

GROWING UP AND MEMORY OF THE MARGINS IN PATRICIA  
NELL WARREN'S (PATRICIA KILINA'S)  
*BILLY'S BOY*

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**Abstract:** While numerous news outlets in Ukraine reported about the passing of Patricia Nell Warren, as of 2019, none of her anglophone works has been translated into Ukrainian. This fact seems surprising because Warren, the first wife of George Tarnawsky, disappointed with the lack of success with her work in English, in the 1960s published a few volumes of poetry in Ukrainian under the pen name Patricia Kilina. Hence she has a strong link to the Ukrainian literary process. Although a few scholarly articles have been published about Warren's most popular novel, *The Front Runner* (1974), its sequels have not been studied yet. The aim of this article is to fill this gap by examining *Billy's Boy* (1997). The authors of this article argue that by depicting the coming-of-age experience of John William, the twelve-year-old son of Billy Sive who tries to find his own identity and find out more about his father, Warren manages to not only show that cultivating the postmemory of Billy and trying to understand his roots are crucial in the process of William's maturation but also portrays social changes happening in the USA in the late 1990s.

**Keywords:** coming-of-age, memory, postmemory, American Literature, Ukrainian Literature, queer memory

*Я пишу хлорофілом, та не зеленим,  
соком рослин, та не соком рож.  
Думаю про світ без вух, без очей,  
де звуки нечутні, де істоти невидні.  
У сні я бачу нечутний грім –  
грім форми урни.*

*Я хочу жити без червоних і без чорних.  
Ніч без тіней, рух без вітру.*

Патриція Килина<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> П. Килина, *Трагедія джмелів*, Нью-Йорк: В-во Нью Йоркської групи, 1960. Full text available at <http://www.ukrcenter.com/Література/Патриція-Килина/67847/Я-хочу-бути-без-червоних-і-без-чорних>, accessed: 29.10.2019.

After Patricia Nell Warren's death on February 9, 2019, several stories about her novels' influence on generations of gay Americans began to appear on the Internet. Whether it was a way of coming out by giving a copy of *The Front Runner* (1974) to a friend or the feeling of solidarity the novel provoked in readers, for decades, Warren's works have undoubtedly been significant for many non-heteronormative Americans, especially those coming-of-age in the 1970s. While numerous literary websites in Ukraine reported her passing, as of 2019, none of her anglophone works has been translated into Ukrainian. This fact seems surprising because Warren, the first wife of George Tarnawsky, disappointed with the lack of success writing in English, in the 1960s published a few volumes of poetry in Ukrainian under the pen name Patricia Kilina and hence has a strong link to the Ukrainian literary process<sup>2</sup>. Apart from her intimate poetry, she also translated into English other Ukrainian authors and traditional *dumy*<sup>3</sup>. In her career as an émigré poet, Warren's American heritage allowed her to be published in various places behind the Iron Curtain, where, unlike her husband, she was not seen as a political enemy<sup>4</sup>. As she claims in *Tragedy of Bees — My Years as a Poet in Exile*, there would have been no anglophone novels without that poetry<sup>5</sup>. Unlike her fellow Ukrainian poets from the avantgarde émigré New York Group she and her husband belonged to, she never lived through any war. Sill, being in the closet, married to a man, Warren was waging war within and used Ukrainian poetry as a way of coping with her emotional battle<sup>6</sup>. Writing in Ukrainian allowed Warren to create a secret code of talking about her sexual otherness, and the "struggle to escape from a tragedy of her making would produce a couple hundred more poems"<sup>7</sup>. This internal conflict ended when Warren divorced Tarnawsky, came out of the closet and published *The Front Runner* in 1974 under her own name.

When the novel was released, the American LGBTQ+ community had already gained social visibility, in large part due to the 1969 Stonewall Riots, considered the most important event in modern American queer history<sup>8</sup>. In the early 1970s, gay-themed books were not part of the literary mainstream.

<sup>2</sup> М. Светліцкі, *Змагання за ідентичність і спори про досвід. "The Front Runner" Патриції Нелл Воррен*, "Літературознавчі обрії. Праці молодих учених" 2018, vol. 25, pp. 75–82.

<sup>3</sup> *Ukrainian Dumy: Original Texts*, trans. by George Tarnawsky and Patricia Kilina, Toronto, Cambridge 1979.

<sup>4</sup> More about The New York Group see: М. Ревакович, *Крізь іншу призму (Про феномен і поезію Нью-Йоркської групи)*, [in:] *Півстоліття напівтисні: Антологія поезії Нью-Йоркської групи*, ed. М. Ревакович. Київ 2005, p. 17–40.

<sup>5</sup> P. Nell Warren, *Tragedy of Bees — My Years as a Poet in Exile* [in:] *The Best of the Harvard Gay & Lesbian Review*, ed. R. Schneider, Philadelphia 1997, p. 30–40.

<sup>6</sup> More see: М. Светліцкі, op. cit.

<sup>7</sup> P. Nell Warren, op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>8</sup> М. Светліцкі, op. cit.

The publication of *The Front Runner* to commercial success was another milestone in the history of American queer literature. It appeared on the *New York Times* bestseller list, the first contemporary gay novel to do so, has sold more than ten million copies, and has been translated into more than a dozen languages. Eric Anderson, an American sociologist, shares his experience with the novel at the beginning of his book *In the Game*:

After coming out of the closet as an openly gay high school track coach in 1993, I was urged by my friend to read Patricia Nell Warren's *The Front Runner*. Depressed after a poor performance at the California State Cross-Country Meet [...] I read the story of Harlan Brown, a gay coach at a premier distance running university. His sexuality is discovered, he is jeered, and his name blackened. I periodically cried the entire drive home, for the struggle he and his athletes endured was both an accurate representation of my life and a foretelling of my future<sup>9</sup>.

Anderson writes about the struggles he had to face after coming out and mentions that it made him see the social importance of sexuality in the USA: "Overnight I had gone from being known as the hilarious teacher and revered coach to the faggot teacher and the faggot coach"<sup>10</sup>. His experience seems similar to the one found in Warren's novel. The story about Harlan Brown, a running coach, and his star athlete Billy Sive, reveals the former's past in the form of flashbacks and focuses on homophobia in American sport in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Having overcome many obstacles, Billy wins the gold medal in a race in Montreal, but when he is within meters of winning another one, he gets shot dead by a radical homophobe.

Warren decided to return to the protagonists of *The Front Runner* in two companion novels, *Harlan's Race* (1994) and *Billy's Boy* (1997). While a few scholarly articles have been published about *The Front Runner*, its sequels have not been studied yet<sup>11</sup>. This article aims to fill this gap by analyzing *Billy's Boy*. John William, the protagonist of this coming-of-age novel, is the son of Billy Sive, born using *in-vitro* fertilization after his father's tragic death at the end of *The Front Runner*. While he was begotten to keep the memory of Billy alive, the boy is raised by Betsy, a single mother, with little to no knowledge of his dead father. William's entire life revolves around remembering his father, someone of whom he has no individual memories. The narration balances between William's two worlds – the outer where he is being lied to by his mother, and the inner where the consequences of the lies and the lack

<sup>9</sup> E. Anderson, *In the Game: Gay Athletes and the Cult of Masculinity*, New York 2005, p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> E. Anderson, *Inclusive Masculinity: The Changing Nature of Masculinities*, Routledge 2009, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> See M. СВЕТЛИЦКИ, op. cit.; T. Steuernagel, *Contemporary Homosexual Fiction and Gay Rights*, "The Journal of Popular Culture" 1986, p. 125–134.

of individual memories of his father make him fall into misery. The absence of the father and the desperate need to find out more about him by collecting pieces of other people's memories are the main factors provoking William's growth. The protagonist holds onto his dad's fictional image and is unaware of how remembering Billy and longing for a father figure directs his life. He prematurely becomes sexually active and is conflicted about whether he should stay alive or commit suicide to join his father in the afterlife<sup>12</sup>. Analyzing *Billy's Boy*, we want to argue that by depicting the coming-of-age experience of the twelve-year-old son of Billy Sive, Warren shows how important remembering the father is in the protagonist's growth, as other people's memories about Billy shape William and influence his understanding of gender, sexuality, and family dynamics. Although the novel is set in the early 1990s, Warren's portrayal of the struggles of non-heteronormative families seems even more timely now than it did when *Billy's Boy* was published twenty-two years ago.

COMING-OF-AGE AND THE OPPOSING IMAGES OF MASCULINITY,  
SEXUALITY, AND FATHERHOOD

While the memories of William's absent father play a vital role in the boy's life, he knows only a few details about Billy – his first name and the cause of his death. William also owns a couple of photographs – one of them is framed on his dresser, accompanied by a candle as a form of prayer. As Marianne Hirsch argues, “photography is an «inscriptive» (archival) memorial practice that retains an «incorporative» (embodied) dimension: as archival documents that inscribe aspects of the past”<sup>13</sup>. In *Billy's Boy* photographs not only keep the memory of Billy Sive alive, but they also allow William to create his own image of his father.

The memory of Billy haunts William even when he moves to Costa Mesa with his mother. There they meet the Heasters, a religious and very conservative couple with a son named Shawn. Without hesitation, William even lets his new friend see the secret box containing more photographs of his dad. William also opens up about a recent dream in which Billy appeared to him, claiming to be alive and waiting to meet him. The protagonist becomes passionate about astronomy when his mother suggests that stars could be the spirits of dead people. The boys bond as they begin to play in finding Billy in space and start using code names – Shawn becomes Orik of the Sun and William Commander Finder. Their friendship becomes intimate during sleepovers as they develop

<sup>12</sup> The topic of suicidal thoughts is not unknown to Warren herself, as she attempted to end her life twice.

<sup>13</sup> M. Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, “Poetics Today” 2008, nr 29(1), p. 107.

a fascination with each other's naked bodies. They do not see anything homoerotic about it and call one another "brothers" who are "real men"<sup>14</sup>. When the boys eyewitness sexual violence towards a new Mexican student at school, they do not react. After all, even if it is done in a "mean way", they are real men, and being a "sissyfag" is a disgrace. C. J. Pascoe in her 2007 book *Dude, You're a Fag* underlines the importance of this kind of homophobic rituals in the American mindset to "avoid becoming a faggot"<sup>15</sup>. The boys' special friendship flourishes behind the walls and is secretive, just like the nicknames they use in private. At the time when they are not naked, Finder and Orík watch movies about space, read astronomy magazines, and look through a telescope.

During one of the families' hiking trips, things start to get complicated. Shawn's father begins to show his dark side and, together with his wife, yells at William's mom for multiple reasons. He questions her parenting skills as a single mother. It is a typical example of performing hegemonic masculinity, as he presents his domination towards both Betsy and his own wife<sup>16</sup>. Alone and miserable, William considers committing suicide through drowning in the lake: "Maybe there was no other way to get to my Dad except die myself... I mean, really die"<sup>17</sup>. William and Shawn move away from their families, and when a kiss is about to happen, they get caught. Later that night, the protagonist hears the sound of Shawn being beaten. The violence his father uses to masculinize him symbolically shows how important it is for him to be a dominant, heterosexual man<sup>18</sup>. The idea of his son being anything else is unexpected.

While William continues his search for any information about his father with the help of a teacher, Shawn's parents bring him to church and insist on William to talk to his mom about Jesus. They also make the boys follow the new Mexican student and encourage them to beat him as "real boys" should do<sup>19</sup>. Influenced by a friend named Jerry, William learns new vocabulary, including homophobic slurs, which he keeps using until the end of the novel. William uses the homophobic discourse to avoid being accused of homosexuality by other men<sup>20</sup>. It is an act of homophobia, a fear described by Eric Anderson in his 2009 book *Inclusive Masculinity*<sup>21</sup>. We can observe it in Shawn's

<sup>14</sup> P. Nell Warren, *Billy's Boy*, Beverly Hills, CA 1997, p. 26.

<sup>15</sup> C. J. Pascoe, *Dude, You're a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School*, Berkeley 2007, p. 53.

<sup>16</sup> R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, *Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept*, "Gender and Society" 2005, Vol. 19, No. 6 (December), p. 842.

<sup>17</sup> P. Nell Warren, op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>18</sup> R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, op. cit., p. 841.

<sup>19</sup> P. Nell Warren, op. cit., p. 62.

<sup>20</sup> M. Świetlicki, *Nie nazywaj mnie pedalem – homofobia i homohisteria w prozie Serhija Żadana*, "Poznańskie Studia Slawistyczne" 2016, nr 11, p. 15.

<sup>21</sup> E. Anderson, op. cit.

abusive father's behavior as well. His constant anger results from the fear of being perceived as anything less than a real, heterosexual man. Michael Kimmel, who studied the phenomenon of anger among American cisgender straight white men, points out that defining masculinity as being in control leads to losing control being "a sign of damaged manhood"<sup>22</sup>. Indeed, Shawn's father, who represents the opposite of Billy, the father William does not know, gets angry over the idea of the boys' sleepover and once again, showing his aggression, beats his son to the point where officers are involved. Unfortunately, the law is not on Shawn's side. The Heasters threaten William and his mom, as they want the boys to stay away from each other: "Tell her to keep her evil spawn away from our son, or we'll see her in court"<sup>23</sup>.

When the boys are separated, William visits a befriended family, the La-Fonts. There he meets Ana, a girl his age, and becomes infatuated with her. When the protagonist learns that his father was homosexual, and so is his mother, growing up becomes even more difficult for him. William seems to be very proud of his fascination with Ana, which symbolizes the quest to rebel against his non-heteronormative family: "with a whole family full of queers, it was up to me to continue the heterosexual tradition"<sup>24</sup>. As William gets to meet more and more people who knew his dad, he gets more confused, as the image of Billy that emerges in his head does not fit the one he has created. Nevertheless, he picks up the photograph of his dad, holds it to his chest, and apologizes: "I'm sorry, don't be mad at me. I'm trying to understand"<sup>25</sup>.

After finally meeting Harlan, his late father's boyfriend, William refuses to interact with him and his co-workers. He is unable to see Harlan as a person, and one of the first thoughts about him that come to the protagonist's mind is about Harlan's strong hands: "he had touched my Dad's body with that hand. The thought weirded me out"<sup>26</sup>. On his way back home, William keeps using homophobic slurs and is disgusted by the effeminate behavior of gay men. The protagonist's confusion is visible all the time as he not only has to come to terms with the fact that his father was gay but also understand his own sexuality: "Was I queer too? With a queer Mom and a queer Dad, I *had* to be queer, right? So why did I think Ana was cool?"<sup>27</sup>. William is even more confused when he becomes attracted to the bodyguard of his father, but, unable to admit it, he turns the attraction around and starts wondering if Chino is a pedophile. After getting to know Ana better, William ends up kissing her

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<sup>22</sup> M. Kimmel, *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era*, New York 2013, p. 187.

<sup>23</sup> P. Nell Warren, op. cit., p. 68.

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem, p. 103–104.

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem, p. 112.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, p. 116.

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, p. 120.

as they are “two dadless kids” who can take care of each other<sup>28</sup>. However, the idea of sexual intercourse with a girl scares him, as William does not feel towards Ana what he feels towards Shawn, and the couple decides to stay friends. Interestingly, the protagonist admits that he is “hungry for touch” whether from a boy or a girl, showing his unquenchable longing for affection.

One evening, William meets Teak, another boy his age. He is introduced to William as Marian’s housekeeper’s nephew, who came out as gay to his family, got beaten by them, and was thrown away, sharing the fate of countless LGBTQ+ adolescents<sup>29</sup>. William describes Teak as “girlie” and “faggy”<sup>30</sup>. Still, the idea of his family ripping out his earring and hurting him brings back the shameful memory of chasing Alberto, the Mexican classmate. Teak’s effeminacy intimidates William as he starts to wonder what kind of a man his father was<sup>31</sup>. When the protagonist goes dancing, the thoughts of Billy and Shawn suddenly hit him: “Did my Dad move like this?”<sup>32</sup>. Seeing two men sharing a kiss brings back memories of his lost friend: “I stared at them, remembering being at the lake with Orik [...] So that was what my Dad looked like when he kissed Harlan”<sup>33</sup>. Being able to witness people kiss with a swell of pride allows him to admit that this was what he had always wanted to do with Orik, “and now I’d never have the chance”<sup>34</sup>. Except for Shawn, there is only one thing on William’s mind while he is exploring the gay culture of Los Angeles, and that is his father: “For me, this was scientific research [...] My Dad had walked those same kind of streets”<sup>35</sup>. He has no interest in visiting any “queer-owned businesses,” all that matters to him is that he is getting closer to his father. He meets a variety of people living in the streets and owning small businesses in the area, which makes him think of Billy’s experiences: “I wondered how my Dad felt about homeless kids

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<sup>28</sup> Ibidem, p. 124.

<sup>29</sup> Studies show that many of the homeless American LGBTQ+ youth were forced out by their homophobic parents. More than 30% of them faced various kinds of abuse at home, including sexual assault. See: R. Barri Flowers, *Runaway Kids and Teenage Prostitution: America’s Lost, Abandoned, and Sexually Exploited Children*, Westport 2001.; J. Seaton, *Homeless rates for LGBT teens are alarming, but parents can make a difference*. “The Washington Post”, 29 Mar. 2017. [www.washingtonpost.com/news/parenting/wp/2017/03/29/homeless-rates-for-lgbt-teens-are-alarmingheres-how-parents-can-change-that/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/parenting/wp/2017/03/29/homeless-rates-for-lgbt-teens-are-alarmingheres-how-parents-can-change-that/) Accessed 19 October 2019.

<sup>30</sup> P. Nell Warren, op. cit., p. 179.

<sup>31</sup> Teak’s appearance in William’s life also brings his grandfather John, who is ready to help the flamboyant Mexican boy. He works as a lawyer, considers LGBTQ+ clients his family and never charges them.

<sup>32</sup> Ibidem, p. 196.

<sup>33</sup> Ibidem, p. 196–197.

<sup>34</sup> Ibidem, p. 197.

<sup>35</sup> Ibidem, p. 186.

selling their sex to get food. The idea made me desperately sad”<sup>36</sup>. William also slowly comes to peace with his sexuality as he shares some secrets with Ana.

Time passes, but Shawn does not leave William’s mind. One night he watches the news, and it comes to his mind that maybe his friend is dead, but no one says it out loud. He cannot find comfort in anything, as his mind continually goes back to the times he was with Shawn and keeps worrying about him being alone. William refuses to give up and finds a lead to Shawn at the Los Angeles Youth Alliance shelter. Unexpectedly, he bumps into a purple-haired girl in the street:

When she took off the dark glasses, her slanty eyes blinked between black make-up lines. She looked jittery and scared.

She stared at me. “Finder?”

I stared back. The girl turned away, like she was afraid of me and wanted to cross the street. Then she looked at me again. “It’s me,” she whispered in a familiar voice<sup>37</sup>.

Overwhelmed with Shawn’s new, feminine look, “his little gold earrings, long fake eyelashes, purple lipstick and nose bead”<sup>38</sup>, William cannot believe it is his friend in drag. They sit in a restaurant and talk about everything that Shawn has missed. While Shawn does not want to share his story, William notices significant changes in his behavior. Using gay slang, swearing, and smoking, he is now more similar to Teak than his old self. Nevertheless, William offers Shawn a place to stay to keep him safe from his parents.

William’s attitude towards his sexuality is the greatest transformation of all. At the beginning of the novel, he does not know the outside world, and exploring his body with Orík seems to be just a game he likes to play. As time passes, he struggles with internalized homophobia, heavily influenced by Shawn’s parents and their church. Multiple conversations with his mother regarding being a part of the LGBTQ+ community completely change his perspective. He goes from “I might as well be queer, I get treated like I am”<sup>39</sup> to “So maybe I’m bi?”<sup>40</sup> and eventually, he learns to accept himself. When Betsy laughs that he is probably the first kid in the universe to cut his eyelashes, as he does not want to look feminine, he admits that “Jerry said that single moms and lesbian moms raise boy kids who aren’t masculine. They’re... feminine and sissy. They don’t like sports and stuff”<sup>41</sup>. He eventually lets himself

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem, p. 187.

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem, p. 263–264.

<sup>38</sup> Ibidem, p. 264.

<sup>39</sup> Ibidem, p. 249.

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem, p. 310.

<sup>41</sup> Ibidem, p. 174.



be vulnerable and stops seeing hegemonic masculinity performed by Shawn's father as the only way of being a man.

FROM *BETSY'S KID* TO *BILLY'S BOY*

At the beginning of the novel, William introduces his mother by saying "the Heden family was me and my Mom against the world"<sup>42</sup>. They move to southern California for her to coach a female sports team. Quickly enough, the reader finds out that there is another woman in this family, Aunt Marian. Despite the heartwarming relationship with his mother, William finds her untrustworthy when it comes to the father mystery. Following Billy's death, she chooses to raise William independently and isolates themselves from the child's father's family. While Betsy is present throughout William's maturation, they drift apart as the boy starts to have his own secrets. She is angry at him despite being the one who started the carousel of lies and secrets. Even after the reunion, her presence is slightly irritating, as William loses trust in her with every newly uncovered lie. She also refuses to be completely honest with her son about her feelings until the end of the novel, when she finally admits she loves Marian. Betsy gives the reader a sense of being forgotten throughout the process of William's growing up, which might be Warren's way of shedding some light on the double social exclusion of her not only as a woman but also as a lesbian. Betsy claims that she is comfortable with her sexuality, and loving women has always been natural to her, but it is not visible.

Only when the protagonist meets Chino, an old friend of his mom and aunt, he learns the truth about his father. Chino was a bodyguard, and, driven by guilt for not saving Billy, he nearly committed suicide. William's lesbian mom decided not to put his father's name on his birth certificate as "straight people don't like queer people having children. They go to court and take the children away"<sup>43</sup>. She also tells him that he was conceived through *in-vitro* fertilization. William's anger and disgust toward his family grows. He does not want to engage with "any queers" and considers Harlan, his father's partner, "nothing"<sup>44</sup> instead of a second father. He feels deceived. Before Betsy reunites with Harlan after twelve years, she only sends him one photograph of William per year. Consequently, Harlan has to create his own image of William based on photographs. When he finally meets the boy, they both realize that the images they have been preserving – William of his father and Harlan of William – differ from reality.

<sup>42</sup> Ibidem, p. 8.

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem, p. 97.

<sup>44</sup> Ibidem, p. 102.

When the time comes for William's fourteenth birthday, he is still miserable: "Everybody tried to make it terrific, but it was the unhappiest birthday of my life", he says<sup>45</sup>. The protagonist spends the day with his family and friends, calls John his grandpa for the first time, and even allows uncle Vince, Harlan's boyfriend, to hug him. Maurice Halbwachs argues that "the family has its own peculiar memory, just as do other kinds of communities. Foremost in this memory are relations of kinship"<sup>46</sup>. William, who has never met Billy, is the only one who does not feel Sive's presence and openly admits that he wishes his father was there. Little does William know that meeting Harlan's son, Michael, would change his life completely. Michael comes home with his wife and manages to bond with William as they are both science geeks. He studies blood and diseases, so William starts to wonder if there is a gay gene. He states that he would like to see Billy's chromosomes, and after a long moment of silence, Harlan admits that it is possible: "Three of your dad's semen specimens are still in deep freeze"<sup>47</sup>. They are being kept in a Californian cryobank, but the emotional attachment to something so personal makes it hard for Harlan to show them to William.

In the meantime, Harlan makes the decision and lets William see the chromosomes of Billy. The protagonist goes to the cryobank with Harlan, Michael, and Chino and is amazed by the building's interior space-like architecture. It is a very emotional moment for William as he has dreamed of seeing a living part of his father since he was born. He gets to witness Billy's DNA, although he is confused about what it exactly is. Later he notices Michael joking with Harlan and gets extremely saddened because he will never experience something as personal with Billy. Despite not being able to talk to Billy, the trip to the cryobank seems to be one of the best days of William's life: "Amazing how much stuff was still left from my Dad's life. Today was the day I'd felt closest to him"<sup>48</sup>. This unusual visit also makes William bond with Harlan and Michael.

William's joy does not last long, though. Only a few days later, William visits Harlan with his mother and overhears their argument. Everything he has believed in for the past fourteen years is about to be challenged when Harlan shares the news:

"Well, I got out Billy's medical records. They were put away in a box of old stuff, that I keep in a safe-deposit box at the bank. And I was right. Billy was type AB."  
"So?"

"It means that... well, what it means is that Billy isn't your biological father."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibidem, p. 213.

<sup>46</sup> M. Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. by L. Coser, Chicago 1992, p. 63.

<sup>47</sup> Ibidem, p. 241.

<sup>48</sup> Ibidem, p. 249.

<sup>49</sup> Ibidem, p. 251.

William is devastated as this information makes him think that his life was built on lies. Harlan struggles to get to the main point; he does not know how that mistake could have happened: “The only O carrier in the picture is... me”<sup>50</sup>. It is even more difficult for William to proceed with this information as, despite his mother’s best intentions, he is most likely influenced by her negative attitude towards Harlan. The 95-percent chance of Harlan’s paternity leaves him speechless. He assures William that the DNA tests do not change anything, though, and he is Billy’s kid “spiritually, emotionally, mentally”<sup>51</sup>. Once again, just like in the beginning, when he was fighting an inner war, “I was the only kid in the universe who didn’t have a dad”<sup>52</sup>, he is alone with his struggles.

After a few days, William finally gets to talk to Harlan about the dreams he has been having about Billy, as well as the apparition he saw after being hit by a wave. The more William opens up, the more Harlan seems to understand the protagonist’s inner issues: “Your mom says you’ve had this death wish since you were little. Accidents... being reckless... It’s about wanting to be with your dad, isn’t it? [...] You don’t have to kill yourself to get to your dad”<sup>53</sup>. He assures William that both he and Billy wanted the boy to be born and highlights that being a parent means more than having the same genes. Eventually, William and Harlan manage to build a father-son relationship. William experiences a strange feeling of genuine happiness that he is afraid of losing.

When William receives a box full of Billy’s belongings, he is in complete shock discovering inside the same clothes that Billy’s apparition was wearing. The souvenirs and photographs have a deep meaning for Billy’s non-traditional family. Attachment to objects associated with the protagonist’s father plays a significant role throughout the novel<sup>54</sup>. They allow William to shape his own memory of Billy. One evening the candle in front of Shawn’s and Billy’s photographs burns out, and William hears Billy’s voice telling him not to give up on remembering Orík, even if he is dead. Hopeless, he looks for another candle to light up as it reminds him of the two lost men. The emotional attachment to the objects allows William to imitate the dead’s presence among the living.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibidem, p. 253.

<sup>51</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>52</sup> Ibidem, p. 10.

<sup>53</sup> Ibidem, p. 299.

<sup>54</sup> Norwegian archeologist Bjørnar Olsen describes the purpose of objects in our lives. Objects surround us, and we cannot treat them as a trace of an absent presence as they are involved in creating or differentiating between eras. Olsen emphasizes that they shape our history and let the past live on. Oddly enough, often we are not aware of their function as many of them become so valuable unintentionally. See: B. Olsen, *In Defense of Things: Archaeology and the Ontology of Objects*, Lanham (Maryland) 2013.

Selectivity is one of the most significant traits of individual memory<sup>55</sup>. To focus on specific memories, we must first forget about others. By removing some memories, we give room and space for new memories. William has the choice to do whatever he wants to with the box filled with Billy's personal belongings and the envelope with photographs Betsy gives him. He decides to keep only positive memories about Billy and Orik.

William was born to honor the memory of Billy, after whom he was also named. Still, the boy does not know his father due to Betsy's isolation and secrets. William holds on to the little details and dreams of people recognizing him as "Billy's boy": "up to now, they called me *Betsy's kid*"<sup>56</sup>. When William finally meets his family, everyone starts calling him "Billy's boy". By finding out more about Billy and meeting his other family members, the protagonist becomes more than "Billy's boy" as he manages to find his own identity.

#### CONCLUSION

Astrid Erll argues that media such as "literature and film can have effect on both levels of cultural memory: the individual *and* the collective"<sup>57</sup>. The media's transmission ability and range are undeniable. That is why the words passed by a single author may form memories of whole groups and communities<sup>58</sup>. Warren's *Billy's Boy* is a coming-of-age story that includes references to various intersectional issues connected to the queer discourse. Starting with the exploration of William's sexuality and identity, through the presentation of a queer family's dynamics, and finally, by introducing historical events, Warren sheds light on the different levels of memory and mechanisms of preserving it among a marginalized community. As the book is set twenty years after *The Front Runner*, Warren often mentions the AIDS epidemic during the 1980s<sup>59</sup> and thoroughly points out racial discrimination. Just like with the Stonewall riots in *The Front Runner*, she consciously mentions the

<sup>55</sup> See: A. Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives*, Cambridge 2012.

<sup>56</sup> P. Nell Warren, op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>57</sup> See: A. Erll, *Memory in Culture*, Basingstoke 2011, p. 346.

<sup>58</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>59</sup> It is the HIV-related stigma that often stops William from treating the affected people with respect. The boy's worldview gets crushed multiple times though, for instance when he gets to know that Ana's heterosexual stepdad is HIV positive. Moreover, one of Ana's family members died of AIDS and her mother suffers from CFS. About the HIV/AIDS epidemic see: P. J. Smit et al, *HIV-related stigma within communities of gay men: A literature review*, "AIDS Care" 2012 Vol. 24, № 3–4 (April), pp. 405–412.

subject of the riots in the streets of Los Angeles after the beating of Rodney King. Warren also continually brings up the problems of the LGBTQ+ community to portray the discrimination and social stigma present in the media at that time.

As we have tried to argue, cultivating the postmemory of Billy and trying to understand his roots are crucial in the process of William's maturation and acceptance of his sexuality. Hirsch associates postmemory with growing up alongside the idea of certain memories of older generations and mentions three significant elements of the intergenerational structure of postmemory – memory, family, and photography. She also analyzes the impact of gender roles on shaping postmemory<sup>60</sup>. William is first attached to photographs of his dad and then uses other people's memories of Billy to create his own. Although the idea of having a new family is difficult to get used to, William eventually learns to embrace his roots. While he struggles with accepting that Billy is not his biological father, he finally appreciates Harlan and his entire non-traditional family. Betsy summarizes their situation towards the end of the novel by saying "Nobody ever knows everything about their family. A family is a whole universe. Nobody knows everything in the universe"<sup>61</sup>. This quote highlights the importance of William appreciating the bond with his loved ones. The conflicted boy introduced at the beginning of the novel becomes a young man who eventually embraces himself and learns how to accept other people. The postmemory of his childhood hero Billy Sive turns out to be just one puzzle piece shaping his identity.

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<sup>60</sup> M. Hirsch, op. cit.

<sup>61</sup> P. Nell Warren, op. cit., p. 338.

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#### DORASTANIE I PAMIĘĆ MARGINESÓW W POWIEŚCI *BILLY'S BOY* PATRICII NELL WARREN (PATRICII KILINY)

**Streszczenie:** Chociaż wiele serwisów informacyjnych na Ukrainie zamieściło wiadomość o śmierci Patricii Nell Warren, na chwilę obecną żaden z jej anglojęzycznych utworów nie został przetłumaczony na język ukraiński. Fakt ten wydaje się zaskakujący, ponieważ Warren, pierwsza żona Jurija Tarnawskiego, opublikowała w latach 1960. kilka tomików poezji w języku ukraińskim pod pseudonimem Patricia Kilina, a tym samym ma silny związek z ukraińskim procesem literackim. Choć opublikowano kilka artykułów naukowych na temat najpopularniejszej powieści Warren pt. *The Front Runner* (1974), jej kontynuacje nie zostały jeszcze odpowiednio przebadane. Celem artykułu jest wypełnienie tej luki poprzez analizę powieści *Billy's Boy* (1997) w perspektywie studiów nad pamięcią. Analizując ten utwór, autorzy artykułu chcą argumentować, że przedstawiając doświadczenia związane z dorastaniem Johna Williama, dwunastoletniego syna Billy'ego

Sive'a, który próbuje odnaleźć własną tożsamość i dowiedzieć się więcej o swoim ojcu, Warren udaje się nie tylko pokazać, że kultuwanie postpamięci o zmarłym ojcu i próba zrozumienia własnych korzeni są kluczowe w procesie dojrzewania Williama, ale także ukazuje zmiany społeczne zachodzące w Stanach Zjednoczonych pod koniec lat 1990. oraz znaczenie zachowania pamięci o zmaganiach i osiągnięciach poprzednich pokoleń społeczności LGBTQ+.

**Słowa kluczowe:** dorastanie, pamięć, postpamięć, literatura amerykańska, literatura ukraińska, pamięć marginesów

ДОРОСЛІШАННЯ І ПАМ'ЯТЬ ПЕРИФЕРІЇ У РОМАНІ *ХЛОПЧИК БІЛЛІ*  
(*BILLY'S BOY*) ПАТРИЦІЇ НЕЛЛ ВОРРЕН (ПАТРИЦІЇ КИЛИНИ)

**Анотація:** Попри те, що багато українських інформаційних порталів розмістило інформацію про смерть Патриції Нелл Воррен, жоден із її англomовних романів не був перекладений українською. Цей факт видається несподіваним, оскільки перша дружина Юрія Тарнавського, опублікувала у 1960-х роках кілька поетичних збірок українською мовою під псевдонімом Патриція Килина і має тісний зв'язок українським літературним процесом. Хоча було опубліковано кілька наукових статей про найпопулярніший роман Воррен *Лідер забігу* (*The Front Runner*, 1974)), її продовження досі не були належним чином досліджені. Мета статті – заповнити ці лакуни шляхом аналізу роману *Хлопчик Біллі* (*Billy's Boy*, 1997) з перспективи студій над пам'яттю. Досліджуючи цей твір, автори статті хочуть довести, що показуючи досвід дорослішання Джона Вільяма, дванадцятирічного сина Біллі Сайва, який намагається віднайти свою ідентичність і більше довідатися про батька, Воррен вдалося не лише продемонструвати, що культивування постпам'яті про померлого батька і намагання зрозуміти власні корені є ключовими у процесі дозрівання Вільяма, але вказує також на суспільні зміни, що відбувалися у США наприкінці 1990-х років. Крім того, письменниця показала значення збереження пам'яті про боротьбу і досягнення попередніх поколінь ЛГБТ+ спільноти.

**Ключові слова:** дорослішання, пам'ять, постпам'ять, американська література, українська література, пам'ять периферії

