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Post-Holocaust Migrations of Empathy: *My Star* by Felicja Raszkin-Nowak

Felicja Raszkin-Nowak is a person known and unknown at the same time.¹ She is known in Białystok which as a result of the Holocaust became her native town. In her modest book, *My Star*, published in 1991, she describes the time she spent in the Białystok ghetto and her life in hiding in one of Podlasie villages (Nowak 1991: 203). Originally written in Polish, the memoirs were translated into English by Andrzej Bursa and published in 1996 in Toronto as *My Star. Memoirs of a Holocaust Survivor* with the introduction by Diana Kuprel and the afterword by Andrzej Szczypiorski (Nowak 1996: 179).

In 1997, the memoirs were translated into Danish and published twice (again with Szczypiorski's afterword), and then in 2001 into German (in a rendition

1 This text, originally titled, *My Star: Memoir of a Holocaust Survivor: First-Person Experiences and Comparisons with Others' Experiences* was presented at the 52nd Annual ASEES (Association for Slavic, East European, & Eurasian Studies) Convention (November 5–8 and 14–15, 2020) in a panel titled: “The Białystok Ghetto: Testimonies of Rebellion and their Literary and Linguistic Perspectives.” *Moja gwiazda (My Star)* was published under the names Felicja Nowak and Felicja Raszkin-Nowak. I use the author's double name in the text.

from English), and, finally, in 2011 into Esperanto² (Raszkin-Nowak came from the Esperanto speaking family).³ The book is thus available in a few languages, but it is not, I think, as recognized as it deserves to be (cf. Ruben 31–44; Ławski 195–222).

There are two reasons for this negligence. First, Raszkin-Nowak’s perspective on the Holocaust is marked by the emphasis she places on her Polish-Jewish identity.⁴ The text is devoid of judgmental tone—there are no accusations or hasty conclusions, and its spiritual message is encapsulated in the epigraph “In memory of Those, who gave me life, and Those who lost it” (Nowak 1991: 1). Second, the Polish publication of the memoirs is far from perfect—amateurish, badly edited and what is even worse, never republished because the author sold her copyrights to a publishing house which does not exist any longer. The book that should be on the reading list in every secondary school in Białystok is still a rarity, even in its imperfect editorial form.⁵

- 2 F. Raszkin-Nowak, *Min stjerno: erindringer*. Trans. Runa Kildegaard Klukowska. København: Fremad, 1997, 275 pages; *Mein Stern: Erinnerungen einer Holocaust-Überlebenden*. Trans. Anna Kaiser. Gerlingen: Bleicher, 2001, 347 pages; *Mia stelo*. Trans. Tomasz Chmielik. Białystok: Książnica Podlaska im. Łukasza Górnickiego, 2011, 189 pages.
- 3 Her uncle was Jakub Szapiro (1897–1941), an Esperantist from Białystok, also well-known outside Poland, who was murdered in Białystok by the Germans. He wrote several books, including: *La mondmilito kaj Esperanto*, Saratov 1915 (in Russian), (World War and Esperanto); *Jakobo Sapiro, Gvidilo tra Białystok, la nask-urbo de nia Majstro*, Koln 1923 (Guide to Białystok, the city of our Master’s birth); *Babiladoj de bonhumora Zamenho-fano* (1922, 1924). He is also warmly remembered by Felicja Raszkin-Nowak (2018: 29): “As one of the first, Jakub Szapiro demanded to establish a Zamenhof museum at Zielona Street, where the creator of Esperanto once lived... The flat at 33 Lipowa Street was a meeting place that hosted Esperantists, not only Polish ones.” Szapiro was shot by the Germans in Pietrasze together with Felicja Nowak’s father, Jakub Raszkin, which was a special trauma for the writer. Jakub Szapiro’s wife and son Artur were murdered in the camp.
- 4 I understand Polish-Jewish identity as the heroine of my text saw it. Her daughter, Beata Ruben, referring to her mother’s words, writes: “I would like to start with a quote from a poem by the great poet Julian Tuwim: ‘This is my house – four walls of poems/ In my beautiful homeland – Polish.’ Felicja Raszkin-Nowak chose this homeland. And so she remained faithful. As she herself said in an interview for Television Polonia: ‘I treat Poland as my homeland, whether someone likes it or not. I speak this language. And I think in this language. And whatever I do in the Polish community and Jewish clubs, I do it with Polish culture in mind, because it is in me’” (Cf. Ruben 31).
- 5 The work was published by the defunct “Versus” publishing house, and was reissued by the now defunct academic publishing house “Trans Humana.”

Apart from her memoirs, Raszkin-Nowak published a small volume of poems, *Stars in Darkness* (Białystok 2003), with the afterword by Professor Teresa Zaniewska. It includes the verses composed during the German occupation and in the years that followed. These days the volume is also hardly available to readers.

Raszkin-Nowak came from the family of Białystok's merchants and manufacturers. Searching for better life opportunities, her parents moved to Warsaw, where she was born in 1924. Almost every year, she would return to Białystok to spend Christmas and vacations, and her grandmother's house became an emotional center of her private world. When the WWII broke out she was fifteen years old. With her parents, she fled from Warsaw to Białystok, where they soon were closed in the ghetto. Out of the whole family, she was the only one to survive—her father was executed by fire squad in Pietrasze; her mother and grandfather died in Treblinka. Raszkin-Nowak, as will be described in detail later, managed to escape from the ghetto and went into hiding. She writes:

During my two-year stay in the Białystok Ghetto, I lost my nearest and dearest in successive “actions” of Nazi crimes. All relatives from both my Father's and Mother's sides were deported to death camps. Extremely painful was the loss of my grandmother Maria Szapiro, to whom I was very attached and had been coming from Warsaw since early childhood. The most tragic moment was the separation from my Mother and the impossibility of hiding together. (2018: 22)

Raszkin-Nowak offered her life story from the perspective of a fifty-year-long distance. The events described in the 200-page long book were noted down on impulse. In 1987, she read the article by Tomasz Wiśniewski in Białystok's *Kurier Podlaski*.⁶ The article mentions “my war time story in this town, as well as three of my poems” (Nowak 1991: 5). As she later noted, “I was deeply moved that after all those years somebody found my war time accounts. And again I felt the urge to describe my experiences and recall my happy childhood, my family and relatives” (Nowak 1991: 5).

6 T. Wiśniewski published an article about the writer (no. 162) in the now-defunct *Kurier Podlaski* in 1987. He corresponded with Raszkin-Nowak for years, and maintains correspondence with her daughter Beata Ruben. I thank Dr. T. Wiśniewski for this and other information (e.g. about the Esperanto version of the film about the writer). Cf. also: Wiśniewski 30.

The structure of the volume reflects the original design. Raszkin-Nowak depicts the life before the Holocaust (“Childhood,” “School,” “The Appeal of School Uniform”), the Holocaust time (“The War,” “Białystok with the Hammer and Sickle,” “The German Białystok,” “The Humming of Machines,” “Enclosed in the Ghetto,” “Displacement,” “Life with the Death Sentence”), and the life after the ghetto (“A Return to Life,” “Political Upheavals,” “Epilogue”).

Despite a half-century time distance, Raszkin-Nowak’s account retains its exceptional vividness and the accuracy with which it reconstructs the topography and culture of the pre-war and war-time Białystok. The simplicity of the text wins over heart with its unusual mode of narration, which can be called “emphatic realism.”⁷ While representing the horror of the Holocaust, it nevertheless looks for the traces of goodness among the inhuman, which Michał Głowiński called “Obliteration” (of Jewish people) (2001: 13–15; 2005).

After the war, Raszkin-Nowak stayed in Poland and took up a job in Polish Radio. In March 1968, she left the Polish People’s Republic, settling down in Copenhagen and freelancing for Radio Free Europe. She worked in various Polish and Jewish organizations as well as in the Royal Danish Library. In the Polish Embassy in Copenhagen she organized meetings dedicated to notable emigrants of Polish and Jewish origin.⁸ As remarked by her colleague, Roman Śmigielski:

Felicja managed to do something almost impossible, namely to partly integrate Poles and Jews. Polish Jews visited Polish clubs to listen her talk, and Polish emigrants, often for the first time in their lives, crossed

7 The category of “emphatic realism” appears in relation to nineteenth-century literature, for example in the work of Ewa Paczoska (2018). The researcher argues that: “The novel in the edition of James and Prus could certainly be placed in the formula of ‘emphatic realism,’ i.e. focused on the way the characters feel the world, where the camera’s eye is directed at the sphere of impressions, feelings, the relationship between what is hidden and what is manifested” (76). With regard to the world presented in Raszkin-Nowak’s work, the point is to emphasize the relationship between the author’s subject and the described world. This relationship is based on the category of *mimesis*, but one whose limits are determined by the author’s sympathy with all the characters she describes. This has fundamental consequences for the way the world is presented: this type of realism does not emphasize the effects of human actions, but focuses on an attempt to penetrate its deep motivation.

8 See the extensive photo material devoted to the writer in *Żydzi wschodniej Polski*, Series v1 8, 47–50, 399–417; cf. Romanowicz 2018.

the thresholds of Jewish clubs or Jewish community districts. (qtd in Ruben 41)

Raszkin-Nowak died in 2015 at the age of 90. In Białystok there is a communal garden named after her,⁹ and in 2017 she was commemorated in the International Conference “Jews of Eastern Poland” dedicated to Jews of Białystok.¹⁰ The exhibition that accompanied the event was opened by her daughter, Beata Ruben. In 2017, thanks to the support of the Center of Civic Education Poland-Israel her short memoir, *My Białystok Family*, was published in Białystok (Olech, Ruben 40).

Returning to *My Star*, we need to pose the question what makes Raszkin-Nowak’s perspective on history emerging from her memoirs so unique. I argue that while in her text we may discover the elements well-known from other Holocaust testimonies, in *My Star* they are presented with exceptional intensity and in a unique arrangement.

The memoirist returns to her war time experiences after half a century. Her recollections fuse two traumas—one originating from the war and the other from the emigration after March 1968. Her view of March is traumatic, but filtered through the awareness that she is leaving behind the devastated and often robbed graves of her fathers in the country. She writes: “The children first gave the impulse to leave. What is left for them? The Polish language, love of the countryside, memories, love of Warsaw, Białystok, friends and a HUGE regret” (Raszkin-Nowak 2018: 30; Ruben 36). The assumed perspective does not mean the estrangement from Polish culture. On the contrary, the link is strengthened. On the one hand, Polish culture is, along with the Jewish one, the context of her growth and maturity. The Polish language is not the chosen one but the sole natural means of expression in words. Raszkin-Nowak does not pass over March 1968 in silence nor does she euphemize it. As she writes:

- 9 Raszkin-Nowak’s Square was opened on November 1, 2019 near Czysta Street. The writer was also commemorated with the film *Garnek pełen złota (Pot Full of Gold)*, made by Białystok Television and directed by Tomasz Wiśniewski and Paweł Garbnecki (2008; in English and Esperanto) and a radio report: “Felicia Nowak’s Białystok”—broadcast by Teresa Kudelska and Jolanta Szczygieł-Rogowska on August 17, 2020.
- 10 Conference “Żydzi wschodniej Polski. Żydzi białostoccy: od początków do 1939 roku. Kontekst środkowoeuropejski” (“Jews of Eastern Poland. Białystok Jews: From the Beginnings to 1939. The Central European Context”), Białystok June 12–13, 2017. Patron: Felicja Raszkin-Nowak (1924–2015).

If anybody tells me that March 1968 has left no mark on their lives, and they are satisfied with their arrival in a foreign country, forgetting about their past experiences and their careers, I will not believe them. The March emigration was a painful thorn that pierced everybody's heart.

For me, Poland is a native country, irrespective of whether people like it or not. I speak the Polish language and I think in it. Whatever I do in Polish and Jewish clubs, I do it with the native culture on my mind. This is inside of me and cannot be eradicated.

As I think, we must still talk about the March 1968 events because the wrongdoing has not been made up for. Even if the Polish Parliament made an official apology, which was a nice symbolic gesture, the problem has not been solved. Therefore it is important to return to it over and over again; and talk about it.

When I was leaving, I did not feel to be an offended Jewish woman but as a deeply hurt Polish citizen. (qtd in Ruben 37)

How does March 1968 shape her view of the Holocaust?¹¹ Both dramas throw light on each other. Both are the trials of humanity, which some faced up to and some did not. The time distance to events being described in a written form often evokes the desire to interpret them *ex post* and to endow them with a didactic dimension, or to inscribe them into an ideological context, in the sphere of the dichotomy “for” or “against.” Raszkin-Nowak avoids both moralizing and overtly didactic tones.¹² The testimony she gives is sufficiently powerful to shock the readers. The representations of the scenes from the Białystok ghetto are deeply moving by their brutal realism, but their horror is filtered through the controlling “I” of the narrator:

While we were leaving, the horse-drawn carts filled with corpses were passing by. The inert bodies were placed in layers, their dangling limbs hitting the tires. A German soldier was walking in the front, two Jewish policemen with dropped heads lagging behind the cart.

- 11 It is undoubtedly a separate profiling, not devoid of a feeling of bitterness, but strongly differentiating the participants of March '68 both in terms of political and human behavior.
- 12 She is far from extreme conclusions, generalizing outlooks. She carries the stigma of the survivor, of the “smeared,” to use Irit Amiel's formula, but this does not take away her strength, she is still active in the Polish and Jewish Copenhagen milieu. Cf. Olech 2017.

I was particularly moved by the sight of an old man sitting among the corpses. Thin, with a pale complexion and long beard, he seemed totally indifferent, looking far ahead, perhaps into the netherworld. (Nowak 1991: 124)

When she writes “I was particularly moved by the sight of an old man...,” she becomes a commentator and witness guiding us through the nonhuman world. Yet assuming the perspective of an old person, she recognizes a set of contradictions—the drama of worldviews, the collapse of religion and culture:

Christ preached about Loving our neighbors, about Kindness and Equality, but what has remained of that teaching? How many people acted in accordance with His instructions? What should we think of all those crimes, unparalleled in history, of the mass extermination and gas chambers, of the plan to eradicate the whole nation? After all the perpetrators were Christians, with the slogan “Gott mit uns” on the belt buckles. (Nowak 1991: 124)

It is worth remembering that similar remarks can easily be found in numerous accounts written either on the spot or after the war. However, what makes Raszkin-Nowak’s narrative unique is the emphasis placed on the rescue that is possible thanks to the benevolence of other human beings—she experiences it, in a psychological dimension, in the ghetto, and later, when she finds shelter in a barn owned by local peasants, remaining there for a year. While in the ghetto she seeks solace in the books by Henryk Sienkiewicz, Heinrich Heine, in Rudyard Kipling’s *The Jungle Book* or Gustave Flaubert’s *Salambo*. She diligently learns German and studies the writings of the eighteenth- and nineteenth century Polish and German authors.

Two writers are especially important for her during that time. The first one is Johann Wolfgang von Goethe—just before the war she takes part in the school theatre adaptation of *Reynard the Fox*. But her infatuation with Goethe develops further, in an unexpected way. While in hiding, she translates into Polish his *Erlkönig* (1782), the poem about the death of the child assailed by a supernatural being.¹³ Completed on May 20, 1944, it is an amateurish rendition, yet informed by a powerful eloquence. Here the death comes silently but

13 As we know, it was also an important work for Bruno Schulz’s imagination. It has been written about many times. Cf., e.g. Czabanowska-Wróbel 1994, Fieguth 2015.

in a sinister manner. It is not the fall into abyss, but a form of liberation; the abduction into an unknown world. Thus, the words of the nineteenth-century German writer—the fact that is meaningful in itself—record the death experience of the Jewish teenage girl.

The key scene of *My Star* depicts the moment of escape and parting with mother. This fragment exemplifies the force of Raszkin-Nowak's emphatic realism. It is worth quoting also because one of the central characters is a German soldier:

Other women gathered around, urging me to flee. They wanted at least one person among them to survive. Although they believed in me, giving a consolation, I still was besieged by doubts. I explained to my mother how serious the risk was. I asked her to accompany me so we could support each other and better watch out for the Germans. She did not agree, constantly repeating that two people stood lower chances of finding a hideout. She was also afraid that her face was not Aryan enough and insisted on me trying to escape first.

“Escape. You must tell everybody about us,” she said. “It is your duty.” And these were her last words.

She did not hesitate to part with me. The most important thing for her was to let me find a shelter—her presence would lower the chances. She made the supreme sacrifice, disregarding her own plight.

I thought that if I managed to escape, I would help her and others to get out, but if I remained, we would all perish. Taking the risk was the only way out from that hopeless situation. I decided to try.

I did not cry but felt a lump in my throat while saying the last goodbye. Mother tried to smile but her big green eyes were hopelessly sad. I was looking at her before she left. Her slim figure in a black dress was slowly fading away.

This time I sat on the last cart. To my surprise, we were being escorted by the same young man who often asked “where is the one with glasses on?” He was in good humor, making jokes about being at last “alone in the presence of the glasses.” I did not share his hilarity. He had no idea about my thoughts neither did he understand the struggle within my heart.

We were sitting next to each other on the edge of the cart. The German was leaning against his machine gun, I—against my bag covered with the tail of my coat. At the front, hunched-up, two men from the ghetto were talking.

Suddenly, driven to desperation, I asked the soldier to stop making jokes and help me. He did not understand. I told him I wanted to escape. He smiled, asking for the address I was intending to go to. I sensed deception in his words, and told him that I was about to go straight ahead to the countryside.

He stared at me intently.

“I feel sorry for you. I will turn away. Do what you want,” he said.
(Nowak 1991: 129–130)

In Raszkin-Nowak’s account death is omnipotent. The words “perished,” “transported,” “shot” or “Treblinka” are omnipresent.¹⁴ From the perspective of many years, she writes so as to give testimony of the rescue of herself and of human culture in general. As she keeps reminding her readers, this was possible not only thanks to the behavior of an ordinary peasant but thanks to a certain culture and tradition:

The most beautiful human deeds do not always require publicity, or special commemoration. Rather, they are informed by modesty and silence. The man who saved his life in the dark time of the German occupation—thus putting in danger the safety of his family—strongly opposed when I wanted to reveal his name. He said he had not done it for fame. I respected the greatness of his heart, but I could not be silent about what he did, because not everybody believed in his unselfishness. I thought that it was my duty to testify not only to the truth about the war atrocities, but also to exceptional human virtue. *My Star*, published in 1991 in Białystok, was the proof of my intent. Apart from the recollections of my whole family murdered by the Germans, I wanted to express my deepest respect for all those who became my new family. (Nowak 2018)

In the barn of “Mr. Piotr,” where she spent a year, Felicja wrote one of the most moving poems of that cruel time. Following in the footsteps of Adam Mickiewicz’s “Ode to Youth” (the poem she knew by heart), she composed her own version: “Now I was alone. Alone with my despair. The surrounding

14 It can be said, following Sławomir Buryła, that Raszkin-Nowak has exhausted almost the entire list of “Holocaust topos,” and yet their use is specific in her prose: it is free of resentment and also does not relent of conventionalization, despite the time distance that separates the author from the described events. Cf. Buryła 2013.

darkness pushed me to turning my thoughts into verse” (Nowak 1991: 162). She refers to the tradition of the eighteenth century, of the Enlightenment and Romanticism, which to a certain degree was shaped by Goethe, and later developed by Mickiewicz and Heine. Mickiewicz’s outstanding “Ode” is transformed into a harrowing testimony to the Holocaust. Even if stylistically clumsy, it is certainly informed by genuineness:

O Youth, strengthen my heart,
and help in the anguish of bondage
to harden my soul
so as to know no fear in suffering.
O Youth, you are my strength;
make my thoughts bright
to distinguish the voice of truth.
I want to fight for a better life.
You are my might!
O Youth, give me strength.
An eagle is flying high,
I need to reach out for it,
And stir the blue sky.
Give me strength! (Raszkin-Nowak 2003: 10)

When the war was over, Raszkin-Nowak was nineteen years old. Much later, she describes her experience in the text which is marked by symbols and unobtrusive metaphorization but never loses its rational underpinning. The star from the title is a souvenir—a precious six-pointed brooch, the shape of which resembled the Star of David. Originally belonging to her grandmother, it was passed on to Raszkin-Nowak when she was escaping from the ghetto. She wanted to give the brooch to her savior, but he returned the gift telling her something that she remembered for the rest of her life:

“Take it back, my child, and keep it on you. Me and my wife have realized that in case of sudden danger, it would be very difficult to take it out from the place where it is hidden. This is the only material thing from your home that you possess, and it is essential that you keep it all the time,” he said with a matter-of-fact tone in his voice. (Nowak 1991: 147)

From this time on, as she writes, the star “became her shield.” But the word has more than one meaning, connoting also “destiny.” This predestines one to

see, save, and testify. In the title of Raszkin-Nowak's volume of poetry the stars glow in the darkness—they are the “stars in the darkness,” i.e. they symbolize both a saving tradition and those individuals who come to rescue.¹⁵ In this particular case, it refers to the family of peasants living in the vicinity of Białystok. Raszkin-Nowak does not hide her attitude to the outbursts of anti-Semitism in Poland, but she refrains from giving them prominence:

Regrettably, despite the passing of time and numerous changes that have taken place in Poland, we are still unable to comprehend this fact. The people who saved my life did not wish their names to be revealed, saying that it is important *what* was done and *not* who did it. Though unwillingly, I accept their wishes, understanding that the anonymousness stems not only from modesty, but is caused by other, unspecified reasons. In my memoirs, I would like to offer my tribute to those whose good deeds, attempted in the midst of crimes, deplorable acts and hatred, shine like stars. (Nowak 1991: 201).

After the war, Piotr and his family did not want to have their surnames published for two reasons. Firstly, they were afraid of some of their neighbors. Secondly, (and this is not stated explicitly in *My Star*), after the war, the savior, a member of the Home Army, was arrested and imprisoned. When she started her education in one of the schools in Moscow, Raszkin-Nowak—as she herself underlines her name is meaningful in itself, deriving from the Latin *felix*,¹⁶ “happy”—entreated the Soviet authorities for Piotr's release. However, in the context of the Stalinist epoch the unwillingness to reveal the underground activities and the names of the people who carried them out during the war is all too obvious.

As I have already written, after 1945 Raszkin-Nowak worked as a journalist for Polish Radio. Her experience as an editor, i.e. somebody who knows how to structure the written text, can be seen in *My Star*. Raszkin-Nowak is very economical with words and not afraid of discarding irrelevant materials. Her style is informed by the simplicity of expression, the avoidance of verbosity,

15 The author's erudition makes it possible to look for distant references to the motif of “dark stars” not only in Immanuel Kant's “The starry sky above me and the moral law within me...” from *Critique of Practical Reason* (1781), but even in Tadeusz Miciński's salient and only, dark volume *In the Darkness of Stars* (1902).

16 The name Felicia actually comes from the Latin *felix*—happy, gracious, kind. The masculine version of the name is, of course, Felix.

and the condensation of meanings, signaling that the last is conveyed through the medium of the author-survivor.

Raszkin-Nowak's whole modest oeuvre combines the horrifying and aptly expressed testimony with the strategy of overcoming trauma. The strategy was by no means easy to be achieved. And the process of overcoming trauma was not tantamount to the escape from Jewishness into a Danish identity, or from the Polish identity into the Jewish one. It was an affirmation of both these most important elements—the Polish and the Jewish.¹⁷ Only the woman with such experience as Raszkin-Nowak's (the Holocaust and March 1968) was capable of expressing (without a false note) the message that is emerging from her *In Memory of My Father Murdered by German Soldiers on 12 July 1941*:

My grandson's bluish eyes
resemble the azure sky on a summer day;
his trustful, breezy gaze,
directed at a peaceful dream.

My Father's bluish eyes
like flowers from the Polish fields
were riveted by the sight of heaped corpses
before He was pierced by a deadly pain.

How to explain it today to a youth,
who does not belong in here anymore
that the shots were fired by cruel Germans
at innocent people?

My grandson named after my grandfather
understands the depth of my grief,
admiring at the same time
the great deed of my rescue.

Human life is a fleeting moment
in the earth's movement among the stars.
Eternity is a retention of memory,
because it stops the time.

17 For Raszkin-Nowak, Danish identity was only of an official, "passport" nature.

Let's silence our hearts,
and soothe the urge to shed tears,
because memory will prove much stronger
than the sign of death (Raszkin-Nowak 2015: 17).

It is in this work that one can see how empathic realism transforms into a specific apology of memory. It is neither a theodicy nor an explanation of the roots of evil, but it turns out to be an attempt to draw conclusions from the author's tragic experiences for the future. Empathic realism does not justify anything, it does not euphemize crime, but it does lead to a perspective in which the past is overcome by the future. This overcoming is achieved only when the bridge stretching between the terrifying past and the happening, vital future is an understanding, deep, intergenerational memory. In other words, it can be called empathic memory.

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| Abstract

ANNA JANICKA

Post-Holocaust Migrations of Empathy: *My Star* by Felicja Raszkin-Nowak

Felicja Raszkin-Nowak still remains a little-known witness of the Holocaust. Born in Warsaw, she found herself in Białystok as a little girl during the war. Miraculously she survived the liquidation of the ghetto and hid on a farm, from where she was liberated. After the war, she worked at Polish Radio, and after March 1968 she

emigrated to Denmark. In 1991, she published her memoirs titled *My Star*, translated into several languages. They are a faithful and shocking portrayal of war and the Holocaust, written with rare mastery. Raszkin-Nowak's writing strategy combines several different perspectives: that of a child and an adult, a Polish woman and a Jew, a girl and a mature woman on the threshold of old age. Raszkin-Nowak uses an innovative storytelling technique that can be called empathetic realism. It enables the author to overcome the internal and external distance between the experience of childhood and the experience of war, the experience of cultural settlement and the experience of emigration, the time of events and the time of reminiscing.

Keywords: Felicja Raszkin-Nowak, memories, Holocaust, empathic realism

| Bio

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