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Literature and Geography

We have found ourselves at the frontier of the imagination, marked not merely by the limits of the current developmental model, but by the limits of its ability to conceive the next stage of development.

Disintegration of Polish democracy, along with the serious turmoil in international relations has thrust us into this unique place. We have also been pushed to the limits of thinking by such external processes as the crisis of the European Union, Brexit, waves of migrants reaching Europe, the annexation of Crimea by Russia, the civil war in Ukraine, changes in global capitalism, etc. As a result of all these processes taking place on the border of law and lawlessness, rationality and resentment, we are overcome by a prevailing sense of uncertainty: we do not know what the future of Poland holds, what will happen to the European Union, how the Union's relations with Great Britain and the United States will develop. We know, however, that the future will not be defined by a welfare state or a neoliberal state, i.e. by the two systemic solutions to the problem of how to coexist with global capitalism. It is also difficult to accept that introducing national capitalism to our country would be a long-term solution; it would restore social rights, while curtailing civil liberties and isolating Poland from the world. It is as if the present is severing contact with history, and nationalist egoisms have become detached from geography. In this situation, not only are the current developmental concepts disintegrating, but also thinking itself.

We do not know how to expand our thinking in order to understand the current process. And these are the limits of the imagination.

The task that I have set for myself in this text will be to describe the path that has led us to these frontiers, and also to analyze the conditions that exist there. The material that I will draw on for my conclusions come from Polish literature of the last quarter century. To those who question the value of analyzing literary texts at a time when the foundations of global order are crumbling, I propose a simple answer: if I am right in thinking that we are at the edge of the imagination, then literature has an equal stake in the debate about reality with other discourses; perhaps, it is even a participant deserving of attention, since it is the most efficient in using the imagination.

Of the many frontiers, only one will be discussed here—the geographical.¹ This frontier is determined by an unprecedented process of cartographic change, as a result of which today's Poland is not where it used to be.

Cartographical shifts do not, of course, only mean changes in physical coordinates, but indicate that existing relationships with neighboring countries have been gradually loosened, violated and broken down. In effect, we now find ourselves in the process of an unprecedented departure from the previous map, undertaken for an unknown purpose and in an unknown direction. Poland is “somewhere else” not because its position has changed, but because our presence in the larger structures to which we once belonged is radically changing.

After 1989, one could see the process of becoming rooted in four such entities, which have been determined, for the sake of argument, by geographical directions. These were the following: the European Union from the west, Central Europe from the south, the Lithuania-Belarus-Ukraine belt in the east and Scandinavia in the north. These entities have different entities and degrees of institutional connection, so when we talk about them, we need to imagine not so much permanent systems of states, but rather gravitational fields with different strengths of attraction, depending on the bodies that create them and the connections between them. Their historical permanence is not identical, as well as our presence in each of them. Although this presence has been uneven, it should be noted that the attempt to simultaneously take root in four different, in addition harmonious, entities is unprecedented in Polish history.

1 In this article I will make use of conclusions from the following book: Przemysław Czaplinski's *Poruszona mapa. Wyobrażenia geograficzno-kulturowa polskiej literatury przełomu XX i XXI wieku*.

1. The East: Borderlands, or Decolonization

The Giedroyc project began to be implemented with a focus on the East and consisted in creating good relations with Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania, and in strengthening their statehood. This concept was, in fact, a political translation of the Polish literary heritage of “small homelands,” which includes one of the most important and valuable collections of works created in exile. Literature of “small homelands” appeared in the 1950s, and its core texts included the following: Florian Czarnyszewicz *Nadberezyńcy* (*Berezina People*) (1942), Józef Wittlin *Mój Lwów* (*My Lwów*) (1946), Czesław Miłosz *Dolina Issy* (*The Issa Valley*) (1955), Zygmunt Haupt *Pierścień z papieru* (*Paper Ring*) (1963), Andrzej Chciuk *Atlantyda* (1969), Jerzy Stempowski *Ziemia berneńska* (*The Bernese Land*) (1954), as well as the trilogy of Stanisław Vincenz *Na wysokiej połoninie* (*On a High Polonyna*) (part 1: 1938; part 2: 1970; part 3: 1979). These works changed the perception of the Eastern Borderlands, giving eastern areas cultural autonomy and independence from postwar attempts at Polonization. The act of retroactive liberation from Polish domination consisted in presenting equal but ethnically diverse communities living in the eastern lands (Polish, Jewish, Lithuanian, Ukrainian, German, Belarusian, Tatar, etc.). This expanded representation led to the conclusion that the Borderlands did not belong to any nation exclusively, and that the moment when nationalistic aspirations for dominance appeared was the beginning of the end of that world.

Juliusz Mieroszewski's essay, “Rosyjski kompleks polski i obszar ULB” (The Russia's Polish Complex and the ULB area), published in 1974, offered a political summary of the cultural equality project, laid out earlier by the literature of “small homelands” (Mieroszewski). The author argued that, after the Second World War, Polish claims against Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine became “a notebook from ‘the house of the dead’” (9): the imperial attitude of Poland in the interwar period hindered the development of good relations between neighbors and it served to legitimize Russian imperialism: “This is a two-way process, Poles who are patiently waiting for a moment of retaliation and restoration of the ‘bulwark’ intensively fuel Russian imperialism” (14). As Mieroszewski wrote, such claims to the eastern lands must be abandoned; doing so would equip Polish foreign policy with a moral mission and geopolitical significance and it would strengthen our roots in Europe, allowing us to shape our relations with Russia differently. In this concept, independent and stable democracies in the Eastern Belt were the path to a more stable Poland.²

2 “We have to look for connections and an understanding with Russians who are ready to grant Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus full independence, and, what is equally impor-

After 1989, the Giedroyc's concept gained influence. In the early 1990s, the governments of the Third Polish Republic recognized the independence of Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania; a decade later (2004–2005), President Kwaśniewski urged Western governments to support Ukraine and created a political alliance with Valdas Adamkus and Javier Solana to integrate the Eastern Belt with the rest of Europe. Also, in 2005, that is, at the start of our membership in the Union, Poland initiated the “Eastern Partnership” program, which defined the Union's eastern policy. During the 3rd National Eucharistic Congress in Warsaw in June 2005, there was a symbolic rapprochement and a gesture of Polish-Ukrainian reconciliation; soon thereafter presidents Kwaśniewski and Yushchenko opened the restored Cemetery of the Defenders of Lwów. Public support for Ukrainian democratic and pro-EU aspirations also increased, as evidenced by the various initiatives organized in Poland and by politicians visiting Ukraine during the Orange Revolution (2004–2005) and during Euromaidan (2013–2014).

But from the very beginning of the new period, Giedroyc had an old-new opponent—Henryk Sienkiewicz. His legacy made it easier to dismantle relationships rather than to forge new ones. At the end of the 1990s, Lithuania was caught up in a dispute regarding the Polish minority population. Belarus, as evidenced by the termination of Belsat satellite television,³ which had been financed by the Polish government and legally constituted part of Polish Television, is left to fall deeper into Lukashenko's power, who is trying to establish conditions for neocolonial exploitation.⁴ Ukraine, which is strategically the most important

tant, we must once and for all renounce all claims to Vilnius, Lviv and withdraw from any politics or plans that would aim to establish in a more favorable conditions our dominance over the East at the expense of the aforementioned nation... Ukraine, Lithuania and Belarus must be granted full independence, as this is demanded by the Polish-Russian national interest” (Mieroszewski 12).

- 3 The founder and director of the independent station established in 2007 was Agnieszka Guzy-Romaszewska; in December 2016, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed her that her budget had been reduced and that the station has to switch to the Polish language. “According to unverified information, to which Romaszewska refers, Ministry of Foreign Affairs has cut financing for television from 17 million to 5 million złotych” (Poczobut).
- 4 The PiS government is expanding its cooperation with Belarus, thereby relativizing and legitimizing the regime in power there. This cooperation is in itself significant, as it includes, e.g. plans for the purchase of atomic energy and land for wind power stations (something which PiS is opposing in Poland, calling it a sign of German colonization). “According to plans, the sales between Minsk and Warsaw are to increase four-

country, is increasingly being pushed away, as relations are governed by historical politics, identity politics and Polish claims to innocence, not by pragmatic calculations. Even in 2013, when a liberal government, Civil Platform (PO), was in power, the Sejm adopted a political declaration about Volhynia, defining the UPA crimes as “ethnic cleansing with signs of genocide,” which the ruling right-wing party, Law and Justice (PiS), later changed to simply “genocide” in 2016, marking July 11 as the Day of Remembrance of Victims of Genocide perpetrated by Ukrainian nationalists on citizens of the Second Republic of Poland during WWII.⁵ Therefore, Poland expects, as if under Sienkiewicz’s dictation, that Ukraine forever accept its role as that of a criminal, that it renounce its “cursed soldiers” and concede to Polish civilizational superiority.⁶ To this we might also add the scant legal and social protection offered to the million Ukrainians working in Poland.⁷ Such works as the film *Wołyń* (Volhynia; Hatred), which is commonly taken as presenting evidence for Ukrainian crime and Polish martyrdom, also strengthens reluctance and a sense of moral superiority.⁸

Over the past ten years, foreign policy towards Ukraine has, therefore, radically changed, and state propaganda has transformed the image of “Ukraine

fold. In October, we were able to pass an agreement regarding local border traffic, and the PKP (Polish Railways) celebrated this fact by introducing more connections from Kraków–Warsaw–Grodno. Interestingly, at approximately the same time the connections between Wrocław–Dresden and Wrocław–Berlin were eliminated” (Witkowski).

- 5 July 11, 1943, UPA units attacked approximately 100 Polish villages in Volhynia.
- 6 “Some time ago I talked to president Poroshenko and told him directly: you won’t enter Europe with Banderites; you’ll have to choose between integration with the West, which means giving up UPA or the East and everything that is connected to it” (Kaczyński).
- 7 Taking advantage of the economic crisis, Poland is draining Ukraine of its work force: The majority of these immigrants are doing what Poles do in the West: picking fruit, sorting fish, construction work, serving dinner and lunch. The minority is to fill the holes left by emigrating doctors, nurses and computer programmers, without whom the workforce cannot regenerate and the economy cannot develop” (Witkowski). Furthermore, the growing (and exacerbated by PiS) anti-Ukrainian sentiment prevents the development of an alliance between Polish and Ukrainian workers.
- 8 “Last year the Sejm passed an act concerning the Volhynia crime and almost simultaneously president Petro Poroshenko, kneeling before the monument of Polish victims of Volhynia. The film *Wołyń* (Volhynia; Hatred), based on the simplest stereotypes in describing the complex Polish-Ukrainian history, was called a gesture of reconciliation between the nations. In Polish eastern policy is slowly being taken over by an National Democratic, nationalistic narrative, and Giedroyc’s ideas about a Polish-Ukrainian alliance have become nothing more than a pipe-dream” (Smoleński).

aspiring to be in Europe” into the image of “Ukraine worshiping Banderites.” Highlighting UPA, the Volhynia crime and the allegedly widespread support for Bandera in Ukraine affects Polish attitudes to Ukrainians residing in Poland: acts of verbal aggression against individuals are multiplying, as well as physical assaults during cultural events or even during religious processions. Emphasizing the “unfairness” of the Giedroyc doctrine has already entered official political discourse,⁹ just as it has become the norm to deny the Ukrainian minority additional state subsidies.¹⁰

At the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the cultural depiction of Ukraine aligned with the political discourse. Both underlined the similarities between the two countries, societies and cultures. Analogies served to work through the colonial heritage, that is, to understand that Poles were present in the Ukrainian lands from the seventeenth to the twentieth century in the role of a hegemon that impeded the developmental opportunities of the native society and relegated Ukrainians to the position of slaves. In this context, it seems remarkable that the Ukrainians were the ones to begin renewing Sarmatism—in a folk and postcolonial spirit—as a culture common to societies living in the former areas of the noble Polish Republic (see Pollack).

As part of the narrative of similarity, the writers also highlighted the key significance of dignity in the history of both societies and pointed out that Poland underwent a capitalist transformation largely facilitated by the West (this is help that in the twenty-first century Ukraine more urgently needs). In the context of Polish literature on Ukraine, “neighborhood” began to mean that Poles ask more than instruct, create a common language rather than use another language of domination.

Texts that aimed to decolonize the Polish memory of the Borderlands played a key role in this process. Examples of such roguish books are the following: Daniel de Beauvois’s *Ukrainian Triangle. The nobility, Tsarism and People*

9 “Many politicians are thoughtlessly clinging to an outdated and compromised myth of Jerzy Giedroyc. Regardless of what Giedroyc had in mind, his spiritual pupils, e.g. Adam Michnik, Henryk Wujec, Tomasz Nałęcz or Paweł Kowal, interpret his ideas thus: for the good of our relations with independent Ukraine, atrocities committed by UPA ought to be forgotten” (Isakowicz-Zaleski).

10 Cutting funding for organizations representing minority groups in 2017 (granted on the basis of the Act on National and Ethnic Minorities passed by the Ministry of Interior and Administration): Association of Ukrainians in Poland has not received any funding for the 70th anniversary of deportations that took place as part of the “Wisła” initiative in 2017; no funding was granted for the Ukrainian language website Proştir. pl. In all, seven projects proposed by the Association of Ukrainians in Poland were rejected (in preceding years at most 1–3 were rejected).

in *Volhynia, Podolia and Kiev Region 1793–1914* (2005), Józef Obrębski's *Polesie* (published in 2007, containing analyzes from the 1930s), Jan Sowa's *The King's Phantom Body* (2010). All three authors analyzed the centuries-old colonial conditions created by Poles in the Borderlands. Ziemowit Szczerek's *Mordor Will Come and Eat Us* (2013) provided journalistic evidence for the current relevance of this postcolonial attitude. The author presented the Borderland language "in action," or Polish cultural awareness—full of stereotypes, prejudices and a sense of superiority in relation to Ukraine, acting like a machine that brings colonial relations to tourism. Polish tourists bring with them this border discourse to Ukraine: it manifests itself in words, behaviors, selected routes, visited sites, and even in the patterns of affected behavior towards monuments and ruins. The re-Polonized and reactivated borderland discourse is strengthened by the Polish tourist industry: travel agencies, guidebooks and albums produce ample evidence of the superiority of Polish culture over Ukrainian barbarism. The world presented in the reportage is not Ukraine, but contemporary Polish soft-colonialism, which no longer has the power to conquer foreign lands, but can, to a limited degree, stop history. Polish tourists looking for traces of Polishness in Ukraine are paying residents to maintain signs of their former colonial dependence.

Other books have also crossed this decolonization threshold: Małgorzata Szejnert's reportage, *Raising Mountains: True Life Stories from Polesie (Usypać góry. Historie z Polesia)* (2015) and Olga Tokarczuk's novel, *The Books of Jakob (Księgi Jakubowe)* (2015). They share a common feature of presenting the Borderlands in different languages and from different perspectives: from the point of view of a Pole and a Ukrainian (Belarusian, Lithuanian, Jew...), from the point of view of a nobleman and a peasant, owner and owned, the free and the enslaved. Therefore, these writers have learned to read the Borderlands in much the same way as a sociologist would; in order to understand the ethnic and economic relations in those lands, one must, first of all, learn to listen to someone else's stories.

The political discourse of the second decade of the twenty-first century radically departs from this concept. In opposition to the narrative of similarity and critical decolonization that have developed in literature, the language of politics primarily relies on the rhetoric of hierarchical difference. This rhetoric is connected not only to the celebrations of tragic events in Volhynia, which are used as the strongest argument against Giedroyc's doctrine¹¹ and the bloodiest

11 In 2013 activists of Poland's fringe right-wing movement "reconstructed" the Volhynia massacre in Radymno. Seven wooden houses were burned down in front of 5,000 spectators, and recordings of this "happening" were circulated on the Internet. Com-

evidence of the victims' moral superiority, but also to public declarations to the effect that Poland represents civilization and Ukraine is backward, that all permanence and value (churches, manor houses) were created by Poles, and Ukrainians have only themselves to blame for everything that is associated with clutter, backwardness and destruction, and finally, that Poland belongs to Europe and Ukraine still only aspires to it.

Thus, Giedroyc's concept is fulfilled in today's Polish foreign policy in its clumsiest variant: the government is separating Poland from Russia not so much by strengthening its eastern neighbors, but by provoking symbolic wars with them. This is done not in the name of a long-term program of international relations, but because of the inability to overcome its own complexes. That is why, although it is difficult to define the goal of Polish Eastern policy, it is not difficult to point to Sienkiewicz as its source.

2. The South: Central Europe, or Isolation

The second, southern direction gained prominence in the 1980s, when, thanks to Milan Kundera's famous essay "The Kidnapped West, or the tragedy of Central Europe" (Kundera), Polish culture began to rebuild its place in Central Europe. This text, which was quickly translated into many languages and was met with many enthusiastic comments and polemics, was intended as a challenge to Cold War geopolitics. The writer stated that Poland, Czechoslovakia¹² and Hungary became hostages of the Yalta peace treaty, as Western Europe gave Soviet Russia three of our countries in exchange for its own security. The best evidence that the Center did not agree with this decision were the uprisings that erupted in the following decades against totalitarian power—in 1956 (Hungary, Poland), in 1968 (Czechoslovakia, Poland), in 1970, 1976 and 1980 (Poland).

This rebellious attitude stemmed from the fact that Central Europe—the wealth of nations, cultures, faiths and languages—was not familiar (in the view of Kundera) with violent resolutions of conflicts; this area existed according to the following rule: "maximum diversity on a minimum of space" (Kundera 18). "How could we not be terrified of Russia which was building

menting the necessity of staging such "reconstructions," one participant stated proudly that it is "connected not only to preserving memory," but to rejecting "the outdated and discredited Giedroyc myth" (qtd. in Portnov).

12 Kundera consistently uses the name "Czechoslovakia" in the text, though he is referring to the Czech Republic (since he is referring to exclusively Czech and to cities, which are also exclusively Czech).

its might on the opposite logic: minimum diversity on a maximum of space?” (Kundera 18). By building this opposition and basing it on the idealized image of Central Europe and the terrifying image of Russia, the writer accomplished an extraordinary feat: he distinguished Central Europe from all the countries of the Soviet bloc, making it an internally coherent creation, with its own traditions; he introduced into the pan-European debate the image of a specific area in which culture retains its authenticity; he proposed a cultural (not political!) narrative that became the basis for the supranational language of resistance to the Soviet Union. He also justified the restitutionary attitude towards the West. In this approach, Soviet Russia was recast as a colonizer of culturally alien spaces, while Western Europe was seen as a traitor who, in exchange for security and prosperity, abandoned her younger sister.¹³ Despite these simplifications (or maybe thanks to them?), Kundera transformed geopolitics into geopoetics. Throughout the post-war period, the map of Europe was held hostage by ideology. Alliances were based on the recognition of the integrity of borders, and thus the integrity of the narrative. The essay on Central Europe triggered the imagination and the map came to be seen as a derivative of the story, not of political systems.

The history of the first and second decades after 1989 saw the prognostications in Kundera’s essay come to fruition: The Visegrad Group, i.e. the alliance formed in 1991 between Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia (since 1993, with the Czech Republic and Slovakia) was an attempt to establish new relations between states on the common tradition described by Kundera. CEFTA (Central European Free Trade Agreement), created by the same countries in 1992, was meant to deepen the bond between these countries. This was, incidentally, the first international alliance which used the term “Central Europe” as a full-fledged political category. These agreements were meant to confirm the cultural unity of Central Europe and, at the same time, to help accelerate admission into the United Europe. That is why it is perhaps no exaggeration to claim that Kundera’s essay can be considered a key text for the first transformation of the map; the thinking that the Czech writer popularized allowed Central European politicians to transform geopolitics into geopoetics, i.e. they transformed the map in accordance with the narrative.

The membership application submitted in 1994 began the process of institutional integration of Central Europe into United Europe, which was completed

13 This term, which appears in Kundera’s essay, refers to Jerzy Kłoczowski’s monogram *Młodsza Europa. Europa Środkowo-Wschodnia w kręgu cywilizacji chrześcijańskiej średniowiecza.*

with the signing of the accession treaty in 2003. Integration and, therefore, disappearance. The accession of Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary to Europe took place at the cost of the Center being dispersed into separate, though united in a different whole, countries that weaken cooperation and mutual alliances in favor of cooperating with the Union. Failure to cultivate the narratives of the Center is what proved fatal. Polish politics still seems to be trapped in the logic of Kundera's essay, while reality has sided with Andrzej Stasiuk.

In the memorable essay "Dziennik okrętowy," included in the volume *Moja Europa* (My Europe) (2000) and written together with Yurii Andrukhovych (Jurij Andruchowycz), Andrzej Stasiuk extended the map of Central Europe to include eastern and southern regions, thus annexing the areas of Ukraine, Romania, former Yugoslavia and Albania. This allowed Stasiuk to display the kind of cultural strangeness that is incomprehensible to the West, civilizational backwardness, poverty and a peculiar passive activity that can transform life into intense expectation. According to the writer, the countries of the Center perceive unification with the West, which is based on the transfer of money and new technologies in exchange for getting rid of cultural identity, as yet another form of colonization. Against this, Stasiuk orientalized the Center, presenting passivity as a strategy of waiting for the next stage of history in an attempt to preserve one's own culture.

In subsequent books, *Zima* (Winter) (2001), *Jadąc do Babadag* (Driving to Babadag) (2004), *Fado* (2006), *Dojczland* (2007) and *Dziennik pisany później* (A Diary Written Later) (2010), Stasiuk consistently upheld this depiction, turning himself into a kind of anti-Kundera of the unification discourse. Whereas Kundera attributed Western features to Central Europe, Stasiuk gave these areas an oriental character. For Kundera, Central Europe was an area betrayed by the West, whereas for Stasiuk it was an area betrayed by the elegant concept of Central Europe smoothly and seamlessly joining the West at the price of forgetting the Balkans, Romania and Albania. For Kundera it was a reservoir of beautiful monuments, whereas for Stasiuk it is a rusty warehouse of socialist industry and a kiosk with counterfeit Western goods. For György Konrád, Czesław Miłosz or Danilo Kiš, it was primarily a bourgeois area, for Stasiuk, just like for his great predecessors Josef Kroutvor or Joseph Roth, it is plebeian territory. Supporters of integration regarded Central Europe as an intermediate stage, while Stasiuk treats it as an impassable stage. According to Stasiuk, Central Europe (extended to the Balkans) is a distorted mirror of the West: the people of the Center will never reach the civilizational level of the West, and the only gift that the West can offer as part of the exchange is a parody of modernity. Central

Europe mocks the West, because it unintentionally exposes the fact that these unification myths make it possible for the West to renew its civilization mission and that this mission is a technically advanced version of the petty bourgeoisie.

We do not have to believe Stasiuk and we do not have to regard his texts as a reflection of the truth. It is important, however, that they made it possible to understand how dangerous it was to recognize the narrative of unification as the end of history. The side effects included eagerly forgetting the South, that is, in effect there was no significant difference between Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, on the one hand, and Romania or Albania, on the other. Selected post-communist states were admitted to the Union not because of their past achievements, but in the name of solidarity and in order to achieve the goal of unification. However, successive Polish governments took admission to Europe for granted, which prevented them from thinking about solidarity towards other participants in history. As long as no events disturbed the new order, a sense of Poland's permanent presence in Europe was conducive to this forgetfulness. The rapid influx of war refugees to Europe in 2015 became a critical test of the historiosophical and solidarity narrative represented by the Central European nations. It then became clear that the tradition of tolerance, attachment to European culture and a sense of solidarity are merely illusory values. As a result, the first wave of migrants washed Central Europe off the map and undermined Poland's presence in a united Europe.

In 2015, three nations regarded by Kundera as exclusive representatives of Central Europe agreed that they would not accept refugees. However, there was no unity in this concerted reaction: the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland were not refusing to accept migrants in the name of solidarity with each other (which would be a perverted version of solidarity), but because they had entered Europe as victims and wanted to remain victims deserving of constant assistance. Closing its borders to immigrants meant that Central Europe was made up of separate states interested in a selfish isolational policy. And because egoists, even when alike, remain apart, so Central Europe crumbled before our eyes. Polish foreign policy focused on an alliance with Hungary or the Czech Republic or Romania in an effort to recreate Central Europe is a result of treating the specter of Kundera's essay as reality. Only a specter remains after Central Europe. Ziemowit Szczerek traverses this land in his novel *Międzymorze* (2017), which reveals a simple mechanism that breaks down every alliance of Central European nations; these societies feel different from Western ones; hence, their predilection for Art Nouveau; at the same time, this feeling of separateness in relation to other Central European nations is understood more as uniqueness and thus contributes to further isolation.

3. The West: Germany, or Europe

In a travel essay entitled *Dojczland* (2007), Andrzej Stasiuk stated that Germany and Russia have been determining the fate of Central and Eastern Europe for centuries. They are like two arms of a vice, which grabbed the middle regions and, on account of their location, delivered a geopolitical innocent verdict. For two centuries, Poland either ceased to exist due to the actions of both neighbors or had to adapt its development to them; then, after World War II, it was afraid of the East, and looked to the West with toxic adoration. Germany as an object of desire has always been too far away, Russia as a source of fear too close, so the Polish strategy of survival was based on a civilizational shift towards the West and a cultural shift away from the East.

To move towards Germany meant to imitate. In *Dojczland*, Stasiuk argued that Poles—producers of underdeveloped and impermanent forms—imitate Germans not because they fell in love with perfection, but because their Eastern neighbor threatens Poland with formlessness. The opposition (between Eastern formlessness and German perfection) can be used to formulate another hypothesis: running away from Russia and imitating Germany is combined in the search for one's own form. This form should allow one to achieve (or at least to understand) conditions of equality in shaping one's location on the East-West axis. However, this requires relinquishing claims to superiority and overcoming complexes. In other words, it is necessary to find replacements for the kind of ideas formulated by Stasiuk.

A full discussion of this search for replacements in relation to literature would require the inclusion of several hundred texts. The scope of this essay requires radical shortcuts. Therefore, let us establish the beginning of the accelerated exchange of imagination roughly in the mid-1980s. Andrzej Szczypiorski's novel *The Beginning* (1986) was met with instant acclaim; it was extensively reviewed and after 1989 found its way onto the high school reading list. This novel provoked a shift in affect in that negative emotions were now focused on Russia, leaving Germany as a potential civilizational ally. Stefan Chwin's novel *Hanemann* (1995), published almost a decade later, drew on the heritage of melancholy¹⁴ and pointed to its weakness in redefining the opportunity for Polish-German relations. The spatial protagonist of the novel, i.e. the city

14 Chwin rekindled the interest in melancholy. See Bałus's *Mundus melancholicus. Melancholiczny świat w zwierciadle sztuki* (*Mundus Melancholicus: The Melancholy World in the Mirror of Art*); Bieńczyk's *Melancholia. O tych, co nigdy nie odnajdą straty* (*Melancholy: Those Who Never Recover Loss*); Kuczyńska's *Piękny stan melancholii. Filozofia niedosytu i sztuka* (*The Beautiful State of Melancholy: The Philosophy of Insatiability and Art*),

of Gdańsk, was described by the writer as a model example of a “small homeland”, which (like all such spaces throughout Central Europe) experienced ethnic cleansing after 1945. However, Chwin did not write a historical novel; he presented his story to readers who were immersed in the 90s, i.e. in a period of re-establishing small homelands and redefining identity. It was to these readers that the author addressed the only possible foundational message: the need to stand on the side of people deprived of their homeland. Acceptance of the Other requires the melancholic abandonment of strength and the recognition that weakness is a necessary basis for co-existence. Polish-German relations, and in a broader sense Europe, cannot exist without melancholy. If Szczypiorski denazified Germans, Chwin demilitarized them; *The Beginning* introduced the figure of the good German to social emotions, whereas *Hanemann* introduced the figure of the fascinating German; the first hero became the object of sympathy, the second the object of longing.

Along with *Hanemann* came a pronounced shift of emphasis in the representation of the war and post-war years: an increasingly important role was attributed to the civilian population and its fate, as well as its forced displacements. From this perspective, Polish literature from the turn of the twenty-first centuries has carried out a double exchange: first of its horrors, then of its homelands. The first exchange consisted of a gradually completing a more comprehensive image of war and occupation: the dominant image represented the horrific suffering of Poles persecuted by the Germans.

The subsequent texts made it clear that German civilians suffered a great deal in the aftermath of the war. Edmund Nowak was perhaps the first to describe this suffering in his study *Cień Łambinowic (Shadow of Łambinowice)* (Nowak 1991). It dealt the labor camp in Łambinowice,¹⁵ which existed 1945–1946 and which held around six to eight thousand people: they were German soldiers and civilians, Silesians, Opole Germans, as well as people who were deemed disagreeable by the new authorities or were accidentally arrested. The proportion of victims who died of hunger, illness, torture, and rape is estimated between 1/3 and 4/5. The first commandant of the camp, Czesław Gęborski, and his deputy, Ignacy Szypuła, were brought to justice in 1958 and later acquitted. An outstanding Polish prose writer, Janusz Rudnicki, got a hold of the court files and created a fictitious confession of the deputy commandant (Rudnicki). The sadist says dispassionately:

15 The first description of Łambinowice in German literature can be found in a book written by a camp doctor, Heinz Esser in *Die Hölle von Lamsdorf (The Hell of Lamsdorff)*.

We shot people in the trees as if they were monkeys, we shot people in the restrooms as if they were flies.... We beat and killed.... One shoemaker from Bielce, 58, jumped on my back until he died. His buddy from the same village, 65, had a brain, so I smashed his skull with the butt.... We shot a woman in the ninth month of pregnancy, and then shot her little daughter as she laid flowers on her grave.... We buried those who only fainted. They woke up as the sand fell on them. Darla was possessed, the gravediggers buried them at an accelerated pace. If someone asks me today if I can hear these screams, I can't hear them. I do not regret my sins. (Rudnicki 290–291)

Rudnicki presented a sincere confession of a murderer who feels no guilt. The author, testing the boundaries of communication, created a symmetrical portrait to that of the figure of the Nazi (at one of the hearings, the commander admitted that in the camp he used the regulations of the Nazi camps, because, as a former prisoner of one, he did not know other regulations). Thanks to the ghostly symmetry, the story introduced a mutual hindrance to Polish-German relations: Poles can no longer claim that they were only innocent victims, and the Germans must recognize that they created a pattern of persecution that was faithfully reproduced by the victims.

At the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century, Marek Łuszczyna wrote a follow-up report on *Mała zbrodnia* (*Little Crime*) about Polish post-war concentration camps (Łuszczyna). Based on the collected materials, the author compacted the map:

Between 1945 and 1950, 206 forced labor camps and concentration camps operated in Poland, in which Germans, Ukrainians, Lemkos and Poles were detained. Intact Nazi infrastructure abandoned by the retreating German crews was used to create them.... Bunks in places where the greatest crime in the history of humanity took place, already a few weeks or even a few days (as in the case of Auschwitz II-Birkenau) after their liberation were filled with new prisoners—enemies of the people's power. (9)

Had the Polish authorities taken over the Nazi concentration camp infrastructure, Poland would have become an area of nationalist retaliation reproducing Nazi methods. The shocking reportage by Łuszczyna argues that this was prevented by the resettlement of Germans outside Poland.

In this way we come to another exchange—displaced persons. In the *Hanemann*, the parents of the main narrator, Mr. and Mrs. C., came to Gdańsk just after several hundred thousand Germans fled the city. They were also displaced persons: she escaped from burning Warsaw and he from Vilnius, which was occupied by the Russians. This makes us aware that in the years 1945–1948 a parallel exodus continued: the displacement of Poles from the Borderlands took place at the same time as the displacement of Germans from former East Prussia and Silesia.¹⁶ In 2006, Jan Klata (born 1973), one of the most important theater directors of the twenty-first century, staged the play *Transfer*; he invited Polish and German displaced persons to the performance, who alternately went on stage and talked about their lives during the war and during the resettlement. It was a synchronic history unprecedented for Polish and German cultures, equalizing the experience of civilians of both nationalities: Germans displaced from Silesia and Poles expelled from the East (see Ciesiołkiewicz).

As a result of this process, the main post-war subject, i.e. the nation that is recapturing its lands, gave way to migrants. However, the issue of migrants brought with it problems: acquiring a (new) homeland in this case was associated with the loss of the (former) one; continuity was replaced by a fractured history that constantly has to start anew, and the soldier's agency and independence gave way to an almost disgraceful passivity and susceptibility to objectification (civilians are a deindividualized collective body to be loaded into cattle cars, deported, raped, forced to work, killed). What is more, thanks to the migrants, the definition of the homeland changed: it was no longer a culturally inhabited area, inherited from ancestors or (in the heroic version) reclaimed from enemies. The homeland understood as heritage became something that could be taken away from everyone and anyone. The new definition, which gave hope for a future life, required an understanding that a homeland is a space that nobody recognizes as exclusive property and which can be lent to strangers when they arrive.

16 “Out of around 12 million Germans who fled or were expelled from Eastern Europe after the war, the majority were from Czechoslovakia (3.5 million) and from Poland (7.8 million). The large part of the second group lived in the areas that were taken from the defeated Germans and given to Poland by the Allies”; “By the end of 1944, 6 million Germans fled from the Red Army; it is then when the majority of the 600,000 casualties were killed. Many of them found themselves trapped between the two opposing armies; some were intentionally massacred by Soviet soldiers or died in Soviet camps. The Czechs and the Poles also committed murders. A part of the responsibility for the deaths of these people lies at the feet of Hitler, as the Germans did not organize the evacuation in time” (Snyder).

These exchanges, related to realizing the symmetry of the tragedies experienced by the civilian population, the mass resettlement and the new homeland, resulted in another modification. It concerned ethnic identity after the borders were abolished.¹⁷

Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz regarded the fear implicit in the issue as serious. In his autobiographical, digressive, historiosophical essay *Kinderszenen*, the writer returned to the times of the occupation and the Warsaw Uprising (which coincided with his childhood); considerations entwined around a distinct thesis: “The Warsaw Uprising was the greatest event in Polish history. In our entire history there was (and probably never will be) a greater event” (Rymkiewicz 140). The greatness of the Uprising resulted not only from the fact that it was incited (despite a huge disparity in strength), but also from the scale of the victims. To describe it, the author recalled, with remarkable vividness, the German crimes of that time. And he polemically referred to the formal address Polish bishops gave in 1965 to German bishops, containing the epochal sentence: “we forgive and ask for forgiveness.”¹⁸ Rymkiewicz writes:

It seems that we have forgiven the Germans too quickly and too easily. There are things in history that you never forgive—never, because there is no reason to forgive. The church and prime ministers of subsequent Polish governments should not forget about this—to forgive, one must have authorization; not from God, because God has nothing to do with it, but from Poles, and no one has ever given anyone such permission. (Rymkiewicz 156)

17 A discussion of changes in Polish identity should include literature written by Polish writers living in Germany. However, the large scale of this output would require a separate monograph. I will limit myself to the following list: Dariusz Muszer’s *Wolność pachnie wanilią* (Freedom Smells Like Vanilla) (German edition 1999, Polish 2008), Krzysztof Niewrzęda’s *Poszukiwanie całości* (In Search of Wholeness) (1999), Jurek Zielonek’s *Tadzio* (2000), Brygida Helbig’s *Anioły i świnię. W Berlinie!* (2005), Wojciech Stamm’s *Czarna Matka* (Black Mother) (2008) and Krzysztof Maria Załuski’s *Wypędzeni do raju* (Expelled to Heaven) (2010). This list should also include Janusz Rudnicki’s work, *Można żyć* (It’s a Living) 1993; *Cholerny świat* (Damned World) 1996; *Tam i z powrotem po tęczy* (There and Back on the Rainbow) 1997; *Męka kartoflana* (Potato Pangs) 2000; *Mój Wehrmacht* (My Wehrmacht) 2004; *Śmierć czeskiego psa* (Death of the Czech Dog), 2009.

18 For the historical significance of the bishops’ letter see: Pflüger, Lipscher, Holzer, Madajczyk, Kalicki.

Rymkiewicz opposes his bishops because his position is based on faith in the national absolute (that is why “God has nothing to do with it”). However, the nation exists not because it suffered casualties during the war, but because it did not forgive (the bishops forgave without asking others for their opinion). If the nation had forgiven, the only (separating) link between Poles and Germany, i.e. war, would have disappeared. After forgiveness, the author argues, Germany owes nothing to the Polish people; however, this moral debt that Poles are owed is what funds the existence of a collective subject. Therefore, if the collective subject refuses to forgive, stops the process of getting rid of identity and accepting developmental patterns of others, it regains control over its own historicity and strengthens the Polish “we.” Because in Rymkiewicz’s view Polish identity is based on nothing else but remembering the threat of complete annihilation, Poles can shape their history only on the basis of a refusal to forgive.

Another “we” was described by Włodzimierz Nowak in his collection of reportages entitled *Obwód głowy* (2007), one of the most important books for understanding the process of revising the Polish-German map. One of the reportages presents the present cities of Gubin and Guben located on both sides of the Nysa border. After 2004, Poles and Germans began to talk about one city. At the beginning, joint trade and transport appeared, then came the first bilingual school, shared sports competitions, shared holidays and games, a bridge going to the midriver island from Poland and Germany. Each solution had its side effects: car theft, sex tourism, drug trafficking; during a handball match, girls from both teams threw insults at each other (Polish pigs, Nazis). But the good results prevailed and they pointed to new possibilities: for example, a shared sewage treatment plant.

The process of the two cities merging will never be completed, and new problems will constantly force us to redefine “us.”¹⁹ However, it will already be a postnational “us,” thinking in terms of *polis*. The mentioned purification plant has symbolic significance in this process. Rymkiewicz wanted Polish and German blood to remain unchangeable in the economy of salvation; And Guben-Gubin is “the only place in the world where German and Polish sh ... intermingle” (Nowak 2007: 54). Blood is a sacrifice of the body—pure and heroic; shit is body secretion—dirty and inevitable. The example of the Polish-German

19 The mayor of Gubin, Czesław Fiedorowicz, said: “In a few years the right and the left shore of Eurocity will be governed by one mayor, once a Pole, once a German, elected by a shared parliament. The government headquarters does not need to be built, because the city hall already stands on the Polish side.... One Employment Office, integrated schools with Polish and German languages” (Nowak 2007: 49–50).

border town proves that without ceasing to ask from whom spilt blood separates us, we may start asking with whom our excrements connect us.

Revising the map begins with the imagination. Instead of an image of past great events (wars, uprisings), everyday life appears; instead of permanent and partitioned territories, we have mutability. From these two poles, Nowak's revolutionary bourgeois narrative is born: it includes the image of the Polish-German borderland as an area of communal everyday life. Schools, kindergartens, workplaces, means of communication, bridges, pipes, roads—this is a bourgeois list of infrastructure for the transfer of everything (people, goods, information, dirt), which will move both ways. Revolution is about recognizing mutability as a challenge and opportunity. In response to a mutable history, Rymkiewicz wants to restore the solid consistency of collective identity. The inhabitants of Gubin are building an infrastructure for a mutable reality—a network of roads, canals, pipes, relay stations, and mixing and treatment plants. They know that this infrastructure that they have built will attract people looking for work and criminals, legally bought and stolen goods, things that are necessary and threatening. In the face of these threats, they make no attempt to return to the old borders, but instead they try to incorporate control mechanism to the mutable infrastructure. For Rymkiewicz, the differences between Poland and Germany should never disappear, because without them Poles will lose their identity. For inhabitants of Gubin, cultural differences are primarily communication differences, for which an exchange network can be created.

Nowak's report is complementary to *Kinderszenen*. Both authors agree that there is no historical plan. History must be created. For Rymkiewicz, this means "to win," for Nowak it means "to work out." *Kinderszenen* depicts the history (of a nation) as a unidimensional history, in which expressing past trauma revives Polish identity, whereas *Obwód głowy* suggests a multidimensional history, in which expressing divisive Polish-German issues is a condition for the emergence of a new communal identity. Rymkiewicz writes about a community that should never change under the threat of annihilation, whereas Nowak presents a community that should constantly change under the threat of annihilation. Rymkiewicz chose the more noble task: conversing with the dead, whereas Nowak chose the more difficult task: listening to the living.

The last of these differences refers to the role of literature. According to Rymkiewicz, this role is to resurrect the dead, so that they could help us recreate the old map. According to Nowak, literature exists to say everything²⁰—from in-

20 I am alluding here to Lipski's *Powiedzieć sobie wszystko: Eseje o sąsiedztwie polsko-niemieckim* (To Tell Each Other Everything: Essays on Polish-German Relations).

sults, which preserve borders, to ideas, which create the future. New cartography is not a clearly defined task. However, if there is to be any real reason to revise the Polish-German map, then it must include creating communal everyday life.

The above discussion of the most important works on Polish-German relations can be summarized in the following way. On the Polish-German map in the last thirty years, wartime cartography was the first to give way to civilian cartography (Szczypiorski, Chwin), followed by descriptions of places where of mass arrests of civilians (Rudnicki, Nowak, Łuszczyna), then the resettlement routes were marked (Chwin, Klata) and migration (Muszer, Helbig, Niewrzęda and others). Today, the old cartography of displacements has taken the form of a mutable map of communal everyday life (Nowak). From the point of view of time, this literature was first retrospective in nature (addressing the war and its aftermath), then it was asynchronous (emphasizing the eternal “backwardness” of the migrant), and finally it took the form of a reportage that considers the social construction of a relation network.

The mutable state of the Polish-German map that emerges from literature indicates that the western direction has lost some of its causative power.²¹ It can be cautiously claimed that it has opened itself up to interdependence. However, fusing the infrastructure in such a way seems to be unacceptable to politicians. They work to create a vision of Poland as a country with a semi-permeable western border: EU subsidies may flow through this border, but European legal solutions may not, and especially not EU problems.

4. The North: Scandinavia, or an Alternative to the West

A different process leads to political isolation from the North. After the collapse of communism, Polish literature²² has presented Scandinavia as an alternative

21 The increased role of mutable infrastructure means that no connections results in exclusion. This is made clear by the, Northern Pipeline, which is very disadvantageous for Poland (established in 2012), which runs from Russia to Germany (1,222 km) on the bottom of the Baltic Sea, avoiding the obvious transit countries (Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia). The Northern Pipeline, contrary to its name, weakens the North (especially Norway as a supplier of gas) and strengthens the East-West axis. Twenty-first-century history, as it follows, requires attention to mutable infrastructures, and not only to stable identities.

22 A list of the most important titles: Zbigniew Kruszyński, *Szwedenkrauter* (1995); Bronisław Świdorski, *Słowa obcego* (The Words of a Stranger) (1998) oraz *Asystent śmierci* (Death Assistant) (2007); Manuela Gretkowska, *Polka* (Polish Woman) (2001); Dorota Masłowska, *Paw królowej* (The Queen's Peacock) (2005); Grażyna Plebanek,

to the West. In this alternative, the North, unlike the West, combined social prosperity with a welfare state and freedom with equality. Literature supported this view of the North, but added some important reservations. These narratives undermined the naive belief that Scandinavian modernity can simply be copied, recognizing that this was not a stable model, but a system open to continuous correction. However, not even this system can be imported to Poland by sea, because the modernity based on continuous correction functions on the basis of social trust and the basic principle of equality. In order to achieve similar effects as the Scandinavians, we would have to define the foundations of inequality in Poland, introduce systemic mechanisms aimed at eliminating them, and come up with social practices that are conducive to trust. A society that does not trust each other, its laws and its authorities, will neither be able to join the North, nor develop its own modernity.

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, politicians still supported the “Scandinavian dream,” although they reduced it to the belief that social trust will rise along with increased GDP. However, in the second decade, right-wing propaganda introduced into the mass media the image of the North as “modernity that has gone too far.” Too far in terms of accepting refugees, as their excessive numbers deprive native people of their right to self-determination; too far in terms of child protection, as a simple spanking leads to parents losing custody of their children;²³ too far in terms of protecting women’s rights, as “normal” groping of breasts or buttocks can result in the offender being fired; too far in terms of sexual equality, as it accords “perverts” the same rights as normal people.

5. The Status of the Map

To sum up, we are isolated from the East by the specter of the Republic of Nobles, from the South by the specter of Central Europe, from the West by sovereignty understood as ideological integrity, and from the North by the anxious protection of Polish customs against equality (which includes also domestic violence, misogyny and homophobia). This four-fold disengagement characterizes the strange condition of contemporary Poland, which, as part of an

Przystupa (2007); Maciej Zaremba, *Polski hydraulik i inne opowieści ze Szwecji* (Polish Plumber and Other Stories from Sweden) (2008).

23 For a comprehensive account of the problems connected to child care and government intervention in parenting see: Marcin Czarnecki’s *Dzieci Norwegii. O państwie (nad)opiekuńczym* (Children of Norway: An (Over)Protective Nation).

unprecedented shift, is changing its location. Poland is entering a state of intra-continental drift, or inertial tide, initiated in the name of an unknown destination and taking place in an unknown direction.

To change this state, one would have to come up with a kind of sovereignty that integrates, i.e. we would have to abandon nationalism separating us from our eastern neighbors, work out a new narrative about Central Europe, look at the mutable infrastructure in the West and follow the model of the North, work on social trust as the basis of modernity. Four sides of the Polish world have become the conditions of the geography of late modernity. By defining these conditions, literature makes it clear that isolation is impossible today: it is impossible to speak of a separate Poland, if it is to exist at all, but it cannot exist without renewing its narrative connections. Narratives that expose Poland's total separateness from the East, narratives about Poland's obvious place in Christian Europe, about the possibility of stopping the emancipation process, or about Polish self-sufficiency are useless. However, to draw this new map, one needs to imagine a different future.

Translated by Marcin Tereszewski

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| Abstrakt

PRZEMYSŁAW CZAPLIŃSKI

Literatura i geografia

Artykuł stanowi propozycję potraktowania literatury jako matrycy wyobraźni zbiorowej. Podstawą omówienia jest proza polska okresu 1986–2016, a teza główna mówi, że kultura polska dotarła do krańców wyobraźni geograficznej. Jest to rezultatem wyprowadzki z dotychczasowych większych całości, do których Polska należała bądź do których dążyła (osłabienie obecności w Unii Europejskiej, zniknięcie Europy Środkowej, zahamowanie procesu orientowania się na skandynawski model państwa i kultury obywatelskiej, kryzys w stosunkach z Litwą, Białorusią i Ukrainą). Osłabianie bądź zrywanie więzi z państwami sąsiedzkimi prowadzi do czterostronnej izolacji – czyli wspomnianych krańców wyobraźni geograficznej. Wyjście z impasu byłoby możliwe pod warunkiem wypracowania nowych narracji łączących Polskę z kulturami sąsiedzkimi i osadzających nasz kraj na europejskiej mapie.

Słowa kluczowe: krańce; mapa; wyobraźnia geograficzno-kulturowa; wyobraźnia polityczno-kulturowa; Europa Środkowa; Skandynawia

| Abstract

PRZEMYSŁAW CZAPLIŃSKI

Literature and Geography

This article proposes to treat literature as a template of the collective imagination. The basis for discussion is Polish prose from 1986–2016, with the main thesis being that Polish culture has reached the limits of geographical imagination. This is the result of Poland withdrawing from the larger structures to which it once belonged or to which it aspired (its diminishing presence in the European Union, the disappearance of Central Europe, delayed efforts to pursue the Scandinavian

model of the state and civic culture, the destruction of relations with Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine). Weakening or breaking ties with neighboring countries has led to isolation from all four sides. In order to get out of this impasse, it is necessary to develop new narratives that would link Poland with the neighboring cultures and would once again put our country back on the European map.

Keywords: borderland; map; geographical and cultural imagination; political and cultural imagination; Central Europe; Scandinavia

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