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Tangibility of Time in the Prose of Aleksander Jurewicz*

Aleksander Jurewicz infuses his prose with a myriad of autobiographical threads, striving to assemble a personal mythology. The matter of issues etched in memory, a gaze into the past, questioning the meaning of returns to childhood and adolescence, reconstruction of ventures into familial memories, reflections on impermanence and limits of identity and personal freedom constitute the basis of his work.

This article offers a significant new perspective on the state of Aleksander Jurewicz's grand total of prose – *Lida* (1990), *The Lord Does Not Hear the Deaf* (*Pan Bóg nie słyszy głuchych*, 1995), *The True Ballad of Love* (*Prawdziwa ballada o miłości*, 2002), *Ashes and Wind* (*Popiół i wiatr*, 2005), *The Day Before the End of the World* (*Dzień przed końcem świata*, 2008) – as a collection of texts interlaced with references and the writer's own reflections on himself and his time.

Our article is inspired by the meeting with the writer that took place on November 18, 2022 in Gdańsk. It is based on live narrative materials – with the aim to demonstrate the unique beauty of the author's precise speech – as well as original interpretations of temporal signifiers in Aleksander Jurewicz's work. Time is examined as the subject of portrayal in the artistic text, as well as the implicit experience, perceived as a psychological experience of time, its perception, also in retrospective projection. We regard time as a transversal image that organizes the composition and the entire structure of works, since textual artistic time is a model of an imaginary world. Jurewicz develops a consistent concept of time as an indivisible, tangible matter that functions in the author's mind in the form of metaphorical images, temporary references. We draw attention to the fact that in the writer's oeuvre time is a personal category that has a distinguished character in the ternary opposition of life, death, and eternity. Concurrently, the course of time in the artistic world of Jurewicz is associated with negative dynamics, the loss of domestic hearth and the falling world of people close to him.

1. *Jurewicz in the Realm of Literary Studies*

Aleksander Jurewicz was born in 1952 in the Belarusian town of Lida, but in September 1957, following a repatriation campaign, he and his parents moved to Poland, and

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settled in Gdańsk; only in 1986 did he manage to visit his homeland since he left. From 1971 to 1976 he studied Polish Philology at the University of Gdańsk. In 1973, he made his debut as a poet in magazines *Litery* and *Nowy Wyrzaz*, and a year later, his collection *A Dream Which Couldn't Have Been Love* (*Sen, który na pewno nie był miłością*), was published. Aleksander Jurewicz's first book, *On the Other Side* (*Po drugiej stronie*, 1977), was honored with the Peleryna Award for the most interesting debut of the year. Aleksander Jurewicz permanently left his mark on Polish literature in 1990, after the publication of the poetic novel *Lida*. In 1991, the writer became the first laureate of a private literary prize awarded by Czesław Miłosz:

Miłosz told me something that left me quite embarrassingly surprised. Namely, he said that he traces the returns to the family past in Polish literature and that it was me who started it with *Lida*. I objected a bit. Well, it's a pity that it was just between us, a pity that Miłosz didn't write it down for example, didn't announce it publicly somewhere (Jurewicz, Wojan 2021: 14-15)¹.

In 1994, a documentary film (with Jurewicz taking part) was made, directed by Barbara Balińska and Krzysztof Kalukin. The film, inspired by *Lida*, was entitled *In the Rhythm of Wheels, in the Rhythm of Tears* (*W rytmie kół, w rytmie łez*). *Lida* turned out to be one of the most significant works published after 1989, a breakthrough year for Polish literature. Zbigniew Żakiewicz received *Lida* as a nostalgic book by a member of a new generation of writers from the northern borderlands (Belarus, Lithuania), a continuation of the literary traditions of Józef Mackiewicz, Sergiusz Piasecki, Florian Czarnyszewicz, Czesław Miłosz, and Tadeusz Konwicki. Speaking about the theme of eternal returns to the source, the author of *Lupine Meadows* (*Wilcze łąki*, 1982) noted:

After all, the atavism of the generations that were quick enough to be born in Belarus is overwhelming – it is impossible to live without roots, which are in that promised and only land. Jurewicz tries to reconstruct the residual relics of the five-year-old's memory at all costs, touching upon the memory of a wounded leg, Cygan the dog, orchard littered with fallen overripe apples. These elements of the already utopian world return again and again as a warrant to possess that real world (Żakiewicz 2017: 54)².

¹ “Miłosz powiedział mi coś, co mnie wprawiło w dość kłopotliwe zdumienie. Powiedział mianowicie, że śledzi w polskiej literaturze powroty do rodzinnej przeszłości i że początek temu dałem swoją *Lidą*. Trochę zaoponowałem. No, szkoda, że to padło tylko między nami, szkoda, że na przykład Miłosz nie napisał tego, nie ogłosił gdzieś tego publicznie” (here and afterwards, unless otherwise indicated, the translation is mine, H.P.).

² “Jednakże atawizm pokoleń, które zdążyły się urodzić na Białorusi, jest przemożny, nie sposób żyć bez korzeni, a te są w tamtej obiecanej i jedynej ziemi. Jurewicz za wszelką cenę stara się zrekonstruować owe szczątkowe relikty pamięci pięciolatka, zahacza się o wspomnienie skaleczonej nogi, psa Cygana, sadu, gdzie spadały przejrzałe jabłka. Te elementy utopijskiego już świata powracają raz po raz, jako legitymacja uprawomocniająca go do posiadania tamtego, prawdziwego świata”.

Stanisław Uliasz, examining *Lida* in the context of the artistic generation born in the years 1952-57 (*childhood after Yalta*³), mentioning Małgorzata Baranowska, Paweł Huelle, Stefan Chwin, and Adam Zagajewski, claims that “thanks to Aleksander Jurewicz, traumatic childhood memories gained the right to be literature. For until now, two basic patterns have functioned in the literary tradition: Mickiewicz’s and Proust’s” (Uliasz 2001: 218)⁴. S. Uliasz also refers to the opinions of Marek Adamiec (Adamiec 1991), Aneta Mazur (Mazur 1992), and Adriana Szymańska (Szymańska 1991), who consider *Lida* to be one of the most mature contemporary stories about the painful experience of expulsion from the eastern borderlands of the Republic of Poland (Uliasz 2001: 161). Marek Olesiewicz’s article (Olesiewicz 1996) also falls within the scope of these considerations.

Przemysław Czapliński classifies *Lida* and Jurewicz’s later *The Lord Does Not Hear the Deaf* as literature of *private homelands*, memoirs with a strong nostalgic tone. According to the literary critic, Jurewicz’s work falls within the trend of the *mythobiographical revival*, revealing the *ancestral homeland* (Czapliński 1999). Jurewicz emphasized that he wrote *Lida* during martial law, escaping from the unpleasant reality. Tadeusz Komendant considers this experience of martial law, the experience of *empty, arrested time* to be the main reason for the birth of *private myths* (Komendant 1997: 94). Jan Błoński reflects on the phenomenon of *emigration of the imagination*, in other words emigration into the past or fantasy (Błoński 1990: 16). Zbigniew Bieńkowski provides the definition of the past present tense in the context of cultural nostalgia (Bieńkowski 1996: 8-9). Agnieszka Nęcka-Czapska writes on the category of memory in Jurewicz’s works (Nęcka-Czapska 2019). Joanna Jeziorska-Haładaj and Aleksandra Zdanowicz examine the narrative layer of Aleksander Jurewicz’s works within the trend of autobiographical prose, referring, among others, to Philippe Lejeune’s concept of the autobiographical pact and Dorrit Cohn’s studies on first-person narration (Jeziorska-Haładaj 2006; Zdanowicz 2020).

2. Temporal Axis of Jurewicz’s Artistic Reality

Aleksander Jurewicz is a complex writer, who arrests the recipient’s attention, forcing them to listen to the *silence of a dead childhood*, distinguishing *traces* long gone. He risks the reader being scathed by the dangerous *shores of memory*, admitting how *difficult of a companion* he is to himself (Jurewicz 2022)⁵. On the one hand, the fate of the author of *Lida* is marked by a kind of uprooting, primarily from home and childhood. On the other, by intellectual entrenchment – him creating his own world dominated by literature and music – dynamic forms of art, in which composition developed with time – is the most

³ See M. Czermińska, *Centrum i kresy w twórczości pisarzy urodzonych po wojnie*, “Akcent”, 1993, 4, pp. 76-83.

⁴ “Dzięki Aleksandrowi Jurewiczowi traumatyczne wspomnienia z dzieciństwa uzyskały prawo bycia literaturą. Dotychczas bowiem w tradycji literackiej funkcjonowały dwa podstawowe wzorce: mickiewiczowski i proustowski”.

⁵ “Jestem ciężkim współpasażerem”.

important element. When speaking of meeting Czesław Miłosz in 1997 in the Camaldolese monastery in Wigry, Jurewicz does not forget that the music playing in the background was Rachmaninoff, performed by the great Lithuanian pianist Aldona Dvarionaitė (Jurewicz, Wojan 2021: 14).

One that will keep coming back to Jurewicz will keep discovering new meanings with each re-reading, penetrating one's experiences and emotional states. It is the literature of an uncomfortable inner journey, of the bared nerve of memory. As Aleksander Jurewicz points out,

In writing, one stands on the side of doubt, not certainty; on the side of questions, not ready-made answers. This is what I look for in other people's books, [...] literature written with an open heart, and not calculated writing that flatters cheap tastes (Jurewicz 2005: 103)⁶.

The writer does not impose his own opinion on his readers, nor does he tower over them like a clamorous self-proclaimed moralist. His confused thoughts and impressions are authentic; his moral choices, right or wrong, are born of life, the truth of childhood experiences. Jurewicz exists in a suspended motion of perpetual return, cut through by time. This becomes increasingly apparent in the insatiable journey of searching and mediation in Jurewicz's creative space. As of late, Jurewicz has been reading a lot of various biographies, diaries, and letters, fascinated by contemporary Scandinavian literature, as well as the works of Portuguese writer António Lobo Antunes; after the passing of Jerzy Pilch he mentions Paweł Huelle and Wiesław Myśliwski among writers that interest him the most.

Aleksander Jurewicz's work is deeply rooted in his childhood. This period inspires the writer and provides the keys to the interpretation of each work, behind which there is an adult man *with a child inside him*, subsisting through memories:

Childhood fears – despair – loneliness – eternal regret – unyielding guilt – belief in ghosts and superstitions – crossing oneself tamely before bed – the fervent 'Angel of God / my guardian dear / to whom God's love commits me here', – birds – clouds – the mysterious horizon – penny buried in the garden so that money will grow – timidity and a sense of being obsolete. Man finds a once-living child in himself. He becomes the father of that child when the father is no more... (Jurewicz 2005: 57)⁷.

⁶ "W pisaniu staje się po stronie zwątpienia, a nie pewności, po stronie pytań, a nie gotowych odpowiedzi. Tego szukam w książkach innych, [...] literatury pisanej na otwartym sercu, a nie literatury wykalkulowanej, schlebującej tanim gustom".

⁷ "Lęki dzieciństwa – rozpacz – osamotnienie – uczucie wiecznego żalu – nieustanne poczucie winy – wiara w duchy i zabobony – znak krzyża czyniony płochnie przed pójściem spać – żarliwe odmawianie 'Aniele Boży, Stróżu mój, ty zawsze przy mnie stój...' – ptaki – chmury – tajemnicza linia horyzontu – pięciogroszówka zakopana w ogrodzie, żeby wyrosły pieniądze – nieśmiałość i poczucie zubożności. Dorosły odnajduje w sobie żyjące kiedyś dziecko. Staje się ojcem tamtego dziecka, kiedy sam ojca już nie ma..."

For Jurewicz, writing was supposed to be an escape from childhood, a sort of account settlement with this resolved period of his life. However, it became an escape to childhood, a piercing, perfectly subtle reflection on what has long passed, a Bachelardian philosophical category (Bachelard 1968: 29). The intersubjective triunity of time allows the author to become aware of everything he experiences. Time inversion, drawing on the resources of memory and consciousness, drifting in a hybrid reality allows Jurewicz to construct a psychobiography, his own verbalized philosophy of time: “there must be something beyond the past, which seems closed, something more than the day that is about to end, and the tomorrow that will soon begin. I thought that there is one time that connects everyone and everything around – infinite time, like someone’s invisible gaze that we sometimes feel on ourselves” (Jurewicz 2005: 89)⁸. Temporality of being as an existential experience is at odds with this infinity, perpetuity, and immortality: “The wind blew out the flame of the candle, fire in the furnace extinguished, the train left into the unseeable distance. It’s all over now, yes...” (Jurewicz 2005: 172)⁹. Temporality is presented as a waiting room or a train that never stops, sometimes as a journey or an abyss – elements embedded in transience. Life is the destruction of the beginning; birth is the beginning of dying.

3. *Human Time and Space Defined through Life and Death*

In Jurewicz, the illustrative equivalents of irreversible demise are rains (“drops of dead rains”, Jurewicz 2005: 57)¹⁰, snows, tears, waves, sands, ashes, cigarette butts in an ashtray, a calendar with pages torn out. Creativity becomes the source of the individual sense of life’s meaning, capable of resurrecting the past. That is why Jurewicz writes without a vision of a finished whole: with an openness to the unknown future, missing the time that is *here and now*. In *Lida*, a clock with a hand broken off signifies the alignment of the place’s spiritual content with the emotional state of the protagonist; in *The True Ballad of Love*, there is a “clock with a lifeless dial” (Jurewicz 2002: 60)¹¹, in *The Lord Does Not Hear the Deaf*, the chirping of grandfather clocks is a projection of polyphonic time disharmony. In *The Day Before the End of the World*, the main character of the work says: “I was stuck between two hands of the same clock, both unable to find a mutual hour” (Jurewicz 2008: 61)¹², while the ticking watch on the deceased father’s hand aggravates this sensitivity to time.

⁸ “Musí być jeszcze coś ponad czasem przeszłym, który wydaje się zamknięty, coś ponad dniem, który właśnie się kończy, i jutrem, które zaraz się zaczyna. Myślałem, że jest jakiś jeden czas łączący wszystkich i wszystko wokół – czas nieskończony, jak czyjeś niewidoczne spojrzenie, które niekiedy czujemy na sobie”.

⁹ “Wiatr zdmuchnął płomień świecy, zagał w piecu ogień, pociąg odjechał w niewiadomą dal. Już jest po wszystkim, tak...”

¹⁰ “krople umarłych deszczy”.

¹¹ “zegar z nieżywym cyferblatem”.

¹² “Byłem wciśnięty pomiędzy dwie wskazówki tego samego zegara, które nie mogą ustalić wspólnej godziny”.

Connected to the human body, the watch overcomes the power of biological time, and transgresses the limits of mortality. Its ticking can be perceived both as not coming to terms with the death of a human being, the desire for his life to continue, as well as indifference, and perhaps even hostility of time towards the fate of man. Aleksander Jurewicz shows the heterogeneity of “human time”: the physical category of homogeneous time cannot be applied to it. The watch counts the time in which the father is no more. In this time, orphanhood, uncoziness, and spiritual homelessness are born inside the “dying house”, “house of mourning”, in which the protagonist cannot find a place.

Jurewicz describes his father’s room several times. Dead, drowned in silence and darkness, it no longer resembles the sewing workshop that was the whole world for the deceased: “For him, it was a lonely island and a roaring arena, a monastery cell and a bar” (Jurewicz 2008: 25)¹³. Father’s space drapes itself in mourning. His window, table, bed belong only to him, as they are attributes of his life. The calendar with the date “September 8” indicates the day his father never woke up. And on the evening of the previous day, tearing off a page from the calendar, he did not suspect that he was closing the book of his own life. Someone’s jacket cut by the father will never be sewn. Jurewicz emphasizes imperfections, sudden cessations, understatements. The father’s death is accompanied by a “dead silence around him, so unusual for him, a silence more dead than he – my father, my dad” (Jurewicz 2008: 10)¹⁴. The tapping of the “Singer” sewing machine, a companion of daily affairs, father’s hand and voice, is not heard: “They sang as if they believed they could drown out life” (Jurewicz 2008: 104)¹⁵. The sewing machine, the most valuable piece of luggage taken from Belarus, was a symbol of happiness and the meaning of tailor Michał Jurewicz’s life. Merged with this person, it is an inseparable member of the family, for which it has a high sentimental value. The machine is a thing woven into the father’s biography. Speaking of memorabilia, Witold Nowak points out:

A special category of things that evoke memories are objects left by the deceased. They can be intentionally left and addressed as souvenirs to specific people, they can be treated by the living as souvenirs, regardless of the intentions of the deceased (Nowak 2017: 157)¹⁶.

Without his father, the sewing machine becomes a mere souvenir, a useless and idle thing. A supposedly living inanimate object is dead for the lack of a performer. The narrating character, looking at it and his father lying idle, feels ashamed for him. He wants to protect the dead from the unnaturalness of his state, the awkwardness of lying silently in

¹³ “Była dla niego samotną wyspą i pełną zgiełku areną, klasztorną celą i barem”.

¹⁴ “martwa cichość wokół niego, tak jemu niezwyczajna, cichość bardziej niezwywa niż on – ojciec, mój tato”

¹⁵ “Śpiewali, jakby wierzyli, że potrafią zagłuszyć życie”.

¹⁶ “Specjalną kategorią rzeczy, które ewokują wspomnienia, są przedmioty pozostawione przez zmarłego. Mogą one być intencjonalnie pozostawione i zaadresowane jako pamiątki do konkretnych osób, mogą zostać potraktowane przez żywych jako pamiątki niezależnie od intencji zmarłego”.

front of other people. Hence the reflexive desire to bury the dearest person as quickly as possible. In youth, an encounter with death becomes traumatic. The protagonist of *The Day Before the End of the World* is completely unprepared for the loss of his father; he must learn his new role as a family guardian, a farmer in charge of the house, responsible for the wellbeing of his mother and younger siblings. Hence the persistent thought that his childhood and youth died together with his father. The aching memory keeps pulling him back to that happy period of his life:

I knew that sand buried not only my father, yet everything connected with him. Along with the coffin they buried a red Belarusian sledge, the first oranges, wooden holders with nibs, a collection of postcards, a lace-up soccer ball, the warmth of a tiled stove, grandma's letters, a rocking horse, *The Paul Street Boys*, *Rifle* jeans, a *Bambino* adapter, plum jam, moths burning in the kitchen (Jurewicz 2008: 138)¹⁷.

P. Czaplński rightfully notes that for nostalgia, enumeration is one of the fundamental means of retrieving the past, it is a thing unto itself (Czaplński 1999: 66). The human body turns into an object, while things soaked with the human element become carriers of memory, a strong experience of someone's presence, someone who is no longer there. In *The True Ballad of Love*, there are, among other things, reflections on the fact that the things dear and valuable to the deceased should be buried with them:

A mug or a cup, a blue plate with a drop of fat on its edge that has not been washed off, a tie, a razor with an unfinished shaving soap, music sheets, a book read from back to back or not read at all, a flashlight, house slippers, a penknife, a ticket saved from some journey, coins found after death in a pocket or purse, a door key, a comb, a mirror, a dried rose last love turned into, glasses, cigarettes and matches (Jurewicz 2002: 36-37)¹⁸.

The belongings of the deceased constitute their everyday world, they speak of their character, preferences, profession performed during their lifetime. Objects were given a value, thanks to which they lived together with people, lasted with them. With the loss of all use, do they become a material correlate of their owners, dead tissue of their lives? Do things have an objective value? Or is it strictly subjective? In the novel *God Does Not Hear*

¹⁷ "Wiedziałem, że piasek zasypuje nie tylko ojca, ale i wszystko, co się z nim wiązało. Wraz z trumną grzebali czerwone białoruskie sanki, pierwsze pomarańcze, drewniane obsadki ze stalówkami, zbiór widokówek, sznurowaną futbolówkę, ciepło kaflowego pieca, listy od babci, konika na biegunach, *Chłopców z Placu Broni*, dzinsy *Rifle*, adapter *Bambino*, śliwkowe powidła, płonące w kuchni ćmy".

¹⁸ "kubek lub filizankę, niebieski talerz z nie zmytą kropelką tłuszczu na jego brzegu, krawat, brzytwę i nie wymydlone mydło do golenia, nuty, zaczytaną albo nie doczytaną książkę, latarkę, domowe kapcie, scyzoryk, zachowany bilet z jakiejś podróży, monety znalezione po śmierci w kieszeni lub torebce, klucz do drzwi, grzebień, lusterko, zasuszoną różę, w którą zamieniła się ostatnia miłość, okulary, papierosy i zapalki".

the Deaf, Alik finds himself in the room of Mr. Sierożka, who was buried a few hours ago. An empty room to which its owner will never return. A bed, a painting of Our Lady of the Gate of Dawn, same as at home, a crucifix, old photos, a lamp, glasses, and slippers – those things were ordinary, but the life of grandfather's friend dwelled in them.

4. *Jurewicz's Familial Mythology*

The Day Before the End of the World is based on the writer's memories; Aleksander Jurewicz relates the events that took place almost thirty years ago. He seems to relive his father's death over and over again. The writer prepared to realize this work for several years, keeping the figure of his father in memory, collecting everything that was related to those days of September. He wrote for his brother Arek, then thirteen years old. It was supposed to be a keepsake of the father. The work was finished within a month and a half. The preparatory process turned out to be disproportionately long compared to this final verbalization of the farewell to father. For this purpose, Aleksander Jurewicz came to his mother, returned to the "death space". The timeline of experience in the sudden death of a loved one became the plot material of the novel, spread over three days from the moment of receiving the news of the father's death to the end of the funeral rite. It is a time of tangible pain, suffering, despair, helplessness, denial, and fear. Jurewicz was creating his own chamber story in a scenery manifesting the death of a loved one. Retrospection has been updated. The writer saw the table in front of him as if placed against a catafalque on which his father was lying. This combination of imagination with the perception of memory turned out to be an effective way to accomplish the artistic task set by the author. Missing words are replaced by music. Jurewicz mentions S. Prokofiev's *Sonata No. 2 in D Major* and *Margarethe's Jewel Aria* from Ch. Gounod's *Faust*. The leitmotif resonant with the literary text is Chopin's *Lento con gran espressione*, or *Nocturne in C-sharp minor*. When leaving for college, Jurewicz perceived it as an overture to future nostalgia; after his father's death, the nocturne "became a double requiem" (Jurewicz 2008: 107)¹⁹. Chopin's work conveys anxiety and hesitation, elegiac reverie, violent emotions, dramatic tension in the mysterious scenery of the night.

In Jurewicz, the fragmentary, loose narration resembles a ripped film: "There is a jagged plot of days and faces, voices and silences, laughs and bitter sighs, all too vast for my father's workshop at this point, passing through my memory as if it were a malfunctioning projector" (Jurewicz 2008: 26)²⁰. It is worth mentioning that in the academic year 1982-1983 Jurewicz attended the Screenwriting Study at the National Film School in Łódź. The personal biographical narrative, moving, captivating with the sincerity of the protagonist's

¹⁹ "stał się podwójnym requiem".

²⁰ "Przez moją pamięć przewija się, niczym w projektorze, którego mechanizm się rozstroił i kadry filmu rozbiegają się po ekranie, poszarpana fabuła dni i twarzy, głosów i ciszy, śmiechu i gorzkich westchnień, dla których w tym momencie pracownia ojca staje się za ciasną".

confessions, gives the impression that this literary requiem has been written in the presence of the deceased. Terminated events, permanently assigned to the past, are perceived as ongoing, still present. Temporal relations have their own semantics; they extend the time horizon of the narrative. A comprehensive description of the mental processes and internal motivation of the protagonist in *The Day Before the End of the World* justifies his behavior. He does not hide the fact that he is afraid of his dead father, afraid of looking at him, approaching the coffin. In his mind, he is constantly speaking with the deceased, mixing intersecting time planes. He dreams of a Gypsy caravan with which his father leaves. As time passes, the association of family with the caravan moving into a house rebuilt after the Germans emerges. The house chosen by the father, “when we came here to live again” (Jurewicz 2005: 58)²¹. A second home. Jurewicz left this house when he departed to study. A *shifted place*, as Małgorzata Czermińska would call it (Czermińska 2011: 9). Now this house, which replaced the family home, “seems abandoned, no longer needed by anyone” (Jurewicz 2008: 22)²². The house is frozen in mourning. Jurewicz seeks a symbolic shelter in the house he was born in: “As long as that house in a small Belarusian village near Lida stands, I am sure that its walls still hold my childhood, that we are still together, just as in the beginning, and everything still has some sense and meaning, time stops for a moment” (Jurewicz 2005: 47)²³. The old family home is the guardian of family history. The writer compares it to a sanctuary. Krupowo (located six kilometers from Lida), *that Place* (Jurewicz 2005: 36)²⁴ is the center of the universe, the source of physical and spiritual completion. It is the writer’s “land of memory” (Bieńkowski 1996: 82)²⁵. The search for this home is a quest through the temporal continuum, in a ceaseless confrontation between all of its three aspects, a drift inside the labyrinth of writer’s memories and fantasies: “The home then becomes something more than a birthplace; it is the home of our dreams and reveries” (Bachelard 1970: 177)²⁶.

In his works, Aleksander Jurewicz repeatedly defines the symbolic background of the family myth through cranes, chimney smoke, and moths: “And up there, under the unknown land of the sky, two dark birds swayed like burnt kites” (Jurewicz 2008: 139)²⁷. The image of a crane flying towards the North, back to its native land, is found in Tadeusz Konwicki’s *Bohin*, and black rooks are also mentioned by Zbigniew Żakiewicz (2017:

²¹ “kiedy przyjechaliśmy tutaj od nowa żyć”.

²² “wydaje się opuszczony, już nikomu niepotrzebny”.

²³ “Dopóki stoi tamten dom w małej białoruskiej wsi pod Lidą, mam pewność, że jego ściany jeszcze przechowują moje dzieciństwo, że jeszcze jesteśmy wszyscy razem jak na początku, i wszystko ma jeszcze jakieś znaczenie i sens, czas na chwilę przystaje”.

²⁴ *Tamto Miejsce*.

²⁵ “ziemia pamięci”.

²⁶ “Quelque chose est donc plus profond que la maison natale, ce qui est appelé dans un livre la maison onirique, la maison de nos rêves”.

²⁷ “A wysoko, pod nieznaną krainą nieba, kołysały się dwa ciemne ptaki, jak nadpalone latawce”.

199). It is a spiritual and emotional metaphor of perplexity and perdition, estrangement of people expelled from their familial hearth, a spiritual construction of their particular *loci communes*. The smoke that rises from the chimney signifies family bonding and warmth, waiting for the children to return; it also represents the order and predictability of life, it emblemizes a space used by a family. It embodies the connection between heaven and earth, matter and spirit. "This smoke is like a drip that keeps me alive. As long as it rises from the chimney, it seems to be the thing most permanent, although it is but flickering of a felled tree's fleeting spirit" (Jurewicz 2005: 149)²⁸. Therefore, its absence is associated with the loss of a hearth and sense of security. Finally, a moth, heading towards the light of an oil lamp, is born of night and night is its domain, but its hidden beauty still lies in its attraction to the source of light. For the writer, it is a metaphor for creativity, nocturnal writing. It is also associated with childhood and the power of the moon: "In vain, from the first time I light my lamp, I expect some stray moth to come and flutter around the hot lampshade, yet I keep telling myself that if there is even one moth left in the world, it will surely come here" (Jurewicz 2005: 16)²⁹. For Jurewicz, the moth is a link to the past and the future, a personification of regenerative power in a world destined for solitary individuality, temporariness and ephemerality.

The writer is attracted to the changing nature of the world, and at the same time its stability, like in the light Moon shines in. After all, it does not come from the Moon itself, but it is the reflected light of the Sun. The symbolism of the moon combines antinomies, hides the secrets of the world. The moon is inextricably attached to the night, as well as the human subconscious, imagination and fantasy, sharpened intuition. Jurewicz admits: "The moon in the sky is something as natural for me, but still unusual, as the date of my birth. Moonlit nights give me strength, unlike sunny days, which are a curse. I have been adoring the Moon since I was a child; I need its presence, light, dust..." (Jurewicz 2005: 51)³⁰. For him, it is a symbol of insight and alert sensitivity, calmness. In *The True Ballad of Love*, the moon is a faithful guardian of lovers, watching over feelings, blessing young people with its light. Unlike the solar attributes, lunar symbolism has a clearly positive connotation in Jurewicz: "Back then, it was called 'lunette,' and when I say its old name a few times, I feel the taste of something warm, good and friendly" (Jurewicz 2002: 125)³¹.

²⁸ "Ten dym jest jak kroplówka podtrzymująca mnie przy życiu. Póki unosi się z komina, wydaje się czymś najtrwalszym, choć to przecież zaledwie migotliwy i ulotny duch ściętego drzewa".

²⁹ "Na próżno od pierwszego zapalenia u siebie lampy oczekuję jakiejś zabłąkanej ćmy, która nadleci i będzie łopotała wokół rozgrzanego kłosa, ale wmawiam sobie, że jeśli na świetcie pozostała jeszcze chociaż jedna ćma, to ona kiedyś na pewno tutaj przyleci".

³⁰ "Księżyc na niebie jest dla mnie czymś tak naturalnym, ale i ciągle niezwykłym, jak data mojego urodzenia. Księżycowe noce dodają mi sił, w przeciwieństwie do słonecznych dni, które są przekleństwem. Adoruję Księżyc od dziecka, potrzebuję jego obecności, światła, pyłu..."

³¹ "Jeszcze wtedy mówiono na niego 'miesiączek', i gdy wymawiam parę razy jego stare imię, czuję smak czegoś ciepłego, dobrego i przyjaznego".

Jurewicz does not manifest mirages of man's perseverance, his endurance. Man is a fragile, airy figure, akin to ashes. It is no coincidence that the title of one of the writer's works consists of two words joined by the conjunction and: ashes and wind. In Jurewicz, ash (often occurring together with the word "dust") can be seen as human fate, an image of life that is short and finite. Likewise, wind is a symbol of time, passing and destruction. "Time is a wind; it blows small candles out / Yet makes great fires burn with increasing heat" (Mickiewicz 1984: 352-353)³². Ashes themselves are the remnants of something that has ceased to exist, miserable remains after burning, loss of structure. This thread plays an important role in *The True Ballad of Love*:

Into ashes and smoke turned the words he spoke, the thoughts he thought, the deeds he did, all dreams fulfilled and unfulfilled, old love confessions and bachelor songs over the river on summer Sunday afternoons, illnesses and dances at evening parties, fragments of pleading prayers uttered on one's knees in difficult hours of life and grateful glances sent to heaven, all bad awakenings and peaceful sleeps, good mornings and turbulent nights, memories most distant and from before the mortal day, dreams of the little boy one used to be, and hopes held on the threshold of old age, which took on the taste of bitter herbs, sung masses and services, yesterday's news from an unfinished newspaper. Everything from Romejka's life turned into an ashpit – dust, which may today be spread over the vegetable patches, and which will soon be covered by the snow that has already started to come here from somewhere (Jurewicz 2002: 35)³³.

This time, Jurewicz does not talk about material things, those left after a person. The spiritual life of man, the world of one's experiences, dreams, and interpersonal relationships turns into ashes. The aspiration of the author of *Ashes and Wind* is to try to stop the world and decipher it with all senses. It is a process of literary construction and reconstruction of oneself and one's loved ones. The achievements of each person are a picture of their selves, each of one's elements reflects one's character, the structure of identity. Jurewicz tries to trace transitional, indefinite moments, and resurrect what is left in ashes. The use of frame composition emphasizes the author's intentions. Fragments 1 and 55 of *Ashes and Wind*

³² "Czas jest to wiatr: on tylko małą świecę zdmuchnie, wielki pożar od wiatru tym mocniej wybuchnie".

³³ "W popiół i dym zamieniły się słowa, które mówił, myśli, które myślał, uczynki, które czynił, wszystkie spełnione i nie dośnione sny, dawne miłosne wyznania i kawalerskie śpiewy nad rzeką w letnie niedzielne popołudnia, choroby i tańcowania na wieczorynkach, części błagalnych modlitw wznoszonych na kolanach w trudnych godzinach życia i dziękczynne spojrzenia ślone ku niebu, wszystkie złe przebudzenia i spokojne zasypiania, dobre poranki i ciężkie noce, wspomnienia najdalsze i te sprzed śmiertelnego dnia, marzenia małego chłopca, jakim kiedyś był, i nadzieje na progu starości, które nabierały smaku gorzkich ziół, odśpiewane msze i nabożeństwa, wczorajsze wiadomości z nie doczytanej gazety. Wszystko stawało się popieliskiem po życiu Romejki, które może jeszcze dzisiaj rozsypią po warzywnych grządkach i które niezadługo przykryje śnieg, co skądś już zaczął tutaj podążać".

are built on the principle of repetition. The ending is a reflection of the beginning, though slightly shortened, more rhythmic and lyrical. Time becomes too tight for the writer, and temporal penetration is the only way to tame it, or to at least make sense of it.

5. *The Desire to Defy Time*

The author of the work looks at a photo taken in the spring of 1953. An ordinary photograph from a family album. However, for Jurewicz, it becomes a plasticization of his past, the beginning of his life (synonymous with “Everything,” “Everything: World – Life – Death” [Jurewicz 2005: 7])³⁴, it transfers him to another mental dimension. The photograph hides massive layers of emotions of a man returning to the past, to his “maimed childhood” (Mazur 1992: 128)³⁵. And what has been left unsaid, Jurewicz can imagine. He experiences family history in his own way, he gets emotional and dives into his own pre-history. In addition to showing what exists, what is pinned to a certain place and moment, photography can reveal images that go beyond a set time and location. Temporal substance is concentrated in the space of photography, a secondary sign of its time – time frozen in the current. The visual message precedes the verbal representation. Jurewicz sees a small yellow rectangle as a miniature of the cosmos. Mother, father, and little Aleksander (in the first paragraph, the author uses the third person singular form with some distance: “His eyes seemed to reach out to the world, to life, to fulfill the destiny assigned to him. A few months old, trusting, without pain or desires, wonderfully free and bereft of memory” [Jurewicz 2005: 7])³⁶. The parents, still young at the time, are the first sign of temporal disruption, the existence of different time orders. The three figures in the photo – despite the fact that they are captured in a single moment of physical and clock time – are not engraved in the same time. It was different for each individual person. Mother’s time is different from father’s. The child’s time is completely unlike: “It will be the first spring in life...” (Jurewicz 2005: 7)³⁷. These times run parallel, occasionally crossing, they come closer, yet never get rid of their subjective, psychological character. In *The True Ballad of Love*, the narrator looks at his future grandmother and asks a question: “And where was I then? In what corner of the universe or infinity have I patiently or anxiously waited for my turn to come, for someone to call me and take my hand to lead me out of the darkness and into blooming meadows, white-washed walls, pure mornings?” (Jurewicz 2002: 31)³⁸.

³⁴ “Wszystko”, “Wszystko: Świat – Życie – Śmierć”.

³⁵ “okaleczonego dzieciństwa”.

³⁶ “Jego oczy jakby wyrwały się do świata, do życia, do wypełniania przypisanego mu przeznaczenia. Kilkumiesięczny i ufny, bez bólu i pragnień, cudownie wolny i bez pamięci”.

³⁷ “Będzie to pierwsza wiosna w życiu...”.

³⁸ “A gdzie ja wtedy byłem? W jakim zakątku wszechświata czy nieskończoności cierpliwie lub z niepokojem czekałem, aż przyjdzie na mnie kolej, aż ktoś zawoła mnie i weźmie za rękę, żeby wprowadzić z ciemności ku rozkwitłym łąkom, pobielonym ścianom, przeczystym porankom”.

Time is a frame, a category present at every stage of human life, from birth to death. Each person has their own way of operating within temporal perspectives, i.e. past, present and future. Therefore, time is an important element of self-awareness. Man is endowed with consciousness of his location on the temporal continuum – being in time, making assumptions about the length of his own life, thinking about the certainty of his death. Bending over an old photograph, Aleksander Jurewicz wakes a sense of continuity, he captures time in real and biographical planes, as well as in the very process of creating a literary work. He compares his writing to saving memory³⁹, typing in the former home on the keys of the machine, in order to be able to say: “We are in this welkin as a reminder that we were once very much together on Earth. And as long as I feel this dying and coming back to life, nothing has really ended – and it cannot end yet” (Jurewicz 2005: 172)⁴⁰.

The act of speaking from and into oneself is in suspended continuous (current) time. The personal-biographical type of narration does not exclude dialogue, but rather anticipates it, assuming that the reader will empathize with the writer’s temporality as they flip through pages of his own diary. Contemplating on the category of the writing subject, Joanna Jeziorska-Haładaj writes: “Reaching back into the past, reinterpreting, aligning it with the present and the projected future allows one to construct a coherent narrative on the human life” (Jeziorska-Haładaj 2006: 104)⁴¹. The writer tries to avoid a discrepancy between naturalness, the authenticity of experiences and the externally imposed artificiality, the rigors of writing. An atmosphere of intimacy allowed him to discover himself – to be himself, to pull through the split into “I for me” and “I for others”, to express his own essence.

Aleksander Jurewicz exhibits elements of his privacy, refers to personal experiences so that the reader recognizes him as a man struggling with the same issues, having similar joys and sorrows, a man afraid of uncertainty, old age, illnesses, and finally, death: “One day, we will be but a shadow that sits for a while on an empty chair at someone’s Christmas table” (Jurewicz 2005: 157)⁴². There is a disturbance in the temporal perspective: the living are at the starting point of the anthropocentric paradigm “I – here – now”, while the dead are on the other side of it, in their eternal “now”, “in a time irretrievably past, time shut by

³⁹ As J. Jeziorska-Haładaj notes, “there is a certain danger in giving memories a final, written form: it is impossible to return to the state before writing. Putting it on paper saves them from oblivion, but also impoverishes, narrows, and limits the world preserved in memory to some extent (Jeziorska-Haładaj 2006: 107). (“W nadaniu wspomnieniom ostatecznej, pisemnej formy kryje się więc pewne zagrożenie: nie jest możliwy powrót do stanu sprzed pisania. Przelanie na papier ocala od zapomnienia, ale i w pewnym stopniu zubaża, zawęża, ogranicza świat zachowany w pamięci”).

⁴⁰ “Jesteśmy w tych przestworzach na pamiątkę, że byliśmy kiedyś bardzo razem na Ziemi. I dopóki czuję to zamierające i na powrót ozywające pulsowanie, nic naprawdę nie skończyło się – i jeszcze nie może się skończyć”.

⁴¹ “Sięganie do przeszłości, reinterpretowanie jej, uzgadnianie z terażniejszością i projektowaną przyszłością umożliwia stworzenie spójnej narracji o ludzkim życiu”.

⁴² “Zostaniemy kiedyś tylko cieniem, który na chwilę przysiądzie na pustym krześle przy czyimś wigilijnym stole”.

the coffin lid, buried under grave sand, showered in posthumous flowers” (Jurewicz 2005: 141)⁴³, an unfulfilled tomorrow.

Throughout his life, man is on his way to death. Each day, he wakes up a day older. Jurewicz says that those little hands which hold the rattle in the old photo are the same hands that are holding the pencil now, and in time, they will lose their warmth and feeling forever. Life is compared to the process of photographing. The writer admits: “I remember and will never forget those visits to the photographer, which reminded me of dying. I thought that I would only stay on the shot and not make it out of the photographic atelier alive” (Jurewicz 2005: 72)⁴⁴. The distance between the imposing situation and the events depicted is evident, as “the glass of photographic frames divides our lives into two parts – the “there” has the childhood and everything that has already happened, and the “here” will never have a beginning, as all beginnings have been left behind glass, on the wall, on the other side” (Jurewicz 2005: 11)⁴⁵. The writer is carrying that child of a few months, a three-year-old, a five-year-old, an eight-year-old, whose reflections hang in frames on the wall of the room. Within this multi-layered view onto oneself, there is an “auto-interpretational effort, a singular point of view independent from external criteria” (Czermińska 1987: 16)⁴⁶. The discontinuity, the “punctuality” of their lives contributed to the current continuity, the perpetuation of consciousness. They are different, yet at the same time they know everything about each other, and sections of their lives form a straight line that will one day come to an end, like the line of his father, mother, or grandma Malwina. Those children, who are now gone, who have grown up, assume the attitude of a constant observer.

They are helpless bystanders whom I perhaps shame with my life, my discouragement, my aging. I guess they had other plans for me, and not such longings to fulfill or hungers to feed. They bet on a better kind of fate; it was supposed to be different beyond that first horizon: not this city, not this table, not such dreams. Because they certainly remembered how it was really meant to be, and they know why it didn't work out. They certainly remember why their lives took a different path (Jurewicz 2005: 10)⁴⁷.

⁴³ “w czasie bezpowrotnie przeszłym, w czasie zatrzaśniętym wiekiem trumny, zasypianym grobowym piaskiem, przykrytym pośmiertnymi kwiatami”.

⁴⁴ “Pamiętam i nie zapomnę nigdy tych wizyt u fotografa, które kojarzyły mi się z umiarem. Myślałem, że zostanę już tylko na fotografii i nie wyjdę żywy z fotograficznego atelier”.

⁴⁵ “szkło fotograficznych ramek rozdziela nasze życie na dwie części – tam jest dzieciństwo i wszystko, co już się zdarzyło, a tutaj już nigdy nie będzie żadnego początku, wszystkie początki zostały za szkłem, na ścianie, po drugiej stronie”.

⁴⁶ “wysiłek autointerpretacji, jednostkowy punkt widzenia, niesprawdzalny do kryteriów zewnętrznych”.

⁴⁷ “Są bezradnymi świadkami, których być może zawstydzam swoim życiem, zniechęceniem, starzeniem się. Chyba mieli inne plany wobec mnie, nie takie tęsknoty do spełnienia czy głody do wykarmienia. Obstawiali lepszy wariant losu, inaczej miało być za tamtym pierwszym horyzontem: nie to miasto, nie ten stół, nie takie sny. Bo na pewno zapamiętali, jak to naprawdę miało być, i wiedzą, dlaczego nic z tego nie wyszło. Na pewno pamiętają, dlaczego ich życie poszło inną drogą”.

The writer sees two people in himself (close, but not the same), he hears the rapid breathing of a boy running to the playground. An adult man and a boy are “simultaneously in the same place and in one form” (Jurewicz 2005: 29)⁴⁸, “we walked together: me and that me” (Jurewicz 1995: 115)⁴⁹. Simultaneism and dechronologization destroy temporal distances, immensity converges with timelessness, time overlooked with time remembered, and time lost with finite past time that lengthens with each page torn from the calendar, grows old, and dies down. And one can no longer catch up with the rocking horse. Czesław Miłosz notes: “When telling a story, one does not know which time to choose, present or past, as if what has passed is not completely gone as long as it persists in the memory of generations – or a solitary chronicler” (Miłosz 2010: 9)⁵⁰. Referring to Miłosz, one can recall Jurewicz’s memory of how in 1990 he received the poet’s autobiography *A Year of the Hunter* (*Rok myśliwego*) from the author himself. In the form of an autograph in this book, Czesław Miłosz proposed to the author of *Lida* to go to Belarus and record conversations on the past of those lands with Poles who stayed there and preserved borderland narratives (Jurewicz, Wojan 2021: 13). Many people who were once bearers of Kresovian memories have already passed, their remembrance gone with them. Jurewicz, however, did not see himself as a man with a tape recorder, recording and then reproducing someone else’s speech. Such a role did not suit his temperament and artistic preferences.

In the literary world of Jurewicz – a writer with a melancholic disposition and reclusive attitude, there is still the possibility of experimenting with time which, as years pass, becomes more and more of a physical burden. Psychological time decides the choice of artistic time, which can get stuck in delays, various *soon*, *later*, *sometime*, growing into *too late*, *never*, *unfortunately not*. However, the awareness of the inevitable death, combined with the difficulty of the search for the meaning of existence, the pursuit of grasping one’s own identity, being wise and noble, does not allow a person to lose:

No
I’ll avoid nothing – I’ll survive, I’ll forget,
I will pass...

(Jurewicz 2005: 178)⁵¹

At the present moment, Aleksander Jurewicz is writing *A Farewell Book* (*Książka na pożeganie* – work title), a certain literary self-portrait, an index of his own life.

⁴⁸ “jednocześnie w tym samym miejscu i w jednej postaci”.

⁴⁹ “szliśmy we dwójkę: ja i tamten ja”.

⁵⁰ “Opowiadając, nie wie się, jaki wybrać czas, terażniejszy czy przeszły, jakby to, co minęło, nie było całkowicie minione, dopóki trwa w pamięci pokoleń – czy tylko jednego kronikarza”.

⁵¹ “Nie / uniknę niczego – przetrwam, zapomnę, / przeminę...”

6. Conclusion

The œuvre of Aleksander Jurewicz is a reconstruction of the microcosm of childhood, a space in which different time planes and orders intersect. The artistic representation of time makes it possible to trace the writer's creative thinking, it determines and organizes the narrative structure of his works. With the dominance of the past tense, the future tense exists in concord with it, and present forms are used much less frequently. As Przemysław Czapliński notes, "for the nostalgic, the entire lost world exists in words, therefore, the nostalgic *praesens historicum* manifests as an expression of the author's yearning to stop the time in place, wielding but a simple grammatical operation" (Czapliński 1999: 67)⁵².

The language verbalizes inner memory and brings it out into the artistic consciousness, actualizing experiences and memorized images, elements of everyday symbolism. This artistic type of memory is not only the basis upon which a new artistic world is built, but also the means for the writer to find a new world within himself, in the depths of their own spirit. Memory is capable of returning the lost meaning of life and connecting disparate temporal continua.

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⁵² "Dla nostalgika cały świat utracony istnieje w słowach, więc nostalgiczne *praesens historicum* pojawia się jako wyraz autorskiej tęsknoty, by za sprawą języka, za pośrednictwem prostej operacji gramatycznej, zamrozić czas".

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Abstract

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Tangibility of Time in the Prose of Aleksander Jurewicz

The article is focused on the model of artistic time in the works of Polish writer Alexander Jurewicz: *Lida* (1990), *The Lord Does Not Hear the Deaf* (*Pan Bóg nie słyszy głuchych*, 1995), *The True Ballad of Love* (*Prawdziwa ballada o miłości*, 2002), *Ashes and Wind* (*Popiół i wiatr*, 2005), and *The Day Before the End of the World* (*Dzień przed końcem świata*, 2008). Novel-collage *Ashes and Wind* is considered as a key work that sums up the writer's reflections. Jurewicz crosses temporal layers, memories of the past, and refracts vignettes from childhood onto artistic reality. Replicating the past contributes to a fuller definition of one's own identity. The article shows the interpretation of time by a writer who ruminates on the existence of a person in time and in discord with it, on the openness and tightness of the temporal frame, as well as the timeless nature of sacralizing the space of his home and childhood.

Keywords

Alexander Jurewicz; Artistic Time; Memory; Suspended Continuous Time; Childhood.