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Protagonist and setting in the short story "The Greater Punishment" by Marek S. Huberath

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Abstract

The article presents an interpretation of one of Marek S. Huberath's first published short stories, which is also one of his first "eschatological" fictions (texts set in the after-world). The article analyses how the protagonist, who finds himself in a combination of hell and purgatory, wastes his chance to mend his ways and stays within a potentially endless cycle of sin and punishment. The spatial setting of the story becomes a metaphorical reflection first of the character's opportunity and then of its loss. The story thus seems to suggest the idea that an inveterate sinner suffers a potentially endless punishment because, in spite of retaining free will, he keeps making the same wrong choices.

Key words

Huberath, "The Greater Punishment", space, hell, moral transformation

Protagonista i miejsce akcji w opowiadaniu Marka S. Huberatha *Kara większa*

Abstrakt

Artykuł przedstawia interpretację jednego z pierwszych opowiadań Marka S. Huberatha, stanowiącego zarazem jedną z jego pierwszych „fikcji eschatologicznych" (tekstów osadzonych w zaświatach). Artykuł analizuje, w jaki sposób główny bohater, który trafia do miejsca łączącego w sobie piekło i czyściec, marnuje szansę, aby naprawić swoje postępowanie i nadal tkwi w potencjalnie nieskończonym cyklu grzechu i kary. Tło przestrzenne opowiadania staje się metaforycznym odzwierciedleniem najpierw szansy stojącej przed bohaterem, a potem jej utraty. W ten sposób opowiadanie zdaje się wskazywać, iż niepoprawny grzesznik ponosi potencjalnie nieskończoną karę pomimo zachowania wolnej woli, ponieważ wciąż dokonuje tych samych błędnych wyborów.

Słowa kluczowe

Huberath, *Kara większa*, przestrzeń, piekło, przemiana moralna

1. The protagonist and the other world

1.1. Marek S. Huberath is a Polish science fiction and fantasy writer whose literary output, though limited in scope, merits scholarly attention for its extremely imaginative and intriguing ideas. This article, however, will not deal with any of his major novels. Instead, its aim is to focus on one of Huberath's early short stories, "The Greater Punishment" ("Kara większa"), which, in its time (the first version was published in 1991), attracted considerable attention and even aroused some controversy due to its decidedly pro-life content. The story has been, in fact, translated into English and included in the collection *The Dedalus Book of Polish Fantasy*.[1]

[1] Although an English translation of the story exists, I will use my own rendering whenever I quote the text under discussion. Also, all quotations of

This article aims to analyse the spatial setting of the world presented in Huberath's short story and the way that space is related to the main character's development in the course of the plot. For the purposes of the analysis to follow, a narratological framework will be adopted. Following Uri Mardolin, quoted by Fotis Jannidis, I understand by character "a general semiotic element, independent of any particular verbal expression and ontologically different from it" (2013: 11). Jannidis also points out that "Even some of those who have claimed that character is a paradigm of traits assume that there exists a cultural code making it possible to perceive these traits as a meaningful whole," citing Lotman as an example (2013: 14).

In a different context, Marie-Laure Ryan also cites Lotman as one of the first who "showed that in literary texts, especially poetry, spatial oppositions such as high and low, right-left, near-far or open-closed are invested with non-spatial meaning, such as valuable-non-valuable, good-bad, accessible-inaccessible, or mortal-immortal" (2014: 18). Out of these "spatial oppositions" that may bear "non-spatial meaning," two will be of special interest to us: "high and low" and "open-closed."

Other terms proposed by Ryan will also be useful in this study. The researcher uses the term *narrative space* to refer to the broadest spectrum of spatial phenomena within any fictional universe, i.e. without any references to the space of the medium in which a text is embedded (paper, layout, typography etc.) – she calls these physical aspects of a text the *spatial extension of the text* (2014: 12–13) – or to the physical space to which a text refers, in which it is read etc. (she covers this aspect of a text's spatiality with the descriptive term *space that serves as context and container for the text* [2014: 4–17]); my focus will be mainly on *narrative space* as such.[2] Ryan

Polish sources are provided in my translation.

[2] Apart from narrative space, spatial extension of the text and space as context and container for the text, Ryan also proposes the term spatial form of the text, by which she means "any kind of design formed by networks of semantic, phonetic or more broadly thematic relations between non-adjacent

subdivides the term into *spatial frames*, *setting*, *story space*, *narrative world* and *narrative universe* (2014: 5–11). For the purposes of this study, I shall take the liberty to simplify this terminology by subsuming *setting*, *narrative space* and *narrative world* under the common heading *setting*, the definitions of the above three terms being sufficiently similar and sufficiently general to justify such a conflation. By *settting*, then, I will understand the sum of all intratextual spacial phenomena – both indicated and implied – along with all inferences regarding the spatial dimension of the world presented made by the reader based on their general knowledge (that is, even if a spatial element is neither mentioned nor alluded to in the text itself).

Narrative universe is a term that refers to "the world (in the spatio-temporal sense of the term) presented as actual by the text, plus all the counterfactual worlds constructed by characters as beliefs, wishes, fears, speculations, hypothetical thinking, dreams, and fantasies" (Ryan 2014: 10). However, it seems to me that the concept of *narrative universe*, rather than being narrowed down to the spatial dimension of the actual and potential worlds within the fictional universe, should encom-pass those possible worlds in all their dimensions. The reason for this is the fact that such dream-worlds, hope-worlds or fear-worlds may often not involve any spatial dimension, while still being salient for the story (e.g. when a character asks him- or herself questions such as "will I come out of this alive?" or "whom will I marry?"). Therefore, the term *narrative universe* will not be used in this study.

This, then, leaves us with two main concepts within the general idea of *setting*: *spatial frames* and *story space*. *Spatial frames*, understood as the background of particular scenes (Ryan 2014: 6) – whether described in detail in the narrative or barely sketched in – will be at the core of the analysis as I shall argue that these carry metaphorical meaning exactly because of their correlation with given scenes. The concept of *story space*

textual units" (2014: 16). It is, as she admits, a metaphorical aspect of a text's spatiality, and it will not be relevant to the present research.

will also be relevant, insofar as it includes both *presented* (i.e. described) space and *implied* space (i.e. only named or alluded to) (Ryan 2014: 8). Both presented and implied space will be relevant to the present study inasmuch as they are relevant to the character's actions, plans etc. Also, *spatial frames* may have a virtual aspect to them, since they may not always be described in detail (making them partly *implied*), and yet retain their relevance to the story.

1.2. Overall, it will be argued that the spatial frames serve as a metaphorical reflection of the meanings that can be identified by analysing the protagonist's characteristics. The discussion will start with a plot summary and then go on to profiling the protagonist's character traits. As will be shown, the main figure's characterisation highlights his negative side, while also presenting him as a person faced with an opportunity for a change, who nevertheless does not use that opportunity properly. The spatial setting is endowed with metaphorical significance by correlating a large space with that part of the plot which deals with the main character's chance for moral improvement; and correlating a confined space with that part of the plot which shows the character as receiving punishment for his misdeeds. The plot depicts the character's movement from the limited space to the relatively open space and back to the confined space, and it is arguably this movement that metaphorically indicates the man's wasted chance. Apart from that, the article will also seek to prove that the above-mentioned confined space / broad space opposition is correlated, among others, with the up / down and vertical / horizontal oppositions that reinforce the non-literal meaning of the character's movement. Additionally, the article contends that, at one point in the story, the limited – broad – confined spatial scheme is reduplicated.

Before analysing the above-mentioned elements of the text, it is necessary to provide a brief outline of the setting and plot, as the story is not very well-known outside the circle of Polish

SF and fantasy fans. Huberath's "The Greater Punishment," like some of his other novels and short stories, is set in an imagined "after-world" which, in this case, resembles "a concentration camp" (Wiśniewski 2006: 64) that functions as a combination of hell and purgatory.[3] This hell- purgatory seems to be inspired by both German Natzi and Russian Communist systems as the demons who oversee this place bear either German names (Neuheufel [Huberath 2006: 165], Holzbucher [182], Kohlengruber [226]) or Russian ones (Blicyna [163],[4] Panfiłowa[5] [176]) (Glensk 2002: 114). Some of them wear uniforms with the pentagram, a pop-cultural symbol of Satanism. As I explain in another article, the camp is an example of an intermediate space – or interspace – between the world of the living and the other world (Chojnowski 2018). In the words of Neuheufel, "everyone must come here: everyone has passed through here, even the Galilean [Jesus]" […]; however, some will eventually leave the camp and move on to heaven, while others will stay there forever.

The punishment that sinners receive in this after-world are divided into the Greater Punishment and the Lesser Punishment that alternate periodically. The Greater Punishment means tortures that take place in an underground chamber outside the camp itself; the Lesser Punishment is a stay in the camp which is called "the adaptation centre." The centre, as has been said, is modelled on a concentration camp: there are barracks, guard posts and a railway ramp that receives successive arrivals of the newly-deceased. However, the conditions of living are milder than in real concentration camps; for instance, there

[3] As Huberath comments in an interview about *Miasta pod Skałą* [*Cities Under the Rock*], whose setting is based on a similar principle: "What mattered here was the spatial and temporal unity of hell and purgatory, which I assumed for the sake of the novel. […] I reused my idea from 'The Greater Punishment.' […] They [hell and purgatory] share a common space, except that for some people it is an endless punishment, whereas for others it is a finite one […]" (2005: 12).

[4] Cf. *Blitsyna Surname Meaning & Statistics*, [in:] *Forebears*. 2012-2015. http://forebears.io/surnames/blitsyna Accessed: 19.05.2015.

[5] Cf. *Panfilova Surname Meaning & Statistics*, [in:] *Forebears*. 2012-2015. http://forebears.io/surnames/panfilova Accessed 19.05.2015.

is a crematory, but all it does is to burn rubbish from a hospital. Besides, most of the inmates are elderly people, who are unable to perform hard physical labour anyway.

The narration starts as the protagonist, Ruder Milenkowicz, also known as Rud, finishes his Greater Punishment episode and is being moved first to the hospital for operations and convalescence, and then on to the camp. Once in the camp, he makes friends with Maria, a 18-year old girl with whom he falls in love, and Patrycja, one of the "unborn," i.e. aborted children that walk around the camp in the form of foetuses and communicate telepathically due to an undeveloped speech apparatus. Neither Maria nor Patrycja undergo the Greater Punishment and they both expect to leave the camp soon to move on to Heaven. In the meantime, Rud is performing intellectual jobs for Neuheufel, one of the supervisors, and trying to remember facts from his life that could have led to his being sentenced to the Greater Punishment. A likely cause was his relationship with Dianna, a girl whom he had made pregnant and then jilted and who aborted the pregnancy afterwards. Rud learns that Maria left the camp without a chance to say goodbye.

As a result of Neuheufel's lies, Rud is for a long time convinced that the camp is a vestibule of Heaven. It is only at the end of the story that he learns that it is the Lesser Punishment instead. Also at the end, it is explained that both Rud's mutilations and his later regeneration were merely a subjective way in which he perceived his punishment. The story ends with Rud being informed that the next day he will return for another session of the Greater Punishment and that he cannot be told whether the cycle will ever end for him.

The synopsis provided above testifies to the fact that "The Greater Punishment" can be classified as a certain characteristic sub-genre of speculative fiction for which, in my doctoral dissertation, I proposed the term "eschatological fiction" (Chojnowski 2021: 76). Like other narratives, including films, that can be grouped under the same heading (for instance, *Lincoln in the Bardo* by George Saunders (2017), *What Dreams May Come*

by Vincent Ward (1998, an adaptation of Richard Matheson's 1978 novel), *Constantine* by Francis Lawrence (2005) *or The Lovely Bones* by Alice Sebold (2002), filmed by Peter Jackson in 2009), it features the deceased as characters, an imaginative version of the after-world as setting, a plot that is directly related to the character's situation in afterlife (e.g. working out the rules, possibilities and limitations in the land of the dead) and an axiology that is also relevant to such an environment and involves, for instance, the concepts of guilt, redemption, sacrifice etc. (Chojnowski 2021: 76–80).

1.3. Now, we need to know more about the protagonist's character traits in order to understand what causes his overall failure; a failure, needless to add, that is primarily moral in nature. There are certainly a few negative characteristics that Rud does not manage to realise and, consequently, to overcome. His stay in the camp, or "adaptation centre," seems to present him with an opportunity to "mend his ways"; if he did, his moral metamorphosis could, it is implied, liberate him from the vicious circle of alternate Greater and Lesser Punishment. However, the man does not take this chance. Rud's main vices seem to be his inconstancy of feelings, his egocentricity and his shallow approach to women (and to himself as well). His changeability is perhaps the most salient of his features: this is possibly what brought him to the place of torment: he discards Dianna, easily forgetting her and starting to take interest in another woman. As he confesses to Neuheufel, "Then I had to leave because I started my studies [. . .]. And she was pregnant. She even followed me. To where I studied. But I was already after another" (Huberath 2006: 185). This inconstancy is strictly related to his egocentricity: after jilting Dianna, Rud did not seem to care for her fate or their child's:

> "Did she have that baby?" [asked Neuheufel]
> "I think she didn't. I mean I'm sure she didn't[,]" [said] Rud [...]. (Huberath 2006: 185).

It is also worth noting that the protagonist's inconstancy and callousness are accompanied by a third related feature: his shallowness that manifests itself in paying special attention to his and other people's external looks. When he describes his relationship with Dianna, he focuses almost entirely on her looks, which suggests that it was her appearance that made her attractive to Rud: "In her face, everything was pretty: the brows, the lashes, a blush just like a peach's and a matching delicate fuzz on her cheeks" (Huberath 2006: 184). Even if he talks about her with sentiment ("I'll never forget her eyes"), he does not stop to evaluate her with the cold eye of someone concentrated on aesthetics: "The nose, perhaps slightly too prominent" and, later on: "Only later did I realise that she dyed her hair. But that wasn't too much of a problem" (Huberath 2006: 184). He even indirectly objectifies her by his choice of words: "Her eyes were inquisitive, distinct, green-blue […]. Plus bright hair. A gorgeous *set*" (Huberath 2006: 184, emphasis added). Thus Rud's inconstancy and egocentricity, coupled with his superficiality, brought the punishment on him and, as we might infer, it is these features that require mending for him to be liberated. Is such a metamorphosis possible for Rud?

2. A wasted chance

One of the things that point to Rud's potential for change is the shift in his attitude towards the unborn as a result of his friendship with Patrycja. Before meeting her, he keeps aloof from them: "Rud did not like the unborn. He believed they thought themselves better than others" (Huberath 2006: 181). Since his meeting with Patrycja, his attitude is starting to change. He invites her for a chat of his own will (Huberath 2006: 217) and is glad to meet her by accident (Huberath 2006: 233). A friendship is kindled between them. "The unborn never assumed an embryonic position in the presence of the born: in this way, they tried to assert their human status. The fact that she [Patrycja] curled up like this in the company of Rud was evidence of close

intimacy" (Huberath 2006: 233). The acquaintance thus seems to create favourable conditions for Rud to change his attitude to his own unborn child, which he disregarded during his lifetime.

However, even in this otherworldly milieu, a relationship between Rud and his son, who chose the name Rolf for himself, does not come into being. They do meet, but only once: Rolf comes to Rud in the form of a young man "to see him and say goodbye" before leaving the camp. He tells Rud: "You didn't want to teach me how to catch fish. You were a good angler and I could have been too […]. Now it's too late" (Huberath 2006: 217). Rud does not recognize Rolf as his son until after it is too late: "It was only when he shaved in front of a mirror that Rud made a discovery: Rolf had looked almost like Rud's copy: somewhat slighter, perhaps, somewhat younger. The only difference had been his green-blue eyes, like Dianna's" (Huberath 2006: 217). Now that Rolf is gone from the camp, any further attempts at forming a relationship are precluded and the father and son may never meet again.

Apart from Rud's change of attitude towards the unborn, another possible change of his character can be seen in his occasional altruistic acts that he performs for the sake of his fellow inmates. For instance, he "started disinterestedly to provide food for the inmates of Maria's barrack" (Huberath 2006: 223). However, his disinterestedness is far from obvious. Firstly, Rud is not immediately told to whom Maria gives the food he provides. Initially, he simply offers it to her, evidently to gain her favour. It is only some days into this scheme that Maria explains to Rud that women in her barrack "are starving" (Huberath 2006: 221), implying that she is aiding them. Before that explanation, Rud could think that Maria *sold* the bread she received from him. Secondly, when Rud learns that Maria has left the camp, he erroneously thinks that his beloved did not want to say goodbye, and says: "She forgot about me […]. She only needed me to get chow for her friends" (Huberath 2006: 234). In this way, Rud ascribes a calculating nature to Maria; at the same time, it can be inferred from the same utterance that Rud

himself is calculating. If he isn't happy because of helping someone, it may mean that he provided food for Maria only to gain her favour.

Another instance of Rud's possible altruism is the change in his attitude to his fellow barrack inmates. Once, when Rud was given a week-long ban on leaving the barrack, "only at this point […] did he notice that the old men were starving" (Huberath 2006: 230). Later, after Maria had left the camp, "it sometimes even happened that he shared his food with the infirm old men who did not leave their bunk beds" (Huberath 2006: 238). Still, "he did not do it out of pity, but because Maria had done so" (Huberath 2006: 238). It might mean that he learned something from her, but it may also mean that he is again trying to gain Maria's favour in case he ever meets her again. Thus even those of Rud's behaviours that could qualify as an improvement of his character are themselves dubious because of his potentially calculated motivation.

But there is even more to testify against his supposed improvement; namely, an active perpetuation of his vices: shallowness, egocentricity and inconstancy. The first of these manifests itself in the fact that the protagonist pays particular attention to his looks and the impression he makes on others. One by one, he obtains a pair of smart shoes (Huberath 2006: 194), trousers, a hat (Huberath 2006: 208) and a jacket (Huberath 2006: 211). Already with the pair of shoes he earns the nickname Dandy; the complete outfit makes him resemble a "leader": a prisoner functionary, equivalent to a kapo. (But his plan backfires as Maria, whom he wanted to impress with his looks, feels intimidated and terrified rather than attracted to him).

Rud's egocentricity manifests itself in the form of callousness towards Eckhardt, a leader who competes with him for Maria. Rud learns from Neuheufel that Eckhardt is a castrate. Nueheufel, when informing Rud about this, jeers at Eckhardt's mutilation. "Initially, Rud joined in Neuheufel's sneering laughter, but then he thought that Eckhardt is even more miserable than himself, and by laughing at him, he seemed to despise

himself as well" (Huberath 2006: 198). Nevertheless, later on Rud uses this knowledge unscrupulously to humiliate Eckhardt before Maria (which, by the way, ends with Rud being beaten by Eckhardt [Huberath 2006: 210]).

As regards the protagonist's inconstancy of feelings, Rud evinces this trait in his afterlife as well. Maria is not his only love interest: before meeting her, he was attracted to a medical doctor named Panfiłowa. But once Maria makes an appearance, "he did not like Panfiłowa as he used to, for now he was thinking about Maria" (Huberath 2006: 211). It is no wonder then, that, after Maria is gone from the camp, Patrycja rebukes him for his inconstancy: "I know that Maria loved you. And you, Ruder? Yesterday it was Dianna, today Maria, tomorrow perhaps the transport will bring another girl . . ." (Huberath 2006: 235).

All in all, it seems that the main character's potential for change remains unrealised. Admittedly, Rud's return for another session of the Greater Punishment is a routine element of the punishment cycle; and neither the narrator nor the characters ever say explicitly whether this cycle will ever end. But there is more evidence to support the claim that the protagonist remains a static character than to the contrary. We can see the persistence of the character's old negative features that resurface in the new environment: as on earth, so in his afterlife, Rud displays self-centredness, superficiality and changeability of affections. We can also see the dubious nature of his supposed transformation. This would seem to confirm Neuheufel's words: "each Lesser Punishment episode is for them [the inmates] a chance they don't take" (Huberath 2006: 240).

3. Spatial frames as a reflection of the protagonist's (lack of) development

The story juxtaposes confined and (relatively) open spaces: the open space of the camp is a spatial frame of that part of the plot which deals with the protagonist's opportunity to change, whereas the confined space of the torture chamber is the spatial

frame of the scenes in which Rud receives punishment for his misdeeds. The fact that it is a limited space can be inferred from the fact that it is referred to as an "interrogation room" (Huberath 2006: 166), which in itself implies being limited by the four walls. Besides, "at one point, during an interrogation, the blood splashed as far as the clock" (Huberath 2006: 162), which means that the distance between the wall and the table Rud is fastened to cannot be great. The camp, on the contrary, is vast in dimensions. We know it because "Rud walked for over an hour before he reached row 971" (Huberath 2006: 231), where Maria's barrack was to be found. It must be stressed, though, the openness of the camp is relative as, in spite of its dimensions, the camp is naturally surrounded by a fence, beyond which no inmate can go without permission.

All of the above-mentioned events which testify to Rud's chance for a change, i.e. his evolving attitude to the unborn and to other coinmates, take place against the spatial frame of the camp. As a result of this correlation, the relatively open space of the camp acquires a (relatively) positive significance, as opposed to the cramped space of the interrogation room. Additionally, it is worth noting that the open/confined spatial opposition is reflected in the narration time and in the spatial extension of the text. In terms of narration time, the plot follows a certain pattern: the scenes that take place in the torture chamber are either recapitulated briefly as a flashback of the story's vorgeschichte or implied as the nachgeschichte to unfold after the story's final words, while the main part of the plot takes place in the relatively wide and open space of the camp. Thus, the narration time devoted to the scenes in the interrogation room is as "cramped" as the room itself and the narration devoted to the scenes in the camp is as extensive temporally as the camp is extensive spatially. Consequently, the spatial extension of the text, i.e. the physical space covered by the text, also reflects the relationship between the enclosed and open spaces: the greatest portion of the text is devoted to the camp scenes and the portion

of the text that describes torture chamber scenes is decidedly smaller.

The character's movement from confined to open space and back again constitutes a metaphor of a wasted chance. If, as has been noted, the space of the camp is a metaphorical parallel to Rud's chance, it is not difficult to ascribe to the torture chamber the opposite meaning, that of not having or losing a chance. At a literal level, then, the character being moved from the "interrogation room" to the camp signifies his chance to leave this hell; at a more metaphorical level, the same movement signifies a chance to improve his character and be freed from the consequences of his previous actions. The return to the room signals that Rud has forfeited both kinds of opportunity. Additionally, it is tempting to claim that this kind of plot and setting scheme – confined to open and back to confined space – hints at what is ultimately going to happen with Rud: whether he is ever going to be liberated from the potentially endless cycle of Greater and Lesser Punishments. Admittedly, Huberath's short story is technically open: Neuheufel explicitly refuses to answer the protagonist's question about his ultimate liberation. However, the fact that the story ends on an ominous note – Rud being told of his imminent return to the chamber for another bout of interrogation – quite strongly suggests that the protagonist's cycle of punishments will never end.

The open / confined opposition overlaps with several other spatial oppositions: up / down, vertical / horizontal and mobility / immobility, plus what might be called "social" oppositions. As literary scholar, Michał Głowiński, observes when discussing the motif of movement, "it is thanks to movement that elements of space reveal themselves, in a sort of natural fashion, in a literary text" (1978: 94-95). Thus the way from the enclosed spatial frame of the torture chamber to the open spatial frame of the camp is simultaneously a way up: when Rud is released, Neuheufel takes him "all the way up" in a lift (Huberath 2006: 167). The interrogation room is probably situated underground: when the protagonist witnesses an accident in the camp

(a toppling watchtower), "it seem[s] to Rud that" the stretcher-bearers, who have been called "from below," "[a]re squinting their eyes, unused to the light" (Huberath 2006: 200). The enclosed / open and down / up motion also overlaps with a shift from the horizontal to vertical and from immobility to mobility: in the interrogation room, Rud is fastened to a table; after his release, he can stand up and move around. (Not immediately, of course; at first, he is emaciated and can hardly stand on his feet. But then he spends some time in the hospital, so that when he actually enters the camp, he is in a much better condition.)

The above oppositions can be supplemented by two others: isolation / company and foes / friends. If the only characters Rud has contact with in the torture chamber are "interrogators" and "executors" – a narrow set of hostile personages (including a spiteful cleaning lady) – so in the camp Rud finds himself surrounded by a much larger and more varied company. Apart from the diabolical overseers, he now has contact with a lot of fellow inmates, including the kapo-like "leaders," but also with friendlier persons, such as Maria and Patrycja. These additional spatial and other oppositions reflect and reinforce the metaphorical function of the basic enclosed / open opposition. As has been shown above, the spatial concepts of "confinement," "down," "immobility" and "horizontality," as well as the non-spatial concepts of "isolation" and "foes" are correlated with the interrogation room as a place where pain is inflicted, whereas "openness," "up," "mobility" and "verticality" plus "company" and "friends" are associated with the camp as a place where the protagonist has regained health and is presented with a chance for a moral transformation.

As if to emphasise and draw attention to its metaphorical potential, the narrative and spatial schema of temporarily releasing the character only to confine him again is repeated on a smaller scale: while Rud stays in the camp, he is allowed to leave it for some time with a group of other prisoners, but then they are forced to return. The area outside the camp is described when Rud comes to the camp from the hospital: "The Adaptation

Centre covered a considerable area surrounded by grey hills on one side and a sickly little wood on the other. The grey-blue sky, which he had not seen for he knew not how long, was breath-taking" (Huberath 2006: 179). From this, it can be concluded that the area outside the camp is greater, if not more inviting: the adjectives "grey" and "sickly" indicate that the landscape is unattractive. Additionally, one must admit that the wood and the hills can be construed as a kind of natural barriers, making the outside space limited too. The horizon is not mentioned either, being evidently invisible behind the wood and the hills. Still, the camp, though enclosed, is incomparably bigger than the interrogation room, and the area beyond the camp's fence is even more expansive. Therefore, it is little wonder that the main character perceives this latter area as attractive: "Rud observed the little wood that grew beyond the wires. He had a great notion to get to that wood" (Huberath 2006: 199).

An opportunity to fulfil this wish comes after the already mentioned accident when a rotten watchtower collapses: in order to reconstruct it, building material must be obtained, and a group of prisoners is sent to the copse to cut some wood.

> Rud was overcome with joy when he realised that they would go to cut wood in none other than his wished-for grove […]. They were accompanied by only one unarmed investigator. He introduced himself as Schulz. The wood wasn't far and, after a little more than a dozen minutes of brisk walking, they came in among the first trees. Schulz picked out the ones for them to cut down. Then it began: Rud's nose started to feel Itchy. He sneezed once, twice, ten times. Mucus came trickling out of his nose. He felt terrible […]. Everyone else suffered similarly […]. They took the felled and prepared trunks on their arms, two men to each trunk. In spite of the burden, they returned at a fast pace, to the accompaniment of sneezes and curses […]. Rud came back inside the wire fence with a relief. The hay fever symptoms abated the moment he set his foot in the Adaptation Centre. (Huberath 2006: 202-203)

The disappointment experienced in the outside space and the necessity to return to a less open one mirror the broader spatial scheme of leaving an enclosed space, entering an open space and coming back to the enclosed space. This arguably serves to draw the reader's attention to the metaphorical significance of both movements (exiting and returning) as reflections of the character's inability to "go beyond" his own wicked tendencies.

All things considered, Huberath's "The Greater Punishment" has as one if its main plot motifs the character's chance for a transformation and his failure to use it. The plot includes scenes which prove that the protagonist has a potential to change; however, there are also scenes which depict the tenacity of his old negative habits. The latter tendencies seem to outweigh the former. The spatial frames which form the backdrop to the plot – first enclosed, then open, then confined again – constitute a metaphorical parallel to the plot about a wasted opportunity. The other spatial oppositions – horizontal / vertical, down / up and immobility / mobility – enhance and reinforce the metaphor. The open ending with a pessimistic twist suggests that the protagonist may fail to use similar chances in the future too. In this way the story seems to present the addiction of a sinner to his sins.

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