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Vol.6, No.3, September 2014

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2014 年第 3 期

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Edited by Małgorzata Czermińska

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波兰文学研究

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# Meeting the Other: Dialogue, Trauma and Traces in the Space: An Introduction

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Polish literature is deeply involved in history. Merely existential problems, separated from the context of the events shattering the life of community, rarely appear in it, for example in very early Romanticism, then in the Young Poland period (at the turn of 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the movement called Jugendstil, the equivalent of Secession in visual arts, appeared in Europe), and recently in the period of political transformation, as a result of so-called “Autumn of Nations” that took place in 1989. Geopolitical situation, namely the fact of Poland being situated in the Central-Eastern Europe, causes Polish culture to incessantly deal with the problem of identity, first of all of collective but also of individual identity. The widest context in which the question of identity appears is relation to the Other. The Other in terms of nationality, culture, religion, aesthetics. The relation to the Other develops in various ways. It very often takes the form of a conflict, very often a deep and violent conflict, resulting in trauma that can last for decades, be passed over from generation to generation, and express itself in plexiform manner. There are also different kinds of relations to the Other: attempts of meeting, dialogue and exchange of values without neither the drive towards aggression and dominance nor fear about one’s own identity. The attempts to realise one’s own identity in all its complexity involves a question of expressing it in literature, visual arts, film, theatre, and also in material culture (e.g. architecture). The special place of meeting the social and the existential dimension of identity, with its expression in material culture, is the vital “in modern civilisation” phenomenon of the city as the environment of life and creativity. One of the currents of methodological research in modern humanities, called spatial turn (or topographical turn) played vital role in revealing this link between the city as a particular type of place and the existence of culture.

The articles presented below concern modern Polish prose. Every article relates to a different literary text and every one of them deals with certain detailed themes which, at first glance, bear no relation to one another. On a deeper level, however,

the articles are connected by their relation to the aforementioned range of problems, even though they certainly do not exhaust it. The texts discussed in the first two articles deal with the problem of national identity. Hanna Gosk writes about literary response to the Nazi Germany's aggression against Poland during World War II, describing it as a conflict that gave birth to a deep trauma which required decades to start recovering from. Polish-Jewish relations, presented in the second article, are of a very complex nature. The author, Sławomir Buryła, remembers about the common history (with its bright and dark sides) of Poles and Jews who co-existed for several centuries, but first and foremost concentrates on the literature of Holocaust, conducted by Nazi Germany on Polish territory. He also deals with the modern memory of those events. The national perspective was crossed and extended by Ryszard Kapuściński, who understood his role as a reporter to be one of translator, building bridges of understanding between various cultures, especially between European and African cultures, as well as South American. Narrative strategies, which he used in his work of translator of cultures, are analysed in the article of Magdalena Horodecka. In the two concluding articles the memory of historical events shaping the identity, and of material traces of memory, is approached mainly in terms of spatial turn and geopoetics. Katarzyna Szalewska presents symbolical metamorphoses of literary descriptions of cities destroyed and rebuilt in the course of history of the Central-Eastern Europe in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Elżbieta Konończuk writes about prosaists who presented the process mostly in relation to borderlands, the lands where the borders of countries shifted, causing great migrations, the lands that even today are considered peripheries of Europe.

# Identity Forming Aspects of Dialoguing with the Other: A Literary Version of Polish-German Relations in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Polish Prose

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**Abstract** The aim of this paper is to discuss fictional versions of the problematic of identity-formation of literary characters in situations of contact and conflict with the Other regarded as Enemy. Such a theme is quite prominent in 20th century narratives dealing with Polish-German relations. My focus will be on two characteristic works, whose action takes place soon after World War II, but which, written forty years apart, represent two very different approaches to the topic. In Tadeusz Nowakowski's novel *Obóz Wszystkich Świętych* (*All Saints' Camp*, 1957) an attempt to establish a dialogue between a Pole and a German in the immediately postwar period proves more than difficult, since it ends in a multifaceted failure. Not so in Stefan Chwin's novel *Krótką historią pewnego żartu* (*A Short History of a Certain Joke*, 1991), in which the child-protagonist tries to reinterpret for his own sake the history of Polish-German relations, demonstrating in the process the extent to which that history is made up of multiple local narratives, both Polish and German, which in their sum form a far from straightforward overall story in the nature of a palimpsest. The paper will demonstrate how the two novels, by making use of local memory, try to overcome the stereotypes and consequences of the traumatic events of the war, which lie heavily on 20th century Polish-German neighborly relations. More specifically: what type of argument is deployed to redefine what immediately after World War II and long thereafter made the Polish attitude to the Germans particularly difficult.

**Key words** Polish-German relations; identity; Other; 20<sup>th</sup> century Polish fiction

The problematics of Polish-German relations, marked in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the traumatic experiences of the Second World War is a vast topic, so as an illustration of one of its aspects, the one which had the greatest influence on the formation of Polish identity relative to the Other/Enemy I will choose two prose texts, which were written

in the space of forty years by two very different authors — Tadeusz Nowakowski (1917-1996), who after the War lived in exile, and the much younger Stefan Chwin, who was born already after the war.

Nowakowski, author of the novel *Obóz Wszystkich Świętych* [*The Camp of All Saints*], which was published in 1957 in Paris, spent the years from February 1940 until the end of the war in German prisons and camps, and after the liberation by American forces moved to a camp for refugees in Holland, where he taught in a Polish secondary school and devoted himself to literary activity. In the autumn of 1946 he went to Italy, and subsequently, in 1947, to Britain; he eventually settled in Germany in the early 1950s.

Nowakowski thus had a feel for the places, observed the people's behavior and had a direct experience of the events which find their replicas in his novel. Through the prism of individual biography he depicted the socio-historical processes which in the language of today's anthropology are described as the formation of identity relative to the Other, and he did so in the context of the disintegration of grand narratives and their replacement with micro-tales, which last only as long as the local community remembers them (in this case it is the memory of the prewar community of Bydgoszcz, a city in which the Germans and Poles were neighbors).

Stefan Chwin was born after the war, in 1949 in Gdańsk, in a city which until 1939 had, as was decided by the Treaty of Versailles, the status of a free city inhabited both by the Poles and the Germans. Hence he knows about the pre-war days and the occupation only on the basis of narratives (official, family). He can thus observe from a distance how they became recorded in human memory. His novel *Krótką historią pewnego żartu* [*A Short History of a Certain Joke*, 1991] is a return to the time of childhood, marked by the memory of Stalin's rule and what he has learnt at school and at home about Hitler's time. The novel is an attempt to reconstruct places and events of Gdańsk, which with time acquire the character of a literary myth. Memories of wounds, traumas and enchantments come back, revealing fascinations with strange otherness and the closeness of the Polish-German lives.

In this partly autobiographical work skepticism about the official version of some aspects of Polish-German relations emerges from simple questions which the child puts to itself. These questions tend to undermine all kinds of truths considered by the grown-ups as self-evident: to mention only the idea of historical necessity. The young boy's doubts touch upon fundamental questions, they concern the interpretation of reality put forward immediately after the war by the new rulers, who in their own ideological way defined good and evil, and presented the development of events in terms of their irreversibility. Chwin, in recreating the view of the child, in fact uncovers the sequence of time's layers, which form the Gdańsk palimpsest. They

were made up of different cultures, different confessions, and esthetics (stalinist, nazi, middle class). Discovering that mosaic, deciphering its obscured meanings and revealing their value in the process of identity-forming of today's inhabitants of Gdańsk constitutes Chwin's contribution to the story of the difficult Polish-German neighborly relations.

The action of Nowakowski's novel also takes place after the war. Its protagonist, a young Pole, sublieutenant Stefan Grzegorzcyk, while staying in a camp for displaced persons, marries a German woman, the daughter of an ex-mistress of his father, whose existence reminds him — despite all kinds of painful overtones — of his native, prewar Bydgoszcz. He transgresses with his behavior a number of fundamental rules of life of the Polish camp community — as a Pole he becomes close with a German, as a Pole he distances himself from the patriotic façade, which the camp authorities have created. In short, he transgresses against the stereotype of a Polish patriot, breaks with the Polish community, but he feels a stranger in the new community, which he has entered thanks to his marriage, and in the end, defeated by the double dose of alienation, returns to the camp, bitter and humiliated.

This problematic of the work highlights the problem of the relation between the I and the Other, and the question of the construction of individual identity in the difficult space of the disintegration of a number of orders: historical, geopolitical, psychosocial, ethical and moral — concentrating on the challenges of the stereotypical understanding of such categories as patriotism, Polishness and Germanness.

That he is perhaps not that much different from his compatriots in his attitude towards all Germans, the protagonist discovers when he himself attacks one of them (i.e. a German) unable to accept the fact that the German has a Polish scout's cross pinned down to his hat.

He almost choked. It must have been plundered in Poland [...] You wait — he swallowed bitter saliva. Hatred almost blinded him. He felt the drumming of blood in his ears, he clenched his fists in his pockets. That horrible murderous adjective “ours, ours, ours”! [...] He beat up a man. As a protest against cruelty. He behaved like a Nazi [...] The incurable Polish beast has awakened in me. There is no getting away from it. [...] It waits for you everywhere and it will find you wherever you are, that greedy, jealous and vengeful fatherland of yours, that “collective obligation,” “essence of morality” [...] (423) — thinks Grzegorzcyk.

The impossibility, understandable in the immediate postwar period, of breaking the barrier between the Polish I and the hateful German Other reveals itself in Nowakowski's novel not only on the level of the behaviour of the main character, but

also in the attitude of the narrator, who does not describe the German in the hat with a Polish badge in a neutral way, but right away gives him negative characteristics.

Bauer, bored with singing, detached himself from the group. Trotting like a dachshund he crossed the square of the station [...]. Grzegorzcyk run after him (421). [...] Give it back! — he said in a choking voice. The owner of the green hat blinked his white eyelashes. *It's mine. I bought it.* The eyes behind the white eyelashes moved anxiously. Were you in Poland? No, I wasn't. (422)

The protagonist's failure in his relations with the Other becomes even more pronounced, given the fact that earlier on he suffers nightmares at the memory of the first day of liberation, when the enraged crowd of emaciated pows, forced labourers and prisoners freed from the camps mete out summary justice to the captured Germans, murdering and raping them.

Tadeusz Nowakowski's novel was the first to pose the question, which may be found in the work of the other Polish writers: Witold Gombrowicz, Henryk Grynberg and much later ones: Janusz Rudnicki, Paweł Huelle, Stefan Chwin, namely the question on what conditions does one belong to a community, and that question becomes a question about otherness and its boundaries.

The protagonist of *Obóz Wszystkich Świętych* himself becomes, as it were, the Other, and when he gains the consciousness of his role, he acts before both Polish and German communities in the character of a theatrical person, who is constantly watched. His situation and his milieu compel Grzegorzcyk, viewed as the Other by both the Poles and the Germans, to adopt certain rules of the game, which he initially rejected, and reject those which define his individuality. The sublieutenant ceases to be the Other, but Becomes a Nobody. In his case the acceptance of the superficial, stereotyped image of being a Pole or a German amounts to the obliteration of the features of his individual identity. In Nowakowski's novel the protagonist experiences as a result of his dialoguing with both the Polish and the German communities a sense of defeat.

The war and occupation experiences of Stefan Grzegorzcyk on the one hand strongly bond him emotionally with his local (lost) space of childhood and years of early youth, and on the other, compel him to revalue some highly fundamental questions (cutting him off at the same time from the axiological space in which he grew up). Polish patriotic upbringing, which he received before the war in his home, subjected to the test of September 1939 and the distress of the occupation and life in the postwar camp, does not give him a sufficient basis on which to build a future, considering that the young sublieutenant asks himself the following question: "did

this Fatherland of theirs (that is, of Poles who lost their lives during World War II) deserve to be offered as a gift that one and only life, which a human being has, this irreplaceable, unrepeatable biological existence?" (32). And he reaches the conclusion, which even half a century later sounds timely, saying:

Mr. Raczka, M.A. in his white-and-red tunic (editor of the ultra-patriotic camp newsletter — H.G.) may not like the fact that there are Germans in the world, the sturbanführer SS with the skull and crossbones may not like that there are Poles. I do not want to be either a Raczka, or an SS-man, I want to be a human being. (380)

Biological existence and the human being free of the label of nationality these are the categories, which are left to Nowakowski's protagonist, since they survived the pressure of history understood by him as a set of determinants resulting from the final loss of contact with a hidden order of the universe and entailing a sense of disintegration of both the order of reality as well as of a monistically-substantial vision of the subject. Though the author tries to imbue Grzegorzcyk with an identity-forming memory of the past, and makes the main motive of his behavior being faithful to the patriotic tradition embodied in the murder by the Nazis in September 1939 of a group of Bydgoszcz middle class inhabitants, yet at the same time the entire thrust of the main idea of the novel's narration, which assumes the shape of a discourse on the subject of broadly understood war trauma, casts doubt on the question of whether such a bond can continue to play a role in the construction of the subject of our times.

It is worth noting that the memory of the past has in this case all the characteristics of local memory, preserving the charms of a provincial city, the pre-war Bydgoszcz, in which one used to have both Polish and German neighbors. And the paradigms of tradition established in history of which Grzegorzcyk often thinks, in various ways reveal the interpretive character of history. What Nowakowski seems to be saying is that in light of the cancelled orders, the broken tablets of the Decalogue, only the local community, which ably husbands its own space, can be the creator and guardian of values upholding the anthropocentric paradigm of reality

The existential concrete detail is captured in his novel sensuously, for instance through smell: "one needed only to sniff to know all there was to know: at Tepper's today it's pea-soup with an 'addition,' at Fronck's it is 'pig slaughtering' with the grodzisk beer, at Kocerka's — cinaders, and at Berent's they serve tripe and 'eise beins'" (108).

As one can see the cooking is tasty both at the German and Polish neighbors', and the entire paradigm of orderly, harmonious pre-war Bydgoszcz reality, upholding

its own hierarchy of importance of things and people is presented in terms of the sensual aesthetic of images encapsulated in visual memory. Nowakowski's protagonist preserves his knowledge of the past, which has already become history and has proved to be a local knowledge capable of being supplemented with other "local knowledge." To become conscious of its matrix, he proposes a detailed description and makes an attempt to categorize something, which until now did not undergo such an "ordering." The way the Bydgoszcz middle class take walks on Sundays, the set of ordinary concrete props which define in Bydgoszcz social status, the décor of the interiors of apartments, become in his handling elements of the "pattern" of the order of the pre-war provincial city with traditions. Here is a characteristic example:

The walk after church of families of merchants and artisans takes place in a well established pattern. In front, holding hands, trot the smallest children, behind them slightly older offspring, still behind them marches the maturing youth [...] There then follow ladies in their finery — these are the wives, and at the very end of the family procession walk ... men [...] in bowler hats with their hands clasped in dignity on their kidneys. (116-117)

A contemporary anthropologist would note that such an attempt to find in history traces of order and stability was meant to be a remedy for the feeling of loss of the lasting foundations of reality, for the loss of conviction about the existence of some objective truth, the essence of things, and clear indicators of the good and evil.

One is struck in *Obóz Wszystkich Świętych* of how sensitive the novel is to the interpretative character of history as a grand spectacle of a game, in which the victors are not those who "were right" but those, who were conscious of the rules of the staging of the whole spectacle. The writer's awareness of the staging-interpretive character of human collective behavior which later becomes arranged into so-called historical events is perhaps best represented by that fragment of the novel devoted to the mass celebrated for the ex-prisoners of the camps, which was conducted in the stadium belonging to the hitlerjugend by priests of four denominations in chapels brought on cars.

The priests — we read — blessed the throng. A powerful voice cried on a record: "my god...mon dieu...hospody pomyluj...Boże nasze...mio dio." And from the roof of the nearby dais a group of photographers was filming this quite unique collective scene. (223)

Nowakowski, through the mouths of the many characters of the novel and in various

other ways grasps the paradox of the irony of historical change, which reveals the inadequacy of the existing “languages” with their lexicons for the description of reality in the stage in which the paradigm is undergoing a transformation. He asserts above all else that no wars are ever victorious, and he also believes that the victors of the last war have not changed the world for the better.

The negative poetics of the novel shows freedom as a form of new yet old enslavement. He subjects the individual who rebels against this to a difficult test of humiliation, and in fact of annihilation of individuality. Sublieutenant Grzegorzcyk, though he fruitlessly tries to break with his behavior all kinds of stereotypes, and to redefine that which is the most difficult to redefine so soon after the war, Polish attitude to the Germans, becomes in the end a Nobody, drifting alone toward the images-signs of the local Bydgoszcz past, which no one understands except him.

The presentation of the problem of a Pole’s attitude to the German/Other, as well as of the feeling of alienation from one’s own community, of the limits of this alienation and its effect on the sense of individual identity, and additionally, of the negotiated, non-final meanings of history, perhaps most tentative when they concern sensitive, painful questions, makes *Obóz Wszystkich Świętych* [*The Camp of All Saints*] in a way akin to *Krótką historia pewnego żartu*, [*A Short History of a Certain Joke*] written forty years later.

Stefan Chwin makes the protagonist-narrator of his novel undertake an effort to examine what determined the relations between Poles and their western and eastern neighbors in the last half-a-century. He talks about the cultural differences between his Polish and German characters and the history dividing the two nations in various ways, for instance by way of a description of (old) German and new (Polish) gardens:

Old gardens spread around themselves the impression of stable permanence, they spoke of a kind of strange, calm self-assurance, indifferent to everything else, which one almost never sensed about the new gardens [...], in which the very way of cultivating the greenery betrayed the anxiety of people who had come here from far away, bringing with them a fear of time, the sadness of impermanence of life and the hidden bitterness of exile. <sup>2</sup> (80)

The protagonist of the novel does not participate in events in the conventional sense of the term, does not accumulate objects, to own them, does not conquer space like a traveler or wanderer but “deciphers” happenings, fragments of space, objects as “un-phrase-able” (that is, not expressed in the frame of some final interpretation, impossible to articulate with the help of the current communication code). He becomes a reader of events and things as of that which precedes the generally

accepted representation, as if he thought that history, which had stabilized some meanings of the elements of his reality amounted to no more than a kind of “esthetics” arbitrarily disseminating meanings, and not an objective global knowledge. For him history is local history. Such a history, that constructs and defines that, which later the given community considers as “universal” and “natural” truths.

In *Krótką historia...* the attitude to all universalisations and totalizations is highly skeptical; instead the focus is on the specifics of the local historical and cultural context. The reader has to realize in reading this book that she is looking at the past through the prism of cultural constructs of contemporary time. This contemporaneity has behind it the experience of twentieth century history, which in its brutality issued a challenge to realistic literary representation, and by the same token suggested that history is neither progressive nor rational, and hence that when dealing with history it is impossible to create a coherent narrative on the subject of some universal truth.

For a small boy, who does not hide his connection with the mature author of the work, history is textual and discursive. He stops believing in “the only correct/objective truth of history,” when he admires the Gothic vault of Oliva cathedral. He confesses then:

Freedom which I did not suspect in myself, still fragile, still barely outlined, filled my heart with disquiet, though I knew, that I am crossing some invisible, painful boundary — in enjoying the beauty of the golden inscription (in German “szwabacha” — H.G.) against dark-olive background, I did not sin against Grandma, whose house “those” (Nazis — H.G.) burnt in Mokotów. [...] I was stepping outside the closed circle, although someone was paying for this with a hurt. (44)

In the identity-forming discourse of the protagonist there takes place a confrontation between that which until now was familiar and that which is new. The result of this confrontation will be a horizon which will make it possible to understand the difficult Polish/German past of Gdańsk and in general of Polish/German neighborliness: it is within this horizon that the life of the protagonist-narrator-author of the novel takes place. What is significant, this confrontation is existential and not intellectual. The initiation, which he has undergone, could be formulated as follows: “fact” is an abstract concept: “factuality.” “Polish-German past,” “What happened” are what they are primarily from the perspective of somebody’s life, it is that life which decides ultimately about their meaning and does so in a constantly new way, since life that is open to the future not so much is as is becoming, and hence its dimension of factuality (including past factuality) is never fully completed, closed.

The literary characters in the examples here discussed of Polish works having as their background the Polish-German past belong more properly to the plane of discourse than of narrative. Their role in the “action” of the novels, the meaning of their actions, is not as important as the role of the *exemplum* in the dialogue concerning the past, or of the indicator of the hiatus of the habitus of contemporaneity underpinned with history or of the investigator who revises historical conclusions.

The protagonist-narrator of Stefan Chwin’s novel becomes immersed in the past depicted in the form of a text arranged in a linear fashion, which — as its construction suggests — has not been read to the full, and actually more than that, such a final reading does not even seem possible. This work takes into account in its presentation of the relation between its characters and Polish-German history a semiotic perspective. In the semiotic perspective the historical process is presented as a process of communication, in which the constant flow of new information conditions the reaction on the part of its social addressee. A special role in the construction of the protagonist is played not only by his predisposition to “textualize” the events and objects of reality, but also the ability to conduct discourse on the level of meta-history. He is the discoverer and observer of the traces of a new paradigm in the thinking of an individual about the Polish-German past. A paradigm in which the concept of “structure” has been replaced by that of “process”; a paradigm in which one gives up the attempt to view the reality in an objectifying manner and instead views it in an epistemic way. It is recognized that cognizing processes are not neutral in relation to the process of cognition, and hence they should be part of the description of phenomena. The observer’s consciousness participates in the construction of the investigative process, and what is more, it becomes part of the whole. The concepts which describe human cognition and knowledge in general (including the knowledge of the past) have changed, something that sublieutenant Grzegorzczyk seems to have intuitively felt in Nowakowski’s novel.

In Chwin’s work written towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century one no longer speaks of a “building” but rather of a “net.” “Building” presupposes the existence of a lasting base, on which one can rest the search for further solutions, while the tendency now is to abandon the concept of “absolute truth” and use instead that of “approximate description.”

The characters of *Krótką historią pewnego żartu* have been so situated in the represented world of the work, that they seem to argue that in interpreting historical facts (including those most difficult ones, such as the Polish-German conflicts) or discovering their historical context, what the commentator expresses are his convictions (that which he believes), ways of thinking, prejudices, while attempts by individuals who observe the rules of traditional historicism, in order to construct

a unified vision of reality, which supposedly occurs in a society, are reductionist illusions. Human culture constitutes a net of conflicting discourses, which cannot be reduced to a single point of view or a set of ideas arranged in a linear fashion.

The construction, the situating in a novel's world and the fates of the characters of more traditional prose works with contemporary history as their background (at first sight, in a superficial reading, one could categorize *Obóz Wszystkich Świętych* as just such a novel) facilitated for the reader the understanding of the chain of causes and effects of historical events which affected them (the literary characters). They provided the possibility (the illusion) of knowing the actual causes of certain processes and phenomena.

In the works of Nowakowski and Chwin, which I have treated here as *exempla*, the sense of the attitude of the protagonist towards the contemporary world and Polish-German history seems to point to Nietzsche's myth of eternal return and his *Genealogy of Morals*, in which he proposed the abandoning of sets of abstractions and concentrating on the processes of hidden pain and suffering that generate values, which with great force influence the shape of reality.

Such a literary character refers with its construct to the real existence of man immersed in the difficult reality of the turn of the century; of an individual who undertook the effort to create out of "a world in which it is almost impossible to live" (the term is Agata Bielik-Robson's) his relatively secure *Lebenswelt*, as if taking for the motto of his own actions Nietzsche's aphorism: "What does not kill me, strengthens me."

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# The Holocaust in Polish Prose

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**Abstract** This paper presents a comprehensive discussion of the Shoah in Polish prose. The author shows how Polish literature (prose, poetry and drama) has extensively preserved the Holocaust experience and has left the highest number of literary testimonies of this event compared to other world literatures. The sketch introduces the main topics explored by Polish authors (Polish-Jewish relations during the time of occupation and after the war, various strategies of recording the Shoah experience), as well as the evolution in presenting the Holocaust in Polish prose. In the conclusion, the author discusses the main issues facing Polish researchers: preliminary archival research in communist censorship resources, forming large, interdisciplinary research teams, creating a synthesis of Polish literature on the Shoah and global dissemination of knowledge concerning the richness of Polish literature on the Holocaust.

**Key words** Holocaust; Polish literature; issues in Holocaust research

Let us begin with an obvious issue which, nevertheless, is not necessarily so obvious for a European reader. Polish literature provides the most testimony to the extermination of the Jews. The latest research shows the multitude of texts we deal with. This enormity is most fully revealed in the publication entitled *Literatura polska wobec Zagłady (1939–1968) [Polish Literature towards the Shoah (1939–1968)]* issued in 2012. The bibliography published there lists almost 200 books only in the field of prose, while the list of poetic, remembrance and autobiographical works is considerably longer. This is an exceptionally huge heritage recorded in the Polish language.

The period of 1945–1949 is particularly rich in Holocaust testimonies. Communist censorship was not yet operating efficiently (although it formally existed since 1946). At the same time, the memory of the war remains unusually, even extremely, vivid (since the war and the occupation in Poland and Eastern Europe had a particularly brutal character, incomparable to what happened in the West). The weight

of Nazi atrocities is so heavy that it demanded almost immediate recording, reporting and condemnation of Nazism.

Polish literature occupies a particular place in comparison to all others — English-speaking, French, German-speaking, Russian or Jewish literature — not only because of the richness of literary evidence of the *Endlösung*. The Holocaust took place on land belonging to Poland. The Poles thus also had a double role — of being both victims and witnesses — and Polish authors were in direct proximity of the *Endlösung*.

From the abundant collection of Polish texts concerning the Shoah, I have selected prose. I will present it in a synthetic way, being fully aware of the absence of Polish literature in the global reflection on the Shoah. It is not a subject of discussion in significant academic journals and it seems to have been passed over. In the summary, I will discuss the subjects and problems that Polish researchers are faced with.

### **Texts Created *hic et nunc***

Apart from a quite numerous set of poetic works, it turns out that the prose created during the war — *hic et nunc* — is rather modest. It includes only a few works, such as *Oczekiwanie* [*Awaiting*] by Jerzy Broszkiewicz, a collection of short stories entitled *Bestia* [*The Beast*] by Władysław Kowalski, *Wielki Tydzień* [*Passion Week*] by Jerzy Adrzejewski, a moving introduction by Władysław Szlengel to the volume of poems *Co czytałem umarłym* [*What I read to the dead*]. Apart from *Oczekiwanie*, these are short forms. A much more abundant representation of poetry created during the occupation in comparison to prose should not be surprising. Poetry is often the effect of emotions and moments, while prose usually needs more time. If, in poetry, in which we can find a collection of at least some texts that can be interpreted as the projection of the Holocaust (e.g. *Koszmarny sen* [*Nightmare*] and *Księga dżungli* [*The Jungle Book*] by Władysław Szlengel), there is only one such work in the field of prose. It is a short novel by Adolf Rudnicki, entitled *Lato* [*Summer*]. The atmosphere of fear and the spectre of imminent catastrophe is hovering over the Jews spending holidays in Kazimierz Dolny.

The tragedy of the Jews was given much more thought in the writers' diaries. The majority of the preserved diaries maintained during the war include references to the fate of the Jewish population. The diaries kept by Zofia Nałkowska, Maria Dąbrowska, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, Stanisław Rembeka, Leopold Buczkowski, Karol Irzykowski and Anna Kowalska are so interesting and unusual because they present the Holocaust from the closest possible

time perspective. Events, human behaviours and choices are evaluated on a current basis. Kowalska, Irzykowski or Iwaszkiewicz do not say much about the extermination of the Jews. This is only a few single references. Perhaps, it was for safety reasons (Iwaszkiewicz gave shelter to many Jews in his house in Stawisko). After all, the history of Nałkowska's burning of a fragment of her diary concerning the events in the ghetto is known. The writer did it under the influence of emotions, for fear of being arrested since, during a Gestapo search, the notes from the diary would provide evidence against her.

Although Buczkowski — just like Kowalska, Irzykowski, Iwaszkiewicz — does not say much in his *Dziennik czasu wojny* [*Wartime Diary*] about *Endlösung*, his laconic records are highly suggestive. They touch upon the crucial issues: the loneliness of the Jews, the self-defence actions undertaken by them and stereotypical opinions concerning the cowardice of the Jews. At the same time, Buczkowski perceives the tragedy of Jews in the broader context — the tragedy of all other nationalities inhabiting the areas of Volhynia and Podolia. In his work, the Holocaust takes place against the background of total war — all with all — the disintegration of the former national community and ethnic conflicts fomented by the Nazis.

Three diaries deserve particular attention: from Rembek, Dąbrowska and Nałkowska. Apart from the first one, the other two have been well-examined in the subject matter literature. However — let us admit — the thoroughly-discussed subject of the Holocaust rarely emerged in such analyses. *Dziennik okupacyjny* [*Occupational Diary*] by Rembek provides a unique testimony because it is kept from the perspective of an inhabitant of a small town, recording events, not of the writer, but of an ordinary man. The Holocaust emerges from time to time in discussions while drinking alcohol or during a train ride. The fate of the Jews evokes in Polish neighbours fear about their own future. At the same time, Rembek is not embellishing reality; he does not want to pass over the shameful manifestation of enrichment of Polish inhabitants after the liquidation of the ghettos. His diary is a striking testimony to everyday life during the war.

For Nałkowska, the Holocaust is the epicentre of the evil of war, an event concealing the mystery of human nature. Living in Warsaw, the writer observes subsequent stages of the persecution of Jews. Her point of view is different than that of Rembek. The Shoah is, for Nałkowska — an expert in human psychology who often places the protagonists of her works in situations requiring complicated moral choices — is as much of an ethical and cognitive challenge as an artistic one. In her diary, Nałkowska finally appreciates the value of the

behavioural narration for presenting the truth about the Shoah. She will use this knowledge later on in *Medaliony* [*Medallions*] — a collection of seven short stories describing human reactions and not feelings. Nobody else in the Polish literature about the Shoah and the war so consequently rejected the author's evaluation of the presented world (even in the short stories of Borowski we can find examples of indirect judgement of the world of concentration camps, e.g. through hidden irony). But at the same time, this lack of judgement in *Medaliony* is the best judgement of the wartime period.

Dąbrowska assumed the most complicated approach towards the Jewish issue. It is hard to provide a clear-cut evaluation here. What seems to be beyond discussion — contrary to Nałkowska — is that Dąbrowska does not comprehend the exceptionality of the Jewish suffering.

Neither before the war, nor after the Shoah, did Dąbrowska free herself of the clear division into “fellow countrymen” and “strangers” (despite the aversion to nationalist circles, to which she sometimes gave expression in pre-war statements). On one hand, it is expressed in an almost obsessive indication of their “real” surnames while referring to persons of the Jewish origin, while on the other, what is meant here is a specific competition in suffering. Dąbrowska's view of the Jews has something of the traditional approach — best demonstrated in the attitude of simple people (but also in the superiority with which the noble class looked down at the Jews). It can be clearly perceived in how Dąbrowska grasps the distinctness. Cultural, religious and moral distinctness is regarded by her as the manifestation of something “worse” compared to Polish culture — therefore, inferior in essence.

As compared to the poetry or the prose originating in 1945–1949, one difference can be seen in case diaries. In so far as the most interesting poems, short stories and novels are usually produced by beginners and novices (Tadeusz Borowski, Tadeusz Różewicz, Stanisław Lem, also Leopold Buczkowski, who did not publish any book before the war and, thus, can be treated as a beginner), in the intimism, we can hear the voice of authors representing the older generation, also enjoying recognition — apart from Buczkowski — in the interwar period. This is the voice of authors shaped in artistic and ideological terms, entering wartime as adults, all representing specific views (including political ones).

Both in diaries from the war period and in short-stories and novels created in the first post-war years, evidence supporting the thesis of the exceptionality of the Holocaust can be found extremely rarely. However, this does not mean that Polish prose did not perceive particular suffering experienced by Jews. We

can find many such examples. Even Zofia Kossak in her book entitled *Z otchłani [From the Abyss]*, focused on the description of the tragedy of the Polish people in Auschwitz and devotes a large chapter to persecution, which is incomparable to anything and which the Jews suffered in the concentration camp. The failure to perceive the exceptionality of the Shoah is not surprising. Indeed, Europe and the world grasped the extent of the particular character of the crimes against the Jewish people only after Eichmann's trial. Apart from this, Polish literature was in a particular situation, since the Polish nation was one of the most affected by the war. The range of one's own pain shut out or diminished the pain of Jewish neighbours. This was a natural psychological reaction.

### Writing Subjects and Strategies

From the very beginning, Polish literature — both poetry and prose — was aware of a basic dichotomy: the amount of suffering paralysed the artist, but at the same time the artist was aware of the fact that art cannot remain silent. The fear and the need to provide testimony neighboured each other. This is expressed by Rudnicki in his short story *Wielkanoc [Easter]* (completed in April 1945). The author takes the side of those who undertook the pains to record the Jewish pain using words, being aware of the imperfection of art.

Dorota Krawczyńska in her introduction to *Literatura polska wobec Zagłady (1939–1968)* distinguishes the following groups of subjects around which the Polish literature on the Shoah focuses:

- anticipation of events found in the pre-war literature;
- exclusion — existence and topography: ghetto, camp, Aryan side;
- objectification and boundaries of humanity [...];
- life in hiding (Polish-Jewish relations, property theft, denunciation, help);
- dilemmas of the survivors (the feeling of being eradicated, the questions about identity, the feeling of guilt);
- questions posed to the literature (problems of representation, adequacy and inadequacy of traditional means of expression);
- mission of literature, literature as testimony;
- questions posed to culture: critics of arts and culture;
- reflection on anti-Semitism;
- questions about God;
- reflection on the essence of the Shoah;
- narration strategies (double perspective: child/adult, fragment and small narration, autobiographism, types of documents);

– dilemmas of memory (Polish and Jewish memory of the Shoah, the exceptional character of the Jewish experience, being a Jew after the Holocaust).  
(416)

The problems listed by Krawczyńska show the main subjects and motifs appearing in Polish literature on the Shoah, but it can also be referred to a significant part of the global literature on the Holocaust. As we have already stated, Polish literature contains the broadest range of works concerning the Shoah and in this sense, it provides the matrix for other national literatures.

Comprehensively-examined Polish prose on the extermination of the Jews is dominated by the convention of realism. This realism seems to befit the expression of the tragedy of the Jews during the war. However, this realism has different faces. On one hand, we have short-stories by Borowski and by Nałkowska from *Medaliony* (a behaviouristic, impassive record of crimes), while on the other, at the opposite end of the spectrum — a subtle, psychological, admittedly symbolic reading of prose by Adolf Rudnicki. In a similar spirit, Stanisław Wygodzki sometimes crafted his short works (e.g. the volumes *Upalny dzień* [*Sweltering Day*], *Przy szosie* [*At the Road*], *Koncert życzeń* [*Request Program*], *Boczna uliczka* [*Side Street*]).

What is completely opposite to a realistic depiction is the mode of expression patterning on fairy tales. This technique was used shortly after the war by Ewa Szelburg-Zarębina in the short stories *Złote koźlątko* [*Golden Kid*] and *Kuropatwy* [*Partridges*] from *Ziarno gorczyczne* [*Mustard Seed*], and lately by Joanna Rudniańska in her book *Kotka Brygidy* [*Brygida's Cat*]. However, a fairy tale is extremely rarely used in the Polish prose about the Shoah. The simplest explanation of this phenomenon suggests a subconscious conviction that such measures seem grossly inadequate to the subject of description. The element of fiction, essential for a fairy tale, is here of crucial importance. An aversion to fiction stemmed from its being viewed as untruths and fabrication — morally suspicious categories.

The realistic convention does not automatically assume speaking directly about the Shoah. In Polish prose, the master of such a strategy of writing on the Holocaust is Julian Strykowski. As he claims in his *Ocalony na Wschodzie* [*Saved in the East*], the fact that he was not present during the war in the land where the Shoah took place does not permit him to talk about the events to which he was not a direct witness. “Sit down and write! But about what? About the uprising? By what right, since I did not take part in it? [...] I will write about what I know. I will put a gravestone to the nation as far as I am able. I will evoke the memory of the most remote past of my life, my childhood” (170). At the same time, the memory about the murdered nation of his ancestors does not allow him to remain silent. Therefore, he chooses the way

of immortalizing the world from before the Shoah — the shtetls, small Jewish towns, typical of the Jewish community in Eastern Europe (e.g. *Głosy w ciemności* [*Voices in the Dark*], *Sen Azrila* [*Azril's Dream*]). The Holocaust is here a *p r e m o n i t i o n*, something that will inevitably happen, but cannot be seen, something that Strykowski does not dare to describe.

After 1989, this manner of presenting the Shoah was continued by Piotr Szewc. Although for Strykowski the fear of presenting the extermination of the European diaspora results from the fact that he was not a witness to *Endlösung*, for Szewc it results from the simple fact of being born about a dozen years after the war. If Strykowski goes back in his mind to his childhood, early youth, Szewc and other authors born in ethnically-uniform, and not multi-cultural Poland, must resort to their imagination in order to reconstruct the world from before the Catastrophe. For Szewc, this is a poetic, oneiric vision (*Zmierzchy i poranki* [*Dusks and Dawns*], *Bociany nad powiatem* [*Storks over the County*]).

The Polish prose on the Holocaust can be looked at through another contrast: traditional vs. avant-garde. This first perspective is definitely predominating. But in the other — although less strongly represented — we can find at least one outstanding author who is unrecognized in the world. Perhaps one of the most important reasons for the absence of Buczkowski in the global reception is the linguistic layer of his novel, which makes its text exceptionally difficult to translate. Buczkowski reconstructs the language used by the inhabitants of the former eastern part of Poland (currently an area belonging to Ukraine). He reaches for words comprehensible only to inhabitants of those areas. Their meaning often faded away with the death of their users. Besides *Chleb rzucony umarłym* [*Bread thrown to the Dead*] (a novel by Bogdan Wojdowski about the Warsaw ghetto), *Czarny potok* [*Black Stream*] by Buczkowski is the greatest Polish novel about the Shoah. At the same time, it defines the most remote point in the evolution of Polish experimental prose on the extermination of the Jews. In Buczkowski's work, it is difficult to distinguish who is the enemy and who is an ally; who is the executioner and who is the victim. Buczkowski breaks the traditional composition of the novel and introduces time retardations. Quite frequently, we cannot answer the question of who is speaking to whom in *Czarny potok*. Chaos and confusion in narration, difficulties in determining the identity of characters, the precise time and scene of the action are used to reflect the nature of the occupation in the Polish eastern frontier region.

The writer employs the poetics of expressionism, naturalism and onirism to create a surrealist vision. However, none of these occupies a primary role. Instead, they complement one another. The density of facts, a stifling atmosphere of crime, danger and fear lurking in wait everywhere, are bordered in *Czarny potok* with lyricism.

In a strange way, brutality and cruelty meet a poetic vision in Buczkowski's work. This is the terrifying phenomenon of his prose. It has an attracting power, despite the images of crime which prevail in his book. *Czarny potok* hypnotizes the reader.

Shortly after the war, one more contrast emerged in the Polish prose, in which a documentary report collides with lamentation and despair, full of complaint and grief. Despair is sometimes combined with questions posed to God, accused of shared responsibility for the crime and is seen by many authors as the best method to express the atrocities of the Shoah. Interestingly, such an attitude emerged both in works of Catholic authors (Zofia Kossak *Z otchłani*), and those with a different outlook (Leon Cukierberg *Cień Torquemady [Torquemada's Shadow]*). Another — free from emotions — a manner of speaking about the tragedy of war was initiated by Borowski and Nałkowska. *Pożegnanie z Marią [Farewell to Maria]* by Borowski and *Medaliony* by Nałkowska did not annihilate the sublime style of speaking about the tragedy of war, but provided it with a question mark.

### Literature Was First

It was usually claimed that the real discussion concerning attitudes towards the Jews started in Poland only after publication of *Sąsiedzi [Neighbors]* by Jan Tomasz Gross. Until then, nothing was to be said on this subject, or the subject was falsely presented. This is not true. Polish literature, long before the sensitive issues of Polish-Jewish relations became the subject of discussion and public debate (intensely going on for more than ten years in Poland), engaged and described almost all subjects which made it a subject of dispute. Among other sensitive problems, the writers brought up issues of post-war anti-Semitism: the taking over of Jewish property by Polish citizens and also — episodic — murders of Jews. The problem is that readers and researchers did not want to see subjects which might destroy the image of Poles as impeccable victims, who suffered during the war the same, or even more, than the Jews. And although the involvement of the Polish nation in helping Jews is true, as well as the fact that Poland belongs to those countries that suffered most during the last world war, it is also true that some Poles happened to denounce, and even murder, Jews. These were touchy issues for communists, but also for average citizens not involved in politics. On this point, the communist authorities agreed with a considerable part of the Polish society.

It is impossible to list all the short stories, novels, diaries and memories in which “difficult topics” were brought up. Besides known authors, those problems also appear in second-rate texts in terms of artistic quality. We will not find certain themes or images in writers most often associated with the Holocaust, but they emerge in artists of secondary importance or those not associated with problems concerning

the extermination of Jews. This is, for instance, the case of the short story written by Monika Kotowska *Wyplata będzie w niedzielę* [*The Payday will be on Sunday*] and a motif presented there of children who used to spot Jews leaving the ghetto and informing on them to adults.

Polish prosaists were aware of the continuity between the anti-Semitism of the twenty-year interwar period and the symptoms of hatred towards Jews in the period of occupation and shortly after the end of the war. While examining this issue, they pointed to the heritage of the second half of the 1930s in Poland (press campaigns, persecution at the universities and the vandalism of Jewish shops). Kazimierz Brandys combines these phenomena in two texts making up the tetralogy *Między wojnami* [*Between the Wars*] — *Samson* and *Antygona* [*Antygone*]. The most important, and the most extensive, comment of Polish writers and intellectuals concerning symptoms of post-war anti-Semitism is a collection of sketches entitled *Martwa fala* [*Swell*]. The articles it gathers result from direct emotional reactions to anti-Semitic attitudes coming back to life. The most shocking manifestations of anti-Jewish behaviour included the largest post-war slaughter in Kielce in July 1946, in which 42 persons were killed. It became an impulse for Julian Przyboś to speak out and protest, as strong as he could, against the “disgrace of anti-Semitism”: “Shame, sorrow, tormenting burden of disgrace — overpower, paralyse the capacity of words. This is the only subject that terrifies and which cannot be coped with” (60-61). It cannot be coped with, although everybody knows that such attempts should be undertaken and nobody should remain silent. Not only Przyboś was convinced that anti-Semitism, or even only tolerance of anti-Semitism, is something not to be underestimated and accepted after the war.

Jerzy Andrzejewski in *Martwa fala* also stated, with horror, that anti-Semitism in Poland — despite the extermination by the Germans of several million Jews — was still a current issue. Just like Przyboś, Andrzejewski saw in the hostile attitude towards Jews a shameful and, at the same time, painful issue. After forty years, the subject of shame was taken up in an essay entitled *Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto* [*The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto*], crucial for the debate about attitudes of Poles towards Jews, written by Jan Błoński, an outstanding literary critic and a lecturer at Jagiellonian University. The debate on the character of the Polish guilt dates back to its publication in 1987 in the Catholic weekly “Tygodnik Powszechny.” Błoński understood it as an unsatisfactory sensitivity to the evil against Jews. It was the beginning of the debate which would continue in a new socio-economic environment, without the participation of communist censorship.

**March 1968**

March 1968 was the culminating point of the anti-Semitic and anti-German propaganda of the 1960s, consequently led by the ruling communists. It was the last moment in the Polish People's Republic of understanding between the authorities and the part of the society which supported the anti-Jewish action. However, it should not be forgotten that — as Józef Hen convinces us in his *Oko Dajana [Dayan's Eye]* — the crude anti-Semitic propaganda of the authorities in March 1968 often gave rise to an opposite result than the communists intended and evoked in Poles compassion and a desire to help.

The psychology of the survivor marginalizes the truth that anti-Jewish speeches were to a large extent inspired by the communist secret service. For a person of Jewish origin, an ordinary citizen in the Polish People's Republic, who did not belong to the sphere of power, did not have any contact with it and did not know the genesis of the incidents, reviving anti-Semitism first took the form of an injustice that he experienced in his workplace, in his circle of acquaintances, hostility in the street, bitter words uttered in the environment around him. Just like during the war — in a hurry and cheaply — Jews sold out their property and observed Poles who took advantage of this. For small amounts, they bought out what the Jews had worked to gain for the last twenty years. “They are already getting ready to buy out Jewish cars dirt-cheap” — says Luiza in *Nieznany przyjaciel [Unknown Friend]* by Krzysztof Kąkolewski (183).

Trains with emigrants of 1968 departed from Warsaw's Gdańska Station. Those departing were often seen off by their friends and acquaintances: “Many persons thought that [...] going to the Gdański Station is a certain kind of moral duty” (Eisler, 430). This station was located in the direct vicinity of the place from which transports to Treblinka departed during the occupation. It is hardly surprising that association with the Shoah emerged in some minds. The Polish prose also gives voice to it (e.g. Henryk Grynberg in *Memorbuch*, Nina Karsov and Szymon Szechter in *Nie kocha się pomników [Monuments are not Loved]*, Andrzej Kuśniewicz in *Nawrócenie [Conversion]*). Such an image is presented in *Western* by Hen: “I went to the Gdański Station a quarter to seven. [...] People with flowers crowded through the tunnel. There were a few boozed up. A late person of those seeing off [...] pushed his way through the crowd, shouting: Where is this train to Treblinka?. Someone laughed, someone of those leaving” (39). Thus not only in the emigrants, but also in those who accompanied them, the associations with the occupation were subconsciously called up. Marek Nowakowski recorded how “a Jewish friend spoke about the fear which gripped her old mother. The atavism of persecution woke up, particularly in a woman who survived the Holocaust”<sup>1</sup> (207). Fear-arousing memories came back to life.

In 1968–1971, as a result of the March 1968 events, about 13–15 thousand

citizens of the Jewish origin left Poland. In collections of short-stories written in the 1980s, the awareness of the twilight of the Jewish diaspora in Poland prevails (*Krzywe drogi [Crooked Roads]* by Bogdan Wojdowski). Old Jews, those who managed to survive the Holocaust, live in a state of suspension between worlds, haunted by memory. The young are almost absent in Wojdowski. If they do appear — as Adam Kuczer from *Pascha [Passover]* — they want to leave and forget about the “everlasting resentiments” of the war past, which still preoccupies minds of their parents. Gutowski from *Krzywe drogi*, to the fullest extent, expresses the opinion of Wojdowski himself: “The young leave, the old die”(83). Therefore, the events of 1968 can be looked as the end of the thousand-year history of the Jewish diaspora in Poland. Polish prose starts to document this state from the end of 1980s, when many books expressed a longing for bygone times, for the impossible-to-be-recovered-colours of the past, including, among others, the presence of Jews in the Polish landscape. One of the first and most outstanding works of this trend is *Weiser Dawidek* by Paweł Huelle.

### **New Perspectives**

The next decade — mainly due to the growing role of the democratic opposition — brought a new look at the Polish-Jewish relationship. Although the prose and journalism (as shown in the *Martwa fala* collection) of the second half of the 1940s talked a lot about “difficult subjects,” it was only in the mid-1980s that they started to be extremely loudly-voiced. With the publication of Błoński’s essay *Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto*, the process of describing the “Polish guilt” begins, in which the native prose participates — showing the character of those offences against “neighbours” in many ways (one of the last works in this collection was issued in 2008 *Pingpongista [Ping-Pong Player]* by Hen, dealing with the crimes in Jedwabne). In the era of social and political transformations taking place, the discussion about the Polish-Jewish relations became easier. At that time, a generation of writers born after the war, growing up in a time “without Jews,” took their turn to speak.

At the end of the 1980s, the canon of works on the Shoah was extended by new, important texts (e.g. *Weiser Dawidek* by Huelle, *Zagłada [Shoah]* by Piotr Szewc, *Tworki* by Marek Bieńczyk). One of the crucial works of this period, marking out the path that would be taken by many Polish authors at the end of 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is *Umschlagplatz* by Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz. The originality and novelty of *Umschlagplatz* lies in a consistent attempt to enter the psyche of those murdered, and a desire to ease their fate and share their suffering by the Polish protagonist of the novel. Some researchers often talk about the precursory nature of *Początek [Beginning]* by Andrzej Szczypiorski (a book published almost at the same time as *Umschlagplatz*). However, a change in the perspective in the Polish prose about

the Shoah does not consist in starting the discussion about difficult Polish-Jewish relations during the occupation, but in the attempt to enter the psyche of the victims, to identify with their fate. Another more significant process also took place. Literary texts concerning the Holocaust became the subject of open, public debate which was impossible until the mid-1980s, due to the communist censorship, among others.

In 1990s there was an emergence of a huge amount of texts concerning the Shoah, comparable only to what happened in the Polish literature in 1945–1949, when the memories of the war were still very vivid. Beside novels and short stories, diaries and reports prevail. “Late testimonies” were published, the authors of which overcame a psychological barrier after years of remaining silent about their experiences in the Holocaust period. This was the case, among others, of books by Zofia Szymańska, Stefan Chaskielewicz, Adina Blady-Szwajger, Maria Hochberg-Mariańska and Halina Zawadzka. For some authors, “late testimony” becomes an element of integration of their identity as a writer (this is particularly important for those who survived the war as children: Michał Głowiński *Czarne sezony* [*Black Seasons*], Janina Bauman *Zima o poranku* [*Winter in the Morning*], Wilhelm Dichter *Koń Pana Boga* [*God’s Horse*]).

Along with postmodernist *Tworki* by Bieńczyk, the question of the possibility of updating and experiencing the tragedy of the Holocaust by authors for whom the war is not the generational experience, became valid. A new phenomenon that requires explanation emerged — the works of authors born after the Shoah, as well as the prose of the so-called second and third generation (among others, *Mykwa* [*Mikveh*] and *Ślicznotka doktora Josefa* [*Doctor Josef’s Pretty Face*] by Zyta Rudzka or *Pensjonat* [*Pension*] by Piotr Paziński).

One of the most important manners of talking about the Shoah after 1989 is metonymy. It was used by authors born after the war. *Sny i kamienie* [*Dreams and Stones*] and *Skaza* [*Flaw*] by Magdalena Tulla, *Ziemia Nod* [*The Land of Nod*] by Radosław Kobierski — provide some examples of using metonymy while representing the Shoah. However, these are not unique texts written in this style, and the issue requires separate analyses.

### **Tasks to Be Done**

Among the numerous tasks faced by the Holocaust researchers in Poland, one of the most important is the reconstruction and discussion of the topics related to the Shoah. Polish poetry and prose provide the natural and the best context for creating the matrix of *loci communes* of the Holocaust. This is for two obvious reasons. First of all, Polish literature — as it has been already claimed — contains the richest set of texts about the Shoah in terms of volume. Among all global literatures, extermination of the Jews found in Polish prose and poetry the most numerous representation. Secondly, as the

Holocaust took place in the area and in the social, cultural and political reality of land making up the Second Republic of Poland, Polish authors were put in a specific situation: they were direct or indirect witnesses to what happened.

I would like to list a few categories of entries making up a preliminary index for the future glossary of the Holocaust literature topics: OTHER WORLD, SMOKE, QUIET, SILENCE, WALL, SZMALCOWNIK, CLOSET, HANGMAN, LITTLE SMUGGLER, ANIELEWICZ, RUMKOWSKI, CZERNIAKÓW, RUBINSZTAJN, SZMUL ZYGIELBOJM, ANGEL OF DEATH/MENGELE, FRANKENSTEIN, GROSSE AKTION, JEWISH DEATH:POLISH DEATH, DEATH TRAIN/LOCOMOTIVE, JEWISH EYES, WINDOW, ASH, JEWISH WAR, ARYAN PAPERS, CREMATORIUM, SELECTION, GOOD APPEARANCE:WRONG APPEARANCE, JEWISH FACE, JEW-COWARD, JEWISH MOTHER, JEWISH THINGS, SHTETL, MUSELMANN, AUSCHWITZ, HELL, RAMP, STAR OF DAVID/JEWISH STAR, ARYAN SIDE, UMSCHLAGPLATZ, GUARD OF JEWISH GRAVES, JEWISH GOLD.

The Polish reflection on the literature of the Holocaust lacks publications summing up the current state of knowledge. What is missing is a monograph that would make it possible to see the richness of subject matter concerning the Shoah in poetry, prose, essay and drama. The already-mentioned book, entitled *Literatura polska wobec Zagłady (1939–1968)* was published as late as in 2012. The prevailing studies are monographs showing Holocaust motifs in the works by one author. They are important, yet they would not replace a synthesis. Additionally, there are no publications of the glossary or encyclopaedic type. *Literatura polska w Izraelu. Leksykon [Polish Literature in Israel. Lexicon]* has been completed only lately. Nevertheless, one project, still in the phase of creation, should be also mentioned. A synthesis entitled *Reprezentacje Zagłady w kulturze polskiej [Shoah Representations in Polish Culture]* provides a thematic and chronological continuation of the monograph *Literatura polska wobec Zagłady (1939–1968)*. The assumption of *Reprezentacje* is — as far as possible — to provide a complete and exhaustive description of various phases and forms of expression concerning the Holocaust experience in artistic accounts, including literature (poetry, prose, personal documentary literature, essay writing and journalism), theatre and drama, visual arts, film and photography, popular culture and new media, as well as a theoretical discourse about the Shoah. This research undertaking is unprecedented in the Polish literature of the subject.

A part of the crucial issues concerning the Holocaust should be covered in larger problem groups. Therefore, the most urgent tasks in reflection on the Shoah include appointment of research teams gathering representatives of various humanistic

professions, from various research centres. This would allow completion of large, cross-sectional projects.

A separate circle of issues is created by the problem of the extermination of the Jews in the context of the communist censorship. In the article entitled *Cenzura PRL a współczesne edytorstwo [Censorship in the Polish People's Republic and Contemporary Editing]* published in the collective work *Autor, tekst, cenzura [Author, Text, Censorship]*, Tadeusz Drewnowski claimed that restoration of the original author's form of works from the second half of the twentieth century, clearing them of distortions made by the Main Office of Control for Press, Publications and Shows (GUKPPiW) was one of the most important tasks for editors and publishers after 1989. Since then the situation has not radically change for the better. Due to the costs of printing, publishing houses which decide to publish most often do not care to check what the text looked like before the intervention of a meticulous censor.

An issue that has been completely omitted is the question of works withheld by censorship. Works kept in the censorship collections slightly broaden the collection of texts treating the Shoah. In *Zatrzymane przez cenzurę [Withheld by Censorship]* Kamila Budrowska brings to light *Dni grozy [Days of Fear]* by Rajmund Hemepl and *Lamus [Storeroom]* by Nadzieja Drucka, considerably broadening the modest collection of post-war drama texts about the Holocaust. These are not the only texts raising the problem of the Shoah that were not admitted for publication by censorship. They do not include outstanding works, although some interesting works can be found that had been considered by the censor as “dangerous” for the reader. At this point, another, more generalized thesis concerning the communist censorship should be mentioned. According to Budrowska, against the common belief, the copies reaching the GUKPPiW were relatively rarely destroyed (despite the orders from above). This raises the hope that many of them can be found in archives of publishing houses archives or in private collections and archives. This is worth remembering. Too often it is assumed that the text does not exist since it disappeared “at Mysia Street” — without an appropriate search to verify this fact.

To date, nobody has examined the activity of the censorship around 1968. The operations of the-then authorities are quite well-known — including the anti-Semitic journalism — inspired to a large extent by communist rulers (particularly circles close to General Mieczysław Moczar) and has been well-described, but we do not know anything about the influence of censorship on literary texts. Other questions ask whether, and in what way, the production of anti-Semitism works of that time was inspired. Two overtly anti-Semitic works were created at that time (the only ones in the entire Polish prose of 1945–1989). One was a novel, *Glupia sprawa [Stupid Thing]* by Stanisław Ryszard Dobrowolski, and one was a short story, *Dawid, syn*

*Henryka [David, a Son of Henryk]* by Roman Bratny.

While examining the issue of communist censorship in the Polish People's Republic, one should recall the different stages of its development: relative freedom of 1945–1948/49, the time of its largest influence (1950–1953/54), a “thaw” (1956–1958) and publication of works restrained in the first half of 1950s, tightening of censorship in 1959–1970, emergence of independent publishing circulation in the mid-1970s, freedom of the “Solidarity” era (1980–1981) and tightening of censorship during the martial law period (1981–1983). In the editorial reviews written by censors, the topic of the Shoah is not presented as a direct reason for eliminating text, but rather allegedly low artistic value or unjustified pessimism was often cited. Censoring the subject matter of the extermination of the Jews should be treated as an element of manipulating the memory of World War II (particularly important in the Stalinist times). I discussed the issue of presence/absence of the Holocaust in the Stalinist era a few years ago, in “Midrasz.”<sup>2</sup> Contrary to expectation, the extermination of Jews did appear in the prose of 1949–1954. Communists used the tactic that they followed almost throughout the entire era of the Polish People's Republic. An artist could refer to the Holocaust if he accused the opponents of the communist authorities of atrocious acts against Jews. A complete exposition of dark episodes from the Polish past was by no means the objective of the ruling communists. They were not concerned with countering lies concerning the past, but about its misrepresentation through the so-called “class interpretation” of history. And this does not mean anything more than subordination to the general idea of the enemy being the only beneficiary of the former Jewish property. The enemy also included the anti-communist opposition.

To sum up, the subjects concerning war, occupation, the fate of Polish population and extermination of the Jews were not approved by the communists if they did not emphasize a particular role of socialism in the fight against the Nazis, did not discredit political opponents or did not contain an optimistic vision of the future. The image of war detached from the political interpretation raised the suspicion of defeatism and gratuitous violence.

A separate issue requiring comprehensive presentation is the meeting of the popular culture with the Shoah (signalled already earlier in books of 1970s, for instance, in *Szczurzy pałac [Rat Palace]* by Bogdan Ruth). On one hand, in *Żydówka Noemi [Noemi the Jew]* by Jerzy Stegner or in *Agent* by Manuela Gretkowska, the context of the extermination is used to make the plot “more attractive,” on the other hand — to its unmasking (as in *Good night, Dżerzi* by Janusz Głowacki, where those mechanisms are subject to criticism), or in a perverse camp book by Igor Ostachowicz *Noc żywych Żydów [The Night of Living Jews]*). In the last decade, a considerable collection of texts appeared, in which the Shoah constitutes only a context to tell the

history about maturation or for pure provocation. Because of such works as Krystian Piwowarski's *Więcej gazu, Kameraden! [More Gas, Kameraden!]*, a need to pose again the question of appropriateness, the possibility of transferring the experience of *Endlösung* and — more broadly — its ability to be expressed emerges.

Finally, let us mention one more task faced by the Polish researchers of Holocaust literature. One of the most important tasks consists in promotion of knowledge concerning the richness of the literature concerning the Shoah. In a dynamically developing (over the past few dozen years) reflection over the Holocaust, in recognized, sometimes classic, books on this topic, Polish poetry and prose almost does not exist. A few names are usually mentioned, namely: Tadeusz Borowski, Czesław Miłosz, Henryk Grynberg, less often Władysław Szlengel, Zofia Nałkowska, Adolf Rudnicki or Andrzej Szczypiorski. Such authors as Jerzy Kosiński and Piotr Rawicz are more often referred to. However, they can hardly be recognized as Polish authors (since one of them wrote in English, and the other in French). Diaries are mentioned much more often — by Adam Czerniakow, Dawid Rubinowicz, Dawid Sierakowiak or *Pamiętnik [Diary]* by Janusz Korczak. Without Polish literature — in which the Shoah found its fullest representation — the research on the Holocaust is much more limited, and certain issues cannot be discussed without referring to Polish literature.

## Notes

1. The Shoah trauma brought back to life in March 1968 is mentioned by Michał Głowiński in his interview given to Teresa Torañska (*Sq. Rozmowy o dobrych uczuciach [They exist. Talks about good feelings]*. Warszawa: Świat Książki 2007).
2. See S. Buryła, *Zagłada Żydów w prozie socrealistycznej [Extermination of the Jews in the prose of Socialist Realism]*. *Midrasz* 11(2008)26-30.

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# Narrative Strategies in Ryszard Kapuściński's Reportages

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**Abstract** This paper examines narrative techniques of Ryszard Kapuściński. It presents the most important facts about professional biography of Polish reporter, showing the main places and historical moments he experienced. Kapuściński's art of creative nonfiction writing is compared to New Journalism Movement where some elements of fiction were used to give the artistic interpretation of experienced reality. The author is focusing on three of Kapuściński's books: *The Emperor*, *Shah of Shahs* and *Travels with Herodotus* examining different forms of structuring gathered information into parabola, collage or hermeneutic self-interpretation.

**Key words** Ryszard Kapuściński; literary journalism; reportage; *The Emperor*; *Shah of Shahs*; *Travels with Herodotus*; narration.

## Introduction

Ryszard Kapuściński (1932-2007), one of the most important literary journalist of the twentieth century is widely recognized on the contemporary map of world literature. He is one of the most often translated Polish writers, among authors such as Stanisław Lem, Czesław Miłosz, Zbigniew Herbert, Wisława Szymborska or Andrzej Sapkowski. His most famous books, *The Emperor* or *Shah of Shahs*, were translated into more than thirty languages.

Recent biographers, e.g. Artur Domosławski, the author of *Ryszard Kapuściński. Non-fiction* (2010), tried to weaken the authority of famous writer and journalist, showing Kapuściński's sins concerning his private and professional life. Domosławski tried to prove that Kapuściński was passing the truth in his reportages. That stimulated the everlasting discussion about the borders of fiction and non-fiction in journalism which was very loud in Polish media just after publication of Domosławski's book (two years later translated into English). However, literary researchers much earlier than biographers proved the presence of some types of fiction in Kapuściński's art

of story-telling and understood fiction not as the synonym of lying but as probability or as the use of imagination to create a literary vision based on real experience (Lemarque 1996). What is interesting — this distinction between different types of fiction, obvious for literary scholars, is not an argument for some journalists. The problem of fiction in nonfiction still divides reporters into two groups — one who believes that the borders of literary journalism should be open for some types of creative writing and others who reject literary modes of narrating reality. The famous representatives of the first trend are writers from the New Journalism movement in United States — Tom Wolf, Truman Capote or Norman Mailer (Weber 1974), in Poland very similar idea was realized by Kapuściński. The second group treat literary techniques as kind of risk of missing the truth and disappointing the trust of witnesses whose stories are always incorporated in reportage discourse. In my article, I describe what are the fiction elements of Kapuściński's prose and how they are combined with the representation of reality. I also examine the importance of composing empirical material and the role of choosing different narrative modes for each of Kapuściński's books. I analyze narrative strategies of *The Emperor* (1978), *Shah of Shahs* (1982) and the last of Kapuściński's books: *Travels with Herodotus* (2004).

Ryszard Kapuściński published his first collection of reportages *Busz po polsku* (*Polish Bush*) in 1962. Debut of the young reporter anticipated the feature typical for the style of his later books — entanglement of literary and journalistic discourse. This connection will develop and evolve in his later output leading to different artistic impressions. Kapuściński believed that different forms of narrative strategies frame our interpretation of the word (Kapuściński 1997). His idea was very closed to the contemporary interdisciplinary studies about narration seen not only as a neutral, linguistic form of storytelling but also — as a tool which reflects, structures and sharpens our way of conceptualizing the word (Trzebiński 2002), which is also a paradigm of cognitive narratology (Hart 2001).

Kapuściński sought for always new narrative forms for different subjects of his books (Horodecka 2010). The choice of particular narrative strategy was connected with his vision and interpretation of reality he experienced being a witness of many important historical events in Africa, South America, The Soviet Union and Poland. The beginning of his career coincided with the big anti-colonial movements in Africa on 1950. and 1960. As a young Polish journalist he had a rare opportunity to travel abroad, as a historian — he decided to be an observer of history *in statu nascendi*. That is why he report mainly from Africa. In 50., 60. and 70. he traveled a lot, e.g. to Ethiopia, Algeria, Kongo, Ghana, Tanganika, Kenia, Rwanda, Uganda, Sudan, Angola, Somalia, or Nigeria and observed the rapid changes on the continent, often as a war correspondent (Nowacka, Ziątek 374). In 1967 he went for first time to

South America (Santiago de Chile) and then stayed for three years in Mexico (1969-1972) and was traveling a lot to Honduras, Boliwia, Peru, Brasil and Venesuela often experiencing conflicts and wars. One of the most famous local conflict he described in reportage *Soccer War* published in Poland in 1978. In 1979 he was also present for a few months in Iran and observed the overthrow of Shah — Reza Pahlavi, and then described this experience in *Shah of Shahs*.

It would be enough for the life of two or three journalists but not for Ryszard Kapuściński whose third field of interest — after Africa and South America — was the Soviet Union region. He traveled there twice, first for three months in 1967 to gather materials for the book about Asian and Caucasian Republics of the Soviet Union and came back after more than 20 years to observe and describe the fall of Soviet Union in his book *Imperium* published in Poland in 1993. As we can see — the best Polish reporter did not have much time to write about Poland, but — he came back to the country and stay longer in 1980 to participate in strikes which were an important step towards the fall of communism in Poland in 1989<sup>1</sup>. Although he wrote only a short text about this historical event, he came back to the mechanism of revolution in his reportage about the collapse of shah, Reza Pahlavi. The way of writing about the fall of shah was inspired by the experience of Polish strikes.

It is difficult to believe that one person could have the physical strength and intellectual potential to experience and describe so many spaces, events, meeting with thousands of witnesses. Moreover — the artistic impact of Kapuściński's professional life is really impressing and estimated not only in Poland but also in the word — which can be seen in translational phenomenon of his works. The list below shows the most important reportages by Ryszard Kapuściński with the chronology of publishing in Polish and English language. Two of them — *Travels with Herodotus* and *The Emperor* were not long ago translated into Chinese by Wu Lan.

The most important books by Ryszard Kapuściński published in Poland	English translations
1. Jeszcze dzień życia, Warszawa 1976	1. Another Day of Life, trans. W. R. Brand, K. Mroczkowska-Brand, New York, 1986.
2. Wojna futbolowa, Warszawa 1978	2. The Soccer War, trans. W. Brand, London 1990
3. Cesarz, Warszawa, 1978	3. The Emperor. The Downfall of an Autocrat, trans. W. R. Brand, K. Mroczkowska-Brand, New York 1983
4. Szachinszach, Warszawa 1982	4. Shahs of Shahs, trans. W. R. Brand, K. Mroczkowska-Brand, London 1985.
5. Imperium, Warszawa 1993	5. Imperium, trans. W. Brand, New York-Toronto, 1994
6. Heban, Warszawa 1998	6. The Shadow of the Sun. My African Life, trans. K. Głowczewska, New York-Toronto, 1994
7. Podróże z Herodotem, raków 2004	7. Travels with Herodotus, trans. K. Głowczewska London 2007

This seven books are only a few of his numerous artistic works, which also includes writing poetry (Kapuściński 2008) and being a photographer. I choose to present this titles, as they are the most famous in the word and each of them has at least 20 translation into different languages. In next sections of this article I will examine three of them: *The Emperor*, *Shah of Shahs* and *Travels with Herodotus*.

### ***The Emperor***

*The Emperor* is consider as the most literary book by Kapuściński. Author's intention was to join journalistic and literary tools in describing the splendor and fall of Hajle Sellasie's Court. The narrative effect was so surprising that even nowadays the book divides the reading audience. Some people admire the narrative form of the book, others claim that Kapuściński came to far in experiments with the literary borders of reportage (Domosławski 2010). Many literary critics interpret a book as a kind of parabola, legend or even a myth (Rose 1983). The question appears: how is it possible that reportage is treated as a fictional story? The answer comes with the analysis of narrative strategies of the book.

Kapuściński was present in Etiopia in 1964, 1976 and 1977 (Nowacka, Ziątek 379). He not only observed the reality but also speak with many Ethiopians who belong to Haile Sellasie's court. This numerous conversations were used in the book as an empirical background which was the foundation of wider literary vision of the psychological and sociological mechanisms of the autocratic power. This aim changed the book into a universal parabola through the use of particular narrative strategies.

Significant feature of *The Emperor* is the economy of its structure. The text reveals a variety of devices which formalize and remould the empirical material of reportage into a multi-levelled, intricate narrative. The narrative voice is diversified: in the unfolding of the text, narration is offered consecutively either directly by the reporter or through the framed monologues of the servants in the palace. Multi-layered structure provokes associations with palimpsest.

*The Emperor* opens with a sentence that anticipates the content to follow: "In the evenings I listened to those who had known the Emperor's court" (Kapuściński 4). This opening, calm, almost melancholic phrase embodies the compositional mechanism of the reportage, whose main principle is to follow the reports of encountered witnesses. It could be claimed that *The Emperor* on the narrative level is a collection of monologues of people who survived the revolution. Surreptitiously, under the cover of darkness, they reconstruct their stories, offering a specific *curriculum vitae*. The reporter conceals their actual identities under initials (e.g., F., L.C., P.H.-T.), perhaps unwilling to put them in danger. Above all, however, the device

highlights the universal rather than individual character of the figures presented. In total, *The Emperor* makes use of 34 subnarrators, whose accounts are offered by the first-person narrator: reporter. Most of them present stories only once, some appear two — three times (e.g. P.M. or T.L.).

It is important to stress at this point that a third path the narration follows is related to the mottos opening each chapter. These introduce an external order and serve a metatextual function. The proportion these mottos occupy is substantial: 4 percent of the whole text, 8 pages in total, are devoted to them. The narrator-reporter's segment makes for 25 percent, and the remaining large part (around 70 percent) is devoted to the framed narrative monologues. Such a mathematical summary only confirms what the reader experiences from the very beginning — the first-person narrator recedes into the background, giving right of way to a polyphony of opinions, facts, and emotions of those who for long years witnessed the reign of the autocrat. This in turn clearly underlines the importance of the sources of information — the servants are here reliable — because the most direct — in what they can offer about events. The narrator, in turn, takes the role of a medium.

That is the reason why the journalist himself rarely speaks, similarly to *The Soccer War*, where he clearly distinguishes his narrative parts with italics. This duality of his account broken into his own remarks and collected monologues of the emperor's servants is consistent in the whole text and is a distinctive narrative device serving several significant purposes. For example, it creates the impression of objectivity of the journalist, who separates his point of view from his interlocutors' perspective. This impression is, however, partly destroyed in the process of narrative evolution.

Now let us have a look at the vertical order inscribed in the text. The journalist's narrative is most often represented by a single voice (nevertheless, it happens that the narrator's and servants' voices intersperse). We can notice a peculiar mass of voices in the stories of palace people; they form an order in which the following linguistic planes merge:

1. Information gathered in Ethiopia
2. The authorial process of linguistic stylization of the servants monologues (use of Old Polish) and ordering them in a sequence;
3. Polish as the journalist's language into which he translates collected materials;
4. English as the language of some conversations and Teferra the guide;
5. The Amharic language as the national language of Ethiopia (and the modes of expression — e.g. metaphors characteristic of that language).

Single planes are present in the text with various intensity. For instance, English occurs sporadically — in actual expressions such as “Mister Richard” or (“My dear brother”) and in mispronounced name — “Mr Kupuczycyky.” The five-layer system portrays the order of voices overlapping in the narrative of servants, but also stylization, which has been emphasized most, at the same time, and speech structures — typical for the Amharic language. This most profound narrative plane could for example include the anecdotal nature of servants’ speech. Jerzy Jarzębski connects it with the pre-alphabetic culture of Addis Abeba, which is echoed in the colloquial form which Kapuściński uses to describe the emperor’s court (Jarzębski 2009).

The reporter’s narration and the monologues make up a compositional sequence which offers a dynamics to narration, creates a polyphonic effect (highlighted in the mottos), and introduces universal dimension into the story. It seems that the intricate structure determines the parabolic character of *The Emperor* and reveals its symbolic meaning. The compositional dominant consists of various structural elements evoking the sense of time passing. The atmosphere of *vanitas* is evoked by a great number of mottos. The second chapter is preceded by a quote from the *Book of Jeremiah*: “They ... have walked after vanity, and are become vain” (*The Emperor* 59). In the last chapter, there are even four *vanitas* mottos: from Conrad, Procopius of Caesarea, Marcus Aurelius. Let us quote the last one: “Next I ask myself the question. Where is it all now? Smoke, ashes, fable. Or perhaps it is no longer even a fable” (*The Emperor* 107). Thus even the quotes reveal the tension through creating the atmosphere of the coming end. Also the variety of authors and times of the mottos creates an impression of timeless debate on elapsing, unavoidable decline of any power, but also of human life. It is worth noting how in the third chapter Kapuściński skillfully manifests the topos of an ancient ruler, referring to Procopius’s apocryphal account on Justinian and his courtiers (with a ghostly motif of a head which disappears only to reappear on the ruler’s neck — perhaps a symbol of illusoriness or of temporary authority of a particular ruler).

A composition technique evoking the sense of the end coming is connected with the motif of hours elapsing. Monologues are ordered chronologically according to the emperor’s everyday rituals. Even L.C., the second servant from the reportage, talks about the hour when the emperor wakes up (4 or 5 a.m.); another — Y.M. — talks about the denunciation hour during the morning walk; G.S.-D. — about the nomination hour (from 9 to 10 a.m.); W.A.-N. about the financial hour between 10 and 11 a.m. in this manner the other hours pass by. Obviously, this informs us about the extremely schematic and ritual way of ruling the country, but also is an evidence of the totality of power. It seizes all the state functions, but also has something divine in

itself because it seems to control time perfectly. At the same time, some hidden clock strikes further hours of ruling which symbolize the end of the day, of the night, but also of the catastrophe, the end or even death.

*The Emperor* acquire symbolic and literary dimension also as a result of using old Polish language (which sometimes is difficult to save in translation), rhythm and rhymes. It changes the story not only in parabola but also highlights the grotesque as a form of silent estimation of the Hajle Sellasie reign and of each autocratic power. Some journalists, literary critics and even anthropologists argue that Kapuściński went too far in formal experiments with the narrative form which went too far from reality. In fact — Kapuściński gave Hajle Sellasie's servants the language they could not speak. Facts mentioned in the book are true, but it is for sure not the example of literal truth — fundamental for journalism but not for literature. That is way *The Emperor* balancing on the border of both will be for a long time the example of difficult dilemma of literary journalists.

### ***Shah of Shahs***

Similar subject but in completely different narrative form is presented in the second most widely known reportage by Ryszard Kapuściński. Published in Poland in 1982, four years after *The Emperor* a — in the contrary to the story about Ethiopian Emperor — still fascinates journalists as a hidden story about the workshop of foreign reporting. It was the first book where Kapuściński shows not only the wide political and historical analyze of the Iranian powers but also points to the difficulties of understanding and describing the Other cultures. The Iranian society occurs as particularly difficult to penetrate because of religious traditions of islam and great social fear caused by the Savak, secret police determined to punish each suspicion of disloyalty to shah.

The narrative form of reportage reflects the epistemological problem of transcultural communication. In contrast to *The Emperor* Kapuściński uses the poetics of fragment which can be compare to the esthetics of collage. In the first chapter it is announced by the description of Kapuściński's hotel room which changes into a symbol of reporter's lost in the political chaos of Iran. The first sentence of the book — “Everything is in confusion” (*Shah of Shahs* 3) — refers to the Chomeini's coming back and shah's escape from the country and seems to be mirrored by the description of reporter's room:

The worst chaos is on the big round table: photos of various sizes, cassettes, 8-mm film, newsletters, photocopies of leaflets — all piled, mixed up together, helter-skelter, like a flea market. And more posters and albums, records and

books acquired or given by people, the collected remnants of an era just ended but still able to be seen and heard. (*Shah of Shahs* 4)

The table symbolizes journalist's workshop and shows simultaneously — the effort to gather information and journalist's problem with comprehension. In next chapter we can observe how Kapuściński tries to solve the difficulties. He surrenders coherent description and decides to stick elements of gathered information — like an artist making a collage of different materials and fragments. What elements Kapuściński is using in his storytelling? One can observe it in the subtitles of the second chapter (*Daguerreotypes*): *Photograph 1, 2 and 3*, then: *From the Notes 1; Cassette 1; From the Notes 2*; etc.

Each paragraph gives new information — connected with the history of Iran or with contemporary political and social situation. Some of them (like *Cassette* or *Notes*) are presenting reporter's conversation with Iranians but such resources are rare. The most important are *Photographies* — they are the most numerous source of information, particularly significant. Their presence show that it is difficult to get in touch with local people and reporter seems to be forced to use pictures. The way Kapuściński "reads" the photos is very significant for his style and epistemology. He is merging the description of the photo with his own associations and interpretations. This strategy of storytelling will come back in *Travels with Herodotus*, I will come back to this. Now it is important to understand the consequences of such technique — it weakens the reporter's authority as someone who gives as only proven and reliable knowledge. However Kapuściński is presenting lots of facts, dates and real names, simultaneously is not afraid of using his imagination. He changes more into an artists, visionary or — how he was called — into reporter-poet (Parker 1994). I is seen when he uses metaphors or the technique of omniscient narrator or indirect interior monologue:

Whoever scrutinizes this photo of father and son, taken in 1926, will understand a lot. The father is forty-eight and the son seven. The contrast between them is striking in every respect: The huge, powerful Shah-father stands sulkily, peremptorily, hands on his hips, and beside him the small pale boy, frail, nervous, obediently standing at attention, barely reaches his father's waist. They are wearing the same uniforms and caps, the same shoes and belts, and the same number of buttons: fourteen. The father, who wants his son — so essentially like him — to resemble him in as many details as possible, thought up this identity of apparel. The son senses this intention, and, though he is by nature weak and hesitant, he will try at all costs to resemble despotic, ruthless father. (*Shah of*

*Shahs* 22)

Let us add to that characteristic of narration in *Shah of Shahs* that its incoherent, collage structure is not consistent. It is contradicted by the hidden order of chronology in describing gathered sources of information.

### ***Travels with Herodotus***

The last coherent book by Kapuściński<sup>2</sup> — *Travels with Herodotus* — shows the important change in his narrative strategies and simultaneously — synthesizes many of his previous techniques. Probably he never before speak so openly about his professional biography, which changes the book more into autobiographical essay with the elements of reportage. He also never went so far in using intertextual strategies by incorporating vast parts of another book (*The History* by Herodotus) into his own. However one could predict the shape of *Travels* from previous books of the writer, because Kapuściński's "I" was always present — but more indirectly. Questioned who are the heroes of his books, he used to answer provocatively: I am the main hero (Nowacka, Ziątek 9). He had also used quotations from other sources, frequently from literature or historiography. Intertextuality of narration was in each book more and more important — he used it for example as a polyphonic way of describing Soviet Union in his earlier book — *Imperium* (1993).

Although, as we have just mentioned, most of Kapuściński's work is to a degree autobiographical, *Travels with Herodotus* highlights the autobiographical through a curious juxtaposition of two narratives. The link does not lead to a conflict of discourses, but to their interactive coexistence. If there are thematic motifs and narrative devices known from other books, the concept behind the text remains unique. It refers to a generic traditional element of conversation with the dead as well as to an interview with an important figure, a witness of the present<sup>3</sup>. Kapuściński plays a surprising game in this respect. His primary interlocutor, Herodotus — though never directly addressed in the dialogue — is a member of the ancient world and a witness of his own time. His *The History* similarly witness Kapuściński's own journey and become yet another interlocutor of the text. The motif of travelling towards different places in the word with *The History* and with its author, organises the structure of whole book and profiles reporter's interpretation of observed events and his method of describing it.

Although there are two main narrators-protagonists (Herodotus and Kapuściński), the image of one author dominates throughout the book. Autobiography of Polish journalists appears directly (in memories and in all elements of reconstructed biography of the reporter) and indirectly (in reflections, analyses and interpretations of

Herodotus work). In many respects the historian seems to be Kapuściński's *alter ego*, a mirror in which the reporter watches himself and is watched by the reader.

The meeting with Herodotus is for Kapuściński an adventurous meeting with Other. We initiate such meetings, as Lévinas would put it, to transgress ourselves or constitute our own identity<sup>4</sup>. But at the same time the meeting is also an attempt at understanding and describing the difference. Kapuściński has worked with cultural otherness (e.g. with Africa in the very vicinity). In *Travels* he goes to visit an "other" Herodotus — he goes along his spaces and across his discourse. And here, I believe, we face the unique idea. The reporter tries — through narrative interaction (which can be understood as specific collision of texts, stories and discourses) — to reconstruct two portraits that shed light on one another — the portraits of himself, and of Herodotus.<sup>5</sup> Małgorzata Czermińska comments on this issue in the following way: "The first-person voice ("I") is repeatedly reassured in its role of the subject by numerous references to "you." This is clearly a motivation for discourse" (Czermińska 10).

Let us then have a look at Herodotus and the way he appears in *Travels*. It is surprising just how much of the book is given over to the historical accounts of Greek historian. Not only the narrative sections quoted from *The History*, but also some fragments Kapuściński wrote himself to concisely paraphrase it, added to the body of the text. Thus — with almost half of the book being somehow related to Herodotus — it could be argued that *Travels with Herodotus* seems, in large degree, to have been co-authored by the Greek historian.

A comparison may prove useful here between the picture of Herodotus that is revealed in his own *The History* and the image offered by the Polish reporter. The Greek rarely writes about himself, his narrative mainly concentrates on recounting stories as well as describing customs, religions and peoples he meets. There is, of course, a lot of information on topography and the countries explored. Herodotus appears to be not only the father of history, as Cicero would have it, but also as a sociologist, ethnographer or geographer. The interdisciplinary character of his interests is commented on by Seweryn Hammer, who writes that "Herodotus is interested in the lives of people, in climate, soil types and in natural produce. For ethnography he created a system — discussing: nations, languages, religions and cultures. In fact, the list of Persian peoples he offers in book became the basis for subsequent geographic and ethnographic explorations of the ancient East" (Hammer 12).

In *Travels with Herodotus*, the image of the Greek historian is filtered through the personality and interests of the author. Kapuściński remains only partially faithful to the picture that is revealed in *The History* — most of all, he leaves his own imprint on the figure of his master. The reporter paints a realistic portrait of the historian (paying

attention to verisimilitude), but adds a few authorial touches to it. Such reception style (according to the categorization proposed by Michał Głowiński)<sup>6</sup> is to a large degree expressive since its narration strongly aims at individual reconstruction of the identity of the sender of the text. Still, we can also notice elements of instrumental style — it happens now and again that Kapuściński quotes Herodotus to discuss his writing techniques as a paradigm for historians and journalists.

When looking at these most crucial aspects of the subjectively reconstructed figure of Herodotus, it is worth noticing what information we receive about the Polish reporter, who narrates the story. Even the selection of quotes from Herodotus is marked by the writer's personal interests. It is easy to notice that the use of the quotes is motivated by a need to make the reader interested in what fascinated the author himself. Quite frequently Kapuściński offers Herodotus text as if it were contemporary crime fiction — he selects shocking, dramatic moments and never avoids scenes of blood and gore. A person being impaled or the rotting body of the dying queen Feretime are shown with naturalist precision. The brutality is not necessarily an advertising trick, drawing the reader's attention. It is, instead, an example of the author's genuine interest in the sufferings of ancient people. Herodotus, as Kapuściński remarks at some point, treats the material with the indifference of somebody who is well used to it. The reporter, in turn, reacts to the scenes, observing them with awe.

Another dimension of the subjectively constructed portrait of Herodotus is the use Kapuściński makes of his own imagination as an interpretative tool for the ancient book, its style and for the Herodotus methods of traveling and observing other cultures. The interpretation of the events in ancient historiography involves a large dose of imaginative skill. This is visible in the passage describing the Babylon besieged by Darius the Great, where the reporter first offers a quote from the historian, and then adds: "Let us imagine this scene" (*Travels with Herodotus* 129). The fragment following such a question is not always a pure product of imagination. Quite often, as in the case of this passage, such comment is only a symptom of change in the speaking voice — a change of narrators. Authorial narration takes over to reconstruct the events in a condensed, shorter version. It is easy to notice how much Kapuściński's imagination relies on his own extensive knowledge. The symptomatic question quoted above is followed by a detailed passage:

Let us imagine this scene. The world's largest army has arrived at the gates of Babylon. It has made camp around the city, which is encircled by massive walls of clay brick. The city wall is several meters high and so wide that a wagon drawn by four horses all in a row can be driven along its top (...) It will be

twelve hundred more years before gunpowder makes its appearance in this part of the world. Firearms won't be invented for another two thousand years. (...) So the Babylonians feel invincible, able to behave with impunity — nothing can happen to them. (*Travels with Herodotus* 130)

I will return to the motif of imagination as a narrative regulator, but here I would like to stress that an example of such authorial interpretation can be also found in numerous fragments which aim at reconstruction of Herodotus's journalistic talents and his methods of collecting information. The historian is precise and laconic — as could be seen in numerous phrases throughout the book. These phrases also contain an element of the portrait — Herodotus very visibly uses fragments of the stories he has heard but rarely reveals much about the circumstances in which he did so. Let us then have a look at how Kapuściński discusses the historian's workshop:

For now, people gather in the evenings at the long, communal table, by the fire, beneath the old tree. Better if the sea is nearby. They eat, drink wine, talk. Tales are woven into those conversations, endlessly varied stories. If a visitor, a traveller, happens by, they will invite him to join them. He will sit and listen. In the morning, he will be on his way. In the next place he comes to, he will be similarly welcomed. The scenario of these ancient evenings repeats itself. If the traveller has a good memory — and Herodotus must have had a phenomenal one — he will over time amass a great many stories. That was one of the sources upon which our Greek drew. (*Travels with Herodotus* 270)

This representative passage shows very well how the reporter's imagination adds (on the basis of his genuine knowledge) to the content of Herodotus's *The History*. The added material, otherwise absent, is thus more interesting, more actively arousing, as if presenting a detective's work. The writer is puzzled with the places of indeterminacy in the ancient text and consequently tries to solve mysteries through acts of imagination.

Other significant narrative strategy of the book is the poetics of interrogation. For instance in the comment Kapuściński offers after the concise quote from *The History* which mentions women strangled by besieged Babylonians in need of food:

Our Greek says nothing more about this mass execution. Whose decision was it? That of the Popular Assembly? Of the Municipal Government? Of the Committee for the Defense of Babylon? Was there some discussion of the matter? Did anyone protest? Who decided on the method of execution — that

these women would be strangled? Were there other suggestions? That they be pierced by spears, for example? Or cut down with swords? Or burned on pyres? Or thrown into the Euphrates, which coursed through the city?

There are more questions still. Could the women, who had been waiting in their homes for the men to return from the meeting during which sentence was pronounced upon them, discern something in their men's faces? Indecision? Shame? Pain? Madness? The little girls of course suspected nothing. But the older ones? Wouldn't instinct tell them something? Did all the men observe the agreed silence? Didn't conscience strike any of them? Did none of them experience an attack of hysteria? Run screaming through the streets? (*Travels with Herodotus* 128)

We may also notice that these interrogative passages very strongly dramatize the material presented by Herodotus. Facts offered by the historian are reworked in a way that adds new tragedy, escalates fears that must have overwhelmed the people in such terrifying circumstances. Thus Kapuściński completes the gaps left by historical account, which concentrates on major conflicts, royal affairs and large scale processes. In other words, the reporter presents the experience of the individual, common man, unimportant to Herodotus but of immense interest to modern historians.

A characteristic feature of the text, the cascades of questions are also symptoms of a very visibly hermeneutic attitude, which is essentially based on the desire to understand. Kapuściński's writing, thinking and reading of Herodotus and of himself thus reveals some influence of such thinkers as Dilthey, Gadamer, and Ricoeur. Kapuściński follows Paul Ricoeur by making a deliberate effort to interpret not only Herodotus's work but also himself. Ricoeur comments on the issue: "Reflection is not so much a justification of science and duty as a reappropriation of our effort to exist; epistemology is only a part of this broader task: we have to recover the act of existing, the positing of the self, in all the density of its works" (Ricoeur 45). In this way the interpretation of *The History* has a clearly autobiographical character. It reveals identity of the reporter-reader; leads to self-understanding through interpretative effort and regular accumulation of knowledge about other works and writers.

It is important to mention that Kapuściński's contact with Ricoeur's work is confirmed in *Lapidaria*. In volume VI, we find two somehow encyclopaedic paragraphs devoted to hermeneutics:

Hermeneutics — a method of interpreting texts and the world; discussed by Vico, Schleiermacher, Weber, Dilthey, and others. Both Weber and Dilthey talk about understanding as *verstehen*, putting yourself in the shoes of others.

Recently the same problem has been addressed by, e.g. Gadamer and Ricoeur.

Hermeneutics originates in Protestantism, which pays great attention to appropriate reading of the Bible. Schleiermacher suggests multiple consecutive readings, while Dilthey extends hermeneutic procedures onto the interpretation of all human behaviours and creations. (*Lapidarium VI* 84)

I do not want to dwell too much on such comments on hermeneutics (though this passage shows, for instance, a strong tendency the reporter has for precise concise, synthetic formulations), but I believe we may easily assume that also *Travels with Herodotus* does offer a deliberate reference to the hermeneutic approach. The technique seems more convincing if we realize that the writing of *Travels* is mentioned in the very same volume of *Lapidarium VI*. Hermeneutics is contextually relevant to *Travels* as it also touches upon a problem Kapuściński repeatedly deals with in most of his work. Historical distance between us and most creations of culture is — in hermeneutic approach and in much of the reporter's writing — neutralized neither by biographic recreation of authorial intention (biographism) nor the structure of the work (structuralism), but by the interpretation aimed at internalizing the text, breaking down its foreignness that is inherent in the temporal distance. Any other method would involve, as Katarzyna Rosner claims, an assumption that “all creations of antiquity bear witness to the fact that it does not have anything to tell us” (Rosner 265). Hermeneutics, in turn, makes us believe that every text is alive and will speak to us and play its primary cultural role by becoming a tool for the understanding of ourselves. Kapuściński seems to follow a similar interpretative approach. The autobiographical effects of such affinities follow suit.

The historiographic strategy comes close to some theories offered by Hayden White, who discusses discourses which narrate and those which narrativize (White 6). *Travels with Herodotus* strictly follow the second type. It is not, however, a narrativizing discourse without a speaker (as Benveniste would have it<sup>7</sup>), but a specific kind of subjective, personal, sometimes emotional narration. Kapuściński hides his face behind Herodotus or perhaps he uses the figure as a medium. Thus Herodotus becomes Kapuściński's double, a shade and mirror which had been accompanying him in his farthest travels. In some sense, he cannot dispose of him, but the ghost brings him genuine pleasure. Herodotus is not a romantic double — a phantasm indicating a neurotic chasm, fears or emotions of its original “I”<sup>8</sup>. He is kind and friendly with his twin brother, Kapuściński says: “We wandered together for years. And although one travels best alone, I do not think we disturbed each other” (*Travels with Herodotus* 271).

The last paragraph of the book is giving important interpretation frame.

Kapuściński recollects his stay in Halikarnas, which used to be a Greek city, and now is located in Turkey: "I returned to the hotel. At reception, in place of the dolorous boy, stood a young black-eyed Turkish girl. When she saw me, she adjusted her facial expression so that the professional smile meant to invite and tempt tourists was tempered by tradition's injunction always to maintain a serious and indifferent mien toward a strange man" (*Travels with Herodotus* 275). In the light of Kapuściński's whole oeuvre this does not seem a surprising ending at all. An open epilogue aims to encourage the readers to add their own interpretation and empathically follow Kapuściński who throughout the whole book has followed Herodotus so carefully.

What seems especially important in the scene is the fact that the author again uses an imitating gesture. Like Herodotus, he presents his times through the behaviours of people. The girl comes from between two cultures — one, Western, demanding a "professional smile" and another, local and very traditional. This is indeed a telling signature of our multicultural world, with its dialogue and conflict in which different cultures meet. He watches the girl, reads her face, reads his own times. And writes our history — his *The History*.

### Conclusion

It is surprising how different is narrative form of each of Kapuściński's reportages. Three examples I chose to analyse show the evolution of writer's modes of narrating reality he experienced. In each book he seems to give facts different artistic form according to interpretation of reality he wants to present. In the history of Haile Sellasie's rise and fall he intended to see allegory of each autocratic power which profile narration into a parabolic, universal structure of *The Emperor*. Iranian culture and revolution was so complicated and closed for foreign correspondent that he decided to use fragmented form of collage in *Shah of Shahs*. Finally, in the end of his life he chooses more autobiographical form in *Travels with Herodotus* and shows his inspiration in hermeneutics which changes narration into the tool of self-understanding through the unusual, intertextual meeting with Herodotus- friend and The Other.

### Notes

1. Kapuściński wrote about Polish strikes in the text *Notatki z Wybrzeża* in published Warsaw newspaper *Kultura* in 14.10.1980. See also: <http://wyborcza.pl/1,109015,2893854.html>.
2. After *Travels with Herodotus* published in 2004, just after Kapuściński's death the sixth volume of his notes and collection of quotation appeared in print under the title *Lapidarium VI* (2007).
3. Roman Zimand, *Czas normalizacji: szkice czwarte* (London: Aneks, 1989)71.

4. Towards the end of his life, Kapuściński found philosophy of dialogue more and more important. See Ryszard Kapuściński, *The Other* (London: Verso, 2008).
5. The autobiographical aspect of *Travels with Herodotus* has been analyzed by Dorota Kozicka in "Podróż jako czytanie świata. Ryszarda Kapuścińskiego wędrówki z Herodotem" (*Dekada Literacka* 15, 2005, no. 6).
6. See: Michał Głowiński, *Świadectwa i style odbioru*, in *Style odbioru. Szkice o komunikacji literackiej*, ed. Michał Głowiński (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1977)131.
7. Quoted in, *ibid* 7.
8. For more information about the motif of a literary double, see Małgorzata Czermińska, *Autobiografia i powieść*, 30–40.

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# The Experience of Urbanity in Contemporary Polish Literature<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract** The presented reflections constitute an attempt to decipher the 20<sup>th</sup> century history recorded in written statements by one chosen aspect of the (post-)war trauma, that is, architecture and related spatial practices. The objective of this articles is to depict main models of perception and the description of urban spaces, as well as models recorded in contemporary literature and those that are a textual formula for the experience exceeding beyond the architectural-aesthetic dimension towards a political, cultural and social reflection. The reading of contemporary Polish literature leads through a matter from which the textual description of cities is built to an actual matter — to the building material of both the 20<sup>th</sup> century architectural and historical landscapes. The culture of burghers, which has introduced the tenement house life (including that fictional) into the Polish experience so late and for such a short time, has soon found an epilogue in the shape of a brick torn from a building and the (anti-) aesthetics of post-war ruins. The trauma (also the spatial one), the annihilation of cities, including the most significant — Warsaw, is verbalized in anti-fictional forms of anti-diaries, whose authors often are residents of symbols of reconstruction, socialism, and oblivion, erected after the war — districts of slab block housing estates that “block” with their cement weight the access to what is hidden beneath the lawns — the trauma. The author proposes to specify out of the former century three types of urban perception, treated here conventionally, whose symbols are: a tenement house/ruin and the construction material characteristic of Polish dilapidated buildings, i.e., a brick; post-war complexes, both institutional and residential, constructed from giant concrete slabs; lastly, stones of Western Europe seen with the eyes of a “barbarian” from beyond the Iron Curtain — a synonym of aesthetization of the observed reality.

**Key Word** surban studies; history of architecture; urban anthropology; the 20<sup>th</sup> century experience; contemporary Polish prose

If one was to seek a synthetizing perspective for the reading of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Polish

literature, he would consider as the most significant matter World War II with the resulting tragedies, among all, the Holocaust, but also with its political and spatial consequences, such as totalitarianism and deportations. All the remaining issues accompanying a reading of written statements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century experience are connected in one way or another to the historical borderline of war that ends the long 19<sup>th</sup> century. This experience affects all subsequent models of creating identity narrations in Polish literature. This paper is an attempt to decipher the 20<sup>th</sup> century history recorded in the written statements through one chosen aspect of the (post) war trauma, that is, architecture and related spatial practices, the latter being used here in the sense given by Michel de Certeau. “Spatial practices” are therefore all sorts of actions taken by a passer-by in a city, individual “[...] deviations relative to a sort of ‘literal meaning’ defined by the urbanistic system” (Certeau 100, Lefebvre). Obviously, a synthetic view on the record of the rich historical experience of such an exceptional time as the former century is beyond both the competencies of the author and the formula of a singular depiction. Hence, the objective shall be the depiction of main models of perception and the description of urban spaces, models captured in contemporary literature and those that are a textual formula for an experience that exceeds beyond the architectural-aesthetic dimension towards a political, cultural and social reflection.

The most thorough combination of architecture and the concept history can be found in works of Walter Benjamin. His monumental and never-finished book titled *The Arcades Project*, a summa of Paris as the capital of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is above all an application of a particular method of studying the past based on deciphering the city like a historical record. Benjamin “tried to represent the nineteenth century as ‘commentary on a reality’ [...], rather than construing it in the abstract. We can put together a kind of ‘catalogue of themes’ from the ‘First Sketches’ about the *Passagen-Werk*. The catalogue shows us what the work was supposed to treat at this level: streets and warehouses, panoramas, world exhibitions, types of lighting [...]” (Tiedemann 932), reading from those petite elements of urban space the spatial practices characteristic of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Parisians. Analogously, one could begin reading the 20<sup>th</sup> century texts with a “catalogue of themes” classified according to modifications of the urban landscape, each time connected to the political-social changes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century experience. Drawing inspiration from the quite peculiar method of the author of *The Arcades Project*, one could specify in the former century at least three types of urban perception,<sup>2</sup> treated schematically in the book. Their symbols are: a tenement house/ruin and the construction material characteristic of Polish dilapidated buildings, i.e., a brick; post-war complexes, both institutional and residential, constructed from giant concrete slabs; lastly, stones of Western Europe

seen with the eyes of a “barbarian” from beyond the iron curtain — a synonym of aesthetization of the observed reality. This classification is not precise, and due to its general and “Marxist” character (on the part of the connection between the matter and the cultural text formed out of it), it ought to be perceived solely as a reading metaphor. Therefore, when exploring this risky analogy between urban building material and urban literature one should note not only the abundance of urban subject in modernist writings,<sup>3</sup> the experience of the urban space regarded as a kind of a lens that concentrates within itself matters far beyond the narrow “motivology,” but also from the spirit of the 19<sup>th</sup> century observation of how the social aspect influences the subject’s identity.

Supposedly, the most famous description of a space that is an equivalent of a drama taking place within it begins de Balzac’s *Père Goriot*:

The lodging-house is Mme. Vauquer’s own property. It is still standing in the lower end of the Rue Nueve-Sainte-Genevieve, just where the road slopes so sharply down to the Rue de l’Arbalete, that wheeled traffic seldom passes that way, because it is so stony and steep. This position is sufficient to account for the silence prevalent in the streets shut in between the dome of the Pantheon and the dome of the Val-de-Grace, two conspicuous public buildings which give a yellowish tone to the landscape and darken the whole district that lies beneath the shadow of their leaden-hued cupolas. [...] The most heedless passer-by feels the depressing influences of a place where the sound of wheels creates a sensation; there is a grim look about the houses, a suggestion of a jail about those high garden walls. A Parisian straying into a suburb apparently composed of lodging-houses and public institutions would see poverty and dullness, old age lying down to die, and joyous youth condemned to drudgery. It is the ugliest quarter of Paris, and, it may be added, the least known. (Balzac 6)

This well-known passage, a description of a Parisian space, in fact, not only does build a background for the forthcoming events, but also becomes a medium of the symbolization of the city, a unit of the Balzacian Parisian text.<sup>4</sup> The separation of a borough out from the city center, color and light manipulation, the topology of death, the juxtaposition of the ill “texture” of residential buildings with the monumentality of pantheons — all this enables an interpretative movement from the urban space functioning as a local color, carried here by description, to the analysis of textual records of the urban experience, with a novel as its equivalent. This genre comes alive together with the bourgeois lifestyle, the problems of a tenement house space, the urban experience and its influence on the subject. Analyzing the bourgeois

groundings of the birth of the genre in *Puissances du roman* Roger Caillois states, that there is only one subject of a novel, namely, a man's life in a big city and his realization of limitations resulting from the social character of such life (Caillois 24–26, Lukács). Hence, a search for an appropriate discursive form for rendering the situation of being-in-the-city occurs here, which leads to an analogy between urbanity and a literary genre, that is, a novel. If, metaphorically, we would consider a novel a textual equivalent of a bourgeois tenement house, a question regarding the 20<sup>th</sup> century architectural forms and the corresponding models of literariness arises. This broad problem shall be presented here on representative, yet individual examples that certainly would not exhaust the matter, on instances close in their nature to models of literary spatial depictions schematized for the study.

### **Brick — the Figure of Ruins**

In the light of the Balzac's novel quoted above the difference between spatial practices of pre- and post-war times is even more vivid. If anchoring is the most desired spatial experience, understood as being in a given place separated from the space (according to Tuan, "When space feels thoroughly familiar to us, it has become place" — Tuan 73), offering a feeling of safety, then the basic spatial situation of the time of war is dislocation (also in the meaning of war and post-war deportations, refugeeism, forced and voluntary emigration, etc.). Returning to the analogy between urban building material and a literary text depicted in the introduction, if a novel was a form of urban modernity coming to life, then the experience of World War II invalidates this genre in its original form. Balzac writes *Père Goriot* in 1835, whereas in Polish literature almost fifty years later, that is, in 1897–1898, Władysław Reymont publishes *Ziemia obiecana* [*The Promised Land*] — an anti-urban image of Łódź, the industrial-financial center in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a result of a search for a form, that carries this subject of urban experience. No later than in 1935 Zofia Nałkowska writes *Granica* [*The Frontier*] — a modern novel employing the Balzacian-like figure of a tenement house as a spatial sign of social problems in the interwar period. The publication of *Granica* and the events described in Miron Białoszewski's *Pamiętnik z powstania warszawskiego* [*A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising*] are separated only by 9 years. This text, though written in a considerable period of time after the war, is a testimony of life in the war-torn Warsaw of 1944.<sup>5</sup> Białoszewski, who witnessed the Warsaw Uprising, wrote his *memoir* no sooner, than in 1967. According to Mieczysław Dąbrowski, who called this work "a late war speech," one may assume, that the texts that have not emerged soon after the war and which depict certain events (the uprising in the Białoszewski's work, the life of the Varsovian ghetto in Wojdowski's, the Ukrainian-Polish conflicts in Odojewski's) aim to tell it in a special

way, different to that of all the other texts written just after the war (Borowski, Nałkowska, Herling-Grudziński). This “special way,” as strongly indicated by Białoszewski, pertains to language. Each of the three mentioned writers create his own kind of a “final dictionary” (Dąbrowski 327–238). In the Białoszewski’s work this dictionary is based on urbanism, the grammar of the city. The “finality” is fulfilled in the topography, the deconstruction of map as a spatial dictionary. The space of middle-class tenement houses and working-class yards, present in Nałkowska’s works, transforms in the eyes of the narrator of *Pamiętnik z powstania warszawskiego* into a ruin. In the course of bombardments a bourgeois tenement house is replaced with a singular brick, and the novel genre — with anti-categorical forms that are an attempt to find a form for the description of an untold trauma. A ruin becomes the basic spatial figure of the times of war, which signifies on both urban and textual level the collapse of the world of tenement houses.

A particular fascination with the material which the pre-war city was built from, not revealed until the cataclysm, is characteristic of the literature that employs the anti-aesthetics of ruins. An analysis of the rubble as a visible signs of the former life makes one read the city on the one hand as a body that was severely wounded in the war, and on the other — in a textual metaphor — as a palimpsest, whose individual layers of text conceal former inscriptions.

Białoszewski’s Warsaw is indeed a ruin, a rubble full of secrets, both materialistic and historical. The former reveal the matter Warsaw was built from, the latter show the layers of its past. The destruction of war discloses a blend of these two substances, therefore Białoszewski uses a repetition when listing planks, bricks, reeds, the Saxons, the House of Vasa, etc. (Janion 120). The construction materials juxtaposed with the figures of Polish kings reveal this odd dependence between the building material of history in its material dimension, urban experience, and cultural record. The decay of historical buildings becomes in this context a ruin not only in the urban sense, but also in the symbolic sense — a ruin of the history of the city, the nation, and the individual who is experiencing it.

In *Pamiętnik z powstania warszawskiego* (Białoszewski 55) not only the city and its building material undergoes a deterioration, but also the literary form. The entire work is a continuous swerving, back and forth, among ruins. Białoszewski’s book is a manifesto of the inability to exist of a rhetorical order when the accompanying spatial order is annihilated. Białoszewski depicts then not only the chain of events, swiftly altering scenes, that — having been reconstructed in the reception — form the history of the Warsaw Uprising, but also creates a sequence of places that do not share any simple causal connection. A matter decomposition finds its equivalent in the syntax of ruins, the substitution of sentences with elliptical constructions and intentional

grammar distortion.

Białoszewski reminds, that the Church of St. Lazarus in Warsaw (just like many other buildings in the capital he writes about) exists only in reconstruction, without its unique character, transforming into a palimpsest covered with numerous layers of the history of Warsaw. The heterotopias (Foucault 22–27), i.e., the city torn by war, another different space where rules characteristic of other places blending right into the linguistic order are not binding, is in Białoszewski's writing also the inability of a grammatical order to exist. Here the spatial aspect (dominated by history) is most tightly bound to the aspects of discourse and identity. Piles of bricks are fascinating as an element of the pre-war world, but also as a building material of the subject's identity. A ruin is a wound on the city's flesh and a hole in the autobiographical narration of its inhabitants at the same time. In the impossible novels of the time of war description boils down to talking the trauma away. Lawns in the city center conceal rubble (Baranowska, *Pamiętnik mistyczny* 83), of which one may read in *Pamiętnik mistyczny [A Mystic Diary]* of a Varsovian poet Małgorzata Baranowska, who gives the post-war childhood experience a unique poetic form. The difference between ruins and rubble is brilliantly depicted in her writing. Ruins are a relic, a keepsake with its own philosophy and aesthetics. Artificial ruins used to be built in romantic parks due to a lack of the true ones, providing picturesqueness and Gothic atmosphere. However, no one has ever constructed rubble, it was solely a result of demolition, abundant not in upper-class parks, but on every ordinary street of the post-war childhood (Czerwińska 175).

The figure of a post-war ruin reveals its aesthetic potential, based not on artificiality, but on the traumatic reality of the material, which unmask the city, suddenly exposing the shameful urban anatomy, unveils the scandal of a historical break between the past and the present. Lastly, it deprives the subject of the space-time grounds. One cannot reside in a heterotopia, no map is able to depict the piles of bricks. Still, an aesthetic event results also from a breaking of the linearity, first of all, in the sense, that — as Baranowska notices — a person is unable to comprehend the present events when facing a demolished stairway because of the lack of association between individual elements, the lack of purpose, so favored in the linear time (Baranowska, *Pamiętnik mistyczny* 70–71). Second of all, a brick turns into a building material of a new spatial organism, and this material recycling provokes a thought of the alternative of history, the coexistence of temporal layers in the urban space. Other Varsovian writer, Magdalena Tulli, realizes this phantasm in a suggestive spatial image of attentive citizens of Warsaw, who must pay attention not to sit on a formerly demolished balcony, not to hit long gone walls with their heads in longing for what has passed (Tulli 78–79). Lastly, to name one more contemporary

attempt to rework the Varsovian trauma in Polish literature, bricks come to life, becoming a history medium. In Elżbieta Janicka's *Festung Warschau* one may find a passage significant in the context of these "urban-constructional" reflections, pertaining to a wall separating the Varsovian ghetto from the "Aryan" part:

It's hard to keep up with the wall [a wall as a construction characteristic of the times of war — Author's note]. Notices in three languages, two of which I don't understand. Plates. Signboards. Made of brass or other kind of bronze. On polyurethane. On acrylic glass [bronze as a monument material juxtaposed with modern and functional acrylic glass — Author's note]. Something appears. Something else disappears. Two bricks — probably from Bogumił Schneider's brickyard in Jelonki [a district of Warsaw — Translator's note] — taken by air to the Holocaust Museum in Washington. To give authentic power to its permanent exhibition. (Janicka 36)

### **Concrete — the Figure of Amnesia**

While in the 1970s Miron Białoszewski recalled the dust from the demolished Warsaw crunching between his teeth, according to Baranowska (Baranowska, *Wracam na Ochotę*. 11), he would be happy to eat a Varsovian brick — one cannot grow attached to a concrete slab. It is noteworthy, that it was the author of *Pamiętnik z powstania warszawskiego* who was one of the first Polish poets of bleak block housing estates trying to find the form for a life lived within a huge slab.<sup>6</sup> The latter, compared to a brick as a building material of the pre-war city and the ruins of the times of a cataclysm, becomes in the official discourse of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a symbol of the post-war socialistic reconstruction of the People's Republic of Poland, whereas in the literary register — a sign of the urban and cultural amnesia and unification. According to Leder, the slab block buildings are an omnipresent element of the Varsovian landscape. Seemingly exuberant, they are in fact rickety in their frugal choice of materials. A question arises: what are these buildings actually blocking? Without them, the city would be filled with a void, unhealed ruins confined here and there with preserved constructions (Leder as cited in: Janicka 35–36, fn. 36). The slab block constructions block — that is, conceal — the trauma, yet it is a flimsy architectural bandage that does not heal, but only covers the festering spatial wound instead. The act of pouring concrete onto former ruins and erecting on such a foundation new cultural-spatial forms had to end up in a psychological disaster, an urban neurosis.<sup>7</sup> After all, a psycho-analytical reading of this kind (and especially that of Warsaw) eventually revolts in the post-memorial output of young authors, where

in the foundations of slab block estates — against the “blocking” force of concrete — the memory of the war is stored. Forgetting is just one of the aspects connected with the experience of the post-war concrete space. Brodski used to compare the author of the idea of the machine-like residential buildings to Luftwaffe regarding the losses caused in the European space. Apart from the aesthetics, concrete binds in the cultural study with the discourse of power (the association with the Polish phraseological construct *beton partyjny*, literally “partisan concrete,” is not accidental), which denotes a fraction of a ruling party exceptionally resistant to changes). Architectural wounds on the city’s flesh as a souvenir of the time of socialistic dependence prevail in the space of many Polish cities, especially vivid within the boundaries of block housing estates and in the very shape of public buildings. A notable example in the Polish context is the Palace of Culture and Science.<sup>8</sup> Tadeusz Konwicki’s *A Minor Apocalypse*, published in 1979, begins with a description of the Palace of Culture which is depicted as an enormous spiked building that used to awake fear, hatred and horror in the citizens, yet, after long years is nothing more but a forgotten “barrack” devoured by mold and fungus, an old skeleton. The author notes the construction to be courting him with a repulsive intimacy.

The novel, a political grotesque on the 1970s, an apocalyptic vision of the moral downfall of the nation, is also a record of imprisoning power inside the city, as the figure of Warsaw turns out to be for Konwicki particularly useful for both observing and discoursing individual and collective identities, and seeking forms pertaining to phenomena of the Polish dependence (also architectural) to the Soviet Union. With his fictional journey through the city, Konwicki’s protagonist, seduced by a disgustingly cozy “barrack,” aiming to self-immolate in a gesture of a political rebellion gives a proof of the inability to hide from the unwanted and questionable coquettishness of the statue of confinement, overseeing the main character’s horizontal path. The private topography is here entirely owned by the collective topography. The spatial practices of the Warsaw of the 1970s that determine the nature of the city are manifestos, processions and parades, limousines of the Polish United Workers’ Party on the Varsovian streets. The invasion of authorities takes place also in the audiosphere — megaphones, “groaning” bands and military drums become the sounds of Warsaw. In reference to the notion of “soundscape” popularized by R. Murray Schafer, one may additionally reflect on the exceptionality of this “sound-landscape” in a city determined by politics. In the Schafer’s concept, “[...] soundmark is derived from landmark and refers to a community sound which is unique or possesses qualities which make it specialty regarded or noticed by the people in that community” (Schafer 10). Though in Schafer’s reflections sound-marks constitute sounds worth recording and preserving, a cultural legacy of a community, in case of a totalitarian

city these signals sent and received by the protagonist become yet another sign of the oppression, a sound signal at this time. Though the subject of a sound experience of a political oppression (after all, used also in the popular culture in the form of already iconized megaphones) deserves a more scrupulous insight, which cannot be provided by the short form of this article. It is important, though, that the Varsovian soundscape in Konwicki's vision harmonizes with the decomposition of the topography, the totalitarization of the urban map. In a city subordinate to the discourse of authorities and the drunken majority of the society, any individual spatial practice, any swerve from the main road towards the less trodden paths, one's own places, become impossible. Konwicki's protagonist does not have any such private place, being shown by guides to the place of self-immolation. Interesting is, that in the context of the above, the individual piece of space found by the protagonist required for the intimacy of a sexual contact is a concrete ruin. The main character compares remains of walls and ceilings in a devastated building of editorial office to a creation of a romantic architect (Konwicki 138).

Konwicki returns in his depiction to the 19<sup>th</sup> century aesthetics of ruins. The concrete space in *Mala apokalipsa* [*A Minor Apocalypse*] is condemned, contrary to the properties of the building material, to be decomposed — fungus and mold cover the Palace of Culture, and both Warsaw and its citizens, and lastly — the entire nation represented by the inhabitants of the capital — are decrepit in the novel. The apocalypse stands for returning to the biological forms, razing to the ground, destroying the cement. It does not bring, however, any hope in the story for bringing the memory back, reaching to its deep-settled layers hidden beneath the foundations of buildings. The silhouette of the Palace, like a Big Brother, traces the citizens, visible from every spot in the space — it does not allow them to forget about the eye of the authority and to remember the other past of Warsaw, meaningfully inexistent in the novel. After all, the figure of concrete as an end of history is also amplified in the novel by the construction of time, as none of its characters knows the current date. Konwicki's protagonist compares the Palace of Culture, his future “tomb,” to a gigantic fish whose stone scales are flaking off. As Adrian Forty notes in his monograph *Urban Memory. History and amnesia in the modern city*, “[...] concrete has [...] been so generally associated with the erasure and obliteration of memory. Concrete makes everywhere the same. It cuts people off from their past, from nature, from each other. This sense that concrete is a symptom, if not a cause, of alienation has been around since the early 1960s, if not for longer. Take, for example, J-L. Godard's 1966 film *Two or Three Things I Know about Her*, in which lingering shots of concrete being poured on the construction of the Paris périphérique are accompanied on the sound track by musings on the city's loss of meaningfulness, its

demise as a communicative medium. Or another French example, Henri Lefebvre's 1960 essay *Notes on The New Town*, where, despite the absolute clarity and legibility of the functions of the concrete buildings, the result is an utterly impoverished environment: "Here I cannot read the centuries, not time, nor the past, nor what is possible. [...]. All this is nicely summed up by graffiti sprayed onto a multi storey car park in Marburg in Germany in 1992–3 — 'Beton ist Koma', 'Concrete is Coma'" (Forty 75). In his grotesque-apocalyptic vision Konwicki leaves no illusion as to the possibility of waking up.

### **Stones of the West**

Finding in Polish literature a writer who would combine the visible and the form in which it is described (as well as equally sensitive to the building material of the city, its texture, color and influence made on the passer-by) as firmly as Zbigniew Herbert does, is difficult. While Warsaw is asleep under the ideological concrete quilt, that is deconstructed in Konwicki's vision, Herbert seeks the roots of Europeanness, reflecting in the cities of France, Greece, the Netherlands and Italy upon the matter the culture of Europe is built from. In a collection of essays by Herbert titled *Barbarzyńca w ogrodzie* [*Barbarian in the garden*], published in 1962, the author states, that the preparation of the mortar, the understanding of brick walls and the proper painting process are all of equal importance. The undercoat lime has to be cured for a long time before it may be mixed with washed fluvial sand. Meanwhile, lime is being warmed in the sun to be further mixed with colors (Herbert 70). The work is based on noting the experience of visiting places and depicting their histories, filling the gaps left by chroniclers with hypotheses, suppositions, interpretations, micro-narrations of a passer-by that fictionalize the history, gain a great *fortia de expression* owing to the replacement of the strictness of academicians with a detail spotted by a *flâneur* — a leisurely passer-by introduced into the literature in Baudelaire's *The Painter of Modern Life*.

A *flâneur* is, shortly speaking, a saunterer who slowly (the pace plays an important role here) strolls the city streets with no purpose, making insightful observations of the urban space and turning them into art — an art of designing and aesthetizing the encountered individuals, situations, eavesdropped conversations and views recorded in the *flâneur's* memory. The history of this anthropological figure is long and became overgrown with numerous interpretations (see, for instance, Benjamin 1999, Benjamin 2002, Hessel, Baudelaire, Buck-Morss). Herbert himself uses the term *flanowanie* [*flâneuring*] to refer to the manner of perceiving European cities characteristic of his works (and of his many continuators in Polish literature<sup>9</sup>), the manner whose principal feature is the aesthetization prevailing in Herbert's

writings. As an intrinsic and lasting value, art determines the spatial experience in the Herbert's essay writing, which, hence, may be compared to textual arcades (Szalewska) — a genre congruous to this type of city-experiencing, that is a discursive equivalent of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Parisian arcades — the natural habitat of leisurely passers-by. The city exists here as a space dominated by the museums, cathedrals, monuments and paintings present within it. When depicting the town of Orvieto, a “supplement” to the cathedral (Herbert, *Barbarzyńca w ogrodzie* 67), Herbert notices, that even when circling around the town for a long time, the feeling of having the cathedral right behind your back, its overwhelming presence, erodes all other feelings (Herbert, *Barbarzyńca w ogrodzie* 67). This over-existence of art overlaps the landscape, diminishes the city to a role of a background, the space seems to be a Benjaminian aura enabling us to see the work of art in its natural context. However, the city transforms into an object of aesthetic experience not only owing to the beauty borrowed from museums; as an architectural group of buildings, the city may become a work of art itself, whose construction material is also included in the contemplation process. It requires the element of individuality that decides on the unique character of the city, expressed in Herbert's writing through colors and the specificity of the material. In his opinion Italian cities and towns differ in color: Assisi is associated with the light red color of sandstone, Rome with a terracotta on a green background, whereas Orvieto is of a golden-brown color. This realization comes to mind when standing in front of the Roman-Gothic Palazzo del Popolo — a huge matt copper cube with a wide balcony, flat roof bristled with merlons and beautiful windows with columns and volutes, which hides a fiery memory of lava inside (Herbert, *Barbarzyńca w ogrodzie* 66–67).

Through the act of transforming the city into a work of art<sup>10</sup> a history spatialization takes place — the history of art and the history of the city, whose following depictions in arcades remind of notes in a *flâneur's* private guide book. The aesthetization of the city is here a contribution to historiosophical reflections, which prepares a foundation for equally subjective history writing by organizing and selecting the space. Here a specificity of textual arcades as a different essayist genre (popular in Polish literature) of a modernist form shows, as arcades are the written form of the city understood as an experience of history. Hence the figure of a museum, particularly favored by Herbert. The museum organizes discourse in arcades on the level of a description of a stroll in the urban space, determining the subject matter (a visit in a museum as a subject, a textogenic factor) and the form (the aesthetization of the urban space as a determinant of the construction of descriptive pieces of text, an ekphrasis, portraits, biographies and other micro-genres of historical narration). His power is best visible when he moves from the level of description, a

rhetoric ekphrasis, to a factor determining the essayist's world view. Herbert admits, that it is hard not to digress into the subject of legends and history when writing on the landscape (Herbert, *Labirynt nad morzem* 82), to verbalize the liking of the past, characteristic of the leisurely passers-by. The historical narration is one of the basic modalities of the discourse in textual arcades, in Herbert's essay writing strongly vivid in the search for the stone, depicted along the lines of a romantic ruin, that keeps within a trace of the European past (*n.b.* different to the aesthetics of the Varsovian rubble). One of the continuators of Herbert's idiom, Wojciech Karpiński visualizes in his collection of essays *Pamięć Włoch* [*The Memory of Italy*] invisible strings that connect all people of the European culture with the stones of Rome (Karpiński 190). Herbert's interest in the building material of Italian cities and French cathedrals is an escape from both Poland — the ruin of the times of war — and Poland — the concrete of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is, however, also an escape from the present into the aesthetization, a search for his own genealogy, the European birth certificate of a "barbarian." In a post-mortem publication (2000) titled *Labirynt nad morzem* [*Labyrinth by the Sea*] Herbert writes about Greece, recalling his eagerness to wipe off the dust of history, when the boundaries of time, the past and the present began to blur, since only in this two elements a man can live a full life (Herbert, *Labirynt nad morzem* 54–55). Herbert aesthetizes the matter, swallows Cretan stones, thereby bearing witness to the experience Białoszewski dreamed of, thinking of the act of eating bricks, and which Konwicki's protagonist could not have experienced in the concrete Warsaw.

Reading contemporary Polish literature through the matter that forms the textual description of cities leads to the real matter, the building material of the 20<sup>th</sup> century landscape, architectural and historical, at the same time. The bourgeois culture, which has introduced to the Polish experience the life (also fictional) in a tenement house so late and for such a short period of time, has soon found an epilogue in the form of a brick torn from a building wall and the (anti-)aesthetics of a post-war ruin. The trauma, also the spatial one, the annihilation of cities, including the most significant — Warsaw, is verbalized in anti-fictional forms of anti-diaries whose authors often reside in the symbols of reconstruction, socialism and oblivion, erected after the war — districts of slab block housing estates "block" with their cement weight the access to what is hidden beneath the lawns — traumas, that yet start to get "to speak" in the more contemporary literature of these residential buildings (*nb.* it is a voice of authors from a generation that finds developments of this kind a natural environment of its daily existence). While Konwicki sees in the apocalyptic vision a moral downfall visualized in the physical decay of the city, numerous writers retreat from the concrete

coma into the illusion of the inaccessible matter or grieve after that nonexistent one. Herbert's essay writing, with his files of aesthetization of the reality and the search for the universals among the Mediterranean stones is just one of many aspects of this architectural escapism. Other dilemmas are introduced to the above context by elegies for the lost cities, filled with a longing for the cobblestones and bricks of Lviv and Vilnius (numerous other examples of these cities can be found in Polish literature, just to mention Czesław Miłosz's *Zaczynając od moich ulic* [*Beginning with My Streets*], Józef Wittlin's *Mój Lwów* [*My Lviv*], and many, many others). To sum up, in order to complete the complicated image of the construction material circulating in the palimpsest-like space of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the reverse side of the elegy for the lost Kresy ought to be recalled, i.e., the aesthetically disturbing surprise of the encounter with the German matter in the prose of Gdańsk, Szczecin or Silesia in Polish literature, the search for one's own spatial practices on the traces of those of the former inhabitants. Not discussing these threads well-identified in the Polish literary studies, I shall end these architectural-literary analyses with a quotation from a text highly significant in this view, *Dwa miasta* [*Two cities*] of Adam Zagajewski, in which the lost matter of Lviv touches upon the alien matter of Gliwice, and where the childhood spatial experience and the emigrational spatial experience of the adult writer overlap: "[...] I was thoroughly convinced, that when walking on the streets of Gliwice, among Prussian Art Nouveau tenement houses ornamented with heavy granite caryatids, I am actually there. Still, my grandfather, though walking by my side, at that very moment used to move to Lviv. I was strolling the streets of Gliwice, whereas he was strolling the streets of Lviv" (Zagajewski 15), writes Zagajewski, sitting "[...] at the table in a room on the sixth floor of a monstrous concrete slab block building situated on the outskirts of Paris" (Zagajewski 46).

## Notes

1. The publication was supported by the Foundation for Polish Science.
2. See also perception models of a city in contemporary Polish literature, based on other classification (connected with the poetics of description) — perceptual poetics, constructivist poetics, parabolic poetics, constructivist poetics, parabolic poetics, and social documents — Rybicka.
3. One does not have to look far for its representation — it is enough to instance the canon of texts created at that time. Cities like Paris, Vienna, Prague, London and New York have become protagonists of modernity, whereas their heroic history written down by accurate chroniclers — Apollinaire, Musil, Whitman, Kafka, and many others — not limiting themselves to the role of a building material of the literary space, they turn into a mirror of an anthropological identification. In one of numerous (now) works reflecting upon the relations between modernism and the city titled

*Unreal City: Urban Experience in Modern European Literature and Art* one may read, “For this identification, the facts of development of the city into the metropolis are basic. We can see how certain themes in art and thought developed as specific responses to the new and expanding kinds of nineteenth-century city and then, [...], see how these went through a variety of actual artistic transformations, supported by newly offered (and competitive) aesthetic universals, in certain metropolitan conditions of the early twentieth century: the moment of ‘modern art’” — Timms, Kelley (15). Aragon’s *Le Paysan de Paris*, Mann’s *Death in Venice*, Rilke’s *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, the Prague of Kafka’s writings, the Dublin of Joyce, and many other examples of modern literature testify with no doubt to the promotion of the city to one of the most important issues of modernist and subsequent literature.

4. I have used here the term “Parisian text” in analogy to the Saint Petersburg of Vladimir Toporov, according to whom it might be defined as a particular heterogeneous text of a particular meaning allowing a particular sign system, realized in the text, to be reconstructed. A text that preserves signs of its extra-textual substrate and which, in turn, requires from the user an ability to regenerate a bond with the external sphere, with extra-textual phenomena for each and every “node” of the Petersburgian text. Hence, the text teaches how to move beyond its boundaries. This bond keeps alive the very Petersburgian text and those, to whom it appeared as a reality that has not been reduced to the objective-material level (Toporov 73).

5. The Warsaw Uprising began on August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1944 and was directed against both the German occupiers and the Stalin’s political game. It is difficult to summarize the causes, the course and results of the Varsovian revolt in such a short footnote form. The uprising, which fell on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1944, has brought massive casualties and political loss, and has turned Warsaw into ruins. However, it has also given birth to disputes over the sense of initiating armed struggle, as well as artistic realizations of the theme of uprising, which has become a popular symbol of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Polish history. Warsaw, a city-wound after the historical experiences of the former century, has come to take on particular significance. The losses suffered by the city during the struggle grew over the post-rising period. According to Davies, districts on the west coast of Vistula were being devastated for over three months after the fall of the rising. Despite the fact, that every single man was needed in the desperate defense of the Reich, thousands of Nazi soldier were carrying orders of *Führer* in the ruins of Warsaw in order to wipe it off the surface of the earth. Varsovian buildings and monuments, though already plundered and ruined, were further destroyed with flamethrowers, dynamite and heavy equipment, one by one (Davis 573). Walter Benjamin wanted to describe Paris building after building, street after street — *rue par rue, maison par maison*, similarly Białoszewski recorded the disappearance of Warsaw.

6. A giant slab is a constructional element used in the building of, most of all, slab block residential buildings. Its characteristic feature, that influences also the aesthetics of residential complexes built in this way, is modularity, since it is a prefabricated element applicable in multiplication. Giant slab buildings were raised in Poland from the 1950s to the 1990s (the peak of its popularity being the

1970s), transforming urban landscapes into deserts of concrete facades (though today renovated and aesthetized), which have become a symbol of the proverbial grayness of the time of the People's Republic of Poland, understood in a political, social, economic and aesthetic sense). Miron Białoszewski sought that poetic form for expressing spatial experiences of living in such a huge slab, and, longing for the brick, created an "epic poem" of the *mrówkowiec*, as he used to call a slab block building, in form of numerous short compositions (especially, *Chamowie* and *Odczepić się*).

7. I make use here of Andrzej Leder's term (Leder), who finds in psychoanalysis an inspiration for reading the space, where an irritatingly non-existent artifact overgrows with events that are to connect its nonexistence with the surrounding structure. Yet, since in Warsaw this structure is exceptionally weak, it is the phenomena formed out of the posttraumatic, post-war fever, that give the space its character. They are, literally, a cover of the concealed memory of trauma concealed after a trauma (Janicka 21–22, fn. 5).

8. The Palace of Culture and Science is situated in the very heart of Warsaw at Parade Square (*Plac Defilad*), overlooking the capital both in terms of architecture and symbolism, being a characteristic element of the Varsovian skyline. Elevated as a gift from the Soviet nation, initially it was named after Joseph Stalin. The construction works were completed in 1955. To this day the building provokes many disputes between the enthusiasts of its demolition as a symbol of Poland's dependence to the USSR and those regarding the Palace a historic building worth preserving (since the Palace has been listed on the Register of Historic Monuments in 2007, it is, therefore, a historic monument).

9. The idiom of the Herbert's stroll reminds of essays of such writers like, among others, Adam Zagajewski, Jerzy Stempowski, Józef Wittlin, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, Czesław Miłosz, Mieczysław Jastrun, Zygmunt Kubiak, or Jan Parandowski.

10. To learn more on this subject, see: aesthetic analysis of a city as a work of art — a project by Georg Simmel — Simmel (301–310).

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# Topographical Turn in Contemporary Polish Literature in the Works by Erwin Kruk, Andrzej Stasiuk and Jerzy Limon

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**Abstract** The analysis concerns the experience of geographical space as a text which allows a reading of the time and experience of a particular place, and in which traces of the past initiate the work of memory. Interpreting works on space and place demands we bring in the interdisciplinary contexts of humanistic geography and geo-history and employ the tools of geo-poetics. I present the oeuvre of three writers. Erwin Kruk narrates the post-war identity drama in the Masuria and the traces of its belonging to Germany. Kruk contemplates individual memory confronted with geographical space seen as historical text. Andrzej Stasiuk's descriptions of traveling in Eastern Europe as newly divided by borders belong to the poetics of post-colonialism. Jerzy Limon presents the space of the city of Sopot as a palimpsest, read by the narrator as a historian-archeologist.

**Key words** geopoetics; geographic space; post-colonialism; memory; topographical turn

The analysis concerns the experience of geographical space as a text which allows a reading of the time and experience of a particular place, and in which traces of the past initiate the work of memory. Interpreting works on space and place demands that we bring in the interdisciplinary contexts of humanistic geography and geo-history and employ the tools of geo-poetics. In this paper, I examine the oeuvre of three writers. Erwin Kruk narrates the post-war identity drama in the Masuria and the traces of its belonging to Germany. Kruk contemplates individual memory confronted with geographical space seen as historical text. Andrzej Stasiuk's descriptions of traveling in Eastern Europe as newly divided by borders belong to the poetics of post-colonialism. Jerzy Limon presents the space of the city of Sopot as a palimpsest, read by the narrator as a historian-archeologist.

Erwin Kruk (born in 1942) is an author who makes a subject of his poetic and prosaic reflection Mazury, a region situated in north-eastern Poland. The writer was born during World War II on the territory of present day Mazury, which, since the 13<sup>th</sup> century, when as a result of Teutonic Knights' wars, the Baltic people of Prussians was annihilated, has been a disputed territory. For four centuries masters of this land were either Germans or Poles, and from the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century to World War II this territory, called East Prussia, belonged to the German Reich. After the war it returned into the borders of Poland. Thus, the Masurian land is to Kruk, who calls himself "the last of the tribe of Old Prussians," a space of searching and confirming identity, both that individual and that collective. Although the writer remained on the land of ancestors, he lives with a feeling of being on exile from the world of their culture, where signs of both the Old Prussian and German past have been erased. In his writing he takes a task of deciphering the past in the Masurian space, the past erased from the landscape as a result of the post-war Polish policy of integration and unification.

Kruk's writings, for instance collections of poetry: *Rysowane z pamięci* (*Drawn out of memory* 1963), *Zapisy powrotu* (*Records of a return* 1969), *Moja Północ* (*My North* 1977) as well as novels: *Drogami o świcie* (*Ways at dawn* 1967), *Kronika z Mazur* (*A chronicle from Masuria* 1989) make up a literary interpretation of the ideas that underlie the theoretical considerations of Karl Schlögel, presented in his book *Im Raume lesen wir die Zeit. Über Zivilisationsgeschichte und Geopolitik* (2003). Schlögel is interested in reflection on history in its spatial aspect, since history happens not only in time but also in space, which is the scenery of events. He understands the human history as inscribed in space and this approach is a basis of the discipline proposed by him, which is topocentric historiography.

Masuria is to Kruk a space in which subsequent generations of his ancestors have left their trace but the war and post-war policy erased the traces of the Masurian autochthons' presence there. Thus, in the Masurian landscape he looks for traces of his ancestors' presence, and his writing becomes a chronicle of this search. In search of traces left by the ancestors, Kruk's characters wander into the past, both their own and that collective. Seeking for a Masurian identity requires then, as we could say after Schlögel, the skill of "reading time in space." They read the past of the Masurian land from the landscape, especially from cemeteries.

First poetic volumes of Kruk, *Rysowane z pamięci* and *Zapisy powrotu*, reflect the experience of a man who returns after the war to his family landscape and despite the sense of alienation, searches for the places marked with the presence of his close ones. In his poems an image of a pensive newcomer sitting among the Masurian grasses and sands. This desert landscape, perceived as a dead space, intensifies

the sense of loneliness, makes him recollect the past, which the poet “draws out of memory.” He finds in the Masurian space a place for rooting his memory, the place where memories revive.

Incredible places in the Masurian landscape are cemeteries, and in the poetic world of Kruk they play a special role. Cemetery crosses often turn out the only testimony of the presence of its former inhabitants on this land. The poet-wanderer listens intently to the silence of the cemeteries and reads the history of his family from the vanishing German grave inscriptions. In this poetry returns an image of the Masurian land as an enormous grave hiding not only remains of ancestors but also their secrets, old books, hymn-books, which, according to a Masurian custom, were buried with them. The cemetery has become a space of oblivion, since German tombs were demolished in post-war Poland. The poet treats the landscape as a palimpsest, i.e. a multilayer text, in which earlier messages shine through from under the last layer. Uncovering subsequent layers of meanings is a job of the poet-landscape interpreter, but is also a condition of lasting and continuity of collective memory. The persona of Kruk’s poems desires, like a mole, to reach the depth of earth to discover mysteries of history.

The poet searches the landscape for places strongly semanticised, which convey the essence of being Masurian. He listens closely to their speech and to what they say about the past of the land. Thus, the landscape is perceived as a symbolic text, demanding being read and interpreted, and the symbols it uses are sand, a tomb, a tree. It is the elements of the landscape, frequently evoked by the poet, which, beside universal symbolic meanings, have meanings given them by the Masurian tradition.

The motif of tomb symbolising vanishing and memory of the past time, becomes a symbol of hope in Kruk’s poetry. A tomb opens the way to the land of dead ancestors, and thereby becomes a promise of return to the tribe. The motif of calling by the dead appears several times in his poems, for example in the poem *Ich głos (Their voice)* in the volume *Powrót na wygnanie (Return to exile)*:

Someone calls me  
 With a juniper which grew slender among the ruins,  
 With a blow of the wind on the water,  
 Clean as an abandoned weeping.  
 Someone calls me  
 With a hill  
 Where young pines have trampled cemeteries  
 And the expectance of the dead rustles in the leaves. (*Powrót na wygnanie*  
 12)

In this poem, a man, orphaned and deserted in the familiar landscape, feels the presence of his dead ancestors. He reads the elements of the landscape, a juniper among the ruins, cemetery hills, trees rustling with their leaves, as signs of understanding with those who have passed away. In the sounds of the nature he recognises voices of his dead family members, due to which the landscape ceases to be alien and becomes refamiliarised and saturated with values. Therein one feels again at home. The symbolism of tomb as well as the motif of the expecting and inviting dead brings to mind Old Prussian beliefs, which the poet includes in the circle of his tradition. The cult of Mother-Earth was particularly important to Prussians. They believed that inside the earth there is a land of eternal happiness, where people weary of their lives find rest, where they sit on benches waiting for their relatives and come to meet them. In Old Prussian beliefs also a tree was represented as a seat of an ancestor looking after his family. Perhaps out of this inspiration in Kruk's writings appear pictures of those calling the man of trees. They, growing in cemeteries among the graves collapsing into the ground, seem to be arms of the dead who call to them the wanderer lost in the familiar landscape. The poet ascribes this meaning particularly to junipers, so characteristic of the Masurian landscape. As "the guards of the tribe" among the cemetery sands, it is just junipers, like cypresses, that express sorrow yet also memory of the past.

The symbolism of tree in Kruk's poetry is also connected with the symbolism of the Tree of the Cross. Decaying cemetery crosses deepen the poet's solitude in the Masurian landscape and deepen his experience of alienation on his family land. Crosses, decaying and collapsing into sand, mark the Masurian land with a stigma of suffering. Symbolic images of sand, a tomb or a tree are connected with the archetypical image of Mother-Earth. It is the earth that rescues from oblivion the past, preserving its relics. She also returns a human unity with the world, including him after death into her bloodstream.

"Reading time in space," reading the landscape, serves Kruk's characters not only to join the social frames of the Masurian memory, but also allows them recognise their past selves. In the poem *Dziecko i przechodzień* (*A child and a passer-by*, 2005) the poet presents an unusual image of meeting with himself as a child.

We are still standing opposite each other,  
 As if at the threshold of eternity:  
 A mute child and I,  
 A tired passer-by.  
 I know it is little.

But the boy is stubborn.  
He is standing in the dust of the road.  
I do not know how to make him wander.  
Will he believe me if I say  
That all the bad has gone?  
Or that now, since we still  
Do not have a permanent place,  
We'll go ahead  
And look for it together. (*Znikanie* 8-9)

Kruk's writings repeatedly appears a moving image of a four-year-old boy, trusting, silent, left alone on a sandy road. In this picture returns the writer's autobiographical experience, who was orphaned by the war. His father never came back from war, mother died of typhoid, as many Masurian women, forced to carry corpses of soldiers from the fields. In the novel *Rondo* the narrator says:

Still between the present me and the past me stands a four-year-old boy looking trustily ahead; loiters around the house, goes out onto flowered hills where weary women carry soldiers in blankets and spill the dead to the dug craters. (149)

Kruk's characters traverse the Masurian space in search of not only familiar places but also memories. They traverse both the real landscape and the landscape of memory. Frequent evoking images from childhood proves their importance for the recalling. Being the beginning of a human's way, they affect his whole further life. Evoking them, and this is the function that Kruk gives to his whole autobiographical writing, fulfils a function of putting in order and integrating his own biography and thereby understanding himself and confirming his own identity.

The war destroyed the writers house, disintegrated the space around it, the space in its topographical and axiological sense. Thus, the poet builds an image of the house and the landscape surrounding it of the memorised events, usually saturated with the drama of war. From his memories emerge mainly images of his family's deaths and their funerals. Such visions complement the drama of loneliness. In the poem *Znak (A Sign)* in the viluem *Zapisy powrotu (Records of return)*, he describes a situation where only accidental objects remind him the atmosphere of his family home. His mother's mended tablecloth, kept by a strange woman, was the only thing, beside her grave, that was her heirloom.

Kruk's writing is a literary interpretation of the ideas of Karl Schlögel, who within the framework of anthropogeography understands reading and deciphering

landscapes as a key to the history of peoples and humankind, for every landscape is simultaneously a cultural and historical text.

An interesting phenomenon in Polish topographical turn literature is the output of Andrzej Stasiuk (born in 1960), who expresses his fascination with the geopolitical space of Central and Eastern Europe, the space which has been dynamically transformed over the last quarter of the century. The decomposition of “grand narratives,” as we can call, after Jean- Francis Lyotard, the disintegration of totalitarian orders, resulted in the emergence of “small narratives,” conducted by those who came from under the broadly understood domination and try to tell their story anew; they try to describe the space in its new shape. Political divisions in the Central and Eastern Europe have changed its map, moved the borders, opening some of them and closing some of them. Changed in the 1990s, the form of the European geopolitical space — covered with a new borderline network as a result of political changes — has become a frequent topic of literary pieces. It is just Andrzej Stasiuk who in his reportages describing trips in Central and Eastern Europe makes these new European spaces, in a geographical, historical and anthropological aspects, a subject of literary reflection.

An interesting record of the experience of the Central Europe space is his book *Moja Europa. Dwa eseje o Europie zwanej Środkową* (*My Europe. Two essays on the Europe called Central*, 2007), the co-author of which, beside Stasiuk, is the Ukrainian writer, Yuri Andrukhovych. Both great authors describe in their reportages an experience of crossing real state borders, simultaneously giving their experiences a metaphorical meaning of crossing intercultural and inter-human borders. Stasiuk travels over Slovakia, Romania, Slovenia, Albania, Moldavia, or the countries he calls “auxiliary/reserve countries” and in order to show even stronger the chasm between the East and the West, he calls them recycling lands, where used-up objects (and ideas), which are not needed anymore where they came from, are dumped. The writer manifests his interest in peripheral places situated in the outskirts of Europe, remaining off big tourist tracks. Poor Central European countries are presented by him as a labyrinthine space in which, among similar landscapes of poverty and languages which sound alike, a Western European wanders about as in a dream.

In his accounts of the trip, in the collection *Jadąc do Babadag* (*Going to Babadag*, 2004), Stasiuk mentions various situations of crossing borders in Central and Eastern Europe, the borders between “worse and lesser nations.” The ritual of border crossing, which refers to a situation of before 2004, resembles a spectacle prepared by customs officers. He mentions Romanian customs officers, whose face, seeing about twenty stamps in his passport, shows suspicion and hope to arrest a smuggler or a spy. He remembers a Slovenian customs officer inquiring about dinars,

who had forgotten that his country had not been Yugoslavia any more for ten years. Stasiuk gathers anecdotes connected with crossing borders, describes the forms of the stamps in the passport, some of which represent old vehicles, others a plane and yet other are amateurish and frivolous, as if made from a potato. All this gives the ritual of border crossing the nature of a childish game of tag or blind man's bluff. The spectacle of crossing the border fulfils, thus, the function of a ritual of passing to the area of a mystery protected from strangers.

Stasiuk, making his subject the space of Central and Eastern Europe, the space covered with a thick network of borderlines, inspires to consider the divisions into western and eastern countries, rich and poor countries, those dominating and those dominated. The author of *Jadąc do Babadag* is undoubtedly a co-creator of the spatial turn in Polish literature. On the one hand he offers the reader a reflection over the space in a geopolitical aspect, shaped as a result of liberating movements in Europe, thus the post-dependent space. On the other hand, he perceives the geographic space as if in a geo-poetic perspective, i.e. he treats it as a conveyor of poetic meanings. An interesting motif recurring in his writing is a map understood as both a tool of geographical representation and also a text supporting the memory of the trip and forming geographical imagination.

In Stasiuk's *Dziennik okrętowy (Logbook)* often recur cartographic metaphors based on the imagery of a map as a text combining biographic experience with spatial experience. This imaging may be recognised as playing a key role in his writing and resulting from the conviction that geography and imagination are, as he writes, "connected with each other with a bond stronger than madness and reason altogether," since "daydreaming always takes space as its object" (*Moja Europa* 85-86).

Stasiuk in his reportages themes the situation of contemplating or reading a map and confronts it with the image of the space experienced, i.e. perceived or remembered. In the scenes with a map, often occurring in Stasiuk's writing, the writer, like a Vermeer's geographer, raises his eyes to delve into the recollections of the places experienced during his journeys or let him get carried away by dreams of the places which he has not discovered yet. The map, thus, fulfils a function of not only a guide of unknown areas but is also a mnemonic tool invoking memories, and thus helpful in telling about journeys.

The writer conveys the experience of geographic space through two narrative situations. One is a contemplation of a map resembling looking at vast tracks of land from above; the other is a physical experience of space through the effort of wandering from place to place, often off the beaten track, in the heat or in the cold. The former satisfies the dreams of the human on coming to know the world from the divine perspective, the dream of knowledge and power over the world. The latter, on

the other hand, represents a perspective of a human overwhelmed with the vastness of the space surrounding him. Stasiuk introduces a Lilliputian perspective through his allusion to Jonathan Swift, evoking the scene of Gulliver's visit at the queen of Brobdingnag. In this scene a Lilliput pays homage to the monarch embracing her little finger with his both arms and kissing its tip. She, on the other hand, provides him with security giving him shelter in her palm. The image of the character moving on the queen's body constitutes a suggestive interpretative context for Stasiuk's allegoric images of Europe.

Yes, Europe, your heart beats somewhere between Dijon and Paris, and your head is Iberia in the blue bedding of waters. Your insatiable belly is Germany. An me? I mean us? Were we your loins? Over twenty years ago I did not even know this word and I felt like a fish in water, like Gulliver visiting the queen of Brobdingnag, when I pored over your image for hours, as if over a forbidden photograph. The right thigh of Ukraine and the left thigh of Scandinavia. Long autumn afternoons over a school atlas and searching your arteries: the Danube, the Seine, the Rhine and the Dnieper. I felt their pulse under the green-yellow skin of plains and uplands. (*Moja Europa* 124-125)

The allegoric representation of Europe as a woman is a form of eroticization of space experienced in a rapture close to ecstasy. Such visualisation expresses a need for a direct, sensual contact with European spaces.

Ah, Europe [...] Twenty-five years ago I looked at your portraits in the school atlas. [...] I looked into your images and imagined that I was wandering somewhere, small and invisible, over your enormous body. It was a very erotic vision. [...] Someone conceived it well that continents are feminine; if you were a man, I wouldn't be able to think about you with such tenderness. [...] You are lying on your back between the blues of waters, your left arm is Great Britain and the palm of Ireland, and the right arm is Italy; your beautiful head is Iberia and your heart beats somewhere between Dijon and Paris...(*Moja Europa* 118-119)

The image of Europe as a woman resting in blue beddings not only refers to the image of Gulliver wandering over the queen's body but also brings to mind the painting of Max Ernst *Le Jardin de la France* representing a woman's body in sensitive aesthetics, which, shrouded in the landscape, is surrounded by the rivers Loire and Indre. The eroticized representation of the geographic space renders the

intimacy of its experience, the sense of security and bliss which it conveys. The dramatised visualisation of the geographic space also refers to the tradition of ancient cartographic discourse, when maps were not only a graphic representation of the world but constituted a colourful metaphoric story of the world.<sup>1</sup>

The writer's spatial imagination, which could be called a cartographic imagination, was undoubtedly formed due to his fascination with maps. "A man reading maps," as Stasiuk refers to himself, perceives the surrounding world from the perspective of a cartographer, whose job is to represent the geographic space graphically. Europe contemplated by the writer stooping over an atlas is a topic of colourful descriptions which compose Stasiuk's metaphoric cartography. Bent over a Czech atlas of the world, he analyses the shapes of state borderlines.

Well, among all European countries my Homeland has the most beautiful outline. It approximates the ideal, which is a circle. [...]. I'd better not mention England. The cradle of the modern European civilisation, France, looks like a spread and shabby shirt. Italy, with its highly unserious shape falls into contradiction with herself as the foundation of Europe as such. The Austrian pie can be omitted. [...] For the same reason let's omit also Hungary. In this way, actually only Romania stays at the battlefield. Only she can compete with us in this duel of beauty and harmony. (*Moja Europa* 92)

The space presented in the geographical atlas is interpreted as a graphic record of relations between countries out of the shape of which he reads their nature as well as connecting them relations of co-existence or dependence. Thus, reading the map becomes an emotional analysis of geographical, historical, economic and demographic conditions of forming the state borders. It is also a pretext for reflection over such divisions between the East and the West, between the centre and peripheries.

The map is themed by Stasiuk also as a metaphor of travel. "Is there any better metaphor of travel as a damaged map?", writes he in *Fado*. In his stories the map is understood as a thing which bears on it marks of its being used (thus, travelling), thereby becoming a text telling about a trip. A trip, as well as a story about it are always inseparable, and both those experiences are accompanied by a map.

Brian Harley, a historian and theoretician of cartography, map interpreter and collector, practising humanistic geography, compares maps with a home book or a family photo album, for those maps which accompany man in his struggles with the space and which bear marks of these struggles become, according to him, a source of memories and, as if mnemonic systems, support the memory in evoking landscapes, events and travel companions. Harley treats the map as a unique document of life.

He calls it a “graphic autobiography,” the contemplation of which, enlivening the past, becomes a form of a sentimental journey. Like in the case of Stasiuk, for whom travel is a form of being in the world, the map becomes an important autobiographical document, which helps to spin a story about roams: those completed and those intended.

A trip and the space experienced during this trip are presented by Stasiuk in the narrative-compositional scheme which I call cartographic narration.

Writing is listing names. Like with a journey, when the beads of geography slip on the thread of life. [...] Borderlines like chapters, countries like literary genres, the epics of routes, the lyrics of stopovers, the blackness of asphalt at night in the light of the car bring to mind a monotonous and hypnotic line of print. (*Moja Europa* 111)

An example of cartographic narration is the description of the Danube, beginning with evoking its subsequent names: Donau, Dunaj, Duna, Dunav, Dunarea, with which it is called from the source to the mouth, often changing, as Stasiuk writes, its nationality. The writer constructs a narrative situation from the perspective of a map-reader and, in a fit of fascination with its picturesque tributaries, tries to present the meandrousness of the Danube in the description. Developing the metaphor adduced, it can be said that Stasiuk slips on the thread of the Danube tens of its names like “beads of geography,” thereby including his narration into the cartographic discourse.

[...] because literature imitates history as well as geography, and in this case it must consist of fragments, of crumbs, of looks through the car glass, for here, at ours, it is impossible to knock together a long reasonable narrative which would not be more boring and less believable than life and the world. [...] Yes, Europe, [...] Your body consists of names and love lies in the fact that words mean more than they really mean. (*Moja Europa* 125)

Geography, according to Stasiuk’s reasoning, constitutes a model of telling about the world, competitive towards history. Whereas historical stories put the course of events in chronological order, geographical stories put the space in order, naming and describing places. Stasiuk not only presents a geographical space but also makes a subject of his reportages the process of its perception. Perception of the space during a journey has a nature of catching impressions out of the corner of your eye and gathering quickly passing pictures. Central and Eastern Europe traversed by the writer is thus perceived as a mosaic of events and landscapes. The world perceived during

a journey always appears as fragmentary and so is it stored in memory and, like a jigsaw puzzle, reconstructed in recollections and imagination. Therefore Stasiuk needs a map as a model of putting the space in order and merging its image, dispersed in the process of perception.

Stasiuk's trips in Central and Eastern Europe are actually stories whose theme is geography, and their plots develop according to the rhythm of the writers moving from one place to another. Here is an example of the writer's reflection identifying wandering with storytelling:

I always leave and return through Konieczna and this is a real *nomen omen*. I circle, snake and wander like Schweik on the way to České Budějovice and, like him, I can't keep a straight line, I can't follow the linear path of simply told stories. (*Moja Europa* 157)

The map used in a journey helps to establish its direction and course, while used during telling about the journey it constitutes a basis of the narrative order. Stasiuk's trips can be thus called map practising.

In the story *Mapa* of the volume *Fado*, Stasiuk tells a unique journey, which he makes in his imagination, studying a one-hundred-year-old transportation map of Austro-Hungary. Deciphering with a magnifying glass faded names of places, it becomes a journey into the past. Thus the century-old map lets the writer experience the past, since he reads from it an out-of-date image of the space rescued by the cartographer. In the event of sudden geopolitical turns, a map may fulfil the function of a historical source, for it preserves an old image of reality, and, as Stasiuk says, "the map is anyway the ultimate word and the mortal shroud of events."

My map, on the other hand, as any old map anyway, rescues the world and, simultaneously, shows its decomposition, its passing. Looking at it, I look into nothingness, which my imagination wants to fulfil at all costs. This fragile, smouldered out, crumbling between the fingers paper resembles human memory, weak, imperfect, threatened by sclerosis and senile dementia. (*Fado* 38)

In *Słowacka dwusetka* (*Slovakian Two Hundred*) in the volume *Jadąc do Babadag*, Stasiuk describes a crumbling map, frayed at the edges, cracked at the lines of folding. The image of a crumbling map is a metaphor of the world falling apart, which is best rendered by the author's words: "Towns and villages gradually cease to exist, are used up along with folding and unfolding" (*Jadąc do Babadag* 14). Such an impression accompanies Stasiuk during his tour of the Balkans perceived as a space which loses

its clearness, fades, is subject to destruction, falls apart.

The century-old map, which makes no help in the journey, serves a reflection on the past. The author stoops over it as if over a text which conveys information on a historical picture of the space, and thus gives a pleasure of association with the past, reads with reverence the names of now-defunct places, which the map rescues. Reading the map with a magnifying glass becomes a full of reverence act of “reading the past.” When the political image of the world is subject to transformation, borderlines are moved and the names of places are changed, it is the map that adopts the function of historical story.

Stasiuk’s cartographical narration enters the dialogue with the post-colonial discourse, humanistic geography, topocentric history and topocentric history of literature, so with all the new tendencies in humanities which emerged as a result of the topographic turn.

Another example of the literature of the topographical turn is the novel of Jerzy Limon (born in 1950) *Koncert Wielkiej Niedźwiedzicy. Kantata na jedną ulicę, siedem gwiazd i dwa głosy* (*A Concert of the Great Bear. A Cantata for one street, seven stars and two voices*, 1999), which tells stories of one street in Sopot, ulica Haffnera (Haffner street), where the author-narrator lives. This novel implements not only the assumptions of geo-poetics but may also be called geo-historiographic, since the author presents a geographic concrete, the space of a city as a conveyor of historic knowledge, for the geographic space is for Limon the text in which one may read the past. The subject matter of the novel is a street fulfilling just the function of a text, or actually text-palimpsest, which is composed with layers of meanings recorded by particular historic eras. The narrator, in order to reach these multi-layer senses, assumes the role of an archeologist and descends into the depth of the history of his street.

Arrival of Ests, or (Old) Prussians from behind the Vistula is ten centimeters on the level of three meters. The rule of the medieval duke of Pomerania, Świętopełk, is fifteen centimeters at the depth of two meters, and the period of the rule of the Teutonic Knights is as many as ninety-two centimeters. Jerusalem of Herodotus’ time is twenty meters into the earth. A few, more than ten, sometimes some tens of years fit in one centimeter. A human life, a few generations are preserved as a couple of millimeter dashes. Time, like canvas or other cloth, is measured in meters. But it is good that at least this has remained. A thousand years of history of a town in five but sometimes only in two [...] Time accumulates as growth rings in a tree trunk. (50)

I define the narration in Jerzy Limon's novel *Koncert Wielkiej Niedźwiedzicy* as archeological narration, for the author reveals subsequent layers in the history of the street. In this process he uses various testimonies and remnants. Thus, beside historical documents, he uses such sources as legends, literary pieces, biographies and memories of the people living in the street described. The author, as he writes, practices archeology of space, raking from the depth of the earth remnants telling the story of his street. He also practices archeology of memory, digging through his own memories and those of the others, who created the history of the Sopot street. The sources of knowledge about the past are of diverse nature then, and thereby they render a non-chronological and fragmentary image of the past. A narrative collage that emerged in this way combines in one text legendary origins of the town, wartime events, Siberian vicissitudes of the deportees who settled in Sopot after the war. Thus, the novel is of multi-vocal and multi-textual nature, which on the level of poetics makes it a multilayer subject of archeological interpretation.

An example of employing the archeological methodology is the fact, described by the author, of discovering human remains from the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The artifacts found with them: an iron awl, a needle with a thread wound around it, pieces of multicoloured twine, a boot upper and heel tip, allowed for identifying the excavation as a cobbler's grave. These establishments are, as the author remarks, the end of the role of an archaeologist. Here begins the role of a writer who poses questions and his imagination answers them, creating, unconfirmed by any documents, events and images of everyday life. He asks then, if a master shoemaker could participate in the meeting with the bishop of Prague, Wojciech (Adalbert)? Could he be baptised by him? Did he have a family? Did he wear fashionable clothes? Did he like dancing? Such questions refer to fiction-narrative schemes, which allow for constructing a hypothetical history of a medieval cobbler's life. Thereby the narrator draws attention to the nature of the knowledge of the past, the knowledge moulded simultaneously by a historian establishing facts on the basis of source examination and a writer putting these facts in an attractive story.

Another example of a find "unburied from the earth's memory" is a skeleton grave, where remains of a man, probably a warrior, and his horse were found. On the basis of the parts of bones, a spearhead, a ritual knife, remains of horse harness, a stone circle with an obliterated relief, a history of the death of a warrior, killed by many spear hits and buried with his horse is reconstructed (or rather constructed). This story coincides with Herodotus' account presenting a ritual worshipping a Thracian deity Salmoxis, to whom, seeking eternal life, they sent a warrior flinging him in the air in such a way that he falls on the spears. The history of the first resident of the Sopot street becomes a subject of literary fantasy of the author of the novel, who tells

it behind a fictitious novel, stylised as a eye-witness account of the events described.

Beside the excavations conducted by professional archaeologists, also amateur treasure seeking during children's open-air games reveal material remains of previous inhabitants of the street. The archaeology done by the children involves burrowing courtyards of surrounding houses damaged during the warfare. The playground in the ruins of a bombed house becomes an excavation site, where young treasure seekers acquire knowledge of the past of the house and its residents. The testimony of the past is crippled dolls, charred blocks, contorted cutlery, remnants of clothes and vessels. Beside the toys, what enjoys a special popularity is stamps, which, closely looked at, gain in value as historical micro-documents providing evidence of the history of the town. The items excavated: a little clown in checked clothes, a clock pendulum, a broken ashtray or a china teapot, move and open imagination. The made up stories provide these subjects with a status of valuable exhibits and the "children's archaeology of ruins" becomes a particular history lesson.

The subject of Limon's autothematic and meta-novel considerations is mutual inspirations of historical writing and fiction. The novel, as the author signalizes in the title, is written "for two voices." These "two voices" are the voices of the author and the narrator co-creating the narration, of which the author's voice corresponds with the historical narration whereas the narrator's voice is responsible for the fictitious order of the novel. The theme of Limon's novel is actually learning the past and its registering in both historiographic as well as literary narration. The archaeological research, on the other hand, is shrouded in an aura of mystery, since based on the reconstruction of knowledge on the basis of remains excavated from the earth, they approximate history to literature. The writer underscores then that "archaeologists are real poets among historians."

In order to reconstruct the past of the street the author employs not only the tools of a literary historian (who may be interested in the fact that Rilke once stayed there, that Herbert used to visit his mother there), historian, archaeologist, geographer, yet also an architect and astronomer. The titles of the chapters bear names of the seven stars of the Great Bear (Ursa Major) constellation and bring a metaphoric dimension into the narration. The author presents the street as a string taut at the neck of the instrument, the instrument of the town, on which the Great Bear gives a nightly inaudible concerto of celestial spheres. Limon, like Kenneth White, the originator of geopoetics, calling himself a poet-cosmographer, discovers "the poetics of space," in this case the poetics of urban space in the context of the astronomical space. A poetic dimension is attributed to the cosmic space perceived through the window of a child's room, where, as a result of Grandfather's stories, the constellation of Great Bear and Auriga become heroes of the child's imagination. Close listening to the symphony of

the world (the cantata in the title) is just, to adduce White's term, "lyrical inhabiting the world." Limon employs the novel form as a forum where various humanistic disciplines enter a dialogue on space. Thus, the poetics of space is uncovered by an archaeologist, a poet among historians, reading the past from sand and an astronomer reading the past from the light of stars, so often already extinct.

In order to reconstruct the history of his street, Limon employs the archaeology of space or reads the past from the earth as if from an open book, which he leafs through uncovering subsequent layers of history. Here is the way the author uses the metaphor of book, so as to express through it the work of an archaeologist, who, as a poet among historians, reads the poetry of the earth:

Like wise shamans, archaeologists perform a section of time, read from the bowels of the earth, finding in them mysterious signs, a buried language of the past, reading the caked human fate, divining from a needle or a comb found, from feathers and swamps of time [...] For them a document is needle-cover and ashes, bones and fish scales, vessel shells grow to the significance of pages torn off a big book of the past; a bead found becomes a stamp, a ball of thread a papyrus scroll. (48-49)

The history of a place is always connected with the history of a man who inhabits this place and who tells about it. Thus, studying local history, understood as a metaphoric uncovering subsequent layers of earth is connected with studying one's own past.

Interest in the place of residence often leads, as Ian Hodder observes, to interest in archaeology, and a fruit of such interests is local history, which is the history of a place written from the perspective of individual experiences of those who live in this place. Limon's novel, created from fascination with a geographic concrete, and thus also locality, is just an example of exploring and interpreting local history. Limon's novel, telling a story of the author's street and house, makes up a typical example of local narration. This allows for proposing a thesis that exploring the knowledge on locality or one's closest place, is of a nature of archaeological excavations in their both literal and metaphoric sense. Thus, the local narration may be called archaeological, whose goal is to understand the place where a human is and to present a harmony between the human and his closest environment. Creating a local narrative is, thus, a form of inhabiting a place through building a spiritual connection therewith. The local narrative, thus, constitutes a confirmation of the idea of geopoetics, according to which the connection of the place and literature involves mutual shaping, for the place with its history and landscape is perceived as literary inspiration, while literature has a power of creating a cultural image of the place which consolidates in a collective

consciousness. The street presented in Limon's novel gains just a literary being due to including its history into the narrative, both historical and geographic.

Limon makes the subject of his novel not only the place but also the tools used for constructing the narrative about it, the tools of a writer, historian and geographer. The conceptualisation of the reflection on tools in a literary plot provides the novel with characteristics of a poetic and philosophical treatise on history writing.

This paper presented three different literary testimonies of geographical space experience demonstrating the development on the Polish ground the literary and theoretical tendencies whose source was the topographic turn.

Erwin Kruk in his writing "draws out of memory" the space of Masuria, the space from which after the war the Prussian and German past was erased and the signs of the past cultures only rarely shine through in the landscape-palimpsest. His writings, thus, serve to create a Masurian cultural space, and thereby to save the memory of the presence of old inhabitants of the Masurian land. In his literature Kruk reconstructs the space in which one will be able to read time.

Andrzej Stasiuk, on the other hand, fits the post-colonial discourse, presenting in his reportages a new European reality after the political divisions in the Central and Eastern Europe. The writer makes a map, changing and becoming outdated, an instrument of examining space and thereby makes a method of its description, called here a cartographic narration.

Jerzy Limon, however, in the novel analysed here, which I define as geohistoriographic, presents a geographic and historical space of his home town. In his local narration he uncovers, with the tools of archaeology and humanistic geography, a palimpsest history of his street in Sopot. Thus, Limon's novel, reflecting the poetry of his close space, becomes a form of a "lyrical inhabiting the world."

## Note

1. Karl Schlägel talks about old maps: "Indeed maps and atlases are pompous inscenisations. Abraham Ortelius and Jan Blaeu call them *Theatrum mundi et orbis terrarium*. Curtains hang on the title pages; podiums and stages are erected on them, where geographical history of the world, continents, oceans, climatic zones, the wind rose have their show. Many maps are of impressive dimensions; they are not small pictures but real panoramas [...] Some maps can be framed with picture stories, history in moving pictures, an early form of cartoons and comics." See Karl Schlägel, *W przestrzeni czas czytamy. O historii cywilizacji i geopolityce*. Trans. Izabela Drozdowska, and Łukasz Musiał (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2009) 218, 220. Michel de Certeau writes about 15-18<sup>th</sup>-century maps as stories using narrative representations of ships, animals, figures, visualising various spatial actions such as voyages, wars, trade etc. See Michel de Certeau.

*Wynaleźć codzienność: sztuki działania.* Trans. Katarzyna Thiel-Jańczuk (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2008) 120.

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# Manufactured Landscapes: An Introduction

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Amidst the sound and fury of climate change today, we as a group want to address not just how men created the climate crisis, but how men help create nature as well. Of course, by nature, we mean a particular type of nature, man-made landscapes, to be more exact. *Manufactured Landscapes* is an ecocritical term that refers primarily to those industrial and urbanizing constructions that are *disturbingly* massive and sublime and have over time infused their presence in the human subconscious as part of the natural landscape. The term has gained rapid traction among scholars of ecocriticism in their study of ecology and literature worldwide as it heralds the advent of naming our current phase of earthly existence *Anthropocene* — the recent geological testimony to the dominance of human-led alterations across the face of Planet Earth. Alongside this rising awareness has emerged the act of our awakening to a couple of key notions related to man-made landscapes:

(1) Nature with a capital N we used to long for as humanity's root of innocence and harmony is fading, if not faded already; there is nothing we can do now to return us to that imagined origin of pristine and undeveloped nature; nor should we indulge ourselves unduly in pining for the loss of a spiritual home in such landscapes even though we once wrote passionately about them as symbols of nostalgic pasts and idyllic innocence and simplicity. What is most important is for us to be more inquisitive and vigilant about the way nature has morphed into manufactured habitats at humans' behest, and how we humans should hold back, offset and remediate our own unchallenged authority and privilege in altering the non-human world.

(2) The multitudes of life forms that exist in the biotic sphere all around humanity are not, indiscriminately, all dumb brutes; we now know that it is wrong to regard them as totally passive and powerless, thinking that they have barely survived at the mercy of the superior intelligence of humans during the prolonged evolution of the earth. The truth is: as humans have developed incrementally by virtue of technological advance and social evolution, so have the multitudes other than us humans; we need to reckon with the fact that, along with the humans, these a-human

multitudes have never simply bowed to human domination, but have slowly yet surely adapted to the humans' incessant, callous and mostly disruptive alteration of their habitats. In a sense, their evolution has resulted in a host of offsetting reactions and repercussions that are as yet unknown to human knowledge and have reached a point that, when merged into some *brainless* coordination, the trans-human forces can diffuse, displace and even offset humans' mastery of natural elements. As many recent discoveries have shown us, there are so many ways for the a-human multitudes to form "assemblages" or "fields of forces" that can trigger malfunctions, disruptions and total stoppages against human design and endeavor. One most effective way is for them to work through man-made systems and networks from inside out — bringing to halt the designed operation of devices, instruments and constructions by the humans. We only need to turn around to look at the many abandoned industrial sites and the defunct hydraulic dams to remind us of that.

As evidenced in our writings below, we are wary of the vast inroads such landscapes have made into our mode of life, and we focus intensely on their erosion by revealing how they have wrought confusion, displacement and alterations on what has hitherto bonded humanity with the land for a sustained livelihood — *interdependence* between humans and the land. One way to study manufactured landscapes is, we believe, to expose the lopsided and ever-deteriorating relationships between us and the land, explore the altered yet potent forms of biotic, corporeal and terrestrial materiality, and bring into play our positive, vital and interactive energy, care and wisdom towards the a-human world. To that end, the four contributors of this cluster of articles explore recent literary, photographic and filmic works that seek to reclaim, foster and nurture a renewed alliance of the human and the landscapes. Taking cue from the animating notion of "new materialism," we attest to the *relational* perspective on a trans-human materiality that relies decisively on assemblage, network and flow of agential forces, resists and dispels the deterministic model of mechanically mastering and consuming resources as if they were merely trite, static, and robotically responsive. In the same vein, we seek out those trans-human material aspects that are self-directing, suspensory and distributive, and non-deterministic with an eye on shaping a continuum of *becomings* — states of material development that reveal alteration, congealment and dissolution *contra* human design and beyond human control in relation to landscapes, both wild and reclaimed. By way of our critical reflections, we hope to tease out the dysfunctional command by human consciousness over a-human matter, enhance an informed awareness of the relational and autonomic (non-deterministic) efficacies evolving through our affective encounters of the landscapes; we stress ties of interstitial affinity between human and natural environs, and foster a deepening understanding of aspects of *interdependence*

between humans and the land such as *efficacy*, *trajectory* and *causality*.

**Karen Thornber** works in the Department of Comparative Literature at Harvard University as its Chair and Director of Graduate Studies. She leads off this cluster of articles with a brilliant reading of two texts of contemporary fiction: Hu Fayun's *Ru Yan (Such Is This World, 2006)* and Yan Lianke's *Ding Zhuang meng (Dream of Ding Village, 2006)*. Setting as the backdrop the fate of the urban and rural communities when they are struck by SARS and HIV outbreaks (based on real-life occurrences in China's Guangdong and Henan earlier in the last decade), Thornber sheds light on the authors' deep anxiety towards culpability and vulnerability of the humans in their frantic drive for wealth and pleasure; with a discerning eye, she gathers unnerving details from both works and creates an apocalyptic "ambience" — the kind that Timothy Morton theorizes (Morton 79); she pinpoints the root cause of the plague-like spread of fatal diseases as human "hubris," cautioning us against the probable futile and brutal ends that can wreck our very essence as human when our desire is allowed to be overblown and our resources overspent. In a convincing way, her critical reading makes a connection between fatal diseases and the human-led reshaping of landscapes, whether urban or rural; she also delivers an unequivocal message about the importance of being committed to the interdependence of people and landscapes.

**Hua Li** is from the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures at Montana State University. Her contribution to this cluster focuses on what Lawrence Buell famously defines as "speculative" literature on environment, whose mission it is to forecast the future in order to shock the present (Buell 102-103). Enlightened by the knowledge and analytical wisdom she gained from her past research on the sci-fi narratives in China, Li takes the reader to the still more erratic times of *overdevelopment* — when humans are confronted by the *overly* manufactured landscape. She examines Liu Cixin's three novellas *Di huo (Underground Fire, 2000)*, *Di qiu da pao (Cannon of Earth, 2003)* and *Yuanyuan de feizao pao (Soap Bubbles, 2004)*. Her emphasis on how the sci-fi cognitive estrangement can be applied to environmental literature is especially original and effective: it helps access analogical modes of thinking about the harsh reality China faces today due to its overuse of water, fossil fuel and vegetation. It raises readers' vigilance against the acute consequences of excessive development in their own times, which leaves all but little prospects of interdependencies between human and nonhuman and within human society.

**Yuehong Chen** contributes to this cluster as a newly minted Ph.D from the Department of Studies of Literature in the University of Texas at Dallas. Since her academic affiliation is with the China Three Gorges University, it is no surprise that she takes the issue of hydraulic damming in China to task in her writing, and her

approach is to revisit the award-winning filmmaker Jia Zhangke's two films, *Shi jie* (*The World*, 2004) and *San xia hao ren* (*Still Life*, 2006), in the context of Space vs. Place debate. Following Yi-fu Tuan's place-space framework, Chen dissects the key protagonists' experience of drifting away from *place* (a locale of ancestral and spiritual roots) to *space* (free-roaming chases of better jobs and life values). She links their frequent plight of being spatially displaced to the flux of migrating laborers from the rural to the urban and industrial; she discloses their gradual "hollowing out" of moral judgment and spiritual faith; she also critiques the fractured social fabric that used to bond *the relational* with *the instrumental* aspects of human relationship as a result of the State's headlong plunge into the global market economy.

**Xinmin Liu** is from the Department of Foreign Languages and Cultures at Washington State University. As the editor of this cluster of articles, he takes the opportunity to elaborate his own take on "manufactured landscape" as an ecocritical concept and applies it to his review of the still photography of the Canadian photographer Edward Burtynsky in *Manufactured Landscapes* (2007) and the Chinese documentary filmmaker Hu Jie in his *The Silent Nu River* (2006). Prompted by his ontological interest, Liu explores the cognitive complexity in studying the disruptive impact of these man-made landscapes, and he conducts his study by comparing the two artists' shooting techniques from the viewpoint of "affective intervention." He focuses intensely on how the affective abilities assist the viewer in diffusing the binary order in perceiving the human and the land, and in transferring aesthetic impressions to ethical judgment while affectively embracing interactive feedback from the ahuman world.

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# Chinese Literary Landscapes of SARS and HIV/AIDS: On Hubris and Vulnerability

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**Abstract** The year 2006 witnessed the publication of two landmark Chinese novels on global health crises: Hu Fayun's *Ru Yan@sars.come* on the SARS epidemic and Yan Lianke's *Dream of Ding Village* on the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Although the primary focus of these novels is exposing human and especially bureaucratic culpability for the rapid spread of fatal diseases, *Such Is This World* and *Dream of Ding Village* also interrogate relationships between human communities and the natural environment. At the same time that Hu Fayun's text exposes human destruction of the biotic and abiotic nonhuman, it ultimately dismisses the anthropogenic reshaping of landscapes brought about by human hubris by underlining human vulnerability in the face of both disease and nature. In contrast, Yan Lianke's work depicts human vulnerability to disease, in combination with hubris, as largely responsible for destroying the natural world.

**Key Words** HIV/AIDS; Hu Fayun; SARS; vulnerability; Yan Lianke

The year 2006 witnessed the publication of two landmark Chinese novels on global health crises: Hu Fayun's (胡發雲, 1959–) *Ru Yan@sars.come* (如焉 @sars.come, *Such Is This World@sars.come*) on the SARS epidemic and Yan Lianke's (閻連科, 1958–) *Dream of Ding Village* (Ding zhuangmeng, 丁庄孟) on the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Although the primary focus of these novels is exposing human and especially bureaucratic culpability for the rapid spread of fatal diseases, *Such Is This World* and *Dream of Ding Village* also interrogate relationships between human communities and the natural environment. At the same time that Hu Fayun's text exposes human destruction of the biotic and abiotic nonhuman, it ultimately dismisses the anthropogenic reshaping of landscapes brought about by human hubris by underlining human vulnerability in the face of both disease and nature.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, Yan Lianke's work depicts human vulnerability to disease, in combination with

hubris, as largely responsible for destroying the natural world. That is to say, *Such Is This World* features certain landscapes as destroyed by human hubris but people as ultimately at the mercy of a dominant nonhuman (both disease and nature), while *Dream of Ding Village* portrays environments as destroyed by a combination of human hubris and human vulnerability to disease, people and landscapes given only the faintest hope of regeneration.

At first glance these two novels appear to be unusual choices for ecocritical examination; scholarship on the intersections among landscapes and illness has tended to focus on anthropogenic environmental diseases, and in particular on health conditions caused by exposure to toxic chemicals. But this is precisely the point: references to human destruction of the environment infiltrate much of Chinese literature, as they do most literatures, and analyzing their dynamics is essential to obtaining a fuller understanding of cultural production and indeed cultures themselves, especially how communities perceive the implications of their interactions with the natural world. SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) is a viral respiratory illness caused by the coronavirus SARS-CoV; it generally begins with influenza-like symptoms, followed by acute atypical pneumonia, which can lead to respiratory failure and death (Li 4211). The disease was first reported in China's Guangdong province in November 2002 and ultimately spread to nearly thirty countries in Asia, the Americas, and Europe before it was contained in the summer of 2003; altogether SARS infected 8000 people, claimed close to 800 lives, and impacted trade and travel worldwide.<sup>2</sup>Hu Fayun's *Such Is This World* — initially published on the internet (2004) and then, revised, as a book (2006) — provides a disturbing glimpse into life in China during the SARS incident.<sup>3</sup> The novel focuses on Ru Yan (茹嫣), a forty-something widow who after her son leaves to study abroad in France finds solace and then fame in the internet — writing essays under the screen name So It Was / Such Is This World (如焉 [Ru Yan], a homonym of her actual name). Ru Yan's postings and those of her online friends cover a variety of topics, revealing among other things the horrors of war and the Cultural Revolution; the novel is also a social history of the internet in China. When rumors begin to spread about SARS, Ru Yan does not shy away from writing about what is happening in her community and country, focusing not only on the disease but also on the official reaction to it. *Ru Yan* likewise puts SARS into global context, commenting at one point, “Even as the strange disease called *feidian* [非典, SARS] was racing forward, spreading silently like fire in the underbrush, the Americans suddenly kindled the flames of war in Iraq, shocking the world” (190); the narrator later notes that the war in Iraq appeared to be moving in parallel with SARS, and he points to the similarities between China's abuse of citizens at home and the United States's crimes against peoples abroad.

Although much of *Such Is This World* centers on how people treat one another, the novel includes several important passages on human interactions with nonhuman animals and landscapes more generally. To begin with, Hu Fayun's text speaks of the widespread slaughter of both domesticated and stray dogs during the SARS epidemic; although there was no scientific evidence linking dogs to SARS, Chinese authorities and private citizens alike feared that the animals were at least partially responsible for the spread of the disease, and so, their panic stoked by the state news media, they killed canines on a large scale.<sup>4</sup> Shortly before he left for France, Ru Yan's son had entrusted her with his puppy Yang Yanping, which he had rescued from a life on the streets. Although Ru Yan initially had been repelled by animals, fearing infection, she rapidly warms to Yang Yanping; whenever she holds the puppy in her arms the animal reminds Ru Yan of her son when he was an infant, "light, soft, wonderful to the touch" (8); it soon becomes apparent that she speaks more with the dog than with people. *Such Is This World* depicts actual contact with an animal, as well as human need for physical and emotional comfort after the departure of a loved one, as dispelling phobias and in fact as increasing health; the narrator notes that Ru Yan has read on the internet that it is detrimental to women's well-being not to speak at least 5000 words each day and that she believes one reason her son left her his puppy was to "give her a reason to talk" (57). The novel also includes glimpses of domestic canine experiences before the advent of SARS, animals enjoying walks with their owners and especially encounters with other dogs; Yang Yanping, for her part, becomes attached to a local beagle and is devastated when Ru Yan keeps her away from her sweetheart.

But conditions change with the advent of SARS — cries of animals being beaten to death echo through the streets, and soon, the narrator notes, "it was as though on this earth there had never been anything known as a dog" (231). Ru Yan has taught a very distressed Yang Yanping to relieve herself indoors, and to remain silent at all costs. Yang Yanping was traumatized by the wails of her fellow canines and after an unfortunate incident with a security guard no longer barks or moves much at all, instead spending most of her days lying in Ru Yan's bedroom and expressing herself through groans. The narrator goes so far as to describe her as being as "terrified, forbearing, obedient and docile as a Jew" (它像一个犹太人一样恐惧着, 隐忍着, 驯服着, 231). Ru Yan does her best to comfort the animal, holding her close. The narrator likens Yang Yanping's silence to that of the larger world — people too have been silenced and confined, even children and the elderly, and the streets are empty of people and animals yet replete with apprehension and unease. The World Health Organization rescinds its travel advisory for Beijing in late June of 2003. And, the narrator of *Such Is This World* declares in the novel's final pages, all rapidly returns to normal, at least on the surface. Once deserted roads now are gridlocked;

once abandoned malls, internet cafés, and dance halls now are thronged with people. Everything from the past few months — the catastrophe (灾难), panic (恐慌), anger (愤怒), loneliness (孤寂), and suffering (苦痛), not to mention all types of abuse — are said to have been transformed, in retrospect, among other things, into “beauty and enjoyment” (一种审美享受, 267). But the focus remains on human anguish and alleged recovery. Nothing is said about the condition of the city’s animals, save for a brief reference to Ru Yan caressing Yang Yanping’s head after the puppy comes over to stare at her one morning, placing its paws on the edge of her bed and eager for a walk; Ru Yan promises her dog that they will go outside, declaring that today the two are going to make a fresh start. Whether Yang Yanping is one of the few dogs to have survived, or whether she is one of many that have been hidden indoors and now can resume their walks outdoors, remains unclear. Regardless, the novel’s silence on the fate of the city’s animals — victims of human vulnerability vis-à-vis disease (here manifesting as paranoia) — points to their likely relative insignificance in the eyes of Ru Yan, the narrator, and the community itself. People destroy one another, and animals, yet what ultimately happens to the latter is not seen as particularly important.

A similar dynamic is at play concerning perceptions of human interactions with landscapes writ large. Promising Yang Yanping a walk, Ru Yan tells her dog: “Let’s go downstairs and get energy from walking on the ground” (踩踩地气去, 449), pointing to the belief that floors do not transmit the *qi* of the earth, that living beings need to have direct contact with the soil. A month or two earlier, Ru Yan and her friend Damo had traveled far out of town, to a mountain retreat which prized itself on its “Green Tourism” (绿色旅游, 261), a converted logging camp with electricity and comfortable cabins, but with few other signs of human presence. The narrator emphasizes the genuineness of the place: the greens gradually grow stronger (浓郁), things feel purer (纯净) than in the fields below, the mountain forests and rivulets and rocks and even the flowers and grass, everything is unadulterated nature (都是自然本色, 260-61). Sitting in the stillness, together, Ru Yan and Damo appear at peace.

Like Yang Yanping, nature itself is depicted as providing comfort or at least as helping people relax. It is also portrayed as relatively impervious to human behaviors. At the height of the SARS epidemic, Ru Yan thinks about her deceased husband and father, the impending death of her aging mother, and then the fate of her son, most of whose setbacks, humiliations, and pain would remain obscured from her, as hers are hidden from him. She tells herself that God made human beings suffer, that grief and pain are the foundation of life, with joy and pleasure nothing more than brief moments of respite. But then her thoughts turn to human reshaping of landscapes:

People brag that they’re the pinnacles of the universe, they brag that they’re the

masters of the world, blasting mountains and diverting water, remaking heaven and earth [ 改天换地 ], strong and proud, indomitable, but in fact people are like flowers and grass, mosquitoes and flies, unable to endure a single strike.... Those towering buildings that enter the clouds, those highways that stretch for thousands of miles, those exquisite ingenious tools, that resplendent, noble finery...in the face of certain forces, in fact are so fragile that they cannot endure a single strike. (204)

Ru Yan draws attention to the ephemerality of the built environment at the same time that she minimizes anthropogenic destruction of the natural world. Leveled mountains and redirected waterways, lofty towers and lengthy highways, these vertical and horizontal penetrations of ecosystems large and small are depicted as helping human societies prove to themselves, and to others, that they are the pinnacles of creation, the rulers of the world, without equal. In contrast, Ru Yan calls attention to human vulnerability vis-à-vis nature: all it takes is a relatively minor tremor in the earth's crust or an infinitesimal virus to wreak havoc on human communities and their manufactured landscapes. So in the battle between human and nonhuman, nature comes out on top; she implies that while mountains do not regenerate, nor do waterways (immediately) restore themselves, other forces vanquish the vanquishers. Ru Yan depicts people as far more fragile than the biotic and abiotic nonhuman, a point she explicitly emphasizes by declaring human suffering much greater than the sheep and cattle slaughtered by human hands. *Such Is This World* stresses human vulnerability, and although the novel calls attention to how animals and landscapes alike can comfort people, it also for the most part minimizes their destruction. People depend on their environments, with which they develop close ties, but they perceive their reshaping of these environments as inconsequential.

Late in Hu Fayun's *Such Is This World*, a medical researcher chastises the mayor of a city hit hard by the SARS epidemic for lamenting that medication to combat this disease will not be available for some time. She declares:

You think that what we most need now truly is medicine? Think about it. From its beginning, how many lives has "SARS" taken? A hundred? A thousand? Worst case scenario, ten thousand? With China's hundreds of millions of people, is there anything that doesn't kill more people than SARS? Hepatitis, tumors, heart disease, poisonings, suicides, car accidents, occupational injuries, fires, mine disasters ... the newspapers are full of them, even the common cold kills more people than "SARS." What we most need now is not medicine, it is calming down the mood of the general population. We need to dispel the panic. This is

more important than medicine. (240)

The researcher astutely observes that shaping public opinion about a disease can be just as important as developing medications to combat that disease. But even more noteworthy about her remarks is the conspicuous absence of HIV/AIDS on her list of conditions that kill Chinese, despite the fact that by the turn of the twenty-first century HIV/AIDS had claimed the lives of far more people in China, not to mention the world, than SARS ever would. Subject to significant censorship, *Such Is This World* repeatedly condemns the deceitfulness of Chinese officialdom concerning the severity of SARS, together with the silences imposed on the Chinese people. But Hu Fayun's novel paradoxically contributes to the even more extreme silences surrounding an even more deadly disease, one that Yan Lianke takes up in *Dream of Ding Village*.

China's first reported HIV/AIDS case was that of an Argentine-American tourist who died in a Beijing hospital in 1985. In the years that followed, the disease, officially identified only in individuals who had traveled outside of China or used imported blood products, was deemed a foreign (capitalist) condition, one caused by "the corrupted Western bourgeois lifestyle," which allegedly promoted such social evils as drug use, homosexuality, and prostitution (Guo and Kleinman 240). The Chinese government remained for some time convinced, or at least continued to give the impression they were convinced, that HIV/AIDS came from abroad. Considerable attention was thus given to preventing the disease from entering China, rather than identifying local sources. But an outbreak of infections among intravenous drug users in Yunnan province (southwest China), on the border of Thailand and Burma, challenged these approaches.

So too did a blood selling scandal. In the 1990s, and particularly between 1992 and 1997, Henan Province was at the epicenter of an AIDS outbreak that affected seven provinces in central China. The area had been the site of numerous blood markets since the early twentieth century, when missionary hospitals introduced blood transfusion technology; missionaries took advantage of the Chinese cultural prejudice against donating blood, stemming from the belief that any loss of blood, central to the body's vitality, would harm the health of the donor. Blood merchants, who gradually took the place of missionaries, seldom tested blood, needles and syringes were not sterilized, and blood from multiple sellers was pooled into a single centrifuge with the extracted red cells re-injected into any number of people via contaminated infusion equipment, a procedure that almost guaranteed the rapid spread of the AIDS virus. Not only did patients receiving blood transfusions and hemophiliacs taking blood-clotting medication fall ill, so too did plasma sellers who were injected with pooled red blood cells (Jun 80-82).

Yan Lianke's *Dream of Ding Village* addresses the plight of a rural community decimated by this scandal. Unlike much creative writing on HIV/AIDS, it devotes considerable space to the plight of the nonhuman, interweaving descriptions of human death from AIDS with discourse on the human destruction of nature. In so doing, the novel emphasizes the interdependence of people and landscapes and not only how *readily* both can be obliterated but also *how* both can be obliterated so readily — largely as a result of human hubris.

*Dream of Ding Village* underlines how frequently hubris controls behavior, and ultimately destroys human lives. Early in the novel the narrator Ding Qiang describes how when everyone else was living in thatched, mud-brick cottages, his father Ding Hui built a single-story home of brick and tiles. And then, when others built similar homes, his father tore theirs down to build one with two floors; when the villagers again followed suit, they built a home with three stories; no other family was authorized to do the same, so it was in this house that they remained. The house itself was furnished not for comfort, but for display, the narrator noting that it was fitted with indoor plumbing but that his parents, unable to adapt to such facilities, built an outhouse, and that even though they had a washing machine, his mother preferred to do laundry by hand, out in the courtyard. Here mimicking others or mimicking an ideal is portrayed as having few consequences, and there is a safety net of sorts: indoor plumbing and a washing machine do not usurp the lives of the Ding family, and in fact are easily avoided even when installed.

HIV/AIDS is another story. Ding Hui's ravenous appetite for profit leads him to become the kingpin of a massive blood selling enterprise. Initially, everyone seems to benefit; securing a somewhat steady income by selling their own blood or that of others helps lift many in the village out of extreme poverty, while the narrator's father enjoys a considerable boost in his own wealth. And a concrete road is built that now links Ding Village to the outside world. But some years later the consequences of an unregulated blood market become apparent, and the town and its environs collapse. At first the nonhuman is invoked only as simile, the narrator likening people perishing of AIDS to dying ants and falling autumn leaves. Early in the novel city officials share with the narrator's grandfather Ding Shuiyang predictions that turn out to be all too accurate, introducing refrains that will appear throughout the novel:

The fever would explode violently [ 大爆 ] across the plain. It would explode violently [ 大爆 ] upon Ding Village, Willow Village, Yellow Creek, Two-Li Village, and thousands of other hamlets like a flood. Like the Yellow River bursting through its dikes, it would surge through hundreds if not thousands of villages, and people would die like ants, people would die like falling leaves.

Going out like lights [ 灯一灭 ], there would be no more people on the face of the earth, they would die like leaves floating down. At that time, Ding Village would disappear forever. Ding Village would vanish from the face of the earth. Like leaves atop an old tree, the people of Ding Village, first withering, then yellow, and then with a gurgle [ 哗哗啦啦 ], all would fall. After a gust of wind, the leaves, like the village, would go off somewhere unknown [ 不知哪去了 ]. (10-11)

The difference, of course, is that come spring the leaves will be replaced and provide a glorious canopy once again; human futures, on the other hand, are far from certain and changing seasons do not spontaneously bring with them new life.

Eventually, however, AIDS is revealed as a destroyer not only of human communities, but also of the landscapes by which they are surrounded. Initial transformations of the natural world are notable, but ultimately appear relatively benign. The narrator describes how Ding Village, when it was the site of twelve blood-collection stations sponsored by a plethora of government organizations, was littered with blood-filled plastic tubing, bottles of plasma, broken glass vials and syringes, discarded cotton balls, and used needles surrounded by splashes of red blood. Moreover, tree leaves in the village absorbed air “filled with the stench of fresh blood” and began to take on a faint reddish color (31). Even fresh verdure was affected: the narrator notes that in the past, the new leaves of the locust trees had all been thin and soft, and under the sunlight their color had been a pale yellow, with the threadlike ribs of the leaves appearing brownish, darkish green. But during the blood boom years, the new leaves of these trees were tinged with pink and their veins were a brownish purple. The locust tree by the veterinary hospital, beneath which had stood a particularly active blood bank, was especially affected; its yellow leaves became as red as those of persimmon trees in autumn and grew larger and thicker than in years past. Selling their blood also enables farmers to purchase chemical fertilizer, which allows them to grow plumper wheat than ever before.

Yet things change when people begin to die. Far from enjoying a resurgence, which often happens when human populations decline, the ecosystems of Ding Village and its environs appear to be destroyed just as readily as, and in fact even before, the human population; Yan Lianke’s novel is replete with descriptions of a damaged and then decimated natural world. Most notably, demand for coffins, and the subsequent demand for wood for a variety of other purposes, depletes the village’s wood supply, as residents receive permission to fell trees for any number of reasons, including but not limited to constructing coffins. Authorities so freely authorize people to fell trees for coffins both needed and anticipated that soon every tree is marked for destruction.

The narrator devotes part of volume four to describing, in bold characters, village ecosystems under siege. He reveals how one evening, as he walked toward the village, his grandfather gradually began to hear buzzing saws and chopping axes. Shuiyang arrived at the nearest lights only to find them illuminating a large cottonwood under attack.

When he questioned who gave the villagers permission to uproot this tree, they produced a letter on Ding Village party stationary. Shuiyang quickly discovered that authorities had authorized the felling of virtually every large tree in the village; the reader follows him through the hamlet as he surveys the extent of the (imminent) damage, remarking on the stark differences between the village now spreading before him and that of his dreams. He had envisioned Ding Village as a place of flowers (above) and gold (below). Instead, what he finds is a site of surreal destruction, trees being taken down no matter where in the village and its environs they are situated. The narrator observes, “Standing amid that torrential, unending [ 滔滔不绝 ] sound of trees being felled, Grandpa once again caught sight [in his imagination] of the fresh flowers on the surface of the flatlands and of the gold beneath” (158). But the next morning all the trees are gone; it has taken just a single night to render the village treeless. And the effects are immediate, the narrator noting that although the spring sun shone warm as usual, without foliage or shade to temper its rays it scorched the villagers’ flesh. Later in *Dream of Ding Village* the narrator speaks again of trees being felled to house the dead:

Because of the fever, on the plain people are dying just like lights going out, just like leaves floating down from trees [ 和灯灭一模样, 和树叶飘落一模样 ]. The dead needed coffins and the living needed houses. Used for coffins, the paulownia trees were as scarce as silver, and the cedar, used for crosspieces, as scarce as gold. But the coffins my father had delivered were not made of paulownia or cedar, but instead of gingko. The entire coffin was gingko.... The entire coffin was made from planks, three inches thick, from a 1,000 year old gingko. (218)

Ding Qiang describes in detail the specifics of his Uncle’s coffin — every surface of the casket is engraved with scenes of people and nature, including “trees in parks, with people below trees” (218). To be sure, most of the engravings are of material culture, everything from skyscrapers to overpasses to refrigerators, washing machines, and televisions. Yet nature remains an important part of material culture.

Noteworthy here is not only the refrain comparing human death with that of leaves and lights and the revelation that a particularly venerable tree, one that

has survived a millennium, has now been sacrificed for a coffin decorated in part by engravings of trees. Even more important is the comparison of the scarcity of paulownia trees with that of silver and the scarcity of cedars with that of gold. The narrator earlier had stated that all the trees had been felled, whereas here readers are informed that trees are as scarce as precious metals; it is not as though trees are now plentiful, and they are clearly difficult to obtain, but they are not entirely non-existent.

Moreover, the narrator describes his grandfather as dreaming about trees: “Conditions in the courtyard were the same as before Uncle and Lingling had moved in. The crowns of the paulownia trees shaded one third of the courtyard, and the radiant sunlight streamed through the thick tree leaves ... there wasn’t anything that wasn’t the same as before” (212). The emphasis here is on continuity. Not all is perfect, to be sure; Shuiyang also sees in his dream the two trees between which a washing line has been strung, and these have been “deeply scarred” by the metal wire that has been wrapped around them. But interestingly, the narrator seems to forget that the trees are alive (presumably) only in the dream. He has Shuiying wake up, tear himself away from his dream, and race toward Uncle’s house, where, “The cries of cicadas were dropping from the courtyard’s paulownia trees, like falling, overripe fruit” (213). In fact, reality is here more fecund than the dream: it is in reality that animal voices are as rich and full as succulent fruit.

These moments of resilience, however imagined, are few and far between, and circumstances deteriorate as the novel progresses. Nevertheless, people and plants continue to defy expectations. Whereas the narrator earlier had stated that fields were left fallow, here he speaks of crops damaged by drought, revealing that people do continue to plant, on however limited a scale. The narrator repeats his claim that the trees that once shaded the village are gone. But he also depicts trees as being attacked by swarms of insects. And he declares that, “The trees, those that still lived, could not support so many leaves, the leaves thinned out, so just the roots and the trunk still lived.” And meanwhile, the cicadas hang from branches at night so that when the sun rises, “all the [cicada] shells emit a yellow light/ A golden yellow light.” Trees can hardly be said to be thriving, but they continue to support a robust insect population. Interestingly, the narrator almost immediately goes on to claim that at sunset the plain turns to fire and that by nightfall “throughout the land there are just lively cinders/ lively cinders everywhere on earth” (只有遍地的红火烬 // 满天下的红火烬, 234). But if this truly were the case, if the earth truly were reduced to nothing but burning cinders, then the following day there would be nothing left to burn. The fires cannot be as destructive as the narrator here indicates. And so the pattern continues, the narrator speaking in the following chapter of the extreme, deadly heat, about how the wheat and grass are withering, the leaves curling up and dying (236). But this is

something these plants have been doing since the beginning of the novel, leaving the reader to question just how much has been, and how much remains to be, destroyed.

Indeed, at the same time that it underscores the vulnerability of both people and nature, Yan Lianke's novel also leaves space for different forms of survival, if not resilience.<sup>5</sup> On several occasions the narrator Ding Qiang speaks of landscapes being razed (most often in terms of trees having been felled), only to refer in a subsequent chapter to surviving if not thriving trees and other foliage. Similarly, the narrator refers regularly to people dying one after the other, of the town as disintegrating into oblivion, only to speak in a subsequent chapter about healthy survivors. And he comments repeatedly on the penetrating silences of both people and landscapes, only then occasionally to reveal the silence as shattered. This relative inconsistency can be attributed in part to the narrator's own positionality. But the novel's ambiguity signals to an even greater degree the possibility of both people and nature surviving, somehow, against incredible odds.

This dynamic comes to the fore in the eighth and final volume of *Dream of Ding Village*, a short chapter of just four pages, where devastated landscapes ultimately come alive, although in curious form. The narrator begins with a report on the drought, the worst the plain has experienced in nearly a century, and reveals that trees did survive the initial felling by reporting on their death in the drought: "The trees, trees that couldn't endure the drought, they also died. Like the paulownias, locust trees, chinaberries, elms, toons . . . they had all silently died./ The big trees had been chopped down, and the small trees could not endure the drought, they all died" (281). The reader is informed as well that ponds congeal, rivers stop, and wells run dry; mosquitoes disappear along with the water and only the sun, stars, planets, and wind remain. But in the second month of autumn the rains return, and sounds of life begin are heard across the land. And despite everything some grass still lives and even emits fresh green shoots; across the bright red skies an occasional bird takes flight. Returning to Ding Village, Shuiyang finds the streets deserted, no people or animals to be found save for several stray dogs, yet the road to the school is filled with the scent of the new grass growing on the plain, and grasshoppers, dragonflies, and moths are flitting through the air.

Exhausted Shuiyang dreams. He passes through all the villages he has known, walking hundreds of miles and visiting hundreds of villages, all of which are devoid of people, animals, and trees; people and animals have been obliterated, the plain barren. But at night onto this barren wasteland falls a torrential downpour, one that turns the parched soil into mud. A woman — one who closely resembles the legendary Chinese goddess Nüwa (女媧) — dips down into the mud with a willow branch, then lifts up the branch and swings it back and forth. With each swing there appear many

mud people (*niren*) on the earth ( 地上就有了好多泥人儿 , 285). Another dipping into the ground, another swing in the air, and on the ground there are hundreds, thousands of mud people. Touching and swinging again and again, never stopping, countless mud people leaping and jumping ( 蹦蹦和跳跳 ), as numerous as the bubbles the rain makes on the ground, such that Grandpa finds himself gazing upon a “new leaping jumping plain” ( 新的蹦蹦跳跳的平原了 ). The following sentence, in plain type, concludes the novel: “A new leaping and jumping world” ( 新的蹦蹦跳跳的世界了 ). Repeating three times in three lines the phrase “leaping [and] jumping” (*bengbeng[he]tiaotiao*, 蹦蹦 [和 ] 跳跳 ) the narrative highlights the liveliness of this new world. But no mention is made of plants and animals and their place in this imagined landscape. Without them, of course, people will not be able to leap and jump for long. Perhaps the nonhuman no longer appears in Shuiyang’s dreams because its regeneration has already begun, albeit on a small scale. But its absence points both to human hubris and to human vulnerability: the envisioned new world is one inhabited solely by people, people with no means of survival.

## Notes

1. The distinction between “disease” and “nature” is necessarily an artificial one. And the terms “nature” and “nonhuman” are not unproblematic. For more on the dynamics of speaking about such phenomena see Thornber.
2. SARS had a global spread, but China (particularly Hong Kong), Taiwan, and Singapore, as well as Canada (especially Toronto), were the most active sites of this disease, which had a mortality rate of about fifteen percent, much greater than that of influenza. SARS was contained by July 2003; it reemerged in Guangdong province in the winter of 2003-2004 affecting four individuals, all of whom recovered. (Li 4211) The Chinese government was harshly criticized by the international community for failing to report the outbreak of this disease more promptly. Much scholarship on SARS focuses on the social construction of the disease. See in particular Ali and Keil, Fidler, and Powers and Xiao. Powers explains how this first international health-related crisis of the twenty-first century was also the first international health communication crisis (1-13). SARS was an inspiration for Steven Soderbergh’s (1963–) Hollywood film *Contagion* (2011). See also Sterlin for more on images of SARS.
3. The internet version was quickly taken down. In 2007 Hong Kong’s WenhuaYishuChubanshe published a version of this novel that advertises itself in English and Chinese as the “uncensored edition” ( 一字不删 / 足版全本 , lit., not a single character left out/complete edition, unabridged edition). This version includes a brief biography of Hu Fayun and comments on the novel by noted scholars, critics, and artists. Another noteworthy novel from 2006 in this context is the Taiwanese writer Jiang Xun’s ( 蒋勋 ) *Mimi jiaqi: Vacances Secretes* ( 秘密假期 : Vacances Secretes; Secret

Vacation: *Vacances Secretes*), which opens with a city under siege by an epidemic that resembles SARS, with viruses floating and spreading and killing. AIDS overshadows much of the text as well.

4. The immediate origin of SARS is believed to be exotic animals from a Guangdong marketplace, particularly Himalayan palm civets and raccoon dogs; raccoon dogs are a species native to Asia.

5. Resilience — best understood as the ability of a system to absorb shocks, and arguably more of a process than a characteristic — is an emergent and increasingly popular area of scholarly inquiry in a number of diverse fields. For a helpful summary, see “Resilience.”

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# Manufactured Landscapes in Contemporary Chinese Science Fiction

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**Abstract** The term “manufactured landscapes” has negative, critical, and even ironic connotations. It refers to landscapes that have been deformed, destroyed, or devastated by human industrial endeavour, such as shipyards, dams, abandoned quarries and mines, and recycling junkyards of industrial waste. These man-made landscapes are closely related to energy consumption and environmental deterioration, and are symbols of troubled relations between humankind and nature. This article will explore the manufactured landscapes presented in Chinese science fiction, specifically three of Liu Cixin’s SF novellas. Using the SF analytical framework, I argue that in Liu Cixin’s three novellas, the aesthetic of estrangement is created by the extrapolative manufactured landscapes of huge bubbles, a long tunnel, and a coal mine on fire. These environmental extrapolations lead to cognition of an energy crisis, the depletion of natural resources, the degeneration of the environment, as well as possible solutions to these various environmental and energy problems. In addition, I contend that there is an intertextuality between Liu’s imaginative manufactured landscapes in the novellas and the manufactured landscapes in the author’s empirical world such as the Three Gorges Dam, the South-to-North Water Diversion project, the Shanghai Magnetic Railway, and numerous coal mines in China.

**Key Words** Manufactured landscape; energy; environment; science fiction; intertextuality

The image of a mammoth industrial structure dotting an urbanized landscape has been a motif in many Chinese SF narratives before the neologism of “manufactured landscapes” was coined. These “manufactured landscapes” presented in the large-scale photographs by Edward Burtynsky and captured in the documentary by Jennifer Baichwal provide us with a critical perspective to ponder industrial society and technology since the Industrial Revolution.<sup>1</sup> The term “manufactured landscapes” has negative, critical, and even ironic connotations. It refers to landscapes that have

been deformed, destroyed, or devastated by human industrial endeavour, such as shipyards, dams, abandoned quarries and mines, and recycling junk yards of industrial waste. These man-made landscapes are closely related to energy consumption and environmental deterioration, and are symbols of troubled relations between humankind and nature.

This article will explore the manufactured landscapes presented in Chinese science fiction, specifically three of Liu Cixin's (刘慈欣, b.1963) SF novellas, *Underground Fire* (地火, 2000), *Cannon of Earth* (地球大炮, 2003) and *Soap Bubbles* (圆圆的肥皂泡, 2004). Coal mines on fire, an entire city festooned with soap bubbles, and a giant tunnel through the center of the Earth to Antarctica are among the images in Liu Cixin's SF narratives that reveal a paradoxical relationship between the tapping of new energy sources and the devastating ecological consequences likely to follow. These narratives provide a critical reflection on what has been dubbed "the new materialism" — "a materialism based on transformations of energy." It is "neither a crude consumerist materialism nor a reductive atomic materialism. It takes seriously the material and physical world in which we live" (Crockett and Robbins xvi).

Manufactured landscapes and the new materialism are both significant concerns of environmentalism. When we examine how these environmental concerns are reflected in SF narratives, we are dealing with the relationship between environmentalism and science fiction. Specifically, we are looking at the interaction between environmental cognition and a sense of estrangement created by manufactured landscapes in SF narrative. Therefore, before doing my analysis of Liu Cixin's three novellas, I will briefly explain what I view as the connection between environmentalism and SF, as well as my framework for analyzing SF.

Over the past two decades, the interaction and connection between environmentalism and science fiction literature have been widely discussed, recognized and valued by environmentalists, literary critics, and political scientists. Some SF narratives make a literary contribution to discussions of environmental degradation and its origin. They address issues such as environmental movements, green political parties, deep ecology, the land ethic, landscape restoration, socio-biology, sustainable agriculture, eco-feminism, social ecology, and bioregionalism. When discussing the relation between the text and ecocritic in his book *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, Lawrence Buell claims that "no genre potentially matches up with a planetary level of thinking 'environment' better than science fiction does" (57). He further argues: "For half a century, science fiction has taken a keen, if not consistent interest in ecology, in planetary endangerment, in environmental ethics, in humankind's relation to the nonhuman world" (56). Patrick D. Murphy finds in SF

literature “several varieties of nature and environmental engagement” (41). Some SF narratives “provide factual information about nature and human-nature interactions as well as provide thematically environmentalist extrapolations of conflict and crisis based on such information”; they “provide analogous depictions of ecosystems and human interaction with such systems”; and they “demonstrate the disastrous consequences of exploitive relationships between humans and other humans, humans and other sentient beings, and humans and ecosystems in which they are an exotic” (41).

All the above comments on the relation between environment and SF narratives reveal an interaction between environmental cognition and the estranged world that SF creates. This leads to my framework for analyzing SF. In his book *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, Darko Suvin argues for an understanding of SF as the “literature of cognitive estrangement” (4). He defines SF as “a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author’s empirical environment” (8). In this definition, “Concepts of science [are] for cognition, and fiction for estrangement” (13). The framework of “cognitive estrangement” distinguishes the SF genre from both realist literature and meta-empirical genres such as the fairy tale, mythology, and fantasy narration. Estrangement distinguishes SF from literature of a realist, naturalist or empirical bent. Estrangement also signifies a break with the empirical world, but is at the same time beyond the confines of reality with the help of “novum” (a strange newness) (4). Cognition distinguishes SF from myths, fairy tales, folk tales, and fantasy. “Significant modern SF, with deeper and more lasting sources of enjoyment, also presupposes more complex and wider cognitions: it discusses primarily the political, psychological, and anthropological use and effect of knowledge, of philosophy of science, and the becoming of failure of new realities as a result of it” (15).

Using the above SF analytical framework, I argue that in Liu Cixin’s three novellas, the aesthetic of estrangement is created by the extrapolative manufactured-landscapes of huge bubbles, a long tunnel, and a coal mine on fire. These environmental extrapolations lead to cognition of an energy crisis, the depletion of natural resources, the degeneration of the environment, as well as possible solutions to these various environmental and energy problems. In addition, I contend that there is an intertextuality between Liu’s imaginative manufactured landscapes in the novellas and the manufactured landscapes in the author’s empirical world such as the Three Gorges Dam, the South-to-North Water Diversion project, the Shanghai Magnetic Railway, and numerous coal mines in China. I borrow the term “intertextuality,” coined by poststructuralist Julia Kristeva in 1966 to refer to the interaction between

the manufactured landscapes in reality and the ones described in Liu's novellas.<sup>2</sup> Intertextuality is a narrative technique to convey the meaning of one text by referring to another text. In my discussion of Liu Cixin's novellas, I expand the concept of "another text" to something more than just literary text. It is something in reality that readers can refer to so that they will have a better understanding of the thematic concerns of the narratives. Specifically, in Liu Cixin's novellas, "another text" refers to manufactured landscapes in contemporary China. Liu Cixin borrows and transforms such manufactured landscapes as the Three Gorges Dam, the dams built for the South-to-North Water Diversion project, underground tunnels, and abandoned coal mines. In this way, the resulting intertextuality alerts readers to China's gigantic engineering projects, raise their environmental consciousness, and explores alternative solutions to energy problems.

Liu Cixin's day job has been that of senior computer engineer in Shanxi province's Niangziguan (娘子关) Electric Power Plant. He published his first SF short story "Whale Ballad" (鲸歌) in 1999. That same year, he won first place in the Milky Way Award competition — China's most prestigious science fiction award — with the story "Travel with Her Eyes" (带上她的眼睛, 1999). Since then, he has definitely been China's most prolific and popular SF writer with his numerous sci-fi short stories, novellas, and full length novels, among which *Drifting Earth* (流浪地球, 2000), *Ball Lightning* (球状闪电, 2004), and the trilogy *Three Bodies* (三体, 2006-08) have been particularly well received. Aside from these narratives dealing with outer-space travel and the eschatology of the universe, Liu also wrote some novellas dealing with the energy crisis in contemporary time, such as *Cannon of Earth*, *Soap Bubbles*, and *Underground Fire*. The visions of disaster portrayed in these three novellas are consistent with the eschatological point of view reflected in Liu's other narratives on the ultimate fate of Earth and universe. *Cannon of Earth*, *Soap Bubbles*, and *Underground Fire* are all about the depletion of energy and natural resources (water, coal, and refined fuel) in the near future, and the environmental problems brought about by industrial development. Liu Cixin not only reveals the problems, but also tries to provide an alternative to solve a given energy issue or environmental problem. However, these solutions entail gigantic engineering projects, and thus cause further environmental problems.

### **Coal Gasification**

In *Underground Fire*, the protagonist Liu Xin is an engineer who specializes in the technology of coal gasification in the coal mining industry. His father has died of silicosis as a result of a lifetime of work in the coal mine. Liu Xin has tried to find ways to improve mining technology so as to eliminate the need for coal miners

to work below ground. He has performed laboratory experiments in gasifying the underground coal and transporting the gasified coal through underground pipes. In this way, workers do not need to work in the underground shafts anymore. However, due to a technical negligence in the experiment, the underground coal of the entire coalmine caught fire one day. The situation soon went out of control. It took eighteen years to finally put out the mine fire. All vegetation in the vicinity was either burned or withered as a result. Thousands of people became destitute and homeless. Liu Xin committed suicide. However, one hundred years later, coal gasification finally becomes a mature technology and replaces the conventional approach to coal production.

This story touches upon three main issues in contemporary China's coal industry: rampant pollution, harsh and dangerous working conditions, and the need for technical improvements. First of all, the story reveals the most devastated scene of a mining accident. In the narrative, after the accident, Liu Xin revisits the coalmine. It is as if he is strolling through Hell. The sky is clouded by heavy black smoke, and the Sun is merely a dull red disk. Particles of coal dust generate static electricity in the sky. They are like lightning flashing in the sky from time to time. The burning coal mine is eerily illuminated by flashes of lightning. Monstrous columns of thick black smoke billows from every mine pit and rise up in the sky like boa constrictors climbing upward. Underground fires glow at the base of these columns of smoke. Highways are burning hot; asphalt pavement is melting. The noxious air reeks of sulphur. The highways are full of people and cars. People are wearing respiratory masks. Their clothes are covered by grey dust that is falling from the sky.<sup>3</sup> This eschatological scene of the mining accident reads much like a newspaper report of a mining accident in contemporary China. According to statistics, the death rate from coal mining accidents in China has dropped significantly during the past two decades. But the overall mortality rate from coal mining in China is still very high when compared with that in advanced countries. For example, 2630 people died in Chinese coal mine accidents in 2009, and 2433 died from this in 2010. The death rate per megaton of coal mine in the Chinese industry is 0.803%.<sup>4</sup> Coal mining accidents are directly related to two other problems: bad working conditions and low pay. In the novella, when the protagonist enters the office building of the coal mine, he sees a big crowd of miners on strike due to not having been paid for months in a row. Many of them are disabled due to mining accidents and have been living on a pension ever since. The bad working conditions, low pay, and wages being in arrears have been stubbornly persistent problems in the Chinese coal industry. Liu Cixin's depiction of the miners' strike is very realistic. For instance, a recent news report of over a thousand Chinese coal miners on strike during 23 February 2014 is set in the Yangzhuang Coal Mine in Shandong province. They

had not been paid for six months of work.<sup>5</sup>

This narrative also presents an extrapolative picture of the future coal industry. The last chapter of the novella is set 120 years in the future, by which time gasified coal has already been successfully produced. The traditional coal mining industry with workers toiling in underground tunnels can now only be seen in museums. In just such a museum, a teacher tells her students that gasification technology has delivered the world from the throes of its energy crisis. In the late 21<sup>st</sup> century, the decline after “peak oil” had already occurred, and was about to set off another world war in the Middle East. Fortunately, the timely invention of gasification technology provided the world with abundant and relatively non-polluting new energy resources, and thereby saved everyone from another world war.

The extrapolation of coal gasification is not merely a fantasy. Even though coal gasification technology is still at the beginning stage of development, it has already been in commercial use on a small scale. The governments of both the US and China view coal gasification as a core technology of green energy in the future. After peak oil, coal gasification would be part of the many-sided solution to our energy crisis. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, humans derived energy from burning wood and other biomass, as well as harnessing water power, wind power, and draught livestock. As pointed out by Crockett and Robbins in his book *Religion, Politics and the Earth*, “The discovery of coal met with a ready-made advancement of greater exploitation of energy conversion capability and technological innovation that birthed the Industrial Revolution” (90). In the Industrial Revolution, the modern steam engine, combined with the exploitation of coal, propelled an already powerful Europe, and resulted in Great Britain’s relatively dominant position in the world during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The mining and burning of coal by steam engines fuelled the British Empire from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Around that time, the discovery and tapping of petroleum and natural gas led to their replacement of coal as the primary source of energy in more and more countries of the world. During the transition from coal to oil, the United States gradually replaced Great Britain as the relatively dominant great power in the world. But what may happen after the depletion of petroleum? After all, untapped reserves of oil and coal are limited. Therefore, people have to improve the efficiency with which oil and coal are utilized. Gasification-based energy systems would be one of the solutions. Coal gasification has the advantage of higher energy efficiency, and also emits fewer greenhouse gases than the burning of coal. Statistics published by the US Department of Energy demonstrate the higher efficiency of gasified coal. “Less fuel is used to generate the rated power, resulting in better economics (which can mean lower costs to rate payers) and the formation of fewer greenhouse gases (a 60%-efficient gasification power plant can cut the formation

of carbon dioxide by 40% compared to a typical coal combustion plant).”<sup>6</sup> Coal gasification is especially important for the Chinese government. Coal gasification will not only help reduce air pollution from the combustion of coal, but will also greatly improve the production-related safety record and miners’ working conditions by transforming underground mining to a surface-level operation. This is also the protagonist Liu Xin’s major concern in the novella. He strives to transform the dirty and dangerous coal industry into a clean and safe industry.

### **Energy Depletion**

In *Cannon of Earth*, because of environmental problems and energy depletion, people become increasingly interested in the natural resources of Antarctica. The UN has designated Antarctica as a Global Development Region. The major countries in the world have established economic zones and explored the natural resources there. China has even launched a gigantic engineering project to connect China with Antarctica — and built a tunnel from Beijing to Antarctica through the center of the Earth. It seems that the tunnel has a perfect energy saving design: it uses gravity to ship people and goods to Antarctica. It will supposedly be cheaper and faster to travel from Beijing to Antarctica in this tunnel than by train from Beijing to nearby Tianjin. However, the project turns out to be a big financial and engineering disaster. A lot of workers die from accidents when building this tunnel. Many other people go bankrupt from having bought stock in the tunnel construction companies. In addition, because of the high investment required by this project, the resulting shipping costs are not lower than the conventional way of shipping. More importantly, the Antarctic dream is soon dashed because of the excessive exploitation of natural resources and industrial pollution. Antarctica was turned into a polluted and resource-deficient continent, no different from other continents on the Earth. So the UN issues a new Antarctic treaty. All countries withdraw from Antarctica in the hope that the continent’s ecology will recover as excessive exploitation is phased out. The only large-scale man-made thing remaining there is the huge abandoned tunnel through the center of the Earth. Half a century later, with the further environmental degradation of Earth, people have to close all industrial facilities on the Earth, and move all the industries they wish to preserve to outer space. The abandoned tunnel in Antarctica is finally turned into a useful space gun for the launching of spaceships.

Liu’s *Cannon of Earth* reminds the reader of Jules Verne’s novel *From the Earth to the Moon* (1865), in which people build an enormous sky-facing Columbiad space gun and launch three people in a projectile with the goal of landing them on the moon.<sup>7</sup> In Liu’s story, the tunnel was originally designed as a transportation corridor for shipping goods from China to Antarctica. Though the project fails because of

both technical and economic reasons, it is eventually refashioned as a space gun for launching spaceships into orbit five decades later. It plays the same role as the Columbiad Gun, but on a much larger scale. The major difference between the two cannons lies in the aims of their designers. The Columbiad projectile aims to land astronauts on the Moon and explore its surface. However, the projectile becomes a Moon satellite, and the fate of the three astronauts on board remains unknown. In contrast, the Cannon of Earth has a more practical mission, and achieves its goal by sending space ships into orbit around the Earth. It is possible that Liu was inspired by Verne's novel. In contrast with Verne's novel of pure fantasy, Liu's novella broaches energy issues and environmental concerns. The changing mission of the canon reveals various alternative paths to the overall destination of solving the world's energy problems. The reason for building the tunnel through the center of the Earth is to exploit the energy and natural resources of Antarctica. The tunnel itself is also energy saving because it does not use any fuel. It uses only gravity to move the train forward. However, the project fails, natural resources in Antarctica become depleted, and finally people cast their eyes up toward outer space. The long tunnel in the novella reminds readers of China's air-raid shelters and tunnels dug in late 1960s to early 1970s when Mao Zedong and his Communist Party mobilized the Chinese populace to engage in civil defence projects such as tunnel construction.<sup>8</sup>

The novella's long tunnel also reminds readers of the Shanghai Maglev train and tunnels. The Shanghai Maglev is the first commercially operated high-speed magnetic levitation railway line in the world and the third Maglev line to be operated. The train line connects Shanghai's Pudong International Airport with the outskirts of central Pudong, where passengers can transfer to the Shanghai Metro — with connections to destinations all over Shanghai. The Shanghai Maglev train shares some similarities with the Cannon of Earth in terms of its huge cost and low utilization rate. The Maglev project required almost three years to build, from March 2001 to the end of 2003. The commercial service of the train line started in January 2004. The total investment for it was RMB1.2 billion. It was the cooperative project between German companies and local Chinese companies. The local Chinese companies built the track. In order to maintain the stability of the track, several thousand concrete piles were driven 70 meters deep into the ground to lay the foundation. Steel reinforced concrete supporting columns were driven into the ground with an interval of every 25 meters because of unstable soil conditions in the Pudong area.<sup>9</sup> It is uncertain how these steel and concrete structures in the ground will affect the geological structure and soil conditions in the Pudong area. However, one thing people can see is that the utilization rate of the Shanghai Maglev Train is not as high as the project leaders originally expected. In spite of its high speed, most passengers still choose to ride the

conventional metro instead of Maglev train because of the expensive price of a ticket for the latter. Similar to the Cannon of Earth, shipping or transportation costs are very high in order to break even on a big investment. As what Liu says in the story: the biggest disaster is the project itself. It is an unprecedented engineering project in terms of technology, but it is also a big financial burden. It is hard to explain why this money-burning proposal could have been signed off on in the first place. It is probably because of the fantasy of the discovery of the new continent and the frantic worship of technology. From the perspective of economics, the time of completion of the project is also the time of its death. The advantages of a brief shipping time and low energy consumption were offset by high shipping expenses.<sup>10</sup> The Cannon of Earth is an extreme version of Shanghai Maglev train Line. Through his novella, Liu offers socio-political commentary on China's construction of face-giving huge engineering projects such as Shanghai Maglev train line: a very high level of government and thus taxpayer funding, plus a change to the geological characteristics along the route of the project, along with a very low utilization rate due to sticker shock among the general public.

Another extrapolative disaster the novella describes is the consequence of over-exploitation of Antarctica. It also warns people that the natural resources in Antarctica are limited. In the narrative, the Cannon of Earth is just part of a bigger project — the Antarctic Courtyard project. Similar to many other countries, China regards Antarctica as its backyard where it can exploit natural resources and develop industry in almost any way it deems appropriate. However, this Antarctica dream soon shatters. Excessive industrialization and exploitation of natural resources ruins the world's last pristine continent. The global environment thus further degenerates, and pollution as well as stepped-up ozone depletion result in the extinction of vast amounts of vegetation. Clean air itself becomes a precious and rare commodity. Now the only way to save the Earth is to shut down all of the planet's heavy industry, including the energy sector. The Cannon of Earth is transformed into a space gun to launch space ships into orbit. It launches one space ship every two or three minutes. These space ships help move all of the planet's heavy industry from Earth to outer space. These space ships are as numerous as meteor showers in the night sky. This dramatic change of the use of the tunnel from a failed engineering project to a highly efficient space gun reveals Liu's optimistic view of technology. He also provides an ultimate solution to energy needs and environmental problems on Earth. That is, he points to the necessity of expanding our realm of everyday activity to outer space. This solution appears to resonate with the new materialism.

## Water Shortages

The novella *Soap Bubbles* is about how people use technology to solve the problem of water shortages in northwest China. Yuanyuan, a materials engineer, hails from a northwestern city called Silk Road in China. Nowadays, however, Silk Road City is disappearing because of desertification. Inspired by soap bubbles, Yuanyuan invents a kind of special foaming agent to produce giant bubbles in sky. Yuanyuan and her colleagues use these bubbles to capture moist air from the faraway South China Sea and Bay of Bengal. These bubbles fly away and carry back moist air to northwest China. When the bubbles break, their vapor condenses into rain. So the city of Silk Road is saved from water shortage and desertification.

Liu's story reminds some readers of the science popularization narratives written in 1970s China such as "Round Smoke Ring" (圆圆的烟圈), which explores possible solutions to the problem of exhaust emissions in a chemical factory. In *Soap Bubbles*, Liu provides a better way to solve the water shortage problem than simply launching huge engineering projects. Though Liu does not mention the Three Gorges Dam Project or the South-to-North Water Diversion Project, readers can easily make a quick connection to these projects when reading Liu's narrative. Water shortages and desertification have been a long lasting problem in northwest China. The Chinese government has been engaged in the South-to-North Water Diversion Project since 2002. The project is a multi-decade infrastructural effort to better utilize water resources in China. The engineering scale and challenge of this project exceed even the massive Three Gorges hydro-power project. Similar to the Three Gorges project, this is also a controversial project and involves such problems as large-scale human migration, radical changes to various local eco systems, and negative impacts on local history and culture. In *Soap Bubbles*, Liu offers an alternative solution to the problem of water shortages in northwest China. Instead of building gigantic dams and hydro-power stations, people use high tech methods of capturing moist air, which brings rainfall to regions in desperate need of more water. The solution does not involve huge engineering projects, large-scale human migration, pollution, or gigantic costs for the government and taxpayers.

In the narrative, Liu provides a detailed description of the bubble project. The project takes ten years. During these ten years, gigantic sky grids have been built. Every grid has thousands of big rings. These rings are formed by thin tubes with small holes in them. The diameters of these rings range from several hundred meters to one thousand meters. They can produce huge bubbles when filled with a foaming agent. The sky grids are both land-based and sky-based. The land-based grids are spread along the shores of the South China Sea and the Bay of Bengal. Bubbles containing

moist air form a new “Great Wall” over a thousand meters high in the sky. Blown by strong winds, these bubbles flow like a long river, drifting deep into the hinterland, passing over the Himalayas, and finally arriving in northwest China. The city of Silk Road is under a dream-like sky. The bubbles cast huge shadows on the ground. The most spectacular scenes are at dawn and dusk when the morning or evening sunlight makes the bubbles shine a golden color. When the bubbles break, drizzle and rain soon fall from the sky.<sup>11</sup> The image of transparent and flowing bubbles is in sharp contrast with the concrete grey dams over Yangtze River and many other rivers in China. The bubble river flowing in the sky from the South China Sea and the Bay of Bengal to northwest China also parallels the Yangzi River’s flow in actuality.

However, there are some potential consequences that Liu Cixin does not mention in his story. How will the bubble project affect the environment of the South China Sea when its moist air is captured and shipped to other regions? Will this project have an impact on the local vegetation and fauna in northwest China after its pattern of humidity changes? Will the bubbles bring light pollution to the Silk Road city? These questions remain unanswered in the story. However, it may cause the reader to ponder how whenever we benefit from technology, we are likely to encounter some negative consequences as well.

## Conclusion

As with many other SF narratives, *The Cannon of Earth*, *Soap Bubbles* and *Underground Fire* are wedded to a hope of finding in the unknown the ideal energy solution or the possibility of alternative energy sources. Analysing the novellas in the “cognitive estrangement” framework, we can observe that the depletion of energy and natural resources amounts to the aesthetic paradigm of these three SF narratives. These estrangements are created by the gigantic engineering projects and spectacular scenes, which were made possible by innovative technologies. One could point to three cognitions in particular.

The first cognition is to raise reader’s consciousness with respect to the energy crisis: conventional sources of energy such as petroleum, coal, and hydro-power, are limited in our continents, including Antarctica. We will soon exceed the capacity of the natural resources of the earth to sustain several billion people at the levels of consumption many of us have already reached. What will we do when we use up these conventional energy sources and other natural resources? As Crockett and Robbins have pointed out, “In its most basic sense, life is energy conversion. In a way, being or legality itself is also energy. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Albert Einstein demonstrated the convertibility of mass and energy in the famous formula,  $E=mc^2$ . Energy is fundamental to everything we are and everything we do” (87). Liu Cixin’s

novellas examine the crucial role of energy in the rise of technological civilization and consider how that civilization is threatened due to the limited supply of cheap energy sources. *Underground Fire* and *Cannon of Earth* consider a future beyond oil and beyond heat, and thus is integral to our stated goal of thinking what comes next: collapse, if not utter exhaustion.

The second cognition is to exploit available energy resources in concert with developing human technological innovations. Developing technologies has been what we human beings have done collectively over the last few millennia. In these three narratives, such innovative technologies are intended to solve the energy and natural resource crisis, but they either fail or create even worse environmental problems. However, the author gives readers hope. In *Cannon of Earth* and *Underground Fire*, the Antarctic Courtyard and coal gasification projects both fail at the beginning. However, one century or so later with further development of science and technology, both coal gasification and gravity-powered transport are used to benefit people. These endings of his novellas reveal the author's optimistic views about science and technology.

The third cognition is how the development of science and technology will affect our environment. The extrapolative descriptions of the manufactured landscapes, such as the burning coalmine, gigantic tunnel and huge bubbles, are the marks of trauma that human beings have left on the Earth. They have become part of the natural world. These extrapolative manufactured landscapes echo and transform such manufactured landscapes in the author's realist world as dams in the South-to-North Water Division project, the Shanghai Maglev train, and abandoned coalmines in China. In addition, some depictions in Liu's three novellas are not only extrapolations in time but ostensibly factual, newspaper-style reports about what has happened in contemporary China. The intertextuality within the novellas and outside of them provides a basis for in-depth environmental and political cognition.

## Note

1. Jennifer Baichwal, *Manufactured Landscapes* (New York: Zeitgeist Films, 2007). Baichwal was inspired by the photographic works of Edward Burtynsky and made this documentary film. For more of Burtynsky's works, see Edward Burtynsky, *China: the photographs of Edward Burtynsky* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2005).

2. Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980) 69. Kristeva's coinage of "intertextuality" represents an attempt to integrate her study of how signs derive their meaning within the structure of a text with her examination of the multiple meanings in each text (especially novels).

3. For full text of the novella, see Liu Cixin. *Underground Fire*. This story can be accessed on internet.
4. For detail, see Caomu guzi, "Statistics of death rate in mining accidents since 1949 in China." Also see Baidu wenku, "The Fourth Set of Statistics of Annual Death Rate in Mining Accidents."
5. For detail, see Zhongguo jinwang, "Shangdong Yangzhuang Coal Miners on Strike because of Wages in Arrears."
6. For detail, see "How Coal Gasification Plants Work," Office of Fossil-fuel Energy.
7. Jules Verne, *From the Earth to the Moon*. Scholastic Book Services, 1965. This novel can be accessed on internet.
8. For detail, see Wang Zhenhu, "Air-Raid Project during the Period When the Sino-Soviet Relationship Deteriorated."
9. For detail, see "Shanghai Maglev Train."
10. For full text of this novella, see Liu Cixin. *Cannon of Earth*. The work can be accessed on internet.
11. For full text of the story, see Liu Cixin, *Soap Bubbles*. It can be accessed on internet.

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# Dilemma in an Era of Change: Place and Space in Jia Zhangke's *Still Life* and *The World*

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**Abstract** In the course of modernization, China has been witnessing rapid industrialization and urbanization, which is undoubtedly built on the unprecedented transformation of the physical world, and has in turn greatly impacted the lives of the Chinese and their sense of place and space. Contemporary Chinese, when compared with their ancestors, have obtained much greater freedom enabled by enhanced mobility and extended space. On the other hand, more space brings them, other than freedom and widened horizon, feelings of being uprooted and thus of estrangement from their ancestral and spiritual home. Jia Zhangke has captured this dilemma with which contemporary Chinese are faced in his two films: *The World* (2004) and *Still Life* (2006). Following Yi-fu Tuan's place-space framework, this paper examines how the four protagonists, namely, Zhao Xiaotao and Cheng Taisheng in *The World*, and San Ming, the coal miner, and Shen Hong, the nurse in *Still Life*, experience the overwhelming transformation in their lives, brought out by the country's deep plunge into industrialization and urbanization. I thereby argue that Jia Zhangke's combined use of documentary and surreal elements skillfully presents Chinese people's dilemma in the era of transformation and critical changes.

**Key words** Jia Zhangke; place; space; *The World*; *Still Life*

Over the past three decades, China has been transforming herself from an agricultural economy to an increasingly industrialized and urbanized country. There is no doubt that the rapid industrialization and urbanization is built on the unprecedented transformation of the physical world, which, undoubtedly, greatly impacted the lives of Chinese people and their sense of place and space. In his now classic book *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, Yi-fu Tuan, the famous cultural geographer, fully and clearly explains two interdependent yet paradoxical human desires in embracing place and space: place is security, space is freedom; we are attached to the one and long for the other (3). Before the onset of nationwide industrialization and

urbanization, most Chinese were farmers, and were deeply rooted in their hometown. The rapid industrialization and globalization has greatly enhanced their mobility and contributed to the expansion of their living space. The current Chinese, when compared with their ancestors, can thus enjoy more freedom in moving around. On the other hand, more space brings them, other than real freedom and widened horizon, the feelings of being uprooted and of estrangement from their original self and, their ancestral and spiritual home. The internationally acclaimed filmmaker Jia Zhangke well captured the dilemma that contemporary Chinese are faced with in his two films: *The World* (2004) and *Still Life* (2006). While the former follows a family of Shanxi migrants into a theme park called “The World” in Beijing and tracks the painful personal encounters of these migrants in the metropolitan city, the latter depicts how the construction of the world-famous Three Gorges Dam has dramatically shaped the life of two families from different classes. Using Yi-fu Tuan’s place-space framework, this paper examines how the four protagonists, namely, Zhao Xiaotao and Cheng Taisheng in *The World*, and the coal miner San Ming and the nurse Shen Hong in *Still Life*, experienced the overwhelming tremors and trepidations in their lives, brought about by the country’s giddy pace of modernization and urbanization.

### **Space and Place in the Chinese Context**

As has been mentioned above, Yi-fu Tuan contends that place and space seem to stand in opposition to each other but actually stand for the two paradoxical desires of human beings since they seek attachment and freedom at the same time. He writes: “We have a sense of space because we can move” (118), and “space [being] transformed into place acquires definition and meaning” (136). Although the attachment to the homeland is a universal phenomenon, the increased mobility of modern people decreases their sense of place since it generally takes time to know a place. Tuan also points out,

Space is a common symbol of freedom in the Western world. Space lies open; it suggests the future and invites action. On the negative side, space and freedom are a threat. A root meaning of the word “bad” is “open.” To be open and free is to be exposed and vulnerable. Open space has no trodden paths and signposts. It has no fixed pattern of established human meaning; it is like a blank sheet on which meaning may be imposed. Enclosed and humanized space is place. Compared to space, place is a calm center of established values. Human lives are a dialectical movement between shelter and venture, attachment and freedom. (54)

Thus while the term “place” can be associated with the past, established values, shelter, safety, and attachment, the word “space” is related to future, no established values, venture, risks, and freedom. This independent yet interdependent relationship between space and place is universal in human nature, but from the comparative perspective, Chinese had the deeper attachment to their place rather than space when compared with Westerners.

The reasons are as follows: first of all, from a philosophical perspective, both Confucianism and Taoism in China advocate being attached to one's place. For instance, in Confucianism, the term *jia* (家, home/household/family) is the key concept. Considered the smallest social unit of the society, *jia* is much more valued than the individual being. Confucius holds that even *guojia* (国家, the whole country) should be managed like a *jia*. While in English the two words “home” and “family” are used to mean the physical dwellings and the emotionally-knit family with a child respectively, *jia* in Chinese can mean both, that is to say, there is no division between the emotional home and the physical home. The stability of *jia* used to be highly valued. Thus there is the saying that “when parents are alive, children are not supposed to leave them”(父母在, 不远游). In addition, the ideal of the simple and sedentary life is stated in the Taoist classic *Tao Te Ching*. It says: “Reduce the size and population of the state....Though adjoining states are within the sight of one another, and the sound of dogs barking and cocks crowing in one state can be heard in another, yet the people of one state will grow old and die without having had any dealings with those of another” (142). Secondly, in terms of mode of economy, farming has been the dominant one. Compared with the West that started as nomadic countries, China has been an agrarian country since ancient times, resulting in the fact that the former would move from one place to another while the latter used to be rooted in one place, that is, one's home or hometown.

For the past three decades, China has embarked on the road of industrializing and urbanizing, giving rise to the fact that millions of people, voluntarily or involuntarily, leave their home places, go on unfamiliar journeys and end up in the seemingly enlarged spaces that have been created by industrialization and urbanization. The physical transformation of one's hometown may result in the loss of their ancestral and spiritual home. To put it simply, if their physical home is knocked down, where are they to resettle their ancestral root and spiritual home? Thus the sense of “placelessness” or “uprootedness” appears widespread and acute in today's China during the Reform Era in which manufactured landscapes are constantly emerging. It is no exaggeration to say that the unprecedented alteration of the physical world is coupled with an inescapable displacement of people's sense of home place, and subsequently the total erasure of their ancestral roots as a spiritual home.

### Place and Space in *The World and Still Life*

Written and directed by Jia Zhangke, *The World* is mainly set in an actual theme park located in Beijing, that is, Beijing World Park, which displays a gala of replicas, albeit at reduced scale, of iconic landmarks found all over the world for park visitors and “accidental” tourists. The film tells the story of two migrant workers employed by the World Park: Zhao Xiaotao (Xiaotao), a dance entertainer, and Chen Taisheng (Taisheng), Xiaotao’s boyfriend, who works as security guard. As young people from the rural area of Shanxi Province, they come to pursue their shared dream of leading a better and freer life in the metropolis. Just as the theme park brings the rest of the world home to the park visitors, their jobs seem to lay a short-cutting path to the end of realizing their dream.

In this film, we can see clearly how migrant workers negotiate with the unfamiliar living environment — the simulated park space spreads farther and wider than their hometown. Accustomed to being confined to their small hometown, the couple of lovers seem to have obtained much greater freedom since they arrived in search of jobs in Beijing, one of the world’s largest cities, but actually they have been confined to their working place, which, ironically, is the mimicry of the whole world. Although the logos of the park are “See the world without ever leaving Beijing” and “Give me one day, I’ll give you the whole world,” this “world” is not the real one, but merely a midget replica of the world-famous buildings that are used to create a fantasized *simulacrum* for the unsuspecting tourists.

Such is the world that those migrant workers are living in day in and day out. Take Xiaotao’s case for example: talking to her boyfriend on the phone while riding on a mono-rail train, she is feigning to tour around the land of “India”. But this tour in a theme park gives her none of the genuine thrill of touring around the real world, and has left her the feeling that “being stuck here will turn me into a ghost.” Thus more space for those migrant workers might mean more alienation between them, and more uncertainties for their future. It is deeply ironic that mobility in such space has led to joy-killing suffocation.

In the film, Director Jia combines the use of real-life elements with surreal mimics, to accentuate the sharp contrast between fantasy and reality in the life of those migrant workers. In other words, the cinematic images project a world which is both real and yet illusory. For one thing, the fictional setting and characters of *The World* masquerade real people in real places. The film was partially shot at the actual “World Park” in Beijing as well as at the “Windows of the World” in Shenzhen. Many characters on the cast are not played by professionals, but undertrained amateurs. For instance, Xiaotao, the female lead in the film, used to be a dance teacher in a Shanxi

high school; Sanming, the male lead who was to play the major role in *Still Life*, is Jia's cousin, a motivated but untrained first-time actor. The duo, for most of the film's length, speak Shanxi dialect rather than mandarin Chinese. All those arrangements are intended to create the sense of the real. For another, Director Jia's realist or naturalist method of storytelling allows actors' "emotions to develop fully in the natural course of time" (qtd. in Gatenaio 26). In Jia's own words, "My way of filming allows me to describe Chinese reality without distortion" (qtd. in Gatenaio 26). These documentary-like elements give added weight to the film's critical representation of contemporary China as it grapples with ups and downs of globalization experience.

But Director Jia's creative use of the symbolic images, no matter real or surreal, enhances the irony and the paradox in those migrant workers' life. Xiaotao's craving for mobility and freedom is effectively illustrated through animated sequences that further underscore the impossibility of ever satiating such desires. As Tuan points out, the airplanes can extend man's freedom and space (53), but in the film, the airplane symbolizes the alarming chasm between the mundane reality and the migrant workers' longing for freedom. For instance, there is a sequence in which Xiaotao has the fantasy of becoming a flight attendant in uniform, flying like a bird in the sky over the Beijing city. In the following dialogue between Er Guniang and Xiaotao, it can be seen clearly that the airplane is something that they can watch flying by but can never actually be riding in, for air travel is so far beyond their financial reach. Take a look at the following dialogue between them:

Er Guniang: Sister Tao, who flies on the planes?

Xiaotao: Who knows — I don't know anybody who has ever been on a plane.

On the surface, they have immersed themselves in the "world", but the reality is that they have to struggle to survive, for nothing in the theme world park really belongs to them. In another scene, Xiaotao and Taisheng are seen riding on a simulated flying magic carpet against which the park's monuments are the backdrop. Even as they hope to escape the park's confines and cruel reality, "the migrant workers are virtual prisoners and the freedom they do experience is only fleeting and imaginary, albeit pleasurable" (Gatenaio 28).

As entertainers of the park on the side, the job of these characters is to help create a fantasy for audience. They wear different fancy costumes on the stage, but when they go backstage, the place where they changes clothes are simply messy and crowded, no better than a disorderly warehouse; the dorms in basement where they live look just like underground cells. Yet they cannot find any means or ways to change their situation because of their poverty and limited mobility. Thus the feeling

of uprootedness among migrant workers is acute. As Gatenaio notes,

the park's migrant workers illustrate the uprooting of people from place according to the logics of global capital flows and labor market mechanisms, as well as the intangible quest for modernity, whereas the theme park itself depicts the global circulation of iconic places (e.g., the Leaning Tower of Pisa), and their symbolic meanings, via their replication in miniature for tourist consumption. (26)

This uprootedness is all the more acute when we see the sharp contrast between workers' dull workaday lives, their marginalization in the metropolis, their meager accommodations in basement dormitories and the images of leisure, wealth, and travel projected by the theme park for tourist consumption. Thus those migrant workers have become, paradoxically, the most visible yet invisible people. While most people applaud the great benefits engendered by the increasing globalization in China over the past three decades, Jia Zhangke is sensitive enough to capture the ambivalence of those migrant workers in face of globalization, and the great tensions between their pursuit of freedom and prosperity on the one hand, and their marginalized and hopeless situation on the other hand.

The seemingly globalized living environment thus brings them the great anxieties and even distrust for each other. As a traditional-minded girl, Xiaotao refuses to have premarital sex with her boyfriend Taisheng. When she is finally convinced to lose her virginity to him, she accidentally discovers that Taisheng has betrayed her. In the end, Taisheng and Tao have succumbed to the gas leak, in their friends' apartment. There is suspense about whether the gas leak is a real accident or man-made one. From my perspective, it is more inclined towards a premeditated one, since for Xiaotao, on her part, only death could help her regain a peaceful mind. As the film fades to black, Taisheng's voice asks, "Are we dead?" "No," Tao's voice responds, "this is only the beginning." At once, sexually consummated but life terminated, their death together seems to cleanse their disoriented past and symbolize their journey returning to their original selves.

Director Jia expresses his original intention in shooting the film as follows:

In *The World*, I was trying to address the rapid change transforming China — it seems that China is opening up and that there's a promise of a new life, of new technologies, but actually this economic development is causing people to become even lonelier and more alienated. It's this contradiction that I'm trying to explore: with more openness and more economic development, there's actually

more alienation among the people. (qtd. in Rapfogel 46)

The death of Xiaotao and Taisheng ties a symbolic knot for their tragic fate, and of returning to the past. Xiaotao, being cheated by Taisheng and by the reality as well, cannot really adapt herself to the new environment. What she chooses to do is poisoning herself. The ending of the film seems to imply Jia's pessimistic attitude towards the reality of those migrant workers, especially female ones. The concept of "space" in this film is thus related to metropolis, globalization, air travel, etc. However, the seemingly extended space for those migrant workers is illusory and deceiving. What is really related to the illusory space is marginalization, distrust, and alienation, etc. In his next film *Still Life*, Jia seems to provide one more choice for his audience, that is, to adjust oneself to the new changing reality, since life has to go on.

### ***Still Life***

In face of drastic changes in life, people generally have two attitudes towards them. One is to be brave enough to say farewell to the past, and adapts oneself to the new reality. The other is to cling to the past, and to strive to return to it. Director Jia's films have addressed the challenges of industrialization and urbanization in current China. Different from the absolute pessimism in *The World*, Jia seems to be more open-minded about the changes brought about by the large-scale transformation of the physical world in current China in *Still Life* (三峡好人; literally "Good people of the Three Gorges"). Shot in an old village of Fengjie, a small town on the Yangtze River which is slowly being destroyed by the building of the Three Gorges Dam, *Still Life* tells the story of two people in search of their estranged spouses. The film premiered at the 2006 Venice Film Festival and was a winner of the Golden Lion Award for Best Film. In this film, Jia continues with his documentary-format style. His cousin Sanming, who was just cast only a minor role in *The World*, is now the male protagonist in *Still Life*. The Three Gorges Project, as the largest hydroelectric project in the world and one of the biggest transformative alterations of the physical world, involves the removal and relocation of more than one million local residents. Thus it is safe to say that it has greatly impacted people's lives in various aspects and in different ways. It has also altered people's attitudes towards the concept of place or home. To some extent, it can be said that, as a miniature spatial displacement, it symbolizes the destruction of the old place or old hometown and the opening of a new chapter in Chinese historical development. In face of the large-scale terrestrial alteration, how do ordinary Chinese break up with their familiar lived habitats? And with their cultural past? Obviously they would have to find the comparable space, external as well internal, to fill up the gaping void left of their place attachment, but

how are they able to do that?

In *Still Life*, Director Jia has genuinely captured the drastic impact made by the Three Gorges Project on ordinary people's lives. It was Liu Xiaodong, a famous contemporary Chinese artist, who triggered Jia's interest in filming on the Three Gorges. The first time when Jia visited the Three Gorges, he was following Liu Xiaodong as the latter invited Jia to film him while he painted a group of laborers near the Three Gorges Dam. But when Jia saw the large-scale demolition of old cities such as Fengjie, and felt how local people's lives had been affected, he decided to shoot a film about it. He says,

When I was making *Still Life*, what I first saw was a site of destruction, a two-thousand-year-old city that was destroyed in two years leaving a sense of void and emptiness. But at the same time, the people are still going about their daily lives — which is evidence of a strong life force. So there's a sense of contradiction between destruction and an ongoing urge to live. (qtd. in Rapfogel 47)

Fengjie the old town in this film symbolizes the past and history. The construction of the Three Gorges Dam has engendered a blanket demolition of local residence areas, alteration of the administrative infrastructure, and the slow recovery of people's emotional bonding to the newly constructed place.

*Still Life* fields two threads of plot development, featuring two main characters. One is Sanming, a coal miner, the other is Shen Hong, a nurse. Both come to Fengjie, a city that would be soon be flooded by the rising water level of the damming of Yangtze, to search for estranged spouses. Sanming's wife whom he had married as a mail bride left him 16 years ago. Sanming is told that his wife's former home had now been flooded by the ever-expanding dam construction, and that she had been away to Yichang helping on a passenger ship. When Sanming finally finds his wife, he has the intention to bring her back to his hometown. Shen Hong, on the other hand, makes up her mind to propose a divorce with her husband, who had not contacted her for two years, and who had lived together with his lover named Ding Yaling. Shen Hong tells him that she fell in love with someone else.

In Jia's opinion, *Still Life* aims to teach people how to make choices when confronted by life-altering changes in our times.

When I was making *Still Life*, I realized that China's ongoing open economic policy has reached its fruition — the allocation of resources is complete. But the reality is that people don't realize how much disruption there has been of the

past and of history. And people in China have to realize that they need to know how to proceed, to continue to lead their lives. *Still Life* is actually about making choices, especially in the case of the two protagonists, choices they have to make so they can become freer. (qtd. in Rapfogel 46)

Sanming and Shen Hong are from two different social classes, but the problems they are faced with are quite similar. Both come to Fengjie to make a final decision. But their choices are dramatically different. One is striving to bring back his estranged wife, while the other is trying desperately to find her absentee husband before starting her life with somebody else. As their problems are caused by the damming at the Three Gorges, their lives have been totally changed. But they differ in their attitudes towards the changes. Sanming desperately wants to revert back to his lost youth, and clings to a treasured past, while Shen Hong, having endured a painful separation, has made up her mind to break up with the unfaithful husband, and re-starts her own life in Shanghai. So the two threads of dénouement reveal divergent attitudes towards their lived habitats, the paradox between attachment and freedom, change and resistance.

Sanming's clinging to the past is manifested in various aspects. For instance, he still keeps the address (5 Granite Street of Fengjie Country) that his wife left to him sixteen years ago, and only finds out that it had been already erased by the flooding. The ring tone of his cellphone is "Blessed Good-Hearted People", which ironically was held as one of the most popular songs one decade ago. So when Fengjie, "a city with two thousand years' history was demolished in just 2 years," the nostalgic Sanming is still unwilling to reconcile himself with the reality. Brother Mark, a young local guy Sanming has befriended with, expresses his nostalgia this way: "We remember our past. The present-day society doesn't suit us ... because we're too nostalgic." In reality, however, Old Fengjie has gone forever while New Fengjie is still under construction. Many local residents, including Sanming's absent wife, have left for bigger cities to seek job opportunities in the hope of becoming rich. In fact, Fengjie has already, to some extent, become a money-oriented, desire-driven space. From the motorcycle-taxi drivers, to the fake magician on the passenger ship, people have been trying various means to make money. Even the teenager girl, who wants to become a babysitter, begs Shen Hong to take her away to the outside world. So with the demolition of the old residential buildings, the established moral rules such as mutual trust and honesty seem to have perished as well. The city reduced to rubble has become just another landmark of moral degradation.

When China stands at a crossroad of dramatic change, people are apt to struggle with, and even become overwhelmed by the need to cope with forces of change. These changes come out of destruction of the old and the past, which, to Director Jia,

is a saddening fact. But at the same time, the passing of the old gives birth to new hope and the chance of making it happen. Jia says, “Of course there’s a great sadness here: a two-thousand-year-old memory has just been erased, there’s a sense of loss. But this has also ignited my imagination — it has led me to think about what is going to happen next, about the future. So I imagined the scene of a UFO flying away ...” (qtd. in Rapfogel 46). Unlike Sanming, the nurse Shen Hong has already made up her mind to rid herself of the estranged husband for she does not want to be stuck in the past. She is resolute in using the hammer to smash open the lock on the door of her husband’s office. Being prepared for the changes in her life, she is determined to put her past behind her. Thus for her, the expansion of space enables her to be more mobile and independent.

Director Jia has created a striking sequence of these surreal moments to underscore Shen Hong’s determination in embracing the enlarged space. Such moments include a UFO flying across the horizon of the Yangtze River, a monument to the Three Gorges Dam blasting off like a space rocket and the final shot of a tight rope walker passing from the top of one condemned building to the next. Thus space symbolizes freedom, hope, and rebirth. As Robinson points out, “Jia seems to be reminding us that there will always be other ways of imagining, and representing spatial dimensions, and that the place identities that frame social life need to be reconceived and re-politicized in ways that draw attention to the immaterial and relational processes that define their moments of emplacement and displacement” (118).

As for why there are two intertwined narratives of one focusing on the male and the other on female, Jia offers this explanation: “In China there’s a cultural tradition that regards men and women as the yin and yang of the culture — they form the basic make-up of the human society. The movie is about destruction, about a site of destruction, but it’s also about a new beginning, so it made me think about having these yin and yang elements in the make-up of this new beginning” (qtd. in Rapfogel 47). So it can be seen clearly that Jia is more like a present-day Taoist, i.e., by way of getting rid of the utter pessimism he has infused in the film *The World*. While applauding the great achievements brought about by the completion of the Three Gorges Dam, we should not forget that the great impact that it has made on the lives of those people as represented in the characterization of Sanming and Shen Hong.

## Conclusion

In times of earthshattering changes, how to embrace the changes poses a big challenge. The destruction of the old places and the globalization of the entire nation seem to be the inevitable outcome of modernization and urbanization. As is analyzed,

Jia Zhangke has focused on how those changes impacted ordinary Chinese, especially, the lives of the rural people. The use of the real and surreal elements in his two films signifies the paradoxical relationship between place and space, between security and freedom, and between loss and rebirth. When the old and familiar places symbolizing the established values have been demolished, and when the expansion of space makes it possible for people to move to new places, the critical issue is the possibility and ability to familiarize oneself with the new places, and turn a new chapter in one's life. While we are applauding the great achievements accomplished over the past decades, Jia reminds us of the necessity to heed the emotional and psychological casualty and loss that the destruction of the old might have inflicted on the psyche of ordinary Chinese. In *The World*, Jia suggests that it is essential to help those marginalized social beings gain access to the freedom created by the newly-formed space, and to raise their sense of belonging to such new habitats. In *Still Life*, he is more hopeful in the spiritual rebirth after the destruction of the old, for life has to go on. The great values of Jia's two films lie in that he has displayed genuine concern about the fate of those ordinary people.

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# Ethical Dilemma in “Documenting” Manufactured Landscapes in China

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**Abstract** Amidst the impressive growth of China’s industrial workings, we have detected a dubious trend of “manufactured landscapes.” Taking cue from Burtynsky’s term, I have focused intensely on such alteration of the nonhuman material world by revealing how the trend has wrought illusion, displacement and transfiguration of man’s relationship with water, land and other forms of materiality which has hitherto remained fused and bonded with man’s sustained livelihood. Acting on a similar impulse, the film documenters in China and overseas have explored China’s recent massive industrial and commercial constructions that have radically altered the basic nature of her vast landscape, and have drastically affected the bond between human habitat and the natural environment. I explore the layered complexity in documenting the disruptive impact of these man-made landscapes by means of “affective intervention” — by looking closely at scenes taken from Burtynsky’s *Manufactured Landscapes* (2007) and Hu Jie’s *The Silent Nu River* (2006). In the former, I stress how Burtynsky and Baichwal use the camera’s panning shots to tease out and mediate the little contested framing of still photography, while in the latter, I underscore how Hu Jie adroitly deploys the camera to involve the people being interviewed and viewers to record moments of conflict and negotiation. Both documentary films shed light on the embedded agency of both human and non-human forces in its indigenous cultural and social environs.

**Key Words** manufactured landscape; affect; Edward Burtynsky; Jennifer Baichwal; Hu Jie

When Edward Burtynsky first released his documentary film of China’s mega-sized industrial constructions (with Jennifer Baichwal as director), it was not clear whether he used the term “Manufactured Landscapes” in the film title to renew an old concept of his in order to caution against a new hazard in the spirit of environmental activism.<sup>1</sup> In the ensuing years, “Manufactured landscapes” came to stand for

mammoth industrial and engineering constructions that are disturbingly grand and sublime, and have over time infused themselves in the human subconscious as part of the natural landscape. The term soon gained critical traction and has since morphed into the *modus operandi* for much of the critical commentary on ecology in China insofar as its industrial and urban engineering impact the wellbeing of the human habitat. Reassessing such impact shall shed light on the dubious nature of China’s development frenzy; it has indeed revealed its excessive and unregulated craving for real estate investment and capital construction, and its outcome has left China’s already crowded landscape studded with eye-sore buildings and landmarks in a manner reminiscent of the Great Leap Forward campaign in late 1950s.<sup>2</sup>

I approach manufactured landscapes in the Chinese context from a relational perspective, namely, to explore aspects of the ecological impact via a cluster of issues underlying the interdependence between the humans and landscapes. I realize full well how this relational interdependence draws from a deep fount of ancient Chinese cosmology; it is spelled out in a popular mantra: *Tian ren he yi* (天人合一, Heaven and humans are a harmonious whole). Yet I also acknowledge that one vital force that has sustained human survival amidst biotic and terrestrial flows and ebbs is the Chinese notion *Ren di qin he* (人地亲和, Humans and land exist in affinity), which emphasizes a cohesive melding of humans and terrestrial settings.<sup>3</sup> According to Yi-fu Tuan, what brings about this cohesion is an enmeshing of social relationships, cosmological wisdom and traditional ceremonials and rites in diverse locales. Prompted by Tuan, I intend to explore a realm of subjects intersecting aesthetics, ethics and ecology; at the heart of my inquiry is the question: how shall we perceive landscape and build livable habitats in an age beset with willful depletion of resources and runaway property development? I find it compelling that, since the onset of China’s Open-Door Reform (circa 1980s), there have been aggravating efforts to bring landscapes under human control solely at the behest of market-driven demands and costs. This has resulted in an ever-whetted appetite for property construction for the market and a grave neglect of a balanced and wholesome planning and building of human habitats. Lapses of moral sensitivity and ethical judgment have clouded our vision to discern an excessive use of resources driven by a misguided instrumental reason.<sup>4</sup> Regarding landscape or wilderness as parts of a mechanistic system at our disposal, we have allowed ourselves to reclaim, reorder and reconstruct lands solely by human desire, and have caved in to “the cash-in imperative” by overusing land and other resources and consuming them at a breakneck pace. In the end, we realize it is this nullifying dissonance that lies at the root of our moral laxity.

My take on what causes this dissonance has directed me to the study of the intricate nature of man-made landscapes that have made vast incursion not only into

our physical topography, but our cognitive sphere.<sup>5</sup> It is thus necessary to explore the layered ambiguity in documenting man-made landscapes by “a disinterested observer” and reveal the seemingly grand, but profoundly disruptive impact of these spectacles of industrial working. A central issue poses itself right out-front: is photo realism objective and dispassionate by default? A great many documentary filmmakers have answered to the contrary, offering us powerful footages of ecological calamities as a result of China’s feverish growth of industrialization and urbanization. Rather than taking these spectacles as documented evidence of a cool, disinterested mind at work, they regard them as a means to reveal the directors’ ability to discern man-made sublimity in ways that appear self-effacing but are deeply provocative and insightful. I thus argue that such documentation signals a different kind of emotive attachment, rather an affective intervention, if you will, and that their approach re-asserts the need for ethical judgment to restore our sensibility to design and sustain livable habitats.

### **Edward Burtynsky’s Still Images of China**

It is Burtynsky’s photographs of China’s man-made landscape that bring into focus the excessive largess of human encroachment on the planet and the hidden pitfalls in the human endeavor to disfigure and displace natural landscape in excess. Burtynsky is no stranger to photography’s lasting ambiguity — the tension between aesthetics and conscience, but he has aptly introduced “padding” of ambiguity and complexity into his photographs that enrich and incite the viewers to reach a breaking point of tension where they make a moral decision themselves. By means of embedded references to painting and sculpture of landscape, for instance, he has captured wide-range vistas of industrial scenes and projects through an “elevated perspective” and then expands it by a mid-aspect of the industrial workings, such as railcuts, open-pit mines and tailings, followed by an extended eye line suggesting infinity.<sup>6</sup> According to Burtynsky, when such an unfolding perspective is infused in the still image, it would “bring the viewers to grapple with their own consciousness about being that space.”(Pauli 41) In the same vein, he stresses the unique role of still photograph; he believes that “[s]till images are used as the iconographic representations of issues we need to grapple with in our times,” and that “[Still photographs] lock on. ... allow[ing] that kind of fragment to become embedded into our memory.” (Burtynsky 52)<sup>7</sup> He further explains how still photograph fulfills the role of inciting moral awareness:

... we don’t avert our eyes, but we get drawn into that place. Once a person is drawn into that place of the content of these images, it forces that person into this kind of forbidden pleasure: “I’m enjoying being in there, but there’s something wrong here. Why am I enjoying this? I shouldn’t be. This isn’t good. This is a

waste land. (Burtynsky 53)

As the viewer engages in self-interrogation while viewing the photographic image, he/she reaches the point where the person has to grapple with his/her conscience about the validity of seeking any hedonistic pleasure out of these still images as if they were fruits of pure artistic creation rather than ruined environs resulting from unchecked human desire. It seems, however, there is real potential for certain internal conflict to arise in Burtynsky’s account since it figures both an unfolding perspective from within the photo and a frozen representational frame from without. Seemingly at odds with each other, such a dubious feature has not escaped the scrutiny of his critics who have lately explored this ambiguity, using it to caution the viewers against the risk of neutralizing “the implicit moral and social force of photographic images.”<sup>8</sup> Kenneth Baker, after dissecting the internal functions of a still photo by Burtynsky, states point-blankly that “Burtynsky’s submerged references to non-photographic modern art slow, perhaps even block, merely hedonistic consumption of his pictures”(Pauli 41). In the meantime, Baker is quick to point out that

... beneath our pleasure beats a note of anxiety that arises from our wondering how the beauty of the image came about? The acts of shooting and printing it are like the pieces that complete a fantastic abstract puzzle. The picture’s writhing details almost invite reading as ideographs: What ravage of earth and air do these compacted masses of colored metal signify? (Pauli 42)

It is thus apparent that the dualistic nature of still photograph lays the intent of the artist open to reactions at once affirmative and critical, and Burtynsky is no exception. Yet it requires a genuine moral alertness on the part of the photographer to document not just awestruck feelings at the sight of ugly vastness and sublimity, but a nagging despair at the humans’ inability to bring their own consumptive excess to a halt. It was as if Burtynsky had been awaiting his trips to China between 2002 and 2005 to rise to that challenge.

Incidentally, *Manufactured Landscapes* (2007) presents us an intriguing instance in which the famed photographer finds himself facing a similar conundrum.<sup>9</sup> This film is now globally acclaimed thanks precisely to its title “Manufactured Landscapes” and the gallery of Burtynsky’s still photographs it exhibits alongside the film’s documentary narrative. With a discerning eye, he has captured stunning images of these mega-size industrial projects that have studded China’s landscape in recent decades. Noisily and menacingly, these projects are taking over China’s topography as a result of her hasty embrace of the global, market-driven economy. In a similar

manner, Burtynsky's earlier images overwhelm the viewer with a sense of being awestruck. He used his favored panoramic angle to underscore the chaotic scene of war-like ruins left behind by the hurried and unruly demolition of residential towns; these images are "locked on" in the viewer's mind as a stirring testimony to the ambitious scope and rapid pace with which the Chinese were building their industrial workings, urban centers and business facilities, but also to the costly underside of it: the brutal and indiscriminate excesses committed by the humans in their drive for power and control over nature. The apocalyptic effect of such images is enhanced through his innovative use of the lenses and angles coupled with a calculated shooting distance. In addition, some of these images are unique and rare because, when Burtynsky photographed these colossal industrial sites, they were taken at exactly the same spots, but during two or three separate visits with a year or so apart. In other words, he has visually documented phases of the landscape being altered with the lapse of time (Pauli 44). Thus, the images enable him to display an evolving process of then vs. now. This progressive mode is especially striking with his photos on Wushan 巫山, a city located on the Yangtze River not too far from the Three-Gorge Dam. Burtynsky visited Wushan twice in 2002 and once in 2005 respectively; nearly three years passed between then — the demolition of the old town of Wushan — and now — its nearly complete man-made flooding.<sup>10</sup> The film captures this poignant moment: perched atop the mountains, with his camera placed at the same spots he had placed before, the photographer saw exactly what he wanted: a chance to witness the last moments of old Wushan before being flooded in its entirety and chronicle a total erasure of an age-old human habitat completed with its watery burial deep in the man-made lake (Figure 1).



Figure 1: The City of Wushan in 2002 (left) and 2005 (right), Courtesy of Manufactured Landscape (DVD)

However, there is more: the film captures the moment in motion. Much like his earlier Wushan images, Burtynsky's photographs tend to induce an arresting stillness as if the artist's vision has delimited to an invisible frame, and it cannot help being

withheld from taking a crucial step ahead and moving beyond into the realm of social conscience. But the withdrawal of his vision also entails a catch: viewed within the photographic frame, the camera is apt to rehearse the gaze of a detached observer whose perspective is aligned with an atomistic “I” in command over the natural sublime, or in this case, the apocalyptic shock. Withdrawn from the sights observed, Burtynsky thus risks making his photos liable to a dissonant gaze; by freezing and miniaturizing landscape he would etherize the painful trauma inflicted upon those local residents who were forced to abandon their ancestral homes at the behest of modern progress.

What his still photography falls short of is more than compensated by what the film captures in motion at the hands of Elizabeth Baichwal, his filming partner. Assisted by Baichwal, Burtynsky is able to overcome the inertia of disinterest and neutrality of his earlier photographs, avert the trap of dissonance by allowing his camera gaze to track moving figures in the scene rather than stay fixed on its objects or sceneries. Together, they have opened up the photographic frame and infused it with the tracking ability of the film camera, thereby inserting a panning sequence with the still-life images. Thus the viewer is no longer confined to a static vision, but is shown the effects of an unfolding narrative. Upon close scrutiny, we notice that the earlier images come very close to presenting a haunting nightmare of Wushan when the city was disfigured like a patient being operated on with its abdomen cut open to reveal the contorted “intestines” — half-torn houses and mangled streets (Baichwal, DVD). In contrast, we now discover that the camera’s deliberate panning has brought our focus to the border zone where the sprawling new city meets the submerged old. As it zooms in on human figures caught in a flurry of activities, we find ourselves in direct and personal contact with not only live individuals, on-going communal events, but memories of the recent past and distant histories of the local sites. As the voiceover of the film now comes on to tell us, in an unassuming yet engaging tone, that these men were carrying used bricks and abandoned wooden frames they had gathered from the old city, and that they need to reuse these to improve their new homes because the “new” houses in which the city authorities had relocated them lack windows — a shocking detail in the local and living reality which would have probably slipped the attention of still photography (Baichwal, DVD).

While the camera tracks further and deeper in the border zone, more and more real-life details are brought to light, filling in the social backdrops for Burtynsky’s still images of awe-inspiring debris. One such detail reveals, for instance, that the new houses were short-changed in design and construction because a portion of the official funds for the relocation housing projects were paid off as “kickbacks” for the local officials and contractors. As the tracking draws to a close, it is evident that

Baichwal has put a human face onto the pathos of the debris zone — she has posited more sociological and psychological relevance by means of the film camera’s tracking motion. In a convincing manner, the tracking shots correlate the documentary’s narrative progression, which in turn reflects on the artist’s vibrant awareness of the ties between aesthetics and social complexity and individual integrity. It is therefore crucial to conclude that she has nimbly merged the mobility of the cinematic narrative with the distilling stillness of photography, and she has ably assisted Burtynsky in valorizing an ethical orientation in his still photography by extending their visual portent beyond the parameters of aesthetic framing. And to that end, Burtynsky acknowledges the indebtedness and has credited her, while being interviewed by the media, by praising her effort to establish “a dialogue” between different generic forms of “framing” landscapes, yet stays course with his own critical strategy of avoiding a didactic “right” or “wrong” moral judgment but “leaving it open for the viewers” (Baichwal, DVD). Incidentally, in doing so, Burtynsky also concedes that there is no insurmountable barrier between aesthetics and social conscience in terms of photographic documentation.

In the light of this “open-ended” dialogue, I would argue that the deeper issues are yet to reveal themselves if we further explore the partnership between photographic and filmic documentation. One issue is directly related to the cross-medium dialogue which Burtynsky refers to: it is the transference of value judgment from the aesthetic to the ethical. As seen from the above, whereas the ethical does rely on human affective reaction to affirm its stand, the aesthetic does not automatically correlate to the ethical when impacted by pragmatic reasoning. In a way, this aesthetic lopsidedness is exactly what holds the viewer back from feeling the urgency and gravity of a moral choice. At the sight of the awe-striking and ruinous largess, the viewer is likely to detect a sense of humans “taming” nature, wreaking havoc with its apparently chaotic and devastating aftermath. Concurrently, however, the manufactured sublime appeals more to his/her sense of supremacy than to a sense of alarm triggered by disproportion and extremity. Derived chiefly from a technological rationale, the fear-stirring enormity of human endeavor, whether in feat or in waste, attests to the fact that a scientific rationale is sufficient to outsmart the inchoate nature. By now we realize that Burtynsky’s vision of man-made landscape embodies a set of discordant musings: they are interwoven visually but remain divisive ethically; thus it is poised to bring about either a firmer resolve for humans to anatomize and master natural landscape, or a rude awakening about the irreversible doom if they choose not to respect and co-exist with it. Thus, it reveals the likely risk of complicity with humans’ conquest of nature enmeshed in Burtynsky’s still photography that exerts the human will excessively, but constricts the human affective as grounds for ethical

judgment, thereby alienating the human from the non-human life forms on the planet.

This is precisely how the human viewer, whether an artist or a scientist, gets his/her ethical impulse lulled into inaction and becomes vulnerable to the dominance of the technicist world view in which an excessive drive for technological prowess blights human affective reactions to natural landscape, calling them sentimental, and therefore, inferior in judgment.<sup>11</sup> Burtynsky’s earlier enthrallment with industrial workings and his photographic celebration of it is guilty of such ethical laxity. I therefore believe that in his earlier photos the sensory led to the sensuous, which in turn led to unwary tolerance of “manufactured decay and ruin.” His fault lies in letting the sensory impact be channeled solely toward a human-centered use of natural resources for the sake of human gains — a typical technicist mindset. It is thus vital for Burtynsky’s aesthetics to incite awe and dread from the viewer so as to use that affective impact to raise his/her environmental awareness. To meet that end, he has of late exhibited “an environmentalist turn” with his photographic documentation of landscape, including this collaborative effort in recording China’s construction “boom” with photography and film.<sup>12</sup> When aligned with Baichwal’s cinematic eye, he succeeded in freeing the photographic gaze on industrial grandeur, and enmeshing the animated sequence of tracking the motion of the local “scavengers.” A new perspective thus opens up to display local residents struggling to cope with life under immanent dangers of premeditated flooding and imposed relocation. Their jointly presented footage is presently triggered by an ethical anxiety in the interest of ecological conservation. Their collaborated work gives off a genuine sense of ethical concern and care by means of a break-away from what was typical of the photographic gaze — the removed and disinterested viewpoint, the photographer now begins to turn a critical eye against the abusive prowess of technology and shifts his photographic gaze towards acts of ethical infringement owing to technological excess. Arguably this collaborative experience has resulted in an “ethical awakening” for both artists. In the face of industrial grandeur, an aesthetic appreciation can only go so far as its lopsided values allow — as a therapeutic antidote to the injurious excess of endless quest for wealth and power. But when the affective is evoked primarily to restore the viewer to living reality, as Baichwal has done with her panning shots, a free flow of interconnected feelings between the sensory and the sensual is augmented to help insert the viewer in the ethos of demolition and flooding at the Wushan site.

The film has indeed ignited a type of “affective intervention” that counters the pure “sensory” pleasure dictated by humans’ instrumental appropriation of reason.<sup>13</sup> The upshot of it, as Baichwal shows, is the “lived” attachment of local communities to the landscape, such as the Wushan residents did, in the most harmonious way they could with the river and their daily routines of fishing and farming amidst the

surrounding. Related to this attachment is how a static and fetishistic image of the man-made sublime comes to pass at the peril of the local history, both human and non-human. Taking cue from their “lived” experience, the two documenters are intensely observant and attentive to what the film camera picks up during their tracking sequences, and spares no effort in following up with on-spot, in-person conversations with the local residents. A case in point is their filming of two large-size red pennants on which are inscribed Chinese characters and hanging over an old residential area about to be demolished. They learned later by chatting with the residents that the pennants form two slogans that seemingly support the local leadership’s relocation policy, but in fact admonish them to be as good as they profess in public — not to abuse their power for self-serving gains. Details like this, filmed on the spot while they chatted, are thus embedded in the evolving narrative, and affectively assemble a context that extends, congeals and enlivens what meets the eye with the still photography.

### **Hu Jie and *The Silent Nu River***

I now want to explore how Chinese filmmakers navigate the challenging task of documenting the disruptive effects of man-made landscapes in contrast to the “disinterested” gaze of still photography. Contrary to the shared decorum of being disinterested, I contend, these documenters aim at the semblance of reality in a variety of ways that appear self-effacing but deeply provocative or stimulating. I believe that right up front, the aim of their documenting industrial landscapes is to re- evoke the bond between humans and landscape being or already lost in the midst of frantic urban and industrial growth; they engage the human affect as a way to serve as checks and balances whenever the landscapes and human habitats come under threat posed by zealous pursuits of property construction and resource depletion. Individually or as a group, their investigative works reclaim fresh grounds in fostering an ecological outlook by way of an ethical impulse in spite of our toxic bodies and blighted sensibilities. I will highlight below how Chinese directors’ ethical concerns based on a land-human affinity help them bond with their local environs and the myriad ahuman life forms via their corporeal attachments. My analysis seeks not just to applaud such affective reactions in photographic memory, but to underscore the importance of the “genealogical” bond linking the human to the ahuman material world by means of their land-rooted bodies, communal values and traditional ceremonials and rites, and affirm how human/land affinity can effectively anchor the rudderless chases of human greed.<sup>14</sup>

It is not as if the Chinese filmmakers have never traveled down this path before. After all, China’s crossing over the modern thresholds around mid-1800s was largely

motivated by ethical as well as instrumental values and knowhow inspired by the West. Since its advent, Chinese modernity had embedded a keen ethical drive for its inquiry and application in adapting the Western notion of “evolution” very much in the spirit of “change-as-improvement” to guide the overall course of social progress.<sup>15</sup> But this alternative way of conceptualizing social progress turned out to be outpaced and overpowered by the urgent drive led by the Chinese state to grow into a world-class power and avenge her feeble and humiliated losses at the hands of foreign imperial powers. This official mandate compelled many leading intellectuals to embrace a linear path to national supremacy based on wealth and power, which posed itself as the overarching and irreversible end of social betterment.<sup>16</sup> Before long it nurtured a full bloom of certain teleological thinking that mimicked the rise to technological dominance of first the Soviet Russian model of heavy industry and centralized economy in the 1950s and then the market-driven venture capitalism of Euro-America since 1990s. Despite the irreparable gap between the two cold-war ideological camps, the Chinese State has adduced and put into practice brands of socialism, ineptly yet effectively mixing ingredients of market-driven entrepreneurship with mechanisms of its ideological control. Nevertheless, neither model of governance has genuinely valorized a balanced approach to the pressing needs of an oversized human population sustained with limited natural resources. The PRC’s nation-building project since 1949 has been fraught with cases in which many in the science community caved in to instrumental misuse of resources under ideological disguise adorned by the State; the outcome is blandly predictable: they veered off the path of moral obligation and social conscience, and, by suspending their critical sensibility, they became accomplices to wanton acts of mangling the natural landscape and depleting its resources.

We need not look too far to find the mortifying instances in the state-led massive projects of hydraulic dams.<sup>17</sup> Since the Reform Era, the foremost mishap caused by the abuse of technological advance is to be subsumed into a single-track, linear thinking that caters to the State’s feverish development scheme. In the local context, they have endorsed a hasty agenda of melding of “urban renewal” and “gentrification,” which has commandeered massive arable lands first from China’s east coast to the interior, then from the interior to the frontier/border regions out in West China. In tune with such ambitious schemes, leading technocrats would envision gigantic construction projects, such as the damming of the Yangtze, Lanchang and Nu Rivers in southwestern China, with scarce concern for the needs of the local inhabitants and ecological habitats. Where the natural resources, e.g. water, abound, there happen to be age-old towns and villages of land-bound Han farmers and ethnic minorities whose life style blended seamlessly in with their ecological environs through generations. Damming these rivers excessively would pose an instant threat of drowning their

farmlands and pastures, result in uprooting them from their ancestral habitats and disrupting their time-honored livelihood. Telling instances of such an imminent desolation are found in *The Silent Nu* (Hu, 2003).<sup>18</sup>

True to investigative journalism, *The Silent Nu* features a series of interviews of local ethnic residents on camera and seeks to air a cross-section of views and opinions on the upcoming project of damming the Nu River in the attempt to eventually build thirteen tiered hydraulic stations along the middle and upper reaches of the Nu.<sup>19</sup> The filming crew trekked through a number of small towns, villages and scenic sites along the upper and middle reaches of the river to complete their investigative agenda: to document how the local residents living on the river banks would react to the government's over-ambitious energy scheme. Rather than extracting useful data and diagrams from the local offices and archives, the director chose to visit the local families from door to door and chat with one host after another while sitting around the family fire-hearth. There is a deliberate effort in the narrative to relinquish the field-trip style routines of collecting data and crunching numbers for statistic surveys and polls in favor of his face-to-face casual chats with the residents without disrupting whatever they happen to do on a normal day. Unlike the on-camera Q-and-A interrogations typical of news coverage, the camera captures the people being interviewed in their casual and unguarded moments as they react to questions posed to them as if they were at home chatting with friends. As a result, the director's inquisitive tone betrays no trace of condescending disinterest and it serves to dissolve any alienating distance owing to lack of intimacy. This turns out to be the chief reason why Hu succeeds in making his affective intervention by din of the viewer.

Let me explain with the following two instances. In the first instance, Hu's focus homes in on an affective displacement — how the commercial prospects of damming the Nu River caused the local ethnic leader to willingly forego his corporeal ties with the elements of his home place, disregard the river-based habitat as his nurturing lifeline, thereby surrendering his home-grown sensibility to the cash-in mindset of a building contractor. Presently Hu's camera is trained on A-pu, a Lisu ethnic minority leader, praising the pristine qualities of the river water bestowed on them by the snow-melt of the Himalayas. Then with a gradual close-up followed by a deliberate long-take, the director's presence recedes to let the viewer step in as the conversation partner with A-pu while the Lisu leader loquaciously "informs" the viewer how he and his Lisu community have come around to aspire to the lucrative "returns" by turning their river into a money-maker, and that their best option is to dam this section of the river and build a hydraulic power station. To be fair, as he speaks, A-pu remains in awe of the towering snow-capped mountains and the timeless roaring of the river currents behind his back. As he glowingly flaunts his new "vision," however,

the viewer cannot but notice that he becomes tentative and abstract, which is clearly evidenced in his awkward gestures. By pointing to the river behind him, he declares: “beneath all that is where the money is hidden, and we are ready to scoop it all out!” (Hu, DVD) A-pu’s words inadvertently betray his thinking of damming as uncovering some treasure that has been illicitly hidden from them and should now be rightfully restored to them. In the meantime, by now the viewer lets his/her attention be hooked, he/she is imperceptibly drawn into the Q-&-A session, and his/her role as a viewer morphs into that of a participant, in fact a co-investigator, of this encounter by means of the director’s camera. This is as significant a move as Burtynsky’s having Baichwal to co-direct the film *Manufactured Landscapes*.

Director Hu captures A-pu’s image at this poignant juncture shortly after the Lisu leader has been “enlightened” by a technician vision of livelihood based largely on a crude form of Western instrumental reason. The vision and its “logical” assertions rudely disregard the fact that so many diverse and surviving ethnic communities have sustained their living in close affinity with the land and resources reclaimed by their forefathers since ancient times. It sheds light on the extent to which some local ethnic leaders like him have been coerced into thinking “rationally” and have perilously plugged into the global market of venture capitalism. This leap of faith on his part is the result of embracing a profit-driven calculus that brackets out the entire process of demolition, alteration and rebuilding of the terrains, climate and modes of livelihood. Long before the damming can bring any income to his people, he must be reminded that they would have to relocate to designated areas and move in to prefabricated new houses where, owing to the one-size-fits-all urban design, they would no longer have lands to farm, or pasture for their cattle to graze. Their mode of life will be profoundly altered, starting with the loss of their most intimate daily routines, such as airing hand-washed clothing in the open air or taking a casual dip in the body-cleansing hot-springs nearby. With a slate of hand, A-pu would be led to abruptly suspend his corporeal being, by way of a crassly conceived law of marketability, from a “lived” environ that bears witness to time-honored wisdom and endurance of his ancestors.

If put in so many words from the Investigator’s lips, all this would have been didactic prep talk and fallen on the deaf ear of many like preaching. But having the viewer involved, “face-to-face” with the local residents, as co-investigator, posits vital difference: among the audience, one can surely find those who have been through similar phases of demolition and relocation in their life thanks to some damming projects thrust on them. Like those who endured in the aftermath of the Three George Dam, they would be instantly compelled to testify with their experience of traumatic survival and urge A-pu and his cohorts to think twice before being sold unconditionally to the damming project. And their cautionary tale would go somewhat

like this: The profits of damming the Nu River might trickle down eventually, but it would take a long time, for whatever is used to justify the damming of the Nu has so much to do with primary priorities, such as the consumers' demands in coastal urban centers half way across China and with the values of the energy dictated by marketing factors in total disregard of the conditions of the local habitats. On the other hand, as a more plausible scenario for the immediate impact facing the local residents, it would amount to disowning their sovereign rights to their lands and severing their ancestral ties to the rich and unique wisdom necessary for sustaining river-based farming and cattle-ranching. In brief, their lived mode of existence would be forcibly displaced and altered without any of their own consent. What A-pu has embraced is indeed a form of self-effacement of their distinct mode of existence with unique cultural heritage.

Likewise, it would provoke others in the audience, but in a different way; by that I mean those in leadership — especially the technocrats — who oftentimes deem it a necessary price to pay for the sake of “progress,” progress in the more developed parts of China. For a sobering comparison, Hu presently shows an interview with a hydraulic engineer who was dispatched from Beijing to take charge of the dam construction at this location. Apparently highly educated and professionally trained, the chief engineer is surprisingly candid and informative with the adverse effects of damming the Nu to produce hydraulic power. When Hu asks (in a voice-over) what concerns the chief engineer has had for the local community while designing the dam, surprisingly, the man from Beijing offers a candid and honest reply: “local people will be shocked by what they see once the dam is completed — they'd better be prepared that the roaring waves splashing the rocky banks for which the Nu is famous will be there no more! Instead they will see a huge, standstill man-made lake” (Hu, DVD). His remark sounds honest but tentative, and a tad guilty (Figure 2). Since as a person with a clear conscience, his affective reactions to the damming project are genuinely keen and scrupulous, and he cannot let these feelings be suppressed as irrelevant. As if to savor what this remark implies, Director Hu instantly shifts the camera to direct the viewers' gaze towards the roaring river currents while keeping the chief engineer's remark as a voice over. Next, Hu cuts right back to the face-to-face interview with the chief engineer, his next question is blunt: “since you are leading the damming project, can you tell us how you feel about these perilous effects?” No sooner does the question end than the hydraulic expert smile wryly and declare: “I can't tell you that; my position here doesn't allow me to. I'm not interested in politics!” He then quietly exits out of sight (Hu, DVD Figure 2).



Figure 2: the Lisu Village Head (left) and the Chief Hydraulic Engineer (right)  
 Courtesy of Hu Jie/Wang Yongchen.

The chief engineer’s ill-timed departure matters on many levels. Firstly, it is regrettable that in his capacity as the leading specialist, he is in a position to openly disclose the truth derived from his professional judgment, yet he stops short of stating the truth which can only deprive him his chance to do his part for a just and fair treatment for the local people — whose lands and livelihood his damming project is about to flood and ruin. Secondly, his self-styled silence just before the point of a truth revelation is regrettable to the viewer and probably to himself as well; one cannot but wonder: what sort of social or cultural forces are outstripping his moral conscience over such vital stakes? It is not hard to imagine that the submissive role science has customarily played under rigid ideological constraints in China has prompted him to exercise self-censorship: to blot out his affective judgment and yield to a utilitarian view, so as not to contest the State’s overarching scheme of damming rivers to keep up with the excessive demand of consumption. Thirdly, failing to reveal the truth on moral grounds is ultimately equal to failing the mission of modern science in the Chinese context. Any scientist with a decent level of conscience should advocate that this is an issue of fairness and equality on the societal level. It should urge him/her to confront their inner guilt and help overcome the final obstacle to technological modernization, i.e., China’s social progress — the economic boom has hitherto done pitifully little to ensure their “trickle-down” policies and repay those who have contributed the most to and benefited the least from the benefits of China’s economic takeoff.

The failure of the hydraulic specialist in articulating his true feelings about damming the Nu River is a symptomatic analogy of the wide-ranging inability of science to crucially further the cause of social wellbeing. Director Hu’s on-the-spot decision to film his interview with the chief engineer was risky yet deeply rewarding; the kind of feedback from his interaction with the interviewees and the audience as shown above is not guaranteed to occur all the time. Yet when it does happen, the

impact is phenomenal: it not only helps encompass the portentous meaning beyond the photographic framing, but include live instances to illustrate where the symptom lies and how it can be remedied. So, the symptomatic silence of the Nu, which is clearly implicated in the film title, should be alarming enough to challenge and destabilize not just the elusive benefits that A-pu and other local leaders were led to expect. In these two instances, what gets expressed and what gets silenced about are the two sides of one and the same technicist mindset that induces technology's willing complicity and conformity to social and political manipulation. In the case of the hydraulic expert, when he blots out his affective impulses, his judgment is hence blinded to its ethical restraint, turning his expertise into a likely tool for the State's misguided palate for energy consumption and her runaway urbanization. In his turn, A-pu, the Lisu cadre, forgoes his corporeal and land-bound wisdom, and buys into the frenzy for fast revenues and material affluence sans his ethical intuition of the humans' relationship with land. Led by the implied *télos* of a one-size-fits-all development, both have bowed to the flawed scheme of modern development in accordance with one model and one model only, thus being misguided by the delusion that humans are entitled to capitalize on whatever natural resources they can lay their hands on in the ahuman world as their expendable assets.

What inspires me is how an ecological awareness enables these artists to observe the massive industrial projects discretely, and how they attempt to restore a merger between the ethical and the technological by way of the human affect. To seek a solution by way of humans' affective capacity is for them to timely capture those emotive instances in which their intuitive attachments to the land, water and other vital elements of the habitats rise up to the occasion to resist or offset errors of reckless ambition and greed manifest in their technicist ambitious schemes. Evoking science's original ethical mission, they aptly implicate the experts of science and users of technology in the attempt to revive their sentient gift of affective bonding with non-human materiality, and treat the multitudes of life forms, not as "dumb" brutes, but as "conveyors and converters" of the general ecological network.<sup>20</sup> By exercising their expertise in "check and balance," they are called upon to act ethically, opt for development policies that treat industrial and commercial construction as integral part of sustainable life on earth, and sustain the indigenous customs and modes of existence that respect the various eco-systems. In sum, the latest "material turn" in ecological studies has spawned a great deal of attention not only to the areas intersecting ethical studies and environmental justice, but potential links between ontology, epistemology and ethics. One area that apparently warrants critiquing is an intersecting realm between the ontological formation of ethnic identity and the conception of ecological values. I believe that this is precisely where epistemological

shifts often occur from the one to the other, which will facilitate a mutual transference of value from the scientific to the ethical.

## Notes

1. Edward Burtynsky: *Manufactured Landscapes*. Directed by Jennifer Baichwal. Performance by Edward Burtynsky. Zeitgeist Films, 2007. The words “manufactured landscape” had been used by Burtynsky for one of his photo catalogues released in 2003. There seems to be no earlier citation of these words anywhere in history.
2. The Great Leap Forward was designed and led in 1958-1960 by Mao’s strategy of using Soviet Russia as the pace-setter to embark on a spell of grand-scale construction and production which soon turned overheated and overblown, resulting in a three-year famine in the early 1960s.
3. One key factor that welds human survival to ecological transformation is dwelled on as the human-land affinity by the cultural geographer Yi-fu Tuan. I stress Tuan’s important contribution to this topophilic shift that has emerged as the most original and energizing variation of the Tian,ren he yi notion. In terms of historical value, it is highly relevant to note that Tuan’s articulation of Ren di qin he appeared at a time that coincided with the rise of humanist geographers who in the 1970s intervened against a “quantitative revolution” of the social sciences on the strength of affect, memory and literary imagination.
4. There are many explanations for this surrender. Dave Foreman writes: “Humanism makes Man the measure of all things, the vessel of all values. Humanism is engineering — of machines, society, individuals, and Nature. Resourcism is Humanism applied to Nature (or ‘natural resources’).” Dave Foreman, “Around Campfire with Dave Foreman” in the Online Bulletin, accessed on March 1, 2007 by The Rewilding Institute: Albuquerque, NM. The historian Mark Elvin has made similar observations based on his voluminous study of the Chinese agrarian civilization. See Mark Elvin: *The Retreat of the Elephants: An Environmental History of China* (New Haven: Yale University, 2004) 167-215.
5. My research has led me to focus primarily on the following documentaries: Hu Jie, *The Silent Nu River* (Beijing: Green Earth Distributor, 2006), and Jennifer Baichwal: Edward Burtynsky, *Manufactured Landscapes* (New York: Zeitgeist Films, 2007).
6. I have referenced what Lori Pauli states in her article “Seeing the Big Picture,” in Lori Pauli: *China: the Photographs of Edward Burtynsky* (Göttingen: Steidl Publishers, 2005).
7. “The Still Photography: Embedding Images in Our Mind,” *Nieman Reports*, Spring 2010/Online Exclusive (Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard) 52.
8. Kenneth Baker, for one, has raised such a concern in his article “Form and Portent: Edward Burtynsky’s Endangered Landscapes” in Pauli, *The Photographs of Edward Burtynsky*, 41.
9. Jennifer Baichwal: *Edward Burtynsky, Manufactured Landscape* (New York: Zeitgeist Films, 2007).

10. In 2002, Burtynsky traveled to Wushan twice to photograph the town, and two of his photos show the incredible pace at which the town buildings were demolished.

11. I have adopted the term “technicist” from Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1996)39-40.

12. I borrowed the term “the environmentalist turn” from, among other things, the title of an ecological convention held in Milwaukee WI, in (circa) April 2012. I think the term fits Burtynsky’s significant change of tone in his public statements.

13. In perceiving the potential role of “the affective intervention,” I have drawn on ideas espoused by Diana Coole and Samantha Frost in their Introduction to the book they co-edited, *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency and Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010)1-46.

14. I hereby reference a variety of critical approaches on the notion of “new materialism” which, instead of focusing on the human subject as the center, probes the workings of trans-corporeal bond between humans and all other material forms, and explores the “agentic” functions of assemblages and interconnections that together motor environmental changes. These works point me to the direction in which I will focus intently as to how human-land affinity can relate to the espousal of new materialisms while writing on the theme of manufactured landscapes as one significant dimension.

15. Interested readers are referred to Wang Hui, *The Rise of Modern Chinese Thought* (Beijing: Sanlian Publishing House, 2004) and Liu Qingfeng, ed. *Hu Shih and the Emergence of Modern Chinese Culture* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1990).

16. H. Lyman Miller makes a penetrating yet cogent argument along this line of thinking in his *Science and Dissent in Post-Mao China: The Politics of Knowledge* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996) to which I am indebted in the ensuing comments.

17. There have been studies of these massive failures recorded in journalistic reportage and scholarly works in the area of cultural anthropology. Jun Jing, *Temples of Memory: History, Power, and Morality in a Chinese Village* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Elizabeth Economy, *The River Runs Black: the Environmental Challenge to China’s Future* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); Dai Qing, ed. *Changjiang zhi si* (The Death of the Yangtze), (Xindian: Xinfeng Publishing House, 1991).

18. Hu Jie, *The Silent Nu River* (Beijing: Green Earth Distributor, DVD, 2006).

19. The ambitious project was first approved and implemented by the State Council and the Ministry of Hydraulic and Fuel Energy of China in 2003. Since then, there have been heated controversies amongst experts and the general public over its adverse effects on the environmental and biotic environs. They once caused the then Premier Wen Jiabao to suspend its construction by means of an executive order. But just recently the suspension has transpired and damming on the Nu River is again underway. In the film, the camera now and then captures shots of crews of engineers and laborers on the banks and in the river preparing for their dam construction.

20. I am drawing on the key idea in Bruno Latour’s book *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the*

*Sciences into Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004) 9-52.

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# Sea Change in Literary Theory and Criticism in Asia: A Review on Zhenzhao Nie's *An Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism*

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**Abstract** After deconstruction and postmodernism which had been engaging the confrontation with the Other, literary theory and criticism have been encountering the “Ethical Turn.” After the famous Paul de Man’s downfall, a new argument of ethical reconsideration appeared in the forefront of the literary discourse against deconstructionist and postmodernist assumptions that human beings are the unconscious and social construct. Martha Nussbaum and Wayne are initiating trailblazers, initiating present insightful renderings of what’s at stake in ethical criticism. In this context, one thing I noticed intriguing in Prof. Nie Zhenzhao’s book, *An Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism* (2014), is that an economic and cultural sea change in China anticipates the future anterior of the critical exchange in the field of critical theory in Asia at large.

**Key words** ethics; ethical turn; ethical literary criticism; critical theory; ethical criticism; critical exchange

Human subject comes to exist as an authentic subject in the region where the subject and the Other become involved in the negotiations and dialogues, the so-called mutual communicative exchange. “I” do not exist or the impersonality or the Other exists, where the speaking subject does not perform thinking activity, that is, without will and intention. In that case, the speaking subject is positioned in the region of the unconscious by being “the plaything of my thought.” Then, language and the unconscious constitute the space of the Other. The nature of the Other is two-fold: internally “the radical heteronomy” opens within man beyond his control and consciousness, and externally “the radical ex-centricity” with which man is confronted. From the radical heteronomy, the irrecoverable lack originates within man, while from the radical ex-centricity, both the speaking/writing subject and the

hearing/reading subject constitute and participate the space of speech, the space which is both oral and written in the literature of the multiple, chaotic, but dynamic knots of symbolic discourse.

In writing, the discourse of the Other is constructed in the unconscious space of the writer. As a result, the external Other in writing becomes the space within the subject, which inheres in temporality or historicity. Thus, the speaking or writing subject is always already positioned within the structure of discourse. The tradition of discourse is the fundamental structure which regulates culture and simultaneously the order which gives unconscious impact upon the subject. Therefore, as far as the Other is situated within the self, the linguistic structure has always already existed in the form of the unconscious. The nature of the Other is structured like Moebius strip without distinctive borderline between the inside and the outside.

When the Other performs “other-ing” in the literary discourse, it creates the symbolic signifying chains. One can create a cut which breaks and sutures the gaps simultaneously by means of the wedges of the form of the suturing tangential point. In this context, literary criticism has been engaging with the potential ethics of Othering to construct an “ethical literary criticism.”

After deconstruction and postmodernism which had been engaging the confrontation with the Other, literary theory and criticism have been encountering the “Ethical Turn,” as the titles of books and journal special issues demonstrate: Peter Nicholas Baker’s *Deconstruction and the Ethical Turn* (1995), Todd F. Davis and Kenneth Womack’s edited collection *Mapping the Ethical Turn: A Reader in Ethics, Culture, and Literary Theory* (2001), and Bárbara Arizti and Silvia Martínez-Falquina’s edited volume *On the Turn: The Ethics of Fiction in Contemporary Narrative in English* (2007), “Literature and Ethics” (*Poetics Today* 25.4, Winter 2004) and “The Ethical Turn in Canadian Literature and Criticism” (*University of Toronto Quarterly* 76.3, Summer 2007), to name a few. After the famous Paul de Man’s downfall, a new argument of ethical reconsideration appeared in the forefront of the literary discourse against deconstructionist and postmodernist assumptions that human beings are the unconscious and social construct. Martha Nussbaum’s *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (1986), and Wayne Booth’s *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (1988) are initiating trailblazers, followed by a brilliant horde of ethical criticism by Frederick Crews, Mark Johnson, Richard Eldridge, Robert Loudon, James Q. Wilson, Steven Mithen, E.O. Wilson, Geoffrey Galt Harpham, and Marshall W. Gregory.

Marshall W. Gregory, in his essay “Redefining Ethical Criticism,” presents an insightful rendering of what’s at stake in ethical criticism:

What's at stake in ethical criticism is the centrality of both ethics and literary art to human beings' lives as morally deliberative, socially embedded, imaginatively fertile, and persistently emotional creatures who are capable, even if frequently unwilling and clumsy about doing so, of submitting their moral deliberations, their social relations, their imaginative constructions, and their emotional impulses to rational inspection, intellectual analysis, and ethical evaluation.

In this context of Gregory's stakes of ethical criticism, one can encounter a Chinese version of ethical criticism, Prof. Nie Zhenzhao's *An Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism* (2014), the result of the ten-year painstaking and indefatigable project of ethical literary criticism in the era of the "Ethical Turn." Biwu Shang's "Ethical Criticism and Literary Studies: A Book Review Article about Nie's Work" and GexinYang's "Ethical Turn in Literary Studies and the Revival of American Ethical Criticism" have been tracing Professor Nie's project development.

*An Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism* (2014) by Professor Nie, the founder of ethical literary criticism in China, is an award-winning book selected by the National Humanities and Social Sciences of China, and offers a new approach to literature studies both in China and abroad. The book is composed of two parts and appendixes, including glossary and definition of ethical literary criticism, and attempts to illuminate the working hypotheses and principles of ethical literary criticism as well as to apply the methodological terms to the close reading of the western canonical texts. The first part provides basic theories of ethical literary criticism as well as the methodology for engaging these theories in tandem with practical close readings. The second part discusses how ethical literary criticism deals with classic and modern literature. The appendixes include the list of terms and their definitions.

In attempts to deconstruct/reconstruct the ethical literary criticism from the Chinese perspective, Prof. Nie redefines the important key terms such as ethical selection, natural selection, ethical taboo, ethical environment, ethical knot, ethical line, ethical identity, ethical confusion, Sphinx factor, human factor, animal factor, rational will, irrational will, natural will, and free will. The purpose of these keywords is to avoid the negative cluster of the "theoretical complex," "preordained theme complex," and "term complex" (4) which had been bogged down in the traditional discourse.

One can overview Nie's book and visualize his conceptual map as follows:

1. There have been two kinds of selections in human civilizations: natural selection and ethical selection.
2. On the basis of Darwin's theory of evolution, man achieved his form as the result of natural selection. Natural selection is hence the first selection undergone by

man. However, due to his lack of knowledge about ethics (good and evil), man did not differentiate himself from other animals.

3. Man got the human essence (human nature) from ethical selection, which he underwent after natural selection. Ethical selection is hence the second selection necessary for man to obtain knowledge of good and evil. It is only after ethical selection that man can differentiate himself from other animals. While natural selection made man into a formal being, it was ethical selection that made man into a being endowed with reason.

4. Natural selection is the result of evolution, whereas ethical selection is the result of teaching and education (or cultivation mainly coming from literature).

5. Teaching and education come mainly from literature not only in early human civilization but also in modern times. The basic function of literature is instruction and education to teach man to be a moral being.

6. Ethical literary criticism intends to study, analyze and interpret literature by foregrounding its instruction and education: they constitute the ethical core which ethical literary critics aim to reveal.

7. The value of literature is to cultivate man to be a moral being through the teaching stemming from moral examples.

8. The goal of ethical literary criticism is to interpret and comment literary works by analyzing literary characters, actions, events, narratives and descriptions on the basis of literature's ethical teaching, moral instruction and revelation as well as ethical warning. This goal is hence distinct from other methodologies that have hitherto informed literary criticism and theory — namely the American school of ethical criticism that appeared in the 1980s.

9. In this critical practice, terms such as human nature (many scholars have tended to confuse human nature and animality, when in fact animality is human instinct), animality, ethical identity, ethical selection, ethical situation and context, ethical taboos, reasonable consciousness, reasonable judgment, reasonable will, and free will (natural will) are the conceptual tools available to critics to interpret and critique literature.

One thing I noticed intriguing in this book is the discussion about natural selection and ethical section. Prof. Nie sees that the biggest problem for mankind is to make a selection between the identities of animals and human beings (32). Darwin's theory of natural selection and Friedrich Engels's theory of labor are effective tools for making a distinction between human beings and animals. Prof. Nie argues that "both Darwin and Engels failed to make a fundamental distinction between man and animals though explained where human beings have come from" (34), and proposes natural selection is only initiating the step to help human being find out who they are

in a biological sense, by articulating: “What truly differentiates human beings from animals is the second step, ethical selection” (35). Then he supports his argument by turning to the story of Adam and Eve from Bible. In short, his argument is that “The consequential ability acquired to tell good from evil from eating the forbidden fruit helps Adam and Eve to complete their ethical selection and become human beings not only in biological sense but also in ethical sense” (35). To Prof. Nie, the story of Adam and Eve represents the vital role of ethical selection: “The nature of ethical selection lies in man’s decision to be a human or an animal, and the precondition of this decision is the knowledge about man’s self or about what distinguishes human beings from animals” (36).

Prof. Nie further elaborates his proposal for ethical literary criticism by providing Sphinx factor, which represents “an exploration of the mystery of why a man is such a being” (36) and “is composed of two parts — human factor and animal factor” (38). Prof. Nie explains that “the various combinations and alternations of human factor and animal factor generate a variety of ethical events and ethical conflicts in literary works, thus conveying different moral implications” (38). Human factor equals to “ethical consciousness embodied by the human head,” while animal factor is human being’s “animal instinct, which is mainly controlled by their primitive desires” (39). In short, Sphinx Riddle represents the ethical selection in that it refers to the after-step of the natural selection for the human beings to ruminate over what they have done during the natural selection.

In the second part, Prof. Nie provides the practical close readings of the literary classics, such as *Hamlet*, *Oedipus Tyrannos*, and *The Old Man and The Sea*. In reading *Hamlet*, Nie uses “incest taboo” and “ethical identity” for revealing Hamlet’s reasoning concerning the postponement of revenge, winding up his discussion to redefine the famous Hamlet’s monologue “To be or not to be” in terms of not a question about life and death but about ethical dilemma. In reading *Oedipus Tyrannos*, Nie employs the concepts of “predestination” and “Oedipus complex,” and redefines the classic tragedy as “an ethical tragedy resulted from the conflict between ethical taboo and Oedipus’ intensifying ethical consciousness”(177). Prof. Nie’s reading of *The Old Man and The Sea* and employs the “Jungle Law” to analyze the character of the old man from the perspective of ethical chaos (214).

One of the interesting aspects of this book is that it provides the contemporary Chinese trends in the fields of theory and criticism. Since the opening up of China after the Cultural Revolution, China has been importing Western critical discourses, including comparative literature, psychoanalysis, Russian Formalism, structuralism, narratology, reception theory, postcolonialism, feminism, new historicism, cultural criticism, ecocriticism, and what not. Western critical theories, in particular, contribute

to the flourishing of literary studies in China, although they generated some basic problems during the process of importing, as Biwu Shang articulates succinctly: “First, scholars tend to move away from literature in the name of theory (33); second, scholars are too much engrossed in the so-called 理论自恋 (theoretical complex), 术语自恋 (thematic complex), and 命题自恋 (terminology complex) (44); third, there is an inadequacy of ethical engagement in all these theories (3), and fourth, there is a serious shortage of Chinese scholars’ engagement with literary criticism--as opposed to literary scholarship” (2).

To my understanding, what is happening in China in the field of critical theory as well as in an economic and cultural sea change anticipates the future anterior of the critical exchange in Korea as well as in Asia at large. I would like to conclude that Prof. Nie’s book, *An Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism: An Introduction* (2014) is the trailblazing piece for the future of Asian literary critical discourse.

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# The Rise of a Critical Theory: Reading *Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism*

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**Abstract** As an original critical theory formulated by a Chinese scholar, ethical literary criticism has received a large amount of attention from the academics. This paper, with reference to Nie Zhenzhao's new monograph *Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism*, reviews the background and significance of ethical literary criticism before illuminating its major arguments and core issues such as the origin of literature, the existential forms of text (brain text, material text, and digital text), ethical selection, and Sphinx factor. Apart from surveying the critical receptions of ethical literary criticism in China, it also offers three tentative suggestions for the future development of this new critical theory, namely, the construction of its critical principles, the examination of the interconnections between ethics and narrative forms, and the necessity of placing dialogues between ethical criticism in the West and ethical literary criticism in China.

**Key words** Nie Zhenzhao; ethical literary criticism; ethical turn

Terry Eagleton, in his notorious *After Theory*, observes that “The golden age of cultural theory is long past” (Eagleton 1). The evidence lies in the fact that, in Eagleton's opinion, the “pioneering works of Jacques Lacan, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault are several decades behind us,” and gone are “the path-breaking early writings of Raymond Williams, Luce Irigaray, Pierre Bourdieu, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Derrida, Hélène Cixous, Jürgen Habermas, Fredric Jameson and Edward Said” (1). With these observations in his mind, Eagleton concludes that “[t]hose to whom the title of this book suggests that ‘theory’ is now over, and that we can all relievedly return to an age of pre-theoretical innocence, are in for a disappointment” (1). Partially right is Eagleton's hypothesis. It is true that those Western critics who are doing theory purely for the sake of theory instead of trying to uncover the deep meaning of literary text, are doomed to be disappointed, owing to the waning tide of critical theories. Equally disappointed are those non-Western

scholars, including Chinese critics, who are enthusiastic for introducing and importing Western critical theories to their native countries, since the source of their academic capital is no longer sufficient. Yet, turning our eyes to China, we find a different but exciting picture that counterpoints to the fate of literary theory in the West, which, to a large extent, is due to the rise of ethical literary criticism founded by Nie Zhenzhao.

In a year that followed Eagleton's lament for the bygone golden age of literary theory, there was "Conference on Anglo-American Literature Studies in China: Retrospect and Prospect" held in Nanchang. In his key-note speech addressed to the conference, Nie proposed ethical literary criticism as a new methodology, criticizing the unnatural gulfs between critical theory and literary criticism on the one hand, and elaborating the frameworks, objectives of this critical approach as well as the ethical tradition of literature on the other hand. Nie's address raised a profound interest of all scholars attending the conference, and led to a heated discussion thereafter. More significantly, it marked an emergence of ethical literary criticism, which is defined as "a critical theory that reads, analyzes and interprets literature from the perspective of ethics so as to identify its ethical nature and moral teaching function" (Nie, *Introduction* 13). The previous decade witnessed an explosion of interest in exploring literature from an ethical perspective in China. Noteworthy is Nie's continuous efforts in constructing and building up this critical theory, which culminates in his 2014 monograph *Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism*.

I agree with Yang Jincai when he argues that "It is not easy job to theorize ethical criticism and its methodological appropriateness, but Nie has achieved what he has proposed to do" (Yang 151), which is evidenced in Nie's more than ten papers on ethical literary criticism and his ground-breaking *Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism*. This paper, with its major reference to Nie's new book, attempts (1) to elaborate on the ethical turn and its Chinese counterpart; (2) to illuminate the theoretical framework and the core concepts of ethical literary criticism; (3) to survey its receptions and applications; and (4) to outline a few directions for its future development.

### **Ethical Turn and Its Chinese Counterpart**

In Western academics, *ethical turn* is a rather popular term, which is often used interchangeably with *turn to ethics*. However, in Robert Eaglestone's opinion, "this term is misleading, since the study of literature has always had a strong involvement with ethics since its inception and vigorous arguments have taken place as to how that involvement should be understood" (Eaglestone 581-82). According to Eaglestone, there are "two wings" that "make up a sense of the ethical turn, the recent renewed interest in the relationship between literature and the question of

how we should live” (586). The first wing lies in the disappearance or overtaking of ethics by new critical approaches developed in the 1970s and ‘80s, such as feminism, post-colonialism, Marxism, and deconstruction; while the second wing comes from a necessary deepening and concern for ethics in a more “theorized” strand of criticism, which is accounted by three sub-factors: “a sense that the Marxist project *per se* had failed”; “the need for a response to the criticisms made of deconstruction and other theoretical paradigms”; and “the quite normal development to critics’ own interests” (584). Unlike Eagleton, Liesbeth Korthals Altes examines *ethical turn* in a rather narrow sense. That is, *ethical turn* in narrative theory, which refers to several overlapping developments such as a pointed interest in narrativity and narrative literature from the side of moral philosophy, an increased reflection on the relation between ethics and the novel, and the corresponding growth focusing on ethical issues in narrative fiction (Altes 142).

Despite the different observations made by Eagleton and Altes, agreeable is the fact that since the 1980s, a considerable number of scholars have taken their interest in unpacking ethical elements in literature or investigating literature from the perspective of ethics. As David Parker points out, there has been “a profusion of work, especially in the US, that looks very much like the beginning of a significant resurgence of ethical criticism” (Parker 14). The boom of western ethical criticism can be found in the proliferation of works contributed by such renowned scholars as Martha Nussbaum, Tobin Siebers, Wayne C. Booth, Charles Altieri, J. Hillis Miller, James Phelan, Adam Zachary Newton, and many others.

Interestingly and surprisingly, contemporary Western ethical criticisms have been most recently further promoted, strengthened and enriched by their Chinese counterpart, though its *ethical turn* has occurred two decades later and ascended against a different background. With reference to ethical literary criticism, there are four major factors accounting for the *ethical turn* in China. First and foremost, it came as a response to *theory aphasia* in contemporary Chinese literary studies. As is known, since the opening up to the outside world after the Cultural Revolution, China has imported a huge number of Western critical theories such as comparative literature, psychoanalysis, Russian Formalism, structuralism, narratology, reception theory, post-colonialism, feminism, new historicism, cultural criticism, eco-criticism, to name a few. Admittedly, the imported Western critical theories contribute to the overall progression and flourishing of literary studies in China. However, compared with the large-scale importing and applying Western critical theories, there is a serious shortage of Chinese scholars’ engagement with literary criticism, that is, not even a single Chinese critical theory proposed and applied. Second, there is an inadequacy of ethical engagement in those imported critical theories, which are either concerned

with the structures and forms of literature (e.g., New Criticism, Russian Formalism, Structuralism, etc.), or concerned with politics, power and ideology in literature (e.g., feminism, post-colonialism, Marxism, etc.). Third, scholars tend to move away from literature in the name of theory. Consequently, they are too much engrossed in the so-called *theoretical complex*, *thematic complex*, and *terminology complex*. Fourth, the origin of literature has been misread or misinterpreted. For a long time, literature has been conceived of deriving from labor or mimesis. That said, moral teaching or enlightenment of literature has been largely neglected or devalued (Nie, *Introduction* 3-5; Huang 117-118). The above-mentioned factors suggest that the belated *ethical turn* occurring in China in the new millennium aims at solving the practical problems existing in contemporary Chinese literary studies, which conveys much sense why Nie's ethical Literary criticism has been warmly received and heatedly discussed by Chinese scholars.

Against the background elaborated above, Nie proposes ethical literary criticism, which embraces the following five aspects: (1) in terms of writers and their writings, it needs to investigate moral values of the writers and their historical background, and the connections of the writers' own moral values and those ethical values projected in those writings; (2) in terms of the works produced by the writers, it needs to investigate the relations between moral phenomena existing in works and in reality, the moral inclinations of the works, and social and moral values of the works; (3) in terms of the relations between readers and works, it needs to examine the effects of the works' moral values upon readers and the society, and readers' evaluations of the moral thoughts of the writers and the works; (4) it also needs to evaluate the moral inclinations of the writers and their works from an ethical perspective, the influence of the moral inclinations of the writers and their works upon their contemporary writers and literature as well as those of the later period, (5) it not only aims at uncovering the moral features of the writers and their works but also aims at exploring various issues concerning the relations between literature and society, literature and writer, and literature and writer from an ethical perspective (Nie, "Ethical Approach" 19-20). In order to develop ethical literary criticism into a fully-fledged discipline, Nie has put forth a set of core concepts and basic theoretical frameworks and demonstrates their working mechanisms, which are to be discussed in the next section of this paper.

### **A Conceptual Map of Ethical Literary Criticism: Major Arguments and Core Concepts**

When reflecting upon the practices of Western ethical criticism, Todd F. David and Kenneth Womack admit that "What has changed over the course of the twentieth

century in our discussion of ethics and literature is *the simplistic, uncomplicated prescription of external ethical forces* regarding so many different literatures and cultures” (David and Womack x, emphasis mine). David and Womack are astute commentators, and it is usually unwise to argue against them. With no doubt, these external forces help to quicken the development of Western ethical criticism. However, they also failed to consider ethical criticism as an independent discipline or school of critical theory. For instance, in the case of Emmanuel Lévinas, Maurice Blanchot, and Martha Nussbaum, ethical criticism has been more or less assimilated by philosophy; in the case of Wayne C. Booth, James Phelan, and Adam Zachary Newton, ethical criticism has been assimilated by narratology. Unlike its Western counterpart, ethical literary criticism has been developed into an independent or individual school of critical theory in China, which is saliently marked by its distinctive theoretical framework and core concepts. For the sake of clarity, I shall focus on four major arguments of ethical literary criticism, namely, the ethical origin of literature, the materialist nature of literary text, ethical selection, and Sphinx factor.

About the origin of literature, there have emerged a number of hypotheses, such as Mimetic Theory, Catharsis Theory, and Labor Theory. So far, the most influential theory on the origin of literature has been Labor Theory, which argues that literature, or arts in a broad sense, has originated from human labor. Frederick Engels claims that the development of labor “necessarily helped to bring the members of society closer together by increasing cases of mutual support and joint activity, and by making clear the advantage of this joint activity to each individual. In short, men in the making arrived at the point where *they had something to say to each other*” (Engels 454-455, italics original). Unlike Engels, Nie forcefully argues that “labor is just one of the conditions for human beings to produce arts” (Nie, “Ethical Literary” 14). In his opinion, “literature is produced out of the need of humans to express their views on morality or the desire to share their ethical experience” (14). Nie’s reasoning goes as follows: when early human beings identified the need for collaboration and cooperation in their working, they learned to deal with their relations with others, which gradually brought them to recognition of order. Consequently, their recognition of collaboration, cooperation, and order marks the initial form of ethical relations. In turn, human beings created scripts and written characters out of their desire to express those ethical relations and ethical values, so that they could document the incidents of their collaboration coupled with their own understandings. “In doing so, they turned abstract life stories into written texts made of letters and words, which in turn served as references or guides for them as well as for their descendants to pursue a worthy life. The texts generated in this manner can be considered as the earliest form of literature” (14).

Closely related to Nie's argument about the ethical origin of literature is his elaboration upon textual forms of literature. According to Nie, words and texts are two fundamental conditions for studying literature. Specifically, words are the carriers of meanings; while texts are the forms taken by literature (Nie, *Introduction* 16). In accordance with the existence and consequential forms (or to be better phrased as *media*) of words, texts fall into three broad categories: brain text, material text, and digital text. Before the creation of words, literature mainly takes on the form of brain text, which is defined as "memory stored in the human brain. As a peculiar biological form, brain text contains human beings' perceptions and cognitions of the world" (270). In the history of literature, there have existed many kinds of literary genres that resort to the brain text. Typical examples are mythologies, folk tales, and legendary stories. Those genres of literature taken on the form of the brain text have been passed down from one generation to the next through oral storytelling, though they cannot be inherited biologically. Consider oral literature as an example. In contrast to the popular view that negates the existence of textual forms of oral literature, Nie sees it in a different way. He postulates that "Literature cannot exist without texts, and oral literature is no exception. Unlike written literature, oral literature is communicated not through the visible form of material text but through the invisible form of the brain text" (271). Nie goes further to argue that "Fundamentally, all literary works result from the writers' retrieving, assembling, processing, rewriting, storing and representing of the brain text. To put it another way, without the brain text, there wouldn't be writings produced by writers, and thus there wouldn't exist material text and digital text" (271). Unlike the brain text, the material text usually takes those lifeless materials as its carriers such as paper, rock, pottery, metal, etc. Nie considers the creation of the material text as a revolutionary event in the field of communications and literature, which in turn helps the brain text to be liberated from its abstractness and to take on the concrete material form. Thus, it wins "the independence of literature" (278). Compared with the brain text and the material text, digital text or electronic text can be easily identified as those textual forms "stored as documents or files in hard drives, disks, or other electronic devices" (278). In my opinion, though the digital text is derived from the brain text and the material text, it does not mean that the digital text can replace the other two textual forms. That is to say, all three textual forms are expected to be in coexistence instead of replacing one with another, and they enjoy complementary relations instead of exclusive ones.

Equally significant is Nie's contribution to the understanding of human nature, which is aptly illuminated through the concept *ethical selection*. I agree with Nie when he sees the fact that "In the history of human civilization, the biggest problem for mankind to solve is to make a choice between the identities of animals and the

identities of human beings” (32). It is true that why and how human beings have come into existence are always central to scholars’ interest. As is known, Charles Darwin developed his evolutionary theory to account for the physical forms of human beings, who have evolved from apes through a long process of biological selection. Later on, Friedrich Engels, relying on Darwin’s theory, goes a step further to argue that it is labor that differentiates human beings from animals. However, in Nie’s view, labor is merely one of the conditions that enable human beings to evolve and to develop from apes. In other words, both Darwin and Engels succeed in accounting for where human beings have come from but fail to draw a fundamental distinction between man and animals (31-34). “Biological selection,” Nie argues, “is the first step taken by human beings, which helps them to be who they are in a biological sense. What truly differentiates human beings from animals is the second step — ethical selection” (267). It is ethical selection that helps to endow human being with reason and ethical consciousness, which eventually turn them into an ethical being. To illustrate the differences between biological selection and ethical selection, Nie deliberately uses the story of Adam and Eve, who are physically different from other living creatures in the Garden of Eden. However, so far as knowledge is concerned, they remain basically the same as other animals, being naked with no sense of shame, taking fruit from trees when hungry, and drinking water from streams when thirsty. The act of eating the fruits from the Tree of Knowledge is rather significant in the sense that Adam and Eve have thus acquired knowledge and ability to tell good from evil, which accounts for their consequential actions of feeling ashamed of their nakedness and looking for leaves to cover their secret places. With reference to this biblical tale, Nie argues that “Eating the forbidden fruit and the consequential ability acquired to tell good from evil helps Adam and Eve to complete their ethical selection and become human beings not only in a biological sense, but also in an ethical sense. In other words, the ability to tell good and evil sets up a criterion for distinguishing human beings from animals. The notion of good and evil emerges along with ethical consciousness and is used to evaluate human beings only. In this sense, good and evil constitute the basis of ethics” (35-36).

In connection with ethical selection, Nie coined another helpful concept *Sphinx factor*, which is derived from his new reading of the Sphinx Riddle in Sophocles’s *Oedipus Rex*. From the perspective of ethical literary criticism, the Sphinx Riddle can be seen not as “an expression of issue concerning humanity’s doomed failure to fight against fate, but as an exploration of the mystery why humans are such beings.” (36). In Nie’s opinion, the feature of the Sphinx’s combination of a human head and an animal body implies that “the most important feature of a human image lies in its head, which stands for reason of human beings emerged in the evolutionary process,

and that human beings evolve from animals and thus still contain some features belonging to animals” (38). With this point in his mind, Nie names this feature the “Sphinx factor”, which is composed of two parts: the human factor and the animal factor. Specifically, the human factor equals “ethical consciousness embodied by the human head, which results from human being’s biological selection in their evolution from savagery to civilization”; while the animal factor refers to “human beings’ animal instinct, which is mainly controlled by their primitive desires” (38-39). Viewed in this light, the Sphinx Riddle can be interpreted as an ethical proposition for human beings to meditate after their going through biological selection — being human or being animal, which in turn requests them to complete their evolutionary process by undertaking the ethical selection. In terms of the Sphinx factor, Nie argues that “the various combinations and alternations of the human factor and the animal factor generate a variety of ethical events and ethical conflicts in literature, thus conveying different moral implications” (38). There are an uncountable number of literary works demonstrating the interplay between the human factor and the animal factor. Typical examples are *Oedipus Rex*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *The Cloven Viscount*, and *The Journey to the West*.

David and Womack observe that at present, “the ethical consideration of a given work of literature ranges from the close reading of the text itself — particularly in terms of the dilemmas and conundrums presented in the lives of the characters that we encounter there — to the ethical questions that the story raises in the readers own life beyond the margins of the text” (David and Womack x, emphasis mine). Apparently, David and Womack place much stress upon the moral implications of literature for readers. To some extent, ethical literary criticism shares the similar position. As Nie says, “In specific literary works, central to ethics are those about the recognized and accepted ethical relations between human beings, between human beings and society, and between human beings and nature, as well as about the ethical norms and orders established upon those relations” (Nie, *Introduction* 13). “The mission of literature,” Nie claims, “is to write about changes of those ethical relations and their consequences, so as to offer enlightening power for the progression of human civilization” (13). In order to uncover the ethical nature of literature and the moral implications of given literary works, Nie also proposes some other insightful concepts, including ethical taboo, ethical environment, ethical identity, ethical confusion, rational will, irrational will, natural will, free will, etc., which are amply illuminated in his *Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism* and other relevant publications.

### **Ethical Literary Criticism in China: Receptions and Applications**

There are countless books and over 1,700 essays concerning ethical literary criticism

published in Chinese journals in the years between January 2005 and August 2014 (as indexed in CNKI). More surprisingly, Nie's ground-breaking essay "Ethical Approach to Literary Studies: A New Perspective" (2004) has been cited over 200 times (as indexed in CNKI). The above mentioned hard facts reveal Chinese scholars' enthusiasm for embracing ethical literary criticism, as well as the warm receptions and wide applications of this new critical theory in China. A brief survey shows that all those publications related to ethical literary criticism fall mainly into two encompassing categories: (1) those concerned with theoretical explorations of ethical literary criticism; and (2) those concerned with the applications of ethical literary criticism to specific literary works.

For those scholars working in the first category, we can identify such names as Liu Jianjun, Zhang Jie, Lu Yaodong, Li Dinqing, Long Yun, and many others. For instance, Zhang Jie and Liu Zengmei examine the methodological basis of literary ethical criticism from a perspective of pluralism, claiming that moral standards based on the value judgment are pluralistic, that ethical literary criticism ought to be open and dialogical accordingly, and it is not to preach morally at readers, but rather to pose questions, to be thought-provoking, and to hold dialogues with readers (Zhang and Liu 137-143). Similarly, in their co-authored paper "Current Situation and Future Trend of Ethical Literary Criticism," Xiu Shuxin and Liu Jianjun identify three major problems existing in ethical literary criticism: undifferentiated use of the terms of ethics and morality; confusion over ethical literary criticism and moral criticism; and a lack of classification of related terms. With these three problems in their minds, Xiu and Liu suggest redefining ethics, combining ethical literary criticism with other critical approaches, and proposing the key terms of ethical literary criticism and moral criticism (Xiu and Liu 165-170).

For those scholars working in the second category, we can name quite a few scholars such as Liu Maosheng, Yang Gexin, Liu Hongwei, Wang Songlin, Tian Junwu, Shang Biwu, and others. For instance, employing a set of toolkits like ethical identity, Sphinx factor, and ethical context from ethical literary criticism, Liu Hongwei reads Harold Pinter's *Betrayal* in a new light. She argues that the "extramarital love" between Jerry and Emma demonstrates that Man is an existence of Sphinx factor, fully embodying the ethical conflicts among rational will, free will and irrational will. Their extramarital relationship results from the uncontrolled free will as well as the irrational will controlling their sense of moral obligation. Jerry's choice of going back home shows the return of his ethical consciousness, and the power of the rational will (Liu 26-33). With reference to ethical literary criticism, Shang Biwu re-reads the "daughter-selling" event of Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* and decodes a set of ethical complexes in the novel, such as ethical choice, ethical identity and ethical consciousness, and thus

arrives at a new interpretation of this fictional work (Shang, “Ethical Choice” 14-23).

It also needs to be noted that, there have been several symposiums held in China to explore ethical literary criticism as a new methodology for literary studies. Namely, there was “China’s National Symposium on Ethical Literary Criticism” (Wuhan, Oct. 2005) attended by over 100 scholars, who were eager to express their interest and enthusiasm for this burgeoning critical paradigm, and “The International Symposium on Ethical Literary Criticism” (Yichang, Dec. 2012) attended by over 150 scholars and a variety of issues concerning ethics and literature were discussed. A particularly fruitful result of Yichang conference is the establishment of International Association for Ethical Literary Criticism, the mission of which is to provide a forum and resource for scholars and advanced students all over the world an opportunity to share their findings in the study of literature and ethics. There was “The Third International Symposium on Ethical Literary Criticism” (Ningbo, Oct. 2013) attended by nearly 200 scholars coming from home and abroad, which was saliently marked by internationalization, and much wider range of issues and perspectives that have been tackled with. And, there is “The Fourth International Symposium on Ethical Literary Criticism” (Shanghai, Dec. 2014), which is to be attended by over 200 scholars from different regions and countries.

It is not only the scholars and the journals that have shown their unprecedented enthusiasm for embracing ethical literary criticism. As a new critical approach proposed and constructed by a Chinese scholar, ethical literary criticism has also caught the eyes of China’s National Planning Office of Philosophy and Social Sciences, which first funded Nie’s *Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism* and later selected it into the National Achievements Library of Philosophy and Social Sciences. With his new project “Ethical Literary Criticism: Theory Construction and Critical Practice” recently funded by China’s National Planning Office of Philosophy and Social Sciences, we have strong reasons to expect Nie and his team to bring us more surprises.

### **Forward Thinking: Future Developments of Ethical Literary Criticism**

Zhang Jiang keenly observes that “Contemporary Western critical theories are deeply rooted in the Western culture, which makes them different from Chinese culture in such aspects as language, ethics and aesthetics. Consequently, their applications in China are limited” (Zhang 4). About the future developments of Chinese critical theories, Zhang suggests “returning to Chinese writings and avoiding too much reliance upon Western critical theories; returning to Chinese context and inheriting the traditional Chinese literary theories; and maintaining the balance between external studies and internal studies” (4). Insightful are Zhang’s suggestions, which are

also applicable to ethical literary criticism. To expand and enrich Zhang's thought-provoking suggestions, I would like to add three points to that list.

First, a set of critical principles of ethical literary criticism need to be proposed. Despite its applicable frameworks and terminologies, ethical literary criticism needs also to offer critics a set of rules or principles to follow when they attempt to pursue an objective criticism of a given literary work. For instance, in my opinion, there might be a three-step procedure of reading literature across ethical literary criticism, that is, reconstruction, description and evaluation. The first step is to reconstruct the ethical environment, ethical identities of characters, ethical order governing a given fictional world, etc. The second step is to describe changes of characters' ethical identities, the breaking of ethical order, and their respective consequences, etc. The third step is to evaluate moral inclinations projected by the works and to reveal their moral implications for the contemporary society.

Second, the interconnections between ethics and narrative forms are to be examined. It is true that "literature is an ethical expression of a human society in a given historical period, and the nature of literature is about ethics" (Nie, *Introduction* 13). However, literary works vary in effectiveness of conveying their ethical experience and moral enlightenment to readers. Presumably, all writers resort to narratives as a means for their ethical aims. In that case, it is necessary to investigate the writers' employment of narrative strategies and their consequential effects upon the expression of ethical values.

Third, a dialogue needs to be placed between ethical criticism in the West and ethical literary criticism in China. Chinese scholars are very familiar with ethical criticism practiced by the Westerners; while the Western academics know very little about the tradition of Chinese moral criticism and the newly established ethical literary criticism. I think, the more our exchanges involve a sharing of ideas about the two traditions and innovations, the more we can learn from each other and the more productive the relationship is likely to be.

It has to be admitted that some of these suggestions have already been taken. Consider the dialogues between ethical criticism in the West and ethical literary criticism in China as a quick example. In addition to organizing annual convention of International Association for Ethical Literary Criticism, Nie has guest-edited several special issues on ethical literary criticism in some international journals, which are either under preparation or forthcoming. To name a few, "Ethical Literary Criticism: East and West" in *Arcadia: International Journal of Literary Studies*, "Ethical Literary Criticism" in *Universitas-Monthly Review of Philosophy and Culture*, and "Fiction and Ethics in the 21st Century" in *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*.

When reflecting upon "theory now and again", Jonathan Culler stresses that "In

literary studies, theory was first deployed for thinking about the nature of the critical enterprise and for *producing new readings of literary works*" (Culler 230, emphasis mine). In Culler's opinion, the most essential quality of a good critical theory is to produce new readings of literary works. In that case, I think Culler should be happy if he reads what Nie has stated about the aims and purpose of working towards ethical literary criticism: "The overall goal of ethical literary criticism is to shed new light on a given literary text by performing a close reading from an ethical perspective... The significance and value of ethical literary criticism is not to repeat the existing conclusions or arguments but to arrive at new interpretations, cognitions, and new findings, surpassing thereby the existing scholarship, and ultimately moving critical scholarship forward" (Nie, "Ethical Literary" 22). Thus, I would like to end this essay by reiterating what I have argued somewhere previously: formulating and practicing ethical literary criticism, Nie "exemplifies the best resource for the study of literature by facilitating new ways of engaging with literature and fostering new understandings of literary history. In this sense, it resonates not only with Chinese scholars, but ought to resonate with scholars in the West" (Shang, "Ethical Criticism" 6).

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# 叙事学研究新视野：评尚必武《当代西方后经典叙事学研究》

王业昭

**内容提要：**进入新世纪之后，后经典叙事学受到欧美学界高度关注，相关研究如火如荼。相比之下，国内研究则明显滞后。有鉴于此，尚必武教授新著《当代西方后经典叙事学研究》具有开拓性的重要意义。该书以西方后经典叙事学的主要流派和核心概念为主轴，在梳理、廓清的基础上，对上述议题进行了再探讨和重新认知。本文在概述《当代西方后经典叙事学研究》主要内容的基础上，旨在提炼作者对后经典叙事学主要流派和核心概念的独特见解，希冀以此对读者研读该书时有所帮助与启迪。

**关键词：**后经典叙事学 流派论 概念论 未来发展

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**Title** A New Vision of Narratology: A Review of *Contemporary Western Narratology: Postclassical Perspective*

**Abstract** At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, postclassical narratology is a focus in western academics, while it is insufficiently studied in China. *Contemporary Western Narratology: Postclassical Perspective* explores the major schools and core concepts of western postclassical narratology and sheds a new light on them from a Chinese scholar's perspective. Reviewing this valuable work, the paper aims at highlighting the insights of this work and makes it suggestive to scholars interested in narrative inquires of various kinds.

**Key Words** postclassical narratology; major schools; key concepts

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## 一、引言

经典叙事学以文本为中心，将叙事作品视为独立自足的体系，隔断了作品与社会、历史、文化环境的关联，这一特征使其在 20 世纪 80 年代遭到质疑与否定。在这种批评气候下，以语境主义叙事学为特征的后经典叙事学应运而生。自此，后经典叙事学呈现出蓬勃发展之态势（尚必武 1-15）。<sup>1</sup>与后经典叙事学

在当今欧、美学界备受重视形成鲜明对比，国内的相关研究则显得较为滞后。在这样的背景下，2013年岁末，尚必武教授新作《当代西方后经典叙事学研究》（下文简称《后经典》）的出版显得意义非凡。

作为国内首部系统、全面评析西方后经典叙事学主要流派与核心概念的专著，《后经典》以追踪西方后经典叙事学的发展进程和态势为中心旨趣，着力考察其研究范畴、方法和范式的演进和转移，意在窥探后经典叙事学的存在维度。该书分为上、下两篇，分别以西方后经典叙事学的主要流派和核心概念为主轴，在梳理、廓清的基础上，作者对上述议题进行了重审。本文在概述《当代西方后经典叙事学研究》主要内容的基础上，旨在提炼作者对后经典叙事学主要流派和核心概念的独特见解，希冀以此对读者研读该书时有所帮助与启迪。

## 二、对西方后经典叙事学主要流派的梳理与再探讨

《后经典》上篇共六章，分别评述了后经典叙事学的主要流派：诗歌叙事学、非自然叙事学、语料库叙事学、女性主义叙事学、修辞叙事理论和认知叙事学。必须指出，在上述章节中，作者并非只是介绍后经典叙事学的这些主要分支，而是在梳理的基础上对它们进行再探讨，发表了自己对这些流派研究方法、发展方向等方面的见解，这也是笔者在下文着力追踪、评述的部分。

第一章《跨文类的叙事研究与诗歌叙事学的建构》指出在超越文学叙事的跨媒介叙事研究背景下，有必要把“超越小说叙事”的“跨文类”叙事研究提上日程。诗歌叙事学既是叙事研究的“后经典转向”与“叙事范畴的扩展”或“泛叙事性”的双重结果，同时也可被看作是“超越小说叙事”的“跨文类”叙事研究的一个新领域。此章以建构诗歌叙事学为中心旨趣，主要探讨了：诗歌叙事学兴起的语境；诗歌叙事学的建构路径；诗歌叙事学的批评实践。

诗歌叙事学无论是对诗歌研究还是叙事学研究，都开辟了新的研究视角和路径。但长久以来，叙事理论一直忽略了诗歌叙事这一重要领域。作为后经典叙事学的一个起步较晚，但具有广阔研究空间的分支，诗歌叙事学目前仍处于初创阶段。有鉴于此，在总结前人的基础上，尚必武提出了加速诗歌叙事学发展进程的五个建构路径或方向：诗歌叙事特有的话语属性；诗歌叙事的多元方法；现有叙事学理论与诗歌理论之间的相互借鉴与交流；不同文类的诗歌叙事学研究；诗歌叙事学的理论建构与评判实践并举（25-26）。为验证上述五种路径之于建构诗歌叙事学的可行性和效度，尚必武以英文抒情诗《西风》为例加以分析。

非自然叙事学是一支新兴的后经典叙事学流派，得到了西方学界的热切关注。在第二章中，针对什么是非自然叙事？怎样研究非自然叙事？如何建构和发展非自然叙事学？非自然叙事学与经典叙事学以及后经典叙事学的其他分支之间有何关系？尚必武从四个层面来探讨上述问题：在反模仿叙事层面上辨析了非自然叙事的定义与特征；在故事层面上讨论了非自然叙事对“不可能的故事世界”的建构；在话语层面上考察了非自然叙事所惯用的“反常的叙述行为”；在方法论层面上对非自然叙事学的建构路径和未来研究提出了若干建议。在此

基础上, 作者认为, 要建构和发展非自然叙事学, 研究者必须处理好四种关系: 非自然叙事学与经典叙事学之间的关系; 非自然叙事学与后现代叙事, 以及非自然叙事学与后现代叙事理论之间的关系; 非自然叙事学与跨媒介叙事学之间的关系; 非自然叙事学与后经典叙事学其他分支之间的关系(44-46)。

作为国内首部涉及语料库叙事学研究的专著, 《后经典》的第三章《语料库叙事学论略》主要做了如下几个方面工作: 介绍语料库叙事学的产生背景和前提条件; 评述国外两种具有开创性的语料库叙事学研究, 即戴维·赫尔曼基于语料库的关于动作事件的研究和迈克尔·图伦从语料库文体学视角出发对短篇小说叙事进程的研究; 展望语料库叙事学的研究前景, 并对其未来研究的任务和方向提出建议。书中, 尚必武对图伦的《短篇小说的叙事进程: 语料库文体学方法》进行全面评介。在此基础上, 作者辨析了图伦的语料库叙事学的几个“弱项”: 过于拘泥于文体学分析, 过多涉及作品的遣词造句, 而对作品的整体叙事结构未给予充分考虑; 在叙事进程这一论题上, 过多关注了文本线索之于读者的期待或读者反应的影响; 过多依赖“基于语料库”方法, 而“以语料库为驱动”方法运用明显不足。针对这些不足, 尚教授对语料库叙事学未来的发展提出个人观点: 打破语料库语言学与叙事学之间的学科界限, 促进两者研究界面的整合, 实现叙事学方法与语料库语言学方法之间的互补; 建构各种不同类型的叙事语料库, 进而为语料库叙事学的研究提供支撑; 语料库叙事学还存在许多有意义的研究论题亟待开展(59-60)。语料库叙事学的最大优势是把叙事分析从对具体文学叙事的阐释实践中分离出来, 使得同时考察数量庞大的叙事文本成为可能。鉴于国内研究者普遍对语料库叙事学相对疏生之状况, 作者的上述见解与观点无疑具有重要指导意义。

20世纪90年代以降, 以北美为主导的女性主义叙事学得到了长足的发展, 无论是在叙事理论建构还是在叙事批评实践上均取得了引人瞩目的成果。第四章以英国学者露斯·佩奇的《女性主义叙事学的文学与语言学视角》一书为底本, 以评述她的女性主义叙事学理论为切入点, 并从性别、叙事性、研究方法以及研究课题等层面出发, 探讨了佩奇对女性主义叙事学的贡献, 以及其对女性主义叙事学主题的偏离。作者指出, 一方面, 佩奇采用文学与语言学的双重视角, 对女性主义叙事学的发展做出了重要贡献, 而另一方面, 佩奇关于叙事形式可以脱离性别的论点又偏离了女性主义叙事学研究的主流。就其学科属性而言, 尚必武认为女性主义叙事学的未来发展应该处理好下述四重关系: 女性主义叙事学与女性主义批评理论之间的关系; 女性主义叙事学与叙事美学之间的关系; 女性主义叙事学与后经典叙事学其他分支之间的关系; 女性主义叙事学与新型的叙事媒介或叙事形式之间的关系(70-72)。在新的历史条件下, 女性主义叙事学面临着全球化、多元化的挑战。但从另一方面来说, 这些挑战也是女性主义叙事学得以进一步发展的机遇, 而尚必武的上述见解也是在为这一重要后经典叙事学流派的发展添砖加瓦。

在第五章中, 作者以詹姆斯·费伦的《体验小说: 判断、进程及修辞叙事理论》

为考察对象，评析了其修辞叙事理论。作者指出，费伦在重访和拓展修辞叙事理论的基础上，以考察读者的阅读体验为主旨，藉“叙事判断”、“叙事进程”之共谋为视角，从叙事理论和叙事批评实践的双重层面，着力探讨读者“以相似的方式，体验相同作品”的可能空间，展示了修辞叙事理论的力量。虽然是当今后经典叙事学领域超重量级专家的扛鼎之作，尚必武亦指出其存在的疏漏与盲点。就宏观层面而言，在叙事判断三种类型之间的关系上，作者认为费伦只注意到审美判断与阐释判断和伦理判断之间的历时关系，而忽视了它们之间也存在共时关系的可能；只注意到阐释判断和伦理判断之间的共时关系或平行关系，而又忽略了它们之间也存在着历时关系或因果关系的可能；只注意到伦理判断之于审美判断的服务功能，而忽略了审美判断之于伦理判断的服务功能。就微观层面而言，《体验小说》在原先四种伦理取位的基础上，又增加了修辞目的的伦理，即“整个叙事行为的伦理维度”。但这与已有的“隐含作者”的伦理取位在很大程度上是重合的，似没有增加的必要。此外，费伦既没有提及关于叙事判断的七个命题之间的关系，也没有详细阐述叙事判断与叙事进程之间的互动关系（93）。

第六章中，作者以戴维·赫尔曼《叙事的基本要件》为底本，讨论了叙事学研究的两个根本问题：“什么是叙事？”、“怎么研究叙事？”。上述问题不仅反映了叙事学研究的基本立场、方法取向，甚至决定了叙事学研究的最终目标和结果。在“什么是叙事？”这个问题上，戴维·赫尔曼提出了叙事的“四分法”（情境、事件序列、建构世界/分裂世界、感应）；在“怎么研究叙事？”这个问题上，赫尔曼倡导包含认知科学、语言学、语言哲学等在内的跨学科方法，为重构叙事学研究的基础工程做出了颇有意义的探索。尚必武对赫尔曼观点解读的基础上，将笔墨放到自己对上述问题的理解。譬如，“情境”是叙事的第一基本要件，在“情境”的研究方法上，赫尔曼提出三种方法：社会语言学方法、话语心理学方法以及叙事学方法，而他的主要立场是综合这些方法的跨学科研究范式。作者则认为，叙事的情境或语境主要包括两种含义：叙事的微观情境，即具体“故事讲述”行为的直接发生语境或直接阐释语境；叙事的宏观情境，即“故事讲述”行为的间接发生语境或间接阐释语境——历史文化语境。赫尔曼只注意到了叙事的微观情境。研究情境的中心参照点是“故事讲述”行为。但是，无论“故事讲述”行为的发生语境，还是“故事讲述”行为的阐释语境，赫尔曼皆拘泥于文本之内，忽略了文本之外的社会历史文化语境（102）。

纵观《后经典》上篇，作者对西方后经典叙事学主要流派进行了全面梳理，并在此基础上发表了个人见解，指出它们存在的瑕疵或今后的发展方向。上述观点既充分表明作者对这一领域的透彻理解与把握，又体现出他强烈的学术评判精神和敏锐的学术评判思维。

### 三、对后经典叙事学核心概念的廓清与再认知

《后经典》下篇共七章，分别对“叙事性”、“情节”、“隐含作者”、“不

可靠叙述”、“第一人称复数叙述”、“叙事开端”和“叙事聚焦”作了逐一廓清，这对国内相关领域的初级研究者具有重要指导意义。

作为“叙事”的衍生概念，“叙事性”之于理解叙事的本质与表现、叙事研究的方法与目标都有着重要意义。后经典叙事学家奉行“叙事无处不在”的“泛叙事”观，由此导致了“普遍叙事性”的产生。后经典叙事学对经典叙事学的超越主要体现在两个方面：方法和媒介。就方法而言，本章主要讨论修辞叙事学、认知叙事学、女性主义叙事学的叙事性研究，就媒介而言，本章探讨媒介叙事学视阈下的“叙事性”研究。总之，作者着力从方法与媒介的双重层面透视后经典语境下西方叙事学界的“叙事性”研究。最后，作者认为未来的“叙事性”研究需要紧密结合叙事的其它要素（人物、时间、空间等），避免孤立研究“叙事性”的倾向（128-129）。在后经典叙事学领域，与“叙事性”并举的另一重要概念便是“情节”。在第八章中，尚必武全面评析了希拉里·丹尼伯格的情节理论。作为新时期情节理论的集大成者，丹尼伯格的情节理论可大致归纳为三个方面：情节的三种建构方式（认知、本体和空间）；情节的两大基本类型（巧合与反事实）；情节的两个发展方向（聚合和离散）。此外，丹尼伯格还审视了情节的建构方式、基本类型和发展方向在不同时期、不同文类中的差异与变迁。在重话语、轻故事的研究语境下，丹尼伯格的情节理论有力地推动了叙事学的向前发展。同时，丹尼伯格是以小说情节的主要发展方向（聚合和离散）参照基准，对情节的两种基本类型（巧合型与反事实型）做了一番比较。这样的做法受到普遍接受，但尚必武指出：丹尼伯格主要通过不同历史时期的小说考辨，得出了“小说情节总体上呈现出由巧合到反事实、由聚合到离散的发展趋势”这一结论，这似乎值得商榷。作者自己认为：小说情节的发展方向应该是小说的所属文类决定的（138）。之后，作者又以《莫格街的谋杀案》和《玻璃之城》两部小说验证了自己的观点。

1961年，叙事理论学家韦恩·布思在《小说修辞学》中首次提出“隐含作者”概念。这一概念的提出不仅加速了叙事理论的发展，而且也引发了学界旷日持久的争论。在《后经典》的第九章，尚必武在探讨“隐含作者”的含义与提出缘由的同时，对学者们关于这一概念的争论加以全面梳理，并分析他们争论的焦点和实质。全章围绕着“隐含作者”的含义与提出缘由；“隐含作者”的是非之争；以及争论的焦点与实质展开评论，指出在文学批评实践中“隐含作者”依然具有其存在的必要与价值。在此基础上，尚必武认为西方学者有关“隐含作者”的争论实质还在于其定义与来源、和存在、划分“隐含作者”的参照物等方面，并对此指出三点：西方学者争论的焦点在于“隐含作者”的定义和来源；他们争论的焦点还在于隐含作者这一概念是否具有必要性，即到底存不存在隐含作者的问题；划分隐含作者的参照物也成了叙事学家争论的焦点之一（152-153）。

作为叙事学研究的一个核心论题，不可靠叙述引发了当下叙事学界最热烈的讨论。第十章从“不可靠叙述”的原初概念出发，在研究路径上梳理了从布

思到费伦的修辞方法；从雅克比到安斯加尔·纽宁、汉森的认知（建构主义）方法；以及“语法人称”视角；在研究范畴上考察了非虚构类叙事作品中的不可靠叙述。在此基础上，作者对“不可靠叙述”的未来研究提出了四点思考和建议：在发展“不可靠叙述”研究修辞、认知方法的同时，也可不断开辟其研究的新方法、新路径；必须对“不可靠叙述”概念的批判史进行梳理和总结，加强研究初第一人称叙述者之外的其它类型叙述者的“不可靠性”；对中国学者而言，任何结合中国特有的文化语境，考察不同文类、时期、媒介中的“不可靠叙述”是当下研究的一项重要任务（191-192）。

长期以来，叙事学界大多关注第一人称单数叙述、第三人称叙述、第二人称叙述，而忽略了第一人称复数叙述这一重要领地。随着非自然叙事学的兴起，第一人称复数叙述在西方叙事学界迅速升温，成为当下叙事学研究的一个热点。作为国内首篇关于后经典叙事学第一人称复数的探讨者的专著章节，第十一章重点探讨了第一人称复数叙述的存在样态、指称范畴和意识再现中三个问题。在此基础上，作者提出第一人称复数叙述在未来发展所需要回答的五个问题：对第一人称复数叙述者“不可靠性”的考察；对第一人称复数叙述者的“叙述聚焦”的研究；第一人称复数叙述的历史有待书写；对第一人称复数叙述“受述者”的探讨。文学叙事中的第一人称复数叙述与其它媒介（如法律、报告、歌剧等）的第一人称复数叙述之间的对比研究（202-203）。

“叙事开端”是当下叙事学研究的另一重要论题，引起了西方学者的热烈讨论。与此相反，国内学者对叙事开端的研究则较为生疏，未对其给予足够的重视和关注。第十二章在梳理西方叙事学界关于开端研究的基础上，重点探讨了四个命题：虚假的开端；文学叙事的开端与跨媒介叙事的开端；叙事开端与叙事结尾之间的内在联系；“叙事开端”未来研究的方向和任务。至于第四点，作者认为有如下六个方向和任务值得思考：形成一个统一的关于“叙事开端”的定义；不同时期的叙事作品的开端的研究；不同文类的叙事作品的开端的研究；不同国别、不同区域的叙事作品的开端的研究；不同媒介的叙事开端研究；不同方法论指导下的“叙事开端”研究（214-215）。总之，鉴于国内学界“叙事开端”研究之现状，尚必武的意图在于抛出“叙事开端”这一话题，以求引起叙事学研究同行的关注，推动国内关于“叙事开端”的研究，进而打开这一后经典叙事学核心概念研究的新开端。

自1969年被法国叙事学家热拉尔·热奈特正式提出，作为叙事理论的核心概念之一，“叙述聚焦”引领无数学者竞相对其展开多维研究。随着后经典叙事学的崛起，学界又掀起一轮对“叙述聚焦”新的研究热潮。在《后经典》的最后一章，作者从早期的叙述视角研究谈起，详细评析经典叙事学视阈下叙述聚焦理论的建构与论争。同时，以女性主义叙事学和认知叙事学为例，着力探究后经典叙事学视阈下叙述聚焦研究的新态势，力图从全局上考察和把握叙述聚焦研究在西方学界的嬗变。

在“结语”中，尚必武指出，在叙事学研究的后经典阶段，跨国界、跨媒

介、跨学科是叙事研究的最主要特征。沿着这一“跨”的发展路径，后经典语境下的叙事研究将会迎来更为灿烂的春天。在叙事学研究的“满园春色”之中，中国学者有必要展现出自己的“亮丽色彩”，而尚教授的《后经典》就是其中的一抹重彩。

#### 四、结语

《后经典》的“附录”部分是尚必武对三位当今西方顶尖叙事学研究专家的访谈录：詹姆斯·费伦就修辞叙事学以及当代叙事理论的发展趋势和未来走向发表了看法；戴维·赫尔曼教授就叙事学研究的新发展这一话题阐述了自己的观点；布莱恩·理查森阐释了自己对“非自然叙事学”及当代叙事理论的见解（261-290）。研读这些访谈，读者从中处处可见尚必武与当代西方叙事学领域“大师”们的思想交流与观点碰撞。这既表明他对当代西方后经典叙事学最前沿的了解，也体现出《后经典》的对国内学界的重要价值。

《后经典》围绕西方后经典叙事学的发展进程和态势而展开，并通过层层论析揭示出：一方面，后经典叙事学超越了经典叙事学的文学、文字叙事范畴，日渐走向研究方法的多元化，研究范式的语境化、动态化，在当下叙事学研究中势头强劲。另一方面，后经典叙事学的崛起也引发了一定的误解与问题，颇有澄清和探讨的必要，而本书的“点睛”之处正体现在这后一方面。《后经典》虽围绕西方后经典叙事学的主要流派与核心概念而展开，但其并未对西方知名学者在这一领域的观点亦步亦趋。相反，作者在进行评述时都发表了自己的观点和见解，并从中国学者的视角，指出西方学者研究中存在的不足、如何走出困境，以及未来的发展方向。鉴于后经典叙事学在国内学界相对滞后的研究现状，《后经典》势必成为相关研究者重要的参考文献。

#### 注解【Note】

1. 本文相关引文均出自尚必武：《当代西方后经典叙事学研究》（北京：人民文学出版社，2013年），以下仅标注其页码，不再一一说明。

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# 评《伦理选择与价值评判：劳伦斯·达雷尔重奏小说研究》

秦明利

**内容摘要：**由复旦大学出版社2014年出版的徐彬撰写的《伦理选择与价值评判：劳伦斯·达雷尔重奏小说研究》一书以文学伦理学批评为分析方法揭示了达雷尔重奏小说的伦理结构及内涵。该专著突破了现有国外研究中方法陈旧与单一的局限，对国内外达雷尔研究及与之相关的英美文学研究贡献颇丰。专著首次阐释了达雷尔的艺术伦理选择问题。达雷尔的艺术伦理选择表现为对前驱作家继承与超越的艺术伦理旨归和对现代、后现代和后殖民语境下性爱、自我完满以及场所等母题的伦理思考。

**关键词：**《伦理选择与价值评判：劳伦斯·达雷尔重奏小说研究》 文学伦理学批评 徐彬

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**Title** A Review of Xu Bin's *Ethical Choice and Value Judgment: Study on Lawrence Durrell's Ensemble Novels*

**Abstract** *Ethical Choice and Value Judgment: Study on Lawrence Durrell's Ensemble Novels* written by Xu Bin and published by Fu Dan University Press in 2014 has employed literary ethical criticism as its critical paradigm and revealed the ethical structures and connotations in Durrell's ensemble novels. The monograph has broken through the theoretical bottle neck of the present international scholarship on Durrell and made a great contribution to Durrellian scholarship and related English and American Literature studies. The monograph has deciphered questions related with Durrell's artistic ethical selections. Durrell's artistic ethical selections are reflected in his ethical pursuit of inheriting and surpassing his predecessors and his ethical reflections on motifs such as sex, self-fulfillment and place in modern, postmodern and postcolonial contexts.

**Key words** *Ethical Choice and Value Judgment: Study on Lawrence Durrell's Ensemble Novels*; ethical literary criticism; Xu Bin

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劳伦斯·达雷尔 (Lawrence Durrell 1912-1990) 是常被我国外国文学研究者们所忽视的、颇为高产的著名现当代英国作家, 曾获达夫·库珀文学奖和布莱克纪念奖, 1982 年获布克奖提名, 1988 年获诺贝尔文学奖提名。达雷尔被亨利·米勒、T. S. 艾略特和劳伦斯·鲍威尔等誉为最具创新精神的作家, 是现代主义文学到后现代主义文学创作中极具代表意义的过渡型作家, 其作品开启了后现代和后殖民小说创作的新领域, 因此对达雷尔的研究具有重要的理论价值和现实意义。

国外劳伦斯·达雷尔研究方兴未艾, 成果频出, 涉及心理学、现代主义、后现代主义和后殖民等领域, 主要涵盖五类命题: 历史、神话、性爱、自由和小说艺术。然而对以《黑书》(*The Black Book*)、《亚历山大四重奏》(*The Alexandria Quartet*) 和《阿芙罗狄蒂的反抗》(*The Revolt of Aphrodite*) 为代表的达雷尔重奏小说的文学伦理学批评在国内外学界尚属首次。2014 年 5 月由复旦大学出版社出版的《伦理选择与价值评判: 劳伦斯·达雷尔重奏小说研究》中, 青年学者徐彬将文学伦理学批评的分析话语运用到劳伦斯·达雷尔部分重奏小说研究中。这一研究范式与策略在对已有的劳伦斯·达雷尔重奏小说文本和与之相关的批评文本的全新闻阐释中以及在文学伦理学批评的具体实践中均体现出较强的创新性。“伦理选择”既是文学伦理学批评中的一个关键词又是对达雷尔重奏小说文本分析的切入点, 在此基础上专著作者分七章探讨了主人公在不同语境下的伦理判断、动因及结果。

“达雷尔《黑书》中自我与他者之生、死变奏”一章着重探讨的小说中作家身份的第一人称叙述者“我”创作之处为了消解“前驱影响焦虑”而采取的“妖魔化”和“逆崇高”<sup>1</sup>的伦理选择以及“我”所发出的“英国之死”的文化批评和伦理判断。如专著作者所述, “达雷尔在英国社会和前驱作家的影响下面临着如哈姆雷特般的生死抉择。”<sup>2</sup> 作品既是作家创作的产物又是承载作家自我之声和塑造作家身份的母体, 前驱作家的影响如大量渗透至后继作家创作过程中则表现为对母体的占有和对作家自我之声的剥夺。因此如将作品和前驱作家分别比成作家的“母亲”与“父亲”, 作家在俄狄浦斯情节作用下在创作过程中必定要面对哈姆雷特弑父与否的伦理选择。

达雷尔借小说世界中的虚拟“自我”路西弗之口抒发了他对前驱作家怀有的彼此矛盾的理性的“道德情感”和非理性的“自然情感”。<sup>3</sup> 道德情感表现为对“父辈”前驱作家的亲近与仰慕, 而自然情感, 或可称为作家对作品本身怀有的上述比喻意义的“恋母情结”则表现为对前驱作家的抵抗与反叛。专著作者指出《黑书》主人公格雷戈里有关“艺术的真谛在于连本带息地偿还对前人的借鉴”的论述中所提及的“利息便是超越前人艺术成就的部分”<sup>4</sup> 的说法便是上述两种矛盾情感之间彼此调和的结果, 是以继承与超越前驱作家为艺术伦理旨归的第三种伦理选择。

专著作者还指出: 虽然《黑书》恰如达雷尔所说是作家本人的“第一声啼

哭”（34），但该小说并未停留在作家自传层面上的自恋式和后现代实验性写作；达雷尔的社会道德责任心体现在对 20 世纪 30 年代英国文化的批判上。专著作者在对《黑书》主人公路西弗和格雷戈里波西米亚生活方式的描述基础上，揭示了达雷尔对二十世纪二、三十年代盎格鲁撒克逊民族“英国之死”文化及伦理危机的关注。

“《亚历山大四重奏》的经典化与妖魔化”一章从读者反应论的视角出发阐释了与艺术创作与接受之间关系的伦理内涵。专著作者认为《亚历山大四重奏》的成功不仅得益于对现代主义文学创作传统的继承还得益于对欧美阅读群体好奇心的满足。与卡繆（Albert Camus）相似，达雷尔以北非亚历山大城为背景的文学创作使其跻身 20 世纪著名作家的行列。在现代主义文学叙事框架下，《亚历山大四重奏》被视为描写英国作家身份的主人公海外经历的“成长小说”。“作为现代主义文本的经典化”一节详细论述了《亚历山大四重奏》中涉及的“艺术规范生活”和“艺术的自由性”等艺术伦理与道德主题。《后现代叙事的妖魔化》一节表明读者对该小说的抵制态度源自达雷尔新型写作手法的运用。“外来性”和“法国性”写作造成英国读者和评论家们阅读与批评的困难，这是部分评论家对该小说中后现代叙事妖魔化的原因之所在。除此之外，该小说对历史、文学文本和文本自身的互文性写作将读者带入一个又一个曲折婉转的意义的迷宫，进一步增加了该作品的阅读难度。

“《贾斯汀》：自我解构与重构的二重奏”一章在“现代城市中的自我困惑”标题下聚焦《亚历山大四重奏》的第一部小说《贾斯汀》中描写的现代城市居民性爱观的伦理道德问题。“有性无爱”是小说主人公不受理性控制的“兽性因子”泛滥的文本呈现。专著作者揭示了达雷尔对人间地狱般的亚历山大城街头景色的描写背后对亚历山大城市居民的伦理与道德批判。作者阐明：《贾斯汀》中的性爱描述并非旨在娱乐读者，满足读者的窥视欲望；与之相反，达雷尔通过将主人公乱性后自我分裂的恶果付诸笔端，起到警醒读者的伦理劝诫作用。

“从《贾斯汀》到《克丽》：后现代语境下的自我嬗变”一章对达雷尔后现代叙事技巧的探讨虽然属于形式主义文学批评的范畴，但就主人公自我嬗变过程中创伤性经验的探讨而言，本章又兼顾了文学伦理学批评特征。以“时空压缩”、“滑动展示板”和“望远镜视角”为关键词，专著作者在分析阐释达雷尔叙事技巧的同时揭示了同一主人公在不同时空中伦理思想的反常化表现。与后现代文本中主人公自我的多变、多元和去中心化等表现形式并存的是主人公伦理主体稳定感的消失。小说中自我的多重复写（palimpsest）伴随着主人公伦理与价值判断的反复无常。在借鉴荣格原型理论对小说主人公的心理世界加以分析的基础上，专著作者得出个人化历程等同于个人伦理与道德意识成熟的过程。以对部分小说主人公虽死犹生的自我价值和对他人的成长过程中的积极影响为例，专著作者指出主人公的“自我完满”实际上应被视为他们伦理思想升华的结果。

“劳伦斯·达雷尔《亚历山大四重奏》中的场所与伦理解读”一章将社会

学中的“场所”(place)概念引入对《亚历山大四重奏》的文学伦理学批评之中。该章的研究重点是英国现当代著名作家达雷尔《亚历山大四重奏》中“场所与伦理”之间的关系问题,即:对在后殖民语境下亚历山大城这一“相对固定”但又“变动不居”的场所中的小说主人公伦理判断、伦理身份的选择等方面的考察。专著作者认为莎士比亚的戏剧《安东尼与克莉奥佩特拉》是《亚历山大四重奏》中的第一部小说《贾斯汀》(Justine)中第一人称叙述者达利(Darley)认识亚历山大城和城中居民并分别给他们贴上“欲望之都”和“克莉奥佩特拉后代”的伦理标签的文本依据。小说女主人公贾斯汀(Justine)是现代版的克莉奥佩特拉,被达利视为“妖魔化”了的“欲女”。正如达利对《安东尼与克莉奥佩特拉》中克莉奥佩特拉伦理身份的误读一样,达利并未认清贾斯汀为国献身的“圣女”的伦理身份。专著作者指出达雷尔在第三部小说《芒特奥利夫》中将带着伦理判断有色眼镜的第一人称叙述者达利换成客观的、全知全能的第三人称叙述者,随着叙述者的转变,贾斯汀“圣女”的伦理身份最终浮出水面。

专著作者强调了亚历山大城后殖民历史语境对主人公芒特奥利夫(Mountolive)政治判断和伦理身份选择所起的不可忽视的作用。处于殖民与后殖民时期交界点上的芒特奥利夫仍将维护英国在埃及的殖民主义统治视为外交官至高无上的伦理旨归。当芒特奥利夫重拾维护大英权益的“现实原则”时却发现自己如萨特存在主义中对人之存在处境的描述一般被“投掷到”(projected)一个熟悉却陌生的亚历山大城的“场所”之中,伴随着英埃条约的签订和埃及的独立,芒特奥利夫顿时失去了伦理身份选择的能力,而陷入“伦理真空”之中。

从斯皮瓦克(Gayatri Spivak)题为“贱民能否发言?”(Can the Subaltern Speak?)的论文入手,专著作者探讨了后殖民语境下亚历山大城内埃及科普特精英塑造新型伦理关系的主题。“贱民”莉拉和她儿子纳西姆的反抗以学习和“模仿”西方殖民统治者伪装。芒特奥利夫眼中“完美的被殖民他者”的形象背后隐藏着的是科普特霍斯南尼家族近乎三代人坚持不懈地反英斗争。如专著作者所述,长期以来人们历史与文化的价值判断浓缩于亚历山大城这一独特场所之中,并以诸多方式深刻影响了主人公的伦理评判和伦理身份选择。

“《阿芙罗狄蒂的反抗》中的伦理与文化隐喻”一章以浮士德博士精神的伦理悖论为核心词。费利克斯为了实现个人科学梦想而与公司签订契约出卖灵魂的伦理主线与他幡然悔悟并决定反抗公司为大众谋利益的伦理主线交织在一起形成一个“究竟该如何是好?”的伦理节。专著作者形象地将现代资本主义社会中的公司制度比作魔鬼撒旦的契约,将费利克斯比作现代版的浮士德博士。斯宾格勒所说的“机器文化的没落”实际上指的是在光怪陆离的美好科技面前人类道德良心的泯灭。“阿芙罗狄蒂的反抗”是小说中类人机器人艾俄兰斯的自杀式反抗。身为科技文化和消费文化代言人的妓女艾俄兰斯死后被梅林科技公司制成类人机器人并使其继续为公司和公司总裁朱利安服务。然而与为人的艾俄兰斯出卖身体与良心换取自己本能物质欲望的满足相比,类人机器人却选择与朱利安同归于尽,结束公司对她身体与灵魂的占有。专著作者认为费利克

斯受类人机器人艾俄兰斯自杀式反抗的启示，烧毁公司档案室实现了有良知的发明家的伦理身份的重塑。

“达雷尔的多重身份与艺术伦理选择”一章从“艺术伦理选择”的定义出发揭示了国外批评家对达雷尔殖民作家身份的误读和达雷尔本人“自我救赎的西方佛教徒”的艺术家伦理身份的选择。如专著所示“艺术伦理选择”指的是“艺术家从其艺术工作者的职业身份出发而进行的伦理选择，以及在其艺术创作中展现出的伦理指归；强调在一定社会、历史语境下，艺术家与作品之间双向的伦理意识和伦理评判之艺术表现体系的建构”（178）。专著作者指出部分西方研究者之所以将达雷尔视为殖民作家与达雷尔英国驻塞浦路斯、亚历山大等地新闻官的任职经历有关。然而达雷尔远离英国的自我流放出自对英国和英国文化的抵制，以此为前提，达雷尔貌似为大英帝国海外利益服务的新闻官工作不过是养家糊口的权宜之计，而不具政治动机。相反，达雷尔在以《苦柠檬》为代表的系列游记作品中清晰地展现出对所到之处本土居民殖民遭遇的同情。专著作者指出通过达雷尔几部重奏小说伦理主题的考察，可以发现“达雷尔实现了由英国文化批判者到世界公民和西方佛教徒的艺术家伦理身份的转变；在由‘西’向‘东’的自我流放过程中，以世界大同的伦理道德理想和佛教救赎思想为核心，实现了由‘东’向‘西’的批评性回写”（197）。

徐彬将达雷尔的生平研究与作品研究相结合，揭示其“重奏小说”的叙事形式、主题探讨和文化批评与作者本人的旅行作家身份之间密不可分的联系。专著在对重奏小说中主人公伦理身份、伦理危机和伦理选择等主题详加阐释的同时兼顾对达雷尔本人创作过程中的艺术伦理判断和选择的揭示。《伦理选择与价值评判：劳伦斯·达雷尔重奏小说研究》是现当代英美文学研究中不可或缺的研究成果之一。该书的出版将为从事英美文学、世界文学和比较文学研究的科研院所中的研究人员、相关领域里的高校师生提供一本高水平的研究参考资料。

## 注解【Notes】

1. 参见哈罗德·布鲁姆，《影响的焦虑》，徐文博译。南京：江苏教育出版社，2006，第102页。
2. 徐彬：《伦理选择与价值评判：劳伦斯·达雷尔重奏小说研究》。上海：复旦大学出版社，2014年，第33页。
3. 聂珍钊：《文学伦理学批评导论》。北京：北京大学出版社，2014年，第250页。
4. 徐彬：《伦理选择与价值评判：劳伦斯·达雷尔重奏小说研究》。上海：复旦大学出版社，2014年，第37页。下文出自该书的引文只标注页码，不一一说明。

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