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Two Homes: From the Carpathians to the World

Abstract: The article delves into the profound meaning of home for refugees, a concept that takes on a new depth when one's homeland is ravaged by war. It examines the contrasting experiences of the Polish writer Stanisław Vincenz and his Jewish friend Benedykt Liebermann, both from the Eastern Carpathian region. Despite their different paths, both individuals demonstrated remarkable resilience. Vincenz, while in exile, poetically recreated in memory his childhood Carpathian home, which allowed him to continue his writing. For Liebermann, who attempted to build a new home in pre-state Israel after being uprooted, the destruction of Jewish life in his former hometown made recovering a sense of home immensely difficult. The author of the article suggests that philosophies about memory's role in preserving a home have limits, as the trauma of losing one's home is a highly personal experience. For Jewish refugees, that rupture severed entire cultural worlds in a way that defied simple remedies.

Keywords: lost home; roots; rootedness; belonging; oikology; reconstruction of the lost home; memory as the foundation of a new home; contrasting Jewish and Polish refugee experiences of home loss; Stanisław Vincenz; Benedykt Liebermann.

Słowa kluczowe: utracony dom; korzenie; zakorzenienie; przynależność; ojkologia; odbudowa utraconego domu; pamięć jako fundament nowego domu; kontrastujące doświadczenia żydowskich i polskich uchodźców związane z utratą domu; Stanisław Vincenz; Benedykt Liebermann.

The atrocities of almost any war are inextricably linked to the movement of victims wandering from place to place, often with little more than the clothes on their backs, seeking safety, food, or just hope, leaving behind homes, possessions, jobs, and loved ones. Therefore, the topic of the lost home, in its broad meaning, is strongly connected to the topic of war violence.

The two Carpathian homes – introduction

Let us delve into the topos of home, drawing from a narrative penned by Stanisław Vincenz and the theory of Tadeusz Sławek. We will then explore the concept of a lost home and its profound impact on those who have experienced it. To illustrate this, I will share the deeply personal stories of two refugees, Stanisław Vincenz and Benedykt Liebermann, each with his unique perspectives on the notion of a lost home. This will lead us to ponder whether it is possible to generalize the experience of a lost home, considering its deeply personal nature. To aid in this exploration, we will reference the text of the Polish writer from the last volume of his tetralogy and Liebermann's correspondence to Vincenz.¹

The two men mentioned might not seem to have much in common. Vincenz's biography can be regarded as typical of a Central and Eastern European intellectual born in the late nineteenth century. He was born in 1888 to a wealthy Catholic family in the Eastern Carpathians. These mountains, as it turned out later, would become essential heroes of his prose as Vincenz became an important Polish writer (whose renown grew only long after his death). Most of his literary work was written while he lived in emigration. He fled Poland just after the start of the Second World War, having spent three weeks in a Soviet prison with his son following the Soviet attack on Poland in 1939.² Despite these hardships, he illegally crossed the border through the mountains with his family with the help of local guides, spent the war in Hungary, and, after the war, in search of a new place to live in Europe, settled in Grenoble in France and in Lausanne in Switzerland. After some time, he bought a small cottage in the alpine village of La Combe de Lancey, where the family spent their summer days. Vincenz never visited Poland and died in 1971.

¹ Stanisław Vincenz, *Na wysokiej połoninie*, [vol. 4:] *Barwinkowy wianek* (Warszawa, 1983), 120–131 [chapter *W domu*] and Benedykt Liebermann, Letters to Irena and Stanisław Vincenz, Archive of Stanisław Vincenz [henceforth: ASV], Ossolineum Library Wrocław, call number 17630.

² The family of Vincenz left their Carpathian home secretly one spring night in 1940. First, Vincenz's two sons left, followed by Vincenz and other members of the family. They went by foot, crossing the mountains towards Hungary. After several, sometimes life-threatening, events, they found their rescue. They spent the war years first in Budapest and later in Nogradveroce, as it was already too late to move further to the west of Europe. Hungarians were friendly to the Vincenz family. Stanisław had many friends there, yet they spent the war years in constant fear, ready to escape at any moment. Mirosława Ołdakowska-Kufłowa, *Stanisław Vincenz – pisarz, humanista, orędownik zbliżenia narodów. Biografia* (Lublin, 2006), 208–220.

Benedykt Liebermann, called Benno or Benno by his friends, also represents a typical biography of a Central and Eastern European intellectual born in the late nineteenth century. He was born and lived in Stanisławów (today called Ivano-Frankivsk), a town in former Galicia, former Poland, and now Ukraine, into a rich Jewish family whose wealth originated from yeast and vodka production in the Eastern Carpathian Mountains.³ Holding a Ph.D. in law, Liebermann was involved in local intellectual circles and never suffered financial problems. He left Poland with his family in 1939 and settled in the north of today's Israel on a property that his father had purchased a few years earlier. The outbreak of the war, fears for his father and other relatives who had stayed in Stanisławów, and, at the same time, confrontation with a very difficult economic and political situation in a country ruled by the British, with their not exactly friendly attitude toward the Jewish newcomers,⁴ had a negative influence on Liebermann's frame of mind. He died in 1950.

These two men might not seem comparable at first sight. However, there is a strong connection between them. Apart from being friends, they were brought up in similar times, in similar places, and in similar homes, with similar material status and quite similar social status.

Home – between *oikos* and *polis*

Tadeusz Sławek and Aleksandra Kunce in their works⁵ adapt the term *oikology* to the humanities. The term applies to the science of houses and homes and derives from two different ways of understanding the home: private (*oikos*) and common (*polis*). Sławek studies the meaning of the question “where?” in the context of understanding what “home”

³ The sources of Liebermann's family history and the house in northern Israel are from the Beit Liebermann Museum in Nahariya, from his letters to Stanisław Vincenz, and from conversations with Liebermann's daughter, Rachel Evenine. Benedykt Liebermann (letters to Stanisław Vincenz), 1946–1950, ASV, call number 17630/II, 145–234. Stanisław Vincenz (a letter to Benedykt Lieberman), 1950, ASV, call number 17654/II, 299–300. Benedykt Liebermann (two letters to Irena Vincenz), 1947–1950, ASV, 17682/III, 165–170.

⁴ Avital Ginat, “British Mandate for Palestine,” in Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell et al. (eds.), *International Encyclopedia of the First World War, 1914–1918*, https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/pdf/1914-1918-Online-british_mandate_for_palestine-2018-12-07.pdf [retrieved: 22 Jan. 2024].

⁵ Tadeusz Sławek, Aleksandra Kunce, *Oikology: Return* (Katowice, 2020); Tadeusz Sławek, Aleksandra Kunce, Zbigniew Kadłubek, *Oikologia. Nauka o domu* (Katowice, 2013); Tadeusz Sławek, “Gdzie? Rozważania oikologiczne,” *Anthropos* 16/17 (2011), 1–22.

is. He points out that, to answer this question, it is crucial to consider the place—(locum, location)—and broadly understood space (which is not only the physical environment but also culture, people, smells, impressions, etc.). He adds another crucial element of “home”—“doing,” meaning the human activity in this space. Sławek also refers in his study to Simone Weil’s theory of rootedness, which I mention here because her thoughts were close to Vincenz’s heart. Weil’s theory connects to oikology by suggesting that it is not about a single root but a whole mesh of interconnected roots.⁶ Sławek repeats after Weil that every human needs numerous roots, and if one does so, rooting does not cut a person off from others, does not exclude or isolate him or her, but, on the contrary, introduces him or her to an entire network of connections and relationships.⁷

Equipped with the terminology and a concept, let us see how Vincenz presents the topos of home. Here, I propose, based on Vincenz’s text, to add one more element to the mentioned *locum*, *space*, and *doing*: namely, *memory*.⁸

Vincenz described the Hutsul⁹ house in several parts of his main work, the tetralogy *Na wysokiej połoninie* [On the High Uplands]. In these books, it is easy to notice that Hutsul houses play special roles next to the mountains and their inhabitants.¹⁰ Hutsul houses, scattered among meadows, far from roads, embedded in the landscape, perfectly fit the description found in the chapter *The House of Our Birth and the Oneiric House* in Gaston Bachelard’s classic essay *Earth and Reveries of Repose*:

⁶ Alexandre A. Martins, “Simone Weil’s Radical Ontology of Rootedness: Natural and Supernatural Justices,” *Theology Faculty Research and Publications* 767 (2019), https://epublications.marquette.edu/theo_fac/767 [retrieved: 22 Jan. 2024].

⁷ Sławek, “Gdzie? Rozważania oikologiczne,” 2.

⁸ The meaning of memory and the importance of the concept of memory in the work of Stanisław Vincenz we find in Kaczmarek’s exhaustive study: Michał Kaczmarek, *Proza pamięci. Stanisława Vincenza pamięć i narracja* (Toruń, 2009). The figure of the house/home can also be seen as one of the forms of metonymy of memory: Justyna Gorzkowicz, *Metonimie pamięci i zapomnienia w „Syrojidach” Vincenza*, <https://www.youtube.com/@pracowniavincenzologicznai890> [retrieved: 7 Feb. 2024].

⁹ Hutsuls are an ethnic group of mixed Ruthenian and Wallachian origin, inhabiting the Ukrainian and Romanian parts of the Eastern Carpathians. Along with the Boykos, with whom they border to the west, and the Lemkos, they are one of the three main groups of Carpathian Ruthenians living in the eastern part of the Carpathians. The term “Hutsul” became popular in the nineteenth century. The Hutsuls created an original regional culture.

¹⁰ Virtual exhibition “Vincenz’s Dialogues – Views,” curated by Justyna Gorzkowicz, presents a fascinating series of photographs by Lidio Cipriani, who, following in the footsteps of Stanisław Vincenz, presented the Hutsul region. See <https://vincenz-bluepointart.on.fleek.co/> [retrieved: 22 Jan. 2024].

Our reverie wants a house to retire to and wants it to be poor and peaceful and isolated in a little valley. This dwelling-reverie adopts all that reality has to offer it, while immediately adapting the real little abode to fit an archaic dream. It is this fundamental dream that I am calling the *oneiric house*.¹¹

I mention the philosopher Bachelard here as he dedicated another meaningful volume on the topic of the house—his monumental *The Poetics of Space*¹²—where he points strongly to the role of memory, which plays a great role in the perception of the house and, in fact, does so in a metaphorical way, as an inseparable part of it. It is an interesting coincidence that, in this work, as with the just-quoted essay, Bachelard cites some lines from Czesław Miłosz’s poem “Melancholia” [Melancholy]. Miłosz was involved in Vincenz’s life while both writers lived in emigration. One could say that Miłosz experienced the emigration house of Vincenz dearly while spending a lot of time there as a friend and interlocutor. Both great writers no doubt shared their thoughts and recollections about the long-lost homes kept deep in their memories.

Vincenz’s Hutsul houses represent the materialization of the concept of a dreamlike house, an *oneiric house*. Looking closely at his book *Na wysokiej poloninie*, we understand these are not ordinary cottages. If Bachelard had had the opportunity to read Vincenz’s prose, he would undoubtedly have quoted him in his essay *The House of Our Birth and the Oneiric House*, as he would have found most of the categories of home analyzed in it. While constructing his idea of the *oneiric house* and pointing to its various concepts, he could have identified the following constructs in Vincenz’s text: organic, anthropomorphic, metaphysical, as well as physical, and, finally, a universal house.

Reconstruction of the Carpathian house

Vincenz’s houses are firmly, physically embedded in the ground, having stone roots, having a soul, being mystical houses, strongly anthropomorphized and organically blended into the surrounding nature. Those descriptions are of great ethnic value, and they tell the story not only of the culture of the actual building process (or even before the building process

¹¹ Gaston Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Repose: An Essay on Images of Interiority*, trans. and annotated Mary McAllester Jones (Dallas, 2011), 72.

¹² Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston, 1969). See especially the chapter *House and Universe*, 38–73.

when Hutsuls looked for the right place to build) but also present the original architecture of those characteristic wooden buildings.¹³ However, here I would like to focus on another description of a house or rather “home” in Vincenz’s prose, which will best serve the idea of humanistic oikology and memory: a text about the house of Mr. Tytus, found in the chapter *Wiatr nad Bukowiną* [The Wind over Bukovina] located in the *Barwinkowy wianek* [Periwinkle Wreath], specifically in the subchapter *W domu* [At Home]. I chose this particular story and house because, apart from the aforementioned categories of Hutsul house, it is distinguished by roots based on two key elements: “doing” (meaning human activity) and the reflection on the house in memory. In this light, the description of Mr. Tytus’s house becomes particularly important. Reading carefully what is said between the lines, one can assume that Vincenz was not describing Mr. Tytus’s house in this fragment but was talking about his own home, the lost home for which he longed and which was for him the base—a tangle of branches, roots intertwining in some cosmic knot, from which a solid trunk emerges—a unique coil of relationships that shaped him as a man and a writer. Conversations with his wife show that Vincenz analyzed the topos of the house deeply. Here there are a few rather lengthy fragments from *Rozmowy ze Stanisławem Vincenzem* [Conversations with Stanisław Vincenz] worth quoting, as they present at least a few directions of Vincenz’s thoughts regarding the house. The following fragments, which are further elaborations on the topic, let us also identify Mr. Tytus’s house with Vincenz’s:

8.04.1964 środa: Nareszcie niebo jasne, o godzinie ósmej już siedzimy przy kawie. St. mówi: Ciekawi mnie, co ci przychodzi na myśl, kiedy się mówi o domu, jakie konkretne obrazy powstają u ciebie, czy może wasz dom, kiedy twój ojciec jeszcze żył. Wydaje mi się, że ty wcześniej straciłaś zakorzenienie dzieciństwa i dlatego może długo zostałaś dzieckiem.

Ja: Dzieckiem bez dzieciństwa?

St.: Tak, jakbyś straciła i szukała tego dzieciństwa. A teraz powiem o sobie. W przeciwieństwie do tego (może dlatego, że ja się obserwuję) ja bardzo często doznaję nalotu choćby przelotnego wrażeń, postaci, obrazów, co najmniej nastrojów wziętych z domu mojego ojca, a trzeba powiedzieć, z różnych epok mojego życia, a czasem nawet cofają się do tego domu, który znałem, kiedy byłem dorosły, wstecz do

¹³ Dorota Burda-Fischer, “Dom huculski, dom Vincenza, dom człowieczy,” in Jan A. Choroszy, Justyna Gorzkowicz (eds.), *Stanisław Vincenz i Lidio Cipriani. Dialogi huculskie / Stanisław Vincenz and Lidio Cipriani: Hutsul Dialogues* (bilingual edition) (London, 2024).

domu, z którego się wyprowadziliśmy, gdy miałem lat sześć. W każdym razie dom ojcowski i moich rodziców daje mi nieraz obrazy, ale także i nastroje dla tego wielkiego kompleksu, co nazywa się dom. . . . w tym się uwydatnia pewna identyczność poczucia wyrażenia „dom” z bezpieczeństwem. Dlatego przypominam sobie jakieś zaciszne miejsca w domu.

Ja: Przypomniała mi się ta książka, zgadnij jaka. *Ofiara* Zahorskiej, gdzie właśnie dom przestaje być miejscem bezpiecznym. Bardzo dobrze ona to uwydatniła. . . .

9.04. Czwartek rano: Cały Homer jest pełen Domu (*à propos* tego cośmy mówili niedawno o domu). Pamiętasz, jak Penelopa nie będąc pewną czy to Odys, kazała mu przenieść łóżko. Tyle szczegółów domowych, właśnie wiadomych tylko rodzinie. . . .

23.04. Wieczorem. St.: Mam bezsprzecznie dwie doskonałe cechy: świetną pamięć i jednocześnie dar zapominania.

[Wednesday, April 8, 1964: The sky is finally clear, at eight o'clock we are already drinking coffee. St. says: I wonder what comes to your mind when people talk about home, what specific images are created in your mind; maybe your home when your father was still alive. It seems to me that you lost your childhood roots at an early age and that is why you may have remained a child for a long time.

Me: A child without a childhood?

St.: As if you lost and searched for that childhood. And now I will tell you about myself. In contrast to this (perhaps because I observe myself), I very often experience at least a fleeting impression, characters, images, or at least moods taken from my father's house, and it must be said, from different eras of my life, and sometimes they even go back to the house I knew when I was an adult, or back to the house we left when I was six. In any case, my father's house and my parents' house sometimes present me with images, but also moods for this great complex called home. . . . This highlights a certain identity between the sense of the expression "home" and security. That's why I remember some quiet places at home.

Me: I remembered this book, guess which one. Zahorska's *Sacrifice*, where home is no longer a safe place. She brought it out very well there. . . .

April 9. Thursday morning: All of Homer is full of home (speaking of what we said recently about home). Remember how Penelope, not sure if it was Odysseus who came, ordered him to move the bed. So many home details, known only to the family. . . .

April 23. Evening. St.: I undoubtedly have two excellent qualities: a great memory and at the same time the gift of forgetting.]¹⁴

Vincenz most likely used his experiences and thoughts to create his characters and actions. He spoke to his wife on 15 June 1964 on a Monday morning, "Już sam nieraz nie wiem, co prawda, a co ja sam wymyśliłem."

¹⁴ Irena Vincenzowa, "Rozmowy ze Stanisławem Vincenzem 1964," *Regiony* (1998), 4:37–60. Translation to English by the author of the article.

[Sometimes I myself don't know what's true and what I made up.],¹⁵ or earlier, on 19 June 1956, in La Combe: "Powie ci coś, tylko tobie to mówię: z tą *Starą wiosną* i ze wszystkim, co teraz piszę, jest tak, jakbym o sobie pisał, nie pamiętnikowo, tylko symbolicznie." [I'll tell you something, and I'm telling only you: with this *Old Spring* and with everything I'm writing now, it's as if I were writing about myself, not as if in a diary, but symbolically.]¹⁶ This admission of self-creation, combined with Vincenz's earlier thoughts about the house, allows us to clarify the analysis of Mr. Tytus's house.

Mr. Tytus, as Vincenz describes, inherited his adventurous, Cossack nature from his ancestors. He returned to his home in Pokuttia, a region in the Eastern Carpathians, after years of living in America, where he had tried to settle but did not find peace. We meet him when he comes home to collect a few items and horses; he spends a night and a day and then goes to a relative's wedding, which was his actual reason for his coming back from abroad. He is in a rather melancholic mood; from subtle hints, we understand that he went through some troubles, was divorced, and takes his time to think over his problems. He does not feel happy and certainly is not satisfied with the life he had in America. Crossing the threshold of the old house is full of nostalgia and tenderness when he utters words about his childhood home, which reflected a hope, a promise that what will come later will be great.

And so the narrator adds, "nadzieja jego splotła się z wiarą w przestrzeń" [his hope was intertwined with faith in space].¹⁷ As a child and an energetic youth, Mr. Tytus was particularly fond of steppes, large spaces, endless oceans, and high mountain plateaus as far away as East Africa. It was then, as a young man on the threshold of a great life, that he dreamed of a house as a tower as high as the Tower of Babel, from which half of the earth could be seen. Knowing Vincenz's story *Odwrotny cud* [Reverse Miracle],¹⁸ which talks about a great king who decided to build such great towers in order to be closer to God and to obtain all knowledge and truth, we know that this great idea failed.¹⁹ The young Mr. Tytus had little

¹⁵ Ibid., 51.

¹⁶ Irena Vincenzowa, "Rozmowy ze Stanisławem Vincenzem 1956," *Regiony* (1993), 4:88.

¹⁷ Vincenz, *Na wysokiej połoninie*, [vol. 4:] *Barwinkowy wianek*, 119. This and the following texts of Vincenz are translated to English by the author of the article.

¹⁸ Ibid., 71–79.

¹⁹ The idea failed because the king miscalculated and did not foresee that he was too weak to achieve his goal, that he would never obtain the whole truth, and that he would remain unsatisfied forever. But in order to face such truth and, what's more, acknowledge

modesty, so his belief in his tower was arrogant. Was Vienna the tower of Vincenz? Or perhaps Warsaw, the city of great hopes and plans and ultimately disappointment, as Stanisław Obirek describes in his article about autobiographical threads in “The Post-War Adventures of Socrates”?²⁰ Does the wife described in the chapter about the house have anything in common with Vincenz’s first wife, whom he met and loved and with whom he lived in Vienna and then in Pokuttia?²¹ But those are only speculations.

Certainly, the disappointment of Mr. Tytus in America was tied to his unproductiveness, his lack of the aforementioned “doing” meaningful activity. This is what Mr. Tytus missed, as the narrator expresses it: “Gdy zmęczyły się marzenia i gdy uświadomił sobie brak prawdziwej aktywności i gdy siedział tak nocą, wciąż w tym samym bibliotecznym pokoju, tuż obok sypialni, a przypomniał sobie, że ma lat trzydzieści z górą i nic jeszcze nie zrobił, nigdzie prawie nie był, popadał w rozpacz.” [When dreams got tired and he realized his lack of real activity, and as he sat at night, still in the same library room, right next to the bedroom, and remembered that he was over thirty years old and had not yet accomplished anything, he was almost nowhere, he fell into despair].²²

It took Tytus a long time to understand that it wasn’t about rush and speed; that activity and doing must have deep meanings that have their source in roots. When he talks about himself standing in front of the stars, it can be assumed that Vincenz is expressing a thought related not only to his personal experience but also to draw an order of the cosmos that could be briefly summarized as the definition of home. We could try to outline this definition as follows: the cosmos consists of the stars that guarantee stability and around this stability is eternal movement; in this movement, one thing is connected to the other, like roots, and the memory of this movement is like the tail of a comet, a trace left in the sky, serving as a reminder of what is important. Without movement, movement in the right direction, the feeling of unfulfillment is overwhelming, just like Mr. Tytus’s when he sat alone in an armchair at night, trying not to fall asleep so that he could deeply experience his presence at home:

and accept it, experience and humility acquired with age are necessary. See: Dorota Burda-Fischer, *Stanisława Vincenza tematy żydowskie* (Wrocław, 2015), 114–119.

²⁰ Stanisław Obirek, “Dar skrzydeł albo o tęsknocie za zatopioną Atlantyda,” in Jan A. Choroszy (ed.), *Zatrudnienie: literat. Materiały, studia i szkice o Stanisławie Vincenzie* (Wrocław, 2015), 193–202.

²¹ Jan A. Choroszy, “Lena Vincenz. Szkice do portretu,” *Plaj* 55 (2018), 77–104.

²² Vincenz, *Na wysokiej poloninie*, [vol. 4] *Barwinkowy wianek*, 120.

I choć tak lubił patrzeć w dal, choć nadzieję swą wiązał z przestrzenią, niechętnie spoglądał ku gwiazdom. Bał się ich właściwie. Bo możesz tak iść, gnać, lecieć stepem-morzem, a one niezależnie od twego ruchu, ciągle bez przerwy spokojne, niewzruszone. Tak jakbyś zawieszony gdzieś u góry, spętany arkanem z promieni ani kroku nie zrobił. Sądzą cię swym ogromem, bezlitośnie przytłaczają swą wiecznością, bez przerwy szepczą ci, żeś takie straszne nic.

[And although he liked to look into the distance, although he placed his hope in space, he was reluctant to look at the stars. He was actually afraid of them. Because you can walk, run, fly across the steppe and sea, and they, regardless of your movement, remain calm and unmoved all the time. As if you were suspended somewhere above, bound by a rope of rays, and had not taken a single step. They judge you with their vastness, they mercilessly overwhelm you with their eternity, and constantly whisper to you that you are such a big nothing.]²³

It took Tytus long to understand that “doing” must have a deep, rooted meaning. He did not succeed in America, because even if he tried extremely hard, he felt that he had lost something along the way: “Jedno nie wiązało się z drugim, a kto mógł kiedy sprawdzić, czy wiązało się z całością.” [One thing was unrelated to the other, and who could check whether it was related to the whole.]²⁴

His accomplishments in America left behind no memory, but remained suspended in a void. And when you get lost in space, the only way to find help is to return to the port—home. In this port, as he himself says, there are “ludzie, człowiek, dusza! Rzesze przyjaciół pomocnych szczodrych sercem, z taką wiernością, z taką pamięcią i taką rozpiętością pamięci, jakiej nie było dotąd.” [people, man, soul! Crowds of helpful friends, generous in heart, who are so faithful, with such memory and with such a breadth of memory that has never existed before.]²⁵ The important role of memory in “the home,” understood as a base or foundation, is shown in the following passage about the dust that covers household appliances. This metaphor of dust can be understood as follows: undusted objects—unvisited places—disappear: “Ileż to dziejów, ile dzieł ludzi pokrył już i na zawsze pograżył pył taki.” [How much history, how many works of people have already been covered and buried forever by such dust?]²⁶

Mr. Tytus, walking on the floor covered with dust, imprinting his traces, rediscovers the place, brings the house back to life, dusts off its memory,

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 123.

²⁵ Ibid., 125.

²⁶ Ibid., 126.

and even restores its voice—when the floor creaks under his steps. The memory of home can be a source of great strength and inspiration; by bringing home back to life and remembering its essence, you can feel free and able to undertake creative activities. The reason for this is that the home offers “czarodziejskie tła błękitne i różowe.” [magical blue and pink backgrounds.]²⁷ It seems that, by using such a metaphor, the author describes home as a canvas upon which one can paint or rather initiate a new activity, such as continuing to create in exile, cut off from the familiar surroundings, from the readers. Having such magical backgrounds in your arsenal, having your home in mind, you can create incredible, meaningful things and feel like an important, productive element of the universe.

The memory of home faces the danger of experiencing excessive sentimentality, and Mr. Tytus or—as we assumed—Vincenz himself is aware of this. However, he again proposes a different approach to traveling back in time and memory. He proposes not a sentimental approach but a constructive one:

Wiatr, wielki głos wielkiego świata, do reszty zmieniał wszystko, cofał czas, zakręcał go wstecz ślimakowato, po czym zawieszał ten zwój gdzieś głęboko przed zaczęciem się czasu. Przestrzeń małą pokoiku wyniósł na coś jedyne go a bezpiecznego, jak jedyny i zupełnie zamknięty system w kosmosie, jakby nie było tej innej niekończącej się otchłani.

[The wind, the great voice of the great world, changed everything, turned back time, twisted it back like a snail, and then suspended the coil somewhere deep before time began. He turned the small space of the little room into something unique and safe, as if it were the only and completely closed system in space, as if there was no other endless abyss.]²⁸

This fragment is particularly moving when we realize that Vincenz himself lost everything material; even some of his manuscripts were displaced in the turmoil of the war’s relocations.²⁹ Nothing remained of his material home; his foundation, his “home” became the symbolic safe little room quoted above, engraved deeply in memory. That is why the words about Mr. Tytus, who sits in an armchair so as not to go to sleep, not to fall asleep too quickly, savoring his home, feeling a bodily unity with home,

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 127.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 127–128.

²⁹ Jan A. Choroszy, “Wstęp i opracowanie,” in Stanisław Vincenz, *Na wysokiej polonie (wybór opowieści)* (Wrocław, 2023), XXI.

giving himself the feeling that he is again in the port from which he once sailed away—this is why the passage sounds so poignant and symbolic.

We may consider Mr. Tytus's home the home of Stanisław Vincenz. We could risk stating that the perception of home derived from memory helped Vincenz continue his work while he was in exile. Most of Vincenz's oeuvre was created almost entirely while he was far away from his home in his beloved Carpathians. It is best and most literally summed up in his words:

Dom to takie schronienie jak JA człowiecze. Tylko gdy szczelne, zwarte i ciche, może zeń wypłynąć tęsknota zdobywczą. I wtedy doń dochodzi muzyka świata. Dal nie jest zagrożona, nie zatarasowana, lecz zapewniona, zawsze obecna—wytężenie do jej osiągnięcia niepotrzebne.

[Home is a shelter like the human ego. Only when it is tight, compact, and quiet can the “constructive longing” emerge from it. And then the worldly music reaches it. “Far away” is not threatened, not obstructed, but assured, is always present—no effort is needed to achieve it.]³⁰

The house in Nahariya

The great strength of Vincenz during difficult times was reflected in his ability to nurture friendships. Vincenz had many friends and he cared for them meticulously, writing and receiving hundreds of letters from them. Among his correspondents, some who also found themselves in Israel after the war, were his Jewish friends. In correspondence with Benno Liebermann, the theme of the house appears many times; it is constantly present. Liebermann was in a relatively privileged position because he did not have to see the total collapse of humanity and the destruction of his original “home” with his own eyes.

Liebermann and his relatives left Stanisławów (today Ivano-Frankivsk) before World War II for the north of today's Israel, to live, as mentioned, on an estate his father had purchased earlier. For Liebermann, who had to cope with the difficult situation in the country ruled by the British and who experienced personal tragedy in a new world, this was an extremely challenging period. Although he tried to cope, started a new family, and tried to look to the future with hope by referring to his old idealistic plans, he was overwhelmed by everyday life. Before he died prematurely and

³⁰ Vincenz, *Na wysokiej połoninie (wybór opowieści)*, 128.

tragically, he corresponded with Vincenz. His letters reflect the struggle with reality and a longing for the past. Vincenz appears in them as an anchor, an unchanging element in Liebermann's life, for whom his friendship with the writer was proof that not everything he had had was irretrievably gone. He often mentioned his intention to visit the Vincenzes, especially when they bought their house in La Combe, and he also planned to bring them, perhaps even permanently, to Israel. The latter thought can be read between the lines in his answer to Irena Vincenzowa's sad letter of 13 January 1947,³¹ full of memories about the former home in Bystrec. Liebermann, to console her, cited one of his friends, who said that Liebermann's estate was even more beautiful than his home in Stanisławów. Further, Benno said to Irena Vincenz:

Ein Sarah to mała posiadłość obok Nahariji (1600 mieszkańców), położona w północnej Palestynie, 30 km na północ od Hajfy. Przesłałem Wam przed dwoma miesiącami obraz domu, pisałem Wam też, że w Ein Sarze bardzo dużo drzew, ptaków i wody i że z wyjątkiem 2–3 miesięcy bardzo gorących klimat tu dobry. Skoro byś Ty, Reno, miała zdrowie i energię pracować, moglibyście tu prowadzić życie skromne, samodzielne, od nikogo niezależni, a Ty, Stachu, mógłbyś poświęcić całą swoją energię wykończeniu swoich książek. Jest tu kilku ludzi, z którymi można by howoryty [porozmawiać – D.B.F].

[Ein Sarah is a small property next to Nahariya (1,600 inhabitants), located in northern Palestine,³² 30 km north of Haifa. Two months ago I sent you a picture of the house, and I also wrote to you saying that there are a lot of trees, birds, and water in Ein Sarah and that, except for 2–3 hot months, the climate is good here. If you, Rena, would have the health and energy to work, you could lead a modest, independent life, independent of anyone, and you, Stach, could devote all your energy to finishing your books. There are a few people here with whom you could talk.]³³

Liebermann thought that Vincenz would feel better mentally in Israel than in Europe:

(Jest tu) sporo doskonałych ludzi z naszej generacji, ludzi, w których się wartości kultury polskiej i tradycji żydowskiej bardzo ciekawie skombinowały. Pod tym

³¹ Benedykt Liebermann (a letter to Irena and Stanisław Vincenz), Nahariya Ein Sarah, 31 Jan. 1947, ASV, call number 17630, p. 155. Liebermann's letters are translated to English by the author of the article. Vincenz, *Na wysokiej poloninie (wybór opowieści)*, 158.

³² The State of Israel was proclaimed on 14 May 1948. At the time described in a letter, these areas—Palestine—were under British rule.

³³ Benedykt Liebermann (a letter to Irena and Stanisław Vincenz), 31 Jan. 1947, ASV, call number 17630, p. 156.

względem znajdziesz tu może więcej atmosfery polskiej, aniżeli obecnie w Europie. A Telawiv, miasto, które bardzo lubię, z wszelkimi zaletami i wadami ma bardzo silne piętno polskie, więc nie czulibyście się tu obco.

[(There are) a lot of excellent people from our generation, people who have combined the values of Polish culture and Jewish tradition in a very interesting way. In this respect, here you will perhaps find a more Polish atmosphere than in Europe today. And Telawiv [original spelling – D.B.F.], a city I like a lot, with all its advantages and disadvantages, has a very strong Polish stamp, so you wouldn't feel like a stranger here].³⁴

Unfortunately, Liebermann's plans did not even allow the Vincenzes to make a decision, as it turned out that it was impossible to obtain visas because, in February 1947, relations between the British and the Jews were very tense.

Conclusions

Introducing the personal stories of two refugees, Stanisław Vincenz and Benedykt Liebermann, let us emphasize their importance in understanding the wider theme of displacement and loss of home. However, is it possible to generalize about the experience of a lost home? Based on those two stories, the subject seems unique to each refugee. Benno Liebermann well understood how to build a new house: not dwelling on the old one, but by creating space and by *doing*. He tried hard, and his plans to turn the house into a hostel partly succeeded: the house served as a shelter for newly arrived refugees from Europe who, having crossed the Mediterranean, illegally crossed the border of the British Mandate and were smuggled further into the country. They often spent their first night at Liebermann's house. The house also served as a shelter for Jewish rebels against the British government. Liebermann dreamed of building a housing estate for poorer people nearby; he wanted to recreate the former "home" of Stanisławów, where, as already mentioned, he was engaged in philanthropy. However, he lacked one of the most important elements of the home: the "space" that we mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the people, relations, and roots that could create "the home." He was looking for them and his rich correspondence can only serve as proof of that. However, in the end, it turned out to be insufficient for him. Vincenz was extremely

³⁴ Ibid., 158.

important for the newly built home for Liebermann and he wanted Vincenz close by. Sometimes, in his letters he wrote desperate cries, such as: “Oj, gdybyś, Stachu, tu był!” [Oy, Stach! If you were here!] ³⁵ or “Tak bardzo za Wami tęsknię.” [I miss you so much.] ³⁶

In the case of Jewish refugees, their loss of home had an additional dimension: it disappeared totally. The place (*locum*) was annihilated or taken away by hostile others, and the space, understood symbolically to include relations with the family, surrounding people, with culture, Jewish culture, it, too, perished. In the case of Jewish refugees, remembering home was associated with unimaginable pain. It seems to me that, however attractive the idea/theory of memory, which can offer the refugee a shield from pain and give a lot of strength, might be, it does not so easily work in the case of Jewish refugees after World War II. If looking for a comparable metaphor, we could say that their loss of home did not consist only in cutting it out by the roots. Rather, their home was also torn from their heart along with the roots. Vincenz, with all his difficulty, could imagine that parts of his lost space still carry on without him, but, for Liebermann, it was clear that Jewish life and culture in his lost home had ceased to exist.

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³⁵ Benno Liebermann (a letter to Irena and Stanisław Vincenz), 19 Feb. 1947, ASV, call number 17630, p. 156.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 221.

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