Hide and Seek with Nazis: Playing with Child Identity in Polish Children's Literature about the Shoah

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Summary/Abstract: The paper analyses child character identity change presented in contemporary Polish children's novels about the Holocaust. Using the category of play described by scholars such as Erving Goffman, George Eisen, and Jerzy Cieślikowski, it is shown that the change of a protagonist's identity from Jewish to non-Jewish and vice versa is a sort of play containing a set of rules, practices, stakes, etc. As it is described, the child Jewish identity is something determined by the surrounding (mainly Nazi authority) and then something fluid, not solid (as the protagonists mostly come from integrated Polish-Jewish backgrounds). Playing-out as coming out of normal life seems to be the only way to survive the terror of war and the Shoah. Identity fluidity is presented as a mechanism to show the protagonist as a universal character facing terrible events, which makes these novels readable for contemporary readers.
I (nie) żyli długo i szczęśliwie. Konstrukcje zakończeń w polskiej literaturze dziecięcej o Zagładzie

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During World War II, 20,000–50,000 mostly Polish and Soviet children were abducted from their homes and forcibly moved to Nazi Germany for the purpose of Germanization, or indoctrination into becoming German. According to Dirk Moses' estimate, 20,000 children were abducted for such purposes from Poland, 20,000 from the Soviet Union, and 10,000 from Western Europe and Southeast Europe. The aim of the project was to acquire and "Germanize" children with purportedly Aryan-Nordic traits, who were playing hide and seek and getting caught could mean their lives. How do you live for years in hiding. And how do you survive without seeing your loved ones for years on end. A children's book looking at the journey a young girl and her family went through as Jews in Nazi Germany. Though simply written for the intended audience, it is effective in describing how the events changed the subjects' lives. A good historical fiction piece for a preteen reader.