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GONZO, IRONIC NOSTALGIA, MAGICAL REALISM,
OR, HOW TO RE-NARRATE TRAUMATIC
TRANSNATIONAL BORDERLAND STORIES.
EXAMPLES FROM THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY
POLISH(-GERMAN) LITERATURE

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Słowa kluczowe: Tomasz Różycki, Sabrina Janesch, Ziemowit Szczerek, gonzo, nostalgia, realizm magiczny, postmemory, Austriacka Galicja

S u m m a r y

This paper focuses on the former Austrian crown land of Galicia and Lodomeria and its return in literary texts of a new generation that can recall it only from collective and family memory. Spaces like Galicia are situated in shifting political borders and often marked by (fragmented) memories connected to traumas caused by migration, forced resettlements, expulsions, or violence. The rediscovery of these spaces, often from nostalgia for a lost home and bygone times, is the starting point of many narratives of the postmemory generations in contemporary literature. Authors use new rhetorical strategies when dealing with adversarial nationalistic and traumatic topics: ironic nostalgia, gonzo, and magical realism. These narratives do not verify “truths,” instead they play with different myths, possibilities, and “alternative futures.” The analysis includes Tomasz Różycki’s *Dwanaście stacji* (2004), Sabrina Janesch’s *Katzenberge* (2010), and Ziemowit Szczerek’s *Przyjdzie Mordor i nas zje* (2013).

GONZO, IRONICZNA NOSTALGIA, MAGICZNY REALIZM, CZYLI JAK OPOWIEDZIEĆ
TRAUMATYCZNE, TRANSNARODOWE HISTORIE Z POGRANICZA.
PRZYKŁADY Z LITERATURY POLSKIEJ XXI WIEKU

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Artykuł koncentruje się na dawnej austriackiej prowincji „Królestwie Galicji i Lodomerii” oraz jej powrocie w tekstach literackich młodego pokolenia, które może się odnieść do tej przestrzeni jedynie poprzez zasoby pamięci zbiorowej i rodzinnej. Obszary takie jak Galicja wytyczane

przez zmieniające się granice polityczne często są naznaczone (fragmentarycznymi) wspomnieniami związanymi z traumami spowodowanymi migracją, przymusowym wysiedleniem, wypędzeniem lub przemocą. Ponowne odkrycie tych przestrzeni, często spowodowane nostalgią za utraconym domem i minionymi czasami, jest punktem wyjścia wielu narracji postpamięci we współczesnej literaturze. Autorzy wykorzystują nowe strategie retoryczne odnosząc się do nacjonalistycznych i traumatycznych tematów: ironiczną nostalgię, gonzo i magiczny realizm. Te narracje nie weryfikują „prawd”, zamiast tego bawią się różnymi mitami, możliwościami i „alternatywną przyszłością”. Analiza dotyczy tekstów: *Dwanaście stacji* (2004) Tomasza Różyckiego, *Katzenberge* (2010) Sabriny Janesch i *Przyjdzie Mordor i nas zje* (2013) Ziemowita Szczereka.

Introduction

Spaces situated in shifting political borders are not only marked by multicultural heritage but also by (often fragmented) memories connected to traumas from migration, forced resettlement, expulsion, or violence between neighbors, as well as different nationalistic instrumentalizations. The rediscovery of these spaces, often from nostalgia for a lost home and bygone times, is the starting point of many narratives in contemporary literature. These recent texts are narrated by the postmemory generation, which re-tells traumatic stories of their ancestors or even nations to overcome the trauma.¹ At the same time, the individual family stories link to politics and history revealed in ethnic and national conflicts. Contemporary authors develop new poetics for dealing with these topics: be it ironic nostalgia, gonzo, or magical realism. Through rhetorical strategies, these narratives do not verify “truths,” instead they play with different myths, possibilities, and “alternative futures.”

My analysis will focus on three books and authors: (1) Tomasz Różycki (born 1970) uses ironic nostalgia in his postmodern epic poem *Dwanaście stacji* (Twelve Stations; 2004),² (2) Sabrina Janesch (born 1985) employs magical realism to tell the story of her family in the novel *Katzenberge* (Cat Mountains; 2010),³ and (3) Ziemowit Szczerek (born 1978) uses gonzo in his novel *Przyjdzie Mordor i nas zje, czyli tajna historia Słowian* (Mordor Will Come and Eat Us, or the Secret History of the Slavs; 2013).⁴ While Różycki and Janesch

¹ Other examples of texts that deal with the space of Galicia are Rebecca Goldstein's *Mazel* (1995), Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated* (2002), Dara Horn's *In the Image* (2002), and Jenny Erpenbeck's *Aller Tage Abend* (The End of Days, 2012). For an analysis of the Jewish-American narratives, vide Marianne Windspurger, “Generation 3.0: Narrative der dritten Generation. Eine Bestandsaufnahme,” in *Drei Generationen*, eds. Martha Keil, Philipp Mettauert (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2016), 89–100.

² Tomasz Różycki, *Dwanaście stacji* (Kraków: Znak, 2004).

³ Sabrina Janesch, *Katzenberge* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2010).

⁴ Ziemowit Szczerek, *Przyjdzie Mordor i nas zje, czyli tajna historia Słowian* (Kraków: Ha!art, 2013).

tell stories based on their private family experience by focusing on Polish-German and Polish-Ukrainian relations, Szczerek focuses on the stories of nations in the Polish-Ukrainian relations. These three books constitute a representative selection, due to their popularity and influence in and out of Poland. *Dwanaście stacji* won the Kościelski Prize in 2004 and within a few years became required reading at schools, was adapted for the radio and stage. In 2007, the Ministry of Education selected it as one of the subjects for the Polish final high school exam in Polish Language and Literature. Today, Różycki is described as a “truly unique voice in contemporary world literature”⁵ even outside of Poland. Sabrina Janesch’s *Katzenberge* also received very good reviews followed by the Mara-Cassens-Preis in 2010 and the Anna-Seghers-Preis in 2011. Her work also received much attention from the academia: by focusing on the expulsion of Poles from the former Polish eastern territories the novel offers a perspective unfamiliar to most German readers. Ziemowit Szczerek’s novel *Przyjdzie Mordor i nas zje* was awarded the Polityka Passport Award for Literature, a nomination for the Nike Award, and is already translated.

These three authors are connected through one borderland region: the former Austrian crown land of Galicia and Lodomeria. This space resurfaced in literary texts after 1989/1991 and is now predominantly present in works of a new generation, which can recall it only from collective and family memory. Galicia was one of these Central-European regions which were subject to many political border shifts in the twentieth century. After its artificial creation in 1772 as “Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria,” it existed until 1918 as part of the Habsburg Empire. Later, its territory became part of the West Ukrainian People’s Republic (1918–1919), the Second Polish Republic (1919–1939), then passed between Hitler and Stalin during the Second World War and was later split into two halves: the western part became part of the Polish People’s Republic, the eastern – of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. A fact that led to expulsions, forced resettlements, and migrations, hence why Galicia appears in so many different national literatures and cultures. That is, Galicia is one of those areas that Timothy Snyder calls “bloodlands.”⁶

⁵ Major Jackson and Mira Rosenthal, “‘Every Poet Has to Be Lonely:’ A Conversation with Tomasz Różycki and His Translators,” *World Literature Today* 90, no. 5 (September/October 2016): 21.

⁶ Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands. Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

Leaving Galicia, Settling in Silesia

The end of the Second World War and the division of European territory following the Yalta Conference and the Potsdam Agreement of 1945 led to changes in the territories of the former Polish Galicia and German Silesia, which in turn triggered migration movements. Only 54% of the territory of the Second Polish Republic belonged to the People's Republic of Poland after the war. The dividing powers pursued the goal of creating national states with own territories in which the national community would be as homogeneous as possible. Poles, Ukrainians, and Germans became victims of these politics. Two events are especially influential for the Galician-Silesian context. On the one hand, the bloody Ukrainian-Polish conflict in Volhynia and Galicia and the associated expulsions of the Polish population from this area in 1943–1946.⁷ On the other hand, the “repatriation” of displaced persons or forced relocation of Poles to the formerly German Silesia, which was itself characterized by the expulsion of the local German population.⁸ In 1939, 7.1 million Germans lived on the German eastern territories, awarded to Poland after the Second World War, which thus became Polish western territories: Silesia (Wrocław), East and West Prussia, Danzig and Pomerania (Szczecin).⁹ At the same time, about four million Poles lived in “Kresy,” the Polish eastern territories, with Vilna and Lviv adjudged to the Soviet Union after 1945.¹⁰ These Poles had to leave their homes too and settle in the territories designated as Recovered Territories

⁷ *Redrawing Nations. Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe 1944–1948*, eds. Philipp Ther, Ana Siljak (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 138.

⁸ Anna Wylegała, *Przesiedlenia a pamięć. Studium (nie)pamięci społecznej na przykładach ukraińskiej Galicji i polskich “ziem odzyskanych”* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2014).

⁹ Wojciech Roszkowski, *Najnowsza historia Polski 1945–1980* (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 2003), 28; Mathias Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen. Voraussetzungen, Verlauf, Folgen* (München: C.H. Beck, 2011), 85.

¹⁰ The understanding of the concept of “Kresy” changed over time, and today we can distinguish two notions which refer back to different times and territories. The “Kresy” were founded on a legend of Wincenty Pol around the knight Mohort from the poem *Mohort. Rapsod rycerski z podania* (1854). The knight defended the southeastern borders of the noble republic at the Dnipro mouth and the lower reaches of the Dniester. So the first notion of “Kresy” means the borderlands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, territories far further east and south than Lviv or Wilno. The second notion, to which we mostly refer today, and which is also often referred to as “Kresy Wschodnie” (Eastern Borderlands), goes back to the times after 1918, the interwar period, and the territory of the eastern borderlands of the Second Polish Republic, to which Lviv and Wilno belonged. Vide also Christof Schimsheimer, “Galizien und die Kresy als polnische Erinnerungsorte im Vergleich,” in *Galizien in Bewegung. Wahrnehmungen – Begegnungen – Verflechtungen*, eds. Magdalena Baran-Szołtys, Olena Dvoretzka et al. (Göttingen: Vienna University Press at V&R unipress, 2018), 37–55.

in the People's Republic of Poland.¹¹ Thus, the Poles, who had to leave their homes in Galicia, began to live in the houses abandoned by the Germans in Silesia. Despite the difficulty of providing accurate statistical data, it can be estimated that approximately twenty percent of the total population in both Poland and Germany was directly affected by the forced displacement.¹² Flight and expulsion can hardly be differentiated in retrospect.¹³ However, nostalgia for "Kresy" and Galicia still lingers among many Poles, as evidenced by the large number of publications dedicated to this topic.¹⁴ At the same time, also Ukrainians from Galicia became victims of this border shifting. In the 1947 "Akcja Wisła" (Operation Vistula), approximately 150,000 people from the Ukrainian minority were forced to resettle from the South-Eastern provinces of post-war Poland to the Recovered Territories, including Boykos and Lemkos.¹⁵

Ironic Nostalgia

Tomasz Różycki's postmodern epic poem *Dwanaście stacji*, published in 2004, "portray[s] an extended Polish family inhabiting the region of Silesia" and is "an excuse to depict the image of lost Ukraine and "Kresy,"¹⁶ as preserved in the

¹¹ The expellees from the former Polish eastern territories after 1945 were referred to in Poland as *repatrianci* (repatriates) and the entire process as *repatriacja* (repatriation). Thus it was communicated (also propagandistically) that they returned to Polish territories, now called "Ziemie Odzyskane" (Recovered Lands).

¹² Hans Jürgen Bömelburg, Robert Traba, "Erinnerung und Gedächtniskultur. Flucht und Vertreibung in deutschen und polnischen Augenzeugenberichten," in *Vertreibungen aus dem Osten. Deutsche und Polen erinnern sich*, eds. Hans Jürgen Bömelburg, Renate Stößling et al. (Olsztyn: Borussia, 2000), 13.

¹³ Philipp Ther, *Die dunkle Seite der Nationalstaaten. 'Ethnische Säuberungen' im modernen Europa* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 142. For the exact course of the expulsions, vide Philipp Ther, *Deutsche und polnische Vertriebene. Gesellschaft und Vertriebenenpolitik in der SBZ/DDR und in Polen 1945–1956* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998). About the German-Polish relationship after 1939 with focus on the population displacement, vide *Deutsch-polnische Beziehungen 1939–1945–1949. Eine Einführung*, eds. Włodzimierz Borodziej, Klaus Ziemer (Osnabrück: fibre, 2000); Norman M. Naimark, *Flammender Hass. Ethnische Säuberungen im 20. Jahrhundert* (München: Beck, 2004).

¹⁴ For a cultural-historical overview of "Kresy," vide Jacek Kolbuszewski, *Kresy* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 1995).

¹⁵ Andreas Kappeler, *Kleine Geschichte der Ukraine* (München: C.H. Beck, 2014), 224–226.

¹⁶ The frame of reference of literary and cultural (post-)Galicia does not coincide with the administrative unit of the Habsburg province; it is much larger, vide Kerstin S. Jobst, *Der Mythos des Miteinander. Galizien in Literatur und Geschichte, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Osteuropakunde* (Hamburg: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Osteuropakunde, 1998), 7–8. The territories and concepts of Galicia and "Kresy" often mingle in Polish narratives, as in *Dwanaście stacji* they are not completely distinguished and merge with each other.

family memory.”¹⁷ Różycki employs ironic nostalgia to retell sometimes more and sometimes less traumatic stories from the past. As Ewa Stańczyk states, the poem simultaneously is a “fictional response to the post-German heritage of contemporary Upper Silesia.”¹⁸ The following quote shows which three topics the book opens: “Have any of you ever listened at the station / to the announcements of departures, arrivals, and delays? Does that voice / embodiment of pure nostalgia, not come from the beyond?”¹⁹ First, the forced migration that happened in different ways, second, the memories of it and the past in general, and third, all the things and people left behind or passed which want to be remembered. All these topics accumulate in this “embodiment of pure nostalgia,” which Różycki uses in an ironic manner.²⁰

“Grandson,” the protagonist of the poem, is a descendant of a family expelled from the former Galician territory after the Second World War and resettled in Opole, a city in the Recovered Territories. Opole is characterized by the expulsion of Germans from this territory. One strategy of processing transgenerational transferred trauma from expulsion, resettlement, and homelessness in the family history is literary alienation, such as the ironic nostalgia used by Różycki in his poem. Ulrike Vedder remarks that fiction and imagination open literary spaces and, by doing so, can bring hidden things to the surface.²¹ Thus, they can deal with the past in a new dimension, exactly as Różycki does.

“O Fantasticality! O Imagination! O Gnosis, Neurosis, and Hyperbole!”²² These exclamations in the poem seem to be a self-describing play with the genre, text, and topic. As one of the most important features, the text uses a myth-creating strategy along with the play with imaginations, associations, and intertextuality. The poem is also a pastiche of the Polish national epic *Pan Tadeusz* (Sir Thaddeus; 1834) by the legislator of Polish Romantic poetry, Adam Mickiewicz, and plays with its myth-creating legacy.²³ Jagoda Wierzejska argues

¹⁷ Ewa Stańczyk, “Ukraine and Kresy in Tomasz Różycki’s *Dwanaście Stacji*. Postcolonial Analysis,” *Zagadnienie Rodzajów Literackich* LII, no. 1–2 (2009): 94.

¹⁸ Ewa Stańczyk, “Polish Contacts Zones: Silesia in the Works of Adam Zagajewski and Tomasz Różycki,” *Słowo* 21, no. 2 (2009): 50.

¹⁹ Tomasz Różycki, *Twelve Stations*, trans. Bill Johnston (Brookline: Zephyr Press, 2015), 191.

²⁰ For a broader analysis of nostalgia in Różycki’s poem, vide Magdalena Baran-Szołtys, “Visions of the Past: Revised in the Present, Recreated for the Future. Nostalgia for and Travels to Galicia in Polish Literature after 1989,” in *Galizien in Bewegung*, 75–90.

²¹ Ulrike Vedder, “Luftkrieg und Vertreibung,” in *Chiffre 2000. Neue Paradigmen der Gegenwartsliteratur*, eds. Corinna Caduff, Ulrike Vedder (München: Fink, 2005), 60.

²² Tomasz Różycki, *Twelve Stations*, 35.

²³ On a comparison between Różycki’s *Dwanaście stacji* and Mickiewicz’s *Pan Tadeusz*, vide Wojciech Maryjka, “Powroty do Sopotu. *Pan Tadeusz* Adama Mickiewicza w najnowszej poezji polskiej,” *Pamiętnik Literacki* CVII, no. 4 (2016): 47–52.

that this shows the way of thinking of people expelled from Galicia, and even some of their descendants: “space in terms of duality, Galician-Silesian” is comparable with the way that Poles think “about Polishness in terms of Soplicowo [from *Pan Tadeusz*].”²⁴ Różycki himself clarifies the reference – certainly an alter ego of Grandson – as he traveled to Ukraine in 2004 as well, as he believed, to “free myself from this terrible history” of his family; but he found no traces of their residence there. Only one: a brick cellar, half-buried.²⁵ But the reference to *Pan Tadeusz* lifts the narrative from a private to a collective one. The poem approaches the memory of post-generations who might have difficulties understanding the meanings and references of these (hi)stories. So, the poem resembles this relationship through irony and reference to a frequently-read text by Mickiewicz. As Różycki states, his reference point was not even so much the national epic as a text but even more the movie adaptation by Andrzej Wajda (1999), which almost every schoolchild has to watch. The vision of child perception of the movie affected Różycki as he thought that they might not understand the relation to Lithuania at all.²⁶ Subsequently, Różycki started to think about his own family which settled from Ukraine to Silesia: “It’s so complicated that at some point it starts to be funny, so I tried to explain it in a funny way, this whole complicated Polish story.”²⁷ Różycki reveals his self-proclaimed mission. He created a fresh Polish narrative about Silesia with its past and present inhabitants, as well as about their relationship to Ukraine and “Kresy.”

In the poem, Grandson is given the mission to organize a trip to his family’s hometown Gliniane in old Galicia, today’s Ukraine. This trip is not only a journey in space but even more so a journey in time. It reveals pictures and imaginations of people and places torn between the present of Silesia and the past of Galicia. Wierzejska connects these two spaces and encapsulates it as a relationship established imaginarily and discursively between Galicia and the new living space, which resembles the relationship between form and concept: “Galicia becomes that which needs to be revealed or discovered – the essence of a place into which fate and history threw the former Galicians.”²⁸ At the same time, the journey should reassure the memory and presence of this actual space: Galicia. The initial point for the journey is Grandson’s grandmother’s prophetic dream,

²⁴ Jagoda Wierzejska, “Galician Displacements and Transformations: On a Spatial Dimension of Creating Galician Identity in Post-War Polish Literature,” in *Galizien in Bewegung*, 63.

²⁵ Tomasz Różycki, “On *Scorched Maps*,” *A Blog for Writers and Readers*, PEN America. Last modified July 13, 2009, <http://penamerica.blogspot.co.at/2009/07/guest-post-tomasz-rozycki-on-scorched.html> (acc. 16.02.2018).

²⁶ Major Jackson, Mira Rosenthal, op. cit., 25.

²⁷ Ibidem, 26.

²⁸ Jagoda Wierzejska, op. cit., 63.

in which her dead husband, his grandfather, is alive again, pointing at their house and saying: “This is the place; we’re not going any further. This is where we shall live.”²⁹ This scene will be repeated at the end of the poem, as a surreal realization of the dream. The journey starts in Opole and ends at the border between Poland and Ukraine. The narration and visions of the past are guided by the space in combination with nostalgia. Every place and object hides its own sequences of the past, which dominate the present narrative.

Różycki’s nostalgia is always ironic. It creates a surreal picture of the world, which expresses all these overlapping layers, in which in the end it does not really matter what is real and what is only imagined, because all these layers are connected and make a whole: the present perception influenced by the past. It is so because “it approaches the historical legacy in an angled way. It’s not speaking directly to a past conflict,”³⁰ as summarizes Major Jackson, one of Różycki’s translators into English. An example of that in the text is an illumination of something that at first glance seems to be an old aunt:

On the bed itself, / ... he spied a sitting figure ... / He thought at once that this / figure must be someone he knew, // that it had to be some family member, aunt / or uncle ... / The figure he beheld that had been sitting for so very long / ... suddenly seemed to him / A pure vision of Almighty God himself, / for where if not in this very place was such an illumination / to take place, in all its essence.³¹

Różycki constructs an ironic illumination, which ends up being neither an old aunt nor God, but a wasps’ nest, which still is highly symbolical. Alina Świeściak remarks that we find here total irony in the sense of Baudelaire: the old world passes away, the new one does not want to arrive. What the Grandson seeks is authenticity, which he tries to find in the family myths. He looks for the truth about the world and himself, which should confirm the sense of the myth and constitute himself again. But he never arrives in Gliniane: it is impossible to get there because it is only a myth.³² In the end, the whole family sits in the train to Gliniane and arrives at the border to Ukraine, but it is also the border to the great beyond. In the train, there are not only the living relatives but also the dead ones, with the dead grandfather at the helm. The text and Grandson’s visions blend with reality, which appears to be the retrieval of the lost time and the space of myth.

What this surrealistic vision with its ironic language and narration shows is that homecoming is not possible. The nostalgia will stay forever because there

²⁹ Tomasz Różycki, *Twelve Stations*, 67.

³⁰ Major Jackson, Mira Rosenthal, op. cit., 22.

³¹ Tomasz Różycki, *Twelve Stations*, 149–151.

³² Alina Świeściak, “Ironiczna nostalgia,” *Dekada Literacka*, no. 5–6 (2004): 62–65.

is no existing object of longing in the real world that could satisfy it and stop the longing. David Lowenthal points out that “[f]ormerly confined in time and place, nostalgia today engulfs the whole past,”³³ so what remains is a longing for all the things lost forever, which today only appear in dreams. Svetlana Boym offers a similar definition of nostalgia, which for her is “a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed”³⁴ in the first place. Thus, *Dwanaście stacji* is a poem about the experience of living in the shadow of the myth.³⁵

Magical Realism

In Sabrina Janesch’s 2010 German novel *Katzenberge*, the narrators’ travel to Galicia is also motivated by the origin of the grandparents. Hence, the narrative framework of both Janesch’s and Różycki’s work is the journey to the land of the ancestors. But while the grandparents had to flee from east to west, their grandchildren move from west to east. Therefore, on the basis of the traveled topography connected to the lives of their grandparents, it is exactly their ancestors’ lives are remembered and narrated. Real space determines the topography of memory anchored in the narratives. Like the novel’s narrator Nele Leipert, Sabrina Janesch is the third generation of Galicians who were resettled to Silesia. The second generation emigrated to Germany, that is why the narrator tells the story from a German-Polish perspective, which represents Silesia maybe like no other because a lot of the Galician expellees emigrated to Germany in the 1960s.³⁶

Katzenberge measures the world from a “double vantage point of the German-Polish and Polish-Ukrainian borderlands.”³⁷ Both Janesch’s and Różycki’s text mostly stem from experiences that the narrators themselves have never experienced, but only draw from family memory. Marianne Hirsch’s term postmemory describes such phenomena, in which the descendants develop

³³ Dawid Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 6.

³⁴ Svetlana Boym, “Off-Modern Homecoming in Art and Theory,” in *Rites of Return. Diaspora Poetics and the Politics of Memory*, eds. Marianne Hirsch, Nancy K. Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 151.

³⁵ Kornelia Ćwiklak, “Hanyś i Chadzaj w jednym stali domu,” *Polonistyka*, no. 3 (2006): 60.

³⁶ Werner Nell, “Die Heimaten der Vertriebenen – Zu Konstruktionen und Obsessionen von Heimatkonzepten in der deutschsprachigen Literatur nach 1989,” in *Entwicklungen in der deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur nach 1989*, eds. Carsten Gansel, Elisabeth Herrmann (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2013), 162.

³⁷ Karolina May-Chu, “Measuring the Borderland in Sabrina Janesch’s *Katzenberge*,” *Monatshefte* 108, no. 3 (2016): 351.

relationships to events in their own family that occurred before their birth: “‘Postmemory’ describes the relationship that the ‘generation after’ bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before – to experiences they ‘remember’ only by the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up.”³⁸ What is handed down from the story of parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents are remnants of remembrance that have been passed on to stories that are still formative and ongoing;³⁹ but to a large extent based also on myths and legends. Thus, the re-imagined and re-told past in *Katzenberge* articulates two things: family postmemory and a broader transnational Polish-German memory,⁴⁰ maybe even a Polish-Ukrainian-German memory.

Katzenberge is characterized by a magical realism that is distinguished by the blurring of boundaries between time, space, imagination, and reality. We see this in the novel, on the one hand, in the image of Galicia as a “magical” place, and on the other hand, in the attempt to banish the curse of traumatized families – symbolically represented by the beast. This magical realism is used by Janesch to tell the mythologized story of her grandparents in a way that would embody the fictional and unreal elements of their narrative about home. Janesch simultaneously uses the power of symbols to make the story stronger and express the trauma: historical disruption is rearticulated by using the poetical strategies of magical realism.⁴¹

Galicia operates in the text through its elements of the “magic-superstition,”⁴² spanning the whole novel, which like nothing else constructs the image of Galicia and stems from imagined mythical components. In the stories of Djadjo, the grandfather, Galicia is portrayed as a place “where ghosts, demons, devils, witches, and forest fairies wreaked havoc.” There are “beings from the other world” there and it is a world “you just could not enter just like that.”⁴³ Although the granddaughter as the narrator distances herself from these myths

³⁸ Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory. Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 5.

³⁹ Marianne Hirsch, “The Generation of Postmemory,” *Poetics Today* 29, no. 1 (2008): 106–107.

⁴⁰ Claudia Winkler, “A Third-Generation Perspective on German-Polish Flight and Expulsion: Discursive and Spatial Practices in Sabrina Janesch’s novel *Katzenberge* (2010),” *German Politics and Society* 31, no. 4 (2013): 85–101.

⁴¹ Friederike Eigler, *Heimat, Space, Narrative. Toward a Transnational Approach to Flight and Expulsion* (Rochester: Camden House, 2014), 174.

⁴² Anastasia Telaak, “Geteilte Erinnerung. Galizien in Sabrina Janesch’s *Katzenberge* und Jenny Erpenbecks *Aller Tage Abend*,” in *Galizien als Kultur- und Gedächtnislandschaft im kultur-, literatur- und sprachwissenschaftlichen Diskurs*, eds. Ruth Büttner, Anna Hanus (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015), 303.

⁴³ Sabrina Janesch, *Katzenberge*, 71. All translations are my own.

and enacts herself as a sophisticated woman, the same myths and pictures of Galica are still re-narrated and form the basis for her and her family's image of Galicia, which she seems unable to overcome. This self-orientalization is not directly reflected in the novel. This idea of Galicia is deeply rooted in the descendants of the people of Galicia. The Polish family members believe in these "fantasies."⁴⁴ The traditional mythical stories became the basis of a vision of Galicia, which now functions as reality; because this is the world "as it really was."⁴⁵ The lost homeland of Galicia now consists only in its imaginations, in the grandfather's tales; the boundaries between myth and reality are already blurred. A trip to Galicia seems impossible to the other descendants "because no one ever went there."⁴⁶ Galicia exists for them only in the family memory, but it is a strong identity-creating element, and like in Różycki's poem, it only exists as a myth.

The picture of the mythical, magical Galicia remembered and transferred by the grandfather is continued by the granddaughter, but in a romanticizing and simultaneously playful ironic manner. Despite the enlightened pose of Nele and the disclosure of family secrets surrounding a fratricide,⁴⁷ the mythical and fantastic Galicia has not disappeared. By attempting to perform the superstitious banishment on the basis of a magical formula, Nele's action stands for the survival of the Galician heritage in the descendants. "Djadjo infected me with fantasies,"⁴⁸ notes the granddaughter. However, the "fairy-tale-mythical images" of Galicia mingle with the traumatic ones, in connection with the experience of expulsion.⁴⁹

The novel reifies the trauma of expulsion and resettlement in the "black beast" that persecutes the family from settling in Silesia, and again through fairytale alienation. The beast as a literary figure "disrupts a world that is otherwise based on realist principles."⁵⁰ The beast is portrayed as a "being from the other world,"⁵¹ which observes the family time and again. The grandmother Maria is visited by the beast in her dreams and tries to break the curse, but she does not succeed, even if the beast is not so strong in Silesia.

⁴⁴ Ibidem, 85.

⁴⁵ Ibidem, 223.

⁴⁶ Ibidem, 85.

⁴⁷ The grandfather is said to have killed his brother Leszek, who allegedly cooperated with the Ukrainians during the expulsions. So the fratricide symbolizes the Polish-Ukrainian conflict: it could become a domestic problem even in ethnically Polish families.

⁴⁸ Ibidem, 196.

⁴⁹ Florian Rogge, "Trauma und Tabu in S. Janesch's *Katzenberge*," in *Galizien als Kultur- und Gedächtnislandschaft im kultur-, literatur- und sprachwissenschaftlichen Diskurs*, eds. Ruth Büttner and Anna Hanus. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015, 290.

⁵⁰ Karolina May-Chu, op. cit., 356.

⁵¹ Sabrina Janesch, op. cit., 104.

The grandmother describes it as “the most miserable beast ... she has ever seen.”⁵² The grandparents already know “beasts” from Galicia, but this beast seems to be different: “The Galician devils.... There is no point in comparing, he said. Or would something here remind her of home? The beast has to be looking for something.... It may concern the farm or the house.”⁵³ It becomes obvious that the beast belongs to the former German owners of the farm. So the grandparents make a tomb for the German landowner, Herr Dietrich, who has died of suicide, “because they owed it to him; above all, to keep him away from the farmyard.”⁵⁴ They hope to build a tomb “that would be strong enough not only to keep Herr Dietrich away, but also all other Germans living and dead.”⁵⁵ But the curse cannot be lifted and the grandmother knows that “something lurks in these meadows and forests and waits for the right moment to return.”⁵⁶

The fear of both the past and the future becomes visible; the only hope to break the curse lies in the granddaughter and the earth brought by her from Galicia. The mission of the journey is to enable life without the curse: “After all, you have to take care of the future, not just the past.”⁵⁷ The beast symbolizes the homelessness of the expelled Galicians and the legacy of the equally displaced Germans, which manifests itself in its everlasting presence in Silesia. Now, the curse is to be banished by Nele, but whether this actually succeeds remains open. This is similar with the impossibility to arrive in Gliniane in *Dwanaście stacji*: homecoming is not possible; it might be the same with the banishment of the curse. But only literature and fiction can overcome this trauma through narration.

Gonzo

In the next analyzed novel, the East is called “Mordor” based on the dark kingdom of Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*. Depending on the observer, the East or Mordor moves farther and farther East. With his texts, the Polish writer Ziemowit Szczerek takes a different approach than the Polish travelers to Ukraine before him. Inspired by the literature of the American beat generation of the 1950s and H. S. Thompson’s *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1971), Szczerek describes his journeys to Ukraine in the style of gonzo: satirical,

⁵² Ibidem, 113.

⁵³ Ibidem, 114.

⁵⁴ Ibidem.

⁵⁵ Ibidem, 116.

⁵⁶ Ibidem, 105.

⁵⁷ Ibidem, 114.

exaggerated, subjective. Galicia and Ukraine serve as a field for the redefinition of the East-West dichotomy, with special reference to the post-Soviet heritage. From breaking stereotypes, self-reflections, and identity negotiations through a general confrontation with history and its instrumentalization to the satire of nostalgic “Kresy” tourism – the rhetorical and topical scale of the successful novel *Przyjdzie Mordor i nas zje, czyli tajna historia Słowian* (2013) is very broad. The book describes several trips to Ukraine. Łukasz Pończyński is the first-person narrator and can be considered the alter ego of Ziemowit Szczerek. Łukasz writes a dissertation on Western Ukrainian Separatism and gonzo articles for the Polish press under the pseudonym Paweł Poncki.⁵⁸

Polish “Kresy” texts or nostalgic journeys look at Ukraine and its part of Eastern Galicia as a part of Polish history, which can be incorporated into their own identity with the theme of the Polish superpower “from sea to sea” (“od morza do morza”), as the title of Szczerek’s latest books suggests, *Międzymorze*.⁵⁹ Ukrainian history and identity are irrelevant; the narrators try to pass over them more or less consciously. With his text, Szczerek takes a new path in the contemplation of Ukraine and its Galician history in Polish contemporary literature. He exoticizes and orientalizes Ukraine but, at the same time, recognizes a part of himself in it, which makes him ashamed and eager to negate it. Hence, the path of the travel also is a reflection about the Polish heritage in Ukraine. Łukasz follows traces of Mickiewicz, Sienkiewicz, Schulz; the protagonists are Polish students from Cracow who study Polish literature or Polish tourist groups who visit the Cemetery of the Defenders of Lwów. Thus, Szczerek’s text is both a treatise on Ukraine and its identity, as well as on Poland itself. Later, he shows the Western postcolonial view of the East, which is here objectified through Poland and Ukraine,⁶⁰ and which deconstructs the stereotypical and nationalistic Polish positions toward Ukraine.

Due to the irony and exaggeration that are characterizing Szczerek’s novel, as well as the gonzo style, the narrator repeatedly reveals the constructive character of the text and the images of Ukraine, Galicia, and their inhabitants. The self-referential text concentrates on the stories of the protagonist’s journey. The novel contains illusion-breaking elements that produce self-referentiality caused by metafiction. Metafictional comments address both the fiction of the text and the literary conventions that visualize, parody, and alienate. The first-person

⁵⁸ Ziemowit Szczerek, op. cit., 99.

⁵⁹ Ziemowit Szczerek, *Międzymorze. Podróże przez prawdziwą i wyobrażoną Europę Środkową* (Warszawa, Wołowiec: Agora, Czarne, 2017).

⁶⁰ Marta Cobel-Tokarska, “Strasznie i pięknie. Ukraińskie podróże młodych Polaków,” in *Sąsiedztwa III RP – Ukraina. Zagadnienia społeczne*, eds. Marcin Dębicki, Julita Makaro (Wrocław: Gajt, 2015), 211.

narrator as a writer comments on the genesis of his texts and – as an alter ego of Ziemowit Szczerek – also comments on the book itself. Soon after the trip starts, it turns out that the narrator’s expectations of Ukraine cannot be satisfied: “In fact, no Western Ukrainian separateness has ever existed, in my PhD and my articles I had to cook up as much as I could.”⁶¹ The first-person narrator overwrites reality to meet and exceed expectations and perceptions, blurring the boundaries between reality and imagination. At the same time, the narrator in the novel reflects about this strategy: “I do not even remember where the truth in this story ends and the bullshit begins.”⁶² The narrator’s travels and lyrics base on “bullshit” (“ściemnianie”) with the narrator explicitly disclosing the following:

And it so happened that I professionally began to deal with bullshit. Lying. More expertly: capturing national stereotypes. Most often nasty.... I expressed in these texts the Ukrainian decay and dissension. It had to be dirty, hard, cruel. That is the essence of gonzo. In gonzo there is booze, there are grinders, there are drugs, there are ladies. There are vulgarisms. Yes, I wrote like this and it was good.⁶³

The exposed constructive character of the text expresses the fictionality of what has been narrated so far and questions the literary conventions followed by the novel: it seems to be a factual travel story, but it is fictional. The text becomes a reflection about the performative potential of journalism, as Izabella Adamczewska suggests.⁶⁴

The exaggerated reality of Szczerek’s novel and narration leads almost everything to absurdity. The story is devalued by the narrator due to its improbable plot and heavily overdrawn characters that expose the text’s implicit metafiction. What makes it clear are the linguistic and stylistic peculiarities, such as the use of a vulgar language. The potential of such productions is “to expose the absurdity of social rituals and the bigotry of fellow human beings.”⁶⁵ Szczerek achieves this by constructing illusions and simultaneously breaking them up by overwriting. This mostly happens through the means of “self-deprecating differentiation”⁶⁶ inscribed in the figures of the narrator and the

⁶¹ Ziemowit Szczerek, *Przyjdzie Mordor i nas zje*, 163. All translations are my own.

⁶² *Ibidem*, 100.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, 99.

⁶⁴ Izabella Adamczewska, “Wariacje na temat pewnego paktu. O dziennikarstwie gonzo,” *Czytanie Literatry. Łódzkie Studia Literaturoznawcze*, no. 3 (2014): 187.

⁶⁵ Michael Hendrik, “The Weird turns Pro. Zur Funktion des Skandals in Hunter S. Thompsons gonzo-Reportagen,” in *Skandalautoren: Zu repräsentativen Mustern literarischer Provokation und Aufsehen erregenden Autoreninszenierung*, eds. Andrea Bartl and Martin Kraus (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2014), 115. All translations are my own.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, 119.

other protagonists. For example, this becomes visible in the negotiations of stereotypes toward Ukrainians, which eventually become negotiations of Polish identity and self-imagination. The overbearing Polish pose toward Ukraine is exposed as a negation of this part of Polishness, of which the narrator is ashamed. The “hardcore” the narrator finds in Ukraine, travelers from Western World discover in Poland.⁶⁷ In the end, both countries are in the same position. The arrogance and protectionism should hide this but what develops instead is an “anti-authoritarian concept of the liberal ironist.”⁶⁸ By exposing this attitude, Szczerek addresses and overcomes an unconscious postcolonial narration about Ukraine from the Polish perspective and delivers a new narrative in the context of the complex Polish-Ukrainian relationships.

Conclusion

The above tree texts show how literature can find poetical devices to overcome the boundaries of political correctness or traumatic speechlessness. Individual stories that represent collective memories can be used in a creative way to show different perspectives and tell deeper stories. With new strategies, the authors retell history without ideologies and accusations. By doing so, they constitute a collective transnational narrative. The attempt to create a not-excluding narration without the compulsion to deliver facts may be one way to overcome trauma. This is what literature may offer over historiography, which not always seems capable of fulfilling this mission. But the message of all these stories is simultaneously the same: to tell the story, you have to journey yourself.

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⁶⁷ Ziemowit Szczerek, *Przyjdzie Mordor i nas zje*, 103.

⁶⁸ Michael Hendrik, “The Weird turns Pro,” 119.

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