

Agnieszka Krawczyk
ORCID: 0000-0003-0211-3132
University of Łódź

Landmark Events in the Lives of the Characters in the Film *The Purim Miracle*

ABSTRACT

In this article, I analyze the fate of the protagonists of the film *The Purim Miracle*. The purpose of the analysis is to reconstruct their fate and to show the transformations that took place in their lives. The article consists of two parts: theoretical and analytical. In the introduction, I present a historical outline of Purim, the most important holiday for Jewish people, called the Jewish carnival. In the theoretical part, I summarize the issues that relate to landmark events in human life. Then I explain the issues concerning biographical process structures as seen by Fritz Schütze. In the analytical part, I describe the fate of the protagonists of *The Purim Miracle*, namely the parents (Jan and Jadwiga) and their son (Henio). The process of discovering one's origins is a watershed event for both the whole family and individual family members. It causes changes in their lives, which requires from them biographical work. The fate of the characters is interpreted in relation to the process structures distinguished by Fritz Schütze. The title of the film itself is symbolic, as it refers to the holiday during which the characters converted from Catholics to Jews. The biculturalism of the family is revealed not simultaneously, but linearly.

KEYWORDS

Jewish origins, process structures, biography, biographical work

SPI Vol. 26, 2023/1
e-ISSN 2450-5366

DOI: 10.12775/SPI.2023.1.006en

Submitted: 4.10.2022

Accepted: 2.01.2023

Introduction

The festival of Purim is celebrated on the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar I.¹ This was the month in which Moses was born and died, and buried by God himself. It is associated with reflection that should be concluded with joy, i.e. the celebration of Purim, otherwise known as the Feast of Lots.

This is the most joyous festival of all those celebrated by Jewish people, and thus it serves as a counterbalance to other major festivals. It celebrates the events described in the Book of Esther, the liberation of Jews from persecution by the viceroy of the king of Persia, Haman. After dismissing his first wife due to her disobedience, the king, Ahasuerus, took Esther as his wife. However, she did not tell the king about her Jewish origins or name (Hadassah). Later, her uncle Mordecai was the only one who refused to worship Haman. This provoked the wrath of the Persians, who decided to exterminate all Jews residing in their country. Haman drew lots to decide the exact day on which the Jews should be exterminated.² Mordecai asked Esther to beg the king for mercy. Esther told the Jews to fast for three days;³ then she went to the king, who agreed to save her people. Haman was hanged on the same gallows that had been prepared for Mordecai. To commemorate those events, every year Jews celebrate the Purim festival, which is preceded by a one-day fast (*Taanit Ester*).

During the festival, the Book of Esther (*Megilat Ester*) is read in synagogues. During the utterance of Haman's name, the Jews gathered in the temple drown it out by shouting and stamping their feet to symbolically wipe it from the pages of history. Those who are celebrating are required to express special concern for those in need, as well as to have fun and turn the existing order upside down. The festival of Purim is known as the "Jewish carnival," during which the

1 It is in February or March according to the Gregorian calendar.

2 *Pur* – lot.

3 In the folklore and beliefs of various ethnic groups, three (and its multiples) is a magical number, hence, for example, the three godmothers, three fairies, the resurrection of Jesus occurred three days after His death, the fasting of the Jews lasted three days, and (in a fairy tale) twelve brothers were enchanted into swans.

participants rejoice, give each other gifts, dine with loved ones and are even allowed to use alcohol (the only time of the year). Young Jews dress up as members of the opposite sex and students prepare performances in which they parody their teachers (rabbis) (Borek 2016; Kameraz-Kos 1997; Majewski 2009; Wiszniewska 2014).

The motif of the Purim festival is used in art,⁴ e.g. in the film *Cud purymowy* [*The Purim Miracle*], made in 2000, directed by Izabella Cywińska, and based on a script by Maciej Karpiński. It also opens a series of thirteen films titled *Święta polskie* [Polish Festivals],⁵ which were produced by Polish TV. The main characters are members of the Kochanowski family: the father Jan (Sławomir Orzechowski), the mother Jadwiga (Danuta Stenka) and son Heniek (Grzegorz Małecki). The characters live in Łódź, which is historically connected with Jews and their culture.

The film begins and ends with a thematic bracket that shows the characters participating in the religious rituals of the two faiths. In between, the plot of the film unravels, in which the transformation of the characters is shown. The miracle they experience takes place during the festival of Purim. The filmmakers could have chosen any holiday in the Jewish calendar, but no other Jewish holiday would have constituted such a contrast to the characters' boring lives.

The Purim Miracle can be interpreted in two different ways. On the one hand, the fate of the protagonists can be viewed as the fate of three individuals who, caught up in the same space and history, remain separate from each other. Then, their experiences can be analyzed separately, but in relation to the other members of the family.

4 Another example of using the motif of the Purim feast is the short story by Eliza Orzeszkowa: *Silny Samson* [Strong Samson].

5 The other films in the series are *Noc świętego Mikołaja* [Night of St Nicholas] (St Nicholas Day), *Żółty szalik* [Yellow Scarf] (Christmas Eve), *W kogo ja się wrodziłem* [Who do I Take After?] (Father's Day), *Wszyscy Święci* [All Saints] (All Saints' Day), *Miss mokrego podkoszulka* [Miss Wet T-shirt] (Easter), *Biała sukienka* [White Dress] (Corpus Christi), *Długi weekend* [Long Weekend] (1–3 May), *Królowa chmur* [Queen of Clouds] (Mother's Day), *Piekło niebo* [Hell Heaven] (First Communion), *Barbórka* [Little Barbara] (St Barbara's Day), *Przybyli ulani* [Uhlans Came] (Assumption of Mary/ Polish Army Day), and *Miłość w przejściu podziemnym* [Love in the Underground Passage] (St Valentine's Day). The very titles reflect the irony accompanying the whole series, which is actually about holidays from different cultural orders and not about Polish holidays.

On the other hand, the film's protagonists can be treated as a community which reflects well the complexity of human nature, in which anger is combined with gentleness, hatred with love and thoughtlessness with thoughtfulness. In this article, I present an analysis of the first type, with the aim of reconstructing the fate of the characters in the film and showing the transformation that takes place in their lives. At the same time, it is important to bear in mind that the plot of the film is limited by time, so some themes must be presented in a condensed way and permeated with symbolic meanings.

Events in human life

Human life can be seen as successive stages or as parallel planes of existence. Particular areas of human existence are given different meanings at different times and a linear view of experience represents a certain simplification (Dobrowolska 1992).

In the course of an individual's entire existence, various events occur. Particular events are not separated from each other by clear boundaries, but occur throughout a person's whole life. Some of them are related to the biological age of the individual or to their being a member of certain sociocultural groups; they may be triggered consciously or unconsciously; and some of them may be related to living in a specific historical time. How they are perceived and interpreted by the individual depends entirely on the individual and their level of reflectivity and interpretative capacity. Landmark events can be considered a special kind of life events. They can include situations that have play a significant role in an individual's life, change the course of their life, psyche, or identity or lead to a transformation of their environment. They are important for the further course of life, opening or closing opportunities, changing the way we view the world around us and ourselves in it. Such crucial events can be sudden and surprising to the individual (Dobrowolska 1992). This means that the individual, in a unique and subjective manner, gives a meaning to their experiences.

Periods accompanied by landmark events can be linked to being a member of specific cultural communities. In religious communities, the moments of transition from one phase to another are regulated by appropriate rituals, which provides an instrument for overcoming

crises. This also ensures social continuity, which can be disrupted by successive generations abandoning tradition. Romano Guardini spoke of external and personal crises that accompany cultural rituals. They ensure cultural continuity and predictability on an individual level (Lanzen 2003). Where rituals occur, there may also be room for reflection. This may be needed in order to decide whether to participate in a particular ritual and thus remain a member of the community. Irrespective of the existence of these two types of crises, every individual experiences personal crises which disrupt normal functioning at the time and cause significant changes (positive and negative) in their daily life.

Life events can also be captured from a methodological perspective. In fictional narratives (e.g. in literature or film), turning points and moments differ from summaries in length. The former are presented in detail and show a change of situation and a break in the plot line. Summaries (i.e. short passages) include those events that do not play an important role. Thus, narrative time is a criterion for classifying an event as a landmark event (Ball 2012). Fictional works are usually built around a landmark moment that determines the further fate of the protagonist. The other life events merely provide a background, aiming to explain the issues that take place during the crucial events.

When confronted with a turning point in life, one has to re-evaluate one's self-image and often must answer the question "Who am I?" One part of building one's own biography is to construct it by reconstructing past experiences. Peter Alheit calls such activities biographicality and points out that it is undertaken when one encounters difficulties and obstacles. Biographicality gives a person the opportunity to design their life from scratch (Ball 2012), which is related to sorting out past experiences. This is accompanied by biographicalization, which according to Winfried Marotzki combines two dimensions of reflection: diachronic and synchronic. The former consists of giving something its individual meaning and significance. The latter is characterised by the need for the approval from other people. If an individual is evaluated negatively, they search for activities that will be approved by society (Urbaniak-Zajac 2005). It is also possible to adopt a strategy in which the individual, rather than changing their own actions, looks for an environment that accepts

the values they present, and thus supports them. Biographicalization can be successful when an individual creates stable structures through which they maintain a positive self-image, or unsuccessful when they receive feedback from their social environment that prevents the creation of such an image (Urbaniak-Zajac 2005).

Interpreting one's own experiences also accompanies the activity which Anselm Strauss calls biographical work. It is particularly necessary in the case of unsuccessful biographization. Like biographicality, biographical work makes it possible to deal with the contradictions that arise with reference to one's own identity. It can accompany everyday situations, especially in those moments when a distorted self-image occurs. It is intensified at crucial moments. The main task in doing biographical work is an emotional return to the past, which results from individual experiences and external circumstances (i.e. social conditions) (Kaźmierska 2008). As a result, a person has to perform such work on their own.

Modernity offers people the opportunity to choose the best lifestyle for themselves. Making individual choices at different stages is facilitated by reflection. The tool for reflecting on one's life is the awareness of both oneself and the surrounding world. Biographical awareness is characterized by a person's knowledge of those patterns that are available to them, as well as of the possibilities for self-fulfillment once the person has chosen any of them. It is an individualized feature characterized by variability, selectivity and continuity (Lalak 2010).

These issues are relevant to an individual constructing a stable self-image. Biographization takes place as a result of the disruption of the natural rhythm of life, in which the individual has to re-evaluate their previous lifestyle. This is done in parallel with biographization, which allows them to look at the changes in an individualized way, but (usually) taking into account the opinions of others. If the biographization process is not successful (although not only in such a case), the individual undertakes biographical work. Each activity, supported by reflection, facilitates them overcoming life crises.

Process structures

The fate of the protagonists in narrative plays can be referred to four process structures which were described by Fritz Schütze. The first of these includes biographical plans/schemes of action that are identical to the principle of intentionally planning one's biography (Kaźmierska 2004; Rokuszevska-Pawełek 1996). Such a plan may be specified or not (Kos 2013) and can be fulfilled successfully or unsuccessfully. It can consist of "general biographical projects" which are related to stages of life (e.g. education, employment or starting a family) (Kaźmierska 2004). It can also be the result of a coincidence that forces a change in the current course of life, which does not result from the individual's own will (Kos 2013). A biographical plan of action can also be constructed because of a need to try something new or to change one's current lifestyle, in which case the individual pursues certain goals through the fulfilment of the plan (Kaźmierska 2004; Kos 2013; Prawda 1989; Rokuszevska-Pawełek 1996).

The second process structure is represented by course curves/trajectories. These situations are characterized by an individual's loss of awareness of experiencing and acting. Processes that take the form of course curves can be caused by biographical events, sociohistorical processes or institutional interventions (Jakob 2001). They are triggered by those experiences that do not depend on the individual. They are identified with sensations accompanied by suffering. They are sudden in nature and make an individual lose control over their life as the previous ways of coping prove to be inadequate. Coping with unfavorable situations is a long process, leading to "working out new interpretations of the situation" and to a transition from experiencing to acting, which involves developing a new plan of action (Kaźmierska 2004).

The third process structure, the institutional pattern of the course of life, is shaped by the fulfilment of expectations on the part of institutions, and it is linked to the norms adopted in a given community and related to specific stages of human life. The following spheres of human existence are subject to them: education, professional work and family (Jakob 2001; Kaźmierska 2004; Rokuszevska-Pawełek 1996).

The fourth process structure is the biographical processes of changes/metamorphoses. These can either be the result of a biographical plan of action (e.g. working through specific difficulties in the course of therapy) (Kos 2013; Rokuszewska-Pawełek 1996) or they may appear unexpectedly (e.g. winning the lottery or recognising previously unknown talents in oneself) (Kaźmierska 2004; Rokuszewska-Pawełek 1996). The changes that accompany metamorphosis can be a part of biographical work on the trajectory (Rokuszewska-Pawełek 1996). They are often positive in nature (Kos 2013) and involve a change in a person's identity (Kaźmierska 2004).

Landmark events in the life of the film characters

Each of the film's protagonists had their own path to follow and did so in their own way, although they acted together. They form a seemingly stereotypical Polish family which does not look particularly different from others. The audience meets them when they attend a Sunday Mass, which Jadwiga is satisfied with, but Jan is not. In the middle of the ceremony, he leaves and waits for his family outside the church. The son does not really care; he went to Mass because his parents were going. On the way home, Jan criticizes the "foreigners" who are "bossing around" the country and who want to buy Poland for "their mammon". Henio tells his father that he talks like "some Jew". Jadwiga tries to calm the situation. This scene introduces the viewer to the atmosphere in the family, filled with hatred and contempt for everything different.

The family's life would probably continue in a colorless way, but one day Jan gets a phone call. The caller, whom Henio describes as "a Jew of some kind," invites the protagonist to dinner, during which he informs him of the possibility to receive an inheritance from his deceased Jewish uncle. However, Henio (along with his entire family) must fulfil one condition. From that moment on, the life of the protagonist, and soon of the rest of the family, changes.

Jan's story

Jan Kochanowski is a husband and father. He is an employee in a factory, from which he is dismissed. The official reason is down-sizing, though the unofficial one is probably his open disdain for the management. Jan participates in a protest against the company authorities, during which the workers shout hate-filled slogans such as “to the gas!” or “Gestapo!”⁶ The riots at the company are shown on television, which is applauded by his son.

Jan's life can be divided into two stages separated by a landmark moment: the meeting with the lawyer, Aron Silberstein (Andrzej Szopa). During the meeting, the protagonist is confused and, convinced of a mistake, waits for an explanation. The lawyer reveals the truth about Jan's family, which included rabbis, and about his surname, which his parents changed from Cohen to Kochanowski. As the closest relative of the deceased uncle, Jan may be the heir to his property. The uncle was a philanthropist and a very religious person, as a result of which the inheritance can only be given to a religious relative. Otherwise, it is to be given to charity. Jan is stunned.

Before meeting the lawyer, the protagonist is an anti-Semite. He does not hide his views; he expresses them openly and aggressively and he encourages his son to adopt the same attitude. Jan's “encounters” with Jews mainly take place indirectly. Every time he comes across a newspaper article⁷ about Jews, he comments on it in an aggressive manner. Furthermore, he utters every foreign-sounding name with anger and contempt. After the phone call from the lawyer, a discussion starts among the family members, in which names such as Polański are mentioned. Here is how Jan comments on Henio's statement that Polański is also Jewish: “You can't even recognize them by name anymore. They have camouflaged themselves so well.”⁸ The second form of the protagonist's symbolic encounter with the

6 Jan's dismissal may be a symbolic reference to 1968, and the confusion of references to two different historical orders may indicate the superficiality of the slogans and the factory workers' lack of understanding of them.

7 For example, the newspaper *Dziennik Łódzki*, an appendix to the newspaper *Neue Lodzer Zeitung* in the 19th century, was published by Germans from Łódź.

8 This is ironic in the context of the information given by the lawyer.

Jews is a drawing of the Star of David hanging on a gallows, on the wall of the lift. This wall is the meeting place between Jan and his Jewish neighbor, Holtzman (Zygmunt Hobot). They do not talk or interact. Kochanowski looks at his neighbor with hatred, while Holtzman looks at him with pity.

In the first phase of the protagonist's story, it is difficult to understand what his hatred of Jews is caused by. Apart from his neighbor and his daughter Sara (Eliza Ryciak), who are peaceful people, he does not know any representative of this ethnic group (or he is unaware of the fact). Knowing the further fate of the protagonist, it can be assumed that the negative attitude towards Jews may have been instilled in him by his parents. By changing their surname without informing their son, they wanted to cut themselves off from their roots. Perhaps the desire to suppress this was so strong that it turned into a hatred of their own nation, including themselves. The aversion to Jews passed on to their son may have been a kind of protection against possible danger. Perhaps his parents assumed that once Jan hated this ethnic group, he would not incorporate potential signs of belonging to it into his consciousness. Even if he encountered such a sign, he would reject it.

Another aspect of Jan's parents adopting a Polish identity might be the adoption of the Catholic faith, which is sometimes regarded as a part of Polish culture. By attending the Catholic Mass, Jan seems to be performing a duty, as if he were doing something that should be done rather than what he wants to do. This is confirmed by the first scene of the film. Such behavior may mean that religiousness was imposed on him, first by his parents and then by his wife. Participation in religious rituals might give a sense of security to Jan's parents, but he does not know or understand this. His religiosity is unreflective and very superficial.

After meeting the lawyer, Jan's life enters a new phase, leading him to answer the question "Who am I?" At first, Kochanowski is lost. He does not talk to anyone about the meeting and he is angered by his wife's questions about it. When his son reads an article about a foundation dedicated to supporting Jews returning to their roots, Jan reacts with anger. He snatches the newspaper from Henio and tears it up. Jan postpones the confrontation when he receives information from a lawyer. He avoids talking to his wife because he fears

that words once spoken will forever become the truth. The article brings him closer to this truth, but—as the text is destroyed—the truth does not exist. This reflects Jan’s wish to destroy the truth about his Jewish origin. Not verbalizing this truth is not the same as not thinking about it. Jan, walking around the city, sees Jews everywhere. He recognizes them by their distinctive clothes and hairstyles. He sees them in the street; they are just standing and talking. He sneaks into the courtyard of the synagogue. He wants to go inside, but he hesitates and finally gives up. He stands in the courtyard, not knowing what to do. When he hears the sound of the door opening from inside, he hides behind a rubbish bin. From afar, he observes a conversation between two Jews who are speaking in a language he does not understand. He tries to get closer to the Jewish world because he is not ready to jump in at the deep end. This metaphor is not accidental, as the protagonist’s actions remind us of the behavior of a child who wants to learn to swim but is afraid of water. He slowly dips his foot into it, but immediately withdraws it. It takes some time before he is fully immersed in it, and even more before he begins to swim.

Another example of Jan getting closer to the Jews is the change in his attitude towards his neighbor. He says “good evening” to Holtzman. But, at the same time, he is annoyed by the music coming from the neighbor’s flat into Jan’s flat. Kochanowski angrily slams the window shut and comments on the music (and the neighbor) in a vulgar manner. Here we can see how Jan is torn between the two worlds. He would like to get closer to Jews, but is afraid to do so. He approaches only to immediately withdraw. Jan does not know who he is; he does not know where to begin his search for himself. The protagonist looks at his reflection in a shop window, touches his nose and temples. He looks as if he wants to try on the image of a Jew in a symbolic way, or to check whether the mask of a Pole, under which his parents hid him, is really just a mask. He does not know who he is—neither internally nor externally—but he begins to realize that he is not the same person he was before meeting Silberstein.

When Henio returns from a football match with chants on his lips, Jan decides to tell the family about the meeting with the lawyer. He starts with the positive aspect of being able to inherit the property. It is much more difficult for him to admit who the testator is. Speaking the truth brings him some relief, which is more about

getting rid of the secret itself, rather than about its content. Jan says out loud: “I am a Jew,” and he sees that the reality does not change. At least the external reality, because the internal one is still scattered. The verbalization of his origin triggers the protagonist’s first attempts to reflect on who he is. He begins by saying that he has always been a Pole and a Catholic, and he “celebrated the holy day.” He wonders why he now has to give this up. Jan’s religiousness was rather superficial, so pondering the difficulty of giving it up seems absurd. Nevertheless, it was religion that seemingly connected him with Polishness. It can be assumed that the identity of his entire family of origin was built around Polishness and the obligations deriving from it. And now this identity is to be taken away from him and replaced by something alien—something that has hitherto appeared evil and hostile. At no point does he say aloud that he previously hated Jews. Now he is one of them. Could it be that he hated himself? Maybe the very anger he directed towards those around him was anger towards himself. Maybe this is what was passed on to him by his parents, who symbolically “buried” themselves as Jews in order to be reborn as true, Catholic Poles.

Another issue under reflection is the surname. Up to that point, it had been a source of pride for Jan, allowing him to identify with the poet whom he regarded as “some distant relative.” The name testified to his Polishness. It is likely that his parents built a family legend around it, as well as around Catholicism, which they told their son from an early age. This caused in him an aversion to people with “non-Polish” surnames, a sensitivity to recognizing them among public figures and eventually even anger at those who hide their “wrong” origins under their “proper” names. Now it suddenly turns out that he is one of “them.” The information provided by the lawyer has caused a rupture in Jan’s identity.

Contrary to Jan’s fears, sharing information about his background with his family does not provoke negative reactions from those closest to him, and he can even count on his wife’s support. Perhaps her empathy, Jan’s readiness or both make him decide to “get to know” Judaism. As he walks through the Jewish cemetery, he no longer wonders why he is Jewish and what that means, but he wonders why his parents did not tell him about it. His wife explains to him that they probably wanted to protect him from unpleasant behavior from

his schoolmates. Jan replies that the children called him “little Ursula” anyway. We may wonder, then, who the parents really wanted to protect: the child or themselves? Children at school often bully those who are different from everyone in the group, and such differences do not always result from ethnic or religious origins.⁹ Perhaps the Catholic faith is so strongly identified with Polishness that people find it difficult to follow a different path. Such a conclusion can be drawn with regard to Jan Kochanowski’s parents. The character’s anger with his parents can be seen as a prelude to accepting his own Jewish origin.

The next step taken by the protagonist is a visit to the synagogue and a conversation with a rabbi (Cezary Kosiński). Jan wants to find out what it means to be a Jew. In the course of this meeting, the protagonist gives the impression of a man reconciled with his origins, although not yet fully confident in the Jewish world. However, he is still concerned about whether his surname was Kochanowski or Cohen? The rabbi tells him that “a name is a relative thing. What is important is who you are, not what your name is.” These words may explain the ease with which Jews in the past polonized their surnames. Perhaps Jan’s parents concluded that, just like superficial Catholicism, a surname was just a kind of lifeline to protect the child and themselves from potential danger. Perhaps they even considered that, when the time was right, religion would “find” their son itself. This would be in line with the mysticism firmly rooted in Judaism, in the belief in fate and destiny.

The conversation with the rabbi convinces Jan to experience his Jewishness during the Purim celebrations, to which he invites Holtzman and Sara. The neighbor, albeit reluctantly, accepts the invitation, albeit reluctantly, which is in line with the tradition of reconciliation that is to take place on that day.

At this stage Jan appears to be a person with an identity that is already found. His anger and aggression directed at the world disappears, and in their place understanding and forgiveness appear.

9 The religious aspect is also important for today’s young parents with moderate or no faith, but, when faced with the dilemma of whether to baptise their child or to send them to religious education classes, they decide to do so. They justify this precisely because they fear that their child will be perceived as different to their friends.

This can be confirmed by Jan's accidental meeting with a colleague from his former job. The colleague partly contributed to the protagonist's dismissal, but Jan feels no resentment and, on hearing that the colleague has also been dismissed, he does not feel any satisfaction. Furthermore, Jan informs the friend that he and his wife are preparing to celebrate Purim. Two transformations of Jan become apparent in this scene. Firstly, he is capable of forgiveness in line with the spirit of Judaism. Secondly, he openly speaks about celebrating Jewish festivals, which may reflect his full acceptance of his origins.

However, the real transformation takes place during the Purim celebrations. Up to this point, the viewer might be convinced that Jan's new identity is superficial and assumed only for the sake of inheriting money. However, the celebrants are visited by the lawyer, who informs Jan about a mistake. It turns out that closer relatives of the deceased uncle came to his office and they are to receive the inheritance. What the protagonist will receive may not even cover the legal costs. Here, the viewer might expect Jan to become angry, ask his guests to leave and bluntly express his opinion of Jewish people. But Jan does not do this. Instead, he gets up, starts dancing and invites others to join in. His face is calm. He is fully reconciled to both his Jewish background and to the loss of his inheritance. This scene closes the thematic bracket and is an antinomy to the opening scene of the film. At the beginning of the film, Jan angrily leaves the church; here, he joyfully stands at the head of the dance procession. He has found his place; he knows who he is; he has assembled the broken identity. Throughout the Purim celebrations, Jan wears a *kip-pah* on his head. Jan Kochanowski is the character who has undergone the greatest transformation, and his fate is shown as a journey from an anti-Semite to a Jew.

Henio's story

Just like his father, Henio Kochanowski hates Jews. And like his father, he does not know how to explain it. Here, however, the reflection of home education in the son's attitude to otherness is evident. Although the character's age is not given in the film, he can be categorized as a young adult. His education and occupation are not given either.

Before his parents inform him about his Jewish background, Henio does not spend much time on any reflections. The word “Jew” is an empty, meaningless word for him. He usually uses it as a substitute for vulgarisms when he wants to tease someone (e.g. his father).

Henio is a proud football fan and he supports the ŁKS team. Together with his friends, he sometimes participates in fights with the supporters of another Łódź team: RTS Widzew.¹⁰ He is proud whenever he manages to take an opponent’s scarf, which he relays to his parents. Every attempt by his mother to get even a hint of reflection out of Henio fails. He tells her with satisfaction that after matches they shout to the Widzew fans: “Jews, Jews, the whole of Poland is ashamed of you!” Jadwiga asks him if everyone is Jewish in the other team or how he knows that indeed the whole of Poland is ashamed of them. Why are they ashamed of them when the other team is playing so well and Henio’s team keeps losing? The son does not feel like thinking about such complex issues; he concludes that they simply talk that way, and he walks away.

Unlike his father, Henio interacts with a representative of the Jewish minority. He repeatedly tries to make contact with Sara. When he meets her in the lift, he always starts a conversation and even tries to make it polite. He invites his neighbor to the pub, but she refuses. When she asks about the meaning of the Star of David drawn on the wall of the lift, he replies with surprise that “it’s just for fun.” He does not understand the girl’s feelings; he does not even seem to understand the symbolism of the picture. For him, life is not complicated: it’s the way things are done; “everyone” does it, so he does, too. The simplicity of Henio’s life is also revealed during a conversation with his father. When Jan criticizes him for talking to Sara, pointing out that she does not have a Polish name, the son states that a heroine of a film was called Sara and she “wasn’t a bad chick.” That’s enough for him. It is easy for Henio to make fun of a Jew when the Jew has a shapeless figure and it is not entirely clear

10 The information on the creation of the two clubs is imprecise. The fans of RTS Widzew believe that it was established in 1910 by the German factory owners Julius Kunitzer and Julius J. Heinzel (Bonisławski, Podolska 2007). In turn, ŁKS was created in 1908 by Henryk Lubawski, Arnold Heiman and Jerzy Hirsberg (Piestrzeniewicz 2012). The origins of the ŁKS founders is not specified.

who he is. When the Jew takes the form of an attractive girl, it is no longer so easy to laugh at her and give up interest in her just because she is defined by an unclear term. The young Kochanowski does not even seem to see the connection between insulting the Jews and the fact that he likes a girl who is one. At the same time, the young protagonist is evidently more sensitive than he shows. He had to submit to a certain convention, and it is unclear whether it was of his own free will or not (the latter is more likely). Raised by an anti-Semitic father and surrounded by anti-Semitic friends, Henio sees no choice but to adopt their views as his own, even though he does not even understand them.

Henio takes a pragmatic approach to the information about his origins. While the father experiences inner dilemmas, the son concludes that since he is to be a Jew anyway, he would rather be a rich Jew than a poor one. He is ready to immediately change his religion and embrace a new culture, even though it is meant to be temporary. He quickly devises a plan according to which the whole family will adopt the new culture and, after receiving an inheritance, they will give it up. Finally, the parents' dilemmas make him nervous; he gets impatient and loses the will to implement any changes. Henio behaves erratically, which may result from his lack of a formed personality. He is steered by external circumstances, and he follows the stimuli that reach him with the greatest force. He does not select them; he does not try to adapt them to himself; he accepts everything as it is.

Although Henio is an adult, he undergoes a childlike transformation. The first stage for him is to test the social ground. His greatest dilemma is that he does not know what to say to his friends in the light of the new information. He does not find a solution, although rebellion against the reality he has known so far can be considered a small part of it. He and his friends sit on a bench in front of the block of flats and drink beer, while one of his comrades tells vulgar jokes about Jews. Kochanowski says nothing, but gets annoyed. He smashes the bottle against the pavement and walks away. In this symbolic way, he wants to show his friends that he does not agree with such behavior in his presence. At the same time, he also releases the emotions swirling inside him. Despite his lack of reflectivity, Henio, just like his father, loses his sense of security; he ceases to know who

he is, and his ordered and simple world falls apart and becomes complicated. Until now, a Jew (apart from Sara) was someone to be laughed at and even beaten. Now he is a Jew himself and he will not allow himself to be laughed at.

In a symbolic way, Henio begins to look for “his new people.” Above all, he hopes for his neighbor’s positive attitude. However, the information about his origins does not impress the girl, and he does not understand why. It only shows that specifying the ethnic group of a person is an empty slogan for him. He is unaware that changing ethnic identity entails a number of consequences. Then Henio goes to a football match “with his colors.” When the match is over, he takes out of his pocket a scarf of the opposing team which he once took from a fan. He picks it up and heads straight for a group of “his own guys,” who attack him. The football fans do not recognize Henio as a friend; they do not think about who he is. The label of the opposing team’s scarf is enough for them to consider him an enemy. This situation shows that, for his friends, he is not important as a person with all his individual qualities, but is accepted by them as far as he fits into their idea of the world. Perhaps both experiences (the earlier one in front of the building and the later one after the match) were needed for him to discover who he wanted to be. He needed to experience being the Jew he hated in order to actually want to become one. At the same time, it is also possible to recognize that, ultimately, the acceptance or rejection of certain values depends, to a large extent, on a person’s personal decisions and not on what is imposed on them.

When he enters the house after the match, his mother greets him with “Jesus!” Henio asks her if this is a greeting for a decent Jewish home. In this way, he shows her his acceptance of his origins, of his family’s acceptance of him, and he also expresses his desire to participate in the Purim celebration which is being prepared by his parents and the neighbor. With his attitude, Henio shows that, above all, his thoughtlessness is a mask that protects him from the brutality of the reality in which he grew up. He also shows that he does not move smoothly between the Polish and Jewish worlds, but that he is capable of taking sides.

According to the tradition, Sara and Henio dress up for the celebration: she puts on a suit and he puts on a dress. The son does not

comment on the loss of the inheritance in the way he would have commented previously, but he participates in the procession led by his father. Henio's transformation, like Jan's, can be seen symbolically as the acceptance of the conversion.

Jadwiga's story

Jadwiga Kochanowska née Krajewska seems to be the most transparent character, providing the background to the expressive characters of Jan and Henio. However, this is just an impression; the truth is that she hides a secret the revealing of which will show the depth of her inner world. There is no mention of her education or place of work in the film, and her role is reduced to being a wife and mother. She takes care of cooking, sewing and calming the disputes between her husband and son. Jadwiga mainly appears in the scenes set at home. She only leaves it to go to church or to the cemetery. This may symbolize the role of women who, in various religions, act primarily as guardians of the home.

Her husband's confession has a completely different dimension for Jadwiga than for Jan. For her, it represents a kind of relief, release and even hope. It is a moment in which she can share a long-hidden secret with her family. She too is Jewish, and this is something she has known for a long time, but until now has not told anyone about. She had no-one to share it with. It is only at this point that the audience (the other characters seem not to notice) can put various pieces of the puzzle together. Jadwiga has so far acted as an ambassador, a spokesperson or an advocate for Jewishness, although she did so in a very subtle way. This was evident in her attempts to provoke reflection in her son and to soothe her husband's anger at the "strangers" who want to "buy" the country. After the phone call from the lawyer, she openly sides with the Jews and Israel. Jan and Henio search for a hidden meaning in the dinner invitation. They wonder why a man with a Jewish surname is calling from the United States of America and speaking Polish. It seems impossible. In response, Jadwiga starts talking about how developed Polish culture is in the United States, and then she adds: "And how great it is in Israel! Everything is there: Polish bookshops, Polish tripe!" The horror in the eyes of her husband

and son, however, quickly brings her back to order; she stops talking and returns to her domestic duties.

Living with the secret she hides from her anti-Semitic family members certainly causes a lot of tension and fear of the truth being revealed. Nevertheless, her internal Jewish issues are already mastered and integrated into her life experience. She learnt about her origins from her mother when she was a young girl. This took place just after the death of her father, who prevented the truth from being revealed. This may be a reference by the filmmakers to the Jewish tradition according to which Jewish origin is passed on to the child by the mother. In the case of Jadwiga, it was passed on not only genetically, but also emotionally.

During a walk in the Jewish cemetery, Jadwiga decides to take Jan to her parents' grave. Her husband only finds out years later why they only ever visited the grave of his parents in the Catholic cemetery. He had not thought about it before. Or perhaps he had some doubts, but he pushed them away. One has to wonder, however, whether he did this out of fear of discovering the truth about his wife or himself.

The preparations for the Purim holiday are very absorbing to Jadwiga. During those preparations, she gives the impression of being in the right place. On the surface, nothing has changed; she prepares food in the same kitchen as before, but an internal change is apparent in her. Previously, she mechanically carried out her duties, as if she was following some instructions. One could see resignation in her. The new Jadwiga is the opposite of the old one. She looks for recipes so that she can prepare food not just to eat, but so that each dish can symbolize something. She reads about customs and traditions, she listens to Holtzman's hints and she includes her husband and son in the preparations. There is a bustle in the house, a nice and friendly atmosphere, which she had not had the strength to fight for before. It culminates in the very moment of the Purim celebrations, during which Jadwiga is smiling all the time.

The Purim miracle?

In accordance with the principle of writing fiction, the plots which contain landmark events are discussed at great length. Other life events, on the other hand, are summarized and referred to usually

in order to explain or complete the threads concerning the crucial events. Thus, the entire plot of the film *The Purim Miracle* was built around the landmark event to which all the earlier scenes led, and from which all the later scenes resulted.

For each of the characters, bringing to the surface their Jewish roots had a different meaning. This is primarily due to the fact that each of them is an individual personality with different views, beliefs and experiences. Each of them is at a different stage of life and presents a different level of reflectivity. However, the “new” information has shaken up their world and caused the collapse of their previous reality, after which they had to build a new one. This new reality is full of honesty and coherence with oneself, although it was preceded by a bumpy road to oneself.

Although the issue of Jewish origin was common for the whole family, each character had to do the biographical work independently. In Jadwiga’s case, biographicality consisted in giving herself the right to tell her family about important threads from her family past. For Jan, reconstructing the past was difficult because his parents had isolated him from the knowledge of his background and from contact with Jewish culture. He does his biographical work by understanding who he is and seeking answers from people who are directly connected with Jewish culture and Judaism. He focusses on the present and the future, on who he is and who he will be. References to the past are about learning about Jewish culture in general, not about his family history. The earlier Jan felt an incomprehensible and unexplained hatred of Jews. The simplest explanation would be that it was an escape from the truth about oneself or one’s identity. However, this does not directly result from the plot of the film. After Jan discovers his origin and begins to identify with it, there are no moments in which he refers to some Jewish elements from his family home. Jan gives us the impression that the Jewish origin was given to him by his deceased ancestors. But it is a gift he did not know about and did not expect. It is not the family home to which he used to go on holiday as a child, but a home he did not know about and therefore he has no memories of. Jan inherits the “house” and begins to build his own story around it. For Henio, his new identity is mainly of a social nature. He is looking for a group to which he can belong. He is interested in who he is, but mainly from the perspective of who he

should socialize with. As a result of the family transformation, the youngest of the protagonists has matured.

In the first scenes of *The Purim Miracle*, it is difficult to identify the characters intentionally planning anything. This may have taken place earlier, when Jadwiga and Jan were completing their education and starting a family, although then this planning could rather be treated as general biographical projects resulting from specific stages of life, or as institutional patterns of the course of one's life. Another reference to the second of these process structures is the reflection on Jan's parents' change of surname that accompanies his conversation with Jadwiga. It shows that, for Jewish people, providing children with security and a symbolic sense of belonging to the school community is important. Perhaps this is the reason why Jewish parents make specific decisions concerning their children.

Certainly, the intentional way of acting appears in the characters a little later. From a certain point on, Jan deliberately seeks contact with other Jews. His visits to the synagogue, which at first were incidental, acquire a purpose over time: to learn about and become a user of Jewish culture. For Jadwiga and Jan, the preparations for the Purim holiday are also intentional. Although the protagonists do not have fully defined plans for their participation in Jewish culture and recognizing its values as their own, they successfully clarify and fulfil them on an ongoing basis.

The stimulus for all the characters in the film to start a new plan of action comes with the information about Jan's (initially only his) Jewish background. This information is both the result of a coincidence that accompanies changes in biographical plans/schemes of action, and may be the result of a trajectory. In both father and son, it triggers a change in their previous lifestyles that is not in accordance with their will. At first, Jan rebels against the existing reality, as he attempts to deny, negate and reject the knowledge of his own origins. Ultimately, however, these lead to the start of a new plan. Henio also tries to negate this, and he attempts to dissociate himself from the plan pursued by his parents. However, in the end, he wants to try something new and experience being Jewish (e.g. in the scene after the match). Jadwiga's situation is different: for her, the information about her husband's origins brought relief and fulfilment of a new plan.

As a result of their experiences of participating in Jewish culture, the film's protagonists begin to feel the need to change their previous lifestyles, culminating in their participation in Purim celebrations and the symbolic adoption of intergenerational conversion (Kłoskowska 2005). In the case of the film's characters, it involves parents and son and occurs in the final scene. The change also represents a metamorphosis, i.e. the effect of the fulfilment of certain actions within a more or less specified plan. The nature of the changes that have taken place in the lives of the Kochanowski family can be considered positive. Jan and Henio have transformed themselves from anti-Semites into Jews, and they have learnt to form selfless relationships with people, based on joint and constructive action. Jadwiga, in turn, has changed from an unhappy and resigned woman into a woman full of life and hope. Therefore, the Festival of the Lots can be perceived as a symbolic metamorphosis of the characters of *The Purim Miracle*.

Bibliography

- Bal M. (2012). *Narratologia. Wprowadzenie do teorii narracji*, Kraków: Eidos.
- Bonislowski R., Podolska J., *Spacerownik. Widzew i nie tylko...*, *Gazeta Wyborcza* [free insert], 11.10.2007.
- Borek P. (2016). "Święto Purim," *List informacyjno-modlitewny*, no. 2.
- Dobrowolska D. (1992). "Przebieg życia – fazy – wydarzenia," *Kultura i Społeczeństwo*, no. 2, pp. 75–85.
- Jakob G. (2001). "Wywiad narracyjny w badaniach biograficznych," in D. Urbaniak-Zajęc, J. Piekarski (eds.), *Jakościowe orientacje w badaniach pedagogicznych*, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, pp. 111–126.
- Kameraz-Kos N. (1997). *Święta i tradycje żydowskie*, Warszawa: Cyklady.
- Każmierska K. (2004). "Wywiad narracyjny jako jedna z metod w badaniach biograficznych," *Przegląd Socjologiczny*, no. 1(53), pp. 71–96.
- Każmierska K. (2008). *Biografia i pamięć. Na przykładzie pokoleniowego doświadczenia ocalonych z Zagłady*, Kraków: Zakład Wydawniczy „Nomos”.
- Kłoskowska A. (2005). *Kultury narodowe u korzeni*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Koczanowicz L., Nahirny R., Włodarczyk R. (eds.). (2005). *Narracje – (Auto)biografia – Etyka*, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Dolnośląskiej Szkoły Wyższej TWP.
- Kos E. (2013). "Wywiad narracyjny jako metoda badań empirycznych," in D. Urbaniak-Zajęc, E. Kos, *Badania jakościowe w pedagogice*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, pp. 91–116.

- Lalak D. (2010). *Życie jako biografia. Podejście biograficzne w perspektywie pedagogicznej*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie „Żak”.
- Lenzen G. (ed.). (2003). *Podstawowe pojęcia pedagogiczne*, Berlin–Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Mater.
- Majewski M. (2009). *Judaizm – święta i obrzędy. Pakiet edukacyjny*, Warszawa: Fundacja Ochrony Dziedzictwa Żydowskiego.
- Piestrzeniewicz M. (2012). “Kultura fizyczna łodzian na przełomie XIX i XX wieku,” *Studia z Historii Społeczno-Gospodarczej*, no. 10, pp. 137–152.
- Prawda M. (1989). “Biograficzne odtwarzanie rzeczywistości (o koncepcji badań biograficznych Fritza Schütze),” *Studia Socjologiczne*, no. 4, pp. 81–98.
- Rokuszewska-Pawełek A. (1996), “Miejsce biografii w socjologii interpretatywnej. Program socjologii biografistycznej Fritza Schützego,” *ASK Research & Methods*, no. 1, pp. 37–54.
- Urbaniak-Zajac D. (2005). “Pedagogiczna perspektywa w badaniach narracyjno-biograficznych,” in L. Koczanowicz, R. Nahirny, R. Włodarczyk (eds.), *Narracje – (Auto)biografia – Etyka*, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Dolnośląskiej Szkoły Wyższej TWP, pp. 115–127.
- Urbaniak-Zajac D., Kos E. (ed.). (2013), *Badania jakościowe w pedagogice*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Urbaniak-Zajac D., Piekarski J. (eds.). (2001), *Jakościowe orientacje w badaniach pedagogicznych*, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego.
- Wiszniewska I. (2014), *My, Żydzi z Polski*, Warszawa: Czarna Owca.

I am grateful to Prof. Danuta Urbaniak-Zajac for her content-related guidelines and to Dr Marcin Fastyn for sharing his knowledge of the Łódź football clubs.

ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE:

Agnieszka Krawczyk
 University of Łódź
 Faculty of Educational Sciences
 e-mail: agnieszka.krawczyk@now.uni.lodz.pl