakiewicz-Dziadosz (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 1998), 63–84.

<sup>17</sup>Eelco Runia, 'Presence', *History and Theory* 45, no. 1 (2006): 1–29, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2303.2006.00346.x>.

<sup>18</sup>Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *In 1926. Living on the Edge of Time* (Cambridge – London: Harvard University Press, 1997). See in particular *User's Manual* (IX–XVI). Among Polish authors, Tomasz Mizerkiewicz is probably the most willing to use Gumbrecht's conceptualization of 'presence' – See Tomasz Mizerkiewicz, *Po tamtej stronie tekstów: literatura polska a nowoczesna kultura obecności* [On the other side of the texts: Polish literature and the modern culture of presence] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2013).

<sup>19</sup>Zbigniew Taranienko, 'Odbicie. Rozmowa z Andrzejem Kuśniewiczem' [Reflection. An interview with Andrzej Kuśniewicz], in *Rozmowy z pisarzami* (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1986), 469.

<sup>20</sup>See Krzysztof Pacewicz, *Fluks. Wspólnota płynów ustrojowych* [Flux. The community of body fluids] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2017).

<sup>21</sup>Taranienko, 463.

<sup>22</sup>See Agata Bielik-Robson, 'Deus otiosus: ślad, widmo, karzeł' [Deus otiosus: trail, specter, dwarf], in *Deus otiosus. Nowoczesność w perspektywie postsekularnej*, ed. Agata Bielik-Robson and Maciej A. Sosnowski (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2013), 5–39.

<sup>23</sup>Cf. Gorgie Gospodinow's concept of a 'natural novel', which I write about in Antoni Zając, 'Minotaur w piwnicy' [Minotaur in the basement], *Literatura na Świecie*, no. 5–6 (2020): 361–62.

<sup>24</sup>Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London ; New York: Verso, 2003). Benjamin's work deals with the relationship between the Renaissance (exploring the cosmos) and the Baroque (studying libraries).

late cake impaled on a fork, or carried to an already opened mouth but never ingested. The cream dripping from the fork would hang in the air. The mouth would remain dead, absurdly open forever (KTS 10)

It is therefore symptomatic that Kuśniewicz writes about cinematic art, because his novels seem to imitate construction techniques often used in cinema. This is the reason for constant changes between close-ups and wide angles, as well as the effort to present multiple themes simultaneously or through the prism of visuality, manifested by the richness of very detailed descriptions. About this specific aspect of Kuśniewicz's works Paul Coates writes interestingly:

The hermetically closed nature of the past lends Kusniewicz's relation to it something of the air of a viewer's relation to a film [...]. In both novels [*The King of Two Sicilies* and *Lessons in a Dead Language* – A.Z.] characters are shown watching others through a telescope: viewing them in the long shot with which the present views the unattainable past. [...] The combination of a cinematically plastic image of the surfaces of the past, which are fetishised much like the props in a period drama, with the incomprehensibility of the people who move among them, is an ironic one. In many respects, Kusniewicz's novels resemble descriptions of scenes in a film. Or rather, they are films, translated into the alternative medium of literature<sup>25</sup>.

The past, presented from a 'telescopic' distance, is set in decorations whose conventionality is clearly highlighted; the American scholar is right when he points out the fetishistic character of the epoch's props, which are often presented in the foreground. Yet it is the ironic superconsciousness producing the discussed dialectics – between efforts to transfer the past into the present (reader's) time and retrospective research on the world, carried out with the use of quotations of its dead aspects or, alternatively, functioning in the form of *Nachleben*<sup>26</sup> phenomena – which ensures us that we are not dealing with a so-called antiquarian novel<sup>27</sup>: 'We are still in the era of the dying Art Nouveau, so we can afford a certain exaggeration in feelings and definitions, a rather sentimental immodesty', Kuśniewicz writes (KTS 123) The significant element of *The King of Two Sicilies* is its vividly rococo micromegalism which transforms ornament from a supplement into a guiding principle of the world presented in the book. Because of this "They lose their dimension and get lost in the miniature world of ornaments and seashells"<sup>28</sup>, thus constituting perhaps little more than the pars pro toto of the past.

Let us return, however, to Coates' intriguing vision of the novel-as-film and try to treat it as a perfectly legitimate conceptualization of the relationship between the author, the images of the past they create, and the meaning that they gives to what is surplus, props, creating decorations, and at the same time coming to the fore. It seems that Kuśniewicz's prose is

<sup>25</sup>Coates, 'Hofmannsthal and Kuśniewicz: The Soldier-Aesthetes of the Austro-Hungarian Army', 144.

<sup>26</sup>*Nachleben* is a term used by Aby Warburg that can be translated as "after-life" or "survival" As Paweł Mościcki writes, *Nachleben* is 'a kind of fossil that experiences the change of the epoch, but only in a changed form, enlivens the present not through a triumphant return to earlier patterns, but rather through a relapse of repressed archaism, a symptom of a past, suppressed time' – Paweł Mościcki, 'Sejsmografy przewrotu. Gesty rewolucyjne jako Pathosformeln' [Seismographs of the revolution. Revolutionary gestures as Pathosformeln], *Konteksty*, no. 2–3 (2011): 163.

<sup>27</sup>This is the name used by Ewa Wiegandt to describe Andrzej Stojowski's novels like *Chłopiec na kucu* [The Boy on a Pony] – Wiegandt, *Austria Felix, czyli o micie Galicji w polskiej prozie współczesnej*, 141.

<sup>28</sup>Jan Białostocki, 'Rokoko: ornament, styl i postawa' [Rococo: ornament, style and attitude], in *Refleksje i syntezy ze świata sztuki* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1978), 170. From this text I also take the concept of micromegalism by Hermann Bauer.

characterized by features interestingly similar to those that are to constitute the specificity of the film medium, in line with the approach presented in the classic *Theory of Film* by Siegfried Kracauer<sup>29</sup>.

As Adam Lipszyc writes, according to the German theorist, ‘the film records what is too small and too big to be noticed, what is transient and secondary; it shows the material world in its randomness, indeterminacy, infinity – it reveals the “flow of life” itself [...]’<sup>30</sup>.

Using a variety of technical and artistic means, film artists are able to combine two elements in their works: the “plot”, i.e. an inventive, narratively ordered weave of excerpts from the wider world presented in a movie, and the “street”, i.e. the presentation of a busy life in all the multiplicity of its objects and events, shown in a manner which manages to balance out a sensitivity to detail and the epicness of the panorama, which preserves not only the human character, but also their rich surroundings – although inanimate, which is also achieved through the illusion of movement. We can say that for Kracauer a movie is able to liberate the whole presented existence by means of its dehierarchization (alternatively – by shifting a vertical order into a horizontal one) and by its immortalization. At the same time, it makes this existence accessible to the viewer: as a kind of *mise en abyme* of a whole materiality, which is finally perceptible, and not appropriated by the particularisms of the plot (which is the case in many literary works, when a thing receives a specific teleology, for example, a symbolic meaning, and functions just as a magic prop, as a ‘falcon of a story’ to evoke Paul Heyse’s didactic terminology). This is the origin of the thinker’s optimistic conclusion: ‘The cinema can be defined as a medium particularly equipped to promote the redemption of physical reality. Its imagery permits us, for the first time, to take away with us the objects and occurrences that comprise the flow of material life’<sup>31</sup>.

This concept seems lack sufficient sharpness, it is too one-dimensional. Especially if we want to use Kracauer’s ideas in analyzing Coates’ hypothesis – they do not take into account the problem of irony, which plays such a significant role in *The King of Two Sicilies*; the physical matter of the presented world isn’t so accessible when all the images created are mediated by language. Therefore, I would like to enrich these diagnoses by using more ambiguous conclusions from a much earlier essay by Kracauer entitled *Photography*<sup>32</sup> and thereby following with a text by Lipszyc in which he presents a dialectic reinterpretation of the film theory discussed here. The formula of this approach seems to be much more applicable to the novel written by Kuśniewicz.

As Kracauer states in *Photography*, historical memory is never a complete history record. It captures just its neuralgic part which becomes visible against the background of an overwhelming multitude of images, events and material phenomena. This is the part that will be

<sup>29</sup>Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton, N.J.; Princeton University Press, 1997).

<sup>30</sup>Adam Lipszyc, ‘Co zostaje z babci, czyli w poszukiwaniu materialistycznej teologii fotografii i filmu’ [What is left from grandma, i.e. in search of a materialistic theology of photography and film], *Widok. Teorie i Praktyki Kultury Wizualnej*, no. 4 (2013): 11.

<sup>31</sup>Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 300.

<sup>32</sup>Siegfried Kracauer, ‘Photography’, trans. Thomas Y Levin, *Critical Inquiry* 19, no. 3 (1993): 421–36.

able to outlive the erosion of the time passing by – as an answer to a question, unattainable from within a given epoch, what will be memorized from this historical complexity. A dual division thus emerges: firstly, into so-called monograms, i.e. elements that go beyond the immanent frame of spacetime, crystallizing its essence or the truth contained in it in the form of a single image, a single name. Secondly, into matter that lacks meaning, which is neglected and therefore ‘unsalvationable, and has no chance for a historical afterlife. Photography governs the domain of these remains. It captures not so much the individual signature of the subject or event, but rather its superficial, external conditioning. This is how a truly spectral reproduction, devoid of this monogram, comes into existence: ‘Photography assembles fragments around a nothing [...] it is not the person who appears in his or her photograph, but the sum of what can be deduced from him or her’<sup>33</sup>.

However, is it really true that a dress worn by an old lady (this is Kracauer’s example) or a favorite book she is holding are unable to convey some of the important aspects of her irretrievably gone life? Is it true that the epoch’s fashion, colors, poses and moods remain outside the sphere of this epoch’s nominality? Maybe the opposite is true? Maybe there are no sublime, transcendental emblems of the spacetimes that have already died away? These are questions posed by Lipszyc, and in response, he proposes a model combining some aspects of both concepts discussed here. A new film theory is thus constructed, and it should be interpreted as a more general vision of a dialectic reproduction of the past:

The film wants to say something, but suddenly it strays into an alley, wanders along it, showing more than it should, more or less involuntarily registering the surface of objects, initiating the local liberation of material reality. [...] When telling a story, the film makes a certain promise: it promises that it will do justice to the people and objects presented, that it will extract and convey the truth about them, that it will capture their unforgettable names in the plot, the final memory image. The irony, however, is that he must inevitably break that promise, because names are not in the story – at least in our world dominated by *ratio* and laced with nothingness. Real names remain in the nameless, the overlooked and abandoned, in the shells of matter itself, in the street. The film must, therefore, repeatedly admit to a lie, suspend the story, break the order of meanings, and reach for what cannot be remembered, but is most memorable, what is devoid of truth, but, being ‘the other’ of an inevitably mendacious story, unexpectedly becomes the proper premise of this truth<sup>34</sup>.

Maybe this is the reason why the autoreferential prose of Kuśniewicz, negating or negotiating its own meanings, is so devoted to the exploration of the outskirts, backgrounds and margins; maybe this is the source of its sensitivity to the complex ambiguity of differences and repetitions. Between life’s ‘plot’ and the ‘street’, a search for names-monograms is taking place. Sometimes they can be found on the surface of convention, sometimes they are hidden, even lost, thrown into an inner crypt as an inexpressible reality concerning ourselves or the world around us. It is not meaningless that the notebook of Emil R., the main source of the story told in a novel, is pulled out from the river in which a young boy commits suicide by throwing himself into it. Its contents, reconstructed by the narrator (often with the use of free indirect

<sup>33</sup>Kracauer, 431.

<sup>34</sup>Lipszyc, ‘Co zostaje z babci, czyli w poszukiwaniu materialistycznej teologii fotografii i filmu’, 15.



speech or prosopopeic transcription of the main character's voice), transform into a foggy testimony of a long forgotten life. Finders of the notebook can decode just one sentence written in it: 'Once upon a time...' (KTS 197) – the sentence, as general as possible, an open beginning denoting everything and nothing at the same time. So, handwriting itself cannot be (at least on the level of the plot) an object of cryptological investigation. They are what seal Emil's ultimate end. We cannot ignore the fact that this 'Once upon a time...', which is both part of a convention and a statement written by Emil R., is also a beginning to *The King of Two Sicilies* itself: 'Once upon a time there were two sisters, Elizabeth and Bernadette, who had one brother, Emil' (KTS 3)<sup>35</sup>. Perhaps this means that literature, especially in the specific formula of 'movie-prose', not so much salvages, but rather allows what is under-articulated to be complemented; it allows to images to be presented that enable the epoch (or maybe rather our conceptualization of the epoch) to finally see itself. 'Once upon a time...', in an ironic turn on a convention, nothing is finalised here. It is merely the beginning of this extraordinary *bildungsroman* about Emil R.

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Emil is born as a premature baby, 'the result of that stormy Imperial night' (KTS 14). He was conceived by intercourse during which both his father and mother fantasized about having sex with another person. Both of them also remained clothed in line with the Viennese fashion of the time. The subjectivity of the novel's main character is thus presented as doubled from the very beginning. He is born (on the birthday of Franz Joseph, by the way) both from individual phantasm and the ideas of a given period. He seems to be somehow aware of this when he considers his similarity to the model protagonist of the male adolescence narrative – Emil from the work by Rousseau<sup>36</sup> (KTS 55). Kazimierz Bartoszyński points out that Emil's sisters also have significative names: the oldest of the siblings, Elżbieta (Elizabeth), called Lieschen (she is named after empress Sissi, KTS 66), and the youngest one, Bernadetta (Bernadette), or Detta, named after Saint Bernadette of Lourdes<sup>37</sup>.

Emil's childhood plays a significant role in the novel as the period in which all of the protagonist's hopes, fears and desires come into existence. They will haunt him throughout his whole, yet very short life. We see the boy mainly in scenes depicting the peculiar games of the siblings (or 'games' as Kuśniewicz would put it) initiated by Lieschen, for whom these games are a source of cruel pleasure, whilst the passive, timid Detta falls victim to her ideas. Emil is the passive spectator of events for whom a whole performance is prepared. In the first of these sequences,

<sup>35</sup>In one episode, Emil writes down the first sentence of his 'lyrical diary', but unlike the first sentence of *The King of Two Sicilies* it begins not with two sisters, but with Emil: 'Es war einmal der Jungling Emil und er hatte zwei Schwestern' [The abovementioned alteration isn't present in the English version of the book: 'Once upon a time there were two sisters, Elizabeth and Bernadette, who had one brother, Emil...' (KTS 173) – G.R.]. We can risk the statement that at this point Kuśniewicz marks the movement of the shift of subjectivity, inscribing it into the narrative about ourselves, which, when we become a part of the past, no longer belongs to us.

<sup>36</sup>It would also be interesting to juxtapose Emil R. with the title character of Zofia Nałkowska's novel *Hrabia Emil* [Count Emil] from 1921 – that hero also, albeit more casually, occupies the position of a masochist in his childhood, even fantasizing about being beaten by a tutor; cf. also the following passage: 'Child's play turned into suffering. Emil adored Joanna. He trembled with her gestures, words, orders. He hung his eyes on her lips. He wanted terribly to call her now: miss Joanna, lady. On long evenings of dreams, he composed sentences in which he expressed this request' – Zofia Nałkowska, *Hrabia Emil* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1977), 30.

<sup>37</sup>Bartoszyński, 'Ironia i egzystencja. Uwagi o "Królu Obojga Sycylii" Andrzeja Kuśniewicza', 258.

Detta, forced by her sister to imitate various animals<sup>38</sup>, kneels in front of Lieschen in the sumptuous living room of the household on a piece of parquet – usually covered by a carpet, but now uncovered as if a carefully guarded secret was revealed. Describing a triangular relationship, the center of which is Lieschen's attempt to seduce Emil into incest<sup>39</sup>, Kuśniewicz also cites here one of the basic figures of the sadomasochistic universe, although the actual quasi-erotic agreement is here between the torturer and the viewer – not her direct, humiliated victim<sup>40</sup>:

Emil stands on the side, not important, taken into consideration by neither of the two girls. But this is only a pretense. [...] In a moment, perhaps, *with the point of her shoe – still almost a child's, with a bow or pom-pom adorning it – Lisa will nudge her sister on her forehead or shoulder*. Or perhaps this will occur after we have left the drawing room of Mr. and Mrs. R. in the Stubenring (KTS 18, emphasis mine – A.Z.).

In Emil's memory, the observed scenes are ambiguous, as they bring both anxiety caused by the violent rituals performed by his sister (as if she is actually practicing for the role of a mistress) and a certain unbearable pleasure, already realized at that time as merely a virtual fulfillment of a desire whose object is unattainable. In some fragments Lieschen's cruelty has an almost caricatural character. It suggests that these memories were retroactively supplemented with events which could not have taken place. At the same time, however, on a different level of the narrative, Kuśniewicz is once again testing the plasticity of sadomasochistic aesthetics:

Sometimes Detta's hands are tied behind her back [by Lieschen – A.Z.], not to prevent any protest, which would never happen, but to make the ritual, according to Lieschen, 'more grown-up and serious'. This is an idea she got from an illustration in a magazine for grown-ups. Then follow some words of ritual warning: 'If you dare to do anything...' – here Lieschen's voice and expression become threatening – 'remember that there's something hanging in the pantry cupboard'.

What she means is a carpet beater [...] At the mention of this, Detta draws in her shoulders and hangs her head even lower. [...] Emil stands still, his arms hanging at his sides, and says nothing (KTS 138).

<sup>38</sup>Detta 'thinks about her sister with fear and respect, mixed also with a fervent doglike love and fascination (KTS 140, highlight – A.Z.). Lieschen is also trying to get Detta to be stung or bitten by a bumblebee, which is a fairly obvious sexual symbol intended for Emil, who almost reaches orgasm when he looks at his sisters (KTS 141-144). Representations of the perverted relations between children and animals in literature are a topic for a separate study – it is worth mentioning here, for example, their great importance for the prose of Leo Lipski (in works such as *Niespokojni* [Restless], *Piotruś* [Peter] or *Miasteczko* [Little Town]; see Antoni Zając, "Poniedziałek – Ireny". *Fantomowe Kresy Leo Lipskiego*, *Narracje o Zagładzie*, no. 4 (2019): 285–86). See also the chapter of a controversial book by Kathryn Bond Stockton, 'Why the (Lesbian) Child Requires an Interval of Animal. The Family Dog as a Time Machine', in *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham – London: Duke University Press, 2009), 89–119.

<sup>39</sup>Apart from *The King of Two Sicilies*, the motif of incest appears in Kuśniewicz's earlier *Eroica* and three years later *Stan nieważkości* [The State of Weightlessness], where the sister who is the object of desire also appears with another, younger girl dominated by her, but there the subject fantasizes about being not only a brother but also, metaphorically, a father – a father of 'a little rascal born of great longing' Andrzej Kuśniewicz, *Stan nieważkości* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1973), 298. See Adrianna Jakóbczyk, 'Motywy o cechach symboli w opisach miłości incestualnej. O trzech powieściach Andrzeja Kuśniewicza' [Motifs with the features of symbols in the descriptions of incestual love. About three novels by Andrzej Kuśniewicz], *Amor Fati*, no. 4 (2015): 135–73.

<sup>40</sup>Emil notes later: 'Detta was the object of these experiments, but not their purpose. It was I, each time, who became the true object on which the experiments were performed. I shall never find out whether Detta also experienced pleasure from submission, or whether she agreed to everything only because she was afraid of her sister. And did she know that it was I who, by proxy, took the whole burden upon myself?' (KTS 112).

Lieschen's experiments are not only an expression of her sadistic imagination, they are not just a way to seduce Emil, but they are also a kind of childish ritual which aims to explore the bodily and mental boundaries between violence and polymorphic pleasure<sup>41</sup>. Moreover, they are a matrix for future experiences, also perceived in the categories of the theatre – the theatre of desire, and – secondarily, but this is what we find here to be the most interesting – the theatre of memory, and (to a lesser extent) of the culture of everyday life itself, as Elżbieta Dutka<sup>42</sup> suggests. This is a different, but also legitimate, way to interpret the artificiality and excessive conventionality of the setting.

Besides, Lieschen, Detta and Emil literally perform in children's theaters and shows of "tableaux vivants", which were a fashionable attraction at aristocratic parties at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. The game with gender dynamics (evoking Androgyne paradigm which is omnipresent in Kuśniewicz works<sup>43</sup>) is a crucial element: the tiny and pale Emil plays Saint Cecilia or a fairy<sup>44</sup>, whilst Lieschen is a page or a little devil. These roles become a part of Lieschen's ritualized entertainment: as a boy she gives her 'sister' Cecilia holy communion, represented by an almond: "The almond assumed the identity of a Host. The scene occurred less than six months after his first communion. [...] With a feeling of mortal sin he accepts in anguish the diabolical Host from his sister's ink-stained fingers" (KTS 59). The motif of the 'communion of souls' returns in an image of a later period, in which Emil takes communion, despite not having confessed his thoughts about his sister – so he decides to spit it out and bury it. However, Lieschen decides to force him to eat the wafer once again with her in order to establish it as a symbol of their incestuous covenant<sup>45</sup>: "If you behave and do everything I tell you to, perhaps – who knows – perhaps I'll marry you. I'll think about it. Now get away from here – Mama's back!" (KTS 150).

The sequences described consist of vibrating, affective memory images, in the form of which the desire that haunts Emil chaotically recurs, affecting at the same time the topography of his inner life and his external functioning – his idleness, decadent inertia, which portrays Emil as somehow melancholic, suspended in an unsuccessful search for a fulfilled existence. He is doomed to unproductive repetitions: "Again and again these secondary images. Mirror reflections primarily, always incomplete, stunted in their definite form from their moment of birth and transform into other equally stunted shapes" (KTS 113). It seems that the atmosphere of the early days of the war on the front to which he is sent also affects his mood: anxiety, waiting, the feeling of calm before the storm – "but the war seems suspended, like a project, a foreboding or perhaps a promise" (KTS 87). The protagonist claims stubbornly that the main problem is the lack of (written with a capital let-

<sup>41</sup>Melanie Klein investigated similar tangles of sexuality and violence in the psychological development of a child – see e.g. Melanie Klein, "The Sexual Activities of Children", in *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* (London: Hogarth Press, 1973), 164–78.

<sup>42</sup>Elżbieta Dutka, *Okolice nie tylko geograficzne. O twórczości Andrzeja Kuśniewicza* [Not only geographic areas. About the works of Andrzej Kuśniewicz] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2008), 164.

<sup>43</sup>See e.g. Wiegandt, *Austria Felix, czyli o micie Galicji w polskiej prozie współczesnej*; Mieczysław Dąbrowski, "Androgyne w prozie Andrzeja Kuśniewicza" [Androgyne in the prose of Andrzej Kuśniewicz], *Miesięcznik Literacki*, no. 4 (1981): 50–59.

<sup>44</sup>Lieschen stabs Emil with a pin; he is dressed as a fairy, and, 'like Saint Sebastian, in spirit tendered not only his arm but his whole body to the darts of his sister, desiring them, anticipating them, and realizing with some apprehension that he was made happy by having been chosen as a living target' (KTS 57–58). On the topic of Saint Sebastian as an allegory of masochism see e.g. Richard A. Kaye, "Determined Rapture": St. Sebastian and the Victorian Discourse of Decadence', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 27, no. 1 (1999): 269–303.

<sup>45</sup>Its renewal is then followed by blood vows, which Lieschen induces Emil to make in Trieste (KTS 66–67).

ter but significantly undefined) ‘That’ – lost, but virtually remaining in subjects, objects or experiences. In this sense, Emil is going through a specific mourning, despite his sister not, in fact, being dead. However, as Sigmund Freud states in his canonical *Mourning and Melancholia*<sup>46</sup>, followed by the Hungarian-French psychoanalysts Maria Török and Nicolas Abraham<sup>47</sup>, mourning is not just about working through the loss of a loved one’s life – its subject can also be a feeling, an idea, or even an event gaining its phantasmatic prefiguration, which “in reality” never took place.

As Török and Abraham show, melancholy is the result of mourning, the work of which could not be successfully completed thanks to introjection, which means absorbing the missing object, and thus finding an adequate space for the void created by the loss within the “I” itself, and then – denouncing it. The reversal of introjection, and therefore the effect of chronic mourning, is incorporation. In this process, that what is lost starts to phantasmatically live inside the subject, in the psychic space called by thinkers a crypt<sup>48</sup>. Incorporation makes the object stored in the crypt unnamable. Moreover, the subject’s language is turned into a kind of cipher, coding a traumatic lack, but also wreaking havoc in all communication: with the environment and with one’s own memory. The symptom of the indirect transfer of messages from the crypt are codenames, i.e., significant words that stand out in the speech of the “I”, and thus – by way of interpretation – allow at least a partial decoding of his or her experience<sup>49</sup>.

Perhaps the full use of Török and Abraham’s concept is not fully justified here. It is though probably worth getting inspired by it, in order to reveal unclear or mysterious elements from Emil’s cinematic stream of consciousness, which hide important, otherwise impossible to express, content – the previously mentioned “That” trapped in Emil. The word ‘Solferino’ is one of these elements. In the novel it functions as a complex, dual symbol, constructed analogically to the dual meaning of the word itself. For *solferino* is both the name of a color fashionable in the early twentieth century (‘It was a dark violet that looked saturated with blood’ KTS 49) and the name of the town under which a battle between Austro-Hungarian (and therefore the Kingdom of Two Sicilies) and Piedmont forces was fought in 1859. It was one of the bloodiest battles of those times, resulting in the largest number of victims, and thus providing the impulse for funding of the International Red Cross movement<sup>50</sup>.

*Solferino* is the color of Elizabeth’s first “adult” dress, which she, to the simultaneous delight and horror of Emil, wore to the theater for the performance of *Oedipus The King* they watched together ‘in

<sup>46</sup>Sigmund Freud, ‘Mourning and Melancholia’, in *Collected Papers*, trans. Joan Riviere, vol. 4 (London: Hogarth Press, 1971), 152–70.

<sup>47</sup>See in particular Maria Török and Nicolas Abraham, ‘Mourning or Melancholia. Introjection versus Incorporation’, in *The Shell and the Kernel. Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Nicholas Rand, vol. 1 (Chicago – London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 125–39.

<sup>48</sup>As Giorgio Agamben suggests (apparently inspired by the thoughts of Török and Abraham, but not directly referring to it), ‘the crypt contains only images, like a picture book for children who do not yet know how to read, like the *Imagerie d’Epinal* of an illiterate people. The body of desires is an image. And what is unavowable in desire is the image we have made of it for ourselves. [...] Until the moment when we begin to understand that desire will remain forever unfulfilled – and that this unavowed desire is ourselves, forever prisoners in the crypt’. Giorgio Agamben, ‘Desiring’, in *Profanations*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 53–54.

<sup>49</sup>See Maria Török and Nicolas Abraham, *The Wolf Man’s Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*, trans. Nicholas Rand (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1986) and also; Ireneusz Piekarski, *Strategie lektury podejrzliwej* [Strategies of Suspicious Reading] (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, 2018), 46–82.

<sup>50</sup>See a book by the founder of The International Red Cross Movement Henri Dunant – Henry Dunant, *A Memory of Solferino* (Geneva: ICRC, 2011).

a darkened box full of the stifling scent [...], filled with solferino-colored light, a sin-polluted atmosphere transferred in a seemingly innocent way to his sister' (KTS 50). Marta Jacobi, a woman who is an object of Emil's sexual fantasies, appearing only as a phantom in his memories, wears a dress of the same color. Viewed from this perspective, it seems that the word 'solferino' and its returning repeatedly (even in the last sentence uttered by Emil) is a synecdoche not so much of Lieschen herself, but of the unfulfilled desire associated with her, which in language is manifested only in the form of this single, secret word. However, we have to consider the second meaning of this noun as well.

Mentions about the "fields of Magenta and Solferino" appear in the work's early parts – it turns out, that these refer to Emil's grandfather, who (similarly to Joseph von Trotta, although we do not know if he was as heroic as Joseph Roth's character from *Radetzsky's March*<sup>51</sup>) died during the Battle of Solferino. However, this fact is not only an important part of the family story, it also has a much stronger impact on the protagonist's life – in his imagination (Kuśniewicz uses the term "participatory imagination") there are scenes and images related to the battle: 'the white uniforms of those historic years of Solferino and Magenta, specters dragging themselves along through mist or fog, the battlefields on the Lombard plain, ghosts chanting in chorus in the Elysian fields' (KTS 30) Moreover, Emil describes himself as a rider travelling through 'the battlefield of Solferino' (KTS 28) and his memories interfere with memory artifacts which source is hard to establish.

Is it possible that Emil, as a soldier, feels overwhelmed by his grandfather's legacy, who was both merited and killed in the battle? We know for sure that the legend of this heroic death accompanies the protagonist when he decides to join his ancestor's unit – the 12th Regiment of Lancers<sup>52</sup>. For him however, this legend is also dark and bloody: 'Solferino meant defeat, death, a black night filled with the premonition of catastrophe, with the groans of wounded men, with caravans of white ghosts dragging themselves across the battlefield (KTS 48-49). The words of warning from *Radetzsky March* can be recalled here, in this context they sound like a curse: 'Don't forget your grandfather'<sup>53</sup>

There are also more serious complications or connections between what is our own and what is not, which should be seriously considered. Solferino returns as a code name for a trauma, not so much experienced by the subject himself as inherited – this is the part of the story about his grandfather that is drowned out by the mythologizing narrative about a victory achieved at the cost of his death. Therefore, although Emil repeatedly states that he is not interested in the war and that he is in no way afraid of it, in his last, hectic conversation with his friend, second lieutenant Kocourek, he admits that he is tormented by a feeling of defeat, of destruction. The scene in which Emil is in the cemetery is an outstanding representation of the memory "infected" by phantom tanatic messages:

I thought that some of the gravestones had rooted away to such an extent that they had reverted to childlike dimensions. The coffins of old people have changed with the passage of years into white or light blue boxes, containing the brittle, thin bones of infants. And at night, when a full moon rises over the Dolomites, these childish graves begin to babble, slowly, one word an hour, with delibera-

<sup>51</sup>Joseph Roth, *The Radetzky March*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (Woodstock, N.Y.: Overlook Press, 2002).

<sup>52</sup>Emil and Kocourek could choose which regiment they wanted to belong to as 'volunteers for one year's service' (KTS 48). In interviews, Kuśniewicz mentions that in this unit, also stationing in Fehértemplom, 'his mother's great-uncle' served. (Taranienko, 'Odbicie. Rozmowa z Andrzejem Kuśniewiczem', 457).

<sup>53</sup>Roth, *The Radetzky March*, 67.

tion, like infants. Phrases taken from the store of memory, shreds of something that has or has not happened, that has never been said, but grows now like a soft white fungus (KTS 106).

Solferino, as a hidden signifier refers to the future as well. It is a ‘dark harbinger’<sup>54</sup> that reveals knowledge of what may come. In addition to the transfer of this under-articulated content, there is also a post-memory component – Solferino appears in repeatedly reproduced illustrations and engravings or in the regiment’s memorial book, always painted in beautiful colors, despite hiding a dark reverse, haunting the *belle époque* constantly and carrying its warning.

Thus, two lines of meaning intersect in the word *solferino*. The color of the dress inevitably evokes the color of blood, whilst an unfulfilled desire is combined with chronically traumatizing violence, tearing apart the apparent peace of the *belle époque*. Returning to the remarks on the concept of Kracauer, we could say that in its duality, Solferino is a monogram-cryptonym for both Emil’s memory – disturbed, functioning in the logic of affects, and of the historical spacetime pictured in *The King of Two Sicilies* – erotic and tanatic Sicily, dead for history and still haunting memory. There are actually at least two kings (Ferdinand II and Francis II of Bourbon) looking from dusty portraits at a third king – Emil, who states: ‘The duality in the name of a kingdom which perished years ago bears in it the seeds and sentence of death’ (KTS 23)

Kuśniewicz’s novel seems to be one of the most interesting attempts at an experimental novel in Polish literature in the latter half of the twentieth century, with an innovative play with the economy (both in terms of literature and film) of the narrative, which is capable of presenting a complex domain of disturbed memory not only in the dimension of the plot but also structurally. For this purpose, the author uses the ironic potential of the distance between the spacetime of the world presented – dead, frozen in an ornament – and the moment of the story’s construction, where the foregone present meets the actual present; it also draws conclusions from the assumption that the experiences, phantasms or sensual phenomena anchored in our psyche are not always explicitly available to us, but rather tend to exist in a coded form, unclear to ourselves. In the chaos of the past, the secret monogram of the subject or of its epoch is revealed where it is least expected, and referring to something even more different. The monogram can be embodied even by the color of the dress, recognized as the latest (possibly the last) fashion trend.

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In conclusion, I would like to suggest one more area of interpretation, although this will only be a contribution to a broader inquiry. It seems that the search for monograms, these encoded emblems, can be carried out not at the level of diegesis, but at the level of the speaking I, especially assuming that it is sylleptically associated with the authorial I. The narrative of *The King of Two Sicilies* is essentially auctorial by nature, but it also consists of numerous parabases which, as I said before, formally and in terms of content testify to the spacetime distance between events and their actors – human and non-human – and the one who speaks.

<sup>54</sup>In Gilles Deleuze’s theory, the “dark harbinger” foreshadows the moment of communication between two series of objects establishing the relationship of difference and repetition with each other – Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014).

An example of such an interruption is one of the novel's last paragraphs, ultimately proving the superconsciousness of the narrator, looking to the dead world:

One might therefore begin everything anew, in one way or another. Even so the end would be the same, because the past, down to its smallest details, is irrevocable and indivisible. In spite of the fact that since then so many matters have lost their importance and even become somewhat ridiculous, like the fashion for affectation in feelings, for despair, for hopelessness. And for exaggeration. Like the sentimental silent pictures of the early years of this century. Or like Vienna dress fashion *Wiener Mode* from 1900. Like the faint scent of perfume rising from the pages of the *Wiener Illustrierte of 1914*, or from a box found years later and containing, along with visiting cards of persons unknown to us and programs from dances, a few yellowed photographs (KTS 196-197).

This reminiscence may serve as an accurate summary of the earlier considerations on the dialectical nature of monograms, which may not only be residual, but in their impermanent materiality they are both fallen and saved. Moreover, they retain their meaning only partially, existing mainly in a form of unclear presence. It seems that it at least illustrates a certain truth about the mechanisms of individual memory, so it would probably not be a mistake to assume that this is a statement whose meaning can be extrapolated to the level of the subject itself, the one who is formulating these words. It is therefore interesting that in *Moja historia literatury* ['My History of Literature'] Kuśniewicz writes about the attic of his family house, where the magazines 'Wiener Illustrierte' and 'Wiener Mode' were stored<sup>55</sup>. The attic itself can also be understood as a metaphor for what indeed remains of the former present, but is separate, devoid of significant meaning, and as a psychotopographic metaphor that builds an analogy between the space of the house and a certain layer of the subject's internal structure – a memory, an object, a desire, a longing are located in 'my' attic, but layered and covered with dust<sup>56</sup>.

We can continue such speculation by returning to the topic of cinema and inspiration by film techniques in presenting events. In the novel itself, in addition to the previously analyzed meta-narrative remarks on this subject, we can also find a fragment about specific film works:

While on the subject of films, it is perhaps worth mentioning that during that week the only movie house in Fehertemplom, the Bio-Moderne, was showing a film in two parts entitled *Queen of the Nile*; having been shown with great success in more important towns in the monarchy, from Vienna and Graz to Budapest and Arad, it was finishing its run here (KTS 10).

As emphasized by Kuśniewicz himself, the author of the series of essays devoted to cinema (they were published in "Film" magazine)<sup>57</sup>, movie art had been present in his life since a very early stage, perceived by him as something fascinating and secretive (PM 12). In an interview with

<sup>55</sup> Andrzej Kuśniewicz, *Moja historia literatury* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1980), 122–23.

<sup>56</sup> See e.g. Marta Raczyńska, *Czas uwarstwiony na gąsawskim poddaszu. Antropologiczny szkic o przestrzeni, przedmiotach i obcowaniu z przeszłością* [Time layered in the attic of Gąsawa. An anthropological sketch about space, objects and communing with the past] (Kraków: Libron, 2016).

<sup>57</sup> This is how Elżbieta Dutka writes about Kuśniewicz's columns: 'Short statements form a personal history of cinema and film. Recalling cinematographs – Viennese bioscopes, which he remembers from childhood, the author also writes about his own experiences and emotions from that period, outlining the maturing process of the viewer – an increasingly aware recipient of culture'. Dutka, *Okolice nie tylko geograficzne. O twórczości Andrzeja Kuśniewicza*, 143.

Grażyna Szcześniak, he develops this thought and describes his first ever visit to the Viennese cinema – where the film, the name of which is already known to us, was screened. However, it was not yet the end of the show:

The first time I saw a screen through the eyes of a child in Vienna [...] The film *Queen of the Nile* was playing [...], which made a smaller impression on me than the fragments of the news chronicle, or rather something that could be called a news chronicle today, and which was then one of many components of the two-hour program. The Balkan war was being fought, and we were shown a battlefield full of corpses and wounded, around which paramedics, or maybe gravediggers, were bustling, with elongated, caricatured shapes, moving angularly, with jumps, as if in some kind of circus dance... (PM 51)

*Queen of the Nile* is a title-cryptonym, functioning as a screen memory<sup>58</sup> against the shocking images of death and violence that do not appear in the *King of Two Sicilies* neither in a direct relation nor in a cinematic mediation. Instead, they are grotesquely deformed (perhaps, already in the flashback itself, by the memory), and thus appear even more disturbing, difficult to tame. The screen displays the traumatic truth of the times, which for Kuśniewicz also evoked a fetishized belle époque – in the same *Puzzle pamięci* [‘The Puzzles of Memory’] he claims that as a little boy in Vienna he waved to the emperor, who smiled at him (PM 10). He also boasts about having a photo picturing a few years old Otto von Habsburg with his dedication which he received during a Austro-Hungarian symposium in Duino in 1983 (PM 73-74). The actual content, the monogram of the I.R-ish cipher, is again hidden in the lining, this time in the lining of the filmic Cleopatra’s costume.

This is the cipher that the author writes about in the chapter of *Moja historia literatury* devoted to the ‘Archduke’ Stanisław Jerzy Lec – through him, everything related to the largely phantasmic identification with the dead I.R. world is communicated: these are evocative keywords relating to its characters, moods and places. Commenting on a somewhat hermetic joke by Lec, Kuśniewicz emphasizes what makes such a coding something truly intriguing, and at the same time, distinctive of his work: ‘You will say: a joke. Indeed – a joke. It seems to be a joke. A half-joke. However, the other half, not clearly named – is a piece of the code. Irony is interwoven with genuine lyricism so inseparably here, that it is impossible to unravel this problem<sup>59</sup>. Another, hidden layer of the code, which is intended only for insiders, seems to refer to scenes such as those seen in the Viennese movie theater, which remain implicitly ‘a special conglomerate, a concentrate of complex impressions’<sup>60</sup>.

translated by Gerard Ronge

<sup>58</sup>Referring to Freud’s concept of ‘screen memory’ (*Deckerrinerung*). Sigmund Freud, ‘Screen Memories’, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, vol. 3 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1962), 299–322. Kuba Mikurda defines ‘screen memory’ as ‘displacement (*Verschiebung*) appearing in memory not because of its explicit content, but its metonymic connection with another, potentially traumatic memory that has been displaced as such’ – quoted after Natalia Lemann, *Historie alternatywne i steampunk w literaturze. Archipelagi badawczo-interpretacyjne* [Alternative and steampunk stories in literature. Research and interpretation archipelagos] (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2019), 24.

<sup>59</sup>Kuśniewicz, *Moja historia literatury*, 184.

<sup>60</sup>Kuśniewicz, *Moja historia literatury*.



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# KEYWORDS

Andrzej Kuśniewicz

*cryptonym*

**monogram**

**ABSTRACT:**

The paper is devoted to *The King of Two Sicilies* – a novel from 1970 by Andrzej Kuśniewicz. The novel is analyzed as an intertextual, historiographic metanovel, depicting the relations between a single subject, its memory, marked by distortions of transgenerational transmissions, and the historical events it is entangled in. Special attention has been given to those aspects of the novel which, as Paul Coates suggests, make its narrative structure similar to a movie's structure. The concepts of Siegfried Kracauer, alongside those of Nicolas Abraham and Mária Török, have been also used in the interpretation. These are also the authors of two crucial terms: monogram and cryptonym.

*m e m o r y*

history

NARRATION

*P R E S E N C E***NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:**

Antoni Zając – born 1996, MA, Ph.D. student at the Doctoral School of the Humanities at Warsaw University. He is currently working on a project devoted to the works of Leo Lipski for which he received a prestigious “Diamond Grant” from the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education. He is also interested in the uses of psychoanalysis in interpretations of literary texts, in the relations between philosophy, theology and contemporary literature, and in postsecular theory.