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Meeting in Children's Literature Concerning Death – Finding Connections with Andrzej Nowicki's Incontrology. With the Example of the Relationship with the Oldest Generation

Abstract

Philosophy in literature may also be found in children's books, especially those concerning such serious subjects as death. The authors of these books often introduce the philosophy of life and the meaning of death by showing them through the prism of a meeting of a child and an elderly person. What results from these meetings and what other qualities, apart from the context of familiarizing with death, can be found in these literary meetings? The reference point in the paper is Andrzej Nowicki's philosophy of a meeting, i.e. incontrology.

Keywords: education, andragogy, thanatopedagogy, meeting, children's literature, Andrzej Nowicki, intergenerational meeting.

Spotkanie w dziecięcej literaturze dotyczącej śmierci – odnajdywanie związków z inkontrologią Andrzeja Nowickiego na przykładzie relacji z najstarszym pokoleniem

Abstrakt

Poszukując filozofii w literaturze, można ją odnaleźć również i w książkach dla dzieci, szczególnie jeśli dotyczy ona tak poważnych tematów jak śmierć. Autorzy tychże książek, przybliżając filozofię życia oraz sens śmierci, często ukazują je poprzez pryzmat spotkania dziecka i osoby starszej. Co wynika z tych spotkań i jakie inne

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walory, oprócz kontekstu oswajającego ze śmiercią, można jeszcze odnaleźć w tych literackich spotkaniach? Za punkt odniesienia w pracy została przyjęta filozofia spotkania Andrzeja Nowickiego – inkontrolologia.

Słowa kluczowe: pedagogika, andragogika, tanatopedagogika, inkontrolologia, literatura dziecięca, Andrzej Nowicki, spotkanie międzypokoleniowe.

The fact that the paths of philosophy and literature often overlap is not surprising. The two disciplines share roots which go back to the ancient era. The issues of both concern human matters, stimulate thinking, are a source of answers to troubling questions, or sometimes become a lodestar. Frequently, the borderline between philosophy and literature is blurred. That happens particularly when the world of literature raises difficult issues which deeply concern human matters. Such issues include death; and it is that issue that is the main motif of the literature which is the point of reference for this paper.

Zofia Zarębianka (2016: 142) indicates a network of relationships between philosophy and literature. She distinguishes between direct and indirect relationships. A direct relationship between philosophy and literature occurs in the case of philosophical theses with a literary style or literary works with philosophical motifs. However, indirect relationships occur when philosophical categories are used as tools in the process of interpreting and understanding a text. In the literature which is analysed here, both direct and indirect relationships are present.

Literature for children is special, as it includes both artistic and educational components and often has philosophical properties. Those do not always have to be present directly. Frequently, texts become only (or as much as) an invitation to philosophizing, creating the space for asking questions. The category of death itself may raise many problems difficult to solve explicitly. What is death, what meaning can it have for life, and does it have such meaning at all? Those problems are not included in the scope of this paper and will not be explained here (Sztobryn-Bochomulska 2018a). The main discussion will focus on showing the special relationships of characters, relationships in the difficult circumstances of death/dying/saying goodbye for ever which occur between a child and a senior. In those relationships, the philosophy of a meeting can be found, here in the approach developed by Andrzej Nowicki.

The first part of the paper describes the thought of Andrzej Nowicki concerning his theory of meeting. The second part includes the interpretation of selected literary texts and, in a certain sense, will be a result of a personal meeting both with literature and with Nowicki's inkontrolologia. As a result, the assumption of its author will be realized, as he spoke about inkontrolologia as follows:

inkontrolologia has been devised in that manner – as a philosophy of meetings in both meanings. The first meaning tells us that it examines

meetings; the second one that it is an “open system” which invites one to meetings and development through meetings. Everyone can enter and develop it from the inside in the direction imposed on them by the independent movement of their thoughts [...] (Wieczorek 2013: 37).

The third and final part includes conclusions which would describe the most important properties of a meeting in literature and with literature, “a meeting with death”, and a meeting with the oldest generation.

When introducing Andrzej Nowicki’s theory of meetings, one should refer to his idea of the “*daimonion* field”. *Daimonion* [Greek: guardian spirit] is the good guardian spirit of an individual. That idea is related to Socrates, who, as described by Plato or Xenophon, heard an internal divine voice which protected him from wrong actions or helped to solve difficult situations and break a deadlock in his whirling thoughts (Filozofia 2000: 91). By referring to that story, Nowicki showed that he believed that in each individual there is a part which may be called the *daimonion* field or the internal space. It is important and it consists of our experiences gained during our lives. What filled Nowicki’s “*daimonion* field” was his meetings with teachers. In one of his works, he presented sketches of teachers who were important for him (Nowicki 1982) and showed the influence which those teachers had on him, how they left their mark on his attitude to life, and how they became catalysts of his development. Such considerations are close to the idea of meetings because whether we have a chance of saturating our internal space with “something” valuable depends on the meetings we have in our lives. However, that does not mean that each meeting is incontrology. Nowicki believed that only those meetings which are mutual, i.e. where all parties to a relationship benefit, are of consequence for an individual. It is only a meeting which meets such conditions that becomes a cause and an ingredient of self-creation and it was self-creation that became the first important element in Nowicki’s theory of meetings (ibidem: 11).

“Self-creation is the transformation of a being who is not a person yet into a cultural being. It is not a one-off act but a long process which lasts for a whole life” (Raimondi 2013: 352). Therefore, incontrology, i.e. the philosophy of meetings, differs from meetings which include only unilateral benefits, based on the model of “influences” or “borrowings” (Wieczorek 1990: 37). According to Nowicki, the existence and essence of an individual are secondary to social coexistence. An individual becomes a person because they exist in culture and create it. Before an individual can speak about their identity, they must first meet with others. Those meetings, as has been mentioned above, may be more or less consequential for one’s self. They may exist in two manners, i.e. objectively, when they are stored in our memory and we only sometimes recall them, and subjectively. The subjective presence takes place when a meeting is not only fixed in our memory but, most of all, “is transformed into an active ingredient of our thinking and co-participates in raising and solving individual issues, both theoretical and existential ones”

(Nowicki 1991: 129). Participants in meetings exteriorize from themselves and/or interiorize in themselves particles of personality which are the most important. Both these processes are ruled by the fundamental law of incontrology, i.e. fragmentation (ibidem), as we do not exteriorize all that is inside us and we do not want to or cannot accept everything either.

With time, the understanding of a meeting has changed. According to Krzysztof Wiczorek, Nowicki extended incontrology not only to an interpersonal event occurring for both parties at the same time, but also to contacts between individuals or groups of people who could live in different eras, with different religious, political, or philosophical beliefs (Wiczorek 1990: 38). It was possible owing to meetings with others in objects, as a meeting with another person may not only be personal and direct but also indirect, owing to the products of other people. The products of other people, called objects by Nowicki, are not ordinary objects which take the lowest place in the world's hierarchy. They are not only inanimate creations which may be replaced with any other creation. For Nowicki, objects have a human particle; they acquire the properties of a human, i.e. their author. The meaning of a human life is combined with works: those which are or could be created by an individual or those which an individual meets, contemplates, or interiorizes. The meetings in objects have become the highest form of a meeting and have been called *erganthropy*.

In that manner, A. Nowicki created a new philosophical approach to a human being, as he opposed the unilaterality of idealism, where only that which is invisible is valuable, i.e. our thoughts and feelings, and the unilaterality of naturalism, which sees a human person only in contact with nature, far from the artificial world of products of people (Nowicki 1991: 78). For him, an individual lives in many dimensions, also in objects, which are not something next to which we live and which only serve us to achieve our goals. Objects "live" in their own way because an individual, their creator, gives them a thought, a feeling, a particle of themselves. Nowicki wrote about his philosophy as follows:

the world of high and deep culture is composed of cultural beings, *homines*, i.e. Creators (possible if not actual) and their products, i.e. works we call objects (*res*). Real life consists in "entering" into one's works or the works of other authors. When I enter into the works of philosophers, poets, painters, composers, I absorb them into me, they fill me, they are transformed, like food, into the substance of my personality. I become a person constructed of cultural substance (thought, image, or musical substance). Therefore, culture as the world of wonderful works lives in those people who can absorb it into themselves. I call that manner of existence "the life of objects in an individual" (Agnosiewicz, Nowicki 2009).

An object understood in such a manner is something which is the most perfect which an individual can create and is the most important manner of an individual's

being, as it gives an individual the opportunity of existence even after death. The principles of Nowicki's philosophy indicate that an individual develops owing to other people, meetings with them, and through meetings in objects. Owing to the dialectics of meetings, an individual creates themselves but also the world of culture is created. It is an individual, a potential creator, that becomes the creator of an unrepeatable world and may remain immortal owing to their works. To go further, it may be concluded that the immortality understood in that way may be achieved only by a talented individual, owing to the creation of musical, artistic, or philosophical works; therefore, as Wieczorek correctly observed, such immortality would be an exclusive privilege. However, as is underlined by that author, in Nowicki's works:

that would be the situation (...) but for the second, incontrological (apart from the first, erganthropic) ingredient of Nowicki's philosophical doctrine. It makes everyone who accepts the doctrine understand how important the role played by meetings is in our lives. Each time an individual meets an individual, the established relationship results in (for both parties) the transformation of a personality consisting in including, in its structure, if only a little particle of the personality of the partner in the meeting (Wieczorek 2013: 48–49).

Therefore, the existence of a human in the other individual which is constructed through meetings may not be underestimated. As Nowicki himself underlined:

if the real life of each individual is constituted through their meetings with other people, it is obvious that our immortality should be weaved of the same material as well. An individual achieves immortality through meetings, living still in those traces which they left while going through the consciousness of other people (Nowicki 1991: 117).

It was that idea that was the inspiration to write this paper. Certain relationships may be noticed between Nowicki's philosophy and the literature about death, addressed to children, which uses not only the motif of a meeting but also the idea of immortality understood in line with his interpretation, as will be demonstrated below.

The studied literature, which has become a basis for a wider study (Sztobryn-Bochomulska 2018b) and has been described only shortly here, often uses the construction of a storyline where authors clash two worlds together, i.e. the world of a child with the world of an old person. That structure seems obvious if only for two reasons. Firstly, the literature is addressed to children and that is why the main character is a child. That makes it easier for the reader to identify themselves with the protagonist. Secondly, if the succession of generations is adopted as a standard, the loss of grandparents is usually one of the first deaths with which a child has contact in their life. Therefore, the course of events described in the books has its

source in the natural processes of life. As a result, the rhythm of life is presented which is based on natural laws: there is a beginning of life in the form of a child and the end of life personified by old age.

To show the relationships between literature and Nowicki's incontrolology, it is necessary to describe some parts of the storyline. Out of necessity, the choice of the material from the available literature has been limited to three books. They are examples of Nowicki's concept.

The first meeting (Piumini 2013): This story starts at the deathbed of little Maciek's grandfather. The boy is observing the surrounding people: the pale and frail grandfather, the family in pain and reverie, and a fly walking on the ceiling. It seems that what inevitably will happen in a moment is outside the boy's awareness. Perhaps because he does not understand the reality fully yet or perhaps because he is the youngest and the most beloved grandson of the dying grandfather, he has a strange and metaphysical adventure: suddenly his grandfather gets out of bed unobserved and proposes to take Maciek for a stroll.

Their journey together is described in a fairy tale atmosphere and full of adventures, such as being captured by pirates; however, it also involves wise conversations which are the catalyst for the boy's reflections. During the stroll, the grandfather gives Maciek many lessons, not only with his words but also with his attitude. He is patient and loving. He encourages the boy to make independent decisions. Maciek, on the other hand, must, most of all, cope with strange feelings towards his grandfather, who becomes smaller and smaller along their way. That unusual transformation of the old man initially raises the boy's anxiety, then worry, and, in the end, protectiveness.

That story should be read and understood as a memory of their life meeting in the retrospect of their time together presented in a metaphorical way. The accompanying transformations, i.e. the physical change of the grandfather and the mental change of the grandson, are not inconsequential here. They are an expression of the passage of human life, which shrinks and disappears with time, and, on the other hand, an illustration of development as an effect of a meeting. Maciek's grandfather dies but his grandson already knows that as long as you love someone truly and think about them, that person will live forever although they are not physically present any more. He has been prepared for that by his grandfather; he also heard that in his father's words of comfort: "a person we love remains with us forever" (ibidem: 92).

The story ends with death and, perhaps, many readers would feel that it is a sad ending; however, death is inevitable for all of us but it involves hope when it is shown in that manner. That hope is related to the possibility of incontrolologic immortality provided by a meeting with another person. During that symbolic journey, the last stroll together, the grandfather becomes smaller with each moment and, in the end, he is completely invisible and goes inside the boy with the air. Leaving, he says: "there is no better place to live than inside a little boy" (ibidem:

90). Those words, full of optimism, are not only a comfort, but also an expression of philosophy which is realized between generations.

The second meeting (Stanecka 2013): In the second story, two worlds collide: the young world being Rysio and the old world being grandfather Franciszek. At first, those two worlds are divided by a great chasm. Rysio dislikes the senior. He sees a strange old man who smells unpleasant and with whom he has nothing in common. The grandfather, on the other hand, is frozen in his armchair and, feeling the grandson's hostility, does not make any attempts to make contact with him. He is static in his old age. Although they meet, they are in their own worlds divided by an invisible wall.

One day, when asked to pass a cherry-wood cane, Rysio does so, but unwillingly. He even wants to nudge the cane hanging on a hook to make it fall down. But the grandfather's cane strangely falls down on its own and changes into a cherry tree when it reaches the floor. The observation of the tree, which first puts out young leaves, then blossom, gives fruit, and in the end rots and turns to dust, becomes an opportunity to break the invisible barrier present between the protagonists. Their conversation makes the grandson see, in his grandfather, what he could not have seen or felt before, i.e. the smell which is not unpleasant any more, his grandfather's smell, pleasant and giving the feeling of security, his smile which is as gap-toothed as is his own, and wisdom, as in the end it was the grandfather who made Rysio aware that everything "is beautiful and young for some time only" (ibidem: 14).

From that moment, the grandfather becomes a part of Rysio's life or maybe it is Rysio that fills his grandfather's world. In fact, they both benefit from the incon-trology in which they are taking part. That meeting transforms their worlds. It changes the unpleasant loneliness of the old man and gives him joyful colours. It gives him vitality and willingness to be an active participant in the child's world and to enjoy his own life still. He says to Rysio: "Now, when you talk to me, I start to be curious about the world again" (ibidem: 25). He goes for a walk with his grand-son to discover the appeals of spring, the world, and life again. Rysio, on the other hand, finds a real friend in his grandfather, who understands even more than his mother and goes deeper into the child's world. A real and deep intergenerational relationship is established between them, which saturates both of them.

When the story nears its end, the grandfather prepares the grandson for the goodbye. He tells the boy that at a certain moment he will have to go away, that their time together will soon end. The boy does not like this and objects to his grandfather's words. Therefore, to avoid hurting the child, old Franciszek ends the conversation quickly by saying: "I only wanted you to know that I am not afraid any more. Not any more." (ibidem: 68).

What the grandfather stopped fearing was death. Remaining from the tree which joined the protagonists at the beginning, was a cherry-stone. Rysio put it into his pocket. The result of the meeting of the grandfather and the grandson has transformed Rysio; that is why, the grandfather is not afraid any more, even of the

end of his existence. He knows that he will exist inside his grandson. The awareness of the possibility of living in the memory of the younger generation is a reinforcement and it completes human life. When the grandfather leaves for ever, his grandson will always carry him in his symbolic pocket. Although he will be absent physically, he will be present like the stone, having sprouted in his grandson. Such a chance is provided by a meeting in the spirit of incontrology, i.e. one which is valuable, important, and owing to which one may construct oneself by interiorizing the personality of others. Admittedly, the time before the appearance of the cherry tree, when Rysio, while at his grandfather's, "was staring at the floor blackened with age, munching dry biscuits, and thinking only about when he would be able to go home", could also be called a meeting (ibidem: 7). However, it was only the active participation in a meeting that became a catalyst for transformations in the protagonists, in particular in the child.

The third meeting (Eriksson 2006): Esben's beloved grandfather died suddenly. That loss meant that Esben could not stop crying, maybe because the grandfather appeared in the boy's room during the night after the funeral and on the following nights. Of course, he was a ghost, which his grandson liked very much. However, the old man was worried because he did not know why he kept coming back to the old world. They read in a book that it sometimes happened when a deceased person had left unfinished business. From that moment, for several nights, they tried to discover together what the unfinished business was, one which prevented the grandfather from saying goodbye to the world for good. For that purpose, the ghost and Esben visited together the grandfather's former house; they also walked the paths in the city known to both of them. However, although the old man recalled many things, none of them was the solution to the riddle. In the end, the grandfather discovered that the unfinished business concerned both of them and made the grandson recall everything he remembered of their time together. When Esben listed a number of various memories, both important and less important ones, funny as well as moving, he heard from his grandfather:

- And this is what it is about.
- What "this"? [the boy asked. J.S-B.]
- Everything, and everything which you did not mention - [the grandfather] explained" (ibidem).

In that last meeting, the old man made his grandson aware how important their time together, their meetings, their being together had been. Although Esben lost his grandfather in the physical sense, he did not lose him in the spiritual dimension. As long as the memory of the deceased is nurtured, they will live. That message not only soothes the boy's pain but also gives peace to the deceased. He may leave because he knows that, in fact, he will still exist in his grandson, as he is a part of the child.

Literary meetings which bring benefits to their participants, which influence the personality of participants, and which bring a possibility to be immortal in the incontrological sense, are not only a literary method of becoming familiar with passing human life. Those stories are also examples of the universality of an idea which may be found in the literature of that type. That universality is realized in the belief: "If you really remember me, I will not die completely" (Rattan 2009: 77) and it is closest to the principles of Nowicki's concept. However, memory should not be treated here as recollections only. In the possibility of becoming immortal as understood by Nowicki, more than ordinary memory is involved, as memory may disappear, fade away. Only the interiorization of the other which happens as a result of a meeting enables us to speak about immortality. That idea has been expressed in authentic memories of a grandson about his grandmother: "I can't remember the details of her appearance but I know how much she loved me. And although the image of my grandmother is fading in my memory, I will recognize her good heart everywhere, as it is like jewellery for a soul" (Siwołowski 2014: 193). Memory is fleeting and although that word is usually used to describe what remains of us in others, what permanently remains in us is the life of others in us, i.e. attitudes and actions which we assume and accept as ours and which become that special "jewellery for a soul". One only has to be open to a meeting with another individual, which is expressed in being ready to remember and accept, as described by Nowicki "if only on a trial basis" (Nowicki 1991: 219), someone else's point of view.

At the end, it is worth considering the multidimensionality of a meeting which is possible in contact with literature. A meeting may be recognized here not only in the manner which has been presented above, i.e. between literary protagonists, but also from another viewpoint. One of the possibilities includes the erganthropic dimension of a meeting with authors in their worlds which, like incontrology, is based on Nowicki's ideas. Another, special type of a meeting which may be experienced when reading books about dying is the meeting with death. The literature of that type is very often called "taming", as it allows the readers, in a careful way, to cope with difficult emotions related to the issues of dying and death. However, from the viewpoint of incontrology which is present in a storyline and which occurs in the unusual conditions of saying goodbye to someone, one may observe not only the philosophical dimension of the reading, but also its pedagogic nature. Becoming aware of one's own mortality owing to literature and also understanding the incontrological message release, in an individual, the responsibility for creating their own self so as to enable that self to become, according to Nowicki's concept, "the subjective ingredient of their personality" (Wieczorek 2013: 38). The meetings in the presented literature are creative in that manner. That happens not only at the level of the text but exceeds the internal world of the protagonists and enters the world of the reader. When we read a book or watch a film and it is able to move us, change our perspective on the world, stimulate our thinking, we may call it incon-

trology. The modern world is often superficial; therefore, perhaps, a meeting with unusual literature may become something which will leave its “mark” on a reader. And fill the field of their *daimonion*.

And finally, one cannot refrain from observing the reflection which came to mind during the reading and which directs us towards the beauty of the existing relationships between a child and a senior. The influence of an intergenerational relationship on a child's development is important.

Grandparents are important for their grandchildren as the eldest family members and people who are close to them. Appropriate relationships with them expand the circle of mental and social experiences. They also create the foundations for the feeling of being rooted in a family for the future and, at the same time, create favourable conditions for the development of an individual's identity (Pieńkos 2015: 280).

That relationship is not unilateral. In contacts with their grandchildren, grandparents also find benefits. The feeling of being needed, the possibility of providing assistance and showing feelings protects the mental comfort of seniors (Napora 2016: 7). In the literature, it is emphasized that intergenerational contacts are important and necessary. The apotheosis of such relationships in literature supports that belief and is a good point of reference which reminds us not to forget about the eldest people in the family in the reflection on the education of younger generations and not to neglect those contacts in everyday educational practice. Literature and philosophy carry the wisdom of the many; they are the incontraological and erganthropic heritage which is worth using and which should be used.

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