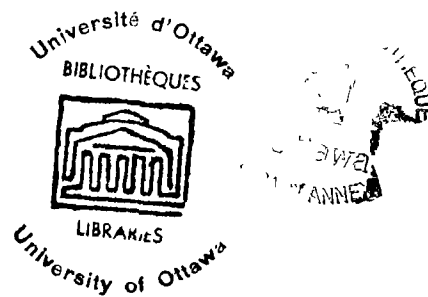


T. BOROWSKI'S VISION OF THE
CONCENTRATION CAMP UNIVERSE

by

Odon Leopold Ostrowski

Thesis presented to the Faculty of Arts
of the University of Ottawa in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts



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CURRICULUM STUDIORUM

Mr. Odon Leopold Ostrowski was born on November 15, 1926 in Sosnowiec, Poland. Here, he received his primary education. The war, 1939-1945, interrupted further studies. After the war, Mr. Ostrowski attended the General Sikorski High School in Lippstadt, West Germany and graduated there in 1947.

In 1948, Mr. Ostrowski emigrated to Canada and subsequently continued his studies on part time basis. He received a general Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Manitoba, Canada, in 1958, Bachelor of Pedagogy degree in 1959 and Bachelor of Education degree in 1961, also from the University of Manitoba.

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INTRODUCTION

The tragic events of Polish history reaching back to the partition of the country in the second half of the eighteenth century had a profound impact on the subsequent life of the nation and on its literature. The struggle for national survival, which followed, became the major force in the country's thinking and aspirations which were reflected in Polish letters.

After a brief period of independence, 1918-1939, Poland became subjugated once again by Hitler's Germany and by Stalin's Russia. The new wave of unprecedented oppression, the lost war, the mass killings perpetrated by the Nazis and later on an uneasy "independence" under Russian domination, left another permanent scar in the heart of the Polish nation. Unavoidably, these tragic events and experiences have provided rich and new material for the Polish writers during the past twenty-seven years.

The outbreak of the Second World War brought to an end the inter-war literary period, to be followed by six years of clandestine literary and cultural activities:

The Nazi occupation suppressed all legal forms of cultural activity in Poland for more than five years. All secondary and university schools were closed, and so were theatres, publishing houses and the press.¹

During this era, anyone suspected of creative writing in Poland, or any other cultural endeavour, would be hunted down and executed without trial. In spite of this Nazi terror, Polish clandestine publications reached 1,123 periodicals, with thirty-nine purely literary journals. This was a very impressive record considering the harsh form of the German occupation.

Immediately after the cessation of hostilities, several larger works were published by the older writers, who tended to continue the pre-war tradition. However, the emerging young writers such as J. Andrzejewski, T. Borowski, and T. Breza, for example, assumed a different position. Their first prose works prepared the way for a post-war transformation pointing to the development of new trends in the Polish prose.

Despite the occupation and the destruction of stabilized conditions of the inter-war years, the war period proved to have been a training ground for the new generation of writers. Despite great personal risks, the very young were entrusted with responsible posts as chief editors, commentators, critics.

¹ Stefan Żółkiewski, "Literature Since the War" (1), Polish Perspectives, Nos. 7-8, 1964, p. 79.

Authentic war experiences and memories of the underground struggles, the lessons of responsibility and effective action, and the verification of all values in the fire of the Great Adventure, all affected the artistic attitudes of this youth.²

It was evident that during the war and in the immediate post-war years, Polish society on the whole and its intellectuals in particular, were ready to accept more radical socio-economic changes. Consequently, the overwhelming majority of young writers rallied to the most radical literary journals, and in particular to "Kuźnica" (The Forge).

"Kuźnica" emphasized the cognitive functions and values of literature. It criticized widely the surrealist and experimental trends of the inter-war period. "Kuźnica" strongly advocated a return to the tradition of socio-political prose, of social criticism and commitment. In other words, "Kuźnica" preached the return to S. Żeromski's tradition of the first decade of the inter-war period.

Many new prose works appeared reflecting this type of thinking and literary programme. Among them, we find several inventive and often bold novels based on social observation and analysis. Their cognitive value is sometimes instructive, but they lack penetrating interpretations and artistic qualities. The representative young writers of this

² Żółkiewski, op. cit., p. 79.

group include Wygodzki, Kawalec, Patkowski, Morton, Białkowska, Filipowicz, Babinicz, and Rolleczek--very few of them went beyond the debut stage.

Another traditional area of Polish prose was the historical novel. This genre of fiction includes many prominent inter-war and post-war writers such as Kossak-Szczucka, Iwaszkiewicz, Kruczkowski, Parnicki, Hołuj, Dobraczyński, Gołubiew, Malewska, Grabski, and Parandowski, the latter a connoisseur of the ancient Greek and Roman culture.

Many young writers of the post-war period also made an attempt to develop a new literary programme based on models found in Balzac and Stendhal, but they failed. They failed because they were unable to adapt to the post-war realities the nineteenth century supraindividual conventions, social mechanisms, cultural structures and values. The world these writers inherited was not the world of Balzac and Stendhal. It was the world dominated by the spectre of crematoria and Nazi's hangmen. They could not accept the thesis that the murder of millions was the diabolical work of the proverbial demons. Instead, the reality resulting from experience pointed to the fact that:

The hangman was merely one of thousands of civil servants carrying out the sentences in Hitler's death factories, and his victim--the faceless, many-million mass which had died in the gas chambers.³

They instinctively felt--and this was later fully corroborated by abundant documentary material--that the mass killings of Poles was not a work of a group of maniacs, but a well-planned scheme aiming at creating "Lebensraum" for the Germans and a world of Slaves and Masters. The Nazis were especially determined to exterminate the nation's leadership, its cultural and intellectual elite. And their purpose was pursued from the very beginning of the occupation. Several weeks after the collapse of Poland, they imprisoned the entire professorial staff of Poland's oldest university. According to Jon Evans,

The camp at Orienburg received the largest number of Poles, and achieved a special notoriety when 170 members of the academic staff of the Jagiellonian University of Cracow were deported there in a body.⁴

The subsequent years of the Second World War during which over six million Polish citizens perished is the confirmation of Nazi Germany's intentions.

Poles were not alone; many more millions of Europeans paid with their lives for man's greatest madness ever recorded in the annals

³ Żółkiewski, op. cit., p. 80.

⁴ Jon Evans, The Nazi Order in Poland, London, Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1941. p. 63.

of mankind. And no matter what explanations have been offered in plumbing the depth of the civilization that annihilated millions of innocent men, women and children, the wounds and memories are too deep to be easily healed or forgotten. Undoubtedly, literature will preserve the most direct testimony of the European twentieth century holocaust and man's related activities.

Martyrological Literature

The mass killings carried out by Nazi Germany gave rise to a new literary form--the martyrological literature. This is the term coined by Polish critics and scholars encompassing all genres dealing with the victims of Nazi terror behind the front lines. All nations have contributed to this voluminous literature, but, understandably, Poland's contribution was the largest and is still growing.

Soon after the end of hostilities, in 1945, the first works of fiction belonging to this type of literature were published. Within a few years, it grew into a sizable collection of short stories, novellettes, novels, anthologies written in diverse styles and techniques showing an equally wide range of artistic merits. Those who wrote about the Nazi "death camps" represented various social strata, several generations, varied talents and even differed as to the very purpose of their writing.

Expectedly, the greatest contribution came from the representatives of the Polish intelligentsia and writers. Among the latter, one finds the names of well-established authors, those who debuted in letters just before the war and some entirely unknown names mainly of the young generation. To the first category belong Z. Nałkowska's Medaliony (Medallions), S. Szmaglewska's Dymy nad Birkenau (Dense Smoke over Birkenau), Żukrowski's Kantata (The Cantata), Z. Kossak-Szczucka's W otchłani (In the Abyss), S. Jagielski's Sclavus saltans, G. Morcinek's Dziewczyna z Champs-Elysées (The Girl from Champs-Elysées),--to mention the earliest, most popular and most discussed works. J. Andrzejewski's Apel (The Roll-call) may well represent the group of writers who began their literary career a few years before 1939. And several of T. Borowski's stories which later entered into the volume entitled Pożegnanie z Marią (Farewell to Mary) constitute the best contribution made by the youngest generation.

One does not mention here a large volume of works which stand between fiction and reportage, or pure, factual description of the "death camps". These works, many written with literary talent, could be considered only in a comprehensive analysis of the entire fiction on the concentration camp topic--a task beyond the scope of this dissertation. It should be added that this semi-fiction and reportage offered many a motif for future novels and stories. For the interest

in the Nazi genocide continues, and the recent works by B. Wojdowski, Chleb rzucony umarłym, (Bread for the Dead) or S. Grochowiak's, Trismus, are suitable examples of fiction with superior literary qualities.

The question which haunted every writer in the immediate post-war year was the position he "... should assume in the face of the horrendous crimes committed against his nation in the Nazi death camps";⁵ and concurrently, what is a writer "... to say to a humanity that witnessed mass extermination, saw old people and children burnt alive, was given soap made of human fat?"⁶

The answers were not unanimous; the positions taken by various writers with respect to this question differed considerably. However, for the purpose of general orientation one may speak of two major segments of the camp literature divided on the basis of the interpretational and attitudinal criteria.

The first segment--and the smallest of the two--attempted to answer the above posed question in the spirit of Z. Nałkowska's "Człowiek człowiekowi przygotował taki los".⁷ (Such was the fate to

⁵ Andrzej Kijowski, "Highways and By-Ways of Contemporary Polish Letters", in Polish Perspectives, Nos. 7-8, 1958, p. 50.

⁶ Kijowski, op. cit., p. 50.

⁷ Zofia Nałkowska, Medaliony, Czytelnik, 1970, p. 4.

which man condemned man). The publishing of this thin volume of stories by an elderly and prominent pre-war novelist stands in sharp contrast to the bulk of fiction published before 1948. This novelist known as the best exponent of psychologism in the Polish fiction, offered in Medaliony (Medallions) a completely anti-psychological perception of the "death camps". Her gallery of sketches executed in the simplest of narratives and with the greatest economy of words depicting most cruel acts and attitudes in chilling impersonality constituted, then, a literary event. T. Borowski's early stories belong to this category of artistic perception of "man's cruelty to man".

But, the preponderance of writers assumed another posture and understood differently their task. For them, writing about camps became as K. Wyka phrased it, "A function of collective memory".⁸ In other words, the writers' chief task was to keep alive in the minds of humanity the memory of millions who died anonymously in the German "death camps". "Lest we forget"--seemed the most appropriate motto of their artistic endeavours, and this is explicitly formulated and easily detected in most works.

Another and fundamental trait of this category of fiction lies in the realm of perception. Whether we read Szmaglewska, Kossak-

⁸ Kazimierz Wyka, Pogranicze powieści, (Proza polska w latach 1945-1948), Kraków, Wydawnictwo M. Kot, 1948, p. 176.

Szczucka or Żukrowski--to use this sample of most accomplished prose writers of the older generation--we are given the perception of an outsider looking at the "camp universe". And this does not refer only to those writers who were lucky enough to escape imprisonment; it includes those who, like T. Borowski, survived several years in the concentration camps.

This group of "camp fiction" views, describes, interprets and, frequently, passes judgement--but through the prism of ethics, morality, or codes of values shaped in the universe outside the camp's compounds. They present their panoramas or vignettes of camp life seen through the worldview of the society they came from, and not the society of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Their vision reflects the fundamentals of a particular philosophical creed, be it religious or atheistic.

Thus, Kossak-Szczucka's vision is that of an ardent Catholic; Morcinek and others espouse ethical perception; still others transpose the camp universe in terms of their political beliefs. Consequently, the fiction in this category approached the topic from a priori philosophical positions with strong commitment to the ethico-moral code of established, traditional society.

As a consequence of this position, the "camp universe" tended to idealize, to select and emphasize men, women, their deeds and behaviour which supported the a priori conceptions. Therefore,

individuals, events and acts contrary to the writer's perception and moral code were de-emphasized and generally treated as cases of man's perversion, criminality and debasement, which could be traced to the guard's or the inmate's past, their characters, etc.

The examples of this perception, interpretation and avowed purpose abound. Szmaglewska who in Dymy nad Birkenau (Dense Smoke over Birkenau) preserved to a relatively large degree her "objective" observer posture, offers in the following excerpt a good sample of the "committed" type of fiction:

Some faces appear momentarily in the moonlight and vanish quickly into the darkness of the night. Some faces remain serene and strangely beautiful. Looking at them, one gets the impression that these women had died earlier retaining their facial features frozen in a moment of sadness. It is impossible to forget them. Others have faces twisted with anger and hatred. The latter one tries to forget.⁹

T. Borowski's stories and articles rejected the validity of the vision a reader is allowed to glean from the fiction exemplified by the just-quoted paragraph. His "camp fiction" offered an entirely opposite view and posed a far more profound question related to

⁹ Seweryna Szmaglewska, Dymy nad Birkenau, Warszawa, Czytelnik, 1971, p. 17-18.

Niektóre twarze jawią się na chwilę w tym oświetleniu i nikną szybko w cieniach nocy. Niektóre mają w swych rysach ciszę zupełną i oblicza ich zakrzepły w niemym wyrazie smutku. Tych zapomnieć niepodobna. Inne mają rysy wykrzywione pasją, wściekłością, gniewem. O tych pragnie się zapomnieć.

Nałkowska's famous dictum that "Such was the fate to which man condemned man".

The prime purpose of this dissertation is an analysis of the camp fiction of T. Borowski focussing on his vision of this universe of which he was a part for over two years. The dissertation consists of two main chapters followed by the final chapter of summaries and conclusions. The last section is made up of an abstract and bibliography.

Chapters I and II form the central part of the study. The former contains a brief biography of T. Borowski, the background of his formative years and later literary and publicistic activities. In Chapter I, we will also discuss certain elements of his first volume of poetry which will be helpful in understanding T. Borowski's world-view as more fully expressed in subsequent prose works.

In Chapter II, the longest and the focal segment of the dissertation, we will analyze those aspects of the writer's "camp" stories which constitute the most important components of his vision of Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camps. Much attention will be paid to the writer's technique employed in projecting this vision into a work of art.

The study of T. Borowski's universe will be based on the texts--contents of eight stories under the leading title: Pożegnanie z Marią. The choice of this cycle, and not Kamienny świat (The Stony

World) for example, was prompted by its greater concentration on actual life in the camps. Moreover, the first camp stories project a vision truer to T. Borowski's initial conception. Subsequent stories contain already larger amount of polemical and political elements.

At this point, we wish to mention that all translations in this work from Polish to English and from German to English were made by the author of this thesis, unless otherwise specified.

CHAPTER I

TADEUSZ BOROWSKI

The available biographical material provides very meagre information about T. Borowski's family, childhood, and boyhood.¹ Tadeusz Borowski was born on November 12, 1922, in Zhitomir in the Ukraine. In 1933, his family moved to Poland. T. Borowski's father was a labourer and his mother a seamstress. From the accounts of students and teachers at the Tadeusz Czacki's State High School in Warsaw, we learn that Tadeusz Borowski was a good pupil. He graduated in 1940, i.e., during the German occupation of Poland. According to Wanda Leopold, a writer and a personal friend, T. Borowski was a shy boy, even after graduation from high school, displaying great interest in books and knowledge in general. At the age of nineteen, he enrolled as a student of the Polish language in the Underground University of Warsaw.²

All Polish schools and universities were ordered by the German authorities to be closed. But already in the early 1940's the

¹ This gap may be filled by T. Drewnowski's monography which has not appeared at the writing of this thesis.

² Alicja Lisiecka, "Borowski-Nonkonformista", Z Problemów Literatury Polskiej XX Wieku, Warszawa, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1965, p. 53.

underground army began to organize an illegal school system.

Following his graduation, T. Borowski, then eighteen years old, began to work for a building contractor's firm "Pędzich", situated in a rather poor section of Warsaw. He began as a labourer, then advanced to the position of a warehouse clerk and to foreman. At the same time, he attended the "Underground University of Warsaw" as a student of Polish philology. Among the teaching staff one found Poland's most eminent professors and scholars, men like Julian Krzyżanowski, Wacław Borowy, Bogdan Suchodolski, Witold Doroszewski, Zofia Szmydtowa,³ and others. In addition to formal lectures, students had an opportunity to meet and learn from prominent Polish writers and poets including L. Staff, J. Iwaszkiewicz, J. Andrzejewski, and J. Zagórski. There were also contacts with the members of the Polish Underground Army which was involved with the functioning of the University.

At the Underground University, Tadeusz Borowski displayed great zeal in his studies and participated eagerly in all sorts of literary gatherings.

Those who remember him as a student and a budding poet stress T. Borowski's sharp polemical mind which frequently expressed itself

³ Tadeusz Borowski, Utwory zebrane, Warszawa, PIW, 1954, Vol. 1, Wiersze, p. 7.

in the form of "drwiny" (scoffing) bordering on cynicism. T. Borowski was especially vehement in his criticism of all absolutes, old and new, whatever form they took. This uncompromising rejection of the past and loudly verbalized suspicion of the new ideology proclaimed by various political groupings brought sharp attacks from his own generation.⁴

This indicates why T. Borowski paid little interest to the political meetings and avoided studiously any involvement. Thus, Borowski's first three years under the occupation were spent relatively uneventfully between studies, literary discussions, work, and the usual business of survival. It was during those years that T. Borowski made his literary debut.

In December of 1942, the twenty-year old aspiring poet mimeographed, at his own expense, 165 copies of his first cycle of poems entitled Gdziekolwiek ziemia ... (Wherever the Earth ...).⁵

The appearance of the volume brought quick critical response from two young men of T. Borowski's generation and literary circles. One, written by T. Gajcy, was limited to the artistic aspects of the

⁴ Lesław M. Bartelski, Genealogia ocalonych, Szkice o latach 1939-1944, Kraków, Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1969, p. 117-118.

⁵ Marian Pankowski, "Tadeusz Borowski po dwudziestu latach", Wiadomości, No. 1281, 1970, Londyn, p. 4, column 2.

volume. The other, by W. Bojarski, sharply polemicized with the spirit which pervaded all ten poems of the cycle. What, one may ask, spurred W. Bojarski to write such a spirited rebuttal.

T. Borowski's poems hardly refer to concrete events or history. Instead, one feels cosmic dimensions within which the young poet deals with a number of philosophical questions. Thus, the man's world appears to be ruled by some "blind force", irrational and responsible to no one. And man is like a blind creature having no control over his life and forces surrounding him. This vision of cosmos and earth is permeated by a feeling of the oncoming catastrophe--an apocalypse bringing in its wake total destruction. This "catastrophism" in T. Borowski's poetic debut is not a novelty; he, like most beginners in literature at that time, inherited this attitude and worldview from Czechowicz, Miłosz and other poets of the thirties. But, while the older generation's "catastrophism" stemmed from premonitions, perceptions and interpretations of the European stage of the 1930's, T. Borowski's generation lived in the world of "catastrophe" and apocalypse. Their outlook was formed by very tangible everyday reality.

But "catastrophe" was not something God-sent; it was brought about by men who receive much attention in T. Borowski's poems. For men, the poet did not reserve any uplifting feelings. Instead of pity,

love and like feelings, T. Borowski depicts them thus:

O, blind and simple people. Better abandon your toil and pleasures. Hang your heads humbly and run unnoticed toward some cave or thicket, where misfortune has no access.⁶

In this and other lines, the poet treats men with contempt and ironic gibes. There is no pity for the vanquished whom he regards as "helots" or slaves. And their lot? They deserve it--so seems to be saying the poet--because they allowed themselves to be vanquished. The war is man's own making, and history tells us that there are only two possible categories of people: slaves and masters.

Although T. Borowski's bitter, pessimistic, almost nihilistic panorama of the European "catastrophe" never directly refers to actual situation in Poland, clearly it is an outburst of suffering reflecting the great spiritual debacle experienced by his generation. The pre-war dreams of great Poland, on which these adolescents were brought up, appeared nothing more than the proverbial castle in the sky. The incantations and invocations to the glorious past, the glorifications of the national virtues, the faith in supposedly invincible and eternal allies--all this and much more became to the young generation

⁶ Borowski, "Struny", Utwory zebrane, Vol. I, p. 121.

O, ślepi ludzie i zwykli. Lepiej by było od razu niechać i pługu, i dziewcząt, głowę ukradkiem zwiesiwszy, w puszcze, w jaskinie uchodzić przed nienawistnym szczęściem.

a mirage or a downright lie. The faith in the victory of "good" over "evil" was nowhere to be seen in 1940-1942. The "evil" ruled almost the entire continent of Europe and immoral or unethical activities became the everyday fare of the conquered peoples. Can one wonder why these "catastrophic" motifs and disillusionment permeated the poetic debut of the twenty-year old? What did the future have to offer for him and youth like him? What could they accomplish by armed resistance?

To these questions T. Borowski offers a very pessimistic response. To fight an "evil" victor is just hopeless, not only because the enemy is physically stronger, but also because we do not seem to know what we should be fighting for. So, there we have a double defeat. And this feeling of helplessness, of total paralysis is doubly tragic by a realization that the entire generation was lost before it was given a chance to live, or to write its own history in the annals of humanity. The young writers thought that future human beings would not understand the problems of T. Borowski's generation; while passing a judgement on that era:

People who shall come after us will easily forget our songs,
and despise the cries and accusations of Helots.⁷

The conclusion of this generational analysis was expressed in the now famous stanza:

Song

Above us--night. The flicker of stars, chokes in the
deadly shadows of a purple sky. We'll leave a legacy
of twisted steel (as part of our civilization)--to be
followed by a hollow laughter of future generations.⁸

The majority of T. Borowski's views and feelings embodied in his first cycle of poems were shared by his age group. The strongest and most immediate opposition was aimed at the poet's tone of helplessness, pessimism and the final prophecy. The answer came from Wacław Bojarski. While agreeing that at the moment "evil" ruled, this, however, did not and should not lead to surrender. One must fight, for

⁷ Borowski, "Na zewnątrz noc", Utwory zebrane, Vol. I, p. 137.
Człowiek który nadejdzie po nas, pieśni zapomni
naszych, znienawidzi wołań i skarg helotów.

⁸ Borowski, Utwory zebrane, Vol. I, p. 125.

Pieśń

Nad nami-noc. Goreją gwiazdy,
dławiący, trupi nieba fiolet.
Zostanie po nas złom żelazny
i głuchy, drwiący śmiech pokoleń.

Contemplation and remorse may effect a feeling of absolution. We reject such absolution. In life, we are confronted with "good" and "evil"; what matters most at present is that "good" should be strengthened. The current war is not merely a Satan's carousel. It is the clash between "good" and "evil". It does not frighten us that this is a clash of two opposing forces.⁹

Nor does W. Bojarski accept the prophecy that the pile "of twisted steel" and the "laughter of future generations" is all that will be left for posterity:

No matter how many brutal acts are committed against us by the oppressor, no matter how much will be destroyed and how badly our bodies disfigured by the hangman--our painful scream shall remain as an echo for future generations to hear--telling them that some of us strived to be good.¹⁰

Borowski's was the cry of despair of a talented, well-read, introspective adolescent uttered during the darkest years of modern

⁹ Bartelski, Genealogia ocalonych, p. 117.

Kontemplacja, załamania rąk od tej troski uwalnia, rozgrzesza. Nie chcemy tego rozgrzeszenia!

...Dzisiaj chodzi o to wreszcie, by dobro otrzymało siłę. Wojna obecna nie jest dla nas karuzelą szatana. Jest starciem dobra i zła. Nie przeraża nas, że jest to starcie dwóch sił.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 117-118.

Choćby miał po nas przemaszerować chamski but kata, choćby wgniótł w ziemię nasze ciała, zniszczył, zgnoił, rozmazał, choćby zmienił naszą, jakże nędzną broń w kupę złomu - to przecież dla przyszłych pokoleń będzie ten nasz krzyk niezaspokojony, niezadławiony, żarliwy - pragnieniem mocnego dobra.

Europe. The first impression one receives upon reading his poetry is that of a harsh, cruelly realistic, totally alienated young man rejecting all avenues of salvation, seeing man as a primordial animal bent on self-destruction. Close analysis of his first volume of poetry will show that much of what has been just said is a facade; for behind it hides a sensitive youth seeking, but having difficulty in finding the way out of the dilemma facing modern Europe. This hidden aspect of Borowski comes to the surface in lyrical passages, and particularly in the delicate lines when he speaks of his love. Indeed, at that time, love for him was the only element that could bind mankind and pave the way for a better future.

And he did fall in love just then with one of his colleagues attending the underground university lectures--a girl named Tuśka. Together they shared their love for poetry, together they dreamed and debated under the shadow of the ever-present threat of arrest and death.

The arrest came at the end of February, 1943, when Tuśka fell into the net of the regular street round-ups in Warsaw. Fully aware of certain arrest, T. Borowski went to Tuśka's home where he was promptly seized and taken to the dreaded Gestapo headquarters, later transferred to another prison, and finally to Auschwitz. For

the largest portion of his stay in the concentration camp, he remained close to his loved one, helping her in many ways.

In the concentration camps, the young and sensitive poet had the opportunity to observe first-hand the efficient, German machine programmed for the mass extermination of millions of people. In his dejection, he saw in the Nazi scheme an evidence of the new European culture and civilization. In the last years of his life, T. Borowski shifted the blame directly to Nazi Germany.

Some critics view T. Borowski's pessimistic perception of European civilization as a result of the depression he suffered upon witnessing the human misery around him. Wiktor Woroszyński, Borowski's first biographer, wrote that:

He was affected by witnessing thousands of varieties of human suffering and death; the gas chamber and crematorium, electric wires and forty-hour long roll-calls, the rifle butts of the guards, the flogging sticks of the "Kapos",¹¹ the fists of the block leaders. In addition, the standing Auschwitz illnesses were: dysentery, phlegm, typhus, and mange; there were also isolation cells and public executions; the extremely hard labour and selections of "Mussulmans"¹² for the gas chamber.¹³

In the camp itself, there existed a class hierarchy which divided the inmates into: "prominentów, organizatorów, muzułmanów" (Prominents, Organizers, and Mussulmans). The "Prominents" enjoyed some privileges granted by the German administration.

The "Organizers" were the cunning inmates who secretly traded with various articles. In this way, they were able to buy

¹¹ Kapo--A concentration camp overseer--a type of supervisor of working details who frequently clubbed men to death for the slightest infraction. Some of the Kapos were inmates who offered to serve in such capacity to save their own lives.

¹² Mussulman--a camp inmate without influence; usually first selected for extermination due to illness or inability to work.

¹³ T. Borowski, Utwory zebrane, Vol. I, op. cit., p. 14. Składało się na nie tysiąc rodzajów ludzkiego cierpienia i śmierci, komora gazowa i krematorium, naelektryzowane druty i czterdziestogodzinny apel, karabin posta, pałka kapa, pięść blokowego; oświęcimskie choroby: krwana biegunka, flegmona, tyfus, świerzb; bunkier i publiczna egzekucja, nadludzka praca i wybiórka muzułmanów do gazu.

a little time by bribing the SS-men. The "Missulmans" were people in the last phase of exhaustion and, consequently, destined to be first selected for the gas chambers.

Henryk Korotyński, one of the young poet's fellow inmates, writes that after a lengthy illness and several months of hard labour, T. Borowski was "miraculously" selected by the German administration to be trained as "Pfleger"--sanitary aid--a male nurse.

Subsequently, he was transferred to the camp's hospital where he had a good chance of survival. For a time, he remained in this position in order to help his fiancée, Tuśka, imprisoned in the adjoining women's section of the same camp, who suffered from several illnesses in succession. Later, Borowski resigned voluntarily from this "privileged" position; he chose to share the lot of his friends employed in the labour details. For the young poet believed that his self-respect demanded of him to be with them.

During the imprisonment, T. Borowski wrote poems designed to uplift the morale of the inmates and especially Tuśka's. Some of these poems survived the war, but most were lost since they were anonymous, and, many of the people who memorized them perished in the gas chambers.

As the Russian armies pushed westward, the German authorities managed to evacuate all healthy inmates from Auschwitz.

Consequently, T. Borowski was transferred into the interior of Germany: first to Dautmergen near Stuttgart and later to Dachau--both being branches of Hitler's large network of concentration camps.

In May of 1945, Borowski was liberated from Dachau by the U.S. Army and was immediately transferred to an American "isolation camp" in Freimann near Munich, West Germany. He resented this period of additional humiliation and later described vividly the life in the American camp. Borowski was bitterly disappointed with the Americans--the "liberators", who kept him in confinement after the war. In July, 1945, he wrote that the Americans liberated them from the Germans, but he wondered now who would liberate them from the Americans. T. Borowski felt that the Allies treated the Nazi victims unfairly, while they were extremely lenient with the defeated Nazis. In one brief poem without a title he wrote:

Who was a prisoner, remains a prisoner, while SS-men
enjoy freedom.¹⁴

Along with other Nazi victims, he had to wait for real freedom until October, 1945, when they were finally released from Freimann camp.

¹⁴ Borowski, Utwory zebrane, Vol. I, op. cit., p. 33.
...Kto był więźniem, ten jest więźniem, a esesman wolno
chodzi.

Borowski moved to München where he worked for the Polish Red Cross. During this period, he and two other former inmates decided to inform the world about their experiences in Hitler's concentration camps. Consequently, they published a collective book in 1946 entitled Byliśmy w Oświęcimiu (We were in Auschwitz) by Tadeusz Borowski, Janusz Nel-Siedlecki, and Krystyn Olszewski. The book was designed to serve primarily as a document against Nazi crimes; therefore, little attention was paid to its artistic aspect. Some early critics accused the above authors of indulging excessively in "raw" realism, of smearing the memory of the camp's victims--criticism often repeated today.

In June, 1946, T. Borowski returned to his beloved Warsaw which he found almost totally destroyed. Soon, he began to urge his fiancée, Tuśka Rundo, then recuperating in hospitable Sweden, to return to Poland. Tuśka complied and returned to her homeland to become Borowski's wife.

Poland was devastated, both physically and psychologically. The nation's only goal was to rebuild the country. To do his part, T. Borowski plunged into all sorts of activities. Apart from creative writing, he became a steady contributor to several newly established literary magazines. From September 1946 until the summer of 1947, T. Borowski was a member of the editorial board of the leftist

"Świat Młodych" (World of Youth), and also wrote for "Pokolenie" (Generation). At the beginning of 1948, he published his second volume of camp stories Kamienny świat (The Stony World). He travelled to Yugoslavia as a Polish delegate to the Yugoslav writers' congress. In February, 1948, T. Borowski became a member of the Polish Communist Party. By then, it was the most powerful political organization which soon became the sole ruler of the land. The history of the take-over and the role of the Soviet Union is too well known to be narrated here. Moreover, this aspect of the Polish recent history does not lie within the scope of this dissertation.

For at least one year from his return to Poland, T. Borowski showed no definite political leanings. Like most young Poles, he favoured the significant socio-economic reforms and was willing to co-operate with a communist-dominated regime. In a speech at Warsaw, November, 1946, he asked young writers and scientists to scrutinize carefully every political movement, including "democracy". Borowski's gravitation toward the communist ideology became more pronounced toward the end of 1947.

Borowski's entry into the ranks of the Party's membership was greatly appreciated by the leaders of the Polish Workers Party (such was the official title of the Communist Party). This young and talented writer who could not be accused of old communist leanings

enjoyed large following and prestige among the young. His example spurred, undoubtedly, a greater acceptance of the inevitability of the "dictatorship of the proletariat", among the hesitant younger generation.

From May, 1949, till March, 1950, T. Borowski was assigned as cultural attaché to the Polish Information Bureau in Berlin. This one-year stay in Germany gave him an opportunity to view the former enemy from another vantage point. There, he befriended several German writers who shared his philosophical and political convictions. Resulting from this reassessment of German-Polish relations were several articles and speeches where the former Auschwitz inmate advocated greater understanding and friendship between the Polish and German people. After his recall from the Berlin assignment, Borowski visited East Germany several times; the last visit took place in May, 1951, shortly before his death.

The final three years of T. Borowski's life, beginning with the formal Party membership, constitute a distinct period in his biography. Now, he seemed to have as his goal the communist program for Poland and threw himself headlong into the vortex of the political and cultural upheaval. This young man who some eight years ago rejected active struggle against "evil"--i.e., the Nazi occupation--

now forged to the forefront. In practice, it meant intensive, almost frantic activities on many fronts. He became one of the most effective polemicists and propagandists of the new cultural program imposed upon Polish letters in 1949, during the now famous gathering in Szczecin (Stettin). It was during that congress, and several other subsequent meetings in the 1950's, that the Soviet model of Socialist Realism in literature had been promulgated as the only approved form of literature.¹⁵

This three-year period is marked by a steep decline of Borowski--the writer. Kamienny świat, published in 1948, already shows a departure from the art practiced in the first volume, Pożegnanie z Marią. In Kamienny świat, one notes a stronger polemical vein and a sign of mental depression. Friends urged him to stop writing about the cruelties of war, to relax and rest. Borowski took their advice and agreed to submit himself to a short-lived psychiatric treatment, only to plunge again into a more extensive and agitated journalistic activity.

He continued to write short stories which, in 1949, together with other writings appeared in a volume entitled Opowiadania z książek

¹⁵ Paweł Hostowiec, "Notatnik nieśpiesznego przechodnia", Kultura, issue of September 1954, 7-24, p. 24.

i_gazet (The Stories from Books and Magazines). But there was little left of Poland's most promising literary talent; the publicist took over. Working sometimes with vicious zeal, he contended with literary enemies, real or imagined; now he spearheaded and fought for the principles of the Socialist Realism in a spate of articles often poorly written. Closer analysis of T. Borowski's journalism shows less of a convinced convert to the "new religion" and more of a man determined to believe, rather than sincerely believing in the new "credo".

Much of his time was taken up by various official positions in the domain of the recently organized and regimented cultural and literary life. Yet, whatever he undertook, it was carried out with the force, passion, and pugnacity characteristic of "an angry young man". He touched a wide range of contemporary issues thus allowing some of his colleagues to avoid "touchy" problems.¹⁶ His energy seemed to be inexhaustible. There were no signs of the oncoming catastrophe, and if close friends were aware of Borowski's repeated bouts of severe depression, no one expected that a tragic end was so near. On July 3rd, 1951, Poland was informed about an unspecified accident

¹⁶ Ryszard Matuszewski. Szkice krytyczne. (Warszawa) Czytelnik, 1954, p. 291.

which caused T. Borowski's death. The actual circumstances remained a secret. The body of the twenty-nine year old artist was carried to the newly opened Military cemetery with the pomp and ceremonial characteristic of the communist "decor". The country's top men recited bombastic oratories. An avalanche of hagiographic articles was published in the country's newspapers. The truth remained buried in police files and was kept from the public. Friends suspected the real cause, but no one spoke. Only during "the thaw", a brief announcement informed the country about T. Borowski's suicide. Even now, an unhampered scrutiny of the causes of the writer's death is on the restricted list. However, an account of T. Borowski's suicide appeared recently in Paris' Kultura and it reads as follows:

It was a breakdown, a complete nervous breakdown--one must infer as much from the timing he selected for suicide. His wife was still in the clinic after giving birth to a baby girl. Following a visit to the hospital, Borowski went home; he drank a few glasses of whiskey, (it was known generally that Borowski avoided alcohol), swallowed several sleeping pills, opened the gas stove in the kitchen of their small apartment--simulating the overflow of boiling water from the kettle and retired with a book, fully dressed, on the bed. The next morning neighbours from the adjacent apartments smelled the gas emanating from Borowski's room. When the rescue squad broke the door, T. Borowski was still alive. He was rushed to the hospital, but all attempts to revive him failed as the doctors were unaware that besides gas poisoning their patient drank alcohol and mixed it with barbiturates the night before. Consequently, Borowski failed to respond to their treatment. The true cause of his death became apparent only after the post-mortem examination of his body.¹⁷

Abroad state controls do not apply, and articles on the subject of T. Borowski's death have been appearing from time to time.

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Witold Wirpsza, "Stalinowska przygoda literatury polskiej", Kultura, No. 4/295, Paryż, 1972, p. 17.

Że było to załamanie, i to załamanie się ostateczne, o tym świadczy moment, wybrany przezeń świadomie na dokonanie samobójstwa: żona jego znajdowała się jeszcze w klinice z kilkudniową córeczką; on wypił kilka kieliszków wódki (a znane było, że raczej wódki unikał), poszedł do domu, połknął kilka proszków nasennych, otworzył w kuchni gaz - mieszkanie było małe, jednopokojowe upozorował wykipienie czajnika z wodą i położył się w ubraniu, z otwartą książką, na nieposłanym łóżku. Kiedy nazajutrz rano sąsiedzi poczuli na klatce schodowej ulatniający się gaz i wezwali pogotowie, i kiedy pogotowie wyłamało drzwi, Tadeusz Borowski żył jeszcze; umarł dopiero w szpitalu - lekarze nie wiedzieli, że prócz gazu zatruiły go nadto barbituraty i alkohol, nie mogli więc zastosować wszystkich środków ratunku. Prawda ujawniła się dopiero po sekcji zwłok.

The latest controversy developed between Pankowski and Maurer, writing in London's "Wiadomości", the first maintaining that Borowski's own realization about his declining creative powers pushed him to commit suicide. Pankowski also expressed grave doubts about certain aspects of Borowski's art. J. Maurer, clearly an admirer of the writer, denied vehemently Pankowski's charges.

There undoubtedly will appear other "theories" on T. Borowski's death. Whatever interpretations might be offered, though, it is clear to the writer of this dissertation that the causes of Borowski's tragedy can be gleaned from his writings. And whatever contributing factors might be recognized, the chief one should be attributed to the "God who failed". Having thrown himself into the embrace of Soviet Marxism, Borowski soon realized that it essentially did not differ much from the system he analyzed in the cycle Pożegnanie z Marią. Therefore, his last hope of a better world for mankind disappeared, and keeping in mind his passionate nature, death offered the only way out. Death was no stranger to him who belonged to "zarażonych śmiercią" (the infected with death generation), as K. Wyka aptly put it.¹⁸

¹⁸ Kazimierz Wyka, op. cit., p. 153.

CHAPTER II

POŻEGNANIE Z MARIĄ

Even a non-analytical, leisurely reading of Tadeusz Borowski's cycle of stories comprising Pożegnanie z Marią (Farewell to Mary) would enable an ordinary reader to state that the writer's principal concern is with his characters. Characters--people densely populate his stories; we hear them talking, quarreling, describing, and, generally, busying themselves with survival. T. Borowski's characters project the concentration camp universe, and not learned discussions about it carried on in a lofty, philosophical manner. The writer's emphasis on characters rather than on any other aspect of story-telling technique is understood from the point of view of T. Borowski's primary aim--to show how Man lived in conditions conceived, devised, controlled, and managed by MAN.

The chief purpose of this chapter, as well as of the greater part of the analysis, is the study of the characters in the Pożegnanie z Marią cycle. The proposed study will fall into two major sections, each with a somewhat different purpose and technique of analysis. The first section will study separately the principal characters in each story in the light of their structuring. That is to say, we will attempt to determine what techniques, what areas and traits of characters

constitute the main elements of T. Borowski's workshop. Equally important for us will be to find out what T. Borowski's characters are thinking about, what are their relationships with each other--in short, what constitutes the universe of men and women living in the shadow of death.

The second part of the study will attempt to establish--on the basis of findings derived from the preceding section--trends, tendencies and chief characteristics of the writer's technique. The second aspect of this section will be concerned with the "camp universe" emanating from the cycle.

Although the action in three stories in Pożegnanie z Marią, (Pożegnanie z Marią, Chłopiec z Biblią, [The Boy With the Bible] and Bitwa pod Grunwaldem [The Battle of Grunwald]) takes place outside the electric fences of the concentration camps, they could not be omitted from the scope and purpose of our analysis and study. Closer analysis will show that the three are integral and most vital elements of T. Borowski's goal--the universe of the concentration camps. That this is the case was well indicated by the writer himself at the time of final composition of the cycle for its first publication in book form in 1948. The subsequent analysis will also show that the first two stories opening the cycle and the last one, Bitwa pod Grunwaldem,

form two wings of the triptych enveloping the central component consisting of five stories.

The Inmate Society

The action of Pożegnanie z Marią takes place in occupied Warsaw, sometime in early 1943. The story is made up of several larger scenes evolving around some one dozen men and women: Tadeusz (the narrator), Maria--his fiancée, a young Jewess, an old Jewish matron, the Engineer (the absent owner of the building material supply company), the company's Manager (Kierownik), and six remaining but very briefly treated members of this group of people associated in various ways with the workings of the firm. Although even very episodic characters make an important contribution to the story, Tadeusz--the narrator--and his above listed associates will be submitted to more thorough scrutiny.

One learns very little about Tadeusz's outward appearance. Apart from his height--his fiancée is "... o pół głowy wyższa", (... half a head taller)¹, T. Borowski indicates no physical features, not even the clothes worn by the narrator. The narrator's age can be gleaned from several intimations--he is in his early twenties. Tadeusz

¹ Tadeusz Borowski, Utwory zebrane, op. cit., p. 5.

has a prominent position in the company's structure and, like other members of its labour force, he is acquainted with and active in the company's illegal, black-market dealings. More is given us about the narrator's private activities and ambitions: he is a student of the underground university; he reads and studies extensively and has literary ambitions. At the very beginning of the story we are told about Tadeusz's thin volume of his poetry published at his own expense. Tadeusz's interest in literature is also confirmed during his brief discussion with Maria, his fiancée.

In short--the figure of the story's narrator is very incomplete and sketchy. It is composed, in the main, from information related to the character's occupation during one day of the story's duration. There is nothing about his family, social background or his past.

However, much more and more important clues to Tadeusz's character are gathered from his brief utterings, opinions, few thoughts and his relationship with others from the world he is a part of. One thing is certain--he is rather morose, uncommunicative, perhaps shy. At any rate, he talks little preferring, instead, to observe and to listen. Although he is an active participant in the group's business of making a living, in rather difficult and dangerous times in Warsaw, he is very much aloof and emotionally detached from the peripetiae and

tragedy of various individuals. This is confirmed by Tadeusz's reaction, or lack of it, to the police round-up of innocent passersby. Most astonishingly, Tadeusz does not lose his composure after spotting his beloved Maria amidst the mass of humanity in the truck destined for forced labour and death:

I discovered later that Maria, being half Semitic and half Aryan, was taken to a well known camp by the sea. Here, she was put to death in a gas chamber and her body probably recycled and made into soap.²

Blood-chilling comment coming from Maria's lover. This is a very inhuman, cowardly attitude on the part of Tadeusz which could perturb even the unemotional reader. But, as later findings will show, such an attitude is the central feature in the structure of Pożegnanie z Marią, and of the entire cycle, indeed.

About Maria, the fiancée, one is told even less. We know few details about her clothing, almost nothing about her physical appearance (except for her being taller than her lover). But from the few utterings dispersed across three episodes, from her attitude toward a young Jewish woman and her relationship with Tadeusz, one obtains a

² Ibid., p. 38.

Jak się później dowiedziałem, Marię, jako aryjsko-żydowskiego mischlinga, wywieziono wraz z transportem żydowskim do osławionego obozu nad morzem, zagazowano w komorze krematoryjnej, a ciało jej zapewne przerebiono na mydło.

sketch of a young, kind, "romantic" woman in love with poetry and Tadeusz--the poet. She, too, is a student of the underground university. As in Tadeusz's case, we know nothing about her past--only her present-day situation projected through one day--the time-span of the story.

At the wedding celebration going on in the neighbour's apartment, we are introduced to several characters, among them a young Jewish woman, an escapee from the Warsaw ghetto, and a Jewish matron, also from the local ghetto.

The young one comes from a middle class, still elegantly dressed, and without great hopes of escaping the fate assigned her by the Germans. She knows the tragic reality behind the ghetto walls, a reality she forecasts for "Aryans" as well, with only one difference: while Jews still can escape and hide among Poles, the future "Aryan" ghetto will have no escape--"... nie będzie z niego wyjścia".³

The elderly Jewish woman, once relatively rich and with good connections among "Aryans", now plans with their help to extricate her entire family from the ghetto; then in the advanced stage of liquidation. Her solid and only hope is the firm's manager--her pre-war employer--who is willing to save her and her family for appropriate

³ Ibid., p. 11.

remuneration, of course.

Unlike all other characters in Pożegnanie z Marią, the matron is relatively well developed: we know something about her pre-war situation, and her present plans. We are told a lot about her physical appearance and clothing; her reactions, thoughts, manner of speech, gestures, and the like. We are also briefly informed about the failure of her plans precipitated by her son-in-law's delaying his departure because of unfinished business dealings--"On ma tam interesa. Jeszcze dzień, jeszcze dwa ... Tam się wszystko skończy". (He still has some business to attend. Another day or two ... and the ghetto will disappear.)⁴ It is important to note that sheer economic gain closed the door to possible salvation from the German gas chamber.

Relatively well-developed is the domain of the company's economic operations synonymous with illegal business dealings involving everyone within the company and many outsiders: Poles, Jews, and Germans alike.

From the narrator's information and the Manager's own talk and actions emerges a war-time businessman, a successful entrepreneur with extensive contacts bringing him good earnings. Indeed, the Manager has a capacity to adapt to every new situation, always with profit for

⁴ Ibid., p. 24.

himself. It would be wrong to think of him as an unprincipled monster; indeed, he is helping out many individuals--Tadeusz and the old Jewess, for example; he has his problems, worries, and fears. Like most, he dreams of peacetime when "... a man will be allowed to make business freely"⁵--this is his dream. But, in the meantime, one has to survive, and survive one must with capital sufficient to establish oneself, once this war is over.

Among the employees of the building material company and Tadeusz's closer acquaintances, one finds several young men--Apoloniusz, Tomasz, and a few unnamed figures--who expand the readers' perception of the group, without however adding anything significantly new. Two of them, though, the Engineer and a nameless female office worker throw some light on the subject which has been least talked about--the question of armed resistance, fight for freedom, independence, and the like ideas to which the bulk of "martyrological" literature has been dedicated.

The scene depicted in Pożegnanie z Marią takes place in Warsaw, 1943--the time of intensified struggle with the occupier. Warsaw was the hub, the nerve-centre of Poland's underground activities, of government agencies and political developments. Yet, these

⁵ Ibid., p. 31.

most vital aspects of the nation's existence occupy a very peripheral position in the story. Of many topics discussed and mentioned by the story's characters, patriotism, armed struggle with associated motifs and actions receive but two brief mentions, and both are connected with minor characters: the Engineer and an unattractive female. The first manifests his concern with national survival by paying Tadeusz's university fees with an admonition "So that I should study for the Fatherland"⁶ --informs the narrator. The second, "works" in the office. This does not prevent her from helping herself to company's funds and spending her time on reading cheap romances. But, the narrator informs us, "... with post-office regularity she supplied me with conspirational papers decked out with eagle and plough and sword."⁷

The foregoing analysis of characters in the opening story of the cycle provides information about T. Borowski's character drawing technique and about the group's life, activities, concern and mentality. Regarding the first--the writer's technique--there is one discernible tendency: the author's presentation of his heroes and heroines relies on outward traits. That is to say, T. Borowski does not probe his characters' inner life, its emotional stratum. Nor does the writer

⁶ Ibid., p. 19.

⁷ Ibid., p. 24.

reveal the rationale of the characters' existence and attitude. Instead, he makes them talk and act, or narrates himself about their daily routine existence. And that daily existence of Warsaw men and women centers on economy, i.e., making a living. The transcendental, lofty, idealistic, patriotic motifs constitute but a very tiny proportion of what the reader is allowed to know about the group's life.

Another aspect of the story's heroes and heroines--the emotional side of these people's lives, is clearly shown as being very reticent. The fate of the Jewish runaways from the ghetto does not move anyone; the old matron's return to her death evokes merely one comment: "At last she will die with her (daughter), as a human being...".⁸ The apocalyptic sight of a column of trucks filled with people caught during street round-ups only elicits a realization that the Germans are "Getting to us...".⁹ And the above quoted comment by Tadeusz on Maria's fate underlines this strange lack of emotion on the part of people witnessing massive suffering meted out by the occupier.

Whatever might have been T. Borowski's reason for this particular manner of treatment of his characters, he projects them as a group very much isolated from the nation and the city of Warsaw. We are shown a group of people going through their daily activities aiming at

⁸ Ibid., p. 38.

⁹ Ibid., p. 37.

survival; people who lived in the shadow of death and thus became quite immune to lofty ideals and slogans of patriotism or morality; people who want to survive at any cost, even at the price of shedding the customary idealistic garb in which other novelists clothed their characters. The group we meet in Pożegnanie z Marią is a universe of its own; a microcosm of humanity observed and related to us by the narrator--himself a component of this unusual society.

Another interesting characteristic of the group is its social origin. Although the author does not dwell on it, an analysis shows that the people in Pożegnanie z Marią come from the middle stratum of Polish society: businessmen, students, intelligentsia. There are no economic tycoons, aristocracy, eminent intellectuals and artists, political or military leaders. The writer's social selection is understood in terms of the story's setting, but it also points to his preference and perception of the universe he set out to present.

Whether very sketchy or somewhat more developed--all characters are projected from the perspective of the events of a single day. The story is told, one ought to remember, from "I" the participant and narrator's point of view, and, consequently, a deeper and more extensive treatment would endanger the writer's credibility. We are left with a glimpse of the existence of people ever-ready to meet imprisonment and death; people living in unusual times. And this is pointedly under-

scored in the second story of the cycle: Chłopiec z Biblią (The Boy with the Bible).

Chłopiec z Biblią is the shortest story of the entire cycle--barely eleven pages. The scene is a Warsaw prison cell; the story's time-span--several hours. By introducing a young schoolboy (he is in his early teens), T. Borowski confronts his readers with the life of a group of prisoners isolated from the world they left behind, uncertain of their future, but accepting death as an ever-present possibility.

Who are these men? About the young boy there is very little concrete information. He was thrown into prison for reasons unknown even to himself. Since he does not want to reveal anything to his cellmates except that his father is a bank director, they leave him alone returning to their own activities and pre-occupations: card-playing, exchanging bits of information about events in the prison, prison food and speculation regarding their own fates. The group is quite varied as to profession and type of "criminal" activity which led them to the cell: Kowalski, the typesetter, is accused of working for the underground paper; Szrajer--at whose place police found some newspapers and other evidence of working for an organization; Kozera--caught for smuggling foodstuffs into the city; Matula who "... pretending to be Gestapo" "... chodził w długich butach i skórzanej kurtce po chłopach i rekwirował świnie"; (... went around in jackboots and a leather jacket

requisitioning the peasants' pigs.)¹⁰ Mławski whose "crime" is unknown and as is the narrator's. Thus, we have six men and the narrator, apart from the boy. Two of them for suspected political offences (Szrajer and Kowalski), two for purely criminal offences, and three for undisclosed reasons.

The most striking impression one receives having completed the reading of the story is an atmosphere of calmness, of the matter-of-factness with which prisoners talk about their unenviable position. They know that death is very likely the outcome of their confinement. Yet, there is no hysteria, no confessions, no repentance. Indeed, following the bits of their conversation one could hardly think of death as the ever-present reality. And when death is mentioned, it is done in an unemotional fashion; in the same manner they talk about food, the prison gossip, the latest firing squads, and the game of cards they seem to prefer above everything else.

About their presumed "crimes", one hears very little. Indeed, the prisoners seem to withhold information on this subject, partly out of fear of implanted Gestapo informers. And their suspicion is well-founded, because, despite tacit acceptance of the firing squad, the prisoners have never given up the hope of staying alive. To attain this,

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 40.

some are willing to betray or to find other victims. Thus, Mławski coolly informs that he "... proposed to his father to become an informer"¹¹ a role the latter accepted. Mławski's strategem aims at saving his life at whatever price. Szrajer, the one caught with evidence indicating his involvement in underground activities, worries about his family not out of some fatherly feeling, but because he "hoped to receive food parcels from home".¹² Others simply nourish a thought that someone else will be called out for the next evening's execution.

These thoughts and schemes about which the prisoners talk openly and calmly would obviously be chastised by a moralist. But they are the real and principal elements of thoughts and feelings of men condemned to die. Furthermore, these prisoners do not show any rebellious attitude, not even in thought; they do not invoke absolutes or moral codes; they do not curse their oppressors. These men living in constant terror and fear of imminent death have been already dehumanized to a point that their sole salvation lies in remaining alive with the help of highly unethical deeds. They are ready to commit any crime to save themselves. At the same time, they had already reached the stage of passivity which eliminates most chances of escaping death.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 46.

¹² Ibid., p. 42.

Chłopiec z Biblią is again narrated in "the first person" point-of-view with a minimum of interference from the narrator. The story is executed with utmost economy of words; it would appear that the narrator repeats word-by-word the bits of conversation he overheard during several hours of the cell's life. And this technique gives the story even a greater degree of detachment from the subject matter. Here, the writer achieved almost total elimination of emotional colouring in the face of death and men's degradation. The narrator's own role was limited to the very basic information about the place, time and cell-mates, names and their "crimes". The rest comes from the characters themselves.

The third story, Dzień na Harmenzach (A Day in Harmenze) transports us behind the electrical fence of the concentration camp. In length, it comes close to that of the first story--Pożegnanie z Marią--about thirty pages. As to the story's position within the cycle--it is already the central part of the triptych--the "camp universe".

Similarly to other stories, the action of Dzień na Harmenzach (A Day in Harmenze) takes place during one day and develops around the group of prisoners working on the camp's expansion outside the camp proper. The story is divided into seven sections each corresponding

to one main segment, or event in the prisoners' working day. Here, as elsewhere, Tadeusz, the narrator, is our guide and a focus through which we view this strange social microcosm.

The story provides substantial material for the study of several aspects of the concentration camp universe: its administrative mechanism, and the methods which enabled a relatively small group of Germans to control the many thousand of camp inmates. It projects the network of relationships existing between various segments of prisoners and the prisoners' relationships with their overseers and executors. And, finally, Dzień na Harmenzach may serve for the evaluation of the "moral" code which was adhered to by all--the prisoners and non-prisoners alike. Similar concerns are at the centre of three other stories: Proszę państwa do gazu (Welcome to the Gas Chamber, Ladies and Gentlemen), Ludzie, którzy szli (People Who Kept Coming), and Śmierć powstańca (The Death of a Rebel). Our focus in the study of Dzień na Harmenzach will be the social stratification of the world of prisoners and the associated elements of the mechanics of their existence.

The protagonists of the story--Tadeusz, the narrator, Ivan, Beker, "Pipel" (Kapo's helper),¹³ another Jew--Rubin, Andrzej,-- are not ordinary rank-and-file prisoners. Indeed, they form the elite--

the "Prominents"--as they are called. They are men who spent a relatively long time in the camp, and, above all, who know the "ins and outs" of the system and learned how to put that knowledge to their advantage. Briefly, they learned the lesson of survival and know how to apply it. As a result, these men occupy leadership positions (usually they are foremen of the working gangs), they have good contacts, they know the psychology of the SS-men and German guards, they know how and where to get food and other necessities. Tadeusz, for example, eats relatively well, as do others of his "social" standing. Of this elite only a Jew, Beker, once the group leader in Poznań's concentration camp where he put his own son to death for food stealing, only Beker is always hungry. Beker's animalistic craving for food is an example of man's utmost degradation. Beker is an example of an "ex-Prominent"; of a man who failed and for this failure he paid with his life: together with a number of other sick and weak prisoners, Beker was selected for the crematorium. Germany could not afford feeding unproductive prisoners.

Neither Beker, nor his acquaintances became upset upon hearing about his destiny. Going to the nearby crematorium is not a

¹³ Ibid., p. 78.

novelty for long-timers. It is, indeed, as normal as going to sleep for people outside the camp's limits. And Beker's last wish was to eat, to quench this horrible hunger which turned him into the killer of his own son. This is how Beker expresses his last wish:

"Tadek, I have a request!"

"Talk" - I said leaning toward him.

"Tadek, I'm going to the chimney!"

I leaned even closer and looked straight into his eyes - they appeared peaceful and empty.

"Tadek, I've been extremely hungry for a very long time. Give me something to eat, for this is my last evening."¹⁴

It is not enough to know the workings of the system and to have good contacts to be in the elite; one must also be shorn of the most rudimentary feelings towards one's fellow man. In practice, it meant the fullest application of the "survival of the fittest" theory which posited no mercy for the weak ones. To survive one had to know how to keep away from those in command and how to apply the biblical "tooth for a tooth" slogan when it involved a man of equal standing.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 78.

'Tadek, ja mam do ciebie prośbę.'

'Gadaj - rzekłem przechylając się ku niemu.'

'Tadek, idę do komina.'

Pochyliłem się jeszcze niżej i zajrzałem mu z bliska w oczy: były spokojne i puste.

'Tadek, ale ja byłem tyle czasu taki głodny.'

Daj mi coś zjeść. Na ten ostatni wieczór.'

Examples of this type of morality abound in Dzień na Harmenzach. Thus, Tadeusz, who acts as foreman, simulates his own efforts in work, while screaming at his exhausted men when someone above his rank is nearby. It is he who forced Ivan to admit stealing the camp commander's goose, and consequently, exposed him to certain death; Ivan stole Tadeusz's two pieces of soap. Andrzej, the Russian, murders a fellow-prisoner by, first, beating him and then choking the half-dead Greek by placing a stick across his throat and then stepping on it.

The elitist knows that mercy would only lead to the crematorium chimney, and to avoid it, he would go to any length, cold-blooded murder included. Besides, the concept of "cold-blooded murder" does not and cannot exist in the prisoner's code. Full-scale murder is the order of the day. Human life is the commonest of commodities in Auschwitz camp's network. The elitist had long ago purged his mind and emotion of such a luxury as compassion. Hunger and the constant fear of death which may come any time, at the least expected moment and for the most incomprehensible reasons--these are two main pillars on which the German Reich erected its smoothly-running concentration camp system. Hunger and fear of death constitute the main structural elements of Borowski's vision of the camp universe developed in the other three central stories. It will, therefore, be to our advantage

to study them in the later part of the present thesis.

Another and important set of relationships within the camp's compound exists between the inmates and the free man. In Dzień na Harmenzach, and in all the remaining stories, treating life in the concentration camp, the free segment of the camp's population is made up of Germans representing various branches of administration, the Gestapo and the camp guards. T. Borowski's projection of masters and oppressors found in the stories of the cycle is much at variance with those found in the voluminous "martyrological" literature, films, and popular perception. The writer's view of the Germans is consistent throughout, and since it constitutes an important component of his worldview, the analysis and discussion of this aspect will be carried out elsewhere in this chapter.

To return to Dzień na Harmenzach. The writer's technique has not changed. As in the previously analyzed stories, we see the panorama of the prisoners' workday through the eyes of Tadeusz--the narrator, expanded by brief, laconic and essential information about people, setting, events, rules, and weather. But the bulk of the material making up this panorama comes from the actors of the drama--the camp inmates.

Again, as in Chłopiec z Biblią, the prisoners do not intellectualise or ponder profoundly over their misery and the everpresent proximity of death. Their talk and quarrels are verbalised in a single overriding and immediate concern: how to "organize" the supply of food to supplement their starvation diet, and how to avoid being caught, which may mean death, or a cruel beating, at least.

Everything else ascribed to the inmates that one can find in popular fiction and well-meant moralising tracks devoted to German concentration camps, is a figment of the imagination conceived, chiefly, by people who had never lived in a camp. This is what T. Borowski is implying in drawing a gallery of sketches representing different variants of dehumanized, twentieth century man.

As in previous stories, the writer adheres strictly to the three classical unities: unity of time (one day), place and theme. The other world, the one beyond the fences or guards is represented only by what the prisoners saw on their way to the work location: a fairy-like "... dworek z różyczkami i firaneczkami to jego dom." (... estate where the camp's commander lived with his family and dogs):

Walking along the road, one must unavoidably pass by a colourful cottage with green shutters and windows decorated with small hearts from paper cut-outs probably made by children. The upper halves of the windows are adorned with white curtains. Outside, bushes of pink roses surround the house and other flowers grow in boxes neatly arranged on the window sills. On the steps of a verandah covered with thick vines, a little girl plays with a huge, grumbling dog.¹⁵

T. Borowski's artistic intention implanted in this passage is obvious--to provide the sharpest possible contrast between the two worlds existing side by side; aiming to emphasize the "heaven-hell" like polarization of life between the inmates and their masters. Another element belonging to both universes--nature--is employed several times in the story, and for the same purpose: to use sharp contrast between the natural beauty of the world in which we live and the misery created by man. It should be added that incursions into the grim reality of the camp are executed with characteristic brevity and matter-

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 60.

Po wyjściu na drogę trzeba koniecznie przejść obok malutkiego domku o oknach z zielonymi okiennicami, które w środku mają niezgrabnie wycięte serduszka, i o białych, w górę zesuniętych firaneczkach. Pod oknami pną się delikatne róże o bladym, matowym kolorze, a w skrzyneczkach rosną jakieś dziwne, fioletowe kwiateczki. Na schodach z ganeczkiem oplecionym ciemnozielonym bluszczem bawi się mała dziewczynka z wielkim mrukliwym psem.

of-factness. There is no metaphysical yearning or lyricism--both strangers to the inmates' psyche and needs. Of course, the narrator noticed them, but, then, he is not very hungry. He knows how to avoid pitfalls, and, in addition, he is our guide.

Dzień na Harmenzach was called a panorama--and not without justification: it encompasses several gangs of prisoners, several "social" strata and a relatively wide area on the camp's periphery. Śmierć powstańca, the seventh sequential story in the cycle may be compared to a single section of the panorama executed with "close-up" technique and viewed in still sharper focus.

The place and time have changed. The action takes place in the closing months of the war, somewhere in Württemberg where the Germans transported the human remnants of Auschwitz, so they could still work for the tottering Third Reich. The group of inmates in the story are Poles of various lengths of "service", now employed in building a new camp site.

Analyzed in relation to Dzień na Harmenzach, Śmierć powstańca concentrates on sharp divisions separating the "old-timers" and newcomers. Tadeusz, the narrator, and Romek, the "dywersant", have behind them several years of Auschwitz and the "know-how" that comes along with it. The newcomers derisively called "the gentlemen from Warsaw" have no idea how to cope with the camp's intrigues and the

strange environment. They still maintain the mentality of people from the other side of the electric fence and this attitude leads them inevitably to starvation and death.

The difference between the two groups is colossal, although members of both are of the same nationality and are imprisoned for identical crimes: political work and armed resistance. Yet their attitudes toward each other are so separate as if they came from different worlds; indeed, they had. Tadeusz and Romek are the product of the camp's system, while the "gentlemen from Warsaw" are still in their initiation phase.

In no other camp story are menial and behaviouristic differences so clearly delineated as in Śmierć powstańca. Tadeusz and his companion skillfully apply the technique of survival they learned in the camp: they know how to impress their watchman with minimal physical effort; how to "arrange" for additional food without being shot; and, finally, what to eat without danger to their health. The others, the late-comers to the camp attempt, by doing an honest day's work, to earn the foreman's appreciation--extra food. Being hungry, they eat indiscriminately anything seemingly edible--and suffer or die. And, to make things worse, they persist in getting excited about politics and other notions brought from the world outside the camp. At the end of the story, it is Tadeusz and Romek who get bread crumbs

from the foreman, while others go hungry and one of them is near death.

It should be noted, though, that Tadeusz and Romek, and Tadeusz in particular, are not completely disinterested in the fate of their compatriots. They give them advice and warn them about the danger of indiscriminate eating; they disclosed some "secrets" of survival. But, that is as far as their ethics went. And the death of one of them had not evoked the slightest emotion in them. After all, they lived in the company of death for several years.

Reading the stories in Pożegnanie z Marią cycle is like a progression through various stages of Dante's La Divina Comedia: through purgatory to hell. The stories thus far analyzed constitute those progressive stages leading to T. Borowski's "hell" consisting of two stories: Welcome to the Gas Chamber, Ladies and Gentlemen and People Who Kept Coming--the fourth and sixth story of the cycle. Both focus on the chimneys of the Auschwitz crematoria.

The crematoria of Nazi Germany which disposed of millions of people in a most efficient fashion have been evoking mixed feelings: of shame, disgust, hate or, in a man with a disposition toward philosophizing--a feeling of pessimism with respect to the human race. For the inmates, the nearby gas chamber was a steady companion, and the smoke rising from the crematoria chimneys indicated the arrival of a new transport which usually created quite a stir; not because of some

lofty feelings, though. A new transport meant for some inmates additional food, clothing, even gold and jewelry which could then be traded off for other necessities.

Welcome to the Gas Chamber, Ladies and Gentlemen depicts the manner of disposal of a "rich" transport from Sosnowiec-Będzin region-- a very common episode in the life of the concentration camp seen by Tadeusz, the narrator, who, thanks to good connections with one Frenchman, joined a special group of inmates employed in the disposal of the transport.

This relatively short story unveils various aspects of the functioning of crematoria: the organizational machinery needed to gas thousands in the span of several hours; the division of labour; a vision of humanity passively accepting their fate, and, last but not least, it shows various aspects of human relationships in this most inhumane of acts.

One learns from the story about the organization of the entire process of genocide marked with proverbial German efficiency. Nothing was left to chance; every small detail was thought of and timed. The arrivals were quickly divided into those going immediately to furnaces (old, sick, mothers, children), while the healthy looking males and females were marched off to the camp: "Gas ich nie ominie, ale najpierw

będą pracować". (They won't escape the gas chamber, but first they will work.)¹⁶ Despite appearances there is order and purpose in everything done by the various groups of inmates and SS-men--both forming a well-knit, efficiently working labour-force. While some empty the freight cars of its human cargo (dead or alive), others insure that every piece of luggage, overcoats, purses, umbrellas are stored separately--the Third Reich will use them to help its economy. Still others, pack into the waiting trucks those destined for the gas chambers. And when the last trucks depart the inmates pick up "... meticulously the remnants of rubbish and dirt from the transport in order to remove all evidence."¹⁷

This Dantesque scene enveloped in the roar of trucks, screams of children and women, curses of hard-working inmates is scanned by the watchful eyes of SS-men, soldiers and officers ever-ready to shoot and whip. The entire process of annihilation is carefully noted down by an "... SS-man z notatnikiem w ręku" (... SS-man with a notebook) as "Ordnung muss sein" (Order must prevail).¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 89.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 93.

"... skrzętnie znad toru wszelkie papierki, wygrzebujemy spomiędzy drobnego żwiru nietutejszy, transportowy brud, żeby śladu po tym obrzydlistwie nie zostało..."

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 89-90.

By the early morning, the commando groups of the inmates and the SS-unit return to the camp. For the former, it meant several days of better living:

For several days, the camp will benefit from the transport-- the inmates will eat the hams, sausages, preserves, fruit; drink the whiskey, liquors; wear the garments and trade with the stolen gold.¹⁹

For the SS, it meant a duty well done.

The story is gruesome, to say the least. However, Borowski's purpose in writing it was not to produce yet another piece of prose of the type that has been written so many times by writers of various nations. Borowski's chief purpose was not so much to project the human mass in the final phase of annihilation; rather, it was to show the reactions of those who were instrumental in carrying out the Nazi scheme. And, although the SS-unit is in charge of the operation, all facets of work involved in processing the transport to the gas chambers along the prescribed protocol had been performed by the inmates themselves. It is they who deceived the arrivals, who tore children away from their mothers, whose brutality is even more revolting than the SS-man's whip or casual shooting.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 100.

Parę dni obóz będzie żył z tego transportu: zjadał jego szynki i kiełbasy, konfitury i owoce, pił jego wódki i likiery, będzie chodził w jego bieliźnie, handlował jego złotem i tytanicznie.

Closer analysis of inmates in the "Kanada" commando²⁰ shows several distinct human types: "Mussulmans"--inmates at the lowest level of animalization, whose principal and only goal in life is to get food; the old-timer like Tadeusz's acquaintance, Henri, through whose hands "... przewinęto się ... chyba kilka milionów ludzi" (... probably passed several million people).²¹ Such a man is totally immunized against any revulsion in performing the most gruesome aspects of annihilation. To him

The most irksome transports are from Paris: 'one always meets an acquaintance'. 'What do you tell them?' (asked Tadeusz). 'That they will take a shower and I'll see them later in camp. What would you say?'--inquired Henri.²²

The third type is represented by Tadeusz, the narrator. Although an old-timer in the concentration camp, this was his first contact and participation in the work performed by the "Kanada" group. But even Tadeusz's spirit hardened against the dehumanization he had witnessed in the camp, revolted at the sight of the utter inhumanity

²⁰ "Kanada"--such was the name given to the commando groups employed in unloading transports destined to the furnace. "Kanada" in the Polish language was a synonym of "being rich", "to do well".

²¹ Ibid., p. 97.

²² Ibid., p. 97-98.

Najgorsze są transporty spod Paryża: zawsze człowiek spotyka znajomych. A co im mówisz? Że idą się kąpać, a potem spotkamy się w obozie. A ty byś co powiedział?

committed against the helpless and defenceless transports of people. Compared with the scene at the ramp leading to the gas chamber, the camp itself appeared to him as a heaven:

I rested momentarily on a cool iron plate under the tracks and dreamt about returning to the camp, to the bunk bed without a mattress; I thought about sleep among my companions who will not go to the crematorium that night. ²³ Suddenly, the camp appeared to me as a bastion of peace.

Regarding the technique of narration,--Tadeusz's own contribution to the story is limited to the setting, brief descriptions and equally brief comments. There is one episode which sets off a single case of individual heroism on the backdrop of the apocalyptic scene. It involves a beautiful girl who confronted Tadeusz with the question as to the true destination of the transport. He did not answer, partly because "... jest prawo w obozie, że ludzi idących na śmierć oszukuje się do ostatniej chwili. Jest to jedyna dopuszczalna forma litości" (... one unwritten law which exists in the camp is never to reveal the imminent fate of those destined to die. This is the only

²³ Ibid., p. 99.

Leżałem na dobrym, chłodnym żelazie i marzyłem o powrocie do obozu, o pryczy, na której nie ma siennika, o odrobinie snu wśród towarzyszy, którzy w nocy nie pójdą do gazu. Naraz obóz wydał mi się jakąś zatoką spokoju.

permissible form of mercy),²⁴ partly, because that resolute, fearless and beautiful girl stirred in the hardened soul of the inmate the realization of his own deprivation. This brief episode reminded the narrator of Tuśka. The contrast technique serves the writer here, as it had on many occasions, to bring out the question of human values lost in the sea of anonymity and animalization. The courageous action of this lovely young woman is perhaps symbolic of the human dignity which normally exists among free people and for which she chose to die. She quickly guessed the true destination of the loading trucks and proudly embarked on one of them.

People Who Kept Coming (Ludzie, którzy szli)--the sixth story of the cycle--is also a vision of the crematoria's functioning, but rendered in different fashion and from several points of view. Here, the railway ramp at which the human cargo is unloaded and then processed through the crematoria constitutes the dominant leitmotif of the story. The other leitmotif narrated by the onlooker, Tadeusz, is the camp with its inmates and system.

Unlike other stories thus far analyzed, People Who Kept Coming encompasses a longer period of action, involving perhaps a few months.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 88.

These two leitmotifs--the ramp and the nearby camp--form one single universe differing only in the degree of the proximity of death. While the People Who Kept Coming through the ramp and toward the furnaces were beyond any hope of survival, those who have been witnessing this steady stream of victims survived and retained the hope of surviving. Those in the camp were destined to labour for the Reich; only illness and other forms of inability to be economically useful would schedule an inmate for the crematorium.

Despite the full view of the ramp and the road leading to the gas chambers--both regularly filled with fresh transports--the life at the camp has been following the established pattern with its "Mussulmans", "Prominents", SS-men, inmates' intrigues, hopes and worries.

In Ludzie, którzy szli (People Who Kept Coming), the author portrays the women's section of the camp and the indignities they suffered there. The main emphasis, however, is on the ramp, the road and the full view of operating crematoria which serve as a tool, a technique of bringing into sharp focus the effects of the system. The camp's inmates witnessing columns of people marching toward the furnaces lost most basic human feelings of sorrow and pity. Man, comments the narrator, has in these moments "... małą skalę reagowania na wielkie uczucia i gwałtowne namiętności. Wyraża je tak samo jak drobne, zwykłe odruchy. Używa wtedy tych samych słów" (... limited range of reaction

to human feelings and passionate emotions. He regards them in the same manner as small and inconsequential impulses. And he expresses himself accordingly).²⁵ Hence, the inmates' most casual tone when attempting to calculate the thousands already gassed, or merely a somber remark against the SS-men who jest at the sight of an elderly man being gently prodded by one of them, and who obligingly hurries to catch up with his group marching toward the crematorium.

Unlike Welcome to the Gas Chamber, Ladies and Gentlemen, this story has a much larger proportion of narration provided by Tadeusz. In it, we find many additional reminiscences and reflections originating from the narrator. The thematic content is definitely being presented from the perspective of time passed. Here, one does not feel that immediacy noted in Welcome to the Gas Chamber, Ladies and Gentlemen. The unity of time and place present in all the stories discussed up to this point is absent in People Who Kept Coming. The thousands of victims marching directly to the crematoria are observed by the narrator over a period of several months. "Action-packed" novelistic patterns noted in other stories, recede, giving room for reflection, description, and straight narration. However, outside of the masses of people

²⁵ Ibid., p. 152.

marching day and night to the crematoria and the suffering of the women, nothing new is added here to the vision of the camp universe.

U nas w Auschwitzu (In Our Auschwitz) has many distinctions: It is the longest story of the cycle; it is the first story written by T. Borowski and first published in 1946, in the volume Byliśmy w Oświęcimiu. It is also technically unique among the remaining stories of the cycle. It is the only story where reflection and judgements are prominent. In the first book edition, the story was placed between Welcome to the Gas Chamber, Ladies and Gentlemen and People Who Kept Coming.

Unlike all the other stories of the cycle, U nas w Auschwitzu is written in the epistolar form. In fact, it is a series of letters directed to someone not named, but, clearly, it is the narrator's fiancée, also an inmate in the women's compound of the Auschwitz network of the concentration camps. U nas w Auschwitzu is divided into nine parts of differing length ranging from two to six pages. Each part corresponds to one letter smuggled into the women's compound.

The setting--Auschwitz proper--where Tadeusz, the narrator and the author of the letters was sent from Birkenau to attend a course for medical orderlies. The purpose, according to the camp officials, was "... that the medics, some one dozen people from a total of twenty

thousand males in Birkenau, (should) lower the mortality rate in the camp and raise the inmates' morale".²⁶ The first letter informs the addressee about the overall "medical" scheme devised by the "thoughtful" authorities.

Auschwitz proper differs significantly from its branches: Birkenau, Brzezinka, and others. At that time, it was in fact 1944-- people in Auschwitz were scheduled to work more efficiently, and to achieve this goal conditions were improved somewhat. Tadeusz informs us about the availability of the camp's brothel for deserving, i.e., well-behaved and hard-working inmates; about Sunday concerts, sports, the always locked room with a "Library" sign on the door. But, alongside the very popular "Puff".²⁷ There is also a compound where the notorious Dr. Josef Mengele carries out his medical experiments on a group of healthy female inmates. The camp's population is made up of "very low numbers"--men who have behind them several years of survival, who grew accustomed to the system, and, indeed, who spoke of Auschwitz with a sense of pride. But they feared Birkenau, because it was the annihilation camp.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 101.

²⁷ "Puff" - an affectionate expression invented by the inmates for the camp's brothel.

The course attended by Tadeusz was carried out in an atmosphere of freedom undreamed of by the Birkenau inmates: lectures, studies, free time, long discussions, leisurely walks, relatively decent accommodation and food. An ideal situation for people coming from under the shadow of the crematoria chimneys to relax, think, dream, ponder, and reminisce. The greater part of the story-letters is devoted to these "unorthodox" matters. For the reader, it is an opportunity to extend his acquaintance with Tadeusz beyond what he learned from the previous stories; i.e., beyond daily existence in Birkenau and Auschwitz.

In these letters, Tadeusz reveals his inner self; here he formulates his views and feelings related to the system he is part of. Here, too, are posed most fundamental questions pertinent to the twentieth century world which prepared such an apocalyptic, Dantesque fate for humanity epitomized by genocide and the crematoria chimneys. In U nas w Auschwitzu, Tadeusz summarizes the essence of the episodes strewn in the other stories of the cycle. Contrary to the impressions one might have received on reading previous stories, Tadeusz emerges as a sensitive young man--something he managed to subdue and hide in his everyday dealings and struggles for survival. We learn that the stay in the camp with all its brutalities, atrocities, and ever-present death and hunger had not even weakened his love for the woman who was the primary cause of his imprisonment. His reminiscences about hours spent

together before the arrests are a powerful sustaining force, indeed, the only belief still retained:

I smile and remind myself that human beings keep rediscovering one another through love; for love is the most important and most stabilizing force in our lives.²⁸

Apart from love, there is Hope--the second most powerful stimulus making him and others want to live at any cost. This very hope, however unreal and intangible, is responsible, in Tadeusz's opinion, for people's passivity and apathy as they march toward the furnaces:

For it is hope that takes people passively into the gas chambers, it prevents rebellion and deadens the minds. It is hope that helps to tear family ties, allows mothers to reject their own children, causes the wives to sell themselves for bread and the husbands to kill others. It is hope that makes people fight for every day of existence, for maybe that day might bring the long awaited freedom. One often ceases to expect life in a better world, but one hopes merely to survive and rest a little in peace.²⁹

²⁸ Ibid., p. 112.

Uśmiecham się i myślę, że człowiek zawsze na nowo odnajduje człowieka - przez miłość. I że to jest rzecz najważniejsza i najbardziej trwała w życiu ludzkim.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 121.

To właśnie nadzieja każe ludziom iść apatycznie do komory gazowej, każe nie ryzykować buntu, pogrążyć w martwość. To nadzieja rwie więzy rodzin, każe matkom wyrzekać się dzieci, żonom sprzedawać się za chleb i mężom zabijać ludzi. To nadzieja każe im walczyć o każdy dzień życia, bo może właśnie ten dzień przyniesie wyzwolenie. Ach, i już nawet nie nadzieja na inny, lepszy świat, ale po prostu na życie, w którym będzie spokój i odpoczynek.

But how does this hope for a better tomorrow sound? Is it well based? Can we really expect it to happen after the apocalypse of the Second World War, its wholesale murder and genocide? How can one expect those who survive to become instruments in building this better world:

And in this atavistic atmosphere stands a man from a peculiar world, a man who conspires to prevent conspiracies, a man who robs to eradicate thievery on earth and a man who kills so that others might live.³⁰

Continuing the argument several pages later:

Look at the unique world we live in: there are very few men in Europe today who did not kill someone, and whom others would not wish to murder.³¹

In the seventh letter, Tadeusz rebels against history, against abstract platonism, against all those who might later write not about the victims,

³⁰ Ibid., p. 120.

I w tym wylewie atawizmu stoi człowiek z innego świata, człowiek, który konspirował po to, aby nie było kłótni między ludźmi, człowiek, który kradł, aby nie było łupiestw na ziemi, człowiek, który zabijał, aby nie mordowano ludzi.

³¹ Ibid., p. 121-122.

Patrz, w jakim oryginalnym świecie żyjemy: jak mało jest w Europie ludzi, którzy nie zabili człowieka! I jak mało jest ludzi, których by inni ludzie nie pragnęli zamordować!

but the victors. History with its magnificent antique civilizations was achieved through an Auschwitz-like system of slavery. Like the fate of the inmates' who have been laying down "... the foundation of some new, horrible civilization",³² writes Tadeusz,

The famed antiquity was in reality a huge concentration camp where they branded the slaves on their foreheads like cattle and crucified them for attempting to escape. That antiquity represented an enormous conspiracy of free men against the enslaved.³³

And Plato with his wonderful world of ideas? Tadeusz is now certain that all he once learned and believed was a big lie. Because "... w rzeczach ziemskich nie odbija się ideał, ale leży ciężka, krawa praca człowieka" (... in human affairs, high ideals play a secondary role, while in reality we face hard and exacting work of men).³⁴

The concentration camp cured Tadeusz from all "nonsense" learned at school and the Underground University in Warsaw. He does

³² Ibid., p. 130.

³³ Ibid., p. 130.
Ta starożytność, która była olbrzymim koncentracyjnym obozem, gdzie niewolnikowi wypalano znak własności na czole i krzyżowano za ucieczkę. Ta starożytność, która była wielką znową ludzi wolnych przeciw niewolnikom!

³⁴ Ibid., p. 130.

not believe any longer in an abstract beauty, truth and goodness built on suffering: there is no beauty if it relies on man's misery. There is no truth which bypasses this pain. There is no goodness which allows such suffering.³⁵

Camp experiences could not support the absolutes and abstracts of our civilization as they have been espoused by philosophers, priests, politicians, artists, the state, nationalism and the assortment of related ideas and platforms. Utter nihilism?--Not quite, according to Tadeusz. He still retains a faith in certain values: the value and power of love and a belief that "... godność człowieka naprawdę leży w jego myśli i w jego uczuciu" (... the dignity of man truly exists in his thoughts and his feelings).³⁶ These two absolutes brought from the world outside the camp constituted the essence of Tadeusz's sustenance and formed the canons of the world he would want to see after the war.

It would be incorrect to assume from the preceding considerations that, in this story, our narrator turned into a moralizer or a philosopher of sorts. Although reflections and introspection occupy comparatively large segment of U nas w Auschwitzu, there are still many

³⁵ Ibid., p. 130.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 132.

vivid episodes from the camp's life. None however adds a new aspect or throws a fresh light into what has already been shown or depicted in the other stories of the cycle. There is, for example, a discussion about the normalcy of the system which, contrary to beliefs held by outsiders, works smoothly, and is achieved:

Without magic, without poisons and without hypnosis. There are only a few individuals directing traffic in order to avoid tie-ups, and people flow like water from an open tap. All this is taking place among anaemic looking trees in a smoke-filled forest. Ordinary trucks deliver the victims, then return for others and bring new ones again and again, like on a conveyor belt. All of this happens without magic, without poisons and without hypnosis.³⁷

Another final episode confirms in a more drastic fashion man's final degradation. In it, a Jew from "Sonderkommando"³⁸ informs Tadeusz about the latest innovation devised by his group and aiming at a more efficient disposal of children--a method of burning four children at once, instead

³⁷ Ibid., p. 114.

Bez czarów, bez trucizn, bez hipnozy. Paru ludzi kierujących ruchem, żeby tłoku nie było, i ludzie płyną jak woda z kranu za odkręceniem kurka. Dzieje się to wśród anemicznych drzew zadymionego lasu. Zwykle ciężarowe samochody podwożą ludzi, wracają, jak na taśmie i znów podwożą. Bez czarów, bez trucizn, bez hipnozy.

³⁸ "Sonderkommando"--in German-- a special commando; in this case referring to inmates who worked in the gas chambers and the crematoria.

of one at a time. And when Tadeusz did not seem to appreciate this ingenuity, the "Sonderkommando" man explains that "... in Auschwitz we have to find diversions anyway we can. How could we otherwise withstand all this?"³⁹ Incredible?-perhaps. Our narrator ends the story with an ironic remark assuring readers that "... all this is untrue and grotesque; just as grotesque as is the entire camp, and the entire world".⁴⁰

We have already^{noted} Tadeusz's capacity for introspection and reflection; apart from this, U nas w Auschwitzu adds another important dimension to Pożegnanie z Marią cycle. In all previous stories, we knew the narrator only from his life and activities in the camp. The first story, Pożegnanie z Marią, supplied some information about Tadeusz's personality, but only those traits closely related to his activities within the building supplies firm, his studies, literary ambitions and his fiancée.

In U nas w Auschwitzu, the biographical lacunae have been filled. We are told about the circumstances of his arrest, his stay in dreaded Pawiak (the Warsaw prison-citadel), and the escape of the

³⁹ Borowski, Utwory zebrane, op. cit., p. 140.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 140.

prisoners while being transported by rail to the camp. Tadeusz relates about his family and his Warsaw literary friends killed by the Gestapo. We are told about his literary credo and polemics with the literary and political opposition.

In summation, U nas w Auschwitzu unveiled that part of Tadeusz which was left behind the camp's barbed wire. The narrator's figure that emerges after this story is now rounder, more complete and complex than that known from all previous stories.

U nas w Auschwitzu completes the central part, i.e., the camp sector of the cycle. Bitwa pod Grunwaldem (The Battle of Grunwald), the last story, constitutes the other wing of the triptych. Pożegnanie z Marią begins with life outside the prison in Warsaw; The Battle of Grunwald marks the return to people and life after the defeat of Germany. The moment that all of enslaved and conquered Europe dreamed of had arrived. After six years of wholesale murder and genocide, those who survived the concentration camps could start off on a new road to begin a new life. So it might seem to non-participants in this cataclysmic epoch of the European history. But this is not what emerges from The Battle of Grunwald. Although the crematoria's furnaces were extinguished, although the SS, Gestapo, the spectre of death and hunger disappeared, the concentration camp mentality and life-style remained.

Like the other stories, except for U nas w Auschwitzu, The Battle of Grunwald relates the life of a D.P. camp organized on the pattern of its predecessor--the German concentration camp. But, instead of German guards, administration and "Kapos"--there are American guards and camp leaders chosen from among the Polish officers and "Prominents".

For six years, they had kept marching in the camps in files of five; after two months' rest, they march again - glory be to God and the Fatherland - only now in ranks of four and instead of Kapos - they have the officers to lead them.⁴¹

--comments Tadeusz watching a freshly organized military unit marching around the yard. The camp's population is a mixed bag of ex-prisoners, prisoners-of-war, refugees, people of various social and cultural standings, diverse ambitions, conditions and plans for the future or lack of them. Moreover, the Polish sector is already seething with political animosities and the "red" versus "white" split. The camp abounds in all sorts of manipulators and black-marketeers, but most people do not know what to do, where to go--people without a future.

Against this rather dismal backdrop of "free" people in familiar confines develops a significant relationship between Tadeusz

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 173.

Przez sześć lat w lagrze piątkami łazili, teraz odpoczęli dwa miesiące i znów łążą, chwają Bogu i Ojczyźnie, po czterech, a zamiast kapów - oficerowie na czele.

and a refugee--a young and pretty Jewish girl determined to burn her Polish and Jewish past and to start afresh. To do this, one needed courage and the will to risk the unknown. But Tadeusz refuses the girl's proposal to leave the camp:

"I am afraid to risk it; I have witnessed the death of scores of people and do not wish to be killed now. Let others - why should I?" (...) "If we escape, we won't have any food. On the other hand, we might be captured by the black monkeys in white helmets and die from hunger in some unknown camp."⁴²

The episode ends with the senseless killing of the girl by an American guard. And Tadeusz? How has he reacted to the concentration-camp style of killing? The answer lies in his reply to the American camp commandant who asks what had happened:

"Nothing, sir, Nothing happened" - I indicated making an ironic gesture with my hand and a polite bow.
"Nothing happened - your man merely shot a girl from the camp a few minutes ago."⁴³

⁴² Ibid., p. 199.

"Ja boję się ryzyka, za dużo śmierci widziałem, żeby się dać zabić. Niech inni, po co ja?" (...) "Jeżeli pójdziemy stąd, to nam nikt nie da jeść. Na każdym skrzyżowaniu mogą nas złapać te czarne małpy w białych kaskach i wsadzić do nieznanego obozu, w którym zeżre nas głód."

⁴³ Ibid., p. 205.

"Nothing, sir. Nic się nie stało - uspokoilem go bagatelizującym ruchem ręki i uprzejmym poddaniem całego ciała. - Nic się nie stało. Zastrzeliliście przed chwilą dziewczynę z obozu."

Moments later Tadeusz added:

"Here in Europe, we are used to such treatment" - I replied apathetically. "The Germans used to shoot at us during the past six years and now you are shooting. What's the difference?"⁴⁴

The technical rendition of The Battle of Grunwald is comparable to U nas w Auschwitzu: the narrator's reflections occupy the central position in the web of the story. But, if the reflections found in the epistolary U nas w Auschwitzu are concerned with present and past, here of a great importance are his reflections about the future, a future which is very uncertain, and, in a sense, very tragic. The concentration camp structure and function no longer exists, but its model continues in the attitudes, values, behaviour, and mentality of the now free Displaced Persons (D.P.'s).

Structurally, The Battle of Grunwald is a very fitting epilogue for one of the most monstrous aspects of the European holocaust. It is the closing phase which condenses the leitmotifs of the entire cycle. It is the balance sheet of the war waged behind the barbed wires of the concentration camps--a balance sheet without prophesy or "Te Deum".

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 206.

"My tu, w Europie, jesteŃmy do tego przyzwyczajeni - odrzekł obojętnie. - Przez szeŃć lat strzelali do nas Niemcy, teraz strzeliliŃcie wy, co za różnica?"

The Germans

The universe of the concentration camps cannot be complete without considering the Germans--the only free men, yet a very integral component in T. Borowski's vision. And that they belong to the universe of their creation is consistently underlined by the writer in more than one way. Thus, whether Gestapo, SS-men, guards or higher officials--we know them only as part of the camp's administration; in their official capacity. They do not form a link with the outside world. This trait is, of course, consistent with the cycle's narrative structure. "I", the participant, through whose eyes and senses readers are familiarized with the subject, could not draw fuller figures of the Germans without changing the writing technique.

We meet Germans in every story: the gendarmes (Military Police) on duty in Warsaw; ordinary soldiers who sell stolen building materials to the Polish firm; an SS-man in Warsaw prison (The Boy with the Bible). In the camp, many more types of Germans are ushered in: ranging from the "Oberscharführer" through Gestapo officers and rank-and-file down to ordinary guards. Analysing the ranks introduced by the writer, one notes a relatively low level of SS officialdom. The majority belong to the lowest military ranks; the highest--Oberscharführer--corresponds to a staff-sergeant.

Another important characteristic--quantitatively, the positions Germans occupy constitute a small percentage of men and women depicted in the stories. One might say, they keep to the sidelines of T. Borowski's universe. And although they are unquestionable rulers, the camp operates through the network of leaders and informers selected from among the inmates.

How are the figures or the camp's rulers described? In studying various characters, one can distinguish two groups of Germans: those endowed with some human features and those depicted as silhouettes associated with certain functions.

In the first group we meet a Komandoführer, an ... "SS-man w rozchłestanej koszuli ..." (... SS-man in an open shirt ...),⁴⁵ who ... "śmieje się szeroko i dobrodusznie" (... smiles broadly and good-naturedly).⁴⁶

Or the notorious Dr. Josef Mengele

... in a green forest ranger's uniform wearing a small Tyrolian hat decorated with a variety of sports badges-- a man with the face of a kindly satyr.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 58.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 60.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 110.

... w zielonym myśliwskim ubraniu, w tyrolskim kapelusiku z natkanymi odznakami sportowymi, o twarzy dobrotliwego satyra.

Most extensively drawn is the figure of Tadeusz's post in One Day in Harmenze. We are witnessing the guard's attempt to bargain with Tadeusz for his much better shoes, and, later, see him enraged at suspected political propaganda. In both instances, the German was neutralized by the more intelligent inmates. On the whole, though, German characters drawn beyond the above examples are very few. Most belong to the second category.

For example:

On the platform of the station, several motorcycles arrived bringing well-fed, elegant, but arrogant-looking SS-officers who shone with polished boots, medals, and the silver insignia of their uniforms. Some of the officers carried briefcases, others powerful bamboo whips. Their appearance created an atmosphere of officious correctness and power.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 86.

Zajeżdżały z warkotem motocykle wiozące obsypanych srebrem odznak podoficerów SS, tęgich, spasionych mężczyzn, o wypolerowanych oficerskich butach i błyszczących, chamskich twarzach. Niektórzy przyjechali z teczkami, inni mieli giętkie, trzcinowe kije. Nadawało im to służbowy i sprężysty wygląd.

One officer in a green uniform superbly decorated with silver insignia, distinct from all others, grimaced with contempt. He inhaled deeply the smoke from his cigarette, shifted the briefcase to his other arm and with one hand motioned to a soldier. The guard slowly gripped the suspended machine gun, aimed at the train and fired a volley of bullets into the wagons.⁴⁹

"Behind me stands an SS-man, looking cool, collected and professional".⁵⁰

A bit to the side, stands a young, well-shaven SS-man with a notebook in his hand. He signals to the drivers as soon as their trucks are loaded and every departing truck is recorded by a stroke of a pen. Sixteen dispatched truckloads represent one thousand people - more or less. The gentleman is composed and exact. Every truck is accounted for in his notebook as "Ordnung muss sein" (in German - Order must prevail).⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 87.

Człowiek w zielonym mundurze, bardziej niż inni obsypany srebrem, skrzywił usta z niesmakiem. Zaciągnął się papierosem, odrzucił go nagłym ruchem, przełożył teczkę z prawej do lewej i skinął na posta. Ten powoli ściągnął automat z ramienia, złożył się i przeciągnął serią po wagonach.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 88. "Za plecami stoi SS-man, spokojny, opanowany, fachowy."

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 89-90.

Z boku stoi młody, gładko wygolony pan, esesman z notatnikiem w ręku; każde auto to kreska, jak odjedzie szesnaście aut, to jest tysiąc, tak plus-minus. Pan jest zrównoważony i dokładny. Nie odjedzie auto bez jego wiedzy i jego kreski: "Ordnung muss sein."

Clearly, the figures of the "masters" belonging to this category are shown as mere silhouettes without names, but associated with their functions in the operation of the camp. They are sketched as professionals fulfilling their duty in a calm, detached and very efficient manner. For the most part, they remain anonymous; we can only guess their official positions on the basis of the amount of "silver" of their insignia, the condition of their boots and the elegance of their uniforms.

What is the relation of the Germans with the inmates? T. Borowski gives us many situations permitting us to answer this question. An analysis of all episodes involving inmates and their "masters" show that in the majority of cases, the Germans do not seem to enjoy beating, killing or any other form of brutal action. They do not abhor it either. When they kill or beat a prisoner, they do it in a most disinterested manner. It is part of their duty, and they go through it with calm accuracy and efficiency.

Although the bulk of the Germans come from the SS and Gestapo units, none of them preach or demonstrate in any manner racism, hate, or the superiority of Germans--all those features associated with Nazi Germany. Indeed, one might say, that Germans in Borowski's vision are not lumped together as perverts, sadists, criminals, brutes or psychopaths. Neither does the writer project simplistic categories of "good"

and "bad" Germans. Instead, we find the German characters to be a mixture of human types found in any larger gathering of men.

To conclude, the figures of the "masters" in T. Borowski's cycle occupy a peripheral position, although treated as an organic element of the camp universe. The writer's Germans are not cast in the traditional role of "demons", the embodiment of "evil". Like the inmates, they too are the product of the system they serve.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The submitted thesis on T. Borowski's Vision of the Concentration Camp Universe is limited to the cycle of eight stories in his Pożegnanie z Marią. Tadeusz Borowski (1922-1951) wrote his works in Polish. Consequently, the original sources were primarily available in that language. We found, however, a few related articles in English and these are listed in the bibliography. T. Borowski's "death camp" universe is presented in a unique style of objective detachment and is considered to be the best portrayal of the Nazi machine, both in Poland and abroad.

In the introduction, brief reference is made to the tragic events of Polish history and their influence on literature. The bulk of this background information deals with the Nazi period in Poland (1939-1945) which leads to a better understanding of T. Borowski's work. In addition, several other writers are mentioned who also expounded the "martyrological literature" in Poland and whose philosophical approach to this subject differs from that of Borowski.

In Chapter I, we have T. Borowski's biography and Chapter II contains the analysis of the cycle of eight stories, namely: 1) Pożegnanie z Marią (Farewell to Mary), 2) Chłopiec z Biblią (The Boy with the Bible), 3) Dzień na Harmenzach (A Day in Harmenze), 4) Proszę

państwa do gazu (Welcome to the Gas Chamber, Ladies and Gentlemen),
5) U nas w Auschwitzu (In Our Auschwitz), 6) Ludzie, którzy szli
(People Who Kept Coming), 7) Śmierć powstańca (The Death of a Rebel),
and 8) Bitwa pod Grunwaldem (The Battle of Grunwald).

It was already stressed in the first chapter that T. Borowski's "camp" fiction stands in opposition to the majority of prose-works on the same theme, written by Polish and non-Polish writers. T. Borowski's position, though, should not be looked upon as sheer coincidence. Indeed, it is an artistic expression of the writer's worldview and literary program published in 1946, in the introduction to Byliśmy w Oświęcimiu (We Were in Auschwitz). T. Borowski and his two co-authors of the volume stated that:

Our unifying force was the daily shadow of death and nothing else; not the fatherland nor honour, but the common pain of exhausted bodies covered with scabs, affected by typhus and swollen legs ... we saw millions of people going apathetically and without resistance into the gas chambers ... We trampled over people who dropped on the ground weakened by starvation, and others trampled on us in similar situations ... We saw people murdered for stealing a few raw potatoes ... we saw women who sold themselves for a piece of bread ... we saw the above-mentioned suffering and believe that we are entitled to speak about it seriously and frankly, the way we remember it. The life in the camps, starvation, tortures and death in the gas chambers do not reflect any heroism ... but reflect the stupidity of those who allowed themselves to be captured ... It was a primordial struggle for survival left to the ingenuity of the downtrodden inmate alongside the downtrodden SS-man. We stress this fact very emphatically as we suspect that on this background legends and myths will develop in the future. In the concentration camps, we did not fight for fatherland or for reforms of man's inner self, but we struggled for a bowl of soup, a place to sleep, for a woman, or gold and watches from the arriving transports.¹

¹ Tadeusz Borowski, Janusz Nel-Siedlecki, Krystyn Olszewski, Blyliśmy w Oświęcimiu, Monachium, Anatol Gris, 1946, p. 6-8. passim.

Połączyła nas śmierć codzienna i bez patosu; nie za ojczyznę, nie za honor, lecz po prostu za wyczerpane ciało, za wrzody, za tyfus, za spuchnięte nogi (...) widzieliśmy miliony ludzi apatycznie i bez oporu idących do komór gazowych ... Deptaliśmy ludzi padających z głodu i deptano nas, gdy wyczerpani padaliśmy na ziemię ... Widzieliśmy ludzi zabijanych za kradzież paru surowych kartofli ... Widzieliśmy kobiety, które oddawały się za kawałek chleba ... Widzieliśmy i sądzimy, że mamy prawo mówić o tym bez osłonek, surowo, tak jak pamiętamy. Obóz, nędza, tortury i śmierć w komorze gazowej nie są bohaterstwem ... są grupotą tych co się dali zapaść. ... Została pierwotna walka, którą samotny, upodlony więzien toczył o swój byt, z równie upodlonym esesmanem ... Podkreślamy to mocno, bo na tym tle będą rodzić się legendy i mity. Nie walczyliśmy w obozie o pojęcie ojczyzny albo o przebudowę wewnętrzną człowieka, walczyliśmy o miskę zupy, o miejsce do spania, o kobiety, o zdjęcie i zegarki z transportów.

This statement aroused the ire of many writers and ex-inmates, and quite understandably so. Yet, T. Borowski essentially retained this position throughout the years of heated polemics. He reiterated his views which were incorporated into the artistic vision of the concentration camp universe projected in Pożegnanie z Marią cycle.

Whether the above quoted statement reflects the writer's irreversible, low opinion of mankind is a matter for another analysis. We can only suggest that behind these harsh words hides an anxious young writer, former inmate, who wishes to portray the truth about the atrocities which had been committed in the "death camps"; realizing also that some people may prefer to forget or to confuse the issues. Subsequent summary of the writer's wishes and aspirations will further confirm this hypothesis that Borowski's seemingly harsh and raw panorama of incarcerated humanity is also a disguise.

Pożegnanie z Marią appeared in a book form in 1948. It was not unexpected since many stories were published separately, beginning in 1946. Yet, although not a novelty, it received critical attention from all literary quarters, from critics of every persuasion. No other book in post-war Poland has been given so wide and diversified coverage. Many critics were repulsed; others found a number of the book's elements unacceptable, even avowed admirers. In particular, the young generation could not accept the volume without some reservations. Yet, everybody

read it, and every editor sought T. Borowski's contributions.

The best example of such an attitude is provided by the editors of Twórczość--a literary monthly appearing since 1945--who found it necessary to precede Dzień na Harmenzach with an explanatory editorial note. In it, the editors clearly stated that in the story "... brakuje tego stanowczego przeciwstawienia się złu ... Dlatego nie możemy solidar-
yzować się z sensem moralnym tych utworów ..." (... there is a definite lack of opposition to evil ... and for this reason we must relinquish all responsibility concerning the moral aspects of the stories).²

Critical articles which appeared later raised similar objections, in addition to many others. Borowski was accused of cynicism, moral provocation, one-sidedness, negative selection of episodes and characters, lack of patriotism and respect for the dead. Of course Marxists, especially from the ranks of the young, quickly noted T. Borowski's philosophical immaturity (which meant lack of a Marxist viewpoint) and Zolaesque naturalism. Lech Budrecki's essay on Pożegnanie z Marią which won him a literary award in 1948, represents this segment of literary criticism.³ L. Budrecki bemoans the fact that T. Borowski says nothing

² Editorial in Twórczość, 1946, No. 4, p. 42: preceding the story "Dzień na Harmenzach".

³ Lech Budrecki, "Mała Apokalipsa" in Twórczość, 1948, No. 11, p. 113-117, passim.

about "... genealogii tych ... na uboczu" (... genealogy of those ... on the sidelines).⁴

Non-Marxist criticism was much the same although stemming from different philosophical bases. On the whole, though, the problems and issues raised by the early critics are invalid because the critics accused the writer for his failure to do something he had no intention of doing. Indeed, if they read more carefully T. Borowski's own statement and polemics they would realize that the bulk of their opinions are not related to the writer's purpose and goal. And what was this purpose and goal?

A vision of the concentration camp universe perceived by one who was a part of it; a vision constructed according to the artist's views on man and executed in the literary form of his choice. Here we have fundamental questions pertinent to T. Borowski's art which, when answered, provide a summary of his art and worldview.

Borowski's microcosm of the camp universe is constructed out of carefully selected elements. The main structural elements are provided by characters from the "Prominents" strata of the camp's population. Tadeusz--the narrator, his acquaintances recruited from among foremen,

⁴ Ibid., p. 114.

ex-Kapos, and the camp's "old-timers" constitute the network within which much of the camp's life revolves. A much larger segment of the inmates--the so-called "Mussulmans"--are treated en masse, as an anonymous conglomeration of nationalities.

From various sets of relationships between individual "Prominents"; between "Prominents" and "Mussulmans" as well as the relationships between these two segments and their German masters, T. Borowski constructed the mechanics of the workings of this unique universe. And the mechanism is a very simple one considering the size of the population and its social, national, cultural and "criminal" diversity.

The simplicity of the operation of Auschwitz, and, undoubtedly of similar camps, was achieved by bringing inmates to the state of existence based on fear of ever-present death and hunger. When these two became the sole motivations for man's existence, then we deal with animalization, guided by primitive instincts, and not with moral "homo sapiens". As man becomes an animal avoiding instinctively death at any cost, and when his life's prime object becomes food also obtained at any cost--the old morality brought from outside becomes irrelevant. Ethics, accepted codes of behaviour, love, friendship, lofty ideals, honour,--all these and many other elements of the European culture are thrown overboard. Man who wants to survive in the conditions created by Nazi Germany in its concentration camps cannot afford the luxury of a morality he

learned from childhood in a decent society.

Whether T. Borowski was right or wrong in constructing the morality of the concentration camp based on fear of death and hunger is not for us to judge, although it caused revulsion and much irrelevant criticism. Notwithstanding these objections, T. Borowski created one of the most powerful and unforgettable visions of the last war in Polish fiction.

This achievement is the product of T. Borowski's unquestionable talent and an art seldom found in the literary debut. Some aspects of this art of prose writing have been studied in the preceding chapter. Here, we should like to provide a summary of the writer's workshop employed in Pożegnanie z Marią.

A strict adherence to "I"--the viewer and participant angle of narration has its advantages and disadvantages. It places stringent limitations on the selection of the material. With the exception of U nas w Auschwitzu, T. Borowski even further limited his perception to observing and reporting very ordinary, everyday facts, incidences, and episodes of the life behind the fences, life shown without the traditional in-depth commentaries, judgements and conclusions. All this is presented in dry, matter-of-fact manner. The narrator's function is that of an unemotional reporter or a camera scanning through selected portions of the camp's universe.

Such a technique of viewing has important implications for other components of the stories. One, and the most important in T. Borowski's art, is the chief role assigned to characters--people. And it could hardly be otherwise, because Auschwitz is a multitude of people living within unusual and highly limited and prescribed areas of activities. This is one thing that the writer intended to show his readers--several variants of possible existence; all reduced to the search for food and the avoidance of being scheduled for the gas chamber.

A human microcosm as it existed in Auschwitz, could hardly be constructed out of several, well-developed characters. Consequently, Borowski's gallery of inmates is a very large one, indeed. But, also, it is a gallery of sketches and not of portraits. The sketches are done in several bold strokes, each signifying an essential trait and component of life in this strange universe. These sketches of inmates spotlight actual, daily reality; they have no historical, social or cultural backgrounds which are totally irrelevant in a society where death and hunger are the chief forces.

To be consistent with narrative strategy, T. Borowski makes the characters reveal themselves through dialogues "talked out" in a large number of brief episodes. Dramatically-rendered episodes rather than descriptions coming from the narrator enhance the feeling of veracity--a very important quality in any work of art.

Similar consistency is manifested by the writer in treating the settings which occupy little space and are executed with great economy of words. Borowski's settings--whether natural or man-made--serve to locate the place of action. But they, especially nature, also serve another and important function: they render strong contrasts between the man-made hell and unperturbed, beautiful nature.

Borowski's universe is not a single, slowly unrolled panorama based on a single idea or character. The vision he presented is made up of a myriad of elements cemented by the writer's perception of the concentration camp universe. The already mentioned death and hunger is the other cohesive force. The organization of the entire Pożegnanie z Marią cycle has a triptych-like division intimating the road leading to, through and out of the twentieth century inferno. All three segments form a cohesive structural and conceptional unity.

As he wrote in the introduction to the volume published in 1946, his purpose was to tell about the camp without sentimentality, legends, myths. A vision where there are no heroes and no villains. But, was there really nothing else beyond this clearly and strongly verbalized goal? Every true work of art, we believe, contains a message; moral precepts. So does Borowski's cycle of stories.

Borowski's stories act as a powerful cleanser to the sensitive reader, a European reader. Contrary to the appearances, his stories

constitute a question mark and a chilling statement that the vision of the universe he offered is "the fate prepared for man by man". Borowski questioned the validity of a proud civilization that is responsible for the holocaust swallowing millions of innocent people. Can this civilization bring about a fundamental change?--is another question.

The hope it can, explains to a large extent Borowski's disillusionment with the West and his subsequent embracing of communism. But, soon, he realized that the latter offered no hope either. Borowski came in contact with the Western Allies only briefly, during an unsettled period of the post-war occupation of Germany. Consequently, he never really knew about life in a free society and the resulting disenchantment with the West was based on a few unpleasant contacts with the American soldiers. Upon his return to Poland, T. Borowski found a strong totalitarian regime and there was no escape. The young writer, at one point in his life, decided to co-operate with the unwelcome rulers of the land in the hope perhaps that he might influence and improve the lot of the Polish people. One question, however, must linger in our minds: what choice did Borowski have under these circumstances? Knowing the young writer's passionate nature and his strong convictions regarding "good" and "evil", it is little wonder that he chose death instead of a prolonged life under communism.

APPENDIX 1

ABSTRACT OF

T. Borowski's Vision
of the Concentration Camp Universe¹

The submitted thesis consists of four main parts: A. Introduction, B. Chapter I, Tadeusz Borowski's biography, C. Chapter II, contains the analysis of 8 stories from the cycle starting with: (1) Pożegnanie z Marią (Farewell to Mary), (2) Chłopiec z Biblią (The Boy with the Bible), (3) Dzień na Harmenzach (A Day in Harmenze), (4) Proszę państwa do gazu (Welcome to the Gas Chamber, Ladies and Gentlemen), (5) U nas w Auschwitzu (In Our Auschwitz), (6) Ludzie, którzy szli (People Who Kept Coming), (7) Śmierć powstańca (The Death of a Rebel), (8) Bitwa pod Grunwaldem (The Battle of Grunwald), and D. Summary and Conclusions.

Tadeusz Borowski (1922-1951) lived, as a young man, during a very difficult period of European history (1939-1945), accentuated by the Nazi occupation of Poland. Borowski's works are written in Polish. He started his writing career as a poet in 1942 by publishing the first cycle of poems "Gdziekolwiek ziemia..." (Wherever the Earth...), while attending the Underground University of Warsaw. Borowski continued to write poetry even in the concentration camp, where he was imprisoned by

¹ Odon L. Ostrowski, master's thesis presented to the Slavic Department of the University of Ottawa, August 1972, v-94 p.

the Nazis from February, 1943 to May, 1945, but he gained the greatest recognition in Poland following the publications of the prose works:

"Byliśmy w Oświęcimiu" (We were in Auschwitz), 1946, "Pożegnanie z Marią", 1948, and "Kamienny świat" (The Stony World), also published in 1948.

During the last three years of his life, Borowski concentrated his efforts in journalism.

In the introduction, brief reference is made to the tragic events of Polish history with the main emphasis on the Nazi period in Poland (1939-1945). In addition, several other writers are mentioned here who became the chief exponents of the "martyrological literature" in Poland and whose philosophical approach to this subject differed from that of Borowski.

In Chapter I, we have T. Borowski's biography dealing primarily with his life in occupied Warsaw between 1940-43, the underlying philosophy of the first cycle of poems: "Gdziekolwiek ziemia...", his first love with Tuśka Rundo and their subsequent imprisonment by the Nazis, 1943; liberation by the Americans, 1945; return to Poland, June 1946, and death in 1951.

In Chapter II, we provide an analysis of the cycle of eight stories from "Pożegnanie z Marią". The main stress is placed on the writer's workshop, especially with regard to the development of characters, point of view and his vision of the concentration camp universe.

The stories are related from "I", the first person point-of-view and the characters are revealed to us as people of one day's acquaintance, frequently without names, but associated with certain functions in the peculiar "death camp" society. Borowski emphasizes the portrayal of the elitist group of inmates who had the greatest chance of survival. The characteristic feature of the writer's workshop is his ability to reflect the realities of life in the "death camps" with a cool, personal detachment and objectivity. The author acts merely as a guide and refrains from commentaries, judgements or moralizing.

The Germans are presented in the same fashion as the inmates. In fact, Borowski's Germans emerge as ordinary human beings who merely carry out their duties diligently and efficiently. They are not lumped as a group of perverts, brutes or criminals. We do not detect any specific categories of "good" or "bad" Germans, and there are definitely no traces of the proverbial German "demons" who allegedly operated the "death camps".

The "Summary and Conclusions" simply contain the condensation of the main ideas expressed in the preceding chapters of this dissertation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I PRIMARY SOURCES

Borowski, Tadeusz, Utwory zebrane, Warszawa, PIW, 1954, 5 Vol. (introduction by Wiktor Woroszyński; chief editor: Jerzy Andrzejewski); Vol. I: Wiersze, 244 p., Vol. II, Proza 1945-1947, 314 p., Vol. III, Krytyka literacka i artystyczna, 268 p., Vol. IV, Z publicystyki 1946-1948, 481 p., Vol. V, Proza 1948-1951, 280 p.

-----, Utwory zebrane, Warszawa, PIW, 1954, Vol. I, Wiersze, 244 p.

Polish text. This volume contains a biographical essay by W. Woroszyński which is an important source of information. However, the essayist's interpretation and assessment of T. Borowski's works and activities are often superficial and clearly pro-Marxist's.

-----, Utwory zebrane, Warszawa, PIW, 1954, Vol. II, Proza 1945-1947, 314 p.

Polish text. This volume contains Pożegnanie z Marią cycle of stories which is the subject of our study in this thesis.

Borowski, Tadeusz, Janusz Nel-Siedlecki, Krystyn Olszewski, Byliśmy w Oświęcimiu, Monachium, Anatol Gris, 1946, 120 p.

Polish text: This was a collective book about camp experiences written by three former inmates. Later Dzień na Harmenzach (A Day in Harmenze) was reprinted in Utwory zebrane and is presently part of the cycle Pożegnanie z Marią (Farewell to Mary).

II SECONDARY SOURCES

Books

Bartelski, Lesław M., Genealogia ocalonych, Kraków, Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1969, p. 5-338.

Polish text: This book encompasses the epoch of 1939-1944 and deals with Bartelski's friends, his fellow writers including T. Borowski, many of whom died in tragic circumstances. It is an important source as it reflects the lives of several young men with literary ambitions during the war and Nazi occupation in Poland.

Lisiecka, Alicja, "Borowski-Nonkonformista", Z Problemów Literatury Polskiej XX Wieku, Warszawa, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1965, 286 p.

Polish text: Miss Lisiecka provides her own impressions about T. Borowski's art and makes occasional references to views of others who knew him personally. Her article (pp. 52-65) gives us a greater insight into T. Borowski as a man and as an artist. She regards him as a uniquely talented writer of realism.

Matuszewski, Ryszard, "Szkice krytyczne", Warszawa, Czytelnik, 1954, 324 p.

Polish text: This article entitled "O Tadeuszu Borowski" (About T. Borowski) is an excerpt from a collective work on unrelated subjects. We are concerned here with pages 287-293 where Mr. Matuszewski describes his personal friendship with T. Borowski. In fact, they were colleagues writing for "Nowa Kultura" (New Culture). Matuszewski gives us an insight into T. Borowski's pleasant and witty disposition. We are also given to understand that T. Borowski worked on two plains: (1) as a creative writer, and (2) as a journalist, with equal zeal and equal dedication doing an outstanding job in both fields.

Nałkowska, Zofia, Medaliony, Kraków, Czytelnik, 1946, 87 p.
Polish text: Z. Nałkowska became well known in the inter-war Poland, 1918-1939, as a writer of psychological novels. In Medaliony, however, this sixty-year-old lady uses a completely different method of expression. Here, she resorts to a collection of straight facts and impersonal sketches which stand as a chronicle of mute horror of the Nazi crimes in Poland. In this sense, her book corroborates the realities of the "death camps" described by T. Borowski.

Szmaglewska, Seweryna, Dymy nad Birkenau, Warszawa, Czytelnik, 1971, p. 7-383.

Polish text: This is a novel about life in the concentration camps, Auschwitz-Birkenau, where the author was imprisoned from 1942-1945. She was the first to publish an extensive discourse on this subject in the form of a novel. It is regarded as fiction, but aiming to portray authentically the realities found in the "death camps". This purpose is clearly stated in the foreword, when the author refers to her own imprisonment. At the end of the book, we find maps of the Auschwitz-Birkenau complex. This work enlarged our vision of the camps described also by T. Borowski.

Wyka, Kazimierz, Pogranicze powieści, (Proza polska w latach 1945-1948), Kraków, Wydawnictwo M. Kot, 1948, p. 7-390.

Polish text: Following the first article of 1946 by the same title, this is an enlarged treatise, in book form, containing critical analysis of several Polish prose writers and their publications between 1945 and 1948. We are especially interested in pages 150-159 where Mr. Wyka discusses T. Borowski's prose in Pożegnanie z Marią.

Articles from Periodicals
and Newspapers

Budrecki, Lech, "Mała Apokalipsa", Twórczość, 1948, No. 11, p. 113-117, passim.

Polish text: This critic regrets merely that Borowski concentrates mainly on portraying the "Prominents" in the camps and ignores the masses. Budrecki is a Marxist and as such, he spotted the superficial treatment of masses in T. Borowski's camp stories.

Drewnowski, Tadeusz, "Z popiołów Oświęcimia", Życie Literackie, Rok XX, No. 3 (938), Kraków, Newspaper article: front page.

Polish text: This article reflects on T. Borowski's camp literature with a reference to his personal life. Mr. Drewnowski links Borowski's post-war depressions and subsequent suicide with the latter's "death camp" experiences. This is followed by a sketchy analysis of Pożegnanie z Marią and Kamienny świat including references to Borowski's controversies with other writers.

Drewnowski, Tadeusz, "Na pół drogi pewnej polityki", Twórczość, IV, 30, 1970, p. 30-43.

Polish text: This article traces T. Borowski's career during the period 1948-1951, both as a writer and as a high ranking official in the Polish Information Bureau in Berlin. We get a glimpse into the writer's work in the main stream of the communist ideology and his revised views on Polish-German relations. It is an important source for our study of Borowski's biography.

Frąckowiak, Ewa, "W kręgu kamiennego świata", Tadeusza Borowskiego", Pamiętnik Literacki, Warszawa-Wrocław, Rocznik LIII, Zeszyt 4, 1962.

Polish text: The discussion here centres on Borowski's views about contemporary literature and the polemical nature of this work. Many of the stories in this cycle are dedicated to certain writers with whom Borowski led heated controversies regarding the functions of literature. This source is of passing interest to our study in this thesis.

Hostowiec, Paweł. "Natatnik nieśpiesznego przechodnia", Paryż, Kultura, issue of September 1954, p. 7-24.

Polish text: The author of this article scans in general terms the ten years, 1945-1954, of state-controlled literature in Poland. Mr. Hostowiec proceeds to prove that a totalitarian state has the means to impose guidelines on the writers by taking controls of all presses, paper supplies and by punitive regulations. He also makes references to organized meetings by the department of culture where definite guidelines were issued to the writers and intellectuals. The article is useful for our study in connection with T. Borowski as he created and published his major stories during this period.

Kijowski, Andrzej, "Highways and By-Ways of Contemporary Polish Letters", Polish Perspectives, No. 7-8, 1958, p. 50-56.

English text: This author provides brief comments about a variety of prose works containing primarily the themes of the "death camps". One of the writers he mentions here is T. Borowski, the subject of our present study.

Kijowski, Andrzej, "Prose Writing Since the War", Polish Perspectives, No. 1, 1961, p. 12-24.

English text: The same author as above refers here to events of history as a force influencing literary works. He discusses selected works of writers from the inter-war period and then proceeds to appraise the contributions of the new writers especially for the period 1956-1961. It has only limited value for our study here.

Lam, Andrzej, "Thoughts on Post-war Literature", Polish Perspectives, No. 10, 1968, p. 30-42.

English text: This writer sees the development of literature as a natural outcome or reflection of social and ethical phenomena. History is involved and so are various ideologies which become translated into literary works. This author tries to be fair to the inter-war period and for our purposes has only limited value.

Maurer, Jadwiga, "Zostanie po nas złom żelazny...", Wiadomości, No. 24 (1315), Londyn, 1971. Newspaper article: front page.

Polish text: This article was written in reply to Marian Pankowski's analysis in "Wiadomości". Miss Maurer defends Borowski's literary capabilities stating that he is still misunderstood by many. She expresses hope that someone will undertake the analysis of Pożegnanie z Marią.

Palusińska, Aleksandra, "O opowiadaniach obozowych Tadeusza Borowskiego", Prace Polonistyczne, Seria XXI (1965), Łódź 1966, Zakład Narodowy Im. Ossolińskich We Wrocławiu.

Polish text: It is an analysis of T. Borowski's prose in Pożegnanie z Marią and Kamienny świat. Miss Palusińska points to the cool detachment of the author of the above stories-- his almost total abstention from reflection and moralization leaving the reader to draw his own conclusions. It is a valuable source as it provides the analysis of prose in Pożegnanie z Marią, which is the subject of our study.

Pankowski, Marian, "Tadeusz Borowski po dwudziestu latach" and "Pierwsza śmierć Tadeusza Borowskiego", Wiadomości, Nos. 1281 and 1282, Londyn, 1970. Newspaper articles: pages 4 and 2 respectively.

Polish text: This critic attempts to analyze T. Borowski's literary output in two, full page newspaper articles. The end result--a very sketchy analysis indeed. Mr. Pankowski accuses T. Borowski of failing to participate in armed conflict against the Nazis, of being a Communist; he attacks Borowski's artism and concludes that this writer committed suicide because, toward the end, T. Borowski lost his creative powers in favour of journalism and could not face life any longer as a second rate publicist. The above articles provide a controversial view about T. Borowski and as such are of interest in our study.

Wirpsza, Witold, "Stalinowska przygoda literatury polskiej" Paryż, Kultura, No. 4/295, 1972, p. 8-18.

Polish text: This article takes a critical view of the government-controlled literature in Poland. Mr. Wirpsza bewails this state of affairs and suspects that this limitation of literary freedom might have contributed to T. Borowski's suicide. This article is especially important to our study as Mr. Wirpsza provides new evidence regarding the circumstances of Borowski's death.

Żółkiewski, Stefan, "Literature Since the War" (1), Polish Perspectives, No. 7-8, p. 76-87.

English text: The author is a known Marxist and employs his ideology especially with regard to the twenty years' inter-war period, in Poland. Otherwise, the article contains valuable information about the development of post-war prose in Poland including the contributions of T. Borowski.

----- Editorial in Twórczość, 1946, No. 4.

Polish text: This is an editorial comment of 1946 preceding the stories Dzień na Harmenzach where the editor states that the tale lacks a definite example of opposition to "evil". For this reason, the editor wishes to relinquish all responsibility regarding the moral aspects of the stories. (Note that the original "Dzień na Harmenzach" consisted of several isolated episodes).

Newspapers

Wiadomości - Londyn

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