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## **From Experiencing Disability to Adapting to It: Turning Points and Therapeutic Values in the Life and Work of Michał Kaziów**

**Od doznania niepełnosprawności – do przystosowania  
O punktach zwrotnych i terapeutycznych wartościach życia i twórczości  
Michała Kaziowa (13 września 1925 – 6 sierpnia 2001)**

**Abstract:** The life and literary works of Michał Kaziów (a blind amputee of both hands) have been the subject of numerous literary, psychological, pedagogical and bibliotherapeutic analyses—as expressed in scientific and journalistic publications. This article analyses the writer's life to identify turning points/epiphanies that influenced his life path and the nature of his literary expression. These considerations reference Lech Kowalewski's concept of the psychosocial process of adapting to a disability, Roman Schulz's concept of creativity and Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun's concept of post-traumatic growth. A modified model of interdisciplinary research into the writing of visually impaired authors is used in identifying the turning points in Kaziów's life and work and in determining their therapeutic importance for the writer and his readers, paying particular attention to the biographical method, critical-descriptive analysis of sources and the method of participatory observation. The research results are verified using the personal (autopsy) experience of the author of the study. It is concluded that Kaziów's life and creative output can be used in the process of biographical learning and bibliotherapeutic proceedings.

**Keywords:** multiple disabilities, literary creativity, epiphany, adaptation to disability, post-traumatic growth, bibliotherapy.

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## Introduction

The life of Michał Kaziów (13 September 1925–6 August 2001) has been described in the rich literature on the subject, including in: journalistic articles, interviews and press reports, which are often maintained in the spirit of sensationalism and build his myth; scientific and critical-literary reviews permeated with biography; as well as monographic anniversary and posthumous books.<sup>1</sup>

The life of every person consists of many events of varying significance: from those of little importance or even completely unimportant to those that serve a breakthrough function, marking the stages of human fate which diametrically change its course. In scientific considerations, these are referred to as turning points,<sup>2</sup> biographical cracks<sup>3</sup> or critical events.<sup>4</sup>

Kaziów's life story fits the characteristics of turning points proposed by Anna Izabela Brzezińska, Radosław Kaczan and Ludmiła Rycielska.<sup>5</sup> These authors emphasize that turning points: are individual; change the previous life trajectory; may have positive, negative or dual consequences; deeply transform the structure of life activities and functioning; bring relatively lasting effects; break the continuity of previous development and change its course; stimulate

- 1 Cz. Sobkowiak, *Prolegomena do Michała Kaziowa*, photograms Cz. Łuniewicz, ed. G. Chmielewski, Zielona Góra 1980; *Dla Michała Kaziowa*, ed. B. Sikora, Jaworzno 1992; *Michał Kaziów. W 70. rocznicę urodzin*, ed. E. Ćwilińska, Zielona Góra 1995; *Wywiedzione z losu. Księga jubileuszowa Michała Kaziowa*, ed. M. Mikołajczak, Zielona Góra 2000; M. Czerwińska, *Słowem potrafię wszystko. O piśmienności osób z niepełnosprawnościami wzroku. Studium bibliologiczno-tyflogiczne*, Zielona Góra 2012; R. Rudiak, *Fenomen Michała Kaziowa. Monografia*, Zielona Góra 2019.
- 2 A. Rokuszewska-Pawełek, *Chaos i przymus. Trajektorie wojenne Polaków—analiza biograficzna*, Łódź 2002.
- 3 T. Malec, *Biograficzne uczenie się osób z nabytym stygmatem*, Wrocław 2008.
- 4 H. Sęk, *Procesy twórczego zmagania się z krytycznymi wydarzeniami życiowymi a zdrowie psychiczne*, in: *Twórczość i kompetencje życiowe a zdrowie psychiczne*, ed. H. Sęk, Poznań 1991, pp. 30–41.
- 5 A. I. Brzezińska, R. Kaczan, L. Rycielska, *Przekonania o swoim życiu. Spostrzeganie historii życia przez osoby z ograniczeniami sprawności*, Warszawa 2010, pp. 96–97.

or inhibit development; lead to relatively lasting changes in the living environment; and affect self-image, perception and expectations towards other people. Striving for terminological, definitional and methodological solutions influencing the analysis of the Kaziów phenomenon, it is impossible to ignore the concept of epiphany. Graham Gibbs understands this as an episode in the biography or life history of a given person, having the nature of a turning point, dividing the life into contrasting periods—before and after the epiphany—and leading to transformation.<sup>6</sup> Norman K. Denzin believes that epiphanies are existential crises that appear at those special moments in life when a person confronts serious difficulties and experiences the effects.<sup>7</sup>

Denzin has distinguished major epiphanies, cumulative epiphanies, minor or illuminative epiphanies and relived epiphanies,<sup>8</sup> all of which can be found in Kaziów's biography. Referring to the title of the study, it should be noted that his multiple disabilities (the simultaneous loss of sight and both his hands) also justify referencing Lech Kowalewski's concept of the psychosocial process of adaptation to disability.<sup>9</sup> However, this is not the main subject of this study, but a kind of 'background' for describing the turning points in the life and work of the blind writer. The Kaziów phenomenon refers to both the trajectory of his life and his scientific and literary work as these areas were inextricably linked. The analysis of turning points must therefore be accompanied

6 G. Gibbs, *Analizowanie danych jakościowych*, tł. M. Brzozowska-Brywczyńska, Warszawa 2011, p. 254.

7 K. J. Szmidt, *Epifania i doświadczenie krystalizujące w biografii twórczej—próba zarysowania pola badawczego*, „Teraźniejszość—Człowiek—Edukacja. Kwartalnik myśli społeczno-pedagogicznej”, 15 (2012) issue 4, p. 74.

8 N. K. Denzin, *Interpretative Biography*, Newbury Park 1989.

9 L. Kowalewski, *Psychologiczna i społeczna sytuacja dzieci niepełnosprawnych*, in: *Dziecko niepełnosprawne w rodzinie*, ed. I. Obuchowska, Warszawa 1991, pp. 55–100; it is worth noting that the stages of adapting to disability have also been described by: E. Schuchardt, *A Study of 500 Biographies Coping with Crisis As a Process of Learning for Disabled and Non-disabled also in the Field of Psychiatry, Why Is this Happening to Me?*, Berlin 1989; N. Kerr, *Understanding the Process of Adjustment to Disability*, in: *Social and Psychological Aspects of Disability*, ed. J. Stubbins, Baltimore 1977, pp. 317–324.

by both the theory of post-traumatic growth by Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun,<sup>10</sup> as well as Roman Szultz's concept of work.<sup>11</sup>

In light of these theoretical assumptions, the basic research question is: What are the epiphanies/turning points in Kaziów's life and work and what is their therapeutic value?

The descriptive-critical analysis of sources covers personal documents, private correspondence, Kaziów's works and subject-related scientific and journalistic studies. According to Mieczysław Łobocki's classification of research methods and techniques, a document analysis method is applied here.<sup>12</sup> Participant observation, resulting from the author's many years of contact with Kaziów and Halina Lubicz, is also important in this study.

### **A biography as a timeline of life and work composed of turning points (epiphanies)**

Kaziów's life can be divided into two closely related and mutually interpenetrating timelines: life and work. The years 1925–1945 were filled with cumula-

- 10 R. G. Tedeschi, L. G. Calhoun, *The Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory: Measuring the Positive Legacy of Trauma*, „Journal of Traumatic Stress”, 9 (1996) issue 3, pp. 455–471, DOI: 10.1007/BF02103658. It should be added that this concept assumes that experiencing stressful events that cause suffering should be associated not only with negative consequences, but also with possible positive psychological changes concerning: self-perception (an increased sense of strength, self-worth and effectiveness), interpersonal relations (empathy, increased compassion and sensitivity to the problems of others) and changes in the philosophy of life (appreciating minor events, everyday life, putting family and friends before professional career). It is also worth mentioning that the research of Stanisława Byra is also significant for special education: S. Byra, *Niepełnosprawność ruchowa w paradygmacie pozytywnie ukierunkowanym*, Lublin 2019.
- 11 K. J. Szmidt, *Szkice do pedagogiki twórczości*, Kraków 2002; M. Czerwińska, *Słowem potrafię wszystko*, s. 11. It should be added that this concept assumes that creative (literary) activity, like other forms of human activity, always takes place under specific conditions and in a specific context and environment. There are internal, subjective conditions—the psychological environment of the creative individual (author)—and external conditions, relating to the social context in which creativity takes place. Factors that have a positive impact on creative activity are referred to as stimulants and negative factors as inhibitors of creative activity.
- 12 M. Łobocki, *Metody i techniki badań pedagogicznych*, Kraków 2000.

tive epiphanies—a series of different events which happened during his childhood, adolescence and early youth built his life—influencing its course after the major epiphany.

Michał Kaziów was born on 13 September 1925 in Koropets on the Dniester, to a patriotic, Catholic family of farmers and craftsmen. Among the significant events he experienced during World War II were: his conspiratorial activity, cooperation with a Home Army unit, deportation for forced labour, a stay in the Czerwony Prądnik camp near Kraków, escaping from the farm in Mydlniki, an attempt to return home, which was interrupted in Przemyśl, joining the army, guard duty in Wrocław and waiting for his parents to arrive. A shocking turning point in his life was the inability to return to his family home in the Borderlands, caused by political changes. However, Kaziów was destined to experience a much more tragic epiphany (the major epiphany). Namely, on 5 October 1945, during his guard duty at the Wrocław river port, 20-year-old Kaziów lost his eyesight and both hands as a result of a mine explosion. This event was undoubtedly a turning point, an experience that affected his life.

Classifying the events in the subsequent years of his life is problematic. Kaziów's narratives included in the analysed material (for instance, interviews) do not refer to all the revealed biographical facts. The information from the many conversations conducted during participant observation was invaluable. Minor and illuminative epiphanies revealing tensions and problems in everyday situations and contact with others prevailed in that period. These were most often consequences of the major epiphany. For example, Kaziów mastered operating a radio receiver without his sight and hands thanks to which he began to work with Polish Radio (initially, from 1949 to 1953, as a social field correspondent).

Another epiphany as ground-breaking as the loss of his sight and hands was Kaziów's meeting in 1953 with Halina Lubicz-Kirszke, an actress in the Poznań and, later, Zielona Góra theatres and a social activist with the Polish Association of the Blind. She inspired him, organized the challenges he undertook, guided him, took care of him and also read all his letters, press articles and even the things he wrote to him.<sup>13</sup> She persuaded him to: master the ability

13 M. Czerwińska, *Żył sobie taka komedianka*, „Pochodnia”, 6 (1991) pp. 6–8; H. R. Żuchowski, *Opowieść o niepowtarzalnym życiu Haliny Lubicz*, Lublin 2005.

to read the Louis Braille system with his upper lip; lead (1954–1955) an amateur theatre group in Bogaczów—a village near Zielona Góra, where he lived with his parents and sister; start (in 1954) a permanent collaboration (which lasted until his death) with the periodical for the blind *Pochodnia* [Torch]; and manage the district office of the Polish Association of the Blind in Poznań (1965–1967). Lubicz awakened the educational and cultural needs of the 30-year-old Kaziów, who was disabled in many ways. The subsequent stages of his education were undoubtedly major epiphanies of a positive nature. Namely, from 1955 to 1959, he studied at the Karol Marcinkowski High School No. 1 for Working People in Poznań, which he completed with distinction. From 1959 to 1964, he studied Polish philology at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, culminating in the defence of his master's thesis entitled 'The Figure of a Blind Person in the Eyes of Poets,' published by Ossolineum in 1968. In 1967, he began his doctoral studies at the Faculty of Philology, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, which culminated in 1972 in the defence of his doctoral dissertation entitled 'About the Radio Work: From the Issues of Aesthetics of the Original Radio Play,' written under the supervision of Professor Jerzy Ziomek.

Obtaining a high school diploma, a master's degree and a doctoral degree through heroic work and the great mental and physical effort of Kaziów and Lubicz (with the involvement of her mother and husband) is not just a series of turning points in his life. They are testimony to the fortitude of spirit, the immensity of selfless human sacrifice and also victory over social stereotypes. It was not a complete victory. Unfortunately, Kaziów, a qualified teacher of Polish, was only allowed to work (voluntarily) at a school for one year (1964–1965) and he was never employed at a university, despite having a doctorate in a very rare subject—the aesthetics of the original radio play.

Therefore, he engaged in scholarly, research, reviewing, journalistic and literary work. He actively participated in local and national cultural, literary, journalistic and social events (including those for the visually impaired). Kaziów's subsequent minor epiphanies were as follows: from 1964 to 1992, he managed the quarterly *Niewidomy Masażysta* [The Blind Masseur]; from 1968 to 1994, he ran a regular column called 'Włącz radio' [Turn on the Radio] in the magazine *Gazeta Zielonogórska* (later *Gazeta Lubuska*), in which he published 875 weekly columns/reviews of broadcasts (mainly radio plays) on Polish Radio; and from 1975 to 1982, he worked closely with the literary editorial office

of the Zielona Góra Polish Radio station, assessing the issues and artistic quality of radio plays, mainly by writers from the Lubusz region, and the value of literary reports broadcast locally. His research activity resulted in monographs and articles in recognized scholarly, literary and professional periodicals.<sup>14</sup> His literary activity covered novels, collections of short stories and feuilletons<sup>15</sup> published in various publishing formats. His scholarly and literary publications allowed him to join the Young Writers' Circle at the Board of the Polish Writers Association, Zielona Góra branch (1970–1974). From 1974 to 1992, he was a full member of this association.<sup>16</sup> From 1992 to 2001, like many Polish writers, Kaziów changed his affiliation to the Poznań branch of the Polish Writers Association.<sup>17</sup> The turning points here were that he changed his worldview and, above all, that a writer with multiple disabilities joined a creative union/association in times when such people were rather stigmatized and socially isolated.

In that period, turning points (both positive and negative) can also be indicated in the trajectory of the writer's personal, private life. Among the most tragic ones, which can be defined as a major epiphany, was the deteriorating health and then death of Lubicz (1991), which was undoubtedly a psychological drama for the writer that reorganized his life. A positive turning point was his marriage to Stefania Klimkowska, who was a caring and dedicated life companion. She provided the writer with favourable conditions for further creative work and enriched his life with experiences resulting from the role of husband, head of the family, stepfather and grandfather.

A turning point of dual value occurred at the end of Kaziów's life. This was the cornea transplant by Professor W. Łantuch at the Institute of Eye Microsurgery in Novosibirsk which brought limited, short-term effects.

Considering Kaziów's death (2001) in terms of turning points (epiphanies) seems controversial. It remains indisputable, however, that his passing can be perceived as an unpleasant life event for many people (particularly those with

14 *Wywiedzione z losu. Księga jubileuszowa Michała Kaziowa*; M. Czerwińska, *Słowem potrafię wszystko*; R. Rudiak, *Fenomen Michała Kaziowa. Monografia*.

15 M. Czerwińska, *Słowem potrafię wszystko*.

16 BdPP, inventory no. 1805, Kaziów Michał, Teczka personalna członka Związku Literatów Polskich.

17 The Polish Writers Association did not keep official records of its members.



disabilities) for whom the writer—with his complicated biography and multi-genre works—was a significant person.

### **A biography from the perspective of the psychosocial process of adapting to disability**

The life course of a person with a disability is characterized by the stages of adapting to disability, described many times in pedagogical and psychological literature, encompassing numerous phenomena in the psychological and social spheres, specific to each stage, and comparable to turning points/epiphanies.

In Lech Kowalewski's concept, this process begins with the stage of experiencing disability. In the psychological sphere, it is dominated by psychological shock, depersonalization, disorientation of personality, somatic experiences (for example, pain) and the deprivation of needs. In the social dimension, it is characterized by isolation from the family and social environment, as well as exposure to so-called iatrogenic factors.<sup>18</sup>

In Kaziów's life, this period covers the years 1945 and 1946, when he stayed in a Wrocław hospital. He experienced shock after losing his eyesight and hands, physical pain, 'disembodied pain' (as Kaziów called it), uncertainty about the near and distant future caused by the extensive disability, helplessness, dependence on others, a sense of hopelessness giving rise to suicidal thoughts and a lack of information about the fate of his parents.

Kowalewski describes the stage of 'realizing limitations' as consisting of mutually conditioning psychosocial phenomena such as the 'stiffening' of the value system, the collapse of the previous system of values, goals and tasks, lower self-esteem, the occurrence of depressive states, an unsatisfied need for affiliation and a lack of identification with the problem of one's disability and the environment of people affected by it.<sup>19</sup> This stage of Kaziów's life lasted from 1946 to 1952, when he stayed in Bogaczów on his parents' farm. At that time, he thought a lot about his lost abilities and life plans, struggled

18 L. Kowalewski, *Psychologiczna i społeczna sytuacja dzieci niepełnosprawnych*, pp. 61–65.

19 Ibidem, pp. 68–78.



with the hostile attitudes of the rural community and desperately searched for medical and rehabilitation help. In one of the interviews, Kaziów recalls:

In the beginning, my life really looked quite miserable. I could not come to terms with my disability. My parents were a great support for me as they tried to make me not feel that I was disabled. My father read a lot to me.<sup>20</sup>

The breakthrough stage in the psychosocial process of adapting to disability is that of 'attempts to function with disability,' characterized by the impact of intrapsychic defence mechanisms. This involves striving for positive mechanisms to be dominant. These include compensation, overcompensation, rationalization, transformation of the value system and identification which in turn conditions the achievement of the final stage of this process.<sup>21</sup> In Kaziów's life, this stage spanned from 1953 to 1959. It began when he mastered the ability to independently operate a radio receiver, yet was dominated by contact with Halina Lubicz-Kirszke when he learned to read the Braille system with his upper lip, engage in recitation activity and made the first reviews of radio broadcasts and correspondence for the Braille press. At that time, he also tried to wear hand prostheses for the first time and worked at a weaving workshop, established his first personal contacts with the community of blind people and took part in some of its activities. This stage ended with the final examination at an evening high school in Poznań. Kaziów confesses:

Mrs Lubicz [...] mobilized me to take action immediately. When she sent the Braille alphabet, I slowly began to learn it. With the help of my father, I memorized each letter and within a week, I had a precise image of the dotted script for the blind in my memory. However, it took me at least three months to feel the letters by touching them with my lips and read them. Thanks to my perseverance, I managed to read, slowly, but

20 M. Kaziów, *Rozjaśnianie mroku. O motywacjach twórczych i warsztacie autorskim*, interview E. Ćwilińska, in: *Michał Kaziów. W 70. rocznicę urodzin*, pp. 22–34.

21 L. Kowalewski, *Psychologiczna i społeczna sytuacja dzieci niepełnosprawnych*, pp. 78–91.

I did read. As I could read Braille, I focused on the text and my own interpretation, I remembered the spelling and orthography. [...] At the beginning of 1954, Mrs Lubicz came to Bogaczów. [...] This was my first meeting with her. Shortly after that, at her invitation, I went to Poznań, where I met other blind people. [...] Mrs Lubicz strongly involved me in the life of the blind and, seeing my great persistence, she began to help me get a secondary education.<sup>22</sup>

The last stage of adapting to disability mentioned by Kowalewski is that of full, real acceptance of disability, conditioned by the inclusion of disability as an integral personality feature, the formation of a system of values and motivations, the stabilization of self-esteem and social functioning based on the principles of integration/inclusion. In Kaziów's life, this stage covered the years 1959–2001, from when he began his Polish studies at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań until his death. His professional, creative, scientific and social activity showed that he fully accepted his disability.

### **Biography: literary achievements and craftsmanship**

Kaziów's creative activity reflects his life. Therefore, his publications of a scholarly (three monographs), literary (three novels, four volumes of short stories, one volume of feuilletons—in five publishing formats) and journalistic nature (including approximately 900 critical and radio feuilletons) were the turning points in his life.<sup>23</sup> The writer implemented two closely related types of discourse: critical research and literary, which resulted from epiphanies and were a manifestation of his post-traumatic growth. The first includes his scholarly publications. His published master's thesis entitled 'The Figure of a Blind Person in the Eyes of Poets' went beyond the assumptions of literary studies, asking about the participation of poetry in the process of social re-adaptation of the blind.<sup>24</sup> His doctoral dissertation, 'On the Radio Work: From the Issues

22 *Rozjaśnianie mroku*, pp. 22–34.

23 M. Czerwińska, *Słowem potrafię wszystko*.

24 M. Kaziów, *Postać niewidomego w oczach poetów*, Wrocław 1968.

of the Aesthetics of the Original Radio Play,' is a theoretical and literary monograph, the first and, so far, only work of this type.<sup>25</sup> Kaziów continued this writing trend in his work 'Zielona Góra's Theatre of Imagination,' which discusses the artistic activity of the Zielona Góra Polish Radio station,<sup>26</sup> and in his 'Turn on the Radio' reviews/columns in the local daily press.

The literary discourse of Kaziów's writing is based on his autobiography, according to which: 'we are no longer interested in the author only as the subject of statements or the subject of creative activities, but increasingly as a living person with a soul, body and fate.'<sup>27</sup> This can be applied to the writer's fictionalized autobiography,<sup>28</sup> the fictionalized biographies of Jan Silhan<sup>29</sup> and Włodzimierz Dolański,<sup>30</sup> and four volumes of short stories.<sup>31</sup> The writer preferred writing stories based on real events and human fates as this type of writing enabled communication with the reader to the fullest. He used simple, conversational, common language imitating spoken narration. His work was guided by the old principle: *movere, delectare, docere* [to move, to delight, to teach].

### **A life preserved in a literary narrative about oneself**

Kaziów's autobiographical novel entitled 'Gdy moim oczom' [When Before My Eyes]<sup>32</sup> should be considered a turning point (a relived epiphany) in his life. This fictionalized prose covers his early, pre-war childhood in the Eastern Borderlands until the defence of his doctoral thesis in 1972, so it refers to all types

25 Idem, *O dziele radiowym. Z zagadnień estetyki oryginalnego słuchowiska*, Wrocław 1973.

26 Idem, *Zielonogórski Teatr Wyobraźni*, Zielona Góra 1980.

27 J. Abramowska, *A jednak autor*, „Teksty Drugie”, 2 (1994) pp. 47–53.

28 M. Kaziów, *Gdy moim oczom*, Warszawa 1985.

29 Idem, *A jednak w pamięci. Opowieść biograficzna o ociemniałym kapitanie wojsk austriackich i polskich—Janie Silhanie*, Warszawa 1994.

30 Idem, *Dłoń na dźwiękach*, Lublin 1998.

31 Idem, *Zdeptanego podnieść*, Warszawa 1988; idem, *Z orchideą. Opowiadania*, Zielona Góra 1995; idem, *Piętna miłości*, Zielona Góra 1996; idem, *Pod tęczę*, Zielona Góra 2000.

32 Idem, *Gdy moim oczom*.

of epiphanies. The novel contains an in-depth analysis of the mental states of the blinded author at all stages of the psychosocial process of adapting to disability. Its guiding idea is the author's bold statement: 'I am blind, it is true, I have no hands, it is true, but my personality is that of a man with five senses.'<sup>33</sup> The publisher of Kaziów's autobiographical book aptly notes:

'This is the attitude of a reconciled rationalist who stubbornly destroys the barriers of otherness and effectively mocks every false note of compassion and gesture of philanthropy. He seeks broad contacts with people and builds his existence primarily on his effort.'<sup>34</sup>

The author's extensive correspondence contains positive opinions of readers about this kind of testimony to the writer's life and its literary version. For example, Maria Kuncewiczowa states: 'I thank you and your co-creators of the human being with all my heart for the lesson of perseverance and the sign of friendship.' Cardinal Henryk Gulbinowicz states: 'I read the doctor's autobiographical novel with emotion. I admire your power and the noble zeal of persevering on the path of life with everyone.'<sup>35</sup>

### **A biography or 'A blind man about blind people'**

The figure of a blind person was at the centre of Kaziów's literary fascinations. He also transferred his experiences, which stemmed from epiphanies, to his biographical works about people from the Polish blind community.<sup>36</sup> The common theme of the life paths of his characters, Włodzimierz Dolański and Jan

33 Ibidem, p. 141.

34 Tenże, *Gdy moim oczom*.

35 Arch. M. K., Michał Kaziów, Korespondencja 1985–1989, rps.

36 Doctor Włodzimierz Dolański (1886–1973)—a blind, one-armed virtuoso pianist, typhlopedagogue, activist of the Polish and global movement of the blind; the protagonist of Kaziów's story entitled '*Dłoń na dźwiękach*' [A Hand on Sounds]. Captain Jan Silhan (1889–1971)—a blind officer of the Austrian and Polish armies, a carer for and rehabilitator of blind soldiers, the initiator of the central Braille library and the Kraków massage school for the blind; the protagonist of Kaziów's story entitled '*A jednak w pamięci*' [And Yet in Memory].

Silhan, is the constant struggle with adversity, not only for self-fulfilment but also in the interest of all people with visual disabilities. Both protagonists are connected not only by historical and social realities but, above all, by the same steadfast character, unyieldingness in the face of unkind fate, psychological resistance to difficult situations and determination in action as a reaction to critical life events. This is well illustrated by the words Kaziów experienced as true during his long-lasting relationship with Lubicz: ‘... sacrificing oneself for another person can completely fulfil the meaning of a person’s life. Encouraging people with a good word, giving them hope and leading them on the right path can be the highest reward from life.’<sup>37</sup>

Kaziów saw an analogy between Dolański’s and his fate, which he summed up as follows:

Similarities, if any, concern fate and struggling with it. That is why I had the right to put into the mouth of Dolański, a historical figure, some of my thoughts, feelings, sensations and experiences, which I did not want to reveal in my autobiography (‘When Before My Eyes’—the author’s note), I could also gift him with my dreams. In this sphere, suspicions of analogies are indeed justified.<sup>38</sup>

This is why Dolański’s life motto fully corresponds to Kaziów and Silhan’s life attitude: ‘You will be a mountain, a high mountain, hard, untrampled and uncuttable, but only if you have a good heart, a wise mind and a strong will.’<sup>39</sup>

The story about Silhan also contains many very personal reflections of the author. For example, Silhan’s experiences caused by an unfavourable ophthalmological diagnosis and belonging to the stage of experiencing disability, are extremely realistic because they are based on the author’s own experiences:

He will never see. This news fell on his head like an avalanche. [...] Now a different kind of darkness took over his head and his whole body. He

37 M. Kaziów, *A jednak w pamięci*, p. 54.

38 Tenże, *Chcę pisać o człowieku*, rozm. M. Czerwińska, „Pochodnia”, 12 (1992) p. 33.

39 Tenże, *Dłoń na dźwiękach*, p. 54.

began to complain why such a terrible fate befell him. Maybe it would be better to die! [...] Everything collapsed. It was irretrievably lost. He saw no place for himself in this world, no future. Everything was lost. His whole life! He thought about all this at the speed of light. [...] He felt terribly lonely, only left with his misfortune, which was now growing bigger and bigger. [...] He felt lost, almost like a child. Now he regretted everything. He said the worst things to himself and was surprised that they came to his mind. [...] He was even terrified by the assumption that this was not some kind of punishment for sins. [...] At night he was overcome by fears and bad premonitions that he would not be able to do anything in life. [...] All dreams and plans sank into some unreal space.<sup>40</sup>

This literary description of the emotional states of a newly blind person is confirmed by the many narratives of people in whose lives the sudden loss of vision was the major epiphany (including the author of the article) and by studies, including those by Thomas Carroll<sup>41</sup> and Tadeusz Majewski.<sup>42</sup>

### **A biography filled with universal values**

The mutual interpenetration of turning points (epiphanies) and universal values provokes Kaziów to 'examine his conscience, life attitudes and choices' in his work. Reaching for universal values, the writer does not ignore the sphere of religion and the dogmas of faith. The problem of the relationship between man and God permeates all of his prose, revealing itself with particular intensity in his feuilletons,<sup>43</sup> primarily those printed in the regular column 'Słuchokrąg' [Listening Circle] in the periodical *Aspekty* [Aspects] (a diocesan supplement to the Catholic weekly *Niedziela* [Sunday]). The writer included many personal confessions in them. He examined his conscience and his political past. He recalled the time when he left the Church. He confessed, among

40 M. Kaziów, *A jednak w pamięci*, pp. 28–29.

41 T. J. Carroll, *Blindness. What It Is, what It Does, and how to Live with It*, Boston–Toronto 1961.

42 T. Majewski, *Psychologia niewidomych i niedowidzących*, Warszawa 1983.

43 M. Kaziów, *Ślady na sercu*, Zielona Góra 1998.

other things: 'Thanks to grace, I am again close to the Cross and draw strength from this source of faith.'<sup>44</sup>

The turning point in Kaziów's life and work was the extremely personal feuilleton 'Ujawnienie' [Disclosure], which contains his confessions relating to the issue of faith:

How much can be learned about a person from the prayer 'Our Father'? What does it really mean: 'As we forgive those who trespass against us'? Do we really forgive and when? Or: 'Lead us not into temptation.' Are we resistant? Aren't we leading others astray? If we can answer such questions, our knowledge of the world expands. [...] The worldview I have abandoned can hardly be called agnosticism. I was simply religiously indifferent from the end of the 1950s—because before that I had been a believer, which I owe to my family upbringing and Father Fedorowicz in Laski. In 1991, Halina fell seriously ill and went to confession. And so did I. Since then, I have known that if Jesus is the greatest good shepherd, then if I do not believe in Him, I myself will not be a good shepherd. [...] On Good Friday 1991, I listened to the Way of the Cross from the Vatican, led by John Paul II. His prayer at each station reflected the enormity of Christ's suffering. It had a shocking effect on me. The voice of the Holy Father, full of humility and deep faith, testifying that suffering is salvific, made me pray so that I could understand what this salvific gift of suffering was. I cried while praying. [...] When I think about my book 'When Before My Eyes', I feel a bit sorry that I was unable to express the whole truth about my struggle. In fact, it was not from my own will, but from prayer that I drew strength to live and work.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, Kaziów, with his life and work marked by epiphanies, opposes manifestations of hypocrisy, falsehood and nihilism, proclaiming that 'the basic value is universalism, which encompasses life and death, faith and truth, love and goodness.'<sup>46</sup>

44 M. Mikołajczak, *Dać świadectwo. O felietonistyce Michała Kaziowa*, in: *Wywiedzione z losu. Księga jubileuszowa Michała Kaziowa*, p. 38.

45 M. Kaziów, *Ujawnienie*, in: M. Kaziów, *Ślady na sercu*, Zielona Góra 1998, pp. 21–23.

46 M. Mikołajczak, *Dać świadectwo*, pp. 29–40.



### **Biography: rehabilitation and work techniques**

The multitude of turning points in Kaziów's life influenced, referring to Roman Schulz's concept of creativity, the subjective and extra-subjective conditions of creative activity, taking the form of its stimulants and inhibitors.<sup>47</sup> His daily functioning consisted of minor epiphanies. The writer required constant help in everyday activities, collaboration with a radio presenter and a guide. His apartment was equipped with sanitary facilities, a telephone and a watch, adapted for use by a blind person and amputee of both hands.

The place where he worked had a radio tape recorder set with foot pedals, an Uher-5000 Universal Akustomat, adapted for use with his foot, the stumps of his hands and parts of his face (lips, chin and nose).

Kaziów's tape recordings were characterized by precisely formulated thoughts, great verbal order and logic of expression. To facilitate collaboration with radio presenters, the author arranged the recorded topics in a specific order by numbering them. He knew perfectly well where radio presenters should look for individual books and documents.<sup>48</sup>

### **A biography or authenticity of a significant person**

Being aware of the extraordinary nature of his fate and the wealth of experiences from his psychosocial rehabilitation, Kaziów did not shy away from taking on the role of a significant person for those who found themselves in a so-called difficult situation, not only because of illness and disability. This is evidenced by, for example, many years of activity in the Polish Association of the Blind, numerous meet-the-author sessions, extensive correspondence with readers (especially after the publication of his autobiography 'When Before My Eyes'), a series of broadcasts-talks with listeners on *Radio Zachód* [Radio West], as well as subject-related scientific, journalistic and literary studies, biographical entries in information publications and entries in general and specialist encyclopaedias, dictionaries, lexicons and information guides. He was

47 M. Czerwińska, *Słowem potrafię wszystko*, p. 11.

48 Eadem, *Słowem potrafię wszystko*.

granted many state and regional decorations, awards and distinctions for his creative and social activity.<sup>49</sup> The writer perceived these biographical facts as positive turning points in his life.

Kaziów treated meet-the-author sessions as particularly special events. Many years of participant observation by the author of the article show that they were enjoyed by many groups of recipients. The writer was extremely communicative and touched upon the issues of disability and the need to overcome social stereotypes. He shared the knowledge of a person experiencing disability. He talked about his scholarly and literary path. Kaziów pointed out that a person should have goals to strive for and set themselves high standards. He often spoke honestly about his return to God and the essence of faith. He emphasized the therapeutic significance of creativity in his life and spoke about internal maturation, the effort he took to work on self-development and reach the fullness of humanity. He emphasized the importance and support of Lubicz's family, who participated in many meet-the-author sessions. Another form of meeting with readers was radio broadcasts on Radio Zachód's night series entitled 'Nocne marki' [Night Owls] and on the religious and political socially conservative Polish radio station Radio Maryja. The audience recognized him as a man of high personal culture, tact, politeness and sensitivity.<sup>50</sup>

The fact that Kaziów played the role of a significant person confirms that he achieved the final stage of the psychosocial process of adapting to disability (the stage of full, actual acceptance of disability). This is proven not only by biographical artefacts but also by his literary and non-literary statements/narrations. The following words illustrate his reserved attitude towards disability (including his own):

I have also had many bitter and painful experiences that result from social ignorance about people with disabilities. In some of my books, throughout my social work, I try to convince people that there are no hopeless situations and that one should never give up. I convince people with disabilities that any, even the greatest disability, can be overcome by the power of one's will, mind and heart. And I ask healthy people to change their

49 Ibidem.

50 Ibidem.

attitude towards people with disabilities so that their families do not feel ashamed of them. And to help them only when it is necessary.<sup>51</sup>

How different I am now. I am not ashamed of my disability. I can laugh and joke. But would it be possible without a helping human hand?<sup>52</sup>

He expressed his desire to build inclusive social relations by confessing: 'When I have people in front of me, I know that if I cry, I will cry alone. But when I smile, everyone smiles.'<sup>53</sup> He expressed his duty to the world, God, and people as follows: 'I would gladly give up my five senses, including those I do not have, to possess the sixth, which allows me to penetrate another person and help them effectively.'<sup>54</sup> He understood his literary 'mission' as follows: 'The truth is what is born of emotions. You just need to let them flow, let them carry you away. I always know one thing—I want to write about man.'<sup>55</sup>

Kaziów is predisposed to the role of a significant person not only by his life, rich in numerous turning points, but also by his experiences of post-traumatic growth resulting from these epiphanies. Gerald Caplan, Viktor Frankl and, later, Richard Tedeschi, Lawrence Calhoun and Kazimierz Popielski<sup>56</sup> state that post-traumatic growth is characterized by changes in interpersonal relationships, self-perception and the philosophy of life. Kaziów had greater ease in establishing close relationships with others, discovering in himself greater reserves of sensitivity and compassion for others. He found within himself the strength to look at his life from a distance and change it for the better. He perceived family, friends and small everyday pleasures as important, often primary, values. He demonstrated an increased sense of personal strength, the conviction of his

51 M. Kaziów, *Rozum widzi, serce czuje*, interview J. Koniusz, in: *Wywiedzione z losu. Księga jubileuszowa Michała Kaziowa*, p. 15.

52 Idem, *Gdy moim oczom*, p. 85.

53 H. Szczepański, *Michał Kaziów, czyli jak widzieć, nie posługując się oczyma*, „Niedziela”, 35 (2003), [http://www.niedziela.pl/artukul\\_w\\_niedzieli.php?doc=nd200335&nr=22](http://www.niedziela.pl/artukul_w_niedzieli.php?doc=nd200335&nr=22), accessed: 15.06.2023.

54 TN, *Światło jest w ludziach... Wspomnienie o Michale Kaziowie*, [http://www.nasze-sprawy.nazwa.pl/docs/67/67\\_pdf\\_9.pdf](http://www.nasze-sprawy.nazwa.pl/docs/67/67_pdf_9.pdf), accessed: 15.06.2023.

55 M. Kaziów, *Chcę pisać o człowieku*, p. 34.

56 K. Popielski, *Psychologia egzystencji. Wartości w życiu*, Lublin 2009.

effectiveness and greater confidence in himself and his abilities. He noticed his increased coping skills and competences and set himself new goals. He appreciated life to a greater extent and lived it more consciously.

### **Therapeutic functions of Michał Kaziów's works**

Therapeutic values are embedded in both the course of Kaziów's life and the literary works that reflect it. His works can be assigned many functions:

- counteracting negative emotional states and defence mechanisms as reactions to disability;
- shaping appropriate attitudes towards oneself and one's disability and helping to achieve a psychosocial state of full acceptance of disability;
- shaping appropriate social attitudes towards people with disabilities;
- stimulating and developing interests in people with disabilities;
- supporting the process of acquiring and improving skills;
- providing rational knowledge about disability and forms of support;
- mitigating the psychosocial effects of the ageing process;
- inspiring reflection on the chosen systems of ethical and moral values and the nature of social interactions;
- helping to define one's attitude towards religious dogmas, God and faith in life;
- supporting the process of resocialization of socially maladjusted people.

Narrowing the considerations to bibliotherapeutic effects, it is necessary to indicate that Kaziów's biographical facts and literary statements can be used in bibliotherapeutic models towards, for example:

- blind people (including the newly blinded) who cannot adapt to disability;
- people affected by gradual loss of vision;
- students with a visual impairment who cannot function in a mainstream school (inclusive education);
- parents who cannot adapt to the disability (visual, motor) of their child;
- people in a difficult psychological situation, who require a transformation of the value system;
- people who do not accept the psychosocial effects of the ageing process.<sup>57</sup>

57 M. Czerwińska, *Słowa, które leczą. O biblioterapeutycznej wartości prozy Michała Kaziowa*, in: *Wywiedzione z losu. Księga jubileuszowa Michała Kaziowa*, pp. 41–54.

## Conclusions

The analysis of Kaziów's life and work, conducted from the perspective of turning points (epiphanies), reveals developmental, situational, existential and environmental crises in his life.<sup>58</sup> The critical life events experienced by the writer had a dual nature, leading to self-creation.<sup>59</sup> Writing and direct encounters with people were the meaning of Kaziów's life. As he treated existence as a task, realized through self-creation and the development of one's abilities, and thanks to his life and works marked by turning points, he became a 'therapist' for others (for example, his readers) and for himself. This therapeutic function was served not only by the written message, which was represented by 'wisdom' literature, containing life truths, the centre of which was man and the desire to share what is most valuable: faith, truth and experience but also by the verbal message, which involved speaking and listening.<sup>60</sup>

Kaziów's works and life reveal an extraordinary consistency; the desire to be as close to difficult human matters as possible. He therefore spoke on the topics of faith, family, illness and suffering. His literary work and the literature on his subject create the possibility of indirect, that is, biographical learning, which can be used in the upbringing, education and therapy of people with and without disabilities.<sup>61</sup>

The research concept used in these considerations should be treated as a supplement to the previously developed research model, referring to interdisciplinary research on the literacy of people with disabilities (visual impairment).<sup>62</sup> Thus, a new interdisciplinary (pedagogical, biographical and

58 R. K. James, B. E. Gilliland, *Strategie interwencji kryzysowej*, trans. A. Bidziński, K. Mazurek, Warszawa 2004, p. 28; A. Lipczyński, *Psychologiczna interwencja w sytuacjach kryzysowych*, Warszawa 2007, p. 19; E. Stanisławiak, *Psychologia kryzysu*, in: *Psychologia kryzysu i interwencji kryzysowej*, ed. J. Plak, Warszawa 2012, p. 7.

59 H. Sęk, *Procesy twórczego zmagania się z krytycznymi wydarzeniami żywotowymi a zdrowie psychiczne*, in: *Twórczość i kompetencje życiowe a zdrowie psychiczne*, ed. H. Sęk, Poznań 1991, pp. 32–33.

60 M. Mikołajczak, *Dać świadectwo*, pp. 29–40.

61 T. Malec, *Biograficzne uczenie się osób z nabytym stygmatem*.

62 M. Czerwińska, *Słowem potrafię wszystko*.

bibliological) perspective opens up for the study of the lives and literary works of authors with disabilities. Referring to Kaziów, Czesław Sobkowiak states:

Here is a man who was born twice. Once he was born of his mother and the second time of himself, of his desire to live, to struggle towards life. And at these second beginnings, he was also defenceless, exhausted and withdrawn to the stage of infancy.<sup>63</sup>

These words remain true for the fates of many artists whose lives and works are marked by turning points.

**Streszczenie:** Życie i twórczość literacką Michała Kaziówna (osoby ociemniałej, amputanta obu rąk) poddawano licznym analizom literaturoznawczym, psychologicznym, pedagogicznym, biblioterapeutycznym—co wyraziło się w publikacjach naukowych i publicystycznych. W niniejszym opracowaniu proponuje się analizę biografii pisarza, zmierzającą do wskazania punktów zwrotnych/epifanii i ich wpływu na przebieg drogi życiowej oraz charakter ekspresji literackiej. W toku rozważań odwołano się do koncepcji psychospołecznego procesu przystosowania do niepełnosprawności Lecha Kowalewskiego, koncepcji twórczości Romana Schulza oraz koncepcji wzrostu potraumatycznego Richarda Tedeschiego i Lawrence’a Calhouna. W identyfikowaniu punktów zwrotnych w biografii i twórczości Kaziówna oraz określaniu ich terapeutycznego znaczenia dla pisarza i jego czytelników posłużono się zmodyfikowanym modelem interdyscyplinarnych badań nad piśmiennictwem autorów z niepełnosprawnością wzroku, szczególną wagę przywiązując do metody biograficznej, krytyczno-opisowej analizy źródeł oraz obserwacji uczestniczącej. Uzyskane wyniki poddano weryfikacji, wykorzystując osobiste (z autopsji) doświadczenia autorki opracowania. Wskazano na zasadność odwołania się do biografii i dorobku twórczego Kaziówna w procesie uczenia się biograficznego oraz postępowania biblioterapeutycznego.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Niepełnosprawność wieloraka, twórczość literacka, epifania, przystosowanie do niepełnosprawności, wzrost potraumatyczny, biblioterapia.

63 Cz. Sobkowiak, *Prolegomena do Michała Kaziówna*.

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