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Autobiographical Sites. A Proposition Within Geopoetics.

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I hereby propose to establish a separate category of autobiographical sites for the purpose of diagnosing phenomena situated at the intersection of literature and geography; phenomena whose description requires the simultaneous application of instruments from such diverse fields as literary criticism, anthropology, cultural studies, and humanistic geography. To put it more precisely, it's about connecting the author's biography and his output, in the broad sense of that term, meaning the complete collection of the author's preserved *oeuvre*, that is works traditionally considered literature – including essays, private notes, audio and video recordings, and works from other fields of art if practiced by the author. I still believe that the hypothesis positing a collective, synthetic subject within an author's collected work is ontologically legitimate, while its application yields tremendous insight. The idea of establishing a separate category of autobiographical site is based on such an assumption concerning the author, with reference to his biography and taking the geopoetics perspective into consideration. Elements constituting an autobiographical site might be clustered in a single piece of work, one that is essentially dedicated to the theme of placement

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within a specific place; they can also be scattered across a plethora of texts, successively complementing or transforming the vision of a site. Despite the literary multitude of possible forms, it always refers to a territory described toponymically that features in the writer's biography. The reader can have unfettered access to that territory, unmarred by the vision outlined by the writer, because it exists in extraverbal space, as a geographic object equipped with its own appropriate cultural symbolism.

On both of these levels: output and biography, we constantly encounter methodological traps and clash with issues stemming from different methods of interpretation – not to mention the confrontation of both of the aforementioned planes. However, confronted with the impossibility of solving problems plaguing both levels, we sometimes have to face a third in hope of finding a proper solution. That's how I understand the insight available to scholars investigating the relationships between an author's output and his biography, stemming from the spatial (topographical) turn that has taken place in the humanities. Various possibilities, either rooted directly in humanistic geography (e.g. the works of Yi-Fu Tuan¹) or attempts to transform and utilize them, whether according to the spirit of geopoetics, as proposed by Kenneth White,² or using the term geocriticism, as coined by Bertrand Westphal,³ encourage further investigation. At the same time, these new ideas should not sever themselves from prior traditions of studying space, started back when structuralism still dominated literary theory and further developed within the field of cultural semiotics, phenomenology or mythography research, related to ethnology and anthropology to which the California school of humanist geography is very indebted. Out of the invoked concepts, "geopoetics" seems to be the most widely accepted in recent efforts of Polish literary theorists, particularly due to Elżbieta Rybicka, who labored relentlessly to introduce the study of space in the humanities and related issues to the Polish scholastic

1 Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977)

2 K. White *Wstęp do geopoetyki* in: K. White, *Poeta kosmograf*, ed. and trans. K. Brakoniecki (Olsztyn: Centrum Polsko-Francuskie Côtes d'Armor–Warmia i Mazury, 2010). The publication also contains interviews, where White elaborates on the different aspects of his understanding of geopoetics which, according to White himself, is not just an investigative method but rather a specific philosophy of life, cultural practice, and literary program.

3 *La géocritique. Mode d'emploi*, ed. B. Westphal (Limoges: PULIM, 2000), as quoted in: E. Rybicka, "Geopoetyka (o mieście, przestrzeni i miejscu we współczesnych teoriach i praktykach kulturowych)" in: *Kulturowa teoria literatury. Główne pojęcia i problemy*, ed. M.P. Markowski and R. Nycz (Kraków: Universitas, 2006).

landscape.⁴ In my opinion, the name is both convenient and accurate, therefore I agree with the position that supports its common usage.

For scholars examining work that's clearly marked with the autobiographical attitude, whether in the case of personal document literature in the strict sense of the term or in reference to texts wherein autobiographism serves a constitutive purpose, the geopoetic perspective is an especially valuable ally, since it helps counter the tendency to treat autobiographical writing as a pure construct, as something that's not fundamentally different from fiction. This radical claim, put forward by a certain group of scholars, was the result of their attempts to distance themselves from simplistic psychologizing and a naïve understanding of representation in autobiographies. Paul de Man, for example, focused on the rhetoric character of autobiographic writing and coined the term *de-facement*, deftly translated into Polish as *od-twarzanie*.⁵ In essence, his theory aims to demonstrate that writing an autobiography is rooted in the process of depersonalization of both author and protagonist, accompanied by the loss of their collective face, because individual countenance dissolves in the linguistic matter of hints and clues subject to the laws governing rhetoric. Given that the Polish translation of de Man's eponymous term creates the illusion of tension between the literal and figurative readings of the expression, [noted below in the footnotes –trans.] however, the scholar's reasoning does not suggest the assumption of such a perspective. Moreover, literary criticism will find no counterbalance to this tendency in postmodern methodological examinations of the teaching of history, given that, for example, Hayden White describes the work of the scholar in this particular profession as something akin to historical writing, arranging its outcomes according to the rules of literary genres and aesthetic categories like tragedy and comedy. Meanwhile, humanist geography is conducive to the exploration of extraliterary references, essential in the study of autobiographical writing, and refrains from pushing the scholar back into naïve psychologism.

4 E. Rybicka, "From a Poetics of Space to a Poetics of Site: a Topographical Turn in Literary Research," *Second Texts* 4 (2008): 21-38. The first Polish book dealing with categories of humanist geography that I can think of is Beata Tarnowska's *Geografia poetycka w powojennej twórczości Czesława Miłosza* (Olsztyn: Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej, 1996), published in a very limited run.

5 P. de Man, "Autobiografia jako od-twarzanie," trans. M.B. Fedewicz in: *Dekonstrukcja w badaniach literackich*, ed. R. Nycz (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2000) [*od-twarzanie* is wordplay that combines the literal reading of the word *odtworzenie*, that is *reconstruction* or *recounting of events* with the figurative reading of the hyphenate, which translates into *removing the face* –trans.]

Individual Memory Sites

Distinguishing between space and site, first demonstrated (or rather clarified) by Yi-Fu Tuan is absolutely crucial for the differentiation of autobiographical site as a separate category. To put it more simply, geographic space is an established fact, and as such is a tangible subject of scientific inquiry. A site, however, is a separate portion of space; a part whose singularity stems not only from its concrete characteristics, but primarily from its assigned cultural symbolism, created, disseminated, and transformed by social traditions. We should also remember that this particular understanding of the concept of site is similar to the way of thinking that has functioned in culture since time immemorial, whether as the distinction between *sacrum* and *profanum* and the idea of the *axis mundi* or the ancient Roman belief in the protective spirit of a given place, called *genius loci*, which subsequent cultural traditions appropriated as the symbol of the literary mythos of a specific place. The Romantic-era emphasis on local color and traditions coupled with the subsequent revival of regionalism infused these notions with new energy. The advent of globalization, however, presented the aforementioned ideas with new challenges, with the concept of globalization emerging out of the upheaval.

The autobiographical site as a concept serving to augment literary theory fits the understanding of place as described by Yi-Fu Tuan in his exegesis of humanist geography, it exists, however, on a wholly separate level.⁶ It retains its necessary connection to a geographical place, it is not, however, a piece of tangible, existing space or even a set of cultural meanings and notions assigned to it. It is distinguished by two basic attributes: it has individual character and is shaped primarily by literary matter (in its broad understanding, as mentioned in the opening passages of this article). It is my belief that autobiographical sites can be found also in other fields of art, especially painting, photography, and film; therefore, although this proposed category could be transposed into the realm of art history and cultural studies, I will not be developing this particular thread herein.

When claiming that its singular dimension, that is the reference to the individual, is the autobiographical site's inalienable attribute, we should also remember that certain geographical places often have their own cultural specificity, shaped over the course of entire centuries, their own colorful local mythology. We can see this quite clearly in resplendent cities of the Antiquity

6 A further development of preliminary ideas presented at the "Narracje migracyjne w literaturze polskiej XX i XXI wieku" conference held at the University of Warsaw on May 5-6, 2011 in a lecture *Kategoria "miejsca autobiograficznego" w literaturze doby migracji*, later included in the post-conference publication edited by H. Gosk and in the *Introduction to Czesława Miłosza "Północna strona,"* ed. M. Czerwińska and K. Szalewska (Gdańsk: Scholar, 2011), 6-17.

like Babylon, Jerusalem, and Rome, as well as metropolises of the modern era, like Paris, whose mythology was scrutinized by Roger Caillois,⁷ or Petersburg, examined by Vladimir Toporov.⁸ The phenomenon may also be related to select spaces of nature. In the case of sites already infused with specific cultural symbolism, the notion of an autobiographical site of a given author partially stems from existing traditions and partially charges and enriches the existing imagery with original, individual tones, similarly to what T.S. Eliot described when characterizing the relationship between tradition and individual talent. The extent of the originality of that individual tone or its derivativeness with respect to stereotypes is a quantitative, rather than qualitative issue. Even the less artistically creative image of an autobiographical site by definition has to contain some elements that are linked to the life of that person and that person alone.

There are also writers who managed to create a literary mythos around a place that has never before exhibited any extraordinary personality and could not dare match the charm of ancient cities whose traditions span entire centuries. That's what Bruno Schulz accomplished for Drohobych. However, we should not forget that literary critics noticed that Schulz's work, notorious for doing away with proper topographic names, contains an autobiographical site only fairly recently. The work of Jerzy Ficowski and Jerzy Jarzębski is especially important in this regard. Also, some of Schulz's drawings and illustrations are important to his creation of an autobiographical site with regard to pre-war Drohobych. Another example: the private mythology of Sanok and its surroundings created in the poetry of Janusz Szuber, in the context of alluding to personal experiences from his childhood and adolescence, as well as the past histories of his own family, his neighbors, and other inhabitants of the city.

Invoking the category of memory sites, established by Pierre Nora⁹ in reference to the shared past of communities, allows us to define autobiographical sites as their equivalent in the realm of an individual's existential experience, as sort of individual sites of memory. They require no social sanction, and are not rooted in collective consciousness or mentality. Although they often employ collective representations and notions, which they later incorporate

7 R. Caillois, "Paryż, mit współczesny" in: R. Caillois, *Odpowiedzialność i styl. Eseje*, ed. M. Żurowski, trans. K. Dolatowska (Warszawa: PIW, 1967).

8 V. Toporov, "Petersburg i tekst Petersburski literatury rosyjskiej. Wprowadzenie do tematu" in: V. Toporov, *Miasto i mit*, ed. and trans. B. Żyłko (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2000).

9 P. Nora, "Czas pamięci," trans. W. Dłuski, *Res Publica Nowa* 7 (2001); E. Rybicka, "Venue, Memory, Literature (in the Perspective of Geo-Poetics)," *Teksty Drugie* 1-2 (2008); A. Szpociński, "Sites of Memory (lieux de mémoire)," *Teksty Drugie* 4 (2008).

themselves into to possibly become an element present in a historical memory site (e.g. in the case of a preeminent artists linked with a given place), they retain their autonomy due to a particular frame of reference involving the individual history of a specific person and existing within their individual oeuvre. The main difference between this new category and memory sites as posited by Nora is their existential status: autobiographical sites exist in literature, they are notions composed out of descriptions, toponyms included in the text, allusions, and metaphors. However, they also have objective, tangible, topographically situated equivalents like the writer's home turned into a museum, a monument, a memorial plaque, a tourist trail linking places related to the writer's biography and/or locations used in his work. The bond between literary notions and their reflections in reality, the bond suggesting associations with historical sites of memory in the way Nora envisioned it, is also shaped by works that reveal just how deep the autobiographical site is anchored in geographical space: guidebooks (Joyce's and Leopold Bloom's Dublin, Białoszewski's Warsaw, Huelle's and Chwin's Gdańsk), city plans and maps that feature tourist trails (like the Mickiewicz Trail in Belarus, which covers places where the poet lived as well as locations that he allegedly used as templates for the environments he later described in his works, particularly *Pan Tadeusz*). A similar function is served by quote-laden plaques posted on objects to which the quotes refer (e.g. the "Writers in Gdańsk" series had the building of the Gdańsk-Oliwa railway station adorned with a plaque featuring the station's description taken out of one of Chwin's works); or announcing the locations of fictional sites or enterprises, like the plaques in Warsaw hanging by the entrance to Wokulski's store (by the Castle Square) and his apartment (at Krakowskie Przedmieście).

The autobiographical site category should also be confronted with the claims of Marc Augé, the man behind the definition of a new phenomenon in the spatial order, a phenomenon Augé dubbed the "non-place." The French anthropologist considered the anonymous, deindividualized non-places like the train station, airport lounges or the supermarket characteristic of the latest phase of Western culture he christened "hypermodernity" (or "supermodernity"). They are "spaces which are not themselves anthropological places and which, unlike Baudelairean modernity, do not integrate the earlier places: instead these are listed, classified, promoted to the status of «places of memory,» and assigned to a circumscribed and specific position."¹⁰ I believe that one fine example of literary creation of non-places can be found in Olga Tokarczuk's *Runners*, in the form of international airports through which

10 M. Augé, *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (New York: Verso, 1995), 78.

the narrators constantly roams. The concept of autobiographical site refers to modern literature, in which they function as anthropological by nature, they are, as Augé writes, “relational, historical, and concerned with identity.”¹¹ They are the opposite of the non-place, the latter deprived of individualism, like a hotel, decorated and furnished just like every other hotel administered by the international chain brand. The literary autobiographical site is a semantic, symbolic equivalent of a genuine geographic location and cultural notions associated with it. It does not exist in a geographical vacuum, does not pertain to geometric space, universal and empty. It is always linked with topographic, tangible matter, even if it is subject to literary transformations, typical of not only metaphors found in realistic genres, but also of the rules of the oneiric and the fantastic.

Evidently, not all writers carve out autobiographical sites in literature, just as not all writers mine their own lives for material with which to build their fictional worlds. Drawing on personal experiences does not necessarily mean including one’s strictly personal affairs, the latter comprising autobiographic matter. I don’t consider the radical dichotomy: between writers demonstrating a proclivity towards adopting autobiographic attitudes and those who consistently shun it, to be appropriate in this particular case. It’s a spectrum, rather than a simple division, a spectrum covering the span between two extremes, on which each author can find his own place.

Topographic Imagination

Aside from a proclivity towards adopting personal perspectives in writing, the author needs to exhibit a specific sort of imagination in order to create an autobiographical site. There are authors who, for the purpose of this paper, I would define as possessing a topographic imagination, that is authors prone to observing the external world, gifted with high sensitivity to sensual stimuli, interested in the richness of the tangible, with a feeling for the significance of the material detail. Concerned with landscapes and objects, they pose questions about values and meaning that may be hidden within shapes, colors, sounds, and scents, movements and light. They’re curious about the visible world, they see its diversity, either beautiful and strange or daunting. Or they probe it for traces of the past. Such an imagination can be found in the work of writers as different from one another as Iwaszkiewicz, Miłosz, Konwicki, Białoszewski, and Zagajewski. Each and every one of them managed to create a vivid reflection of their own autobiographical sites. These authors offer

¹¹ *ibid.*, 77.

very interesting avenues of inquiry to scholars convinced that employing the concept of geopoetics and its methods might lead to valuable insight.

If in his poem *Blacksmith Shop* Miłosz repeats the word “stare” twice and then concludes that he was called “to glorify things just because they are,” then the opposite end of the imagination spectrum may attract writers who could describe themselves as called to “turning ideas inside out” just because ideas exist. Authors like these are rather insensitive to the material stimuli of the three-dimensional, tangible world; however, they are not necessarily only interested in exploring their own interior world. They tend to pursue either abstract thought constructs or other people, the latter’s psychological lives and social relationships. They are rather indifferent towards the material backdrop against which their characters move, speak, and act. Writers like Parnicki, Mrożek, Wat, and Gombrowicz, each of whom managed to live all across Europe and on other continents, were in no position to complain about a lack of external stimuli. They lived abroad for years, they could have extolled the loss of one’s own place or become travellers, drinking in exotic stimuli. However, none of them considered topographic concrete realities to be worthy of focused, long-term attention.

Bronisław Świdorski (b. 1946) is a clear example of a writer born after WW2 who turned his back on the sensual expressiveness of geographic reality, although circumstances seemed to push him in that exact direction and offered him a plenty of opportunity to contrast and compare. After the 1968 political crisis in Poland, Świdorski emigrated to Denmark. In his pronouncedly autobiographic novel *Asystent śmierci* (*Death’s Assistant*), the plot presents the narrator and protagonist in two timelines and two separate places: between his post-1968 years in Copenhagen and the memories of a childhood and adolescence spent in Warsaw. The narrative is filled with people and conversation the author had with them, writing and reading, alternately the work of Kierkegaard and the three versions of the résumé of his mother, a woman obsessed with concealing her Jewish extraction which, in her opinion, carried a death sentence attached to it. Despite the tension between the fortunes of a Jewish writer in Poland and Denmark, a tension crucial for the novel and anchored in autobiographical motifs, the space of both cities does not exist as a topographic reality. Warsaw is represented by the interior of an apartment shared with a sick, eccentric father, whereas Copenhagen is reduced to waiting rooms and employment offices, as well as the hospice where the narrator worked and an apartment, empty after his wife left him. The only thing he witnesses in the city are protests held by Muslims in response to the publication of cartoons lampooning the Prophet.

Writers indifferent towards the realities of topography can mark their autobiographical sites in other ways, namely by introducing toponyms or

referring to specific historical events or institutions whose location is known from extraliterary reality. Świdorski's example perfectly illustrates this. He unambiguously identifies the two cities appearing in his narratives through frequent use of toponyms – Warsaw and Copenhagen. He avoids introducing pseudonyms, even though a similar trail was already blazed by Żeromski and Dąbrowska, the former changing the name of Kielce whereas the latter employed a pseudonym for Kalisz. Writers with reality- and fact-sensitive imaginations also have one other way of dealing with toponyms at their disposal: they can omit them and then introduce a plethora of suggestions that facilitate the identification of the topographic original of their literary creation; such an approach was employed by Bruno Schulz in his treatment of Drohobych and by Magdalena Tulli in her portrayal of Warsaw in *Dreams and Stones*.

Secondly, Świdorski invokes specific events from the histories of both cities. From sources other than his autobiographical narrative we know that the events of October of 1956, which later sealed the fate of the narrator's father, took place in Warsaw, while the student strikes of March of 1968, which led to the narrator's decision to emigrate from the country, started at the University of Warsaw. Copenhagen indubitably is Kierkegaard's hometown, and the institute dedicated to the study of the philosopher's output was the narrator's place of employment for quite some time. Additionally, in 2005, a Copenhagen-based newspaper gained international notoriety for publishing a cartoon caricature of the Prophet Mohammed, which led to violent protests breaking out across the Muslim world.

I do not consider the distinction between the two types of imagination to be dichotomous in nature, as two mutually exclusive possibilities. I believe that they constitute two ends of a spectrum, on which writers situate themselves in places they consider appropriate. That's why writers devoid of topographic sensibility sometimes exhibit glimmers of that attribute. In his book *A Journal of Return*, Sławomir Mrożek included a series of snapshots depicting his Mexican estate which he is just about to leave to return to Krakow. In the poem *Willows in Alma-Ata*, Wat managed to create memorable, incredibly rich metaphors of homeland and place of exile with no more than a few dozen words.

Therefore, the creation an autobiographical site requires from the author a proclivity to adopt an autobiographical perspective and a well-developed topographic imagination.

Elements comprising an autobiographical site can be found both in texts that could easily be considered an author's personal documents, if such materials were ever created (including autobiographies, journals, memoirs, personal letters), as well as in an author's fictional output, poems, essays, critical texts, and commentaries on one's own work, interviews, etc., obviously taking

into account the nature of conventions utilized in these declarations. Simultaneously, we use publicly available biographical information, not only textual but visual as well. It might be photographs (including captions describing the location and date the photo was taken) that feature compelling topographic elements which, in turn, facilitate the identification of a place, or distinctive accessories. In other words, we include whatever helps us to situate biographical events and provides context facilitating the understanding of elements of literary works, especially works featuring specific regional characteristics and allusions to peculiar cultural phenomena. The photographs of Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz are one example, especially pictures from Zakopane and the Tatra Mountains, as well as numerous portraits of the writer in these surroundings; these pictures shed additional light on specific details of scenery portrayed in the author's novels and emphasize the presence of autobiographical elements and devices typical for a roman à clef in Witkiewicz's work.

When examining an autobiographical site, we need to contemplate the plethora of diverse situations that comprise the writer's existence: place of birth, where he grew up, went to school, attended college, his journeys and the places he visited, as well as changes in place of residence that are important from the perspective of traces that they might have left behind in the author's oeuvre. The majority of literary creations of personal territory pertains, perhaps unsurprisingly, to places where authors were born and spent their childhoods, with archetypal subtexts usually present and operative. There are, of course, exceptions: Nałkowska spent her entire life in Warsaw but created her autobiographical site in *The House Upon the Meadows*, wherein she referred to her parent's summer cabin in Górkki near Warsaw, whereas Adam Zagajewski created the most illustrious portrayal of Krakow, where he spent his college years, alongside an imaginary Lviv i Gliwice. The countries he visited as a journalist clinched the creation of Africa as Ryszard Kapuściński's autobiographical side, alongside his lost hometown of Pinsk about which he did not manage to write in the end, leaving behind only drafts and sketches. Long-term invariability in the author's place of residence may also serve as an important clue to understanding the work, as it was with the portrayal of Warsaw in the writings of Miron Białoszewski and Małgorzata Baranowska.

Aside from the author's own literary work, we should also contemplate all other textual or visual (e.g. a photograph or a painting) traces of the author's interest in other people's descriptions of his site/region, of the traditions and mythologies of these places, and elaborations on their *genius loci*. The creation of an autobiographical site is not based solely on one's existential experience, it is also related to the exploration of and participation in the traditions of a given place – even if the link to other people's testimonies is hidden or only alluded to. Often enough, however, texts authored by one's predecessors are

not only invoked or referred to, they are weaved into one's own work, like, for example, historic documents from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania appearing in the footnotes of Czesław Miłosz's poem *Where the Sun Rises and Where it Sets*.

We also need to consider the evidence of an author's interest in other people's written (and visual) portrayals of their journeys to places the author chose or was cast into by fate, only to be appropriated as his own, its images incrustated with intertextual references. Focusing on Iwaszkiewicz's multiple references to journeys through Italy pervading the European literary canon would be an example of such an approach, as would be the oral narratives of Karol Szymanowski who managed to inculcate his cousin with an undying curiosity of all things Sicilian. The same goes for Jerzy Stempowski, whose essays on Berne and its surroundings contain traces of the author's extensive knowledge of the area derived from historical records. This sort of mediation plays a significant role in the process of familiarization of foreign territories and appropriating it for one's own autobiographical site. The predecessor, either by interacting with the author directly or whose work the author explores himself, facilitates his introduction into this new territory, serves as the writer's protective spirit whose role is to initiate him into communing with the *genius loci*. This allows to examine not only the individual relationship between the output of an author prone to adopting an autobiographical perspective who we're interested in and other writers whose work captivated and engaged him, but also the shaping of comprehensive cultural symbolism of a given topographic territory.

Types of Autobiographical Sites

Through observation of the types of autobiographical sites created as part of the creative praxis of Polish writers active in the second half of the 20th century, I discerned a dichotomy between stasis and mobility taking shape in the background of the matter. The dichotomy perfectly fits the historic and social realities of the transformations our culture underwent after WW2; at its heart, it invokes the aforementioned basic distinctions supplied by cultural anthropology. Distinguishing between a permanent and shifted autobiographical sites is absolutely fundamental. The permanent place is given in nature, inherited, in a sense, whereas the shifted one is linked with coming out into the world, movement, and the arrival at some other point where the journey comes to an end. It is a situation encompassing what's chosen, acquired or imposed, therefore completely different than residing in a primal place, a place we possess, in which we simply are. We also need to invoke one other distinction, one that is not only critical but also anthropological in nature, namely the spatial *topoi* of the home and the road,

related to the distinction between open and closed space. We're familiar with the matter thanks to numerous investigations in the field of semiotics, phenomenology, and mythography, enquiries which despite adopting different methodologies all yielded fascinating results and which now serve as sources for current research in the field of cultural studies (although the tradition often goes unacknowledged). On the other hand, social sciences give us another basic distinction: between societies that are closed and static (originally usually agrarian) and those espousing openness and mobility (originally nomadic, pastoral, or mercantile and thus often seafaring).¹² Therefore, from the perspective of attitudes one can adopt towards space we see two fundamental possibilities open up: we either live statically or in motion. Movement comes in three basic forms: it's either vacating and returning to (even repeated) one's place of residence (traveling), transplanting oneself into another place (resettlement), or constant migration (nomadism). Each of these three forms can be found in literature. Motion is one of humanity's ways of relating to space, we have to take it into account when reconstructing literary autobiographical sites.

Given that one's location in space stems directly from one's biographical situation and given the writer's particular way of constructing narrative, we can identify multiple different types of autobiographical sites, namely observed, recollected, conceived, shifted, chosen, and touched upon.

Only the observed site is permanent in nature. It may be a slightly unfortunate name, because observation seems to be characteristic of topographic imagination, but I will be using it due to lack of a better way to emphasize that it is about creating an autobiographical site here and now, or, possibly, here and back then, in any event, creating it without introducing spatial distance, without detachment. The subject is basically constantly present in his actual area, observing it day in and day out to later channel the observations into creating its literary reflection. He writes about a place while being present at that particular place, usually with a sense of being firmly linked with it which, in turn, often stems from the fact that one was born and raised there.¹³ A model example of this approach can be found in Miron

12 cf. Becker's and Barnes' classic study, H. Becker, H.E. Barnes, *Social Thought from Lore to Science: A History and Interpretation of Man's Ideas About Life with His Fellows* (New York: Dover Publications, 1961).

13 A permanent place of residence, passed from generation to generation, a staple among Eastern European noblemen, was analyzed from a perspective inspired by humanist geography by Vasily Shchukin in the book *Mit szlacheckiego gniazda. Studium geokulturologiczne o klasycznej literaturze rosyjskiej* [*The Myth of the Nest of the Gentry: A Geoculturological Study of Classical Russian Literature*], trans. B. Żyłko (Kraków: Universitas, 2006).

Białoszewski's portrayal of Warsaw or the way both Huelle and Chwin write about Gdańsk. It is a clear opposite of a migratory situation, it is a place that's one's own, fully accepted. However, the anxiety spawned by the era of migration and historic shockwaves eventually reached the territories of permanent residence. Warsaw, portrayed by Białoszewski with incredible precision and attention to detail, is a place forever mauled by the experience of the Uprising, the division into a pre- and post-Uprising Warsaw constantly present in its appearance and character. In everyday trivialities, among "denunciations of [everyday] reality" arranged in "rustles, nodes, and strings," or among memories of childhood games, of a boy playing theater in a small pre-war apartment in Leszno, we constantly encounter echoes of that liminal time of the Uprising, even if they're only naïve urban legends about women buried alive under mountains of rubble who survived the Uprising and never learned that the war is over, ate mushroom sprouting from the walls, and pressed linens to pass the time. *Heart Attack*, Białoszewski's autobiographical book about the cardiac incident he went through in 1974 and his subsequent stay in the hospital sheds additional light on his earlier book, *A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising*, revealing the *Memoir* to be a depiction of a city undergoing a similar catastrophic failure of its most vital organs. The city did not move horizontally, along the surface of the earth, but vertically, collapsing in on itself, falling into ruin.

By employing the fact of being born and raised citizens of Gdańsk as an autobiographic, allusive backdrop in their novels and short stories, both Huelle and Chwin are able to adopt and fully accept the palimpsest-like text about the complex, multilayered history of the city as their own; however, emphasizing that they're only the first of their families to be assigned permanent residence in the city is a very important component of the image of the places they create from the perspective of being *here*. Their prose features a recollective perspective espoused by the previous generations, that is migrants who were forced to abandon their homes in Vilnius, Lviv and razed neighborhoods of Warsaw, and who cannot fully accept Gdańsk to be a place they could regard as their own.

All of the other types of autobiographical sites were directly marked by migratory situations. The remembered site was once permanent, a given, but was lost, often as a result of expulsion or escape. Usually it was a place where they were born and raised, where they spent their adolescence and settled into a pleasant life, which they eventually had to leave due to some unforeseen cataclysm. This image enlists, in more ways than one, the Mickiewiczian trope of lost idyll, kept alive by Sienkiewicz in *The Lighthouse Keeper*, and then updated in 1942 by a group of editors who collected the memoirs of wartime émigrés in a volume entitled *Kraj lat dziecińczych* (*The*

Land of Childhood Years), the name an unambiguous reference to the tradition.¹⁴ This trope, very susceptible to stereotyping, found particularly fertile ground in popular reminiscent literature. On the other hand, it's incredibly resilient, as evidenced by the fact that it recently provoked a parody response in the form of a poem by Tomasz Różycki called *Twelve Stations*; even its ironic perspective, however, does not completely nullify the amusing mixture of nostalgia and bawdiness. The recollected model of autobiographical site, represented quite extensively in literature about the Eastern Borderlands, has been developing – albeit not necessarily in a stereotypical way – since World War I, starting with Wańkowicz's depiction of the “puppy years,” through Iwaszkiewicz's portrayal of Ukraine, Vincenzo's descriptions of Hutsul lands, the depiction of the Vilnius region authored by Miłosz, Konwicki, and Żakiewicz, Haupt and Wołoszyński's Podolia, and Stempowski's portrayal of the Dniester River valley and Volhynia (to mention only a few of the authors). The phenomenon is undoubtedly very important to the subject, but it's too well-known and well-studied to pay any more attention to the subject, therefore I will conclude the diagnosis at indicating its existence. Kapuściński, a writer whose topographic imagination was directed towards constant motion rather than stasis, also attempted to create his own autobiographical site. There might be some significance to the fact that the book about Pinsk he so often promised to write never came about and the autobiographical site mentioned by the author comprises only drafts and outlines: the first piece in *The Polish Bush*, the opening of *Imperium*, a movie documenting his journey with Anders Bodegård, and a host of statements given here and there.

Family traditions play a key role in the creation of conceived autobiographic sites, that is created with reference to a geographic camera which the writer did not get to know firsthand, and had no prior opportunity to explore. Genealogy, important on its own for recollected sites, is absolutely fundamental when it comes to establishing conceived sites. This is especially pertinent in the case of second-generation immigrants. For them, the past is available not via their own memories but rather through an imaginary anchoring in an inaccessible space whose image is created as a result of familial influence and cultural mythos, *sans* confrontation with personal, extraverbal experiences. The conceived site is established in a process, its methods resembling archeological research; the site belongs to the field of genealogy rather than autobiography in the strict sense, while the effort required to create it, in spite of migratory realities, makes it more prone to creating utopias in comparison to the effort necessary to establish recollected sites. Podolia as portrayed in

14 *Kraj lat dziecinnych*, ed. M. Grydzewski, K. Pruszyński (London: M.I. Kolin, 1942)

Odojewski's work, including a few of his later short stories and episodes of *Oksana*, is a crucial example of this thesis (although we know from the writer's biography that his notion of Podolia was formed primarily during one short journey he was taken on when he was still a little boy). Another example can be found in Anna Bolecka's *The White Stone*, a novel with a clear autobiographic undercurrent, which, unfortunately, combines knowledge of genuine genealogy, uncertain and full of gaps, with conjecture and speculation.

Lviv from Zagajewski's *Two Cities* and his poem *To Go to Lvov* also belongs to that type of site, or at least it did before the author finally visited the city and confronted his idea of Lviv with the personal experience of visiting the city. It did not, however, develop characteristics of a recollected site in the process. The image of the city was significantly improved after the author composed the essay *Should We Visit Sacred Places?* (later included in his volume *A Defense of Ardor*). It might have seemed that the publication will put the writer's interest in that subject to an end. His latest book, however, entitled *A Slight Exaggeration*, expands his reflections and writes about imaginary Lviv as a place that parents reminisce about, insofar as the father is one of the most important characters of this personal narrative. Like his earlier publication, *Another Beauty*, *A Slight Exaggeration* is not strictly about poetry, but rather about a poet. Moreover, it's not about a poet in general, but about a specific poet, namely Adam Zagajewski; his recent essays are permeated with the autobiographic element, the latter, however, expressed through a framework of intellectual, spiritual autobiography. In *A Slight Exaggeration* he even invokes the patron saint of such an approach to personal writing: Henryk Elzenberg as author of a philosophical journal entitled *The Problem with Existence*.

A shifted site appears whenever an émigré finds a "second homeland" where he settles down and which he accepts to the extent that he includes it in his work. Often enough (but not always), that process is accompanied by the creation of a recollected site encompassing places that were familiar once. I believe that to be the case of Jerzy Stempowski as author of *Ziemia berneńska* [*The Bernese Lands*], a volume of essays on the landscapes surrounding the Swiss capital, wherein the author finds traces of the region's culture and history which he then interprets using his extensive knowledge of European literature, philosophy, and painting. His *Listy z ziemi berneńskiej* [*Letters from the Bernese Lands*] also fit that particular mould, as do some of the pieces from *Essays for Cassandra*, e.g. *At the Schaffhausen Waterfalls*. Stempowski, without bringing up facts and events from his own life, portrays himself rather as someone speaking within the text, as someone who partakes in the common heritage of Europe, in which he sees himself as both a citizen of Switzerland (where he studied before the war) as well as a native of the specific region of Ukraine where his ancestors once dwelled and where he spent his childhood

and adolescence. He portrays these lands as a recollected site in *In the Dniester Valley*, *Esej berdyczowski* [*The Berdychov Essay*], *Bagaż z kalinówki* [*Luggage from Kalynivka*], and *Dom Strawińskiego w Uściługu* [*Stravinsky's Home in Ustyjuh*].

Maybe we should also notice a shifted site in Miłosz's *Visions from San Francisco Bay*, some fragments of *The Year of the Hunter*, and references to California landscapes scattered among his poems. In *Notes on Exile* (Berkeley, 1975), which were already quoted herein in order to support the definition of personal point of reference in spatial orientation, crucial for the localization of person settled into a specific place, Miłosz also describes the situation which I took to calling transposition:

Although quite popular, literature of yearning is only one of many ways to cope with being severed from one's homeland. A new point that organizes space in reference to itself cannot be eliminated, that is, you can't abstract yourself out of physical presence in a particular place on Earth. That is why we're faced with a peculiar phenomenon: two centers and two spaces around them, overlapping or – if we're lucky – fusing.¹⁵

Multiple passages in *The Journal Written at Night* and a series of short stories taking place in and around Naples (starting with *Pieta dell'Isola* published in 1959, through *The Bridge*, *Ruins*, *The Miracle*, *The Plague in Naples*, and many, many others, the last of them being *Death Knell for the Bell-Ringer*, published in 2000) painted a picture of the situation that Herling-Grudziński found himself in. In one of the interviews he's given on living in the "city under a volcano," the writer explained that he and his wife, Lidia Croce, picked Naples as their new homeland (they also considered moving to Germany) as they wanted at least one of them to be "at home" instead of both of them being émigrés. The author often wrote he hasn't felt accepted by native denizens of Naples for decades and that he himself accepted the little office in their house in Dragonea as his place on Earth only in his twilight years, long after his work brought him success and critical acclaim and after visiting his erstwhile homeland. For Grudziński, the Naples region and a handful of other places in Italy, their magnificent scenery, history, traditions, folklore, and other peculiarities became an inexhaustible treasure trove of ideas and topics. The term "fortunate solution" might be slightly inappropriate (for a variety of reasons)

15 Cz. Miłosz, *Noty o wygnaniu* in: Cz. Miłosz, *Zaczynając od moich ulic* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 1990), 49. A wider context for the sort of self-identification we find expressed in Miłosz's version of the figure of the stranger, depicted as someone capable of quickly finding his bearings in new places, can be found in R. Nycz, "Osoba w nowoczesnej literaturze: ślady obecności" in: R. Nycz, *Literatura jako trop rzeczywistości. Poetyksa epifanii w nowoczesnej literaturze polskiej* (Kraków: Universitas, 2001), 73-77.

in Herling-Grudziński's vision of man's existence, however, as far as the craft of writing is concerned, the fact that he found another, fertile homeland for his imagination seems undeniably fortunate. We also know of the recollected site of *The Tower's* author thanks to Włodzimierz Bolecki's inquisitive interpretation; the latter's *Ciemna miłość* (employing a Mickiewiczian phrase about one's land of childhood years) consolidated a series of poignant and emphatic references to Grudziński's hometown of Suchedniów scattered among the pages of *The Journal Written at Night*.¹⁶

In the work he has written during his stay in Guatemala, Andrzej Bobkowski established his own shifted site within the tiny South American country he had moved to after his deliberate and decisive withdrawal from the European continent.

Shifted sites present in the work of the generation that grew up in the interwar period do not displace one's memories of a permanent place that once was given and then was lost. This, in turn, is counteracted by the nostalgic perspective, typical for writers of the "second wave" of postwar emigration. Nostalgia, however, does not really carry that much weight for the younger generation of émigrés who fled the People's Republic of Poland "choosing freedom" in the West, for people who left the country after the wave of anti-Semitism that swept Poland after the 1968 political crisis, as well as for the post-Solidarity émigrés. For these three formations, the transplantation into other locations is linked with the feeling of overwhelming loss, and strongly associated with unrest and anger towards the rejected realities of socialist Poland, whose veil of lies and hypocrisy only furthered the erosion of its ability to serve as one's own place, a place underpinning one's identity.

Chosen sites are different from shifted sites in that you can only visit the former, you cannot reside in them permanently. They are chosen due to particular values they espouse or endorse, however, for a variety of reasons, people who choose them are unable to reside in them. They do not have to be associated with the most severe form of migration, namely expulsion, although as a result of historical and social realities of 20th century Poland they were found and chosen primarily in that specific context. They may also function within the confines of the notion of journey. A chosen place can be a migrant's temporary asylum, where one cannot stay permanently due to certain circumstances, but where one can, from time to time, find a realm that is more beautiful and superior to one's everyday life. This adopted "homeland of the soul" is usually found by travel aficionados who in their accounts of journeying to different captivating corners of the globe

16 W. Bolecki, *Ciemna miłość. Szkice do portretu Gustawa Herlinga-Grudzińskiego* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2005), 141-165.

always save the greatest praise for their privileged sites, to which they also frequently return and which they incorporate in their biographies and their work. Iwaszkiewicz made both Italy and Sicily (and Sandomierz, but to a lesser extent) his chosen sites, making them the subject of his travelogues and poetry, and using them as locations for short stories and novels (like his “Italian novellas” and *Fame and Glory*). Iwaszkiewicz also incorporated them in his own biography, given that he journeyed and worked there fairly often. Manuscripts he worked on in Italy weren’t usually thematically related to the country itself, e.g. *The Maids of Wilko*, dated: “Syracuse, April of 1932,” or *Shadows* (an account of the 1917 revolution in Ukraine), dated: “Roma, May of 1963.” Providing a time and place of a given work’s creation establishes a relationship between the order of literature and the factual order of the author’s biography. By writing about Venice, Florence, and Sicily in Poland during the occupation and about Mazovia and Ukraine before and after the war in Rome and Syracuse, Iwaszkiewicz builds a peculiar plexus that merges his own, actually observed or recollected autobiographical site and the chosen one, his “homeland of the soul” which he visits only as time and circumstances permit him to. He also strengthens the bond between his own biography and the free world of literary imagination.

Zbigniew Herbert treated Greece in a similar way in his poetry, essays, and letters, bestowing upon it a very special position in his Mediterranean “garden” visited by the “barbarian” from the Northern wilderness. Herbert’s interactions with Greece were initially limited to books and the author’s own imagination, later, he communed with it in French and Italian museums, finally meeting the Great Hellas in person, in the Doric temples of Paestum. Only later did the author journey to Athens, the Peloponnese, and the islands of the Aegean Sea, the visits yielding work we know from *The Labyrinth on the Sea* and *The King of the Ants*. The process of creating Herbert’s chosen site was complemented by illustrations and sketches the poet drew throughout the journey.

As bizarre as labeling an entire continent “a site” may seem, Ryszard Kapuściński spent years gradually discovering Africa as his chosen autobiographical territory. Although the journalist often emphasized that there is no such thing as a unified notion of Africa because the continent’s vast territory encompasses a host of very different countries, landscapes, and peoples, Kapuściński himself bestowed privileged status upon the continent and frequently returned there whenever his journalistic obligations permitted, his fondness for the land eventually culminating in the publication of *Ebony*, a *summa* of his African experiences. He knew Africa incomparably better than other corners of the globe he wrote about in his books, like *Shah of Shahs*, *Imperium*, or *The Soccer War*. That claim was seemingly confirmed by his last book,

Travels with Herodotus, an autobiographic narrative about his professional calling which, from the perspective of defining sites, can be considered an account of Kapuściński's road to Africa. His photographs complement the creation of Africa as his chosen autobiographic site.

Finally, the touched place is also one that was discovered in the course of a journey, but only fleetingly, and in most cases never visited again. It somehow drew the writer's attention, making him remember the name and the realities, forcing him to write about it not only in a journal entry, a letter or a reportage, but in his later work; it is introduced into the author's work but not processed and adopted as a chosen site, to which an author frequently, meaningfully returns, to significant personal and literary effect. This approach can be found in Zofia Nałkowska's treatment of Switzerland. In her journal, she wrote down numerous observations captured during her stay in a mountain health resort between February and April of 1925 and then two years later published her "international novel" entitled *Chaucas*. The writer's portrayal the drama of confronting the first symptoms of aging and the tensions arising in the international community of patients after World War I takes place between winter and spring in the Alps, and imparts independent value on the author's observations of nature as well as the lot of the mountain folk. A comparison of relevant episodes of her *Journals* with the novel's reconstruction of the local color of the Alpine resort reveals that this particular cozy corner of Switzerland left a very pronounced imprint on the author's biography and literary output. The episode also made a very significant mark on the development of her style. Individual patient characters in *Chaucas* allows the author to explore a wide variety of topics, including the Armenian genocide, committed by the Turks a decade earlier. Nałkowska's portrayal of these events seems a harbinger of the style that Nałkowska would develop after World War II in *Medallions*.

In Miłosz biography and oeuvre, the rank of a touched site was bestowed on Żuławy, explored only in passing, despite the region's particular importance stemming from the fact that the writer's mother lived there after her expulsion from the Vilnius region until her death in 1945. The image of the plains at the mouth of the Vistula under a permanently overcast sky reappears in numerous poems written in America, including *Grób matki* [*Mother's Grave*] (1949), *Żuławy* (1950), and *Z Nią* [*With Her*] (1985). The latter is of crucial importance to the autobiographical site, as the death of the poet's mother in a village near Gdańsk is remembered on the day of the poet's birthday. The poem included a footnote written in prose that explained the circumstances of Miłosz's mother's death (she contracted typhoid fever from an old German woman she cared for while the latter was sick) on which the poet also elaborated during a soiree in Gdansk in 1998.

Migratory situations often result in a decision on the part of an author creating his autobiographical site to employ more than just one model. A single model would have sufficed were the author leading a stable, static life, although some writers, especially those belonging to the “second emigration” generation, are obsessed with creating the single, unique site that was lost and now can only be recollected. Often enough, however, motion and change induce the author to try and utilize different portrayals of his own place in the world. A specific hierarchy often establishes itself within a single author’s biography and oeuvre: one model is dominant, with the subordinate rest either competing with the dominant model for the top spot or complementing it. There are really no rules to this particular situation, a writer’s individual decisions is what sets the stage.

Translation: Jan Szelągiewicz