

Grynberg's Poetics of Place

Began @ age of 12 as a actor in the 1st Hol. movie ever made
Had to learn the Yiddish dialogue phonetically
Would have been a natural in the Polish cinema!
Later became actor in Yiddish theater where most of the xx were Poles & most
of the audience listened with earphones

Hol. Lit as a self-conscious genre
Winner of Tadeusz Borowski Prize
Aesthetics of Hol prose same as his
Adopts Rudnicki's skeptical attitude towards fiction
Children of Zion = 2nd Hol. collage
Drohobycz, Drohobycz = most fully developed

The Tyranny of Place, The Nightmare of Return
Return to Dobre, where everyone has stolen goods
Jewish men marry their Christian saviors
Russian soldiers imitate Hasidic dance (26)
The Victory 42-43; farshterte simkhe
Survivors are harshly judged
"Everyone thought that Frymka shouldn't have jumped from the train without her
children" (27)
Anti-community

The Tyranny of Language / Politics of Reception
A Polish-Jewish writer, who happens to live in America
How He Was Marketed
The Jewish War appears as Child of the Shadows (1969)
Ferocious title neutered & turned into schmaltz
Caught betwixt & between
Continues to write in Polish, as Celan continues to write in German
His real career happens by proxy
Wiesel has French & English
Others experience permanent alienation: "To the Americans I was a foreigner," says the
narrator of "A Pact with God." "To the Poles, a hidden Jew. Who was I to the Jews?"
Way too dense for an average American reader; its ironies too opaque

k Grynberg has dealt directly or indirectly with the Holocaust in twenty-six books of prose, poetry,
essays, and drama, not counting the documentary film that kidnapped his story, all written in his
native Polish. He considers the Holocaust singularly important as a lesson, a warning, and a turning
point in the history of our civilization, and frequently calls himself a guardian of the graves and the
writer of the dead (Adamczyk-Garbowska 2003).

rinding of narrative into the pastness of experience and history,

ghtmare of return had been the subject of Henryk Grynberg's second autobiographical novel, and the first he wrote without fear of censorship. *Zwycięstwo* (1969), translated as *Victory* in 1993, told of two Jewish survivors, a mother and son, returning to live in Dobre, where every Polish resident has stolen Jewish goods, where the only women for Jewish men to marry were their Christian saviors, and where the survivors judged each other very harshly. "Everyone thought that Frymka shouldn't have jumped from the train without her children" (Grynberg 1993: 82). Dobre was an anti-community.

The Jewish War

Adopts same 2-part structure for both novels

Father / Mother

Begins in medias res w/Squire convincing Germans that Father is indispensable

We were country folk and we knew that, no matter what, one does not perish so quickly in the country as in a town (6-7)

Mother changes her mind @ last minute & fails to give her youngest son Buciek away to Polish woman; his death = 1st tragedy

Meet a forester who hunts Jews

(17) milking his own cows [which will ultimately cause his death]

(19) Men alone, they held out in the forest longer than anyone else

(20) Podorewski the Squire w/degree in philosophy who rationalizes why Jew. property should belong to him

Zlatka comes out of hiding

Obtaining Aryan papers

Encomium to his father (23-25 ff)

[The passages that must have moved the film director]

II (Mother)

Hanka their savior

Must lean not to knock like a Jew (31)

Can see the Warsaw ghetto burning from afar (33)

Elemental maternal love that conquers all fear

Must fabricate a father & forge his letters

He school w/Russian exercise books = the Godless ones

How you must shed one identity & assume its opposite

"In the forest people and animals look and act alike" (45)

Powerful passage from adult perspective about listening to Polish peasants talk about hunting for Jews (44-45)

Mother goes to confession

Their Peasants hate the AK (47)

Priest tells them Bible stories; moved by Jesus (50)

My dear David,

This is not a parody or anything rooted in the Polish tradition, this is a result of his own choice (or even obsession) that was already visible in *The Children of Zion* - placing documents over fiction. He mentions this tendency in his essays and also in his latest book he verifies some facts from his earlier works aiming at being closer to the truth. Of course he fictionalized these stories but they are all based on real testimonies.

The dedications mean that they are life-stories of these particular people retold by him for them.

While in Washington I befriended one of the original "protagonists" Charlene Schiff and she was not too happy with Grynberg's version (she is the narrator of the third story "Without a Trace"). Her own versions were published in the series of books "Echoes of Memory" published by the USHMM.

The parodistic effect might be caused by the fact that Grynberg has a great sense of humor and irony (not many critics focus on this but I think this is one of the greatest values of his writing) so he emphasizes some paradoxical or grotesque elements in the testimonies he used.

You are right, he is not sentimental at all (at least not in his writing).

I also wrote a review of "Drohobycz" some time ago. Here is the link:

http://www.jbooks.com/fiction/FI_AdamczykGarbowska.htm

You can also write to Henryk directly, I am sure he will be happy to answer your questions. When one of our students was writing his MA dissertation about him he patiently answered all his questions and even corrected dozens of mistakes so I am sure he will be even more helpful corresponding with a well-known scholar like you.

His e-mail:

Grynbe@aol.com

Kochana moja!

I just finished reading *Drohobycz*, *Drohobycz*. Perhaps you can help me situate this work. Where does this genre of fictionalized testimonials come from? Is it a postmodern parody of something recognizably Polish? In the opening story there is obvious parody in his constant reference to street names like Mickiewicz and Slowacki, when what he's describing is the murder of one of Poland's greatest writers, who will have no streets named after him.

And what about the dedications? Are these supposed to be the true-life prototypes whose stories he is retelling?

By MONIKA ADAMCZYK-GARBOWSKA

DROHOBYCZ, DROHOBYCZ AND OTHER STORIES
True Tales from the Holocaust and Life After
By Henryk Grynberg
Translated from the Polish by Alicia Nitecki.
Edited by Theodosia Robertson.
275 pages. Penguin Books. \$14.

Until recently, the word Drohobycz (pronounced "Dro-ho-bit-ch") sounded to most American readers like an exotic Eastern European tongue twister. Then, three years ago, the name of this Ukrainian town appeared in the world press when representatives of Israel's Yad Vashem controversially claimed a set of murals painted by Bruno Schulz, a lifelong resident of Drohobycz who was gunned down by the Gestapo there in 1942 and is now considered to be one of the greatest writers of the 20th century. It is Bruno Schulz's haunting self-portrait that gazes at us from the cover of Henryk Grynberg's powerful new book, *Drohobycz, Drohobycz and Other Stories*, and it is Schulz and his fellow residents of the eastern borderlands of pre-war Poland who inspire Grynberg's tales, which have been awarded the 2002 Koret Jewish Book Award for Fiction.

A child survivor of the Holocaust and longtime resident of the U.S., Grynberg has dealt directly or indirectly with the Holocaust in twenty-six books of prose, poetry, essays, and drama, all written in his native Polish. He considers the Holocaust singularly important as a lesson, a warning, and a turning point in the history of our civilization, and frequently calls himself a guardian of the graves and the writer of the dead. Unlike Schulz, who aspired to become a mainstream Polish writer, Grynberg writes from a post-Holocaust perspective and emphasizes his Jewishness—though he still considers himself a Polish writer and has received a number of major literary awards from his native country.

The documentary-like stories of *Drohobycz, Drohobycz* are set in almost a dozen countries. His narrators are survivors of ghettos, labor and death camps, as well as wartime deportations to the Soviet Union. Although they were originally written in Polish, elements of Yiddish, Hebrew, Russian, Ukrainian, Hungarian, and other languages abound in the stories. The narrators recall hundreds of names, places, and local historical events; in the face of destruction, these details of the past acquire a new poignancy, and Grynberg's allusions underline the wide geographical scope of the Shoah.

Letting others speak is Grynberg's conscious strategy—he takes his inspiration from real testimonies but crafts them with fictional techniques. We can only guess that the names mentioned in the dedications preceding each tale—"Halina M." or "Janina" or "Ben, Zoila, Michal and Basia"—belong to the real-life victims on whose lives the fictions are based.

Grynberg dutifully catalogues these survivors' responses to the horrors they have experienced and the challenges of survival. In some cases, the survivors, many of whom like Grynberg himself are children of the Holocaust, view the world from a child's perspective. After the war, the narrator of "A Hungarian Sketch" is surprised to see mothers with children strolling in the street; having miraculously escaped the clutches of Mengele she imagined there can be no more mothers and

children in the world. Others experience permanent alienation: "To the Americans I was a foreigner," says the narrator of "A Pact with God." "To the Poles, a hidden Jew. Who was I to the Jews?" The narrator of "A Family Sketch" remarks, "I married twice and didn't try after that. I didn't want to have children. I'd rather be by myself." Another woman narrator argues survivors are like painters unrecognized during their lifetimes: "No one wants to know them, and when they're dead they make money off them. They still think they're better, that it couldn't happen to them, and they still don't really want to know."

Although Grynberg is very careful to give his narrators their own voices, his authorial touch is felt in the ironic distance, sense of absurdity, and even humor of these tales. A former actor, Grynberg has said that he has been encouraged by his editors to exploit his talent for comedy in his fiction. Though only so much humor is appropriate in stories as grim and often heartbreaking as these, Grynberg's ironic sensibility makes his tale-testimonies easier to read, as their tragedy is tempered for the reader who otherwise might be overwhelmed with the scope of suffering and horror he describes.

Twenty years ago, Philip Roth introduced Bruno Schulz to the American audience in the series "Writers from the Other Europe," and since then Schulz's life and work have inspired novels by Cynthia Ozick and David Grossman, and a powerful biography by Jerzy Ficowski, recently translated into English. Schulz's famous example illustrates how important it is that new stories of tragedy and survival continue to be unearthed from the wartime and post-war experiences of Polish Jews. In *Drohobycz, Drohobycz*, Grynberg carries on this work, using fiction to tell "True Tales from the Holocaust and Life After" and to create a compelling portrait of the effect two totalitarian systems—Nazism and Stalinist Communism—had on the lives of millions. By sharing his own story and those of more than a dozen survivors, Grynberg helps these millions become less anonymous.

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Dear Professor Droskies,

Of course I remember you, and I always admired your scholarly work.

To answer your questions better:

All the stories in the "Drohobycz, Drohobycz" collection generated from my private conversations and often multiple oral interviewing of the narrators by myself. You are absolutely right that the narratives are augmented by my own memories. But I also used other sources, like minutes from the debates in the prewar Polish Parliament, excerpts from prewar Polish press, and files from the trials of Nazi criminals in the title story "Drohobycz, Drohobycz". I double-checked and sometimes corrected historical facts mentioned by my narrators, especially in the complex Soviet story "Family" where I also needed consultations from physicists. In the case of "Cousin Benito" I took a trip to Florida in order to see and depict the setting of the survivor's new life.

If you have any further questions, I'll be always glad to answer.

Thank you very much for your interested -

Henryk

August 18, 2011

Henryk Grynberg

1. Genesis of his Pol. consciousness
 @ 23 in 1959
 revisiting Praga streets where he had hidden in '43
 writing from child's perspective
 some stories, many "universal" poems
2. Victory - couldn't be written in Poland
 1st post-Polish work 1968
3. Documentary imperative
 now realizes truth is stronger than fiction
 Children of Zion - edited transcripts of Teheran Children
4. Polish Naturalism - minimalist, gaps, silences
 - a) Medallions
 - b) Borowski
 - c) Grynberg
 - d) Fink - though Monika considers her too didactic
- 5) Antigone Crew = 1st story; so shaken to learn of this episode
 that he had to commit it to writing
- 6) His mother's stories = too sanitized, sentimental
- 7) Child's perspective - no phenomenological knowledge
 cannot retroject
 cf. Kertész Fatelessness
 committed nonverbal understanding (Eric)
- 8) Making the documentary taught him more than he wanted to know
 director found him in Paris
 arrived incognito; walked around after dark
 villagers knew him as Abram's son