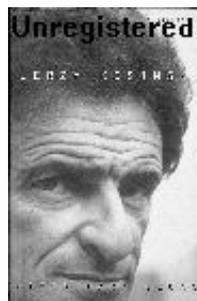


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Jerzy Kosinski: Grand Calumniator of Poland



Kosinski: His real story might have been every bit as compelling, in its way, as "The Painted Bird."



Jerzy Kosinski

who the world understood to have been To Hell and Back

The Audie Murphy of the Holocaust

turned out to be little better than the

Grand Calumniator of Poland

Holocaust Witness Jerzy Kosinski

Jerzy Kosinski was once to Poland what Simon Wiesenthal is today to Ukraine. Jerzy Kosinski was the grand calumniator of Poland; [Simon Wiesenthal](#) is the grand calumniator of Ukraine. The Poles have been successful in discrediting their grand calumniator; the Ukrainians are too timid to attempt to discredit Simon Wiesenthal. The present web page is dedicated to understanding Jerzy Kosinski, to congratulating the Poles, and to giving courage to Ukrainians.

Who was Jerzy Kosinski? Jerzy Kosinski was born Jerzy Lewinkopf to Mojzesz (Moses) Lewinkopf and Elzbieta Lewinkopf (maiden name Elzbieta Wanda Weinreich). Six significant dates in Jerzy Kosinski's life were:

1933 born in Lodz, Poland

1959 entered USA on a student visa

1960 published *The Future is Ours, Comrade*, under pseudonym Joseph Novak

1968 won the National Book Award for *The Painted Bird*

1982 veracity challenged in *Village Voice* article, "Jerzy Kosinski's Tainted Words"

1991 committed suicide

Biographer James Park Sloan

I quote from two sources by the same author. I quote below from two sources, both written by James Park Sloan: (1) the magazine article, *Kosinski's War*, *The New Yorker*, October 10, 1994; and (2) the book, *Jerzy Kosinski: A Biography*, Dutton, United States, 1996. The first source provides the first two excerpts below, in blue, which by themselves present the chief features of the Kosinski story. The reader interested only in a broad outline need not read beyond these first two quotations. The second source provides a number of further excerpts shown in green, which serve to flesh in a fuller picture. The analogy to Audie Murphy in the above title was taken from p. 227 of this second source. Audie Murphy was the most decorated American soldier in WW II who went on to become a movie star, and played himself in the autobiographical war film, *To Hell and Back*.

Who is James Park Sloan? The dust jacket of the Sloan book informs us of the following:

JAMES PARK SLOAN is a professor of English at the University of Illinois at Chicago, a prize-winning novelist, and a widely published short story writer and critic. He knew Jerzy Kosinski for over twenty years before Kosinski's death.

A Personal Experience

I recollect, by the way, many years ago talking to a New York Jewish lawyer about Kosinski's book *The Painted Bird*, partly on the basis of which this lawyer held the deep conviction that Poles were pretty close to sub-human. When he told me about Kosinski's description of eyeballs being torn out as an incident that would not be clearly out of place in a Polish household, I replied — to his discomfort — that such a scene would be about as typical in a Polish household as it would be in an American one. When I added that the only Poles that I had ever known were intelligent, civilized, and cultured he did not reply, but his manner suggested that I had told him something that was a patent impossibility.

What's the Relevance?

Why is so much attention given to Jerzy Kosinski below, even to the point of touching on his sexual deviance and other character defects? As already mentioned above, Kosinski provides a precedent of a calumniator of a Slavic peoples who has been successfully and thoroughly discredited, and whose example thus may give Ukrainians courage to similarly discredit their many calumniators, chief among whom is Simon Wiesenthal. Beyond that, however, the Kosinski biography provides unusually detailed information which brings to the fore several generalizations which may assist in the understanding of the phenomenon of anti-Ukrainian calumny.

The Gang of Ten

Let us begin. Heading the list of anti-Ukrainian calumniators are the following nine: [Yitzhak Arad](#), [Dov Ben-Meir](#), [Yaakov Bleich](#), [Alan Dershowitz](#), [Sol Littman](#), [Morley Safer](#), [Neal Sher](#), [Elie Wiesel](#), and [Simon Wiesenthal](#). If we expand this list to include prominent calumniators of Slavs, Jerzy Kosinski makes it a list of ten. In order to express my disapproval of these individuals, and in order to encourage in Slavs in general, and in Ukrainians in particular, an attitude of bold intolerance toward their misdeeds, I propose that they be called "the gang of ten," as I myself do below.

Incidentally, the link to Sol Littman above will take the reader to the very section in "The Ugly Face of 60 Minutes" that deals with Littman, but only when using a Netscape browser — readers relying on other browsers will have to use CTRL+F to get down to the section titled "Sol Littman's Mengele Scare."

Examining the gang of ten, it is possible to arrive at several generalizations, the chief of which may be the following:

(1) The gang of ten is Jewish. One notices immediately that all ten of these calumniators of the Slavs are Jewish. This observation reminds us that in examining those who were responsible for the 23Oct94 *60 Minutes* story, [The Ugly Face of Freedom](#), seven out of seven of those in the chain of command proved to be Jews (three being common to both lists).

But are there any non-Jewish calumniators? Of course there are, and where I find them, I impartially include them on the Ukrainian Archive. Trouble is, I don't find many, and their calumny does not rank as high. One of these is University of Toronto historian [Robert Magocsi](#), and another is Harvard University historian [Omeljan Pritsak](#). Offhand, I can't think of any others. But while Magocsi and Pritsak distort, they cannot compare with any of the gang of ten (or with any of the [CBS gang of seven](#)). The really egregious calumny comes only from Jews.

Henryk Sienkiewicz. Henryk Sienkiewicz (among my favorite novelists for his *Quo Vadis*) comes to mind as a Polish calumniator of Ukraine (in his novel about [Bohdan Khmelnytsky](#), *With Fire and Sword*), but he is not discussed on the Ukrainian Archive primarily because he is not contemporary, and also because, like Magocsi and Pritsak, he is more subtle. The Ukrainian Archive restricts attention to contemporaries whose calumny is egregious.

The Ukrainian archive does not focus on Jews. It has been more than once remarked that the Ukrainian Archive focuses on Jews, which is incorrect — which is

no more than an additional calumination of Ukrainians. The truth is that the Ukrainian Archive focuses on calumniators, and it incidentally happens that the chief of these are Jews. If the leading calumniators of Ukraine had proven to be Czechs or Poles or Romanians or Hungarians or Russians or Germans or Armenians or Iranians or Palestinians or Chinese or whatever, I would have impartially and disinterestedly featured them instead of Jews. If someone can bring to my attention prominent contemporary non-Jewish calumniators of Ukraine that I have been overlooking, I will gladly give them generous representation on the Ukrainian Archive, and if such non-Jewish calumniators overwhelm the Jewish calumniators by their numbers, then all the better. The prominence of Jews on the Ukrainian Archive is not to be explained by looking into my psyche, it is to be explained by examining the characteristics of calumniators of Ukraine. It is not for me to justify why Jews appear so frequently on the pages of the Ukrainian Archive, it is for Jews to explain why no Gentiles can be found whose anti-Slavic calumnies are able to compete with those of the Jews in the gang of ten (or with those of the Jews in the CBS gang of seven).

(2) The gang of ten is prominent. One notices too that these are not ten obscure Jews, but highly placed ones. Their names are recognizable. They constitute a Jewish leadership. They hold high office within the Jewish community, or within society generally. Two have been spoken of as candidates for Nobel prizes. They frequently appear on television or are quoted in the media or are cited in the discussion of Jewish affairs. Perhaps the only other Jews who equal or exceed them in prominence fall into three categories: (i) Jews functioning in a non-Jewish capacity, as for example musicians and scientists; (ii) North American Jewish politicians, particularly Congressmen, Senators, or Mayors in the United States, but again functioning only in small part as Jewish representatives; and (iii) Israeli politicians and military leaders. However, restricting our attention to Jews who live in, or who are influential in, North America, and to those who appear expressly as representatives of Jewish interests, the gang of ten constitutes a dominant clan. They set the agenda for Jewish-Slavic dialogue. Even the one who lives in Austria (Simon Wiesenthal), and the two who live in Israel (Yitzhak Arad and Dov Ben-Meir), are able to make their presence felt in North America either during their visits, or in being covered by the media, or by means of their court room testimony either in Israel or in North America. American Jews such as Noam Chomsky and Norman Finkelstein are also highly prominent, and do speak on Jewish affairs, but speak primarily of the State of Israel, and — unfortunately — have little to say about the Slavic world. Overwhelmingly, the Jews who step forward to speak on the Slavs do so only to calumniate. Whereas individual Jews have occasionally stepped forward to defend Ukrainians, I know of none who does so on an ongoing basis the way that the gang of ten defames Ukrainians on an ongoing basis.

Raul Hilberg. Jewish historian [Raul Hilberg](#) deserves mention as falling in a class by himself. I do not agree with everything he says, but in cases where I disagree, I do not regard Hilberg as guilty of calumny, but only as falling within the range of responsible but divergent opinion which is to be expected upon any historical question. Raul Hilberg has amply demonstrated that he is ready to be guided by the evidence to conclusions without regard to whether they are palatable to Jews or Germans or Ukrainians or other involved parties.

(3) The gang of ten is typified by deception. I understand calumination to mean damaging utterances *characterized by untruth*. An utterance that is true, I do not characterize as calumny no matter how damaging. To not mince words, then, the gang of ten is a pack of liars. The most fantastic, the most childish, the most palpably untrue statements spew from their lips in profusion, as

is amply documented on the Ukrainian Archive. They suppress evidence, they create historical events out of thin air, they contradict themselves from one recitation to the next.

(4) The gang of ten enjoys impunity for lying. When the deceptions of any of these calumniators are brought to their attention, or to public attention, the refutations are ignored. The ten calumniators appear to be able to say whatever untruths they want with little fear of punishment or censure or even embarrassment. They rarely have to correct their misstatements, or to retract them, or to apologize for them. Of the ten, only Jerzy Kosinski has lost his impunity, but he did nevertheless enjoy a large measure of impunity over many years of his professional calumny. The generalization, therefore, is not that the gang of ten enjoy absolute and permanent impunity, but only that they enjoy surprising measures of impunity over surprising intervals of time.

(5) The gang of ten is typified by modest intellectual capacity. On the whole, the members of the gang of ten have the minds of children. This is demonstrated primarily in their lying which is primitive and palpable, and which is not merely occasional, but which permeates their thinking. On top of that, their speech and their writing tends to be illogical to the point of incoherence. They are strangers to the ideal of being constrained by logic. They don't know the facts, and they don't rely on facts. In not a single case have I come across anything any of them might have said or written touching on Ukrainian-Jewish relations that one would be forced to admire — or so much as respect — for its reasoning or its data or its expression. Given their prominence and their power, their academic and intellectual accomplishments, on the whole, are unimpressive. The bulk of their writing would get C's or worse if submitted in freshman courses in history or political science or journalism. The only one of the ten to achieve an unambiguous distinction outside his calumny activities is Alan Dershowitz — Harvard law professor, media star, defender of O. J. Simpson. He alone among the ten must be acknowledged to have substantial academic qualifications and to show flashes of intelligence and wit. However, restricting myself to his statements on [Ukrainians or Palestinians](#), I find Dershowitz's thinking fully as primitive and as childishly self-serving and as duplicitous as that of the other nine.

The incongruity between low desert and high reward is particularly great in the case of Jerzy Kosinski; the evidence below will demonstrate that in addition to lacking academic capacity, and in addition to lacking literary skills, every area of his life was crippled by immaturity, irresponsibility, deception, and perversion.

What picture emerges?

Is there any way of tying all of the above generalizations into a single coherent picture? Why should it be the case that the leading slanderers of Ukrainians are all Jewish? How can it be that Jewish leaders are so prone to lying, and have such palpable intellectual shortcomings, and sometimes even remarkable character defects? How does it come to pass that they are permitted to incite hatred against Ukrainians with impunity? The answers to these questions can be found throughout the Ukrainian Archive.

An individual Pole is persecuted by Simon Wiesenthal

Jerzy Kosinski calumniated the Polish people collectively. Simon Wiesenthal persecuted a single Pole — [Frank Walus](#) — individually.

Time For the Quotes

And now for the quotations from Sloan's article:

Jerzy Kosinski's "Painted Bird" was celebrated for its "overpowering authenticity":

"Jerzy was a fantastic liar," said Agnieszka Osiecka, Poland's leading pop lyricist and a familiar figure in Polish intellectual circles.... If you told Jerzy you had a Romanian grandmother, he would come back that he had fifteen cousins all more Romanian than your grandmother ... and they played in a Gypsy band!"

Osiecka was responding to a recent expose by the Polish journalist Joanna Siedlecka, in which she argued that Jerzy Kosinski, Poland's best-known Holocaust survivor, had profoundly falsified his wartime experiences. According to Siedlecka, Kosinski spent the war years in relatively gentle, if hardly idyllic, circumstances and was never significantly mistreated. She thus contradicts the sanctioned version of his life under the German occupation, which has generally been assumed to be only thinly disguised in his classic first novel, "The Painted Bird," published in this country by Houghton Mifflin in 1965. ...

In stark, uninflected prose, "The Painted Bird" describes the disasters that befall a six-year-old boy who is separated from his parents and wanders through the primitive Polish-Soviet borderlands during the war. The peasants whom the boy encounters demonstrate an extraordinary predilection for incest, sodomy, and meaningless violence. A miller plucks out the eyeballs of his wife's would-be lover. A gang of toughs pushes the boy, a presumed Gypsy or Jew, below the ice of a frozen pond. A farmer forces him to hang by his hands from a rafter, just out of reach of a vicious dog. In the culminating incident of the book, the boy drops a missal while he's helping serve Mass and is flung by the angry parishioners into a pit of manure. Emerging from the pit, he realizes that he has lost the power of speech. ...

"Written with deep sincerity and sensitivity, this poignant account transcends confession," [Elie Wiesel](#) wrote in the *Times Book Review*. At the time of Kosinski's suicide, in 1991, Wiesel said, "I thought it was fiction, and when he told me it was autobiography I tore up my review and wrote one a thousand times better."

Wiesel's review sanctified the work as a valid testament of the Holocaust, more horrible, more revealing — in a sense, *truer* — than the literature that came out of the camps. Other writers and critics agreed. Harry Overstreet wrote that "The Painted Bird" would "stand by the side of Anne Frank's unforgettable 'Diary'" as "a powerfully poignant human document," while Peter Prescott, also comparing it to Anne Frank's "Diary," called the book "a testament not only to the atrocities of the war, but to the failings of human nature." The novelist James Leo Herlihy saluted it as "brilliant testimony to mankind's survival power."

"Account," "confession," "testament," "document," "testimony": these were the key words in the book's critical reception. What made "The Painted Bird" such an important book was its overpowering authenticity. Perhaps it wasn't exactly a diary — six-year-olds don't keep diaries — but it was the next best thing. And in one respect it was better: Kosinski was Anne Frank as a survivor, walking among us.

"The Painted Bird" was translated into almost every major language and many obscure ones. It was a best-seller in Germany and won the Prix du Meilleur Livre Étranger in France. It became the cornerstone or reading lists in university courses on the Holocaust, where it was often treated as a historical document, and, as a result, it has been for a generation the source of what many people "know" about Poland under the German occupation. At the height of Kosinski's reputation, there were those who said that somewhere down the road Kosinski was a likely candidate for the Nobel Prize.

(Jerzy Kosinski, *Kosinski's War*, *The New Yorker*, October 10, 1994, pp. 46-47)

But turned out to be fabricated out of whole cloth:

According to Joanna Siedlecka ..., Kosinski's wrenching accounts of his wartime experiences were fabricated from whole cloth.

... Siedlecka contends that Kosinski spent the war with his family — his mother, father, and later, an adopted brother — and that they lived in relative security and comfort.

The Kosinskis survived, she suggests, in part because Jerzy Kosinski's father, whose original name was Moses Lewinkopf, saw bad times coming and acquired false papers in the common Gentile name of Kosinski; in part because they had money ... and were able to pay for protection with cash and jewelry; and in part because a network of Polish Catholics, at great risk to themselves, helped hide them.

Siedlecka portrays the elder Kosinski not just as a wily survivor but as a man without scruples. She maintains that he may have collaborated with the Germans during the war and very likely did collaborate with the N.K.V.D., after the liberation of Dabrowa by the Red Army, in sending to Siberia for minor infractions, such as hoarding, some of the very peasants who saved his family. Her real scorn, however, is reserved for the son, who turned his back on the family's saviors and vilified them, along with the entire Polish nation, in the eyes of the world. Indeed, the heart of Siedlecka's revelations is her depiction of the young Jerzy Kosinski spending the war years eating sausages and drinking cocoa — goods unavailable to the neighbors' children — in the safety of his house and yard....

(Jerzy Kosinski, *Kosinski's War*, *The New Yorker*, October 10, 1994, p. 48)

Right from the start, Kosinski wrote under duress — an impecunious young man, particularly situated to be of use to clandestine forces, he could leapfrog to advancement only by cooperating with these forces. Thus, his first book, the *Future is Ours, Comrade* (1960), was published under the pseudonym Joseph Novak, and appears to have been sponsored by the CIA:

Czartoryski recommends Kosinski to the CIA.

Between Kosinski's penchant for telling more than the truth and the CIA's adamant insistence on telling as little as possible, the specific financial arrangements concerning the "book on Russia" may never be made public. Indeed, full documentation probably does not exist. A number of facts, however, argue strongly that there *was* CIA/USIA intermediation on behalf of the book, with or without Kosinski's full knowledge and understanding. One major piece of evidence is the name of the original titleholder on the Doubleday contract: Anthony B. Czartoryski. A further clue was the address to which communications for "Czartoryski" were to be delivered: the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America at 145 East Fifty-third Street.

The clear presumption is that Czartoryski became aware of Kosinski's notes, suggested the possibility of a book to his contacts within the CIA, and then had the manuscript delivered to Doubleday, which already was quite familiar with arrangements of this nature; Gibney served unwittingly to protect the author's identity and the manuscript's origin.

(James Park Sloan, *Jerzy Kosinski: A Biography*, Dutton, United States, 1996, p. 112)

Surprisingly quick production.

As for the book, not only its instant acceptance but its quick production would remain a mystery for many years. How could a graduate student at Columbia — struggling with his course work, engaged in various side projects as a translator, and busy with the details of life in a strange country — how could such a person have turned out a copy that could be serialized in the editorially meticulous Reader's Digest in less than two years?

(James Park Sloan, *Jerzy Kosinski: A Biography*, Dutton, United States, 1996, p. 117)

Exactly what the CIA would have wanted.

All in all, the book is everything an American propaganda agency, or the propaganda arm of the CIA, might have hoped for in its wildest dreams. In broad perspective, it outlines the miserable conditions under which Soviet citizens are compelled to live their everyday lives. It shows how the spiritual greatness of the Russian people is undermined and persecuted by Communism. It describes a material deprivation appalling by

1960s American standards and a lack of privacy and personal freedom calculated to shock American audiences. The Russia of *The Future is Ours* is clearly a place where no American in his right mind would ever want to live.

(James Park Sloan, *Jerzy Kosinski: A Biography*, Dutton, United States, 1996, p. 129-130)

As Kosinski's veracity in *The Painted Bird* came increasingly under question, his support came most noticeably from Jews, reinforcing the hypothesis of a Jewish tendency to side with coreligionists rather than with truth, despite the consequent lowering of Jewish credibility:

Byron Sherwin at Spertus also checked in with his support, reaffirming an invitation to Kosinski to appear as the Spertus award recipient at their annual fund-raiser in October, before 1,500 guests at Chicago's Hyatt Regency. He mentioned a list of notable predecessors including Arthur Goldberg, [Elie Wiesel](#), Philip Klutznick, Yitzhak Rabin, and Abraham Joshua Heschel himself; the 1978 recipient, Isaac Bashevis Singer, had recently won the Nobel Prize. Kosinski was deeply moved by this support from Sherwin and Spertus, and its direct fallout was a move to make Spertus the ultimate site for his personal papers, with Sherwin serving as coexecutor of his estate. At the same time it accelerated his movement back toward his Jewish roots. In his greatest moment of crisis, the strongest support had come not from his fellow intellectuals, but from those who identified with him as a Jew.

(James Park Sloan, *Jerzy Kosinski: A Biography*, Dutton, United States, 1996, p. 389)

Not only did the Jews get mileage out of *The Painted Bird*, but so did the Germans, at the expense of the Poles, of

course:

The German edition was a hit.

The book was doing reasonably well in England and France, better certainly than in America, but the German edition was an out-and-out hit. For a Germany struggling to shuck off the collective national guilt for World War II and the Holocaust, its focus on the "Eastern European" peasants may have suggested that sadistic behavior and genocide were not a national trait or the crime of a specific group but part of a universally distributed human depravity; a gentler view is that the book became part of a continuing German examination of the war years. Perhaps both views reflect aspects of the book's success in Germany, where *Der bemalte Vogel* actually made it onto bestseller lists.

(James Park Sloan, *Jerzy Kosinski: A Biography*, Dutton, United States, 1996, p. 234)

Attempt to dilute German guilt.

The Warsaw magazine *Forum* compared Kosinski to Goebbels and Senator McCarthy and emphasized a particular sore point for Poles: the relatively sympathetic treatment of a German soldier. Kosinski, the review argued, put himself on the side of the Hitlerites, who saw their crimes as the work of "pacifiers of a primitive pre-historic jungle." *Glos Nauczycielski*, the weekly publication of the teaching profession, took the same line, accusing *The Painted Bird* of an attempt "to dilute the German guilt for the crime of genocide by including the supposed guilt of all other Europeans and particularly those from Eastern Europe."

(James Park Sloan, *Jerzy Kosinski: A Biography*, Dutton, United States, 1996, p. 236)

Although Sloan does not speculate that the French may have had similar motives to the Germans for promoting Kosinski's book, we have already seen the [French buying protection](#) from accusations of complicity in the Holocaust, and wonder

whether the high honor they paid *The Painted Bird* may not have been motivated to further deflect attention from their own collaboration:

Kosinski returned to New York on April 14, and only two weeks later received the best news of all from Europe. On May 2, Flammarion cabled Houghton Mifflin that *L'Oiseau bariolé* had been awarded the Prix du Meilleur Livre Étranger — the annual award given in France for the best foreign book of the year. Previous winners included Lawrence Durrell, John Updike, Heinrich Böll, Robert Penn Warren, Oscar Lewis, Angus Wilson, and Nikos Kazantzakis. New York might be the center of publishing, but Paris was still, to many minds, the intellectual center of the universe, and Kosinski had swept the French intellectual world off its feet. Any who had doubted the aesthetic merits of *The Painted Bird* were now shamed into silence. The authority of the "eleven distinguished jurors" was an absolute in New York as in Paris; Kosinski's first novel had swept the board.

(James Park Sloan, *Jerzy Kosinski: A Biography*, Dutton, United States, 1996, pp. 234-235)

The question has been raised on the Ukrainian Archive of what conditions are likely to lead to the creation of a [great liar](#). One such condition might be a modest intellectual endowment which limits the achievement that is possible by legitimate means. In Jerzy Kosinski's case, Sloan drops many clues indicating that Kosinski's academic career was a disaster, among these clues being political maneuvering on Kosinski's part as a substitute for performance, which maneuvering occasionally degenerated

into "the dog ate my homework" quality excuses, in this case being made on Kosinski's behalf by patron Strzetelski:

Kosinski had used his time fruitfully, Strzetelski argued, in spite of his impaired health and "the accident (combustion of his right hand) which made him unable to write during almost the whole 1959 Spring Session." It was the first and last mention in the file of the injury to Kosinski's hand, which had not impaired his ability to produce lengthy correspondence.

(James Park Sloan, *Jerzy Kosinski: A Biography*, Dutton, United States, 1996, p. 123)

Kosinski was unable to rise to academic standards. He disappointed his friends. He was shunned by responsible scholars:

Unlike Kosinski, Krauze took the discipline of sociology very seriously; he was deeply committed to his studies, and it troubled him that Kosinski was so blithely dismissive of its rigor and of the hurdles required in getting the Ph.D. By then Kosinski was busy looking at alternative ways to get approval of his dissertation. One of them involved Feliks Gross: he proposed a transfer to CCNY, where he would finish his doctorate under Gross's supervision. In Krauze's view, Kosinski had simply run into a buzzsaw in Lazarsfeld, his Columbia supervisor, a man who could not be charmed into dropping the rigor of his requirements. Gross too promptly grasped that Kosinski was trying to get around the question of methodological rigor; he politely demurred and excused himself from being a part of it.

(James Park Sloan, *Jerzy Kosinski: A Biography*, Dutton, United States, 1996, p. 169)

The pedestrian task of writing an examination, for Kosinski became a trauma, and his capacity for academic

work deteriorated to the level of the pitiable:

[H]e had neglected the necessary preparation for his doctoral qualifying exam, the deadline for which now loomed.

On February 19 [1963] Kosinski sat for the examination as required. Midway through, he informed the proctor that he was unable to continue. [...] [H]is flight from the doctoral exam marked a low point in his life in America — his academic career blocked, with no alternative in sight.

(James Park Sloan, *Jerzy Kosinski: A Biography*, Dutton, United States, 1996, p. 186)

But Kosinski was not only a student who could not study — he was also, and more importantly, a writer who could not write:

Kosinski did well enough in spoken English, to be sure; his accent and his occasional Slavisms were charming. But writing was a different matter. He was, quite simply, no Conrad. In writing English, the omission of articles or the clustering of modifiers did not strike readers as charming; instead, it made the writer appear ignorant, half-educated, even stupid. Conrad wrote like an angel but could not make himself understood when he opened his mouth; with Kosinski, it was exactly the other way around. Which might not have been such a handicap had not Kosinski been a writer by profession.

From the beginning of his life as a professional writer, Kosinski had to protect a terrible secret: He could not write competently in the language in which he was published. Whenever he wrote a simple business letter, his reputation was at risk. Even a letter he wrote to his British agent, Peter Janson-Smith, required a hasty followup; the solecisms and grammatical errors were explained as the result of failure to proofread.

(James Park Sloan, *Jerzy Kosinski: A Biography*, Dutton, United States, 1996, p. 174)

In view of Kosinski's inability to write, it is little wonder that he was accused of using ghost writers and translators who contributed more than their translation. He was also accused of plagiarism:

On June 22, 1982, two journalists writing in the *Village Voice* challenged the veracity of Kosinski's basic account of himself. They challenged his extensive use of private editors in the production of his novels and insinuated that *The Painted Bird*, his masterpiece, and *Being There*, which had been made into a hit movie, had been plagiarized from other sources.

(James Park Sloan, *Jerzy Kosinski: A Biography*, Dutton, United States, 1996, p. 6)

The accusation that Kosinski's *Being There* was plagiarized was particularly easy to document:

In its protagonist, its structure, its specific events, and its conclusion, the book bore an extraordinarily close resemblance to [Tadeusz] Dolega-Mostowicz's 1932 novel *The Career of Nikodem Dyzma*, which Kosinski had described with such excitement two decades earlier to his friend Stanislaw Pomorski. The question of plagiarism is a serious one, and not susceptible of easy and final answer; ultimately the text of *Being There* resembles the text of *Nikodem Dyzma* in ways that, had Dolega-Mostowicz been alive and interested in pressing the matter, might have challenged law courts as to a reasonable definition of plagiarism.

(James Park Sloan, *Jerzy Kosinski: A Biography*, Dutton, United States, 1996, p. 292)

As in the case of other great frauds like [Stephen Glass](#), Jerzy Kosinski for a time

appeared unassailable no matter how outrageous his falsehoods. The reference below is to a letter from Jerzy Kosinski to *The Nation* literary editor Betsy Pochoda:

The letter had been riddled with such errors that, in her view, its author could not possibly have been the writer of Kosinski's award-winning novels. Over the years she had picked up literary gossip about Kosinski's supposed "ghost writers" and had decided that such gossip was altogether plausible. In early 1982 she shared her opinion with Navasky, and made him a strange bet. People well enough situated in America, she bet him, could get away with anything, even if their most shameful secrets were revealed.

(James Park Sloan, *Jerzy Kosinski: A Biography*, Dutton, United States, 1996, p. 384)

A second condition which might promote the creation of a great liar might be an environment which condones or even encourages lying. Sloan demonstrates that at least Jerzy Kosinski's mother did indeed provide such an environment, and goes on to describe how such lying may have originated as a survival tactic. Please note that Sloan's description of the wartime environment which might have created a subculture based on lying not only provides an excuse for habitual lying, but provides also an excuse for greeting with a measure of skepticism some of the more extreme stories told by immigrants coming from such a

subculture. The situation Sloan describes below is one in which Jerzy Kosinski's career success has depended upon his telling stories of his youth which his mother, Elzbieta Kosinski, would know to be untrue, and with the mother arrived from Poland to dote on her successful son in New York:

At the same time, there was a dilemma to be resolved. By that time he had regaled the entire Polish émigré circle and much of Mary Wier's New York society with stories of his catastrophic and *solitary* adventures during the war — the wandering from village to village, the dog that had leaped at his heels, the loss of speech, the reunion at the orphanage where he was identified by his resemblance to this mother and the mark on his rib cage. What if conversation got around to those wartime experiences? What, God forbid, if someone casually asked her where the adult Kosinskis had been during the war? The question had come up, and he had managed to get away with vague answers. Sweden, he sometimes said. It was a big country. Some Poles must have escaped there. Maybe they had gotten there by boat.

The way Kosinski dealt with the situation reveals a great deal about the type of intimacy that existed between mother and son. In the course of her visit to New York, Elzbieta Kosinski met a good number of people — not only Mary and her friends, but the Strzetelskis and members of the Polish émigré circle. They made a day trip to Long Island, where Kosinski, Mary, and his mother spent an afternoon with Ewa Markowska and her family. Instead of shrinking from discussion of his experiences during the war, Kosinski made a point of bringing the subject up. His mother supported his story in every particular, describing the terrible fears she had felt for her son. On that point, everyone who met her in New York agreed.

How did he enlist her support? It is interesting to consider what arguments he must have made, if any were needed. The family had always managed to survive by telling a lie, he might have said. Lies were an essential tool of state; not only Hitler and Stalin, but all political leaders and all governments lied. It might be Camelot in America, but the Kosinskis were

Europeans. Americans could buy images like the Kennedy marriage and family (even the myth that Kennedy had produced a Pulitzer Prize-winning book); Americans were innocents, but Europeans — especially worldly Central Europeans like the Kosinskis — knew better. What was a lie anyway, and what was the truth? The minute after an event took place, it meant different things in the memory of each individual who had witnessed or experienced it. What was art but lies — enhanced "truth," nature improved upon, whether visually or in language. Even photographs chose the angle of representation; indeed, photographs, with their implication of objectivity, were the biggest liars of all. Wasn't that the most basic message of the twentieth century? The truth, whether in art or in life, was whatever worked best.

Or perhaps it wasn't necessary to make excuses for himself at all. His mother knew what he had been through in actual fact. She had lived the same history; she was the wife of Moses Lewinkopf, who had survived the Holocaust at whatever cost. She may have recognized the inner necessity of her son's behavior. She may well have grasped that those half-invented wartime stories had become an important part of his personal capital.

(James Park Sloan, *Jerzy Kosinski: A Biography*, Dutton, United States, 1996, pp. 171-172)

And here is an even more explicit confirmation of Elzbieta Kosinski supporting her son's lying — Sloan is describing a letter from Elzbieta Kosinski to her son, Jerzy, in which she recounts her reactions upon first reading a German translation of *The Painted Bird*:

But then, she added, she suffered from the innocence that *he was not with them at that time*. Writing, of course, in Polish, she spaced the letters — Y O U W E R E N O T W I T H U S. The double-spacing might well have had the character of emphasis, but in the context of all that is knowable of the Kosinski family during the occupation, one must conclude that this most remarkable statement was, instead, delivered with a

symbolic wink.

As extraordinary as it might appear, the most satisfactory explanation is that Elzbieta Kosinska had agreed with her son to maintain, even in their private correspondence, the fiction that he had been separated from them.

(James Park Sloan, *Jerzy Kosinski: A Biography*, Dutton, United States, 1996, p. 225)

In fact, it would not be too much to say that Kosinski's relationship with his mother transcended her supporting his lying – it ventured into the pathological:

There is, of course, a powerfully Oedipal undertone to this constellation of affinities [...]. That this is not mere conjecture is made clear by a conversation Kosinski had with Tadeusz Krauze, who was by then in New York as a graduate student in sociology. To a shocked Krauze, Kosinski unburdened himself of the revelation that he would like to have sex with his own mother. Before Krauze could respond, he added, "I would like to give her that pleasure."

Near the beginning of *Blind Date*, there is an episode in which the protagonist has sex with his own mother. The elderly father suffers a stroke, and the relationship begins when mother and son both run nude to the telephone to take a call reporting on the father's condition. After the call, mother and son find themselves in an embrace. They remain lovers for years, the relationship bounded only by her refusal to undress specifically for her son or to allow him to kiss her on the mouth. As *Blind Date* is filled with transparently autobiographical material, the episode dares the reader to believe that it is literally true.

(James Park Sloan, *Jerzy Kosinski: A Biography*, Dutton, United States, 1996, pp. 129-130)

Kosinski's sexual deviance is of insufficient relevance here to describe in detail. Let us glance at just one more

incident, this one having to do with a first date with Joy Weiss (an incident reminiscent of Kosinski's attempt to debauch his step-son by taking him on tours of sex clubs, as is recounted in the TV documentary *Sex, Lies, and Jerzy Kosinski*):

Toward the end of the meal he suggested that the two of them go to Chateau Nineteen, an S-M parlor with which he seemed to be quite familiar. She agreed on condition that she not be required to participate or remove her clothes. Once they were there, he moved comfortably among the patrons, chatting as if at a country-club tea. He was particularly friendly with a man who worked in the jewelry district, who was busy masturbating as they spoke.

(James Park Sloan, *Jerzy Kosinski: A Biography*, Dutton, United States, 1996, pp. 360-361)

An accumulation of incidents points to the conclusion that Jerzy Kosinski was irresponsible, immature, impulsive, physically abusive toward women, and generally reckless with the welfare of others. Below are six character-revealing incidents which taken collectively might have long ago led Jews to write Jerzy Kosinski off as unfit for leadership, might have long ago led Jews to conclude that he was too unstable to be trusted as a Holocaust witness, might have long ago led Jews to conclude that he should be shunned as

someone likely to bring ruin upon any who associated with him:

First character-revealing incident — how Kosinski attempted to elicit a declaration of love.

Meanwhile, matters had come to a crisis in the affair with Dora Militaru. He insisted that she profess her love for him, and when she refused, he hit her repeatedly. Dora broke off the affair. Their relationship soon resumed as a friendship — in January he would grant her his only TV interview, for Italian TV, undertaken within two years of the *Village Voice* episode — but his physical assault ended their relationship as lovers.

(James Park Sloan, *Jerzy Kosinski: A Biography*, Dutton, United States, 1996, p. 391)

Second character-revealing incident — how Kosinski had fun behind the wheel.

On the long straightaway crossing the Tappan Zee Bridge, he opened it up to 120, pure exhilaration for a boy who had been told always to do things carefully, legally, and correctly. A little farther along they found themselves stuck on a two-lane road behind a slow driver. As a man who would one day drive Formula One race cars, David was astonished at the fluidity and skill with which Kosinski finally got around the recalcitrant ahead of him — and entertained mightily when Kosinski then slowed to a crawl and used those skills to prevent the car from passing him. He was more than a little shocked, however, when Kosinski persisted with the game in the face of an oncoming truck, causing the other car to run off into a ditch.

(James Park Sloan, *Jerzy Kosinski: A Biography*, Dutton, United States, 1996, pp. 150-151)

Third character-revealing incident — how Kosinski played a little joke on one of his students.

Kosinski looked at the young man severely. "You know, the very first time I saw you I got the feeling you were going to die young," he said. "In the past twenty years I've had the same feeling about several people and each time I've had it, they died. Of course, I could be wrong this time."

The young man, who was afraid of being drafted and sent to Vietnam, started to cry.

(James Park Sloan, *Jerzy Kosinski: A Biography*, Dutton, United States, 1996, p. 287)

Fourth character-revealing incident — how Kosinski exposed Yale students to the intellectual contributions of the Neo Charles Mansonists.

As part of the class, the Yale undergraduates were required to write about their own deaths. To stimulate their thinking, Kosinski brought in members of the Process Church of the Final Judgement — a group of Satanists who arrived dressed in gray. They saw themselves as having some sort of tenuous link with Charles Manson's Helter-Skelter family. Proselytizing in Kosinski's Yale classroom, they urged the students to "accept and embrace *evil* within themselves." This notion was uncomfortably close to Kosinski's own claim to Krystyna Iwaszkiewicz that he could achieve revenge upon his enemies because of a pact with the Devil [...]. The classroom episode took an unexpected turn when a young Jewish student went off with the Satanists, prompting an exchange with the student's parents over the pedagogical appropriateness of this classroom activity.

(James Park Sloan, *Jerzy Kosinski: A Biography*, Dutton, United States, 1996, pp. 300-301)

Fifth character-revealing incident — how Kosinski entertained his dining partners.

One day, when the three couples had planned to have dinner in the city, Rose Styron arrived first and was persuaded to be his accomplice in a prank. Kosinski would hide in his apartment on Seventy-ninth Street, and the others would look for him. They came, looked, failed to find, and began to grow cross; Sadri was ready for dinner, and didn't find the prank so funny. Kosinski finally unfolded himself from behind the cabinets in his darkroom.

(James Park Sloan, *Jerzy Kosinski: A Biography*, Dutton, United States, 1996, p. 262)

Sixth character-revealing incident — what Kosinski did to Marian Javits's dog — from which some might conclude that Jerzy Kosinski was not only the kind of man that you would not leave alone with your daughter, and not only the kind of man that you would not leave alone with your son — he was the kind of man that you would not leave alone with your dog.

Marian Javits, in particular, was charmed by him, and she continued to be his friend even after his stories and eccentricities had become familiar — this despite the fact that one of his eccentricities had to do with her dog. Lying in bed recovering from a leg injury received while riding, she was startled when her dog ran furiously across the room, dripping urine. A moment later Kosinski appeared at the door. Later a friend told her that Kosinski had been observed abusing the dog in a way that would engender such behavior.

(James Park Sloan, *Jerzy Kosinski: A Biography*, Dutton, United States, 1996, p. 263)

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