

Elementary memory and its limits. Element and detail in Zygmunt Haupt's prose

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Towards combining factography with fiction.
Some remarks on Haupt studies

There are two clear tendencies in the reception of Zygmunt Haupt's prose. The circle of Parisian "Kultura" [Culture], probably the first to recognize Haupt's talent, focused on the **memorialistic** character of his prose. In 1962 Jerzy Stempowski wrote a letter to Jerzy Giedroyc saying that "Haupt's stories are not products of imagination. They are memories, works of a memorialist"¹. In the same year, Haupt was awarded the magazine's prize, and Paweł Hostowiec commented that his stories "adhere perfectly to observed reality"². Józef Czapski's attitude within the "Kultura" milieu is harder to classify; on the one hand, he highlighted the emotional, "internal" culture of Haupt's prose, and on the other – he looked at it with a painter's eye, comparing Haupt's visuality to Cézanne's "seeing anew"³. Nonetheless,

¹ Jerzy Giedroyc, Jerzy Stempowski, *Listy 1946–1969* [Letters], edited by Andrzej St. Kowalczyk, part II (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1998), 214–215 (letter from 30.10.1962).

² [Paweł Hostowiec], "Nagroda literacka «Kultury» za r. 1962 – Zygmunt Haupt" [«Kultura's» 1962 literary award] 1-2 (1963): 195.

³ Józef Czapski, "O Haupcie" [On Haupt], *Kultura* 10 (1963). See Agnieszka Bielak, "Haupt Czapskiego" [Czapski's Haupt], in: *Jestem bardzo niefortunnym wyborem*. *Studia i szkice o twórczości Zygmunta Haupta* [I am a very unfortunate choice. Studies and papers on works by Zygmunt Haupt], edited by Andrzej Niewiadomski, Paweł Panas (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2018).

Czapski did not argue with the memorialistic classification of Haupt's works, which remained the dominant interpretation in the "Kultura" circle.

A few years later, Krzysztof Rutkowski proposed a **fictionalist** approach to Haupt's prose. Based on the high frequency of the phrase "as if" in Haupt's stories, as well as on a reference to Hans Vaihinger, a neo-Kantian and author of *Die Philosophie des Als Ob* (*The philosophy of "as if"*, 1911)⁴, Rutkowski concluded that Haupt's is highly hypothetical literature, rather than stories about the world "as it is" or "as it was"⁵. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that Haupt's prose, rediscovered in Poland in late 1980s and early 1990s, was not treated as a memory medium for Eastern borderlands; it was then when a revision of the canon of Polish modernism from the perspective of form became just as important as the cultural-historical aspect⁶.

It seems that all subsequent approaches to Haupt's work were variations of those two basic conceptualizations (memorialistic and fictionalist). In an interview by Renata Gorczyńska in 1989 (published ten years later, in 1999), even before Rutkowski's publication, Czesław Miłosz spoke of biographical "impressions" mixed with "half-fictional episodes", as if he wanted to synthesize the possibilities determined by those two opposite reading strategies: "In Haupt fictionality is not that strongly developed. His prose is partially a memoir"⁷. Thus, Miłosz compared it to the egofication of Haupt's contemporary, Henry Miller. At the time, Miłosz's interview passed unnoticed by contemporary Haupt studies – this may be because of Miłosz's initial disdain for Haupt, due to his "literary", bloodless paper association with the title of Haupt's first collection of stories. As a result, Miłosz did not include it in *The History of Polish Literature*, 1969, 1983⁸. It is interesting that unlike in "Kultura", in the case of Miłosz, the (partially) memorialistic interpretation appeared only years later.

Balancing – implicit in Miłosz – became more defined in studies by Aleksander Madyda, who stressed that "writers are after more than just preserving the past"⁹, and who characterized Haupt's prose as "autobiographism", i.e. autobiography with fictional elements¹⁰. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the most important reconfigurations among scholars of Haupt after 2000 have concerned the issue of artistic forms, i.e. constructing space, fragmentation of time, and tropology (rhetoric, mannerism, etc.), as is evidenced in works by Monika Kłosińska-Duszczuk, Ewa Wiegandt, Piotr Rambowicz, Dorota Utracka, Agnieszka

⁴ This refers to the story "Henry Bush i jego samolot" [Henry Bush and his plane] (1948). Zygmunt Haupt, *Baskijski diabeł. Opowiadania i reportaże* [Basque devil. Stories and reportages], edited by Aleksander Madyda, introduction by Andrzej Stasiuk (Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2016), 408. All quotes from *Baskijski diabeł* are from this edition. All translations mine, PZ.

⁵ Krzysztof Rutkowski, "W stronę Haupta" [Towards Haupt], *Teksty Drugie* 1-2 (1991): 117.

⁶ Jan Zieliński's *Leksykon* [Lexicon], first published in 1989, played a formative role here. See Jan Zieliński, [alias Kowalski], *Leksykon polskiej literatury emigracyjnej* [Lexicon of Polish emigration literature], 2nd edition, revised and extended (Lublin: Wydawnictwo FIS, Wydawnictwo Unipress, 1990), 56–57.

⁷ "[C]hez Haupt le caractère fictif n'est pas poussé très loin. Sa prose a pour une part le caractère de mémoires". Czesław Miłosz, Renata Gorczyńska, "En guise de préface" [1989], in: Zygmunt Haupt, *Le chardon roulant*, trad. du polonais par Alain Van Crugten et Elisabeth Destrée-Van Wilder (Montricher: Noir sur Blanc, 1999), 12–13 (translated by me, Ch.Z.).

⁸ Miłosz, Gorczyńska, 8.

⁹ Aleksander Madyda, "Posłowie" [Afterword], in: Zygmunt Haupt, *Baskijski diabeł*, edited by Aleksander Madyda (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 2007), 682.

¹⁰ Aleksander Madyda, *Haupt. Monografia* [Haupt. Monograph] (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2012), 9–31.

Nęcka, Jagoda Wierzejska, Jakub Lubelski and Andrzej Niewiadomski¹¹. In these studies, memory ceased to be directly related to record; they are all concerned with fictional motifs, which, however, were not as central as in Rutkowski's works. The findings of representatives of "Kultura" may remain influential even today – more than one would expect – as Maciej Nowak's recent study highlights. On the one hand, he openly opposes the memorialist thesis: "Haupt's 'remembered' material is used for exploring a whole variety of issues which go far beyond memoir literature"¹². Haupt was supposed to be mostly concerned with the passing time, and temporality in general – however, this means that despite his intentions, Nowak in fact continues the memorialistic orientation, motivating it "existentially" rather than culturally-historically-regionally.

The present paper is situated between the two trends in reception, highlighting their mutual dependence. I will refer especially to Miłosz's observations, who stressed the importance of details as building blocks in Haupt's prose. Miłosz was impressed with "this totally amazing gift for evoking details" (*ce don d'évocation tout à fait invraisemblable des détails*) or simply "an unparalleled number of details" (*une quantité inouïe de détails*) in those stories¹³, which he connected to the fact that Haupt came from Eastern borderlands. According to Miłosz, Haupt preserved a world characterized by a wonderful surplus of details. And because of the War, the Holocaust, Sovietization, and the relocations that reality was replaced with "enormous greyness" (*une énorme grisaille*), deprived of genuine, vibrant details. Miłosz found the highly technologized American society of the second half of the 20th century no less deprived of details – due to its abstract "attitude" to natural environment. This context offers an interesting ground for comparisons with Haupt, who was an emigrant as well; in terms of landscape impressions of "incurable Europeans" (Miłosz) in America – with another emigrant, Theodor W. Adorno. Miłosz openly admitted that his perspective carried the risk of idealizing the East-

¹¹See Monika Kłosińska-Duszczak, "Funkcjonalizacja przestrzeni w prozie Zygmunta Haupta i Czesława Miłosza: Kresy – Ameryka" [The functionalization of space in prose by Zygmunt Haupt and Czesław Miłosz: Eastern borderlands – America], *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 3 (1998); Ewa Wiegandt, "Wszystko-nic Zygmunta Haupta" [Zygmunt Haupt's everything-nothing], in Wiegandt: *Niepokoje literatury. Studia o prozie polskiej XX wieku* [Literature's unrest. Studies in Polish twenty-century prose] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo WBPiCAK, 2010); Piotr Rambowicz, "«Potrafię skazać się na nicłość». Kreacje przestrzeni w prozie Zygmunta Haupta" [«I can sentence myself to nothingness». Creations of space in Zygmunt Haupt's prose], in: *Paryż – Londyn – Monachium – Nowy Jork. Powrześnieowa emigracja niepodległościowa na mapie kultury nie tylko polskiej* [Paris – London – Munich – New York. Post-September independence emigration on the cultural map – not only Polish], edited by Violetta Wejs-Milewska, Ewa Rogalewska (Białystok: Oddział Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej, Wydawnictwo Uniwersyteckie Trans Humana, 2009); Dorota Utracka, *Strzaskana mozaika. Studium warsztatu pisarskiego Zygmunta Haupta* [Shattered mosaic. An analysis of Zygmunt Haupt's writing] (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2011); Agnieszka Nęcka, "W pogoni za fantazmatem miłości: na marginesie wybranych opowiadań Zygmunta Haupta" [In pursuit of the phantasm of love: marginal notes on several stories by Zygmunt Haupt], *Tematy i Konteksty* 1 (2011); Jagoda Wierzejska, *Retoryczna interpretacja autobiograficzna na przykładzie pisarstwa Andrzeja Bobkowskiego, Zygmunta Haupta i Leo Lipskiego* [Rhetorical autobiographical interpretation on the example of works by Andrzej Bobkowski, Zygmunt Haupt and Leo Lipski] (Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, 2012), 245–364; Jakub Lubelski, "Zygmunta Haupta porzucanie literackości" [Zygmunt Haupt's abandonment of literariness], in Lubelski: *Ssanie. Głód sacrum w literaturze polskiej* [Sucking. Hunger for sacrum in Polish literature] (Warszawa: Teologia Polityczna, 2015), 182; Andrzej Niewiadomski, "Jeden jest zawsze ostrzem". *Inna nowoczesność Zygmunta Haupta* [One is always a blade. The different modernity of Zygmunt Haupt] (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2015); Andrzej Niewiadomski, *Przeciw entropii, przeciw Arkadii. O pisarstwie Zygmunta Haupta* [Against entropy, against arcadia. On Zygmunt Haupt's prose] (Kraków: Instytut Literatury, 2021).

¹²Maciej Nowak, "Uporczywa bezsilność sztuki, czyli Haupt i granice literatury" [Persistent helplessness of art, i.e. Haupt and limits of literature], *Roczniki Humanistyczne* vol. 1 (2018), 83.

¹³Miłosz, Gorkczyńska, 10, 13. For a similar discussion specifically about Eastern borderlands, *ibidem*, 15-16. "Detail" is a key notion for Miłosz's works as well – I shall return to that issue at the end of this paper.

ern borderlands, especially mythologizing Galicia¹⁴. However, this is a separate discussion, beyond the scope of this paper, in which I will focus on the role of details in Haupt's world. Andrzej Niewiadomski writes about "plotlines, images, motifs, characters, events" migrating between Haupt's texts of various genres, and the "dilemma of «detail»", which is especially significant in the context of this paper¹⁵. Niewiadomski tries to identify what systemic references can be found "in the maze of those details"¹⁶. What is significant – neither Miłosz, nor Niewiadomski mention this – the lexeme "details" appears in Haupt as a metaliterary, migrating phenomenon. However, I shall use it as an operative notion – and thus bracket the axiological connotations present in Miłosz, and assume Haupt did not analytically exhaust it in the context in which I use it here.

The way in which this observation connects with the memorialist trend in the reception of Haupt's works is clear – the details have their source in biographical-historical experience. But what is his attitude to the fictionalist model? I would put it simply: Haupt's narrator presents "details" from lost time not as facts, but as potentialities, as non-necessary phenomena. However, this does not mean that they are fictional, that they were used in the "as if" mode. The richness of Haupt's world is based on details not being facts, but rather possible, non-necessary epiphanies. Marek Zaleski was the first one to use the notion of epiphany in this context: referring to the motif of the "moment" in the story *Szpica* [Spearhead], Zaleski observed that "Haupt's description clearly suggests that this moment is unpredictable: it is an epiphany. But Haupt's narrations are an attempt at repeating such an experience, evoking it again from the past, using eidetic imagination, which interacts with memory"¹⁷. Apparently, such a combination of experience and imagination is in line with the memorialistic and fictionalistic trends described above, developing them towards phenomenology and Proust. I believe that the epiphany interpretation of Haupt's memory – suspended between involuntariness and effort – proposed by Zaleski, remains relevant. However, it lacks the less subjective and less consciousness-based dimension of space, i.e. a connection of the experience of time with the element, which plays a significant role already in Proust¹⁸, and it is clearly an integral part of Haupt's writing. In answer to the question where this bottom-up epiphany combines memory with imagination, Dorota Utracka discusses the "variability" of Haupt's prose as a "playful strategy"¹⁹ – reminding Rutkowski's fictionalism. Indeed, Haupt's epiphanies often appear as full-fledged plot scenarios which suspend the main plot. By supplementing mnemopoetics

¹⁴On "the construction of the Eastern borderlands' myth" see Przemysław Czapliński, "Shifting Sands: History of Polish Prose, 1945–2015", in: *Being Poland: A New History of Polish Literature and Culture since 1918*, ed. by Tamara Trojanowska, Joanna Niżyńska, and Przemysław Czapliński, with the assistance of Agnieszka Polakowska (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 373–375. Czapliński: "nostalgic conjuring of the eastern Borderlands as an alternative to nationalistic Europe" (*ibidem*, 380).

¹⁵Niewiadomski, "Jeden jest zawsze ostrzem", 192, 205.

¹⁶Niewiadomski, "Jeden jest zawsze ostrzem", 205.

¹⁷Marek Zaleski, *Formy pamięci. O przedstawieniu przeszłości w polskiej literaturze współczesnej* [Forms of memory. On presenting the past in contemporary Polish literature] (Warszawa: IBL, 1996), 51–52 (more extensively: 50–66).

¹⁸On the earthly dimension in *In Search of Lost Time*, see Ernst Robert Curtius, *Marcel Proust* [1925] (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1961), 91–95 (chapter "Die menschliche Flora").

¹⁹Dorota Utracka, "Teksty-nomady? Wariantywność jako strategia gry w prozie Zygmunta Haupta" [Nomad text? Variability as a game strategy in Zygmunt Haupt's prose], in „*Jestem bardzo niefortunnym wyborem*". *Studia i szkice o twórczości Zygmunta Haupta*, edited by Andrzej Niewiadomski, Paweł Panas (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2018).

with a geopoetic perspective, we can however add that this openness is more than just a game – it constitutes the elementary structure of Haupt’s poetic world²⁰.

The figure of remembering “nothing but...” and the appearance of details

In Haupt’s memory mode the background is fundamental, which leads to something I call *elementary memory*. Details seem to appear as a peculiar side effect of the anamnesis of a specific element – on the immanent level in a text, this is their most general “reference point” or “construction”²¹, problematized and highlighted by Niewiadomski in a number of important microinterpretations. However, I am more interested in the source of details in elementary memory than in their connection within a (fluid) system. This is a recurring situation in a number of Haupt’s most famous stories. The intimate relationship between details and the elements is also confirmed by Haupt’s dispersed texts, some of which only recently have been published for the first time, such as fragments of *Zabawa w “zielone”* [Playing “green”] (first published in 1950). In that story, the narrator is lying on grass and contemplating the role of the element in the origins of artistic prose:

It will suffice that a lost eyelash falls on this surface of nothingness [“green” – Ch.Z.], in an arched trajectory, a thin comma, and you can construct a whole world around it.

Do not be afraid of it, let yourself do it, force yourself to do it, if need be, risk it – this experiment is worth your while.

And so as **I am lying on grass and nothing more**; cicuta next to me, thistles, silvery wormwood, buttercups like flames, thyme, bindweed, bindweed whirling, wild oat, like a vagabond, cheerful and truculent, fat yellow marigolds²².

The narrator radically reduces the world to the element. Curiously, the effect of the focus on the alleged “nothingness” of this world is differentiation – clearly an epiphany, although a very “grounded” one. The scene is taking place at present, or – due to its fragmentary syntax – beyond time. The crystallizing model has an almost universal meaning in Haupt’s prose, where anamnesis is typically signaled with “nothing but”: the narrator stresses multiple times that he remembers **nothing but** the one, holistic element. In that moment “nothing but” transforms into a space of arising potentialities. Consciousness is doubtlessly engaged in that process²³. This connects elementary memory with classical-modernist epiphany. However, the role of “phenomenological” consciousness is relativized and trans-subjectively transgressed

²⁰I understand geopoetics literally as a way of writing about the earth – or, more generally, about the elements. See Andrzej Niewiadomski, „Czym jest, czym (jeszcze) mogłaby być «geopoetyka»? [What is «geopoetics», and what (else) could be?]”, *Teksty Drugie* 5 (2018) for a systemic reflection upon geopoetics as a vague sub-discipline in literary studies. Edward Kasperski discussed Haupt’s “immanent geopoetics”, and Elżbieta Rybicka – geopoetics as “a characteristic of Haupt’s works”, which is supposed to be reflected in a specific “interpretative method” under the same name (*ibidem*, 91–92).

²¹Niewiadomski, „*Jeden jest zawsze ostrzem*”, 205.

²²Zygmunt Haupt, *Z Roksolanii. Opowiadania, eseje, reportaże, publicystyka, warianty, fragmenty (1935–1975)* [From Roksolania. Stories, essays, reportages, articles, variants, fragments], edited by Aleksander Madyda (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2018), 274. All highlights by me, Ch.Z.

²³For a slightly different context, see Rambowicz, 800–804 (chapter “Przestrzeń jako sceneria aktywizująca świadomość” [Space as a consciousness-activating scenery]).

by the “nothing but” figure, which only seems faulty. Everything suggests that this relative independence from the subject is essential for achieving the effect of non-necessity.

Miłosz does not discuss elementary memory, but Andrzej Stasiuk – also a writer and not a critic – did important initial work in this context. Stasiuk defined Haupt’s narrative as “the fire of a fire”, in which everything that is being told – the details of Galician life – is brought into a process of “annihilation”, and so a sphere of its “salvation”²⁴. According to this metaphor, elementary movement in memory burns the things that are remembered, it changes their state. Although Stasiuk does not explain what state this is, in my interpretative perspective what is at display is precisely a state beyond necessity.

Deszcz [Rain] (1953), probably the most widely discussed story by Haupt, seems to be a clear example of this model. However – surprisingly – such an extrapolation has never been proposed. In criticism, *Deszcz* has been described as characteristic of Haupt, but the way in which the past is evoked in it has not been compared to similar devices used in his other stories. In *Deszcz* three detailed scenarios of what the narrator-protagonist could have been doing in a provincial town emerge from his remembering **nothing but** rain, grey, and wet greenery from a one-day visit. The three scenarios are: a date, a minor business trip (the narrator was promised a small sum of money), and a contract killer (to shoot someone in the back). Since he cannot exclude any of the three possibilities, at the end when, as if on screen, we have seen many stories, the narrator concludes that he **only** remembers **rain** for certain²⁵. It is impossible to miss the metapoetic trope, which precedes this conclusion. The speaker presents the following auto-interpretation in the form of a question: the sense of the present short “oeuvre” is supposed to contain all “possibilities and variants”, at the same being open an “open work” the blanks of which the reader can fill in while reading. Moreover, according to the narrator, rain turns out to be a parable about the futility of all things mundane: everything in life will, sooner or later, be literally wiped away by time.

Perhaps those auto-interpretative tropes – the open work and the parabolic mode – truly contain the artistic-philosophical message of *Deszcz*. However, we should ask to what extent those three scenarios are marked as memories, and to what – as fiction? It would be a mistake to postulate a dichotomy here: memory *versus* fiction. Compared to the elementary memory of rain, those three incidents seem to be made up, but each has its own degree of probability: the first one (end of love) seems to be the most probable, partly because it resembles the end of the love story from Haupt’s *Madrygał dla Anusi* [Madrigal for Anusia] (1949). The second scenario (business) seems somewhat comical and improper, as it is about a small sum of money – still, it may have an autobiographical foundation, as Haupt always had financial problems and was often in debt²⁶. Finally, the third scenario (assassination) seems to be deliberately exaggerated in its brutality, or even impossible in Haupt’s world, which we typically get to know through the lens of a first-person narrator; in the light of this scenario the text would not be classified as memorialistic. I believe that we are dealing with an ekphrastic effect here – an internalized ekphrasis of a detective movie, with the intense rain as “element of cinema”

²⁴Andrzej Stasiuk, “Odwrócona ciemność” [Reversed darkness], in: Zygmunt Haupt, *Baskijski diabeł*, edited by Aleksander Madyda (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 2007), 15.

²⁵Haupt, *Baskijski diabeł*, 275–278.

²⁶I would like to thank Andrzej Niewiadomski for this tip.

(Robert Bird²⁷), a naturalized image of the celluloid on which details appear. Rain would thus be a media metaphor (Haupt's expression according to which the details appear "because of that rain"²⁸ fits this very well). This hypothesis has not been verified, but it would seem that the cinematographic trope may complete the parallel between Haupt's writing and painting, which has been a recurring motif in criticism since Czapski. To support this hypothesis, we could mention *Szpica*, in which the narrator talks about his ability to see himself as a character in a movie²⁹.

At the same time, we should observe that if the second, and especially the third scenario seem to move from mnemopoetics to a kind of popular fiction – *pulp fiction*, so to say – it is not pure fiction nonetheless. Popular cinema belongs to the lost world no less than what the narrator experienced "autobiographically"³⁰. Both life reality and popular culture can be reflected in elementary memory and (for a moment) come to the fore. Moreover, the introduction of the behavioral plot-line from popular culture does not mean that the story is deprived of a certain moral concern; it is possible to read the story in a way that recognizes a hierarchical amplification in the three scenarios of *Deszcz*, i.e. admitting guilt, in the process of which the truth is gradually revealed, and the third scenario then turns out to be the only one worth considering. What remains problematic is the fact that it disagrees with the letter of the narration itself – the narrator does not favor the murder scenario (even if this importance seems to be implied by its position on the list). Neither does he put forward any clear suggestions that the first two scenarios should be read as dodges and steps leading to admitting guilt, because indeed, the third scenario maintains its status of a potential, unconfirmed version. Just as what the narrator from the somewhat related *Jak wiosna przyjechała* [When spring arrived] (1951) says about remembering lost love by the wind: "all that happens as if without any foundation, to be taken on faith, for what would be the source of certainty here? nothing: not reserved, not secured by a deal or contract"³¹.

The narrator's voice in Haupt's stories cannot always be directly attributed to the experiencing "I". In some cases it can be described as a captious and commenting listener. In *Coup de grâce* (1950) the narrator presents events from other people's lives (although ones he knows well)³². Writing about an incident that is both succinct and tragic, he observes: "I have been told how it is told, but it can be recreated in some way until the ultimate limits of reality"³³. He achieves what the reader in *Deszcz* is supposed to fill in through such "recreation". However, the question arises how to understand the phrase "until the ultimate limits of reality". It leads to the very center of our problem – the abundance of possible details. I am not sure if this is justified in this specific case from *Coup de grâce*, but with some reservations I would understand that phrase in such a way that the element transgresses the ultimate limits of reality as an inevitable condition for the details to appear.

²⁷Robert Bird, *Andrei Tarkovsky: Elements of Cinema* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008). Bird reconstructs Tarkowski's cinematography, using elements (earth, fire, water, air) as analytical categories.

²⁸Haupt, *Baskijski diabeł*, 275.

²⁹Haupt, *Baskijski diabeł*, 596.

³⁰On Haupt and cinema in a broader perspective see Rafał Szczerbakiewicz, "Haupt idzie do kina" [Haupt goes to the cinema], in: *Jestem bardzo niefortunnym wyborem*. *Studia i szkice o twórczości Zygmunta Haupta*, red. Andrzej Niewiadomski, Paweł Panas (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2018).

³¹Haupt, *Baskijski diabeł*, 316. Translation mine, PZ.

³²Haupt, *Baskijski diabeł*, 210. Translation mine, PZ.

³³Haupt, *Baskijski diabeł*, 210. Translation mine, PZ.

Haupt's element is no *tabula rasa*, no monochrome, as demonstrated clearly by *Szpica*. The narrator of this story about military service presents himself as a "fortunate choice" for the vanguard because he can "encroach in the surrounding vastness". At the same time this ability proves to be such a great disadvantage that it consumes all his attention, while a spear's vigilance "should be impersonal, completely flat, as then its surface will reflect every detail, every sign is supposed to be reflected and scream in a crazy spasm of alarm"³⁴. In abstract terms: this concept of space is not about a black-and-white model of potentiality and actuality, but about the complete participation in an element which is supposed to facilitate the free appearance of details.

I believe that the animated element is key in Haupt's memory poetics. Let us analyze it using another example: in *Balon* [Balloon] (1970) memory and retrospection are compared to looking at a rearview mirror while driving at full speed. Again, this is a model of a surface (this time – artificial) on which the details of life appear – details which reach the driver by mediation of the surrounding landscape only to disappear in the mirror, "getting smaller, losing their shape", but the narrator observes that against that momentary loss "memory helps us"³⁵. *Balon* presents a memory model which is able to inflate even the most minute details to a "surreal" size in the course of unexpected plot twists – and as such it is a model of grotesque space but also of valorized deformation. However, we cannot extrapolate this image of a mirror, it is not typical for Haupt's prose. More numerous are the cases in which memory requires an unconditional placing in nature's element.

Here are a few examples which provide a better picture of the model of the possibility of details out of elementary memory. First, *Czuwanie i stypa* [Vigil and funeral reception], which is the original, longer version of *Stypa* [Funeral reception] from *Pierścień z papieru* [Paper ring]³⁶. There is a description of snow as a dynamic, active element. In the context that interests me, the moment when the phrase "nothing but" appears is decisive:

It is starting to snow, it is snowing persistently, endlessly, and when you press your face against a cold window pane, you will see **nothing but** a blizzard and a swarm of birds, capricious, circling here and there, you lose any sense of whether they are flying down from the sky, or up from the ground, you lose all sense of space, am I here? or am I there? where are the ones further away? they are passing by one another, some white, some black, contours of objects, trees, houses, they are all becoming blurred.

Contours become blurred; chaos is growing. However, the sentence following the quote above introduces a new level of detail:

[...] people behind them are sneaking like conspirators, but they cannot escape what marks them and burdens them and sits on their arms and backs, throws a coat and *delia* of comical dignity over them, it is hanging in a melted drop off their noses, it stars over their lashes dips their moustache in unsweetened snow ice and they are surprised, once they get home, that they find melting kaleidoscope

³⁴Haupt, *Baskijski diabeł*, 596.

³⁵Haupt, *Baskijski diabeł*, 549.

³⁶Haupt, *Baskijski diabeł*, 191–196.

stars on their sleeves, and each is different and crystallized in a well-thought way, and unparalleled in their melting impermanence³⁷.

The description shifts smoothly from the chaotic element to crystal-clear details: eyelashes, moustache, sleeves stiff from the cold. Perhaps this leap from the element to details represents the kind of “surreal” accumulation of details which Haupt will later discuss in *Balon*. However, what is important, in *Czuwanie i stypa* they emerge from a memory of the overwhelming element rather than from an artificial mirror (although perhaps a melting one, like in a painting by Salvador Dali).

In *W Paryżu i w arkadii* [In Paris and in arcadia] (1945) Haupt describes German troops during World War I, i.e., at the time when he was a child, with extensive use of enumeration – a typical device in his prose. After listing a great number of war details across roughly half a page, he notes: “But all that is covered by a cloud dust kicked up by the passing infantry”³⁸. This is how dust – a natural element in a very volatile form – joins the details *post festum* and renders the abundant description in fact impossible, as those details should be invisible if dust covers them. This logical break supports even the hypothesis of the basic role of the element: it is more important that details appear in some relation to the element than that they are actually seen. In *Polowanie z Maupassantem* [Hunting with Maupassant] (1943) the “whiteness of snow” forces the narrator to “expect a number of more or less fantastic possibilities”, and while remembering lost time, “new circles and new associations emerge”³⁹. In *Gołębie z placu Teodora* [II] [Pigeons from Theodore’s square] (1944) the titular square is transformed from an actual place into “an image of its own imagination”, as details seem to exist only as freely imagined⁴⁰.

In a way, the fantastic tendency constitutes a formal rather than thematic category here. The very mode of emerging details, i.e., the birth of reality unburdened by necessity, is “fantastic”. A similar, empirically impossible visuality can be observed in *Biały mazur* [White mazurka]. The narrator describes ants crawling on the ground, while he would like to “roll his eyes to look inwards”⁴¹. The more clearly individual ants are visible, the more problematic the very act of looking becomes. A metaphorical variant of this model can be found in *O Stefci, o Chaimie Immerglücku i o scytyjskich bransoletkach* [On Stefcia, On Chaim Immerglück, and on Scythian bracelets] (1953), where memory – here clearly traumatized by a sense of guilt related to the death of Galician Jews in the Holocaust⁴² – is a troublesome catch of fish “in water so great that it is black”⁴³. A more melancholic type can be found in *Meine liebe Mutter, sei stolz, ich trage die Fahne* (1951), where cemetery greenery proves to be the only probable “memorial” of people

³⁷Zygmunt Haupt, „Czuwanie i stypa”, *Kultura* 2-3 (1950), 128.

³⁸Haupt, *Baskijski diabeł*, 223.

³⁹Haupt, *Baskijski diabeł*, 279.

⁴⁰Haupt, *Baskijski diabeł*, 319.

⁴¹Haupt, *Baskijski diabeł*, 288.

⁴²See Marek Wilczyński, “Zapowiedź rzeczy przyszłych. Szyfr zagłady w galicyjskich opowiadaniach Zygmunta Haupta” [Foreshadowing future events. Holocaust code in Zygmunt Haupt’s Galician stories], and Antoni Zajac, “«Nie gość, nie intruz, nie mieszkaniac, jestem jak duch...». Psychotopografie pamięci w twórczości Zygmunta Haupta” [Not a guest, intruder, inhabitant, I am like a ghost... Psychotopographies of memory in Zygmunt Haupt] – both in the current issue of “Forum of Poetics”.

⁴³Haupt, *Baskijski diabeł*, 235.

killed in the war (“**nothing** was left for their monument, **only** that spring greenery”)⁴⁴; the impermanent blooming grass becomes a place of memory inscriptions rather than gravestones.

In *Madrygał dla Anusi* [Madrigal for Anusia] sand is the leitmotif, and it can even be considered one of the protagonists. There is a recurring scene, in which the titular, adored Anusia throws sand on the narrator on a beach⁴⁵. Towards the end he realizes that everything between him and Anusia was built on “volatile sand”⁴⁶, which brings to mind the *vanitas* topos from *Deszcz*. It is impossible to ignore the significance of those salient metaliterary references, which sometimes are almost too explicitly exposed. That comment probably does not contain the whole truth about sand in *Madrygał dla Anusi*; for sand is more than just an image of fragility, it is at the same time the condition of the unusual, extraordinarily concrete sensuality of the narration. The love is built on sand, and so “it has no future”. Indeed, but the poetics of this madrigal is built on sand as well, and it reaches unusually plastic sensuality. Sand becomes an extension of touch⁴⁷.

Limits to elementary memory: culturalism, emigration

As I have tried to demonstrate, in Haupt’s works memory and fiction are not mutually exclusive – they are mutually dependent, if we take a closer look at how details appear as potentialities through elementary memory. I hope that this model has become clear based on the discussed examples.

Now I would like to move on to considerations regarding the limits to this model in Haupt’s prose. I think that there is at least one serious, persistent limiting factor, which is difficult to miss: what Andrzej Mencwel has called “Polish culturalism”, i.e. an attitude – taken to extremes by the philosopher Stanisław Brzozowski – that sees first and foremost chaos in nature, and thus a challenge to organize it and produce human values⁴⁸. I understand culturalism not in its narrow sense, as an attitude characteristic of the Polish left, which out of necessity strives towards immanently justified fairness and social advancement⁴⁹. Haupt might have rejected namely the Promethean implications of that attitude. What I mean is rather a general fear of the “nonhuman” world, about which Brzozowski had written so passionately⁵⁰. Culturalist (in this understanding) mentions of the alien, inscrutable, and hostile element can already be found in Haupt’s early works; take for instance *Polowanie z Maupassantem*, where

⁴⁴Haupt, *Baskijski diabeł*, 257.

⁴⁵Haupt, *Baskijski diabeł*, 263, 264, 265, 274.

⁴⁶Haupt, *Baskijski diabeł*, 265.

⁴⁷“My Anusia is throwing sand on me, lying, from her pink hands, like from an hourglass, and she is burying me in this white sand. As I am lying I can see her from below, kneeling on the sand, her thighs thick and hard above her knees, and her knees with whitened skin, and her swimsuit is stuck to her belly, and the wonderful dimple between her breasts, like a promise, and she is laughing, and when she lifts her head off the hot sand, her cheek is running towards her chin, and her hair, in the messiest bun, is cutting her neck.” Haupt, *Baskijski diabeł*, 263.

⁴⁸Andrzej Mencwel, *Etos lewicy. Esej o narodzinach polskiego kulturalizmu* [The left’s ethos. Essay on the birth of Polish culturalism] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2009), especially the afterword, “Etos, lewica, kulturalizm” [Ethos, the left, culturalism], 255–261.

⁴⁹See Mencwel, 257–258.

⁵⁰Brzozowski influenced the interwar right through the motif of “fighting” the nonhuman world; the right saw this fight as a premise for the process of rebuilding a strong national state.

the narrator comments on “the greenery of humanity in a wild, chaotic world, which is yet to become a world”⁵¹. In this context, Haupt’s elementary memory is characterized by a non-obvious ambivalence. He maintains axiological-cultural distance in order to “secure” his dangerous participation in the celebration of an unchained element – in fact, on closer inspection, he did that from the very beginning. And this means that at some point the “naked”, uncanny nature and “entropy” left behind by technological civilization coincide, as projected by Haupt already in 1943, and developed in his later works (at least in a hidden way)⁵². There is a striking analogy with another European emigrant in America, Theodor W. Adorno, who – although using completely different diction and without references to the scientific metaphor of entropy – sought a third way between an all too organized and pre-cultural, wild nature in the concept of “cultural landscape” (*Kulturlandschaft*)⁵³.

The culturalistic factor is intertwined with the two emigrants’ melancholic attitude to nature. In Haupt’s stories which are set in America nature becomes a largely dangerous category. *Cyklon* [Cyclone] (1948) speaks of the “element’s dread”⁵⁴. Later, in *Z kroniki o latającym domu* [From the chronicle of a flying house] (1959), we see a sandy beach after a sea storm – a place that is clearly ugly, and what is more significant, a place where details lose any meaning to the observer:

Fine white sand, as if made of shattered glass. It is white, and then suddenly dirty, wet, brown. And there is a shell on it, but not some fancy sea conch, twisted, spotted, or creatively painted, no: a shallow brown boat, with mother-of-pearl shimmering on the inside, similar to our freshwater mussel. Then there is a stick, a rotten tennis shoe, and then nothing, only sand. And if you lift your eyes, there is flat, dirty-green water, and only when you look at the horizon, it becomes emerald, green, very green. And there are clouds above.

So this is it? Water, sand, garbage, sky. It is so far? And so unsurprising⁵⁵.

The details are highly “entropic” – especially the tennis shoe – and they seem random, but not exempt from necessity like in Haupt’s most famous stories. They are burdened with factuality. Perhaps the fact that the details cannot be integrated into a whole – as happened, despite much resistance, with the element (rain, wind, snow, grass, dust, sand) in the Galician stories – results from their unfreedom. In *Entropia* – written still during the war – Haupt outlined a horrifying vision of a dreadful ecosystem reduced to one, uniform season that deprives all details contained within it of their living source. He juxtaposed this vision with a peculiar incantation: “My country is a country of four seasons” – again, this sentence is interrupted

⁵¹Mencwel, 281.

⁵²Mencwel, 21–32.

⁵³See Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie* [1970], edited by Gretel Adorno, Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2012), 106–107: “Wie sehr die Vulgarantithese von Technik und Natur irrt, liegt darin zutage, daß gerade die von menschlicher Pflege ungesänftigte Natur, über die keine Hand fuhr, alpine Moränen und Geröllhalden, den industriellen Abfallhaufen gleichen, vor denen das gesellschaftlich approbierte ästhetische Naturbedürfnis flüchtet. Wie industriell es im anorganischen Weltraum aussieht, wird einmal sich weisen. Der stets noch idyllische Naturbegriff bliebe auch in seiner tellurischen Expansion, dem Abdruck totaler Technik, der Provinzialismus einer winzigen Insel”.

⁵⁴Haupt, *Baskijski diabeł*, 721.

⁵⁵Haupt, *Baskijski diabeł*, 415.

by a half-page-long apposition after “My country”, and so by an intrusion which iconically highlights the appearance of details as dependent on the four seasons⁵⁶.

In *Z kroniki o latającym domu* the devastation of a country which is not “his” inspires the narrator’s empathy. Perhaps his reaction becomes more understandable from the perspective of Haupt’s conscious, proud, slightly ironic provincialism, which is to some extent characteristic of small motherlands literatures⁵⁷. Looking at devastation makes the European observer want to rebuild – in a way, to reverse entropy:

One would like to rescue that house on the distant, foreign seaside. To straighten it, stretch it over the shamelessly hollow roof of branches, leaves, stitch it up with hay, cover this nudity, help it, make it into a shelter against the elements once again, right the wrongs, scare away evil, fight the abandonment and homelessness that follow it⁵⁸.

It is not surprising that the wish to protect – *nota bene* not oneself in the first place – works as a reflection of the enumeration of the details dispersed on the beach. The presence of water is also highlighted in (seemingly) more peaceful scenes, such as in *Luizjana* (1948), the first story from Haupt’s American period:

And the river is walking in front of us with its huge surface and is tickling the timber of our raft. It is flowing from some distant world like from a cave, and it is supposed to be a bright day and the sky is stretching wide above us, its extent and heavy force unknown and impenetrable, its wet element is alien to us, we are used to draught and solid ground, walked on and trampled, it makes it cave-like and alien, and incomprehensible⁵⁹.

It is impossible not to notice that in this reportage-like story (narrated in the present tense) the element of water is associated with something “classically” sublime, as a father is trying to show his son the Mississippi in all its overwhelming vastness. He cares about their shared journey, because (as he says) “it is good to have an opportunity to deal with greatness”; and in accordance with the classical logic of the sublime he adds that “it may be a paradox that we are so tiny compared to something so huge”⁶⁰.

Nevertheless, the image of water dangerously entering land, which ultimately fails to lift the subject’s spirit, recurs, for example, in *Kawaler z morskiej pianki* [Bachelor from sea foam] (1950):

Only the alien sea roars and hums down there. Only the iron sea is coming and hitting against the rocks. I am supposed to be standing here and watching the alien element rubbing against the land, peeling gravel off it, spitting at it with its salty foam. Only alien water, incomprehensible and indifferent, it is shattering deliriously and consuming the land – the last of what is left under my feet⁶¹.

⁵⁶Haupt, *Baskijski diabeł*, 21–22.

⁵⁷See Czaplinski, 375.

⁵⁸Haupt, *Baskijski diabeł*, 420–421.

⁵⁹Haupt, *Baskijski diabeł*, 691.

⁶⁰Haupt, *Baskijski diabeł*, 687.

⁶¹Haupt, *Baskijski diabeł*, 394.

Just as with the lack of exchange between the element and the details of the damaged beach, we are dealing here with the disrupted “economy” between water and land. This dysfunctionality is an allegory of banishment in general, but perhaps especially of the condition of European emigrants in America. Thus, the strangeness of nature, intensifying in this period in Haupt’s work, unexpectedly has a lot in common with the strongly “European” or “Middle-European” attitude to nature, as showcased in Czesław Miłosz’s *Widzeniach nad Zatoką San Francisco* [Visions from San Francisco Bay] (1969):

[...] there is a continent spirit which maliciously destroys anything you try to try, to build for yourself. The huge size of the huge size of the area, violated yet always triumphant, folded land skin belittling all our mistakes and achievements. In the face of the Feather River pine trees or rocky headlands puked over with explosions of ocean whiteness, where wind brings roars of sea lions, or on the slopes of Tamalpais, from where the jagged land is the first day of creation, I am standing stripped, deprived. I have achieved nothing, I have not participated in any evolution or revolution, there is nothing I can boast about, because the whole collective game of gloating and humiliating collapses. Strangeness, indifference, stone everlastingness (or resembling stone) and I, compared to it a flash of a fraction of a second, tissues, nerves, the heart pump, subject to the same incomprehensible rule which rules what came before me, and what for me is only a self-sufficient anti-sense⁶².

However, whatever threatens with limitations, paralyzed creativity and memory in Haupt (although it also inspires a sympathetic reaction)⁶³ – in Miłosz it has a completely different meaning. In *Widzenia...*, the strange, jugged nature teaches the poet a lesson in humility. Although the landscape presents itself as sublime – like the river in Haupt’s story – it does not make the observer feel subjectively elated (unlike the classical sublime), it remains only a “a self-sufficient anti-sense” – and it is precisely in this state of complete disappointment that the Eastern European poet’s maturing takes place. Through this parallel we are returning to Polish culturalism in America – as we know, a few years earlier Miłosz had written a thoroughly culturalist book about Brzozowski (*Człowiek wśród skorpionów* [Man amongst scorpions], 1962).

At this point a revealing contrast with Adorno’s vision can be seen. In his description of the Californian landscape in *Minima Moralia* (1951), Adorno stresses – similarly to Miłosz – the untamed wildness of nature untouched by civilization⁶⁴. However, contrary to Miłosz, who is still somewhat skeptical, Adorno leaves no room for doubt; he is openly contemptuous to what he perceives as the pre-cultural ugliness of American nature. Curiously, as for Haupt, for Adorno it is the lack of

⁶²Czesław Miłosz, *Widzenia nad Zatoką San Francisco* (Paryż: Instytut Kultury, 1969), 12.

⁶³Haupt discussed this issue explicitly: “Regardless of how I highlight the aspect of banishment, I do not feel separated from American life”. Zygmunt Haupt, “Pisarz polski osiedlający się w Nowym świecie. Odpowiedź na ankietę «The Pacific Spectator»” [Polish author moving to the New World. In answer to «The Pacific Spectator» survey [first draft, 1949], in Haupt: *Z Roksolanii*, 167. For Haupt’s uncharacteristic literary struggles with American reality, see Rafał Szczerbakiewicz, “Ameryka Haupta. Próby literackie [Haupt’s America. Literary attempts] (*Luizjana, W barze Harry’ego, Zamierzcze echa, Oak Alley nad Missisipi, Cyklon*)”, paper read at the conference “Zygmunt Haupt. Warsztat pisarski – inspiracje – konteksty” [Zygmunt Haupt. Writing – inspirations – contexts], AMU Faculty of Polish and Classical Philology, 20–21 September 2021. For a more general discussion of Haupt’s emigration based on latest sources, see *Zagubiony wśród obcych. Zygmunt Haupt – pisarz, wygnaniec, outsider* [Lost among strangers. Zygmunt Haupt – author, outcast, outsider] (Bielsko-Biała – Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe ATH, Instytut Literatury, 2019).

⁶⁴Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, translated into Polish by Małgorzata Łukasiewicz, afterword by Marek J. Siemek (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1999), 50 (*Minima Moralia. Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben* [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1951], 54–55).

balance and mutual relationship that proves to be the main problem. A modern highway remains a foreign body, it does not harmonize with the surrounding landscape: “These are always inserted directly in the landscape, and the more impressively smooth and broad they are, the more unrelated and violent their gleaming track appears against its wild, overgrown surroundings”⁶⁵. However, it should be noticed that for Haupt driving through a vast, open area is a valuable means for recognizing American landscape. This is how his first-person narrator describes the experience of travelling along the Mississippi with his son: “We are driving, and this is the essence of life at the moment”⁶⁶. Adorno claimed that “the hurrying eye cannot retain what it has seen merely from the car, and the vanishing landscape leaves no more traces behind than it bears upon itself”⁶⁷. According to Miłosz, man in America, cut off from “menacing, monstrous sights” of nature and its details, was “a mere observer sitting inside a machine”⁶⁸. In a stark contrast to this European pessimism, the perspective conditioned by driving allows Haupt a new, creative look at the charming sight of the river: “We are now carried by the sight of the river. When you look up at its waters, and then quickly look back, you can see the difference in the water levels, that indeed there is up and there is down”⁶⁹. And so what Miłosz deemed impossible, writing that “the car already pre-fabricates what we look at through the window”⁷⁰ becomes possible in Haupt.

* * *

In recent years Haupt has been portrayed as an isolated, paradoxical phenomenon, a representative of “strange modernity”⁷¹, and at the same time an anarchist-traditionalist, fictional memorialist, documentary mannerist, or “watchmaker-dynamiter”⁷². Insofar, my conclusions do not throw any new light on his works. However, I hope that I have managed to capture the close connection between memory and nature, characteristic of Haupt’s poetics. The “nothing but” figure used in confrontation with nature allows for details to appear in a realm of non-necessity. This as it were grassroots version of epiphany allows for the experience of unheard-of freedom through memory.

translated by Paulina Zagórska

⁶⁵Adorno, *Minima Moralia...*, 50 („Diese sind allemal unvermittelt in die Landschaft gesprengt, und je glatter und breiter sie gelungen sind, um so beziehungsloser und gewalttätiger steht ihre schimmernde Bahn gegen die allzu wild verwachsene Umgebung”, *Minima Moralia. Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben*, 54–55). English version translated by E.F.N. Jephcott, Redwood Books, 1997: 48.

⁶⁶Haupt, *Baskijski diabeł*, 690.

⁶⁷Adorno, *Minima Moralia...*, 50 („Denn was das eilende Auge bloß im Auto gesehen hat, kann es nicht behalten, und es versinkt so spurlos, wie ihm selber die Spuren abgehen”, *Minima Moralia. Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben*, 55).

⁶⁸Miłosz, 33. Miłosz asks rhetorically: “Am I an exception for needing a sensual relationship with details?”. From his European perspective he even talks about Americans’ “scarcity of details from childhood” (*ibidem*, 34).

⁶⁹Haupt, *Baskijski diabeł*, 691.

⁷⁰Miłosz, 34.

⁷¹See the chapter *Zygmunt Haupt’s “strange” modernity* in Niewiadomski, “*Jeden jest zawsze ostrzem*”, 117–168.

⁷²Jan Zieliński, “Watchmaker-dynamitar”. From the archive of *Gałęź zachodnia* in the present issue of “Forum of Poetics”. The title is a reference to a sentence from *Biały mazur*: “In fact it is watchmakers who are the most skilled dynamitards and bomb-throwers, good old-fashioned bombs from the previous century”, Haupt, *Baskijski diabeł*, 293.

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KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT:

Recapitulating major tendencies in Haupt studies, the paper revisits the question of memory models in works by Zygmunt Haupt, and proposes to extend the established, “epiphanic” reading of Haupt’s prose with a geopoetic perspective. Based on numerous examples from Haupt’s works, the paper demonstrates how exuberant details of the lost Galician world tend to grow on the ground of an element seemingly remembered as monolithic and absolute (rain, snow, sand, grass, air, dust, etc.). A certain type of epiphany crystallizes in the emergence of details, focused on surroundings rather than on the subject. Thanks to this externalization of memory through the elements, details gain their specific non-necessary status expressed in the typical Hauptian enumerations. This model is limited by “Polish culturalism” (Andrzej Mencwel), according to which nature constitutes first and foremost “a nonhuman world” – an idea that Haupt seems to share in a moderate, apolitical form. Haupt’s culturalist attitude is further explored by a comparison of some of his American stories with negative descriptions of Californian landscape by Czesław Miłosz and Theodor W. Adorno.

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geopoetyka

CENTRAL EUROPE

GALICIA

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