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# Intertextuality and Topography in Igor Ostachowicz's *Noc żywych Żydów*

The aesthetization of Polish soil as physically representing the Holocaust was expressed in literary texts already during the war by Czesław Miłosz and Julian Tuwim. In response to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, both poets metaphorically, and even metaphysically, relegated Jewish space to below ground – Miłosz in the poem "Biedny Chrześcijanin patrzy na getto" ("A Poor Christian Looks at the Ghetto") and Tuwim in his manifesto *My, Żydzi Polscy... / We Polish Jews...*[1] In "Biedny Chrześcijanin patrzy na getto," Miłosz described the space under the ghetto as filled with "buried bodies" and "human ashes" distinguished from everyday objects by "their luminous vapor." Teetering on the border between material remains

[1] Miłosz's poem was originally published in the collection *Ocalenie* (*Rescue*) in 1945. It has been republished a number of times since. See the original in *Utwory poetyckie. Poems* (Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1976), 100–01. English language quotes of this poem are taken from *The Collected Poems* (New York: Ecco Press, 1988), 64–65. For Tuwim's text, see *My, Żydzi Polscy... / We Polish Jews...* (Warsaw: Amerykańsko-Polsko-Izraelska Fundacja "Shalom," 1993). Throughout, I quote the English translation of Tuwim's text from this edition with occasional corrections noted in brackets.

and spirit, Miłosz lamented in this poem the death of Jews in the Warsaw ghetto and interrogated Christians' (i.e., non-Jewish Poles') culpability and guilt as bystanders vis-à-vis the Holocaust.[2] In the image of the guardian mole, who in the poem is likened to a Patriarch boring an underground tunnel in search of Jewish remains in the ghetto, Miłosz poetically identified the space belowground as the place of judgment for the poetic "I":

> I am afraid, so afraid of the guardian mole.
> He has swollen eyelids, like a Patriarch
> Who has sat much in the light of candles
> Reading the great book of the species.
>
> What will I tell him, I, a Jew of the New Testament,
> Waiting two thousand years for the second coming of Jesus?
> My broken body will deliver me to his sight
> And he will count me among the helpers of death:
> The uncircumcised.

In the final stanza of the poem cited above, the poetic "I," who fears to be counted among the helpers of death, imagines a confrontation with the Jews of the ghetto (represented in the poem by the mole-Patriarch) on the Day of Judgment. Despite the imagined confrontation, however, the future tense of this final stanza implies the distinction between the living, uncircumcised Christian Poles and the Jews who perished in the ghetto, suggesting that the imagined dialogue of the poem between Pole and Jew is an internal monologue, an attempt by the poet to confront his own conscience.

[2] While in the context of this article I underscore Miłosz's use of the term "Christian" as referring specifically to "non-Jewish Poles," it is worth noting that the broader signifier "Christian" versus the narrower signifier "Catholic" (which might be more expected in the Polish context) gets at the core of the universal, ethical, and moral dilemma posed in the poem. Miłosz also expressed the ethical dilemma of the bystander in the poem "Campo dei Fiori."

While the Jewish voice in Miłosz's poem is notably silent, Tuwim's *My, Żydzi Polscy...* gave voice to those Poles, whose Jewish identity was emphasized by the racial policies of the Nazis.[3] Carefully outlining his argument for being a Pole and a Jew simultaneously, Tuwim defined his Jewish identity not based on religion or ethnicity of blood coursing through the body, but rather by virtue of Jewish blood "spilled by this gang-leader of international Fascism."[4] In his manifesto, Tuwim developed the discursive connection between Jewish blood and Polish soil. Writing in 1944 around the first anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, Tuwim spoke of "martyr blood" and "blackened streams that merge with a stormy, frothy river"; he wrote of the brotherhood between those who perished and those who survived the genocide, casting the survivors as only "half-living" or "quasi-dead" representatives of a larger community:

> Never since the dawn of mankind has there been such a flood of martyr blood, and the blood of Jews (not Jewish blood, mind you) flows in widest and deepest streams. Already its blackening rivulets are flowing together into a tempestuous river.
> [...]
> We Polish Jews...We, everliving, who have perished in the ghettos and camps, and we ghosts who, from across seas and oceans, will someday return to the homeland and haunt the ruins in our completely preserved unscar[r]ed bodies and our wretched, presumably spared souls.
> We, the truth of the graves, and we, the illusion of the living; we, millions of corpses and we, a few, perhaps a score of thousands of quasi non-corpses; we, that boundless brotherly tomb, we a Jewish burial ground such as was never seen before and will never be seen again.[5]

[3] Tuwim left Poland in 1939 at the outbreak of the war and was in New York at the time of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

[4] J. Tuwim, *My, Żydzi Polscy...*, 42.

[5] Ibid., 42–43.

By naming a brotherhood of living and deceased forged by bloodshed, Tuwim tied together the living with the dead, the land with the blood, and the spirit with place, casting the surviving Polish Jews as ghostly remains and as part of a Jewish community which exists as a burial ground, both literally and figuratively, in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Though speaking from the Jewish perspective, Tuwim's manifesto – like Miłosz's poem – was a monologue, here one of the Polish Jew demanding to be heard; yet in the dynamic and powerful language of the manifesto there remained an awareness of a coming silence expressed saliently in such poems as Antoni Słonimski's 1947 "Elegia miasteczek żydowskich" ("Elegy for Jewish Towns"), which underscored the loss of Jews in Poland not through the disappearance of the physical spaces they inhabited, but through the death and erosion of memory caused by a lack of presence.[6]

Miłosz's poem, written in the voice of a Pole who is not Jewish, and Tuwim's manifesto, written from the perspective of a Polish Jew (to use Tuwim's own terminology), posited a metaphorical or imaginary encounter between the living and the dead as a means of imagining an ethical dialogue between Poles and Jews or Polish Jews. In each case, however, the poets wrote texts that rhetorically functioned as monologues by establishing their interlocutors as the victims of the Holocaust. Importantly, both poets create a synecdoche where the remains of Jews and the blood that was shed on Polish soil represent the Holocaust more broadly. They identified the historical truism of a blood soaked earth as a way of getting at the core of abstract human values and "addressed" their monologues to those physical remains, albeit silent and dead. At the same time, however, each poet posited a different stance vis-à-vis this same land. For Miłosz, the soil symbolized a space of

[6] An English translation of Słonimski's poem available in *Stranger in Our Midst: Images of the Jew in Polish Literature*, ed. H. B. Segel (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996).

and desire for a Polish reckoning with the past; for Tuwim, this same soil was a vessel of memory, a meeting place between living and dead Jews.

The transformation of Miłosz's and Tuwim's poetic monologues into a dialogic form was achieved in 1987, with Jan Błoński's "Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto" ("Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto") published in the weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny*.[7] In his article, Błoński used Miłosz's poem as a means of opening a dialogue among Poles about Polish-Jewish relations and demonstrating the necessity for a society-wide responsibility to confront and remember the past. Błoński famously interpreted Miłosz's poem as transposing the factual death of the Jews in the ghetto into a literary construct that allows for both a literal and figurative reading of the underground as a space permanently designated as "Jewish," as well as a permanent place of judgment. As Błoński noted, Miłosz's mole "...burrows underground [*Literal space. EW*] but also underneath our consciousness. This is the feeling of guilt which we do not want to admit" [*Figurative space. EW*].[8]

While Miłosz's poem and Błoński's interpretation of it called attention to the ethical dilemma provoked by the Holocaust (i.e., the culpability of the "Jew of the New Testament" who fears being "counted among the helpers of death"), the poem's imagery – and Błoński's reading of it – saliently institutionalized the displacement of Jewish space in literature from above- to belowground and designated this spatial transposition as an integral part of poetics on the Holocaust. Intensifying Miłosz's idea, Błoński reminded his readers that Miłosz considered Polish soil "sullied, blood-stained, desecrated" by the wartime genocide. He developed Miłosz's metaphor of the underground introduced in "Biedny

[7] J. Błoński, "Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto," *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 1987. Reprinted in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 11 February 2009. Translations from Błoński's essay are from "The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto" in *"My Brother's Keeper?": Recent Polish Debates on the Holocaust*. ed. A. Polonsky (New York: Routledge, 2002), 34–48.

[8] J. Błoński, "The Poor Poles," 41.

Chrześcijanin patrzy na getto," and explicated its meaning in broader, historical terms. Błoński wrote:

> What Miłosz means here is neither the blood of his compatriots nor that of the Germans. He clearly means Jewish blood, the genocide which – although not perpetrated by the Polish nation – took place on Polish soil and which has tainted that soil for all time.[9]

Błoński further extended Miłosz's poetic reckoning with the past into the realm of collective memory, seeking to demonstrate the importance of an active stance of memorializing Poland's Jewish past in the present through literature and culture. Błoński wrote: "...collective memory which finds it purest voice in poetry and literature cannot forget this bloody and hideous defilement. It cannot pretend that it never occurred."[10] What stands out most immediately in Błoński's reading of Miłosz's poem is the extent to which the distance between the war and the 1980s transposed Miłosz's and Tuwim's rhetorical monologues into a public dialogue addressed to Polish society. Though paralleling Miłosz's 1945 poem, Błoński's essay was written to and for a new generation of Poles who had no experience of the war and whose "memory" of an active, visible Jewish community was based not on personal experience and encounters with the Other, but rather on historical accounts. Błoński's essay was a critical voice in a sea of potential non-remembrance that called for a confrontation with the past. It was a plea to remember actively.

It is in this context of the call to remember and Tuwim's and Miłosz's identification of Polish soil as the space of remembrance and confrontation that Igor Ostachowicz's 2012 novel *Noc żywych Żydów* (*Night of the Living Jews*) must be read.[11] In the novel, Osta-

[9] Ibid., 34.

[10] Ibid., 34.

[11] I. Ostachowicz, *Noc żywych Żydów* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo W.A.B., 2012). Translations from Ostachowicz's novel are my own.

chowicz creates a literary encounter with the Other in which a contemporary Polish man is tasked to usher into safety a community of living-dead Jews who are animated by a magical, silver heart and who exist in the subbasements of Muranów, a neighborhood re-built on the rubble of the Warsaw ghetto. This community is in danger of extermination (once again), eternally hunted by an undead German officer who organizes a band of contemporary neo-Nazis, led by a skinhead who calls himself Hitler, to do his final bidding. While stylistically and topically playing on popular cultural references, the novel is fundamentally rooted in a literary tradition of the Polish encounter with Polish Jewish remains after the Holocaust.

In *Noc żywych Żydów*, Ostachowicz literalizes Miłosz's and Tuwim's language and imagery as a means of recreating a Jewish space in contemporary Poland and exploring the potential of a real encounter with the Other. Thus, where in Tuwim and Miłosz we encounter metaphors, poetic imaginary, and a spiritual brotherhood (particularly in the case of Tuwim), in Ostachowicz we encounter the buried corpses of Warsaw Jews – a historical fact of the space – as narratively resuscitated by a need for reckoning not so much between Poles and Jews, but between Poles and Polish land or space. Ostachowicz's text is a confrontation with the unsettling memory of the past for a new generation. Despite Miłosz's invocation of poetry offered as a sacrifice to the dead "So that you should visit us no more,"[12] Ostachowicz's novel shows that the ghosts of the war continue to haunt, despite the political, economic, and social transformations from the end of the war to the twenty-first century.

[12] C. Miłosz, "Dedication" in *The Collected Poems* (New York: Ecco Press, 1988), 78–79. For the original, see "Przedmowa" in *Utwory poetyckie. Poems* (Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1976), 39.

## Towards an Understanding of a post-Holocaust Varsovian Topography

Miłosz's, Tuwim's, and Błoński's texts provide a framework for a discursive confrontation with a post-Holocaust reality in Poland through a topographic prism. Significantly, for both Miłosz and Tuwim, the literary expression of this discursive confrontation is set in a space that quintessentially represents the way in which Polish and Polish Jewish experiences of the war dramatically intersect and diverge. In particular, I am referring here to Warsaw and, more specifically, the neighborhood of Muranów which was included within the boundaries of the Warsaw ghetto, and which functions as the implied setting of Miłosz's and Tuwim's texts, as well as the explicit setting of Ostachowicz's novel. Understanding this spatial context and the symbolism or meaning attached to the geo-specific place called "Muranów" within the broader meaning of Warsaw is imperative to elucidate Ostachowicz's intertextuality as it relates to a post-Holocaust Varosovian topography.

For both Poles and Jews, Warsaw is a symbolic center of resistance against oppression, but for different reasons. From a Polish perspective, the German occupation of Warsaw in 1939 and the Warsaw Uprising in 1944 against the Nazi oppressor easily fit a dominant historical-cultural paradigm that began with the partitions of Poland in the late eighteenth century and cast Warsaw as the locus of insurrection against the Tsarist Empire. Fitting in with the romantic Messianic notion of Poland as the "Christ of Nations," the Warsaw Uprising remains till this day an important extension and symbol of this national discourse and the streets of Warsaw are a vessel of memory and a commemoration of these acts of resistance.[13] This is visibly marked throughout the city by dozens of memorial markers and plaques installed at places of execution

[13] For a discussion of the relationship between the city of Warsaw and this Messianic myth as it pertains to post-1989 political discourse, see D. Galasiński, "The Messianic Warsaw: Mythological framings of political discourse in the address by

inscribed with such phrases as "This place is sanctified by the martyr blood of Poles fighting for freedom." From a Jewish perspective, Warsaw is primarily associated with the ghetto established by the Nazis during World War II, the place where thousands of Jews died of starvation and abuse, and the place from which thousands were sent to concentration camps.[14] It is also the location of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943. While notable revolts took place in the Białystok, Częstochowa, and Vilnius ghettos, the revolt in the Warsaw ghetto was the largest such act of Jewish resistance against the Nazis during World War II. Thus, from both Polish and Polish Jewish perspectives, Warsaw (for Poles), and more specifically Muranów, or in other words the Warsaw ghetto (for Jews), are marked as places of heroism and resistance, tragedy and death.[15]

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Lech Wałęsa," in *The Art of Commemoration: Fifty years after the Warsaw Uprising*, ed. T. Ensink and C. Sauer (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2003), 41–56.

[14] For a detailed history of the Warsaw Ghetto, see B. Engelking and J. Leociak, *The Warsaw Ghetto: A Guide to the Perished City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). Engelking's and Leociak's "Introduction" includes an excellent overview of Jews living in Warsaw prior to 1939.

[15] While this presentation of the "Polish" and "Jewish" perspectives on Warsaw is an oversimplification, my intention is to sketch out the basic "antipodes" of the symbolism and discourse as related to the geographic space called "Muranów" in order to inform my reading of Ostachowicz. As regards the heroic or partisan narrative of the Warsaw ghetto, see M. Edelman, *The Ghetto Fights* (London and Chicago: Bookmarks, 1990); I. Gutman, *Resistance: The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994); and M. Arens, *Flags Over the Warsaw Ghetto: The Untold Story of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising* (Jerusalem, Israel and Springfield, NJ: Gefen Publishing House, 2011). While few Jews survived the Warsaw ghetto, some memoirs remain. These memoirs tend toward underscoring the everyday abuse in the ghetto, as well as the "miraculous" stories of survival. See, for example, M. Zylberberg, *A Warsaw Diary, 1939–1945* (London and Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2005) and B. Goldstein, *Five Years in the Warsaw Ghetto (The Stars Bear Witness)* (Edinburgh and West Virginia: AK Press/Nabat, 2005). More recent scholarship has focused on elucidating the details of everyday life in the ghetto. See, for example, S. D. Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History?: Emanuel Ringelblum, the Warsaw Ghetto, and the Oyneg Shabes Archive* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007). See also M. Edelman, *I była miłość w getcie* (Warsaw: Świat Książki, 2009).

To get at the distinction between the "Polish" and "Jewish" sense of space located at the specific geographic point marked on the map as "Muranów," we need only consider the terms used to refer to this neighborhood – "Muranów" and "Warsaw ghetto" – which operate differently both historically and linguistically. From a historical perspective, "Muranów" is the name of a neighborhood established in the seventeenth century, a primarily Jewish neighborhood in the interwar period, the location of the Warsaw ghetto that was destroyed by the Nazis, and a postwar neighborhood rebuilt by the communists. At each point of this chronology, the geographic space named "Muranów" remains a part of the city called "Warsaw." Because of World War II, the chronological, historical, "natural" development of Warsaw, including Muranów, was entirely disrupted. In the case of Muranów specifically, what was once a central urban neighborhood marked by the bustle of everyday life, became a space marked first and foremost by death; and despite the process of reconstruction after the war, this mark remains a prominent characteristic of Muranów through its postwar architecture and the monuments erected in the area. Nonetheless, in the process of reconstructing Warsaw after the war, Muranów was integrated into the cityscape and remains a central neighborhood of the Polish capital.

But when this space is considered from a primarily Jewish point of view, Muranów is above all a place which made up a significant part of the Warsaw ghetto. From this perspective, because of the historical importance of the Warsaw ghetto to the experience of the Holocaust, the term "Warsaw ghetto" supersedes the local name of the neighborhood even though it refers roughly to the same geographic space as the term "Muranów." Even more importantly, "Warsaw ghetto" is a term that is chronologically limited by the dates when it was established (16 November 1940) and destroyed (April 1943) and physically limited or defined by walls that were erected by the Nazis, walls that artificially demarcated the boundaries of a "Jewish" space. It became a space that intensi-

fied the distinction between Poles and Jews. With the destruction of the ghetto in 1943, Muranów was "returned" to the broader urban space, but its history remained evident in the totality of that destruction as compared to other parts of the city, which were systematically destroyed by the Nazis in 1944. Thus, "Warsaw ghetto" refers to a space that chronologically and physically was "carved out" of the city and has attained a symbolic meaning beyond time and place. The term "Warsaw ghetto" carries with it a very specific set of connotations that layers the physical space with the history and memory of the extreme abuses meted out by the Nazis and the death that took place within the walls of the ghetto.

Postwar Warsaw remains till this day a space of memory and commemoration that vies with the tendencies of urban growth, development, and the persistence of everyday life. It also remains a space that is understood differently, depending on whether it is seen from a "Jewish" or "Polish" perspective. As a Jewish space, the bloodshed during the war transforms Warsaw, and Muranów in particular, into a territory of remembrance, an area that belongs first and foremost to the deceased (a sentiment touched on by Tuwim in *My, Żydzi Polscy...*). As a Polish space, Polish blood (be it the blood of Poles or Polish Jews), transforms Varsovian space into a patriotic, national discourse of resistance and salvation, following the Varsovian tradition established after the partitions and implying persistence, resistance, freedom, and national independence. Importantly, however, Muranów – though centrally located in the Polish capital – does not figure on the physical or symbolic map of the Warsaw Uprising, a circumstance that can be explained to some extent by the process through which Warsaw was destroyed.

Warsaw was destroyed in three stages: the September 1939 bombing of the city by the Nazis; the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943; and the Warsaw Uprising in 1944. By the end of the war, the Polish capital was over eighty percent demolished, leaving a landscape scarred by the concerted effort of the Nazis to wipe the Polish capital off the face of the earth. Left were miles and miles of rubble

and ruins, barely habitable by humans. Underneath skeleton-like, bombed-out structures and the estimated 20 million $m^3$ of rubble that remained visible above ground[16] was hidden a more tragic reality: thousands of corpses remained buried throughout the city. The part of the city most thoroughly left in fragments, however, was the area of the ghetto. Unlike parts of Warsaw where ruins and skeletal structures provided a landmark to identify what-stood-where before the war, Muranów was a pile of ashes and rubble with few spatial markers remaining to orient even those most familiar with the neighborhood. Because of this degree of destruction, Muranów was one of the few spaces in the city that did not see extensive activity during the uprising in 1944; it was simply not accessible to the insurgents and, for the most part, bereft of a living human presence. While some notable places near or in Muranów, such as Wola or the Pawiak prison, played a role in the Warsaw Uprising, the battleground of the city-wide insurrection did not overlap with the area of the ghetto uprising. This created a sense of two distinct spaces that cut Muranów out of the narrative of the Warsaw Uprising, both physically and symbolically, and contributed to it being treated differently on material, discursive, and symbolic levels than other areas of the postwar city.[17] As historian Michael Meng points out, postwar preservationists "venerated Warsaw's ruins" as a shrine to the Polish nation; but "Muranów never fit into this restorative and redemptive harnessing of the past. Historic preservationists did not worship the ghetto rubble as sacred ruins of the nation."[18]

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[16] Z. Grzybowski, H. Hilscher, and L. Wysznacki, *Warszawa 1945–1970*, trans. R. Gorzkowska, et al. (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo "Sport i Turystyka," 1970), 8.

[17] Pawiak, a prison established already in the 1830s, was taken over by the Gestapo shortly after the Siege of Warsaw. It is located in Muranów and was thus within the boundaries of the ghetto. Wola was the site of one of the largest massacres of Poles during World War II, which took place in the early days of the 1944 uprising and is a district of Warsaw located directly west of Muranów.

[18] M. Meng, *Shattered Spaces: Encountering Jewish Ruins in Postwar Germany and Poland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 74.

As postwar plans for reconstructing Warsaw ensued, clearing the city of rubble became a priority. This process included the exhumation of corpses buried by rubble throughout the city with an immediate focus on matters of health and hygiene. Despite these exhumation efforts, even today, Warsaw remains a burial ground. Contemporary renovation and construction workers continue to discover bodies of World War II victims buried beneath the city. It is important to note, however, that because of the extent of the ghetto destruction, the exhumation of Muranów was more limited than in other parts of the city.

The urban landscape after the war undeniably underscored this distinction between the ghetto space and the rest of Warsaw. This reality was captured well by Adolf Rudnicki in his short story "Czysty Nurt" ("The Crystal Stream") about the destruction of prewar life and the impossibility of its postwar reconstitution.[19] Set immediately after the war on the rubble of the ghetto, the main character, Abel

> expected to see destruction, but on the same scale as in the other districts...Here the city had been rubbed out, removed from the surface of the earth like a tent from a meadow. On other districts there were dead bodies; here there was not even a dead body. In this place the capital had been crushed to powder, not one stone was left on another. And though beneath these fields of rubble rested more dead than in a hundred cemeteries, there was nothing to suggest a cemetery.[20]

It is on this field of rubble so vividly described by Rudnicki that a new housing complex was built in Muranów in the 1950s as part of communist urban planners' effort to build a socialist capital. Planned as a housing district for workers, Muranów was to be built

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[19] A. Rudnicki, "Czysty nurt" in *Sto jeden*, vol. 1 (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1984), 65–89.

[20] Ibid. 68–69. English translation taken from A. Rudnicki, "The Crystal Stream," in *Art from the Ashes: A Holocaust Anthology*, ed. L.L. Langer (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 380.

upon the ruins and rubble of the ghetto as a symbol of new life rising from the ruins.[21] Its architect, Bohdan Lachert, even planned to symbolically mix the rubble of the ghetto into the concrete foundations and integrate his modernist design with the landscape shaped by mounds of uncleared rubble and the recently erected Monument to the Ghetto Heroes. With the official adoption of socialist realism in 1949, however, Lachert's design which was meant to memorialize the past and celebrate the present, was replaced by Stalinist-era structures. From the perspective of propaganda, Muranów was a symbol of postwar Varsovian reconstruction meant to help abolish the city's bourgeois past and shape a new socialist *future*.[22]

Despite the communist-era propaganda that sought to define Muranów as a model socialist neighborhood, the memory of Muranów as a locus of Jewish trauma and tragedy remains part of the neighborhood's history. But it is, above all, a silent memory. According to Beata Chomątowska, a journalist and Muranów historian, the neighborhood is pervaded by a silence that she calls the phantom pain of a lost limb, the loss of the Jews of Warsaw, and more broadly, the loss of Polish Jews who perished in the Holocaust.[23] Since the end of the war, this "cemetery" silence of Muranów has been "voiced" by a handful of memorials, primarily to the members of the Jewish Combat Organization (ŻOB). For many decades, the only official memorials were the Anielewicz Mound, an unexhumed area completed as a memorial in 1946 and located at 18 Miła Street where over a hundred partisans of ŻOB committed mass suicide rather than be taken by the Nazis; the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes, designed by Natan Rapoport and un-

[21] M. Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, 78.

[22] For more on the politics of reconstructing Muranów under the communist authorities in postwar Poland, see ibid., 74–84.

[23] B. Chomątowska, *Stacja Muranów* (Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2012), 22.

veiled in 1948; and Mordechaj Anielewicz Street, named in 1955 in honor of the commander of ŻOB.[24] One might argue, however, that these commemorations are typically "Polish," commensurable with the memorializing tendencies of the dominant, Polish culture in which the tradition of exhumation, memorialization, and commemorative markers combine to "cleanse" the broader space for the continuation of everyday life by limiting the space of memory to a well-defined and condensed area. And until recently, there was no specifically Jewish architectural trace of Jewish life in Muranów, a state of affairs that has been rectified by the presence of the POLIN Museum of the History of the Polish Jews housed in a spacious glass building of Finnish design. Furthermore, there are memorial markers scattered throughout the city that outline the former boundaries of the ghetto and thus reconstitute the ghetto space as a place of commemoration through identifiable boundaries that do not disrupt the everyday functioning of the urban space.[25]

Nonetheless, the problems associated with active memorialization and commemoration of the victims of the ghetto are compounded by the fact that Muranów is centrally located in the capital. It is, in fact, a neighborhood of Śródmieście, which is the downtown district of the city. While Warsaw's residents remain aware of the history of the city and its neighborhoods, continuous memorialization of the horrors of the ghetto is problematic in the context of everyday life. Thus when we encounter Muranów in Miłosz, Tuwim, and (as we shall see) in Ostachowicz, we encounter not one

[24] It is worth noting that despite the taboo placed on such topics as the Warsaw Uprising and Polish-Jewish relations under the postwar communist regime, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was seen by some as an important heroic act of a radical, leftist Jewish movement against the Nazis. See M. Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, 76.

[25] For more about the problem of sites of memory that lack visible boundaries, see Meredith Shaw in this volume. Bożena Karwowska's article likewise touches on this issue as it relates to the camps in Auschwitz.

space, but essentially three different spatial constructs informed by three perspectives: the Polish national discourse that encompasses all of Warsaw, the Jewish experience of the ghetto, and the communist era housing complex that is built upon the rubble of the ghetto. When these three perspectives are combined, Muranów is that which is above ground, but it is also that which cannot be seen or touched. It is that which, according to the author Sylwia Chutnik, is both past and present:

> It seems obvious to me that living in Muranów today you live with people from the ghetto. After all, the cinder blocks made here contained not only fragments of the bricks from destroyed buildings, but everything that was there, including most likely human remains...There was no exhumation on this terrain. Everything that was ground up or fragmented served as building material.[26]

## Intertextuality and Topography in *Noc żywych Żydów*

While everyday life forces one to contend with the physical space of Muranów as it exists today, in both Miłosz and Tuwim we are confronted by that which remains underground, that which can only be experienced through memory, history, and text. Muranów is, after all, located upon the ruins of the ghetto. And both Miłosz and Tuwim suggest that this underground location is a space that belongs, first and foremost, to those who perished. It is at the intersection of Muranów as memory-text and Muranów as a space of everyday life that Ostachowicz's novel takes place. From a historical perspective, Ostachowicz's literary meeting between undead Jews and living Poles is rooted in a particularly Polish cultural processing of World War II and the Holocaust, and the fact of living in a geographic locus that is eternally marked by the trauma of the war.

[26] Quoted in B. Chomątowska, *Stacja Muranów*, 226.

The premise of Ostachowicz's novel relies on the historical relationship between the Holocaust and Polish soil as expressed by Miłosz and Błoński, and the main character of the novel expresses frustration with this very fact:

> I'm simply furious with myself and my fate, that I wasn't born somewhere else or in a different era, in some peaceful place that is not torn apart by pangs of conscience and painful experiences from the very depths of its underground waters, all the way through the sand, clay, cement and bricks, the roots, trees, cats, windows, rooftops, air, birds, clouds, and people with their belongings. This entire cursed geographic breadth, as high as it is deep, is through and through soaked with pain and a fear, which I have barely touched...I can even put down two layers of tile, ours from Opoczno underneath, and on top of those, terracotta tiles imported from peaceful, sunny places, where they live from one vacation to the next, I could pave all of Warsaw and all of Poland and we could gaily slide across those tiles in our wool socks made by mountain folk...but even then we won't be carefree like those stoned Dutchmen...If this were at least a normal cemetery.[27]

This expression of the inescapable clash between a desire for levity and lightness in everyday life and the collective experience that has marked Polish soil as a place of genocide bursts from the pages of the novel in the distressed voice of a new generation, who must come to terms with a past they have not directly experienced or encountered. At the same time, through its intertextuality with the above-cited texts of Miłosz, Tuwim, and Błoński, Ostachowicz's novel does indeed begin to fulfill the call for literature to serve as memory and collective consciousness, i.e. to remember. It is the poetic and discursive construct of Miłosz's and Tuwim's monologues which form the basis for the dialogic process of memory work encountered in Ostachowicz's novel.

[27] I. Ostachowicz, *Noc żywych Żydów*, 205.

At the same time, the tension between memorialization and everyday life limits the topographic experience of the novel to the boundaries of Muranów, and a short, graphic segment that takes place in Auschwitz. From the perspective of cultural or literary discourse, Ostachowicz's story of undead Jews emerging from the basements of Muranów can only succeed because it is set in a space that has been textually defined as a place of memory. On the level of poetics, Ostachowicz's text directly mirrors Miłosz and Tuwim, both topically and lexically. For example, the main character ponders the relationship between the blood-soaked earth in Muranów, designated by Anielewicz Street, and the potential for an encounter with the Jewish Other:

> Summer. Anielewicz Street. Linden trees with shimmering leaves and their honey-like smell...not many people, 'cause it's hot. And every single one of them would say you're crazy if they heard you say that you can't bury evil under rubble and earth. Suffering must be respected and accounted for. And **blood – if it isn't washed away in time and you let it indifferently soak into the earth and mix with the clay – will one day crawl out as an horde of golems** that move as slowly as tanks, and their **broken bones and bodies**, knocked about, will cover themselves in **left over rags** that haven't been stolen, and will glue themselves together by the power of sub-biology into **two-legged specters** that know only pain and that will share this pain, running around bent over, from door to door, from one peaceful apartment to the next. [*Emphasis throughout mine. EW*][28]

The bolded text in the above quote marks the intertextuality between Ostachowicz's novel and Błoński's, Miłosz's, and Tuwim's texts. Throughout the novel, Tuwim's discourse is deployed by the main character as he realizes that indeed a "horde" of Jewish undead are emerging from Muranów's underground. Like in Tuwim, Ostachowicz's main character muses about "quasi-corpses"; how-

[28] Ibid., 14.

ever, for Ostachowicz's main character, the return of these corpses in the form of "golems" (a term used by the main character as shorthand for the undead Jews rather than in reference to the artificial creature of Jewish folklore) occurs not as a result of the Holocaust, but rather as a result of a failed reckoning and delayed catharsis of Poles living on Polish soil in the aftermath of the Holocaust and the failure of cultural memory and ritual to come to terms with Poland's Jewish past.[29]

This intertextual comparison provides us with a means of grasping the multilayered themes on which Ostachowicz's narrative relies and the literary or textual material from which he "constructs" his narrative and, in essence, his undead characters. While *Noc żywych Żydów* considers the outcome of a reconstituted Jewish space through the presence of Jews in twenty-first century Muranów, this type of novel could not happen without the weaving together of preexisting discourses of presence/absence with the discourse of physical remains buried underground. In other words, his narrative only works because these preexisting discourses (institutionalized by Miłosz and Tuwim) have been sufficiently popularized that they are a part of the mentality of Ostachowicz's main character, who is an educated Varsovian from an anti-Semitic family.

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[29] Notably when the main character inquires why Poles are not crawling out of their graves, he learns that: "Only those who are forgotten, those who don't have families and at whose graves no one pauses for a moment of silence [crawl out of their graves]. After death, a person needs a bit of warmth, someone to show interest in him, especially after a tragic death. But if your entire family, beginning with your mother and ending with your most distant cousin, is buried in the sand, and if all of your friends are buried in the sand, then you can't just lie there...you get up, shake off the dirt, and look around. Poles are stuffed to the hilt with cemetery candles and prayers of remembrance. Even if someone is tormented by something and doesn't get enough of it, he wants to run from the cemetery as far as possible, away from all the appeals of the casualties, the celebratory masses, the speeches, and gun salutes. If you are looking for Catholics, you won't find many..." (I. Ostachowicz, *Noc żywych Żydów*, 203).

Thus Ostachowicz's story brings together both the displacement of Jewish spaces into the underground with the reconstitution of Jewish spaces through narrative. In the first instance, Ostachowicz combines the historical reality of Jewish death and trauma in Poland with the figurative language of Miłosz and Tuwim; in the second instance, he pushes the limits of narration by animating Miłosz's and Tuwim's metaphorical discourse. He revives the past and brings the Jewish corpses of Muranów back to life by employing such literary techniques as literalization of metaphor (i.e., giving figurative language literal status within the narrative), matter-of-fact narration, and bending the scientific limits of time and space, all which take the novel outside a realist framework and make it more akin to magic realism or fantasy.[30] These narrative techniques, thus, allow the main character to act according to the assumptions of a rationally ordered world, i.e., according to physics, biology, and history. From this perspective, he initially treats the undead Jews in Warsaw as a community of the past that should be relegated to cemeteries and the space below Warsaw. At the same time, when his senses are confronted by a new, remarkable, irrational, and scientifically untested reality, he accepts the Jewish undead at face-value, assisting them and becoming transformed by their presence.

Relying on the spatiality, or in other words the meaning, history, and symbolism of Warsaw's Muranów as a geographic locus, Ostachowicz tests the limits of a contemporary confrontation between past and present, and explores the challenges of protecting the dead, zombie-like beings who surface from their graves and

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[30] For a productive definition of magic realism in this respect, see A. C. Hegerfeldt, *Lies that Tell the Truth: Magic Realism Seen Through Contemporary Fiction from Britain* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2005). For an application of Hegerfeldt's definition of magic realism as it pertains to contemporary Polish literature, in particular the work of Olga Tokarczuk, see E. Wampuszyc, "Magical Realism in Olga Tokarczuk's *Primeval and Other Times and House of Day, House of Night*," *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 27, no. 2 (2014): 366–85.

whose physical presence defies reality. In its fantastical manifestation, the undead Jewish community of *Noc żywych Żydów* can be interpreted as a memory project that exploits the cultural trope of encountering Jewish remains which eternally mark the land with their presence. On the one hand, Ostachowicz's Jewish characters reconstitute a Jewish space in the Warsaw of the novel through their "physical" presence, rather than through memorialization or a focus on the absence or emptiness of space, as in the case of the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes or the POLIN Museum. On the other, by virtue of being "undead," and thus not belonging to this world (i.e., the world of the living), the people who perished in the Warsaw ghetto at the hands of the Nazis become a disruption to the normally functioning urban landscape and a challenge to Polish cultural paradigms and self-perception. As the undead Jews become enthralled with contemporary life in twenty-first century Poland, they emerge from the Muranów underground, enticed by the glitter of the Arkadia shopping center built at the edge of Muranów, MP3 players, hip-hop fashion, and the trappings of consumer desire; yet their appearance – decomposed bodies dressed in dirty, musty, and tattered rags – marks them as "Other" twice removed, as Jews of the past and as zombie-like men, women, and children whose presence is disturbing to the clientele of the local shopping mall.[31] Their presence in Warsaw is explained as a historical reenactment, a happening, as performance art; but to the Neo-Nazis, they are marked as Jews to be eliminated regardless of whether they are living or undead.

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[31] Despite the title of the novel, which alludes to George Romero's 1968 movie *Night of the Living Dead*, translated into Polish as *Noc żywych trupów*, the undead Jews of Ostachowicz's novel are not the stuff of popular culture or Hollywood horror that attacks living humans for their flesh. Rather, these characters have human emotions with no need to feed off the living. The only difference between the undead characters and their living counterparts is that they are indeed corpses, whose skin and bones have suffered death and burial. Furthermore, they are people of their own time, meaning they are products of prewar and wartime Warsaw with the anachronistic mores and expectations associated with that time.

In addition to the history of Muranów, Ostachowicz employs Muranów's sense of space created by local lore which abounds with retellings of nightmares or stories of ghostly screams and cries attributed to the Jews who suffered and died in the ghetto. At the end of the day, historical memory pervades and its past is never far away. Yet a sense of fear persists. In combining historical fact with local lore and the metaphysical (even fantastical?) ruminations of Muranów's contemporary residents, Ostachowicz narratively resuscitates the Jews of the ghetto. In this way, the narrative goes beyond the historical truth that imbues the space and poses the questions: What would happen if indeed the thousands of corpses buried in the rubble of Muranów were to rise from the dead? How would contemporary Poles respond when faced with the moral and ethical choices confronted by Poles during World War II? What would be the reaction of Polish society more broadly? Is reconstructing spatiality or animating a space with remnants of a Jewish past possible? Or is the reconstruction of a Jewish spatiality in Poland primarily a discursive, cultural act, rather than an actual proposition?

Clearly, such a reckoning poses more questions than it provides answers. With the narrative revitalization of a Jewish presence in Warsaw, albeit a fantastical one, Ostachowicz's project follows the problem posed by Israeli artist Yael Bartana in her experimental trilogy of film shorts entitled *And Europe Will Be Stunned*, which explores Polish-Jewish relations, specifically, and the confrontation with the Other, more universally. Consisting of *Mary-Koszmary* (*Nightmares*) (2007), *Mur i wieża* (*Wall and Tower*) (2009), and *Zamach* (*Assassination*) (2011), Bartana's films materialize discourses on Polish-Jewish relations by setting the action of the films in Warsaw. For example, in *Mur i wieża* she portrays the establishment of Europe's first kibbutz in Muranów, borrowing stylistically from socialist realist imagery and positing an alternative geographic locus for the state of Israel. In *Mary-Koszmary*, publicist and literary critic Sławomir Sierakowski portrays the protagonist

of the film and voices an invitation for three million Jews to return to Poland:

> Jews! Fellow countrymen! People! Peeeeople!!!! This is an appeal. Not the appeal of the dead, but an appeal for life. We want three million Jews to return to Poland so that you will once again live among us. We need you! We beg you! Return!

It is worth noting that Bartana's treatment of place in the trilogy is primarily symbolic, but with a strong political message of confronting the past. Her engagement of place is a sort of international, group catharsis. *Mary-Koszmary*, for example, is set in an empty stadium. While the stadium is recognizable to Poles as the now demolished 10th Anniversary Stadium, the setting of her film does not evoke a specific space related to Jewish memory nor does it develop a sense of spatiality tied to a specific geospatial point, unless that point is considered Poland or even Europe. Furthermore, the film cinematically alludes to Nazi or communist-era propaganda films, and thus not only poses the problem of Poland confronting the past, but casts the encounter with the Other in broader, European terms.

While Ostachowicz's treatment of Jewish space is limited by the boundaries of Muranów and relegated to spaces historically "Jewish," both Bartana's and Ostachowicz's conception of the return of Jews to Poland is anxiety producing and triggers a complex transformation of how "Polish" space is understood. If Bartana's provocative suggestion to reconstitute a Jewish community and therefore a Jewish space (which comes from the Israeli perspective) were to be materialized or made real, then what might have to be displaced in order to accommodate these new communities? Ostachowicz's novel, which is written from the Polish perspective, toys with this idea. By repopulating Muranów with Jews, albeit deceased ones, his novel directly asks those questions which Bartana's film only implies: What would happen if in fact a Jewish presence of three million returned to Poland? What space would they occupy

physically? What rhetorical space could the presence of a Jewish community occupy in Poland today? What would be the social role of a suddenly reconstituted, widely practiced or performed Jewish space in Poland? And, to what extent do Sierakowski's words "We need you!" articulate a true need or desire for a Jewish presence?

Through the revitalization of the "Jewishness" of Muranów and the main character's direct interaction with this reconstituted Jewish space (i.e., a space filled with presence not absence), Ostachowicz's main character confronts history and historical memory in an entirely new way. One of the most profound takeaways from Ostachowicz's novel is that identity and space are inextricably linked. But in Ostachowicz's interpretation, this is fundamentally a Polish problem, rather than a Polish-Jewish problem. His memory project argues that Jewish Warsaw, while not physically present and impossible to reconstitute, does indeed demand a rhetorical space within the definition of Polish identity formation and consciousness. Though the reconstitution of Jewish space in the novel is a memory project, it is not one of memorialization. Rather, a Warsaw populated by prewar and wartime Jews creates a liminal space where Polish identity based on ethnicity, religion, and Romantic Messianic sacrifice is challenged. For the main character, this occurs on the level of his identity as a post-1989 consumer and capitalist, who when tested by simulated experiences of World War II is motivated to act according to fossilized paradigms of heroism, on the one hand, and extreme debauchery on the other.[32]

This liminal space in the novel tests, contests, interrogates, and critiques the boundaries of Polish identity through the moral and ethical dilemmas posed by a meeting with the Polish-Jewish Other. Ostachowicz ends his novel with a reconstitution of Jewish space in the form of the Arkadia shopping center. It is there that the Jews of Warsaw converge and where they are attacked by fascist

[32] Scenes of debauchery and extreme violence occur in the novel when the main character is transported to Auschwitz to get a "glimpse" of hell.

skinheads. As readers, however, we are not made privy to the final outcome of what can only be called a contemporary pogrom, albeit in literary form. The main character of the novel dies, the storyline is cut short. We do not know if the events of the novel are "real," a dream, the main character's purgatory, or even his hell. What we do know, however, is that the final result of a Warsaw space infused with a Jewish population, if left to the logic presented by the narrative, does not lead to the commemoration and memorialization of the Jewish community, but rather to its annihilation. In the end, Ostachowicz does confirm the need for a "Jewish" space in Poland, but it is a space in which Poles must confront themselves and their own conscience. Whether there is room for a physically reconstituted Jewish space akin to the one of prewar Poland is a question left for another time and, maybe, for another novel.

## Intertekstualność i topografia w powieści *Noc żywych Żydów* Igora Ostachowicza

### Streszczenie

Konfrontacja ze śladami żydowskimi, zarówno w sensie dosłownym, jak i w przenośni, stała się tropem powojennej kultury polskiej. Najczęściej ujawnia się ona na styku życia i śmierci, teraźniejszości i przeszłości, zapomnienia i pamiętania, a wywołuje ją miejsce – prawdziwe lub wyimaginowane – symbolizujące nieobecność społeczności żydowskiej w Polsce. W powieści *Noc żywych Żydów* (2012) Igor Ostachowicz, podążając tym właśnie tropem, tworzy projekt pamięci rekonstruującej społeczność żydowską wojennej Warszawy. W artykule analizowana jest rola topografii miasta w projekcie Ostachowicza na tle innych narracyjnych reprezentacji śladów żydowskich w stolicy Polski: *My Żydzi Polscy* (1944) Juliana Tuwima i film *Mary koszmary* (2007) Yael Bartany. Autorka ukazuje, w jaki sposób Ostachowicz wykorzystuje kategorie czasu i przestrzeni, aby utrwalić pamięć o Żydach warszawskich.

**Słowa kluczowe:** narracja, reprezentacja, przestrzeń, czas, społeczność żydowska, Igor Ostachowicz