

Arkadiusz Morawiec*

Janka Hesseles' *Locomotive* (to Belżec)

Tuwim's *The Locomotive* was published in the pages of the twelfth issue of "Literary News" on April 12, 1936¹. Announcing it along with the poems *In an Aeroplane* and *Bird Radio*, in a leading literary magazine in which Tuwim had previously placed *Poems for children*², was a kind of ennoblement of children's poetry, an acknowledgement of its equality with poetry itself³. In the book edition, *The Locomotive* appeared in January of 1938⁴.

Lots of competent essays have been written on the numerous qualities of this poem, its translations, and how it has been applied in education. Its reception has also been written about, although not as extensively. My statement is a contribution to the issue of the reception of this, as Jerzy Cieřlikowski put it, "most popular poem written by Tuwim"⁵; it is, to be more precise, a footnote to the comments made in the book *An Icon of Modernity. Rail in Polish Literature (Ikona nowoczesności. Kolej w literaturze polskiej)* by Wojciech Tomasik (especially in the chapter An Engine at the Exhibition. In the Footsteps of Tuwim's *Locomotive*)⁶ and to an article by Katarzyna Kuczyńska-Koschany, which

* Dr hab. prof. UŁ, e-mail: arkadiuszmorawiec@poczta.fm, Department of 20th and 21st century Polish Literature, Faculty of Philology, University of Lodz, 91-404 Lodz, 171/173 Pomorska street.

¹ J. Tuwim, *Lokomotywa*, "Wiadomości Literackie" 1936, issue 16, p. 8.

² J. Tuwim, *Wiersze dla dzieci*, "Wiadomości Literackie" 1935, issue 5, p. 1.

³ See J. Cieřlikowski, *Wstępi*, in: *Antologia poezji dziecięcej*, selection and compilation by idem, edition 3 corrected and extended., Ossolineum, Wrocław 1991, p. XX. It's worth mentioning that *Wiersze dla dzieci* appeared on the first page of "Wiadomości Literackie" next to a story by Bruno Schulz *Mój ojciec zostaje strażakiem (My father becomes a firefighter)* (by neighbouring poems for children, that prose, undoubtedly adult, despite having a boyish protagonist, was, you could say, puerilised).

⁴ J. Tuwim, *Lokomotywa. Rzepka (według starej bajeczki). Ptasię radio*, Wydawnictwo J. Przeworskiego, Warsaw 1938. I cite the exact date of publication as presented in S. Grabowski, *Wiersze dla dzieci Juliana Tuwima 1919–1939*, "Poezja i Dziecko" 2003, issue 3, p. 41.

⁵ J. Cieřlikowski, *Najbardziej popularny wiersz Tuwima*, "Odra" 1977, issue 1, pp. 75–78.

⁶ W. Tomasik, *Ikona nowoczesności. Kolej w literaturze polskiej*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 2007.

references this book, entitled Tuwim's *Locomotive*: variations and contexts (from a children's poem to a poem on the Holocaust)⁷.

In his bibliographic monograph dedicated to Tuwim, Janusz Stradecki mentions that *The Locomotive* was the subject of many literary references – paraphrases and travesties unfortunately, the bibliographer lists only three such pieces⁸. A wide array of them can be found in the fourth issue of the quarterly “Poetry and the Child” from 2004, which was dedicated to *The Locomotive* in its entirety⁹. In it, one could find poems for children and adults inspired by Tuwim's masterpiece, among them were: *The Steam Engine* by Władysław Broniewski, *A poem about beer and an engine* by Wanda Chotomska, *The Locomotive* by Stanisław Wygodzki, *The Old Locomotive* by Tadeusz Śliwak, *At the Train Station* by Józef Ratajczak, and Edward Zyman's *Electric Locomotive*. A separate group of poems presented poems written by children, “moved” by Tuwim's *Locomotive*¹⁰. To this rather abundant anthology, one could add many other works, like Leszek Aleksander Moczulski's *Old Locomotive*¹¹.

These, as well as other poetic references to Tuwim's text have a various nature, sometimes a surprising one, for *The Locomotive* had many “wagons” attached to it. At the turn of the forties, in the era of soc-realism, Józef Prutkowski attached the call to a fight with bureaucracy in the poems *An Engine stands at a train station... (Stoi na stacji lokomotywa...)* and *Springtime troubles (Wiosenne kłopoty)*¹², while Henryk Zgrzebny, in the poem “*Locomotive*” – *Tuwim, corrected* (“*Lokomotywa*”, *czyli Tuwim poprawiony*), has the “joyful youth” of the ZMP (Union of Polish Youth) portrayed as engineers¹³. Four decades later, when the steam engine of the times got out of breath, the station became a stop for branches of the state police instead of the locomotive. As Wojciech Łysiak writes in the book *The Great Contestation. Political Folklore in the People's Republic of Poland*:

The Locomotive became the “mother” of an innumerable number of works basing on its rhythm, onomatopoeia, on the level of its sounds and meaning. [...] So

⁷ K. Kuczyńska-Koschany, “*Lokomotywa*” Tuwima: *wariacje i konteksty (od wiersza dla dzieci do wiersza o Zagładzie)*, “*Polonistyka*” 2012, issue 1, pp. 6–13.

⁸ J. Stradecki, *Julian Tuwim. Bibliografia*, PIW, Warsaw 1959, p. 284.

⁹ Books of poems: *Wariacje na temat oraz Mogę wiersz napisać o lokomotywie...*, “*Poezja i Dziecko*” 2004, issue 4, pp. 63–97.

¹⁰ The book of poems *Z dziecięcego zeszytu. Laureaci II Konkursu Poetyckiego im. Ludwika Wiszniewskiego*, “*Poezja i Dziecko*” 2004, issue 4, pp. 110–124.

¹¹ L.A. Moczulski, *Stara lokomotywa*, “*Przekrój*” 1993, issue 49, p. 23.

¹² J. Prutkowski, *Stoi na stacji lokomotywa...*, “*Trybuna Wolności*” 1950, issue 43, p. 11; idem, *Wiosenne kłopoty*, “*Głos Koszaliński*” 1955, issue 79, p. 8. In the first of the mentioned poems we read: “The machines miss some action. / But finished. With rust. With bureaucracy. / They dream of norms, noble missions... / But they stand, stand... Travel the commissions”.

¹³ H. Zgrzebny, “*Lokomotywa*” *czyli Tuwim poprawiony*, “*Szpilki*” 1950, issue 40, p. 11.

many texts were heard about enforcements or divisions of the state police that stand at the train station, which came to be as commentary either to the events connected to the ninth congress of the Polish United Worker's party or those pertaining to martial law... At times the authors of these remakes were known, although their identity was assumed more often than not. However in this case as well, during subsequent realizations of the "new" works, spoken as well as written, the text underwent more and more changes which strayed from the archetype at a basic level.¹⁴

On the internet, today one can find pornographic remakes of the noble archetype. These pathetic, vulgar productions, which do not speak well of their authors, speak the best of *The Locomotive*, and the strength of its influence. Surely not many works in our literature are as ubiquitous and present in such various incarnations and circumstances.

Jerzy Cieślowski once said: "It does not seem like anything new can be written about a locomotive after Tuwim"¹⁵. Well, it surely is difficult to write something equally excellent. One may, as it turns out, "write with *The Locomotive*". And, in a way, it has been written with since the beginning. In the aforementioned quarterly "Poetry and the Child", Dominik Grabowski mentions a "mandatory stop" in the locomotive's journey, and its career which is still taking place today, which was caused by a period of war¹⁶. But the locomotive did not stop at all during that time, it slowed down somewhat at most. This poem, as Stradecki tells us, was recited by Tuwim at author meet and greet events in the United States in 1942, gaining widespread popularity (the English translation was recited by E.L. Płonka), and in the same year *The Locomotive* was printed in the Detroit Weekly "Our World"¹⁷. During the war, the English translation of *The Locomotive* was sold in Great Britain¹⁸. Therefore, Tomasik is also mistaken when he writes: "Tuwim's *Locomotive* did not gain popularity until after the war. It appeared too late in order to have readers enjoy its first printed copy"¹⁹. Wincent Rzymowski's review of a book entitled *The Locomotive. The Turnip (according to the old story)*. *Bird Radio*. Convinces us, that it was otherwise. In it we read:

¹⁴ W. Łysiak, *Wielka kontestacja. Folklor polityczny w PRL*, PSO, Poznan 1998, p. 26.

¹⁵ J. Cieślowski, *Bajeczka dziecięca. (Próba określenia gatunku)*, in: *Kim jesteś Kopciuszku, czyli o problemach współczesnej literatury dla dzieci i młodzieży*, S. Aleksandrak (ed.), Nasza Księgarnia, Warsaw 1968, p. 128.

¹⁶ D. Grabowski, *Dlaczego?*, "Poezja i Dziecko" 2004, issue 4, p. 11.

¹⁷ J. Stradecki, *Julian Tuwim...*, p. 284.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 333.

¹⁹ W. Tomasik, *Ikona nowoczesności...*, pp. 227–228.

[...] Julian Tuwim's famous *Locomotive*.

I say famous, because in the circle of experts and amateurs of the Polish language, it became famous several years ago when it appeared for the first time in "Literary News"²⁰.

Broniewski's poem *The Steam Engine* (which, by the way, Tomasik mentions!) also proves *The Locomotive's* popularity before the war. This poem, which is a paraphrase of Tuwim's poem, published in 1946 on the pages of "The Little Cricket" ("Świerszczyk")²¹, most likely came to be in 1938²². Tomasik is undoubtedly correct (although even in this case one must have certain reservations – I shall say more about this later), when he says that at the time of publication of Stanisław Wygodzki's poem *The Locomotive*, in the vacation issue of "Creative Works" from 1947, Tuwim's poem "became something else. More carefully: it could mean that which its author could in no way foresee"²³.

Wygodzki's *Locomotive* is a piece inspired by the work of Tuwim, but most of all one originating from trauma. It is a piece about annihilation. It is a lyrical story about the journey of the poet's daughter to a concentration camp, it is a lament²⁴. Here are its last three stanzas:

And off she went, the small girl
In a dark wagon,
But there was no mention in Tuwim's poem
of her.

There was no mention of those chimneys
which smoke,
when a small girl arrives
At Auschwitz.

²⁰ W. Rzymowski, *Tuwim-polonizator*, "Ilustrowany Dziennik Ludowy" 1938, issue 360, p. 9.

²¹ W. Broniewski, *Parowóz*, "Świerszczyk" 1946, issue 27, p. 5. Reprint: idem, *Dla małych dzieci*, Czytelnik, Warsaw 1951.

²² See F. Lichodziejewska, *Twórczość Władysława Broniewskiego. Monografia bibliograficzna*, PIW, Warsaw 1973, p. 222.

²³ W. Tomasik, *Ikona nowoczesności...*, p. 228.

²⁴ Kuczyńska-Koschany writes about the Wygodzki's attempted suicide on their way to Auschwitz (in a cattle wagon): "Improperly dosed luminal killed Wygodzki's wife and daughter; he stayed alive" (K. Kuczyńska-Koschany, "Lokomotywa" *Tuwima...*, p. 10), meanwhile Monika Szablowska-Zaremba, having the poet's autobiographical record at hand, informs us that "wife and daughter fell asleep, he left the wagon stunned" (M. Szablowska-Zaremba, "Tragarz pamięci" – *rzecz o Stanisławie Wygodzkim*, in: *Ślady obecności*, S. Buryła, A. Molisak (eds.), Universitas, Cracow 2010, p. 220).

No mention of the mother, none of me,
 When the wheels' rattling went silent,
 And the small girl handed over to flames
 is my daughter²⁵.

With time, more of such holocaust themed paraphrases appeared, though not necessarily based on the author's experience. Under the influence of the Second World War, the train itself changed from a symbol of modernity and civilizational development and progress, into a symbol of modern, mass murder. Tomasik states:

If the steam engine were to remain a monument of the nineteenth century, the period of steam and electricity, then the following century, which was written in history under the name of the century of many totalitarianisms, can be imagined precisely in the form of a freight train, which had the destination point of a Nazi death camp²⁶.

The poem *Wagons* by Henryk Vogler, composed in 1944 in Gross-Rosen, speaks about this kind of journey, and these wagons. Sealed wagons rush in Wisława Szymborska's *Jew Transport 1943*, in Jerzy Ficowski's *Postmortem Landscape*, in *Romancy* by Arthur Międzyrzecki, in Anna Frajlich's *Locomotive*, and in *The Professor's Knife* by Tadeusz Różewicz²⁷. We find them in very numerous prose works (memoirs as well as fiction) and in a drama by Marian Pankowski *My Wife's Parents' Journey to Treblinka*²⁸. Also – within poems which are a paraphrase of Tuwim's *Locomotive*. Surely one of the most brilliant of these

²⁵ S. Wygodzki, *Lokomotywa*, "Twórczość" 1947, issue 7/8, p. 64. Reprint: idem, *Pamiętnik miłości*, Książka, Warsaw 1948.

²⁶ W. Tomasik, *Ikona nowoczesności...*, p. 235. We should also remember about the, unfortunately less evocative for a Westerner's imagination, (cattle) wagons speeding, even much earlier than WWII, to the East: about the Soviet wagons. We, of course, find them in Polish poetry, e.g. in the poem by Beata Obertyńska, *W bydlęcym wagonie*, in: *Gulag polskich poetów. Od Komi do Kołomy. Wiersze*, compilation and introduction by N. Taylor-Terlecka, Polska Fundacja Kulturalna, London 2000, pp. 45–46.

²⁷ H. Vogler, *Wagony*, "Pismo Literacko-Artystyczne" 1984, issue 4, pp. 74–75; W. Szymborska, *Transport Żydów 1943*, "Dziennik Literacki" 1948, issue 17, p. 2; J. Ficowski, *Krajobraz pośmiertny*, in: *Odczytanie popiołów. Wiersze*, Pogranicze, London 1979, pp. 19–20; A. Międzyrzecki, *Romanca*, in: *Nieskończona przejrzystość. Nowe wiersze (1987–1997) i wybór wierszy dawnych*, Znak, Cracow 1997, p. 28; A. Frajlich, *Lokomotywa*, "Tygodnik Powszechny" 1999, issue 8, p. 15 (reprint: eadem, *W słońcu listopada*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Cracow 2000); T. Różewicz, *Nożyk profesora*, in: *Nożyk profesora*, Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, Wrocław 2001, pp. 5–27. About Frajlich's poem write both Tomasik and Kuczyńska-Koschany.

²⁸ M. Pankowski, *Podróż rodziców mej żony do Treblinka*, "Dialog" 2003, issue 12, pp. 66–74.

is Szymborska's *Still* (*Jeszcze*)²⁹, which drums the ominous rattle of the wheels of a train:

This, this is how. A wheel rattles. A forest with no clearing.
 This, this is how. Through the forest a freight of screaming.
 This, this is how. What I hear at night, roused from sleep
 This, this is how. The pounding of silence into silence.

The ballad-like poem by Szymborska is a homage to murdered Jews³⁰. The poet attempts to enchant the rushing train in some way ("where will they ride to, / will they ever get off / do not ask, I can't tell, I don't know"), she makes an attempt at not allowing it to arrive at, as it turns out, a destination known to the author: "The tracks lead into a black forest".

Tuwim's poem presents a standing, then moving, then rushing engine. In Wygodzki's poem which was quoted before, the rattle of a train's wheels has already gone silent... This poem, Tomasik concludes, "is only good for quiet reading, for it is a painful grievance in which a declamatory pathos would be flagrantly inappropriate"³¹. It is, undoubtedly, a very particular testimony of the perception³² of Tuwim's *Locomotive*, but in spite of what Tomasik claims, he is not the first who caused this most famous of Polish children's poems³³ to become something different than it was. It turns out that firstly, *The Locomotive* was known before the war not only, as Rzymkowski states, in the circle of experts and amateurs of Polish literature, and secondly, that in spite of what Dominik Grabowski claimed, *The Locomotive* journeyed among readers during the war, and it did so in places where one could hear gunshots and death moans as often as, or more often than the sounds of train wheels rattling. There are four poems which prove this, and these are the poems I'd like to draw attention to.

²⁹ W. Szymborska, *Jeszcze*, in: *Wolanie do Yeti*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Cracow 1957, pp. 37–38.

³⁰ Michał Głowiński, who, surprisingly, doesn't even mention in the article *Wisławy Szymborskiej ballada o Zagładzie* about the similarity between Szymborska's piece to *Lokomotywa*, remarks: "That poem, close to a ballad in its poetic, at one point – near the end – apparently stops being a ballad" (M. Głowiński, *Wisławy Szymborskiej ballada o Zagładzie*, in: *Lustra historii. Rozprawy i eseje ofiarowane Profesor Marii Żmigrodzkiej z okazji pięćdziesięciolecia pracy naukowej*, M. Kalinowska, E. Wiślak (eds.), IBL, Warsaw 1998, p. 189). The similarity is mentioned by Tomasz Cieślak: "some structural techniques, present in Szymborska's poem, are a direct reference to *Lokomotywa* [...]"; Szymborska plays with the model of a childish, optimistic pre-war poem [i.e. Tuwim's poem – A.M.] (T. Cieślak, *O Holokauście. "Jeszcze" Wisławy Szymborskiej*, in: *W poszukiwaniu ostatecznej tajemnicy. Szkice o polskiej literaturze XX wieku i najnowszej*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Lodz 2009, p. 114).

³¹ W. Tomasik, *Ikona nowoczesności...*, p. 234.

³² See M. Głowiński, *Świadectwa i style odbioru*, in: *Styl odbioru. Szkice o komunikacji literackiej*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Cracow 1977, pp. 116–137.

³³ K. Kuczyńska-Koschany, "*Lokomotywa*" Tuwima..., p. 13.

The first one, which I will mention only briefly, is the recently publicized satire from Marek Fogelbaum, who was born in 1902. It is entitled *Rumkowski in the style of The Locomotive*, it was written in the Litzmannstadt ghetto in 1943 or 1944, its addressee is an infamous Superior of the Jewish Seniority of the Lodz Ghetto³⁴. More unusual illustrations of *The Locomotive's* reception, not only because of the place and circumstances of their creation, but also due to their creators themselves, are the poems: *The Locomotive* by Jerzy Ogórek, *A Train's whistle* By Jerzy Orłowski, and *Bełżec* by Janka Hesseles. The existence of these poems proves not only that Tuwim's poem reached a large audience of young readers before the war, but also that it was actually popular among children. All of the authors mentioned, Ogórek, Orłowski and Hesseles, were born in 1931. At the time the war broke out, they all were eight years old, and they were all five years old when *The Locomotive* first came out. It may, therefore, be expected that more similar paraphrases of this famous poem composed by children during the war exist. Either way, it was not Wygodzki, nor was it Szymborska who shifted *The Locomotive* onto tracks leading "into a black forest". By the way, the forests in these poems written by children (they are not **for** children!) carry very precise names: Auschwitz, "treblinkas", Bełżec. And so (I will paraphrase the subtitle of Kuczyńska-Koschany's article), I now switch from a children's poem to **children's poetry** about the Holocaust.

The earliest that Jerzy Ogórek's poem could have come into being is 1942³⁵. An eleven year old boy wrote it in the Cracow ghetto and made it a present. A note above the poem reads: "A show of good heart is repaid on your birthday with a measly poem". It is a truly particular gift. Here the young author rewrote pieces of Tuwim's work, significantly modifying them in a specific way. The changes made to certain words, their arrangement, punctuation and the verse boundaries are likely due to an imprecise knowledge of the archetypal poem. However, some of the variations are clearly motivated by the author's reality, for example, wagons of "wood and steel" are substituted for Tuwim's wagons of "iron and steel". Tuwim's colourful description of ten out of the forty wagons attached to the engine is exchanged for the following, gloomy picture:

³⁴ Here are the first four lines of that poem: "stands in the market an old man. / He must be six foot ten, oh, what a man / He stands and curses, he spews and pants / Sweat drips from his forehead" (M. Fogelbaum, *Rumkowski w stylu lokomotywy*, <http://www.muzhp.pl/aktualnosci/238/glos-z-lodzkiego-getta.html> [accessed on: 10.11.2013]; the website appeared on 27.08.2009). The book containing the poem is in the archives of the Museum of Polish History in Warsaw. A different manuscript with this poem, or rather a different version of it, is kept in the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw – see http://www.jhi.pl/genealogia/wyjatkowe_historie/52 [accessed on: 1.12.2013].

³⁵ J. Ogórek, *Lokomotywa*, in: *Tango lez śpiewajcie Muzy. Poetyckie dokumenty Holokaustu*, introduction, collection and compilation by B. Keff, Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, Warsaw 2012, pp. 155–156. The poem's manuscript is in the archives of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.

And every wagon is full of Haftlings
 Germans do load them up like horses.
 And there may be forty such wagons
 And each contains sixty Haftlings.
 Each wagon holds several children,
 So small and scrawny
 That tears find the eye
 They sit quietly
 Like all is fine
 When suddenly
 There is a loud whistle
 First a toot,
 Steam is churning,
 Wheels are turning,
 [...]

The wonderful rush of a train, expressed by Tuwim in over twenty lines, was condensed into fewer short (two, three, five and six-syllable) ones, of which the last one, instead of opening up the horizon, contains the sentence:

[...]

 And even faster

 It whacks

 It knocks

 strongly in a rush

 But whither?

 But whither?

 Where does it rush to?

 Through fields

 Through forests

To Auschwitz

I do not know the fate of Jerzy Ogórek. I know, however, that Jerzy Orłowski travelled in a wagon of “wood and steel”. The echo of this event, as well as the sound of other, similar transports, is heard in a poem dated 25 April 1944 written in Bergen-Belsen entitled *A Train's whistle*³⁶. In July 1943, as a twelve-year-old

³⁶ J. Orłowski, *Pociągu świst*, in: *Czy jest nadzieja? Wiersze polskie z Bergen-Belsen / Gibt es noch Hoffnung? Polnische Gedichte aus Bergen-Belsen*, collected and compiled by K. Liedke, translation from Polish by K. Lipiński, Fundacja Dolnosaksońskie Miejsca Pamięci & Rada Ochrony Pamięci Walk i Męczeństwa, Celle–Warsaw 2007. I cite the quotes from the poem not in its

boy, Orłowski was shipped off with his brother and aunt from the Warsaw ghetto to Germany, to a sub-camp for Jews who were to be switched with Germans to be questioned by the Allied Forces (Aufenthaltslager). The boy survived the war. Today, he is known as Uri Orlev, lives in Israel, and is a brilliant writer of literature for young adults and children in the Hebrew language³⁷. *A Train's Whistle* is a less demonstrative paraphrase, more discreet than Ogórek's work, and surely more awkward. But it is not mainly artistry we are talking about here. This thirty-two-line poem begins in the middle of Tuwim's poem, so to speak. Here is its beginning:

A distant, lengthy toot
 A distant, lengthy hoot
 The train is moving, a train full of moans
 The train is moving, with whistles and clamour

This train, which is not only during a journey, but makes journeys with "people-filled wagons", arrives at its destination every time. And a recent prisoner of the Warsaw ghetto, whose joy in his misery was the fact, that he got to Bergen-Belsen, exposes this destination directly in the last two lines of the poem:

And round here less people, all's empty and hungry
 And in treblinkas lie corpses, a bigger pile each day.

Ogórek's and Orłowski's poems were published recently. The names of places contained in them were dictated by history: sealed wagons usually rode to Auschwitz, those from Warsaw – to Treblinka. Where did they ride off to from Lviv?

In 1947, the same year in which "Creative Works" presented *The Locomotive* by Wygodzki, in the anthology *The song will survive...* compiled by Michał Borwicz, *Bełżec* by Janka Heschel came out. The presentation of this piece, just as in the case of other works from the young author's poetry collection, took place earlier. They were, as we read in Borwicz's editor's note, "written and recited by the then eleven-year-old author in the ('janowski') death camp in Lviv"³⁸. It is only appropriate to say a few more words about this author. Even if due to the fact that

printed (on p. 134) corrected by the editor version, but from that reprinted in the book by Orłowski from Bergen-Belsen; the photo of a piece of paper with the poem *Pociągu świst* can be found on pp. 163–164. My correction of obvious (spelling) mistakes of the author I place in square brackets.

³⁷ See *Czy jest nadzieja?...*, p. 119 (editorial note); K. Famulska-Ciesielska, S.J. Żurek, *Literatura polska w Izraelu. Leksykon*, Wydawnictwo Austeria Klezmerhojs, Cracow–Budapest 2012, pp. 121–122.

³⁸ M.M. Borwicz, *Nota redakcyjna*, in: *Pieśń ujdzie cało... Antologia wierszy o Żydach pod okupacją niemiecką*, compilation and introductory essay by M.M. Borwicz, Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna w Polsce, Warsaw–Lodz–Cracow 1947, p. 270.

her last name sounds familiar to any amateur of Polish literature. Janina Heschel today resides in Israel. She worked for many years as a chemical scientist, and since marrying, she has gone by the surname Altman. She, she is the daughter of Henryk Heschel, a translator, critic and editor-in-chief at the Polish written daily of the Jews of Lviv called “Moment” (“Chwila”)³⁹, as well as the cousin of Marian Heschel, that is Marian Hemar (a comedy writer and satirist better known by his pseudonym)⁴⁰, who was a good friend of Tuwim’s. Considering these circumstances, it is hard to imagine a situation in which *The Locomotive* could have been unfamiliar in Janka’s family home. It is worth mentioning that the author of *Bełżec* is related to yet another writer, the author of the novel *Among the Dead*, where – and this is no surprise in the case of a (Polish) Jew from Lviv – the theme of the concentration camp in Bełżec appears: Janina Heschel’s aunt (Hemar’s mother) was also the aunt of Stanisław Lem.

Janka Heschel went from the ghetto in Lviv, which was being gradually emptied by the Germans, to the camp situated on Janowska street in Lviv, colloquially called the “Janowski camp”. Initially it had the function of a labour camp; with time it gained the status of a transitional camp, and finally an extermination camp. With the beginning of the mass deportations of Jews from Eastern Galicia (and soon also from various other countries of Europe) to the death camp in Bełżec, the Janowski camp became a place of selection: those capable of work remained in it, while the rest were directed to the Bełżec gas chambers. As a result of further action against the Jews which was conducted in the summer of 1942, thousands of people wound up in the “Janowski camp”; most of them were murdered within a short time, not only by being sent off to Bełżec, but also through executions on the spot, in a ravine near the camp, “at the Sands”⁴¹. Janka’s mother committed suicide in the camp. Her cadaver was likely burnt nearby, most likely “at the Sands”.

In a recollection written during the war, after her escape from the camp, Janka wrote:

During work time it was terribly hot, and in the night fleas and stuffiness would not let us sleep. We were not allowed to be outside after 9pm, but the braver women

³⁹ See B. Łętocha, “Chwila”. *Gazeta Żydów lwowskich*, <http://www.lwow.com.pl/rocznik/chwila.html> [accessed on: 9.11.2013].

⁴⁰ See: “Madam Janina [Heschel – A.M.] due to a big age gap wasn’t in close contact with her already famous then [meaning: before the war broke out – A.M.] cousin. They met only in 1964, when Hemar arrived to perform in Israel” (*Ja kabareciarz. Marian Hemar – od Lwowa do Londynu*), compilation by A. Mieszkowska, Warszawskie Wydawnictwo Literackie Muza, Warsaw 2006, p. 19).

⁴¹ For more on “janowski camp” see A. Morawiec, *Wstęp*, in: L. Weliczker, *Brygada śmierci (Sonderkommando 1005). Pamiętnik*, Ośrodek “Brama Grodzka – Teatr NN”, Lublin 2012, pp. VII–XII.

would go out. I, too, went out behind the barracks, and there we would sing and recite. In front of us, flames of burning bodies blazed from the Sands. The stench poisoned the air. I longed for my mother, but I did not despair, I only envied her for ending it. And there I was, looking at that smoke, in which she may be burning, and I know that I too will burn there. Nights like these tangled my head, and I would compose rhymeless little poems⁴².

One of these little poems (although with rhymes, just imprecise ones) is *Belżec*. One could say that it is, and with it its inspiration – Tuwim's *Locomotive*, a **life-giving** poem. For it is thanks to the poems written and recited in the camp that Janka Hesseles avoided death "at The Sands", or in the gas chambers of Belżec. "To these and other poems, we read in the anthology *The Song Will Survive...*, she owed her entrance into underground cells, and later the escape from the camp"⁴³. She owed her escape, it needs to be said, to Borwicz: a poet, a member of the resistance movement and the organizer of a (makeshift) cultural life in the "Janowski camp". After appreciating her literary talent in the camp, Borwicz, having escaped, through the help of his friends who were active in the Polish Council to Aid Jews, got the young poet out of the camp⁴⁴. In the chapter of his book called *Literature in a camp*, entitled *Janka*, Borwicz recalls:

At one point, several parties began "recommending" a girl, twelve years of age at the time, named Janka H. (the daughter of the editor of Lviv's "Moment"), who wrote poems and recited them in the women's barracks. After being asked to get involved, I was reluctant at first. Conspiring with a twelve year old girl cannot last in an institution, where in certain cases one must remain silent under the threat of gunshots. Janka, unable to wait to get in touch with me, tricked her vorarbeiters and, evading the SS men, found me on her own. There was no simple truculence about her, no mannerisms. Quite the opposite: she was humble, lost in thought, frowning. Her poems were – of

⁴² J. Hesseles, *Nie płacz, płacz to poniżenie w nieszczęściu i szczęściu*, in: J. Iwaszkiewicz, *Wtedy kwitły forsycje*, edition II, Wydawnictwo bis, Warsaw 1993, p. 244. The title of the presented here memories of Hesseles was given by Joanna Iwaszkiewicz; it is a quote: those are the last words that Janka's father spoke to her after Germans arrived in Lviv in 1941. He was murdered soon after. Janka's memories were first published in Cracow in 1946 by Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna, entitled *Oczyrna dwunastoletniej dziewczyny* (*In the eyes of a twelve-year-old girl*) (that version bears some marks of editing; Iwaszkiewicz quotes the text, or rather its large fragment, citing from the original stored now in the archives of Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw).

⁴³ M.M. Borwicz, *Nota redakcyjna*, p. 270.

⁴⁴ See M. Hochberg-Mariańska, [introduction], in: [J. Hesseles], *Oczyrna dwunastoletniej dziewczyny*, Centralny Komitet Żydów Polskich, Cracow 1946, pp. 9–10; M. Borwicz, *Spod szubienicy w teren*, Księgarnia Polska w Paryżu, Paris 1980, pp. 46–47; J. Hesseles, speech from 1 August 2013 during a meet the author session in Centrum Historii Miejskiej Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej (Центр міської історії Центрально-Східної Європи) in Lviv, <http://www.Lvivcenter.org/pl/chronicle/news/?newsid=1116> [accessed on: 11.11.2013].

course – absolute primitives (in the good meaning of the word). The way she recited them – natural and devoid of affectation – made a big impression.

I decided to get the girl a special present. [...] a collection of Mickiewicz's works. That was one gift for a girl in return for her alliance with literature. And the second? Janka was the first person whose escape from the camp I organized after my own. [...]

The tighter the loop bound itself, the more tragic and persistent was the scream which tore out from a strangled throat. And, in the end, it is hard to say if it is the literary crumbs which make the glum reality more evident and pronounced, or if it is reality which emphasize these fragments of literature⁴⁵.

After her escape from the camp in the late summer of '43, Janka, as Maria Hochberg-Mariańska recalls, would “place here and there, between the pages of a book she was reading – little sheets of paper filled with writing, poems which always had similar content: – the camp, ‘The Sands’ – death, longing for her mother – Bełżec...”⁴⁶. In the account she was writing down at the time (“the diary”), Janka noted: “While riding on the train, I still did not believe that I was heading towards life, towards Cracow”⁴⁷.

But, just for a while, we will return to Lviv, to Janowska street, to recall a *Locomotive*-stimulated poem, born out of painful experience (echoed in the theme of the mother and father) and fear, about a train to death:

What a terrifying image:
 A people-filled wagon
 a few corpses in the corner,
 Everyone stands in the nude.
 Moans are overtaken by clamour,
 Only the sentenced understand,
 What the clamouring wheels speak to them:
 To Bełżec! To Bełżec! To Bełżec!
 To death! To death! To death!
 To Bełżec! To Bełżec! To Bełżec!
 For death! For death! For death!
 If you want to live
 Then jump, then fly, then rush
 But beware
 for banschutz awaits as well.

⁴⁵ M.M. Borwicz (Boruchowicz), *Literatura w obozie*, Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna przy C.K. Żydów Polskich, Oddział w Krakowie, Cracow 1946, pp. 48–49.

⁴⁶ M. Hochberg-Mariańska, [wstęp], p. 12.

⁴⁷ [J. Heschles], *Oczyma dwunastoletniej dziewczyny*, p. 65.

To another convict it whispers,
 No more will you see your mother
 In vain you weep, in vain you sob
 You will not see your father,
 for the wheel rushes you to Bełżec
 To Bełżec! To Bełżec! To Bełżec!
 For death! For death! For death!
 To Bełżec! To Bełżec! To Bełżec!
 To death! To death! To death!
 And the train's slowing down, it stops running so fast
 And out from a thousand chests a moan tears its way
 The train at its destination arrives
 The steam engine wheezes
 It's Bełżec! It's Bełżec! It's Bełżec!⁴⁸

It is indeed hard to answer: does this poem emphasize the gloomy reality, or does the gloomy reality emphasize the poem?⁴⁹ And is it in fact, as I said, an expression of fear or rather an attempt at quelling it, an incantation, an enchantment. Surely, there is no relevance in determining if – besides *The Locomotive* – any other poems can be heard in it. Was the expression “then jump, then fly, then rush” borrowed by the eleven-year-old (maybe it is not allusion, but reminiscence) from

⁴⁸ J. Hesseles, *Bełżec*. I quote the poem from the manuscript, i.e. the book by the author, currently in the archives of Beit Lohamei Haghetatot in Israel ref. no. 10066). Several pieces included in the book, including *Bełżec*, have a lot to them: “Poems I wrote in the camp or D.A.W. [i.e. the factory part of the camp – A.M.] in Lviv from VI 1943 till October”. First printing of a version slightly different from the original, in: *Pieśń ujdzie cało...*, pp. 270–271. Reprints: *Poezja Polski Walczącej 1939–1945. Antologia*, compilation by J. Szczawiej, preface by K. Rusinek, vol. 1, PIW, Warsaw 1974, pp. 464–465; “Kamena” 1983, issue 8, pp. 7; K. Strzelewicz, *Polskie wiersze obozowe i więzienne 1939–1945. W archiwum Aleksandra Kulisiewicza*, Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, Cracow 1984, p. 121; *Ocalone we wspomnieniach. Wspomnienia byłych więźniów politycznych hitlerowskich więzień i obozów koncentracyjnych*, A. Marcinek-Drozdalska (ed.), Koszalińska Biblioteka Publiczna im. Joachima Lelewela, Koszalin 2011, p. 108. German translation: J. Hesseles, *Bełżec*, in: *Hiob 1943. Ein Requiem für das Warschauer Getto*, selection and compilation by K. Wolff, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, Berlin 1983, p. 192.

⁴⁹ It's worth recalling here the memory, or rather a testimony about the journey to Bełżec, made by Rudolf Reder, one of the five people who managed to get out of that death camp and one of the two who lived till the end of the war (or about whom we know that they survived it): “I was loaded at the Kleparów train station [in Lviv – A.M.] onto a wagon. I knew that it was a death transport. It had 50 wagons, with a hundred people in each. The train carried 5000 people; women and children. It was escorted by the gestapo. They were covered freight wagons, sealed, windows behind bars. Everybody inside knew that they would ride to Bełżec to die in a gas chamber. The journey took seven hours, horrible, desperate and hopeless. The train arrived at the Bełżec station, approached the camp through a sidetrack” (R. Reder, *Komory gazowe*, in: *Dokumenty zbrodni i męczeństwa*, M.M. Borwicz, N. Rost, J. Wulf (eds.), Centralny Komitet Żydów Polskich, Cracow 1945, p. 56).

the collection of poems by Mickiewicz which she was given by Borwicz, from the poem *To B...Z*. (“My nightingale! Fly off and sing!”⁵⁰), or from Tuwim’s poem *Life of mine* (“Rush, fly, hurry, in a gallop!”⁵¹). Yes, one may wonder if, the relatively faint, in comparison with the archetype, sound fabric (assonance) in Heschel’s poem is mainly a symptom of artistic awkwardness, or if it is due to the fact that the author considered the poetry she created in the camp above all as a testimony⁵². The camp-based poet focuses on the visual aspects, because sight is, we think, a more reliable witness than hearing: “What a terrifying image” – we read in the first verse. This image was surely derived from the stories which circled the camp, and may partially be inspired by a grim ballad. Perhaps *Erlkönig* by Goethe⁵³. The phrase: “No more will you see your mother” brings to mind the words “No more will you see your lover” from Mickiewicz’s *Maryla’s Grave Mound*⁵⁴, from this ballad. The realism, or naturalism even, (nude people, corpses, moans) in Heschel’s poem intertwines with prophecy, with a sentence rhythmically clamouring through the personified wheels, and with the inhumane, demonic banschutz which lurks waiting for a human’s mistake (“ba[h]nschutz”, not the familiar-sounding “guard”).

The Locomotive by Tuwim, writes Władysława Borys, “appears [...] as a picturesque melodious sign of joy which a child has when experiencing a rush, the phenomenon of movement, change, dynamism. [...] The rush of the locomotive drives the world into a state of euphoria”⁵⁵. *The Locomotive* is addressed to the youngest children. Halina Semenowicz, a children’s creative work researcher claims that children sometimes happen to create poetry as well, containing “the joy and happiness of life itself” within them⁵⁶. Meanwhile, older children, between the ages of twelve and fifteen, where it seems appropriate to include the prematurely grown-up: Janka Heschel and her peers, Jerzy Ogórek and Jerzy Orłowski, usually “escape into poetic expression at times of sadness and perplexity”⁵⁷. At that age, writing poetry has a mainly therapeutic role, it allows the child to be released from the psychological tension which torments him or her.

⁵⁰ A. Mickiewicz, *Do Bohdana Zaleskiego*, in: *Poezje. Wydanie zupełne w czterech tomach*, vol. 1, Księgarnia S. Bodeka / Drukarnia A. Gojawczyńskiego, Lviv 1925, p. 203 (in the title of the original there are initials).

⁵¹ J. Tuwim, *** [Krw, snów, mknien, żądz...], “Maski” 1918, issue 33, p. 643. Reprint (entitled *Życie moje*), idem, *Sokrates tańczący*, J. Mortkowicz, Warsaw 1919.

⁵² See: “Poetry by definition is an art, has its importance, in poetry you lecture on – so could think a student of a pre-war school – noble truths. The very form makes them important” (B. Keff, *Tango lez śpiewajcie Muzy, czyli czym jest zawartość tej książki*, in: *Tango lez śpiewajcie Muzy...*, p. 12).

⁵³ See J.W. Goethe, *Król olszyn*, translated by W. Syrokomla, in: *Liryki i ballady*, introduction by M. Ranicki, Nasza Księgarnia, Warsaw 1955, pp. 82–83.

⁵⁴ A. Mickiewicz, *Kurhanek Maryli*, in: *Poezje*, vol. 1, p. 31.

⁵⁵ W. Borys, *Odkrywanie piękna “Lokomotywy”*, “Życie Szkoły” 1988, issue 11, p. 635.

⁵⁶ H. Semenowicz, *Poetycka twórczość dziecka*, Nasza Księgarnia, Warsaw 1979, p. 60.

⁵⁷ Ibidem.

Some poems by the older children (aged 14–15) – Semanowicz explains – are marked with rebellion and criticism aimed at a poorly arranged world, and often a feeling of panic peeks through, panic caused by phenomena which they cannot understand, such as destitution, hunger, death, the atrocities of war, phenomena with which a child does not want to and cannot come to terms with⁵⁸.

Summing things up from this perspective – a child's creativity – discussing the artistic value of the poetry written by Janka, Jurek and Jurek, seems pointless, and maybe even inappropriate. "But does a literary work indeed mean only as much as it says? Does it always mean just as much?"⁵⁹ – Borwicz asks rhetorically in the anthology *The Song Will Survive...* Elsewhere however, when discussing the poetry written in the camp, he adds: "One thing is for sure: none of it should be judged in isolation from the conditions in which it was created", "Expressions which are bleak and in need of refreshment in typical conditions, there call on ideas which are painfully real and close"⁶⁰. In circumstances such as these, "the clamour of wheels" is something much more than a poetic trail, an onomatopoeia.

In 1939, in the review of a book edition of Tuwim's *Locomotive*, Janina Broniewska wrote: "Whither does this mad train rush? This is something none of us adults can know"⁶¹. As we see, madness, including the madness of locomotives, and especially that of its dispatchers, can have a variety of faces. The darkest one was – for the first time – uncovered by children sentenced to a premature adulthood.

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⁵⁸ Ibidem, p. 63.

⁵⁹ m. b. [M.M. Borwicz], [introduction], in: *Pieśń ujdzie cało...*, p. 39.

⁶⁰ M.M. Borwicz (Boruchowicz), *Literatura w obozie...*, pp. 68, 69.

⁶¹ J. Broniewska, *Tuwim dla dzieci*, "Wiadomości Literackie" 1938, issue 14, p. 4.

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Arkadiusz Morawiec

Janka Heschel's *Locomotive* (To Belżec)

(Summary)

This article concerns the influence of the most famous Polish poem for children: *Lokomotywa* by Julian Tuwim, particularly in three “Holocaust” paraphrases of this work, written by children in the ghetto and the concentration camps – the poems *Lokomotywa* by Jerzy Ogórek, *Pociąg świst* by Jerzy Orłowski, and especially *Belżec* by Janka Heschel.

Keywords: Julian Tuwim, Janka Heschel, *Locomotive*, *Locomotive* (to Belżec)