



You have downloaded a document from  
**RE-BUŚ**  
repository of the University of Silesia in Katowice

**Title:** "Genius loci" or (in)habiting words

**Author:** Adam Dziadek

**Citation style:** Dziadek Adam. (2010). "Genius loci" or (in)habiting words. W: B. Malska, K. Wojcieszuk (red.), "Genius loci" : mappa della ricerca = mapa badań = research map" (S. 83-85). Katowice : Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego.



Uznanie autorstwa - Użycie niekomercyjne - Bez utworów zależnych Polska - Licencja ta zezwala na rozpowszechnianie, przedstawianie i wykonywanie utworu jedynie w celach niekomercyjnych oraz pod warunkiem zachowania go w oryginalnej postaci (nie tworzenia utworów zależnych).



UNIwersYTET ŚLĄSKI  
W KATOWICACH



Biblioteka  
Uniwersytetu Śląskiego



Ministerstwo Nauki  
i Szkolnictwa Wyższego

---

## *Genius loci* or (in)habiting words

What does *genius loci* represent for contemporary man, who the postmodern world exposes to the experience of atopia or Non-Place, the *Non-Lieu* described so well by Marc Augé in his introduction to surmodernity<sup>1</sup>. In antiquity *genius loci* was conceived of in terms of a friendly and caring space, a unique space impossible to imitate or replicate, the space with which we can identify to such a degree that it is best referred to as “I”.

By (in)habiting words I mean two kinds of experience: poetic (in which I read and/or compose poetry) and philological (in which I transcend the stage of mere “understanding” of a word and start appreciating and loving it). In the poetic experience a word is approached with a particular sensitivity to something which we would like to call the biology and history concealed in words, and hence a poem becomes a luminescent masterpiece, shining, like a multifaceted diamond, with a myriad of meanings.

From this perspective it is perhaps easier to understand Baudelaire’s phrase which maintains that “La poésie, elle aussi, brûle nos étapes” and thus helps us to see why (in)habiting poetry

---

<sup>1</sup> M. AUGÉ: *Non-Lieux. Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité*. Paris 1992.

is bound to be problematic. To understand the poetic word is not only to read it but also to disclose its history and its liveliness. Although written down, scripted, it is by no means dead but, called into being with strenuous efforts, it will last because it has its body, its own biological life, its own morphology which reaches beyond grammar. Every vowel and consonant matters, and so do each accent, each prosodic feature, articulation, and the piercing “rhythm-shibboleth” without which there is no access to the poetic word. Thus, a history of the word is not confined to its linguistic mutations and evolutions; it is a history of individual beings but also of nations and whole civilizations.

*Genius loci* – it is Baudelaire’s Paris which we have to see to meaningfully approach his poetry, but it is also Hölderlin’s Laufen on a cloudy day when vineyards on high banks of the Neckar look like Egyptian pyramids. But also in T.S. Eliot’s London with its views of the Thames: “The river sweats/ Oil and tar/ The barges drift/ With the turning tide/ Red sails/ Wide.../ Weialala leia/ Wallala leialala...”. We find *genius loci* in Paul Celan’s ellipsis and *Gespräch im Gebirg*, and also in his knowledge of the fact that the absolute poem does not exist. With Marina Cvetayeva *genius loci* makes us discover the truth that all poets are Jews; in Adam Zagajewski’s *View of Delft* there also lurks *genius loci*:

Houses, waves, clouds, and shadows  
 (dark blue roofs, russet bricks)  
 At long last you have become only a gaze

Unrestrained, shining with the black  
 Tranquil pupils of things.

You will outlast our admiration, our weeping  
 And our noisy sordid wars.

Finally, *genius loci* is a honeysuckle in my garden, planted there, how could it be otherwise, under the influence of the poetry of Czesław Miłosz.

From this perspective experiencing the word, (in)habiting it, is one of the most beautiful experiences which can happen to a human being. My *genius loci* is a poetic word which I, a philologist, have always loved, which I have always inhabited, and in which I will always remain homeless.

*Adam Dziadek*