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STUDIA I SZKICE

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# The Representation of Memory and Thinking in *The Unfortunates* by B. S. Johnson

People search for different ways of tackling trauma, loss and grief. Psychologists say that when somebody experiences the death of a friend or a relative, an accident, a catastrophe or any other trauma, they have a tendency to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which is described in the tenth version of *The International Classification of Diseases* (ICD-10) as "a delayed or protracted response to a stressful event or situation (of either brief or long duration) of an exceptionally threatening or catastrophic nature, which is likely to cause pervasive distress in almost anyone."[1] According to the classification, a person with PTSD is likely to relive the trauma through "flashbacks" (referred to as "intrusive memories") and nightmares. A sufferer might often feel anxious, depressed and detached from other people. Avoidance of activities and situations associated with the traumatic event is typical.[2]

However terrible the symptoms may seem, psychologists have found out that PTSD can be followed by post-traumatic growth (PTG). Merve Yilmaz and Ayten Zara describe this as being "positive changes in the aftermath of trauma."[3] PTG takes place when a person is happy about relationships,

[1] *International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems,* 10th ed., s. v. "post-traumatic stress disorder," n.p.

[2] Ibid., n.p.

[3] Merve Yilmaz and Ayten Zar, "Traumatic loss and post-traumatic growth: the effect of traumatic loss related factors on posttraumatic growth," *Anatolian Journal of Psychiatry,* Vol. 17, No. 1 (2016), pp. 5–11.

starts to feel their personal strength and experiences "an evolved philosophy of life such as gaining new spiritual insights.[4]" Cognitive schemas start to be restructured. Assumptions about the world, values, other people and oneself, which have been damaged by the trauma, are redefined and the outlook on life takes on a new shape.[5]

One of the ways to effectuate post-traumatic growth is through writing down one's experiences. As Kalí Tal states, "[t]he writings of trauma survivors comprise a distinct 'literature of trauma.'"[6] According to the scholar, some of the most important goals of this type of writing are "the reconstruction and recuperation of the traumatic experience" as well as creating space for communication between those who have suffered and other people.[7] Attempts to capture tragedies on paper and share stark memories have become more and more popular. Leigh Gilmore reports that "[i]n 1996, a *New York Times Magazine* special issue announced nothing less than the 'triumph' of literary memoir and linked its ascendancy to the therapy-driven 'culture of confession' with which it was a perfect fit."[8]

In the "Introduction" to his discussion of examples of autobiographies, Gilmore expresses hope for a marriage between "scientific and psychoanalytic research on trauma," whose aim is to "provide an improving understanding of helping people to heal," with "studies of self-representation," which might add new perspectives to the discussion about getting over PTSD.[9] This suggests that psychological research could benefit from taking into account literary representations of trauma, as well as implies that semi-fictional or fictional narratives indeed enable writers to gain an insight into a human's inner life. Conversely, the reading of literary fiction through the prism of psychology is justified because, as Paul Ricoeur notes:

> [N]o mimetic art has gone as far in the representation of thoughts, feelings, and discourse as has the novel. And it is the immense diversity and the seemingly unlimited flexibility of its means that have made the novel the privileged instrument for the investigation of the human psyche [...][10]

[4] Ibid., p. 6.

[5] Ibid., p. 6.

[6] Kalí Tal, "Worlds of Hurt. Reading the Literatures of Trauma," *Worlds of Hurt. Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 17.

[7] Ibid., p. 17.

[8] Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), pp. 1–2.

[9] Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography*, p. 15.

[10] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 89.

Trauma and grief are indeed frequently encountered themes in creative writing to the extent that works drawing on such dramatic experience form separate literary categories. Examples include Holocaust literature, and the so-called post-9/11 novel.[11]

In this paper, I would like to focus on one of numerous literary attempts to share traumatic experience, namely *The Unfortunates* by B. S. Johnson, published in 1969.[12] It is a semi-autobiographical account of the author's experiences after his friend, Tony, died of cancer. The main character, who is also the narrator, comes to Nottingham to see a football match and write a report about it. While walking around the city, he is struck by numerous recollections, most of which are associated with the places in the city he had visited with Tony.

The novel was designed as a book-in-a-box. It consists of twenty-seven separate sections. The first and the last ones are marked, while the remaining twenty-five can be read in random order, according to readers' preferences or intuition. That is why the novel is an example of a multimodal work. Its Polish translation has been also included in the Liberature series.[13]

My main goal is to analyse how post-traumatic memory and the stream of consciousness are presented in *The Unfortunates*. This depiction of the mental processes is of particular interest to me since Johnson was a representative of the British post-war avant-garde, which attempted to develop a new language to reflect accurately on these kind of mental processes. As Johnson states in the "Introduction" to his collection of short prose *Aren't You Rather Young to Be Writing Your Memoirs?*, one of the tasks of a writer is to focus on "the explication of thought" and presenting "the inside of his own skull."[14] I also pay attention to the form of *The Unfortunates* and I analyse it using some psychological data concerning memory metaphors. This might help me approach the differences between

[11] For the former see Kalí Tal, p. 1–59. For the latter see Ewa Kowal, *The "Image-Event" in the Early Post-9/11 Novel: Literary Representations of Terror After September 11, 2001* (Kraków: Jagiellonian University Press, 2012),

[12] Bryan Stanley Johnson, *The Unfortunates* (London: Picador, 1999). There is a visible revival of scholarship concerning this author in contemporary academic writing thanks to Glyn White, Julia Jordan, Martin Ryle and Krystyna Stamirowska, among others.

[13] The concept of liberature was defined by Zenon Fajfer and Katarzyna Bazarnik. The series is published by Korporacja Ha!art in Kraków and collects works whose form is united with the content in a way that it foregrounds the message expressed in the text and conveys additional senses. The form is carefully designed by the author, but despite the importance of the space of the book, it is always the text that plays the most important role in the whole work. Liberatic books are published in multiple copies and are available for readers also in libraries. See Zenon Fajfer, *Liberature or Total Literature. Collected Essays 1999-2009* (Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2010) and Katarzyna Bazarnik, *Liberature, A Book-bound Genre* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2016).

[14] B. S. Johnson, "Introduction," in: *Aren't You Rather Young to Be Writing Your Memoirs?* (London: Hutchinson, 1973), p. 12.

the psychological and literary means of handling loss and see if the fusion of the two scientific fields suggested by Gilmore is successful in the case of Johnson's novel.

## The state of mind

It is not surprising that the circumstances in which the narrator of *The Unfortunates* finds himself evoke in him a negative attitude to life: though his thoughts do fluctuate, most of them are rather unpleasant. Some of them may be even described as depressing, e.g., "a trolley might come next, or a surprise, but no, I do not believe in that kind of miracle, or surprise, any longer, it is simply not, and does it matter."[15] Two phrases in this passage are worth noting. The first is "any longer," which suggests a division of time into periods. There must have been some "before" followed by an important event after which everything has changed. There must have been a period in the narrator's life when he used to believe in miracles, even in these simple and everyday coincidences. Unfortunately, it is over and there is no hope for it coming back. The liminal event was, obviously, Tony's death. The juxtaposition of the past and the present is a key theme in the novel, which I discuss further in "Past or present?" subchapter.

The second phrase is "and does it matter." It is like a refrain throughout the whole novel, as it is repeated many times in different chapters. What seems striking about this phrase is that it suggests the destruction of the narrator's value system and shows that he is in a depressive mood. To his mind, nothing seems to make sense, so he does not care about the world that surrounds him. He tends to find his existence pointless and confirms this nihilistic assumption with the constant repetition of "and does it matter." He has structured a vicious circle of negative thoughts and is unable to escape them.

Andrew Edward Paul Mitchell mentions "a vicious circle" in the context of mood congruent memory. Following R. M. Wenzlaff, D. M. Wegner and D. W. Roper,[16] he writes that "[m]ood congruent recall suggests that a person experiencing a transitory negative mood state can enter into a vicious circle, where their negative mood state can prime negative memories, which in turn triggers a negative affective state."[17] As presented in the above-quoted

[15] Johnson, *The Unfortunates* (*Time! It's after two!)*, p. 3.

[16] A. E. P. Mitchell refers to their article "Depression and mental control: The resurgence of unwanted negative thoughts," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 55 (1988), pp. 882-892.

[17] A. E. P. Mitchell, "Autobiographical Memory Response to a Negative Mood in Those With/Without History of Depression," *Studia Psychologica*, Vol. 57 (2015), p. 230.

passage, something similar happens to the narrator in *The Unfortunates*. He keeps reflecting about the trauma, which seems to make him even more depressed.

We can see a connection between this state of mind and post-traumatic stress disorder, which may encourage us to wonder if there is any chance for the narrator to experience post-traumatic growth as a consequence of his negative mood. He does not seem to start to appreciate his relationships or feel personal strength, but since the places he visits force him to recollect various situations, he definitely has an opportunity to think many issues over. Krystyna Stamirowska states that "the narrative itself [...] is largely an attempt to understand."[18] Indeed during the day spent in Nottingham, the narrator can confront his situation again and reflect on life, death, trauma, his friend as well as his present state. He sometimes finds it difficult to make up his mind and faces many contradictions, but the attempt to make sense of the tragic event and his present state may allow him to restructure his outlook on life. In the following passage, I take a closer look at the stream of consciousness as played out in the novel and I try to observe how the narrator's memory functions in the traumatic state following his friend's death.

## Clear or blurred?

One of the oppositions the narrator faces refers to the nature of his recollections. He describes plenty of them, and therefore, it is possible to analyse not only the situations he remembers, but also the shape and peculiar features of the memories as well as his difficulties with recollection. Undeniably, some memories described by him are full of details. For example, the one about arriving late at Tony's funeral. The narrator recollects how he and his wife got to the place where the ceremony was to be held and presents the fairly extensive complications they had on their way. He mentions the people who turned up, examines their expressions and appearance to deduce what they must have felt:

> [B]ut just as we arrived, they were coming out, the party, his mother I see still, tears, one foot on the upper step, the other one step down, caught, I see her as if in a still, held there, fixed. Friends, [...] and June, already looking alone, already looking bereaved, lost, her face still showing all the pain she had carried...[19]

[18] Krystyna Stamirowska, *B. S. Johnson's novels: a paradigm of truth* (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 2006), p. 116.

[19] Johnson, *The Unfortunates* (*We were late for the funeral*), p. 1.

The recollection appears to be like a photo in his mind because he uses many words connected with vision: "see," "looking," "showing," "a still." The repetition of the first two aforementioned words emphasises that they are not chosen by accident. The reader may have an impression that the event is "relived" in the narrator's memory because the people seem frozen; they are "held up" as if somebody was looking at a photograph and describing a specific, concrete scene. Narration in this excerpt matches these assumptions. There is a set of enumerated and juxtaposed images that might resemble shots described by a film director. In such a situation, elaboration is not crucial. Pointing out the details of the scene is sufficient. As a result, stream of consciousness proves to be a helpful device to depict the vividness of the recollections. The set of enumerated elements that is a composition of nouns, phrases and sentences is rather incoherent from the syntactical point of view, but it enables the reader to share the picture of the recollection with the narrator after only having read a couple of lines. We may speak of acceleration here, which, according to Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck, occurs when "the time of narration is shorter than story time."[20] They add that such a way of constructing narration speeds up the action. In Johnson's novel, it also seems to make the recollection even more emotional.

Yet, it is clear that the narrator is not really looking at a photograph. He gives many details, but there are also some blanks in the recollection: "Someone gave us a lift back to the house, I forget who, but it was packed, three or four of us in the back, the car, and as we went away up the hill […]."[21] We note that some details have been forgotten by the narrator and some information is uncertain, for example, the number of passengers sitting at the back. This uncertainty is foregrounded by the cataphoric reference. We do not know what is packed until we reach the phrase "the car." Such a reference does not follow the pattern of cause and effect and, therefore, might be difficult to comprehend after the first reading. However, it appears to be a good way of presenting how details of the recollection flow within inner speech. It is also connected with vividness: the narrator does not need any order that would govern the mentioned elements because he sees the whole scene clearly in his mind and describes it to himself. That is why the pronoun "it" can appear before the corresponding noun.

A psychologist would probably categorise this recollection as a "flashbulb" on the account of its subjective importance and emotions that play a major role in its description. With reference to research carried out

[20] Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck, *Handbook of Narrative Analysis* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), p. 61.

[21] Ibid., p. 1

by Brown and Kulik and published in 1977,[22] Amanda Krahal and Adriel Boals describe such memories as "highly vivid and long-lasting memories for events that are emotionally significant and personally important."[23] They add that "the important issue in flashbulb memory is not the event itself, but rather the subjective elements and personal context of the news."[24] Although such recollections usually refer to public events, such as e.g., the death of a famous person or a natural catastrophe, they may also form a part of the autobiographical memory. Krahal and Boals note that flashbulb memories are likely to contain data about the source of the information, the people who accompanied the person during the event or when hearing the news, their appearance (e.g., the clothes they were wearing) and emotions. They are usually more vivid than other recollections and a person is more convinced that they are true in comparison to "every day memories."[25]

The definition of the flashbulb memories corresponds to the description of the funeral from *The Unfortunates.* A lot of details connected to emotions, people and their clothing are included in this recollection, which makes it vivid and clear. Personal importance is obvious in this case since Tony's funeral can be treated as a liminal event for the narrator. The fact that the section *We were late for the funeral,* which is very short, is wholly devoted to this particular image suggests that the event is singled out from other remembered situations. This testifies to the significance of the analysed recollection.

Nevertheless, not all recollections are as detailed as the one depicting Tony's funeral. There are several passages in the novel in which the narrator seems to stutter or asks himself questions in order to complete the image of a particular memory. Despite the effort, he is not always able to retrieve all the information. For example, when he reminds himself of his trip to Brighton, he wonders whether Tony read the typescript he had sent him or not:

> And when I had finished it, there was another occasion, another trip to Brighton, to his parents' home, I had sent the typescript to him the previous week, or some days previously, had asked him to read it as a whole before we came, Ginnie came with me, for the day, and he had, but had he? Forget what he said about the thing, but know I was disappointed…[26]

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[22] Roger Brown and James Kulik, "Flashbulb memories," *Cognition*, Vol. 5 (1977), p. 79.

[23] Amanda Krahal and Adriel Boals, "Why so negative? Positive flashbulb memories for a personal event," *Memory*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (2014), p. 442.

[24] Ibid., p. 442.

[25] Krahal and Boals, "Why so negative?", p. 442.

[26] Johnson, *The Unfortunates* (*Sometime that summer*), p. 3.

The narrator hesitates and the question he asks remains unanswered. He cannot remember if Tony read the typescript nor what he said about it. What has stayed in his mind is his disappointment. This demonstrates the importance of emotions in the process of recalling. The narrator may not remember facts, but he can go back to the feelings the situation evoked in him.

The narrator relies on emotions while reconstructing events in his memory, but he also tries to find other solutions to overcome the weaknesses of his memory. When he describes the wildlife at Newstead Abbey, for instance, he uses his knowledge about the world: "And geese, of special sorts, as I remember, other waterfowl, and peacocks? Were there peacocks? They would have fitted, peacocks, but I do not think I can remember there being any."[27] He asks himself questions again, but this time he is able to give an answer. The expression: "They would have fitted, peacocks" might refer to the concept of schemas, which Richard Gerrig defines as "conceptual frameworks, or clusters of knowledge, regarding objects, people, and situations."[28] He writes that "schemas are 'knowledge packages' that encode complex generalizations about your experience of the structure of the environment."[29] When the narrator searches for a missing detail of his memories, he refers to his experience and wonders what would match the given situation or the image he tries to recall. It does not mean that the object he thinks about is the right one, just as in the example above in which peacocks are evoked as a part of the schema and he becomes aware that he did not actually see them.

The narrator seems to be aware of the fact that schemas are quite inflexible and offer only an overall picture of a typical situation or place, which means he cannot completely rely on the "frameworks" while recalling a specific event. When he describes the place he is laid up at during his illness, he states: "It must have been at the front of the house, overlooking the road, rather than at the back, overlooking the valley. Not must have been, for that fits in, but I remember it was in fact the front, facing the front."[30] He distinguishes what he remembers from what he knows, thus making the report more convincing.

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[27] Johnson, *The Unfortunates* (*Again the house*), pp. 4-5.
[28] Richard J. Gerrig, *Psychology and Life*, 20th ed., (Boston: Pearson Education, 2013), p. 194.
[29] Ibid., p. 194.
[30] Johnson, *The Unfortunates* (*The estate*), p. 6.

## Past or present?

Another opposition discussed by the narrator concerns the temporal aspects of the novel. The time of narration is clearly shorter than the narrated time.[31] The story from the past which is devoted to the narrator's relationship with Tony and the experience they shared is over, and, apparently, independent from the present events, namely, the journey and writing of the report. When the narrator arrives at the railway station, he treats the city as another insignificant place he has to visit to make a living. Jonathan Coe, in the "Introduction" to the novel, mentions Johnson's commentary on his job: "When you are going away to report soccer in a different city each Saturday you get the mechanics of travelling and finding your way about in a strange place to an almost automatic state."[32] However, when the narrator starts to recognise different places in the city, he realises that this visit is going to be memorable and meaningful. "The two potential chronological orders […] the one reconstructing the history of the friendship between the narrator and Tony, and the other giving an account of the day the narrator spent in the city,"[33] as Katarzyna Bazarnik describes it, start to mingle and appear to be interconnected.

The confusion caused by the narrator's inability to settle in a specified time influences the process of recalling. The following passage illustrates there are moments when he has to correct himself: "That was the first time, that must have been the first time, yes, hitching there, here, that is, along the Great North Road."[34] The narrator sees the place where the past event occurred and therefore, can no longer call it "there." Objectively, the road remains the same for many years, but, for him, it transfers from the past to the present and becomes "here." A part of the recollection can be experienced again and other parts are going to follow, eventually, letting Tony be brought back to life in the narrator's mind. Julia Jordan notices this process and writes that:

> Johnson's sentences are the shortest sentences he can sentence himself to write, and yet the loose chapters proclaim potentially infinite continuity in their cyclical, shuffleable perpetuity – this has happened and this will happen again. The curious sense both of absolute discontinuity and a kind

[31] According to Luc Herman and Bert Vervaeck, the time of narration is "the time the narrative devotes to an event," while narrated time features "the duration of events" (*Handbook of Narrative Analysis*, p. 63).

[32] Jonathan Coe, "Introduction," in: Johnson, *The Unfortunates*, p. viii.

[33] Katarzyna Bazarnik, "Chronotope in Liberature," in: *James Joyce and After. Writer and Time*, eds. Katarzyna Bazarnik and Bożena Kucała (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), p. 125.

[34] Johnson, *The Unfortunates* (*That was the first time*), p. 1.

> of protensive ongoingness are brought about by the novel's aleatory method and its semantic and syntactic form.[35]

She suggests a new dimension that could be added to the opposition between the past and the present is eternity. The narrator cannot experience the events from the past again, but since he can endlessly recollect them in his mind, perhaps there is no need for judging whether they belong to the past or the present. This point of view presents the process of recalling as independent from time. Despite this fact, the narrator does not give up marking temporal references in his discourse. For instance, when he reminds himself of his relationship with his ex-girlfriend, Wendy, he says:

> I joined in, as I remember, joined in with her, to participate, rather than with the dog, to show that I was spirited, gamey, too, would not be left out, would make her share everything of hers as I made her share everything of mine. That was the way I wanted it. That was the way I went out to get it. And where I went wrong. It does not matter, now. At tea, genteel sandwiches with no crusts but made with margarine and salty luncheon meat.[36]

The division between the past and the present is underlined by the change of grammatical tense from past simple to present simple as well as by the adjunct "now." Interestingly, the sentences become shorter as if the excitement connected with recalling was giving way to a bitter realisation of the transience and the impermanence of relationships. The anaphora "[t]hat was," combined with the closing sentence: "[i]t does not matter, now," and the long space, might be associated with disappointment, resignation or irritation. The passage illustrates the narrator's development as it shows that his life, goals and desires undergo constant changes. This assumption corresponds with Johnson's belief that "[c]hange is a condition of life."[37]

The discussed opposition tells us a lot about the narrator, his personality and life situation, but it may also be applied to the author, who balances between the past and the present when he refers to literary tradition and at the same time searches for new ways of expression and invents his own innovative concepts. The idea of reporting how a character spends a day in a city can be traced back to James Joyce's *Ulysses*, while the focus on inner life and mental processes might be also associated with the novels of Virginia

[35] Julia Jordan, "'For recuperation': elegy, form, and the aleatory in B. S. Johnson's *The Unfortunates*," *Textual Practice*, Vol. 28, No.5 (2014), p. 749.

[36] Johnson, *The Unfortunates* (*Up there, yes, the high mast*), p. 11.

[37] Johnson, "Introduction," p. 17.

Woolf, her philosophy and attitude to writing. As she explains in her essay "Modern Fiction," the task of a novelist is to "[e]xamine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day"[38] and to "record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall."[39] Johnson's novel seems to be a realization of these premises to a great extent, only that the Saturday it depicts is unexpectedly affected by the trauma and, hence, turns out to be far from "ordinary" in the course of action. The narrator arrives in Nottingham to write one of his numerous football reports, but comes back after experiencing a confrontation with his life and his past. Additionally, *The Unfortunates* seem to echo "The Waste Land" by T. S. Eliot, in which the speaker also reflects on death and presents a similar depressing attitude to life:

> He who was living is now dead
> We who were living are now dying
> With a little patience.[40]

The references to modernism in Johnson's novel are accompanied by innovations like the book-in-a-box form, which works as a means of conveying "the randomness of the material"[41] and as a solution to the struggle with finding a proper way to show the characteristics of memories in the human mind. The author was aware of the fact that the form may not be perfect, but he believed it "was nearer; and even if it was only marginally nearer, then it was still a better solution to the problem of conveying the mind's randomness than the imposed order of a bound book."[42]

In *The Unfortunates*, the past and the present are inseparable. The opposition between the two temporal layers of experience illustrates features of the narrator's discourse as well as his development, but can also be analysed in a broader sense as an illustration of Johnson's dialogue with literary history. While studying the relation between memories connected with Tony and the narrator's journey to Nottingham, we can also arrive at a conclusion that chronology is restricted in the novel. The narrator is aware of the fact that time passes, so some events belong to the past and cannot be changed. He knows he will never get another chance to meet his friend. However, when he attempts to analyse the past in more detail, i.e. to put specific events in chronological order, he fails. He cannot explain why

[38] Virginia Woolf, "Modern Fiction," in: *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, Vol. 4 (1925 to 1928), ed. Andrew McNeille (London: The Hogarth Press, 1984), p. 160.

[39] Ibid., p. 161.

[40] Thomas S. Eliot, *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (New York: Harvest Book, Harcourt: Harcourt, Brace & World Inc., 1962), p. 42.

[41] Johnson, "Introduction," p. 25.

[42] Ibid., p. 26.

particular situations, e.g., meetings, trips, and evenings spent in pubs, are shuffled in his memory. Even if he makes an effort, he still recollects them in a random order.

## The form

When analysing the content of the novel, we can observe some characteristics of the narrator's memories and thoughts. Some of them are vivid and full of details, while others are blurred and prone to the process of forgetting. By means of memory, the past is mingled with the present. The analysis presented above demonstrates that, although the narrator might try to construct a new vision of the world and himself by creating oppositions, it is conjunction that seems to be a better tool. He makes an attempt to comprehend his situation after the traumatic event, but he does not opt for any one particular side of the oppositions.

As noted above, all these reflections are encoded in the book-in-the-box, which is yet another tool to render and understand the complexity of the narrator's mental processes. Jonathan Coe, in the essay "A Life in Seven Novels," assumes that "[c]ertainly there is nothing very sophisticated about Johnson's central conceit: randomly ordered pages as a tangible metaphor for the random interplay of memories and impressions in the human mind."[43] It may be beneficial to investigate why the author chose such a form. Abandoning the traditional bound book is significant since Kathrine N. Hayles is concerned that "[t]o change the material artifact is to transform the context and circumstances for interacting with the words, which inevitably changes the meanings of the words as well."[44] Therefore, I will take a closer look at the novel as a memory metaphor and present it alongside other related concepts.

## Metaphor

Henry L. Roediger argues that "it is a natural impulse, when confronted with a phenomenon that we do not understand, to try to relate it to things that we do understand or at least are familiar with."[45] In his view, that is the reason for creating numerous memory metaphors – to comprehend what it

[43] Jonathan Coe, "A Life in Seven Novels," in: *Like a Fiery Elephant: the Story of B. S. Johnson* (London: Picador, 2005), p. 22.

[44] Katherine N. Hayles, *Writing Machines* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2002), pp. 23–24.

[45] Henry L. Roediger, "Memory Metaphors in Cognitive Psychology," *Memory & Cognition*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (1980), p. 231.

means to think and to remember. Roediger divides the representations of memory into two categories: spatial metaphors and alternative ones, which include non-spatial and abstract concepts; and delineates the historical development of them all. According to him, the whole discussion has its roots in Plato and Aristotle's suggestion that the mind resembles the wax tablet on which all stimuli are imprinted. Other and later analogies are a gramophone, the house imagined by William James, and Freudian rooms. A switchboard, a purse, a leaky bucket or a sieve, a junk box, and a bottle, preceded one of the currently most famous metaphors, which is a computer program. It is not possible to enumerate all of the ways in which mind has been conceptualised, but the ones that are definitely worth paying attention to are Broadbent's library, the dictionary suggested by Loftus, Landauer's garbage can, the organizational theory and the two networks: hierarchical and associative.[46]

Similarities between Johnson's and Landauer's representations of memory are worth noting. Although one of them is a writer and the other a psychologist, they both present memory as a three-dimensional space in which recollections are stored randomly: a box and a garbage can, respectively. Since this paper is concerned with Johnson's idea about mental processes, we should pay attention to his suggestion that it is space beyond one's mind that arranges memories: "The mind is confused, was it this visit, or another, the mind has *telescoped* time here, runs events *near to one another in place*, into one another in time."[47] It is the city the narrator walks around that determines the order of recalled events in a way that particular places remind him of particular moments he shared with Tony. What is more, while dealing with the organization of memories in the novel, we cannot ignore the role of the reader who decides about the sequence of the sections. As Katarzyna Bazarnik explains, "the reader actively shapes the time-space of the novel, sharing part of the responsibility for the appearance of the represented world with the author."[48] The choice of the material metaphor of the box is justified by the theme of the recollections. Chaos in the narrator's memories shows what a tough experience he has gone through.

## Tangible

Roediger points out that most of the psychological representations of the mind are reflected in everyday language, "the ideas of the psycholo-

[46] Ibid., p. 233.
[47] Johnson, *The Unfortunates* (*Again the house*), pp. 5–6. Emphasis mine.
[48] Bazarnik, "Chronotope in Liberature," p. 126.

gists about memory are guided by the same metaphor that has dominated common thinking about the topic."[49] Expressions like "to hold an idea in mind," "an idea is in the back of our minds," or "an idea is in the dark corner of our minds," serve as proofs of Roediger's statement.[50] We can imagine a container with "something" inside – an idea or a memory in this case. We often treat them as objects located in space when we speak about viewing an issue from various perspectives. We also describe our mental activities as searching, finding and arranging. These expressions show that the mind is a kind of space and its products (thoughts and memories) are perceived as objects.

Similarly, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson describe memory through ontological metaphors, i.e., "ways of viewing events, activities, emotions, ideas, etc., as entities and substances."[51] They describe the metaphor of the container as the one that uses the in-out orientation. They explain that "[o]nce we can identify our experiences as entities or substances, we can refer to them, categorise them, group them, and quantify them."[52] This description corresponds with Roediger's assumption that, in confrontation with an unfamiliar phenomenon, we tend to relate it to a reality that is familiar to us.[53]

According to one of the main theses presented by Lakoff and Johnson, metaphors present in language are directly linked with our experience. We can observe this, for example, while analyzing orientational metaphors: we say that we are feeling up, because "the concept HAPPY is oriented UP."[54] If we refer this to *The Unfortunates*, we might notice that Jonathan Coe's expression "a tangible metaphor" is telling and precise. B. S. Johnson transfers the metaphor from the abstract to the physical level. The content starts to "reflexively interact with the inscription technologies."[55] Johnson lets the reader experience his novel by means of touch as well as the perception of depth and space. The box functions as a medium of additional senses, it becomes a physical image of chaos. We can try to understand the story by interpreting the words, but also by manipulating the material object. By referring to the experience depicted in language, Johnson attempts to present the processes of thinking and recalling so

[49] Roediger, „Memory Metaphors," p. 231.

[50] Ibid., p. 232.

[51] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors we live by* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 26.

[52] Ibid., p. 26.

[53] Roediger, "Memory Metaphors," p. 231.

[54] Ibid., p. 15. Emphasis original.

[55] Hayles, *Writing Machines*, p. 24.

that they might be clearer to his readers. What is conveyed nonverbally can easily be comprehended and does not require translation because it refers to universal representations of the mind as space. Hence, it is not surprising that the Polish translation of *The Unfortunates* has been included in the Liberature series. The concept suggests that senses can be transferred primarily by means of a text, but also by the carefully chosen form of a book and that is exactly what happens in Johnson's novel: the author communicates with his readers on different levels, by means of words as well as non-verbal devices.

Although Coe's commentary about the novel as a memory metaphor is an accurate description of *The Unfortunates*, it seems to be unfavorable. According to the biographer, the idea of putting the unbound sections into a box is not original and innovative. It might be beneficial to call this sentence into question. Perhaps Johnson did not aim at creating a "sophisticated" work, but rather at creating a mimetic depiction of memory. One of the reasons why he manages to depict the workings of memory so successfully is that the devices he uses are connected with issues researched by psychologists. Johnson refers to human experience and mental processes, so readers can understand what the narrator goes through or remind themselves of their own experiences and even identify themselves with him. That is perhaps why the novel has a strong impact on its audience.

## Conclusion

Roediger concludes that "cognitive psychologists attempt to account for relations between input and output events (stimuli and responses) by postulating a variety of mental mechanisms intervening between stimulus and response. Often, these explanations are based on some sort of correspondence metaphor."[56] A metaphorical model of mental processes is useful for psychologists when it can let them predict human behavior as a response to a stimulus and help them carry out experiments. The analysis of Johnson's novel demonstrates similarities between the psychological and literary (and liberatic) approach to the representations of mental processes in terms of their conceptualisations, but it also reveals differences in their functions. The psychologists' goal is to use the depictions to predict behavior, while Johnson's aim is the representation itself: presenting the mind and trying to understand how it works seem to be his main concerns.

[56] Roediger, "Memory Metaphors," p. 243.

Despite these differences, analysing his work in reference not only to the literary, but also the psychological sources, enables us to focus on the writer's conceptualisation of mental processes and some characteristics of memory and thinking he foregrounds. He arrives at the conclusion that memories and thoughts can be either clear or blurred. He presents the mind as the space where the past mingles with the present. He is aware that particular events belong to the past, but is unable to fully reconstruct the chronology and put specific events in the correct order. The walk around the city determines the way he recollects the past and that is why it is rather space than time that arranges memories in the novel. By choosing the form of the book-in-a-box, he uses a device able to produce an equivalent effect of chaos and randomness of memories. We do not know whether these discoveries may help the narrator overcome the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, but the book allows its readers to experience what he went through during his journey and in this way *The Unfortunates* speaks volumes about the ongoing discussion on trauma, grief and mental processes.

Katarzyna Biela

**The Representation of Memory and Thinking in *The Unfortunates* by B. S. Johnson**

The aim of this paper is to analyse the representation of the processes of recalling and thinking in *The Unfortunates* by the British novelist B. S. Johnson. This autobiographical novel published in the form of unbound sheets in a box was written after the death of the author's (and the narrator's) friend, and it records the influence of the traumatic event on cognitive processes. The paper examines how the narrator attempts to understand the past and his present state. It analyses the literary representation of flashbulb memories, schemas and controlling mental processes. It shows how the usage of the stream of consciousness technique and other literary devices serve this purpose, referring to the literary analyses of K. Stamirowska and J. Coe. An overview of memory metaphors offered by H. L. Roediger is summarised and related to B. S. Johnson's novel whose book-in-a-box form is viewed as a material metaphor of the mind, in this way testifying to the unity between content and form. Besides the paper relates the literary work to G. Lakoff and M. Johnson's notion of the conceptual metaphor as based on experience as well as to liberature – the literary genre defined by K. Bazarnik and Z. Fajfer.

**Key words:** B. S. Johnson, *The Unfortunates*, memory, thinking, metaphor