

SUMMARY

Youth from “Good Homes,” Boys from
“Bad Neighborhoods” – Literary To-
pographies of Warsaw

This book studies autobiographical texts whose authors identified with the “good homes” or “bad neighborhoods” of twentieth-century Warsaw. I analyze literary works by Jeremi Przybora (*Przymknięte oko Opaczności. Memuarów część I, Przymknięte oko Opaczności. Memuarów część II, Zdążyć z happy endem. Memuarów część III*), Jarosław Abramow-Newerly (*Lwy mojego podwórka, Lwy wyzwolone, Lwy STS-u*), Agnieszka Osiecka (*Szpetni czterdziestoletni, Galeria potworów, Rozmowy w tańcu, Na początku był negatyw*), Stanisław Grzesiuk (*Boso, ale w ostrogach, Pięć lat kacetu, Na marginesie życia*), Marek Hłasko (*Piękni dwudziestoletni*) and Andrzej Stasiuk (*Jak zostałem pisarzem (próba autobiografii intelektualnej)*).

The personal identities of these artists were formed under different spatial and temporal circumstances, although each emphasized his or her strong connection to Warsaw. Representatives of the oldest generation – Przybora and Grzesiuk identify with Śródmieście and Czerniaków respectively. Representatives of the “middle” generation, socialized in the period of “small stabilization,” identify differently; Abramow-Newerly associates with Żoliborz, Osiecka with Saska Kępa, and Hłasko with Marymont and partly with Powiśle, while the youngest writer whose horizon formed in the Gierek-era – Stasiuk – identify with Grochów. Their memoirs function in three autobiographical modes: personal (used to report on the life story), environmental (used to depict relationships with the environment,

mainly family and/or peers), and topographical (used to mark places on the autobiographical map and transfer them to the narrative map).

The book includes an introduction, five chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography, and an appendix. The first chapter, entitled *In Praise of the Interdisciplinarity*, is theoretical. In this section, I discuss the key theories of (auto)biographical research, memory studies, and geopoetics that form the methodological background for my further analysis. I also refer to works from the fields of sociology, anthropology, psychology, geography, and varsovian studies. In Chapter Two, *Panicz Jeremi ze Śródmieścia*, I reflect on Przybora's life and stage image. I present his azimuth of self-creation as determined by three coordinates: – his belonging to the intelligentsia (“inteligenckość”), his identification with the pre-war period (“przedwojenność”), and his strong ties to Warsaw (“warszawskość”). I likewise explore Przybora's attitude towards his hometown, with which he parted many times and in various ways. In Chapter Three, *Żoliborski lew*, I discuss Abramow-Newerly's image multiplication. Then I analyze the writing technique of the “later autobiographer;” consisting of dramaturgical, journalistic, and fictional workshops. I present the writer's process of growing up from three different viewpoints: artistic, self-creationist, and topographical. In the appendix, I include a *Calendar of life and work of Jarosław Abramow-Newerly*, prepared in collaboration with the writer. In Chapter Four, *Panienka z Saskiej Kępy*, I reflect on Osiecka's *poli*-biographical narratives. Instead of writing an autobiography, she creates a biography of many people, indeed, a biography of her generation. She distances herself from her personal revelations in various ways, replacing unaddressed themes with autobiographical ersatz. I discuss her verbal escapism at the level of the text, e.g., strategies of disbelief, i.e., blur, duplex, and collage, and topographical escapes related to displacement. I trace the trajectories of the memoirist's life and assign various topo(bio)-graphical roles to her “autobiographical sites” [Małgorzata Czermińska].

In Chapter Five, entitled “*Cwaniaki*” i “*cwaniary*” z warszawskich przedmieść, I examine the self-narratives of Grzesiuk, Hłasko, and Stasiuk, who represent three generations of Varsovians from “bad neighborhoods”

– “the marginal men” [Robert Ezra Park] and marginalized people with horizons broader than their (real or fictional) addresses would indicate. I present Grzesiuk as a topo(bio)graphical insider, a local, and a boy from the hinterlands. I consider Hłasko a poseur, a frequent visitor who repeatedly crossed the border between the center and the periphery and an outsider who longs to be associated with Marymont, even though lives in Żoliborz. Finally, Stasiuk is a rebel, a vagabond, and a nonsider, treating Grochów as a symbol rather than a real place. I distinguish three rhetorics of locality used by these writers to present their neighborhoods: the rhetoric of sentiment in Grzesiuk’s works, the rhetoric of marasmus in Hłasko’s, and the rhetoric of nostalgia in Stasiuk’s. I argue that the authors of these texts treat the “bad neighborhoods” like a shelter from threats coming from the city center. To characterize the topos of Warsaw’s “bad neighborhood” as fully as possible, I refer to other works, including fiction (a special role among them is played by the novel *Cwaniary* by Sylwia Chutnik).

I conclude by emphasizing that Osiecka, Przybora, Abramow-Newerly, Grzesiuk, Hłasko, and Stasiuk “textured” their autobiographical sites and “placed” their memoirs. They captured the gradual blurring of the boundaries between the exclusive “city” and the proletarian “suburb” and the changes in the canon of behavior that accompanied this process. Environmental and spatial categories influenced the shaping of the identities of youth from the “good homes” and boys from “bad neighborhoods,” and proved to be important components of their autobiographical texts.