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The Joy of Crossing the Dark Line of Script

Abstract

The standard image of research as toil, method and the principle of objectivity appears sterile, mechanistic and devoid of human agency. But research to happen requires scholars, who are passionate about their subjects of investigation. 'Doing research' brings them physical pleasure, which pushes scholars beyond the formal boundaries set in a contract with a university or a grant-making institution. Pecuniary compensation is secondary and rarely adequate for compensating the effort and time expended. The joy of discovery is the ultimate payback. The first stepping stone to research and then to other scriptally differentiated fields of enquiry leads through the acquisition of the skill of reading (and often writing). Initially, it comes in the writing system of a person's first language, but then other scripts tend to follow. This feat of mastering a script always frustrates before achieved, but eventually brings the joy of opening the door to another human world.

Key words: joy, research, polyscriptalism, script

Parole chiave: Gioia, ricerca, polyscriptalism, scrittura

Joy

It was the first (almost) post-pandemic spring in 2022. After the hiatus of the two long and often lethal years of rolling lockdowns, with trepidation I stepped onto the board of a low-cost airplane headed for Germany. A visiting professorship at the University of Jena proved too appealing to turn it down. The location also brought back to my mind happy memories of childhood. In the mid-1970s, my parents took my brother and me in a car for a week-long summer ride from Upper Silesia to East Germany. The prospect of retracing our tracks half a century later was irresistible.

The immersion in the German-speaking environment was like going back to my earliest years. While Mum and Dad were doing their shifts at work, Ōma took care of me. She spoke and told me children's stories in this language, while switched to Silesian, so that my Mum would understand. In Jena, almost palpably, I felt a pleasant halcyon feeling of the presence of persons and things long gone. Yet, it was interlaced with the frustration of not being able to hold a more substantial conversation in German beyond some small talk with a waiter or shop assistant. The post-1945 forced polonization of Upper Silesia deprived me of the possibility of acquiring an adult-style command of German, while research and unexpected life choices pushed me toward the English-speaking world, be it South Africa, the United States, Ireland or now Scotland.

That day I was returning from a day-long outing to Weimar, where I enjoyed museums and cafes. Paradoxically, the town is symbolical of Germany's democracy, but also of nazi and communist totalitarianisms. Layers of the past seep into one another and leave one with a bad aftertaste. The architectural remnants of the unfinished ideal city of national socialism darkened my mood. On a simple concrete platform, the form of which was dictated by functionality alone as a bow to the Bauhaus school, a crowd of commuters were waiting for the service to Jena.

It was warm, even hot for those who in the chill of early morning had put on a woolen coat. The people stood or sat on few benches largely without moving around. They stayed put. Family upbringing and school education that placed premium on 'orderly behavior' prevented them from flouting this stiff convention. Suffering of allergy, I am glad smoking is banned across public spaces in today's Europe. Yet, the platform's far end set apart for the smokers' corner drew my eyesight. I started walking along the platform with a flâneur's faux absentmindedness to have a better look.

She would be nondescript in Palermo, but cut quite a figure in this gentrified German town's railway station. The young woman in subdued office-style attire was smoking with abandon. She held the cigarette between her index and middle fingers, as though it were placed in a flamboyant film star's cigarette holder. The wide

movement of her arm to place the cigarette between her rouged lips was emphatic in the fashion of silent movies. At the same time, she paced to and fro at the large standing flower pot molded from concrete that disguised the smoking place. This dark blond haired woman was treading elegantly in her sensible shoes on rather low heels, but with a loud click-clack, as if wearing stilettos. A half-open handbag danced on her arm with an empty and washed clean transparent plastic lunch container that stuck out.

She enjoyed herself, had a time of her life with the men pretending that they did not look at her, while some women tried to send her a disapproving look without actually appearing to do so. The overriding silent agreement was to keep appearances of boring decorum on this sunny day, though joy became it more. The young woman emulated in her moves an early Marlena Dietrich, dreaming of long travels and nights out in Paris or New York. Dance on, in democratic and integrated Europe and in the globalized world such dreams may easily come true. Let the joyous stiletto of liberty nail the 20th-century totalitarianisms firmly into the ground of oblivion.

Schooling

In the evening before another workday, Mum and Ōma planned lunch. Afterward, the latter departed to the bedroom for her whispered evening prayers in German. Mum talked in school Polish, avoiding Mazovian expressions. Speaking Silesian, Ōma double-checked what to buy at the grocer's in the morning. Then she wrote the items down on a piece of paper in German. A couple of such shopping lists done in her hand could be found in our living room's multi-function bookcases – *meblościanka* ('fitting-the-entire-wall furniture') in Polish – until the early 1980s. In 1974, I went to elementary school with an ambition to read these lists and to learn to write like Ōma did.

Nothing doing, and now five decades later, I am not closer to achieving this lofty goal. Well, I could read German names of foodstuffs on the lists. The task is simple enough. What beats me is Ōma's calligraphic hand, known as the *Kurrentschrift*, or German-style cursive. I never learned how to write like that, so I remain unable to decipher a text in this elegant hand of the Latin alphabet. Otherwise, the alphabet is what I mastered in school for writing in Polish. In the wartime Third Reich this form became known as the *Normal-Schrift* ('normal, regular cursive and alphabet'). In 1941, the *Kurrent* and its even more intricate successor, *Sütterlin* (developed by Royal Prussian Ministry of Culture Ludwig Sütterlin in the early 1910s), were

demonized and banned as 'Judeo-Swabian letters' (*Schwabacher Judenlettern*) (Bormann 1941). During these dark times, anti-semitism could be used as an excuse for whatever an arbitrary decision made by a state official.

This ban extended to *Fraktur* ('broken letters' in Latin), previously employed for printing all German-language publications, with the exception of natural science works and periodicals. None other than master engraver, Albrecht Dürer, developed this printing type for Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I in the early 16th century. It stemmed from the medieval manuscript tradition that had yielded the font for the first printed books in Europe half a century earlier. Subsequently, the Reformation and Counter-Reformation split Western and Central Europe between Catholics and Protestants. The latter chose to mark their confessional difference with *Fraktur* (also known as Black Letter or the Gothic type in English) and languages developed from the faithful's vernaculars. Meanwhile, the Catholic Church clung to elitist Latin. Humanists led by Erasmus of Rotterdam revived the pre-Christian literary tradition in Latin, alongside the historically Roman type of Latin letters, namely, *Antiqua* ('old letters' in Latin). It became the Catholic logo in writing and publishing, and later Nazi Germany's *Normal-Schrift*.

Learning how to write and read these ancient letters of the Roman Empire from two millennia ago, I was then unaware of the great confessional cleavage symbolized by *Antiqua* and *Fraktur*. Ōma valued Catholicism more than any language or national identity. This type of Christian faith was her true homeland. I wonder what she would make of her *Protestant* hand stemming from *Fraktur*, if she knew. The present moment observed in light of history is always more ambiguous and ironic than we expect. In the mid-1990s, I embarked on my doctoral research project devoted to the rise of ethnic and national groups in Silesia during the second half of the 'long' 19th century (Kamusella 2007). I had no choice but to start reading newspapers and books from this period that were almost invariably printed in *Fraktur*. To my silent satisfaction, after a week of perusing such sources, I stopped noticing which passage was in *Fraktur* and which in *Antiqua*.

That is why, I was taken by surprise when in Trinity College Dublin, in 2009, prominent specialist in the history of the book, Jean-Paul Pittion, complained that he experienced problems with reading historical catalogs of the Frankfurt book fairs (*Frankfurter Buchmesse*) because they were published in *Fraktur*. I tried to convince him to practice reading this type, but to no avail. However, at that time, Google released a new facility of copying from digitized books available in its Google Books service. Next, for instance, such a copied fragment could be pasted in Google Translate. In the process, besides obtaining a translation of a German text, the online service automatically transforms the text's *Fraktur* font into *Antiqua*. This serendipitous discovery let Pittion accelerate his research for the new monograph that analyzes the Renaissance book as a material object (Pittion 2013).

Becoming a Researcher

Having been born, raised and educated in communist Poland, I had no choice but to learn Russian, including its script of Cyrillic. Russian classes began in the fourth grade of elementary school. Between 1978 and the last year of my secondary education in 1986, I toiled joylessly at this ideologically-motivated imposition. In most cases, students and teachers were just going through the moves to tick the box. In the wake of martial law imposed on restive Poland's overwhelmingly anticommunist populace in 1981–83, communist party planners went into overdrive. They reimposed the previously neglected obligation of teaching Russian to university students. This measure covered also the students of English philology at the University of Silesia in Sosnowiec, where I continued my education.

In the academic year of 1986/87 my colleagues and I flouted this obligation of attending the course of unloved Russian, which soon afterward was silently scrapped in the spirit of Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of perestroika and glasnost. After all, we had applied to the Department of English, which at that time was one of the most competitive in Poland, so that we would *not* have to learn Russian. We hoped that a reasonable command of English would allow us to escape dreary communist Poland, together with Russian and its Cyrillic. After all, English offered a gateway to the Anglophone West, while citizens of communist Poland were not even permitted as individual tourists to the 'workers' paradise' of the Soviet Union. Hence, there was nowhere to speak and practice one's school Russian. What a bother!

In secondary school, I was compelled to read a single assigned Russian-language novel, namely, *A White Sail Gleams* (Белеет парус одинокий *Beleet parus odinokii*) by Soviet writer Valentin Kataev. It was a chore, I found no joy in it. Subsequently, Cyrillic disappeared from my daily and working life for decades until the early 2010s. At that time, I began researching the forgotten 1989 ethnic cleansing of communist Bulgaria's Turks. The project entailed reading much primary source material in Bulgarian, which is obviously written in Cyrillic (Kamusella 2019a). My enthusiasm pushed me to scale this barrier of script, yet at times I gave in to the easy route of automatic romanization that Google Translate affords. A breakthrough came in 2018, when I achieved fluency in reading Cyrillic, meaning I stopped consciously noticing whether a text is in Latin or Cyrillic letters.

At that time, I visited Miensk and Horadnia in Belarus to gather research material for a new project. Much to my surprise, I discovered that Belarusian is much closer to Polish than Slovak. During the sojourn, I kept reading the spell-bounding novel *Сабакі Эўропы* *Sabaki Eüropy* (Dogs of Europe) by Alhierd Bacharevič (2017), or currently the country's best and most original young writer. I was astounded that

I plowed so quickly through this thick volume of almost 900 pages. I forgot about Cyrillic, this script became transparent to me, what mattered now was the storyline. My unplanned acquisition of Cyrillic was serendipitously rounded up with the discovery of Polish-language books in the Russian-style Cyrillic produced for Catholics in today's western Belarus (Kamusella 2019b).

In turn, Belarusian historian, Hienadz Sahanovič, gifted me a Belarusian-language Catholic prayer book in Latin letters (Stepovič 1949). In this manner, I discovered for myself the Belarusian Latin alphabet, or *łacinka*. Very few books are published nowadays in this script, but in 2020, I chanced upon an e-book with the Belarusian translation in *łacinka* of Lithuanian author Ričardas Gavelis's sprawling novel *Vilnius Poker* (Havialis 2018). It was a veritable scriptal feast of literature, which I would gladly have a repeat of in the near future. Yet, with the recent suppression of the independent Belarusian-language publishers of literature in Belarus, I have little hope of this dream come true anytime soon. Much to my delight, however, in Prague, in the middle of this otherwise awful year of 2022, a collection of Bacharevič's poetry came off the press in both *łacinka* and Cyrillic, biculturally titled *Vieršy Вершы* (Poems) (Bacharevič 2022).

Sadly, my on-and-off perusal of Cyrillic-based articles and online media in Belarusian, Russian, Macedonian, Bulgarian or Serbian (Serbo-Croatian) acquired a new – more ominous – dimension, due to Russia's unprovoked and unjustified full-scale invasion of peaceful Ukraine in 2022. After achieving a skill of reading fiction in Belarusian, I was vain enough to want to repeat this feat in the case of Ukrainian literature. But with no research project that would necessitate reading through Ukrainian-language material, the process was slow. Yet, in moments free of assessing student essays, I read through two 'thick' Ukrainian novels. Both turned out to be excellent.

Serhii Synhaivskii's *Дорога на Асмару Doroha na Asmaru* (The Road to Asmara) is devoted to the secret Soviet military intervention in communist Ethiopia during the mid-1980s (Synhaivskii 2016). The story is told from the perspective of a Soviet military interpreter, modeled on the author himself. On the other hand, Sofia Andrukhovych's *Амадока Amadoka* recovers from oblivion a sweeping panorama of Ukraine's 'long dark 20th century.' It is composed from the interlaced stories on the Holdomor, the Holocaust, Soviet totalitarianism and present-day Russia's neo-imperialism. The last phenomenon is exemplified in the book through the Kremlin's 2014 attack on eastern Ukraine, which stalemated into a simmering local conflict (Andrukhovych 2020).

Little did I know that Moscow's 2022 onslaught against Ukraine would compel me to liaise with colleagues from this country and read Ukrainian-language news outlets on a regular basis, as I do until now (that is, October 2022). These developments came rapidly into the footsteps of the 2020 protests in Belarus after the bla-

tantly falsified presidential election. The unprecedented repressions that followed in Belarus continue to this day and earlier convinced me to observe the situation by reading Belarusian-language news sites. At present, each day, I read articles and information in Belarusian, Ukrainian and also Russian, not taking any conscious note of the fact that it comes in Cyrillic letters. The same script also masks from me the fact that I switch between different languages.

At times, this bittersweet pleasure of scaling Cyrillic is too much, because of the war-related circumstances. One becomes too emotional and depressed. Reaching such a place, I stop and cut on staying abreast with news for a week or so. In these idling moments, I like trying my hand at reading Slavic or Romanian (Moldovan) texts in Church Cyrillic. After all, what we refer to as Cyrillic nowadays, is none other than Antiqua-like (Antiqua-ized?) Church Cyrillic. This type was designed in the early 18th century by Dutch engravers, commissioned by Muscovian (Russian) Tsar Peter, who wanted to westernize Muscovy (Russia). In Russian, modern Cyrillic is known as Гражданка *Grazhdanka*, meaning, the 'civil' (non-ecclesiastical) script. But until the mid-19th century, the Russian Orthodox Church stuck to Church Cyrillic, while non-ecclesiastical books were printed in *Grazhdanka*. At present, in Russia only liturgical books are produced in Church Cyrillic, while in prayer books for the faithful even texts in Church Cyrillic are given in *Grazhdanka*.

The switch from Church Cyrillic to *Grazhdanka* for writing and publishing in Bulgarian and Serbian took place as late as the mid-19th century, though the Balkan Slavic Orthodox Churches remained loyal to Church Cyrillic till the early 20th century. In the 1860s, the process of abandoning Church Cyrillic accelerated in Romania, but with a twist. Instead of changing from Church Cyrillic to Antiqua-like *Grazhdanka*, the Romanians decided to drop Cyrillic altogether in favor of the Latin alphabet, obviously in the Antiqua type. Yet, this switch was limited to between these two types of Cyrillic in the then Russian province of Bessarabia, or today's Moldova. As a result, Moldovan (Romanian) was written there in *Grazhdanka* as late as 1989.

Although still plagued by some difficulties in this regard, I developed a reading skill in Church Cyrillic, mainly thanks to an Orthodox prayer book in Church Slavonic, published in the eastern Polish city of Białystok (*Modlitewnik* 2009). This small book offers the basic Orthodox prayers in Church Slavonic executed in Church Cyrillic letters. In a parallel column such a prayer is phonetically rendered in the Polish-style Latin alphabet, while below a Polish translation is supplied.

Going היים *Heym*

First of all, this polyscriptal and multilingual Orthodox prayer book struck me as an apt synecdoche for Central Europe, as this region used to be prior to the rise of the normatively monolingual and monoscriptal nation-states after 1918 (Kamusella 2021a). Yet, on another look, this kind of technologically dexterous and utilitarian religious publication reminded me that its model must be a typical Jewish prayer book. The latter always furnishes the faithful with prayers in the biblical Hebrew and Aramaic, both languages written in Hebrew letters. In addition, such a publication never fails to provide a phonetic rendering of these Jewish prayers in the official language of a European country, including this language's specific script, be it Cyrillic, Greek or Latin. At times, a translation into such a language follows, but it is not a theological must (*Błogosławieństwa* 2007). What counts in Judaism is pronouncing relatively correctly a given Hebrew or Aramaic prayer.

To the vast majority of today's Europeans the Hebrew abjad (consonantry) appears to be so foreign, so out of place, so pronouncedly *un-European*. Unfortunately, despite any protestations to the contrary, in this respect antisemitism and Nazi Germany's aspiration at *Endlösung* ('final solution') won. Postwar Europe's exhortations to rebuild the continent on the foundation of Judeo-Christian values and to commemorate the Holocaust as a sure prevention of yet another genocide fell on deaf ears. Yes, most state officials and Europeans go through the passive moves of attending boring Holocaust-themed ceremonies. But no practical conclusions for day-to-day life are drawn from this ritualized activity, largely devoid of meaning in the eyes of increasingly unwilling participants.

Politicians and teachers regularly applaud the Allied victory over the Third Reich in 1945 and the fact that not all the continent's Jews were exterminated. But next to no one remembers, or let alone grieves, the *utter* destruction of ייִדישלאַנד Yiddishland. It was a modern country – even a nation-state! – not marked on any political map of Europe, but clearly discernible to all Yiddish-speakers and their goy neighbors across Central Europe. It was a wide, tolerant and highly receptive space of Yiddish culture, language and literature that extended from the Baltic countries in the north to the Danube in the south, from Germany in the west to the Volga in the east, and beyond, as far as the Jewish Autonomous Region (ייִדישער אויטאָנאָמע געגנט) *yidisher oytaname gegnt*) of Birobidzhan (ביראָבידזשאַן) in the Soviet Far East on the frontier with China (Maksimowska 2019).

The demographic core of Yiddishland corresponds well to what people believe Central Europe is in spatial terms. It is Yiddish language and culture that most fully define this malleable region (Kamusella 2021a: 72–73). Nevertheless, rarely does any present-day inhabitant of this area reflect on the currently resounding absence of

Central Europe's Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazim. Not a single Yiddish-speaking locality or city quarter – however small – survives in today's Central Europe. Not a single Yiddish-language library was preserved or reestablished anywhere in postwar Europe. Prior to World War II, 90 percent of Europe's 10 million Jews spoke Yiddish, or as many as the population of the Netherlands at that time. Somehow, to this day non-Jewish Europeans have failed to take note of this 'vanishing' of an entire European ethnolinguistic nation of Yiddish-speakers. I fear that most (Christian) Europeans – consciously or not – welcome this absence.

Yiddish is a language, which is closest to German, like Belarusian to Polish. In both pairs oral communication is hardly impeded between speakers of these kindred languages. What truly separates Yiddish from German and Belarusian from Polish is script. However, in the case of Belarusian and Polish, these two languages remain a subject of enquiry and teaching in university departments and institutes of Slavic studies. On the other hand, Yiddish is excluded to such an extent from curricula and research in departments and institutes of Germanic languages that this field's scholars would typically *not* know that today's Germanic languages are written in two scripts, namely, Latin and *Hebrew* letters. The latter piece of information never fails to surprise them and in some evokes outright denial that borders on unacknowledged antisemitism. This is the ugly reality of present-day Europe of tokenistic tolerance, inclusion and *Judeo-Christian* values. Is antisemitism such a value? (Kamusella 2021b).

Should today one wish to browse and read Yiddish books as physical objects fashioned from paper and printing ink, one needs to sail far across the Atlantic to Amherst in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, where the יידישער ביכער-צענטער *yidisher bikher-tsender* (Yiddish Book Center) is located. Fortunately, this Center digitized almost all its holdings and makes the collection of 11,000 book titles available online free of charge. Shamefully, fewer Europeans than Americans avail themselves of this rare and in essence European resource. However, some concerned European intellectuals are acutely aware of the hypocrisy that poses a direct challenge to the continent's values and culture. Perhaps, it is not an accident that the person who recently proposed a new standard of how to rekindle the publishing of Yiddish literature in Europe comes from Belarus.

Versatile philologist and translator, Siarhiej Šupa, works in the Belarusian Service (Radio Svoboda) of the Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty in Prague. He edited and prepared for publication in two handsome volumes the entire poetic oeuvre of interwar Belarus's leading Yiddish-language writer Moyshe Kulbak (משה קולבאָק). One volume offers all the poems in their Yiddish originals, including also an introduction in this language (Kulbak 2022a), while the other provides romanizations of the poems and their translation into Belarusian (Kulbak 2022b). Romanization allows new readers of Yiddish literature to scale the hurdle of script and thus makes the

book immediately accessible to any German-speaker. What is more, the Belarusian translation unlocks Kulbak's oeuvre to Belarusian-, Ukrainian- and Polish-speakers, who have no working knowledge of German.

A truly tolerant democratic and integrated Europe genuinely steeped in both 'legs' of Judeo-Christian values is possible. A necessary step in this direction is the espousal of Yiddishland, not just in words but in deeds. Not only students of Germanic philology, but also all children in Austrian and German schools ought to acquire, as a matter of course, both Latin and Hebrew letters as the equal alphabets of *their* language (מאמע לשון *mame l[o]shun*, *Muttersprache*, 'mother tongue') of Yiddish-German. Elsewhere across Europe, school education should secure at least general knowledge of the Hebrew script-based alphabet of Yiddish. This process must be facilitated and completed through making Yiddish into another official language of the European Union, also for the sake of filling in with actual practice and meaning the 'Judeo' leg of the continent's Judeo-Christian values.

Eventually, each literate European with a smattering of education should not have any difficulties with deciphering the title of any Yiddish-language book or periodical displayed in a local bookshop's window. With this skill – so utterly absent in present-day Europe – an appreciation of Yiddish language and culture would grow leading to a revival in the appreciation and production of Yiddish publications. A healthy Europe is one, where numerous bookstores offer and specialize in Yiddish literature. While the resurrection of the murdered inhabitants of Yiddishland is impossible (Katzenelson 2021), a re-founding of the Yiddish book market is doable and advisable. It would hail the end of the continent's unacknowledged antisemitism and denial of the initial half of Judeo-Christian values. These lethal prejudices are still unreasonably widespread after the Holocaust, leaving Europe with a gaping hole in its head and heart. As such, the continent remains vulnerable to new totalitarianisms and authoritarianisms.

Approaching the Horizon

In rare moments free of teaching, university administration and household chores, I have time and again had a go at acquiring the Yiddish alphabet. Interwar self-teaching textbooks of Yiddish turned out to be of much help. They follow the pattern of a Jewish diaspora prayer book. The Yiddish original is accompanied by a romanization and a translation into another ('Christian') European language, in this case into Polish (Grzegorzczuk 1924; Gutenberg 1939). Curiously, today's textbooks of reading and writing in Yiddish, besides being few and apart, are less developed and

useful in comparison to their prewar counterparts (Weiss, Greve and Raveh-Klemke 2013). Šupa's aforementioned edition of Kulbak's Yiddish poetry works much better in this respect.

I would love at least half a year of full immersion into perusing Yiddish, mastering the basics of this par excellence European language's script and practicing to read it aloud. Otherwise, the process will take at least a decade. Just in time for my retirement, when at long last I hope to be able to read Yiddish fluently. What awaits me then is (Central) Europe's forgotten – or rather actively suppressed – ocean of Yiddish letters. Now line after line of these letters have no choice but to lead subterranean existence hardly revisited by a regular reader's kind and alert gaze. This is the undiscussed essence of today's Europeanness. Huge seams of renewable cultural energy are ready for tapping, but remain studiously shunned.

Vain dreams and impractical projects one could conclude. But it was exactly such short-sightedness and mistaking prejudice for common sense that in the first place led to totalitarianism and the Holocaust. What then about the laudable example of Portugal and Spain? Half a millennium after the expulsion of Iberia's (Sephardim) Jews in 1492, Lisbon and Madrid experienced a radical change of heart. A decision was taken to make up for this crime of ethnic cleansing by extending both countries' citizenship to any Sephardic Jew, who would like to apply for it (Bill 2015; Nationality 2015).

It already elapsed almost eight decades since the Holocaust and half a century from the liquidation of the postwar shadow of Yiddishland in communist Poland. With authoritarian tendencies spreading rapidly across Central Europe from Poland to Hungary and Bulgaria, and murderous totalitarianism firmly back in Russia and Belarus, there is no time left to spare. The Kremlin wants to conquer Ukraine militarily and impose rashism (Russian fascism) there and over as much of Europe as possible. The reconstruction of Sephardland (*el país sefardí*, ספֿרדלאַנד *S[e]f[a]rdland*) now underway in Iberia points to the urgent need of rebuilding Yiddishland in Central Europe as an inoculation against tyrants, antisemitism, racism and xenophobia. Otherwise, Europe will fall without the steady support of its two 'Jewish legs,' Yiddishland and Sephardland. Hence, reading – or better, enjoying – Yiddish literature in original is a must. It is the best way forward, away from the destructive temptation of authoritarianism and totalitarianism, or in simple words, darkness.

Joy Redux

In the spring of 2016, on a brief city break, I visited radiant Lisbon. The Portuguese capital literally tasted salty and moldy, due to the waves of oceanic humidity that kept wafting from the Atlantic. I traveled by subway for a bit of sightseeing downtown. The stations sport a Spartan look of neglected industrial landscapes executed in weather-stained steel and concrete. Even underground humidity did not subside, though ceaseless draft cooled the tunnels, leaving underdressed passengers trembling. This pervasive smell of mold and maritime wetness never left me in Lisbon. It kept reminding about the defunct 'tri-continental' sea empire of pre-democratic Portugal. In the end, nature will claim back each thing that a human hand made. The permanently dimmed lights across this subway system's maze appeared to emphasize this conclusion, though on paper it was done for cutting the costs. Half a decade ago, Portugal still struggled with the painful aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis.

But in these dimmed and smelly subway stations I recognized a stage in the *Theatrum Humanitatis*, which life is. Generations come one after another. Ancestors leave traces of their follies for descendants to decipher, be it engravings in stone or illegible scrawl on paper. Writing about life, instead of living it is absurd. Therefore, literature is absurdity incarnated. Yet, without belles lettres life would be not worth living. Osteoarthritis is typical of old age in prosperous but rainy Europe, where these days most live up to their ripe eighties and beyond. Yet, this malady must not stop one either from reading or living.

A tall and youthful-looking old dame in a cocktail dress with a suitable broad-brimmed hat on her head with the shock of long dyed red hair flowing onto her arms appeared to be in need of a taxi. Taking subway to her destination did not become the dame's sophisticated elegance. She refused to sit down. I thought the dame feared to crumple her attire, until I noticed she stood straight as a rod supporting herself with a cane in her right hand. In the other hand the dame had an umbrella with a long and shiny ferrule firmly lodged in the carriage's floor. The dame pretended she merely held it. In reality, she used this umbrella and the cane as crutches. The dame's bare knees were swollen, indicating painfulness that she studiously chose to disregard.

La comédie humaine never ends before death terminates it. But where one life ends, another begins. This is hope. The carriage's information system confusingly displayed names of stations, which the subway train had already arrived at the last stop. The driver made an error, when switching on the announcement system this lazy Sunday morning. Maybe she slept in and was late to her shift, so the matter escaped the driver's attention. The dame gave out a laugh and engaged fellow trav-

elers in small talk. She opined that we travelled in a time-machine. It was unable to transport us to the past of our liking, but at least braked the relentless flow of time by a couple of minutes. Clutching back these few minutes from stingy Chronos was a feat, indeed. The anomalous train ride gave us this rare gift of mirth that could be enjoyed and lived for longer. Let us ride and read as long as it takes.

Literature reflects life, before Thanatos shatters the mirror, ruthlessly transforming the quick into belles lettres. What connects both is the trickle of letters. Even death is helpless in the face of script, this ceaseless dance of graphemes with phonemes, syllables and morphemes.

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Abstrakt

Radość z przekraczania ciemnej linii pisma

Standardowy obraz badań, jako praktyka, którą „rządzi” trud, metoda i zasada obiektywności – wydaje się sterylny, mechaniczny i pozbawiony efektu ludzkiej sprawczości. Jednak, aby badania mogły się odbyć, potrzeba naukowców, którzy pasjonują się przedmiotem swoich poszukiwań. „Prowadzenie badań” powinno sprawiać fizyczną przyjemność, która wypycha naukowca poza formalne granice określone w umowie z uczelnią lub instytucją oferującą granty. Rekompensata pieniężna ma charakter drugorzędny i rzadko wystarcza do zrównoważenia włożonego wysiłku i poświęconego czasu. Radość

z odkrywania jest najwyższą zapłatą. Pierwszym krokiem wiodącym na pole badań, a następnie do innych, zróżnicowanych praktyk akademickich, jest nabycie umiejętności czytania (i często pisania). Początkowo pojawia się ona w systemie pisma używanego do zapisu pierwszego języka danej osoby. A potem nastaje czas na spotkania z następnymi pismami-szyframi. Ten wysiłek włożony w „opanowanie kodu” zawsze frustruje, ale ostatecznie przynosi radość z otwarcia drzwi do kolejnego ludzkiego świata.

Słowa kluczowe: radość, badania naukowe, wielopiśmienność, pismo