*Blood from the Sky*:

Piotr Rawicz’s Novel on the Holocaust as a Source for His Intellectual Biography

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Piotr Henryk Rawicz (1919–1982) was a French-speaking writer of Jewish origin. Although born to an assimilated, Polish-speaking family in Lviv, he became deeply involved in the world of the Ukrainian language and literature as well as its political and cultural life due to his personal contact and affinities during his formative years. After being interned in Nazi camps and surviving the Holocaust, he moved to Paris, where he resided until the end of his life. He published articles in various newspapers and worked on the translation and publication of works by various authors, predominantly of Central or Eastern European origin. In addition, he wrote two novels that dealt with key topics in twentieth-century history: one on the Holocaust and the other on the events that occurred in Paris in May 1968.

The first of these works, *Blood from the Sky,* was published in 1961. This article briefly analyzes this book to illustrate how Piotr Rawicz’s descriptions of the Holocaust relate to biblical and kabbalistic narratives. By considering certain aspects of his life and comparing his biography and Holocaust narrative to those of two other contemporaneous authors with similar backgrounds (Avrom Sutzkever and Paul Celan), the article aims to demonstrate how and under what conditions mysticism resurfaced and affected the literature of their period. In addition, it addresses the role this worldview played in the search for and formation of identity during the war and the post-war era. It also highlights the fact that *Blood from the Sky* is the only source that currently offers some insight into how Rawicz identified as a Jew.

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**The history of the novel**

Piotr Rawicz’s first novel, *Blood from the Sky*, was published in 1961 by the French publishing house Gallimard.[[1]](#footnote-1) This was the third press to which Rawicz had submitted his manuscript: the previous two while greeting it with enthusiasm, ultimately refused to publish it.[[2]](#footnote-2) Gallimard agreed to publish the novel, but only on condition that Rawicz agree to change its title. The publisher considered the original one, *La queue et l’art du comparer*, too scandalous and thus presumably incapable of commercial success.[[3]](#footnote-3) The year after the book came out, Rawicz won the Rivarol Prize, an annual award for the best literary work written in French by a foreigner. *Blood from the Sky* was also nominated for, but ultimately did not receive, the prestigious Prix Femina. [[4]](#footnote-4)

Between the years 1961 and 1962, over thirty reviews of the novel as well as short articles on and interviews with Rawicz appeared in the French press.[[5]](#footnote-5) References to him also found their way into Belgian, Swiss, and even American, Israeli, and Dutch publications. Critics drew attention to the book’s dark humor, deliberate dissonance, and “unbearable quality.” While emphasizing the importance that the author placed on the poetry within it, the reviewers claimed that this prevented the book from achieving true success and popular acclaim.

Although *Blood from the Sky* was eventually translated into many languages, Rawicz remains unknown to the general public. However, there are two books and a number of articles that offer critical readingsof his book. The first is *Engraved in Flesh. Piotr Rawicz and His Novel* “*Blood from the Sky,*” by Rawicz’s personal friend, Anthony Rudolph.[[6]](#footnote-6) Containing an abundance of archival material, the book was the first (and for now, it seems, the last) attempt to connect Rawicz’s life to his body of work. The 2013 edited volume, *Un ciel de sang et de cendres. Piotr Rawicz et la solitude du témoin,* is the outcome of a multi-year effort by a team of authors led by two literary experts.**[[7]](#footnote-7)** The compilation contains ten essays on *Blood from the Sky* by an international array of scholars, plus an article by Rudolph. It also includes several reviews from 1961–1962, texts of Rawicz’s prefaces to novels whose publication he had helped advance, memoirs, notations, and fictionalized memoirs of friends from various points of his life as well as several pages of unedited entries from his own diary. As Rawicz’s work is viewed as part of the canon of French Holocaust literature, many articles about *Blood from the Sky* and him can also be found in encyclopedic accounts of the Holocaust. Occasionally, scholars of Holocaust literature, refer to the novel, placing it within various conceptual frameworks. While their studies are high quality and interesting, *Blood from the Sky* has unfortunately not yet been subject to comprehensive analysis or a close reading that sets it in context.

Since *Blood from the Sky* is a fictional testament to the Holocaust, with clear allusions to particular moments, places, and individuals, and is written in a purportedly autobiographical, albeit complex form, it is tempting to assume that the events it describes are those actually experienced in precisely this order and at these locations by Rawicz himself. Aware of this problem, the author warns us that this is not the case.[[8]](#footnote-8) Our information on this period is extremely limited,[[9]](#footnote-9) and the mutually contradictory recollections and testimony of Rawicz’s colleagues in later years do little but exacerbate the situation.[[10]](#footnote-10) All this, along with the novel’s form, content, and hidden allusions, gives us reason to believe that Rawicz’s objective was not to describe the events that he had experienced during the Holocaust, but to convey something different to the potential reader—something that in his opinion was more seminal and significant.

**The sources and significance of Rawicz’s mysticism**

There are almost countless ways in which to approach the question of how to read, classify, contextualize, and so on, the literature of the Holocaust. I touch on some of these below. However, given that I am positioning this study as an intellectual biography, and am also claiming that I regard *Blood from the Sky* as a source—albeit of a specific type—for examining Rawicz himself, my approach tends to be phenomenological.

In the context of intellectual biography, the most precious information that Rawicz’s novel could offer scholars would probably be the answer to the question of why he wrote in this fashion. Any attempt to answer this question, at least in part, requires going beyond the framework of the author’s biography and to some degree, broadening the context. For this reason, I begin by considering—even if superficially—Rawicz’s life and work alongside those of two of his contemporaries: Paul Celan and Abraham Sutzkever.

From a historical perspective, this choice of authors is no coincidence: all three are of the same generation and matured under more or less similar circumstances. In addition, all were born between 1913 and 1920 on the territory of the so-called “bloody lands” and spent their youths in three “border” cities—Vilna (Sutskever), Chernivtsi (Tselan), and Lviv (Rawicz). It was precisely then that national identity was beginning to play a key role, relations between various urban communities were growing strained, and anti-Semitism was becoming increasingly open and violent. Although all were of Jewish origin, their families were not Orthodox, and thus they were more flexible in terms of religion, language, and culture. All three received both a traditional Jewish and a secular higher-level education, and encountered anti-Semitism while completing the latter.[[11]](#footnote-11) Based on the distinction drawn by Kamil Kiek in *Children of Modernism*,[[12]](#footnote-12) one could include Rawicz and Sutzkever in the generation born and raised in the Second Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which, having studied in the Polish public school system, was strongly shaped by both high and popular Polish culture. Indeed, this was the only reality they knew. This generation differed considerably from that of their parents, who, having been residents of Tsarist Russia or the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, were brought up under fundamentally different (albeit no less difficult) conditions. According to this line of reasoning, the generation that reached adulthood in the 1930s was marked by “modernist radicalism”: its members either aspired to effect a qualitative change in a reality that was not to their liking[[13]](#footnote-13) or wished to break with it completely, that is, to take the “leap into the kingdom of freedom.”[[14]](#footnote-14) Yet, if Rawicz and Celan gravitated towards the latter and preferred not to get involved in “Jewish affairs,” then Sutzkever, who became a member of the organization “Jung Vilne,” saw his mission as the creation of Yiddish culture.

All three survived the Holocaust in different ways.[[15]](#footnote-15) After the war, they all wrote literary works about what they had been forced to endure. These are united by the portrayal of the Holocaust not as an unparalleled tragedy, incomprehensible in its sheer evil, but as merely one of an entire series of similar events—although no less horrific on that account—from the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem to the present. All three contain mystic motifs, which serve not as explanations, but as metaphors for establishing continuity across centuries and between the “present” and the “past.” Their relationship to religiosity is limited largely to form. This type of mysticism underscores the myriad ways that people searched for identity in the post-war era—ways that were rooted in territory, language, ​​and ancestry.

Celan’s mother came from an Orthodox family in Sadhora, and his father was a staunch Zionist, but German was the language of both mother and son, although it became an endlessly bleeding wound once it shifted from *Muttersprache* into *Mördersprache*.[[16]](#footnote-16) Celam’s early education was at a Jewish school, but like most people of his generation, he did not see his ethnic origin, at least not before the Holocaust, as key to his self-identity. In his close analysis of the cabalistic motifs in Celan’s poetry collection, *Die Niemandrose* (1963), Petro Ryhlo drew attention to the fact that Celan purchased Gershon Scholem’s translation of an excerpt from *Zohar*. It was precisely after he read it that a change occurred in his writing style, thereafter becoming permeated with the motifs of mysticism,[[17]](#footnote-17) kabbalistic symbols and concepts, plays on letters, names, and so forth, as well as with the sense of ​​God’s inability to influence people and history. This mysticism was a rather late attempt to seek answers to the questions posed by the Holocaust and to search for both one’s self and one’s inescapable Jewish identity in a totally alien world. This is also why the world at large, which did not care to know much, quickly forgot about what Celan and thousands of others like him had suffered.

As noted, Rawicz’s family was thoroughly assimilated. While familiar with Jewish traditions and able to read Hebrew, he had studied exclusively at secular schools from the outset, and spoke Polish at home. Despite this, his political sympathies lay more with Ukrainians,[[18]](#footnote-18) and, according to his own words, he even wrote his first poem in their language.[[19]](#footnote-19) Although he probably developed an interest in Jewish history and sacred texts, including the Kabbalah, before the war, like many others, including Celan, he was forced to become conscious of his Jewishness only during the Holocaust, and primarily because it placed his life in danger. After moving to Paris (in 1947), he found himself in a social circle consisting largely of Central and Eastern European intellectuals who had experienced the violence of totalitarianism of two types: Nazi and Soviet.[[20]](#footnote-20) There, he chose to write in French, which did not come easily to him. His wife, Anna/Rebecca,[[21]](#footnote-21) always edited his texts, as did the editor-in-chief of *Le Monde*, and their corrections were so extensive that nearly every sentence was rewritten.[[22]](#footnote-22) Rawicz’s mysticism was an attempt not so much to explain himself or the world in general, as to set his life and experiences in a particular metaphorical structure that enabled him to convey in words what he had seen and suffered, which was practically impossible to believe.

Unlike Rawicz and Celan, Avrom Sutzkever was raised mainly in Vilna, the “spiritual center of Jewish Eastern Europe,” [[23]](#footnote-23) which in his view was primarily a Jewish city.[[24]](#footnote-24) His mother came from a family of rabbis,[[25]](#footnote-25) and Yiddish was his native tongue, rather than one that he had simply learned. It was in this city and its environs that he spent the Holocaust, and it was here that he worked on preserving Jewish heritage. Thus, despite his secular secondary education, he did not feel detached from Judaism and set the events that he described in his works against the background of his city and the area around it. Although Sutzkever did employ certain symbols of the Jewish mystical tradition[[26]](#footnote-26) and raised the issue of theodicy, the theme of total destruction is not central for him, unlike Celan and Rawicz, who both included it prominently in their work.[[27]](#footnote-27) According to David Roskies, Sutzkever claimed that there were two ways of dealing with the Holocaust: either by following “the apocalypticists, who draw their strength from the mystique of destruction and the unfathomable horror that fed Jews’ inherent fear of personal and collective catastrophe,” or by choosing “a neoclassical norm, intransigent and unconditional, with its impossible claim on order and sublimation.”[[28]](#footnote-28) He obviously chose the latter. In his view, “the greater the loss, the greater a person’s need to transcend it by appealing to selective memory, eloquent verse, and the beauty of nature.”[[29]](#footnote-29) Sutzkever finds the source of strength in the same source that inspired him to write before the war. The only difference lay in the fact that in the ghetto he had written to “revive the living,” while after the war, he had done so to “bring the dead back to life.”[[30]](#footnote-30)

It is precisely this comparison of Sutzkever’s writing and approach to the existential crisis to those of Rawicz and Celan, who used the same tools, but in a completely different way, that enables us to see how the response of those with a sense of roots differed from those without it. None of these men ever became deeply religious in the strict sense of the word. Instead, they all remained at the “philosophical” edge, which existed, in fact, due to the religio-philosophical tradition of Jewish thought and its deeply intellectual mysticism. This edge was far sharper for Celan and Rawicz, who in the post-war era found themselves in an environment in which this form of self-identification was totally alien. Furthermore, once the Holocaust was over, they could no longer “break” with it by merging into the world of pure, high art.[[31]](#footnote-31) Instead, they chose the “path of the apocalypsists.” The language in which each of the three authors recorded their experiences speaks quite accurately to the form and substance of their writing. Celan’s native German became the language of death, Sutzkever’s native Yiddish became the symbol of a lost world, but also a living language dear to him, while the French language, which remained foreign and difficult for Rawicz, created a distance between him and his memories.

**Textual analysis**

*Blood from the Sky* consists of three parts, followed by a “coda” and an afterward. The story is told by an anonymous narrator, who finds himself in Paris in 1961 (that is, at the time and place of the novel’s publication). Sometimes the narrator speaks in his own voice, but usually, he passes this honor to the main character. In addition, the initial part of the story is recounted for the most in the first person by the protagonist (“I,” Boris), the second part is also relayed in the first person, but by his alibi (the fake “I,” Yuriy), while the third uses the third-person voice to speak about the protagonist (“He,” Boris). Rawicz transports the reader through time and space, using different voices, mixing genres, and drawing on the various techniques of counterpoint. In its essence and form, *Blood from the Sky* is a metapoetic work, which, whether intentionally or not, sends us back to Paul Celan and his *Death Fugue*. And although the reference to Celan may be regarded as speculative, many factors indicate that Rawicz’s general reference in the novel to a fugue was deliberate and multi-dimensional. On the one hand, this is suggested by the structure of the work, its polyphony, layering, and his exploitation of these voices, as well as the final part, which he called the “Coda.” On the other hand, at the core of the novel is a protagonist who is constantly on the move in the hope of saving his own life and who thus embodies the etymology of the word “fugue” or “escape.” The term is used in psychology to refer to an individual’s escape from his own identity. Last but not least, is Rawicz’s most characteristic feature: multi-layered, dark humor. As a famous riddle goes: “What do fugues and dogs have in common?” “A tail.” In Italian, *coda* means “tail,” while in French the word is *queue*, a slang term for male genitalia. The events described in the novel revolve around circumcision—the sole means of determining the Jewishness of a man of non-Semitic appearance in possession of documents proving his Aryan origins. Hence the novel’s initial title: *The Tail and the Art of Assimilation*.

Equally noteworthy is the author’s great effort to “depersonalize” the described places and characters. Without referring to any specific dates or cities, he changes the names of historical figures and tells the story from the perspective of multiple characters, none of whom go by their real name(s). For the most part, however, these “secrets” are relatively easy to unravel, since the descriptions of people and places are true to life and only their names differ. This is especially evident in the case of cities or towns but also holds true for the characters in the novel. For example, one of the key figures in the first part is a certain Leon L. (or LL)—a lawyer and old friend of the protagonist’s father, who often visits the family’s home, and who has been appointed head of the *gmina* (local government). This character is, in fact, based on Leib Landau, the head of a Jewish social service association.**[[32]](#footnote-32)** Garin, an important figure who uses his wealth and influential connections to organize “Garin’s Workers’ Workshops,” is, in turn, based on Salo Griever, a businessman who, under an agreement with the Germans, managed the workshops in the ghetto.[[33]](#footnote-33)

It is therefore quite obvious that Rawicz’s novel draws on real historical characters and events, which are not difficult to distinguish and identify. Equally obvious, however, is that it is neither of importance to the author nor his priority to provide an accurate account of his own Holocaust experience. This is clear from the very nature of his descriptions (the changed or omitted names) and his conclusion.[[34]](#footnote-34) From the perspective of historical research, we cannot accept the events described in the novel (or their chronological order) as truth because we cannot confirm any of them with data from other sources. Nonetheless, I regard the work itself as a *source* for the study of Rawicz’s biography—not in the sense of how he managed to survive the events of 1941–1943, but in that of the meaning he derived from them. Indeed, a reading “between the lines” of the text offers information on his life, environs, and worldview of the kind that would be impossible to obtain otherwise.

The language of *Blood from the Sky* is polyphonic and multi-layered. One can read it on different levels, trying to guess the author’s concealed riddles. The first, or, in a certain sense, the “simplest” of these “levels” lies in the widespread and intuitively apparent symbols that Rawicz uses throughout the text. All the same, he seems to “reverse” their meaning each time he uses them, thus provoking a sense of discomfort in the reader. In doing so, he resorts to black humor, caricature, and carnivalization. When speaking of ​​flowers sprouting from graves (“When spring arrives, lovely violets will blossom; they’ll blossom above us”[[35]](#footnote-35)), for example, he instantly subverts the symbol’s sacred meaning by interjecting a remark by a soldier: “Before long you’ll be smelling those violets from their very roots.”[[36]](#footnote-36) This technique makes the reader “stumble,” forcing them out of their comfort zone and encouraging them to perceive a familiar image in a new way. The scenes are quite memorable since they have the power to “snap” readers out of their indifference or numbness, for, as is well known, the more one reads about violence, the more one’s sensitivity to it diminishes.

The second “level” of the novel lies in its indirect references to historical events and other texts. The author uses these to express his thoughts without spelling them out. In his final conversation with Boris (the protagonist), for example, LL (Leon L. noted above) picks up Heinrich Heine’s *The Rabbi from Bacharach.* [[37]](#footnote-37) First published in 1840 as a response to the so-called “Damascus case,”[[38]](#footnote-38) the 1921 of edition Heine’s book[[39]](#footnote-39) inspired much debate both between the two World Wars and during the Holocaust. These discussions hinged on, among other things, the problem of morality. In an afterword to the story published in 1937, the Berlin literary critic Erich Löwenthal drew attention to “the astonishing irresponsibility of the rabbi in question, who in a time of danger, abandoned a community that had placed its trust in him in order to save his own life” (Löwenthal himself died in Auschwitz in 1944).[[40]](#footnote-40) It is thus noteworthy that LL begins discussing this novel precisely after he explains why he has turned down a position at Harvard University and chosen to remain with his community.[[41]](#footnote-41) Another example lies in an episode that occurs during an interrogation, at which the protagonist argues that he is Ukrainian, not Jewish, and displays as proof, among other things, his knowledge of the work of the little-known Ukrainian modernist poet “Ihor Granych” (actually Bohdan-Ihor Antonych, whose work at the time of the novel’s composition was known only within a tiny circle of people).[[42]](#footnote-42) Such references occur quite often in Rawicz’s novel, and clearly reveal his method and desire to write a multi-layered work “for insiders,” but also, and ultimately, to demonstrate his erudition.

The third “layer” of the novel lies in its allusions to Jewish heroes, traditions, and texts, particularly mystical ones. Here the references can either be quite obvious or well concealed. Among the most “obvious” to the uninitiated reader, for example, are episodes involving Hebrew letters and numbers. These are ones whose combinations and peculiar symbolism are granted special attention in the Kabbalah.

The ability to interpret these symbols provides us with clues about what will occur later in the novel. For example, in Chapter XXXII, in which Boris manages to save his life, he sees the “Sign of Earthly Life: a horizontal line with protruding three branches encircled with tiny lights.”[[43]](#footnote-43) Once deciphered, this sign is the letter ש (shin), the penultimate letter of the Hebrew alphabet. According to the Kabbalah, one of the meanings of this letter is “change”: for the Divine Being, nothing has changed since Creation. Rawicz, too, offers a reading of this letter in an episode where he describes the smashing of the tombstones: “*Shin*, a letter symbolizing the marvelous guardianship of God...”[[44]](#footnote-44) *Shin* also appears on the exposed side of the mezuzah scroll, where it signifies one of God’s various names (*Shadai*), which, in fact, refers to His presence in man’s destiny and His role as protector. The three tips of this letter are usually understood as representing three small letter *Yuds* ((י, and are thus associated with the three patriarchs, Abraham, Jacob, and Isaac, whose “virtue” protects Jews. In the Kabbalah, *Shin* corresponds to the sphere of *Gvura* (valor, courage), which, in turn, corresponds to the Patriarch Isaac. Passive during the “sacrifice of Adam,” Isaac accepts God’s decision but is not sacrificed at the last minute. Therefore, hope for *Shin* amounts to hope for survival in situations where death seems inevitable. In fact, it is right after this scene that the protagonist lands on the idea of ​​impersonating a Ukrainian, which saves his life.

Although real historical characters and events do appear in the work, their “authenticity” or “inaccuracy” does not bear any critical weight in the study of Rawicz’s biography. In as much as these characters, places, and events did exist, they are not necessarily ones that the author himself saw or experienced. What does carry great weight, however, is what Rawicz says “between” the lines, which points to his deep familiarity with the Ukrainian discourse as well as the religious and mystical texts of Judaism. These are “facts” that can be confirmed with the help of other sources, and which add qualitative originality to the study of Rawicz. As he himself professes in an interview with Anna Langfus: “I’m not interested in historical or political truths. The only thing that holds meaning for me is ontological truth.”[[45]](#footnote-45)

Everyday language is incapable of describing massive, shameless violence committed on an unprecedented scale. However, feeling the need to leave behind his own testimony, Rawicz embarks on the path of poeticization or “encryption”; he turns black humor, poetry, philosophy, and symbolism into a means of conveying things that the reader would otherwise not notice (due to the fact that such things are practically unimaginable). Rawicz was willing to explain some of the images used in this novel in his later texts, both in excerpts of his literary pieces in the journal *European Judaism*, and in his prefaces to the works of other authors that were published by Gallimard with his help. For example, he expounded on the image of the “salesman” that appears at the beginning of *Blood from the Sky* in a preface to a novel by Danylo Kish—actually Rawicz’s last text, published shortly before his suicide.[[46]](#footnote-46) In it, he refers to authors of Holocaust literature as “salesmen.”[[47]](#footnote-47) Similarly, he presents his view of events in a global dimension by referencing ancient texts and earlier episodes in Jewish history. Instead of recreating reality—an impossible task—he uses the novel to create another reality, a metaphorical one with multiple layers and voices that is far more intense than any narrative re-telling of events and capable of plunging the reader into a state of despair, disgust, and sometimes even powerlessness.

This observation provides us with a rough understanding of Rawicz’s position in discussions on recognizability/unrecognizability and Holocaust literature. Ruth Franklin identifies two ways of approaching the issue: the “realistic” and the “mystical.” The first—the academic one—is usually “assigned” to historians as it assumes that the Holocaust is something that is basically knowable, that is, that we can understand it through the help of the usual methods of reading, examining documents and photographs, and interviewing witnesses.[[48]](#footnote-48) The second views the Holocaust as a unique event that is comprehensible solely by those who survived it; such an experience can neither be transmitted to others, nor depicted or explained through any art.[[49]](#footnote-49) The chief proponent of this view is Elie Wiesel. Those espousing this approach speak in particular about the “inadequacy” of human language to convey the horrors suffered by these people—that is, to the literal impossibility of expressing them in words. The inability to do so is indeed not metaphorical: fairly recent psychiatric findings have confirmed that trauma can, in fact, impair verbal memory.[[50]](#footnote-50)

In a certain sense, Rawicz assumes what is in effect a “neutral” position in these discussions. Although he describes atrocities, despair, extreme self-deception, baseness, and horror, his overriding message is that there is nothing exceptional about them; instead, they are part of man’s very essence, and, as such, are in some way, “normal.” Contrary to the “traditional” view, which sees the history of the Jews as inextricably bound to persecution and suffering, the Holocaust undercut the concept of theodicy, placing all responsibility for these events on people—and on them alone. Thus, according to Rawicz, in order to comprehend the horror in full, we would have to shake off all our illusions about the essence of these people and their thousand-year history.

**Turning to the Bible and the Kabbalah**

In their attempt to make sense of a huge corpus of works, scholars of Holocaust literature have developed different ways of classifying them: according to language, location, time, generation, or degree of “factography.” Many have also examined authors, who, after experiencing the Holocaust, turned to Scripture, arguably with the intent of mocking or accusing it and in this way conveying their horror. Some studies have argued that such an approach is not the consequence of the exceptional tragedy of the Holocaust, but, in fact, a traditional approach that has its roots in the Lamentations of Jeremiah, and reaches its blasphemous peak in the period following World War I. [[51]](#footnote-51)

The heart of such an appeal lies in the search for truth and the answers to fundamental questions. But why the urgent need to answer these questions? Because the Holocaust undermined our image of ​​the world and the essence of the individual: “In Auschwitz, it was not only the person who died, but also the very idea of the person.” [[52]](#footnote-52) Yet, the question of selfhood is not a question of identity, for identity is based on opposition, on something that distances one individual from another.[[53]](#footnote-53) In the literature of the Holocaust, the individual is not so much opposed to any group as rejected everywhere because the reality denies a certain community. When this group is accused of being what it is, and is engulfed in nothingness, that same nothingness swallows up part of the individual.[[54]](#footnote-54) In the Holocaust, it ceases to be itself, ceases to consist of people, and lacks a voice. This is why the testimonial novel is a kind of rebirth, a return to the world for the author, who can go back to being a person, however incomplete, *speak* about who he is, and seek through dialogue a definition of *who* or *what* he is. The content of this dialogic relationship between the author and the character, or the author and the reader, lies in the space between or above them: provisionally in a third entity, invisible and silent, which is God.[[55]](#footnote-55)

Taking different paths, Rawicz seems to “wander” (inviting the reader to keep him company) as he searches for answers to these essential questions. In his opinion, after all, the Holocaust was not so much unique in its monstrosity, as it was the “ultimate ontological experience.” [[56]](#footnote-56)

*Blood from the Sky* contains constant references to the holy texts. Chapter Three, for example, begins with the words: “The moss-covered stone that served as my pillow was nothing but a pretext. The inviolability of my body, hidden behind a cliff, was a broad and royal road to survival.”[[57]](#footnote-57) A little below we read: “having crossed the river under the cover of night...” [[58]](#footnote-58) These lines are direct references to the story of Jacob in the Book of Genesis:

He took a stone from among the stones that lay in the place, put it under his head and lay down (to sleep) in that place. And he dreams that here is a ladder resting on the ground, and its top reaches the sky, and that there are angels stepping up and down on it. And the Lord stood over him and said: “I am the Lord, the God of Abraham, your father, and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie, I will give to you and your descendants. [...] Here I am with you, and I will protect you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land, because I will not leave you until I fulfill what I promised you.” When Jacob woke up from his dream, he said: “Truly, the Lord is in this place, and I did not know.” And he was frightened and said: “What a terrible place this is! This is none other than the house of God, and these are the gates of heaven!”[[59]](#footnote-59)

and:

That night he got up, took his two wives, and his two maidservants, and his eleven children, and crossed the Jabbok. Then he took them and brought them across the stream; also translated everything he had. Yakov alone remained.[[60]](#footnote-60)

We find a nearly identical allusion in the novel at the beginning of Part II:

Curled up on my suitcase in a dark corner I dozed off for a few seconds and had a dream: I saw a red flame, quite tall and slender. The wind, or possibly something else (but what ELSE? some organic force?) was pushing the flame, slowly, in various directions. Submissive to the wind (let’s say it was the wind), the flame flickered here and there, as if wandering the four corners of the Earth. Kissing the earth, the black and fleeing earth. A voice calls out: “Boris, hey, Boris! Hold on to the tip of the flame. Hold on to it tightly and sway with it to and fro, with all your might.”

The biblical allusion draws a parallel between Jacob, who has fled from his brother, and the novel’s protagonist, who flees his enemies. Boris asks himself whether God exists in this place.

In addition to its aforementioned “conventional/traditional” appeal to the Scriptures and other texts in order to emphasize the “inseparability” of the history and suffering of the Jews, Rawicz’s novel has another motive that distinguishes it to some extent from this vast array of books. It presents the Holocaust in a light that makes it seem not so much legitimate, as “normal”; something corresponding to the essence of what it means to be human. The fact of the matter is that, as already noted, the Holocaust undermined the concept of theodicy because the suffering of the Jews could not be attributed either to their sinfulness or to their status as the “chosen ones” in terms of faith.[[61]](#footnote-61) The Kabbalah, by contrast, offers a different concept of God, according to which He is neither the Absolute nor the Almighty, but rather the One who sets limits on Himself for the sake of creating the world and revealing the root of evil,[[62]](#footnote-62) which He potentially contains within Himself. According to this line of reasoning, evil becomes real through the act of creation. And although God participates in what happens on Earth, he does not and cannot influence it.

In *Blood from the Sky*, we constantly encounter episodes with motifs drawn from the Kabbalah that deal with the creation of the world, the course of history, the Creator, and creation.[[63]](#footnote-63) The text also includes more easily recognizable symbols, such as references to the Shekhinah, for example, or Hebrew letters scattered here and there.[[64]](#footnote-64)

More specifically, Rawicz draws repeatedly on the images of the Messiah and the Golem, and ends up comparing them. Describing one particular character,[[65]](#footnote-65) he observes that “he could not pass by any rock without imagining a stream of running water of the kind that Moses would command to shoot forth,”[[66]](#footnote-66) an obvious reference to the Book of Exodus:

“Behold, I will stand before you there, on the rock, on Horeb, and when you strike the rock, water will pour out of it, and people will drink.” This is what Moses did in front of the elders of Israel.[[67]](#footnote-67)

Moses’ “proclamation of himself” also imposes itself on Rawicz’s reflections on the *tzaddiks* (righteous ones) as “self-proclaimed Messiahs.” These appear in many parts of the novel. Rawicz calls them “some sort of holy miracle workers,”[[68]](#footnote-68) con artists, semi-legitimate, ambiguous characters. He also places Karl Marx on the same level as he does “false Messiahs” like Sabbatai Zevi and Jacob Frank, as well as “a round dozen of people’s commissars and sub-commissars.” [[69]](#footnote-69) Here too he shares his thoughts on everyone’s place in this strange system:

Who among us has not believed himself to be—even for a moment—the Messiah of flesh and blood? [[70]](#footnote-70)

Based on the above, Rawicz describes the exclusivity of the tragedy (Holocaust) as follows:

And so, from time immemorial, false messiahs and golems have crawled out of our bowels, some bleeding more, some less; but have you ever imagined what would happen if their paths were to cross one day?[[71]](#footnote-71)

What is significant here is that Rawicz describes the mythical Golem’s intent to murder as a yearning for a soul that has been denied him from the outset, or, to put it differently, as “a noble form of suffering induced by the wasteland.”[[72]](#footnote-72) In his opinion, “Golem becomes a killer due to a certain kind of sensitivity, a blind need of kindness.”[[73]](#footnote-73) And in this sense, Rawicz presents him as the “reverse,” the *Sitra achra* of the Messiah.[[74]](#footnote-74) It thus turns out that Rawicz combines Golem and the Messiah, and if every Jew imagines himself—at least a bit—as the Messiah (which can become quite dangerous during the Holocaust), then he also does so as Golem, the false Messiah. This, for Rawicz, is what Jews are like: false Messiahs, lacking identity (just as Golem lacks a soul). [[75]](#footnote-75)

All of these as well as the other symbols and figures that make their appearance in *Blood from the Sky* have their own long and rich tradition and are ultimately used in the text in myriad ways. What is important is that one can read the novel without interpreting or decoding all these elements. Still, they are what matter—if not the most, then at least a great deal—to the author. They are “embedded” in the work according to the principle of their singular associations: and this is precisely the device that allows us to immerse ourselves in Rawicz’s world without fully understanding their nature. These are the passages that reveal the most about the author’s “relationship” with God. The question of His presence and/or absence is central to and omnipresent in them: the night spent in a field and the crossing of the river bring us back to the Book of Genesis— indirectly, of course. In addition, Rawicz compares the main character to Jacob and the head of the workshops in the ghetto to Moses; he often describes the other protagonists in the novel in the same way that the Bible describes the prophets.

As noted, there is no basis for claiming that Piotr Rawicz was a deeply religious individual immersed in sacred Jewish texts—classical and/or mystical*—*and traditions. All the same, he clearly knew them well and used them to understand, explain, and convey ideas about the world, to which he added a generous mixture of folklore and myriad allusions, layering them in different ways that periodically led his text to teeter on the edge of blasphemy. And while familiarity with the fundamental concepts of Hasidism was a fairly common phenomenon, even among less deeply religious (and non-religious) people in the area where Rawicz was born, brought up, and traveled, reading the Kabbalah and the texts of the Jewish mystics was not.

The question as to when and how Rawicz began taking an interest in these texts merits separate attention. In his late Israeli interview, he claims that when he left his university due to the “bench ghetto” episodes, he earned his living by offering private lessons in Latin and ancient Greek. One of his students at the time, Avraham Enshel Rokeach, was descended from the tzaddiks of Belza. In exchange for Piotr’s help with classical languages, Avraham studied Judaism with him, and together, the two analyzed chapters of the *Talmud* and the books of *Zohar*. Most likely Rawicz also grew interested in Hasidism and Jewish mysticism thanks to the works of Martin Buber, whose importance to him is particularly evident in the fact that in 1961 he sent him his novel with the dedication: “Without *Gog and Magog*, my life would be different.” Furthermore, and possibly a key factor, was the emergence of Gershom Scholem’s works in the 1930s and 1940s. Most likely, the excerpts from the *Zohar* mentioned by Rawicz in the aforementioned interview were, in fact, those of Scholem’s translation, published in 1935. In any case, even if he never read Scholem in German, by the 1950s, when Rawicz was living in Paris, there were French translations, to which he certainly would have had access.

**The context of Lviv**

Since *Blood from the Sky* drew the attention primarily of literary critics, and more specifically, those researching Holocaust literature, its “Jewishness” was obviously not surprising to anyone and thus did not generate discussion. However, the Jewish aspect has been far less apparent to those interested in Rawicz’s intellectual biography. The form and philosophical framework of the novel—both of which differ to some degree from those of the highly conventional “canon” of Holocaust literature— have likewise not provoked debate.

As noted, the answer to these questions is rooted in part in the territories, languages, and origins that largely defined the way in which individuals and authors constructed their identities in the post-war period. I have tried, at least superficially, to touch on these issues earlier in this essay. What is no less important in this respect is the somewhat “narrower” view of the interwar period, throughout which Rawicz lived and reached maturity in Lviv.

Due to the pogroms of 1918, Rawicz’s family underwent a fairly sharp ideological shift right after World War I. Piotr’s brother, Mariano, older than him by ten years, devoted a good deal of his memoirs to these events.[[76]](#footnote-76) Based on Mariano’s description and what we know about Piotr’s youth, we can surmise that in the interwar period, the family veered from “assimilation” to “acculturation,” and began sympathizing less with the Polish and more with the Ukrainian political position. And although these changes were far from the only reason, Rawicz’s closest friends in his youth as well as his social environment were, in fact, Ukrainian, as we can clearly gather from his words and the testimony of other people. However, this milieu could hardly be called “typical,” as it consisted of Lviv’s exceptionally well-educated and intellectual Ukrainian elite, such as the Rudnytskiy family. Indeed, Rawicz’s closest friend at that time was Ivan Lysiak-Rudnytskiy, who later became one of Ukraine’s most influential and original historians.[[77]](#footnote-77)

It was in this environment that Rawicz actually learned Ukrainian and was exposed to Ukrainian political and/or ideological debates, culture, and, ultimately, literature—particularly the writings of Bohdan-Ihor Antonych, whom he used as a character in the episode of the prison interrogation in his novel. The influence of Antonych’s work—including that of his literary texts—on Rawicz’s own writing merits separate analysis, nonetheless, another contemporary figure in Lviv with ties to both authors, namely, Roman Ingarden, is critical to our understanding of *Blood from the Sky*.[[78]](#footnote-78)

One of Edmund Husserl’s top students in Freiburg, Ingarden decided to return to Lviv after defending his thesis. Although we lack any definitive evidence that Rawicz attended Ingarden’s seminars in the years prior to the German occupation, the latter’s ideas were actively discussed in the intellectual circles of Lviv’s cultural elite. Moreover, the impact of his phenomenological approach to the interpretation of literature is quite important and palpable in *Blood from the Sky*. Of particular relevance in this case is Ingarden’s *Das literarische Kunstwerk* [The Literary Work of Art] of 1931,[[79]](#footnote-79) in which, among other things, he raises a series of questions about the structure and multi-layered quality of literary works as he separates and analyzes these layers one by one (e.g., the “layer of meaningful units,” “of the themes presented,” and “of schematized expositions”).[[80]](#footnote-80) It is here too that Ingarden deals with the orderly succession of parts in a literary work.[[81]](#footnote-81) Of interest to him is the problem of distinguishing the author (as the historical/real individual) from the narrator, the importance of form (and the unity of structure and content) in literature, and the problematics of musical composition.

In sum, given the questions discussed above, including that of the deliberate interweaving of *Blood from the Sky* with the musical fugue, the “accuracy”/”autobiographical nature” of the novel’s subject, and the countless layers of allusions that vary in breadth and depth, there are good reasons to assume that when structuring his work, Rawicz modeled it on Ingarden’s ideas and work.

**Conclusions**

This analysis of Rawicz’s *Blood from the Sky* sheds light on aspects of the author’s personality that would be nearly impossible to probe with other sources. The novel not only demonstrates its author’s familiarity with Jewish culture, tradition, and sacred texts but also illuminates his deep immersion in Jewish mysticism, through the prism of which he represents the Holocaust. At the same time, however, we know that this immersion was not instilled by Rawicz’s family or upbringing. Despite his awareness of his Jewish origin, he had chosen not to dwell on it—even in his own mind—before the war. However, he was forced to do so once his life was in danger for the sole reason that others had reason to believe that he was a Jew.

Thus, Rawicz’s mysticism arose from his attempt to understand and represent the Holocaust to others. It does not signify deep religious feelings but instead serves as a kind of philosophical argument, a search for ontological truth that enabled his mind to balance faith, which he lacked, and the desire to find an explanation for something utterly incomprehensible. This course of action was typical of, but not unique to Rawicz, although it was also the result of the coincidence of several conditions, including his origin, place of residence, relations with people of other nationalities, the (non)religiosity of his family, his high level of education, and the language in which he wrote. In some sense, he can thus be said to have continued the tradition of Franz Kafka.

Whatever the case, drawing a link between Rawicz’s novel and Ingarden’s philosophical approach to interpreting literature allows us to shed light on the “physical” and “philosophical” structure of *Blood from the Sky* and thus to finally draw attention to ontological issues, which were obviously of central importance to Rawicz.

1. Piotr Rawicz, *Le sang du ciel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1961). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Piotr Rawicz, *Krew nieba*, trans. by Andrzej Socha (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Krakowskie, 2003), 322. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The title literally translates to “A Tail and the Art of Assimilation,” albeit in French slang, the word “*queue*,” which here signifies “tail,” refers to the male genitalia. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Rawicz, *Krew nieba*, 322. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See also Nicole Dethoor, *Combat,* October 5, 1961; Jacqueline Piatier, *Le Monde*, October 21, 1961; Camille Bourniquel, *Esprit,* November, 1961; Claude Bourdet, *L’Observateur Litteraire*, November 9, 1961; Guy Bayard, *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, November 23, 1961; Maurice Nadeau, *L’Express*,October 26,1961; a conversation with Madeleine Chapsal, *L’Express*, December 7, 1961; P. O. Walzer, *Journal de Genève*, December 11, 1961; Gérard Rosenthal, *Le droit de vivre*, January 1, 1962; P.P., *Libre Belgique*, January, 17, 1962; Rawicz, interview with Anna Langfus, *L’Arche,* February, 1962. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Anthony Rudolf, *Engraved in Flesh: Piotr Rawicz and His Novel “Blood from the Sky*” (City??: Menard Press, 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Annie Dayan Rosenman and Fransiska Louwagie, eds., *Un ciel de sang et de cendres. Piotr Rawicz et la solitude du témoin* (Paris: Kimé Éditions, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Adding a universalizing note, he observes in the afterword that this episode could have occurred anywhere and with anyone; Rawicz, *Le sang du ciel*, 280. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The documents indicate solely that Rawicz resided in the Lviv ghetto from September 1941 to September 1942. He was later sent to the Gestapo prison in Sanok, then to the prison in Tarnów, and finally to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. In September 1944, he was transferred to the camp at Leitmeritz, where he remained until his release in May 1945, an event he describes in detail. Until September 1944, Piotr Rawicz appeared in documents as Yuriy Bosak, a civilian worker and political prisoner born on August 4, 1920 in Sopotyn.

   Doc. No. 10832161;

   Doc. No. 99094811;

   Doc. No. 99094814;

   Record group: O-62; File number: 95, 3p. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See, for example, Ivan Lysiak-Rudnytskyi, *Щоденники* [*Shchodennyky*; Journals] (Кyiv: Дух і Літера [Dukh i Litera], 2019); Christoph Graf Von Schwerin, “Piotr Rawicz,” *Twórczość*, 6, No. 631 (1998):146–47; Janina Katz Hewetson, “Piotr Rawicz, pisarz zapomniany,” *Kultura (paryska)*, 3/510 (1990): 125–33; and Rudolf, *Engraved in Flesh.* [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Celan wrote to his aunt in Palestine about the anti-Semitism at his school, while Sutzkever and Rawicz each experienced “bench ghettos” in their respective cities. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Kamil Kijek, *Dzieci modernizmu: Świadomość, kultura i socjalizacja polityczna młodzieży żydowskiej w II Rzeczypospolitej*, (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. This refers to engagement in movements of both the far left and the far right. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. See Kamil Kijek, *Dzieci modernizm*, 13–14. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Rawicz, in Auschwitz and Leitmeritz; Celan, in a Romanian labor camp; and Sutskever, in the ghetto of Vilnius and the surrounding forests. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Petro Rykhlo, “Спів понад терням: Травматична поезія Пауля Целана як дзеркало його долі,” [“Spiv ponad terniam: Travmatychna poeziia Paulia Tselana yak dzerkalo yoho doli”/Singing over Thorn’s: Paul Celan’s Poetry as a Mirror of his Fate] in *Пауль Целан. Референції. Наукові студії, статті, есеї* [*Pavel Tselan. Referentsii. Naukovi studii, statti, esei*/Paul Celan. References, Academic Studies, Articles, Essays] (Кyiv: Дух і Літера [Dukh i Litera], 2020), 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Petro Rykhlo, “Містичні мотиви єврейської кабалістики у збірці Пауля Целана *Нічийна троянда*,” [Mistychni motyvy yevreiskoi kabalistyky u zbirtsi Paulia Tselana *Nichyina troianda/*The mystical motifs of the Jewish Kabbalah in Paul Celan’s poem collection, *Nobody’s Rose*] in *Пауль Целан*, 287–312. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. In his youth, Rawicz’s was close friends with Ivan Lysiak-Rudnytskyi. He stated that generally speaking, his closest friends in school had been Ukrainians. This was due to the situation at the time, as Jews and Ukrainians found themselves subject to Polish attacks. His parents’ recollection of the 1918 pogrom in Lviv also played a role in this. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Leib Kupershtein, “Встречи с Пётром Равичем, миллионером страданий” [“Vstrechy s Pёtrom Ravychem, myllyonerom stradanyi/Meetings with Piotr Rawicz, a Suffering Millionaire] *Газета Давар* [Hazeta Davar] (May 29, 1970): 8. My thanks to Zoya Kopelmann for her translation from the Hebrew. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. He maintained good—although perhaps not regular—relations with Józef Czapski, Czeslaw Milosz, and later also with Danylo Kish, Vladimir Maximov, Oleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Witold Gombrowicz, and Konstantin Yelensky, and corresponded with Slawomir Mrozhek. Among the close friends of his youth was Adolf Rudnytskyi. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Rеveka [Rebekah?] Yavych, later known by her pseudonym Anka D'Astrée. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. See Christoph Graf Von Schwerin, “Piotr Rawicz,” *Twórczość* 6/631 (1998): 146. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, 228. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Oleksandra Uralova, “Передмова” [“Peredmova”/Preface] in Abraham Sutzkever, *Із Віленського гетто. Зелений акваріум. Оповідання* [*Iz Vilenskoho hetto. Zelenyi akvarium. Opovidannia*/From the Vilna Ghetto: The Green Aqaurium. Stories] trans. Oleksander Uralovoi, in *Abraham Sutzkever* (Кyiv: Дух і Літера [Duch i litera, 2020), 11–12. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid., 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. *Eyn Sof*, and the Tree of Life, for example. On this, see H. Valencia, “Bashtendikayt” and “Banayung”: *Theme and Imagery in the Earlier Poetry of Abraham Sutzkever*, (Ph.D. Dissertation: University of Stirling, 1991). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, 255. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Ibid., 257. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Ibid., 255. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Yet, in the Kabbalah, as Gershom Scholem notes, the horrors of the Exile are reflected in the philosophy of metempsychosis (a late Greek term for the transmigration of souls), and the worst fate that can befall the soul is “rejection,” or “disclosure”—a state that allows neither for rebirth/reincarnation nor descent into hell (worth mentioning here is that the main character in Rawicz’s novel assumes the surname Golets after changing his identity). See Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 250. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. See Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, 226. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. “This book is not a historical document. If the author did not regard the concept of coincidence (like most concepts) meaningless, he would be inclined to point out that any parallels with the period, location, or ethnic group described are coincidental. Phenomena similar to those described here could arise anywhere and at any time, in the soul of any person, planet, or mineral…” Rawicz, *Le sang du ciel*, 280. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Ibid., 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. This book, written in 1824, was published in an edition of 320 copies in Berlin in 1921. Its theme centers on nationalism and national enmity. This episode is comparable to that of Leon Feuchtwanger’s 1925 novel, *Jud Süß*, inspired by a short story written by Wilhelm Hauff in 1827, which, in turn, became the basis for a Nazi propaganda film (of the same name) in 1940 and was obviously influenced by Heine’s work. The echoes of the latter in the text are obvious, not to mention the fact that Feuchtwanger wrote his dissertation on the “Rabbi of Bacharach.” [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. An episode in 1840, when thirteen high-ranking members of the Jewish community of Damascus were arrested after being accused of the ritual murder of a Christian monk and his servant (“blood libel”). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Not the actual work, but only a fragment of it as the complete manuscript was destroyed during a fire in 1833. See Greta Ionkis, “Автобиографический подтекст гейневского «Бахарахского раввина” [*Avtobyohrafycheskyi podtekst heinevskoho “Bakharakhskoho ravvyna*”/The Autobiographical Subtext of Heine’s *Rabbi from Bacharach*] *Лехаим* [*Lechaim*] 2 (166) (February 2006/Shevat 5766). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. “I’m glad that things turned out the way they did. That I am here, with you, with all of you, with all of US. I would not like to be without us”; Rawicz, *Le sang du ciel*, 27. In the same passage, he assesses his place in the community as follows: “I play a role, no, I am, I became... Head of the Holy Community... let’s say, in Frankfurt during the plague”; Rawicz, *Le sang du ciel*, 27–28. In the Middle Ages, pogroms were widespread during epidemics especially because revenge on the “killers of the Messiah” was viewed as necessary. In addition, Jews were often accused of poisoning wells. In many cases, they chose to die voluntarily rather than be killed, as exemplified by their mass suicide in Frankfurt-on-Main during the plague of 1348–49. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. The most important scene in the long dialogue on literature, for example, one in which the protagonist does not reply “Taras Shevchenko” to the question “Who is Ukraine’s most siginificant poet?”, but claims instead that it is Ihor Granych, a marginal modernist and presents a detailed argument supporting his choice. The description of this poet’s character and work corresponds perfectly with those of Bohdan-Ihor Antonych. Ivan Lysyak-Rudnytskiy’s testimony strongly suggests that Rawicz learned Ukrainian thanks, in particular, to Antonych’s poetry; see: Ernest Guidel, “A Historian of a ‘Non-Historical’ Nation: Ivan L. Rudnytsky and the Development of Ukrainian Studies in North America,” 7. NEEDS FULL CITATION [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Ibid., 246. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Ibid., 53–54. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Anna Langfus, “Conversation avec Piotr Rawicz,” *L’Arche* (February 1962): 16–17 [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Danilo Kiš, *Sablier*, trans. from Serbo-Croatian by Pascale Delpech (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), 288. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. P. Rawicz, Danilo Kiš… avec les seules armes dignes d’un poète (Préface) // Rosenman, Annie Dayan??? REFERENCE UNCLEAR HERE; Fransiska Louwagie, *Un ciel de sang et de cendres. Piotr Rawicz et la solitude du témoin* (Paris: Éditions [Kimé](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%89ditions_Kim%C3%A9), 2013), 388. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Worth noting here is that when literary critics discuss the historian’s craft, they tend to see it as one that aspires towards absolute knowledge or truth. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Ruth Franklin, *A Thousand Darknesses: Lies and Truth in Holocaust Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4–5. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. See, for example, G. E. Johnsen and A. E. Asbjørnsen, “Consistent Impaired Verbal Memory in PTSD: A Meta-Analysis,” *Journal of Affective Disorders* *111* (1) (2008): 74–82. Accessible at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2008.02.007 [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. David S. Roskies, “Review: The Holocaust According to the Literary Critics,” *Prooftexts* 1, No. 2 (1981): 214–16. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Elie Wiesel, *Legends of Our Time* (New York: Schocken Books, 2011), 190. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. David Patterson, *The Shriek of Silence: A Phenomenology of the Holocaust Novel* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1992), 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Ibid., 10. Here we refer to the criticism of the work of David Roskis, who demonstrates the “traditionalism” of the Jewish response to the Holocaust [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Ibid., 19. The reference here is to the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Rawicz, “Piotr Rawicz on French Jewry,” interview with Michael Goulston and Anthony Rudolf, trans and ed. Juliette Politzer, *European Judaism* 5, No. 1 (1970–1971), 5–7. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Rawicz, *Le sang du ciel*, 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Ibid., 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Genesis 28:11–17. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Genesis 32: 23–25. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. See Hans Jonas, *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz: Eine jüdische Stimme,* (Suhrkamp Verlag, 1987). [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. *Tzimtzum* (or “restraint”) is a concept in the Lurianic Kabbalah claiming that God limits (restrains) Himself, ceases to be Omnipresent, Absolute in order to open up a new, independent space for creation. Thus arises the paradox of His simultaneous presence and absence in a vacuum. In this new space, free will, too, becomes possible. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. In her article on the Kabbalah’s intertextuality, Christa Stevens identifies and illuminates several such motifs in *Blood from the Sky.* See Christa Stevens, “Le sang du ciel, la Kabbale et l’écriture sacrilège.” *Image & Narrative* 14, No. 2 (2013): 8–15. I could not find any other works on this topic. Here, I analyze motifs that Stevens does not touch on, and try to deduce the sources and reasons that led Rawicz to the Kabbalah. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. One such episode goes as follows: While walking through the old Jewish cemetery, Boris sees a group of workers breaking [мацеви] with heavy hammers: “Aleph flew to the left, while Chei, carved on another stone fragment, bounced to the right. Gimmel sank into the dust, followed by Nun. Many Shins—letters standing for God’s miraculous guardianship, were pounded with hammers and trampled by laborers, who themselves were already on the threshold of death.” See Rawicz, *Le sang du ciel*, 53–54. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. In the novel, this is Garin, who corresponds to the historical individual Salo Griever, who, holding a German contract, ran workshops in the ghetto and tried to convince wealthy Jews that labor was their only path to salvation. See Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, 226. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Rawicz, *Le sang du ciel*, 130. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Exodus 17:6. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Rawicz, *Le sang du ciel*, 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Ibid., 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Ibid., 37–38. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Ibid., 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. According to Moshe Idel, the “Golem” first appears in the Book of Psalms (139-15), which many perceive as magical and apotropaic. See Moshe Idel, “‘Псало’ Пауля Целана: Откровение, ведущее в ничто,” [“‘Psalo’ Paulia Tselana: Otkrovenye, vedushchee v nychto/Paul Celan’s Psalm: A Revelation Leading to Nothing”], in *Пауль Целан. Материалы, исследования, воспоминания, том 1, Диалоги и переклички* [Paul Tselan. Materyalы, yssledovanyia, vospomynanyia, tom 1, Dyalohy y pereklychky/*Paul Celan: Materials, Studies, Memories*, vol. 1, *Dialogues and Roll Calls*] (Moscow: Мосты Культуры [Mosty Kultury], 2004), 307–14. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Mariano Rawicz, *Confesionario de Papel: Memorias de un inconformista* (Granada: Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno (IVAM),1997), 101–111 [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. See, for example, Ivan Lysiak- Rudnytskiy, *Історичні есе* [Istorychni ese/Historical Essays], 2 vols. (Кyiv: Дух і Літера [Duch i litera/ Spirit and Letter], 2019), who also dedicated his essay “Українські відповіді на єврейське питання” [“Ukrainski vidpovidi na yevreiske pytannia”/Ukrainian Responses to Jewish Questions] to “Pietro Rawicz, a friend from my youth,” vol. 1, 168. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. On the interplay of the ideas of B.-I. Antonycha and R. Ingarden, see *Danylo Ilnytsk, У проекції двох дзеркал: Інґарден і Антонич у феноме нологічному дискурсі* [*U proektsii dvokh dzerkal: Ingarden i Antonych u fenomenolohichnomu dyskursi/* In the projection of two mirrors: *Ingarden and Antonych in the phenomenological discourse*]. REST OF CITATION MISSING [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Roman Ingarden, *Das literarische Kunstwerk. Eine Untersuchung aus dem Grenzgebiet der Ontologie, Logik und Literaturwissenschaft* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1931) [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Ibid., Part II, “Будова літературного твору” [Budova literaturnoho tvoru/The Structure of the Literary Work]. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Ibid., Chapter 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)