

Summary

Theory, Literature, and Discourse. A Postcolonial Landscape is a collection of essays in postcolonial theory and criticism concerning the Polish and East Central European historical experience. Some of the essays have already been published in Polish and/or English between 2006 and 2012 (see *Nota bibliograficzna [Bibliographic Note]*), while others have been written specifically for the purpose of the volume. The book is divided in three sections titled “Toward Theory,” “Toward Literature,” and “Toward Discourse,” each of them containing articles related to the respective fields of analyses.

Despite the thematic variety of the volume, due to the chronological span of texts from the 19th century to the present and issuing from the varied textual materials analyzed from poetry and narrative, literature and critical discourses, Romantic and modern writings, the volume’s coherence is maintained by the underlying theme of collective, primarily national, identity. The forming of national identity by means of discursive practices, viewed from a postcolonial perspective, unites the various threads and defines the main vector of the book. Along with other humanist discourses, literature is considered to be a set of cultural practices participating in the shaping of a nation’s collective identity and, simultaneously, reflecting the nation’s identity. The import of literature invites an examination of cultural discourses like poetry, historiography, and journalism, within the framework of a broader notion of “identity discourse.” Identity, in general, and collective identity, in particular, are a major field of interest within postcolonial criticism and a central issue explored in the book, both as a theoretical discussion and as an aspect of literary analyses. The issue of identity, alongside the aforementioned reasons for why the volume came into existence, has been included in the short introductory text titled “Instead of an Introduction: From Whence Cometh this Book?”

Theory as developed in the first part of *Theory, Literature, and Discourse. A Postcolonial Landscape* provides a general framework and departure point for analyses of literature and writing in the chapters to follow. Part One “Toward Theory” addresses some major theoretical problems of postcolonialism that arise in Polish and East Central European context. In the chapter “In Perspective of Humanism and Transcendence,” philosophical and ethical assumptions of postcolonial theory are discussed as well as suggestions for aesthetical angle and perspective of transcendence within postcolonial studies are offered. The chapter “Some Dilemmas of Postcolonialism and their Implications for East

Central Europe” takes as its departure point the various existing definitions of postcoloniality vs. *post*-coloniality, discusses the problematic relationship between postcolonialism and postmodernism; along with the concept of “provincializing Europe,” and explores the prospects of postcolonial theorizing of East Central Europe. In the chapter “Postcolonialism on the Vistula River” I consider the conditions for and the plausibility of postcolonial discourse in relation to Polish literature and culture as well as offer possible directions in which postcolonial theory in Poland may be developed. The chapter “Roads and Crossroads of Postcolonial Studies in Poland” crystallizes the major existing stances in Polish postcolonial criticism since its inauguration in Poland in the early 2000s and further interrogates the role of those stances in the knowledge produced and the extent of the effects of postcolonial studies in society’s life. The chapter “Identity from Postcolonial Vantage Point: Necessary Specifications, Preliminary Proposals” drafts a proposal of postcolonial studies that consider the specificity of identity of East Central European nations and ethnicities, all of whom share a similar historical experience of Soviet-Russian colonial domination and aspire, despite various frustrations, to work out a *modus vivendi* in the contemporary globalizing world. Anthony Smith’s ethnosymbolist model, combined with Charles Taylor’s and Alasdair MacIntyre’s notions of subjectivity, is considered an effective analytical instrument for counterbalancing the limitations of the currently dominant constructivist concepts of nation. In the same chapter, identity is the fundamental underlying theme in Polish literature since the partitions of Poland in the late 1700s through many periods of foreign domination and, reversely as well, through Polish domination over other nations and ethnicities inhabiting the former (First) Polish-Lithuanian *Respublica* and the Second Republic of Poland until the present. The Polish self-definition is also a convenient analytical tool for isolating and defining some key problems of contemporary post-communist societies after 1989 and rethinking the diagnoses formulated in languages of theoretical systems other than postcolonialism. The last chapter in Part One of the book, “Literature as Compensation: ‘Comprador’ Intelligentsia Facing Hegemonic Discourse (Preliminary Theoretical Remarks),” is an attempt at theorizing the cultural loss that results from the subjection of periphery to the hegemony of the metropolis.

Part Two of the book collects studies and essays on literary representations of national and ethnic identities and of these identities’ inseparable reverse, namely, “otherness” in some selected pieces of Polish literature from Romanticism to the present. The study of consciousness of ethnic “difference” through the analysis of literary “imagology,” including the dynamics of confrontation between nations as depicted in creative representations, provides conclusion to not only the collective self-perceptions and self-definitions but also the cultural dynamics of “colonial encounter” that was taking place between 1772 (first partition) and 1989 (collapse of communism) in the former territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The rethinking of national and ethnic identities in light of postcolonial theory invites critical afterthought on how texts of those periods can and should be read today through the reconstructing prism of modern Polish postcolonial identity.

The chapter “Facing the Legacy of Romanticism” ponders on the popular reception of some political ideas of the Romantic era from whence the modern “narrative of the nation” developed, laying the foundations of modern Polish identity discourse. The analysis

of those ideas, among them the concept of 'national messianism', leads to the conclusion that long-term colonial dependence has resulted in the society's continuing inability to discuss critically the legacy of Polish Romanticism. Such a legacy includes an extended life of the Romantic ideas and the lack of political realism. A re-reading of Polish Romanticism as suggested in the chapter is void of such sentiment but sensitive enough to detect in the Romantic writings society's efforts to develop an identity discourse within historically determined framework. As an example of Romantic articulations of big currency, Juliusz Słowacki's oeuvre exemplifies the six problem areas in which interesting interpretative questions arise today: 1) the ambivalence of being a Pole in existing between the oppositions of *pride* and *shame*; 2) the colonial condition diagnosed by Słowacki as a "union with the hegemon;" 3) the problem of the Poles' *European* identity; 4) the core of Polish identity described as *Sarmatianism*; 5) the interactions between the Poles and *Others*; 6) the *orientalization* of Słowacki's own works in western scholarship.

The essay titled "Exclusion of the Natives in the Text of the Poet of the Empire?" offers a postcolonial reinterpretation of Adam Mickiewicz's *Crimean Sonnets*, one that opposes Roman Koropeckyj's one-sided reading of *Sonnets*. Seeking an answer to the question of why the natives of the Crimea have been excluded from Mickiewicz's lyrical portrayal of the Orient, I suggest that the Oriental world in *Crimean Sonnets* is ambivalent: on the one hand, it almost entirely excludes the local *human* element, while, on the other hand, it escapes and transgresses some principles of Oriental discourse as described by Edward Said, which applications do not allow Mickiewicz to be seen as a mere duplication of typical Oriental clichés of the time.

"The Hybrids in a Polish-Ukrainian Melting Pot" analyzes Słowacki's drama *The Silver Dream of Salomea* in light of Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridity. The way the characters interact and are represented due to their complex national and ethnic affiliations proves Słowacki's matured consideration of Polish-Ukrainian relations and reflects contemporary theoretical awareness concerning the matters of the "Other," "othering," and "otherness" in the humanities discourse. By portraying an instance of the Polish metropolis losing control over the Ukrainian periphery against the background of the two intersecting cultures, neither did the poet offer a sentimental image of the Ukraine nor did he silence the voice of the subaltern in order to strengthen the dominant Polish narrative. Rather, he managed to divulge the clichés and the conceptual matrix stored in the mentality of his Polish audiences, thus challenging them to rethink the markers of Polish identity.

The chapter "Pal'aki haroshye hlopty": the Narrative as the Process of Subordination" concerns Tadeusz Konwicki's first novel *Rojsty* ["The Marshes"]. Censored in 1948 and published as late as 1956, the novel is typically interpreted by literary critics and scholars as a reevaluation of the legacy of Polish Romanticism. *The Marshes* is considered in the essay as an example of the cultural implications of setting up of colonial machinery in Polish and Lithuanian lands by the Soviet regime in the aftermath of the Second World War. Through the analysis of the narrative and the plot, the conclusion is that *The Marshes* is a record of the process of articulating in Polish literature the following intellectual thoughts and consciousness: (1) the fear against foreign domination that evolves into voluntary submission, (2) the domestication of the sinister "Other," (3) the redefinition, the weakening, and even the loss of Poles' identity resulting in their acknowledging

their own inferiority as a subjugated province of the Soviet empire, (4) the Poles' perception of their cultural obligations in terms of providing a justification for the hegemony of the foreign empire and their own submission, that is, the justification for the "domination upon consent."

In the chapter "Identity as the Object of Investigation" Paweł Huelle's novel *Castorp* is analyzed with respect to spatial representation, language, characters' identities, and the literary genre. The exploration of these four fields is of importance for my conclusion that the Polish author has skillfully exploited the conventional schemes of imperial literatures only to subvert them, thus filling his narrative with postcolonial weight. Although the novel pretends to be a "prequel" to Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, it is entirely a product of literary and political consciousness of the turn of the twentieth century, in that it deconstructs the European, including German, patterns of colonial narrative through a series of fissures, partings, and transgressions.

The essay titled "Central European Complex" poses a question on the image of East Central Europe that emerges from Andrzej Stasiuk's works, among them *Going to Babadag* and *Fado*. Stasiuk's ostentatious and radical rejection of Western Europe's modernity and urbanity is replaced with his own "identity project," one based on a peculiar revitalization of orientalist stereotypes of the region, already seen and repeated in western discourses. Though ironically acclaimed as Poland's contemporary most innovative writer in the West, the author's works are simply a duplication of western epistemological clichés couched in the Stasiuk style of reviving the myth of native, folk origins of East Central European culture, one allegedly uncontaminated by the supposedly more elite and highbrow culture of western European countries due to Latin influence.

The last chapter in Part Two of the monograph, titled "Transgression of the Emigré Identity," scrutinizes the identity of the characters in Joanna Clark's novel *W cichym lesie Vermontu* ["In the Silent Woods of Vermont"]. In her novel Clark overturns the traditional paradigm of émigré, i.e. exile, identity proliferating in Polish writing since the collapse of the Poles' conflict against the Russians called "November Uprising" in 1830-31, as well as upsets the modern pattern of cosmopolitan identity, one which denigrates the need to seek identification with one's national code, both in favor of another kind of identity, the "trans-national" one. That new identity is not based on a rejection of the original identity but rather constitutes a "third value." The trans-national identity is reflected upon in the essay from the perspective of "rooting," cultural memory, and cultural geography, and is being worked out in Clark's narrative under the influence of intercultural contact through which the female subject, a member of a peripheral diaspora, manages to overcome her "inferiority complex" in relation to metropolitan culture and gains full agency. The novel is considered a record of interrogations of a national identity that no longer constitutes undesirable ballast but rather has been integrated into the new type of transnational hybrid identity in the postcolonial era.

Part Three of the book ponders how the Poles' postcolonial identity is perceived and approached in contemporary Polish and western, mainly American, discourse of humanities. That discourse has been greatly influenced by Orientalist concepts and clichés stored in western scholarship and writing since the Enlightenment, thus participating in the prolonged process of "orientalizing" East Central Europe.

In the chapter “The Colonized Poland and the Orientalized Poland: Postcolonial Theory Facing the ‘Other’ Europe,” Larry Wolff’s *Inventing Eastern Europe* and Tony Judt’s historical works are explored as examples of latent orientalism in the discourses of western humanities, especially in their conceptions of the history and cultures of the nations and ethnic groups between Germany and Russia. Founded upon the a priori authority of the western academia, such an approach leaves the role of the hegemon out of the account. This contributes to the further marginalization of these societies, which, in turn, leads to the cementing of the inferiority complex, so distinctive an image in all postcolonial populations. In particular, the discursive mechanisms of appropriation of East Central Europe are scrutinized and the implications of scholarly authority and the allegedly universal structures of knowledge that excludes “local” scholarship are interrogated. The conclusion points to political circumstances of knowledge production and the implications of political and cultural hegemony of the West in modern scholarship on East Central Europe, despite this scholarship’s alleged intellectual self-discipline and self-criticism.

The chapter titled “The ‘Slavic’ Troubles with Identity” is a critical discussion of Maria Janion’s book *Niesamowita Słowiańszczyzna* (“The Uncanny Slavdom”) in which the author is advancing her thesis concerning the apparently long-term results of the alleged medieval “colonizing through christening” of Polish lands. According to Janion, the western idea of *latinitas*, imposed on the Slavic inhabitants of medieval Poland from the outside, primarily from the Germanic lands, became a source of the Poles’ current problem with self-definition. The polemics in the chapter concern not only Janion’s interpretation of historical facts but also the perverse way in which she resorts to Said’s notion of orientalism, closing her eyes to the effects of Russian and Soviet imperialism while reviving the illusory Panslavic identity as an alleged antidote to identity difficulties of contemporary Poles. To counter Janion’s case, arguments put forward by such historians as Jerzy Kłoczowski, Oskar Halecki, Benedykt Zientara and Klaus Zernack are referred to, and a different route for conceptualizing the subject matter is suggested. This alternate view does not leave out the “conservative” tradition in Polish writing, represented by Cyprian Norwid and so deeply permeated with Christian ideas, but it likewise seeks the core of national self-identification in Christianity.

The last essay, “Melancholia of the ‘Borderlands Discourse,’” takes as its departure point the Freudian notion of melancholia and analyzes the groundwork of the so-called “Borderlands discourse” in Polish writing, i.e., the discourse on the eastern territories of the former Polish-Lithuanian Republic. The chapter discusses simplified, one-sided interpretations reducing that discourse either to an instrument of domination over those territories and cultivation of ethnocentric “imperial nostalgia” or to a gesture of severing them off from the core of Polishness, that is equal to national apostasy. I propose that the source of contemporary anti-postcolonial stance of some Polish critics be seen in melancholia understood as a form of resistance against a possibility of losing control over the discourse of loss. As opposed to the melancholia of Romantic and post-Romantic “Borderlands discourse,” the melancholia of contemporary “Borderlands discourse” cannot be reduced to rehearsing the gesture of loss in the face of endangered identity. Rather, it is complemented by another kind of melancholia—one that results from the awareness that

the desires of the subject are incompatible with the possibilities provided by the discourse. The way out of this limbo may be through making this melancholia an object of scrutiny in postcolonial studies. While some postcolonial critics in Poland wish to see it this way, this melancholia is not simply a “disease” of nostalgia experienced by the former hegemon who lost her hegemonic power over her former “colonies.” Thus, the contention that Poland’s “Eastern Borderlands” are equivalent to Saidean “Orient” is simplified and insufficient. This parallel must be problematized and complemented by the notion of “Borderlands” being an essential part of Poland’s narcissistic self and the object of Poles’ melancholia due to Poland’s long-lasting colonial subjugation. Any attempt to prove the colonial nature of Polish “Borderland discourse,” without rendering appropriate attention to the broader context of Russian and Soviet colonialism, would be a glaring abuse of postcolonial theory and must fail as ahistorical and misleading.

The book closes with a Postscript titled “Three Warnings,” outlining my critique of postcolonial theory and criticism. I put forward these caveats: 1) to not overestimate the category of “difference” and the perspective of “oppression” in postcolonial studies as conducive to eliminating from the horizon the elements that are conjoint to humankind in historical experience. Instead of emphasizing differences, those elements allow for the realization of the fundamental *identity* of all human beings as subjects of that experience, and call for interpreting that experience in categories transcendent of oppression, such as overcoming one’s limitations and weaknesses. 2) To not monopolize postcolonial studies by neo-Marxist approaches, ones that accentuate “class struggle” alongside the economic dimensions of conflicts considered as the groundwork for modern cultural processes and disparage the positive cultural role of national communities. 3) To not have blurred and vague, quasi-humanist understanding of the idea of “truly free man” as the ultimate horizon of the emancipatory reflection of postcolonial studies, transcending mundane, temporal, and local, even national, limitations. Referring to Said’s closing remarks in *Culture and Imperialism*, the book concludes that it is *through*, and not *against* or *bypassing*, the appreciation of one’s national identity that a “universal,” “super-national,” human identity can be obtained.