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Discrete Presence. *Natura tutelar* et *curans* in Ida Fink's Short Stories

Abstract: In the article, the author discusses the role, place and function of nature in Ida Fink's stories, presents the relationship between images of nature and the tragic history of the Holocaust. In the article nature entangled in the tragic history of humanity does not remain indifferent, it is seen as an autonomous and sovereign entity, revealed in a romantic-modernist and reflective perspective, entangled in a system of symbols and signs to be read. Such a message strategy allowed Ida Fink to frame the subjectivity of narratives (including images of nature) in an affective, experiential and empathetic form. Nature, in Fink's works, does not take on a "role" of *natura devorans* (devouring) and *natura atrox* (atrocious) in its contact with Holocaust depictions, instead – nature is a space of calm, shelter and care (*sedatio naturae, curans naturam*), sometimes being both friendly and tame, it reveals her discreet presence that is perceived by Jews in hiding, by showing that she is merciful, saving and salutary. The action of peaceful and quiet nature also has a clear connection with human existence, not only thinking about the meaning of life and its rhythm, coexistence with nature, a kind of symbiosis and coexistence with the world, but also exposing a kind of "aesthetic escapism".

Keywords: relationship between nature and Holocaust themes, empathetic reading, narrative poetics, existential-ethical contexts, silence of emotions, short stories, passage of time

Motto:

*History is no longer simply the history of people, but
is also becoming the history of natural things.*

(Bruno Latour, 2011)

The issues of nature, landscape, the plant and animal world in relation to the Holocaust have been essentially absent from the horizon of previous research on Holocaust representations, although organic, ecological-environmental semantics seem an essential part of many canonical films or literary texts about the Holocaust. Suffice it to recall Claude Lanzman's image of the blood-red autumn forest around the Shoah extermination camp or the theme of primordial wilderness in Edward Zwick's *The Resistance*, the motifs of hiding in dugouts,

bunkers, pits dug in the ground in the prose of Henryk Grynberg or Wilhelm Dichter, the role of organic matter in the paintings of Jonah Stern, Erna Rosenstein, Anselm Kiefer, the reportages of Rachel Auerbach, the poetry of Jerzy Ficowski, the novels of Piotr Rawicz. The symbolic presence of nature even imposes itself as an indelible element in many works dealing with the Holocaust (Ubertowska, 2015: 93)¹.

But unfortunately

anthropocentric paradigm in the humanities [...] did not allow nature to be seen as a causal factor in history, but even saw it as unmarked, passive, transparent”². As some scholars noticed “environmentalism and Holocaust and genocide studies have a great deal in common; the research trajectories they set out intersect (or rather, could intersect) at many points where analogous historiographical and ontological problems are articulated using other vocabularies and methodologies.(Ubertowska, 2015: 94–95)³.

In the subject of the relationship between nature and the Holocaust its worth mention e.g. Tim Cole (e.g. “Nature Was Helping Us’: Forests, Trees, and Environmental Histories of the Holocaust”) (Cole, 2014), John Roth (e.g. “The World Around Us: What Have We Learned From the Holocaust?” (Roth, 2013) and Eric Katz (e.g. “Nature’s Healing Power, the Holocaust and the Environmental Crisis”) (Katz, 2001) who argued

[...] that there were connections between the Shoah and environmental destruction: genocide and ecocide may be linked together by an analysis of the concept of domination. A comparative study of these two evils may point us in the direction of developing a harmonious relationship with both the natural world and our fellow human beings (Katz, 2001: 80).

An interesting interpretation of the issue of the relationship that occurs between nature and the Holocaust, especially in the perspective of considerations

¹ This text is an expanded and modified version of the article by D. Michulka, S. Switala and L. Gregorowicz: *Czytanie pamięci: cisza, czas i emocje w opowiadaniach Idy Fink*, “*Slavica Wratislaviensia*” (2021). T. 173, p. 303–314.

² A. Ubertowska, *op.cit.*, p. 94–95.

³ See also: Tim Cole, “*Nature Was Helping Us’: Forests, Trees, and Environmental Histories of the Holocaust*,” *Environmental History* 19, no. 4 (2014): 665–86. Cole considers “what environmental history might contribute to the field of Holocaust and genocide studies (665). He adds that he seeks not only to contribute to Holocaust studies where forest hiding is relatively understudied, but also to the field of environmental history where the Holocaust and genocide remain largely unexplored despite more recent interest in environmental histories of war and environmental histories of Nazism [...]. I am interested in forests as both material sites and memorial landscapes, both as lived spaces and remembered spaces. (667) His ideas were inspired by research on the role of nonhumans in the survival of those who hide in the forests. Cole’s explorations are, in turn, an important inspiration for us and provide the starting point for our own thoughts outlined here.

of emotions is presented by Dominick LaCapra. Researcher uses terms “traumatopisms” and ‘empathic unsettlement’ and an affective response to a boundary event (LaCapra, 2009).

And this is exactly what happens in Ida Fink's short stories, in which nature entangled in the tragic history of humanity does not remain indifferent, it is seen as an autonomous and sovereign entity, revealed in a romantic-modernist and reflective perspective, entangled in a system of symbols and signs to be read (Barcz, 2012: 58–59). Such a message strategy allowed Ida Fink to frame the subjectivity of narratives (including images of nature) in an affective, experiential and empathetic form.

Nature, in Fink's works, does not take on a “role” of *natura devorans* (devouring) and *natura atrox* (atrocitv) in its contact with Holocaust depictions, instead – nature is a space of calm, shelter and care (*sedatio naturae, curans naturam*), sometimes being both friendly and tame, it reveals her discreet presence that is perceived by Jews in hiding, by showing that she is merciful, saving and salutary (Cobel – Tokarska, 2012) .

The action of peaceful and quiet nature also has a clear connection with human existence, not only thinking about the meaning of life and its rhythm, coexistence with nature, a kind of symbiosis and coexistence with the world, but also exposing a kind of “aesthetic escapism”. “It turns out that [...] nature [can, D.M.] perform here the function of a makeshift ‘home,’ a familiar, safe space to which history has no access” (Ubertowska, 2015: 105).

Ida Fink is a Polish-language writer of Jewish descent, who in 1942 escaped with her sister from the ghetto. The experience of the sisters from this period (available Aryan versions obtained and a journey to the Third Reich) became the canvas for sending the novel *The Journey* (the author preferred the define of autobiographical fiction). She was born in Zbaraż in 1921 (the city belonged to Poland until 1945). In 1957 she went to Israel, where she lived until her death in 2011. She grew up in a secular family in which ‘the religion of Moses was perceived [...] only in terms of cultural value.’ She worked as a journalist, accompanist at the University of Physical Education in Wroclaw, librarian in the music department at the Goethe Institute in Tel Aviv. In the years 1960–1971 at the Yad Vashem Institute, she dealt with the documentation of testimonies of Holocaust survivors. She debuted in 1958 in the Israeli Polish-language press. Although she decided to stay in Tel Aviv, her relationship with Poland was strong –she was involved in Polish cultural life in Israel, she was writing only in Polish (Famulska-Ciesielska, 2011: 369)⁴.

⁴ Ida Fink said about the beginnings of her writing in an interview: ‘I tried before the war. In my early youth I wrote very bad poems. Then the desire to write disappeared – I thought – forever. [...] In the first post-war years, one could feel great joy that part of the family survived, on the other – a terrible emptiness. These were years of growing up

The small-scale work of Ida Fink a Polish-language writer of Jewish descent (e.g., collections of short stories *A Scrap of Time and Other Stories* and *Traces: Stories* as well as the autobiographical novel *The Journey*), intended for young people and adults, falls within the circle of research on the culture of memory, the issues of the wartime Holocaust presented from the perspective of private and individual testimonies (Czapliński 2010) over the socio-historical contexts referring to the issues of Polish-Jewish relations (Błoński 1994) and people's behavior in the face of death. Her narrative was described as 'heart-breaking, although it rarely uses the word "death" and is devoid of grand adjectives' (Smoleński, 2019)⁵.

'The events of the Holocaust are not only shaped *post factum* in their narration, but ... they were initially determined as they unfolded by the schematic ways in which they were apprehended, expressed, and then acted upon' (Young, 1988: 5) writes James E. Young in his book *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust*. The American literary scholar articulates in his work the strong conviction, reinforced by the consequences of 'the narrative turnaround', that the experiences of the Holocaust survivors always reach us in the narrative structure, in the anthropological or cognitive sense of the term. (Ubertowska, 2007: 151).

Therefore, in the words of Bogdan Owczarek, they present 'a certain vision of the representations of mental processes occurring in the human mind'. (Owczarek, 2001: 15) Following in the footsteps of Aleksandra Ubertowska, one of the ways of 'describing a traumatic experience and its aftermath would be individual micro-incidents, micro-narratives, micro-stories (Domańska, 1999), not always cohesive and coherent, often fragmented and segmented. Such strategies of presenting the world are associated with the issue of inexpressibility and refer the reader to the category of deconstruction of language, subject, and reality.

This is also how nature is depicted in Ida Fink's stories.

Especially that the literary testimonies of extermination rooted in the poetic images of nature (as a "mental images") as presented by Ida Fink allow us

in the present, almost normal, and past in the past, which still persistence, has not become a thing of the past. The survivors had endless conversations about the occupation, this time was with us. Until one day I realized that what we are talking about is already adapted writing. I am already writing, but not on paper. Unexpectedly, the thought "Write, write" appeared again. I started late, but during these years of silence I had somehow written these stories' (Sobolewska, 2003: 14). The author received numerous awards for her work. In 1985, she received the Dutch Anne Frank Prize for *A Scrap of Time*. She also won the Yad Vashem Buchmann Prize (1995), the Italian Alberto Moravia Prize (1996), and a special award of the Polish PEN Club (2003). Her novel *The Journey* was included in 'The 100 Greatest Works of Modern Jewish Literature', a list announced by National Yiddish Book Center in New York. Fink is also the winner of the Israel Prize in Literature in 2008 (for the first time, it was awarded to an artist who did not write in Hebrew).

⁵ Smoleński, 2019. Page not fund.

to explore the phenomenon of memory from a modern perspective (we should keep in mind that her stories were published in the 1970s), which enables researchers to take into account the changing and dynamic nature of memory (Ulanowicz, 2013)⁶. Thus, they assume 'discontinuity' of the narrative, its incompleteness, and lack of a logical cause-and-effect structure of the story, while highlighting poetic and mental images of nature, emotion, silence and time, ostensibly unrelated to the overall statement as a "writing in whispers" (Sobolewska, 2003: 14)⁷.

The conceptualization of those all four elements of the depicted world is coherent in the stories and clear on a deeper metaphorical and existential level of reading the text.

The discussion of Ida Fink's act of creative consciousness becomes a classic shift, a semantic transformation of the uncertain, anxiety-laden world of man in the face of the Holocaust, the seemingly safe, sheltering world of nature, the beauty of landscapes and idyllic natural scenery as an escape from cruel reality, and the nostalgically created inner experiences of the characters of the pre-war world of the past through mental images of nature.

The prose of the Jewish writer is crystalline, cool and distanced, but at the same time poetic and fairy-tale-like, which allows, to carefully hide strong emotions and nightmare. Descriptions of nature are rooted in: 1/. convention of escapism; 2/. they are maintained in the poetics of sensual-emotional narrative (they are full of colors and scents); 3/. in arcadian aesthetics ("morning beautiful and pure", "beautiful and lush garden"), but also 4/. in shots of the confrontation of worlds: beauty and tranquility ("the afternoon was mild, the sun was lazy and golden"), safety and carefree (here: willows growing on the riverbank, an image of an garden of paradise where apples are ritually plucked, "heather smelled like a thyme" (*Zamknięty krąg*, p. 45)⁸), colourful flowers: bluebells, hazel, daisies (*Jean – Christophe*, p. 32), "the grass was yellow with buttercups" (*Zamknięty krąg*, p. 29)⁹ with fear and terror. 5/. Images of nature correspond with the narrative of the setting (poetics of setting) and is in fact,

⁶ "[...] it is produced not solely by 'personal feelings but by rules and customs' that traditionally characterize pre-existing kinship relations...Such memory involves an individual's affirmation of, and sense of participation in, a given demographic's shared narrative of its past...it is characterized by a profound self-awareness...involves an individual's conscious recognition of the ways in which her present circumstances have been mediated and shaped by past events that she herself did not directly experience" (Ulanowicz, 2013: 4).

⁷ In this context of consideration the case of narratives of Ida Fink, the cognitive approach also seems helpful, focusing on: 1/ understanding the narrative strategy; 2/ psychological perspective in presenting characters (e.g. resilience of the human psyche); 3/ emotional reader response; and 4/ visualising as a style of reception.

⁸ Fink I. (2009). *Wiosna 1941*.

⁹ Fink I. (2009). *Wiosna 1941*.

clearly superimposed in Fink's stories on the narrative of time and takes the shape of Bakhtinian space-time (cultural chronotope)¹⁰.

I. SILENCE OF EMOTIONS, NATURE AND TIME

The prose of the Jewish author with poetical way carefully hides strong emotions and nightmares. The 'silence of emotions' reflects the unique anthropological sensibility of the narrative, which is expressed not in words but in simple gestures and glances. The dominant artistic features of the narrative are: the strategy of silence, instances of narrative stoppage during critical situations (K. Jaspers), and the category of time shown in works in the context of its duration (H. Bergson): from infinity to seconds extracted from snippets of memories. The time the characters feel/experience determines the meaning of their existence, it can be individual and psychological; it also takes the form of 'inter-subjective specific time' (the term used by K. Bartoszyński), creating questions 'about continuity, permanence, and sameness in the time of the human individual and about the relationship of individual memory with the permanence of the self. (Bartoszyński, 1987: 220).

In addition to individual time, we deal with social time, which, according to Barbara Engelking,

is not an abstract, spontaneous being, but is rooted in social events and relationships between them [...] social time is discontinuous, variable, unstable, and subject to valuation. Its individual segments, which can be of unequal length, have value measured by events filling them. [...] Its passage is not constant; it can be non-uniform, qualitative, repeatable, or cyclical (Engelking, 1996: 9–10).

In her short story 'A Scrap of Time', Ida Fink clearly outlines the image of time:

We had different measures of time, we different ones, always different, always with the mark of difference that moved some of us to pride and others to humility. We, who because of our difference were condemned once again, as we had been before in our history, we were condemned once again during this time measured not in months nor by the rising and setting of the sun, but by a word – 'action', a word signifying movement, a word you would use about a novel or a play' (Fink, 1988 'A Scrap of Time', p. 3–4).

Fink clearly differentiates past from present ('old time' from 'today') and emphasises the perspective of socially created reality – the 'old' one (pre-war) and 'new' (happening now, during the nightmare of war). Pre-war everyday life is

¹⁰ In this article I use the following editions of Ida Fink's short stories, 1/ *A Scrap of Time and other Stories*, transl. by Madeline Levine and Francine Prose, Peter Owen London 1988, 2/ *Wiosna 1941*, Wydawnictwo W.A.B. Warszawa 2009 and 3/ *Traces: Stories*. Translated by P. Boehm, F. Prose. New York: Metropolitan Books 1997.

not only idealised, but even sanctified (e.g. in 'The Garden That Floated Away'). The introduction of the past form 'used to' in the following fragment: 'We used to do the chores . . . we mowed the grass . . . painted the tree trunks' indicates ritual performance of the activities and the perspective of sacred time. The retrospective narrative of the story is written in the style of a fairy tale ('Once I saw a garden float away' (Fink,), in the poetics of a dream (Janion, 2007: 76), and clearly draws on the world of poetic of nostalgia and imagination (as defined by Bachelard).

Some people were determined to escape from the new time to the past, denied its existence, tried to cheat it, avoid it like Elzbieta from the short story 'The Threshold':

They walked along the riverbank, just as in the old days, down by the little beach, and then across to the pastures. They bought apples from the farmer and ate nothing else all day. . . . Outside the window were lilacs, beyond the lilacs was the garden, and beyond the garden was the river (Fink, 1997. 'The Threshold'..., p. 11–12).

The new time was built by other times (Fink, 1995, 'A Conversation'..., p. 49–52; Fink, 1997, 'Zygmunt'..., p. 26) and become a kind of hybrid of the past, present, and future because in different situations it is experienced as one of these three temporal dimensions or their combination.' (Kotarska, 2010: 284).

This three-dimensionality of the existence of the time of the Holocaust is present, for example, in the short stories "A Scrap of Time" and "The Garden that Floated Away"). The signs and symbols of the book of nature (including colors, smells, sounds) and the silence of emotions reinforce the message (Hańderek, 2004: 227; Bartoszyński, 1987: 220).

The apparent calmness prevailing in the world presented in both of the stories, as well as the maximum focus on the characters and the reality around them (*sharpened vigilance*) creates a situation of peculiar "use to Holocaust" on the one hand, and escapism on the other, an escape into the interior, where they work out their own imaginary space of existence. Reinforced by imagination and ethically characterized, the "other" space of the protagonists (heterotopia in Michel Foucault's terms) "appears" in the text as a "place" uniquely saturated in quality.

Space and feeling of social time has "has different properties in the daily life and everyday periods, while it is felt differently in dramatic, critical, exceptional situations" (Brach – Czajna, 2006: 56–57) preparing Aryan papers for a Jewish family ("The Floating Garden"). The narrative of the story is maintained in a poetic and oneiric atmosphere, and begins with a description of a neighbor's garden, which the narrator-heroine is looking at and time has stopped in this point:

I was sitting with my sister on the porch of the steps, and the two gardens – Wojciech’s and ours – were right there in front of our eyes. They formed a single garden, for they were not divided by a fence. A fence, we said would be an intrusion. Only a row of evenly spaced currant bushes stitched the two gardens together. It was a peaceful afternoon. The sun was lazy and golden. Wojciech stepped onto his porch – the houses, too, were twins – and called to us, – Let’s go pick the russet apples! We used to do the chores in both gardens at the same time: we moved the grass on the same day, painted the tree trunks white on the same day, and so, out of habit, he told us about the apple picking” (Fink, 1988, *The garden that floated away*, p. 11–12).

The garden motif, ordinary, everyday life and the social context of events also play an important role in the story. These include Polish-Jewish relations and the behavior of the characters during daily interactions with their neighbors.

In this context L. Berger and T. Luckmann draw attention to literary depictions of reality from a sociological perspective, showing everyday reality as an 1/ objectified (existing outside the individual), 2/ ordered (functioning paradigmatically according to certain patterns and rules) and 3/ comprehensible (thanks to cognition of a colloquial nature, based on dialogue with other people, such as neighbors) sphere (Berger, Luckmann, 2010: 31–32)¹¹. Jolanta Brach-Czajna characterizes everyday existence in a similar way, emphasizing its imperceptibility. The researcher emphasizes philosophical contexts in describing everyday life and states:

Even when we ourselves are the perpetrators of everyday events, they seem to mean too little to be worth analyzing. They are peculiar and therefore too obvious for us to want to think about them. [...] everyday events, by repeating themselves, ritualizing and accustoming us to themselves, give the impression of being empty, dead, devoid of deeper meaning, and so masked they slip by unnoticed by us (Brach – Czajna, 2006: 56–57).

The idyllic image of the garden is maintained in an affirmative, glorifying convention and its artistic creation refers to the aesthetics of arcadian idealization stylized as space of paradise (Tatar, 2013: 252).

The story emphasizes the commonality of the space of the neighbors’ gardens (the lack of a boundary between the gardens) and its real unity (the gardens are “welded into one”), expressed by the personification “currant alley

¹¹ “Everyday life as a reality interpreted by people, with which they associate subjective meanings, appears in the form of a coherent world[...] The world of everyday life is not only accepted unreservedly by ordinary members of society in their lifelong, subjectively meaningful conduct. It is a world that arises in their thoughts and actions and, through these thoughts and actions, persists as a real world” (Berger, Luckmann, 2010: 31–32).

sewed them together with an even stitch”) and the epithet “twin” characterizing the neighboring houses. “The accumulation of so many terms,” Anna Tatar concludes, “indicating the unity (togetherness) of the farms results in an expansion of its scope: it no longer includes only the spatial (physical) dimension, but also the existential (metaphysical) one.” (Tatar, 2013: 252).

The impersonal grammatical forms of verbs introduced into the story (“grass was moved,” “tree trunks were whittled”) indicate the ritual performance of activities and the perspective of sacred time used in the quoted passage of the story.

In the story one can see the apparent calm and sense the tension in the narrator’s account, noting that the reason for the emotional tension of the narrative is shown only in the last line of the story. During an ordinary activity – picking apples in the garden – a dramatic conversation takes place in the apartment of the Jewish heroine and her sister about preparing Aryan papers. At this point the heroine-narrator abandons the fairy-tale-poetic convention, “switching” abruptly to an informational narrative, she explains “straightforwardly”: “so that we could lose ourselves, so that they wouldn’t kill us” (Fink, 2002, *Odpywający ogród*, p. 56)

And here, maintained in a similar polysensory poetics, is an excerpt from the short story *A Scrap of Time*.

“This beautiful, clear morning, that I am digging out of the ruins of my memory is still fresh; its colors and aromas has not faded: a grainy golden mist with red spheres of apples hanging in it, and the shadows above the river damp with the sharp odor of burdock, and the bright blue dress that I was wearing when I left the house and when I turned around at the gate. It was then, probably at that very moment, that I suddenly progressed, instinctively, from an infantile state to a still naive caution – instinctively, because I wasn’t thinking about what I avoided the gate that led to the street and instead set off on a roundabout route across the orchard, along the riverbank, down a road we called “the back way” because it wound through the outskirts of town. [...] Along the way, I stopped and carefully picked out flat stones, and skipped them across the water; I sat down for a while on the little bridge, beyond which one could see the town, and dangled my legs, looking at my reflection in the water and at the willows that grew on the bank. I was not yet afraid then, nor was my sister [who] dangled her legs over the river which is called the Gniezna – a pitiful little stream, some eight meters wide [...].

The view of the marketplace leapt out at us from behind the building on the corner, that we suddenly stopped in our tracks. There was a square, thick with people as on a market day, only different, because a market – day crowd is colourful and loud, with chickens clucking, geese honking, and people talking and bargaining. The crowd was silent. [...] We suddenly stopped and my sister began to tremble, and I caught the trembling, and she said “Let’s run away” and although no one was chasing us and the morning was still clear and peaceful, we ran back to the little bridge, but we no longer noticed the willows or

the reflections of our running figures in the water, we ran for a long time until we were high up the steep slope now as Castle Hill – the ruins of an old castle stood on top of it – and on this hillside, the jewel of our town, we sat down in the bushes, out of te breath and still shaking (Ida Fink, 1988: 5–6).

The polysensory narrative and poetic description of nature paradoxically reinforce the tension in the evoked situation. Literary representations of nature have a sensual and emotional character in this passage, the aestheticization of the narrative in the depiction of the image of a „beautiful and clear morning” allows the soft colors and scents of nature to be exposed („damp shadow,” „tart smell of burdock,” „golden mist,” „red balls of apples”), which reinforce, as it were, the silence of emotions.

The apparent stillness and silence of the narrative prevail in this passage until the characters see from the hill a silent, black crowd in the market square. The shock of the image of people waiting to die, „although the morning was still clear and calm,” also breaks the calmness of the perception of nature („we did not see the willows or the reflection in the water of our running figures”), the heroines are overwhelmed by terror, which is also reflected in the dynamics of description and „happening” expressed by the accumulation of verbs: the girls shake with fear, flee, run, climb the steep slope where the castle – the ornament of the city – stands, and take shelter on the hill in the bushes (so nature again shields from danger, protect, take care and guards). (Hańderek, 2004: 227; Bartoszyński, 1987: 220).

II. SILENCE OF NATURE AND SPACE

The social context of Fink’s works, consistently emphasized in our deliberations, also allows for a more thorough examination of the poetics of setting in which the Jewish characters move. The spaces in the works of the Jewish writer are also socially marked: they are located outside the concentration camp and outside the ghetto. It can also refer to the interpretive context related to memorials (*Les lieux de mémoire*) in Pierre Nora’s terms, or “not-places” of memory – in M. A u g é’s terms, actual places where tragic events occurred, places that witnessed cruel and dramatic scenes (e.g., experiencing mass death, genocide, places associated with extermination: destroyed tombstones in forgotten cemeteries, empty uninhabited villages from which residents fled in terror or were murdered) (A u g é, 2010) also spaces associated with nature, which witnessed tragic event (e.g., the Gniezna river near Zbaraż, the ruins of the castle on the hill that the fleeing girls climbed)¹².

¹² In the study of memory, an important role is played by the poetics of space, the identification of the actual places where tragic events occurred. The literature refers to them as “Non-place of memory” because these places lack both a form of commemoration (e.g.,

Thus, they are open spaces, seemingly free, settings inscribed in images of nature, in which a significant role is played by ordinary people – Polish neighbors, acquaintances, friends and enemies, kind people, though equally terrified by the reality of war, sometimes offering hiding places. The heroes of the stories of open spaces, therefore, also include random passers-by, observers of events, witnesses, “bystanders” – they too become “carriers” of memory and pass on to posterity the dramatic “pieces of fate” and fragments of the lives of participants in wartime events.

Even if in Fink's stories there are many indifferent witnesses of dramatic events, bystanders, nature retains its independence, autonomy and sovereignty, is unmoved, behaves steadily, seems to be “stuck” in its beauty and silence of emotions, protecting the people hiding them from death.

Silence of nature which seems to be peaceful and friendly, is also reinforced by the seemingly insignificant, mute elements of the depicted world: ‘The night was heavy, humid; one of those midsummer nights when not a single leaf trembles, and the asphalt, overheated during the day, exhales its steamy breath’ (Fink, 1997, ‘The End’, p. 3) or in the story ‘Behind the Hedge’: ‘The orchard is silent; the bees, so noisy at midday, have grown quiet; there is only the sound of crickets and the chirping of the sparrows stripping the cherries from the trees.’ (Fink, 1995. ‘Behind the Hedge’, p. 21)

III. SILENCE AND ANIMALS

There were also silent conversations between the characters and animals that seemed to understand the tragedy of the situation took on the burden of responsibility for people (e.g. the ‘Black beast’, or Czing, a dog who ignores the questions of an SS-man about its Jewish owners (Fink, 1995, ‘A Dog’, p. 28).

The short story ‘The Black Beast’ show an image of a cultural chronotope, internal escapism, and emotional ‘suspension in time. The experience of time in this story is associated with the dramatic waiting of the hero for another hiding place. The world of the protagonist of the story is situated on the verge of reality, combining figural realism (White, 2004) and phantasmatic structure with dream elements. The focal point of the narrative is the image

plaque, monument, exhibition, local museum) and memorial practices (e.g., symbolic lighting of candles, anniversary celebrations, dedication of flowers). However, in the consciousness of the local community, these places are important, and the events that occurred there are remembered. Local, community, collective, social memory, inter-generational transmission will therefore be in this case an important element in maintaining the continuity of the history of the region. The term *non-places* clearly refers to the findings of Pierre Nora, discussed in his work on places of memory (French: *lieux de mémoire*) and the 1986 statement of Claude Lanzmann, who used the term *place of memory* (French: *non-lieux de mémoire*) to describe previously unmarked elements of the space where the Holocaust of the Jews took place.

of a dog (the title 'black beast'), who leads the hero through fear and terror towards safe worlds.

But it is not entirely clear if it is real.

The artistic creation of the literary figure of a dog refers to the world of emotions – the narrative tension of the story is intensified not only by the mental state of the hero (he is terrified both by the lack of a hideout and the unknown, mysterious animal) but also by the prospect of a long, dangerous path (in this case, the experience of time is associated with the will to survive) that he must walk to reach a place inhabited by friendly people.

In contrast, the image of the animal in the short story 'Dog' is realistically portrayed.

The narrator is exceptionally precise about the animal's attachment to its owners, its character and personality:

Ching knew how to beg, how to shake hands, and how to fetch. He obeyed all our commands without enthusiasm or joy, but rather with sad air of resignation, kind of philosophical thoughtfulness, which Agata [Ukrainian housekeeper, D.M] was the first to notice. One day when she was carrying in the platter of steaming pirogi, she announced: "That Ching is a philosopher..." "Of what school?" - our well - read cousin joked. "A sad one" - Agata replied. (Ida Fink, 1988, *Dog*, p. 25- 26).

Faithful to the end, the dog, when questioned by the Germans about the owners' hiding place (even despite being fed sausage with words "where is your master?...mistress?...master?...mistress"(p. 28), he did not betray his family.

Ching looked at them calmly (afterwards Agata swore that he shook his head no) and didn't even tremble. He just looked at them and sat there [...] It is true that he was got kicked for this, but he bore tis blow in silence, although afterwards he trembled for thec rest of the day, just like person who, after some extraordinary effort cannot calm down for the longest time. (Ida Fink, 1988: 28-29).

In the end, however, Ching was killed: "They hung him from a cherry branch" (*Dog*, p. 29).

The figures of animals (dogs) in both stories can be considered in the context of theory of Dominick La Capra in his book *History and its limit. Human, animal and violence* (2010) in which issues of the semantics of nature are exposed. La Capra – a prominent theorist of post-traumatic culture confronting the legacy of the Holocaust – takes up the issues of animal studies and "again – this time partly in an ecocritical perspective, the issue of witness, testimony, art about the Holocaust , and more broadly in the essay *Traumatropisms* (2009) – exposes the figure of the secondary witness, whose essence is defined not so much by participation in or identification

with a historical event such as the Holocaust, but by «empathic unsettlement», understood by La Capra as an affective response to a boundary event combined with a critical distance, an intellectual ability to pass judgment” (Ubertowska, 2025: 98–99).

It seems that – according to La Capra’s theory – the figures of the two dogs (*Black beast* and *Chang*) fit perfectly into the area of affective responses to border situations.¹³

CONCLUSION

Ida Fink treats nature exceptionally, “humanly,” empathetically and passionately, with care and attention to detail:

Each apple must first be carefully-delicately removed from the branch, then carefully-delicately wrapped in a paper coat so that it doesn’t get cold in winter, then carefully-delicately put into a wicker basket [*Odplywajacy ogród...*]. Fink treats words with the same tenderness¹⁴. Fink takes care that they do not hurt, there are not too many of them, but at the same time they appeal to the recipient. The apparent dispassion of this autobiographical literature inspires humility in the reader. [...] After reading, one is left with an impression of warmth, clarity and intimacy. The focus on small things, objects, around which the entire story is built, creates the illusion of ordinariness, appreciated only when danger creeps into everyday life (Agnieszka Warnke, <https://culture.pl/pl/artykul/osiem-lekcji-idy-fink>)

This is perfectly evident in the descriptions of nature, which is a mainstay, practically the only indelible trace of old, pre-war life. This unchanging background is painted with velvety words, the softness of which contrasts with the sounds of war, fear, impending disaster:

Tsarina’s death would have remained one of a million anonymous deaths, if it were not for the fact that it took place on a beautiful and gentle day [...], in the predawn hours, when the trees cast long shadows, and the air is saturated with a light bluish haze, growing darker and darker from moment to moment,

¹³ “Particularly noteworthy here is Ida Fink’s short story “The Pig,” (a story about human indifference to tragedy) and especially five of her completely unknown children’s books (the covers also bear the name of Chaim Mesing, who was de facto only the publisher, while his wife translated the stories into Arabic), which contain fairy-tale, though underpinned by natural science knowledge, stories about animals: an elephant, a beetle, a crocodile, a white fish and a snake. They were all published in two versions, in Hebrew and Arabic, in Israel in 1971 by the Ma’ariv publishing house. Manuscripts of them have been preserved in the writer’s home archive. The most interesting aspect of these texts is the specific language of the narrative. They all tell of various forms of danger and can be treated as peculiar allegories of the Holocaust” (Krupa, 2017).

¹⁴ I refer here also to Olga Tokarczuk theory of “tender narrator” who consider things emphatically and is emotionally involved in described events.

although evening is still far away (*Death of Tsarina*). (Agnieszka Warnke, <https://culture.pl/pl/artykul/osiem-lekcji-idy-fink>).

The aesthetics of description are reinforced, as you can see, also by the ethical level of the narrative and silence. Poetic and fairy – tales scenes expressing the beauty of nature reveal in the narrative in the ritually performed activities recalled from pre-war times (*The Floating Garden*). Pre-war everyday life (including the image of the garden) is shown in this short story in the convention of a daydream, not only subjected to idealization and embellishment (“it happened once that I saw a garden floating away”), but even sanctified. Scenes depicting the natural world are also situated on the border of a story set: 1/. in the poetics of figurative realism (White 2009) and 2/. phantasmagorical construction with elements of oneirism (e.g. in *Black Beast*).

Fink’s stories, thanks to the skillfully woven into the narrative, varying in terms of conventions, images of nature: 1/ clearly separate the happy past from the nightmares of the present, thus neatly 2/. combining the embodiments of nostalgia and melancholy with the topography of loss, and 3/. at the level of emotions – “cross” the sphere of uncertainty, horror, anxiety and fear (*A Scrap of Time*) with a strengthened faith in human kindness and hope (*The Floating Garden*).

Nature soothes, protects and shields from danger, has a saving and merciful power. Thus, there is time in this prose for reflection and filling in the „blanks” with one’s own individual reading.

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