

Crumbled images, disturbed places

Sketches on 21st-century Polish prose

SUMMARY

The volume *Crumbled images, disturbed places* brings together texts devoted to 21st-century Polish literature that explores the relationship between people and place. These sketches contain reflections on the cultural exploration of space and how its images function in the collective consciousness and communal memory. Contemporary works addressing this issue reveal the transformations taking place in the processes of identity formation (both individual and collective) and in strategies for utilising cultural heritage. The authors' work is not merely an artistic exploration of reality; their aim is to challenge existing stereotypes, clichés and the conventions involved in creating its literary and documentary representations. The retelling of stories and summoning voices once marginalised, distorted or invalidated also has a cognitive, (self-)therapeutic and ethical dimension.

The texts included in the book are divided into three parts. The first of these, *(Un)discovered*, deals with prose on rural spaces. Among other topics, it examines in detail the factors shaping the most recent interest in the heritage of peasant culture, which is referred to as the 'folk-' or 'plebeian turn'. The focus also extends to issues such as the coming-of-age prose produced within this movement, the civilisational changes that exert a destructive impact on the modern-day countryside, strategies for appropriating and co-opting selected elements of tradition, and the various ways past time is depicted. Part Two, entitled *(Un)revealed*, is dedicated to works about places that preserve the memory of the Jewish presence in Polish territories. Closer examination is given to the changes in the portrayal of the Holocaust since the year 2000, the mythologised space of Drohobych as a special symbol of a lost shared history, as well as to works about places written by Israeli authors with family ties to the territory of the Second Polish Republic, and also contemporary visions of the Polish-Jewish past, both pre-war and during the occupation. Part Three, *(Un)tamed*, contains reflections on the accounts of new residents settling into the lands incorporated into Poland as a result of the Yalta agreements. Contemporary accounts of relations with regions once referred to as the 'Recovered Territories' reveal the scale of the problems – previously repressed from the collective consciousness – that emerged during the settlement of foreign lands. For the generation of grandchildren, the

descendants of former repatriates and settlers, restoring the memory of the ambiguous past of these places and the fates of their own ancestors proves particularly vital.

Adopting various perspectives in the analyses and interpretations conducted here – through a series of zooms in and out – as well as the varying focus of the research strategies employed and the fragmented nature of the enquiry serves a dual purpose. On the one hand, it demonstrates the open (and future-oriented) nature of the subject under investigation; on the other, it confirms that today it is precisely these ‘fragmented images’ – cultural texts and their often highly divergent interpretations – that help us reach the ‘disturbed places’ that have lost their once culturally entrenched meanings. Moreover, focusing on the emotional, emancipatory and educational dimensions of the works under analysis is intended to bring us closer to understanding the complex essence of the problem.

Translated by Rob Pagett