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winter/spring 11-12 | 2018

THE POETICS OF TRAVEL WRITING

Today, the poetics of travel writing seem to rely less and less on intertextual play between a series of related narratives. More and more, they seem to consolidate certain conditional strategies.

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Editor: Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland

„Forum Poetyki | Forum of Poetics” winter/spring 2018 (11-12) year III | ISSN 2451-1404

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Travel, Condition, Poetics

Tomasz Mizerkiewicz

*In analyses that continue to dominate the field today, travel writing is framed as one of many possible textualizations of the places visited by their authors. These textualizations are suspended in rhetorical tension or conflict with other forms of textual rendering, and the agents behind them tend to retain the status of Roland Barthes' historical "scriptors." The growing relevance of travel writing as a subject for philological reflection seems to stem, however, from several other cognitive impulses. Among these, we can set apart the notion of "condition" as a problem of travel writing that we can understand in a number of ways. By confronting new places, the traveling subject takes stock of the personal, linguistic and cultural resources she has at her disposal. Together, these resources amount to a "condition" within our first understanding, as a form of inventory: rarely would these authors question the content (quality; volume) of their inventories before travel, and perhaps they never even knew it was possible to ask. To move on to our second understanding of condition, travel is almost always associated with a great (at times extreme) strain that forces the traveling subject to confront the limitations of her capacities and to ultimately develop a condition of her own: her ability to take care of herself, reckon with hardships, and concentrate on the very "here and now" of travel that ends up shaping the subject. This leads to our third understanding of condition, for the Latin *conditio* indicates not only an inventory and by analogy, a sense of lack, but the creative act as well. Today, the poetics of travel writing seem to rely less and less on intertextual play between a series of related narratives. More and more, they seem to consolidate certain conditional strategies. They can offer a method for taking stock of collective balances and individual inventories, or for identifying fundamental deficiencies, limitations, impossibilities and impasses. Finally, they allude to, or perhaps replicate, the work of developing new conditional possibilities and the formation of new skills, new forms of attention and focus, and new techniques of preservation. This final and unusually pragmatic aspect shifts the emphasis from the intertextual relationship to the relationship between text and gesture, text and worldview, or perhaps text and the creative act under strictly circumscribed conditions.*

In this issue of "Forum of Poetics", we map out, for example, the conditional dilemmas of historical European authors chronicling their encounters with China (Anna Kołos, Tomasz Ewertowski). Briefly taking stock of the Western inventory, we do not always turn up enco-uraging results. We also see how travel was at times linked to such a vulnerable sense of one's "condition" that travelers were compelled to develop a mythology around an imagined inventory (Krystyna Pieniążek-Marković's article speaks to this issue in the context of travel texts by Croatian romantics). At other times, travel leads to a complex game with the forces of colonial domination (Anna Snaith describes such a process in her important article on women's travels in London, translated for this issue). In an analogous scenario, a forgotten Polish interwar reporter denounces allegiance to colonial mythologies, exposing the cruelty of white colonists in the Congo (Mikołaj Paczkowski's article on Tadeusz Dębicki). Using the correspondence of late romantics, Anna Marta Dworak explores the development of skills necessary for coping with the conditions of a new form of travel: the train. Przemysław Ka-liszuk describes portrayals of the conditions needed for travel in his analysis of the poetics of books by two renowned Polish climbers who took on the Himalayas, Jerzy Kukuczka and Adam Bielecki. We also encounter the special gonzo state of the contemporary, individualized traveling subject; through his extraordinary conditions, he is able to forge a radically new method for recording his encounters with the space. Arkadiusz Kalin and Cezary Rosiński discuss these themes using the case study of reportage by Ziemowit Szczerek. Urszula Ko-walska-Nadolna and Wiesław Ratajczak's reviews of books by Robert Burden and Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech complement these reflections. The reviews meticulously discuss travel accounts as symptoms of the "condition of crisis" of modern subjectivity. Themes of condition are approached from yet another angle (this time outside the domain of travel) in two pole-mics by Grzegorz Pertek and Patryk Szaj, who explore motifs of the contemporary conditions of deconstruction and hermeneutics.

We might therefore posit that today, poetological travel writing requires new "conditional" strategies, and that the poetics of the analyzed text participate in developing these strategies more or less directly.

Three Variations on the Road to the Far East:

On Strategies for Generating Cultural Difference in Polish Travel Writing from the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

Anna Kołos

This article was developed under the auspices of a grant from the National Center for the Sciences, project no. 2014/15/D/HS2/00801.

As a branch of writing, travel literature poses a range of hurdles to any attempts at theoretical, methodological, genealogical or poetic classification. In a canonical reference book for philologists in Poland, *Dictionary of Literary Terms* (*Słownik terminów literackich*), Janusz Sławiński defers to the broadest possible definition for the genre, arguing that travel literature operates between two poles: that which is “fully factual” sits on one end of the spectrum, while on the other, we find contrived travel tales both realistic and fantastical.¹ This vast range includes Herodotus, Marco Polo, the alleged Mandeville, Columbus, More, Benyovszky, Swift, Sterne and Krasicki, to name just a few. Those who did indeed travel find themselves in the company of those who mystify or simulate travel, as well as those who experiment with the conventions of travel writing. Yet even if we were to try to impose some order on Sławiński’s semantic chaos and claim that on the level of textual ontology, writing that describes a factual journey should be differentiated from tales of fabricated voyages, the problematic categories of authenticity and literariness still prevent us from reducing this textual field to a simple definition.

The “realness” of experience, which ostensibly precedes its submersion in writing, remains up for debate. After all, poets and travelers alike are prone to lie,² as Diderot has aptly shown us:

In what way could man, drawn by his very nature to the miraculous, see things just as they are?
After all, he is always seeking the extraordinary to justify the great effort he makes to observe

¹ J. Sławiński, *Podróż*, [in:] *Słownik terminów literackich*, ed. J. Sławiński, 2nd edition, Wrocław 1988, p. 363.

² D. Carey, *Truth, Lies and Travel Writing*, [in:] *The Routledge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. C. Thompson, Abingdon, New York 2016, pp. 3–14.

these things in the first place. Out of all men of letters, the erudite must be singled out as the most gullible and naïve. We can say a similar thing of historians: out of all of them, those who travel lie, exaggerate and deceive, and they do all of this without ill will.³

Even if we optimistically wished to read Diderot's judgment as hyperbole, we must admit that whether we like it or not, the transfer of information "from one party" to another is immanently and unconditionally mediated by the act of reading, images, myths and everything else that falls within the horizon of the individual traveler's preconceptions. Moreover, the literary mode of writing subjects empirical experience to an imbalanced game that condemns it to failure. In this game, two orders of understanding merge, thus undermining the privileged status of the nonfictional account. In this sense, the travel text appears as a continuum that stretches from the pseudo-factual and often non-narrative record, to literature that fictionalizes the reality of travel.⁴ A pressure forms between topography as a textual trope of reality and the literary system that greedily absorbs everything into itself, usurping the territory of "non-fiction." This tension becomes transparent in the ironic strategy adopted by Słowacki in *Voyage to the Holy Land from Naples (Podróż do ziemi świętej z Neapolu)*:

I set off on the road, through Apulia, Otranto,
Corfu... Where am I going? The next canto will tell you (verses 5-6).⁵

It takes no hardened structuralist to see that in this verse, the artistic function (in Jakobson's sense) towers over the travel report while words, place names and one strictly literary term (Otranto and *canto*) seem to marvel at their own proximity (think of Horace). Literature thus devours reality at the same time as it permits the trip to live within its attractive narrative, thanks to which its story will be told.

When it comes to ghostwriting, a phenomenon rather prevalent in the world of travel literature, these problems of form and literariness become particularly transparent. An example of this dynamic long-embedded in European culture is Marco Polo's collaboration with Rustichello da Pisa.⁶ The merchant postponed publishing his notes from his journey to China so long after returning to Venice that we might reasonably suspect Marco Polo in fact lacked the writing skills needed to go down in history. Yet as luck would have it, after a few years in Italy, Marco found himself imprisoned in Genoa, where he shared a cell with the novelist who had penned

³ D. Diderot, *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*, Baltimore 1935

⁴ See also: S. Burkot, *Polskie podróżopisarstwo romantyczne*, Warsaw 1988, pp-7.

⁵ J. Słowacki, *Podróż do Ziemi Świętej z Neapolu*, [in:] *Dzieła zebrane*, vol. 2: *Poematy*, ed. J. Krzyżanowski, Wrocław 1983, p. 7.

⁶ Here, I am accepting the authenticity of Marco Polo's travels in spite of the controversies that persist today. Let us recall that in 1978, John W. Haeger directly contested the claim that Marco Polo was ever actually in China. In 1996, in the study *Did Marco Polo Go to China?*, Frances Wood answered this question in the negative. Her skepticism was largely informed by the lack of references to Marco Polo in Chinese materials, which seems to undermine the author's claim that he held high rank in the court of Kubilaj-chan. She also cites the fact that *Il milione* never mentions the existence of the Great Wall, whose trajectory in fact ran rather close to Beijing. Among recent research on the subject, an extensive discussion on the authenticity of this trip can be found in H.U. Vogel's text *Marco Polo Was in China. New Evidence from Currencies, Salts and Revenues*, Leiden 2012, pp. 11-88. This study's author goes to great lengths to reconstruct the historical economic conditions in China at the dawn of the Yuan dynasty, juxtaposing this picture with the information conveyed in *Il milione* on the production of salt, paper money and the usage of other currencies as well as financing and administrative structures in the country. After comparing these portraits, the sinologist comes away convinced by the Venetian traveler's tales.

the first Italian adaptation of the King Arthur legends. Marco would tell him stories, and the writer would arrange them into seductive literary narratives, producing an ambivalent tension between experience and literature. As soon as the ghostwriter took over, this writing was no longer based in experience. He was writing stories, with one word propelling the next, while the thing itself... but that's just it, could anyone else have possibly spoken a truer word?

Dependent relationships of the kind were by no means a secret in the early modern world of books. In 1759, the editors of the English periodical "Monthly Review" certified the travel book *French and Indian Cruelty* as authentic with a certain caveat: "We imagine the story of Peter Williamson to be, in general, matter of fact with a few pardonable embellishments by the hand of some literary friend."⁷ Of course, it is difficult to imagine any piece of travel writing available to readers that lacks this literary "adornment."

In the last few decades, an enormous effort has been made to overcome the paradigm of treating travel texts as autonomous entities and focusing on their internal structures of representation. There has also been a push to overcome culture's dominant role in the relationship between travel and its historical contribution to the expansion of Europeans' geographical knowledge, particularly in the early modern period. It seems that the Polish humanities in particular have long doted on the analytical habit of ascribing only innocent intentions to historical authors. If we begin with the first phase of exploration by Spanish and Portuguese fleets, we often come across aphorisms describing an intensifying "thirst for knowledge" or "curiosity about the world,"⁸ as if academic discourse is trying to camouflage European expansionism. Since Polish travelers seldom took one step beyond the continent, scholarship on travel writing has been free to focus mainly on the "foreign but close" and discuss local modes of travel⁹ as a hobby of the intellectual Polish nobility. By embracing this subject, they could avoid getting entangled in the more difficult problem of the poet's relationship to politics as expressed in the diction of travelers and ethnographers.

Compared to other branches of literature, travel texts have a strong potential for agency. They can expand the scientific and public discourse of their home culture and are often active nodes of the elaborate relational network through which power operates. This approach to texts is not at all new: it is supported by the substantive New Historicism movement, cultural poetics and imagological¹⁰ and postcolonial studies, all of which foreground the role of construction in the creation of literary and mental images and the imagination's processes of deindividuation. In the Polish humanities, however, we are arguably still far away from piecing together a comparative and comprehensive view of these themes. This being said, when it comes to travel writing, the diversity of material and persisting methodological chaos¹¹ surely obstruct our ability to formulate complex theses on the genre, regardless of what analytical optics we adopt.

⁷ "The Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal. By Several Hands" 1759, vol. XXI, p. 453.

⁸ For example: H. Dziechcińska, *O staropolskich dziennikach podróży*, Warsaw 1991, p. 9 et. seq.

⁹ A. Kucharski, *"Theatrum peregrinandi."* *Poznawcze aspekty staropolskich podróży w epoce późnego baroku*, Toruń 2013, p. 13.

¹⁰ See: *Imagology. The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters – A Critical Survey*, ed. M. Beller, J. Leerssen, Amsterdam, New York 2007; J. Leerssen, *Imagology. On Using Ethnicity to Make Sense of the World*, "Iberic@l. Revue d'études ibériques et ibéro-américaines" 2016, issue 10, pp. 13–31.

¹¹ P. Kaczyński, "O staropolskich dziennikach podróży," *Hanna Dziechcińska, Warsaw 1991* [review], "Pamiętnik Literacki" R. 84: 1992, vol. 4, p. 235.

If we give up all pretensions of comprehensiveness, we must still fundamentally rethink the analytical categories we apply to certain types of literary material whenever we situate it at the crossroads of poetics and intellectual consciousness. By reflecting on these categories, we might be able to reveal how the text allows us to see the world as well as the ideological conditions informing it and the political ramifications that follow. This perceived reality (I choose this word fully aware of how much is lost when we privilege the sense of sight) operates at the intersection of the physical act of travel and empirical experience on one side, and a mental image of geography, history and politics on the other. As we know, this mental image accompanies the traveler as soon as he sets off from home. In this preliminary study, I propose to map these relations by looking at Polish travelers (although national qualifications can sometimes be problematic) exploring the Far East. I will mainly focus on the influences of Chinese culture. By foregrounding the material dimension of travel, which precedes and informs various perspectives within the text's internal organization, we can observe how the road traveled reveals a great deal about specific historical moments in exploration of the Far East. These variations include (1) maritime transport used by explorers, (2) traveling by land via Siberia, and (3) modern tourism by sea.

The Eighteenth-Century Explorer and the Poetics of Island Paradise

Even before Ignacy Krasicki reached for his pen to bring us the first modern Polish novel, a swiftian utopian tale that experimented with conventions of travel writing, *The Adventures of Mr. Nicholas Wisdom* (*Mikołaja Doświadczyńskiego przypadki*, 1776), an earlier set of adventure tales in the vein of the "Robinsonade" was published by Maurice Benyovszky (in Polish, Maurycy Beniowski).¹² Benyovszky had been exiled to Kamchatka as a Bar Confederate. The baron's story is well known: it was not enough that while in exile, he started a victorious rebellion against the Russians; he also hijacked the largest ship in the port and set sail with a group of rebels. If we look at the fugitives' journey as a whole, it is worth highlighting one revealing yet rarely discussed episode that brings up the key issues of textual representation for Benyovszky, who published his accounts as *Journals* (*Pamiętniki*). The episode I have in mind is the crew's short sojourn on the island of Usma Ligon (which was then under Chinese rule, but is now located in the Japanese Riukiu archipelago).¹³

Benyovszky's travel account offers a late testimony of travel by the explorer's ship, representing a model that had left its mark on European literature. The tale focuses on maritime imagery and coastal exploration depicted in the imaginative mode of adventure tales known as "Robinsonades." In this particular episode, the rebel ship runs up on shallow waters, and the Europeans explore the land nearby and ultimately meet the island's population. One would be hard pressed to find a more

¹²It is widely known that Benyovszky's national status is extremely complex. The baron's life story includes interactions with Hungary, Slovakia and Poland, but due to the author's own declarations of Polonophilia, his participation in the Bar Confederation, and his usage of a Polish ensign, we might allow ourselves to include his contributions in the history of Polish literature. To make things more complicated, Benyovszky wrote in French, but his work was first published in English (1790). Edward Kajdański's contemporary translation seems to be the most reliable textual reference. In the years preceding his work on the translation, Kajdański analyzed the signature devices of his *Journals* (*Pamiętniki*) and reconstructed the baron's journey. As a result, we can feel confident that he went to great lengths to bring the reader the fullest and most accurate version of Benyovszky's "original." See: Kajdański, *Przedmowa tłumacza*, [in:] M. Beniowski, *Pamiętniki*, translation and commentary by E. Kajdański, Warsaw 1995, pp. 7–19. See also: E. Kajdański, *Tajemnica Beniowskiego: odkrycia, intrygi, fałszerstwa*, Warsaw 1994.

¹³See more: E. Kajdański, *Długi cień wielkiego muru. Jak Polacy odkrywali Chiny*, Warsaw 2005, pp. 83–85.

conventional and tame instance of the motif of breaching the “contact zone” (this is Mary Louise Pratt’s term for the space where two remote cultures come into contact and affect one another).¹⁴ The literary trope Benyovszky is reproducing offers a whole repertory of classical images cemented in the seventeenth and eighteenth-century canons that begin to radically transform at the break of the next century, impacted by Hegelian idealism. Benyovszky, however, preserves the archetype of the early capitalist explorer. He is an astute observer of natural resources and quickly picks up on all opportunities for trade and enterprise. He is a capable, resourceful and skilled administrator and sailor who often doubles as negotiator and mediator.¹⁵ The travel narrative’s ties to the archetypal journeys of Odysseus and Aeneas seem particularly pronounced, although our modern hero has no transcendental powers working for or against him. He is fully responsible for his own survival, and he surpasses Odysseus on many fronts. At the very least, he takes seriously his custody over his subordinates and takes great care that the crew’s immodesties and (to use the captain’s own euphemism) “dalliances” with women do not damage their rapport with the locals.¹⁶ Our hero avoids repeating the error of Odysseus, who neglected the men in his service on the island of Helios by forbidding them from slaying the island’s cattle. The archetype of the explorer-colonist is also reinforced by Benyovszky’s rational mastery over his base instincts and unrestrained urges. This attribute reinforces his power over his uncouth crew. We might see this superiority in parallel with the one often claimed by white men over the “dark” race in early modern sociopolitical thought. This superiority also seems analogical to that of lawful civilization over the anarchic state of nature. The civilizing logic that surfaces in this text is therefore embedded in the structure of Benyovszky’s voyage and pre-established before he enters the “contact zone.”

Yet this framework for conceiving the encounter with the other is associated with conventions from late antiquity and early modernity alike. When he describes meeting strangers who speak in a Mandarin dialect, Benyovszky uses the trope of the idyllic island and the utopian poetics that come with it. Sticking to a traditionally generalized register, the traveler depicts the indigenous people as virtuous, gentle, adverse to violence and peacefully good-tempered. The land they inhabit is described as fertile, enchanting, and distinct for its warm and pleasant climate. Describing the indigenous population, the captain adds:

[their] good nature and friendly rapport often awoke in me a desire to share their easy, happy life. For this island was remarkably beautiful. Its warm climate seemed perfect, and its people were free. These motives alone were powerful enough to sway a man who has already been crossed by fortune’s tireless game.¹⁷

This classical repertoire of praises for simplicity is embellished when the fugitive confederate makes a political observation that is new to the lexicon of primitivism: he admires the island people’s full sovereignty and lack of conflict with their neighbors. This reveals much about Benyovszky’s own sociopolitical consciousness and his identification with the Poles. Moreover, in the turn of phrase “fortune’s game,” we hear the echoes of the renaissance-era fatalism

¹⁴M.L. Pratt, *Arts of the Contact Zone*, “Profession” 1991, pp. 33–40; *Imperial Eyes...*, pp. 17–34.

¹⁵See also: D. Kalinowski, *Polska droga na Daleki Wschód (od oświecenia do romantyzmu)*, [in:] *Bez antypodów? Zbliżenia i konfrontacje kultur*, ed. B. Mazan, with S. Tynecka-Makowska, Łódź 2008, p. 26; D. Kalinowski, *Przybliżanie Dalekiego Wschodu. O trzech polskich podróżach orientalnych*, “Ars Inter Culturas” 2010, p. 159.

¹⁶M. Beniowski, op. cit., p. 361.

¹⁷*Ibid*, p. 358.

that preceded the modern belief in man's agency. Benyovszky, however, superimposes a dichotomy between movement (voluntary and compulsory mobility) and rest over the classical dichotomy between civilization and primitivism. These idyllic islands, a tropical paradise for Europeans, promise stability, consistency and intimacy with nature. This is expressed through the poetics of rest. In the century to come, rest will be understood as the absence of history and development, correlating to doomed stagnation.

Benyovszky goes even further in his apologia for primitivism, drawing on moralizing tropes and contrasting the virtue he praised earlier with the vices and degeneration of modern civilization. As we saw in the declaration cited above, the morality of the indigenous people "excited his imagination" and awoke in him the "daydream" of never leaving the island.¹⁸ The traveler also expresses sentimental Rousseauian motifs in his critique of his culturally debased crew. In an early stage of the voyage, the crew demands to spend some time on a deserted island. They are driven by material motives and hope to exploit the rumored gold deposits they expect to find on the island. Benyovszky uses the classic trope of enhancing his own character to allot himself sovereign status in the textual world. His amenable openness to the other is consistent with the nearly ideal archetype he represents of the enlightened explorer. On the other hand, he reproduces the classic tendency to force a binary between these separate worlds, as evidenced by the rhetorical intonations of the word "daydream." If we follow the text, white civilization means movement, transformation and action. Surely, our energetic baron is not ready to give all this up for one local community firmly "outside of history." His utopian mirage remains a figment of the imagination he can flee to for the duration of short, sentimental fantasies, but it does not give our hero what he needs to pursue the culturally conditioned ambitions from which he is clearly not immune. This also seems to inform the superficial status of his bucolic tale. I say superficial because the tale, assimilated in the course of reading, becomes a perceptive filter, rather than an observation born out of experience.

Until now, our hero has left his European identity in tact. Even if he pines for the "simple, idyllic" island life, he does not actually negotiate the gap between the values he represents and those espoused by the locals. At one point, however, the contact zone compels the sailor to second guess his position and suspend the axiology of his own culture (the culture of Christian Europe) in favor of a foreign culture and its own form of syncretism between Christianity and local customs.¹⁹ The hospitable locals urge Benyovszky to follow his crewmen and choose a companion for himself among the island's young ladies. At first, the explorer balks at this idea, asserting yet another indication of his moral and intellectual superiority to the rest of his entourage. Held back by his marital bonds, he finally gives in to their suggestions after learning that the locals are motivated solely by their specific customs. They tell him:

For us, a young lady is her own master. She answers to no one so long as she remains young (...). Only after her betrothal must she conform to strict requirements (...). So you may freely access

¹⁸See also: p. 359.

¹⁹For clarity's sake, I should add that the island's inhabitants had already undergone Christianization at the hands of Father Ignatius' missionaries of the Jesuit order. After the missionary's death, however, no further efforts were made to propagate and maintain the new faith. These and other circumstances informed Benyovszky's narrative's projection of the "noble savage" archetype. The author recognizes that their culture is superior to a savage state. The *bon sauvage* trope, however, was most often used in reference to non-Christian cultures.

these young girls. It is easy to tell them apart from the married ones, for the latter cover their heads and faces with a veil.²⁰

The link between white colonial expansionism and sexual desire can come as no surprise if we consider the history of the last three centuries as reflected in travel literature, ethnographies and other texts that fetishize ethnic difference.²¹ Benyovszky's escape from Kamchatka to Canton occurred shortly after the famous travels of Samuel Willis and Louis de Bougainville, who were the first to discover Tahiti, and subsequently transformed the land into islands of "earthly paradise" in the European imaginary. Echoes of these expeditions might well have been known to Benyovszky, although it is hard to posit any textual dependency between the works, for de Bougainville first published *Voyage autour du monde* in 1771. The two travelers fall within a close temporal window, and they both render portraits of the exotic that extend the European tradition of depicting a vision of paradise that was actualized much earlier in the experience of Tahiti.²² Diderot manages to encapsulate the work of de Bougainville using his signature pithiness that never fails to deconstruct the obvious:

You stroll along, good sir Bougainville, you and your people, throughout the whole island. Everywhere they accept you. You help yourself to everything and nobody sets any obstacles in your way. No doors are closed to you, for the usage of doors in itself is unknown. They invite you to sit down. The whole wealth of the country surrounds you. So, you want young girls? Don't bother seducing them, for their own mothers will lead you to where they wait, fully undressed. Out of all these huts full of men and women, you are the sole possessor of this young victim of the duties of hospitality. The ground is littered with leaves and flowers, the street musicians tune their instruments, and no one disturbs your sweet embraces. The damsel responds to them of her own free will. A hymn resounds, a hymn that incites you to be a man, that urges your lover to be a woman, a yielding woman, delightful, loving, tender...²³

The philosopher relentlessly exposed European explorers' signature penchant for taking possession of all things. It did not suffice that the perspective of sight alone indicated what would at least potentially succumb to the conqueror's rule; while exploring the seas, they masked their sexual lust as innocent simply because they encountered no resistance.

In the historical timeline leading up to this moment, this aspect of eighteenth-century poetics is, of course, nothing new. The sensuality and openness of the Orient framed by the European traveler or conqueror had long existed in the consciousness of the literary West. In certain verses of the medieval multi-text the Romance of Alexander, the leader and his male entourage would

²⁰M. Beniowski, op. cit., p. 361.

²¹In the Polish Context, Bartłomiej Szleszyński's writing on colonial and sexual fantasies is particularly interesting. See his text: *Bolesław Prus i pozytywistyczne "porno z Murzynkami," "Napis. Pismo poświęcone literaturze okolicznościowej i użytkowej"* 2012, issue 18, pp. 155–173.

²²R. Edmond, *The Pacific/ Tahiti. Queen of the South Sea isles*, [in:] *Travel writing*, ed. P. Holme, T. Youngs, 5th edition, Cambridge 2010, p. 139.

²³D. Diderot, op. cit., p. 42. As an aside, we should note that Diderot's critique exclusively targeted the conduct of white travelers, for whom all the riches and splendors of the islands were wide open for the taking. He himself indulged in fantasies regarding women's natural promiscuity in this region. For Diderot, promiscuity should not necessarily be condemned by Christian axiology preemptively imposed on a culture: "young girls gave in to the caresses of young people in front of their parents, among the innocent people of the island, to the sound of the flute, and you want to poison their souls with your cockamamie and false views and make them aware of their transgression by enforcing your delusional notions of shame." (p. 41)

make their way to an “enchanted” forest somewhere in the remote East, where sensual women of unbridled sexuality awaited them.²⁴ These classic tales always have a “gimmick,” and their folkloric structure asserts the idea that all wantonness, indulgence and violations of categorical prohibitions will be punished. Such is the case when Odysseus’ crew gets turned into swine on the island of Circe. Inversely, not one tale imposes restraints on the modern colonist. Tropes of earlier myths and romances fade into obscurity in the emerging body of literature that expresses the European’s new relationship to the world. “Our” explorer, distinguished from the ship’s crew and legitimizing his position of power on the basis of his extraordinary restraint and self-control, represents his ultimate submission to the indigenous people’s customs as a negotiation tactic between two distinct value systems: Christian virtue and the imagined promiscuity of the cultures of the Pacific. This action becomes a process of transculturation that affirms the traveler’s right to sexual indulgence by manipulating another language to account for his motives.

Although they only comprise one isolated episode of his escapades, Benyovszky’s tales from the islands of Riukiu represent a distilled set of pivotal themes of eighteenth-century travel writing and its poetics. The tale presents its narrator and hero as an enlightened explorer, proving the persistence of early modern myths and relativist modes for representing local and foreign cultures. Benyovszky’s adventures make transparent certain literary parallels drawn from empirical experience, while the traveler himself becomes a hybrid figure referencing Odysseus, Aeneas,²⁵ Robinson Crusoe and Lemuel Gulliver, in turn.

Savagery and Civilization. On the Chinese-Siberian Border

The earliest literary testimonies of exile from the late eighteenth century broached the subject of Russian intervention in Polish politics. Benyovszky’s work falls in this category, as does that of Karol Lubicz Chojecki, although the nineteenth century ushered in a whole new category of literature of exile on a broader scale. This literature tends to single out the circumstances surrounding Polish travel writing from the history of the European prose of the colonial and imperial eras. Polish travel writing did, however, have much common ground with the broader European landscape. Common threads include a focus on ethnography, the advancement of scientific discourses as evidenced in the work of Jan Potocki, and exploration into the interior of new lands as opposed to the coastal encounters emphasizing maritime transport that were more prevalent in the earlier phases of European exploration of the geographical world.²⁶ Poles’ actions and texts were consistent with this general thematic range (this is particularly true for Poles living within the Russian partition). For most of the nineteenth century, they traveled by land to the Far East, passing through the vast expanse of Siberia and the Mongolian steppe to reach Northern China and occasionally as far as Beijing.

This mode of travel, so characteristic for exiles, prisoners, fugitives and travelers attached to scientific expeditions and diplomatic missions in the Russian service, forced travelers to adapt

²⁴D. Buschinger, *German Alexander Romances*, [in:] *A Companion to Alexander Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. D. Zuwiyya, Leiden 2011, p. 311.

²⁵For more on the relationship between the erotic episodes of Aeneas and Dido in the context of eighteenth-century travel texts, see: P. Hulme, *Colonial Encounters. Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492–1797*, London, New York 1986, p. 249.

²⁶M.L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 37–66.

to the entrenched cultural dichotomy between savagery and civilization. Affected by the many nomadic peoples living in Siberia and Central Asia and their route through expansive lands of unspoiled nature, they superimposed a continuum that stretched from barbarism to culture over their physical route.

Jerzy Tymkowski, a Russian Pole educated during a mission to China and profoundly influenced by Herder, conveyed the travel impressions he gathered from 1920 to 1821 rather meaningfully:

Is there any traveler who is not amazed when, after long exertions, passing through the formidable steppes and dense forests or threatening sea, in a word, after all the wild and ravaged nature that obstructs his yearnings and complicates his journey, he sets off into this totally ungoverned country in a rapture, where countless villages, sprawling settlements inhabited by millions of people who enjoy all of life's comforts in peace, safety and the order of the law, become a mere image in his eyes.²⁷

The author establishes a categorical and hierarchical opposition between the hardships of travel through untamed nature and the landscape sculpted by man, consisting of a network of “countless” settlements and a sense of safety produced by the imposition of law over the state of nature.

This binary comes across even more vividly in the work of Józef Kowalewski, a former Philomath turned Orientalist with an interest in Mongolia. Kowalewski, who was educated in Russia, uses the trope of the border in his text, positioning his perspective on a mountaintop:

Then, perched on the lofty mountain ridge that divided such disparate lands, I gaze out on one side and my insatiable eye takes in the naked steppe. On the other side, I see precipitous, terrifying cliffs fraught with danger, where the farmer's skillful hand has turned the bald, stony terrain into fertile flatlands. On this side, the [negligible] populace has vanished into the deserts, living an idle, pastoral life. Here, the silent millions move about as if in an anthill. After a few days in these parts, I went in search of a humble yurt to refresh myself with a pot of tea, break up the monotony with some a short conversation and stamp out the boredom that was gradually clouding my heart. Here, I wait for the crowds of thoughtful people who live here. From that direction, a pure but cold wind blows that pierces to the bone, which allows me to appreciate the pleasant air that dries the sweat from my brow.²⁸

Kowalewski's travel account describes the border in poetic terms: its physical dimension is diminished by the weight of its cultural connotations. The mountain, with its euphonic “precipitous, terrifying cliffs” implies a sense of the sublime. The sublime, as Lyotard has written, “In the event on an absolutely large object – the desert, a mountain, a pyramid – (...) like all absolutes can only be thought (...) as an idea of reason (...).”²⁹ In this text, however, the ineffability of the idea has been replaced by the narrator's totalizing point of view as he looks down from on high and

²⁷J. Tymkowski, *Podróż do Chin przez Mongoliją w latach 1820 i 1821*, trans. T.W. Kochański, vol. 2, Lviv 1828, p. 7. Tymkowski's original three-volume work was published in Russian, but a Polish translation followed only a few years later.

²⁸Cited in: W. Kotwicz, *Józef Kowalewski orientalista*, introduction by Marian Lewicki, bibliography by Maria Kotwiczówna and the unpublished correspondence of Józef Kowalewski, Wrocławskie Towarzystwo Naukowe, Wrocław 1948, p. 70. Text originally published in “Tygodnik Petersburski” (1835, issue 64, p. 374).

²⁹Lyotard, “The Sublime and the Avant Garde,” in *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*, p. 458.

categorizes the experience of traversing a continuum of values superimposed over the tangible border. It is worth noting that the Mongolian steppe and the desert do not function as signifiers of the sublime in the text, and their “insatiability” does not awaken pain mingled with pleasure. To the contrary, they signify stagnation (“monotony”), sadness, loneliness and alienation. The parallel established towards the end of the passage lists the discomforts and labors of life on the steppe, which are then contrasted with the Chinese reality on the level of cultural values as well as environmental conditions. It is as if the narrator is asserting a Taineian sense of environmental determinism.

This binary approach must have also impacted subsequent stages of entering the “contact zone,” as the narrator now seems intent on constructing a description of China that stands in juxtaposition to that of the first part of his trip, when he described the Chinese relatively to Mongolians in order to cast civilization in a negative light in contrast with the savage and wild:

Having our fill of the dirty, raw Mongol and his great void, the eye clings with enormous pleasure to the disciplined and tidy Chinese! The Chinese man has cast a spell over our souls: we praised everything we came across in this country developed centuries ago that is so original in all its details. On the steppe, we were met everywhere with the shrill cry of those desperate for anything new. Here, this cry was replaced with a quiet, phlegmatic greeting, imbued with a certain pride.³⁰

It is interesting that the author bases his valorization of the Chinese not only on eyewitness testimony: he also cites acoustic impressions. The eye remains the predominant arbiter, however. Unintentionally, as if on a level that precedes awareness, the eye “clings” to civilization. This is a nod to objective laws of aesthetics and involuntary physiological processes linked to the visual pleasure that comes after the torments of the savage world. Meanwhile, the ear, fatigued by the alleged “shrieks” of the people of the steppe, feels relief when it comes into contact with the quiet and proud disposition of the Chinese. This axiology engages an aesthetic system organized according to classical taste and favoring harmony and balance. For the romantic Orientalist, that which is “marred, clashing,” noisy and screeching is necessarily low and base, as opposed to that which reflects “specific mores and forms” and has been “enlightened for centuries.”³¹

In Kowalewski’s description of the Chinese, history as a category becomes somewhat synonymous with culture defined in opposition to savagery. This category, however, will subsequently take on clearer forms. The poetics of the philosophy of history are widely expressed in nineteenth-century travel writing. At first, these poetics mainly surfaced as the Hegelian concept of the phenomenology of spirit. Later on, affirming this same conceptual schema, travel writing absorbed the nomenclature of biological evolutionism. Agaton Giller, an activist for independence in the generation that followed Kowalewski’s, was exiled to Irkutsk. His route into China corresponded to the route through Siberia that shaped the poetics of Tymkowski and Kowalewski. Giller framed his impressions of Siberia in the spirit of Hegelian idealism, treating history as an absolute concept. Describing one Siberian community, Giller wrote:

³⁰Cited in: W. Kotwicz, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

³¹Cited in: *ibid.*

History has not yet been written on the brow of this savage sent from God. Here, the dream life reigns: an obscurity of thought and deafness of the heart. There is nothing that propels one into historical life. The noise of the forest ignites the imagination of the Oroch man, and he falls asleep like a child [...]. In the forest, there is no room for the historian, no room for the writer of romances. There is plenty of room, however, for the philosopher-observer. For only he might look at this man immersed in nature and the bliss of ignorance and discern the early reflexes of human thought. Only he might contemplate and recognize how thought takes shape in this human-animal, how it gains traction and might someday develop into autonomy.³²

Giller freely summons a range of cultural myths for his image of the “prehistoric” savage symbolizing a childlike stage of humanity. The savage is simultaneously assigned an animal’s place in the kingdom of creatures. Giller’s assessment conjures echoes of biblical anthropology in its intonations of man’s desire to dwell within the “bliss of ignorance.” The metaphorical images “dream,” “darkness” and “deafness” are meant to draw out a contrast with the image of the European spirit: historical man consummated by actions of the soul. The gentle rhythms of the forest noise offer another suggestive vision of passivity and lack of agency. It is particularly interesting that darkness, deafness and unrealized capacities to intellectually process sensory impressions all clash with the perspective of the European interloper: the “philosopher,” ethnographer, anthropologist, scientist or traveler whose ability to observe affirms his privileged power in this foreign environment. To fully legitimize his judgment of this savage land, the Polish exile must condemn the literary tradition that precedes him and expose its primitivist poetics as false:

So the philosophers and writers of old tales wish to take this so-called life in nature as a model for happiness. Well, if all those who fawn over simplicity and the virtue of life unspoiled by civilization were to actually come to Siberia and take a closer look at the Orochs, Buryats, Yukagirs and Chukchis, they would soon realize the vain falsehood of their praises. To all those who dote on this so-called “state of purity” or “state of nature,” those who glorify the patriarchal virtues and simplicity of the golden age: I invite you to Siberia to live among the savage folk. Once you observe the filth, syphilis, stupidity and vices of these nomadic people, you will learn to appreciate the virtues of civilization and you will understand that *civilization is the natural state of man*.³³

This emotional judgment confronts imagined textual representations that fail to account for their circumstances with empirical experience. This culminates in an antithesis that perfectly captures the nineteenth-century Hegelian position of viewing civilization and the folk hierarchically: man’s natural state is his destination, not his starting point.

The cultural poetics of Giller’s views on Siberian populations are no longer relative. The author does not dramatize any distinction between the nomadic people and settled Chinese civilization. Unlike Tymkowski and Kowalewski, his negative assessment of all non-European cultural works can only yield a gradient portrait. He forces no harsh contrasts between Siberia, Mongolia and China. Romantic Hegelianism, an elaboration on Herder’s philosophy of history, comes across more vividly in his assessments of the Middle Kingdom:

³²A. Giller, *Opisanie krajiny zabajkalskiej*, vol. 1, Lipsk 1867, p. 227.

³³*Ibid.*, pp. 222–223. Emphasis. – A.K. See also: D. Kalinowski, *Przybliżanie Dalekiego Wschodu*, pp. 162–163.

Many travelers exhibit a penchant for the past and old customs that distinguishes the Chinese from all other nations. For many of us, their conservative preservation of concepts, lifestyles, material goods and old-world forms has protected the Chinese nationality from being manipulated by foreign newcomers, sparing them from denationalization. While they never expelled their occupiers, their stubborn tradition of conservatism ultimately forced their occupiers to become like them. Perhaps this is why Providence never gave them the spirit of progress but instead burdened them with a persevering strength, because she wanted the new world to see the thoughts and ways of life developed by the remote antiquity of the East.³⁴

The Europeans quickly diagnosed Chinese culture as conservative in contrast to the rapid, radical changes unfolding on the Old Continent and the discourse of progress that had been building up since the Scientific Revolution. Yet Giller's background and ideological foundation caused him to adopt a position of ambivalence towards the conservatism of the Chinese. This position contrasts with the categorical allegations of stagnation formulated by Western travelers of the period as well as most Polish visitors to China in the later part of the century. It is difficult to decode the suggestion (never expressed outright) that the Chinese, by resisting change, have rescued their culture from denationalization and that invading foreign dynasties³⁵ – as history has shown us – never deprived them of their culture. To the contrary, it was the invaders who showed signs of becoming more Chinese. To be old-fashioned thus becomes a defense tactic against foreign forces. In the context of Polish ideologies of independence, this clearly raises the issue of rescuing Polish identity from the politics of conquering nations.

While Giller remains categorical and direct, he also expresses an idealist belief in the evolution of the Soul: its only cradle is located in the East, yet the Soul could only fully evolve in Christian Europe. Hegelianism, which came hand in hand with the idea of Providence for Catholic Poles, leads one to perceive China as an open-air ethnographic museum that exists only to be seen through European eyes. It would be hard to find a more apt textual example of construing the East as Europe's mirror: the East becomes a surface on which Europe can gaze at itself and study the wrinkles of a bygone world. It also becomes a contrived entity that does not exist on its own but is rather a museum designed for its visitors.³⁶ Johannes Fabian describes this issue succinctly by coining the term "denial of coevalness," which refers to the "persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse."³⁷

Hardly twenty years after Giller's sojourn on the Siberian-Mongolian-Chinese border, Polish travelers began to convey similar ideas through Darwinian poetics. Bronisław Rejchman, an evolutionist, naturalist and ethnologist, is a representative example.³⁸ At the turn of the eighteenth

³⁴A. Giller, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 242. See also: E. Kajdański, *Długi cień wielkiego muru. Jak Polacy odkrywali Chiny*, Warsaw 2005, p. 211.

³⁵Here, I am mainly referring to the Mongolian Yuan dynasty initiated in the eighteenth century by Kubilaj, the grandson of Ghengis Khan, and the Manchurian Qing Dynasty which ruled in China in 1644 (in Polish literature the Manchurians are identified with the Tatars).

³⁶A similar image of China comes across in the poetics of Herder's letters – see: R.J. Goebel, *China as an Embalmed Mummy: Herder's Orientalist Poetics*, "South Atlantic Review" 1995, vol. 60, issue 1, pp. 111–129.

³⁷J. Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*, foreword by M. Bunzl, with a new postscript by the author, New York 2014, p. 31 (first edition – 1983). See also: D. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton, 2007.

³⁸In criticism he is also referred to as Rajchman.

century, conservatism (understood as resistance to assimilation) becomes equated with an exceptional capacity for biologically determined adaptation allowing for a species' preservation:

[...] for all his extraordinary conservatism, the Chinese is a man who is able to adapt to all conditions. While *adaptation* is a crucial aspect of the species' struggle, the history of China is not yet over, and these funny people with their braids might yet play a role in world history that is not necessarily for the better good, but will certainly leave its mark. As ruler Bogd Khan has already clearly knocked down the Chinese wall and sent out his coolies to America and his merchants to Russia.³⁹

The traveler does not conceal his belief in racial conflict as a necessity. This belief was conditioned by biological evolutionary determinism and propelled by socio-political phobias about the 'yellow peril,' which is most often referred to as the "yellow question" (*kwestya żółta*) in late nineteenth-century Polish texts. In travel accounts and academic discourse alike, the motif of the Great Wall of China was manipulated to many ends. Most often, Europeans conceived the wall as a symbol of isolation and security against the "barbaric" populations of Northern and Central Asia. After the fall of the Ming Dynasty, the wall became a prevalent symbol for the military weakness of the Chinese, who "despite the wall" failed to defend themselves from invaders.⁴⁰ In the face of mass migrations mainly to America,⁴¹ Rejchman metaphorically expressed how Chinese powers eliminated the wall to flood the world with cheap labor.

As scientists, orientalist, exiles and naturalists, Tymkowski, Kowalewski, Giller and Rejchman all arrived in China by way of a similar route through Russia, reaching the borderland between China, Mongolia and Siberia. This route left its imprint on their strategies for representing cultural difference in texts that draw from empirical experience. Although the cited statements are staggered by an interval of only fifty or so years, they reveal rapid transformations in how we generate cultural difference based on the current status of European discourse.

Modern Tourists

The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and, in particular, Britain's seizure of it in 1882 significantly facilitated maritime transport to India and East Asia. This led to the expansion of commercial steamship services that made travel accessible for trade and tourism alike. The logistics of travel by sea diverged entirely from the conditions of traveling to the East by land. Due to the expansion of luxury services for the wealthy "leisure class," maritime transport was

³⁹B. Rejchman, *Z Dalekiego Wschodu. Wrażenia, obrazki, opisy z dobrowolnej podróży po Syberyi*, Warsaw 1881, p. 173. Emphasis – A.K. It is worth noting the author's emphasis on the "free will" behind his Asian voyages in order to distinguish himself from political exiles.

⁴⁰As an example, take this statement from an eighteenth-century geography reference book: "Despite the long and terrible wall that marked this nation's border on the side of the Tatars, the fortifications fell and the Tatars called Mantheous conquered the Chinese Throne and possess it to this day." (D. Szybiński, *Krótką wiadomość o znakomitszych w świecie monarchiach, starodawnych królestwach, rzeczachpospolitych...*, vol. 1, Warsaw 1772, p. 12).

⁴¹It is telling that a review of Rejchman's work published in "Gazeta Polska" and written by Henryk Sienkiewicz confirms the traveler's diagnosis based on Sienkiewicz's experience in America: "The author foresees the future calamities for Europe represented by the influx of Chinese workers. Their arrival in America already shows signs that fully justify the so-called "yellow" issue. In the very near future, this might lead to a dangerous social revolution." (H. Sienkiewicz, *Publicystyka. Krytyka, studia i wrażenia literackie i artystyczne*, published by L. Bernacki, vol. 5, Lviv, Warsaw 1937, pp. 422–423).

intrinsically and incomparably modern. This mode of travel suddenly allowed one to choose from a range of destinations: port towns between the Suez Canal and the coast of Japan were all accessible. These hubs had predominantly been given over to European control. As a result, this route depicted the world as somewhat homogeneous. The journey was associated with visiting the progressive stages of colonization, and contact with local cultures was limited to a minimum: small doses the tourist could experience as “local color.”⁴²

The painter and watercolorist Julian Fałat described his journey around the world⁴³ between 1884 and 1887 in his posthumously published journals. Fałat’s route embarked from the Suez and passed through the Red Sea, Aden, Colombo, Singapore, Hong Kong and Yokohama, finally ending in San Francisco. Compared to nineteenth-century travel diaries, Fałat’s text is striking for its debonair naivety and thin reflexivity on a political, historical and social level. At the same time, the text’s superficiality beautifully illustrates the “tourist gaze.” Fałat limited himself to ephemeral impressions that were mainly visual and had a tendency to exoticize cultural difference. The journals convey the privileged position of a white man padded in comfort, enjoying himself among other white people and residing in hotels exclusively for white people (the noted names of Singaporean inns “Hotel de France” and “Hotel de l’Europe” are significant in this context).⁴⁴

Technological progress and advancements in cartography and navigational tools facilitated maritime tourism in Asia. Passing the Bab al-Mandab Strait between the coast of Africa and the Arabic peninsula, Fałat evokes history by reminiscing on traditional place names. This strategy is typical of the tourist’s encounter with the world:

At its most narrow, the isthmus that links the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean is only three kilometers wide. Here, the sea is always boisterous and splashes the rocks with white foam: on some of these rocks, you can see the hull of a ship through whose interior waves rush out. The name “Gate of Tears” obviously hails from the time when little sailing ships were commonly used. The passage must have been dangerous for these small vessels. Today, now that electricity and underwater supports have been installed on fantastic platforms, steamships can navigate this isthmus without any risk and without even slowing their pace.⁴⁵

On the one hand, Fałat seizes the opportunity to convey a suggestive image of restless waves passing through ships. On the other hand, by establishing a contrast with the isthmus’ metaphorical name, he emphasizes the safety and comfort of this new mode of travel. Even in his brief description of the restless sea, we see a hunger for sensory impressions and potential themes for painting. This informs the young artist’s strategy for perceiving the exotic. We see this most clearly on the island of Ceylon. Fałat’s language evokes the tradition of the idyllic poetics of the tropics:

A new world permeates the window of my cabin – an unknown world that already baits the senses. We quickly get dressed to catch a first glimpse of this earthly paradise, perhaps from the deck. The greenery of palm groves shining with their promise of eternal summer, some ethereal fragrance,

⁴²A. Wiczorkiewicz, *Apetyt turysty. O doświadczaniu świata w podróży*, Krakow 2008, p. 204.

⁴³See: J. Malinowski, *Podróż Juliana Fałata do Chin i Japonii w 1885 roku*, [in:] *Orient w kulturze polskiej. Materiały z sesji jubileuszowej z okazji 25-lecia Muzeum Azji i Pacyfiku w Warszawie, 15-16 października 1998*, Warsaw 2000, p. 75.

⁴⁴J. Fałat, *Pamiętniki*, Katowice 1987, p. 115.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p. 108.

a sun that suffuses the whole world... all these things tear a yelp of wonder from my heart: everything here is miraculous, unusual, and so different from anything my imagination could have conceived.⁴⁶

The phrasing “perhaps from the deck” makes it clear that Fałat’s actions were governed by spontaneity and direct sensory stimuli (both visual and olfactory). Yet the artist was not after any kind of ethnographic immersion in the foreign environment, nor did he try to intellectualize his impressions. The expressions “eternal summer,” “the greenery of the palms” and “an ethereal fragrance...” resemble slogans from tourist brochures in their level of generality. These things offer something of intrinsic value to the artist in pursuit of exotic “marvel” and “the extraordinary.” They demand no further commentary beyond these poetic exclamations. A surplus of impressions leads directly to creative impotence: “I would like to paint something, but that would be impossible; a true ‘embarrass de richesse...’ I cannot say what is the most beautiful, the most quintessential....”⁴⁷ This pursuit of something that might distill and represent the experience of cultural difference demonstrates the severe essentialism endemic to tourists.

In several passages, Fałat is by no means stingy with his praises for European colonization, especially when it comes to Britain as a world power and his investment in the prestige of the “white race”⁴⁸ and the Anglicization of the locals. According to Fałat, the locals learn English of their own free will and with enormous passion. When he encounters the Sinhalese and Chinese wearing braids and playing cricket or tennis, he infantilizes them and depicts them in a “funny” light, recalling Homi Bhabha’s now classic thesis on mimicry, which requires “a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.”⁴⁹

In Hong Kong, the traveler declares that he has no interest in seeing the colonial buildings of the “white” quarter or other testaments to the glory of Britain. His *idée fixe* is the exotic: his image of the quintessence of local culture. Interestingly enough, this “quintessence” appears in the form of referential familiarization when Fałat imposes his painter’s filter over the image of otherness of Chinese people of Singapore. Observing poor children sharing a pineapple on the street, he conjures up a classic painting by Murillo:

The suburbs are full of picturesque alleys mainly inhabited by the Chinese who are engaged in trade or the crafts. They make up one quarter of the population of Singapore, and the hygienic conditions they live in are downright horrific: they live at the mouths of canals, surrounded by mud. In spite of all this, judging from their appearance, they are healthy and live a good life. I once saw a group of small Chinese rascals devouring a delicious pineapple, lifting it with their fingers into their mouths piece by piece; the scene called Murillo to mind.⁵⁰

⁴⁶Ibid, pp. 112–113.

⁴⁷Ibid, p. 113.

⁴⁸The author cites racial segregation in trains and on ships as an example of the prestige of the “white race.” (ibid, p. 125).

⁴⁹H.K. Bhabha, *Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse* [in:] *The Location of Culture*, London and New York, 1994, p. 85.

⁵⁰J. Fałat, op. cit., p. 119.

The artist's gaze is surely meant to transform this episode into a scene he can paint. The scene's intensity is marked by his unverified belief in the "deliciousness" of the fruit that cannot be found in Europe. Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, a Spanish baroque artist, was famous for his monumental religious scenes as well as his portraits of children sunken in poverty. These works often fall somewhere on the border between realism and aestheticizing sentimentalism.

Julian Fałat was most likely the first Polish artist to embark on a journey around the world. Right on his heels, however, Karol Lanckoroński (author of *Around the World 1888-1889. Impressions and Views / Na około ziemi 1888-1889. Wrażenia i poglądy*) joined the masses of "tourists" crossing the Indian Ocean. Paweł Stapieha also joined their ranks, writing *Journey to East Asia 1888-1889 (Podróż na wschód Azyi 1888-1889)*. Stapieha's journals are particularly symptomatic of the poetics of mass tourism in the Far East due to the text's lack of reflexivity. The artist swaps out his sketchbook and pencil for a camera, creating a vivid record of the contemporary tourism experience. In terms of their lust for the exotic, however, Stapieha and Fałat's texts belong to the same paradigm.

Conclusion

Within this sketch, these three distinct routes into the Far East taken up by Polish travelers convey how the physical mode of travel, at various historical moments, left its imprint on the poetics of these travel texts. The texts are saturated with ideological content that points back to the discourse circulating among the authors' milieus (be they Polish or, more broadly, European). The nineteenth century in particular witnessed radical shifts in the perception of the East driven by the advent of imperialism, which freely absorbed significant models of thought for culture and science, such as Hegelian idealism and Darwinian evolutionism. Although European and American literature on the subject, mainly devoted to exposing the colonial ambitions of Western civilization, offers a great many insights, it is also valuable to constantly highlight the nuances of Polish identity in these travel texts. Poles self-identified as representatives of the broader entity that was Christian Europe, whose predominance over the rest of the world was rarely contested in the nineteenth century. They also problematized their own nation's entanglements in the politics of expansion in terms of its "situation of dependence."⁵¹ The employed basic strategies such as creating cultural difference, familiarizing (domesticating) or collapsing the distance between local and native culture, and defamiliarization (alienation).⁵² This last strategy, appearing here as imperial orientalism or exoticization, strives to preserve a belief in total otherness.

⁵¹H. Gosk, *Opowieści "skolonizowanego/ kolonizatora."* W kręgu studiów postzależnościowych nad literaturą polską XX i XXI wieku, Kraków 2010, p. 10.

⁵²These categories are borrowed from Viktor Shklovsky's theory of literature and have been carried over to translation theory. They remain relevant for travel writing criticism if we treat the text as a form of translation between local and native culture.

KEYWORDS

cultural difference

TRAVEL

C h i n a

t h e s a v a g e

EXOTICISM

ABSTRACT:

This article explores three routes into the Far East, starting with the explorative and adventurous escapades of Maurice Benyovszky, moving on to the exploring of Siberia and the Chinese border, both common in the nineteenth century, and ending with mass maritime tourism that developed after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. Texts by Polish travelers including Benyovszky, Jerzy Tymkowski, Józef Kowalewski, Agaton Giller, Bronisław Rejchman and Julian Fałat have been selected from a great wealth of source materials to represent categories of material routes into Asia that informed specific conceptual frameworks and shaped the writers' methods for representing different cultures. These methods were also impacted by the contemporary intellectual experiences of the authors.

*East Asia***civilization****Orientalism****postcolonialism***situation of dependency***NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:**

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Scent of the Dragon: On the Poetics of the Senses in Travel Writing on China

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This article was written under the auspices of the research project “China in Polish and Serbian Travel Writing (Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries).” This project was funded by the NCN (National Research Center) awarded in resolution 2014/15/D/HS2/00801.

Recent decades have witnessed a surge of interest in travel writing among scholars, shaped in large part by postcolonial discourse. Travel sketches have proven to be a particularly useful reservoir of material for scholars seeking to map out the ramifications of European expansion, as they both depict Europeans’ activities and shed light on the ideologies and motives that loomed behind the colonial project.¹ Following the impetus of Edward Said’s foundational text *Orientalism*,² a great deal of scholarship has explored representations of alterity and their ideological underpinnings, often relying on travel writing as source material. To find excellent examples of diverse applications of this paradigm, one might look to research surrounding the Balkans,³ Eastern Europe,⁴ Siberia⁵ and South Africa.⁶

¹ C. Thompson, *Travel writing*, London–New York 2011, p. 3. See also: D. Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire. Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration*, Durham–London 1993; M.L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, New York 2007

² E. Said, *Orientalism*, New York 1978

³ M. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, Oxford 2009; B. Jezernik, *Wild Europe: The Balkans in the Gaze of Western Travellers*, Ann Arbor 2004

⁴ L. Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe. The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, Stanford 1994.

⁵ M. Bassin, *Inventing Siberia: Visions of the Russian East in the early nineteenth century*, “American Historical Review” 1991, vol. 96, issue 3, pp. 763–794; M. Bassin, *Imperial Visions. Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840–1865*, Cambridge 2004.

⁶ S. Huigen, *Knowledge and Colonialism: Eighteenth-century Travellers in South Africa*, Leiden–Boston 2009.

These texts are united by their tendency to privilege sight as the dominant sense, as one might even discern from their titles. I would venture the claim that postcolonial and “opto-centric” impulses are closely bound. The “images” of foreign countries tend to be analyzed “in the eyes of” the travelers, and by examining this, we are able to draw conclusions on the mechanisms of imperial domination and colonial rhetoric in travel writing. This also seems to be the paradigm that dominates scholarship on tourism. Scholars such as Krzysztof Podemski and Anna Wieczorkiewicz have both pointed out the widespread tendency to approach tourism as a form of visual consumption.⁷

There might be something to gain from turning our focus to examples of travel literature criticism that diverge from this paradigm and instead belong to what is often called the anthropology of the senses. In her writing on Venice and Italy, Aleksandra Achtelek pays special attention to sensory experiences of the cities comprising the Italian Peninsula.⁸ In her study of tourism in countries of the former Soviet Union, Anna Horolets sets aside an entire chapter for sensations of taste.⁹ Anna Wieczorkiewicz has published several analyses of tourism that emphasize the multisensory valences of the tourist’s experience. Krzysztof Podemski analyzes 20-30 pieces of travel writing describing India with a special focus on sensory experiences. Podemski unambiguously makes the argument that the traveler’s encounter can by no means be reduced to sight.¹⁰ The reflections I offer in this article belong to a greater effort to reflect on the poetics of the senses in travel writing while attending to the postcolonial paradigm.

I am primarily interested in travel accounts from China written by Polish and Serbian authors in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Bronisław Grąbczewski (1855-1926), a Polish traveler in the Russian service, referred to China as “the land of opposites, where everything is the inverse of how it is at home.”¹¹ Due to the geographical and cultural distance between Europe and the Middle Kingdom, this country is perceived as no mere place, but as a form of “otherness without compromise.”¹² This gives us all the more reason to analyze travel writers’ sensory experiences of the otherness of East-Asian space. A large body of scholarship has already emerged around Anglo-Saxon travel writing, Japanese writing about China,¹³ and the image of China in the overall European cultural sphere.¹⁴ Most of this research conforms to the paradigm noted above, although some examples do address travelers’ descriptions of

⁷ K. Podemski, *Socjologia podróży*, Poznań 2005, pp. 9–10; A. Wieczorkiewicz, *Apetyt turysty: o doświadczaniu świata w podróży*, Kraków 2012, pp. 133–138.

⁸ A. Achtelek, *Wenecja mityczna w literaturze polskiej XIX i XX wieku*, Katowice 2002; A. Achtelek, *Sprawcza moc przechadzki, czyli polski literat we włoskim mieście*, Katowice 2015.

⁹ A. Horolets, *Konformizm, bunt, nostalgia. Turystyka niszowa z Polski do krajów byłego ZSRR*, Kraków 2013.

¹⁰ K. Podemski, *Socjologia podróży...*, p. 13.

¹¹ B. Grąbczewski, *Podróże po Azji Środkowej*, Warsaw 2010, p. 59.

¹² *Sinographies. Writing China*, ed. E. Hayot, H. Saussy, S.G. Yao, Minneapolis–London 2008, p. x.

¹³ J. Fogel, *The Literature of Travel in the Japanese Rediscovery of China. 1862-1945*, Stanford 1996; S.S. Thurin, *Victorian Travelers and the Opening of China, 1842-1907*, Athens 1999; *A Century of Travels in China. Critical Essays on Travel Writing from the 1840s to the 1940s*, ed. D. Kerr, J. Kuehn, Hong Kong 2010.

¹⁴ For research on Western European travel writing, particularly Anglo-Saxon examples, see: R. Dawson, *The Chinese Chameleon. An Analysis of European Conceptions of Chinese Civilisation*, New York 1967; C. Mackerras, *Western Images of China*, Oxford–New York 1989; J. Spence, *The Chan’s Great Continent. China in Western Minds*, London 1998. For more on the image of China in Russia, see: A.B. Лукин, *Медведь наблюдает за драконом. Образ Китая в России в XVII-XXI веках*, Moscow 2007.

cuisine.¹⁵ The selection of Polish and Serbian authors collected in this article offer a remarkable comparative perspective. Poland and Serbia did not participate in explorations of China in the early modern period. On the other hand, Poles and Serbs did make several voyages to East Asia as emissaries of European powers. This wealth of material allows us to piece together a comparative perspective and expose certain ambivalences between Eurocentrism and sympathy for the Chinese.¹⁶ In existing scholarship on Polish and Serbian travel writing, themes of cuisine and its representation have already drawn much attention,¹⁷ so in this article, we will limit our focus to sensations of smell.

My approach rests on Vladimir Gvozden's definition of travel writing. Borrowing language from Mikhail Bakhtin, Gvozden identifies a set of factors that constitute travel writing: chronotopes (configurations of time and space) of travel, and encounters in which the writer, conditioned by his subjectivity and intellectual background, enters into dialogue with the new and the strange.¹⁸ Our main preoccupations here will be the way in which the encounter with otherness has been recorded in the form of textual representations of scent-based impressions, what means were used to describe them, and what role these portraits played in the text.

Scent as a Signifier of Identity

The expansive territories of China are home to a vast diversity of cultures and climates, yielding a vast range of scent-based experiences. We might begin this study with the scent of soybean oil (called "fava bean oil" among travelers). This substance is almost ubiquitous in travel texts due to its prevalence, specificity and distinctiveness. For Józef Gieysztor (1865–1958), who joined a scientific expedition to Northeast China (Manchuria) and Japan in 1903,¹⁹ this aroma was a sign of what it means to be Chinese: "Through the open doors of the wagon pours the garbled noise of a hundred voices, the soft patter of felted shoes, and that scent of fava bean oil that clings so consistently to the chinese [sic!]. We must be back in China."²⁰ Gieysztor does not describe the scent itself, but utilizes it as a self-sufficient identity marker. In his book, Gieysztor reminisces on the odor constantly, although he tends to avoid describing organoleptic senses pejoratively, as so many other travelers have done. In another pas-

¹⁵R. Forman, *Eating out East: Representing Chinese Food in Victorian Travel Literature and Journalism*, [in:] *A Century of Travels in China. Critical Essays on Travel Writing from the 1840s to the 1940s*, ed. D. Kerr, J. Kuehn, Hong Kong 2007.

¹⁶Overviews of Polish travelers in China can be found in these works by E. Kajdański: *Długi cień wielkiego muru: jak Polacy odkrywali Chiny*, Warsaw 2005; M. Kałuski, *Polacy w Chinach*, Warsaw 2001; L. Cyrzyk, *Literatura podróżnicza o Chinach w Polsce XIX w.*, "Przegląd Orientalistyczny", 1966, vol. 3(59), p. 205–216. Two anthologies of Serbian travel writing on China have been published: *Kapija od žada. Putopisi Srba o Kini: 1725–1935*, ed. R. Pušić, Belgrade 1998; *Podnebesko carstvo. Srbi o Kini 1725–1940 (putopisi i članci)*, ed. R. Pušić, Belgrade 2006 (throughout this article, Serbian-language texts are uniformly written in the Latin alphabet).

¹⁷T. Ewertowski, *Chiny a polskie podniebienie – reprezentacje chińskich kulinariów w polskich tekstach podróżopisarskich*, [in:] *Spotkania Polonisty Trzech Krajów – Chiny, Korea, Japonia – Rocznik 2014/2015*, ed. K. Morita, Tokio 2015, p. 135–146.

¹⁸V. Gvozden, *Srpska putopisna kultura 1914–1940. Studija o hronotopičnosti susreta*, Belgrade 2011, p. 39–40.

¹⁹For more on Gieysztor, see: E. Kajdański, *Długi cień wielkiego muru...*, pp. 243–258.

²⁰J. Gieysztor, *Na Dalekim Wschodzie*, Warsaw 1904, p. 134–135. Emphasis – T.E.

sage, Gieysztor writes of the “soapy scent of fava bean oil...that specific aroma of Chinese apartments.”²¹ Here, the oil’s aroma again figures as a sign of Chinese-ness, although in this instance, it bears an epithet. Relaying these experiences, these writers inscribe Chinese otherness into their knowledge systems by assigning it consistent attributes. We will encounter similar applications of aromatic figures later on in this article.

We come across a similar impression that this scent and the Chinese essence are inextricably bound in the book *Kroz Kinu* (“Through China”) by Milutin Velimirović (1893-1973). This Serbian writer and doctor spent time in East Asia in 1918 and 1919 as a member of a Russian-Mongolian trade mission. He is acclaimed among Serbian scholars for his style and sensitivity.²² Describing the phenomenon of Chinese emigration dispersed from the eastern parts of Siberia to India and Iran, Velimirović notes that throughout all these lands, Chinese immigrants carry along their unflappable merchant’s spirit and the scent of fava bean oil.²³ Here, the scent figures as an identity marker. It is important to note that in this instance, the writer refrains from describing the actual sensation and instead utilizes the concept of the scent as a signifier.

In Velimirović’s prose, we encounter yet another feature that has proven to be a hallmark of aromatic experiences of China: sensory descriptions of unpleasant or repugnant organoleptic impressions: “I often smell the scent of garlic throughout the entire home. When mixed with fava bean oil, this produces the unpleasant and singular stifling atmosphere of Chinese alleyways.”²⁴ Velimirović uses the generic epithets “unpleasant” and “specific” to emphasize the sensation’s idiosyncratic quality without rendering it at all accessible to the reader. This is a common strategy for constructing a lexical representation of sensory phenomena. We encounter a similar tendency in descriptions of scenic views or feminine beauty: authors delight in deferring to the convention that “there are no words to express this thing,” or “you would have to see it for yourself.” When they describe scents, they often rely on vague epithets or simply emphasize the specificity of the impression without articulating its actual attributes.

The scent-based impressions of Mieczysław Jankowski (1878-1961) are also framed in a negative light. Jankowski passed through Northeast China in 1904-1905 as a soldier in the Russo-Japanese War. He wrote: “the chinese [sic!] know nothing of bread; in its place they bake patties made of millet flour and fried in bean oil, which produces quite a stink.”²⁵ Scents of oil and garlic are uniformly described as unsavory and are used to project an extremely pejorative portrait of the Chinese. These observations quickly escalate to a Chauvinist discourse

²¹*Ibid*, p. 60.

²²V. Gvozden, *Srpska putopisna kultura...*, p. 88, 93; *Podnebesko carstvo...*, p. 129–130; H. Jin, *Opis Kineza u putopisu Milutina Velimirovića “Kroz Kinu,”* [in:] *Ljubomir Nenadović i srpska putopisna tradicija*, Priština 1995, pp. 159–162.

²³M. Velimirović, *Kroz Kinu: putopis*, Belgrade 1930, p. 33.

²⁴*Ibid*, p. 31. Unless otherwise noted, the translations are provided by Eliza Rose, who translated this article into English. These translations use the author’s Polish translations as a reference point. The original citation reads: “Zadah belog luka oseća se često po celoj kući, a pomešan sa bobovim uljem on stvara jedan neprijatan, specifičan zadah kineskih sokačica.”

²⁵M. Jankowski, *Mandžurja. Wrażenia i wspomnienia*, Warsaw 1909, p. 36.

on the “stinky” and “dirty”, which according to David Spurr is a signature feature of imperial rhetoric.²⁶

On the other hand, several examples run counter to this tendency. In his book *Przez lądy i oceany. Sześć lat na Dalekim Wschodzie* (*Over Land and Seas: Six Years in the Far East*), Przemysław Smolik (1877-1947) writes a genuine *apologia* of the Chinese. After enumerating their many virtues, he states that “Truly — this is a nation worth adoring and imitating, **despite the unpleasant scent of garlic and bean oil** that pervades its clothes and ‘fanzas’ (huts)!...”.²⁷ Smolik, who was a subject of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was captured by the Russians during World War I. After the October Revolution, he found himself in China along with a wave of refugees.²⁸ Smolik exhibits a consistently warm attitude towards the people of East Asia. His book describes his interactions with the Chinese, Mongolians and the Buryat people. Although he does acknowledge a lingering unpleasant scent, this comment is trivial in the context of his overall apology to Chinese society.

Scent (or its Lack) as a Symbol of China

The conventional constellation of symbols for China associated with the turn of the twentieth century includes tea, chopsticks, opium, braids, rice, calligraphy and silk. Interestingly enough, fava bean oil (soybean oil) is not usually included in this set. However, as we have demonstrated already, when it comes to sensations of scent described in the period, this oil’s role was profound. This dissonance between the traveler’s experience and the stereotypical image of China might be of some interest.

We might also take a closer look at other symbols and their impact in the representations of sensory experiences in travel writing. Ozren Subotić (1873 – sometime after 1941) found himself in East Asia on the suggestion of his brother, Dejan Subotić, who was a general in the tsar’s army. Subotić studied at the Eastern Institute in Vladivostok and served in the army. In his memoir *Iz žutog carstva* (*From the Yellow Kingdom*),²⁹ he repeatedly recalls a certain “aromatic Chinese drink.”³⁰ In Chinese culture, tea is inextricably tied to a host of social and

²⁶See the chapter titled *Debasement: Filth and Defilement* in: D. Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire...*

²⁷P. Smolik, *Przez lądy i oceany. Sześć lat na Dalekim Wschodzie*, Warsaw–Krakow 1921, p. 132. Emphasis – T.E.

²⁸Aside from Smolik, several other authors wrote travel accounts describing their experiences as they fled to East Asia from a Russia embroiled in revolution. These accounts include: Kamil Giżycki *Przez Urianchaj i Mongolię. Wspomnienia z lat 1920-21* and *Ze Wschodu na Zachód. Listy z podróży*, Ferdynand Antoni Ossendowski *Przez kraj ludzi, zwierząt i bogów*, Jerzy Bandrowski *Przez jasne wrota*. For more on the subject of Polish immigration to East Asia spurred by war and revolution, see: M. Cabanowski, *Tajemnice Mandżurii. Polacy w Harbinie*, Warsaw 1993, pp. 42–72; M. Kałuski, *Polacy w Chinach...*, pp. 97–104. Serbians and representatives of other South Slavic states also took part in this wave of migrations. Several books of Serbian travel writing are partially devoted to describing East Asia in the context of this experience. These include: Aleksandar Đurić, *Ka pobeđi*, Jovan Milanković, *Uspomene iz Sibira 1918–1919 i put okeanom u domovinu 1920*, Vlada Stanojević, *Moje ratne beleške i slike*, Arton Mihailović, *Kroz plamen ruske revolucije*, Hrvoje Grgurić *Na Dalekom Istoku. Uspomene našega dobrovoljca iz Sibirije, Mandžurije, Mongolije i Kine* and *Kroz tamnice i crvenu maglu*.

²⁹For more on this writer’s biography, see D. Samii, *Ozren Subotić - novosadski istraživač Dalekog istoka*, “Sveske za istoriju Novog Sada”, 2016, issue 17, pp. 41–45.

³⁰O. Subotić, *Iz žutog carstva*, Novi Sad 1921, p. 85, 90.

cultural issues, while for foreigners, it figures as a major symbol of the Middle Kingdom.³¹ What's more, in the Early Modern era, the tea trade played a fundamental role in the global³² economy, with China remaining its sole producer until the late nineteenth century. It is no wonder, then, that the drink is referenced regularly in travel writing, although it usually comes up in the context of the economy or customs. Its aroma is rarely emphasized, even in the off-hand manner Subotić demonstrates in the passage above.

Father Ignacy Posadzy (1898-1984) describes the city of Tianjin from his travels through Asia towards the end of the 1930s. In this text, he introduces yet another substance that often figures in this period as a symbol for China: "Open storefronts invite passersby inside, lured by a glimpse of vibrant textiles. The sounds of clamorous melodies came from all sides. Here and there, through open doors, wafted the **soapy-sweet scent of opium**."³³ This quote describes several simultaneous sensory impressions, with opium representing the sense of smell. This description helps complete the sense of place and becomes one of many elements constructing a multisensory portrait of the city.

Similar examples are easy to find. Witold Jabłoński (1901-1957), Professor of Chinese Studies (Sinology) at the University of Warsaw, traveled throughout far-flung areas of Western China in the 1930s.³⁴ Here he describes a particular settlement: "The houses stand on top of one another, their eaves sagging. All a bunch of ramshackle roadside inns. In the dark abyss, steam rises from rice on the stove and the pervasive odor of **opium** lulls travelers, beckoning to them to have faith that here they'll find everything they need to be happy."³⁵ Scent is but one of many elements of the settlement's multifaceted nature. Both Posadzy and Jabłoński fall back on epithets to describe the aroma of opium. Yet interestingly enough, their descriptions diverge. The juxtaposition of the "pervasive odor" with the "soapy-sweet scent" suggests that the authors are in fact describing two different sensations, although both are referring to the same substance. Again, we find ourselves broaching the problem of how to generate lexical representations that adequately capture sensory impressions. Linguistic resources ultimately fall short of being able to vividly reproduce an impression without explicitly naming its subject. If they did not call out "opium," the reader who encounters the phrases "pervasive odor" and "soapy-sweet scent" would have no way of knowing that the author is speaking of narcotics.

In opium references, we encounter the same problem associated with tea: the popularity of the subject does not come hand in hand with a universal consensus on how to represent its sensory experience. The archetype of the opium addict has often been exploited as a symbol

³¹J.A. Benn, *Tea in China. A Religious and Cultural History*, Hong Kong 2015, p. 2.

³²R.W. Jamieson, *The Essence of Commodification: Caffeine Dependencies in the Early Modern World*, "Journal of Social History" 2001, vol. 35, issue 2, p. 283-284.

³³I. Posadzy, *Przez tajemniczy wschód*, Potulice 1939. Emphasis – T.E. The version consulted here can be found on the website: <http://www.patrimonium.chrystusowcy.pl/kandydaci-na-oltarze/sluga-bozy-ks-ignacy-posadzy>, (October 14 2017). This website also offers a biography of Ignacy Posadzy and a series of texts about him.

³⁴For background information on Jabłoński's biography, see: K. Golik, *Witold Jabłoński – niesłusznie zapomniany polski sinolog*, "Azja-Pacyfik" 2009, vol. 12, pp. 218–229.

³⁵W. Jabłoński, *Przed ćwierćwieczem po niezmierzonych obszarach Chin (1932)*, [in:] *Ze wspomnień podróżników*, ed. B. Olszewski, Warsaw 1958, p. 245. Emphasis – T.E.

of Asiatic decadence. The narcotic substance and its trade were instrumental for the political expansion of Great Britain in Asia and the formation of colonial capitalism,³⁶ so it is no surprise that it makes its way into so many travel accounts. Ozren Subotić and Mieczysław Jankowski (cited above), Polish reporter Roman Fajans (1903–1976), and the Serbian traveler and writer Milan Jovanović (1834–1896, author of the seminal book *Tamo amo po istoku*) all describe their visits to smoking dens and offer economic analyses of the opium trade. However, we rarely encounter descriptions that even casually reference the drug's scent. Milutin Velimirović, for instance, offers a rather detailed account of a smoking den, but alludes to sensations of smell only once: "the air was so saturated with opium that one sensed the narcotic even without smoking it."³⁷ Aleksander Janta-Pończyński (1908–1974), a journalist and poet who collected accounts of his travels through Asia in the 1930s in two books,³⁸ devotes a few pages to an analysis of the philosophical and sociological issues attached to opium smoking. Yet beyond the remark that he himself "smokes opium" (which can be understood in several ways), he restricts his scent-based impressions to one reference to the "aromatic smoke."³⁹ In the interests of specificity, I should mention that this excerpt is in reference to his time in Vietnam.

Scent and Constructing Representations of Place

We have already analyzed many cases above that represent scent in order to construct the perception of a given place. This category might be filled out with a few similar examples that expand our understanding of these poetics.

Lalja Velimirović, who was related to Milutin Velimirović, spent her childhood and youth in East Asia. Her father directed the Bacteriological Institute in Harbin. After moving to Belgrade, she wrote a short series of travel sketches that were published in the newspaper *Vreme*.⁴⁰ Describing the nature in Hong Kong, Velimirović points out the easy access to the tropics, where nature, the greatest artist of all, expresses her full grandeur. Alongside the streaming light and enchanting greenery, she describes "sweet slumber overflowing with aromatic air."⁴¹ In this case, we might say that the spell of tropical nature has its own scent. The poetic tone that pervades Velimirović's sketches is conveyed through her allusions to the many senses alongside epithets and metaphors.

³⁶See: C.A. Trocki, *Opium and Empire: Chinese Society in Colonial Singapore, 1800–1910*, Ithaca [N.Y.] 1990; C.A. Trocki, *Opium, Empire, and the Global Political Economy: a Study of the Asian Opium Trade, 1750–1950*, London; New York 1999; C.A. Trocki, *Opium as a Commodity in the Chinese Nanyang Trade*, [in:] *Chinese Circulations. Capital, Commodities, And Networks in Southeast Asia*, ed. E. Tagliacozzo, W. Chang, Durham-London 2011, pp. 84–104. See also: The critical review of Trocki's second book, A. Klimburg, *Some Research Notes on Carl A. Trocki's Publication "Opium, Empire and the Global Political Economy"*, "Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London" 2001, vol. 64, issue 2, pp. 260–267.

³⁷M. Velimirović, *Kroz Kinu...*, p. 112.

³⁸For background information on Janta-Pończyński, see: F. Palowski, *Aleksander Janta-Pończyński. Ballada o wiecznym szukaniu*, Warsaw - Krakow 1990.

³⁹A. Janta-Pończyński, *Na kresach Azji*, Warsaw 1939, p. 145.

⁴⁰For background information on Lalja Velimirović, see: *Podnebesko carstvo...*, pp. 184–189.

⁴¹L. Velimirović, *Šetnja kroz Hong-Kong...*, "Vreme", 4.10.1932, p. 4. Original: "slatkom dremežu razlitom u mirisnom vazduhu."

Travel reportage by Roman Fajans offers a strong contrast. Fajans, who is lauded as a major journalist of the 1930s,⁴² visited the Middle Kingdom in 1937-38 and collected his observations in the book *In China there is War Again* (*W Chinach znowu wojna*). Here, he describes the situation in Canton after the Japanese air raid: **“The foul smell of something burning and the stench of blood make the head reel.** It’s terrible, a hundredfold worse than on the front...An army doctor tells us they’ve already collected sixty corpses.”⁴³ Like Velimirović, Fajans incorporates sensations of smell here as one constituent element of a multisensory portrait of the event, although his literary conventions are a far cry from the Serbian author’s poetic prose. In Fajans’ reportage, concrete descriptions of scents conveyed through predicate modifiers outweigh epithets and metaphors. It is perhaps of note that Fajans is not the only author whose accounts of the war in China reference the smell of something burning. We find this same scent in the accounts of pilot Witold Urbanowicz (1908-1996). As a Division 303 Pilot, Urbanowicz fought in China in the American “Flying Tigers” squadron during World War II. In his book *Fire Over China* (*Ogień nad Chinami*), also published as *Flying Tigers*, he recalls the smell of something burning in his descriptions of an air raid’s fallout.⁴⁴

Halina Bujakowska (1907–1971) rode a motorcycle with her husband Stanisław Bujakowski from Poland through the Balkans, the countries of Western and Southern Asia, and eventually to China in 1934-36. Her memoir, published posthumously in 2011 and titled *My Man, My Motorcycle and Me*, describes the boisterous streets of Canton in details.⁴⁵ Scent often figures as one of many elements: “But this is a street of lacquer, with gongs, giant bowls and ornate boxes spread out on its cobblestones. In the depths of the gloomy slipshod shops it’s all red, gold and black, while one alleyway over, banners swoop to the ground over a great spread of roosters and fancifully painted dusters with golden feathers. Decadent racks of elephant bone hold a spread of silk and paper crafts. Jewelers sit in the corners, tucking away their workshops in discreet nooks. **The scent of sandalwood hovers in the air,** and a boy paints Mahjong pieces onto little jade tiles.”⁴⁶ The list is a rhetorical figure often relied upon to describe the foreign. Bujakowska’s technique of listing these sundry items conforms to the convention of representing China as a “rich and exotic marvel.”⁴⁷ Aromatic impressions conspire to generate a suggestive portrait of the detail-rich streets of Canton.

A few terms noted above also appear in Ozren Subotić’s compelling description of a Chinese temple: “An enigmatic dim half-light filled the interior of the main temple. You can smell the Chinese lacquer, aromatic papers burning, incense, the rare scent of rosewood and that all-pervasive *odeur chinoise* so characteristic of all that encompasses the Chinese, following

⁴²100/XX+50. *Antologia polskiego reportażu XX wieku*. Vol 3., ed. M. Szczygieł, Wołowiec 2015, p. 261.

⁴³R. Fajans, *W Chinach znowu wojna...*, Warsaw 1939, p. 197. Emphasis – T.E.

⁴⁴W. Urbanowicz, *Latające tygrysy*, Lublin 1983, p. 220.

⁴⁵Virgil Ho, a historian of interwar Canton, argues that the fascination with the noise of street life played a prominent role in descriptions from this period. See: V.K.Y. Ho, *Understanding Canton. Rethinking Popular Culture in the Republican Period*, Oxford 2005, p. 1.

⁴⁶H. Bujakowska, *Mój chłopiec, motor i ja*, Warsaw 2011. Chapter title: *Hotel czterech ocenów*. Emphasis – T.E. This quote was found in the digital edition distributed as a MOBI file by the online bookstore Virtualo, which is why I have provided no page number.

⁴⁷C. Mackerras, *Western Images of China*, Oxford 1987, p. 16.

them wherever they go.”⁴⁸ This description contains a whole inventory of exotic aromas. It is worth noting that Subotić uses both epithets and concrete descriptors here to convey a sense of the actual substances. The temple is filled with a dim half-light and silence, which opens up a space for describing a rich plurality of aromatic sensations. Listing scents, just like the gesture of listing products in Bujakowska’s quote above, helps convey an exotic portrait that simultaneously functions as an identity marker. It is also significant that in this rather fanciful excerpt of his recollections, Subotić uses scents to construct a static description of the setting. Later on in the text, certain events intrude upon the static scene, and once this shift occurs, sensations of sight and sound move to the foreground.

Degradation and its Relativity

Milutin Velimirović, whose references to the scent of oil were cited above, mentions the characteristic “stench” of Chinese alleyways, while Mieczysław Jankowski claims that the Chinese “stink.” All too often, evocations of scent in travel writing are manipulated to project a deprecating image of Chinese cities and the Chinese themselves. Even authors who demonstrate a more positive attitude towards the Middle Kingdom revert to this tone to describe what they smell. Hrvoje Grgurić (1893–1981), a Croatian writer who spent several years in East Asia during the October Revolution,⁴⁹ describes Chinese cities as a labyrinth of narrow alleys saturated with a “terrible stench.”⁵⁰ He also compares the cleanliness of Japanese markets to the “filth and stink” of Chinese cities.⁵¹ Unpleasant scents come up not only in reference to China; they are also used to describe Chinese people living abroad. In his book describing his journey around the world in 1888–89, Count Karol Lanckoroński (1848–1933), an aristocrat and acclaimed art historian, describes San Francisco’s Chinatown thus: “The opium dens are rather repulsive for their filth and stench, and the holes where they zealously play poker and some kind of dominoes are not much better.”⁵² Lanckoroński’s vocabulary is by no means neutral; his word choice consistently carries negative connotations. The hunter Wacław Wasilewski⁵³ associates the Chinese diaspora in Siberia (referred to as “*manza*”) with an unpleasant scent. In the 1880s, Wasilewski spent time in territories of East Asia that had been annexed to Russia in 1860 (Outer Manchuria). He writes, “From each man, but especially from the simplest *manza*, radiates a unique and unbearable scent felt at some distance. Even at night, from fifteen or more feet away and against the wind, you can distinguish the *manza* from the Russianman [sic!]. This scent is produced by their remarkable lack of hygiene, the wild garlic that

⁴⁸O. Subotić, *Iz žutog carstva...*, p. 22. In the original: “U prostorijama glavnog hrama vladao je tajanstven polumrak. Osećao se miris kineskog laka, spaljenih aromatičnih hartijica, tamjana, retkog palisandrova drveta i toga neizbežnog *odeur chinois*, koji je tako karakterističan za sve to što okružava Kineza, i koji ga svuda prati”.

⁴⁹For background information on Grgurić, see: F. Hameršak, *Nepoznati Hrvoje Grgurić*, “Kolo: časopis Matice hrvatske” 2000, vol. 10, issue 4, pp. 25–40. I have decided to include this Croatian author in a text devoted to Polish and Serbian literature because Grgurić served in a division of Serbian volunteers during World War I, and his experiences have much in common with the fate of so many Serbian soldiers who made their way to China after the outbreak of the October Revolution.

⁵⁰H. Grgurić, *Na Dalekom Istoku. Uspomene našega dobrovoljca iz Sibirije, Mandžurije, Mongolije i Kine*, Zagreb 1931, p. 87.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. 155.

⁵²*Ibid.*, p. 155.

⁵³A short biographical sketch of this writer can be found in *Polskie opisanie świata: studia z dziejów poznania kultur ludowych i plemiennych. T. 1 Afryka, Azja*, ed. A. Kuczyński, Wrocław 1994, p. 170.

is their favorite seasoning, and their constant consumption of tobacco and opium. This same scent fills their *fanzas* [homes] and permeates their surroundings. Simple *manza* carry it with them wherever they go: it is their signature Chinese scent.”⁵⁴ Lanckoroński consistently depicts scent in a negative light, using the word “stench” and the adjective “repulsive.” On the other hand, Wasilewski describes sensations of smell in a somewhat analytic tone, specifying how they circulate (including the figure “from fifteen feet away and against the wind”) and explaining where they come from.

The acclaimed writer, ethnographer and political figure Wacław Sieroszewski (1858-1945) introduces yet another method for characterizing sensations of smell. Sieroszewski’s *Pages from a Journey* (*Kartki z podróży*) describes his passage on board a Chinese ship.⁵⁵ His descriptions mention odor, but he conveys sensory impressions from a comparative perspective: “between the cleanest Chinese man and the average European, we find the exact same difference that separates an Englishman who bathes daily and a Polish peasant who perhaps bathes once every few years. I do not advise travelers sensitive to disagreeable scents and somewhat ‘tawdry’ food and accommodations to set sail on Chinese ships. Even without the boat’s gentle rocking, you can easily become sea sick from the pervasive, unbearable odor drifting off the ship’s crew and its opium-smoking passengers.”⁵⁶ This excerpt demonstrates how authentic experiences can easily be woven into an imagological discourse premised on generalizations and stereotypes.⁵⁷ Comparisons and analogies are signature devices of travel writing that are often manipulated to grasp otherness and sort it into a logical order more legible for the writer and his readers. Descriptions of unpleasant scents and other misadventures on the ship in the mode of generalizations and analogies not only reproduce stereotypes about the Chinese; they also project stereotypes of Englishmen, Europeans and Polish peasants. Sieroszewski’s critical remarks on Polish peasants somehow softens the orientaling slant of his words, although his choice to identify colonized people with the urban lower class is a hallmark of imperial discourse.⁵⁸ As an aside, we might note that Sieroszewski’s three “Chinese” novels are full of allusions to sensations of smell. This, however, falls beyond the scope of this article.

To fill out the observations collected in this section, it is important to note that these travel writers’ negative impressions do not only target the Chinese. Ignacy Posadzy, who was cited above, describes the scent of Europeans thus: “I have learned that the dogs here only bark at white people. Someone has explained to me that a European’s body gives off an idiosyncratic scent that is imperceptible to our senses. The scent is produced by a diet dominated by meat. Chinese people, meanwhile, give off a much more delicate scent thanks to their diet of rice,

⁵⁴W. Wasilewski, *Z krańców Sybiru. Zapiski myśliwego-turysty*, Warsaw 1886, p. 161.

⁵⁵For more on Chinese themes in Sieroszewski’s work and issues of colonialism and postcolonialism in his oeuvre, see: J. Bachórz, *Wacław Sieroszewski o Chińczykach i Chinach*, [in:] *Początki wiedzy o Chinach w Polsce*, Gdańsk 2008, p. 85–106; A. Kijak, *Odkrywca innej Syberii i Dalekiego Wschodu. O prozie Wacława Sieroszewskiego*, Kraków 2010.

⁵⁶W. Sieroszewski, *Na Daleki Wschód. Kartki z podróży*, Warsaw 1904, pp. 292–293.

⁵⁷“Imagology” is understood here as the study of discourses of representing the other in literature and culture. See: *Imagology. The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters. A Critical Survey*, ed. M. Beller, J. Leerssen, Amsterdam-New York 2007.

⁵⁸See: R. Forman, *China and the Victorian Imagination. Empires Entwined*, Cambridge 2013, p. 110.

fish and grains.”⁵⁹ As an author, Posadzy unambiguously speaks on behalf of a Catholic and patriotic value system. For a number of reasons, he seems to be less sensitive to cultural relativism than the other authors discussed here. On the other hand, it is precisely through his evocations of the senses that his writing gains a relativist perspective. In this case, it is the Europeans whose scent deserves scorn.⁶⁰ It is also curious that Posadzy’s patriotic and Catholic-oriented text includes yet another eloquent instance of relativism: he describes a few Chinese men bursting into laughter after hearing an excerpt of *Pan Tadeusz* recited, since the sounds of Polish speech strike them as hilarious.⁶¹ The two scenes cited here show how some prose can undermine Europeans by evoking the Chinese experience. It is also worth stressing that these excerpts are not consistent with the overall tone of Posadzy’s text. It is often said that travel writing reveals more about the traveler than it does about the destination, but in spite of this, the encounter with otherness does yield some moments in these travel narratives that are radically distinct from the prevailing ideological tendency.

Conclusion

Sensations of smell evade language. They are characterized by descriptive or evaluative epithets or articulated more concretely through descriptions of their origins. They may be approached via analogy, but the “scent in its own right” is beyond language. Take, for instance, the curious juxtaposition of Jabłoński and Posadzy’s parallel descriptions of opium. In reality, both reference the same substance, but the language used is inconsistent. Representing scent plays a distinct role in travel writing, although travelers are much more likely to rely on sensations of sight and sound, since they are evocative and easier to articulate concretely. The scent of products construed as symbols of China, such as tea, opium and rice, rarely attract the traveler’s attention. The authors discussed here write about these substances and often even devote mini-treatises to them, but relegate sensations of smell to the background. Soybean oil, on the other hand, has earned the status of an identity marker. Aside from this function, it is also evoked for descriptive purposes. Scent figures as one of many components of multifaceted portraits of specific destinations or situations. In the case of Ozren Subotić’s description of the temple, sensations of smell are pulled to the foreground. Descriptions that emphasize a stench or odor tend to belong to an imperial and orientalist rhetoric, and these descriptions are often wielded at the expense of the Chinese. Sometimes, as in the case of Sieroszewski’s writing, we encounter an entire system of stereotypes. In Przecław Smolik’s writing, on the other hand, despite his rather typical descriptions of scent, the writer attempts to distance himself from imperialism and offer a form of apology to the Chinese.

⁵⁹I. Posadzy, *Przez tajemniczy wschód...*, op. cit.

⁶⁰For contrast, see writing on the relativist function of descriptions of European cuisine from a Chinese perspective: R. Forman, *Eating out East...*, p. 69.

⁶¹I. Posadzy, *Przez tajemniczy wschód...*, p. 139.

KEYWORDS

poetics
of the
senses

s c e n t

P O S T C O L O N I A L I S M

CHINA

travel writing

ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE SENSES

ABSTRACT:

The aim of this article is to disrupt the “optocentric” paradigm that dominates criticism on travel writing. The main focal points are scent-based impressions and their formulation and function in the text. To this end, the article analyzes a sampling of Polish and Serbian travel writing on China from the turn of the twentieth century.

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Between the Individual and the Collective:

The Poetics of Romantic Croatian Travel Literature Using Antun Nemčić Gostovinski and Stanko Vraz as Case Studies

Krystyna Pieniążek-Marković

As was the case elsewhere in Europe, Croatian travel literature began to flourish in the Romantic period.¹ This being said, if we compare the situation in Croatia to its counterparts in Western Europe or even Poland and Slovakia, where “Dark Romanticism”² and the uncanny³

¹ This is not to suggest that the first examples of Croatian travel writing appear in the romantic period. Bracketing medieval travel accounts of this world and the world beyond (and various reworkings of these same texts throughout the Christian world), we might include two renaissance texts in the category of travel writing (understood here as a genre): Petar Hektorović's *Ribanje i ribarsko prigovaranje* (Fishing and Fishermen's Talk, 1568), which tells the tale of a three-day voyage at sea, and the first Croatian novel, *Planine* (Mountains, 1569) by Petar Zoranić, which describes an expedition over a mountain range. Travel also appears in Jaketa Palmotić's baroque epic *Dubrovnik ponovljen* (Dubrovnik Recalled), which describes the diplomatic mission of several envoys to the Sultan carried out after an earthquake in Dubrovnik in 1667, and the Franciscan priest Jakov Pletikos' report of his visit to the Holy Land *Putovanje k Jerozolim u god. 1752* (Journey to Jerusalem, 1752). Croatians also claim Marco Polo as their countryman, arguing that a particular Croatian island was the more probable of his two rumored birthplaces (Korčula and Venice). In this case, the accounts of his journey to China could also be included in this genealogy of Croatian travel writing (although the provenance of these stories has been questioned). If we leave the Croatian identity of Marco Polo to legends, we should also note certain diplomatic journeys and their literary accounts (often written in Latin) of Antun and Faust Vrančić (from the sixteenth century) and Bartol Kašić (seventeenth century).

² For background on the Slovak case, see: *Czarny romantyzm – przypadek słowacki. Rekonesans*, ed. J. Goszczyńska, A. Kobylińska, Warsaw 2011.

³ See: M. Janion, *Niesamowita Słowiańszczyzna*, Krakow 2006.

were the dominating motifs, then the Croatian case is somewhat distinct. Early nineteenth-century Croatia was home to the Illyrian movement⁴ and a national revival. In this climate, literature was reorganized around patriotic and didactic priorities and Enlightenment ideals. Literature served to create idyllic, arcadia-like images of a unified people peacefully coexisting in a beautiful and fertile land.⁵

New Nation, New Literature

The complex situation of the various state, regional, cultural and social bodies within the divided Kingdoms of Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia, became even more convoluted in the 1830s (much to the dismay of the ideologues and writers of the “new,” “reborn,” “awoken” Croatia-Ilyria). Proponents for the national revival aimed to disrupt regional and linguistic divisions between the three languages (dialects)⁶ used in early literature. Until this moment, all three languages had enjoyed equal status. National revival adherents chose the Shtokavian variation as the foundation for Croatian literary language. They intended for this choice to be a first step towards Serbo-Croatian unity, but the gesture condemned the rich heritages of Chakavian and Kajkavian to be forgotten. In the end, a gesture intended to unite turned out to be one of elimination. Paradoxically, if we honestly assess the revivalist climate of the period, we might say that the “proper” or ethnically-oriented name “Croatia” and the Croatian language were ceded in favor of a Utopian Slavic Illyria, the Illyrians, and the Illyrian language.

Literature of the period was used as a tool by those engineering a new, united nation. The revivalists intended for this process to play out on the cultural level before taking the form of political activity. Literature preceding the period had multiple centers of gravity, mainly

⁴ “The Illyrian movement was a controversial cultural and political movement that dominated the Croatian national revival in the 1830s and 1840s. It is rooted in the history of modern culture in Croatia and reflects the complexity of its former model while prefiguring contradictions and paradoxes that would emerge later.” J. Rapacka, *Leksykon tradycji chorwackich*, Warsaw 1997, p. 74. Croats evoked the myth of the Slavic people’s common descent from the ancient Illyrians. This served a number of purposes: 1. The neutral name did not suggest the dominance of any particular region and therefore supported the integration of all areas within Croatia, linking Dalmatia, Croatia and Slavonia in its most modest iteration; 2. In its most extreme iteration, the paradigm united all Southern Slavs. They attributed huge importance to the Illyrians in the eternal conflict with Hungary, while promoting the concept of a nation that transcends ethnic categories and includes Croats, Slovenians, Bosnians, Serbs, and even Bulgarians, although officially, we confine Croatian issues to the context of the Hapsburg Monarchy; 3. The paradigm established the population’s roots in the territories they inhabit (not conceding to the narrative that these populations migrated from beyond the Carpathian mountain range!) and their right to a heritage that reached back to antiquity.

⁵ The most popular example of these “bucolic tales” would be the Croatian anthem (*Lijepa naša domovino*, *Our Beautiful Homeland*), published in 1835 as *Hrvatska domovina* (*Croatian Homeland*), a reveille by Antun Mihanović, who was an early instigator of the national revival. Ljudevit Gaj, a forerunner of the Illyrian movement, also lauds peace and unity as the Croats’ signature attributes in his popular reveille *Horvátov sloga i zjedinenje* (Unity and Peace among the Croats, from 1832–33. This hymn is also known by a title that references the Polish anthem: *Još Hrvatska nij’ propala*, *Croatia is Not Yet Lost*). See: B. Zieliński, *Obraz ojczyzny i narodu w hymnografii słowiańskiej XIX wieku*, *Wielkie tematy kultury w literaturach słowiańskich*. “Slavica Wratislaviensia” CXV, Wrocław 2001, pp. 83–94.

⁶ It is also crucial to remember that Croatian literature appeared not only in the three Croatian literary languages (Chakavian everywhere in Dalmatia but Dubrovnik, Kajkavian in Croatia, and Shtokavian in Slavonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro) and in the three major alphabets (Latin, Cyrillic, and Glagolitic), but in Latin, Croatian variations on Old Church Slavonic, as well as Italian, German and Hungarian.

emerging out of the various urban hubs throughout Dalmatia (Dubrovnik, Split, Šibenik, Zadar, Korčula, Hvar) as well as throughout the Mediterranean sphere and from the eighteenth century onwards in the Central European North, Croatia proper and Slavonia (Varaždin, Križevci, Požega, Osijek, Zagreb). This dispersed landscape was laid down on the altar of an imagined, consolidated new literature⁷ with Zagreb situated as the exclusive center. This re-oriented literature within a Germanic/Germanic-Slavic and Central European cultural milieu. During these years, Zagreb provided fertile ground for Illyrian, romantic and revivalist ideologies,⁸ while growing into a new economic and political hub.

These emerging ideas were disseminated through new press outlets, facilitated by the advent of the periodical as a medium. In fact, it was in periodicals that the first travel accounts were generally published. These reports narrated individuals' experiences alongside current ideas linked to social and cultural revival, and were thus politically motivated. In the first Croatian-language cultural insert ("Danica horvatska, slavonska i dalmatinska" — "The Dawn of Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatinska") in the daily newspaper (*Novine horvatske* or *Croatian News*), travel (*putovanje*) was defined as a form of knowledge acquisition, and its textual product (*putopis*) as a means for disseminating knowledge.

Out of Love for the Homeland

Travel and travel writing have always been closely bound to patriotic ideals. The Croatian clergyman, philologist and writer Adolfo Veber Tkalčević, one of the most prolific travel writers of the nineteenth century, starts his account of his travels to Plitvice (*Put na Plitvice / Journey to Plitvice*), with a didactic piece of advice. Tkalčević demonstrates how we might realize the modernist objectives of the Enlightenment through an encounter with the Other by seeing our home comparatively and potentially implementing strategies picked up abroad at home:

Fascinated by love for your homeland, you blindly praise all its aspects, while the world has a laugh at your excessive allegiance. Pass through a few foreign lands and you will quickly see

⁷ The process of forming an old canon and creating a new literature came hand in hand with the process of distinguishing the new Croatian nation as a unique entity, which played out in the programmatic texts of the Croatian revival. "They [programmatic texts] contain internal notes on the optimal language for literature and optimal literary models and functions of literature that are undeniably at the service of establishing the so-called 'new Croatian literature, and retroactively, its venerable tradition.' This would simultaneously allow us to form a national body of scholarship on literature. At the same time, in many cases the primary (if not exclusive) objective of these texts was to construct and develop a sense of national identity." S. Coša, *Od Velike Ilirije do «Lijepe naše» h(o)rvatske domovine. Oblikovanje nacionalnoga identiteta u programskim tekstovima preporodnoga razdoblja* (From Great Illyria to "Our Beautiful" Croatian Homeland. The Formation of National Identity in Programmatic Texts from the Revivalist Canon), "Umjetnost riječi" LI (2007), issues 3–4, p. 268. All translations from the Croatian are Eliza Rose's on the basis of Polish translations by Krystyna Pieniążek Marković

⁸ The debate over the domination of one component of this triumverate, which coincided with the debate on how to adequately name and characterize the period, remains somewhat unresolved, and perhaps cannot be resolved. All literary histories on Croatia propose their own periodizations depending on the predominance of Illyrian, romantic and revivalist beliefs. Perina Meić offers a comparative overview of the matter in the article *Romantyzm w historii literatury chorwackiej*, "Poznańskie Studia Slawistyczne" issue 1/2011, pp. 171–188.

that not everything your *native tongue* calls gold is indeed gold. Not only will you come across the advantages of other ways of life, but you will rush back to what's yours with intensified love. With all the strength you have you will hasten to plant these prettier flowers next to your own gardens overgrown with weeds; and in so doing, you will serve the glory and progress of your homeland⁹.

In nineteenth-century Croatian travel writing,¹⁰ the framing of the text played a critical role. In introductions, forewords, and opening sections, authors articulated the motives that led them to first take the road, and then to share their personal experiences with the world. In these metatextual asides, they articulate their concern for the utilitarian value of travel writing, and particularly its cognitive role and function as a vehicle for information.¹¹ In this sense, the authors are addressing themes concerning the poetics and function of the text (and the genre as a whole).¹² Nearly every travel account includes an aside about the writer's "unseasoned pen," structural incompetence, humility, or inability to describe "indescribable" sights. At the same time, they often counter these with assurances that the reader is holding a faithful report in her hands. These asides reflect a particular attitude towards the readers they are addressing, which could be the nation as a whole or, in the case of Stanko Vraz, a close relative.

While justifying the journey and the writing that follows it, authors tend to mention personal motives and to express their own sense of duty to serve the homeland. This seems to be the case regardless of the given text's political and ideological portent and regardless of the traveler's itinerary. Croatian Romantics explored their own lands (corresponding to today's Croatia and Slovenia, framed in the collective memory as an unrealized Napoleonic Illyria — the Illyrian Provinces), westward (primarily to Italy and throughout the Hapsburg Empire), southward (usually to Bosnia), eastward (to the near East, represented by Serbia and occasionally Constantinople) and northward (to the Russian Empire). There is also one instance of a journey around the world by Tomo Skalica, a political émigré from Slavonski Brod.

⁹ A. Veber Tkalčević, *Put na Plitvice*, in: *Odabrana proza* (Selected Prose), ed. I. Pranjković, Vinkovci 1998, p. 55.

¹⁰ The best known authors of travel writing from the period include Ivan Trnski (who wrote the first published travel account), Matija Mažuranić (who wrote the first book of travel writing, which describes his journey to Bosnia under Ottoman rule, *Pogled u Bosnu ili kratak put u onu krajinu, učinjen 1839.-40. po Jednom Domorodcu*, A Glance at Bosnia, or: A Certain Patriot's Brief Journey to the Region in 1839-40, 1842), Stanko Vraz, Antun Nemčić Gostovinski, Ivan Kukuljević Sakcinski, Adolfo Veber Tkalčević, Mihovil Pavlinović, the Bosnian Franciscans Grgo Martić and Ivan Frano Jukić (which belong in both literary contexts – Bosnian and Croatian).

¹¹ Matija Mažuranić draws the reader's attention to discomforts of internalizing new knowledge, the sacrifices and risks one takes to obtain it, and the comfort of the readers back home who then access this knowledge through the book in their hands: "sitting at home, free of all labors, torments and risks, they find out at least as much as I did by putting my life on the line." M. Mažuranić, *Pogled u Bosnu ili kratak put u onu krajinu, učinjen 1839-1840. po Jednom Domorodcu*, Zagreb 1842, p. XIV.

¹² Dean Duda discusses this issue in more depth in the chapter *Obrazloženje (okvir)*, in: *Priča i putovanje. Hrvatski romantičarski putopis kao pripovjedni žanr*, Zagreb 1998, pp. 93–100. (chapter title: *Exposition of Motives (Frame)*, book title: *Travel and Narrative. Croatian Romantic Travel Journals as a Narrative Genre*).

Surveying the vast body of authors and texts, I have chosen to focus my analysis on Stanko Vraz's *Put u gornje strane* (Journey into the Mountains, 1843) and Antun Nemčić Gostovinski's *Putositnice* (literally: Details from a Journey,¹³ 1845). Stanko Vraz (also known as Jakob Fras or Frass) was a Slovene fully devoted to Illyrian ideology. He moved to Zagreb and wrote in the Croatian language, earning a place among the canonical authors of the Croatian Revival. Antun Gostovinski was also a fervent advocate of the national revival. He was fully committed to public activism, although he lived and wrote in the Croatian provinces (Križevci). Both authors explored the western regions of the Hapsburg Empire and for both, their travels and accounts serve social and political ideals.¹⁴ When we read Croatian travel texts from the romantic period, we can easily draw some conclusions about the subordination of the genre and its poetics to ideological agendas.

The Western Region of the Austrian Empire

The impetus for national revival was at the heart of Antun Nemčić Gostovinski's decision to publish *Putositnice* (1845), as the author states in the foreword. *Putositnice* tells the tales of Gostovinski's travels through Northern Italy. The writer's itinerary brought him through Trieste, Venice, Verona and Padua. On his way home, he visited Slovenia, Graz and Vienna. The trip was therefore more or less a domestic one between cities that belonged to Austria at the time, just like the regions of northern Croatia he hailed from (Ludbreg and Koprivnica). Alluding to the opening of Petar Zoranić's *Planine*, which is hailed as the first Croatian novel (and is also a travel journal), Nemčić also justifies his decision to share his text with a wide range of readers by pointing out the scant body of Croatian literature available for developing literacy and counteracting the nation's cultural underdevelopment. In light of these concerns, the travel journal provides an excellent genre for spreading scholarship through a (refined) form of play: "If our literature had already blossomed, say, as German literature has done, then I would either cast this work away to eternal darkness or perhaps only share it [...] with a close circle of friends."¹⁵

Many public figures took up the impetus to generate and publish texts in a campaign to stimulate the Croatian national and cultural revival by raising readers' consciousness. In extreme cases, they resorted to paraphrasing and transcribing oral literature or classic works into colloquial language and making the material available in more enticing formats (such as travel

¹³ 'Putositnice' is a neologism coined by Nemčić that only applies to the title of this work. It poses an analogy to 'putopis:' with 'put' meaning road/journey and 'sitnice' meaning details/trifles/miscellanies.

¹⁴ I discuss the issue of catering personal letters on travel to social ideals in the instance of travel to the south and east of Croatia in the forthcoming text *Pomiędzy jednostkowym doświadczeniem a kolektywnymi programami ideologicznymi – chorwackie dziewiętnastowieczne relacje podróżnicze*, which will appear in the published proceedings of the Slavists' Congress in Belgrade, 2018.

¹⁵ A. Nemčić, *Putositnice*, ed. G. Pavošević, Vinkovci 1998, p. 15; see: D. Duda, *Priča i putovanje...*, pp. 234–236. In this work, Zoranić presents Croatian literature as a reservoir consisting of scarce and unripe, bitter apples (in contrast to the rich and sumptuous fruits of literature available in Latin). He blames the Croats for this shortcoming and accuses them of shying away from their own language and opting instead for foreign tongues.

writing and novellas).¹⁶ According to the declaration he makes to the reader (although his direct communication with the reader was surely also a “playing field” of sorts for the author), then it was precisely these priorities that informed Nemčić’s decision to publish his personal journal. The game he plays with the reader on a number of textual levels not only applies to the (non)fictional status of the work. The neologism he invents for the title, *Putositnice*, clearly marks the book as a collection of “trifles from a journey,” but in the passage titled *The Fate of a Certain Journal* (accompanied by the motto *Fata libelli*) the traveler informs us that although he brought 100 sheets of blank paper for keeping a journal, only once did he manage to jot down some notes. At the same time, Nemčić informs us that he based the book on notes written during his wanderings and on various ephemera and “bits of paper,” only a third of which proved useful, as another third was lost and the last third turned out to be entirely illegible.¹⁷ Still elsewhere in the text, he suggests otherwise: “while my travel companions dozed, I went back to writing my journal.”¹⁸ We might also consider Duda’s thesis about simulating the act of journal writing:

He simulates the circumstance behind his journal, and perhaps the same applies to his notes. Perhaps he only did this to establish a narrative frame, within which he could invent as he pleased. At first, he states explicitly that he did not keep a journal. He then admits that he lost two-thirds of his notes, and in doing so, he rhetorically opens up a space for the traveling subject who dominates the title, which by implication leaves the author himself as the sole guarantor of the text.¹⁹

Against the backdrop of travel writing produced by Croatian romantics as a whole, Nemčić’s book stands out as a work of singular artistic and aesthetic value. It calls for a much more refined reader than, say, Matija Mažuranić’s colloquial adventure story/novel *Pogled u Bosnu*. Duda points out the text’s semantic and compositional complexity, despite the fact that it conforms to the genre’s conventional poetics. He also points out the abundance of tropes, rhetorical figures, references, digressions and foreign-language passages.²⁰ All these stylistic devices are meant to guide us away from a straight-forward reporting style and towards a literary portrait of travel.

The self-portrait of the narrator and author sketched in the introduction depicts a romantic who cannot help but indulge in effusions of his restless heart.²¹ Our hero sets off on a journey

¹⁶After the first wave of folk songs meant to awaken national consciousness and galvanizing people for battle (*budnice* and *davorije*), journal editors encouraged authors to write prose. To this end, they announced competitions and proposed that authors base new work on oral literature: “There were far-reaching proposals to realize the fundamental objective of a modern national literature and produce new prose. Mijat Stojanović, for instance, suggested making up for the lack of source novels by basing prose on fodder from folk songs. He himself even wrote something based on Gundulić’s *Osman!*”. V. Brešić *Hrvatska književnost 19. stoljeća* (Nineteenth Century Croatian Literature), Zagreb 2015, p. 114.

¹⁷A. Nemčić, *Putositnice...*, pp. 26–27.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹⁹D. Duda, *Priča i putovanje...*, pp. 231–232.

²⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 219–220.

²¹The narrative begins with an apostrophe: “My restless heart — if only your wishes were granted, your endless desire, your wanton, mercurial longing, that has just a bit of virtue yet”...), A. Nemčić, *Putositnice...*, p. 17.

even though it would perhaps suffice to simply let his imagination wander, sweeping over the beauties of his immediate environs (literally: “under his nose”) that are entirely comparable to the faraway vistas whose beauty is lauded by famous travel writers. This kind of wanderer – Nemčić tells us – is unknown to Stern’s typology and is a pragmatic “thrifty traveler” (*putnik iz štedljivosti*). At the same time, swayed by his feelings, the narrator has been forced to sell off most of his “stamp collection.” Yet our rash and romantic narrator also betrays a sense of social sensitivity and a real concern for his people, acknowledging Croatia’s need to modernize and reform its economic and agricultural systems. In tune with the spirit of the times, his judgments all come from a “patriotic place,” and as a patriot, he assures us he would never leave behind his homeland for good, although he would gladly continue to travel. His travel is bolstered by patriotic ideals, and he even journeys in “Illyrian” garments.

Putositnice has much to say about the timely issue of how to standardize a national language and official attire. The impetus to restore the Croatian language might seem intuitive and in fact unanimously appealing for proponents of the Revival. Nemčić, however, also saw a need for developing a cohesive Croatian clothing style as an external symbol of one’s avowed values. He himself donned a “surka” jacket and cap in the “Illyrian” style. He proposed unifying national attire as a direct pathway towards unifying the people’s ideals:

[so I] slipped into a surka jacket [...]. I’ll admit that it would have been wiser to first emancipate the national language, and only then focus on the attire – for to go around in a surka still speaking German is much more of a contradiction (contrast) than, say, speaking Croatian in a tailcoat or attila. The tailcoat, after all, is European, just like our language. And the attila was not brought to our lands by the Asiatic werewolf who bears that same name. After all, the garment’s signature braids are a Slavic invention, even if the coat is classified as Hungarian. [...] – It would be rather appropriate if Croats were finally able to see this and could choose a congruent costume (in whatever style) for ceremonial occasions. Our great variety of clothing is a significant roadblock in our efforts to unify our ideals.²²

One of the narrator’s many patriotic concerns is precisely this sense of urgency to reach a consensus (*sloge*) on fundamental issues. He is particularly sensitive to issues of language and seems afflicted by the undeniable domination of the German language, both in everyday conversation and in text he encounters throughout Zagreb, the very capital of of Illyrian ideology (in advertisements, street notices, signs and awnings). Nemčić argues that for a newcomer, Zagreb presents itself as a German city, rather than the capital of Croatia. His descriptions of mythic places and references to historical moments embedded in collective memory (or perhaps the collective imaginary) also reinforce the spirit of the Illyrian Revival. He describes sites such as Grobničko polje (Grobničko Field), a symbol of the Croats’ victory over occupiers from the East. The site had been commemorated earlier in a romantic revivalist epic poem by Dimitrija Demeter.

The ideological tenor of this travel account from Italy becomes acute in Nemčić’s occasionally hyperbolic critique of the cities he visits (take, for instance, his opinion on contemporary

²²A. Nemčić, *Putositnice...*, p. 37.

living conditions in Venice). This surely drives his need to affirm his own national values.²³ The same need surfaces in his hunt for traces of Slavic presence in foreign cities. These findings allow him to assert the Slavic origins of these places (as he does with Venice²⁴ and Graz), which were unfortunately (for Nemčić) appropriated by the Germans and Romans.²⁵ This insistence on the “eternal” persistence of a Slavic presence in territories associated with the classic canon serves to validate the discourse on the “Slavic Illyrians” and their roots in antiquity. These journeys “to the West” illustrate ideologies of belonging to Western Europe, sharing the heritage of European antiquity, and continuing the tradition of European civilization. All these narratives are reflected vividly in the Croatian imaginary. By exploring the territories where the people of Dalmatia, Croatia and Slavonia have divided up national administrative jurisdictions for centuries, there was no need to cross tangible state borders, which sustained the impression that they too belonged to this “better world.” As a rule, these trips were paired with a glance back at “Slavic Illyria.” Romantics utilized this comparative gaze to express their love for the homeland together with a patriotic concern for its future. It also gave them the opportunity to convey didactic information about their nation’s dramatic history.

Slavic Illyria

“Slavic Illyria” figures as the main focus point of Stanek Vraz’s visit to the territories of Slovenia, Austria and Italy. Despite the fact that his trip took him somewhat abroad, he conveys the impression that the whole trip fell within the scope of what is today Croatia and Slovenia (Carniola, Carinthia, Styria), a claim that depends on the specifics of the historical moment and reflects the author’s interests in that which belongs to the folk, the nation, and the Slavs. In his notes from a journey made in 1841, he exemplifies these Illyrian concepts by painting pictures of an idealized and even sacred Slavic essence, particularly in its folk iteration. The urban counterpart of this paradigm is more elusive due to the intelligentsia’s denationalization and the Germanization of major cities: “Kind people [...], how pure, good-hearted and divine you are in your nature.”²⁶ The author opens his personal account by informing us that he is stifling his nostalgic reminiscences (longing, grief over abandoning Zagreb and his loved ones) and his anxiousness over travel conditions (inclement weather, gloomy and sterile accommodations). He obeys his patriotic imperative and subordinates his personal impressions to the needs of the homeland:

²³D. Duda, *Priča i putovanje...*, pp. 115–116.

²⁴Venice was a particular point of fascination for nineteenth-century Croats due to its “romantic” atmosphere and historical background: “A Croat of the nineteenth century was free to inscribe himself into Venice’s European context. There, among the people of so many European nations, the Croat was one of the few who could discern traces of their countrymen in the urban landscape (literally: on the face of the city),” *ibid*, pp. 106–107. In Nemčić’s case, this comment pertains to Croatian painters who worked in Venice, although when passing through other Italian cities, he points out (as Kukuljević Sakcinski did) the Croats’ contributions to the cultural and political heritage of Italy.

²⁵Kukuljević Sakcinski reaches the same conclusions in his travels through Venice and Padua, claiming that these places were first settled by the Venetians (who he identifies as Illyrians), which is to say “our forefathers.” See: A. Franić, *Hrvatski putopisi romantizma* (Chorwackie podróże romantyzmu), Zadar 1983, pp. 35–36.

²⁶S. Vraz, *Put u gornje strane*, in: *idem, Izbor iz djela*, ed. M. Šicel, Vinkovci 2000, p. 195.

I started to contemplate that I am no woman, but in fact a man, a patriot, who ought to be ready to part with all pleasantries, with all he holds dear in the world, if that is what the nation's welfare calls for. In this way, I was able to collect myself and reach a state of total calm.²⁷

Vraz ultimately publishes his travel writing as *Put u gornje strane*. The text consists of nineteen letters (*dopisi*) written on the road to personal acquaintances or directly to the press. The letters therefore address a wide range of readers. Five “open” letters²⁸ were published for Croatian readers while the author was still on the road. Of Vraz's fourteen “personal” letters, twelve were addressed to his relative Dragolja Štauduar, and individual letters were addressed to Vjekoslav Babukić and Jožef Muršec. These letters catered to their addressees' expectations and often referred back to earlier disputes: “So again we find ourselves in conversation, dear cousin! I'll catch you up on everything I saw and sensed that is of note, and anything that might (as I see it) be of some value to you.”²⁹ Intertextual signals are embedded in the text, referencing material both parties have read. The author's intentions remain somewhat opaque, although despite the devices he uses to mark the letters' “intimate” tone, he explicitly mentions that he plans to publish the letters for a broader readership. By addressing a specific loved one, he generates a more compelling dynamic for the reader who, after all, constantly hungers for insights into the private lives of public figures, especially when the author-addressee relationship is between a man and a woman.

Drawing in the reader, Vraz “indoctrinates” them with the ideals of the Illyrian Revival. In keeping with this value system, he emphasizes a sense of harmony between all peoples. Just like Ljudevit Gaj's well-known hymn, one of the first Croatian “reveilles” (in Croatian, *budnica*), *Horvatov sloga i zjedinjenje*, Vraz's letters project the image of an (multinational) friendly band of travelers setting off on the road together and an agreeable (multiethnic) existence (in this case, between the Uskok and Kraina people).³⁰

In the spirit of the Revival campaign, Vraz focuses his text on any and all symptoms of the native, authentic, original or folk-oriented, even if these traces hail back to the pre-Christian era. The poet discerns surprising values in the sense of uniqueness he strove to cultivate, glorify and use as the basis for a new social order. This uniqueness was to be a bastion of physical and ethical strength, but it was also to validate aesthetic judgments (as in the case of a statement on literature he heard from Dragolja Jarnević, a Croatian intellectual and writer from the period). This enchantment with the native came hand in hand with a sense

²⁷Ibid, pp. 187–188.

²⁸The last of these letters, titled *Bijeli Kranjci (Dopis iz Kranjske)* – The White People of Kraina (Letters from Kraina) – stands out. Despite its subtitle, which suggests some affiliation with epistolography genre, the letter lacks the formal resolutions characteristic of the genre, but also lacks a sense of movement through space that would identify the letter as travel writing. The text is a study of sorts for an ethnological/ethnographic or definitive lexicon (D. Duda, *Priča i putovanje*, p. 186). M. Mažuranić's work *Pogled u Bosnu* included a lexicon of knowledge about the territory explored here, and Vraz was the first to critique and defend this lexicon.

²⁹S. Vraz, *Put u gornje strane...*, p. 187.

³⁰Ibid, p. 198. “Vraz made a concerted attempt to demonstrate that there is no material difference between the Croats, Slovenes (the people of Kraina, as the Illyrians then called Slovenes) and Serbs (or the Uskoks living in Slovenia and Croatia as ‘politics call them’ – to use Vraz's words – or the Vlachs, as the few Croatian and Slovene Serbs called themselves, who are also called the ‘white and black people of Kraina’). A. Franić, *Hrvatski putopisi romantizma*, Zadar 1983, p. 33).

of wonder for all that is Slavic. The Illyrian iteration of Slavophilia is reflected in redundant background information: Vraz often feels the need to point out the Slavic character or a particular place, people, or custom. Impressed with the health, posture and aesthetic appearance of the peasants he encounters on the road from Karlovac to Metlika, he provides detailed information about the healthy “Slavic” faces, the genuine “Slavic” hospitality, the “Slavic” appearance of the village, “Slavic” heart and soul, and finally, the “Slavic” table in the impoverished household, which he equates with an altar to the noble Old Slavonic God who continues to rule over these lands. As spectator and participant of this “sacrificial rite,” taking food from the altar to the Orthodox God, he has a privileged perspective, since he possesses his own key to access the heart and soul of the Slavs. In keeping with the romantic notion of language as the fundamental criterion for forming a nation, this key, of course, is linguistic kinship: “it opened up its soul for us and for him, for we possessed the golden key, the only key that opens the heart and soul of the Slavs, for we were able to speak with him in his national tongue.”³¹ As in Antun Mihanović’s hymn *Horvatska domovina*, the territory Vraz portrays is fertile and beautiful, just like its inhabitants: “these are good people — in heart and in soul.”³²

Illyrian ideology is also reinforced with language like “the land of antiquity”³³ or information regarding classic works encountered throughout the area and the courageous Iapydes (an ethnic group from the northwestern regions of the Illyrian map), who once rose up against the Roman Empire. The people who would come to inhabit these lands would naturally inherit (according to the Illyrian narrative) the valor of the ancient Illyrians, as they proved in their heroic battles with the Ottoman “Empire.”³⁴ This diachronic kinship was reinforced by an equally if not more important sense of synchronic kinship. Vraz rationalized the minor differences (mostly linguistic) between the Slavs he met in his travels (Croats, Serbian Uskoks, the people of Kraina) by emphasizing the trajectory of the national border and its tendency to “divide brothers.”³⁵ In keeping with the Illyrian narrative, Vraz tried to reconcile his faith in the Southern Slavs’ roots among the ancient Illyrians and postulates on the need to cultivate the “classically” Slavic with his assertion of language as the most crucial form of communication between peoples and states. He mentions the Shtokavian language once (“The Uskoks speak in a pure Shtokavian language, the Bosnian way”³⁶) and the Illyrian dialect once (the White Kraina people sing in a “purely Illyrian dialect”³⁷).

³¹ S. Vraz, *Put u gornje strane...*, pp. 193–194.

³² Ibid, p. 193.

³³ Ibid

³⁴ In annexed Croatia, only one (Turkish) enemy was officially recognized. This enemy provided an impetus to unite, and the Croats proved their valor in these battles. At the suggestion of Ljudevit Gaj, the movement’s leader, the Illyrian instigators entered into official negotiations with the Austrian Empire, while illicitly plotting with representatives of the Russian Tsar to ultimately dismantle the Turkish and Austrian world powers.

³⁵ S. Vraz, *Put u gornje strane...*, p. 190.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 198.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 201.

Pausing occasionally from the Revival cause, Vraz also compiled notes on cultural heritage and worked as a scribe for the poetry and tales of the folk,³⁸ becoming one of the very first theorists of folklore. He saw his efforts to compile and disseminate oral literature as a platform for integrating his “Illyrian brothers:”

Artistic merit aside, folk literature and the act of compiling it offered Vraz a pathway towards mutual cultural understanding. [...] Recording and collecting folk heritage had profound cultural relevance, for it was a way to locate common ground that might bind together the often divided “Illyrian brothers.” In this sense, Vraz used folk poetry as a means for cultural consolidation.³⁹

He often imbued these folk songs with mystical connotations for their enigmatic and wondrous beauty, particularly when transcribing the so-called *ladarica*.⁴⁰ He equated the songs’ powerful sway for the “Slavic heart” with the power of monks’ prayers in primeval monasteries. For Vraz, both forms of song are vehicles for the voice of the past, and he called on contemporary generations to revive this voice and capture the knowledge inherent in it (“na promišljavanje i spoznavanje”).⁴¹ These positive religious connotations (tied to Orthodox observance) run counter to the clergy’s public prohibition against performing any *ladarica* that exhibit traces of pre-Christian beliefs. Violation of the law was punishable by excommunication. Yet for the romantic poet and scholar of Slavic heritage, these pre-Christian folk customs formed a crucial component of Christian piety and ethics. Observing the everyday life of the people of “Slavic Illyria,” a community that included both the noble *domoradaca* (patriots) and the folk, Vraz described and evaluated all these features according to the priorities of Illyrian ideals and a revivalist agenda.

Conclusion

The journeys of Stanko Vraz and Antun Nemčić Gostovinski aptly illustrate mechanisms for engaging literary forms, including personal confession and the narration of individual experience, in the project of constructing the nation. Drawing from personal and biographical ar-

³⁸The fruits of these labors were published in 1839 as a collection of 115 Slovene folk songs *Narodne pësni ilirske, koje se pëvaju po Štajerskoj* (Illyrian folk songs sung in Styria). In the third volume of the “Kolo” journal (1843), he published *Narodne pesme Harvatah* –Folk songs of the Croats (with the songs *Iz Primorja*, *Iz Istrie* and *Iz Austrie i Ugarske*). “As one of the first in the Croatian community attempting to learn about and link native Croatian society with Croats living in the South of Austria and Western Hungary, he published their folk songs as examples of the heritage of Croatian folk poetry. Alongside Croatian and Slovene poetry, he also praised Bulgarian folk heritage, seeing it as particularly valuable and rather neglected. In the article *Narodne pësme bugarske* (Bulgarian Folk Songs, “Kolo”, 1847) Vraz attempts to expose Croats to the cultural heritage of this fraternal Slavic nation, and in the fourth and fifth volumes of “Kolo” he begins to include Bulgarian folk songs.” A. Sapunar Knežević & Marijana Togonal, *Stanko Vraz kao folklorist. Vrazov prinos poznavanju hrvatske i slovenske usmene književnosti* (Stanko Vraz as a Folklorist. Vraz’s Contributions to Knowledge on Croatian and Slovene Oral Literature), “Croatica et Slavica Iadertina” 2011, issue VII/I, p. 193.

³⁹Ibid, p. 197.

⁴⁰A folk custom popular in Central Croatia that often accompanied celebrations of St. John’s Day (June 24) and Saint George’s Day. A group of children would visit various homes throughout the village, singing their traditional songs, dancing the *kolo*, and expressing their wishes that the house spirits will shower the inhabitants with gifts.

⁴¹S. Vraz, *Put u gornje strane...*, p. 191.

chives (letters, casual notes) as well as travel literature read widely at the time, these authors broadcast the ideals of the Illyrian National Revival. Strong adherents of ideologies of unification peek out from behind the romantic and self-stylized avatars of hypersensitive narrator-hero-authors. The Croatian romantic “tourist” either caters his journey to the priorities of the Revival (Vraz exemplifies this position) or, more vulnerable to the effusions of the heart, he does not neglect his duties to the homeland and becomes an “Illyrian tourist” through and through (this is the case with Nemčić).

KEYWORDS

personal archives

Slavic Illyria

ABSTRACT:

Using the travel accounts of specific figures of Croatian romanticism, this article analyzes the relationship between travel writing and personal writing (travel journals, correspondence) and the ideologies of unification and revival that were widespread in Croatia at the time. This article demonstrates the formal and ideological subordination of the actual journeys (travel) and their published accounts (travel writing) to the overarching objective of creating a new Croatian nation, language, and literature. Nineteenth-century Slavophilia shaped the perspectives authors brought to the lands they traveled, compelling them to take on the role of ethnographer and advocate for all aspects that seem Slavic, Croatian, or at all related to folk heritage. Metatextual passages in these texts speak directly to the given text's function and poetics, demonstrating the notion that this genre was understood in cognitive and utilitarian terms.

ideologies of unification

n a t i o n a l r e v i v a l

THE ROMANTIC "TOURIST"

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A Vertical Schema of Experience:

Travel Writing from the Himalayas (Jerzy Kukuczka, Adam Bielecki)

Przemysław Kaliszuk

One could argue that any exploration of the experience of travel, the sense of the world captured in transit and the intellectual tools used to conceptualize the traversed (absorbed, consumed, etc.) space (geographically, physically and culturally) must be foregrounded by first identifying the basic obstacles to articulating the nuances of travel and its literary and textual counterparts. On the one hand, the arsenal of tools available for travel writing criticism is fantastically rich: it draws from the discourses of literary criticism, anthropology, ethnology and philosophical languages broadly conceived. Within this spectrum, classical attempts to identify the stylistic and poetic features of reportage, essays and travel literature sit alongside more contemporary strategies proposed by geopoetics, for instance, which reflects on the possibility of representing space within the scope of the text through mechanisms of language, culture and ideology; or in simpler terms: everything that falls within the territory of the spatial or topographical turn in the humanities.¹

So far, these studies have limited their focus to strategies for documenting space in literary or paraliterary texts, or the observations of everyday experience. I would like to examine

¹ E. W. Soja, *Postmodern geographies. The reassertion of space in critical social theory*, London – New York 1990, pp. 10–42; E. Rybicka *Od poetyki przestrzeni do polityki miejsca. Zwrot topograficzny w badaniach literackich*, “Teksty Drugie” 2008, issue 4, *ibid*, *Zwrot topograficzny w badaniach literackich. Od poetyki przestrzeni do polityki miejsca* [in:] *Kulturowa teoria literatury 2. Poetyki, problematyki, interpretacje*, ed. T. Walas, R. Nycz. Krakow 2012.

a specific type of writing that seems to take a vested interest in the spatial situation of the writing subject and to posit this physical position as a necessary condition for the subject's very existence. This yields a scenario where, by documenting and publicizing his experience, the subject — traveling and viscerally in motion — exposes himself to the risk of instrumentalizing his “genuine” experiences or trivializing them in an effort to make them marketable.

What I have in mind is the expansive field of mountain literature,² and in particular, narratives by Himalayan climbers, who, as we might expect, began to attract interest at the turn of the twentieth century with their inconceivable achievements. Currently, as we progress into the twenty-first century, these climbers are active figures in public life, heroes of the collective imaginary, and pop-culture and media stars absorbed in a world dominated by fleeting events and celebrities who broadcast their privacy as a spectacle.³ By examining the tools of interpretation and analytical procedures compatible with discourses of travel and the experience of spatiality written into these discourses in the stories of Himalayan travelers, we flag the crucial issue of where to locate these narratives in the literary criticism landscape.

Genealogically speaking, the narratives of Himalayan explorers have a unique status: on the one hand, they appear to be utilitarian and non-fiction texts. On the other hand, certain features link them to literature (such as thoughtful plot structure, narrative composition, and stylistic devices that link together multiple registers of the Polish language). Due to its particular literary mode, or perhaps its quality, prose by climbers has not yet garnered acclaim among readers or scholars, for whom the literary aesthetic canon is the exclusive property of highbrow prose and poetry, particular that of twentieth-century “high modernism.” This exclusivity seems to be the natural product of the opposition between high and low that dominates how we think about culture. I would argue that from a contemporary perspective, this opposition only remains valid if we carve out far-reaching caveats or abandon it wholesale.

I would claim that we can easily include travel literature, together with all its current variations, in the broader issue of readers' attraction to diverse forms of “authenticities,” non-fiction literature and reportage. We can discern a certain “fiction fatigue” in prose of the last few decades of the socialist period in Poland.⁴ This shift was legitimized precisely by these “authentic” genres (biography, autobiography, reportage, diaries, memoirs, and perhaps also narrative guidebooks and field guides). Today, in the wake of this legitimization process, the reader's hierarchy locates fictional stories in an analogical position to other forms of nonliterary or non-artistic pragmatic writing. That which self-identifies as an artistic text no longer occupies a privileged position among all discourses and narratives. The fall

² M. Pacukiewicz, *Literatura alpinistyczna jako “sobąpisanie,”* “Napis” 2010, vol. 16, pp. 495-511.

³ E. Cushmore, *Celebrity/culture*, New York 2006, pp. 1-17; G. Turner, *Approaching celebrity studies*, “Celebrity Studies” 2010, issue 1, pp. 11-20.

⁴ J. Jarzębski, *Powieść jako autokreacja*, Krakow 1984, pp. 337-364 J. Kandziora, *Zmęczeni fabułą. Narracje osobiste w prozie po 1976 roku*, Wrocław-Warsaw-Krakow 1993; P. Czapliński, *Ślady przełomu. O prozie polskiej 1976-1996*, Krakow 1997, pp. 11-105.

of literature proper's monopoly over literariness (literature proper being understood here not aesthetically, but as the gesture of self-differentiation from the non-literary) has given way to other categories of "readability"⁵ — the consumption of content. This issue seems to deserve deeper scrutiny, especially since the contemporary tourist's gaze is informed by a consumerist disposition and a strictly visual absorption of impressions.⁶ I would suggest that this shift is acutely visible in mountaineering prose, and particularly in the narratives of Himalayan climbers, for these narratives have proven to be full-fledged contenders in fiction and nonfiction literature, in spite of their seemingly niche status.

One feature that distinguishes mountaineers' tales from other travel texts is what I would describe as their vertical spatial schema. While the most widely-read classics of travel literature attend to horizontal space, asserting a prototypical experience of movement by way of travel, mountain tales generate the trope of vertical movement with the same intensity, which leads to an entirely distinct mode of storytelling and forces the narrating and authorial subject to devise new expressive tools that will not simply rehash the horizontal schema. As a result, these discourses and stylistics are shaped by heterogeneous experiences of the narrator's physical position in space, be it at one fixed point or between several places. Embedded in the Himalayan climber's travel account is the pressure to forge an original conceptualization of one's own location.

To define these Himalayan tales, we must address a key question: how can we succinctly characterize this form of writing? Should we defer to the broader category of mountaineering discourse,⁷ which embraces long-form prose alongside other discursive practices and events, so that we might bypass the inconvenient and often aporetic issues haunting the definition or definability of these peculiarly "pragmatic" texts? Perhaps the heading "mountaineering/Himalayan travel discourse" would be more apt? These anxieties indicate the "shimmering" quality of travel writing by these climbers, who intuitively locate their texts at the intersection of genres. By camouflaging their texts' genre attributes, they are in a better position to express their own dilemmas over how to convey the experience of vertical travel. Despite the concrete and pragmatic orientation of these texts, they seem to harbor the potential for critical self-reflexivity on travel writing as a practice that mires its author in so many paradoxes.

How can we date the beginning of mountain literature? Mountains – or more specifically, high elevation mountains – have captured our interest since the dawn of modern western culture. This interest gained traction throughout the modern period. In the Polish context, we can discern a galvanized interest in exploring and climbing mountains in utilitarian guidebooks written as early as the turn of the nineteenth century.⁸ Mountain themes quickly infiltrated romantic literature and later on, in a slightly altered form, became a fixation for modern

⁵ This is Raymond Federman's formulation. See: R. Federman, *What are Experimental Novels and Why are there So Many Left Unread?* [in] *ibid*, *Critifiction: Postmodern Essays*, New York 1993

⁶ J. Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, London 1990.

⁷ M. Pacukiewicz, *Grań kultury. Transgresje alpinizmu*, Krakow 2012, pp. 12-17.

⁸ J. Żmizdiński, *Przewodnik jako scenariusz rytuałów turystycznych (na podstawie dawnych bedekerów pienińskich). Narodziny pewnej religii*, "Napis" 2010, vol. 16, pp. 476-493.

artists.⁹ Even a few examples suffice to give a sense of this phenomenon: Julian Przyboś's well-known poem "From the Tatra Mountains" (*Z Tatr*)¹⁰ (fascination with the Tatra landscape gives Przyboś the impetus to devise his own tools of expression), Jalu Kurek's novel *Mount Everest 1924* (on the death of the first person to summit Everest), the poetry of the Young Poland movement and the tragic death of Avant-Garde artist Mieczysław Szczuka (who avidly developed a cult around alpine and Tatra symbolism, perhaps most importantly among circles of "non-pragmatic" intellectuals and artists), Stanisław Vincenz's essays on the Hutsul'shchyna region (*On the High Uplands / Na wysokiej połoninie*). This constellation also includes the founding text for Polish mountaineering tales, Ferdynand Goetel's (*A Trip – How Not to Write about it / Wycieczka – jak się o niej nie pisze*)¹¹ from the turn of the twentieth century. Intonations of the Young Poland movement¹² still linger in this text, although the author relates ironically to the notion that the experience of climbing a mountain can truly be captured in words. We might also mention Kazimierz Sosnowski's modern guidebook for alpine tourism, which came out in 1914.¹³

It seems telling that climbing, alpine tourism (mainly in the "recently discovered" Tatra mountains, but also in the more accessible and developed Beskid mountains) and the act of conquering summits are typically framed as being beyond human reach (think of George Mallory and Everest). This notion circulates as early as the turn of the twentieth century, and we can locate it at the intersection of cultural registers: it offers thematic impetus for the artistic strategies of the Avant Garde and sits thematically at the very heart of modernism. It becomes a new iteration of the rapid experience of modernization as well as a new and popular physical practice for promoting human fitness.¹⁴ Climbing joins the domain of sports but lacks the rules that regulate typical competition, for at the time, climbing offered no awards, distinctions or medals. Adepts of this new activity, contending with sweeping changes in the rational and practical trajectory of modernization,¹⁵ seemed most intrigued by the activity's inexhaustibility and its rejection of practicality.

In the twentieth century, the social transformations prompted by modernity brought with them a gradually maturing branch of writing that cannot be analyzed solely through the

⁹ M. Pacukiewicz, *Grań kultury*, op. cit., pp. 47-69.

¹⁰ See: K. Obremski, *Zamarła turnia, siostry Skotnicówny i ekwiwalentyzowanie. "Z Tatr" Juliana Przybosia*, "Pamiętnik Literacki" 2011, no. 2.

¹¹ F. Goetel, *Wycieczka — jak się o niej nie pisze* [in: *Czarny szczyt. Proza taternicka lat 1904–1939*, ed. J. Kolbuszewski, Krakow 1976, cited in: M. Pacukiewicz, *Literatura alpinistyczna jako "sobq̄pisanie"*, op. cit.

¹² E. Skulmowska, "Pokolenie zdobywców." *O intelektualnej i artystycznej drodze Ferdynanda Goetla*, "Świat Tekstów. Rocznik Słupski" 2013, vol. 11, pp. 58-62.

¹³ K. Sosnowski, *Przewodnik po Beskidzie Zachodnim. Od Krynicy po Wisłę łącznie z Pieninami i terenami narciarskimi*, Krakow 1914.

¹⁴ N. Lewis, *The Climbing Body, Nature and the Experience of Modernity*, "Body and Science" 2000, vol. 6, pp. 58-80.

¹⁵ From this perspective, it might be interesting to juxtapose climbing figures with the myths of individuality that spearheaded modernism. See: M. Berman, "All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity," New York 1982; I. Watt, *Myths of Modern Individualism: Faust, Don Quixote, Don Juan, Robinson Crusoe*, Cambridge 1996. The alpine or Himalayan explorer forms a hybrid of sorts of the dreamer or hero who challenges the order of nature, and the one who fervently enters the whirlwind of modern life. We might reflect on whether the postmodern or late-modern climber exists who is the product of an entirely different set of visions, concepts and processes than the modern mountaineers of the twentieth century, or those who relate entirely differently to these circumstances.

prism of historical travel writing genres (travel literature, reports, letters, diaries), utilitarian literature (guidebooks, manuals) or even personal writing (autobiographies, memoirs, diaries, essays) or journalism (reportage, feuilletons). For all these genres frame this new branch as one that continues and participates in modern travel discourses.¹⁶ The strategy of transgressing genre and stylistic borders is not particularly innovative and in itself does not justify introducing an entirely new category into literary criticism's established network of concepts and nomenclatures. This being said, one idiosyncratic feature of this emerging branch of literature is its introduction of a heterogeneous and hybrid modality. To be more precise, the travel texts that interest me here do not uniformly operate in the context of one category. They operate at a point of contact between multiple strategies (and multiple poetics) used to convey the experience of travel. For in the climate of the early twentieth century context, when mass tourism first appeared as a phenomenon,¹⁷ travel became a fetishized commodity, or an ideological product of electronic media and the tourism market.

In my mind, what is crucial here is the question of the sources behind this hybrid modality. The modality's intentions in the context of modern and postmodern approaches to travel discourse are also essential. It might seem like a stretch to claim that in popular culture, non-fiction travel prose written by "extreme athletes" picks up the writing strategies developed in twentieth-century "intellectual journey"¹⁸ narratives. Yet modernism proposed certain tactical poetics for documenting travel that offer an intuitive and lucid foundation for comparison and reference.

I will not attempt to provide a historical cross-section here of the prose of Polish Himalayan climbers. I will focus, rather, on two select texts, and by juxtaposing the two, I hope to effectively convey a sense of the writing conceived by the Himalayan climber shaped by late modernity. Both cases feature authors who began to publish their prose just as a narrative canon devoted to the mountaineer's vertical experience had solidified. This being said, their stories are informed by vastly different backgrounds.

Here, I am thinking of Jerzy Kukuczka, the "mountain main" most famous outside of the Polish mountaineering community, and Adam Bielecki, who captured the attention of the public and media after the tragic circumstances surrounding his climb to the summit of Broad Peak in Karakoram in the dead of winter. Both figures drew infamy as reckless climbers who not only neglected to care for other members of their expeditions, but were allegedly directly implicated in the deaths of their climbing partners. This aside, they have indisputable accolades as climbers, and this alone justifies their decisions to share the stories of their Himalayan adventures. Out of the vast community of Polish mountaineers who took on the Himalayas

¹⁶D. Kozicka, *Wędrowcy światów prawdziwych. Dwudziestowieczne relacje z podróży*, Krakow 2003, pp. 46-68.

¹⁷J. Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, op. cit., pp. 13-22, 36-59, 223-240.

¹⁸D. Kozicka, op. cit., pp. 69-94; *ibid*, "Dwudziestowieczne podróże intelektualne." (*Między esejem a autobiografią*), "Teksty Drugie" 2003, issue 2-3, pp. 41-59.

and contributed to mountain literature, these two figures¹⁹ offer narratives that we can locate in a chronological schema of generational differences between climbers and their stories.²⁰ We can also reflect on how these climbers' strategies for representing vertical travel in writing are contingent on the sociocultural conditions of their moment, or on how their moment defined literature and literariness.

Kukuczka and Bielecki faced the challenge of how to convey the experience of high elevation climbing to both mountaineering connoisseurs and experts in adjacent areas. As a result, their discourses straddle layman's explanation and hermeneutic reporting.

The texts *My Vertical World* (*Mój pionowy świat*) and *Under Frozen Eyelids* (*Spod zamrożonych powiek*) feature two essential building blocks of narrative: 1) an introduction shedding light on the climber's life leading up to his arrival in the Himalayas, and 2) a realistic and elaborate travel report suffused with autobiographical details indispensable for grasping the mountaineering experience. These components form the basic structure of the narrative, which goes on to focus on climbing in the Himalayas and everything that comes with it.

In their introductions, Kukuczka and Bielecki pen genealogies of themselves as climbers-in-making. These genealogies rest structurally on the metaphor of travel: a hike into the mountains (progressing from hiking to climbing, or walking from the lowlands into the boulders at the mountain's base) offers an analogy for the amateur's metamorphosis into a semi-professional climber (which is not the same thing as someone who climbs for a living) and his ultimate ascendancy to the world of high-elevation mountains. This initiation narrative consists of transposing the horizontal and vertical orders: by accumulating experience and honing skills, they are free to explore increasingly hazardous regions and literally ascend upwards. Also latent in this emphasis on mountain space are motifs of self-discovery and self-improvement. These introductions are crucial devices through which Kukuczka and Bielecki forge meaningful approaches for narrating vertical travel in the Himalayas. The introductions support their efforts to articulate the radical otherness posed by climbing.²¹ Even in the prelude to the adventure itself, preconceptions of the mountain dissolve in the face of the Himalayas.

At the same time, these prologues mobilize strategies that differentiate the two writers' discourses. For Kukuczka, this brief episode is only a set-up for the tale of his victory over the "eight-thousanders." For Bielecki, the younger of the two, the prologue forms the axis of narration. Bielecki harps on the differences between tackling one section of a mountain and journeying into an eight-thousander. He establishes a chronological schema based on gradual temporal progression, building up the dramaturgy of the young adept's biography.

¹⁹ J. Kukuczka, *Mój pionowy świat*, ed. C. Kukuczka, Katowice 2014, first edition: *Mój pionowy świat, czyli 14 x 8000 metrów*, London 1995 and *Mój pionowy świat*, review, consultation, editing, images and commentary by Z. Kowalewski, Warsaw 1995; Adam Bielecki, Dominik Szczepański, *Spod zamrożonych powiek*, Warsaw 2017.

²⁰ M. Pacukiewicz, *Literatura alpinistyczna jako "sobąpisanie"*, op. cit., p. 504.

²¹ On the difference between sport and adventure climbing, see: P. Donnelly, *The Great divide. Sport Climbing Vs. Adventure Climbing* [in:] *To the extreme. Alternative sports, inside and out*, ed. R. E. Rinehart, S. Sydnor, New York 2003, pp. 291-304.

This strategy has the double purpose of reinforcing Bielecki's right to tell his story, while softening the strangeness of his experiences for the reader. It also creates a sense of intimacy between the reader and author (once a rookie himself), and establishes a hierarchy of achievements: taking on the eight-thousander (or even supporting other climbers' attempts) becomes the capstone of the climber's capacities.

Kukuczka, meanwhile, chooses a more traditional model for his chronological recollections: individual anecdotes conform to the order in which he summited a series of eight-thousanders. In Kukuczka's account, the formative period is only a brief and necessary phase that prepared him for what would actually matter. It is a backdrop whose only purpose is to paint an image of the Himalayas that contrasts starkly with the reader's world. Kukuczka uses this developmental phase to better reconstruct and draw out his stay in the harsh reality of the uniquely inhuman "vertical world." His access to this space and his capacity to reach certain destinations (in this case, in the Himalayas) reflects his "vertical" evaluation of a climber's trajectory. Both Kukuczka and Bielecki develop plot structures that privilege vertical movement as their central motif: the rest is mere backdrop.

Each climber takes a fundamentally different approach to storytelling, which seems to reflect their age difference, the historical timing of their achievements, and finally (and perhaps most importantly), their contemporary sociocultural contexts. This being said, their narratives remain rooted in certain principles consistent with the canon of mountaineering literature that help them transcribe the vertical Himalayan experience into a "shaggy dog story" accessible to readers. Each author creates a diary-like pseudo-document, or a private autobiography pushed through a literary filter.

It strikes me that the essential question here concerns these climbers' authenticity and the poetic tools they use to establish that authenticity. Kukuczka and Bielecki's texts mobilize the deliberate strategy of bearing witness to events to seal the referential pact. Authenticity thus becomes an embedded value in the adventure climbers' ethos, a measure of the texts' truthfulness, and a justification for the authors' deferral to stylistic and narrative tactics. Authenticity also operates as the story's baseline and fundamental structure. The narration template consists of a hybrid between documentary details, autobiographical perspective, memory and self-analysis, and that special brand of pragmatism associated with climbing, expressed in rigorously accumulated descriptions, reflections and words of advice. The Himalayan climber's discourse, just like the discourse of alpine mountaineering, strives to transform — at least temporarily — into a substitute climbing practice.²² Underlying this impression, however, is the acute knowledge that this wish cannot be fulfilled. If I can run ahead of myself for a moment, this dynamic is what sets Kukuczka and Bielecki apart from other authors of Himalayan travel accounts and informs the shift proposed by *Vertical World* and *Frozen Eyelids* in how we conceive vertical narration.

The authors' strategies for sampling stylistics from other literary or pragmatic genres are all at the service of reinforcing the authenticity of the story being told. First-person narration

²²M. Pacukiewicz, *Literatura alpinistyczna jako "sobopisanie,"* op. cit., p. 505.

supports the text's reliability and legitimates the storyteller: The "I" must experience what he describes, for otherwise, he does not qualify as a reliable narrator and source of the truth. The compulsory eyewitness motif coincides, by analogy, with the extreme experiences of modernity (e.g., the war) that forced us to reformulate our cognitive, conceptual and discursive canons.²³ Only experience – often intimate and resisting objectification – can reinforce the nation's sturdiness and help construct the story. This requirement, however, is not necessarily transparent to the reader as an external axiom. It is embedded, rather, in the very impulse to narrate the experiences unique to alpine travel. Only those who have put themselves on the line as adventure climbers have earned the right to tell these stories. This condition provides the foundation for all narrative and nonfiction work devoted to extreme experiences, a fact that becomes particularly clear in the case of reportage. As a mediated genre, reportage requires its author to densely cite the testimonies of the stories' heroes and to furnish full documentation and archival materials on climbing.²⁴

First-person narration is the only adequate strategy for constructing narrative, for only this mode can certify authenticity. The author enters into an autobiographical pact, asserting his extraordinary journey as a crucial piece of his biography, and moreover, as the founding condition for his trajectory as a climber — a trajectory shaped by the rhythm of his summit attempts. When Kukuczka or Bielecki narrate individual trips, they describe logistics, interpersonal relations on the trail and climbing techniques. Most importantly, however, they situate themselves within this vertical space and its internal order. To reinforce their referential and autobiographical pacts, the authors lay down an elaborate foundation of fact. This neurotic and somewhat compulsive "accumulation" of facts includes descriptions of climbing conditions, hard data (e.g., the exact times specific events occurred), and information on the expedition's gear and attire (often listed at length). By speaking at times in a climber's sociolect, the authors defend themselves from allegations that they are imprecise or document their travels incompetently. The texts also include archival materials independent from the author's personal memories and travel notes that objectively confirm motifs he establishes elsewhere. Photographs and links to audiovisual materials (films, maps, topographical diagrams) sit in the body of the texts as QR codes²⁵ but reach beyond them, leading to specific online resources.²⁶ These strategies all simulate the reader's participation in the event as mediated by the text. This operation validates the author's qualifications to tell these stories and cements the documentary mechanisms of the text as a whole. Emerging digital media seems to be a novelty for Kukuczka. For Bielecki, on the other hand, digital elements form a natural component of his toolkit for establishing the authenticity of his stories.

²³J. Świąch, *Wojny a projekt nowoczesności*, [in:] *ibid*, *Nowoczesność. Szkice o literaturze polskiej XX wieku*, Warsaw 2007, pp. 192-220.

²⁴A selection of recent, relevant publications: B. McDonald, *Freedom Climbers*, Sheffield 2012; J. Hugo-Bader, *Długi film o miłości. Powrót na Broad Peak*, Krakow 2014; D. Szczepański, P. Tomza, *Nanga Parbat. Śnieg, kłamstwa i góra do wyzwolenia*, Warsaw 2016; D. Kortko, M. Pietraszewski, *Kukuczka. Opowieść o najsłynniejszym polskim himalaiście*, Warsaw 2016.

²⁵QR Code, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/QR_code (November 4 2017).

²⁶A. Bożek, L. Kamińska-Mazur, *Książka hybrydowa — kod QR sposobem na koegzystencję książki drukowanej z e-bookiem*, "Biuletyn EBIB" 2012, issue 7.

The experience of space forces the climber-author to pursue new tools for conveying the events in which he partakes. A certain paradox emerges: the authorial first-person narrator/subject is immobilized within the text, but is obligated (by the reader, but also by himself) to produce an adequate textual substitute for mountain space. To this end, the climber reconstructs his surroundings using geographical names and verbal equivalents of visual topographical maps: he describes the climbing route by detailing its technical challenges and rock formations,²⁷ evokes sensory impressions (what he saw, his physical condition at a certain point along the route), and most importantly, reconstructs his techniques. This last rhetorical device locates him firmly in vertical space.²⁸

The Himalayan climbing discourse produces a constant tension between memory and the need to support it with supplementary documentation.²⁹ Memory is always in a conflicted and somewhat aporetic relationship with authenticity: personal perspective is the only possible medium for conveying the facts objectively. At the same time, memory's imperfections expose the climber's tale to relentless processes of erosion, creating a demand for supplementary materials. Both Kukuczka and Bielecki scrupulously inform us of landscape formations, record all their movements through space, paint portraits of their climbing companions (both passive ones hired to assist the expedition and active climbing partners) and describe weather conditions in detail. All this amounts to something resembling a protocol or calendar that lists all significant data and provides a narrative and stylistic schema for the tale that is as necessary as it is boring. The schema divides the story into the preparation period, arrival at the mountain and the time spent on the mountain (with intimate details of life at base camp). The time on the mountain is rhythmically divided into subsequent summit attempts (supplemented with reconstructions of various climbing maneuvers), arrival at the summit or failure to do so, and the return to the everyday world beyond the Himalayas.

A certain disproportionality strikes me: the Himalayan travel account is, naturally, populated by the act of climbing (the ascent and the action on the summit), yet these events are contextualized at the author's sole discretion. At the beginning of his text, Kukuczka exoticizes the local cultures of India, Nepal and Pakistan.³⁰ As he progresses through the story, he gradually mutes the presence of these cultures. Although he mentions basic geographical data, he confines his focus to the mountaintop. Bielecki, on the other hand, weaves local culture into his narrative right up to his conclusion, but (significantly) does not go beyond stereotypical images: these post-communist societies lying to the East are depicted as sincere and kindhearted, but developmentally backwards and unorganized.³¹ The specific space of a given region and its cultural climate and socio-ethnic complexities fundamentally do not interest these Himalayan climbers. Kukuczka and Bielecki do not take up the role of tourist or ethnographer, nor do they wax philosophical like the wanderer or pilgrim. The autobiographical

²⁷Jakie są formacje skalne w górach i skałach?, <http://drytooling.com.pl/serwis/art/artykuly/988-formacje-skalne-w-skalkach-gorach> (November 4 2017).

²⁸N. Lewis, *The Climbing Body*, op. cit., pp. 70-71.

²⁹See also: M. Pacukiewicz, *Grań kultury*, op. cit., pp. 235-237.

³⁰See: J. Kukuczka, *Mój pionowy świat*, op. cit., pp. 17-22, 70-75.

³¹A. Bielecki, D. Szczepański, *Spod zamrażniętych powiek*, op. cit., pp. 48, 53, 65-68; the description of a terrorist attack provides one exception, see: pp. 231-233.

documentary mode coincides with a form of pragmatism that seems specific to Himalayan discourse. These writers focus on everything pertaining to movement, climbing, and life at high elevations. The Himalayan climber himself, as Kukuczka shows us, senses his own exotic qualities in his immediate social context³² but makes no effort to mediate this experience. The above-mentioned disproportion between “ethnographic” and climbing descriptions reflects the authors’ belief that any attempt to understand the cultures around them would be futile. In other words, vertical movement in this remarkable place becomes the fundamental impetus and justification for the labor of writing

Alongside authenticity and memory, the third pillar and condition for conveying the Himalayan adventure that I would identify is the pragmatic narrative mode. Kukuczka strives to formulate generalized, existential reflections. He keeps personal self-reflection to a minimum, although he cannot quiet this impulse entirely: writing is a form of understanding and working through one’s own experiences. Bielecki (or rather, the duo formed by Bielecki and Szczepański) takes this even further, for he eschews the temptation to posit universal observations on the human condition and instead centers his voice around common sense and objectivity, yielding a style reminiscent of reportage.³³

Kukuczka and Bielecki’s discourses are governed by the same principles: authenticity, non-fiction, autobiographicality and pragmatic observations. Kukuczka proposes an “athletic” model, seeing the Himalayas as a limit case on the fringe of the sports world that nonetheless has a penchant for metaphysical problems:

For me, mountains are a constant conversation with myself. Do I keep going or do I give up? Do I have enough in me to go further? I’m in it for these moments.³⁴

The climber in *My Vertical World* is thus interrogating the climber’s place in the order of human activities, reflecting on the meaning of climbing in the Himalayas, contemplating the relationship between mountain space and the subject and relying on the body and its physical fitness in the face of the high, impassable summits.

Kukuczka’s book offers no answers to the questions posed so often about the meaning of high mountain exploration.

I never felt a need to define it. I went up into the mountain and conquered it. That’s it.³⁵

³²When Kukuczka takes part in an international expedition and no longer has to watch his spending, he comments: “When we are all together, we go to a restaurant where I am already treated like a normal, white man: I order what I want and not what I can afford. I don’t have to stay in the cheapest inns from day one and cook for myself to save money.” (J. Kukuczka, op. cit., p. 168).

³³It would be difficult to maintain clear boundaries between the two authors given their consistently first-person narratives that are somewhat uniform in style. Here, I am describing one particular author: Adam Bielecki.

³⁴J. Kukuczka, *Mój pionowy świat*, op. cit., p. 64.

³⁵Ibid, p. 12

Kukuczka conceptualizes climbing (and with it, his own climbing narrative) in terms of his idiomatic experience of vertical motion. This motion simultaneously suppresses and foregrounds how he thinks of himself and the reality of horizontal space. His writing seeks to translate into pragmatic terms this strange existential and cognitive mode: a mode centered around the solitude of the subject located within inhuman, inhospitable space. I would argue that Kukuczka brushes close against a vision of modern man pitched against nature and his own conditions. This adversity is expressed as the need to conquer all eight-thousanders and to transgress the borders of what is humanly possible. Several times in the text, Kukuczka hints that his intentions are to push back against the problem of inexpressible experiences and epiphanies. This reveals something about the genealogy of his amateur writing: his model is modern realism and its pursuit of reality as it strives to objectivize the universalization of individual experience through literature.

Adam Bielecki comes to his high mountain adventures from entirely different circumstances. For Bielecki, Kukuczka is the stuff of legends. He therefore faces a choice: he can continue the narrative paradigm of the Himalayan climbers who came before him, or propose a story structure of his own, attending to the specificities of climbing in the current sociocultural climate as well as his own approach to the mountain. Of course, Bielecki by no means negates the act of storytelling. He merely shifts his emphasis to pragmatic, biographical and professional issues and curtails the scope of his universal reflections to do so.

Bielecki composes a compendium of sorts (an itinerary) that guides the reader through the world of high mountain climbing. Bielecki demonstrates the activity's practical valences and traces a historical profile of the Polish school of Himalayan climbers in the context of his own achievements. We might say he activates two travel narratives: first, he tells the story of his own journey to the high mountains. Secondly, he invites the reader on a meandering hike through the practical and historical issues of mountaineering. Ultimately, Bielecki transforms before the reader's eyes into a professional climber and athlete whose career consists of the personal conquest of space. Bielecki weaves back and forth between the first-person mode of his own story and his role as a guide to the exotic world of extreme athletes. Unlike Kukuczka, who describes unimaginable feats that disrupt his quotidian reality, Bielecki is more focused on spreading his knowledge of the Himalayan experience as a way of life, or as one of many existential modes.

Bielecki, the younger of the two climbers, abandons all inclinations to penetrate the mystery of climbing. Whenever he brushes up against these issues, he defers to pragmatic explanations. He emphasizes the contrast between the Himalayan experience and the layman's perspective. Bielecki's book becomes an instruction manual of sorts, or a pragmatic demonstration of what it really looks like to climb the Himalayas as a physical, bodily exercise. He refrains from burdening climbing with intellectual concepts. For Bielecki, the truth can only be represented by detailed descriptions reminiscent of reference guides that are nonetheless rooted in the experience of an actual climber. While Kukuczka sought existential justifications for his feats, which he then articulated in laconic pseudo-maxims (thereby resolving the dilemma of inexpressibility), Bielecki abandons these attempts, or perhaps voices them in a more private and unpretentious tone. For Bielecki, writing about climbing requires no

other explanation than the practice itself.³⁶ “You dissolve. You cease to climb, and you become climbing.”³⁷ This shift in the modality of the practice indicates a transition from the mystical and athletic model for approaching the Himalayas to the category of extreme sports as an everyday practice and way of life.³⁸

Certain tales of Himalayan climbers and mountaineers who have conquered summits can be particularly inaccessible, exaggerating the scale of the danger and giving the reader a glimpse of a world that is doubly extraordinary. This space is remote and often exotic (with authors often projecting a sense of the exotic entirely unconsciously, thus reproducing colonial representations of the other). This space is closed to its readers, yet its stories open a view into this altered reality woven together with routine activities and duties on the one hand and on the other, the thrill, exertions and exhaustions required to master this space. These narratives focus on the specific properties of mountain travel, laying bare the paradoxical structure of a fixed routine unfolding against the backdrop of an exhilarating adventure. The narrators are tangled up in contradictions that reveal the special character of life on a climbing expedition, where movement and rest are interlaced, constituting the inverted and carnivalesque progression of the day that nonetheless proves to be surprisingly ordinary. Time spent on the road, distancing oneself from home and breaking off contact with the tame safety of domestic space, incrementally establishes a new space for a safe life.

Travel literature – to linger with this imprecise category a moment longer – enters into a symbiosis of sorts with the broader phenomenon of the fascination of those who manage to radically break out of the everyday grind. What was once a travel account transforms from a story about spatial, cultural and social otherness (bracketing, for now, the writer’s relationship to that otherness) into the story of an escape from the everyday rhythm of life and, indirectly, a testament to the fact that such an escape is impossible (and undesirable) on a broader scale. By narrating the extreme feats man pursues of his own free will (ultra-marathons, long-distance hikes, high mountain climbing in environments hostile to man or extremely remote from his life context), they intone the promise that we can take control over our own existence. In the conditions of late modernity, as sociologists tell us, this is fundamentally impossible.³⁹

³⁶ “[...] cognizance of the written word – for example, as in the textural description of the rock-climb or route in the climber’s guidebook – is fundamentally undermined as being the principal means by which the climb is understood. The direct experience of climbing usurps the pre-eminence of cognitive apprehension as the key to acquiring knowledge.” (N. Lewis, *The Climbing Body*, op. cit., p. 71).

³⁷ A. Bielecki, D. Szczepański, *Spod zamarzniętych powiek*, op. cit., p. 184.

³⁸ This distinction becomes particularly clear in passages devoted to preparations for a climbing expedition (training, keeping certain diets) and equipment (experimenting with different attire, climbing gear, shoes): Bielecki consciously deals with his own hybrid climber’s body (despite the fact that rhetorically, he speaks disparagingly of climbing gear; see: A. Bielecki, D. Szczepański, op. cit., p. 70), while Kukuczka confronts these extreme experiences as a rational and bodily being whose technical accouterments are merely one of many necessary elements. For Kukuczka, however, it is the climbing subject that ultimately determines whether the summit will be conquered. See also: P. Barratt, *Vertical worlds: technology, hybridity and the climbing body*, “Social & Cultural Geography” 2011, vol. 12, issue 4, pp. 397–412.

³⁹ U. Beck, A. Giddens, S. Lash, *Reflexive Modernization*, Stanford 1994; U. Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, trans. M. Ritter, London 1992.

The emergence and subsequent institutional consolidation of activities that fall outside of traditional sports disciplines have shed light on the extent to which we ritualize sport. What's more, they again lay bare the elite nature of Olympic sports, team sports and track and field. New disciplines have earned the moniker "extreme," which in fact denotes their contradictory status as both amateur and professional. These tend to be extremely difficult activities that require technical finesse and are often associated with the risk of serious bodily damage or even death.⁴⁰ On the one hand, these sports seem to be accessible to non-specialists (qualified trainers, clubs, organizations), which is surely due to their horizontal entry levels, for these sports are often first practiced as hobbies. On the other hand, they require incredibly difficult and time-consuming training regimes of the adept, and while they seem to promote a vision of collectivity (they build communities and are practiced in groups), they are ultimately individual activities.⁴¹ The descriptor "extreme" introduces something interesting into the whole enterprise, for it effaces the contrast between athletic passion and the non-athletic everyday world, integrating these spheres into a more expansive life practice: a lifestyle. These spheres become codependent and therefore inseparable, so that the extreme athlete's social roles are all inextricably enmeshed.

There is also a nonathletic valence to breaking out of the daily routine. This gesture is linked to all forms of abandoning life routines in the relative stability of Western society, where routines are structured by a consistent rhythm of work, duties and pleasure forged off of middle class templates. The volume of published books, websites and magazines devoted to extreme exploits pulled off by renegades confirms the strong public interest in travel blogs and informal travel reportage that express a desire to disrupt the monotony of existence. These feats (e.g., setting a new record in an elite or niche discipline) are not broadcast in a sports context so much as in reference to the daily routines, social roles and duties that overpower us as twenty-first century subjects. In other words, these diverse travel narratives circulating in popular culture as thematic blogs, semi-literary essays and guidebooks (both digital and as printed matter) produce a discourse that expresses as much about daily life and current socioeconomic problems as it does about travel itself as a decisive break from the domesticated and all-too-familiar existence of western man.

The travel discourse produced by these Himalayan climbers is at times a pragmatic record of authentic experiences and at times a layman's explanation of a remarkable feat. This discourse is profoundly linked to the widespread interest in extreme sports. At the same time, it revitalizes modern strategies (in altered forms) for describing travel, expressing the movement of the subject through space and conveying the extraordinary nature of practices that transcend everyday routine. These climbers' narratives are both sophisticated (demonstrating an expert knowledge of climbing and mountain terrain) and amateur (in terms of their literary strategies). They demonstrate a borderline position, for they do not fully conform to literature or pragmatic or non-fiction writing.

⁴⁰V. Robinson, *Everyday Masculinities and Extreme Sport. Male Identity and Rock Climbing*, Oxford - New York 2008, pp. 41-59, D. Dornian, *Xtreem*; [in:] *To the extreme. Alternative sports, inside and out*, ed. R. E. Rinehart, S. Sydnor, New York 2003, pp. 281-391.

⁴¹R. E. Reinhart, S Sydnor, *Proem* [in:] *To the extreme*, op. cit., pp. 3-7.

When we consider the modern genealogy of high mountain climbing, mountain literature figures as a unique variation of “life writing.”⁴² However, as we see in Kukuczka and Bielecki’s texts, in the context of late modernity, we are witnessing a consistent and incremental repudiation of the modernist longing for an adequate means of expression. The vertical travel tale ceases to privilege literariness as the only tool that qualifies a text as “true” literature. Instead, it begins to express its own form of pragmatism rooted in the concrete register of “raw” experience. The Himalayan discourse is governed by the stern logic that is as clear and transparent as possible, satiating the “mountain appetite” of readers who typically cannot bring themselves to indulge in the pleasures of an extreme Himalayan expedition.

⁴²While in the very definition of “life-history” (let me ignore the question of the disputability of this formula) there is some paradoxical exclusivity that favors literature, whereas in Himalayan narratives, especially in Bielecki’s book, the relation is clearly reversed or even annulled: it is climbing and its spatiality that comprise the foundation of writing this, because the climber is not focused on the possibility of combining his own practice and his own life with the machinery of literature. Cf. H. Bereza, *Sposób myślenia. 1. O prozie polskiej*, Warszawa 1989, p. 467-483; A. Karpowicz, *Proza życia. Mowa, pismo, literatura* (Białoszewski, Stachura, Nowakowski, Anderman, Redliński, Schubert), Warszawa 2012, pp. 13-22.

KEYWORDS

Kukuczka

TRAVEL

modernity

ABSTRACT:

This article explores travel narratives in texts by Himalayan climbers. The author examines the modern provenance of the discourse of high mountain climbers, using two books as case studies: one written by Jerzy Kukuczka, and the other by Adam Bielecki. The article identifies the essential features of Himalayan narratives: the experience of space and vertical movement as a stylistic and narrative challenge, the relationship between memory, authenticity and autobiography, and finally, the textualization of experience as a stand-in for the climbing practice.

Himalayan climbing

BIELECKI

c l i m b i n g

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The Polish School of Fabrication:

Literary Travel Reportage. Ziemowit Szczerek's Journeys from Mordor to the Intermarium

Arkadiusz Kalin

In the realm of theory, travel literature remains a somewhat obscure phenomenon. It is genealogically diverse and its long tradition reaches back to antiquity, having passed through several cultural transformations along the way.¹ To further complicate things, the genre includes a vast range of texts that are fundamentally disparate in terms of their themes, narrative modes, and their relationship to the reality they portray: this spectrum includes everything from Homer's *Odyssey* to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Kerouac's beatnik novel *On the Road*, not to mention purely fantastical voyages to the cosmos like Lem's phenomenal *Star Diaries*. In this article, I focus on the similarly nuanced conception of travel embodied in the work of Ziemowit Szczerek. The primary poetological context for Szczerek's body of work is travel reportage: the very genre that shaped the twentieth-century model for narrating travel. In fact, travel literature criticism often identifies reportage as a genealogical qualifier for the genre. The fundamental issue at stake here is the unresolved debate over the relationship between authenticity (referentiality) and fiction in travel reportage framed as literature.

Truth and Fabrication

There seems to be a prevailing consensus that travel reportage should be particularly reliable in the authenticity of its accounts, that it should recapitulate facts and describe places truthfully, down to the most minute detail. This expectation stems from the factuality gener-

¹ Dorota Kozicka discusses the theoretical issue of how to classify travel literature in the first part her study *Wędrowcy światów prawdziwych. Dwudziestowieczne relacje z podróży*, Krakow 2003

ally assigned to reportage as its defining feature, which is a result of the genre's roots in the press and the strong, ongoing tendency to identify its many variations with news on current events. If we locate this issue in its broader context, we might approach this question by thinking about the relationship between literature and documentary art. In assessing the literary tenor of reportage, we often classify it as a borderline, paraliterary genre, although its literary qualities are generally limited to the text's aesthetic, stylistic and compositional structure, the vividness of the prose, and a characteristic yearning for universal meaning. This being said, you could search reference books exhaustively for an entry on "literary reportage" and come up empty-handed. At best, this issue surfaces in the context of general reflections on the "literature of fact."² Genre definitions of reportage tend to feature media studies perspectives that emphasize authenticity as the genre's constitutive feature and therefore define reportage as non-fiction prose. This entry from the *Lexicon of Media Terms* (*Słownik terminologii medialnej*) expresses this notion through categorical claims:

The journalistic text is defined by the authenticity of its message: its function is to convey the facts as a report would, without superfluous literary artistry. [...] There is no room for literary fiction in reportage. In this genre, authenticity does not only entail the responsibility to report; first and foremost, it requires the reporter to describe reality without fabricating facts. These facts should be fully verifiable, for a reporter is responsible for the content he conveys, even before a court.³

The author of a theoretical approach to reportage argues in the same vein:

Reportage, strictly speaking, must not avail itself of fiction and must rule out fabrication. Fiction penned by a reporter can only be a testament of his incompetence and his inability to get a hold of the facts. It is also an abuse of the convention. Authenticity is also a prerequisite for contemporary reportage expressed through other media.⁴

This position is rather prevalent in scholarship on the subject. Critics assert the consensus that the defining feature of traditional reportage is in fact this "referential contract" established with the reader,⁵ also described as the "factographic pact."⁶ The author of the genre's entry in the *Lexicon of Literary Terms* (*Słownik terminów literackich*) takes a much more liberal approach to the matter. He identifies variations within reportage "that link authentic material to narrative fiction [...]. Modern reportage has absorbed many experiences from narrative

² See U. Glensk, *O estetyce literatury faktu*, [in:] *Słownik terminologii medialnej*, ed. W. Pisarek, Krakow 2006, p. 186.

³ K. Wolny-Zmorzyński, A. Kaliszewski, *Reportaż*, [in:] *Słownik terminologii medialnej*, ed. W. Pisarek, Krakow 2006, p. 186.

⁴ E. Pleszkun-Olejniczakowa, *Reportaż. Wokół pochodzenia, definicji i podziałów*, "Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Litteraria Polonica" 2005, vol. 7, p. 9.

⁵ This phrase borrows Philippe Lejeune's formulation, offering a counterpart to his widely known "autobiographical pact." A recent study on literary reportage uses this idea as the basis of its theoretical approach. See: P. Zajas, *Jak świat prawdziwy stał się bajką. O literaturze niefikcyjnej*, Poznan 2011, pp. 9-35.

⁶ This phrase also references Lejeune. See: Z. Bauer, *Gatunki dziennikarskie*, [in:] *Dziennikarstwo i świat mediów*, ed. Z. Bauer, E. Chudziński, Krakow 2004. Similar nomenclature appears in reporters' statements. See: P. Nesterowicz, *Reportaż to kontrakt prawdy. Ufam ci, że tak było*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 13 VI 2015, http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/1,124059,18101750,Reportaz_to_kontrakt_prawdy_Ufam_ci_ze_tak_bylo.html.

prose, and particularly from the novel and novelistic forms [...].”⁷ Jacek Maziarski similarly acknowledges the genre’s literary provenances. For Maziarski, the genre is authentic as a rule, but expresses that authenticity through the mediation of tactics for instilling belief in the reader, in some ways generating a “reality effect.” On the other hand, for this theoretical view of reportage, the issue of authenticity is secondary:

For the reportage critic, whether or not the situations narrated through the prose are true is a matter of secondary importance. More weight is given to an evaluation of the account’s “features” of truthfulness or its deliberate construction to produce an appearance of truthfulness. For their remains no doubt — reportage can be based to a lesser or greater degree on fictional events, only portraying people in silhouettes, concocted in the author’s imagination or generalized from a hundred individual incidents.⁸

This sentiment leads the scholar to a general definition of reportage in which certain literary trademarks also play a constitutive role:

Reportage is an intersectional genre that straddles journalistic and literary forms, yet seems to lean towards the literary. Its employment of plot, narrative and its constituent parts, intense visuality and literary framing brings the text closer to narrative prose.⁹

For the most part, this attentiveness to the literary valences of reportage and its refined devices of fictionalization are a hallmark of recent studies. It seems to come up particularly in the analysis of Polish reportage of the last quarter century in reference to reporters who labor rigorously to remain faithful to authenticity (such as Wojciech Jagielski), and creative writers like Jacek Hugo-Bader and Mariusz Szczygieł, whose reportage can undoubtedly be described as literary.¹⁰ Both scholars and the authors themselves have noted the rising tendency to publish reportage in collections, which encourages readers to perceive it as literature. More and more often, the very texts are conceived in the format of single-theme books and demonstrate an increasing flair for artistry.

Literary critics on the subject also advocate for these disparate positions: some embrace the genre’s literary status (e.g. Henryk Berez) while others reject it (e.g. Andrzej Kijowski), and still others occupy a place on the spectrum between these extremes. This range not only reflects critics’ personal hierarchies of aesthetic values and views on the borders of literature;

⁷ J. Sławiński, *Reportaż*, [in:] *Słownik terminów literackich*, ed. J. Sławiński, Wrocław 1989, p. 431.

⁸ J. Maziarski, *Anatomia reportażu*, Kraków 1966, p. 16. In this study, Maziarski expresses his reluctance to rigorously embrace authenticity and deny the genre the right to fiction, which would do a disservice to the work.

⁹ J. Maziarski, *Reportaż*, [in:] *Słownik rodzajów i gatunków literackich*, ed. G. Gazda, S. Tynecka-Makowska, Kraków 2006, p. 635.

¹⁰ See I. Adamczewska, *Granice kreatywności w reportażu*, “Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich” 2017, vol. 1; J. Biernacka, *Fikcja narracji, czyli o mniej konwencjonalnej formie fikcji we współczesnym polskim reportażu*, “Tekstualia” 2016 issue 4; K. Frukacz, *Między literackością a podmiotowością. Nowy wymiar “skażenia” polskiego reportażu*, “Postscriptum Polonistyczne” 2013, issue 1; K. Szcześniak, *Między reportażem a literaturą. Twórczość Wojciecha Tochmana*, Lublin 2016; M. Zimnoch, *Fikcja jako prawda. Referencyjność reportażu ponowoczesnego*, “Naukowy Przegląd Dziennikarski” 2012, issue 1; and by the same author, *Poetyka reportażu intertekstualnego na przykładzie tekstów Mariusza Szczygła*, “Jednak Książki. Gdańskie Czasopismo Humanistyczne” 2016, issue 5.

it also expresses the genre's historical entanglement (e.g. the specter of its socialist realist iteration).¹¹ It goes without saying that the authors themselves are just as polarized. In fact, the "godfather" of global reportage, Egon Erwin Kisch, proposed joining reportage to literature long ago, and even defended its right to fully make use of fictional elements. The same view was espoused later on by celebrated literary figures and practitioners of the genre such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Bruce Chatwin.

In the Polish sphere, Melchior Wańkowicz alone asserted the genre's right to literary creativity. He explicitly wrote about the "privilege of fiction" and cultivated a fiction-generating practice in his own work.¹² We might also identify a literary basis in the work of the author who succeeded Wańkowicz as the reigning progenitor of literary reportage: Ryszard Kapuściński. This orientation stands out, however, for those who read his texts as literary scholars, for even Kapuściński himself (unlike Wańkowicz) never confessed to taking major liberties in his descriptions of reality.

While the literariness of reportage is no longer such a controversial topic, and the very idea has now been sanctioned by a host of prestigious awards (the Nobel Literary Prize in 2015, the Nike Prize in 2017), the inclusion of fictional elements in reportage remains provocative. Resistance to the fictional seems linked to the fear that it might threaten the very factuality that defines the genre. Even putting aside the inclusion of purely fictional elements, any attempt to stray from authenticity or misrepresent or even omit the facts provokes protest and demands for rectification.

The vigorous public debate over Artur Domosławski's book on Kapuściński (*Kapuściński non-fiction*, Warsaw 2010) is related to this controversy.¹³ Since the book's publication, there has been a resurgence of the attitude that reportage must be purified of all creative and fictional elements. This stance seems symptomatic of an anxiety that the literary will "contaminate" reportage. Its advocates call for declarative prose in the spirit of non-fiction. Scholars who work on contemporary reportage argue, however, that this is a form of self-deception. If nothing else, this declarative mode stems from a theoretically obsolete dichotomy that puts literary fiction and authenticity in opposition with one another. In other words, it stems from a rather unsophisticated understanding of mimesis (representation) and a faith in nonliterary style as a reliable and "true" expression of reality.¹⁴ This position is rooted in a tendency to impose ethical categories on aesthetic ones ("fabrication" would apparently weaken the journalist's professional ethics). Surely, this reflects a response to the increasing performativity of the

¹¹See: J. Jezierska-Hałady, "Literacenie? O granicach reportażu na łamach *Rocznika Literackiego*" (1932-1984), "Jednak Książki. Gdańskie Czasopismo Humanistyczne" 2016, issue 5.

¹²Wańkowicz collected these articles in the fifth chapter (titled *Poszerzenie konwencji reportażu*) of his metaprosaic great work—*KaraŹki La Fontaine'a*. Other writers of the genre such as Krzysztof Kąkolewski adopted very different views. See: K. Kąkolewski, *Reportaż [in:] Teoria i praktyka dziennikarstwa. Wybrane zagadnienia*, ed. B. Golka, M. Kafel, Z. Mitzner, Warsaw 1964.

¹³P. Zajas and G. Wołowicz discuss the first wave of reception for this biography in the journal "Teksty Drugie" 2011, issues 1-2.

¹⁴See J. Landwehr, *Fikcyjność i fikcjonalność*, trans. A. Nasłowska, "Pamiętnik Literacki" 1983, vol. 4. The theoretical implications of the question of representation are addressed in M. P. Markowski's text, *O reprezentacji*, [in:] *Kulturowa teoria literatury. Główne pojęcia i problemy*, ed. M. P. Markowski, R. Nycz, Krakow 2006.

genre's unrivaled capacity to impact reality in comparison to its literary counterparts. One consequence of this mindset is a totalizing insistence on fact checking, or the verification of a work's sources and circumstances as proof. This impulse, at least in part, is driven by a fear of legal consequences.

In the latest phase of the discussion that has circulated since Domosławski's publication, Mariusz Szczygieł has taken a dissenting position, distancing himself from a strict approach to (literary) reportage. He voiced these views in an article polemicizing with those who chastised the "Polish School of Reportage" for straying too far from the facts. This provoked a debate, prompting Adam Leszczyński to pen an article with the telling title *The Polish School of Fabrication* (a title I borrow polemically for this article), in which he cites many instances of journalistic abuse.¹⁵ The dialogue that then ensues reinforces the opposition between "literature" and "documentary." What's more, writers themselves take up this position, while until that time, this relationship had been reversed. Interactions between literary and documentary genres, contemporary "silvae rerum" (home chronicles), textual hybrids, Konwicki's "lie-diaries" and so on all produced a climate in which this opposition seems radically anachronistic, and has seemed so since the 1980s.¹⁶

I will briefly recapitulate the positions against embracing the literary status (fictionality in particular) of reportage, along with the most recent statements on the subject, for we find these same concerns (or their lack) in the reception of travel literature, particularly in response to work by Andrzej Stasiuk or Ziemowit Szczerek that is glossed as reportage. Stasiuk, who is known for his book *On the Road to Babadag* (*Jadąc do Babadag*), made a distinct effort to frame his output as literary prose. Stasiuk even contributed to the debate surrounding Domosławski's book. Right after Kapuściński's biography came out, Stasiuk offered a commentary that could easily be applied to his own work:

He should have realized that we live in a time of intersecting genres— in hybridized times. [...] Since the novel's form has changed, why should reportage remain static and therefore ultimately condemned to go obsolete? He should also have noticed that our lives are changing radically. Every day they become more and more fictional. For he has seen, after all, that with increasing frequency we interact with images and phantoms and fata morganas. That gradually, we are leaving reality behind — or at the very least, reality in its former, archaic sense: a reality that could be grasped through direct contact. In the act of traveling, for instance. Or through a traveler's stories. Truth has wandered off into the past. Why demand it of the journalist, since we don't even demand it of

¹⁵See: M. Szczygieł, *Reporter, czyli koleżanka z ZUS-u*, "Duży Format," supplement to "Gazeta Wyborcza" from May 22 2017, issue 19 [Online title: *Co wolno reporterowi. Mariusz Szczygieł odpowiada krytykom polskiej szkoły reportażu*, <http://wyborcza.pl/duzyformat/7,127290,21833806,co-wolno-reporterowi-mariusz-szczygieł-odpowiada-krytykom.html>]; L. Włodek, A. Domosławski, *Reporter w czasach ściemy. Polemika z Mariuszem Szczygłem*, "Duży Format," supplement to "Gazeta Wyborcza" from June 5 2017, issue 21 [<http://wyborcza.pl/duzyformat/7,127290,21896617,reporter-w-czasach-sciemy-polemika-z-mariuszem-szczygłem.html>]; A. Leszczyński, *Polska szkoła zmyślania*, "Krytyka Polityczna," <http://krytykapolityczna.pl/kultura/czytaj-dalej/leszczynski-polska-szkola-zmyslania/>; W. Szablowski, *Jak pracować na zaufanie czytelników. Szablowski odpowiada Leszczyńskiemu*, "Krytyka Polityczna," <http://krytykapolityczna.pl/kultura/czytaj-dalej/jak-pracowac-na-zaufanie-czytelnikow-szablowski-odpowiada-leszczynskiemu/>; L. Ostalska, *O polskiej szkole reportażu rozmawiamy bez złości*, "Duży Format," supplement to "Gazeta Wyborcza" from June 12 2017, issue 22 [<http://wyborcza.pl/duzyformat/7,127290,21927454,o-polskiej-szkole-reportazu-rozmawiamy-bez-zlosci.html>].

¹⁶See: Z. Ziątek, *Wiek dokumentu. Inspiracje dokumentarne w polskiej prozie współczesnej*, Warsaw 1999.

ourselves, reconciled as we are to the notion of personal, discrete truths? Which is to say, truths that are entirely individual and impossible to replicate.¹⁷

The question of reportage's *Dichtung und Wahrheit* seems particularly relevant in the case of work by Ziemowit Szczerek. Although Szczerek's books may recall Stasiuk's *Dojczland*, they offer a distinctly phantasmagoric vision of cultural space in which heterostereotypes and autostereotypes have a heavy hand in shaping our impressions of other nationalities. While imitating the referential writing style of travel reportage, Szczerek boldly ventures into the terrain of literature. To this end, he plays upon precedents set by Stasiuk and also riffs on American New Journalism, particularly its "gonzo" variation.

Ziemowit Szczerek entered the literary scene with his book published in early 2013, *Mordor's Coming to Eat Us: A Secret History of the Slavs* (*Przyjdzie Mordor i nas zje, czyli tajna historia Słowian*). The author's next book appeared that same year, titled *Triumphant Republic: An Alternative History of Poland* (*Rzeczpospolita zwycięska. Alternatywna historia Polski*). **This book is written in the newly popular genre of alternative history, and offers alternative scenarios of Poland's outcomes in several wars. One year later, Szczerek's road novel Highway No. 7 (Siodemka) came out, which treats contemporary themes with a vivid flare for alternative fantasy. Towards the end of 2015, Szczerek published a new book that revisits the theme of his Ukrainian wanderings, titled *Tattoo with a Trident* (*Tatuaż z tryzubem*), and in late spring of 2017 his most recent book came out, titled *Intermarium: Travels through the Real and Imagined Central Europe*.**

For the purposes of this article, I am particularly interested in the books concerning Ukraine (*Mordor's Coming...*, *Tattoo with a Trident*) alongside *Intermarium* as texts that closely resemble travel literature. Szczerek's debut novel won him the attention of critics and readers. The author came from a background in journalism and political punditry, with a special focus on issues of Central Europe and its Eastern frontier.¹⁸ His devotion to the subject earned him the prestigious Polityka Passport Award in the literature category in 2013 and a nomination for the Nike Prize in 2014. *Tattoo with a Trident* was also shortlisted for the Nike Prize in 2016.

As a rule, both of Szczerek's Ukrainian books are glossed as literary takes on travel reportage. Their composition is episodic, consisting of a dozen or so chapters that all function as standalone tales of the protagonist's wanderings. The two books are very different from one another, however, and *Tattoo with a Trident* can hardly be read as a continuation of Szczerek's debut book. The protagonist of *Tattoo...* offers a broad perspective on travel: sections resembling reportage are intertwined with substantive reflections on history, politics and culture, offering their own commentary on the descriptions of events and places. *Mordor's Coming...* is

¹⁷A. Stasiuk, *A jeśli by nawet to wszystko zmyślił*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" March 2 2010, http://wyborcza.pl/1,75410,7615303,Stasiuk__A_jesliby_nawet_to_wszystko_zmyslil.html.

¹⁸With Marcin Kępa, Ziemowit Szczerek co-authored a collection of stories called *Paczka radomskich* in 2010. (I treat *Mordor's Coming...* as his true debut as an author, although he also published his early experiments in literary prose in literary journals and on the cultural hub e-splot.pl, where he published his (unfinished) road novel called *Countries that Don't Exist* serially in 2011. The standalone debut of Ziemowit Szczerek (b. 1978) came about rather late in his career, for he belongs to a generation that literary critics had already dubbed "Children of the 70s" ("roczniki siedemdziesiąte") by the beginning of this decade.

more of a picaresque road novel, while *Tattoo...* veers in the direction of a deep cultural travel essay. Most importantly, the more recent book was written after Euromaidan, a wave of anti-state acts of civil disobedience in Ukraine that lasted several months and brought about the collapse of the government and Ukraine's total geopolitical reorientation. Euromaidan also triggered the secession of insurgent Eastern regions, Russia's annexation of Crimea, and a *de facto* war with the Russian offensive. These dramatic events are reflected in *Tattoo...* and surely provided an impetus for the book's deeper historical and political analyses.

Intermarium can be described as a travel account of several nations of East and Central Europe complete with a deep historical-political analysis in the vein of *Tattoo with a Trident* and searing commentary on recent political events. All of this is gathered under the political concept of Intermarium called out in the book's title.

Authenticity in Travel and Cultural Hallucination

Ziemowit Szczerek's three books discussed here can be linked to the boom of literary reportage that has dominated Polish publishing over the last dozen or so years: entire publishing imprints have surfaced to represent this mode (one of which published *Tattoo...*). Dozens of new books of travel literature come out every year. Even a cursory glance at Szczerek's oeuvre gives the impression that it draws from a diverse range of literary traditions and represents a hybrid form woven from intertextual references to all subgenres of travel literature. Szczerek's prose can, however, claim one specific source of inspiration which puts him in dialogue with a cultural trend widespread in Poland since the 1920s. I am referring to the phenomenon of alternative, unorganized and niche tourism, conducted on one's own. This is the practice of exploring with a simple backpack, using local transportation or hitchhiking (in the West, this is called "backpacking"). These practices imbue the journey with a sense of originality, or a sense that the experiences accumulated are unique. This form of travel seems to be a signature experience of Szczerek's generation.¹⁹ Until recently, this mode of travel was barely acknowledged in socio-cultural studies, although it has undoubtedly exerted a formative influence on the young Polish intelligentsia.²⁰

Ziemowit Szczerek reproduces all the major iconic elements of the Pole's journey through Ukraine. *Intermarium* also captures echoes of likeminded explorations of East and Central Europe. The first chapter of *Mordor's Coming...* tells the story of the author's first trip in 2002, during which he collected typical interactions with the "exotic Eastern Other:" the quintessential experience of getting around on local mini-busses (*marshrutkas*), spotting an abacus at a shop counter, the dearth of nightlife after 10:00 pm, or sampling local drinks such

¹⁹"*Mordor* is also a blow at myself, for I am one of those people who journeyed off to Ukraine with a backpack, subconsciously in pursuit of the 'hardcore.'" – Z. Szczerek, *Synowie buraczanych pól*, interview with J. Sobolewska, "Polityka" February 4 2014. <http://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kultura/paszporty/1569197,2,rozmowa-z-ziemowitem-szczerkiem.read>.

²⁰The first comprehensive analyses of this trend appeared in the books: A. Horolets, *Konformizm, bunt, nostalgia. Turystyka niszowa do krajów byłego ZSRR*, Krakow 2013; A. Bachórz, *Rosja w tekście i doświadczeniu. Analiza współczesnych polskich relacji z podróży*, Krakow 2013. Both books are discussed in this article: T. Zarycki, *Socjologia polskich podróży do krajów byłego ZSRR. Dwa przykłady*, "Kultura i Społeczeństwo" 2016, issue 1.

as “dzhintonik,” vodka drunken with sourdough yeast, and the high-proof herbal tincture known as Vigor balsam. This last product is a defining signature of Szczerek’s first Ukrainian book and comes up constantly in the book’s reviews and author interviews.²¹ The first city these wanderers encounter is usually Lviv, and the encounter involves a reckoning with the city’s incompatible identities: its contemporary Ukrainian identity, and its former identity as part of the Polish *Kresy* (the Polish borderlands). This second identity is cultivated by the nostalgic pilgrimages of “mainstream” Polish tourists, and cleverly role-played by Lviv’s Polish community. Szczerek comments on this phenomenon in a series of hyperbolic scenes. This excerpt offers an example:

Aging Poles waddled around the market square, locals and tourists alike. You can tell the two groups apart no problem. The visitors trudged around slowly [...] and whined in a whisper. Their fear, however, was expressed rather loudly. They had all these pretensions that they’ve been fucked over, damaged, by the UPA, by Bandera... They moaned about Yalta, Stalin... They droned on about Szczepcio and Tońcio... The local Poles, on the other hand, moved about jerkily [...] approaching the people around them to see if they didn’t need an apartment to rent, or perhaps a map with Polish street names. And for a little bonus, they’d throw in some disparaging words about the evil Ukrainians and the grandeur of the old Commonwealth. And the Poles from Poland lapped up these flattering fibs from the Polish Ukrainians like baby guppies. All it takes is for a local Pole to go up to them, tell them a tale or two from prewar Lviv, hum the tune *On a rainy, gloomy day*... and say “Feel like to be at home, for its your city ain’t it, too...” and already the Poles from Poland have burst into tears, already they’ve completely lost it, they’re all over the place, it’s like they’ve been hit by a car, already their weeping, it’s flying out of their nose, they’re pawing for their wallets, they’ve already bought maps, guidebooks, rented an apartment... [MC, p. 12-13].²²

In both books, the author distances himself from this nostalgia for the Polish *Kresy*, framing this history as a distinct source of nationalist hostilities and a tool by which Poles orientalize Ukraine (in Said’s sense of the word). It turns out, however, that even niche tourism, which seeks an experience of authenticity beyond the guidebooks and is fascinated by the cultural difference encountered in Ukrainian space, is by no means innocent of its own set of clichés. While the protagonist of *Mordor’s Coming*... seems well aware of the artificial and indecent behavior of both Polish typologies described in the passage, he himself reproduces the signature conventions of so many travel accounts (the border, the mini-busses, Lviv, abacuses, Vigor balsam, etc...) and more deeply veiled beliefs on cultural difference. *Mordor’s Coming*... narrates the protagonist’s process of deconstructing his biased cultural gaze — for these biases are by no means absent from alternative tourism. Szczerek is not only addressing the dubious authenticity of a private experience of travel bogged down in redundant identity questions; he is exploring the cultural baggage travelers (mostly hailing from the young intelligentsia) bring with them. The most-cited passage from *Mordor’s Coming*... is perhaps the chapter in which the vagabond heroes come across some pretentious Polish literature students making a pilgrimage to Drohobycz “to pay tribute to the great Polish-Jewish writer, the grand master

²¹The Ukrainian balsam “Vigor” is sold only in pharmacies and is used locally as a medicine (for potency, as we find out in the book). It was in fact very popular at one point among this class of Polish tourists.

²²I will indicate citations from *Mordor’s Coming*..., *Tattoo with a Trident*, and *Intermarium* in the body of the text with the abbreviations MC, TT and I.

of the Polish language [...] To pay homage, and, of course, to find the Street of Crocodiles.”²³

Mordor's Coming... offers a wide panorama of “backpackers” anecdotes throughout Ukraine, replete with their signature drunken decadence, pretensions, and tendencies to exoticize this new reality. The protagonist/narrator confesses to traveling in this same style, although his portraits have an irreverent and disillusioned tone. For example, here he describes the attitude of his travel companion, a photographer named Korwaks who purportedly documents life in the Ukrainian countryside to give himself a “broader cultural context,” but in reality, is after something else: “They turned Ukraine into a brothel on wheels. Although they would never admit to as much.” [MC, p. 122]. Upon their return, the itinerant cultural critics organize a public exhibition of their photographs:

Korwaks and his friends spoke of the dignity and honor of the people of the poor East, and meanwhile crowd of cultural critics looked at photos of children splashing with pigs in the mud. Korwaks and his friends said that a proud, courageous people live in the East while in the photo, a drunken *babushka* lying passed-out on the ground by a roadside altar, with her legs spread no less. And everyone sees the *babushka* passed out with her legs spread wide, with no proud or courageous nation in sight. These are beautiful and worthy people, declare Korwaks and his friends. “They have a splendid history, a splendid tradition: and here’s Wasia, a tractor driver, wasted as can be, sunburnt mug, a cigarette butt in his snout, and behind him in the distance rise the wooden shacks of the Soviet communal farms and a mob of half-zombie children that look like they’re from some piece of Nazi propaganda. And the whole club crowded with cultural critics stares at Wasia, gulps down Wasia, and then, in a discussion led by Korwaks and his friends, they too speak of the dignity of Wasia, his history, his tradition... [MC, pp. 122-3].

Even the book’s first pages ridicule characters smitten with the Ukrainian situation — this time, the critique is voiced by a young Ukrainian woman:

“Why do you come here, you Poles [...] You come here because in other countries they laugh at you. And they think of you the same way as you think about us: as a backward shit-hole you can sneer at. And feel superior towards. [...] Because everyone thinks you’re impoverished, Eastern trash. [...] Not just the Germans, but also the Czechs, even the Slovaks and the Hungarians. You only think the Hungarians are such fucking awesome pals of yours. But in fact they make fun of you just like everyone else. Not to mention the Serbs and the Croats. Even the Lithuanians, pal. Everyone thinks you’re just a slightly different version of Russia. The third world. It’s only here that you can be patronizing. Here you make up for the fact that everywhere else they wipe their asses with you.” [MC, p. 37]²⁴

One reviewer has suggested that *Mordor's Coming...* is perhaps the first Polish postcolonial novel. This assessment feels apt, for the author himself explicitly references this trope. The last chapter bears the title *Orientalism* and narrates a dispute between the Polish protagonist

²³From an excerpt of *Mordor's Coming...* translated by Scotia Gilroy and published in *Asymptote Journal*, <https://www.asymptotejournal.com/nonfiction/ziemowit-szczerek-mordors-coming-to-eat-us-a-secret-history-of-the-slavs/> (March 18 2018).

²⁴From Scotia Gilroy’s translation

and his Ukrainian friend about cultural feelings of superiority. This final shift in the protagonist, a journalist-buffoon in constant pursuit of extreme adventures, indicates his disavowal of his orientalist perspective and colonial gaze on the cultural space he describes. The closing scene of *Mordor's Coming...* is memorable: in this chapter, the protagonist crosses the border as he did in the book's opening, now heading in the opposite direction. The emotions that accompany his border crossing are also new: most crucial is his feeling of shame:

At the border, I showed my Press Pass to the Ukrainian border guard in the hopes that he might let me skip the cavalcade of ants. I rushed past the Ukrainians. At the Polish checkpoint I went up to the gate marked "EU Citizens Only." I glanced at the next gate, the gate for the worse-off, for the subnations, where the border guards harassed an older Ukrainian man. He was tall, gray-haired and had an elegantly trimmed beard. He said he was a writer and that he was traveling to Krakow for a reading. He said all this, mind you, in impeccable Polish. The border guards, mere twenty-something kids, spoke to him brusquely using the informal "you" and asked why he wasn't traveling to promote his book in Kiev. I clenched my fists and felt ashamed. So very fucking ashamed." [MC, pp. 220-221]

It is only in the postcolonial context introduced by the ending (which is entirely realist in its portrait of Polish border guards) that the tone of the book's opening epigraph finally becomes legible:

I am sorry, gentlemen. I am very sorry. Things should not have happened this way.

Józef Piłsudski to Ukrainians screwed over by the Commonwealth. Internment Camp in Szczypiorno, 1921 [MC, p. 5].

Piłsudski's words here reference the Poles' violation of the agreements between Ukrainians who fought alongside Poles "for our freedom and yours," against the Russians in the Polish-Soviet War. The Polish-Russian armistice not only signaled the total failure of Piłsudski's dream for a federation between Poland and an independent Belarus and Ukraine — it also signified the end of the Ukrainian dream for independence. As a result, *Mordor's Coming...* is not so much (or not only) a piece of pseudo-reportage imitating the various tales of young Polish tourists wandering throughout Ukraine. One might call it an attempt at cultural revisionism that seeks to break Poland's dominant narrative modes about Ukraine: tales of the Polish *Kresy*, travel tales, and political narratives.²⁵ The author's commentary also explicitly addresses this issue:

On the road to Ukraine, consciously or otherwise, we take a good hard look at our Polishness. For this feeling of superiority we feel towards the East (situating ourselves as the West, somewhat

²⁵In what is perhaps the first academic attempt to analyze *Mordor's Coming...*, Joanna Szydlowska astutely notes the disgrace of Polish geopolitical sentiments and their exoticizing gaze. Szydlowska does not, however, appreciate the narrative's distanced and ironic optics towards the excesses of travel, and the articulation we find in the epigraph and ending of feelings of shame and transformation in the hero/narrator/author. I therefore feel reluctant to concede the scholar's claim that: "The reader must resolve for herself if it is an eccentric lunatic who is telling this tale, or perhaps a cynic or nihilist." — J. Szydlowska, *O pożytkach z podglądania marginesu, czyli po co centrom peryferie. Egzotyżacja świata w prozie reportażowej Ziemowita Szczepka* ("Przyjdzie Mordor i nas zje, czyli tajna historia Słowian"), [in:] *Centra – peryferie w literaturze polskiej XX i XXI wieku*, ed. W. Browarny, D. Lisak-Gębala, E. Rybicka, Krakow 2015, p. 386.

without cause) is something that's passed down from generation to generation in our national mythology. Even if you say you're only going there to pay tribute to the beautiful city of Lviv. In some sense, we were colonists, only we never set sail on the waters, but merely ventured to the Eastern frontier.²⁶

The image of Ukraine in Polish culture bears echoes of a colonial attitude towards inferior nations that was endemic to the time of the Polish *Kresy*. This image is distorted by resentments over our loss of these Eastern regions and a reassessment of our affiliation with Western culture that only becomes possible when we compare ourselves with Ukraine. This also might shed some light on the book's enigmatic subtitle, "A Secret History of the Slavs." *Mordor's Coming...* is the result of a deep examination of Polish-Ukrainian relations with the long history that forms the backdrop of *Tattoo...* Together with *Intermarium*, these books offer a rich object of analysis for postcolonial perspectives, especially those that focus on the problem of orientalism.²⁷

The title of Szczerek's latest book, however, is somewhat deceiving. The title explicitly references Józef Piłsudski's idea for a federation of nations between the Baltic, Black and Adriatic Seas (under Polish leadership of course). The idea has recently been reclaimed by right wing public figures, and is widely cited in literature. More importantly, politicians gunning for Poland to become a world power have revived the idea of this geopolitical excavation. Of course, Szczerek is polemicizing these fantasies and relates to them ironically (as he does with the title *Triumphant Republic*), but Piłsudski's concept is by no means the book's central theme (the Intermarium itself does not even come up until page 68). The book's occupations lie closer to the themes taken up in Przemysław Czapliński's most recent book, titled *Displaced Map* (*Poruszona mapa*), in which the author builds a portrait of Polish culture in relation to the regions of Europe that have cultural relevance for the Poles. Czapliński bases this portrait on Poles' own visions of these regions (for the most part literary ones) and seeks to shed light on the formation of modern Polish identity.²⁸ Szczerek's book adopts an even larger scope: he is tracing the relations of the cultural peripheries — historical and contemporary — of the countries of East and Central Europe in relation to the longstanding Western-oriented center of civilization (which today takes the form of the European Union). At times, these relations consisted of attempting to consolidate powerful autonomous bodies (as in the case of the Intermarium project), or either disassociating from or clinging to the surrogate superpower that has always been Russia. In reality, Szczerek is concerned with relations between the center and the periphery (this becomes clear in the book's epigraph, which cites Tomasz Zarycki, a major scholar on the question of peripheries). He is also concerned with questions of national and regional identity, or identities that exceed national borders, such as the idea of a united Slavic people. In this context, the Intermarium naturally functions as an alias for Central Europe and the pursuit of an ideology that would link the nations in this part of the

²⁶*Obnażanie kompleksów i mitów*, interview with S. Frąckiewicz and Z. Szczerek, <http://lubimyczytac.pl/aktualnosci/3060/obnazanie-kompleksow-i-mitow/>.

²⁷The latest discussion in this vein took place in the pages of the bimonthly journal "Nowa Europa Wschodnia" 2017 issue 2, initiated with articles by A. Balcer and Z. Szczerek, and later on with contributions by P. Czapliński, W. Górecki, and L. Włodek.

²⁸See P. Czapliński, *Poruszona mapa. Wyobrażenia geograficzno-kulturowa polskiej literatury przełomu XX i XXI wieku*, Kraków 2016.

continent, an area usually perceived by the world as an array of curiosities. These are Szczerek's preoccupations, for he has no agenda to revive the Intermarium. *Intermarium* is a final reckoning. Despite its mocking airs, this is a tragic book that diagnoses the rise of dangerous asocial tendencies in Central Europe. It is the story of disappointed peripheries and their rebellion against an over-idealized center:

Poland has rebelled against the West, for the West has turned out to be something quite different from what it was supposed to be. Golden, dazzling neon marquis have been replaced by banal advertisements for Rossmann and Lidl. This was supposed to be the land of riches, but it turned out to be the land of the extreme left. We were supposed to get babes in fast cars from Playboy centerfolds, and instead we get the feminists' pep talks that the word "babe" demeans women, and we get scolded by the Greens that fast cars poison the atmosphere. Let alone the fact that Playboy discontinued their nudie pics. [I, p. 331].

Gonzo Reportage: Approaching Fiction

The rich tradition of countless historical journeys to the East lies alongside the legacy of the *Kresy* and martyrological Polish literature to form the intertextual foundation of these Ukrianian journeys. These eastward journeys include Mickiewicz's exoticizing *Crimean Sonnets* and varied accounts of traveling in pursuit of spiritual transformation, such as Herman Hesse's *Journey to the East*, the beatnik generation's Eastern-inspired attempts at psychological renewal, as well as the hippies' similar efforts in the counterculture broadly conceived. In the chapter titled *Beat*, the protagonist of *Mordor's Coming...* explicitly references the myth of the countercultural vagabond, conceived to a large degree by the beatnik generation (widely known in Poland since the early 1990s). The book also alludes to Jack Kerouac's book *On the Road*:

And so we took off for this alleged East, and we kept going, going, going. On mini-busses, trains, busted up Ladas. This is how it went. Instead of Benzedrine we had the balsam Vigor. Instead of rural America and Mexico in the '50s... we had Ukraine. But it's all the same. We grabbed our backpacks and hit the road." [MC, p. 41].

Like his later book *Highway No. 7*, *Mordor's Coming...* is a road novel clearly inspired by Kerouac's book and the host of literary and film variations on the genre that followed it. For the most part, this journey is modeled after countercultural templates represents the pursuit of adventure and a taste of the exotic rather than spiritual transformation. This being said, by the end of the book, the narrator manages to achieve the latter as well. The hero-narrator Szczerek is not a contemplative wandering aesthete, but a vagabond or bum. He is off in search of adventures, wending through the post-socialist morass, compelled by places entirely missing from tourists' maps, places where "there is nothing at all," perhaps recalling Stasiuk's well-known Babadag.

The author smuggles a cue for how to read *Mordor's Coming* and its highly subjective and energetic narration into the chapter called *Gonzo*. This term seems useful here as a descriptor of

the protagonist's journalistic reports published on Polish online forums, but perhaps it also functions as a marker of the narration's formal identity as a whole. The genre of journalism referenced in the chapter title is somewhat obscure in Poland: this is a genre that scandalizes and personally engages the reporter. The protagonist articulates these very strategies in his own brief definition of *gonzo* reportage, which is supposed to be "filthy, strong, cruel. This is the gonzo essence. In gonzo there is booze, fags, drugs, chicks. And there are definitely vulgarities." [BC, p. 99]. We learn even more from the reports he excerpts, written in the gonzo style:

I wrote a few gonzos in Odessa. Take, for instance, the one about the lady who rented out her apartment and murdered her guests with a leaky gas stove. The lady robbed them of all their possessions and then, working with an old geezer (for what kind of lady would she be if she didn't have a geezer in tow) she carried the bodies up to the roof of the housing block where no one ever went and just left them there. The bodies were only discovered when it got popular to play around on Google Earth.

This is the kind of drivel I wrote, and well, people read it. [BC, pp. 106-7]

The progenitor of this variation of reportage (or perhaps reportage "style," as English-language sources define it) was the American journalist Hunter S. Thompson who, until recently, was mainly known in Poland from the film adaptation of his 1971 book *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. In 1998, Terry Gilliam directed a film by the same title, featuring Johnny Depp in the main role. In Poland, the film met with critical reviews, although it became a cult favorite among many cinephiles.²⁹ The Polish translation of Thompson's book — which is hailed as the touchstone classic of gonzo journalism — came out in 2008 with the literal title *Lęk i odraza w Las Vegas*. The publication was not followed up with any other translations from the genre. The reportage style only started getting attention in Poland when the *Ha!art* periodical put out a themed issue on the subject in 2013. The issue included the founding text for gonzo journalism: Thompson's *Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved* (1970), translated to Polish by Ziemowit Szczerek.³⁰ Generally speaking, we might describe Thompson's gonzo journalism as a countercultural project falling under the banner of New Journalism that embraced the right to generate fiction and the exposition of the reporter's first-person subjectivity, often yielding the portrait of a new and "unhinged" reporter who distorts reality freely. The reporter would carry out this operation through his spontaneous reactions, linguistic freedom and altered states of consciousness prompted by alcohol and narcotics. Most importantly, gonzo disassociated itself from the objectivity and referentiality traditionally required of reportage, although it was by no means the first aesthetic school to take up this cause. For now, we will bracket the question of whether gonzo journalism is just one auteur's variation on the broader tradition of New Journalism (associated with writers like Tom Wolfe, Truman Capote

²⁹For unknown reasons, the film was screened in Poland under its French title: *Las Vegas Parano*. This adaptation was in fact a remake, for the first film adaptation of Thompson's book came out in 1980 as *Where the Buffalo Roam* with an outlandish performance by Bill Murray. The first adaptation is virtually unknown in Poland.

³⁰See: H. S. Thompson, *Upadek i demoralizacja na Derby Kentucky*, trans. Z. Szczerek, "Ha!art" 2013, issue 1 [https://issuu.com/korporacja_haart/docs/ha_41_calosc/1?ff=true&e=3640121/10661728]

and Norman Mailer) that seeks to subjectivize reportage and enhance its literary qualities.³¹ Wolfe, Capote and Mailer, on the other hand, have long been known and adored in Poland (as authors of reportage no less). Thompson and his gonzo style, on the other hand, were a discovery of recent years. This publication history surely had a direct influence on Szczerek's work. Thompson's texts often spout fantasies about unrealized or botched journalism assignments. In a similar vein, Szczerek's protagonist sends his editors sensational reports from Ukraine in the gonzo style. In keeping with Thompson's work, the heroes of Szczerek's book do not limit themselves to the drunken inebriation so canonical for eastward-traveling Poles; they also help themselves to LSD, colloquially referred to as acid (see: the chapter titled *Acid*). Experimentation with LSD often comes hand in hand with explicit references to the American literary inspiration for these benders (or rather, its film adaptation, since they refer to it by its Polish-rendered title, *Las Vegas Parano*: "Almost hardcore is hardcore; almost *Fear and Loathing* is *Fear and Loathing*, no? [...] The Vigor balsam calmed my nerves enough that I was able to gulp down some acid. Indeed. Almost *parano* is *parano*." [MC, pp. 74-75]³²

Szczerek's protagonist quotes from his own gonzo journalism with the caveat that he writes this way for popularity and profit. He has no illusions about his readers' lowly tastes and knows he must appease them, ideally by rendering all cultural stereotypes in vivid hyperbole. The book's main narrative thread, however, also crafted in the gonzo style, identifies with the protagonist's actions in ironic scare quotes, while the epigraph cited earlier and the novel's conclusion suggest a more serious tone. The chapter titled *Gonzo* provides the book with a reflexive identity marker for its poetics (with exaggeration as a governing principle). At the same time, the author points out the mercantile motives behind this writing style (which was originally conceived as an anti-establishment rebellion in its American context). For Szczerek, to write gonzo is to adapt one's style to the demands of a new medium and the nuances of online journalism that caters to clicks:

So that's how I started to professionally specialize in the art of deception. Fibs. Speaking as an expert, I might call this the art of preserving national stereotypes. As a rule, nasty ones. But it pays. Because nothing sells better in Poland than Schadenfreude. I know it all too well. All I had to do was write a few texts about Ukraine in a gonzo tone and the commissions started coming in. I must have dazzled them with my Ukrainian drivel and dissimulation. It had to be filthy, strong, cruel. This is the gonzo essence. In gonzo there is booze, fags, drugs, chicks. And there are definitely vulgarities. So that's how I wrote, and it all went swimmingly. I got a great gig as staff writer for one of those up-and-coming websites out of Krakow. Every week I had to send in a fat wedge of Ukrainian meat. They wanted hardcore, so hardcore's what they got. [...] Well, at any rate, they paid. They funded more trips to Ukraine. So I stuck with my deceptive articles and I invented

³¹See: Z. Bauer, *Dziennikarstwo "gonzo": epizod czy trwały trend w dziennikarstwie?*, [in:] *Dziennikarstwo a literatura w XX i XXI wieku*, ed. K. Wolny-Zmorzyński, W. Furman, J. Snopek, Warsaw 2011; B. Stopel, *Gonzo bez lęku i odrazy*, "Ha!art" 2013, issue 1; I. Adamczewska, *Wariacje na temat pewnego paktu. O dziennikarstwie "gonzo," "Czytanie Literatury. Łódzkie Studia Literaturoznawcze"* 2014, issue 3, and *Gonzo journalism*, "Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich" 2014, vol. 1.

³²This passage is mostly devoted to describing a narcotic-fueled experience of reality, but it ends with a clash between Poles and a Ukrainian who has come along for the journey. Szczerek plays with the Polish word for acid (*kwas*) and its other colloquial meaning as a conflict, disagreement or fight. The dispute ultimately brings about the protagonist's spiritual transformation.

such hardcore tales you'd have to be a fool to fall for them. I turned Ukraine into a crackhouse on wheels, baked à la Kusturica, where anything can happen and everything does happen. The wild, wild east. Poles loved it. They kept clicking and reading. And the more they clicked, the faster the cash flowed from the giddy advertisers. In Poland, selling negative stereotypes about our neighbors brought in loads of cash. [MC, pp. 99-100].

This, of course, is a satire of online journalism, but it also communicates a self-ironizing signal to the reader, nodding to the poetics of grotesque exaggeration that inform the book's overarching tone. Gonzo functions here as a form of buffoonery (albeit mercantile). But derisive hyperbole can also be mobilized as a narrative tactic of cultural disillusionment:

I even started to love this morass. In Poland I hated it. Here, I had no choice. I always suspected that traveling to the post-soviet East was a journey into the very depths of what we despise within our own country. And in fact, that is the main reason Poles even come here. It's a journey into Schadenfreude, a journey you embark on only so you have something to go home to. Because here, it's essentially the same as it is back home, just intensified. It's a wasteland of everything we tried to eject from ourselves. I always suspected this, although only a gonzo journalist could really write it. Any other way and it would come out crooked.

The protagonist's choice to stylize the narrative as gonzo journalism allows him to articulate the author's own postcolonial position. The Polish fascination with Ukraine manifests itself as the rejection of Poland's own "eastness" while Poland is absorbed into Europe and the Occident. In reality, we are no less "eastern," we merely imitate the West more extremely, and by traveling eastward, we veil our cultural complexes.

In Szczerek's book, gonzo poetics are only strictly affiliated with the protagonist's paraphrased works of "reportage." On the other hand, criticism on *Mordor's Coming...* tends to identify the style of the hero's hyperbolic stories with the overarching authorial narrative.³³ Moreover, in an interview I cite below, the author himself claims that the book was written as "gonzo journalism about gonzo journalism," which speaks to Szczerek's fascination with this mode (remember: he is also Thompson's translator). And if we seek out other representatives of the gonzo school in Polish reportage (Adamczewska also situates Jacek Hugo-Bader's writing in this category) then certainly Szczerek, with his vivid authorial voice developed in *Mordor's Coming...* and refined in his subsequent books, can be included in this aesthetic category (although formally, *Mordor's Coming...* is the only book to reflexively thematize gonzo).³⁴ Szczerek's nonchalant literary diction, which already had readers spellbound when his first book came out, is a hybrid of erudition and popular slang written in a humorous and at times ironic shorthand. He masterfully manipulates stereotypes using satirical condescension, generic (tragi)comic scenarios, and a fluid narration that avails itself of colloquial speech and occasionally even veers cavalier. To the gonzo formula more broadly among Polish writers, we would have to proceed with caution. It would be too easy to project seemingly gonzo at-

³³See: I. Adamczewska, op. cit., p. 196; J. Szydłowska, op. cit., pp. 384-387.

³⁴Mariusz Szczygieł also follows Adamczewska's lead in his article that closely examines American gonzo. He identifies Szczerek and Hugo-Bader as local representatives of the style. See: Szczygieł, *Gonzo*, "Książki. Magazyn do czytania" 2017, issue 3.

tributes onto Polish reportage. Yet the reflexive stylization we find in Szczerek's work (and most likely in Hugo-Bader's as well) is an entirely different case. It means something else to unconsciously meet these requisites without ever knowing they belong to a genre, model, writing technique, style, or simply Thompson's personal idiom.³⁵

Lie-Reportage

The direct allusion made in Szczerek's first book to gonzo journalism poses a question about the status of literary reportage as the literature of fact: non-fiction. The blurbs on the back cover of *Mordor's Coming...* seem to suggest this is a work of bona fide reportage: "A bracing, shocking reportage" (Andrij Bondar), "*Mordor's Coming...* proves that the genre of reportage has not yet been exhausted and is crossing into a fresh new stage," (Sławomir Shuty). The brief "About the Author" note characterizes Szczerek as a journalist first and foremost. Reviewers also regularly tie *Mordor's Coming...* (and Szczerek's other books) to the reportage genre, and some even suggest that Szczerek practiced gonzo journalism in his earlier work for the press. In this case, the descriptor "gonzo" seems to apply to both protagonist and author.³⁶ On the other hand, the author himself cautions us against such a straightforward reading:

[...] what fascinated me in non-fiction is its subjective element, its way of pushing reality through the filter of the self. And if we're honest, the whole book is made up of perspectives — of many perspectives. I really had fun with this, with creating a specific construction from a very different set of views. Views on Poland, Ukraine, the East, all things Slavic... *Mordor's Coming to Eat Us* was not written as an example of gonzo journalism, it was written as gonzo journalism about gonzo journalism. The hero-journalist classifies his own work as gonzo, choosing this convention. It's not my fault that people read *Mordor's Coming* as a work of non-fiction.³⁷

On the very first page of these tails of Ukrainian travels, we encounter a distinct sign of fictionality (distancing the book from the author's identity): the hero-narrator is Łukasz Pończyński, an online journalist. In a certain sense, Łukasz figures as the author's alter ego, for Szczerek himself often journeyed into Ukraine and contributed to informational online hubs (although never in the hero's sensational and inventive style, for his political analyses had an entirely serious tenor!). As the book goes on, the travel accounts continuously diverge from the facts. For instance, the first trip he describes allegedly took place in 2002, while the circumstances seem to apply to an entirely different moment. In the passage, he describes a colossal monument to Stepan Bandera standing in Lviv that was actually not erected until 2007.

³⁵One author who appears in the gonzo issue associates this "model" with the work of Sławomir Shuty and the lesser known Jan Sobczak, Piotr Milewski, Kornel Maliszewski and Kazimierz Malinowski. This creates the impression of promoting a particular scene. The author of strictly-defined travel books are most akin to gonzo must be Wojciech Cejrowski – see: J. Bińczycki, *Sporysz zamiast pejotlu*, "Ha!art" 2013, issue 1. See also: K. Frukacz, *Amerykańskie Nowe Dziennikarstwo po polsku? Transfer poetyk, problemy adaptacyjne*, [in:] *Adaptacje II. Transfer kulturowe*, ed. W. Hajduk-Gawron, Katowice 2015.

³⁶For example, this idea comes from a reviewer who wrote about Szczerek's "confession of past sins" – see: M. Szymański, *Bloki przypiekane słońcem*, dwutygodnik.com, <http://www.dwutygodnik.com/arttykul/4427-bloki-przypiekane-slonecem.html?print=1&print=1>.

³⁷*Obnazanie kompleksów...*, op. cit., <http://lubimyczytac.pl/aktualnosci/3060/obnazanie-kompleksow-i-mitow>.

The border between the hero-narrator and the author is never sharply defined, but we can still trace its contours. One critic who analyzes Szczerek's first book as a work of gonzo journalism astutely evokes Ryszard Nycz's notion of the sylleptic subject: the construction of a textual "I" — often narrated in the first person — so prevalent in contemporary literature (we also see this in the work of Dorota Masłowska and Michał Witkowski), and even historical literature (Bruno Schulz, Witold Gombrowicz). I would argue that this concept is more relevant for Szczerek's *Tattoo.....*³⁸ This device is associated with literature that blurs the facts, taking in the naïve reader (take, for instance, the passage describing the students on a pilgrimage to Drohobycz to "find the Street of Crocodiles," which is the effect of Schulz's own construction of a hero-narrator). This feature does not describe non-fiction. To even apply this device to gonzo prose, or more generally speaking, to reportage, is an indicator of the writing's literary (fictional) status.

That's why I created this hero. To push him into the kind of devilry I myself could never indulge in. Gonzo, his literary genre, is premised on pure invention. And in fact, all literature that falls under the English heading of fiction is exactly this: invention. Gonzo is a form of fiction, even if it is modeled after non-fiction. Theoretically speaking, gonzo has no responsibility to stick strictly to the facts in order to describe certain mechanisms. But Łukasz, my hero, uses the gonzo formula to embellish the stereotypes that Polish readers hunger for.³⁹

Szczerek's book plays with the convention of reportage, and he styles his work as gonzo reportage to mark this. We must take this gesture in scare quotes, or at least bear in mind the tenuous entanglement between hero and author. I would argue that Szczerek's other works of "reportage" might be described as examples of "lie-reportage."⁴⁰ This phrase alludes to Konwicki's formula of his "lie-diaries." As in its original context, the phrase marks texts as literature. The term "lie-diaries" first appeared in Konwicki's *The Calendar and the Hourglass* (1976) and might also be used to characterize his later "diaries." These works are invented literary constructions (albeit in the "home chronicle" style) and reflexive responses that surely take their cue from Gombrowicz. Writing in the "lie-diary" mode, Konwicki fictionalizes the subject (as a sylleptic "I") and even fabricates his travels and the adventures they entail, even taking his hero to Mongolia! Szczerek evokes Gombrowicz in a similar vein, and his work might be situated alongside Konwicki's as literary creations. This supports our decision to classify Szczerek's work on the side of literature. The author himself even makes this suggestion by distinguishing non-fiction from the literary *Mordor's Coming...*:

I have always been compelled by playing with reality, myths, a stereotypical vision of the world, the distortion of reality through personal perception and through the media's eye — that's why

³⁸See: I. Adamczewska, op. cit., pp. 194-195. "Ja sylleptyczne – mówiąc najprościej – to ja, które musi być rozumiane na dwa odmienne sposoby **równocześnie**: a mianowicie, jako prawdziwe i jako zmyślane, jako empiryczne i jako tekstowe, jako autentyczne i jako fikcyjno-powieściowe" – R. Nycz, *Tropy "ja". Koncepcje podmiotowości w literaturze polskiej ostatniego stulecia*, "Teksty Drugie" 1994, issue 2, p. 22.

³⁹Z. Szczerek, *Synowie buraczanych pól* op. cit., <http://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kultura/paszporty/1569197,2,rozmowa-z-ziemowitem-szczerkiem.read>.

⁴⁰This classification is also proposed by critics who have analyzed *Mordor's Coming...* in terms of its relationship with classical journalism and its gonzo variation. Yet both critics are referencing the hyperbolic style of the protagonist's "gonzos" paraphrased in the text. See: J. Szydłowska, op. cit., p. 386 ; I. Adamczewska, op. cit., p. 187.

the book came out this way. This mechanism of bending the truth has also always compelled me precisely because who am I but a little bugger leeching off reality, for I work in the current events column of a major news forum. But when I write these articles, I write them straight, without distortion. That's why my distortions landed me with a book: which is to say, with literature.⁴¹

Yet the author seems most comfortable in the context of these fiction-generating geopoetics, rather than classic, authentic travel reportage. This mode even shapes the book's anecdotes that seem strictly historical. The same formula plays out in *Tattoo...* in its description of historical travels along Poland's postwar eastern border (the so-called Curzon Line). The attentive reader will notice direct references to Gombrowicz's novel *Transatlantyk*, including an explicit nod to the Society of the Chevaliers of the Spur!). Szczerek is in fact reproducing Gombrowicz's portrait of the political climate surrounding Polish emigration. In his portrait of the Zalizhchyky summer resort in what was the southernmost "Mediterranean" resort town in prewar Poland, we get a taste of the twilight of the Polish *Kresy*, tinged with the nostalgic but somehow preapocalyptic atmosphere of Konwicki's *Chronicle of Amorous Accidents* (and Wajda's film adaptation) or even Nikita Mikhalkov's film "Burnt by the Sun." Szczerek liberally helps himself to cultural legends of the period as his source material, so his account is hardly a strictly historical and political discourse, but instead gives an overview of cultural images and stereotypes for narrating the history of Eastern Poland. Szczerek continues to elaborate on the issue of national images and illusions in *Intermarium*, which offers a catalog of invented regions alongside entirely real ones.

Imagined Geography

One more essential feature of Szczerek's book that links it to literary fiction bears mention. The author often refers to creating cultural maps and reproduces this practice himself. I would argue that Szczerek's books can be examined in the context of territories conceived through fiction, or imagined geography. This concept (also articulated as creative or imaginative geography) draws from the work of the "godfather" of postcolonialism, Edward W. Said (imaginative geography). It refers to culturally and politically determined geographic figures that exert a specific influence on colonial practices and self-colonizing practices alike.⁴² In Szczerek's books that treat Ukrainian themes, Western Ukraine seems to feed off the nostalgic and idyllic myth of Galicia, while Eastern Ukraine figures as the titular Mordor. On top of the reality of the East, Szczerek superimposes the mythical evil region, borrowed, of course, from Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. This name, so fantastic in origin, is even introduced by the Ukrainian character, Taras, who accompanies the hero into Eastern Ukraine: "Here, everything starts to blur together, he said. Here it's all the same. Whether it's Ukraine, Russia, whatever. Even Mordor." [MC, p. 165]. This moniker has also appeared in the political press in reference to Putin's Russia, particularly in the context of the war in Ukraine. Interestingly enough, in August of 2015, Ukrainian President Poroshenko called "New Russia" precisely this, referring to the rebel regions in Dnipropetrovsk and Luhansk, and in January of 2016, the Ukrainian version

⁴¹*Obnażanie kompleksów...*, op. cit., <http://lubimyczytac.pl/aktualnosci/3060/obnazanie-kompleksow-i-mitow/2>.

⁴²A broader discussion of this issue can be found in Elżbieta Rybicka's theoretical project on geopoetics: *Geopoetyka. Przestrzeń i miejsce we współczesnych teoriach i praktykach literackich*, Krakow 2014.

of Google Translate offered “Mordor” as a translation for “Russia.” By availing himself of this term, Szczerek was perhaps capturing the spirit of the time. The narrator of *Tattoo...* strives to distance himself from this Ukrainian self-stereotype when the phrase comes up during his visit to the hometown of the overthrown President Yanukovych: “an anti-Maidan stronghold:”

These were horrid thoughts, thoughts that would turn these people into orcs out of Mordor. This was only useful as fuel for antipathy for these people, and the whole of pro-Maidan Ukraine seemed to feed off these antipathies. These are zombies, they told me in Kiev and Lviv. These are bad, ugly people who are products of a bad, ugly world. Don't even try to understand them, they told me. They're orcs. So many things pissed me off in Maidan-era Ukraine, but this? This pissed me off the most. [TT, p. 189]

Of course, in the title of Szczerek's debut book, the name “Mordor” carries a range of meanings, embracing “easterness” at large and therefore threatening the Poles' secure sense of “westernness.” The name also functions on a broader scale, figuring generally as the East for the West:

Mordor is not like Tolkien's Middle Earth, where elves are perhaps something like the French, the hobbits resemble the English, and the dwarves are perhaps some version of Germans. Mordor is that vague, gray and inhospitable space looming to the east, where monstrous orcs with kohlrabi mugs do dwell. For this is exactly how the West has always perceived Eastern Europe, and continues to do so today.⁴³

Perhaps in the vein of Andrzej Stasiuk, Szczerek conjures a geopoetics replete with so many cultural visions of the East in order to put pressure on the timeless and rudimentary division of Europe into two halves, a division whose roots reach past Yalta and the Iron Curtain. In the eighteenth century, the historical division of Europe into North and South gradually gave way to an opposition between East and West. At the same time, an intermediate zone appeared: Eastern Europe figured as a construct somewhat less exotic than the Orient that allowed one to define what it means to be “Western.” In his book on the concept of Eastern Europe and its origins in the French Enlightenment, Larry Wolff reconstructs the process by which this “invention” of Enlightenment thought came to be, positing an undeveloped space dependent on colonial impetus from the West.⁴⁴ This space would be a European province less remote and barbaric than the Orient, culturally and spatially defined as a societally immature and a poorly developed cultural periphery: the antithesis of Europe.

Constructions in this vein have tainted the West's perception of our region until the end of the twentieth century, if not to this day. This paradigm has also influenced the formation of entrenched phantasmagorical visions of the region in popular culture. Invented regions with odd names are not unique to fantasy literature (i.e. Mordor): this paradigm plays out in popular culture that posits an unreal and faraway Eastern Europe from a Western perspective. Ziemowit Szczerek's blog is enigmatically titled *Between Rurytania and Molvania* (*Między*

⁴³Z. Szczerek, *Synowie buraczanych pól*, op. cit., <http://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kultura/paszporty/1569197,1,rozmowa-z-ziemowitem-szczerkiem.read>.

⁴⁴See L. Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe. The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, Stanford 1994.

Rurytaniq a Molwaniq), although if anything, this speaks to the author's penchant for invented names. In the last sketch of *Intermarium* (which had already been published as a piece of journalism), Szczerek lists the many visions of an essential Eastern Europe that circulate in the mass culture of the West. He cites regions such as Rurytania, Borduria, Syldavia, Elbonia, Molwania, Slaka and Krakozja, places that are all condensations of ubiquitous stereotypes. They tend to represent a vision of Eastern Europe as a space that is simultaneously totalitarian, authoritarian, backwards and primitive. These visions have been concocted in the West in order to domesticate the continent's strange and sometimes threatening eastern peripheries. At this point, I will cite a longer fragment of the text because it plays a decisive role in defining the book's tone as a whole:

I've been all over Central Europe. From the Adriatic to the Black Sea, from the Balkans to the Baltics. I've passed through all those places: Borduria, Rurytania, Molwania, Elbonia, Krakozja. All those nonexistent invented nations that stand for our part of Europe in Western popular culture. The reflection of a stereotype. It all started with Rurytania. At the turn of the century, a British man named Anthony Hope made it up. He needed an appropriate setting for his romance novels. It's a bit exotic, but then again, a bit not. The general idea is that you start in the "real world" (the West) and from there set off for a strange region not yet civilized, still bogged down in feudalism, where you live through strange adventures, all the while going between a German-speaking aristocracy and a simple, scuffed-up folk that resemble, as one of Hopes epigones once wrote, "dirty Slavs and Huns."

And this is precisely how the fin-de-siècle West, gazing out over the Austro-Hungarian Empire, imagined Central Europe. Later on, between the World Wars, the peaceful and rural Rurytania, threatened constantly by their stronger neighbors (or perhaps by dynasties or revolutions), gave way to other imaginary visions: Borduria and Syldavia. These countries come from Belgian artist Hergé and his Tintin comics. Borduria and Syldavia together embraced all the prewar stereotypes available on the subject of Europe's eastern lands. The comic features Cyrillic writing alongside minarets, medieval monarchs (Syldavia), authoritarianism enforced by uniformed thugs, and even nationalist monuments of moustachioed tyrants (Borduria). [...] In a kind of Disney Land we find, for instance, Brutopia, where everything is filthy, tyrannical, evil and cold. In *Naked Lunch*, we find Annexia. From Ursula Le Guin, we get Orsinia. The British novelist Malcolm Bradbury created Slaka, the muddy, tawdry nation somewhere off in Central Europe, replete with socialist absurdists, money launderers, opportunists and cowards all kissing up to the Western tourist one moment and government informers the next. And when communism collapsed, popular culture in the West responded immediately by spawning Elbonia in Scott Adams' Dilbert comics (yes, the very same ones that appeared in "Gazeta Praca"). Dilbert, as a corporate-rat-capitalist sales specialist, flies to this "Elbonia" to "teach the ways of capitalism." Or perhaps "flies" is not quite the right word, for the Elbonian Airline offers something more like a catapult that shoots its passengers into the sky. The whole nation is wallowing in mud, and its people wear fur caps and full-coverage beards (women and children notwithstanding). Molvania, meanwhile, is the Eastern European country described in a fictional series of guidebook parodies: here (perhaps it comes as no surprise) it is dirty, authoritarian and intolerant. Everyone has busted teeth and they all stink of garlic vodka. Later on, Steven Spielberg brought us Krakozhia, which is presumably some former Soviet Republic shaken every moment by military upheavals. This, more or less, is how the West sees our region, and Sasha Baron Cohen prolonged this tradition just a bit further with Borat [I, pp. 337-339].

Szczerek ironically keeps up this legacy, using his “Ukrainian” books to concoct even more monikers for communist and post-communist space such as Sovietia and Postsovetia (at some point, Szczerek titles an article on Belarus *Blackhole-Rus*, or in Polish, *Czarnadziurorus*), and in *Intermarium*, he calls the formerly German regions *Exgermania* (*Poniemiecja*). At least some of these strange place names can be attributed to the author (Sovietia, Postsovetia, Exgermania, Karpatia), but Szczerek is also referencing xenonyms: cultural epithets for eastern territories coined in the West and cited in the excerpt above. In *Tattoo with a Trident*, Szczerek also evokes the local Ukrainian epithet Pachanat [TT, pp. 120-121].

Unlike Stasiuk, Szczerek’s literary mode thrives off this hybrid of nostalgia and subjective imagination. He is wary towards his own, personal nostalgia, but explores imagined worlds that are social constructs: national self-images and images of foreign neighbors, nationalist mythologies, messianic ideologies of the Slavic essence, the eastern essence, the western essence, ethnogenic fantasies that verge into vivid fabrications, historical blind spots and pathological national narcissisms. These phantasmagorias seem all too amusing in *Intermarium*. Take, for instance, the fantasy of the Lechite Empire originally referencing Kąłubek, but now evolving freely into something entirely new, or perhaps the equally ancient mania of the Macedonians, who have reimagined their capital city Skopje as a Disneyland of pseudo-antiquity. The book also includes a few less jolly cases, such as the fascist salutes of the Right Wing party in Slovakia and the Ukrainian neo-Nazi organization Azov.

Intermarium is a comic and chilling reportage-guidebook for the phantasmagoric Intermarium region. At times it deals with political projects like Mitteleuropa, the Intermarium and Baltoscandia, but the most compelling aspect of Szczerek’s book is its expansion of this imaginative geography into futurist visions that veer folkloric yet capture real contemporary politics, real feelings of national pride, and real stereotypes used to describe the self and one’s neighbors. *Intermarium* also paints the portrait of a created geography that offers alternative histories for these nations and peoples.

Szczerek not only evokes Western European epithets for eastern regions at the service of a postcolonial critique: in fact, he seems invested in these inventions. Szczerek seems particularly smitten with Rurytania and its idyllic vision of a primitive eastern Valhalla. He also seems to fancy the authoritarian and totalitarian Borduria. Perhaps it is precisely between these two extremes that the novel unfolds, narrating the author’s travels throughout the imagined geography of East and Central Europe under the banner of the Intermarium it shall never be:

So I go around these Rurytania that alternate with Bordurias. I travel around the Intermarium, dreamed up by so many, but never possible. Never possible precisely because they made Bordurias in its place, and Bordurias, with all their nationalist resentments, are incapable of ever reaching a place of understanding and united, can do nothing at all. (I, p. 341)

Intermarium is effectively a guidebook for the pseudo-community of Central Europe, for it turns out that in fact the only concept gluing together the mosaic of nations that makes up the Intermarium is this isolating national idea:

Central Europe, that hapless Intermarium, is a place where the ethnic idea has truly degenerated and become a caricature of itself. Every place is the center of the world. Every nation, even if it can only claim a population of one or two million, must draw up, tighten up, and touch up its own history. (I, p. 139)

Intermarium is therefore the tale of Poland's neighbors near and far and their identity crises. In fact, each one of these neighbors imagines itself as a strong ethnic nation and world power: Great Serbia, Great Macedonia, Great Albania, Great Hungary, and so on, and so forth. This idea is conveyed through the labyrinth of fabricated borders that makes up the map on the book's inside cover. If we look closely at Great (not to mention entirely ordinary) Poland, some aspects of the map seem amusing. Take, for instance, the giant scale of the Masovian Voivodeship, or the Lesser Poland Voivodeship, or perhaps both together. Szczerek represents these national preconceptions in a spirit that seems to conform to the old aphoristic definition of the nation attributed to the French Historian Ernest Renan. According to this definition, a nation is "a group of people united by a mistaken view about the past and a hatred of their neighbors." Just as the historical notion of the Intermarium really only appeals to the Poles, this ethnomosaic dreamt up by Szczerek is ultimately a tale of Poland alone: a Poland viewed within the broader context of fantastical dreams of a true and absolute national form.

In the context of imagined geography, Szczerek's books become legible and reliable as explorations of cultural maps rather than mimetic travel reports. At the end of the day, Szczerek is writing about the cultural imagination of space and national phantasms. If we adopt the perspective of traditional writing on authenticity in reportage, we might say that Szczerek deals with fictions. These fictions, however, are cultural compositions (both ideological and political) that enact critical displacements of reality (the real). The books of Szczerek's oeuvre I analyze here, although they vary among themselves, might be grouped under the category of literary reportage (broadly conceived) in that they fully exploit literary modalities, including the mode so often exorcized from reportage — fiction.

KEYWORDS

Literariness

GONZO REPORTAGE

Polish contemporary literature

ABSTRACT:

This article discusses the writing of Ziemowit Szczerek in the context of its genre credentials as travel reportage. Because Szczerek's work can be read as literary reportage, this article addresses the controversy over the genre's referentiality and literary status. It also discusses gonzo journalism, which was a source of inspiration for Szczerek, as well as creative devices that problematize issues of fictionality in reportage in reference to themes of imagined geography (E. W. Said), cultural self-stereotypes and hetero-stereotypes, and intertextual relations. The argument leads to the claim that Szczerek's literary reportage is deeply embedded in creative fiction, perhaps in the vein of Andrzej Stasiuk's work, and that this only enhances the value of his work.

travel reportage

Ziemowit Szczerek

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Travel Styles: Ziemowit Szczerek's *Mordor is Coming to Eat Us*

Cezary Rosiński

To begin, I will introduce three contexts.

The first context: A course in the Adam Mickiewicz University's Faculty of Polish Studies. Due to the small number of students, the group meets in the instructor's office. The cramped quarters might put some ill at ease, but for the most part, they foster the atmosphere of a close circle devoted to a common goal. This sentiment has some relevance for a question posed by the instructor regarding the source of adventure. Guiding the students to a specific response, the instructor asks one of them to open the door, and after a moment, repeats the request. The doors are opened. Where does adventure come from? Why, it comes from outside...

The second context: Jean-Paul Sartre's "Venice from my Window"¹ and Marielle Macé's commentary on the text in *A Literary Style: Looking Out on Life from a Balcony*.² At the beginning of the text, we see the French philosopher sitting by the window of a Venetian hotel. Sartre

¹ J.-P. Sartre, "Venice From My Window", trans. C. Turner, in *Portraits*, Chicago 2017 (1964).

² Michelle Macé, *A Literary Style: Looking Out on Life from a Balcony*, https://villagillet.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/mace_marielle_en.pdf (December 29 2017)

gazes out onto the lagoon and describes not so much the space spread out before him as its highly specific configuration: the lack of geographic coordinates due to the fact that his view is cut off by the window frame irks the philosopher. What can we make of this perceptive moment? The philosopher sees a Venice deprived of a horizon, for he is “condemned to short-sightedness” (“which prevents him from projecting, and for him, all action begins with projection.”)³ After all, the place from which he looks down on the city is merely one part of the image circumscribed by a frame that restricts the visual field.⁴

The third context: *Ghosts of Home. The Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory*⁵, or, Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer’s journey to Chernivtsi (formerly Czernowitz), the birthplace of Hirsch’s parents. Hirsch is also the author of *Family Frames. Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*, a book in which she (according to Aleksandra Ubertowska) forges a pathway between concept and experience, and between intellectual and affective attempts to reckon with intergenerational memory and the traumatic past.⁶ The book’s first and most revealing section, “We would not have come without you,” tells the story of a family trip organized in 1998. The authors were accompanied by Hirsch’s parents, who had emigrated from Czernowitz in the mid-1940s. This “roots trip” (Hirsch’s phrase) is an attempt to re-encounter places tied to the Hirsches’ past within the space of this multicultural city.⁷ The authors are not concerned with the city’s historical fate, but rather, with “Czernowitz in the Bukowina, now twice lost to Jews, came to persist only as a projection—as an idea physically disconnected from its geographical location and tenuously dependent on the vicissitudes of personal, familial, and cultural memory.”⁸

These contexts introduce three perspectives: the first being a new experience precipitated by a shift in spatial coordinates, the second being a new form of space conditioned by its point of observation, and the third being the forging of theoretical concepts based on the somatic experience of coming into contact with space and its layers of accumulated meanings. All three perspectives will support our approach to Ziemowit Szczerek’s work of reportage, *Mordor’s Coming to Eat Us: A Secret History of the Slavs*,⁹ and its narratives of travel through Ukraine.

The publisher of *Mordor’s Coming...* promotes the book as the tale of Polish “backpackers” journeying to the East in search of adventure and the “hardcore.” The destination of the tourists’ explorations is Ukraine, and they travel the region by every possible means of transportation, using trains, buses and their beloved “*marshrutka*” mini-buses. It hardly matters what vehicle they end up in so long as it’s old and broken-down. As they go along, the wanderers pick up stories they will share with others back in Poland, but only after

³ Ibid, p. 2

⁴ Ibid

⁵ M. Hirsch, L. Spitzer, *Ghosts of Home. The Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory*, Berkley 2010.

⁶ See: A. Ubertowska, *Praktykowanie postpamięci. Marianne Hirsch i fotograficzne widma z Czernowitza*, “Teksty Drugie,” 2013 issue 4, p. 269.

⁷ M. Hirsch, L. Spitzer, op. cit., p. xvii.

⁸ Ibid, p. xv

⁹ Z. Szczerek, *Przyjdzie Mordor i nas zje, czyli tajna historia Słowian*, Krakow 2013.

touching them up to make them more exotic.¹⁰ For their own travel is propelled by similar, fanciful tales. Ukraine strikes them as a phenomenon, a phantasmagoria, or an illusion stitched together from memories and sensory impressions that do not necessarily conform to reality. “There are days like these – “ (here, Sartre comes to our aid) “....when Venice seems sated on its own memories, and the hapless tourist wanders lost in this fantastical panopticum where water becomes the basic material of delusion.”¹¹ For Szczerek’s tourists, Ukraine is no Venice: it is an illusion forged from fantasy and imagination that becomes its own self-perpetuating simulacrum. Reality is replaced with a configuration of its signs. In the foreground, the doppelganger and generator of signs eludes us, leaving reality no chance to constitute itself.¹² In its place, self-reinforcing signs step up to generate narrative. This mechanism becomes quite clear in the scene describing the protagonists’ arrival in Lviv:

And then there was Lviv.

This city isn’t supposed to exist – this is what I thought to myself, gazing out the window. The Polish myth of the loss of this place is so overpowering that the city itself simply isn’t supposed to exist. Yet here it stood, looking no worse for the wear. In fact, it even had the gall to resemble the city it was before its local apocalypse...¹³

Tourists visiting Ukraine define their mode of travel through this juxtaposition of reality and fantasy. They can choose between two strategies: the myth of the “wild East” and “Post-Soviet jungle”¹⁴ enhanced with the belief in a “lost Poland,” or a parody of this first mode of travel, blending constant astonishment with a strong penchant for the exotic:

“Oh yeah!” boomed Uday and Kusaj as they launched into taking photographs. They photographed the bear, the deer and the lady working the bar, even after she screamed at them to stop. But Uday and Kusaj got her somehow. They just shouted “oh yeah!” and went on taking pictures.¹⁵

This is the response of those Polish tourists who choose the first path. They screech with delight in a local pub converted into a sushi bar but retaining its artificial aesthetic. The waitress, for example, looks like she belongs in a communist-era milk bar and wears a skin-tight kimono. The Polish tourist’s gaze distorts Post-Soviet space.

Dariusz Nowacki posits that we can trace this phenomenon back to the particular genre of reportage Szczerek mobilizes, a genre whose brutality and rawness is meant to convey a “gon-

¹⁰See: < <http://www.ha.art.pl/wydawnictwo/nowe-ksiazki/2852-przyjdzie-mordor-i-nas-zje-czyli-tajna-historia-slowian.html> > (December 31 2017).

¹¹J.-P. Sartre, op. cit., p. 72.

¹²See: J. Baudrillard, “The Precession of Simulacra,” trans. Paul Foss and Paul Patton, in *Simulacra and Simulations*, ed. Mark Poster, Stanford, 1988, pp. 166 - 184

¹³Z. Szczerek, op. cit., p. 10.

¹⁴See D. Nowacki, *Przyjdzie Mordor i nas zje, czyli tajna historia Słowian*, <http://www.institutksiazki.pl/ksiazki-detajl,literatura-polska,9719,przyjdzie-mordor-i-nas-zje--czyli-tajna-historia-slowian.html> (December 25 2017).

¹⁵Z. Szczerek, op. cit., p. 93.

zo" style.¹⁶ The mystification produced by these strategic distortions renders transparent the national stereotypes and feelings of superiority held by Pole journeying eastward: "Here we could get a thrill from the local hardcore, just like we poor drunks so proud of our crippled country rejoiced when we managed to find something even more crippled than ourselves."¹⁷ While Nowacki is mainly concerned with how the mangled portrait of Ukrainians ultimately becomes a genuine and cruel portrait of Poles and their complexes and pettiness, this distortion seeps beyond this specific dynamic. For Szczerek, the fundamental features of this distortion are the mediation of how we perceive those unlike ourselves and the act of observing the observer – for this is what propels the pursuit of Ukraine, not only for Poles, but for Germans, Americans and Canadians as well, who all turn this gaze on Ukraine, Poland, and the interactions between them.

By ascribing the same inversions to different characters, Szczerek creates a network of contingencies based on a hierarchical order of reality. Identical phrases are expressed in disparate contexts, discrediting the authors behind these beliefs. The collision of gazes between a Pole and a Canadian turns out to be an intense episode of shortsightedness, the lazy passing of judgments, and oversimplified travel commentary, although the first describes Ukraine, and the second, Poland:

Here, in this little village outside of Lviv, green space stretched before us and cows wandered about. A pastoral landscape. An agrarian idyll. Rurytania.¹⁸

Later in the text, we read:

The cot across from me belonged (...) to a Canadian with the surname Rigamonte. When he found out I was from Poland, he started to go on about how my country was a pristine civilization and about the little village grandmas with handkerchiefs tied around their heads. He told me about the quaint, pre-modern communities of village life, with all their traditions and rituals... like when someone dies, the neighbors all come to light candles and sing. Generally speaking, he told me, this society spared from the hideousness of modernity is a good, old agrarian idyll. Rurytania.¹⁹

Szczerek sets up this simplified schematic view to reveal how it is constructed partly on the basis of a fixation on the pure past, and partly as the product of an intellectual passivity characterized by a total lack of curiosity and a tendency to process reality as a series of idealizations and depreciations. These tourists are convinced of their own cultural superiority. They utilize travel precisely as a means for affirming their sense of self worth.

¹⁶See: D. Nowacki, op. cit.

¹⁷Z. Szczerek, op. cit., p. 217.

¹⁸Ibid, p. 84

¹⁹Ibid, p. 103

This mechanism plays out rather clearly in two passages. The first describes the organization of special trips that promise to “take a few Poles with a mean thirst for the exotic on a weekend to Ukraine and to show them the ‘hardcore East.’”²⁰ The narrator observes the four men on the trip: a member of the advisory board of a Krakow-based website, an accountant, the owner of a small tourism agency, and the manager of a club in Kazimierz. He takes stock of their remarks and sentiments, cataloging phrases such as: “it’s different here; you can smell it in the air,” or “it feels more like a cheap movie here,” which is to say, “it’s ugly.” This mechanism of neutralizing otherness and adorning it in exotic rags is reproduced throughout Szczerek’s book. The narrator remarks that the focus of these organized trips into Ukraine is fundamentally no different from that of trips organized for the British in Krakow.

The second passage describes photographing Ukraine and seeking out visual anomalies to immortalize and ultimately exhibit after squeezing them into the narrative frame of the Other. In short, “they turned Ukraine into a brothel on wheels.”²¹

Later on, in Krakow, they showed their photographs (...) and said that of course, over there in the Post-Soviet world, everything is terrible and terrifying, but these poor and beautiful people from Ukraine, these heroes of the East, they do what they can to live in dignity. (...)

Korwaks and his friends spoke of the dignity and honor of the people of the poor East, and meanwhile the crowded packs of cultural critics gazed at the photos and saw children splashing with pigs in the mud. Korwaks and his friends said that a proud, courageous people live in the East, cin-cin: and in the photo, a busted up babushka takes shelter under a roadside altar, with her legs spread no less. And everyone sees the busted up babushka with her legs spread wide, with no proud or courageous nation in sight. These are beautiful and worthy people, declare Korwaks and his friends. “They have a splendid history, a splendid tradition, cin-cin: and here’s Wasia, a tractor driver, wasted as can be, sunburnt mug, a cigarette butt in his snout, and behind him in the distance rise the wooden shacks of the Soviet communal farms and a mob of half-zombie children that look like they’re from some piece of Nazi propaganda.”²²

It is only against the backdrop of these episodes that we can detect signs of the transformation the narrator undergoes between the covers of *Mordor*. He confesses that in fact, he is just like the rest. He, too, is only after bread and circuses. But when he is asked if he is “hunting the wild East” he answers without hesitation that yes, he is, now and forever, but not like everyone else. What differentiates the narrator is his awareness that preconceived fantasies and the fictions he concocts do not conform to the reality of the actual place. This kind of “theory fatigue” must give way to the desire to test his former perceptive categories in experimental conditions. As a result, Szczerek begins to resemble Marianne Hirsch, whose journey to Czernowitz was a “post-memory practice” – the experience of one’s own presence in actual space and the act of exposing the self and its conceptual apparatus to an encounter with the

²⁰Ibid, p. 187.

²¹Ibid, p. 122.

²²Ibid, p. 122-123.

visuality, identity and cultural practices actually present “over there.”²³ No such encounter would be possible without movement, for movement precipitates a collision between theory and the concrete, intellectual categories and experience, and finally, meaning and presence. In the case of both Hirsch and Szczerek, this practice leads to a blurring between two modes for thinking about place: on the one hand, we are dealing with a replaceable world's gaze at signs and an interaction with reality restricted to the constant work of interpreting an environment's symbols. On the other hand, this is also an attempt to break away from a strategy premised on the lack of engagement, for it strives towards presence, full immersion in the actual place, and a willingness to accept new phenomena.²⁴

This awareness of the insufficiencies of constant interpretation as a mode of relating to space and its compromised images provokes a desire to embed oneself in actual topography and to establish contact with a space replete with historical and contemporary meanings. Finally, this sense of inadequacy prompts a need to physically situate oneself among reality's hard and material constituent parts. For Ubertowska, in *Ghosts of Home*, this work surfaces in the form of “wandering the local streets of this contemporary, Post-Soviet city and using old Austrian maps to find the sites linked to major events in the lives of Lotte and Carl Hirsch.”²⁵ In *Mordor's Coming to Eat Us*, it is the direction of travel itself that propels the protagonist. Moving eastward coincides with traversing the road within. By physically traveling through Ukrainian towns, he is situating himself within the morass and observing phenomena that exist in Poland in intensified form. Yet the act of travel does not suffice on its own: what he needs is a different point of view. He can only undermine his notions of the “wild East” and “Post-Soviet jungle” by hitting on this third road. The third gaze allows him to open himself to the Thirdspace. Alongside Firstspace and the “directly-experienced world of empirically measurable and mappable phenomena”²⁶ whose signature feature is objectivity, and *Secondspace*, which is more subjective and generated from imagined and symbolic representations, we find Thirdspace: the attempt to break away from dialectical thought. For Edward Soja, this escape from the logic of “either/or” produces the more lucid logic of “that and also...”:

Thirdspace (...) is portrayed as multi-sided and contradictory, oppressive and liberating, passionate and routine, knowable and unknowable. It is a space (...) of multiplicitous representations, investigatable through its binarized oppositions but also where *il y a toujours l'Autre* (...). It is a meeting ground, a site of hybridity and *mestizaje* and moving beyond entrenched boundaries, a margin or edge where ties can be severed and also where new ties can be forged.²⁷

²³See: A. Ubertowska, op. cit., p. 273.

²⁴See: T. Mizerkiewicz, *Po tamtej stronie tekstów. Literatura polska a nowoczesna kultura obecności*, Poznań 2013, pp. 180–181.

²⁵A. Ubertowska, op. cit., p. 274.

²⁶E.W. Soja, *Chapter 2 Thirdspace: Expanding the Scope of the Geographical Imagination*, in: *Architecturally Speaking: Practices of Art., Architecture, and the Everyday*, ed. A. Read, Londyn 2000, p. 17. Cited in: A. Nacher, *Telepleć. Gender w telewizji doby globalizacji*, Kraków 2008, p. 77.

²⁷E.W. Soja, op. cit., p. 28. Cited in: A. Nacher, op. cit., Kraków 2008, p. 79.

For Szczerek's protagonist, this outside perspective is provided by people of non-Slavic origins. Their cultural backgrounds allow them to see Eastern Europe from the outside through perspectives that are geographically and emotionally distanced. As a result, their somewhat generalized observations ultimately clarify a sense of common ground:

"'You Poles, you're rational people,' she said rather cautiously. I peered at her suspiciously. 'Well... so I assume. So explain to me, then, why every time I meet a Pole, he tells me about all the crazy things he's seen here. How everything is thoroughly fucked and nothing works. Every Pole I meet tells me some story from another planet. And yet –" furtively, Heike studied my reaction. "– You surely can't be so unreasonable that you don't see what I mean. Am I right?"²⁸

The narrator's response to this question posed by Heike, a German, hardly clarifies things: "I would say you don't get Poland at all." The confusion that follows is much more revealing.

In this way, travel becomes a story in which certain relations (e.g., between power and topography, or history and memory) become transparent. To discover one's own experience in this network of mutual contingencies and forge a relation between self and place, these observers of Ukraine (Hirsch and Szczerek both) require their own tactics. Unlike strategy, these tactics are closer to Michel de Certeau's "art of the weak."²⁹ Entering into battle on foreign grounds (and yet the space of the tactic is always the space of the other), governed by the law of a foreign power,³⁰ they can indulge in the simplest, most humble activities: movement, walking around, travel. Moving through space (in travel writing, this activity is strictly textual) is implicated in the relation between history and memory discussed above. The narrator of *Mordor* is well aware of this connection:

So I walked into Ukraine. After a moment I looked around and took in this new reality that, only a second ago, had been an utterly ordinary, normal continuation of my own reality. Once I passed through the border town of Medyka, however, this reality veered away from mine to go down its own path.

I savored these differences, tasted this eastern silt in the air, the stuff of good old Galicia. I contemplated these faces that – if someone had nudged Stalin's pen just one millimeter to the side – would be driving cars of Polish make. Just one millimeter and they'd be our people, a million times over our people. And if this were the case, they wouldn't be worth a second glance (...).³¹

There is something troubling in this idea. On the sole basis of historical decisions, a group of people that could have been "ours" becomes strangers. Historical and geopolitical circumstances have turned Ukrainians into that "alien traumatic kernel" that "forever persists in [the] Neighbor...."³² This formulation, proposed by Slavoj Žižek and so relevant to this context, succinctly articulates the inversion by which we inscribe otherness in the Neigh-

²⁸Z. Szczerek, op. cit., p. 148.

²⁹M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1984, p. 37.

³⁰See: ibid, pp. 37-39.

³¹Z. Szczerek, op. cit., p. 44.

³²S. Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute, Or, Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* London & New York, 2001, p. 109.

bor. The exploitation of the neighbor, which depends on a discernible resemblance and a sense that the same issues affect both parties, coincides with the kernel of otherness, and it is here that we can locate the impossibility of identification. In other words, the Proximate, or Neighbor, “remains an inert, impenetrable, enigmatic presence that *hystericizes* [the self].”³³

Szczerek exposes this dynamic between resemblance, or sometimes even a total uniformity of experience and identity modes, in the traditional tourist's encounter. This perhaps becomes most clear in an episode where two Ukrainian children approach a dense crowd bottlenecked at the Lychakiv Cemetery in Lviv, muttering “give me Polish coins, mister.” The multicultural throng of tourists expresses a delight that quickly fades when the young beggars take the angle that they are Polish children who have been wronged, and that the Ukrainians are to blame. This instant and essentially hysterical, emotionally charged reaction might have something to do with Aleida Assmann's claim that “there is nothing that could prolong memory as forcefully as the mid-twentieth century catastrophe of destruction and forgetting.”³⁴

Mordor's Coming to Eat Us is the product of an escalated crisis of memory. On the level of nationality, the cultural memory of generations to come (not so much construed from living memory as it is derived from media based on material reference points such as monuments, museums and archives) is commandeered by the politics of memory and forgetting. The transformation of memory from what is living and private to a contrived cultural consensus leads to problems such as the deformation, reduction or instrumentalization of the things we remember.³⁵ The image of Ukraine distorted by harmful stereotypes, seen as a country populated by bloodthirsty nationalists and wild and heartless brutes of the Steppe, is bluntly reinforced by literary depictions like “that Haidamaka brutishness” or “the wild folk of nature” (Sienkiewicz's phrase).³⁶ This portrait is not necessarily in harmony with Szczerek's perspective, although *Mordor* has no shortage of descriptions that fit this bill – take, for instance, “that stunted backwater so easy to mock.”³⁷

We might find some hope for breaking apart the duopoly of history and institutional memory in the notion of post-memory. This term is differentiated from memory by generational distance, and from history, by a deep personal bond. Post-memory describes the experience of those whose upbringings were dominated by narratives cemented before they were born. If post-memory designates a specific form of memory more mediated by processes of imagination and narration than by recollection,³⁸ then in the context of tourism to the “Lost Polish

³³Ibid.

³⁴A. Assmann, *Przestrzenie pamięci. Formy i przemiany pamięci kulturowej*, trans. P. Przybyła, in: *Pamięć zbiorowa i kulturowa. Współczesna perspektywa niemiecka*, ed. M. Saryusz-Wolska, Krakow 2009, p. 110. (English translation via the Polish by Eliza Rose)

³⁵See: *ibid.*, p. 106.

³⁶For more on stereotypical views of Ukrainians, see Rafał Kalukin's text: *Ukrainiec: Dziki kozak - wściekły banderowiec?*, <http://www.newsweek.pl/polska/ukraincy-stereotyp-ukrainca-w-polskiej-kulturze-newsweek-pl,artykuly,282885,1.html> (December 29 2017).

³⁷Z. Szczerek, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

³⁸See: M. Hirsch, *Family Pictures: Maus, Mourning, and Post-Memory*, in: “Discourse,” vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 8-9

Kresy,” it refers to a progression from the lament over a squandered past or (more flipantly) from “saving the bones of our forefathers”³⁹ to the self-reproach precipitated by disillusioned mental images and the discomfort of travel:

The visitors [Poles – CR] trudged around slowly [...] and whined in a whisper. Their fear, however, was expressed rather loudly. They had all these pretensions that they’ve been fucked over, damaged, by the UPA, by Bandera... They moaned about Yalta, Stalin... They droned on about Szczepcio and Tońcio...⁴⁰

The practice of wandering and the creation of post-memory directly inform the experience of those “roleplaying” their presence in a given place. The protagonists of *Ghosts of Home* improvise reenactments in significant places for the people of Czernowitz. In her text on Hirsch’s book, Aleksandra Ubertowska pays close attention to the “visualization of experience” and the narration of familiar stories within actual space as strategies for convincing oneself that a specific environment and geographic proximity are in fact capable of enhancing memory.⁴¹ Hirsch includes in her book a note she made in her journal on September 6 of 1998 that observes something similar:

What’s different about hearing the same story, here, in the actual place? Because the stories in fact have not changed, they are all still the same. Few new ones have come, a few additional details, maybe. But it is different. This crossroads is so graphic, so immediate, and yet also so symbolic.⁴²

In her commentary on this note, Ubertowska adds that memories rooted in actual space gain substance, dimensionality, texture and color. Actual space can therefore stimulate unrestrained emotions. Presence, however, is the requisite condition of this process. The whole project of post-memory practices is tied to physicality, and the necessary groundwork for conceiving a story is not narrative competence but a play of footsteps that give their shape to space and weave together place (to paraphrase de Certeau)⁴³ along with the “somatic letter:” the act of touching the object, exhausting oneself with travel, or occupying space in an actual location.⁴⁴ The protagonists of *Mordor* do precisely this. In the chapter devoted to their visit to Drohobycz, to memorialize the writer Bruno Schulz, they must necessarily visit the site of his death. The first person to mention this is a Polish photographer they meet by chance:

“Looking for Schulz?” he asked. “You’ll find the spot where they killed him because you’ll see a candle there. I lit it,” he said proudly.⁴⁵

³⁹This is Szczerek’s protagonist’s answer when the border guard asks about the reason for his visit to Ukraine (Z. Szczerek, op. cit., p. 7).

⁴⁰Ibid, p. 12.

⁴¹See: A. Ubertowska, op. cit., p. 276.

⁴²M. Hirsch, L. Spitzer, op. cit., p. 137.

⁴³M. de Certeau, op. cit., p. 97.

⁴⁴See: A. Ubertowska, op. cit., p. 276.

⁴⁵From an excerpt of *Mordor’s Coming...* translated by Scotia Gilroy and published in Asymptote Journal, <https://www.asymptotejournal.com/nonfiction/ziemowit-szczerek-mordors-coming-to-eat-us-a-secret-history-of-the-slavs/> (March 18 2018).

Later on, at the site of Schulz's death, the narrator adds:

The candle was there. It really was. It was at the bottom of some steps leading up to a bakery with a sign advertising FRESH BREAD. It was even burning. SO it was here that Schulz's corpse lay in the street for a whole day because, for some reason, the Germans wouldn't let anyone take it away. I tried to imagine it – Schulz lying there, small and dark, in a heavy winter overcoat – but my mind was totally blank.⁴⁶

At the very end of the chapter, they meet Marzena and Bożena, two Polish Studies students from Warsaw, who have come to “to pay tribute to the great Polish-Jewish writer, the grand master of the Polish language (...) and, of course, to find the Street of Crocodiles.”⁴⁷

What we described earlier as two travel strategies, one based on making a spectacle and seeking out the exotic, and the other on making a mockery of the first strategy, can be seen from one more perspective. We might find some value in Marielle Macé's proposal to approach these things in terms of style. Despite the fact that Macé applies categories of style to forms of literature that, for the reader, represent a set of appropriate situations and perspectival frames for reality, we might also divert the concept of style away from literature and the reading process. As a general concept, style refers to a certain mode of doing, speaking and changing. How might this help us read Szczerek's book? Consider this:

A person who reads is a style that looks upon another style, that looks out from the balcony of her own life and allows herself the freedom to change her way of being. At the heart of the way in which we use a literary work, in other words, is the opportunity for a veritable “stylistics of existence.”⁴⁸

We might then posit that styles of perception will always be confronted by the style of a literary work, which in turn is derived from its author's mode of being. For Macé, who is reading Sartre, the dynamic between styles refers precisely to the experience of Venice that profoundly disrupts the French philosopher's conception of time and action.⁴⁹ Standing on his balcony, he loses himself in the visible:

The real Venice will always be somewhere other than where you find it. At least that's how I see it. I'll content myself, rather, on what I already have; but in Venice, I fall victim to a jealous madness (...). I go off on a hunt for this enigmatic city.⁵⁰

Unable this clash of styles to bear, he leaps out of the frame he constructed for himself:

I need heavy, massive presences. I feel empty in the face of such diaphanous plumage painted on glass. I am going out.⁵¹

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸M. Macé, op. cit.

⁴⁹See: ibid.

⁵⁰J.-P. Sartre, op. cit., p. 68.

⁵¹J.-P. Sartre, op. cit., p. 73, cited in M. Macé, op. cit.

For Sartre, this other mode of being shocks him, and he has no choice but to face it as a challenge. Macé suggests that “[t]he Venetian landscape threatened Sartre, it wounded him in his duration, contradicted his inner rhythm, defied him.”⁵² Her observations seem surprisingly applicable to the protagonist of *Mordor*. Significantly, the protagonist’s first visits to Ukraine were necessarily catered to the agendas of texts he wrote on commission for various websites. To put it mildly, his style bore the marks of persisting national stereotypes, or to be more blunt: lies: “I must have dazzled them with my Ukrainian drivel and dissimulation. It had to be filthy, strong, cruel. This is the gonzo essence.”⁵³

For a few hours in Venice, Sartre experiences a different mode of being, a brief opportunity to choose a different project and sense “new ways of perceiving and behaving.”⁵⁴ Similarly, during his sojourn in Ukraine, *Mordor*’s protagonist is exposed to an “experience of rapid, fleeting beauty” that allows him to adopt a new cognitive posture, or perhaps even a new moral attitude.⁵⁵ Alongside the protagonist’s dialogues with his Ukrainian friend Taras, the conclusion of *Mordor* proves to be incredibly revealing. In the first scenario, the narrator throws out a phrase that is simultaneously banal and groundbreaking (in terms of its style). He suggests that Ukraine is a perfectly normal country that is merely poorly managed. In just a few sentences, Taras then manages to articulate all the features of Ukrainian tourism fueled by stereotypical images:

“You simply started looking at Ukraine through the eyes of a Ukrainian. Which means earlier, you saw us how? You came here to go on safari? This whole time? (...) What, orientalism, is that right? The exotic? You came here just like you’d go to a zoo?”⁵⁶

The second passage is clear proof that the narrator is working on his own style and reckoning with himself and with the very way he enters a place and establishes a new empirical frame. For Macé, in *Venice from my Window*, the balcony turns out to be metaphor of utmost importance. In *Mordor’s Coming to Eat Us*, a sense of similar gravity is concentrated in the ending, which depicts the protagonist leaving Ukraine and the metaphor of a closed fist:

At the border, I showed my Press Pass to the Ukrainian border guard in the hopes that he might let me skip the cavalcade of ants. I rushed past the Ukrainians. At the Polish checkpoint I went up to the gate marked “EU Citizens Only.” I glanced at the next gate, the gate for the worse-off, for the subnations, where the border guards harassed an older Ukrainian man. He was tall, gray-haired and had an elegantly trimmed beard. He said he was a writer and that he was traveling to Krakow for a reading. He said all this, mind you, in impeccable Polish. The border guards, mere twenty-something kids, spoke to him brusquely using the informal “you” and asked why he wasn’t traveling to promote his book in Kiev. I clenched my fists and felt ashamed. So very fucking ashamed.”⁵⁷

⁵²M. Macé, op. cit.

⁵³Z. Szczerek, op. cit., p. 99.

⁵⁴M. Macé, op. cit.

⁵⁵M. Macé, op. cit.

⁵⁶Z. Szczerek, op. cit., p. 218.

⁵⁷Ibid, pp. 220–221.

As Macé would have it, Sartre's posture on the balcony offers an opening into our own lives. Similarly, as the narrator of *Mordor* gradually recognizes the damage inflicted by national stereotypes, we can treat his transformation as an expression of the difficulties of utilizing personal experience. The shame that floods the protagonist at the end of Szczerek's book becomes an opportunity for us to change our own habits, personalities and cultures: to experiment with ourselves as a style, or perhaps, rather, to accept the inconsistencies of our style, as well as its potential and limitations.⁵⁸ As it turns out, to emancipate this potential, we need outside interference. We also need to engage in a new space, or to "position" ourselves in new configurations.

⁵⁸See: M. Macé, op. cit.

KEYWORDS

reportage

literary style

ABSTRACT:

This article explores Ziemowit Szczerek's work of reportage, *Mordor's Coming to Eat Us: A Secret History of the Slavs*. In his analysis, the author applies Marianne Hirsch's conception of post-memory practices, Marielle Macé's conception of literary style, and Michel de Certeau's "spatial stories." This text attempts to map the traveler and reporter's transformations prompted by contact with actual geographical space.

p o s t - m e m o r y

THE CULTURE OF PRESENCE

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“Space Hinges on Time...”¹:

New Modes of Transportation and Non-Places in Travel Writing

Anna Marta Dworak

The early nineteenth century witnessed sweeping and revolutionary developments in our modes of transportation. In 1825, the world's first railway line went into operation in England, and between 1840 and 1860, dynamic railway projects were already underway. The train quickly ceased to be a mere curio of technology and was increasingly sought after as a favored mode of transportation. Similar changes played out in ocean travel. The first passenger steamships sailed the waters at the turn of the nineteenth century and quickly gained enormous popularity. These developments opened up new opportunities for travel. New approaches to travel were also reflected in the travel literature of the period, which often directly addressed themes related to the new resources provided by ongoing technological advancement.² The world seen from the train compartment window had an altogether different appearance than the one traversed by traditional means. Detailed accounts of the

¹ W. Smaczniński, *Kolej żelazna. Oda*, [in:] *Zbiór poetów polskich XIX w. Księga druga*, ed. P. Hertz, Warsaw 1961, p. 138.

² Wojciech Tomasik has comprehensively researched these themes and has published his findings in several books on train motifs in literature: W. Tomasik, *Pociąg do nowoczesności. Szkice kolejowe*, Warsaw 2004; *ibid*, *Inna droga. Romantycy a kolej*, Warsaw 2012; *ibid*, *Ikona nowoczesności. Kolej w literaturze polskiej*, Torun 2015.

entire route were no longer possible. If we examine travel writers active in the period, we can distinguish a few signature paradigms they used to convey their impressions of this radically new travel. Most important among these are remarks on the disappearance of space, time's capacity to supersede space, and kaleidoscopic representations of travel impressions.

Space is Time

By analyzing individual travel texts, we can observe how time becomes a category of increasing importance in early nineteenth-century travel. Spatial intervals between the beginning and endpoints of travel forfeited their relevance to the time required to traverse space. Time gradually replaced space as the unit that segmented the individual phases of travel.

Such a shift in perspective was surely no product of chance. As Marc Augé has claimed, the tendency to use time as a unit of measurement is a hallmark of the non-place: "Since non-places are to be passed through, they are measured in units of time."³ I should mention that Augé uses the term "non-place" to describe spaces that resist definition in terms of identity, relation or history.⁴ In other words, these are emotionally neutral places. The scholar usually applies this category to the "supermodern" period: a world fully dominated by rapid modes of transport. Augé's exemplary non-places include train stations, supermarkets, airports, freeways, and so on. Of course, not all of these non-places date back to the nineteenth century. What's more, even those that did exist do not necessarily qualify as non-places. The status of the nineteenth-century train station, for example, remains up for debate.⁵ This being said, if we confine our focus to the actual act of traveling by train, the non-place category seems entirely applicable.⁶ For nineteenth-century writers, train travel was a radically new experience and a vivid collision with modernity. On the one hand, train travel allowed them to rapidly traverse space, and on the other, it forced them to accommodate new constraints: timetables, pre-determined routes, and the company of random travel companions.⁷ Due to these limitations, the train car became a foreign space belonging to no one: a form of non-place.

The texts I will analyze here demonstrate that authors of the period acutely detected the groundbreaking nature of these new forms of travel and often emphasized this feeling in their work. One widely described feature of modern travel was the speed at which trains traveled,

³ M. Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. J. Howe, New York 1995, p. 104.

⁴ Ibid, p. 52.

⁵ Here we should mention Aneta Włodarczyk's article. Włodarczyk attempts to demonstrate how nineteenth-century train stations figured as "non-neutral architecture for the humanist impulse" and therefore meets the criteria of a place. See: A. Włodarczyk, *Samotność tłumie. Analiza przestrzeni dworca w świetle koncepcji nie-miejsc*, [in:] *Kolej na kolej...*, pp. 258-259.

⁶ Kamila Gieba has written about the relevance of the "non-place" for scholarship on train motifs. See: K. Gieba, *Kilka słów wstępu o torowisku humanistyki*, [in:] *Kolej na kolej...*, p. 7.

⁷ See also: W. Tomasiak, *Pociąg do...*, pp. 25, 53-54.

which was increasingly referred to as “rush/impetus” (in Polish, *pęd*). Władysław Syrokomla has described the idea of “*pęd*” as speed seen from above,⁸ while Józef Kremer has described it as an “arrow” soaring over the earth.⁹ Józef Ignacy Kraszewski has called it “satanic flight”¹⁰ and has also commented: “at this speed, nobody had before seen a view of the mountains but the birds flying over them.” Speed and time seem to be the dominant forces in the travel writing discussed here.

In *Mosaic on Commission* (*Mozaika kontraktowa*), Aleksander Groza observes: “Now, you can get from Paris to Warsaw in three days, and for that matter, you can get to Kiev in the same amount of time if you don’t count the nights [...]”¹¹ In this passage, the author equates a trip from Paris to Warsaw with a trip he most likely took himself from a small Ukrainian village (where he was based while writing *Mosaic*) to Kiev. Time is the force that makes this comparison possible. The geographical distances on both sides of the analogy are starkly different. Time offers a more reliable index than, say, miles, for a distance can be traversed at different speeds depending on the travel conditions.

In *Travel Notes* (*Notatki z podróży*), Maurycy Dzieduszycki compares two trips separated by an interval of nearly twenty years. As a young boy, Dzieduszycki traveled with his parents to Vienna from somewhere in the vicinity of Drohobych. According to his account, the trip took ten days and was made by way of “our own courier coach, complete with a servant and butler.”¹² The trip comes across as a real journey. Dzieduszycki made the second trip as an adult, when he decided to use time off from work to visit Vienna. After arriving in Krakow from Bochnia, he went on to Ołomuniec by train. As he notes, from Ołomuniec, “for the first time in my life I took a freshly built railway line and made it to Vienna in five hours.”¹³

If we analyze specific texts, we might notice that travel time is increasingly measured in hours (and sometimes even quarter-hours) rather than days, even when the hours add up to a figure that could easily be tallied in days. In her book *Last Journey to France* (*Ostatnia podróż do Francji*), Łucja Rautenstrauchowa notes how: “[...] in Frankfurt, train tracks transect the city perimeter, heading in all directions. One of them conveyed me to Mainz in one hour’s time.”¹⁴ Further on in the text she continues: “as soon as you leave Aachen you are already passing into Belgium with its steel tracks, and in only a few hours you’ve traversed the twenty miles between the border and Brussels.”¹⁵ In Ludwik Pietrusiński’s travel account *Journeys, Drives and Strolls through Europe* (*Podróże, przejażdżki i przechadzki po Europie*), the reader learns one can get from Krakow to Vienna in only fifteen hours, although in reality, this trip took almost three days.¹⁶ In *Travel Letters* (*Listach z podróży*), Zenon Leonard Fisz writes that a train jour-

⁸ W. Syrokomla, *Podróże swojaka po swojszczyźnie*, Warsaw 1914, p. 28.

⁹ J. Kremer, *Podróż do Włoch*, t. 1: *Droga z Krakowa do Triestu; Opisanie Wenecji*, Wilno 1859, s. 98.

¹⁰ J. I. Kraszewski, *Kartki z podróży 1858-1864*, vol. 1, ed. P. Hertz, Warsaw 1977, p. 56.

¹¹ A. Groza, *Mozaika kontraktowa: pamiętnik z roku 1851*, Wilno 1857, pp. 64-65.

¹² M. Dzieduszycki, *Notatki z podróży 1821-1872*, 6724/I Mf. 1789, k. 2.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ł. Rautenstrauchowa, *Ostatnia podróż do Francji: ostatnie jej wrażenia*, Lipsk 1841, p. 14.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 15.

¹⁶ L. Pietrusiński, *Podróże, przejażdżki i przechadzki po Europie*, vol. 1, Warsaw 1843, p. 60.

ney from Pest to Vienna takes eight hours.¹⁷ Travel time is also measured in hours in the context of travel by courier coach. According to Pietrusiński, by courier coach you can "get from Lviv to Vienna in 100 hours."¹⁸ In *Journey to Scotland and England* (*Podróż do Szkocji i Anglii*), Teodor Tripplin measures the trip's length in quarter-hours: "In five quarter-hours we traveled by rail from Manchester to Liverpool. Nine geographic miles, no more and no less, from one place to the other."¹⁹

As a rule, the motif of perceiving of traversed space in terms of the time required to cross it comes up in reference to Western Europe and the pinnacle of development it represents. Travel literature shows us, however, that these transformations also played out elsewhere in the continent. In *Journey through Scandinavia* (*Podróż po Skandynawii*), Tripplin compares the time required to get from Drontheim to Hammerfest during the author's latest trip and twenty years earlier:

Twenty years ago, the trip from Drontheim to Hammerfest took one whole month; today, thanks to steamships donated by King Bernadotte to Finmark, the same trip takes only eight days.²⁰

As we can see, travel time (in this case due to steamships) is reduced almost four times over: what once took an entire month now took eight days.

This seems to suggest that modes of transportation instigated a revolution in travel and prompted major shifts and distortions in how we perceive space. Suddenly, two places were considered close to one another not because a modest distance lay between them, but because one could travel from one to the other in as little time as possible. This logic is what prompted Ludwik Pietrusiński's assertion that "today, we ought to say that London is closer to Istanbul than Królewiec is to Warsaw."²¹ Similar observations apply to England and its colonies: "fast and cheap transport for passengers and mail brings England and its colonies closer together than some countries occupying the same body of land, separated by some twenty or thirty miles."²²

The contraction of travel time also affected the nature of travel. "Journeys" give way to motor-powered travel that fits into the length of a vacation, as we saw earlier in the case of Maurycy Dzieduszycki. Leon Potocki paints a picture of a vacation spent in Paris by a bureaucrat of modest funds:

Today, now that Europe's whole body is criss-crossed with railway lines, we go about from place to place with great speed and at little expense, even when our destination lies on the other end of the continent. In 1847, I met a certain bureaucrat who made a modest salary of 5,000 zloties and still managed to scrape together a few thousand to visit the capital of France. So he takes a 28-day vacation, hops into

¹⁷Z. L. Fisz, *Listy z podróży*, vol. 3, Wilno 1859, p. 292.

¹⁸L. Pietrusiński, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 4-5.

¹⁹T. Tripplin, *Podróż do Szkocji i Anglii*, "Biblioteka Warszawska" 1852, vol. 2, p. 396.

²⁰Ibid, *Podróż po Skandynawii odbyta w roku 1855: dwa tomy w jednym*, vol. 1, Vilnius 1861, p. 114.

²¹L. Pietrusiński, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 375.

²²Ibid, p. 1, p. 330.

a train car, and in just four days he is propelled by steam power to Paris. In Paris, he settles down and has a ball for three weeks: he visits museums, archives, painting galleries, theaters, restaurants, cafés... He procures himself a whole new suit, indulges in all sorts of whims, and then turns around heads back the same way he came.²³

In travel accounts of the period, the words “travel” and “journey” (in Polish, *podróż*) are increasingly replaced with words like “jaunt,” “ride,” or “vacation,” all of which diminish the trip’s status. These terms are reminiscent of everyday life and hardly evoke the sense of something extraordinary that would require long and arduous preparations.

Vanishing Space

The second paradigm among travel writers’ responses to new travel resources is the emphasis on the traveler’s inability to get to know the space he traverses, or the superficiality of travel. Some travel texts go so far as to refer to the disappearance of space. In *Mosaic on Commission*, Aleksander Groza states outright that: “beyond the network of train routes, space vanishes.”²⁴ On a similar note, *Paris Chronicle* (*Kronika Paryska*) (published in 1959 by “Biblioteka Warszawska”) describes the motif of “railway lines abolishing space.”²⁵ The author also observes how the collapsing of space reduces the distance between various cultures, linking them as neighbors.

These Polish authors reinforce these observations. Space has disappeared: it has become invisible, unfathomable. In *Travel Notes* (*Kartki z podróży*), Józef Ignacy Kraszewski describes his journey to Paris by postal train. He informs us that the train sped along too fast and that as a traveler, he saw nothing: “the most beautiful region of France raced by me like a dream.”²⁶ He describes his impressions of the trip (which we might call a “flight,” taking the author’s cue) as “fleeting.”²⁷ He is only able to fill out his image of the region during a later trip, when he manages to set aside some time taking breaks and reading about the sites.²⁸

Władysław Syrokomla also seems sensitive to his inability to get to know space traversed by train. He writes: “I was there but saw nothing.”²⁹ Despite the fact that he has no chance to experience the sites he passes, Syrokomla maintains an awareness of their significance (for he presumably read or heard about them in the past). Through the train window, he sees only placards with place names:

We’ve already reached the edge of the Grand Duchy of Posen. The train flew faster than a bird: we

²³L. Potocki, *Mania jechania za granicę. – Białoruś; Płock; Hory-Horki. – Powrót do Warszawy*, [in:] J. Kamionka-Straszakowa, *“Do ziemi naszej”: podróże romantyków*, Kraków 1988, p. 108.

²⁴A. Groza, op. cit., p. 64.

²⁵*Kronika paryska*, “Biblioteka Warszawska” 1859, vol. 1, p. 431.

²⁶J. I. Kraszewski, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 252.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹W. Syrokomla, op. cit., p. 29.

would pause at the station for hardly a few minutes and then fly onward, leaving hardly enough time to even read the town's name printed in black letters on the Bahnhof façade, and right next to it, the distance from Wrocław to Poznań [...]. Propelled by an invisible force, the train whisked across vast spaces, leaving no time to feel remorse for all we've left behind, or to scrutinize what sits before our very eyes, or prepare for what we'll see next.³⁰

Prognoses for the future of travel were even more ominous. In *Humoresques* (*Humoreskach*) Teofil Nowosielski conceives a vision of travel to come. In his mind, the contraction of travel time has a negative impact on travel's cognitive benefits, leading to a scenario where "we will see more, but be capable of less."³¹ For Nowosielski, the ability to see all of Europe by train may condense travel time, but this freezes the traveler's impressions at a superficial level:

A rich old dad sends his son on a voyage, giving him at least three years to see all of Europe. Later on, thanks to the railway, the young voyager covers all of Europe in a mere four weeks. Upon his return home, people ask about what he saw in Holland, for instance. He answers: I did in fact pass through Holland, but I didn't see it. Actually, I spent that portion of the trip asleep in the train.³²

We might note that another frequent motif in these travel texts is an emphasis on the superficiality of the travel encounter and its contrast with the great potential of traditional modes of transport. Although a typical voyage through Europe might have taken as long as three years, this gave the traveler time to rigorously get to know the continent. For Nowosielski, the brisk train ride will never provide this. Włodzimierz Budzyński's personal observations lead to the same conclusions. Budzyński authored travel accounts of the German principalities and Switzerland. He notes that while travel has become more accessible, its cognitive benefits have been strictly curtailed:

Everything degenerated as it became more commonplace. Everything! Travel, knowledge, property ownership. You meet a stranger and take him for ordinary village folk, but no! It turns out he has seen all of Europe, and after a little time with him you notice that he is always going on about churches and theaters, which means he explored these places *in a hurry, seeing very little*. And you know that *what he did see was no good*. [emphasis – AMD]³³

Budzyński also bemoans the fact that train travel erodes the traveler's imagination:

In the old days, they'd see a cross over the forest road and tell each other terrible tales about some Scheiderhun. Today, these stories are replaced with anecdotes about train mishaps. People swap stories about a slain mechanic, a few broken legs and a few dozen chipped teeth. This, too, leaves an impression, but it does not incite the imagination.³⁴

³⁰Ibid, p. 28.

³¹T. S. Nowosielski, *Humoreski*, Warsaw 1841, p. 239.

³²Ibid, pp. 238-239.

³³W. Budzyński, *Niemcy*, Poznań 1850, p. 4.

³⁴Ibid, p. 7.

Zenon Leonard Fisz points out another trend: the “malaise” of those brought up in Western culture. Fisz complains that his contemporaries are lazy and take the comforts of travel for granted. As a result, they limit themselves to destinations they can conveniently access. As a result, more demanding destinations seem to vanish entirely from their consciousness, earning the status of non-places. It was not the appeal of a place or space that drew the traveler, but convenience:

People today, especially those in the West, are so spoiled by comfort and luxury in travel that they will gladly forego the most beautiful regions if their train car or ship won't deliver them right there, or if no comfortable hotel awaits them.³⁵

In this passage, we see how train access also imposes major constraints on travel. The existing system of railway lines now determined one's travel route, which in turn marginalized spaces that fell beyond its scope.³⁶ Teodor Tripplin observes this in *Recollections from Travel* (*Wspomnienia z podróży*), noting that “smaller cities fade away beyond the railway,” for the train directs “life and cargo to larger port cities” (such as Aix or Marseilles).³⁷ These limitations did not bother everyone. With relish, Tomasz Bartmiński describes sightseeing in a region of Italy that has deliberately been set up with full train access to meet tourists' needs:

I had the most wonderful experience a traveler can possibly encounter here. To see Herculaneum and Pompeii, I traveled along train routes prepared expressly for this purpose. Next, I saw Posilipo, Stromboli, Virgil's tomb and the famous grotto *del Cune*.³⁸

For Bartmiński, this mode of travel actually yields the most pleasure. Paradoxically, most of the authors discussed here argue that railway expansion did not contribute to a better understanding of space, but in fact led to its disappearance.³⁹ The travel route thus transformed: only major sites were marked along the way, and the rest transformed into non-places.

We should also take a closer look at how the authors of these travel texts described the very act of train travel and the feelings it provoked, for by no means were these feelings uniformly positive. Józef Kremer notes that passengers sometimes treated one another with pleasant cordiality, but hastily adds: “this cordiality is a rarity in train travel.”⁴⁰ Earlier in the text, Kremer

³⁵Z. L. Fisz, *Listy z podróży*, vol. 3, Vilnius 1859, p. 270.

³⁶Wojciech Tomasik wrote of the modern era's changing relationship between the protagonist's body to the road. The traveler ceased to be the master of the situation who determined the course of travel. Instead, he became merely a transported passenger entirely dependent on the system and established route imposed on him by the railway. See: W. Tomasik, *Pociąg do...*, pp. 53–54.

³⁷T. Tripplin, *Wspomnienia z podróży*, vol. 11: *Francja i Włochy północne*, Warsaw 1852, pp. 23–24.

³⁸*Wspomnienia z Hiszpanii z r. 1848. Wyjątek podróży Tomasza Bartmińskiego*, “Biblioteka Warszawska” 1852, vol. 2, p. 289.

³⁹Karl Schlögel has noted that the nineteenth and twentieth centuries brought, on the one hand, the thought or idea of the disappearance of space. On the other hand, we can discern quite the opposite position as well, taking form as the need to study, learn about and dominate space. See: K. Schlögel, *In Raume Lesen Wir Die Zeit. Über Zivilisationsgeschichte und Geopolitik*, Berlin 2006.

⁴⁰J. Kremer, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 34.

writes: "the temporary residents of the train car are so obliging and polite amongst themselves that it's as if they're one giant well-reared family!"⁴¹ Kremer does point out a tone of cooperative friendliness among travelers, but at the same time, the fact that he refers to them as "temporary residents" emphasizes the situation's ephemeral nature. The train car does not earn the status of "place" in the word's traditional meaning, especially once we account for all the inconveniences of train travel. For Tomasik, these encumbrances imposed a certain standardized behavior on passengers.⁴² The train car, then, appears to qualify as a form of non-place, conforming to Augé's definition of non-places as those that cannot be "places of identity, of relations and of history."⁴³ The train car is a place we dwell merely fleetingly to reach a designated destination.

The idea that we might think of the train car as a non-place is clearly reinforced in Józef Ignacy Kraszewski's travel account. The writer compares train passengers to packages, and describes train travel itself as voluntary submission to captivity:

Sure, horses or cattle transported to market by high-speed *Schnellzug* might be able to withstand this form of travel (although even this I doubt). Humans, however, could hardly imagine a more severe form of bondage when they voluntarily rescind their freedom and become mere numbered packages. Somewhere on the road from Vienna to Trieste, they might lament at how the enchanting landscape flies by. In just day, from six in the morning to eleven at night, how the miles fly by us... and how a country... how a marvelous region passes by in the blink of an eye, like fading dreams! How could we possibly write about these glinting views the human eye can hardly grasp?⁴⁴

On the train, people give up their freedom and become mere objects to be transferred to a fixed destination. Travel leaves no opening to get to know the route whose views flit impassively before their eyes.

Kaleidoscopic Images

Although the speed of travel seems to suggest the vanishing of space, this does not mean that spatial descriptions have no place in travel accounts. We should, however, take a closer look at how these descriptions change. Borrowing a term from Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, we might propose the category of "kaleidoscopic vision" and the "kaleidoscopic description of space" it yields.⁴⁵ The *Polish Language Dictionary* defines a kaleidoscope as "heterogeneous images, impressions or events in rapid succession."⁴⁶ Many travel writers process fleeting space in a similar mode. Heterogeneous images of landscapes seen from the train window displace one another at unprecedented tempos, hardly allowing one to grasp and register

⁴¹Ibid, p. 32

⁴²See: W. Tomasik, *Pociąg do...*, pp. 25, 49.

⁴³M. Augé, op. cit., s. 52.

⁴⁴J. I. Kraszewski, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 55.

⁴⁵Ibid, p. 57.

⁴⁶*Słownik języka polskiego PWN*, ed. L. Drabik, A. Kubiak-Sokół [et al], Warsaw 2006, p. 300.

them. It is no wonder that travel accounts often lack detailed descriptions of these landscapes. Complex accounts of adventures encountered on the road are gradually replaced with lists or epithets that depict the landscape in broad brushstrokes. Kraszewski also defers to this strategy:

The first segment in particular of the trip up the mountains to Semmering offers a host of incomparable beauties, transforming like a kaleidoscope that rearranges the same elements in various iterations. The distant mountaintops with their airy intonations, the lush greenery of meadows, dark forests and red cliffs all come together to form this mobile landscape.⁴⁷

This journey through Semmering, as Wojciech Tomasik has noted, was no ordinary trip, for its purpose was not transport, but the spectacle of travel.⁴⁸ It is no surprise, then, that these landscapes made such a strong impression on Kraszewski. Józef Kremer, who traveled by more or less the same route, also comments on the rapidly changing landscapes. He compares the act of watching them through the window to admiring paintings in a gallery or drawing back stage curtains:

Suddenly – and at every moment – the approaching hillocks, mountains and groves displace one another like alternating stage curtains in the wondrous theater of nature. The train window frames these images, turning them into landscape paintings by the great masters hung about on the wall of a gallery. In this case, the only difference is that these passing views are constantly changing, and are always suffused with the brilliance of the sun.⁴⁹

Relative to other texts, the description in *Travels to Italy* (*Podróży do Włoch*) is rather detailed, but remains within a generalized register. The writer mentions houses, sketches their general appearance, provides a silhouette of the landscape, and goes even further, attempting to convey the play of colors and light:

The lighting and coloring of these views are constantly changing – this metamorphosis is so vivid and frequent that it is almost as if nature itself is showing us how to paint landscapes and adorn them with shadows, light and color. Nature is no modest master! Through the train window, we glimpse a private world: little houses with red roofs and snow-white walls, a pale green meadow, azure, sun-dappled water, and just above it a wreath of silver-leaved willows, and further on bales of yellow wheat. Nature brushes all these objects with its own paint, honoring the rules of shadow and light.⁵⁰

It would be difficult to identify any actual location on the basis of this description. Instead, we have a general vision of places flitting before the traveler's eyes. We might also add that this view is confined to what the author manages to see through the square of the window. The admired landscapes may be dynamic and always changing, but they remain rather flat. They

⁴⁷J. I. Kraszewski, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 57.

⁴⁸W. Tomasik, *Pociąg do...*, p. 106.

⁴⁹J. Kremer, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 101-102.

⁵⁰Ibid, pp. 102-103

are images: views that lack depth. The rapid march of the train does not allow one to take root in any space or to render it as "place." Landscapes are merely observed from the train window; they are never experienced or explored. Of course, this mode of observation held a certain appeal for romantics, particularly in the case of landscape descriptions of Semmerling and its feasts for the eye.⁵¹ This does not change the fact that the mode of perception for the passing landscape has been fundamentally altered. The kaleidoscopic transience of these landscapes undoubtedly impedes any attempt to contemplate them.

Władysław Syrokomla also reflects on the transience of these images. In *My Own Travels through My Own Lands* (*Podróży swojaka po swojszczyźnie*), he writes:

The imagination compels us to quickly consolidate an image that then rapidly fades into another one, leaving faint traces in its wake. I do not know if I'll ever come back here again; I was there, but saw nothing. Near tears, I told myself: this is train travel! We've passed the border into Silesia, we've passed the town of Rawicz, the former Przyjemski estate, then the Opaliński estate, the town memorable for its textile factory and printing houses of which not a trace remains today. We've passed Bojanowo, the birthplace of the Junosz, the Bojanowski coat of arms [...].⁵²

Franciszek Morawski conveys a similar impression in his poem *The Railway*. Traversed space seems to be moving itself: its image changes at a fast tempo, hardly allowing one to discern the individual elements of the landscape:

It races onward like a clap of thunder,
Forests, mountains flee;
Somewhere behind them, in the obscure distance
Ragged clouds whisper
Hardly glimpsing the Alps, the Tatras,
It leaves them behind with its elephantine immensity.⁵³

Train travel thus becomes synonymous with the kaleidoscopic perception of images and impressions. We see further proof of this in a critical review of Ludwik's Pietrusiński's travel text *Memories from Venice, the Lipniki-Vienna Train Line, Vienna, the Carpathian Mountains in Wadowice, Frankfurt am Main, and from Krakow to the Spiski Tatras* (*Wspomnienia z Wenecji, kolei żelaznej Lipnicko-Wiedeńskiej, Wiednia, Karpat Wadowickich, Frankfurthu nad Menem, i przelotu z Krakowa do Tatr Spiskich*). The review was published by "Biblioteka Warszawska," and its author critiques the text's hurried descriptions of Venice, comparing the prose precisely to views "escaping" by train:

"Venice" becomes a mere catalog of buildings, images, artists, Italian phrases, dates, names and historical facts alluding to its former glory. We hardly get any details about contemporary life. The

⁵¹See footnote 48

⁵²W. Syrokomla, op. cit., p. 29.

⁵³F. Morawski, *Droga żelazna*, [in:] *ibid*, *Pisma*, vol. 1, Wrocław 1841, p. 213.

text describes views, a few towers, columns, copulas, altars and windows, often in *such a hurry that it's as if everything is escaping by train*. [emphasis – AMD]⁵⁴

Texts describing train travel often turn into long or short lists of the constituent parts of passing space. These spaces defy closer scrutiny and can never be described in detail. Passing space can never be truly encountered; it will never transform into “place.” It therefore takes on the role of the non-place.

The paradigms for describing train travel illustrated above do not operate in isolation. Often, they mutually complement one another. Kaleidoscopic perception and kaleidoscopic descriptions of passing landscapes often coexist with observations on how the rapid pace of travel makes it impossible to get to know these landscapes. Other texts omit descriptions of passing space and in their place emphasize the time required to cover a certain segment of the trip. Nevertheless, the passages collected here indicate the novelty of high-speed travel. Some authors embrace this experience optimistically, seeing the promise of new opportunities and sensory impressions in the rapid expansion of transportation systems. An equal share of authors feels threatened by new modes of transportation and emphasizes the constraints they impose. This analysis also identifies shifts in the travel writer's consciousness provoked by steamship or train travel. Time has superseded physical distance ceased to be a reliable unit of measurement. This shift reveals itself in minor details in texts describing travel through regions at staggered levels of development. The more developed a region, the more developed its network of train connections, and the less chance the traveler will have to actually encounter the place.

This analysis also demonstrates how travel prose from as early as the nineteenth century conveys a specific sense of space and place, recalling the category of the “non-place” proposed by French anthropologist Marc Augé. Augé, however, uses this language in the context of modernity and maintains that supermodernity is the very force that generated the non-place:

But non-places are the real measure of our time; one that could be quantified – with the aid of a few conversions between area, volume and distance – by totaling all the air, rail and motorway routes, the mobile cabins called ‘means of transport’ (aircraft, trains and road vehicles), the airports and railway stations, hotel chains, leisure parks, large retail outlets, and finally the complex skein of cable and wireless networks that mobilize extraterrestrial space for the purposes of a communication so peculiar that it often puts the individual in contact only with another image of himself.⁵⁵

⁵⁴*Kronika literacka*, “Biblioteka Warszawska” 1846, vol. 1, p. 192.

⁵⁵M. Augé, op. cit., p. 79

Despite Augé's assertion, the non-place might be useful as a category for thinking about earlier epochs. It goes without saying that the quantity of non-places dating back to the early nineteenth century was much sparser (lacking planes, cars, airports, cable skeins and wireless networks). Railway systems aside, this era also witnessed the advent of train stations, hotels and other travel novelties. As a result, the distinction between place and non-place (despite the lack of this terminology at the time) was intensely felt.

KEYWORDS

travel writing

non-place

space

ABSTRACT:

This article attempts to describe how nineteenth-century travel texts reflected the rapid expansion of transportation modes and new travel resources suddenly available to travel writers. Three characteristic descriptive modes are outlined: the disappearance of space, time's tendency to supersede space, and kaleidoscopic descriptions of travel impressions. The article also discusses how we might apply Marc Augé's category of the "non-place" to the experiences of romantic travel writers.

TRAIN TRAVEL

T I M E

p l a c e

r o m a n t i c i s m

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Anticolonial Poetics in Tadeusz Dębicki's Reportage: *Moienzi Nzadi. U wrót Konga*

Mikołaj Paczkowski

In 1927, Tadeusz Dębicki, a twenty-five-year-old Pole living in Antwerp, joined the crew of the cargo ship *Mateb* as an officer. The ship would embark on a month-long journey to Africa. Its route followed the *Moienzi Nzadi* named in the book's title: "the river that draws its source from all other rivers" [MN, 35]¹ in the Belgian colony of the Congo. Dębicki recorded his observations of landscapes that were a far cry from their European counterparts and commented on the brutal labors of the ship's black crew. These notes were published one year later in a collection of reportage. The resulting text can be singled out for its author's unambiguously anticolonial attitude. He conveys these views articulately and without caveats, as Olga Stanisławska has previously noted.² These beliefs also leave their imprint on the poetics of the text, a matter that we will look into here.

The piece of reportage discussed here was published in 1928 and is the direct product of the interwar climate, when interest in other cultures and faraway regions suddenly surged. This drove a tourism boom in the newly independent Poland,³ and opened up a new need for literary travel accounts. These reports (often published in newspapers, memoirs and reportage collections) described Polish regions as well as remote destinations on the global map. Textual expeditions to lands commonly perceived as exotic became increasingly popular. When compared to the texts by authors like Ferdynand Ossendowski, Adam Paszkowicz, Jerzy Chmielewski and Władysław Szafar, the contrast offered by Dębicki and his anticolonial position becomes acutely visible (and conversely, these writers provide a good context for Dębicki's views). The unambiguously anticolonial stance taken in *Moienzi Nzadi* did not exactly conform to critics' tastes. In one of the many reviews of the book that came out at the time, a critic remarks that "the only moderately pejorative feature of this curious book is its frequently repeated (perhaps to excess) expressions of remorse for the victims of European civilization and culture, for this is how the author describes the African Negro."⁴ This comment confirms that any critique of the colonial system was a novelty at the time of *Moienzi Nzadi*'s publication, and that public opinion was not fully prepared for Dębicki's work.

¹ T. Dębicki, *Moienzi Nzadi. U wrót Konga*, introduction: O. Stanisławska, second edition, Warsaw 2016. All citations from this text will be marked with the abbreviation "MN" followed by the page number.

² O. Stanisławska, *Marynarz antykolonialista*, in: T. Dębicki, op. cit., p. 5.

³ See: M. Lewan, *Zarys dziejów turystyki w Polsce*, Krakow 2004, pp. 47–64.

⁴ W. M., *Dębicki Tadeusz. "Moienzi Nzadi. U wrót Konga" [review]*, „Wiadomości Geograficzne” 1930, issue 1, p. 10.

This sailor-journalist's journey down the Congo River conjures vivid associations with Joseph Conrad's masterpiece *Heart of Darkness*. Conrad's novel is even referenced explicitly in *Moienzi Nzadi*. Describing Antwerp, where the ship was docked before leaving for Africa, the author alludes to the "city of *white sepulchers*." [MN, 14] Korzeniowski (Conrad's Polish surname) uses this evangelical allegory in *Heart of Darkness*, most likely in reference to Brussels (as Dębicki seems to have presumed as well): "in a very few hours I arrived in a city that has always made me think of a whited sepulchre."⁵ In *Moienzi Nzadi*, however, the "whited sepulcher" seems to stand for Europe as a whole. This image suggests that European countries conceal the actual motives of their "civilizing" missions behind a façade of pretty aphorisms on progress and the propagation of civilization. In this way, Antwerp earns the status of a synecdoche of sorts for the Old Continent, becoming a reference point for the young officer's impressions of Africa.

For Dębicki, Europe embodies two categories he perceives as uniformly negative: civilization and progress. His journey to remote Africa is therefore a kind of escape "from people, civilization, the cacophony of the cities, and the intrigues and prejudices of the old world." [MN, 39] The author seems to reiterate his anti-civilization convictions at every step, driving home the notion that unrestricted development is the very root of Europeans' ethical depravity. This position stems, of course, from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's conception of a return to nature, and was by no means unique to the interwar climate. We encounter the same sentiment, for instance, in Ludwika Ciechanowiecka's essays, *In the Heart of the Sahara (W sercu Sahary)*. Ciechanowiecka departed for Africa in order to "tear herself from Europe's icy embrace" and "free herself from the everyday drag."⁶ Yet the majority of Polish accounts from the "Dark Continent" have only praises to sing of the civilizing missions spearheaded by colonists. While a few journalists do seem aware of the indigenous peoples' aversions to the influx of Europeans due to the injustice and brutal violence they suffered, these journalists critique isolated blunders made by the missionaries without ever challenging the logic driving the enterprise as a whole. Ferdynand Ossendowski expressed admiration for the two thousand Frenchmen seeding progress among ten million black people. He writes: "these men are no mere colonists; they are spokesmen of grand ideas."⁷ The writer does note that these "spokesmen" resort to violence and coercion to carry out their missions, but he rationalizes these actions, framing them as the only effective method for getting through to the recalcitrant "Negroes."

Against this backdrop, Dębicki's contribution offers stark contrast. *Moienzi Nzadi* contains not a single attempt to justify the coldblooded brutality of the white man in Africa. For Dębicki, this "civilizing project" consisted of imposing duties while stripping the indigenous people of their rights wholesale. He also argues that the grand aphorisms of progress and humanitarianism broadcast by Europeans in reality served merely as a cover-up for the far-reaching exploitation of the colonized regions:

In the African colonies, what the white man calls "importing civilization," with perhaps a few slight exceptions, is pure exploitative robbery. Veiled in subterfuge, in the name of increasingly lofty ideas, they exploit and rob defenseless people that are stupefied by the scale of things they are seeing for the first time and terrorized by the "humanitarian" colonists. [MN, 87]

⁵ J. Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, Dover Thrift Editions, New York, p. 7

⁶ L. Ciechanowiecka, *W sercu Sahary. Algier-Mzab-Tidikelt-Hoggar*, Warsaw 1933, p. 5.

⁷ F. Ossendowski, *Czarny czarownik. Relacja z wyprawy do Afryki 1926 r.*, Warsaw 1926, p. 59.

The white men's overarching objective was therefore to enrich themselves and expand their sphere of influence, yet these motives were masked by hypocritical expressions of concern for the colonized peoples. This becomes particularly clear in the sections of the text that describe the labors of black workers. Dębicki uses naturalist language to depict the arduous tasks that the workers kept up over several hours as they loaded and unloaded the ship's cargo. Dębicki draws attention to the weight of the goods, the young age of the African workers (some of whom were only teenagers), and the men's overworked and dire physical conditions. Their toils are depicted alongside those of the Europeans, who all seem exhausted by merely overseeing the work and giving orders. This contrast is accented by Dębicki's description of the meals laid out for different groups within the crew: while the white officers help themselves to an opulent dinner in a shaded cabin, the black workers receive four crackers apiece. As Dębicki highlights, "beating a Negro is *forbidden*," [MN, 118] but the white foremen pay this no heed, resorting to corporal punishment without the slightest reason. The young officer ironically remarks that the next achievement of the ever-ascending European continent ought to be a manual on how to beat colonized peoples.

In the text, Dębicki harshly stigmatizes the white people's total lack of ethical right to consider themselves superior to the populations they construe as "primitive." He represents Europeans as a degenerate people who live in violation of the very virtues they preach. During his stay at the Matadi port, the sailor happens upon a local church where the congregation is reciting vespers. He notices that only the locals seem to be joining in prayer. Speaking in French, they pray for the welfare of all people, regardless of skin color. In the same passage, Dębicki points out "the white *mondela pembe* and white *mamis* go [...] drink *whisky and soda* at Hotel A.B.C." [MN, 97]

This contrasting juxtaposition of the lives of white and black people is one of Dębicki's chief strategies for building an image of the colonized Congo. These contrasts are often premised on extreme and even hyperbolic combinations of images, which imparts a grotesque aura to the anecdotes collected in the text. Describing a brawl between Belgian and American sailors, the author initially points out the eurocentrism and haughtiness exhibited by the Belgians (who even call the Portuguese "colored") and their barbaric harassment of one of the Americans when they cut off both of his ears. The journalist punctuates the event by quoting a sign over the door of a nearby hotel: "Entry denied to savages." Dębicki follows this with the ironic question, "And what am I to make now of the *savage* and the *civilized*?" [MN, 112] Dębicki also veers grotesque when he describes a monument in Antwerp.⁸ He sets up an analogy between the colonial situation and the Germans' occupation of Warsaw in 1915, reaching the following conclusions: "At least the Germans never thought of raising a monument in Berlin depicting Poles praying on their knees before a Prussian soldier. This monument's counterpart can be found, however, in Antwerp." [MN, 125] To convey the primitivism of the European colonists, he also offers a scene from the end of his journey and describes an officer spitting on the head of a black worker who is walking away.

There are many other pieces of journalism devoted to Africa that include accounts of morally degenerate white people. Ferdynand Ossendowski's *Slaves of the Sun* (*Niewolnicy słońca*)⁹ opens with

⁸ Dębicki is probably referring to the monument of Father de Deken built in Antwerp in 1914. De Deken was a missionary who worked in China, Tibet and the Congo. The monument depicts the priest with a second man kneeling before him. The monument remains standing today, although a few years ago, few controversies provoked city authorities to install a plaque clarifying the historical context.

⁹ F. Ossendowski, *Niewolnicy słońca. Podróż przez zachodnią połąć Afryki podzwrotnikowej w 1925/26 r.*, Poznań 1927.

a chapter about a European man who takes an administrative post in North Guinea. After the death of his beloved wife (who couldn't weather life in the inclement climate), Richard gradually transforms into an "eternal colonist," giving in to frivolous vices and serially moving through black wives and lovers (for Ossendowski, this is the most base form of demoralization). The journalist speculates that the factors driving the white man's downfall lie outside of the man himself, in the adverse environmental conditions of Africa, and in the man's prolonged exposure to Guinea's indigenous people. For Ossendowski, these conditions all produced a sense of "moral torment" in the man. Tadeusz Dębicki, however, opts for another explanation. He argues that in Africa, Europeans find themselves suddenly able to behave however they please, since news of their behavior will never reach home. [MN, 86] What's more, he claims that man conducts himself in a "civilized" manner only out of fear of the repercussions that await him if he strays too far from accepted social norms. If he knows that his deeds will go unpunished, however, he quickly abandons the values he once preached.

Another aspect that distinguishes *Moienzi Nzadi* from other accounts of Africa from the period is the author's take on the stereotypes and myths circulating in interwar Europe about the inhabitants of the "Dark Continent." One such myth was the view that all goods produced by indigenous peoples were primitive and inferior to those made in the "civilized" world. In his text *Angola: Notes from a Journey through Africa (Angola. Notatki z podróży po Afryce)*, Jerzy Chmielewski, describes his visit to a village and observes its buildings:

Small huts modeled out of clay or slapped together from branches, roofs thatched with grass like heaps of hay. Nearby, a few farm buildings have been thrown together in the same primitive style. The granary stands on stilts and is painted with bright clay in zigzag patterns. A coop for hens and pigs is no different from a residential home. This is the Negro homestead!¹⁰

The author deliberately describes the residential home alongside buildings designed for animals in order to divulge his own attitude towards the people he observes. For Dębicki, on the other hand, simple buildings built from hay and reeds are built "skillfully" and meet all the needs of their tenants. He portrays the structures built by the colonists in an entirely different light. Passing through a port town, he remarks that the buildings are "crooked and clumsy, primarily with iron roofs and broad, shadowy verandas with flat awnings and mosquito netting in lieu of window-panes." [MN, 95] He also observes that the Europeans only use products of European origin. The old continent, which was purportedly to import civilization, in fact brought a haul of tawdry junk that clashes with the beauty of African nature.

Dębicki's attitude towards the women he meets in Africa is particularly interesting. He highlights their modesty and shyness. He compares the Europeans' vice of false morality to the African women who wear long dresses down to the ankles. [MN, 60] This portrait has little in common with the descriptions that dominate other travel writing from the period. In other texts, the black woman becomes somewhat of a symbol of licentiousness and sexual promiscuity. She is often portrayed in the nude, or perhaps performing an erotic dance, seducing the white man's gaze and giving herself up to him in exchange for cheap trifles (beads or fabric). We find no such descriptions in *Moienzi Nzadi*. Spinning a gloomy image of a "Dark Continent" that has been colonized in full, Dębicki uses sharp contrasts to juxtapose African and European women's ways of life:

¹⁰J. Chmielewski, *Angola. Notatki z podróży po Afryce*, introduction: J. Makarczyk, vol. 1, Warsaw 1929, p. 27.

[...] [the colonists — M.P.] will bring about a situation in which even the slight, black, warm *mami's*, built like brass statues with dreamlike profiles and firm breasts, even they will become false and refined, just like white women. And they will love only money, or perhaps even only love for money... [MN, 89]

The young journalist's technique for setting up contrasts somehow forces him to cultivate a binary vision of the world in which each attribute assigned to the people of Africa must be balanced out by its opposite counterpart among Europeans. At times, his idealization of one society (or degradation of another) is taken to such an extreme that Dębicki's prose veer hyperbolic and somewhat grotesque.

Another widespread stereotype of the interwar period was the bias that the people of Africa were irrational and unintelligent. In his book *Black Sorcerer* (*Czarny czarownik*), cited above, Ferdynand Ossendowski writes that the black people he encountered in Guinea are "lazy" and "insensible," for they never think of the future and live only in the present.¹¹ Journalists also relate "amusing" tales of the African people's fear of machines imported from Europe such as the car or airplane. We find similar anecdotes in Dębicki's tales, although they evoke no feelings of superiority in the young officer. He merely relays the stories, without providing any commentary on the black workers' behavior. After sharing a second-hand anecdote about the indigenous people's lack of rationality (in the anecdote, they apparently pushed a cart weighed down with tree trunks instead of merely moving aside an obstacle in the road), [MN, 57] he immediately follows this with his own observations of his employees' work ethics. He notes their intelligence, cleverness, and skillful ability to adapt their work to their own aptitudes and physical strengths.

If we consider the text's optics of constant comparison between the African and European circumstances, the journalist does manage to subvert several stereotypical images linked to the people of the "Dark Continent," while reproducing and confirming others. This writing can certainly be associated with Rousseau's mythic archetype of the "noble savage." Rousseau depicts the savage as an entity uncorrupted by evil and intrinsically good. Another variation on this myth that clearly operates in *Moienzi Nzadi* is the portrayal of the indigenous people of Africa as "oversized children." Several times throughout the text, Dębicki recalls that the black people he lives among give off the impression of "kindhearted children," [MN, 43] and that they are "simple, naïve souls" [MN, 88] who "rejoice like children [...], laughing with their kind, giant eyes." [MN, 121] This image prevails throughout writing on Africa, and it usually serves to justify the "civilizing" missions (for surely a child needs the care of an adult). On the other hand, as Maciej Ząbek has noted, we also encounter this myth in abolitionist literature by authors who seem aware that they need to resort to new stereotypes to subvert the dominant ones, if only to be understood.¹² In Dębicki's case, we can hardly accuse him of the condescending impulse to take care of his black employees. He represents the African people as children in order to highlight a sense that they are naïve in their goodness, and that this prevents them from seeing the extensive evils the white colonists are perpetrating when they exploit them for hard labor and transport all that is of value back to Europe, destroying the landscape they leave behind.

We might also speculate on the motives driving Dębicki's views of the colonial conditions he observed in the Congo, given how extremely out of step they were with their time. It seems clear that

¹¹F. Ossendowski, *Czarny czarownik...* op. cit., p. 8.

¹²M. Ząbek, *Biali i Czarni. Postawy Polaków wobec Afryki i Afrykanów*, Warsaw 2007, p. 148.

Dębicki's views were influenced in part by his mode of travel and destination. Unlike other authors who tended to embark on their journeys primarily to write literature, Tadeusz Dębicki went to Africa to earn money. His work on the trade ship forced him to be in constant contact with the black workers and to observe how they went about their tasks. Dębicki demonstrates a remarkable level of engagement as well as interest, mobilizing his own form of participative observation. He tries to learn the indigenous people's language, speaks with them, and listens closely to the songs they sing. He writes:

Now, after a month of communicating with them, I can already recognize each one. I notice the absence of the curious Hotentot, who has two upper rows of teeth. I see that scrawny Jean with six toes on his left foot always comes first in the roll call. I can easily distinguish Sanda from Samba and I smile at the young Antoine, who greets me in a sonorous voice [...] [MN, 132]

Direct contact with the Other thus allows Dębicki to get to know them and ultimately, to access their subjectivity. The mode of travel also shaped the anticolonial position of another Polish writer from the interwar period. I am referring, of course, to Kazimierz Nowak, who wandered throughout Africa on a bicycle between 1931 and 1936.¹³

Dębicki's critical stance towards the colonial situation also stems from his anti-civilization views mentioned above. Dębicki has only disparaging assessments of civilization and progress, the products of European culture. Yet their point of origin is of course the very people who conceived these ideas. Perhaps this is why Dębicki concludes his text with a curious device. Just as the colonists judged the people of Africa on the basis of their skin color, so Tadeusz Dębicki makes the claim that white people living in Europe are "all evil people." [MN, 138] He does not even exclude himself from this generalization, since he is all too aware that for the African people, he will always represent the very people he critiques.

Moienzi Nzadi: At the Gates of the Congo is a remarkable piece of reportage in the context of Polish travelers' accounts from Africa from the interwar period. The young reporter, striving to convey absolutely everything he observed during his month-long journey in the fullest detail, mobilizes a poetic strategy that consists of two artistic devices. Firstly, he sets up sharp and often generalized or hyperbolic comparative pairs, pitching two distinct worlds against one another. These portraits often veer grotesque and have a strong effect on the reader. Secondly, he is an apt practitioner of irony, and uses this mode to convey the hypocrisy and duplicitous nature of the colonists. In his efforts to subvert certain prevalent stereotypes and myths associated with the "Dark Continent" and its people, he cannot help but preserve other ones, and is occasionally guilty of naïve idealization. All this being said, Dębicki's voice is remarkable for Polish literature of the period and seems to have been undeservedly forgotten. We can only hope that a new edition of the 1928 text might help cultivate the memory of the "anticolonial sailor."

¹³Natalia Grądzka writes more substantively on Kazimierz Nowak's specific mode of travel and his position on colonialism. See: N. Grądzka, *Wokół Kazimierza Nowaka. Od podróży po koloniach do postkolonizowania Polski*, "Panoptikum" 2009, issue 8(15), pp. 221-234.

KEYWORDS

Africa

travel reportage

ABSTRACT:

This article analyzes the reportage of Tadeusz Dębicki, titled *Moienzi Nzadi: At the Gates of the Congo* (1928) in terms of its anticolonial attitude. The article reviews the writer's methods for constructing a critique of the colonial system (through contrast and irony) and discusses its uniqueness against the backdrop of other Polish travel accounts from Africa written in the interwar period. The specific circumstances of Dębicki's journey are also described here, as well as the prevailing stereotypes associated with conditions in Africa, which the author either subverts or affirms.

a n t i c o l o n i a l i s m

s t e r e o t y p e

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Urszula Kowalska-Nadolna

Between Tradition and Progress: History and Modernity, Land and Sea

C r i t i c s :
Robert Burden, *Travel, Modernism and Modernity*, Farnham 2015.

*Places have deep associations; places have story
to tell...*

Robert Burden

In 2015, Ashgate Publishing Limited put out a book by Robert Burden, a British scholar who had written several publications on the work of Joseph Conrad, D.H. Lawrence and literary portraits of place and space. The book was titled *Travel, Modernism and Modernity*.

The objective of Burden's study was to explore the internal meanings of travel writing dating from the modernist period. The author roots his observations in select literary and nonliterary texts by five Anglophone writers: Joseph Conrad (1857 – 1924), E. M. Forster (1879 – 1970), D. H. Lawrence (1885 – 1930), Henry James (1843 – 1916) and Edith Wharton (1862 – 1937). While these writers' careers have drawn the interest of literary scholars many times over, what distinguishes Burden's work from other analyses available to readers is its distinct ability to pursue many motifs in

parallel, along with the breadth of its contextual perspectives. Burden creates sketches of his book's protagonists, drawing out the meaning of autobiographical motifs in their texts (travel-related and otherwise). He analyzes the settings in which they wrote in the context of the period, and examines their references to other eras, with special attention to the Enlightenment and Romantic traditions. Travel merely offers a superficial thread that ties together the texts. In reality, Burden's whole study identifies parallels, correspondences, original features and special idiosyncrasies in the writing of these five Anglophone authors.

The scope of Burden's analysis includes journals, essays, notes, guidebooks and other literary texts in his exploration of the travel motif in select works by Conrad, Forster, Lawrence, James and Wharton. He defines travel's role and discusses the degree to which this theme impacted the text as a literary trope, dominant theme and narrative model reflected in the narrative structure. In Burden's analysis, travel of-

fers artistic expression a useful metaphor for the search for identity (be it individual, national, or cultural...) in an epoch of profound crisis. A critical gaze on modernism and modernity often comes hand in hand with a sensitivity to the colonial traditions shaping British and American culture.

The essential concept running through the interpretations of the selected texts is, of course, modernism itself. Burden understands this term broadly, following Tim Armstrong and Michael Levenson. Burden brings particular focus to the theme of stylistic and aesthetic diversity that exceeds modernist conventions and can often be found in descriptions of landscapes and architecture.

For Burden, the phenomenon of modernity called out in the title is an immanent aspect of a modernist and binary approach to seeing the world (p. 3). As he states in the book's introduction, his approach rests upon a premise introduced by Steve Giles, who took an in depth look at the modernist discourse on comprehending modernity. Burden describes the ambiguous take on modernity endemic to the turn of the century: modernity brought with it technological and scientific progress, on the one hand, giving man the means to seize control over the natural world. On the other hand, modernity distanced man from traditional value systems that had once provided a sense of identity (p. 3). "The modernist critique of modernity is represented by the writers examined in this study," writes Burden. He also follows after Baudelaire with his claim that contemporary existence is characterized by the "transitory, the fugitive, and the contingent." The modernist loss of traditional values prompted a sudden break from literary conventions, which informed these five authors' campaign to restore classical narratives to literature. Burden also highlights a strategy in these efforts mobilized by four of the writers (Conrad, Forster, James and Wharton) who used aes-

thetic and formal devices to reconstitute traditional values. The artfulness of the prose used to describe places the writers traveled through (spaces, cities and landmarks) and the joy of observation (significantly, from the traveler's perspective rather than the tourist's — Burden highlights this distinction repeatedly as being unusually sharp in modernist prose) correlate to moral values. These values are elucidated through the observation of art and architecture. A sense of harmony (aesthetic and otherwise) was to provide the very basis for contemporary civilization.

In his extensive introduction, Burden reiterates major theories on modernism formulated since the mid-twentieth century. Together, these theories offer an extraordinary range of analytic approaches. Burden cites concepts introduced by Rogvald Eysteinnsson (modernism as the object of different critical formations), Roland Barthes (an emphasis on the "problematics of language"), Ortega y Gasset (who wrote on the dehumanization of art), György Lukács (who was mostly concerned with decadence), Theodor Adorno (for whom modernism was a radical attack on modernity in the realm of the aesthetic), Richard Sheppard (who proposes three strategies for answering the question "what is modernism?" that attend to its political, social, historical and literary contexts) and finally, a group of German scholars centered around Jürgen Habermas who construed modernism as the continuation of the Enlightenment tradition (pp. 5-6).

Having established this broad and diversified background of literature on the subject, with *Travel, Modernism and Modernity*, Burden offers a new take on the motif of travel, which had been neglected in the last few decades' discourse on modernism and world literature. For Burden, this motif operated in the literature of the era as both a narrative model and literary trope. Running through Burden's argument

is the belief that travel's influence only intensified in the late modernist period (the 1930s). He suggests that the trope of wandering — structurally reflected in the textual composition — and the critical role of topography in the space of the literary (or artistic) work are also visible in earlier prose of the period. In this case, travel writing (going against the grain of Victorian models) becomes significantly subjectivized and veers impressionistic, with a new, fervent focus on the impression, experience and consciousness of the traveler rather than the journey itself. Burden's preoccupations and meticulous analysis of the select authors' literary output stem from his observation of the literary devices the authors use to deconstruct conventional travel writing while reasserting the archetypal status of the wanderer, pilgrimage, escape, pursuit, process of discovery, and the quest... He also explores motifs endemic to the age of abandoning one's homeland, emigration, and deracination.

Even in these first pages, Burden calls out resonances between the biographies and literary texts penned by these five authors. He highlights the vivid distinction between travel and tourism. Mass commercial tourism was characterized by superficial observation that lacked depth and in fact was entirely bereft of cognitive exploration. For Burden, this form of travel is symptomatic of the "dark side" of modernism. Conrad, Forster, Lawrence, James and Wharton practiced various modes of travel (both literally and figuratively), and these forms of travel correlate with different cognitive modes and levels of reflexivity regarding otherness and the foreign. Burden points out that the symbolic act of crossing a border (taking the form of an adventure in Conrad's work and a romantic pilgrimage in Forster's and Lawrence's) becomes a departure point for reflecting on the American and British colonization of social, racial, cultural, epistemological and identity-based differences. For Burden, the experience of the traveler fleeing the

kitsch and the cliché is a defining component of the selected authors' travel journals, guides and other texts. This feature distinguishes these texts from the "mass" "popular" ephemera that artificially and coercively reduces and simplifies cognitive impressions. This view informs a literary and artistic perspective (p. 11).

As Burden argues, "places have deep associations; places have stories to tell" (p. 13). In each chapter, he meticulously scrutinizes the various stories "narrated" in the space of these texts. These stories represent the major cities of modernist consciousness (Paris, London, Berlin, New York, Chicago) alongside other topographical portraits of buildings, landscapes, ruins, seas, forests... Burden also emphasizes that a critical attitude towards one's homeland framed within a foreign and externalized perspective functions as an analogy in all five authors' travel texts. Burden thoroughly substantiates his approach with numerous textual examples. In the five chapters devoted to the individual authors, he analyzes their "spatial practices" that engage the cultural associations of specific places and regions. Interestingly enough, Burden's reflection often exceeds the literary level and attends to the philosophical, psychological and sociological valences of travel. At these moments, Burden often evokes the thinking of Freud and Lacan, who both treat travel as the expression of a lack of satisfaction with one's home that ultimately becomes a method of self-discovery. The transgressive and transformative aspects of wandering correlate to the belief so prevalent in modernist works that anyone who sets off on a journey must come home a changed person. Among both writers and the protagonists of their books, we can identify a yearning to travel that exposes their need to confront everyday conventions dominating English and American turn-of-the-century society.

The only author in Burden's study who takes a strong position on social inequality between

men and women also happens to be the only woman in his research — Edith Wharton. The book's last chapter is devoted to Wharton's body of work, offering a sort of foil for the vast scope of the first chapter, which focuses on Joseph Conrad's fascination with the sea and the resulting impression that travel is man's domain. Issues of gender (and sexuality) are by no means absent from the other authors' oeuvres: take Henry James, for instance. In his work, the crisis of cultural integrity and the demise of traditional values coincide with a crisis of masculinity.

I would be hard pressed to do justice to Robert Burden's erudite work in just a few pages. Although he examines celebrated authors who are seminal figures in Anglophone literary modernism, he offers a new take on their work while complementing the existing body of scholarship. The book's finest assets are its multiple layers of text, along with its deep analysis and detailed mapping of travel motifs. Burden's study also provides a useful overview of existing research on this literary period and its representative figures.

The book's first chapter, titled *Joseph Conrad: Stories of the Sea and the Land*, examines themes in specific books by Conrad that broach themes of travel, with an emphasis on the trope of the sea. Analyzing texts such as *Heart of Darkness*, *A Personal Record*, *The Mirror of the Sea* and *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* Burden first focuses on the author's strong bond with the sea that clearly derives from personal experience. In Conrad's work, the sea becomes an ideological and imagined space. Burden also attends to the specific microcosm of life on a ship, as well as the opposition between sea and land in which the latter figures as a repugnant non-place, or the very negation of home. Towards the end of the chapter, Burden analyzes devices operative in Conrad's work that reference impression-

ist painting, although he assesses the writer's "impressionism" as a form of radicalized realism (p. 37). Travel also seems to permeate the very structure of Conrad's narrative, which exhibits archetypal echoes of mythic sea voyages and constantly evokes classic myths (e.g. the sea appearing as the mirror from the Narcissus myth). Conrad deconstructs traditional and long-standing clichés of travel writing and the picaresque novel. Burden informs us that the latter was Conrad's favorite genre in his youth. The gesture of conjuring an author's personal experience becomes Burden's signature move, and it occurs throughout all the book's chapters. This maneuver allows him to zoom in on the context of the historical moment and examine biographical information such as family history, life situation, and the itineraries and motives of the authors' travels. Witnessing the British colonial project becomes a significant limit point that links the private and literary existences of all five authors, although this is particularly explicit in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. In the case of Conrad's work, Burden tries to distance himself from other scholars' allegations regarding the writer's racism (p. 46). Conrad's range of travel prose certainly includes accounts of specific places (the Malay Archipelago, the Congo, South America), but it also describes cities the author himself visited. Conrad's topography occasionally drifts into the figurative, covering exotic regions, seas, and vast urban centers (figuring as a metaphor for the degeneracy of Western civilization). Burden discusses these places in detail in the first chapter and uses them to elucidate the two faces of modernism that appear in Conrad's oeuvre. They also help him draw out Conrad's consistent dichotomy between civilization, progress, and modernity, on the one hand, and, on the other, a return to roots, tradition and nature.

Burden finds similar motifs in the work of the second chapter's protagonist, E. M. Forster. Forster's chapter is titled *The Heuristic Value*

of *Travel and Place*. Here, Burden focuses on the pressure that builds between traveling and dwelling at home. For Burden, this pressure affords Forster the ability to gaze critically at his own birthplace. Unlike in the previous chapter, Burden investigates the author's travel journals as well as his novels. For Burden, the journals offer a guidebook of sorts (albeit one written with an experienced and educated tourist in mind). They describe journeys to Italy, Greece, Egypt, and other destinations. Burden writes that in Forster's text, "geography becomes the key to history by creating a sense of place" (p. 68). Journeying into the past and encountering the "ghosts" that haunt a city's ancient corners can yield a critique of modernity and its empty abandonment of historical tradition. In all five authors' bodies of work, Burden takes an interest in the dissonance between one's mental image of world's remote corners and the reality (this opposition coincides with the one between the tourist's collective and reductive gaze and the gaze of the traveler who manages to grasp the actuality of the space that eludes the tourist's reach). This is a consistent thread throughout Burden's reading of Forster's "Indian" texts, collected in *The Hill of Devi*. These "vacations from Britishness," as Burden ultimately calls them, become an opportunity to celebrate difference and to flee the confinements and affiliations (mainly associated with class, everyday conventions, and heteronormative mores) that bind him to his place of birth. These experiences become a departure point for developing a narrative of contemporary identity and for idealizing the past (Forster also notes this phenomenon in his travels throughout the British Provinces). Forster does not eschew symbolic oppositions in his landscape descriptions (light vs. dark; interior vs. exterior). His journey can be characterized by its heuristic value, offering him space "for the broadening of cultural and sexual horizons" (p. 106).

The next protagonist of Burden's study is D. H.

Lawrence (*Travel, Otherness and the Sense of Place*). His overview of Lawrence's many trips (to Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Australia, New Mexico and Mexico) is in fact an exploration of the author's intrinsic condition of lacking a home and endlessly seeking a space of his own. The genuine tone of his literary prose is due in part to the fact that Lawrence penned his texts on the go, in the very act of travel and under the direct influence of new places and landscapes that circumscribed him in specific spaces while exposing him to new and open spaces. The urge to travel pacifies Lawrence's nostalgic yearning to return to a land unsullied by modernity. At bottom, this desire can be equated with the pursuit of a lost paradise that evolves into a critique of modernity and its interventions on traditional orders, values, and natural bonds. For Lawrence, the quest for "the other" and the encounter with the "ghosts" of the cities he visits provides the only viable path towards defining his sense of identity. His fascination with faraway regions quickly stirs up other associations, becoming a mirror of Lawrence's emotional state, psychological condition, and struggle to define his sexual identity. At the same time, his idyllic and romantic accounts of the landscapes, customs and regions fail to resolve the question Burden poses in reference to all these authors' work: setting aside their openness (or otherness), are they really capable of escaping the imperial perspective and transgressing the framework of the "imperial imaginary" (Mary Louise Pratt) that dominated the turn-of-the-century Western gaze?

For the last two chapters of his book, Burden shifts to the American perspective. In the fourth chapter (*Henry James: Journeys of Expatriation*), the scholar proposes an approach to "border-crossing motifs" in Henry James' nonfiction and literary writing, drawing special attention to the fundamental meaning of travel in his work. For James, travel co-creates narrative and helps him locate a point of departure

for the text (James himself called this kind of journey the “story seeker’s journey” (p. 156). Burden scrupulously analyzes several motifs reflected in James’ texts, including: the longing to travel to Europe, critique of the irreversible changes brought about by modernity, the radical representation of a superficial and mass consumerist tourism against deep cognition, contemplation of time and the ephemeral (particularly visible in his descriptions of ruins), the pursuit of the past undertaken by a man “from a country with no past,” and framing travel as an aesthetic experience.

Burden’s book concludes with a chapter on Edith Wharton (*The Aesthetic Value of Travel*). Again, he starts off his analysis with a brief biographical sketch of the author, drawing out Wharton’s personal travels that were so instrumental to her work. For Wharton, travel became a test of sorts that challenged her cultural fluency and openness towards otherness and diversity (p. 197). In her work, fictional protagonists are given cognitive peepholes through which they come to understand another culture. Finally, we see this experience from a woman’s perspective. Burden concludes that Wharton’s work transgresses gender conventions and evades the trajectory assigned to women by culturally prescribed roles. A substantive portion of the chapter juxtaposes Wharton’s work with James’ (the two writers were personally acquainted, and Burden makes the case that this had a decisive impact on their literary output). Significantly, Burden focuses his analysis on the fact that despite Wharton’s choice to set her major novels mainly in New York (*The House of Mirth*, *The Custom of the Country*, *The Age of Innocence*), their themes explore travel in a literary, metaphorical and literal sense.

These brief comments on the individual chapters of *Travel, Modernism and Modernity* do not capture the level of detail that Burden brings to the themes called out in his title. His in-depth

analysis of select texts by these five authors can be leveraged as a starting point for tackling other motifs in these modernists’ work. Burden’s comprehensive research on the diverse and detailed contexts behind their work, along with his multifaceted assertion of space and travel as formative factors for modernist cultural consciousness, mark this book as an original contribution, despite the substantial scholarship that has already explored these authors’ legacies. This book takes the form of a great culmination of existing concepts while proposing a fresh approach to motifs of travel, wandering, the pursuit of a home and a sense of identity (individual and national) that have been so intimately bound to literature for centuries. Although the texts explored in the book date back to the early twentieth century, it seems that Burden’s findings offer vividly relevant insights for the contemporary moment as well.

KEYWORDS

travel writing

MODERNISM

ABSTRACT:

The review presents the monograph *Travel, Modernism and Modernity*, written by British scientist Robert Burden, published in 2015. The purpose of Burden's book was mainly to develop and analyze meanings of modernistic travel writing. Fundamental for his studies were literary and non-literary works written by five British and American writers: Joseph Conrad (1857–1924), Edward Morgan Forster (1879–1970), David Herbert Lawrence (1885–1930), Henry James (1843–1916) and Edith Wharton (1862–1937). Their works have repeatedly been the object of interest of literary scholars. However, what distinguishes Burden's work from the other analyzes, is very broad contextual perspective. Burden elaborately presents the main characters of his book, emphasizes the importance of autobiographical themes in their texts (not only those related to traveling), contextually analyzes their works in historical, sociological and psychological context. What is connecting selected texts is not only the journey – in fact, the whole study is devoted to pointing out parallels, correspondences, as well as original features, specific, significant differences in the writing of five English-language authors. The discussed book appears as a great summary of previous views, at the same time it offers an interesting thoughts about the archetypical motif of traveling, wandering, searching for a place and human identity (both: individual and national). Although the texts described in Burden's work were written at the beginning of the twentieth century, it seems that the author's investigations are extremely relevant also nowadays.

spacial practices in modernistic literature

TRAVEL AND TOURISM

modernity

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Wiesław Ratajczak

Reading, Traveling, Conversing

C r i t i c s :
Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech, *Travels with Conrad: Essays (Podróże z Conradem. Szkice)*, Kraków 2016.

The title of Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech's book might strike the reader as an odd fit. Literary travel writing is not the book's primary focus, nor is the author interested in wandering in the footsteps of an author or the heroes of his prose. Yet it would be unfair to assume that the signpost *Travels after Conrad* only functions here as a heading that holds together various essays with little in common. The image of reading and interpretation as acts of travel seems straightforward and even a little too obvious. In the case of Conrad's work, however, you would be hard pressed to find a more appropriate concept to grasp the map of his literary invention (spanning just about the whole planet), the wonders of navigation that provide the very context of narration, the simultaneous risk and promise of an encounter with the Other, cultural borders, foreign languages and spheres of initiation...

When preparing for a journey, the first, indispensable step is to collect maps, guidebooks, useful information, and in this case: a sampling of good literature on the subject. Adamowicz-Pośpiech provides a scrupulous overview of the readings offered by her predecessors, sometimes following their cues and often polemicizing with them. These references never overwhelm the reader, however, and in reading the book, you never feel bombarded by footnotes. Instead, you feel confident that the book's interpretations are new but rooted in tradition.

Any journey, or perhaps the departure of a ship, can only start with an encounter with the captain, for his word decides all. It seems appropriate, then, that Adamowicz-Pośpiech opens her book with an essay discussing the integration of autobiographical elements into Conrad's books. Although this is a favorite theme among Con-

rad acolytes and has already been the subject of much scholarship (much of which is derivative of Zdzisław Najder's foundational study),¹ Adamowicz-Pośpiech introduces the term "anti-confessional autobiography," which allows her to grasp the matter more precisely than her predecessors. Using this insightful formula, she builds upon Najder's premises. Najder has argued that embedded in Conrad's *Lord Jim* is a challenge to Jean-Jacques Rousseau as the founder of modern confessional literature and its tendency to seek the exotic and rationalize infidelity and impotence.² Adamowicz-Pośpiech centers her reflections around the volume *A Personal Record*, which embodies the tenets of the Conradian autobiographical pact. These tenets include an aversion to speaking directly of the self, the displacement of emphasis to the places he visited and the people he met, and a tendency to process existential experiences through the prism of literature, relying on allusion, citations, and unattributed references. These strategies set up a game of concealment and revelation that is rife with red herrings and subterfuges. Paradoxically, however, while Conrad conceals himself, he simultaneously reveals the essential hallmarks of his work and personality. As Adamowicz-Pośpiech points out, Conrad rejects the convention of confession but simultaneously divulges the very principles he "expressed in his works, but more importantly, those by which he lived his life, such as self-possession, self-control, sobriety, duty, and an infinite sense of loyalty" (p. 15).

Adamowicz-Pośpiech situates the volume *A Personal Record* against an expansive backdrop of theories of personal writing and its poetics (drawing from the work of Regina Lubas-Bartoszyńska, Phillippe Lejeune, Mieczysław

Dąbrowski and Maria Czermińska, among others). In doing so, she reveals the volume's singular quality as a mediated autobiography that embeds the writer's life in a diverse body of references to literary tradition and allusions to the lives of others, second-hand anecdotes, and portraits of the places he visited. Adamowicz-Pośpiech manages to persuasively elevate the longstanding dialogue on the "integrity" of Conrad's confessions to a new level.

Aside from the dispute over the autobiographical status of his prose, the second issue that looms large in Conrad criticism (particularly in Poland) is the ethics of his stories' protagonists. Adamowicz-Pośpiech has also decided to contribute her "two cents" (p. 31) to this discussion in the book's second chapter. Tracing the formation of the value system with which Conrad identified, she underscores the importance of Korzeniowski's family life (to use his Polish name). When he was a toddler, the young Conrad was exiled with his parents to the Russian interior for their involvement in conspiracies and an uprising. Although these experiences rarely enter into Conrad's prose explicitly, Adamowicz-Pośpiech highlights this background as a significant context that deserves further scrutiny.

The book offers a contribution of extreme value and originality, however, in the form of its schema for four variations among Conrad's heroes. She proposes a typology that can be applied to nearly all the major characters encountered throughout the reader's journey with Conrad. To start off, Adamowicz-Pośpiech singles out the "simple hero:" this figure is brave, reliable, and unwaveringly faithful to his professional code of conduct. We see this archetype reflected in Singleton from *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus,'* the French lieutenant in *Lord Jim*, and Captain MacWhirr from *Typhoon*. The next cluster consists of "sensitive heroes" whose personalities are crippled by some weak point that ultimately forces them into a moment of reckoning. In this group,

¹ Zdzisław Najder, *Życie Josepha Conrada Korzeniowskiego*, Krakow 2014.

² See also: Zdzisław Najder, *Conrad i Rousseau*, [in:] idem, *Sztuka i wierność. Szkice o twórczości Josepha Conrada*, Opole 2000, pp. 149-162.

we find Kurtz from *Heart of Darkness* and Jim from Conrad's masterpiece. We can also distinguish a group of "reflective heroes" united by a common tendency to live by straightforward and consistent principles who are nonetheless cognizant of the risk of moral downfall and entirely aware of their own weaknesses and fears. This archetype characterizes Marlow, a narrator who appears in several of the author's works. The final typology consists of Conrad's "anti-heroes" who are entirely bereft of shame and moral intuition. Adamowicz-Pośpiech informs us that this type "has little appeal for Conrad due to the wholesale deviation from society it represents" (p. 50). This claim seems to hold true if we limit ourselves to the examples of Donkin (from *Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*), and Chester, Robinson, Cornelius and Brown (who all hail from *Lord Jim*). However, in the case of Jones from *Victory*, it becomes harder to determine whether this character is compelling for the author and his readers. Willems, from *An Outcast of the Islands*, is another ambiguous case. At any rate, Adamowicz-Pośpiech's notion remains extremely useful and opens up a space for new readings, including those that revise or refine her schema. Moreover, the scholar has once again managed to contribute a new approach to the traditional and widely discussed theme of Conrad's ethics and their contexts.

The strongest section of the book by far and the most thrilling stage of *Travels with Conrad* consists of three essays devoted to Conrad's individual novels and stories. In the first essay, a reading of *Lord Jim*, Adamowicz-Pośpiech proves herself as a scholar of English letters with her ability to point out nuances that have been lost in translation. Here, I should mention that Adamowicz-Pośpiech is also the author of *Conrad's "Lord Jim": Readings ("Lord Jim" Conrada: Interpretacje)*.³ This book consists of thorough,

systematic and erudite schemas offering various interpretations of the novel. The scholar adds her own approaches to the scholarly tradition she knows so well. Her main preoccupation is the issue of impeded (and often downright impossible) mutual understanding among people from different cultural spheres due to their prejudices, ignorance, preconceptions and stereotypes.

Adamowicz-Pośpiech's approach adopts some insights grounded in the anthropological discourse introduced in Marek Pacukiewicz's book on the subject.⁴ Adamowicz-Pośpiech analyzes the figure of Marlow as a subject who is vulnerable to prejudices of his own and tends to treat others as foreign and inferior. Given that the novel's core theme is the pursuit of the truth of others through dialogue and by compiling the stories of others, the "communicative discontinuities" (p. 51) in *Lord Jim* (to use Adamowicz-Pośpiech's words) become particularly severe. Many factors underlie these fundamental misunderstandings, such as racial aversions, language gaps, and psychic blocks. In her analysis, the author effectively reveals the "didaskalia" offered by Marlow's dialogues with other characters, in which moments of understanding run up against moments of distortion that either obstruct the pursuit of truth or make it altogether impossible. The situations grows even more complex when the main protagonist relates a story secondhand, now filtering its content through his own identity and proclivities. In this light, Marlow becomes an ambiguous character, and to a certain extent a figure more intimate to the reader. This relationship is analogical to how Marlow himself becomes closer to the figure of Lord Jim gradually surfacing through a morass of metaphors (particularly abundant in the tales told by the character Stein). Marlow gradually pieces together a portrait of the eponymous hero from various, fragmented testimonies.

³ Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech, *"Lord Jim" Conrada. Interpretacje*, Krakow 2007.

⁴ Marek Pacukiewicz, *Dyskurs antropologiczne w pisarstwie Josepha Conrada*, Krakow 2008.

On the surface level, Conrad's novella *Typhoon* might seem to contain little depth or mystery. In this case, however, Adamowicz-Pośpiech has also managed to propose a new reading of the text. Her approach focuses on the letters and books that circulate among the novella's characters. This perhaps simple impulse yields wonderful results. Captain MacWhirr, the mechanic Rout, and the first officer Jukes all pen letters in the novel. Each one portrays events from their own perspectives, and none of them disclose the whole story. In nineteenth-century realist literature, letters often figured as valuable pseudo-documents offering a record of the protagonists' spiritual lives and substantially supplementing the third-person narration.

In her reading of *Typhoon*, Adamowicz-Pośpiech does a brilliant job of conveying the story behind the letter that readers surely find most intriguing: Captain MacWhirr's notes to his wife. Reading the novella, one might expect these personal notes to provide an access point to the emotions and motives of this commander who is rather terse towards his crew. Yet Adamowicz-Pośpiech points out that the captain's wife is not at all interested in her husband's professional life. She receives news of the typhoon with total indifference. Bored, she gives the letter only a cursory glance. Meanwhile, the reader, who depends on the captain as his only entry point to the manuscript, is forced to rely on oblique hints, omissions, and loosely quoted snatches of text. This insightful interpretation reveals fine detail in the narrative structure: again, we are dealing with an instance of Conrad's experimentation with literary convention and yet another pretext for "communicative discontinuity," misunderstanding and otherness.

Adamowicz-Pośpiech also frames the correspondence between the two protagonists as examples of the ironic distance the writer maintains towards the reader's desire to rely on the

book as a reliable record of the crew's clash with the elements. The letters penned by Rout, the steamship's chief mechanic, reveal more about the intimate details of his marriage than they do about the voyage. They are meant to appeal to his wife, and to postpone the story itself until his homecoming, which they both await eagerly. Jukes, on the other hand, who comes across as an upstart and wise guy, pens a letter to a friend of his in the Navy that touches up the truth in order to downplay his own cowardice.

These three epistolary addenda to the main text, so distinct from one another, broaden the text's context substantially by introducing new characters, places and themes. At the same time, they give the reader little access to the main events of the dramatic voyage. Adamowicz-Pośpiech's reading helps us discern ambiguous moments in the text that had previously gone unnoticed in criticism. She also sheds light on the heroes' manipulations of these letters to convey their personal experiences, self-reflexivity (or self-deception, as the case may be) and commentary on others. The scholar elaborates on MacWhirr's thesis that "there are some things for which books have no words" with a valuable insight: in the novella *Typhoon*, there are no words to describe the actual moment when the typhoon attacks the ship.

If today, Captain MacWhirr's tale of this ill-fated voyage is rarely taken seriously among Conrad scholars, then the novella *Idiots* might be situated on the very fringe of Conrad's oeuvre. Adamowicz-Pośpiech begins to correct this state of affairs by reading *Idiots* in conversation with Conrad's novel *The Secret Agent*. Her reading focuses on two female characters, Susan Bacadou and Winnie Verloc. Once again, she finds a simple but original angle of interpretation that yields remarkable effects. Her parallel reading is very much to the benefit of both texts and only to the detriment of the

(unfortunately populous) Conrad scholars who have accused the author of failing to conceive vivid and persuasive female characters. As Adamowicz-Pośpiech demonstrates compellingly and in detail, Conrad does in fact cultivate literary portraits of the longstanding violence to which women have been subjected over the years and men's tendency to treat them as a mere means for satiating their needs. The female protagonists of these two works both demonstrate strategies of self-preservation and hold themselves at an aloof distance in order to weather assaults on their self-worth. As it happens, both protagonists ultimately commit crimes.

The three sections discussed above make up the middle of the book and prove to be its most inspiring, innovative and complex passages. The ideas collected in these sections would benefit any reader, from the veteran Conrad scholar who has read these texts many times over, to the one who knows nothing about them. Adamowicz-Pośpiech treats both readers with equal respect. Her expansive knowledge of existing scholarship on Conrad allows her to carve out an original path for her own approach, and these three essays all root their readings in different perspectives: from the observation of cognitive limits embedded in cultural differences, thought systems, and preconceptions (as in her reading of *Lord Jim*) to her deep analysis of a specific but instrumental element of narrative structure (the letters in *Typhoon*) and her subtle comparative character analysis of two of Conrad's works (the novella *The Idiots* and the novel *The Secret Agent*).

The expansive concluding chapter, titled *Conrad in the Political World*, has somewhat less to offer. Adamowicz-Pośpiech starts the chapter off by giving us a rather cursory and laconic recap of the political debates surrounding Conrad's work: from the great emigration of talent at the end of the nineteenth century to the af-

termath of Jan Kott's essay *O laickim tragizmie* (*On the Secular Tragedy*) and Jerzy Andrzejewski's afterward for the 1956 edition of *Lord Jim*, and twentieth-century debates on the literary canon. This overview leads to the rather obvious conclusion that Conrad's word has been instrumentalized and exploited to serve various agendas. Adamowicz-Pośpiech provides a historical overview of the political controversies surrounding Conrad, which she then supplements with more recent and representative opinions. Although her arguments here are entirely justified, comprehensive overviews of these themes were already available in earlier criticism.⁵

It is somewhat difficult to glean the purpose of the four-page subsection titled *Politics in Conrad's Letters*. It would be impossible to do justice to this issue, so substantially and frequently addressed by Conrad scholars, in one brief essay. Adamowicz-Pośpiech's contribution merely consists of identifying a few valid concepts and elaborating on a few motifs (such as the symptom of weakness and the disintegration of Western European democracy). This section does, however, offer valuable insights on Conrad's influence on the work of Gustaw Herling-Grudziński. This issue could very well be the subject of its own monograph. She offers an extensive analysis of Herling-Grudziński's polemics with Jan Kott, who wrote *O laickim tragizmie* (*On the Secular Tragedy*). In 1947, Herling-Grudziński published an article in the émigré journal "Światło." At the time, he was not necessarily in a good position to properly engage in the debates circulating in his country. Defending Conrad from Kott's attempts to scandalize the author on behalf of communist cultural politics, Herling-Grudziński drew focus to the artistic and ethical implications of

⁵ See also: Stefan Zabierowski, *Dziedzictwo Conrada w literaturze polskiej*, Kraków 1992, idem, *W kręgu Conrada*, Katowice 2008.

Conrad's oeuvre. According to Adamowicz-Pośpiech, Conrad represented the ideal writer for Herling-Grudziński. She then expands this thesis in the next few pages in the form of an essay demonstrating Conrad's influence on Herling-Grudziński's techniques for representing these extreme situations (suffering and death).

"The journey proposed follows only one of many possible routes. This leaves many others yet to be traveled, with different paths for the reader and for myself," (p. 174) – with these words, the critic concludes her book. This sentiment conveys the book's very nature: it draws from

an enormous knowledge base of Polish and English literature on the subject (one glance at the footnotes and the extensive bibliography confirms this). At the same time, the book is a testimony of analytical originality and a true talent for forging one's own analytical paths.

For the reader, addressed in this case as a traveling companion, the biggest takeaway from the book is its ability to shed new light on inconspicuous regions of Conrad's prose. As we journey onward, we might bring Adamowicz-Pośpiech's perspectives with us to forge new navigational tools and maps, this time unearthing insights on our own.

KEYWORDS

travel in literature

JOSEPH CONRAD'S OEUVRE

ABSTRACT:

In the first chapters of her book *Travels with Conrad* (*Podróże z Conradem*), Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech addresses the critical themes of Conrad criticism. Although the autobiographical valences of the writer's works have been discussed many times over, Adamowicz-Pośpiech introduces the term "anti-confessional autobiography," which turns out to be an original and effective interpretive tool. The scholar subsequently attempts to outline the four main hero archetypes of this body of work, revealing new aspects of Conrad's ethics. The book also offers refreshing analyses of specific novels and stories by Conrad. In *Lord Jim*, Adamowicz-Pośpiech points out "communicative discontinuities" produced by the characters' cultural differences, preconceptions, and biases. In her analysis of *Typhoon*, she focuses on the decisive role letters play in portraying the novella's world. She reads the novella *Idiots* in parallel with the novel *The Secret Agent*, reaching new conclusions on Conrad's ability to create psychologically plausible female characters and convey their long-term struggles against violence and degradation. *Travels with Conrad* is an example of contemporary scholarship on Joseph Conrad that is compelling and has many new perspectives to contribute.

ethics in literature

personal letters

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Wiesław Ratajczak (b. 1969) is a Professor of the history of literature at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. He researches Polish culture from the late nineteenth century. He has written the following books: *Teodor Tomasz Jeż (Zygmunt Miłkowski) i wiek XIX* (2006), *Słownik motywów literackich* (2006), *Literatura polska XIX wieku* (2008), *Conrad i koniec epoki żaglowców* (2010), and 'Stąd konserwatyzm jest pozytywizmem'. *Myśl społeczno-polityczna młodych konserwatystów warszawskich i ich adherentów 1876-1918. Antologia publicystyki* (2018). He has co-edited several anthologies, including *Poznań Czerwiec 56. Sens pamięci* (2006), *Europejskość i rodzimość. Horyzonty twórczości Józefa Ignacego Kraszewskiego* (2006), *Cóż wiesz o pięknie? Szkice o literaturze, filmie, muzyce i teatrze* (2007), *Norwid – artysta* (2010), *W kręgu młodokonserwatyzmu warszawskiego 1876-1918* (2015), and *Krasiński i Kraszewski wobec europejskiego romantyzmu i dylematów XIX wieku. (w dwustulecie urodzin pisarzy)* (2016). He has written articles on late nineteenth-century Polish prose, religious symbolism in literature, and stereotypes and national myths in novels. He has also published methodological essays and literary and film reviews.

Prepositions:

The Metaphysics of “Closeness”

Grzegorz Pertek

In his article *Tracking the (Traces of) Sense (Śledzenie (śladów) sensu)*, Patryk Szaj asserts a radically hermeneutic understanding of text and reading, proposing we practice the latter by: “[...] taking steps¹ **upon/after** ²[the traces of the text]” in “a form of play that generates meaning ...” What might we make of this minor and seemingly non-generative “upon/after” (in Polish, “*po*”) in the above claim, which, for me, is so central to the ontology of text as “trace?” Does the phrase “traces of the text” mean the same thing as “traces **upon/after** the text?” And if not, then what does it imply to wedge this particle between “traces” and “text?” And what might it suggest, in turn, if we were to displace the particle to another position within the formula “upon/after traces of the text?”

Radical hermeneutics claims to draw from two traditions simultaneously: on the one hand, it maintains a continuous rapport with its own “past,” or with classical hermeneutics, as proposed by Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur (doing so, of course, only to a degree). At the same time, it takes seriously the lessons of Jacques Derrida and deconstruction, demonstrating the hermeneutic capacity of this approach and fulfilling – on the basis of its blueprint – the “semiotic deficit” that limits hermeneutics (TT, p. 85, 86). We can already say that this schema for the methodological field is not above reproach, for it seems to suggest that hermeneutics and deconstruction (and earlier on, certainly structuralism) have always been in conflict, and that only radical (postmodern) hermeneutics seeks to (or has already managed to) overcome this conflict by cultivating an original reading strategy that insists on keeping “**close to the text**” (according to a specific procedure, TT p. 80). In this response to Szaj’s article, I would like to briefly examine how the category of “closeness,” which is central to his text, organizes the system Szaj proposes within this methodological field.

Hermeneutic “Closeness” (Transcendence)

Jacques Derrida’s basic allegation against hermeneutics concerns its practice of “transcendental reading:” a form of reading that always reaches “[...] **outside** the text itself and towards meaning

¹ P. Szaj, *Śledzenie (śladów) sensu. Tekst i lektura w hermeneutyce ponowoczesnej*, “Forum Poetyki” 2017 (spring/summer), pp. 88–89. Italics – GP. Throughout the text this source will be designated as TT followed by the page number.

² Translator’s Note: the original Polish uses the preposition “*po*,” which has many meanings, including “upon” and “after.”

(which **founds** and **precedes** it). The hermeneutic act of "keeping close to the text" therefore turns out to be rather **superficial**, for in fact, this mode of reading seems more concerned with what is *beyond* the text itself." (TT, p. 82, italics – PS) We might conceive of the relationship between the text and (its) sense on the basis of these same fragmentary formulations (such as: meaning precedes the text; meaning is located beyond the text; meaning is outside the text, and meaning founds the text), both in terms of the text's **temporal** and **spatial** displacement, and in reference to its **structural** and **genetic** character. Yet this "outside" does not necessarily coincide with the word's colloquial, spatial meaning as a certain **interval**, or the space constituted "between two things"³ (in this case, between the text and meaning). It is difficult to even fathom the physicality of such a space. It is neither "outside" nor "beyond," nor does it foreshadow what is to come.

One element in this critical approach, however, seems extremely interesting. I am referring to the attempt to tie together the figures of "the outside" and "closeness" (as in "close" reading). The predicate "closeness" implicated in time and space (cause/effect; inside/outside), for this is its "natural" (by definition) affliction.⁴ At the same time, it is (somehow) visibly enmeshed in an entirely separate opposition between **semblance** and **truth**.⁵ The "truth" as a standard is not explicitly mentioned in the passage cited here. It is hard to say if this omission is a deliberate attempt to shift the target of critique — which, by the way, had not yet been issued. We might have expected as much (particularly in the wake of deconstruction) in regards to the idea of "closeness" **in general**, or in the "truthfulness" of the **specific** form of "closeness" we arrive at through the "external" reading practiced by hermeneutics. Who can say, then, whether this omission haunts Szaj's text as a whole (perhaps the truth of "closeness" has not yet found its own signifier)? For the **position** (this word choice is not so fortuitous) of meaning vis-à-vis the text is meant to somehow resolve the "true" or "superficial" forms of "closeness." If we follow this logic, then "to be beyond" (or "be outside of") unmask (unveils) a false "closeness," and its status as fact (its truthfulness) can only be confirmed by "being within" (TT, p. 83).⁶ This opposition between inside and outside (which coincides, at least here, with the opposition between signifier and signified [TT, p. 83]), precisely by means of a "closeness" that can manifest itself as "superficial" or "true" (and which is not neutrally positioned, but sits in the conflicting field of the critique of hermeneutic reading), is no "peaceful coexistence of a *vis-à-vis*, but rather [...] a violent hierarchy," where "one of the two terms governs the other (**axiologically**, logically,

³ See: J. Derrida, *Positions*, trans. A. Bass, Chicago 1981, p. 106. Throughout the text this source will be designated as P followed by the page number.

⁴ "The close" can designate: 1) someone/something finding herself/itself in close proximity; 2) that which is meant to occur in the near future; 3) something in the recent past; 4) something that is detailed, specific, precise; 5) someone/something directly akin with someone/something; expressing a particular relationship; 6) someone/something with attributes that coincide with someone/something else; 7) someone intensely connected to another by their feelings, views, and also: the expression of this sense of connection. The relationship of "closeness," as we see here, can be a strictly subjective relationship (as in 7), referring to a subject and/or object (as in 1, 5, 6) or strictly object-related (2, 3, 4). See: *Słownik języka polskiego...* (*Dictionary of the Polish Language...*)

⁵ A separate but somewhat adjacent question would address whether "closeness" should be aligned with the ontology of the text described here, or rather with an ontology of reading? And to what extent are these issues inextricably related?

⁶ Is something that "is (already) inside" something always (still) "close" to that thing? Or, perhaps, by transcribing a text word for word, letter for letter (like in Borges' famous story) are we still and always "close" to the text we transcribe? Where do we stand when we cite it (even in its entirety), and do we stand somewhere else when we merely paraphrase it? Is the act of citing (and likewise paraphrasing) located on the "inside" or perhaps "beyond?" Or maybe it is neither "in" nor "beyond?" Is there some other option aside from "inside" and "beyond?" What is the third position?

etc.), or has the upper hand” (P, p. 41; boldface GP). In this case, “closeness,” at least in one of its internal threads of signification, openly **privileges** the “inside.” It can therefore have little in common with *spacing*, a notion that for Derrida “is a concept which also, but not exclusively, carries the meaning of a productive, positive, generative force. Like *dissemination*, like *differance* it carries along with it a *genetic* motif [...]” (P, p. 106, italics – Derrida). *Spacing* “also signifies, precisely, the impossibility of reducing the chain to one of its links or of absolutely privileging one – or the other” (P, p.107). “Closeness,” at least at times, is decidedly closer to its spatial and rather literal conception, as the distance that separates one thing from another.

In this case, the false “closeness” of traditional hermeneutics, or a “closeness” oriented towards meaning that, ostensibly and otherwise, privileges meaning and its “outside” vis-à-vis the text, cannot be the same “closeness” we encounter in radical hermeneutics, anticipated in advance.⁷ The text is only an “intermediary product” or “epiphenomenon” (TT, p. 81). It can only be reduced to a “derivative figure” of the truth or meaning that precedes it, constructed through “the element of logos and within this element” (TT, p. 82). Can we really claim that “closeness” is bent towards “external meaning” and leads us in that direction so that we might position ourselves as readers in a **relation** that **increasingly grows distant**? Does the “outside” inherently imply some kind of distancing? The passage we just reviewed is followed by the sentence: “[...] the entire hermeneutic undertaking proves to be **misconceived** due to its [...] ‘silent assumption’ that the text indeed has sense” [TT, p. 82, emphasis – GP]. Let us dwell for a moment on the fact that this word “misconceived” is already laden with the (still) major risks attached to introducing the suspect category of “closeness.” In this light, it seems clear that this category might simply mean **hitting the point** (which, as we are about to see, is also the objective of reading conceived via the metaphor of “acuteness,” which already establishes a certain *telos*).⁸ If this claim about the status of meaning and its existence **in general** – and this deserves emphasis – is unjustified, then on what basis can we define the position of meaning vis-à-vis the text? Through its “externality?” Does this notion of the “illusory” nature of “closeness” not rely on that “silent assumption,” or a leap of faith (albeit temporary) that meaning in fact exists in so far as hermeneutics has embedded it in an **improper** place, which is to say “outside” the text? Sooner or later, we must reckon with this claim about the “authenticity of appearances,” for we have no choice but to rely on appearances (a typical antithesis: “if it’s **really** in fact a matter of...” [TT, p. 82] frees it from the clutches of parentheses). But does this claim not require faith in the truthfulness of the “outside” (the factual transcendence of meaning) so that through negation (presumably, for there is no other way) one might delineate the contour of a true “closeness” that culminates when (and only when) a certain **distance** (and only this distance) is **reduced** to zero? Does this imply that this increasing “closeness,” which we can only fathom as a perpetually **diminishing** distance, will grow as it decreases? Does “closeness” culminate only when it ceases to exist at all? Is it at all

⁷ “[...] at the very least, the relationship to the text that radical hermeneutics proposes is not **arbitrary**. To the contrary – it performs the hermeneutic task of keeping “close to the text” with all due radicality. The point is that both the text itself and “closeness” have specific definitions in this context.” (TT, p. 80, emphasis - GP)

⁸ We might even go further to propose that “acute” reading (along with the “acuteness” of the analyzed text, such as a poem) is a **targeted**, **accurate** and **adapted** reading. Yet if we wish to discuss the text without using categories such as target or adaptation, we would no longer be able to speak of the meaning of the text and our strategies for understanding it. We would have to speak, rather (in the spirit of Paul de Man) of some sort of “material vision” (See: W.B. Michaels, *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History*, Princeton 2006, p. 6).

reasonable to speak of closeness in terms of "peaks" and "troughs?" At a certain point, Szaj evokes Paul Ricoeur to suggest that "the text and the reader approach one another and recede from one another in turn" (TT, p. 80). In this case, is "closeness" something we can **measure**, and if so, what tools would we need to do so? On the other hand, perhaps "closeness" is merely a matter of establishing two stable positions: zero ("within") and one ("beyond")?

If, in spite of everything, we must reject hermeneutic "meaning," the semiotic "signified," and the transcendental *signifié* (TT, p. 83), then by abandoning these notions along with less literal forms of the "outside" of the text associated with a constant but undefined distance, do we not make the factual status of "closeness" an inevitable consequence for the reader? Does the absence of this transcendental meaning that evades the reader at every step not suggest that "closeness" is a curse that condemns the reader to repeat Borges' experiment *ad infinitum*?

Deconstructionist "Closeness" (Immanence)

What does deconstruction's model of "close" reading consist of, if it is the "art of microreading *par excellence*?" (TT, p. 83) Does this also imply that deconstructionist reading (precisely as microreading) is condemned to "closeness?" How can we perceive deconstructionist "closeness" as somehow "more true" than the "closeness" proposed by traditional hermeneutics?

Totalizing meaning (meaning that guarantees complete comprehension) anticipates the status of "close" hermeneutic reading. As such, it is always situated (spatially, temporally, and in every other sense) "outside" the text (the work) and is therefore beyond a text's reach in that it does not correspond to any one signifier and cannot content itself with any signifiers that the text – potentially – puts forth. Since hermeneutics yearns to position itself as "close" to meaning as possible (or to somehow obtain it), and since meaning is always situated "beyond" the text (which is itself merely a "means to an end") then "closeness," following in its tracks (which is to say **abandoning** the text, distancing itself from it) cannot possibly be the same thing as "closeness" to the text. The vector of interpretation proposed by "closeness" to the text should lead in the opposite direction, "to the interior." Hermeneutic reading thus faces a dilemma: it betrays the letter, which becomes (according to this logic) the very border of the text. Moreover, it ignores form and passes over the *signifiant*, and does all of this in the name of a "transcendental *signifié*." The truth is therefore rooted somewhere in between two points of orientation: text and sense (and in a certain sense: *signifiant* and *signifié*). Yet the problem remains: how can we conceive of the "closeness" of hermeneutic reading, if it truly is transcendental reading, as a **movement that edges away** from the text (while **moving towards** meaning)? Can we even think of it as the act of **breaking through** to "beyond" the text, despite the fact that the entire history of interpretation includes no instance where meaning has ever abandoned the text? Meaning **cannot abandon** the text, for it has always been "outside" it. By the same logic, it is impossible to **extract** from the text something that never was "inside" it. We might provisionally suggest that every hermeneutic reading oriented towards meaning contains an "original" moment "immanent" to itself that might function as a "semiotic" or "textual moment" (some point of signification that can be "grabbed onto"). This moment can be nothing but a discernible

product of the imperceptible truth of meaning (at some point in the text Szaj makes a similar claim in the form of a question: “is some ‘deconstructionist element’ already concealed in the very interior of the hermeneutic experience?” [TT, p. 84]).

Deconstructionist “closeness” has no need to grapple with this problem, for it is not concerned with meaning that transcends the text. According to deconstruction, this kind of meaning does not exist at all. We might, however, venture the tautological statement that according to deconstruction, text means precisely what it means. And nothing more. Deconstruction, facing more or less the same dilemma, makes the opposite choice, privileging the “inside” of the text over its “outside,” the *signifiant* of the individual word occurring “within” a particular textual environment over the *signifié* that transgresses “beyond” that text: “the reading Derrida calls “nontranscendental” reading consists of remaining loyal [...] to the game of signifiers, remaining invested in the signifier, form, language and matter from which the text derives its structure” (TT, P. 83).

“With Joyce, I was able to pretend to isolate two words (*He War* or *yes, yes*); with Celan, one foreign word (*Shibboleth*); with Blanchot, one word and two homonyms (*pas*). But I will never claim to have ‘read’ or proposed a general reading of these works.” This list, as we know, could very well be filled out with other examples: Mallarmé’s “hymen,” Rousseau’s “suplement,” Plato’s “pharmakon,” Kant’s “parergon,” Levi-Strauss’ “incest taboo” ... Derrida’s **focus** on individual expressions from the texts he has read (though not thoroughly) forms [...] a crucial element of his strategy, which consists of emphasizing the role of the act of writing and its ability to generate meaning, which plays out not **outside** the text, on the level of the signified (e.g., signified meaning), but precisely **on the inside**, on the level of the signifiers.⁹

For deconstructionist reading, then, “meaning” is an **effect** of the text itself” (TT, p. 84, emphasis – GP), which is why “we cannot *extract* (remove to the outside) meaning from the text, for it is always located *within* the text, in the arche-text.” (TT, p. 84, italics – from the original) Meaning is therefore the product of the text, but first and foremost, the textual product is the transcendence of meaning. Perhaps this is why Szaj eventually improvises an impasse: “transcendental reading is **impossible** [...]. But transcendental reading is also **necessary**.” (TT, p. 84) There is no way to “extract” meaning “to the outside,” for at its root, the transcendence of meaning is located “within” the text. Deconstruction – if we follow Szaj’s opposition – **internalizes transcendence** and renders it contingent on the reading.¹⁰ The hermeneutic moment within deconstruction is one consequence of this process. Meaning and text literally trade places,¹¹ reinforcing the sense that this notion of deconstructionist reading **chafes against** the mode of reading practiced by traditional hermeneutics. Now meaning (as an ef-

⁹ TT, p. 83, emphasis - GP. Internal citation: *This Strange Institution Called Literature: An Interview with Jacques Derrida*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby [in:] *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge, New York: 1992, pp. 33 - 75

¹⁰ This becomes particularly clear when Szaj, following Derrida, suggests that “the text in itself cannot resist giving in to ‘transcendental’ reading...” (TT, p. 83)

¹¹ We also encounter other figures of inversion, like the somewhat “disjointed” “deconstructionist circle” **as opposed to** “the hermeneutic circle,” or Gadamer’s “surplus of sense” situated **in opposition to** Derrida’s “surplus of signifiers.” (TT, p. 85).

fect) becomes the result, and text becomes the cause (an inversion of genetic contingency).¹² Deconstruction remains, in this case, clasped in a **dialectical** relationship with traditional hermeneutics. The very concept of the "outside" of the text (meaning) as a product of the text reinforces this point, for it is in keeping with the Hegelian spirit and is therefore entirely compatible with traditional hermeneutics.¹³ The task of hermeneutics, which seeks to "consolidate

¹²By positing such a harsh contradistinction based on a hierarchical opposition between inside and outside, does Szaj not go too far? Does he not essentially idealize the situation precisely in order to prepare a sufficiently legible space for postmodern hermeneutics that responds to traditional hermeneutics by (to use Szaj's words): "attempt[ing] to compensate for this **semiotic deficit**" (emphasis - GP), which is rooted in the belief that "text becomes a specific phenomenon operating at the intersection of semiotics and hermeneutics?" (TT, p. 86) This opposition suggests that postmodern hermeneutics (and only postmodern hermeneutics) has launched a campaign to "reconcile" two distinct and a(nta)gonistic motifs in the humanities: the "internal" (phenomenology, formalism, structuralism, semiotics and – we might add – deconstruction) and the "external" (positivism, Marxism and hermeneutics). In another article (*Czy można pogodzić dekonstrukcję z hermeneutyką? Dialog Derridy z Gadamerem*, "Czas Kultury" 2014, issue 5, pp. 68–74), Szaj explicitly addresses the antagonistic relation between deconstruction and hermeneutics. Already in his proposal to take seriously the lessons of deconstruction, we see its former negation by hermeneutics. "The lesson postmodern hermeneutics might learn from deconstruction primarily consists of an intensely scrupulous turn to the textuality (semiosis) of the text. While this feature had already been accounted for in many movements within modern hermeneutics (by Ricoeur in particular), it is in fact missing from Heidegger and Gadamer's approaches [...]" (TT, p. 86) Heidegger's presence here as one of the responsible parties for the deficit of meaning in hermeneutics might, at the very least, provoke some questions. It is never the case that some methodology (or theory) is either "purely" internal (semiotically positive) or "purely" external (semiotically negative). It seems interesting that Maria Janion, basing her hermeneutics off a Heideggerian model, once called hermeneutics a form of "existentialist structuralism," although it is markedly distinct from the linguistic model of "phonological structuralism" that inspired its name. It is structuralism, however, that (once again) in opposition to the paradigm of positivist research, appreciates the formal and aesthetic aspect of the literary work (see: M. Janion, *Humanistyka: poznanie i terapia*, Warsaw 1982, p. 38, and particularly the essay titled *Spór o genezę*). To a certain degree, and formally speaking, deconstruction's critical gesture towards hermeneutics might repeat (with certain displacements, of course) the gesture enacted by twentieth-century formalism against the positivist orientation. At the time, formalists believed that by attending to the aesthetic dimension of a literary work, they were finally dealing with the essence, or "literary status," or "immanence" of the text (unlike the geneticists). It took little time, however, for them to realize the superficiality of this position. If we were to take deconstruction as a method (in spite of its own intentions, of course), then it is neither an "external" method (ignoring signifiers) nor "internal" one (totalizing signifiers). This is not only because it follows the long (and substantive) legacy of structuralism, for deconstruction itself understands this division as the product of its own "discovery," which is to say, *différance*: "[...] the concept of *différance* is neither simply structuralist, nor simply geneticist, such an alternative itself being an 'effect' of *différance*." (P, p. 9). This perhaps informs Anna Burzyńska's position when she writes that "from the very beginning," Derrida was concerned with "breaking away from the closed circle of language, or the hermeneutic 'cocoon' of the text, now reduced to an internal 'game of signifiers'" (A. Burzyńska, *Dekonstrukcja, polityka, per formatyka*, Krakow 2013, p. 519–520). Postmodern hermeneutics, committed to enacting a "double negation," which is to say, a negation of the negative gesture of deconstruction, becomes embedded in this dialectical controversy with the same enthusiasm that propelled Michał Głowiński to announce the advent of a new paradigm in literary theory with the appearance of "literary communication theory," a paradigm that transcends the division between "external" and "internal" methods (see: M. Głowiński, *Od metod zewnętrznych i wewnętrznych do komunikacji literackiej*, [in:] *Problemy teorii literatury. Seria 4. Prace z lat 1985–1994*, ed. H. Markiewicz, Wrocław 1998, pp. 456–469). For more on hermeneutics' turn towards language and speech, see: G. Marzec, *Poza głosem i fenomenem. W sprawie dekonstrukcji i hermeneutyki*, [in:] *Filozofia i etyka interpretacji*, ed. A.F. Kola i A. Szahaj, Krakow 2007, pp. 121–130. This author puts forth a thesis that seems particularly relevant in the context of the claim regarding the "semiotic deficit" of hermeneutics, stating that one of basic allegations Derrida issues against Heidegger's hermeneutics concerns its fixation on universalizing language.

¹³"Hegel was the first to truly understand the presuppositional structure thanks to which language is at once outside and inside itself and the immediate (the nonlinguistic) reveals itself to be nothing but a presupposition of language. 'Language,' he wrote in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 'is the perfect element in which inferiority is as external as exteriority is internal' [...] We have seen that only the sovereign decision on the state of exception opens the space in which it is possible to trace borders between inside and outside and in which determinate rules can be assigned to determinate territories. In exactly the same way, only language as the pure potentiality to signify, withdrawing itself from every concrete instance of speech, divides the linguistic from the nonlinguistic and allows for the opening of areas of meaningful speech in which certain terms correspond to certain denotations. Language is the sovereign who, in a permanent state of exception, declares that there is nothing outside language and that language is always beyond itself." G. Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, Palo Alto, 1998, pp. 19–20, internal citation: G.W.F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, pp. 527–29.

the entirety of the text in the truth of sense” (TT, p. 82) corresponds analogically to deconstruction’s task of encapsulating the signification of the text “as a whole” in the figure of the *signifier* of a single word (or at times even one silent letter).¹⁴ Any Polish language dictionary will offer many definitions of “closeness,” including those that define it as what is exact, specific, and precise. Derrida introduces his famous notion of *différance* with the sentence: “I will speak, therefore, of the letter a (...).”¹⁵ If, by addressing this letter **a** in *différance*,¹⁶ Derrida directs his language “towards the interior,” then does he perhaps merely sketch its “external” surface? How **close** to one another are the *signifiant* and *signifié* located?¹⁷

The Praxis of “Closeness”

Marian Stala titles one of his books on contemporary poetry *Close to the Verse* (*Blisko wiersza*). This formulation – as the author freely admits – is a “maximally compact discourse [...] on the program of literary critique.” Stala writes: “we are closest to verse when we drill down into the very words, sentences and images that co-create it; when we attempt to penetrate the mysteries concealed within it. And when we record that essential encounter with the poet’s voice,

¹⁴The passage Szaj evokes from Derrida appears – contrary to Szaj’s claim – in the second Polish edition of *Positions* (*Pozycji*, FA-art”, Katowice 2007, trans. A. Dziadek), although its wording is somewhat different: “accumulating the whole of the text in the truth of its sense” (“zebranie całości tekstu w prawdę jego sensu” [p. 44]). The phrase comes up at a point in the text where Derrida is explaining the distinction between polysemy (recalling Ricoeur’s hermeneutic theory of polysemy), which offers some progress from the notion of the “linearity of writing,” or “monosemic reading” yet remains at risk of teleology, eschatology and dissemination, which “in order to create an infinite volume of semantic effects, does not allow itself to yield any simple beginnings [...] or eschatological presence,” (pp. 44–45), mainly due to its semantic power. In some sense, then, polysemy is only the effect of dissemination, or its image. See also: J. Derrida, *Mallarmé*, [in:] *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge, New York: 1992, pp. 33–75. This text is also where the phrase “reservoir of meaning” first appears, defining the limits of polysemy.

¹⁵J. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass, Chicago: 1982, p. 3

¹⁶What function does the letter “a” have here? “It is a question, rather, of producing a new concept of writing. This concept can be called *gram* or *différance*. [...] Whether in the order of spoken or written discourse, no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which is not simply present. This interweaving results in each “element” — phoneme or grapheme — being constituted on the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain or system. This interweaving, this textile, is the *text* produced only in the transformation of another text. Nothing, neither among the elements nor within the system, is anywhere ever simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces. [...] The gram as *différance*, then, is a structure and a movement no longer conceivable on the basis of the opposition presence/absence. *Différance* is the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the *spacing* by means of which elements are related to each other. This spacing is the simultaneously active and passive (the *a* of *différance* indicates this indecision as concerns activity and passivity, that which cannot be governed by or distributed between the terms of this opposition) production of the intervals without which the “full” terms would not signify, would not function. It is also the becoming-space of the spoken chain— which has been called temporal or linear; a becoming-space which makes possible both writing and every correspondence between speech and writing, every passage from one to the other. (P, pp. 26–27, emphasis – GP). As we see here, the “a” to which the above passage from Derrida alludes (although the letter “a” is concealed in parentheses), as a “trace of traces,” becomes both the starting and endpoints of the individual elements of the chain, system, or system of micro-dissections.

¹⁷The externality of the “transcendental signified” (whose existence is posited by traditional hermeneutics) would be truly (radically and absolutely) beyond language. For it would not only be derived from the difference between the sign’s *signifiant* and *signifié*: “[...] ‘transcendental signified,’ which in and of itself, in its essence, would refer to no signifier, would exceed the chain of signs, and would no longer itself function as a signifier.” (P, p. 21). Does this also imply that the “inside” (surely just as radical as it is true) ought to be situated on the level of the signifiers? If we read further (with Derrida): “[...] from the moment that one questions the possibility of such a transcendental signified, and that one recognizes that every signified is also in the position of a signifier, the distinction between signified and signifier becomes problematic at its root.” (P, p. 21). And yet Derrida often describes writing that “literally meant nothing,” or the risk of entering into the associated “play of *différance*” to “mean-nothing.” (P, p. 17). This play, then, “prevents any word, any concept, any major enunciation from coming to summarize and to govern (...).” (P, p. 14) Can we discern here a longing for conceiving a *signifiant* without a *signifié*?

imagination and sense of the world.”¹⁸ Given the ongoing, expansive emancipation of so many theoretical discourses (a process that continues today) that spawn analyses of themselves with unbridled pleasure, does keeping “close to the text” not refer to the very **practice of interpretation**? Towards the end of the 1970s, Janusz Sławiński described the acute effects of this emancipation: “[...] today, our tools and procedures are less interesting in terms of their potential analytical usefulness and more so as the object of potential explications, commentaries and additional thoughts. We are not drawn to their capacity to describe or clarify, but rather, to the extent to which the tools themselves can be further clarified.”¹⁹

Bearing in mind Sławiński’s diagnosis alongside Stala’s criteria for understanding “closeness,” for some time now theory has occupied a position vis-à-vis literature that is AS DISTANT as possible. As a result, the methodological postulate asserted by the urgent need to practice “close” readings of the text is essentially fulfilled by a double-entendre that enjoins as it prohibits. For “closeness” can be expressed exclusively outside of itself, disregarding the object of speech or even contradicting that which is openly expressed. The postulate of “close” reading might therefore consist of edging away **from reading the declarative content of the reading that unfolds**, expressed from a certain distance that grows wider and wider (with each new letter), but also expressed from a place of **deferral**.²⁰

Let us note the fact that Szaj postulates “close” reading while **postponing** the reading itself. He practices close reading in its “pure” form, which can only be realized in the metadiscourse. How might we begin to **implement** “close” reading, then, if even its most basic definition, subject to the inevitable law of deferral, turns out to be a negative definition? Sławiński describes a scenario in which theory, having rendered itself the object of its own research, has usurped the function of literature and is therefore merely a specific form of literature. From this perspective, theory occupies a position vis-à-vis literature (with literature’s definition now partially modified) that is AS CLOSE as possible. Without addressing literature at all, it remains faithful to it. The *praxis* of “closeness” only makes sense under these conditions, on the basis of the tightly bound self-referentiality produced when theory merely “says that when it speaks, it is speaking.”²¹ Within the most perfect form of this relation, “close” (self)-reading

¹⁸M. Stala, *Blisko wiersza. 30 interpretacji*, Krakow 2013, p. 5.

¹⁹J. Sławiński, *Zwłoki metodologiczne*, [in:] *Teksty i teksty*, Warsaw 1991, p. 39. Elsewhere in the text, Sławiński comments: “The evolutionary process of today’s humanities resembles [...] a series of epidemics– they spread rapidly, but have extremely short lifespans. One has not yet been extinguished, and another is fast on its tails [...] The rapid rotation of languages that have not yet been fully fleshed out means that none of these languages get the chance to fully conquer a discipline. As a result, none have the chance to supply a discipline with an authoritative paradigm that might provide some order for these constantly accruing methodological experiences.” (ibid, p. 40)

²⁰“The rise of methodology and its pursuit of autonomy [...] is surely governed by the **law of deferral** [...] Effusively indulging in the ceaseless work of mulling over methodologies, we defer to an unspecified point in the future the moment when we might actually make use of them.” (J. Sławiński, op. cit., p. 41, emphasis - JS).

²¹Michel Foucault has written: “In forthrightly saying ‘I speak’ I am exposed to none of these perils; the two propositions hidden in the statement (‘I speak’ and ‘I say that I speak’) in no way compromise each other. I am protected by the impenetrable fortress of the assertion’s self-assertion, by the way it coincides exactly with itself, leaving no jagged edges, averting all danger of error by saying no more than that I am speaking. Neither in the words in question nor in the subject that pronounces the is there an obstacle or insinuation to come between the object-proposition and the proposition that states it. It is therefore true, undeniably true, that I am speaking when I say that I am speaking.” (M. Foucault, *Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from Outside*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman, Brian Massumi [in:] Foucault | Blanchot New York 1989, p. 10

coincides with **not-quite-close-enough** reading, or to go even further: it is suspended at a certain distance, perhaps the **distance of the trace** that reading has always co-created.²² A “truly” close reading would therefore imply the frontier of commentary. In this sense, the postulate of “displacing understanding as far away as possible” (TT p. 84), which in this case, paradoxically means “as close as possible” (the textual letter, the *signifiant*) is a metaphysical postulate.

This also implies that “acuteness” is a **limit case** (perhaps Derrida would say negation)²³ of “closeness.” From outside its sphere, “acuteness” attempts to describe “closeness” from a new angle. At its very best, “close” reading can – let us repeat – *achieve* a status of “acuteness,” but it can never actually accomplish this, even if “acuteness” also refers to the awareness of the impossibility of ever finalizing a relation of “closeness:” “this word seems to indicate [...] the acute impossibility of fully embracing the findings of interpretation and the acute ambiguity of meanings of the text, which cannot be resolved through the hermeneutic procedure” (TT, p. 90). Szaaj associates “acuteness” with Gadamer’s formula evoked earlier, which describes “the experience of literary text as meaning’s capacity to ‘shock that which has been stated.’ This does not yield a harmonious union of sense; it **transgresses the horizon** of **all** expectations” (TT, p. 90, emphasis – GP). “In the original German,” he goes on to write, “‘shock’ is expressed as *Betroffenheit*, a word that phonetically connotes the verb *treffen* (**to hit or strike**) and its passive mode (*betroffen werden* – to be hit, struck, found out)” (TT, p. 90, emphasis – GP). The phrase also conjures Heidegger’s notion of “acuteness” that comes as a “blow” (*Stoß*). Finally, it is linked to Derrida’s experience of reading as an “acute test,” whose acuteness is derived from the fact that each poem is a wound itself and can wound others to equal degrees (TT, p. 90). These many metaphorical connotations are united by their intentional reduction of separation, which is the constituent material of “closeness.”

The “Closeness” of the Trace

According to deconstruction, there is no meaning of the text that can ever step “beyond” its borders. The debate between deconstruction and modern hermeneutics reconstructed by Szaaj is rooted in this claim, for hermeneutics asserts the existence of a transcendental *signifié*. Modern hermeneutics has no interest in the text itself and is only concerned with its meaning, for which the text is merely a vehicle. It therefore seems appropriate to describe this mode of reading as **external reading** (vis-à-vis the text). The “externality” (we could also say mediation; inaccessibility) of meaning **is not derived** from the text as a product, say, of its inexhaustible multiplicity of meanings. To the contrary, sense **betrays** the text, for as soon as meaning surfaces, text establishes its derivative and therefore imperfect figure. By adopting such a **far-ranging** perspective, the reader becomes desensitized to the forms that mediate his access to meaning: the textual (signifying) aspect of the work (let us acknowledge, however, that this idea is inevitably laden with faith in the transparency of language). What

²²Szaaj evokes the words of Paweł Dybel: “each signifier is itself only insofar as it is already outside of itself” (TT, p. 87; P. Dybel, *Oblicza hermeneutyki*, Krakow 2012, p. 42). Is this not a formulation of transcendence?

²³See: J. Derrida, *Ousia et gramme: Note sur une note de Sein und Zeit* [in:] *Marges*, p. 31–178 (and in particular, *La paraphrase: point, ligne, surface*).

is essential here is that which is partially or entirely invisible (concealed, veiled) and can only be made manifest in the process of comprehension. The invisible, exactly like the mediated, must therefore imply the **distant** (further). The tangible absence of the signifier is therefore the burden of hermeneutic reading.

In deconstruction, as we have already established, we encounter the opposite problem. Hermeneutics, by understanding sense as an **effect** of the textual game (text **betrays** sense), practices an **internal reading** that focuses its attention – by analogy – on that which is visible through and through (yet) is only acknowledged in the tradition of western metaphysics as a **representation**. And the discernible (the visible) surely coincides with what is closest, or (least) distant. Whoever wishes to think of deconstructionist reading as a form of reading (par excellence) that gets close to the text must locate within his material a stable reference point (stable as in distanced, relative) for defining the relationship of proximity. True (not illusory) closeness cannot be relative or qualified in any way, which is to say, it cannot be defined on the basis of some other thing that either does not exist at all (for deconstruction, external meaning) or has an undefined position (for hermeneutics, “the mediated”). Closeness can only appear vis-à-vis that which IS. And this appearance must necessarily be fixed, occurring once and for all, as in the case of **writing** which, for Derrida, figures in western tradition as a mere representation or externalization of language.²⁴ On the other hand, Derrida also writes that “deconstructing this tradition will therefore not consist of reversing it, of making writing innocent,”²⁵ which implies, in these circumstances, not only the **reduction** of writing to the status of the *signifiant*, but the act of asserting it as the **internal** (privileged) side of language. “This is precisely why Derrida has always insisted on the primacy of **writing over speech**.”²⁶ “While Gadamer is concerned with what plays out on the level of the signified, this Derridean **reduction to the signifier** significantly complicates matters...”²⁷

The ontology of text as a trace does not satisfy these conditions: “[...] precisely this logic [the logic of *différance* – italics GP] determines the **“trace-like status” of the text** and the extent to which it has been ‘contaminated.’ For if every sign carries within itself some kind of “recollection” of the signs that preceded it, then it simultaneously “foreshadows” the signs to come, which brings about the **fragmentation of its stable identity** (TT, p. 86, emphasis GP). The trace, collapsing the opposition between present/absent (text/sense), can be identified with

²⁴See: J. Derrida, *The Outside Is the Inside*, [in:] *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Baltimore 1998, pp. 44-64.

²⁵J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, op. cit., p. 37.

²⁶P. Szaj, *Czy można pogodzić...*, op. cit., p. 72. Emphasis- GP. Naturally, in somewhat of a defensive maneuver, the author cannot at this point justify the claim that deconstruction conceives the meaning of *writing* absolutely outside of the order established by the metaphysical tradition (the phonocentric opposition of speech versus writing). As a result, assigning *writing* to the dimension of the *signifiant* is unfounded. However, since deconstruction conceives of *writing* as something that transgresses the traditional order, how can it possibly offer a *contrast* (opposition) to Gadamer’s move to reinforce this tradition when he writes that he “invariably treated writing as alienated speech?” (p. 72). Earlier, Szaj even wrote: “For Gadamer, etymologies (understanding and self-understanding – GP) prove that the fundamental concepts of hermeneutics already contain the motif of *différance* that Derrida will distill even further, and that – to put it simply – any practitioner of hermeneutics would affirm Derrida’s thesis on the ontological precedence of difference over identity: [...] ‘difference is latent within identity, for otherwise identity would not be identity’ [...] and Derrida [...] is not at all (or perhaps: not exclusively) concerned with the difference latent in identity, but rather (as we are well aware), with the very mechanism of differentiation” (ibid, p. 72).

²⁷Ibid. Emphasis – GP

neither the presence of something, nor its lack. To put it simply: when we try to speak of the trace, we ought to deny it precisely that to which it might be linked (essence? objecthood?). Nor is the point that the trace – in its failure to be close – is something we get “in exchange,” something distant. We cannot say the trace *is* (telos); it merely **references**. Like displacement, dissemination, or even *différance*, the trace has an inherent *genetic motif* that generates **distance** (difference). It is precisely because of the trace that “close” reading (like transcendental reading, for that matter) is just as necessary as it is impossible. Yet there are other ways to understand the trace. Just like closeness is necessarily closeness vis-à-vis something else (e.g., vis-à-vis the text), the trace turns out to be a trace **of something**.

How do we understand new hermeneutics’ postulate of “keeping close to the text?” We might posit a particular form of “tracking the traces,” or perhaps, as Andrzej Zawadzki writes, “pursuing, following the trail of traces, tracking and reading them, answering to them with a trace of one’s own. To put it simply: the act stepping over/among these traces by following them [the traces of the text] is a form of play that generates meaning.”²⁸ (TT, pp. 88-89, emphasis – GP)

In the thoughtfully worded expression “trace of the text” (or “traces of the text”), the trace itself is relegated to a position of lower importance. We might say it gets disenfranchised. Contrary to appearances, the “trace of the text” is not the same thing as the “trace-like status of the text” that corresponds to the logic of *différance*, just as the figures “following the trail of traces” and “following the traces of the text” can never be equated when they apply to reading. In the compound expression “trace of the text,” where the word “text” inevitably appears to the Polish reader in the **genitive** form (and for this there is no recourse), this text inevitably becomes something **belonging to the past**, something absolutely **former**. Although some trace of the text (still) **is**, the text itself **is no longer**. It is as if the text were the whole, and the trace merely one of its fragments. The trace does not reference subsequent traces in order to reveal to the reader that she must constantly start from scratch and perpetually hover at the very beginning of the path of reading.²⁹ It refers, rather, to its own past, to the text that was once **something greater** than the mere trace that remains.

Szaj bases his definition of **non-transcendental** reading, which consists of **not** going beyond an interest “for the signifier, form, language and matter from which the text derives its structure” (TT, p. 83), on an **inversion** of one of Derrida’s definitions of the verb “to transcend.” “‘Transcend’ here means going beyond interest for the signifier, the form, the language (note that I do not say ‘text’) in the direction of the meaning or referent [...]”³⁰ Is it enough to replace the verb “to go beyond” with a form that contradicts it, writing instead: “to not go beyond an interest” for the signifier, to turn transcendental reading into a form of **non-transcendental** reading? Derrida – and please note the subject here – only describes the text in the sense that he says he will not describe it. This text clearly transcends the order described in this passage as if it were entirely obvious and unambiguous, namely: the order of the signifier, or the order of

²⁸Internal citation: A. Zawadzki, *Literatura a myśl słaba*, Krakow 2009, p. 157.

²⁹See: P. Szaj, *Czy można pogodzić...*, op. cit., p. 74.

³⁰J. Derrida, *This strange institution...*, op. cit., p. 190.

form and language.³¹ This is not to suggest that the text is most likely something greater than (and entirely different from) (only) the *signifiant*. Perhaps the trace **materially** breaks out of this order to occupy a position vis-à-vis the text that is **symmetrical** to that of the text, if we assume we cannot collapse meaning with the order of the signified, just as we cannot collapse the trace with the order of the signifier. The trace would then be located outside of the text, or perhaps "on the other side." Functionally speaking, this makes the trace an inversion of meaning. Since it consistently IS (delivered visibly to the reader), precisely as a chain of *signifiants*, there is no way for us to **hunt it down**. For to hunt it down (track it down) would necessarily mean to make it manifest. When we turn to the "traces of the text," however, we reverse this procedure. We might say that we posit its remnants as a **trace-like figure**, which is inevitably linked to that particular form of manifestation that is the manifestation of the absent, or a form of **unabsent-ing** that *strives towards* absence. "Hunting down" the trace therefore takes no part in this game. But "something greater" in the text's relation to the trace might imply not only a quantitative dynamic that retains its essence, but perhaps a qualitative one as well. The traces of the text simultaneously become the traces **that follow** the text. For by reading, we can only pursue **after/upon** these traces. In this instance, the special status of the Polish "*po*" ("after/upon") means that syntagmatic rules assign the preposition a status that is in conflict with the status assigned to it by semantics. According to the **line of interpretation** taken up here, "after/upon" as a constituent part of the formula "traces after/upon the text," reveals to us the paradoxical position of traces that *signifié* – willingly or not – appear twice: "before" and "after" the text.

³¹Text transcends the order of the signifier for yet another reason. "For the text, as a textile (from the Latin *texere*) of textual folds, layers and warps offers the very conditions for reading as a practice of de-constructing or unwinding. For Derrida, however, this work inevitably remains unfinished, for the fold as well as the wrinkle – *le pli* – is that "elementary" element of the text that precludes its semantic culmination. A complete *ex-plic*-ation of the meaning of the text, a "smoothing out" of all its folds, therefore proves impossible. For hermeneutics, of course, this is the root of drama. At the same time, it is also simply the precondition for practicing any kind of hermeneutics: if all the textual folds could be conveniently "straightened out," then hermeneutics would be entirely unnecessary." (TT, p. 89) What determines the inexhaustibility of the work of interpretation, the impossibility of a "complete *ex-plic*-ation" of the meaning of the text? Could it be the **amount** of folds in the text, which is to say: is there no way to smooth out all the folds of a text simply because, as a rule, they are infinitely numerous? Or is it rather a question of their **quality**? Since "not all" folds can be conveniently "smoothed out," might we simultaneously posit that there exists among these folds a few that actually cooperate quite well with this procedure? How might we identify the fold that **can be smoothed**, versus those that cannot? On what basis might we gauge the *smoothness* of the text and a reduction of the fold?

KEYWORDS

t r a n s c e n d e n c e

text

t r a c e

reading

CLOSENESS

ABSTRACT:

This article offers a polemical response to Patryk Szaj's text, titled *Tracking the (Traces of) Sense: Text and Reading in Modern Hermeneutics*. In his article, Szaj demonstrates how the category of "closeness" he uses to define the ontology of reading practiced in modern hermeneutics is metaphysically charged. The specific conception of deconstruction we encounter in Szaj's analysis frames it as an inversion of modern hermeneutics, which not only implies that "closeness" privileges the interior (at the expense of the exterior) and the *signifiant* (at the expense of the *signifié*). It also implies that the "trace" is an inversion of "meaning." We might say that their result is merely the text.

MEANING

immanence

INSIDE

a f t e r / u p o n

o u t s i d e

SIGNIFIÉ SIGNIFIANT

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:

Grzegorz Pertek is a doctoral candidate at the Faculty of Polish and Classical Philology at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. His research interests include: twentieth-century Polish poetry, literary theory, philosophies of transgression. His work has been published in "Czytanie Literatury," "Przestrzenie Teorii," "Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne," "Wielogłosie," "Aluze," and elsewhere.

And Yet It's About...

Patryk Szaj

I would like to start by expressing my gratitude to Grzegorz Pertek for his scrupulous response to my article. His essay *Prepositions: The Metaphysics of "Closeness"* prompted me to contemplate several issues, while revealing the nuances of many matters I discussed only briefly (perhaps to a fault). At the same time, it seems to me that a great deal of Pertek's laborious efforts was taken up... in vain. After reading his polemical response, I cannot help but reach the conclusion that we more or less stand in agreement.

The main intention of my article was to attempt to *displace* the commonplace conception of hermeneutics and deconstructionism as opposing discourses. I sought to complicate this relationship by revealing a certain *hermeneutic* feature of deconstruction, while simultaneously (and this is relevant for our purposes) identifying the *deconstructionist* potential of hermeneutics. To be more specific, I wanted to prove that deconstruction is merely an intrinsic condition of hermeneutics. The third part of my article, "The Derrida-Gadamer Controversy: Repetition (and Displacement)," is devoted to complicating this picture, and Pertek seems to have passed over this section. I begin the section with an *introductory* overview of the opposing trajectories of hermeneutics and deconstruction, and then turn to their *kinship*. New hermeneutics draws from precisely this kinship and not — as my polemicist has implied — from hermeneutics' alleged triumph over deconstruction. As an aside, I also address the common features of these discourses in my article *Can We Reconcile Deconstruction with Hermeneutics? A Dialogue with Derrida and Gadamer* ("Czas Kultury" 2014, issue 5). Pertek cites this article (perhaps unjustly) as if I had answered the title's question in the negative. This, at the very least, is a problematic assessment.

One aspect of *Prepositions* brings me anxiety. This the matter of excerpts, scraps of sentences and fragmentary thoughts being cited out of context. This practice misleads the reader to a point of confusion: at times, it is unclear if Pertek is citing my claims or someone else's, if I am condoning or condemning certain theses, or if I am reconstructing another distinction between hermeneutics and deconstruction *as a reference point* or perhaps already demonstrating their kinship, and so on, and so forth. My polemicist's essay is filled with such moments, and I will cite a few here by way of example. Pertek writes: "If we follow this logic, then 'to

be beyond' (or: 'be outside of') unmask (unveils) a false 'closeness,' and its status as fact (its truthfulness) can only be confirmed by 'being within' (see: ŚŚ, p. 83)." In this case, I would like to ask: who has adopted this logic in the first place? For I certainly have not — at the moment cited in the text I am merely reconstructing a dispute between Derrida and Gadamer. Nor does Derrida adopt this logic: on the very same page as this citation, I make this explicit: "In comparison to the so-called American deconstructionists [...] Derrida emphasizes the simultaneous impossibility of not entering into a 'transcendental' reading: 'the text in itself should not resist giving in to «transcendental» reading. [...] There is no recourse for avoiding this moment of «transcendence» although it may present itself in a complex or entangled form.'" I am therefore indicating (although admittedly, I do so cursorily) the problematic opposition between inside and outside, proximity and distance, signifying and signified. This opposition becomes the very basis of Pertek's article (which, I'll reiterate, is extremely nuanced). At no moment in my text did embrace this binary, as my polemicist has alleged (with the notion that the deconstructionist "inside" is somehow more "true" than the hermeneutic "outside"). I was trying, rather, to use Derrida's language excerpted above to draw attention to the *complexity* of the moment of transcendence. I by no means meant to suggest that we abandon it entirely. As an aside: my reading of this passage of Derrida perhaps differs from Pertek's: I do not take away a sense of "internalized transcendence" or a sense that one might distance oneself from transcendence. Instead, I discern an admission of respect for the "externality" of the text, which *demands* hermeneutic synthesis but simultaneously shies away from it. If the author of *Prepositions* had cited another excerpt from my article, then either I have led us astray, or his interpretation is in error.

To move on: Pertek notes that "The fragment we just reviewed precedes the following sentence: '[...] the entire hermeneutic undertaking proves to be *misconceived* due to its [...] "silent assumption" that the text indeed has sense.' [ŚŚ, p. 82, emphasis GP]. His grave (if specific) concerns with my article are premised on this very sentence, but he fails to mention that the ideas cited by no means represent my own views, but merely rehash Derrida's allegations against Gadamer while nodding to Anna Burzyńska, who coined the phrase "silent assumption." A similar thing happens when Pertek shares the quote: "The lesson new hermeneutics might learn from deconstruction primarily consists of an intensely scrupulous turn to textuality (semiosis) of the text. While this feature had already been accounted for in many movements within modern hermeneutics (by Ricoeur in particular), it is in fact missing from Heidegger and Gadamer's approaches [...]." [ŚŚ, p. 86] After an ellipsis he throws in "as Wojciech Kalaga has noted, for one." I have no desire to challenge authority (although Kalaga, who is known for the text *Nebulae of Discourse / Mgławice dyskursu* does cogently explain why Heidegger belongs in this set, which might come to Pertek's surprise). I would, however, like to point out the fact that while every sentence in *Tracking the (Traces of) Sense (Śledzenie (śladów) sensu)* is uttered in a uniform "modality," this does not mean that each one represents my own position.

Pertek's other strategy for extracting passages from my essay consists of assigning implications or meanings to them that I never (at least intentionally) expressed. I will give two examples here. Pertek begins one sentence thus: "If, in spite of everything, we must reject hermeneutic 'sense,' semiotic 'meaning,' and the transcendental signified (ŚŚ, p. 83) [...]"

With these words, he frames his reference in such a way as to identify me as the responsible party for proposing that we reject the text's "external" forms that Pertek names. Yet I have suggested no such thing, for the cited fragment in fact references a critique (and is a critique necessarily a rejection?) of the notions Derrida introduces in his article *Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences*. Here is a second example: "We also encounter other figures of inversion, such as the 'disjointed deconstructionist cycle' **versus** the 'hermeneutic circle,' or Gadamer's construction of the "surplus of sense" situated **against** Derrida's "surplus of signifiers." (ŚŚ, p. 85) I would go so far as to interpret this distortion of meaning as a sign of ill will, for it is Pertek who *inverts* my claim about Gadamer and Derrida, insinuating that they take antagonistic positions to one another, while at this very moment in the text I demonstrate (perhaps originally) their close kinship. I do not frame the hermeneutic and deconstructionist cycles in opposition to one another; I place them *next to* one another as two variations (two modalities) of the same ontology of text. I do not establish an antagonism between the surplus of sense and the surplus of signifiers. To the contrary, I write about them as each other's *complements*.

One might venture the claim that instead of taking up the gauntlet and offering a genuine response to the polemic, I am merely obsessing over details. However, it is my belief that these "negligible" misreadings are in fact the root cause of Pertek's fundamental failure to understand my argument. The first misreading concerns the category of "closeness" which, in truth, might very well represent a blind spot in my article. I evoked this concept as a provisional departure point for positing a radically hermeneutic relationship with the text, perhaps failing to give due weight to the concept's attendant issues. Pertek has surpassed me in this regard. And in fact, we must take responsibility for what has been written: I concede my polemicist's point when he argues that I smuggle a host of metaphysical contraband into the text through the concept of "closeness." It seems valid to claim that the category of "acuteness" would "undermine" these metaphysics (I am not so naïve as to have faith in the total triumph of metaphysics), but I will return to this matter in a moment. More importantly, I hardly assert the thesis that "deconstructionist closeness" is somehow more genuine than "hermeneutic closeness." The assertion that sense is only generated by the text does not imply a full-fledged inversion of relations in the sense of Hegelian dialectics, as perhaps Pertek would prefer. It merely *displaces* these relations. This does not mean that deconstruction "chooses [...]" the 'interiority' of the text over its 'outside:' the signifier of a single word occurs 'inside' the concrete textual scenario as opposed to the signified, which leaps 'beyond' that text." Nor does it imply that "sense and text literally change places." Deconstruction can only indicate that "sense" (and with it "truth") is located not only within some "external" or "extratextual" reality, but rather in an "arche-text" that cannot be radically reduced to the interior. To the contrary, deconstruction opens up an access point to powerful cultural, ethical and political contexts. I cited Derrida's definition of an arche-text in my article, although here I might add that the words "nothing exists outside the text" simply mean that we cannot extricate ourselves from the web of discourses. For only through this web will we yield such things as hermeneutic sense. In other words, the arche-text does not invert the opposition between inside and outside; it merely *outlines* it. The logic of the trace, which I've been circling around this whole time, reveals that any binary theory of the sign is oversimplified. The signified is simply a particular signifier situated in the position of "signified," or rather, situated as the effect.

This does not mean that sense simply “does not exist.” it implies that sense is not a “pure” signified but merely a signifier giving itself over to the signified. Pertek knows this very well, for he himself took great pains to explain it to me. In this sense, his efforts were in vain, for on this point, I am in full agreement with my polemicist.

I will admit, however, that I fail to grasp the logic behind Pertek’s claim that “whoever wishes to think of deconstructionist reading as a form of reading (par excellence) that gets close to the text must locate within his material a stable reference point (stable as in distanced, relative) for defining the relationship of closeness.” In my mind, closeness to the text correlates here to a sensitivity to its capacity to generate meaning. By evoking so many authoritative definitions of “closeness,” does Pertek not run the risk of immobilizing them to a fault? Does his approach actually leave enough room for us to enter into close relation with something dynamic, something that perhaps leaves behind traces as it displaces itself together with these traces wherever their trajectories may take them? Of course, this complicates the whole notion of “closeness,” while I intend to deliberately emphasize a “specific” understanding of the concept, suggesting that the “fidelity of the text” turns out to be “unfaithful,” and so on. Pertek applies a similar operation to the formulation “traces of the text” that appears in my essay. Pertek evokes syntagmatic principles to bring his rather antiquated way of thinking up to date (in the vein of Vattimo, he understands the trace as a “remnant of something”). However, I fail to comprehend why he does not concede that the “traces of the text” can also refer to those “traces that comprise the text.” I also fail to understand why he ignores the second part of my formulation, despite quoting it directly: “the act pursuing traces by following them [the traces of the text] is a game that generates meaning” — in this case, he highlights the *future-oriented* nature of the trace, simultaneously implying that the capacity to generate meaning always *precedes* the act of interpretation, and that it can never be caught in the act (or in Pertek’s words, “tracked down”). Finally, I do not see my polemicist’s motives for claiming that I identify the text with (one?) signifier (“The point is not that the text is probably something more (and altogether different) than (merely) the signifier”). To this, I would follow Barthes and retort that the text is in fact a whole galaxy of signifiers (which is to say, those signifiers that the reader is willing to locate within the field of the signified).

In brief, the trace can simultaneously be the trace of what has passed and what is to come, and is surely either both, or neither (its meaning exceeding all intentions and generating both that which is “past” and that which is “to come”). For these reasons, we can follow its tracks but not *track it down*. We might therefore posit the simultaneous impossibility and necessity of transcendental reading, with (stable) proximity transforming into a (transitive) “unfaithful fidelity.” At this point in my essay, I introduce the category (or perhaps it would be better to say “quasi-category”) of “severity” at the service of exposing the trajectories of the trace. I wanted to make the point that this figure cannot be resolved: it maintains inside itself something that *both* derives from a “hermeneutic” longing for sense *and from* a “deconstructionist” deferral of sense. Severity does not coincide with the accuracy of “hitting the point,” nor does it suggest a *telos* of interpretation. It is an attempt at a description (or even phenomenology) of the experience of reading. At the cusp of the hermeneutic code, nobody can possibly speak “from outside.” Severity constitutes the act of grazing the irresolvable border between inside and outside, signifying and signified. It originates from a mutual and porous exchange

between the text and the reader. The text cannot be decoded in full, but it does facilitate a certain level of contact. What's more, as the reader, I am not the only one who "touches" the text in my desire to access it, but the text itself (perhaps from a distance) "touches" me. By suggesting all of this, I have no intention to "collapse the separation" that Pertek has asked me to recognize. I am hinting, rather, at a concept in which my polemicist is deeply invested, if I understand him well: the (severe!) impossibility of "closeness" embraced as a static postulate of metaphysics. At this point, I would like to evoke Derrida's words, if I may: "To touch is to touch a limit, a surface, a border, an outline. Even if ones touch an inside, "inside" of anything whatsoever, one does it following the point, the line or surface, the borderline of a spatiality exposed to the outside, offered – precisely – on its running border, offered to contact."¹

In light of this, I am in full agreement with Pertek when he writes, "The postulate of "close" reading might be a mere presaging **of a reading to come that** steps back **from the act of reading**, expressing a **distance** that constantly grows (with each new letter) but also a **de-ferral**." I would like to propose "intensity" as a concept that sensitizes us to this aporia, bearing in mind that it is not the crowning moment of an action but simply the condition underlying all interpretations. In this case, Pertek is entirely justified when he suggests that "Szaj [...] postulates 'closeness as a model of reading that **defers** the reading itself. He constructs a 'pure' figure of this concept that can, however, only be realized on the level of meta-discourse." If we follow the logic of the trace (!), then every *reading practice* will inevitably damage or contaminate that "purity" *intensely*. I personally choose to stand behind my right to contaminate through all the interpretive gestures I enact here and elsewhere as I break away from — but simultaneously remain entangled with— my metadiscourse.

¹ J. Derrida, *On Touching*—Jean-Luc Nancy, Stanford 2005, p. 103.

KEYWORDS

deconstruction

text

closeness

sense

hermeneutics

TRACE

ABSTRACT:

This text is a response to Grzegorz Pertek's polemical essay *Prepositions: The Metaphysics of "Closeness."* In this text, I offer a rebuttal to allegations against the metaphysical gravity of the postulate "closeness" by pointing out the category of "acuteness," which "softens" this postulate and makes it "dynamic." I also clarify that I am not concerned with inverting the relationship between hermeneutics and deconstruction, but in displacing them by asserting the fundamental kinship between the two discourses.

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