

Childhood Agency and Activism in WWII Warsaw

The World War II diary of Julian Kulski is one of few English-language primary accounts of the German occupation of Warsaw. First published in 1979 and re-issued in 2014 as *The Color of Courage: A Boy at War: The World War II Diary of Julian Kulski*, this account follows Julian's experiences over the course of the war. Kulski, just ten at the war's start, "is recruited into the clandestine Polish Underground Army by his Scoutmaster, undertakes a secret mission into the Warsaw Ghetto, is captured by the Gestapo, sentenced to Auschwitz, rescued, fights in a Polish Commando unit in the Warsaw Uprising, and ends [up] as a 16-year-old German POW." Drawing on Marah Gubar's kinship model, I analyze how Julian demonstrates childhood agency as he fully participates in and even leads acts of resistance to the German occupation. Kulski's text depicts collaboration between children and adults that extends beyond aesthetic production to explicitly political engagement. First, I address how the adults in Julian's life attempt to limit his agency, especially by limiting his access to knowledge. Then, I analyze the ways that Julian demonstrates child agency through his petty sabotage of the German occupation without adult knowledge. Finally, I demonstrate how Julian collaborates with adults first by joining the Polish Underground, and then by participating in the Warsaw Uprising as a soldier in the Home Army. Ultimately, I argue that Julian Kulski's WWII account demonstrates the efficacy of children working both alone and in conjunction with adults to resist tyranny.