

DOI: 10.31648/pl.10527

ALDONA KIELPIŃSKA

Pomeranian University in Słupsk

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9679-7840>

e-mail: [aldonakielpinska92@gmail.com](mailto:aldonakielpinska92@gmail.com)

## Utilising Genograms as a Visual Diagnostic Tool to Explore Trauma within Agata Tuszyńska's Family<sup>1</sup>

### Genogram jako graficzna technika diagnostyczna traumy rodziny Agaty Tuszyńskiej

**Keywords:** war, extermination, war memories, genogram

**Słowa kluczowe:** wojna, zagłada, wspomnienia wojenne, genogram

#### Abstract

The burden to continue the war narrative falls on the so-called second generation, i.e. persons who, despite being born after World War II, are equally burdened by the memory of their mothers' traumatic experiences. Existing research in psychology and the social sciences, as well as the genogram theory formulated by American researchers, proves helpful in expanding knowledge and structuring information on the phenomenon of trauma and its inheritance. The tools thus obtained enable reinterpretation of the texts by A. Tuszyńska, whose experience of the war, although not direct, largely shaped her identity and had a destructive impact on development and assimilation in the new, post-war reality.

The starting point for my inquiry is the notion of post-memory as formulated by literary scholar Marianna Hirsch. The researchers conceptualise it as a highly unique form of memory because its relation to the object or source that it describes has not been mediated through memories but through imagination and creativity. Hirsch combines the familial domain of memories with the cultural

---

<sup>1</sup> Translation services were co-financed by the Ministry of Education and Science pursuant to agreement No. RCN/SP/0200/2021/1 of 1 November 2022; value of the grant awarded as part of the "Development of scientific journals" program – PLN 54 090.

understanding of commemorative activity, which is recorded, e.g. in diaries and other memorabilia (Ubertowska 2013: 271). This involves certain relatively recently formulated concepts, such as specifically understood “heredity”, mediation of the past, and the deconstruction of its image, which takes place during transmission (Ubertowska 2013: 271). Hirsch blurs the boundaries between the private and the public and seeks to underscore familiarity as a fully-fledged cultural category.

The memoirs on which I have chosen to focus on in this study and confront their content with Hirsch’s research hypothesis concern mother-daughter relationships explored through literature. The memoirs contained in the writings of Agata Tuszyńska undoubtedly represent one such testimony to an extremely difficult but also exceptionally important bond. In the writer’s autobiographical works, one encounters a whole range of behaviours resulting from the anomalous relationship between the daughter and the mother, one of whose distinctive traits is the inability to cope with various types of emotions, overcoming the communication barrier between generations, the inexpressibility of trauma, exceedingly diminished – or sometimes overabundant – sensitivity, scarcity or excess of its understanding and empathy (Grzemska 2016: 168). The burden of experience transmitted from one generation to the next turns out to constitute an extraordinary emotional load:

The traumatic baggage of this unmanifestable and unutterable double part of experience is deposited in the non-reflective memory of individuals and communities; carried wherever one goes, it cannot be abandoned or offloaded. It exerts pressure, demanding disclosure and articulation which, inevitably doomed to incompleteness and unfulfillment, nevertheless become momentous indicators or symptoms [...] of the reality of what cannot be grasped (Tokarska-Bakir 2005: 154).

That kind of emotional load is passed on by the mother to Agata Tuszyńska, whose work is characterised by the constant confrontation of the narrator with the speaker’s alter ego, based on which one may classify her writing among autobiographical forms with elements of self-therapy.

That particular interrelation may be elucidated by drawing on the conclusions formulated by the American art historian Kaja Silverman. The latter developed a concept of identification manifesting in variants, which represented the responses to the research questions she had asked. Is it possible, and how, to function empathically in the mother-daughter relationship and to create stories about it? According to the researcher, the first type she distinguished, i.e. idiopathic identification, “presumes internalising the other through similarity, in a way that the other becomes me. Shared traits are emphasised, whereas the irreducible

differences are sidelined or simply ignored” (Grzemska 2016: 171). In contrast, in the second type – referred to as heteropathic identification – the subject “assumes the risk – temporary and partial – of standing next to the (traumatised) other, but without integrating them or appropriating their experience” (Grzemska 2016: 171). It is, therefore, important to forge an ethical and, at the same time, empathetic relationship founded on the co-existence of the daughter (subject) and the mother, who represents the previous generation. This relationship should be thoughtful, conscious and ethical.

Through discursively inculcated memories, the subject can participate in the desires, struggles and sufferings of the other (where the culturally devalued and persecuted other plays a special role), and engage in identification at a distance [...]. Heteropathic memory (feeling and suffering with the other) means being able to say: “it could have been me, it could have been me”, while simultaneously (with emphasis on that simultaneity), “it was not me” (Grzemska 2016: 171).

The aforementioned heteropathic memory and identification correlate with Marianne Hirsch’s concept of post-memory outlined above. The categories of post-memory, identification, and the project of an empathetic relationship between generations prompt reflection on whether and how these theoretical insights may be helpful in the analysis of autobiographical literature.

## **Genograms as an example of therapy**

When conducting family therapy, specialised therapists take advantage of a unique method which consists of creating so-called family genograms (Grzemska 2016: 171). A genogram is a tool that illustrates the kinship between individual family members and delineates intergenerational relationships. It is a source of information about conflicts within the family, the roles assigned to family members, dysfunctional behaviours, pathologies and traumatic events. The resulting diagram depicts emotional, psychological, and spiritual relationships. Once they are plotted, one can decode and diagnose the patterns of behaviour that occur in the family and the actions which affect the lives of individual family members. Genograms are particularly useful for clinicians because, in an orderly fashion, they graphically represent complex family patterns that would be much more difficult to describe and read without ambiguity. They facilitate defining the family structure in a transparent manner, as well as make it easier to introduce corrections or record data when the family picture changes. More specifically, a genogram

is a “synopsis of the family”, thanks to which persons who are unfamiliar with a particular case may become quickly acquainted with an enormous amount of information about family relationships and identify issues (McGoldrick, Gerson, Shellenberger 2007: 20).

Genograms also prove to be useful in literary research, enabling an in-depth understanding of each family described by the authors, as well as offering a broader perspective on their families so that problems may be examined in the current and historical context. Information about relationships, structure, and family functioning can be obtained by analysing the genogram both horizontally, which reflects the present family, and vertically for the generational context (McGoldrick, Gerson, Shellenberger 2007: 20). On the other hand, the study of the entire spatiotemporal expanse of familial links will make it possible to determine the links between persons directly involved in a family ordeal and how they function within the broader system, as well as identify the family’s strengths and weaknesses in relation to a particular situation.

In the horizontal and vertical viewing modality, a trauma may be analysed simultaneously within multiple subsystems (which may be freely created), including reciprocal relationships, triangular relationships with siblings, or in conjunction with the wider community or socio-cultural context. By exploring the family system from a historical perspective and determining the transformations in its life cycle, it is possible to identify problems in the context of the family’s educational patterns. For this reason, the genogram requires that at least three generations of a given family be described; critical watershed moments that are associated with the family’s life cycle need to be accounted for as well. Genograms “allow dates to speak, suggesting possible connections between events occurring in the family over time” (McGoldrick, Gerson, Shellenberger 2007: 2).

Thus, in literature, genograms are employed to illustrate and textualise familial relationships, additionally creating an opportunity to plot multiple elements of a diffuse past in a diagram. As a result, they are a kind of catalyst for post-memory. The family genogram simultaneously exposes all that is repressed, unwanted, obscured, unspoken, latent, and spectral, affecting the condition of the author and the narrative framework of the works – all that may undergo identification and have an impact on referentiality. This entails multiple attempts to break the silence with affective response, the transference of trauma and the stimulation of empathy.

Regarding the practical aspect of literary studies, the genogram may be dissected in the same manner as a literary text, though allowing for the differences, notably those related to temporal distance. This analogy has proved helpful

in investigating post-traumatic literature, its autobiographical varieties in particular. Here, it is an important point that repetitions are often encountered in families, and the integration of such images in the graphic form of the genogram highlights the fact that what happened in one generation tends to recur in the next. Murray Bowen called this phenomenon the “multigenerational transmission of family patterns” (McGoldrick, Gerson, Shellenberger 2007: 27). There is a hypothesis that patterns of relationships in the previous generations may constitute an implicit model of family functioning for the subsequent ones.

Furthermore, genograms afford a broader scope, thanks to which one can simultaneously track the dependencies between how a family functions and its social surroundings or current events that affect the family at a given time, while linking them to inherited stressors. The correlation of historical events (such as war), on the other hand, is not treated as a coincidence but as events that can be connected within a system. In addition, there seem to be certain periods in which the probability of important changes in family relationships increases. This is highly likely, especially at transitional moments in the family life cycle. Symptoms may multiply when family members have to reorganise their relationships in order to move on to the next phase. A family in which such symptoms may be observed appears to be “stuck in time” and unable to overcome the impasse (McGoldrick, Gerson, Shellenberger 2007: 27). Patterns and relationship histories identified by means of the genogram may thus also serve as important clues to establish a chronology of dependent events, i.e. what symptom may have developed in order to preserve a particular relationship pattern, prevent its occurrence or protect the legacy of previous generations.

### **Sources of trauma in Agata Tuszyńska’s relationship**

In order to understand the relationships in Agata Tuszyńska’s family and the genogram created on their basis, it is necessary to take a closer look at her autobiographical disclosure in *Rodzinna historia lęku* [*A Family History of Fear*]. The journalist grew up in a traditional home, unaware that she was a representative of the second, post-traumatic generation. She was nineteen when her mother revealed a family secret to her. It turned out that she had Jewish roots on her mother’s side. It was only many years after discovering the truth that Agata Tuszyńska decided to retrace the history of her ancestors who perished in the Holocaust. In the biography entitled *Rodzinna historia lęku*, the author describes the fates of several generations of her Polish-Jewish family. The story features

tragedies that originated in the distant past and numerous secrets that can no longer be uncovered today. As the author writes:

It took years before I found the strength to accept this news. Before, I let it enter my awareness, which defended itself against it. I needed time to usher it in. Not yet to accept it, but to consider the possibility within myself. Has it happened? Can I say of myself: I am Jewish? (Tuszyńska 2005: 46).

*Rodzinna historia lęku*, in which the narrator identifies with the author, is a chronicle of how she uncovers the mystery once she learns about her unexpected roots. The mother did not wish to pass on that trauma to her daughter.

She didn't want me to have a hump. She was happy to have given birth to a blue-eyed girl with light-coloured hair. The girl had a Polish father. She raised me to live in this country. She didn't want to place a burden on her child's shoulders that she wouldn't be able to carry. She did not want her daughter to grow up in fear and with a sense of harm (Tuszyńska 2005: 10).

Agatha's mother was proud that her daughter did not look like her, which, apparently contrary to nature, becomes fully understandable in the context of her past, filled with fear and a sense of trauma. Tippner discusses the syndrome of "Jewish mothers", whose despotic character traits do not stem from the trauma of the war but are part of the productive stereotype of the "Jewish mother" (Tippner 2016: 80). Listing the behaviours of the so-called "Jewish mother", the author mentions the need for excessive control, oppressive love, and emotional manipulation. Such characteristics are corroborated by the transformation of the image of the "Jewish mother" in literature: initially, she was the epitome of the cold and absent woman. American literature of the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century introduced a different image, which combines overbearing nature and tenderness. According to Tippner, the behaviour of Tuszyńska cannot be justified by the trauma of the war alone, as it primarily hints at turbulent family relations or problematic personal constellations deriving from medical conditions (Tippner 2016: 80). On the other hand, Bożena Umińska invokes the figure of the "Israeli mother", arguing that "there is no such figure of a Jewish woman in Polish literature that positively corresponds to the model of the Jew-patriot, also if we consider Jewish female protagonists from the upper strata" (Umińska 2001: 73). Nevertheless, I will try to demonstrate that the behaviour of Agata Tuszyńska's mother is largely the result of the trauma she had experienced. The archetype of the Israeli mother is outlined in the Jewish analogue of *Do Matki Polki* [*To the Polish Mother*], namely, Henryk Mierzbach's poem *Do matki Izraelki*, which alludes to the raising of Jewish children:

Sing to him early on about his native country  
About great work and great love...  
For he has returned to the paradise of his dreams  
That he had already longed for centuries in exile  
(Mierzbach 1997: 242).

The narrator is aggrieved that her family hid a secret from her. At the same time, she portrays her mother as a modern woman who does not conform to stereotypes. She was a journalist and earned well enough to support her child on her own. For her, Poland was a country of freedom and affluence. She did not complain about anything, and she did not expect gratitude. She was able to afford the necessities. The woman writes about the unpleasant childhood memories associated with her parents' divorce:

I didn't like Sundays. I was afraid of those days, and it stayed with me. Sunday was a time for happy families. A day of planned rituals we did not partake in. The Sunday service, a walk, family dinner, and afternoon tea with homemade apple cake. Everyone together, everything in its place. Mum, dad, me, as in a story for children. Mum's mum, grandma, mum's dad, grandpa. This wasn't the case in any of the homes of mine (Tuszyńska 2005: 100–101).

Thus, in line with Tippner's observations, one can conclude that the trauma which Tuszyńska has to confront is caused by the breakdown of her family; at the same time, the break-up of her parents' marriage may also have had its roots in the trauma of Halina's mother. The painful wartime experiences made Halina want to forget her Jewish background as soon as possible and create a typical Polish family. When the first problems in the marriage arose, it turned out that those experiences had not been overcome:

I don't know where she was going out. Bogdan's friends liked to drink, and he liked it too. Halina didn't touch alcohol and still doesn't. Did she not like it? Or was she afraid of its effects, of losing the self-control she had worked so hard to keep? Or perhaps she was already beginning to organise her life without her father. Afternoons and evenings, evenings and nights. And then, later on, that "at his side" grew bothersome. That's how I imagine it (Tuszyńska 2005: 95).

Today, researchers who seek to explain situations similar to Agata Tuszyńska's are able to provide evidence for the transmission of trauma from one generation to the next (Wolynn 2017: 32). One of the leading researchers on post-traumatic stress disorder, Rachel Yehuda, discusses the neurobiology of PTSD in Holocaust survivors and their children in her studies. People affected by post-traumatic stress

disorder do experience the sensations and feelings associated with the trauma, even though it happened in the past. It manifests in, e.g. anxiety, insomnia, stupor, depression, nervousness, nightmares, confusion or horrifying ideation. Hence, if a parent happens to have PTSD, their children are three times more likely than the rest of the population to develop its symptoms, being prone to anxiety and depression. According to Yehuda, that type of intergenerational PTSD is inherited rather than being a result of immersion in parental stories. The researcher was one of the first to demonstrate how the children of trauma survivors experience psychological and physical symptoms of traumas that they have not experienced first-hand (Wolynn 2017: 32).

Just as trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder is inherited from ancestors. Agata Tuszyńska still struggles today with the psychological and physical fallout of her inherited trauma. According to Anja Tippner:

The discovery of a mystery – the Jewish origin and the Holocaust – is marked by great ambivalence in Tuszyńska's case since, even though both facts are at the core of her book, the author cannot recall the moment when she found out about it from her mother. Thus, she inherits not only the memory of the Shoah and Jewish identity but also the mechanisms of silence and denial. Tomasz Łysak compares Tuszyńska's memoirs in which she reveals her Jewish background with coming out and refers to the author's situation as "sudden Jewishness" (Tippner 2016: 84).

The mechanisms of silence and denial are indeed in operation in Tuszyńska's recollections, which is due to the fact that the news of her Jewish origin was abrupt and unexpected, hence the term "sudden Jewishness" suggested by Tomasz Łysak.

Agata Tuszyńska inherited trauma not only from her mother but from her entire Jewish family. It is symbolised by the black handbag which she was given by her mother and which once belonged to Tuszyńska's grandmother. In the book entitled *Czarna torebka* [*Black Handbag*], she describes its contents in detail and reflects on the fears that it engenders. Tuszyńska performs a kind of anthropomorphisation, lending the inanimate object many human-like characteristics, such as fear or memory.

According to Anja Tippner, "the post-catastrophic co-testimony of daughters also includes knowledge of the theory of trauma and transgenerational transmission" (Tippner 2016: 17). Hence, the metaphor of the container used in Tuszyńska's case, and the reference to the handbag as an object which stores the past. Tuszyńska's manner of writing, Tippner claims, occasionally resembles mimicry of trauma memory, which, according to Shoshana Felman, is incomplete and fragmented (Tippner 2016: 18). However, it is understandable that the author wants



to fill in the gaps in her family history, whereby she avails herself of references to general knowledge instead of citing specific facts concerning the deaths of the murdered individuals. Tuszyńska seeks to address those gaps by searching in the archives, visiting the sites of events, intensive reminiscing, interviews, conversations with her mother, and resorting to imagination. She notes on numerous occasions that some of the events or conversations are only imagined, particularly in the chapter on her grandmother. After all, she had never met her grandmother Dela in person but was able to envisage her with the help of her handbag and its contents. It all started with that object: the discovery of her own identity, learning about her ancestors, uncovering the truth. In *Czarna torebka*, Tuszyńska describes her inherited fear. She was given the eponymous handbag of grandmother Dela by her mother, Halina, and it took time before the author felt familiar with it. It lay hidden in a drawer for several years as its heiress had to mature to face its contents. The handbag also enables Tuszyńska to understand her mother's behaviour. This is how the author underscores what the object represents:

This handbag is like a shelter and like a nest. The nest of a family that I used to have that I did not know. One that you had to be silent about in order to go on living. Living in Łęczyca, the Jewish family of the mother of a girl from the Warsaw ghetto. After the war, she – the fourteen-year-old Halinka, a half-orphan – had one dream: to fall in love, preferably with a Polish boy, and give birth to a girl with blue eyes. Maybe that was the most important thing – blue eyes, proof of Polishness so that the little one would never face a fate similar to her own. And here I am. Her daughter has blue eyes. In front of me is my Jewish grandmother's handbag. The grandmother who has been gone for so long, and yet she stayed with us (Tuszyńska 2023: 5).

The inanimate object has become a vehicle for the memory of the Holocaust. Tuszyńska feels a sense of gratitude and obligation towards grandmother Dela. She has built her picture in her mind:

I've created her for myself. I inferred her out from inside the leather envelope that she did not part with in her last months, or perhaps years. I get to know her secretly, from documents and signs, scraps and traces of everyday life. It's only the handwriting that feels real to me (Tuszyńska 2023: 15).

Adela Goldstein did not exist in her life. The first time she saw her likeness in a photograph, she seemed a strange figure, "not her own", since she did not resemble the mother or the granddaughter at all:

I don't know anything about her fear. I imagine she armed herself with strength for the child. Everything suggests that they went out one cool day in late July or early

August. It was cloudy that summer; a cold wind was blowing, and it rained (Tuszyńska 2023: 36).

It is likely that Adela Goldstein also tried to protect her child from trauma, though that was impossible as Halina was born during the war. It may be surmised that she imparted the model of upbringing prevailing in the Warsaw ghetto to her daughter Agata. In the book, Tuszyńska repeatedly emphasises that she did not think about her grandmother's fear because it never affected her. For her, grandmother Dela is a valiant woman, running through the streets of the ghetto. She is aware, however, that she must have been afraid. If not for herself, then for her family.

Tuszyńska uses numerous metaphors when speaking of the handbag:

The inside of the handbag is bigger than it appears at first glance. It can fit the whole handy world in it. In the open compartments and the hidden pockets. It can be read over and over again. The side belt folds double, providing additional storage. She was ready for confrontation at any time (Tuszyńska 2023: 38).

The author waited a long time to confront herself with the handbag. For Dela's granddaughter, it was her grandmother's whole life, like an open book to which one can always return. The handbag is a story of many generations of women, although, in the visual sense, it did not testify to the owner's Jewish origin, as the owner was prepared for a possible search. Inside, Tuszyńska found documents, a baptismal certificate, a holy picture, patriotic notes and an *Ausweis*.

The eponymous black handbag represents a kind of legacy: a burden to be carried for the rest of one's life. On the one hand, the author feels anxious about this, but the handbag she received also gives her comfort, creating a false sense of security. It attests to her Jewish origin. Having it in her hands, the woman knows where she comes from and who she is. It is likely that this object is helpful in coping with trauma. It appears to be a piece of tangible evidence of her experience, but the handbag helps the woman to "familiarise" it, to be reconciled with it. By communing with the handbag, Tuszyńska wants to lose the traumatic memory, and yet she evokes it as an "identity base". It guarantees continuity and provides the woman with the knowledge that she has not come from nowhere and that her being is uninterrupted and anchored. This awareness gives the woman a sense of strength. The black handbag constitutes a link between her and her grandmother. The object enables her to "enter" Dela's body. As Mark Wolynn observes, "In order to process trauma, it's often helpful for clients to have a direct experience of the feelings and sensations that have been submerged in the body" (Wolynn 2017: 35).

According to Rachel Yehuda, the aim of epigenetic changes is to increase the number of possible responses in a stressful situation, which is a positive change. When a person who inherits trauma understands the purpose of the biological change induced by stress and trauma, it is possible to “develop a better way of explaining to ourselves what our true capabilities and potentials are” (Wolynn 2017: 35).

Traumas, thus understood, whether inherited or experienced, represent a legacy of anguish, but they can also become a source of resilience and strength to be passed on to future generations. It is, therefore, somewhat dysfunctional that a generation of parents feel the need for normalcy, which is expected to prevail by concealing the truth about one’s Jewish origins. According to Tippner, “the striving of subsequent generations to find their own roots is associated with the need to be a witness to the Shoah, thus compensating for the silence of their parents” (Tippner 2016: 84). The texts written by the representative of the second generation are characterised by the presence of a metaleptic narrative and an implicit self-commitment to convey her parents’ experiences (Tippner 2016: 84). However, Eva Hoffman underlines that “while the first generation writes drawing from the abyss of memory and in the conviction of its real power, the second generation writes about memory itself and the resulting uncertainty, errors and blank spaces” (Tippner 2016: 85). According to Tippner, the approach adopted by Agata Tuszyńska is characterised by superiority with respect to her mother’s painful memories. The woman inscribes herself in the intergenerational relations that concern her directly, but she also appropriates the history of her Jewish ancestors, a history tainted by violence and discrimination. The woman engages with the biographies of her ancestors based on the conviction that one can only understand oneself if one understands the parent of the same gender. The genogram method used in family therapy may prove helpful in dealing with inherited trauma.

Tuszyńska writes about the anxiety that developed after her parents had separated. It had various facets: fear of coldness, alienation, and loneliness. She mentions feeling inferior to her father’s children from another marriage. The sense of “otherness” would not leave her, but the woman could not determine where it stemmed from. Everything changed the moment she learned her true identity. The knowledge of her family tree helped her to understand herself. It follows from the presented genogram that certain behaviours, such as anxiety triggered in certain circumstances, are encountered in at least two generations. It is also apparent that women are at high risk of developing symptoms of trauma inheritance. This is what epigenetic inheritance consists in. Tuszyńska inherited many of the transgenerational effects of trauma that may be attributed to biological impact (Pawłowicz 2022).

Describing her memories, Tuszyńska adopts a strategy of self-therapy, as her book was intended to serve that function. This is evident in how she reflects on the awareness that the branches of her family tree are marked with the stigma of alienation, fear and anxiety. The author makes an attempt at self-definition as to whether she is Polish or Jewish. At the same time, she tries to understand why her origins were shrouded in mystery for so long and account for the fact that she herself was unable to speak out about it for a long time.

### Genogram of Agata Tuszyńska's family

The genogram below shows Agata Tuszyńska's family:

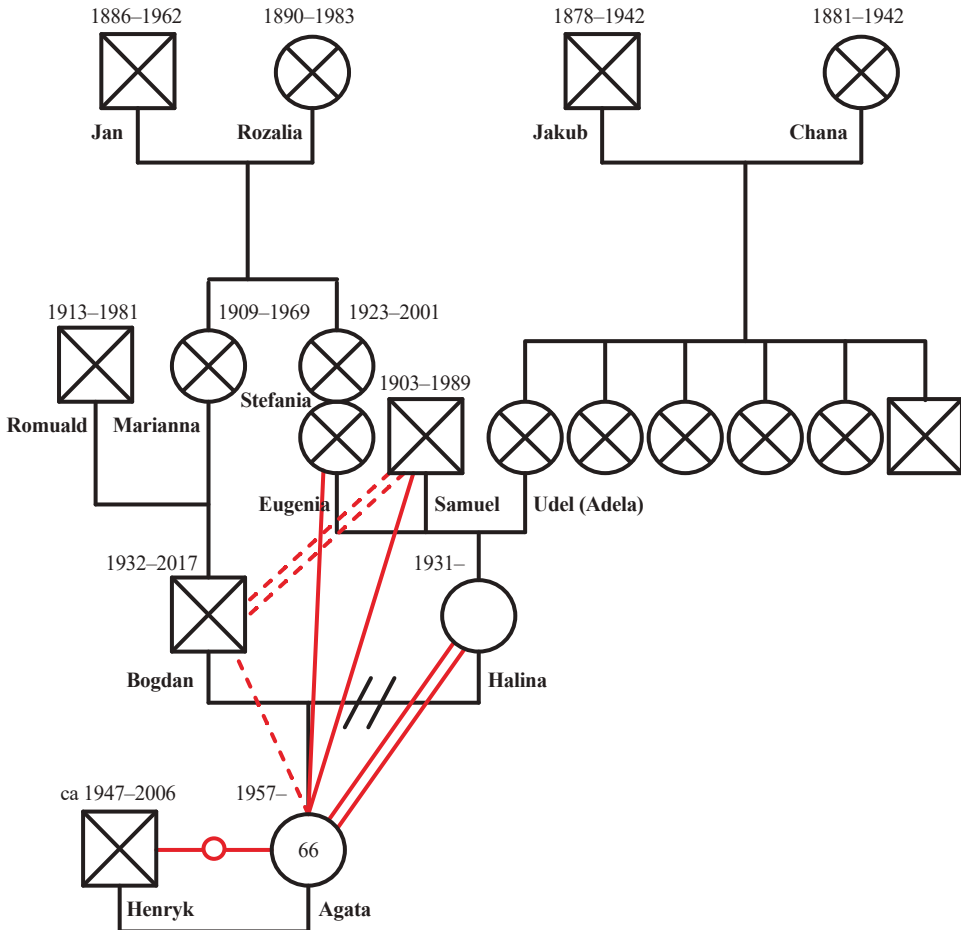


Fig. 1. Genogram of Agata Tuszyńska's family

The dates of birth and death are stated next to each person and their names may be seen under each symbol which denotes them. My analysis will start with the person it concerns, i.e. Agata Tuszyńska, found at the bottom of the genogram. To her left is her late husband, Henryk Dasko. He died in 2006 of a brain tumour, hence the caption “ca” (cancer as the cause of death). The couple had no children. Tuszyńska describes their joint struggle with the disease in the book entitled *Ćwiczenia z utraty [Exercises in Loss]*. The death of a loved one was another blow to the author. One could say that she felt just as her mother Halina had done when her grandmother Dela died and how her ancestors had felt losing their children during the war. Tuszyńska carries this pain inside her all the time. The feeling could be called the anguish of loss. In the book dedicated to the battle with cancer, the author writes:

On the last night before your death, someone threw a stone at the window. The glass shattered. I felt that something bad was going to happen. I had the impression that I was in Nazi Germany during *Kristallnacht* (Tuszyńska 2007: 238).

Tuszyńska’s reference to *Kristallnacht* does not seem accidental. Images and associations from the war have accompanied the author throughout her life. The Holocaust became so deeply ingrained in the woman that it returned to her at the most difficult moments.

In the genogram, the parents of Agata Tuszyńska – Bogdan and Halina – are depicted above her. Bogdan Tuszyński (died in 2017) was a sports journalist. Her mother, Halina, worked as a journalist. Her daughter recalls: “My mother is over ninety years old. She doesn’t remember much anymore” (Tuszyńska 2023: 7). The two vertical strokes between Tuszyńska’s parents mark their divorce. As already mentioned, the break-up of the family also had a significant impact on her mental well-being. Her memories of childhood, when she had two homes and two families, are anything but positive:

From the very beginning, ever since I had to shuttle back and forth with a thousand-zloty note from my father’s flat to my mother’s flat, I already felt unjustly wronged [...]. I quickly learned not to tell what happened in either. And I knew how to keep quiet from the start. That’s where the skill to live in disguise and fit into different, often distant realities came from. To fit in, to adjust oneself, to be able to play the right string, to have many faces and to be able to take each one off. And not let anyone get to know you truly (Tuszyńska 2007: 101).

The above description is reminiscent of the loss of identity that her grandmother, Adela Goldstein, struggled with as a child. As already noted, the woman

had to assume a new identity and forget everything that was Jewish. Clearly, therefore, a certain behaviour is repeated in the next generation. Halina is the daughter of Adela and Samuel. Grandmother Dela, the owner of the black handbag, died in 1944. Samuel remarried a woman called Eugenia, to whom Tuszyńska refers as “Żenia”. Adela Goldstein had five siblings. They are depicted on the right side of the genogram, but their names remain unknown. Their fates are outlined by Tuszyńska:

My grandmother’s sisters and her brother, a house painter – the only one who did not want to study – were killed. Their parents, uncles, and cousins died. In Chełmno nad Nerem, not far from Łęczycza, or in Treblinka. They have no graves (Tuszyńska 2023: 46).

The awareness that most of one’s ancestors perished during the war translates into a sense of loss and grief experienced by the next generation. The family of Tuszyńska’s father are equally important, although we know less about them. Bogdan’s parents are Romuald and Marianna, who was called Grandma Mania by her granddaughter. Next to her is her sister Stefania, whom Tuszyńska also mentions. Their parents were Rozalia and Jan Karliński. They had twelve children, but only five lived to adulthood. I deliberately included only Marianna and Stefania in the genogram, as they were the most significant women for Tuszyńska. Unfortunately, we know nothing about the fate of their siblings, nor do we know their gender. They most likely died during the war.

The red lines traced on the genogram also have their significance. Two continuous lines between family members indicate close relationships, one – dashed – line denotes emotional distance, two dashed lines represent discord, and a line with a circle represents love. The first visible relationship – the marriage of Agata and Henryk – was connected by the line of love, as they were in love with each other and lived in harmony until the death of one of the spouses. Agata’s relationship with her mother, Halina, was marked by two lines in view of their close bond. Tuszyńska writes about her in a very tender and endearing fashion: “But above all, she was my mother. ‘A child deserves the whole world.’ That’s what Halina would always say” (Tuszyńska 2005: 91). Her contacts with her father, on the other hand, are denoted by a single dashed line, signifying emotional distance. After her parents’ divorce, Agata’s relationship with Bogdan deteriorated. Tuszyńska also has few fond recollections of the relationship with her grandfather Samuel and his second wife, Eugenia (Żenia). For this reason, the bond with those persons was also marked with a dashed line. An emotional distance developed between Agata and Żenia, as the author discloses:

I didn't like to visit the flat on Puławska Street. Ever since I can remember, Żenia would greet me with remarks like: "Does she have to run around so much?", "Would you just look at her hair!" or: "Wasn't there anything more hideous you could buy?" (Tuszyńska 2007: 211).

That relationship could also be labelled as discord (two dashed lines), but it is only Żenia who is emotionally distanced towards the child. Agata, being a girl at the time, did not entertain negative feelings towards her, although her remarks must have struck deep, affecting her self-esteem. The situation with Tuszyńska's grandfather was quite similar. Resorting to harsh treatment, Samuel persistently tried to teach his granddaughter how to play the piano: "He'd jump off his chair and slam the black fall board. I was afraid he would cut off my fingers" (Tuszyńska 2007: 212). Tuszyńska also notes that her grandfather bought her chimes, but ultimately "he wrote her off" (Tuszyńska 2007: 212). The relationship between the grandfather and his granddaughter was difficult. It is likely that Samuel's inability to express his feelings caused the emotional distance to arise between them, which is also indicated by the dashed line on the genogram. Halina's father was demanding and assumed the role of a teacher instead of a loving grandfather. He struggled with depression for some time. As we know, both psychology and biology are responsible for inheritance. We speak of post-trauma when parents, experiencing the aftermath of inherited trauma from their parents, transmit epigenetic changes to their children, including proneness to depression. It might be that Samuel, also called Szymon, inherited a propensity for depression from his parents and passed it on to the next generation. Two dashed lines describe Bogdan's relationship with his father-in-law, symbolising discord. The men did not have a good relationship, probably because of their distinct characters:

At the beginning of his relationship with Halina, he tried to get closer to his father-in-law. He tried to overcome his dryness and his lack of acceptance. But Szymon made no secret of the fact that his son-in-law was not to his liking. Bogdan claims that his father-in-law treated him like shit. He did not respect him. Neither himself nor what he did. My father liked people who were open, with whom you could make a connection. Szymon spoke little and did not start a conversation himself. He was haughty and important. They seldom met (Tuszyńska 2007: 91).

Tuszyńska inherited many of the transgenerational effects of trauma that may be attributed to biological impact. Traits obtained through epigenetic inheritance also include fear of the unknown, panic attacks, depression, phobias and even post-traumatic stress disorder.

The genogram method, which has been chosen to explore family relationships in Agata Tuszyńska's case, is applied in family therapy. The first generation was convinced that keeping silent about the war and the Holocaust would ensure a return to normalcy, whereas the second generation sought to discover their own roots. It turns out that withholding the truth from one's children is not good for the female psyche. The striving of the daughter of the first generation to find her own roots is an attempt to compensate for her parents' silence.

The genogram analysis shows that many behaviours are repeated across several generations. These include, for example, proneness towards depression. In addition, the author of the memoirs uses similar methods to conceptualise post-memory, while also seeking emotional commonalities. Thanks to those artistic endeavours, the writer attempted to take advantage of the experience of the first and second generations.

Tuszyńska's memoirs focus mainly on scenes which depict negative emotions, marginalising situations that prompt feelings of happiness at the same time. Thus, the representative of the second generation opted for the role of the victim. The memoirs I have discussed fall into the category of "relational autobiography", as described by Paul Eakin. The autobiographical "self" of the second generation comes to the fore here, against the background of the first generation. The excerpts cited are a manifestation of the generation of "identified victims" in literature. The genogram made it possible to trace transgenerational patterns of behaviour, beliefs, family myths, peculiar communication models and ways to address emerging difficulties. Using such an approach, I was able to better understand how a family's past influences its current functioning. The genogram was intended to afford a distanced perspective on the author's family. This is also how she should analyse her ancestors. The author is aware of the burden she has to face, but she is still trying to learn more about her family, their behaviour, and their values. The genogram helps to account for the behaviour of her mother, who chose to remain silent. Reflection and detachment are the necessary conditions to be in better command of one's own reactions.

## Bibliography

### Sources

- Tuszyńska Agata (2005), *Rodzinna historia lęku*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków.  
Tuszyńska Agata (2007), *Ćwiczenia z utraty*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków.  
Tuszyńska Agata (2023), *Czarna torebka*, Wydawnictwo Osnowa, Warszawa.



## Literature

- Grzemska Aleksandra (2016), *Uwikłane. O relacji matka-córka w autobiografiach kobiet*, w: *Autobiografie (po)graniczne*, red. I. Iwasiów, T. Czerska, Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, Kraków: 167–183.
- Kubis Barbara (2000), *Kobiety polskie w latach przełomu historycznego 1945–1956 w świetle literatury pamiętnikarskiej*, w: *Partnerka, matka, opiekunka. Status kobiety w dziejach nowożytnych od XVI do XX wieku*, red. Krzysztof Jakubiak, Wydawnictwo Uczelniane Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej, Bydgoszcz.
- McGoldrick Monica, Gerson Randy, Shellenberger Sylvia (2007), *Genogramy. Rozpoznanie i interwencja*, przeł. Monika Hartman, Wydawnictwo Zysk i S-ka, Poznań.
- Mierzbach Henryk (1997), *Do matki Izraelki*, w: *Żydzi w Polsce. Antologia literacka*, red. Henryk Markiewicz, Marek Roztworowski, Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, Kraków.
- Tippner Anja (2016), *Sensing the meaning, working towards the facts: drugie pokolenie a pamięć o Zagładzie w tekstach Bożeny Keff, Magdaleny Tulli i Agaty Tuszyńskiej*, „Teksty Drugie”, nr 1: 68–87.
- Tokarska-Bakir Joanna (2005), *Syn marnotrawny dziesięć lat później*, „Teksty Drugie”, nr 4: 140–155.
- Ubertowska Aleksandra (2013), *Praktykowanie postpamięci*, „Teksty Drugie”, nr 4: 269–289.
- Umińska Bożena (2001), *Postać z cieniem. Portrety Żydówek w polskiej literaturze od końca XIX wieku do 1939 roku*, Wydawnictwo Sic!, Warszawa.
- Wolynn Mark (2017), *Nie zaczęło się od ciebie. Jak dziedziczona trauma wpływa na to, kim jesteś i jak zakończyć ten proces*, Wydawnictwo Czarna Owca, Warszawa.

## Internet sources

- Nierealni – czym jest depersonalizacja*, <https://www.psychologia-plus.pl/blog/nierealni-czym-jest-depersonalizacja/> [accessed: 03.05.2023].
- Pawłowicz Beata (2022), *Traumy odziedziczone po rodzicach i dziadkach – jak sobie z nimi poradzić?*, <https://zwierciadlo.pl/psychologia/525914,1,traumy-odziedziczone-po-rodzicach-idziadkach--jak-sobie-z-nimi-poradzic.read> [accessed: 30.04.2023].

## List of figures

Fig. 1. Kiełpińska Aldona, *Genogram rodziny Agaty Tuszyńskiej* [graphic diagram].

