

TRANSLATION BETWEEN EASTERN AND WESTERN EUROPE

Postcolonial Contexts and Parallels

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses possible applications of the term “postcolonialism” as a framework to describe translation trends present in the literary exchange between Eastern and Western Europe. In translation studies the notion of “postcolonialism” has gradually broadened to embrace various forms of “internal colonialism” within Europe itself (Cronin) and to refer to all types of cultural relations based on hegemony or power imbalance. The translation discourse developed notions of “ethnocentric violence” (Venuti), hegemonic and dominated cultures, minority and majority languages, and the aim of the article is to test whether the postcolonial framework is a useful tool for the description of the asymmetries between the West and the “other Europe”. Norman Davies in his essay “West Best, East Beast” stresses that the construct known as “Eastern Europe” can be traced back to the Enlightenment, when West was equated with the light, progress and culture, while the East of Europe was associated with half-barbarian lands plunged in intellectual darkness. The inner divisions and hierarchies within Europe are also a legacy of the cold war and communism and, Eastern European countries, including Poland, continue to be constructed as the *other*, despite significant changes on the political and economic arena. The paper focuses on showing how this dichotomy affects the translation strategies, and finally, the reception of the translations among the target readership. I shall test some of the theoretical propositions described above against the case studies, i.e. translations of Polish novels into English and their presence (as products) on the Anglo-American book market. Of particular interest to me are the ways in which translations may become vehicles for cultural representation and the ways in which they generate images or social constructs referring to being “Eastern European” or “Polish” and which become part of a larger cultural discourse.

THE SCOPE OF THE NOTION OF POSTCOLONIALISM IN POSTCOLONIAL THEORY AND TRANSLATION STUDIES

The postcolonial theory arises out of cultural and literary criticism which was initially aimed at analysing the cultural and social legacy of colonization. The colonial and postcolonial discourse rests on the opposition of the West and the “third world”, i.e. the colonizers or imperial powers of the Western world and the colonized (Africa, Asia, Latin America). Stuart Hall (1996: 185) points out that there are several problems concerning the neat division to “the West and the Rest” and they are related to the concept of the West itself.

First of all, it is unclear where and what is the “West”. Following Hall (1996: 185–189), it has to be seen as a complex notion that refers not so much to geography, as to

history, ideology, type of society and its level of development. Also, there is no clear-cut consensus on the borders of Europe, and the case of the so called “Eastern Europe” proves that not all of Europe belongs to the concept of the West. Thus, it may be argued that the notion of the West is a classification tool which enables us to evaluate, label and contrast nations or societies. Yet, the classification cannot be “innocent” because it reflects axiology: the West and Western society is associated with development, industrialization, civilization, etc. whereas the “non-West” is seen as underdeveloped and backward, i.e. struggling to catch-up with the West. Again Eastern Europe can serve as an example here. Davies (1997) in his essay *West Best, East Beast* comments on the origins of the intellectual construct known as “Eastern Europe” and writes that from the period of the Enlightenment, the West began to be equated with the light, progress and culture, while the East of Europe was associated with half-barbarian lands plunged in intellectual darkness.

The second problem concerning the West and non-West dichotomy is that the theoretical discussions and case studies on postcolonial issues of power imbalance tend to be limited to the opposition of the West and the Third World. This academic status quo has been challenged by some researchers, including translation studies scholars, who draw attention to the Second World and the imperial ambitions of Russia and the Soviet Union. In his essay *Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique*, David Chioni Moore (2001) investigates the possible postcoloniality of the post-Soviet sphere and bemoans the lack of connections between postcolonial criticism and studies concerning Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, as well as a lack of common research on the issues of postcolonialism and postsocialism. Assuming a more extreme tone, Ewa Thompson (2000) writes about the failure of literary critics to treat Russia as a colonial power and about the strategy of intentional concealment of the issue of colonialism in relation to the Soviet Union that is present in Western academia.

The debate that was initiated focused on the discussion whether the postcolonial critical tools and theory can be applied to the region of Eastern Europe and former satellite countries of the Soviet Union (Kania 2009; Korek 2007). It has been particularly heated among Eastern European researchers, who attempt to “legitimize” the study of Eastern Europe from the postcolonial perspective (for an overview of the debate, see the online journal *Postcolonial Europe* at <http://www.pismo.easyisp.pl/index.php>). Most authors lament the neglected Second World and call for the academics to recognize and acknowledge it in the postcolonial writing. For example, Skórczewski (2006) discusses the notion of periphery and comments on the marginalization of Eastern European societies that may be the factor leading to the proliferation of the inferiority complex which is characteristic of postcolonial nations. Another academic, Clare Cavanagh (2003: 18), points out that there is a clear structural analogy between domination systems in the First and Second Worlds and argues that the Second World is excluded from the Western-dominated academic discourse and discussed the case of postcolonial Poland, which she calls “an empty space on the map of current theory”.

Another research area in which the issue of the possible applications of postcolonial criticism beyond the First World-Third World opposition was raised is translation.

Tymoczko (1999) discusses the translation of early Irish literature into English and analyses potential discursive practices within the context of colonization/decolonization of Irish culture. Similarly, Michael Cronin (1996: 3) examines the Anglo-Irish colonial relationship, and in his study *Translating Ireland*, he criticizes postcolonial studies academics for neglecting “internal colonialism” within Europe and for concentrating on the “simple opposition of Europe and the New World or Europe and the Colony”. In *Translation and Globalization* (2003: 140), Cronin again bemoans the fact that “no attempt is made to account for the asymmetry and inequality of relations between peoples, races, languages in Europe itself”, and that in this way, criticism becomes imperialist in itself.

The theoretical propositions presented above reflect a gradual movement towards a more generalized and broader understanding of the notion of colonialism/postcolonialism. Following Foucault (1972), the processes that operate under colonialism and in a postcolonial context are now often described in terms of a *discourse* and draw on a play of oppositions (centre-periphery, minority-majority, global-local, dominating-dominated, familiar-other, etc). The discourse generates meanings and knowledge, but according to Hall (1996: 204–205), it is also a system in which power circulates – this power is exercised over those who are subject to the knowledge. Therefore, postcolonial criticism evolved to embrace all types of ideological dimensions and postcolonialism is used to refer to any relations of power imbalance or centre-periphery that is present also in modern European nations. This cultural imbalance is reflected as well in the translation industry. In order to reflect this status quo, also translation studies developed certain notions that have originated from postcolonial criticism, for example, the idea of “ethnocentric violence” in translation (Venuti 1995, 1998) and minority and majority languages/cultures (Cronin 2003: 144–145).

WESTERN EUROPE VS. “THE OTHER” EUROPE

The objective of the present paper is to apply the postcolonial theoretical framework to the cultural and political configuration in Europe after the fall of the Soviet empire. The inner divisions and hierarchies within Europe are a legacy of communism and the cold war. I believe that the iron curtain still remains an imperceptible barrier and Eastern European countries continue to be constructed as the *other*, despite significant changes of the political and economic arena. The phrase *the other Europe* has made its way to the everyday language and to multiple contexts, including travel agencies’ offers and literature (see the Penguin series *Writers from the Other Europe* edited by Philip Roth). Even nowadays in the political and economic EU discourse, the notion of Europe seems to be split between the “EU 15” and “new accession states”. In an important collection under a telling title *Central Europe: Core or Periphery?* (Lord 2000), Croatian writer, Slavenka Drakulić, criticizes Western Europe (and the EU) for excluding Eastern Europe as “the other Europe” and in this way limiting the notion of the European identity.

The dichotomy of East and West is one of the most perceptible, and yet unexplored, instances of asymmetries in Europe. Apart from the work concerning the Irish-English context, very little has been written about power imbalance in Europe, despite Cronin's calls for the need to step outside the colonizer-colony duality. Current EU expansion and the changing image of Europe encourage research on the cultural exchange taking place between the two "Europes", which are divided by history, politics and long-established stereotypes.

This paper is an attempt to fill this void to some extent and discuss Eastern Europe in a colonial/postcolonial context. Let me focus on the example of Poland. In recent years, postcolonial discourse has made its way into Polish academia and various attempts at the application of postcolonial theoretical tools to the situation of Poland have been made. A useful classification has been proposed by Hanna Gosk (2008), who proposes a historical outline of geopolitical configurations based on the type of dependence. The variety of dependence and domination paradigms with regard to Poland includes the following:

1. Imperial discourse in the pre-partition period (16th–18th century), during which Poland played the role of an empire, expanding its borders to the neighbouring lands.
2. Period of the Partitions (1795–1918): loss of statehood, oppression and division of the country between Russia, Prussia and Austria; Poland becomes a colony of the three imperial powers.
3. Inter-war period which is a "mixed variant": postcolonial (Poland regains its independence) and colonial (Polish imperialist policy towards the Eastern borderlands, expressing interest in overseas colonies, Borkowska 2007).
4. Colonial situation under the German and Soviet occupation during WWII.
5. 1945–1989 Soviet occupation: Poland becomes a colony of the Soviet Union and after 1989 finds itself again in the discourse of post-dependence (Gosk suggest using a term "post-dependence" rather than "postcolonial" in this context).

My objective is to go beyond these paradigms of oppression and domination and apply the postcolonial theoretical framework to the cultural and political configuration in Eastern Europe (and Poland specifically) after the fall of communism, which is sometimes seen as a period of new dependence. The aim of this paper is to focus on one particular moment in the history of Europe, mainly the fall of the communist regime in 1989 and the gradual transformation of the former Soviet Union satellite countries to democratic and independent states. The crucial issue relates to the ideological implications that this change brings and the way it affects the cultural exchange (including translation) between Eastern and Western Europe. The moment of the fall of the iron curtain also bears linguistic consequences, as in most countries

in Central and Eastern Europe, the master language, Russian, has been replaced by hegemony – English and Anglo-American cultural values.

Therefore, I argue that the period of political and economic transformation in Eastern Europe is a “colonial” and postcolonial moment at the same time and that this region of Europe has been dominated by two centres: the East and the West. First, for over 50 years after WWII, the communist Eastern Bloc belonged to the Soviet occupation zone and essentially constituted a USSR colony. Then, from 1989 onwards, it found itself under the strong influence of Western (primarily Anglo-American) cultural values. Understandably, the relation of Eastern Europe after the fall of the Iron Curtain to the West is not one of political oppression, but it is certainly characterized by cultural domination, or imbalance based on the centre-periphery opposition. The way this asymmetry is enacted is clearly visible in the case of Poland, and I shall use it as an example.

In the period when communism was gradually replaced with capitalism, Poland found itself, as sociologists term it, in a “cultural void” described as a general feeling of disorientation, helplessness and lack of values (Reykowski 1993). Thompson (2005) also writes about a post-Soviet pessimism that comes with freedom from hegemony and manifests itself in apathy and lack of self-confidence. The void was filled in the process of imitation, as a result of which Poland (and other Eastern European countries) became some of the major recipients and importers of Western cultural output. This process involves two major areas, namely language and literature.

In the first five years of political freedom, the number of borrowings from English in the Polish language doubled (Mańczak-Wohlfeld 1994), and it must be underlined that this influx stems not only from the need to fill semantic gaps (e.g. in technology), but also from the fascination that Anglo-American culture invokes, particularly among young people. The book market is another significant area of Western influence. After 1989, there was a sharp rise in the number of the translations published in Poland, accompanied by a fall in the publication of Polish books. As data shows, most translations are from English: in the decade between 1989 and 1999, the number of translations from the British originals has increased six times, and from the American originals eleven times (Adamiec, Kołodziejczyk 2001). Index Translationum, UNESCO’s international bibliography of translations [available online], is an interesting source of data concerning the translation statistics. The database of the cultural sector of UNESCO contains bibliographic information on books translated and published from 1979 in over 100 different countries. The data related to the book exchange between Poland, Britain and USA deserves special attention. Translations from English prevail among translations into Polish – in the period after the fall of communism (1989–2010), 35,467 books have been translated from English into Polish (18,630 in the category of literature). Translations from Polish into English are marginal: only 1093 translated books in this period, of which 201 belong to the category of literature.

The quoted data proves the assumption that Anglo-American culture acts as a hegemonic (in relation to Polish culture) correction and justifies the view that Polish culture remains a minor and dominated partner in the cultural communication

between the two. The situation of Polish literature and culture during the transformation period made it sensitive to all imports from the West that filled the gaps of the communist era. At the same time, translations from Polish occupy the margins of the Anglo-American literary system. Cronin (2003: 36) points out that the imbalance in the translation industry is particularly visible in the relationship between the UK and the “rest” of the EU:

... it is worth bearing in mind the very significant disparity between the number of translated titles published in the UK which is as low as 2 per cent, and the figures for translated titles in other EU countries and accession states, which are 25 per cent and higher. There is clearly a translation imbalance in terms of a privileged source language (English), which does not engage in a relationship of reciprocity in the area of literary translation.

An interesting parallel can be drawn between travel and migration. For example, Malena (2003; quoted in Cronin 2006: 45) talks about migration by means of a translation metaphor: “Migrants are translated beings in countless ways. They remove themselves from their familiar source environment and move towards a target culture which can be totally unknown or more or less familiar [...]”. Similarly, after Poland joined the EU in 2004, Polish people, (as representatives of the most populated nation in Eastern Europe) started to throng to Britain: they “translated themselves” from their native culture to the culture which, they believe, offers better opportunities. The underlying motivation is the need to move from the periphery to the centre, with the conviction that Western culture is more “central”, “major” and consequently – superior.

The asymmetry between Eastern and Western Europe that has been discussed above with reference to the example of Poland undoubtedly exists. I would put forward a hypothesis that, even though the interactions of the two Europes are free from violence, oppression or any form of imposed (political or economic) domination, the mechanisms that operate in West-East relations in Europe are analogous to those present in a postcolonial colony-colonizer relationship. In an article devoted to a study of Polish Eastern borderlands, German Ritz (2008: 131) comments on the image of the EU in Eastern European mentality: “The EU is not an empire, but because of the memory of the historical Kremlin and Habsburg empires in the this region, it is associated with an empire” [my translation]. Thompson (2005) in turn suggests that because Russia and later the Soviet Union were never an object of admiration in Poland, it was successfully replaced by “substitute hegemons”, i.e. Western countries.

In this cultural configuration, which is characterized by unequal social and cultural exchange, not only migrants travel, but also translations. The question that arises in view of this imbalance concerns the cultural implications of translation processes that take place both in Eastern and Western Europe. Of particular interest to me are the ways in which the East is received, read and interpreted, in other words, how does the West (especially Britain) “translate” Eastern Europe?

VISITORS FROM “THE OTHER EUROPE”.
HOW DO TRANSLATIONS FROM EASTERN EUROPE TRAVEL TO THE WEST?

This paper specifically focuses on the issues of translation and processes involved in the publication of contemporary Polish novels in Britain after 1989 and the ways in which the post-dependence discourse may govern the production of meanings conveyed by translation as a product. Many translation scholars (e.g. Venuti 1995, 1998; Gentzler, Tymoczko 2002) suggest that power relations are inextricable from the translation process. According to Venuti (1995; 1998), translation in the context of inequality (economic, cultural, linguistic) from a minor culture/language to a major culture/language involves assimilation, adjustment and is a form of violence performed on the “weaker” party. Therefore, the primary aim of this paper is to investigate some of the strategies that are applied to translation from Polish into the dominating language of Europe, English. I posit that the analysis of choices undertaken on the level of language, as well as the publication and circulation of novels (choice of book covers, reviews) may reveal certain mechanisms and patterns characteristic of cultural exchange in a colonial/postcolonial situation. The analysis shall be limited to translations from Polish into English; however, I believe that the poetics and politics of the translations, seen as products “sold” to the target readership, can be an index of the cultural and social relationship not only between Poland and the UK, but perhaps also between Eastern Europe and Western Europe, the “empire” of the English language. I have identified several mechanisms present in the translations, and I shall briefly present them below.

THE DICHOTOMY OF US AND THEM

In the postcolonial discourse, the division of the world into the colonizers and the colonized (us and them, us and the foreign) is axiological. The hegemonic/dominating culture deprives the subject of its discourse of its richness, which may give way to phobias, stereotypes and simplifications. The “us and them” model may be observed in strategies applied not only by translators, but also by reviewers (or publishers) who present the translation to the new target audience, but at the same time, distance themselves from anything that is unfamiliar or exotic. A translation of a novel by Olga Tokarczuk entitled *House of Day, House of Night* by Antonia Lloyd-Jones (Tokarczuk 2002) may serve as an example. The strategy of the publisher is to arouse the interest in Polish fiction by emphasizing the mysteriousness of the novel’s world (set in between truth and myth, dream and reality) and its enigmatic and quirky characters. The publisher’s blurb on the cover reveals a tendency to foreground those aspects of *House of Day, House of Night*, that are universal and that go beyond cultural specificity. The publisher presents Tokarczuk as an “exciting new voice for British readers”, which suggests that he also expects the target audience to be tempted by the novelty and freshness that foreign and, to some extent, exotic writing may evoke. Yet, the reader of the translation will also come across the note of the translator,

which concerns the recipes found in the novel and contains a warning: “Readers are advised that some of the recipes in this book should carry a health warning, ‘Don’t try this at home!’” Thanks to this playful remark, the translator becomes a visible medium and enters into a friendly and familiar dialogue with the new audience. On the other hand, the warning leaves an imprint of exoticism and strangeness on the translation. It creates a distance between the source and the target culture and carries hidden information about potential dangers related with a closer contact with the Other (Slavic culture).

The “us and them” model may be also present in the reviewing strategies. For example, the review of a translation of a novel by Andrzej Stasiuk (2003), published by *The Guardian*, ends with a bitter comment that the book (thanks to an elegant edition) can make a good present for a homesick Pole (Hickling 2003). This statement implies that Polish reality may only be understood by a Pole, and that Polish culture and its past (despite the publisher’s and translator’s efforts) remains exotic and untranslatable. Excluding the target readership from potential recipients of the novel means rejecting anything that is unknown and which cannot be easily subjected to a dominating discourse. In colonial discourse, the colonized are deprived of the voice or they do not have a representation in western discourse – in the case of this reviewing strategy, the literature which represents the culture of the dominated, despite the fact that translation is not transferred and remains beyond the scope of the interest of the English speaking audience.

THE MOTIF OF THE UNCIVILIZED AND BACKWARD OTHER

The inferior Other is a key category in colonial and postcolonial studies, and it is related to the issues of national identity and stereotyping practices. Consider the case of the reviews of Dorota Masłowska’s novel *White and Red* (2005). The reviewer of *The Guardian* (Seymelinska 2005), despite praise, constantly underlines the fact that the novel is merely a second-hand creation, which uses patterns that are long established in the “Western canon” (*American Psycho*, *Trainspotting*). A critic for *The New York Times* (Fishman 2005), in turn, points out that, despite the fact that the novel is successful in Poland, to American readers, it will appear “both inaccessible and dated”. Moreover, the reviewer observes a cultural gap between West and East: “Masłowska’s postmodern whimsy may seem radical in Poland, but it will be creakily familiar to most Western readers.” This gap arises from the backwardness of the Eastern Europe that has to catch up with the West in terms of trends and style.

The motif of the backward Other is also present in British tabloids. The British tabloid press (*Daily Mail*, *Daily Express*, *The Sun*) has on numerous occasions described Polish (or Eastern European) immigrants in terms of civilizational backwardness. The most famous articles include the case of a Polish man (presented as “a Polish Borat”) accused of sexual abuse, a story of a Pole masturbating by means of a Hoover, stories of Poles eating swans from the British parks, violating road regulations and fighting for a place to sleep in 20-pence toilets (Głuchowski, Kowalski 2008).

DOMESTICATION STRATEGIES

Domestication strategies are aimed at reducing the effect of foreignness and adapting the text to the target readers' expectations. These may include semantic shifts in the text or title modifications. The example I would like to briefly discuss is a novel by Paweł Huelle *Weiser Dawidek* published as *Who was David Weiser?* in translations by M. Kandel and A. Lloyd-Jones (Huelle 1994; 1995). The novel appeared under a modified title, and one can formulate a hypothesis that it may be a sign of a deliberate strategy of the publishers and the translators. The title places emphasis on, above all, the mysteriousness of the novel and is supposed to arouse curiosity and intrigue the target reader more than the title of the original. The atmosphere of mystery is enhanced by the picture on the cover that features a boy sitting on a bomb, eating ice cream. On the one hand, such efforts are aimed at attracting the attention of the target reader, but on the other hand, the modification of the title enables the publisher to minimize the effect of exoticism and foreignness by putting emphasis on its universal mysteriousness. The review in *The New York Times* (Begley 1992) confirms this hypothesis. The author of the review appreciates the atmosphere of miraculousness and the world of children's imagination presented in the novel, but he points out that the power of the story is weakened by "monotonous use of flashbacks" and "deadeningly intrusive politics", while digressions on the political unease of 1970 and 1980 constitute an important level in the novel's structure. Yet, these references may hinder the understanding of the story and alienate the English speaking readers.

Another example concerns the aforementioned novel *House of Day, House of Night* (Tokarczuk 2002) and a major shift in its macrostructure, i.e. the omission of a particular chapter, entitled *Listy (Letters)*. The chapter is a metalinguistic treaty on words that are "unfair probably because they originate from an unequally and sloppily divided world" [my translation] (Tokarczuk 1998: 104). To show this inequality in language, the narrator comments on the morphology and etymology of several Polish words. For example, she observes the lack of the feminine equivalent of the word *męstwo (bravery)*, which in Polish shares the same root with *mężczyzna (a man)* and *męski (masculine)*. She wonders about the ways of naming this particular virtue in a woman, without "erasing" her sex. The reason for which this chapter has been left out in the translation is presumably the linguistic untranslatability related to the specificity of the Polish lexical items discussed in the discussed fragment of the novel. Lloyd-Jones told me explicitly that the cut has been made for purely linguistic reasons, because there are not any equivalents in the English language that would carry the same, positive and negative connotations (Lloyd-Jones, pers. comm. 2007).

However, it may be argued that the decision by the translator (working together with the editor) to omit the chapter, although not ideological, may have significantly influenced the reception of the novel in the target audience. As several Polish literary critics pointed out (Lengren 1999; Nowacki 1999), these metalinguistic comments are proof of Tokarczuk's feminism, and they largely determined the perception of her work as an instance of "feminist literature". For a comparison, a major review in

The Observer (Marsden 2002) that appeared after the publication of the translation fails to comment on this particular aspect of the novel or on Tokarczuk's status as a feminist writer. To make the problem of the reception of the novel more complex, the cover of the English translation features a photograph of a woman standing by the window of an old house and preparing a meal in a rather outdated pot. I posit that the cover becomes a vehicle for cultural representation: the message that it conveys to the target readers about the novel is that it is "different", "non-West European" and perhaps "exotic" or "unfamiliar". Also, it promotes a paradigm of gender roles in Eastern Europe, which may be based on stereotypical constructs and which envisages women's role as primarily domestic – limited to household chores and childbearing. A hypothesis that may be formulated here is that the feminist overtones of the novel do not correspond too well with the images that British people have about Polish women and their understanding of gender roles and Eastern European femininity. In order to test this assumption, I carried out a brief survey among 20 British people, both men and women of various ages. The respondents were asked about the role of women in contemporary Poland regarding household roles, employment, education attainment and participation in political life. The majority of respondents (65%) believed that Polish society is "male" and envisages women primarily in household roles, which are "all-encompassing and very traditional and burdening". The British imagined that there is a "strong maternal and domestic role surrounding women, more so than in Britain". Therefore, I argue that the translation as a product promulgates a certain vision of Polish femininity (which I believe is part of a more general discourse on Eastern Europe), but at the same time it simply reflects the existing discourse and social knowledge about Polish women. Thus, the choice of the cover and the omission of the chapter may be regarded as strategies aimed at the domestication of the novel and its adaptation to target readers' expectations.

HOMOGENIZATION AND WRITING INTO A CANON

Homogenization of a translation involves all types of publishing and translation procedures which aim at the unification of the image of the Other, so that it is more "assimilable" and comprehensible in the hegemonic culture. What may serve as an example is a tendency to place all Polish literature published on the Anglo-American book market within a historical paradigm that corresponds to the image of Polish writing as a "literature of memory" (Hoffman 2004). For instance, the review of *House of Day, House of Night* in *The Guardian* (Marsden 2002) foregrounds the historical threads in the novel (as one of the many recurring motifs of the book, the reviewer mentions the motif of absent Germans who fled to the new Germany). Marsden appreciates other aspects and dimensions of the novel, yet, the vision of Polish literature he creates is a vision of literature which is immersed in history and obsessively attempts to come to terms with the past. Foregrounding the aspect of history and memory enables Marsden to place Tokarczuk among other Polish writers (Herbert, Miłosz, Szymborska, Mrozek, Kapuściński) whose works constitute a canon of translated Polish literature, and all

draw on “collective faith and an irony that often seems the only sane approach to the cruel joke of Polish history” (Marsden 2002). It may be argued that this preoccupation with past and historical heritage is a construct that prevails among the British readers of Polish fiction and that reading Polish fiction from a historical lens is a dominating reception paradigm. Even travel guides tend to introduce Poland as a country very much concerned with history. For example, the introductory section “Destination Poland” of a Lonely Planet guide presents Poland as a country burdened with past and history: “overrun countless times by marauding aggressors, subjugated to overbearing foreign rule for centuries, and now told their beloved vodka can be made from anything the Polish nation has endured more than most” (Bedford et al. 2008: 16). The reviews of *White and Red* (Masłowska 2005) make use of an opposite strategy, which is particularly interesting from the perspective of the relationship between the cultural Western “centre” and Eastern peripheries. The reviewers attempt to write the novel into a Western canon and the examples are numerous. The novel is compared to the novels of Bret Easton Ellis (*Less than Zero*, *American Psycho*), works of the American Beat Generation, (*Naked Lunch* by William S. Burroughs, Ginsberg’s *Howl*, Kerouac’s *Dharma Bums*), as well as works by Irish (Flann O’Brien, Brendan Behan) and Scottish writers (Irvine Welsh *Trainspotting*) (<http://www.groveatlantic.com/grove/bin/wc.dll?groveproc~genauth~4006~4223~QUOTES>).

This strategy may imply that the works originating from Eastern Europe are secondary to the literature of the West and that translations “travelling” to the West can be assimilated and appreciated only to the extent that they resemble something familiar to the new audience.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Applying a postcolonial framework to the study of translations from Eastern European languages into English (as some would argue, the language of the new global “empire”) foregrounds discourses that arise out of the opposition of Eastern and Western Europe and allows for the reinterpretation of this division. The cultural space where Western Europe and Eastern Europe meet is definitely an interesting one, where new and unusual values may occur. This paper shows that there is still room for further research into cultural phenomena that arise out of the East-West dichotomy.

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