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Longing for Home: Nostalgia and Anti-nostalgia in Inter-war Polish-Jewish Literature

Abstract: This article discusses the significance and enduring presence of nostalgic narrations in works by Polish-Jewish authors that are often accompanied by motifs of anti-nostalgia. They derive from complex relations with spaces categorized as familiar and alien, close and remote, as well as complex, ambivalent experiences of bonds, distance, and loss. The intersection of nostalgia and anti-nostalgia brings together and intertwines Polish and Jewish traditions and discourses of nostalgia. The sources of the article are writings by the outstanding inter-war Polish-Jewish writers Roman Brandstaetter, Anda Eker, Stefan Pomer, and Maurycy Szymel.

Keywords: Polish-Jewish literature; nostalgia in Polish-Jewish literature; anti-nostalgia in Polish-Jewish literature; Roman Brandstaetter; Anda Eker; Stefan Pomer; Maurycy Szymel.

Słowa kluczowe: literatura polsko-żydowska; nostalgia w literaturze polsko-żydowskiej; antynostalgia w literaturze polsko-żydowskiej; Roman Brandstaetter; Anda Eker; Stefan Pomer; Maurycy Szymel.

Nostalgia and modern nostalgic narrations

"A longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed" and "a longing for a place" are the formulas used by cultural theorist Svetlana Boym, author of "Nostalgia and Its Discontents," to define the contemporary experiences of nostalgia.[1] According to her, a nostalgic feeling of

[1] Svetlana Boym, "Nostalgia and Its Discontents," *Hedgehog Review* (Summer 2007), https://hedgehogreview.com/issues/the-uses-of-the-past/articles/nostalgia-and-its-discontents [retrieved: 23 Mar. 2024].

loss and the yearning for lost places can be a private, autobiographical emotion as well as a collective, historical one. Reflective nostalgia is personal, referring to individual experience and the resources of individual memory. Restorative nostalgia, however, is of collective nature. It creates images of a mythical original home and "returns and rebuilds . . . one homeland," while recalling the community symbols important to the collective memory and identity.[2] "Evoking national past and future,"[3] restorative nostalgia acts as the "nostalgia for the future" and usually gives strength to national political movements. Both types of nostalgia can be accompanied by motifs of anti-nostalgia because, as Boym claims, "yearning is not contradictory to critical thinking, and affective memories do not release us from compassion, judgment, or critical reflection."[4] Boym considers nostalgia as a historical emotion associated with modernity and progress. The nostalgic longing to return to a lost place, in her opinion, is connected with the yearning to return to the lost time. As Fredric Jameson points out, "Nostalgia's incongruence with history" results in the "longing for what is lacking in a changed present, a yearning for what is now unattainable, simply because of the irreversibility of time."[5] Thus, nostalgia is related to an experience of modernization and modern acceleration of history and focuses on what has been lost as a result of changes.

Contemporary anthropological studies explore both emotions, as well as discourses and practices of nostalgia.[6] Anthropologists underscore the diversity of their forms and study "how nostalgic discourses and practices work concretely in different social and cultural environments."[7] Moreover, Katherine Stewart stresses that nostalgic "forms, meanings and effects shift with the context—[nostalgia] depends on where the speaker stands in the landscape of the present."[8] Thus, nostalgic perspective also refers to memory and history.[9] In the work entitled *The Key from (to) Sefarad*, devoted to the role of nostalgia in the culture of Sephardic Jews, Joseph Josy Lévy and Inaki Olazabal point to the significance of the historical

[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Olivia Angé, David Berliner, "Introduction: Anthropology of Nostalgia – Anthropology as Nostalgia," in Olivia Angé, David Berliner (eds.), *Anthropology and Nostalgia* (New York, 2016), 2.
[6] Ibid., 5.
[7] Ibid., 1.
[8] Ibid., 5.
[9] Ibid., 2.

factors and to the fact that "the idea of nostalgia in the Jewish world has . . . been studied in its occurrences in diverse historical settings."[10] They also indicate some nostalgic places and some historical moments that became objects of interest in recent Jewish studies. These include, *inter alia*, "Vienna at the End of the Century," "the city of Harbin in China," and "Orthodox groups in the United States."[11]

In this article, I wish to analyze nostalgic stories about places depicted in inter-war Polish-Jewish literature where one of the central *topoi* is the bond with "two homelands": Poland and Palestine, the diaspora and Eretz Israel. I shall focus on the works of four authors: Roman Brandstaetter (1906–1987), Anda Eker (1912–1936), Stefan Pomer (1904–1941), and Maurycy Szymel (1904–1942). They all belonged to the literary circles connected with the inter-war Jewish press published in Polish and were involved in the project of creating Jewish literature in the Polish language.[12] In their works, the nostalgic perspective is visible in two focus areas: images of Palestine and life in the diaspora. Thus, their nostalgic narratives derive from complex relations with spaces categorized as homey and alien, own and other people, close and remote, as well as complex, ambivalent experiences of bonds, distance, and loss.

Homelands of Roman Brandstaetter

The significance and enduring presence of nostalgic narrations is striking in the literary output of Roman Brandstaetter. Brandstaetter, in the inter-war period one of the most active, most renowned, and most influential Polish-Jewish writers and an ardent Zionist, was the only one from the aforementioned group of Polish-Jewish poets who survived the Holocaust. He spent the war period in Palestine, arriving there via Vilnius, Moscow, and Tehran. However, he decided to return to Poland—via Italy, where he was baptized. The nostalgic perspective, while also a polemic with the discourses of nostalgia and anti-nostalgic accents, are present in his poetry and reportages from the 1930s. In his post-war autobiographical texts, in

[10] Joseph Josy Lévy, Inaki Olazabal, "The Key from (to) Sefarad," in Angé, Berliner (eds.), *Anthropology and Nostalgia*, 140.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Eugenia Prokop-Janiec, *Polish-Jewish Literature in the Interwar Years*, trans. Abe Shenitzer (Syracuse, 2003), *passim*.

turn, we can find the records of his personal experience of nostalgia, as well as subtle analyses of the mechanisms of nostalgic memory.

In his work entitled *Ja jestem Żyd z „Wesela"* [I am the Jew from *Wesele*/*The Wedding*] (1981), Brandtsaetter recalls, for example, the wave of nostalgia experienced during his stay in Palestine during World War II. His detailed testimony—I shall quote it with some abbreviations—records complex emotions related to various autobiographical spaces of his life and home:

> This happened in Jerusalem, on a day in August 1944. I was sitting in "Café Europa," at the corner of Rechov Ben Jehuda and Rechov King George . . . [On that day,] I got up early in the morning after a restless night. I had had those nostalgic dreams again, kept in the "what to think about" mood, and they were so vivid that even after waking up, they preserved . . . this taste of actual reality while awake. . . . [Dreams] showed me the landscape of Kraków's Planty park in autumn, perhaps the one towards the Wawel Hill, or perhaps the one near Sławkowska Street, some non-existing/existing space. . . . unreachable but very close at the same time. While waking up [in Jerusalem] on a hot morning, when the closed blinds . . . let through the beams of boiling light, I could still smell the rotting autumn leaves and the moisty mist from the Vistula River. . . . On the evening of the [same] day, I sat down at the terrace of my apartment in Jerusalem. There were shooting stars at the August sky. The contours of the road cut white between the hills scarcely grown with olive trees. I closed my eyes and started recalling from the depth of time and . . . space Kraków's autumn, . . . and again I smelled, at the heart of Judean Mountains, this time awake, the moisty mist stretching from the Vistula.[13]

The narration focuses on sensations associated with the remote and unreachable place as well as mechanisms that allow its recovery. Nostalgic dreams emerge both owing to the unconscious, hidden work of the memory as well as to the conscious, overt "desire of another place"[14]—the place that is emotionally dear, homey but lost. By referring to the phrase "what to think about" from the canonical romantic poem *Pan Tadeusz*, the writer introduces into his story one of the Polish traditional romantic *topoi*: *topos* of nostalgia of expatriates, suffering caused by being away from Poland and yearning for the homeland. The poem by Adam Mickiewicz, written in 1834, is a work "marked with emigration," "emigree's dream"[15]—nostalgic,

[13] Roman Brandstaetter, *Ja jestem Żyd z „Wesela"* [I am the Jew from *Wesele*/*The Wedding*] (Poznań, 1981), 5–6. All Polish quotations have been translated by Justyna Piątkowska-Osińska.

[14] Boym, "Nostalgia and Its Discontents."

[15] Alina Witkowska, "*Pan Tadeusz* emigracją naznaczony," in Elżbieta Kiślak, Marek Gumkowski (eds.), *Trzynaście arcydzieł emigracyjnych* (Warsaw, 1996).

oriented to the past, referring to memory. In Polish literature, the *Invocation* and *Epilogue* of the work (where the quote used by Brandstaetter comes from) constitute a "template of expatriate declarations renewed by consecutive generations"[16] of writers speaking of their lost places. Nostalgia is understood here by Brandstaetter in its fundamental and the oldest meaning as "the feelings of suffering related to *mal du pays* or homesickness."[17] Through intertextual reference to Mickiewicz's poem, the writer inscribes his personal situation into Polish collective experience and its culturally established patterns. He also reaches for means characteristic of the poetics of nostalgia. He superimposes—just as in the cinematic technique of superimposition—the images of two spaces:[18] Jerusalem, where he is staying, and Kraków, which he dreams about while asleep and awake.

Similar memories and similarly constructed images of "places where one thinks of other places"[19] as well as practices of "picking out time from time"[20] return several times in the writer's post-war writings. This is the case in his works from the volume *Krąg biblijny i franciszkański* [The Biblical and Franciscan Circle] (1981), where he recalls his journey to Palestine in 1935 and his stay there in the years 1941 to 1945. In his memories about traveling to Palestine in 1935, the writer focuses on recalling the past as the epoch unaware of the approaching Holocaust and then contemplating the world as the "home of peace."[21] In his narratives about the wartime in Jerusalem, where he managed to escape from German-occupied Poland, he accentuates the sense of expatriation from Europe, where he feels at home. It is about Jerusalem that Brandtsaetter writes as about a place that "seems . . . alien and remote, [similarly as] . . . the land that is not our land, and the house which is a wanderer's tent in the desert of the world."[22] The feeling of alienation is alleviated by landscapes associated

[16] Agnieszka Czajkowska, "*Pan Tadeusz* Konwicki(ego)," in Bogusław Dopart (ed.), *„Pan Tadeusz" i jego dziedzictwo. Recepcja* (Kraków, 2006), 237.

[17] Lévy, Olazabal, "The Key from (to) Sefarad," 140.

[18] Boym, "Nostalgia and Its Discontents."

[19] Ondine Park, Tonya K. Davidson, Rob Shields, "Introduction," in Ondine Park, Tonya K. Davidson, Rob Shields (eds.), *Ecologies of Affect: Placing Nostalgia, Desire, and Hope* (Waterloo, 2011), 1.

[20] Boym, "Nostalgia and Its Discontents."

[21] Roman Brandstaetter, "Wstąpienie w człowieka" [Incarnation], in id., *Krąg biblijny i franciszkański* [The Biblical and Franciscan Circle] (Warsaw, 1981), 264.

[22] Roman Brandstaetter, "Droga do Assyżu" [Road to Assisi], in id., *Krąg biblijny i franciszkański*, 9.

with Poland, for example from "the Valley of the Cross, where there are only mountains resembling . . . our homey Subcarpathian Region,"[23] or the image of a V-shaped formation of storks flying to the north.

Brandstaetter's post-war autobiographical texts analyzed here have the clear form of a palinode: they offer a reversal, negation, and withdrawal from the position represented in his works from the inter-war period.[24] The crucial change here concerns his choosing of the homeland. The writer corrects and nuances his earlier valuation of both home spaces: Poland and Palestine, diaspora, and Eretz Israel. At the heart of Brandstaeter's inter-war poetry was the image of Eretz Israel—the "cedar homeland."[25] In turn, in his texts from the 1980s collected in the volumes *Krąg biblijny i franciszkański* (1981) and *Bardzo krótkie i nieco dłuższe opowieści* [Very Short and Slightly Longer Stories] (1984), memories of Poland—the shtetls, villages, and rivers—are at the forefront. The very enumeration of the local names he introduces here "sounds . . . full of poetry and memories" and brings associations with "events from the times . . . of childhood and youth, with the colours and aromas of the fields, meadows, gardens, of which just a bitter knowledge about the lost and not regained paradise remains."[26] This sort of attachment to places of childhood and youth represents emotions that Boym refers to as the "intimacy of diaspora."[27]

Thus, his late autobiographical prose is abundant with reflective nostalgia, while his early inter-war works were dominated by restorative nostalgia.[28] Although these forms of nostalgia can intersect, and the ideas about what is past are, in both cases, rooted in present experiences, both types of nostalgia use different narrations and different methods of constructing images of the places. Reflective nostalgia concerns the individual experience of loss, refers to personal memory resources, is driven by the wish of individual return home, and concentrates on specific facts and actual circumstances. Restorative nostalgia is focused on the restoration

[23] Ibid., 9.

[24] [Janusz Sławiński] js, "Palinodia," in Michał Głowiński, Teresa Kostkiewiczowa, Aleksandra Okopień-Sławińska, Janusz Sławiński, *Słownik terminów literackich* (Warsaw, 1998), 368.

[25] Roman Brandstaetter, "Ojczyzna" [Homeland], in Eugenia Prokop-Janiec (ed.), *Międzywojenna poezja polsko-żydowska. Antologia* (Kraków, 1996), 164.

[26] Roman Brandstaetter, "Raj nieodzyskany" [Paradise Unrecovered], in id., *Bardzo krótkie i nieco dłuższe opowieści* [Very Short and Slightly Longer Stories] (Poznań, 1984), 172.

[27] Boym, "Nostalgia and Its Discontents."

[28] Ibid.

of the past, on "returning and restoring . . . the homeland,"[29] the mythical home of the community, and introduces an interplay between the biography of an individual and the biography of a nation. Its rhetorical devices are community symbols that are important to collective memory and group identity.

This rhetoric of restorative nostalgia is visible in Brandstaetter's poem "Elegia" [Elegy] (1934). The images of spring landscapes of Warsaw, its streets, alleys, and banks of the Vistula give way to the vision of remote "homeland fields" of Palestine, the Lebanon Mountains, the tents of Biblical patriarchs and fields where the Chalutzim work:

> Że nie dla mnie tu dzisiaj te białe kasztany
> I wezbrane zielenią woniejące drzewa,
> Że chłodem nie orzeźwię mych piersi zbolałych
> Pod najpiękniejszym kręgiem warszawskiego nieba.
> . . .
> Bo serce moje rwie się do ojczystych łanów
> I do dłońmi chaluca powiązanych snopów,
> Do ziemi drżącej w cieniu smukłego Libanu
> I śpiącej pod płótnami przewiewnych namiotów.
> ("Elegia")[30]

> [And these are not for me, these white chestnuts / and the aromatic blooming trees / and I shall not refresh my ailing chest / with the most beautiful circle of the Warsaw sky.
> . . .
> Because my heart longs for the homeland fields, / and for the sheaves tied by the Chalutz, / for the soil shivering in the shade of smooth Lebanon / and sleeping under the canvas of the airy tents.]

The poetic map of Warsaw is constructed through specific images, referred to personal experience, and rooted in the time of individual experiences. In contrast, the Palestinian map that expresses, as Brandstaetter put it in his poetic programme, the yearning for a Hebrew homeland,[31] is filled with symbolic religious and ideological signs, with historical facts

[29] Ibid.

[30] Roman Brandstaetter, "Elegia" [Elegy], in Prokop-Janiec (ed.), *Międzywojenna poezja polsko-żydowska*, 155.

[31] Roman Brandstaetter, "Sprawa poezji polsko-żydowskiej (Artykuł dyskusyjny). Poeci polsko-żydowscy," *Opinia* (1933), no. 23; id., "Sprawa poezji polsko-żydowskiej (Artykuł dyskusyjny). Społeczeństwo polsko-żydowskie a my," *Opinia* (1935), no. 24; id., "Sprawa poezji polsko-żydowskiej (Artykuł dyskusyjny). Kłody pod nogami," *Opinia* (1933), no. 25.

intertwined with contemporary realities. This vision of Palestine is "evoking national past and future"[32] at the same time.

The differences between discourses, practices, and nostalgic narrations in the inter-war and post-war works by the writer are most clearly visible in the way he constructs several variations of his account of his journey to Palestine in the mid-1930s. In the texts published in 1935 in the *Opinia* weekly as correspondence from his journey, he uses the scheme of a "return journey" narrative[33] and exposes the Zionist idea of abandoning the galuth. From such a perspective, the story of Jews arriving in Palestine is interpreted as the story of "Ahaswer returning to his homeland."[34] The meeting with the land of the ancestors is treated as the most important experience of the Jewish traveller:

> Stoję na górnym pokładzie, wpatrzony w siny pas mgły, spoza którego lada chwila ma się wyłonić ziemia. Nasza ziemia. . . . stoję . . . w ciszy ogromnej, wśród szumiących fal, pod słońcem wschodzącym nad Mare Nostrum, i po raz pierwszy od 2000 lat z drżeniem w sercu czekam na pojawienie się tej ziemi, która już tam za obłokiem mgły praży się w promieniach upalnego poranka. Nagle w głębi widnokręgu, w strumieniach złota, padającego z rozżarzonego nieba, zarysował się żółtą linią delikatny pas ziemi. Palestyna! Ziemio ojczysta![35]
>
> [I stand at the top deck, looking into the white strip of mist from which the land is about to emerge. Our land. . . . I stand . . . in great silence, among the murmuring waves, under the sun rising over Mare Nostrum and, for the first time in 2000 years, my heart trembles while I wait for the appearance of the land that gets heated in the light of the hot morning just behind this cloud of mist. Suddenly, far in the horizon, in the streams of gold falling from the heated sky, there is the yellow delicate line of land. Palestine! My homeland!]

In the post-war memories of that travelling, in turn, Brandstaetter uses the scheme of a religious conversion represented by the story about the "road to Damascus." At the foreground of his report, there is his approach to Christianity in the 1930s and interest in the Gospel. The writer's private

[32] Boym, "Nostalgia and Its Discontents."

[33] John J. Su, *Ethics and Nostalgia in Contemporary Novel* (Cambridge, 2005), 1.

[34] Roman Brandstaetter, "Palestyna potem i krwią płynąca. Ahaswer wraca do ojczyzny" [Palestine Runs with Sweat and Blood: Ahasverus Is Returning Home], *Opinia* (1935), no. 24 (122), 8.

[35] Roman Brandstaetter, "Palestyna potem i krwią płynąca. Kartki z okrętowego notatnika" [Palestine Runs with Sweat and Blood: Pages from Ship's Diary], *Opinia* (1935), no. 25 (123), 9.

map of Jerusalem at that time includes the most important landmarks such as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Valley of the Cross.[36]

Another palinodic replica is an image of the writer's return to Poland in the winter of 1947:

> poczułem w sobie przypływ gorących i niecierpliwych uczuć, które są naszym udziałem, ilekroć witamy najdroższe i długo nie widziane osoby. Wybiegłem z wagonu. Ogarnęła mnie świeżość mroźnego poranka i przeraźliwa biel lasów, uginających się pod ciężarem śnieżnej powały.[37]
>
> [I felt the inflow of warm and restless feelings that we experience whenever we welcome the dearest people whom we have not seen for a long while. I rushed out of the train car. I was overwhelmed with the freshness of the frosty morning, and the terrifying white of the forests bending under the weight of snow.]

These scenes of welcome to Palestine in 1935 and of return to Poland in 1947 mark the two poles of Brandstaetter's search for home and homeland spaces.

Towards diaspora and Polish discourses of nostalgia

The most important of Brandstaetter's inter-war works built upon the motif of nostalgia include the poem "Skarga Srula z Lubartowa" [A Complaint of Srul from Lubartów], published in 1935 in the weekly *Opinia*.[38] Its conceptual references include, on the one hand, the idea of diaspora and the question of relations between the Jews and the lands where they have to live dispersed, while, on the other, Jewish and Polish integrationist ideologies promoting the vision of the Jews' and Poles' "common land" and slogans of brotherhood. The poet employs an intertextual strategy there that, to use the categories of post-colonial criticism, can be defined as re-writing. Re-writing belongs to the forms of writing-back and counter-textuality.[39] In the Polish-Jewish literature, this practice of travestying and questioning the prevailing discourses and models of representation

[36] Roman Brandstaetter, "Bazylika konania" [Church of the Holy Sepulchre], "Wstąpienie w człowieka" [Incarnation], "Jak czytałem Pismo Święte w Jerozolimie" [How I Read Scripture in Jerusalem], "Emaus w Zebrzydowicach" [Emaus Feast in Zebrzydowice], "Droga do Assyżu" [Road to Assisi], in id., *Krąg biblijny i franciszkański*.

[37] Brandstaetter, "Emaus w Zebrzydowicach," in id., *Krąg biblijny i franciszkański*, 288.

[38] Roman Brandstaetter, "Skarga Srula z Lubartowa" [A Complaint of Srul from Lubartów], *Opinia* (1935), no. 15. Reprinted in Prokop-Janiec (ed.), *Międzywojenna poezja polsko-żydowska*, 193–194.

[39] John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester, 2000), 160–169.

usually takes the form of a critical dialogue with works from the Polish literary canon.[40]

The reference for Brandstaetter's poem is the short story "Srul z Lubartowa" [Srul from Lubartów] by a positivist novelist Adam Szymański. Written in 1885, this story opened the volume *Szkice* [Sketches], which was devoted to deportees to Siberia and was one of the most popular works promoting the vision of the Polish-Jewish brotherhood built on attachment to the "our common land." Szymański understood nostalgia in a way typical of the nineteenth century: as a sickness of the soul and "afflicted imagination."[41] The encounter of a Polish political deportee and a Hassid from Lubartów, people united in their yearning for Poland and in the suffering on the alien and "cursed land" of Siberia, was thus principally a union of "sick with one disease," "companions in suffering."[42] So, for both of them, "nostalgia proved to be a manifestation of patriotism, a sickness of those who loved the charm of their land—up to sickness."[43] Critics termed Szymański a "singer of nostalgia,"[44] and his short story was reprinted many times and, in the inter-war period, acted as a source for various Jewish travesties.[45] In the preface to the edition of 1921, right-wing writer Adam Grzymała-Siedlecki argued that the value of the work lies in depicting "the painful struggle of affection" and "arduous effort of feeling" for the hometown in a "dark Orthodox man who [it would seem] does not know any homeland other than the abstract Zion."[46]

While re-writing Szymański's work, Brandstaetter used an intertextual method of a "figure on loan."[47] He introduced the protagonist of Szymański's text and then polemically developed and completed his story. In Brandstaetter's poem, Srul, the protagonist, has returned from Siberia

[40] Eugenia Prokop-Janiec, "W kręgu Skamandra: Maurycy Szymel – Julian Tuwim," in Maria Antosik-Piela, Eugenia Prokop-Janiec (eds.), *Twarzą ku nocy. Twórczość literacka Maurycego Szymla* (Kraków, 2015).

[41] Mickey Vallee, "From Disease to Desire: The Afflicted Amalgamation of Music and Nostalgia," in Davidson, Park, Shields (eds.), 90.

[42] Adam Szymański, "Srul z Lubartowa" [Srul from Lubartów], in id., *Szkice*, vol. 1 (Petersburg, 1887), 15.

[43] Boym, "Nostalgia and Its Discontents."

[44] Wacław Wolski, "Śpiewak nostalgii," *Robotnik* (1921), no. 22.

[45] Marian Hemar, "Ból serdeczny rozwagi wstrzymywany siłą" [True Pain Withhold by Caution], in id., *Koń trojański* [Trojan Horse] (Warsaw, 1936).

[46] Adam Grzymała-Siedlecki, "Słowo wstępne," in Adam Szymański, *Szkice* (Lwów, 1921), XV–XVI.

[47] Theodore Ziolkowski, "Figures on Loan," in id., *Varieties of Literary Thematics* (Princeton, 1983).

and watches the white bean flowers he missed so much while deported. He has finally seen Poland's revival and the march of "Polish troops through Polish Lubartów"[48] (194). In the epigraph of the poem, there is a quote from Szymański's work: "Do you want me . . . to remind you, . . . to tell you what our land is like?"[49] In the short novel, this question is posed by a Pole with an intention and appeal for solidarity. Brandstaetter's poem brings about a tale about Poland—but characteristically transformed. In the new version, there is no Polish-Jewish dialogue and solidarity. It is a Jewish monologue, *soliloquium*, a disillusioned complaint spoken to oneself:

> Jestem bardzo samotny. Bo gwiazdy są zimne,
> I czarną krwią ocieka topoli słój lepki,
> I woń trawy jest obca, i pola są inne,
> I smak tej żywej ziemi jest gorzki i cierpki.[50]
>
> [I am very lonely. Because the stars are cold, / And the poplar trunk is sticky with the black blood, / And the smell of grass is alien, and the fields are different, / And the taste of this living soil is harsh and bitter.]

The introduction of a Jewish point of view and counter-perspective of alienation transforms the perception of Polish space and causes disturbing signs to appear in the descriptions of the landscape. The mild images of "silver and golden" fields are intertwined with disturbing signals of hatred, metaphors of "dangerous night" and "hurtful spikes of freedom," as well as an allusion to spilled blood. The punchline of the poem—"Czyż prawdą jest, że Polski dziś znaleźć nie można / w złotych kwiatach łubinu i strączkach fasoli?" [Is it true that Poland cannot be found nowadays / in the golden lupin flowers and bean pods?][51]—turns against the nostalgia idealising the unifying power of the "common land" and thus gives the text an anti-nostalgic meaning.

A broader, less exposed, but not less important context for Brandstaetter's poem is formed by inter-war works that make allusions to integrationists' ideas of Jewish-Polish brotherhood and introduce the motif of Jewish nostalgic attachment to Poland. It is present, for example, in "Palestinian" poems from the volume *Droga na Wschód* [Road to the East] (1924) by

[48] Brandstaetter, "Skarga Srula z Lubartowa," 194.
[49] Szymański, "Srul z Lubartowa," 15.
[50] Brandstaetter, "Skarga Srula z Lubartowa," 194.
[51] Ibid.

an outstanding poet of the Skamander group, Antoni Słonimski. In his lyrical works, such as "Jeruzalem" [Jerusalem] or "Rozmowa z rodakiem" [A Conversation with a Compatriot], there appears the construction characteristic of the poetics of nostalgia that involves overlapping images of the Palestinian space experienced at present and the Polish space remembered:

> Stary Żyd mnie zapytał koło Jaffskiej bramy:
> – Ogród Saski jest jeszcze? Ciągle taki samy?
> Jest fontanna? Przy wejściu do Czystej ulicy,
> Tam sklep z wodą trzymali dawniej cukiernicy.
> ("Rozmowa z rodakiem")[52]
>
> [An old Jew asked me next to the Jaffa Gate: / Does the Saski Garden still exist? Is it still the same? / Is there a fountain? Next to the entrance to the Czysta Street, / there used to be a shop with water held by pastry makers.]

A more intense anti-nostalgic tone is present in Brandstaetter's visionary and catastrophic poem "Czarny tors" [Black Torso] (1937). The name of Lubartów and the image of blooming beans appear here as elements of the setting of mysterious, cruel events. In the dreamlike, fantastic night landscape, symbolic images of destruction and danger prevail: fire, storm, death, blood, pogrom violence, and the suffering of the dying.[53]

Passing between the homey and alien places

Apart from restorative nostalgia and the polemics on Polish discourses of nostalgia, so important in Brandstaetter's works and having obvious political, national, and community significance, inter-war Polish-Jewish literature also introduces other variants of the nostalgic perspective. These include the already mentioned reflective nostalgia that focuses on individual, private narrations of loss as well as modern nostalgia caused by modernization and the vanishing of traditional Jewish home spaces.

The earlier of these perspectives prevails in the poetry of Anda Eker. Born in Lwów (now: Lviv in Ukraine) in a family with strong Zionist affiliation, she emigrated to Palestine but decided to return to Poland

[52] Antoni Słonimski, "Rozmowa z rodakiem" [A Conversation with a Compatriot], in id., *Droga na Wschód i inne wiersze* (Warsaw, 1985), 57. Pisownia oryginalna.

[53] Brandstaetter, "Czarny tors" [Black Torso], *Ster* (1937), no. 8. Reprinted in Prokop-Janiec (ed.), *Międzywojenna poezja polsko-żydowska*, 195–200.

shortly before her sudden and premature death in 1936. In her work, both Palestine and Poland are places where a nostalgic speaker yearns for other homey places. The poet usually presents them as spaces of private, intimate experiences. This follows the aforementioned rule pointed to by Svetlana Boym: reflective nostalgia avoids operating symbols and focuses on specific details. In Eker's poetry, this predilection is particularly visible in the images that register individual, sensual perception of "eastern" and "oriental" Palestine. The difficult experience of "living in many places at the same time"[54] and the complex emotions of diasporic intimacy are expressed here through the record of complex and variable feeling of places' proximity and familiarity, remoteness and loss. In her poem "Elegia z Orientu Do Lwowa" [The Elegy from the Orient to Lwów] (1935), the protagonist's nostalgic dreams feature images of her hometown representing everything that is personally "the dearest, past, lost."[55] The Lwów space is valued by her as homey, close, "familiar, the only one":

latarnie krzywe i mgła perłowa
grające rynny mojego Lwowa,
pluszczące dachy, siwe kominy
takie znajome – takie jedyne.
("Elegia z Orientu Do Lwowa", 1935)[56]

[curvy lampposts and pearl mist / the sounding gutters of my Lwów, / the pattering roofs, white chimneys / so familiar—the one and only.]

Eker's relationship with Lwów is personal and affectionate. Her city map comprises places important in her private experience, significant due to her affective bond with other people. "Fields of care" (to use the well-known term coined by geographer Yi-Fu Tuan) here include "nooks full of memories and associations"[57]—a house, a street, a square. Palestine's space, in turn, is valued as alien, and the distance towards it is created by the very reference to the category of the Orient, which builds on the division between Europe and the East.[58]

[54] Boym, "Nostalgia and Its Discontents."

[55] Anda Eker, "Elegia z Orientu Do Lwowa" [The Elegy from the Orient to Lwów], in ead., *Miłość stracona*, eds. Maria Antosik-Piela, Eugenia Prokop-Janiec (Kraków, 2017), 172.

[56] Ibid., 172.

[57] Elaine Baldwin, Brian Longhurst, Scott McCracken et al., *Wstęp do kulturoznawstwa*, trans. Maciej Kaczyński, Jerzy Łoziński, Tomasz Rosiński (Poznań, 2007), 170.

[58] Edward Said, *Orientalizm*, trans. Monika Wyrwas-Wiśniewska (Poznań, 2005).

The intersection of nostalgia and anti-nostalgia is particularly striking in Eker's poetry in motifs related to Tel Aviv. While describing the city, she refers to herself in the poem "O ulice! Ulice!" [Oh, Streets! Streets!] as a "foreigner in an alien, eastern city,"[59] whereas she also finds here the home she longed for. In the autobiographic poem "Córka gospodarza" [The Host's Daughter], it is particularly her stay in Tel Aviv that caused a wave of severe nostalgia for Poland. The text records the symptoms of suffering in detail:

> Leży długo ciężko chora, pokorna w swoim wielkim betonowym domu,
> nikt tu nie jest dla niej bliski i miły – nie jest bliska i miła nikomu.
> Ojciec dla niej ten dom wybudował. Długo na nią czynszowy dom czekał.
> Przyjechała. Nie chciała. Płakała. Płakała. Jest tu zbędna, daleka.
> ("Córka gospodarza")[60]
>
> [She lies for a long time sick, humble in her grand house of concrete, / no-one is dear and nice to her here – she is not dear or nice to anyone. / Her father built this house for her. The rental house waited long for her. / She arrived. She did not want to. She cried. Cried. She is useless here, remote.]

Yet also leaving Palestine gives rise to nostalgia manifested in the painful memory of the places bid farewell to[61] including, in particular, Tel Aviv:

> W nocy w pokoju się budzą te dawne, minione chwile,
> Bo księżyc zlewa na dachy zielony i srebrny swój blask
> Jak tamten sponad Kinereth, jak słodki księżyc Galilu
> Gdy spinał obłok z jeziorem klamrami różowych gwiazd.
>
> Lecz rano moje marzenie pryska dotkliwie, boleśnie,
> Czar się rozwiewa, rozpierzcha. I odlatuje gdzieś dziw.
> I wtenczas serce się kurczy, że nie jest wciąż tak jak we śnie,
> Że świt niebieski i biały to nie jest dzień w Tel Awiw.
> (*W nocy wołają wabiąco* [At Night, They Call Luringly], 1933)[62]
>
> [At night, in the room, these former past moments wake up, / Because the moon covers the roofs with its green and silver shine / Just like that over Kinereth, like

[59] Anda Eker, "O ulice! Ulice!" [Oh, Streets! Streets!], in ead., *Miłość stracona*, 165.

[60] Anda Eker, "Córka gospodarza" [The Host's Daughter], in ead., *Miłość stracona*, 256.

[61] Anna Kubiak, *Nostalgia i inne tęsknoty* (Łomża, 2007), 14.

[62] Anda Eker, "W nocy wołają wabiąco" [At Night, They Call Luringly], in ead., *Miłość stracona*, 168.

the sweet moon of Galilee / When it tied the cloud with the lake with the clamps of pink stars.
But in the morning, my dream is painfully broken, / The charm is gone, away. And the wonder isn't there. / And then my heart shrinks that it is no longer like in that dream, / That the blue and white dawn is not a day in Tel Aviv.]

Longing for home and shtetl

Nostalgia related to an experience of modernization and modernity focuses on what has been lost as a result of changes. The difficult present is juxtaposed with the former order; the cosmopolitical or universal—with the local. In Stefan Pomer's work, the author, born in provincial Brzeżany, from where he moved to Warsaw in 1930, cultural opposition between modernity and tradition is translated to spatial oppositions. These include oppositions between the modern city and a Jewish provincial town, or also Poland's center and the Kresy (Poland's Eastern borderlands). The place yearned for is, in Pomer's poetry, a "faraway town in Podolia" ("Elegia o samym sobie" [Elegy for Myself], 1931).[63] In his nostalgic narratives about the lost "home in Podolia," the poet principally records the difficult, alienating experience of dislocation. This experience strengthens the attachment to the former space of rooting and raises awareness of a strong bond with homey space:

Inna jest wiosna u nas w domu na Podolu,
Niż u was, w miejskich parkach gracowanych;
Kwitnie bujna i szeroko rozpowita w szczerym polu
Wonnym szumem kęp kąkolich w falujących łanach.
("Złota Lipa" [Golden Lime]) [64]

[We have a different spring, at home in Podolia / than you do, in the hoed city parks; / It blooms abundantly and broadly in the open field / with the aromatic buzz of tares in the waving fields.]

In his other poems, we can also find a biographic trait comprising the departure from the safe province in the borderland and feeling lost in the unfriendly space of a big city. Nevertheless, regressive attempts to return to his province (from the cycle "Miasteczko" [Shtetl] in the volume

[63] Stefan Pomer, "Elegia o samym sobie" [Elegy for Myself], in id., *Złota Lipa*, eds. Maria Antosik-Piela, Eugenia Prokop-Janiec (Kraków, 2019).
[64] Stefan Pomer, "Złota Lipa" [Golden Lime], in id., *Złota Lipa*, 112.

Elegie podolskie [Podolian Elegies]) are usually accompanied by waves of anti-nostalgia:

> Ujrzeć cię w skwarze południa i znienawidzić i przekląć –
> Ciebie miasteczko podolskie – żeś było jawą i złudą,
> Żeś było głuchym więzieniem i czarodziejską kolebką.
> ("Powrót" [Return])[65]
>
> [To see you in the heat of the noon, and hate you, and curse you, / Podolian town, because you were both real and illusion, / Because you were a dreadful prison and a charmed cradle.]

Thus, in Pomer's poetry, the Jewish shtetl in the Kresy can become neither a refuge nor the regained ideal home and its image includes overlapping elements of idealization and criticism.

Another space lost in the course of modernist changes is the traditional Jewish home. In Polish-Jewish literature, its nostalgic representations recall both the scenes from everyday family life and the images of holidays and rituals celebrated by the family. In the works of Maurycy Szymel, an important poetic topic is the yearning for the comeback home and the awareness that "one cannot return to home that has become distant."[66] The writer, born in Lwów but living in Warsaw from the beginning of 1930, introduced this motif already in the title of his debut volume, *Powrót do domu* [Return Home] (1931). The poet's nostalgic narrations start usually with a description of the contemporary alienation of city life: "the noise of the hasty streets,"[67] "the anxiety of vicious chase"[68] of people, loneliness. Such scenes are juxtaposed with images of cosy family homes and small family communities offering shelter and affectionate bonds. "Modernity as a source of suffering" does not, however, obscure the shadows of the past. Szymel's anti-nostalgic accents involve a tone of miserabilism and descriptions of poverty and destruction as witnessed by spaces of tradition.

[65] Stefan Pomer, "Powrót" [Return], in id., *Złota Lipa*, 61.

[66] Maurycy Szymel, "O sobocie utraconej" [On the Lost Sabbath], in id., *Twarzą ku nocy*, Antosik-Piela, Prokop-Janiec (eds.), *Twarzą ku nocy. Twórczość literacka Maurycego Szymla*, 134.

[67] Maurycy Szymel, "Sobota" [Sabbath], in id., *Twarzą ku nocy*, 90.

[68] Maurycy Szymel, "Przyjdzie Eliasz prorok" [Prophet Eliahu Will Come], in id., *Twarzą ku nocy*, 93.

Conclusion

The inter-war works by Polish-Jewish authors analyzed here feature various types of nostalgic and anti-nostalgic feelings. They derive from writers' complex relations with spaces categorized as homey and alien, own and other people's, close and remote, as well as ambivalent, complex experiences of bonds, distance, and loss. It is worth mentioning that nostalgia is also present in other Jewish literatures that record the experience of transition and migration, such as the most recent Russian-language literature in Israel, interpreted by Roman Katsman using the poetic formula of "nostalgia for a foreign land."[69]

The intersection of nostalgia and anti-nostalgia brings together and intertwines various traditions and discourses of nostalgia. On the one hand, they activate the *topoi* of Jewish literatures, such as Eretz Israel, *galuth*, and *shtetl*. On the other, there are clear and strong references to the Polish Romantic images of the suffering of the expelled and expatriates.

An important context is clearly formed here by the ideologies of modernity. The preference of restorative nostalgia is related to the Jewish revival ideal and has a national aspect. Reflexive nostalgia, in turn, is often bound towards spaces of traditional Jewish life. Anti-nostalgic motifs, however, sometimes result from dialogue with Polish traditions and discourses and constitute a polemic, critical response to the Polish perception of the Jewish world and its relation with Poland.

Polish-Jewish nostalgias are principally oriented at different times and spaces: the Polish space, the space of the Jewish diaspora, the space of Eretz Israel, the deep historical past, and the recent past. The fluctuations, transitions, and tensions between nostalgia and anti-nostalgia also undoubtedly reflect the contradictions of the moment in history when the writers experienced the search for and the loss of their home spaces.

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