

## LIMITATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF POSTCOLONIAL CRITICISM

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### ABSTRACT

The author asks about the applicability of postcolonial criticism to the study of the culture of Central and Eastern Europe, especially Galicia. She presents the voices of Polish and Ukrainian proponents of this method, as well as those who are sceptical about the possibility of adapting it to the analysis of Central European culture. She indicates the factors which complicate transferring the theory of postcolonial studies to the Habsburg monarchy and the peoples living there, and defines the conditions that should be taken into account for the use of postcolonial theory to be persuasive. She presents the benefits of postcolonial criticism as applied to the analysis of literature created in Galicia, noting the hegemonic historiography contained in the literature and the narrative forms establishing the hierarchy of cultures, and protecting the value and superiority of one's own culture – a phenomenon that has not been investigated.

**KEYWORDS:** Galicia, postcolonial theory, postcolonial criticism, narrative, hegemonic historiography

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The postcolonial method has functioned in Polish humanities long enough to ask, with a view to draw certain conclusions, what is the impact of this research perspective on the studies on Central and Eastern Europe? Maria Janion, the author of one of the first Polish publications on literary studies analyzing the Slavic world through the ideas and assumptions borrowed from the works of Edward W. Said, wonders: “Can we use the categories of postcolonial criticism to tell the story of Slavdom and the story of Poland? That is the question that

I ask myself.”<sup>1</sup> The way has already been paved for this question: Janion quotes Ewa Thompson and her critic Zdzisław Najder<sup>2</sup>. Even before the publication of *Niesamowita Słowiańszczyzna* [*The Amazing Slavdom*], the postcolonial method was recommended for studying Central Europe and its culture by Aleksander Fiut<sup>3</sup>, joining Janion in quoting the works of Thompson translated into Polish in 2000, and the theses of Clare Cavanagh put forward in publications including the article published in “Second Texts” in 2003<sup>4</sup>.

Janion answers the question concerning the usefulness of postcolonial criticism, quoted above, but not only on theoretical level; she provides the answer by analyzing various Polish cultural texts. She focuses on the lack of cultural traces that should have been left in Poland after the old beliefs – and yet they are nowhere to be found. According to the scholar, this suppression of memory about Slavic, pre-Christian times had significant cultural consequences and contributed to the development of “(...) the often paradoxical Polish postcolonial mentality”<sup>5</sup>. Being “paradoxical” would be expressed by the postcolonial feeling of helplessness, acknowledging one’s marginality and inferiority to the West, which in Poland’s case blended with feelings of superiority and colonial longings.

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1 M. Janion, *Niesamowita Słowiańszczyzna*, Kraków 2007, p.10. Since 2000, the topic of postcolonialism has been discussed frequently in Poland: in 2003, several issues of “Teksty Drugie” were devoted to this problem (e.g. the essays of Cavanagh, Fiut, Bakuła). The debate continued in 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2008 (e.g. in the article by I. Surynt, *Badania postkolonialne a "Drugi Świat". Niemieckie konstrukcje narodowo-kolonialne XIX wieku*, “Teksty Drugie”, 4 (2007)). In 2005, the topic was also discussed in “Europa. Tygodnik idei”, as well as in „Er(r)go”, and „Recykling idei”. See also: E. Domańska, *Historie niekonwencjonalne. Refleksje o przeszłości w nowej humanistyce*, Poznań 2006; A. Fiut, *Spotkania z Innym*, Kraków 2006; I. Surynt, M. Zybyra (ed.), *Opowiedziany naród: literatura polska i niemiecka wobec nacjonalizmów XIX wieku*, Wrocław 2006, A. F. Kola, A. Szachaj (ed.), *Filozofia i etyka interpretacji*, Kraków 2007; D. Vogel, *Historia a postkolonializm. Pisanie historii narodowej i jej obecność w krytyce i literaturze postkolonialnej*, Racibórz 2007; H. Gosk i B. Karwowska (ed.), *(Nie)obecność. Pominięcia i przemilczenia w narracjach XX wieku*, Warsaw 2008; and K. Stępnik, D. Trzeźnikowski (ed.), *Studia postkolonialne nad kulturą i cywilizacją*, Lublin 2010. There is also an important bibliography of translated texts, and applications of the postcolonial method in specific analyses.

2 M. Janion, *op. cit.* p.35. (the Author included the references in note 10).

3 A. Fiut, *Polonizacja? Kolonizacja?*, in: K. Krasuski (ed.), *Krainy utracone i pozyskane. Problem w literaturach Europy Środkowej*, Katowice 2005.

4 C. Cavanagh, *Postkolonialna Polska. Biała plama na mapie współczesnej teorii*, “Teksty Drugie”, 2-3 (2003).

5 M. Janion, *op. cit.*, p.12.

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The dominating attitude could be seen in both messianic ideas and visions of the Polish mission to bring civilization to the East.

The paradox of the Polish postcolonial attitudes, described by Janion, brings a feeling of unease: although postcolonialism had different faces, its version of the 1980s and 1990s clearly differentiated the functions of superiority and inferiority, cultural hegemony and subordination. It was the clarity of the differentiation that brought about the objections raised against the Western culture by the representatives of postcolonial studies. In this context, Polish postcolonial mentality would reveal a certain schizophrenia. The schizophrenia would be seen in the fact that superiority to the East merges with inferiority to the West, as noted by Janion. The very attitude of Poles towards the Western world has always been and remains complicated: it consists of complexes, but also of “looking down” on things and people, sometimes bordering on megalomania. To “excuse” Poles one may say that other Slavic cultures display a similar ambivalence towards Western Europe. Moreover, Polish superiority to the East has also been ambiguous: Poles appeared here not as an individual and separate culture, not as a nation, but as representatives of Europe; they saw themselves as the representatives of the European civilization whose values they wanted to spread.

Their feeling of superiority to the West was more individualized: in this case, they spoke on behalf of a nation whose unique features were a gift for Europe. An obvious example is the Polish messianism, but also – though less often remembered – the romantic ideas of “organic work”<sup>6</sup>. The exponents of the ideas, approving the progress of civilization and the inevitability of industrialization, at the same time critically observed such processes as they took place in the West. They believed they knew more about it and that they “knew better”. Cyprian Kamil Norwid, a usually harsh critic of Polish culture, was equally strict in criticizing the Western philosophical thought. In his opinion, it was a Pole, August Cieszkowski, who created a valuable design of a new social order for Europe and invented better forms of work culture. In his ecstatic praise, Norwid emphasized Cieszkowski’s philosophical oeuvre and expressed the belief that planting Polish philosophical

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6 Numerous publications include B. Skarga, *Narodziny pozytywizmu polskiego (1831–1864)*, Warszawa 1964; A. Walicki, *Filozofia a mesjanizm, Studia z dziejów filozofii i myśli społeczno-religijnej romantyzmu polskiego*, Warszawa 1970 (and his other works).

thought in Western ground was an opportunity for Europe and for the world.<sup>7</sup> Where is the humility and subordination typical of the postcolonial personality of the worse “Other”?

These concerns regarding the limitations of the postcolonial perspective on Polish culture are accompanied also by other doubts. Critics are anxious about “disguising” anachronistic discourses and thinking habits under trendy methodological “robes”. The postcolonial discourse, using the rhetoric of oppression, discrimination and humiliation, may lead astray to risky or false generalizations.

Several examples can be found in the book by Thompson, as the author defines the division into aggressive (expansive) and defensive nationalisms. According to the author, the former is typical for empires (the Russian Empire in Thompson’s analysis), and the latter can be observed in “communities of memory, which see themselves as endangered, whether due to their small size (Lithuanians, Georgians, Chechens) or due to a threat from their expansive neighbours”.<sup>8</sup> According to the theory, Poles and Czechs represent the defensive nationalism. However, can such a theory be supported?

It was attacked in the discussion sparked by Thompson’s book<sup>9</sup> and – as I will try to demonstrate later – the thesis is difficult to defend in the light of modern knowledge on national relations in the Habsburg Monarchy.

The dangers that lie in the ethical thread of postcolonial discourse are noted even by those who are generally in favour of the method, including Fiut. The Cracovian scholar, while approving of Cavanagh’s theses, nevertheless indicated the potential weaknesses of the methodology, claiming that it is possible to “(...) indirectly strengthen, in a now different

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 7 In his poem *Psalmów-psalm* [*Psalm of psalms*] (1850) Norwid wrote that Cieszkowski was “the most influential thought in Poland today (hence in the world – as that’s how it is these days)”, that he “is one of the most brilliant of our writers, and even more than only ours, because *urbi et orbi*” (quoted after: Z. Trojanowiczowa, *Ostatni spór romantyczny Cyprian Norwid – Julian Klaczko*, Warszawa 1981, p.100).

8 E. Thompson, *Trubadurzy imperium. Literatura rosyjska i kolonializm*, translated by A. Sierszulska, Kraków 2000, p. 17.

9 Cf. J. Kieniewicz, N. Kotsyba, M. Szczypek, K. Tomaszuk (ed.), *Debaty IBIAL*, T. 1, Warszawa 2008. Andrzej Nowak, arguing with Ewa Thompson, refers to the example of Hungary, where in the second half of the 20th century an “orientalizing” operation was carried out, and to the example of Sweden (p.31).

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system of notions, the traditional and already very much faded image of Poland – a victim, suffering innocently, for ages persecuted by invaders. The martyrological phantom dressed in a freshened up postcolonial costume is indeed an unappealing prospect...<sup>10</sup> However, according to the author, the danger may be avoided if we remember that “(...) there was a time in the history of Poland where it was not the conquered, but the conquering country. That its culture pushed local cultures aside”.<sup>11</sup>

However, did the problem close with one “specific period in the history” of the Polish Republic? After the partitions, Poland ceased to exist as a state, but did that mean that Polish culture, although limited and repressed itself, did not push other cultures aside any more? Would Ukrainian resentment be so strong in Galicia in the 19th and then in the 20th century if Polish culture – not German culture, supported by the authorities and the state – had not been perceived as an obstacle on the path to Ukrainian cultural emancipation? The Ukrainians had a reason to be afraid of Polish culture as the dominant culture, although at the same time there were numerous efforts in the Habsburg Empire to push Polish culture into the background.<sup>12</sup>

Resentment related to Polishness is also observed in the Polish-Lithuanian relations. It is a scar that originated not during the First or Second Polish Republic, but during the time when the Polish state did not exist.

10 A. Fiut, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

12 The fear of Polish influence was expressed through issues such as the dispute over the adoption of Latin alphabet in Ukrainian literature, which sparked the “language war” in Galicia in the 1930s. Ruthenians, averse to latinization, feared that it will result in their language being absorbed into the Polish language. Biographies of the first Ruthenian nationalist activists in Galicia were marked by the drama of their extraction from the Polish culture, which they were more familiar with and which was easier than their own culture, which they were only now creating. Their spoken and written Polish was better; their imaginations and rhetoric were shaped around Polish literature, Polish illegal political brochures, etc. Under such conditions, developing their own, national cultural discourse turned out to be difficult, particularly in the context of the pressure of cultural complexes and with limited opportunities to practice their own culture as the high culture. In my book *Inna Galicja* (Warszawa 2008), I wrote extensively about the “drama of muteness” and about the sense of threat from Polishness, even though Poland officially did not exist as a state. There I cite the examples of professed opponents of Polishness, e.g. Yakiv Holovatsky, who nevertheless remained entangled in it (cf. *Inna Galicja*, *op. cit.*, p. 163, 165-168 and other. The work refers to numerous Ukrainian sources which show their fear of the Polish influence, and works where the issue is discussed).

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In her article *The stereotype of a Pole in the eyes of a Lithuanian*, Greta Lemanaitė writes: “Polish and Lithuanian press from the period [early 1890s – DS] abounds in examples of mutual animosity. A Pole, seen through the eyes of a Lithuanian, is a cultured nobleman, but also an educated, duplicitous swindler, who always and everywhere calls a Lithuanian his brother and who keeps talking about equal rights, but in reality his actions contradict his words. He is also known for his arrogance; he approaches the Lithuanian language with patronizing understanding, seeing it as the language of peasants, unworthy to be used in decent company or in church. Furthermore, he also falsifies history. He claims that such historical figures as Mickiewicz, Matejko, Lelewel, Moniuszko, Kościuszko and others are Poles, when it is common knowledge that they all came from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. So, in short, they were native Lithuanians”.<sup>13</sup>

Lithuanian claims that they were being robbed of their native heroes were accompanied by the accusation of distorting common history. The grudges against Poles, concerning their attitude towards Lithuanians, the Lithuanian language and history are a part of the postcolonial story model about the worse “Other”.

We have all of its elements here: the oppressive use of the cultural canon, i.e. considering Lithuanian culture uncivilized; historiographic hegemony used towards Lithuanian history in the Polish historical narrative; the lack of Lithuanian voice in culture and literature; and the objectified status, since in the descriptions of the multicultural Republic, Lithuania is not presented as an independent subject but as an object, described from the outside and subject to stereotyping.

The allegations were put forward not only in relation to the time of the Polish Republic, but also – or rather especially – to the time when the Polish Republic was under partitions, when Polish culture was persecuted by the Russians, and the supervision of Russian authorities made life difficult for Poles.

Even in the Polish-Belarusian relations, despite the fact that until the Second World War the Belarusian national awareness was the least

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13 G. Lemanaitė, *Stereotyp Polaka w oczach Litwina*, in: T. Walas (ed.), *Narody i stereotypy*, Kraków 1995, pp. 90-91.

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advanced, we too can find some resentment resulting from contacts with Polish culture, perceived as the dominant one.<sup>14</sup>

What is the conclusion that arises from the discussion? The history of Central and Eastern Europe was too complex, and national relations too complicated to allow us to distinguish two distinct discourses: the discourse of the colonizers, and the discourse of the colonized. The same communities which revolted against the domination of the ruling culture saw nothing wrong in dominating cultures whose achievements they considered “ethnographic” phenomena, and their “lack of independence”, assumed a priori, was seen as a pretext to deny the ambitions of maturing cultures. In this respect, Central-Eastern Europe serve as an example of “selective blindness” demonstrated towards the rights of the worse “Others”: the Czechs criticized Polish shortsightedness on the Ukrainian issue, although they displayed similar shortsightedness on the Slovak issue. Additionally, it was not only nationalist loudmouths that acted this way; even eminent figures such as T.G.Masaryk, sensitive to the issues of the rights of small nations, had a complex approach to the “Slovak issue”.

In his work *Světová revoluce* [*World Revolution*; translated into English as *The Making of a State. Memories and observations 1914 - 1918*] Masaryk stated that merging historically Czech territory with Slovakia should be seen as the “Slavic duty” of Czechs<sup>15</sup>.

He dissociated himself from Moravian and Slovak separatism, later seeing his former affection for the movement as a sign of the immaturity of youth. Masaryk did not deny the specificity of Slovak culture, neither did he disregard the signs of Slovak patriotism, but he believed that they do not delegitimize the ideas of the Czech and Slovakian community. He was selective in constructing the vision of the community; he referred to such manifestations of Slovak culture which fitted into his concept while underestimating or ignoring others, as in the case of

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14 Cf. A. Sadowski, M. Tefelski, E. Mironowicz, *Polacy i kultura polska w perspektywie mniejszości białoruskiej w Polsce*, in: J. Mucha (ed.), *Kultura dominująca jako kultura obca. Mniejszości kulturowe a grupa dominująca w Polsce*, Warszawa 1999, p. 65. See also the outstanding work of J. Obrębski on the strengthening of anti-Polish prejudice whose features transform from social to nationalist (J. Obrębski, *Studia etnosocjologiczne. Polesie*, edited and introduced by A. Engelking, Warszawa 2007).

15 T. G. Masaryk, *Světová revoluce. Za války a ve válce 1914–1918*, Praha 1925, p. 522.

štúrovci.<sup>16</sup> In every Slovak work on history, history of literature, or the history of Slovak culture, štúrovci will play a fundamental role as nationalist activists and authors of the Slovak auto-identifying discourse. Masaryk “did not see” them. The same happened to other phenomena and people who did not fit into his political vision. Certain statements of the president, some elements of his rhetoric and argumentation, as well as instances of censoring facts could be considered practices compliant with the “colonial” discourse. At the same time, to anyone familiar with the intellectual oeuvre of the Czech politician and philosopher, the above would be a great simplification of Masaryk’s political thought, ignoring other statements which prove his approval of the Slovaks’ rights to self-determination. What can be done about it? Should we consider Masaryk’s manifestations of contradictory or sceptical attitude to the Slovak issue a marginal problem, because the idea of “completeness” invalidates the meaning of isolated statements? The author of the lecture *O malom národe* accepted the Slovak linguistic distinctness, and he was not tempted to restrict the rights of the language; he even recognized its literary function. He expressed doubts, however, whether it was necessary to publish scholarly

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16 The name *štúrovci* refers to a group of young Slovak intelligentsia, people who gathered around Ľudovít Štúr (1815-1856), considered the leader of the Slovak national revival and the codifier of the Slovak language. In 1846, Štúr published his work on the Slovak language and on the need to write in Slovak, which constituted the first important demand related to freeing Slovak from the Czech language. Štúr’s later political activity coincided with the Spring of Nations, when he fought against Hungarians for the rights of Slovakia. He worked closely with Josef Miloslav Hurban and Michal Miloslav Hodža. After 1849, facing strict censorship, Štúr focused mainly on literature where he tried to prove the independence of Slovak culture. Note that the demonstrations of Slovak independence took place before Štúr’s well-known speeches. In 1842, Samo Chalupka wrote: “Our relations with Czechs have been unfriendly for a long while; it’s time to be serious about it. We are thoroughly Slovak; there is nothing Czech about us, and our work is borne out of a truly Slovak spirit, so why can’t the Czechs recognize us?” (quoted after Podiven, *Češi v dějinách nové doby (1848-1939)*, Praha 2003, p. 340). Štúr’s address provoked the outrage of Czech patriots and those Slovaks who – like Jan Kollár – did not share his separatist tendencies. In a well-known article *Slovan a Čech* (1846), important for the Czech nationalist movement, Karel Havlíček Borovský called Štúr and Hurban “miserable people who only care about their writing careers, and not about the well-being of the nation”, and he accused them of pettiness and egoism. The line of accusations, similar to the allegations raised by Poles against the Galician Ruthenians and their aspirations, was also later continued by Havlíček Borovský when he juxtaposed *štúrovci* with “positive” Slovaks such as P. J. Šafárik and J. Kollár. See also: Z. Sojková, *Masaryk a štúrovci*, in: *Masarykova idea československé státnosti ve světle kritiky dějin*, Praha 1992.



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papers in Slovak, believing it was sufficient to publish them in Czech.<sup>17</sup> And again – should we push such an opinion “aside”, as coincidental, irrelevant?

Paraphrasing Said, one may say that we know too much to follow such thinking without ill will. Contradicting political statements should make us wonder, but it does not mean that we expect absolute logic and coherence from human actions. That would be unrealistic; neither history nor people are consistent, which should be seen as natural. At the same time, the aporias of political statements, at least in such cases as this one, should be something “of interest” to us. The views of Masaryk, when he denies the existence of a Slovak nation using arguments that accuse either Germans or Hungarians of “inventing a fictitious Slovak nation”,<sup>18</sup> sound too familiar (let us remember Galicia) to pass over them lightly. The statements were made for foreign journals and newspapers, which gave them additional “international resonance”.

The ideological heritage of Masaryk is associated, among others, with the concept of small nations, with defending their right to exist, and guaranteeing the conditions for those rights to be respected. It was also Masaryk who believed that “(...) a small nation, like Czechs, cannot afford to lose two millions of its members”.<sup>19</sup>

I by no means believe that the democratic discourse of Masaryk is an appearance that requires deconstruction and uncovering of the hidden layers of “colonial” thinking. Jarosław Kiliás, a scholar of the nationalist views of the Czech president, writes that perceiving Masaryk as a proponent of Czechization and depriving Slovaks of their national identity – or, on the contrary, seeing him as a man who fully accepted Slovak identity and only led by noble ideas suggested the two nations should “be together” as long as possible – are both incorrect interpretations.<sup>20</sup>

The examples quoted here intend to show that national relations in Central and Eastern Europe, multifaceted, criss-crossing at different angles, do not allow us to define clear-cut systems of hegemony and subordination.

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17 T. G. Masaryk, *O malom národe*, “Naša Zástava”, 3/191, p. 69. Quoted after: J. Kiliás, *Naród a idea narodowa. Nacjonalizm T.G.Masaryka*, Warszawa, 1998, pp. 177-178.

18 In an interview for “La Petite Parisien” in September 1921, Masaryk said: “There is no Slovak nation (...) it’s an invention of the Hungarian propaganda. Czechs and Slovaks are brothers. They speak two languages, but the difference between the two languages is smaller than between German in northern and southern Germany”, quoted after: J. Kiliás, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

19 *Ibid*, p. 179.

20 *Ibid*, p. 178.

Postcolonial rhetoric calls for restoring the dignity and the voice to those whom colonial narratives forced to be silent or whom they condemned to disregard. Central and Eastern Europe in general, and Galicia in particular, represent in this respect a complicated and manifold system of cultural rivalry and often violence, where almost everyone happened to be a victim and an oppressor. It is all the more complicated by the fact that there was no single centre and single periphery. This part of Europe was in the sphere of dominance of two empires – the Russian and the Habsburg – which obscures the picture further. One may consider: were the effects of being under the influence of the two superpowers the same?

And did they not change over time, depending on the evolving political situation? Can one apply the same measure to the postcolonial shadow cast by the Habsburg Empire and the Russian Empire? Yaroslav Hrytsak emphasized that Ukrainians living under the Habsburg rule could gain political experience and civic education thanks to temporary liberalizations of the system (and, we should add, thanks to the strategy of the government which equally divided its favours). The opportunity, according to the historian, was not given to their compatriots under the Russian rule. In one of his last publications, translated into Polish, Hrytsak writes about the difference in political awareness of Eastern and Western Ukraine, and he concludes that the difference is caused by “(...) their different history (the heritage of the liberal Austro-Hungarian empire and the interwar Czechoslovakia)”.<sup>21</sup> The historian notes that the point is not to mythicize Austria Felix, but, he warns, we should not lose the historical specificity of the studied area in our generalizations of the postcolonial method.

Yarosław Hrytsak claims such simplifications are made by Mykola Riabchuk, who was among the first to apply the postcolonial categories to studying problems of modern Ukraine. Riabchuk’s books, popular in Ukraine, gained popularity in Poland as well.<sup>22</sup> Hrytsak is aware of the author’s success, but he believes that despite or rather due to the success, we should reveal intellectual simplifications of the popular writer. Let me quote just one objection: Hrytsak asks whether we may indeed say that

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<sup>21</sup> J. Hrycak, *Nowa Ukraina. Nowe interpretacje*, Wrocław 2009, p. 174.

<sup>22</sup> Two extensive “postcolonial” works by M. Riabchuk were published in Poland: *Od Matorosji do Ukrainy* (orig. *Від Малоросії до України: парадокси запізнілого націєтворення*) translated by O. Hnatiuk, K. Kotyńska, Kraków 2002 (Polish issue only two years after the publication in Ukraine) and *Dwie Ukrainy* (orig. *Дві України: реальні межі, віртуальні ізри*), Wrocław 2004. Polish press published numerous articles by Riabchuk.

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the “Creole”<sup>23</sup> awareness of modern, post-Soviet Ukraine is the result of the exclusive domination of the Soviet Union (and, let us add, the earlier domination of the imperial Russia). Riabchuk’s claim that until Ukrainians and Russians met they had been members of two distinct communities, and “(...) the assimilation and “creolization” are the outcomes of the last two centuries, when the modernization of the Ukrainian ethnic group was inherent to Russification”<sup>24</sup>, is considered wrong by Hrytsak. One may not, he writes, ignore the issue of identification which resulted from the fact that Ukrainians and Russians shared the historical heritage of Kievan Rus’. Due to those historical roots Ukrainians found it difficult to keep the memory about the past (as it defined their specific culture), and also to defend themselves against gradual “melting” into a single, all-Russian whole. At the same time they had to oppose the Polish Catholic assimilation tendencies.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, Hrytsak doubts the successful application of postcolonial tools to interpreting Russian and Ukrainian relations. He believes that national relations were so specific in the Russian Empire, and the Empire deviated from the classic imperial model to such an extent, that using research methods developed for another historical reality raises objections.

Hrytsak’s critique of postcolonial Ukrainian interpretation comes down to the objection of ahistoricism. The book by Thompson was criticized on the same grounds during a debate organized by the Institute for Interdisciplinary Studies “Artes Liberales”.<sup>26</sup>

One of the opinions summing up the discussion included a statement that the dispute about postcolonialism is a clash of philologists representing cultural studies with historians.<sup>27</sup> In that view, mainly the former group supports the method.

23 Hrytsak notes that the “Creole community was born on the border of two cultures: the Spanish and the Native American. Until the two met, it was hardly conceivable that they could have anything in common (...). The situation was different in Eastern Europe; both Ukrainians and Russians (and Belarusians, too) are modern nations which emerged from pre-modern Russia. Various East-Slavic ethnic groups (“pre-modern ethnic substrates”) spoke dialects understandable to each other, maintained a historical memory – if somewhat blurred – of their historical belonging to Kievan Rus, and shared the awareness of belonging to one – Orthodox – church”; J. Hrycak, *Dylematy ukraińskiego nation building*, translated by A. Wylegała, in: J. Hrycak, *Nowa Ukraina. Nowe interpretacje*, Wrocław 2009, p. 166.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 167.

25 *Ibid.*, pp. 167-168.

26 The discussion was noted in: *Debaty IBI AL*, *op. cit.*

27 *Ibid.*, pp. 42, 54,

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The above review of doubts and reservations, which may be raised by transferring the postcolonial study method to Central and Eastern Europe, does not exempt us from considering the extent and limitations of postcolonial criticism. This time we focus on Galicia, because even though the weaknesses of postcolonialism are easier to find if we apply a wider perspective, the advantages of the methodology are clearer if we focus on a smaller section of reality.

The founders of postcolonial studies had considerable merit in making us sensitive to more subtle forms of violence than those resulting from direct military oppression or openly unfriendly, administrative decisions of authorities. They drew our attention to the results of cultural dominance, as well as cultural marginalization. They established a set of notions effective in extracting “the spheres of the unseen” from the generally shared and repeated image of culture with which a given society wants to identify. The postcolonial method was not isolated in reminding us the voices and views that had so far been suppressed and dominated. As a result of the structuralist turn of the early 1970s, social scientists became generally more sensitive to the relativity of cultural and historical truth and to ideological determinants of the knowledge they propagated. Each of the study areas that developed at that time had its share in demonstrating how truth is created and how facts are made. As a scholar of Galicia, I see the greatest achievements of postcolonial criticism in demonstrating the necessity to thoroughly analyze cultural discourses and representations, including those in “innocent” materials such as popular literature or in intimate literature (diaries, letters, etc.). And although I am not convinced by the moralist aspirations of postcolonial criticism, and I do not think that it is possible in Galicia to determine clear-cut and stable divisions into the dominating and the dominated, I consider the method effective and practical when postcolonialism focuses on literature and reveals hidden methods of cultural conquest. It may also be effectively merged, in an “eclectic” manner, with other methodologies – mainly with new historicism.

New historicism, which proposes an analysis of mythos patterns, or the fictionalization of history and rhetoric clues contained in historical narratives, complements postcolonial studies of violence of the cultural discourse. To describe what postcolonial criticism calls “hegemonic historiography”, one should remember not only the historical, but also the literary

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sources. In Galician culture, it is an area of study hardly explored by scholars, and it may give us extensive knowledge on our own culture and our relations with others (both “the better” and “the worse”).

Literature is not an “innocent” description of reality: even when it is created with neutral intentions, the descriptions it contains carry an ideological burden. In this sense literature known as Galician remains in fact an undiscovered reality, and it should be studied using some of the tools developed within postcolonial studies. In a way, it would constitute the reverse of the idea of close reading.<sup>28</sup>

Close reading intends to show the rhetorical mechanisms of the text, disregarding external contexts (political, ideological, or historical). Postcolonial criticism applied to Galician literature would involve close reading, thus revealing ideological and political meanings related to the given time in history, hidden in the rhetorical and historical representations.

It would be a good idea to describe more than just the literary and historio-literary discourse about “Others” in Galicia. We should also take a closer look at historical narratives referring to Galicia created after 1945 and then after 1989.

Let me quote some examples. In Stanisław Grodziski’s *W Królestwie Galicji i Lodomerii* [*In the Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria*], published in Kraków in 1976 and still referred to in bibliographies, the existence of Ruthenians/Ukrainians in Galicia is understated. In the chapter on Galician countryside, the author does not mention that peasants in Western Galicia were different from peasants in Eastern Galicia; he notes the Polonization of Galician Germans, but he ignores the issue of the development of Ukrainian national awareness. He only mentions the appearance of the “Ukrainian issue” in 1848 in the context of social policy, although it was also a political and national phenomenon. Ivan Franko and Mykhailo Pavlyk appear only once in Grodziski’s work – as activists of the peasant movement and socialists<sup>29</sup> – which is a very narrow interpretation of their biographies. Another book by the same author, published after the breakthrough of 1989, mentions as an example *gente Poloni, natione Rutheni* by V’yacheslav

28 A notion introduced to literary criticism in 1929 by I. A. Richards, a representative of American formalism (*New Criticism*). The supporters of the movement, as well as other representatives of the anti-positivist turn, believed a work of art to be of autotelic value and it should not be explained by external contexts.

29 S. Grodziski, *W królestwie Galicji i Lodomerii*, Kraków 1976, p. 273

Lypyns'kyi without mentioning the specific understanding of the phrase by the Ukrainian historian or without any information about the evolution of his views and about his bitter disappointment regarding the hope for transforming Polish attitudes to Ukraine.<sup>30</sup>

One may “dismiss” the issue by claiming that the examples refer to books for the general public, not scholarly books (although the first in particular is cited in scholarly publications). Does it mean, however, that the objective to popularize justifies the perpetuation of selective or even false images of the past? And here, postcolonial criticism is a useful tool in restraining one’s carelessness. In light of postcolonial studies, one could not ignore, for example, the “Galician encyclopaedia”, addressed to the popular audience, or the term “Polish Piedmont”, which does not even mention the fact that there was also a “Ukrainian Piedmont”.<sup>31</sup>

It is obvious that books are always “selective” in one way or another, that no work can show everything, and that the ability to select is one of the conditions for creating a publication in the first place. However, postcolonial criticism rightly emphasizes the criteria for the selection. It makes us consider the effects of excluding certain phenomena and facts, and demand that we ask to what extent the created image of the past reflects the views and ideological interests of the given community. We are not talking about the simplest, economic understanding of interests which include the well-being of a community, confirming one’s views, and maintaining a positive image of one’s culture. The publications mentioned above, even if we consider them “popular works”, still create knowledge; the knowledge might be “unscholarly”, but it will be perceived as scholarly by many recipients. The “knowledge” will create ignorance and imaginations which are favourable for the given community.

One of the proponents of using the postcolonial method in the studies of Polish culture refers to the phenomenon of “asymmetric ignorance”, described by postcolonial scholars: “It is displayed, among others, in – as he quotes – the fact that Third World historians feel the need to refer to works on the history of Europe; the historians of Europe do not feel the need to reciprocate that. “They” create their works in a relative ignorance of the non-Western lands, which seems to influence the quality

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<sup>30</sup> Idem, *Wzdłuż Wisły, Dniestru i Zbrucza, Wędrówki po Galicji dyliżanssem, koleją, samochodem*, Kraków 1998, p. 324.

<sup>31</sup> M. Czuma, L. Mazan, *Austriackie gadanie czyli encyklopedia galicyjska*, Kraków 1998, p. 372.

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of their studies. “We”, however, cannot return the gesture. We cannot even afford equality or symmetry of ignorance on this level, without running the risk that we will be perceived as “outdated” or “passé”.<sup>32</sup>

Thompson defended her position in a similar manner, claiming that the West knows such countries as Poland only from the Russian perspective and “lesson”. According to the author, it is worth for our voices and for the voices of similar, “smaller Others” to be heard. The calling to broaden the Eurocentric perspective, or “Western-Eurocentric” to be precise, is not a thesis supported just by postcolonial critics. Similar opinions are voiced today by comparatists who argue that comparatism, in its modern understanding, should enable cultures considered as “weaker” or “younger” to be seen on the cultural arena. Such thinking is not based on a questionable intention to discover “hidden pearls”, but on the will to break the monopoly on being right and do away with only one point of view. Agreeing with such an objective, I wish to suggest a modification of the understanding of “asymmetric ignorance”, as, unfortunately, ignorance does not affect only the “hegemonic leaders”. Those who are subordinated in some kind of a frame of reference are not at all unmotivated to open up to the point of view of the other subordinated. “Asymmetric ignorance” is not exclusive to dominating cultures. In Poland the preference for this approach can be seen in the still insufficient consideration of other cultural and national perspectives, which should be taken into account in the studies of the history, culture, and society of the First and Second Polish Republic.

Translated by Paulina Dzwonnik

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<sup>32</sup> D. Skórczewski, *Wobec eurocentryzmu, dekolonizacji, postmodernizmu*, “Teksty Drugie”, 1-2 (2008), p. 42.

LIMITATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES?  
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## SUMMARY

The paper presents the interest in the use of postcolonial theory to describe Polish culture. The author writes about papers created in this spirit and discussions about the postcolonial studies and books of Ewa M. Thompson *Troubadours of the Empire*..... Recalling some examples of Polish-Ukrainian, Polish-Lithuanian, Czech-Slovak and others, the author argues that in Central and Eastern Europe national relations do not allow us to speak of a simple system of domination and subordination. She presents various aspects of systems with authority and cultures treated as higher. The centre-periphery relationship in this region of Europe was further complicated by the radiation of two centres of power – the Russian and Habsburg Empires. According to some Ukrainian authors, this undermines the legitimacy of interpreting Ukrainian culture in the postcolonial spirit. After indicating the restrictions on the applicability of postcolonial theory to the study of Central and Eastern Europe, the author shows the terms under which postcolonial criticism could beneficially be used for the study of Galician literature