

BARBARA KLONOWSKA

GENDERING THE HOLOCAUST:
ROBERT McLIAM WILSON'S *MANFRED'S PAIN*
AND MAREK SOBÓL'S *MOJRY*

Abstract. This article analyses two Holocaust novels, *Manfred's Pain* (1992) by the Northern Irish novelist Robert McLiam Wilson and *Mojry* (2005) by the Polish writer Marek Soból, as texts which foreground the female body, female sensibility and the female version of (his)story. Both novels link this theme to sexual violence and emphasise the specificity of the female experience of the Holocaust. This article argues that the gendering of the Holocaust and the focus on its female side constitutes a fundamental difference setting the two novels apart from other, chiefly 'male', Holocaust novels, both by Polish authors and by Wilson. The male experience, usually naturalised as the universal human one, is dislocated in these two novels to also include the female perspective. In the case of *Manfred's Pain*, this dislocation operates by a change of proportions: although the novel has a male protagonist and narrator, with the female figure seemingly occupying the background, the latter gradually emerges as an equally important protagonist and the female experience becomes as central as the male one. In Soból's novel, the roles are already reversed: it is the women who come to the fore both as protagonists and narrators, and the text presents both their experience and their points of view, with the male characters reduced to the status of witnesses. Focusing on the fate of women, the novels 'gender' the seemingly universal experience of the Holocaust, and draw attention to its gender specificity.

Key words: the Holocaust; trauma; violence; body; femininity.

The historical fact of the Holocaust and the psychological ramifications of its experience observed in the victims were among some of the fundamental factors that fuelled the development of and featured prominently in trauma studies. Emerging in the 1980s, first in historical, and then in literary studies (cf. studies by Cathy Caruth or Dominic LaCapra), trauma theory and trauma studies focused on the experience of trauma and the complex pro-

Dr. habil. BARBARA KLONOWSKA, Prof. at KUL – the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Faculty of Humanities, Institute of Literary Studies, Department of English Literature and Culture; address for correspondence: Aleje Raławickie 14, 20-950 Lublin; e-mail: maple@kul.lublin.pl. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8327-854X>.

cesses of its confronting, overcoming and possible healing. In literary studies, two aspects in particular came to the fore: the problem of the representation of trauma and the possible therapeutic effects of the attempts of doing it. As Susana Onega and Jean-Michel Ganteau observe, in recent literature both the theme of trauma, and its importance reach unprecedented proportions:

from the 1980s onwards, the fictional presentation of trauma has come to colonise contemporary literary production through its evocation of the haunting consequences (both for individuals and collectivities) of such armed conflicts as the two world wars, the wars of decolonisation and, more recently, the menace of international terrorism, the trauma of segregation and other forms of institutionalised ethnic hate, not to mention sexual trauma. (Onega and Ganteau 3)

The authors stress that literature, in a sense, enjoys a privileged position when it comes to handling both the theme and the consequences of trauma; they claim that it offers one of the very few possibilities of safely approximating, and then perhaps facing its consequences (Onega and Ganteau 3).

One of the possibilities offered by literary representations of trauma is the imaginary attempt to come close to and to represent the traumatic experience. In psychological studies the very representation of trauma is often perceived as problematic: the traumatic event is frequently too enormous and devastating for the victims to describe it and as a result, they often develop symptoms that only indirectly hint at the experienced harm. The indirect, allusive signs of trauma include fragmentations of consciousness, a distorted perception of time, amnesia, bodily disorders or numbness (cf. Kędra-Kardela 49-50), silence and amnesia serving as a defensive screen put up by the mind to protect it from the further harm and eventual collapse of the psyche that may result from remembering the traumatic event. This void and the inability of representing pose practical consequence for both historical and psychological studies as they obscure the very source of trauma. Yet, for literature they may pose a challenge to imaginatively fill the void, representing – if only fictionally – the unrepresentable, and in that way at least approximating the roots of trauma. The attempt to imagine, represent and read about similar experience may, in turn, result therapeutic and help in the process of coming to terms with personal trauma. Thus, trauma literature and fictional works which focus on traumatic events feature prominently in trauma theory and trauma therapy, serving patients, as well as general readers in the process of imagining and understanding its enormous and incomprehensible aspects.

The present article will analyse two fictional attempts of representing and approximating the trauma of the Holocaust as experienced by its female victims. In different ways, *Manfred's Pain* by Robert McLiam Wilson and *Mojry* by Marek Soból try to render the experience of the Holocaust trauma and to analyse its long-lasting, devastating consequences, not only for its immediate victims but also for their families and future generations. In contrast to the majority of the Holocaust fiction, the two novels focus on the specific double suffering of female victims and their particularly vulnerable position in the process of dehumanisation inflicted by the Holocaust.

THE NOVELISTS AND THEIR NOVELS

Robert McLiam Wilson, for twenty years widely recognised and celebrated, is the author of three novels. His two extremely popular, awarded and commented-upon novels, *Ripley Bogle* (1989) and *Eureka Street* (1996), quickly became bestsellers and catapulted him into fame. Interestingly, most of the eulogies of Wilson's prose, both past and present, conveniently overlook his second novel, *Manfred's Pain* (1992), not devoting much time or space to any substantial analyses, save for occasional reviews when the novel came out. This seemingly strange lack of recognition may be connected with several features of the text. First, *Manfred's Pain* does not fit the label of an Ulster novel by an Ulster novelist, usually attached to Wilson and his prose. Both *Ripley Bogle* and *Eureka Street* provide the reader with an almost palpable feeling of the stifling and crippling atmosphere of Northern Ireland; both are critical of the conflict presenting it as self-inflicted and irrational. Set in the pre-WWII and post-war London and focused on the Holocaust, *Manfred's Pain* does not fit the Northern Irish profile of Wilson's prose. Another reason for its 'strangeness' may be its lack of humour, characteristic of the remaining two novels. Despite the serious or even tragic themes presented in them, their tone is surprisingly often light, mixing pathos with humour and tragedy with irony. In contrast, *Manfred's Pain* is a consistently serious and pessimistic novel without redeeming moments of humour and light-heartedness, the only remnant of the previous style being occasional ironic comments of the narrator. Additionally, the construction of main characters sets *Manfred's Pain* apart from the rest of Wilson's novels. While *Ripley Bogle* and *Eureka Street* introduce extremely likeable, attractive protagonists-narrators, who in a brilliantly self-ironic way comment on

the Northern Irish reality and themselves, eponymous Manfred is constructed as a misanthrope immersed in himself, both in his young and old age; a character who may hardly win much sympathy due to his ugly deeds and unacceptable attitudes. He seems unlikely to awake admiration or even understanding although he definitely poses an interpretive intellectual challenge for an inquisitive reader.

Finally, *Manfred's Pain* has a much more serious and novelistically difficult theme – the Holocaust – which automatically distances the novel from the serious yet humorous remaining works by Wilson. Although civil war may hardly be considered a comic theme, either, its lighter treatment seems, both theoretically and in practice, permissible and imaginable. No such licence, however, is possible in the case of the Holocaust with the theme almost automatically conditioning the tragic tone of the text.¹ Moreover, Holocaust fiction has never been a major trend in British contemporary prose, producing few major novels and forming hardly any easily recognised group of texts.² *Manfred's Pain* inscribes itself thus into a minority trend of a limited appeal – the Holocaust theme automatically limits its reception reducing it to the relatively narrow circle of serious readers. In contrast, Wilson's remaining novels belong rather to popular fiction, in at least two senses of the phrase. First, they come close to popular literature generically, since they activate conventions of the popular novel. They are, however, also popular in the very strict sense of the word – they seem to appeal to a very wide and diverse circle of readers.

Measured against this background, *Manfred's Pain* may indeed seem untypical with its serious treatment of the tragic theme, the setting in pre- and post-war London and a hardly likeable character. Yet, I would argue that what weaves through this prose is the theme of violence presented in its various manifestations: personal, historical, sectarian, racial or gender. In this context, *Manfred's Pain* is the novel which addresses this problem most

¹ The combination of humour and the Holocaust is a dangerous territory whose entering almost always provokes scandals, the memorable one recently being Roberto Benigni's film *Life Is Beautiful*, which invited many negative comments due to its light tone and the humorous treatment of the theme.

² Among them, probably the most celebrated and commented upon is the novel *The White Hotel* by D.M. Thomas, published in 1981, which got a remarkable recognition and received numerous prizes, not only because of its theme but primarily due to its experimental, postmodernist form and the unconventional treatment of the Holocaust theme. The latter turned out controversial and provoked both admiration and outrage. Recently, the Holocaust appears in the novels by Howard Jacobson (for example in *J* from 2014), yet again, however, in the atmosphere of controversy and unease.

prominently and in a most serious manner. Violence, trauma, victimhood and their long-lasting repercussions become central themes in this work which focuses on the Second World War and the Holocaust and dramatises the memory of violence, the persistence of trauma and the inability to heal. Yet, in contrast to the remaining two texts, *Manfred's Pain* features not merely male but also – or even primarily – female experience through which it presents the immeasurable horror of the Holocaust.

This focus links the novel to a very different, yet comparable novel by Marek Soból, *Mojry* ('*The Moirai*') published in Polish in 2005. In contrast to Wilson, Marek Soból is a newcomer to literary circles: a Cracow-based IT specialist by profession, so far he has published only this one novel, which was never followed by any other longer work and did not establish its author as a well-known or celebrated literary figure. Similar to Wilson's work, the novel received only a minor recognition: save for a few occasional reviews following its publication, it did not attract much critical attention and is practically absent from the canon of contemporary Polish novel, even that concerning the Holocaust. The reasons for this last omission seem, however, much more mysterious than in Wilson's case. In contrast to British literature, in Polish fiction the theme of the Holocaust has and still does feature prominently, still producing important and widely discussed novels, testing new forms and addressing its increasingly diverse aspects.³ The theme, then, though hardly popular in the colloquial sense of the word, is a well-recognised and well-established part of Polish fiction.

The very novel, too, despite its serious theme focused on violence, loss and death, features complex and round main protagonists involved in dramatic plots, thus creating a dynamic and engaging narrative. Additionally, the novel has an intricate structure: it is a tightly-knit set of three short-stories told by 1st-person unnamed female narrators (the eponymous three Moirai). The stories take the form of either the monologue (in the section "Lachesis" that opens the novel and "Clotho" which closes it), or the diary, as in the middle part – "Atropos." The monologues employ the *skaz* convention, i.e. the fictional imitation of oral storytelling in the form of a monologue addressed to a potential listener implied in the text.⁴ They are directed

³ Among many recent Polish novels one may mention *Noc żywych Żydów* ('*Night of the Living Jews*') by Igor Ostachowicz (2012), *Pensjonat* ('*The Boardinghouse*') by Piotr Paziński (2009) or the *Annihilation* trilogy by Piotr Szewc (1987-2005).

⁴ For a more detailed treatment of the *skaz* convention cf. B[oris] M[ikhajlovich] Ejchenbaum, "Iluzja narracji mówionej" and "Jak jest zrobiony *Plaszcz* Gogola," published in *Rosyjska szkoła*

at a relatively young man who lives in Poland, visits Paris and is – presumably – a writer of literary fiction. His character constitutes one of several devices which connect the three narratives set in different times, distant places (Paris and Cracow, post-war vs. the 2000s) and focused on different themes. Apart from confiding in the same character, all the narrators-protagonists meet at one point in the Kazimierz district of Cracow, during a concert closing a Jewish culture festival and become involved in a silent dialogue of tears. All of them mention each other, too: Lachesis describes Atropos, the latter mentions Clotho, who in turns tells about both Atropos and Lachesis. Atropos, too, turns out to be the author of not just her diary but also short stories which closely resemble those presented in parts one and three. The novel as a whole, then, is informed by a metafictional frame implying – despite the quasi-realistic, seemingly improvised, imitative *skaz* convention – its highly literary, self-conscious character.

Moreover, though focused on their very different life stories, the narrators explore similar themes which may be described as themes of death and resurrection: the three stories, told respectively by an old, middle-aged and young woman present a spectrum of various shades of loss, hope and survival. As the author claims in the note on the book cover,

This is not a novel about women, though women are its main protagonists. This is not a novel about suffering, death and the Holocaust. It is a novel about facing the evil, about the ability to sustain it and about a patient and unswerving pursuit of happiness. (Soból, cover; my translation)

The comment of the author should be, perhaps, qualified: the novel definitely *is* both about women and about the Holocaust, though these themes may be slow to emerge. The stories, though seemingly different, all show women and their experience, and present the difficult process of coming and working through the Holocaust trauma, of building a new life on the ashes of the previous one and of the resources of strength and hope against all odds. As the character of Lachesis – an elderly woman, a Holocaust survivor running a dilapidated Paris cafe – observes,

Whatever happens, one always has to have hope – the hope I had that the Fate will be generous, that it will turn round, that there still might be happiness waiting for me. We cannot give up, cannot destroy everything in us and around

stylistyki, edited by Maria Renata Mayenowa and Zygmunt Saloni, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1970, pp. 487-490.

us, even if we think everything is finished and life is senseless. We never know, we can never be certain, what the next morning or the next evening may bring. (Soból 58-59; my translation)

Referring to the ancient topos of the three Moirai, which create, maintain and terminate human life-thread, the novel points to the continuity of life which runs against time, suffering and even death.

Similar to *Manfred's Pain*, Soból's novel focuses on the female sensibility and the female version of (his)story. The novel, too, just as Wilson's text, connects this theme to sexual violence and the specificity of the female experience of the Holocaust. I will argue that this aspect – the gendering of the Holocaust and the focus on its female side – constitutes a fundamental difference setting the two novels apart from other, chiefly 'male' Holocaust novels by both Polish authors and by Wilson.⁵ The 'buddy culture', male bonding and male experience naturalised as the universal, human one are dislocated in these two novels to also include the female perspective. In the case of *Manfred's Pain* this dislocation operates not so much by the change of the point of view, but rather by the change of proportions: in the novel it is still the male protagonist who is the centre of the action and the focaliser of the narration, it is his story and his experience that occupy most of the novel. Yet, the female figure who seemingly occupies the background gradually emerges as an equally important protagonist and the female experience becomes as central – and I would argue that perhaps even more important – than the male one. In Soból's novel the roles are already reversed: these are the women who come to the fore both as protagonists and narrators and the text presents both their experience and their points of view, with the male characters reduced to the status of witnesses. Focusing on the fate of women, the novels 'gender' the seemingly universal experience of the Holocaust, and draw attention to its gender specificity.

THE NOVELS

Manfred's Pain is narrated by the third-person limited-omniscient narrator that focuses on Manfred's experience and presents his point of view. The

⁵ The 'maleness' of Wilson's prose is one of its striking and often noticed characteristic features, linking him, more generally, with the contemporary fiction by Northern Irish novelists; for a more extensive analysis of this theme see Caroline Magennis. *Sons of Ulster. Masculinity in the Contemporary Northern Irish Novel*. Peter Lang, 2011.

narrative is divided into three parts entitled "Time will show", "Gains and losses" and "The pain," each of which is further divided into four or five sections alternating the chronologically told story of Manfred's life with those devoted to his contemporary situation of an old sick man. The alternating sections thus form two intertwined plots of the novel: the character's past and present. The narrative moves back and forth between two time levels: that of the pre-war, wartime and post-war era and the contemporary one of the early 1980s, the past sections at first providing the context and the explanation of the present ones, slowly, however, becoming the main theme and interest of the story, with the present being their consequence. The balance of the sections is carefully maintained but it is clear that their importance and gravity gradually privilege the past: it is there where all the important and formative events happen, with the present being shown mainly as the aftermath of the previous life. It is in the past where both happiness and trauma of the characters lie and it is the constant return to the past, its analyses and vivisections which the main protagonist performs that try to approximate and render the experience which eludes words.

At the heart of the narrative, literally in the central sections of the novel, lies the experience of the war and the Holocaust, the war and wartime experience of the main male character constituting the overt plot of the text, with the Holocaust experience of the female character being hidden by silence and ignorance. Both protagonists suppress their traumas in order to live on; none of them succeeds as the unspoken and unspeakable experiences run subconsciously to emerge years later as violence and pain. Violence becomes a delayed symptom and consequence of unworked traumas and unhealed wounds; it is a belated reaction to, release and relief of the violence experienced in the past. The novel, then, becomes a quasi-psychological study of the progression of violence, its suppression, latent operation and subsequent release; of the inability to overcome trauma and the long-lasting disastrous effects of a traumatic experience. In the case of Manfred and his wife Emma, the trauma of the war and the Holocaust, experienced and witnessed, turns out impossible to overcome: despite the seemingly immense happiness and harmony, it reappears as domestic and personal violence and destroys marriage, happiness and the sense of existence. At the level of the narrative, the trauma of the past and its constant persistence through the present is dramatised as pain, both physical and metaphorical: the pain of the old and ill individual body and that of the sick soul and humanity.

In the case of Marek Soból's *Mojry*, the theme of the Holocaust and of violence features prominently in the first story forming the novel, the monologue of Lachesis. As she recalls her life to an unnamed listener, she returns several times to her experience of the Nazi camp (probably Auschwitz) and the violence – physical, sexual and personal – she was a victim of there. Some of the horrors – similar to the character of Emma in *Manfred's Pain* – she does not dare mention even decades after the war; as she claims, “there are things I will never tell, not even on Judgement Day, if there is any judgement” (Soból 50; my translation). The traumatic experience remains in the sphere of the unspeakable, yet despite its invisibility it casts a long shadow on the protagonist's life, seriously damaging her further relationships and prospects. The physical and psychological effects of violence turn out painful and disastrous for this protagonist, too.

THE PAIN

The pain, then, becomes the central motif of both novels; in *Manfred's Pain* it appears both at the level of the plot, literally descending on the old protagonist, and at the level of the theme, metaphorically rendering the experience of trauma and the inability to overcome it. The pain structures the novel, providing it with its frame: the ‘present-time’ sections are almost entirely devoted to the descriptions of its various shades and manifestations, and the first and last sentence of the novel are about pain. Literally, at the level of the plot, the protagonist suffers from a progressing and undiagnosed terminal illness; he refuses diagnosis and treatment in order to experience it fully and consciously till the inevitable end. Metaphorically, Manfred's pain is a spacious motif rendering a host of dramatic and traumatic experiences: the inferiority, otherness and rejection of a Jew in the pre-war, quite unfriendly Britain; the unspeakable atrocities of the war, in which he takes part as a soldier; the resulting trauma and then violence as a reaction; the feeling of guilt and remorse; the helplessness and the inability to undo the past. In the shadow of Manfred's pain, however, there hides another, even greater pain of his wife Emma, a Holocaust survivor, a prisoner of Theresienstadt and Birkenau, and her unrepresented and never fully told trauma of a victim of a still greater violence. The pain, then, is a complex motif rendering both metaphorically the characters' unhealed trauma which mars their subsequent lives, and literally its physical embodiment as the violence is inflicted on the body and emerges through it.

In the novel, the theme of trauma and its manifestation as pain is reflected in the construction of both main characters and the plot. Its most visible example is traumatised Manfred, brought up in the atmosphere of otherness and inferiority and then subjected to the brutality of war with its mindless and endless cruelty, who contains his pain for a while resurrected by the pleasures of life, love and passion. After a while, however, his trauma of a victim and a witness returns in a transformed form, concealed as domestic violence, and turns him into a perpetrator who inflicts pain on Emma and their son Martin. Beating his wife, he releases his own pain and his pent-up trauma, unable to come to terms with it or even adequately represent it. The pretexts and reasons are unimportant: his jealousy of her, her passivity, other people's remarks – anything seems to provoke violence. Manfred violently releases his own pain – and then, left by his wife, feeling guilty and learning more about the Holocaust, welcomes it back in an act of repentance. The character of his wife, in turn, represents yet another trauma and yet another reaction to it: that of a victim. Hers is the first-hand trauma of a victim and survivor of the Holocaust, of which Manfred knows next to nothing. In contrast to her husband, as a Jewess from Prague, she experienced everything: persecutions, ghettos, concentration camps, death of her closest relatives, hunger, illness, exile and all other unspeakable atrocities connected with them. She is the character who refuses to speak – and when she finally does, her story marks the ending of her marriage and – paradoxically – her release into a new, single but seemingly more fulfilled life. Finally, there is another pain introduced in the novel – the pain of the nameless narrator who in the last section of the text speaks in the first person and mentions his own pain. From this brief closing part one can infer that the narrator is probably much younger than his protagonists; one could perhaps risk the interpretation that it may be the voice of their son, Martin. His pain, then, may be interpreted as an inherited pain of a second or even third generation, the trauma passed over to the (grand)children of the Holocaust.

In the novel, therefore, the motif of pain serves metaphorically as an externalisation of painful experience and traumatic past. At the level of the plot, it is an outlet for unhealed traumas: the trauma of a witness and a perpetrator (in the case of Manfred), the trauma of a victim (Emma) and the trauma of memory (the narrator). The pain, then, functions as a remnant of the violence, which returns: violence inflicted and experienced emerges later as domestic violence and pain. In classical postcolonial theory violence is usually interpreted as a reaction of the dominated / colonised to the long-

lasting subjugation, deprivation and violence of the dominating / colonisers (cf. Fanon 31 and 33). With some reservations, a similar mechanism may be observed operating in this novel: the long-lasting denigration, either social in the case of Manfred, or brutally physical in the case of Emma, leads to the transmission of violence on the everyday life of the protagonists and later on to future generations.

In contrast to Wilson's Emma, the character of Lachesis in Soból's novel enjoys the happiness of a great love and a fulfilling relationship; she marries a man who loves, cherishes and respects her and whom she loves and admires in return. All the three short stories forming Soból's novel, generically, are romances: love stories that eulogise love showing it as one of the possible remedies for trauma. Yet, despite this seeming optimism located in the resurrecting power of love, the novel leaves no illusions about the persistence of trauma. The pain experienced by Lachesis in the distant past leaves irreversible, very tangible traces, literally visible on her body. Her marriage suffers, too, being a sexless and childless one: her body is irretrievably damaged both by the Nazi violence and the ensuing operations; the part of her femininity connected with eroticism and procreation is painfully destroyed, leaving psychological, relational and physical ruins. Her body is covered with large and deep scars, terrifying for everybody who happens to see them and they are not merely an aesthetic blemish – they are a serious damage to the ensuing life of the protagonist. Her body becomes an archive: a detailed documentation of pain and violence inflicted upon her during the Holocaust. Though the wounds do not manage to destroy her completely, they are written on her body as a testimony of the experienced trauma that thus can never be forgotten. Even if medically healed and no longer painful physically, the wounds never pass away; the body is a testimony and a constant remainder of the Holocaust and its ramifications for all the spheres of the protagonist's life.

GENDERING THE HOLOCAUST

In *Manfred's Pain*, beneath the narrative of old age and its pains and the retrospections of wartime youth, lies the unspoken and unspeakable theme of the novel: the Holocaust. Interestingly, the narrative circles about it constantly, seemingly focusing on other problems; it emerges only in the last part of the novel significantly entitled "The Pain". The painful silenced past is the secret which finally comes out and destroys the never really happy

family. The traumatic experience, long suppressed and pushed aside, re-emerges as a monster in a disfigured shape. Thus interpreted, Wilson's novel takes up the theme of the long-term costs of trauma and about the mechanisms of confronting it or avoiding working through it.

The key manifestations and symptoms of the Holocaust trauma in the novel are silence and violence – silence in the case of the Holocaust survivor, violence in the case of its witness. Following the mechanisms of repression, the trauma, when it reappears, takes the deformed shape of domestic violence. For the witness, this is the misconceived way of release and relief of his feeling of inferiority, smallness, helplessness, lack of control and jealousy. For the victim, it is one more act of violence that ultimately confirms her victimhood, inferiority and her doom. For the second-generation narrator, both belong to the memory and post-memory: the memory of family problems and the post-memory of the Holocaust that lies at their roots. The Holocaust, then, is presented as a festering mortal wound that refuses to heal, causing ceaseless pain to its witnesses, survivors and inheritors. True to the logic of trauma, this most profound reason underlying the characters' existential problems is hidden in the narrative under the successive veils of other themes: illness, silence, family problems and family violence. Analogically to the psychological process of repression, the novel 'represses' the theme of the Holocaust trauma for a long time, only to confront it in most dramatic narrative circumstances.

Interestingly, when the theme of the Holocaust finally appears at the surface in the plot of the novel, it is inextricably connected with the woman figure and, more broadly, with femininity. The novel consistently constructs women as double victims of the war and the Holocaust. In sections describing the progression of Allied Forces during WWII in Africa, Italy and Germany, women are shown as victims of both wartime violence and sexual abuse, of the aggression of both the enemy and their own men. The novel vividly depicts and laments their treatment as disposable material or objects; flesh, which once used, is simply discarded in a garbage heap (as, for example, in the fragments set in the post-war Berlin). The same rule seems to operate in the Holocaust and post-Holocaust sections: women are doubly victimised, first because of war-time deprivations and secondly, because of sexual abuse; they become victims of both the enemy and their own husbands or liberators. They constitute the bottom of human hierarchy which enjoys no rights and deserves no compassion.

Similarly, Soból's novel, too, focuses on sexual violence. Lachesis, the narrator-protagonist of the first story, recalls many acts of violence and deprivation she went through during the war: the ghetto, the death of her parents and sister, the perishing of almost everybody she knew, public executions, acts of murder, heavy systematic beatings, tortures, hunger, dirt and diseases; yet, it is sexual violence, only hinted at in her narrative, which turns out unbearable. Its monstrosity makes it unrepresentable: it is the violence which the protagonist cannot represent and refuses to narrate; it can be narrated – indirectly – only by her body that manages – imperfectly – to communicate it. The fact of her being a woman makes her a double victim: once of all the various forms of the Holocaust violence experienced by all of its victims, and twice as a victim of the particular, female-directed, sexual violence that damaged women both physically and psychologically. This double victimhood, degradation and pain – as a human being and as a woman – marks the specifically female experience of the Holocaust; and the inability to render it in discourse, the deformed way of communicating it only through the mute and mutilated body, is a specifically female way of expressing this kind of trauma. Granting his protagonist the voice to narrate her own story, and yet making her unable to fully communicate her trauma, Soból draws attention to the experience of women, their double victimisation and double helplessness.

Widespread violence against women, including domestic and sexual violence, may be interpreted as a sort of a litmus test marking the presence of violence on a grander, national or racial scale, towards which the former is a pathological reaction (cf. Fanon 31). Therefore gender and systemic gender violence become unmistakable signs of both past and present trauma, of a victimisation that desperately seeks relief even in a monstrous behaviour. Positing a female Holocaust victim at the centre of his novel, contrary to its title which suggests male pain, Wilson draws attention to the monstrous trauma of the Holocaust which reaches even most hidden and secret corners of human experience and which is not fair gender-wise. His novel equips the Holocaust with gender, drawing attention to the specifically female experience and the double victimisation of women. In so doing, it imaginatively recovers the unhealed wound of female survivors, and it dramatises it in a narrative which imitates the secrecy, shame and hiding strategies of female Holocaust victims. Gendering the Holocaust, *Manfred's Pain* inscribes itself in a female-oriented trend of the Holocaust writing trying to do justice to the female pain, in the case of his novel – Emma's pain. Soból's novel, in turn, apart from bringing up the subject of the female double victimhood, draws

attention also to the problem of the unrepresentability of the so inflicted trauma, of the inability of the victims to represent it and thus – possibly – to work through it. His novel seems to suggest that this kind of pain can never disappear, leaving its traces on the body, psyche and lives of its victims. Un-speakable and unrepresented, female pain of the Holocaust searches for its narrative representations, of which the two analysed novels are but some of examples and possible versions.

In the last analysis, then, both novels try to recover and represent the gender aspect of the Holocaust drawing attention to the fact that even such monstrous phenomenon is never gender-neutral or universally-human and that its experience was different in the case of women. They also showcase the difficulties with the representation of this kind of trauma and to the role of the body as an archive and testimony. Finally, focusing on the pain of women, both texts imaginatively try to do justice to the often unspeakable horrors of the female Holocaust and to offer its narrative representation which the protagonists themselves are unable to do. Indirectly, then, they point to the power of literature to approximate and represent the trauma which the traumatised victims cannot adequately render in discourse. As Susana Onega and Jean-Michel Ganteau observe, “in trauma fiction, literature has come to be envisaged as one of the privileged *loci* of testimony, being endowed with the power of saying / complementing what other types of narratives, including history, cannot say” (Onega and Ganteau 3). Granting their protagonists the voice and the narrative, the two analysed novels seem to offer a possibility of approximating, and as a result, of facing the consequences of female trauma.

WORKS CITED

- Benigni, Roberto, dir. *Life Is Beautiful*. Perf. Roberto Benigni and Nicoletta Braschi. Melampo Cinematographica, 1997.
- Ejchenbaum, B[oris] M[ikhailovich]. “Iluzja narracji mówionej.” *Rosyjska szkoła stylistyki*, edited by Maria Renata Mayenowa and Zygmunt Saloni, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1970: 487-488.
- . “Jak jest zrobiony *Plaszcz* Gogola.” *Rosyjska szkoła stylistyki*, edited by Maria Renata Mayenowa and Zygmunt Saloni, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1970: 489-490.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Wyklęty lud ziemi*. Translated by Hanna Tygielska, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1985.
- Jacobson, Howard. *J. Jonathan Cape*, 2014.

- Kędra-Kardela, Anna. "The Theme of Trauma in Elizabeth Bowen's War Stories." *Margins and Centres Reconsidered*, edited by Barbara Klonowska and Zofia Kolbuszewska, Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 2008, pp. 49-56.
- Magennis, Caroline. *Sons of Ulster. Masculinity in the Contemporary Northern Irish Novel*. Peter Lang, 2011.
- Onega, Susana, and Jean-Michel Ganteau. "Traumatic Realism and Romance in Contemporary British Narrative." *Trauma and Romance in Contemporary British Literature*, edited by Jean-Michel Ganteau and Susana Onega, Routledge, 2013, pp. 1-13.
- Ostachowicz, Igor. *Noc żywych Żydów*. Wydawnictwo W. A. B., 2012.
- Paziński, Piotr. *Pensjonat*. Wydawnictwo Nisza, 2009.
- Soból, Marek. *Mojry*. Wydawnictwo W. A. B., 2005.
- Szewe, Piotr. *Zagłada*. Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1987.
- Thomas, D.M. *The White Hotel*. Penguin, 1981.
- Wilson, Robert McLiam. *Manfred's Pain*. Picador, 1992.

PLĘĆ HOLOKAUSTU: AUTOPSJA ROBERTA McLIAMA WILSONA
I MOJRY MARKA SOBOLA

Streszczenie

Artykuł analizuje dwie powieści dotyczące Zagłady: *Manfred's Pain*, czyli (w polskim przekładzie) *Autopsję* (1992), północno-irlandzkiego pisarza Roberta McLiama Wilsona i *Mojry* (2005) polskiego autora Marka Sobola jako przykłady prozy skoncentrowanej na kobiecym ciele, kobiecej wrażliwości i kobiecej wersji historii. Obie powieści wiążą ten temat z przemocą seksualną i podkreślają specyfikę kobiecego doświadczenia Holocaustu. Artykuł dowodzi, że spojrzenie na Zagładę z perspektywy płci i przedstawienie jej 'kobiecej' strony stanowi swoiste *novum* odróżniające te powieści od innych, zwykle 'męskich' narracji Holocaustu w literaturze polskiej i bardzo 'męskich' powieści Wilsona. Męskie doświadczenie, zwykle naturalizowane jako uniwersalnie ludzkie, jest przemieszczone w tych dwóch powieściach w kierunku kobiecej perspektywy. W przypadku *Autopsji* dokonuje się to poprzez zmianę proporcji: chociaż bohaterem i narratorem powieści jest mężczyzna, a postać kobieca stanowi zaledwie tło, to ta ostatnia okazuje się bohaterką równie ważną, a jej doświadczenie równorzędne z męskim. W powieści Sobola role są już odwrócone: to kobiece postaci wysuwają się na pierwszy plan jako bohaterki i narratorki, a opowiadania prezentują ich doświadczenie i ich punkt widzenia, przeznaczając dla męskich postaci rolę świadków. Skupiając się na losach kobiet, oba teksty opowiadają pozornie uniwersalne doświadczenie Holocaustu z perspektywy płci, zwracając uwagę również na jego płciowe uwikłanie.

Słowa kluczowe: Zagłada; trauma; przemoc; ciało; kobiecość.