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Growing up in the Łódź Ghetto: The Diaries of Rywka Lipszyc and Dawid Sierakowiak

When we think of the diaries of the Holocaust, our thoughts inevitably turn to the famous text written by Anne Frank. This article is not about Frank's diary, though no discussion of Holocaust diaries seems possible without at least a superficial reference to the experiences of the Jewish girl in the Netherlands. In the introduction to an anthology of children's wartime diaries, Laurel Holliday notes that Frank's diary became known as "the child's diary of the Holocaust,"[1] while Sue Vice contends that it "remains the best-known work of Holocaust literature in general."[2] Dutch author Hans Goedkoop goes a step further, insisting that Anne Frank has become the symbol of the persecution of the Jews during the Second World War, particularly in the Netherlands. Goedkoop attributes this focus on Frank to one sentence she wrote shortly before being arrested, which reads: "In spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart." It was used in a play about Frank as the final motto and was painted on the wall of the Anne Frank Museum. According to Goedkoop, the 'usage' of Frank's quote turns her into an image – "an international symbol of hope and innocence, courage and a lust in life, and everything else that has to do

[1] Laurel Holliday, Introduction to *Children's Wartime Diaries: Secret Writings from the Holocaust and World War II* (London: Piatkus, 1995), xiv.

[2] Sue Vice, *Children Writing the Holocaust* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004),120.

with tolerance and human rights. In this image so much has been invested that it sustains itself, disregarding the real life of the girl with which all of this started."[3]

Holliday identifies the danger inherent in singling out Frank and her diary for attention. Frank's experiences do not necessarily reflect what many children endured during World War II. Holliday explains: "Because she was in hiding, she did not experience life in the streets, the ghettos, or the concentration camps, as it was lived by millions of children throughout Europe."[4] Indeed, when reading Holliday's or Zapruder's anthologies of children's wartime diaries, which were published in 1995 and 2002 respectively, one readily notices the diversity of experiences among children during World War II, influenced by various factors such as age, class, gender, religious beliefs, and, perhaps most crucially, nationality/ethnicity and the location where they spent the war. The war definitely meant something different for a Polish child living in a small town or village compared to a Jewish child imprisoned in the ghetto or the concentration camp, and it was a wholly distinct experience for an English child who spent the war in the relative safety of the English countryside.

This article brings to the fore two diaries written by teenagers in the Litzmannstadt Ghetto during World War II, and will compare them with ghetto diaries written by adults. One of these diaries belonged to Rywka Lipszyc, who was fourteen when she began writing it in the autumn of 1943; the other was composed by Dawid Sierakowiak, who started his journal a few months before World War II broke out in 1939, when he was almost fifteen years old. Sierakowiak's and Lipszyc's diaries exhibit considerable differences. Sierakowiak was well-educated, knew several languages, and showed interest in current affairs. As a result, his diary displays a high level of fluency and eloquence. Lipszyc, on the other hand, had limited education, and writing did not come easily to her – a fact she commented on in many of her diary entries.

Despite their differing personal backgrounds and the individual characteristics of the two diarists, they both inevitably witnessed similar events and shared a similar fate. Therefore, it is worthwhile to compare

[3] Hans Goedkoop,'Een morele schijnbeweging. De biografie van een joods meisje als onderzoek naar de shoah'. *De vele gezichten van Ann Frank*. Ed. Gerrold van der Stroom. Amsterdam/Antwerpen: De Prom, 2003. I am indebted to Professor Monica Soeting who allowed me to use her own translation of Goedkoop's essay.

[4] Holliday, Introduction, xiv.

what they chose to record on the pages of their journals, how they framed their experiences, and how they grappled with the trauma of day-to-day existence. While Lipszyc focuses extensively on her emotions and her mental struggles, Sierakowiak documents the physical deterioration of his body (Kowalska-Leder regards it as a study of "ghetto disease") and rarely expresses his feelings. Furthermore, Sierakowiak seldom dwells on the past, whereas Lipszyc constantly returns in her thoughts (and dreams) to the traumatic events of losing her parents and siblings. Lipszyc finds some sort of comfort in faith, which holds much less importance for Sierakowiak. However, there are also similarities between the two diarists. For instance, both teenagers frequently comment on family troubles and their attempts at cultivating their minds against all odds. When examined together, their accounts allow us to begin to form an image of how ghetto life affected adolescents, how they made sense of a world on the brink of annihilation, and how their concerns differed from (or were similar to) the concerns of adult ghetto inhabitants.

In the following section, I will offer a brief overview of the socio-historical context of life in the Litzmannstadt Ghetto, with a specific emphasis on the circumstances faced by children. I will then proceed to provide introductory details about the authors, before delving into a comparative analysis of Sierakowiak's and Lipszyc's diaries.

Children in the Łódź Ghetto

Łódź – a city in central Poland and once a vibrant capital of the textile industry – was home to around 233,000 Jewish people (one-third of all the city's inhabitants) before World War II, which meant that the Jewish community of Łódź was the second largest such community both in Poland and Europe. The persecution of the Jews began simultaneously with the Nazis' occupation of Łódź on 8 September 1939, and the Jewish community was immediately subjected to various restrictions and orders, not to mention the indignities and hardships they suffered on a daily basis. On 8 February 1940 plans were announced to create an isolated district for the Jews, and a few months later these plans turned into a terrifying reality for the over 160,000 residents who by 30 April 1940 were enclosed in the

ghetto in the northern part of the city, by then renamed as Litzmannstadt.[5] The Łódź ghetto was the first large-scale and the longest operating ghetto during the war.

Mordecai Chaim Rumkowski, who had been the head of the Jewish Administration from the beginning of the war, became the Jewish representative responsible for the internal organization and management of the ghetto. Although Rumkowski has gone down in history as a highly controversial and divisive leader[6], he did, as Löw remarks, pay special attention to children in the ghetto and tried to secure better conditions for them.[7] Löw explains that children were seen as the future of the Jewish nation, and there was a widespread consensus among the ghetto population that they should be fed and treated better,[8] although, as we will see in Sierakowiak's diary, that was not always the case. Rumkowski, a former director of the Jewish orphanage, initiated many programs and social aid operations that were supposed to help children. Shortly after the outbreak of the war, the Jewish Council, operating under Rumkowski's administration, reinstated the temporarily-closed schools and until their permanent closure in autumn of 1941 a considerable emphasis was put on education. Ghetto schools served not only as centers of learning but also as providers of essential support, ensuring that children received a daily meal and basic healthcare.[9] Browning, Dean, and Megargee report that

[5] Christopher R. Browning, Martin Dean, and Geoffrey P. Megargee. *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933–1945, Volume II: Ghettos in German-Occupied Eastern Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012) 24 May 2023. <muse.jhu.edu/book/28803> 77

[6] Mordecai Chaim Rumkowski (1877-1944), the president of the Łódź Ghetto, seemed to believe that by collaborating with the Nazis he would manage to save at least some people. He enjoyed many privileges in the ghetto and often abused his power, but his position did not save him from being liquidated in Auschwitz. In many diaries and survivor's testimonies he is represented as a despised figure and considered a traitor. In 1986 Primo Levi published a well-known essay entitled 'The Grey Zone', in which he argued that we should not so easily pass judgment on 'privileged' Jews, such as Rumkowski, who collaborated with the enemy and made unpopular decisions during the war because they found themselves in extreme situations. The influential concept of the grey zone destabilizes the seemingly black and white binary oppositions of 'friend' and 'enemy' or 'good' and 'evil' and warns that moral judgement is sometimes difficult, if not impossible, to pass, and in some cases it should be withheld entirely. The representation of figures such as Rumkowski, Levi insists, might require some form of ambiguity. For further discussion of Rumkowski see for instance Richard L. Rubenstein, "Gray into Black: The Case of Mordecai Chaim Rumkowski" in Jonathan Petropoulous and John K. Roth (eds.), *Gray Zones: Ambiguity and Compromise in the Holocaust and its Aftermath* (2005).

[7] Anrea Löw, *Getto łódzkie/Litzmannstadt Getto: Warunki życia i sposoby przetrwania*, trans. Małgorzata Półrola, Łukasz Marek Pleś (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2012), 152.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid., 156.

"[b]etween June 1940 and October 1941, 14,798 children attended 45 primary and 2 secondary schools."[10] In August 1940 Rumkowski opened a colony for children in Marysin, the northeastern part of the ghetto, where 1,600 orphans and children from the poorest families were accommodated.[11] Later, centers for Zionist youths as well as day and summer camps for children were established in the area.

However, with each year of the war the protection of children grew increasingly difficult. Those children who remained in the ghetto after the *Gehsperre*,[12] known as *szpera* in Polish, which took place in September 1942, could not, as Löw puts it, "remain children" anymore.[13] Schools, orphanages, day and summer camps ceased to exist, and children had to work, care for households, wait in lines to receive provisions, and look after their younger siblings, especially if their parents had passed away, as was the unfortunate case for both Lipszyc and Sierakowiak.[14] In spring 1943, when the situation in the ghetto became temporarily stable, some workshops organised classes for teenagers which were supposed to teach them a trade that was usually related to the work they performed (for instance, Lipszyc spent time learning how to operate a sewing machine). Apart from their vocational education, they received the rudiments of certain subjects such as mathematics and Hebrew. However, only a fraction of adolescents benefited from this form of training. The young people also did their best to maintain a semblance of normality by organising meetings, clubs, and libraries. Younger children found ways to play games, many of which imitated life in the ghetto. Löw, quoting the sociologist George Eisen, mentions that it was not uncommon for children to play at *Aktion* or to act out daily scenes from the ghetto, such as queuing for rations.[15]

Although efforts were made to protect children, they nonetheless suffered great physical, intellectual, and psychological losses. They were also the likeliest victims of starvation and disease. For many, especially the younger ones, the ghetto meant a death sentence, as children under ten,

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[10] Browning, Dean, and Megargee, *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos*, 79.

[11] Löw, *Getto łódzkie/Litzmannstadt Getto*, 152.

[12] It was the general curfew and examination of the ghetto population that was supposed to eliminate the weakest and 'non-productive' member of the society, that is children, the infirmed, and the elderly.

[13] Löw, *Getto łódzkie/Litzmannstadt Getto*, 293.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid., 296.

along with the elderly, were the first to be deported to the camps. The tragic situation of children in the closed district can perhaps be best summarised through the words of Rachel Auerbach, the manager of a soup kitchen in the Warsaw ghetto and one of Ringelblum's collaborators, who recorded in her diary the following paradox: "I once saw with my own eyes […] a child's corpse covered with a 'Children's Month' poster with the slogan: 'Save children! Our children must live!'"[16]

Dawid Sierakowiak, Rywka Lipszyc, and their diaries

Dawid Sierakowiak was born in Łodź on 25 July 1924. When the war broke out on 1 September 1939, he had just turned fifteen. He began his diary on 28 June 1939 at a summer camp in Krościenko nad Dunajcem, a mountain village in the south of the country. Dawid was an incredibly talented, ambitious, and mature young man. He knew several languages and was eager to learn new ones. He kept his diary in immaculate Polish, wrote articles and poetry in Yiddish and Polish, and translated between these two languages. He also taught Hebrew and Yiddish to students to contribute to the family income, read John Galsworthy in English and Thomas Mann in German, and studied Latin and French. Thanks to his high grades at school, he had received a scholarship which had allowed his education to be continued in a private school before the war. He was keenly interested in political affairs and was fascinated with Marxist philosophy, which made him particularly sensitive to the inequalities in the ghetto.

Dawid's family of four struggled from the beginning of the war, and Dawid suffered incredible hardship in the ghetto. His notebooks contain a story of immense deprivation, starvation, and the degradation of familial bonds. It is a tale of continual loss – the loss of hope, the loss of intellectual curiosity, the loss of physical strength, the loss of both parents, and ultimately, the loss of life. Dawid died in the ghetto on 8 August 1943 from tuberculosis, most likely triggered by the starvation he endured from the start of the war. His diary, which breaks off a few months before his passing, is undoubtedly the most comprehensive record of life in the Łódź ghetto

[16] Rachela Auerbach, *Pisma z getta warszawskiego [Rachel Auerbach, Writings from the Warsawa ghetto]*, ed. Karolina Szymaniak (Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, im. Emanuela Ringelbluma, 2016), 125 [my own translation]

as experienced by an adolescent, as Dawid kept his entries regularly for almost four years during the German occupation.

Alan Adelson, the editor of the English edition of Sierakowiak's diary, describes Wiesław Szkudlarek's discovery of the five surviving notebooks of Sierakowiak's diary when he returned to the apartment he had been forced to vacate before the war to make space for the ghetto's inhabitants. Notebooks 2 and 4 were published for the first time in Poland in 1960, while all five available notebooks (at least two others were most likely lost) were first published in English in 1996. The Polish edition of the whole journal did not appear until 2015.

Encouraged by her dear friend, Rywka Lipszyc commenced her diary a few months after Dawid Sierakowiak's death, on 3 October 1943, so her diary covers a different period, effectively carrying on the account of ghetto life from where he had left off. When she began keeping her journal she was almost the same age as Dawid when he started his: she had just turned fourteen, while he had begun his about a month prior to his fifteenth birthday. Rywka was born on 15 September 1929, followed by three siblings: her brother Abram (Abramek), born in 1932, and two sisters – Cypora, affectionately called Cipka, born in 1933, and Estera, referred to as Tamarcia in the diary, who was born in 1937. By the time Rywka began her diary, she had already lost most of her family. Her father, severely beaten by the Germans, never fully recovered and died in June 1941. Her mother followed a year later in July 1942. A few months after their mother's passing, Estera and Abram became victims of the *szpera*, a horrifying event in September 1942, during which around 15,000 children and the elderly were deported to the extermination camp in Chełmno nad Nerem. Rywka's aunt, who had been caring for Rywka and Cypora since their mother's death, passed away in July 1943. When we meet Rywka in her diary, she lives with her sister Cipka and three cousins, Estusia, Chanusia, and Minia, of whom only Estusia (Estera) was of full legal age, meaning that the household was run mainly by underage girls who were left to fend for themselves. Rywka's world was dominated and shaped by women, which makes the gender perspective another potentially interesting plane for comparison to Dawid's diary.

Rywka's diary, as Judy Janec recounts, was found in the spring of 1945 amidst the ruins of Auschwitz-Birkenau by Zinaida Berezovskaya, a physician accompanying the Soviet army. She took it with her back to

Omsk in Siberia. The diary, which was handed down from one family member to another after Zinaida's death, eventually attracted the interest of Zinaida's granddaughter, Anastasia Shangina-Berezovskaya, who came across it when she arrived from the United States to visit her mother. Anastasia took it with her to the United States, where it was published in English in 2014. Its Polish edition emerged three years later, in 2017.[17]

As for Rywka herself, her fate after the war remains unknown, according to what can be gleaned from various essays that precede and follow the English edition of her diary. When the Germans decided to liquidate the Łódź ghetto in the summer of 1944, Rywka, along with her sister and three cousins, was deported to Auschwitz. Various documents and the testimony of her two elder cousins, who survived the war, confirm that Rywka was subsequently sent to Christianstadt, a labor camp, and from there to Bergen-Belsen. She managed to survive the perilous march to Bergen-Belsen, but after liberation, was too weakened to join her cousins, who went to Sweden. The last trace of her existence is the Displaced Persons Registration Record of 10 September 1945. Despite extensive efforts to ascertain her subsequent fate, nothing further has been established so far.

The Diary of Dawid Sierakowiak: Five Notebooks from the Łódź Ghetto versus *Rywka's Diary: The Writings of a Jewish Girl from the Lodz Ghetto*

The style and function of the diaries

Sierakowiak was five years older than Lipszyc, which meant that he had been at school for five years longer when the war broke out, and these different levels of education are clearly reflected in their diaries. Sierakowiak wrote his diary in fluent and correct Polish. Every entry is meticulously dated and accompanied by the name of the location, which, with the exception of the initial month he spent in Krościenko nad Dunajcem, was consistently Łódź. While at the beginning of his diary he sometimes skipped a day or two, when the war began he recorded daily, at least for the first four months. The extent of his sustained record-keeping is unknowable, given that the second notebook, encompassing the pivotal period of his relocation to

[17] Judy Janec, Preface. 'The Diary's Journey from Auschwitz to America'. *Rywka's Diary: The Writings of a Jewish Girl from the Lodz Ghetto*, ed. Anita Friedman, trans. Malgorzata Markoff., (New York: Harper Collins, 2015) [e-book edition], (Loc 34-78).

the ghetto, is lost. What can be asserted with certainty, however, is that throughout the four-year span of keeping his diary, he exhibited a relatively consistent writing pattern. The longest periods without any records can be found in the fifth notebook, where he no longer skipped single days but whole weeks, probably due to his declining strength and health.

Sierakowiak rarely struggled with self-expression. Even when he described the grimmest of events, he was rarely lost for words and rarely questioned his ability to recount what he witnessed, as many adult diarists did. According to Leociak, the motif "no words can express it"[18] is evident in a majority of ghetto diaries. Sierakowiak only twice characterized the situation as "indescribable." The initial instance occurred on 5 September 1942, when he bore witness to the Nazis apprehending his mother during the *szpera*, and was confronted with scenes reminiscent of a Dantean inferno unfolding on the streets. When children were separated from their mothers, he wrote that "[t]he screams, struggling, cries of the mothers and of everyone else on the street were indescribable."[19] Then, in his last notebook, already exhausted by hunger, he noted: "I am completely depressed. The prospect of cold and hunger fills me with indescribable terror."[20] Otherwise he felt confident of his ability to relate his life, as well as the lives of other people, in the ghetto.

The majority of his entries are brief, typically comprising up to ten sentences, with a significant portion consisting of no more than three or four. These shorter entries are occasionally interspersed with more extensive notes. Dawid recounts in a rather factual manner, and he mainly describes what happened to him and his family members or what he witnessed and heard in the ghetto. He also reports various announcements, orders, and news, and, once the sources of information have been cut off (as the Germans forbade the Jews from reading newspapers and confiscated their radios), he notes in many of his entries: "There is no news" or "In politics there is nothing new." In this respect his journal resembles many adult diaries composed in both Łódź and other ghettos. The factual style of reporting and the thematic scope of his entries can be compared, for instance, to that of Jakub Poznański, who, along with with his wife and

[18] Jacek Leociak, *Text in the Face of Destruction: Accounts from the Warsaw Ghetto Reconsidered*, trans. Emma Harris (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2004), 109.

[19] Sierakowiak, 218.

[20] Ibid., 243.

daughter, managed to survive the Łódź ghetto. Poznański, who successfully concealed his radio, also frequently relates the changing political situation, recounts the life in the enclosed quarter, and comments on the ghetto inequalities which have become more glaring with each passing year of the war. Moreover, both authors regularly note down the rations that they either received or were expecting to receive.

Another similarity between Poznański and Sierkowiak is that their diaries rarely convey their emotions. In Sierakowiak's case, his emotions have to be inferred from his descriptions of the situation, like "It's really bad at home"[21] or exclamations, like the recurring "Damn it!" Dawid also frequently uses the collective 'we,' which sometimes refers to his family, sometimes to a group of specific people, like his friends or people from his workshop, but very often his collective 'we' refers to the whole ghetto population, as in the following fragments: "We live in constant fear and worry,"[22] "Meanwhile, we are dying here,"[23] and "We are not considered humans at all; cattle for work or slaughter."[24] Even when he narrates his own weakening physical strength and the fact that he can barely walk, he makes his condition universal by finishing the entry with "We are running on the last of our energy,"[25] knowing that a similar fate is being shared by thousands of others in the ghetto.

It is difficult to determine what role the diary played in Sierakowiak's life because he rarely comments on his diary writing, never addresses his diary, and never indicates that he wishes to keep a record of this human tragedy for posterity (as many of the adults, including Jakub Poznański, did[26]), or that his writing brings him comfort (again a motif frequently encountered in adult ghetto diaries). The only time when he declares the importance of his journal is when he considers signing up for voluntary work in Poznań on 27 May 1942, but due to his weakness brought about by hunger he abandons the idea, and then adds: "Besides, I would miss

[21] Ibid., 160.

[22] Ibid., 157.

[23] Ibid., 158.

[24] Ibid., 170.

[25] Ibid., 169.

[26] Jacek Leociak in his book *Text in the Face of Destruction* notes that it was an imperative of many diarists from the Warsaw ghetto to pass on their information, to testify to the atrocities of the war, or to leave a permanent trace behind, even at the expense of their personal safety.

my books and 'letters', notes and copybooks. Especially this diary."[27] The fact remains, however, that he kept the diary regularly and diligently, and even when his strength failed him, he seemed determined to document his declining health and the deteriorating conditions in the ghetto, so the diary must have been important to him. Besides, voicing the purpose of his diary writing might have been redundant, because, as Garbarini notes, "Jewish diary writing reflected the deeply-rooted Jewish tradition of bearing witness to tragedy."[28]

There are no doubts about the diary's importance to Rywka because she comments on it on numerous occasions. Writing is for her a coping mechanism, for she admits "during writing all the nervousness goes away."[29] In another entry, she exclaims: "To write! It's such a gift. Thank you, God, for letting me write!",[30] and when she is scolded by one of her cousins for writing, she comments: "Oh, if she only knew what writing means to me!"[31] Rywka frequently addresses her diary as "my diary," and at one point she treats it anthropomorphically: "You, my diary, must be feeling bad, too, because you have to absorb so many sorrows."[32] In fact, the act of writing holds such significance for her that she envisions her future intimately intertwined with this pursuit, as is evident from the following fragment:

> A few years ago, in my dreams, when I was imagining my future, I could see sometimes: an evening, a studio, a desk, there is a woman sitting at the desk (an older woman), she's writing … and writing, and writing … all the time … she forgets about her surroundings, she's writing. I can see myself as this woman.

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[27] Sierakowiak, 174.

[28] Alexandra Garbarini, *Numbered Days: Diaries and the Holocaust*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 3. Leociak gives a detailed explanation of this phenomenon: "The Torah and Talmud impose the obligation of bearing witness to the wickedness. In the Book of Leviticus (5:1) we read that he who shall 'hear the voice of swearing and is a witness, whether he hath seen or known of it, if do not utter it,' then he commits a grave sin. . . . It is not just being an eyewitness, but knowledge about a crime, which makes the person possessed of knowledge a witness. That knowledge constitutes an obligation. The status of a witness implies an obligation to bear witness – telling other people about what has happened" (Text in the Face of Destruction, 96) – for more details see 96-98.

[29] Lipszyc, Loc 919–925.

[30] Ibid., Loc 1570.

[31] Ibid., Loc 1877.

[32] Ibid. Loc 2118.

The act of writing is a central motif of this brief passage. Despite the fact that the fragment imagines the future, the woman's total absorption in writing suggests that for Rywka writing functioned as a means of escape. All the above examples point to the vital role of her diary, which became her confidante and a repository of her complex and painful emotions.

The entries in her journal are not, like in Dawid's case, the finished product – a brief account of a given day. They seem more like an inscription of a reflective process during which Rywka tries to understand herself, her emotions, and the complex circumstances she finds herself in. Unlike the coherence of Dawid's diary, Rywka's is full of repetitions, ellipses, choppy sentences, fillers, exclamations, and rhetorical questions. Her entries are usually lengthier, but also less regular, than his, and she she easily transitions from recounting the conditions within the ghetto to expressing reflections more befitting a teenager. The rapid shifts from one thought to another sometimes pose a challenge for the reader in tracing her line of reasoning.

Unlike Sierakowiak, who is very reserved, Lipszyc brims with the emotions that she expresses, or tries to express, in her journal, because many a time she writes about the inability to articulate and comprehend her feelings. "I feel so strange… I can't express it … I can't find a place for myself,"[33] she records in one of many similar fragments. However, she seems to believe that writing will eventually help her understand, and this sentiment is evident in the following remark: "I want to write more, and maybe I'll express myself."[34] Sometimes she uses her writing as a form of self-control. In one entry, after voicing her sadness and helplessness, she admonishes herself: "Enough. It's always the same. I have to do an examination of conscience … to persevere."[35] According to Goldberg, "Diaries written in traumatic situations seek to represent trauma within a narrative and in so doing function as a coping mechanism."[36] The pages of her journal therefore provide a safe space where she can articulate her feelings and navigate the trauma of her day-to-day existence by exploring her confusion and anxiety.

However, as Garbarini warns, the therapeutic potential of the diary should not be overestimated because "for many Jewish diarists of the

[33] Ibid., Loc 1106.
[34] Ibid., Loc 1024.
[35] Ibid., Loc 1987.
[36] Amos Goldberg, *Trauma in First Person* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 7.

Holocaust […] diary writing neither positively affected their emotional state, nor had the power to maintain their sense of equilibrium."[37] In fact, she posits that it could even intensify the diarists' anxiety, and adds that this is particularly true for entries written after the great deportations of 1942. Indeed, this is also observable in Rywka's case. Despite the many passages in which she mentions the importance of writing, she also admits that it frustrates her. In one entry she records:

> Oh, I want to pour all my sorrows over the paper – will I be able to feel better? Oh, what now? Now, when so many people suffer in these terrible and tragic times, is there a place for my silly sorrows and suffering? *By writing this, I'm not diminishing my sorrows at all; to the contrary, I'm increasing them.*'[38]

Her frustration with writing paradoxically implies her emotional investment in it. It shows a willingness to confront her emotions, even if that leads to greater distress. On the one hand, writing is regarded as a medium though which she hopes to finds comfort. On the other, in the face of widespread suffering, writing about her personal concerns seems irrelevant and becomes a source of guilt. And then there are passages in which she questions the sense of recording altogether, like the following: "Hunger is increasing, this horrible and hopeless hunger. It's colder, it's freezing. Oh, why shall I even write about it? Words are so insignificant and they express nothing."[39] Confronted with a growing desperation, Rywka, like many other diarists, highlights the limitations of language to capture the magnitude of such harsh realities. However, although she might have found it difficult to find the right words to describe her emotional state, and sometimes even doubted the point of keeping her journal, her choppy way of writing and her agitated voice speak volumes about how lost, distressed, and vulnerable she felt.

Mental vs. physical disintegration

As can readily be seen in many of the extracts given above, Rywka was mainly focused on herself, her feelings, and her troubles, which she sometimes deemed too trivial if considered from a broader perspective. In comparison to Dawid, who scrupulously records the events of the ghetto

[37] Garbarini, *Numbered Days*, 9.
[38] Lipszyc, Loc 1657, [my emphasis].
[39] Ibid., Loc 1465.

and tries to follow the political situation, particularly in the early stages of the war, Rywka writes relatively little about the life of the ghetto. When she does describe it, it is often in relation to her own experiences and how they affect her. Some of her entries, if taken out of context, contain the 'ordinary' concerns of a teenage girl, such as a description of her friendships, shifting loyalties, preparations for performances like a play for Hanukkah, and participation in literature clubs where various literary works were read and discussed (reading played a particularly central role in both her and Dawid's life, and in this regard they shared a common experience with many others in the ghetto for whom reading served as a form of mental respite[40]).

However, her main focus is on her inner life, and her diary is an attempt to make sense of the emotional turmoil she experiences. The pages of her journal are therefore filled with descriptions of tumultuous emotions, some of which repeatedly resurface. Among them, there is remorse in connection to her dead family members. Rywka regrets, for instance, the harsh words she once said to her now-dead mother, and constantly considers whether she could have done anything to prevent her younger siblings from being taken away. She frequently reminisces about her life in the ghetto, particularly during the days when she experienced the loss of her family members. Her family also manifests in her dreams. Horrible memories of the time in the ghetto, combined with the uncertainty of tomorrow, also trigger frequent feelings of sadness, and anxiety which she frequently depicts using idioms related to the heart, such as "heavy heart" and "breaking heart." But most of the time, she cannot put her finger on what troubles her, and she is full of "inexpressible emotions."[41] There is also a recurrent motif of choking or suffocating, which suggests that these various, often unnamed, emotions are overwhelming her. Additionally, in several entries she expresses a desire to escape her current reality, either by falling asleep and waking up in a different world, or by expressing a profound disinterest in living altogether. Sentences such as "I am sick of my entire life,"[42] "I don't feel

[40] Garbarini talks about the importance of reading for many people in the ghetto. She explains: 'For many diarists, reading was the most useful cultural activity in the sense of affording escape and moral uplift […] In general, reading connected the reader to the writer of that work and, through the writer, to "the world at large"' (133).

[41] Lipszyc, Loc 1677.

[42] Ibid., Loc 899.

like living,"[43] and "Honestly, I wanted to die,"[44] echo like a refrain. Some of her reflections are of an existential nature. Considering her place in the world, she confronts the stark question of her (in)significance: "What do I matter? Nothing."[45] In another entry she delves even further into her existential crisis: "When I realize that I don't matter in the world, that I'm just a speck of dust, that I can't do anything, at this moment I feel much worse, I'm suffocating and I'm helpless."[46] Both passages provide a window into her inner world, revealing a profound sense of existential angst, hopelessness, and powerlessness.

Her feelings are undoubtedly intensified by the fact that she feels lonely. Having lost most of her family members, she has only her older cousins to rely on, and their relations are strained, as were many family relations in such extreme circumstances. She reports having frequent squabbles with her cousins, which contribute to her feeling isolated and misunderstood. Once she discovers that someone in their household – she refuses to divulge the identity of this person – is stealing food from the others (Sierakowiak experiences the same situation), she is extremely disappointed and disgusted. Unfortunately, such situations were not uncommon in the ghetto. Daily stress, uncertainty, and the lack of resources put a lot of strain on people, as most adults realized. For example, Jakub Poznański noted:

> Our meals become more and more monotonous. On the top of that, there is horrible overcrowding. This influences each of us terribly: my wife, child and me. Sometimes we say something unpleasant – reproaches, which in other conditions would be unthinkable. But obviously no one pays much attention to these words which are triggered by our mental state and the overall situation in the ghetto.[47] (42, author's own translation)

Rywka was not equipped with the mechanisms that would help her see and understand the bigger picture. She took everything very personally, which comes as no surprise, considering her young age.

There are only two sources that bring her occasional comfort: her love for her friend Surcia, and her faith. Rywka came from the family of

[43] Ibid., Loc 934.
[44] Ibid., Loc 1012.
[45] Ibid., Loc 1999.
[46] Ibid., Loc 2180-85.
[47] Jakub Poznański, *Pamiętnik z getta łódzkiego* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, 1960) 42.

observant Jews, her uncles were rabbis, and her great-grandfather, Rabbi Eliyahu Chaim Meisel, had been the chief rabbi of Łódź back in the nineteenth century.[48] Rywka is happy that she was born a Jewish girl, who "was taught to love God,"[49] and admits that if not for her faith, she "would lose [her] will to live."[50] She often addresses God and asks for his intervention, as in the following fragment: "I'll go crazy. . . I need strength. . . God! Strength!"[51] However, her faith, or rather the fact that she cannot practice it, can also be a source of great distress. The Germans not only closed and then destroyed Jewish places of worship at the beginning of the war, but they also did not respect their holidays. Jews had to work on the Sabbath and during other Jewish festivals, which massively unsettles Rywka, who clearly feels guilty for not being able to observe this important religious holiday:

> This day, this holy, sacred day is for them an ordinary and normal weekday. God, am I among them? And I'm like them? [...] For me, going to the workshop on Saturday was a terrible agony [...] Oh, God, do something so I wouldn't have to go to the workshop on Saturday! I felt so bad! I wanted to cry![52]

Once again she questions her own place in this altered reality. The fact that she has to compromise her religious beliefs brings her a great deal of emotional pain.

Although Dawid's family was religious, religion did not play an important part in his life. Early on in his diary, displaying great maturity and independent thinking, he explains his view on the subject: "Although I'm not a traditionally pious man, and every year I have considered the avoidance of prayer as a liberation, I now experience every order pertaining to the Jews with great pain because I know what faith brings to its believers."[53] For that reason we do not find invocations to God in Dawid's diary, even in the hardest of moments. This is one of many differences

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[48] Fred Rosenbaum, 'Lodz: A History of the City and the Ghetto.' In *Rywka's Diary: The Writings of a Jewish Girl from the Lodz Ghetto*, ed. Anita Friedman, trans. Malgorzata Markoff. (New York: Harper Collins, 2015), Loc 739.

[49] Lipszyc, Loc 1397.

[50] Ibid., Loc 1553.

[51] Ibid., Loc 1198.

[52] Ibid., (Loc 1751–56).

[53] Sierakowiak. 38.

between his diary and Rywka's; another is what he focuses on in his journal. Unlike Rywka, who scrutinizes her emotions, Dawid does not dissect his feelings, and therefore we do not encounter many descriptions of his emotional states, especially in the first three notebooks. Sometimes he mentions them in passing, for instance, noting briefly upon learning about German victories that he has "completely lost [his] head since yesterday,"[54] and sometimes his emotions disappear behind the collective voice, as in the following fragment: "Everyone is extremely nervous,"[55] but most of the time he is interested in reporting external events rather than the intricacies of his inner self. And even though after the *szpera* – during which his "most Sacred, beloved, worn-out, blessed, cherished Mother has fallen victim to the bloodthirsty German Nazi beast!!"[56] – he is more tense and more prone to vent his frustrations, he does it differently from Rywka. While she is lost in the labyrinth of her emotions, he can name them and thus own them, no matter how intense and difficult they are. Sometimes he even uses sarcasm and dark humour to distance himself from the hopelessness of his situation. For instance, explaining that he has decided to spend the little money he has on a filling for a bad tooth, he comments 'jokingly': "If they are going to bury me in this ghetto, let it at least be without cavities in my teeth."[57]

Instead of focusing on his feelings, Dawid increasingly concentrates on his weakening physical self. Although both diarists experienced hunger in the ghetto, Rywka was in a slightly more privileged position than Dawid because together with her sister they received *bajrat* (also known as B allocation), which provided a supplementary ration of food for selected people. Consequently, references to hunger only become more noticeable in the final pages of her journal. In contrast, Dawid suffered hunger almost from the very onset of the war. With each passing month, Dawid – who at the beginning of his diary displays a lot of youthful enthusiasm, social commitment, and interest in current and political affairs – turns his attention to food. There are weeks in which most of his entries are in some way related to the topic. He regularly gives an account of the rations he has received, or the lack thereof, scrupulously enumerates what products he and his family obtained, lists their prices, and notes the dates of expected

[54] Ibid., 108.
[55] Ibid., 71.
[56] Ibid., 218.
[57] Ibid.,188–89.

allocations. He also frequently comments on the distribution of food and the fact that the process breeds inequality in the ghetto as the privileged get more, and more diverse, allocations, which for him, someone fascinated with Marxism, was particularly glaring and outrageous. Hunger therefore becomes a dominant theme. The word itself appears around 70 times in his journal, not counting its synonyms (in comparison, it appears 13 times in Rywka's). As the hunger intensifies, he records how it affects his family relations as well as his intellectual and physical self. Similarly to Rywka, Dawid also had to deal with disappointment with his family, especially with his father who regularly stole rations from others. During the war, many children could not count on the protection of even their closest family members, and frequently the roles were reversed – the children had to take care of their dying parents or younger siblings, thus drawing on resources they would not have had to tap into in normal circumstances.

While Rywka's diary is rather consistent in its content, Dawid's preoccupations change as the war progresses, and we observe how his world slowly shrinks. Although he does his best to develop himself through reading and studying, his starving and exhausted body gradually deprives him of his intellectual curiosity, and Dawid records his physical decline. On 24 June 1942, a few months before the *szpera* (Germans usually sent less food to the ghetto before planned deportations) and around a year before his death, he notes: "I'm deteriorating rapidly. Even reading is difficult for me. I can't concentrate on anything for long. Time runs from one meal to another."[58] His diary registers the different stages of starvation: the lack of concentration, weakness, fatigue, dizziness, shortness of breath, perspiration, depression, inertia, various ailments (such as scabies or abscesses forming in his mouth), "the hourglass on the mug,"[59] an emaciated and, eventually, swollen body. Dawid is aware that if his situation does not improve, death by starvation awaits him and many other inhabitants in the ghetto; and unfortunately he was right.

In this regard, Dawid's diary complements the firsthand adult accounts from various ghettos that shed light on the pervasive issue of hunger. Irene Hauser, who was deported from Vienna to Łódź in 1940 along with her husband and six-year-old son, also concentrates almost

[58] Ibid.,189.
[59] Ibid., 187.

exclusively on starvation and the deterioration of family life in her very short journal, which runs to barely 28 pages in the published version. Like Dawid, she scrupulously notes each ration and tries to describe the toll that the constant fight for food has taken on her and her family, although she does so only during a very brief period and far more chaotically than young Sierakowiak. Both diarists depict how hunger destabilized family structures, reversed gender roles, strained relationships between parents and their children, and ultimately devastated both the body and the spirit. Another notable contribution to the accounts of hunger is Leyb Goldin's "Chronicle of a Single Day," written within the confines of the Warsaw ghetto. As its title suggests, Goldin describes one day in the life of the ghetto, focusing in particular on his struggle with hunger, which is so overpowering that the protagonist can barely think about anything else. He measures the time that separates him from his next meal, and each passing hour feels interminably long to his empty stomach, which engages in conversations with its owner. Goldin's autobiographical essay is lyrical and full of intertextual references. According to Sven-Erik Rose, Goldin deliberately draws on the European literary tradition in seeking the right framework to understand and articulate the extreme experiences of the ghetto, particularly that of hunger. Each of these works provides valuable insights into the daily struggles of the ghetto, thus constituting a crucial and unique contribution to the collective memory of the Holocaust.

Conclusion

In the foreword to Sierakowiak's diary, Lawrence Langer states: "Those hoping to find in this diary a tribute to the invincible human spirit are bound to be disappointed."[60] In fact, this comment can easily refer to both the diaries examined here, as their authors suffered a horrible ordeal, although each of them experienced life in the ghetto in their own individual way, and each of them focused on different aspects in their writing. While Rywka recorded and scrutinized her complicated and distressing emotions in an attempt to comprehend and manage her mental state so that she could persevere despite being engulfed in hopelessness, Dawid, who initially documented the unfolding events in the ghetto and beyond, gradually

[60] Lawrence Langer, Foreword to *The Diary of Dawid Sierakowiak: Five Notebooks from the Łódź Ghetto*, ed. Adam Adelson, trans. Kamil Turowski (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), ix.

turned his attention to his physical survival, or rather his physical decline. Their diverse experiences stemmed undoubtedly from their unique sensibilities, different levels of education, and religious beliefs. However, they were also shaped by their respective positions within the ghetto's social structure since even within the confines of the ghetto, inequalities were prevalent. Additionally, I believe their gender played a role, as it was customary for men to concentrate on external, public aspects of life in their journals, while women tended to emphasize the personal aspects of their existence. Dawid, despite his young age, exhibited remarkable maturity in reflection and observation, and his diary resembles those of many adults. In contrast, Rywka's diary, with its focus on the authorial "I," distinguishes itself through its emotionality and spontaneity, and is more in line with what is customarily expected of adolescent writing.

Going back to my introduction, I believe there is one more reason why the spotlight lingering on Anne Frank's diary, and especially on its more optimistic parts, is dangerous: it makes the unbearable bearable, thus taming the terror of the Holocaust. In his thought-provoking essay "Who Owns Auschwitz?" the Hungarian Nobel prize winner and Holocaust survivor Imre Kertész warns against the stylization of the Holocaust, claiming that even "the word 'Holocaust' is already a stylization, an affected abstraction from more brutal-sounding terms like 'extermination camp' or 'Final Solution.'"[61] For that reason, we should turn to such diaries as Lipszyc's and Sierakowiak's, because, although they are mediated representations of real events, they can deepen our understanding of coming-of-age in captivity in general, and in the ghetto in particular. And instead of hopeful quotes, like the one by Anne Frank discussed by Goedkoop, we should pick the most painful, disturbing, and horrifying ones (both diaries abound in them) not only to do justice to the victims, who did not compose glorious stories of triumph over evil (because they did not survive that evil), but also to emphasize, and remind everyone once again (for even now there are numerous war zones where people, including children, struggle and die) that human beings are breakable. This is not to refuse agency to these young people, because they undoubtedly did everything in their power to endure and stay sane; but the circumstances they encountered were beyond the human capability to survive.

[61] Imre Kertész, 'Who Owns Auschwitz?' trans. John MacKay. *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 14 (1) 2001: 267–272, 268.

Anita Jarczok

Growing up in the Łódź Ghetto: The Diaries of Rywka Lipszyc and Dawid Sierakowiak

This article analyzes the diaries written by teenagers living in the Litzmannstadt Ghetto during World War II and contrasts them with the accounts of adult ghetto inhabitants. The diaries in focus belong to Rywka Lipszyc and Dawid Sierakowiak, both adolescents who endured similar hardships yet displayed distinct perspectives and writing styles. Sierakowiak, characterized by his erudition and intellectual curiosity, provides a detailed and analytical account, focusing first on external events and then on his physical deterioration. In contrast, Lipszyc's diary reflects her emotional turmoil. On the pages of her journal, she grapples with the loss of her family and the trauma of daily existence. The comparative analysis of Lipszyc's and Sierakowiak's diaries underscores the complexities of ghetto life and the varied coping mechanisms employed by its inhabitants. Their narratives, while unique, collectively contribute to a deeper understanding of the impact of the Holocaust on adolescent experiences and perceptions.

Keywords: Rywka Lipszyc, Dawid Sierakowiak, the Holocaust, Holocaust diaries, Łódź Ghetto

Słowa kluczowe: Rywka Lipszyc, Dawid Sierakowiak, Zagłada, pamiętniki Holokaustu, łódzkie getto