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## *Czasy wojny* by Ferdynand Goetel. An Attempt at Reading

### ÉMIGRÉS' MEMOIRS

World War II still remains an insufficiently researched period of the history of Poland and Poles. Quite a significant role in the discovery of its various faces is played by the memoirs of the Second Emigration. This is because of these fundamental reasons: first, these works were written under conditions that ensured the possibility of free speech, and secondly, the fate of the émigrés inextricably associated with the war and politics was falsified or almost completely passed over in Poland for half a century.

In journalistic and scholarly discussions (both in Poland and abroad) on the works of émigrés, especially those associated with the London milieu, the reproach has been and continues to be made that these works focus too much on the past. This unraveling of times past was once referred to as reminiscence, which had a pejorative connotation. One should bear in mind, however, that in general, the lives of émigrés were governed by the dictates of the past. “The émigrés were eager to turn to the past already during the war, seeking in it a background for the present. After 1945, the

past took on a different dimension.”<sup>1</sup> It often served as a political argument in debates over the Polish cause. In addition, there was a fully justified fear that the country’s past would be portrayed in an adulterated way, with many understatements. Émigrés thus replenished the “resources of national memory.” The clearest example of this is the information about the Katyn massacre. It is also worth mentioning that the turn to the past alleviated the severity of life in exile and was also an escape from the disappointment of the present. Many émigrés probably shared the opinion once expressed by the editor of the London-based *Wiadomości*.

“It seems to me that referring to a concrete past is a more real thing than idly plunging into the future. And ultimately, all great literature is based on such reminiscence.”<sup>2</sup>

## ON THE RECEPTION OF CZASY WOJNY [THE TIME OF THE WAR]

Let us now take a look at one of the memoirs, which opens up an intriguing field for the consideration of Poland’s history from 1939–1945 (1946). The memoir in question is Ferdynand Goetel’s *Czasy wojny*. On the one hand, the work is in a sense typical of the literature written in emigration at the time, as it is part of a broad current of war memoirs that began to appear as early as the late 1940s and early 1950s. Examples include such books as: Waclaw Grubiński’s *Między młotem a sierpem* [Between a hammer and a sickle] (1948), Władysław Anders’ *Bez ostatniego rozdziału. Wspomnienia z lat 1939–1946* [Without the last chapter. Memoirs of 1939–1946] (1949, republished many times later), Anatol Krakowiecki’s *Książka o Kołymie* [A book about Kolyma] (1950), Gustaw Herling-Grudziński’s *A World Apart. A Memoir of the Gulag* (1951, 1st edition in Polish in 1953), Zbigniew Stypułkowski’s

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<sup>1</sup> R. Habielski, *Emigracja* [Emigration], Warsaw 1995, p. 48.

<sup>2</sup> An excerpt from a conversation between M. Grydzewski and L. Kielanowski (Radio Free Europe); see: “Rozmowa o *Wiadomościach*” [A conversation about *Wiadomości*], *Wiadomości* 1953, no. 43, p. 5. The same comments about the past were made, among others, by T. Terlecki; see: T. Terlecki, “O *Wiadomościach* bezprzymiotnikowych” [About the adjective-free *Wiadomości*], in: *XXX-lecie “Wiadomości”* [The 30th anniversary of *Wiadomości*], London 1957, p. 54.

*W zawierusze dziejowej. Wspomnienia 1939–1945* [In history’s turmoil. Memoirs 1939–1945] (1951), and Klemens Rudnicki’s *Na polskim szlaku. Wspomnienia z lat 1939–1947* [On the Polish path. Memoirs from 1939–1947] (1952). On the other hand, *Czasy wojny* stands out in Polish literature for its courage in formulating judgments, especially in relation to the actions of compatriots, while showing the wrongs that Poles suffered from both occupiers. Krzysztof Tarka, writing about Goetel’s memoir in a now free Poland, aptly notes that “in his memoir, the writer included many accurate and profound judgments. Some of them deviate, I think quite significantly, from the stereotypical view of the occupation held today. Sometimes they can even be difficult to accept.”<sup>3</sup> The independence of thought of the author of *Czasy wojny* is also pointed out by Jacek Trznadel, who in one of his essays states:

Goetel’s book – although intended only as a modest memoir of things personally experienced and remembered – represents an independent attitude that is almost absent from memoirs and assessments of recent history.<sup>4</sup>

*Czasy wojny* was first<sup>5</sup> published in London,<sup>6</sup> by the Catholic Publication Center “Veritas” in February 1955. The second edition was published in 1990 in Gdańsk (“Graf” Publishing House). More recently, in 2005, *Czasy wojny* was published in Cracow with an introduction by Władysław Bartoszewski (Arcana Publishing Company). It may be interesting for us to see how the memoir written by Goetel, who undoubtedly was well past his prime as a writer, was received by the émigré critics of the time. There was a difference of opinion between some of the most important periodicals of the post-war émigré circles: the Paris-based *Kultura* and the London-based *Wiadomości*.

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<sup>3</sup> K. Tarka, “Powrót Ferdynanda Goetela. Ferdynand” [The return of Ferdynand Goetel. Ferdynand], *Odra* 1996, no. 6, p. 84.

<sup>4</sup> J. Trznadel, “Ferdynand Goetel. ‘Myśleć samodzielnie’” [Ferdynand Goetel. “To think independently”], in: idem, *Ocalenie tragizmu. Eseje i przekłady* [Saving tragedy. Essays and translations], Lublin 1993, p. 213.

<sup>5</sup> In 1949, the London-based *Wiadomości* published F. Goetel’s account of his stay in Katyn; these excerpts later became part of the book.

<sup>6</sup> The circulation was two thousand copies.

In the pages of *Kultura*, in a review titled “Świadectwo klęski” [A testimony to defeat],<sup>7</sup> Janusz Jasińczyk reproaches Goetel for not clarifying in his memoir the slander of his collaboration with the propaganda department of the Warsaw district [of the General Government – translator’s note]. He also accuses him of inaccuracies in his accounts of, among other things, Rydz-Śmigły’s escape from Romania or the assassination of Kutschera. Jasińczyk says that Goetel writes as if he really has not read even the most important accounts of the times he describes. He ends the review by stating: “It is a sad spectacle when an excellent writer confirms his own defeat and the defeat of his nation with an artistic failure.”<sup>8</sup>

Wojciech Gniatczyński, on the other hand, in a review with the telling title: “Tak było... Tak było...” [That’s how it was... That’s how it was...],<sup>9</sup> published in *Wiadomości*, appreciates, among other things, the fact that Goetel recreated “the atmosphere of Warsaw, charged with electricity and Polishness.” He also points out that Goetel’s book is a journalistic book, not a work of art. Gniatczyński further notes that Goetel shows different types of barbarism (both in Katyn and in German crimes). In his account of some events, he may have made mistakes because he was recreating facts from his (unreliable, after all) memory, having lost his notes earlier. However, Goetel managed to create a synthesis of these times and these behaviors. And moreover,

Goetel seeks the truth at all costs. Therefore, more than one proposition or reminder of a fact in his book will not be liked by many. To the reader, to the nation, Goetel speaks as an equal partner and not as a primitive heathen. Among Poles, only writers do this, and not all of them.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> [J. Poray-Biernacki] J. Jasińczyk, “Świadectwo klęski” [A testimony to defeat], *Kultura* 1955, no. 7/8 (93/94), pp. 208–210.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 210.

<sup>9</sup> W. Gniatczyński, “Tak było... Tak było” [That’s how it was... That’s how it was], *Wiadomości* 1956, no. 18, p. 2. I quote the current excerpt and subsequent ones verbatim, preserving the syntax and punctuation typical of *Wiadomości*.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*.

## GOETEL DURING THE WAR

At the outbreak of the war, Ferdynand Goetel (a novelist, publicist, and playwright) was already a mature man (49 years old),<sup>11</sup> had lived through the experience of World War I (including exile to Turkmenistan),<sup>12</sup> and had been a recognized writer.<sup>13</sup> In September 1939, he was a member of the Presidium of the Civic Committee for the Defense of Warsaw.<sup>14</sup> During the occupation, he was active (along with Adolf Nowaczyński, among others) in a literary committee that organized a popular canteen for writers and their families in the Warsaw premises of the former Polish Writers' Union.<sup>15</sup> In addition, in 1943–1944 he co-edited (with Wilam Horzyca) the clandestine magazine *Nurt*. In April 1943, in consultation with the underground authorities, he travelled to Katyn to the site of the massacre discovered by the Germans. As early as then, there were rumors and slanders about Goetel's collaboration with the Germans. In exile, he was cleared of the charge of collaboration by the relevant units of the Polish II Corps as early as in late 1945 and early 1946.

Nevertheless even after these conversations a “distasteful memory” remained, as one can read in *Czasy wojny*.<sup>16</sup> The matter was ended by General Władysław Anders himself, to whom Goetel wrote personally. Below we quote an excerpt from that letter.

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<sup>11</sup> Born in 1890 in Sucha Beskidzka, died 1960 in London; see: K. Polechoński, *Ferdynand Goetel*, in: K. Dybciak and Z. Kudelski, eds., *Leksykon kultury polskiej poza krajem od roku 1939* [Lexicon of Polish culture outside of the Poland since 1939], vol. 1, Lublin 2000, p. 131.

<sup>12</sup> See, among others, his memoir *Patrząc wstecz* [Looking back], published posthumously in London (1966) by the Polish Cultural Foundation.

<sup>13</sup> See, among others: *Kar Chat. Powieść* [Kar Khat. A novel] (Warsaw [1923]), *Przez płonący Wschód. Wrażenia z podróży* [Through the burning East. Impressions from travel] (Warsaw 1924), *Z dnia na dzień* [Day by day] (Warsaw 1926).

<sup>14</sup> See: K. Polechoński, *Ferdynand Goetel...*, pp. 131–134.

<sup>15</sup> See: K. Tarka, “Powrót...” [The return...], p. 83.

<sup>16</sup> See: F. Goetel, *Czasy wojny* [The time of the war], London 1955, pp. 211–216 (Chapter XVII: “Zderzenie z dwójką” [A collision with the Second Department]) All quotations from *Czasy wojny* cited in this sketch are from that edition. I give the page range of subsequent citations in the main text in round brackets.

The charge of my collaboration with the Germans can only be based on reckless gossip or wicked slander. I maintained with the Germans only those relations to which my position as a member of the Literary Commission of the Main Welfare Council compelled me.

The trip to Katyn, carried out after an agreement with the political authorities of Underground Poland, was the only exception in this regard. The truth of this I undertake to prove before any court that will allow a hearing consistent with the understanding of justice of a Western man. During the occupation, I did not publish any books or articles, but I edited the underground magazine *Nurt* and worked closely with Zygmunt Hempel, Kazimierz Stamirowski, and Julian Piasecki, who all lost their lives at the hands of the Germans. Their heroism can be attested to by people both within the Corps and in the country.<sup>17</sup>

In 1945, the communist authorities prosecuted Goetel with an arrest warrant for his participation in the Katyn delegation. After escaping from Poland in December 1945, the writer got to Italy, where he joined the Polish II Corps, with which he moved to Great Britain in the autumn of 1946. In Poland, however, he was officially recognized as a collaborator and traitor to the Polish nation. This situation actually lasted until the end of the People's Republic of Poland. It was not until the meeting of the Board of the Polish PEN Club in Warsaw on June 19, 1989 that Ferdynand Goetel, who acted during the German occupation with the knowledge and approval of the authorities of the Republic of Poland, was "cleared of infamy."<sup>18</sup>

Going back to *Czasy wojny*, let us recall that it describes events from late August 1939 to the autumn of 1946. Among the places Goetel talks about, it is necessary to mention first of all Warsaw (most of the memoirs are devoted to it) and its surroundings, as well as Katyn (the aforementioned delegation), the Sandomierz region (a trip with Adolf Nowaczyński), Cracow (a short stay before the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising and a longer one after it), Bohemia (during the transit), Germany (among other places,

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<sup>17</sup> Quote after: I. Sadowska, "Ferdynand Goetel pisze do gen. Andersa" [Ferdynand Goetel writes to General Anders], in: eadem, *Od Witkacego do Jana Pawła II. Itineraria literackie* [From Witkacy to John Paul II. Literary itineraries], G. Legutko, ed., Kielce 2008, pp. 77–78.

<sup>18</sup> For more information on this subject, see: M. Danilewicz Zielińska, "Ferdynand Goetel w oczach Warszawy i Londynu" [Ferdynand Goetel in the eyes of Warsaw and London], *Kultura* 1989, no. 11 (506), p. 112.

the Dachau camp, which Goettel saw already after its liberation), and Italy (together with the Polish II Corps).

## MEMOIRS READ AFTER FIFTY YEARS

It is worthwhile considering at this point what seems to be particularly engaging in Goettel's book and how his memoir can be read today. It is best to begin with the style in which *Czasy wojny* is written. By analyzing all the chapters of the memoir from this perspective, regardless of their content, we will find three essential features: restraint, factuality, and brevity. At the same time, Goettel's writing style interestingly combines with his ability to write in an extremely poignant manner. An example of this is the passage about the tragedy of Warsaw at the end of September 1939.

The mass bombing of Warsaw on September 25 and 26 was topped off by a massive air raid. Coincidence would have it that just on that day, selected for an aerial crackdown on the crazy city, the perpetually serene sky was covered with restless clouds. The planes circled above it until noon, until a breaking wind opened windows in the clouds. Hundreds of demolition bombs and tens of thousands of incendiary bombs fell on Warsaw. During the night, a dry storm broke loose and drilled entire neighborhoods with flames. This was the first vision of the end of the world that Warsaw would experience (p. 17).

What is interesting is not only the way Goettel conveyed the message, but also, and perhaps most importantly, its content. Of the many different themes explored in *Czasy wojny*, let us choose those that are the most intriguing and at the same time rarely found in Polish writings on the nation's struggle against the occupying forces in 1939–1945. This is because, as Tadeusz Wyrwa once rightly pointed out,

Polish historiography mostly sticks to the following two themes: disaster and heroism. The third theme, or stereotype, is to blame our failures solely on others instead of looking for their causes primarily in ourselves.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> T. Wyrwa, "Rola historii i literatury w kształtowaniu świadomości narodowej" [The

In contrast, Goetel's testimony is far from standard thought patterns, generalizations, and simplifications – if only in relation to the Germans or Russians who occupied Poland. However, it is particularly significant and worthy of consideration that *Czasy wojny* [...] revises the myth of the unity of the nation's attitudes."<sup>20</sup> The writer has the courage to speak even about shameful pages in the history of wartime Warsaw, as exemplified by the following picture.

The last days before the entry of the Germans, who were not in a hurry to occupy the capital city, were written quite blackly in memory. The unloading of public warehouses, which was probably right, if not necessary, provided an opportunity for games where arms and fists decided the outcome. The "legal" acquisition of free goods from the open windows and doors of tobacco, spirits, and sugar warehouses was followed by the unprofessional robbery of private stores and warehouses. The robbers assaulting the store rooms of the Castle and its still-surviving premises did not surrender to the citizen militia, overcame its resistance, and stripped the Castle of the rest of its possessions. The National Library was not spared either: illuminated pages were ripped from books and leather bindings were removed from old incunables. Not only the mob, mixed with thugs released from detention centers, took part in the looting. In the Downtown area, young ladies in chic furs burst into abandoned stores and carried off whatever fell into their hands. Groups of clever thugs lurked for looters laden with plunder. More than on sack carried on the back was cut with a knife, and the leaking contents fell into the hat of a thief. The weaker ones were sometimes forcibly deprived of their loot. This was the first display of rudeness, which, empowered in a way and absolved by the brutality of wartime events, was gaining a foothold in life. This trial, still episodic at that time, was to come to life over time in events and phenomena that were far more shameful.

But then robberies were a normal street activity (p. 18).

While Goetel is amazed by the later resourcefulness (sometimes frantic – for example, street trading in food products, which is forbidden, and

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role of history and literature in the shaping of national consciousness], in: idem, *Krytyczne eseje z historii Polski XX wieku* [Critical essays on the history of Poland of the 20th century], Warsaw 2000, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> J. Trznadel, "Ferdynand Goetel...", p. 221.



often takes place right under... a hanging German poster, stipulating the death penalty for doing so) and heroism of the capital city's residents (e.g., pp. 37–38), at the same time he is struck by reflections on the depravity of youth during the years of war and occupation.

But is it possible to glorify phenomena that, in their very essence, consist in deceit and that offend the most basic notion of the order of things that is binding upon people? The group most intoxicated by the “charms” of this life was the youth. Many people from the older generation also bemoaned the young people who went through the hard school of easy living, symptomatic of the occupation period. How will they relate to the law and honesty in everyday life when normal, peaceful times come?

I don't know if people get used to the law as quickly as they get used to lawlessness. I am afraid that the process of return is more difficult and longer. Anyone who looked at the struggle for existence under the German occupation could not help but fear that the traces and blemishes went deeper than we thought at the time (p. 41).

Goetel's reflections are extremely insightful. One would like to add that they are sadly correct, as the subsequent history of the nations occupied during World War II confirmed this. The moral devastation caused by the war also did not bypass our compatriots, although, after all, not in everyone did the war destroy human feelings, examples of which can also be found in the pages of *Czasy wojny*.<sup>21</sup> It should not be forgotten that in many places in Goetel's memoir there are descriptions and reflections on the commendable attitudes of Poles under the occupation, such as these:

[...] thousands of people owed their lives and freedom to the constant alertness of the population. The widespread and reliable solidarity also created this strange sense of self-confidence and made the atmosphere of the city purely Polish, while the Germans felt like intruders and didn't know the day or the hour of their death. And although the Gestapo found people eager to provide services, and spies and scoundrels stood on every street corner, their numbers must have been inadequate and their training meager, given the limited success of the espionage efforts, despite the fact that Warsaw resi-

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. also the interesting reflections on people after the war contained in Wiesław Myśliwski's *A Treatise on Shelling Beans*.

dents were characterized by an unrestrained and even provocative freedom of expression (p. 84).

For a while, Goetel also happened to talk about the realities of the occupied Warsaw in a slightly amusing way.

For example, we get staple foods in our house from the janitor Mrs. Truszczyńska, who “additionally” smuggles meat, fats, and eggs, and is consequently the most important and perhaps the most affluent person in our small tenement house. Mrs. Truszczyńska travels to get the food to the Lublin region or to the Mazowsze region, but also to the Kujawy region which is a part of the “Reich.” If she is “caught” on one out of five trips and her goods are confiscated, the business is still profitable. I don’t think she is caught more often than once every ten trips. The lady has become tough as iron, seasoned, conscious on even the worst occasion (p. 54).

It must be admitted, however, that a similar, somewhat humorous tone appears in *Czasy wojny* very rarely.

Let us now point out another important topic in Goetel’s book. Given the pre-war views of the author, who was sympathetic to fascism of the Italian variety,<sup>22</sup> it may be surprising what and how, being already in exile, he says about the fate of Jews and their relations with Poles.

This is because *Czasy wojny* treats Warsaw’s Jews with calm and compassion (also recalling their patriotic gestures at the outbreak of the war), and Goetel does not even hesitate to mention Poles taking money for hiding Jews.

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<sup>22</sup> The problem of pre-war political views and sympathies is discussed by M. Urbanowski in the sketch “Faszystowskie credo Goetela” [Goetel’s Fascist credo], in: idem, *Oczyszczenie. Szkice o literaturze polskiej XX wieku* [Cleansing. Sketches on Polish literature of the 20th century], Cracow 2002. Let us only remind that shortly before the war a book was published, which was a collection of Goetel’s columns, entitled *Pod znakiem faszyzmu* [Under the sign of fascism], (Warsaw 1939). According to Urbanowski, Goetel understood fascism as a heroic attitude towards reality; see: M. Urbanowski, *Faszystowskie... [Goetel’s...]*, p. 107. There is also the following mention of this book in *Czasy wojny*: “As the author of a pre-war book on fascism, signed with my name, a book that was certainly erroneous, though certainly written *cum bona fide*, I had nothing to hide” (p. 211).

From what social classes did the people who were engaged in the procedure of tracking Jews come? The core group was mostly unemployed spies. The executive tool – the “blue” police. Their network, however, reached deep into the homes of private people who also wanted to “gain something from the Jews.” The ways of exploitation were very diverse, sometimes even so innocent as to almost be considered beneficial.

An anecdote of this kind was told in Warsaw at the time: “What does X do for a living?” someone asked of his acquaintance. “She has a Jewish governess,” was the reply.

This cruel joke aptly illustrates the degradation of the moral sense of those years (p. 110).

Also mentioned here is the infamously remembered episode associated with the carousel at the ghetto, known from Czesław Miłosz’s poem “Campo dei Fiori.”

I also remember the mess caused by the carousels on this side of the wall almost in the immediate vicinity of the ghetto, which were always full of riffraff wanting to have fun. There was one time when fighting Jews appeared on the broken balcony of one of the ghetto’s tenement houses and shouted to the people having fun to move away, as they intended to shoot from there. This small and minor, but so telling, episode has stuck in my mind forever (p. 139).

No less moving is the account of Goettel’s aforementioned visit to Katyn in 1943, so let us quote an excerpt of it.

I am standing on the side and trying to embrace with my mind everything I saw here. The graves located in this forest were not difficult to find. After all, the simplest indicator is the pine trees planted on them. The several years old, not tall, light green trees clearly mark the area and the boundaries of each grave. Sometimes the boundary of the grave’s depression is aligned with them. The corpses, although arranged in the greatest order in a thick layer, are covered with only a small layer of soil. The grave digger’s work here is therefore done rather superficially, and the way the graves are camouflaged is primitive and naive, as it would have to take decades for the pine trees to grow and blend in with the forest. I recall the documents, signs, and uniforms left with the victims, and I comprehend that the executioners and grave diggers must have been guided by the certainty that this place would be inaccessible to anyone but people they trust for a long, long time to come (p. 132).

It is worth adding here that the testimony of the author *Czasy wojny* about Katyn – as Rafał Habielski points out – “[...] was and still is if not passed over in silence then certainly underestimated.”<sup>23</sup> It should also be recalled that Goetel’s book includes an account by Ivan Krivozertsov, who lived right next to the forest where the murder of the Polish officers took place. It was probably that Russian man, whom the author of *Czasy wojny* met in Italy, who was the first to notify the Germans about the mysterious graves of Polish officers; he died in unexplained circumstances in Great Britain shortly after the end of the war.

Going back to the image of Poles in Goetel’s memoir, it must be admitted that the writer, who cannot be denied his merits in conspiratorial activities, has a rather critical attitude toward the Polish Underground Government. Sometimes he criticizes both politicians and ordinary citizens by bluntly saying: “The stupidity of the underground politicians matched the lack of critical thinking of the masses.” (p. 145) These specific words referred to the actions of the residents of the capital just before the outbreak of the 1944 uprising. Although in another place, speaking of the atmosphere preceding the fighting, the author confesses: “Yet the days before the uprising were beautiful and the pulse of Warsaw’s life throbbed with a strong and thrilling rhythm” (p. 146). By the way, Goetel did not fight in the uprising: as he says of himself, he was only a passive witness to it. Here are some thoughts on the national uprising, about which the author was skeptical, as he realistically assessed the slim chances of its victory.

The uprising seemed to me to be an inevitable consequence of the attitude adopted by the Polish society since the beginning of the war (p. 155).

The uprising cannot be comprised in any memoir, because it resembles a story about another, second life that is only loosely connected to the previous and subsequent ones (p. 156).

So what can be said about these days? Probably only that after the torrential rain on the night of August 1, the weather over Warsaw was as still and

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<sup>23</sup> R. Habielski, “Na linii czasu. Szkic o twórczości emigracyjnej Ferdynanda Goetla” [On the timeline. A sketch on Ferdinand Goetel’s emigration works], *Więź* 1994, no. 9, p. 94.

clear as a glass pillar and the air sounded with voices of battle as dramatic, vivid, and expressive as the battle in the streets of Warsaw was unlike any war. [...] And that I watched with despair in my heart from my window the night flights of our aviators from Italian bases and that I saw the shot down aircraft falling on the other side of the Vistula, perhaps out of necessity or perhaps out of hope that they would nevertheless reach the areas occupied by the Russians, who refused them the right to take off from their bases. That my house, my souvenirs, and scripts from several years of work eventually burned down. These were, in a nutshell, the things that I saw and experienced (pp. 156–157).

But the inquisitive Goetel continues his deliberation: “What did I not know and what would I like to learn from an authoritative source?” This is not the first proof that Goetel’s reflections on the time of the war are not finite.

After the uprising, the writer arrived in Cracow, where he soon – after the withdrawal of the German troops – became an eyewitness to a phenomenon he described as a change of occupation. He used that term in the telling title of Chapter XIII of his memoir, where he describes the looming terror and the insidious enslavement of the country that, according to the increasingly intensive communist propaganda, was supposedly being liberated. At one point, without any illusions, Goetel states:

The process of making a revolution from the top is therefore happily underway. The quickly propagated slogan of working at the grassroots, rebuilding the country, and increasing its economic power will attract numerous groups of technocrats and professionals. The intelligentsia will become the tool of the occupier. The writers will be the vanguards of defection and betrayal. The zeal with which they will serve the occupier’s propaganda will imprint on their attitude a stigma of disgrace, unprecedented in the history of Polish literature (p. 180).

It will not be an exaggeration if we say that the history of post-war Poland, which is still being discovered, only confirms the above remarks.

Goetel’s reflections on the tragedy of the war are in a way complemented by his impressions from his stay in the former Dachau concentration camp, which was turned into a museum shortly after the war.

I am leaving the museum with revulsion and horror in my soul. I did not understand anything and cannot believe that from today, tomorrow the world will change and end camps of this kind once and for all. The crime committed here is so unbelievable, so monstrous and irreconcilable with everything we thought about man and the world, that it is difficult [...] to shake off thoughts of some deadly, secret disease that has afflicted the Western world, beyond its consciousness and knowledge. Dachau and other camps are no longer dead museums, but still living abscesses of leprosy on the body of Germany and Europe. It is better to avoid them until one has figured out what they really mean. And perhaps it would be better to burn down and plow Dachau together with the SS officers' houses and gardens where good mothers raised innocent children, where the radio played Bach, Beethoven, and Strauss's waltzes, and where thrifty people grew flowers and vegetables (p. 201).

### CZASY WOJNY AND THE ROMANTIC TRADITION

A careful reading of Goetel's memoir allows us to see an interesting and, against all appearances, ambivalent attitude of the author towards Romanticism and the Romantic tradition. This issue is only a part of a broader problem, which we could entitle "the Romantic tradition in the work of Ferdynand Goetel," or "Ferdynand Goetel towards the Romantic tradition." At the same time, the issue is a part of a certain cultural phenomenon: the takeover of the Romantic tradition by the postwar Polish émigrés. Awareness of the similarities between the experiences and fate of the émigrés of 1945 (primarily fighting for the homeland and opposing the forcibly imposed order in the country) and the émigrés of 1831 caused the Second Emigration to annex the Romantic tradition in the broad sense. In the clusters of Polish émigrés in the United Kingdom, and especially in the London milieu to which Goetel belonged, the vitality of Romanticism was clearly manifested, which stimulated pro-independence attitudes in a political situation that was very difficult for Poles. At that time, the Romantic tradition in the "Polish London" revives with great force, and manifests itself especially in the writings, literary life, publications, and behavioral styles of the Polish émigrés. The 1940s and 1950s are a period of particular intensification of these phenomena; let us recall that this is also the time when Goetel's memoir was written and appeared in print.

Of course, the issues indicated above can be the subject of more than one dissertation. However, let us go back to *Czasy wojny* and look for examples of a dialogue with the Romantic tradition. It must be admitted that it would be futile to look for traces of Romanticism in Goetel's description of the realities of the war; the author is far from the Romantic exaltation and the Romantic view of the nation. However, from the remarks relating to the effects of the occupant's repression, it can be inferred that it was Romanticism, which was revived during the war (though not explicitly named here), and its idea of freedom, that encouraged Poles to fight, including in the uprising.

It was because of these offended national and human feelings, this exaltation of the masses, and their eagerness for revenge that never before in the history of Polish insurrections its leaders were so sure of their own beliefs, when it came to the Polish people, whom they had at their disposal completely without encountering any resistance or a word of criticism. This ease opened the way for the craziest ventures and fueled the craziest ambitions. The state of turmoil conditioned the leaders' power and influence, intoxicated them with the illusion that by succumbing to it they were leading the nation and moving toward great historical solutions. The trust shown to them by the masses allowed them to forget what they were and what their talents were to lead the national cause. So they started in the underground with fog in their eyes. The struggle for freedom they led, their will that was so heroic at times, was a blind fight (pp. 86–87).

On the basis of this and other passages, it would probably be possible to say that the *implicit* conspiratorial aspect of Romanticism present here does not win the approval of the author of *Czasy wojny*, since it inevitably leads to actions that are “always irresponsible” (p. 155). And “the catastrophe of the Warsaw Uprising” was probably one of them (p. 141). However, we will not find in Goetel's memoir any clear and longer settlements with Romanticism, but only some thoughts, given in a concise form on various occasions.

However, there is a clear reference to the Romantic tradition in the final chapters of *Czasy wojny*. We are talking about – firstly – the disagreement with the existing reality and the resulting attitude, expressed by Goetel in the most romantic manner possible. After the end of the war against

Germany, but in the face of the new occupation of Poland, the author sees only two styles of behavior. “Either raise the partly damaged roof over your head and remain silent, or leave the country and assert its rights to freedom from afar” (p. 180). As we know, he chose the latter, although he did not at all criticize his compatriots who stayed in Poland and often, in their own way, also struggled with the new socio-political order.

Secondly, in Goetel’s deliberations there is a conviction, let us add: a Romantic one (especially similar to that of Mickiewicz), about the special mission of the exiles, which is illustrated, for example, by the following quote: “Although the exiles of the time constituted only a fraction of the nation, they carried with them a lot: all that an independent Polish state still meant” (p. 191). Moreover, in the last chapter, titled “Na wygnaniu” [In exile], the author consciously inscribes the new emigration, which he himself was part of, in the tradition of earlier Polish emigrations, including the Great Emigration.

I soon had to leave Poland too, one of thousands of Poles. Emigration from the homeland was not a new phenomenon in Polish history. We left the country more than once, protesting the injustice inflicted on it. We went into the world crying out for freedom. But now we were leaving Poland after a war that ended in the victory of the countries that proclaimed the slogan of freedom with us. What more did I have to say, a son of a nation that had already sung out its wrongs once throughout the 19th century and cried out for its rights to life so fervently that its freedom was finally restored, only to be sold and abandoned again? We were not to hear shouts of *Vive la Pologne* on our route. “A thousand brave men” who left Warsaw in 1944, similar to the shadows, are not those who left Warsaw with unfurled banners in 1832. Their fate has now burdened the whole world with shame. No one will listen to people they are ashamed to look in the eye. [...]

Finally, we were given the right to the citizenship of almost all countries, except our own. In this way, the sins and mistakes committed against our country are to be paid for. In this way, we are to be denationalized as a reward for the loss of our country’s independence (pp. 275–276).

He ends the whole chapter with a confession: “Being Polish is not as big a deal as we think. But to stop being one is to stop being a human” (p. 276). Intertwined in this statement are two perspectives: the Polish and the



universal one. While not glorifying Polishness, Goetel draws attention to its paradoxically more general dimension. Now, in the face of the renewed and insidious enslavement of the homeland, Polishness and Poland become not so much a value, but rather a task and obligation (one can find here clues leading to Cyprian Norwid's reflections). Renouncing Poland in the current situation would be downright inhumane, an act against humanity. As the punch line of the deliberations on the attitude of the author *Czasy wojny* towards the Romantic legacy, let me quote a certain proposition expressed by the writer in an article entitled "Polska legenda" [Polish Legend], published in the London-based *Wiadomości*. Goetel expressed his view briefly but significantly: "[...] it would be necessary to revise the concept of Romanticism, since a Romantic today is any man who still believes in something and professes something."<sup>24</sup>

## FINAL THOUGHTS

*Czasy wojny* is, despite two reissues,<sup>25</sup> still insufficiently known and the public is not aware of its existence. However, there seems to be a need, especially today, for an insightful, factual, and calm account of the difficult wartime and immediate post-war times. The author of this memoir possesses an ability, invaluable in literature, to keep a distance from the characters portrayed and the events described, which allows Goetel's book to successfully pass the test of time. Admittedly, this is one of many voices about the war, but it is certainly an important voice that should be taken into account when one reflects on that period.

It is also interesting that the author clearly shows his point of view, although at the same time this does not prevent him from calmly presenting other, often extremely different, views. Most importantly, however, the author of *Czasy wojny* wonders about and tries to inquire into the essence of things. Thus, Wojciech Gniatczyński, mentioned earlier, is right when he considers the following to be the invaluable feature of Goetel's book:

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<sup>24</sup> F. Goetel, "Polska legenda" [Polish legend], *Wiadomości* 1952, no. 46, p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> But in a small number of copies and rather difficult to find.

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[...] nowhere does he settle for the official version, nor does he repeat the usual arguments or uphold traditional claims. [...] This is a book for those who want to think about those times, not for those looking for ready-made formulas.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, the wealth of topics discussed – including war, conspiracy, totalitarian systems, testimonies of historical events, considerations of the future fate of Poland and the world – makes Goetel's book a valuable source not only for historians and literary historians, but also for cultural anthropologists and sociologists. However, the value of *Czasy wojny* is not limited to its quality as a source of information, for Goetel's memoir also opens up the broad space of humanistic questions and reflections on man.

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<sup>26</sup> W. Gniatczyński, "Tak było..." [That's how it was...], p. 2.