

## Narrating Geographic Space

Inspired by the notion that place and space – like the past – can be accessed through narration, the essays presented in this volume interrogate the causative power of literary and cultural texts, which not only describe specific geographic places, but which can also preserve, develop, and co-create them in cultural memory. The authors of these essays explore the performative nature of literature, its ability to generate narratively specific geographic places identifiable on a map, as well as imagined places that cannot be located using geospatial coordinates. This performative nature of literature is clearly demonstrated in the first essay of the volume by Katarzyna Szalewska (“Figures of Absence / The Rhetoric of Emptiness”). Based on examples from literature, Szalewska shows how writing actively contributes to the process of developing a cultural network that relies on a tension between empty and filled spaces.

This performative aspect of literature is especially palpable in narratives connected with historical and cultural margins and borderlands. As such, essays in this volume take us on a narrative tour of the eastern and western borderlands of today’s Poland

to Galicia, Lower Silesia, and Podlasie, as well as the northern regions of Warmia and Mazury; the “border” cities of Gdańsk and Szczecin; spaces of exception, such as the Warsaw and Łódź Ghettos, and the Auschwitz concentration and extermination camp; and “far off” foreign places that explore the geographic imaginary beyond Poland’s contemporary borders, such as the Caucasus, Sakha, Siberia, and St. Petersburg.

Agnieszka Czyżak’s essay “In the Space of the Other: Narrative Gestures of (Self-)Awareness in Prose at the Turn of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries” demonstrates how narrative representations of spaces considered “other” or “foreign” can productively serve as an avenue for self-definition. This fundamental idea weaves through the essays that explore Polish experiences or narrative interpretations of places outside of Poland or geographic loci that are “non-Polish” within its geopolitical boundaries. For example, in his essay “A Map of the Tatar Imagination: On the Experience of Geographic Space in the Poetry of Polish and Kazan Tatars,” Grzegorz Czerwiński discusses how the cultural geography and geographic spaces of Polish and Kazan Tatars are intimately tied to ancestral history and the Tatar experience of migration. Agnieszka Izdebska’s essay “Some Observations on the Construction of Space in the Prose of W. G. Sebald” sheds light on the relationship between space, text, and photography through the literary works of a non-Polish (German) author and demonstrates the power of textualized space as an analytical category. In the essay “Geographic Continuum of Representation: Wojciech Górecki’s Caucasus,” Magdalena Horodecka discusses how space is textualized in reportage and journalistic encounters with place, at the same time demonstrating how authors-journalists can co-create a geographic imaginary. Continuing the scholarly engagement with reportage and travel literature, Magdalena Roszczyńska outlines the intertextuality between contemporary and older travel guides, and shows how space and place can be narratively (de-)textualized (“Following Polish Traces in Siberia and Sakha with Michał Książek as Guide”). Reaching into the early

nineteenth century, Svetlana Pavlenko combines a study of literary and journalistic sources to elucidate the textualization of the 1824 flood of St. Petersburg and to trace literary motifs used to describe the Neva River (“Necropolis: The Flood Motif in the History of Petersburg Based on Examples of Selected Literary and Journalistic Texts”).

While the essays pertaining to “non-Polish” spaces show the productivity of the spatial framework when applied to texts that engage the world at large, the majority of the essays in this volume elucidate the importance of such a scholarly pursuit for Polish cultural studies, specifically. The historical vicissitudes of the eastern and western Polish borderlands have cultivated fertile ground for narrative expressions of places “lost,” forgotten, (re)remembered, and (re)conceived. In some narrative instances, these vicissitudes are expressed through the creation of an internal geography as demonstrated in Tomasz Cieślak’s essay “(Re)constructed post-Schulzian Spaces. Lower Silesia in Karol Maliszewski’s *Mannequins* and Tomasz Różycki’s *Bestiarium*”. In his analysis, Cieślak interrogates the impact of historical heterogeneity in Lower Silesia on the imagined spaces generated by childhood memories and emotional experiences. Approaching this topic from a more theoretical perspective and with the help of Deleuzian metaphors, Maciej Dajnowski’s “Literary Maps: The Rhizome, the Fold, and the ‘Antechamber Effect’” considers the process of articulating a real geography within the “realm of literary imagination” and demonstrates how an imagined vision of geography potentially transforms places into nonexistent spaces.

Other essays in this volume explore the narrative reconstitution and geospatial poetics of places “lost” or forgotten because of changes in political and geographic borders, clashes between Poland and neighboring cultures, and the historical transformations that ensued from war and economic transitions. In describing cultural practices as they relate to silenced, excluded, and traumatically experienced places, authors pay special attention to the

narration of absence through a spatial poetics. As some of the essays in this volume show, absences find expression in cultural works that feature inhabitants of borderlands who experience regional or local culture through spatial liminality. Such is the focus of Elżbieta Konończuk's essay "Textualization of Place as a Way of Practicing Rescue History. The Example of Podlasie" in which the author adapts Ewa Domańska's concept of rescue history and analyzes Polish theatrical performances that explore the history of the Polish-Belarusian border. In her essay, Konończuk shows how the textualization of the eastern border serves as a form of rescuing the "historically mute" from oblivion.

The interrogation of absent or lost places through the prism of space demonstrates the importance of this line of academic inquiry for memory studies. As illustrated by Agnieszka Karpowicz's analysis of guidebooks on the Warmia and Mazury regions ("Eider-down or Comforter? Sewing a Map of the Mazury Region"), spatial discontinuity caused by historical narration can have a profound effect on collective memory. The same can be said for an individual's attempt at experiencing the discontinuity of time and space, a point expressed by Szymon Trusewicz in his essay "Absent, Narrated: Andrzej Stasiuk's Story *Place*" which discusses how narration can fill gaps in memory through descriptions of space. Finally, in "Theater, Synagogue, Prison, and Parking Lot. One Place, Four Stories", Małgorzata Czermińska explores the physical transformations of one specific location in Gdańsk and demonstrates how its history can be reconstructed through not only literary textualization, but also visual (postcards, photographs, maps, and drawings). Such textualization fills both time and space with a fuller and deeper understanding of the past and present.

Historical trauma and its ensuing narrative silences and exclusions constitute a recurring theme of this volume. Some of the authors saliently demonstrate how the narrative textualization of space often mirrors the loss and subsequent absence of people. In the context of today's Poland, this pertains particularly to Jewish

communities. Always aware that political clashes, cultural differences, and wars contribute to the “disappearance” of people and places, these essays demonstrate how historical loci and their inhabitants can be – and indeed are – “rescued” or (re)constructed and transformed into (re-)imagined, narrative entities or territories. For example, in the essay “In Szczecin, or in Other Words, Nowhere: The ‘Jewish’ Periphery of the City”, Paweł Wolski shows how the unstable identity of the city Szczecin narratively works to resuscitate the phantom memory of a Jewish presence. While many of the essays in this volume treat narrative as a means of sustaining memory and reclaiming the past, Krystyna Pietrych’s essay on representations of the Łódź Ghetto in contemporary prose, graphic novels, and children’s stories reminds us that there is an inherent danger in the textualization of place, namely the potential for narrative to lead to historical falsification (“(Re)Presentations or Simulations? The Space of the Łódź Ghetto in Twenty-First Century Literature”).

With its focus on the Holocaust, Pietrych’s text serves as a transition between the two linguistically different parts of this volume, which presents the research interests of both Polish and Anglo-American scholars. While the volume in its entirety offers academic inquiries into changing, transforming, and disappearing spaces accessible primarily through textual representation, the English language essays constitute their own subtheme. They are focused on how the Holocaust and what Nazi Germany called the “final solution” left an imprint on the physical and narrative geography of today’s Poland. Each of the four English-language essays in this volume introduces a different, though equally important, aspect of Holocaust studies through a spatial lens. By employing concepts of geopoetics and the rhetoric of absence to the study of the Holocaust, these four essays shed light on delicate and often painful issues related to the memory and memorialization of space. Their authors show the need for creating a multidimensional map of places, which owe their persistence in cultural memory (national, local, familial, etc.) to narration. The active process of mapping memory

suggested in these essays is especially important as the temporal distance between World War II and today steadily increases, and as Holocaust-related geographic coordinates are, on the one hand, narratively textualized and, on the other, commodified by a market-driven economy.

In “Intertextuality and Topography in Igor Ostachowicz’s *Noc żywych Żydów*”, the Warsaw Ghetto, or more precisely Warsaw’s postwar Muranów, is the main subject of academic inquiry. Here, Ewa Wampuszyc analyzes Ostachowicz’s spatial poetics in the context of Polish and Israeli post-Holocaust expressions of Warsaw space and demonstrates how Muranów becomes a symbolic locus that reveals more about current identity politics than about the past. Bożena Karwowska and Anja Nowak write about Auschwitz as a space first experienced by victims of Nazi Germany and now by visitors to the Auschwitz-Birkenau (German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp) Memorial and State Museum. Through their careful spatial analysis based on memoirs, literary texts, cultural representations, and the physical geography of the museum, they get at the core of how Auschwitz functions as a space of memory that symbolically represents the *idea* of the camp and more broadly the Holocaust. More importantly, each of them in their own way demonstrates the extent to which our understanding of place is reliant on the co-existence of narration and the physical geography of Auschwitz. The volume closes with the essay “Commemorative Efforts Outside of those at Former Camp Complexes: Northeast Poland’s ‘Non-Lieux’ and ‘Lieux de Mémoire’”, in which Meredith Shaw discovers spaces connected with the so-called “Holocaust by bullets” and, in particular, discusses the Podlaskie region with its “memory” of Jews, complex Polish-Jewish relations, and current issues of Holocaust commemoration.

Bringing together scholars from Europe and North America, this volume embraces a variety of theoretical approaches for understanding the intersection between social geography, space, place, and text. What unifies these essays is a common goal to under-

stand how space is textualized in various genres, and cultural forms and practices. The framework of geopoetics allows us to show and discuss pressing issues of space's textualization. In particular, this framework helps elucidate how textualization carries with it the potential for rediscovering and giving voice to lost histories, as well as the capacity to gloss over the past and silence it. In presenting this bilingual volume to our readers, we hope that the theoretical and practical issues raised by the authors will reach an academic audience beyond the geopolitical borders of Poland, and make a lasting contribution to spatial studies in the humanities and social sciences.

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