

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 19th 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 20th 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.