Details of the Shoah.

The Holocaust in Polish children's literature

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War changes perspective. Things that used to be considered trivial suddenly become important, and the color of your hair, the color of your eyes, or your name could be the difference between life and death. War takes away the right to look from those who are forced to hide, only allowing them to peek at the world in and through fragments. War forces one to play a difficult game of zooming in and zooming out, as time, as in Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński's poems, seems to run backwards, towards non-existence.[1] Trying to come to terms with such unusual circumstances, literary stories about war employ non-linear narratives, use details, and show the world as fragmented. Children's literature which deals with the most difficult war experiences presents the reader with personal stories, and often refers to the conventions of non-fiction, connecting with the real world through details. Main characters are immersed in

[1] Edward Balcerzan, *Poezja polska w latach 1939–1968. Książka dla nauczycieli, studentów i uczniów* [Polish poetry in the years 1939–1968. A book for teachers, students and pupils] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1998), 38–39.

the world of true fabrication, and the truthfulness of the story is determined by the details which refer to historical events. Such a convention calls for a unique reading style – the reader has to focus on details, behind which lies the unsaid and the implied. In Holocaust narratives, the most important things are, at first sight, unimportant – little pieces refer to a larger whole, to a longer story outside the text. Fragments of history found in the literary text become the pillars of postmemory – a frame around which the reader's awareness may grow. In order to notice such details and reconstruct the stories behind them, a careful and tender reading is required, one which significantly reduces the distance between the reader and the text. The reader looks at the textual world up close; the bond between the child and the adult who reads to the child, usually one of the parents, fosters interpretation, as the adult can add to what has only been implied in the text. Individual things, small gestures, individual scenes open the door to other stories – they have a life of their own, they grow, they transfigure, and as if reaching out of the text towards the reader, leading them towards a new path.

In order to notice a painterly or an architectural detail, one has to come close to it, almost touch a sculpture or a painting. Detail observed from such a perspective may seem strange, overexposed, grotesque, and out of scale. It distances itself from the work of art as a whole – it reaches out to the viewer and enters their world. In literature, details become malleable, three-dimensional; they come close to the reader and determine how the reader understands the story. Details touch and move. Focusing attention on details forces a shift in perspective. The viewer comes closer; they are too close to notice the broad context and full meaning of the work. Indeed, the viewer may subjectively decide to "cut the work into pieces," and focus exclusively on the most attractive parts (in Romance languages, the word "detail" – in French *détail*, in Italian *dettaglio* – points to the words *tailler* [French] or *taglio* [Italian] which mean to cut). In children's literature, however, the focus on the detail is usually inscribed in the text, which imposes a unique reading style; the detail functions like the synecdoche and particularly traumatic events are revealed only to those who are prepared for it, insofar as they are able to follow interpretive guidelines.

The detail instead of the whole

Children's books about the Holocaust often work in and through details by default; the reader has to focus on the details which are often shown against a blurred background, that is events that are too horrifying to be represented directly. A story of cruelty and pain cannot be told in its entirety – the narrative thus employs gaps, understatements, allusions, and suggestions that can only be read by those who have extra-textual knowledge, which in a sense prepares them to face the historical truth. Thus, the detail becomes a sign, a kind of reference which points to information from outside the text, historical facts which the child either knows about or which their parents and guardians know about and share with the child during reading.

Individual scenes are as if captured in a photograph found in a family album: a Jewish wedding, a family Sabbath, special dishes become pretexts which tell the story of a culture that no longer exists. The wedding of Dorka and Chaim, the protagonists of Cezary Harasimowicz's

Mirabelka [The Mirabelle plum tree], illustrated by Marta Kurczewska, is showered in purple light. Dusk, pieces of a broken glass, scattered beads – all this is both nostalgic and points to the looming disaster. The glass was broken, as is customary in Jewish tradition, to commemorate the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, but this image points to a different disaster, which will not only wipe out many temples from the face of the earth but also destroy almost an entire nation. The first part of *Mirabelka* only seemingly has a happy ending. The second part opens with the birth of Noamek, the son of Dorka and Chaim, and a description of the Mirabelle plum tree bearing fruit. The two main characters, who are also great friends, give and create life but the illustration found in the book is not joyful. The drawing shows a high brick wall, behind which one can barely see the tip of the Mirabelle plum tree. It is not a ghetto wall, not yet, but a wall between the backyards of neighboring tenement houses. However, placed in the foreground, the wall grows huge and makes it impossible to see the world; it makes it impossible to explore the world, foreshadowing the terror of segregation.

In her article on the visual synecdoche in children's books about the Second World War, Katarzyna Wądolny-Tatar draws attention to one of Jola Richter-Magnuszewska's illustrations in Beata Ostrowicka's book *Jest taka historia. Opowieść o Januszu Korczaku* [There is such a story. The story of Janusz Korczak]. In the double-page spread illustration, legs in black boots trample over white houses with red roofs. This image interrupts the story of everyday life in the Orphanage run by Korczak and introduces the reader to the most difficult parts of the plot. Wądolny-Tatar writes:

> The occupation and destruction of Warsaw was vividly expressed through the drawing of army boots with the trouser legs of gray German uniforms, with characteristic stripes on the sides, tucked into them. The perspective: showing one officer instead of thousands and parts of the body of the person who is "trampling (also literally in the drawing) all over the city instead of his full figure exemplifies the *pars pro toto* principle. The German giant represents the power of the invader and the scale of destruction. His power is also manifested in how he stands – firmly, with both feet on the ground – and his silhouette is evenly distributed on both opposing pages.[2]

Details in the illustrations often point to the unsaid, suggest a continuation of the interrupted story. The backyard wall is a harbinger of the ghetto walls. When Chana's braid gets caught in the door of a cattle wagon in Renata Piątkowska's book *Wszystkie moje mamy* [All my moms], as illustrated by Maciej Szymanowicz, the reader cannot help but imagine the little girl's fate (*Wszystkie moje mamy*, p. 22). In *Jest taka historia. Opowieść o Januszu* Korczaku, Korczak's book and glasses, a child's shoe, toys, and crayons found scattered on railway tracks imply what happened to the children from the Orphanage from (pp. 58–59). Glasses and shoes lying around also inevitably evoke associations with the warehouses of Auschwitz, as long as the reader knows about the history of the described events. Perhaps the drawings of shoes, in itself an inconspicuous detail, found in Iwona Chmielewska's *Pamiętnik Blumki*

[2] Katarzyna Wądolny-Tatar, "Synekdocha jako trop wizualny w książkowych ilustracjach dla dzieci (na przykładzie wybranych narracji słowa i obrazu o drugiej wojnie światowej)" [The synecdoche as a visual trope in book illustrations for children (the example of selected word and image narratives about the Second World War), in: *Literatura i inne sztuki w przestrzeni edukacyjnej dziecka* [Literature and other arts in the children's educational space], ed. Alicja Ungerheuer-Gołąb, Urszula Kopeć (Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, 2016), 169–170.

[Blumka's Diary], terrify only the informed reader, insofar as the sinister history behind them is not explicitly recounted. However, whoever has seen the piles of shoes in Auschwitz, looked at the photographs or visited the museum at least once, will remember it forever. This image will come back to the reader; it will, in a way, be superimposed on the image of the elegant slippers on display at Rosenbaum's shoe shop, on the image of Janusz Korczak cleaning children's shoes, and on the image of the shoes abandoned by the railway tracks. In the perspective of the Holocaust, the world of things was privileged not only because, as Bożena Shallcross writes, material objects were looted, gathered, and catalogued. Shoes turn into a sign, one of the signs, which must be read and interpreted in the wider historical context. The Holocaust objectified people and rendered objects more important.[3] The reader's knowledge and/or memories transform seemingly insignificant parts of the text and illustrations into important testaments.

Playing with the perspective: Zooming in and out

The fairy-tale opposition between what is small and what is large, strongly rooted in childhood experience, was reimagined in World War II narratives. In Baczyński's poems, as Edward Balcerzan writes, "to tame means to scale something down."[4] Understanding requires distance, a perspective which renders people and things smaller. They can then be held in children's hands and thus become credible and accessible. Scaling down may be seen as "heroic,"[5] insofar as it paradoxically allows one to overcome childhood weaknesses and face reality. Scaling up, expanding, filling up the space, in turn, becomes a form of self-defense, defense against time running out and the constant threat of death.[6]

In children's literature, the opposition between what is small and what is large plays an important role, and a shift in perspective allows one to distance oneself from the dangerous world, escape, and find a temporary shelter. The size of different objects, it turns out, depends on the distance from which they are observed. The viewer may thus influence how they perceive reality by playing with the size of referents, by zooming in and out. Some things, however, pushed by an invisible force, must be in the foreground; they cannot be moved and thus invalidated. Historical facts endow otherwise unimportant or secondary details with great importance, so much so that they determine the value of a person. They cannot be removed from one's field of vision; they are huge, and they obscure all positive and negative aspects of the characters.

Usually, however, much depends upon the adopted perspective. Zooming in on the detail, bringing it to the fore, renders it more important, while zooming out makes the object seem smaller, almost unnoticeable – it disappears in the background. Little Helena from Joanna Rudnińska's novel *Kotka Brygidy* [Brygida's cat] understands such dependencies. Helena climbs a tree in her yard to look at the war-torn world from above, over the head of

[3] Bożena Shallcross, *Rzeczy i Zagłada* [The Holocaust and Things] (Kraków: Universitas, 2012), 25.

[4] Balcerzan, 37.

[5] Balcerzan, 37.

[6] Balcerzan, 39.

her babysitter, who is franticly running around below. Sitting in a tree, Helena sees three places of worship (a synagogue, an Orthodox church, and a Catholic church) where, according to her, three Gods live. She can also see the progressing destruction of the city, the glow in the sky over the burning ghetto, but also Stańcia, who from her perspective seems tiny, and her instructions are insignificant. Such shifts in the significance attributed to different events and people are one of the important themes of *Kotka Brygidy*, which shows how war transforms insignificant features into details of great importance – they ultimately define one's identity and place in history. Being Jewish is one of such features. For some characters, for example for the assimilated Kamil, it has been insignificant, and it is suddenly perceived as crucial.

The lives of different characters are also determined by their appearance, by little details that have not been important before. The comments about "looking good" (that is not looking Jewish) or "not looking good" (looking Jewish) may be found in many books. While children do not always understand such references, they always arouse curiosity or horror, grow to extraordinary sizes, come to the fore. Zosia, the protagonist of Andrzej Marek Grabowski's *Wojna na Pięknym Brzegu* [War on the Beautiful Embankment], with illustrations by Joanna Rusinek, heard her mother say that the Jewish woman hiding behind the wardrobe "looked 'good' but 'her son' did not look 'good.'"[7] Zosia thought Janek would have protruding ears or a hump. She was very surprised when she found out that

> The boy was just lovely. […] with jet-black, dreamy eyes and curly hair so black that in the lamplight it seemed navy blue. The only thing that could be pointed out was that his nose was too big, but I thought his aquiline nose suited him very well. He looked like a pirate of the south seas or an Arabian outlaw.[8]

While Zosia does not understand what it means to "look good," she knows that keeping the existence of the dark-haired boy secret is a matter of life and death. A different Zosia, the three-year-old protagonist of Agata Tuszyńska and Iwona Chmielewska's *Mama zawsze wraca* [Mom Always Comes Back], dreams of being an adult woman who looks "good." She thinks that it will keep her safe, although she does not understand what exactly she should look like.

The detail as a pillar of postmemory – biography

The detail is remembered, it is as if photographed, arrested in time. Susan Sontag writes: "The attempts by photographers to bolster up a depleted sense of reality contribute to the depletion. Our oppressive sense of the transience of everything is more acute since cameras gave us the means to 'fix' the fleeting moment."[9]

[7] Andrzej Marek Grabowski, *Wojna na Pięknym Brzegu* [War on the Beautiful Embankment] (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Literatura, 2019), 57.

[8] Grabowski, 57.

[9] Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), 140.

The detail captured in a frame, also in a literary frame, on the one hand seems to exist outside of time, and, on the other hand, it clearly points to the passage of time. Stopped in mid-movement, the object, which comes to the reader again and again in the sentences which follow one another in a descriptive passage, lasts, although its owner inevitably passes away. It is no coincidence that, as Sontag points out, photography is the medium of postmemory.[10] A single moment, gesture, or situation captured in a frame gives rise to a story that refers to memories or builds a post-memory narrative. Photography is the art of the detail.

A post-memory narrative can be based on a number of details. Writing about biographical narratives devoted to Janusz Korczak's life, Małgorzata Wójcik-Dudek argues:

> Biographical narratives addressed to children also gave the story a certain rhythm, although it is certainly not based on chronology but on the detail. The detail allows one to capture the essence of Korczak's life story, without celebrating its tragic finale. Indeed, what lies at the center of the rebellious hero's life story is the detail or, in other words, different centers that are everywhere and nowhere. Episodicity, anecdotality, and orality are not often found in mainstream narratives, because such stories function outside the center. The biography is therefore based on a fragment, on a fragmented confession, which, when arranged and organized, turns into a representation, into a narrative.[11]

Thus, Korczak's biography is told through a series of attributes, significant details that create the image of a person. Korczak's life is made of individual scenes and situations not only in the biographies discussed by Wójcik-Dudek, but also in the books *Jest taka historia* and *Pamiętnik Blumki*. In *Pamiętnik Blumki*, Korczak is seen in and through the details found in the illustrations and noticed by the children who lived in the Orphanage. We can see Korczak looking at young pea shoots grown by children, hanging shirts on a clothesline to dry, feeding sparrows, holding an umbrella over a group of children, holding a box of crayons in his hands, and wearing an apron with a floral pattern. Tiny flowers may also be found on Blumka's dress – they look like forget-me-nots, flowers of memory, because one keeps "a diary so that one does not forget."[12] Such scenes and details make up the story of Janusz Korczak. They become sites of memory, *lieux de mémoire* captured in the book, around which histories and stories may further grow.

In one of Gabriela Cichowska's illustrations to Adam Jaromir's *Ostatnie przedstawienie panny Esterki* [The last performance of little Esther], Doctor Korczak waters the geraniums. Outside the window we can see barbed wire and on the other side of the street we can see a German guard. The doctor is thinking: "I'm watering the flowers, poor plants. Plants in a Jewish Orphanage. Some respite for the dry soil."[13] Growing flowers, a peaceful and inconspicuous

[10]Sontag, 140–141.

[11]Małgorzata Wójcik-Dudek, *W(y)czytać Zagładę. Praktyki postpamięci w polskiej literaturze XXI wieku dla dzieci i młodzieży* [Reading the Holocaust. Post-memory practices in 21st-century Polish children's and young adult literature] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2016), 113.

[12]Iwona Chmielewska, *Pamiętnik Blumki* (Poznań: Media Rodzina, 2011), 48.

[13]Adam Jaromir, *Ostatnie przedstawienie panny Esterki* [The last performance of little Esther] (Poznań: Media Rodzina, 2014), 94.

activity, helps one forget about the reality of living in the ghetto, if only for a moment. Korczak consciously chooses to pay attention to the details – to the banal, the trivial, the everyday – and thus challenges the *status quo*. Wójcik-Dudek writes that:

> A tactician in a weak position pays attention to details; he is able to render specific observations universal. It's an obvious choice. A strategy that is devoid of rules, devoid of constants, and defies all classifications, must be based on details; if the rules change, details can be quickly forgotten so that one may focus on a completely different center.[14]

As we move from one detail to another – watering the geraniums, feeding the sparrows, and looking after the children – we reach, linearly, the tragic finale. The selection of anecdotal stories and individual scenes, however, resembles how memory works, insofar as it brings to mind seemingly unimportant frames, akin to photos randomly selected from an album.

Identity details – Star of David armbands

Some details in Holocaust narratives become important in the text because their meanings and significance are determined by the war. Literature shows how war changes how we perceive the world. It also shows how the meaning of certain signs and symbols changes, as they are re-defined by the occupiers. A particularly significant detail, one which recurs in many of the discussed works, is the armband with the Star of David (or, in general, the hexagram as a symbol). Helena, the protagonist of *Kotka Brygidy*, at first does not realize what the mysterious armband means. However, the armband appears more and more often, stubbornly pushes itself to the fore, catches the eye, and occupies the girl's attention. When Helena finally puts the armband with this sign on her shoulder, she feels its ominous power – people look at her differently, the neighbors no longer smile when they see her, strangers try not to look at her. The meaning of the religious emblem changed as a result of war – war rendered it dangerous; war disfigured it, insofar as a detail which is viewed too closely takes on strange, sometimes grotesque shapes. It takes over the whole picture. It is no longer confined to the background. The Star of David – the seal of Solomon, a symbol of Judaism which may be found on tombstones, synagogues, or ceremonial textiles – is transformed into the stigma of death.

In one of the illustrations found in *Pamiętnik Blumki*, a windowpane with six cuts on it (vaguely resembling a bluish Star of David) breaks. This ominous foreshadowing of the Holocaust is thus confronted with the memories of one of orphans, Szymek the rascal, who used to "steal and throw rocks at windows."[15] In the Orphanage, Szymek takes part in cooking competitions organized by Madame Stephanie [Stefania Wilczyńska]. Blumka is a little afraid of her impulsive friend, but his misdeeds, assessed in the wider context, seem completely innocent in the face of the evil that is about to take place, as announced not only by the drawing of the Star of David, but also by the shower scene on the same page. The boy, who cries after chopping onions, is taking a shower. Water is pouring onto his head, and it looks like lined paper, like

[14]Wójcik-Dudek, 119.
[15]Chmielewska, 12.

a page in Blumka's diary. The scene is a terrifying foreshadowing of gas chambers, and a triangular piece of glass, which the main character has gently picked up, resembles a concentration camp badge.

Young Szymon, the main character of the novel *Wszystkie moje mamy*, also quickly realized that "these armbands are not decorative."[16] His older sister explained to him emphatically that the Star of David is a stigma, but one cannot get rid of it:

> The point is that the Germans must know at a glance who among the people on the street is a Jew. […] A Jew can be hit, knocked over, or even shot for no reason. […] They announced that they would immediately kill any Jew who showed up in the city without an armband.[17]

It comes as no surprise that Szymon, who managed to escape from the ghetto, is relieved when he can get rid of the armband. However, when he verbalized these feelings (he is a child after all), he had to flee again, as if the memory itself determined who he was:

> Namely, once I was standing with my mother Maria in a long line; we wanted to buy some bread. I was wearing a fur-lined navy-blue coat. It wasn't new, but it was very warm. Then I remembered something:
> "I used to have an armband with a big blue star on it. I always had to wear it on my sleeve. But now I don't have to, right?"
> Everyone heard what I said and stared at us.[18]

There is no such perspective, no such temporal or spatial distance, that would invalidate the meaning and the significance of the armband. Whoever brushes against it is marked with the inalienable stigma of the detail that defines and determines the life of the individual.

The perspective of a hiding place

Hiding places – a key motif in Holocaust stories – determine the perception of the world through details. In a claustrophobic space, one can neither look at the world from a distance nor keep one's distance. In a hiding place, everything is right next to the observer, close to their face, the lack of perspective overwhelms and makes the details grow and change their shapes. In frescoes which decorate cathedral walls, the painter must take into account the perspective so that the figures, viewed from below, appear proportionate. Similarly, whoever is looking at details in a claustrophobic hiding place should take into account how the extreme close-up deforms the image. However, it is difficult when one is forced to look (out) and forced to hide in a confined space. Then things appear to be something else than what they really are. They expand and transform. They take over the world. This is why in Irena Landau's *Ostatnie piętro* [The top floor] a little mouse, who lives in a den in a dark, cramped

[16]Beata Piątkowska, *Wszystkie moje mamy* [All my moms] (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Literatura, 2018), 11.
[17]Piątkowska, 11–12.
[18]Piątkowska, 32.

wardrobe on the top floor of a Warsaw tenement house, becomes young Cela's friend and playmate. The girl, who has to be quiet as a mouse in a dark, stuffy room, seems to share the same fate as the frightened animal – she is dependent on people who also pose a threat to her very existence.

Children in hiding places often focus their attention on details. Limited space, being confined to a small room, a kind of mental isolation, and being cut off from the outside world (as a security measure) forces them to change their perspective, to look closely, to be satisfied with the perception of little pieces of reality. In *Mama zawsze wraca*, little Zosia learns what the world looks like outside her hiding place from her mother. It is her mother who brings her chestnuts, catkins, colorful autumn leaves with raindrops on them. She draws her a sledge and tells Zosia about Warsaw before the war. Mom also finds a piece of fabric with a floral pattern on it from which she makes a dress for Zosia's doll. Zosia becomes a mother to her doll. The love that the girl has for the doll is a reflection of the relationship between the daughter and the mother – it gives Zosia a sense of security and hope for survival. In a way, focusing on the doll, whose name is Zuzia, distracts Zosia from the apocalypse which is taking place around her – the detail obscures the whole, it is in focus, while the background remains blurred. As an adult, Zosia begins to tell her story by introducing the doll: "Her name is Zuzia. She is my doll. My little girl."[19] When she was taking care of the doll, she felt strong like her mother. She says:

> I was her mom. I felt great because I could be a mom, not a child. It was cold, we had nothing to keep us warm. And mom always knows where to find a blanket or a piece of fabric and where to find a potato or a carrot. […] Being a mom is the best. Everyone wants to catch the child, everyone wants to shoot the child, take the child away from their parents. I didn't want to be a child anymore, I just wanted to grow up. And be an adult.[20]

In comparison with the doll, the girl feels big, tall, and important. She becomes a mom, a creature that seems almost omnipotent to children. Zosia fights, trying to make sure that nothing can separate her from her doll, because she believes that mom should never leave her daughter. Life brutally verified her illusions. After the war, when Zosia and her mom were on their way to Israel, a group of orphaned children explained to her that in reality all moms die. The cabin in which Zosia's seriously ill mother lay was no longer a safe place. The vast sea – contrasted with the claustrophobic cabin and the claustrophobic hiding place, which is still present in her memories – no longer draws attention to the detail; all hope is lost. The vast world cannot be sewn up, pieced together, as Zosia would like. A ball of yarn and a piece of fabric with roses on it will not save anyone anymore.

[19]Agata Tuszyńska, Iwona Chmielewska, *Mama zawsze wraca* [Mom Always Comes Back] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Dwie Siostry, 2020), 1.

[20]Tuszyńska, Chmielewska, 19.

One or many

Noam, Blumka, Jutka, Szymek – different books tell personalized stories of different protagonists, which are often firmly rooted in the real world, based upon facts, and reminiscent of real people. Children's biographies – although each life has its own dramatic course – are representative of what happened to a generation and a nation. Twelve orphaned children surrounding Janusz Korczak in the photograph which gave rise to *Pamiętnik Blumki* may remind one of twelve disciples gathered around Christ, and they may also symbolize the twelve generations of Israel. What happened to those children is emblematic of the entire nation. The lives of these characters are monuments, built of words, erected not to commemorate a specific person but to commemorate all the people whom they represent. One of the characters in *Ostatnie piętro*, a Jewish boy who leads children out of the ghetto and is active in the underground resistance group on the Aryan side, is thus described in the author's note:

> Writing about Jerzy-Piotr-Chaim, the author thought about all Jewish heroic boys who fought for dignity and honor and died during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.[21]

A girl in a red dress – Dosia, Dorotka, or Dotty from Cezary Harasimowicz's *Mirabelka*, with illustrations by Marta Kurczewska – embodies the idea of representativeness. Different characters, with different cultural, national, and racial backgrounds, are in a sense the same little girl who, in a dialogue with the Mirabelle plum tree, discover their identity and roots. A red dress, a string of beads – these details recur in the illustrations of generations of little girls who must remember or learn about horrific war events in order to discover who they are and where they come from. A red coat, a reference to Roma Ligocka's book, decorations which resemble scattered beads from a Jewish workshop – such details have a hidden meaning and help place different characters in the wider context of history and tradition. Beads and sequins scattered in the yard under the Mirabelle plum tree are both a realistic detail, insofar as they enhance the mimetic and the factual, and a symbol. Beads, Mirabelle plums, and music shown in the illustration as colorful balls floating in the air – such small round objects are everywhere, even in the soil, water, and air. And Jewish culture is everywhere too. Although no longer part of the post-war world, Jewish culture will forever shape the neighborhood of Nalewki.

Representing details faithfully, Daniel Arasse argues, lies at the heart of mimesis, because it places emphasis on representing unique features of the world.[22] The detail, especially thus defined (as something particular; in Italian *particolare* means a small part), forges a connection between the text and the real (the world beyond the text). However, finding and concentrating on a detail depends to a large extent on the viewer/reader, who, in the act of perception, cuts the whole into little pieces, separates something from the larger whole. In this sense, the detail is "cut out" from the work, which breaks up the composition of the picture and blurs

[21]Irena Landau, *Ostatnie piętro* [The top floor] (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Literatura, 2015), 86.
[22]Daniel Arasse, *Le détail: Pour une histoire rapprochée de la peinture* (Paris: Flammarion, 1992), 1.

the wider context.[23] Arasse writes that the detail-*dettaglio*, also moves the image, not only because it isolates one element, submerging the whole, but above all because it breaks down the regular construction of perspective, which throughout the entire history of mimetic painting controlled the viewer's physical relationship to the image so that the full "effect" would manifest itself from the right distance.[24]

A similar shift takes place in children's literature. Placing emphasis on the detail, however, does not invalidate the whole represented in the text (usually shown in a discontinuous and fragmentary manner). Instead, it points to a different sphere of meanings which facilitates understanding. It is impossible to talk about the Holocaust in its entirety. Such events must consist of pieces, fragments, and literary details which point to the extra-textual reality. Details are gaps which connect literature with the personal experience of the author and the reader. Fragmented memories of real experiences and events found in the literary text speak through details; they, as if, reach out to the reader. The bond between the author and the reader, the bond between lifelike characters and young readers, which this gap creates, touches the human heart, evoking compassion and fear. Through literature and history, which may be seen through such gaps, the reader is able to experience the Aristotelian catharsis.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

[23]Arasse, 160.
[24]Arasse, 160.

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KEYWORDS

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

the Holocaust

Abstract:
This article examines what role details and other similar artistic devices play in representing the Holocaust in contemporary Polish children's literature. The focus on the detail often forces a shift in perspective, both in the fine arts and in literature. Focusing on prominent and meaningful details renders the story less direct, and the cruelty of history is revealed through gaps in the narrative. Details stand for the unsaid and refer the reader to extra-textual knowledge. Details also allow one to engage in a game of perspectives: by zooming in and out on specific scenes or events one, alternatively, renders them more or less important. Children's books about the Holocaust are primarily meant to build memory and post-memory, and employ details to that end. Around and through details, the successive layers of stories may grow.

synecdoche

ILLUSTRATION

postmemory

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