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Post-colonial Poland – (Im)possible Project.

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We were many, from Jassy and Koloshvar, Wilno and Bucharest,
Saigon and Marrakesh
Czesław Miłosz, *Bypassing Rue Descartes*

Is there then a world
where I rule absolutely on fate?
Wisława Szymborska, *The Joy of Writing*

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1.

Why is Polish literature not recognized as post-colonial? There exist at least two answers to that question. But before providing those answers, we need to specify what we understand by the term "post-colonialism."

"Post-colonialism" within the realm of literary studies, contrary to its initial, political meaning, does not delineate a new era, "after colonialism," in the history of literature. It is a term from the field of literary theory, not the history of literature. If one were to talk about post-colonialism in the categories of periodization, the most appropriate definition would probably reference distrust toward the "progress" that marks the colonial era in the

western world.[1] Such distrust assumes distance which prohibits post-colonialism from being equated with decolonization, a process that has lasted throughout nearly the entire 20th century. It was started in the territories conquered by Western empires, emerging as independent from European powers. Therefore, what is "post-colonialism"? It is a perspective that strives to understand and analyze complex cultural phenomena connected to colonization and to place it within various systems of reference: literary historical, socio-political, ethnographic, anthropological, religious, geographic, as well as economic frames of reference. The post-colonial point of view is based on the conviction that the experience and/or idea of colonization shapes the presentation of reality by both imperial writers and writers representing nations and communities that were subjugated. Common to all these experiential phenomena is a deeply embedded imperial foundation, which leads, in the case of former, to an apology or tolerant attitude in relation to acts of colonization, and in the case of the latter – to the resistance or adaptation.

Post-colonialism – as opposed to anti-colonialism, which similarly questions the hegemony of colonial empires – does not frame cultural relations between the colonizers and colonized in simple bi-polar categories, but recognizes the complexity of these systems and interrelations existing between them.[2] Post-colonial criticism's goal is to examine the cultural effects of colonization that include both works belonging to the "center," as well as to the "peripheries," both from the period of colonization and its aftermath. It strives to grasp artistic representations of the mechanisms of power present in imperial discourse or to reconstruct the image of the "Other" in that very discourse, as well as to recognize and interpret the strategy with which writers and poets of the former colonies deconstruct the mythical image imposed on them by narrations of their metropolis. Tracing the cultural mechanisms of the empires, as well as their heritage in literature and other discourses of the metropolis and its peripheries – this is the main area of interest for post-colonial politics. That kind of critique goes back, as we can see, moves between older and contemporary texts. It proposes reading works by excavating meanings created imprinted with the effects of colonization. This is a "distrustful" reading which leads to revealing hidden imperial ideologies within literary discourse, as well as the cultural processes that are its product.[3]

1 See *Postcolonial Criticism*, edited by B. Moore-Gilbert, G. Stanton, W. Maley, London-New York: Longman, 1997, 2.

2 See Bassnett, S. *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction*, Blackwell, Oxford, UK-Cambridge, USA, 1993, 78.

3 Compare a definition of the *post-colonial reading* in: Ashcroft, B., G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin *Postcolonial Studies The Key Concepts*, London–New York: Routledge, 2000, 192-193.

This essay will not attempt to describe the entire complex of problematics formulated by post-colonial criticism. It is worth to recognizing, however, the magnitude of the phenomenon, as well as the interpretative possibilities of that perspective. In an introduction to classical post-colonial work entitled *The Empire Writes Back*, we read the following:

> More than three-quarters of the people living in the world today have had their lives shaped by the shared experience of colonialism. It is easy to see how important this has been in the political and economic spheres, but its general influence on the perceptual frameworks of contemporary peoples is often less evident. Literature offers one of the most important ways in which these new perceptions are expressed...[4]

2.

Let us go back to our initial question. The first possible answer points to the seemingly methodological, but ideological in point of fact, character of the source of Poland's absence in post-colonial discourse. The answer finds its explication in an article by Clare Cavanagh.[5] The post-colonial critique, according to Cavanagh, is to a large extent (but not entirely, which we will discuss soon) in both its lineage, as well as its scholarly practice a current related to Marxism that is still popular at American universities – the main bastion of post-colonialism. Marxism found a fraught expression in the form of Soviet communist ideology and totalitarianism – and so, in a conviction that is not spoken out loud, but common among the post-colonial critics with a left-wing leanings – it would be untactful to apply this approach to Russia (long praised by the Western, and particularly American, humanities and remembered as the spokesman for the colonized peoples of Africa and Asia on the UN floor). It would constitute an act of methodological suicide – recognizing the Soviet empire and conquered countries as its colonies.

The post-Soviet sphere does not seem to fit entirely within the post-colonial paradigm of American critics. However, this is only a matter of appearance. As Said observes: "Unlike Britain or France, which jumped thousands of miles beyond their own borders to other continents, Russia moved to swallow whatever land or peoples stood next to its borders, which in the process kept

4 Ashcroft, B., G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*, p. 1, London–New York: Routledge, 2002.

5 "Postkolonialna Polska. Biała plama na mapie teorii" ["Post-colonial Poland"] in *Teksty Drugie*, vol. 2-3, 2003, 60-71.

moving farther and farther east and south"[6] – as well as west, of course. The question of Soviet conquests as classic examples of colonization deserves the treatment of a historian.

The second reason is slightly more complicated. That is why we need to pay even more attention because its acknowledgement allows us to realize why Ireland is recognized as a post-colonial country, while Poland is not. The decision was not based on the fact that Great Britain did not support its conquests though Marxist ideology or by masking its imperial actions by characterizing itself as a defender of militarily weaker ethnic groups, as the USSR tended to do. The true answer can be found elsewhere, in the archaic structure of Slavic studies in the United States. The imperial model created in the 1950s that favors the metropolis while marginalizing the peripheries (nations deprived of independence) is still at work in the university. It reminds us of the situation in which, at the beginning of the 1980s, the literature of former British colonies was, for a long time, pushed to the margins of English-language literary studies by both British and American scholars who would either ignore or appropriate literary traditions other than those designated as "purely" British.[7] Dominated by the legions of historians of Russia and the USSR, as well as scholars of Russia raised in the cult of Pushkin, Tolstoy, and the Russian ballet, American Slavic studies continually minimized the importance of the literature of Central-Eastern Europe, which lead to a preservation of their unequal status in relation to "great" Russian literature. This approach only strengthened an imperial vision of culture, a vision with which the scholars of English, French or Spanish dealt with long ago. We need to add that Slavic studies, in its current state (with rare exceptions), turns out to be unprepared for a discussion about the methodologies of Said, Gayatri Spivak, or Lella Ghandi. After looking at the main journals of Slavic studies in the United States, it is not difficult to understand how the Russo-centric perspective effectively mutes voices dedicated to the cultures of other languages and nations: in particular, "Slavic and East European Journal" and "Slavic Review." The assumed point of view in those journals leaves very little space for studies on what happened in the part of Europe that was under the shadow of Moscow until very recently. The explanations of American and partly Western European scholars are rather unconvincing in claiming that the lack of interest in the literature of Eastern Europe from international humanities scholars is principally due to a "lack of linguistic competences necessary to study them."[8] The minor interest in the

6 Said, E. W., *Culture and Imperialism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1993, 10.

7 Brydon, D., H. Tiffin *Decolonizing Fictions*, Dangaroo Press, Sydney 1993, 7.

8 *Comparative Literature: Matter and Method*, edited by A. Owen Aldridge, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1969, 2-3.

matter that can be found among American Slavic scholars is generally followed by a strong conviction about the great "delicacy" with which the post-colonial subject should be treated regarding the former USSR and its satellite countries. Who does not follow the protocol risks being ostracized by society.

Seen from this angle, the work of the American Slavic scholar Ewa Thompson, *Imperial Knowledge*, is a breakthrough in the field of studies on Russian literature.[9] Its meaning for the questions posed in this article is impossible to overestimate. Firstly, what is particularly important for Polish critics and scholars, Thompson has proven her thesis and demonstrated that a post-colonial critique can be practiced without relying on Marxist ideology. Among the various important conclusions for a post-colonial interpretation of Polish literature by Thompson, two should be listed: recognition of the imperial myth as an idea penetrating the works of Russian prose and poetry in the 19th and 20h centuries, as well as the description of the strategies of representation that helped this literature generate a suggestive image of outstanding Russians and Russia and thereby impressed the West with its culture and suffering, while simultaneously creating a stereotypical image of colonized nations (including Poles). Thompson points to the fact that despite curious similarities between the mechanisms of hegemony in the discourse about "Others" in the works of Russian and British writers

> Interpreting Russian literary texts as fundamentally free from being engaged in its military actions, Russian and western commentators fall prey to the spectacular ability of those texts to avoid the look of a critic that could reveal their work for the empire. Russian literature achieved an amazing success in leading, prompting and managing the discourse about itself in a way that allowed it to avoid going under the scrutiny of research that the post-colonial scholars imposed on the British, French, or other Western literatures.[10]

3.

Does the post-colonial view on the literature of Russia and the USSR proposed in *Imperial Knowledge* find its parallel in the works dedicated to other Slavic literature? Not entirely, although filling up the "blank spot" on the post-colonial map through sketching the outline of Poland's borders would not

9 R.F. Starr highlighted the fact in his review, "National Identity and Expansionism," (*Modern Age*, Fall 2000), 408-410.

10 Thompson, E.M. *Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism*, Westport, CT and London: Greenwood, 2000.

be without precedence in American Slavic studies. Such precedence exists with respect to another country from the former "Eastern Block" – Bulgaria. Roumiana Deltcheva, an American Slavic scholar of the Bulgarian origin, devoted a number of essays to contemporary Bulgarian literature, identifying traces and marks left on the worldview of Balkan writers (for example, Viktor Paskov) by the presence of the Soviet colonizer, as well as by his disappearance.[11] Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, a Canadian scholar born in Hungary, on the margins of his cultural studies, as well as comparative work pertaining to the varying literature of Central Europe, writes about Soviet colonization as a peculiar experience common to many countries of the region, which demands a post-colonial perspective. In order to describe the experience, he introduces his own concept of the "filtered type of colonialism," distinguishing it from the "classic" incarnation of the phenomenon. According to Tötösy, Soviet colonialism, as opposed to the British or French variety, was supposed to have a secondary character and realize itself with the help of ideological, political, social, and cultural means.[12] One can debate this view, since it could be difficult to identify, perhaps with the exception of Yugoslavia or Romania, meaningful differences between the overseas conquests of Great Britain and political and military expansions of the USSR in our region. What is more, Tötösy talks about a second direction in which the colonization of the countries to the east of the Oder River progressed (and still progress). It is an intellectual colonization that has its central hubs in the cultural centers of the West, including Germany, France, and Great Britain, as well as, to a continuously greater extent, the United States. And so, according to the scholar, the most recent history of our region would be the scene of a clash between opposing forces in culture, stemming from two centers: Western and Eastern, pointing to the "periphery" that is Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, etc. Central-Eastern Europe would thereby constitute a region that has a status of a dual periphery, according to current post-colonial theory: from the perspective of the West (as a sphere for the export of ideas and not their fair exchange) and the East (a territory to be conquered in the most literal sense). Without a doubt, the inferiority, or more precisely the

11 See Deltcheva, R. "East Central Europe as a Post-Coloniality: The Prose of Viktor Paskov," in *Colonizer and Colonized. Vol. 2 Of the Proceedings of the XV Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association "Literature as Cultural Memory," Leiden, 16-22 August 1997. (Text Studies in Comparative Literature 26.)*, 589-598, edited by T. D'Haen and P. Krüs, Rodopi, Amsterdam–Atlanta 2000 (*"The Difficult Topos In-Between: The East Central European Cultural Context as a Post- Coloniality,"* in *Sarmatian Review*, vol. 18, no. 3, 1998)

12 Tötösy de Zepetnek, S. *Comparative Literature: Theory, Method, Application*, Amsterdam–Atlanta: Rodopi, 1998, 131-132.

complex of inferiority, constitutes a characteristic cultural image of the cultures and societies of nations that were under the USSR's dominion until recently.[13] In order to describe this phenomenon, Tötösy introduces the notion of a "peripheriality that results from suspension, from being 'between,'" an in-between peripheral zone, as characteristic of the literary discourse of the region. Peripheriality is yet another post-colonial category which produces interesting results when used in the interpretation of literary works of the former colonies produces interesting results.[14]

Tomislav Longinović, a Slavic studies scholar with Serbian roots, in his study dedicated to the culture of the borderland and the politics of identity based on selected works of literature, traces the constructs of identity based on an awareness of the borderland in Gombrowicz's work, amongst others.[15] His study is poorly anchored in post-colonial methodology, however, and as a result it is hard to characterize his interpretations as representative of that approach. His book makes us aware of certain problems that a comparativist interested in a literary work of Central-Eastern Europe might encounter: 1) the danger of pan-Slavic ambitions and simplifications when attempting to synthesize the experiences of non-Russian nations; 2) the need for cultural differentiation between Slavic regions 3) the difference between totalitarian and colonial experiences (Longović, similar to Cavanagh, too quickly equates the two, where in reality there are differences which make differentiate the critique of totalitarianism with post-colonial attitudes). As a consequence, despite the fact that *Borderline Culture* takes up issues important questions of identity from the post-colonial point of view, the proposed take leaves much unsaid, in part because of the aforementioned pan-Slavic insertions.

Independent of the methodological deficiencies that characterize such approaches to research, these examples reveal post-colonial theoretical problematics in relation to countries that have belonged, in the immediate past, to the Soviet empire.[16] Unfortunately, the presence of this region within the discourse of post-colonialism is still too weak to assume a permanent place within the paradigm of the field.

13 See *Comparative Central European Culture*, edited by S. Tötösy de Zepetnek, Indiana: Purdue UP, West Lafayette, 2002.

14 See Deltcheva, R. *East Central Europe...*

15 Longinović, T. *Borderline Culture: The Politics of Identity in Four Twentieth Slavic Novels*, Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1993.

16 The greatest achievement in this field can be claimed by an American Ukrainian studies (I am thinking about works by Marko Pawłyszyn and Mirosław Szkandrij).

4.

In contrast to Slavic studies, English studies in the USA, as well as in other areas of Anglo-Saxon culture, has been successful in giving new life to elements of post-colonial theory. First of all, such effects have already been present in the early 1980s (soon after the publication of Said's famous *Orientalism*, published in 1978), in the form of the revision of the canon, the reinterpretation of English classics, along with many studies dedicated to the work of writers from the so-called Third World, who were recognized, almost *ex officio*, as post-colonial. The number of studies conducted in the field goes into hundreds, if not thousands. Amongst these, we can separate several dozen classics, fundamental for this trend in Anglo-Saxon critique.

Looking at the body of work of post-colonial critique gives an indirect answer to the question concerning the Polish absence from the map of post-colonial studies. The framework of the field has been created by literary theorists coming principally from university circles in the United States, with many or most of them originating outside of America. The experience acquired in their country of origin (usually in one of the countries of the so-called Third World) formed their perspective and significantly influenced the range of their interests. Said never hid his Palestinian origin.[17] Similarly to Bhabha, or Spivak who highlighted their Indian origins, basing their analysis of Western imperial influences in literature and education on their private experiences. The same goes for the scholars from Australia (B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, and H. Tiffin) and Ireland (G. Smyth), whose involvement in constructing post-colonial discourse necessarily meant breaking the taboo surrounding the imperial domination of certain white societies over other white societies, ultimately including territories such as Canada, Australia, Ireland and Scotland within the realm of post-colonial literature.

We should not, however, conclude that the subject with post-colonial status has the only right or any special prerogative for exercising the post-colonial discourse. This kind of "nativism," or "reversed ethnocentrism" is based on a false theoretical assumption that only the experience of being colonized gives one a right to take up post-colonial discourse.[18] This is not the case, of course. However, it is impossible to deny the influence that literary scholars coming from former colonies have had on the emerging field and its discourse; a discourse which, founded on the methodological and philosophical traditions of the West, cleared the path for to the global "market of ideas"

17 His interviews are suggest a widely popular postion in the USA: *Power, Politics, and Culture: Interviews with Edward W. Said*, edited by G. Viswanathan, New York: Pantheon Books, 2001.

18 See Moore-Gilbert, B. *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics*, London–New York: Verso, 1997, 87.

for countries that had otherwise been denied access, discriminated against, or to put it mildly, remained imperceptible for and by the West itself. A similar role ought to be played, it seems, by scholars and critics from Central Europe if they want their literature to be included in the globalized humanities. This is an inclusion that it certainly deserves. From that perspective, the awareness that post-colonialism is not an exclusive property of ethnic groups from the so-called Third and Fourth Worlds, but also to body of work of "white" societies dependent on power structures of the empire.[19] The process behind the emergence of that awareness also coined the term "white colonialism" – but has still not embraced the nations and cultures of Central-Eastern Europe. The example of Ireland and its colonial dependence on a stronger neighbor also merits attention, since many Polish and Irish writers have pointed to this experience as a parallel for the Polish fate.[20] The introduction of Ireland to post-colonial discourse was clearly marked by the appearance of the book *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*.[21] Not without significance for that groundbreaking publication was the fact that Seamus Deane and Terry Eagleton, two of the four authors of the included essays, are Irish. Thanks to the works of David Lloyd and publications devoted to contemporary and older Irish literature, the country has been permanently included in the sphere of post-colonial research.[22]

Recognizing the colonial dependency of territories inhabited by white people was not a straight forward process. On the contrary, many post-colonial critics question the phenomenon of "white colonialism," claiming that colonialism, as such, is inherently connected to the dominance of whites over others, non-whites. They tend to ignore, at the same time, the phenomenon of colonialism in Europe and concentrate on less complicated methodologically (and, let us add, more politically correct, as race is utilized as a primary criterion) cases of so-called Third World countries. All of this takes place despite the fact that there exists, as Michael Hechter highlights in his monograph dedicated to the "internal colonialism," a particular model of a colonial

19 Compare Brydon, D., H. Tiffin *Decolonising Fictions*.

20 See Żeromski, S. "Literatura a życie polskie," in *Kartografowie dziwnych podróży. Wypisy z polskiej krytyki literackiej XX wieku*, edited by. M. Wyka, Cracow: Universitas, 2004, 160.

21 Eagleton, T., F. Jameson, E.W. Said *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*, Minneaopolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.

22 Lloyd, D. *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1993; Cairns, D. S. Richards *Writing Ireland, Colonialism, Nationalism, and Culture*, Manchester–New York: Manchester University Press, 1988. Special issue of a journal was devoted to Ireland: *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies: Ireland, Postcoloniality, and Contemporary Irish Literature* (Spring 2001).

dependency in which white people are both colonizers and the colonized (the case of Ireland, as well as Scotland and Whales comes to mind). And David Lloyd, on the example of works by Seamus Heaney, Samuel Beckett, William Butler Yeats, and James Joyce, has proven that Irish literature does not constitute an anomaly, as compared to existing models of post-colonialism.[23] As is not hard to observe, such an approach leads to the marginalization of the cultures of European countries conquered by colonial empires such as Great Britain, but also Germany and Russia. The experience of the European peripheries of England are often denied colonial status (a fact which Irish critics have learned the hard way) – an action which pushes those places even further into the background, making them yield to the literatures and cultures of the West (that is the empire cultures), as well as yielding to the literatures of the former overseas colonies that are promoted by post-colonial critique: India, South Africa, the Caribbean, Polynesia, etc. The post-colonial critics from the former white colonies – Ireland, Australia or Canada – concentrate most of their energy on legitimizing the post-colonial status of their own cultures in the discourse of Western humanities. For these reasons and others previously identified, it is that much harder to fight for the place of Poland and other countries in Central and Eastern Europe in post-colonial discourse. How can this inclusion be achieved?

5.

In her work, Ewa Thompson observed that while the West, by means of its post-colonial critics, conducted a thorough analysis and assessment of its imperial actions, reflected in literature and other texts of culture, the critique of Russia still remains unthinkable.[24] It is the "ideology of imperialistic guilt," as Lewis Feuer[25] has called it, that has become a foundation of the decolonization process and lead to the emergence of a post-colonial stance in university circles in the US and Western Europe. And how does the project of a post-colonial history of Russia appear when seen through the eyes of

23 Hechter, M. *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1953-1966*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975.

24 "To allow Spivak or Bhabha to shape the academic reactions of the West to the Western imperialism is like inviting, let us say, Poles, or Lithuanians to instruct students at Russian universities in Russian imperialism. The unimaginability of such a project suggests the distance between the relative openness of Western discourse and the continuous damping of the discourse in the Russian Federation" (Thompson, E.M. *Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism*, Westport, CT and London: Greenwood, 2000.)

25 Feuer, L. *Imperialism and the Anti-Imperialist Mind*, Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1986, 104.

Polish historians? Based on the historiographic materials dedicated to the Russian and Soviet empires, it is easy to observe and trace the phenomenon, pointed out by Tötösy, of resistance among Central-European intellectuals to recognizing their own countries' colonial status in relation to Russia and the USSR.[26] Józef Smaga, author of *Rosja w 20 stuleciu*, observes: "The Tsar's empire could not have been a tool of exploitation of conquered nations the same way other colonial empires of the past (Spain, Portugal) were, because its logic of creating empire was different."[27] Similarly, the territories adjacent to the former USSR are not considered in the categories of colonial conquests, but are described by means of outdated Cold War rhetoric with arguments pointing to the expansion of a sphere of influence.[28] The central place in the historian's narration is taken by figures of Soviet leaders and executioners of their orders. There is no analysis of mechanisms that were used by Russia to build and continuously exert its power, based on the conquests of territories in Asia and Eastern Europe. As a consequence, despite highlighting Russian expansion and Soviet totalitarianism, the reader is presented with a distilled image in which, although Russia remains a country of dictatorship supported by society's submission, its politics toward its neighbors seems to be free of the stain of colonization. Smaga does not see that even though Russian imperialism was indeed realized in a different style than the Western-European model – principally because it was colonizing adjacent rather than overseas or distant territories, taken in conjunction with its visibly regressive character[29] – the very nature of the phenomenon: the political, social and cultural dependence of nations and ethnic groups from Russia, especially in culture, remains unchanged. In this regard, the works of many Polish historians devoted to Russia do not diverge from the conclusions of Western historiography, where, for years now, the role of a standard textbook has been assumed

26 In many cases, intellectuals from Central and Eastern Europe, especially those who are more nationalistic in their attitudes, categorically oppose even the very possibility of an existence of a cultural colonialism on the behalf of USSR [...] Their objections are based on ungrounded conviction that"the Soviet colonialism did not affect – and none for some – other cultures. They reject a view according to which the culture and literature of the region are influenced by ideological, economic, social, etc. factors that came from the Soviet center." (*Comparative Literature...*, 134)

27 Smaga, J. *Rosja w 20 stuleciu*, Cracow: Znak, 2002, 14.

28 Ibid., 161-162

29 "Progressive imperialism raises the standard of living and culture. It introduces the education and art to the backwards regions.... Regressive imperialism... is aiming towards continuous exploitation or extermination of the peoples, regardless of the level of its civilizational level." (L. Feuer, *Imperialism...*, 4).

by Nicholas Riasanovsky's *A History of Russia*.[30] Not even a single page out of the almost seven hundred within this vast work indicates a realization about the colonial nature of Russia and the USSR's politics toward their neighboring countries. Riasanovsky successfully copies the stereotypical image of suffering in the "Great Patriotic War" of Russia and its neighbors, who appear, as if spontaneously, under its wing, not even asking the mechanism for the inclusion of European and Asian territories into the USSR and Eastern Block and what would be the price for the nations inhabiting those territories, which suddenly became the peripheries of the metropolis, for being included into its sphere of influence.

These examples prove that the need for studies that would – modeled after those devoted to the British, French, or Dutch empires – show the scale of the Russian colonial undertaking, basing their research on detailed data from various areas: politics, economy, geography, demography, as well as literature and culture. One should not disregard information such as the number of Russian books printed in translation in the languages of Central-Europe, including Polish, in comparison with the number of publications in the native language of a given country.

Independently of the historians, however, the decisive point in whether Polish literature will exist on the map of post-colonial critique belongs to scholars of literary studies, on whether they will be willing to reach for the methodology sketched by Said. However valid Cavanagh's outrage might be when she notes that the "impressive post-colonial references" of Poland do not translate into the inclusion of Polish literature into interest by scholars of post-colonialism – we should not blame American or Australian scholars for this fact. The initiative should come from the Polish scholars.

6.

Of course, this is not about using a fashionable "-ism" to sell Polish works to an international audience, while dressing them up as something they are not. It is more about discovering that content and excavating it in the light of day using the proper instruments. Post-colonial methodology brings tools which allow us to reach a double goal. Firstly, the categories worked out by post-colonialism would allow us, most likely, to see many of our works through the optics of universal human experience of most continents from the last two hundred years. It would allow Polish literature, as well as the discourse surrounding it, to break free from the vicious circle of "Polish particularity" and arrive at the reader who speaks another language and is educated

30 Riasanovsky, N.V. *A History of Russia*, New York–Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000.

in a different culture and tradition. Works of our writers would function in a general circulation in a way in which the readers will think about them, according to Conrad's conviction that "a man's real life is that accorded to him in the thoughts of other men."[31]

On the other hand, for the Polish reader the studies exploring areas so far unexplored and unanalyzed without post-colonial instruments would be of value. Here are examples of questions that could be tackled: 1) a "dichotomy" of our literature (discourse of the colonized and of the colonizer)[32]; 2) experiences of colonization and its literary representations, identifications and refutations (here, one could analyze the complex of inferiority – feeling of intimidation, alienation, etc., as well as literary practices of ignoring these feelings); 3) identity formed in the face of and in opposition to the "Other" with whom there is a relation of colonial submission (the "Other" as a colonizer is perceived by the colonized, but the colonized are also seen through the eyes of the colonizer); 4) the literary image of women and men (with a focus on the de-masculinizing of men in Polish literature as an inseparable effect of being colonized);[33] 5) connections between works of art and the socio-political discourses of the empire revealed in language, modes of representation, etc.; 6) mechanisms of constructing counter-hegemonic discourse with respect to discourse of the empire in literature. Also, the literary phenomena known and described from different perspectives and in different languages could reveal in the post-colonial perspective their interesting, unsuspected dimension. I am thinking about the poetics of "coming home" (Zagajewski and Miłosz), the literature of "small motherlands" (the prose of Huelle, Chwin, and Stasiuk), creations of "imaginative space" and space in general, especially urban space (Herbert, Tyrmand, Nowakowski, and Konwicki), and finally the motifs of dislocation and displacement in their literary incarnations (Mackiewicz, Chwin, Zagajewski, and Jurewicz).

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31 Conrad, J. *Under Western Eyes*, New York - London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1911, 13.

32 For the need of exploration of the imperial dimension of the Polish literature, Aleksander Fiut pointed to in his *Polonizacja? Kolonizacja?* (*Teksty Drugie*, vol. 6, 2003, 150-156) However antagonizing to both directions of post-colonial research this might be, even when supported by the best intentions, it can only hurt undertaking in the long run. One has to highlight that tracing the colonizer's discourse in our poetry and prose, as well as in literary studies, even though it opens interesting perspectives for post-colonial studies, should not lead to forsaking the studies of the cultural results of being colonized. These studies, contrary to Fiut's fears, should not aim at "preserving ... the traditional and stale image of Poland-victim, suffering and bullied by its conquerors" (152). Post-colonial problematics, along with the methodology constructed within that current of thought, is much more complex and allows for a more subtle look than could be gathered from the essays presented here: those of Cavanagh and Fiut.

33 My thanks go to Ewa Thompson for directing my attention to that issue.

The contours of the project I am attempting to sketch here is not risk-free. The fate of Ewa Thompson's book allows us to assume that the task will not be easy. An American edition of *Imperial Knowledge*, which has been positively reviewed by a conservative journal entitled *Modern Age*, has been treated in some circles of Slavic studies as the product of a rowdy scholar.[34] Hence, one has to take into the account the possibility of critique, especially from the direction of traditionally practiced Russian studies and Slavic studies, as well as – possibly – a Poland-centric and suspicious toward any kind of "novelties" Polish studies. And yet, the undertaking seems worthwhile. Especially since the image and reception of our work in the contemporary world are what is at stake. The Polish literature of the last two centuries has contained unique experiences of a double colonization, the obscurity of which impoverishes the modern world, especially the Western world. A blank spot on the map of theory, localized by Cavanagh, has to stop terrifying us with its emptiness. But first and foremost, it needs to be recognized, along with its rich and diverse problematics, which can be revealed by post-colonial methodology.

Looking at Polish literature from that perspective, and perhaps an eventual creation of a *History of Polish Literature* based on the methodology initiated by Said, is not only a possibility but a need. It is necessary to introduce our literature into global circulation, in which, as a nation with a rich writing heritage, we are almost non-existent with exception of several names known to the poetry aficionados. In the light of the above observations, however, it is clear that we have to undertake the task ourselves.

Translation: Jan Pytalski

34 See R.F. Staar *National Identity...*; P.I. Barta, "Slavic and East European Journal" Fall 2002, vol. 46, no. 3, 595-596; K. Hokanson, "Comparative Literature Studies" 2001, vol. 83, no. 3, 264-266.