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 DOI: 10.35765/pk.2024.4502.01

Transformations: Time in Culture, Literature, and Language

“What, then, is time? There can be no quick and easy answer, for it is no simple matter even to understand what it is, let alone find words to explain it,” asserts St. Augustine in his *Confessions* (XI, 14, 263–264). It is perhaps surprising that, after nearly two millenia since the composition of the philosophical treatise, we still ponder time. This volume of the *Perspectives on Culture* [*Perspektywy Kultury*] continues the inquiry by engaging in a dialogue upon time and transformation discernible in social, cultural, and literary space.

Volume 45, 2024/2, of the *Perspectives on Culture* entitled “Transformations: Time in Culture, Literature, and Language” includes 23 thematic articles in Polish or English. The inner structure of the volume follows that in St. Augustine’s *Confessions*, opening with a discussion regarding atemporality that extends beyond the human experience of time and continuing with ever more nuanced observations upon transience and the individual.

Chapter 1, “Transformation within Time: the Earth [Transformacja w czasie: Planeta],” contains four articles, whose Authors attempt to define the nature of the relation between the time measured by the clock and the geological time of the Earth. Maxim Shadurski explores the timescape perspective in the contemporary novel. As the scholar observes, the culturally inflected notions of human time collide with the Earth’s nonlinear temporal orders. It is argued that the narratives of the threshold engage with multitemporality which, in the texts under investigation, acquires a distinct chronotopic and narrative expression. The hopelessness of the human life as lived in the Anthropocene is the subject of the second article in the section. Its author, Michał Kisiel, focuses upon time experience and unorthodox vitalism permeating Tadeusz Kantor’s theatre of death. Kisiel discusses a convoluted figure of the future, or rather, of the so-called “poor future,” by suggesting a coexistence of human life with alien temporalities. Another drama scholar, Aleksandra Kamińska, pivots her discussion around the human, the Earth, and the Anthropocene, and observes that, due to the vastness of geological time, contemporary man not only

faces climate crisis, but also a crisis of imagination. This, she argues, may be overcome in theatre where various timelines collide, with the collision enabling the viewer to grasp the significance of the sweeping changes in the contemporary world. Attention to the Earth remains the focus in the final article in this section. As Asia Battiloro observes, Joseph Conrad managed to discuss the devastating alterations to the Earth as early as at the beginning of the twentieth century. The scholar argues that, in Conrad's narrative under discussion, time acquires a double analytical meaning, namely historical and biocolonial. Whereas the former engages with capital investment, the latter offers a new perspective upon Conrad's work read as a narrative of the Plantationocene. Thus, Conrad sounds as the voice of reason, calling us to consider technological progress and biocolonial change a serious danger to modern man and the Earth.

Chapter 2, "Transformation within Time: Christianity: [Transformacja w czasie: Chrześcijaństwo]," contains articles pertaining to European Christian legacy. Aleksander Gomola opens the section with his reading of the Septuagint, i.e., the earliest Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, which he rightly considers a foundational text for Christianity. While a detailed linguistic examination of selected fragments uncovers the etymological and semantic implications in the Greek text, the discussion involving music and the arts in its scope of reference highlights the significance of the Septuagint as a lasting cultural repository for the European mind. Considered a "linguistic time capsule," the Greek Bible is also a field of reference for the next scholar, Agnieszka Cierpich-Kozieł, who investigates the English language in the context of multinationality and linguistic transformation performed by various people and nations. The Biblical parable of the Babel Tower provides the conceptual starting point for a diachronic examination of the gradual development of the English language as a *lingua franca*. In the following article, Joanna Nowińska also approaches the Bible, or, more precisely, the New Testament, in her discussion regarding the conceptualisation of temporality in the Book of Revelation of St. John. The scholar elaborates on both the etymological nuances of the Semitic thought as verbalized with *koine* and the conceptual mechanics discernible in the Biblical polisensory imagery engaging with time and transience. The section closes with an article by Yanina Ryier who discusses the transformation visible in the image of the Christian performed during the Middle Ages. Based on the chronicles of the Teutonic Order, the study examines the processes of Christianisation in the Eastern Europe that evolved over time and space.

"Transformation within Time: Society [Transformacja w czasie: Społeczeństwo]" is the focus of Section 3. It opens with Mirosława Buchholtz's investigation of social transformation as performed in the

nineteenth century in Europe and the United States. Henry James's 1886 social novels, *The Bostonians* and *The Princess Casamassima*, are argued to have challenged their readers with their social worlds including such characters as the Bostonian proto-feminists or, perhaps uncharacteristically of James, London's lower classes, respectively. Buchholtz posits that the unusual thematic scopes, including socially active young women alongside daring anarchists and nihilists, were indeed the signs of the times in which reality had begun to significantly change following the ever accelerating pace of life. This unprecedented acceleration is the main theme of the subsequent article, whose author, Sylvia Janina Wojciechowska, addresses such issues as progress and globalisation as explored by Joseph Conrad. Wojciechowska observes that Conrad, a friend of Henry James, also pondered the ongoing transformation and commented upon its consequences discernible both ashore and at sea and thematised in his autobiographical *The Mirror of the Sea*. The final article in this section continues the discussion of Conrad's maritime chronicle by elaborating on the changing interrelation between man and nature. Its author, Brygida Pudełko, argues that the transformation performed over time and marked in the relation of modern man and his natural surroundings was indeed a major field of investigation of writers directly witnessing the change, such as Joseph Conrad and Ivan Turgenev.

The next section narrows the time perspective down to the single individual. "Transformation within Time: the Individual [Transformacja w czasie: Jednostka]" begins with an article by Dominika Ruszkiewicz who argues that Geoffrey Chaucer's medieval poetry constitutes a valuable field of investigation for those interested in the philosophy of attention. By engaging with *prosoche*, i.e., the ability to concentrate upon the present moment, Chaucer is argued to be a poet promoting the idea of attentive reflection on individual life transforming over time and in relation to both other people and the cosmos. A similar sensitivity towards the issue of inner transformation of an individual is discussed by Jarmila Mildorf who investigates its contemporary prose representations. Mildorf argues that Candia McWilliam's memoir, *What to Look for in Winter: A Memoir in Blindness*, constitutes a literary attempt at transforming certain devastating life experiences in the act of writing. Thus, time past appears as re-defined in relation to both past and present, serving as an overarching metaphor for transformations of the self over time. Mildorf aptly shows that a highly complex literary autobiography in which life storytelling meshes with metanarrative reflection may become a valuable field of investigation of time-related concerns. The next featured scholar, Urszula Gołębiewska, takes up the issue of auto-narration from a somewhat different viewpoint by exploring the limitations of self-narrative.

Gołębiowska reads Michael Ondaatje's recent novel, *Warlight*, as a narrative problematising the idea of a simple recreation of life as a source of identity and self-understanding. Given the impact of deep time and of the nonhuman context on narrative and subjectivity, Ondaatje's narrative allegedly shifts away from the anthropocentric focus on transience and human perspective as found in self-narratives. The final article in the section also addresses the issue of transience and biographical time. Grzegorz Koneczniak explores these issues in drama writing. Posited against the framework of existentialism, Koneczniak's comparative study of two Irish dramas, Marina Carr's *Ariel* and John Millington Synge's *Riders to the Sea*, examines the loci of invariance and their transformations with reference to themes, characters' roles, and their relationships which develop over time.

Section 5, "Transformation within Time: Narration [Transformacja w czasie: Narracja]," addresses narratology. Arkadiusz Misztal opens the discussion with an examination of entropy as applied by Pynchon in his examinations of lived time and "local temporalities." Misztal argues that transitions from order to disorder affect narrative representations of time and temporal experience, thus portraying alternative temporalities in contemporary novels. The next article continues the reflection upon the handling of time in the novel, with the novelist this time being Joseph Conrad again. With reference to McTaggart's theory of time (1908), which negotiates time as an independent category, Anna Szczepan-Wojnarska examines Conrad's *An Outcast of the Islands* for its representation of the temporal dimension that, while generally governed by the cause-effect logic, may occasionally remain virtually ungoverned and unpredictable as is the case, she argues, with the protagonist, Peter Willems. Szczepan-Wojnarska concludes that, ultimately, such handling of time connotes the life and actions of the gambler. Another scholar, Grażyna Maria Teresa Branny, also comments on unpredictability in an article that thematises the epistemological transformation in one of Conrad's short stories, *The Idiots*. Branny argues that understatement and denegation both lay the foundations for Conrad's prose which is intertextually close to the narratives by William Faulkner. With time in the focus of the analysis, another Conradian specialist, Joanna Skolik, ventures to term Conrad as "the time Lord." Next to contingency and time shifts, Skolik examines the Conradian method of the so-called delayed decoding and views this particular technique as a token of Conrad's expertise in rendering the human experience of living in time.

The ultimate section in the Volume, "Transformation within Time: Form [Transformacja w czasie: Forma]," is similarly centred around formal issues, the major question being the transformation of the form of expression. Looking back to the Renaissance, Marta Gibińska expertly

argues that William Shakespeare's artistic play with form contributed to the immense popularity of the tragicomedy in Europe of his days. The scholar examines the interlacement of various genres within several plays by Shakespeare and posits that such a generic mixture betokens the overall transformation which the Europeans were undergoing in times of early modernity. The two following articles continue with the examination of form in theatre and prose, respectively. While in the former Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech discusses the use of the media in several contemporary stage adaptations of the literary canon, in the latter, Krystyna Zabawa addresses the graphic novel. In their analyses, both scholars concentrate upon the transformations of the narratives originally composed at the turn of the twentieth century, that is on Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*, respectively. The final article in the Volume comments upon the changing literary tastes the readers. Anna Dybiec delves into the nuances of word selection in literary translation and, with reference to a short story by Charles Dickens, she shows how linguistic choices have impacted upon the reception of the literary text under investigation.

"What, then, is time?" asks St. Augustine in his *Confessions* again and adds: "I know well enough what it is, provided that nobody asks me; but if I am asked what it is and try to explain, I am baffled" (XI, 14, 264). This Volume attempts to formulate an answer to the issue which St. Augustine once considered the major challenge to the human mind, namely, the nature of time pondered from the perspective of the ever transforming reality.

REFERENCES

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