

# The geopoetical detail?

## The cultural archive as part of a place's texture

Elżbieta Dutka

ORCID: 0000-0002-5404-2586

**detail** “a part of a whole, a small and subordinate part; something tiny, a trifle.” to explain something in detail. To speak in general terms without going into details.<sup>1</sup>

**detail** <fr. *détail*> part of a bigger whole, a small component of something, e.g., a machine, a device; metaphorically: a thing, a matter of no importance, a trifle.<sup>2</sup>

In comparison with what is large

The study of details has become the hallmark of micropoetics; in 2017, an entire issue of *Forum of Poetics* was devoted to it.<sup>3</sup> Elżbieta Winięcka drew attention to the problematic nature of the object of micropoetics, insofar as it depends on the preconceived and subjective assumptions held by scholars:

<sup>1</sup> “Detail” in: *Słownik języka polskiego PWN* [The PWN Dictionary of the Polish Language], ed. Mieczysław Szymczak, vol. 1: A–K (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1999), 362.

<sup>2</sup> “Detail” in: *Słownik wyrazów obcych PWN* [The PWN Dictionary of foreign words and phrases], ed. Jan Tokarski (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1980), 147.

<sup>3</sup> *Forum of Poetics* 2017 (spring/summer).

Because what matters here is the comparative perspective, which exhibits differences in scale, allowing us to highlight the fundamental fact that small is small in comparison with what is large (or, also, depending on our needs: official, dominant, manifest, self-explanatory, important, inspiring). And that what hitherto was overlooked or only fleetingly shown, particularly in the panoramic perspective on the history of literature, now finds itself at the centre of scholarly interest. As we can see, the scale of micro is micro only when there exists in our consciousness a broader context for it: macro-problems, macroprocesses and macrostructures.<sup>4</sup>

I would like to draw attention to the detail, a particular issue, a part perceived only on a micro scale. The spatial humanities provide a broader (albeit probably not the broadest<sup>5</sup>) critical background for it. Relatively recently, it inspired scholars to write about the spatial turn<sup>6</sup> and today it inspires us to use the term “spatial literary studies.”<sup>7</sup> Robert T. Tally coined such a collective name for various research perspectives focused on space, including geocriticism, literary geography, and geopoetics.<sup>8</sup> Considered in the wider context of spatial literary studies, geopoetics, although in itself a significant and complex research trend, constitutes but a fragment, a detail. I shall narrow the perspective even further and focus on one particular approach to geopoetics.<sup>9</sup> Elżbieta Rybicka in the monograph *Geopoetyka. Przestrzeń i miejsce we współczesnych teoriach i praktykach literackich* [Geopoetics. Space and Place in Contemporary Literary Theories and Practices] argues that geopoetics is primarily a research practice,<sup>10</sup> a multifaceted project of “analysing and interpreting interactions (including circulations) among works of literature and related cultural practices and the geographical space.”<sup>11</sup> Respectively, in one of her articles, Rybicka writes that geopoetics studies investigate how geography determines literature (and the author) and the structure of a literary text; it may be defined as “the study of the mechanisms which create the topography of a region and a place.”<sup>12</sup> The

<sup>4</sup> Elżbieta Winięcka, “Micropoetics and its contexts”, *Forum of Poetics* 2017 (spring/summer): 46.

<sup>5</sup> An even broader background may be provided by the cultural theory of literature. See: *Kulturowa teoria literatury. Główne pojęcia i problemy* [The Cultural Theory of Literature. Main concepts and problems], ed. Michał Paweł Markowski, Ryszard Nycz (Kraków: Universitas, 2012); *Kulturowa teoria literatury 2. Poetyki, problematyki, interpretacje* [The Cultural Theory of Literature (Part 2). Poetics, Problems, Interpretations], ed. Teresa Walas, Ryszard Nycz (Kraków: Universitas, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> *The Spatial Turn. Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Barney Warf, Santa Arias (London: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> *Spatial literary studies. Interdisciplinary approaches to space, geography, and the imagination*, ed. Robert T. Tally (New York and London: Routledge, 2021).

<sup>8</sup> Robert T. Tally, “Spatial Literary Studies Versus Literary Geography? Boundaries and Borders Amidst Interdisciplinary Approaches to Space and Literature”, in: *Spatial literary studies*, 317–331; Robert T. Tally, “Introduction: the map and the guide”, in: *Teaching Space, Place, and Literature*, ed. Robert T. Tally (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 1–9; Robert T. Tally, “Introduction: The Reassertion of Space in Literary Studies”, in: *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space*, ed. Robert T. Tally (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 1–6.

<sup>9</sup> It is assumed that Kenneth White coined the term “geopoetics;” he saw it as a philosophy and an art of life. See: Kenneth White, *Geopoetyki* [Geopoetics], sel., ed., trans. Kazimierz Brakoniecki (Olsztyn: Centrum Polsko-Francuskie Côtes d’Armor – Warmia i Mazury w Olsztynie, 2014). Elżbieta Konończuk writes about the various meanings of geopoetics in: “W meandrach geopoetyki” [In the meanders of geopoetics], *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2005): 213–228. Anna Kronenberg, in turn, formulates an ecological understanding of geopoetics as “green writing and reading,” *Geopoetyka. Związki literatury i środowiska* [Geopoetics. Relations between literature and the environment] (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2014).

<sup>10</sup> Elżbieta Rybicka, *Geopoetyka. Przestrzeń i miejsce we współczesnych teoriach i praktykach literackich* [Geopoetics. Space and Place in Contemporary Literary Theories and Practices] (Kraków: Universitas, 2014), 12.

<sup>11</sup> Rybicka, *Geopoetyka*, 92.

<sup>12</sup> Elżbieta Rybicka, “Ponowoczesny regionalizm i badania komparatystyczne” [Postmodern regionalism and comparative studies], *Rocznik Komparatystyczny* 2 (2011): 154.

most important, but also the most problematic, category of geopoetics is place. Its complexity and heterogeneity may be explained using the metaphor of texture, insofar as it refers both to geology and the concepts associated with weaving, be it a piece of fabric or a text, which have been part and parcel of literary studies for years.<sup>13</sup> A place's texture, this complex and condensed constellation, consists of:

[...] personal existential experiences, sensual experiences and emotions that permeate private landscapes, autobiographical memory with its turmoil, but also the sphere of cultural (literary, visual, musical) experiences, and, finally, imagination, which transforms and freely transfigures these components. And these three ingredients – experience, the **cultural archive**, and imagination – make up this dynamic configuration which we call “place,” not only in literature and not only in literary studies [emphasis – E.D.].<sup>14</sup>

The geopoetological detail that I would like to draw attention to is the cultural archive – a term that Rybicka did not even list in the subject index in her monograph.

In addition to geopoetics, a broader background against which such a detail as the cultural archive may be studied is the archival turn. It may be seen, first and foremost, in the name of the part of place's texture of interest to me; the name “cultural archive” is not accidental. One cannot but notice that the applied terminology is a testament to the popularity of archival imagery. Of course, the fact that archives are “trendy” does not fully explain why this particular name for the geopoetological detail is used, but it is nevertheless very telling.

The archival turn, like other “turns” recognized (probably too often) in contemporary literary studies, raises a number of questions.<sup>15</sup> Scholars argue that this phrase did not only spark the interest in the archive, which found itself at the center of various research projects and fields, but also significantly expanded the definition and metaphorized the concept of the archive.<sup>16</sup> A broader view of the archive as the figurative representation of the most important problems of modernity may be found, among other places, in Jacques Derrida's lecture, where he reads the archive in Freudian terms.<sup>17</sup> The archive has been “revived” and “embodied” in

<sup>13</sup>Rybicka, *Geopoetyka*, 168–169.

<sup>14</sup>Rybicka, *Geopoetyka*, 173.

<sup>15</sup>Danuta Ulicka, “Zwrot archiwalny (jak ja go widzę)” [The archival turn (as I see it)], *Teksty Drugie* 1/2 (2010): 159–164.

<sup>16</sup>Elżbieta Wichrowska, “Badacz w archiwum i archiwum badacza. Paradoks archiwum” [The researcher in the archive and the researcher's archive. The paradox of the archive], *Pamiętnik Literacki* 2 (2021): 289–290. The 7th World Congress of Polish Studies at the University of Wrocław which took place on October 20–23, 2021, summarized the discussions concerning the archival turn in the Polish humanities. The conference *Archives and the Present* was held at the congress, during which I delivered a paper entitled “*Nic tak nie ożywia opowieści jak skamielina*”. *O archiwum kultury z perspektywy geopoetyki* [‘Nothing brings a story to life like a fossil.’ The cultural archive from the perspective of geopoetics], in which I have addressed the issues discussed in this article.

<sup>17</sup>Jacques Derrida, *Archive fever. A Freudian impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

contemporary theatre studies and performance studies.<sup>18</sup> Moving away from the traditional status of the archive as a site and a set of institutionalized practices, primarily related to creating, selecting, and sharing collections as well as studying documents, is met with both enthusiasm and reservations.<sup>19</sup> Danuta Ulicka uses two different terms – the archive and the “archive” – to emphasize the difference between the traditional and the symbolic approach.<sup>20</sup> Ulicka notes that the “archive” is riddled with “too many” meanings:

The word has been widely used in various fields and critical cultural practices, either as a synonym for the universally respected (historical, social, cultural, individual) “memory,” or (in the works of historiographers) as an equivalent of an “alibi” or a “pretext,” that is a seemingly decisive argument found in a historical document; the “archive” may also be an equivalent of a “granary,” a “storage room,” a “repertoire,” or a “collection,” the content of which allows one to freely destroy, construct, and “design” the past. The list of synonyms and the stories produced around them is long. Such stories, supported by philosophical (Bergson, Derrida, Foucault) and literary (Proust) authorities and discussed in the wider context of psychoanalytical, feminist, masculinist, post-colonial, identity, critical-constructivist studies, serve “potential history” well, insofar as they serve to expose the power of the archives in the light of the concealed mechanisms and purposes of their production, but they have also turned the term into a metaphor.<sup>21</sup>

Indeed, in comparison with actual archival research and discoveries which influence the development of the discipline, the very operations on the term “archive” (paraphrasing, interpreting and reinterpreting, or artfully transforming it) are devoid of such “causative power.”<sup>22</sup> But just as archival documents require a careful reading, a reading which takes into consideration their various contexts, a reading that “exposes” them,<sup>23</sup> so do metaphorical meanings or “impressions”<sup>24</sup> evoked by the very term “archive.”<sup>25</sup> The archive, as a “travelling concept,”<sup>26</sup> moves between disciplines and theories, entering into new constellations. The potential opened up by the archive as a metaphor, as well as the way it functions in various

<sup>18</sup>See, among others: Dorota Sosnowska, “Ciało jako archiwum – współczesne teoria teatru i performansu” [The body as an archive - contemporary theory of theater and performance], in: *Świadectwa pamięci (W kręgu źródeł i dyskursów (od XIX wieku do dzisiaj))* [Testimonies of memory (The sources and discourses (from the 19th century to the present))], ed. Elżbieta Dąbrowicz, Beata Larenta, Magdalena Domura (Białystok: Alter Studio, 2018), 79–89; Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire. Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham–London: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>19</sup>Wichrowska, 290.

<sup>20</sup>Danuta Ulicka, “«Archiwum» i archiwum” [«The archive» and the archive], *Teksty Drugie* 4 (2017): 273–302.

<sup>21</sup>Ulicka, “«Archiwum» i archiwum”, 274.

<sup>22</sup>Ulicka, “«Archiwum» i archiwum”, 276.

<sup>23</sup>Ulicka, “Zwrot archiwalny (jak ja go widzę)”, 161.

<sup>24</sup>Derrida, 46.

<sup>25</sup>“The ‘archive’ has become one of the most popular metaphors for all kinds of memory and storage agencies”. Wolfgang Ernst, “The Archive as Metaphor. From Archival Space to Archival Time”, *Open* 7 (2005): 46–53, <https://docplayer.net/12159609-Wolfgang-ernst-the-archive-as-metaphor-from-archival-space-to-archival-time.html>, date of access: 7 July 2021.

<sup>26</sup>Magdalena Rewerenda writes about the archive as a “travelling concept,” *Performatywne archiwum teatru. Konsekwencje Nie-boskiej komedii. Szczątków Olivera Frłjicia* [Performative Theater Archive. Consequences of Oliver Frłjic’s Un-divine Comedy: Remains] (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2020), 10.

interactions and the results of such conceptual “travels” and transfers, are all very interesting. From the point of view of archival science, the “archive” moves away from the original meaning; it transcends institutional limitations. Other disciplines see it differently – as a possibility, a chance. One particular problem we should consider is how the metaphor of the archive works in geopoetics.

In the first part of the article, taking into account a broader background – the macrostructure of geopoetics and the archival turn – I will ask questions about the meaning and function of the geopoetical detail. Dictionary definitions of the word “detail” and different sayings and idioms point to a certain ambivalence. On the one hand, something is not worth going into details, because it is trivial, because we focus too much on petty issues. On the other hand, however, the details determine the shape of the whole, “the devil’s in the detail.” So, what kind of a detail is the cultural archive in geopoetics? Is it just an intriguing terminological grain of sand, or a pebble in your shoe that is impossible to ignore? In the second part of the article, I shall analyze the works of Janusz Szuber and Adam Robiński and reflect on the meaning of the cultural archive in literary conceptualizations of a place and identity. I wish to examine to what extent the geopoetological detail may also function as an operational concept, a concept that is useful in literary interpretation.

## The cultural archive – part of a place’s texture

Elżbieta Rybicka explains that the cultural archive, as a part of a place’s texture, is a collection of “known representations, cultural codes, patterns of space recognition, genre norms.”<sup>27</sup> It is an anthropological and cultural reservoir of “testimonies” which show the relationship between man and place – relationships “constituted by perception, emotions, meanings, beliefs and imaginations.”<sup>28</sup> This reservoir may be understood in two ways. On the one hand, the cultural archive houses universal cultural codes, norms, patterns (e.g., ways of representing specific landscape features) which are not associated with any specific geographical space. On the other hand, it refers to various texts of culture which relate to a specific place, which is, in a way, “occupied” by previous authors. Such a concept of the cultural archive is present in Małgorzata Czermińska’s notion of autobiographical places (although she does not use the term “cultural archive” explicitly in her article).<sup>29</sup>

The cultural archive as part of a place’s texture, similarly to geological strata, undergoes various transformations; like a thread in a piece of fabric, it has a distinct connectivity to other threads; as a text, it requires reading. What distinguishes it from other archives and “archives” is its symbolically enhanced spatiality. At the beginning of his lecture, Derrida refers to a topological principle, pointing to the archive as a place “where things commence.”

<sup>27</sup>Rybicka, *Geopoetyka*, 174.

<sup>28</sup>Rybicka, *Geopoetyka*, 174.

<sup>29</sup>Małgorzata Czermińska, “Miejsca autobiograficzne. Propozycja w ramach geopoetyki” [Autobiographical places. A proposal within geopoetics], *Teksty Drugie* 5 (2011): 183–200.

The French philosopher derives topology, similarly to the nomological principle of order and power of the archive, from the word *arkhé* – the “commencement” – and beginnings are so important for the archive.<sup>30</sup> To paraphrase these remarks, it can be said that the archive that creates texture is a place where place commences; it is the source of a place’s law and politics, its *genius loci*.

Therefore, the cultural archive is a very broad metaphor in geopoetics. The cultural archive is (also in a figurative sense) a museum and a library. In archival studies, the functions of the museum and the library are clearly separated;<sup>31</sup> in geopoetics, such divisions seem to be less important than convergences and similarities, pointing to a certain whole embodied in a place, a certain whole which connects a place and the wish to preserve it, to save its unique nature. The cultural archive is primarily a figure of memory<sup>32</sup> – collective memory, intersubjective memory – which, combined with individual experiences and imaginations, gives rise to a place.<sup>33</sup>

The cultural archive and other elements which make up a place’s texture, i.e., experience and imagination, enter into complex and dynamic relations. Elżbieta Rybicka points out that experience may not be articulated if the cultural archive is not activated;<sup>34</sup> likewise, creation (imagination) feeds on cultural memory.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, the archive seems indispensable; it even becomes the central element of a place’s texture, but it is also an extremely problematic element. The paradox of the archive in geopoetics is that it is often a starting point and a point of reference for new and original representations, although it is also sometimes perceived as a façade behind which a place is hidden.<sup>36</sup> An example of the latter may be “Paris” syndrome, experienced when the image of the city known from cultural texts may not be found in reality. As a component of a place’s texture, the archive is associated with both the “fever” of archival research and a moment of resistance, signaled by Derrida,<sup>37</sup> which in fact refers to the process of negotiating the image of a given place. In reflection on place, the urge to archive, preserve,

<sup>30</sup>Derrida, 9–10.

<sup>31</sup>See, e.g.: Lutosław Stachowski, “Muzea jako strażnicy materiałów archiwalnych” [Museums as guardians of archival materials], *Problemy Archiwistyki* 1 (2009): 23–49, <https://www.archiwa.gov.pl/images/docs/problemy/LStachowski.pdf>, date of access 4 August 2021.

<sup>32</sup>“The significance of archives in modern and postmodern societies makes them the basic point of reference in discussions about memory, and often also a model for thinking about it.” Iwona Kurz, “Archiwum” [Archive], in: *Modi memorandi. Leksykon kultury pamięci* [Modi memorandi. Lexicon of the Culture of Remembrance], ed. Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska, Robert Traba, with the help of Joanna Kalicka (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2014), 45. Cf. “The archive thus turns out to be a metaphor for the figure of memory; it points to the question about memory, implying its crisis: the politics of memory; the rules of constructing the past and attempts to explain the mechanisms of the modern world; the threat; what is happening to ‘memory’ today (that is, the processes of forgetting); how we need memory and what kind of memory is possible; how to reproduce it (and the dangers thereof).” Wichrowska, “Badacz w archiwum i archiwum badacza”, 289–290.

<sup>33</sup>Rybicka, *Geopoetyka*, 174.

<sup>34</sup>Rybicka, *Geopoetyka*, 173.

<sup>35</sup>Rybicka, *Geopoetyka*, 172.

<sup>36</sup>Rybicka, *Geopoetyka*, 184.

<sup>37</sup>“For Derrida, the archive is a place or a moment of subtle resistance rooted in ‘historicity and the obligation of memory.’” Aleksander Kopka, “Śladem archiwów (Jacques Derrida *Gorączka archiwum*)” [Tracing archives (Jacques Derrida’s *Archive fever*)], *Art. Papier* 332 (2017), <http://artpapier.com/index.php?page=artykul&wydanie=334&artykul=6441>, date of access 1 February 2020.

and repeat clashes with the urge to blur, repress, and reject.<sup>38</sup> The archive, as a part of a place's texture, is "not only a factor which determines the perception of space, but also raw material subjected to critical transformations."<sup>39</sup>

## The cultural archives of the Bieszczady Mountains – a library and a cabinet of curiosities

We can learn more about the significance of the cultural archive, its complex nature, and various forms, by analyzing the literary topographies of the Bieszczady Mountains. I offer only preliminary remarks about the role which the cultural archive of the Bieszczady Mountains plays in creating the texture of the "wildest" region in Poland. I shall discuss very different works by Janusz Szuber and Adam Robiński.<sup>40</sup>

W czeluściach gór dymiących	In the depths of the smoking mountains
Niedźwiedzie piwo warzą	Bears brew beer
Albo w panwiach żeliwnych	Or leach wood ash
Ługują popiół drzewny.	in cast iron pans
Cyhany hrajut na skrzypkach i basach <sup>&lt;?&gt;</sup>	Gypsies play on violins and basolias

This is how Janusz Szuber's poem *Las wielki i niedźwiedziów dosyć* [The forest is huge and there are enough bears] begins; it was published in the collection *Tam, gdzie niedźwiedzie piwo warzą* [Where bears brew beer]. Although Szuber's poetry is so firmly rooted in culture that it is sometimes associated with classicizing trends,<sup>41</sup> this poem is different. It is almost entirely composed of quotations, with a short commentary and footnotes which reveal to the reader the sources used by the poet (F, 9). There are twenty-seven lines in the entire cento, only five of which are not quotations. Thus, almost the entire image of the place was created from materials found in the cultural archive. The poet said that his work is "the testimony of language from different eras" (F, 9). For Małgorzata Okupnik the poem is a "sophisticated intertextual game," an "imaginary creation."<sup>42</sup> Okupnik writes that:

<sup>38</sup>"The archive as a public prosthesis of memory essentially juxtaposes the desire to repeat and preserve the original event with its inevitable obliteration and displacement, resulting from the very essence of the archive." Kurz, *Archiwum*, 46.

<sup>39</sup>Rybicka, *Geopoetyka*, 416.

<sup>40</sup>Szuber's works analyzed below have already been interpreted. In addition to the sources I cite, see also e.g., Ewa Ogłóza, "«Powiedzieć. Cokolwiek». Janusza Szubera – próba lektury i projekt dydaktyczny" ['Say. Anything.' Janusz Szuber – an attempt at interpretation and a didactic project], *Z Teorii i Praktyki Dydaktycznej Języka Polskiego*, vol. 22 (2013): 81–82; Andrzej Sulikowski, "Twórczość poetycka Janusza Szubera" [Janusz Szuber's poetry], *Pamiętnik Literacki* 2 (2004): 93–128 and the monographs: Tomasz Cieślak-Sokołowski, *Mój wszechświat uczyniony*. *O poezji Janusza Szubera* ['My created universe.' Janusz Szuber's poetry] (Kraków: Universitas, 2004); Jacek Mączka, *Powidła dla Tejrzejasa. O poezji Janusza Szubera* [Jam for Tiresias. Janusz Szuber's poetry] (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2008). I would like to write more about Robiński's reportage in a separate article.

<sup>41</sup>Cf. Krystyna Latawiec, "Poeta wobec uniwersum kultury. O poezji Janusza Szubera" [The poet and the universe of culture. Janusz Szuber's poetry], *Annales Academiae Paedagogicae Cracoviensis folia 20, Studia Historicolitteraria* 4 (2004): 184.

<sup>42</sup>Małgorzata Okupnik, "«Poszóstnie przez Bieszczad». Janusza Szubera poetyckie utraty i nostalgii" [In a six-horse carriage through the Bieszczady Mountains». Janusz Szuber's poetic losses and nostalgia], *Porównania* 2 (2012): 175.

Szuber “composed” the poem from verses found in official records and regional *lauda*, Stanisław Staszic’s *Dziennik podróży* [Travel journal], Ludwik Zajszner’s and Oskar Kolberg’s research and travel notes, Wincenty Pol’s and Marcin Szmarzewski’s diaries, and works by Jan Kanty Podolecki and Waław Potocki. In order for the “testimony of language” to be truly complete, Szuber quoted a sentence in Yiddish, a phrase in the Boyko language and, finally, a Lemko folk song. Each quote individually reflects this lost multicultural world, and together the quotes create a coherent, multidimensional, polyphonic whole, which can hardly be considered a faithful historical reconstruction. In Szuber’s vision, the Bieszczady Mountains are an Arcadian space with no history of violence, fratricide, resettlements.<sup>43</sup>

The quotes that make up Szuber’s cento are not only a site of intertextual games; they may also be read as sources which have been carefully selected by the poet from the cultural archive. Undoubtedly, the poet exposes archival materials; in this poem, they take precedence over other elements which make up a place’s texture. They give the reader an idea about how multicultural and diverse the region used to be and, what is equally important, they were combined in such a way as to create a “coherent,” “polyphonic whole.” The Arcadian, that is idealized, image of a community-in-diversity in the cento stands in contrast to the other poems in the collection, which refer to the Holocaust, resettlements, and the wartime and post-wartime apocalypse. Therefore, both what is included and what is omitted is important. Selected archival quotes create the place’s texture. The geopoetological detail thus allows us to make an interpretative shift from literature and language to reality. To draw on Ryszard Nycz, it can be said that *Las wielki i niedźwiedziów dosyć* refers to the “textual world,”<sup>44</sup> but at the same time the geopoetological perspective allows us to notice a “literary practice” in the poem. The work influences reality by creating (constructing rather than reconstructing) the place, its texture, the images associated with it, by shaping how it is perceived and interpreted.

The cultural archive dominates the cento; other elements which make up the place’s texture are slightly more visible in *Świadectwo języka* [The testimony of language] – Szuber’s commentary to the poem *Las wielki i niedźwiedziów dosyć*.<sup>45</sup> In this autobiographical text published in the collection *Powiedzieć. Cokolwiek* [Say. Anything], the poet declares that he is “one of many, so many, who fell in love with the Bieszczady Mountains at first sight” (T, 71). Emotions and experiences primarily make up the place’s texture in this text. Szuber writes about “sensual” mountains: mountains that may be seen, traversed, and experienced in various ways (from a glider, on a motorbike, on foot). The text is a testament to a strong, emotional connection with the place. Even the illness that made the poet leave his beloved mountains did not break this bond. It was then that direct and sensual experiences were replaced by the cultural archive and imagination. Describing his long hospital stay, Szuber emphasized:

<sup>43</sup>Okupnik, 175.

<sup>44</sup>Ryszard Nycz, *Tekstowy świat. Poststrukturalizm a wiedza o literaturze* [Textual world. Poststructuralism and literary studies] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 1993).

<sup>45</sup>Janusz Szuber, “Świadectwo języka” [The testimony of language], in: *Powiedzieć. Cokolwiek* [Say. Anything] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2011), 71–74. Henceforth, I use the abbreviation T.



Almost unable to move, as allowed by my present condition, I reached for the windowsill, which my fellow inmates called the library. I kept there maps, books, notebooks. Autumn in the mountains dressed up in colors, while I, against, against what, fate, accident, genetic conspiracy, slowly, quote after quote, exploring the poetics of the cento, began to write *Las wielki i niedźwiedziów dosyć* [...] (T, 73).

The cultural archive clearly acts as “compensation” in this case. The “library” on the hospital windowsill and the fact that the poet was exploring the poetics of the cento show that he developed “archive fever.” The act of looking for something in his collection may be read as a desire to find a place he had to leave because of the disease and a desire to learn about its *arkhé*. For the poet, the commencement and the essence of the Bieszczady Mountains are multiculturalism and diversity. The desire to preserve, to conserve the “polyphonic whole” clashes with the melancholic sense of loss – the realization that the real experience of the mountains is out of the poet’s reach and that his vision is utopian. In Szuber’s works, a decidedly logocentric cultural archive, a library of sorts, allows the poet to escape an existential and historical crisis.

The role (and the nature) of the cultural archive in Adam Robiński’s *Kiczery. Podróż przez Bieszczady* [Kiczery. A journey through the Bieszczady Mountains]<sup>46</sup> is equally interesting, though different. In this hybrid work – a mixture of a travel book, an anthropological study, and an essay about a place – one may also see “archive fever.” Indeed, the very opening shows how important the cultural archive is in Robiński’s text. Robiński reminisces about his childhood, living in a block of flats in Warsaw, and goes through his own archive – a private collection of books and maps – which takes him back to the beginnings of his passion for travelling.<sup>47</sup> An actual journey through the Bieszczady Mountains begins with a visit to the Natural History Museum of the Bieszczady National Park in Ustrzyki Dolne. Robiński pays attention to only one thing – a plaster cast of the woolly rhinoceros; an animal which roamed the earth twenty-three thousand years ago. The reporter repeats after Bruce Chatwin, whose book *In Patagonia* he carries in his backpack, “Nothing brings a story to life quite like a fossil or some other paleontological discovery” (K, 23). Chatwin’s travel book turns out to be the most important guide to the Bieszczady Mountains. Robiński draws surprising analogies, as he discovers “Polish Patagonia” – “an extraterritorial region, somewhere at the end of the world” (K, 53). The reference to paleontology, apart from it being a clear indication of the source of literary inspiration, also points to an early archival gesture. Robiński does not only watch the exhibit, but, like the archivist, also begins to analyze it. He describes previous excavations and searches and explains to the reader in a very matter-of-fact tone why the rhinoceros, whose remains were discovered in 1929 in the former Stanisławów voivodship, was preserved in such good condition (K, 19). Anecdotes and logistical and engineering details concerning the unearthing of the archaeological discovery

<sup>46</sup>Adam Robiński, *Kiczery. Podróż przez Bieszczady* [Kiczery. A journey through the Bieszczady Mountains] (Wołowiec: Czarne, 2019). Henceforth, I use the abbreviation K.

<sup>47</sup>This passion may be seen in Adam Robiński’s debut book, *Hajstry. Krajobraz bocznych dróg* [Hajstry. Images of side roads] (Wołowiec: Czarne, 2017).

prove how important the find was – locally, it was an event “comparable only to the landing of Apollo 11 on the moon” (K, 22). Robiński also describes in detail how the find was secured and archived. The museum exhibit triggers an archival search, raising questions not only about the prehistory of the place, but also about what happened later, when the Bieszczady Mountains were part of Galicia, and modern times, when the area was turned into a National Park. The story of the prehistoric rhinoceros may also refer to an “archaeological parable” noticed by Derrida in the writings of Sigmund Freud. Freud dreamed of a discovery on par with archaeological excavations, which would be a source that does not require additional explanations by the archivist (archive “in divorce with regard to the *arkhé*”).<sup>48</sup> However, as Derrida further writes, Freud thus “raises the stakes,”<sup>49</sup> the search for a fossil or stone that “speaks by itself” fuels archive fever even more, semantic tensions arise between the *arkhé*, *archive*, and *archaeology*. The archaeological exhibit seen at the beginning of the book does not “speak by itself;” it is not an answer, but instead raises many questions (e.g., how it ended up in the museum in Ustrzyki Dolne). It resembles a document found in an archive, the origin of which needs to be checked; it requires deciphering and leads to other archives, other collections. This is how the search for something that would explain the phenomenon of the Bieszczady Mountains begins in *Kiczery*.

Robiński explores the cultural archive, evoking literary descriptions, memories, documents, and tourist guides. He quotes, among others, Aleksander Fredro, Wincenty Pol, Mieczysław Orłowicz, Martin Pollack, Stanisław Kryciński, Andrzej Potocki, and Władysław Krygowski. However, in his archival research, Robiński does not limit himself to intertextual references. The archive which forms the place’s texture in *Kiczery* is more diverse than the one in Szuber’s *cento*. It is not a library or a museum; it is a cabinet of curiosities.

Robiński also refers to Karolina Grzywnowicz’s artistic project entitled *Chwasty* [Weeds] (K, 104–106), and thus the texture of the place is also revealed to include plants. Grzywnowicz literally placed a fragment of a Bieszczady meadow in the Zachęta Gallery in Warsaw. She wanted to draw attention to the archival function of nature – the distribution of weeds allowed her to recreate the layout of former Boyko villages. A desire to archive the last traces of the past also inspired the creation of the Museum of Migration described by Robiński. It is a “traveling institution;” it is housed in a caravan converted into a mobile recording studio. Robiński quotes fragments of testimonies and memories about World War II and the post-war years collected in the museum. Indeed, he actually also creates an oral archive of the Bieszczady Mountains, recording stories told to him by the locals. Memories of the “pioneers,” of Greek refugees in Krościenko, of westerns which were shot in the pastures create the image of the old “wild” Bieszczady Mountains. The reporter also archives contemporary stories in his travel book: for example, stories about looking for “sheds” (i.e., antlers shed by deer), or tourist legends about bear encounters. One story leads to another, determining

<sup>48</sup>Derrida, 91.

<sup>49</sup>Derrida, 91.

the “trajectory of the archival quest,”<sup>50</sup> demonstrating that the image may not be rendered coherent. The reporter-archivist looks at the collected material and observes: “Everyone in the Bieszczady Mountains dreamed of something. Some said they were cowboys, others said that the local forests were bottomless wells and no one in the lowlands would notice if they dried up” (K, 235–236).

Robiński does not only suggest that the Bieszczady archive is a figure of imagination rather than memory,<sup>51</sup> but he also exposes significant gaps in the collection. These gaps do not only exist because archival materials are fragile. To a large extent, they exist because during the times of the People’s Republic of Poland the history of this region, especially the history of World War II and Operation Vistula, was falsified and taboo. The aforementioned manipulations are illustrated by a quote from the extensive *Przewodnik po Polsce* [Guide to Poland] from 1969, in which “[w]hat happened in the valleys, i.e., the displacement of eighty-six thousand non-Polish inhabitants of the Rzeszów Voivodship, was described by the authors as ‘a return to local vegetation patterns’” (K, 157).

The journey through the Bieszczady Mountains in *Kiczery* turns out to be a journey through the nooks and crannies of the local archive or, indeed, a cabinet of curiosities. The archive constructed in the narrative is a site of recording, recording messages and ideas about the place, but also a site of critical reflection. However, the archival quest does not answer the question about the phenomenon of the Bieszczady Mountains but allows one to discover the extremely complicated texture of this place. In Robiński’s book, the cultural archive has a melancholic nature; it awakens desires but fails to fulfill the hopes it inspires. It can be said that it is:

[...] too random and too extensive to be an answer. Loss is hidden in unordered archival collections – the archive houses everything and nothing at the same time, becoming in itself a synonym of melancholic loss.<sup>52</sup>

## The geopoetological detail as an operational concept

Although it is not as popular as, for example, narrative maps, readerly journeys, or toponymic tropes, the cultural archive turns out to be a useful and important concept in literary studies.<sup>53</sup> By entering into relations with other elements which make up a place’s texture, the cultural archive helps one understand and recognize a place, look at it differently, experience it more deeply, truly feel it. It is also a breeding ground for imagination which creates a place,

<sup>50</sup>This phrase comes from Katarzyna Szalewska’s article “Topo-grafie archiwum – o genealogii i melancholii” [Topo-graphies of the archive – genealogy and melancholy], in: *Świadectwa pamięci*, 261.

<sup>51</sup>Szalewska writes about the archive as a figure of imagination, which in postmodern autobiography is “a form which conceptualizes identity,” 259.

<sup>52</sup>Szalewska, 254.

<sup>53</sup>The term “cultural archive” has been used in literary studies by, for example, Jerzy Borowczyk and Krzysztof Skibski: Jerzy Borowczyk, Krzysztof Skibski, “Puste miejsca w przestrzeni, puste miejsca w języku. Wokół Miejsca Andrzeja Stasiuka i dwóch opowiadań Zygmunta Haupta” [Empty places in space, empty places in language. Around *Miejsce* by Andrzej Stasiuk and two short stories by Zygmunt Haupt], *Polonistyka. Innowacje* 8 (2018): 173–190.

either from scratch or anew. In the works of Szuber and Robiński, the cultural archive plays a leading role, and at the same time both authors critically reflect on its make-up. The geopoetological detail draws attention to small parts, to particulars, which are sometimes difficult to find in the archival nooks and crannies, and to the role they play in a place's texture. Also, we cannot but ask questions about the performative and pragmatic dimension of the cultural archive, about the manner in which archival materials are collected, preserved, constructed, and about the purpose of such collections. In each case, the question of choosing and omitting is important. In Szuber's cento, it points to the idealization of the beloved region; respectively, in Robiński's travel book it reveals political manipulations, individual illusions, mythologies, and the essentially phantasmatic nature of the Bieszczady Mountains.

Writing about the contexts of micropoetics, Elżbieta Winiecka indirectly points to the role of details:

Micropoetics goes into textual particles, but also into the cracks between them, attempting to fathom what is unspoken and unspeakable. It is thus not exclusively an art of analysis, but rather, primarily, of interpretation.<sup>54</sup>

The cultural archive in geopoetics is such a particle, a component that matters. It is a metaphorical detail, a kind of a crack through which one can reach the often-difficult matters related to a place. The geopoetological detail demands attention and analysis. Above all, however, as Winiecka writes, it requires interpretation and leads to interpretation.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

<sup>54</sup>Winiecka, "Micropoetics and its contexts", 57.

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# KEYWORDS

Robiński

geopoetics

*a place's texture*

**ABSTRACT:**

The cultural archive is a terminological detail in the dictionary of geopoetics. This is how Elżbieta Rybicka described this indispensable part a place's texture (which is also created by experience and imagination). It is only when we adopt a micro perspective that we see that the cultural archive is as complicated a category as the place itself, and, additionally, it is further re-defined and re-contextualized by the archival turn. I discuss the problems related to the archive, its various types and the role it plays in the conceptualization of the place and identity associated with it, by interpreting the works of Janusz Szuber (*Las wielki i niedźwiedziów dosyć* [The forest is huge and there are enough bears]; *Świadectwo języka* [The testimony of language]) and Adam Robiński (*Kiczery. Podróż przez Bieszczady* [Kiczery. A journey through the Bieszczady Mountains]).

d e t a i l

SZUBER

THE ARCHIVAL TURN

cultural archive

**NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:**

Elżbieta Dutka – prof. dr hab., works at the University of Silesia in Katowice, the Faculty of Humanities (Institute of Literature). She primarily studies contemporary Polish literature. Her research interests center around the issues of space (mythical lands, cities, regions, landscapes, mountains) studied from different perspectives: geopoetics, new regionalism. She is the author of: *Ukraina w twórczości Włodzimierza Odojewskiego i Włodzimierza Paźniewskiego* [Ukraine in the works of Włodzimierz Odojewski and Włodzimierz Paźniewski] (Katowice 2000), *Okolice nie tylko geograficzne. O twórczości Andrzeja Kuśniewicza* [Not only geographical spaces. The works of Andrzej Kuśniewicz] (Katowice 2008), *Zapisywanie miejsca. Szkice o Śląsku w literaturze przełomu wieków XX i XXI* [Recording a place. Sketches about Silesia in literature at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries] (Katowice 2011), *Próby topograficzne. Miejsca i krajobrazy w literaturze polskiej XX i XXI wieku* [Topographical sketches. Places and landscapes in Polish Literature of the 20th and 21st Centuries] (Katowice 2014), *Centra, prowincje, zaułki. Twórczość Julii Hartwig jako auto/bio/geo/grafia* [Centers, provinces, alleys. Julia Hartwig's Works as Auto/Bio/Geo/Graphic] (Kraków 2016), *Pytania o miejsce. Sondowanie topografii literackich XX i XXI wieku* [A Question of Place. Probing literary topographies of the 20th and 21st centuries] (Kraków, 2019). She is the co-editor of collective volumes, including *Proza polska XX wieku. Przeglądy i interpretacje* [20th-century Polish Prose. Reviews and interpretations] (Volume 2, Katowice 2012; Volume 3, Katowice 2014). She published, among others, in collective volumes as part of the *Nowy Regionalizm w Badaniach Literackich* [New Regionalism in Literary Research] series (Universitas). |