

WOJCIECH BROWARNY  
Uniwersytet Wrocławski

## The Scars of Memory: The Biographies of Monument Trees in Central Europe\*

Every tree is subject to biological changes, physical processes and external influences. It also undergoes semantic operations related to the practice of naming, representing and evaluating plants. Monument trees<sup>1</sup> are particularly capacious in terms of symbolism and axiology, with their importance stemming not only from their dendrological features, but also from their historical, social and cultural significance.

This article is devoted to trees seen as objects or carriers of memory about collective trauma. I am primarily interested in trees whose names (patronages), narratives about the past, and historical and national roles (along with the physical condition of these plants) represent such issues as political or military conflicts, border changes, mass migrations, expulsions and purges, ideological

\* The article is the result of, among others, the cooperation with the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Technical University of Dresden and own research conducted in Lusatia and Saxony in June 2022 as a part of the implementation of the University of Wrocław's grant for the study trip (IDUB 32/2022).

1 Monument trees are defined as trees that are the oldest, the thickest, and the tallest, as well as those that are particularly important historically, socially, or culturally (not necessarily natural monuments in the legal sense) (*Rejestr Polskich Drzew...*, accessed: 2023).

or religious antagonisms, and revisions of collective identities. Working on the “biographies” of several Central European trees, treated here as figures or media of memory, I describe traumatic events and processes as well as their changing interpretations.<sup>2</sup> The figure of memory is represented by a tree appearing in a narrative of the past, which figuratively concretizes this narrative in space and time, as well as in a collective system of views and values (e.g. Chrobry Oak in the Polish story about the meeting between the German emperor and the Polish king by this tree). The mediating function of the monument tree consists in its being used to preserve memories, maintain their circulation in social communication and stimulate the memory (e.g. the monumental spruce near Javornik in the Czech Republic, which, as stated in various tourist guides, “survived both world wars”). This type of biomemory can reinforce and record the official historical policy or it can (re)construct the memory landscape;<sup>3</sup> however, in specific circumstances—which is the thesis of the article—it also functions as an alternative history or counter-history, preserving local and regional (other than national) traditions, inspiring cultural practices or tourism, conceptualizing the relationship between the ideological and civilizational and organic perception of the natural environment.

I understand the titular concept of a scar as a metaphor for traumatic memory (trauma in collective memory). In the biological sense, the definition of a scar suggests a wound suffered in the past, the process of healing, the formation of a visible mark on the surface of the skin as a result of a damaged or removed body part, and the physiological mechanism of compensation for a loss or disorder. If these attributes of a scar were transferred to changes in social memory, as represented by biographies of monumental trees, it would be just as vulnerable to external changes, injuries resulting from acts of physical or cultural violence. Traces of this violence would manifest themselves in social memory as semantic cracks, amputations, anomalies, displacements, dead places, relics (residual), conrescences, outgrowths, and branches in the narrative or image of the past, which over time would be overgrown with new

2 The biography of trees can be considered a narrative, not necessarily literary, in which the plant’s past is represented in a biographical convention.

3 Memory landscape is a set of ideas and practices connected to commemorating or recalling, for example, events, works, people, social groups, living entities, and objects in real space, whose meaning and significance are in this way (re)contextualized in relation to the past (Maus 2015: 218). I define biomemory as a set of natural and environmental traces of the past used to construct, store, pass on, and reinterpret social memory (of groups and individuals) in terms of a memory landscape.

meanings and then sealed in temporary interpretations, which are, however, susceptible to successive readings as part of the process of changing the paradigm of memory. With this terminology, I will analyze several dendrological scars of memory that testify to political, cultural or religious violence, which have led to places having been brutally “cleansed” and adapted to new functions, to a dissonance between historical and administrative geography, arbitrary changes in local or regional toponymy, myths, falsifications and misunderstandings present in the general knowledge of history. The metaphor of the scar combines the three basic aspects of biomemory discussed in this article: history, culture and nature, and at the same time emphasizes the mediating function of the organism-monument. A monument tree (or a group of such trees) that has been burned, bombed, mutilated, cut down, forgotten, renamed mediates between a past trauma and its trace (figure) in the current memory, the cultural significance of a place and its natural features, the formal rank of heritage and its real location as part of conservation, economic (forest), administrative, tourist or propaganda practices.

### 1. Scars and splinters of history

Cuts and markings on the surface of smooth and bright beech bark remain visible for years. The Germanic and Slavic name of this tree is associated with a letter or with writing (Brückner 48). One interesting example of a monument beech in Central Europe is the so-called the Political Beech (Politische Buche) in the Niederwartha (Kleditschgrund) district located on the outskirts of Dresden, which has been under protection since 1951 (Schramm 2019). Carved into the surface of its trunk are twentieth-century political symbols, such as the three arrows of the Iron Front, partially covered by a swastika, the abbreviations KPD (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands), SED (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands), and FDP (Freie Demokratische Partei), probably added after the reunification of Germany. The Political Beech is located in a secluded, tree-covered area on a steep slope above a stream, which, as it can be assumed, provided opposition activists a safe space to hold discreet meetings during the Nazi period. The history of this tree was outlined as a kind of political biography by Stefan Schramm:

It was in perfect health during the Third Reich, but it could not emigrate. Its hideout was in the suburbs of Dresden, where it remained undiscovered. The symbol of resistance which it once proudly represented had to give way to the swastika. Then, it lived in East Germany, where it received a party insignia. The last decades until its death were spent

in the united Germany. This reads like a biography with two differences: its hero was never denazified nor was it a person, but a dignified tree with a unique history. (Schramm 2019)



Fig. 1. The Political Beech in Niederwartha, 2022  
(photo: Wojciech Browarny)

The Political Beech is one of nearly 150 natural monuments in Dresden, about half of which are trees. One of them is a tree commemorating the dramatic history of World War II, that is, a pedunculate oak, commonly called Splittereiche, in the impressive, well-maintained and centrally located Großen Garten. The name “splinter oak” recalls the wounds this tree sustained during the Allied bombing of Dresden in February 1945. The Splittereiche represents a key image fostered in Dresden depicting the senseless destruction of the city and the huge number of civilian victims, which in the post-war period shaped a “false” German memory, at least according to the historical policy of the victorious powers and the German Democratic Republic. After the reunification of Germany, this martyrological theme of collective memory permeated the official narrative about the past; this was confirmed in 2017 with a memorial

plaque placed under the tree with a quote from Mark Twain: “Time may heal wounds, but she is a miserable beautician.” Thus, the Splittereiche is a place of commemoration of the German victims of World War II, but also an organic medium of post-memory in Dresden. Despite the passage of decades and the reconstruction of the city, the symbolic and emotional scars of traumatic experiences remain, not only reminding us of the victims and the destruction in the twentieth century, but also reaffirming the veracity of the local myth. The “biography” of the tree monument anchors this myth in a specific and imaginary space, as well as in a fixed image of the past.



Fig. 2. Splinter Oak in Dresden, 2022 (photo: Wojciech Browarny)

In eastern Upper Lusatia, in Henryków near Lubań (Lower Silesian Voivodeship), there is a yew, which is about 1,270 years old (*Rejestr Polskich Drzew...*, accessed: 2023). Comparative data analysis confirms that “Henryk” is the oldest tree in Poland and one of the oldest in Central Europe (Dreslerová 2017: 93–96). Theodor Schube described it during his sightseeing and dendrological expeditions at the beginning of the twentieth century, noting

that the trunk bears traces—according to local records—of sword cuts from the Napoleonic Wars. In 1945, the tree was damaged by Soviet artillery, and a branch of the trunk broke off during a storm in 1989. It was not until 1992 that the Henryk Yew obtained the status of a natural monument and was put under protection. During this period, it began to be mentioned more often in Polish tourist studies. In a sense, “Henryk” is also the descendant of the Piast narrative, because in 2017 the Council of Lubań named the tree after the prince of Jawor and Świdnica, and at the same time the tree became an instrument of contemporary ideological undertakings related to the constant commemoration of the Polish past in the “Recovered Territories.” That the yew had earlier avoided similar legal and symbolic processes may be due to its peripheral geographic location and its late inclusion in the classification of high-ranking Polish natural monuments.



Fig. 3. The Henryk Yew in Henryków Lubański, 2020  
(photo: Wojciech Browarny)

## 2. The stigma of patronage

The thickest oak in Silesia, measuring about 11 meters in diameter at breast height, was to be found near Zabór in the Zielona Góra district. During the period of the People's Republic of Poland, its patron was changed. Teodor Schube, a distinguished Wrocław-based researcher of trees in the region, was replaced by Emperor Napoleon. A metal plaque commemorating Schube was removed (torn off), but it was found in the 1970s and displayed in May 2021 in the Botanical Garden of the University of Zielona Góra. "Napoleon" died and withered away, most likely as a result of arson.<sup>4</sup> The oldest Silesian Chrobry Oak, over 750 years old in the area of Piotrowice near Przemków, burned down in 2014 (probably also set on fire), and then died. "Chrobry" was granted protection in the 1960s and at the beginning of the century it was described and photographed by Schube. In the German period, the tree was called the Fat Oak (*Dicke Eiche*), while its post-war name is associated with a story detailing a meeting between Emperor Otto III and the Polish king. A different version of the origin story was created by Jerzy Wilanowski in *Spotkanie z olbrzymem, czyli "Legenda Chrobrego"* (Meeting with the Giant, or "The Legend of the Brave"). There, the Piast myth is the source of royal patronage, though it is set not in the integral context of the ideology or historiography of the "Regained Territories," but in the polyphonic "biography" of the tree, telling about the complicated history of the region, the experiences of living beings, the environment and the changing names and meanings of the oak (Wilanowski, accessed 2023). The Wilanowski legend also includes the Napoleonic theme of 1813, but the military episode from the past is no more prominent than the everyday life of people and animals.

There are also monument trees in Silesia that did not receive a Polish dendronym after their inscriptions had been removed, along with plaques from memorial boulders (e.g. the currently nameless beech tree in Szczytnicki Park or the tree at Pawłowicki Pond in Wrocław). In a few cases, in forests and remote areas, German monument trees and the occasional boulders accompanying

4 This natural monument was also virtually absent in the public awareness of the Polish people. Sebastian Pilichowski, a researcher from the Botanical Garden of Zielona Góra, wrote: "Despite identifying as a resident of Zielona Góra, despite all the years of study from preschool to university, nobody has ever organized a trip to the nearby Zabór to show us the thickest Polish oak. All the logistic barriers could have been overcome, that is, we could have taken a bus there and then walked the 2–3 km. Unfortunately, I never saw the Napoleon Oak. I can only admire this majestic tree in photographs and other people's memories" (Pilichowski 2021: 8).

them have been left intact (e.g. the inscription on a commemorative boulder lying under an oak near the settlement in Ryczyn was dedicated to the forester Richard Vollack and received the name Raclaw).



Fig. 4. The Napoleon Oak, 2023 (photo: Wojciech Browarny)

The Napoleon Oak and the Chrobry Oak probably fell victim to vandalism or irresponsible behavior that consequently led to it burning down. For mainly political reasons, the names of the patrons of these monument trees were officially changed or removed, in effect blurring the memory of the German past of the “Recovered Territories.” In the 1960s, that is, during the (re)intensification of anti-German propaganda in the Polish People’s Republic, a process of symbolic Polonization was well underway, as a result of which various objects were granted such patrons as Piast kings or other figures related to the Polish national or folk tradition, including, among others, the Napoleonic legend, which was treated as a counter-narrative of the Prussian—and therefore Silesian—collective memory. This “conrescence” of versions of history is still legible in the landscape of memory. A few kilometers from the location of the remains of the fallen “Napoleon” stands the monument tree Black Oak (*Rejestr pomników przyrody...* 2023: 132), next to which there is a historical gravestone with an inscription commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Prussian War of Liberation of 1813. Another oak monument has been preserved in the area of Nowe Miasteczko, named after the French emperor (Siatecki 99).

Ideologically motivated “repolonization” in the post-war period was primarily concerned with trees growing in the main administrative centers of the “Recovered Territories”, metonymically representing the return of these territories to the “mother,” or particularly impressive dendrological specimens in these areas (Chrobry Oak, Napoleon Oak). The reason why there was so much concern for the preservation of these exceptional trees was connected not so much with their natural value as with their adaptability to symbolic Polonization, making them effective tools for representing the national version of the past. Trees of monumental rank in peripheral areas or those that were deemed unsuitable for ideological purposes were often destroyed or neglected and forgotten (even the Henryk Yew had been neglected for a long period in the People’s Republic of Poland). A specific case were Adolf Hitler’s Oaks, patronages granted and marked on occasional boulders during the Nazi period, for example, in Gdańsk, Wrocław and Opole.<sup>5</sup> These trees were physically removed (with the exceptions of the oak in Mosina near Witnica) after the annexation of the “Regained Territories,” leaving no trace in the place where they once stood.

### 3. Life and death concrescences

The most historically and dendrologically valuable monument trees were given “life after death.” The Napoleon Oak was cloned and its genetic copies were planted inside the perimeter of the mother tree and in the ZU Botanical Garden next to the boulder with the recovered Schube plaque. From the acorns of Chrobry Oak, blessed by Pope John Paul II, sprouted several hundred seedlings, which found numerous commemorative applications.<sup>6</sup> The same happened with dozens of seedlings from Henryk Yew seeds, blessed by Pope Benedict XVI, which were planted mainly near the main tree in Henryków Lubański, but also in remote locations (e.g. at the parish church in Książ Mały in Wrocław).

“Henryk,” “Napoleon” and “Chrobry” were copied and reproduced. As reproductions of already dead or dying trees, these young plants, which are their descendants, have now, or will have, the status of a nomadic copy without a concrete, material original. Although seemingly undergoing the process of

5 In April 1933 near the Oppeln Ostbahnhof train station an oak was planted with a commemorative boulder with the inscription “Adolf Hitler Eiche 1933.” This event was described in the “Oppelner Zeitung” (Janowski 2015).

6 The plaque located at the Chrobry Oak by the Szprotawa Forest Management states that the foresters during their pilgrimage to the Vatican in April of 2004 took with them 2.5 kg of acorns from this oak. After being blessed by Pope John Paul II, they gave rise to around 500 seedlings, from then on called Pope’s oaks.

reproduction in the natural environment, these new trees are only organic duplicates of their parent trees; however, as media of memory they are carriers of different meanings, often implemented in other contexts and places. As seeds or seedlings of monumental plants, cleared of their indigenous unique identity (replicated and deterritorialized), which, apart from genes, inherit from their ancestors only the prestige of patronage and origin (from record specimens), they are suitable for various memorial applications. However, their use is actually limited and is part of the Polish modern social contract which posits the following: national and territorial integrity of the state, a centralized administrative structure, the privileged position of the Catholic faith, the depreciating historical role and aspirations of various national, ethnic or religious groups and regional communities in the collective memory. Specific, complete and localized “biographies” of Silesian monument trees—which represent, for example, our knowledge of Prussian history, Protestantism, traditional borders of Central European regions (at the junction of Silesia, Lusatia and Brandenburg, in the area of Zielona Góra)—did not fit into this agreement. “Henryk,” “Chrobry” or “Napoleon” were, therefore, forgotten or neglected, destroyed, renamed, reproduced, allowed to be deterritorialized or be sacralized, which radically changed their meaning as figures or media of collective memory.

The physical scars on trees are signs of past events, but also contain traces of objects that no longer exist. A chapter of twentieth-century history described more broadly in recent years has been the fate of the “post-German” necropolises, considered inactive during the communist period, and as a result have been devastated and then consistently liquidated. This happened, on the one hand, because of the “de-Germanization” policy in the territories taken over in 1945, but, on the other, because of the traumatic experiences of their new Polish inhabitants, who, like the mother of the poet Tadeusz Różewicz, did not want to “lie among the Germans.” Those historical or Jewish necropolises and small forgotten cemeteries that were located in forests, mountains or on the outskirts of small towns survived destruction. Some Catholic and communal cemeteries retained their original function, but most German tombstones were removed. Only in exceptional cases—such as the grave of Carl von Clausewitz (Trzaskowska 146)—were the remains of the deceased exhumed and reinterred elsewhere. Some areas of former German necropolises have for several decades served as parks or as green areas. However, the traces of the defunct cemeteries are clearly visible in the topography of these “polluted landscapes” (Martin Pollack’s term): the characteristic unevenness of the ground surface, the kind of dominant vegetation, and the remnants of utility infrastructure, such as fences, paths or water cisterns. After 1989, in many Polish towns in the “Recovered

Territories,” these areas were commemorated with monuments or plaques as reminders of their previous function (e.g. Common Remembrance Memorial in Grabiszyński Park in Wrocław).

Trees that retain the scars of destroyed graves or cemetery infrastructures can be treated as biomemory media that commemorate dismantled necropolises. Several such cases were recorded in the capital of Silesia. The evangelical cemetery of St. Bernardine parish on Krakowska Street (the burial site of Karl von Holtei) was physically dismantled and cleared during the communist period, but its trees have been partially preserved. One of the trees has grown into the former fence, a material remnant of the topography of this necropolis. In the General Władysław Anders Park, a fragment of a tombstone has survived, wedged between the trunks of maples growing around a stone slab. The inscription on its surface commemorates the sisters Melania Reiche and Franziska Pohl, née Lachinski (*Nowy cmentarz św...*, accessed 2023). In Skowroni Park, which once was also a cemetery, there is a tree with a remaining fragment of a metal fence, typical of the small architecture of former German necropolises (*Nowy cmentarz św...*, accessed 2023). What was supposed to disappear completely and without a trace survived as relics of architecture and sepulchral infrastructure merged with living plant organisms, which, paradoxically, preserved the relationship between culture and nature in the local environment. Cemetery topography, vegetation and tombstones, although their cohabitation is constantly changing along with the life of trees, materially maintain their *status quo ante*, thus reminding us about the previous inhabitants and functions of the city space. If we were to search for a new meaning of indigenouness in the “Regained Territories” in the context of post-humanist and trans-species thought, ideological identification could be replaced by environmental identity. Social groups or individuals could define themselves as autochthonous not in relation to the model image of history or national community, but through the interpretation of their participation in a specific natural and cultural environment in which the changing relationships of biological organisms and inanimate matter open the contemporary experience of space (place) onto both a historical and non-historical perspective.

#### 4. Conclusion

The culture of monument trees is deeply rooted in the modern idea of collective identity and in the legitimization of a group’s claim to exclusive ownership of a given territory and to its version of history. At the time when the idea of nationalism was at its peak, but also earlier, hundreds of trees in Central Europe were dedicated to religious reformers, rulers and political leaders



Fig. 5. A fragment of a tombstone in Anders Park in Wrocław, 2023 (photo: Wojciech Browarny)



Fig. 6. A fragment of a fence once surrounding a grave in Skowroni Park in Wrocław, 2023 (photo: Wojciech Browarny)

(Hrušková 2005; Morgenthal 2016), such as the Hussites, Martin Luther, the Piasts, the Hohenzollerns and Chancellor Otto von Bismarck. Oftentimes, they gave their patronage to lindens, and later also to oaks, thereby mediating the complex relations between Slavic and Germanic cultures as well as between Catholicism and Protestantism in the same lands. Numerous monument trees had a similar function in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. One of the many reasons for the Polish practice of dedicating lindens and oaks to the Piast dynasty (not only in the “Regained Territories”) had to do with the policy of removing traces of the foreign past, both in national and religious terms. The Henryk Yew, which sprouted well before Poland adopted Christianity, and is, therefore, a remnant from the pre-Piast times, was blessed (by the pope) after it was propagated to commemorate Catholic saints or clergy and figures of national public life. The Silesian Chrobry and Napoleon oaks, which grew in Poland only for a fraction of their “biographies,” were subjected to the same biopolitical and symbolic processes. The Political Beech and Splinter Oak told stories that were deemed false. Traces left by events or historical processes on the surface of monumental trees often testify to a different past. These scars are a signature of a counterhistory, a different collective identity, blurred regional or national borders, changed functions of space or devastated natural and cultural heritage, but they are also potentially a figure or a medium of a more inclusive and capacious, living biomemory that is open to change.

## | References

- Brückner, Aleksander. “Buk”. *Słownik etymologiczny języka polskiego*. Kraków: Krakowska Spółka Wydawnicza, 1927. 48.
- Del Buono, Zora. *Das Leben der Mächtigen. Reisen zu alten Bäumen*. Berlin: Matthes und Seitz, 2015.
- Dreslerová, Jaromíra. “Memorial Trees in The Czech Landscape.” *Journal of Landscape Ecology* 2 (2017): 78–108. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jlecol-2017-0019>
- Hahn, Jan. *Śląsk magiczny. Puszcze, knieje, lasy, drzewa*. Katowice: KOS, 2022.
- Heath-Kelly, Charlotte. “Survivor Trees and memorial groves: Vegetal commemoration of victims of terrorism in Europe and the United States.” *Political Geography* 64 (2018): 63–72. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2018.03.003>
- Hrušková, Marie. *Kult stromů v zemích Koruny české*. Praha: Abonent ND, 2005.
- Janowski, Artur. *Oppeln było zakochane w Hitlerze. Do dziś jeździmy po moście powstałym na jego cześć*. i.pl, 26 Jun. 2015. <https://tiny.pl/ckkc7>. Accessed 3 June 2023.

- Kowalski, Michał W. "Czego pomnikiem jest drzewo 'pomnik przyrody'?" *Stan Rzeczy* 2 (2020): 261–297. <https://doi.org/10.51196/srz.19.11>
- Małczyński, Jacek. "Jak drzewa świadczą? W stronę nie-ludzkich figuracji świadka." *Teksty Drugie* 3 (2018): 373–385. <https://doi.org/10.18318/td.2018.3.26>
- Maus, Gunnar. "Landscapes of Memory: A Practice Theory Approach to Geographies of Memory." *Geographica Helvetica* 70 (2015): 215–223. <https://doi.org/10.5194/gh-70-215-2015>
- Morgenthal, Charlotte. *300 Eichen für Martin Luther*. Luther 2017, 19 Jul. 2016. <https://tiny.pl/ckkw3>. Accessed 3 June 2023.
- Nowy cmentarz św. św. Salvatora i Jana. Polska-org.pl. <http://tinyurl.com/2au49a92>. Accessed 3 June 2023.
- Pilichowski, Sebastian. "Wstęp. Ochrona przyrody i człowiek – ocean inspiracji i trudnych wyborów." *Przyroda nie zna granic – ochrona przyrody polsko-niemieckiego pogranicza*. Ed. Sebastian Pilichowski. Zielona Góra: Lasergraf Uniwersytet Zielonogórski, 2021. 3–13.
- Plit, Florian. *Krajobrazy kulturowe w geografii polskiej. Szkice*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie Dialog, 2016.
- Praczyk, Małgorzata. "Granice przyrody. Natura pogranicza polsko-niemieckiego w perspektywie imagologicznej." *Porównania* 2 (2017): 91–103. <http://dx.doi.org/10.14746/p.2017.21.13959>
- Rejestr Polskich Drzew Pomnikowych*. Sekcja Drzew Pomnikowych Polskiego Towarzystwa Dendrologicznego. <https://www.rpdp.hostingasp.pl>. Accessed 3 June 2023.
- Rejestr pomników przyrody województwa lubuskiego. Stan na 3 lutego 2023 roku*. Regionalna Dyrekcja Ochrony Środowiska w Gorzowie Wielkopolskim. <https://tiny.pl/ckkw8>. Accessed 3 June 2023.
- Rybicka, Elżbieta. "Biopamięć (pomiędzy etnobotaniką a bio regionalizmem)." *Regionalizm literacki – historia i pamięć*. Eds. Zbigniew Chojnowski, Elżbieta Rybicka. Kraków: Universitas, 2017. 484–498.
- Siatecki, Alfred. *Szósty klucz do bramy. Rozmowy nieautoryzowane albo nieobyte o przeszłości Środkowego Nadodrza*. Muzeum Ziemi Lubuskiej, Zielona Góra. *Spod ziemi patrzy Breslau*. <https://www.facebook.com/spodziemipatrybreslau/>. Accessed 3 June 2023.
- Schramm, Stefan. *Ein geschichtliches Zeugnis stirbt—die Politische Buche in Niederwartha*. Dresden Neueueste Nachrichten, 18 Feb. 2019. <https://tiny.pl/ckkwn>. Accessed 3 June 2023.
- Smykowski, Mikołaj. "Hibakujumoku – drzewa, które przeżyły. Ekologiczne dziedzictwo bombardowań atomowych w Hiroshimie i Nagasaki." *Teksty Drugie* 3 (2018): 386–398. <https://doi.org/10.18318/td.2018.3.27>

Trzaskowska, Grażyna. “Nie przysypywać pni drzew!’. Likwidacja wrocławskich cmentarzy w latach 60. i 70. oraz jej skutki”. *Śląski Kwartalnik Historyczny Sobótka* 1 (2020): 123–159.

Ubertowska, Aleksandra. *Historie biotyczne. Pomiędzy estetyką a geotraumą*. Warszawa: IBL PAN, 2020.

Wilanowski, Jerzy. *Spotkanie z olbrzymem, czyli “Legenda Chrobrego.”* Nadleśnicstwo Szprotawa. <http://tinyurl.com/5b3ne2z9>. Accessed 3 June 2023.

Zarzyński, Paweł, Tomusiak Robert, Borkowski Krzysztof. *Drzewa Polski: najgrubsze – najstarsze – najsłynniejsze*. Warszawa: PWN, 2016.

## | Abstract

WOJCIECH BROWARNY

### The Scars of Memory: The Biographies of Monument Trees in Central Europe

The author of the article examines monument trees, representing in history and culture traumatic social experiences. Using examples from Central Europe, he describes specific trees and their close environment (surroundings), looking for traces of dramatic events or processes from the past. On this basis, he reconstructs the biomemory of the region, which stores the “scars” of military conflicts, political violence, expulsions or cultural cleansings. The author argues that biomemory can function as an alternative history or counterhistory, preserve local tradition, inspire social practices, and conceptualize the relationship between the ideological, civilizational and organic perception of the natural environment.

**Keywords:** monument trees, Central Europe, trauma, biomemory

## | Bio

Wojciech Browarny—professor at the University of Wrocław, where he specializes in history of literature, regionalism and literary criticism. He is the head of 20th- and 21st-Polish Literature Department as well as the Regional Studies Centre in the Institute of Polish Philology. His academic interests center on Polish literature, the Silesian cultural heritage, and the relationship between history, culture and the natural environment. He is a member of the Committee of Literary Studies of the Polish Academy of Science, a member of the jury for the Central European “Angelus” Literary Award. He has authored the following books: *Tadeusz Różewicz and Modern*

*Identity in Poland since the Second World War* (2019), *Historie odzyskane. Literackie dziedzictwo Wrocławia i Dolnego Śląska* (2019), *W drodze. Wrocław śladami Tadeusza Różewicza* (2021), *Anatomia nowoczesnego regionu. O związkach środowiska, kultury i pamięci* (2023) and edited *Wybór prozy* by Tadeusz Różewicz (BN 2021).

E-mail: wojciech.browarny@uwr.edu.pl

ORCID 0000-0002-4829-2351