

R E C E N Z J E I P R Z E G L Ą D Y

LITERATURE AND GEOGRAPHY IN ACTION*

Stefania Skwarczyńska's article from 1937 on representations of regionalism in Polish literature as well as Janusz Sławiński's preface to *Space and literature* published in 1978 laid the groundwork for all subsequent papers on intersection of geography and literature presented before Ewa Rewers introduced the core ideas of the topographic turn to Polish humanities in the late 1990s. Considering the main attribute of a turn which is the ability to modify perception of basic categories while transforming tools from descriptive to operational, and in coherence to traditional Polish theory, Elżbieta Rybicka proposes a book with an ambitious agenda – both to organise notions covering similar interests while proposing geopoetics as a firm research orientation, and to inspire further research by asserting raw phenomena which embody reciprocal influence of geography and literature.

This excellent volume promises to bring into order a vast range of spatial categories glossary ingraining geopoetics into Polish literary studies. As a consequence, it carries the potential to cling many previous and proceeding scholarly observations under the idea of notion-in-action. Selected terms are arranged within the scope of four aspects – poetological, geographical, anthropological and performative. Maps, imagined geography, idiolocality, place, auto/bio/geographies and others are put in association to reception and reading practices, somatic and emotive experience, and finally creative potentiality. The primal interest of the author, although appears subtle enough, is manifested quite forthwith. The active factor of the intersection, its performativity, constructs different kinds of questions which estrange inquiries on representation. The dissertation is accompanied by four supporting hypotheses: geopoetics does not result in treating geographic perspective as a final product of the analysis, it inflicts world-/meaning-creation, both geography plays an active, poietic (gr. Ποιητικός, “creative”) role and the literature has a geographic character, and finally these heterotopias are not only a source of new meanings, but also a key to understanding them. Rybicka refers to the definition of *poiesis* as an act of creation, power to execute, thus geopoetics should be understood not only as a feature of creativity towards geography/literature, but also as an interpretative method, which may put ideas

* E. Rybicka, *Geopoetyka. Przestrzeń i miejsce we współczesnych teoriach i praktykach literackich*, Kraków: Universitas, 2014.

into motion, according an active role to them. As a consequence, a prospective, rather than retrospective utopia may be emphasised, and pragmatic, rather than mimetic questions posed (389).

In the first two parts Rybicka presents richness of perspectives heading towards current understanding of the intersection of geography and humanities; she evokes the linkage of the turns and their diachronic placing, showing variations of understanding “space” and their impact on crucial literary categories such as language, subject, reception, reading or genres. Afterwards, a question about the object of research orientation and its methods is posed to meticulously append foundations for further analysis and to present geopoetics as a comprehensive choice for the researchers. Part three depicts Wincenty Pol’s 19th-century vision of the intersection while introducing categories like maps seen as metaphors, ekphrasis, inspiration for literary cartography, like a place as a between state where the experience changes, like imagined geography that constantly reinvents relation between the real and the imagined. The fourth part concentrates on emotive and sensual topographies, the fifth – on heterotopias and linkage between geographic space and memory constructs, and the final one on rethinking regionalism which has been reduced to nostalgic and escapist category of “little motherland” in Polish studies. Additionally, an appendix is introduced showing the examples of implementations of the presented method.

An impressive apprehension of the relations between geography and literature, illustrated with a wide range of arguments and perspectives, permits the author to draw a lively, yet extremely disciplined picture of fascinating ideas such as critical cartography or mismapping as motions between deterritorialization and reterritorialisation (165), of substantiated set of key words such as circulation, dialogue, integration (129), finally of inquiries about how the active role of geographic factor may enable to rethink established categories, how reading and writing have a potentiality to create geographic events, and, contrariwise, experiencing geographical space occurs as a result of the literature’s impact. Moreover, the volume raises great expectations of not only setting a firm research orientation, but also of introducing order into a heterogeneous collection of works on the intersection published in the last years within Polish literary studies and their reference to the notion-in-action. Besides a few names, such as Bolesław Hadaczek, Jakub Malik, Krzysztof Zajac, Małgorzata Czermińska, Magdalena Marszałek, the reader, although the subject appears to attract many academics, will not find sufficient guidance. The publisher alone proposed three books investigating relations between geography and literature during last three years: Rybicka’s, one on imagining space in Przyboś’s poetry¹ and one which is a selection of the articles about new regionalism². The author does not refer to works, which among others, also pose pragmatic questions about the active and metaphorical role of space in literature, e.g. books on narrating migrations, post-reliance, between-frontier states³. In the contribution to this literature, the

¹ M. Kmieciak, *Oblicza miejsca. Topiczne i atopiczne wyobrażenia przestrzeni w poezji Juliana Przybosa*, Kraków: Universitas, 2013.

² M. Mikołajczak, E. Rybicka (ed.), *Nowy regionalizm w badaniach literackich, Badawczy rekonesans i zarys perspektyw*, Kraków: Universitas, 2012.

³ Just to mention some of the recent works: *Poetyka migracji. Doświadczenie granic w literaturze polskiej przelomu XX i XXI wieku*, ed. P. Czapliński, R. Makarska, M. Tomczok, Katowice:

author presents an enormous range of foreign concepts. She was clearly aware that fulfilling the expectation of identifying a connection with the magnitude of papers herein the Polish studies may be nearly unfeasible. Nonetheless, the author does not justify her choice more than emphasising the freshness of the ideas presented. At the same time inspiration for the orientation found in Skwarczyńska's and Sławiński's works is underlined.

The last part of the book promises to be a selection of geopoetics applications and a collection of inspirations to continue the path. The author presents strategies for creating non-existing Central European identity based on representations of Zofiówka garden (375), likewise in reference to geographically fixed everyday culture appearing in popular essays on cuisine (398), and also shows composition of settled/nomadic identity aiming to organise places in motion based on Miłosz's topographies (422). On account of the richness of academic literature of the chosen subjects, like gardens in literature, and length of the articles, the goal seems onerous to reach. The author arouses appetite tremendously by adding the appendix, although she leaves the reader ravenous in the end, not only because of contracted contexts, but also owing to a joint subject of the articles which pleads for a separate book, a very interesting, yet *in situ* faintly sketched, portrait of geographically fixed performative acts which carve sculpture of Central European identity, an ever lasting germ in menace.

In short, doubts mentioned above do not subtract much of the book's enormous value to the field. It is an excellent, articulate presentation of an inspiring research perspective, accompanied by detailed illustrations of new phenomena and a vast collection of herewith concepts relating to the linkage between geography and literature, making the challenge of doing justice to such an ambitious work quite arduous.

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