

Holocaust Studies and Materials
Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały

VOL. 10 (2014)

ISSN: 1895-247X
eISSN: 2657-3571
DOI: 10.32927
WWW: www.zagladazydow.pl

Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów IFiS PAN
Polish Center for Holocaust Research

Auschwitz Virus

Wirus Auschwitz

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.32927/ZZSiM.556
Strony/Pages: 874-884

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Points of view

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The Auschwitz Virus

Sławomir Buryła – one of the most competent Holocaust scholars in Polish literary studies and a consistent explorer of the main and still not described aspects of the Holocaust – has published a book, which constitutes a revelation and a puzzle.

As the author writes in the introduction, *Tematy (nie)opisane*[1] [(un)described topics] is an attempt at a "synthetic discussion of several significant themes that appear in Holocaust publications" (p. 11). The author chose three motifs: the fate of the Jewish Columbus boys, the economic benefits derived from the Holocaust, and the portrait of the tormentor.

The Impure Generation of the Columbus Boys

Before I briefly discuss the subject matter of the individual parts of the book, I would like to stress that even though the three topics are not discussed in an equally insightful manner – with the parts devoted to Jewish Columbus boys and the portrait of the oppressor being the most and the least revealing respectively – each of them has been analysed in a manner characteristic of Sławomir Buryła. Characteristic and, I dare say, unique. His style consists of an ability to include various contexts, erudition, a confrontation of literature with nonliterary disciplines, and, first and foremost, titanic preparatory work. The sum of these features makes Sławomir Buryła perhaps the only scholar in Poland who has read all the Polish publications on the Holocaust and also the only one who tries to synthesise them as a whole.

Buryła also has a characteristic talent for finding empty spots. He can notice an obvious and at the same time not yet described issue, one that is not so much hidden from one's sight as from one's perception, one positioned beyond the set of classic enquiries. One such issue is the fate of Jewish Columbus boys, that is, the generation of Jews born in the first half of the 1920s. Though members of that generation had very diverse biographies, its portrayals have been not only scarce, but also very uniform.

[1] Sławomir Buryła, *Tematy (nie)opisane* (Cracow: Universitas, 2013), 440 pages.

Sławomir Buryła's idea to examine the genealogy of the name of this generation led to the discovery of an evident mystery, a mystery lying in the open. For the hero of Bratny's novel *Kolumbowie. Rocznik 20* ['Columbus' boys, the generation born in the 1920s], whose pseudonym 'Kolumb' (Polish for Columbus) became a term for the entire generation, proves a Pole of Jewish origin hiding his double identity. Thus, it occurs that the most famous Polish generational formation of the 20th century owes its name to a young Jew, who became engraved in the memory of Polish society only due to a suppression of his origin. Its shadow, not included in the characteristic of the Polish lost generation, becomes an object of Buryła's interest.

Why has nobody remembered that 'Kolumb' from the novel was a Jew? The main reasons discussed by the author seem cruelly simple. First of all, the Warsaw Uprising is remembered as a Polish insurrection and not a Polish-Jewish one, so the Polish national mythology – autarkic and possessive of exclusiveness – removed the memory of the 'others'. Secondly, the stereotype of the Jewish coward that functions in Polish imagination does not match the clear evidence of Jewish bravery. Thirdly, the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto has dominated what Poles think about young Jews and it has suppressed the awareness of other variants of their biographies. While formulating these explanations, Sławomir Buryła, as usual, does not forget to indicate what must be done in connection with the case he has discovered and described. He states: "The history of small ghettoes is still waiting to be told. We must also recreate the biographies of the generation born in the 1920s, as the Jewish origin of a number of its members remains unknown" (p. 109).

Buryła's book has once again reopened the history of the Columbus boys (Polish, Jewish, and perhaps other ones too). The author's 'discovery' questions the conviction about the existence of exclusively Polish events in Polish history.

Rotting Gold

In the second part the author focuses on "three spheres of meanings that become topoi – 'post-Jewish', 'property', and 'Jewish gold'. Combined together they constitute a different topic – the 'New Eldorado' signalled in the title" (p. 119).

Consequently, Buryła presents the economic spectrum of the Holocaust, considering any values monetised and their circulation: from the early property assessments in Germany, through forced 'Aryanisation', the transfer of property by Jews to Poles, the later increasingly brutal looting at the stage of 'ghettoisation' and deportations to camps, camp searches, searching of corpses and digging up the ground near the camps, to sheltering Jews for money, murdering Jews for profit, and taking over of their property after the war within the framework of nationalisation and the waves of anti-Semitic purges in Poland.

In the conclusion of this part the author states: "So far nobody in Poland has estimated the amount of Jewish property looted in Poland (neither has it been

done in Europe – in France, Holland, the Czech Republic, or Hungary). There has been no estimation of either the property appropriated by the communist state and then granted or the property that in various ways fell into Polish citizens' hands" (p. 234). It is difficult to calculate the financial benefits obtained by Poland and Poles as a result of the Holocaust due to the unclear legal status of some of the property and/or because it is difficult to give a good estimate of its value (should charges for sheltering a Jew be counted as cost of living or profit?). Sławomir Buryła does not venture to do the accounting, though somebody (a team of historians, economists, art historians, material culture historians, etc.) could certainly offer an estimate.

The author focuses his reflections on the topics of profit, being all forms of articulation of profit – expected, taken over, maintained, or, finally, legitimised. In this respect, which is connected with the topoi of profit derived from the Holocaust, a significant value of Sławomir Buryła's reflections is the revelation that this topic has never disappeared from Polish literature. "Gross is wrong. His claim that Bogdan Wojdowski's *Naga ziemia* includes one of the few 'descriptions of digging for 'Jewish gold' does wrong to the Polish post-war prose. The word 'few' is rather imprecise" (p. 169). To support his statement the author enumerates the works written in the 1950s and 1960s (for instance, by Tadeusz Hołuj, Pola Gojawiczyńska, Jalu Kurek, or Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz), which mention 'diggers' and about a dozen other compositions that present 'Jewish gold' as their characters' motivation, a literary theme, a representation of relations between Poles and Jews, or a metaphor of a transformation of an individual during the Holocaust. Nevertheless, an entire chapter of *Tematy (nie) opisane* proves that the scope of that phenomenon, being the total amount of Jewish property appropriated by Poles, has not found its proportional reflection in literature and public discourse.

While discussing other literary works (yes, more like discussing than interpreting, as the individual texts appear as *exemplum*), the author reconstructs the topoi of profits functioning in Polish imagination and articulated by Polish literature. In these topoi 'gold' is a literary theme and a motivation for people's actions, it is an expected, though inconvenient profit, so one can see how the social imagination works hard predominantly on how to legitimise the right to appropriation of that property. The right (understood as *doxa* and not *lex*) should cleanse the profit and give it moral validation. Consequently, some of the topoi reconstructed by Sławomir Buryła had an actually very simple objective: transform all Jewish property into 'pure gold', that is, property free of any doubts of moral nature.

'"Topic" is by definition always plural. Sławomir Buryła writes that "initially Polish literature vociferously condemned not only 'the diggers', but also those who profited from Jewish plight" (p. 191). Consequently, there is a large group of literary works, which use the topos of 'Jewish gold' to show the impossibility of transmutation into 'pure gold' – a sediment of evil shall always remain to

turn against its new owners. This moral aspect seems to play an increasingly significant role in Stawomir Buryła's ruminations in the subsequent fragments of part two, and particularly in the final ones, where the author reaches an otherwise obvious conclusion that profits in the economic dimension resulted in losses in the ethical dimension.

Such a conclusion exhibits traces of the problems the author caused himself by expending much effort in the search query and neglecting to order his elaboration and diversify his conclusions. Consequently, the 'New Eldorado' part seems more like a patchwork of separate articles, of several approaches to the same issue, rather than based on a carefully arranged material. That order lacks sufficient conceptual precision, methodology, and an argumentation plan. For the author has identified the topic with the problem, and the collected material with the method.

The insufficient conceptual precision results in an imprecise status of the literature. The author treats it on the one hand as a source of knowledge and a testimony, and on the other hand as a necessary expression of moral doubts or judgements directed at those who benefitted from the Holocaust. But the latter approach gives his exposition a normative character, and consequently a reductive one, as it invariably leads the author towards a search for a moral right. For instance, in the conclusion of the second part the author writes that conscience "constitutes a significant (or perhaps the only) point of reference for contemporary reflection on the subject matter of Jewish gold and Jewish property" (p. 239). At the same time he states that a scholar's task is to "weigh the arguments, complicate the picture, and attempt to grasp the full picture" (p. 240). It seems that there is a relatively serious conflict between these two assumptions: regarding conscience as the ultimate context of the Holocaust commands the scholar to be biased (and take the side of morality), whereas striving for a full picture and 'objectivisation' of stances calls for multi-sidedness. The former leads to preference of texts, which offer a moral judgement on that phenomenon, while the latter requires searching for literary texts which maximally 'problematise' the moral judgement of profits derived from the Holocaust. This conflict results in not so much a necessity to choose between morality or objectivity, as in a requirement to define them both, that is, to reconstruct one's criteria of 'partiality' and 'objectivity' in relation to the interpretation. Had the author defined them, he would have seen the real problem, which he was leading one to but which he failed to name: on the one hand, literature takes notice of the ubiquity of 'post-Jewish' property (houses, gold, paintings, furniture, clothes), and on the other hand, it completely refuses to accept profits derived from the Holocaust.

This leads to a conflict between ethics and existence, which the author has overlooked, a conflict within the framework of which the moral right is in opposition to life as such, and not only to the life of those who profited from the Holocaust. If one moves beyond the reflections included in the book

reviewed, one shall see that the closer to the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, the more art (both Polish and European) questioned the possibility of achieving a balance between the living and the dead. All ethical systems – the Christian, the (neo)pagan, and the lay one – enter a state of crisis. If no atonement, no willingness to improve, no remorse, no compensation can lead to absolution, then Christianity proves helpless in regard to 'post-Jewish' property. And so do the (neo)pagan beliefs: in modern European art no offering, propitiation, sacrifice of some of the living, or killing the dead again can stop 'post-Jewish' possessions from spontaneously resurfacing or the increasing pressure of corpses. In a wider perspective this leads one to a picture of Polish culture (or even European culture), which makes one realise the ubiquity of the profits derived from the Holocaust and at the same time the impossibility of propitiating the dead. The debts incurred with the dead prove impossible to repay. This is why European culture is turning into a bookkeeper of its own catastrophe – inevitable, irreversible, and creeping in.

For neither in the ethical nor in the economic order are there actions, which could separate the 'dirty money' and return it – in an act of justice – to the creditors. In the economic sense, repayment proves impossible because the debt is connected with genocide and it shall never become a purely numerical value, and in the ethical sense, because neither Christianity nor any lay ethical system can specify what would need be done to achieve moral cleansing. In the situation where 'gold' can neither be cleansed nor returned, to the fore come the aesthetics, which depict the process of the unrelenting pressure of death exerted on the living. In the European culture of the last two decades it has been the aesthetics of horror. In horror films, literature, and dramatic works Jewish property returns as a blemish, a brand, a curse, which gradually absorbs post-war life and turns the living into the undead.

My comments on the aesthetics of horror do not by any chance impose upon Sławomir Buryła's book a context, which is alien to it. Here are his comments on the works with the theme of Jewish gold: "Jewish gold holds […] magical power. It becomes an object of universal desire, and sometimes of a mania. The individuals under its influence resemble zombies – listless creatures under the pressure of nature. Gold initiates and stimulates the transformation into a murderer" (p. 184).

Moreover, on several occasions Buryła quotes works that clearly allude to this aesthetics. Consequently, horror as the 20th century quintessence of dread is not alien to the author's ruminations. But when he uses the term 'zombie' for the manic search for gold, he introduces into his book a context subversive to his reflections.

The core assumption of the second part of *Tematy (nie)opisane* is that there exists a concept of good, which makes it possible to specify and fulfil the moral obligations of the living towards the robbed and murdered Jews. But horror shows not so much that death is more powerful than one thinks, as that the

border between decay and life is not entirely sealed. The horror of the Holocaust analysed from the economic perspective would thus be contained in the fact that the profits derived from it circulate everywhere, as capital does, dissolving the border that separates the profits connected with the Holocaust from those not connected with it. The more carefully Sławomir Buryła looks for literary works, which condemn any profit derived from the Holocaust, that is, works that present the looting/appropriation of Jewish flats, furniture, duvets, coats, furs, paintings, etc., the larger the sphere of circulation of the capital indirectly connected with the Holocaust.

Consequently, it seems as if the author wished to escape the nemesis he writes about. With the post-Holocaust economy ever unable to cleanse itself from the profits derived from it, the condemnation of such profits is in fact an attempt to establish a morally pure sphere, that is, the one from which such judgement is articulated. But the problem is, as Jan Tomasz Gross wrote in *Golden Harvest*, that the conversion of the Holocaust into an economic value has encompassed a too extensive sphere of life for us to be able to pretend that it is possible to reconstruct a pure axiology. If writing about the Holocaust is not to sustain this illusion of a pure sphere, then one should consider the texts, which *question or even reverse the circulation of value*.

From the point of view of capitalism such a reversal of value is similar to a transformation of a purchased product into invalid money: a bite of bread in our mouth turns into a banknote removed from circulation, shoes prove to be a paper check, and a house is not built of bricks and walls but of invalid bonds and bills of exchange. Such money denounces its owner in two ways: it reveals the origin of the wares and refuses to represent their pure market value. It turns back time, but instead of youth it brings decay. This is precisely the economic horror – the inability to isolate the pure exchange value from money. This is why, in my opinion, the 2011 play *III Furie* by Małgorzata Sikorska-Miszczuk, Magda Fertacz, and Sylwia Chutnik as well as *Noc żywych Żydów* (2013) by Igor Ostachowicz focus on the economic theme in the context of the Holocaust: in *III Furie* this theme leads to a decision to return a once looted coat to the ghost of the woman who used to wear it, while in Ostachowicz's novel it concludes in paying for whims of Jewish zombie children. Importantly, in both these texts the individuals engaged in the reversed economy have nothing to do with the Holocaust. They are not paying their own debt but one incurred by others. The reversed economy means intentional loss of value, an initiation of a transaction that proceeds in the opposite direction. It is haggling with ghosts and it has only one purpose – to halt the economic circulation started by the Holocaust.

The fact that I mention *III Furie* or Ostachowicz's novel does not mean that I accuse Buryła of an incomplete search query, for his lists of texts are always more than extensive and informative. I add new titles to signal that in Polish literature there is a kind of 'literisation' of the paradoxes of the post-Holocaust economy. In his poem "Always a Fragment: Recycling" (1998) Różewicz wrote about 'rotting

gold' (Buryła discusses the poem on p. 237). This perfect oxymoron names the influence of the precious metal, which increases the decay instead of the profit.

Impure horror

The reversed economy, which inspires horror and which, is also described with the use of the aesthetics of horror, becomes a challenge for interpretation of literature. For it makes one aware that after the Holocaust one lives not only on soil which, to quote Czesław Miłosz, is "burdened, bloodied, and desecrated,"[2] but also in an economy, which maintains the circulation of the putrescent currency.

But the aesthetics of horror are important also for another reason. It belongs to the broad spectrum of popular art, though it is obvious that it communicates serious questions and fears, fascinations and phantasms, and not artistic solutions or a specific level of works. Horror as an existential and aesthetic category does not necessarily entail conventional works. Yet beginning his reflections on the portrait of the tormentor in the third part of his book, as if fearing this triviality, Sławomir Buryła deems that art is divided into high and low. And this division determines the underlying order of the last part of his book.

This topic lacks a strong sense of coherence, because it has been insufficiently precisely specified. The author writes: "The objective of this study is to present the theme of the Nazi tormentor in prose written between 1939 and 1989" (p. 241); "Arkadiusz Morawiec has recently […] observed that there is no synthetic study of the portrait of the tormentor. A comprehensive discussion of this subject matter in the context of literary portrayals requires an extensive monograph" (p. 242); "The lack of such a synthesis might be surprising […]" (p. 243). But the thus formulated objective proves ostensible, because, as in the second part, the author fails to 'problematise' the core notions (Is the 'portrait' a theoretical literary category? How should one understand the "presentation of the theme of the tormentor" and the "synthetic study of the portrait of the tormentor"?) and specify the objective. One might as well state that there is no synthesis of the Pole in post-war Polish prose, or that there is no synthesis of 'woman' or 'animal' either. There is no such synthesis because it is impossible. A synthesis as such is a hypostasis – when it is made, it is always a synthesis of a certain aspect made from a specific perspective.

A synthesis of the tormentor could encompass the changeability of his portrait and the conditions of that changeability, the style of portrayal and the rhetorical/emotional effect, or an ethnic, sociological, economic, gender, or sexual profile.

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[2] Ewa Czarnecka [Renata Gorczyńska], *Podróżny świata. Rozmowy z Czesławem Miłoszem. Komentarze* (New York: Bicentennial Publishing Corporation, 1983), p. 119. The title of the English edition is *Conversations with Czeslaw Milosz* (trans. Richard Lourie, San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987).

As the author neither specifies the initial conditions nor fully clarifies the objectives, he makes a list of features and types of portrayals, which, let me stress that once again, is impressively comprehensive. He also outlines a certain order in the framework of which one can see the increasing complexity of the literary portrait in Polish literature and the decreasing simplicity of moral evaluations. This means that the number of characteristics increased with every decade and that their number and complexity was becoming exceedingly important, while the rhetoric of judgement of the tormentor from the period immediately after the war was declining. The stereotypical metonymies "German – Nazi – soldier – tormentor – sadist – inhuman creature (beast/devil)" became replaced with a series of disparities: not every German was a Nazi, not every Nazi was a soldier, not every soldier was a tormentor and not every tormentor was a sadist…

The reflections included in the third part of the book are of course much more complex than the conclusions I present here. But in this part the author's argumentation is based on a substitution, within the framework of which, he constantly changes the object of his reflections (from the portraits which, present Nazis as devils to the anaesthesation of the Holocaust). The relative coherence of this part consists not in the figure of the tormentor, but in the mentioned division into the high and low, into sophisticated and popular art.

Consequently, the texts discussed are accompanied with clear labels, which inform the reader that worthwhile art about the Holocaust can offer "a totally unbiased look at the Nazi and Germany" (p. 358), an "in-depth depiction" (p. 359), and a chance to touch the "mystery of evil" (p. 361). High art also "surprises" one and "forces us to accept the mystery" (p. 390). By contrast, art of an inferior quality can be recognised by its lack of "artistic depth" (pp. 363–364), its failure to offer "an original and new perspective" (p. 364), and its tendency to "easily reach simplistic conclusions, which do not rise above the level of journalistic reflections" (p. 372). It might convey "the helplessness in the face of the cruel phenomenon of evil" in the form of "the ineptitude of the formulated explications" (p. 377), while the conclusions of low-quality works "contain the truth of platitudes" (p. 378).

I wish to emphasise strongly that I do not question the author's right to aesthetic assessments, but I do question his right to assessments, which do not serve interpretation and which are consequently unjustified. It seems that if the author reconstructed his own axiological system, one would quickly discover that it was created through dissecting the "high – low" opposition into aspects. Thus the series of oppositions: depth – superficiality, originality – conventionality, disinterestedness – mercantilism. Such a set enables one to make the highest cognitional demands of the art devoted to the Holocaust, that is, to demand from it an insightful answer to the question: "Who is the tormentor?"

The author uses another pair of criteria: 'authentic – mediated', which complicates the matter, because 'authenticity' can result in 'superficial' art, while 'mediation' can give profound art. But the most important inconsistency appears

at the end of the book, where the author leads us to a "consent to mystery" (p. 390) as the desired effect of portraying and interpretative efforts. 'Mystery' is contrasted with 'transparency', 'expressibility', and 'comprehensiveness'. And this questions the assessments where the depth of portrayal or originality is treated as cognitional requirements, because 'mystery' questions the possibility of ultimate cognition.

These contradictory criteria result, as one might think, from the insufficient auto-reflection on the axiology used in the book and on the Holocaust aesthetics, and also from excessive trust in modernism. For Sławomir Buryła seems to assume that the Holocaust has its own canonic aesthetics. It can be correctly presented only through ethical works (discussed in the second part) and works of high art (as opposed to popular works), original (and not conventional), and authentic (as opposed to fictional). But the problem is that while the pairs 'high – low', 'original – conventional', 'ethical – aesthetic' had a hierarchic character, the opposites 'expressible – inexpressible' fit the scope of high modernism. The hierarchic oppositions can be resolved by pointing to more valuable works (more profound, original, ethical), while the opposition between expressible and inexpressibility cannot be resolved, because it is an opposition between Borowski and Różewicz, between Buczkowski and Hanna Krall, between Primo Levi and Samuel Beckett. Inexpressibility is similar to a doppelganger of modernity, its spectre, which questions the referential capacities of language and the connection of words with reality.

Sławomir Buryła, who edited Buczkowski's *Dziennik wojenny* [war-time diary] published in 2001 and two volumes of Tadeusz Borowski's prose (2004, 2005), certainly does not wish to make anybody choose between Borowski and Różewicz. He introduces a praise of inexpressibility into his reflections because the cognitional and ethical aspects of expressing the Holocaust have undergone conventionalisation. A substantial portion of contemporary art devoted to the Holocaust is based precisely on this obscene endeavour to fully present the inside of the wagons and gas chambers, to enumerate the victims and name the perpetrators, and to reveal and explain the mechanism of the Holocaust. In order to block the conviction about the visibility of the truth of the Holocaust Jean Baudrillard wrote that in the 1960s and 1970s the media images substituted the Holocaust and restaged it (while actually making it obscene). Sławomir Buryła refers to Baudrillard's essay *Holocaust* (p. 415) to support his argumentation about the value of the inexpressible. Thus he can suggest that we shall never comprehend the Holocaust, that its truth shall forever evade comprehension and presentation. Inexpressiveness is a counterbalance to the postulate that the Holocaust can be presented in the form of clear and all-explanatory images as well as in the form of words that determine what is true and specify the moral obligations toward the past.

But by referring to this concept Sławomir Buryła falls into a contradiction – he goes from the highest cognitional expectations to an expectation of mystery.

One might suspect that just as in his earlier reflections on the issue of Jewish gold, the author once again wishes to mark out a fragment of life not affected by the Holocaust. In the second part, that fragment was morality, which was to owe its revival to a clear and explicit condemnation of profits derived from the Holocaust. In the third part this fragment is to be the inexpressible truth, which becomes a condition for cognitional and linguistic humility. Hence, both these cases are about the cleansed horror of the Holocaust.

But inexpressibility, just as money in the second part, proves to be impure – it is a phenomenon that blurs distinctions, upsets orders, and questions boundaries. Much as rotting gold returns to us in the form of the reversed economy, the aesthetics of the inexpressibility of the Holocaust provides language in the form of gibberish, cries, and inarticulate sounds. Inexpressibility is a spectre that fills the living, depriving them of their command of language and questioning the reality of their existence. From now utterances of the living dead can be understood only approximately and only as a reference to something that still defies description. The signs the spectre confers are at the same time human and incomprehensible, hence they question the faith in the linguistic ability to cope with reality. They also signal that language has undergone the same process of depravation of meaning as human life during the Holocaust.

But Buryła's remarks on inexpressiveness included in the conclusion of his book indicate a different direction. It seems to me that I understand the author's intention and I even think that I share it to some extent. For Sławomir Buryła wishes to make the Holocaust a taboo again, restore its status of *sacrum*. Then, the Holocaust would be simultaneously a foundation of post-war culture and its inviolable layer, the source of the principle of respect for life and an unquestionable axiom. But the reflections included in *Tematy (nie)opisane* prove that the Holocaust appears as an impure *sacrum* – dirty, frightening, and disgusting. It is an embodiment of the reality, that is, of what returns in every possible world and defeats life in each of them.

As a matter of fact, Sławomir Buryła's book precisely discusses such returns of the real. The first part states that when Poles came to regard the Warsaw Uprising as something purely Polish, the Holocaust returned in the form of a Jewish Columbus boy, who before disappearing gave his name to an entire generation of AK members and forever joined the Polish with the Jewish. In the second part the author wishes to convince one that the post-war morality tries to base itself on the act of condemnation of profits derived from the Holocaust. But in fact the "New Eldorado" part shows that Polish literature contrasted the attempts at a reconstruction of morality with rotting gold as a putrescent foundation of all life, that is, as a non-culpable impurity, which was spread by the postwar circulation of goods and which clung to everybody. Finally, the objective of the third part is to maintain the sacral position of the Holocaust by giving it a status of the inexpressible. But the part devoted to the portrait of the oppressor proves that as a result of the reinstatement of the inexpressibility,

the living lose their command of language and transform into zombies unable to describe reality. Consequently, Sławomir Buryła shows the processes of the return of the Holocaust, but in his interpretations he strives for distillation of pure horror. But the returns he discusses are a quintessence of the impure, that is, of what blurs the distinction between fault and blemish, the living and the dead, and language and gibberish.

In this sense *Tematy (nie)opisane* proves that the horror of the Holocaust cannot be cleansed. And to understand this impure horror is to see the humanities without a foundation for reflections intended to mark out clear boundaries of the Holocaust. The distinctions used by science – into the human and non-human, the linguistic and the inarticulate, the high and the low, the ethic and the economic – nest a virus of decay, which dissolves these boundaries. This is precisely how I understand the Auschwitz virus, due to which no value in contemporary life can separate itself from the Holocaust.

Translated by *Anna Brzostowska*

Abstract
The article presents – based on a review of Sławomir Buryła's book *Tematy (nie) opisane* – a polemic with the approach to the Holocaust as an element of the historical process, an element, which can be isolated from modernity and to which loftiness can be assigned. Czapliński contrasts it with the conception of the 'Auschwitz virus', according to which morality, economy, and science after the Holocaust shall never be able to separate themselves from it.

Key words
Polish lost generation, profits from the Holocaust, the inexpressible, horror aesthetics, the real, Auschwitz virus