

Przemysław Paweł Grzybowski

THE LAUGHTER OF LIFE AND DEATH



Personal Stories of the Occupation, Ghettos
and Concentration Camps to Educate and Remember

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The book comprises some descriptions of the circumstances in which the phenomenon of laughter occurred in times of social crisis associated with the Second World War and the occupation of Poland during that time. Owing to the reports, memories, and testimonies provided by the participants of the dramatic events in occupied Poland, the ghettos, and concentration camps, as well as the collection of humorous works from the times of the war and occupation, the reader will realize what an important function was fulfilled by laughter, as a factor of resistance, improving the quality of life, and shaping a community.

The author presents some examples of the activity of the "people of laughter" during World War II, within cultural creation, underground activity and in street folklore. He also presents some fragments of the personal stories of both the people known from mass culture in Poland (Adam Grzymała-Siedlecki, Marian Hemar, Anna Jachnina, Jerzy Jurandot, Aleksander Kamiński, Szymon Kobyliński, Janusz Korczak, Bożena Krzywobłocka, Eryk Lipiński, Antoni Marianowicz, Marian Walentynowicz, Władysław Szpilman, etc.) and little known or anonymous ones, who by making others laugh and laughing with them improved the quality of life of the people experiencing the trauma of war and occupation.

The book is interesting for people eagerly studying the history of World War II and the Holocaust in its intercultural approach. Furthermore, those who deal with historical education associated with national memory sites and with laughter therapy for the victims of social crises will find new inspiration through the anecdotes and stories contained herein.



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THE LAUGHTER OF LIFE AND DEATH

*For all the victims of the occupation, ghettos and concentration camps.
Let the nightmare they experienced never return.*

Przemysław Paweł Grzybowski

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Personal Stories of the Occupation, Ghettos
and Concentration Camps to Educate and Remember



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Introduction

*Laughter is the only means of resistance to terror.
The one who does not laugh, will be devoured by wolves.¹*

Michel Butor

In October 2018, I took part in the International Scientific Conference “Crisis in the Contemporary World: Diagnoses, Prospects, Threats”, organized by the Department of English Studies at the Faculty of Fine Arts and Pedagogy in Kalisz – a unit of Adam Mickiewicz University. Due to my interest in laughter as a factor improving the quality of life and education, I was asked to deliver a lecture. I decided on the title “Laughter in the Crisis Time of 1939-1945. The War, Ghetto, Concentration Camp”. While accepting the invitation, I was fully aware of how difficult this task would be – not only in regard to the extensiveness of the issue, but also because of possible misunderstandings resulting from the reception of comical contents in such an unusual context by hypothetical listeners and readers. However, I did not expect that it would turn out to be much more demanding and complex – I managed to collect so many sources that I needed to make a radical selection.

In my work on collecting and analysing comical materials, I have frequently met anecdotes, jokes, satires, and other artistic pieces referring to various (individual and social – e.g. economic, political, cultural, etc.) crises. Everything that happens during a crisis and the laughter involved in it is related to the unique experiences of individuals or societies, to the degree to which their humour is developed as well as to the culture of laughter that determines the perception and understanding of comical effect. When laughter accompanies suffering, illness, dying, violence, traumatic

¹ B. Epin: *Rire contre les loups*. In: H. Lethierry (ed.): *Savoir(s) en rire 3. Rire à l'école? (Expériences tout terrain)*. De Boeck Université, Paris-Bruxelles 1997, p. 79. All the footnotes and comments to quotations are mine, unless stated differently. Poems, songs and jokes – to the regret of the translator – are literally translated into English so that their sense, not their artistic form, is reflected.

experiences – when it occurs in circumstances commonly regarded as far from being amusing, the analysing and describing of human behaviour and its consequences is often exceptionally difficult and subjective. Moreover, researchers and popularisers of science are burdened with pre-assumptions, resulting from their own experience and the culture of laughter in which they participate. Their fact-based studies are not a manifestation of unconcerned merriness and the search for entertainment, but a consequence of noticing some very serious guidelines concerning human nature in comical situations and in the reactions to them. Those studies also give voice to the witnesses in order to save the memory of the past.²

While studying the circumstances in which laughter appears in the stories of people who have experienced unprecedented dramas, presenting the testimonies of funny incidents in spite of life-threatening situations, noticing people who laugh in remembrance sites, etc., distance and empathy are required. Having numerous experiences associated with education in slums, tanatopedagogy (i.e. reflection upon education to suffering, being ill and dying), and my voluntary service as a clown doctor (in hospitals, hospices and various care institutions), I have witnessed laughing in places and circumstances which most of readers might find unusual. Therefore, I am aware that my culture of laughter, sense of humour, and sensitivity to humour in critical situations – all shaped in such circumstances – may result in an overinterpretation of the motifs developed in this book.

For this reason, I have decided to give voice first of all to the witnesses and chroniclers. The introductions to particular motifs and the argumentation of ideological and gelotological³ assumptions have been reduced to an indispensable minimum. I have made efforts to avoid commenting, assessing and interpreting the facts described in the examples.

The reading with “a user’s manual”

Three parts have been distinguished in the structure of the contents. The first comprises an essay on laughter in times of social crisis associated with war. The second part is a collection of participants’ examples, memo-

² I. Passi: *Powaga śmieszności*. trans. K. Minczewska-Gospodarek, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa 1980.

³ Gelotology (in Greek: *gelos* – laughter, to laugh) – the interdisciplinary reflection on laughter in the philosophical, cultural, psychological, sociological, anthropological, pedagogical, linguistic, medical, historical, literary, artistic, etc. contexts.

ries and reports concerning the Nazi occupation of the Polish territories. The third part comprises an anthology of comical works of that time.

No general, theoretical, and interdisciplinary monograph has been published so far, which has presented the circumstances of laughter in the life of individuals, groups and societies functioning during the occupation. It would require in-depth analyses and exemplifications in historical, psychological, ethnological, cultural research, and other contexts. The materials which could serve the study of this issue are dispersed in many memories, diaries, publications in the field of history, literary studies, etc. In this book, my focus is on some selected threads as well as on indicating the clues for possible further exploration.

What I have assumed is that most of the readers have a basic, "course-book" information on the course of World War II, the occupation, the Holocaust, etc. Therefore, I have decided not to present this. There are many works on particular subjects, so those in need of information may supplement their knowledge.⁴ My own experience and observation of how comical materials pertaining to the war and occupation are received by my students, family and friends at various ages make me believe that there is a need for a return to reading about the issues which – in the common reflection – function in the traditional ideological and martyrdom context. I assume that presenting the events involving laughter in the times of the occupation might not only encourage the reading of classical works but might also help to see the witnesses of those events in a new light.

My book is only a modest invitation to a deeper exploration of the undertaken subject. I do not make generalizations here, nor do I suggest an outline of a theory. Moreover, I do not undertake any attempt at the extensive indicating and ordering all available materials. I have not written another volume of the history of the Polish cabaret and comic show, of occupied Warsaw, of ghetto life during the Holocaust, or of the crimes committed in concentration camps. I present **some selected episodes from**

⁴ E.g.: W. Bartoszewski: *1851 dni Warszawy*. Wydawnictwo Znak, Kraków 2008; C.R. Browning: *Geneza "ostatecznego rozwiązania". Ewolucja nazistowskiej polityki wobec Żydów. Wrzesień 1939 – marzec 1942*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2012; B. Engelking, J. Leociak: *Getto warszawskie. Przewodnik po nieistniejącym mieście*. Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, Warszawa 2001; Z. Jagoda, S. Kłodziński, J. Masłowski: *Oświęcim nieznanym*. Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków-Wrocław 1981; Z. Jagoda, S. Kłodziński, J. Masłowski: *Więźniowie Oświęcimia*. Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków-Wrocław 1984; A. Pawelczyńska: *Wartości a przemoc. Zarys socjologicznej problematyki Oświęcimia*. Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa 1973.

the occupation as well as some individual reports and memories, which illustrate the typology of laughter in times of crisis. If someone laughs at any of the situations described here, this does not mean the same will happen in other cases. I present only some incidents from the life of individuals, which cannot be treated as a rule without undertaking detailed studies.

The war time testimonies comprise many motifs associated with laughter. Reading the memories of resistance fighters and soldiers, witnesses of the occupation, ghetto inhabitants, former prisoners – by a person who did not experience the hell of those times and has no personal relations with those who did – leads to a belief that it is impossible that, in such horrible circumstances, one could hear laughter from time to time. It seems a bit easier to believe in the laughter of the executioners, for whom service in the army and occupational institutions was a “regular” job, after which they returned to their homes and families.

In the work of theoreticians of humour, the motif of laughter in places of suffering and torture does not occur. It is hard to explain this without appropriate research. It can be only supposed that one of the reasons is the fear that considering the horror of the prisons, ghettos or concentration camps, laughter might harm the seriousness of martyrdom and distort the traditional image of the occupation and death factories. Another reason is the difficulty in understanding the relationships and behaviour patterns in extreme, often pathological conditions. Still, another one is that the phenomenon of laughter appears as marginal against the multitude of phenomena and processes associated with the war and occupation. However, in spite of appearances, laughter was a very important element in the life of both victims and executioners. Treating it as a limit experience⁵ and a form of escape, self-defence, therapy, resistance or retribution in the context of individual experiences and social relationships opens a remarkably rich door with a multitude of perspectives.

The culture of laughter shaped during the war and terror of occupation is a small section of a reality dominated by crime, plunder, genocide, pain and death. I would not like any of my readers to get the impression that life in those times was funny and laughter was common. Laughing in a time of crisis cannot be unambiguously assessed or analysed when the participants and witnesses of particular incidents are

⁵ See: section “Laughter versus limit experiences”.

not alive. "Observing" those who laugh and analysing the reports concerning their behaviour from a distant perspective of place and time, without a thorough familiarization with all the circumstances of this phenomenon, might lead to the unjust accusation that they are of insufficient seriousness and appropriateness, or of pettiness, cruelty, insensitivity, etc. Yet, the memories and accounts of the occupation carry a powerful emotional load, are subjective, and are sometimes told in a specific language, which was also used to describe comical events.

In 1960, Andrzej Stanisławski wrote: (...) *I am deeply convinced that it is impossible to restore the truth about Pawiak and Majdanek in a literary and good-mannered convention. In such an approach, my diary would stop being authentic, personal memories, and this is not what we are concerned with. Soothing Nazis' or in general Germans' expressions, in fact quite common among the Polish community (for which every German was a synonym of crime and inhumanity), would distort the image of those years. Therefore, I could not avoid the occupation terminology, so my memories are often interwoven with the jargon used a quarter of the century ago. However, in my opinion, this language is indispensable to reconstruct those years – a time rich in experiences and incomprehensible to our youth, as well as to many adults who were lucky to have avoided it. This language also adds some colouring, sometimes hoarse or brutal, but always true, even when tinted with the subjective evaluation or my own commentary. Yet, this is a privilege of the author writing memories from which I do not want and cannot resign. (...) This is also a source of the, unintended while writing the diary, specific assessment of the attitudes of people who take part in it in various periods of my time in the camp. (...) We do not need to excuse ourselves about anything or to anyone. Still, we have the duty to testify to the truth, to testify to history – this duty can be undertaken only by those who have survived Nazi death camps and Gestapo prisons. As was once stated, "human memory reaches only the time it concerns; what starts beyond this is history".⁶* These remarks will become useful, especially while reading the second and third part of the book – I neither avoid nor use dots to hide vulgarisms and brutal, sometimes even repulsive, contents related to the terror of occupation.

I make use of the texts containing foreign and slang vocabulary which used to function in the described places. The recollected memories and artistic pieces comprise expressions from the *lagerszpracha* – the camp lan-

⁶ A. Stanisławski: *Pole śmierci*. Wydawnictwo Lubelskie, Lublin 1960, p. 6-7.

guage, which was a mixture of quite alien and distant linguistic elements in various language varieties – from the literary one to urban dialects and environmental jargons.⁷ Thus, the provided translations are not “pure” linguistic translations. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find the meaning of all words. In some cases, even the comments and notes of the editors of the quoted works have not been helpful.

I do not use the officially accepted forms, such as “German Nazi concentration camp”, instead – I use the abbreviations KL or LA (German *Konzentrationslager* – concentration camp; *Lager* – camp) along with the name of the place and/or institution – e.g. KL Auschwitz. I also do not use the distinction of concentration and death camps. In the quotes, I have updated and unified the spelling largely differentiated in the original sources by changing “ghetto” into “getto”, and the surname “Rubinstein” and “Rubinstajn” into “Rubinsztajn”.⁸ These editorial undertakings are aimed at making the form of the book more readable. Readers interested in the linguistic analysis of the provided examples are asked to consult the original sources listed in the footnotes.

I am deeply convinced of the great significance of every personal story. The individual, personal approach to the past, the story of a single person, enables the filling of cognitive gaps and struggling against the stereotypical and general view of reality. This is possible owing to presenting this reality from a unique angle.⁹ This concerns both their own stories and the ones recorded in witnesses’ memory, even if they were present in the life of others only for a short time. For this reason, I mention so many names in my book, doing my best to indicate those who recollect the stories presented. Apart from many famous figures in history and contemporary mass culture, there are heroes in my tale who are not known by name or surname but are important due to their contribution to enriching the culture of laughter.

⁷ D. Wesołowska: *Słowa z piekła rodem. Legarszpracha*. Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls, Kraków 1996, p. 73.

⁸ There is no doubt it is the same person described by different authors. However, no documents have been preserved with the original spelling of the surname. Therefore, I applied the phonetic recording, used, among others, by the editors from The Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute.

⁹ I. Chmura-Rutkowska, E. Głowacka-Sobiech, I. Skórzyńska: *Jakiej historii nam dzisiaj potrzeba?* In: I. Chmura-Rutkowska, E. Głowacka-Sobiech, I. Skórzyńska (eds): *Historia ludzi. Historia dla ludzi. Krytyczny wymiar edukacji historycznej*. Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls, Kraków 2013, p. 11-19.

From Augustynek to Rubinsztajn – about the people of laughter

What I suggest in the reflection upon the circumstances of laughter during the occupation is taking into account a special category of the participants of the described events – I designate them as the **“people of laughter”**. I was inspired to introduce this category by Victor Hugo’s novel “The Man Who Laughs”.¹⁰ The main hero is Gwynplaine who has been mutilated by wandering jugglers and experiences dramatic misfortunes. The unceasingly present smile on his face is a masque which in particularly bad times – in a crisis – is to evoke positive feelings in others. The hero is constantly accompanied by pain, life threatening situations, the struggle to survive, and... laughter. The man of laughter, as the hero in the novel, balances on the border of various emotional states. Despite his suffering, the man of laughter loves, makes fun, shares his own self with others, unconsciously trying to enrich their worlds and rebuild those who have fallen for various reasons. **My book is a tale about the “people of laughter” in the time of occupation, ghettos and concentration camps**, who in spite of their own suffering cheered others by making them laugh or by laughing themselves.

The idea of improving the quality of life by laughing in a time of crisis is nothing new. In my search for the archetype of the man of laughter which would correspond to my concept of such a figure, I came across the legend of the bagpiper **Augustynek**,¹¹ who cheered up people tormented by fear, illness and pain during the plague in Vienna in the spring of 1677. An episode from his life – in a fictionalized form – was described by Hanna Muszyńska-Hoffmannowa, who reported the following memory of Countess Barbara Wessel – the housekeeper of a Polish princess, Teresa Kunegunda Sobieska: *Probably five years ago, before the Muslims struck at Vienna, a terrible illness visited my homeland – the “Black Death”. People were dying like flies. Weakness started in an innocent way, with a usual sneeze – like from snuff. But this ominous snuff was served by the grim reaper – death. When hearing a sneeze, relatives, friends and acquaintances wished them sympathy: “Let God send you health” – but all in vain – the illness took over a person and after a couple of days death came. The whole quarters of Vien-*

¹⁰ V. Hugo: *Człowiek śmiechu. Tom 1-2*. trans. H. Szumańska-Grossowa, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1955.

¹¹ In Polish: a diminutive form of Augustin. (trans. note: A.C.)

na were deserted: richer town dwellers sought refuge from the plague in the mountains. The poor obviously stayed – what else could they do? And their hovels were soon marked with a black cross sign to let others know nobody was alive there. Such houses were only visited by gravediggers, who entered them wrapped in shrouds covering their figures. Nobody else dared. Nobody? No! The merry Augustynek did!

Just in those hard moments for Vienna, a peculiar jester musician appeared on its streets. He told others to call him Augustynek, as he was supposed to have gotten this name on his christening years ago, and soon he also got the nickname “merry”. This took place because this poor musician, a wandering vagabond, did not lose anything of his fantasy, although Providence had affected him severely by taking away his wife and child. He fearlessly entered the plague infected homes and by playing a lively sztajerek¹² on his bagpipe in his own arrangement, he cheered up those wretches whose days in that well of tears had been already counted. “Hey, Augustynek – the curious asked – aren’t you afraid of the Black Death?”. Then the musician answered “No. To be true, I’ve got a pact neither with God nor the devil, but I said to myself: be brave and the plague will fear you”... It was true that the Black Death kept away from the jester and soon, owing to the consolation he strenuously offered to sick fellows, he earned – apart from “merry” – a new nickname “dear”.

Merry Augustynek was really loved by our whole town. So, when one day the sad news was heard that the musician had been found without signs of life in a gutter, he was heartily regretted. “Still, the frost came for him too! Pity, what a pity!” – lamentations were heard both in rich town houses in the centre and in the hovels huddled near the town gates. Gravediggers threw Augustynek’s body on a ‘death wagon’ and took it far from Vienna. There at dawn, he was to find the eternal rest in a huge common grave. Yet, early in the morning, Augustynek woke up... as this turned out to be a blackout resulting from his excessive drinking. He got out somehow from this horrible pit and when the midday Angelus was rung, he was hopping all around the streets of Vienna and singing his favourite sztajerek with his bagpipe music. Just at that time, the plague – as if in fear of the brave musician – died down...¹³

¹² A Polish dance. (trans. note: A.C.)

¹³ H. Muszyńska-Hoffmannowa: *Rumaki Księcia Józefa*. Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, Łódź 1974, p. 18-19.

In the times of the Nazi occupation in Poland, applying the attitude of the man of laughter was encouraged by Aleksander “Kamyk” Kamiński, who wrote the following in a manual for saboteurs: *This is one of the most interesting phenomena in medicine and psychology. An optimistic, merry, smiling patient overcomes the illness quickly and efficiently. A worried, dissatisfied person, full of fears and bad hunches, becomes a magnet attracting illnesses; before such a person frees himself from one illness, another one is lurking. This phenomenon has not only clinical properties – it is reflected in a vivid way in the field of professional work. As a rule, the effectiveness of an optimistic and smiling person – obviously, I do not mean lazy clowns and jokers or story-tellers but a cheerful worker – is better than the effectiveness of an irritable, worried, grumpy growler. This is not the end – apart from success in health and work which accompanies cheerful characters, there is something additional which follows optimists: people call this luck. Such lucky people are usually cheerful and merry. I have never heard about a lucky person with a painful or worried face. So, brother, whistle, sing and smile around – because cheerfulness is a determinant of health and success in life. And even if you feel bad or have been in the claws of trouble or problems – defeat this and even in those conditions have a smile on your face and sing a merry song. This kind of pretending, when one tries to hide away the anxiety which bothers the heart with a merry tune, is a good game and good pretending. Self-suggestion takes place then, as a result of which the anxiety and fear, concern and pain will withdraw far into the corner of one’s soul, giving way to a cheerful smile and merry melody.*¹⁴

Nowadays, the idea of improving the quality of life through laughter is implemented in the activity of clown doctors. Those red-nosed “people of laughter” not only arrive at hospitals, hospices, care houses, etc. to entertain the ill, suffering and dying, but also appear in places affected by humanitarian crises due to warfare and natural disasters, in refugee camps, prisons, etc.¹⁵

People of laughter are recalled by many authors of diaries and journalist reports from places affected by various crises – also by war and occupation in their various forms. By using their *vis comica* and/or subjective humour of the reality, they trigger laughter, which in their own life and in

¹⁴ A. Kamiński: *Wielka gra*. Oficyna Wydawnicza Rytm, Warszawa 2000, p. 243-244.

¹⁵ E.g.: E. Balestrieri, S. Moser: *Clownin’ Kabul*. Italy 2002; P.P. Grzybowski: *Doktor klaun! Terapia śmiechem, wolontariat, edukacja międzykulturowa*. Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls, Kraków 2012.

others' lives play important social functions in each of the critical phases. People of laughter are professionals (actors, cabaret artists, clowns, satirists), who earn their living by laughing and making others laugh, "ordinary" people with a sense of humour, as well as some ambiguous figures who go beyond any schemes. The last category was represented by **Rubinsztajn** – a man of laughter from the Warsaw ghetto, a tragic hero, who will be more broadly presented further in this book.

The memories, reports and examples collected in this book pertain to laughter as a factor which made survival easier. This is the **laughter of life and death** – such which in some cases enabled survival or improvement of the quality of life, but in others – foretold its end. Human nature is familiarized with defensive mechanisms, which not only help to survive the crisis but also, still after many years, in some exceptional cases allow for a smile at the memories or even for laughing heartily at them. The people presented in my tale are the heroes of the moment, owing to whom crisis and human nature can be explored from a unique perspective. With their diverse origins, religions, and views, these people are witnesses, victims, executioners, and gawkers – involved in laughter, laughing or making others laugh...

* * *

While collecting materials for this publication, I wrote to curators of museums and art galleries, asking for consultations and the possibility of accessing the documents associated with the subject of my book. In the majority of cases, if the answer came at all, I faced surprise and a delicate refusal. Therefore, with very special respect, I would like to express my gratitude for the help and expert support of Sonia Ruszkowska, Ph. D. – Senior Specialist for Education in the Department of Education at the Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews, Piotr Setkiewicz, Ph. D. – Director of the Research Centre at the Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau, and Michał Trębacz, Ph. D. – Director of the Department of Science at the Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews.

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Part One

**QUITE SERIOUSLY
ABOUT LAUGHTER**

Laughter seems to be everywhere, yet – it is solely a masque. (...) Real laughter has hidden itself in ourselves; it has become a phenomenon of conscience, experienced only by the privileged.¹⁶

Georges Minois

¹⁶ G. Minois: *Histoire du rire et de la dérision*. Fayard, Paris 2000, p. 579.

Laughter in the physiological and sociocultural perspective

Laughter as a **physiological phenomenon** is a series of involuntary muscle contractions with co-occurring spasmodic, rhythmical breathing and a characteristic sound. Its length and mimic or respiratory form depend on the activity, time and intensity of various stimuli. Generally, laughter is an emotional, organic reaction, manifested in vivid excitement, usually of a pleasant nature. Apart from aesthetic or social stimuli (i.e. humour), laughter might be evoked by such physical factors as: low temperature, toxins, diaphragm injury, filling the stomach after a long period of hunger or fasting, impact of chemical substances, tickling, and other stimuli. Laughter can be also triggered by movement which does not demand intensive effort (e.g. gymnastics or light running). It is not necessarily a manifestation of relaxation and satisfaction with what is going on with a person or their surroundings.

The inclination to laugh is not a permanent quality and occurs in particular individuals depending on many external factors. When a person is alone, there is a bigger tendency to smile than laugh. Smiling and laughing take place much more frequently as reactions to meetings. A human being tends much less to laugh in situations of limited communication possibilities – for instance, before sleeping and just after waking up.

Uncontrolled laughter, induced by intensive external factors, is often a physiological reaction, a reflex. Among some other cases, laughter appears in hysteria attacks resulting from a shock, although – due to cultural aspects – in some situations it would be unacceptable (e.g. at the sight of a dead person, during a funeral). Such laughter can be associated with other physiological reactions, such as retching, tremors, faint, urination, etc. The occurrence of critical circumstances explains the enforced behaviour of those who laugh and they are usually treated with understanding in spite of their infringing upon a social taboo.

The lack of laughter and a disturbed sense of humour may be viewed as pathological states. This frequently takes place in melancholy or depres-

sion, when the ability to notice humour and to laugh is reduced or absent. There is also a state which impedes social relations – gelotophobia, a fear of being laughed at or of laughter in general.

Laughter is a social phenomenon in the context of its origin, manifestations, consequences, and – therefore – it is a factor of shaping an individual's personality in social relationships. As a **sociocultural phenomenon**, laughter is an element of social relations and a rich source of information about their course and character in a particular environment. As a human being often laughs involuntarily, it is difficult to plan laughter and pretend or control it in a natural way. Therefore, the skill of reading its senses in a particular situation is an especially valuable skill.

Laughter is a social signal providing a wealth of information about the participants of an interaction, for instance – about the statuses and relationships of the laughing and the laughed at or about their mental state. The enforcement of laughter or the suppression of it on demand always brings about an unnatural effect, even though one tries hard to control one's reactions.¹⁷

Sources of laughter are the phenomena associated both with one's own experience and with other people, the world of things, ideas, values, etc. Laughter always manifests an attitude to them and its particular (physiological, social, emotional, intellectual) aspects occur with various intensity and proportions. In order to understand another person's laughter, one needs to be able to consider it in a particular social context. Participants and observers of a social situation attribute certain senses to laughter, not only by confirming its physical presence but also by interpreting this situation in various aspects.¹⁸

The **model of the differentiation of laughter** current in European culture comes from antiquity. It occurred in Greek culture as *katagélân* – mostly meaning negatively valued purposeful derision, mockery, and as *gélân* – positive, joyful, spontaneous laughter. Some Hebrew expressions of identical sense appear in the Bible – *lâhaq* and *sâhaq*.¹⁹

Derision is a phenomenon which co-occurs with laughing at someone or something and is often related to ridiculing – an intentional

¹⁷ P.P. Grzybowski: *Śmiech w edukacji. Od szkolnej wspólnoty śmiechu po edukację międzykulturową*. Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls, Kraków 2015, p. 22-30.

¹⁸ M. Dudzikowa: *Pomyśl siebie... Minieseje dla wychowawcy klasy*. Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, Gdańsk 2007, p. 215.

¹⁹ G. Minois: *Histoire...*, op. cit., p. 39.

activity aimed at possibly the longest retention in social memory of the fact of derision. This kind of laughter is the opposite of **joyful laughter**, which is a sign of good mood in reaction to humour and does not hide any intention.

In the case of derision – aggressive, malicious laughter aimed at someone or something is dealt with. The social consequences of derision and laughing at someone may be felt for years. If the memory of the fact lasts and no positive event lessens its effect, the effect may be felt even until the death of the victim and/or the one who was derided. In some drastic cases, this can be passed on to future generations as an element of family or national history. Derision is often a tool of social conflict and resistance, a spark of a revolution or a popular element of mass culture, in which aggressive laughter is a part of the public debate. Mockery, spiteful jokes, derision and satire, as forms of laughter, are a means of achieving social mental hygiene through the discharging of dissatisfaction, powerless anger, indignation and complexes. They can also become a compensation for failure, disappointment, humiliation, fear and defeat – both personal and of a social group or the whole nation.

Expressing criticism of public matters in comical forms is a way to improve the quality of troublesome social relations. Such laughter is usually aggressive, but – after all – it is aimed at the public good. It has due significance in relationships between groups, provides a perspective for acceptance or rejection, and acts a base for attributing value to people and phenomena. It also helps to create, strengthen and integrate groups by contributing to the birth of laughter communities.

The object of derision, not only in the public sphere, is the real or attributed (to people who are laughed at) stupidity, helplessness, hypocrisy, meanness, greed, jealousy, etc. – the universal features condemned by the environment. Laughing at these qualities in art and mass culture allows for assuming that this is a manifestation of an eternal attitude and a legitimate reaction to the infirmity of human nature. In this way, it sometimes becomes an excuse to feel superiority by people who deride, who being intellectually and morally (at least in their opinion) stronger look down at those who are laughed at, revealing their insufficiencies and bad nature. Thus, laughing at others functions as a therapeutic factor, owing to which the society classifies and stigmatizes not fully valuable people because of their defects.

The most popular object of deriding is the enemy (rival, opponent) and their weaknesses (both real and imagined ones), which especially in a time of crisis is manifested in all forms of individual and group laughter at the enemy and their collaborators, ideas, plans, actions or their lack. Laughing at someone brings into the daylight everything which makes one weaker, lower and worse than one really seems. As a result of being laughed at, even a very strong enemy loses self-confidence and the victims of this enemy achieve a better mood.

Another tool for criticism, condemnation and ridicule and a means of derision is **satire**. As a sign of negation and disapproval, it is also a form of punishment which is to trigger the shame and dissatisfaction of those who are laughed at. It is used to discourage them from improper conduct and stimulate them to correct their mistakes. In the observers, it should also shape the attitude of criticism and uncompromisingness towards evil. **Satire is a particularly effective tool for resistance, retribution and revenge** – especially against common, public enemies (e.g. the occupier).

There may be a taboo on deriding some objects, phenomena, people (e.g. politicians, clergy). Infringing upon these may result in serious social consequences – for instance, informal exclusion of the derider from a particular environment or a punishment imposed by the law which protects the dignity of the hypothetical victims of derision. Although comical works are assumed to have no limitations and there are situations when everything can be laughed at, some values are particularly protected in the public sphere (e.g. religious, family) and, only in some environments and under some specified conditions can a comical attack meet no criticism or punishment. A taboo is usually associated with a particular environment and time. **The criteria of taboo and derision change in times of sociocultural crisis**, to the benefit of people of laughter and satire. Authors of satirical works often consciously and teasingly break a taboo in compliance with the principle “what is forbidden by the enemy can and should be laughed at by their victims”.

Sometimes, one of the forms (tools) of derision is a **spiteful verbal joke, a jest or a hoax**. They usually involve the fact that what might become unpleasant brings about laughter and enriches the observers’ sphere of pleasant sensations, though – at the same time – this hurts the person who is laughed at. These are the forms of retribution, resistance, or fun, in which creativity and uniqueness make it possible to show the superiority, advantage, and triumph of the joking person over the victim. Particularly

hurtful, merciless derision often becomes a show of power and its effects can be long-lasting and painful, depending on the environment's culture. The criteria of derision are changeable and are determined by the level of education, experiences, familiarity, and other factors which influence the participants of the situation. Prolonging derision in any form turns something that might appear at first to be humorous into tormenting the object of derision.

For some people, crossing the borderline between derision, satire and a spiteful joke or hoax may be an act of improving the quality of their life, but for others – it causes severe harm. This is a common phenomenon in a crisis situation, when the conflicting and mutually hostile sides seek all possible means to annoy, insult, hurt, and torment each other.²⁰

Laughter versus limit experiences

In ancient Sparta, laughter was so important that a temple was devoted to it, apart from similar ones devoted to fear and death. Homer, Theopompus from Chios and Herodotus often mention people dying of laughter during public ceremonies of funerals and sacrifice offerings. Georges Minois explains these phenomena with the popular attitude (in those times) of treating life as an unpleasant necessity. Both laughter and weeping were a sign of a man's being possessed by supernatural powers. **Laughter was associated with the magic of transgressing the border of death** and with entering the underworld, it was also a manifestation of the joy of liberation from – most frequently – a miserable life. The sardonic grin of people dying in drastic circumstances (e.g. warriors and gladiators dying in a battle or the arena) was viewed in a similar way. On the one hand, it was related to uncertainty, incomprehension, and fear, but on the other hand – it expressed the hope that suffering would end at last and what would follow might bring about the desired relief and liberation from the constant worldly struggle.²¹

In every society, the eternal form of reacting to the fear of suffering, illness, social crisis and death was the existence of formal and informal jesters, i.e. – people of laughter. In Mirosław Słowiński's opinion: *A jester is*

²⁰ P.P. Grzybowski: *Śmiech w edukacji...*, op. cit., p. 64-70.

²¹ G. Minois: *Histoire...*, op. cit., p. 20-37.

*a figure born in the world of laughter; laughter resulting from fear. Anxiety and aggression, fear and social deviations have found in this insane figure another form of articulation. The laughter of a madman who started laughing at the laughter of death. The madman, while prophesying the coming of this bogeyman, disarmed it at the same time.*²² Jesters were sometimes people who were mentally ill, intentionally deformed, often humiliated, bitten, tortured, given as a present, etc. The observers who described their life and work (i.e. diary writers, chroniclers) usually drew attention to the difficult life of jesters, poverty and bad treatment, especially in the feudal times. However, all of them emphasized that the presence of jesters in a particular environment mostly brought about positive effects by discharging tension through laughter.²³

In the Middle Ages, the mutual relationships and ambivalence of death and laughter and of people's protest against their brutal reality were publicly expressed in the so-called **fools' holidays**. Their roots reach back to the pagan Saturnalia – the joyful holidays of the winter solstice, during which at first, winter and its casualties are bemoaned and, then spring is merrily greeted. During fools' holidays, collective laughter encompassed both the “jesters” – (amateur and professional) – the people of laughter and the gawkers. What was triggered in the gathered crowds due to this was the wish to freely express the hidden childhood tendency to have uninhibited fun as a protest against the difficulties of life, suffering and death. With the passing of time, fools' holidays in their all varieties became a game of biting satire, parody and open criticism towards the authorities and a form of open protest against oppression.²⁴

In hard times, laughter was not only an element of joyful fun but it also helped to handle the threat of hunger, epidemics, wars and death. It was also an aim and a means which enabled abreacting and expressing hidden emotions in communion with others. The crowds taking part in the parodies of masses, funerals, mysteria, etc. during fools' holidays referred to the old Babylonian ritual of choosing the king of jesters and later, killing him to provide order in the universe. The chaos and fun which ruled during fools' holidays, turning the world order upside down,

²² M. Słowiński: *Błazen. Dzieje postaci i motywu*. Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, Poznań 1990, p. 69.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 10-16.

²⁴ J. Heers: *Święta głupców i karnawały*. Oficyna Wydawnicza Volumen, Wydawnictwo Marabut, Warszawa 1995, p. 68-125.

laughing at rulers and executioners, brought about – at least for a while – forgetfulness, liberation from sin, expurgation, renewal, as well as hope for a better fortune. In the face of the oppressed people's constant feeling of real and metaphysical dangers, laughter was used as a means of overcoming their fear, at least for a moment, after which laughing people returned to their daily drudgery.²⁵

These old ideas seem to be echoed in modern Christian eschatology as well. As Terry Lindvall notices: *Death and illness are just commas in life, horrible and unfortunate commas, but indicating just breaks before the exclamation mark of the Resurrection. Thus, although death might bring a person torment with its existential pain, in the perspective of eternity it can be laughed at and mocked.*²⁶

According to Odo Marquard and Helmuth Plessner, when the limits of human existence are endangered, the so-called **limit reactions**, including laughter and weeping, take place.²⁷ The authors mean both spatial and intellectual limits, which are trespassed in the crisis threatening the worlds of individuals and societies (e.g. war and occupation). When the world in its existing form has been toppled, nothing is or will be the same again. Co-occurring laughter and weeping, usually as signs of despair, helplessness and resignation, are also a manifestation of transgressing a certain limit within which changes can be accepted – the limit of mental and physical resistance to them. The laughter and weeping taking place while crossing limits most frequently results from the physiological mechanism of discharging tension and from their sociocultural determinants.

While developing the motif of limits, my suggestion is to follow Jacek Leociak and to consider laughter and weeping during the crisis of war and occupation as reactions to **limit experiences**, which (...) *carry a trauma and are associated with macabre and horror. They co-occur with the huge catastrophes of the 20th century, such as both world wars and the Holocaust.*²⁸

²⁵ M. Słowiński: *Błazen...*, op. cit., p. 53.

²⁶ T. Lindvall: *Zaskoczeni śmiechem*. trans. T. Szafranski, Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, Warszawa 2001, p. 301.

²⁷ O. Marquard: *Rozstanie z filozofią pierwszych zasad*. trans. K. Krzemieniowa, Oficyna Naukowa, Warszawa 1994, p. 125; H. Plessner: *Lachen und Weinen. Eine Untersuchung der Grenzen menschlichen Verhaltens*. In: H. Plessner: *Philosophische Anthropologie*. Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt /M. 1970, p. 155 and further.

²⁸ J. Leociak: *Doświadczenia graniczne. Studia o dwudziestowiecznych formach reprezentacji*. Instytut Badań Literackich Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Fundacja Akademia Humanistyczna, Warszawa 2009, p. 20.

Limit experiences take place in the field of both the individual and collective, social experiences. In either case, they are characterized by ambivalence and going through such an experience makes a person not the same as before.²⁹ As the author writes: *Pain throws us off the daily routine and allows for experiencing the limits of corporeality. It leads us to the edge, beyond which there is only the horror of death and the fearful corpse. A word turns into a shout, stammer, howl. Finally – into silence. Yet, the confrontation with pain, suffering and horror brings about cognition. Death confirms the meaning of life. Limit experiences, like a strong shaft of light, outline our human shape and bring it out of shadow.*³⁰

In the situation of the long-lasting crisis associated with the war, occupation, life in a prison, ghetto or concentration camp, the observed and experienced limits of death become obscured. Odo Marquard is of the opinion that death always exists in two forms: of our own death and the death of others.³¹ Torn of their privacy, tormented in the presence of their relatives and strangers, people co-participate in the life, suffering and death of others. In this way, the death imposed by executioners becomes “intrusive”, inevitable in the so far unknown and inconceivable context and form. **Laughter and weeping which co-occur with suffering and death as limit experiences gain through this new contexts and forms.** This is not only laughter and crying as a result of humour but as an expression of astonishment at the discovery that such a multitude of crimes is possible – such was the insolent objectification of victims and the unexpected (earlier considered impossible) inhumanity of the executioners.

In the face of limit experiences, it is possible that the temporary or permanent occurrence of the characteristic **limit identity** is seen. In such a situation, there “are no” personal, ethnic, cultural, national, etc. identities. There are only people conciliated in common experiences, emotions, dramas, hopes, expectations and reactions related to the threat to losing one’s life or death. Laughter is often their way of maintaining a safe distance from reality. It provides, even though only momentarily, protection of their own identity along with protecting, at the same time, the inviola-

²⁹ J. Leociak: *Doświadczenia graniczne...*, op. cit., p. 20-21.

³⁰ Ibidem, p. 5. Cf.: K.E. Cherry, L. Sampson, S. Galea, L.D. Marks, K.E. Stanko, P.F. Nezat, K.H. Baudoin: *Spirituality, Humor, and Resilience After Natural and Technological Disasters*. In: “Journal of Nursing Scholarship”, No 50 (5)/2018, p. 492-501.

³¹ O. Marquard: *Rozstanie z filozofią pierwszych zasad*. trans. K. Krzemieniowa, Oficyna Naukowa, Warszawa 1994, p. 127.

ble core of other people's personalities. During the ongoing annihilation of the existing world, the life and identity which preceded the crisis is hid away behind laughter and crying.³²

The limit experiences that take place particularly during the war and occupation do not leave only emptiness but they lead as well to radical changes in the global world and individual worlds, which might be described and interpreted also owing to the memories passed down to descendants. According to Jean-François Lyotard, (...) *not only was "the reality" annihilated in gas chambers but also the existing ways of talking about this reality. Great metanarrations, capturing the world as a sensible whole, fell apart: they were substituted by micronarrations: partial, temporary, provisional, and not ready.*³³ Every testimony, report, and chronicle record contain not only the testimonies of the past, but also messages, advice, and warnings, on the basis of which it is possible to study the process of transgressing the limits in times of crisis – and also in the context of laughter related to it.

Communities of laughter

In times of crisis, manifested not only in the threat to health and life but also in making joint attempts to stay out of trouble while opposing the executioners and occupiers, the rise of **laughter communities** seems typical.

Unexpected or provoked laughter usually brings about positive emotions among those laughing and the collective, jointly experiencing this create many enjoyable memories. This is the principle of building a community based on a particular social bond. A community of laughter may be informal (e.g. gawkers in the street who observe a funny incident) or formalized (e.g. the audience of a comedy show). A laughter community appears and functions within other communities (family, neighbour, school, work, societal, etc.), even those which are serious by nature (e.g. institutions), or shaped spontaneously out of strangers.

³² O. Marquard: *Exile der Heiterkeit*. In: W. Preisendanz, R. Warning (eds): *Das Komische*. Wilhelm Fink Verlag, München 1976, p. 133-151.

³³ J. Leociak: *Doświadczenia graniczne...*, op. cit., p. 6. More on this: J.-F. Lyotard: *Le Différend*. Les Editions de Minuit, Paris 1984.

The emergence of laughter communities is a natural phenomenon and does not require any competence or preparation from the participants. The ability to take part in laughter communities is innate and lasts over the course of one's life. Due to the various personalities of their members, laughter communities differ in the intensity of experiencing humour, in the preferences concerning its forms, in the skills of reading its undertones, as well as in feeling the need for creating comical values and sharing them with others. Therefore, one laughter community can accept certain comical content and behaviour, while others reject them.

The conscious use of laughter as an open form of oppression or a disguised means of fighting against opponents or enemies is often seen in political or ideological conflicts or long-lasting crises (e.g. war and occupation). Belonging to a laughter community which gathers together people of socially unaccepted or negatively evaluated mentality might be a source of trouble. Some comical activities, as elements of playing, are based on physical aggression and tormenting and are treated as acts of hooliganism or criminal acts (e.g. the playing of executioners in ghettos and concentration camps). They are driven by the wish of common laughter based on fulfilling the need of expressing anger, revenge, maliciousness, abusing an accidental victim, destruction, etc. It often happens that members of such laughter communities proceed unreflectively, following a spontaneous impulse, for fun, without thinking about the consequences or victims. In these communities, joint laughter at the victims and encouraging other executioners to "comical" activities is not only proof of integration with the professed ideologies, a sign of power and solidarity with the community, but also a manifestation of aggression towards enemies.

Every social conflict is accompanied by laughter aimed at the integration of a particular environment and the community of laughter becomes an effect of this process. This laughter might be aggressive, co-occurring with resistance and struggle, or joyful, associated with success (e.g. defeating the enemy) or some experiences that allow one to forget about a traumatic situation. During the crisis associated with the war and occupation, a particular internal integration and, at the same time, the large diversity of humorous situations were the characteristic features of the laughter communities of soldiers in the trenches (e.g. laughing at a safe distance at the enemy's comical behaviour) and the communities spontaneously born in the streets when the end of the war was announced.

Depending on the type of the comical forms (intelligent or primitive) applied by the conflicting sides, they can be received in different ways – the character and reaction of the recipients (especially the victims of derision) is of key significance here. Skilful use of humour and the intentional creation of a laughter community (even a very short-lasting one) may undermine the enemy's effectiveness. A well-aimed spiteful joke can inflame the conflict and result in other acts of violence, integrating – in this way – the members of the laughter community who are victims or who sympathize with them.

Although the frequency of collective laughter decreases in difficult situations (life threatening situations, suffering, illness, death, mourning, etc.), sometimes it breaks out for a trifle reason, discharging the tension, clearing the air, and reducing stress. Such laughter brings out a relief to individuals and groups (also unrelated and at various ages) who have been included – often unexpectedly and involuntarily – into a spontaneous and transient community of laughter. This laughter returns the mental balance both to those who make others laugh and to the laughing, sometimes even to the people who are laughed at, who join others in the collective laughter. The laughter communities created in this way are very internally integrated.³⁴

Typology of laughter in the times of crisis

While referring to the crisis, I understand it as a complex, multisided process related to the times of the war and occupation and affecting both individuals and societies. I take into consideration here long-lasting terror, persecutions, plunder, the intentional mental and tormenting of victims, their imprisonment, ghettoization, concentration in work and death camps, and their planned extermination by the occupiers.

Each situation needs more detailed specification concerning the phase or type of crisis which is dealt with – whether for a particular person or category of people this is a **crisis-breakdown** (catastrophe, degradation, fall) or a **crisis-breakthrough** (overpowering, resolution, turning point) which brings about new hope and new values.³⁵ Without a doubt, the victims of World War II (i.e. the inhabitants of the occupied territories, ghettos

³⁴ K. Żygulski: *Wspólnota śmiechu. Studium socjologiczne komizmu*. Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1985, p. 19-233.

³⁵ T. Hejnicka-Bezwińska: *Tożsamość pedagogiki. Od ortodoksji ku heterogeniczności*. Wydawnictwo 69, Warszawa 1997, p. 130-131.

and camps) experienced a crisis-breakdown, leading to the temporary or irreversible destruction of their worlds. However, many originators of the crisis (Nazis and their collaborators) treated it as hope for a better future, control over the world, better socio-economic status, etc. At least in the first phase of the war, it was a crisis-breakthrough for them and only the further development of the war, which took place against their wishes, caused that – from the executioners – they became victims of the crisis, though in a different way than the people whom they tormented and killed.

Distinguishing – in the structure of this book – the motifs of the occupation, ghetto and concentration camp is a procedure which helps to organize the collected materials. It is based on the **gradation of crisis**, from the systemic change in the life of a country during a war and under occupation, through the circumstances of life in a closed district – in which people tried to function “normally” at least in the beginning, to the daily experience of planned, mass extermination in prisons and camps, in which the criminal plan was implemented on an unprecedented scale.

Having applied detailed differentiating criteria, I have elaborated an **outline of the typology of laughter in times of crisis**. It comprises the basic types of laughter, which complement, supplement, and permeate each other, depending on the individual and social determinants of the participants of a situation. Thus, every case requires a separate, individual analysis. It should be emphasized here that the feelings of the witnesses and readers of the memories concerning a laughing person's behaviour are always subjective and only their verification in direct relation with the participants of the events could help to specify more accurately the circumstances in which laughter appeared, its justification, course and effects, etc. This means that different observers may consider the same phenomenon as different types of laughter. In the footnotes to the following typology, readers are provided with some selected examples comprised in the memories and reports (the main text of the book contains many other examples).

Criterion of time (When does one laugh?)

- **laughter before the crisis** (preceding, warning, expressing helplessness, impotence, ignoring or not noticing the approaching crisis);
- **laughter during the crisis** (corresponding to particular phases of the crisis and, the related or not, individual and social experiences);

- **laughter after the crisis** (the “post-laughter” occurring when critical – for individuals and societies – events and processes have come to an end, owing to which it is possible to view them from a distance).

Criterion of the subject (Who laughs?)

- **laughter of perpetrators and executioners** (soldiers, civil functionaries of the war and occupation system and their supporters, who consciously or unconsciously undertake decisions and fulfil tasks associated with the cause and the current course of the crisis);³⁶
- **laughter of victims** (people who experience oppression as a sign of crisis; deprived of decisive and legal possibilities in a systemic way; those who feel the effects of the crisis to different extents and are aware or unaware of them);
- **laughter of gawkers** (most often, the carefree laughter of witnesses of crisis-related phenomena, in which – for various reasons – they do not want and/or do not have to participate, because they are not aware of their occurrence, do not belong to the societies directly affected by the crisis and are indifferent to them).³⁷

Criterion of the presence (Who does one laugh with?)

- **solitary laughter** (individual, in the public sphere or hidden; determined by the feeling of threat due to emotions experienced in a situation, engagement in it, and potential solidarity with its participants);
- **community laughter** (collective experience of humour, evoking it and reacting to spontaneous comical situations in the formal and informal sphere; while sharing the laughter of others, the laughing person does not need to understand or agree with the cause of their laughter).³⁸

Criterion of the object (What and/or who does one laugh at?)

- **laughter at something** (spontaneously or intentionally evoked reactions to humour in different circumstances and with a different extent of laughing people’s engagement);

³⁶ Examples 2, 6, 23, 24, 26, 27, 34, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 50.

³⁷ Examples 10, 11, 12, 13, 25.

³⁸ Examples 1, 2, 55.

- **laughter at someone** (purposeful derision, joking, the ridiculing of others or oneself as a result of self-reflection, associated with the perception of humour in a situation in which one takes part directly or as a witness).

Criterion of purpose (Why does one laugh?)

- **spontaneous laughter** (laughing people react to unexpected comical events);
- **purposeful laughter** (in its passive form, it is intentional laughing at comical situations purposefully induced by others – both professionals and amateurs; in its active form, it is intentional making others and oneself laugh; derision, ridiculing, joking).

Criterion of competence (What preparation does someone who makes others laugh have?)

- **laughter of an amateur** (based on the individual, most often an unreflectively shaped culture of laughter);
- **laughter of a professional** (well considered and elaborated owing to the study of the determinants of humour and the practise of artistic forms of making others laugh – both in the case of those who make one laugh and who laugh).

Criterion of emotions (What are the emotional determinants of someone who laughs?)

- **carefree laughter** (laughing people, at least temporarily, those who do not feel unpleasant emotions or can overcome them; typical of people who do not pay much attention to the critical reality – e.g. children);³⁹
- **nervous laughter** (a conscious or unconscious reaction to stress; a sign of confusion, uncertainty, fear, etc.);
- **spiteful laughter** (accompanied by the experience of malicious satisfaction, pleasure and the feeling of superiority – among other things, because of someone's humiliation and/or defeat);
- **cruel laughter** (co-occurring with the feeling of satisfaction and pleasure at the sight of a victim's suffering);

³⁹ Examples 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15.

- **gallows laughter** (disguising the laughing person's misfortune, turning the attention away in an objectively not funny situation);⁴⁰
- **laughter through tears** (most often in an objectively dramatic and sad situation, the laughing person notices humour; experiences violent, mixed emotions; often masks the true feelings of the laughing person);⁴¹
- **gloomy laughter** (the laughing person perceives and understands the apparent humour of someone's misfortune and, while laughing, seriously reflects upon this particular situation);
- **satirical laughter** (expresses a critical attitude to the reality and its subjectively comical elements);
- **sarcastic laughter** (expresses reluctance and hostility towards the reality);
- **bitter laughter** (expresses disapproval of the reality);⁴²
- **joyful laughter** (the laughing person enjoys something, smiles and laughs, although the objective reason is not necessarily comical – e.g. an enemy's failure or death).

Criterion of function (What function does laughter fulfil in a particular situation?)

- **laughter of ignorance** (feeling awkward, the laughing person disguises their ignorance by laughter or does not understand a phenomenon and laughs, attributing comical features to it);⁴³
- **laughter of evasion and escape** (turns attention away from the laughing person, another person or situation; is an escape from traumatic experiences, fear, boredom, monotony);
- **excusing laughter** (the laughing person consciously covers their own or others' confusion, resulting from an error, incompetence, ignorance, etc.);
- **integration laughter** (integrates both the laughing and the laughed at, even against their will, contributing to the birth and/or consolidation of laughter communities);

⁴⁰ Examples 3, 7.

⁴¹ Example 31.

⁴² Example 64.

⁴³ Example 9.

- **laughter of discharge and purification** (helps to abreact and decrease tension, stress, trauma in various circumstances; has a therapeutic character – improves the quality of life and restores mental balance);⁴⁴
- **aggressive laughter** (directed against someone in the form of derision, ridiculing, playing practical jokes; aimed at harming, unpleasantness);
- **defensive laughter** (a form of protection from an attack; it precedes an attack and weakens its effects);⁴⁵
- **laughter of resistance and retribution** (most often, a conscious creation and the use of humour to oppose someone, take revenge for personal or others' harms);⁴⁶
- **laughter of reckoning** (discharging minor or serious tensions and conflicts of both executioners and victims of the crisis in the form of inducing amusing situations, full of irony and allusions);⁴⁷
- **educational laughter** (comical contents that serve to pass down important, not necessarily amusing, information concerning the reality of a crisis);
- **laughter of oblivion** (degraded, reduced laughter, dominated by deriding stereotypes without the awareness of their incompatibility to the reality).⁴⁸

The typology suggested here is of an arbitrary and open nature. The indicated types of laughter can be recognized in the examples presented in the following parts of the book. It is possible that readers will be able to distinguish other types of laughter based on their own criteria which I have not taken into account.

⁴⁴ Examples 6, 9, 18, 48, 51, 52, 55.

⁴⁵ Example 35.

⁴⁶ Examples 1, 4, 5, 13, 16, 17, 18, 20, 22, 48, 50.

⁴⁷ Examples 8, 19, 20, 21.

⁴⁸ This type of laughter was not considered in the typology comprised in the Polish language version of the book. It was suggested to me by Lech Witkowski, after his reading of the part on post-memory of this book. More on this: L. Witkowski: *Pora na nowy "Oddech myśli". Próba nowego otwarcia badań międzypokoleniowych w polskiej pedagogice*. In: L. Witkowski (ed.): *Dziedzictwo idei i pęknięcia międzypokoleniowe w pedagogice polskiej. Wprowadzenie do problemu*. Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2019, p. 237-243.

Part Two

**THE LAUGHTER OF VICTIMS,
EXECUTIONERS AND GAWKERS**

*Some die, others want to have fun. It has always been like that. Well, maybe not on such a large scale. People do everything to forget. Only to find themselves in laughter again.*⁴⁹

Ryszard Marek Groński

⁴⁹ R.M. Groński: *Ale głach! Wszyscy równi*. Warszawskie Wydawnictwo Literackie Muza S.A., Warszawa 2016, p. 53.

Occupation

(...) the not caressing hand of life has created mentalities which – even in the hardest moments, in the most horrible conditions – were capable of carefree laughter, of joking in spite of everything and sometimes about everything. (...) even in the most tragic moments – among bullets, in a Gestapo cell, and under the terror of the NKVD, the resilient human spirit cut through the insignificance of bars and chains, released with a salto-mortale and said apt things, consoling things.⁵⁰

Anna Jachnina

Preludium – Pre-war Laughter

Before the world was overwhelmed by the nightmare of World War II and the Holocaust, their main perpetrators had become the heroes of many satirical works. There were anti-Nazi jokes, satirical drawings, caricatures, lampoons, and pamphlets circulating both in the public and the private sphere. In the Third Reich, all manifestations of free satire were investigated and fought against. Every year – as a result of growing censorship, satirists and comedians were more and more frequently sent to prisons and penitentiary camps. Gestapo confidants who traced citizens even noted down in their reports the jokes told by them. The Nazi were aware of the significance of propaganda and education, which they perfected both in the national and international politics.⁵¹ Therefore, they reacted with

⁵⁰ A. Jachnina, M. Ruth Buczkowski: *Anegdota i dowcip wojenny. Wiersze i fraszki. Anegdota i dowcipy warszawskie... lwowskie... żydowskie... niemieckie krążące w Rzeszy i wśród Niemców w Polsce*. Komisja Propagandy Biura Informacji i Propagandy Komendy Głównej Armii Krajowej, Warszawa 1943, p. 2.

⁵¹ K. Kakareko: *Karykatura jako narzędzie polityki Państwa*. In: "Czasopismo Prawno-Historyczne", vol. LXIX, No 2/2017, p. 295-311; E. C. Król: *Polska i Polacy w propagandzie narodowego socjalizmu w Niemczech 1919-1945*. Wydawnictwo Instytutu Studiów Politycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Warszawa 2006; B. Rudawski: *Niemieckie afisze propagandowe*. In: "Z Archiwum Instytutu Zachodniego", No 9/2016, p. 1-5; J. Sobczak:

indignation and violence to all satirical activities aimed at them. Even in the countries outside the circle of the Nazi ideology, they made use of the diplomatic service and confidants to gain information about the cases of joking about Nazi politicians and they sent protest notes about this.⁵²

At the same time, the Nazi propaganda campaign ground on, in which many censored satirical texts and drawings commissioned by the authorities were used. The propaganda was mostly based on negative national stereotypes. The derision of enemies in the mass communication media was to humiliate them, reveal their weaknesses, and justify the need for their extermination within the framework of the struggle of real people against sub-humans. Thus, in the mocking articles published, for instance, in "Das Illustrierte Blatt",⁵³ "Das Reich",⁵⁴ "Der Kladderadatsch",⁵⁵ "Der Stürmer",⁵⁶ "Die Lustige Blätter",⁵⁷ "Simplicissimus"⁵⁸ and on posters, a lot of stereotypical motives appeared of Polish roads and bridges (badly built, full of holes and defects); of "stupid Polacks", who were fanatical Catholics, drunkards, slobs; of greedy Jews-Bolsheviks, who stank of onions, have huge noses, googly eyes, vampire teeth; of stupid, drunk, uncivilized Russians; of obese Americans or colonialist Englishmen, etc. The favourite heroes of Nazi satires were the politicians taking part in the (pre)war storm, such as Neville Chamberlain, Winston Churchill, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Joseph Stalin, or Władysław Sikorski. The exaggerated allegorical figures of the American Uncle Sam or the English John Bull were frequently used. Materials from the Nazi press were translated and reprinted in other countries, among other things, in the 'Fascist' press in Spain and Italy, in anti-Semitic journals of nationalist or far-right parties (e.g. in "Pod Pręgierz [To the Pillory]" published in Poznań) and later transferred to the so called *gadzinówki* (official propaganda and information newspapers issued in the war time), such as "Gazeta Lwowska. Dziennik

Propaganda zagraniczna Niemiec Weimarskich wobec Polski. Instytut Zachodni, Poznań 1973.

⁵² R. Herzog, J. S. Chase: *Dead Funny. Humor in Hitler's Germany.* Melville House, New York 2011.

⁵³ Das Illustrierte Blatt – Illustrated Newspaper.

⁵⁴ Das Reich – The Reich.

⁵⁵ Der Kladderadatsch – Accident (onomatopoeic).

⁵⁶ Der Stürmer – Stormtrooper.

⁵⁷ Die Lustige Blätter – Funny Leaves.

⁵⁸ Simplicissimus – An unmannered chap.

dla Dystryktu Galicyjskiego [Lviv Paper for the District of Galicia]”, “Goniec Krakowski [Cracow Messenger]”, “Kurier Częstochowski [Czestochowa Courier]”, or “Nowy Kurier Warszawski [New Courier of Warsaw]”.⁵⁹

In Poland, the anti-Nazi satire started in the 1930s in the press, cabarets and music halls. For instance, the caricatures of Nazis, satires, and humorous stories frequently appeared in such magazines as “Czarno na Białym [In Black and White]”, “Lewar [Leverage]”, “Szpilki [Pins]”, “Wiadomości Literackie [Literary News]”. Their authors were famous cartoonists (Karol Baraniecki, Eryk Lipiński, Mieczysław Piotrowski, Andrzej Siemaszko, Henryk Tomaszewski, Zenon Wasilewski, Ignacy Witz, Jerzy Zaruba) and writers (Leonid Fokszański, Zuzanna Ginczanka, Tadeusz Hollender, Świątopełk Karpiński, Aleksander Kraushar, Stanisław Jerzy Lec, Janusz Minkiewicz, Adolf Nowaczyński, Władysław Syrokomla, Edward Szymański, Władysław Szlengel and Julian Tuwim).⁶⁰

In 1933, in the music theatre Cyganeria [Bohemia], Eugeniusz Bodo – the king of the Polish cinema – announced the rise of his own political party, “Różowe Koszulki [The Pink Shirts]”, of which the member’s image remarkably resembled the Nazi one: a shirt; a heart instead of swastika; the greeting gesture with the left arm lifted up, the right hand on the heart, and a smile on the face. Co-performers of the joke were the journalists from the weekly «Kino [Cinema]», which published an interview and suggestive illustrations: *So far, “Kino” has been apolitical. Yet, now – when shirts in various colours are in fashion: black, brown, celadon and others, when the world is being shaken by new movements, such as Hitlerism and Nazism, “Kino” has also decided to take part in the act of social reconstruction and here it is – as a manifestation of a new policy – Bodoism – or the party of.. Pink Shirts.*

⁵⁹ P. Bednarz: *Polska i Polacy w świetle propagandy niemieckiej na przykładzie satyr w tygodniku “Kladderadatsch” w latach 1930-1939*. In: “Kultura – Media – Teologia”, No 25/2016, p. 133-151; T. Sikorski: *Karykatura polityczna jako źródło do badań nad historią Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej. Postulaty badawcze*. In: “Historia i Polityka”, No 1/2009, p. 63-81; H. Sojka-Masztalercz: *Rysunek satyryczny jako narzędzie propagandowego oddziaływania w polskojęzycznej prasie “gazdinowej” (na materiale “Gazety Lwowskiej” 1939-1945)*. In: “Studia Ukrainica Poznaniensia”, No 1/2013, p. 307-313; T. Szarota: *Gdańsk w karykaturze niemieckiej*. In: “Mazowieckie Studia Humanistyczne”, No 2/1999, p. 29-52; T. Szarota: *Polak w karykaturze niemieckiej (1914-1944). Przyczynek do badań stereotypów narodowych*. In: W. Wrzesiński (ed.): *Wokół stereotypów Niemców i Polaków*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Wrocław 1993, p. 69-93.

⁶⁰ E. Lipiński, J. Szeląg (eds): *Pożegnanie z Hitlerem*. Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza Czytelnik, Warszawa 1945.

How has this happened?

In the following way:

– I'd like to invite a representative of "Kino" to an important conference – ordered Eugeniusz Bodo – the king of the Polish screen.

– At your service, Your Majesty.

– I'll ask you a couple of questions.

– I'm all ears.

– Is there a crisis?

– Yes, there is.

– Are people worried?

– Yes, they are.

– Is trouble harmful to a person's health?

– Yes, it is.

– Isn't life beautiful though?

– Yes, it is!

– Should everyone have joy in their heart and a smile on their face?

– Yes, they should!

– Thus: lift up your hearts. Announce my message, please.

"We, by grace of »Kino« the king of the Polish screen for the year 1933, Eugeniusz Bodo – order that everyone will smile and be cheerful. Let trouble be hidden under the blanket".

– This is a manifesto. How will the implementation of these regulations proceed?

– To implement this, I decree the rise of the League of Love and Laughter. The League can be joined by everyone in the heart of whom there is still a note of joy. The badge of the League will be a red heart with the B letter, which will be worn by everyone on a lapel, beret or on the left side of a dress. Here is our photograph in the gala outfit of the League. Everyone who wants to join the League has to submit their application to "Kino". League members must always be joyful and smiling; they cannot be seen in public with a long face; they must have a lot of love for all in their hearts. The League members are the brothers and sisters in "Bodoism"! The badge entitles one to enter acquaintances without the participation of the third party. I'm finished!⁶¹

The group of film and stage stars who successfully parodied warfare was joined by Adolf Dymśa in the role of Dodek Wędzonka – a footballer

⁶¹ M.s.: *Manifest króla polskiego ekranu. Bodo na czele nowej partji "Różowych koszul".* In: "Kino", No 47/1933, p. 8.

and troublemaker, who in the film *Dodek na froncie* [Dodek at the Front], directed by Michał Waszyński, experienced funny ups and downs in the frontline of World War I after he changed his Austrian uniform for a Russian one. The artists who made parodies of the reality of war did not even save hospitals, in which one of Dodek's famous conversations with a doctor took place: *I'm dying! – Of what? – Of laughter!*⁶²

In the cabaret theatre Ali Baba in Warsaw, Adolf Hitler was shown as a wax figure in the programme “Orzeł czy Reszka [Heads or Tails]”. The figure was propelled by Mira Zimińska, who turned the crank, to sing couplets about current political events. After a hard-hitting protest of the officials from the German embassy, the stunt with Hitler had to be withdrawn, even though it was one of the biggest attractions in the capital.⁶³

The most famous Polish satirical song, which made the Nazis furious, was “Ten wąsik [This Moustache]” with lyrics by Marian Nemar and music composed by Léo Daniderff.⁶⁴ Its performer, Ludwik Sempoliński, disguised as Charlie Chaplin in fact made a parody of Hitler. “Ten wąsik” was also performed in the Ali Baba in a music show “Pakty i fakty [Pacts and Facts]”, the premiere of which took place in April 1939. From this moment to the outbreak of war, it was shown over a hundred times and, among the audience, there were even Hasids from Nalewki Street who came to see the famous anti-Semite. The German embassy protested again, demanding the withdrawal of the stunt with Hitler. However, this time the protest was recognized as pointless, as the lyrics contained neither the first name Adolf nor the surname Hitler. On the 2nd of September, 1939 the building of Panorama, where Ali Baba was located, was bombed, but L. Sempoliński still performed “Ten wąsik” numerous times during the siege of Warsaw.⁶⁵

The Nazis did not forget about the artist and his stunt. Soon after the seizure of Warsaw, the Gestapo started to search for him – fortunately in vain, as he had escaped to Vilnius. Much less lucky was Józef Węgrzyn, who was arrested and sent to a concentration camp for playing Hitler in the George Bernard Shaw's play “Geneva”. It was a political comedy, staged

⁶² S. Janicki: *W starym polskim kinie*. Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, Warszawa 1985, p. 109-111; M. Waszyński: *Dodek na froncie*. Poland 1935.

⁶³ R.M. Groński: *Śmiechu warte. Więcej satyry to nakaz chwili*. In: “Polityka”, No 31/2018, p. 57; M. Zimińska-Sygietyńska: *Nie żyłam samotnie*. Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, Warszawa 1988, p. 176.

⁶⁴ Example 56.

⁶⁵ I. Kiec: *W kabarecie*. Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, Wrocław 2004, p. 73.

in July 1939 in the Polish Theatre in Warsaw. The author mocked three Fascist dictators: Benito Mussolini (Bombardone), General Francisco Franco (Flanco) and Hitler (Butler), showing them shouting at one another in Geneva during a session of the League of Nations.⁶⁶ At the beginning of the war, some cabaret fans brought back some similar performances from World War I. In those times, posters encouraging to see the show in, for instance, Łódź provided information that the play would end before the curfew, the theatre would be heated, and the show would have a patriotic and anti-war character.⁶⁷ In the September campaign in 1939, such information was unnecessary (beautiful weather, Poland was already at war, and a quick surrender), but cabaret shows always started with singing the national anthem – even during air raids.

Most of the performances comprised jokes related to the government propaganda about the cardboard tanks of Hitler's army, which would be smashed up by the Polish troops under the command of Field Marshal Edward Śmigły-Rydz. There were many performances on improvised open-air stages in which artists encouraged the defenders of the towns captured by the Nazis. The famous music hall announcer Fryderyk Jąrosy recited the poem "Halo, tu mówi Warszawa druga [Hello, this is Warsaw Two speaking]" over the radio. Finally, in the face of the inevitable defeat, many authors and performers of cabaret sketches left the capital – among others, Marian Hemar, Julian Tuwim, Antoni Słonimski. The idea of transforming cabarets into frontline theatres collapsed with the announcement of the capitulation.⁶⁸

Many artists who took part in the September campaign as soldiers or civil defence members started their wanderings after the surrender. This motif is so lengthy that it requires a separate elaboration. Yet, in order not to omit it completely, here are some examples from the life of the most famous pre-war stars, which may indicate some starting points for readers' own research.

The radio satirists from *Wesoła Lwowska Fala* [The Merry Wave of Lviv], including Kazimierz Wajda and Henryk Vogelfänger (the famous

⁶⁶ R.M. Groński: *Śmiechu warte...*, op. cit., p. 57.

⁶⁷ A. Kuligowska-Korzeniewska: *Kabaret w "złym mieście" podczas Wielkiej Wojny*. In: D. Fox, J. Mikołajczyk (eds): *Kabaret – poważna sprawa?* Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2015, p. 13-38.

⁶⁸ R.M. Groński: *Taki był kabaret*. Wydawnictwo Polskiego Towarzystwa Wydawców Książek Codex, Warszawa 1994, p. 218-219.

Szczepko and Tońko), left Lviv on the 11th September, 1939 and went to Romania, where YMCA took care of them.⁶⁹ The radio group was given a new name – Polski Zespół Artystyczny YMCA Lwowska Fala [The Polish Artistic Ensemble YMCA Wave of Lviv] and started touring with the shows in the camps for interned Polish soldiers and refugees. In March 1941, the group reached France, where they performed as Polowa Czołówka Teatralna nr 1 Lwowska Fala [The Field Theatre Top No 1 Wave of Lviv].⁷⁰

Cabaret artists practiced their art even in captivity. For example, on the 1st January, 1941, the world premiere of the satirical “Noworoczne Rewie [New Year Music Halls]” in war prisoners’ camp (oflag II C) in Wolenberg took place. The show was directed and led by Kazimierz Rudzki.⁷¹

Some cabaret groups were established for the Polish Army in the USSR, e.g. Czołówka Rewiowa Krukowskiego [Krukowski’s Music Hall Top] (Kazimierz Krukowski was the famous cabaret artist Lopek) in Buzuluk or Feliks Konarski’s similar ensemble “Ref-Ren” in Totskoye. Many stars of the Polish pre-war music hall performed there. In May 1942, they were all evacuated with the Polish Army to the Middle East, where they merged into one ensemble – Teatr Polowy Armii Polskiej [The Field Theatre of the Polish Army].

Many artists from the war cabaret, music hall or theatre groups remained in Great Britain and the United States, where they laid the foundation for the artistic movement of the post-war immigration. For example, having left the struggling Warsaw, M. Hemar first went to Romania and then fought in the Polish Independent Carpathian Rifle Brigade. He founded “Cyruлик Warszawski [A Warsaw Barber]”, a small theatre for soldiers, and performed in small field stages in Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, France, and Italy. Later – in London, he conducted the Polish Theatre in the Polish Immigrants’ Club – a cabaret.⁷²

In the meantime, the long-lasting occupation had started on the Polish territories.

⁶⁹ YMCA – Young Men’s Christian Association.

⁷⁰ W. Budzyński, T. Terlecki, A. Horowicz, H. Hausman: *Na wojennej lwowskiej fali. Wybór piosenek, wierszy i humoru z wojennych programów Teatru Żołnierskiego “Lwowska Fala” z lat 1939-1946*. Eroll Publishing, London 1947; I. Kiec: *W kabarecie...*, op. cit., p. 75-78.

⁷¹ R.M. Groński: *Taki był kabaret...*, op. cit., p. 240.

⁷² I. Kiec: *W kabarecie...*, op. cit., p. 81-103; examples 65, 66.

Small Theatres of Occupied Warsaw

The initial hopes that the occupation would not be so oppressive, because Germans are a civilized nation which likes order, were soon dispelled. Apart from terrorizing of the civilian population, the Nazis started to implement their planned policy of destroying the culture. The cultural and educational institutions in the capital were closed or had been bombed during the siege, leaving their staffs jobless. The conditions for obtaining the authorities' consent to perform were to be of Aryan origin and to have been earlier employed in this profession. The Secret Theatre Council set up by the General Board of the Association of Polish Actors forbid official artistic activity, initially excluding only cafes of which the owners, shareholders and – first of all – workers were famous actors. Shows took place there but what prevailed in their programmes were nostalgic songs, tangos and *varsaviana*.⁷³ Merry laughter in the public sphere had been silenced, as there were no reasons to laugh. It was substituted by the coarse cackle and malicious giggle of the occupiers, who were aware of their impunity. Soon, the people of laughter, especially professionals, started to show their new faces: some by putting on comical masks, others by taking them off.⁷⁴

In 1939, J. Tuwim's pre-war flat was given to the National Radical Organization by the Nazis. It was a group of Polish Germanophiles and anti-Semites collaborating with the Germans and supervised by Andrzej Świątlicki. It consisted of the members of the delegalized National Radical Camp Falanga. In the poet's study, where not long before anti-Nazi satires and texts deriding the invaders had come into being, the meetings were organized to debate on collaborating with the occupiers.

One of the first decisions of the occupation authorities was the organization of compulsory work for Jews. Each day, thousands of people were rushed to their work places, being beaten along the way, humiliated by cutting off their beards and sidelocks and forced to act out demeaning scenes which were photographed by the executioners. The list of the Nazis' "games" at the cost of Jews is very long. Some are hard to imagine: digging antiaircraft trenches with bare hands; scratching floors with nails; washing windows, floors and toilets with their own underwear or bare hands;

⁷³ Artistic works associated with Warsaw and its history. (trans. note: A.C.)

⁷⁴ R.M. Groński: *Taki był kabaret...*, op. cit, p. 219. More on this: T. Mościcki: *Teatry Warszawy 1939. Kronika*. Bellona, Warszawa 2009; K. Trojanowski: *Świnie w kinie? Film w okupowanej Polsce*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2018.

cleaning carpets with a toothbrush without bending the legs; sharpening pencils on bald heads; beating dust off doormats with sticks on another person's back; putting people in double lines and forcing them to beat or spit at those who stand opposite; forcing to dance and sing songs in which Jews were blamed for the outbreak of the war.⁷⁵ On 10th November, 1939, Moshe Menachem Segal – the Chief Rabbi of Łódź – was taken by force to a synagogue, made to tear, trample and spit at its furnishings. He was also ordered to dance around over and over to be finally thrown away onto the street. These events were described in “Pieśń o zamordowanym żydowskim narodzie [A song about the murdered Jewish nation]” by Icchak Kacnelson, who lived in the neighbourhood:

(...) Sir, where is our Rabbi?

He's running around the bema⁷⁶ and a German with a thick riding crop is standing just near.

*The Rabbi is old, the Rabbi is short, a bit disabled, a little crooked,
Ugly, handicapped... He bows down three times, runs, and falls down speechless!*

The riding crop hits straight on his humpback – the Germans are laughing hard...⁷⁷

This is a fragment of another report by a witness of some events at the Kaliski Railway Station in Łódź: *Some Jews were given work with cleaning the sheds of the waste collected there, and the other – larger – group was ordered to do humiliating and vulgar tricks, during which they were derided and mocked. The Jews had to sing Jewish songs and those who did not know them became closely familiarized with German truncheons and riding crops. They were kept till the evening without a bit of bread or a drop of water.⁷⁸*

In a *gadzinówka* “Nowy Kurier Warszawski” (often called a ‘rag’), a report was published in which the hero was Andrzej Włast – a pre-war cabaret star, the founder of the music theatre “Morskie Oko”, the author of hundreds of hits, sung by all of Poland (e.g. “Tango Milonga”, “Jesienne róże”, “Tango andrusowskie”, “Czy pani mieszka sama?”, “Ja nie mam co na siebie włożyć”). The reporter noticed A. Włast in the crowd and merrily

⁷⁵ A. Sitarek: “Otoczone drutem państwo”. *Struktura i funkcjonowanie administracji żydowskiej getta łódzkiego*. Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu Oddział w Łodzi, Łódź 2018, p. 27.

⁷⁶ Bima – a platform in the centre of a synagogue.

⁷⁷ A. Sitarek: “Otoczone drutem państwo...”, op. cit., p. 28.

⁷⁸ Ibidem, p. 27.

commented that “the favourite artist of the audience from Nalewki Street” finally found his right place because he was marching to work with a spade on his shoulder. The satirist died later in the Warsaw ghetto as most of the artists at that time.

Cultural life and entertainment under the occupation developed in the concession-based current (the official one, implemented in controlled institutions) and in the social current (the informal one, hidden in homes and using the “whispered” transmission canals in the streets). Thus, there were two faces of laughter: the public and the private. Concession-based entertainment, forced into the limits of censorship, was rather shameful. Yet, it attracted many supporters – both organizers and spectators. The private face was characterized by a fear of being revealed and by solitary laughter – yet, sometimes also by defiance and the growing willingness to resist the Nazis, which could be achieved excellently by various comical forms. It was particularly the laughter in the private sphere which started to create communities.

As Ryszard Marek Groński notices, in the descriptions of the reality of war and occupation in Poland, the history of Polish performing art is stereotypically omitted and the pattern is copied, according to which all artists struggled and famous actresses preferred washing up and serving coffee to acting for money in the Propaganda-Amt.⁷⁹ Yet, quite soon, when the authorities allowed the work of small theatres (the so called *tingelki*, acting at cafes and restaurants, usually with low and unambitious programmes), the worst qualities of the pre-war cabaret were soon revealed. For many people, serving the art gave way to the need for collaboration and earning without patriotic sentiments.⁸⁰ The guidelines of this were clearly expressed in the Nazi propagandists’ instructions: *Polish spectacles must not have an artistic character. They must not deal with philosophical, moral or historical problems. Folk elements must not be used in them. Music halls have to be under strict German control. Their artistic and moral level has to be low. Pornography is welcome.*⁸¹

The first legal small theatre opened in Warsaw in 1940 was Kometa. Its manager was the first person with a concession for running a caba-

⁷⁹ Propaganda-Amt – The Propaganda Office of the occupation authorities, responsible for, e.g. organizing and financing entertainment activities.

⁸⁰ R.M. Groński: *Taki był kabaret...*, op. cit., p. 217-218.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, p. 219.

ret, Tymoteusz Ortym-Prokulski – before the war, a well-known organiser of children’s parties and a host announcer in low-level music halls. Quite soon, seventeen small theatres played here and all of them claimed they had originated from and followed the traditions of pre-war literary and artistic cabarets. They also often referred to earlier names: Bohema, Figaro, Hulajnoga, Jar-Rozmaitości, Maska, Niebieski Motyl, Nowości, Stara Mewa, Wesoła Banda, Złoty Ul. The songs, sketches and monologues performed there were often written by, among others, Marian Hemar, Fryderyk Járosy, Konrad Tom, Julian Tuwim, Emanuel Szlechter, Władysław Szlengl and Andrzej Włast. Only the authors’ names were changed, especially of Jewish authors, whose works were forbidden. What appeared on the posters, in the programmes and announcements, were the names and pseudonyms which did not mean anything to anyone. Sometimes, only connoisseurs knew they were watching pieces written by pre-war stars.

Among the organisers and managers of small theatres – apart from Gestapo agents (e.g. Zygmunt Ipohorski, famous for slapping Antoni Słonimski in his face for the poem “Dwie ojczyzny [Two Homelands]”) and some unknown people dealing in cash and the black market – there were pre-war cinema and music stars, such as Jerzy Boczkowski – the founder of “Qui pro Quo”. After her return from Vilnius, Stanisława Perzanowska, a close colleague of Stefan Jaracz, worked as a director and Maria Chmurkowska, Aleksander Fertner, Józef Orwid, Władysław Walter, Józef Węgrzyn, Stefan Witas, not to mention those who debuted, acted in small theatres, too. The posters announcing Adolf Dymśa’s shows presented such headlines: “Dymśa is going crazy!”, “Hello, Dymśa!”, “The à la Dodek System”, “Dymśa, Humour and Company”. They were placed side by side with the lists of the executed.

The adjustment of theatre programmes to the aforementioned instruction of the Propaganda Office can be seen in the titles of the performances: “Cyk, pod rzodkiewkę [Hop, to the Radish]”, “Czy pani lubi bez... [Lady, Do You Like Without...]”, “Dajemy jajka [We Give Eggs]”, “Jedna baba drugiej babie [One Country Woman to Another One]”, “Kupa rozkoszy za parę groszy [A Lot of Ecstasy for a Few Pence]”, “Od smoczka do kieliszka [From a Teat to a Glass]”, “Trunki i pocałunki [Drinks and Kisses]”, “Wesoły harem [A Merry Harem]”, “Ząb, zupa, dąb [A Tooth, a Soup, an Oak]”, etc. This was used by the Nazi authorities for propaganda goals. The journalists of Hitler’s newsreels made an episode in which they showed Poles joyfully celebrating the loss of their state. The Danish, French and Dutch journal-

ists who collaborated with the Nazis were shown these films as examples of the “subhumans” sense of humour. As Marek Groński writes: *It was not so much about denying the rumours about inhumanity and crime but rather about showing Hitler’s Germany to their own eyes in such a way that there is no one to feel sorry for... The apolitical nature of cabarets confronted with some facts of the propaganda use of their presence is a very disputable issue. Even when we resign from following the moral models written into the ethos of the Underground State – the best actors fought within the Home Army, organized underground education, and staged plays confirming compliance with the values of European culture. The creators and artists taking part in the concession-based activity cannot be excused by their ignorance – the attitude of the underground to small theatres was well-known. It is hard to suppose that, in their dressing rooms, they did not comment on the actions against the most active entertainers: head shaving, executing a portion of whips or beating with a stick. In spite of this, they kept performing, having a safety net in the form of donations for the support of the environment (Ortym gave the incomes and royalties from his jubilee for help to his colleagues) and in the form of supporting the illegal press.*⁸²

The artistic activity in small theatres was viewed as collaboration, an act of disobedience of the ban of the Secret Theatre Council, a proof of helplessness in life, conformism, and rolling down into the artistic gutter. This phenomenon concerned ten per cent of the artistic environment in Warsaw. Being employed in this way ensured an affluent life and was safer than working as a waiter or cigarette salesman. Some worked in entertainment out of the fear of inevitably being declassified and forgotten – of losing their artistic popularity. Others, as they declared, did this to save the leftovers of hope, to forget about the nightmare of their everyday reality – on the one hand, by working themselves, and on the other – by providing entertainment and (after all) fulfilling the social mission of a comedian. After the war, during a court trial of the Association of Polish Theatre Artists, one manager of a small theatre explained that even when sometimes air pilots in Luftwaffe uniforms had appeared, the audience knew that – under those fascist uniforms – Polish hearts beat. Humour is just humour and the programmes were apolitical.⁸³ Looking back at this from a distance, making any evaluations of artists’ behaviour in those times is very difficult.

⁸² Ibidem, p. 225-226.

⁸³ Ibidem, p. 218-222; I. Kiec: *W kabarecie...*, op. cit., p. 74-75.

Sometimes – in the face of not knowing all the facts – it is unjustified. For instance, Adolf Dymśa, earlier mentioned here, not only spent his earnings from concession-based theatres on supporting his large family and on medicine for his ill daughters, but he also hid L. Kittay – an illusionist of Jewish origin – in his flat and helped to free Maria Chmurkowska, Czesław Skonieczny, Mira Zimińska from Gestapo prisons. He also took part in charity concerts for children and war invalids, and prepared parcels for his friends in the ghetto, which were smuggled there until the outbreak of the uprising by Zofia Grabiska. After the liberation, the court of the Association of Polish Theatre Artists punished Dymśa with a five-years-long ban on performing in Warsaw theatre stages. He had to give 15% of his income to the Actor's Home in Skolimów, and for a certain time his name on posters was replaced by three stars. There were many more such ambiguous and tragic figures as him.⁸⁴

In the majority of cases, the decision to undertake collaboration with small theatres was not an ideological choice but ordinary conformism. This can be confirmed by the fact that when the Warsaw Uprising broke out, many artists left the theatre floors: *In the changed conditions – a large group of comedians dashed towards the barricades to carry the words of consolation, to sing, dance, and recite for insurgents. Some managed to slip their skins. They gained spectators, crossed out the past... Anyway, they had never had problems with the audience. This is confirmed by conspiracy newspapers: it was not easy to get tickets for cabaret shows. “Biuletyn Informacyjny [Newsletter]” of the 12th February, 1942 comprises an attempt at analysing the composition of the audience: “The spectators are mostly war upstarts of various professions, from street gold traders to great fuel speculators”... Yet, these two categories of new money makers would not fill the rooms. Who used to go to small theatres then? The intelligence which steadily grew poorer and the youth which were often deeply engaged in patriotic activity. They broke bans and omitted the appeals to a boycott. Why? After many years, we forget that everyday life has its rules. In extreme situations, when the border between life and death was fading, seeing something for the first time might become the last remembered image. The cruelties of the occupation do not consume every minute: apart from ambushes and detentions, searching sweeps and sabotage action, there were moments when feelings woke up; love*

⁸⁴ More on this: R. Piotrowski: *Artyści w okupowanej Polsce. Zdrady, triumfy, dramaty*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2015.

wanted to make use of the suddenly revealed happiness; to go somewhere, see something, before the curfew came, the obligation to sit at home. Loneliness was also present, as well as the wish to be surrounded by crowds and of co-experiencing... This was what the organisers of entertainment counted on and they were right. To see Parnell dancing in "Nowości", admire the talent of Bittnerówna, the humour of Walter and Dodek – yes, this was a temptation. And it did not matter that its price was a guilty conscience at the ticket office (5 zlotys for a ticket), the moral ambiguity of the decision, the necessity to participate in weak and lousy stunts, written by the main supplier of the repertoire – Stefan Strauss (who used the pseudonym "Struś [Ostrich]"), a new authorial firm on the horizon of entertainment. It was all nothing if, just after this, pre-war hits were heard and for a couple of minutes one had the illusion that the earlier, carefree Warsaw – that of Banda [Band], Cyrulik [A Barber], Morskie Oko [Sea Eye], Małe Qui pro Quo [Small Qui pro Quo] – was laughing and having fun.⁸⁵

In small theatres, the laughter of the occupation became a reflection of human dramas and expectations. Choosing between entertaining for money and service to art and the nation became a challenge which is hard to describe by generalizing and, first of all, to judge. The drama of individuals embedded in the everyday life of people dealing with professional laughter must have co-occurred with the frank laughter of gawkers and the undoubtedly triumphant laughter of the executioners, who seemed to be convinced of the effectiveness of their propaganda activities. Fortunately, the victims started to laugh as well.

Resistance with a Smile

The occupation authorities banned the publishing of independent journals and the access to works of art which had not undergone strict censorship. This directive resulted in an unprecedented reaction lasting the entire war – the secret cooperation of people of laughter, both professionals and amateurs. Satire became a tool of resistance, a means of unwinding, and sometimes of great fun at the cost of the occupiers. Unfortunately, in the case of blowing their cover, both the artists and the distributors were threatened with the loss of freedom or life.

The laughter of the resistance appeared in all forms of visual and literary works, which immediately reached the recipients, being copied in pa-

⁸⁵ R.M. Groński: *Taki był kabaret...*, op. cit., p. 226-227.

pers, leaflets, stickers, headlines and drawings on walls. Epigrams, poems, songs, satirical prose as well as jokes and anecdotes were reprinted in the so called news-sheets and passed down orally by learning them by heart, reciting or singing.⁸⁶ What also appeared were many caricatures, handmade on paper, carved in wood or linoleum, or stamped from tin films with the use of a duplicating machine. In the form of paper scraps, they were glued onto walls and pillars or thrown around in tramways and trains.⁸⁷ Making an allusion to distinguishing the places *Nur für Deutsche*,⁸⁸ paper scraps were put on lanterns and pillars with the inscription: “Reserved. Only for Germans”.⁸⁹ One of popular pieces reaching the readers in this way was Stanisław Ryszard Dobrowolski’s epigram “Nadzieja [A Hope]”:

*A small light flashes in the cloud,
Less somehow weighs the rude boot,
When you can read on the wall,
A small and sight-pleasing KAPUT.*⁹⁰

During the occupation of Poland, the underground press was issued, in which – apart from the latest news and articles – one could find many satirical works and caricatures that derided the occupiers. There were 19 illegal satirical papers (11 in Warsaw, 3 in Cracow and Lviv, 1 in Pruszków and Sandomierz-Tarnobrzeg) and some one-day papers printed on duplicating machines, e.g. “Hak [A Hook]” (Pruszków, 1940), “Biały Koń [A White Horse]” (Warsaw, June 1940, edited by Stanisław Czosnowski), “Lipa. Wesołe pismo wychodzi w Polsce w dniach grozy [Sham. A Martyr Paper Issued in Poland in the Times of Horror]” (Warsaw, 1940-1941), “Nowa Mucha [A New Bow Tie]” (Warsaw, 1940), “Szpilka [A Pin]” (Warsaw, 1940), “Kret [A Mole]” (Warsaw, 1940-1941), “Zadra [A Splinter]” (Warsaw,

⁸⁶ Examples 58, 59, 86.

⁸⁷ A. Bem: *Satyra i karykatura jako elementy przełamujące okupacyjną rzeczywistość*. In: “Historica@. Wydanie specjalne”, No 20/2017; M. Bryant: *II wojna światowa w karykaturze*. trans. E. Gorczyńska, Wydawnictwo Buchmann, Warszawa 2012; E. Lipiński (ed.): *Satyra czasu wojny i okupacji*. Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, Białystok 1984; G. Załęski (ed.): *Satyra w konspiracji 1939-1944*. Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej, Warszawa 1958; example 13.

⁸⁸ Nur für Deutsche – Only for Germans.

⁸⁹ N. Rocheles: *Propaganda uliczna*. In: A. Żółkiewska, M. Tuszewicki (eds): *Archiwum Ringelbluma. Konspiracyjne Archiwum Getta Warszawy. Tom 26. Utwory literackie z getta warszawskiego*. Żydowski Instytut Historyczny im. Emanuela Ringelbluma, Warszawa 2017, p. 751.

⁹⁰ Z. Jastrzębski: *Poetyka humoru lat okupacji 1939-1944*. Instytut Wydawniczy Pax, Warszawa 1986, p. 9.

1941), “Nowy Dzień [A New Day]” (Warsaw, 1943), “Sowizdrzał [The Rascal]” (Lviv, 1943), “Dylizans [A Stagecoach]” (Warsaw, 1944).⁹¹ In the daily “Demokrata [A Democrat]”, published since 1943 with Grzegorz “Grzegorz” Załęski as the chief editor, the sixth page was dedicated to verbal and cartoon satire. Since September 1943, “Moskit [A Mosquito]” (7 issues) was also printed in Warsaw – it was personally and technically associated with “Demokrata”. The following people collaborated with it: Henryk “Yes” Chmielewski, Maksymilian “Cyk” Kałużny, Jerzy “Jur” Kajetański, Andrzej “Was” Will and Stanisław “Miedza” Tomaszewski. Caricatures and satirical cartoons for underground press and street distribution were also created by Kazimierz Grus, Eryk Lipiński, Aleksander Świdwiński, Jerzy Zaruba, Julian Żebrowski. Many authors created anonymously, there were some famous writers among them: Stanisław Ryszard Dobrowolski, Tadeusz Hollender, Aleksander Maliszewski, Jerzy Wyszomirski, Tadeusz Zelenay.⁹²

Some secret papers were also published which imitated *gadzinówki*, e.g. “Nowy Kurier Warszawski [The New Courier of Warsaw]”. From time to time, the conspiring editors – within the action of informational diversion – printed a parodical version of “Dodatek Nadzwyczajny [A Special Supplement]” to the rag paper with very similar characters, in red and black, in the same format, layout, etc. As Adam Chętnik looks back, in December 1942: *In front of the editorial office, a car with “Kurier” pulled over, the issue was awaited by huge groups of paperboys. Having been handed out, the issue was formally ready for sale and was distributed into booths. The boys running with the paper-supplement shouted as loud as they could: “Spain has declared war on Germany” (this was the key news), other news was equally sensational, some other news were about the Polish army abroad, air force, navy, etc. Hitler was sometimes called “hycel”⁹³, Germans were promised retribution for their crimes in Poland, etc. The papers were even bought by Germans, Poles – having read the headlines – hid the supplement into their pockets, and soon the police were chasing the paperboys and going to the booths, confiscating the remaining unsold is-*

⁹¹ E. Lipiński (ed.): *Satyra czasu...*, op. cit., p. 6; Wicek Warszawiak: *Humor w czasie okupacji 1939-1945*. Wydawnictwo Nowy Świat, Warszawa 2009, p. 6.

⁹² M. Garlicka (ed.): *Satyra walcząca 1939-1944. Sierpień – październik 1984*. Muzeum Karykatury, Warszawa 1984, n.p.; E. Lipiński (ed.): *Satyra czasu...*, op. cit., p. 8; example 16.

⁹³ The word in Polish sounds similar to “hycel”, which means a dogcatcher. (trans. note: A.C.)

sues, even sometimes beating the boys. The sensational publications soon reached the price of 100 zlotys for an issue! This hoax was enjoyed by people of Warsaw, as it was successful from the beginning to the very end and was made expertly and skilfully. The Germans ordered a search of the editorial office of the real “Kurier”, where they did not find anything suspicious, the expeditionary car had vanished into thin air, and the paperboys did not know who had given them the issues.⁹⁴ On the 5th May, 1944, the readers of “Dodatek Nadzwyczajny” learned in the same way about the invasion of Sweden by Hitler’s army.

In Cracow, which was the capital of the General Government and the seat of the General Governor, the notorious Hans Frank, “Goniec Krakowski [Cracow Messenger]” (often called “Cracow Assenger”)⁹⁵ was published. On the 1st December, 1943, a whole column appeared in number 228 which was parodied by conspiring editors and comprised announcements, commercials, and purchase-sale adverts. They all derided the occupation authorities, well-known officials and policemen in Cracow, etc.: *The laundry “Nur für Deutsche” was relocated from Tunis and Sicily to all the frontlines. More detailed information on Radio London. (...) Nur für Deutsche. Whorehouses are seeking candidates for making the last moments of the defenders of the dying Reich pleasant. Necessary conditions: health certificate, lively temper, NSDAP identity card, obesity allowed, well-shaved head, spreading womb. Priority to the unmarried without children. Applications: Cracow, Pomorska Street 2.*⁹⁶ In Cracow as well, in 1943, a group of scouts from the Grey Ranks started the satirical weekly “Na ucho [In the Ear]”. It was copied on a duplicating machine stolen from a Nazi bank. 20 issues of this magazine were published. Unfortunately, the Gestapo found the editorial office, which resulted in many imprisonments. The chief editor Jerzy Szewczyk, a cartoonist Jerzy Wirt, and a couple of their colleagues were shot on the 27th May, 1944.⁹⁷

Within the so-called Action “N” begun in late December 1940 by Jan “Prezes” Rzepecki (the Head of the Bureau of Information and Propaganda

⁹⁴ A. Chętnik: *Wspomnienia z lat okupacji. Pod niemiecko-hitlerowskim obuchem (1940-1944). Powstanie sierpniowe w Warszawie*. Muzeum Historii Ruchu Ludowego w Warszawie, Wszechnica Świętokrzyska w Kielcach, Warszawa-Kielce 2014, p. 129-130.

⁹⁵ In Polish, the pun suggests a close relationship with “ass”. (trans. note: A.C.)

⁹⁶ E. Hull: *Okupacyjna codzienność. Warszawa i okolice w dokumentacji Adama Chętnika*. Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2006, p. 95.

⁹⁷ E. Lipiński (ed.): *Satyra czasu...*, op. cit., p. 7.

of the Headquarters of the Polish Victory Service – Union for Armed Struggle – Home Army) and extensively continued since mid-1941 as an undertaking of the Polish Underground State,⁹⁸ the conspiring satirists and cartoonists imitated the manner of German authors by publishing in German “Der Soldat”⁹⁹ (editor: Zygmunt “Sawa” Ziolek) and “Der Hammer”¹⁰⁰ (editor: Stanisław “Zelga” Smoleński). These paper sheets were dropped off in the wagons transporting German soldiers to the Eastern front as well as in cafes and other places frequented by the Nazis. On April Fools’ Day in 1942, the faked issue of the weekly “Erika” was printed with the subtitle “Die Frohe Zeitung für die Front und Heimat”.¹⁰¹ Among other things, the issue comprised many gruesome, grotesque and pornographic cartoons and caricatures by S. Smoleński. The paper was dropped off in the officers’ club in Cracow, in which it was placed for over a month in the file for the authentic “Erika”.

Later (in 1942), “Der Hammer” was transformed into “Der Durchbruch”,¹⁰² and “Der Soldat” into “Der Frontkämpfer”¹⁰³ with S. Tomaszewski’s graphic design. The success of “Erika” was continued from 1942-1944 by the journals “Der Klabautermann”¹⁰⁴, edited by S. Smoleński, and “Die Ostwache”.¹⁰⁵ In November 1942, S. Smoleński was arrested and the editorial works in “Der Klabautermann” were taken over by an outstanding classical philologist Kazimierz “Kozakiewicz” Kumaniecki, who started to disseminate the true *Greuelpropaganda*¹⁰⁶ in the form of coarse humour, highly exaggerated caricature and ornery erotic forms. The first six issues of the paper were printed in black and white, the rest in three colours. The cornerstone of this exceptional satirical activity was S. Tomaszewski, just then

⁹⁸ More on this: G. Mazur (ed.): *Akcja dywersyjna “N”. Dokumenty i materiały z archiwum Tadeusza Żenczykowskiego*. Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Ossolineum, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław 2000.

⁹⁹ Der Soldat – The Soldier.

¹⁰⁰ Der Hammer – A Hammer.

¹⁰¹ Die Frohe Zeitung für die Front und Heimat – A Merry Paper for the Front and Homeland.

¹⁰² Durchbruch – A Breakthrough.

¹⁰³ Der Frontkämpfer – A Stormtrooper / A front-line fighter.

¹⁰⁴ Der Klabautermann – A proper name of a phantom which prophesies the sinking of a ship.

¹⁰⁵ Die Ostwache – Eastern Guard.

¹⁰⁶ Greuelpropaganda – The putting off, disgusting.

saved from Pawiak during the famous action of his fictitious death on the operating table and substituting another man's corpse instead of his.¹⁰⁷

Apart from the works of Polish satirists and cartoonists, German anti-fascism satire was also used. The original poems from the times of the Weimar Republic were translated, reprinted and shared, as well as the works of the classics of German literature (e.g. Johannes Becher, Bertold Brecht, Heinrich Mann, Thomas Mann, Erich Weinert, Friedrich Wolf).¹⁰⁸ As Aleksander Gieysztor writes: *The printer in Sadyba, the "Number One" of the Secret Army Publishing Works, active till the serious threat in March 1944, printed almost a million copies in various forms, from leaflets and booklets to periodicals under different names of the alleged opposition. Additionally, there were publications for the Volksdeutsche in Polish, and later in Italian and Hungarian. Another separate field of action were special actions of deriding and threatening with the use of sticky leaflets or posters, as well as the commission for moral terror towards individual Germans.*¹⁰⁹

What seemed the masterpieces of comical art (available in the public space) created by the people of laughter acting in conspiring editorial offices were the prints which imitated documents issued by the Nazi authorities. These were mostly the posters made with the use of matrices for all the occupation announcements in the territory of the General Government. In most cases, one could realize they were parodies only after a detailed reading.

The following "Rozporządzenie o statucie prawnym dla Polaków [Directive on the legal status of Poles]" can serve as an example:

On the basis of Paragraph 5 of the 1st Decree of the Führer of the 12th October 1939 /Journal of Laws of the German Reich I p. 2077/III/, I order:

1. *Compliant with the law of the Greater German Reich, the Polish population inhabiting the territory of the General Government is not a nation. The rights and duties of this population are normed by the regulations of this directive.*
2. *The Polish population must not: occupy flats which fulfil the requirements of the members of the German Nation. These flats, along with*

¹⁰⁷ A. Gieysztor: *Walka wręcz na czarno-białą, czasem wielobarwną broń*. In: M. Garlicka (ed.): *Satyra walcząca...*, op. cit., n.p.; E. Lipiński (ed.): *Satyra czasu...*, op. cit., p. 8; Wicek Warszawiak: *Humor w czasie...*, op. cit., p. 6.

¹⁰⁸ A. Marianowicz, E. Osmańczyk (eds): *Niemiecka satyra antyfaszystowska*. Czytelnik, Warszawa 1951.

¹⁰⁹ A. Gieysztor: *Walka wręcz...*, op. cit., n.p.

their whole furnishing, are dedicated to Germans who seek shelter against the terrorist air-raids of Anglo-Saxons.

3. *Moreover, the Polish population has no right to: (...)*
4. *Use wood and coal during the winter. The 1943/44 winter in the General Government will be as hot as the experiences of the German African Corps in Libya, Tripoli and Tunisia. (...)*
5. *Who trespasses the regulations of this directive shall be subjected to the death penalty.*
6. *Under the death penalty, the Reichs-, Volks- and Stammendeutsche¹¹⁰ are forbidden to tear off and destroy this directive (...)*
8. *This directive enters into force backwards, starting with the 1st September 1943, which is the fourth anniversary of the Huns' conquest of Poland.*

Cracow, 15th October, 1943

General Governor (-) Frank¹¹¹

In Poland under the occupation, the fragments of Hitler's speeches were put in the form of posters with the headline "Hitler said" on the announcement columns. On Easter 1942, some posters were distributed with parodied fragments from *Mein Kampf*, in which Hitler allegedly explained that in order to strike at Russia he needed a strong rear and therefore he needed peace with England at all costs. Then, there were excerpts from his various speeches in which he expressed his joy due to the alliance with Russia, as well as the prediction that, for Hitler's army, 1941 would be the year of victory and the end of the war. The readers of the posters were astonished at the Führer's mistakes and nodded their heads, but after a while they smiled, having recognized the joke of the conspiring organization.¹¹²

In December 1941, the Germans ordered the Jewish Council (Judenrat)¹¹³ to carry out an action of confiscating both female and male fur coats. At that time, many small posters appeared on the walls of Warsaw showing Hitler on weirdly twisted skis in a female astrakhan fur with a fox

¹¹⁰ Reichsdeutsch – a German inhabiting the Reich territories; Volksdeutsch – a person on the list of citizens of German origin; Stammdeutsch – a native German.

¹¹¹ E. Hull: *Okupacyjna codzienność...*, op. cit., p. 94.

¹¹² A. Chętnik: *Wspomnienia...*, op. cit., p. 100; example 17.

¹¹³ The Jewish Council (German: Judenrat) – a form of authority introduced by the occupier in Jewish communities.

collar. He had a small stove on his back with smoke coming out of it and, below, there was an inscription in Polish: “Even this will not help you”.¹¹⁴

The distribution of satirical works was an element of psychological diversion used by the Small Sabotage Organization of the “Wawer” group (from 1941 – “Wawer Palmiry”)¹¹⁵, which came into being in 1940 on the initiative of scouts and their supreme commander Aleksander “Kamyk” Kamiński. Simultaneously, he was the head of the Warsaw District Bureau of the Commission of Propaganda at The Home Army (in Polish abbreviated to KOPR) and the editor of “Biuletyn Informacyjny [Newsletter]”. Among others, Anna “Hanna” Jachnina – the author of the famous song “Siekiera, motyka [An axe, a hoe]” – acted in its artistic unit.¹¹⁶

In 1942, the editors of “Biuletyn Informacyjny” and KOPR announced a competition for the best memories of the defence of Warsaw. A. Jachnina wrote “Pamiętnik z oblężenia Warszawy [The Diary of the Siege of Warsaw]”, providing it with the initials “XY”, and submitted it for the competition.¹¹⁷ Her work won first place and the author was commissioned to prepare a collection of jokes, anecdotes and other satirical works from occupied Warsaw and Lviv, which were heard on the street, in trams, trains, etc. The collection was aimed at maintaining the hope and social resistance. After introducing some corrections, A. Jachnina was on her way to the printer with the final text when she was arrested and sent to KL Auschwitz. She did not know that she had been helped in her work on the collection by Marian Ruth Buczkowski, owing to whom the book was soon published.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ N. Rocheles: *Propaganda uliczna*. In: A. Żółkiewska, M. Tuszewicki (eds): *Archiwum Ringelbluma...*, op. cit., p. 751.

¹¹⁵ More on this: W. Bartoszewski: *Organizacja Małego Sabotażu “Wawer” w Warszawie (1940-1944)*. In: W. Bartoszewski, W. Biegański, S. Biernacki, W. Borzobohaty, S. Jellenta, J. Pawlak, J. Stoch, J. Zamojski (eds): *Najnowsze Dzieje Polski. Materiały i Studia z okresu II wojny światowej. vol. X*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 1966, p. 77-113.

¹¹⁶ M. Karnowski, W. Jachna: *Ziarno piasku. Rzecz o Annie Jachinie*. Fundacja Vlepvnet, Warszawa 2016; example 57.

¹¹⁷ XY (Anna Jachnina): *Pamiętnik z oblężenia Warszawy*. In: H. Buczyńska (ed.): *Pamiętnik z obrony Warszawy*. KOPR, Warszawa 1942, p. 3-18.

¹¹⁸ A. Jachnina, M. Ruth Buczkowski: *Anegdota i dowcip...*, op. cit. More on this: H. Sowińska: *Zabić wojnę śmiechem. Opowieść o Annie Jachinie – autorce słów piosenki “Siekiera, motyka...”* In: “Gazeta Pomorska”, Internet issue 14.06.2010, <http://www.pomorska.pl/strefa-biznesu/wiadomosci/z-kraju-i-ze-swiata/a/zabic-wojne-smiechem-opowiesc-o-annie-jachinie-autorce-slow-piosenki-siekiera-motyka,10271500>; example 18. **The access date of all websites in the book: 1.02.2019.**

Street Folklore and Jokes

It can be confirmed on the basis of some surviving examples of street folklore during the occupation (coming from the collections of Marian Ruth Buczkowski, Adam Chętnik, Anna Jachnina, or Ringelblum's archives)¹¹⁹ that the laughter culture of the victims of the discussed war crisis was rich and diverse. It was manifested in the sphere of language and in the individual and collective behaviours in the public space. Although this culture was limited by censorship and the fear of severe repressions for the jokesters, their families, as well as the distributors and recipients of their comical creativity, the benefits of the common laughter that unexpectedly appeared on the streets and in the means of transport could not be underestimated. Street humour was spontaneous and self-born. It referred to the current events, moods, feelings and hopes of the society. The contents of street humour involved whispered propaganda, news from the front, and the motifs purposefully disseminated by underground organizations. Humour was a factor which facilitated the remembering and transmission of all the information. During the occupation, jokes, poems, songs, sayings and other comical forms of street folklore most often originated in the capital city and then spread all over the country.¹²⁰

There were always enough reasons for comical creativity. As Marian Ruth Buczkowski notices: *Sometimes these were just details, gestures or words, but how apt and swelling with mockery! The cars going to the front were painted white in winter for protection and they were called "wedding" carts. Such expressions were created on every single occasion. More significant events stimulated real creativity. Then, not only inscriptions and a series of jokes were created but whole poems or fictional works. Verses were sung by boys on the streets, in trams and in the backyards, jokes were told at work, on street markets over vodka shots.*¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Ringelblum's Archives – the most important secret archives of the Warsaw ghetto, collected from October 1940 by the interdisciplinary team Oneg Szabat [The Saturday Joy] under the supervision of Emmanuel Ringelblum – a social activist and historian. The materials were collected to record – after the war – the history of Polish Jews during the occupation. The archives comprise some official documents, underground press, leaflets, statistical elaborations, literary works, diaries, cartoons, photographs, letters, school notebooks, etc. The fragments which have been found are now held by The Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. For the constantly updated list of the published volumes of the archives – see: <http://www.jhi.pl/archiwum-ringelbluma/pelna-edycja>.

¹²⁰ Examples 4, 5, 67, 68.

¹²¹ M. Ruth Buczkowski: *Warszawski dowcip w walce 1939-1944*. Nakład Gebethnera i Wolffa, Warszawa 1947, p. 13.

Some of the most popular forms were jokes and anecdotes, of which there was a real multitude and many have been preserved in the currently available anthologies.¹²² In some cases it is difficult to establish whether an anecdote (a report of a comical situation with the participation of real people) is dealt with or a joke, invented on the basis of a funny motif in which laughter is often induced by accurate, often vulgar expressions: *What has Hitler taught us? Our women are standing in a queue in Warsaw and talking about their misery. Each has something to say, each will add something. Finally, the talking moved to what benefits Hitlerism offers. This is all bad and almost worthless. Yet, there are some good things – said one resolute woman – Hitler has taught us to wash without soap, to sleep without husbands and shit without food. Everyone agreed she was right.*¹²³

In Anna Jachnina's opinion, these jokes – sometimes tasteless, coarse and snappy – were a form of defence of oppressed people, who “killed” the horror of life with laughter and defended themselves with a street whistle. It was a cheap and efficient way.¹²⁴ However, as Marian Ruth Buczkowski writes: (...) *an anecdote was not at all the most outstanding manifestation of Warsaw humour. An anecdote – a ready, separate and completed work – was rather a crystallized side product dedicated to be taken away. The essence lay in the temper of Warsaw's residents, in their permanent mocking activity, based on the feeling of their own dignity and on the realistic judgement of facts. A visitor from another town might not hear any jokes or might not drink any vodka, but still – they walked around this town more lightly than around others, their soul was jocund, and they noticed with surprise that they had not forgotten to smile.*¹²⁵

When the occupation started, the robberies of the inhabitants' properties, organized top-down, became an element of the Nazi terror. A joke in many versions started to spread all over Warsaw after the war that the Polish

¹²² R. Hernicz (ed.): *Humor wojenny*. Wydawnictwo Dzieł Ludowych K. Miarka, Mikołów b.r.; A. Jachnina, M. Ruth Buczkowski: *Anegdota i dowcip...*, op. cit.; Z. Jastrzębski: *Poetyka humoru wojennego (wybrane kwestie)*. In: “Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska. Sectio F, Nauki Filozoficzne i Humanistyczne”, vol. 28/1973, p. 293-317; S. Kalbarczyk: *Czuj paniusia tyn smród? Humor pod okupacją sowiecką 1939-1941*. In: “Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej”, No 7/2008, p. 53-58; A. Pietrzak: *Jerzy Wilczura i zbiorek żartów okupacyjnych*. In: “Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej”, No 7/2008, p. 41-52; L. Straszewicz: *Śmiech w kajdanach. Kawały warszawskie w czasie okupacji*. n.e., Wrocław 1946.

¹²³ A. Chętnik: *Wspomnienia...*, op. cit., p. 102.

¹²⁴ A. Jachnina, M. Ruth Buczkowski: *Anegdota i dowcip...*, op. cit., p. 2.

¹²⁵ M. Ruth Buczkowski: *Warszawski dowcip...*, op. cit., p. 7.

Travel Agency “Orbis”, instead of popular trips entitled “Recognize your mountains” or “Familiarize yourself with your seaside”, would organize trips to Berlin entitled “Recognize your furniture” or “Let’s see our furniture”.¹²⁶

It should be emphasized that children and youth were extraordinary participants in this crisis and resistance. As Bożena Krzywobłocka states: *The real folklore of Warsaw streets owes a lot to the youngest inhabitants of the capital, though not all elements of this folklore have been documented – especially those satirical ones painted on walls with appropriate inscriptions. They used to become a lively paper with local news.*¹²⁷ This opinion is supplemented by Marian Ruth Buczkowski: *Little boys selling newspapers were masters of words. These were wonderful, everyday improvisations, closed within a few words and in an intriguing configuration. “A great victory in the air! Four bedbugs knocked off on a sheet”... You should have heard this to learn the taste of mockery lurking in their voice! Hate towards the occupier was a deep feeling that could burst out in a direct action. The current life required something more handy. Therefore, the mental disposition of a man of the street was expressed in the well-known saying addressed to a gendarme: – Do you prefer a kick now or later?!¹²⁸ What follows is a chant of a boy in a Warsaw tram, recorded at the end of 1941:*

*A march, Hitler’s march,
Let the holy shit take him away,
Let the lightning strike him,
Let Hitlerism fade out!*¹²⁹

The shows of street players and singers were a traditional way of earning a living for them. Along with the progressing terror of occupation, they became a means of disseminating satirical contents and a tool of social resistance. *Songs, chants, couplets, performed in trains and villages, at church and town fairs, expressed – in their uncomplicated contents – the longing for independence. They built optimism and were acts of courage, because they constituted an intrinsic, active manifestation of the anti-German attitudes of Poles, which were subjected to repression and persecution. Often performed by youth and children, they were the testimony of their being educated in the*

¹²⁶ J. Jurandot: *Humor w opasce*. Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich, Warszawa 2014, p. 428.

¹²⁷ B. Krzywobłocka: *Walka o kulturę najmłodszych*. In: E. Rudak (ed.): *W obronie kultury dzieci wojny*. Fundacja Moje Wojenne Dzieciństwo, Warszawa 2003, p. 21.

¹²⁸ M. Ruth Buczkowski: *Warszawski dowcip...*, op. cit., p. 12-13.

¹²⁹ A. Chętnik: *Wspomnienia...*, op. cit., p. 70.

*spirit of love for the Homeland, their need for activity and the significance of a patriotic attitude in daily life.*¹³⁰

In 1941, after the attack of Germany on the Soviet Union, big propaganda boards were placed in the market squares and other city squares in occupied Poland. This was done by order of the German Propaganda Bureau. Soon, the boards became a kind of street satire workshop, used mostly by scouts and other minor conspirators. One day, an inscription appeared on such boards with clear big letters: “England, this is your great work!”. Quite soon the number “1812” was added, written in chalk, which was an allusion to Napoleon’s unsuccessful march on Moscow and the prophesy that the same failure would happen to Hitler. In some small towns near Warsaw, the plates “Cattle halt place” were fastened in an unnoticed way onto the columns with loudspeakers broadcasting Nazi propaganda, which were mostly placed in market squares. This was done to deride the potential listeners.¹³¹

Some particular occasions for mocking creativity, the effects of which were immediately absconded by people on the streets, resulted from various retribution actions of the occupiers. On 11th February, 1940, Maciej Aleksy “Alek” Dawidowski – a scout from The Grey Ranks, unscrewed the German plate with the words: “DEM GROSSEN ASTRONOMEN NIKOLAUS KOPERNIKUS”¹³² from Nicolaus Copernicus’s monument in Warsaw. As a retribution for this “mischievous attack done by unknown perpetrators”, Ludwig Fischer – the governor of the Warsaw district, ordered the removal of the monument of Jan Kiliński – a cobbler and one of the leaders of the Kościuszko Uprising. Soon, some jokes and verses referring to this incident started to be popular all over Warsaw:

*Our astronomer is sitting with a worried face
They want him to become a German and say it’s a grace:
I wonder if it is worth this, it is a fragile power
As they’ve feared the sword of the brave Kiliński.
Copernicus is worried about his lost Kennkarte¹³³
As the astronomer is guilty but the shoemaker is jailed.*

¹³⁰ E. Hull: *Okupacyjna codzienność...*, op. cit., p. 89; example 13.

¹³¹ A. Kamiński: *Wielka gra...*, op. cit., p. 174-175.

¹³² Dem grossen Astronomen – To the great astronomer.

¹³³ Kennkarte – An identity document issued by the German authorities during the occupation.

For some technical reasons, Kiliński's monument was being removed for over a week. During that time, an inscription appeared on the base of the monument: "Johnny, don't give up, pose as a Volksdeutch". When finally, the monument disappeared, people in Warsaw wondered where it had been taken. One morning, someone finally wrote on the wall of the National Museum: "The people of Warsaw, I'm here – Jan Kiliński". Yet, this was not the end of the game with monuments. In a couple of days, a notice was put on announcement pillars: "As retribution for destroying Kiliński's monument, I order the prolongation of winter by 6 weeks – Nicolaus Copernicus, the astronomer". Surprisingly, the nature decided to take part in the joke, because the 1941 winter lasted until April.¹³⁴

As a reprisal after the assassination of Franz Kutchera – the SS commander in the Warsaw district of the General Government, on the 2nd February, 1944 a contribution of one hundred million zlotys was imposed on Warsaw and the municipalities of Warsaw County.¹³⁵ This was done apart from many other severe punishments. Then, this riddle started to circulate in Warsaw: "Who is the biggest black marketeer in the world? Hitler – because he ordered us to pay him 100 million zloties for one pig". In the summer of 1944, the Nazis started to collect the obligatory quota from households. When they imposed the duty to deliver particular numbers of eggs, a dead hen was hanged on a monument in one of Warsaw squares with the following inscription: "I prefer hanging upside down to feeding Germans with my eggs".¹³⁶

Similar examples can be multiplied. The acts of resistance in comical forms, performed by people of laughter (whose names mostly have not been preserved), brought relief and hope to the victims and made the occupiers angry – especially because of their massive character, the fight against them was doomed to failure. This encouraged one to create new texts, make new jokes; to pass down the information about the places in which Germans had been derided; to imitate and reconstruct the drawings removed by the authorities, and to undertake one's own creativity – which was a unique one, because it was always associated with a particular place, time and current events.

¹³⁴ A. Jachnina, M. Ruth Buczkowski: *Anegdota i dowcip...*, op. cit., p. 5.

¹³⁵ T. Strzembosz: *Akcje zbrojne, podziemnej Warszawy 1939-1944*. Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1983, p. 322.

¹³⁶ E. Hull: *Okupacyjna codzienność...*, op. cit., p. 99.

In any case, amusing situations were not a basic feature of the occupied streets. Although the tales about them trigger a smile or laughter, along with laughing people, someone was tortured, beaten, killed by the occupiers. Thus, the laughter of people reacting to the stressfulness of the situation was also the laughter of the gawkers who often did not react to tragic incidents just around the corner or behind the wall. This sometimes took place in the case of the residents of Warsaw, whose laughter from time to time could be heard in the ghetto.¹³⁷

The People of Laughter

Only some small and rare testimonies and memories concerning the people of laughter have been preserved – the people whose cheerfulness, smiles, words and smile triggering behaviour were particularly valuable as they shared their light-heartedness with their oppressed compatriots, sometimes in exceptional circumstances.

On the 19th May, 1943, Tadeusz Hollender was arrested – a poet, satirist, the author of one of the most famous satirical poems of the occupied capital city “Uśmiech Warszawy [The Smile of Warsaw]”, which he published under the penname Tomasz Wiatracyjny in a secret collection.¹³⁸ Aleksander Maliszewski remembers him the following way: *All of us who knew him can remember this smile – sometimes it was a masque for his being deeply moved, but most often – a reflection of the deepest sense of humour, which never left Hollender, also in the most dramatic moment of his life. This smile was faithful to him till the end. Hollender’s mates from the cell in Pawiak say that after arriving at prison, Tadeusz was always cheerful, willing to tell jokes, make puns, recite poems and tell stories about the world, events and people. For the twelve days of his imprisonment in Pawiak, he became a new load of the faith in victory for a whole group of people whose fate had placed him with them. On the 31st March, 1943, Tadeusz Hollender was taken out and executed/shot in one of the yards in the Warsaw ghetto.*¹³⁹

Father Wojciech Gajdus writes about the transportation of arrested intellectuals from Chełmża to the prison in Toruń. The arrested were told they were going to a “training camp”: *We – 70 men gathered at the*

¹³⁷ Examples 10, 11, 12.

¹³⁸ T. Wiatracyjny: *Satyry i fraszki*. KOPR, Warszawa 1943; examples 60, 61, 62.

¹³⁹ A. Maliszewski: *Wstęp*. In: T. Hollender: *Wiersze, satyry, fraszki*. Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 1949, p. 5.

station in Chełmża. The youngest, a boy aged 16, the oldest – the grey-haired, hunched Canon Father Pellowski, aged 74. There were a couple of 70-year-olds. The teachers from the country and from the town of Chełmża prevailed, apart from them – there were priests, lawyers, farmers, railway men, craftsmen and several merchants. The atmosphere in the class 3 waiting room was serious, focused. Obviously, we weren't going to a wedding. Only Counselor Staś Strzyżowski, who was always merry and joking, tried to break the serious atmosphere of those who had gathered by making them laugh while presenting to the group of his acquaintances the joys of the future training.¹⁴⁰

The people of laughter also included the executioners, for example – Karl Friedrich Strauss, the commander of the Toruń district of Selbstschutzu¹⁴¹ and vice-commander of the Fort VII Friedrich der Grosse. Even though his behaviour was probably fun for him, an example of the executioners' laughter, and it had ironic subtext or constituted an additional form of torment for prisoners, the mode of acting is always similar. Therefore, it seems worth to quote here another memory of Father Wojciech Gajdus: *With the underwear under our arms, as only it was allowed, we left our cell.*¹⁴² *We were moved to the hall. There, we were waiting, all shivering out of cold, for our turn to go to the town in cars. The waiting time was made more pleasant by Strauss with his anecdotes and jokes, which at the start revealed that they come from the gutter. Yet, we stood quiet, calm, still in the place. Only a provost, Father Ziemski, who was standing by my side, couldn't refrain from snarling with contempt: "A dog is allowed to bark at the Moon".*¹⁴³

Melchior Wańkiewicz saved from oblivion his memory concerning Bruno Winawer – a comedy writer and a columnist: *We know the Jewish sense of humour, embedded in the mist of sadness. Bruno Winawer, a man with an angel's heart, whom I remember in a subtle halo of stingless humour, while being taken away by Germans, was saying goodbye to the petrified*

¹⁴⁰ Ks. W. Gajdus: *Nr 20998 opowiada*. Wydawnictwo Znak, Kraków 1962, p. 14-16.

¹⁴¹ Selbstschutz – a para-military formation of German inhabitants in the territories of occupied Poland, which came into being in September 1939.

¹⁴² On the 27th December, 1939, the relocation of prisoners (from one cell to another one or to a different prison) started under the pretext of sanitary control and disinfestation. Actually, the prison staff wanted to take away the contents of the packets which prisoners had got from their families as well as other belongings.

¹⁴³ Ks. W. Gajdus: *Nr 20998...*, op. cit., p. 78.

household members who had kept him: “Don’t blame me if the soap doesn’t give enough foam” (he was very skinny). This is the general human bravery of a person facing death. (...) But this joke of Winawer told just before his death is not only an individual feature. This is the heritage of two thousand years of persecutions, in which humour had to struggle without an ally with the gloomy facts and make existence possible.¹⁴⁴

Bożena Krzywobłocka remembers anonymous children and youth who entertained their peers during the Warsaw Uprising: *In the Uprising, there were scout groups who led small theatres for children, entertained people in cellars and the injured in hospitals. In Żolibórz, socialist activists – using the old contacts with the association Szklane Domy [Glass Houses] and the RTPD [Workers’ Association of Children’s Friends] – regularly issued “Jawnutka” – a paper for children. The moments of joy and emotional movement, which these theatres and papers gave to children, were to help them in other difficult moments after being banished from houses. From my own experience, I can tell you about the fate of those who were to become the youngest prisoners of Hitler’s concentration camps.*¹⁴⁵

Examples (reports, testimonies, memories)

Example 1. Eryk Lipiński about the capital’s air defences (1939)

After completing a training course, I was appointed the commander of the undeveloped territory at the corner of Aleja 3 Maja and Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie. My duties involved charting the antiaircraft trenches and organizing the work of the volunteers who came in big numbers. This was three days before the outbreak of war. A funny incident took place while digging these trenches. One elderly, stout, sweating man – tired with digging – leaned out of the trench and called towards me: “We are getting exhausted here and such a youngster is only standing and directing us...”.

A few people standing near nodded their heads, approving of his comment. I had to react quickly not to lose my authority. I asked the fat man if he knew how long the trench should be. He did not know. And how deep, how broad and where it should bend? The fat man was silent. Then I called: “Can you see, sir, not all have to dig, there must be some who think for those who dig”.

¹⁴⁴ M. Wańkowicz: *Karałka La Fontaine’a. Cz. 1*. Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1983, p. 392-393.

¹⁴⁵ B. Krzywobłocka: *Walka o kulturę...*, op. cit., p. 21-22.

Boisterous laughter could be heard, the fat man got red in his face, put his head down and started working diligently with his spade. I won this round.¹⁴⁶

Example 2. Szymon Kobyliński about the first encounters with the occupiers in Mścisko near Wołomin (1939)

The immediately deserted yard, having been warned of the visit by a hollow roar of a big engine, was invaded by a giant armoured car with sinister crosses on its sides. It came to a halt and stood in complete quietness. The shut flaps, the car impenetrable, silent, motionless in the empty space... Secret glances of the waiting and the terrified – from the shadows, from behind the window curtains. How terribly long this lasted! And finally, with a grind, a steel flap slowly opened like a heavy eyelid; it lingered for a while and suddenly a hand appeared out of the interior and put on the armour a small, fluffy dog, a puppy, merrily wagging its tiny tail. Inside the big box, a choir bass roar of laughter burst out instantly.

I can remember the general indignation in our Mścisko house when Mum – having returned from Warsaw, where she rented a flat at Wspólna Street to lodgers who introduced themselves as the Jezierskis (but we did not know if that was their real name), told us about her impressions of a tram trip. “How can you, Wandzia?!” – my grandmother said after listening to the story. It was all about a group of German pilots; they jumped almost on the run and filled the “nur für Deutsche” part – that part in the front of the wagon which was never crowded – with loud laughter, joyfulness and quite a lot of schoolboy’s yelling. The inhumanly packed Poles gloomily looked at the noisy youngsters from the Luftwaffe¹⁴⁷ behind the guard rail and Mum, well...! She saw that they were almost my peers – and also such blond blokes – and that, somewhere far away, their mothers were shivering with fear whether their boys Hans, Kurt, Willi would return from this terrible abyss. And they are chortling here out of excessive vitality, they are frightfully young, they are sons, children so much... She remembered Jacek Sobieski, flying from the wardrobe onto the bookcase and from the bookcase to the piano, she could hear the same buzz of amused freaks. “Wandzia, it was them who in September were shooting at the crowds of refugees in the streets! It is them who are shooting at the same refugees in Europe! What are you saying?!”. “I know” – said Mum – “it’s true, but their mothers fear in the same way as me”.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ E. Lipiński: *Pamiętniki*. Wydawnictwo Fakt, Warszawa 1990, p. 83.

¹⁴⁷ Luftwaffe – German Air Force.

¹⁴⁸ S. Kobyliński: *Noniusz. Wspominki z życia wewnętrznego*. Iskry, Warszawa 1986, p. 18-19.

Example 3. Antoni Marianowicz about the events of September, 1939

At first, they kept saying for a long time that there would be no war, using very convincing arguments. Then I heard Mościcki's voice, testifying something "in the face of God and History". I was very excited but not much frightened. I was fifteen at that time.

We immediately left for Konstancin as it is always safer in the country. Father had a beautiful bunker in the middle of the garden, where we were to hide away from bombs. Yet, quite soon, it turned out that it was safer in the town. Therefore, we returned to Warsaw, to Świętokrzyska Street. This was a big flat in a two-storey building. We came in the evening. Air raid alarms were being announced and cancelled. Everyone had good thoughts, as we were not scared any more, we would do away with them with our cavalry, and England and France would chop Hitler to mincemeat.

However, I got a hysteria attack as I was scared. Father tried to communicate with me – as to whether I was scared in general or here, at Świętokrzyska Street in particular. I was scared in the Świętokrzyska flat, so we immediately moved to my aunt and uncle, who lived opposite in a big multi-storey townhouse. Later, we arranged shelters in the basement and we ran for gas masks, because you could never know with those Germans, although they were so weak. Colonel Umiastowski summoned men to march out, but we resisted it. My uncle, a doctor, had gone somewhere to Stanisławów to join the army, but when they saw him in wellingtons with an umbrella, they quickly sent him back. In our Świętokrzyska flat, the division headquarters were placed. During one of the first air raids, nothing was left of the house and the headquarters. We watched the remnants of our belongings hanging here and there at different storeys, and then we started to save whatever was possible. The treasures excavated from the ruins were moved to the aunt and uncle's place.

And then, we were sitting in the basement, listening to the arguments of our neighbour about the imminent victory of the Allies, when suddenly a girl ran to us with a scream that we were burning. We ran away as we were, only my mother was carrying a huge suitcase, which became an object of sneering. Everything was burning, we were moving on knocked down columns and piles of glass, among walls of fire. Along the way, we got to the flat of Professor Sterling and his wife. He was still out, she – a hysterical woman – was in. Professor Sterling ran home soon and, like a seal, fell into an armchair breathing heavily. Detonations were heard regularly. The Professor's wife shouted at him: "Can you see this – here you are! Can you see this – here you are!". He burst with anger: "What can I see, you idiot, what can I see?" – he growled and buried

himself even more deeply in the armchair. Later, it was even worse, so we went down to the hallway.

The uncle pushed his maid into the niche and shielded her with his own body – my Mum was furious, as she wanted me to be pushed, not this girlfriend of my uncle. Bombs were falling one by one and the house swayed in all directions. A woman shouted upstairs: “The chamber pot, has anyone seen the chamber pot?”. My uncle replied that he had not seen it but that something was being poured onto his head...¹⁴⁹

Example 4. Aleksander Kamiński about street satire

In the spring of 1944, Igo Sym – the German agent responsible for theatre life – was killed in Warsaw. By order of the governor of Warsaw, Moder – the commander of the German police issued several severe directives as retribution for this murder (e.g. he ordered to imprison and later execute dozens of hostages). The posters with those directives were distributed all over Warsaw, on the bottom of each – there was the signature “Moder”, stamped in the boldest print. No sooner had the first posters appeared in the town than an unknown hand made two small corrections in the name of the German official with a wide, navy blue pencil. Two dots were added over the letter “o” and the letter “r” was added right after “o”. Instead of Moder, “Mörder” – a murderer – could be seen. Several hours later, this spiteful but really just correction could be seen on hundreds of posters. The bloody joke must have enraged the occupiers as – quite soon – they started to cover the “corrected” Moder’s name with a special print.¹⁵⁰

Example 5. Marian Ruth Buczkowski about street satire

Humour was on the watch and it lurked everywhere. It replied with an immediate counterpunch to every attack of the hostile propaganda; it injected spite at every symptom of weakness or failure. When the Propaganda-Amt put out posters of Churchill with the words “The arsonist of the world” all over Warsaw, someone immediately placed Hitler’s photograph there and wrote in childish handwriting: “And who is this?”.

When a huge banner recruiting workers for the Reich, saying “Go to Germany with us”, appeared, it was instantly corrected by: “Go to Germany yourselves!”. The German propaganda slogan “Deutschland siegt an allen Fronten [Germany wins on all fronts]” could be easily – by changing one letter (“s” to “l”) – trans-

¹⁴⁹ A. Marianowicz: *Życie surowo wzbronione*. Czytelnik, Warszawa 1995, p. 41-43.

¹⁵⁰ A. Kamiński: *Wielka gra...*, op. cit., p. 173.

formed so that its message was ruined. The changed slogan was: "Deutschland liegt an allen Fronten [Germany lies down on all fronts]". What can serve as a perfect example of such instant and sharp turns was an event which happened in the first days of the German attack on Russia. On the square in front of the main railway station, a propaganda film was being emitted and it was showing the march of some of the volunteer legions: the Spanish, French, Dutch and Norwegian.¹⁵¹ "And where are Poles?" – a propaganda question was heard in the loudspeaker. "In Auschwitz!" – someone shouted from the crowd...¹⁵²

Example 6. Adam Grzymała-Siedlecki about being transported to Pawiak

Already on Kielecka Street, I noticed that when we were left alone, the brave SS-man was somehow anxious.¹⁵³ This nervousness did not correspond to his athletic body build, his layers of muscles and powerful shoulders. And yet, without a doubt, this giant was afraid of something. Does loneliness frighten him? Is it a kind of neurasthenia? A fear of darkness? I could see him in a car, moving nervously, turning to me repeatedly. Is he looking for something? Being quiet all the way, here – at Kaliska Street, he fell into anxiety immediately after the armed gang of his companions disappeared. Suddenly, as if after a decision he had struggled for he rushed to me and – with a firm move he pulled a thick cherry tree stick (I had taken with me) out of my hands. Everything was clear: it was this stick which bothered our brave Teuton! He could not stand the thought that I might want to try to assassinate him.

My later experiences have convinced me about the unbelievable cowardice of these monsters from the Gestapo – then at Kaliska Street, facing such an "unmanly" sign of fear was such a novelty to me that I started to laugh heartily. In my situation at that time, an occasion to laugh was an invaluable gift. Therefore, I felt grateful to that coward – until we met again after three months in thoroughly different circumstances! But this will be discussed later.

In this way, owing to the unexpected *divertissement*,¹⁵⁴ I was approaching Dzielna Street when – after all the efforts of the police – a gang of butchers got into the car with a young man they had arrested.

¹⁵¹ By this time in the war, there were over 7 foreign legions in the Wehrmacht and Waffen-SS. (trans. note: J.E.S.)

¹⁵² M. Ruth Buczkowski: *Warszawski dowcip...*, op. cit., p. 13.

¹⁵³ Arrested at night, the author was transported to Pawiak by a Gestapo patrol, which detained other people on the way.

¹⁵⁴ *Divertissement* – Entertainment, fun.

The new victim overloaded the inside of the vehicle, so he was placed... on my lap. Simply in such a way as something is placed on an armchair or a chest of drawers, on an inanimate object in general. The search must have taken place in some non-monotonous conditions, because the stormtroopers, who had been silent before, were lively interpreting the experience they had gone through and the ape-man – the translator – addressed the arrested man with some dirty jokes concerning his marriage bed. Surely, the weeping wife of this young man did not suppose that she had become an object of bestial jokes of the *unter-mensch*. Her husband sitting on my lap refrained himself with all his powers not to put himself at the risk of imminent and miserable death, which he would have met if he had reacted to the insult. And you should have heard with what bottomless rudeness those jokes stank and what shameless laughing at helplessness that was! Can any other police system be imagined that would allow its functionaries to act with similar wickedness towards an arrested person? The beasts from Aleja Szucha¹⁵⁵ knew that – toward a Pole – they could extremely abuse their privileges and that they would not get even the smallest punishment for that.¹⁵⁶

Example 7. Stanisław Pigoń about a prisoner's adventure

Professor Antoni Prawocheński had inexhaustible reserves of cheerful vitality. The malicious irony of the situation made him an object of derision in extraordinary circumstances. He made fun of this in a carefree way. Already in Cracow, in the yard of the Montelupich prison, an SS-officer – having read in his ID that the Professor had been born in the region of Kiev – asked (with the intention of freeing him):

– “Bist du ein Ukrainer?”¹⁵⁷

– “No” – he replied – “I’m a Pole”. And so, he remained with us sharing our common fate.

In the concentration camp, he had an amusing adventure. He had a daughter in Vilnius and she, having somehow obtained his address, sent him a small food parcel: a little sugar, some cookies roasted in butter, a bar of chocolate. The parcel came and the addressee was summoned to the office, ordered to confirm receiving it with his signature and to pay for the delivery cost. After opening

¹⁵⁵ During the occupation, there was a Gestapo prison in Aleja Szucha 25 – a place where prisoners were tortured.

¹⁵⁶ A. Grzymała-Siedlecki: *Sto jedenaście dni letargu*. Wydawnictwo Literackie Kraków 1966, p. 16-17.

¹⁵⁷ Bist du ein Ukrainer? – Are you Ukrainian?

the parcel, it was announced that its contents would be distributed among the junior officers. They have such a hard duty... They deserve something for this. The owner did not even smell his daughter's gift. Later, the Professor told us this scene with undisturbed humour. He did not care for this. He was not even knocked down by illness.¹⁵⁸

Example 8. Adolf Gawalewicz about the events in Montelupich Prison in 1940

My friend Jot... (may he rest in peace) had a heavy issue: the accusation of hiding a weapon. For this, there were no chances to stay alive. But why did his companions brutally and mockingly deprive him of any hope? Why did they tease him mercilessly at each step, imitate his gestures, laugh at everything – what and how he did things and talk? They bullied him. He was not liked – it is obvious. No wonder then that when he got a wonderful, expensive parcel, he did not share it with anyone, which deteriorated his situation in the cell even more.¹⁵⁹

Example 9. Adam Grzymała-Siedlecki about being transported to KL Majdanek

Over five hundred people had been loaded into one cargo train – men and women separately and terribly overcrowded... However, a kind of organization came into being immediately and spontaneously: some places for the weak and the elderly were found in the wagon corners, where they would be able to go through the voyage in the sitting position on the bundles. "On the bundles" – how if taking any luggage for transport was not allowed? Yes, but the younger took off their coats to make seats for the seniors and disabled out of them. They had given them their coats in unheated wagons which could get to below 20°C-25°C cold, which would surely come at night. Yes, such evangelical heart rescue appears most directly in common misery.

Cargo wagons – obviously without sanitary appliances – would become latrines in a couple of hours; having predicted this, the floor was sprinkled with disinfecting substances, so it was hard to breathe, a new flowerbed in the Chinese garden of tortures, which the Gestapo planted with loving care.

Low spirits, despair on the train?

¹⁵⁸ S. Pigoń: *Wspominki z obozu w Sachsenhausen (1939-1949)*. Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1966, p. 40-41.

¹⁵⁹ A. Gawalewicz: *Refleksje z poczekalni do gazu. Ze wspomnień muzułmana*. Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1973, p. 52.

Just the contrary. Maybe because one did not suffer alone but collectively, in general all were keeping well, at least bearably. Even in the female wagons, you could not see tears nor hear moans. You could only find dull numbness of those who had gone through too much. Here and there – an unbelievable thing – merry laughter could be heard, as well as a shower of jokes.

How significantly human this is: laughter and jokes in such a situation – in full awareness of a voyage to death, served in parts. Thus, there is no such extreme torment in which the impact of humour would die out. I have known someone who claimed that humour had come into being in human mentality as a defensive measure: to save ourselves from the burden of existence through humour.¹⁶⁰

Example 10. Władka Meed about life behind the Ghetto wall

I expected real interest on the Aryan side about the events in the ghetto. Poles who lived near the wall could observe – straight from their windows – the terrible things which took place there. Earlier, I had believed that they would willingly help their Jewish acquaintances and neighbours. After all, they had lived together for generations, worked with them hand in hand, raised kids together, sharing joyful and sad moments. Thus, at that moment when Jews were mercilessly being murdered, it would seem natural that Poles would be deeply moved. And that they would show slightly more human sympathy and a willingness to help.

One Sunday, walking the streets of Warsaw, I reached the area of the ghetto wall. On the Krasińscy Square, there was a playground in the garden opposite the wall. On that Sunday, a lot was going on there: kids and adults were playing sports, games and having fun. In the noisy and crowded cafes, young people were eating, drinking, and playing merrily. I stopped for a while, soaking up this sight, and then I turned and left. A few steps further, just within spitting distance, the wall of the ghetto was dragging on. The same street, two different worlds.

Suddenly, a machine gun clatter was heard on the other side of the wall. The air was torn by a painful cry and then everything sank into silence. The Germans had hunted down another victim in the ghetto.

I glanced towards the palace. Has anyone in this noisy crowd heard this gunshot? Yes, several people were looking in this direction over their shoulder with fear and anxiety. However, someone pointed at the wall and then waved their hand as if saying that nothing serious had happened and that there was nothing to be afraid of.

¹⁶⁰ A. Grzymała-Siedlecki: *Sto jedenaście...*, op. cit., p. 176-177.

– It's no big deal, they're only shooting at Jews – a young Pole said with a smile and went towards the carousel.

It was a sunny winter day. Whole families came to the park for a Sunday walk. I looked at those well-dressed residents of Warsaw, who were calmly walking the alleys, and at their children merrily running to overtake the adults. But in my imagination, I could see my mates in the ghetto and this short military stick, each twitch of which indicated one direction or another, while a sharp voice decided about death or a temporary delay of the execution by rhythmical repeating: "To the left! To the right! To the left! To the right!"¹⁶¹

Example 11. Adina Blady-Szwajgier about the carousel at the Warsaw Ghetto

In the morning, we heard shots.¹⁶² In the distance. This was not in "our" home, nor in our street. I got dressed, went downstairs and I found out that it was in the ghetto. People kept saying: "It has started".

So, I went upstairs and told this to Hela, but she as if had collapsed into herself. She had a grey face, but I did not comfort her.

– I'm going out – I said.

I got dressed neatly. I put on that best suit of mine, did my hair, put on some powder and lipstick. Before going out, I glanced at the mirror – everything was ok. An ordinary face.

I bought a bunch of marsh marigolds from a street flower woman – such a big bunch. I held those flowers in both hands so I could submerge my face in them, as it was joy – spring. The Holy Week. Monday.

So, I went on to Krasińscy Place. Possibly the nearest from home. My legs took me there themselves – to the wall.

A well had stood there. And it was still there. Such (...) a plump street pump from the old times. In my childhood, I washed my eyes of tears and legs of blood after some falls on the street or in the garden.

Yet, today I had no tears to wash. I only stood and leaned against this well of my childhood.

And just near, in a square, a carousel had stood for a couple of days. It was open. There were children on this carousel and it was spinning and I could hear

¹⁶¹ W. Meed: *Po obu stronach muru. Wspomnienia z warszawskiego getta*. Wydawnictwo Jaworski, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Warszawa-Waszyngton 2003, p. 107-108.

¹⁶² The described events took place on the 19th April, 1943 – on the day when the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto broke out.

some music. Or maybe it just seemed that way to me? Children were laughing and people passing them smiling. But there – behind the wall, shots could be heard.

Shooting could be heard and the children were laughing. I stood with these marsh marigolds and smiled. As all did. Later, people said that some flags were hanging, but I did not see them. I saw nothing, though in fact I had no tears. Even if I had been able to and wanted to, I would not have cried, because it was as if all the tears, which I had ever had, had dried out a long time ago, maybe many years ago.

This was nothing to cry about. I only had somehow wooden and heavy legs and I would probably have sat down somewhere, if there had been somewhere. But there was not.

A beautiful poem was written about this carousel by Czesław Miłosz.¹⁶³ That it was like at Campo di Fiori, where Giordano Bruno died at the stake and people were dancing. Thus, when I later, much later, read this poem, it came to my mind that maybe, next to this carousel, he had also seen such a smiling girl with marsh marigolds.¹⁶⁴

Example 12. Józefa Grzymkowska-Kleindienst about underground education in Lida

Some ghostly jokes sometimes come to my boys' minds. Miś [Mike] carelessly did his homework, so I indicated this to him and then his friends started to laugh and call: "Make soap from him, make soap from him!"

I asked amazed what that meant.

– "Don't you know, Madam, that the Germans make soap from people? So, if he is worthless, make soap from him".

They all considered this to be an excellent joke and were laughing – and Miś as well.

What educational measures should I use to raise these boys up to be proper people, if life puts in front of them such monstrosities?!¹⁶⁵

Example 13. Eryk Lipiński about train trips

Once, when I was going on a crowded train from Pruszków to Podkowa Leśna to a meeting with Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz in Stawisko, I happened to travel next to

¹⁶³ Example 77.

¹⁶⁴ A. Błady-Szwajgier: *I więcej nic nie pamiętam*. Volumen, Warszawa 1994, p. 67-68.

¹⁶⁵ J. Grzymkowska-Kleindienst: *Witalis, Berek i inni*. In: M. Kozakiewicz, S. Brzozowski (eds): *Szkoła w konspiracji. Wspomnienia uczestników tajnego nauczania*. Instytut Wydawniczy Nasza Księgarnia, Warszawa 1960, p. 336.

a Wehrmacht soldier, loaded with parcels and with a stuffed backpack. I started a conversation with him about the transport problems during the war, turning his attention away from what I was doing. I opened his backpack and started taking out various objects and giving them away to amused passengers.

These were not precious things: a shoe brush, a couple of soap bars, a book, a small parcel wrapped in paper, etc. In the end, I took out a knife with an aluminium handle, on which some initials were carved – maybe exactly of that soldier's. Being completely unaware of what was going on with his belongings, he laughed with the passengers and shouted that he was going home and that the war would be "kaput" soon. I got off in Podkowa Leśna with the captured knife in my pocket. It has served me till now, as it is of excellent steel and you can sharpen pencils and cut paper with it very well. I treat it as a small personal war reparation.

Once – outside the territory of the temporary camp in Pruszków, I got acquainted with a man with a slightly hoarse baritone, who was a professional singer. As festivals, Pagart and Estrada¹⁶⁶ were not even dreamt of at that time, he sang his songs in the train from Skierniewice to Cracow, earning his living in this way.

Someone had told him that I was an editor and writer, which I did not deny strongly enough – maybe because I did not know what danger this could bring about. Although we did not drink vodka but – nothing to hide – moonshiner, this did not prevent us from becoming friends. Then the artist turned to me with the suggestion he could write a song about the Uprising, which he would be able to perform in trains. He hoped his income would rise owing to such a topic. Being moved, I agreed, but I forgot about the promise on the next day. Yet, the artist did remember it and finally came to me.

The word had been given, so I could not withdraw and after an hour, I gave him the lyrics of the song "O chłopakach z AK [About the Home Army boys]",¹⁶⁷ which I wrote to the tune of a popular song "O, ty Wiśniesko... [Hey, you Wiśniesko...]".

The artist quickly learned the lyrics and, owing to the current contents of the song, he overcame his rivals – he became the Połomski¹⁶⁸ of the autumn 1944 uprising. Every time we met in Pruszków, I always had decent refreshments as my fee.

¹⁶⁶ Pagart, Estrada – State artistic agencies in the Polish People's Republic.

¹⁶⁷ AK [HA] – the Home Army. A Polish secret organization.

¹⁶⁸ Jerzy Połomski – A well-known Polish singer.

This is the contents of the song:

*On the first of August in the whole of Warsaw
A terrible fight started:
On the one side, there were Germans,
On the other – the Warsaw Home Army.*

*The Germans had tanks and cows
And the help of the Russian Cossack,
Brave Warsaw had not this
But, instead, it had the HA boys.*

*The German general puts Polish women
In front of tanks to kill them,
But this doesn't work,
As they are defended by HA boys.*

*Then Germans – from planes
(as such is their trend)
Banged to women and children
So that the HA boys get angry.*

*On the radio, General Bór to Churchill:
Rescue your brothers Poles,
As we won't stand any longer
And all the HA boys will die.*

*Then the secret night landings came,
Not just one pack was dropped on the town.
There are already grenades and guns
And the Jerries get pale when they see the HA.*

*The Führer called his heroes:
It's rubbish – he says – your work!
We have bombers, cows and tanks,
And the HA boys are beating us.*

*And he brought his whole army,
Gave each a bomb into a backpack,*

*Now there are ten of you per one,
You have to beat the HA boys.*

*They terribly feared their chief,
But the Varsovians even more.
For two months they have beaten the capital,
Bravely defended by the boys from the HA.*

*They ruined all the churches,
Loads of folks closed in the barracks,
But this does not help them,
They can't beat the HA boys.*

*As a Roman proverb says:
Hercules won't conquer tens –
In the destroyed town and under violence
The HA boys surrender.*

*The empty and burned down capital
Frightens as a nightmare,
But it is a proof of heroism
For the whole world of boys from the HA.*

*And when Poland rises free,
Its capital won't be average,
It will be a monument for ages
Of the heroic boys from the HA.¹⁶⁹*

Example 14. Marian Walentynowicz about caricatures

Making use (...) of lots of free time, excellent English poster paints and a handy sink in which you could constantly rinse a paintbrush and, in this way, paint in very clean colours, I started drawing some portrait-caricatures of high-rank dignitaries from "Rubens".¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ E. Lipiński: *Pamiętniki...*, op. cit., p. 137-139.

¹⁷⁰ The author presents a memory of his stay (as a soldier) in the Rubens Hotel in London, which was the seat of the Polish government-in-exile during World War II.

When quite a large collection was ready, I decided to make a small inner exhibition. Therefore, I went to the commander of "Rubens", Colonel N.-L. with a request for permission. He asked me to show him the exhibits first. He was looking through them without any remarks, even at his own portrait, and he mercifully gave me his consent. What surprised me though was that he established the opening of the exhibition in two days' time. However, the matter got explained very soon. Half an hour after my visit at the commander's, his adjutant appeared with a suggestion put forward by the colonel that I could sell him his caricature. I agreed immediately and set the price at 5 guineas, which the adjutant paid with no hesitation, emphasizing at the same time that the colonel asked me not to paint any caricatures of him. Pity, but I had to accept this condition, because a stay in a big city with my junior officer's income was not easy and 5 guineas was a big help.

Half an hour after the adjutant's leaving, I had another visit – of the colonel who was the commander of the pastoral care department and whose portrait was also included in my collection. I had caricatured him as sitting in an armchair, in a cassock, with distinctions and with a raised hand as if giving the *urbi et orbi* blessing.

"Apparently, you have a caricature of me, I'd like to see it". He looked at it and then asked me to show him the other pictures. He was looking through them carefully and said: "Others are made so good-looking by you and I'm so ugly. Yet, I'm married and have two kids". Still, I could not see any connection between fatherhood and caricature. Finally, not minding this fault of my drawing, he expressed the same condition as the commander of Rubens, paid 5 pounds and 5 shillings (which equalled 5 guineas), took his ugly portrait and left.

Unfortunately, the exhibition which I organized in the ground floor hall, had no financial benefits. Only General Modelski, whom I had drawn as a grey eminence on an oversize armchair, against the background of a provincial photographer with a moustache, a railing and a curtain, thanked me by saying: "you are the only who has understood me". Frankly speaking, I did not know what he meant but I made such a face as if I understood everything.

I made such shows several times later, listening with great curiosity to the remarks of my victims. The Minister of National Defence, a dear professor and a general, Marian Kukiel, resented his portrait: "You've drawn me without an eye, surely symbolically, that I can't see anything. I can see, I can see everything, please – draw me with the eye in the future".

There were also some tangible results of my exhibitions. The chief of the car park, Major W., who so far had had a salt and pepper mane, suddenly appeared

with a neat haircut and an elegant hairstyle. Then I accused him of spoiling my models and he answered that he had done his hair in the way shown on the caricature for many years but he had not known how funny it had looked.

I was very proud of the positive effects of my drawings. I had done the same as Major B., the adjutant of the Supreme Commander, a distinguished and elegant man, who took care of an equally elegant image of the whole staff in the headquarters. It was him who once gave the order that everyone from then on had to come to "Rubens" in full-dress uniforms, not in battle-dress.¹⁷¹

Example 15. Marian Walentynowicz about a course participants' joke

My relationships with my flatmates were unremarkable. In the bar in the Officers' club, it was possible sometimes to get whisky, though in small amounts, but there was always lots of beer, with which Englishmen – in an incomprehensible (to me) way – could get quite drunk. It was most probably due to this that the conversation became more general and livelier.

This could also be owing to Madam captain, the commander of this whole female army, a very nice and merry lady with half-kilometre-long legs, who always stuck to rather more continental customs. In the evening, with a glass of beer, she could tell some good, sometimes even risky, English jokes and was also able to laugh at the jokes she was told.

Once, she told us a true – as she reassured us – story which had happened in one of the English regiments. A couple of young officers, in a similar bar and drinking beer as we now, were complaining about their very modest incomes. One of them mentioned that the army does not pay much and not always fulfils its duties. In the times of Queen Victoria, his grandfather was promoted from a captain to a major but – for quite a long time – was paid as a captain and later, the debt was not regulated. The grandfather died and the debt was not paid.

Encouraged by beer, the companions had a brilliant – in their opinion – idea and the descendant of the victim, prompted by his friends, on the spot, wrote an application to the Ministry of Defence with a request to pay him – as the only rightful heir of the deceased – the difference in the incomes along with the due interest rates.

The letter had been sent and the jokers forgot about their joke when one day an envelope, which looks very official and had excellent wax seals, came to the second lieutenant from the Ministry of Defence. The contents of the docu-

¹⁷¹ M. Walentynowicz: *Wojna bez patosu. Z notatnika i szkicownika korespondenta wojennego*. Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, Warszawa 1969, p. 100-102.

ment were more or less as follows: "We have received your request, investigated the matter, and it has turned out that your grandfather really did not receive the income difference for the period you have mentioned. The Ministry of Defence is glad to find at last the rightful heir of the deceased major. In those times, the commander of the company in person was financially responsible for horses and your grandfather died, not having settled all horse accounts. We have carried out a thorough calculation of both sums and we found out that you – as the only rightful heir – owe us 10 pounds, which we ask you to pay by a such and such date into the State Bank to our account number such and such".

In this way, the grandson of the deceased major was punished for his slightly inappropriate joke addressed to a significant institution.

One joke was told by Madam captain in honour of me, as a Polish officer took part in it.

One man such as me bought in a pharmacy a gross of certain rubber products. After checking them at home, it turned out that the pharmacist made a mistake and sold him 142 instead of 144 items. The Pole returned with a complaint on the next day. The pharmacist apologized to him for his mistake and finally said: "But I have an impression that I didn't spoil your night by this".

Unfortunately, these evenings in the pub in the company of a merry female captain, about whom you could not learn any details despite a lot of your effort, were rare. The reason of this was that she conducted some evening courses for her charges, about whom she also told various amusing stories and jokes.¹⁷²

Example 16. Stanisław Tomaszewski about the satirical underground press

The 1941 summer was coming to the end.¹⁷³ The loudspeakers on the streets of Warsaw unceasingly reported Hitler's new victories. However, that news was not trusted by accidental listeners. The residents of Warsaw remained incorrigible optimists. The new functions which I was to take over with the arrival of winter made me close down the satirical periodic paper "Szpilka [A Pin]", edited and published by me since November 1940. I was aware of the significance of satire which derided the occupier. Therefore, I had done my best to publish this paper

¹⁷² M. Walentynowicz: *Wojna bez patosu...*, op. cit., p. 167-169. More on this: J. L. Godziszewski: *Opowiadania z Wysp Brytyjskich*. Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza Czytelnik, Warszawa 1982; A. Wasilewski: *Refudziady*. Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1971; A. Wasilewski: "W szkocką kratę". Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1978.

¹⁷³ The recollected memory consists of two parts. The first concerns the events before the arrest and imprisonment of the author, the second – the events after his return to Warsaw.

(it circulated only in 500 copies) even in the most modest form. At first, copying machine films were drawn by me on wax sheets and I initially copied "Szpilka" on a flat copying machine. On eight pages sized 20.5 x 15 cm, I tried to distribute jokes whispered into the ear and to present my own, current satire concerning the occupation. It was really unpleasant to leave my satirical "child".¹⁷⁴

One day after my return to Warsaw, I received information that I had to come to Gloger Street for new assignments in my conspiracy work. The room was in a corner house, on the ground floor. A couple of unknown men were sitting at the table. I was told to sit down along one of the walls. They were settling some matters. When they finished, I was invited to their place. It is how I got acquainted with Kazimierz Kumaniecki, whose pseudonym was "Kozakiewicz". He explained that I was assigned to the "N" unit – the conspiracy press section, which dealt solely with diversion propaganda aimed at German troops and the system of oppression in the General Government.¹⁷⁵ (...)

The first task I had was preparing a graphic design of a satirical paper which would aptly aim at the worries of a German soldier on the frontline and of his family in the depth of the Reich. Its title was "Erika". The first, as if pilot, issue was to justify its future existence. In that period, the news was coming from the Eastern front about the approaching end of Hitler's blitz victories. Therefore, I decided to appeal in my drawings mostly to German soldiers from the Eastern front. We discussed each satire and each drawing with "Zelga" (Stanisław Smoleński). Due to the small size of the paper (4 pages sized 30.7 x 21.5 cm), we were not allowed to waste space on poor texts or incompetent drawings. Each centimetre of paper was to be properly used and to be accurately aimed at the enemy. The success of "Erika" resulted in the decision to publish a regular satirical paper. This is how "Der Klabautermann" came into being – a satirical periodical for the Germans who occupied Poland and for those in the Russian territories. After the arresting of Smoleński – since November 1942, I edited "Der Klabautermann" with Professor Kumaniecki. In my drawings, I made efforts to imitate the manner of the well-known Göebbels' cartoonists. I also used their initials to sign my works. Excellent texts and translations were made by Professor Kumaniecki. The paper was issued mostly every fourth week. In fact, just the two of us did the whole of "Der Klabautermann", but more distant areas thought that there were many editors.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ S. Miedza-Tomaszewski: *Benefis konspiratora*. Czytelnik, Warszawa 1962, p. 52.

¹⁷⁵ Ibidem, p. 98.

¹⁷⁶ Ibidem, p. 100-102.

Example 17. Stanisław Tomaszewski about a street joke

One of our actions had rather a humorous flavour. When the Eastern front was breaking, when female fur coats were being confiscated on the streets of towns to dress German soldiers in them as they were freezing on the “stiffened” positions of that front, we issued a “directive-appeal”, signed by Frank himself and in warm words “supported” by Fischer.¹⁷⁷ On that occasion, I did not fake the signatures and – due to the massive character of the action – the appeal was sealed with a stamp.

The contents of that “directive-appeal”, which the Germans received in the General Government, were more or less the following:

“Your brothers are freezing and starving on the Eastern front. Here, in the General Government robbed for the good of the German nation, you feel good, and so on, therefore, all of you are summoned to appear in the Blank Palace, where you will sign the list, on such and such day and bring (for Warsaw) live hens, geese or ducks and the goods which can be bought only in shops for Germans – in Meinl’s shops.”

It was a hilarious sight when, on the indicated day, the crowds of people with packets and baskets, out of which the heads of poultry were sticking out, were standing at the palace gate – but the guards did not want to allow the “donors” in front of Fischer.¹⁷⁸

Example 18. Anna Jachnina about satirical creative activity

At that time, I lived on Francuska street in Warsaw. It was winter – cold in my flat and inside me. Terrible hunger. I had just got an order to write texts – poems or songs – for our street allies – newspaper boys, street flower women and musicians. The pencil was falling out of my stiffened hands, my brain was getting frozen. There was no light, just a small wick, a small lamp... It was a night of creating in a frozen state. It was probably that night – I cannot remember accurately – when the song “Siekiera, motyka, piłka, szklanka, w nocy nalot, w dzień łapanka [An axe, a hoe, a ball, a glass, air raid at night, round-up in the day]” came into being... (...)

Satire played an enormous role during the war. It was a weapon, an efficient political weapon. The Germans were under pressure all the time, humour undermined their self-confidence and feeling of superiority. It was simply a diversion, patriotic activity, building up the feeling of national unity and defending the in-

¹⁷⁷ Ludwig Fischer – the governor of the Warsaw district.

¹⁷⁸ S. Miedza-Tomaszewski: *Benefis...*, op. cit., p. 120.

ternational moral code for us. After all, apt and well-done propaganda is a big issue in each historical epoch. Humour helps and moves certain matters forward. There is no fullness of life without satire...

How did I collect materials for the book? Humour was born on the street; it was enough to listen carefully. Once I was in a tram and one passenger asked the conductor: "Is it far to Niepodległość [Independence]?"¹⁷⁹ And he answered: "About half a year, sir – till spring". Friends "brought" jokes to me, told me about some observed, authentic situations. For instance: in a Warsaw restaurant, a fat Volksdeutsch is literally stuffing himself and an emaciated boy is standing near, repeating from time to time: "Sir, give me a piece...". Finally, the irritated fat man throws the napkin onto the table and shouts: "What a man, he won't eat himself and won't let the other eat". I was listening and writing down. Then, it was given "onto the typewriter". I was on my way to Wilcza Street – there was the contact place. I had the supplements, corrections and drawings for this book. Yet, there was an ambush at Wilcza. I was arrested. In this way, my supervision over the book ended. Other people took over its publication and distribution. I do not know their names; I cannot remember who made the illustrations. (...) Auschwitz... it is amazing, but even there – in this death factory – humour was being born.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ The passenger asked about Independence Street [Ulica Niepodległości], leaving the word "street", which could be understood as a question about national independence.

¹⁸⁰ M. Woźniak, A. Jachnina: *Śmiechem zabijać wojnę*. In: "Czas", No 3/1975, p. 24.

Ghetto

It seems all this happened only yesterday. The glances of those people – full of tension and despair – persecute us so much, the words about silent pain are so disturbing that we finally lose the sense of time and forget who we are. We are standing with one leg at the door of the Kingdom of Doom and what appears to our eyes are the smoke puffs in which whole cities vanish and whole families and communities head for annihilation, smashed by a heavy cloud like by a tomb stone, only to go further and further and up, where the Heavenly Throne is... Yet, at the same time, we have an impression that this whole period is not a part of our own history, our own life, but that it comes from a kind of ancient legend, in which immortal old men tell the same story for the thousandth time. (...) it is so because it is hard to accept that humanity has given birth to so many murderers, that there was a time when this humanity was mute when a million of children were murdered in its name. And later, despite the burden of such a guilt, it has still existed and led its life... Sometimes a human wants to close their eyes and say: this whole story is only a dream.¹⁸¹

Eli Wiesel

Leszno, Nowolipie and Nowolipki constitute the Broadway of the ghetto district – Broadway in the middle of a graveyard. Again, some questions are raised which are hard to answer. How is it possible that the entertainment industry could exist among a half-million population of Jews, that artists could write, compose, play and sing, being aware of their fate, aware of the ongoing annihilation of the world of Polish Jews...¹⁸²

Ryszard Marek Groński

¹⁸¹ E. Wiesel: *Przedmowa*. In: W. Meed: *Po obu stronach...*, op. cit., p. 14.

¹⁸² R.M. Groński: *Taki był kabaret...*, op. cit., p. 227.

Broadway in the middle of the graveyard

With Hitler's coming to power in 1933, his administration officials, soldiers and supporters of various nationalities, started an open and unprecedented operation aimed at the destruction of the Jewish people. In the occupied Polish territories, the extermination lasted from July 1941 to January 1945. Its apogee took place between April and October 1942. The liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto started on 22nd July. In that period, quite a new sense was applied to pre-war anti-Semitic jokes and some new motifs of black humour appeared in Jewish (self-)satire – all of them mostly involved laughter through tears. Apart from individual memories and diaries, the most valuable collection of documents concerning the Holocaust in Poland (in Warsaw in particular) is the Ringelblum Archive, which also comprises some testimonies pertaining to the people of laughter and their works.

In spite of common opinions, artists had a lot to do in the district of Warsaw that was isolated by the wall, especially in the initial phase of its existence. As Barbara Engelking writes: *The participation in cultural life was not only an escape from the reality and a kind of mental self-defence but also a sign of moral resistance, which provided the feeling of belonging to the world of values from which Germans wanted to remove Jews. Obviously, the possibility of participation in culture concerned only a part of the ghetto population. The growing (with every day) number of the ill, resettled, emaciated inhabitants of shelters, who starved and desperately struggled for life, did not take part in cultural life. In the isolated district of Warsaw, they constituted the majority – with their suffering and death, they applied a tragic character to the daily life in the ghetto and, in this way, created the dominating lifestyle there.*¹⁸³

The concession-based cultural activity in the ghetto was even more intensive than elsewhere as the ban on the participation in the entertainment industry controlled by the occupier was not binding here and the Secret Theatre Council freed the ghetto artists from the boycott duty. The members of the Council were aware that their colleagues in the ghetto had no chance to survive if they did not work. It could be also supposed that the existence of cultural facilities there would be a short episode. Therefore, work in the comedy show business ensured an employment document which guaranteed relative safety. The performing stars earned a loaf of bread daily. If they worked only in entertainment, they starved. So, many

¹⁸³ B. Engelking, J. Leociak: *Getto warszawskie...*, op. cit., p. 516.

artists found jobs in shops¹⁸⁴, canteens, as rickshaw drivers, salesmen, etc. Musicians from bands earned additional money by playing in the streets and yards.

Talking about amusing entertainment in the ghetto requires distance, well-balanced judgements, and the awareness that laughter used to be a rescue, a hope for salvation, and as a source of light in the thickening darkness – thus, small theatres and music halls fulfilled a function that had no counterpart in the history of this genre. The owners of those stages were some prominent ghetto inhabitants, who dealt with collaborators, snitches from the Security Service and the so-called Trzynastka – the Office for Combating Loan-Sharking and Speculation, which was in fact a Gestapo agency that served the Germans. The artists suspected of collaboration with the Gestapo were treated with distrust – in some cases, the accusations were justified. The best seats at premiere shows were occupied by the spectators who made deals with the Germans.¹⁸⁵

The Germans did not interfere much in the ghetto repertoire, shifting control over it to the Jewish administration. There was a ban on performing “Aryan” works by Jews, but in practice – as many others – it was not obeyed. As Ryszard Marek Groński notices: *In the ghetto, the comedy show not only provided oblivion: it was also a transmitter of information. It was important: in compliance with the Hitlerite doctrine, the inhabitants of isolated districts were to be cut off the world behind the wall; the communication between the Aryan and non-Aryan Warsaw should cease completely. Theatres and music halls maintained their lifeline by referring to the common system of signs.*

¹⁸⁴ Shops were the factories of Többers, Schultz, Rörich, situated in the ghetto and outside it, in which brushes (wooden bars with willow twigs for masking weapons on trains) were produced and old clothes were unravelled, repaired and remade. The factories employed over 50 thousand ghetto inhabitants.

¹⁸⁵ R.M. Groński: *Satyryk patrzy na getto*. In: “Polityka”, No 21/2014, p. 87; R.M. Groński: *Taki był kabaret...*, op. cit., p. 228. Cf.: C. Ostrower: *Es hielt uns am Leben. Humour im Holocaust*. trans. M. Yusufi, Springer Fachmedien, Wiesbaden 2018; C. Ostrower: *It kept us alive. Humour in the Holocaust*. Yad Vashem Publications, Jerusalem 2014; L.A. Peschel (ed.): *Divadelní texty z terezinského ghetta / Theatertexte aus dem Ghetto Theresienstadt, 1941-1945*. Akropolis, Praha 2008; L.A. Peschel (ed.): *Performing Captivity, Performing Escape: Cabarets and Plays from the Terezin / Theresienstadt Ghetto*. Seagull Books, New York–Calcutta 2014; L.A. Peschel, A. Sikes: *Pedagogy, performativity and ‘never again’: staging plays from the Terezin Ghetto*. In: “The Journal of Holocaust Education. Special Issue: Performative Holocaust Commemoration in the 21st Century”, No 26/2020, p. 259-281; L. Peschel: *Laughter in the Ghetto: Cabarets from a Concentration Camp*. In: B. Dalinger, V. Zangl (eds): *Theater unter NS-Herrschaft. Theatre under pressure*. Vienna University Press, V&R Unipress GmbH, Göttingen 2018, p. 271-283.

*In the face of the elimination of spiritual centres and high art, they took custody of the heritage of the Jewish and Polish culture by introducing the works of Alejchem, Percec, and Tuwim into their repertoire.*¹⁸⁶

The first concession for a music hall stage was granted to Regina Judtowa – a Gestapo officer's lover and his agent. Jonas Turków, an actor and director, says that – in the peak of the development of small theatres – there were shows six times a week, usually at 5.30 and 7.45 p.m., and the afternoon performances on Saturday and Sunday started at 3 p.m. The tickets were cheaper than on the other side of the wall and they cost 2-3 zlotis (a loaf of bread was about 13 zlotis a kilo). On average, 80% of them were usually sold. Each evening, small theatres could accommodate 3500-4000 spectators. Some particularly popular shows were sometimes seen by bigger numbers of viewers than the facilities could provide space for. Attending small theatres and music halls was risky; passer-bys were constantly at risk of roundups, being arrested, aggression against them by the guards, and being caught by Ukrainian nationalists riding their motorcycles. The stage rooms were wet, poorly lit with carbide lamps, heated with iron stoves and the acoustics were poor.¹⁸⁷

Actors were very popular in the ghetto. They were recognized in the streets, and rickshaw drivers sometimes refused to charge them for a ride. After the performances, artists were approached by beggars, not long before sitting among the spectators, who wanted to express their respect and admiration. The songs heard on the stage were taken over by street singers, workers of the shops, or even prisoners.¹⁸⁸

The ghetto community was not homogeneous. Apart from devoted believers of Judaism, mystics and Hasids, there were many assimilated people who felt Polish, who often came from Catholic – for many generations – families and did not know any Hebrew or Yiddish. This diversity of needs and interests had to be taken into account by the owners of artistic facilities. The repertoire was frequently changed, usually every sec-

¹⁸⁶ R.M. Groński: *Taki był kabaret...*, op. cit., p. 228. More on this: B. Engelking, J. Leociak: *Getto warszawskie...*, op. cit., p. 575-608; K. Radziszewska, E. Wiatr (eds): *Oblicza getta. Antologia tekstów z getta łódzkiego*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2018.

¹⁸⁷ B. Engelking, J. Leociak: *Getto warszawskie...*, op. cit., p. 516-520. More on this: J. Turków: *Teater un koncertn in di getos un koncentracje-lagern*. Knight Publishing, New York 1968.

¹⁸⁸ R.M. Groński: *Proca Dawida. Kabaret w przedsiönku piekieł*. Warszawskie Wydawnictwo Literackie Muza S.A., Warszawa 2007, p. 107; R.M. Groński: *Satyryk patrzy...*, op. cit., p. 87. Examples 73, 74, 75, 76.

ond week, because they performed for an audience which was constantly shrinking. Moreover, the consecutive deaths of the theatre members disorganized the work of artistic groups. When the singers from the operetta and music hall choir had gone, they were replaced by choir members from the Great Synagogue.¹⁸⁹

Without a doubt, the most ambitious music hall in the Warsaw Ghetto performed in the literary café Sztuka [Art] in a room with 100-120 seats. The programme was prepared by outstanding satirists and their works were full of black humour: *A snapshot from a show: a fat woman leading an egg on a chain appears on the stage. By this short glimpse, the authors pointed to the phenomenon of street thefts and assaults of the so-called "flimpers" – emaciated children who grabbed food products from passerbys' hands. One diary writer recollects the immediate swallowing of a candle and a piece of soap to quench hunger... Yet, in spite of signalling the phenomenon, the snapshot showed the unchangeability of human nature: the chain symbolizes the bourgeois attachment to objects – even in a disappearing world, even after the sentence.*¹⁹⁰

What became a special attraction in the repertoire of Sztuka was “Żywy Dziennik [The Living Daily]”, which comprised – in reference to all press columns – the news block, the chronicle of the ghetto and occupation in the form of epigrams, short poems, puns, parodies, and a regularly updated satirical show with the figures of some officials from the Jewish Community. “Żywy Dziennik” was initiated and performed by Pola Braunówna, Leonid Fokszański, Józef Lipski, and Andrzej Włast, but it was Władysław Szlengel who received the greatest applause. He created the figure of Majer Mlińczyk – Lopek’s cousin (Lopek was the role from pre-war comedy shows played by Kazimierz Krukowski), who spoke Polish in its satirical Jewish variety.¹⁹¹

The “articles” in “Żywy Dziennik” consisted, for instance of: an interview with a cloakroom attendant who once had an eminent position and now checks in coats; a reporter’s wandering into some district offices; the life story of Mlińczyk’s wife – the president of the home committee (the only form of self-government permitted in the ghetto); satires and songs about the police, sanitary services, rickshaws, or even the Gestapo

¹⁸⁹ R.M. Groński: *Taki był kabaret...*, op. cit., p. 227-229.

¹⁹⁰ Ibidem, p. 230.

¹⁹¹ Ibidem, p. 233; example 69.

and a typhus epidemic. The artists performed with the musical accompaniment of Władysław Szpilman. In the finale, some couplets were sung to the tune of the song “Siekiera, motyka... [An axe, a hoe...]”:

*An axe, a hoe, a ball, a brush,
Ladies and Gentlemen, jump inside...
What tomorrow? Don't waste the day –
“The Living Daily” is still playing on!*¹⁹²

The viewers particularly liked the jokes aimed at home committees, which unceasingly required payments:

*For Zetos, for Community,
For hospital and a tribute,
For a child and a mother –
A committee fee.
For a health campaign,
For an/the Emergency fund,
For TOŻ and for laundry,
For CENTOS and delousing,
For the midwives' association,
For holidays for the pious,
For an artist's month,
For the poor – according to the list,
For combating typhus,
For the family of Hazenfuses,
For folk cuisine,
For winter help,
For this, for that
And for the security guard!*¹⁹³

The show ceased production in the second half of 1942. Most of the authors and performers of “Żywy Dziennik” were killed in the summer (only Wiera Grań and Władysław Szpilman survived). Władysław Szlengel performed alone for some time, presenting the updated supplements of the satirical journal.¹⁹⁴ In the Ringelblum Archive, some of his satirical

¹⁹² R.M. Groński: *Proca Dawida...*, op. cit., p. 73.

¹⁹³ *Ibidem*, p. 114. Some ghetto actions and institutions aimed at providing financial support are mentioned in the song.

¹⁹⁴ B. Engelking, J. Leociak: *Getto warszawskie...*, op. cit., p. 567-571; A. Marianowicz: *Życie surowo...*, op. cit., p. 76-77; W. Szpilman: *Pianista*. Wydawnictwo Znak, Kraków 2002, p. 65.

works presenting laughter through tears were catalogued: “Chleb [Bread]”, “Opaski [Armbands]”, “Ogródek [The Garden]”, “Ryksze [Rickshaws]”, “Szukam mieszkania [Looking for a Flat]”, “Matura [School Exit Exams]”, “Kiedy... [When...]”.¹⁹⁵

On some stages, shows were performed in Polish, on others in Yiddish, some attempts were made at establishing theatres playing in Hebrew. There were many comedy theatres with the Yiddish language and actors from Jewish theatres, for example: Eldorado – opened on 6th December, 1940 as the first one (it specialized in vaudevilles, music comedies, pseudo-operettas), Nowy Azazel (variety shows referring to the reality of life in the ghetto with satirical fragments addressed to the Jewish Council, some allusions to corruption and the network of relations between prominent persons in the ghetto and their protectors), and Melody Palace. The following performers starred there: Ajzyk Sambeg, Dora Fakiel, Diana Blumenfeld, Regina Cukier, Jonas Turków, the youngest Marysia Ajzensztadt, and Bolesław Norski-Nożyca, a humourist, the author of the hit “Mues [Money]”, which – from the Eldorado stage – went to the streets and became a folk song, constantly increasing in size due to new stanzas.¹⁹⁶

The Polish language was used from April to July in 1941 in Na Pięterku – a typical miniature theatre, led by Michał Znicz – one of the best actors of pre-war film, theatre and comedy shows, who brought here back to life the texts which had been written for him by Julian Tuwim, Marian Hemar, or Jerzy Jurandot.¹⁹⁷

In the variety show theatre Femina, active from June 1941 to April 1942, revues and operettas were staged (such as “Batalion humoru [A Battalion of Humour]”, “Jarmark śmiechu [The Laughter Fair]”), as well as musical comedies – e.g. “Jim i Jill [Jim and Jill]” and “Miłość szuka mieszkania [Love is Looking for a Flat]”. The Femina group included comedians Stefania Grodzieńska and Edmund Minowicz, and Jerzy Jurandot, a satirist, who was the literary manager and the author of most pieces.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ A. Żółkiewska, M. Tuszewicki (eds): *Archiwum Ringelbluma...*, op. cit., pp. 99-101; 101-105; 105-107; 107-108; 108-111; 111-112; 115-117; examples 69, 70, 71.

¹⁹⁶ R.M. Groński: *Taki był kabaret...*, op. cit., p. 228-233; R. Sakowska: *Ludzie z dzielnicy zamkniętej. Żydzi w Warszawie w okresie hitlerowskiej okupacji października 1939 – marzec 1943*. Żydowski Instytut Historyczny w Polsce, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa 1975, p. 215-228.

¹⁹⁷ R.M. Groński: *Taki był kabaret...*, op. cit., p. 229-230.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 230.

What constituted two remarkable examples of satire aimed at the officials of the Jewish Community in the ghetto were the variety show “Szafa gra [Everything is ok]”, directed by J. Jurandot (its premiere took place on 22nd July 1941),¹⁹⁹ and the comedy “Miłość szuka mieszkania [Love is Looking for a Flat]”. In the case of the latter: *If a copy had reached the hands of someone who had never heard about the ghetto, they would only have deduced that the heroes of the comedy lived in the town of horse tramways, the lack of food products, and horrible overcrowding. In the copy, there is no allusion to the occupation. Even in the distant background, Germans do not appear. Only one utterance of Ada (who dreamt that she found herself late at night on the street) allows one to conclude that there was a curfew. A realistic comedy without the data concerning the time and place of action appeals to the imagination more than the descriptions of martyrdom.*²⁰⁰

From mid-1940, comedy shows, concerts, dance parties and variety shows were held in Melody Palace, where Mieczysław Fridman had organized a variety show group “Pięć wesołych chwatów [Five Merry Fellows]”. The first variety show was “Wesele żydowskie [A Jewish Wedding]”, staged there in September 1941 in the open air in such a way that the spectators could take part in it along with the artists as wedding guests. This “super-joyful folk spectacle” was described by the journalists from “Gazeta Żydowska [The Jewish Newspaper]” as a fountain of humour, energy and carefree joy which spread onto the audience.²⁰¹

In April 1942 – three months before the first liquidation action, the Nazis started controlling the repertoire in the ghetto and intensified censorship. However, soon – there was nobody to control as the organizers of cultural life, artists and spectators were sent off for their (most frequently last) journey to concentration camps.²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ “Szafa gra” or “szafograjstwo”, which literally means “The jukebox is playing” but the figurative meaning is “Everything is ok”, were the expressions used in the ghetto in reference to the phenomenon of corruption. R.M. Groński: *Proca Dawida...*, op. cit., p. 48; example 72.

²⁰⁰ R.M. Groński: *Proca Dawida...*, op. cit., p. 120-121; J. Jurandot: *Miłość szuka mieszkania*. Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich, Warszawa 2014, p. 301-401.

²⁰¹ B. Engelking, J. Leociak: *Getto warszawskie...*, op. cit., p. 554-555.

²⁰² R.M. Groński: *Satyryk patrzy...*, op. cit., p. 87; R.M. Groński: *Taki był kabaret...*, op. cit., p. 227.

Clerks and officials in satire

Songs, rhymed couplets, jokes, and – first of all – satirical puppet shows, which constituted a very popular entertainment genre, were successfully used in the ghettos, not only in concession-based entertainment but also in the premises of some institutions (e.g. shops) or in private flats. The themes pertained to people known by the general public or by narrow circles. The performance and dissemination of these works was accompanied by the laughter of settling scores,²⁰³ which was enjoyed by the community members, struggling against both the Nazis' persecution and the consequences of the often malfunctioning administration and its clerks. Here are some of them:

- “Sylwetki znakomitych mężów Służby Porządkowej [The figures of eminent statesmen from the Security Service]” – dated August 1941, a collection of satirical couplets devoted to some selected members and collaborators of the Security Service in the Warsaw ghetto; its authors were Henryk Nowogródzki – an attorney, the head of the Disciplinary Department of the Security Service, and Józef Leon Fels – an attorney in the staff office of the Security Service;²⁰⁴
- “Prezes reb Abe [The President Reb Abe]” – a song by Szmuel Szajnkinder from 1941, sung to the tune of the pre-war hit “Nikodem” with Henryk Wars’s music, a satire aimed at an unspecified clerk and relations in the ghetto;²⁰⁵
- “Zupełnie nowa choroba na szczytach [Quite a new disease on the peaks]” – an anonymous humoresque (sometimes attributed to Menachem M. Kohn) which is a satire on the prolonging sessions and meetings of the Jewish Social Self-Aid association;²⁰⁶
- “W domu z czerwonej cegły [In a red brick house]” – an anonymous poem which is a satire on the activity of the clerks in the Health Care Organization of the Central Committee of Jews (TOZ);²⁰⁷

²⁰³ E.g.: N.N.: *Na marginesie pewnej szopki w roku Pańskim 1942 przy ul. Chłodnej 22*. In: A. Żółkiewska, M. Tuszewicki (eds): *Archiwum Ringelbluma...*, op. cit., p. 178-179.

²⁰⁴ H. Nowogródzki, J. L. Fels: *Sylwetki znakomitych mężów Służby Porządkowej*. In: A. Żółkiewska, M. Tuszewicki (eds): *Archiwum Ringelbluma...*, op. cit., p. 141-157.

²⁰⁵ S. Szajnkinder: *Prezes reb Abe*. In: A. Żółkiewska, M. Tuszewicki (eds): *Archiwum Ringelbluma...*, op. cit., p. 128-129.

²⁰⁶ N.N.: *Zupełnie nowa choroba na szczytach*. In: A. Żółkiewska, M. Tuszewicki (eds): *Archiwum Ringelbluma...*, op. cit., p. 466-468.

²⁰⁷ N.N.: *W domu z czerwonej cegły*. In: A. Żółkiewska, M. Tuszewicki (eds): *Archiwum Ringelbluma...*, op. cit., p. 138-140.

- “Okólnik nr 1 dla wszystkich delegatów komitetów domowych i konsumentów kuchen [The 1st circular for all delegates of home committees and the consumers of kuchen]” – an anonymous satire on the bureaucracy in the Warsaw ghetto, which comprises “Bieg spraw na przydział do kuchen [The conduct for the assignment to kuchen]” – a humorous description of the procedure of obtaining the rights to use home kitchens.²⁰⁸

The use of satire for the criticism of officials' activities and for the public indicating various pathologies was mentioned by Adam Czerniakow, the president of the Jewish Council in Warsaw, who wrote in his diary: *2nd February 1942: (...) they are singing a couplet that the money raised in the Child's Month has been wasted. I've ordered an investigation into who is the author, who sang it and who manages the theatre.*²⁰⁹ When on the 8th of May he was asked whether he allowed to stage a satirical show in which his figure would be presented, he commented on his own answer in the following way: *I replied that I had nothing against that. In the same way, I don't react to the couplet sung on the street: “Czerniakow hot a grojssen boch. Er esst Klop und trinkt joch”.*²¹⁰

What comes from the Warsaw ghetto as well is an invitation to the satirical show “Żarty na karty [Jokes for cards]”, of which the author was a satirist, Antoni Marianowicz. It has the form of a circular written on the back of a food ration card for October 1941 with the slogans of The Child's Day. The sender was indicated as the Company for Supplying the Jewish District in Warsaw – the Department of Humour: *The Company for Supplying announces that, by broadening its activity, in the nearest days it starts rationing humour in the form of supply cards. The assigned ration should be collected with this card on the 17th of the current month, punctually at 11.45 a.m., in the Company for Supplying (Leszno Street, 12). (...) The card is valid only for the person whose name is placed on it.*²¹¹ One of the

²⁰⁸ N.N.: *Okólnik nr 1 dla wszystkich delegatów komitetów domowych i konsumentów kuchen*. In: A. Żółkiewska, M. Tuszewicki (eds): *Archiwum Ringelbluma...*, op. cit., p. 438-439.

²⁰⁹ M. Fuks (ed.): *Adama Czerniakowa dziennik getta warszawskiego 6.IX.1939-23.VII.1942*. Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa 1983, p. 249.

²¹⁰ M. Fuks (ed.): *Adama Czerniakowa...*, op. cit., p. 274. Czerniakow hot a grojssen boch. Er esst Klop und trinkt joch. – Czerniaków has a big belly. He eats meatballs and drinks broth.

²¹¹ R. Sakowska (ed.): *Archiwum Ringelbluma. Konspiracyjne Archiwum Getta Warszawy. Tom 2. Dzieci – tajne nauczanie w getcie warszawskim*. Żydowski Instytut Historyczny IN-B, Warszawa 2000, p. 288.

five copies of the satirical show made with a duplicating machine has been preserved in the Ringelblum Archive and after the war, was moved to the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. Unfortunately, later it was lost.²¹²

In January 1942, a police satirical show “U nas w Rejonach... [In our Districts...]” was performed in “Pod Krzywą Latarnią [Under a Crooked Lantern]”. It was a humorous commentary on the current problems of the Security Service. Its initiators and authors were Jawert from the Security Service (only his surname has been discovered) and the author, Jerzy “Jerry” Ryba – the district officer of District II. Among others, the following heroes appeared on the stage:

- regional officer L. – who sang his confessions concerning his alcoholic tendencies to the tune “Piłem, kto mówi, że nie piłem [I’ve drunk, who says I haven’t]”;
- regional officer Rafał “Rafałek” Lederman – a lecturer in the police officer school, a good organizer, an ambitious strict disciplinarian and a plotter;
- regional officer Jakub Lejkin – often singing the tune “Ach, dlaczego jestem taki mały [Oh, why am I so short]”, a short brutal lawyer, generally hated for his zeal in the period of displacements; there was a joke about him in the ghetto that he had started his official work by collecting bills of police caps because each time he raised his knee the bill was an obstacle; he was killed in 1942, on a sentence of death by the Jewish Combat Organization;
- regional officer Józef Jerzy Herz – already before the war nicknamed “Szatan [Devil]”; he hated Germans but believed in their inevitable victory;
- sub-regional officers Czapliński and T., from “Sepor”²¹³ shown as Stan and Ollie – there were two Czapliński brothers (Stanisław and Marceł) working in the police and both of them deserved their bad reputation; who was T. has not been discovered so far.

This satirical show was enjoyed so much by the audience that it was performed several times in different places, along with charity collections. In April 1942, in Negresco, the same authors from the Security Service staged a show “Wesoła Sielanka [A Merry Idyll]. This time it was a satiri-

²¹² Example 21.

²¹³ Sepor – the section for material support for Security Service functionaries in the Warsaw ghetto.

cal variety show, in which some new figures appeared. The hit of the show was the audio news weekly “Oczy, uszy i nos Dzielnicy [The eyes, ears, and nose of the District]”, in which slides shown on a small screen were used.²¹⁴

Fun, film makers, and a carousel

Although it is hard to believe, merry or mocking laughter could be frequently heard in the ghetto, along with great times in good company. Most often, this was the cackle of overconfident executioners, who had fun at the cost of the victims, and, who with impunity tormented their victims in public places.²¹⁵ This was also the laughter of the gawkers, for whom that place was another attraction of a trip to occupied Poland. Sometimes, one could hear the laughter of people who were having fun and were unaware of the Holocaust drama of the ghetto inhabitants.

In the first days of the occupation, the Nazis did not fully show their contempt and hatred towards Jews, but quite soon it became a “tradition” on the streets of the ghetto that the executioners played games (merry for them and humiliating for the victims), such as cutting off victims’ side-locks, forcing them to perform odd activities (e.g. dancing, hopping, dis-robing, etc.) and killing them. On 10th June 1942, Adam Czerniakow wrote in his diary: *In the Gestapo office, I’ve raised the issue of “Frankenstein”, who shoots at people at one of the gates every day.*²¹⁶ The note refers to one of the most bloodthirsty German gendarmes at the ghetto wall, who shot at passerbys just for fun. Due to his looks and height, he was nicknamed “Frankenstein”. The executioners who knew Polish laughed as well when they heard and understood the song sung on command daily by the Jews being led to work:

*Marszałek Śmigły-Rydz
Didn’t teach us to work at all,
but the golden Hitler came
and taught us how to work.*²¹⁷

In 1941, the ghetto became a tourist attraction of occupied Warsaw. Each day, coaches with sightseeing tours took amused parties all over the

²¹⁴ B. Engelking, J. Leociak: *Getto warszawskie...*, op. cit., p. 213-214.

²¹⁵ Examples 24, 25, 26.

²¹⁶ M. Fuks (ed.): *Adama Czerniakowa...*, op. cit., p. 288.

²¹⁷ J. Jurandot: *Miasto skazanych. 2 lata w warszawskim getcie*. Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich, Warszawa 2014, p. 78.

district. Soldiers often leaned out of the windows and hit the passerbys with whips.²¹⁸ Jerzy Jurandot recollects this in the following way: *From time to time, great tourist vehicles passed by, crowded with officers and their dressed up female companions. Photo cameras clicked; comments were made. The comments must have been humorous as you could see amusement on all the faces. We hated those tourists not less than those who tormented us. It is not nice to feel like an animal in the zoo.*²¹⁹ There was a bus stop at the graveyard, where tourists got off to take photos and make films. They often forced the dead people's families and clergy to break a funeral ceremony and stand in front of the camera. Sometimes, they staged some everyday scenes and had great fun.²²⁰

Many scenes were directed for the needs of propaganda films. In the same way as behind the wall, the visits of film makers from the Hitlerite newsreels became an element of ghetto reality.²²¹ The materials shot by them were to convince viewers of the wellbeing and high living standards in the ghetto and – on the other hand – of the moral failures of the Jews, from whom Hitler was saving the world. Thus, film makers ran into restaurants, ordered waiters to lay the tables with the best food and drinks, and the rushed in clients were told to eat, drink, smile and show the funny side of the elites' life. They made an attempt in Nowy Azazel to force a crowd of random adults and children to gather there and then they filmed those people for several hours without even letting them use the toilet. The "spectators" were firmly ordered to laugh heartily and clap their hands. Those who did not laugh enough were forced to do that by being beating. The President of the Jewish Community received an order to organize a lavish party for outstanding ghetto personalities. Adam Czerniakow wrote about them in his diary with terrible fear and disgust.²²²

Other filmed scenes involved the men and women forced to wash naked in the same room; an old Jew over the naked corpse of a girl; smiling waitresses at the entrance to a restaurant in front of which some begging children were marching... The film shooting lasted three days and each scene was repeated many times to achieve the desired effect.

²¹⁸ B. Engelking, J. Leociak: *Getto warszawskie...*, op. cit., p. 563-564.

²¹⁹ J. Jurandot: *Miasto skazanych...*, op. cit., p. 65.

²²⁰ B. Engelking, J. Leociak: *Getto warszawskie...*, op. cit., p. 564.

²²¹ Example 27.

²²² M. Fuks (ed.): *Adama Czerniakowa...*, op. cit., p. 271-277.

As Władysław Szpilman recollects, those films were to justify the liquidation of the ghetto and to prove that: (...) *Jews were well in Warsaw, they have no morality and do not deserve respect if men and women take baths together, shamelessly showing their naked bodies to each other.*²²³ The collection of films shot in May 1942 by Willy Wist was found after the war in one of the German archives in a box marked with the inscription “Ghetto”. Some fragments of these films, showing the daily life, have become a part of the profoundly moving documentary “Niedokończony film [A Film Unfinished]”, directed by Yael Hersonski.²²⁴

For a long time, hardly anyone behind the wall was aware of the drama the inhabitants of ghettos were going through and of the number of Holocaust victims, which was growing every day. Some tried to support Jews by helping in their escape from the ghetto or by hiding them. Others were indifferent and some still blindly stuck to their anti-Semitic contempt, joked about their persecuted neighbours, helped the Nazis to catch and kill them, which raised terrible fear and disbelief of those who could not agree with the nightmare.²²⁵ Marek Edelman wrote: *It does not matter how many enjoyed what was going on in the ghetto. Probably it was only a handful. What is worse is that – next to this – there is always a silent and terrified crowd of gawkers. And they are still mute, even when they see a scoundrel shouting: “Catch him, a Yid is running away over there!”*²²⁶

It is exactly the category of the gawkers’ laughter in which the well-known event concerning the funfair placed by the Nazis in Krasińskich Square (next to the ghetto wall) in August 1942 can be considered.²²⁷ The carousel symbolizing that place was immortalized in Czesław Miłosz’s

²²³ W. Szpilman: *Pianista*. Wydawnictwo Znak, Kraków 2002, p. 77.

²²⁴ Y. Hersonski: *A Film Unfinished*. Israel, Deutschland 2010; T. Sobolewski: *Niemiecka propaganda o getcie*. In: “Gazeta Wyborcza”, Internet issue 26.08.2010, http://wyborcza.pl/1,75410,8295439,Niemiecka_propaganda_o_getcie.html (1.02.2019).

²²⁵ Example 12.

²²⁶ W. Bereś, K. Burnetko: *Marek Edelman. Życie. Po prostu*. Świat Książki, Warszawa 2008, p. 157.

²²⁷ T. Szarota: *Karuzela na placu Krasińskich. Czy “śmiały się tłumy wesole”? Spór o postawę warszawiaków wobec powstania w getcie*. In: T. Szarota: *Karuzela na placu Krasińskich. Studia i szkice z lat wojny i okupacji*. Oficyna Wydawnicza Rytm, Fundacja Historia i Kultura, Warszawa 2007, p. 149-169; R. Szuchta: *“Biedni chrześcijanie patrzący na getto” w opinii ukrywających się po aryjskiej stronie Żydów*. In: A. Bartuś (red): *Świadkowie. Między ofiarą a sprawcą zbrodni*. Fundacja na rzecz Międzynarodowego Domu Spotkań Młodzieży, Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau, Oświęcimski Instytut Praw Człowieka, Oświęcim 2017, p. 141-155.

peom “Campo di Fiori”, which was anonymously published in a secret leaflet “Z otchłani [From the Abbys]” in March 1944.²²⁸ Explaining the origin of the poem, the author wrote: *On Easter Sunday, Janka and me were going by tram to Bielany to visit Jerzy Andrzejewski. The tram stopped for a rather long time at Krasińskich Square and I saw a chain carousel and some couples flying up on it. I also heard some remarks on what was going on behind the ghetto wall, something like: “Oh, he’s fallen down”. So, I did not make up this scene. After reaching Andrzejewski’s place, I told him what I had seen and a trace of this might have been preserved in his short story “Wielki Tydzień [The Holy Week]”. I was not the only witness, there were others who are still alive. (...) I have been attacked many times as a creator of the fiction that is harmful to the good reputation of the residents of Warsaw. (...) The contrast between the fun on this side of the wall and the fire on the other was shocking enough to dictate my poem. (...) I had no intentions directed against the fun the crowd was having. (...) I just meant the inevitable clash between the collectiveness and individual tragedy, in other words – the loneliness of the dying.*²²⁹

Behind the wall, the liquidation of the ghetto was taking place, as well as mass transportation to concentration camps and the uprising was just about to start. The laughter of the gawkers from the funfair hurt even more because it came from such a close place and became the symbolic marker of the border between the world of the living and the dead. As Marek Edelman wrote: *And in fact, is it so important whether the carousel was spinning then or people were just playing on the swings? It is important that fun was simply taking place – and we were frightened all the time whether anyone at all could see what we were doing in the ghetto... Anyhow, I exactly remember those girls sitting on the seats...*²³⁰

The distorting mirror of the atrium of Extinction

For centuries, the Jewish sense of humour was a means to combat the fear and trauma associated with the dramatic events in this people’s history – such as extreme poverty, persecutions, bloodbaths, unceasing wandering, etc.

²²⁸ Example 11.

²²⁹ C. Miłosz: *Karuzela*. In: “Tygodnik Powszechny”, Internet issue 5.10.2003, <https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/karuzela-122856>.

²³⁰ W. Bereś, K. Burnetko: *Marek Edelman...*, op. cit., p. 158.

As no other in the world, the Jewish sense of humour is full of cheerful self-irony, tinted both with the reflection upon the current reality and gallows humour. It usually leads to laughing at oneself, at personal flaws or funny qualities, as well as to laughing at those who have badly hurt the people who told the jokes. In the opinion of Aleksander Drożdżyński: *Two thousand years of wandering and persecutions have brought about the situation in which Jews – from a generation to a generation – started to find comical moments in every situation and to treat ironically all forms and manifestations of life. Humour became a weapon in the hands of defenceless Jews. After all, nothing impairs a dangerous and strong opponent as much as ridiculing them. Centuries passed by and the situation of Jews has not changed for the better but the tradition has been growing of the particular brand of Jewish humour and joking in a specific mood, folk tone and distinctive sadness. The Jewish sense of humour does not end on playing with words and on situational joking, though in this field as well it is unmatched. First of all, the distinctive feature of this kind of humour consists in presenting Jewish life, fate and customs, seasoned with a pinch of philosophical reasoning and a punch line. How much self-irony we find in the Jewish humour, how much sneering at the fate of the “chosen nation”, at Jewish qualities, religiousness and free thinking, at optimism and pessimism, at the poor and rich! Yet, one will not find in Jewish humour any hatred, it is thoroughly kind-hearted and understanding towards human flaws, even of their enemies.*²³¹

All comic forms – especially the minor ones, such as jokes and sayings, which circulated in the ghettos and other spaces for the Jewish community – constitute unique reports of life during the occupation. They are the basis on which the chronicle of events can be reconstructed and the testimonies of unparalleled humorous attitudes can be collected.²³² What follows are just some examples of these comic “little things”:

– Sayings:

- Don't worry, we'll meet as soap bars in a shopping window!
- Heaven forbid the war lasts as long as Jews can bear.

²³¹ A. Drożdżyński: *Pilpul czyli z mądrości żydowskich*. Sztuka Polska, Warszawa 1988, p. 9-10. More on this: P.P. Grzybowski: *Morycek w szkole. Żydowskie dowcipy o edukacji, w dialogu międzykulturowym*. Fundacja dla Uniwersytetu Kazimierza Wielkiego, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kazimierza Wielkiego, Bydgoszcz 2016.

²³² N. Rocheles: *Zbiór folkloru*. In: A. Żółkiewska, M. Tuszewicki (eds): *Archiwum Ringelbluma...*, op. cit., p. 749-783; A. Żółkiewska, M. Tuszewicki: *Wstęp*. In: A. Żółkiewska, M. Tuszewicki (eds): *Archiwum Ringelbluma...*, op. cit., p. XXXV-XXXVI.

- Where does Hitler feel the best? In the toilet as he has the whole brown mass²³³ with him.
- During the Russian air raids on Warsaw: the greens (Germans) torment us in the daytime, and the reds (Russians) at night.
- On “the other” side, they say: Jews have no flour but they eat chalah. Jews have no radio but know everything. Jews have no army but will win the war.
- Germans have been three times under: “under Moscow”, “under Leningrad”, “under Odessa”. For the fourth time, they will be “underground”.
- What does V mean? The class V the state lottery. A million has already gone.²³⁴
- What can I do legally? Legally, I can only jump and drown in the Vistula River.²³⁵
- Evil speaking / Curses:
 - May you get into the hands of the Jewish Police.
 - May you get into a work camp.
 - May you have such a colour as the yellow patch.²³⁶
 - May Heavens remember you as you remember now about the arm band.
 - Let you experience what I wish to happen to that someone you already know I do.
 - May you fall under a horse tram.
 - May Hitler’s star shine as the light does today.
 - May Hitler’s broth be as fatty as dinners in the peasant’s kitchen.
 - May you be fed by the peasant’s kitchen.

²³³ The pun is based on the association between the colour of faeces and the colour of the Storm Troops of the NSDAP, the “brown shirts”, otherwise known as the SA – Sturmabteilung.

²³⁴ The comical effect results from a complicated playing with symbols. “V” occurs here in two meanings. In the question, the letter V (which the Nazis used in their propaganda as a symbol of victory) is dealt with. Yet, in the answer, V occurs as the Roman number five, which refers to the lottery series. A million means the number of victims.

²³⁵ R.M. Groński: *Proca Dawida...*, op. cit., p. 41-53; *Folklor wojenny*. In: A. Żółkiewska, M. Tuszewicki (eds): *Archiwum Ringelbluma...*, op. cit., p. 724-739.

²³⁶ This refers to a yellow patch with the star of David, obligatorily worn by Jews for identification. Along with a similar arm band, they were called Judenstern – in German: Jewish star.

- May you live in a shelter for refugees.
- May you heat as fresh bread does on one's heart.²³⁷

As Ryszard Marek Groński notices: *The role and significance of humour within the ghetto walls manifests both the opposition against isolation and the preservation of bonds with the other side. Today, after many years, we can see this: a substantial percentage of jokes smuggled to the Aryan side during the occupation returned to the ghetto. Were people aware that the most optimistic anecdotes had not been related to the reality and expressed only the wishes of the narrators and listeners? This was widely known but nobody minded it. The question: "Any news?" was often answered – "Can't you think out something yourself?"... It was also said that the main emitter of jokes was the YWA (Yiden Wyleń Azoj – Jews want it this way) Agency. The YWA competed with the agency called Żyrafa [Giraffe].²³⁸ The releases of both agencies, which are projections of dreams and fantastic calculations, can be used today to reconstruct the history of the ghetto.²³⁹*

The popular heroes of the series of ghetto jokes were Rapaport and Rabinowicz – the two last Jews who have survived in the ghetto. The misleading saying "It's all right!" is a frequent motif in the tales about them:

– Good morning, Mr. Rabinowicz, what's up?

– It's all right, Mr. Rapaport! Churchill will have a speech on Tuesday!²⁴⁰

When the final liquidation of the ghetto was to take place and the heroes of the joke were to be hanged:

– You know, said Rappaport to Rabinowicz, this is the best proof that it's all right.

– Man, come to your senses, what good can you see in this?

– Don't you get it? If they sentence us to hanging, it is a sign they have run out of ammunition and that they are approaching the end. It's all right!²⁴¹

The creation and dissemination of jokes was enhanced by the directives imposed by the occupier. Due to the curfew and early closing of the gates (mostly at 7.30 p.m.), evenings in the ghetto were spent at home, reading books together, listening to music, and playing cards. The young gathered in groups and told jokes, which was an element of self-defence

²³⁷ *Folklor wojenny...*, op. cit., p. 738.

²³⁸ The name of the agency Żyrafa [Giraffe] results from the pun in the Polish language Żydowska Radosna Fantazja [Jewish Merry Fantasy].

²³⁹ R.M. Groński: *Proca Dawida...*, op. cit., p. 37.

²⁴⁰ J. Jurandot: *Miasto skazanych...*, op. cit., p. 81.

²⁴¹ B. Engelking, J. Leociak: *Getto warszawskie...*, op. cit., p. 571.

and a sign of the mental distance from reality.²⁴² Many jokes came into being spontaneously, on the basis of anecdotes associated with the situations observed on the streets of the occupied places and in the ghettos.

In public places, Germans had problems with the identification of Jews, whom they often knew only from anti-Semitic propaganda. It presented a Jew always as a sly dealer, craftsman or a door-to-door salesman. The inability to make instant identification was troublesome, especially in the case of representatives of intelligence, whose identity was revealed neither by their clothes nor their language. This is referred to in a popular joke about a German soldier who saw a passer-by with Semite facial features on the street and came over and asked:

– *Are you a Jew?*

– *No, a Turk!* – he answered ironically.

– *Oh, if you're a Turk, I'm sorry.*

Among other things, such incidents made the German authorities' issue a directive on labelling Jews with arm bands and later, patches with the star of David and on the obligation to bow so that nobody would have doubts with whom they dealt.²⁴³ The labelling symbolized a deprivation of all rights, the belonging to an inferior category of people, and social exclusion. No arm band or patch in a public place brought about the threat of death. The streets immediately reacted to the directive and some sayings became popular: "If you have to buy that rag, at least buy a clean one!", "Nalewki Street has become Hollywood. Wherever you look – there are stars everywhere". An exception appears in a joke about Hitler, who has come to Paradise and saw Jesus there:

– *Well, what is a Jew without a band doing here?*

– *Leave him alone* – says Saint Peter – *this is the landlord's son.*

In another joke on this topic, a prison guard beats a prisoner with a whip:

– *I will teach you, you mangy Jew, going out without a band!*

– *I'm sorry,* – the beaten man defends himself. – *It is clearly said in the directive that there is no duty to wear the band at home and I feel in prison like at home.*

²⁴² M. Lewi-Kurowska: *Pamięć pozostanie*. Wydawnictwo Myśl, Warszawa 1993, p. 44-45.

²⁴³ Example 22.

To avoid complications resulting from their Jewish origin and to increase their own or their family's chances for survival, forging birth certificates became a common practice. This procedure was immediately reflected in jokes and sayings:

– What does the Eleventh Commandment, about which Moses forgot, say?

– Christen thy grandfather and grandmother!

There was also a popular saying that Aryans are divided into horizontal and vertical ones. The horizontal were carried to the christening, the vertical ones – went there on their own.²⁴⁴

After the aforementioned action of confiscating fur coats in the ghetto, people started to say: “It is better that Hitler is in my fur than if I were in his shoes”. The information also appeared that three new divisions had been made owing to Jewish furs: the seal, astrakhan and breitschwanz²⁴⁵ ones and that Hitler would defend Berlin with breitschwanz coats. In the new situation, a new meaning was attributed to a classical joke about convicts: Due to disobeying the fur directive, a Ukrainian, Pole and Jew were sentenced to death. Just before the execution, they were allowed to express their last wishes. The Ukrainian asked for pure vodka and for burying him next to Khmelnytsky²⁴⁶. The Pole asked for distilled dry vodka and for burying him next to Piłsudski's²⁴⁷ heart in Vilnius. However, the Jew asked for strawberries and for burying him next to Hitler.

– *You idiot!* – he was shouted at. – *Where will we get strawberries in winter? And Hitler is still alive!*

– *Shhh, don't shout like that!* – said the Jew. – *Never mind. I've got time, I can wait.*²⁴⁸

One of the most popular reflective sayings and motifs in comical songs in the ghetto was “Only let the smuggling go on!”. The life of the ghetto inhabitants depended on smuggling. It provided the district with goods from the Aryan side and also enabled smuggling people. In his di-

²⁴⁴ R.M. Groński: *Proca Dawida...*, op. cit., p. 38-41.

²⁴⁵ Fur coats made of the leather from prematurely born lambs.

²⁴⁶ Bohdan Khmelnytsky – a hetman (commander-in-chief), a national hero of Ukraine, the leader of the uprising against Poland.

²⁴⁷ Józef Piłsudski – a Polish social and independence activist, a soldier and statesman, the Chief of State and First Marshall of Poland.

²⁴⁸ N. Rocheles: “*Niepachnqce*” żarty. In: A. Żółkiewska, M. Tuszewicki (eds): *Archiwum Ringelbluma...*, op. cit., p. 754-755.

ary, Adam Czerniakow wrote on 7th May, 1941: *One of many jokes: it is said that one Jew has given in a dowry a hole in the wall which is open all night.*²⁴⁹ In another joke, Hitler made an offer for smugglers in Warsaw to smuggle half a million soldiers to Moscow. The smugglers undertook the task but, in compliance with their method, they did it in bits and pieces – heads, legs, hands, each sort separately.

The president, A. Czerniakow was the object of jokes as well. He was said to have created some slogans needed in the social campaign against the typhus epidemic. In another popular ghetto joke, he was said to change the inscriptions in Jewish trams:

- against spitting: “Spit, spit, you will spit up blood”;
- getting on and off a vehicle: “Pass wherever you want, you will pass away anyway”;
- keeping clean: “Don’t mess on the floor, you’ve got the head”;
- against jumping: “Jump, jump, you will break your arms and legs”.

There were also some tales that Czerniakow had joined the Axis and that he allowed a million Germans to march through the ghetto. The Jews living there promised to dress soldiers in a few fur coats, give them some skis, and give typhus to the rest as a gift.²⁵⁰

Even when the momentary laughter of joy turned into the laughter through tears, the jokers could immediately react with an apt saying. Jakub Poznański remembers the moments from the Łódź ghetto in the following way: *2nd August, 1944. A new “bomb” exploded yesterday. At 3 p.m., the news spread about the evacuation of the Jewish district along with the whole population of Łódź. (...) The unexpected news struck the people as lightening. The facilities got deserted in a moment. People were running over the streets as if half-conscious. Yet, after a certain time, they came to their senses. Common sense won – it became clear that – during a few days – it was impossible to evacuate such a big city when the front was just next to it. Hysterically behaving crowds fell into another extreme – they started to laugh and joke about the “lightening” evacuation, making allusions to Hitler’s famous Blitzkrieg.*²⁵¹

²⁴⁹ M. Fuks (ed.): *Adama Czerniakowa...*, op. cit., p. 177.

²⁵⁰ N. Rocheles: *Aktualne rozmowy*. In: A. Żółkiewska, M. Tuszewicki (ed.): *Archiwum Ringelbluma...*, op. cit., p. 775.

²⁵¹ J. Poznański: *Pamiętnik z getta łódzkiego*. Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, Łódź 1960, p. 194.

Alceo Valcini, an Italian journalist who was the Warsaw correspondent of “Corriere della Sera” during the war, remembers the time of the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto in this way: *Between the received wound and a shot from behind the wall, which sent a Nazi to the other world, the ghetto defenders used to find time for exchanging jokes – probably to loosen the dominating state of tension. Doctor Edelman told his brothers in arms, making them laugh: “Imagine that there is someone in the ghetto who dies of a usual illness in their own bed”.*²⁵² In this way, Marek Edelman became one of the people of laughter in the ghetto – but not the only one.

The people of laughter

Even in such dark times like the Holocaust, the Jewish community had its people of laughter in each ghetto, prison, or concentration camp. In fact, only the dramatic circumstances of their public activity and their shorter lives distinguished them from their classical prototypes.²⁵³

Without a doubt, the most famous one was Rubinsztajn – a man of laughter in the Warsaw ghetto.²⁵⁴ Apparently, the show “Ale głąch – Wszyscy równi [All are equal]” based on the motifs from his “creative activity” was performed in Melody Palace.²⁵⁵ His sayings and jokes became the subjects of poems, sung couplets, and comic sketches. He was the hero of many columns in “Gazeta Żydowska [The Jewish Newspaper]”. He was also immortalized in a song by Jerzy Jurandot:

*Not the president Czerniakow, nor Colonel Szeryński
Not counsel Kupczykier, nor editor Czerwiński,
But the most popular person in the district
Is Rubinsztajn, a madman – ragamuffin from the street.
Our Rubinsztajn is calling loudly right now:
”Szabes far ale jidełach
Urem rach, ale głąch!”*²⁵⁶

²⁵² A. Valcini: *Z Malapartem w warszawskim getcie. Z notatek korespondenta.* trans. A. Osmólska-Mętrak, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1990, p. 21.

²⁵³ More on this: A. Celiński: *Kabaret śmierci*, Poland 2014; R.M. Groński: *Taki był kabaret...*, op. cit., p. 227-240; R.M. Groński: *Proca Dawida...*, op. cit., p. 23-35.

²⁵⁴ Examples 28, 29, 30.

²⁵⁵ E. Ringelblum: *Kronika getta warszawskiego wrzesień 1939 – styczeń 1943.* trans. A. Rutkowski, Czytelnik, Warszawa 1983, p. 285.

²⁵⁶ H.Cz.: “*Szamru szabat!*” In: “Gazeta Żydowska”, No 40/1941, p. 2. Szabes far ale jidełach Urem rach, ale głąch! – Saturday for all Jews, the rich, the poor – equally for all!

Remembered almost by all witnesses from the ghetto, Rubinsztajn appears once more after many years in a play by Henryk Grynberg “Kabaret po tamtej stronie [Cabaret on the other side]”,²⁵⁷ a documentary film,²⁵⁸ radio programme,²⁵⁹ and even in the feature film “The Pianist” by Roman Polański,²⁶⁰ which all have made him a unique figure in mass culture.

Most probably, his name was Abraham. He was a refugee or a resettler from Łódź. It is not known how he lived or what he did earlier. Rubinsztajn used to run along the streets of the ghetto (most frequently along Leszno Street) and his small silhouette was so characteristic that he became a widely recognized personality – with a very short haircut, the shadow of a beard on his cheeks and widely spanned eyes. He wore rags, a torn red or brown (the witnesses report two different colours) jacket with a worn-out collar, and trousers which tangled around his skinny legs. Sometimes, he just wrapped himself in a quilt full of holes. He laughed, called to people, and shouted wildly in his hoarse voice. He often waved a pole, jumping, dancing and humming. Rubinsztajn was a one-man institution of a street commentator, although most probably he did not write a single line of text.

The spectators who saw his street performances were sure he was a madman who could allow himself to express his opinions about what he saw. His behaviour was amusing even for the German guards, whom he – without any embarrassment – provoked, mimicked, derided and called them bastards, bandits, and thieves. Germans were heartily amused by this and often, instead of insults, they threw him cigarettes and coins. In this way, he turned the functionaries of murder into the spectators of a folk fair, where a clown behaves in a provocative way and makes those who are standing the closest objects of derision. Rubinsztajn also saluted Jewish policemen, adding spiteful remarks about bribery or their other sins.

When he was hungry, he stood in front of the best stocked shop in the ghetto and shouted as loud as possible: “The end of Hitler! The end of German murderers!”. It was enough to make the owner run out from the shop and give Rubinsztajn food. The ghetto upstarts invited him to a restaurant for dinner so that he could entertain them. He forced rich passerbys to

²⁵⁷ H. Grynberg: *Kabaret po tamtej stronie*. Polska 1997.

²⁵⁸ A. Celiński: *Kabaret śmierci*. Poland 2014.

²⁵⁹ R.M. Groński, K. Zaleski: *Ate glach*. Teatr Polskiego Radia, Poland 2007.

²⁶⁰ R. Polański: *The pianist*. France, Deutschland, Poland, Great Britain 2002.

give him money for cookies, which he swallowed with gusto on the street. People did not let him pass by quietly. He was bothered, provoked, photographed by everyone. Photographs of him were sold for 2 zloties in one of the photograph shops as “Rubinsztajn’s souvenirs”.

His sayings became a classical element of the street folklore and got rooted in the ghetto culture in different versions:

- *Ale gładch!*²⁶¹ – all are equal (in the face of death). Rubinsztajn shouted this, standing in front of the Noe Pinkert’s funeral home and pointing alternately at luxurious hearses and at dead paupers’ bodies covered with newspapers.
- *Ingl hałtoch!* – Boy, take care!
- Don’t give back the ration card! – to give back a ration card (cards) meant to die of hunger.
- Don’t register your ration card at Pinkert’s.
- Sell trousers with a shirt so that you will not get to a coffin (or to a cart).
- I had a penny and I lost it. I had a two pence coin and I lost it. I had three pence and lost it. I only can’t get rid of a vierer (an allusion to the *führer* and a four pence coin).²⁶²
- After the war, the triplets will remain: Pinkert, Czerniaków and me – Rubinsztajn.
- How many of us will survive? Fifty-five. Grzybowska 26 (Judenrat), Leszno 13 (Trzynastka), Leszno 14 (Kohn and Heller), Pinkert and Rubinsztajn – 55 in total (an allusion to some addresses in the ghetto).
- After the war, “forty” will remain”: Grzybowska 26, Leszno 13, Rubinsztajn – 40 in total.
- Lard is getting cheaper because the rich are depleting.²⁶³

In November 1941, Rubinsztajn was not seen in the ghetto. People said he had died of typhus. However, he was “reborn” after a week and appeared on the streets to dispel the rumours about his alleged death. He spent the whole day on visiting various institutions and dignitaries to thank them in person for their participation in the funeral, warm memories and fu-

²⁶¹ There are different spellings of this saying, depending on the applied phonetic formula of Yiddish – e.g. *ale gładch*, *ale glajch*, *ale gładch*.

²⁶² Example 28.

²⁶³ *Folklor wojenny...*, op. cit., p. 738.

neral speeches, condolences, and in general, for everything he had experienced “in those days of his death”. When passerbys were surprised to see him, he explained that he really had been ill but feeling that he had been summoned, he had sent a substitute with the same surname and looks.²⁶⁴

In 1941, the 25th anniversary of Sholem Alejchem’s death was celebrated. He was a writer whose works provided encouragement to readers (also in the ghetto) in times of crisis. Therefore, while discussing the activity of the people of laughter, I will quote the following fragment of a composition written by P. Jedwab – a student educated in secret classes in the kitchen-school No 145 at Nowolipki Street 68 in the Warsaw ghetto, dated after 1st June, 1941: *Sholem-Alejchem*²⁶⁵ wrote (...) *for adults and a lot for children. He differs much from other writers. Other writers describe the misery of the Jewish street with sadness and in such a depressing way that one would like to cry. Sholem-Alejchem is distinguished from others by his describing the poverty and misery of the Jewish people in quite a different style – merrily, with humour and a smile. This is the most interesting. In his works, he describes some situations which could make us sad or make us cry, but in spite of this, we do not cry, there is no sadness, just the opposite: Sholem-Alejchem makes even the saddest people laugh. Let us take Motel, a cantor’s son, who forces us to laugh even when we do not want this at all. Sholem-Alejchem describes his heroes in such a way that we can see them as if alive. (...) Sholem-Alejchem lived a poor life and often starved, but his readers, who often laughed heartily, did not feel this. Sholem-Alejchem was satisfied and convinced that “laughter is health, physicians recommend laughter”. His death filled people – from small children to adults – with great sorrow. Yet, we feel consoled that his books have remained and that we solemnly celebrate the anniversary of his death.*²⁶⁶

The works by Sholem-Alejchem were read to children and used in performances, e.g. in the orphanages led by Janusz Korczak.²⁶⁷ The Old Doctor also became a part of the culture of laughter in the ghetto by writing a comical official letter concerning a public toilet to A. Czerniakow²⁶⁸ as well as a gelotological essay on the good and bad joyfulness.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁴ B. Engelking, J. Leociak: *Getto warszawskie...*, op. cit., p. 571-575; R.M. Groński: *Proca Dawida...*, op. cit., p. 23-29.

²⁶⁵ The original spelling.

²⁶⁶ R. Sakowska (ed.): *Achiwum Ringelbluma...*, op. cit., p. 91-92.

²⁶⁷ Example 32.

²⁶⁸ Example 33.

²⁶⁹ Example 78.

Another set of unique ghetto documents which have become the testimonies of the culture of laughter are the notes in Adam Czerniakow's diary. They show that – even in some dramatic circumstances – somebody's creativity, a gesture, an episode from their life or their death, a trifle event, for others – may become (even involuntarily and surprisingly) a pretext for smiling or laughing:

22nd January, 1940: I noticed the lack of a trousers button in the morning. Even the greatest man may become funny with such a lack. (...)

1st September, 1940: In the morning – at the Community Office. I was told about someone called Rapaport, a biologist who started to laugh just before death. (...)

27th April, 1941: I've read again the novel "Sprawa Dołęgi [The Dołęga's Issue]" by Weyssenhof. What a funny "hero" this Dołęga is! (...)

12th July, 1941: In the evening – a sort of comedy show at home. They said that I hit the high "C" of responsibility by writing the work entitled "Syzyfowe prace [Sisyphus's works]" and that the home dwellers can make trips to Czerniakow. (...)

6th November, 1941: Zofia Feigenbaum died of typhus. She was a person that was able to laugh. (...)

17th March, 1942: I got some photos of prisoners being released from the Jewish prison. The photos show happiness even of the gathered crowd. For the first time, I can see the smile of the ghetto. On the face of the released prisoner. (...)

8th June, 1942: Haendel tells funny stories about Haberbush. (...)

19th July, 1942: I try to hearten the delegations that come to me. They can't see how much it costs me. Today, I've taken 2 headache pills, 1 cibalgin and some valerian. Despite this, my head is about to burst. I do my best not to stop smiling.²⁷⁰

A. Czerniakow's suicide, in the face of the inevitable end of the ghetto, which he managed, was a tragic episode in both the Jewish people's and Poland's history.

What happened to Rubinsztajn? During the large eviction action in the ghetto in July 1942, he voluntarily went to Umschlagplatz. He walked there laughing, ran all over the place laughing and – still laughing – got onto a wagon which most probably took him to the Treblinka death camp.

²⁷⁰ M. Fuks (ed.): *Adama Czerniakowa...*, op. cit., pp. 80, 146, 174, 199, 226, 260, 287, 302.

Examples (reports, testimonies, memories)

Example 19. Jakub Poznański about artistic shows

25th April, 1943²⁷¹: A couple of days ago, a party took place in the Vegetable Section. One of the music hall stunts strongly vilified the Sonderkommando workers due to the revealed theft of flour from the bakery. This scene was played twice in front of a fully crowded audience. At the third show, Gertler arrived and strictly prohibited staging this scene. This resulted in a clash between him and the president, who wanted to keep this scene in the programme.²⁷² (...)

20th May, 1943: The earlier announced potato ration hasn't been given yet. I've understood that people are starving because potatoes were all eaten a long time ago. In our section, the preparations for an artistic event are going on. People are starving and are ready to turn into comedians for an extra plate of soup. Additionally, they hope for a gift in a form of a coupon. The whole system is simply disgusting. But what can be done? Hunger is a powerful drive. One should not cross the borderline of humiliation. Yet, the district dwellers forget about human dignity more and more.²⁷³ (...)

11th June, 1943: I've got a minor fact to note down as the so-called Security Service (*Ordnungsdienst*) – the Jewish police – also staged a comedy show. My wife was invited. She told me most sketches were performed in Polish. It's a fact – the censorship at Bałucki Square, and the commander Rozenblat²⁷⁴ gave the consent for the Polish language. It is a further proof that they feel the approaching end of the war and want to rehabilitate in advance. I don't know whether this kind of "expiation" will help them!²⁷⁵

16th June, 1943: Yesterday, our department received the first "concrete" tokens of appreciation: rations of meat and bread. Each member of the artistic team got 1 kilo of meat and 2 kilos of bread, choir members – 1 kg of meat and 1 kg of bread. Although further assignments were announced, the first ones have already raised great disappointment among most of the workers. The reasons were various. A part of technical staff and some security guards received rations, but the majority of them – did not. Moreover, something was to be offered to the groups which substituted "artists" in rehearsals, but now they've

²⁷¹ This and all the following author's accounts come from his diary written in the Łódź ghetto.

²⁷² J. Poznański: *Pamiętnik z getta...*, op. cit., p. 59.

²⁷³ *Ibidem*, p. 65.

²⁷⁴ Leon Rozenblat – the Commander in the Łódź ghetto.

²⁷⁵ J. Poznański: *Pamiętnik z getta...*, op. cit., p. 74.

been given the fig. Most probably, it was our management who distributed the rewards. Each time when there's an opportunity to get something, the managers think about themselves and their families first, forgetting about the rest.²⁷⁶

Example 20. Antoni Marianowicz about satirical creative activity

(...) my creativity in this field was abundant, almost daily, at that time. Even though I had no press organ in which I could publish my poems, they gained large popularity, being copied on a typewriter by many people whom I did not know. Quite frequently and with pride, I listened to my works quoted in conversations or seen on some scraps of paper which readers handed me.²⁷⁷

These were usually satirical works attacking personally the particularly hated ghetto officials. The following satire is one of those which have been miraculously preserved in my memory. Owing to a pure coincidence, it has also bird-related contents. To understand it, one should know that the name of the particularly hated head of the Housing Section of the Community was Fogel. When the scandal concerning the distribution of accommodation became widely known, the community decided to appoint a well-known solicitor, Adler, for this post. Fogel, Adler²⁷⁸ – these names just called for a winged parable. The poem had a motto borrowed from Wyspiański:²⁷⁹

*Every bird is not the same as another
Every man can't compare to another
(...) An eagle will not go into shit*

and here it is:

*There was a Bird who high on the rock
Distributed places to other animals.
So that he could be respected –
He got a great title of a commissioner.
Yet, when he started the distribution
Terrible complaints started as well.
A lion got a den too small for a pig,
And a rat went into a huge den.*

²⁷⁶ Ibidem, p. 75-76.

²⁷⁷ This memory as well as the following are the fragments of the author's interview with Hanna Baltyn about life in the Warsaw ghetto.

²⁷⁸ Vogel – bird; Adler – eagle.

²⁷⁹ Stanisław Wyspiański – a Polish playwright, poet, painter, architect, one of the national poets.

*The smallest cave in the vicinity
 Was to be shared by a dog and a cat.
 Frictions appeared and serious clashes
 And due to this the Bird got fat.
 Soon, animals did not want to be mocked
 And they threw the bad bird from the rock.
 Later, a decision was taken
 To turn to another bird.
 And now – this may help at last
 The Eagle himself will see to flats.*

Some ghetto dignitaries were described with my short epigrams. For instance:

*His office is crowded all the time,
 You won't get there without patronage.
 Nobody knows what he did before the war,
 Everybody knows how he earns his living now...*

or:

*He's not a robber,
 Nor a brawler, nor a fraud
 But he has always had a weakness
 For our occupiers...²⁸⁰*

Example 21. Antoni Marianowicz about a satirical play

– Did people work for money or rations?

Both. Rations were daily. Every day, a worker of the Supply Facility,²⁸¹ apart from a few pennies, got a half-kilo loaf of earthy bread and beetroot marmalade or artificial honey. I did not make use of it.

– Did you not have to?

I gave it to my friends and – at home – I ate the usually smuggled products bought on the free market. Apart from this, everything had to undergo the distribution of the Supply Facility. You paid for the products in coupons allocated to all ghetto inhabitants. Shop owners glued the coupons onto group sheets which they submitted to us – the controllers. They often tried to cheat, they glued anything and tried to convince us that those were the coupons.

²⁸⁰ A. Marianowicz: *Życie surowo...*, op. cit., p. 71-73.

²⁸¹ The Supply Facility was an autonomous institution at the Jewish Council in the Warsaw ghetto. Its manager was Abram Gepner – a merchant and philanthropist, who supported care institutions and the Jewish Combat Organization.

You could go crazy by controlling the cards. The sheets stank of some fish glue which was disgusting for me. We always had some coupons left. It was on the other side of a card where I “printed” with my colleagues from the Supply Facility the satirical work “Żarty na karty [Jokes for cards]”. I would have never supposed that they would affect my literary creativity in any way.

– Was your activity limited to “smelling” the coupons?

Not at all. As the most worldly person among my colleagues, I often sat in the office counter and served the clients. I met various “picturesque” types there, such as two grandmothers-saleswomen.

– Why did you remember these two grandmothers among the thousands of clients?

Because seemingly they were in the same situation. Both of them wore a small tray on a belt in front of them with some awful sweets of local production, which they sold by the piece. How could one afford to buy 10 decagrams of sweets! One, two pieces was the peak of commercial expectations of both old ladies. There were no differences between the sweets but a distinct difference between the grandmothers – Fajga and Cyrla. Fajga was boring and unlucky. She moaned all the time that she had a disaster, that she fell down, that her goods were stolen or her money for sweets was taken by force. I was afraid of her visits as of fire, as she told – for hours and in a weepy voice – me about the plagues which had affected her whole family. This was true but the horrible truth referred almost to everyone.

Grandmother Cyrla was short, withered, with a huge nose and merrily sparkling eyes. She entertained us with some stories about her not at all amusing adventures. She talked with cheerful self-irony and her Polish provided many additional humorous effects. She had a saying which played a big role in my life and which I repeated in the worst moments. It was as follows: “Every bad thing finally has a good effect”²⁸² (...) – it was suitable for the motto of the whole of human existence. We impatiently awaited Cyrla’s visit and we supported her financially to the disadvantage of her unlucky competitor. The fate of both saleswomen was identical and their attitude – the pessimistic and optimistic one – had no influence on what happened to them. Dying in Auschwitz or Treblinka, grandmother Cyrla had no idea that something will “have a good effect” for her – at least in this sense that she would become the heroine of my tale. If she had known about it, she would probably have smiled sceptically and meaningfully winked her eye:

²⁸² The saying has a similar meaning to the English proverb: Every cloud has a silver lining. (trans. note: A.C.)

"What does it cost me? Write this for your health, sir, but take one yummy sweet more from me, please!"²⁸³

(...) in the ghetto, I wrote with two colleagues and I published a satirical play... What a pity that none of the fifty copies has been preserved! (...) It happened in the following way: I worked in the Supply Facility then. I do not need to add that it was a terribly boring occupation. Therefore, to provide some variety, I decided to write a satirical play of the Supply Facility together with the two lawyers employed in management positions: Kazimierz Herszaft and Tadeusz Teszner. It was really my honour that my older and superior in rank colleagues wanted to see me as a co-author. Yet, I had gained a rather good reputation by that time, hence this distinction. The writing started:

In the Supply Facility

Graphomania rules today.

You come to the counter

And the clerk groans a poem.

Another, in search for a rhyme,

Spends the whole day with Tuwim...

(...)

Quite near, a young messenger

Reads his odes and sonnets

And I can swear

I saw Bekerova

Near the toilet

Writing a poem in the form of triolet.

Obviously, Bekerova was a toilet attendant. In general, all have been embraced by a sort of creative urge:

According to famous authorities

You have to end it in this way or another.

All laugh at this.

Finally, this is also mentioned in the town

That the Management is slowly seized

By this Graffomania and Winteromania.

(Councilmen Graff and Winter were members of the Supply Facility management. I am citing the fragments from my introduction to the play.)

– I would like to know what kind of satirical play it was: with live actors or puppets?

²⁸³ A. Marianowicz: *Życie surowo...*, op. cit., p. 51-53.

With live actors, of course. They were the authors and several other clerks from the Supply Facility. If one should care for the accuracy of the definition, the expression "compilation" or "satirical show" would be more suitable.

– Judging by what you say, the show was performed...

With all the splendour. Its premiere took place in the house at Leszno Street 12 on 17th January 1942. The spectators were solely the management and staff of the Supply Facility. The show comprised the satire aimed at the relations in the facility and partially in the whole district. Obviously, today I am unable to reconstruct the texts which we copied later on the other side of expired food coupons. Our printer was an old hectograph which usually served for copying the inner circulars of the Supply Facility.

The jokes and sayings from the show were introduced to our daily office life, they became our common property. Some most well-aimed ones spread outside.

The second performance of the show took place at the same site. The income was dedicated to a charitable aim. Despite the relatively high-ticket price, the spectators came unfailingly, and the spectacle was a success. For the third and the last time, the show was staged in the private flat of Doctor Henryk Glücksberg – a Community councilman. The whole management of the Jewish district was present, including President Czerniakow, who reported the event in his diary under the date 24th January, 1942. The show has a solemn character. The ghetto dignitaries somehow swallowed our satire or they at least did not demonstrate their dissatisfaction. Even President Czerniakow, rather a gloomy man, smiled several times.²⁸⁴

Example 22. Władysław Szpilman about bowing down

Among many severe directives aimed at Jews there was one unwritten but absolutely obeyed: men of the Jewish origin were to bow down in front of every German soldier they met. This stupid and offensive obligation led Henryk²⁸⁵ and me to fury. We did everything we could to avoid it. When we spotted an approaching German from a far distance, we went to the other side of the road. When we could not avoid confrontation, we turned our heads away, pretending we could not see him – although this always brought about the risk of being beaten.

Father behaved quite differently. He looked for bigger streets so that he could walk them, bowing down to Germans in an exaggerated ironic gesture and

²⁸⁴ Ibidem, p. 73-76.

²⁸⁵ The author's brother.

was delighted when such a soldier, misled by his happy face, bowed back with a smile as if to an acquaintance. Every evening after he returned home, he could not resist the pleasure of mentioning how far his contacts reached at that time: it was enough to go out for a while, and dozens of acquaintances immediately surrounded him. He could not avoid them and his hand went numb due to the unceasing bowing with his hat. He told us about this with a playful smile, rubbing his hands with satisfaction.²⁸⁶

Example 23. Władysław Szpilman about guards

German guards got bored in their checkpoints and tried to do something if they only could. One of their favourite pastimes was dancing. Musicians were gathered from the nearby streets (along with growing extreme poverty, there were more and more street bands) and then the funniest looking people were selected from the waiting group and they were ordered to dance a waltz. The musicians were placed under the wall of a house and an empty space was left on the road for one of the soldiers, who took over the conductor's function and beat the band members when they played too slow. The other soldiers checked the conscientiousness with which dances were performed. In front of the terrified crowd, the couples of invalids, old people, fat or terribly skinny people were swirling. Short people or children danced in pairs with those who were very tall. Germans were standing around, shouted with laughter and gave loud commands: Faster! Move on! All are dancing! If a pair matching turned out to be particularly good and funny, the dancing took longer. The entrance was opened, shut, and opened again, and the unlucky dancers were still hopping in the rhythm of the waltz, wheezing and weeping out of exhaustion, reaching for their last powers, in vain expecting mercy.²⁸⁷

Example 24. Władysław Szpilman about a Gestapo officers' game

We were going in trios along our daily route: through Polna and Chałbińskiego Street and further along Żelazna Street to the ghetto gate. We were already on Chałbińskiego Street when at the front of the column, some wild shouts could be heard. We slowed down and a moment later, we knew what was going on – quite accidentally, we met two drunk SS-men. One of them was "Zig-zag". They attacked us and started beating us with their whips, with which they did not part even during drinking sprees. They were doing their work systematically, beat-

²⁸⁶ W. Szpilman: *Pianista...*, op. cit., p. 35.

²⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 52.

ing a trio by a trio, starting with the column in front. When they finished the job, they took a position a couple of steps from us, took out their guns and “Zig-zag” shouted: – “Intelligence, step forward!”

Without a doubt, they wanted to kill us on the spot. I could not make my decision. Not stepping forward might make them even more angry. On the other hand, they could drag us from the column to torture us before killing us as punishment for the fact that we did not step forward voluntarily. Doctor Zajczyk, a historian and university professor, who was standing near me, was shaking all over, exactly as I was and was undecided in the same way. Yet, after the second shout we went out of the column. There were seven of us. I met “Zig-zag” face to face and he turned to me shouting: – “I will teach you the right order! What have you been doing so long?!” – he waved his gun in front of my nose. – “You were to be passing by here at six and now it is already ten!”

I did not answer, being sure I will be shot in a moment. He looked into my eyes with misty sight, staggered under the lantern and unexpectedly said in a quiet voice: – “Your team of seven is personally responsible for leading the column to the ghetto. Dismissed.”

We had already turned away when he suddenly shouted: – “Come back!”

Now, he had Doctor Zajczyk in front of him. He grabbed Zajczyk’s collar, shook him and barked: – “Do you know why we have beaten you?”

The doctor kept quiet.

–“Do you know why?”

Somebody in the rear, surely terrified, asked shyly: – “Why?”

– “So that you would know it is the New Year today!”²⁸⁸

We were already in the column when we heard another command: – “Sing!”

With surprise, we gave “Zig-zag” a glance. He staggered, burped and ended the command: – “... merrily!” He laughed loudly at his own joke, turned back, kept staggering and went forward. A while later, he stopped and shouted angrily: “Loudly!!!”

I cannot remember which of us was the first to provide the melody, nor do I know why this was this particular soldiers’ song. All of us joined in singing. After all, it did not matter to us what we were singing.

Today, when I recall that moment, I realize how much tragedy mixed with comedy at that time. On that New Year night, we – a group of mistreated Jews – were marching in the middle of a street (of the town in which – for many years – any manifestations of Polish patriotism was punished with death), shouting

²⁸⁸ The memory concerns the New Year Eve in 1942.

terribly loudly and with impunity singing “Hej, strzelcy wraz [Hey, shooters all together]!...”²⁸⁹

Example 25. Marek Edelman about the Nazis’ game and gawkers

Two Germans placed an old Jew on a barrel in Żelazna Street. They started to cut his beard with big scissors – a small crowd around, mostly of Jews, was watching this spectacle with amusement. Many of them laughed. The man on the barrel was exposed to the worst humiliation, much worse than caning. Seeing this, I made a resolution that I would never ever allow myself to be placed on a barrel (...)

It does not matter that the man whom they had cut the sidelocks – and actually who had been humiliated in the public eye – was quite a different person after such an incident. What matters is that there were people standing around and watching this calmly and some even were amused. They were already not the same as before. The executioner, the victim, and the witness were all involved in a crime.²⁹⁰

Example 26. Antoni Szymanowski about the games of Nazis and daredevils

Friday, 31st July.²⁹¹ Manhunt in the streets, random killing, massacres are on. In the ghetto, “daredevils” are rioting. Who are they? Germans have led here loads of butchers and villains. They are Latvian (in khaki uniforms with burgundy patch on the collar) – it is said there are 250 of them. There are Lithuanian “šauliai”²⁹², Ukrainians and Russians released from the German captivity (they all have black uniforms). It seems the “daredevils” have been offered total freedom to act. They rob abandoned homes, they also dash into inhabited flats, shooting all the present people immediately, without any reason, without the right to show any documents. (...) The “daredevils” organize various games. Horrible scenes can be seen every day when these boys, often under 20, are able to, for instance, shoot at the back of a person on the street or on a balcony. They can take a rickshaw – obviously with a Jewish driver, and ride the streets playfully shooting at passerbys. They can engage in a conversation and walk with someone in the street only to take out the gun and kill them in cold blood. And

²⁸⁹ W. Szpilman: *Pianista...*, op. cit., p. 117-118.

²⁹⁰ W. Bereś, K. Burnetko: *Marek Edelman...*, op. cit., p. 41.

²⁹¹ Both this and the following reports come from the author’s diaries published under the penname M.B. by KOPR.

²⁹² Riflemen. (trans. note: A.C.)

the Germans themselves... Today, I have witnessed a crowd gathered after a German gendarme's shooting a man dead. Of course, the gathering consisted only of militiamen. One of them told me later that this gendarme ordered them to check the dead man's pocket contents, learn his address and inform the family! Afterwards, he took out a pencil and wrote down his victim's first name and surname in his notebook under the number 182. I forgot to note down that yesterday, a German customs officer – not a soldier or a policeman – climbed the wall adjacent to the Umschlagplatz with a ladder and, sitting astride the wall, started playfully shooting at windows with a gun.²⁹³ (...)

Tuesday, 4th August. Germans want to prevent their fatigue with collecting the daily quota for eviction. They also dared to make an excellent joke. It was announced that whoever came to the Umschlagplatz as a volunteer, the following privileges would await them: they would get food for the trip (3 kg of bread and 1 kg of marmalade) and the families would not be separated. I was told that on the very first day – and only till 5 p.m. (I leave the ghetto at that time) over 11 000 people had volunteered. Who sees the ghetto every day, as me, can understand these people's psychology: let this end as soon as possible.²⁹⁴

Example 27. Antoni Marianowicz about film makers

In May 1942, the Germans decided to make a film in the ghetto. It was to be entitled *Asien in der Mitte Europas* [*Asia in the middle of Europe*] and was to show what a good life Jews had. The title was rather absurd if we take into account who considered themselves to be European...²⁹⁵ (...). When the film was shot, one felt terrified to walk the streets because the identity documents were taken away and people were ordered to collect them at the indicated address. One ceased to be a human without documents, so all people came there obediently. It turned out on the spot that they had to take part in a staged game, to laugh and dance. The commentary was that the Jewish people were having a good time. Some incidents were much more disgusting – for instance, the orgies of very old men and young girls who were forced to perform naked in the bathhouse. And there were show-off funerals.

²⁹³ M.B.: *Likwidacja getta warszawskiego. Reportaż*. KOPR, Warszawa 1942, p. 13.

²⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

²⁹⁵ In Nazi ideology and eugenics theory before 1945 – Jews are not European but Asiatics. In racial theory, Jews are not Europeans but from Asia (the Middle East). While they may have interbred with Europeans, in current American white nationalist ideology, they are not and never will be, considered as purely 'white' or, for that matter, 'Europeans'. (trans. note: J.E.S.)

– Did you take part in anything like that?

By coincidence. My landlord at Chłodna Street 16 was Herman Czerwiński, a journalist who was said to have worked as *dwójkarz*²⁹⁶ before the war. He had a heart disease and died – I was at his deathbed. After a couple of days, his funeral took place at the Jewish cemetery which was situated behind the ghetto walls – it was a separate enclave. We all attended the funeral out of solidarity with the widow, a very nice woman. Peace, quietness, the ceremony was going on in a good-mannered way as the Czerwińskis were people of a high status. Suddenly, some shouts could be heard and many cars with high-ranking officers drove up in front of the cemetery – probably also with Leist, the proxy of the commander of the Warsaw district, Auerswald, the commander of the Warsaw ghetto, and some others. There were cameramen among them and their task was to film a typical Jewish funeral. They started to direct the behaviour of the widow and the mourners. The widow had to howl, the guests – fall down, the women had to weep, scratch their faces, tear off hair from their heads. I kept on falling down and running with all the others. I would offer a lot to see myself in the film – in the only, so far, role of mine.²⁹⁷

Example 28. Antoni Marianowicz about Rubinsztajn

As it comes to widely-known figures, I often met Rubinsztajn, a ghetto fool and sage, whose nickname was “Ałe głąjch” – which means: all are equal. Rubinsztajn used to announce the fall of all fortunes, as well as making all people equal in the face of death. One of his jokes was very popular – when he threw a coin onto the ground, he shouted: A cwajer in di erd! A drajer in di erd! And finally: a firer in di erd! – Two pennies to the ground! Three pennies to the ground! Four pennies (or: *führer*) to the ground! Everybody liked that. His characteristic feature was the lightning speed of his movement from one place to another. He uttered quickly a saying and ran on, followed by a crowd of folk. Obviously, he was a psychopath but with the quality of a street prophet and his clowning around was lined with tragedy.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁶ It was a popular word for referring to a worker of the Polish army intelligence service (Section II of General Headquarters).

²⁹⁷ A. Marianowicz: *Życie surowo...*, op. cit., p. 80-82.

²⁹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 84.

Example 29. Władysław Szpilman about Rubinsztajn

Usually at that time of the day²⁹⁹, Rubinsztajn, dressed in torn, dirty, waving in all directions rags, was quickly passing Elektoralna Street. He waved his cane, ran in a hopping way, murmuring and humming something to himself. He was very popular in the ghetto. Being recognized already from the distance by his saying: "Take care, boy!", he had only one aim: to give people courage with humour. His jokes circulated all over the ghetto and spread joyfulness there. One of his specialties was approaching German guards and insulting them, among his twitches and grins, with the words "fools, bandits and a band of thieves". Germans had great fun and often threw cigarettes or coins to Rubinsztajn as the payment for his insults, because a madman cannot have been treated seriously. I was not so deeply convinced about his madness as the Germans were. I do not know even today whether Rubinsztajn belonged to those many people who lost their mind due to the monstrosities they had experienced or whether he just pretended to be mad to avoid death owing to a clown's cap, which he did not manage to do anyway. Madmen did not care for the curfew. For them, it had no significance.³⁰⁰

Example 30. Jerzy Jurandot about Rubinsztajn

Out of the black and brownish colouring of the houses and the people, only one brightly coloured spot stood out – the red shirt of the madman Rubinsztajn. I do not know if he had only red shirts or if he wore one all the time, but he was never seen in another shirt than a bright red one under the rags of something that used to be a jacket. Probably, every small town has its madman, a local personality. Apart from the mayor and the police commander, they are usually among the most popular personalities in this place. The mad Rubinsztajn ran the streets of the ghetto and shouted with satisfaction: "A!e g!ajch, a!e g!ajch, all are equal!" However, this beautiful slogan about equality – in this case – meant making all equal to the level of the madman Rubinsztajn. *C'est le ton, qui fait la charme.*³⁰¹ (...) Rubinsztajn particularly liked funerals. When (very rarely in fact) a funeral procession was proceeding, Rubinsztajn – a!e g!ajch was running simultaneously on the sidewalk, hopping, twitching, and laughing heartily.³⁰²

²⁹⁹ The author means the time before the curfew.

³⁰⁰ W. Szpilman: *Pianista...*, op. cit., p. 69.

³⁰¹ *C'est le ton, qui fait la charme* – Charm depends on the style.

³⁰² J. Jurandot: *Humor w opasce...*, op. cit., p. 449-450.

Example 31. Adina Blady-Szwajger about a club room in the children's hospital

(...) we had an idea, a bit like from grand-Guignola,³⁰³ that we should try to restore some smiles to those kids deprived of everything.³⁰⁴

Marysia Natanblut-Hellerowa, the Chief's daughter-in-law, who had nothing to do as she was an AWF³⁰⁵ graduate, came and we both started trying to "run a club" in the afternoon. Yes, at the beginning – we did not know at all how to handle this. It was easier with the smallest kids. (...) We did not know at all what to do with older children, how to start handling this – after all, they were a century older than us and much wiser, a century of the torment and death of the nearest. So, in the beginning, we asked them to help us to play with the youngest – those who wanted, of course. Two or three of them came and the rest laughed at us, though we could not see this. (...)

Thus, on the next day, when the older children came to look how the smallest played home, I suddenly said: – "Fajgełe, sing something to me!" – "Why me?" – "Because you look as if you could sing." And Fajgełe sang a lullaby and we started to talk. It somehow happened that we talked as equal partners – that we all feel the same fear, we have hardly anything to eat as well and that, if we want to survive, we have to try to live as people do, we have to remain people because they want to turn us into animals. I told them how we had learnt English on Śliska Street and, finally, that they were young and should survive and that they cannot forget that – in the past – they had been able to laugh. And eventually, we decided together that we would organize an Easter concert.

We did this. Marysia wrote a fairy tale to be staged, I do not remember which one, and I staged a song "Oif dem pripeczok".³⁰⁶ It was Fajgełe who was a rabbi and sang – and she told the children to "follow her", showing them some dance steps. The smallest kids, disguised as cheder boys, danced a Hasidic dance. There were also some carrot or turnip cakes with artificial honey.

The children were playing and laughing, but I already knew that the beautiful Fajgełe, with a nightingale voice, had a positive Pirquet,³⁰⁷ so that was a matter

³⁰³ The original spelling. Grand Guignol was a theatre of horror near Pigalle in Paris.

³⁰⁴ The author describes the events taking place around Easter 1942 in the Warsaw ghetto hospital, in which she was a doctor.

³⁰⁵ The Academy of Physical Education.

³⁰⁶ "Na kominku [On a fireplace]" – a folk song about the cheder.

³⁰⁷ The positive result of the so called Pirquet Test for detecting tuberculosis.

of several weeks. Yet, I laughed so “merrily” that tears were flowing down my face and the kids shouted: “The Madam is crying out of laughter”.³⁰⁸

Example 32. Antoni Marianowicz about a concert in Janusz Korczak’s orphanage

I am often asked if I knew Janusz Korczak. I did. His image of a martyr in the name of Jewish children has been consolidated. However, I remember him as a tireless organizer, a man who was able to force the rich to give a voluntary donation for orphans. He wore a uniform without distinctions, looked gloomy, he had a stern face, without a smile, with a small beard. He was not particularly pleasant. His aim was to save children and he was ready for anything and for this, he used all his insatiable clout. He organized concerts in his orphanage. Once, I went to see such a concert – I got a ticket from my father who had offered to help with the ticket distribution. This “help” meant that my father often got a couple of tickets from Korczak to be settled later and, as he did not want to bother about them, he simply paid for them. Therefore, I always had lots of tickets, for me and for friends, but – to be frank – I did not like these events much.

The concert started with Korczak’s sitting down at the table on the stage and he had a thrilling conversation with God in front of the spectators. The Jewish God is cruel, therefore Korczak had a heated argument with him and demanded that he should take care of his chosen nation. This improvisation lasted for a long time and made an enormous impression. Just after this, Michał Znicz – an eminent actor, went onto the stage and performed a song, saying that if someone’s name is Ciupek, he or she is already a “*trupek*”.³⁰⁹ The contrast between Korczak’s monologue and this verse seemed so macabre to me. Then, Znicz and Minowicz performed comical sketches. In the end, Marysia Ajzensztadt had her performance. (...)

Marysia Ajzensztadt did not survive – I feel terrible pity for her. This girl, the daughter of a cantor and conductor of ghetto music bands, had the most wonderful voice one can imagine. Apart from this, she was beautiful and full of charm. She did not want to be separated from her father in the Umschlagplatz. She could have been saved, because everybody knew her in the ghetto and was ready to help. She performed wherever possible, mostly at “Sztuka [Art]”. I was even angry at her that she was wasting her talent in such a way.

³⁰⁸ A. Błady-Szwajgier: *I więcej...*, op. cit., p. 36-38.

³⁰⁹ In Polish: a corpse. (trans. note: A.C.)

However, today I regret each event in which she took part and I was not able to listen to her.³¹⁰

Example 33. Janusz Korczak's comical letter to Adam Czerniakow

Dear President,

February. – Mud. – Nowolipie. – Tiredness. – I must take a pee-pee.

The first doorway – no caretaker, no key. The box locked.

The second doorway – the same.

The third – idem.

The fourth doorway. – There is a caretaker.

– A pipe has burst. – Go to Nowolipie Street 51, Sir. – Everybody goes there.

Now, I am bursting.

– Dear Caretaker, the key or a dead man (me). Quickly, the state is dangerous.

The caretaker:

– Open.

Really: open.

Clean – clean. – Clean!!!

A relief.

I shake hands.

– Your name?

– What do you need it for?

– To remember. – How and why do you do this?

– One should educate people. Good manners. – There has already been some progress.

I have sent him *Sława [Fame]* with a dedication.³¹¹

I would like Mr. Cieślak from Nowolipie 51 to be nicely surprised after three months that his work and intentions have been noticed and appreciated in the right way.

Sincerely...³¹²

³¹⁰ A. Marianowicz: *Życie surowo...*, op. cit., p. 59-60.

³¹¹ J. Korczak sent the caretaker a copy of the collection of his own short stories for children.

³¹² J. Korczak: *30 czerwca 1942. List do inż. Adama Czerniakowa, prezesa Rady Żydowskiej, ul. Grzybowska 26/28, opisujący perypetie związane z poszukiwaniem podwórzowej ubicacji*. In: A. Lewin (ed.): *Janusz Korczak w getcie. Nowe źródła*. Oficyna Wydawnicza Latona, Warszawa 1992, p. 94. Both this text and Korczak's essay "Wesołość dobra i zła [The joy of good and evil]" in Part III were found in the suitcase with personal belongings left by the author in the deserted orphanage building in the Warsaw ghetto on the day of his being transported with the children to the concentration camp.

Example 34. Jerzy Jurandot about Umschlagplatz

With a line of bayonets, the convicts were rushed towards a train waiting at the railway siding. Just before getting into the wagons, they had to witness the most terrible scene one can imagine. The SS-men chose an old grey-haired woman from the crowd, had her stand next to a small wooden toilet at the railway and shot her dead. Then, they defiled her dead body by relieving all their physiological needs onto it, in front of all. They were laughing with delight as if that had been the best joke.³¹³

Example 35. Antoni Marianowicz about an escape from the ghetto

– Can you remember the exact date of leaving the ghetto?

It was Wednesday, 29th July, 1942 – the eighth day of the first liquidation action in the Warsaw ghetto.

In the morning, Olek turned up, smiling as usual, and informed us that we had to appear in the Courts at Leszno Street at 11 a. m. to see the Judge Kupść. Such a name is hard to forget, even after several decades. (...)

– Explain this to me – why did people manage to get out through the Courts for so long?

The Courts served both Poles and Jews. You entered the Polish part from Ogrodowa Street, and the Jewish one – from Leszno Street. Being there was not safe at all and passing through the Courts – not easy. Armed gendarmes thoroughly controlled those who exited from Ogrodowa and there were many spies around.

– And how was it on 29th July?

On that day, the traffic was not big but still bigger than I had expected. Maybe, people were getting some documents due to undertaking their work in the “shops”. No sooner had we appeared in the hall than some suspicious man tagged along with us, mumbling something about our illegal presence in the Courts. This was intriguing as we had armbands and nothing revealed the aim of our visit. Driven by an impulse, I gave him 20 zloties in the gesture in which a beggar is given alms. The blackmailer left us without a word. If we had started negotiations with him, the whole plan of our escape could have failed, which I realized much later.

It was still half an hour to eleven. Our further stay in the hall made no sense – we needed to see Judge Kupść. This turned out to be very simple, as Olek with his mother and brother were already waiting in his office.

– Was it the place where your turning into “Aryans” took place?

³¹³ J. Jurandot: *Miasto skazanych...*, op. cit., p. 186.

Dispassionately factual Judge Kupść hid our photos and documents, which he was to give back to us after the war, in a drawer. As I learned later, he had to destroy them soon for some important reason. In this way, we were deprived of the mementos of our past – the very few ones which had been saved were returned to us from our friends from distant places after many years (...).

In the judge's office, we got rid of the armbands and everything else which might suggest our ghetto stay. Now, we were: me – Mieczysław Chmielewski (...), and my mother – Natalia Irena Godlewska. We had known by heart both biographies long before we left the ghetto.

I knew neither Olek's mother nor his brother. Fortunately, they had an excellent appearance – I mean "Aryan" appearance. They seemed to be satisfied with our looks as well.

– Did you leave only with the Oszerowskis?

Not at all, a real theatre staging helped in this. The actors in the spectacle were a few lawyers (I can recollect well the attorneys Płoska and Pilecki) and some other figures known in the Courts. The last person to come was Łuczyński – Oszer Oszerowski's friend and associate, who took care of his family pursuant to the will until Olek's coming of age. I realized immediately that he was the boss there and that he kept all the strings in his hand. Following his sign, we went into the corridor in a particular order – our five in the middle, the rest of the group surrounding us from all sides. Well, just lawyers leaving the building after a trial with files in their hands...

– How did you behave?

The old Łuczyński took the role of a director. – "Loosen up!" – he ordered. – "Laugh, I will be telling jokes!" And he started talking about a girl who thought she had left the lower part of her underwear at her doctor's, whereas in fact she had left it at her dentist's.

An explosion of laughter took place a moment before going through the entrance door leading to Ogrodowa Street. Still giggling, I suddenly saw the mugs of German gendarmes, indifferently looking at the well-known figures of the court staff. All the five of us did not arouse any interest. Still, this is not the end of the adventure, as the first person we came across was the blackmailer met in the Courts' hall. What bad luck! – I thought. However, instead of giving us away into the gendarmes' hands, he smiled to me meaningfully and even winked at me. When he disappeared, I asked Judge Kupść to explain that phenomenon. "It's clear – he said. – This man, since the very beginning, has treated you as Poles who illegally entered the ghetto to do business. And as you know, a dog does not eat a dog..."³¹⁴

³¹⁴ A. Marianowicz: *Życie surowo...*, op. cit., p. 87-93.

Concentration Camp

*A person who has never been in a country terrorized by the Nazis is unable to fully understand the essence of this terror. A person who has not been a concentration camp prisoner does not embrace with their imagination all the mechanisms of camp life.*³¹⁵

Anna Pawełczyńska

*Humour, sometimes gallows humour, plays here the role of an additional slice of bread. A ray of smile, a joke – rather a blunt one, such which gets to the consciousness easily, enables drawing the thoughts away from the dark reality and putting on brighter glasses through which even what is totally black becomes lighter, less filling with the threat of hopelessness. The harbingers of the cheerful thought were death camp jokers, popular rogues in civilian clothes – sometimes infected by cynicism, which here had lost the sharpness of its impact. With a joke and a frivolous song brought from their non-camp civil environment as well as with the one which had originated here, in the camp, in the middle of both the macabre and tragicomedy, they disseminated smiles, mocked human weaknesses and the proneness to sadness. Being picky about the “bitter end”, which is not so terrible that one should fear and resist to it but such that one should reject like a lousy shirt, they told us to lift the head and look at the world more courageously, to look boldly into the eyes of the death, which could be overcome even here.*³¹⁶

Gustaw Przeczek

³¹⁵ A. Pawełczyńska: *Wartości a przemoc...*, op. cit., p. 95.

³¹⁶ G. Przeczek: *Ruch oporu w obozie koncentracyjnym Gusen*. In: H. Jasiczek: *Kalendarz Śląski na rok 1966*. Profil, Ostrava 1965, p. 56.

An additional slice of bread

Concentration camp laughter took place in a reality which is hard to imagine today. Its characteristic features were: living in a confined space, being deprived of intimacy, hunger, cold, nakedness, diseases, constant death and the threat of death, omnipresent mental and physical violence, the physiological and mental effects of unceasing nervous tension and exhaustion, the unavoidable scenes of sick, suffering, and dying people, and, probably worst of all, the ubiquitous presence of executioners, who practiced the most sophisticated tortures and genocide every day.

There are no criteria of analysing the concentration camp humour and laughter that can be compared to classical ones. The narrow sector of the culture of laughter in the concentration camp is dealt with here, and it requires separate standards that take into account the extreme pathology of the phenomena and processes in those times. The laughter appearing there can be viewed from the perspective of the victims or the executioners, who due to their function in the social structure of the concentration camp used to be gawkers as well. Their laughter was often the reaction to the spontaneous humour of everyday events. It accompanied their leisure time and humorous (literary, artistic) creativity. It also constituted a form of resistance, retribution, and clearing. A lot depended on the regulatory rigour imposed on the prisoners in particular camps by the commandant offices and on the strictness of its implementation by the functionaries in particular commandos and blocks. The richest collection of concentration camp memories concerning humour is comprised in the work by Zenon Jagoda, Stanisław Kłodziński, and Jan Masłowski on KL Auschwitz, from which I have elicited many examples in this part.³¹⁷

The concentration camp humour found in the accounts of everyday events in the camps, in comical literary or fine art forms, as well as in concentration camp jokes – at first – seems blunt, brutal, terrifying, not aesthetically pleasing, vulgar, primitive, ornery, or even pornographic.³¹⁸ Only a few of the poems, songs and caricatures contain some motifs which can be considered with the use of traditional theories of humour and art.

In the circumstances different from the ones of concentration camps, the particular forms of camp humour would raise terror and disgust. This is especially apparent concerning the *zugangs* (newcomers), who

³¹⁷ Z. Jagoda, S. Kłodziński, J. Masłowski: *Oświęcim nieznanym...*, op. cit.

³¹⁸ Examples 49, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85.

brutally faced the camp culture, and who were, at least at first, disgusted, surprised, and horrified. Only after a longer while did they get used to the reactions of the *heftlings* (older prisoners) and to the laughter in the camp – such unique and striking one that it could be received without reservations and abomination only after a certain time. Under the influence of the particular pathological atmosphere present in the camps, the earlier-shaped prisoners' sense of humour could change. This might also refer to the executioners, though I have not found any studies which would confirm this thesis. In the concentration camp, the utterances and situations, which would not evoke laughter in normal conditions, relieved tension and constituted a usual element of the hysterical reaction to camp pathologies. Thus, it should not surprise that – in former prisoners' memories – it is often called 'crematorium' or 'latrine' humour, which is to enhance its unique character.³¹⁹

Edmund Polak, an ex-prisoner, emphasizes that (...) *even jokes of poor value, which might often trigger distant associations with the situation of camp prisoners, evoked spontaneous laughter in the most tragic circumstances. It resulted from the surprising, often absurd, contrast between the reminiscences of freedom and the tragedy of the present moment. Laughter brought about a relief, owing to an unexpected change of impressions.*³²⁰ The basic function of camp laughter was bringing relief and alleviating stress. Even if its topics were horrible, the prisoners waited for it not for terrible and bitter events. The merry tales of old prisoners, their sayings and *szajsparole*,³²¹ songs, and poems which came into being in concentration camps had an educational role as well. From them, the *zugangs* learned about the norms of coexistence in the camp community and about the circumstances which might help them to survive. In the memories of former prisoners, camp humour is frequently described as: saving one from depression,

³¹⁹ Z. Jagoda, S. Kłodziński, J. Masłowski: *Oświęcim nieznanym...*, op. cit., p. 137-159. Z. Jagoda, S. Kłodziński, J. Masłowski: *Śmiech w obozie koncentracyjnym*. In: "Przegląd Lekarski" vol. 30, No 1/1973, p. 84-99.

³²⁰ Z. Jagoda, S. Kłodziński, J. Masłowski: *Oświęcim nieznanym...*, op. cit., p. 152.

³²¹ Szajsparole – rubbish, nonsense talks, etc. This dialectal expression comes from the area of Poznań and it originates from the German word *Scheiße* – shit. "Szajsparola" makes people look at the world through the glasses of permanent hope. "Szajsparole" were also the different news which were thought out, untrue, unrealistic, but which went all over the concentration camp, provided encouragement to those who doubted a happy end, and poured faith into all the misery that it would finally end. Owing to this, prisoners found out their own sense (...). G. Przeczek: *Ruch oporu...*, op. cit., p. 57-58.

quenching the longing for freedom and family; a manifestation of self-defence, which indicates the feeling that the war is ending and coming home is near;³²² the way to discharge a bad mood, to take control over nervousness, or even the first signs of panic;³²³ the weapon which saves from the breakdown of those who totally got subordinated to the concentration camp staff; a source of mental hygiene, which enhanced hope, to awaken from prostration, and allow a brighter view on the events in the concentration camp.³²⁴

Prisoners' showing a sense of humour and their laughter were the sign of their viability and better capability of adaptation to the camp reality. The participation in laughter communities, even imposed ones, gave the laughing people better chances for survival and was a proof that they had not broken down or given up. The presence and the sight of laughing people encouraged other prisoners and helped to create the impression of normal social relations.³²⁵ The only group of prisoners in which laughter never appeared were 'muslims'.³²⁶ Becoming 'muslim' meant one's complete weakening of reactions and total indifference – also to humour and the influence of laughter communities.

The black, horrible *lager* humour came into being spontaneously and often involved the use of a paradox or paradoxes. What follows are some examples selected from the memories of KL Auschwitz prisoners:

- The first tragifarce in the camp, after getting there in spring 1942, was the terrible, for newcomers, taking of all their clothes and shaving their heads. This was done by female Slovak prisoners. Looking at and mocking each other, every shaved woman laughed heartily in spite of the tears which came under the eyelids as they looked horribly in fact.³²⁷

³²² Z. Jagoda, S. Kłodziński, J. Masłowski: *Oświęcim nieznanym...*, op. cit., p. 149-150. A memory recollected by Jadwiga Apostoł-Staniszevska.

³²³ Ibidem, p. 150. A memory recollected by Janusz Krzywicki.

³²⁴ Ibidem, p. 149-150. A memory recollected by Jerzy Rawicz.

³²⁵ A. Pawełczyńska: *Wartości a przemoc...*, op. cit., p. 77; A. Teutsch: *Reakcje psychiczne w czasie działania psychofizycznego stresu u 100 byłych więźniów w obozie koncentracyjnym Oświęcim-Brzezinka*. In: "Przegląd Lekarski", No 1/1964, p. 27-38. Cf.: E. Formicki, K. Michalski, A. Usovicz (eds): *"Żyję!". Wybór odpowiedzi na ankietę ks. prof. Konstantego Michalskiego z 1945 roku, skierowaną do byłych więźniów politycznych z czasów okupacji niemieckiej*. Wydawnictwo Instytutu Teologicznego Księży Misjonarzy, Kraków 2012.

³²⁶ In Polish: muzułman [muslim], in German: Muselmann. The term was commonly used in KL Auschwitz and other German concentration camps in reference to a prisoner who was extremely emaciated due to starvation.

³²⁷ Z. Jagoda, S. Kłodziński, J. Masłowski: *Oświęcim nieznanym...*, op. cit., p. 141-142. A memory recollected by Maria Gątkiewicz i Maria Anna Nowakowska.

- When, after the disinfectant procedure, the *zugangs* were forced to run for clothes, one of the older prisoners, who was entitled to wear a watch, pretended that he measured the time like at sport competitions. This was a comic situation for *heftlings*.³²⁸
- In early 1942, the prisoners were standing at a roll call in the main camp. Some were called according to the list made by the infamous murderer *Raportführer*³²⁹ Gerhard Palitzsch, who perpetrated a mass shooting of victims in Block 11. When all were standing depressed, one prisoner unexpectedly hit his friend's neck with a finger and shouted: "Here Palitzsch will shoot at you!" Then, most of the prisoners burst with laughter.³³⁰
- In summer 1941, the prisoners were taking the dead bodies from the camp hospital to the nearby crematorium in the so-called *rolwaga*. At a curve, one wheel came off, so the cart tilted and the corpses fell down, covering one of the escort men. The prisoners noticed that – out of the pile of dead bodies – the hands emerged in an arrangement resembling a breaststroke swimmer. Then one of them shouted to the man under the pile: "Adam, use crawl if you want to go up faster!" Despite the monstrosity of the accident, they laughed and, later, they often asked Adam how he had felt swimming on that day.³³¹
- One prisoner strived to make a stool sample for a medical test but he could not get anything out on call. Finally, he bought a piece of stool from another prisoner for a half of his bread portion. Earlier, he had whispered to the squatting friend: "I'd like to shit onto the Reich" (the German Reich). This was a joke based on a pun, because the weekly paper on which prisoners were told to collect stool was entitled "Das Reich".³³²
- The alleged escapes from the camp were viewed as comical. For instance, while the typhus epidemic was particularly intensive, one could meet – in the corridor of Block No 2 – a skinny figure, wrapped in a blanket, with a belt to which a tin bowl was attached with wire, and

³²⁸ Ibidem, p. 142. A memory recollected by Julian Kiwała.

³²⁹ *Raportführer* – report officer. The second functionary in rank after the commander of the camp.

³³⁰ Z. Jagoda, S. Kłodziński, J. Masłowski: *Oświęcim nieznanym...*, op. cit., p. 141. A memory recollected by Stefan Świszczowski.

³³¹ Ibidem, p. 141. A memory recollected by Julian Kiwała.

³³² Ibidem, p. 151. A memory recollected by Krzysztof Hofman.

with a wooden spoon stuck behind the belt. The sick prisoner, when asked by a *pfleger* where he was going, put a finger to his mouth and said quietly: “Don’t tell anybody, I’ve run away from the concentration camp”.³³³

- In one cell in Block 11, the game called “salonowiec [a man of the world]” was played in the evenings, when it was relatively quiet. A prisoner had his eyes covered and was hit at his buttocks until he guessed who had beaten him. The players joked that the game is good training before interrogations.³³⁴
- An unbelievably funny incident took place in 1944 in the kitchen in which a few *heftlings* from the first transport worked. Wrestling with the SS-man on duty, Mieczysław Jagodziński took out the German’s gun from the holster, which was quietly observed by other prisoners – as beery as the SS-man. Quite soon, the SS-man was asking the prisoner to return the gun, on his knees and on the wet kitchen floor.³³⁵

A sense of humour and the skill of telling jokes to other prisoners and the guards helped in the inner escape, consisting in building the inner world which differed very much from the *lager* one. Many current jokes reached the camp from the other side of the barbed wire owing to prisoners’ contacts with the civilian population working in some of the commandos (work squads). They also came from the radio stations which were illegally listened to. Most frequently, the jokes and anecdotes that were told concerned politics and derided the occupiers, Hitler, and the rest of the Nazis: – What should a real Nazi be like? – Blond-haired like Hitler, slim as Göring, well-built like Goebbels, masculine like Röhm and his surname should be Rosenberg.

Some could be only understood in the context of a concentration camp: “Due to the Germans’ defeat at Stalingrad in early 1943, the decision was taken to develop the camp carpentry workshop as an order had come for a million of chairs. – Why? – Because Germans’ legs started aching after standing so long at Stalingrad.”

Some amusing sayings also circulated in concentration camps: “I will tell you the best wic³³⁶: Aussch-witz!”; “May you be buried in a coffin”; “Don’t

³³³ Ibidem, p. 153. A memory recollected by Eugeniusz Niedojadło.

³³⁴ Ibidem, p. 153. A memory recollected by ks. Władysław Grohs de Rosenberg.

³³⁵ Ibidem, p. 142. A memory recollected by Stanisław Szpunar.

³³⁶ The Polish word which comes from the German “Witz”, which means “joke”. (trans. note: A.C.)

worry, I'll give it back to you when we're free". Some accompanied the observation of other prisoners' defecation: "Such a shit can't be made even by the commander". New prisoners were ironically consoled with the words: "The first four years are the worst, later – it is going better, you can even sit on a razor". This saying made a powerful impression on the *zugangs* and made the *heftlings* laugh heartily.³³⁷

A typical saying understood in the community of laughter, whose members knew the context of its origin, was the remark of the assistant Reguła from Block 11 in KL Auschwitz: "Calm down, you heroes, and don't rack my nerves as I want to go healthy through the chimney!"³³⁸ A similar climate could be detected in another saying: "I can, but not such a chatter". As Jan Wolny recalls: (...) *one of the SS (SGD) medics, Karl Bara – who came from Silesia, did not understand the lagerarzt*³³⁹ *speaking to him in German and asked Wolny, who stood nearby, to translate. When Wolny wondered that Bara did not understand German, he heard: "I the hell can and I do understand German, but I've never heard such a chatter". This episode soon spread all over the camp and, when asked if they could speak German, many prisoners replied in Bara's words.*³⁴⁰

Some former female prisoners recall the *lager* laughter in the sexual context. As Zofia Krzyżanowska writes about the life in the upper plank beds in her block in KL Ravensbrück: *The evening brought about a relief of stress. (...) Both the Black and White Zosias were putting the curlers on their hair and were telling jokes, usually drastic ones. The whole upper part was listening to them willingly, finding particular pleasure in this. The jokes were a kind of substitution which quenched in a certain way our suppressed sexual desire. I liked listening to the sound of laughter but I never laughed. Jokes and humour simply did not get to me. To feel them, you would need to return to the ideas and notions of freedom, to forget at least for a while about the pressing reality. I couldn't do this. I lived on the top, but a lot separated me from the top. I just made use of the spectator's rights...*³⁴¹ Wanda Póltawska, also from KL Ravensbrück, describes the collective laughing at the lesbian prisoners, which was a frequent practice relieving stress and integrating some

³³⁷ Ibidem, p. 153. A memory recollected by ks. Władysław Grohs de Rosenburg.

³³⁸ Ibidem, p. 153-154.

³³⁹ Lagerarzt – camp doctor.

³⁴⁰ Z. Jagoda, S. Kłodziński, J. Masłowski: *Oświęcim nieznanym...*, op. cit., p. 153-154.

³⁴¹ Z. Krzyżanowska: *Czarna flaga*. Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1978, p. 93.

heterosexual prisoners: *The harder it was, the more we tried to laugh on call. We've toughened. When there was no reason to laugh in ourselves, there was always one more: "el" – a magic word,³⁴² the sense of which was understood even by the youngest of us. Now we laughed at this. I think that, defending us from deviation, the sound survival instinct made us deride those, mostly German-Gypsy, "couples" which walked around the place. We read aloud the "love declarations" which a young beautiful Gypsy girl had sent to "Michał" and we loudly laughed at the cuddling couples. We laughed, though the sight was in fact disgusting: gazing eyes, twitches, some grins – all this filled you with repulsion.³⁴³*

As Eugeniusz Niedojadło, a former prisoner, notices: *Humour in the concentration camp was not only the domain of heftlings. The German functionaries sometimes showed humour as well, however – it was usually associated with harassment and was awfully primitive. SS-men's laughter was often dangerous for prisoners and it was usually heard after introducing some sophisticated persecutions, which were directed with a lot of macabre sensibilities. The primitivism of the demand for humour and the comic reactions of the SS-men were frequent in the camp, raising the fear and terror of prisoners, especially the newcomers.³⁴⁴*

In the prisoners' memories, there are some examples showing the particular manifestations of the sense of humour which the SS-men and other camp staff presented. Czesław Ostańkiewicz remembers the transport to Brzezinka on 13th March, 1942 in the following way: *We were put in hundreds. Twelve such hundreds were immediately surrounded by kapos. All labelled with the green triangles of criminal prisoners. Sticks in their hands. They were joined by the candidates for vorarbeiters. SS-men and blockführers took place nearby. While observing the disabled included into the last column, they burst with laughter. We knew that laughter very well.³⁴⁵ Executioners' laughter, even if from their standpoint it was a sign of joy and good fun, for the victims was only the laughter of torment and death.*

³⁴² El – from German Lesbische Liebe – lesbian love.

³⁴³ W. Póltawska: *I boję się snów*. Edycja Świętego Pawła, Częstochowa 2009, p. 115. More on the relations in concentration camps described from the female perspective in: B. Czarnecka: *Kobiety w lagrze. Zapis doświadczenia*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2018.

³⁴⁴ Z. Jagoda, S. Kłodziński, J. Masłowski: *Oświęcim nieznanym...*, op. cit., p. 138.

³⁴⁵ C. Ostańkiewicz: *Ziemia parująca cyklonem*. Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, Łódź 1969, p. 155.

A former prisoner of KL Majdanek Andrzej Stanisławski recalls *Unterscharführer*³⁴⁶ Albrecht – an official translator of SS-men, who one day in spring 1944, sitting on a rail in *Schreibstube*³⁴⁷ on Field III, was humming in Polish: “a fly is crawling in soup, we don’t give a shit about all Germans...” The prisoners did not react as they were not sure if that was a provocation or not. Yet, they all exchanged amused, meaningful looks and commentaries.³⁴⁸

On 20th June, 1940, an emaciated Jew, transported from Tarnów, came to the KL Aushwitz headquarters. His anus was falling out but the sight of the sick man put the SS-men and *kapos* into the excellent mood. For fun, they rushed and beat him, telling him to push the falling anus back with his fingers. He did his best, once keeping his hand near the anus and then hiding himself from the hits, and the SS-men kept on laughing. The faces of the prisoners observing this were full of astonishment and embarrassment. The executioners’ conduct was inconceivable, especially for *zugangs*. Artur Rablin remembers the incident this way: *An elderly man, it seems to me that it was Stanisław Mróz – the editor of “IKG”, was standing with wide opened eyes, quite petrified, very close to the victim. He did not notice that one of the SS-men drew attention to him, stopped laughing, jumped towards Mróz and hit him, but he luckily was able to get mixed with others in the rows. The first day in the concentration camp and the first lesson: if you do not take part in excellent fun, do not try to disapprove of it with any grin on your face or any attitude. The SS-men took revenge on us all for such lack of understanding and for spoiling their fun.*³⁴⁹

When a couple of weeks later some SS-men found a mice nest in a vessel, they came to one prisoner and asked him if he was hungry. When the man nodded, one SS-men took out a mouse and told the prisoner to open his mouth. Surrounded by heartily laughing SS-men who were poking him with their gun barrels, the prisoner took the mouse between his teeth. He held it by its head and, shaking all over, was not able to decide whether to eat it. Beaten with the gun barrels, he started to bite it and blood was streaming down his chin. The prisoners who were near slowed down with their work, but nobody sought eye contact with the SS-men. The SS-men

³⁴⁶ *Unterscharführer* – The lowest petty officer rank in the SS.

³⁴⁷ *Schreibstube* – Office.

³⁴⁸ A. Stanisławski: *Pole śmierci...*, op. cit., p. 221.

³⁴⁹ Z. Jagoda, S. Kłodziński, J. Masłowski: *Oświęcim nieznanym...*, op. cit., p. 140.

stopped the fun and rushed them to work. Commenting on this episode, A. Rablin adds: *It seems to me that before our humour started to appear in the concentration camp life or rather before the happy unique prisoners' humour was born, we had started to seek retribution for this villainy.*³⁵⁰

There are many similar examples. In KL Birkenau, when an SS-man found one male prisoner flirting with a female one, he ordered them – as a punishment – to kiss without a break for an hour, which made him and other SS-men really amused. The prisoners who observed the incident said with laughter that the unlucky couple cheated on the SS-men, stopping the kissing whenever he did not pay attention to them. On another occasion, an SS-man ironically “consoled” the freezing prisoners that they would feel warmer in a crematorium. What was also considered funny were the hoaxes made by the bath house staff, where the prisoners from a new transport washed, consisting in pouring alternately hot and cold water.³⁵¹

For both the readers of such memories and the witnesses of the events, it is hard to believe that someone could laugh in those circumstances. Some questions are raised here about the executioners' behaviour and their culture of laughter in the private sphere. This is dealt with in a memory of Janina Linkiewicz, who at the age of 14 worked in the house of the SS-Unterscharführer in KL Auschwitz Martin Fresemann and his wife, Hildegarda: *Once I was told to buy “sznebezen” in the town. I did not know what it was. Mum has translated: “Schnee” – snow, “Besen” – broom, so I bought a broom. However, this was to be a cream whip. This purchase of mine caused a lot of laughing in the Fresemanns' house. The Fresemanns were young, cheerful, and sociable.*³⁵² What has also become a part of history are the photographs of some SS-men surrounded by girls from SS support services, taken in Międzybrodzie Bielskie in the holiday resort for the SS in 1944 and coming from Karl Höcker's album. The smiling faces look like they come from those of relaxed people, who – judging by their appearance – cannot be accused of the committed crimes.³⁵³

³⁵⁰ Ibidem, p. 140-142.

³⁵¹ Ibidem, p. 140-142; M. Mołdawa: *Gross Rosen. Obóz koncentracyjny na Śląsku*. Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej, Warszawa 1967, p. 119; A. Pawełczyńska: *Wartości a przemoc...*, op. cit., p. 76.

³⁵² P. Setkiewicz (ed.): *Życie prywatne esesmanów w Auschwitz*. Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau w Oświęcimiu, Oświęcim 2012, p. 12.

³⁵³ P. Setkiewicz: *Aussenkommando SS-Sola Hütte*. In: “Zeszyty Oświęcimskie”, No 25/2009, p. 183-192; <http://auschwitz.net/en/the-hocker-album/>.

Comical motifs in the cultural activity of the concentration camp

Jokes were the main weapon of defence from the reality of a concentration camp which was used, among others, by Aleksander Drożdżyński – a satirist, collector of jokes, and an outstanding joke-teller. He spent the last stage of his stay in KL Auschwitz working as a loader of corpses in crematorium ovens. In KL Buchenwald, Fritz Grünbaum – a famous entertainer in Berlin and Vienna – cleaned the latrines. Stopped by the guards, he stood at attention and told them jokes, owing to which he saved his life. There were more professionals who, before being placed in the camp, performed in show business. They constituted the mainstays of cultural activity.³⁵⁴

Comical creativity was a characteristic feature of the *lager* culture of laughter. It concerned the current events in the camp or recalled some good moments from the times of freedom. It was an element of a broader phenomenon of cultural creativity in the concentration camp, which usually related to martyrdom, was sentimental, patriotic, involving the motifs of memories and dreams. Texts created on the spot, as well as those reproduced in the memory or paraphrased in various ways (jokes, real or invented anecdotes, *szajsparole*, episodes remembered from literature, poems, songs, couplets, fragments of artistic shows, etc.) were passed down orally, mostly from the memory. Possessing any writing materials, making notes, keeping or handing over anything written was associated with the threat of severe punishment or even death. Writing longer works (short stories, dramas) was very difficult also due to the lack of time and the impossibility of securing the work from confiscation. The contents of spoken literature were immediately adjusted to the recipients' needs and possibilities or changed depending on the performers' capability to remember and the organizational conditions of the shows. Some of the works created in concentration camps were smuggled to secret centres (mostly in Poland) and printed in the underground press and publications.

As Krzysztof Dunin-Wąsowicz notices: *Obviously, participation in the cultural life in the camp did not pertain to all prisoners or to all camps. This phenomenon hardly took place in the centres of instant extinction, in which most of the prisoners were immediately sent to gas chambers. In the heaviest time of Hitler's terror in concentration camps (1940-1942), the signs of cul-*

³⁵⁴ R.M. Groński: *Proca Dawida...*, op. cit., p. 9-12.

tural life were hardly noticeable. Even in the other periods, this phenomenon did not concern all prisoners, but mostly those in a more privileged position, healthy people, with lighter work, people belonging to certain groups and environments, and – of course – those with the inner need for broadening the existential matters with at least a substitute of culture. In general, it was easier to organize cultural life in the so-called old camps, situated in the territories of the so-called Old Reich – in Dachau, Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen, where political prisoners were members of the prisoners' self-government for a while.³⁵⁵ A detailed presentation of the scale and all the circumstances of this phenomenon is not possible today, as only very few songs, small parts of fine arts, and some teaching aids (used in secret education) have been preserved. It is impossible to reconstruct the texts of satirical shows, theatre plays, or (apart from a few exceptions) the copies of secret camp press or readings illegally distributed among prisoners.³⁵⁶

At least to a certain extent, artistic creation and the chance to participate in the forms of entertainment resulting from it fulfilled the prisoners' need for expressing their feelings, opinions, aesthetic attitudes, etc. It fulfilled the therapeutic, educational, and integrating function as well. Some cabaret-like performances, full of satire and unrefined jokes, were organized. Diverse efforts were made to provide lots of uplifting content, which, in turn, raised the faith in an eventual victory. Artists in concentration camps were not only admired by other prisoners but also protected and fed, which gave them more chances for survival. This was also practiced by some camp staff who wanted to use them to their own benefit, e.g. to please some SS-men by providing them with entertainment or works of art created by prisoners. Although the camp authorities allowed some forms of entertainment for prisoners, they did not inspire anything. A lot depended on block attendants and their assistants.³⁵⁷ The song, which became the symbol of Stanisław Grzesiuk's camp band in KL Gusen (often listened to by prisoners and sometimes even by the staff), started with the following words:

³⁵⁵ K. Dunin-Wąsowicz: *Ruch oporu w hitlerowskich obozach koncentracyjnych 1933-1945*. Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa 1983, p. 278-279. Examples 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 55.

³⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 280.

³⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 320; Z. Jagoda, S. Kłodziński, J. Masłowski: *Oświęcim nieznanym...*, op. cit., p. 112-113.

*It's no point in being sad – being sad,
When freedom runs to us – to us,
Let's laugh as loud as we can
And not complain about the fate.*³⁵⁸

The majority of artistic activities were undertaken by amateurs. As Jadwiga Drabikowa remembers: *In our daily life, songs helped us to survive. In the evenings, we sang various scouting songs or folk ones – both merry and sad, we listened to and learned many tunes sung by Yugoslavian women and we taught them ours. We also composed various humorous couplets, in which we laughed at ourselves, described various events in the lager life, some adventures and situations in which we managed to cheat on the camp authorities, as well as some “organizational” methods and other daily matters. These poems, usually with the Częstochowa rhyme,*³⁵⁹ *were used with well-known melodies and sung to the delight of our mates. (...) These evenings, full of humour and singing, relieved stress, gave us relaxation, rest and smiles – all in all, they helped us to survive.*³⁶⁰ Amusing poems, in which some events from the concentration camp life, prisoners' adventures, and paradoxes of their life (especially the cases of cheating on the authorities) were created, among others, by: Jadwiga Drabikowa in KL Auschwitz,³⁶¹ and by Halina Golczowa and Maria Rutkowska-Kurcuszowa in KL Ravensbrück.³⁶² In the male part of KL Majdanek, a small group of prisoners-writers led by Kazimierz Nowak founded the so-called 'Peanut Gallery' and specialized in satirical works recited for small groups of listeners. The objects of blunt satire and derision were mostly SS-men and other *lager* staff members who tormented prisoners particularly badly.

³⁵⁸ S. Grzesiuk: *Pięć lat kacetu*. Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 1985, p. 281.

³⁵⁹ These are common and trivial rhymed combination of words. The phrase comes from Częstochowa (the name of the most famous place of the cult of Mary in Poland) in the folklore of which such rhymes have appeared most often. (trans. note: A.C.)

³⁶⁰ Z. Jagoda, S. Kłodziński, J. Masłowski: *Oświęcim nieznanym...*, op. cit., p. 116-117.

³⁶¹ I. Urbańska: *Życie kulturalne więźniów w KL Auschwitz w świetle relacji i pamiątek*. Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2005, p. 93.

³⁶² W. Kiedrzyńska, I. Pannenkowa, E. Sulinska (eds): *Ravensbrück. Wiersze obozowe*. Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację, Warszawa 1961; A. Lebda-Wyborna: *Poezja powstała w KL Auschwitz*. “Zeszyt Oświęcimski”, No 16/1975, Państwowe Muzeum w Oświęcimiu, Oświęcim 1975; A. Zych (ed.): *Na mojej ziemi był Oświęcim. Oświęcim w poezji współczesnej*. Wydawnictwo Państwowego Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau, Oświęcim 1987; A. Zych (ed.): *Na mojej ziemi był Oświęcim. Oświęcim w poezji współczesnej*. Część 2. Wydawnictwo Państwowego Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau, Oświęcim 1993.

The habits, faults, weaknesses, and oddities of co-prisoners occur here in rather moderate forms of satire.³⁶³

In KL Auschwitz, the group of comical performers included also some professional artists of the Polish stage – including Stefan Jaracz, Leon Schiller, Tadeusz Hertman-Kański, Zbigniew Sawan – an actor and director of the Warsaw music hall Na Antresoli [On the Mezzanine], or Adam Wysocki from the Dan’s Choir, as well as others. In small reciting and singing bands, performing in the evenings or on Sundays in particular blocks and *lager* hospitals, Mary Didur-Załuska, Zofia Rysiówna and Maria Szczęsna performed in KL Ravensbrück and Aleksander Kulisiewicz in KL Sahsenhausen. Here, one of the most popular songs based on *lager* humour was “W schutzhaft-lagrze³⁶⁴ jesteś bracie [Brother, you’re in a schutzhaft-lager]” by T. Hertman-Kański:

Brother, you’re in a schutzhaft-lager
Days pass by like on a treadmill
Brother, stand round the clock
And at midday stand (stiff as a cock)

They pour coffee and pour soup
But most often they beat our ass
In the lager – a haefltling is cared for
In the Krankenbaum³⁶⁵ they’ll cure him
Brother, stand round the clock
And at midday stand (stiff as a cock)

If you’re sick longer
You’ll evaporate through the chimney
Brother, stand round the clock
And at midday stand (stiff as a cock)

The brick chimney stands
But we’ll screw it

³⁶³ K. Dunin-Wąsowicz: *Ruch oporu...*, op. cit., p. 321-323; Z. Jagoda, S. Kłodziński, J. Maślowski: *Oświęcim nieznanym...*, op. cit., p. 156.

³⁶⁴ Schutzhaft-lager – the camp was for prisoners arrested for “preventive detention”.

³⁶⁵ Krankenbau – hospital.

*Brother, stand round the clock
And at midday stand (stiff as a cock).*³⁶⁶

This song, despite its simplicity, coarseness, and black humour, was very dear to prisoners. As Czesław Ostańkiewicz notices: *It mocked the crematorium, death, roll calls, hunger, vorarbeiters,³⁶⁷ kapos and ourselves. (...) The chorus mentioned roll calls – the most horrible of all lager nightmares. It talked about standing in the rain and drizzle, when one wants to give rest to tired legs, going numb out of fatigue. (...) In my head, I repeated the chorus of this obscene but our song (...) and necessarily with the part Brother, stand round the clock... definitely with this chorus, dashing, in defiance of its contents, with a note of teasing and rebellion, with mockery (...) concerning the chimney which threw out over our heads the snake-like puffs of smoke coming from the burned bodies of close people – our friends and mates.*³⁶⁸

A very unique form of comical cultural activity were camp broadcasts. In the evenings, in the blocks, someone in a radio speaker's voice passed (to small groups of listeners) the latest news from the world and the novelities and gossip from the concentration camp. If it was possible, some vocal performances or recitations were included as well. The broadcasts were conducted, among others, by Father Wojciech Gajdus in 1939 in KL Stutthof and Danuta Brzóska-Mędryk in 1943 in KL Majdanek.³⁶⁹

Owing to the effort of Franciszek Targosz in October 1941, the camp museum came into being in KL Auschwitz. Officially, the collections comprised objects of artistic, historical and commemorative value, which usually came from the warehouses of "Canada" (the *commando* that dealt with sorting the personal belongings of prisoners and Jews brought here to die), as well as those created on the spot by camp artists. The authorities wanted to achieve a proper propaganda effect and disseminate the information of how well prisoners were treated there and that they could even develop their artistic talents. The museum immediately became a kind of refuge for artists and other gifted prisoners – it increased their chances for survival,

³⁶⁶ T. Hertman-Kański: *W schutzhaft-lagrze jesteś bracie*. [from:] I. Urbańska: *Życie kulturalne...*, op. cit., p. 103-104.

³⁶⁷ *Vorarbeiter* – foremen, workers' supervisors.

³⁶⁸ I. Urbańska: *Życie kulturalne...*, op. cit., p. 104. More on this: A. Kulisiewicz: *Dalsze przyczynki do zagadnień muzyki i pieśni w zakresie samoobrony psychicznej więźniów w obozach hitlerowskich*. In: "Przegląd Lekarski", No 19/1979, p. 38-51.

³⁶⁹ K. Dunin-Wąsowicz: *Obóz koncentracyjny Stutthof*. Wydawnictwo Morskie, Gdańsk 1970, p. 207; K. Dunin-Wąsowicz: *Ruch oporu...*, op. cit., p. 304-305; Ks. W. Gajdus: *Nr 20998...*, op. cit., p. 82-84 i 151; example 54.

protection from beatings, and provided opportunities to gain extra food rations and better clothes (SS-men paid in this way for artistic works made for them, for instance – portraits of them and their families). What came into being here illegally were many comical works which contained satire aimed at the occupiers and concentration camp functionaries, e.g. portraits and caricatures, decorations, puppets and costumes for comedy shows or satirical plays. The drawing and dissemination of the caricatures showing the functionaries or SS-men meant life-threatening danger. The museum was active until the evacuation of the camp in 1945.³⁷⁰

There were many talented cartoonists in KL Auschwitz, for instance Xawery Dunikowski, Wincenty Gawron, Jan Machnowski, Natalia Milicer, Tadeusz Myszkowski, Mieczysław Kościelniak, Władysław Siwek, Stanisław Trałka. Tadeusz Myszkowski worked there as well. Franciszek Roman remembers that (...) *on the territory of the camp, he made cartoons and caricatures of kapos, which triggered various commentaries on them and this – in turn – contributed to deriding the kapos and to undermining “the respect for the authorities”.* This decreased fear and breakdown.³⁷¹ Markiel – a Jew of French origin, was an excellent portraitist, who painted in oil paints and watercolours not only for other prisoners but also for SS-men (they provided him with painting materials): (...) *he also drew caricatures: some of them circulated among trustworthy prisoners, bringing about laughter, satisfaction, confidence in a better future, and often some more general reflections on art or painting, which initiated conversations about the galleries, pictures, their creators, etc. seen before the war while living in freedom.*³⁷²

Some meetings aimed at providing entertainment took place in the concentration camps as well. Most frequently, these were secret intimate meetings rather than shows, which were allowed by the staff (often listening to them as well with satisfaction). Most of the performances were improvised – especially if the performers were not professionals. Everybody showed what they could and sketches, jokes, and satirical monologues were frequent items in the repertoire.³⁷³ As Artur Krzetuski recalls: *Artistic shows were usually organized by particular blocks; there was even a kind*

³⁷⁰ K. Dunin-Wąsowicz: *Ruch oporu...*, op. cit., p. 297-298; Z. Jagoda, S. Kłodziński, J. Masłowski: *Oświęcim nieznanym...*, op. cit., p. 112; I. Urbańska: *Życie kulturalne...*, op. cit., p. 113-120.

³⁷¹ Z. Jagoda, S. Kłodziński, J. Masłowski: *Oświęcim nieznanym...*, op. cit., p. 125.

³⁷² Ibidem, p. 125. A memory recollected by Kazimierz Szewberg.

³⁷³ Ibidem, p. 125.

*of competition in organizing such events. The performers used to change – some went away, others came in – but those events can be considered a permanent element in the landscape of camp life.*³⁷⁴

One of the first cultural *lager* events took place in summer 1933 in KL Papenburg-Esterwegen under the title “Zirkus Konzentrani”. In its programme, organized by an actor and director Wolfgang Langhoff, there were clown shows and comical sketches, among many other things. In the same year in KL Dachau, Yarište Komitee conducted cultural activity and presented two shows, consisting of satirical couplets and comical scenes. For a certain period, such performances were forbidden, but the so-called “Bunte Abende” (with jokes and an announcer) were allowed. However, in early 1936 the ban was reintroduced.³⁷⁵

The first prisoners’ comedy show group acted in KL Buchenwald at the turn of 1938-1939. Many professionals – Germans, Austrians, and Jews – were its members, e.g. Kurt Fuß – a comedian, Fritz Grünbaum – a writer, dancer, and comedian, Hermann Leopoldi – a librettist and author of hits, Paul Morgan – an actor and announcer. Satirical poems and sketches came into being to meet the needs of camp performances. Their legal or illegal status in the camp was determined by the topic, place, and participants. Legal shows were sometimes attended by SS-men, who expected the kind of entertainment that was at that time already unavailable in the III Reich with such an artistic cast. F. Grünbaum presented the sketch “Fritz Grünbaum in Heaven – I would like to be an angel”, which dealt with the Jewish artist’s vision. The SS-men did not like it, so further performing was forbidden. The shows were continued illegally and Jewish prisoners in borrowed striped clothes were smuggled to the Aryan blocks and vice versa. On Sunday afternoons, there were regular performances of single artists in prisoners’ blocks. Walter Sonntag, a block attendant in Block 41 in Buchenwald LA III, mentions that the mood in his block was always good. The prisoners played, danced, and sang, and one of the well-known clowns from the Soviet Union showed his tricks.³⁷⁶

In December 1943, consent was obtained in KL Buchenwald for the activity of official international groups, the shows of which took place in

³⁷⁴ Ibidem, p. 130.

³⁷⁵ K. Dunin-Wąsowicz: *Ruch oporu...*, op. cit., p. 305.

³⁷⁶ W. Czarnecki, Z. Zonik: *Walczący obóz Buchenwald*. Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 1969, p. 257.

the cinema room. Most probably, this consent was a kind of bonus which was to stimulate prisoners to efficient work in the arms industry. Among these groups, the Czech, French, German, Polish and Soviet ones were particularly active. Satirical texts were read, dances were practiced, songs for special occasions were sung interchangeably with more serious ones. Even fifty deep-covered shows took place in different blocks. Their organization was conducted with the help of the resistance movement leadership and the German political activists, who held executive positions in the camp. In January 1944, some pieces of comedy shows were reintroduced to official *lager* musical performances, which the spectators enjoyed a lot.³⁷⁷ There are abundant examples of comical artistic activity of prisoners in concentration camps. They are more or less thoroughly described in the memories. Here are some of them:

- In KL Sachsenhausen, an improvised comedy show combined with a concert took place on the 25th December, 1939. The musical part was arranged by Poles, the satirical one – by Germans.
- In KL Auschwitz, in 1940-1941 (mostly on work-free days or after the roll call), the prisoners who had been actors in the theatres of Warsaw and Cracow before the war organized humorous performances in front of the kitchen, on the roll call square, on the improvised stages on tables. They sang couplets and songs about the camp life (e.g. “Rano kawa, wieczór kawa, a w południe trochę awa [Coffee in the morning, coffee in the evening, and at midday – a bit of awa³⁷⁸]”). These shows were attended by many prisoners who demanded encores. Yet, they were banned by the *Lagerführer*.³⁷⁹
- In May 1943, some attempts were made to organize theatrical events in the Roma part in KL Auschwitz. In the Jewish blocks, the actor Abraham (?) Perlmutter performed funny scenes from Sholem Alejchem’s plays. What came into being as well was a (mostly amateur) comedy show team, consisting of German and Dutch Jews.
- In the Trzebinia branch of KL Auschwitz, every second week a new programme (including sketches, songs, and music) was staged.

³⁷⁷ K. Dunin-Wąsowicz: *Ruch oporu...*, op. cit., p. 305; M.I. Sacha: “Gdyście w obóz przybyć już raczyli...” *Obraz kultury lagrowej w świadectwach więźniów Buchenwaldu 1937-1945*. Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Bydgoszcz–Gdańsk 2014, p. 158-160.

³⁷⁸ Awa is a metal can for storing tea or coffee. This is an allusion to a weak beverage (meal?) made from primitive ingredients.

³⁷⁹ Lagerführer – the commander of the camp.

In the Zabrze branch, in autumn 1944, a satirical theatre show, which foretold the end of the war, was staged. Some female prisoners in the Rajsko branch prepared a Cracow nativity play with puppets and the text written by Zofia Grochowalska. On the new Year Eve in 1943, a satirical show with literary quizzes and a fragment of “Moralność pani Dulskiej [Mrs. Dulska’s morality]” by Gabriela Zapolska was performed in the female hospital. This was inspired by Stefania Perzanowska – a doctor. Similar shows were staged in KL Auschwitz and Birkenau.

- On one Sunday in 1944, in KL Stutthof, after a transport from the Pawiak prison in Warsaw, some Varsovians made a show for the invited Polish prisoners, mostly clerks from camp offices. Among other things, a comedian performed there and some sketches full of the Warsaw humour were played. The performances were continued later as well.³⁸⁰
- At Christmas 1944, in the female camp in KL Stutthof, a small ensemble led by Waleria Felchnerowska gave a show, consisting of Christmas carols, humorous *lager* songs, and several sketches.
- In KL Buchenwald, the Czech singing ensemble *Bohemia*, apart from music, presented sketches, satirical scenes and the comical opera “Don Juan”. The German theatre group led by Brunon Apitz often performed sketches and sang couplets.
- In KL Mauthausen-Gusen, mostly at Christmas, the musical shows of solo singers were intertwined with sketches. The satirical variety show “Byle przetrwać [Only to survive]” was staged. The Spanish ensemble with Angel Hernandez Garcia went from one block to another, performing a comical sketch which was a parody of bull fighting.
- In KL Buchenwald, Czech and Spanish prisoners jointly issued a handwritten paper (a leaflet). It was made in one richly illustrated copy, which included caricatures.
- In KZ Janowska in Lviv, some satires and a satirical chronicle of the camp life were presented in the evenings.³⁸¹

³⁸⁰ Examples 79, 80.

³⁸¹ M.M. Borwicz: *Literatura w obozie*. Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna przy C.K. Żydów Polskich – Oddział w Krakowie, Kraków 1946, p. 17-19; K. Dunin-Wąsowicz: *Ruch oporu...*, op. cit., p. 306-341; R.M. Groński: *Proca Dawida...*, op. cit., p. 122-128; Z. Jagoda, S. Kłodziński, J. Masłowski: *Oświęcim nieznanym...*, op. cit., p. 130 i 156-157; C. Ostań-

In the hospital block in Birkenau, the prisoners made efforts to run a regular small theatre stage. Twelve performances took place there. The thirteenth was interrupted by Roman Zenkteller, a Pole who, being afraid of repercussions from the camp staff, did this just after taking over the position of the chief doctor. The repertoire most often included the sketches and poems written by Tadeusz Borowski. The stage and decorations were built on Saturdays and Sundays. Julian Ganschler – in a tailcoat, with a bowtie and a *trójkąt-sztrajfa*³⁸² – was the announcer. The organization of these performances was supported by the *lagerkapo* “Tata” Biernak.³⁸³ In the hospital block, prisoners also listened to Henryk Sienkiewicz’s “Trilogy”³⁸⁴, “summarized” by Bogdan Gliński, who did it with unique humour, introducing his “corrections” of the text, owing to which the listeners received a wonderful mixture of Sienkiewicz’s prose and Wiech’s³⁸⁵ narration style.³⁸⁶

One of the artists of Wesoła Lwowska Fala [The Merry Wave of Lvov] stayed in the camp hospital as well. Although he was unwilling to show off his pre-war role, he encouraged the former listeners to recall the funny dialogues of Szczepko and Tońko. By using Lvov humour, the amateurs successfully talked about current, even gloomy, events in the concentration camp, relieving the stressful atmosphere.³⁸⁷ In Block 10, pseudo-medical experiments were conducted on women. The Jewish prisoners waiting there for surgery and other female prisoners performed shadow theatre and a satirical show describing an examination by one of the doctors and some fragments of their life in the block.³⁸⁸

kowicz: *Ziemia parująca...*, op. cit., p. 260; W. Ostrowski: *Warszawiaci w Stutthofie*. Wydawnictwo Muzeum Stutthof w Sztutowie, Sztutowo–Warszawa 2014.

³⁸² *Trójkąt-sztrajfa* was a sign painted in red or made of cloth scraps, which was placed on the back of clothes to label the prisoners better (most probably prisoners were marked with a cross on the back or side stripes on the trousers). Such labelling was introduced on civilian clothes in concentration camps due to the lack of striped prisoner uniforms.

³⁸³ Z. Jagoda, S. Kłodziński, J. Masłowski: *Oświęcim nieznanym...*, op. cit., p. 131. A memory recollected by Waldemar Nowakowski.

³⁸⁴ “Trylogia [Trilogy]” is a popular cycle of novels written by Henryk Sienkiewicz, which was written “to lift up the hearts” when Poland was under partitions.

³⁸⁵ Wiech was the pen-name of Stefan Wiechecki, a famous satirist, columnist, and journalist, who became popular mostly owing to his articles written in the Warsaw dialect.

³⁸⁶ C. Ostańkiewicz: *Ziemia parująca...*, op. cit., p. 89.

³⁸⁷ Z. Jagoda, S. Kłodziński, J. Masłowski: *Oświęcim nieznanym...*, op. cit., p. 130-131. A memory recollected by Tadeusz Hołuj.

³⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 131. A memory recollected by Maria Anna Nowakowska.

In January and February 1943, in wing B of Block 15 in KL Buchenwald, Zygmunt Zonik started classical entertainment activity on Sunday evenings. What prevailed in it were various forms of humorous criticism of the relations in the camp. Until October, these attempts did not go further than Zonik's room. In his humorous essays, he derided the behaviour and indifference of the prominent functionaries to the common prisoners' fight for survival, snitching, pandering, negligence, etc. Soon, Zonik got help from Franciszek K. – a prisoner from the same room, with a great sense of humour and a talent for epigram writing. The team developed into about one hundred people. The announcing was conducted by Z. Zonik himself, Czesław Ostańkiewicz was the literary director, Witold Myszkowski and Józef Pribula were the singers, Stanisław Kisiel and Edward Polak recited texts, and Józef Kropiński, Kazimierz Tymiński and some others were solo performing musicians. Prisoners (e.g. Edmund Polak) composed songs and couplets, in which the narrators were a grandmother or grandfather. They were sung, among others, by Ryszard Stańkowski and Jan Gelo, who derided the SS order and encouraged prisoners to persevere in the face of approaching freedom.³⁸⁹

The brave laughter of resistance in the concentration camp

According to Anna Pawełczyńska: *Resistance might be manifested in different ways. Not every situation offers a chance for open fighting or even for passive opposition. It was indispensable in the circumstances of Auschwitz to adjust to the objective conditions. Resistance was manifested in the possibility that outer adjustment could co-occur with the permanent aiming at preserving one's inner freedom. In their fight for such freedom, prisoners supported each other. However, every person – on their own – decides about the limits of freedom in their inner world. Extending these limits meant a fight for increasing the resistance of a weak organism and for increasing one's mental resistance. This struggle took place mainly in the sphere of the simplest issues – such that they were necessary for individual existence, for co-existence and collaboration with those in an identical situation.*³⁹⁰ As the author also notices: *What played an enormous role in the implementation of the inner resistance was the weapon that could not be taken away – a sense of humour. Games needed to be *nałve* and primitive. Carrying waste could be done along with playing the horse game. Horse sounds and the sounds of the working commando made*

³⁸⁹ W. Czarnecki, Z. Zonik: *Walczący obóz...*, op. cit., p. 394-397.

³⁹⁰ A. Pawełczyńska: *Wartości a przemoc...*, op. cit., p. 153.

*the boss join the game – she was a German prostitute and, as the quality of the playing suited her well, she turned from the camp executive to a gentle coachman. A sense of humour could bring rescue in dangerous situations as well. Sometimes, one situational joke, told in half-voice, alleviated the paralyzing feeling of fear. Each of the “rebellious” ones worked out their own defensive mechanisms. The sight of a writhing SS-man was less dangerous when one imagined him with his pants falling down or drunk and lying in mud.*³⁹¹

In the situation when an open rebellion by prisoners against the camp staff was impossible, the word was the most popular and convenient weapon – especially anecdotes and comical tales in which the hated executioners’ weaknesses were mocked. Yet, sometimes the circumstances in which they came into being were neither amusing nor safe. Many situations which later triggered the laughter of both those who recalled and those who listened were not meant to amuse. For instance, when in early 1941, during an autopsy, one of the doctors-prisoners put an enlarged liver of a dead prisoner on the window sill, two ‘muslims’ hanging around managed to steal it. Obviously, they kept a bit of consciousness as they went to two *kaapos* and exchanged the liver for two loaves of bread. The *kaapos* fried it on margarine and ate it. As the doctor-prisoner was looking for the lost liver, the event was revealed and resulted in long-lasting laughter in the camp. The ‘muslims’ were never identified and nobody was punished for deriding the *kaapos*.³⁹²

Prisoners used to be amused by imitating and mocking the behaviour, gestures and mimicry of particularly hated functionaries. They often gave those functionaries nicknames associated with their funny looks. The prisoners working in the camp kitchen attached a ram’s bladder and genitalia to the back part of a certain SS-man’s collar. Decorated in this way, he turned up in the canteen and made others laugh heartily. Since that time, prisoners called him ‘The Ram’.³⁹³ Another SS-man, Wilhelm Boger, was nicknamed ‘The Chinese’, due to his slanted eyes. The *Raportführer* Anton Taube from KL Birkenau was called ‘The Horse Death’, as he had long, yellow, and protruding teeth. For the same reason, Margot Drechsler – an SS-Aufseherin³⁹⁴ from KL Auschwitz and KZ Ravensbrück, was called ‘The Biter’. Oswald Kaduk was called The Physician because he “cured” the

³⁹¹ Ibidem, p. 156.

³⁹² Z. Jagoda, S. Kłodziński, J. Masłowski: *Oświęcim nieznanym...*, op. cit., p. 144. A memory recollected by Krzysztof Hofman.

³⁹³ Ibidem, p. 145. A memory recollected by Edward Liszka.

³⁹⁴ Aufseherin – supervisor.

muslims by sending them to the gas chamber. Piltz – the manager of the camp workshops in Monowice – was called ‘The Cripple’. A caricature of him was placed in the engine room. When someone wanted to see it, they needed to lean forward and then got hit with a wooden strip.³⁹⁵ Another object of derision was the cruel *Lagerführer* Hans Aumeier, called ‘The Small Elbow’ or ‘The Pony’ – a short and noisy SS-man who particularly liked beating strong and tall prisoners. In order to reach the face of a prisoner sentenced to death, he had to jump. Prisoners were aware that he felt enormous satisfaction when a prisoner fell onto the ground after his “punch”. Thus, when he took to beating, in the appropriate moment – the prisoners fell down on their own, triggering the observers’ suppressed laughter.³⁹⁶

In KL Buchenwald, another object of derision and of prisoners’ amusing tales was one *kapo* who supervised work in the workshops. During an Allied’ air raid at the camp, to protect himself from bombs, he put a stool on his head, which made older prisoners (used to air raids) laugh.³⁹⁷

The naivety, credulity, intellectual limitations, primitivism, and exaggerated discipline of some members of the *lager* staff helped the prisoners to use and cheat them, making them a laughing stock for both the prisoners and functionaries.

Zofia Posmysz recalls a bold hoax of a prisoner in KL Birkenau, which – for a moment – united the victims and the executioners in common laughter: (...) *there were many funny moments in Birkenau. (...) I remember one scene. There was one SS-woman who liked performing body searches of the prisoners entering the camp. She was even pretty. Prisoners came back from work in the evening and she stopped them at the gate. Predicting that she would start her touch search, a certain joker from the electricians’ commando, an “old number”,³⁹⁸ had earlier cut a pocket in his trousers. So when she put her hand into the pocket, it slipped lower. He stood at attention, hardly refraining from laughter and the whole commando did as well. The SS-woman slapped him in the face. Later, the story went all over the blocks – prisoners passed it down from one to another. The SS-men did the same. Funny, isn’t it?*³⁹⁹

³⁹⁵ Z. Jagoda, S. Kłodziński, J. Masłowski: *Oświęcim nieznanym...*, op. cit., p. 145.

³⁹⁶ Ibidem, p. 144.

³⁹⁷ A. Stanisławski: *Pole śmierci...*, op. cit., p. 224.

³⁹⁸ “Old numbers” was the term usually referring to the prisoners who had survived in a concentration camp more than two years.

³⁹⁹ Z. Posmysz, M. Wujcik: *Esesmanka uratowała jej życie*. <http://weekend.gazeta.pl/weekend/1,152121,21318958,esemanka-uratowala-jej-zycie-gdyby-nie-franz-zywa-nie-wyszlabym.html>.

Amusing incidents were recalled each time when the ridiculed executioners appeared near and then were passed down in anecdotes. These stories often had an educational nature, as they contained valuable information, especially for newcomers, who learned from them about the weaknesses of the camp staff. Revealing the executioners' weaknesses helped the prisoners use different tricks against them later, which constituted a kind of self-defence and helped to gain food, clothes, and other means to survive. The SS-men and other functionaries ridiculed by some elaborate jokes did not seem so dangerous. Such actions of prisoners required enormous courage and cleverness because revealing the perpetrators of a joke meant the threat of torture and death. Here are some examples.

In 1943, some sour-spiced snails with onion appeared in the camp canteen. *Komandoführer*⁴⁰⁰ Bajer was disgusted with this dish. Jan Folwarczny, Stefan Horzela, and Roman Nawrót – prisoners who worked in the canteen, persuaded the drunken Bajer that there were pearls inside the snails. The SS-man believed in that, because he found a pearl, which the prisoners had taken from “Canada”, in one of the snails. Encouraged by the find, he and his colleague cut five kilo of snails overnight. Obviously, they did not find anything.⁴⁰¹

A certain, most probably mentally ill, SS-man liked reciting and singing texts suggested by prisoners, which most often ridiculed him. Around the Twelfth Night holiday, the prisoners wrapped him in a sheet and put a box with a burning candle on his head. He went around the block in such a costume with them, making others laugh.⁴⁰²

As Jan Wolny recalls: *Being afraid of passing the guard post in such a state, the drunk SS paramedic Bara decided to stay overnight in our room for the ailing. He put his belt with a gun into the closet, lay down on the upper bed and fell asleep. I had a visit from my friend, Zygmunt Benikas and, when he realized the situation, he melted some terribly stinking cheese on the stove, took the gun from the holster and poured the cheese into the barrel. When Bara was awake and sober, he took his things and went to his barracks. After a couple of days, he came again to Block 21 – hungry and unshaven. Quite irritated, he told us that they had had a control of weapon cleanness and the gunsmith, while checking his gat, stated that*

⁴⁰⁰ Komandoführer – the Chief of a commando.

⁴⁰¹ Z. Jagoda, S. Kłodziński, J. Masłowski: *Oświęcim nieznanym...*, op. cit., p. 144-145. A memory recollected by Jerzy Pozimski.

⁴⁰² *Ibidem*, p. 145. A memory recollected by Zbigniew Bentkowski.

*“somebody took a shit in his barrel”. He was arrested for seven days. When we pretended to be astonished, he told us to sniff the holster and said that it still stank.*⁴⁰³

A certain female prisoner, while cleaning an SS-man’s house, stole a head of lettuce and hid it in the upper part of his shoe. Unluckily, the man wanted to put it on. Yet, he was unable to do it with the lettuce, so he burst with anger and threatened the prisoner with sending her to the crematorium for this theft. Still, it was her who surprised the SS-man by stating that she would report to the authorities that his shoes were so dirty that lettuce could grow in them.⁴⁰⁴

The *Komandoführer* Edward Lubusch, who supervised the workers in the lock-smithery, regularly stole things from the prisoner Michał Kula. The prisoners who knew about this prepared a fluid ointment made from grease waste, filled a can with this, and put it in the food locker in such a way that it poured down onto Lubusch’s head when the locker was opened. Even on the next day, the SS-man still had sticky, greasy hair.⁴⁰⁵

Another object of gruesome jokes was Mieczysław Pańszczyk, a prisoner who served SS doctors with the voluntary killing of hundreds of prisoners by injecting phenol. In the room where he stayed, the cases of erysipelas and typhoid were confirmed, so he decided for a temporary stay in an empty disinfected room, in which he prepared a bed. The prisoner Jan Wolny decided to play a trick on him. In the evening, Wolny quietly took a naked corpse from the bathhouse and laid it in Pańszczyk’s bed. He stuck a scrap of paper with the inscription “You will regret, pig!” into the dead man’s stiffened hand. Going to bed, Pańszczyk noticed the corpse and ran out to the corridor with a hysterical shout.⁴⁰⁶ As J. Wolny recalls: *Doctors, paramedics, and patients with lighter diseases gathered immediately and, having read the scrap and having seen terrified Pańszczyk, burst with laughter. For a long time, this was a topic often discussed in the camp hospital. Pańszczyk was in a bad mood for quite a long period, he kept away from others, and was constantly irritated. When someone smiled, Pańszczyk thought they mocked him. He did not report that incident to any SS-man, he must have been afraid of the prisoners’ retribution.*⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰³ Ibidem, p. 146. A memory recollected by Jan Wolny.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibidem, p. 146. A memory recollected by Jadwiga Apostoł-Staniszevska.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibidem, p. 146-147. A memory recollected by Artur Krzetuski.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibidem, p. 147. A memory recollected by Jan Wolny.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibidem, p. 147.

The material means of prisoners' resistance and reprisal were leaflets and papers, mostly handwritten and secretly distributed.

In March, 1945, in the *subcommando* of KL Buchenwald which was code-named "Hecht" and was situated on the edge of a small village Eschershausen near Holzminden on the Weser River, Fryderyk Járosy (imprisoned there under a false name after the Warsaw Uprising) edited and issued in one copy "Wiadomości Häftlingowskie [The Häftling News]". It had 10 pages, was dated 11th November 1944, was handwritten and hand-illustrated. This only copy was kept, transported to Warsaw, and submitted to the Theatre Museum by Kazimierz Tymiński. Among other things, the paper comprised: satirical adaptations of mythological and ancient history motifs to prisoners' life, fairy tales, the comical poem "Jestem polnische Schwein [I am a Polish Pig]", a poem about rats (full of allusions to Hitler) and some satires concerning current events in the concentration camp.⁴⁰⁸

It started with the following introduction:

*There are really no limits of lying,
There are really no limits of hypocrisy,
There are really no limits of rudeness,
Of villainy, betrayal, and boredom!
Let's stop fighting with swords of thought,
Taking them seriously would be a sin,
Let's respond to this bragging
With mockery, derision, and laughter!*⁴⁰⁹

What later circulated among the prisoners was the open rhymed letter from "Wiadomości Häftlingowskie":

*The open letter of the Chief Editor of W.H. (Wiadomości Häftlingowskie)
to a certain mister
You are not un homme, comme il faut,⁴¹⁰
And you disappoint gentlemen a lot.
The fact you rule is a Qui pro Quo,
A tragic mistake of a pliable nation.*

⁴⁰⁸ K. Dunin-Wąsowicz: *Ruch oporu...*, op. cit., p. 341-342; K. Tymiński: *Uspokoić sen*. Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, Katowice 1985, p. 113-114.

⁴⁰⁹ K. Tymiński: *Uspokoić sen...*, op. cit., p. 113.

⁴¹⁰ Un homme, comme il faut – a proper man.

*You should be hanged on a lantern
To get rid of you as soon as possible.
You'll get into history, but as a poor
Ivan the Terrible or rotten Herostratus.*

*I personally think you are a villain!
And when you are escaping with your gang,
And meet me – don't bow to me
As I won't bow back to you for sure!⁴¹¹*

In a natural way, the performers of camp jokes and the authors of orally transmitted literature became the leaders of the communities of laughter. The most active of them have become a part of the camp culture of laughter and are present in the memory of indebted co-prisoners as outstanding people of laughter.

The people of laughter

The characteristic features of people of laughter in concentration camps were cheerfulness, sense of humour, fantasy, and the ability to function in a pathological group with a smile. They were appreciated for dissipating the gloomy atmosphere, encouraging other prisoners and recalling the memories and dreams concerning nice moments of freedom.

In their memories, many former prisoners express the belief that it was contact with the people of laughter that helped them to survive the camp. As Julian Kiwała notices: *Apart from their better handling of the hardships of the concentration camp, such people could also influence their nearest environment to a very large extent. The mocking (in some situations) interpretation of some SS-men's orders, the jokes and tales about merry adventures from the previous years enabled others, less mentally resistant, at least for a while, to put aside the nightmare or even the tragedy of the moment.*⁴¹² Many of their names have been preserved. They usually appear in the descriptions of camp episodes, in which their presence and engagement in improving the quality of other prisoners' life are emphasized.

The quality of a cheerful attitude to the reality and of sharing a smile is mentioned by Adolf Gawalewicz: *My mentality could faster than on average shake off the destructive impact of the lager regime. Why? My specific quality*

⁴¹¹ Ibidem, p. 113-114.

⁴¹² Z. Jagoda, S. Kłodziński, J. Masłowski: *Oświęcim nieznanym...*, op. cit., p. 155.

was a cheerful character, with a certain love for self-irony and the mocking attitude to these elements of the reality – both in civilian life and in the lager microclimate – with which I disagreed but was unable to oppose (or did not want this) in any other way. It seems to me that humour and cheerfulness, manifested outside more strongly than was justified by the actual frame of mind, won my mates' friendly attitude to me, and as a result – their help in difficult and sometimes terribly dramatic situations. In a certain way, they also needed me, I was helpful in their struggle for survival, although my merits had, in fact, a non-material value for other prisoners from my nearest surroundings.⁴¹³

The most frequently mentioned prisoner of KL Auschwitz was Czesław Sowul, a medic and comedian, who played the bell plates in the camp band and had an exceptional acting talent as well as a rarely occurring (even at freedom) sense of humour and *vis comica*. As a camp comedian, he was liked a lot by his co-prisoners. He showed real mastery, especially in mimicking the executioners, daring to do this even just behind the back of SS-men and *kapos*. As Jerzy Rawicz recalls: *I can remember how much fun we had on some Sunday mornings, when Czesiek Sowul, clowning around in the way only he could, wandered in front of other white-dressed musicians through the camp doing amazing tricks with a trumpet or a trombone and emitting terrible sounds. This all created an inhuman cacophony and it was good.*⁴¹⁴ Adam Kopyciński wrote about Sowul: *I will never forget how the whole camp laughed (at him) heartily. For this laughter, Czesław should receive honours, the highest possible ones.*⁴¹⁵

Edmund Polak, a former prisoner of KL Auschwitz and KL Buchenwald, created in the camp – among other things – satirical poems, couplets, and songs, which he managed to write down and hand to the researchers dealing with the concentration camp culture. As the author recalls: *Having observed (in the camp) the reaction to the jokes told by me and others, I decided to join, compliantly with my abilities, the group of their authors. I also wanted to increase the rank of camp humour and satire from below the belt to a higher level.*⁴¹⁶ Jerzy Rawicz as well recollects his contribution to the camp culture of laughter: *I can remember from my own experience how once, in Block 14 a, I wrote a humorous short story about a drunken cat (of course I would not be able to reconstruct it). In this story, different ani-*

⁴¹³ Z. Jagoda, S. Kłodziński, J. Masłowski: *Więźniowie Oświęcimia...*, op. cit., p. 156.

⁴¹⁴ Z. Jagoda, S. Kłodziński, J. Masłowski: *Oświęcim nieznan...*, op. cit., p. 154-155.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 154-155.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 155-156.

*mals appeared, using the camp vocabulary and symbolizing some figures of kapos and SS-men. Not many things which I have written in my life (...) were so successful as this short story. The boys rewrote it, read it, and imitated the voices. I was very proud of my work.*⁴¹⁷

Karol Hülle was able to make fifteen prisoners (in the state of deep depression) laugh to tears in a cell in the forced labour camp in Wiśnicz Dolny. As Artur Krzetuski recalls: *I remember that, dying of laughter, I begged him: Lolek, stop, as I really can't. My gloomy mood has dissipated.*⁴¹⁸

Laughter was also triggered by some reports of those who had been transported to the camp from prisons, where they – despite everything – had also witnessed or participated in comical events. Father Władysław Grohs de Rosenburg used to tell his co-prisoners in KL Auschwitz how he had been interrogated due to the Gestapo search for Andrzej Harat (the district commander of the Home Army), who had changed his pseudonym to “Erwin”. The priest did not know about this fact, but he knew a Nazi gendarme of Austrian origin. What follows is are some fragments of Father Grohs’s story, which made the listeners laugh to tears:

– *Do you know Erwin?*

– *Yes, I do.*

– *Where is he now?*

– *In Vienna.*

– *Where?*

– *In Vienna.*

– *Who?*

– *Erwin. He left a week ago, as he had been relocated from Kęty to Vienna.*

– *Which Erwin?*

– *This German gendarme who visited Winduszkowa. It seems his name was Yogelsang.*

– *But it's not about this Erwin but about Harat, whose pseudonym is Erwin. When we bring him here to you in a couple of minutes, you'll recognize your Erwin immediately!*⁴¹⁹

In prisoners’ communities, a similar function to the one served by Father Grohs was fulfilled by other aforementioned jokers. Xawery Dunikowski – the famous sculptor, used to tell (in the camp) a lot of anecdotes from his life, especially from his carefree stay in Paris, and adorned them with

⁴¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 155-156.

⁴¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 155.

⁴¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 151-152.

some erotic tidbits.⁴²⁰ Jan Stanisław Olbrycht – a physician, professor of medicine, often amused his companions with the story how, while being an *oberleutnant* during World War I, he tried to save his grey horse Adonis from artillery shells. He told his orderly to paint the horse a dark chestnut with potassium chloride. As a result of this undertaking, in rainy days Adonis looked like a zebra, making the division officers laugh.⁴²¹ Tadeusz Kański, an actor, prepared entertainment for the meetings after the camp work in many rooms of various blocks. He engaged Greeks, Italians, and Poles to elicit a smile from people.⁴²² The group of concentration camp comedians also comprised: in KL Auschwitz Stefania Baruch from Tarnów and Tadeusz Hołuj, and in KL Gusen Jan Kolmasiak, called Piekutoszczak⁴²³ and Bohdan Zalewski, who sang humorous songs (e.g. the camp hit “Trup w trepach [A dead man in clogs]”, of which he was the author).⁴²⁴

Examples (reports, testimonies, memories)

Example 36. Father Wojciech Gajdus about his arrival at KL Oranienburg – Sachsenhausen

The first directive announced by a certain boss is that one does not walk but run in the camp. Walking is allowed only in free time, i.e. at lunch time. Apart from this, trotting is obligatory for prisoners. And really, when after a while the first five and then the next are summoned to the secretaries, all are running for a short time and in small steps, as the distance is small and one cannot accelerate. I get into the block with my set of five. Each of us comes to the prisoners' secretaries. They establish our files. Having our personal data written down, we trot to the other half of the block. Here, it is much worse as “blacks”⁴²⁵ do their work. Shouts, cries, calling, laughter on the one hand – uncertainty and shyness on the other. At first, one has to leave his watch, money, jewellery, and get the receipt. At the second desk, you should leave clothes and underwear. You are allowed to keep only the belt or suspenders and shoes. There are many naked or half-naked people moving around and, among them, the “blacks” were in a good mood as

⁴²⁰ Ibidem, p. 155. A memory recollected by Stefan Świszczowski.

⁴²¹ Ibidem, p. 151. A memory recollected by Franciszek Targosz.

⁴²² Ibidem, p. 131. A memory recollected by Marian Mikołajczyk.

⁴²³ S. Grzesiuk: *Pięć lat...*, op. cit., p. 280.

⁴²⁴ Ibidem, p. 280.

⁴²⁵ This refers to SS-men in black uniforms.

usually. Having everything taken from you, you just stand with the shoes and the belt in hand. (...) In every other case, one would be seized by empty, loud, and liberating laughter at the sight of this masquerade – those too short skinny trousers, mournfully hanging from the skinny shins as if at half-mast, those too tight jackets that cannot be tied up or hanging on a skinny human pole as a too loose scarecrow among peas. No, it is not laughter which seizes you but a bitter, choking feeling which would take control of you at the sight of a dead man in a coffin in the clothes of a circus clown. There are more and more zebra-clowns. So many people and that emptiness, loneliness in your soul. We stand mute in rows like real sheep and rams, waiting for their butcher.

When the size of the first, already uniformed, bigger group reaches a hundred, an unknown prisoner appears with a black armband. There is an inscription: *Blockaltester* – senior block attendant. He is of medium height, his face would be almost girl-like if it was not for this ugly, surprisingly scruffy expression of his face and his mocking, spiteful eyes. He is about 35. His rocking, almost female, way of walking is in strange contrast with that odd, unparalleled expression of his mouth and eyes. His hands are small and narrow, but repulsive. No! This block attendant seems bad. He is accompanied by his helper, the so-called *Stubendltester*. He is an old man – about 50. Short, but sinewy and tightly built. His face is red as if it was burning. He observes us with a mocking smile, in which he shows scarce small, sharp teeth roots. The *Blockaltester*, called here ‘a block man’, gives commands: turn left, forward march. We go into the block assigned for us. It has the number 20. Encouraged by the prison clothes, the prisoners ask the block man questions to learn who he is, what his function is, and what the scope of his power is. Yet, he does not answer but only smiles sinisterly.

With the moment of reaching Block 20, the order *Knie beugt*⁴²⁶ is given. We crouch down, not knowing whether this is a joke or the first exercise. There is no joking here. Everything here is reality. After this order, another one is given: “Hands forward”. So, we sit like Easter rabbits maddened with this unusual posture. We do not change it even in the moment when the SS authority appears – a young man, maybe about 22. He walks among the rows, looks at the prisoners, and asks them about this and that. He approaches me as well, pushes me with his knee, and asks: “How do you like it here?” I keep quiet. Neither the posture – very uncomfortable and unusual for the body, nor my mood is suitable to tune in to his joke.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁶ Knie beugt – crouch down.

⁴²⁷ Ks. W. Gajdus: *Nr 20998...*, op. cit., p. 198-200.

Example 37. Kazimierz Tymiński about his arrival at KL Auschwitz

The SS-man who had hit me a minute ago stood in front of us and said in German with a cynical smile: You are in the concentration camp Auschwitz, from which there is only one way out – through the crematorium chimney. Here, you only have to work, work, and work again! Got it? – he asked viciously. Nobody said a word as these two words: “Auschwitz” and “crematorium” were enough to understand the sense of his speech. (...)

Suddenly, the SS-man standing near ordered us to clear the way as a ghostly caravan was leaving the camp. Some prisoners dressed in stripped clothes, harnessed in wire collars, were pulling and others, bending down, were pushing a big creaking cart, which was moving with resistance on the slippery road and fully loaded with naked dead bodies. The dead arms hanging between the rungs, the sunken eyes in skinny faces, the leg shins wrapped in skin... This big number of iced corpses sprinkled with frost made a ghostly impression. On the pile of dead bodies, a smiling prisoner was standing with his legs spread apart, dressed in a striped uniform and black bonnet on his head. He was shouting merrily to the poor ones who were pulling the cart:

– Los! Meine Kinder! Schneller! Schneller!⁴²⁸

The procession approached the slowly lifting barrier. The merry fellow gracefully jumped out of the cart and reported to the SS-man: – Acht Häftlinge mit zwanzig Leichen!⁴²⁹

Without much concern for the situation, the German patted the clown on his back familiarly, looked at the full cart and, almost with humour, said: – Jup! In Ordnung! Weiter fahren!⁴³⁰

The ropes tightened again, the creaking wheels moved, and the vehicle moved forward with difficulty, escorted by our terrified eyes.⁴³¹

Example 38. Andrzej Stanisławski about the functionaries in KL Majdanek

At that time, Field III was taken over by the *Lagerältester*⁴³² Peter Birzer. Quite soon, one of his favourite “games”, for which he gained fame, became the following. A group of prisoners were dashed into the space between the double

⁴²⁸ Los! Meine Kinder! Schneller! Schneller! – Go on! My kids! Faster! Faster!

⁴²⁹ Acht Häftlinge mit zwanzig Leichen! – Eight prisoners with twenty corpses!

⁴³⁰ Jup! In Ordnung! Weiter fahren! – Ok! In order! Keep going!

⁴³¹ K. Tymiński: *Uspokoić sen...*, op. cit., p. 13-14.

⁴³² Lagerältester – senior camp attendant.

barbed wire walls, which fenced off particular fields. The prisoners were told to clean the white crushed limestone, which was abundantly dumped here (against the white background, the SS "posts"⁴³³ on the watchtowers could better see and shoot at the potential escapees at night or at dusk). Birzer came to the fence, called an earlier chosen prisoner, and told him to go out of the wires. To "help" him get from under the wires on his hands and knees, Birzer even "obligingly" spread the wires out with his boot. When the prisoner was already sticking out halfway, Birzer used to hit him on his neck with the terrible truncheon which he never parted from even for a while. Then, he snagged the unconscious prisoner's neck with the stick handle, pulled him out of the wires and dragged him on the ground to the hydrant. He threw the prisoner into the full pool – almost one meter deep – and kept him under water with a stick or his boot (he wore high boots) until the unlucky man died. Then, he pulled out the dead body, again with his stick by the neck, and laid it next to the pool. After this, he went for another victim. In this way, later the "death hydrant" was surrounded by a horrible fan consisting of 12 or 15 dead prisoners. The SS-men laughed to tears at this "joke", which excited the deviant Birzer even more. It can be imagined what the prisoners between the wires felt, having seen Birzer's whole murderous procedure and knowing that, in a minute, he would come for one of them...⁴³⁴

Once I saw a prisoner caught in the Gärtnerei:⁴³⁵ an SS-man ordered him to eat a bucket of dirty raw lettuce and drink liquid manure. A couple of other prisoners had to face this as well. What seemed the strangest and the most horrible was that those murderers and executioners – SS-men or *kapos* – did not manifest any visible murderous qualities, they were not abnormal in the common sense of this word. Having killed one or several prisoners, they seemingly behaved in a normal way, they laughed and joked – they could even be loving husbands, fathers, sensitive sons, who wrote beautiful letters to their mothers or fathers and who – in their own way – felt very emotional about the letters which came from the Heimat⁴³⁶ from their families.⁴³⁷

⁴³³ Post – guard post.

⁴³⁴ A. Stanisławski: *Byłem świadkiem oskarżenia*. Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej, Warszawa 1980, p. 167-168.

⁴³⁵ Gärtnerei – the garden.

⁴³⁶ Heimat – the Homeland.

⁴³⁷ A. Stanisławski: *Byłem świadkiem...*, op. cit., p. 193.

Example 39. Kazimierz Tymiński about prisoners' check-up in KL Auschwitz

The check-in of prisoners was also done by the SS-man who supervised the block. He had the title of "Blockführer". The Germans loved titles, therefore – we had many "Führers" in the camp. Our "chief", apart from the normal cynicism of the SS-men, had a peculiar way of joking. When he was doing an inspection, he was walking among the rows with a short stick ending with a pin. From time to time, as if nothing happened, he pushed this sharp pin into a prisoner's buttock. Each time, he made a stupid face – of an innocent lamb – as if he had not known what had happened. When the stung delinquent jumped aside, the joker shouted in German – "Easy! You stupid dog!"

Seeing this, I thought how willingly I would push that pin into his Hitler-ite ass.⁴³⁸

Example 40. Czesław Ostańkiewicz about the *muslims'* room in KL Auschwitz

I remember the following incident which happened in the *muslims'* room. The evening came and Gosk had left the room – he must have been on his raid around the camp. A certain teacher told us about some students who had gone abroad to search for weapons. Somebody else started the story about a postilion from Gdańsk, who had not wanted to take off the eagle from his cap even while being led to an execution.

During this tale, the *pfleger*⁴³⁹ Solich entered the room. He was a Silesian renegade who was waiting for the acceptance of his application to the SS. He stopped at the door and, in a sharp and deep-throat voice – imitating the SS-führers, shouted:

– "Shut the Polish snouts!"

– "Machine guns onto the roof. Cover the streets!" – shouted an unconscious Targowski in reply. He swayed but raised his clenched fist.

– "He's gone nuts" – someone lying near me laughed. – "The attorney's gone goddamn nuts."

Gosk, who had just come, laughed as well. Solich roared out of awe. He corrected the bonnet on his huge red-haired head and dashed to the ill man. We knew he would grab him by his throat, lead him to the bathroom, and drown him in a washtub for washing legs. Solich was known for this conduct each time he had dealt with shouting patients.

⁴³⁸ K. Tymiński: *Uspokoić sen...*, op. cit., p. 21.

⁴³⁹ *Pfleger* – a nurse.

– “Look at Targowski. Observe him carefully! This is how a Polish intellectual gets mad.” – said Piątkowski, a seaman, and before Solich came up, he took the delirious companion’s arm and laid him down gently among us. Solich started to withdraw towards the door, because the man, about whom none of us knew much, stood in his way. It was not known why the functionaries were afraid of Piątkowski (provided that was his real name). It seemed Solich and Gosk would now start “cleaning the mess”. Fortunately for us all, the paramedics Hordyński and “Pokrzywiński” ran towards us as they had been alarmed by someone. The two laid Targowski on a stretcher.

– “We are taking him out of here only to let him die as a human being” – I was told by Major Kosiba, who was registered as a stove maker in the camp. He invited me to a lecture in his room. I promised to come, though I felt very bad.⁴⁴⁰

Example 41. Kazimierz Tymiński about the trans-shipment of potatoes in KL Auschwitz

One day at noon, the SS-man – the chef of the kitchen – unexpectedly came with potatoes. He told us to stop work and turn up in front of the barrack. In spite of thick rain, we marched in a column towards the railway ramp, where we saw about two hundred prisoners already gathered there. Due to their armbands and yellow-red stars, I recognized them as Jews. They were completely soaked, badly dressed, and they were shivering out of cold. A large group of SS-men and several German prisoners – functionaries were standing around them. Each of them was holding a heavy pole. Suddenly, I heard an order issued in German: – In three hours, all the potatoes from the wagons have to be placed in the warehouse. One group – onto the wagons for loading, all others for carrying. Hurry up to work! (...)

All those on duty behaved like mad dogs, but while running, I drew attention to one SS-man. He distinguished himself with his particular sadism. He laughed loudly if he managed to trip somebody up and if somebody from the running group fell down, he hit him on the back with satisfaction, forcing him to get up. Therefore, when – during the assembly – I saw this scoundrel with a bunch of thick ropes, I figured out that he was preparing a new trick. He came up to the *kapo* and told him to cut the rope into two-metres-long pieces and, then, to tie them to the legs of Jews lying in the ditch. Some of them were already dead, some had open eyes and looked horrified. The *kapo* gave an order to pull all of them out of the ditch to the road as he wanted to count how many there were. One of the dragged tried to raise his head so that it did not hit the uneven ground. This was noticed by “the inventor of the rope system”, the degenerate SS-man.

⁴⁴⁰ C. Ostańkiewicz: *Ziemia parująca...*, op. cit., p. 90-91.

He stopped the column and ordered to be given a spade. He put its sharp edge on the throat of this innocent man and pushed it hard with his boot. He cut his larynx easily. Blood burst and poured on the muddy road. This took place a few metres from me. I saw the eyes, which were still alive and begged for mercy, fading out, being cut off from the heart. And I looked at the pleased SS clown, who said aloud in German: – “Now, you will not lift your head anymore! Goddamn you!”

The prisoners who witnessed this looked at the monstrous show with horror. Some turned their heads away. The Germans commented on it with a joke and smile, and their commander announced: – “All in order! Let’s go to the camp”.⁴⁴¹

Example 42. Józef Kondyś about punishment in Buchenwald LA III

Under hardly any pretext, the SS-men executed “justice” for “offences” of the prisoners in the special camp; they often even faked “crimes”. Once, an alleged theft of bread took place in the warehouse. Obviously, it was impossible to detect the “thief”. Thus, the special camp was punished “as an example”. The *Lagerführer* Rödl with the whole SS staff appeared. He made a short speech and then he chose 20 delinquents from the row. They were put in the front and, one by one, stretched on a “*bock*”⁴⁴², and were punished by being given 25 hits. One of the selected for this punishment was a seventy-year-old rabbi from Vienna. It happened that he was imprisoned here with his son. The son asked Rödl for an exchange – for punishing him instead of his father. The *Lagerführer* agreed. Yet, when the son was taken from the stool, Rödl said: – And now the father. The SS-men burst with laughter. The old man died under the hits of the bull whip.⁴⁴³

Example 43. Father Wojciech Gajdus about the guards in KL Stutthof

In front of each barrack, there are diligently swept snowdrifts, which after a couple of days grew into large-sized mounds and after another couple of days formed ice fossils that would have to be crushed with a hoe and carried endlessly. Intending to employ priests in the fresh air and separate them from other prisoners, our authorities decided to give them this job with the snow. Every day in the morning, a big group, consisting of about 60 very strangely dressed figures, left for the warehouse, from which they took tools, and went to the yard at the feet of the old people’s house and shovelled thousands of thousands of cubic meters of snow. The snow collected in the camp was taken to our yard as if to a snow waste dump and our duty was to throw it away to the forest – behind the fence.

⁴⁴¹ K. Tymiński: *Uspokoić sen...*, op. cit., p. 71-72.

⁴⁴² Bock, goat, piano – a wooden desk for executing the punishment of caning.

⁴⁴³ W. Czarnecki, Z. Zonik: *Walczący obóz...*, op. cit., p. 75.

For my eyes, the sight of the group which every day passed the guard post and reported such and such a number of *Schutzhaftlings*⁴⁴⁴ did not seem funny – just the contrary. The idea of humour of the young guards, laughing out loud at the ragged and oddly looking group of priests was quite different from mine. It is true that our appearance was strange, but not due to the strangeness of humour but of tragedy. Did Father Jan Ryglewicz of blessed memory, who was over 70, look funny when he – neither in his steps nor powers – could keep the march pace of young 30-years-olds? Was it funny to look at the priests who, due to their daily work in snow reaching over the knees, had wet cassocks and tied or buckled them at the waist, showing their trousers full of holes? Or maybe the guards were amused by the sight of frost-blue faces or swollen frostbitten hands, out of which the spades fell? Or they were also amazed and amused that some prisoners had only ragged shirts and vests under summer coats? Those young guards, so willing to laugh, cannot have known that all the best cassocks were confiscated in Toruń by Strauss to turn them into elegant SS uniforms. Or maybe the reason of their merriness were such priests as Father Antoś Nowański of blessed memory and others who had lost their shoes and now wore a dress under which you could see open clogs, the so called “*holzpantofle*”, and bare blue heels sticking out of their last pair of ragged socks. Whatever was the reason of your laughter, you the rulers, my sadness grew every day when I observed you, passing by you and seeing your wild delight. So, we threw away snow over the fence – from morning (from 8 to 12 a. m.) to nightfall (from 2 p.m.). The hard work went on. The cold reached and passed minus 25°C. The wind-lined clothes let the cold and January frost storms in and out. Yet, the stomach and insides were already not hunger-lined but eaten away. After an hour of standing in one place and passing the snow from one’s hands to others, the toes and legs to knees and even upper thighs were turning into an insensitive block of ice.⁴⁴⁵

Example 44. Father Wojciech Gajdus about a funeral parody in KL Stutthof

We are going to our daily occupation – the snow. The afternoon seems so long. Time seems to crawl at a turtle’s pace. Every few minutes, the very few owners of smuggled watches have to patiently announce the hours, which pass so slowly. Wilhelm, the vice-commander of the camp, enters into view. He has a dry, Prussian face, resembling Wilhelm II. He calls our *kapo*. Swinging the spades fast, we follow the conversation. After a while, an order is heard: “Put spades

⁴⁴⁴ *Schutzhaftlings* – prisoners from *Schutzhaft-lager* – a concentration camp for those who were preventively arrested.

⁴⁴⁵ Ks. W. Gajdus: *Nr 20998...*, op. cit., p. 114-115.

into the stools, towards the camp – in fours, forward march!” We go deep into the camp. Our other mates, employed all over the camp, join us. There are over seventy of us. Some prisoners stop with amazement, others cease to work and look to where the priests are being led. We head for the third zone – the hospital. Wilhelm is walking near us. He says briefly and intermittently: “Take the dead man to the mortuary and sing to him evenly and well”. Behind his narrow lips, the fangs sparkle mockingly. He leaves us and runs to inform the command about the funeral comedy he has staged. The windows of the command building became full of spectators, who are full of delightful expectation of what they will see in a moment. In the meantime, six priests put the naked corpse of one of the prisoners into the coffin. As it is too small, it is necessary to bend the dead man’s legs and push the lid. As if in an apologizing tone, the *kapo* quietly clarifies things to the dead man: “Brother, this is your last inconvenience, but instead – you will have a beautiful funeral”. Our shoulders are burdened with a simple coffin, the simplest, made of a few planks. It floats high as a black banner, as a black voiceless complaint, such a simple one, without a cross and a wreath.

The funeral is attended by a boy, the 14-year-old son of the deceased, who was imprisoned in the camp with his father. The *kapo* takes him by the hand with a fatherly gesture. We line up in ranks of four and – in a minute – the mournful *Miserere* is heard evenly, loudly, and rhythmically. This has been the first time it is sung in this camp. In our spirits, we dedicate it to those who have been taken to the grave since the beginning of the camp. Emotions want to hold up the voice. They sink in the powerful chorale, which now – after harmonizing all the voices – flows to God. The camp freezes for a moment, work has ceased to be performed. The heads of those who are passing by us and working in the yard can be seen. The hands are raised to make a solemn sign of the holy cross – slowly and reverently. This unique funeral, staged by Wilhelm as a comedy, is accompanied by a strong, the strongest, impression of a concentration camp. Against the will of the initiator, it turns into a manifestation. In the meantime, we reach the windows of the command. They are full of heads, full of SS-men who burst with laughter. The *kapo* turns to us – serious and focused – and shouts in half-voice: “Sing evenly and well”. The air is torn by the sob of the new stanza: *Ecce enim, veritatem dilexisti: incerta et occulta sapientiae tuae manifestasti mihi.*⁴⁴⁶

While singing this, we come under the command windows. Yet, what is going on? The mouths open a minute ago to sing and blaspheme, are twisted

⁴⁴⁶ *Ecce enim, veritatem dilexisti: incerta et occulta sapientiae tuae manifestasti mihi.* – Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.

in a grin now. The tragic note of *Miserere* is hanging like terror, like a warning. The hands raised to make a gesture, fall down. The faces, so laughing a moment ago, have become grey and twisted in a spasm of sudden seriousness. The holy chorale overcomes the devils. As poured with cold water, they are standing in the windows. Not a single smile will get out, because the terror of death, which dominates the song, has put its firm foot on their hard and haughty neck and dampened the breathing. The windows are shutting with cracks. Their craving for a comedy has flown away. We put the dead man in the mortuary and return to the job of shovelling snow, with uplifted hearts and reassured souls.⁴⁴⁷

Example 45. Father Wojciech Gajdus about the functionaries in KL Oranienburg-Sachsenhausen

None of the Prussian corporals in the history of the Reich can dare to compare to Hugon.⁴⁴⁸ Running, whether slow or fast, does not dare to break the even rank with your neighbour on the left or right and with the one in front of you. Punishing for tiny infringements is Hugon's speciality. "So, you don't want it?" – he will laugh silvery. "Good!" – he adds merrily. Then: *Knie beugt* (rabbits) and *Hüpfen* (make frog jumps in the rabbit position). The whole squad rocks while jumping like a group of kangaroos. Young and fit sportsmen do this effortlessly maybe for 100 metres. One needs to be young, strong and have a healthy heart to handle such exercises. Yet, the frog belongs to the daily Oranienburg repertoire. Obviously, all the suffering from heart diseases, the old, and those who had not practiced sport probably since school times are not able to meet the requirements of this figure. Hugon is merciless. Blood is buzzing in our temples, and our calves are seized in a painful cramp. Hours pass by and we still perform the frog jump.

And the ill and old? They sit like rabbits under the block and try to relieve the stiffening bones by kneeling with one knee. One explains to Hugon that he has a hernia, another that he has a serious heart defect, still another – that he is 70. Hugon smiles gracefully and says: "I'm not interested in all this", leaving us under the "care" of Gustav,⁴⁴⁹ and he sees to those rabbits in front of the block. And he orders running, then spinning around onto our dying breath, then running again, interwoven with the commands: get down, get up. Each of his words co-occurs with a kick – expertly performed, knocking one out immediately. He kicks

⁴⁴⁷ Ks. W. Gajdus: *Nr 20998...*, op. cit., p. 120-121.

⁴⁴⁸ Blokowy Hugo Krey – The block attendant, staying in the camp for seven years, after being detained as a criminal.

⁴⁴⁹ Sztubowy Gustav – The block assistant, staying in the camp for seven years, after being detained as an anti-social, unemployed tramp.

with satisfaction at the heart area of all those who are lying on the ground out of exhaustion. When the heart is protected, he will be satisfied with the belly as a shield, and finally – with one strong blow between the legs – he will knock down even the strongest man. And when one is lying, he will make him unconscious from the pain. Hugon is strong. He can knock out the strongest man with one punch in the face, then he steps on him and tramples his chest and belly.

Having done with the ill, he comes to us – who are doing frog jumps and crawling on the ground. The command: *Kriechen* – crawl as amphibians – is uttered. You have to do it thoroughly, which means your whole body sticks to the ground and, bouncing with your legs and torso, you push forward the whole body in a snake movement. Then a new command: running, running. Hugon shouts: faster, faster. The column is dashing as a herd of horses. Coal powder is lifted in a cloud. Sweat is dripping on the forehead, face, and the whole body, as there are no breaks in these gymnastics. The running ends with an order: Lie down, snore and blow. Blue, red, sweating faces are lying on the ground. All are snoring and blowing into coal powder. In a moment: Get up. We do. Hugon laughs like a child who sees a new toy, as we are all as dirty as chimney sweepers. Hugo likes this game so much, that after a while we have to repeat it *da capo*.⁴⁵⁰ The number of the mates, exhausted with these stunts – mostly old men, standing in front of the block is increasing. We – the still running, jumping, lying down, blowing, and getting up again to run with the rest of our lungs – are likely to be still alive tomorrow, but those – who knows?⁴⁵¹

Example 46. Father Wojciech Gajdus about a guard in KL Oranienburg-Sachsenhausen

We were just having lunch when Father Demski returned to the room. At the sight of this disfigured ghost, walking with effort towards his place, a deadly silence fell. He was approaching his place and being asked by others' eyes; he waved his hand carelessly and smiled. I can still see this radiant smile. He said: *omnia pati, nil dolore* – bear everything without complaining, and sat down in his place as if nothing had happened.

On the next day, which was the second last of his life, he was ordered to make frog jumps. He replied to his persecutors that he was already unable to bend down to a squat. Actually, each time he tried it, he fell down. So, the guards, led by Ernst, took him to the block. There, they told him to drop his pants down and, seeing his

⁴⁵⁰ Da capo – Since the beginning.

⁴⁵¹ Ks. W. Gajdus: *Nr 20998...*, op. cit., p. 209-210.

terrible swellings, started laughing and mimicking him. The next day was the last in the life of the physically exhausted and morally mishandled priest. He was still present at the morning roll call. However, he rested on his companions all the time, unable to stand on his own legs. He was fading away every hour. He fell asleep and then woke up, being more unconscious than conscious. He was led to the evening roll call by friends. Leaning against the block wall, yellow, with bloodshot eyes, he was slowly dying. At the end of the roll call, he collapsed and passed away. We laid him next to our living quadrangle. The beams of the setting sun gently touched his face and changed it. It blossomed with beauty and serenity. He was noticed by a guard, one of the murderers. He came, looked wildly at him and at us, and – bursting with emotion and laughter – shouted: “Did this preacher die?... and now they will say he’s a martyr. You, minister! Look, over there – in the corner of your block, your Jesus Christ is standing, smoking a cigarette and laughing at you”. We stood still, deeply in prayer. After a while, having uttered another long sequence of cynical remarks about the deceased, he came to us with the demand that one of his companions had to move forward and give a funeral speech.⁴⁵²

Example 47. Adolf Gawalewicz about a male nurse’s joke in KL Auschwitz

Another incident can serve as an example of the incredible humour which can come into being only in the waiting room beforegassing.⁴⁵³ It was like that: a moment ago, some cars pulled up and now the loading is taking place. The block yard is already empty, the gate is closed. I go out of the den in which I hid for the time of selection. A terrifying silence hangs in the block, which was crowded and full of shouts and moans an hour ago. There were only a couple of us – the living ones. You need to do something with yourself! To smoke! I have a piece of a cigarette, bargained through a block window from people from the *lager*.

There is a lot of soup in our block now, we are unable to eat it. Food is distributed according to the roll call state, so it includes rations for people who do not need it any longer – they have gone to gas or died by “natural death”, which is more frequent here than in the *lager*. I take a couple of puffs of makhorka and newspaper smoke. I am caught by one of the paramedics, a Czech nicknamed “Pepan”. He has just returned to the block from the gate for something.

– “So, you, such and such intellectual (terrible offence), are smoking and we are... saving you, you *muslim*. Then, go to the gas.”

⁴⁵² Ibidem, p. 232-233.

⁴⁵³ This memory pertains to the events in Block 7, the so called *Isolierstation*, in KL Auschwitz in May 1942, where all the prisoners intended to be gassed were taken from the whole camp. The author was taken there as a *muslim* and survived, as one of the very few.

He leads me behind the gate. Some of the convicted are already sitting in the cars, others are rushed by the SS-men, block attendants, and dogs. Pepan leaves me in front of the gate and walks away smiling. The SS-man who directs the transport points at me and orders:

– “Los, Los!” – and he gestures towards the car.

Piasecki dares to save me again and, pretending a heavy blow, he shouts:

– “Get back to the block, you, you bastard, do the work” – and with a kick leads me back behind the gate. Probably, I will never forget this joke of Pepan’s.

In Pepan’s defence, it should be mentioned that what was still smouldering in this horrible block was gallows (or more adequately “gas”) humour, which corresponded to its climate. The humour which is absolutely unavailable and incomprehensible to normal people, living in normal conditions. For instance, I am not innocent as well. In the time just before the war, a sentimental tango was in fashion. It started with the words: “Życie bajka zaklęta, gdy kochają dziewczęta [Life is an enchanted fable when girls love]”... and then: “Jest jedna jedyna, którą kocham najwięcej [There is the only one whom I love the most]”. We used to sing a merry song to the tune of this tango: “There are certain gasworks where we will all meet, Where will we all meet, maybe tomorrow – who knows?”

Unfortunately, this was the cruel truth.⁴⁵⁴

Example 48. Andrzej Stanisławski about shows in KL Majdanek

In this period, I made friends with Zdzisiek Cynkin and Kazik Kołodziejski, two Varsovians with whom I came in one transport from the Pawiak. We were brought together by a song which we all liked humming and then singing in a few voices – we even called our trio the *Crematorium Boys*, which in a certain sense expressed the uniqueness of this situation. However, it turned out that other prisoners, quite unknown to us, very eagerly listened to our vocal productions performed on two upper bunks in the block where Zdzisiek and Kazek slept. We used to be asked for singing a particular melody, some new tunes were suggested, and other old songs were recalled.

It often happened that we performed after the evening roll call, we hummed different tunes, and there was a carefully listening prisoners’ audience around us. In a way, we “became” famous, we were invited on various occasions (name days, birthdays, a good parcel from home) to sing, which we did willingly. This harmless “mania” of ours was preserved till the end of the camp community – to April 1944, when Kazik was transported to Auschwitz or Gross Rosen.

⁴⁵⁴ A. Gawalewicz: *Refleksje...*, op. cit., p. 91-92.

This “mania” also linked our trio with the bonds of strong male friendship – a feeling really required in a concentration camp. Only in such a well-matched team was it possible to survive the camp, to help and support each other in difficult moments, in approaching breakdowns, without letting one of the group die.

Much later, in Field I and with different people, “The Peanut Gallery” came into being. It used to provide occasion for mocking the Jerries, laughing at ourselves, breaking with humour or spite the inner nervous tensions which might bring unexpected and harmful effects. In “The Peanut Gallery”, some older mates under the leadership of Kazik Nowak recalled various humorous and satirical sayings of the luminaries of Polish poetry or satire, they made their own texts, sometimes quite good – it seems to me. This is a piece of camp poetry – to be precise, “committed” on quite a different occasion:

*Oh, you the opposite sex, how much they overrate you,
the one will learn who hasn't had you. Your beauty
in its full I see and describe, as I know you.*

The author has no aspiration to write an invocation;

Just to relax for a while, he writes those smooth rhymes

In honour of the other sex's grace. Here they are:

In fours, like at a roll call, they are arranged...⁴⁵⁵

Example 49. Michał Maksymilian Borwicz about songs in KZ Janowska

The most popular *lager* song was sung to the tune of “Krakowiak [The Cracovienne]”, with an interestingly paraphrased lyrics and a gallows chant before each stanza. The song was heard everywhere.

It was also played by the camp band – the soloist sang the text, obviously omitting the bloodiest words. Other words about certain people were added instead. These additions (matching the taste of SS-men) went towards stupid obscenity. The original text had a different meaning:

We are not such and such,

We from Janów work camp,

Now the world doesn't want to know us –

... ..⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵⁵ A. Stanisławski: *Pole śmierci...*, op. cit., p. 154-156.

⁴⁵⁶ Jacek Kuroń provides full songs and the changed version of the last stanza:

Action in May, action in February,

Your wife and kid behind the wire

The heart wants to jump out of pain

Dick in your ass, for fuck's sake. J. Kuroń: *Autobiografia*. Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, Warszawa 2009, p. 22.

*When you're dragged from the rank,
 You'll even get no coffin
 And you'll sleep in the "sands" –
, ...!
 "Action" in August, "action" in February,
 Wives, children – "behind the wire" march!
 The heart wants to jump out of pain,
, ...!*

These dots substitute some obscene words ending each stanza. It was rare in the camp not to use vulgar words. A long speech is needed to explain the reasons. The mongrel word better matched the dog's fate. Some felt offended and explained that the omnipresence of such words does not comply with the horrible tragedy of the time and situation. Still, a concentration camp was not a noble lounge. In the song above, this formal vulgarity (including accidental rhymes), this neighbourhood and mixture of elements, this simplicity of the expressed tragedy alongside triviality, aptly reflect the *lager* reality. The reality in which the eternal issue of life and death, friendship, love, and hate constantly imposed themselves, being considered in the climate of physical and moral slurry. I came across this song already in the camp. Its author was said to have died by the so-called "natural death" – of typhus. It used to be said that he had composed and sang the song on his bunk in the hours before his death.⁴⁵⁷ (...)

The vulgarity of the text was a shout of despair and, in the orchestra additions, it turned into terribly flat pornography. The SS-men listened to it with real admiration. Sometimes, they learned the whole stanzas and chanted them. And this was the third side of the camp reality: the stanzas created to comply with the SS-men's taste. It used to be exactly such. The song reached the Lviv ghetto as well. During the rule of the bandit Grzymko, who regularly broke windows and stabbed duvets (both for "hygienic reasons"), it was often sung:

*Morning roll call, evening roll call,
 Feathers are flying in the ghetto whole,
 But we are told to stand, etc.*

There were also lines in the German language in the camp. It was said that those stanzas had been given in a surge of "good mood" by one of the SS-men.

While quoting the fragments and variants of the discussed song not in the camp conditions, it is obvious to put dots instead of the vulgar words of the chorus. Yet, they cannot be left unsaid. Those words, along with a line of decorative

⁴⁵⁷ M.M. Borwicz: *Literatura...*, op. cit., p. 32-33.

epithets, were slogans shouted at every occasion by everyone – from SS-men, through brigadiers, *vorarbeiters*, *lager* policemen, security guards, to the humblest of camp prisoners. Who felt offended by them could only be advised to ... check out of the *lager*.

In those phrases, the vocabulary contents had no significance and nobody even thought of them. They were rather a meaningless spell. The proper appeal – from rage to sentimentality (!!!) – was given to them by intonation.⁴⁵⁸

Example 50. Adolf Gawalewicz about songs in KL Auschwitz

If someone asked me a question what memories I associate most with the first months of my stay in the *lager* (which brings about further associations), I would answer (funny, isn't it?): a song, *ein Lied*. I can immediately see myself in the vestibule of Block 7 (later labelled as 22) – bare-footed, in underwear, after “washing” in the earlier prepared wooden vessels previously used for marmalade and now filled with melting snow – standing and singing with others: “*Lori, lori... schön sind die Mädchen von siebzehn, achtzehn Jahr...*”, or trying to pretend, like others, that I am yodelling: “*Schwarzbraun ist die Haselnuss, schwarzbraun bin auch ich, schwarzbraun muss mein Mädels sein, g'rade so wie ich... Hola rio...*” I can feel, see and hear how, terribly damaging the text, we are humming the “camp anthem”, which we were taught soon after coming here and with a lot of effort to console our hearts:

*Im Lager Auschwitz war ich zwar
 Hola rio, hola rio,
 Nicht einen Monat, Tag und Jahr,
 Hola rio*
Ob Arbeitsdienst, ob Sport und Zwang,

*Doch stets ein frohes Lied erklang
 doch denk' ich froh,
 Doch denk' ich froh,
 Gemut und gern, gemut und gern,
 An meine lieben in der Fern... (...)*

For the prisoners who came to the concentration camp not knowing the German language at all (and they constituted the vast majority) enforced singing, apart from all other problems, was an additional torture. Without a doubt, for the listeners – this “singing” was not delightful as well. This “singing” took

⁴⁵⁸ Ibidem, p. 34-35.

place not only in the block or on the way to and from work, but it often happened that “the whole camp” sang. Apart from those lying in hospital blocks, all the prisoners of the (at that time still) small camp, gathered on the roll call square, every day waited impatiently whether – after the hardships of the day and of the evening roll call – they would be allowed to get to their blocks at last or whether they would hear the command: – *Ein Lied!* – a song.

This specific love of singing, or rather forcing the prisoners to sing, had been gradually decreasing until the mourning time after the Stalingrad defeat, when the camp authorities issued a formal ban on singing in that period. Since that time, they basically did not force prisoners to sing.

Coming back to that “anthem”: *Im Lager Auschwitz war ich zwar...* “So, I was in the Auschwitz camp”, this “anthem” (in big quotation marks) was common for all Nazi concentration camps, but the name of the camp was dotted.

I listened to this gloomy song and was forced to pretend that I sang it only in the first months of 1941 – in the period of my introductory stay in the *lager*. Later, the “anthem” was forgotten. The song was gloomy mostly due to its contents, which terrified the already terrified newcomers. In an almost literal translation, the “anthem” said:

*So I was in the Auschwitz camp,
 Hola rio, hola rio, (merrily)
 Not for one day, month, or year
 Hola rio, hola rio,
 Despite the work duty (2x)
 Despite “sport” and coercion,
 A merry song is heard all the time.
 Yet, I think merrily and willingly
 About my loved ones who are far away.⁴⁵⁹*

Example 51. Czesław Ostańkiewicz about songs in KL Auschwitz

When the SS-man went away, the silence fell – such that is heard in gas chambers a couple of minutes after throwing a cyclone in there. It was broken by a frivolous camp song thrown among us by Kański’s revellers. It mocked the crematorium, death, work, roll calls, hunger, *vorarbeiters*, *kapos*, and ourselves:

*The brick chimney stands
 But we’ll screw it...*

⁴⁵⁹ A. Gawalewicz: *Refleksje...*, op. cit., p. 59-61.

The strongly worded chorus was picked up by the audience:

Stand all around the clock

And at midday stand (stiff as a cock)...

The chorus talked about roll calls – the most horrible of all *lager* nightmares. About standing in rain and drizzle, in heat – when lips cracked and one wanted to moan for a drop of liquid, in cold – when one wants to give rest to tired legs, going numb out of fatigue, in the fear how long a roll call can last – three quarters of an hour? Three hours? Three days? It sometimes happened.

And in the fear of what it will bring, as it was most often during the roll call when the convicted to death were led in front of our eyes. We stood with uncovered heads, frozen, suffocating in the summer heat, unshaved, scruffy, dirty, stinking of *durchfall*,⁴⁶⁰ and pus leaking from unwashed wounds. All together: political prisoners, antisocial ones, thieves, intellectuals, children, peasants, seniors, invalids, sportsmen... *häftlings*. We stood in silence, disgusting in our helplessness, our common fear, common hate, and the awareness that we would never forget.

Three times a day, the German command: "Mützen ab"⁴⁶¹ and waiting for the most desired: "Abtreten".⁴⁶² I undressed my head for an SS footman with a well-drilled and humiliatingly agreeable move. "We've taught them (which means me as well!) respect for Germans" – my *blockführer* praised the efficiency of taking the caps off and he did not understand that he was teaching contempt. In my head, I repeated the chorus of the obscene but O U R song:

The brick chimney stands

But we'll screw it...

And in a moment of hunger:

They pour coffee and pour soup

But most often they beat our ass...

And obviously with the chorus: "*Stand round the clock...*", necessarily with this chorus, dashing, in defiance of its contents, with a note of contradiction and rebellion, with mockery concerning the *kapo* who "pours soup", the SS-man who "beats our ass", the goddamn "Mützen ab", the chimney which threw out over our heads the snake-like puffs of smoke coming from the burned bodies of close people – our friends and mates.⁴⁶³

⁴⁶⁰ Durchfall – diarrhoea.

⁴⁶¹ Mützen ab – caps off.

⁴⁶² Abtreten – dismissed.

⁴⁶³ C. Ostańkiewicz: *Ziemia parująca...*, op. cit., p. 78-79.

Example 52. Teodor Musioł about shows in KL Dachau

Christmas used to give an impulse to prepare various shows or celebrations. The holiday was celebrated differently in different blocks. On Christmas Eve in 1940, the block writer Gorbach gave a show with merry songs and guitar playing in the penal block 17. It is easy to imagine what emotions were hidden under the pretended merriness of the prisoners.⁴⁶⁴ (...)

On New Year Eve in 1943, a New Year satirical play "Pan Twardowski [Mr. Twardowski]" written by Leon Kniaziołucki was secretly performed. It was a spiteful satire about the relationships in the camp. Mr. Twardowski came down from the moon as a "Zugang" straight to the roll call square in "Dachauovo". Here, he met Karl Kapp and Martin Schaferski (the *Lagerälteste* well-known for their persecutions of prisoners), negotiated with Sister Pia (who took care of German priests) and Sepp Heyden – a *kapo*. Finally, he went to Egon Zill (the *Lagerführer*), to whom he sold his soul (an allusion to the *Volksdeutsche*), and ran away back to the moon. The play was illustrated with a few successful songs, performed by "the revellers' choir". (...)

On Sunday afternoons, there were concerts in different blocks. Some special ensembles visited particular blocks with the repertoire comprising singing, music, and recitation. The ones who recited were Włodzimierz Skoczylas from Łódź (Polish poetry) and a Czech, Rostilar Major (Czech poetry). (...) Franciszek Okroy sang funny songs with the lyrics of Alojzy Farnik, and Mieczysław Kulawik gave violin concerts.⁴⁶⁵

Example 53. Józef Seweryn about the shows in KL Auschwitz

The biggest (...) interest and admiration were brought about by the shows of Jakub Kozielczuk, a Jew from the area of Białystok – the *kapo* of Block 11. With the naked upper part of the body, he lay on the ground. He was covered by some wooden planks attached to each other, which appeared to be a bridge. He held this structure a bit above himself on his hands and legs, which were bent a bit at knees, and then a passenger car went over it. Other stunts involved ripping out chains or bending iron bars. But what bars? Claussen, who was an organiser of sport life for the SS-men in the camp (as they had competitions in various sports, preferably in shooting, of course), tried to lift such a bar. In vain. He managed to do it only with the support of another SS-man. Kozielczyk lifted such

⁴⁶⁴ T. Musioł: *Dachau 1933-1945*. Instytut Śląski w Opolu, Wydawnictwo Śląsk, Opole-Katowice 1968, p. 225.

⁴⁶⁵ T. Musioł: *Dachau...*, op. cit., p. 226.

a piece of iron with childish easiness, he put it on his neck and bent the ends so that the bar could form an irregular circle. (...)

Kozielczuk's repertoire was enriched by the shows of prisoner Czesio Sowul – a comedian. Like a circus clown, he joked around, pretending he was falling down, stumbling, dropping on his stomach. He was disguised as an ice-cream vendor, chimney sweeper, or cook. He showed simple people. However, he also had one stunt which was only apparently merry. He climbed the roof of the camp kitchen with a pole or a brush, which helped him to keep his balance. He pretended that somebody was pushing him and that he lost something. He corrected his cap and trousers like Chaplin – and was on the edge of death all the time.

How did he keep his balance? Not to fall down, not to get killed? I knew him very well. He asked me: "Do they, the prisoners, know that it is about them – the struggle I conduct on the roof? For keeping up, for verticality?". "For moral verticality as well?" – I asked. "Obviously. Maybe even mostly for this. Yet, I do not fall".⁴⁶⁶

Example 54. Father Wojciech Gajdus about prisoners' broadcasting

"Hello! Hello! This is your "reporter"⁴⁶⁷ speaking! To celebrate the New Year, the management of our radio station wishes all the best to all its listeners. May the New Year with God's help to free us from the occupier's heavy grasp which affects us so much and to let us eagerly take up the reconstruction of our ruined Homeland. The "speaker" attaches his own private wishes to those of the management and, after announcing the official part of this evening's show, he will present – in a genius, poetic, Częstochowa-like way⁴⁶⁸ – his wishes addressed to all the inhabitants of this palace and to everyone separately. If anyone of the nicest and most honourable listeners has any antisocial offences on their conscience, they had better fall asleep immediately not to hear the others' laughter. I want to emphasize as well that due to ideological reasons I cannot agree to skip some nice stanzas, even for one original cigarette of genuine tobacco. Be-

⁴⁶⁶ J. Seweryn: *Uślugiwałem esesmanom w Auschwitz. Wspomnienia więźnia komanda SS-Unterkunftskammer*. Oficyna Wydawnicza Mireki, Warszawa-Kraków 2017, p. 164-165.

⁴⁶⁷ The text of the radio show from the Nazi prison in Fort VII in Toruń was preserved in the author's memories. As the "reporter", he wanted to bring some delight into the prisoners' life through such evening talks and to pass down the information he had heard. He did the same in KL Stutthof and KL Oranienburg.

⁴⁶⁸ See: footnote 361.

cause of the possibility of being overheard by the enemy and of the “speaker’s” inborn modesty, you are kindly requested to refrain from applause and too loud manifestation of your temperament. Having this delightful radio show in mind, we recommend not to yield to sleep and patiently survive the dull but necessary announcements.

A war announcement. On the Western front – intensified artillery activity on the Siegfried and Maginot line. The victorious army of “our” commander is awaiting warmer days to dash and – with the whole power collected for long months – to crush the Maginot line and invade France.

Some respectable fortification men claim that, similarly to World War I, in this war as well Germans will violate the neutrality of Belgium and the (weakly fortified) Netherlands and – with a rapid attack – will move deep into France. Others, no less serious or respectable, statesmen claim that the Germans will be crushed by the French. Please, refrain from a burst of enthusiasm as I hear “a green one”⁴⁶⁹ coming here. I announce a one-minute break.

Hallo, hallo. He’s gone. Still other really serious, respectable and honoured politicians are of the opinion that the war cannot end in 1940 as this would worry Strauss too much, because he would not be “the commander” any more. Yet, we think and we always stress this at the end of the war announcement that: *Ceterum censeo Germaniam esse delendam*.⁴⁷⁰ We are forced to cancel the performance of our famous singer Lucyna Szczepańska, scheduled for this evening, due to the big washing which is taking place in Poznań.

The current news. The prisoners who clean *Ueberprügelungsraum*⁴⁷¹ reported that they had heard “the greens” talking about the transportation of *Pfaffen*⁴⁷² along with the rest of the *verfluchte polnische Intelligenz*⁴⁷³ to another place of isolation. The possibility of such transportation seems to be indicated also by the intensified activity of the commission working in *Ueberprügelungsraum* and by Strauss, who walks the cells and asks for the scientific census of the prisoners and notes it down thoroughly. The third fact indicating the possibility of sending us deep into the Reich was bringing to our fort a group of prisoners from

⁴⁶⁹ A prisoner-criminal who collaborated with the camp authorities and was labelled with a green patch (the colour of which indicated the prisoner’s nationality or category).

⁴⁷⁰ “Furthermore, I consider that Germania must be destroyed” – a travesty of a well-known saying by Cato the Elder concerning Carthage, which became a synonym of insisting on one’s own opinion.

⁴⁷¹ *Ueberprügelungsraum* – a torture room, an interrogation room.

⁴⁷² *Pfaffen* – priests.

⁴⁷³ *Verfluchte polnische Intelligenz* – Bloody Polish intellectuals.

Chełmno: teachers, professors, and mayors, who are to be located somewhere on a permanent basis. We do not want to bother our listeners with this news. Yet, we consider this our journalistic duty to report everything which can affect us in any way. Today, we have asked many of our prisoners who are threatened with being transported about their opinion on this issue. When asked, they announced that they preferred living in any other camp than that residence of ours under the rule of Strauss and other executioners.

This, not much elegant, name of our fort, ends the serious part of our report. The "speaker" still reminds his listeners that you should not talk about your own radio, nor about the news passed down to the prisoners known as uncertain... We ask for remembering about the grounding of the aerial."

This was more or less the way the evenings ended for many weeks. Obviously, neither the radio nor an aerial was possible in the fort due to constant, unexpected, and often supervised moving from one cell to another. During the day, various gossip went around the fort; some letters with the news from the town and the country were smuggled by the bribed "greens". As everyone was craving for news, this material was collected and used for publishing to console and strengthen the hearts. The initiators of the "radio" wanted to make use of good news, so with the passing time it became a custom that every evening, after the camp went silent, one could hear in a dark corner a quiet: "Hello! Hello! This is your "reporter" speaking!" And the speaker discussed everything that made us happy and sad. In this way, all the days were winnowed as if through a sieve, which took in grains with chaff and – through sieving – separated good grains from the waste. Yet, there was usually more sad and disturbing news than good ones, therefore – the "speaker" (God forgive him) often had to seek with his journalistic cleverness some tiny but good facts and paint them in nicer colours from his "palette". He excused himself with the fact that a portraitist would not place on his canvas all the freckles or moles of the painted model. It was a fact that the radio was liked and that, soon before falling asleep after a hard day and uncertain night, it poured at least a little encouragement into the hearts and helped the prisoners to get into the illusive land of dreaming.

Therefore, after moving to the pre-hell called Stutthoff one of the first re-introduced traditions – apart from conducting the common prayer – was the evening radio. It was given up only in the hell of Oranienburg – and only as a result of absolute necessity.⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁷⁴ Ks. W. Gajdus: *Nr 20998...*, op. cit., p. 82-84.

Example 55. Bożena Krzywobłocka about children in KL Auschwitz

Children transported to concentration camps were subjected to regular repressions – like adults. We tried to oppose – with certain shyness – to the two interwoven trends: the horror and the terrible boredom associated with the so-called “quarantine”. We told the book stories we had read in freedom and we recited the poems we knew by heart. The youngest spontaneously created spiteful couplets about the so-called old Janka – a block assistant who beat them with a belt. The couplets had several stanzas and sounded more or less as follows:

*A wreath – to a young miss, a bonnet – to a married woman,
A warm shawl – to a grannie, a chamber pot – to a grandmother.
A cookie – to a young miss, white bread – to a married woman,
A white roll – to a grannie, whole wheat bread – to a grandmother.*

This concert did not cease and the singing was undertaken by the next bunks. As the sweating block assistant was running along the row of bunks, the singing moved in one or the other direction. Only when the block attendant herself went out of her room, surrounded by her brutal favourites equipped with leather belts, the improvised concert definitely ended. A similar role of a tamer of Warsaw boys’ free spirit was played by an exceptionally nasty *Schreiber*, Helena. She was famous not only for her stealing of daily food rations but also for possessing her own harem of girls from the Magdalenes. We, the elder, could not make an apt form of a couplet.

In the camp, holidays were also used for improvising some artistic events. I can remember a huge block, entirely packed with a crowd of women and children, on Christmas Day in 1944. Someone had organized the performance spontaneously. The repertoire of that Christmas show was quite diverse – from great poetry by Władysław Broniewski to some comical songs performed by the very young Zosia Grabińska, or really ambiguous couplets, coming from alcohol-flooded parties, and folk songs. Yet, whatever can be said about the artistic quality of that holiday show, it helped the listeners to forget – at least for a while – about the reality and unsure future in the concentration camp.⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷⁵ B. Krzywobłocka: *Walka o kulturę...*, op. cit., p. 22.

Part Three

**COMICAL
(ARTISTIC, STREET, PRISON)
CREATIVE ACTIVITY
DURING THE OCCUPATION**

*Is it necessary to remind one what a sharp weapon a smile, mockery, and derision are? The rulers of the world and ordinary mortal humans usually fear a spiteful joke more than curses.*⁴⁷⁶

Aleksander Kamiński

⁴⁷⁶ A. Kamiński: *Wielka gra...*, op. cit., p. 175.

The works collected in this part are arranged in compliance with the contents of particular chapters – from pre-war ones to those created in occupied Poland, in ghettos, and concentration camps. The collection is completed with some examples of jokes from the period of World War II.

Example 56. Marian Hemar, *Ten wąsik* [This moustache]

Rags but so much charm,
This bowler hat, this walking stick,
Without unnecessary presentation
One knows instantly: Yes, it's me.
A smile like a lamp on the face,
Shining in the world's darkness
And shoes, a tramp's worn-out shoes,
And such an ordinary step.
And the moustache, my luxury, my charm,
I curl it and everyone laughs.

This moustache, oh, this moustache,
This look, this curl, this dancing step.
And charm, and fear, and face look,
And a smile – yes, this is me.
Oh, ladies, oh, gentlemen,
You need it, laughter is health,
Titina, oh, Titina – this is my only song.

Do you remember, one Saturday,
When you were poor and alone as a dog,
You went to see "The Gold Rush",⁴⁷⁷
And you laughed to tears.
And do you remember, Lady,
The first time after your mourning,

⁴⁷⁷ C. Chaplin: *The Gold Rush*, USA 1925.

You came to the cinema to see my "Circus"⁴⁷⁸ –
 I saw your face in the darkness,
 And I just did this, and you
 Started to laugh through tears.

This moustache, oh, this moustache...

Unluckily, the competitors are alert.
 Recently, my modest throne
 Is wanted by a jealous rival,
 A new candidate, the dangerous HIM.
 He replaced my silence with shouts,
 Wants to turn my laughter into fear,
 He called my bowler hat a helmet.
 The police support him too, oh...
 My moustache, my gadget, my trick
 Was taken by him, taken off, and everyone laughs.

This moustache, oh, this moustache...

This moustache, oh, this moustache,
 This look, this curl, this sulking.
 Is it his or Chaplin's –
 Who's given more to the world?
 Today, the world – my Gentlemen,
 Laughs at him, laughter is health,
 Titina, oh, Titina, – this is my whole song.⁴⁷⁹

Example 57. Anna Jachnina, *Siekiera, motyka...* [An axe, a hoe...]

An axe, a hoe, a glass of moonshine,
 An air raid at night, round-up in the day.

An axe, a hoe, a ball, a block,
 A cop – a pig, a Jerry – a cow.

⁴⁷⁸ C. Chaplin: *The circus*, USA 1928.

⁴⁷⁹ M. Hemar: *Kiedy znów zakwitną białe bzy*. Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1991, p. 360-361.

A salad, a tram, a rickshaw, a hut,
Everybody escapes where possible.

An axe, a hoe, a ball, a nail,
I'll give you a banknote, let me go.

An axe, a hoe, light, current,
When will they go away...

Beer, moonshine, wine, cumin liqueur,
The stupid painter has lost the war.

An axe, a hoe, a ball, a knife,
Has lost the war, already, already, already!⁴⁸⁰

**Example 58. N.N., *Wilk i świnia. Bajka Niekrasickiego*
[A wolf and a pig. A non-Krasicki fable]⁴⁸¹**

In the country which conquers new lands
A wild pig has grown from others' harm.⁴⁸²
And though it had enough food in its own sty,
It pushed its snout everywhere.
It had a ready answer to all remarks:
That it had to extend its living space.
And, while implementing its piggish method,
It caused a lot of damage.
It dug the fields, woods, and meadows along the Vistula⁴⁸³ –
Insensitive to their beauty.
And though it pricked its snout badly
And forest gadflies stung it,
The pig feels neither pain nor shame,
With passion it tears everything to pieces,
Keeps heading for the forest

⁴⁸⁰ A. Jachnina: *Siekiera, motyka*. [From:] M. Ruth Buczkowski: *Warszawski dowcip...*, op. cit., p. 65.

⁴⁸¹ The name in the title is a pun referring to the name of the famous Polish writer of fables – Ignacy Krasicki.

⁴⁸² It refers to Germany.

⁴⁸³ It refers to Poland.

To swallow the red pine mushroom.⁴⁸⁴
 Encouraged by such a dinner,
 The pig rushes for Norwegian herrings.⁴⁸⁵
 Among tulip fields, digging long ditches,⁴⁸⁶
 It chases away calm Dutch cows,
 Finally, to make an unceasing attack,
 And – not feeling the whip –
 To bite the big “cock”
 Of the fearful Miss Marianne.⁴⁸⁷
 The wolf, which has in its nature
 The love for eating carrion,
 Looked at it for a long time with reservation
 But now shouted: “Per Bacco,⁴⁸⁸
 If the pig is so fine –
 I leave the woods.
 Maybe I’ll eat with it till full
 And grab something from the pig’s trough”.
 And not thinking what it’s doing,
 It joined the pig.
 The happy pig shook its legs
 And promised the wolf bones and scraps
 Only to jointly get the rare aim –
 To knock out the lion.
 And they stood together at the channel,⁴⁸⁹
 Thinking how to handle the task
 Of getting to the lion,⁴⁹⁰
 If neither of them could swim.
 And the lion just murmuring in the isles with threat
 Suddenly roared: “Stop this, you pig and you stupid wolf”.
 He shook his mane, blew his nostrils,

⁴⁸⁴ It refers to the Marshall of Poland Edward Śmigły-Rydz. The word “rydz” in Polish means red pine mushroom.

⁴⁸⁵ It refers to the German attack on Norway.

⁴⁸⁶ It refers to the German attack on the Netherlands.

⁴⁸⁷ It refers to the German attack on France.

⁴⁸⁸ It refers to Italy.

⁴⁸⁹ It refers to the English (La Manche) Channel.

⁴⁹⁰ It refers to England.

And grabbed with his mighty paws
 The "RAFs"⁴⁹¹ as huge as pumpkins.
 "Goodness", the wolf and pig shout, "What does the lion do?
 Only the pig can do this.
 The lion threatened my whole sty,
 Killed piglets,
 It's the death to the whole piggish race –
 It's not proper for the lion".
 "Well, – said the lion –" and what did you do?
 I can't let the pig keep getting fat
 And let helpless sheep be grabbed by wolves.
 And I swear upon my mane – I won't rest even a while
 Till the times come
 When the wolf's dead and we could eat yummy pork".⁴⁹²

Example 59 – N.N., *Okupacyjne fraszki* [Occupation epigrams]

A fable

He ate with ration cards for over six years.
 When once he wanted to have a proper lunch,
 He ate a Wiener schnitzel with Czech dumplings,⁴⁹³
 Creamed borscht with Polish mushrooms,
 For dessert – cheese with beer from near Denmark,
 Herring from Bergen or Oslo, sprats from Holland,
 A soufflé à la Leopold, and drank this with champagne,⁴⁹⁴
 Then it seemed to him he ruled the world.
 Yet, when he wanted to add English beefsteak,⁴⁹⁵
 He couldn't digest all this: he had to throw up back what he had eaten.⁴⁹⁶

About beaten roads

Germans complain about the lack of paved roads in Russia
 And that with this lack the treacherous Russia defends itself.

⁴⁹¹ R.A.F. – Royal Air Force.

⁴⁹² N.N.: *Wilk i świnia*. In: M. Ruth Buczkowski: *Warszawski dowcip...*, op. cit., p. 69-70.

⁴⁹³ It refers to the German annexation of Austria and the Czech part of Czechoslovakia.

⁴⁹⁴ It refers to the German attack on Belgium.

⁴⁹⁵ It refers to the German attack on England.

⁴⁹⁶ N.N.: *Bajka*. In: M. Ruth Buczkowski: *Warszawski dowcip...*, op. cit., p. 71.

I think there's no need for more beaten roads there,
As instead of roads, the German army is still beaten here.⁴⁹⁷

Little Joe's poem

Look Mummy, look Daddy,
Two Volksdeutsch are walking there,
Oh, my God – what a shame!
One is a Pole, the other – a Jew.

Look Mummy, look Daddy,
Now there are two from the Gestapo,
Oh, my God – what a shame!
One is a Jew, the other a Jew, too.⁴⁹⁸

A call

Who are you? – A sly Volksdeutsch.
What is your sign? – A broken cross.
Who has made you? – A turmoil.
What awaits you? – A dry branch.⁴⁹⁹

**Example 60. Tadeusz Hollender, *Uśmiech Warszawy*
[The smile of Warsaw]**

Look, this is the proud town of Warsaw,
For more than a thousand of terrible days
The hard and bloody event has lingered,
But it is fighting, it is mocking.

Although today it's leaking and bleeding,
Out of its blood-written daily cards –
As a flame among storms and lightning –
Its fine joke smiles every day.
It bloodily pays for these jokes every day,
But still there is neither a night nor day

⁴⁹⁷ N.N.: *O drogach bitych*. In: M. Ruth Buczkowski: *Warszawski dowcip...*, op. cit., p. 71.

⁴⁹⁸ N.N.: *Wierszyk małego Józia*. In: A. Jachnina, M. Ruth Buczkowski: *Anegdota i dowcip...*, op. cit., p. 42-43.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 42. This is a parody of the poem by Władysław Bełza “Katechizm polskiego dziecka [The catechism of a Polish child]”.

Without a joke shining on a Jerries' poster
 As a sign that it is alive, it fights, it lasts.
 On all the walls, it daily offends
 The Führer's Jerries and the whole Axis,
 And on the lanterns and graveyard gates,
 One will write "nur für Deutsche" again.

Against the gallows, murders and crosses,
 Against the power that has conquered the world,
 You, great Warsaw, the Polish Paris,
 On your ruins, laughter blossoms as a flower.

Who laughs will win,
 Today despair is a big sin.
 For those who always have hoped,
 Your contrarian, victorious laughter can be heard.

Today nur für Deutsche – tomorrow für Polen,⁵⁰⁰
 You will still experience your freedom.
 Tomorrow, you'll sing them the carmagnole,
 Smile, Warsaw, smile for us, smile.⁵⁰¹

Example 61. Tadeusz Hollender, *Bajka* [A fairytale]

With obvious pride, a hundred-year-old man
 Came to a German commission, trying to prove
 He had had German ancestors in Poland, colonists,
 And thus, he became a German at once.

Someone asked when he was leaving with the kennkarte:
 – "Sir, what do you need it for, you will die soon?"
 The old man replied: – "I know,"
 "If a Pole has to die, a German had better die."⁵⁰²

⁵⁰⁰ Für Polen – for Poles.

⁵⁰¹ T. Hollender: *Wiersze...*, op. cit., p. 121-122.

⁵⁰² *Ibidem*, p. 129.

**Example 62. Tadeusz Hollender, *Blaski Guberni*
[The glitter of the Governorate] (fragments)**

Poles are bad, bad and unfaithful,
As they feel bad in the General Governorate;
Is it bad for them, Doctor Frank, to be
In a nice spa, in beautiful Majdanek?
Do they not eat butter and ham
In another resort called Treblinka –
Not to mention among so many names
The name of our charming Auschwitz?
Life in roses, thornless roses
Blossom in the General Governorate.

And how many impressions every day,
How many accidents, many events,
During the day – round-ups and groping,
At night – tanks drive into the ghetto
And exciting scenes take place,
Or sirens wail for long.
And what can be heard at that late time
Is the powerful roar or whirl of motors.
So everybody asks a bit nervously:
-Will they drop anything or just fly by?
Not today. You fall asleep very happy
In your dear General Governorate.

Will you, the Pole, dare to claim here
That in this country for you they don't take care?
Who were you earlier? A Slavonic yob.
And now you are taught the German culture.
To keep it well in your mind,
The inscription shines on Zachęta⁵⁰³ in Warsaw.
Now, it houses the higher culture,
Though they write this culture better
With a whip and bar there – in Auschwitz,
So that the flames go with smoke in crematoriums;

⁵⁰³ Zachęta – The National Art Gallery in Warsaw.

They have too much of the culture –
 Those who didn't have it earlier at all
 All knew it too poorly
 In the territory of the General Governorate. (...) ⁵⁰⁴

Example 63 – Irena Bobowska, ***

I'm learning the greatest art of life:
 To smile always and everywhere
 And bear pain without despair,
 And not to regret what has passed,
 And not to fear what will come.

I've learned the taste of hunger
 And sleepless nights.
 I know how cold can sting,
 When curled up you'd like to
 Keep cold away from you.
 And I know what it means to shed helpless tears
 In many bright days
 And many dark nights.
 I learned how to speed up with thoughts
 The time that lingers so mercilessly.
 I know how hard you need to struggle with yourself,
 Not to fall down and not to get tired
 Of the seemingly unending road...

I'm learning further the greatest art of life:
 To smile always and everywhere
 And bear pain without despair,
 And not to regret what has passed,
 And not to fear what will come. ⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰⁴ T. Hollender: *Wiersze...*, op. cit., p. 125-126.

⁵⁰⁵ I. Bobowska: ***. In: K. Wyczańska (ed.): *Harcerki 1939-1945. Relacje i pamiętniki*. Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa 1985, p. 94-95.

**Example 64. Władysław Broniewski, *Rozmowa z historią*
[A conversation with history]**

You – History, the master of life,
You want some dog tricks,
Orion overlooks us
When we both sit on the toilet.

You tell me old jokes
And smile half-mockingly –
And we've stuck here for sure –
You – for centuries, me – for a month.

Oh, you Immortal, from where
Do you get this trend to paradoxes,
And tell me – is it wise
To ruin the whole world's life?

As in the whole world
There's war or martial law,
Then, tell me, History:
Why the Hell, are we stuck here?

A revolutionary poet
Is to rot in this Soviet jail?
You, History – this is a shame,
One of us is simply a kid.

So, shame on you, you very old Lady,
And let me out of Zamarstyniv...
(Just behind the gate, we'll earn
Imprisonment anew).⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰⁶ W. Broniewski: *Rozmowa z historią*. In: B. Klukowski (ed.): *My deportowani. Wspomnienia Polaków z więzień, łagrów i zsyłek w ZSRR*. Wydawnictwo Alfa, Warszawa 1989, p. 3. The poem written in the Zamarstyniv prison in Lviv in April 1941.

Example 65. Marian Hemar, *Kawał i moral* [A joke and a moral]

They called for a paratrooper –
 A guy as from a Kossak painting –
 “Cheers – they said – at rest!
 Listen. It’s like that:

You’ll fly tonight
 In a prepared machine.
 You’ll jump out of it
 At six a.m. sharp.

Within ten steps
 from the landing
 you’ll find a bike, on which
 You’ll do the task.

The task is in this envelope.
 Open it just before the jump”.
 “Cheers!” – “Yes, Sir!”– said the paratrooper
 With deep satisfaction.

He flew at midnight.
 When six was just about,
 He opened the envelope with the order
 And it was empty.

(Someone probably absentmindedly
 Did not put the instruction inside).
 He jumped and pulled the string.
 The parachute did not open.

He pulled once, twice – all in vain.
 Then, constantly accelerating,
 He thought with regret: “God damn it,
 The bike won’t be there either”.

I’ve heard such a joke.
 When I analysed its sense,

A melancholic moral
 Appeared to me in it:

They say to me: You'll start
 In the dark! Yes, Sir, I will, I will!
 You'll jump! Yes, Sir, I will.
 Let God take care of me.

There will be – they say – on the spot
 Moral rebirth,
 Community of ideas,
 Total safety.

Global planning.
 Total democracy.
 Age of plenty. Idea
 Plus electrification.

Motorization. Work
 For everyone. And moreover:
 A wonderful start for everyone,
 For everyone – this bike.

I'll flow up at any time.
 Where they order – I'll jump everywhere.
 But I'm afraid that the bike,
 This bike will not be there.⁵⁰⁷

**Example 66. Marian Hemar, *Pamiętaj o tym wnuku,
 że dziadzio był w Tobruku*
 [Remember, my grandson, your grandpa was in Tobruk]**

One day, when I'm back from this war
 In a dozen of years,
 I'll put down my rucksack, throw off my shoes
 And I'll stretch my legs with pleasure.

⁵⁰⁷ M. Hemar: *Kiedy znów...*, op. cit., p. 177-178. The poem was written in 1943.

There will be a group of my grandchildren,
 Who will please me with their chatter,
 And will ask their grandpa for a fairy tale,
 And what story will I tell them?!

Remember my grandson,
 Your grandpa was in Tobruk.
 And he thought: oh, it's not good,
 Oh, not good, too much noise.

The sea was bright in glow,
 The Heaven cracked in crackle,
 The grandpa thought: why so much,
 So much sand has been poured here?

The kids ask one by one,
 Why did you go there, grandpa?
 Why did I go to Tobruk?
 To be honest, I don't know.

Either for the matter, or for fun,
 Or to have better control,
 They put us in a fortress,
 Here, they said, you'll stay.

Remember my grandson
 Your grandpa was in Tobruk.
 And he thought of various things,
 Various things not for print.

He forgot what a girl is,
 He survived a year without beer,
 As they told him each Saturday,
 The attack would be on Tuesday!⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁸ M. Hemar: *Pamiętaj o tym wnuku, że dziadzio był w Tobruku*. https://staremelodie.pl/piosenka/2420/Pamietaj_o_tym_wnuku_ze_dziadzio_byl_w_Tobruku.

**Example 67. N.N., *Jadą dzieci, jadą drogą*
[Children are coming, coming along the road]**

Children are coming along the road,
A sister and a brother,
And they wonder really much
How mean the world is.

A yellow patch can be seen here,
And barbed wire there,
We wear grey rags
And a wooden shoe.

Yesterday, they took orphans from here
And sent them far.
You want to cry,
Sadness and pity in your heart.

Children are coming along the road,
Where? Where? To what place?
They can only cry
As long as the train moves on.

The abandoned children cry,
And God is silent, hush.
The starved mothers cry,
Their prayer goes on.⁵⁰⁹

Example 68. Szlojme Elbojm (?), *Wszystkie żonki* [All the wives]

All the wives in the world
Think the same,
No matter how much the husband gives,
Every one of them shouts: awful poverty!

⁵⁰⁹ M.M. Chęciński: *Jedenaste przykazanie: Nie zapomnij*. Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2004, p. 120-121. A song from the Warsaw Ghetto which is a parody of Maria Konopnicka's poem "Jadą dzieci, jadą drogą [Children are coming, coming along the road]".

Oh, your husband is a tough guy,
 He'll manage at once,
 He'll grab a big pole,
 And will caress your back.

My husband, let the life grant
 Rights to you. You conduct excellently.
 Yet, I submit one request,
 Buy me everything I apply for.

When you earn a penny,
 Each bar dances with you.
 You pour into the throat – it's known,
 And the wife? What is she for?!

Oh, if only I had such strength,
 I'd be your strong man,
 I'd show what and how.
 This would happen – just like that.
 If I didn't have that power lack...⁵¹⁰

**Example 69. Władysław Szlengel, *Pamiętają o mnie*
 [They remember about me]**

I had an early shift yesterday, but my wife was at home,
 My wife, of whom I'm the ancient Greek prince and master...
 Suddenly I can see that secretly from the warehouse
 Pinkus Kinpst – a well-known seducer and Don Juan, slips out.
 Where is he going when he can see I'm here in the warehouse???
 Self-understood – he's dashing to her at the call of both sexes...
 I'm following them intrusively – the traces lead to the bedroom,
 I hug to the key hole – overhearing them through the door...
 He whispers something in her ear, and they go to bed...

⁵¹⁰ S. Elbojm (?): *Wszystkie żonki*. In: R. Sakowska (ed.): *Archiwum Ringelbluma...*, op. cit., p. 150. Probably, a song performer by 13-years-old street singer Szlojme Elbojm on the 2nd June 1942 at Smocza Street 42. The Polish version provided by Tadeusz Lewandowski on the basis of Ruta Sakowska's translation. The commentaries to this and the next works from the ghetto come from the editors from The Ringelblum Archive. Here, their shortened version is presented.

He ardently grabs her as if he has got a coupon for her...
 And I see here that in fact they are groaning in an erotic way...
 Suddenly she says: My... husband! My dear husband... where is he?
 I feel a relief,
 Though it hurts a lot,
 I'm less tired as at least
 They remember about me...
 Let it be as it is to be,
 Let them bite each other unconsciously,
 But for me it's worth to live,
 As they remember about me...
 I've been chased for a month from one cellar to another,
 I have an ausweis⁵¹¹ and obituary here on the chest C-C-T,
 This helps me like whooping cough – I don't go out
 I have no shed, no home, nothing a man wants...
 I wear four suits and uncle Mietek's coat
 And I look like a bear invited to a feast.
 I've got a bread box here with a domino and a razor,
 And I'm running and sweating as a full-age scout...
 One runs the whole day crazily as a dachshund,
 But at night I squat in a corner – I could probably sleep...
 Suddenly: ALARM! Sirens... go down, get up... bla, bla, bla,
 I hardly stay on my legs, and I have to run again.
 I feel a relief,
 Though it exhausts me a lot,
 It doesn't hurt me as much
 As they remember about me...
 Let it be as it is to be,
 Let them torment unconsciously,
 But for me it's worth to live again,
 As they remember about me...⁵¹²

⁵¹¹ Ausweis – a certificate.

⁵¹² W. Szlengel: *Pamiętaję o mnie. Piosenka Majera Mlińczyka*. [From:] R.M. Groński: *Taki był kabaret...*, op. cit., p. 248-249.

**Example 70. Władysław Szlengel (?), *Szopka*
[A satirical play] (fragments)**

Home committee at Świętojerska Nr 16 (Warsaw, 1941)⁵¹³

I'll tell a tragic ballad about the Committee,
The Home Committee which has a serious drawback,⁵¹⁴
It keeps discussing each night until two,
But nothing results from such a long debate.
There were commissions, sections, departments,
Which did their work diligently,⁵¹⁵
But of them all, the nicest and most obedient
Was the sanitary one!
I will just say only one word:
They constantly threatened us with steam.
On any day at any time,
With the maximum energy,
My dear and kind guests,
They had the Cleanness Week.⁵¹⁶
(...)
Oh, money mio! Your wonderful clank⁵¹⁷
Can remove the fear of steam [x],⁵¹⁸
Money, a string of money,
Can remove typhus!
But don't think, my dear guests,
That there are only distresses,

⁵¹³ The titles of songs provided in the footnotes were placed by the chronicler near the relevant verses of this work.

⁵¹⁴ "Pamiętasz, sankami jechaliśmy... [Can you remember, we were sledding]" – the beginning of the song "Kochana [My Dear]" (lyrics and performance: Mieczysław Fogg, music: Władysław Daniłowski).

⁵¹⁵ "Panna Marysia telefonistka [Miss Mary, an operator]" (lyrics: Konrad Tom, music: Emanuel Schlechter).

⁵¹⁶ The Cleanness Week – a propaganda action aimed at combating the epidemic of typhus, in which various ghetto institutions (including Home Committees) took part. The role of the committee was conducting lectures and distributing leaflets on how to combat the illness.

⁵¹⁷ "O sole mio" (lyrics: Giovanni Capurro, music: Eduardo Di Capua). In pre-war Poland, this song was performed by Jan Kiepura.

⁵¹⁸ A clanking sound.

Because today – for instance...
 In the Xs' home today – cards, bridge,
 So, Brother, count your money,
 Blah, blah, blah (2×)
 And it is a warm climate there,
 Hm,,, below zero on the thermometer,
 Cydy rumbaj
 And they play and play,
 Losing their money⁵¹⁹
 Therefore the Committee has a full wallet,
 Such is the fate of a loser.
 In cards, there are usually four queens,⁵²⁰
 Everyone knows their names.
 We have such a queen at home,
 Who likes parties
 And is an expert in hygiene,
 And the mess is afraid of her.
 She's an "old hand" in the buffet,
 And knows the route from Warsaw to Riga,
 Who's that everyone knows from the tale?
 In this house, there is someone⁵²¹
 Who has this something
 That frightens us a bit!
 The yellow armband of... the authorities!
 He's known by everyone!
 He creates order,
 This is our policeman!
 Duty calls,
 Everyone knows the saying,
 You need to devote yourself for bread.

⁵¹⁹ "A fisket" – most probably, this refers to "A-tisket, a-tisket", Ella Fitzgerald's song, the title of which comes from nursery rhymes for children.

⁵²⁰ "Joseph, Joseph" – the jazz song recorded in 1938 roku by Ambrose and his Orchestra, the English band founded and manager by Bieniamin Baruch Ambrose (who was born in Warsaw).

⁵²¹ "Ty masz takie coś... [You've got that something...]" – the Polish modification of the hit "Baj mir bistu szejn" (Jid. For me, you are beautiful); lyrics: Jacob Jacobs, music: Shlomo Secundo. In Poland, the song was performed by Mieczysław Fogg with accompaniment by Henryk Wars's orchestra.

If someone is very ill at home,
 If someone is ailing,⁵²²
 They run to Mrs. Dora quickly
 And she helps. (...)
 At such a night (...)⁵²³
 The style disappears from the buffet (...)
 And of yummy cakes, a big (...)
 Darkens my senses.
 I'll pay for you,
 You'll pay for me,
 And the nice dream will go away.
 Look, how soft...
 The Committee becomes
 When it hears the money clang.⁵²⁴
 And I'll tell all the gathered here –
 And you'll need to believe in this –
 That this Committee, so much mocked,
 Is in fact very dear
 to us...
 Though they want money all the time,
 They don't complain about fate,
 As money is the basis,
 Cheer up and pay!
 Because in every committee –
 You know about this well –
 It is the same,
 At first, there is a collection
 From everyone in the yard,
 And then again – give the money!
 Let them live one hundred years,
 One hundred years!

⁵²² "Połóż dłoń na dłoni [Put your hand on mine]" – a song from H. Szaro's film: *Ordynat Michorowski*, Poland 1938; lyrics: Emanuel Schlechter, music: Henryk Wars.

⁵²³ Most probably, the song "Nie kochać w taką noc [Not to love on such a night]" from K. Tom's film: *Ada! to nie wypada [Ada! It doesn't become you]*. Poland 1936, lyrics: Jerzy Jurandot, music: Zygmunt Wiehler.

⁵²⁴ Most probably, the song "Trzy gwiazdy [Three stars]"; lyrics: Zbigniew Drabik, music: Adam Lewandowski.

Let them rule us,
 One hundred years!
 Take the money, take the money...
 This is our [x] motto:
 Let them live!!!⁵²⁵

**Example 71. Władysław Szlengel (?), *Raz kupiłem sobie sak*
 [Once I bought a coat for myself]**

(a satire on the confiscation of fur coats in the Warsaw ghetto)

Once I bought a coat for myself,
 And this was like that:
 On the hanger, near the wall
 A nice fur coat was hanging.
 A guest came, who was a joker,
 And took my fur with him.
 The guy was so merry
 That left me naked without a penny...

Yet, when I had some cash,
 I bought a coat at Wołówka.⁵²⁶
 What a coat! Oh, my God!
 There is no worse one in the world –
 Short, dirty, old, and narrow
 With holes as big as talers at the elbows,
 It's not a coat, but its poor substitute!
 This is what my family says to me.

I saw red with anger
 And was ashamed to pay visits.
 In such a rag, it's a shame.
 What can you do? You won't help it.
 Terrible things. Do you believe?

⁵²⁵ W. Szlengel (?): *Szopka*. In: A. Żółkiewska, M. Tuszewicki (eds): *Archiwum Ringelbluma...*, op. cit., p. 112-115.

⁵²⁶ In fact, Wołówka – the fair where antiques were traded. Before the war, it was situated at the corner of Stawki Street and the unfinished bus station. The Germans indicated a new place for Wołówka at the corner of Gęsia Street and Lubeckiego Street.

I cursed my own life.
 Those thieves, what bastards!
 Hana threatens me with breaking up!

My heart is a big wound,
 When suddenly – a big change:
 The directive that tomorrow
 You have to give back all the furs.⁵²⁷
 My fate changed at once.
 What delight! What a trick!
 Everyone gives back, but not me!
 Out of happiness, I want to die!

To celebrate this event,
 I went to a pastry shop with Henry.
 Yet, a nasty climate here:
 Black mood and black coffee,
 In the crowded room,
 There was a big fur fair.⁵²⁸
 All the guests gave looks
 Full of terrible anger.

Their soul was full of envy
 That I needn't give my coat!
 I hang it on the wall
 And went for breakfast.
 When I sat at the table
 I ordered a quarter of a steak.
 And as the delight was huge
 There was also a drop of booze.

And just before the eating
 I raised a glass with Henio.
 Yet, one thing wasn't nice,

⁵²⁷ On the 25th December, 1941, a directive was issued imposing on Jews the order of giving all their fur coats and other fur clothes to the authorities within three days. Hiding a fur coat was threatened with the death penalty.

⁵²⁸ In pastry and coffee shops, illegal trading took place as well.

I sat with my back to the coat.
 When I stood up – what a scandal!
 There was no coat of mine!
 My God! What will I do tomorrow?
 They turned a coat – into a fur.⁵²⁹

**Example 72. Jerzy Jurandot (?), *Gmina Żydowska. Szafa gra*
 [The Jewish Qahal. Everything is ok]**

At Grzybowska Street, there is the Jewish Quahal⁵³⁰
 And this is the reason of the whole tragedy.
 It stands, snores, and sometimes breaks out,
 Heat bursts out from its hot interior.
 Bang – unpleasantly, phew – unpleasantly,
 It hardly gasps, hardly breathes,
 And yet it often pours jokes.
 Various people have joined it,
 Who were tiny before the war...
 They took all the posts
 You haven't been able to help it.
 There're many types here from Czerniakow⁵³¹
 Who cause the president's headache.
 As he is always lucky,
 He is helped by three Lichtenbaums⁵³²
 In one room, comfortably and with ease,
 Mr. Zundelewwicz⁵³³ sat down as a prince.
 In the second room, an unknown figure –
 Mr. Berman⁵³⁴ who collects tributes.

⁵²⁹ W. Szlengel (?): *Raz kupiłem sobie sak*. In: A. Żółkiewska, M. Tuszewicki (eds): *Archiwum Ringelbluma...*, op. cit., p. 117-119.

⁵³⁰ A satire aimed at the clerks from the Jewish Quahal with the seat at Grzybowska Street 26/28 in the Warsaw ghetto. The building housed the Jewish Council and its sections. The work is a parody of the poem "Lokomotywa [A Locomotive]" by Julian Tuwim. Most probably, this satire was included into the variety show "Szafa gra" directed by J. Jurandot.

⁵³¹ Most probably a pun: people like Czerniakow or from Czerniaków – a district of Warsaw, known for its criminal background.

⁵³² It refers to Czerniakow's deputy, Mark Lichtenbaum and his two sons, Mieczysław and Edward, from the Technical-Construction Section of the Jewish Council.

⁵³³ Bernard Zundelewicz – An advisor in the Jewish Council.

⁵³⁴ Jakub Berman – The head of the Financial and Budget Section of the Jewish Council.

And who sits carefreely in the third?
 It's Mr. Zabłudowski⁵³⁵ – the personnel ward.
 In the fourth Mr. Gepner⁵³⁶ can be seen.
 In the fifth we meet Kobryner.⁵³⁷
 In the sixth Mr. Rozen⁵³⁸ founded his camp,
 In the seventh Bałaban went to bed,
 In the eighth – Rozental⁵³⁹ who collects fees.
 In the ninth the figure of Kupczykier⁵⁴⁰
 In the tenth – the Jewish hospital
 Ruled by Doctor Milejkowski.
 And there are about forty such rooms,
 And I don't know what's inside.
 But even if a thousand of minds could come
 And each had a thousand of ideas,
 And each thought possibly the most,
 They wouldn't know why they are here.
 A whistle at once, a whiz,
 Everything is ok, tra-la-la.
 At first, slowly, with difficulty, as a turtle
 A jukebox played for us sleepily.
 And nobody knew what all this meant
 When the battalion of grief got the word.
 And the song kept playing a dozen times,
 When the money was taken over by Director Hendel.⁵⁴¹
 And he devoted so much zest and spirit here

⁵³⁵ Beniamin Zabłudowski – The head of the Personnel Section of the Jewish Council and the Fuel and Post Section; the president of the Board of Centos Association.

⁵³⁶ Abraham Gepner – The head of the Provision Section and the Economic Council.

⁵³⁷ Edward Kobryner – The advisor in the Jewish Council, vice-director of the Provision Section.

⁵³⁸ Henryk (Chil) Rozen – A member of the Commission of Work Battalions, the head of the Commission of Work Section, an activist in the Provision Section.

⁵³⁹ Baruch Wolf Rozental (Rosenthal, Rozenthal) – an advisor and member of the Jewish Council.

⁵⁴⁰ Leopold Kupczykier – The head of Security Service Section and later of the Care Section. His corruption was the subject of the (popular in the ghetto) song whose hero was the advisor Przekupczyk [in Polish: Briber].

⁵⁴¹ Marian Wilhelm Hendel (Handel) – An inspector in the Jewish police (since 1940 – deputy commander); he supervised the guards controlling the workers during the construction of the ghetto walls; a Gestapo confident.

That the whole team was brought to life again.
 And the jukebox keeps working and battering'
 It plays louder and louder and never withdraws.
 And where? Where? Where do all these who
 Have yellow bands push?⁵⁴²
 Through the guards, the graveyard, and the walls,
 The smuggling takes place today through the fence and holes.
 So lightly, so smoothly, the smuggling goes on,
 And the Quahal pretends not to see it at all.
 And who's this, who's this? Who pushes so hard,
 And what's this, what's this? What dashes so fast?
 And who makes such an order today,
 Taking care at least of their own stomach?
 It's the new police which makes things go.
 It's the new police, each honorary man
 Carries home a two-kilos bread.
 When will this evil end at last?
 It's how it is, it is, it is.⁵⁴³

Example 73. Anatol Pomeranc, *Komitet domowy* [The Home Committee]

No one is bothered so much
 As our home committee.

At first, mister chairman comes –
 Ringing his bell all the time.

Then the secretary follows with a pen in hand –
 Thinking how to note down the biggest amount.

Mister vice-chairman sits down on his seat –
 Whispering something to the cashier's ear.

Then, the sanitary nurse has a speech:
 "I announce that in all places cleanness is weak.

⁵⁴² Most probably, this refers to Jewish policemen, who wore yellow armbands.

⁵⁴³ J. Jurandot (?): *Gmina Żydowska*. In: A. Żółkiewska, M. Tuszewicki (eds): *Archiwum Ringelbluma...*, op. cit., p. 123-125.

No soap, no white washer,
I don't like the commission any more.

And I'm asking you eagerly, sirs,
For a couple of pennies for this."

The child's care requires
Three litres of milk:

"I'm not lazy in this work at all,
But it's necessary for feeding."

In the end, a collector of weekly dues stands up
And says kindly: "I'll give you an empty register today."

Afterwards, an interesting talk goes on
About the steam cleaning in the block.

And finally, a lot of voices ask:
"What is going on with the raffle lottery?"

After this, the chairman uses his bell again
And with minister's solemnity closes the session.⁵⁴⁴

**Example 74. Henryk Nowogródzki, Józef Leon Fels,
Sylwetki znakomitych mężów Służby Porządkowej
[Figures of eminent Security Service officials] (fragments)**

Colonel Szeryński⁵⁴⁵

It's not my fault
That I've always been a cop.
In the times of national democracy
And the times of the Sanation⁵⁴⁶.
It sticks to a man
That it's good in police.

⁵⁴⁴ A. Pomeranc: *Komitet domowy*. In: A. Żółkiewska, M. Tuszewicki (eds): *Archiwum Ringelbluma...*, op. cit., p. 129-130. Written after 1940.

⁵⁴⁵ Józef Andrzej Szeryński – The commander of the Security Service.

⁵⁴⁶ Sanation – a colloquial name of the government ruling Poland in 1926-1939.

I was there during Brest⁵⁴⁷, before and after May,⁵⁴⁸
 And now in the ghetto I'm a cop again.

* * *

In front of the colonel's office, a line of clerks,
 Each is angry, each is furious,
 Each wants to go away as soon as they can.
 Be quiet! Don't lose your temper!
 There are many breaks in the office service
 The red light constantly flashes and plays,
 And behind the door, the mysterium takes place.
 Waiting is a loss of time, you can't help it,
 There is a dentist in the room.
 He'll cover up some holes in the ruler's teeth,
 And then you'll come in – it's sure,
 Unless, dear sir, the breakfast time comes.
 Then, you'll wait a bit again,
 No longer than a quarter, time quickly flies.
 Soon, dear sirs, you'll enter,
 The colonel is in the toilet now.
 He'll come back in an hour or a half.
 He'll be light, merry, and feeling good.
 The morning is over, it is already noon.
 There is a growing pile of papers on the desks,
 A line of clerks in the waiting room,
 Only Doctor Żadziwicz⁵⁴⁹ has already left...⁵⁵⁰

Mister security functionary⁵⁵¹

They say I take bribes⁵⁵² and I'm a bastard.
 It's easy to say, here you are – stand yourself at the exit,⁵⁵³

⁵⁴⁷ It refers to the famous (in the 1930s) trials of parliamentary opposition activists, who had been imprisoned in Brest on the Bug River.

⁵⁴⁸ It refers to the upheaval in May 1926 in Warsaw.

⁵⁴⁹ Władysław Żadziwicz – Most probably, a worker of the Anti-epidemic Section of the Security Service.

⁵⁵⁰ H. Nowogródzki, J. L. Fels: *Pułkownik Szeryński*. In: A. Żółkiewska, M. Tuszewicki (eds): *Archiwum Ringelbluma...*, op. cit., p. 141-142.

⁵⁵¹ The lowest functionary rank in the Security Service.

⁵⁵² It refers to a musician, a Jewish policeman, who organized the smuggling through the ghetto gate for bribes. His role was to bribe the gendarmes.

⁵⁵³ At the ghetto exits, there were guard posts with six guards (two German, Jewish, and Polish).

Toil from dusk to dawn,
 And care for the public good all the time.
 Hardly anyone cares for mine,
 When not the jukebox but my guts rumble.
 Every fishwife insults me every day,
 Though I control the moves of migrant lice,
 And when the hope for rest emerges,
 I had to take two Jewish women to the bathhouse.⁵⁵⁴
 At last, after a month or two,
 Sepor⁵⁵⁵ will give me a half kilo of lettuce.
 Beware of this, everyone!
 Let no one, Heaven forbid, take it into their mouth!
 Who will not listen to this, my friends,
 Will not be able to stand on the post.
 Friends, I'll confess this only to you
 I can't stand at the meeting having eaten that mayonnaise.
 Give me the ricin ration quickly
 Or I'll die at a young age
 And there will be an inscription on my grave:
 "Sleep well, our friend and security man."⁵⁵⁶

Example 75. N.N., *Kuplety więzienne* [Prison couplets]⁵⁵⁷

Listen, people, listen to me, you all
 Listen, the big and the small.
 Do not leave, sit down comfortably,
 I'll tell you everything openly.

This happened at Gęsia Street not long ago.
 Exactly at Gęsia it happened.

⁵⁵⁴ The people selected for disinfection were led to the delousing place by Jewish policemen.

⁵⁵⁵ The section for material aid for Security Service functionaries in the Warsaw ghetto.

⁵⁵⁶ H. Nowogródzki, J. L. Fels: *Pan porządkowy*. In: A. Żółkiewska, M. Tuszewicki (eds): *Archiwum Ringelbluma...*, op. cit., p. 149-150.

⁵⁵⁷ A song with an unidentified tune – a satire aimed at the functionaries in the prison at Gęsia Street in the Warsaw ghetto.

A Jewish prison was erected,
As if someone gave away their last breath.

In cell ten, forty people there were,
Commander Dan Ele is the boss here.
He's got a big belly, as big as a hill,
And he also has a double chin.

Warszawski was our previous commander
His post was taken by Ele Dan himself,
As he read instructions diligently, so in the right way
He scratched off the bugs from his body.

The functionaries, ward assistants – it's real gentry.
When soup is served, they only have meaty ones,
And if Kolski gives a double soup,
They will tell the squad: "You'll get your ass kicked".

Functionary Koniuszko hangs on the wall,
At night he argues about the bed dressing.
He says he won't be taking away the dead
Unless he gets double portions of soup.

There are Icie and Jakubowicz, those two criminals,
They are great, really excellent profiteers.
They'll draw five zlotys from Frania and Jenta,
And the knowledge at least from the pursers.

The Barber is fond of money
He always shaves us with a dirty knife.
When the doctor meets a living dead,
He says: "Komm right to the cauldron"⁵⁵⁸, we've got soup.

It can be said a lot about Paweł –
Whatever he takes up is a success.

⁵⁵⁸ Komm – Come.

He always has a good word,
 He's a soul almost dedicated to us. (...)

The chorus to each stanza:

Tel Awiw, Tel Awiw, bum ta ra da, bum, bum, bum
 Tel Awiw, Tel Awiw, bum ta ra da, bum.⁵⁵⁹

Example 76. B. Bigielman, O.N.E., *Numery-numerki* [Numbers]⁵⁶⁰

Maybe silver, maybe golden.
 Our Commander has a desire
 To make a row again
 "Nur für die stolares",⁵⁶¹
 A new game.
 The "authority" solemnly announced
 That only the chosen
 Will have the voice today.
 There's always a time in the procession of nations
 That something is in fashion.
 In our place, it's carpenters' blood
 Which is said to be bold!
 So you need to have purely carpenter's
 Head and legs to get
 This precious little "gift".
 Some devilish things are said about these folks
 That through the wardrobe's stomach
 They give bigger bread rations
 And two soups.
 And what if no is said

⁵⁵⁹ N.N.: *Kuplety więzienne*. In: A. Żółkiewska, M. Tuszewicki (eds): *Archiwum Ringelbluma...*, op. cit., p. 157-160.

⁵⁶⁰ A satire aimed at the clerks of the carpentry shop OBW (East-German Works of Building Carpentry). It was an enforced work camp at Gęsia Street 30, which employed about 200 people. The "Number" is the colloquial name for the certificate of employment in the ghetto or outside it. It was not granted to people regarded by the German authorities as unnecessary – the elderly and the unskilled.

⁵⁶¹ Nur für die stolares – Only for carpenters.

To giving away!
God, no, forbid!
The wardrobes are gonna suck.
Sir Commander kept in his memory
All the merits with dignity
And decorated the woodwork clan with new numbers.
And what about the rest?
In our shop, some changes –
Instead of numbers – “numerko”
Is said by the Błotniki. Such versions go all over the shop,
That there, they justly
g-i-v-e a-w-a-y.
There’s no to give him or not!
Everyone willing can take!
So, Mr. Commander, don’t be cross
That most of the shop
Are the Błotnikis’ guests.
At the leaders’ conference,
A lot was said about “competition”.
Then, Józio, a change
In just one word,
And our shop is half empty!
It is the Achilles heel of Herszkowicz,
It half plays with a cut half.
And he looks around
Staring at young faces,
What is the basic difference?
“Numerko”, numbers – by the blushes
He’s already understood:
Better numbers!
And hid his wallet.
So not all push into the shop
Not all are eager.
There’re many who praise Lejter’s ideas.
It seems I’m from another era,
I don’t know which is my sphere.
I’ll go to serve even Lepak,
I’ll get the number

And will run away.

To escape, to escape, behind the mountains and the seas.

I'm fed up with this, I want to be killed. But by a storm, by a whirl!⁵⁶²

Example 77. Czesław Miłosz, Campo di Fiori

In Rome at Campo di Fiori,
Baskets of olives and lemons,
The cobbles sprayed with wine
And slivers of flowers.
Rose-pink seafood
Poured onto tables by vendors,
Armfuls of dark grapes
Fall upon peach fluff.

Here, in this square
Giordano Bruno⁵⁶³ was burnt,
The executioner kindled the stake
Surrounded by a curious crowd.
And when the flame was still on,
Taverns were full anew,
Baskets of olives and lemons
On vendors' heads again.

I thought of Campo di Fiori
In Warsaw by a carrousel,
On a nice spring evening
With the sounds of merry music.
Salvos behind the ghetto wall
Were dampened by a bouncy tune
And couples flew up
High into the clear sky.

At times the wind from burning houses
Brought in black kites,

⁵⁶² B. Bigielman: *Numery-numerki*. In: A. Żółkiewska, M. Tuszewicki (eds): *Archiwum Ringelbluma...*, op. cit., p. 236-238.

⁵⁶³ Giordano Bruno – An Italian Renaissance philosopher and theologian, sentenced to the burning on the stake by the Catholic Church for heresy.

The scraps of which were caught
In air by carrousel riders.
This wind from burning houses
Blew girls' dresses open,
The merry crowd was laughing
On that beautiful Sunday in Warsaw.

Someone may read the moral,
No matter if folks in Warsaw or Rome,
They trade, have fun, love,
Passing by martyrs' stakes.
Someone else will read the moral
That human things pass by,
And that oblivion grows
Still before the flame turns black.

Yet then I thought
About the dying's loneliness.
About the moment Giordano
Climbed up the scaffold
And in human language found
No single word
To part with humanity,
The humanity which remains.

They were running ready for wine,
For selling white starfish,
Baskets of olives and lemons
Carried in a merry noise.
And he was far away from them,
As if ages had passed.
They just waited a while
For his flight in fire.

And for those dying, lonely,
Forgotten by the world,
Our language has become as alien
As the tongue of the ancient planet.

Until everything is a legend
 And then after many years,
 In a new Campo di Fiori,
 A poet's word will sparkle rage.⁵⁶⁴

Example 78. Janusz Korczak, *Wesołość dobra i zła. Wesołość mądra i głupia. Wesołość przyjemna i dokuczliwa. Wesołość, która leczy, i wesołość, która sprowadza choroby*
[The cheerfulness of good and bad. Wise and stupid cheerfulness. Nice and bothersome cheerfulness.
The cheerfulness that heals and the one that brings illness]

Once – many years ago, on an educational meeting, we discussed cheerfulness and sadness. We talked about a lazy and careless girl.

What to do with her?

And about a lazy boy.

What to do with him?

The cases, laws, and punishments did not work.

Once, one of the judges voted for forgiving him.

– I'll work instead of him.

I was young and stupid at that time, I used to interfere when people wanted to do something or not.

– You work too little, you work too much, you – for too short, you – for too long, you too quickly. I always had something to say.

This one reads too little, that one reads too much, this takes too difficult books, that takes too easy ones. This one sits too much, that one stands too much; this one has a protruding nose, that one – such ears. This one has too blue eyes, that one – too black ones. The hair of this one grows too fast, as well as the nails of that one. There are such boarding schools in which the tutor knows everything that was before, is now and will be in the future.

– You will grow up to be such and you – to be such. Your life will be such and such and your end will be such. – You will break your arm, you will fall down from a tree, and you will be run over by a tram, and you will suffer from five inflammations: of your throat, lungs, brain, stomach and ass.

They know, but later it turns out to be quite different. A rogue is as sound as a bell and the quiet one breaks legs. A lazy one gets a good job and the hard-working

⁵⁶⁴ C. Miłosz: *Campo di Fiori*. In: C. Miłosz: *Ocalenie*. Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza Czytelnik, Warszawa 1945, p. 100-101. The poem written at Easter 1943.

one is sacked everywhere. Thus, in small steps, a tutor learns to interfere less and rarely declares what will happen and what will not...

Therefore, when this judge started to defend the lazy boy, I asked why he liked him. Afterwards, I asked all judges about the same.

The first said: – Because he's merry.

The second: – Because he's nice.

The third: – Because he tells funny jokes.

The fourth: – Because he leads funny games

The fifth said: – And why do you like a squirrel or grass? After all, they don't bring anything, anything useful.

I kept this in mind: "As grass". I started to think: "Grain is wise and useful. Grain is serious. Potatoes – as well. And a cow is serious and solemn. And a pig, too. Nobody has ever seen a smiling cow or a pig which jumps from a branch to a branch and from a tree to a tree. And the sun? Flowers? Butterflies? And grasshoppers, a kitten, a foal, and a puppy?

The merry greenness of grass, the merry laughter of birds, the merry flying of a butterfly, the merry jumps of a grasshopper or a green frog". And I thought: "Merriness – a good joke, a nice smile, a mild look, brings benefits. There are still unknown vitamins in them, some beams that have not been explored yet.". And I thought: "I must learn to joke".

It went badly – very badly.

Once I tossed a small child and there was a hanging lamp – it hit its head. Once, on a stubble, I started to twist tiny grids with a bare-footed boy and he hurt his legs badly. Once a small girl and me chased each other and her hair hooked on by my button. I pulled it and it hurt a lot. Instead of laughter – pain and tears. I wanted to stop, yet I see that they do not feel offended for a long time, that they want to joke again, you just need to be more careful.

I have learnt the jokes that they do not like. I have understood that there are people who do not like jokes and do not understand merriness at all. This is the same as when someone does not like singing or dancing, nor long hair, nor even meat or new shoes. There are people you cannot joke with as they immediately become impertinent and rude.

And I have learnt to recognize when even a merry joke is not nice. And I have seen when the same joke is nice if the joker is someone they like and not nice – if they do not. I have learnt this, which does not mean I do not make mistakes today. I have learnt, but I can be wrong even now. – It was hard for me to learn as they often pretended that they liked my joke when – just the contrary – it was unpleasant and they did not enjoy it.

Why do they not teach how to joke at school? It is as equally important as history, gymnastics, or the multiplication table.

There are unhealthy, dangerous, and harmful jokes. You should not – just for fun – scare others, nor hide things, nor call someone and pretend you want something. Lifting things up behind the head can cause death, pushing the eyes strongly may cause blindness.

There are wise and stupid jokes. There are pleasant and bothersome jokes. Oleś bites as a joke.⁵⁶⁵ He bit the hand, the leg, and even the ass. Enjoy your meal, Mister Oleś. Yet, after Oleś's joke, there were two big bruises on Mary's hand. It was very strange that nobody wrote Oleś down for a board trial. – Maybe they had forgotten him, as he was stupid and did it not out of malice but out of boredom. Because he was lazy. Lazy at school, lazy at his duties, lazy at reading, even lazy at playing. A clown is not bothersome. I thought what to do for a long time. Maybe not to interfere? Maybe still wait?

But clowning is infectious. It was said that Jozek Faterlauf had already started to bite. And what will be in a week's or a month's time? Dogs' jokes and hoaxes are good in the kennel. One should tell Oleś: it is enough.

I beat Olek not because of his stupid and harmful joking. An honour board trial and a punishment would be sufficient for that. I beat him because he was Mrs. Leonka's son and it could seem to new and silly kids that Oleś had different rights than others, that he could do what he wanted, and that Mrs. Leonka would be cross with the one who would bring that clowning lazy idler to the honour board.

I was afraid of this. I got frightened that Oleś could have practiced his doggish clowning, although there was our care, the staff, the cash aid, the advice office, the calendar, and the paper, to which everyone could write about what they suffered, what they wanted to change or improve, what wishes they had.

Therefore, I beat Oleś and I announced his relocation to Dzielna Street or Stawki Street if he did not calm down and get smarter.⁵⁶⁶

To the Honour Board

I am enclosing the list of heroic, and even more – d o g g i s h, deeds of Oleś. I do not care for a severe punishment, but I want Oleś to understand he may be relegated to Dzielna Street or Stawki Street. – This is not a threat but an unpleasant necessity for me. He should not go on like that and he will not.

⁵⁶⁵ Oleś Asz was a son of Leonia Lengier Asz, an ex-pupil of the Orphanage, the favourite of J. Koczak, Stefania Wilczyńska and the children in the orphanage.

⁵⁶⁶ The author mentions the possible penal transfer of Oleś to similar institutions at Dzielna or Stawki Street.

Apart from Mary, Oleś bit:

1. the arm of: Leon, Szlama – many times; Abramek, Bolek – many times; Josek – the arm and cheek; Mietek, Szmuluś – the leg and arm; Szmulek, Sucher – many times.

2. the ass of: Abuś, Marian, Szlama.

3. the ear of: Motek.

4. Natan and he pinched him.

It is said that his disciple, Josek has already started to bite.

Oleś's excuse

It is true that I have bitten all those mentioned by the Doctor, I shall do my best to improve. I hope that soon the promised improvement will be visible if nothing disturbs me. I would like to ask you for help in this difficult mission.

Yours sincerely (-) Your Oleś⁵⁶⁷

**Example 79. Wiktor Ostrowski, *Na cześć pewnego profesora*
[In honour of a certain professor]**

The cold of Finland, the heat of Africa

A quiet fiord and the Wild West,

Mountains, forests, and isthmuses.

Oceans, seas, the land...

"He" is well known to all

And hospitably treated.

From all the bits of knowledge,

Such was the issued judgement:

Chorus: Sir Professor, Sir Professor⁵⁶⁸

Of all the knowledge he's a judge and assessor,

In the university, everybody's grateful

When the professor sits with them.

⁵⁶⁷ J. Korczak: *Wesołość dobra i zła. Wesołość mądra i głupia. Wesołość przyjemna i dokuczliwa. Wesołość, która leczy, i wesołość, która sprowadza choroby*. In: A. Lewin (ed.): *Janusz Korczak w getcie. Nowe źródła*. Oficyna Wydawnicza Latona, Warszawa 1992, p. 239-243.

⁵⁶⁸ The song from June 1944, sung to the melody of "W Pikutkowie dziś sensacja [There is a sensation in Pikutkowo now]", dedicated to Professor Jan Rostafiński, who stayed in KL Stutthof. J. Rostafiński was a widely liked lecturer, who (most often after supper in a corner of the barrack) attracted listeners and disclosed the world of science for them. K. Dunin-Wąsowicz: *Obóz koncentracyjny...*, op. cit., p. 213-214.

What is healthy for a lion,
 He will tell you.
 What a cow should be given,
 And what a dog shouldn't...
 How to make an elephant from a squirrel,
 How to teach a horse to sing,
 How to change meadows into a wood –
 Ask these questions to him.

Chorus: Sir Professor...

All the walks of life wondered,
 Both the laymen and the ragged,
 That Professor is so famous.
 Here in Stutthoff he sat with us...
 It's a great honour for us,
 That with merriness and humour
 In a common prisoner's way,
 He ate hard bread with us...

Chorus: Sir Professor, Sir Professor,
 Of all the knowledge he's a judge and assessor,
 In the Pawiak or in Stutthoff, everybody's grateful
 When the professor sits with them.⁵⁶⁹

**Example 80. Wiktor Ostrowski, *Na wolności kto niewinny...*
 [Free is the innocent...]**

Free is the innocent, oh!
 But sits in Stutthoff as others, oh!
 Who distributed papers, oh!
 Hid himself in Stutthoff, oh!
 From Warsaw, from the Pawiak, from the Pawiak, from the Pawiak,
 A Varsovian was brought here, a Varsovian, oh!

Who walked with a gun in hand, oh!
 Snores on our bunk, oh!

⁵⁶⁹ Ibidem, p. 210-211.

Who was caught on the street, oh!
Sits with politicians here, oh!
From Warsaw, from...., etc.

Who was a robber in Warsaw, oh!
Will kindly sit here, oh!
The most pleasant sitting, oh!
Is for who worked underground, oh!
From Warsaw, from...., etc.

Don't sit like wet hens, oh!
Put a smile on your face, the head up, oh!
The war will end soon, oh!
A calm future waits for us, oh!
From Warsaw, from...., etc.

Then, watch, who is curious, oh!
How we head for Warsaw, oh!
There, Warsaw girls are waiting, oh!
Wives, daughters, lovers, oh!
From Warsaw, from...., etc.⁵⁷⁰

**Example 81. Adolf Gawalewicz, *Kłopoty pana blokowego*
[A block man's problems]**

Ladies and gentlemen, I'll say something,
And this is quite new,
As with a lot of charm
The durchfal room blossomed with Głowa⁵⁷¹

⁵⁷⁰ Ibidem, p. 212-213. The stanzas of the song from July 1944, sung to the melody of "Przemówił dziad do obrazu [The old man said to a picture]", the chorus – to the melody "Pójdź tam, Hanka, tam u chrustu [Hanka, go there, to the firewood]".

⁵⁷¹ Irena Urbańska, the author of the poem's interpretation, explains the circumstances of its creation in the following way: *In the hospital block, the functions of block men were at the same time taken over by Stanisław Głowa in the room for suffering from diarrhoea and Stanisław Rospondek in the room for the recovering patients. (...) the word "durchfal" means hunger diarrhoea and the "schronung block" was dedicated to patients recovering from illnesses. Camp doctors often placed the patients with internal diseases there.* I. Urbańska: *Życie kulturalne...*, op. cit., p. 93-94. The authors use various spellings of the functionary's name (Rospenek – Rozpondek).

And szonung room – with Rospenk.
 Hence, a new problem,
 Which I will explain soon.
 A block man cries
 That his head cracks.⁵⁷²
 I'll put it in another way
 Without long arguments as well
 Głowa with Rospenk are better
 Than anyone else.⁵⁷³

Example 82. N.N., *Satyra KL Ravensbrück* [KL Ravensbrück satire]

There were two of them – one dark-reddish,
 Lively and nice,
 Jumped through trapezes and bamboos
 All day long,
 Or jumped through hoops
 Onto her four limbs.
 Another time, with grace
 She fanned with her tail,
 Collected nuts, or
 Scratched herself.
 And when repentance time came
 She went on the wire.
 The other is still alive unfortunately
 And her appetite is growing.
 She's a female like the other
 But not so fiery.
 She husks peas and spits the same way
 And fans itself alike.
 She jumps as well but not through hoops
 And scratches even more.
 She shouts and nags and opens her snout as if
 She wanted to brag about her wisdom teeth
 Which she has never had.
 How can she be wise? At least a bit?

⁵⁷² “Głowa” means “head” in Polish; “Rospenk” means “cracked”. (trans. note: A.C.)

⁵⁷³ A. Gawalewicz: *Refleksje...*, op. cit., p. 76-77.

She's as foolish as a donkey.
 But her heart muscle is flexible
 Like a rubber hose.
 If she's bored with one partner
 She tries to get another at once.
 If one sweats and runs away,
 She already smiles to another one.
 Yet, males are attracted by her meat loaves,
 No fear that, when her chase fails,
 She'll go on the wire
 Out of sorrow or for repentance,
 Unless a passer-by hangs there
 A pair of trousers.⁵⁷⁴

**Example 83. Stanisław Wiśniewski, *W Dachau fajno jest*
 [It is fine in Dachau]**

It is fine in Dachau, it's fine.
 You'll get a litre of rotten turnip
 And 15 ounces of bread.

Then you go to the factory
 To work for twelve hours.
 At the machines, you look like the living dead
 But the Gestapo man's look says: work faster!

When in sweat and blood you work enough,
 An SS-man chases you to the lager with his whip,
 It is fine in Dachau, it's fine.
 And when it's alarm time,
 Sirens alarm us.
 They set us for a roll call
 Civilians run away from the works.

But we are chased to bunkers near the works
 As it is fine in Dachau, it's fine.

⁵⁷⁴ N.N.: *Satyra*. In: K. Strzelewicz: *Polskie wiersze obozowe i więzienne 1939-1945 w archiwum Aleksandra Kulisiewicza*. Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, Kraków 1983, p. 29-30.

In a bunker, Brother, do what you want.
Because when a bomb is dropped there

A common grave is waiting for us –
But don't care about it, Brother, as well,
As it is fine in Dachau, it's fine.⁵⁷⁵

**Example 84. Maria Masłowska, *Jak to zdrowo i wesoło*
[How healthy and merry it is]**

How healthy and merry
It is to live with no shoes in winter
To freeze to the bone and to mock
Around, looking at the Jerries.

How interestingly and lightly
It is to feel an empty stomach
And hardly to sleep at night,
But at roll calls stand in rank.

How cleverly and jokingly
It is to fight scabies and lice
To whiten the collar on the stripes
To be carefree and swallow tears...

How tenderly and kindly
It is to hear Germans' slogans
(which protect us safely
Even if a bomb went off).

"Maul halten polnische Schweine
Du keine Sorgen, Krankheit keine!
Arbeit macht Frei! weiter los, los"⁵⁷⁶
Such gargling omnipresent was.

⁵⁷⁵ S. Wiśniewski: *W Dachau fajno jest*. In: K. Strzelewicz: *Polskie wiersze...*, op. cit., p. 250.

⁵⁷⁶ Maul halten polnische Schweine, du keine Sorgen, Krankheit keine! Arbeit macht Frei! Weiter los, los! – Shut up, you Polish pigs, don't worry, you'll not get sick out of this! Work makes you free! Go on, faster, faster!

How lucky my fate is
 That I've already learnt Hitlerism
 Me, not a man but a Number,
 Have seen the depth of their crime.

Ordnung,⁵⁷⁷ The refinement is apparent!
 Inside – mud and carcass!
 Good heart isn't known to them
 Only uppity grins on their faces.

Hurray life! Hurray the Sun!
 The lager pot roasts people.
 Some shine as diamonds do,
 Others lie in some mud.

Those who'll go out alive
 Won't be later broken by anything,
 Will make a frame for Poland
 With their work – and even dreams!⁵⁷⁸

**Example 85. Anna Jachnina, *Po Auschwitzu sobie tupam*
 [I patter all over Auschwitz]**

I patter all over Auschwitz,
 And I look – a corpse here, a corpse there.
 Piles of corpses lying everywhere.
 Rats've eaten ears and noses.
 In the field, each new group like a sack
 Carries a dead man on their back.
 To go out of this morgue will be hard,
 As death walks here, knocking all over the yard.⁵⁷⁹

⁵⁷⁷ Ordnung – order.

⁵⁷⁸ M. "Ryśka" Masłowska: *Humor harcerski*. In: A. Szefer (ed.): *Mury. Harcerska konspiracyjna drużyna w Ravensbrück*, Śląski Instytut Naukowy, Katowice 1986, p. 151-152. A poem written in KL Ravensbrück in 1942.

⁵⁷⁹ M. Woźniak, A. Jachnina: *Śmiechem zabijać wojnę*. In: "Czas", No 3/1975, p. 24.

Example 86. The jokes of the occupied Poland

Just after taking over Warsaw, Hitler started to look for a place for his monument. At first, he came to King Sigismund at the Castle Square.

– “King Sigismund, come down from this column – it’ll be a place for me” – he said.

Yet, the king replied: – “It is me who stands here with the cross as a fighter in the defence of religion and you want to throw me off? What will the whole Catholic world say to this?”

Hitler agreed and went away. He came to Prince Poniatowski and started to encourage him to get off his horse. The prince said: – “It’s impossible. I fought as a soldier, I died in the German land, where I even have a gravestone, and you want to ruin this?”

– “You might be right” – answered Hitler and he went to Copernicus.

– “Sir Copernicus” – he said – “come down here to the ground, this should be a place for me.”

– “Me to the ground? Me, who was born in Toruń, which your nation considers also as their town? And what will the Volksdeutsch say to this?”

– “You are absolutely right” – Hitler said and went to Mickiewicz.

– “Sir poet, please, come down from this high plinth, exactly this will be a comfortable place for me. “

Not thinking much, Mickiewicz came down. Then, Hitler took his place and, as his predecessor, put his hand on his heart.

Mickiewicz was standing on the ground and a huge crowd had gathered there. Hitler noticed that the poet was indicating with his hand the inscription on the monument and that the crowd were laughing heartily.

– “What are they laughing at?” – Hitler asked the poet and pointed to the crowd.

– “At the inscription, which is currently topical “– said the poet.

– “And what is written there?” – asked Hitler.

– “For the author of ‘Dziady [Paupers]’– the compatriots! – such an answer was heard.”⁵⁸⁰

Wartime, Christmas Eve 1940. There will be no nativity play for children this year. The Germans have forbidden it due to the lack of main actors.

– How is this possible?

⁵⁸⁰ A. Jachnina, M. Ruth Buczkowski: *Anegdota i dowcip...*, op. cit., p. 3.

– Jesus is in the ghetto, the Holy Mother is in Nazareth, the donkey in Rome, the devil in Berlin, three wise men in London – no one to perform.⁵⁸¹

Two sharks met on the Mediterranean Sea, where the sea battles were going on for the supplies of soldiers and weapons to Northern Africa. As the younger of them had good manners, it lifted its tail to greet the older and shouted: – “Heil Hitler!”

– “What is this? Are you mad?” – the old shark asked. – “How did this greeting come to your mind?”

– “You see,” – the younger one said – “I haven’t gone mad but yesterday, after a battle, I swallowed a Volksdeutsch and I’ve been burping all the time.”⁵⁸²

A small dog is sitting in a window of a flat and is thinking: – “How have the times changed... Previously, my lady used to look through the window and worry about me – whether I have not been caught by a dogcatcher, but now – I have to look through the window and worry if she has not been caught by the Germans.”⁵⁸³

At school, after the bombing of Berlin:

– “Show me where Berlin is situated.”

– “Sir, I can only show the place where Berlin was.”⁵⁸⁴

A strange type of aeroplane was noticed. The observers could not find out which country it belonged to. Suddenly, one observer said: – “I know whose planes they are. They belong to the Russians.”

– “How do you know?”

– “I’ve simply noticed bare feet of the pilot.”⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸¹ Ibidem, p. 4.

⁵⁸² A. Chętnik: *Wspomnienia...*, op. cit., p. 103.

⁵⁸³ E. Hull: *Okupacyjny humor, dowcip, anegdota w dokumentacji Adama Chętnika*. In: “Rocznik Mazowiecki”, No 18/2006, p. 152.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibidem, p. 152.

⁵⁸⁵ *Folklor wojenny...*, op. cit., p. 723.

An angel was sent from Heaven for an inspection to find out what was going on in the world. After a certain time, he comes with the report that he could not understand this world. – England is not armed but does not want peace. Germany is armed but wants peace. And the Jews shout that everything is all right!⁵⁸⁶

Churchill has invited a rabbi from Góra Kalwaria and has a conference with him on how to conquer Germany. There are two possibilities: the natural way or a miracle. The natural way: a million angels with fiery swords falls down on Germany and annihilates it. A miracle: a million Englishmen land in Germany and crush it.⁵⁸⁷

The winter of 1939/1940. There is a long queue of people in need in front of a charitable institution hoping to get help. It is freezing. The people are talking.

– Now you can see what “the weather for the rich” means. They will have to queue in summer, when it is warm.

In the same winter, people heard about a new English invention: a gas which freezes German soldiers. Therefore, one will not have to be worried about meat. There is enough frozen meat.⁵⁸⁸

A Jew was deprived of all his belongings but he was still merry and thinking positively.

– “You’ve lost your whole fortune, isn’t your spirit plummeting?”

– “Sorry, my dear neighbour. They’ve seized Bohemia, Poland, Denmark, Belgium, the Netherlands, France, and other countries. After all, when they have to give all this back, they will return my things as well.”⁵⁸⁹

In a certain small town, the Mayor issued a directive that Jews had to leave. So, he placed the notice: “Jews, go away – Germans, come in!”. The Jews placed a similar inscription in big letters on the Jewish cemetery.⁵⁹⁰

⁵⁸⁶ Ibidem, p. 724.

⁵⁸⁷ B. Engelking, J. Leociak: *Getto warszawskie...*, op. cit., p. 571.

⁵⁸⁸ *Folklor wojenny...*, op. cit., p. 721.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibidem, p. 721.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibidem, p. 739.

- Are you signing up for a trip to Palestine?
- What trip? What signing up and registration? Don't you know that Germans are already in Cairo? Before the Qahal has finished the registration, they will be sending Jews from Eretz Israel to the Warsaw ghetto.⁵⁹¹

Three Jews are talking about the pleasures they will let themselves have after the war. The first: – I'll buy a lot of sausages, butter, and rolls. I'll only sit and eat all day long... The second: I'll travel all over the world and visit all the battlefields where the Germans were defeated. The third: – I'll buy a bicycle and I'll ride all over Germany...

The first two laughed: – What a pleasure he has chosen – just for two hours!⁵⁹²

⁵⁹¹ N. Rocheles: *Aktualne rozmowy*. In: A. Żółkiewska, M. Tuszewicki (eds): *Archiwum Ringelbluma...*, op. cit., p. 742.

⁵⁹² *Ibidem*, p. 742.

Ending

Just after the war, Molly Picton⁵⁹³ with her humorous repertoire came to Poland for guest performances. Having noticed a young Jewish woman with a child in her arms, she asked why she had not left the baby at home. – I've come so that my child could hear human laughter for the first time in their life – said the mother.⁵⁹⁴

Melchior Wańkowicz

Despite its undoubtedly positive social effects in the communities which really needed this particular kind of relief from stress, the activity of the professional and amateur people of laughter was often an object of criticism. Laughter in the context of warfare, terror, and the victims' drama might have been treated as absurd, madness, or infringing upon a taboo. As Zdzisław Jastrzębski notices, indignation was expressed in many environments by agelasts,⁵⁹⁵ who followed the principle that (...) *in such hard times, one cannot laugh. Some others, who did not fully share such a standpoint, avoided certain forms of humour in order not to bring about misunderstanding or scandal. The reservation concerning laughter could have resulted also from both the wish to be protected from the style imposed by the occupier and the fear of being identified with that style. Some did not appreciate the significance of humour and satire as a method of fighting or considered them to be the forms that are disproportionate to the tragedy of the situation.*⁵⁹⁶

Playing merry shows in ghettos outraged religious purists, who saw sin in them and condemned the organizers of entertainment for their “graveyard games”. Youth from the communist and Bund-related circles protest-

⁵⁹³ An American film and theatre actress, an author of song lyrics in Yiddish.

⁵⁹⁴ M. Wańkowicz: *Karałka...*, op. cit., p. 386.

⁵⁹⁵ Agelast – from Greek “agelastes” (*gelas* – the one who laughs, glitters, shines + *a-* a negation prefix). Colloq.: a gloomy person, an opponent of laughter.

⁵⁹⁶ Z. Jastrzębski: *Poetyka humoru lat...*, op. cit., p. 13.

ed as well, viewing it as a kind of escapism and a manifestation of the petty-bourgeois philosophy of survival at all costs (even at the cost of illusions that a bad fate can turn gracious). By promoting the slogan "Theatre should not be played at the graveyard!", young radicals encouraged people to undertake the risk of armed struggle against the occupier.⁵⁹⁷

In the environment of educators, the golden mean was searched for in the shadow of agelasts' doubts. On the one hand, it was thought that one should not play and laugh in the face of the suffering of the nation. Yet, on the other hand, educators were aware that suppressing the symptoms of merriness during the prolonging occupation is neither possible nor recommended. Regardless of the situation, especially children and youth need joy, careless playing, and laughter with their peers. Desiring laughter, they seek all possible occasions, being often unaware that certain forms of joyful entertainment might be perceived in the category of high treason. This was exemplified by the temptation to watch a comedy in the cinemas and to spend some intimate moments in the company of a girlfriend or boyfriend, while those places were boycotted by the activists of the underground movement in Poland, which was most clearly manifested in the slogan "Only pigs sit in the cinema". This discussion was echoed in the underground publications.⁵⁹⁸

Particularly stormy debates took place among artists themselves, out of whom many painfully experienced the consequences of the war. As Zdzisław Jastrzębski claims (...) *apart from the growing rank of humour, (...) there were some announcements and statements aimed against humorous art. What triggers reflection (...) is the fact that almost every editorial team, while starting the publication of a humorous or satirical paper, considered it necessary to excuse themselves from undertaking such a "not serious" initiative. This mostly resulted from the fear that such a step might be wrongly understood and treated as something inappropriate in the face of the horror of war. Was there inconsistency in this or was the social attitude to humour and entertainment diversified or not crystallized? Or maybe various categories of entertainment were distinguished? It seems that the (sometimes apparent) contradiction between the large-scale practicing of humorous creativity*

⁵⁹⁷ R.M. Groński: *Taki był kabaret...*, op. cit., p. 227-228.

⁵⁹⁸ Z. Jastrzębski: *Poetyka humoru lat...*, op. cit., p. 14. – More on this: *Co wolno, czego nie wolno*. In: "Głos Polski i Komunikat Informacyjny Pobudki", No 210/1942; *Jakie rozrywki dla młodzieży uważam za nieodpowiednie obecnie, a jakie za odpowiednie i dlaczego*. In: "Młodzież", No 1/1942; *Zabawa – ale jaka?* In: "Dziś i Jutro", No 15/1941.

*(and attributing it a lot of importance) and the simultaneous requirement of keeping the national atmosphere of mourning is a consequence of several different and more or less interrelated reasons.*⁵⁹⁹

Some artists (e.g. Tadeusz Gajcy, Ewa Pohoska, Andrzej Trzebiński) tried to make a judgement concerning the ideological and philosophical foundation of the art in the two interwar decades. Before the war, some searched for a new style of culture, they understood art as a carefree entertainment, and applied a careless or even irresponsible attitude and lifestyle, which – in the opinion of critics – did not comply with the seriousness of events and the struggle for serious and responsible art. The war and occupation were meant to be proof of the bankruptcy of the idea of art that serves the society. From this perspective, comical creativity appeared as anachronistic and dangerous. Thus, comical art and joyful entertainment in the public sphere were regarded as primitive and even harmful. By forbidding the activity and eliminating the forms of high-level entertainment (e.g. theatres, libraries, museums, galleries), the occupiers left small variety theatres, cabaret scenes, cinemas, cafes, gaming casinos, etc., which often involved the rude humour of the social margins and pornography. This was considered as supporting the so-called *Warszawka*.⁶⁰⁰

Then, how *SUCH* art could enhance the struggle against the occupier and serve the national values? These issues were extensively analysed by the authors of articles in “*Biuletyn Informacyjny*”, “*Głos Polski* [The Voice of Poland]”, “*Falsze Propagandy Niemieckiej* [The Falsehood of the German Propaganda]”, “*Polska Żyje* [Poland is Alive]”, “*Znak* [A Sign]”.⁶⁰¹

The end of the warfare and occupation made these conflicts much weaker, however, its echoes can be heard even today in the memoirs and specialist studies. The end of the war triggered an explosion of joyful laughter in the environments of the recent victims. Many works of comical art associated with the executioners ceased to be topical as their heroes (e.g. Nazi criminals) had lost their lives or had been imprisoned, and were not harmful any longer. Right after the war, hardly anyone wanted to laugh at them – people were busy with rebuilding their worlds and many of them did not want to return to those hard times, even or especially, in their thoughts.

⁵⁹⁹ Z. Jastrzębski: *Poetyka humoru lat...*, op. cit., p. 10-11.

⁶⁰⁰ *Warszawka* – an ironic or contemptuous expression used to describe the influential people connected with Warsaw (i.e. social or political elites).

⁶⁰¹ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

As regards laughter after the war and occupation, it can be largely diversified by juxtaposing the examples of the laughter of the victims who took part in the crisis and remember it; the laughter of gawkers, who were not affected by the crisis as they did not live in the areas directly involved in the warfare and occupation; and the laughter, free of the crisis legacy, of those who were born later. In this situation, the laughter of the recent victims, which appeared in various contexts, used to have a cathartic, therapeutic, and educational character. Yet, what has been, up to now, particularly painful for the victims and their closest families is the laughter of the gawkers, as well as the laughter of the unaware representatives of the post-war generations, which painfully touches the past of older relatives, neighbours and friends.

It did not take long after the war to create some important and warmly received works of comical art. The imminent danger disappeared but, due to the fresh memory of the crisis and its effects, the demand for laughter (and self-laughter) did not. However, new controversies arose as well because of this demand for humour.

Troublesome “post-laughter”

In Poland, the novel *Café pod minogą* [*Minoga Café*] by Wiech⁶⁰² was published in 1947 (it was continued in his 1960 volume *Maniś Kitajec i jego ferajna* [*Maniś Kitajec and His Gang*]).⁶⁰³ The author not only showed various areas of the reality of occupation in a funhouse mirror, but also touched with a smile such a painful event of the national history as the Warsaw Uprising.

The press also returned to deriding the occupation figures. For example, the satirical weekly “Szpilki” often presented the satires and caricatures of the Nazis – both those refreshed from the pre-war time or the war and occupation and those currently drawn in the spirit of the policy of the new government.⁶⁰⁴ In the Cold War period, the former enemies appeared in the company of some revisionists. For political propagan-

⁶⁰² Wiech: *Cafe pod minogą*. Avir, Katowice 1947.

⁶⁰³ Wiech: *Maniś Kitajec i jego ferajna*. Iskry, Warszawa 1960.

⁶⁰⁴ W. Brudziński, A. Marianowicz, A. Mostowicz (eds): *Coś nam zostało z tych lat. Szpilki 1935-1965*. Wydawnictwo Artystyczno-Graficzne RSW “Prasa”, Warszawa 1967; S. Dziukowski: *Niemiec wyszydzony*. Wydawnictwo Ludwika Fiszer a i Józefa Kubickiego, Warszawa 1946; E. Lipiński, J. Szeląg (eds): *Pożegnanie z Hitlerem...*, op. cit.

da, even the scenarios of satirical shows with Hitler's ghost as the star were published.⁶⁰⁵ A modern curiosity is the comic album *Tytus, Romek i Atomek jako warszawscy powstańcy* [*Tytus, Romek, and Atomek as Warsaw Insurgents*], in which the heroes of the series of comics "become" the participants of some amusing scenes from the times of the occupation and uprising, which Henryk Jerzy Chmielewski – the author of the series – experienced himself.⁶⁰⁶

The first post-war Polish film comedy in which the reality of occupation was boldly derided without ideological or political subtexts was the adaptation of the aforementioned Wiech novel *Café pod Minogą*, directed by Bronisław Brok in 1959.⁶⁰⁷ A similar warm reception was offered to Stanisław Lenartowicz's comedy *Giuseppe w Warszawie* [*Giuseppe in Warsaw*]⁶⁰⁸ in 1964 and, later, Tadeusz Chmielewski's *Jak rozpiętałem drugą wojnę światową* [*How I Unleashed World War II*]⁶⁰⁹, based on the comical novel of Kazimierz Sławiński *Przygody kanoniera Dolasa* [*The Adventures of Gunner Dolas*],⁶¹⁰ or Janusz Majewski's *Złoto dezertków* [*The Deserters' Gold*]⁶¹¹ from 1998.

Foreign artists have sought motifs for contemporary comical creation in the history of World War II and the occupation as well. In 1972, Jerry Lewis – an American comedian of the Jewish origin, a film actor and producer, started shooting the film *The Day the Clown Cried*. The scenario comprised of a story about a clown, who had been arrested by the Gestapo and who brought courage to the Jewish children walking to their deaths in KL Auschwitz. Already at the earliest stages of shooting, the film was considered so controversial that it has never been finished. Its fragments,

⁶⁰⁵ S. Chmielnicki, T. Drzewiecki: *Duchy z duszkiem. Widowisko satyryczne oparte na motywach II części "Dziadów" Adama Mickiewicza*. Towarzystwo Rozwoju Ziemi Zachodnich, Zarząd Wojewódzki, Opole 1961.

⁶⁰⁶ H.J. Chmielewski: *Tytus, Romek i Atomek jako warszawscy powstańcy 1944 z wyobraźni Papcia Chmiela narysowani*. Prószyński Media, Warszawa 2009.

⁶⁰⁷ B. Brok: *Café pod Minogą*. Poland 1959; K. Trojanowski: *Na przekór okupacyjnej rzeczywistości. Warszawski humor w "Café pod Minogą" Bronisława Broka*. In: "Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Zielonogórskiego. Seria Scripta Humana", No 2353-1681, vol. 6/2016, p. 213-229.

⁶⁰⁸ S. Lenartowicz: *Giuseppe w Warszawie*. Poland 1964.

⁶⁰⁹ T. Chmielewski: *Jak rozpiętałem drugą wojnę światową*. Poland 1969.

⁶¹⁰ K. Sławiński: *Przygody kanoniera Dolasa*. Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, Łódź 1967.

⁶¹¹ J. Majewski: *Złoto dezertków*. Poland 1998.

however, have leaked into the public sphere and, even today, are an object of debate among film fans about the borders of satire.⁶¹²

There are many examples of completed film productions which have been successful in the cinema or on TV. Here are the most popular ones:

- *Don't Look Now... We're Being Shot At!* – a French comedy directed by Gerard Oury, with two comedians Louis de Funès and Bourvill, taking part in the adventures of some Allied pilots shot down near Paris;⁶¹³
- *Allo, Allo* – the British series made in 1982-1992 by David Croft and Jeremy Lloyd, who also used the motif of downed pilots;⁶¹⁴
- *To Be or Not to Be* – Alan Johnson's comedy about a theatre group in occupied Warsaw;⁶¹⁵
- *Life Is Beautiful* – Robert Benigni's comedy, among other things, about life in a concentration camp;⁶¹⁶
- *Train of Life* – a satirical tale of Radu Mihaileanu about some Jews' train escape from the Holocaust;⁶¹⁷
- *Jakob the Liar* – a black comedy directed by Peter Krassovitz, shot in Piotrków Trybunalski (Poland), starring Robin Williams, who plays a Jew who supports his fellows in the ghetto by telling them amusing stories.⁶¹⁸

In 2015, to commemorate the Holocaust and basing their performance on self-laughter, Jewish artists from The Manhattan Repertory Theatre at Times Square implemented a project in collaboration with The Jewish Community High School of the Bay in San Francisco. In the show full of black humour, a Rabbi is often amused by prisoners from a concentration camp, who tell jokes, sing, make allusions to Jewish national character,

⁶¹² D. Konow: *The day the clown cried. The movie Jerry Lewis doesn't want you to see (not that you'd want to)*. www.denofgeek.com/movies/458746/the_day_the_clown_cried_the_movie_jerry_lewis_doesnt_want_you_to_see_not_that_youd_want_to.html; *The Story of The Day The Clown Cried*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jbZlyXNRxos>.

⁶¹³ G. Oury: *La Grande vadouille*. France 1966.

⁶¹⁴ D. Croft, J. Lloyd: *Allo Allo*. Great Britain 1982-1992.

⁶¹⁵ A. Johnson: *To be or not to be*. USA 1983. There are two films entitled in this way: Alana Johnson's 1983 film is a remake of Ernst Lubitsch's film from 1942.

⁶¹⁶ R. Benigni: *La vita e bella*. Italy 1997.

⁶¹⁷ R. Mihaileanu: *Train de vie*. Belgium, France, Netherlands, Israel, Romania 1998.

⁶¹⁸ P. Krassovitz: *Jakob the Liar*. USA 1999.

and the circumstances of World War II.⁶¹⁹ In January, 2018, the show "Cabaret dans le Ghetto [Cabaret in the Ghetto]" was presented in the Théâtre de l'Épée de Bois in Paris. It was directed by Justyna Wojtyniak and was based on the texts by Władysław Szlengel. Armelle Heliot – a reviewer from the daily "Le Figaro", summarized the show in the following way: *A simple and what a moving celebration of a tragic moment in the European history. Szlengel's voice appeals to us in the totally present time. Music, dance, laughter, and joy – there is nothing gloomy in this show. A variety show can talk about history with seriousness and can still remain entertainment.*⁶²⁰

Owing to the popularity of the Internet, the project implemented by an Italian cartoonist, Alessandro Palombo, got a large reception. To celebrate the seventieth anniversary of the liberation of KL Auschwitz – Palombo placed his favourite heroes of the satirical animated series about the Simpsons, in the scenery of a concentration camp. In his cycle of drawings entitled "The Simpsons. NEVER AGAIN", apart from the Simpsons, the figure of Annelies Marie "Anna" Frank appears at the main entrance to KL Auschwitz. She was a German Jew, the author of the famous war-time diary, who was taken to KL Bergen-Belsen and died there of typhus in March 1945. In one of Palombo's cartoons, Anna Frank holds the notice boards with the inscriptions: "Never again" and "Stop anti-Semitism". The juxtaposition of some amusing heroes from a modern cartoon with such a serious theme was favourably received, even by the journalists and readers of Israeli magazines as an interesting way of commemorating the Holocaust. In his interview with the "Jerusalem Post", Palombo said: *My drawings invite reflection. They are to raise awareness, especially of the younger generation. The Holocaust should be talked about literally and without filters, recalling the facts and horrifying images which reflect the terror of the annihilation of many millions of human beings. Only in this way can we fight against racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, and all other forms of intolerance that threaten our societies.*⁶²¹

⁶¹⁹ J. Rosenberg: *Making the Rabbi Laugh. Auschwitz, Theatre and the absurdity of evil.* <http://howlround.com/making-the-rabbi-laugh-auschwitz-theatre-and-the-absurdity-of-evil>.

⁶²⁰ L. Lewin: *Paryż. Sukces spektaklu "Cabaret dans le Ghetto".* In: <http://www.e-teatr.pl/pl/artykuly/253543.html>.

⁶²¹ Ł. Woźnicki: *Homer umiera w komorze gazowej. Artysta wysłał do Auschwitz Simpsonów.* http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,17321654,Homer_umiera_w_komorze_gazowej__Artysta_wyslal_do.html.

Palombo's cartoons are often compared to the controversial installation by Zbigniew Libera "Lego. Obóz koncentracyjny [Lego. A concentration camp]", in which – among other figures – there are smiling skeletons. The same artist, in the photography series "Mistrzowie i Pozytywy [Masters and Positives]" made a tragi-comical paraphrase of the famous scene from the 1945 documentary film *Kronika Wyzwolenia KL Auschwitz [The chronicle of the liberation of KL Auschwitz]*, directed by Aleksander Woroncow. Z. Libera showed modern residents of a block of flats behind barbed wire.⁶²² Very diverse feelings accompany the illustrations placed on the website dedicated to fighting Norwegian anti-Semitism. The cartoon heroes are poor students accommodated in a concentration camp, where pizza is served from the crematorium oven.⁶²³

In November 2018, workers of the Auschwitz Museum reported to the prosecutor's office of a possible crime committed by an Italian neo-fascist, who appeared (at an event organized by the activists of the movement Forza Nuova in Pradazzo to commemorate the anniversary of Benito Mussolini's march to Rome) in a T-shirt with the word "Auschwitzland", which looked identical to the logo of the Disneyland.⁶²⁴ Such T-shirts are sold as "artistic" and the graphics printed on them appear also as an element of some mocking posters which advertise the "Disneyland Resort Auschwitz" – an amusement park in which one gets inside through the entrance gate of the concentration camp.

Websites, especially social media, are full of comical photographic compositions, so-called memes, in which the motifs of the war and occupation are applied. Here are some examples (commentary with the description of the background):

- Miss Auschwitz 1943 – a picture of an anorexic girl with the beauty contest winner's sash;

⁶²² E. Domańska: *Czy Libera mógłby nas jeszcze uratować?* In: "Artmix. Sztuka, feminizm, kultura wizualna", Internet issue 23. 12. 2006, <http://archiwum-obieg.u-jazdowski.pl/artmix/4159>; Z. Libera: *Mieszkańcy*. Wystawa "Mistrzowie i Pozytywy", Łódź 2004.

⁶²³ Morsmal: *Norway: NRK satire features 'pizza oven' Holocaust joke*. <http://antisemitism-europe.blogspot.com/2016/12/norway-nrk-satire-features-pizza-oven.html>. More on this: J. Czopowicz: *Obrazy przemocy. Współczesne przedstawienia "ikon zagłady"*. *Przejawy zjawiska powszechnej estetyzacji w kulturze XX/XXI wieku*. Akademia Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie, Warszawa 2012.

⁶²⁴ PAP: *Doniesienie w sprawie włoskiej neofaszystki*. <https://fakty.interia.pl/polska/news-doniesienie-ws-wloskiej-neofaszystki-sledczy-z-krakowa-zbada,nId,2654001>.

- Auschwitz Shore – a picture of joyful prisoners leaving KL Auschwitz after its liberation; it refers to the title of a popular reality show, the heroes of which make parties and get unconsciously drunk;
- Auschwitz for you, for your family – a photograph showing a smiling Hitler, which refers to the commercial slogan of a certain supermarket;
- The technical condition makes an impression. Call Brussels. After all, we will receive these refugees – a photograph of some politicians leaving the Auschwitz Museum through the gate with the inscription: *Arbeit macht frei*;
- The left chamber, how are you enjoying yourselves? So ok, more gas! – a photograph of Hitler in headphones as a DJ at a disco;
- Orange Jews. 100% concentrated – an orange picture of children behind the barbed wire of a concentration camp; the joke based on the same pronunciation of the words "Jews" and "juice" – a reference to concentrated orange juice or orange Jews placed in a concentration camp;
- The fables of Holokit. Alice in Lampshade-land – a picture referring to the novel for children *Alice in Wonderland*, showing a girl with a soap bar, the star of David, and a lamp with a lampshade made of human skin – the objects associated with concentration camps.⁶²⁵

In the field of laughter in the times of crisis, apart from the artistic creations often based on the conscious use of the mechanism of manipulation and provocation to gain fame, the large scale of the creation and transmission of jokes should be emphasized.

Jokes about war and concentration camps are a specific category of the minor literary, but increasingly popular, form, of black humour in which the objects of derision are death, illnesses, deformations, disability, and various types of suffering. As Jacek Kolbuszewski notices: (...) *the humorous attitude to death, manifested in various forms of verbal and visual expression, is a very interesting exponent of the human approach to death, and its historical changeability not only sheds light on the so-called 'history of*

⁶²⁵ Most of these memes are examples of dark humour, but also, are featured on racist, white nationalist, neo-Nazi or anti-Semitic websites. (trans. note: J.E.S.)

death' but also enriches the image of its rank in culture.⁶²⁶ According to the author: *Jokes about death neither constitute the manifestations of a certain modern "ars moriendi" nor evoke the horror of death. They serve enjoyment and entertainment as, after all, they are not told during mourning or funeral ceremonies. Yet, they are a phenomenon which deserves focus in the broader perspective of literary and anthropological-cultural studies.*⁶²⁷ In the gelotological terminology, they are called 'sick jokes'⁶²⁸ or 'sick disaster jokes'.⁶²⁹

In 1969, some spy novels set during World War II describing the spy networks that fought against the Nazis and their collaborators appeared. . In the Soviet Union, it was *Семнадцать мгновений весны* [*Seventeen moments of spring*] and in Poland – *Stawka większa niż życie* [*More than life at stake*].⁶³⁰ Owing to the cultural exchange between Socialist countries and the TV series based on them, their heroes – respectively: Standartenführer⁶³¹ Max Otto von Stirlitz and Captain Hans Kloss – have become icons of mass culture.⁶³² Although there are not many comical scenes in these novels and films, they have resulted in a series of popular jokes about Stirlitz and Kloss, which are even currently retold in some anthologies and on the Internet.

At the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, while collecting jokes told by children and youth, Dorota Simonides recorded – in the group of so-called

⁶²⁶ J. Kolbuszewski: *Śmierć w dowcipach*. In: J. Kolbuszewski (ed.): *Problemy współczesnej tanatologii. Medycyna – antropologia kultury – humanistyka. Tom X*. Wrocławskie Towarzystwo Naukowe, Wrocław 2006, p. 395.

⁶²⁷ J. Kolbuszewski: *Śmierć w dowcipach...*, op. cit., p. 398.

⁶²⁸ More on this: T. Herzog, B. Bush: *The prediction of preference for sick humor*. In: "Humor", No 4(7)/1994, p. 323-340.

⁶²⁹ More on this: A. Dundes: *Cracking Jokes. Studies of Sick Humor Cycles and Stereotypes*. Ten Speed Press, Berkeley 1987; R. Ellis: *The sick disaster joke as carnivalesque postmodern narrative impulse*. In: G. Paton, C. Powell, S. Wagg (eds): *The Social Faces of Humor. Practices and Issues*. Arena, Aldershot 1996, p. 219-269. Cf.: L. Steir-Linvy: *Is it OK to Laugh About it? Holocaust Humour, Satire and Parody in Israeli Culture*. Vallentine Mitchell, Illford 2017.

⁶³⁰ J. Siemionow: *Siedemnaście mgnień wiosny*. trans. Z. Romanowski, Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej, Warszawa 1972; A. Zbych: *Stawka większa niż życie*. Państwowe Wydawnictwo Iskry, Warszawa 1969. The novels were a kind of reply to Ian Fleming's *Casino Royal*, a novel about the adventures of James Bond (agent 007), published in 1953 in Great Britain. I. Fleming: *Sam chciałeś te karty czyli Casino Royal*. trans. R. Stiller, A. Sylwanowicz, Wema, Warszawa 1990.

⁶³¹ Standartenführer – The SS rank equal to the military rank of colonel.

⁶³² T. Lioznowa, J. Siemionow: *Semnadcat' mgnovenij vesny*. USSR 1973; A. Konic, J. Morgenstern: *Stawka większa niż życie*. Poland 1967-1968.

'abstract jokes' (apart from the typical examples of black humour) – some jokes about concentration camps. Most often, their hero was a certain Jacuś or Jaś and their contents raised the similar indignation of adults as jokes concerning religion. The jokes were usually told by secondary school youth and were later passed down to younger children, who often "lost" some of the more important elements. Simonides did not confirm the fact that such jokes were also told by adults. Teenagers did not feel the horror and macabre comprised in them, which might prove the occurrence of the so-called 'comical isolation' – the situation in which, while telling a joke, the centre of gravity is shifted from the harmful and dangerous character of the phenomena described in them to humour itself, resulting from contradiction. The teenagers who told the jokes about concentration camps were amused by the false absurd reasoning and abstract situational humour. At the same time, they did not realize the tragedy of the situation to which the joke related.⁶³³ On the basis of specialist publications in other countries, Simonides claims that similar jokes are told not only by the youth in Poland: *Once, this phenomenon was treated as contradictory to the Polish culture and mentality and that this type of humour will not be adopted among us. Yet, our studies disconfirm this rather wide-spread opinion.*⁶³⁴ Here are some examples of these jokes:

Winter, freezing cold of – 20 degrees. In the guard post of a concentration camp, two SS-men are rubbing their hands out of cold, patting each other on their back. Finally, one of them says: – "Listen, Hans, add one prisoner more, it will be warmer!"

A swimming competition in a concentration camp. The commentator reports: – "Already, already one is near the finish. He's disappeared, we can't see him. Yes, ladies and gentlemen, it is hard to swim in hydrochloric acid!"

Some SS-men are weighting prisoners in a concentration camp, putting them on the scales in tens at the same time. One is writing the weight down and shouts: – "10 kilos! Good, another ten – on the scales!"

⁶³³ D. Simonides: *Współczesny folklor słowny dzieci i nastolatków*. Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe – Oddział Wrocławski, Wrocław-Warszawa 1976, p. 144-147.

⁶³⁴ D. Simonides: *Współczesny folklor...*, op. cit., p. 147.

Hitler is inspecting a concentration camp. He is looking at the prisoners on the roll call, he approaches one of them and strokes him on his face, saying:
 – “Oh, you, you, little fat man!”

A group of prisoners is transported to a concentration camp. An SS-man asks each of them the question: – “Healthy?”

A few answer: – “Yes!” Then, the German directs them to the soup.

Jaś is thinking hard and, when asked, he replies: – “Ill!”

– “With what?”

– “With diabetes!”

– “Then, you’ll go to the stewed fruit!” – said the SS-man.

Some prisoners were closed in a gas chamber. Jaś bangs on the door and shouts:
 – “Mister SS-man, gas is coming out here!” (in other versions: “Mister German, it stinks of gas here!”, “Man, we can get poisoned, gas is coming out here!”).

A Jew is running away from the gas chamber sticking to a fly.

In a concentration camp, a Jew is escaping to the wires. An SS-man asks:
 – “What are you catching?”

– “Wire!”

– “Wouldn’t you rather like to grab some lead?”

An SS-man says to Jews in a concentration camp: – “Today, you’re going to a disco!”

– “And who will be playing for us?”

– “Hans on a machine gun!”

An SS-man to the Jews hidden behind a broomstick: – “Wow, how many of you have hidden here!”

– “What is the best Jewish beer?”

– “Beerkenau.”⁶³⁵

⁶³⁵ Ibidem, p. 146-147; *Najmocniejsze chamskie, seksistowskie i rasistowskie kawaly*. <https://www.wykop.pl/link/225451/chamskie-kawaly/>.

The jokes about war and concentration camps have been present in the public sphere not only in Poland but also in Germany, England, the USA and Sweden. They are transmitted orally and on the Internet, but one will not find them in the official large-scale anthologies. Most of them have a hidden anti-Semite message and similar comical schemes occur in reference to contemporary ethnic minorities (e.g. Turks in Germany).⁶³⁶ Such jokes dehumanize the victims that are laughed at in them. They might be an element of the defensive mechanism against the cruelty of war, used by the executioners, victims, and their descendants, who try to handle the (preserved in the collective memory) black cards of their personal, family, or national history. I have been unable to consult the modern studies on this subject. Yet, the consultations which I have conducted with a group of seventy Polish university students confirmed that most of them had heard such jokes already in primary school and that they can be seen now on the Internet, but the students have never considered them in the categories of taboo, of infringing the remembrance of their ancestors, or the good name of any nation. They simply treat this group of jokes as no different than jokes about any other group (i.e. policemen, students, blond-haired women, etc.).

Quite a new form of "post-laughter", associated with the current trend online, is taking amusing photographs in the territories of concentration camps, in crematoriums, etc.⁶³⁷ Sharing the photos of people making faces, "funny gestures", or merrily hopping have become objects of numerous commentaries of both their supporters and opponents. Here are some selected comments concerning such photographs taken while young people were visiting the Auschwitz Museum:

Sora: *Once I went for a school trip to the museum in Auschwitz, and it's a fact, it was an awful... Disappointment. Surely, many people will think of me now as a heartless cruel person, but the truth is that the death camps are meant to be awfully traumatic places, this feeling is even heightened p, people are persuaded what they should feel and how to behave, and this is done*

⁶³⁶ A. Dundes, T. Hauschild: *Auschwitz Jokes*. In: A. Dundes: *Cracking Jokes...*, op. cit., p. 19-28; A. Dundes, U. Linke: *Postscript: More on Auschwitz Jokes*. In: A. Dundes: *Cracking Jokes...*, op. cit., p. 29-38.

⁶³⁷ P. Kalsztyn: *Zagraniczni turyści nie szanują ofiar Auschwitz*. <https://www.o2.pl/galeria/zagraniczni-turysci-nie-szanuja-ofiar-auschwitz-skandaliczne-zdjecia-6192646682765441g>.

both before their arrival at the museum and during the stay there. I heard all the time here only that “people were killed here in such a way, here in such, here in still another way, such a number of people here, such – there” and the old saying might have been activated that these deaths were turned into statistics. As if they bragged that so many people had died just there. To show a contrast, soon after this I went to Lower Silesia to one of the Nazis’ underground mine complexes, where at first there was an amusing docudrama and only much later, we were drawn from this light tone to be shown the real torments which the people had gone through while building that place. And though in that place a lot of people died, only in this one particular moment were we confronted with cruelty, without unnecessary exaggerated solemnity of the rest of the exhibition. These five or ten minutes had a bigger emotional impact for me than a couple of hours in Auschwitz. So, my conclusion and my request is the following: let’s be restrained, let’s approach such places as events that are of interest to us, not to evoke PTSD (and in this case maybe even compensations for medical treatment). Those who are moved by this will be moved after all, and let the whole rest go through this experience in the way they think is proper.

Daniel (Daniel86): You exaggerate. It is natural that, for children, this is another school trip, and social portals have made you aware of this but have not changed anything. I have never been to Auschwitz, but I remember that the destination of the trips was not important but the fact itself that there will be relaxation and no lessons. And this was still in the times when mobiles with a built-in camera were a complete novelty on the market and the dominating console was Pegasus. VHS still kept its good position as well. Sometimes, when I watch TV or read the Internet, I have the impression that journalists come from a different world.

Arczi: Oh, people, people. Don’t you really understand why the young do this??? I was young, we were visiting Auschwitz with my class, and we also have a photo with some tools taken at the crematorium... Why? You’re a flesh-and-blood Pole, you’re a teenager, and you’ve been sightseeing, visiting these barbarian death methods, looking at those deep eye holes, tons of hair. You’re listening about how the Germans were murdering, anger seizes you, Germans, Jews, etc., out of ordinary anger and the helplessness of Jews, they just killed, approached them and killed. A stress, shock relief; you take these tools, you laugh and try to feel like this sick Nazi. You laugh to show it’s a joke, but it is not. It’s horrifying. A German will never understand this! A Jew even more... Sad.

Feniks06: *I have a problem with the unambiguous evaluation of such situations. I have had no chance to visit a concentration camp, so I don't know what a person who is there feels. Of course, I think that such a place, like a graveyard or a shrine, excludes a certain type of behaviour. Let's not make idiots out of Ourselves, let's not do to ourselves as if..., let's not enter the ovens, let's have respect for the people who lost their lives there and are still there. Yet, on the other hand, this is not a place of cult after all. I can't see a reason to expect from people that during their whole stay there they will keep serious face expressions, full of reflection, and not even tinted with a smile. In the graveyard, you talk to people, smiles appear. If you want to tell a joke, do it, with tactfulness so that peace is not disturbed. You don't need to force yourself to be tense and communicate to the world "how moved I am now". Is taking pictures in Auschwitz anything wrong? I don't think so. Obviously, everything with common sense. If you can pose in a normal way, take photographs. Just give up kisses, tongues, playful poses, photos in the crematoriums, or others that make the impression that you might be retarded.*⁶³⁸

As these reflections confirm, the people currently dealing with the preservation of cultural heritage and undertaking efforts to maintain the collective memory of the war and occupation are constantly faced with the challenge to search for such forms of education that would keep the dialogue of generations and cultures pertaining to the past.

Neighbours, witnesses and places Intercultural education aimed at remembrance

Seeking an appropriate message which would become the culmination of this book – an educational motif in the culture of laughter, I decided to refer to one of the most famous anti-war films, which is also a satire concerning the events that led to the crisis of World War II and the occupation.

In the film *The Great Dictator*⁶³⁹, released for the first time on the 15th October 1940, Charlie Chaplin had the double role of a Jewish barber and the emperor. Tomainia – the name of the country of Emperor Adenoid Hynkel and Field Marshal Hering (an allusion to Hitler and Göring), is de-

⁶³⁸ The commentaries come from the discussion forum under the article: M. Grodecka: *Przejrzałam na Instagramie zdjęcia zrobione w obozie koncentracyjnym Auschwitz. Po tym, co znalazłam, musiałam z kimś porozmawiać.* <https://www.spidersweb.pl/2018/10/instagram-zdjecia-auschwitz-birkenau.html>.

⁶³⁹ C. Chaplin: *The Great Dictator*, USA 1940.

rived from such English words as “mania” and “maniacality”. The message of the film concerns the madness of individuals and nations that do not tolerate difference and tend to blame others and “aliens” for their own failures. Therefore, they are able to involve the world in the horror of war and occupation, as well as in the terror and oppression that result from them. In his speech transmitted via radio to the world, the main hero said: *We all want to help one another, human beings are like that. We want to live by each other’s happiness, not by each other’s misery. We don’t want to hate and despise one another. And this world has room for everyone, and the good Earth is rich and can provide for everyone. The way of life can be free and beautiful, but we have lost the way. Greed has poisoned men’s souls, has barricaded the world with hate, has goose-stepped us into misery and bloodshed. We have developed speed, but we have shut ourselves in machinery that gives us abundance has left us in want. Our knowledge has made us cynical, our cleverness, hard and unkind. We think too much, and feel too little. More than machinery, we need humanity. More than cleverness, we need kindness and gentleness. Without these qualities life will be violent, and all will be lost.*⁶⁴⁰

These words said by the comedian are in fact a pacifist manifesto and a bitter reflection uttered when the war was raging. Some particular scenes from *The Great Dictator* bring about laughter even today. Both then and now, this is bitter laughter or laughter through tears, as it takes place along with the reflection upon the victims’ fate and the fear of a return to a series of complex situations that led to the crisis of World War II.

Bringing back the memories of the facts from those years, even such tiny aspects as the episodes from the lives of the people of laughter, seems of particular significance today. Aleida Assmann draws attention to the long shadow which World War II is still throwing on modern times: *This history of unlimited violence is present in memories, which may both preserve or disarm its dangerous and destructive potential. It is essential then to ask about the function and the quality of these memories. Especially, the negative memory of historical traumas might still trigger new conflicts or throw a paralysing shadow on modern times, taking away from people their power to live and think about the future.*⁶⁴¹

⁶⁴⁰ C. Chaplin: *Moja autobiografia*. Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza Czytelnik, Warszawa 1967, p. 448.

⁶⁴¹ A. Assmann: *Między historią a pamięcią*. Antologia. Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2013, p. 257-258.

What I accept as well is the author's thesis that the difficult past should be kept in mind mostly in order to overcome the threats of the present time: *Over the recent years we have experienced how – in the face of the traumatic past, such as slavery, colonialism, or civil wars – the cultural determinants switch from oblivion to remembering. However, one should differentiate two forms of remembering: the ethically justified culture of memory (which raises the traumatic past to the rank of a norm according to which the current activity should be measured) and the culture of memory which is strategically and therapeutically justified and heads for social and national integration. The latter does not make the memory an absolute norm but treats it as a means on the way to the aim. In this sense, remembrance is an important temporary activity in a transitional situation and it is attributed some particular therapeutic, ennobling, and exculpatory effects.*⁶⁴²

As regards the memories of World War II, without a doubt, the current time is a transitional period. The last witnesses are dying and the contemporary young are usually not interested in history. The danger appears of losing or falsifying the historical memory of those events (e.g. as a result of the phenomena of post-truth or fake news); of underrating, trivializing, and deriding the facts; of modern forms of “post-laughter” that result from ignoring the past. Therefore, the dissemination in education of the contents associated with the drastic circumstances of the occupation has many limitations. It requires not only the preparation of the recipients, whose sensitivity is exposed to an ordeal, but also the consideration of the opinions shared by the authors of the memories as well as the specialists dealing with their processing and dissemination.⁶⁴³

In 1948, Zofia Pieńkiewicz-Malanowska, a former prisoner of KL Ravensbrück, wrote the poem “Pomińcie nas milczeniem... [Omit us with silence...]”, in which she expressed the attitude of many victims of the Nazi persecutions to the improper forms of public remembrance:
You want to be told. What will words recreate?

⁶⁴² A. Assmann: *Między historią...*, op. cit., p. 263.

⁶⁴³ More on this: K. Malicki: *Miejsca pamięci – dawne obozy koncentracyjne i obozy zagłady w edukacji historycznej młodego pokolenia Polaków*. In: I. Chmura-Rutkowska, E. Głowacka-Sobiech, I. Skórzyńska (eds): *Historia ludzi...*, op. cit., p. 465-476; M. Owsiniński: *Projekt “Pomorska Teka Edukacyjna” i regionalny program edukacyjny “Być Polakiem na Pomorzu Gdańskim 1920-1945. Historia dotyczy zwykłych ludzi” jako nowe spojrzenie na regionalną edukację pozaszkolną na przykładzie działań Muzeum Stutthof w Sztutowie*. In: I. Chmura-Rutkowska, E. Głowacka-Sobiech, I. Skórzyńska (eds): *Historia ludzi...*, op. cit., p. 491-500.

*You'd need great strength, Divine power,
 To speak through the Sun's heat, stars' twinkling, storms,
 To cry through autumn chill, be mad through lightning.
 To master a flower's shape, form chimeras' snouts.
 To stretch over this all the reflections of faded rainbow hues,
 To burn forests with fire, melt rocks in water
 To understand the experiences in the "garden of torture".*

*To talk, write, repeat – it's all not enough!
 You see – deep inside, each human body
 Hides terrible, deadly rot in the guts...
 We're said with pathos: "They suffered for the Homeland!"
 But we feel to the bone the abomination of this pulp,
 Of these solemn names: "hero", "martyr", "thug".*

*Somewhere deep in the soul we recall lice, dirt,
 The awful stink of blocks, where people used to die.
 We recall beautiful sunrises and sunsets,
 Rats that ate kids and constant lack of water...
 And wild howling of pain-mad people,
 And wild shouting of sadism-drunk ones...*

*We ask, shout, demand the SILENCE!
 Don't put us on any pedestal of stone,
 Don't give us flowers, orders, or wreaths,
 Leave THE ILL and THE MAD in peace,
 We want to be alone for ever with what it was,
 Omit us with silence, away with all banners!⁶⁴⁴*

The poem was a sign of protest against spending money on secondary goals (e.g. the purchase of nails for the banner of the organization of former prisoners) while people suffered from insufficient health care, material and educational support, etc. In 1973, Anna Pawełczyńska indicated some other determinants of the education about the drastic events from the not so distant past: *It does not seem right to me to familiarize youth in a compulsive and thorough way with the personal biography of our generation. However, I think that this knowledge is necessary most of all for*

⁶⁴⁴ A. Gawalewicz: *Refleksje...*, op. cit., p. 30.

*educators and politicians, who have the duty of constant controlling of their activity and of predicting its effects. For educators, this knowledge is indispensable to shape – in the educational process – a human personality capable of recognizing any evil, even when it is manifested in a rather innocent way, as well as to resist it actively and consciously. For politicians, this knowledge is necessary to constantly control their own activity and to understand that there is not such an end that justifies all means. This knowledge is also necessary for all those who want to protect the world from every form of breaking human rights.*⁶⁴⁵

Unfortunately, almost fifty years after this opinion was expressed, mass media sometimes exposes cases of manipulation within the so-called 'historical politics'; about denying the Holocaust, the existence of concentration camps or the negating of their real character; about the consent of bringing back Fascist ideas and symbols into the public sphere;⁶⁴⁶ about using memory sites for jokes and playing. The circumstances of the appearance and growth of this process were focused on a long time ago by Adolf Gawalewicz: *The weakening in the contact between the World War II generation and the next generations seems bigger than in previous periods. This results from the pace of changes in the modern world and the specific – in Poland and other countries which were occupied – unlikeness of the experiences of the older and younger generation. The language of the era of crematorium ovens for living people is becoming poorly understood by those who use the language of the space flight era. The collections of documents and synthetic works most probably do not appeal to them in a sufficiently convincing way.*⁶⁴⁷ As the author writes later: *We show the younger generations mostly only the stage abandoned by the actors in a drama and the remnants of well-organized and classified props after a spectacle from the inhuman era. However, the inanimate objects do not show any trace of humiliation, suffering, heroic and villainous attitudes, the feelings of bitterness, hunger, love and hate. After all, these feelings – in what a flashy expression – were manifested in the struggle of the people in striped uniforms against their fate. To understand that epoch, it is necessary to appeal to the imagination of contemporary recipients and to evoke their emotional reactions, to move them.*

⁶⁴⁵ A. Pawełczyńska: *Wartości a przemoc...*, op. cit., p. 8.

⁶⁴⁶ More on this: M. Albright: *Faszyzm. Ostrzeżenie*. trans. K. Mironowicz, Wydawnictwo Poltext, Warszawa 2018.

⁶⁴⁷ A. Gawalewicz: *Refleksje...*, op. cit., p. 10.

*This is possible mostly due to showing the drama of those times in the individual cases of human fate.*⁶⁴⁸

The question can be raised then: who and with what curricula and didactic means would be able to implement such an education which is aimed at preserving the memory of the dramatic events related to the war and occupation? Maybe, if children and youth were familiarized with war victims' stories in a proper way, there would be fewer cases of laughing at them and the neo-Fascist, anti-Semitic, and racist movements (the members of which glorify the Nazis and deny the Holocaust) would be less popular. For me, as an educator-enthusiast, it becomes a challenge to seek the appropriate way to – on the one hand – save the stories of even tiny events from oblivion, and on the other – bring about interest in the individual fate of their participants, owing to attractive or unusual contents. As an educator, I would be happy if my story had an educational function, the people and events described here were saved in the collective memory, and the book became a factor of drawing them out of the growing shadow of oblivion. I would like my book to contribute to the revision of cultural remembrance and to its enriching it with new motifs. It might also serve those who work on the concepts of improving the quality of life of people affected with contemporary crises associated with war, occupation, and extermination. I would be very well satisfied if the issues described here moved mostly young readers, as the importance and role of collective memory will depend on them. Yet, I am afraid that my intentions may become only wishful thinking.

To provide the book with the highest educational value, I based my reflection mostly on Polish language literature, available in libraries, bookshops, and on websites. While collecting and studying these materials, I was surprised to find that most of the library books or those bought for symbolic amounts on the sales had uncut pages or empty library cards. This seemed to confirm that they sometimes survived several decades without anyone reading their full texts.

My observation is compliant with what I have learnt from my pedagogy students. They said that, in their educational experience, this subject matter had not been presented so far, they were not interested in it at all, and they had not studied any of the readings on it. Moreover, such literature had not been even recommended to them by their families or teachers who had been shaping their literary culture. As Marcin Owsiański from the

⁶⁴⁸ Ibidem, p. 11.

Stutthof Museum notices: (...) *there are some important limitations which determine the educational work conducted with youth (...). Surely, one of them is the hard-to-assimilate subject matter which visitors to remembrance sites face. On the basis of my own experiences and observations, it should be stated that seldom (apart from a few terms and stereotypes) does this find a place in the common consciousness and results in any interest in the issue before a visit to a martyrdom museum. No interest in or unwillingness to interact with the discussed subject matter pertains both to learners and teachers, which suggests that it is rather a common tendency in the overall Polish society. The undertaken subject is related to another limitation which concerns education in the martyrdom museum. It concerns the fact that not all the well-known forms of work in museology and of popularization activities can (or in other words are proper to) be applied in a place of remembrance and reflection. This mostly results from the character of the museum (it is often also a symbolic cemetery) and, at the same time, from the very emotional way of experiencing the visit in it by a part of the visitors.*⁶⁴⁹

My inspiration to search for the grounds of constructing modern pedagogies in this field of education has come with the cases of collaboration between Polish and German children and youth in learning their common history. It is based on common reflection, as well as the contemporary interpretation of the memories and reports of the witnesses of the ancestors' dark past.⁶⁵⁰ What is manifested in this collaboration are the assumptions of the pedagogy of memory sites and of intercultural pedagogy.

Pedagogy of memory sites (more broadly: pedagogy of memory/remembrance) is a current of historical-political education. It refers to the concept of education after Auschwitz, of which the theoretical foundation was elaborated by Theodore W. Adorno. According to him, the basic mission of modern education is not letting the nightmare of concentration camps happen again. Such education is a task for democratic societies and its ideal and aim should be the shaping of the autonomy of mature citizens – individuals characterized by reflectivity and self-determination so that they could resist authoritarian tendencies.⁶⁵¹ The specialists engaged

⁶⁴⁹ M. Owsiniński: *Projekt...*, op. cit., p. 494-495.

⁶⁵⁰ G. Bucher-Dinc, A. Wancerz-Gluza (eds): *Doświadczenia graniczne. Młodzież bada polsko-niemiecką historię*. Ośrodek Karta, Warszawa 2003.

⁶⁵¹ More on this: T. W. Adorno: *Erziehung nach Auschwitz*. In: T. W. Adorno: *Erziehung zur Mündigkeit. Vorträge und Gespräche mit Hellmut Becker 1959-1969*. Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt a.M. 1971, p. 88-104.

in this current of thought work, among other things, concentrate on the curricular assumptions and practical guidelines for educational activity in memory sites.⁶⁵² While characterizing the pedagogy of memory, Tomasz Krantz notices that: *Currently, it is understood not only as a form of building critical self-awareness in the historical and anthropological dimension, but also as a component of a wider educational process aimed at shaping active and creative attitudes in the face of the threats to democracy – especially such as breaking human rights, racism, and xenophobia. In the sphere of practice, the pedagogy of memory develops mostly within the activity of museums in former concentration camps and non-school education, conducted by various educational subjects, mostly teachers and educational practitioners. Yet, the growing popularity can be observed also in the case of some projects implemented in historical places in which museums have not been founded (on the territories of former ghettos, execution sites, etc.). The pedagogy of memory is often an element of some programmes organized by meeting houses and educational centres in the field of youth exchanges and intercultural education.*⁶⁵³

What is also perceived by me as one of the most important notional categories is “**post-memory**”. It is the space of memory which goes beyond the individual, personal memory and is accessible to the public, owing to various forms of the dissemination of culture. The shaping of post-memory consists in, for example, incorporating other memory acts than one’s own or providing interpretations of the related facts and their cultural representation in the “here and now”. Post-memory is shaped in the communication between the author of the memories and their recipient and is based on the mutual use of cultural competence. In this unique relationship, the level of participants’ empathy is of crucial significance – owing to it, the recipient is able not only to get the message, but also to understand it, and draw conclusions for themselves and the society. The one who recollects the memory gains the possibility to pass down to someone a personal history, their own version of the past.⁶⁵⁴

⁶⁵² More on this: J. Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, L. Hońdo (eds): *Dlaczego należy uczyć o Holokauście?* Uniwersytet Jagielloński, Instytut Europeistyki, Kraków 2005; T. Krantz: *Edukacja historyczna w miejscach pamięci. Zarys problematyki*. Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku, Lublin 2009; T. Krantz (ed.): *Zbrodnie nazizmu w świadomości i edukacji historycznej w Polsce i Niemczech*. Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku, Lublin 1998; P. Trojański (ed.): *Auschwitz i Holocaust. Dylematy i wyzwania polskiej edukacji*. Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau, Oświęcim 2008.

⁶⁵³ T. Krantz: *Pedagogika pamięci*. In: “Nigdy Więcej”, No 18/2010, p. 35.

⁶⁵⁴ A. Boroń: *Pedagogika (p) o Holokauście. Pamięć. Tożsamość. Edukacja*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, Poznań 2013, p. 92-99.

The form of dialogue which leads to the forming of post-memory is a tool successfully applied in **intercultural education**. Jerzy Nikitorowicz defines this concept as “the process of mutual influences of individuals, groups, institutions, etc. which enhances the development of a person that the individual becomes a fully aware and creative member of the family, local, regional, religious, national, continental, and global community, and is capable of active self-fulfilment through building a unique, separate, and permanent identity.”⁶⁵⁵ This is a multidimensional activity aimed at dialogue, mutual learning and understanding, owing to which cultures and their particular members can enrich themselves. The interrelationships of the “Others” and the “Aliens” belonging to various generations and nations, might become a platform for educational activities both in the formal sphere (schools) and in non-formal (e.g. public activities inspired by the leaders of local communities and non-governmental institutions).

My suggestion is to enrich the discourse of intercultural pedagogy (the pedagogical subdiscipline dealing with the educational circumstances of cultural diversification) with the categories present in the pedagogy of memory sites – **neighbours, witnesses, and sites**. In educational practice, they mostly appear in the narrow martyrological and religious contexts. Still, providing them with values based on the ideas of regional, democratic, civil, and anti-discrimination education, as well as taking them into account in modern forms of social engagement of children and youth, would allow education to return to some motifs that have been abandoned or not assimilated by students.⁶⁵⁶

Neighbours and witnesses can be discussed in **personal categories (people)** and **non-personal ones (places, objects)**. In both cases, the elements and factors of enriching the cultural heritage are dealt with. Looking around the neighbourhood for people and places that are associated with the past can help children and younger adults learn individual histories and is an attractive form of work for them, and – with the teachers’ support – may enrich, for instance, authorial curricula in history, geography, or civic education.

⁶⁵⁵ J. Nikitorowicz: *Wartości etnosu jako podstawa kształtowania tożsamości wielokulturowej, podłoże konfliktów kulturowych i cel edukacji międzykulturowej*. In: T. Lewowicki, E. Ogrodzka-Mazur, A. Gajdzica (eds): *Świat wartości i edukacja międzykulturowa*. Uniwersytet Śląski Filia w Cieszynie, Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczna ZNP w Warszawie, Cieszyn–Warszawa 2003, p. 9.

⁶⁵⁶ See e.g.: A. Bartuś: *Edukacja w Miejscu Pamięci Auschwitz w świetle ankiet przeprowadzonych wśród małopolskich uczniów w 2016 roku*. In: A. Bartuś (ed.): *Dzieci wojny*. Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau, Fundacja MDSM, Oświęcim 2016, p. 271-289.

Introducing the categories of “neighbour” and “witness” to the notional network used in intercultural pedagogy requires their factual and axiological redefinition, as well as their operationalization for use in educational practice. In my opinion, it is possible to specify them more accurately against the background of J. Nikitorowicz’s concepts of shaping one’s cultural identity⁶⁵⁷ and of shaping the ‘borderland’ man.⁶⁵⁸ In reference to the first of these concepts, it is possible to consider the neighbourhood and search for witnesses, post-witnesses, and testimonies of the intercultural past in many dimensions – from the individual, family, local, parish and regional ones, through to the national and state dimension, to the continental, and – in the broadest approach – global.⁶⁵⁹

The concept of education which would use these categories may be implemented as a curricular component of classes (both formal and informal) at school or conducted by other subjects dealing with intercultural education. This might involve:

- individual cooperation (teachers and learners who are active in interested clubs, voluntary service centres, local social leaders and educational activists);
- institutional cooperation (schools with non-governmental organizations, such as scout groups, ethnic minority associations, universities, day care centres for seniors and the disabled, institutions dealing with intercultural education in various dimensions, libraries, museums, etc.).

Engaging learners in the search for witnesses, in registering and collecting their testimonies, in indicating the places and objects which are important for shaping the cultural identity can take place both within lessons (e.g. homework and term assignments as a part of authorial curricula, competitions in particular subjects, competitions of students’ teams, etc.) and by developing the interests of enthusiasts (e.g. lovers of regional history, explorers of their own ethnic roots, historical reconstruction groups). Engaging (in the collaboration) the leaders of local communities – especially those who declare refrainment from politics and focus on the activity for the community and the preservation of the cultural heritage, would

⁶⁵⁷ More on this: J. Nikitorowicz: *Edukacja międzykulturowa. Kreowanie tożsamości dziecka*. Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, Gdańsk 2007, p. 60-103.

⁶⁵⁸ J. Nikitorowicz: *Edukacja wobec problemu kształtowania “człowieka pogranicza”*. In: “Test”, No 1/1996, p. 66.

⁶⁵⁹ J. Nikitorowicz: *Edukacja międzykulturowa...*, op. cit., p. 57.

become a lesson of civic education and a forming factor of the local social capital based on the collaboration between generations.⁶⁶⁰

In various dimensions of shaping the cultural identity, encouraging students to familiarize themselves with the cultural heritage during the meetings with witnesses may enhance building cross-generational communities, raising tolerance and respect for differences, as well as mutual empathy. The 'Otherness' and 'Strangeness' of the participants of this process might become a reason for a meeting, conversation, exchange of experiences, and joint activity.

This aim can be achieved by **shaping an aware neighbourhood** – raising the attitudes of openness to the presence of 'Others' and 'Aliens' in the area and may produce empathy to their particular issues; recognizing their contribution to the construction of a common cultural heritage; and, finally, a conscious awareness to the traces of their presence in the shared social life.

It is of crucial significance to adopt – as an ideological foundation of education – the belief that cultural heritage is never the product of a homogeneous group but has come into being due to the efforts of people who differ in regards to sex, age, ethnicity, worldviews, lifestyles, etc. Both in the past and now, these people may have viewed one another as "Other" and "Alien" and may have felt the stress of experiencing these differences or taking part in acts of discrimination (as their perpetrators or victims). However, this is not an obstacle in leaving in a particular place their symbolic and material traces that might be important for both them and the future generations.

In this context, the **non-sites of memory** constitute an exceptionally interesting category of an impersonal witness. The author of this notional theory is Claude Lanzmann, the director of the film "Shoah".⁶⁶¹ *In an interview in 1986, while talking about the details of the concept of his film (which has become one of the most famous documentaries in the history of film), he recalled the deserted and yet untransformed (into museums) territories of concentration and death camps which he filmed in the 1970s in Poland. "I call*

⁶⁶⁰ Examples of possibilities for this kind of cooperation, see: P.P. Grzybowski: *Analiza możliwości wykorzystania lokalnego kapitału społecznego w celu realizacji koncepcji edukacji międzykulturowej sporządzonej dla Burmistrza Miasta i Gminy Lubsko Lecha Jurkowskiego*, sierpień 2017, <http://strefa.academia.edu/PrzemyslawGrzybowski>.

⁶⁶¹ C. Lanzmann: *Shoah*. France 1985.

*these deformed places the non-sites of memory” – he explained.*⁶⁶² Thus, they are the particular places (...) which were witnesses of violence, so they hypothetically could become memory sites, which are the anchors of communal practices of remembering, but did not gain such a status. (...) They are sites of tragic events but also the elements of space that resulted from acts of extermination: abandoned villages, empty places, devastated graveyards.⁶⁶³

The encounter with ‘Others’ and ‘Aliens’ from the past, becoming acquainted with them in the reports of witnesses from different places, and finding common motifs of family stories may help students to discover a world which has been hidden, forgotten, or disregarded so far. Yet, this world can turn out to be very important for its participants and – first of all – similar to the worlds of those who nowadays seek witnesses and post-witnesses of their own and their closest relatives’ past.

Even if this past turns out to be complicated or inconvenient (i.e. black cards in family and national history; revealing the ancestors’ discrimination of their neighbours who were treated as “Others” and “Aliens”), a meeting or conversation with a witness might help in the search for modern forms of learning about the difficult past, asking questions about it and receiving answers – even if they are inconvenient. This would result in understanding the past, in getting used to the trauma, in forgiving the ancestors’ guilt, and in seeking ways of amending the harm (i.e. by cooperation in the cleaning and restoring collective memory to graveyards, remembrance sites, etc.).⁶⁶⁴

And what about laughter? Is there a place for it in the intercultural education of remembrance?

⁶⁶² R. Sendyka: *Miejsce / nie-miejsce pamięci*. In: A. Janus, K. Jarzyńska, M. Kobielska, J. Małczyński, J. Muchowski, J. Mytych, Ł. Połuszny, K. Siewior, M. Smykowski, K. Suszkiewicz, A. Szczepan: *Nie-miejsca pamięci. Elementarz. Ośrodek Badań nad Kulturami Pamięci*, Kraków 2017, p. 10.

⁶⁶³ R. Sendyka: *Nie-miejsca pamięci. Elementarz*. In: A. Janus, K. Jarzyńska, M. Kobielska, J. Małczyński, J. Muchowski, J. Mytych, Ł. Połuszny, K. Siewior, M. Smykowski, K. Suszkiewicz, A. Szczepan: *Nie-miejsca pamięci...*, op. cit., p. 6.

⁶⁶⁴ P.P. Grzybowski: *Barbarzyńcy, sąsiedzi, świadkowie... Przekleństwo “multikulti”, czy nadzieja na rozwój wspólnoty?* In: K. Rejman, B. Rejman (eds): *Problemy i wyzwania edukacji międzykulturowej na wspólnym obszarze pogranicza polsko-słowackiego*. Wydawnictwo Państwowej Wyższej Szkoły Techniczno-Ekonomicznej im. ks. Bronisława Markiewicza w Jarosławiu, Jarosław 2018, p. 75-82; P.P. Grzybowski: *Świadkowie i sąsiedzi. Ku nowym kategoriom pojęciowym oraz perspektywom praktyki w edukacji międzykulturowej*. draft preprint.

As Hugues Lethierry, a French philosopher and educator, claims: *It is possible to deal with “delicate matters”, such as death, with humour without decreasing their status, keeping the respect for texts and teachers’ deontology.*⁶⁶⁵ Yet, this requires not only the teacher’s appropriate attitude and the acceptance of the school environment of **infringing upon a taboo for educational reasons**, but also some specialist didactic means. One of the taboos is the suffering and death of the victims of war and the occupation. These issues are regarded as controversial and teachers often hesitate before undertaking them in the classroom – especially in the case of younger children.

As a result of the popularization and accessibility of electronic means of mass communication, especially the Internet, the subjects which several years or decades ago were treated as taboos have become a common element of mass culture – even if only by their presence on the Internet and TV. Dealing with taboos, discussing them on Internet forums, making them an object of public debate or (sometimes unrefined or vulgar) jokes does not make much impression on students who use electronic media more often and more effectively than adults. On the contrary – the ordinariness of some content (i.e. death), using them – among other things – in computer games or on websites, makes them a natural object of jokes, which results in lowered sensitivity and in being used to the omnipresence of certain content.

Taming death and suffering through laughter has been a well-known phenomenon for centuries, thus, by no means is the application of this technique in modern education a ‘reinventing the wheel’. Many years ago, Kazimierz Żygulski noticed that: *Reflection may concern not only human nature but also human fate, condition, destination, ultimate matters and eschatology. They always raise fear, anxiety. (...) And here, comical creativity comes with support. By presenting people in ultimate situations, facing catastrophes, on their death bed, on the scaffold, in the afterlife, such humour decreases natural fear, restores mental balance and allows for maintaining an attitude which is regarded as befitting a human being.*⁶⁶⁶ The pioneer in the literature for children which touches serious topics with humour was Theodor Seuss Geisel (1905-1991) – known as Dr. Seuss, an author of

⁶⁶⁵ H. Lethierry: *Parler de la mort... et de la vie. Un tabou dans l’éducation?* Nathan, Paris 2004, p. 39.

⁶⁶⁶ K. Żygulski: *Wspólnota śmiechu...*, op. cit., p. 269.

classical readings which he also illustrated.⁶⁶⁷ He suggested many serious subjects to his readers, such as the arms race, racism and fascism. The immense popularity of his books resulted in numerous adaptations, including cartoons, which are still shown today. All of them are used by teachers in many countries as educational means.⁶⁶⁸ Conducting classes in compliance with these principles requires not only the adjustment of the contents and means to the students' age, but also – and first of all – the pedagogical talent and tactfulness of the teacher.

* * *

In this book, the subject matter has not been exhausted. I want to encourage readers to undertake their own research in the sources which I have not taken into account – mostly in the written and issued (not only in Polish) diaries and memories of the witnesses and post-witnesses of the war and occupation: soldiers, insurgents, guerrillas, war captives and prisoners in POW camps and concentration camps; members of artistic front groups; the staff of propaganda institutions and the editors of journals. A real wealth of material is offered in the detailed narrations of women, children, artists, resettled people, and in the expert studies of scientists representing various disciplines. I am deeply convinced that the circumstances in which laughter appeared in the crisis times of war and occupation would constitute an interesting current in interdisciplinary studies conducted with the use of the (auto)biographical method and an analysis of individual cases.⁶⁶⁹

In the end, I would like to indicate two exemplary research directions. To trigger the detective trait of the hypothetical researchers, I would add that I am using here a “second-hand” quotation, though the original sources are so well-known that finding them will not be difficult for the enthusiast:

⁶⁶⁷ More on this: T. Geisel, R. Minnear (eds): *Dr. Seuss goes to war. The world war II editorial cartoons of Theodor Seuss Geisel*. New Press, New York 2001.

⁶⁶⁸ Dr. Seuss: *The racists and other stories. (The Sneetches and other stories)*. Random House, New York 1961; Dr. Seuss: *The tragic futility of the nuclear arms race! (The butter battle book)*. Random House, New York 1984; Dr. Seuss: *Why Hitler is dangerous and other stories. (Yertle the thurlte)*. Random House, New York 1958.

⁶⁶⁹ How large the research scope could be can be confirmed by, i.e. Jacek Leociak's texts about the Holocaust. More on this: J. Leociak: *Tekst wobec zagłady. (O relacjach z getta warszawskiego)*. Fundacja na rzecz Nauki Polskiej, Warszawa 1997.

- *During the Warsaw Uprising, Władysław Ludkiewicz, a bank manager, and his wife hid in the cellar of a house shaken by bomb explosions. They only have a small package with the underwear for their son in case he was found. He died– they will never find him. People are moaning around them; children are fulfilling their natural needs. Oh, and they are bringing in Wojtek Michalski, seriously wounded from fighting on a barricade. Another explosion, the rubble is pouring down. The people are dashing from one corner to another. A man inflicts pain on another man, a man hurts another man. Then, Ludkiewicz tells an anecdote about a weird lord who has made clothes for himself of hedgehog’s leather so that people could not rub against him in church during a mass. The beggars in the shelter burst with laughter. Ludkiewicz goes on with more anecdotes.⁶⁷⁰*
- *The night of the attack is passing by in tension. The tenor of tangled and contradictory reports is mostly sad. At 3.29 am, a report comes that the attack at the key point of one battalion has broken down. I write down: The Chief of Staff starts telling an anecdote about a village parish priest. I cannot hear the anecdote from my corner, but I can only hear the repeated words “rym-cym” and everybody is laughing. I would also love to laugh and I am envious; I would surely laugh – being grateful for an oxygen bubble – in this lampshade (in the headquarters bunker – M.W.), when the Polish line was breaking; I would surely laugh.⁶⁷¹*

What was the further fate of Władysław Ludkiewicz? In what battle did Melchior Wańkowicz take part? What other humorous anecdotes did the soldiers in the headquarters bunker tell? What happened to the people of laughter of those times? Maybe they or the witnesses of those events are still alive and live somewhere in the neighbourhood? Maybe it is possible to get to the places where all this happened. Maybe it is worth to start searching for the roots of present time in the histories of the people of laughter, and, while discussing comical events, to reflect upon very serious matters.

Expressing my gratitude for your time dedicated to the reading of this book, I would like once again to emphasize the value of memory in education – especially in intercultural education, the contents of which also in-

⁶⁷⁰ M. Wańkowicz: *Karafka...*, op. cit., p. 388-389.

⁶⁷¹ *Ibidem*, p. 389-390.

volves the black cards of some individuals and societies. As Duccio Demetrio claims: *If – in a society’s private and social life – tradition is not restored by passing testimonies down from one generation to the next generation and if the ritual of recalling memories is not reborn, we are bound to sink in fiction and appearances. The memory cherished by ourselves (also with our thoughts about the ‘others’) triggers in us the power to experience anew and intensifies the sense of learning about life, or at least about its certain fragments which we have managed to conceive with our mind.*⁶⁷²

⁶⁷² D. Demetrio: *Pedagogika pamięci. W trosce o nas samych, z myślą o innych*. trans. A. Skolimowska, Wydawnictwo Akademii Humanistyczno-Ekonomicznej w Łodzi, Łódź 2008, p. 14.

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