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Migrant Literature

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Migrant Literature

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Foreword

Anna Nasiłowska

Introduction: Emigration and Migration

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Emigrant literature? No: migrant literature. The wave of emigration Poland has experienced since 2004 is not the result of political coercion, nor are the economic reasons for migration entirely unambiguous. These departures are often motivated by curiosity and the desire for adventure, and the choice to relocate can also be made by young people in an attempt to quickly achieve independence from their families. The sense that one can always return has a reassuring effect, though such returns are often hindered by numerous obstacles. Emigration is a bold choice.

Even in the 19th century, the situation wasn't always so unambiguous. Did Mickiewicz really have to emigrate? Probably: he left Russia in a hurry, just before the political crackdown that could have resulted in the confiscation of his passport had he delayed his departure, leaving him stranded in the Russian Empire. But the matter isn't as clear-cut in Słowacki's case. Did he have to leave? He wanted to. Life in the West offered him good stimuli and provided a sense of freedom from censorship, and independence from political circumstances. Similarly, Chopin left in hopes of achieving artistic fulfillment. He would have been a mere provincial artist in Congress Poland. Słowacki would not have seen a single Shakespearean drama performed on stage – but he did in London. He would

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later look back upon the day he saw the legendary actor Edmund Kean in *Richard III* as an extraordinarily happy one. Such motivations for emigration seem similar to contemporary ones.

The difference between migration and emigration lies in just one phoneme, "e," but the prefix is not an indicator of its virtual nature, as is the case with many words equipped with an initial "e," such as e-book or e-shopping. It is emigration that has a hard, specific meaning, while migration is a fluid and variable state. Among the Polish refugees of the twentieth century, the ones who found themselves in the most unambiguous circumstances were those who fled in September 1939. They truly had no choice; many faced certain death. The émigré political elites played a very important role abroad, while writers, perhaps with the exception of such eccentric authors as Gombrowicz, applied their talents by penning columns and stoking the same passions that the wartime conditions had ignited within them. Later, they took up the political duties that arose from their refusal to accept the resolutions regarding the status of Poland made late in World War II.

Though emigration and migration are differentiated by the presence or absence of one phoneme, they differ substantially in terms of the ideological tone of the literature they produce. While the emigrant literature of the 19th century was mystical and visionary, its twentieth-century counterpart was political. It was concerned with topics that it perceived to be its duty to the homeland; it voiced demands for restitution and forged strong bonds with the past. It remained ready to act and to self-organize, producing its own cultural institutions such as the still-existing Sikorski Institute, the Polish Social and Cultural Organization and its library, and the Polish archives in London. Emigrant literature looked back upon the past not just because of the nostalgia consuming writers: it was also a political postulate, one that grew increasingly utopian as the years went on. It was also occupied with everything that was the object of censorship in Poland: the experience of the Gulag system, reckonings with grand European politics and its own literary output as a testimony of resistance.

The dominant tone of migrant literature is entirely different. Thematically, it encompasses intercultural relations, including the juxtaposition between a person's own cultural baggage – their behavior and stereotypes brought over from their birthplace – and their new environment, as well as the problems that emerge when attempting to adapt to a new location, to forge a new self and a detached attitude towards any permanent definitions. Migrants have often left their home country not because they had to, but because they could, and so the answer to the question of why they did so is not simple: perhaps their mothers were overbearing, or maybe they wanted to face a much more interesting challenge than the ones offered them by everyday life in Poland. The bulk of twentieth-century Polish emigrant literature was produced by writers who had honed their craft in Poland and had matured as

creative individuals prior to 1939. They brought their expectations, language and concepts with them. The literature of twenty-first century Polish migrants is largely written by people who debuted only after leaving their home country. It is this experience of moving to a new, rather than foreign, environment that made writers out of them.

Furthermore, twentieth-century emigration was a consequence of closed borders and the Iron Curtain dividing the East and the West; today's departures take place in the context of a completely different global culture. Migrant literature reflects the circumstances of the life of the contemporary nomad; one cannot but mention at this point the "nomadic subject," a term coined by Rosi Braidotti in the book *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*. The feminist theorist earnestly hoped that this concept would lead to the rejection of enduring stereotypical convictions and emancipation from dogmatism. Is that indeed the case? Not entirely: many contemporary works of Polish literature examine the authors' own mental preconceptions and behaviour patterns, brought over from Poland and now exposed under new circumstances, grotesquely ill-fitted to the new situation, like unwieldy and impractical baggage.

Yet the opposition between emigration and migration can sometimes be illusory. Though somewhat obscured by the political perspective thrust into the foreground, twentieth-century Polish literature does display a very distinct complex of issues associated with adaptation and low social status in the new country.

Among the topics explored by emigrant novels was the attempt to describe various patterns of behaviour, both Polish and British. Toporska, for instance, devoted much attention to this subject; after years of obscurity, the 2012–2013 re-editions of her novels allowed readers to rediscover her. Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz's *Londyniszcze* – another re-edition of an extraordinarily eloquent polemical pamphlet that dispelled notions that the British would assume the role of political arbiter on the matter of Polish independence – also contains a sizable dose of fascinating observations on social mores. The outsider, regardless of his status, sees reality in starker relief; it is easier for him to perceive and define the places in which cultures collide, because he himself has experienced the consequences of the differing norms that regulate social interaction, from styles of dress to the rules of political life.

In a 1952 letter to Michał K. Pawlikowski, Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz wrote:

> London is certainly an uglier city than Warsaw, which of course was incomparable to the wonders of Vilnius or the beauty of Kraków, but was prettier than Poznań. The Old Town, the axis linking Krakowskie Przedmieście with Łazienki Park – there were plenty of beautiful things; the streets between Nowy Świat, Ujazdów Avenue, and Marszałkowska Street – those were ugly, as were Warka Square and Savior Square, and yet none of these can be compared to Russell Square or shit like that. But none

> of that matters, anyway. Ryszard Kiernowski put it perfectly: London is a city where you don't feel bad about dying.[1]

I always think back upon this quote with a smile on my face whenever I'm in London: the vivid discrepancy between it and my own impressions is thought-provoking. It remains to be seen what conclusions the authors of contemporary "post-accession" novels written after 2004 will reach. The current edition of *Teksty Drugie* contains a description of a new and relevant phenomenon, a reconnaissance of literature in the process of becoming.

1 Quoted in Jerzy Jaruzelski, *Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz 1896–1966, Wilno–Londyn–Warszawa* (Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz, 1896–1966, Vilnius–London–Warsaw) (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Kultury, 1994), 273.

Essays

Tomasz Dobrogoszcz

Mimicry and Hybridity: New Fiction Interrogating the Identity of Polish Post-2004 Migrants in the UK

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The social and historical survival of every diaspora depends on a solid grounding. It is founded on the resistance of a migrant community to the contingencies of its estrangement in a foreign milieu and to the incommensurability of foreignness surrounding it. In *The Location of Culture*, Homi K. Bhabha suggests that in such circumstances culture can serve as a basis for establishing a "strategy of survival," because it "reaches out to create a symbolic textuality, to give the alienating everyday an aura of selfhood, a promise of pleasure."[1] Bhabha examines the transformations of national discourses, insisting that "culture as a strategy of survival is both transnational and translational."[2] He sees the experience of migration as the scattering, but at the same time the gathering, of people, "exiles and émigrés and refugees" who endure the distress of struggling with "foreign tongues [and] the uncanny fluency of another's language."[3] He emphasises the

1 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), 247.

2 Ibid., 247.

3 Ibid., 199.

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importance of singular narratives in the formation of national and diasporic identity, the production of "the nation as narration," a process of "writing the nation" in which the "patches and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of a coherent national culture, while the very act of the narrative performance interpellates a growing circle of national subjects."[4]

The four works of fiction analysed in this paper illustrate the transnational/translational character of migrant literary discourse, which contributes to the process of writing the Polish nation in contemporary Britain. The paper examines the condition of the Polish diaspora formed in the United Kingdom after the large-scale migration that took place soon after Poland entered the European Union in 2004. As a result of this exodus, Poles are now the largest migrant group living in the British Isles, and Polish has become the second language spoken in the area. One of the effects of this cultural circumstance has been a surge of Polish migrant literature. The experience of leaving a homeland and moving to a foreign milieu inspires many Poles to share reflections and feelings about their new location and its natives. Over eighty books that depict the lives of post-EU-accession migrants in the UK and Ireland have been released since 2004. This paper examines four prose works by Polish writers, two originally written in English – A.M. Bakalar's novel *Madame Mephisto* and Marek Kazmierski's short story collection *Damn the Source* – and two in Polish – *Karpie, łabędzie i Big Ben* [*Carps, Swans and Big Ben*] by Ada Martynowska and *Międzynaród* [*Internation*] by Piotr Czerwiński.

The choice of material analysed does not represent Polish post-2004 migrant literature quite proportionally, as most of it has been, naturally, written in Polish and published in Poland. Nonetheless, it appears legitimate to take into consideration two works published in Britain, as they are targeted directly at English-speaking readers and provide them with a rare opportunity to look into a new cultural phenomenon. But although the selected books are addressed to two different readerships, and their status as cultural artefacts is not the same, they all refer to the issue of migrant identity in a uniform manner and as such can be discussed collectively. Of the four works analysed here, three are written in a generally realist mode, set in present-day Britain and endeavouring to factually present the conditions of the Polish diaspora. *Internation* is the odd one out, where Czerwiński combines various literary genres, including elements of science-fiction, dystopia and satirical fiction. The story is set in the future, in a world where the geopolitical situation has changed dramatically. Poland is a country situated in two large, newly-emerged islands in the Pacific with huge deposits of uranium, which makes it a superpower. Old world superpowers, such as the USA or the UK, are in grave economic

4 Ibid., 209.

decline, while Poland attracts millions of immigrants. Thus the novel reverses the current socio-economic situation, enabling Czerwiński to portray a British diaspora in Poland, and thus satirically represent the vicissitudes of Polish migrants in the UK.

It is only natural that the four narratives in question underline the disadvantaged situation of Poles in Britain. This situation plays out most powerfully in the job market, where members of the Polish diaspora are doomed to perform largely menial jobs, often despite their professional qualifications. The narrator of *Madame Mephisto* sees the roots of this discrimination in her outsider position; among her "insecurities," she enumerates her "imperfect command of English with a dominant Polish accent" and "unprivileged non-Western education."[5] The most common jobs accessible to "Polaks" are badly paid and require strenuous physical labour, many of them in the construction industry.[6] The narrator in a Kazmierski story, a graduate of an arts academy, reveals that EU accession has allowed him to "live the legend of a master of the arts painting walls and ceilings."[7] Beata, the narrator of *Carps, Swans and Big Ben*, hires an accounting and finance graduate from Poland to clean her London apartment. The cleaner's job is actually the only employment the woman can get; her husband is not doing much better, and the couple's British existence is no dream: they spend most of their time working, and seldom socialise, scraping together as much money as they can in order to return to Poland soon. Beata herself has reached a better position, due to her excellent command of English and her professional versatility. Still, her job in a PR agency cannot fulfil her ambitions or improve her CV, as it often amounts to translating elementary texts from Polish to English, or simply dashing to an off-licence to get a bottle of vodka for the agency's Polish partner.[8] In *Internation*, Czerwiński represents the issue by means of his reversal technique: English diplomas are not recognised in Poland, so the migrants have to take up degrading employment. Thus an English girl with a PhD in nuclear physics gets a job as a maidservant,[9] a Polish university hires an English microbiologist to get rid of microorganisms from the toilet,[10] fine arts academy graduates

5 Asia Monika Bakalar, *Madame Mephisto* (London: Stork Press, 2012), 5.

6 Marek Kazmierski, *Damn The Source* (London: OFF_Press, 2013), 37.

7 Ibid., 200.

8 Ada Martynowska, *Karpie, łabędzie i Big Ben* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Sonia Draga, 2010), 27, 74.

9 Piotr Czerwiński, *Międzynaród* (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 2011), 21.

10 Ibid., 81.

are employed in the Polish mining industry, and neurosurgeons are highly appreciated staff in hotels and restaurants.[11] The Polish are surprised at the level of their visitors' education – every second Brit has a PhD, others at least a BA – especially in the context of the state of their economy, which has totally collapsed, and with unemployment nearing 100%.[12] By means of hyperbole, Czerwiński paints a bitter satirical portrait of the economic context for the Polish migration, representing the unfavoured situation of Poles on the British job market.

The unprivileged position of the Polish diaspora in the UK is also connected with the hostility its members experience. In a Kazmierski story, a Polish teenager expresses the predicament quite directly:

> See, they all make noises like they respect us new sorts round here, but it's bull. I see the way the cops, teachers, kids look down their fucking noses. Taking the piss. Saying we're taking their jobs, blah, blah, like this country belongs to them… They think we're barbarians from the East.[13]

Beata from *Carps, Swans and Big Ben*, lucky enough to have a white-collar job, is perturbed by her colleague's conviction that Polish émigré women do not seek good employment, but wealthy British husbands.[14] She is confounded by her dentist's xenophobia, when he taunts her with the remark that her root canals are filled with "Russian cement" and complains that Poles are his worst patients, distrustful towards the British health service, stubborn and contentious.[15] *Internation* also illustrates a national bias, in its distinctive amplified manner. Czerwiński presents condescension towards the English, who are often treated as manservants, hired to take notes during university lectures[16] or merely to switch TV channels.[17] English immigrants are accused of taking Polish workplaces and living off Polish benefits,[18] they are grossly underpaid, often faced with mobbing at work and unwarranted police persecution. Poles

11 Ibid., 106.

12 Ibid., 55.

13 Kazmierski, *Damn*, 44-45.

14 Martynowska, *Karpie*, 243.

15 Ibid., 239-40.

16 Czerwiński, *Międzynaród*, 72.

17 Ibid., 96.

18 Ibid., 182.

expect them to integrate into their society, take additional Polish first names and stop using their native tongue.[19]

The hostility and prejudice against foreign diasporas are to a large extent rooted in unfavourable stereotypes, which fulfil an important social function as a recurring simplified representation of an "exotic" nation or culture. As Bhabha states,

> the stereotype ... is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always "in place," already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated ... as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual licence of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved.[20]

He further claims:

> The stereotype is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation that, in denying the play of difference (which the negation through the Other permits), constitutes a problem for the r e p r e s e n t a t i o n of the subject in significations of psychic and social relations.[21]

Historically, as Bhabha demonstrates, the stereotype was used by colonial discourse for specific political purposes, discrediting subaltern peoples in order to justify the need to dominate them:

> The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction.[22]

While it is obvious that in the case of the Polish diaspora in Britain we cannot speak of a colonial context, the discourse of the British media and public opinion abounds in patronising negative stereotypes about Polish migrants. Poles consider many of those stereotypes unfair, overgeneralised or totally ungrounded; consequently, migrant fiction presents them copiously, trying to destabilise the picture of the Polish diaspora fixated in the British mind as a result of repetitive representations. Magda, the narrator

19 Ibid., 244.

20 Bhabha, *Location*, 94-95.

21 Ibid., 107.

22 Ibid., 101.

of *Madame Mephisto*, pinpoints the condescending attitude of the English, who "live in blissful ignorance of their superiority, of their well-established democratic ways and equal rights" and vaguely associate Poland with having been "part of Soviet bloc," a place which might still not be safe to visit.[23] Most Polish writers of emigrant fiction are astounded by the level of British ignorance about Poland. One of Kazmierski's characters complains about a common British perception of Poland as a communist Siberia-like land, with white bears roaming the streets and concrete factories dominating the countryside.[24]

In *Carps, Swans and Big Ben*, Martynowska intersperses the main narrative with fragments of British press articles on the threats posed by the Polish diaspora. Although the novelist introduces quotations from an imaginary newspaper, the *Daily Messenger*, she develops them from real-life publications in British newspapers. When the *Daily Messenger* writes of a Polish menace to park swans, it echoes reports that actually were published, stating that Polish migrants teach African refugees "to hunt and barbecue swans to the horror of British locals"[25] or that some British people are too scared to visit their local parks because of swan carcasses piling up near illicit migrant camps.[26] Other articles mention that the carp in English ponds and lakes is threatened with extinction, because it is a traditional Polish everyday dish (although a typical Pole eats carp only at Christmas). As Martynowska's *Daily Messenger* argues,

> the problem lies in the fact that Poles do not understand our angling culture at all … It is their custom to bring the caught fish home and eat it. The English angle for pleasure, and we usually return the fish alive to the pond.[27]

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23 Bakalar, *Madame*, 10.

24 Kazmierski, *Damn*, 27.

25 "Polish & Lithuanian Teaching African Illegals to Hunt & Barbecue Swans to the Horror of British Locals – European Knights Project," European Knights Project, December 6, 2014, accessed September 23, 2016, http://www.europeanknightsproject.com/south-african-other-migrants-kill-swans-barbecue-them-in-parks-to-the-horror-of-locals/.

26 Andrew Malone, "Slaughter of the Swans: As Carcasses Pile up and Migrant Camps Are Built on River Banks, Peterborough Residents Are Too Frightened to Visit the Park," *Daily Mail*, March 26, 2010, accessed September 23, 2016, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1261044/Slaughter-swans-As-carcasses-pile-crude-camps-built-river-banks-residents-frightened-visit-park-Peterborough.html.

27 Martynowska, *Karpie*, 133. All quotations from this source translated by the author of the article.

A similar logic stands behind the stereotype which inspired the authorities of a small Welsh town to put up a notice saying "Stop eating all the carp" o n l y in the Polish language.[28] The *Daily Messenger* notes a number of other potential perils brought by the Polish diaspora: the reader of Martynowska's novel learns about Polish shops where British customers are not served,[29] about an English policewoman reporting that "numerous" Poles carry pocket knives, apparently for self-defence,[30] or about the case of a Pole charged with molesting women in the street who seeks indemnity by saying that he was not aware such behaviour was illegal because it is socially acceptable in Poland.[31] The newspaper also reports that Polish migrants are a serious challenge for the National Health Service, due to the rapidly increasing number of births in British hospitals,[32] and a general thereat to the UK economy, as they send most of their earnings back to Poland.[33] Martynowska's narrator concludes: "According to the *Daily Messenger,* I … and my compatriots have invaded the British Isles only to devour all the swans, fish out all the carp and prey on the British social services."[34]

As its narrative strategy demands, *Internation* presents British stereotypes about Poles in an inverted way. Thus it describes the case of three Englishmen who hunt for ducks in a pond, throwing stones at them.[35] Czerwiński's English migrants are not ready to accept the Polish style of living, because most of them wish only to send their earnings to their famished families, or to save up to build a house in England (a rather pointless objective in a country without electricity, with white bears freely roaming the streets[36]). TV documentaries depict an England overwhelmed by poverty and crime, and destroyed by near total unemployment. A stereotypical feature of the English noted by Czerwiński – which, by reversal, represents a stock feature of Polish migrants

28 Liz Hull, "Signs Warn Polish Anglers to »Stop Eating All the Carp«," *Daily Mail*, March 5, 2007, accessed September 23, 2016, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-440226/Signs-warn-Polish-anglers-stop-eating-carp.html.

29 Martynowska, *Karpie*, 299.

30 Ibid., 269.

31 Ibid., 173.

32 Ibid., 13.

33 Ibid., 99.

34 Ibid., 137.

35 Czerwiński, *Międzynaród*, 160.

36 Ibid., 84.

in the UK – is the incapability to learn the new language: English workers speak only basic Polish, and are unable to form simple sentences or even appropriately carry out the orders of their Polish supervisors.[37]

The four novels discussed here point out a number of other stereotypes about Poles: their bravado, dating back to the times of WW2, the efficiency of Polish plumbers, or the devotion of Polish women to family, which makes them ideal brides for Brits:

> Polish women make good housewives; a two-course dinner is always ready on time, the house is scrubbed clean, the children are taken care of, and at night we transform into sexually insatiable goddesses. Making a career is the last of our worries, because it is the family, husband and children who always come first.[38]

The novels also acknowledge one of the most hurtful stereotypical images of the Polish diaspora: the notorious penchant for excessive drinking, along with a consequent predilection for brawls. The acute painfulness of this particular representation lies, to paraphrase Bhabha, not in its falseness, but in its fixation.

Likewise, new migrant literature also presents many Polish stereotypes about the Brits. Perhaps the most frequently accentuated feature is British reticence. The members of the Polish diaspora perceive the British as unable to express their emotions, especially in public places. Beata from *Carps, Swans and Big Ben* notices that the English are expert at evading other passengers' eyes when travelling by public transport, having mastered the technique of hiding behind a newspaper.[39] They seem generally afraid of making eye contact; even her colleague averted his gaze during their conversations for the first six months of their acquaintance.[40] Beata concludes that their inability to meet new people, especially of the opposite sex, makes the English "sexually challenged,"[41] and that most of them should be wearing T-shirts that say "No sex. I'm English."[42] Magda from Bakalar's novel complains mainly about the low level of British education, and ineptitude in the face of bad weather

37 Ibid., 58.

38 Bakalar, *Madame*, 7.

39 Martynowska, *Karpie,* 48.

40 Ibid., 19.

41 Ibid., 24.

42 Ibid., 79.

conditions, especially snow.[43] What the Polish find especially unnerving is the English aversion to foreign languages, or even foreign names. Martynowska's narrator has a good reason for calling the English nation "linguistically idle": the way her name, Beata, is pronounced in London, "Beetah," brings especially bad associations – in Polish *bita* (pronounced *bee-tah*) means "one who is (being) beaten." Czerwiński indicates this trait by means of his reversal technique, noting a Polish uneasiness about English names – the police are looking for an Englishman named "Licence, Driving," who persistently breaks the highway code and has gathered almost 400 tickets in one year.[44] In a remarkable deviation from his narrative strategy, Czerwiński intermingles his reversal technique with presentation of real-life, unreversed stereotypes about the English, e.g., comparing British pronunciation to the sound of a person speaking with their mouth full of noodles,[45] or ridiculing British imperial units as "primitive."[46] *Internation* also mocks stereotypes of English customs, such as saying "hello" eighty times a day, eating square-shaped bread, having tinned beans for breakfast, or drinking tea with milk, a clear sign of distance from human civilisation.[47]

The differences between the Polish diaspora and the British society, highlighted by stereotypes, are indicative of cultural incompatibilities between the nations. In the process of forming transitional and hybrid identities of migrants, these incongruities are difficult to accept. The repulsion one of Kazmierski's characters feels towards the English way of serving tea illustrates this discordance symbolically: "Tea with cow juice. Been here three years … and still can't stomach that."[48] But it is obvious that culture-specific differences, which concern many spheres of life, need not be perceived as only negative. While a character from *Damn the Source* cannot accept the English custom of putting the elderly in homes,[49] the narrator of *Carps, Swans and Big Ben* is genuinely impressed by the *joie de vivre* and complacent femininity of a seventy-year old woman who vigorously dances at a party with a man forty years her junior; she notes that in Poland women at this age mostly complain

43 Bakalar, *Madame,* 36, 38.

44 Czerwiński, *Międzynaród*, 136.

45 Ibid., 177.

46 Ibid., 83.

47 Ibid., 85.

48 Kazmierski, *Damn*, 143.

49 Ibid., 28.

about their ailments, or, at best, take care of their grandchildren.[50] The incommensurability of two cultures does not mean that one is in any way "better" than the other: Beata finds it hard to say "what is more outrageous: that the Poles fish for carp in order to eat it, or that the English fish for it in order to take pictures and return it to water."[51] In fact, any attempt at reconciling the incongruous elements is totally pointless, because the d i f f e r e n c e is crucial for a new hybrid Polish-English identity. The incompatibilities are a key factor for Bhabha, who asserts that "hybrid hyphenations emphasize the incommensurable elements … as the basis of cultural identifications."[52] The migrants only need to understand and accept that their new identity must be a hybrid one, and that a hybrid identity is necessarily a hyphenated, two-sided split.

Nevertheless, the incommensurability of foreign culture, bolstered with elements of British hostility, negative stereotypes and, in some cases, inaccessibility of the foreign language, occasionally results in an unwillingness to integrate with British society and the emergence of self-contained Polish communities. Czerwiński portrays this phenomenon by means of equivalent English communities in Poland. The members of the English diaspora live in "ghettos," often in dreadful conditions. They shop in English greengrocers, eat their traditional inedible food, and watch potato commercials on English television.[53] Magda, the narrator of *Madame Mephisto*, is highly critical of such an attitude, and she generally loathes her Polish background. She is enraged when her mother, visiting her in London, keeps looking for Polish shops, packs her kitchen cupboards with Polish food, and provides her with "healthy" nourishment in the form of "a heap of boiled potatoes sprinkled with dill and a piece of pork with a cabbage salad,"[54] a standard Polish meal. Her mother also wants her to find a "proper" Polish husband, and takes her to a classic Polish wedding party in London; it is a riot of primitive, bawdy, sexist folk songs, vodka and traditional food, the "continuation of the Polish nation … in full swing."[55] Magda is repulsed even by the idea of a Polish diaspora in England:

> The problem with our countrymen is that the minute you start speaking to them in Polish, they treat you as if we were supposed to be one big family, just because

50 Martynowska, *Karpie,* 163.

51 Ibid., 193.

52 Bhabha, *Location,* 313.

53 Czerwiński, *Międzynaród*, 83, 113.

54 Bakalar, *Madame,* 20.

55 Ibid., 20.

> we all live and work in the same place ... Would you be friends with somebody you don't know on a street in Warsaw? No. But over here, just because we are abroad, all Poles think that we should stick together. Like a big fucking happy family.[56]

Bakalar's narrator notices the negative consequences of not integrating with British society: the Poles who stay within the closed community are backward, unsuccessful and often depressed.

> I think the main problem is the majority don't want to integrate ... They simply want to stay among Poles – Polish food, Polish friends, Polish shops and all that ... Most of them don't speak fluent English ... And staying among Poles, speaking Polish all day long, makes you lazy. No wonder most Poles work as builders, fruit and vegetable pickers, cleaners, factory workers. You don't need a certificate in advanced English to do those jobs.[57]

The polar alternative to remaining alienated in a closed community is a strategy which enables adaptation to the foreign milieu and the re-establishment of migrant identity on foreign terms by means of mimicking the elements of the host culture. The difference between the two opposite approaches is distinctly presented in *The Satanic Verses,* where Salman Rushdie uses the contrast between the words of two Latin classics, Lucretius and Ovid:

> great Lucretius tells us, in *De Rerum Natura*, this following thing: ... "Whatever by its changing goes out of its frontiers," – that is, bursts its banks, – or, maybe, breaks out of its limitations, – so to speak, disregards its own rules, but that is too free, I am thinking ... "that thing," at any rate, Lucretius holds, "by doing so brings immediate death to its old self." However, ... poet Ovid, in the *Metamorphoses*, takes a diametrically opposed view. He avers thus: "As yielding wax" – heated, you see, possibly for the sealing of documents or such, – "is stamped with new designs And changes shape and seems not still the same, Yet is indeed the same, even so our souls," – you hear, good sir? Our spirits! Our immortal essences! – "Are still the same forever, but adopt In their migrations ever-varying forms." ... For me it is always Ovid over Lucretius ... Your soul, my good poor dear sir, is the same. Only in its migration it has adopted this presently varying form.[58]

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56 Ibid., 170.

57 Ibid., 171-72.

58 Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (London: Vintage, 2006), 276-77.

Apart from depicting examples of closed Polish communities, new migrant literature also features numerous individuals who have, with varying success, attempted to integrate into English society. The narrator of Martynowska's novel, Beata, is disapproving of her friends whose strategy to blend into the English milieu was marrying Brits. One of them, Monika, believes she has "officially become a member of the British middle class" and insists that she should be called "Monique," because for her it sounds more "European."[59] Monique is so adamant about manifesting her Britishness to her Polish friends that she talks with and writes emails to them only in English.[60] Beata is also scornful of her friend Kasia, whose pride in her husband's Eton education compensates for the fact that the man is much older and really unattractive. Kazmierski's *Damn the Source* also approaches the issue of integrating into the English cultural background; most of the stories focus on the difficulty of this process. In the story "I'll see you in the Dark," the elderly member of Polish post-WW2 emigration, referred to as the Countess, strives to persuade her young house-servant, Kinga, newly arrived in England, to marry a Brit. Kinga renounces this option, but not her ambition to assimilate in the UK; she quits her job with the Countess, and decides that "she would be back, but only when a real job came up, one which guaranteed she would not have to say a word of Polish to anyone as long as she was here."[61] The protagonist of the story "Warhead" provides an example of mimicking Britishness most expediently. He is a retired member of the former Polish communist secret service, and naturally does not consider himself a member of the Polish diaspora; in fact, he is so expertly "British" that he makes hostile racist remarks addressed to blacks and Indians. And Magda, the narrator of *Madame Mephisto*, strives hard to mutate into an Englishwoman, in keeping with her hatred for Polishness. She tries to mimic the stereotypical images of the English presented in her narrative: "I was steadily Anglicized. I kept my mouth shut and smiled more often."[62]

When postcolonial discourse talks about one culture emulating the other, it often uses the term "mimicry," which is Homi K. Bhabha's assimilation of a Lacanian concept. Bhabha points out that mimicry is significantly present in the discourse of the coloniser, not of the colonised, where it functions as a sort of a safety valve:

59 Martynowska, *Karpie,* 104.

60 Ibid., 105.

61 Kazmierski, *Damn*, 112.

62 Bakalar, *Madame*, 42.

> colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference. The authority of that mode of colonial discourse that I have called mimicry is therefore stricken by an indeterminacy: mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal ... mimicry is at once resemblance and menace.[63]

However, while "mimicry" is an effective notion for discussing postcolonial "British" literature, from V.S. Naipaul, through Salman Rushdie, to Zadie Smith, using this category to describe the Polish diaspora of post-2004 migrants in the UK is possible only if one is aware of the differences in its sociohistorical context. For even if the British discourse concerning Polish migrants can be considered hegemonic, it is obviously not of a colonial origin; Poland has never been a part of the British empire, and neither British culture nor the English language have ever been imposed on the Polish nation. Without a colonial past, there is no postcolonial context; the predicament of the Polish diaspora in Britain is significantly different from the situation of the Indian or the Caribbean minorities, and cannot be discussed within the same categories. If mimicry also concerns Polish migrants, it has a different, more limited dimension. The analysis comparing Polish migrant fiction to typically postcolonial British migrant literature would reveal significant differences on many levels: thematic, narrative and linguistic. This, certainly, remains outside the scope of this paper.

Readers of post-2004 Polish migrant literature may detect in it signs of an emerging Polish migrant identity. A pointed example is provided by Kazmierski's story "Jail Flower," whose protagonist, who has spent most of her UK time in prison, attacks a man for telling racist jokes about Poles to foreigners:

> I had overheard a bloke in a pub in Berrickmouth tell a racist joke. About Poles. And that that was all right, I'm not unforgiving of racist shits most days, but that the man telling it was a Pole himself and the people he was telling it to were Irish and they were all laughing along and that was what had upset me. Not the locals taking the piss. Our own putting our own down in front of the hosts.[64]

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63 Bhabha, *Location,* 122-23, emphasis original.

64 Kazmierski, *Damn,* 146.

As new migrant literature demonstrates, the unfamiliar socio-cultural context confronts members of the Polish diaspora with a problem of national identity; it becomes an issue that each of them has to tackle. The narrator of Kazmierski's story "The Animal Quixote" discovers that identity need not, in fact, be entirely an individual, internal issue, but often emerges in dialogue with the other; it is not a mask we ourselves decide to don, but a mask others put over our face:

> most of the tabloids mentioning us over here the past few years talked about Czech doctors cleaning toilets and Polish academics pulling pints ... Tabloids starting to attack again. Calling us scroungers, thieves, asylum seekers again. Which, again, is fine. Who gives a fuck? Never thought of myself as Polish until I came here and found everybody else thought of me that way. But when it comes home, this sort of perception, you worry.[65]

The migrants realise that their Polishness, which has been natural, spontaneous and indisputable at home, becomes a problematic multi-conditional matter in Britain. In addition, new migrant identity cannot be based only on the Polish parts of the self, but must be a hybrid structure including elements of Britishness. The identity predicament faced by the narrator of *Madame Mephisto* illustrates the dilemmas precipitated by hybridity:

> Who was I? A stranger in my own country. One of [my sister's] friends said I did not belong here anymore ... I had become a chameleon, displaying a combination of accents and faces, depending on what suited me. I was too British for the Poles, and too Polish for the British. I loathed my connection with my home country when I was in London, camouflaging myself on the streets, pretending I did not speak my mother tongue, looking the other way when I heard Polish being spoken. And here, in my own country, I was stripped of my birthright, I was a cheat who left for an easier life. Every wrongly accented word, every sentence which sounded too English, was proof that I was not Polish enough, that I had forgotten who I was, that I had discarded, too easily, my Polish identity.[66]

Magda's experience is dominated by her incommensurability; her case shows that hybrid identity may not really work by conjunction, but by exclusion: instead of being both, she is neither the one nor the other. She is bothered by the lack of purity and authenticity that she associates with hybridity; she

65 Ibid., 15, emphasis added.

66 Bakalar, *Madame,* 165-66.

considers herself a "chameleon," a "cheat," and her main preoccupation is "camouflage." When Bhabha bases his notion of mimicry on Lacan, he brings up his observation that

> mimicry is like camouflage, not a harmonization of repression of difference, but a form of resemblance, that differs from or defends presence by displaying it in part, metonymically.[67]

But in the passage cited by Bhabha, Lacan also stresses the crucial importance of "the dimension by which the subject is to be inserted in the picture"[68]; he notes: "To imitate is no doubt to reproduce an image. But at bottom, it is, for the subject, to be inserted in a function whose exercise grasps it."[69] In this way, he returns to his speculation concerning the Mirror Stage. Translating this into our context here: when migrants enter the Symbolic of their new culture, they reproduce the image of the Other, paying the inevitable price of alienation.

It is perhaps this alienation that is brought up by Salman Rushdie in the first chapter of *The Satanic Verses*, where he seeks the elements of migrant identity among the remains of a crashed plane:

> ... mingling with the remnants of the plane, equally fragmented, equally absurd, there floated the debris of the soul, broken memories, sloughed-off selves, severed mother-tongues, violated privacies, untranslatable jokes, extinguished futures, lost loves, the forgotten meaning of hollow, booming words, land, b e l o n g i n g, h o m e.[70]

The formation of a new Polish migrant identity in Britain is still ongoing, the migration itself remaining a dynamically changing process. But numerous writers, not only those mentioned in this paper, have already begun the task of "writing the nation." They tackle the issue of contesting stereotypical representations, trying to represent the translational character of mimicry. It is painfully obvious for Polish migrants that their new hybrid identity has to be "fragmented" and "absurd." But it is still too early to say how much of it must be based on parts which are "broken," "severed," "extinguished" and "forgotten."

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67 Bhabha, *Location,* 128.

68 Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1978), 99.

69 Ibid., 100.

70 Rushdie, *Satanic*, 4, emphasis original.

Elwira M. Grossman

Staging Polish Migration in Transcultural Drama: The Question of Multiple Language Use in Great Britain's Theatre

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The theatrical plays I have chosen for this particular overview cannot be easily classified according to the linguistic and cultural groups they might belong to. Even though they were staged across Great Britain (and some also in Poland), they exist in both contexts simultaneously, being in an imaginary, intercultural borderland that lacks any sort of specific geographical location. This is a space between languages, cultures and traditions, one I have come to call the "space of transcultural idioms."[1] It is the product of a new, "third value" creation arising out of a remixing of something generally understood as native culture (in this case from Poland) and other local cultures in the "destination" country.[2]

1 See Elwira Grossman, "Towards the Literature of Transcultural Idioms: Ewa/Eva Stachniak and Lisa Appignanesi," in *Displaced Women*, ed. Lucia Aiello, Joy Charnley and Mariangela Palladino (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 61-69.

2 See essay by Elwira Grossman, „Kategoria polskości w formacie transkulturowym," in: *Literatura polska w świecie*, vol. IV, ed. Romuald Cudak (Katowice: Wydawnictwo GNOME, Uniwersytet Śląski, 2012), 361-371.

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Of course, the place where a given play is staged is always defined (though not always limited to one location), but I am here more concerned with multicultural determinants relating to the world of the stage, such as mono-, bi- or multilingualism, the "otherness" of theatrical conventions and accents, and by accents I mean something broadly understood, heard on stage in spoken Polish and English, but referring to both the linguistic and the emotional sphere. Hence the title of this work.[3] Because, unlike migration literature, the "accent" in transcultural theatre (and film) defines the eventual aesthetic with no less communicative impact than the language itself, and definitively colours the performative dimension of the whole performance.[4] Following Mieke Bal's methodological observations, I will return to these migratory aesthetic determinants again in my discussion, but here I will list a selection of performances which represent Polish migration in a transcultural format, in a post-2014 British context, and in an aesthetically diverse way. These are:

1) *The Polish Play* (2008), staged by the touring company *Farnham Maltings* in England (February 2008) and in Scotland (April 2008).

2) The work of the Polish émigré theatre group Gappad,[5] described as a "Polish-Scottish theatre," active in Scotland from July 2006 to autumn 2011. Its founder was Agnieszka Bresler, and its artistic director from 2007 was Robert Przekwas. In the course of its theatrical activities, Gappad staged a total of six premieres: *RE-ID* (2007), *As You Always Do* (2008), *Hear Me* (2009), *Jordan* (2010), *Family Voices* (2010) and finally *Spina/Backbone* (2011).[6]

3) *Tu i Teraz ('Here and Now')* is a bilingual performance based on a play by Nicola Werenowska, directed by Sam Potter, staged in London's Hampstead Theatre on the 19th of December 2012 and in The Nuffield Theatre and The Mercury Theatre in 2013.[7]

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3 This graphical description of the word is taken from Edward Balcerzan, who uses it to refer to a different context, see. „Jedno- oraz dwu(wielo)języczność literackich »światów«," *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2009): 9-20.

4 Mieke Bal discusses the poetics of linguistic accents in "Translating Translation," *Journal of Visual Culture* 1/6 (2007): 109-124.

5 This group's name derives from the names of people involved in their stage debut: Gosia, Agnieszka, Pola, Piotr, Anita and Dominik.

6 Agnieszka Bresler also produced two solo shows: *Starsza Pani* [*The Old Lady*, 2010], a play developed with the Italian company Teatro La Madrugada, as well as *11/11*, 'a poetic encounter' based on the same motifs as *The Old Lady*, but staged in Polish as part of the celebrations of the 11th of November at the General Sikorski House in Glasgow. This solo show was based on poems by Małgorzata Zbudniewek.

7 Information about the cast and complete authorship of the text can be found in: Nicola Werenowska, *Tu i Teraz ('Here and Now')* (Portsmouth: Playdead Press, 2013)

4) *Bloody East Europeans* is a play that sits between the conventions of burlesque and musical, performed by the Ukrainian theatrical group Molodyi Teatr from London, presented as part of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival (25-29th of August 2015), as well as in Glasgow's The Milk Cafe (23rd of August). The motif of Polish migrants and their native tongue feature strongly in the performance, in spite of its title indicating a slightly broader perspective: *Bloody East Europeans*. The play was written by Uilleam Blacker, a Scot who describes himself with some pride in a press release for the show as "an honorary eastern European."[8]

The above list is not comprehensive in terms of presenting plays relating to transitional identities, as staged between 2004-2015. There were both more theatrical companies and performances, but in selecting the above examples I was mainly led by their aesthetic variety, the presence of two or more languages in the scripts and shows, and the availability of research materials.[9] There can be little doubt that the variety of all the selected examples is closely related to the context in which they were created, but they are seen by viewers who do or do not share the transcultural space created and presented on stage. What then happens to the way a play is received, when that play does not always know its audience? What sort of function does it serve, if the artistic criteria of the way it is judged are either purely accidental or destined for a completely different context? And finally: how does their quality manifest itself when we are dealing with such vague criteria and lack any sort of singular cultural sense of belonging? I will attempt to address these questions by analysing the above examples.

The Polish Play was written and directed by Gavin Stride, originally intended to be staged in village halls. Utilising a Pirandello-style theatre, as exemplified by *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, Stride mixes reality with theatrical fiction in way that is so effective that for the first few minutes of the performance it is hard to tell whether the person asking the audience about a Polish play, which is about to be staged somewhere nearby, is an eccentric audience member or one of the performers. The play in itself is more of a happening/local event than a play in the strictest sense, because it introduces two characters,

8 This information comes from a Summer 2015 press release relating to the show, Bloody Eastern Europeans, introducing the authors of the Edinburgh Fringe performance as follows: *The play is written by Uilleam Blacker, a Scot and honorary eastern European, and directed by Olesya Khromeychuk, a real eastern European.*

9 I would like to thank Joanna Kosmalska, Agnieszka Bresler, Robert Przekwas, Kasia Kokowska, Gavin Stride, Nicola Werenowska and Uilleam Blacker for the help they have given me in collating materials, as well as allowing access to texts and recordings, without which this article would not have been possible.

speaking with strange accents, into the world of a small village community: a father, played by Michael Strobel, concerned about his daughter's life, and the daughter Marta, played by the Polish actress Agnieszka Korzuszek. Marta arrives in England to work as an au pair, and her naivety, contrasted with the worldly experience of her father, becomes a test both of the audience's empathy and of a community's ability to respond to new arrivals. Listening in on a conversation between Stanislaw (sic!) and Marta, the audience discovers their real motives and fears, along with the dreams migrants have about a better way of life. Art allows us to become familiar with what is alien, operating on different levels. It is also an attempt to de-demonise the rhetoric used in the press and in everyday anecdotal conversations relating to the wave of migration after 2004 ("they only come for the money, taking our work and our benefits, scrounging off of us").

The scenic, utopian world of the play aims to re-evaluate these sorts of attitudes, suggesting that human beings should be helpful, not harmful, to one another. Stride appears to be convincing us that we all emerge from one land (be it Eng/land or Po/land),[10] because we live on the same planet Earth and represent the species *homo sapiens*, factors that precede our belonging to nations and ethnic groups. The play is, in terms of this approach, rather extraordinary, for although it is written by a Briton, it does not repeat the time-worn plot of an emigre's eventual return to their country of origin.[11] Quite the opposite, and it introduces characters sustained by vitality and purpose. Such a play (although it is hard not to accuse it of wishful thinking) can indeed change perceptions, for it trusts Britons and treats their hospitality as part of their innate character, without ever doubting its validity. No one accuses anyone of anything here. Improvisations between the actors and the audience are written into the script, which ends with the beginning of a shared meal, a moment of mutual curiosity and intimacy. Actors encourage the audience to talk, disturbing the staged fiction and changing it into a world that surrounds all the participants, here and now. This is how the ending is presented in the stage directions:

> If this was a theatrical play, it would end at this point, but that is not the case here. Agnieszka Korzuszek remained in England in order to become an actress. Her

10 This phrase has been used by Bogdan Czaykowski in his discussion with Adam Czerniawski (*O poezji, nostalgii, krytykach i kryteriach rozmawiają Bogdan Czaykowski i Adam Czerniawski*, ed. Magdalena Rabizo-Birek (Toronto-Rzeszów: Polski Fundusz Wydawniczy w Kanadzie-Stowarzyszenie Literacko-Artystyczne Fraza, 2006), 148).

11 *The Road Home* (2007) by Rose Tremain illustrates such a story line.

> father returned home. THE NARRATOR LEAVES, AND AGNIESZKA TELLS THE STORY OF HER FATHER'S RETURN. THE END. (28)[12]

In the opinion of the actor playing the Polish father, *The Polish Play* is "the most original, brave and innovative weaving of cultures." The authenticity of this "weaving" is cemented by the use of a Polish actress in the other key role. Korzuszek, being a migrant herself, often tells her own "true story" after the performance. In Sarah Redhead's review of the play, she quotes Strobel: "Once the play is finished, it is common for people to remain, talking. It is thought-provoking, though in a very subtle way."[13] In the words of Gavin Stride,

> What's more, the audience in a village is not just an "arts" audience, so companies develop theatre that has the potential to connect with the whole community. This search for convivial, inclusive events is the greatest strength of the work. … With this in mind, we have created *The Polish Play* [which] sets out to get the audience to talk and listen, not to us, but to each other. The piece incorporates home-movie footage played against some strung-up white sheets … a window onto another, vanishing world and typical of a generous-hearted, guileless evening.[14]

One of the greatest strengths of the piece is how well the female role is developed, the director allowing her to become a mediator between languages and cultures, giving her absolute freedom to use Polish words where they emphasise the power of emotions, the authenticity of the character or the comic aspects of a given scene. Almost all of Marta's lines coming from off stage should – according to the script – be "in Polish" and improvised by the actress. The ever-present air of comedy and good humour percolate through cultural barriers. The success of the show is also evidence of how important it is to have roles written with bi-lingual actresses in mind, utilising their migration experiences and their accented speech, and in a way that adds to our enjoyment of the performance.

The Polish Play, though written with a local British audience in mind, fits into the field of meetings between two cultures and languages, which allows

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12 I am quoting from the manuscript which, thanks to the generosity of its author, I have in my possession; the text has never been officially published.

13 Sarah Readhead, "The Polish Play review," *The List*, 24 April, 2008, accessed September 15, 2015 https://www.list.co.uk/article/7914-the-polish-play/ See also Dominic Cavendish, "The Polish Play: such a sweet shambles," *The Telegraph*, 6 February 2008, accessed September 15, 2015 http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/drama/3670988/The-Polish-Play-Such-a-sweet-shambles.html

14 Quoted in the review by Cavendish

us to better understand the "Other," those human beings who come from a different society or ethnic group. The creation of a trans-cultural space in relation to village communities, which is as a rule missed out when it comes to socio-political analyses, or, for that matter, to literary works, is another significant aspect of this performance/event, adding to its unquestionable importance. It is further enhanced by the trust Stride has in his Polish actress, allowing her to improvise parts of the text. The significance of such a gesture has been noted by Eva Ulrike Pirker, who discusses a similar dramaturgical effect used by Mike Phillips in the migrant play *You Think You Know Me but You Don't*, yet from a different cultural context:

> This process of appropriation is an important act of going beyond the contents of the script written by a Western European author not only *for* but also *about* an Eastern subject. The game of giving and receiving, of inventing/performing an "other" and of appropriating this other as one's own creates a suggestive subtext to the main level of action.[15]

The bilingualism and transcultural aspect of this exceptional play is a challenge to the negative rhetoric of the mainstream press, relentlessly defining migration as a "problem." Although the play was always aimed at rural audiences, I am willing to suppose that its power would not be diminished should it ever be staged in city theatres.

One decidedly city-based company is the Polish group *Gappad,* which delivers a different array of things to think about when it comes to bilingual stages with a Polish accent. Their activities are characterised by an incredible level of involvement and resilience, not only in the creation of high-quality theatre, but also in forcing through a theatrical tradition in the domain of an alien culture. A notable aspect of Polish theatrical achievements is the vision of a physical theatre: bio-mechanical, operating primarily with the body, along with gestures, symbols, light, sound and music. This is a tradition arising mainly out of the theatrical practice developed by Jerzy Grotowski, but it is not limited solely to his influence. The word, as understood in such theatre, is merely an add-on or a pointer, and more often than not secondary in importance. Although physical theatre performances emerge out of dramaturgical texts, which is what happened with performances such as *Hear Me* (2009), *Jordan* (2010) and *Family Voices* (2010), they treat the text loosely, fitting chosen elements in with the overall theatrical vision of the artists. It is therefore

15 Eva Ulrike Pirker, *You Think You Know Me But You Don't – An Introduction*, in: *Facing the East in The West*, ed. Barbara Korte, Eva Urlike Pirker and Sissy Helff (Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2010), 164.

difficult to come up with a clearer clash: British theatre (including its Scottish variants), which is mainly word-centered, and physical theatre emerging out of the homeland of the founders of *Gappad*.

There can be little doubt that *Gappad* has handled this clash with true aplomb over the six years they have been in existence. The group was never a company with full-time contracts and equipment, and the funds to rent rehearsal spaces and meeting rooms came from local grants, submitted by the company members themselves. They had no artistic agents or any other elements of creative industry infrastructure around them, having to be their own ship, rudder and captain, becoming in some way the embodiment of the Juliusz Osterwa theatrical ideal, although the clear difference was that Osterwa did not foresee theatrical companies operating in foreign cultural contexts. In our conversation held in Glasgow on 7 October 2015, the former artistic director, Robert Przekwas, recalled:

> It all started with Agnieszka [Bresler], and I joined a year later. We were simply a group of young people in a foreign country who were missing theatre, lacking also some kind of personal and cultural fulfilment. Each one of us had come here after 2004, in order to earn money, so theatre was for us also a way to make friends and create networks. It was clear that something was eating away at us, and it seems a big part of that was about working through what that something might be. And that was how we started.[16]

The first performance of *RE-ID* (*RE-IDENTIFICATION*) took shape over a six-month period, in association with a young Scottish stage director Kat Harrison, who had graduated a year earlier, and the Polish composer Krzysztof Mielczarek. Taking part in the performance were Agnieszka Bresler, Pola Brejter, Piotr Kurjata, Dominik Dąbek, Anita Łenyk and Małgorzata Zbudniewek. After the Tron Theatre premiere in 2007, *Gappad* also showed it at the Edinburgh Fringe and at the Govan International Festival. The background for the show was the key question about identity: how do I change when the place called "home" is no longer where it used to be? The script was made up of fragments of conversations, letters and voices from Polish migrants in bi-lingual formats, intended to engage audiences in a migrant's key dilemma: to return or to reconfigure one's identity? What is interesting here is that the creators of the show were interested in themselves, in treating theatre as a space which served them first of all, and the audiences' needs were only secondary.

16 All quotes come from my Glasgow conversation with Robert Przekwas and were authorised through our e-mail exchange in November the same year – Elwira Grossman.

Commenting on the decision to keep *RE-ID* bi-lingual, Bresler, then artistic director of the group, explained:

> From the very beginning, I wanted to do a show that would be English and Polish at the same time. I wanted a Scottish person to sit next to a Polish person and they could both understand. If they get frustrated because they don't understand for 30 seconds, that's good, because that's exactly the feeling an immigrant experiences.[17]

The bilingualism of the text, with its fragmentary, non-linear character is also used in the show *As You Always Do* (2008)[18], a title that can be taken as a playful travesty of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. The play, featuring some dark and painful themes, refers to the murder of Angelika Kluk, committed in Glasgow by Peter Tobin. When her body was found, concealed beneath a church floor, a real-life horror turned into a media frenzy of exaggeration and deformed gossip about her lifestyle. The title of the play is a form of accusation of the passive attitudes readers had towards the narratives printed in the press, based often on stories invented by random people. It can also be read as a condemnation of the co-authoring of such narrations. We can hear the stories of disappeared individuals from various parts of the world, because the show – without the actual presence of the disappeared – is an attempt to come to their aid, through choreography and movement that conveys their subordination, their victimhood, and their mortality. And yet, in the end, this symbolic form of telling did not prove clear enough for reviewers. The performance was accused of lacking "the narrative strength to do more than suggest the issues it wants to look at – when you might hope for a more forceful exploration of them." And so, paradoxically, its creators were accused of that which the *Gappad* team had set out specifically not to include in their work. On the other hand, the actors were praised, as were the choreographic arrangements and dramatic images, with the hope that future work by the company would enliven "the heart of Scotland's theatrical life."[19]

It is difficult to judge how much the decisions regarding three more performances were in part an answer to the critical voices mentioned above, and

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17 A conversation with Agnieszka Bresler, quoted in the review by Mark Fisher, "Dramatic Escape from No-Man's Land," *The Scotsman*, 27 May, 2007, accessed September 22, 2015, http://www.scotsman.com/news/dramatic-escape-from-no-man-s-land-1-1419655

18 The show had its premiere at the Tron Theatre in Glasgow in May of 2008, then was shown in June in Edinburgh, as part of Leith Festival and in October at the Festival of Independent Theatre in Poznan. Taking part were Agnieszka Bresler, Dominik Dąbek, Piotr Kurjata and Anna Nierobisz.

19 See Joyce McMillan, "Hear Me," *The Scotsman*, 8 May 2009, accessed September 9, 2015, https://joycemcmillan.wordpress.com/2009/05/08/hear-me/

how much they were a natural evolution of the group's artistic expression. *Hear Me*, *Family Voices* and *Jordan* all, unlike the previous shows, utilised existing dramaturgical texts, without basing the theatrical vision on scripts developed by members of the company. This does not, however, mean that they possessed a narrative clarity demanded by local reviewers. In the first instance, the basis for the show was a play by Tadeusz Różewicz, *Witnesses or Our Small Stabilization*, in the second it was *Jordan*, written by Moira Buffini and Anna Reynolds.[20] *Jordan* is a play constructed around the confessions of a mother-murderess, based on a real story and written by both playwrights after they were released from prison, where they met and became long-term friends.[21]

Both *Family Voices*, directed by Iwona Głowińska, as well as the performance *Jordan* directed by Robert Przekwas, were staged only in English, but with an accent that added a very different dimension to both shows. It is a truism to say that the language used on stage becomes a symbol in all its aspects, and a fact that British culture has a unique approach to accents, seeing it as a marker of identity, origin and social status, hence it is all the harder to overlook this particular concern. Following the tenets of political correctness, we can try to pretend we do not hear accents any more (and this is how local reviewers heard things), but it is hard to assume that all audiences experienced the performance in the same generous spirit.[22] This question is important to me, because speaking with a foreign accent (through the presence of Scottish theatre across the stages of the world) has meant that various ways of speaking now demand equal status, broadening the local space and expanding it into a new trans-cultural dimension. In a way, its presence in theatre has sanctioned migration (of both culture and life), bringing it closer to Scotland in a visible, convincing fashion. This artistic gesture is where the undervalued activity of *Gappad* has delivered, without our needing to ask whether the company was conscious of this or not.

When Magdalena Kaleta took up the challenge and played the main role in *Jordan*, she had already acted in the staging of *'e Polish Quine*, which was considered a success.[23] Taking on the character of a Polish woman coming to the

20 The play was first staged by the Baylis Theatre in London in 1992.

21 In the space of two months, the play was performed from the 11th to the 15th of May 2010, in the Tron theatre in Glasgow, and on the 19th of June in Rozy Art House in Edinburgh, garnering much acclaim.

22 That this was not so was clear from the comments made by audience members, which I overheard after the performance of *Hear Me*.

23 Mathew Zajac, "Dogstar Theatre Company," *The Scotsman*, 25 May, 2007, accessed September 10, 2015, http://www.scotsman.com/news/polished-production-1-748941#axzz300hiBIWI

UK after World War II, she reclaimed the career she had previously discarded, which in turn helped her decide to stay in Scotland and continue acting as a profession.[24] The positive reviews *Jordan* garnered did make reference to the directorial style of Przekwas, which was deemed "polished, raw, detailed" and assigned it (oh the irony!) to the actor-director of Polish origin.[25]

As much as the text of *Jordan* has been shortened somewhat, only about a third of the original play by Różewicz made it into the final version of the performance of *Hear Me* – the *Woman and Man* dialogue, along with the opening poem *Witnesses*. The main motif here is a lack of mutual understanding, when this confusion reaches beyond verbal communication or when, paradoxically, languages hinder rather than help the process of human interaction. The decision to omit bilingualism and stage the play entirely in English indicates the focus on a philosophical rather than verbal aspect of global human communication. This is further enhanced by the way the actors play their roles, their movement on stage, their symbolic body language, by the light and sound, and by Krzysztof Mielczarek's music. Pondering on how we may reach other human beings, overcoming differences of gender, social view or philosophical attitude, becomes the main theme of this play. *Hear Me* seems to support the company's belief that the value of truly artistic enterprises is to be found beyond political dimensions of reality, which is best left ignored. The irony of life, however, clearly disagrees with this perspective: the evident collusion of press silence over the accents of the actors on stage is itself a political commentary on their work.

In our Glasgow conversation, Robert Przekwas stressed how important the questions of communication were to the overall aims of the company:

> We were above all led by the need to communicate. As migrants, we were relatively isolated; theatre gave us the ability to disrupt this distance. It also gave us the courage to try and establish a presence in an alien cultural context, a courage we had to inspire in each other quite often ... Our vision of theatre was based on a need to make contact, to open up and get to know each other: actor to actor, as well as actor to audience. British critics included us in the school of Grotowski theatre, but Grotowski is not the only person associated with physical theatre, seeing as for many other theatrical artists what counts most is the interaction between actor and audience, while the text is often only an excuse to try and establish this interaction.

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24 See the text of the above mentioned article by Zajac, quoting from the actress.

25 Mark Fisher, "A Most Civil Arrangement/Jordan, theatre review," *The Scotsman*, 14 May, 2010; also available 10 September 2015, *http://scottishtheatre.blogspot.co.uk/2010/05/most-civil-arrangementjordan-theatre.html*

Being open to other people, which is the basis of what Gappad actors work towards on stage, has also influenced the various workshops they organised, aimed not only at actors, but also at local communities and Polish children.[26] Workshops and theatrical groups were supported by special visits by actors from Poland, such as Sławek Gostański from Teatr Węgajty or Magdalena Mróz from Teatr Ciałonośny. Alongside the Poles, Gappad also collaborated with Robert Secchi and Raul Laiza from Teatro LaMadrugada (Italy), David W W Johnstone from Lazzi Experiment Arts, Antonia Doggett and Bill Wright.

As the third performance prepared by the same company, *Hear Me* produced some interesting outcomes regarding the places in which it was searching for answers. Joyce McMillan, writing about their development, summarises their efforts thus far:

> … there's a feeling of a group of gifted young artists putting themselves through their paces, rather than throwing themselves into a performance that they want the world to see. Given this company's position, caught between two cultures, perhaps that sense of the provisional in their work is not surprising.[27]

This reviewer's comments about Gappad as "a stage of theatrical shorts," "acting and stage practice," which lay the foundations for less "makeshift performance," seem key as they arise out of local expectations. The overall tone of the review is very positive and it is clear that Joyce McMillan appreciates the talent, effort and quality of their acting. Commenting earlier on Bresler's performance in *As You Always Do*, she notes that the actress has "extraordinary directness and flair" and "can change character with the completeness of a chameleon changing colour." Yet she ends her review of Gappad's Różewicz adaptation by stating that they "have still to find the project that will put them where they should be, somewhere near the heart of Scotland's theatrical life."[28]

Hear me is thematically linked with *Family voices* with its search for mutual understanding, exploring the secretive and often paradoxical mechanisms of human communication (or its lack). Memory and thinking about that which has, once and for all, gone as well as that which is happening now or could happen in the future is also a common motif in both plays. Because Pinter's

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26 Workshops called *HUNGER* (2010) were organised in Glasgow by Robert Przekwas, and children's workshops called *Devils with no land* (*Diabły nie z tej ziemi)* took place on the 3rd of December 2011 in Edinburgh, with R. Przekwas and D. Dąbek, initiated and directed by Iwona Głowińska-Denton.

27 See McMillan, "Hear Me."

28 McMillan, "Hear Me."

drama was staged in English and didn't touch on the topic of migration, the reviews contained cultural specificity when it came to how the text was approached: "Iwona Glowinska's production is so loudly expressionistic that Pinter's very English words are lost in the noise."[29] We are therefore dealing with another example of criticism based on the differences in cultural readings in the conventions presented by *Gappad*, hence the questioning of a different approach to the text which has failed to please critics whose tastes are shaped by generations of local traditions.

The show that crowned *Gappad's* creative output was the play *Spina/Backbone*, once again touching on the theme of migration and conventions from *RE-ID*. The titular *Spina* is a symbolic melting together of two languages: the core English word "spine" and the Polish ending with "-a ." The play was inspired by a one-page text written by Kasia Kokowska, and translated into English by *Gappad* themselves. In it, we revisit the theme of immigrant experience, which seems to weigh people down rather than give them wings. In some way, the show closes the circle of what the company attempted to explore from its beginning, i.e., presenting the migration experience through the prism of martyrdom and persecution, which finally finds its full expression here. It is underscored by the presence of two languages, as well as background noises, which include the accordion, a Polish prayer and a traditional Slav folk song. Certain things are clearly expressed here, such as the white mask worn by one of the actresses (A. Bresler), which changes her face in one of the scenes and becomes a cleansing bowl in another. A secondary character (played by R. Przekwas), wrapped from the waist down in a white sheet, highlights experiences related to martyrdom, a struggle with invisible, yet physically tangible, nightmares, fears and compulsions. A character on the left of the stage lay prostrate beneath a cross, constantly trying to get up (P. Kurjata), an embodiment of both human fate and Christ-like suffering.[30] The play was not widely performed, staged on the fringes for small, select audiences, and so did not garner the same sort of reviews as *Gappad's* previous productions.

In 2012, Robert Przekwas took the decision to dissolve the company. Many of its members returned to Poland, others found themselves in diverse, if often related, jobs. Agnieszka Bresler works in a para-theatrical context with people on the margins of society, and it would be hard not to spot parallels between her migration experiences, where feelings of alienation and even exclusion

29 "Review of *Family voices*," *The Scotsman*, 21 June, 2010, accessed September 10, 2015, http://www.scotsman.com/news/theatre-reviews-family-voices-the-old-lady-the-umbilical-cord-1-813917#axzz30ohiBlWI

30 A shorter, five minute version of the show is available for viewing on YouTube, see: https://youtu.be/rJLrz-TWy3Q

figure strongly, and her current activities. When, during the conversation with Robert Przekwas, I asked why among those taking part in the workshops he organised there were no Scots or Britons, but many representatives of other ethnic groups (Poles included), he replied that he hadn't given this much thought, but added after a while:

> Perhaps it was easier for us to talk to those who were in a similar situation to us. It is easier for them to communicate with us too. Perhaps it is too difficult for us to reach Scots? Perhaps we simply didn't make enough effort? I'm not sure.

Gappad was an attempt to use creativity in order to establish a presence in a new world, bring creative folk together and strengthen the sense of self-worth in the Poles taking part. The fact that their experimental performances were shown on the stages of professional theatres helped validate the presence of Polish culture, language and accented speech in a world where the hegemonic role of the English language is not fading, but rather increasing in influence.[31] It is difficult to give an overall evaluation of the quality of their artistic endeavours, but I believe that this is not of any particular significance, especially when we take into consideration just how important and valuable a role *Gappad* played for the Polish migrant community in Scotland. The company members have created a fascinating chapter of transcultural theatre belonging to the local culture, disrupting social and cultural isolation. By highlighting the dilemmas facing migrants and their sense of identity, they have brought these issues to a wider audience, demanding they be treated more fairly. They have shown that Polish migrants do not need any sort of special treatment, that they are not neighbours from a poorer country, but fully-fledged residents. In this, I see the unique, as yet unexplored, but also undervalued, worth of their theatrical and para-theatrical work.

Tu i Teraz ('Here and Now'), as the unusual rendering of the title suggests, is a bi-lingual play, written mostly, though not solely, by Nicola Werenowska. It draws attention to a very realistic approach to language, its structures and accents. All linguistic elements are scrupulously utilised in order to present a complete psychological portrait of a given character. The play maintains

31 This is confirmed by the ongoing attempts by the Polonia community to introduce the Polish language into the Scottish school curriculum, started ten years ago. Last year, plans were put in place to get rid of the Polish A-Level in 2018. Philip Oltermann, commenting on the decision in *The Guardian*, stated that: "From overseas, Britain increasingly looks like an oddity: a multicultural monoglot. Reversing AQA's decision could start to tackle that problem." See "In Praise of … The Polish Language," *The Guardian*, 6 March, 2015, accessed September 10, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/mar/06/polish-language-britain-exam-board-a-level

a realistic convention in showing a single mother (Marysia) raising a 16-year-old son (Kuba) and attempting to assimilate him completely into his English environment.

The question of Polishness is staged here in a complex way, which has been clearly affected by a larger transcultural context. We are not dealing with straightforward dilemmas but multilayered Polishness, shaped by the source of the characters' pain (Janusz's violence), as well as their joy (the kindness and generosity of spirit Anna shows her nephew Kuba). Marysia is the walking embodiment of the insecure complexity of her heritage – on the one hand, it disconnects her from actual life, and on the other it is something she is drawn towards. Her broken English, and her attempts at using it, constantly making the same old (and at times new) mistakes, becomes a metaphor for her bi-polar life. You cannot hide a foreign accent. Marysia can pretend that she has lost hers, but for everyone else it is as visible as a birthmark. Kuba's English is flawless, and from time to time he corrects his mother's errors, while she proudly displays the new bits of lexis she has picked up, such as the word "appraisal." This specific linguistic symbiosis brings them closer together, rather than sets them apart, although Marysia will not allow herself to think that it is Kuba's multi-cultural essence that is threatened by his monolingualism, and which may be far more important for his future than a perfect grasp of English.

Werenowska's play is rich material for our consideration of how migrants are stigmatised – socially, linguistically, culturally or in terms of familial relations. It shows just how complex these issues are, and makes us aware that there are no one-size-fits-all solutions, that each path involves some sort of price or loss, that it can both strengthen and weaken, that the consequences of choices made cannot be fully foreseen. That which seems right and proper in one culture can come across as very awkward in another. The life of a migrant is therefore a ceaseless searching for one's own cultural *modus vivendi*, an unending search for one's own definition of the meaning of existence, an attempt to reconcile values that are often irreconcilable. Werenowska's play gives careful consideration to all these dilemmas. In Marysia's set beliefs there is no room for the idea that it is bilingualism that offers a better chance of finding employment, makes it easier to connect with people around the world, offers more choices, without even mentioning cultural and intellectual benefits. Her perceptions of Poland are negative, a perspective which, interestingly, is not representative of her whole generation – her slightly younger sister sees Poland in much rosier colours. Anna's deeply rooted connection to the Polish language and familial traditions can be perceived as a template for contemporary, apolitical patriotism. She is not seduced by those lifestyles that remain inaccessible to ordinary folk, promoted through glossy magazines

and media gossip about celebrities. Her perception of London is defined by experiences of survival at all costs, on the absolute poverty line, sustained by demeaning jobs that often go hand in hand with sexual exploitation.

Tu i Teraz ('Here and Now') is written in both languages, with a Polish translation presented in parentheses, or next to the main text, in order not to exclude anyone who is monolingual. This is undoubtedly to show a certain authenticity of experience and mimetic reflection of the world being described, but that is not all. The tangible consequence of such a decision by the author is the previously mentioned desire to create roles for bilingual actors and actresses, and, as a consequence, the facility to create work for migrants. An additional benefit of Werenowska's decision – such as with the travelling theatre *Farnham Maltings* and select performances by *Gappad* – is the equal position both languages occupy on a single stage. In certain scenes, Polish is but an echo, in others the same is true of English. This dual language aspect reflects the parallel reality outside the theatre space, because Polish has become the second most widely used tongue in the British Isles (according to official statistics). Only a few years ago, it would have been Punjabi and Urdu. There can be no doubt that a large number of Britons are multilingual, and although English continues to dominate, sensitivity to other languages and their importance in nurturing cultural traditions of various ethnic groups is taking on ever more context. Werenowska's play emphasises the essential nature of such an approach and, as was the case in previously discussed examples, helps overcome linguistic barriers and makes bilingualism or multilingualism more familiar, giving a suggested equal footing to Polish when set next to English on stage. This gesture arises out of the conviction that bilingualism in no way lessens the narrative impact or depth of the play. What is surprising is that Werenowska, as the author of the play, speaks fluent German and French, but does not speak Polish. It is her husband (emerging out of a second generation of migrants) who speaks it as his native tongue, and she was helped in the writing of the Polish section of the play (which is a translation from the English) by friends whose names are included in the published version of the play.[32]

Giving food for careful thought are the differences in the way local reviewers received the performances. On the one hand, Dominic Cavendish from *The Telegraph* believes that it

> divulges too little personal background and historical context for the dilemmas confronting the family here to flare into rich psychological life. In culinary terms, it's all dumplings and no meaty stew.

32 These are Anna Elijasz, Paulina Nowak and Ania Śliwa. See Nicola Werenowska, *Tu i Teraz* [*Here and Now*], Playdead Press, 2013, 3.

He also adds that "it's nice to hear Polish being spoken in bursts, with the onus on the audience to fathom the sense, and the broken English phrasing rings true too."[33] On the other hand, Daniel Nelson, writing for *One World*, states that

> We are seeing more plays about the migrant experience in London, which is not surprising given that the country is home to 7 million foreign-born residents. The Polish community of 545,000 is the largest group of foreign nationals in the UK and the second, after India, by country of birth.[34]

The critic mistakenly assumes that the author of the play is Polish, praises the excellent performances and ends the review by saying that "Werenowska has talent and I hope she keeps telling stories." These opinions show how shaky and flawed artistic assessments can be, because overall they are based on a purely intuitive perception, subjective sensations and unexamined assumptions. It is also worth pondering on why reviewers do not seem to give weight to the role such productions play in the lives of migrant actors, why they overlook the human aspect of the performance, which reaches beyond the staged fiction, being simultaneously strongly connected with the socio-political reality in which they themselves live. One has the impression that their comments say more about the lack of empathy among contemporary, cosmopolitan communities than about the art itself. They are also evidence that the value of transcultural theatre rests outside illusory artistic criteria and that we are dealing with something quite different here.

Another interesting example, inspired by experiences of migration, in which we hear not just bilingualism, but a diversified multilingualism, is a play that uses the format of a musical, burlesque and tragi-comedy, along with song and dance numbers, developed by the Ukrainian emigre theatre group Molodyi Teatr from London. Created as a rebuke to the anti-immigrant rhetoric published by a number of British media outlets, the play is called *Bloody East Europeans* and is designed to be an interactive game with direct participation from the audience.

Here, we are dealing with a whole gamut of conventional theatrical motifs, but presented in a new context, with original staging ideas, ridiculing both sides of the argument: those arriving and those receiving. In this theatrical vision, Poles have suddenly become a part of the Slavonic family, while their

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33 Dominic Cavendish, *Tu i Teraz (Here and Now)*, Hampstead Theatre, review, accessed September 10, 2015: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/drama/3670988/The-Polish-Play-Such-a-sweet-shambles.html

34 Daniel Nelson, *Here and Now: A Story of Poles in Britain*, accessed September 10, 2015: http://www.nicolawerenowska.co.uk/nicolawerenowska.co.uk/Recent_events.html

uniqueness is reduced to words that no one is able to pronounce, such as Grzegorz Brzęczyszczykiewicz, because all their varied aspects separate them only from neighbouring countries, such as Ukraine, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Lithuania or Belarus. This ethnic grouping is key in that it reflects an average (British) perception, in which all Slavonic countries are one and differentiating between them becomes a major challenge to the average Briton.[35] The general "Slavonic confusion," relating to this part of Europe is a source of humour, shown in items such as the "language" song designed to teach the audience selected words from the "Eastern European" language:

> *Actors line up as in a choir and sing along to the melody from Katiusha:*
> Zdrastvuite – is Russian for "hello"
> Labadiena – Lithuanian for "good day"
> Tak i Nie – is Polish for "yes/no,"
> *Dobre je* – Ukrainian for "okay."
>
> Other words in Eastern European:
> Are poka, spasibo and duran',
> Multumiri Molia Dobhre Pivo
> Vybachaite, jakshcho shchos ne tak.[36]

This specific use of "languaging" possesses a symbolic character here, because it relates to multilingual aspects, treating the hegemonic role played by the English tongue in a tongue-in-cheek fashion. Pop hits from the 1970s are performed and sung on stage, familiar melodies accompanied by humorous lyrics illustrating the absurdity of many situations, for both British and immigrant audiences. The opening scene, showing the moment of awakening when labourers, wearing paper sacks over their heads, are getting ready for work, can be read in a symbolic way. It is not impossible to think that the authors of this play intended it to be an awakening of sorts for audiences, an opening of people's minds to the problems that surround us, to the humanity in those coming from Eastern Europe. Yet this is done without their being idealised. We see them exploiting, blackmailing and abusing each other, especially in times of hardship – and the whole dynamic of migration is contained in lively song and dance numbers, all with Slavonic accents and folk

35 Yet this is a perception mechanism that works both ways, because, for the average Pole, differentiating between England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland simply does not come into play, and during ordinary conversations (which I witnessed in Poland) the whole of the UK is referred to as "England."

36 I am quoting from the manuscript of the play, given to me by the author – EG.

costumes. Sketches, buffoonery and word games are based on an excellent grasp of Slavonic regions. All those kitschy props, including those the average Briton associates with the European East, are used to entertain the audience, though not without a hint of sadness, seriousness and gallows humour.

Along with wonderful stage management and design, delivered by Olesya Khromeychuk, the biggest strength of the show is its brilliant script. The author is introduced in the programme notes as an *Honorary Eastern European*, which he indeed is, in a way. Born in Scotland, Uilleam Blacker studied Slavonic languages in London, Glasgow and Oxford Universities, and can thus claim to speak fluent Russian, Ukrainian and Polish. Since 2014, he has been a lecturer in University College London, and his involvement in theatre is down to his partner, who set up the Ukrainian company, which he in turn supports with his talent and efforts (in this particular show, he is one of the actors playing the guitar and singing). The show offers a whole host of accents and languages, giving Ukrainian actors courage, who (not unlike *Gappad*) have to deal with the borders of culture in a British context to appeal for the right to exist and gain strength – to quote a term coined by Martha Nussbaum, used in a different context – taken from their unique "cosmopolitan belonging."[37] The example set by *Molodyi Teatr* is interesting in that it illustrates the rule of cultural inclusion, rather than exclusion, through the fact that it sympathises with the whole Slavonic region. In its own way, it broadens the "cultural alphabet"[38] and the space of transcultural idioms, paying attention to all that binds and divides Slavonic cultures, with British culture alongside them.

In reviewing the above discussions, it is hard not to notice that one of the main aspects of the plays listed is the introduction and development of that which is more and more often termed "narrative imagination,"[39] along with that which other researchers refer to as "empathic imagination."[40] This is

37 I am here referring to Martha Nussbaum's "capabilities approach." See *Creating Capabilities. The Human Development Approach* (Cambridge-London: The Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 2011).

38 Azade Seyhan, in using this term, analyses diasporic literature from Germany (and Turkish Germany) which was created in the USA. See Azade Seyhan, *Writing Outside the Nation* (Princeton, NY: Princeton University Press, 2001).

39 In referring to a set of "capabilities" necessary to full personal development, Martha Nussbaum introduces the category "senses, intelligence and thought," which other researchers refer to using the term "narrative imagination," see Nussbaum, *Capabilities*, 33.

40 Susan Gubar uses this phrase, citing an earlier idea from Shelley: "In Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*, the imagination is imagined as a muscle that needs to be used. To be "greatly good," according to Shelley, people "must imagine intensely," putting themselves "in the

a form of the imagination that is meant to facilitate the most complete understanding of another's situation, a situation that may be completely alien to readers and audiences, and totally outside their realm of interest. There can be doubt that all the shows discussed here are strongly related to the contexts in which they were created and out of which they emerge, hence it is not really possible to apply a typology based solely on the choice of language, the nationality of the authors, or simple cultural identity, because each spectacle is a borderline phenomenon. Even the typology proposed by Edward Balcerzan, taking into account the presence of many languages in one work of theatrical art, does not make it easier to contain, because the observations by researchers relate to the works of a single, specific author in Polish literature, and hence in works that are printed, not performed live, and that substantially changes the semantic scope of our deliberations.[41]

Each of the theatrical works considered here creates, in its own way, new values on the edges of cultures and languages. The mixing up of cultures and languages is not, however, an artistic aim in and of itself, but clearly relates to a human dimension so typical of our times, defined by the phenomenon of mobility. The multilingual texts of these shows ask ambitious questions, and also teach us humility, returning some measure of dignity to the "Other," and making us more sensitive, empathic and able to engage in mutual respect, and it is in these aspects that I see their value and importance.

Who knows if we are not dealing here with the nucleus of a phenomenon that is reminiscent of Chicano culture, which came out of the mixing of American culture, languages and traditions with those of Mexican and Spanish origins. Chicano has earned its own name and separate fields of study. Perhaps a similarly comparative form of analysis will be the aim of further research into this entangled and fascinating phenomenon of the creation of new cultural affiliations – the inevitable result of an ever more globalised world.

Translation: Marek Kazmierski

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place of another and of many others" so the "pains and pleasures of the species become their own." See. Susan Gubar, *Poetry after Auschwitz. Remembering What One Never Knew* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 242.

41 See Balcerzan, "Dwu(wielo)języczność."

Kris Van Heuckelom

Manual Labour with a Pink Touch: The Polish Migrant Experience as Depicted in Agata Wawryniuk's Graphic Novel *Rozmówki polsko-angielskie* [*Polish-English Phrase Book*]

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Polish Migration and the Graphic Novel

In their recently published *The Graphic Novel: An Introduction*, Jan Baetens and Hugo Frey[1] bring into view two major thematic concerns of the contemporary graphic novel: autobiography and history. In the case of Poland, with its well-developed memorial culture, it should not come as a surprise that graphic novelists have tended to focus their artistic output on the treatment of important historical topics (such as World War II, the Holocaust, and Communism).[2] One of the notable exceptions to this general tendency is the critically acclaimed and award-winning comic book *Rozmówki polsko-angielskie* [*Polish-English Phrase Book*], authored by the young Polish graphic designer and artist Agata Wawryniuk (b. 1988).[3]

1 Jan Baetens and Hugo Frey, *The Graphic Novel: An Introduction* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 10-13.

2 For an insightful discussion of the treatment of history in recent Polish graphic narratives, see Ewa Stańczyk, "'Long Live Poland!': Representing the Past in Polish Comic Books," *Modern Language Review* 1.109 (2014): 186-206.

3 Agata Wawryniuk, *Rozmówki polsko-angielskie* (Warszawa: Gniew Kultury, 2012).

Although Wawryniuk's story directly relates to a very topical issue in recent Polish history – the massive outflow of economic migrants, especially after Poland's accession to the EU in 2004 – it does so in a very personal manner, by using the author's experience as a Polish jobseeker in the UK as the underlying narrative frame. Her attempt to capture the contemporary Polish migrant experience within the generic format of a graphic novel gives the book a distinct position on a more general level as well. Significantly, while the expanding body of cultural and artistic responses to post-1989 and post-2004 migration still tends to be dominated by literary forms of expression (and, to a lesser extent, by audiovisual artefacts such as TV productions, film, and music), Wawryniuk is the first Polish artist to explore the relatively new medium of the graphic novel in order to "image" the impact of transnational economic mobility on contemporary Polish society.[4] In view of this particular state of affairs, the thrust of this article is to offer a textual and contextual reading of Wawryniuk's comic, with a particular focus on the interplay between the author's thematic engagement with contemporary Polish labour migration on the one hand and the book's generic hybridity and stylistic expressivity on the other hand.

"Imaging" the Polish Migrant Experience

In thematic terms, Wawryniuk's novel offers a pictorial version of what Michael Gott and Thibaut Schilt have recently called a "negative journey,"[5] i.e., a narrative focusing on the dark sides of economy-driven east-west mobility made possible by "the ostensible opening of Europe in the wake of the fall of Communism, the Schengen Agreements, and EU

4 There are, however, a couple of interesting foreign-language graphic novels which (directly or indirectly) relate to the long-standing tradition of Poland as an emigrant-producing country. Ruth Modan's critically acclaimed book *The Property* (New York: Drawn & Quarterly, 2013), published in Polish under the title *Zaduszki*, offers the story of an elderly Jewish lady who ventures on a turbulent trip from Israel to her native Poland, in order to reclaim the Warsaw property which her Jewish family had lost during WWII. Another example is *Marzi*, a serialized autobiographical comic created by the Polish-French couple Marzena Sowa (screenplay) and Alain Savoia (drawings) (Sylvain Savoia and Marzena Sowa, *Marzi. L'intégrale* (Paris: Editions Dupuis, 2008)). Although Sowa's coming-of-age story is set in the Polish People's Republic in the 1980s, the narrative contains occasional references to Solidarity-era emigration to Western Europe. Marzena Sowa herself has been living abroad (France and Belgium) since 2001.

5 Michael Gott, and Thibaut Schilt, "Introduction," in *Open Roads, Closed Borders: The Contemporary French-language Road Movie,* ed. Michael Gott and Thibaut Schilt (Bristol: Intellect, 2013), 1-17; 3-4

expansion."[6] In terms of composition, Wawryniuk divides this migration-themed visual narrative into two distinct parts. The black-and-white graphic novel begins with an untitled three-page episode introducing us to the three main characters (the author's pictorial alter ego Agata, her boyfriend Szymon and his cousin Marcel) and the particular circumstances that make them decide to take a trip to the UK. The full-page panel which opens the book (and which is also quoted as the cover illustration) shows the prostrate bodies of the three protagonists in a wildflower meadow seen from a bird's perspective, their heads and their hands coming together. As we learn from the flap text on the left side of the opening image, this idyllic scene is set in the early summer of 2008 in the rural environment of Eastern Poland, the three students having returned home from college to enjoy their holiday break. While slowly reaching their "personal border of boredom," they discuss the possibility of spending the summer as seasonal workers in the UK. Using a term coined by Yosefa Loshitzky,[7] one may say that this opening (pre-departure) episode of the novel revolves around a "migration fantasy": the three emigrants-to-be share with each other various stories associated with the destination country (for instance, Britain's reputation as a generous welfare state), which have been fuelled by the seemingly "successful" accounts of other Polish emigrants (in this case, that of Marcel's older brother Karol, who has relocated to the UK some time before this story begins). The visual culmination point of their fantasizing is a tiny airplane that makes an out-of-the-blue appearance in the final panel of the opening episode. If we use the terminology proposed by Randy Duncan and Matthew Smith,[8] the plane that suddenly wings through the airspace of Eastern Poland functions as a diegetic image in both a sensory and a non-sensory way: apart from representing an object that can be visually perceived within the world of the story (by Agata and her two male sidekicks), it may also be said to "externalize" an internal state (viz., the thoughts and expectations the three lead characters have about their future trip from the eastern edge of the EU to the British Isles).

Apart from diegetically epitomizing the "migration fantasy," the plane motif also connects the opening episode with its immediate paratextual surroundings, in particular the inside surface of the novel's front and back cover

6 Michael Gott, "West/East Crossings: Positive Travel in Post-1989 French-language Cinema," in *European Cinema after the Wall. Screening East-West Mobility*, ed. Leen Engelen and Kris Van Heuckelom (Lanham etc.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 1-17; 1.

7 Yosefa Loshitzky, *Screening Strangers: Migration and Diaspora in Contemporary European Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 22-23.

8 Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith. *The Power of Comics: History, Form, and Culture* (New York, NY; London, UK: Continuum, 2009), 155.

(which is decorated with white-colour images – against a pink background – of circulating planes and criss-cross dashed lines that visualize their multiple trajectories). While it is tempting to read this paratextual embellishment as a "rosy" celebration of cross-border travel and increased mobility made possible by the disappearance of migration restrictions after Poland's accession to the EU and the advent of low-cost airlines, the second (and main) part of the graphic novel casts a more gloomy perspective on the fate of Polish labour immigrants in post-enlargement Europe. Paratextually, the transition to this central (UK-set) segment of the story is marked by the appearance of the actual title page right after the (Poland-set) prelude.

Within the framework of the novel, the titular formula *Polish-English Phrase Book* has a twofold dimension. On the one hand, it refers to one of the final sections of the book (which contains the Polish translations of the English dialogue used throughout the English portion of the novel).[9] On the other hand, the title serves as a metaphorical shorthand for the various (linguistic and other) forms of interaction which unfold between the three seasonal workers and the people they encounter in the UK. Along with the choice of title, Wawryniuk's creative engagement with various non-literary (utilitarian) text types finds apt expression in the fact that she uses the visual device of a tear-off calendar as a means to situate *Polish-English Phrase Book* in a linear structure: the UK-set portion of the novel consists of seventeen distinct episodes, each of which is preceded by a separate title page visually reminiscent of the sheet of a block-calendar. The result is a "visual diary" of its own kind which encapsulates the experiences of the three lead characters in chronological order and which displays a circular structure: while the first episode (entitled "Welcome to…") opens with the trio's arrival at a British airport on July 1, 2008, the action of the concluding section ("Polska") is set two months later (August 30), as Agata and her two male companions land back safely and happily in Poland.

Rather than constituting a plot-driven comic with cliffhangers and suspense, the chronologically ordered episodes can be thematically clustered around two major (and interrelated) issues: first of all, the (predominantly problematic) relationship which unfolds between the three newcomers and

9 Quite obviously, the Polish-English dialogues developed by Wawryniuk significantly diverge from the typical content of "normal" phrase books. Usually divided into thematically oriented chapters (such as food, shopping, travelling), these bilingual booklets typically contain a set of ready-made questions and answers to be used by the traveller in the destination country. In Wawryniuk's list of (translated) phrases and dialogues, however, the dominant grammatical mood is the imperative, which – combined with other constructions that express work-related commands and orders – points to the subordinate economic position taken up by the Polish migrant characters featured in the book.

the local people (including Polish immigrants who settled in the UK earlier) and, second, the main characters' inability to find decent employment that corresponds with their qualifications. While these topics have been extensively explored and treated in many migration-themed books and films, the formal characteristics of Wawryniuk's novel add a particular twist to these representational practices, both on the level of macrostructure (page and panel layout) and on the level of microstructure (drawing style). Following the formal taxonomies described by Jan Baetens and Hugo Frey,[10] the panel/page structure used in *Polish-English Phrase Book* could be called "rhetorical": rather than systematically repeating the same structure of panels and tiers (which is called the conventional mode), Wawryniuk diversifies the panel and page layout (in terms of size and distribution) in order to support the narrative and to highlight certain aspects within the story she wants to tell (especially the issue of labour exploitation and the negative impact it has on the physical and emotional well-being of the migrant workers involved). Wawryniuk's functional and diversified approach to page layout is also exemplified by the fact that variable multi-panel pages are occasionally combined with splash pages (and, in one case, a double-page spread). Apart from this, the "rhetorical" page structure of *Polish-English Phrase Book* goes along with a more or less unstable panel content (changes in perspective, angle, and distance). In terms of drawing style, finally, Wawryniuk's approach displays a similar ambiguity and seems to balance between two modes of depiction: while her portrayals of human figures tend to magnify certain (physical and other) traits of the characters involved and often border on the grotesque, her treatment of various background details, objects, and settings is realistic rather than deformed and stylized. If the former procedure allows Wawryniuk to underscore the physical and mental distance separating the three lead characters from the people who surround them in the UK, then the latter device serves a documentary purpose and provides the reader with detailed pictures of the often deplorable working conditions the Polish immigrant workers are forced to endure.

Characterization: Strange Locals, Polish Conmen, and Wawryniuk's Pink Touch

Whereas Wawryniuk portrays her persona and her two male companions in an undeniably cartoonish, but nevertheless fairly realistic, fashion, she puts much effort into "defamiliarizing" the figures of the other characters. This pertains, first and foremost, to the depiction of British locals whose bodies (heads, chins, necks, bellies) are portrayed, more often than not, as blubbery

10 Baetens and Frey, *The Graphic Novel*, 112.

and corpulent. Apart from offering a form of social critique (Wawryniuk repeatedly brings into view the unhealthy eating habits of the Britons), this stylistic device is part of a conscious process of Otherization: both in the textual and paratextual segments of the novel, Wawryniuk's persona recurrently uses the Polish adjective "*dziwny*" ("strange") to describe the unfamiliar looks and behaviour of the people she encounters as well as the "strange" character of the destination country as a whole. And the very fact that most Polish characters (men and women alike) do not escape from being portrayed by Wawryniuk in a similarly deformed or exaggerated way indicates that this process of Otherization does not take place along ethnic, racial, linguistic or cultural lines. Along similar lines, the pictorial device of physical "magnification" is repeatedly combined with verbally expressed instances of "minimization" vis-à-vis the three lead characters. The linguistic device of being addressed in diminutive terms, such as "*Polaczki*" ("little Poles"), "świeżaczki" ("little freshmen") and "*chłopaczki*" ("little boys"), pertains in particular to Agata, who is called successively "*mała*" ("little one"), "*malutka*" ("very little one"), "*nowa*" ("new one"), "świeża" ("fresh one") and "*dziewczynka*" ("little girl"). The discursive "minimization" of Agata and her two sidekicks does not only relate to purely physical traits (slimness versus obesity), but also to their young age, their lack of experience, and their "inferior" status as new arrivals from Poland (which makes them "small" in the eyes of settled Polish immigrants as well). In a similar vein, the author seems to put much effort into fashioning her diegetic persona as a young and inexperienced "girl." On a paratextual level, this "girlish" perspective is reflected by the presence of pink on the front and back cover of the graphic novel (which is also perpetuated on the inside surface): while Wawryniuk's name is prominently printed in pink letters, the central image of a wildflower meadow (quoted from the opening episode) is decorated with dozens of little rosy balls. Yet *Polish-English Phrase Book* gives an undeniably rebellious twist to the underdog and subordinate position of its female main character; Wawryniuk's (para)textual self-representation on the back of the cover imbues her "girlish" persona with a certain degree of naughtiness and willfulness.[11] Throughout the novel, this narrative thread finds expression in the fact that Wawryniuk's pictorial alter ego usually surpasses her two male companions in terms of agency, resourcefulness and determination

11 The paratext on the back cover begins as follows: "Cztery lata temu przydarzyła mi się pewna historia. Wielu pewnie powiedziałoby, że sama jestem sobie winna, ale kto by ich tam słuchał. Ja nie słucham, co sprawia, że czasem ląduję w dziwnych miejscach. Tak dziwnych jak na przykład Anglia." ("Four years ago, a certain story happened to me. Many people would say that I should blame myself, but who would listen to them? I do not listen, as a consequence of which I sometimes find myself in strange places. As strange as, for example, England.")

(which has inspired Paolino Nappi and Ewa Stańczyk[12] to call Agata "the most active in the group, who remains undeterred by adverse circumstances and is prepared to take control whenever necessary, be it during a job search or a close encounter with a gang of bullies").

It is undoubtedly tempting to read Wawryniuk's depiction of the (relatively) "empowered" female immigrant within the context of certain tendencies characterizing the literary treatment of man-women relations and gender roles in the Polish diasporic space. As I have written elsewhere,[13] many authors of the post-accession wave (both male and female) thematize in their works the impact of transnational mobility on the traditional masculine dominance in Polish society (an impact which – depending on the author's personal perspective – can be termed "threatening" or "liberating"). However, rather than privileging one particular point of view, *Polish-English Phrase Book* casts a multifaceted perspective on the experiences of male and female Polish expatriates and their mutual relationships in the diasporic space. A case in point is offered, first of all, by the July 20 episode "Zgrzyt" ("Conflict"), which shows the three lead characters enjoying a rare moment of leisure in the company of the "settled" immigrant Karol and his wife Anka. In terms of pictorial characterization, Wawryniuk uses an assembly of sartorial and bodily details and accessories to visualize the hierarchical relationship between the "king-like" (but unemployed) Karol and his strained and worn-out female partner (who carries the double burden of having to run the household and having to make a living). While her husband is depicted as a macho person (wearing Elvis-like sideburns and sunglasses) who seems to be much more attached to his sports car than he is concerned about the well-being of his partner, a tiny cross necklace worn by Anka serves as a subtle but significant reminder of the prominent role played by religion in Polish society and its continuing impact on the distribution of gender roles.[14] Set against the background of a car trip to the ruins of Tynemouth Castle (once a strategic fortified area

12 Paolino Nappi and Ewa Stańczyk, "Women Cross Borders: Economic Migration in Contemporary Italian and Polish Graphic Novels," *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 3.6 (2015): 230-245; 240

13 Kris Van Heuckelom, "Polishness in Crisis? Migration and Inter-Ethnic Coupling," in *Polish Literature in Transformation*, ed. Ursula Phillips with the assistance of Knut Andreas Grimstad and Kris Van Heuckelom (Berlin: LIT, 2013), 51-68.

14 Anka's cross necklace motif as a symbol of Polish religiosity stands in contrast with an earlier panel (on the opening page of the episode "Maliny" ("Raspberries")), the content of which nods to the diminishing role of Christian religion and the Church in British society: the panel shows Agata while she is passing a massive Gothic church marked with a "for sale" sign.

where medieval battles were fought and kings buried), the episode under discussion foregrounds Agata's attempts to empower Anka, followed by a verbal fight between Karol and Agata (who accuses him of exploiting his wife).[15] In more than one way, Karol's sports car seems to serve here as the symbolic extension of his patriarchal dominance (not only with regard to his wife, but also with regard to the freshly arrived *Polaczki* sitting in the back of the vehicle). In terms of focalization and encapsulation, Wawryniuk repeatedly switches between frontseat and backseat positions (for instance, by cutting from a front windshield view to an image of the three protagonists sitting on the back seat of the car). This front-seat/back-seat dialectic (reminiscent of road cinema aesthetics) coincides with the equally symbolic spatial opposition between Karol (behind the driving wheel) and his wife as the subordinate passenger submissively enduring her fate.

A counter-narrative to this image of hegemonic masculinity in the diasporic space is offered by an episode which revolves around a middle-aged flower seller who shares with Agata the story of her relocation from Poland to the UK. Apart from referring to the florist's extremely corpulent figure, the episode's title "Ciężar" ("Weight") relates to the psychological burden that triggered the woman's decision to leave her home country and start a new life in a more tolerant and open-minded environment. What is more, the woman's liberation from the constraints and prejudices imposed by the conservative home society finds apt expression in the ostensible ease with which she speaks about her (inter-ethnic) relationships with local men.

In more general terms, the "pink" touch which Wawryniuk adds to her visual/verbal portrayal of the Polish migrant experience does not only point to the autobiographical (and thus female) perspective that underlies the novel, but should also be related to the fact that Wawryniuk approaches the predicament of her female co-ethnics with more understanding and empathy when compared with the overall portrayal of male Polish immigrants.[16] A case in point is Wawryniuk's treatment of another Polish character, with whom the three protagonists initially share a rented house (Karol's acquaintance Boguś). Grotesquely portrayed as a square-shouldered and bearded "bloke" with a criminal record whose speech is replete with curse and slang words and defective syntax, Boguś makes his first appearance in the graphic novel while standing on a doormat with the inscription "GET LOST." By treading the blurred line between hospitality and hostility, his character comes to embody

15 Quite symbolically, Agata encourages Anka to stand up for herself while they are standing next to a huge old cannon (in the immediate vicinity of Tynemouth Castle).

16 For a (comparative) discussion of feminine migrant identities and female agency in two recent graphic novels (including Wawryniuk's book) see Nappi and Stańczyk, "Women."

one of the stock motifs of the contemporary Polish discourse on migration, namely "the Polish conman" (an immigrant who tricks co-ethnics).[17] Characteristically, in this case as well, it is Wawryniuk's pictorial alter ego who takes the lead over her two friends when they attempt to come to grips with the mischievous practices and behavior of their Polish housemate.

Agata's empowerment and recurring confrontational stance (especially towards Polish men) do not affect, however, the strength of the ties between herself and her male companions Szymon and Marcel. Throughout the novel, Wawryniuk foregrounds the sense of congeniality which permeates their mutual relationship and which goes along with a strong in-group solidarity across the gender divide. Three artistically minded and gifted students, they interact with each other on equal terms and display a strong generational, mental and social bond (a bond that is stronger than that between Marcel and his older brother Karol). At the same time, the fact that they have a similar mindset and share the same interests, sets them – culturally and sociologically – apart from the British and Polish working-class environment they wind up in in the UK.

Settings and Close-Ups: Documenting Manual Labour

With the exception of a small panel offering a view of the River Tyne and of Tyne Bridge, Wawryniuk refrains from including touristic snapshots of the urban environment her characters operate in (Newcastle). Instead, most episodes of the novel are set in domestic and work-related spaces (ranging from work agencies, hotels and hospitals to factories and industrial parks). While Wawryniuk occasionally uses a silhouette style to evoke the location of an episode, other panels are rather detailed and realistic in their approach to setting. This pertains in particular to depictions of work-related sites such as the garbage recycling factory featured in the episode "Klapa" ("Flop") or the binder factory portrayed in the penultimate episode "Klik, trzach" ("Click, Bang"). In these cases, Wawryniuk tends to combine large panels offering a macroscopic view of the factory's production line (and its various work stations and machines) with horizontal tiers of small panels imaging – on a microscale – the subsequent steps of the industrial assembly process. Importantly, however, while a large part of these production lines are more or less mechanized and automatized (which Wawryniuk underscores by including detailed depictions of industrial machinery and conveyor belts), some stages of the industrial

17 See Michał Garapich, "Between Cooperation and Hostility – Constructions of Ethnicity and Social Class among Polish Migrants in London," *Studia Sociologica* IV, 2(2012), 31-45, for a sociological approach to this issue.

process still require some type of human intervention, be it visually (monitoring a process) or manually (manipulating a machine or a product). Keeping in line with this thread, Wawryniuk's novel offers a significant number of medium (and sometimes extreme) close-ups of arms, hands and faces during this labour. By doing so, Wawryniuk gives utmost visual dimension to the physical (manual) nature of the labour the Polish characters carry out. Simultaneously, she lays bare the so-called "3D conditions" which typify this kind of blue-collar work: dirty, dangerous, and demeaning. The aspect of dirtiness, to begin with, finds expression in several scenes set at the aforementioned garbage recycling factory, but it also manifests itself in Wawryniuk's visual treatment of Agata's repeated performances as a cleaning lady. So, for instance, one of the tiers featured in the episode "Posprzątane" ("Cleaned up") offers, successively, a close-up of a toilet bowl manually cleaned with a brush, an image of Agata's face and silhouette focalized from behind the grubby surface of a window pane she is polishing, and another close-up of her hand fishing out hair from a clogged bathtub drain. The hazardous character of the working conditions, in turn, is visualized in a couple of scenes set at a local bleach factory and the aforementioned binder factory (where both the manufacturing process and the manufactured goods pose a significant threat to the physical well-being of the immigrant workers involved). The demeaning nature of this kind of labour, finally, relies on the fact that the 3D worker is instrumentalized as a mere performer of repetitive, dull and mind-numbing tasks and remains deprived of any creative or intellectual input whatsoever. This idea is exemplified in the episode "Śrubokręt" ("Screwdriver"), where a horizontal series of panels offers successive close-ups of Marcel's increasingly desperate facial expression while observing rolls of toilet paper passing by on a conveyor belt. The most elaborate – and stylistically most sophisticated – treatment of the issue of 3D labour is provided, however, by the already-mentioned episode "Klik, trzach." While the first panels and pages of the episode serve to make the reader (and the three lead characters) familiar with the various types of manual work performed at the binder factory, Wawryniuk gradually modifies the page layout in order to underscore the startlingly repetitive and numbing character of the jobs carried out by the three protagonists during the final ten days of their stay in the UK: the calendar sheets indicating the linear progress of time now become an inseparable part of the page panels and are interspersed by a seemingly endless succession of ever-smaller panels repeating the very same bodily movements (and the accompanying instructions and onomatopoeic sounds). These repeated sequences ultimately collapse (or "explode") into a mishmash of text balloons, numbers, and onomatopoeic sounds scattered over the surface of a double-page spread. Significantly, apart from being the visual culmination point of the episode, the double panel also serves

as a prefiguration of the industrial accident that eventually occurs to Szymon (whose left hand is injured by a piercing machine).

By situating the British experiences of her three protagonists in the deregulated and hazardous sector of 3D employment, Wawryniuk remains at least partly in line with the bulk of literature on contemporary Polish labour migration. One of its most typical constituent elements (both in reality and in representational practices) is the widespread phenomenon of employment below qualification level.[18] As Wawryniuk shows in the opening episode of the British portion of her novel, this "form of negative self-fashioning"[19] is prompted not only by the particular needs and often absurd demands of the local job market, but also stems from a minority complex. After the trio's first and rather unsuccessful visit to a local job agency (aptly called "WorkPole"), the reader witnesses a late-night scene during which the three characters are diligently working on their job applications. On the one hand, their job-searching strategy relies on making their CVs look more "proletarian," for instance, by including falsified references to former employment and experience in cleaning and domestic services. On the other hand, this "proletarization" procedure involves the erasure of certain skills and qualifications from the jobseeker's educational and professional curriculum. In the case of Agata, this pertains in particular to her background as a graphic designer. So, when asked by Marcel "Piszesz coś o grafice?" ("Are you writing something about your graphics?"), she hesitantly responds: "Nie… Chcę jakąś normalną pracę, jak zmywanie naczyń… Boję się, że za kiepska jestem…" ("No… I would like to have some kind of normal job, such as dishwashing… I am afraid I am too bad.")[20] As ensues from the subsequent work-related episodes of the novel, adjusting one's profile to the qualifications required for a 3D job also involves a significant revaluation of what is traditionally understood as "intelligence": if intelligence is needed at all, then it means, first and foremost, knowing how to carry out various forms of manual labour.[21]

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18 This theme is central, for instance, to Piotr Czerwiński's Dublin-set novel *Przebiegum życiae, czyli kartonowa sieć* (*Conductum Lifae or the Cardboard Web,* 2009). The book's lead character is a forty-year-old Polish economist (Gustaw) who – after losing his well-paid position in a reputable Warsaw company – lands a job as a dustman in Dublin.

19 Joanna Rostek, "Migration, Capital, Space: Econotopic Constellations in Recent Literature about Polish Migrants in Ireland," in *Anglistentag 2012: Proceedings*, ed. Katrin Röder and Ilse Wischer (Trier: WVT, 2013), 47-60; 55.

20 Wawryniuk, *Rozmówki*, 11.

21 So, for instance, in the episode about Agata's first assignment as a cleaning lady ("Gniazdo" ("Powerpoint")) we witness the girl's failed attempts to switch on a vacuum cleaner, which provokes the following reproaching remarks from her British colleague (in the local slang): "Stup@d!!..!!...lit*(...e...ass....&)@... Aaj! Me.. YOU CAN'T CLEAN!!!,"14.

What, obviously, distinguishes Wawryniuk's approach from other (predominantly literary) treatments of the very same topic is her medium (as well as her creative take on the medium's possibilities). As Baetens and Frey[22] indicate, one of the essential features which differentiate the graphic novel from verbal forms of storytelling is its strong focus on physical appearances. In the case of *Polish-English Phrase Book*, these medium-specific tendencies gain additional prominence in view of the novel's thematic engagement with physical labour and its returning focus on images of the human body and its constituent parts. What is more, the specific combination of medium (handmade graphics) and theme (manual labour) seems to add a self-reflexive dimension to Wawryniuk's novel, in its quality of a hand-drawn story dealing with the precarious character of various forms of manual work carried out by the pictorial alter ego of the drawing artist. Significantly, the physical act of handwriting as performed by Wawryniuk's persona appears twice in the opening UK episode of the novel, first of all in a scene which shows a heterogeneous group of Polish immigrants lining up in front of the office window of the local employment agency (the aforementioned "WorkPole"). A small panel within a larger panel offers a close-up of Agata's hands while she is writing on her left arm the word "Bleechx" (the name of a local bleach factory known for employing/exploiting Polish immigrant workers). The first panel on the next page shifts focus to the already mentioned late-night scene in which the three protagonists creatively adjust their CVs to the needs of the local job market. Significantly, the tail of the speech bubble containing Agata's remark about not mentioning her graphics in her job application points downward to her body while she is manually rewriting her CV. As it appears, both the act of handwriting and the content of Agata's writing play an essential role in the process of her 'negative self-fashioning,' i.e., the deliberate erasure of one of her main manual skills (drawing) from her personal profile in favour of other manual skills which she actually does not possess (cleaning). Apart from that, both handwriting scenes can be seen as a narrative flash-forward to a series of work-related episodes in which Agata's body is focalized (often in close-up) while performing dreary or even dangerous manual jobs. While the very next episode offers one more snapshot of Agata's left arm with the inscription "Bleechx" (which can be read as an early – albeit very innocent – form of bodily mutilation prompted by the necessity to find a job), the July 15 episode "Flop" revolves around her actual employment at Bleechx, with particular focus on the physical injuries inflicted by the caustic substance produced at the factory. After showing (in close-up) the scar-covered hand of one of Agata's co-workers, Wawryniuk inserts a tier of panels showing how

22 Baetens and Frey, *Graphic Novel*, 174.

Agata's eyes are hurt by splashing drops of bleach. Within the same episode, Agata's experiences at Bleechx are paralleled by the similarly disenchanting adventures of her two friends performing dirty manual labour as garbage sorters in a factory on the other side of town.

The second part of the same episode adds another twist to the novel's close engagement with manual labour. In an attempt to cope with the disastrous work experience at the factory, the three friends meet up in a local music bar and speculate about what to do next. When the local band takes a short break, Szymon and Marcel are given the opportunity to deliver an improvised jazz music performance. If the factory-set part of the episode portrays the two Poles as the failed performers of dirty and repetitive manual labour, then their successful stage performance at the club underscores their qualities as performers of a different, more creative and inspiring kind of manual labour (playing piano and guitar). This contrast is subtly reflected by the episode's title, which – apart from referring to the Poles' "flop" at the factory – relates to the onomatopoeic formula *KLAP*! (hand clapping) repeated within the diegesis at the very end of the episode. The same opposition also rises to surface in some of the reactions that emerge from the enthusiastic audience during and right after their "blitz" concert: while one of the British listeners responds to the ignorance of his partner by stating "They [the Poles] are improvising, you stupid! Something like jazz music. Something from old times," the episode under scrutiny closes with the advice given to Szymon by a fellow migrant from Poland: "Zapamiętaj to sobie! Szkoda takich rąk" ("Remember. Don"t waste these hands").[23] Yet, while the two Poles' well-received musical performance may be said to envision an alternative and less alienating way of making a living in the UK, such a scenario is crushed by grim reality and promptly replaced by a series of far less rewarding performances of manual labour, its culmination point being the trio's employment at the binder factory. Quite obviously, the cautionary advice about hands that closes "Flop" serves to anticipate Szymon's eventual hand accident at the end of his stay in the UK.

The overall focus on the threatening impact of 3D jobs on the integrity of the human body sheds a more specific light on the symbolic function of the novel's cover image: apart from underscoring the close bond between the main characters, the Poland-set scene featuring three people peacefully lying in a wildflower meadow sets up a stark contrast with the UK-set portion of the novel, not only in spatial terms (rural versus urban settings), but also as far as the portrayal of the human body is concerned (physical integrity versus fragmentation and instrumentalization). On a paratextual level,

23 Wawryniuk, *Rozmówki*, 35.

similarly symbolic is the page that marks the transition between the actual novel and the appendix of (translated) English phrases: in the middle of the sheet, there is a small grayscale picture of the author posing with a dustpan and a broom in her two hands, in the interior space of what seems to be a bar. As it appears, the photograph's function is primarily documentary and serves to provide the reader with "authentic" evidence of the author's work as, among others, a cleaning lady in British pubs.[24] But along with this, Wawryniuk stages the typical tools of her British trade as if they had become extensions of her hands (and her body as a whole). As such, the photograph reiterates and reinforces the prominence of 3D-type manual labour throughout the novel and recalls the various panels offering close-ups of hands holding and manipulating a wide variety of cleaning instruments (toilet brush, tweezers, vacuum cleaner, dust cloth). In a similar vein, the fact that there is no place in the story world for Wawryniuk's creative impulses (and the tools of her actual "trade," namely graphic design) finds apt expression in one of the final scenes showing a conversation between Agata and some other factory workers from Poland: when Agata mentions her educational background and brings up her plans to become a graphic designer, one of her female co-workers boldly responds: "Ale ty nudna jesteś." ("How boring can you be").[25]

Creating an Alternative Binder: Wawryniuk's Manual Labour Performance

Like any form of life-writing (or life-drawing, in the case of Wawryniuk), *Polish-English Phrase Book* should be treated as a narrative form of self-creation. Significantly, in spite of the book's focus on the dark aspect of economy-driven migration, the author puts much effort into exposing the transformative rather than disenchanting and disruptive character of her persona's journey to the UK. Such a reading is fostered, among other things, by the paratextual data surrounding the graphic novel, in particular the folded front and back flaps that partly cover the end papers of the book. Both flaps feature a small

24 Such a "documentary" purpose also seems to underlie the one-page collage of small grayscale photographs reproduced at the very end of the book. Rather than offering colourful postcard images of Newcastle and its surroundings, most of these pictures directly connect to the work-related settings and situations portrayed in the novel itself. What is more, some of the photographs point to the functional character of photography in Wawryniuk's artistic practice. So, for instance, one of the reproduced pictures (of a terraced housing street located in Newcastle's working-class district) clearly served as a model for the hand-drawn image of a very similar street in the second UK episode of the novel ("Gniazdko," 13).

25 Wawryniuk, *Rozmówki*, 85.

photograph of the author and a short textual description (written in the first person present tense) of Wawryniuk's personal and professional situation at two different moments of time: 2008 (prior to her trip to the UK) and 2012 (when she graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Wrocław and published her debut novel). Apart from foregrounding the autobiographical character of the story that is being told (in close accord with the autodiegetic narrative mode introduced on the back cover of the novel), Wawryniuk's use of the inside flaps brings to mind the well-known structure of a before-and-after advertisement, which usually includes two photographs and a text describing the – typically beneficial – changes which affected the consumer of the advertised product or service within a certain span of time. In this case, however, the changes brought about by the "consumed" product or service – a short-term stay as a Polish jobseeker in the UK – seem to be not merely physical (as suggested by the differences between the thumbnail-size pictures of the author featured on both flaps). Wawryniuk's textual self-presentation on the flap copy appears to emphasize, first and foremost, that the four-year time lap has allowed her to "grow" (and to gain more experience and self-confidence) as a graphic artist. The fact that the "visual diary" of her two-month stay in the UK is (para)textually framed between these two moments suggests that the narrated experience is at least partly constitutive of this transformation process. Within the novel, this idea finds apt expression in the motif of oversized luggage, which plays a central role in the final episode "Polska": while preparing for their return trip to Poland, the three protagonists (who – in terms of migrant typology – could be called "hamsters") do everything they can to bring back what they have managed to accumulate during their stay in Newcastle. Undoubtedly, the added value of their stay is not only financial and material, but also mental (involving, among other things, a stronger valuation of their home country, as the content of the final splash page indicates). In Agata's case, however, there is also an undeniable artistic surplus value, as suggested by her remark that the saved money will allow her to buy a new camera (which, in turn, can be closely linked to Wawryniuk's artistic practice). What is more, as the author herself suggests in the paratextual segment of the book, the added value of the "certain story" that "happened" to her "four years ago" cannot be separated from the fact that Wawryniuk's disenfranchising yet eye-opening experience as a manual labourer in the UK proved invaluable for her debut as a graphic novelist (and helped her to acquire cultural capital as a "manual worker" in her own right).

Ultimately, however, it is the graphic novel itself that comes to serve as the most prominent material embodiment of Wawryniuk's performative "maturation." While the story of her trip to the UK largely revolves around the quasi-automatic (and partly self-induced) degradation of Polish jobseekers

to performers of dull, dirty and hazardous manual work, the novel as a material product goes against everything that the world of the story stands for. As a hand-drawn artefact bearing (quite literally) the fingerprint of its maker, the novel embodies and advances a fundamentally different kind of manual labour from the mind-numbing, repetitive and risky 3D jobs visualized and thematized in the world of the story. If, within the diegesis, the binder serves as the quintessential example of non-creative, serialized production carried out by a growing underclass of disenfranchised foreign labourers, then the carefully pencilled artwork of Wawryniuk's *Polish-English Phrase Book* – with its inventive, creative and reflexive approach to the hybrid medium of the graphic novel – comes to function as its ultimate reversal: an "alternative binder" of its own kind, manually crafted and with a distinct pink touch.

Anna Kronenberg

Women's Migrations: Strategies of Regaining One's Voice and Body in Literary Works by Polish Women in the UK and Ireland

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> In using literature, I don't wish to engage in an endless process of reading and analysing texts, only in the endless process of discovering and creating society.[1]

This article presents research conducted into literary works produced by Polish women living in Great Britain and Ireland (a total of 37 novels, 17 diary extracts, the work of 23 female poets),[2] published after the year

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1 Kinga Dunin, *Czytając Polskę. Literatura polska po roku 1989 wobec dylematów nowoczesności* [*Reading Poland. Polish Literature Post-1989 in Relation to Dilemmas of Modernity*] (Warszawa: WAB Publishing, 2004), 26.

2 In addition to the research, I conducted numerous interviews in a number of cities and towns in England, Scotland and Ireland. I spoke not only to women writers, but also to female leaders of the Polish émigré communities (*Polonia*) who set up formal and informal groups, and organise cultural, educational, artistic and integrating initiatives. I believe that the socio-cultural context, when it comes to studying phenomena such as the latest migration, is key, which is why I decided to include 10 novels published in other countries (incl. Sweden, Canada and the USA) in my research. This is because the narratives penned by migrant writers are more influenced by gender, age, educational attainments and experiences (which are usually of a kind) rather than by migration itself.

2004. It is worth noting the incredible scale of literary, as well as socio-cultural, activity Polish women engage in while based abroad. Both the majority of the works of literary art listed here, as well as artistic, integrative and educational initiatives, are produced by women.[3] What is more, in the majority of cases it is only once they migrate that women take up such activities, which is why their output features so many debuts, and so many "beginners" are involved in public activities. I will therefore be looking to answer the question: why are women of Polish descent so collectively and creatively (especially in a literary context) active in Great Britain and Ireland? Which themes do they consider to be of greatest importance?

Expanding migration studies to take in the perspective of women living in Great Britain and Ireland, especially as so many diverse female voices have appeared on the literary scene, seems to me to be an essential broadening of studies conducted into the phenomena of these most recent migrations.[4] The period I have selected – the years 2004-2014 – presents a good opportunity to draw initial conclusions regarding the literary output of the first decade since Poland joined the EU and the migrations related to this event.

The Political Aspect of Women's Creativity Is Part of Its Essential Capital[5]

In the words of Inga Iwasiów: "the presence of women in the public arena is in itself political."[6] Migrant women writers, writing about the

3 This has also been noticed by those organising literary competitions on the theme of migrations, incl. Bronisław Gołębiowski: "a notable aspect of the competition is that the majority of the entries sent in were written by women (some two-thirds)," see Bronisław Gołębiowski, "Emigranci czy Europejczycy?" ["Émigrés or Europeans?"], in *Wyfrunęli. Nowa emigracja o sobie* [*They Flew Away. Stories of the New Émigrés*], ed. Wiesława Teresa Czartoryska (Łomża: Stopka Press, 2011), 326.

4 See for example *Poetyka migracji. Doświadczenie granic w literaturze polskiej przełomu XX i XXI wieku* [*The Poetics of Migration. The Experience of Borders in Polish Literature between the 20th and the 21sth Century*], ed. Przemysław Czapliński and Renata Makarska (Katowice: UŚ Press, 2013); *Narracje migracyjne w literaturze polskiej XX i XXI wieku* [*Migration Narratives in Polish 20th and 21st Century Literature*], ed. Hanna Gosk (Kraków: Universitas, 2012); *Migracje kobiet. Perspektywa wielowymiarowa* [*Women's Migrations. A Multidimensional Perspective*], ed. Krystyna Slany (Kraków: UJ Press, 2008); articles by the Feminist Think Tank, accessed March 30, 2015, www.ekologiasztuka.pl/think.tank.feministyczny/articles.php?cat_id=25

5 Inga Iwasiów, *Granice. Polityczność prozy i dyskursu kobiet po 1989 roku* [*Borders. The Politicality of Prose and Women's Discourses after 1989*] Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego, Szczecin 2013, 13.

6 Iwasiów, *Granice*, 15.

experience of being women in Poland and abroad, touch upon a number of social issues, in turn making them political. Hence, an appropriate methodology when studying their works is to analyse literary texts as cultural texts and a source of knowledge about Polish society, as well as "elements of communicative processes, discursive practices, entangled in the relations of political, economic and cultural power."[7] In Polish literary analysis, this sort of methodology, directly between the sociology and anthropology of literature, along with cultural and gender studies, was defined and practised by the likes of Maria Janion,[8] Inga Iwasiów,[9] Kinga Dunin,[10] Przemysław Czapliński,[11] Agnieszka Mrozik,[12] and Agnieszka Graff.[13] It is also important that any research into women's creative output be sensitive to matters of gender:

> the gendered perspective is, for literature written by women in the last two decades, especially important, because the revealing of gender, courageous and revindicating ... is another aspect characteristic to contemporary literature.[14]

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7 Agnieszka Mrozik, *Akuszerki transformacji. Kobiety, literatura i władza w Polsce po 1989 roku* [*The Midwives of the Transformation. Women, Literature and Power in Poland after 1989*], (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2013), 10.

8 See e.g. Maria Janion, *Kobiety i duch inności* [*Women and the Spirit of Otherness*] (Warszawa: Sic!, 1996); Maria Janion, *Niesamowita słowiańszczyzna: fantazmaty literatury* [*The Incredible Slavonic: Literary Phantasms*] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2006).

9 See e.g., Iwasiów, *Granice*.

10 Dunin, *Czytając*.

11 Przemysław Czapliński, *Resztki nowoczesności. Dwa studia o literaturze i życiu* [*The Remains of Modernity. Two Works on Literature and Life*] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2011); Przemysław Czapliński, "Historia, narracja, sprawczość" ["History, Narration, Influence"], in *Historia – dziś. Teoretyczne problemy wiedzy o przeszłości* [*History – Today. Theoretical Problems of Knowledge about the Past*], ed. Ewa Domańska, Rafał Stobiecki and Tomasz Wiślicz (Kraków: Universitas, 2014), 283–302.

12 Mrozik, *Akuszerki*. See also *Polityka literatury. Przewodnik Krytyki Politycznej* [*The Politics of Literature. A Political Critique Guide*], ed. Kinga Dunin, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej 2009).

13 Agnieszka Graff, *Świat bez kobiet. Płeć w polskim życiu publicznym.* [*A World Without Women. Gender in Polish Public Life.*] (Warszawa: W.A.B., 2001); Agnieszka Graff, *Rykoszetem. Rzecz o płci, seksualności i narodzie* [*Ricochet. About Gender, Sexuality and Nationality*] (Warsaw: W.A.B., 2008).

14 Urszula Chowaniec, "Smutek jest podszewką świata" ["The World is Lined with Sorrow"], *Zadra* 3-4 (52-53) (2012): 88.

One of the key social problems Polish migrant women writers cover is discrimination in the Polish workplace, experienced by those who work in feminised professions, such as nursing:

> Back in Poland … I was constantly bombarded by information about strikes organised by my nurse friends protesting against financial hardships, as well as against the lack of any likelihood that these would improve. Yet their decision to go on hunger strike went without wider response; they were belittled and ignored by the Polish authorities, while being treated as a necessary evil in our world. The high social, professional and financial position occupied by nurses in the UK, in stark contrast, was behind my decision to emigrate to Wales.[15]

Other women writers point to other questions rarely tackled by literature – the feminisation of poverty: "all those women, over-worked, older, dressed in dark colours, standing in queues for the till in their local pharmacies, exact change at the ready."[16]

On the other hand, in her novels, Łucja Fice presents the exclusion and alienation affecting Polish women over the age of fifty in the job market: "there's no cash, you got no work. I told you already, there's no work out there. You're fifty-two years old."[17]

Despite this negative attitude (exemplified here by her husband Zenek), Gabriela Mrozińska, the central protagonist of the novel, has managed to learn English, gain a childcare diploma and find work in England. Gabriela's fate often involves alienation, sometimes foisted upon women by those closest to them when they decide to emigrate. For those who leave their families behind in Poland, migration often goes hand in hand with marital crises, a weakening of bonds with children and a sense of guilt, which makes the experience even harder for our protagonists.[18]

In migration writing we also encounter the theme of the exclusion of women in middle age, not only from the job market, but also from social circles:

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15 Alicja. Szafran, "Pora wracać" ["Time to Go Home"] in *Wyfrunęli. Nowa emigracja o sobie* [*They Flew Away. Stories of the New* Émigrés], ed. Wiesława Teresa Czartoryska (Łomża: Stopka Press, 2011), 276-77.

16 Justyna Nowak, *Opowieść emigracyjna* [*An Emigration Tale*] (Gdynia: Novae Res, 2010), 56.

17 Łucja Fice, *Przeznaczenie* [*Destiny*] (Warszawa: Warszawska Firma Wydawnicza 2012), 12.

18 Such stories can often be found when researching this genre, e.g., in the novels of Łucja Fice and the diaries from two anthologies: Czartoryska, *Wyfrunęli* and., *Na końcu* świata *napisane. Autoportret współczesnej polskiej emigracji* [*Written at the World's End. A Self-Portrait of Contemporary Polish Migration*], ed. Elżbieta Spadzińska-Żak (Katowice: Videograf II, 2008).

> to start everything all over in Poland at the age of 49? Embarrassing! Who'll employ me? How will I show my face to Robert? No one here bats an eyelid … I am a fully-fledged member of society here, and not some old hag whose pension must be paid for by the hard-working young. And in Poland? … it's not the done thing to even wear a shortish skirt. All you have waiting for you is a rocking chair and the chore of looking after your grandchildren. But me, I still want to live a little.[19]

Through their choice of themes, the women authors also protest against the exploitation and the breaches of employment law which émigré women experience, such as Dana Parys-White in *Emigrantka z wyboru* [*The Emigrant by Choice*];[20] Magdalena Zimny-Luis in Ślady *hamowania* [*Skid Marks*];[21] A.M. Bakalar *in Madame Mephisto*;[22] Agnieszka Obirek in "Włoski koszmar" ["The Italian Nightmare"];[23] Magdalena Orzeł w *Dublin. Moja polska karma* [*Dublin. My Polish Karma*];[24] Beata Kamińska in "Dziecko dwóch matek" ["A Child of Two Mothers"];[25] Katarzyna Tubylewicz in Rówieśniczki [*Peers*][26] and Justyna Nowak in *Opowieśc emigracyjna* [*An Emigration Tale*].[27]

In her novels *Destiny* and *Wyspa starców* [*Island of the Aged*], and the collection of poems *Opiekunka* [*The Carer*],[28] Łucja Fice breaks the taboo related to loneliness and the dying of patients in care homes. She creates a narrative of decency for excluded and marginalised groups: people who are terminally

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19 Nowak, *Opowieść*, 56.

20 Dana Parys-White, *Emigrantka z wyboru* [*The Emigrant by Choice*] (Chorzów: Videograf II, 2008).

21 Magdalena Zimny-Louis, Ślady hamowania [*Skid Marks*] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Replika, 2011).

22 Asia Monika Bakalar, *Madame Mephisto* (London: Stork Press, 2012).

23 Agnieszka Obirek, "Włoski koszmar ["An Italian Nightmare"], in *Wyfrunęli. Nowa emigracja o sobie* [*They Flew Away. Stories of the New Émigrés*], ed. Wiesława Teresa Czartoryska (Łomża: Stopka Press, 2011), 121-123.

24 Magdalena Orzeł, *Dublin. Moja polska karma* [*Dublin. My Polish Karma*] (Kraków: Księgarnia Wydawnictwo Skrzat, 2007).

25 Beata Kamińska, "Dziecko dwóch matek ["A child of two mothers"], in *Wyfrunęli. Nowa emigracja o sobie*, 251-264.

26 Justyna Tubylewicz, Rówieśniczki [*Peers*] (Warszawa: WAB, 2014).

27 Nowak, *Opowieść*.

28 Łucja Fice, *Przeznaczenie*; Łucja Fice, *Wyspa Starców* [*Island of the Aged*] (Warszawa: WFW, 2013); Łucja Fice, *Opiekunka* [*The Carer*] (Gorzów: Sonar, 2012).

ill and their carers. She demands they have a place in our society. And Olga, the best friend of the main protagonist Ewa Werner in the novel *Zawieszeni* [*Suspended*],[29] is a proponent of sustainable development and alter-globalism, speaking up for social equality and ecology. Under her influence, Ewa changes her life for one of greater awareness.

The migrant writing researched here can be considered popular, light entertainment. Yet it simultaneously escapes such simple categorisation, for it has qualities of engaged literature. These attempts to combine light reading with socially engaged art are what make the writing produced by Polish women abroad stand out from that published "back home ." Especially since this is not a common connection. Popular women writers who live in Poland do not often take up social issues in their work. The exceptions are rare: Hanna Samson, Olga Tokarczuk, Joanna Bator, Grażyna Plebanek, Marta Dzido and Manuela Gretkowska.[30]

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29 Marta Zaraska, *Zawieszeni* [*Suspended*] (Warszawa: Warszawskie Wydawnictwo Literackie Muza, 2007).

30 Olga Tokarczuk touches not only upon themes of women's rights, but also those of animals, of ecology and, in her latest novel, other excluded groups – the peasantry and Polish Jews. See Olga Tokarczuk *Anna w grobowcach świata* [*Anna in the Tombs of the World*] (Kraków: Znak, 2006); Olga Tokarczuk, *Prowadź swój pług przez kości umarłych* [*Drive your Plough over the Bones of the Dead*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2009); Olga Tokarczuk, *Moment niedźwiedzia*, [*The Moment of the Bear*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyka Polityczna, 2012); Olga Tokarczuk, *Księgi Jakubowe* [*Jacob's Scriptures*] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2014). Hanna Samson touches on the subject of women's rights in every one of her novels, see, e.g., Hanna Samson, *Wojna żeńsko-męska i przeciwko światu* [*Female-Male War and Against the World*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Czarna Owca, 2011, 2nd edition); Hanna Samson, *Pokój żeńsko-męski na chwałę patriarchatu* [*Female-Male Peace in Honour of the Patriarchy*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Inanna, 2006); Hanna Samson, *Życie po mężczyźnie*, [*Life After Men*] (Kraków: Znak Literanova, 2012). Of books by Grażyna Plebanek, those which relate to feminist issues include: Grażyna Plebanek, *Dziewczyny z Portofino* [*Girls from Portofino*] (Warszawa: WAB, 2005); Grażyna Plebanek, *Przystupa* [*A Girl Called Przystupa*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo W.A.B., 2012) and her collection of essays, Grażyna Plebanek, *Córki rozbójniczki* [*Rebel Daughters*], (Warszawa: WAB, 2013). Other socially engaged female authors include Joanna Bator: Joanna Bator, *Piaskowa Góra* [*Sand Mountain*] (Warszawa: WAB, 2009); Joanna Bator, *Chmurdalia* [*Cloudland*] (Warszawa: WAB, 2010); Joanna Bator, *Ciemno, prawie noc* [*Dark, Almost Night*] (Warszawa: WAB, 2013), and Manuela Gretkowska, see e.g. Manuela Gretkowska, *Polka* [*Polish Woman*] (Warszawa: WAB, 2001); Manuela Gretkowska, *Europejka* [*European Woman*] (Warszawa: WAB, 2007). Themes important for the women's movement are also referenced in the literary and film work of Marta Dzido, see Marta Dzido, *Małż* [*Mollusc*], (Warszawa: Ha!art, 2005); Marta Dzido, *Ślad po mamie* [*A Trace of Mother*] (Warszawa: Ha!art, 2006) and the films *Podziemne państwo kobiet* [*The Underground Women's State*] from 2009 and *Solidarność według kobiet* [*Solidarity According to Women*] from 2014.

Let us also note that the majority of the above writers at some point lived and worked abroad. In the world of popular publishing for women there is a lack of social engagement, and the authors in this field steer away from saying anything about women's rights:

> the post-modern trend of producing "women's literature" once again covers up, neutralises women's presence as that of rebels and troublemakers; a presence which is calling for equality.[31]

The exception here is Katarzyna Grochola, who in her novel *Trzepot skrzydeł* [*The Fluttering of Wings*] has touched upon the subject of masculine violence against women.[32] The political aspect of migrant writing is an important part of its value. It is also political to describe the experience of being a woman in a public and a private space, as well as female physicality, which could be termed strategies for recovering the body and the voice by Polish women.

Women's Autobiographical Practices

The latest migrant writing by women is in the main autobiographical. Summarising their studies into the nature of women's autobiographical practices, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson emphasise three key factors – experience, identity and sexuality – which define the limits of the debate.[33]

The question of being allowed to express oneself and to share female identity has been studied by feminist theoreticians since the 1980s on the basis of everyday, personal writing by women. The most recent migrant literature also provides us with a rich and varied resource here. If it was thought in the 1980s that such literature has a lesser, marginalised status, cultural and gender studies have now produced new theories that shed light on the way we contextualise everyday experience. I see the study of women's migrant writing as an organic part of this diverse research into women's descriptions of the "everyday." Like Anna E. Goldman, I am interested in

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31 Iwasiów, *Granice*, 119.

32 Katarzyna Grochola, *Trzepot skrzydeł* [*The Fluttering of Wings*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2008).

33 Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, "Introduction: the concept of subjectivity in women's autobiographical practices" ["Wprowadzenie: koncepcja podmiotowości w kobiecych praktykach autobiograficznych"], trans. Aleksandra Grzemska, in *Subversive Theories. An Anthology of Translations* [*Teorie wywrotowe. Antologia przekładów*], ed. Agnieszka Gajewska (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2012), 33.

> how female narrators situate themselves between pressure from the "me" and the "we" and manoeuvre between political and cultural autobiographical texts, while also seeking to self-actualise by representing the collective.[34]

Anna E. Goldman studied the writing of both black and white working class women, and I think that we can borrow something useful from her approach when analysing the creative output of Polish women who migrated, because they too are an excluded group (due to their gender and nationality). What is more, their creativity introduces the previously marginalised, or even unexpressed, female experience into public discourse. Physicality is an important aspect of interpretation when it comes to studying women's writing:

> … if economic and political realities are played out using the woman's body, a reader who doesn't pay attention to the body in the text also erases the political meaning from the text.[35]

The authors of migrant writing also test the ways in which feminine physicality has been written into social practices. The body becomes a space in which one meets cultural and biological genders.

In terms of creating a theory relating to women's autobiographies, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson mention twelve directions of autobiographical research. They allow us to fill gaps in an existing feminist critique, as described by Agnieszka Mrozik.[36]

The Relational

According to some theorists, this is a characteristic aspect of women's autobiographies. The central characters in migrant writings often create alternative, expanded communities of women, such as friends renting a house together, or the connections that are woven by mothers or daughters. For example, in Dana Parys-White's *The Emigrant by Choice*, a group of women rent a room from Ms Jadwiga, who fulfils the role of mentor and friend:

> well, if Ms Jadwiga has got involved, then it'll be alright. She was a rare example of a woman who was resolute and worldly-wise … She was our mother, father, brother, sister – everything. She was lovely.[37]

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34 Anna E. Goldman for Sidonia Smith and Julia Watson, "Wprowadzenie," 77.

35 Smith and Watson, "Introduction," 83.

36 Mrozik, *Akuszerki*.

37 Parys-White, *Emigrantka*.

Friendship and mutual support also feature in the work of Klara Miodowska, and her employer, Ms Wacława, who gives the girl a part of her estate in order to facilitate her independence while abroad.[38] A closer bond exists in Kaja Malanowska's *Imigracje* [*Immigrations*] between the heroine and Professor Emily, her supervisor:

> ... four years later I threw a book at her.
> – You stupid bitch! – I screamed.
> And she stood there, in the door of her office with that nasty look on her face, in her loose sweater, one breast exposed, stood there and smiled at me.
> – My girl – she said. – I think I'm going to adopt you. Never let anyone dominate you. Understand? No one. You're a woman, and women are only ever valued when they are strong.[39]

In *Irlandzki koktajl* [*Irish Coctail*], the main character, Katarzyna Przybylska, finds a circle of women replacing her family, performing a supportive role:

> why the hell would I pay fifty euros an hour so that I can complain about my life in the presence of someone else – I argued with Sinead, trying on my third pair of sandals – I can do that with you and Jeny for free.[40]

The novels of Anna Łajkowska present a different sort of neighbourly community.[41] Another example of a female support network is the group of Polish nurses working in Wales described in Alicja Szafran's diary, [42] while the novel *Emigracja uczuć* [*The Emigration of Feelings*][43] presents the consequences of work-related migration as experienced by men from the perspective of their wives, consequences that include addictions and extra-marital affairs, a lack

38 Nowak, *Opowieść*.

39 Kaja Malanowska, *Imigracje* [*Immigrations*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2011), 129.

40 Gosia Brzezińska, *Irlandzki koktajl* [*Irish Cocktail*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Bliskie, 2010), 282.

41 Anna Łajkowska, *Pensjonat na wrzosowisku* [*A Guest House on the Moorland*] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Damidos, 2012); Anna Łajkowska, *Miłość na wrzosowisku* [*Love on the Moorland*] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Damidos, 2012); Anna Łajkowska, *Cienie na wrzosowisku* [*Shadows Across Moorlands*] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Damidos, 2013).

42 Szafran, "Pora wracać."

43 Agnieszka Bednarska, *Emigracja uczuć* [*The Emigration of Feelings*] (Zakrzewo: Wydawnictwo Replika, 2012).

of connection with children, and family crises. Sometimes these problems intensify when the wife takes the children and joins her husband abroad.[44] Women's writing highlights the high personal costs paid by families as a result of migrations, and so could be an important voice in public debate.

Another circle of support for our heroines, and also a point of reference for them, are women who are emotionally close but who remained behind in Poland: mothers, grandmothers, sisters, friends:

> granny … fed me stuffed cabbage leaves. Ewka … poked around in my suitcase, checking to make sure I hadn't forgotten to pack anything important, such as the last issue of *Zadra*. Mum stuffed into it a whole medicine kit.[45]

Women who are close to this heroine help not only with practicalies, but with intellectual needs, as symbolised by that "last issue of *Zadra*" – the only feminist magazine in Poland, which has regularly been published for the past 15 years.[46] It becomes here a signifier of our protagonist's world view, and an introduction to themes which the author will go on to deal with later.

As can be seen from the above examples – the authors analysed here take up the theme of family and social ties "on the distaff side." As a result, they complete one of the most important tasks that women writers must take on. "It is essential to restore the pillar which is missing from our culture: the relationship between a mother and a daughter, respect for a woman's word (…). All that demands we convert symbolic codes, especially language, law, religion,"[47] according to Kazimiera Szczuka. For Bella Brodzki this is also vital: "a compelling figure, which haunts women's autobiographical writing, is that of the lost mother."[48] Polish women writers have been trying to fill this gap since the 1990s, and their output indicates just how painful this process can be:

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44 "Sebastian drank almost every day (…) he began to get aggressive. The children annoyed him. I was spending too much money. All other guys were suspected of trying to flirt with me. (…) In the end, I rented a flat by myself and took the kids, moving away from him. (…) I felt defeated. I had invested so much energy, so much time, a dozen years, in something which turned out to be a mistake." Kamińska, "Dziecko," 262.

45 Brzezińska, *Koktajl*, 71.

46 http://pismozadra.pl/, accessed 28 September, 2017.

47 Kazimiera Szczuka, *Kopciuszek, Frankenstein i inne. Feminizm wobec mitu* [*Cinderella, Frankenstein and Others. Feminism Regarding Myths*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo eFKa, 2001), 25.

48 Smith and Watson, "Introduction," 61.

> Polish women's writing of the last twenty years speaks with the voices of daughters: they don't have, nor do they want to have, any patience or mercy for their mothers. Silenced for decades, invisible, suppressed, today they emerge out of the shadows, needing to expel all the fury and pain gathered up inside them.[49]

The bond between mother and daughter is subjected to a critical redefinition, and with it ties to Polish traditions, history, nation – because they generate a set of culturally imposed roles. Adrienne Rich was one of the first to write about this:

> certainly, the mother serves the interests of patriarchy: in her person she exemplifies religion, social conscience and nationalism. Institutional motherhood revives and renews all other institutions.[50]

Relationships between female protagonists and their mothers represent a substantial topic in migrant writing. These feelings range from feelings of love and longing all the way to absolute rejection of the mother. Gabriela Mrozińska, for example, the heroine of two novels by Łucja Fice,[51] maintains a close, intimate bond with her deceased mother, who still serves the role of her guide through life: "I am here – mother's figure spoke and smiled – don't be afraid, and don't try to fathom me using reason."[52] For Barbara, the heroine of a novel by Anna Łajkowska,[53] a longing for everyday closeness with her mother deepens the sense of isolation while living abroad:

> we used to meet so often … when the girls were little … we baked cakes, bought chocolates … talked. Even when I was working, I'd always find a moment in which to pop round mum's for a cup of coffee … Now, of course, I don't have that luxury. Now, there is no way at all … there are tears and the sense of an empty home. And life.[54]

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49 Mrozik, *Akuszerki*, 197.

50 Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* [*Zrodzone z kobiety. Macierzyństwo jako doświadczenie i instytucja*], trans. Joanna Mizielińska (Warszawa: Sic!, 2000), 88.

51 Fice, *Przeznaczenie*; Fice, *Wyspa*.

52 Fice, *Przeznaczenie*, 233.

53 Łajkowska, *Pensjonat*; Łajkowska, *Miłość*; Łajkowska, *Cienie*.

54 See Łajkowska, Pensjonat, 212.

In Aneta Loska's diary, mother and daughter share the fate of migrant women: "we cleaned places in Dublin and kept it all going."[55] Women set up an unofficial centre for helping Poles in their own home: they welcomed them in, helped them solve everyday problems: filling out forms, looking for work and apartments to rent: "over two years we must have had almost a hundred people living in our home. We had problems with most of them."[56]

Art produced while migrating shows the complexity of mother-daughter relations, but also rebellion against their world of values. In the novel *Madame Mephisto*, Magda's mother exemplifies all that she ran away from when she left Poland: unquestioning religious faith and attachment to traditions, including culturally assigned social roles (wife, mother, homemaker). This is how Magda explains her reasons for emigrating to her mother:

> because you always want to control me … you always think you know what I want, but I want something else. I've always wanted something else. I have been choking here for a long time. In this country.[57]

The heroine, under her mother's influence, feels she has betrayed not only her family, but her "motherland" as well. And yet, when she tries to chat to her actual mother, the elder woman cuts off the conversation, telling Magda to go and feed the cat. This mechanism of shutting down dialogue with daughters and diverting attention towards food is also described by Marta Zaraska:

> I sold the car and anything else of value, filed my application with the embassy … Mother was mad … She accused me, as usual, of being ungrateful and a thief, of robbing my own elderly parents, and then she asked if I want more tomato soup … only I had to be quick, because it was getting cold.[58]

A.M. Bakalar also notices this problem: "I wanted to deal with the stereotypical Polish mother – insanely annoying, terrorising with food."[59] This

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55 Aneta Loska, "Uciekłam na moją wyspę" ["I Escaped to My Island"], in *Wyfrunęli. Nowa emigracja o sobie*, 57.

56 Loska, "Uciekłam," 57.

57 Bakalar, *Madame Mephisto*.

58 Zaraska, *Zawieszeni*, 117.

59 Magda Raczyńska, "Profesjonalna kłamczucha. Z A.M. Bakalar, autorką powieści Madame Mephisto, rozmawia Magda Raczyńska" ["Professional Liar. Magda Raczyńska talks to A.M. Bakalar, author of the novel Madame Mephisto"], *Wysokie Obcasy*, June 30, 2012, 31.

phenomenon of the "kitchen matriarchy"[60] was described by Sławomira Walczewska as far back as 1999.

The novel by Magdalena Zimny-Louis presents a range of mother-daughter relationships: Danuta has abandoned her teenage daughter: "I wasn't a good mother … I followed Karol, went after him so he wouldn't drink. His boozing was more important to me than little Justyna, and I'll never forgive myself."[61] Marlena is attached to her mother, while her sister Iza treats her with disdain and befriends her father's lover/girlfriend. Daughters perceive their ageing mothers in a critical way, as subservient individuals, manipulated by religion and ruled by prejudice. Natalia describes her mother in the following fashion: "she sent half her pension as donations for Radio Maryja, yet half way through each month she switched to a diet of potatoes and sour cream, because she'd be low on cash!"[62] Then there is Iza and Marlena's mother:

> She thinks black men give off an unpleasant body odour … thinks God couldn't have made people who are mentally underdeveloped … that midgets … shouldn't marry and have kids, because it's a little bit disgusting, being a midget … Romanians, Ukrainians and Arabs should not be allowed into Poland at all. She had absolutely no mercy for homosexuals or those who were not religious.[63]

These conflicts are underscored by the daughters' pain, a pain caused by the mothers' refusal to accept their professional aspirations, their life choices, even their decision to try life abroad. Mothers sometimes also serve a disciplining function, standing guard over the patriarchal tradition their daughters are doing their best to escape:

> may God finally send you a decent bloke, such an embarrassment you've turned out to be, giving me no grandkids still. People might start imagining that you're one of them … you know, what they call them … lesbies,[64]

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60 Sławomira Walczewska wrote that the kitchen space and feeding are the only places where women can find a safe place and a form of control in a patriarchal society, hence they are so important to them. Sławomira Walczewska, *Damy, rycerze i feministki* [*Dames, Knights and Feminists*] (Kraków: eFKa, 1999).

61 Zimny-Loius, Ślady, 279.

62 Ibid., 47.

63 Ibid., 139.

64 Nowak, *Opowieść*, 143.

says the mother of Klara Miodowska in *An Emigration Tale.* On the other hand, the narrator of the diary by Małgorzata Białecka realises that the pressure put on her by her mother/society itself has become her external voice: "girls get real jobs … girls are polite … Girls get married and have babies – why don't you do something about it already!"[65] This pressure is not just about one's private life, but about professional achievements. In Polly Courtney's *Poles Apart* [*Oddaleni*] Marta's mother says: "I am very proud … Few have had such successes in England like you … I tell everyone about how lucky you've been"[66] – at a point when her daughter is unemployed and at risk of losing her home. Marta keeps up the illusion of success because she knows she won't receive any support if she fails. In this respect, a powerful example of how mother-daughter relationships function is Marta Zaraska's novel:

> And I don't want a career – I say quickly, hurriedly – I don't want to make your dreams come true, Mum … No, I'm not going to say I'm sorry. No, I'm not ashamed … I don't just want to be the perfect daughter, a machine for achieving things, do you hear me?… listen to me just this once, this is important, to me … Wait, listen to me! You've never listened to me, right? Never! You've never been interested in what I think, I feel. No, I'm not going to be calm. But this doesn't mean that … I can hear her breathing –
> Mum … I love you … I say it and know that she too wants to say "I love you, darling daughter," but she's shaking now, choked with pride, and says nothing – then puts the phone down.[67]

The process of reconstructing mother-daughter relations, the echo of which we can hear in the above quote, can, in the words of Agnieszka Mrozik be "the seed of a feminist revolution which will be followed by a new, more female-friendly order."[68]

Migrant writing contains many examples of alliances, friendships and co-operation between different generations of women. Such narrations create the possibility of building similar, strengthening ties in reality.

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65 M. Białecka, "Odczarować Anglię" ["Break the spell of England"], in *Wyfrunęli. Nowa emigracja o sobie,* 128.

66 Polly Courtney, *Poles Apart* [*Oddaleni*], trans. Jan Kraśko (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 2009), 151.

67 Zaraska, *Zawieszeni*, 339.

68 Mrozik, *Akuszerki*, 198.

The Connection between Creating a National Identity and Autobiographical Narratives

This is another area of studies of women's autobiographical writing:

> nations are "imagined communities" ... Human societies create and support narrations which talk about the foundations of their lives as separate entities, while autobiographies, at least in the West, function as a powerful tool in developing such narratives.[69]

This is why it is worth paying closer attention to contemporary migrant writing also in terms of reproduction and redefinition of national identity, especially for young Polish women, because they represent the majority of our female authors. National discourses are constructed according to categories of "other" and "foreign," a grouping to which women have also traditionally belonged. This is why their writing can allow us to hear voices from the edge, from beyond. This distance is increased through the process of migration[70] and it is also why the reading of autobiographical writing by women must refer to the numerous ways in which their narrators refer to myths of national identity and present themselves as either national or non-national entities.[71]

Migrant writing offers examples of traditional reproduction-focused, nationalistic discourse, which emphasises the sexual attractiveness of Polish women: "together with Julka, she often laughed at how tasteless Welsh women were, how they couldn't make themselves look half as good as Polish girls."[72] Magdalena Orzeł critically redefines this stereotypical image of Polish women:

> it's mostly men who call ... Irish men as well as Poles. They all have the same opinions. Polish girls are the most beautiful ... so slim and graceful, ladies indeed, always well turned out, dressed and painted so as to appropriately adorn a man.[73]

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69 Smith and Watson, "Introduction," 85.

70 Agnieszka Mrozik writes about literature produced by émigré women in the 1990s: the experience of migration proved to be liberating for the discourse around national themes in literature, and also in opening it to problems previously considered somewhat taboo: gender, sexuality, religion, age. In the latest works produced by émigré female authors this process is being continued. See Mrozik, *Akuszerki,* 73.

71 Smith and Watson, "Introduction," 85.

72 Fice, *Przeznaczenie*, 136. Łucja Fice's heroines are constructed in accordance with a conservative and patriarchal discourse. This is why their key characteristics are worry over whether they are sexually attractive and willingness to make sacrifices for the family, often at the expense of their health.

73 Orzeł, *Dublin*, 112.

The female narrator asks: "where did these stereotypes come from? How did we, Polish women – overworked, abused and debased – manage to create such a myth?"[74] She arrives at the conclusion that this stereotype only serves to sustain male dominance:

> even though they flatter me, these wee macho Irish-Polish courtships, I know what they conceal. They want to turn me into a doll, open up my legs and manipulate all they want, first tearing out my independent soul.[75]

It so happens that some female authors also replicate this national myth of the Polish wife and homemaker as a model of perfection:

> [Englishmen] looked for practical partners, caring, protective, loving, with the hearts of gentle mothers … This is why East European women proved so popular. They charmed with humility and a lack of excessive demands on their men … They didn't struggle against being tied to domestic duties … All they needed was the presence of man around the house.[76]

In this light, the novel *Przebojowa Polka w Londynie* [*A Polish Go-Getter in London*][77] simply maintains stereotypes, to the extent that it could be considered a discriminatory narrative, a component of an anti-feminist "backlash."[78] Women protagonists who value their work are disparagingly nicknamed "flounders," "secrebithes," "harpies," "gold-diggers," "painted birds" or "botox-stuffed slappers," and their professional aspirations are ridiculed, e.g.: "Nathalie decided to become an officer of Her Royal Highness and is applying for a spot in a prestigious officer school … that's one way to find a husband who is well-connected."[79] Women who manage to secure managerial positions are described in the following way: "is Amanda sleeping with her balding, pot-

74 Ibid., 112.

75 Ibid., 113.

76 Parys-White, *Emigrantka*, 68.

77 Ada Martynowska, *Przebojowa Polka w Londynie* [*A Polish Go-Getter in London*] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Sonia Draga, 2012).

78 "Backlash" is a battle between conservative circles and a movement for the rights of women, fought on many fronts: in the media, politics, pop culture, which eventually becomes a part of the mainstream. See Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* [*Reakcja. Niewypowiedziana wojna przeciw kobietom*], trans. Anna Dzierzgowska (Warszawa: Czarna Owca, 2012).

79 Martynowska, *Przebojowa Polka*, 146.

bellied, seventy-year-old boss or not? ... considering her permanently scowling face, the guy isn't exactly making her dreams come true."[80] In this novel, the ultimate aim of a woman's life, as defined by the main protagonist Beata Martynek, is social advancement through "bagging a thoroughbred Englishman" and becoming a trophy wife. Single women are presented in dismissive fashion, as failures in life. This novel only props up damaging stereotypes of Polish women trying to build new lives abroad.

In migrant writing, narratives which discriminate against and sexualise women, rendering them two-dimensional rather than rounded characters, tend to appear more often in writing by men,[81] though *A Polish Go-Getter in London* represents a rather shameful exception. It could be a symptom of a broader social phenomenon – negative attitudes towards Polish women who have emigrated and are now perceived as threateningly emancipated. An extreme example of this is attacks and insults aimed at migrant women on Internet forums, something Joanna Bator has written about.[82]

Yet the vast majority of works studied here share a critical reading of Polish traditions of nationalism and religious fervour, as well as an awareness of the power relations (involving wealth, politics and symbols) women are subjected to. This is why most of these narratives could be termed "post-patriarchal." The authors construct alternative female identities – critical, open, secular, inviting a peaceful co-existence with other cultures, free of nationalistic ideologies.[83] The most complete manifestation of this is the

80 Ibid., 18.

81 See Piotr Czerwiński, *Przebiegum życiae* [*Conductum Lifae*] (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 2009); Jarosław Bolec, "Zmartwychwstanie śmieciarza" ["The Resurrection of the Dustbin Man"], in *Na końcu świata napisane. Autoportret współczesnej polskiej emigracji* [*Written at the World's End. A Self-Portrait of Contemporary Polish Migration*], ed. Elżbieta Spadzińska-Żak, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Videograf, 2008), 66-107. These narratives not only revisit damaging stereotypes, but they also contain the most drastic examples of the sexualisation of women.

82 In her novel *Ciemno, prawie noc* [*Dark, Almost Night*], the author used many real stories told by men, which she found in online forums devoted to emigration, in order to show how insulting and belittling many of them are in terms of how they refer to Polish women living in the UK and Ireland; Bator, *Ciemno*.

83 Examples of this can include: Marlena from *Skid Marks* by Magdalena Zimny-Louis; Katarzyna Przybylska from *Irish Coctail* by Gosia Brzezińska; the heroine of *Immigrations* by Kaja Malanowska; Ewa Werner from *Suspended* by Marta Zaraska; the majority of female protagonists in the previously quoted anthology *They Flew Away*, such as: Aneta Loska; Małgorzata Białecka, Monika Kulczyk, Katarzyna Kozakowska, Alicja Szafran, Beata Kamińska, the majority of female protagonists from *The Emigrant by Choice* by Dana Parys-White and the short stories by Magdalena Orzeł *Dublin. My Polish Karma*;

central character of *Madame Mephisto* by A.M. Bakalar: Magda Rodziewicz. Zgadzaj wrote the novel in English, and published under the pen-name A.M. Bakalar in order to give herself licence in her approach to Polish traditions. In the author's own words:

> I wanted to show Magda with all of her Polish baggage, and at the same time liberate her from that Polishness … We come from a country of potent, disabling traditions – but what happens to those who want to live completely different lives? I was interested in the mechanisms of this conflict. Magda is, of course, me, in a way, seeing as I too had to contend with this dilemma.[84]

Engagements with national myths and stereotypes about Polish women can also be found in the majority of the literature in this review. Such themes are also present in the work of women writers based in Poland. According to Kazimiera Szczuka, the first decade of the 21st century saw great achievements by Polish women writers in this field: the poem "Utwór o Matce i Ojczyźnie" ["A Piece about a Mother and a Fatherland"] by Bożena Keff,[85] the play *Między nami dobrze jest* [*Thigs Are Good between Us*] by Dorota Masłowska[86] and Sylwia Chutnik's volume of stories *Kieszonkowy atlas kobiet* [*A Pocket Atlas of Women*].[87] These aimed questions at the national paradigm and attempted to provide answers: "Where is women's place in our history? Who has the right to create and present shared narratives?"[88] Migrant authors like Maria Jastrzębska in the poem "Torba" ["The Bag"] allow themselves that right:

> When she sits waiting for us
> Crumpled and forlorn

Barbara from the novel by Anna Łajkowska, the narrator of the diary in Iwona Macałka's *Moja podróż przez życie* [*My Journey Through Life*] (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Piktor, 2008); in the prose and poetry by Wioletta Grzegorzewska (e.g. *Notatnik z wispy* [*Notes From the Isle Wight*] (Częstochowa: Wydawnictwo e-media, 2012)).

84 Raczyńska, "Profesjonalna kłamczucha," 31.

85 Bożena Keff, *Utwór o Matce i Ojczyźnie* [*A Piece about a Mother and a Fatherland*] (Kraków: Ha!art, 2008).

86 Dorota Masłowska, *Między nami dobrze jest* [*Things Are Good between Us*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Lampa i Iskra Boża, 2008).

87 Sylwia Chutnik, *Kieszonkowy atlas kobiet* [*A Pocket Atlas of Women*] (Kraków: Ha!art, 2008).

88 Kazimiera Szczuka, "Rewolucja jest kobietą" ["Revolution Is a Woman"] in *Polityka literatury. Przewodnik Krytyki Politycznej* [*The Politics of Literature. A Political Critique Guide*], ed. Kinga Dunin (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej 2009), 65.

When she answers "I'll have to ask your father"
To everything I say
I don't know what to do
I want to shake her
Find the secret catch
Which can release the woman
Who all through the Occupation

Crossed the streets of Warsaw
Carrying resistance papers
Hidden in her bag
And never got caught[89]

Women writers make the effort to construct not only their own identities, but also those of their mothers – as citizens who took active part in the development of their own country. This difficulty has been covered by Urszula Chowaniec:

> the relationship between the mother and the father/motherland is decisively mediated in the raising of sons of the nation, while daughters are uncharted territory... A daughter is a culturally unwanted space, though notoriously colonised and utilised.[90]

The project of constructing female identities free of national myths harks back to Virginia Woolf and her famous statement that "As a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman, my country is the whole world."[91] Rosi Braidotti also ties into this, creating a concept of nomadic subjects. This is a philosophical, political and social project constructed for women.[92] The subjects in migrant writing being presented here share common

89 Maria Jarzębska, "Torba" ["The Bag"] in *FORUM POLEK. Twórczość polskich kobiet: zbiór utworów w języku polskim i angielskim*. [*POLISH WOMEN'S FORUM. The Literary Works of Polish Women: An Anthology in Polish and English*] (London: Grupa publikacyjna Forum, 1988), 118.

90 Urszula Chowaniec, "O córkach Matki Polki" ["The Polish Mother and her daughters"], *Zadra* 3/4 (48-49) (2011): 78.

91 Virginia Woolf, *In A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas* [*Własny pokój. Trzy gwinee*], trans. Ewa Krasińska (Warszawa: Sic!, 2002).

92 Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* [*Podmioty nomadyczne. Ucieleśnienie i różnica seksualna w feminizmie współczesnym*], trans. Aleksandra Derra (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie i Profesjonalne, 2009). Virginia Woolf's words and Braidotti's project are referenced in the work of Agnieszka Mrozik and Kazimiera Szczuka, two experts on Polish women's writ-

ground with nomadic subjects through shared characteristics: embodying and taking root in specific, real-life places (geographical, but also related to gender, origin, nationality); being split between local and global poles, rootedness/mobility, tradition/modernity; this is a subject in transit which comes into being through the process of creating ties, networks, parallel relations. Nomadism is also a critical cultural consideration – present in the writing being subjected to analysis in this text.

To summarise, in the autobiographical narratives analysed here, we can see the process of moving away from defining identity in accordance with national narratives. The image of a "Mother Poland" as a nation/state has occurred in only one novel: "you asked about Poland? … it is as beautiful as a woman … it is modern … we are doing fantastically well."[93] In all the other works, the nationalistic discourse has been replaced with experiences of nomadism, migration, journeying: "migration is a woman, moving forward with confidence, longing, loving and refusing to shy away from taking risks!"[94] At the same time, the qualities looked for in a Polish woman/Poland itself remain the same: resourcefulness, diligence, self-sufficiency, courage. Are we dealing with the same cultural pressure, but this time in a new guise – that of the migrant woman? The nationalistic narration has become more liberal, but the demands which are placed on women – and which they set themselves – remain similar. And a definition of "woman/migration" narrowed in this way leaves out a number of heroines and real women who are unable to refuse and shy away from taking risks for many reasons that spring largely from cultural, social, economic, familial and individual conditioning. Two narratives converge in the writing under consideration here: a liberal discourse, appropriate to a contemporary culture of therapy in which the individual is isolated from socio-political contexts (the heroine as the "captain of her own destiny")[95]

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ing. Mrozik believes that the concept of nomadic subjects has an elitist character and is related to the most privileged group of women: white, middle-class, intellectual, artistic. Meanwhile, in her project, Rosi Braidotti includes those who have been excluded: migrant women, those who have been cast out, illegal immigrant women from developing countries, indigenous cultures (and even animals and the natural world), creating a strengthening, affirming and defining project (as far as their identity is concerned) which involves knowledge about women as expert knowledge. See also Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* [*Po człowieku*], trans. Joanna Bednarek and Agnieszka Kowalczyk (Warszawa: PWN, 2014).

93 Fice, *Przeznaczenie*, 196.

94 Brzezińska, *Koktajl*, fourth page of the cover.

95 An example of this sort of narration can be found in *The Emigrant by Choice*: "each one of us holds a set of cards to play in life, but not everyone has the need to use theirs. I was convinced that I should play mine." See Parys-White, *Emigrantka*, 172.

and a socially sensitive discourse, which reveals the mechanisms behind the individual, systematic and symbolic discrimination of women.

Memory

Women researchers and theoreticians who study women's autobiographical practices are also interested in the process of the creation and functioning of memory – individual, collective, biochemical – in autobiographical texts. An important aspect of these studies is the direction developed since the 1990s, restoring recollections of experiences which have gone unspoken or are unspeakable. This is "the literary project of restoring and validating memories relating to sexual abuse and psychological trauma – which has sanctioned a great number of autobiographical narratives."[96] An example of such a narrative in Poland is the diaries of Halszka Opfer, entitled *Kato-tata. Nie-pamiętnik* [*Mad-Bad-Dad. An Un-memoir*] and *Monidło.* Życie *po Kato-tacie* [*Wedding Snap. Life after Mad-Bad-Dad*].[97] Women researchers point to a very important function served by this sort of literary testimony – they allow not only the individual but whole groups to be healed. They hint at the kind of potential these tales have – in which their heroines go from being victimised to revitalised (realising the nature of the strength which allowed them to survive). Janice Haaken, a therapist and theoretician, believes that they also allow "the 'healing' of conflict-ridden discourses and fantasies in women's narratives."[98]

Speaking up is the first step in the process of healing. According to Marlene Streeruwitz, a writer and literary critic: "silence is very dangerous for society, silence increases unhappiness."[99] Migrant women writers disrupt the silence which surrounds violence experienced by women, often in early childhood. Wioletta Grzegorzewska wrote about this in her novel *Guguły* [*Swallowing*

96 Smith and Watson, "Introduction," 86.

97 Halszka Opfer, *Kato-tata. Nie-pamiętnik* [*Mad-Bad-Dad. An Un-memoir*] (Warszawa: Jacek Santorski & Co, 2009); Halszka Opfer, *Monidło. Życie do Kato-tacie* [*Wedding Snap. Life after Mad-Bad-Dad*] (Warszawa: Czarna Owca, 2011); Katarzyna Surmiak-Domańska, *Mokradełko* [*A Little Swamp*] (Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2012).

98 Smith and Watson, "Introduction," 87.

99 Agnieszka Drotkiewicz and Anna Dziewit, "Milczenie unieszczęśliwia. Rozmowa z Marlene Streeruwitz," ["Silence Deepens Sadness. A conversation with Marlene Streeruwitz"] *Głośniej! Rozmowy z pisarkami* [*Louder! Conversations with Female Authors*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Twój Styl, 2006), 149.

Mercury][100] (which features, among other things, the story of a girl molested by a doctor and a prostitute) and Grażyna Plebanek in her novel *A Girl Called Przystupa*[101] (in which a girl is raped by a neighbour). In *Skid Marks,* Magdalena Zimny-Louis describes the way her "male friends" abuse thirteen-year-old Aneta: "they tied her to a coat hook in the changing rooms and, one by one, each brave lad (and there were a fair few of them) would approach and grab her breasts."[102] Older women, once migrated, still struggle with this problem – like Klara Miodowska in *An Emigration Tale* [103] after she arrives in London to stay with her aunt. Her husband Robert molests Klara and tries to rape her. He is convinced of his immunity: "Go scream! The Indian neighbour's wife screams all day when her husband is whipping her, and so what?!"[104] Klara manages to defend herself, but her aunt judges her to be at fault and inflicts punishment – Klara loses her home and the help of the only person she knew in the whole of England. Thus the author touches on the theme of repeat victimisation, as experienced by those who have to suffer domestic violence and abuse. Female protagonists suffer discrimination not only in their homes, but in their professional lives, too, like the central character in "Break the Spell of England": "and when the training was over … he ended with the words: you're a fit piece of ass, you'll manage."[105] Gabriela Mrozińska is abused and molested by Marek, a co-worker and fellow Pole, while Klara suffers similar treatment at the hands of her boss Rafał, also a Pole, who not only demands sex in exchange for promotion, but also for her to work as a prostitute in his employ. Klara refuses and is punished once again, this time losing her job.[106] Renata from "Brzęczenia owczych dzwoneczków" ["The Ringing of Sheep Bells][107] has to contend with a similar "offer."

The central female characters in migrant writing are often coerced into sex work and risk being forced into the world of human trafficking. This is

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100 Wioletta Grzegorzewska, *Guguły* [*Swallowing Mercury*] (Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2014).

101 Plebanek, *Przystupa*.

102 Zimny-Louis, Ślady hamowania, 284.

103 Nowak, *Opowieść*.

104 *Ibid*., 59.

105 Białecka, "Odczarować Anglię,"138.

106 Nowak, *Opowieść*, 132-134.

107 Renata Suchodolska, "Brzęczenie owczych dzwoneczków," ["The Ringing of Sheep Bells"] in *Wyfrunęli. Nowa emigracja o sobie*.

the experience of Marta, the protagonist of *Poles Apart*: "the biggest number of job ads these days is for prostitutes, although officially they are meant to be working as masseuses or hostesses."[108] Przystupa is warned by other migrant women:

> "You weren't in church, didn't see you at the Polish shop, I thought they must be driving you round turning tricks!"
> "What?"
> "You know … they drive those young girls round like deliveries of fresh meat! For as long as those chicks are good for it, and then … Eh, never mind."[109]

Why do the protagonists of these tales encounter so much physical intimidation and sexual violence, and why are they so often treated as potential prostitutes? The authors suggest that the social standing of female migrants is low, that they don't know their own rights, that they haven't managed to build networks of friends and allies – which makes them easy prey for individual men, who are usually of a higher social standing than their victims, and who wield a power whose source often lies in a criminal underworld. And yet, as Natasha Walter shows, the social messages of the media and mass culture are also to blame – the phenomena of sexualisation and objectification of women, which in turn negatively affects their position in the workplace.[110] The job market for women is becoming ever more narrow, while the sex trade continues to grow, both at home and abroad:

> the majority of job offers in newspapers and online for women in Poland involves prostitution;[111]

> Plenty of Polish women worked for him, but he also had on offer Lithuanian, Bulgarian and Belorussian girls. Lost in the big city, betrayed … Suburban brothels were easy to find in English cities.[112]

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108 Courtney, *Poles Apart*, 178.

109 Plebanek, *Przystupa*, 261.

110 On the phenomenon of the sexualisation of women and the consequences it has upon their lives, including their professional development, see Natasha Walter, Żywe *lalki*. *Powrót seksizmu* [*Living Dolls, The Return of Sexism*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Czarna Owca, 2012); Faludi, *Backlash*.

111 Nowak, *Opowieść*, 16.

112 Magdalena Zimny-Louis, *Kilka przypadków szczęśliwych* [*A Few Happy Coincidences*] (Warszawa: Prószyński i S-ka, 2014), 168.

The writing of migrant female authors highlights another problem: Polish women are unable to stand up for or to defend themselves when threatened with violence. Their reaction is usually one of helplessness, submission, silence, which is aptly illustrated by Gabrysia: "she wanted to cry … but she hid her tears under her eyelids."[113] The only exception is the protagonist of A.M. Bakalar's novel, Magda,[114] who demands justice for her female office colleague and equality when it comes to social scenarios. But her assertiveness condemns her to social ostracisation and eventually the loss of her job. On the one hand, those migrating characters who refuse to accept violence and discrimination are punished (losing their jobs, their homes, suffering blame). On the other, such frequent moments in novels and diaries of women's histories can be interpreted as a breaking of the silence about, and of the submission to, violence against women. They can also be seen as one of the most important strategies for recovering the voice and the body, the beginning of a process of moving from victimisation to vitalisation of women as individuals. The fact that these narratives are so common also suggests that migration is, for Polish women, a dangerous place, where they not only encounter painful experiences and describe them, but also become more politicised. In the words of the poet and writer Wioletta Grzegorzewska: "on the Isle I felt safer as a woman and mother, because I matured in a social context, becoming more aware of my rights."[115]

Theory of Travel

The questions relating to nomadic existence, migrations and emigrations is another area of studies in women's autobiographical writings. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson suggest that the main question is: "in what way do various kinds of mobility influence the practices of self-representation – for example, the mobility of enforced resettlement or emigration, immigration, exile?"[116] In the works reviewed here, we can identify several kinds of migration and the kinds of female protagonists which go with them:

a) Cultural migration. Narrations about this sort of migration are most often created by women who have degree-level education, are between 25-30 years old, have a fluent grasp of English and are single. Their social status

113 Fice, *Przeznaczenie*, 105.

114 Bakalar, *Madame Mephisto*.

115 Urszula Chowaniec, "O pisaniu i pieniądzach. Z poetką Wiolettą Grzegorzewską rozmawia Urszula Chowaniec" ["About Writing and Money. Wioletta Grzegorzewska in Conversation with Urszula Chowaniec"], *Zadra* 1-2 (54-55) (2013): 53.

116 Smith and Watson, "Introduction," 87.

is either high from the very start, or becomes so in a short period of time. In their case, the decision to move abroad was not just about money. These female protagonists wanted to live in a "European" country, one which was multicultural, tolerant, secular and free from religious dominance.[117] In the words of A.M. Bakalar:

> I am an intellectual migrant. I'm unable to live in Poland ... The Polish mentality is for me unacceptable. I know that Poland will change, but it needs a generation to do so. And I don't have the time.[118]

A related version of cultural migration is educational migration – moving to study for a doctoral thesis, as happens in *Immigrations* by Kaja Malanowska.[119] The question is, should this be perceived as work-related mobility rather than migration? This group has at its disposal the highest social and cultural capital, and Polish women migrants turned to such female protagonists in their writing in the 1990s.[120]

b) Cultural and work-related migration. This is the most frequent kind of migration and the most popular type of protagonist – a woman with pre-graduate or graduate level of education, 20 to 30 years old, often from

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117 Examples of such narrations include: A.M. Bakalar, *Madame Mephisto*; Ada Martynowska, *Przebojowa Polka w Londynie* [*A Polish Go-Getter in London*]; Agnieszka Kwiatkowska, "Dzwonki owiec i duch Wiliama Wallace'a," [Sheep Bells and the Ghost of William Wallace]"; Katarzyna Latała, "W krainie wietrznych deszczowców," ["In the Land of the Rain People"], in *Na końcu* świata *napisane. Autoportret współczesnej polskiej emigracji* [*Written at the World's End. A Self-Portrait of Contemporary Polish Migration*], ed. Elżbieta Spadzińska-Żak (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Videograf, 2008); Marta Zaraska, *Zawieszeni* [*Suspended*], Maria Budacz, *Wot4* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Papierowy Motyl, 2013).

118 Raczyńska, "Profesjonalna kłamczucha," 31.

119 Malanowska, *Imigracje*.

120 Especially Manuela Gretkowska, Natasza Goerke, Izabela Filipiak and Brygida Helbig-Mischewski. Agnieszka Mrozik calls this group "the elite internationalists" and "the homo cafe generation," while Bożena Karwowska emphasises that they represent the most privileged group of Polish migrant women. Bożena Karwowska, "Oswajanie samotności. Kobiecy dyskurs imigracyjny „drugiego świata" w polskiej perspektywie" ["Taming loneliness. A female immigrant discourse in the "other world" from a Polish perspective"], *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 5 (2008): 119-132. In the narratives analysed by Bożena Karwowska, the female authors are not aware of the way female protagonists are entangled in power relations (political, social, cultural), while in the works I have studied here that social awareness is already in place, hence there is a greater sense of unity with other women and sensitivity to their experience, because the fates of their heroines are not solely seen in the categories of private lives, but testimonies of social mechanisms of exclusion.

villages or small towns, lacking fluency in English, and single. At first, she will engage in low-paid menial work, most often related to culturally assigned gender stereotypes (cleaner, carer, nanny, servant). At the same time, she will continue to study, complete language courses, get better qualifications and slowly advance socially – she will leave the "professional gender ghetto" and begin to work in administration or the creative industries, which becomes a signifier of her social prestige.[121] In these sorts of works, we find two specific narratives: the liberal-capitalist version, which emphasises the individual's self-agency, and socially aware narratives which reveal the mechanisms of discrimination against women.

Until the end of the 1980s, literary traditions revolved mostly around two kinds of migrations: political and work-related. Since the 1990s, we are dealing increasingly with a new kind of migration, one Przemysław Czapliński refers to as "existentialist migration," based on the examples of Manuela Gretkowska and Izabela Filipiak.[122] In the books I have included in my research, the authors define their migrations as cultural, educational, socio-cultural, intellectual, and even civilisational. I do think these can be broadly termed as existentialist migrations.

c) Another kind of female protagonist is a middle-aged Polish woman with a higher or school-level education who leaves her husband and children behind in her homeland. The decision to emigrate has come as a result of unemployment and risk of impoverishment. These characters are presented as traditional Polish mothers, hard working women, industrious,

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121 Examples of such narratives include: Dana Parys-White, *Emigrantka z wyboru* [*The Emigrant by Choice*], Justyna Nowak, *Opowieść emigracyjna* [*An Emigration Tale*], Magdalena Orzeł, *Dublin, moja polska karma* [*Dublin, My Polish Karma*], Katarzyna Kozakowska, "Mój cenzor" ["My Censor"] in *Wyfrunęli. Nowa emigracja o sobie* [*They Flew Away. Stories of the New Émigrés*], 153–165; Aneta Loska, "Uciekłam na moją wyspę" ["I escaped to my own island"] in *Wyfrunęli. Nowa emigracja o sobie* [*They Flew Away. Stories of the New Émigrés*]; Monika Kulczyk, "Samotna Wigilia" ["A Lonely Christmas"] in: *Wyfrunęli. Nowa emigracja o sobie* [*They Flew Away. Stories of the New Émigrés*], 69–75; Iwona Macałka, *My journey through life*; Beata Kamińska, "A Child of Two Mothers"; Sabina Majewska, "Opiekowałam się staruszkami" ["I looked after elderly ladies"] in *Wyfrunęli. Nowa emigracja o sobie* [*They Flew Away. Stories of the New Émigrés*], 75–81; Marta Semeniuk, *Emigrantką być, czyli wspomnienia z Wells* [*To Be an Emigrant, memories from Wells*] (Warszawa: Warszawska Firma Wydawnicza, 2011); Anna Łajkowska: *A Guest House on the Moorland, Love on the Moorland*, *Shadows on the Moorland*; Magdalena Orzeł, *Dublin. My Polish Karma*; Gosia Brzezińska, *Irish Coctail*, Polly Courtney, *Poles Apart*.

122 Przemysław Czapliński, "Kontury mobilności" ["The Contours of Mobility"] in *Poetyka migracji. Doświadczenie granic w literaturze polskiej przełomu XX i XXI wieku* [*The Poetics of Migration. The Experience of Borders in Polish Literature between the 19th and the 20th Centuries*] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2013).

ready to make sacrifices,[123] as in the poem "Bronka na obczyźnie" ["Bronka Abroad"] by Urszula Gotowicka:

My name is Bronisława / My name is Bronisława
Tak teraz się przedstawiam / is how I introduce myself
I dzierżąc w dłoni mop / And armed with a mop
I'm looking for some job / I'm looking for some job
Może kto pomoże? / Maybe you will help me?
O Boże, o Boże, o Boże / Oh God, oh God, oh God
Tu się kupuje pracę! / They buy jobs here!
Na raty kupię, spłacę / I'll buy it in installments
I oddam męża długi / and settle my husband's debts
I wyślę mu na szlugi / and send him some fags
Chociaż to jest zbój / Even though he is a thug[124]

This group has the lowest social and cultural capital, and work-related migration maintains this low position, forcing them to repeat traditional gender roles (cleaning, caring for children and adults). In this sort of narration we sometimes encounter a move from work-related emigration into one related to cultural, developmental or emancipatory ambitions. And so we see a new interest in history, tradition and the natural world in a new homeland, and the female protagonists devote their free time to tourism.[125] What makes them stand out from those groups listed earlier is that they consider emigrations to be temporary realities, and their home remains in Poland.

Conclusion: The Transgressive and Re-Vindicatory Potential of Migrant Women's Writing

In writing this study, I have tried to present a detailed analysis of migrant writing produced by Polish women, which is not an easy task due to the

123 See "Yorkszanka, Piękno regionu Yorkshire" ["The Yorkshirewoman, the Beauty of Yorkshire"] in *Wyfrunęli. Nowa emigracja o sobie,*[*They Flew Away. Stories of the New Émigrés*]; Łucja Fice, *Destiny,* Łucja Fice, *The Island of the Aged,* Łucja Fice, *The Carer,* Alicja Szafran, "Time to Return."

124 Urszula Gotowicka, "Bronka na obczyźnie" ["Bronka Abroad"], in *Na końcu świata napisane. Autoportret współczesnej polskiej emigracji* [*Written at the World's End. A Self-Portrait of Contemporary Polish Migration*] ed. Elżbieta Spadzińska-Żak (Katowice: Videograf II, 2008), 325.

125 This is the journey taken by the heroines of the novel by Dana Parys-White and Łucja Fice, the diary by Alicja Szafran and Marta Semeniuk.

number and the variety of source materials. Yet it is important to consider what connects all these works – strategies of recovering body and voice:

1. Making public, and therefore political, the experience of women living in Poland and abroad, through showing the various types of power structures and pressures (economic, cultural, religious and national) they come under;
2. Reconstructing a matriarchal linearity of heritage, the familial and social ties between women, friendships, alliances and multi-generational cooperation between them;
3. Reconstructing alternative national identities for Polish women – close to the concept of the nomadic character in the work of Rosi Braidotti.
4. Exposing the traumas and abuses inscribed on the bodies of women and previously hidden in individual, collective and biochemical memory;
5. Expressing one's own individual experience of migration. The works studied here are a collection of diverse female voices, differing in terms of educational and professional qualifications, origin, age and social class. This multitude of voices allows us to analyse dependencies: familial, social, religious, national, all of which shape female characters. At the same time, these works help to fill in the many gaps which remain in women's writing published in Poland (such as protagonists from lower social strata, those working in menial jobs, those who are older).[126]

The question I posed at the start – why are Polish women so socially and creatively active in Great Britain and Ireland? – will be answered in their autobiographical works and in interviews I conducted with female leaders of social, cultural and community initiatives. Migration has shown itself as a safe and friendly space for them, one in which they can develop and realise their creative potential. This support takes place on institutional, systemic and social levels.

Women's identities are respected during important events such as childbirth[127] or in situations when they are threatened, which is when they can

126 Agnieszka Mrozik, in analysing the works created by émigré women from the 1990s, suggests that these lack narratives on the subject of their material reality, financial circumstances and the everyday life of émigré women. The literary works I analysed do provide such details about the everyday life of Polish female émigrés, and at the same time breach the taboo of work-related emigration.

127 "Because pregnanat women get everything for free…you don't have to work, be of a different nationality, speak no English – it doesn't matter…in Poland you have to run around gynaecologists all the time, pay for their services…and even though she didn't know the language, and home was far away, it was better giving birth here – she felt less a subject

count on help from the police or social services. In the words of Wioletta Grzegorzewska: "I was afraid of going back … Poland is a tough country for women to live in."[128] She adds: "I function better as a writer when I am not socially oppressed."[129]

The authors of the latest migrant literature are aware of discriminatory social mechanisms which affect women both in Poland and abroad. This is why they also write about how female migrants' low social standing contributes to the likelihood of their being exploited, of their rights being infringed, of a higher risk of sexual violence and of finding themselves working in the sex trade. At the same time, female writers try to navigate the publishing environment, and so they often present their work as light reading, even as romantic fiction. In this way, they try to become part of the canon of popular literature. This allows them to enrich the field of Polish light literature with elements which relate to social awareness and to aspects which are vital to women. This also gives hope that topics such as Polishness, tradition, nationhood, religion or identity will go on being critically redefined from women's perspectives. As I have already stated, the latest writing from Polish women has a transgressive potential:

> The re-vindication of norms in women's writing often goes hand in hand with a unique form of nomadic, wandering movement. Those who journeyed and saw something new (travelling, wandering, exiled or émigré women) can perceive the world in a different light. Hence the popularity of characters such as female tourists or vagabonds in the latest writing by women. Viewing the world, it seems they like less and less what they are starting to see.[130]

Translation: Marek Kazmierski

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of medical reviews, and more simply a woman giving birth, one who had the right to an opinion, instinct and intimacy." Orzeł, *Dublin*, 62; "In the maternity ward in St Mary's Hospital in Newport I understood what it actually means to give birth like a human being. The doctors didn't speak down to me or insult me…the way they had done back in Poland." "About Writing and Money," 53.

128 Karolina Sulej "Cierpkie owoce. Z Wiolettą Grzegorzewską rozmawia Karolina Sulej" ["Unripened Fruit. Wioletta Grzegorzewska in Conversation with Karolina Sulej"], *Wysokie Obcasy*, March 5, 2014, 30.

129 Chowaniec, "O pisaniu," 53.

130 Chowaniec, "Smutek," 90.

Interpretations

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In Search of Migrant Writing: The Cosmopolitics of Polish Fiction from the British Isles

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> He knew nothing about Ireland. All he remembered was that they had Guinness there and sang folk songs… Sang, played and had work to offer. Shedloads of work, all of it up for grabs. They'd had nothing to do for some, give or take, five hundred years, but now they did and plenty of it too. He assumed some things would just work themselves out, by definition. A lot of people from Bulanda had such hopes when setting off this way. It seems in England it's even worse. They say Trafalgar Sq. is swamped with desperate villagers, strapped for cash seeing as they spent everything on their tickets, without any capacity for forward thinking, because life in Bulanda destroyed their capacity for perceiving what is real and what isn't, so they approached the first policeman they come across and shouted at him in Polish – Where is work?![1]

Literary accounts of the experience of migration after Poland joined the EU and labour markets opened up are dominated by the fatalism of the subject who realises the

1 Piotr Czerwiński, *Przebiegum życiae, czyli kartonowa sieć* [*Conductum Lifae or the Cardboard Web*], trans. Marek Kazmierski (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 2009), 53-54.

existence of a deterministic border between highly developed and developing countries – to be more geographically precise, between the "Old" and "New" Europe. In the narratives by migrants from Eastern and Central Europe, both Europes remain in a relation of a mutual phantasmatic desire, though tightly regulated: an immigrant from "new" Europe is that "Other" who is currently needed on the job market of the host country. An immigrant, even if locked in a pattern of alienating jobs, along with other, anonymous and disposable people like himself, develops in his narrative from that claustrophobic space a vision of the world: nomadic, fluid, driven by a fundamental inequality of access to opportunity, and, in place of stable social structures, offering transient forms of belonging and precarious rooting. From a global perspective – and this is the perspective the new migrant to the old Europe has to adopt, even though s/he is, at least geographically, a European within the bounds of Europe – the situation he is in is paradigmatically neo-postcolonial. It is from this location of a neo-postcolonial subject of new migration narratives that a new critical reflection emerges, based on the experience of modern nomads – the mobile workforce. In globalization studies investigating what forms this new awareness of the world is taking, this is called "cosmopolitics" rather than "cosmopolitanism,"[2] because what is at stake is the performative aspect of "politics" as an active reflection on a world which does not have to be related to a sense of belonging to the world ("cosmopolis"). The cosmopolitics of this new migrant writing[3] spurs the development of a new epic style – or, more precisely, these two qualities together create a syntagmatic (combinatory: cosmo-political) and paradigmatic (associative: epic) dimension of migrant narratives.

Two novels by Piotr Czerwiński – *Przebiegum życiae* [*Conductum Lifae*] (2009) and *Międzynaród* [*Internation*] (2011) – will provide examples of migrant writing which go beyond the dualistic formula of situating the migrant subject between home and the new homeland; instead, they locate the subject in the space of critical cosmopolitanism. This is the space of worldliness, to use the term coined by Edward Said,[4] which a migrant only gets to know as

2 Pheng Cheah, "Introduction – Part II: The Cosmopolitical – Today," in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, ed. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 20-41.

3 Ref. migration writing as cosmopolitics, see Bishnupriya Ghosh, *When Borne Across: Literary Cosmopolitics in the Contemporary Indian Novel* (New Brunswick– –New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2004).

4 "Worldliness" is for Edward Said a fundamental critical term, relating to the ethos of criticism as a practice of reading which goes beyond textualism of theory. See Edward W. Said: "Introduction: Secular Criticism," in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), 1-30.

a discursive map that overwrites his bodily experience[5] of movement across borders, languages and social practices of the everyday. In both novels, the migrant's story is inextricably linked with an intensive historical and cultural reflection, which manifests, in a tone mixing pathos and irony, the powerlessness of imaginary constructs such as friendship and the brotherhood of nations (presented as drunken dreams or narrative excesses). The migrant condition discloses itself as an inevitably border existence, operating on many levels, of which the first and most important level is the difficulty, or even impossibility, of finding oneself at home, a condition which condemns the migrant to the status of subalternity. The cosmopolitanism of a migrant therefore unfolds as a consciousness of the world of a special kind – it is a cosmopolis of the subaltern who, on the one hand, seems to be excluded from a network of meaning, and on the other, building its narration in the "accursed zones"[6] of subaltern spaces, introduces an important critical voice into literary discourse.

Having lost his job in Poland, Gustaw, the protagonist of *Conductum Lifae*, decides to look for work abroad. His choice of Ireland as a destination is quite random – he has no future in his homeland, while legend has it that, when abroad, having "no future hurts less."[7] His impressive CV and a diploma from the Warsaw School of Economics – "very much *em-bee-ey*"[8] – should guarantee him a successful career as an economist in the burgeoning Irish economy. This optimistic vision is then dressed up in clothes fit for an English gent (a camel hair coat, a bespoke suit, a handmade tie), and Gustaw is now ready to impress both in apparel and in fluent speech. Ireland, of course, fails to live up to a Polish migrant vision of a Promised Land. Gustaw must quickly adapt to new rules of survival on the Emerald Isle: his accent, imitating the Queen's English, is at best amusing to the locals, and, at worst, annoying; his CV and

5 Michel de Certeau in the well-known passage from *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendal (Berkley: University of California Press, 1988), writes about walking as an "elementary form of experiencing the city" (93), and of discursive maps experienced bodily (54). A map is not an ontological given, but a totalizing organization of space: the bodily sketching of trails across the city is one of the ways of undermining the authority (and authoritarianism) of the map.

6 Łukasz Ślipko, *Pokój z widokiem na Dunnes Stores* [*The Room with a View of Dunnes Stores*] (Opole: RB Publishing, 2011), 8. The "accursed zones" is a reference to the cult film from 1975 by Janusz Majewski (the film was based on a 1936 novel by Henryk Worcell). We can also assume that the title of this autobiographical prose gestures towards E.M. Forster's novel from 1908, *A Room with View*.

7 Czerwiński, *Przebiegum*, 51.

8 Ibid., 54.

diploma scare off potential employers; and anyway, recruitment agencies have their own ideas about what work a Pole is fittest for. With a little bit of luck and a lot of determination, he will finally secure a job in the 3D sector.[9] He will move around town within a space marked out by the Luas rail route, used almost exclusively by migrants; the Irish "natives," as the narrator calls them, move within their own, restricted, corporate space of the middle class. Ireland turns out to be a country wallowing in a temporary economic prosperity, and unreservedly replicating models of neoliberal exploitation. It is free from any discomforting historical memory which might force the "natives" to connect the corporate treatment of the new immigrant workforce with the way the British empire oppressed Ireland in colonial times. In this depressing atmosphere, made worse by the idiosyncrasies of the Irish weather that blur summer and winter, Gustaw surrenders to bipolar madness: he writes a film script, believing that he will find an Irish film producer for it, he yields to an almost catatonic alienation in an absurdly enigmatic factory, where his job is to throw cardboard boxes into a giant shredder machine, and there is his home, his "krapi haus," where he lives with other miserable Polish migrants. Immigrants who dream can only be mad, because they refuse to accept the actual order of things: "We are fucking Polacks. We are here to clean their bogs and pick fag butts off their lawns. They don't need us to write their scripts for them!"[10] Yet an immigrant without dreams is only a representative of some "shit folk" who do "shit jobs."[11]

The new literature produced by migrants to Great Britain and Ireland naturally represents relations between incomers from the "new" Europe and the locals. However, the migrant experience is inscribed within a wider context of globalization processes. A corporate work style and consumerist culture are very much in the foreground here, coming before the multicultural mosaic, the specific British class system and characteristic locality of accents. The space open to migrants is often limited to the 3Ds sector, but at the same time this is a space of the new worldliness. The condition of the modern migrant is inscribed within this very claustrophobic yet cosmopolitical space, marked by dreadful repetitiveness or an escape into metafictional narratives. Doomed to work in the 3Ds sector, Gustaw stands witness to the brutal confrontation of fantasy with reality, and takes in his new world with bitterness and irony. The core of this reality is the commodification of everything, along

9 The acronym (Dirty, Dangerous, Demeaning) relates to work done by migrants where there is a shortage of local labour for this type of occupation.

10 Czerwiński, *Przebiegum*, 262.

11 Ibid., 87.

with identity, cultural difference and European integration. Multiculturalism, which could be a project laying grounds for an open society, does not apply to immigrants from new Europe: there is no demand for their cultural brands. Even the "natives" are now only commercialized simulacra of Irishness, kept alive by a corporate spirit.

The wave of migration which followed the opening up of job markets in Western Europe after Central and Eastern European states joined the EU profoundly altered the social landscape in countries until then associated with migration from their former colonies, and hence with a certain ethical obligation with regards to the incomers. The invasion from a much nearer region, until recently separated from the West by the Iron Curtain, by the Berlin Wall and by limited passport availability in communist states, stirred deep emotions in the old Europe, now that nothing could stop those millions from fleeing the postcommunist misery and seeking a better, western world. This opening had a strong affective resonance – the fear of "new" Europeans was articulated quite overtly, across all layers of public discourse, from the streets to the centres of political power, which, in the face of the current refugee crisis in Europe, creates a paradox. First, since the fall of communist regimes, Western Europe has lost its desire for the formerly communist states in Eastern and Central Europe. Until now the fantasy of Eastern Europe reinforced quite unproblematically a narcissistic image Europe had of itself as the home of democracy and freedom; after the opening up of the EU, Europe's conception, its fantasy, of its east was radically changed. The object of these fantasies was meant to be a mirror in which Europe could admire the beauty of its own ethical ideal. Borders gave these relations form, each side capable of freely fuelling each other's desires, unaware that Eros – the superficial essence of their fantasies – is nothing but the ordering formula of the Symbolic.[12]

Meanwhile, after the borders between democratic and communist Europe were removed, the object of these fantasies – Eastern Europe – became real and menacing in its easy accessibility, revealing itself on the one hand as an elusive, absolute Other, who remains an unfathomable mystery – "the unfathomable abyss of radical Otherness"[13] – and, on the other, and much worse for this matter, as a small difference (*object petit a*?) – "a tiny feature whose presence magically transubstantiates its bearer into an alien."[14] Andrzej

12 Slavoj Žižek, "Psychoanalysis and the Lacanian Real: »Strange shapes of the unwarped primal world«," in *Adventures in Realism*, ed. Matthew Beaumont (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 206-223; 210.

13 Ibid., 216.

14 Ibid., 211.

Stasiuk, spinning in *Fado* a fantasy about how Eastern European barbarians (in alphabetical order) invade the old Europe which, subsequently, descends into apocalyptic chaos, activates a vision of Europe's fear of the absolute, monstrous Other. It is, as Stasiuk writes "'a belt of mixed populations,' to use a term coined by Hanna Arendt to describe the changeable and amorphous spaces lost somewhere between Germany and Russia."[15] In a rampantly grotesque style, the author of *Fado* shows, in a strategy of reclaiming a stereotype, what Western Europe is hiding behind the rhetoric of legalism and social care: a deeper content of what in another formula – that of the famous Polish plumber[16] – was an attempt to tame and control fear about the wave of migrants coming over from the "new" Europe. The Polish plumber is a pragmatic proposition for a tamed and useful Other. In the Polish poster designed with a similar aim of ironically reclaiming a stereotype, the plumber is not only highly qualified, he is also handsome and well aware of his charm; after all, his role is to seduce. In this way, mutual relations between the two parts of Europe are returned to their correct formula – eroticism as a performative platform, a play of differences and fantasies, created by the ever less palpable border between the east and the west of Europe. This lack of clarity not only destabilises the old order of a two-way affair, removing its cause, as suggested by Svetlana Boym when she refers to an essay by Dubravka Ugrešić,[17] but also introduces a new, fundamental difficulty into this reciprocity, namely, the uncanny aspect of similarity: "The Eastern mistress returns her Western lover his mirror image, only this is an image in a broken mirror; the more Europeanized she appears, the more he fears Balkanization. Her easy "civilizing process" seems to point to his own thinly concealed inner "barbarian."[18] Between the monstrous Other in *Fado* to the fear of the Other who turns out to be a part of the self, occurs a Lacanian splitting of the Real in difference as monstrosity and as a tiny, barely visible change (but eventually indicating monstrosity as well). An immigrant from Central and Eastern Europe – still Europe, yet different and shockingly like the old Europe proper – is one of the most popular, and yet simultaneously individuating and transsubstatiating manifestations

15 Andrzej Stasiuk, *Fado*, trans. Bill Johnston (Dalkey Archive Press), 82.

16 See the discussion on the "Polish plumber," the term first used by Frits Bolkenstein, a Dutch politician and author of the directive about services on the internal market in 2005, in Anne-Marie Fortier, "The Politics of Scaling, Timing and Embodying: Rethinking the »New Europe«," *Mobilities* 1.3 (2006): 313-331; 313, access 20.06.2016, doi: 10.1080/17450100600915992.

17 Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 244.

18 Ibid., 244.

of the "abyssal dimension of another human being,"[19] in which the Other is the Thing – "that which potentially lurks beneath every homely human face."[20]

This does not mean that every migrant narrative is entangled in this sort of scene of unbearable and unfathomable desire – but it is certain that every migrant narrative definitively motivates and activates the depths of the confrontational relation of subjectivities. The narrative whose topic is migration is usually associated with the process of change, developing, questioning, or, perhaps, working through identity. It is certain that crossing the border which separates life between the old and the new (because transfer does not always imply migration), forces us to reformulate the discursive costume which we put on as our identity. But is each migrant narrative always a progression toward identity? Can it be framed in such a teleological process? Key here are observations made about migrant writers, whose work critics like to subordinate to a reflection on identity. Dubravka Ugrešić talks directly about identity as a burden, pressure and a commodified social product.[21] Salman Rushdie, who is regarded, and rightly so, as a eulogist for a hybridized migrant identity (a chimera-tree, a translated being), develops in his novels the figure of a migrant who is always ahead of the thought forms of identity – those which already exist s/he has left behind, not belonging to nation, ethnic or religious group, but is rather a mobile participant in at least some of those identity forms, but mostly through contiguity and contingency rather than any sort of grounded belonging articulated in historiographic terms. In her text "A Hypothesis of a Neo-Post-Resettlement Literature," Inga Iwasiów considers the (im)possibility of considering

> European literature after 1945 as a literature of a massive displacement of peoples. Writing this sort of a book (dictionary? guide? reportage? novel?) seems as urgent a task as it is risky. Urgent, because we have at our disposal various theories and tools that have tackled the subject from various vantage points already: nomadism, postcolonialism, gender, New Historicism, the territorial turn, the political turn, etc. Risky, because the catalogue of texts is infinite and still unsorted, comprising many genres and languages, in addition revealing an array of themes in various ways connected with the experience of resettlement and displacement.[22]

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19 Žižek, "Psychoanalysis," 216.

20 Ibid., 217.

21 Dubravka Ugresić, *Nobody's Home. Essays*, trans. Ellen Elias-Bursać (London: Telegram, 2007). See especially: "Stereotypes, Identity and The Alibi of Cultural Differences," or "How I got the Picture."

22 Inga Iwasiów, "Hipoteza literatury neo-post-osiedleńczej" ["A Hypothesis of a Neo-Post-Resettlement Literature"], in *Narracje migracyjne w literaturze polskiej XX i XXI wieku*

Such a monograph would inevitably be a utopian project, not only in the common sense of the word, which emphasizes the practical impossibility of such an undertaking, but also in the sense of a futurity framed in the literary genre of utopia. It would deliver evidence that our place in the world, and, subsequently, our sense of history, belonging and, finally, identity, will be increasingly determined by the experience of mobility and migration. It is worth noticing that migration is just such an attempt at realizing a utopia: a movement in time (towards the future) and space (qualitative moving away from the previous place as a result of crossing borders – national, cultural, civilizational). Migration is also, above all, an intensive imaginary process, which forces the subject to project the self onto new semantic networks and new systems of communication on the level of language, widely understood as culture, but also by all means material entering into a new tissue of reality. In this context – of utopia inscribed in the experience of migration and manifest in the records of this experience – a discussion has been developing about whether – in a time of mobility on a global scale characteristic for all modernity but rapidly increasing now, when mobility becomes easier than ever before, and, often, more enforced than ever before – we can still talk about émigré literature, or if we are instead dealing with migration literature (of multiple and multidirectional mobility), or, for that matter, nomadic literature. In search of a research methodology appropriate for such literature, critics point out the necessity to link reflection from literary studies with social sciences, especially in relation to mobility studies, sociology of population migrations and cultural anthropology of globalisation.[23] In the Polish contribution to this interdisciplinary critical thought, two notions are brought to the foreground: 1) how to include in the field of literary studies on migration and mobility literature produced by post-war migrants who moved as a result of shifting borders and communist state policies directed toward a mono-ethnic state, and 2) how to name the literature produced by new migrants – those who left Poland after the transformation and Poland's accession to the EU, in the wake of opening labour markets.

In the first area of literature under consideration which could be referred to as "migration literature," Bogusław Bakuła proposes that it opens up space for

[*Migration Narratives in Polish 20th and 21st Century Literature*], ed. Hanna Gosk (Kraków: Universitas 2011), 209-224; 210.

23 Urlich Beck, "Mobility and the Cosmopolitan Perspective," in *Tracing Mobilities: Contributions from the Cosmobilities Network*, ed. Weert Canzler, Vincent Kaufmann, Sven Kesserling (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008), 25-34; Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

> writing which presents the postwar reality of willed and forced mass migrations/displacements, and where the protagonist, apart from being an individual, becomes also a defined social or ethnic group; the plot develops in a time of national/local post-war reality.[24]

Much like Inga Iwasiów, Bakuła emphasises the historical and existential gravity "of deportations, repatriations and resettlements after the year 1945."[25] Inga Iwasiów classifies the literary records of this mass experience as several waves of narrative engagement: settlement, resettlement, and, eventually, neo-post-settlement narratives,[26] for both critics present a massive epic potential. According to Bakuła, the new northern and western borderlands (with the awareness of the political and historical complexity of this term) pose a "question about the grand topic of the Polish epic."[27] Inga Iwasiów likewise notices in the regionalism and locality of "neo-post-resettlement" narrations the new epic dimension, which combines the collective experience of history with the mobilization of forms of memory directed towards the revision of previous narrations (historical, ideological) on a collective and familial plane. These take shape of cross-generational transformations of memory to post-memory. The literature which emerges out of this intensive dialogue with the past is both a revision and a takeover; it "explains the protagonist's condition through the unspoken trauma of his ancestors,"[28] and, altogether, fits into the utopian plan of the monograph on resettlement literature, linking Polish and European literature across a broad comparative spectrum.

In the second area of migration literature "created outside of Poland,"[29] the prior category of "émigré literature" becomes problematic. It turns out to be inadequate for writing produced today, commonly referring to a historically closed period of subjection and political dependence. It refers, then,

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24 Bogusław Bakuła, "Między wygnaniem a kolonizacją. O kilku odmianach polskiej powieści migracyjnej w XX wieku (na skromnym tle porównawczym)," in: *Narracje migracyjne w literaturze polskiej XX i XXI wieku* [*Migration Narratives in Polish 20th and 21st Century Literature*], ed. Hanna Gosk (Kraków: Universitas 2011), 161-191; 164.

25 Ibid., 166.

26 Iwasiów, "Hipoteza," 209-210.

27 Bakuła, "Między wygnaniem," 166.

28 Iwasiów, "Hipoteza," 224.

29 A provisional category used by Małgorzata Zduniak-Wiktorowicz, *Współczesny polski pisarz w Niemczech – doświadczenie, tożsamość, narracja* [*The Contemporary Polish Writer in Germany – Experience, Identity, Narration*] (Poznań: Poznańskie Press, 2010), 11, to signal a debate going on about the category of "émigré literature."

to this kind of experience of oppressive history which is not present in writing after the collapse of communism, and, therefore, it is not driven by the specific ethos which made émigré literature unique. Małgorzata Zduniak-Wiktorowicz gives a thorough account of this terminological debate in her book *Współczesny polski pisarz w Niemczech – doświadczenie, tożsamość, narracja* [*The Contemporary Polish Writer in Germany – Experience, Identity, Narration*]. Considering the potential of the category of post-migration literature, the author stresses the revisionary effect of the prefix "post," following the debate in postcolonial criticism:

> The "post" is not here evidence of a parting with the key theme of emigration, but an invitation to view "phenomena taking place later," and hence remaining – also through direct negation – in a direct relation with the widely understood migrant condition.[30]

In addition, alongside the broad spectrum of affinities (the author mentions the inclusion of hybrid forms of identity in the new literature, as opposed to the dominant format of former migrant writing), the prefix "post" carries the necessity to overcome dependence.[31] In this way, as the author observes, the "post" not only encodes socio-political transformation, but also inscribes the reflection on (e)migration literature within the horizon of postdependence thought. The most important argument, however, for leaving behind the monolith of migration literature and, provisionally, terming the literature being produced outside of Poland's borders as "post," is the different status of the émigré writer from that which s/he used to have.

The other categories become relative. These migrants no longer think of themselves as exiles, but even this important difference of the pre-1989 literature can be activated again. After all, it's a matter of political situation, as changeable as the course of history. The ethos of émigré writing determined, above all, the writer as the one who has to give the word to the nation, an obligation earned through enjoying the space of freedom. The "post" loosens this determinism and makes room for a revision, or even rejection, of the ethos of émigré writing. Of course, the "post" still binds the writer composing from the "outside." The very theme of migration places the protagonist, narrator, the author's voice, etc., in a space limited by the polar ends of homeland/country/Polishness and the new country/new homeland/place (of temporary) relocation. The migrant identity is a mobilized identity – it becomes an active agent

30 Zduniak-Wiktorowicz, *Współczesny polski pisarz*, 15.

31 Ibid., 20.

in the life of a literary protagonist, regardless of his or her will. In post-émigré writing this bipolarity of the migrant condition is no longer absolute, and the identity mobilization takes on features of open play. What is at stake in attempts to settle on a new, adequate terminology for various fields of writing inspired by the experience of mobility is not a superficial innovativeness that seeks to name a new epoch, new terms, or new disciplines. Rather it is the creation of an adequate structure for literary and cultural reflection within the scope of migration problems; a structure which could show relations between various territories and forms of migration. However, because the term "post-émigré" would be overloaded with references which require in-depth knowledge from the reader and situate the new literature somewhat polemically in relation to the preceding period of émigré writing, the best choice seems to be "migrant literature," which indicates the condition of today's migration: fluid, intermittent, multidirectional, transgressing the former binary division of home and away (or the domestic and foreign), largely as a result of the global interconnectivity of the world.

The category of migration literature would combine clearly different yet reciprocally dialogic strands of writing the experience of resettlement/displacement, especially significant in the time of historical transformations, and parallel to émigré literature. Resettlement-settlement literature, along with its "neo-post" revisions and innovations, would then add to the store of migration writing a huge archive of multi-genre narrations about border crossing (of states, cultures, identities), determined by geopolitics which has a direct impact on the lives of whole communities. This thread also provides a sound comparative resource for references to other formerly communist countries which went through a similar process of developing their national politics and carried out an ethnic reshuffling of its population on a large scale. This could also work for references to political breakthroughs in postcolonial countries, in which the liberation from imperial rule often involved the development of nationalist politics resulting in resettlements of large population groups on the basis of their religion, ethnicity or language, bringing about large-scale trauma.[32] Migration literature which combines the genres of internal migration, émigré and post-émigré literature, shows that the component of displacement (uprooting, resettlement, bearing across) is essential to late modernity on local, regional and global levels simultaneously. As such, it represents a rich store of cognitive, affective and imaginative models of being in

32 Based on the example of the Indian subcontinent: the division of India between India and Pakistan, the Kashmiri separatism, the separation of Bangladesh (earlier: East Pakistan) from Pakistan – all these events resulted in vast migrations of people and stories about the ensuing trauma in memory and post-memory transgenerational writing.

a world where those for whom the idea of "place" as belonging and home has long stopped being a category that can be taken for granted.

The recognition that migrant writing in Poland has discernible postdependence traces and that it bears clear affinities to postcolonial literature prompt us to go further, in the direction of a comparativism which, one would like to suggest, is geopolitical. The task of such comparativism will seek to prove, within a broad territorial perspective (national literature, regional literature: Central and Eastern European, de/postcolonial)[33] that migration writing especially – the literature of resettlements/displacements – develops new forms of cosmopolitan imagination,[34] and cosmopolitan rootedness.[35] Therefore, it allows us to perceive new configurations of place as an interface between global and territorial spaces.[36]

In new migration literature a critic should be especially attuned to signals indicating the new worldliness which allows us to move beyond the polarity of the migrant and the nation, and to follow ideological, cultural, cognitive and affective routes which comprise our maps of belonging to the world. A migrant cosmopolitics is one of the most important projects emerging out of a comparative reading of literature produced by contemporary (e)migrants. "Politics," because migration involves a multifaceted crossing of borders, and this, in turn, is part of a broader geopolitics of mobility within which they must situate themselves. "Cosmo," because every border crossing is an act of opening oneself to the world, learning it and imagining what it is like, in a performative and material sense. Cosmopolitanism developed by migrants would therefore be different from that which we associate with privilege and high status. It would really be a process, not a state or an attribute defining a person priding themselves on an experience and knowledge of the world. Ulrich Beck suggests we study "the chains of cosmopolitinization,"[37]

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33 See Madina Tlostanova and Walter Mignolo, *Learning to Unlearn. Decolonial Reflections from Eurasia and the Americas* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2012), 83-121.

34 Appadurai, *Modernity*, 82-97; also "Grassroots Globalization and Research Imagination," in *Globalization*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 1-21; 8.

35 Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Cosmopolitan Patriots," in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, ed. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 91-114; also Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Cosmopolitan Reading," in *Cosmopolitan Geographies: New Locations in Literature and Culture*, ed. Vinay Dharwadker (London: Routledge, 2001), 222-223.

36 Urlich Beck, "Mobility," 26; also: "The Cosmopolitan Perspective: Sociology of the Second Age of Modernity," *The British Journal of Sociology* (2000): 79-105; 90.

37 Beck, "Mobility," 31.

which have been making up the world for a long time. They can be observed in the history of transcontinental trading routes, echoed in *The Glass Palace* and *The Sea of Poppies* by Amitav Ghosh, in migration routes preceding the contemporary globalisation and described by the same author in his studies on anthropology and literature (e.g. *The Imam and the Indian*). But these pre-global and alter-cosmopolitan worlds can also be observed in the routes (often cutting across mountain ranges) of provincial or peripheral cosmopolitanisms, examples of which can be seen, among others, in the prose by Andrzej Stasiuk and Olga Tokarczuk, or the transcontinental routes of post-Soviet, trans-Asian-European trade, epically embodied in Warsaw's Jarmark Europa. Those historical and contemporary circles of cosmopolitinization create forms of being in the world whose key feature turns out to be their often multi-locational rootedness.[38] This new migrant cosmopolitics develops on a cracked and unstable ground. In his novels, Salman Rushdie often uses the figure of migration as a certain state of being, in which a person who has decided to leave their homeland leaves behind the gravitational force of national belonging, and enters into a sphere of migrant weightlessness, "pitting levity against gravity."[39] This sometimes unbearable lightness of migrant being in the works of Rushdie (whose reference to Milan Kundera is obvious), as well as of many others, such as Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* or Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, is confronted with the gravitational pull of risk.

The world awareness developed by modern migrants in global flows that emerges out of the rich archive of texts circulating as world literature constitutes a comparative foundation for studies in the key thematic nodes of migrant writing. These are, especially: migration from areas of peripheral modernity[40] to countries representing the core of modernity; diasporas and their relations with home country and culture in a new formula of transnation,[41] migrant formations and nationalist identity mobilizations influencing the

38 Bruce Robbins, "Introduction Part I: The actually existing cosmopolitanism," in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, ed. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 1 – 19; also Arjun Appadurai, "Cosmopolitanism from Below," in *Globalization*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Durham: Duke University press, 2000).

39 Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (London: Viking Penguin, 1989), 3.

40 Crystal Bartolovich and Neil Lazarus, *Marxism, Modernity and Postcolonial Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 15; Neil Lazarus, "Cosmopolitanism and the Specificity of the Local in World Literature," *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature,* doi 10.1177/0021989410396037, 2011 46:119.

41 Bill Ashcroft, "Transnation," in *Rerouting the Postcolonial. New Directions for the New Millennium*, ed. Janet Wilson, Cristina Sandru, and Sarah Lawson-Welsh (London: Routledge, 2010), 72-86.

politics of home countries from a distance;[42] ebbs and flows of affect, especially manifest in the sense of alienation and belonging; and spaces of inferiority (refugee camps, transit camps, illegal settlements of illegal migrants), and subaltern subjects (the subaltern in various socio-cultural contexts: illegal workers, women, the disabled, the homeless, refugees without a defined status). In this sort of comparative context of migration literatures across languages and cultures we have a chance to capture the systemic form of the migrant condition and find points, or locations of agency, through which migrants claim their place in the world, creating their own environment and implement their own brand of cosmopolitics.

In Czerwiński's *Conductum Lifae* we encounter many instances of geopolitical irony, such as the one below which touches on a palimpsestial overlapping of colonial oppression:

> Generally speaking, Irishes and Angoles had a long-standing sadomasochistic relationship, which was clearly an unhappy one. Sorta like the flings Bulanda had with her exotic neighbours, all of whom had tried to fuck her over and turn her into soap or send her on holiday to Cyberia. But we never gave in. Anyone fit enough to run, ran away, abroad … Irishes had the same sorts of adventures, so I think that both nations should really be pleased to have found each other … Angoles were sooooo *inlove* with the Irishes that they left them a keepsake in the form of the English tongue. Bulanda's exotic neighbours also tried the same trick, but we never gave in, as I mentioned before. This is why today we all speak Polish and no one understands a word we say.[43]

Tracing the development of contemporary cosmopolitanism, diversified in class, cultural, ideological and cognitive terms in a mobile world of migrants, it is worth paying attention to the cultural and emotional/affective charge which characterises migrations from Central-Eastern Europe to the "Old" Europe. The writers I have quoted above – Dubravka Ugresić, Svetlana Boym, Milan Kundera, along with Czesław Miłosz, who should also be mentioned in this context – have always emphasized the Europeanness of their writing, based precisely on this cosmopolitan ideal of trans- and supra-national communication. Svetlana Boym actually identifies the nostalgia for Europe with the loss of cosmopolitan foundations, acutely felt by writers and intellectuals from Eastern Europe under communist regimes. She identifies in this longing an impetus for anti-communist resistance:

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42 Benedict Anderson, "Exodus," *Critical Inquiry* XX/1 (1994): 314-327.

43 Czerwiński, *Przebiegum*, 77-78.

> Europe was a transnational idea based on a civic ideal of the association of free cities. Sarajevo-Lubljana-Budapest-Belgrade-Zagreb-Plovidv-Timisoara-Bucharest-Prague-Krakow-Lvov/L'viv-Vilnius-Tallin-Leningrad/Petersburg-Gdansk/Danzig, the list can go on. Alternative-thinking urban-dwellers in these cities could find more in common among themselves than with their own countries. In the countries of the former Soviet bloc and Yugoslavia, nostalgia for Europe was a way of resisting the Soviet or Tito-style version of official internationalism as well as nationalism.[44]

However, at the time of post-communist transformations, the ethos of anti-communist cosmopolitanism realized as longing for Europe clashed rather painfully with reality, in which Central and Eastern Europe had a status of inferiority or subalternity, albeit implied rather than directly articulated. And it is this indefiniteness which pushes Eastern and Central, or postcommunist, Europe, to the peripheries. It becomes a border space of obscure fantasies, Oriental in nature, a phantasm of otherness, and a zone of unnamed void,[45] which can then be filled with uncontested knowledge. It is from this very space of amorphous borderland that "new barbarians" emerge to invade the old Europe. In this self-stereotyping, typified by Stasiuk's travelogues, we can sense a desire to wrench from a universal European subject its sole wielding of the naming power.

Reactive self-construction (self-stereotyping, self-Orientalisation, self-grotesqueness)[46] becomes the most frequent strategy of realizing this objective. In answer to the (probably) exaggerated, prejudiced or stereotyped presentation of migrants by the receiving society, the migrant anticipates this sort of gesture (or responds to widespread stereotypes), and adapts the stereotype as material for further processing. In the case of Czerwiński, self-stereotyping serves to emphasise a Candide-type of naivety in Gustaw, our protagonist, when confronted with the deterministic reality of being a migrant:

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44 Boym, *Nostalgia*, 228-229.

45 Bogdan Stefanescu, "Filling in the Historical Blanks: A Tropology of the Void in Postcommunist and Postcolonial Reconstructions of Identity," in *Postcolonial Europe? Essays on Post-Communist Literatures and Cultures*, ed. Dobrota Pucherova and Robert Gafrik (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi/Brill 2015), 107-120.

46 The list of titles could be very long, including Gombrowicz and Choromański, as for recent literature see, e.g., Brygida Helbig-Mischewski, *Anioły i świnie. W Berlinie 2005*; Leszek Oświęcimski, *Klub Kiełboludów*, 2002; in order to compare, see the documentary film *The Romanians Are Coming*, dir. James Bluemel, narrated by Alex Fechete Petru, Keo Films and Channel 4, documentary series February-March 2015; also, see Cristina Sandru in this volume.

> "And so, what sort of jobs are available to us in this country?"
> "What do you mean, what sort? Shit jobs."
> "With all due respect, friend, shit jobs are for shit people."
> "We are the shit people, dear friend. Us."[47]

Eventually, Gustaw acknowledges his status, but refuses to accept the fact that his real work – a script which weaves the Little Prince fairy tale into the life of Dublin migrants – will attract no interest precisely because it is written by a Pole. Konrad, the narrator, tries to explain this to him:

> We are here to clean their bogs and pick fag butts off their lawns. They don't need us to write their scripts for them! … I looked at him, he was completely *sadanddown* and looked as if I had killed his whole family or *sumfink*.[48]

Czerwiński develops a new linguistic system, a tour-de-force mixture of Polish and English based on "Ponglish" – a hybrid spoken by Poles away on the Isles. This interim language caught in-between two systems and always in becoming develops as a powerful form of creative expression. It is a medium which shows that migration is more often than not a clash of incommensurabilities, and the decision to emigrate is usually as necessary as it can be nonsensical (semantically, not in terms of its value, etc.). A migrant in *Conductum Lifae* is a person who is (mis)guided by an excessive amount of imagination and a deficient sense of reality. This reality has some very painful experience in store for the migrant caught unawares: from the Irish weather, perceived by Czerwiński's protagonist as utter insanity, water taps, enigmatically separate, unlike anywhere on the Continent, and, last but not least, the Irish idiom of the English language, which the Pole perceives as under-articulated, chaotic and incomprehensible. The intense self-stereotyping by Polish migrants observable in new migration literature is paralleled by the tendency to stereotype the British and the Irish. The dialogue between Gustaw and Konrad (the eventual narrator-inheritor of Gustaw's legacy), which they engage in as a form of early morning entertainment on the Luas train, involves both stereotyping and self-stereotyping. Gustaw and Konrad represent in this dialogue stereotypical Englishmen speaking about Poles:

> They speak English and try to pretend to be British, parodying the posh accent and tone of English upper classes. The conversation sort of reminds us of Monty

47 Czerwiński, *Przebiegum*, 87.

48 Ibid., 262.

> Python sketches … GUSTAW: Oh my god! Such barbarians. KONRAD: Yes, my dear friend. But that's not all. They only have the one tap in their washrooms! GUSTAW: You don't say! No wonder then that their entry into our good old Europe required some concessions … GUSTAW: … If we compared Europe to a human being, these folk would surely be its hands.[49]

The stereotype works as an excess of representational strategy, which helps overcome a national discourse weighing heavy on the migrant writer. Consequently, in the process of a dialogic exposure of each community's vices (true or imagined), it opens up new possibilities for intercultural dialogue which can be based on such performative references to stereotypes. This is not communication controlled by the demands of the abstract politics of multiculturalism, but multiculturalism that lives also through contention and an (almost) off-limit bantering.

The receiving country relates itself to the incoming communities through a politics of naming that involves a broad spectrum of possibilities determining the migrant as the other. Regardless of whether it be an inclusive, open discourse, or stereotyping bordering on hate speech, one thing characterises it: the naming politics freezes the other, who, in its function of strengthening the subject who holds the naming power, usually remains unchanged, enclosed in its tangibility. Inga Iwasiów, commenting on the usefulness of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theories for Polish feminist discourse, writes that

> within the framework of emancipatory discourses we are able to understand our own multidimensionality, we accept the postulates of diversity, but we do not grant this privilege to the "Other," who remains a phantasmatic being.[50]

The contemporary migrant (or an author who makes a migrant the protagonist of her/his narrative) is relatively well conversant with the mechanisms of the discourse of "othering," and, what is more, is keen to make use of them himself. In this way, the phantasmatic aspect of the Other becomes reciprocal and gains dialogic qualities: it is neither "I," constructed against the backdrop the Other defined by me, who remains the main authority, nor the phantasm itself which, in a gesture of generosity is granted the position of the subaltern. These are, rather, phantasms which construct each other reciprocally

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49 Ibid., 177-178.

50 Inga Iwasiów, *Granice. Polityczność prozy i dyskursu kobiet po 1989 roku* [*Borders: the Politics of women's prose and discourse after 1989*] (Szczecin: Uniwersytet Szczeciński, 2013), 45.

through a dialogue based on picking ever more choice morsels from a pot of finely spiced stereotypes in order, probably, to create one's own, autonomous combination.

This is meant as a proposition of a pragmatic approach to self-Orientalising or self-stereotyping vagaries abundant in Polish literature thematizing border-crossing and clashes with Western Europe. It would therefore be a counterpoint to accusations levelled against new migration literature that self-stereotyping is a technique which exposes nothing less than a surrender to self-colonisation,[51] and an acceptance, without protest or struggle, of the position of inferiority allocated to us by "substitution hegemon," meaning Western Europe.[52] Clearly, the playful representation of oneself as a freakish malformation of the model Europeanness (see fantastical projections penned by Stasiuk in *On the Road to Babadag* and *Fado*), or even as an awkward European Other (such as in *A Girl Called Przystupa* by Grażyna Plebanek, where the titular heroine is an anthropologically defined subject located on the borders between intellectual disability and a scapegoat) are indeed manifestations of an internalised and largely unconscious debasement lingering in the wake of the Soviet subjection. It does influence the Polish sense of subalternity in relation to Europe. However, the strategy of reclaiming the stereotype for the purpose of returning the othering gaze marks the beginning of its subversion and, eventually, undoing.

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51 For the discussion of self-colonization as a form of escapism from the challenges of independence see Alexander Kiossev, "Notes on Self-Colonizing Cultures," in Ginev, Dimitŭr, Francis Sejersted, and Kostadinka Simeonova, 1995. *Cultural aspects of the modernization process*. Oslo: TMV-senteret., and his "The Self-Colonizing Metaphor," in *Atlas of Transformation*, http://monumenttotransformation.org/atlas-of-transformation/html/s/self-colonization/the-self-colonizing-metaphor-alexander-kiossev.html, accessed 16 May 2016; Tomasz Zarycki, *Ideologies of Eastness in Central and Eastern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2014), 79-80; Viacheslav Morozov, *Russia's Postcolonial Identity. A Subaltern Empire in a Eurocentric World* (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2015), 31-32; Emilia Kledzik, "Ironia postkolonialna. Język politycznej poprawności jako tworzywo literackie," [Postcolonial irony. The language of political correctness as literary device] in *Dyskurs postkolonialny we współczesnej literaturze i kulturze Europy* Środkowo-Wschodzniej [*Postcolonial Discourse in Contemporary Central-Eastern European Literature and Culture*], ed. Bogusław Bakuła, Dagmara Dabert, Emilia Kledzik (Poznań: Biblioteka Porównań, 2015), 325-346; 335.

52 Dariusz Skórczewski interprets self-stereotyping as proof of the East-Central European subject's sense of inferiority, and this in turn as a symptom of the unresolved burden of colonial subjection: "Ambivalence of this sort [contempt and admiration for the hegemony] is a phenomenon characteristic of the fundamental features of peoples who are subject to foreign domination across all latitudes." Dariusz Skórczewski, *Teoria – Literatura – Dyskurs. Pejzaż postkolonialny*, [*Theory-Literature-Discourse. The Postcolonial Landscape*] (Lublin: KUL, 2013), 310.

But how to empirically prove the interpretive approach which claims that self-stereotyping is a symptom of surrender to colonisation, if the majority of Polish migrants rather proudly display their national pride? Mixing national pride with nostalgia for the Polish cuisine, the Polish migrant populates the local landscape with specialty shops. While we can all understand the importation of sausages, dumplings, pickled cabbage and gherkins, because these are our national "coordinates," the demand for Polish UHT milk, canned peas or instant Vietnamese noodles featuring in any Polish food section in Tesco, Sainsbury's or Carrefour in Great Britain, forces us to consider the psychological mechanisms behind such nostalgia. I would claim, instead, that we have evidence here for the durability of romantic models of national identity, reawakened among migrants to fill in the nostalgic space, rather than manifestations of unchallenged self-colonisation. Literary representations featuring the playful use of self-stereoptyping indicate the need to cope with the difficult migrant reality through the poetics of satire, through the ironical reworking of the victim syndrome, and, most of all, the need to struggle with the temptations of national megalomania which worm into the minds and hearts of Polish migrants. In the works by Piotr Czerwiński, nostalgia of this kind is used instrumentally and does not escape an ironical commentary:

> from time to time, I would drag myself to the Russo-Polo mini-mart Rusałka on Meath, in order to buy a few kefir drinking yoghurts to battle my hangovers … I didn't traipse all this way to the other end of Europe in order to go buying Polish nosh, but let's be honest, kefir is one of those Eastern inventions which has not yet reached this part of the world, and so I thanked the Almighty that he had helped import kefir to this land of bayobongo along with our proud nation.[53]

The literature produced by Polish migrants to the British Isles and Ireland after Poland's accession to the EU in 2004 displays certain set features of migrant writing. This is, first of all, the need to respond to national discourses (identity and historical constructs, often interpreted as oppressive),[54] and to launch a dialogue with literary traditions. The new migrant literature also features new elements: an active commentary about the culture of the

53 Czerwiński, *Przebiegum*, 272-273.

54 Struggling with a very essentialist, if rather stereotypically delivered, Polishness is the focus of a novel by A.M. Bakalar, *Madame Mephisto* (2012). The protagonist, tired of the oppressive Polishness embodied by her mother, is an émigré to Britain living in London. She becomes involved in global cannabis production and contraband, which functions in the novel as leverage against the limiting nationness, and becomes a symbol of freedom and cosmopolitan initiation.

receiving country, including stereotypical representations of its inhabitants as some kind of a (postcolonial in principle) tactic of taking vengeance, and a conscious appropriation of the English language in the process of creating a new, hybrid literary language. This is how the migrant "Ponglish," reflecting the everyday, naturally hybridised way of communication in which there is no time to separate languages in a disciplined translation, achieves the status of an autonomous literary language, like pidgin in Caribbean literature.

A survey of self-presentation strategies in the new cultural and social contexts of receiving countries would be most revealing if it encompassed all countries in which migration literature is produced by Poles (including all of the languages in which it is produced). Such synthesizing, cumulative research is yet to be done; meanwhile, criticism is dominated by territorial tendencies. Necessary for building a coherent image of literature as a system inscribed in political, social and cultural realities, territoriality in research on migrant literature can also have an effect of isolating such motifs, themes or strategies of representation which would create new entities on the comparative plane. Border reality would be, in the case of migrant literature, such a crucial category begging a comparative investigation. The working of the border of states, languages, habitats and everyday realities experienced by the migrant subject becomes the basis for creating diasporas as self-aware and self-made communities. Bringing together these territories of literature within a broader comparative horizon will be of key importance in research on how Polish migration writing develops an awareness of a globalised world and its often surprising discontinuities, and whether it creates a supra-territorial whole. From a transnational and transcultural perspective, migration turns out to be a new, global socio-cultural system. This might seem like an obvious statement to make, but it poses a substantial challenge in terms of methodology – how to study a system of global mobility, and alongside it, how to study imaginations and imaginaries, politics, and contacts across differences. Global perspectives have the tendency to metonymically generalise specific examples, while local and territorial presentations, shutting out a possibility to look at complex networks of connections brought about by globalization, tend to limit the analyses of migrations into a no-longer sufficient binary format defined by relations between old and new homelands. The global context of contemporary migration patterns usually functions in our awareness as an image of scale. However, globalisation is also made up of migration trajectories and behaviour styles typical of corporate employment and mass cultures, as well as the completely non-marginal mobile diasporas and nomadic labour.

The mass migration to Britain and Ireland after Poland's accession to the EU will undoubtedly produce a gigantic archive. For the time being, this is literature in the making, and any attempts at a synthesis, including evaluation,

can be only speculative. What is of interest in this prose and poetry is a unique form of cosmopolitanism, or cosmopolitics, emerging from critical observations of the new migrant environment. In Czerwiński's novels, seeking an epic dimension as a format for a cosmopolitan perspective produces interesting results. In *Conductum Lifae* this epic effect is achieved through a metafictional narrative framework. The everyday migrant experience is characterised by recurrent schemas of senselessness. These are translated into a hybrid language, because it is the only tool the migrant can use to play at self-indigenization (performed as self-stereotyping and self-Orientalization):

> What else can you talk about when you're a fake tourist from Bulanda … The weather was not a good enough topic for chats, because in the land of bayobongo there was no weather as such, considering it did the very same thing every day. "Dchob" was no good either, because how long can you debate the shifting of sello-taped cartons, stacking them on trolleys, pushing trolleys for so many metres and then tossing said cartons into Jabba's gob? … No shit, men, this ain't no goddam legit topic for the kurva writing of kurva books.[55]

In this tedious, timeless present, inscribing one's life in grand narratives such as *The Little Prince* and (with some resistance and irony) *Forefather's Eve* secures for it a narrative flow and, with this, a chance for a *telos*: sense and closure to look forward to. Gustaw writes, and this is the only activity he engages in with full awareness and passion. The migrant writing Gustaw produces has the potential to become a transformative power in thinking about the migrant condition. However, it will be so only if, out of the claustrophobic, crowded everyday of migrant life (krapi haus, Luas, hopeless employment agencies and the very lowest level of Gustaw's *de profundis*, by which we mean the enigmatic factory whose aim is not to manufacture, but to decompose and disassemble, and where middle management is, in a fashion typical for Ireland in the eyes of Gustaw/Konrad, semi-literate) will emerge, organically, a cosmopolitical project as a form of understanding of the world through micro-practices of resistance against domination by the resident majority. This sounds revolutionary, yet what is at stake is not so much a coup as the kind of writing and reading of migrant narratives which brings to the fore an outline of transnationalism[56] and transnation[57] active there. We can envisage these forms as a

55 Czerwiński, *Przebiegum*, 270.

56 *Minor Transnationalism,* ed. Francoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 1–23.

57 Ashcroft, "Transnation," 73.

> space for exchange and involvement wherever processes of hybridisation occur and where there still exists the possibility of cultures emerging and appearing outside a ruthlessly necessary mediation from the centre.[58]

A transnation would therefore be a non-systemic complex of new forms of diasporic consciousness, developing not only in relation to the majority, but also against the backdrop of other diasporas, and in response to globalising dangers from the corporate capital, but also as a way to foreclose the chances of empowerment and agency offered by globalizing processes.

In new migration prose written after 2004, the subaltern migrant portrait dominates. The migrant story, even if s/he is confined to the space of subalternity, steadily develops a discourse of transnational cosmopolitics. And we are not talking here about how the protagonists of new migration prose are seduced by the charms of multiculturalism, but how they surrender to inevitable processes of hybridisation and creolisation, even if they abide by migrant patriotism manifested mostly as culinary nostalgia (attachment to Polish flavours and products). Migration writing takes place on the level of the clearly marked everyday (where what is "new" is often presented via the poetics of estrangement and exaggeration), overlapping with the level of transnational discourses circulating in global networks. Processes of hybridisation and creolisation take place on both levels. On the one hand, frequently occurring strategies of self-stereotyping inscribe the image of Polish migrant in a two-dimensional structure of Self/Other, albeit with the additional complication that the self is the Other as projected by the Other, who, in turn, is not a model "self" (the subject of a receiving society, calling the migrant an alien/Other), but is Other to an Other it projects. On the other hand, this fixed format is only strategic. It is not an aim in itself, but, rather, it provides the grounds for a wider context which, due to the narrative form we can call the "epic," and, considering its ideology, is cosmopolitical.

The incommensurabilities encountered by migrants in their new homelands are certainly one of the most interesting and culturally productive experiences for people who have decided to leave their country of origin and start a new life abroad. The everyday provides a rich repertoire of wonder, be it in the cityscape, or in a social or domestic environment. Interestingly, in recent migrant writing, migration is not a forward move in time – the migrant cannot see any specific civilizational difference in relation to their own country (Czerwiński actually plays with reversing the civilizational unevenness between East and West). The difference dwells in the political and social. In postcolonial migration narratives newcomers from (former) colonies have the

58 Lionnet and Shu-Mei Shih, *Transnationalism*, 5.

opportunity to become aware, in the most material dimension, of the chasm between the metropolis as the centre for dispensing meaning, and their own country – a (former) colony as a periphery without any sort of semiotic influence.[59] In Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses,* the protagonist, Saladin Chamcha, recalls his first days in a public English school as a nightmare of not knowing cultural codes. The most traumatising example of being beyond metropolitan know-how is kipper – a curious instance of the traditional English breakfast and, at the same time, a metaphor for England itself. The kipper, like England, is accessible only to the initiated. In Czerwiński's writing, the migrant knowledge progresses from a total bemusement to concessions to hybrid forms. Thus Gustaw notes a range of culturally significant trivia – "he was experiencing his first close encounter with Irish plumbing and delighted in the magical sink with two separate taps. One of them produced water which was ice cold, the other boiling hot liquid"[60] – plays at estrangement, phonetically transcribing the Irish English to make it function as an exotic curio, and moves on to hybrid spaces, which is especially evident in the linguistic sphere. The indomitable hybridisation of languages which the narrator succumbs to, claiming it self-ironically as a means of artistic expression, aside from the obvious aesthetic and rhetorical effect, has a key significance for the novel's cosmopolitics. "All of it was making him the most damnable nutter to ever walk the milk'n'honey land of bayobongo."[61] From time to time this Anglo-Polish inter-language is mixed in with some other culturally determined borrowings, and articulates the cosmopolitics of (un)translatability. Hybridization makes language both defamiliarized and more familiar. As such, it remains the only way of delivering the complexity of migrant experience. Hybridization holds in check narcissistic optimism with which a migrant is equipped on arrival to the new Promised Land; it also opens up the locked zones of subalternity in which the migrant seems to have no chance but to be confined, and delineates directions for a utopian, yet necessary, futurity. It involves not only the language, but the whole system of representation – the narrator reaches out in his inter-language for an unfathomable archive of popular culture, speaks in lines from song lyrics, film scripts (*Star Wars*, an essential generational and escapist-utopian frame of reference), and literature. Literary allusions are

59 See. V.S. Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* (London: Andre Deutsch 1967); Jamaica Kincaid, "On Seeing England for the First Time," *Transition* 51 (1991): 32-51; George Lamming, "The Occasion for Speaking," in *The Pleasures of Exile,* ed. Gearge Lamming (London: Pluto Classics, 2005 (1960)), 23-50.

60 Czerwiński, *Przebiegum*, 70.

61 Ibid., 24.

a part of this inter-language in the same way as language proper; together with other references they form a trans-linguistic and trans-national (in the sense of cutting across cultures and national traditions, more or less communicated through stereotypes or ironic simplifications) consciousness, and, with it, a critical cosmopolitics.

The cosmopolitical epic, perhaps – because this seems to be a genre, postulated by Bogusław Bakuła and Inga Iwasiów, we have arrived at in considering contemporary migrant writing – is not exhausted by the migrant reality here (there) and now. In his novel *Internation* (2011), Czerwiński develops this vision as macro-utopia. Poland is envisaged there as a nation borne on a far-off island of the history of outcast homelessness. Poles, a globally discarded nation, settle down on a deserted archipelago and go through a period of poverty whose only source of dignity is the cherished fetish of independence: "Poles had sweet f.a. to their name, well, that along with beetroot crops and of course their independence."[62] This nowhere space attracts those whom likewise "nobody else on the planet wanted in those days either," including the phosphorescent Biker-boys from Bikini, feeding on their nucleo-foodstuffs.[63] When the islands, which Poles happily cohabit with others like them, turn out to be a rich source of uranium, the only power-source used in this fictional future, the land of poverty is raised suddenly to the "uncritically unhealthy levels of wellbeing." Due to a lack of labour (Poles, as the owners of the uranium mines, have no reason to actually work in them; they are too rich to bother), the job market is opened to the English, a people inhabiting a poor, backward island of North-Western Europe

> which became the biggest victim of the global economic collapse, therefore no longer had anything at all to offer that was of value to western civilisation … the English mostly wandered the world, looking for work where they could, where they would be allowed entry, and also in countries where they wouldn't.[64]

Unfortunately, this quasi-idyll heads towards an apocalyptic end, related by a narrator from Atoll 44. This futuristic-prophetic fantasy could be seen as a "writing back with a vengeance,"[65] as it reverses the roles of those in power and those subject to the power, providing an ironical twist to the real migrant/receiving country relations. However, the vengeance framed as self-apocalyptic vision is hardly a triumph, and functions more as satire and ironic warning.

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62 Piotr Czerwiński, *Międzynaród* [*Internation*] (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 2011), 29.

63 Ibid., 30.

64 Ibid., 48-49.

65 Salman Rushdie, "The Empire Writes Back with a Vengeance," *The Times*, July 3, 1982.

Conclusions: Cosmopolitics as Futurity

The retaliatory fantasy in *Internation* remains connected to the subaltern cosmopolitics from *Conductum Lifae.* Taken together, these two novels lean towards a new cosmopolitanism of migrant writing ranging from recording an awareness of subaltern subjects to the agonistic voice in cosmopolitical projects. The migrants presented in the works of Czerwiński, as well as in many other writings, are completely alienated – they have no access to intercultural communication, despite living in multicultural societies; the position and space they occupy are marginal and meant to remain an invisible sphere of bare survival at a cost of great effort; the local (native, as Czerwiński likes to say) culture is perceived through the exoticizing gaze as an idiosyncrasy of primitive peoples. Migrants are also trapped in their displaced, and grotesquely distorting Polishness. They are fully aware of how pathetic and hopeless this fragmented phantasm is, sustained only by self-replicating stereotypes.

Self-expression seems to be the only way to break free from the claustrophobic inferiority felt by migrants. Multilingualism, or the dynamic Anglo-Polish inter-language, a trademark of *Conductum Lifae*, allows them to perforate the border between mutual lack of understanding and the untranslatability of languages. At the same time, this hybrid and hybridizing form of expression opens (itself up to) cultural difference as an opportunity for a productive and transformative experience. In *Conductum Lifae,* the experience of migration eventually (probably) destroys the migrant, because he does not manage to find vent for his communicative urge. Gustaw does not accept the world in which the place for the migrant is defined and fixed. Writing the script is his own project of self-cosmopolitinization and, simultaneously, a strategy of survival. However, for such a project to succeed, Gustaw would need to be able to overcome the institutional barriers. In his case, the hybrid migrant language does not offer escape from an alienating condition through the transformative power of artistic expression. Instead, it comes down to a recycling of discarded language scraps reminiscent of the waste processed in the enigmatic factory where he works. Gustaw vanishes, having the choice to either disappear or remain in the abject zone assigned to migrants. In this context, the futurity *Internation* develops as a speculative "writing back"- style fantasy about a reversed (and, in line with the overall style of the book, wildly exaggerated) order of domination, turns out, above all, to be a cosmopolitical, timeless deliberation on the idea that history's unchangeable format is age after age of (locally variable) domination by one group of another in the mad dash towards the apocalypse.

Borbála Faragó

"More Edges, Less Words": Memory and Trauma in Wioletta Grzegorzewska's Poetry

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Svante Lindberg argues that literature can play a mediating role in the two-way communication between host and origin.[1] The focus of migration studies is often on origins, which are explored and exoticised. Sometimes we also have a blind spot about migration as a historical process and prefer to concentrate on the moment of immigration or emigration. The shock of leaving one's home is a crucial aspect of the migration narrative, particularly for those who suffer hardship in the process, but a migrant, or transnational, identity is shaped in a continuum, rather than an episode. Therefore the benefits of looking at migration as a process embedded in historicity and memory are numerous. Migrants' narratives have their places among similar narratives, and are historically embedded within a larger public story. This continuity is often overlooked, particularly when it comes to kindred narratives shared by different ethnicities. The purpose of

1 Svante Lindberg, "Simon Harel's *Les passages obliges l'écriture migrante* and "The Question of Migrant Literature as Intercultural Mediator in Quebec," *Transforming Otherness*, ed. Jason Finch and Peter Nynäs (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2011), 62.

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my paper is to investigate poetic manifestations of memory, especially trauma or pain memory, in a selection of texts written by Wioletta Grzegorzewska.

The representation of pain and loss in literature is never straightforward: the path from experience to imagination is circuitous and indirect, which is evidenced also by the reading process. Traumatic events are often difficult to recall, and writers often struggle to remember and tell stories of violence. There seems to be a fracture between traumatic experience and linguistic expression. Linearity often fails, and the unspeakable horrors of trauma can destroy narrative coherence. Words, metaphors and signs can trigger flashbacks for a traumatized writer. However, as Kali Tal argues,

> like the survivor, the non-traumatized reader has at his or her disposal the entire cultural "library" of symbols, myth, and metaphor, but she or he does not have access to the meanings of the sign that invoke traumatic memory.[2]

This is why the ethics of reading comes to the fore in trauma literature. Traumatic experiences and memories written on the page might activate visceral reactions in a traumatized reader, while a non-traumatised reader might feel like an intruder into someone else's intensely personal space. But whatever way we read, Kali Tal argues rightly that "the literature of trauma holds at its centre the reconstruction and recuperation of traumatic experience,"[3] which requires vigilant empathy from any reader. Therefore, interpretation needs to become sensitised to affect: transcultural melancholy, loss and trauma are best met with empathy, not scrutiny.

Not many scholarly works compare the literary output of different ethnicities across the ages, on the assumption that ethnicity and a shared contemporaneous experience govern narrative threads. While there is obviously truth in this when you look at countries of origin (we can assume that the experience of 21st-century migrants from Nigeria will bear similarities, although one cannot ignore economic circumstances, either), the shared experience of the migration process, of the development of a transnational identity, might be more similar across ethnicities and history than we might think. However, these parallels surface on the micro level of the individual rather than in the macro narratives of ethnicities or origin. This is a particularly poignant issue in relation to migration trauma. Although life experiences might be similar, there are examples of staking claims on ethnic grounds to trauma narratives.

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2 Kali Tal, *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1996), 16.

3 Ibid., 17

This can lead to exoticising, and to the patronising of certain ethnic groups, offering sympathy to the collective, rather than empathy to the individual narrative. In agreement with Lindberg, I therefore believe that to really "understand that traumatic theme, one needs to descend to the micro-level of human relationships and listen to the individual," where the "real transcultural politics takes place."[4]

It is important to emphasise, however, that migration does not automatically equate with traumatic experience. In today's world of easy travel, transnational movement is a positive and reinforcing experience, especially if supported by adequate financial and family circumstances. Nevertheless, it would also be a mistake to discount the association that exists between migration and trauma. To understand this link better, it is important to define more precisely both these terms. Migration is understood here as movement (voluntary or involuntary) between two distinct jurisdictions, crossing international borders and relocating for an extended period of time in a foreign country. This wide definition incorporates refugees, asylum seekers, economic migrants and voluntary migrants who chose to live somewhere else. There is no assumption that it is the migration experience *per se* that is traumatic. Trauma is defined in this paper as a personal experience of pain, an event or series of events that overwhelms the individual and that often resists linguistic representation. The emphasis is very much on the individual. Trauma narratives are always memory narratives and therefore raise the question of why and how events are remembered, rather than what exactly is remembered. It could be argued that trauma narratives are best investigated from the perspectives of experience and memory. This, however, raises further questions. How are personal or collective experiences remembered and represented?

Memories are what narratives of experience are based on. However, the act of remembering can destabilise narratives as well as authenticate them. This means that remembering is always conditional on the present moment. Representations of memories are necessarily interpretations of past events. This is particularly true in the case of representing life stories, where the present moment constructs a narrative unity out of snippets of memory. What we remember is influenced by social and psychological factors – we learn what is good to remember and what is not, and also what we can and cannot forget. Memories are also embedded in cultural and political contexts and they are inter-subjective: we share memories with, and also for, people. However, when it comes to trauma, the processes of remembering are somewhat reconfigured. Traumatic events are often difficult to recall, and, as Julia Watson argues, writers often struggle to remember and tell stories of violence.

4 Lindberg, "Harel's *Les passages*," 62.

> For some narrators, the problem of recalling and re-creating a past life involves organizing the inescapable but often disabling force of memory and negotiating its fragmentary intrusions with increasing, if partial, understanding. For some, language fails to capture, or engage, or mediate the horrors of the past and the after-effects of survival.[5]

The process of reading has, as Watson explains, an added layer of functionality in trauma literature. As readers we have to attend to the role of remembering and forgetting in the act of interpreting the past and present. This means that the reading reflects on the remembering process, and the records of acts of interpretation, and that it remains sensitised to the personal, familial and communal aspects of forgetting and remembering.[6]

The representation of personal traumatic experience is of course often the authenticator of literary works, especially those that claim autobiographical content. Written experiences seem immediate; however, they are always, as Watson argues, mediated through memory and language, and as such they become an "interpretation of the past and of our place in a culturally and historically specific present."[7] Furthermore, it is arguably experience that constitutes the speaking subject. Autobiographical subjects do not predate experience. In our example, the identity category of migrant is created by the experience of migration, and this subjectivity influences the narration of that experience. But if experience defines subjectivity, we can further argue that language produces knowledge about experience. The discourse of migration, for example, becomes the language through which migrant subjects understand and experience themselves. (This is the reason why media representations can have such damaging influence, as exemplified by the Irish media's constant usage of the term "non-national" in relation to migrants – an obviously negative and exclusionary definition).[8] Experience also exists in a narrative context, which means that it is within a story that experience is represented. However, all narratives are open for interpretation, and interpretation is not always offered by the narrator of the experience. The reading process is therefore also an authenticator that can revise or reinterpret the presented experience.

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5 Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 27-28.

6 Ibid., 30.

7 Ibid., 31.

8 On this subject see Gavan Titley, "No Apologies for Cross-Posting: European Trans-media Space and the Digital Circuitries of Racism," *Crossings: Journal of Migration & Culture* 5 (2014).

Of course, authenticity is a huge issue when it comes to trauma. Narrators of trauma have an investment in the credibility of their stories. Readers are explicitly or implicitly invited to consider the narrator as a "uniquely qualified authority"[9] who compels the reader to believe in the veracity and authenticity of the experience. This is seen clearly when an author appeals for authority on the basis of an identity claim, such as "refugee" or "asylum seeker" or "exile." The reader, however, can also project these authenticating identity categories that surface within biographical background information, which of course raises several issues about the methodology and ethics of reading. I think this is particularly the case when we read poetry, or other non-narrative based works, where the reconstruction of experience is even more of a joint project between reader and writer. As readers we have to be aware of our expectations: do we want our migrant writers to authenticate their narratives in any way? And, more significantly, do we expect authoritative and verifiable migrant narratives from migrant authors?

To summarise, the empathetic reading I advocate should be alive to the complexities of the relationship between experience and memory, the influence of trauma in constructing narratives, and the reader's positionality *vis-a-vis* the text.

The poems of Wioletta Grzegorzewska consider these questions on both micro and macro levels. Her collection *Pamięć Smieny/Smena's Memory*[10] (read here in English translation for the purpose of occupying the position of her readers in her host country)[11] focuses on the role of memory in the process of identity creation. One of the ways in which remembering destabilizes narratives is its representation of time. And time is something that Grzegorzewska's poems constantly touch upon. Whether it is the past, present or future, time is represented as mutable, ungraspable, and destabilising. Her poem "Half Term" ["Ferie"][12] takes a seemingly nostalgic look back to a childhood winter memory, where the speaker is sliding down a frozen hillside, "entranced" and excited, hoping that "the whole half term will be like this." However, this desire to capture the moment of happiness dissipates in the last stanza, where the sun fades and

9 Watson and Smith, *Reading*, 33-34.

10 Wioletta Grzegorzewska, *Pamięć Smieny/Smena's Memory*, trans. Marek Kazmierski (London: Off Press, 2011).

11 *Smena's Memory* was published in the UK as a bilingual edition, poems translated by Marek Kazmierski.

12 Grzegorzewska, *Pamięć*, 11.

Someone shouts: – Get home! – so we get.
Eyes freezing over like tiny planets.

"Eyes," one of our main organs of perception, are in constant movement. We cannot stay long in the moment of observation – we need to wink, look away. Memories, on the other hand, create an illusion of permanence: we retrieve images as frozen snippets of time, believing that they capture the essence of the feeling that accompanied the visual experience. The image of eyes as frozen planets depict the impossibility of authentic recall: the act of remembering retrieves some aspects of the true experience we lived through, but the life is gone from these. In this poem the central metaphor, the "home" that the children return to, is lost in the process of remembering, just as the snow melts and the sun fades away.

The relationship between experience and memory is also explored in the poem "Smena's Memory" ["Pamięć Smieny"][13] The title, as the Afterword of the volume explains, refers to "A Russian camera produced by the firm Smena [that] possessed no memory."[14] Cameras take snapshots, but experience is not lived through stills. Experience is continuous and multifaceted: we see, we hear, we feel – and we process and understand later. A frozen image is therefore always a false memory, because it cannot recreate the continuity of experience. The central theme of Grzegorzewska's poem is the discrepancy between the intention to preserve experience through taking pictures, and the failure to do so. The first stanza opens with the words "She left me," already suggesting loss. The parting gift of the unnamed woman is "two pictures and the suspicion / that something other than blood lines connect us." The focus is on the relationship, which is impossible to contain within a pictorial frame. Mutability becomes the central focus of the next two lines:

Perhaps a susceptibility to become emotional quickly,
Something she captured with a Soviet-made camera.

However, "becoming" cannot be "captured" in stasis, only in movement, paradox and ambivalence. But where the photo fails, language succeeds: words like "perhaps," "become" and "quickly" recreate the sense of transience that the poet attempts to infuse into her personal interpretation of memory.

13 Ibid., 91.

14 Karol Malszewski, afterword to *Smena's Memory* by Wioletta Grzegorzewska (London: Off Press, 2011), 109.

The second stanza – in some ways the central part of the poem – portrays the subjective understanding of time in memory:

> Her hair turned darker at First Communion.
> The wristwatch she received as a gift squeaked.
> A wee spring broke. Time racing
> past her first period. A pained
> childhood which did not heal with time.

"Pain" suggests a suspension of linear, liveable time, where the undisturbed growth of childhood is replaced by the brokenness of subjective experience. These lines are foreboding, and words like "darker," "squeak," "broke" – and the connotation of blood in "period" – suggest trauma and loss. Trauma, as Cathy Caruth explains, following Freud, is a "wound of the mind," which

> is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that … is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor.[15]

Whether the poem references trauma or lesser pain suffered, the sense of suspended time is aptly exposed in the above lines. The last stanza portrays a dull, adult life where the woman "began to wake" from a monotonous existence lived "out of sheer habit." It is left unclear, however, whether this awakening was enough to diminish the childhood pain described in the previous stanza. In fact, the closing line of the poem, "can finity become a drag?" suggests fatigue, and the idea that maybe the awakening contained not a fresh start, but a new awareness of the awfulness of her situation. The experience of emotionality that the Russian camera tries and fails to preserve is therefore recreated as memory in flux in the ambivalent, flowing lines of the poem.

Creating meaning of the past is the topic of "All About My Father" ["Wszystko o moim ojcu"],[16] a longish poem that tentatively attempts to formulate a memory of the speaker›s father. The title promises an all-encompassing description, leaving nothing out, as it were. The father is named and explained in a variety of ways, ranging from "warrior" to "love-seat onanist," "bee-keeper" or "lord of hypochondriacs." Alternating between third-person

15 Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 4.

16 Grzegorzewska, *Pamięć*, 81.

and second-person evocation, the speaker attempts to approach the memory of her father from a variety of perspectives, her confident recollections undermined by the line "if memory serves right," which is dispersed throughout the text. The fragility of remembering permeates this poem and complements the frailty of the father's ageing body. The poem concludes with a sweeping description of a larger-than-life character, a "farming Don Juan," whose personality is too big for a coherent recollection. The closing couplet, "Let this light blue kingfisher be damned for all time / for digging his nest deep within your weak heart" offers an enigmatic metaphor for remembering. The locus of memory is exactly within the heart of the loved ones we remember – what we recall are arbitrary, fleeting moments of connection, appearing and disappearing as fast as a kingfisher's catch. Remembering can be painful, and by recalling a lost loved one's life we inevitably evoke their death as well. Memory, no matter how beautiful, like the bird in this poem, nests "deep within" the pain and trauma of loss.

Time becomes the central metaphor for Grzegorzewska's poem about her migrant experience as well. "In the Time of Seagulls" ["Czas mew"][17] she describes a sleepy English seaside village where the picturesque surroundings freeze in the nightmarish reality of an out-of-place person. The speaker "slowly turn[s]" "fall[s] ill with drawn-out weeks" that bring no respite from the tedium of an unchanging environment. Although the second stanza describes movement ("yachts nodding," "tourists squandering," "hovercraft escaping"), the scene remains claustrophobic and oppressive. The migrant subject is marked by her absence in this scene, yet the sense of imprisonment is overpowering (strengthened further by completing the stanza with the word "closing"). The finishing couplet is a poignant cry for help:

> Take me away from this paradise, where I feel as tepid
> As tea with milk. Take me, before I evaporate.

The familiar paradisiacal scenery does not interact with the migrant subject, who remains outside its metaphorical walls. Time here is the "time of seagulls," and not the time of the speaker, who feels invisible, "tepid," and almost inanimate within this environment. If this is a snapshot, a visual memory of a certain moment in time, the migrant is certainly absent from it, and will not be remembered as an integral constituent of the natural, native landscape. The trauma in this poem is the failure of meaningful interaction between a migrant subject and her alien landscape. A snapshot without memory, taken by an obsolete camera.

17 Ibid., 101.

"Lullaby" ["Kołysanka"][18] introduces a different migrant subject: the manual labourer who works the English land in hope of a better life. The worker's plight is captured in this poem also through the representation of time. The opening line "Sleep now, tomorrow you'll tune into Polish TV" invites the worker to stop time and create an alternative dream universe where utopistically he (presuming a male subject) can "return home," "abandon the farm" and find "blessed respite." This alternate universe is in stark contrast with the reality experienced by the labourer, and the imperative "Sleep!" at the start of every stanza seems to aggressively attempt jolting time out of its normal course, without much success. The lullaby fails because "Night time here in this promised land, is shorter" and there isn't enough space for the identity of the migrant to take shape. Grzegorzewska repeatedly seems to point to the temporal discrepancy experienced by a migrant when living abroad: whether time in the new country stands still or rushes along, its disjointed miscommunication with the migrant subject creates a heightened sense of isolation and loneliness.

This sense of divergence takes centre stage in one of the most beautiful poems in the volume, "Sleepless in Ryde" ["Bezsenność w Ryde"].[19] Kafka's motto, which opens the poem, "A void separates me from everything / and so I don't even go near its edge," gives perfect visual expression to the sense of isolation and fear that can accompany a traumatic transitioning for a migrant subject. The title indicates dislocation from ordinary time: the subject is sleepless, specifically, sleepless abroad, positioned away from the natives who are presumed to be asleep in sync with their local time. The opening stanza describes a cat poised on a window sill, "jumping out of itself just to catch a puff-ball." The ephemeral target of the puff-ball might be interpreted as a desired new identity, a utopistic sense of belonging that migrants "jump out of themselves" to catch. But even if this reading is a bit strained, a sense of split identity certainly characterises most migrants' experience, where the double pull of integration and nostalgia often creates discordance within the self. The second stanza describes an anachronistically named "Englishwoman" descending "from a Victorian tenement," capturing a scene which is historically ambivalent, yet geographically quite precise. We hear her "daily cursing," and then the next two lines bring in a much more internalised landscape:

> At night, the void opens up, cracking the temples,
> Full of a child's cries and whistling ferries.

18 Ibid., 59.

19 Ibid., 55.

The Kafkaesque "void" that separates the subject from a coherent existence – "everything" – threatens the sleepless speaker with the trauma of remembering ("a child's cries") and an image of departure ("whistling ferries"). It sometimes seems that migration does not offer a safe new identity but instead drags the subject closer to a threatening loss of self. " – More edges. Less words." The poem closes with this poignant line, signalling the wordlessness of traumatic experience, which nevertheless gains meaningful expression through the artful idiom of Grzegorzewska's poetry.

In conclusion, Wioletta Grzegorzewska's poems investigate the role of remembering and the fragility of our perception of time by attempting to make meaning out of a disappearing past and insecure present. Her migrant subjects – whether autobiographical or imagined – grapple with a fluid identity which queries the ostensibly fixed nodes of origin and destination. Migration in this poetry is not a completed journey from home to a new host, but a flitting through memory and perception that fundamentally questions the labelling of the migrant as "other." Grzegorzewska is not alone among migrant writers to blur the identity categories that are imposed on her subjects:[20] it seems rather that experiencing migration empowers her and other transnational poets to own a more fluid sense of identity, where this experience is defined as a process by which subjectivity is constructed.[21] There is a significant difference between defining migration as an identity category or as a constitutive experience. From the perspective of a host country, labelling migrancy as an identity category simplifies – but also potentially distorts – attitudes towards migrants. When newcomers are delineated as "other" – as "aliens," "non-nationals," for example – then interaction with them happens on the host's terms: the "foreign" and the "alien" must learn to adapt to the host environment. However, when migrancy is defined as constitutive experience, interaction becomes more complex and balanced, since understanding now necessitates empathy. Poems that recall traumatic memories construct readers who enter into an empathetic interactive space where identity categories become fundamentally challenged. Through the act of reading, we take part in the narratives of trauma and experience the fragility of remembering. Wioletta Grzegorzewska's poetry skilfully brings her readers towards a kind of empathetic understanding, and this allows for a very personal, yet universally understood, interpretation of migration as a constitutive experience.

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20 On this subject see Borbala Faragó, "Migrant Poet(h)ics," in *From Literature to Cultural Literacy*, ed. Naomi Segal and Daniela Koleva (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 86-105.

21 Watson and Smith, *Reading*, 33-34.

Commentaries

Declan Kiberd

Home and Away: Ireland, Poland and Others

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The 1990s and early 2000s were the years of inward migration to Ireland. Great numbers came to live in the country. The Poles came in such a steady flow that many middling-sized towns were able to sustain a specialist Polish shop – as well as Polish hair-dressing salons. Doubtless, these spaces also functioned as community centres. The mass-circulation *Evening Herald* newspaper published a pull-out section in Polish once a week. As building works boomed, many men from Poland came to work on sites: and Polish women found a ready welcome as shop and office-workers. The historic analogies between the two countries were real: a history of invasion and suffering, of a defiant Catholic faith, and of a consequently troubled adjustment to the conditions of modernity. For many younger Polish people, Ireland seemed friendly and attractive. It offered access to the wider English-speaking world. It was at once near and far – sufficiently removed from "home" to seem an authentic elsewhere, yet also near enough not to be distressingly "away." The rapid provision of cheap flights by market-driven airlines reinforced this sense of connection – and indeed more and more Irish people took advantage of these to familiarize themselves with Poland. Over time,

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many Polish migrants married one another and settled in Ireland; quite a few Polish women married Irish men; and – to a lesser extent – Polish men became partners of Irish or Irish-based women. A significant number of Irish males found the mores of Polish women more reassuringly traditional than those of the post-feminist Irish woman; but Irish women found the older-fashioned attitudes of Polish men sometimes baffling. Many of these experiences are touchingly if somewhat awkwardly explored by Daniel Żuchowski in his collection of stories *The New Dubliners* (2014).[1]

Quite a number of the Polish labourers who came to Dublin moved on to London during the building projects which preceded that city's Olympic Games. The memoirs, oral and written, which they have produced are reminiscent in many ways of books like Dónal MacAmhlaigh's *Dialann Deoraí*[2], a mid-twentieth century account of life among building-workers in the English midlands, eventually published as *An Irish Navvy*.[3] Most of these works, thus far – unlike Żuchowski's – are written in the native language, as in a sort of secret code, by which is performed a sort of "reverse anthropology" on the customs of the host community.

As in mid-century England, the experiences recounted are complex to begin with and are further complicated by the simultaneous migration-inward of many other peoples. In Ireland today, the largest group of immigrants is Russian. Some of these are extremely wealthy, while others work in ill-paid jobs. Some are part of the flourishing high-tech industries of Dublin, Galway and other cities, while others (like many Polish migrants) find themselves working in jobs which are not commensurate with their academic or professional qualifications. There is also a significant community of Chinese people, broad enough in scope and influence to have turned the celebration of their new year into a major cultural event in Dublin. And this is to say nothing of the palpable presence of Nigerians (many of whom have increased the size of evangelical churches), Brazilians and, indeed, workers from Italy and other European countries suffering from high levels of youth unemployment. Some of these incomers have arrived as students of the English language but have chosen to stay on. They have added value to an Ireland which has, in more recent years since the economic collapse of 2007-8, lost many of its young people to emigration. Obviously, many of the incomers are willing to work for modest remuneration in posts which at least some of the exiting Irish find unappealing. But the exodus of young Irish adults is probably as complex

1 Daniel Żuchowski, *The New Dubliners* (Dublin: Literary Publishing, 2014).

2 Dónal MacAmhlaigh, *Dialann Deoraí* (Dublin: An Clóchomhar, 1960).

3 Dónal MacAmhlaigh, *An Irish Navvy* (London: Routledge, 1964).

as it was a hundred years ago when J.M. Synge remarked that the motives for it were not always economic – people were leaving, he said, because of despondency about the communal future and often as a sort of chain-reaction to the movement of friends who had already gone. This emigration, though it seemed aberrational after the years of the Tiger, was arguably the restoration of the dominant pattern of Irish life for two centuries. Frank O'Connor summed it up well when he observed that many who left went not in flight from a hated imperial law or even a smothering religious practice but simply because they felt that the life offered to them was boring and mediocre. It seems apparent that the motives of many incomers to Ireland in the past two decades were often surprisingly similar. Not all, by any means, are economic migrants

For some time now *The Irish Times* has run a website and series titled "Generation Emigration." In a world of digital networks and easy travel, Irishness (like Polishness) has become virtual. People might even feel that the word "emigration" is hyperbolic in an era when some would call themselves "commuters." It is also true, of course, that many who left in the years of austerity probably harboured the time-honoured hope to return and yet may never do so. The immensely-strict levels of taxation levied, especially in the wake of the bail-out of bankers by the taxpayer, are often cited by young emigrants as a reason for their continuing absence: but it would also be correct to observe that some Irish who have jobs in an overseas city manage to maintain some level of existence in Ireland (and often have a home or apartment there). The phenomenon of part-time exile is more widespread than people may think, as is the experience of hyper-mobility from one place to another. This, probably, is true also for Poles, Russians, Italians and many other groups. Many seem to use cities like London or Dublin as staging-posts or despatch-points for migrations further afield, whether to Asia, Australia, North America.

If Ireland in the 1990s became the most globalized economy in western Europe (though how exactly would one measure such a thing?), the wider world also became a little more Irishised. There are probably more professional Irish authors living and writing abroad than at any point in cultural history – and arguably more doing so at home too (since those who locate in Ireland no longer face the financial costs of censorship and can make a living by assuming a wide audience in the outside world). The 1990s was the decade in which being Irish became sexy, as postmodern pubs and the spectacle of *Riverdance* caused many to connect with their "inner Paddy."

This was not always a subtle process, for it was often the more simplified forms of Irishness that established themselves in international circuits (the same observation has been made about the Polish soap opera *Londyńczycy* [*The Londoners*]). Global culture might be breaking up traditional communities

but its sponsors still wanted local colour – and so *Angela's Ashes*[4] was a huge success, proving that Ireland was as desperately interesting and as interestingly desperate as ever. The more inflected writing of John McGahern never had the same reach as that of Frank McCourt. Whereas McCourt scaled up the realities of Irish life to make them even more interesting, McGahern took the view that Irish life was inherently so extreme that any serious artist faced the task of scaling things down to make them credible. His US publishers have shown a corresponding nervousness. His last (and greatest) work of fiction *That They May Face the Rising Sun*[5] had the title of its American edition altered to *By The Lake*, lest readers might think it a tour-guide to Japan.

Even in the heyday of the Irish Literary Revival, the outside world had remained important – Paris, London and New York were arguably the cities in which Ireland was reinvented by emigrant intellectuals, as they rubbed shoulders with other nationalities. This experience produced (as Benedict Anderson said) the effect of a white-on-black negative photograph, which those overseas elites then printed out in positive back home through the years of cultural and political struggle. But the state which ensued as a result of these efforts often denied intellectuals the chance to make a living – the choice was either to become a teacher or get out (and indeed McGahern experienced both fates). Those who left would return from time to time to remind themselves (in the words of Frank O'Connor) what a terrible place their country had become. There are probably similar narratives about Poland, Italy, Russia and so forth being written by exiles from these places now. Only in the 1970s did the censorship of books in Ireland ease – unlike the Soviet censorship which was political (top-down), the Irish was bottom-up and often religious in motivation (if a citizen objected to a work, he could make a formal complaint to the Censorship Board and one complaint was sometimes enough to lead to banning).

Despite the best efforts of revivalists like Yeats and his successors, there were few native publishing houses established until the 1970s and 1980s. Yet these were also the years when younger authors became determinedly international in style. The traditional plays performed in the Abbey Theatre were seen as pap for tourists by story-writers who collaborated on books with titles like *Yeats Is Dead!* or *Paddy No More*. The internal debate was well-captured in an exchange between the two great Johns of the contemporary novel, Banville and McGahern. "I want to open a window on Europe," said Banville, who had obviously been studying Peter the Great as he wrote his magnificent trilogy

4 Frank McCourt, *Angela's Ashes* (New York: Scribner, 1996).

5 John McGahern, *That They May Face the Rising Sun* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002).

about Copernicus, Kepler and Newton. "Yes" said a sardonic McGahern, "and I suppose you think I am forever trying to slam that same window shut."

The irony is that we can now read Banville's trilogy of Renaissance scientists as a covert rendition of elements of the conflict then raging in Northern Ireland; and of the effort to get more scientific and technical subjects recognized on school syllabi in the republic. I once asked Banville how he had so unerringly recreated the world of witches, alchemists and spells and he responded: "Easy. I grew up in Wexford in the 1950s." The other irony was that despite McGahern's focus on North Leitrim – never, as Denis Donoghue has observed, a hotly-contested literary territory – he had assimilated at the deepest levels of his art the techniques and themes of Flaubert, Proust, Tolstoy.

By the onset of official "globalization" in the 1990s, the fault-lines in Irish writing had become ineradicable. Even as people from overseas flowed into Dublin, authors like Colm Toibin, Colm McCann or Joseph O'Neill would set entire novels in New York, Berlin or even Central America. Yet each of them, once featured in a piece by the New York Times, would be renationalized as fast as any bank – or as fast as "the Irish poet, W.B. Yeats" used to be in the columns of London and New York in the 1930s. Yeats had himself rather wearily observed that every Irish writer had a choice – either to express the country or exploit it. Yet the more writers resisted cooption to the circuits of Irishness, the more articles seemed to appear excavating an underlying Irish thematic in books that seemed on the surface resolutely non-Irish.

New, complex forms of narrative might have been expected to capture these hybridities and complications: and there have been examples in work by Seamus Heaney, Medb McGuckian and by Irish-language poets, who by very definition are always already multicultural. Also interesting is the fact that some of the highest marks in Leaving Certificate Irish examinations have been recorded by students from Polish or Vietnamese families, who feel no defeatism about mastering a new language. Perhaps the pre-eminent example of a successful hybridity is Brian Friel's play *Dancing at Lughnasa*, which in presenting two plots unfolding at different speeds brilliantly solves the technical problem of how to present the problem of "uneven development." The play registers the impact of liberation theology and of the missionary experience in Africa on parish life in Ireland.

In the novel, however – the genre in which one might expect to find the subtlest exploration of the Irish encounter with the Other – there has been a shyness about foregrounding such themes. Most younger novelists, for perhaps canny technical reasons, have abandoned the traditional panoptic attempt to describe a whole society (despite that society still being rather small) and prefer to focus their art on this or that sub-group – a graduating class in a college, the workers in a restaurant, the members of a rock band,

and so on. One of the best current novelists Keith Ridgway summed up the problem in titling one of his books *The Parts*. It is as if novelists now choose to do what Frank O'Connor once said short-story writers did, profiling "submerged population groups," set in specific places like Dalkey or Coolock or the midlands. Within Dublin – with rare exceptions such as Catriona Lally's *Eggshells*[6] – no novel attempts a Wandering Rocks-type panorama, much less a total portrait of society like the late James Plunkett's *Strumpet City*.[7]

Those authors who conscientiously try to dramatise the encounter with incomers treat them always as "New Irish" and rarely for what they bring in themselves. The immigrant figure is most often given a crash-course in Irish Studies and the reader may be left wondering for whose benefit these seminars are conducted. For publishers in London and New York still in search of that damned elusive Irishness? Or for the authors themselves, who may have grown up in a climate of revisionism, which took so much of the national narrative away that they must seize gratefully on the incomer as a pretext for teaching themselves their own lost traditions? It is as if the contemporary Irish novel often exists to enact a new Statutes of Kilkenny, making the recent incomer "more Irish than the Irish themselves." Polish shop assistants are deemed acculturated when they reach that golden moment when they can tell a customer: "You're grand."

In her book *Strangers to Ourselves*[8] Julia Kristeva says that we encounter the stranger in others in order to uncover the hidden, untranslated parts of ourselves. She observes that in countries such as France, which have received many immigrants, right-wing parties are forever fretting about the national culture which ideally (in their minds) the newcomers will embrace, whereas the left-wing attends more to the cultures which newcomers bring with them. Modernity works best, of course, when both kinds of culture receive equal attention from all parties and there is the hope of newness, fusions, a real hybridity.

Something of that sort happened in the earlier years of Tiger Ireland, up until 2002. In these glory days of economic success, real services were provided, good food processes created and excellent machines built. But that success did not, as the inventors of the original Irish Revival had hoped, work in tandem with culture and politics, but quite independently of them. As non-productive "consultants" began to assume more and more control, people began to feel that they were living in an economy rather than a country,

6 Catriona Lally, *Eggshells* (New York: Melville House, 2014).

7 James Plunkett, *Strumpet City* (London: Hutchinson, 1969).

8 Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

in a consumer cohort rather than a nation state. Yet those glory years up to 2002 brought great advances, not least a multicultural Ireland filled with immigrants who displayed a genuine curiosity about Ireland's traditions and a proper pride in those traditions which they brought with them. There were hopeful examples of a melding of "native" and "foreign" in everything from novels to films, from musicals to cuisine.

One of the incomers during those years, Zeljka Doljanin, has observed in her doctoral dissertation done at University College Dublin that after 2002 there was less fusion and no thoughtfulness. Many immigrants who came in the "bling" phase of the Tiger after that year were lured by talk of quick money and easy living – they seemed far less certain about the cultural values which they brought and far less curious about those which they encountered. Perhaps it was getting harder, even for serious souls, to understand what exactly "Ireland" now was. A government awash with funds set up over seven hundred agencies to appease this or that sub-group. Many of the agencies were themselves worthy enough attempts to protect a minority, but as each got going the very notion of a common culture or shared society seemed to be replaced by endless atomization. And the Irish were themselves bedazzled by the idea of easy cash – the famous statue of the rabbit outside the headquarters of Allied Irish Bank was jocularly christened "The Quick Buck." People, as the fashionably glib diagnosis went, "lost the run of themselves" and results were to be seen on the pavements of Temple Bar on any Friday or Saturday night. No leader was seeking to articulate a national vision, such as Barack Obama or Francois Hollande were still attempting to do in their republics – the language of "patriotism" had been discredited by IRA bombs and by anti-nationalist commentators. Even those incomers who sought to understand Irish identity found themselves often baffled by the inability or even unwillingness of most people to explain.

Dr Doljanin developed an even more radical analysis. By 2002 the last banknotes bearing the image of writers (Yeats, Joyce, Douglas Hyde, etc.) had disappeared, to make way for those anodyne Euro-bridges and buildings which as soon as they appeared had the look of the Lubyanka "modern Gothic" about them. The loss among Irish people of a sure sense of who exactly they were made it more difficult for them to deal with the Other. The denial of a colonial element in the Irish past by certain historians made it harder for some Irish to empathise with the political stresses which had produced many of the incomers. Hence the strangely introverted, involuted spasms of those novels which seem to – but don't really – deal with immigrants such as Dr Doljanin herself.

To find such accounts of cultural encounter, a reader might be driven back to consider the classic rather than contemporary novel. *Gulliver's Travels* deals

exactly with the effect of migration in defamiliarising notions of "home" and "away" – and indeed with the exhausted, empty, even misanthropic self which may be a consequence of too many forced adjustments. *Castle Rackrent* repeatedly imagines just how strange Ireland must appear in the eyes of a newcomer, expected to settle in the rural community – and it anticipates Joyce's *Ulysses* in studying the fretful response to Jews. The trilogy of Samuel Beckett, written in French and then rendered into English, captures the experience of finding everything strange. These authors all came out of a monocultural Ireland yet somehow – perhaps even *because* of that – they could explore alterity.

In my last semester at University College Dublin, while reading *Ulysses* with a group of students (composed equally of Irish-born and overseas members), I asked them a question. If a thirty-eight-year-old man of vaguely foreign aspect met them in Temple Bar at one o'clock in the morning and invited them back to his kitchen, would they go with him? "Not on your life" was the unanimous answer. That is our loss, and theirs. There was a time when people in Ireland could deal confidently with their own strangeness and the strangeness of others. The city was a zone in which one constantly ran into the Other, as Bloom and Stephen do in Joyce's book. But so was the countryside – if you cycled ten miles away from your home, you were effectively in a foreign place, where the people's way of walking, talking or growing flowers seemed utterly different. Now there are mostly suburbs, shopping centres and gated communities, designed to protect people from the sort of chance encounters which are the life-blood of classic narrative. As more and more people move across the world, this way and that, an invincible provincialism seems to have taken hold. Narrow nationalisms are on the rise, as a response to economic insecurity but also to the compulsory internationalism of the later twentieth century, which offered little more than a glib consumerism. And the wider European project – never given a satisfactory cultural definition – has itself been jeopardized by the obsession of central bankers with saving the Euro. It will take a writer and thinker of Rousseauistic genius to help the peoples of the continent to turn this impasse into an opportunity for new ways of thinking and a change of heart.

Joanna Kosmalska

Writing by Poles in the UK and Ireland: The Transnational Turn in Polish Literature

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In July 2012, *Madame Mephisto* by A.M. Bakalar, a female author who had moved from Wrocław to London, was longlisted for the Guardian First Book Award. In one of her articles the writer stresses that it is "a sign of our times that migration between countries offers to many people the best of both worlds."[1] In November 2014, Daniel Żuchowski, a Polish teacher living and working in Dublin, was invited to the Dublin Book Festival to talk about his recently released collection of short stories, *The New Dubliners*. When asked about the setting of the book, he replied that the stories were "universal enough to have happened in any other European, or even non-European, capital."[2] These are only two out of over eighty works of poetry, prose and drama which have been published since 2004 by Polish authors who lived, or still live, in Britain

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1 Asia Monika Bakalar, "Polish People are Britain's Invisible Minority," *The Guardian,* December 18, 2012, accessed November 2, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/dec/18/polish-people-britain-invisible-minority

2 Daniel Żuchowski, *The New Dubliners* by Daniel Zuchowski, "Writing.ie," accessed November 2, 2015, http://www.writing.ie/tell-your-own-story/the-new-dubliners-by--daniel-zuchowski/

and Ireland.[3] All of them were born out of the clash between the writers' national context and other, alien, contexts and they duly illustrate how the driving forces of transnationalism have shaped contemporary Polish literature.

Although transnationalism as long-distance travel, exploration and trade networks has a history preceding "the nation," the emergence of new forms of quick and efficient transportation, communication, and economic flows has fundamentally transformed the contemporary world. In a relatively short period of time, social, political and economic relationships between countries have intensified globally; the Internet has brought into being a virtual reality, parallel to the real world; nation-state borders have grown blurred and porous. Migrations on a large scale have become part of everyday life, but the "new migrants," in contrast to previous generations of newcomers, maintain stronger familial, economic, political and religious ties to home. At the same time, they have been undergoing integration processes in receiving countries faster than before, forging links with host societies and adapting to their values and lifestyles.[4]

When talking about "integration," one has to ask what the word actually means in a multi-ethnic and multicultural country like the UK or modern-day Ireland. I would argue that it means finding a city, town or village where a particular individual can pursue his or her life goals. Once this is accomplished, the newcomer has to get a grasp of the cultures that surround him or her in the neighbourhood and workplace. In other words, the emphasis is placed on locality, since migrants do not integrate into the whole of British or Irish society, but into local, often very ethnically-diverse communities where they lead their everyday lives. For newcomers, it means that they have to adapt to multiple cultures rather than a single, historically dominant national tradition. By sustaining links with a variety of communities in the receiving country and in their homeland, migrants create imagined, virtual spaces, which have been called "transnational social fields"[5] by social scientists and the "third space"[6]

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3 A full bibliography of the literary works mentioned in the article is available in the Virtual Archive which has been compiled as part of *Polish (E)migration Literature*... project: archiwumemigracja.uni.lodz.pl/en. Hence, I only mention the writings that are cited in the footnotes.

4 The short description of transnationalism and its implications is based mainly on a monograph by Steven Vertovec, *Transnationalism* (New York: Routledge, 2009), and on an article by Alvaro Lima, "Transnationalism: A New Mode of Immigrant Integration," *The Mauricio Gastón Institute* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Boston, 2010).

5 The term "social fields" was adopted from an article by Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller, "Conceptualizing Simultaneity: A Transnational Social Field Perspective on Society," *The International Migration Review* 3.38 (2004).

6 Homi K. Bhabha uses the term "Third Space" in *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

by literary critics. In those spaces, processes of cultural interpretation and blending take place, often described in terms of cultural translation, hybridity, bricolage, syncretism, creolization. One of the most conspicuous areas in which these phenomena play out is literature.

With this in mind, this article traces how the "new" aspects of transnationalism – namely, advances in transportation, the breaking down of barriers to the flow of people, the development of electronic media, and the globalisation of economic and social relationships[7] – have influenced contemporary writings by Polish migrants who have moved to Britain or Ireland. Hence, it examines how the reduction of travelling costs and the post-accession opening of EU borders facilitated a confrontation of the post-communist East with the multicultural West. This confrontation has altered the territory that Polish authors cover in their books, transformed the nature of locations the writers describe, moved action to spaces between the real and imagined borders of Poland, and consequently complicated nationalist and cosmopolitan paradigms. Interestingly, this imagined space often overlaps with cyberspace, because once migrants have settled down in a new place, they rely heavily on the Internet for communication and news from their homeland. Such strong engagement with virtual reality has affected the narrative form and language of migrant writing which, as we will see after a closer analysis, shares a number of characteristics with blogs, news websites and communicators. The literary language has been further modified by natural processes of hybridisation, which has turned the migrants' mother tongue into a peculiar vernacular filled with Anglicisms and neologisms. This dialect, captured in diasporic writings, reflects cross-cultural exchanges that take place under the forces of migration. The process is reinforced by the strong economic and social relationships developed between Poland, the UK and Ireland over the last decade, and these in turn have had two significant effects: a greater commodification of migrant literary narratives and their further universalisation.

Since the end of communism in the 1980s, no historical event has reshaped Poland's literature more than her 2004 entry into the European Union. The generation of Poles who levered for the collapse of communism opened the borders of Europe to their children, and EU accession sealed the success. The dream of Poland as a free European country became a reality when migrants were allowed to leave their country of birth and travel to Britain or Ireland. So the mass migration of young people was not a cause of concern at first. What's more, Polish people developed a taste for advancement when they entered capitalistic reality in the 1990s. In short order, they moved from a world where

7 A division into "old" and "new" aspects of transnationalism quoted after Steven Vertovec, *Transnationalism* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 14-16.

goods were scarce to another where they were abundant, but they lacked the financial resources to benefit from this astonishing metamorphosis. Polish society tried to remedy this through an enhancement of skills and the number of students in higher education rose almost fivefold, from 390,000 in 1990 to 1,906,000 in 2004.[8] And Polish people started taking short trips to the West, which stimulated their desire to live in a more liberal reality. When, despite their best efforts, they failed to make a satisfactory life in their fledgling, badly governed, capitalistic homeland, they emigrated. There were, of course, many people who were forced to leave Poland because of long-term unemployment, but others left in pursuit of modernity and liberal values, and this group included a key number of migrant authors. Among them was Anna Wolf, a playwright and founder of Polish Theatre Ireland, who observed: "Unlike us, the Irish are more relaxed. They don't look for problems where there aren't any. It was one of the reasons why I came here. In Poland, I felt under constant pressure to get married, to start a family, to take out a bank loan for a flat. I don't feel that here."[9] Wioletta Grzegorzewska, a Polish author based in East Tilbury, adds: "A number of authors fled the country because of their beliefs, for instance travellers, homosexual authors and feminists. I often hear from members of the recent wave that they want to bounce off their country …"[10] These writers were also driven by curiosity about a Western culture that for many decades was identified with rebellion against the Soviet regime. It was a window opening onto a civilisation that Poles longed to be a part of. As Agata Pyzik writes in her 2014 book *Poor but Sexy*:

> Queuing with dozens of my compatriots, who feed the financial power of all the Wizzairs, Ryanairs and Easyjets of this world every single day, I'm not strictly one of them, I'm a fake: a middle-class overeducated Polish girl, who is there seduced by the cultural lure of the West, rather than led by material necessity.[11]

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8 Department for Higher Education and Science, *Szkolnictwo wyższe w Polsce. Raport* [*Higher Education in Poland. A Report*] (2013), accessed November 2, 2015, https://www.nauka.gov.pl/g2/oryginal/2013_07/0695136d37bd577c8ab03acc5c59a1f6.pdf

9 Joanna Kosmalska and Joanna Rostek "Irish-Polish Cultural Interrelations in Practice: Interviews with Chris Binchy, Piotr Czerwiński, Dermot Bolger, and Anna Wolf," *Studi Irlandesi. A Journal of Irish Studies* 5 (2015): 123.

10 Joanna Kosmalska "Czuję się pisarką polską z krwi i kości. Rozmowa z Wiolettą Grzegorzewską" ["I Feel Like a Polish Writer, in Both Blood and Bone. Joanna Kosmalska in Conversation with Wioletta Grzegorzewska"], *Arterie* 2.19 (2014): 156.

11 Agata Pyzik *Poor but Sexy: Culture Clashes in Europe East and West* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2014), 25.

If we look at the interviews with other Polish writers, it turns out that Agata Pyzik's reasons for migrating are not as rare as she thinks. Her words reverberate in, for example, Piotr Czerwiński's reminiscences about his decision to settle down in Ireland:

> Maybe I should start by stating that I am not a migrant – I am an "expat." That is how the English describe themselves when they settle down abroad, to differentiate themselves from cheap labour folk from Eastern Europe, don't they? Well, in that case, I will not give them the satisfaction of being inferior to them. I am an expat, too! Regarding my moving to Ireland, I guess that my history is slightly different from that of the vast majority of other Poles who came here. First of all, I didn't *have* to go, I *wanted* to. I am probably the only Pole who brought his own savings to Ireland. I had just given up a career in journalism; after twelve years in the mass media I was tired and burnt out … On the whole, I wanted fresh air, a new life. Anything new, as far away as possible from the world I had been living in for so many years. Far away from the rat race – and believe me, they call it a rat race for a reason.
>
> English was the only foreign language I could speak relatively well without any sense of shame, so the choice was obvious when they opened the job market in Western Europe for Eastern Europeans. England was a no-go area at that time. The terrorist attacks on the London tube had just occurred … Ireland seemed different, so I went to Ireland. I put on my best suit, my best coat, and carried an umbrella with a wooden handle. You see, my story is a bit different …[12]

The writers, however, realise that their positive attitude to migration is only one way of looking at the issue. In their works they depict a more varied picture of Polish people in the UK and Ireland by highlighting two opposing tendencies, one rooted in nationalism, where migrants try to recreate a home from home to shelter themselves from the foreignness of the British Isles, and the other emerging from cosmopolitism, where migrants eagerly, often too eagerly, give in to the pressure of assimilation to settle down in the new place.

The former kind of migrants, those who have very strong ties with their native land, leave their country of origin mainly for financial reasons. Not unlike Radek, an infantile degenerate in Marcin Wojnarowski's *Okrutny idiota albo prywatny* żart [*The Cruel Idiot or a Private Joke*], or Krzysztof, the repulsive leader of the Polish Club in Michał Wyszowski's collection of short stories *Na lewej stronie świata* [*On the Left Side of the World*], they speak very little or no English and focus on acquiring wealth they plan to take back to Poland. They have almost no interest in local culture, hiding from the world of the British or Irish

12 Kosmalska and Rostek, "Cultural Interrelations," 110.

in self-imposed Polish ghettos. With their lives centred around Polish shops, Polish restaurants, Polish clubs and the Polish church – in short, Polish places – they sentimentalise their native goods and customs while denigrating local values and traditions. That those characters are often, although not always, satirised for being uneducated, uncultured and narrow-minded indicates the scornful attitude of the writers towards this kind of migrant. At the opposite extreme are the latter type of newcomers, who zealously push aside their own culture to make space for richer, Western European traditions. In the manner of Magda, the shrewd drug dealer in A.M. Bakalar's *Madame Mephisto,* or Damian, the main character in Daniel Żuchowski's short story "To be on time," they feel no need to develop a sense of belonging to a particular place but, on the contrary, they break all the ties that might hold them back. Convinced that they can easily adapt to any new environment, they glorify everything that is foreign or local, while thumbing their nose at the world they have left behind.

These two approaches do not exclude but in fact complement each other: taken together, they evolve into a new idea of migrants whose transnational identity stretches out between cosmopolitanism and nationalism. The identity is dynamically reshaped by assimilation processes which make it possible for an individual to live in a local, multi-ethnic community but, on the other hand, it naturally remains anchored in that person's national narratives. Metaphorically speaking, migrants stand with one foot in their home country and the other in the place where they currently reside. By living in this two-point reference frame, they benefit from the knowledge and experience of both communities. The side-effect of this phenomenon is a feeling of non-belonging to any particular country, as if living away from home stripped people of their nationality and cast them adrift in a transnational virtual space. To the repeatedly posed question "Where do I belong?," the writers respond in ways which echo Piotr Surmaczyński in his *Wyspa Dreszczowców* [*Thriller Island*]: "Maybe, to a nature reserve where they keep creatures with no roots, those which belong nowhere."[13] The idea reappears in *Single* [*Single People*], for example, where Piotr Kępski states: "Bezprizorny, I don't belong to any world."[14] If we use the language of physics and say that migrant identity is located in a gravitational field, the objects in space which exert a force of gravitational attraction on that identity are the multi-ethnic cultures surrounding the migrant. Obviously, the magnitude of the force is dependent on age – the older people are, the less affected they become. In his short story "W stronę domu" ["Towards home"], Michał Wyszowski distinguishes three

13 Piotr Surmaczyński, *Wyspa Dreszczowców* [*Thriller Island*] (Gdynia, Novae Res, 2014), 85.

14 Piotr Kępski, *Single* [*Single People*] (Warszawa: Jirafa Roja, 2009), 270.

age groups: *Double-Home-Owners* comprise "grandfathers and grandmothers" who are tied to their country with a *Made in Poland* umbilical cord and, therefore, they divide everything in half, "money, time, even feelings sent to their homeland via broadband"; *No-Home-Owners*, in turn, are middle-age people who are too young (read too liberal and progressive) to live in Poland, and too old both to forget about the country where they grew up or to integrate fully in the place they have moved to; and *Children-of-European-Integration*, also known as *Hooligans-of-Free-Flow*, include twenty-year-olds who think of Poland as a holiday destination or their parents' home.[15]

As the speed of transportation between home and away, fostered by the proliferation of electronic media, creates the impression of proximity, of blurred national borders, of a shrinking world, migrants develop a feeling of being suspended in some virtual space between two countries. In *Ziemia wróżek* [*The Fairyland*], Krystian Ławreniuk compares this experience to "sneaking between one fairy-tale and another,"[16] while Wioletta Grzegorzewska reveals in "Czas mew" ["In the time of seagulls"]: "On this island, as if between dreams, I slowly turn, am twin."[17] The duality of their existence makes migrants locate their homeland in a virtual space characterised by fluidity, porosity and dislocation, where they can conceive their "private homeland" – shaped not by historical events such as wars, partitions or revolutions, but by the vicissitudes of their own lives. This invented land is not confined by any geographical, political or social borders. Piotr Czerwiński attempts to capture the elusive nature of this place in *Międzynaród* [*Internation*], where he writes: "Our homeland can be anything and anywhere. Our homeland might not exist at all. Maybe, Poland is not a country. Maybe, it is a state of mind."[18] Similarly, in his *Buty emigranta* [*The Emigrant's Shoes*], Ryszard Adam Gruchawka concludes that "our fatherland is a mental concept."[19] Living abroad has affected migrants' perception of their home country: it has become a product of their imagination, formed by their personal experiences. Although it is too early to argue that we have entered the era of transnational order or have become – as the

15 Michał Wyszowski, *Na lewej stronie świata* [*On the Left Side of the World*] (Warszawa: MG, 2010), 198 – all of the quotations come from the short story "W stronę domu" ["Towards home"].

16 Krystian Ławreniuk, *Ziemia wróżek* [*The Fairyland*] (Brzeg: Fundacja Rozwój, 2014), 153.

17 Wioletta Grzegorzewska, *Pamięć Smieny/Smena's Memory*, trans. Marek Kazmierski (London: Off-Press, 2011), 101.

18 Piotr Czerwiński, *Międzynaród* [*Internation*] (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 2011), 329.

19 Ryszard Adam Gruchawka, *Buty emigranta* [*The Emigrant's Shoes*] (Warszawa: Exlibris, 2007), 77.

title of Grzegorz Kopaczewski's novel suggests – members of a *Global Nation*,[20] there is a clear shift in Polish migrant literature from a more local concept of "country" to a more global, hybridised understanding of "homeland."

If we invoke sociological terminology, the cultural flow between the core (the UK and Ireland) and the semi-periphery (the homeland of Polish migrants) has turned into a powerful two-way process which has had the effect of remapping, of pushing forward the mental borders of Poland. It has brought cross-border exchanges, connections and practices to the attention of authors: processes which allow people to develop attachment to multiple locations around the world at once. By the same token, it has moved migrant writings away from a narrow focus on the home culture to include the geographies, histories and traditions of Western Europe to a much greater extent than before. Consequently, authors present a myriad of foreign locations, ethnically diverse characters and non-native traditions, describing them from the perspective of an insider, of someone who takes active part in unfolding events. The writers also emphasize that it is not historical or political commitments but culture that plays the most important role in sustaining ties between migrants and their homeland. Thus they advocate creating innovative, multifarious and socially engaged Polish literature and art. As Anna Wolf points out: "We don't have to fight any regime at present, so our patriotism manifests itself rather in our affection for culture."[21] By saying this, she does not suggest transporting Polish folklore, embellished with the crowned eagle, to the host country, but creating a mainstream culture that, on the one hand, will make it easier for other ethnic groups to understand Polish people and their traditions and, on the other, will broaden the horizons of people who live in Poland. In other words, she advocates creating transnational literature and art that embraces multi-locality, interacts with other cultures and combines national and cosmopolitan values.

The platform for producing such transnational writings is often the borderless space of the Internet. The narrator of Anna Łajkowska's *Cienie na wrzosowisku* [*Shadows Across Moorlands*] reveals on the opening page of her novel: "I wanted it to be a blog at first …"[22] Wioletta Grzegorzewska put such an idea into practice by setting up the blog *Pamięć Smieny/Smena's Memory*, where she makes observations which later inspire her poems and prose. Interviewed about her activity on the Internet, she said:

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20 Grzegorz Kopaczewski, *Global Nation. Obrazki z czasów popkultury* [*Global Nation. Snapshots of Pop-cultural Times*] (Wołowiec: Czarne, 2004).

21 Kosmalska and Rostek, "Cultural Interrelations," 130.

22 Anna Łajkowska *Cienie na wrzosowisku* [*Shadows Across Moorlands*] (Katowice: Damidos, 2013), 7.

> When I emigrated, I published a lot with online writing communities, such as *Nieszuflada*, because this was my only access to Polish readers … I observe that emigrants miss people who have stayed in their home country and they tend to become very active on the Internet when they move abroad.[23]

That online writing has exerted a great impact on Grzegorzewska's work becomes clear when we look at her publications. Her 2011 poetry collection *Pamięć Smieny/Smena's Memory* bears the same title as the poet's blog, while the 2012 chronicle, her *silva rerum*, entitled *Notatnik z wyspy* [*Notes from the Isle of Wight*], keeps a blog-like form and layout – the text is divided into short sections, each marked with a date. The diary covers the period between 2006 and 2012, in chronological order, from the time of the writer's arrival in the UK to the year of the book's release. Selected poems from *Notes from the Isle of Wight* and *Smena's Memory* were included in her 2014 book *Finite Formulae and Theories of Chance*, published under the pseudonym Wioletta Greg to make it easier for English-speaking readers to pronounce the author's name. The book received solid critical acclaim and was shortlisted for the prestigious Griffin Poetry Prize in Canada in 2015.

Not unlike Grzegorzewska, Daniel Żuchowski also started a website where he published excerpts from his short stories for a couple of months. The Irish literary portal, *Writing.ie*, became interested in this "work-in-progress" and featured it on their website. This, in turn, drew the attention of the organising committee of the Dublin Book Festival, one of the most popular literary events in Ireland, who invited the author to talk about his debut book. Lorraine Courtney's subsequent review of *The New Dubliners*[24] in *The Irish Times* noted that "… the writing is not always assured and it works better as a noisy, colourful celebration of contemporary Dublin than as a conventional narrative. Bawdy and boisterous, it's an important book by a writer perfectly tuned

23 Kosmalska, "Czuję się pisarką," 154.

24 The title of Daniel Żuchowski's book alludes to James Joyce's classic 1914 collection of short stories, *Dubliners*, where the author depicts the lives of city dwellers in the capital of Ireland. To celebrate the 100th anniversary of the book's publication, a "sequel" was published, presenting the lives of contemporary Dubliners. Its editor, Oona Frawley, invited popular and critically acclaimed Irish writers, such as Roddy Doyle, Colum McCann, Joseph O'Connor and Maeve Binchy, to contribute a story to the volume. The outcome of their work, a celebration volume *New Dubliners*, was published in 2006. Apart from the above-mentioned references, the title of Daniel Żuchowski's book, *The New Dubliners*, alludes to a politically correct term, "The New Irish," that was used between 1946 and 1961 to describe Irish immigrants moving to the United States, and is now used in reference to post-accession migrants in order to mark the fact that they have become part of Irish society.

into the experiences of the new Irish."[25] Currently, we can follow Jan Krasnowolski's progress on his new volume *Współczucie dla diabła* [*Sympathy for the Devil*] by visiting his website. As the writer reveals there, the book will be produced in the form of a blog, which will motivate him to work towards its completion more regularly. Krasnowolski, Żuchowski and Grzegorzewska are just three out of many authors whose work has become, in a sense, "electronified." They use blogs as a writing tool, a space where they gather and organise their thoughts to publish them in book form later.

The moment of moving from the virtual world of blogs to publishing houses makes it evident how the writers' activity on the Internet affects their literary narrations. For instance, the first reviews reach authors while their work is still "in progress," readers having had the chance to send their comments via email or post them on various websites. Before the book appears in print, it has often been appraised already and is, to some extent, shaped by the readership. What also comes with the culture of blogging is an ethos of independence: since the authors set up the websites by themselves, it gives them unlimited control over the content and layout. They keep this freedom by relying largely on self-publishing or small, independent publishing houses (such as Fox Publishing, Papierowy Motyl, Radwan, Drugie Piętro, Piktor or Damidos), which is typical for contemporary migrant writers. Another similarity of blogs to the analysed writings is their journal- and journalism-like nature. According to Rebecca Blood's etymology of "blogs," the term dates back to the late 1990s and stems from "web journals" that Jorn Barger called "web-logs." Since Peter Merholz announced that he was going to pronounce the word as "wee-blogs," it got quickly shortened to "blogs."[26] In the monograph *Blogging, Citizenship, and the Future of Media*, Mark Tremayne observes that the two most common kinds of blogs are "online diaries," which follow the private stories of the bloggers, and "filter blogs," where the authors – in the hope of changing the socio-political situation – comment on current events in the world around them by "filtering" information from other sources. Which is why this kind of blog is described as an alternative form of journalism.[27] When we look at the content of the migrant books, it turns out that about ninety per cent of them are, in fact, a combination of these two types of blog. Memoirs of

25 Lorraine Courtney, "Bawdy and Boisterous: The New Dubliners," *The Irish Times*, July 5, 2014.

26 Rebecca Blood, "weblogs: a history and perspective," *rebecca's pocket*, September 7, 2000, accessed 2 November, 2015, http://www.rebeccablood.net/essays/weblog_history.html

27 Mark Tremayne, "Introduction: Examining the Blog – Media Relationship," in *Blogging, Citizenship, and the Future of Media*, ed. Mark Tremayne (London: Routledge, 2006), X.

Polish authors in the UK and Ireland are interlaced with their reflections on back-and-forth migrations and the dramatic situation in Poland: all of this includes numerous references to media coverage, which is contrasted with the reality. The writers, like bloggers, are usually personally engaged in the topics they tackle, and they therefore take on a subjective point of view in their descriptions. This leads to the dominant use of first-person narration in the majority of blogs and migrant books, but also to a distinct style of writing that Nina Wakeford and Kris Kohen define aptly as "spontaneous and revelatory."[28]

Some books are even divided into short, topic-orientated sections, which are reminiscent of blog postings, as in the case of Maria Budacz's *WOT.4* or Michał Wyszowski's *Na lewej stronie świata* [*On the Left Side of the World*]. The prevailing mode of blogging dictates that the postings be sequenced according to the date of publication and, accordingly, most of the analysed writers do not disrupt the chronology of their plot. What's more, blogging software allows the bloggers to upload a full range of files, such as written texts, photos, sound files, video clips, and hypertext links. Although the scope for multimedia use in books is obviously limited, we can track down some features – functioning like hyperlinks – that are more common in Polish migrant books than in works written in Poland. These include quotations from Skype and phone conversations, numerous emails, footnotes or dictionaries that provide translation from English, photo documentation, citations of song lyrics, reviews of the TV series *Londyńczycy* [*The Londoners*], and references to British, Irish and diasporic media news. Following a trend from the UK, writers also shoot video clips to promote their writing on the Internet – from amateur recordings, for example, Przemysław Kolasiński's films, to professional trailers, such as film materials by Jarek Sępek or Marek Kazmierski. So in the case of many migrant writings the creation process seems to go full circle: the books are first produced in cyberspace, then they arrive in a printing house, only to end up on the Internet again, where they are advertised and distributed. No wonder, then, that such a strong correlation between the virtual and real worlds has resulted in the development of the previously mentioned, numerous parallels between online and migrant writing.

This heavy reliance on the Internet by Polish writers living abroad has also affected their literary language. Just like the social media users, whose main aim is to get their message across, these writers tend to focus mainly on conveying the story and their observations, paying much more attention to the content than to the artistic form of their work. Their texts are therefore mostly

28 Nina Wakeford and Kris Cohen, "Fieldnotes in Public: Using Blogs for Research," in *The SAGE Handbook of Online Research Methods*, ed. Grant Blank, Nigel Fielding and Raymond M. Lee (London: SAGE, 2008), 308.

devoid of lengthy, convoluted descriptions of places, characters and the like, while the language tends to be colloquial, playful, explicit and abbreviated. Relatively short sentences, sparse in adjectives and adverbs, are interlarded with neologisms. For example, the narrator of Ireneusz Gębski's novel *W cieniu Sheratona* [*In the Shadow of the Sheraton*] works as a "kejpis," which is an acronym of the kitchen porter [/kei/+/pi/+s],[29] while funfair employees in Krystian Ławreniuk's *Ziemia wróżek* [*The Fairyland*] cannot wait to have a "rain off" – a day off work due to bad weather.[30] If we look at these linguistic features outside their literary context, they immediately bring to mind the language of instant messengers: Skype, Twitter or Facebook. In addition, living in Britain and Ireland's multi-cultural, predominantly English-speaking environment has naturally led to the creolization of the language that Polish migrants use on a day-to-day basis. In contrast to former generations of emigrant writers, who paid attention to preserving "the purity of the Polish language," contemporary authors tend to reflect the pidginised vernacular migrants actually use. Therefore, their writings are sprinkled with Anglicisms, loan-blends, translation equivalents, phonetic transcriptions and code-switching. Inspired by Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*, Piotr Czerwiński wrote his 2009 novel *Przebiegum życiae* [*Conductum Lifae*] in this nascent, deliberately exaggerated, migrant dialect:

> Zapłacił dwa j u r k i to the h a p p y p e e p a l from A f r i c a i wyszedł na świeże powietrze, na którym akurat dla odmiany nie padało. Był szczęśliwy, myślał że wszystkie jego problemy przejdą do historii, a on sam rozpocznie nowe życie szybciej niż się spodziewał, w nowym b a j o b o n g o m l e c z n o - m i o d o w y m ś w i e c i e.[31] … Nie mieli szczęścia z pracą po studiach, ponieważ w B u l a n d z i e najlepszy sposób, żeby zostać politykiem, to nie mieć żadnej szkoły w ogóle, a oni mieli doktoraty. J o b w supermarkecie to raczej u s e r - f r i e n d l y eutanazja niż robota, z powodu p a m p e r s - p i s s e r pensji, więc uznali, że będzie mniej samobójczo, jeżeli pojadą do Anglii, upokarzać się za funty. Oboje byli zerami w dziedzinie języków obcych, ale Grzesiek miał l u c k a i znalazł j o b od zaraz.[32]

29 Ireneusz Gębski, *W cieniu Sheratona* [*In the Shadow of the Sheraton*] (Warszawa: Warszawska Firma Wydawnicza, 2011), 3.

30 Ławreniuk, *Ziemia* wróżek, 69.

31 Piotr Czerwiński, *Przebiegum życiae, czyli kartonowa sieć* [*Conductum Lifae or the Cardboard Web*] (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 2009), 106. The highlighted words illuminate the characteristics of the analysed dialect; they are not thus marked in the original text.

32 Ibid., 236.

The writer seasons his text with phrases borrowed from foreign languages, mainly English ("happy," "user-friendly," "job"), but also from Czech ("sakra") and from Arabic (Bulanda means Poland in Arabic); with Polonised English words ("lucka," "dewajsem" or "jurki," which is a term for the euro among the migrants in Ireland); with English-Polish clusters ("twice-a-tydzień"); with phonetic transcriptions ("peepal," "empe-sree"); with translation equivalents ("mleczno-miodowy świat" is a literal translation of the phrase "the land of milk and honey"); and with neologisms ("pampers-pisser" is an adjective implying "very low" wages and "bajobongo" is a name for Ireland, alluding to an exotic holiday place, a paradise). In his novel, Czerwiński has gathered and applied linguistic features that are also introduced, though in a more subtle way, by other contemporary migrant authors.

This dialect, skilfully captured in migrant books, explores not only the construction of the developing language of the Polish diaspora, but also, and even more importantly, the cross-cultural and cross-linguistic exchanges that occur under the forces of recent migration. If we look at the texts produced by Polish migrants, even the short excerpt from *Conductum Lifae* quoted above, we get a clear picture of how Western culture captivates writers' attention, stirs their interest in the Other, and boosts their imagination. This is why every single author from the sample group references cultural differences between Polish people and local citizens in a variety of life spheres. These range from trivial things, such as left-hand traffic, spongy bread, two taps per sink or softer water, to more general issues like the national mentality, male-female relationships or the ethnic make-up of society. Michał Wyszowski indicates those differences in the very title of his book by locating England, the place of action, *On the Left Side of the World*. For many migrants who left Poland, a country with a relatively homogeneous population, and moved to the UK or Ireland, this was their first ever experience of life in a multicultural metropolis of Western Europe. Hence the writers are interested in exploring how Polish people react to cultural heterogeneity and how their biases fare when confronted by other ethnic groups. Thus the characters share houses, work and spend their free time with representatives of different nationalities and, just as in real life, often end up developing closer relationships with migrants from other countries than with British or Irish people. The authors hide behind a veil of sarcasm in order to denounce the xenophobic behaviour of Polish people, which is rooted in narrow nationalism, and to show the advantages of endorsing the Other. Jarek Sępek devotes almost 300 pages of his book *W 80 dni dookoła* świata *(nie wyjeżdżając z Londynu)* [*Around the World in 80 Days (Without Leaving London)*] to exploring and celebrating multiculturalism. Following in the footsteps of Phileas Fogg, the protagonist of Jules Verne's novel, he makes a bet with the editor of *Geographical Magazine* that it will take him no

more than eighty days to find and document eighty representatives of different nationalities who live in the capital of the UK. The experiment is meant to prove, among other things, that London's ethnic diversity is a treasure. As the book was published in Polish and in Poland, we might assume that it was intended for Polish readers from the very start. Actually, out of over sixty migrant authors whose work I have analysed, only five wrote their books in English: A.M. Bakalar, Maria Jastrzębska, Wiktor Moszczyński, Marek Kazmierski and Daniel Żuchowski. The main reason for this is insufficient fluency in the foreign language, something the writers admit to openly, saying that they find it much easier to express themselves in Polish. But this means that their native culture is still a hugely dominant part of their identity; it acts as a prism through which they perceive and describe the outside world.

Members of the two previous waves of Polish emigration to England and Ireland – the first during World War II and the second in the 1980s, when martial law was introduced in Poland – cultivated their national identity by founding Polish Clubs, called Dom Polski [Polish House]. As the name suggests, they were like a home from home, little pockets of Poland in a strange land. They hosted a variety of weekend activities: Polish language classes for children, Sunday mass, dances, art exhibitions and literary evenings. The buildings usually housed a restaurant, a bar and a library. But when post-accession migrants arrived in the UK and Ireland, they thought Polish Clubs were outdated and fossilised time capsules fostering activities that had little to do with contemporary culture in Poland. So these newest arrivals have certainly not pushed up membership of the clubs, but instead established less formal artistic groups, such as KaMPe, Poetry London, E=Art or Interactive Writing Salon in Scotland. Interestingly enough, the previous role of Polish Clubs was partly assumed by Polish shops, which sprung up throughout the British Isles. According to the website uksimple.info, there are currently 319 such shops in operation.

As migrant novelists imply, some newcomers believe consumerism can be a remedy for homesickness: so when they miss home, they go shopping for Polish goods. In a number of books, for instance *Pokój z widokiem na Dunnes Stores* [*The Room with a View of Dunnes Stores*] by Łukasz Ślipko or *Dublin, moja polska karma* [*Dublin, My Polish Karma*] by Magdalena Orzeł, a separate chapter is devoted to the role Polish shops play in the life of the diaspora. The authors dwell, often with sarcastic undertones, on how these places support newcomers and foster patriotism: apart from selling Polish goods, the shops serve as employment agencies and cultural centres, disseminating information about the latest job offers, Polish concerts, art exhibitions or book launches. When Magdalena Zimny-Louis wanted to find out if people would be interested in her work, she left a few copies of *Emigracja uczuć* [*The Emigration of Feelings*] in the local shop in Ipswich and was pleased to discover that they sold out

within three days. In turn, *Kalendarz Easy Ridera* [*Easy Rider's Calendar*] by Konrad Jaskólski, a migrant who lives in the UK, can be purchased at a florist's in Łódź. This intersection of literary narratives and commerce shows how the economic system subsumes the products of culture. As migrant books started to circulate along with other goods, they became an integral part of the materialist world. In *Global Matters*, Paul Jay rightly points out that it is no longer possible "to make a clear distinction between exchanges that are purely material and take place in an economy of commodities and exchanges that are purely symbolic and take place in a cultural economy."[33] Economic flows propel cultural transfer, and *vice versa*.

What this reciprocal relationship leads to is greater commodification of migrant narratives than is the case with literature produced in Poland. All the more so since, as I have already mentioned, a number of the books in question were either self-published or released by small publishing houses, which means that migrant writers were frequently forced to simultaneously adopt the role of author, editor, agent and publisher. In many cases, attention has consequently shifted away from the artistic dimension of the writings to their social and anthropological functions. The imperative to portray recent migration experience "as it really was" became the guiding principle for many of the authors. To reach a relatively wide readership with their message, they invested a lot of time and effort in marketing. For example, Anna Wendzikowska began to heavily advertise her debut novel *300 poranków w Londynie* [*300 Mornings in London*] in 2011, even though seven years later the book has still not been published. This materialistic approach to producing and distributing books has resulted in a surge of migrant writing that has little aesthetic value but is full of social and cultural information, documenting an important period in contemporary Polish history. Reading it, we can see how the meaning of concepts like nationality, homeland, and patriotism is redefined, how old stereotypes are eroded and new ones shoulder them aside, how young people morph into European citizens, and how transnational culture comes into being.

Although migrants produce this culture in a sort of seclusion, parallel to the artistic activity in their homeland – mainly due to geographical distance – it is still closely connected with mainstream culture in their home country. The authors sustain ties with the literary milieu they have left behind by participating in Polish literary initiatives and organising events in cooperation with writers based in Poland. To give an example, Tomasz Mielcarek, moved to England ten years ago and has since taken part in a number of competitions in Poland and won several awards, including the Bierezin Literary

33 Paul Jay, *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2010), 56.

Prize in 2013. This enabled him to publish *Obecność/Presence,* his debut bilingual poetry collection. In 2010, Marek Kazmierski set up OFF-PRESS, an independent publishing house based in London, bringing together Polish and migrant authors to produce unique bilingual anthologies, such as *Free Over Blood,* a beautifully designed, hand-bound collection of poems. Currently, KaMPe in London and Dom Literatury in Łódź are considering joining forces to organise the next Puls Literatury Festival in both cities. Due to such multi-locale cooperation, Polish literature is "travelling" more often and being presented and interpreted in foreign, ethnically diverse contexts. This is especially true as organisers almost always make an effort to attract and engage with local communities. Aware that the audience might comprise a multicultural mix of people, the authors involved attempt to select topics and display them in such a way as to relate to a large spectrum of people.

The process of Polish literature acquiring more universal qualities is further accelerated by numerous literary initiatives aimed at forging international links. One of them is *The Enemies Project,* founded in the UK in 2010 by the British poet S.J. Fowler. Quoting from his website:

> It is a project that looks across nations, languages, genders and ethnicities as much as it does art forms and styles of poetry. It is the culmination of an exploration of the role and practice of the poet in the 21st century, and how that has shifted with new means of communication, language, technology and curatorial purview.[34]

Within the programme, poets are paired up and commissioned to collaboratively write poems which they later perform live at specially organised readings. So far, there have been two such events where Polish poets (many of whom were migrant authors, e.g., Tomasz Mielcarek, Grzegorz Wróblewski and Piotr Gwiazda, among others) cooperated with British authors. They then presented the fruits of their collaboration – poems in English – at the Rich Mix Arts Centre in London. A similar format was used by *Once Upon a Deadline*, a writing marathon originally devised by the Australian writer and filmmaker Robert Mac, staged at the 2011 edition of the Polish Arts Festival in Southend-on-Sea. Polish writers (again many of them migrants, including Piotr Czerwiński, Kajetan Herdyński and Wioletta Grzegorzewska) were coupled with UK authors and sent on a trip around the festival town. While sightseeing, the marathon participants had to write a 1,500-word short story in English and later that same day read it aloud at a live public event in Clifftown Studios at the University of Essex. The short stories were subsequently

34 S.J. Fowler, *The Enemies Project*: www.theenemiesproject.com, accessed November 2, 2015, http://www.stevenjfowler.com/#/the-enemies-project/

collected and published by OFF-PRESS. An expanded format of this project, involving British writers being sent to Poland and Polish writers visiting the UK, was successfully staged a year later.

In transnational practices, such as those above, literary narratives become subject to cultural and linguistic translation from the moment of inception. The writers involved are taken out of their comfort zones and sent to a foreign place where they are asked to assume and assimilate the Other into their own cultural frameworks, in order to produce original, innovative pieces of writing. Their task is to take in elements which are alien, then appropriate, neutralise, reconfigure and recreate them in such a way that they seem foreign and familiar at the same time; and this is not the end of the challenge, because the outcome of this labour has to be expressed in a language that is not native to the authors. As Paweł Gawroński, one of the participants of *Once Upon a Deadline,* admitted:

> It is a very funny experience when you get to the stage where your vocabulary in your mother tongue is quite rich and then you end up in the country where you lose the greatest asset you've ever had. It's suddenly gone. And you've got two choices: you either jump off the bridge or you start to discover a new quality of language.[35]

This quality rejuvenates writing style and is a "side-effect" of translating when one rephrases, reworks and remodels language to convey an original thought in foreign words. In the process, mother tongues and foreign languages interact, each bringing with them different means of expression, resulting in a comprehensive and unconventional description of reality. From the very start, the migrant literary narratives are produced in those transcultural and multilingual spaces where the writer is positioned among multifarious nationalities, histories, values, traditions and knowledge sets. This naturally creates the foundation for a more diversified, complex and hybrid literature. All the more so because it has become quite common for literary texts to be showcased as part of large-scale artistic initiatives such as festivals, where they are presented alongside, together with or in the foreground of art exhibitions, concerts, theatre productions and film screenings. One can therefore talk about a sort of combined artistic, rather than solely literary, production. This multidisciplinary approach is also employed by migrant writers when they promote their own work. At the book launch of *Piękni ludzie* [*Beautiful People*] in Birmingham, many of those who contributed to the anthology chose to read out their texts while music or a film animation was played in the

35 The quotation comes from a promotional video for the collection of short stories *Once Upon a Deadline*. It was available on the OFF-PRESS Publishing House's website: http://off-press.org/main/books/once-upon-a-deadline/, accessed November 2, 2015.

background. And some of the poems were performed by professional actors. The eclectic structure of these events explores the expansive potentiality of combining different artistic media across nations, cultures and languages in order to bring out new forms, styles and themes in literature.

With an increasing number of migrant books on the Polish market being written outside the state's borders, often in more than one location, one can risk concluding that there has been a transnational turn in Polish literature. What are the grounds for such a view? The expansion of EU borders, along with increased availability of cheap flights, have led to Polish contemporary writing being more and more often produced in a range of geographical, historical, cultural and linguistic spaces. The texts then function simultaneously in multifarious social and literary systems, and should be analysed in relation to such. That these writings belong to different contexts is confirmed by the interest they generate among critics and scholars worldwide. 2010, for instance, saw the publication of *Facing the East in the West: Images of Eastern Europe in British Literature, Film and Culture,* a monograph produced under the Rodopi imprint in Amsterdam. And a year later, Joanna Rostek and Dirk Uffelmann, both working at the University of Passau in Germany, compiled and edited a collection of essays on *Contemporary Polish Migrant Culture and Literature in Germany, Ireland and the UK.* Anyone attempting to analyse migrant narratives should take into account the profound effect the authors' reliance on the Internet for communication and online writing exerted on the form and language of their books. Moreover, it is worth looking at how closer economic and social relationships between Poland and Western Europe are providing new spaces and new ways of creating literary narratives (as part of transnational projects), their advertising (by combining literary, music and art events) and the dissemination of books (via Polish shops, publishing houses and literary groups abroad). Should these aspects be ignored while interpreting migrant writing, their meaning and value will be narrowed, distorted, and possibly misunderstood. Anyone who wants to analytically read the books needs to include those perspectives in their mode of literary interpretation. With certain texts there will also be a need to shift attention from aesthetics to their social and anthropological functions, in order to examine how they synthesize elements of multiple places and nationalities, how they become engaged in a multifaceted exploration of intersecting effects of migration and globalization, how they rework the issues of trauma and memory, and how they express transnational identities and experiences. To conclude on a positive note, among the many texts lacking in artistic value one can also increasingly find *rara avises* such as *Guguły* [*Swallowing Mercury*] by Wioletta Grzegorzewska and *Angole* [*Brits*] by Anna Winnicka, both of which were shortlisted for the 2015 Nike Prize, one the most prestigious literary awards in Poland.

Anna Kałuża

Polish Poetry on the Isles: In the Evenings We Feel Nostalgic

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It would be hard to consider Polish poetry written abroad merely in the context of migration studies.[1] Since 1989, Poles have continued to leave their country of birth, though no longer solely driven by political factors – interpreting this ongoing exodus after the year 2000 in historically romantic, national-independence or dissident contexts would be out of synch with cultural reality. It appears that economics is the most appropriate perspective through which to study these short or long stays

1 See numerous books about emigration after 1989, including *Narracje migracyjne w literaturze polskiej XX i XXI wieku* [*Migration Narratives in Polish 20th and 21st Century Literature*], ed. Hanna Gosk (Kraków: Universitas, 2012); Hanna Mamzer, *Tożsamość w podróży. Wielokulturowość a kształtowanie tożsamości jednostki* [*Travelling Identity. Multiculturalism and the Shaping of Individual Identity*] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM Publishing Company, 2003; *Pisarz na emigracji. Mitologie. Style. Strategie przetrwania* [*Mythologies, Styles, Survival Strategies: The Emigre Writer*], ed. Hanna Gosk, Andrzej Stanisław Kowalczyk (Warszawa: Dm Wydawniczy Elipsa, publishing company, 2005); Agnieszka Nęcka, *Emigracje intymne. O współczesnych polskich narracjach autobiograficznych* [*Intimate Emigrations. On Contemporary Polish Autobiographica Narrations*] (Katowice: Uniwersytet Śląski Publishing, 2013).

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abroad. This does not, however, mean that economic factors are sufficient to define the poetry still being written beyond Polish borders, especially if we want to understand it as an aesthetic, ideological and cultural phenomenon. Economic and social factors should certainly be explained through cultural analysis, but I would like to consider poetry – which happens to be a layered communicative configuration – by analysing more, rather than fewer, factors.

Cross Culture and the Economy

We could therefore characterise this situation through Stephen Greenblatt's notions of the "poetics of culture,"[2] connecting with a micro-historical turning which represents an alternative approach – much like geo-poetics – to the narration of classic cultural history, which disseminates the conviction that cultures are homogenous.[3] One could also "protest" the presuppositions of transcultural aesthetics, which direct our attention to such things as "cross culture." It would be useful to analyse this phenomenon from the perspective of literary practices of the everyday (understood thanks to the likes of Michel de Certeau).[4] In any case, it seems that in trying to position Polish poetry created abroad (or thought of as a consequence of such travels), one should abandon thinking related to historically constructed concepts of migrations (and its political and identity contexts) in order to replace them, for example, with ideas of "cultural encounters" or "translating cultures."[5]

By reducing the functionality of historical references to emigration, we achieve a more realistic perspective. In thinking about the consequences of the establishment, function and concept of Polish poetry created abroad we could then be influenced by the context of actual geopolitical and economic arrangements (the EU, open borders, integration policies, employment policies) and our understanding of space and place, of time, of individual identity and collective entities, reshaped by the influence of new technologies and

2 See Stephen Greenblatt, *Poetyka kulturowa. Pisma wybrane* [*Cultural Poetics. Selected Works*], trans. Krystyna Kujawińska-Courtney (Kraków: Universitas Publishing Company, 2006).

3 Peter Burke, *Historia kulturowa. Wprowadzenie* [*Cultural History. An Introduction*], trans. Justyn Hunia (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego Publishing Company, 2012), 8.

4 This solely indicates a broad range of possibilities in creating functional contemporary theories of aesthetics and cultures, replacing historical descriptions of emigration and their updates.

5 Burke, *Historia*, 135-143.

media. From this perspective, there is no easy equation of nation differences with cultural and communicative differences, and the motility of the émigré experience suspersedes the static mapping of people's movement from one place to another. Localities and particularities across this broadened horizon of cultural encounters would be understood as forces which continually drive the revision of fields formed by trans-national or trans-ethnic ideas.

These, however, are merely conceptual frames – though valuable in making interpretative decisions and the process of understanding texts penned beyond Poland's borders. Their flaw might be a lack of recognition of the importance of the pragmatic and social surroundings which regulate and allow the appearance of ready-made objects in the public sphere. One also has to – referencing the perspective of cultural encounters – pay attention to the cultural politics of a given country. Although artistic networks are scattered, away from home, authors can most of all count on Polish institutions (the Book Institute or the Adam Mickiewicz Institute) for help. The global flow of capital, trans-national ideas and metropolitan arrangements within European cities seems to allow residents to work – if at all – within the visual arts rather than literature. The national interests of various countries continue to be a key factor in the aesthetic and ideological game of creating values within literature. Limiting the support from international associations, charities and other private institutions in favour of help secured from state organisations becomes ever more visible, especially in the example of Polish culture. National and state considerations – and not the interests of various movements, be they feminist, anarchist or ecological, backed by various trusts – are therefore the most obvious in thinking about cultural politics within which Polish poetry and its foreign tributaries function.[6] This is an example of "top down" funding (translations, grants, scholarships), which do indeed allow the opportunity for variations in aesthetic ideologies, but still directs thinking about poetry in categories of general nationality. Things are no different beyond the Polish context: in 2015 Katrine Øgaard Jensen introduced new Danish poetry into the American poetry scene, and though she was driven to do so by issues of ecology, feminism and how we cohabit with other life forms on our planet, the critic cannot abandon the category of "Danishness." Importantly, her selections did not contain anything which could have been considered "national" in context.[7]

6 Poetry which features in a less traditional medium can be an exception – such as electronic poetry festivals or Spoke'n'Word festivals, see. e.g. http://www.oslopoesifilm.no/. These practices are almost automatically established in a transcultural environment.

7 Katrine Øgaard Jensen, "After Inger Christensen: Humans, Plants, and Planets in New Danish Poetry" 2015, accessed December 11, 2017, http://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article/december-2015-danish-intro

If the politics of financing culture, and in this case the politics of various scholarship programmes aimed at poets, could also be constructed with greater focus on categories other than nationality (such as artistic, social or ethnic), then a more varied range of ways of conceptualising poetry would also be possible. We would be more careful, too, to formulate theses about the dependency between place and experience/poetic images – snapshots of leaving the motherland and longing for moments of childhood would become solely the extension of a single historical convention, and not the most eagerly awaited textual behaviour of a given poet. It is, among other things, the politics of national institutions which authorises conventionalism and traditionalism in thinking about poetry. In effect, the old arrangements along the homeland-emigration axis are perpetuated. The state as the most important institution in providing symbolic and economic capital is at the same time the most important subject involved in the process of signifying and distributing cultural values. This does not, of course, mean that it functions like censorship in any sort of sensible context, but more like a filter excluding content, images or ideas which first appear, and which will then be prevented from flourishing. Judith Butler defines this precisely when, in *Fighting Words,* she writes that it is not possible to understand censorship solely in categories of jurisdiction and rule. According to Butler, censorship is about the conditions which facilitate the appearance of speech that is deemed acceptable. It doesn't so much function a f t e r, but b e f o r e the appearance of any sort of cultural production.[8] This is why it is so important to consider state-funded institutions which stand "gatekeeper" at the outset of the creative process and its distribution methods, those we consider to be key cultural facts – especially when said facts appear on the borders between institutions, cultures and languages.

Aesthetic Games and Cultural Confrontations

Difficulties in positioning poetry (written abroad) are connected not only with the cultural politics of a given country. Within the framework set by the idea of cultural encounters, one can move too quickly to the everyday reality of the conflicted character of such encounters and the cultural hegemony of specific countries. For example, geopoetics is especially keen on the potential offered by cultural exchange, which is possible thanks to the opening of

8 For Butler, censorship is rules which appear before any sort of individual decision, and which "represent those limiting conditions *which give the chance* to make any sort of firm decisions." Judith Butler, *Walczące słowa. Mowa nienawiści i polityka performatywu* [*Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*], trans. Adam Ostolski (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2010), 148–149.

national borders and the growth of the strong status of metropolitan areas, including local identifications of cultural cohesion.[9] In this context it is therefore useful – perhaps in the future – to ask whether and how Polish poetry enters into a discussion about cultural conflicts, problems with identity, etc., and what the consequences are of the domination of the English language and Western culture within such an arrangement.

From the point of view of poetry, such discussions have been opened up and then ended by recalling Karol Irzykowski's judgement about the plagiarising character of Polish breakthroughs. This opinion has become a typical element of literary critical discourse and – it seems to me – has meant that the analysis of connections between the fields of English and Polish poetic languages has mainly involved trying to trace the debt Polish works owe to their English counterparts. An example of this curious mechanism of cross-checking could be the discussion that took place after 1989 about the "influence" the poetry of two Americans – Frank O'Hara and John Ashbery – had on Polish verse. Passing over its slapstick character – when the word "o'harist," coined by Krzysztof Koehler, became a joke taken seemingly straight from Disney comedies – this discussion was fixed in the "purificatory" consciousness, setting within hierarchies the mono-centrically conceived cultures and separating foreign influences from the domestic.[10] Meanwhile, the gesture of Polish authors indicating artists from other linguistic and artistic locations meant a need to "loosen up" these binary and confrontational attitudes, coloured by nationalistic and cultural tendencies.[11] Conclusions arising from this last, and thus far rather unfortunate, exchange of opinions on the subject of "borrowings" within Polish poetry are that, only when we cease describing poetry in terms of an erosion of homogeneous cultural values (more or less plagiarised, original and copying, repeating and misleading), will we be able

9 See Elżbieta Rybicka, *Geopoetyka* [*Geopolitics*], in *Kulturowa teoria literatury. Główne pojęcia i problemy* [*Cultural History of Literature. Main Concepts and Considerations*], ed. Michał Paweł Markowski and Ryszard Nycz (Kraków: Universitas 2006), 471–490.

10 See the opening of a rather lengthy and drawn-out discussion: Krzysztof Koehler, "Oharyzm,"[*Oharism*], *brulion* 14-15(1990); Marcin Świetlicki, "Koehleryzm," [*Koehlerism*] *brulion* 16 (1991)

11 This was about references to something unknown, an act in the style of the Dadaists, anarchic, and not establishing a new canon set against the old. See Andrzej Sosnowski, *Wiersz i śmiech*, in: ibid, *Stare śpiewki* [*Old Ditties*] (Wrocław: Biuro Literackie, 2013), 78. Sosnowski here talks about the American gesture which he finds in the poem by Kenneth Koch, but I think that the effect of an "ace up a sleeve," as he terms the New York poets' referencing of French and Russian poetry, echoed Polish poets referencing of their US counterparts after 1989.

to study the aesthetic games revealed in the processes of trans-location of various values and socio-political policies. And the stakes in such discussions are high, as the value of poets who "transport themselves" linguistically and geographically – as we know from past lessons – can be underestimated when it comes to poetry itself. After 1989, it was a group of poets and translators, travelling through scholarships, short-term trips or internships, who arranged new conditions within which poetry functioned as an institution.

And yet, we must admit that today – after our media revolution – it would be hard to find the presence of a dominant poetic philosophy in some sort of mono-centric template of influence and aping. Polish poetry after 1989 maintains aesthetic tension with the poetry produced in other languages, especially with innovative American verse, the New York school of postmodern avant-garde, functioning in international slams, civic poetry and electronic contexts.[12] When it comes to experiments somewhere between art and science, Polish artists fail to develop many such connections; when it comes to poetic experiments involving virtual environments (video poetry, flash poetry, poetic gifs, etc.), then only smaller publishers such as Wydawnictwo Ha!art or Hub Wydawniczy Rozdzielczość Chleba run such initiatives; meanwhile, feminist and eco-critical poetry is finding academic validation, which is of course welcome, but it is unfortunate that one cannot confront these with other, more radical elements within poetry, because they do not exist (for example, anarchist-feminist verse or other such radical conceptualisations). In a word, radical extremes seldom break through and appear in Polish poetry. By way of consolation, one could say that Polish prose is even more traditionalistic and written with a conviction in the unshakeable value of universal ideas.

This potentially "nearby" relationship between Polish poetry and other poetic ideologies is possible thanks to "soft borders" – the architectural term for walls that do not separate the interior from the exterior – which the Internet allows. Access to various poetries has been theoretically unlimited for a while now. Some Polish authors read non-Polish poetry and some do not, but either way, it need not automatically result in translations; conversely, one doesn't have to wait for translations for foreign authors to become key players in the Polish linguistic environment. On the one hand, this makes

12 One could study this tension with less optimism and note that in Poland many artists who are famous in the English language world remain unknown, untranslated and "undissected" in Poland. An example of this might be poets other than Ashbery and O'Hara from the New York school (Barbara Guest) or poets from the Language school, also inspired by the New Yorkers, such as Charles Berstein, or their followers, such as Ron Siliman, not even mentioning the new wave of poetry in the UK, which includes Francesca Lisette, Amy De'Ath, Julia Ciesielska, Frances Kruk or Rebecca Goss. The list of "absentees" is certainly long and there is little point in trying to complete it here.

dependencies, connections and engagements of an aesthetic and cultural nature more discreet; on the other, matters become both non-binding and unclear.

So we have to ask whether authors who left after the year 2000 and moved to the British Isles introduced new ways in which poetry can be thought of, whether they are responsible for establishing new, "trendy" names in the canon of Polish verse, and whether they have been decisive in setting some new direction in poetry. Meanwhile, we should also be aware that trends from the 1990s were created by poet-translators, many of whom did not emigrate alongside "pure" poets to the UK. Importantly, in relation to these ongoing migrations, one should include in our description and analysis the "foreign" situation affecting Polish poetry via authors who visit the UK for brief scholarships. It is more migrations and transits, rather than permanent residence, which define here the trails of convergence and divergence between a range of poetic processes.

An Expanding Universe and Didactic Poetry

Of those who spent time in the UK after 2000, we should mention Klara Nowakowska, Robert Rybicki, Kajetan Herdyński, Arkadiusz Kremza and Kamila Pawluś. Grzegorz Wołoszyn has also spoken about his temporary stay there. Then there are the likes of Sławomir Elsner, Małgorzata Południak, Izabela Smolarek, Wioletta Grzegorzewska and Tomasz Mielcarek, who consider their lives abroad to have become permanent realities.[13] Not all wrote and published while "away from home:" Elsner left for Ireland after the publication of his volume *Afekt* [*Affect*] and his book debut *Antypody* [*Antipodes*]; he is currently working in Ireland on his second book. In conversation with Elsner, Jacek Bierut talked about Klara Nowakowska and mentioned that she

13 See. Zdzisław Surowiec, "Nostalgia w wierszach niżańskiego poety" [*Nostalgia in the Works of the Niżanski Poet*], 19 February 2013, accessed December 11, 2017, http://www.echodnia.eu/podkarpackie/wiadomosci/stalowa-wola/art/8598820,nostalgia-w-wierszach-nizanskiego-poety-grzegorz-woloszyn-prezentowal-nagrodzony-tomik,id,t.html; Joanna Kosmalska, "Wielka Brytania moim drugim domem. Z Tomaszem Mielcarkiem rozmawia Joanna Kosmalska" ["Britain, My Second Home"], accessed December 11, 2017, http://archiwum-emigracja.uni.lodz.pl/en/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/a_rozmowa_z_Mielcarkiem.pdf; Joanna Kosmalska, "Czuje się pisarką polską z krwi i kości. Z Wiolettą Grzegorzewską rozmawia Joanna Kosmalska" ["I Feel Like a Polish Writer, in Both Blood and Bone. Joanna Kosmalska in Conversation with Wioletta Grzegorzewska"], 2015, accessed December 11, 2017, http://archiwum-emigracja.uni.lodz.pl/en/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Arterie-19_Wywiad-z-Wioletta-Grzegorzewska_Joanna-Kosmalska.pdf

hadn't written anything during her five-year stay in London.[14] Kamila Pawluś, on the other hand, having published two volumes of poetry in Poland, wrote a series of poems[15] during her two years in London. There are of course many more poets who publish their work online while permanently living in the UK, but it is impossible to arrange their activities into a relatively stable map of Polish poetry abroad.

If we were to present two radically different ways of looking at poetry, we could not do better than choose Robert Rybicki and Grzegorz Wołoszyn. The other poets and their works fit in between these two incompatible versions of imagining what poetry might become.

Rybicki's book *Stos gitar* [*Piled Guitars*] (2009) – written while travelling between places such as the UK and the Czech Republic – are enlivened by an anarchic spirit and the anti-institutional traditions of Dadaism. This allows the author to do much with his verse: for accidents to distort lines, for poetry not to become a form of communication ready to be contained by forces which strive to maintain social and artistic status quo. Above all, it separates poetry from ethical criteria. Rybicki distances himself from both artistic forms present in the poetic mainstream, as well as from more symbolically charged ethical and political strategies. His *Stos gitar* and its promise of Dada-influenced gestures, aiming to reject all positions and replace them with pure negation, in as-yet unpublished poems from later collections – *Dar meneli* [*Gifts of the Bums*] and *Nowy Tristian Tzara potrzebny od zaraz* [*A New Tristian Tzara Needed Right Away*] (written in the Czech Republic) – digs down into the depths of language: German, Czech, Polish, Spanish and English. In the process of connecting individual words, they move from the level of syntax towards that of pure sound. Here is a fragment from "Happy dada:"

> [...] No one knows how it grows,
> frazofrenik z fraktalem frędzla fryzury Freuda,
> ale fala z woala à la Aal im Allee,
> sallam fallus
> als minulost,
> co ona gada w tym anglodada,
> czarna čočka w ciemnościach ćmi
> ako die

14 See "Sławomir Elsner/Jacek Bierut. Pogawędka" ["Sławomir Elsner/Jacek Bierut. Chit Chat"], 2014, accessed December 11, 2017, accessed February 7, 2016, http://fundacja-karpowicz.org/slawomir-elsner-jacek-bierut-pogawedka/

15 Kamila Pawluś, *Wiersze*, accessed December 11, 2017, http://www.dwutygodnik.com/artykul/5276-wiersze.html

i Didi i MIDI LIDI
und da:
nomada gada dada
als Versager [...]

One should mention that the ideas of the Dadaist movement are being spectacularly reborn; in this sense, Rybicki's strategies are not working in isolation:[16] *RetroDada Manifesto* by McKenzie Wark, an Australian media analyst, is one of the many examples of the validity of this sort of source of inspiration.

I reference these verses, even though they do not come from a collection of poems written during his stay in London. This is because they are proof of a continually explored "trans-territoriality" in Rybicki's poetry. Seen in contrast with his later books, *Stos gitar* seems even more grounded in topographical metaphor: labyrinths and prisons are the most important architectural elements in this collection. It is on the differences between limits that Rybicki composes *Stos gitar*: identity crises gain importance here when they are converted into an architectural and cultural or cosmological and biological code. Rybicki's stanzas have a hard time maintaining coherent form solely in terms of canonical sequences, their energies sourced from wasting resources which they could draw upon: traditions within the arts, the so-called humanistic achievements of our species, a relatively stable "arrangement" of linguistic codes, etc. In any case, the tale told by the subject of *Stos gitar* constantly undermines the self and eliminates its own authentications. It is easy to read this book as an attempt to reject criticisms of civilisation based on rational arguments and instead return to the value of jokes, games and comically grotesque hyperbole. In the central, dystopian poem "Maszyny na parkiecie" ["Machines on the Dancefloor"], Rybicki produces an interesting fantasy about the ability to communicate in the future, when life is present within the whole Galaxy. Two languages will exist then: Earthish ("mutated with English of course / ingested tongues of states which dominated for a few thousand / years in the deepest past") and the Code of Understanding, "made up of a million / characters, which are programmed in the appropriate segment of our genetic / coding."[17] The Code of Understanding, along with things such as the books of New Ethics, New Mengele, are signs of a consciousness which has been completely colonised, infiltrated by genetic codes.

16 McKenzie Wark, "RetroDada Manifesto," 2016, accessed December 11, 2017, http://www.publicseminar.org/2016/02/retrodada-manifesto/

17 Robert Rybicki, *Stos gitar* [*Piled Guitars*] (Warszawa: Publishing Company, 2009), 34.

This vision of a cyber-narco-schizo-civilisation is rather apolitical and aims to intensify social movement, ending here with a meta-textual comedy trick. These sorts of games in Rybicki's book work as if they were unruly rules.[18] Writing for him is a collection of reinstated practices which also become a form of acting and living. Rybicki does, however, understand that he can't overcome the symbolic order using straight-forwardly destructive gestures. Hence, his strategy drives towards various codes – social, cultural, psychological and political – implementing each other. This viral perfidy is meant to trip up certain processes which normalise and stabilise the defined rules that govern our lives.

Rybicki does not avoid dealing in social facts, traversing relatively easy-to-read communicative tracts, especially when utilising so-called grand architectural (London-labyrinth-Babylon) or biological/technological (new people of a cybernetic era) metaphors, yet he avoids taking up a "position." As we can see, Rybicki does not write political poems, though he does undoubtedly see poetry in categories of artistic politicality.

On the other hand, in his debut collection *Poliptyk* [*Polyptych*] (2012), Grzegorz Wołoszyn builds most of his verses using a moral character. We have no doubt that the poet is mostly interested in an ethical marking of the situations presented (when the subject of the poems is dying of an incurable disease) or visions (the city as monster). The moral and educational code which underpins all meanings in the poems is responsible for the conservative criticism of modern-day reality which characterises the work. *Polyptych* is also a book which supports the idea of canonic nature as being fundamental for the significance of the poetic process. Paraphrasing *Ocalony* [*Saved*] by Różewicz (transformed into *Sclony*: the hero is both witness and victim of a virtualised reality), usage of a romantic code, stylistic tricks and a variety of poetic measures are employed to support value systems and hierarchies. All this happens along the lines of the past as an authentic reality versus the present of an oppressive, mechanised existence, and of a pastoral, almost Arcadian rurality (but only in an ideological sense, for it is poetically realistic) versus alienating city life. To quote: "Noon tastes of raspberry cordial, / which grandma mixed with milk churn and water" (the poem ż "Harvest," p. 14) and "Shoved tight into the briefcase of a train wagon, weightless in the crushed crowd" (the poem "Droga Pana Incognito" ["Mr Incognito's Road"], p. 52)[19]. The first quote refers

18 See Judith Butler, Żądanie *Antygony* [*Antigone's Claim*, editorial info] – for Butler, the separation of that which is psychological and symbolic from that which is social allows the "pragmatic normalisation of the social field," 87.

19 Grzegorz Wołoszyn, *Poliptyk* [*Polyptych*] (Świdnica: The Cyprian K. Norwid Public City Library in Świdnica, 2012).

to moments experienced during childhood holidays in the countryside, the second to adulthood in an anonymous city. Both – as we can see – perfectly reproduce anti-modern aesthetic ideologies.

Wołoszyn's debut thus consorts with an understanding of poetry as a collection of skills, rules and ideals which are rarely questions, though one could ludically transpose them into more actual contexts. He uses the book to pay off his emigrating "debt" – it is the (Polish) countryside that becomes home to values which – as we can expect – are missing from contemporary life.

Rybicki's aim is to provoke disruption within established structures, Wołoszyn prefers the role of poet/artist as moral guide. Rybicki insists on breaking free of everyday routines, discovering the freedom of expression in places thus far reserved for codified linguistic rules, which allows us to perceive his poetry as a staged "arts happening" of an absurdist, surreal character. Wołoszyn prefers to communicate in the realm of a certain community – with privileged ideas, mediums and values – and suggests thinking about poetry as an art which, as a rule, retains a superior position over other forms of artistic expression (a superiority which emerges out of a romantic hierarchy of arts genres). As a result, poetry, being his meta-language of modernity, has, paradoxically, to be considered as disconnected from present-day reality and cut off from its changes, including technological and civilisational. Perhaps this difference in the way both authors imagine poetry is best described by an attitude towards aesthetic and artistic experiences within modern poetry: either one takes these experiences into consideration, or one does not.

Direction: Countryside

It is not only Wołoszyn who engages in representations of Polish rural life. The mythology of the countryside is also at play in the poetry of Wioletta Grzegorzewska[20] and Tomasz Mielcarek.

Grzegorzewska's poems have a lot to do with her prose (*Guguły* [*Swallowing Mercury*] (2014) and the autobiographical records of her *Notatnik z wyspy* [*Notes from the Isle of White*] (2012). Descriptions of the countryside in her volumes of poetry *Orinoko* (2008), *Inne obroty* [*Other Revolutions*] (2010) or *Ruchy Browna*

20 It will come as no surprise to anyone that Polish literature after 2000 did not achieve notable success in the UK. Young Polish poets have not become well known among English-language readers (leaving aside the general weak trend when it comes to the buying and reading of poetry). A notable exception is the book *Finite Formulae* & *Theories of Chance* by Wioletta Greg (Grzegorzewska), translated by Marek Kazmierski, which was shortlisted for the Canadian Griffin Poetry Prize in 2015. Grzegorzewska has also written many other books of poetry, but I am interested only in those she has written since 2006, after emigrating to the UK.

[*Brownian Motions*] (2011) are characterised by a marked ambivalence, one which is totally absent in Wołoszyn. Having set up home in Ryde on the Isle of Wight, Grzegorzewska maintains a reportage-style in her verses, though we will also find aspects of surreal and fairytale styles in places. This pragmatic documenting of reality, akin to an anecdotal relating of details from the 1980s which dominate descriptions of rural life (Chernobyl, fashions dating back to communist times, old motorcycles), suggests that Grzegorzewska, too, is trying to utilise the sorts of poetic traditions which "enhance identity."

But even if her work often features genealogical and familial recollections, an interesting divergence develops between the author and the scenes and landscapes she describes. The poems can be read as facto-graphical records of folk and peasant culture. Grzegorzewska thus becomes a sort of documentary maker, storing images which come from her native lands: she talks about the traditions of her place of birth in the context of knowledge she has since gained about other cultures. For example, when she describes the custom of "walking house to house with the painting of an icon" she shows the event from a range of perspectives, tripling and doubling voices, despite maintaining a monologue style of verse. Certain sentences describing her ghost-home in *Notes from the Isle of Wight* also sound symptomatic:

> Don't ask me why I haven't gone back to Poland. I don't live in Ryde on the Isle of Wight or in a town of the same name on New South Wales. You will always find me in the ghost house built by my father, who worked on it for years in a meadow where the carline thistles blossom. [21]

Even if the countryside in Grzegorzewska's writing is not shown in a political (economic and class) context, neither is it mythologised in some museum mood of a pastoral Arcadia. In my opinion, this open aesthetic is the consequence of Grzegorzewska's passion for collecting images and narratives with a feminist accent. A looser approach to one's own experience, almost revisionist in nature, strengthens the desire to increase one's collection of images (events, worlds, ideas), rather than the wish to limit them for the sake of preserving some sort of purity of pedigree. Hence the unreal aspect of these presentations becomes key, along with its, so to speak, cultural effectiveness. Grzegorzewska's poetry is a sort of compromise between verses understood as an expression of individual voices and the value emerging from a socio-cultural understanding of art. Hence, her works are best analysed as an example of cross-cultural consciousness, seeing as they contain combinations of various signs and are far from turning these signs into totems which

21 Wioletta Grzegorzewska *Notatnik z wyspy*, Częstochowa 2012, s. 58.

should be fought for by battling against other cultures. Proof of this is in the wonderful line from her *Notes…* : "The wimples, burkas and yashmaks which cover the heads of Muslim women are as ordinary as the shawls your great-grandmother wore or the Reebok caps worn today."[22]

The poems from Tomasz Mielcarek's debut collection *Obecność/Presence* (2014) feature rural backgrounds almost as components of conviction in a naturalistic and biological foundation of life. Mielcarek shows the gradual erosion of the human world in quasi-objective verses. These scenes of our environment are confronted with the indifference of the natural world, with the intention of drawing our attention to the metaphysical: light, large time intervals, mortality, and helplessness in the face of mortality – something only art can capture. It is interesting that this sort of deterministic life philosophy usually appears in terms of art conceived as a cultural, and not adaptive or natural, artistic activity.[23] It is of course "naturalised," otherwise it would be hard to retain this specific aspect of semi-human activity, though from beyond the human perspective. Mielcarek's poetry divides all contradictions of this sort of conservative, elitist conception of the arts. Above all, in its totalising extensiveness, it bears other, historicising points of view and won't allow certain questions to be asked, such as why none of the people who appear in these verses (the homeless man eaten by dogs, an elderly woman growing steadily immobile, a madwoman from downstairs, labourers, etc.) have access to the bitter knowledge which is accessible to the narrator. And do the workmen from the poem "Poranek/Morning," listened to by an awakening narrator, have to tell each other stories about cheap brothels? Could they not, for example, be visiting museums instead?

In this book, poetry and the pictures of rural existence projected within it become a kind of starting motor for a "universalistic" convention, one which – in order to convince – has to conceal its historicity. It expresses ideas that align with, for example, existentialist philosophy: across the whole globe and its ages all people are mortal. This is why the scenes from Polish farm life are here merely a pretext for something else, seeing as they could easily be used to describe similar scenes in other parts of the world. They are only supposed to help us ponder the nature of human existence (life "as a whole") and cannot direct our attention towards economic and political realities, nor be a point of reference for cultural reflection. This disembodied (universalised) perspective in Mielcarek's poems arises of course out of completely different traditions

22 Ibid., 47.

23 See Jerzy Luty, "Sztuka jako kategoria naturalna," ["Art as Natural Category"] in *Estetyka pośród kultur* [*Aesthetics among Cultures*], ed. Krystyna Wilkoszewska (Kraków: Universitas, 2012), 116–129.

of thinking about individuals and art than the transitory ideas contained in Rybicki's works, or the multiple perspectives of cultural perception found in Grzegorzewska's books; a certain thematic similarity might link them to the poems by Wołoszyn. Both their works appear to come from the same convictions about the universal value of art separated from the actual conditions of creation.

Mass Poetics

The work of the remaining poets – Małgorzata Południak, Izabela Smolarek, Kajetan Herdyński and Arkadiusz Kremza – could be loosely characterised as varied examples of "spoken" poetry, focused mainly on a conversational style of communication. Their urban background is clear, though not especially overwhelming, representing simply the natural environment for various linguistic solutions. This poetry of contrasted situations, of micro-dialogues and exchanges of opinion, utilising monologues which are not necessarily lyrical in effect, rarely tries to move away from everyday speech. It is littered with common conversations, intelligent jokes, well-aimed ripostes, insightful observations. The language here doesn't so much work in pictures (sensual and vivid, as in the case of Grzegorzewska, or futuristic and architectural, as in Rybicki), often refusing to present us with settings or a plan of presentation. The authors listed above strive to achieve direct contact with readers, counting on an individually conceived identity – insightful, critical, emotionally engaged in the language being used. And so Kajetan Herdyński, the author of the poetry collection *Późny karnawał* [*A Late Carnival*] (2012), which is discreetly allusive and multi-layered, attaches great importance to rhythm, repetition and fine turns of phrase. In spite of a realistic tone of writing, his poems can be read as pop-movie tales about the city, presenting us with its numerous heroes, legends and typical moods. Małgorzata Południak, author of the collection *Czekając na Malinę* [*Waiting for Malina*] (2012), and the collection she wrote in Ireland, *Odd Numbers* (2014), writes poems that give an impression of intimacy, revolving around family confessions, personal histories, etc. Izabela Smolarek, the author of *się lenienie* (2006), presents the female voice as more at odds with the world. These three poets exhibit a varied range of autobiographical reference points, meant to fit into so-called urban realities as tales of the relationships between individuals who are close to one another.

The work of Arkadiusz Kremza, author of numerous collections, including those written in England – *Ludzie wewnętrzni* [*Interior People*] (2009), *Wiersze z wody i* żelaza [*Poems of Water and Iron*] (2012) and also partly *Sterownia* [*Pilothouse*] (2015) – is most unlike conversational poetry. In the book-length poem *Ludzie wewnętrzni* [*Interior People*], composed as a series of responses

to the titular characters, Kremza displays psychological confusions and social deceits. His books are most often based on a concept which frames the whole in an interesting fashion. And Kremza does not limit himself to a socio-psychological reality in relations of a realistic kind, but allows a slightly more free connection between materiality and spirituality, factuality and potentiality, etc.

Limit Play

As we can see, it is rare that poets living beyond Poland's borders use codes of romanticised nostalgia, but there is still a clear dominance of lyrical forms of expression. It is as if those who moved to the UK were mainly users of the Polish tongue for whom culture (poetry) is a sphere separate from the social and political. It is the communicatively gifted students on Britain's streets, not the excluded, the economically marginalised or the socially enraged, who could consider the arts as an excellent tool for picturing the world. The poetry which emerges from the authors listed above explores values of identity from a personal perspective, while class, gender or civic perspectives seldom appear. Such a conception of poetry is more connected with the values of conservative than avant-garde and progressive art: maintaining a connection with the past becomes the most frequent conviction, formulated through the propagation of defined registers in language and tradition. And so we have a dominant belief that poetry is a matter of personal sensitivity, autobiographical confession and nostalgic recollections of the past.

Such poets mostly surround themselves with languages leaning toward direct lyrical expression, remaining completely indifferent to various changes in the communicative and political spheres. In fact, it isn't at all clear what the ideological and artistic problems might be in the works of such poets as Grzegorz Wołoszyn or Tomasz Mielcarek, aside from the obvious attempt at sustaining the illusion of poetry's previous position. From the perspective they put forward, the value of something like the idea of rural life remains unclear, seeing as poetry is meant to represent timeless values. Maintaining long-established ways of understanding poetry seems the most characteristic quality of writing while abroad, and few authors attempt to develop new conditions and contexts in which poetry could function. We aren't just talking about the fact that the "contents" of their poems almost always draw on historical elements without being critical of them, but about how the way of thinking about poetry which emerges from these poems isolates it from socio-communicative phenomena and other cultural products. What we are talking about, therefore – and I formulate this as a postulate from the critical side – is this kind of broadening of the understanding of

poetry which would place it not only in the sphere of personal expression, but also in a cultural context.

It is once again worth stressing the most surprising thing of all. With only a few exceptions, the poets who live or lived beyond Poland's borders do not in any way refer to the poetry being written in their country of current residence. Instead, it is Polish traditions that they tackle with renewed fervour, rather than opening themselves up to possible experiences of another way of organising space. With the exception of Grzegorzewska and Rybicki, we are not dealing here either with socio-local conventions, which could be a starting point for observations of multicultural meetings, or with the inclusion of poetry in non-general ideas, such as virtuality, technology, political statements or the rights of minority groups. The maintenance of distance from other cultures is the most negative conclusion one can draw from reading this poetry, which is rooted most strongly – with the exceptions I have stressed before – in thinking about culture mainly through the prism of a national monolith called "Meanwhile"; even if funding encourages a conception of culture more in line with Herder's homogeneous context, one has to remember that – as Wolfgang Welsch stresses – arts movements of the past have never been nationalistic, straining against such definitions.[24] For the time being, the poetry created by Poles living on the crossroads of cultures and thus able to closely study life in different landscapes seems to be more tied to a monolithic and conservative model of culture than the poetry being written "back home." It is also tied closely to the aesthetic of traditional conventions.

Perhaps this should encourage us to analyse this poetry not only in categories of aesthetics and artistry. More pertinent would be to study it in terms of cultural practices of the everyday, to seek its connection with other social practices, because it is through such connections that we make communities, that we organise our lives, and that we communicate among ourselves.

Translation: Marek Kazmierski

24 See Wolfgang Welsch, "Tożsamość w epoce globalizacji – perspektywa transkulturowa" ["Rethinking Identity in the Age of Globalization - A Transcultural Perspective"], trans. Krystyna Wilkoszewska, in *Estetyka transkulturowa*, ed. Krystyna Wilkoszewska (Kraków: Universitas Publishing Company, 2004), 37.

Dariusz Nowacki

The Promised Isles: A Critical Reconnaissance

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On May 1, 2004, the day Poland entered the European Union, Great Britain and Ireland bypassed any so-called "transitional periods" and immediately opened up their job markets, leading to mass migration of Polish citizens into those countries. One thing is clear, "mass" falls under the category of a euphemism, some research papers estimating that as many as two million Poles landed on the Isles, which of course does not mean they stayed there permanently in such astounding numbers. I will add as a side note that in the "Islander" tales I will be examining, many of the literary heroes and authors had only temporary residency experiences, ranging from a few months to several years. And it is hardly surprising that the scale of this experience (the flow of Poles into the UK) gave birth to a multitude of literary works in general. Nor should it surprise us, perhaps, that many of these works revolved around memoir, and were tinged with pessimism – though from 2012, a more positive spirit began to push this pessimism aside.

Resources

It is extremely difficult to prepare a comprehensive list of literary works thematically tied to the Polish presence

in Great Britain and Ireland which were produced after May 1, 2004. The bibliographies I was able to find (at the end of 2015) include over 100 pieces of prose; the most comprehensive lists take into account works written in English by Polish authors, who use English as a second language. Naturally, poetical works which give voice to these "Islander" problems should also be added to this long list, as well as other voices scattered but still lingering in numerous blogs or printed magazines. I have taken into account both literature and para-literature (i.e., fabricated blog notes or fictional "reports," which are commonly practised methods on the Internet), thus I am excluding texts from the non-fiction category (reportage, journalistic writing in various forms, assorted "witness accounts" and "coverage"). I suspect, therefore, that even if we focus only on literature on this theme (minus non-fiction) in all its varieties and forms, it will still be impossible to fully encompass its number, and this is not only because of its scope and huge array of sources.

A Sample Reading

The materials which are at the heart of this report, compared to the total amount of texts from which they were selected, might appear small, but I hope that we can consider it representative. I have picked twenty works of prose, taking into account books which exhibited varying types of ambition from their authors, and that built very different kinds of connections with their readers. Some of the works aspired to quality prose, while others were clearly populist narratives. The literary material I studied, therefore, is very diverse: in genre, in stylistic perspective, and in the level of fictional saturation (from fantasy through narrative bordering on fiction to quasi-documentary and pseudo-journalistic writing).

I refer only to books published in the eight years between 2006-2013 in national publishing houses. Before 2006, we find very few "Islander" tales being produced, which is unsurprising, considering that there needed to be a certain distance, a time interval between the first experiences (right after 2004) and settling down to prepare a literary representation of these experiences. In turn, after 2013, the dynamics of "reporting from the Isles" clearly fades (this observation has only to do with prose of the uncompromising-scaremongering kind – of which there are details in the closing section of this report). The next criteria was for the work to be fictional in nature, which explains why this overview doesn't include the journalistic writings of Ewa Winnicka, such as *Angole* [*Brits*] (2014), which itself has the unique position of being the only title from this whole genre which actually reached a wider audience, and was widely discussed and reviewed. In addition, the date of EU accession is critical, which is why I did not include earlier novels, such as

Global Nation. Obrazki z czasów popkultury [*Global Nation. Snapshots of Pop-cultural Times*] (2004) by Grzegorz Kopaczewski: the action of this work, though similar in nature to many narratives I will be discussing, takes place in London at the beginning of the century, two years prior to EU accession. I did reference a few novels which cover the years before the accession, but these are novels that, through their development or in their finale, end up discussing a newer era, and so have a vantage on the "invasion" of Poles in the UK.

A Critical Look

I am aware of the risk I am undertaking in assuming the perspective of literary criticism. But I decided to not to be squeamish here, because what interests me most is an issue which can be put as a very simple question: why is "Islander" literature generally poorly written? What determined that basically no publication, except that of Winnicka from 2014, was able to stand out from the rest? Why was it that every attempt (at least so far) at narrating the experiences of migration to the British Isles ends in artistic and communicative failure? Is there some kind of pattern behind this? Is this a result of transformations in writings that are dedicated to the issues of emigration[1] or of greater changes in the field of literature?

I admit that my choice (a critical perspective) was shaped by a recollection of other literary works. To be frank, in the course of reading these twenty "Islander" stories, I could not break free of a bothersome and unpleasant question: why was it that, in this émigré prose produced in the EU era, we have not thus far seen works of the calibre of *Schwedenkräuter* [*Schwedenkräuter*] (1995) by Zbigniew Kruszyński, or *Słowa obcego* [*The Foreigner's Words*] (1998) by Bronisław Świderski or of the earlier works of Janusz Rudnicki (from his debut collection *Można żyć [One Can Live]* in 1993 to *Męka kartoflana* [*Potato*

1 Following the example of Jolana Paterska, an important expert on the emigration problem in our prose, I am using the synthetic form, which ties together the ideas of emigration and migration. It is enough to remember the titles of both older and newer essays of this researcher: *"Lepszy" Polak? Obrazy emigranta w prozie polskiej na obczyźnie po 1945 roku* (Rzeszów: University of Rzeszow Publishing, 2008), where the characters residing temporarily or permanently abroad, created by writers active after the year 1989, are still referred to as emigrants, as well as *Emigrantki, nomadki, wagabundki. Kobiece narracje (e)migracyjne* [*Women Emigres, Nomads, Vagabonds. Female (E)Migration Narratives*] (Rzeszów: University of Rzeszow Publishing, 2015), dominated by the form found in the title. The same goes for: *Problematyka polskiej prozy (e)migracyjnej po roku 2000. Rekonesans*, w: *Polonistyka w Europie. Kierunki i perspektywy rozwoju* [*Polish Writing in Europe. Directions and Development Perspectives*], ed. Grzegorz Filip, Jolanta Pasterska, Magdalena Petro-Kucab (Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, 2013), 305-318.

Ordeal] from 2000). These pieces of emigration prose had interesting, intellectually engaging and above all culturally problematic elements which the public eagerly discussed; and they were aesthetically rich, too. And we should also mention literary works from the likes of Manuela Gretkowska, Izabela Filipiak or – with a slightly different contextual meaning – Natasza Goerke.[2]

Emigration Narratives of Migration

In "Kontury mobilności" ["The Contours of Mobility"], a comprehensive introduction to a set of treatises in *Poetyka migracji* [*The Poetics of Migration*], we read that:

> Through the processes of perforating borders, increased tourism, economic crises paving the way for mass worker migration, together with the unification of the interior space of Europe, the status of the émigré has become uncertain.[3]

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2 The contextual understanding here is that in the prose of Goerke, the problems of the "exiters" (the 1980s), do not appear directly. One of the researchers stated that: "The texts of the author of *Księgi pasztetów* put forth the key experiences of (e)migration in coded form and inventively highlighted the problems of being a Pole abroad, having Polish insecurities, fantasies or delusions." – Anna Artwińska "Doświadczenie (e)migracji, (e)migracja doświadczeń. O prozie Nataszy Goerke," ["(E)Migrant Experience, (E)Migration of Experiences. Prose works by Natasza Goerke"] in Przemysław Czapliński, "Kontury mobilności" ["The Contours of Mobility"] in *Poetyka migracji. Doświadczenie granic w literaturze polskiej przełomu XX i XXI wieku* [*The Poetics of Migration. The Experience of Borders in Polish Literature between the 19th and the 20th Centuries*], ed. Przemysław Czapliński, Renata Makarska, Marta Tomczok (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2013), 335. The importance of these projects can be read, amongst others, in articles written by Krzysztofowa Krowiranda ("Wizerunek polskiego emigranta w polskiej prozie lat dziewięćdziesiątych XX w. Natasza Goerke, Manuela Gretkowska," [Representations of Polsh Emigrants in Polish Prose of the 1990s according to Natasza Goerke, Manuela Gretkowska] in *Pisarz na emigracji. Mitologie, style, strategie przetrwania* [*Emigrant Writer, Mythologies, Styles, Strategies and Survivals*], ed. Hanna Gosk, Andrzej Stanisław Kowalczyk (Warszawa: Elipsa, 2005) and Dorota Kozicka ("My zdies' emigranty"? Polski intelektualista w „podróży służbowej," ["My zdies' emigranty"? Polish Intellectuals on "Business Trips"] in: *Narracje migracyjne w literaturze polskiej XX i XXI wieku* [*Migration Narratives in Polish 20th and 21st Century Literature*], ed. Hanna Gosk (Kraków: Universitas, 2012), and also cited in the previous footnote from the monograph of J. Pasterska (*Emigrantki, nomadki…* [*Emigrant Women, Nomad Women…*]; chapters about Filipiak and Gretkowska).

3 Przemysław Czapliński, "Kontury mobilności" ["The Contours of Mobility"] in *Poetyka migracji. Doświadczenie granic w literaturze polskiej przełomu XX i XXI wieku* [*The Poetics of Migration. The Experience of Borders in Polish Literature between the 19th and the 20th Centuries*], ed. Przemysław Czapliński, Renata Makarska, Marta Tomczok (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2013), 22.

There are many arguments in favour of moving away from the idea of emigration (to invoke the title of the book by Jerzy Jarzębski from 1998). The most important of these are connected to the temporality of experience, a loosening, or rather an elimination, of struggle: homeland-exile, here-there. Research dedicated to this question unearthed a certain kind of appearance or conventionality of change, which can be clearly seen in our case: the citizens of Poland living in Great Britain and Ireland remained citizens of the European Union. However, the change from emigration to migration does not happen so smoothly or clearly. I am not talking about formal legal framing or sociological definitions, but about strictly literary agendas, about the specifics of creative works refined by (e)migrants of the 21st century. My personal observations concluded that the migrational narratives of the time of the EU, and the slightly younger era of the Schengen opening, are remarkably … about emigration, in the sense that they make use of emigration films, that they operate on motives and framing devices of a somewhat old pedigree (from the end of the 19th century to the immigration of the 1980s).[4]

When I lament that in the sources which are of interest we find nothing of the calibre of Kruszyński, Świderski or Rudnicki, I must reveal the essence of my disappointment. I fear that, amongst the authors I will discuss here, there are no writers even aware that they quote, paraphrase and constantly refer to an existing repertoire. Hanna Gosk wrote about the best of these in the recent past, saying that in their stories, "they expose the context of cultural and literary issues of language, meaning, signification." It is important to quote:

> The characters in the prose of these authors are people who work in words, they are professional translators or teachers of Polish in foreign universities, they have an awareness of the condition of the immigrant as a text that is made up of citations coming from a variety of sources, a text whose contents are decided by stereotypes, posing, artificiality, appropriation, repetition and simulation of quality found in other communications of culture.[5]

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4 I am consciously omitting older traditions, which reach into romanticism and the Great Migration, since this refers to emigration for employment, as the fate of those imprinted in literature who – like the blacksmith Balcer or Wawrzon Toporek – went out into the world "for bread."

5 Hanna Gosk, "My i oni, albo o (nie)możliwości zostania 'tubylcem.' Metaliterackie pomysły Janusza Runickiego oraz Zbigniewa Kruszyńskiego na opowieść o ostatniej fali polskiej emigracji do Europy Zachodniej" ["Us and them, or about the (im)possibility of becoming a „native". Zbigniew Kruszyński and Janusz Rudnicki's meta-literary ideas for writing novels about the most recent wave of Polish migration to Western Europe"], in *Poetyka migracji. Doświadczenie granic w literaturze polskiej przełomu XX i XXI wieku [The Poetics of Migration. The Experience of Borders in Polish Literature between the 19th and the*

The works which concern me are the complete opposite: they impact and astound with their (by no means false or inauthentic) naiveté and straightforwardness of literary expression, along with their completely unique belief in contiguity between words and things. In the case of the majority, if not all, of the literary figures which appear in this essay we could say with some maliciousness that they behave as if no literature existed before them. For this exact reason, these literary works, these stories from the Isles, could be seen as a quaint if sizeable footnote to earlier writings on the topic of emigration, or as prose which illustrates the transition phase between these two states (emigration becoming migration).

By the way, it is worthwhile adding that the writers themselves define their testimonies as being about emigration. The subtitle for Adam Miklasz's *Polska szkoła boksu* [*The Polish Boxing School*] is: *Powieść emigracyjna* [*An Emigration Novel*], the heading of the work of Justyna Nowak is *Opowieść emigracyjna* [*An Emigration Tale*], along with Ryszard Adam Gruchawka's *Buty emigranta* [*The Emigrant's Shoes*]. Other examples: *Emigrantka z wyboru. Opowieść londyńska* [*The Emigrant by Choice. A Story form London*] by Dana Parys-White and *Emigrantką być, czyli wspomnienia z Wells* [*Being an Emigrant, Memories from Wells*] by Marta Semeniuk. This is how narrators and characters express themselves when describing their own position. "I became an emigrant not by choice, but by necessity"[6] – is how the aforementioned Gruchawka, or rather the narrator representing him, begins his story about the difficulties of earning an income in Ireland. The protagonist of Michał Wyszowski's work, in discussing the conditions of migrant workers residing in Great Britain like himself, states that he is: "suspended in the non-existence of emigration."[7]

If we want to stubbornly search for new kinds of qualities, we can look at the kinds of novels which have successful people – if we can use such a phrase – as their protagonists. I am talking about the annually growing collection of women's literature, which does not actually have anything to do with migrants, but rather is about expatriates, or the wives or partners of expatriates. The main characteristic of these stories is that they are written with a seemingly obligatory sense of optimism, and that they are thus curiously distanced

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20th Centuries], ed Przemysław Czapliński, Renata Makarska, Marta Tomczok (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2013), 126. In the quoted passage – in spite of the subheading – the researcher does not refer to Rudnicki, but to Świderski as the author of *Słowa obcego* [*The Foreigner's Words*]; moreover, it was the debut novel of Kruszyński.

6 Ryszard Adam Gruchawka, *Buty emigranta* [*The Emigrant's Shoes*] (Warszawa: ExLibris. Galeria Polskiej Książki, 2007), 11.

7 Michał Wyszowski *Na lewej stronie świata* [*On the Left Side of the World*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo MG, 2010), 198.

from the hardships of being an emigrant (culture shock, social degeneration, economic exploitation and so on). One such novel comes recommended (in its cover blurb) as being "about immigration without hang-ups, an escape from stereotypes."[8]

Niche Niches and the Amateur Movement

Looking at the bibliography, we see that publications on the "Islander" theme are produced by niche publishing houses. The term "niche" may seem – let's be honest here – too exalting. Rather, these publishers tend to be unprofessional or, in the best cases, semi-professional. Amongst the twenty titles on my list, only two were actually the effort of large publishing houses *Socjopata w Londynie* [*The Sociopath in London*] by Daniel Koziarski and *Przebiegum życiae* [*Conductum Lifae*] by Piotr Czerwiński). This observation would not be worth making, if not for certain, and perhaps critical, consequences.

Firstly, the "Islander" narratives are imprisoned – so to speak – in literary niche niches, located on the margin of an already marginal publishing market, deprived of any promotional support or any easy route from publication to readers. From a more pessimistic perspective, one can say that because of their unfortunate circumstances they circulate around an informational vacuum. But do they even circulate? Maybe they were produced for the joy and satisfaction of the authors themselves and only a handful of their friends?

Secondly and more importantly, there is a suspicion that some of the works of the "Reports from the Isles" were published at the writers' own expense, for which there is no direct evidence. After all, authors consistently conceal this kind of embarrassing information these days; one can look in vain for information on how the publication was financed in editorial footnotes. However, there are some clues. Some publishing houses are known to publish books with the financial contribution of authors, but looking through information on the web pages of these publishing houses, it is difficult to find hard evidence. The exception in this respect is the Gdynia publishing Novae Res, which says that it is possible to "publish the work with funding from the author."[9]

My list seems to represent mostly debuting authors (13 out of 20); the rest are writers with a very limited body of work. With Koziarski and Czerwiński, we can also add that their (e)migrant works were the second novels they were

8 Gosia Brzezińska, *Irlandzki koktajl* [*Irish Cocktail*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Bliskie, 2010).

9 http://novaeres.pl/publikuj_w_novae_res; the productions of this publisher included a few of the works from my circle of interest, amongst them *Moja Irlandia* [*My Ireland*] (2013) by Paulina Maćkowiak, *Opowieść emigracyjna* [*Emigration Tale*] (2010) by Justyna Nowak, *Wyspa dreszczowców* [*Thriller Island*] (2014) by Piotr Surmaczyński.

able to publish. If I can allow myself to generalize: the prose I have chosen, however strange it might sound, is a product of the amateur movement, which of course is not without its artistic merit. And since bad luck travels in pairs, many unprofessionally published books also contain many editorial faults and grammatical errors.[10] Perhaps instead of discussing the amateur movement, the focus should be on the consequences of the – another metaphor here – "democratization" of the literary world, which for many years has made its presence felt. I am talking, of course, about the incredibly widespread practice of writing (also as a hobby activity) based on the well-established social conviction that anyone can write and publish regardless of their technical skills and – more generally – their intellectual qualifications.

Envisioning the Reader

Another common characteristic – this time one that is textual, excavated from the narrative commentary (less from the statements of the characters) – is something that I would recognize as the disturbing idea of the "recipient." In general, what this means is that the narrator assumes the role of a guide explaining the world of the UK to us on an elementary level, with the assumption that the reader not only does not possess rudimentary cultural competencies, but also has no access to Wikipedia. Hence some remarkable passages describing the well-known phenomena of Anglo-American culture (and the need for clarification of the latter is simply astonishing):

> British, American or Australian students love their so-called gap year, a year in which to rest from arduous study. It's a time for travel, for getting to know other cultures … A year of madness, which you can only envy them for.[11]
>
> In Poland, during the first days of November (sometimes earlier) when we visit cemeteries, thinking about loved ones and friends who have left us for eternity, Americans as well as more progressive Europeans would rather spend their time

10 In case the reader thinks I am guilty of making false statements, here are a few samples taken from these three titles. In the work of Maria Budacz we find, for example: "The years of the 90s and the s a t i s f a c t i o n of our gained freedom had to pass. Contaminating our virgin ears with the words "freedom," "solidarity," "equality" … m a d e us into life-cripples" [*Wot 4!* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Papierowy Motyl, 2013), 83]. Ryszard Adam Gruchawka surprises us with mysterious sentences such as: "Every moment of living is a market on the edge of the street" (*Buty emigranta* [*The Emigrant's Shoes*], 21), and Łukasz Ślipko for his vocabulary: "One of the g o o d t h i n g s about having language is the ability to say it loudly" (*Pokój z widokiem na Dunnes Stores* [*The Room with a View of Dunnes Stores*] (Opole: Wydawnictwo RB, 2011), 9).

11 Budacz *Wot 4!*, 53.

> carving holes in pumpkins … Kids also have a great time – running around like wild things, dressed up in masks, devils or vampires, accosting strangers, shouting *trick or treat*, asking for candies or some change.[12]

If there is no surprise about the information pasted into the narrative about the specifics of the borough of Ealing ("neither a good nor a bad neighbourhood, located to the west of London; traditionally a lot of Poles live here"[13]), information about the character of Notting Hill, likewise located in the west of London, makes me pause to wonder, because it is extremely difficult for me to imagine that there exists someone who did not at least once see the hit film of the same name starring Julia Roberts and Hugh Grant. Ada Martynowska,[14] however, is of a different mind.

Similar problems crop up when it comes to handling footnotes. The clarifications of such terms as "katlery" or "napkiny"[15] [*phonetic adaptations of the English words "cutlery" and "napkins" in Polish – translator's note*] are rather sensible choices for inclusion, because this helps familiarise readers with the jargon of Polish waiters working in Liverpool, and it lends credence to realistic conversations; however – looking at the same book – explaining the simplest English words and word-compounds[16] not distorted by Polish phonetics and declination seems redundant. Overall, the conclusion is that our authors are unlikely to overestimate the intelligence of their readers, and the editors are not intervening, though indeed they should be. For example, in a book published in 2010, a footnote explaining who Nigella Lawson[17] is should be taken out, since her cookery show premiered on Polish television three years prior (TVN Style), and her first Polish book was published even earlier (*Nigella gryzie* [*Nigella Bites*], 2006).

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12 Daniel Koziarski *Socjopata w Londynie* [*The Sociopath in London*] (Warszawa: Prószyński i S-ka, 2007), 107-108. The work was separated into chapters; the quoted fragment is from the section titled "Halloween."

13 Aleksander Kropiwnicki *Zajezdnia Londyn* [*London Depot*] (Bydgoszcz-Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Branta, 2007), 15.

14 See the vocabulary page *Miejsca* (p. 11), which appears right before – Ada Martynowska, *Przebojowa Polka w Londynie* [*A Polish Go-Getter in London*] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Sonia Draga, 2012).

15 Ireneusz Gębski *W cieniu Sheratona* [*In the Shadow of Sheraton*] (Warszawa: Warszawska Firma Wydawnicza, 2011), 10 and 63.

16 For example: "no good," "flat," "full-time" – pages 3, 14 and 18.

17 Brzezińska, *Irlandzki koktajl*, 23.

The methods and ranges of explanations of Irish and British realities differ greatly. The amount of Irish information mounted into the texts – infallibly given propaedeutically – is simply greater. At certain points, it seems as if Ireland is not a European island in the Atlantic, but an exotic island in the south of the Pacific Ocean, like one of those Bronisław Malinowski wrote about. How else can you explain the presence of information such as "Gaelic is the true Irish language, being older and different from any other"[18] or "Irish people still use the language of the Celts"?[19] Perhaps the most common information given is that food served on the Emerald Isle is intolerable for Polish palates. The worst culprit is the bread, completely undeserving of its name:

> The Irish do not understand what we mean about bread. They show us their baked goods, which means toast bread, as soft as paper, you swallow it like a squished sponge and in no way can you feel the full flavour or derive pleasure from eating it. You won't find any crunchy exterior, or any taste.[20]

> Toast of all kinds reigns here, lacking all taste, irrevocably inflating the asses of the Dubliner men, while softly filling the alluring curves of the women.[21]

> If a Polish baker opened a business in Ireland, he would make a fortune. I've never eaten anything so horrible. They didn't even know what rolls were. Just these long breads, packed in plastic, with the taste and texture of rubber.[22]

The general conclusion is that Ireland seems to be a more pleasant place to make a home in than the rest of Britain. In the worst of the "Islander" works, the former is treated as none other than a *terra incognita*, to such a degree that some of the writers use texts from generally available printed guides – as in the case of Paulina Maćkowska, who, telling us about the heartaches of her heroine, guides us through Northern Ireland (mainly Belfast and its surrounding areas) with a National Geographic guidebook (*Ireland,* Christopher Somerville).[23]

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18 Magdalena Orzeł *Dublin. Moja polska karma* [*Dublin, My Polish Karma*] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Skrzat, 2007), 12.

19 Gruchawka *Buty*, 14.

20 Orzeł, *Dublin*, 143.

21 Iwona Słabuszewska-Krauze, *Hotel Irlandia* [*The Ireland Hotel*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Semper, 2006), 28.

22 Łukasz Suskiewicz, *egri bikaver* [*Egri Bikavér*] (Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Forma, 2009), 45.

23 See Paulina Maćkowska, *Moja Irlandia* [*My Ireland*] (Gdynia: Novae Res, 2013). The author of course uses the Polish edition (2004).

Autobiographical Foundations

These "Islander" tales deserve our attention because they are authentic, in the understanding that what is generally described are the facts of his or her life in the UK or Ireland. The eyewitness account, the importance of building the book on autobiographical foundations, does not surprise in works that are memoir-summaries and expositional in nature. The author suffered working as a dish washer and so – using literature, fictionalizing through assorted methods – describes these miseries to us, at the same time formulating a personal memento: all those who wish to migrate to the Isles, forget any idea that you will make easy money.

The authors assure us that we are dealing with the "authentic," hence it is shocking when we are met with complete fabrications. Let us discuss the case of Jan Krasnowolski. This author is described in the cover note as "portraying contemporary Polish emigrants in a completely original way"; we read further that "in 2006, he left for Great Britain where he settled in sea-front Bournemouth. He converted his emigrant experiences into the short story collection *Afrykańska Elektronika* [*African Electronics*]."[24]

The snag lies in that the longest story, from which the title is derived, is of the fantasy genre; it can be described as grotesque horror. Our nameless narrator-hero, a worker in a London perfume factory and then in a few other places (a fish-cannery, a company for repairing compressors), a young Pole perfectly immersed in his British surroundings,[25] discusses an unusually successful business which he conducts with his Ghanaian friend Tom. Back in the "old country," Tom's African uncle was a shaman practicing Voodoo. For a certain price, using our Polish protagonist and Tom as go-betweens, other characters are able to arrange for fatal accidents to happen. The orders pour in. Almost everyone, in the workplace or the neighbourhood where our hero lives, have some enemies they want dead. The insanity contained in this not very original fantasy escalates with every page. But why does the author, or

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24 Jan Krasnowolski, *Afrykańska elektronika* [*African Electronics*] (Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2013).

25 The level of naturalization is recognizable in the fact that the protagonist only possesses non-Polish friends. In the next story, where Poles are equally adjusted to life in England, we read: "they managed to find places in the pub for the whole gang. There was Steve, Phil, the two Daves, and also Giles … Patryk, the only other Pole in the group, did not feel alienated at all – quite the opposite – after a few years of living in the UK, he preferred going for beers with Englishmen. They, when walking into a pub, left all their problems and bad moods at the door, and in pouring pint after pint into themselves, in general became increasingly friendly. With Poles, it was just the opposite." – Jan Krasnowolski, "Hasta siempre,comandante," in *Afrykańska elektronika* [*African Electronics*] (Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2013), 138.

rather more his publisher, need the emigrant context? English realities are barely even touched upon in this book.

How can we then understand the merit of promoting this notion of the author referring to his or her own experience of emigration? My answer is: writers and their publishers are likely to believe that the subject, or simply the context of "Islander," has a recognizable and anecdotal value, that there is, within the theme of emigration plus autobiographical promise, a certain magnetism when it comes to the ability to attract the reading public. This conviction once again suggests the most frightening picture of the average reader – totally undemanding, reading prose with a consumerist attitude and in a mindless mode, even though it stands in complete dissonance with convention (Krasnowolski).

As to the place of action, it is important to note that the only narrative from my list which is set in a fictional city (Busksby, in the countryside of Monksberry) is the earlier-mentioned *The Polish Boxing School*, but even so Miklasz is not free of the emigrant context. In the author's biographical note, we discover that his debut novel was "inspired by the two times he spent working abroad in the British Isles."[26]

The painstaking care taken to show authenticity is, because of its naiveté, less intriguing than touching. In order to prove the "realness" of their narratives, Magdalena Orzeł and Łukasz Ślipko added colourful photographs[27] of their own authorship to their short story collections. Aleksander Kropiwnicki went even further: along with pictures of the most common tourist attractions of London (Piccadilly Circus, Nelson's Column on Trafalgar Square, etc.), we find at the end of the book as a separate addition, a collection of tips titled *Friendly London, How to Tame It.* In a word, the narrators speaking to us are consistently introducing themselves as experts on emigration issues, as distributors of first-hand stories, and are thus to be taken as so trustworthy that the measure established by a mythical Bard ("What I saw and heard I wrote here for you all to read") seems to be insufficient. Such is the reason for this strange solution – photographs taken by the authors, portraying the places and objects that appear in the pages of their prose.

Interestingly enough, the concern for authenticity or – more cautiously – credibility also features in the work of authors of popular women's literature looking for a connection with their consumers. For example, Beata Martynek,

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26 Adam Miklasz, *Polska szkoła boksu. Powieść emigracyjna* [*The Polish Boxing School. An Emigration Novel*] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Skrzat, 2009).

27 The accompanying text (two examples each): *The most famous Dublin pub, The painterly views from the Dart train.* (Orzeł, *Dublin*); *Panorama Cork (Lake Lee), Shopping Center Dunnes Stores on Lake Lee* (Ślipko, *Pokój z widokiem*).

the heroine of *Przebojowa Polka w Londynie* [*A Polish Go-Getter in London*] was endowed with the attributes of her author, seeing as Ada Martynowska herself studied at King's College and after graduation worked in a relatively important position in one of London's public relations agencies. There is a similar situation with the author of *Irlandzki koktail* [*Irish Cocktail*], who, as we read in the book's blurb, worked in Dublin at the Royal Bank of Scotland, so she was therefore able to have theoretical access to a "better" world (different from just fantasizing about the lives of the local upper middle class).

A Question of Class

These observations lead us towards an essential, absolutely fundamental context (in the realm of "Islander" prose) – the issue of class. A good way to approach this question is through a scene from the novel by Słabuszewska-Krauze. Here we have young Oliwia, who, with her boyfriend Kacper, moves to Dublin almost eight months prior to Poland's accession to the EU. He gets a fantastic job as an architect. She looks for something for herself, but the looking is not from financial necessity; the heroine has in mind, as she declares many times, "self-development."[28] One day (just before accession takes place) Oliwia, while riding on a city bus, overhears her working-class compatriots in loud conversation; the dialogue is dominated by Polish vulgarisms. She is extremely embarrassed, not only because the bus driver has to intervene ("Quiet, please!"), but also because she suspects that her compatriots are riding without tickets. Oliwia falls into a reverie:

> But not all of them are like that … the problem is that only those are visible. Because they are the ones who talk, almost yelling, their curses, the ones who carry themselves through the streets like the echoes over Morskie Oko, they are the ones who throw bottles in the parks and try to get in everywhere through the back door. The ones who are polite and honest, even though their lives are just as hard of course, are not visible. But they exist, they must exist … which leaves the question, who will come here after May? Who will be more visible?[29]

In this context, the most interesting assumption is that there simply have to be ("But they exist, they must") other *gastarbeiters* ("guest workers") who are "polite and honest." Our protagonist does not set herself against the world of vulgar, boozy "proles" and crooks from Poland – being the quiet one, behaving

28 Słabuszewska-Krauze, *Hotel*, 136 and earlier.

29 Ibidem, 118.

as she should, validating her ticket – but she creates a division in the working class itself, keeping herself on the outside. She, like many of the heroines in the prose under review here, is happily deprived of the worries the underprivileged newcomers from Poland must deal with.

These "better" Poles – the residents of the UK, for the most part expats (the above-mentioned Kacper is one of them) – are characterised by the fact that they speak English perfectly, have a high-salary job (an obviously defining factor) and are surrounded by dedicated local friends (in some cases, only natives). The dilemmas or problems which the "better" newcomers have to deal with are by their nature psychological-moralistic and fit into a wide spectrum of existential problems: care for one's "self-development" (Oliwia), complicated woman-man relationship dilemmas, mid-life crises and so on.

Revealing in this regard is a series of books by Anna Łajkowska, which opens with *Pensjonat na wrzosowisku* [*A Guesthouse on the Moorland*]. Here we have Basia, just under fifty, who has lived in England for two years (her husband, an IT specialist, is on great work contract) and has had enough of being a housewife in a golden cage. (As a side note, the themes of Desperate Housewives often feature in "Islander" stories; the protagonists are "ready for anything," to tie in to the Polish title of the series). She rebels, and in a search for the meaning of life runs off with her young son to the countryside, at a point when her husband has taken their two daughters to southern France for the summer vacation. She settles in Oxenhope in West Yorkshire. The first conversation with the owner of a guesthouse, an opportunity for language identification (the issue of the so-called foreign accent), begins with a statement as much as a question from Charoll: "So you're from Kent?"[30] Essentially, Basia comes from Ashford, which her conversation partner immediately recognizes. In later parts of the story, when the protagonist tries to convince her husband to purchase a house with a café in nearby Haworth (because she has fallen in love with the place), she gets in response: "You want to abandon aristocratic Kent and live here in the mountains? Do you know what sort of accent our son will have?"[31] Marcin, to clarify, is the youngest of their three children. The story itself, in accordance with the requirements of the genre, moves towards a happy ending – the spouses actually do buy the property in the "Brontë sisters town," which is repeatedly stressed in the novel,[32] allowing Basia to find

30 Anna Łajkowska, *Pensjonat na wrzosowisku* [*A Guesthouse on the Moorland*] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Damidos, 2012), quote from the e-book pdf, 9.

31 Ibid., 113.

32 But not for the love of literature! It is only to do with the tourist merit of the town, as crowds come to visit, so the Polish owners are guaranteed a good income.

the meaning of her life. But amongst all the balderdash that *A Guesthouse on the Moorland* is packed with, the thing that most caught my attention was the linguistic dilemma. Is the prospect of accent "corruption" through moving from the south to the north of England really such a big problem?

As it turns out, in "Islander" prose, in the sphere of the "hang-up-free" – to use a phrase that has already appeared here – problems with the English language are a nuisance solely for the working class. What's more, any traces of acclimatization or, colloquially speaking, difficult beginnings are consistently removed from the "stress-less" narrative, as in the novel by Maćkowska, which covers the heartaches of thirty-year-old Maria.

Maria joins her partner Michał, who is working in Belfast (we do not have to add that he is well-paid), to enjoy the beauty of the real world in her fictional city and its surroundings. This entails frequent trips, visits to museums, charming restaurants and other pleasures, accompanied by overarching "meditations" on character, presented as the central theme in the story (Do I still love him or not?). At one point, we read: "Maria did not realize how hard it had been for him."[33] The main reason for this reference now to the first few months of Michael's sojourn in Belfast is that it was not developed in any way before. And perhaps it could not be developed because the issues of "martyrdom," of the ill treatment and troubles that affected Polish immigrants, cannot be mixed up in the poetics of a "hang-up-free" tale.

The Gender Issue

In an article dealing with the possibilities of moving beyond endogamy (into a new territory in which Polish men connect with local women, Polish women with local men), Kris van Heuckelom noted that:

> the essential division of "gender" outlines itself … Books written by men abound in losers and anti-heroes, who in their exile fall prey to far-reaching degradation and marginalization, both in terms of professional life, and in terms of male-female relations. Female characters are based on the figure of a contemporary Penelope, who, instead of waiting for her beloved Odysseus in Ithaca, discards her family and goes on to conquer the world, sometimes entering into relationships with so-called "foreign johnnies."[34]

33 Maćkowska, *Moja Irlandia* [*My Ireland*], quote from the e-book in pdf, 33.

34 Kris van Heuckelom *Od „Polish remover" do „polskiej szkoły boksu". Polskość w najnowszej literaturze migracyjnej*, in *Polonistyka w Europie. Kierunki i perspektywy rozwoju*, ed. Grzegorz Filip, Jolanta Pasterska and Magdalena Petro-Kucab (Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, 2013), 322.

Referring to my own text sample, I can confirm this diagnosis – this is the way things are in general: men in the UK lose, women win. Of course, you can always find exceptions to this rule, namely, portraits of women who didn't make it – like unemployed Marta, the heroine of the opening story of *Na lewej stronie świata [On the Left Side of the World]*, who, in desperation, "puts herself on the street." But not in the sense that first comes to mind; instead she goes out onto the literal pavement wearing "a huge cardboard sign that says: Give me the job. I'm worth it!"[35] This provokes a sign war. Locals soon appear next to her with signs that say "Poles out" and "British jobs for British workers."[36] Or we have Asia, "the petite Pole from a place near Chełm," who is worked to death by the cheap retail chain of Two Euro Shop, and cannot afford to pay the dentist ("she did not spend half a thousand Euros for a root canal for her third molar, she couldn't afford that kind of money").[37] Let us follow the bleak anecdote to the end: "Polish poverty and a spendthrift heart did not save the jaw from ruin. The sick tooth landed in the bin, but the thoughts of the unspent euros did not let her worry long." But these exceptions come with an essential limitation: characters who do not find success are not featured in first person narratives or in those where the authors shared negative experiences. Misfortune only touches upon others, or rather other women, because of course we are talking about heroines.

The question referred to here is probably not a simple transfer of truths from the social world, but is rather due to the use of this and no other literary convention. After all, in stories about "ambitious Polish women," you cannot expect the presence of characters who do not save money on dental treatments or even those who do not take to heart the advice we find in *Irish Cocktail*: "The main thing is not to get stuck working the dishes."[38] At this point, anyway, gendered difference makes itself felt with the greatest intensity. Female heroines do not fight as fiercely for a better life as their male counterparts. As well as being driven by the desire to save large amounts in pounds or euros, it is equally important for them to confirm their sexual attractiveness. Their well-being is first and foremost decided by their relationships with local men, and they are satisfied only when courting the better-off classes. Let us take Nicholas, for example, "who by birth belonged to the English elite and even

35 Michał Wyszowski, "Koniec ducha" ["End of Spirit"] in *Na lewej stronie świata* [*On the Left Side of the World*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo MG, 2010), 9.

36 Ibid., 23.

37 Magdalena Orzeł "Ząb," in *Dublin. Moja polska karma* [*Dublin, My Polish Karma*] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Skrzat, 2007), 33; next quote also from this page.

38 Brzezińska *Koktajl*, 20.

his great-grandfather advised Henry VIII,"[39] and who is the man the heroine of Martynowska's story sets her sights on.

What is interesting is that even Polish girls from the lower class handle themselves well; they don't fantasize about English aristocrats (decidedly out of their league), but they nevertheless shine with pragmatism. At least Miklasz's narrator seems to suggest so:

> The Polish girls also partied [on the weekend, in pubs], and with the speed of chameleons they adapted to the rules that governed this new, better world, its trends and the ways to exist within the society of "Uber-men." They bested their girlfriends from other parts of the world – they were not as submissive or as cheap as the girls from beyond the eastern borders of Poland, more distinguished and refined than the English ones, they didn't aim for passing pleasures, they thought like any excellent strategist – tactically and long-term. They were seeking stability, the best form of which would be a charming young man who would guarantee them a better life, a cheaper place to live, a car ride to work and some cash to help maintain their outer beauty.[40]

Work as Scandal

The narratives I am analysing here attest to an unprecedented renaissance on the subject of labour; since the times of social realism, there has never been such a large body of work in literature on this theme. One notes that since the era of positivism we are talking about labour understood as inhuman toil, as degrading and demeaning work that is simply scandalous. If that is so, we can skip the ideas of "better" work – the kind that is carried out in prestigious agencies or banks, and by specialists, by those that arrive in the UK as residents – moving immediately to the dark and dominant perspective.

The radical interpretation appears to be the metaphor of slavery – as in *Buty Emigranta* [*The Emigrant's Shoes*], where "the Polish farmhands" toil 15 hours a day on a cattle farm in southern Ireland. The narrator is outraged; almost everything around him is awful, but the most shocking is probably that the Irish behave as if they were the owners of slaves on cotton plantations, and freely trade their "livestock":

> In the evenings, the islanders meet in a cheap pub where over mugs of beer they begin the discussion of Polish emigrants, how much each one is worth and what

39 Martynowska *Przebojowa Polka*, 128.

40 Miklasz *Polska szkoła*, 87.

> other Irishmen might need them for. The Pole must at this moment shut his mouth and not say a word … This happened in my case, when Jeff, without any warning, drove me to the construction site of his friend.[41]

Protagonists are subjected to various harassments, of which the ban on speaking Polish in the workplace[42] is the least insulting. Torments include deceptions by employers, and the non-payment of salaries owed (the unpleasantness experienced by Suskiewicz's hero in the Dublin pub Oval). However, there is no point in categorizing the horrible experiences of our emigrants, because one thing is sure: the general motifs come out as a great "martyrological" lament. In it, one can hear a deeply humane care about our fellow creature; oh Reader, may you not be tempted by the illusory visions of the profitable paradises that are on the Isles. This last warning of course has to do with the earlier "reports from the Isles," which came into being no later than three or four months after May 1, 2004.

I cannot, however, deny myself the perverse pleasure of bringing up perhaps the most extravagant story of working on the Isles, a snapshot side-note in another story. In Andrzej Goździkowski's *Lenie* [*Lazybones*], a novel dealing with the daily lives of young residents of Elbląg, the memories of one of these individuals, from the time he worked in Ireland (these fragments in italics), are inserted into the novel. The author hyperbolises and deforms these relations immensely, by not removing any language resources. I present this sample fragment about a gypsy who employed illegal "Polish proles" for construction work:

> They call him old man or kapo, but since not all the workers understand the term kapo, they use old fucking faggot and that also helps … The gypsy in Dublin says "Up!" when the Polish prole has to pour the gravel out of the wheelbarrow and says "Down!" when the prole has to stop pouring the gravel out of the wheelbarrow. At times, he adds the command "Go!" and then the prole has to hurry faster and run with the wheelbarrows like a spinning top … as a reward the Polish prole will get eighty euros net and will be happy.[43]

But the most eccentric narrative which appears on the pages of *Lenie* is a micro-narrative about the fear of being buried in a trench (in this case related

41 Gruchawka, *Buty*, 85-86.

42 For example in the back-room kitchen in a Liverpool hotel – Gębski, *W cieniu*, 158.

43 Andrzej Goździkowski *Lenie* [*Lazybones*] (Warszawa: Lampa i Iskra Boża, 2007), 70; original punctuation.

to road work). Here we have our "prole," afraid that he will fall asleep from exhaustion in the bottom of a trench. He imagines this horrible fantasy scenario:

> … the operator of the digger would cover your body with a solid layer of earth. Harold's Magazine headline – a young worker from Poland buried by a colleague at work. The cleaned-up body is waiting for pick-up at the embassy. Friends and family are requested to contact the embassy.[44]

I intentionally bring up the work of Goździkowski. It seems to me that one of the ways to tame the bad, and sometimes devastatingly bad, prose of this (e)migration genre is – if I may say so – by re-modelling our reading of it. In which direction? Well, by seeing it – sometimes perversely, though sometimes not necessarily so – as a special variety of light prose. In this fashion, for example, you can read Czerwinski's *Conductum Life*, setting aside the exposition that arises from a spirit of resentment, and concentrate only on what is funny in the book.[45]

An Attempt at Typology

It is extremely difficult to work out a reliably uniform criterion that would sort out this diverse, multiform literary material, and this is even after reducing the list of texts to twenty. Nonetheless, I will attempt to do just this. In my opinion, the "Islander" narratives can be separated into three spheres.

The first is "lamentation" prose and – another working metaphor – "the settling of accounts" emigration prose. These are similar to earlier tales of "Polish rats"[46] fallen on hard times. One certain, if often barely traceable, correction in this continuation involves some of these stories gaining in value through their direct "reporting" and poetical journalism; amongst these are

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44 Ibid., 103.

45 I tried this method with the book review for *Conductum Lifae* – Daruisz Nowacki, "Raporty znad zmywaka," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, October 10, 2009.

46 I refer to Edward Redliński's title not by accident, though I am aware that the placement of Poles in New York's Greenpoint, especially those working "in asbestos," was much worse. One thing is clear, traditions of introducing the "martyrdom" of Polish migrant workers are much richer, considering the German "adventures" of worker migrants featured in prose at the end of the 80's and at the beginning of the 90's – holding in contrast to the earlier mentioned debut novel by Janusz Rudnicki, for example, Marek Bukowski's *Nic się nie zmieni* [*Nothing Will Change*] (1985) and *Okolice porno shopu* [*Near the Porno Shop*] by Andrzej Rodan (1987).

Wot 4! by Budacz, *Dublin, My Polish Karma* by Orzeł, *On the Left Side of the World* by Wyszowski, and, partly, *Zajezdnia Londyn* [*London Depot*] by Kropiwnicki.

In this sphere of prose there is no lack of situationist narratives (the waiter-kitchen life of Gębski, *W cieniu Sheratona* [*In the Shadow of Sheraton*]) or prose of personal experience (*The Emigrant's Shoes* by Gruchawka). The works in this group show a certain categorical plasticity; what I mean is that the "lamentation" stories have a penchant for different literary and journalistic discourses.

The second sphere is the prose of "ambitious Polish women," which is affirmative, and bolstered by the conventions of women's literature, the blueprints of which contain anecdotes from the alluring and often hilarious life of heroines who manage to penetrate the British or Irish middle class (and sometimes the upper-middle class). We intuit many patrons and inspirations for these stories. In *Irish Cocktail* we can see the echoes of Bridget Jones's escapades (from the series by Helen Fielding), while the trilogy about the moors in West Yorkshire[47] must have been inspired by the Mazovian saga of Małgorzata Kalincińska and a few other stories of mature women looking for new sense and harmony in their lives.

As I mentioned earlier, the stereotypes tied to (e)migration in this sphere have changed: the negative perspective has been replaced by a more positive approach. So the prose of "ambitious Polish women" becomes a counterpoint to the category of "lamentation" prose. And one more tie-in to previously indicated matters: the works within this sphere are gaining popularity, which is, on the one hand, due to the situation of literature in general (popular prose for women is one of the fastest-growing varieties of fiction), and on the other hand, it is probably a consequence of the simple fact that this domain operates in book series (so far there are four volumes of Anna *Łajkowskja*, four of *Łucja* Fice,[48] three of Magdalena Zimny-Louis,[49] to give just a few examples).

The third category is informative-formative prose. These are tales about periods of stay in the UK, created in general by young authors as personal journals from their time of development and maturation. The typical protagonist is a student that does not come to Ireland or Great Britain for money, but rather for "adventure." As with the narrator in *Egri Bikavér*, the boy from

47 The three remaining volumes besides the aforementioned *A Guesthouse on the Moorland*, are *Miłość na wrzosowisku* [*Love on the Moorland*] (2012), *Cienie na wrzosowisku* [*Shadows Across Moorlands*] (2013), *Wrzosowa dziewczyna* [*Moorland Girl*] (2015), all published by Damidos in Katowice.

48 It is fitting to include the titles: *Piegi na słońcu* [*Freckles in the Sun*] (2010), *Opiekunka* [*The Carer*] (2012), *Przeznaczenie* [*Fate*] (2012), *Wyspa starców* [*Island of the Aged*] (2013).

49 *Ślady hamowania* [*Skid Marks*] (2011), *Pola* (2012), *Kilka przypadków szczęśliwych* [*A Few Lucky Coincidences*] (2014).

Częstochowa who becomes awakened artistically, opening up to cultural differences, but slowly realizing that he has arrived in Ireland only to garner disappointment from the experience.[50] Another good example, mentioned in the introduction, is the pre-accession novel by Kopaczewski *Global Nation*.

In this method of classification, hybridity is perhaps the most outstanding overall feature. Take, for example, *The Polish Boxing School*, which combines elements of the initiation and the gangster-thriller genre (Buckby is overrun by warring gangs of immigrants, with the tone set by the most dangerous of these, the "Albanians"). We also have a love story (the coming together of the young stranger with local teenager Sonia). This, of course, is a love story with a strong tint of initiation (first love, first initiation into that world). In turn, in *Lazybones,* the author uses something that we could recognize as overly-dramatized youth, presenting a gaudily expressive and vulgar memoir of a young migrant worker, the overall effect of which is excessively flashy.

Piotr Czerwiński strives for a powerful effect, and his writing sometimes reeks of schoolboy dramatics. "I tell you kinda a hundred times, emigration is fucking fun"[51] states the narrator-protagonist of *Conductum Lifae*. I could not put it better myself, and this work – it is all about creating as much "fucking fun" as possible. Koziarski also aims to multiply such fun. His young hero changes jobs and addresses constantly, meets scores of people, and has formative experiences which the author frames as a continuum of amusing accidents (the most diverse quid pro quo, meetings with all kinds of eccentrics, and so on). Maybe only in *Socjopata w Londonie* [*The Sociopath in London*] can you clearly see that staying in the UK is also useful for collecting "adventures" and impressive experiences.

Alongside this compiled typology, there were also many works which revolve loosely around the issue of (e)migration. Take, for example, *Single* [*Single People*] by Piotr Kępski, where the "Islander" theme has been woven into a larger psychological and moral story. Yes, we have a large set of themes typical for prose of the EU (e)migration era, and even – so to speak – completely Londonesque scenery, but the main layer of the story is essentially a multi-faceted meditation on the condition that the title suggests.[52] In the

50 "In general I did not meet any artists or poets. Maybe they avoided Tesco stores, where I usually found company. In all the autobiographical novels the author meets painters, sculptors and bohemia … I only met maids everywhere, I did not want to even look at them." Suskiewicz, *egri bikaver*, 38.

51 Czerwiński, *Przebiegum*, 70.

52 A small sample derived from this comprehensive and very simple (again, softly put) meditation in the question: "People always find many reasons why they seek the company of others. Being alone is not all that great. Even when you are talking about yourself in

collection of short stories *Zielona wyspa* [*The Green Island*] (2009) by Mariusz Wieteska, things are similar. The author operates sparingly in the local colour; the important, almost obligatory, subject of working in the UK appears only momentarily.

Another example is *London Eye* (2013) by Grzegorz Mucha, an atmospheric story about the relationship between a nameless hero and charming, withdrawn Kinga; a long distance relationship, because the woman takes a job in England, while the man lives in Katowice. He visits her often, however, and they also travel together, visiting, among other places, Scotland. The author has removed any concrete socio-economic issues from this story. "Materiality" or objectiveness is limited to the presentation of places where the lovers venture, and to describing the "spiritual feasts" they grant themselves (visits to museums, galleries, concert halls). We suspect that Kinga is one of many expats who have found themselves on the Isles in the first decade of our century, but very little is really known about her position in society. This restraint seems to be significant. Has what I have so frequently referred to as "Islander" experience started to become subject to neutralization or sterilization?

The questions can be multiplied. The most important one – why is "Islander" prose such poor prose? – I have been able to answer only partly. The question still bothers me, a torment not likely to go away any time soon.

Translation: Marek Kazmierski

a proud way: I'm single – I'm not lonely, I'm just single. And that's a big difference. Really. Because it is my conscious choice, you know?: – Piotr Kępski, *Single* [*Single People*] (Warszawa: Jirafa Roja, 2009), 110.

Dirk Uffelmann

Self-Proletarianization in Prose by Poles Migrating to Germany, Ireland and the UK

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"I become king of the isle."[1] This drunken exclamation by Szymek, one of the protagonists of Adam Miklasz's 2009 "emigration novel" *Polska szkoła boksu* [*The Polish Boxing School*], hyperbolically represents the high expectations that are frequently expressed in recent Polish migrant literature.[2] It seems to correspond to the findings of empirical surveys about the motivations for migration: Polish work migrants have invested high expectations of

1 Adam Miklasz, *Polska szkoła boksu. Powieść emigracyjna* [*The Polish Boxing School: An Emigration Novel*] (Kraków: Skrzat, 2009), 13.

2 Many literary heroes invest huge economic and social expectations in their migratory step (cf. Piotr Czerwiński, *Przebiegum życiae, czyli kartonowa sieć* [*Conductum Lifae or the Cardboard Web*] (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 2009), 60; Łukasz Suskiewicz, *Egri Bikavér* (Szczecin: Forma, 2009), 18; Michał Wyszowski, *Na lewej stronie świata* [*On the Left Side of the World*] (Warszawa: MG, 2010), 29-30 and 206; Łukasz Ślipko, *Pokój z widokiem na Dunnes Stores* [*The Room with a View of Dunnes Stores*] (Opole: RB, 2011), 8; Maria Budacz, *Wot 4!* (Warszawa: Papierowy Motyl, 2013), 34 and 70-71; Jan Krasnowolski, *Afrykańska elektronika* [*African Electronics*] (Kraków: Ha!art, 2013), 89).

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upward economic and social mobility in their post-2004 movement to the UK or Ireland.[3]

With the post-accession wave of Polish migration, the UK and Ireland received proportionally more Polish work migrants than Germany, although it should be acknowledged that the latter had already seen significant immigration in the 1980s and 1990s. Germany regained its attractiveness when the country eventually opened up its labour market in May 2011. The changing dynamics of the influx go hand in hand with the different motives of earlier waves of emigration: while pre-1989 Polish emigration to Germany was mostly political, in the period from 1990 to 2004 cultural pull-motives (such as learning English or gaining intercultural experience) replaced the political push-factors of the 1980s. After 2004, as well as in the case of the post-2011 migration to Germany, the work impulse clearly dominated.[4] In the literary production of Polish migrants from Germany, Ireland and the UK considerable similarities could be observed (such as the thematization of travel, administrative experiences, conflicts of norms, feelings of estrangement, problems with language and intercultural differences as well as the deconstruction of national stereotypes).[5] Some of the features characteristic of literature from Germany seem to subsequently reoccur in literature from the British Isles.[6] As I intend to demonstrate here, this especially applies to the issue of work.

However, even if there have also been and still are migration motives other than work, "work, labour" remains the "founding myth of the new emigration,"[7] as the migrant author Michał Wyszowski puts it. Wyszowski's diagnosis can be narrowed down to the thesis that I intend to defend in this article: work and social mobility are remarkably prominent in migrant literature from all these different periods, including works by migrants from

3 Paulina Trevena, "Degradacja czy poszukiwanie niezależności? Proces podejmowania decyzji migracyjnych przez wykształconych Polaków wykonujących pracę niewykwalifikowaną w Londynie," in *Społeczności lokalne. Postawy migracyjne młodych Polaków*, ed. Anna Śliz (Opole: Wydawnictwo UO, 2008), 21-47.

4 Paulina Trevena, "A Question of Class? Polish Graduates Working in Low-Skilled Jobs in London," *Studia Migracyjne – Przegląd Polonijny* 1 (2011): 71-96; 74-75.

5 See *Contemporary Polish Migrant Culture and Literature in Germany, Ireland, and the UK*, ed. Joanna Rostek and Dirk Uffelmann (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2011).

6 Dirk Uffelmann, "'Self-Orientalisation' in Narratives by Polish Migrants to Germany (by Contrast to Ireland and the UK)," in *Contemporary Polish Migrant Culture and Literature in Germany, Ireland, and the UK*, ed. Joanna Rostek and Dirk Uffelmann (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2011), 103-132; 128.

7 Wyszowski, *Na lewej stronie*, 156.

the 1980s who started writing in the 1990s, and irrespective of the language of the texts (Polish or German).[8] My more specific assumption is that it is more often prose than poetry, and more often literature written by male than by female writers, that portray the low-skilled work performed by the recent wave of migration. Many Polish migrant authors do so, and this is my third hypothesis, through a paradox prism of self-proletarianization. This literary device can be structurally linked to sociological observations of "contradictory class mobility" in the wake of migration.

The concept of "contradictory class mobility," as applied to Polish post-accession migration to the British Isles by Samantha Currie in 2007,[9] describes the double paradox that, first, migrants who went through higher education back in Poland are, as migrants, forced to take up low-skilled work. But even if, second, this low-skilled work is poorly paid and enjoys a low status in the receiving country's job hierarchy, it secures the Polish intellectual migrant more socio-economic autonomy and cultural development than a more prestigious, but even worse paid, job in Poland. In short, we face a combination of socially perceived de-skilling and individually perceived benefit, despite the seemingly objective socio-economic self-degradation. From the latter perspective, even downward social mobility turns into a certain success story.

Success stories have been discussed in film studies, especially in analyses devoted to popular series about Polish work migrants such as *Londyńczycy* [*The Londoners*].[10] At first glance, success patterns also seem to be present in the recent literature written by Polish migrants. In *Karpie, łabędzie i Big Ben* [*Carps, Swans and Big Ben*] from 2010, Ada Martynowska bestows her alter ego Beata Martynek with splendid professional prospects. The blurb offers the potential reader the following summary of the plot:

> Beata Martynek is twenty-six years old and has a university diploma in her pocket. After the opening of the borders she – like thousands of other Poles – tries to make her living in London. She lives in a small apartment which she rents together with two flatmates … For several months she has been working for Berry & Spelling,

8 So far the post-2004 wave of migration to the British Isles has not resulted in much literary production by Polish migrants in English.

9 Samantha Currie, "De-skilled and Devaluated: The Labour Market Experience of Polish Migrants in the UK Following EU Enlargement," *The International Journal of Comparative Labour Law and Industrial Relations*, 23.1 (2007): 83-116; 89.

10 Joanna Rostek, "Living the British Dream: Polish Migration to the UK as Depicted in the TV series 'Londyńczycy' (2008-2010)," in *Contemporary Polish Migrant Culture and Literature in Germany, Ireland, and the UK*, ed. Joanna Rostek and Dirk Uffelmann (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2011), 245-275.

> one of the best British PR companies, which was founded by a famous Polish millionaire … [11]

This summary functions according to a U-pattern:[12] it starts by claiming representativeness ("just like thousands of Poles"), continues by referring to initially modest living circumstances and ends with individual success. Gisela Stopa, the female protagonist of Brygida Helbig's *Anioły i* świnie *w Berlinie!* [*Angels and Pigs in Berlin!*], also faces tough challenges in Germany, but is eventually appointed a university professor in Berlin.[13] The fictional text boasts of career optimism.

If we turn to referential statements about authors of migrant fiction, the cover page 4 of Maja Wolny's *Kara* [*Punishment*] from 2009 offers a biographical success story:

> Maja Wolny (born 1976) is a journalist and essayist and holds a PhD in political science. She studied in Cracow, Warsaw and Brussels. She obtained the prestigious DELF diploma … Since 2003 she has been living in Belgium, where she heads the Post Viadrina Foundation … [14]

Women-authored migration narratives thus either apply a U-pattern to the socio-economic career of the protagonist or the author herself after migration, or tell unidirectional success stories that seem to contradict my third hypothesis of self-proletarianization.

With male authors and male protagonists, however, the picture looks dramatically different. The earliest texts chronologically that deserve attention with regard to their depiction of migrants' work careers come from the German-speaking countries. The first-person narrator Waldemar from Radek Knapp's 1999 book *Herrn Kukas Empfehlungen* [*Mr Kuka's Recommendations*] picks

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11 Ada Martynowska, *Karpie, łabędzie i Big Ben* [*Carps, Swans and Big Ben*] (Katowice: Sonia Draga, 2010), dust cover 2.

12 For the U-pattern in migrants' work careers see Mariusz Dzięglewski, "The Economic and Social Implications of the Last Migratory Wave from Poland as Depicted in Weekly Magazines," in *Narratives of Ethnic Identity, Migration and Politics: A Multidisciplinary Perspective*, ed. Monika Banaś and Mariusz Dzięglewski (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Akademickie, 2013), 131-146; 143.

13 Brygida Helbig, *Anioły i świnie w Berlinie!* [*Angels and Pigs in Berlin!*] (Szczecin: Forma, 2005), 60.

14 Maja Wolny, *Kara* [*Punishment*] (Warszawa: Próczyński I S-ka, 2009), cover 4. The question of whether the grammatical and lexical flaws of the cover texts from Martynowska's and Wolny's books actually refute the claimed success patterns cannot be discussed here.

up undocumented occasional jobs while waiting at Vienna's "workers' prostitution mile."[15] The same occasional character applies to Walerian's freelance job as a Christmas angel actor in Knapp's *Papiertiger* [*The Paper Tiger*]. Knapp's depictions of similar precarious short-term jobs are above all humoresque. In the same book, the hero Walerian Gugania joyfully applies for academic positions "for which he was 100% unqualified." The prehistory, however, hints at a migrant's precarious status in the job market. Before his fake applications, Walerian

> had all kinds of jobs … , apart from as a grave-digger, they are a rather hermetic club, jobs where he did practically everything the domestic labour market had to offer. He was a nurse … , and before that an attendant in a baboon compound. Once he even happened to pop into a lecture on astrophysics … But [next time] there were no supernovas anymore, only figures and geometrical graphs. This terminated his university career.[16]

Knapp's mild irony mitigates the de-intellectualizing implications of the McJobs performed by his protagonists with the rather simple-minded amusement derived from odd occupations such as "baboon attendant."

In stark contrast to the programmatic conciliatory harmlessness of Knapp's stories,[17] Dariusz Muszer develops a drastic social self-degradation. Almost every friend of the first-person narrator Naletnik from Muszer's 1999 novel *Die Freiheit riecht nach Vanille* [*Liberty Smells of Vanilla*], which Muszer himself translated into Polish as *Wolność pachnie wanilią* in 2008, is a social outsider and unemployed person: "Resettlers, asylum-seekers, foreigners of all skin colours and pauperized, scruffy natives."[18] After his arrival in Germany, the protagonist spends weeks living rough at Hanover's railway station and needs to seek help from charitable organizations. When, in the German transition camp for resettlers from Eastern Europe in Friedland, he is asked about his professional experience, he downplays his earlier work for the Polish public prosecutor's office: "'But it was rather an adventure holiday, no proper work.'

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15 Radek Knapp, *Herrn Kukas Empfehlungen* [*Mr Kuka's Empfehlungen*] (München–Zürich: Piper, 1999), 100.

16 Radek Knapp, *Papiertiger* [*The Paper Tiger*] (München–Zürich: Piper, 2003), 8-9.

17 Dirk Uffelmann, "Konzilianz und Asianismus. Paradoxe Strategien der jüngsten deutschen Literatur slavischer Migranten," *Zeitschrift für Slavische Philologie* 63.2 (2003): 277-309.

18 Dariusz Muszer, *Die Freiheit riecht nach Vanille* [*Liberty Smells of Vanilla*] (München: A1, 1999), 164; in Polish: Dariusz Muszer, *Wolność pachnie wanilią*, trans. D. Muszer (Szczecin–Bezrzecze: Forma, 2008), 132.

… 'I was … a candidate for prosecutor, no true prosecutor since I had not passed the state exam.'"[19] As if denying promising previous employment is not enough, Naletnik purposefully looks for undocumented work as a cleaner, but even that fails. The best he achieves is clandestine employment as a distributor of ads to mailboxes.[20]

The dominant device of Leszek Herman Oświęcimski's novel *Klub Kiełboludów* [*Der Klub der polnischen Wurstmenschen; The Club of the Polish Sausage People*] is the depreciative hyperbole "Wurstmenschen" / "kiełboludy" ["sausage people"], people who are forced to work in low-paid jobs. Despite his literary aspirations, the "Großer Wurstmensch" ["big sausage man"] first receives a side job at a bar. He is then praised for his unprecedented social success in being employed at a piece-work assembly line:

> With enormous luck he was selected from many candidates to become an assembly operator on an assembly line from which almost every minute another household appliance came down. Colloquially, this kind of work was also called "industry fucking."[21]

With Oświęcimski's assembly line we have arrived at classical proletarian work, depicted in a way that reminds us of Karl Marx's critique of alienated labour.

When it comes to literature by migrants from the post-2004 wave to Ireland and the UK, the individualized perspective that was characteristic of Knapp gives way to collective portraits of migrants as a group that faces common socio-economic difficulties: long-term unemployment and the struggle to find a job.[22] This leads Marta, the protagonist of Michał Wyszowski's story "Koniec ducha" ["End of Spirit"], to improvise a "work prostitution strip" on the outskirts of an English city similar to the institutional one described by Knapp on Vienna. Her example of standing at an arterial road with a sign say-

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19 Muszer, *Die Freiheit riecht nach Vanille*, 65; in Polish: Muszer, *Wolność pachnie wanilią*, 53.

20 Muszer, *Die Freiheit riecht nach Vanille*, 156-159; in Polish: Muszer *Wolność pachnie wanilią* 124-128.

21 Leszek H. Oświęcimski, *Klub Kiełboludów* [*The Club of the Polish Sausage People*] (Berlin: Wydawnictwo Nieudaczników, 2002), 35; in German: Leszek Herman, *Der Klub der polnischen Wurstmenschen*, trans. Adam Gusowski and Michał Szalonek (Berlin: Ullstein, 2004), 42.

22 Czerwiński, *Przebiegum życiae*, 88 and 92; Jakub Bolec, "Zmartwychwstanie śmieciarza" ["The Resurrection of the Dustbin Man"], in *Na końcu świata napisane. Autoportret współczesnej polskiej emigracji* [*Written at the World's End: A Self-Portrait of Contemporary Polish Migration*] (Chorzów: Videograf II, 2008), 66-106.

ing "Give me the job! I'm worth it!" is quickly imitated by many others.[23] Those who wait at a "work strip" (and are not arrested for violating public order like Marta) receive only short-term, undocumented, unskilled jobs.

Employment in the lowest segments of the labour market is a recurrent topic in many other texts. Their heroes are unqualified workers who have to take up "low-paid physical labour."[24] Going beyond the personification principle of literary illustration, some authors draw veritable panoramas of low-skilled jobs. Michał Wyszowski, for example, mitigates his enumeration of McJobs with a linguistic observation:

> Over time you also learn new professions. From the English, work "on" or "at" simply becomes a new profession. On cheese, on sandwiches, on handcarts, on the green or at a shop, at a factory, at the cleaners ... [25]

Adam Miklasz chooses to order the available low-paid jobs in a ranking from "packing vegetables" through the "higher-value work in factories, at a wholesaler's or in warehouses" to the attainable maximum, i.e. work in bars or cafes, "but only the best and most committed succeeded in obtaining those."[26] The lowest option for Polish work migrants, according to many texts, is working as a dustman (Berni in Miklasz and Gustaw in Czerwiński, to name but two). Bolec's narrator collectively embraces all Polish unskilled migrant workers as a "veritable dustmen's club."[27] If, in Bolec's case, there is still some distance, Piotr Czerwiński, in his *Conductum Lifae or the Cardboard Web*, constructs an even more drastic dialogue between Polish migrants to Ireland that deploys a collective "we":

> "... what kind of jobs are there for us in this country?"
> "How, what jobs? Shit jobs."
> "With all respect, my friend, shit jobs are for shit people."
> "We are the shit people, my dear colleague!"[28]

This verdict from a disillusioned work migrant implies a contrast between initially high hopes and the hard reality that forces the work migrants to "lower

23 Wyszowski, *Na lewej stronie*, 17.

24 Miklasz, *Polska szkoła*, 30.

25 Wyszowski, *Na lewej stronie,* 30.

26 Miklasz, *Polska szkoła*, 31.

27 Bolec, "Zmartwychwstanie śmieciarza," 72.

28 Czerwiński, *Przebiegum życiae*, 87.

their standards."[29] The first-person narrator of Jan Krasnowolski's *African Electronics* renders this disillusion in the following way:

> I came to England in order to earn some money, to stand on my own two feet, but several years of unpicking my veins on assembly lines in different factories, warehouses and industrial plants managed to kill my hope of making my fortune that way.[30]

Who succeeds in finding a job still faces employment below qualifications, as Łukasz Suskiewicz says in *Egri Bikavér* with regard to pre-2004 illegal work migration to the British Isles:

> I saw many Poles looking for work. The big accession would take place in a few months and everybody hastened to make his career in the West. In practice, this meant terrified couples (masters of biology or pedagogy) traipsing around from bar to bar and begging for the position of dishwasher.[31]

Suskiewicz continues by diagnosing that employment beneath qualification poses a psychological challenge to many work migrants who do not want to be reminded of the more prestigious employment they enjoyed back in Poland.[32]

Not all migrant authors provide their protagonists with the capacity of abstraction on their socio-economic situation. Some, however, apply rather terminological notions: Łukasz Ślipko inserts discursive elements into his *Pokój z widokiem na Dunnes Stores* [*The Room with a View of Dunnes Stores*] (2011), calling low-paid migrant workers "external proletarians."[33] Maria Budacz's Polish protagonist explains to her British boyfriend that the Polish word *baba* is the "proletarian-vulgar equivalent for a woman,"[34] and calls work migrants "white slaves."[35] Along the same lines, Piotr Czerwiński makes his protagonist the mouthpiece for a sarcastic historical parallel:

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29 Wyszowski, *Na lewej stronie*, 30.

30 Krasnowolski, *Afrykańska elektronika*, 89.

31 Suskiewicz, *Egri Bikaver*, 27.

32 Ibid., 30.

33 Ślipko, *Pokój z widokiem*, 21.

34 Budacz, *Wot 4!*, 42.

35 Ibid., 34.

> You know, I sometimes think that we, too, are slaves. We are not so very different from the people that were shipped from Africa on slave ships. The only difference is that we do this to ourselves by our own volition … We are the self-made slaves of the twenty-first century.[36]

Czerwiński's frustrated work migrant nevertheless acknowledges the free will that brought work migrants into their present economic situation. By folding the English epithet "self-made" into the Polish original, he is alluding to the American dream. The combination of the American dream of upward social mobility and the extreme downward mobility of self-enslaving creates an intriguing paradox.

The abstract and paradoxical categorization used by Budacz's and Czerwiński's characters applies a poetics of contrast between proletarian work and intellectual reflection. Similar mechanisms, if not the slave hyperbole, can be found in many literary works: Leszek Herman Oświęcimski's big sausage man not only aspires to become a writer but uses the time he has during his merely mechanical manual labour at the assembly line to philosophize about "similarities and differences between Sartre's and Kierkegaard's concepts of existentialism."[37] This construction of internal freedom of reflection clearly plays down the alienation inherent, according to Marx, in machine work.[38] Oświęcimski is not the only one to provide his protagonist with intellectuality: the protagonist of Bolec's story, who has a higher education but often hides this fact from his colleagues,[39] reads Zbigniew Herbert while waiting for a job,[40] and Czerwiński's Gustaw quotes Shakespeare.[41] It would be going too far to enumerate all the intellectual, mainly literary, name-dropping in many texts – be this Joyce, Sholokhov, Dostoevsky or Yeats in Suskiewicz[42] or Masłowska and Reymont in Ślipko.[43] The latter's narrator also quotes Latin sayings, attends university talks on the philosophy of art and refutes Marx's

36 Czerwiński, *Przebiegum życiae*, 191-192.

37 Oświęcimski, *Klub Kiełboludów*, 36; in German: Herman, *Der Klub der polnischen Wurstmenschen*, 44.

38 Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Werke* (Berlin: Dietz, 1956-1990), Vol. 23, 455.

39 Bolec, "Zmartwychwstanie śmieciarza," 77.

40 Ibid., 70.

41 Czerwiński, *Przebiegum życiae*, 173.

42 Suskiewicz, *Egri Bikaver*, 32, 33, 44 and 50.

43 Ślipko, *Pokój z widokiem*, 49 and 61.

materialism,[44] something that Budacz's female first-person narrator, who attends performances by Marina Abramović, tops by referring to Žižek.[45]

Literature is often also present on the level of the plot: Suskiewicz's narrator compensates for boring work by writing poetry;[46] while unable to find a job, Czerwiński's protagonist works on a film script that is in parts included in the novel. All of them seem to counteract what sociological research calls the "feeling of intellectual regression" that is caused by non-intellectual work and a non-intellectual work environment.[47] The texts thus make a distinction between the external proletarian form of work and the worker's "authentic" intellectual essence. It is not only Czerwiński's protagonist, in denouncing himself as a "self-made slave of the twenty-first century," who performatively ceases to be a slave in the sense of a forced bondman. Recognition can also return to the creator of a reflective work migrant via the performative detour of publishing his story, as was the case with Knapp's Walerian.

An analogous recognition is demanded from readers of a piece of migrant literature, given that they are holding an officially published book in their hands. The fictional mechanism of recognition detour via publishing leads to the question of the presence of the empirical author, if not in the text itself, then in its paratexts. In an article from 2013, Rainer Mende observes that paratexts of works of migrant literature often contain autobiographical signals.[48] It therefore seems necessary to rehabilitate the smiled-at and marginalized genres of the blurb and other cover texts. They belong to what Philippe Lejeune calls "these fringes of a printed text that in fact determine the entire reading."[49] Especially relevant are biographical sketches, either located on the cover page 4 or on the dust cover, which oscillate between referentiality and fictional stylization.[50] It is therefore worth exploring the process of

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44 Ibid., 41, 80 and 9.

45 Budacz, *Wot 4!*, 17-18 and 26.

46 Suskiewicz, *Egri Bikaver*, 53.

47 Trevena, "A Question of Class?," 84.

48 Rainer Mende, "Das Problem des Autobiografischen in der polnischsprachigen Prosa aus Deutschland nach 1989. Theoretische Anmerkungen und praktische Anregungen," in *Polnische Literatur in Bewegung. Die Exilwelle der 1980er Jahre*, ed. Daniel Henseler and Renata Makarska (Bielefeld: transcript, 2013), 195-211; 204-205.

49 Philippe Lejeune, *Le pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1975), 45.

50 Cf. Genette's metaphorical placement of paratexts in the "'undefined zone' between the inside and the outside" (Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 2).

"paratextualization"[51] of the fictional characters with the help of biographical sketches about the author.

Following the chronological timeline, I start once again with the "paratextualization" of Knapp's in the German original of *Mr Kuka's Recommendations*. The biographical sketch on the book's dust cover says:

> Since 1976 he [Radek Knapp] has been living in Vienna, where he has studied philosophy and kept himself above water as a tennis teacher, water-infuser in a sauna and sausage vendor.[52]

The same contrast of academic education and proletarian work experience structures the biographical sketch from the cover page 4 of Muszer's novel:

> Dariusz Muszer, born in Western Poland in 1959, has been living in Hanover since 1988. He studied law and worked inter alia as a roofer, public prosecutor, actor, taxi-driver, musician, theatre instructor, journalist and gravedigger.

The rhetorical device of chaotic enumeration applied here includes an obvious social degradation: from a jurist to various auxiliary jobs. Remarkably, the enumeration is almost identical on the cover page 4 of Muszer's Polish self-translation.[53] This means, first, that the paratextual proletarianization of the author is not only directed at the receiving country's audience, but also at the sending country's readership. Second, it is clear that the addressants of the "publisher's peritext"[54] are not the two different publishers. The author must have contributed to this biographical sketch or at least agreed to its repetition.

In the case of Leszek Herman Oświęcimski, it is less his university study (that looks through "Bakhtin's structuralism") than the contrasting professional activities that launch a similar contrast: "In 1988 he emigrated to Berlin, where he worked as a journalist and assembly-line worker."[55] Ryszard Adam Gruchawka's *Buty emigranta* [*The Emigrant's Shoes*] (2007) ends with a very

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51 Lenka Müllerová, *Reklamní aspekty sekundárních knižních textů v devadesátých letech 20. století*, PhD diss., Masarykova Univerzita Brno, 2009, 13.

52 Knapp, *Herrn Kukas Empfehlungen*, cover 4.

53 "Ukończył studia prawnicze, pracował w różnych zawodach, jako ślusarz, klezmer, instruktor teatralny, dziennikarz, oświetleniowiec i taksówkarz" (Muszer, *Wolność pachnie wanilią*, cover 4).

54 Genette, *Paratexts*, 16; Philippe Lane, *La périphérie du texte* (Paris: Nathan, 1992), 18-20.

55 Herman, *Der Klub der polnischen Wurstmenschen*, 2; lacking in the Polish version.

detailed biographical sketch, signed "Wydawca" ["The Publisher"], that introduces Gruchawka as somebody who

> had many different jobs. He worked as a field worker, bricklayer, carpenter and coalminer. / For 20 years he has been working as a woodcutter, but in every free minute he writes.[56]

Be this in the order of earlier (academic) and later (proletarian) or simultaneous occurrence (journalist and assembly-line worker), the degradation on the work level produces a paradoxical mixture.

A comparable genre to biographical sketches on book covers is the introductory information provided for authors of anthologies. In the 2000 anthology *napisane w niemczech / geschrieben in deutschland* [*Written in Germany*], Maria Kolenda is introduced according to the pattern of earlier (studies) and later (simple jobs):

> She studied Polish philology at the University of Wrocław. In 1981 she emigrated to Germany, where she worked as a housekeeper, a vendor in a Japanese shop, a nurse in a center for resettlers and most recently as a childcare worker.[57]

The 2007 British anthology *Na końcu* świata *napisane* [*Written at the World's End*] applies the poetics of simultaneous contrast to Jakub Bolec: "He is twenty-nine years old. At present he lives in London, where he works as an unskilled construction worker. Every now and then, he writes short stories."[58] The recurrent patterns of contrast allow the conclusion that, despite the texts' focus on unqualified work and socio-economic hardship, the intellectual "height of fall" (like the "Fallhöhe" secured by the estates-clause in Batteux's and Gottsched's theories of tragedy, but here without moral fault) is also always present at the paratextual level: the paratexts stress the migrant author's higher education and confront his writing profession with low-skilled jobs. The claimed biographical referentiality makes it clear that we are not just dealing with the literary device of using a less intellectual (*skaz*) narrator than the author himself. What we see is a rather comprehensive and consistent strategy of self-proletarianization that extends to both protagonist and author.

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56 Ryszard Adam Gruchawka, *Buty emigranta* [*The Emigrant's Shoes*] (Warszawa: Ex Libris Galeria Polskiej Książki, 2007), 126.

57 *napisane w niemczech. antologia / geschrieben in deutschland. Anthologie*, ed. Piotr Piaszczyński, Krzysztof Maria Załuski (Jestetten–Köln: b1/IGNIS, 2000), 334.

58 Bolec, "Zmartwychwstanie *śmieciarza*," 66.

The fictitious migrant protagonists and the paratextual representation of the empirical authors converge in the contrast of intellectuality and proletarian work experience.

To be sure, this contrast is hierarchical. The hierarchy stems either from the social status which, irrespective of which post-1989 European country is concerned, is higher for jobs requiring an academic education. A previous employment according with this education, or the performative "proof" of true intellectuality by the protagonists' name-dropping or the authors' published book(s), posits the intellectual dimension as the higher, primary or intrinsic one while making the proletarian experience the lower or accidental and thus extrinsic hypostasis. In this sense Wyszowski's combination of "external proletarians" can be projected from its intercultural context onto the anthropological vector: an internally intellectual work migrant presents himself externally as an unqualified wage-worker.

How justified and functional is Wyszowski's choice of the epithet "proletarian"? The fourth, methodological thesis I intend to defend in this article is that the notion "proletariat" can provide a helpful ingredient when describing the mechanism of "self-proletarianization" in recent literature by Polish migrants to Germany, Ireland and the UK. I regard it as productive because of the paradoxical re-evaluation inherent in the Marxist definition of "proletariat." For the purpose of describing the self-proletarianizing strategy in Polish migrant prose, it would be dysfunctional to confine the socio-economic category to the narrow Marxist definition of collective factory workers alone.[59] Only Oświęcimski's and Krasnowolski's[60] "assembly-line workers" would fit in this strict sense of "proletariat." Since the protagonists of migrant literature perform diverse kinds of low-paid work and authors like Muszer revel in the colorful multitude of unskilled jobs they (allegedly) had, we need to include all forms of short-term employment in a non-self-determined work context. This brings the social stratum depicted in the analysed works closer to Werner Sombart's generalized social definition of "proletariat" that encompasses both the "full-fledged proletarians" and the "half-breed proletarians," which he defines as "the have-nots, the dispossessed population," "proletarian and proletaroid existences."[61] In the migrant literature context it is also important not to exclude the unemployed, the lumpen proletariat that Marx and Engels

59 Cf. Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution*, Vol. 2 *The Politics of Social Classes* (New York–London: Monthly Review Press, 1978), 33-38.

60 Krasnowolski, *Afrykańska elektronika*, 69.

61 Werner Sombart, *Das Proletariat. Bilder und Studien* (Frankfurt am Main: Rütten & Loenig 1906), 6-7.

despised.[62] Their definition is too narrow in terms of socio-economic extension and too naive in the assumption of class consciousness and revolutionary potential. Decisive, however, is the way in which Marx re-evaluates the term "proletariat": for him "proletarianization" appeared as a social degradation that was an unplanned, unwanted and ultimately undesirable (from the point of view of Marx's theory of alienated work) downward mobility. Those who were "proletarianized" had no alternative left: they were compelled to migrate to industrial factories in order to take up wage labour under miserable conditions. Even in Marx and Engels' *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei* [*Communist Manifesto*], the traditional negative disposition is clearly palpable when they speak of the "proletariat, the lowest stratum of our present society,"[63] people "who have nothing to lose but their chains."[64] It is the organized proletariat that makes the difference: "This organization of the proletarians into a class … ever rises up again, stronger, firmer, mightier."[65] Only this makes the proletariat the "inherently universal" revolutionary class.[66]

An unsolved problem for all Marxist theorists is the role of intellectuals in this process.[67] How can intellectuals be integrated in the workers' movement? One solution is a cadre party that centrally organizes a "revolution." The other is the opposite of the cadre party's avant-garde hubris; it is the self-proletarianization of intellectuals who take up factory jobs in order to be in solidarity with the proletariat. This happened in Central and Northern Europe in the 1970s, as left-wing activists performed acts of deliberate downward mobility that were literally called "self-proletarianization," "sjølproletarisiring" in Norway or "Selbstproletarisierung" in Germany,[68] just to mention two political cultures where the reflexive term made a certain career. Leaving aside the particular left-wing motives of the intellectual

62 Cf. Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory*, 453-478.

63 Marx, Engels, *Werke*, Vol. 4. 473.

64 Ibid., Vol. 4. 493.

65 Ibid., Vol. 4. 471.

66 Cf. David W. Lovell, *Marx's Proletariat: The Making of a Myth* (London–New York: Routledge, 1988), 51; Werner Conze, "Proletariat, Pöbel, Pauperismus," in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, Vol. 5, ed. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze and Reinhart Koselleck (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1984), 27-68; 52-54.

67 Cf. Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory*, 481-572.

68 Jon Ivar Elstad, "Arbeiterklassen tur/retur. (ml)-bevegelsens sjølproletarisering," *Samtiden*, 3 (2004): 26-35; Jan Ole Arps, *Frühschicht. Linke Fabrikintervention in den 70er Jahren* (Berlin–Hamburg: Assoziation A, 2011).

"self-proletarianizers" of the 1970s, I borrow the term for my tropological definition. By "self-proletarianization" I designate any mechanism of paradoxical re-evaluation of economic self-degradation. The paradoxical re-evaluating effect that Marx introduced into the notion of the "proletariat" is absent from less ideologized terms such as "unskilled worker," "undocumented worker," etc. It is historically connected with the term "proletariat" and can therefore be reused in this tropological sense – even if one does not subscribe to the Marxist revolutionary teleology or to the solidarity action of the "self-proletarianizers" of the 1970s.

To be sure, the Polish migrant authors under scrutiny in this article rarely come close to Marxist categories[69] such as the critique of monotonous alienating work,[70] or the pride taken in "real work" instead of begging.[71] Even Adam Miklasz, who displays at least remote allusions to Marxian proletarian criticism and pride, distances himself from ideological Neo-Marxism.[72] What is more, apart from in Wyszowski and Budacz, the very term "proletariat" only rarely plays a role in migrant literature. In the literary works, the abstraction of class is in the vast majority of cases concretized in particular professions or in drastic self-deprecating metaphors. What can be observed, however, is the fact that Polish migrant writers use structurally comparable strategies of re-evaluation when constructing their protagonists or fashioning their authorial image in a proletarian direction.

Given that the construction of fictitious characters and the fashioning of the authors apply an analogous mechanism of self-proletarianization, two questions remain: 1) what is the relationship between the fictitious protagonist's story and the author's personal work experience; and 2) what is the function of the paradoxical device that is used on both levels? The analogous fashioning of protagonist and authorial image can be approached from two sides – from the textual evidence and from empirical data about migrants' work biographies. From the literary texts we learn that there is a certain tendency to ascribe writing protagonists an autobiographical poetics. For example, Gustaw's film script in Czerwiński's novel is said to draw on the hero's

69 In the case of late and post-socialist emigration from a (former) socialist country like Poland, the migrant authors lack revolutionary impetus. Ideological Marxism is instead regarded as an affront. In this sense Maria Budacz lets her Polish first-person narrator react to British socialist propaganda by pointing to the negative experience in the People's Republic (Budacz, *Wot 4!*, 26).

70 Miklasz, *Polska szkoła*, 149.

71 Ibid., 204.

72 Ibid., 319-320.

own work and migration experience.[73] Similar claims are made in blurbs about the relationship between the authors' own work experience and the plot. In the case of Miklasz's book, the blurb constructs a direct relationship with the author's past: "His debut novel, *The Polish Boxing School*, is inspired by his work stay on the British Isles."[74]

Less clear are the empirical data about work migrants' social mobility. As it turns out, the positive or negative construction of a person's work migration depends on subjective evaluations, on what Trevena calls "auto-valorization" or "auto-devalorization,"[75] the latter coming close to the mechanism of self-proletarianization. How, in the light of such subjectivity, do "auto-valorization" and "auto-devalorization" relate to socio-economic reality? According to Michał Garapich, neither class nor ethnicity influence cultural representations by virtue of material realities, but via their discursive construction.[76] In the case of Polish work migration, these discursive constructions are ambiguous in themselves. While individual migrants tend to view their migration as economic success,[77] the general picture drawn by journalists is alarmist.[78]

Since it is not the task of literary criticism to check the results of sociological research, I argue that self-proletarianizing narratives enact the divergence with which sociologists struggle. Literary devices of self-proletarianization do not "reflect" either individual work biographies or collective socio-economic conditions in the vulgar Marxist sense of Widerspiegelung. But they function in the contradictory Polish discourse around work migrants.

Given this contradictory discursive context, literary patterns of self-degradation enter into an intriguing conflict with narrative patterns of success

73 Czerwiński, *Przebiegum życiae*, 150-151.

74 Miklasz, *Polska szkoła*, cover 4.

75 Paulina Trevena, "Degradacja? Koncepcje socjologiczne, percepcja społeczna a postrzeganie własnego położenia przez wykształconych migrantów pracujących za granicą poniżej kwalifikacji," in *Drogi i rozdroża. Migracje Polaków w Unii Europejskiej po 1 maja 2004 roku. Analiza psychologiczno-socjologiczna*, ed. Halina Grzymała-Moszczyńska, Anna Kwiatkowska and Joanna Roszak (Kraków: Nomos, 2010), 147-160; 157.

76 Michał P. Garapich, "Between Cooperation and Hostility – Constructions of Ethnicity and Social Class Among Polish Migrants in London," *Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis – Studia Sociologica*, 4.2 (2012): 31-45; 32-33.

77 Angela Coyle, "Resistance, Regulation and Rights: The Changing Status of Polish Women and Work in the »New« Europe," *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 14.1 (2007): 37-50.

78 Mariusz Dzięglewski, "Społeczne i kulturowe skutki migracji poakcesyjnej na łamach tygodników opinii w latach 2004-2012," *Studia Migracyjne – Przegląd Polonijny* 3 (2013): 147-188; 162 and 171.

and with traditional concepts of authorship. This complex context helps us to understand why the device of proletarianization can seem artistically appropriate in literature and to address the second open question – about the function of devices of self-proletarianization.

Proletarianizing somebody else can be a powerful naturalistic literary device. This is also true for migrant literature where the proletarianization of fictitious characters can have an ethical implication of compassion. This has been described by scholars with regard to Janusz Rudnicki's texts. According to Przemysław Czapliński and Piotr Śliwiński, Rudnicki's "sympathetic mockery"[79] means the compassion and empathy of the narrator for underclass protagonists such as the dying alcoholic Uschi. But, in Rudnicki, as in the case of many other migrant authors, there is more than just empathy: the convergence of professions mentioned in blurbs and depicted in the plots of the literary works under scrutiny also allows us to diagnose various tropes of the partial identification of the empirical author with his fictitious narrator-protagonists,[80] who, again, more often than not, have a migrant background and are immersed in lower social strata.

It is migrant literature that voices issues of social degradation. But, as we saw, we cannot determine if the author's self-fashioning in a socially downward direction is "authentic." In the case of Czerwiński for example, who – as he admitted in an interview – earned high wages in Ireland,[81] it certainly is not. The decisive twist in this context comes not from (in-)authenticity or referentiality but from the reflexivity inherent in the device of self-proletarianization: even if the reader will never ultimately know to which "self" the device refers, the identification with downward mobility itself produces semantic effects. The recipient of self-proletarianizing devices faces a de Manian undecidability[82] between the referential (biographical) reading of a fictional text and the reading of biographical sketches about authors as a piece of unreferential fiction. On the one hand, the resemblance of the author's work biography to those of his protagonists (as in the case of Muszer

79 Przemysław Czapliński, Piotr Śliwiński, *Literatura polska 1976-1998. Przewodnik po prozie i poezji* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1999), 245.

80 Małgorzata Zduniak-Wiktorowicz, *Współczesny polski pisarz w Niemczech – doświadczenie, tożsamość, narracja* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2010), 83-87.

81 Joanna Kosmalska and Joanna Rostek, "Irish-Polish Cultural Interrelations in Practice: Interviews with Chris Binchy, Piotr Czerwiński, Dermot Bolger and Anna Wolf," *Studi Irlandesi: A Journal of Irish Studies*, 5 (2015): 103-130; 109.

82 Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven (CT): Yale University Press, 1979).

or Gruchawka) provides the literary work with a suggestion of authenticity, while on the other hand, the suspicious reader would call into question even the most basic biographical data.

This is especially true for biographical sketches on book covers or dust covers. If these texts proletarianize the author or (if the author was asked to authorize the sketch) the author proletarianizes himself with the help of the biographical sketch, this contradicts the findings of Lenka Müllerová's empirical research into paratexts. According to the Czech scholar, "[t]he goal of these texts [cover texts about the author] is to present the author as an exceptional or already well established figure in the literary life … " Biographical self-proletarianization obviously counteracts this goal. The alternative function of a biographical paratext as offered by Müllerová is providing the readers with the possibility of identifying with the author "as a person who lived through the contemporary world in a close or identical manner as the recipient did."[83] This might be true to a certain degree, given that a considerable part of the audience of migrant literature is fellow migrants.[84] What remains, however, is the contradiction between self-proletarianization and traditional concepts of authorship, especially in Poland with its romantic canon. Irrespective of the impossibility of deciding whether this deduction is justifiable, there must be a specific effect from hyperboles such as "self-made slaves" or abstractions like "external proletarians." My fifth and final thesis is that they fulfil an apotropaic function.

As Harold Bloom has demonstrated (with regard to the reaction of "belated" authors to their precursors),[85] the imposition of a foreign pattern on somebody causes anxiety in the latter and produces paradoxical, both appropriative and apotropaic, reactions from his/her side. This paradox comes close to what we have seen here: self-proletarianization appropriates a negative social category that is often imposed on migrants – "they are here for low-skilled jobs." Biographical sketches about the authors of migrant literature adopt this as: "I am here for low-skilled jobs."

This is a paradoxical appropriation that can be structurally compared to what I described earlier as the appropriation of negative hetero-stereotypes about the East (the East of Europe, the Orient or Asia) as self-Orientalization in the literature of Polish migrants to Germany (especially by Muszer and

83 Müllerová, *Reklamní aspekty*, 167.

84 Uffelmann, "Konzilianz und Asianismus," 280.

85 Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

Rudnicki).[86] Germany is somewhat different in this respect from the British Isles, where negative ethnic hetero-stereotypes about the East have a less prominent discursive tradition, and resentment is more likely to be expressed in social rather than ethno-cultural terms.

What is the tropological difference between self-Orientalization and self-proletarianization? The former paradoxically appropriates an ethnic and cultural stereotype, the latter a socio-economic prejudice. The mechanism of identical reproduction of something undesirable, however, is analogous. Postcolonial theory has taught us that even seemingly identical reproduction possesses the potential to transform what is "reproduced." According to Henry Louis Gates Jr., racist hate words such as "slave," "nigger" or "monkey" can become inverted. Gates describes this as an anti-colonial linguistic act of appropriation: "black people colonized a white sign."[87] Transferred to the European system of cultural coordinates, this mechanism can also be applied to negative stereotypes about East and East Central Europeans, namely, to Asian ethno-metaphors such as Kalmyks, Mongols, etc.[88]

With work migration, ethnic and social categories become blurred as we can see from a third related strategy – self-"Kanakization," which was introduced in Germany with Feridun Zaimoglu's anthology *Kanak Sprak. 24 Mißtöne vom Rande der Gesellschaft* [*Kanak Langag: 24 Dissonances from the Margin of Society*] from 1995. With explicit reference to the black-consciousness movement,[89] Zaimoglu describes the appropriation effect as follows: "Kanak! This denigrating hate-word becomes an identity-endowing code-word, a unifying brace for these 'lumpen ethnicians.'"[90] The neologism "lumpen ethnicians" is derived from the Marxist negative class term of "lumpen proletarians" quoted by Zaimoglu four pages earlier. This contains a critical reflection of self-proletarianizing devices, because, according to Zaimoglu, and in contrast to what we saw in Polish migrant writers' self-fashioning, this prose "fixes the Kanak in the role of a victim."[91]

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86 Cf. Uffelmann, "»Self-Orientalisation«".

87 Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York–Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 47.

88 Uffelmann, , "»Self-Orientalisation«," 107.

89 Feridun Zaimoglu, *Kanak Sprak / Koppstoff. Die gesammelten Mißtöne vom Rande der Gesellschaft* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2011), 21.

90 Ibid.

91 Ibid., 17.

Etymologically, the racist neologism *Kanake* is a contamination of the German anti-Slavic hate-words *Kosake* ["Cossack"], *Hannake* ["rouge" – from the Czech *Hanáci*] and *Polacke* ["Polack" – from the Polish *Polak*] (Ha 2009).[92] Thus self-Kanakization enacts a twist from an external ethnonym to an internal socio-economic category. Since *Polacke* is one of the roots of *Kanake*, one could typologically speak of self-Kanakization in Polish migrant authors: they adopt the double negative hetero-stereotype of low social status and migrant background, either stressing the cultural foreignness (self-Orientalization) or the low-skilled work (self-proletarianization). In both cases, by appropriating the external negative category, they re-evaluate it.

By performing paradoxical appropriations of whichever ethnic, cultural and socio-economic prejudice, the subject turns it away from itself and liquidates it by transferring it onto the level of literature. Thus – just as via self-Orientalization and self-Kanakization – the literary subject of self-proletarianization in Polish migrant prose attempts to perform an act of apotropaic appropriation. It tries to performatively free itself from the undesirable socio-economic category of the "external proletarian."

How efficient are similar acts of apotropaic appropriation? Are migrant writers doomed to re-enact the same self-proletarianizing device again and again? No, the apotropaic effect works to a certain degree. We can see this again on both levels, in fiction and in biographical sketches. There is the social success and recognition obtained by Radek Knapp's authorial *alter ego* Walerian, who is unexpectedly awarded a literary prize, has his debut story printed as a book and attracts (erotic) interest from listeners during his first reading trip.[93] The biographical sketch from Knapp's later book *The Paper Tiger* also abides all proletarian jobs and just says: "lives as a free author in Vienna."[94] Apparently, the more time has elapsed and – more importantly – the more books a writer has published since emigration, the less migrant authors are focused on migration topics and the less they deploy the literary device of self-proletarianization.

Beyond the realm of fiction and self-fashioning, however, the performative effect is limited: in most cases the apotropaic act of literary

92 Kien Nghi Ha, "Postkoloniales Signifying – Der 'Kanake' als anti-rassistische Allegorie?," in *Heimatkunde. Migrationspolitisches Portal* 2009, accessed January 18, 2015, http://heimatkunde.boell.de/2009/02/18/postkoloniales-signifying-der-kanake-als-anti-rassistische-allegorie.

93 Cf. Hermann Dorowin, "Simplicius auf dem Arbeiterstrich," in *Eine Sprache – viele Horizonte… Die Osterweiterung der deutschsprachigen Literatur. Porträts einer neuen europäischen Generation*, ed. Michaela Bürger-Koftis (Wien: Praesens, 2008), 165-176; 172-173.

94 Knapp, *Papiertiger*, dust cover 3.

self-proletarianization remains conative. The paradoxical gesture of self-proletarianization in no way automatically secures the author commercial success, nor does it elevate him to a canonical rank. The authority traditionally granted to an author in a postromantic context such as the Polish one does not come with commercial success, the sort that Artur Becker enjoyed after being awarded the Adelbert von Chamisso book prize for migrant literature in Germany in 2009. Even a prestigious prize does not make great author.

Even if only transitorily, as we saw, apotropaic appropriation is present in prose texts by male writers who migrated from Poland to Germany, Ireland and the UK. On the other hand, it turned out that there is a clear gender divide: self-proletarianization is less prominent in texts by female authors (as we have also found with self-Orientalization).[95] Exceptions such as the working class motifs in Budacz's multithematic, anecdotic book *Wot 4!*[96] that are not repeated in any self-proletarianizing biographical sketch on the book cover tend to confirm the gender rule rather than refute it.

95 Uffelmann, "»Self-Orientalisation«," 123-128; see also Dirk Uffelmann, "Wrong Sex and the City: Polish Work Migration and Subaltern Masculinity," in *Polish Literature in Transformation*, ed. Ursula Phillips (Münster: LIT, 2013), 69-92. Something similar applies to the second anthology of Kanak Sprak, *Koppstoff. Kanaka Sprak vom Rande der Gesellschaft* [*Boncestuff: Kanaka Langag from the Margin of Society*] (1998), where female voices belong more often to intellectuals, whereas the male voices of the first anthology belonged to proletarian men (cf. Zaimoglu, *Kanak Sprak / Koppstoff,* 19 and 121).

96 Budacz, *Wot 4!*, 19-21, 34-36 and 102.

Investigations

Joanna Ślósarska

Self-Narration as a Strategy of Negotiating Identity in the Texts of Polish Migrants Residing in the UK and Ireland since 2004

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The main subject of literary works published by Polish migrants residing in the United Kingdom and Ireland after 2004 is the exploration of critical situations, determined by such factors as: the forced change of social roles in a new working environment, and the resulting need for a redefinition of self-identity and community identity; communication barriers related to a lack of sufficient language skills; the lack or loss of means of subsistence and the strategies for acquiring material goods; separation from loved ones, loss of emotional support, and a consequent focus on the reconstruction of emotional ties; the need to respect and understand cultural differences in a multiethnic environment, especially in London. In his essay and reportage collection *W 80 dni dookoła* świata *(nie wyjeżdżając z Londynu)* [*Around the World in 80 Days (Without Leaving London)*], Jarek Sępek sees London as one of today's most culturally, linguistically and ethnically diverse cities, and a place granting unlimited transactional and transformational possibilities to Polish migrants.[1] In *Egri Bikavér*,

1 Jarek Sępek, *W 80 dni dookoła* świata *(nie wyjeżdżając z Londynu)*, [*Around the World in 80 Days (Without Leaving London)*] (Warszawa: „carta blanca", 2012).

Łukasz Suskiewicz regards Victoria Station in London (not Warsaw or Cracow) as a contemporary mirror of the Poles.[2] However, an axiological interpretation in Jakub Bolec's short story "Zmartwychwstanie śmieciarzy" ["Resurrection of the Dustbin Man"] expresses the interactive potential of London in a final phantasmatic flight over the city by means of a metonymy of "garbage collectors" and a "garbage dump." "Below were the lights of a huge garbage dump"[3] where a person's identity is drastically eliminated, largely through a lack of linguistic competence: "when you do not know the language or you speak it like me, i.e., only on a communicative level, you feel like a begging cripple or halfwit;"[4] these words are spoken by the same narrator who is internally moulded as a recipient of high culture. The negatively marked metonymy of England as "the sea of bricks, asphalt and concrete" is also introduced by Ireneusz Gębski in his novel *W cieniu Sheratona* [*In the Shadow of the Sheraton*], dedicated to Polish economic migrants.[5] The migrant's radical disillusionment in a "promised land" is presented by Piotr Czerwiński in the closing pages of his novel *Przebiegum życiae, czyli kartonowa sieć* [*Conductum Lifae or the Cadboard Web*], where he creates a comic utopia: "it was my cartoon city, my magic secret city that never existed. Our hearts were full of true, cartoonish hope."[6]

A set of critical situations determines the conditions for a transitive space, the positive or negative dynamics of which mainly depends on the individual and community skills to establish patterns of biography and identity. By identifying the migrant community, Adam Miklasz in *Polska szkoła boksu* [*The Polish Boxing School*] introduces a sarcastic icon of Slavic migrants: "A new race of Eastern Europeans."[7] The tool for the redefinition of this "new race" used by many Polish migrants was literary communication. The authors of the novels, diaries, short stories, essays, reportage and poetry are mostly young graduates in the humanities (including Polish studies, philosophy, journalism and social

2 Łukasz Suskiewicz, *Egri Bikavér* (Szczecin/Bezrzecze: Forma, Stowarzyszenie Oficyna, 2009), 87.

3 Jakub Bolec, "Zmartwychwstanie śmieciarzy," ["Resurection of the Dustbin Man"] in *Na końcu świata napisane. Autoportret współczesnej polskiej emigracji* [*Written at the World's End. A Self-Portrait of Contemporary Polish Migration*] (London: Videograf II, 2007), 66-106; 105-106.

4 Ibid., 71.

5 Ireneusz Gębski, *W cieniu Sheratona* [*In the Shadow of the Sheraton*] (Warszawa: Warszawska Firma Wydawnicza, 2011), 17.

6 Piotr Czerwiński, *Przebiegum życiae, czyli kartonowa sieć* [*Conductum Lifae or the Cadboard Web*] (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 2009), 335.

7 Adam Miklasz, *Polska szkoła boksu* [*The Polish Boxing School*] (Kraków: Skrzat, 2009), 25.

communication, marketing and management) as well as older people with vocational education in such fields as hotel management, nursing, forestry and geology. Some of the authors made their literary debuts before moving to the UK and Ireland. The migrant works of both beginning and established authors were accepted by numerous, if sometimes niche, Polish publishing houses; this is a social phenomenon that points to a change in the construction of an interactive "literary field." For the publishers, the authors' habitus (i.e., their current position in literary circles, their formal skills or education) is less important than the common topic they engage with, thus forming an individual, "narrative communitas" – a community of people experiencing and describing a migrant reality in which they try to achieve their goals and satisfy their needs.

What is important in the processes of migration, of moving, of travelling from place to place, are (literally and figuratively) the recognized and supported transitions (connections, arcades) and the crevices, cracks and losses of continuity and consistency. Typical problems arising from the fact that individuals and communities are in a transition space include the instability of their axiological, biographical and social identity. Such instability is generated by the systematic discordance of expectations towards the interactive situation. This applies especially to the obligation of a reactive behaviour that becomes inconsistent with the image of an internal "I" constituted in the former experience, for example, holding jobs that do not match the migrants' qualifications (Poles who possess higher qualifications in the humanities often fetch up as cleaners, hotel workers, chefs, nannies, carers for the elderly, shop assistants and staff in pubs). Negative interaction situations are also deepened by the difficulty of standing up to an employer for fear of losing even a paltry wage, and an inability to engage in new emotional relationships because of family members far away who are constantly worried about and longed for. As a result, the experience of anomie (including interactive anomie), that is, of a biographical and social disorder, grows. At the beginning, resistance to anomie includes recognition of the present identity of oneself and of one's community (which is usually an ethnic identity). This is how the migrant writers usually begin the action of their literary work. Jacek Ozaist, the author of *Wyspa obiecana* [*The Promised Island*], begins his short story with the following words:

> I took a pen – a nice one with "Poland" written on it and an eagle on its cap – and I stopped in the middle of a sentence. I shall honestly admit that I do not know who I am. Instead, I perfectly know who I used to be as it so happened that I died somewhere on the way and now I am being born again.[8]

8 Jacek Ozaist, *Wyspa obiecana* [*The Promised Island*] (Kraków: Bogdan Zdanowicz, 2015), 21.

In the novel *Hotel Irlandia* [*The Ireland Hotel*], Iwona Słabuszewska-Krauze (a journalist) also follows the motif of identity's loss by writing:

> I am not the person I should be. I am not where I should be. Not in the way I should be.[9]

There are also two other important motifs in this narrative: the disproportion of inner and outer reality and the disturbances of the relation towards the immediate environment. It turns out that a good salary does not guarantee satisfaction when one's sense of identity is lost, a loss intensified by monotonous duties and tasks, which in turn ratchet up tension between the subjective and objective aspects of identity, all of this leading to crisis. The lack of autonomy, of the ability to meet any decision-making potential in the social field, translates into a struggle for the quality of local situations – the struggle for the untouchability of "my" mug, for the place where "my" napkin will be or for a tiny corner in the bathroom where "my" toothbrush belongs. The tension recognized by the author of *The Ireland Hotel* between "I/me" and "you/your" in the singular or plural in small migrant communities is a characteristic syndrome of the dissonance between the desire for keeping in touch (for belonging, community, unity and co-operation) and the aspiration to strengthen oneself (through self-defense, expansion, self-actualization and personal development). Being a member of a group is therefore a source of both support and conflict, and of a tendency for autonomization, because group identity emphasizes at once the similarity and the competitiveness of individuals struggling for access to the same goods they desire. The process of becoming different, of finding one's own accommodation, partner and expression ("my own opinion" as opposed to "other people's opinions") becomes an urgent necessity. In transitive situations the negative factors are failures of activity projects, the disintegration of community self-organization, disruption of the relationship between personal identities and the identities of small *communitas*, and between these communities and the collective identities of large social groups (ethnic, organizational, national).

The framework of a symbolic universum[10] is the basic concept of the world, the typification of the objects of the universum, considered to be the role model (which therefore controls the system of social expectations), the

9 Iwona Słabuszewska-Krauze, *Hotel Irlandia* [*The Ireland Hotel*] (Warszawa: Semper, 2006), 23.

10 Herbert Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism. Perspective and Method* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1969)

rules of interaction, co-operation and communication in a given community and the basic ideas about the biographical projects and their specific modes of implementation. Providing fundamental ways of interpreting groups and individuals, symbolic interaction makes it possible to capture the actions and modifications of the direction of transformations. The content of any symbolic universum is largely shaped by the systems of values adopted by individuals and communities. The axiologization of the universum is bonded with the meaning of objects, identified as the representations of the desired goods. The basic system of values which is accepted and at the same time strongly questioned and criticized in Polish migration literature includes prestige values (striving for a high position in the social hierarchy) identified with material values (putting importance on consumer goods and economic status). The strategies for living up to these values are accompanied by a hedonistic attitude. Looking for pleasures constitutes a kind of compensatory regulation of tensions and conflicts, of eliminating unpleasant states, of an at least momentary experience of life without distraction. Emotional commitment is expressed in descriptions of the easy ways of releasing states of elation, happiness, fear and suffering. These states are repeated intensively or are rather subconsciously reconstructed in the tendency to become involved with other people, because they endow, after all, a sense of community ties (Bednarska,[11] Martynowska[12]). The need for functional adaptation to a new social environment is combined by the migrants with the recognition of the loss of an allocentric attitude, which people link with the perception of another person as an autonomous value. This motif is starkly presented in "Obcy" ["A Stranger"], a poem by Łucja Fornalczyk-Fice, a carer of elderly and ailing people in the United Kingdom and Germany:

> I did not live in my own nest for four years.
> I lived with strangers, we spoke different languages.
> I was mooning like a dog from one leg to another,
> Without recognizing faces. …
> Kneeling by an elderly woman who knew Szymborska,
> I took care of her swollen legs.[13]

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11 Agnieszka Bednarska, *Emigracja uczuć* [*The Emigration of Feelings*] (Zakrzewo: Replika, 2012).

12 Ada Martynowska, *Karpie, łabędzie i Big Ben* [*Carps, Swans and Big Ben*] (Katowice: Sonia Draga, 2010).

13 Łucja Fornalczyk-Fice, "Obcy," ["A Stranger"] in *Opiekunka* [*The Carer*] (Gorzów Wielkopolski: Sonar Literacki, 2012), 26.

This poem expresses a dramatic tension within the framework of the post-accession, symbolic universum of Europe. This humiliating image of "mooning like a dog from one leg to another" is like a metonymy for those Polish migrants who are ready to accept any job, even the most humiliating. However, a deeper meaning of this metonymy is to be found in the attitude towards that most basic existential situation that makes everyone equal, i.e., suffering and pain. The theme of a carer in the poem "A Stranger" exceeds its literal meaning by opening to the sense of the "role of a carer," devoid of her own home and support of loved ones, a stranger who at the same time is immersed in the crumbling life of a wealthy European woman. It is a symbolic situation that reveals the absurdity not only of the pursuit of material possessions (by those who chase and those who have caught their cherished prosperity) but also of the arrogance towards fundamental values that unite people. The ambiguity of the metonymy "I was mooning like a dog from one leg to the other / Not recognizing the faces" is a signal of an enforcing inconsistency between the inner identity and public existence. The collapse of social orientation and the loss of confidence in oneself makes the process of managing the meaning in the symbolic universe close to impossible. In the story by Parys-White, there appears the sarcastic motif of the competence degradation of Polish migrants, who are forced by the conditions of a new social environment to "convert their intellectual competence into the broom and shovel."[14] The authors of migration literature place a strong standardization emphasis on the interpretation of their native language. At the end of her story, Parys-White interprets the Polish language as an "emergency exit," a "spare bottom," "the other side of the moon" – the gifts she is going to leave to the child.[15]

The investment concept of biography with which the Polish migrants start to struggle for survival in the United Kingdom and Ireland is the chance undertaken in the "society of risks." Agnieszka Bednarska writes:

> Different people, different reasons for their migration and a variety of consequences. The only thing they shared was the desire to improve their own lives and the lives of their loved ones … They all had to take a risk.[16]

Moulding a biographical scheme of actions to change one's own life (professional, emotional and family life) is most often presented in first-person

14 Dana Parys-White, *Emigrantka z wyboru. Opowieść emigracyjna* [*The Emigrant by Choice. Emigration Tale*] (Katowice: Videograf II, 2008), 96-97.

15 Ibid., 174.

16 Bednarska, *Emigracja*, 73.

narrative, referring to the category of an author outside the text. The author therefore legitimizes the sincerity and authenticity of the message, pointing to the suspension of the fictionality of performances. In the preface to *Buty emigranta* [*The Emigrant's Shoes*], Ryszard Adam Gruchawka writes:

> I put into the hands of readers a piece of my soul which I haven't sold to the devil, and I want to reveal what is expressed in the pursuit of something named the dignity of life – the pursuit not at all costs.[17]

The selection of events in these works shows us the paths a person might take in order to be successful, whether that success consists in a fatter wallet, a secure sense of status, or love. And of course the values the migrants bring with them play a part in assessing whether or not they have indeed been successful. Critical situations in the narratives, leading to allocation in the world, are presented both positively (as the discovery of new opportunities, as departure, as change of language) and negatively (the loss of the sense of security, of the means of livelihood, of family and friends). The choice between the various methods of acting is governed by the pragmatic component, often understood only as a successful struggle for survival.

The basic function of self-narration used by the Polish migrants is the reconstruction of personal identity expressed through the speaking subject. As a result of self-narration, the question about one's own identity leads to the formation of a coherent statement where the created "version I" supports personal continuity and stability and blocks negative emotions by being closed to the destructive forms of "I." Episodic memory as the narrative of past events is represented in the sequence of events involving the "emotional I." During the confrontation with a threat (a lost sense of dignity, a lost job), the background of previous experiences is highlighted. Individual identity of one's own continuity is located in the memories of places and events formed in one's own country. In her poem "Ja brzoza" ["Myself as a Birch"], Dana Parys-White creates the anthropomorphic image of a wounded birch tree transplanted into different soil, where it dies longing for its homeland. In the poem "Święte zapomnienie" ["Sacred Oblivion"], by asking the way back ("through silence," "a narrow path") she brings back the image of a Christmas cake with raisins, "rolled up staring / Christmas starrying."[18] The result is a relief of the tension

17 Ryszard Adam Gruchawka, *Buty emigranta* [*The Emigrant's Shoes*] (Warszawa: Exlibris, 2007), 7.

18 Dana Parys-White, "Święte zapomnienie" ["Sacred Oblivion"], in *Z rytmów życia na własną nutę. Wybór wierszy i piosenek na kręte* (Starachowice: PU Campus, 2006), 36-37.

between the internal image of "I" and the image shaped by the conditions of a new environment. This is an act of restoring that sense of internal integrity that was broken and fragmented. In her novel *Dublin, moja polska karma* [*Dublin, My Polish Karma*], Magdalena Orzeł, a graduate of Polish Studies at the University of Warsaw, writes straightforwardly:

> When you leave Poland, you look for it somewhere else because, whether you want it or not, it is your only foundation, tongue in your mouth which you cannot rip out and the soil on which you learnt to walk.[19]

Gosia Brzezińska finishes her novel *Irlandzki koktail* [*Irish Cocktail*] with the following sentence: "Coming back home was like travelling to an unknown destination."[20] The authors of migrant narratives, who distinguish temporary from long-term activities (planned in their dreams of returning to Poland), can make a distinction between everyday life/locality and deeper sources (from one's childhood, from ethnic places) where their biography was formed. At the same time, they are aware that these places undergo dynamic transformations, the understanding of which depends on the individual development of each person.

A transition from a transactional, investment concept of biography to formulating the project of a transformational, creative and subject-focused biography, evident in the narratives of Polish migrants, has been stressed by Ireneusz Gębski in his story *In the Shadow of the Sheraton*. Presenting Polish economic migrants in England, he appreciates such successes as buying a second-hand car, moving from a shared house or apartment into one's own tiny flat, and, in particular, finding a partner. But the real importance lies in the final words:

> Since then they had one common goal. They both knew that it was only they who could decide whether and by what means they would achieve it ... [21]

It is a sign of a straight transition from the standard biography controlled by external factors to the creative biography which can be connected with the standard of autonomous actions in the public sphere.

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19 Magdalena Orzeł, *Dublin, moja polska karma* [*Dubin, My Polish Karma*] (Kraków: Skrzat, 2007), 134.

20 Gosia Brzezińska G, *Irlandzki koktajl* [*Irish Coctail*] (Warszawa: BLISKIE, 2010), 343.

21 Gębski, *W cieniu*, 162.

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Migrant Prose: Sources and Meaning

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Migrant Prose: Sources and Meaning

I would like to begin my review of the latest migrant writing by recalling a key text by Halina Filipowicz, entitled "Polska literatura emigracyjna - próba teorii" ["Polish *Émigré Literature – An Attempt at Theory*"].[1] It appeared at a time of intense deliberations on the relationship between literature produced by Polish writers at home and abroad. Its fundamental questions are about how migrant literature has been treated in relation to that produced in Poland, what represents the centre and what might be considered peripheral, and, above all, how critics in Poland see migrant literature. In attempting to answer these questions, she states that domestic criticism does, and has always, treated émigré writing as an external part of Polish literature (the inside-outside tension), and that the *homo center* position in relation to émigré writing "is stereotypically colonial in nature,"[2] where what is written outside Polish borders is treated – in "keenly" hierarchical

1 Halina Filipowicz, "Polska literatura emigracyjna – próba teorii," ["Polish Emigre Literature" – An Attempt at Theory"] trans. Krzysztof Korżyk, *Teksty Drugie* 3 (1998): 43 -62.

2 Filipowicz, "Polska literatura," 48.

fashion – as equal to that which is created within them, rarely making comparisons with writing produced by others in a given host country.[3] According to Filipowicz, this is because it is easier for critics to apply this sort of external-internal comparative approach than to analyse "confrontations or love-hate relationships between émigrés and the culture they have adopted."[4] Filipowicz makes use of a descriptive term coined by Wojciech Wyskiel – "contemporary writing abroad"[5] – which is designed to avoid numerous traps and include the broadest number of phenomena as a term which is, in theory, politically neutral, non-judgemental and free of emotional context. Yet she also notes that "[t]his term, though it is very inclusive, does, however, wholly retain the old duality of home land and foreign land."[6] She ends with this strongly worded formulation:

> those who remained in Poland still treat their fellow countrymen and women as the Others. Paradoxically, an émigré writer is part of Polish literature, being simultaneously – as the Other – excluded.[7]

More importantly, Filipowicz considers the specific aspects of émigré literature by considering the placing "in between," between the native tradition and the literature of the country where migrants settle, especially with regard to its functioning in a different universe of impulses, problems and values. In order to stress this otherness, she refers to Deleuze and Guattari's category "minor literature" taken from their book *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. Then, referencing Louis A. Renza,[8] she puts forward this thesis:

> And so, "minor literature" is "literature" which in essence sabotages every social or systematic code which controls the means at the disposal of the more valued (major) literature at any given point in the process of literary production.[9]

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3 Ibid., 49.

4 Ibid., 49.

5 Wojciech Wyskiel, „Wprowadzenie do tematu: literatura i emigracja" ["Introduction: Literature and Emigration"], in *Pisarz na obczyźnie* [*A Writer Abroad*], ed. Teodor Bujnicki and Wojciech Wyskiel, Ossolineum, Wrocław 1985.

6 Ibid., 51.

7 Ibid., 46.

8 Louis A. Renza, *A White Heron and the Question of Minor Literature* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 33 (Filipowicz, "Polska literatura," 58-59).

9 Filipowicz, "Polska literatura," 58.

It seems that the latest migrant writings can be included, broadly speaking, in the genre of "minor literature." Its intended "sabotage" should be defined as the development of the sort of literary discourse which, in a more or less defined way, counters discourses which are romantic, nationalistic and patriotic, by which we mean the sort of central discourse that has characterised Polish literature for the past two centuries, including émigré writing of the past. The romantic discourse was our native artistic "major" code, our main system of signs, allusions and historical references, a code of trans-generational and trans-epoch understanding, creating meanings and axiological systems. It is a discourse that Witold Gombrowicz attacks in his writing even before WWII, but especially in his novel *Trans-Atlantyk* [*Transatlantic*];[10] as does Marian Pankowski, if here from a much lower stylistic register. The Great Emigration, even though internally diversified in the sense of choices made regarding artistic languages and ways of communicating with audiences,[11] was in later generations reduced to a singular code of meaning and so-called national style, which turned out to be remarkably resilient and – in terms of the difficult episodes of Polish history – capable of updating itself continually and gaining public attention. But according to Deleuze and Guattari, alongside the main river of culture/literature there run rivulets which are less raging, less important, though they also carry life and thus matter. They might be a little peripheral,[12] less than official, but – marked in terms of class or culture – they model their own machinery for generating meaning. Émigré literature gives a unique answer to the leading question by Deleuze and Guattari: "How to become a nomad, an immigrant and a gypsy in relation to one's own language?"[13] Those who posed this question pointed to "what the Black community in America is doing to the English language," by which they were of course referring to the creation of a unique linguistic subculture. Filipowicz uses this model in order to protect émigré literature from a senseless, even if

10 See article by Stefan Chwin covering the dynamic between both works: "*Trans-Atlantyk* wobec *Pana Tadeusza*" [*Transatlantic* in relation to *Sir Thaddeus*], *Pamiętnik Literacki* LXVI, 4 (1975): 97-121.

11 Ignacy Matuszewski already drew our attention to this in his book *Słowacki i nowa sztuka (modernizm)* dated 1904.

12 The centre-peripheries opposition is used by Itamar Even-Zohar in works specifically relating to texts translated into the target language, but in extremely instructive deliberations. See his "Miejsce literatury tłumaczonej w polisystemie literackim", trans. Magda Heydel, in *Współczesne teorie przekładu. Antologia* [*Modern Translation Theory. An Anthology*], ed. Piotr Bukowski and Magda Heydel (Kraków: Znak, 2009), 197-203.

13 From Filipowicz, "Polska literatura," 60.

"essentialist" categorising in the context of native tradition and turn attentions towards the value and quality of new contexts in which it appears, by which we mean the context which stems from the country of settlement and liberating discourse. I want to use this to support the thesis that migration literature not only builds its essence on cultural differences, but above all is an attempt at creating some sort of "aesthetic counter code," one which contains a polemic with the Polish romantic tradition, with the legacy of Mickiewicz and *Pan Tadeusz* [*Sir Thaddeus*] and with Polish cultural utopia, which loses its performative aspects outside its own geographical borders. It therefore becomes that "minor literature" which Filipowicz so very aptly, when we consider émigré literature, recognises as a "metaphor of being culturally 'between zones'"[14] and which may be the start of a text's creation, one which could be important to both (or many) cultures, once they actually meet within the text.

This "inter-zonality," and also the peripherality mentioned in her text, evoke another category, a marginality which – understood anthropologically – opens specific epistemological perspectives. Let us note that émigré literature is in its own way a literature of the margins, a literature "of border regions," and these are regions that are specifically creative and valuable. This is because they are characterised by diversity, conflict, rebelliousness, contestation and freedom, which give them a uniquely privileged position. Texts produced by migrants appear on the margins of Polish literature and the literature of the country where Poles settle, both local and international.[15] In terms of both these spaces, they exemplify a high level of critical thought and objectivity. The margins (peripheries) are therefore places where a qualitatively new construct can be created; it is no longer Polish literature in a "major" context, but becomes something other than simply its counter-code ("minor literature"). It turns out to be a place where "intercultural texts" are produced, where sharp polemical accents emerge in relation to Polish nationalistic and historical traditions connected with the literature of "troubadours," but where we also find global migrant experiences, often excessively criticised, along with individual characters undergoing mental and cultural changes. And regardless of whether individual migrants see their own exodus as successful or not, miserable or marvellous, they do see in each and every case that they are *living in a different world*, that a set of different factors directs the course of their existence, even if they are still able to recognise their original desires.

14 Ibid., 60.

15 See bell hooks, "Margines jako miejsce radykalnego otwarcia," [Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness], trans. Ewa Domańska, *Literatura na Świecie* 1-2 (2008)

Grzegorz Kopaczewski's book *Global Nation. Obrazki z czasów popkultury* [*Global Nation. Snapshots of Pop-cultural Times*][16] are the diaries of a young Pole who has finished university in his homeland and moves to London to work in the service industry, first selling pizza, then books. He lives in a rented apartment with several young people from various parts of the world (the American Brad McDermont, two Spanish women Vanessa and Carol, and the French-German couple Maria and Christoph), along with our narrator, who goes by the name Daniel Berski – all of them on an equal footing.[17] Canadian Fiona will also put in an appearance, and become Daniel's girlfriend for a time (the romantic relationships migrants engage in tend to be impulsive, short-lived and without commitment[18]). They are equipped with an 85-litre rucksack, the English language and the ability to find shelter. The reason they have left their countries of origin is most often economic, but also to do with culture, though they do not like to talk about these aspects.[19] Everyone works in the service industry, most often in pubs, cafes and shops, complaining about their bosses and yet never lacking in energy or fun ideas. "Our work is all about the basic wage, maximum hours and complete lack of connection with our places of work."[20] This sort of work, place, time and character leave a clear mark on the language:

16 Grzegorz Kopaczewski, *Global nation. Obrazki z czasów popkultury* [*Global Nation. Snapshots of Pop-cultural Times*] (Wołowiec: Czarne, 2004). To quote: "Where I come from, they teach you patriotism at school, during history lessons, because adults think that if someone died during some war that should be the decisive factor in whether I love my homeland or not … Something has to be this way and not that, because our ancestors had it so. They most often died. In fact, all we ever did as a nation was die … I don't know how to think about Poland. I like my city, because that is where my friends and my football team are, and here the same." 237 - 238.

17 Sometimes these aren't even separate bedrooms, but a shared space with bedding arranged on the floor, see Aleksander Kropiwnicki: "seven sleeping places made out of blankets and some additional rags", *Zajezdnia Londyn [London Depot]* (Bydgoszcz-Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Branta, 2007), 37. This cultural, ethnic and racial variety is what passes for everyday normality in London. Koziarski's narrator, apart from the Australian boss Anthony, Ahmed the Turk, Sonia the Spaniard, Marcus the Jamaican, Monica the Pole, Mariano the Croatian and Robert the Slovak, along with Octavia from Ethopia, *Socjopata w Londynie* [*The Sociopath in London*] (Warszawa: Prószyński i S-ka, 2007), 63-64.

18 See "But Magda always ate her breakfast with Lars, in a small kitchen which was next to the small room … A week later, Lars ran out of scholarship funds, and so he packed his bags, handed his key in at the Institute and returned to Oslo, to his wife and kids", Kropiwnicki, *Zajezdnia*, 27-28.

19 "It's weird, but we've never talked about why we've come to London, and what it is we want to do here." Kopaczewski, *Global Nation*, 64.

20 Kopaczewski, *Global Nation*, 29.

> Słuchaj, jak skończysz **szifta**, może pójdziesz z nami na **drina**?
> – Chyba nie dam rady, bo straszne bizi mamy i już nie mam **brejka**, a potem długo będziemy sprzątać – odpowiedziała nowo napotkana Poleczka. – Ale jak będę miała **offa**, to możemy się spotkać. Mieszkam na **flacie** na górze. Zapytaj o Izę, a najlepiej **kolnij**, dam ci mój numer.[21]

London allows them to enjoy their weekends in any way they please. These pastimes are generic and widely practised: nightclubs, beer, "powders," cinema, pub-crawling, party "tunes" – all of it liberally sprinkled with rich, meaty, often vulgar language. Towards the end of the book, the narrator leaves the UK with Brad, the two of them heading off to New Zealand, where he spends Christmas Eve[22] alone, wandering around, travelling, talking to various people he meets and travels with; then he returns briefly to London before heading back to Poland. He promises himself a job in a bank there, one in which he once worked as an intern.

This tale is symptomatic of a new, EU-epoch migration. It shows people who are free of inhibitions and who know the local lingo. The young people whose paths cross in "exile" are all on the same wavelength: well versed in football clubs, "cult" movies, bands, singers and songs, TV shows (such as *Sex and the City*), along with the practical dimension of the digital era (laptops, emails, texts, mobiles), which represent the foundations of mutual existence and understanding. It is their code, their passwords, the tangible effect of globalisation.[23] They all function within popular culture. "[E]verything is pop culture … Everything is already popular, everything can be trendy."[24] Two things characterise this text: as a motto for individual chapters, the author uses statements (quotes) from his peers, listed using their full names, countries of origin and age (between

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21 Marek Jakubowski, "Twarde londowanie," ["Hard Londing"] in *Na końcu świata napisane. Autoportret współczesnej polskiej emigracji* [*Written at the World's End. A Self-Portrait of Contemporary Polish Migration*], ed. Elżbieta Spadzińska-Żak (Warszawa: VIDEOGRAF II, 2008), 197 (bold, English origin words – MD).

22 He describes his Christmas Eve supper of fish fingers with rice in the following way: "I know that I should feel some waves of nostalgia, melancholy, sadness, but nothing of the sort happens" (325).

23 Arjun Appadurai comments: "Popular culture crosses social, religious, national and continental boundaries, erasing national, ethnic and linguistic differences. It mainly relates to culture which is offered by digital media. The global youth culture is in this respect a real phenomenon", in his *Nowoczesność bez granic. Kulturowe wymiary globalizacji* [*Borderless Modernity. The Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation*], translation and introduction Zbigniew Pucek (Kraków: Universitas, 2005), XV (from the translator's introduction).

24 Filipowicz, "Polska literatura," 79.

twenty and thirty years old),[25] and from time to time the author adds sequences of emails to and from various friends in Poland and around the globe, which are a modern form of interaction; traditional, paper letters do not figure. We don't hear any conversations about high-brow culture: classical music, opera, great literature, philosophy, morality. The first thing – mottos – indicates a serious cultural shift: it is not the wisdom of one's elders which matters, nor those with experience, but it is the young – those who are right there and then discovering the world by experiencing it. No one is capable of communicating knowledge to them, the sort which could be useful in their lives, because the world changes day to day; the older generation doesn't know the world in which the young live, and so knowledge about the new rules of the game can be sourced only from their peers, from ongoing events, not from their parents' generation. The sharing of life truths takes on a horizontal, not a vertical axis. This is a key change, one Margaret Mead wrote about in the past, seeing merely the outlines of changes which were to come in future decades.[26] A paradigmatic change has occurred, definitively setting the direction of travel: in terms of technology, so-called civilised progress and so-on, every new generation will have more to say than the one which came before it. Meanwhile, the question of cultural channels remains unanswered, the ways in which experiences and traditions are passed on. Is this sort of cultural transference useful and attractive to the new generation? Such things can hardly be enforced; what seems to be missing is the space and will to turn an ear to something other than the blaringly modern. The exchange of emails in turn reveals the pace and pithiness of contemporary correspondence. These electronic letters, from various parts of the world to which friends have gone, are generally pessimistic in their assessment of the character and the quality of life experienced by their authors. Hardly anyone is pleased, which is rather symptomatic.

The author is aware of the cultural environment he finds himself in while writing his text; by choosing certain types of situations and descriptions, he also gives voice to his own judgements, sensations and sensitivities. This creates an ironic distance between the anecdotal contents, rather stereotypical and monotonous, and its message and meaning. The meaning itself wavers; in spite of a clear critique of the reality the young generation functions within, the tale also proves that it is possible to function within it by taking advantage

25 E.g., "Christ! Television never prepared me for this" Maria Berger (24), Freiburg, Germany (215) or "Being local is so cool", Katia Jensen (21), Bremen, Germany (199); "History came and went. Let's now give the present a chance" Christophe Laucher (26), Lyon, France (322).

26 Margaret Mead, *Kultura i tożsamość,* [*Culture and Identity*] trans. Jacek Hołówka (PWN: Warszawa, 1978).

of as many spiritual pleasures as are available to young citizens of the world. Dorota Antoniak phrases it beautifully:

> You wake in the morning and decide that you feel fine, and what's more not only in your own skin but also in your new home. Some don't fit with the new reality, they leave, but those who remain "lead cultural investigations. And so pack your things and go. Wherever you like it best.[27]

Michał Wyszowski confirms Antoniak's observations in his volume of stories *Na lewej stronie świata* [*On the Left Side of the World*].[28] This book, written with verve and talent, draws our attention to how Poles do not fit into that world. We are talking about qualities which in their time were termed as *homo sovieticus*, but also about the struggle with Polish national myths, myths which cannot withstand rational critique and yet which represent a sizeable burden for every migrant, being the effect of home-spun, school-taught and generally national address.

> "Manliness, bravery, Mickiewicz, Chopin, romanticism, heroism, Kościuszko, Pułaski, hard-working attitude, wild imagination, Miłosz, Gombrowicz, sacrifice, loyalty, Giedroyc, Jeziorański, Anders, honesty even. And now what? Fucking what?" eyes on fire, he jumped up. "Look at me. We've become an exiled people with no character, no identity. What, who is meant to be this 'spirit of the new migration'? Wheeler dealers? Thieves? Con artists? Jolanta Rutowicz?" he screamed.[29]

In May 2004, Poland stood as one with the wealthy countries of Western Europe, nations with mature democracies which represented and go on representing reasons to be somewhat proud, widely considered to be something of a national success. But on the other hand, paradoxically, Poland has simultaneously become a nation of the pariahs[30] of Europe,

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27 Dorota Antoniak, "Polski plastik najemczy," ["The Polish Hired Plastic"] in *Na końcu świata napisane. Autoportret współczesnej polskiej emigracji* [*Written at the World's End. A Self-Portrait of Contemporary Polish Migration*], ed. Elżbieta Spadzińska-Żak (Warszawa: VIDEOGRAF II, 2008), 203. (bold – MD)

28 Michał Wyszowski, *Na lewej stronie świata* [*On the Left Side of the World*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo MG, 2010).

29 Wyszowski, *Na lewej stronie*, 27.

30 "A paradise, measured with the English foot and stone, in which suddenly our Slavic family appear, barbarians who strike camp on some scrap of land. They erect a colourful

unwanted,[31] rejected,[32] badly paid and badly treated,[33] something we have never experienced as a nation to such a dispiriting extent. The book is full of descriptions that catch this dour tenor. The influx of Poles to the UK after 2004 turned out to be a spark which ignited the frustrations of "natives," caused by decades of migrants arriving and being received in the name of political correctness and welcoming charity. One of those taking part in a tragic argument in the story "Zoo" airs all of his old and new grievances. I quote at length here, because this fragment illustrates the perspective from the other side, one often omitted from migrant narratives:

> "Shut it," Jamie's reaction was decisive. "You think you're better, superior," he began. "The likes of you will always come up with some sort of argument, some clause to hide their sweet games behind. Because of the crisis, of poverty, and we are all one big happy European family. Asian-African-European and really fucking big. We have to be nice, we have to help, cos the others need us. And who will help us? Illegal immigrants from Romania, Poles, once they've taken our jobs and spent all of our money. When was the last time you went to an English pub or shop? When, I ask you? In my street, there's nothing left. We have Indian food, a mosque and a shop with Jamaican products. But I don't give a fuck about shit from Jamaica and the blacks going around my house, knives in their hands. Where is the mighty Great Britain? The woman in my bank can barely speak English, at the market the Poles just nod their heads when I ask for the price. What, it's that hard to learn just a few words? Everyone here wants to live, but they don't give a shit about our language, about who we are. All they want is cash, cash, cash. Of course, you

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parasol in the garden, set up a plastic table and loudly dine in the garden of some rented house. So that all the neighbours can see. Singing, inviting guests whose cars disrupt the ideal parking fashions along the street. Sometimes, a few men will gather and have a lengthy discussion in a strange, rough sounding tongue. Over an open hood, tools and beers in hand. This can't appeal to the locals, causing consternation, murmurs and whispers. Though never to anyone's face." Wyszowski, *Na lewej stronie*, 34; "The heroics of the pilots who flew in the Battle of Britain loses with *szoping*. Emigration is no longer defined by a longing for the lands of our forefathers." Ibid., 152.

31 " – Shells. We're like these broken shells to them ... We litter their country, make it dirty. Unnecessary hassle. A herd only good for temporary jobs", Ibid., 26.

32 See the darkly comical story *Zoo*, involving an attempt to stop three newly-born tigers being given Polish names, following a vote in a local survey. Ibid., 87-119.

33 "When you meet your first guy with a master's degree unloading lorries, you think, just for a second, that something ain't right. Then you lower your standards, your tolerance for a life wasted increases. You also know that asking "What did you do back in Poland?" is not always a good idea. It's a raw string, and often snaps." Ibid., 30.

> don't mind, cos we live in one shared house. Screw this house and this sort of family. Screw a government which invites everyone over, without giving a fuck about its own citizens. I don't give a damn about political correctness and Europeans like you. But you don't think like me. You have a great life, home, job. You have a car, and best be pleased you still fucking have it. Will you complain when in a few years' time some guy in a turban takes it all from you? Or some crazy druggie with a syringe in their hand? And you'll have nothing to add then, what? You won't so much as peep when some Turk with his mates fuck your teenage daughter? Cos that's the right thing to do, cos England is open to others, its a land of opportunities for the whole fucking world. Am I right, Dr Parr?"[34]

Life in multicultural societies increases one's sensitivity to conflicts occurring even between closest neighbours. This seems to be mainly a matter of perspective. The average European perceives the Far East or Africa as "the same" because they are distant. And a person from Asia or Africa sees Europe as an entity, only occasionally setting its different countries apart. When we evaluate what is distant (far), we often use the universal law of stereotypes, simplified, metonymic reasoning where individual indicators are taken into account (faith, colour, customs, legal systems) and are then used to construct a generalised picture, while forgetting many other, more subtle, more individualised differences. This involves the laws of scale and simplification. What matters then is the law of large numbers and the right to "keep it simple."

> The Irish pub which employs immigrants from all over the world who speak poor English is an absurd pub. An airport lounge idea, conceived by some corporate mind. An Irish pub in which they struggle to speak English … They have hidden under the umbrella of economic wellbeing, leaving behind their derelict farms, potholed roads and rusty buses. They've been allowed into a crystal palace, but even in this palace they're not free of worry, and the high living standard is something they pay for by being "other," "outsider proletariat," stripped of strong, flexible

34 Ibid., 116-117; See Kropiwnicki: "Why? Because Poles, like you, have taken my job – he said threateningly – Poles and the rest of that scum from the East. I worked on a building site and had it good, until you lot came and now I've nothing to turn a hand to. Why don't you all get the hell, all of you?" *Zajezdnia*, 43; Compare Koziarski: "Where did you come from – from Poland, right? Why did we open up those East European borders, just so this uncultured shit could flood us? – she raged. – And who's saying it! – I felt my forehead pounding with anger. – At least I'm on my own continent, unlike you!" *Socjopata*, 48. The narrator thus replies in this racist and post-colonial way to his black neighbour Brenda.

> language, the sort everyone needs in order to express the self, to fight for one's rights, to communicate with others.[35]

Of the texts written by Poles in Ireland the one which stands out most is Piotr Czerwiński's novel *Przebiegum życiae* [*Conductum Lifae*], (echo of *Curriculum Vitae*). This term will be the book's leitmotif, because its protagonists send out hundreds of CVs to various firms, never hearing back. What's more, it turns out that these CVs, at first touchingly honest and listing the experiences and qualifications of their authors, in time become simplified and shortened because humble CVs are what catch an employer's eye. The locals say that Poles are a "shitty nation meant for shitty jobs," and so that is how their curriculum vitae should read. This fabulously well-written, if at times stylistically irritating, novel is a gold mine of knowledge about the fate of Polish economic migrants, about the Irish mentality, the weather,[36] accommodation, the arrangement of bathrooms, the English language, culinary culture, chaos,[37] etc. The central protagonists are Gustaw and Konrad (names harking back to classics of Polish literature), who have found themselves on the streets of Dublin within half a year of each other and who meet in a factory which takes them on as rubbish men, as well as living together in one apartment. The Polish community described in the novel are people with university diplomas, able to speak relatively good English – Gustaw, for example, uses wonderful "British English," which the Irish locals have a hard time understanding.[38] Czerwiński often stresses that the English tongue, in its Irish variety, is terribly twisted, grammatically and phonetically incorrect; thereby the dialogues of *Irole* (Polish slang for the Irish) are often recorded in ways which sound absurd and almost improbable. It has to be added that our protagonists have university diplomas in so-called social studies – Konrad is a sociologist, there are several political experts and one theologian, none of whom could find any employment apt for their

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35 Łukasz Ślipko, *Pokój z widokiem na Dunnes Stores* [*The Room with a View of Dunnes Stores*] (Opole: Wydawnictwo RB, 2011), 21.

36 "In the land of bayo-bongo there is no such thing as weather. It rained and brightened up, rained and brightened up, rained and brightened up, six times over"; "They don't have seasons in the traditional sense of the word, seeing as all four happen all in one day." Piotr Czerwiński, *Przebiegum życiae, czyli kartonowa sieć* [*Conductum Lifae or the Cardboard Web*] (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 2009), 104 and 133.

37 "Gustaw had just returned from a shop for Poles, where Russians sold Lithuanian food." Czerwiński, *Przebiegum*, 134.

38 "… his English really was perfect. Listening to him, no one would have believed that this man came from Bulanda." Ibid., 185.

qualifications back in Poland. None of them found it in Ireland, either. People who were successful in this job market had specific professions (doctors, architects, IT specialists).[39] The first half of the book describes Gustaw's experiences – this forty-something "pipsqueak," as Konrad refers to him (though he himself is only twenty-six), a well-educated economist who has worked at managerial level in a range of corporations since graduating from one of Poland's top business schools. One day, a "young Turk … knocked him off his perch" by planting and then sharing an email which is against company policy – something Gustaw's most impassioned denials are unable to counteract. He is fired. As he is unable to find new work, his wife takes the children and leaves, his savings run out, he loses his home following the divorce, and so on Christmas Eve he buys himself a ticket to Dublin. A one-way ticket. At the end of the novel, he curses and rejects Poland along with his own Polishness, no longer treating them as guarantees or aspects of identity, and at the same time values committing him to anything. Dublin has become his humiliating Way of the Cross, lined with all the "cee vees" he had distributed to shops and institutions, some by hand, at first in the full version, including his MBA diploma, and then in a shortened, and eventually primitive, version, which only states that he graduated from school and has a driving licence. And still he is unable to find work. It was Konrad who offered him a job, when they met by chance in a pub, in time becoming his best friend, right after his co-worker had been injured in an accident at work and they had to quickly find another Pole to fill his place. Rubbish just couldn't wait.[40]

And so begins the second part of the novel, in which the fates of Gustaw and Konrad become firmly entwined. The work involves getting rid of hundreds of carton boxes filled with anonymous contents by tossing them into

39 We read about them here: "Some Poles are lucky and also work in biznes parki, and also, of course, are wannabe lokals. They are the Poles who say they don't understand you and stop talking Polish when you approach." Ibid., 183.

40 "On top of it all, we're the only rubbish men in history with university diplomas," Piotr Czerwiński, op. cit., 170. See Piotr Kępski: "Oh the irony, that I, born in that communist paradise, come here years later to beg for any sort of job among former exploiters, Western imperialists who have now become our brothers in a united Europe. For ten months now I've been cleaning toilets, washing floors, windows, baths and tiles in bathrooms and dreaming of rotten, sweet pounds sterling which end up each month in my bank account"; "I quite quickly realised that in spite of my qualifications, the locals see me as just another illiterate immigrant who thinks they know English […] but who will never get the same sort of job and income as those who were born here and graduated from local universities, speaking fluent English." *Single* [*Single People*] (Warszawa: Jirafa Roja, 2009), 12, 17 and 53.

a giant shredding machine, cleaning factory halls, picking hundreds of fag butts discarded by workers during tea breaks[41] and so on. In secret, Gustaw writes a film script based on their lives which he tries – without success – to sell to film production companies.[42] Then one day he doesn't return to his shared rented home and the police fail to find him, only collecting his belongings and passing them onto the Bulandan embassy. "Bulanda" is the joke name given to Poland by Czerwiński, lending it a perversely ridiculing and exotic air (echoing *King Ubu* by Alfred Jarry, 1896). Meanwhile, Ireland is referred to as the land of "bajabongo" or "milk-and-honey paradise." The novel utilises a whole range of English slang which has been absorbed into the hybrid form of Ponglish (the author provides a handy glossary of such terms at the end of the book), causing the whole novel to be characterised by alienness and a sense of narrative distance. But it also allows Czerwiński to tell his story in a way which sometimes comes across as awkward, kitschy and primitive, and yet which does a fine job of echoing the air of misunderstanding, grievance, complaint, despair, degradation, humiliation and – eventually – criticism and deconstruction. All these feelings and reactions are experienced by our heroes, though in Gustaw's case they are made even worse by a total lack of contact with his daughters and former wife – the emails he sends are returned marked "unread"; addresses have been changed. Czerwiński has managed to describe his fate in a way which is complete, deep, sensitive and also discomforting, thereby presenting us with the tragic experience of an intelligent, sensitive and educated man who has been swallowed up and destroyed by the world of brutal capitalism. Gustaw vanishes, leaving Konrad[43] his laptop with

41 "And those thick fuckers, resting against the factory walls, hiding under an awning, standing over him (Gustaw – MD), smoking their shitty fags, then throwing them at their feet, or rather his hands [...] And he looked so foolish and helpless on that lawn, in that raincoat, coughing on his hands and knees, seeming so awkward and simple, troo-troo, like a good little kid." Czerwiński, *Przebiegum*, 235.

42 An extract from a letter to a certain broadcasting and television production firm: "I have chosen to write in script format, because I believe that film is currently the most influential form of communication, especially when it comes to this sort of project, where one of the target groups of this enterprise could be Polish immigrants in Ireland (and generally across the globe). The majority of them have certainly failed to learn English to a degree needed to read this story in book format, hence I think my attempt to reach this community through a multimedia format to be well justified. Currently, there are 300,000 Poles residing in Ireland, with another 500,000 in the UK, which provides my project with a huge audience." Ibid., 231; See "Poland as a country will soon become virtual. We're all fucking off out of there – the last person to leave will turn out the lights." Ibid., 265.

43 See "GUSTAVUS OBIIT M. D. CCC. XXIII
CALENDIS NOVEMBRIS

the screenplay and thousands of emails dating back to his old life, along with a farewell letter. Yet the book's ending is open to interpretation.

Konrad receives an unexpected letter from a company he applied to once – the company wants him to start work immediately as an "assistant" in the business development department, on the specific wishes of the general manager. Konrad attends the interview, though the ending of the book is not the interview proper, but a screenplay fragment depicting this very scene: a business suit, "the old man's tie," a bus, the journey to work. Who wrote the scene and when was it written? Are we to suppose that Gustaw, having abandoned his Polishness, has decided to start life anew as a non-Pole and has somehow managed to take up a responsible position in this new firm, in line with his experience and qualifications? And is the interview invite not Gustaw's attempt at repaying Konrad's offer of "true friendship"?

The novel doesn't make this clear – the ending seems to be open to various readings. Was this some sort of suggestion that the fate of these unfortunate characters has somehow improved? Perhaps. And let us suppose so, because Czerwiński has managed to reach the very extremes of debasement and suffering in previous chapters.

His novel, like all the other texts quoted here, fulfils the criteria put forward by Michael Seidel in his book *Exile and the Narrative Imagination,* most so when focusing on the "literary representations, literary exile, especially those in which exile or expatriation becomes the primary narrative device."[44] Piotr Kępski introduces here another important element: Poland's backwardness in terms of customs and laws when compared with the Western world, which is easily read in our own language, in public discourse. During the conversation with his father, he has a key observation to make about the difference between London and the town he comes from, near Warsaw:

> Who would be able to describe it all in the local dialect, in which words such as metropolis, melting-pot, gays and lesbians, Soho, Chinatown, political correctness, City, positive discrimination, Heathrow sounded absurd, alien, rather ridiculous.[45]

HIC NATUS EST
CONRADUS M. D. CCC. XXIII
CALENDIS NOVEMBRIS", in: Adam Mickiewicz, *Dziady* [*Forefathers' Eve*], part III.

44 Quoting from Filipowicz, "Polska literatura," 57.

45 Kępski, *Single*, 58. See the scene from the novel by Koziarski, when its protagonist suspects that one of his work colleagues is gay. Sonia, from Spain, answers: "– But it is obvious! – She laughed in ridiculing fashion, finally getting what I was thinking. – You can see it in his every gesture and movement, no? – But he has a ring on his finger! – You think that ... ah, I forgot that you are from Poland. – She couldn't stop laughing." *Socjopata*, 66.

And here I return to the concept of "minor literature," or rather the opposition "major/minor literature." The tension between this "minor literature" when compared to its "major" counterpart is mainly based on a radical rejection of the romantic textual template, a criticism of Poland's history and her contemporaneity, a radically impassioned polemic with the cult of national suffering, messianism, calls for sacrifice in the name of the motherland, the subjection of the individual to the group, etc. Gombrowicz is the patron of this process, with his opposing concepts of father-land/son-land, along with Bobkowski and Pankowski, and quite possibly many other writers who, since the start of the Second Polish Republic, attempted to alter the vector of Poland's literary expression.[46] The model of romantic thinking and writing was and carries on being influential, annexing new analytical discourses (e.g. postcolonialism), annexing because it is easy, well-codified, well-established, operating in readily recognised signs. The latest migrant writings strive toward the shaping of a diversified language, although still dependent on a romantic model, at least in its initial phase, but clearly entering into a polemic with it, attempting to emancipate, to tear the identity of Poles residing outside their own borders (though the new literature written in Poland is revealing a similar direction) from this paradigm and turning its linguistic imagination and awareness towards universal ideas. Gombrowicz's metaphor of the fatherland finds a hard justification here; I have referred to accusations formulated against the "fatherland," mainly those suggesting that it has thrown a lot of people overboard, condemning them to émigré fates and often involving humiliations greater than those experienced by previous generations of Polish emigrants, seeing as the contemporary world is full of people ruthlessly seeking a new homeland, which mainly involves job seeking. More fragments from Czerwiński's novel are telling here:

> "In that case, what sorts of jobs can we find in this country?"
> "What do you mean what kind? Shitty."
> "With all due respect, friend, shitty jobs are for shitty people."
> "But we are shitty people, dear friend. We."[47]

> "This is no longer my homeland." He was as scared as a little schoolboy. "And none of my business. To get into fights over a country I no longer give a damn about … "

46 I have written on this in my book *Polska awangarda prozatorska* [*The Avant-Garde of Polish Prose*] (Warszawa: Semper, 1995).

47 Czerwiński, *Przebiegum*, 87; Gustaw's conversation with Bartosz, an ex-theologian from Lublin.

> "I told you before. Poland is no longer my homeland. We no longer have a home."[48]

This is also a biting criticism of European discourse. He talks about his university friends (and currently housemates, residing in the room next to his) as naïve fools who

> Always talked all that fashionable bullshit about the European Union and how it will be great when we finally become part of it … I had bloody fun when I met them all in Dublin, without all their trendy clothes and fashionable theories about Europe.[49]

And so this becomes not only a criticism of Polish traditions, which are more of a hindrance than a help in the life of a migrant, but also of a putative European utopia of universal equality, unity and opportunity. One could assume that contemporary human beings do not have a place of their own, but text does. One can see this clearly in the above examples.[50] Narrator-protagonists in these stories are today in Ireland or the UK, though tomorrow they might be in Poland or New Zealand, but their texts will remain closely connected with the specific time and place where they were written. This is one of the everlasting aspects of the poetics of this type of literature, the "poetics of abroad." The author of this term stresses the perspective of description, as if from another shore.[51] But I would like to add a comparative note, recalling the category of meta-overview. We are after all dealing with writer/narrator/protagonists (often one and the same) treating the anthropological material described in comparative terms, and therefore having to adopt an *above* position, based on the idea of *tertium comparationis*, which guarantees them this sort of perspective. It doesn't have to be a disconnected perspective, but it tends to be dominant. Czapliński also goes on to list: "the network of global dependencies," the seeking of connections between "forms of mobility and forms of articulation," which for a researcher

48 Ibid., 287-288.

49 Ibid., 219-220.

50 The émigré writing of Natasza Goerke is a certain exception to this rule, where her mini-narratives do not have a setting, and if so then it is in dreams or imaginary spaces.

51 Małgorzata Zduniak-Wiktorowicz, „W szpagacie. Pisarz między Polską a Niemcami," in *Poetyka migracji. Doświadczenie granic w literaturze przełomu XX i XXI* wieku [*The Poetics of Migration. Experience of Borders in Literature Published Between the 20th and the 21st Centuries*], ed. Przemysław Czapliński, Renata Makarska and Marta Tomczok (Katowice: UŚ, 2013), 223-235, here: 234.

means the necessity of applying a trans-disciplinary perspective, and finally it is "referring to the auto-creative character of the narration itself."[52] The rule of auto-creativeness is here produced most often in two ways: as a sylleptic subject or/and as auto-fiction. Both researchers and authors are well versed in sylleptic subjects, hence no one is surprised by the quasi-biographical nature of this literature.

Discomfort is written directly into this literature, arising out of the necessity of struggling with Polish mentality and Polish traditions while spending time beyond its borders, in relation to foreign influence.[53] Polish literature (in its "major" variation) is after all a literature of being settled, the comfort of familiar faces, the well-known rules of social interplay, and a material basis for existence and symbolic signs. Braidotti formulates a two-fold opinion on this topic:

> Please note that people who are very regulated, anchored and settled belong to a group which tends to be the least empathetic, least emotional, the most intentionally "apolitical."[54]

In *Nomadic Subjects*, Braidotti achieves something both risky and fantastical: the demystification of the category of nomads, stripping it of the negative, or at least a slightly pessimistic and nostalgic, air which previously characterised it so powerfully. Nomadic ways of being are, according to her, a state which, while it may not be desirable, is one which in a completely fundamental sense defines our contemporary condition, and should therefore be accepted and valued accordingly, seeing as it is a state of open-mindedness and readiness to experience new things, to encounter the Other and that which is new. Nomadic is "cool," is "sexy."

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52 Przemysław Czapliński, "Kontury mobilności", in *Poetyka migracji. Doświadczenie granic w literaturze przełomu XX i XXI* wieku [*The Poetics of Migration. Experience of Borders in Literature Published Between the 20th and the 21st Centuries*], ed. Przemysław Czapliński, Renata Makarska and Marta Tomczok (Katowice: UŚ, 2013), 41.

53 In her prose pieces, Natasza Goerke adopts the role of grotesque memories, such as those of Jan, who married a Danish woman and missed in Denmark: "Cheese, for example. They had everything, except that: white, hard, sold in triangles. Or chocolate bars. Jędruś, Pawełek, all sorts of brands. Or liver products. Tripe. Innards in meat jelly, with 'fish eye' and 'hair of the dog'. Madame Pate. Mazowiecki Pate. And others. Such gaps. And terrible, terrible longing" in ibid, titular story, in *Księga Pasztetów* [*The Book of Minced Meat*] (Poznań: Obserwator, 1997), 61-69, here: 66.

54 Braidotti, *Podmioty*, 65.

Kopaczewski deals with this in his book when he describes Christmas Eve in New Zealand. On the one hand, he describes a series of nostalgic gesture-signs which should take place at such a time, and on the other, he notices that it is possible to omit them without losing one's identity, liberating oneself from their disabling power. It is an act of specific rebellion against tradition, indicating a personal distance regarding the national centre, a form of cultural disloyalty.

The books I have dealt with here, along with many others, also indicate a much broader and uniquely understood identity. I have previously mentioned that it is not singular, but multi-layered and labile, but from the point of view of the developing template (style) of this "minor literature," one notices this absolutely fundamental aspect: it has a dualistic vector, directing the subject's attention towards the past and the future. Or even more precisely: identity emerges from the past b e c a u s e o f the future. The migrant (or nomadic) individual references their past in order to discover its structure and verify its value, in order to help him perceive the project of his future. The past is a complete set of national experience one packs and carries out of home, from school, from public discourse, from social pedagogy. The status of the past in this consciousness certainly takes up a more serious place here than in any sort of settled person. In migration narratives it takes up a lot of space, although – let us stress this once again – it doesn't appear as nostalgic or soothing (and this would be quickly dispelled by spending time "back home"), but rather as deconstructive, critical or revolutionary. In the small prose pieces by Natasza Goerke, it appears among information about other cultures and value systems, nomadic lifestyles, stories about the world and "not of this world,"[55] and there is often something venomous in the apparently innocuous. Nothing is strange or alien to her, or rather, everything is odd in a range of ways, everything is held at arm's length, including her own Polish tradition, culture, habits and behaviours. The protagonists/narrators accept every culture, but do not see themselves in any one, don't identify with anything singular. This is why, in a cosmopolitan context, native signs alienate us out of a natural sense, and have to be read following a different code. This also means, for example, the presence of a foreign language which elicits both resistance and curiosity, as in Czerwiński's *Przebiegum życiae* [*Conductum Lifae*]. The author weaves into it English phrases, often doubling up expressions, sometimes using English

55 See "While Mr Zero worked on the java computer language and at nights sang the *Polonez* by Ogiński, Mrs zero wrote her stories. These stories were very short, lacking in action and, it was said, undigestible," Natasza Goerke, the titular story in the collection *Pożegnanie plazmy* [*Farewell to Plasma*] (Czarne: Czarne, 1999), 23-28, here 27.

to replace Polish elements.[56] In previous centuries, this sort of behaviour was called "macaronism"[57] – here, however, we are dealing with the creation of a new textual formula, "text minor," which stands somewhere on the border between native and foreign codes, or the code of the Other, sketching at the same time the frameworks of the migration discourse, certainly innovative, which involves existing in two (or more) languages, as well as spaces, at the same time. "[Migration] writing is not only the process of continual translation, but also an ensuing adaptation to various cultural realities.[58] In such a tangled web, identity can never be singular and stable, neither the one which comes from the past (because it is constantly faced with strange questions which destabilise it) nor the one which heads into the future (because this is based on unclear baggage from the past and undefinable messages from the future). Crossroads and lack of clarity. Depression and rebellion.

This literature defines the protagonists (who are often sylleptic individuals, very close to the author) through their actual, everyday, often dramatically hard "here and now." Language is predictably "infected" by intrusions from other languages (especially English) yet remains extremely fluid, alive and generally capable of describing migrant realities. The identities of the characters presented in this genre are disturbed, dynamic, cosmopolitan rather than national in conception, though still strongly connected – through negation – with the national model (a phenomenon which is more clearly evident in Polish literature than in the literatures of other nations).

Considering today's open borders and range of publication models, and the right – or even the need – for a rigorous, though justified, criticism of that which is native and local in order to counteract encroaching globalisation, one can expect a format to emerge which is different from traditional Polish

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56 Agnieszka Palej shows this phenomenon using the example of texts written by Polish émigrés in German, which utilise numerous quotes from Polish, see her *Fließende Identitäten die deutsch-polnischen Autoren mit Migrationshintergrund nach 1989*, chpt. *11*. "Zu Hause in der deutschen Sprache: Mehsprachigkeit und sprachliche Kreativität" (Kraków: WUJ, 2015), 237-261.

57 See Maria Danilewicz-Zielińska discussing the subject: "The literary Polish language used by the émigré community tends to avoid 'macaronisms', as evidenced by the small number of neologisms such as 'kafejka' or 'flat'. The worrisome example set by the language of American economic migration has played a certain role here, limiting the borrowing from earlier periods, when 'fashions' indicated one should show off recently acquired linguistic skills in the tongue of the new home", ibid. "Język twórczości" in *Szkice o literaturze emigracyjnej* [*Sketches on Emigre Writing*], ed. (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1999, second, expanded edition), 353-358, here 356.

58 Rosi Braidotti, *Podmioty nomadyczne* [*Nomadic Subjects*], trans. Aleksandra Derra, (Warszawa: Wyd. Akademickie i Profesjonalne, 2009), 42

literature (or at least this clearly defined "minor" genre). One can see the development of a literature in Poland which strongly supports this tendency. The texts discussed here begin, it would appear, work on a few key changes which are, in the multicultural countries of the West, rather well advanced. They bring something like the seeds of a trans-national poetics, though still the "-national" element has a greater importance than "trans-." We can see here efforts to get away from the national epicentre and to develop literature aware of ethnic and glocal trends. Ethnic, because in environments that are a mixture of national, racial and cultural elements, such an option becomes an interesting and powerful indicator of the cultural meaning within the text. Meanwhile, glocality is connected with the idea expressed earlier, that texts always indicate the place where they were created. Through characteristics which belong to geo-poetics, the reader is essentially able to interpret and identify this source.

This also has a connection with the shift of emphasis in the procedures of interpretation: today, the priority is in cultural rather than national readings (meaning: ideological), especially in categories of socio-cultural testimony. Young writers, even if they lack an effectively developed theoretical awareness, intuitively sense that they should be heading in this direction, seeking a renewed way of speaking. Polish migrant literature is still far from using "transcultural idioms"[59]; this is the domain of the second generation of migrant writers (as in the case of Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*). Polish migrant writing is just setting out on this path. Perhaps we should in fact consider this state of affairs as a happy solution, because using the grand categories of contemporary literary and cultural theory (such as modernism, hybridisation and creolisation) can lead to the blurring of whatever individual character national literatures might have.[60] Hence it is worth appreciating the fact that these narratives – though they often enter into a dramatic polemic with the Polish romantic paradigm and head in the direction of establishing their own unique counter-code through the criticism of basic precepts, phrases and indicators relating to "major literature" (which contemporary migrants feel is more of a burden than aid) – are still formulated from the position of clearly nationalistic and cultural identification. Their protagonists have not yet reached (with the exception, perhaps, of Natasza Goerke's short forms) the

59 Elwira Grossman, "Blaski i cienie globalizacji, czyli problemy polonistyki w badaniach komparatystycznych. Przyczynek do dalszych badań" ["Globalisation – Flashes and Shadows. Comparative Problems in Researching Polish Literature. An Introduction to Further Research"], *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2009): 66-78.

60 See Jahan Ramazani, "Poetyka transkulturowa," ["Transcultural Poetics"] trans. Iwona Ostrowska, *Forum Poetyki*, (autumn 2015): 42-63.

level of complete hybridisation, contesting their identities, and yet treating them as something personal.

Literature produces its most interesting effects in moments of conflict, exhaustion or crisis, and it seems this is the sort of phenomenon we are dealing with here. In any case, this is a dispute with several heads, engaging with a Polish literary and philosophical tradition, with national history, and with the diverse behavioural and cultural codes that engulf migrants. Such encounters will be intellectually productive as long as the difference between Poles and representatives of other cultures and/or ethnicities are evident and present in the process of mutual explanation. This will be, I suspect, a very powerful literary voice, which will refer to native contexts while subjecting them to ruthless review and judgements influenced by migrant experiences. A voice emerging from the experience of liberty, otherness and cultural diversity.

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Other Emigrations? (Im)Possible Encounters of Prose Written by Authors of Polish Descent in Germany and the UK

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> Eventually, gracefully, the coach turned off onto the pot-holed hard shoulder of a grim-looking petrol station near the border and, once its gates were open, emptied its bowels in express fashion.[1]

> We turned down a small, asphalt road, entered some kind of a woodland and when, in the dark, I saw a border patrol officer with the countenance of a butcher, his threatening *halt* and *schnella* inviting everyone to alight from the vehicle, I remembered stories of the German occupation my gran and grandparents used to tell, which haunt my dreams still with images of SS soldiers' helmets gleaming in the undergrowth.[2]

When I read the story quoted from above, a story that was randomly chosen from the "new migration" category, whose protagonists are the "future, proud conquistadores

1 Adam Miklasz, *Polska szkoła boksu. Powieść emigracyjna* [*The Polish Boxing School: An Emigration Novel*] (Kraków: Skrzat, 2009), 5-6.

2 Ibid., 7.

of the British Isles,"[3] I instantly compared it with an earlier work from the genre, which happens to be a story from the early 1990s:

> They rolled slowly along a row of shipping containers. Tin huts served as currency exchange shops, customs offices, shops, toilets and bars. Someone had painted loudly coloured signs onto them, giving the whole scene the air of a set for a cheap western.

> The car drove onto a small car park and stopped beside a rusting coach. The driver killed its engine.[4]

It's not hard to spot other similarities between these two extracts: the oppressive atmosphere, the tiredness from many miles on the road, the darkness, a roadside stop, the smoking of cigarettes and the watching of other passengers, by which we mean our compatriots. We are shown tired, anxious characters set against a raw, unvarnished canvas. In addition, both writers create scenes which are characteristic of the places in which their protagonists have found themselves in: in the book by Miklasz, this will be the small-scale smuggling of cigarettes: "They're looking out for fags being smuggled wholesale by our fellow countrymen. One carton and not a fag more. Else they'll confiscate,"[5] while in the story by Załuski: "Three women emerged out of the car, a wreck which had been stripped of its wheels. Opening their fur-lined long coats, they presented their tensed-up, scantily clad bodies. Their stockings were black and their hands red."[6]

Both tales are about the experience of migration, whereas the two extracts contain a characteristic and repeated element of narrative poetics of journey abroad,[7] seeing as they are about borders and their crossings, about trips beyond those borders. And what is different about these two stories? It seems that the end point of the journey: the heroes of *The Polish School of Boxing* head for the British Isles whereas the protagonists of the story "We Are All Strangers, Almost All" return home to Poland from

3 Ibid., 6.

4 Krzysztof Maria Załuski, "Wszyscy jesteśmy obcy, prawie wszyscy," ["We're All Strangers, Almost All"] in *Tryptyk bodeński* [*Bodean triptych*] (Sopot: Man Gala Press, 1996), 109.

5 Miklasz, *Szkoła*, 7.

6 Załuski, "Wszyscy jesteśmy", 109.

7 Małgorzata Zduniak-Wiktorowicz, "Poetyka zagranicy", in *Przestrzeń jako kategoria poetyki*, ed. Elżbieta Konończuk and Elżbieta Sidoruk, (Białystok: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, 2012), 71-85.

a spell in the UK and Germany. However, this difference is deceptive because by the end of the novel Miklasz's main character comes back to his homeland, just like Załuski's "real" emigrant from the 1980s. As to hyper-literary aspects, for the sake of keeping good order one has to highlight the time both stories are set in, and how this influences the works – the period, as well as the fact taken from the sociology of émigré literary studies relating to how well known each author is. Adam Miklasz is a representative of a large group of writers who today describe the lives of economic migrants in the UK, while Krzysztof Maria Załuski represents the so-called post-Solidarity migrant group. The latter are, of course, much better known in terms of existing research.[8]

(Im)possible Comparisons

The juxtaposition presented here suggests a handy method that allows me to read émigré prose which has come into being since the 1990s in Europe and the world. This process of bringing together, referencing and comparing emerges out of a desire to follow similarities as well as changes between links in the chain of the latest literature, themed around life abroad, as well as being biographically connected to Poland (through the life stories of their authors). This is because their writing describes the dramatically altering, and therefore demanding, reality of recent years in a dynamic fashion (demanding due to new socio-cultural strata which are forming, along with changes in individual and collective identities). Taken in this context, migration can be treated as a particularly individual experience, as well as being largely collective, or even cohesive. As a space for literary articulations, migration above all evokes a perspective which is invaluable for contemporary Polish literary studies in crossing boundaries; meaning the point of view of the Other: "This potentially alien eye placed in my own socket modifies the perspective of my seeing and the content of what I perceive:

8 See incl.: Eva Behring, Alfrun Kliems and Hans-Christian Trepte, *Grundbegriffe und Autoren ostmitteleuropäischer Exilliteratur 1945-1989. Ein Beitrag zur Systematisierung und Typologisierung* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2004); Małgorzata Zduniak-Wiktorowicz, *Współczesny polski pisarz w Niemczech: doświadczenie, tożsamość, narracja* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2010); *Polska litratura (e)migracyjna w Berlinie i Sztokholmie po roku 1981*], ed. Ewa Teodorowicz-Hellman, Janina Gesche, in partnership with Marion Brandt, *Stockholm Slavic Papers 22* (2013); *Polnische Literatur in Bewegung. Die Exilwelle der 1980er Jahre*, ed. Daniel Henseler, Renata Makarska (Bielefeld: Verlag, 2013); Sławomir Iwasiów, *Reprezentacje Europy w prozie polskiej XXI wieku* (Szczecin-Zielona Góra: PPH Zapol Dmochowski Sobczyk, 2013) (sections of the book devoted to the work of Brygida Helbig, Krzysztof Niewrzęda, Dariusz Muszer, Janusz Rudnicki).

knocking it out of the sphere of the ordinary, introducing problematics, heightening my sensitivity to values."[9]

We can, of course, assign a similar sensitivity of perception to many prose writers, even those who lead more or less sedentary lives, without experience of migration. In the words of a sociologist who specialises in migration processes: "Poles have migration in their blood and it really is hard to find people who wouldn't, in a cultural sense, have migration experiences, who at a certain point in their lives hadn't left or had to choose: to go or to stay?"[10] But I do think that it is actually the migrant authors, thanks to their status of being "between," of living in both cultures,[11] who have excellent awareness of what we, those of us who are submerged in our culture of origin, might miss, even if we are very cosmopolitan in our Polishness (or think we are).

The life of a writer who leaves one country for another is not a simple tale of developing an additional point of view without some sort of conflict being involved: "In general, both the paradigms of the culture one emerges out of as well as the culture one has made a new home in are then subjected to review, to be perceived as a construct."[12] Hence, prose writers like Janusz Rudnicki or Brygida Helbig (to mention the two most important and well-known names of those working on the borders between Poland and Germany) approach issues which for Poles are commonplace with distance and curiosity. Both try to extract a certain exotic reality out of the two countries, which can be presented as something which threatens the individual (Rudnicki's prose style depends on a ridiculing presentation of both his own

9 Teresa Walas, "Oko innego/cudzoziemca jako możliwa perspektywa poznawcza literatury polskiej", in *Polonistyka bez granic* [*Polish Literary Studies without Borders*], vol. 1, ed. Ryszard Nycz, Władysław Miodunka and Tomasz Kunz (Kraków: Univeritas, 2010)

10 Michał P. Garapich, *Die Nomaden Europas – polnische Migranten in der Risikogesellschaft*, *Jahrbuch Polen. Migration* 21 (2010): 68.

11 See Hans-Christian Trepte, "Endstation Deutschland? – Stacja końcowa Niemcy? Czyli *Anioły i* świnie *(nie tylko) w Berlinie*", in *Na chwałę i pożytek nasz wzajemny. Złoty jubileusz Polonicum*, ed. Ewa Rohozińska (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Polonicum, 2006), 277; Małgorzata Zduniak-Wiktorowicz, "»W szpagacie«. Pisarz między Polską a Niemcami", in *Poetyka migracji. Doświadczenie granic w literaturze polskiej przełomu XX i XXI wieku*, ed. Przemysław Czapliński, Renata Makarska and Marta Tomczok (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2013), 223-234; Renata Makarska, "Między Polską a Niemcami, między językami. Skrzyposzek, Niewrzęda, Muszer, in *Między językami, kulturami, literaturami. Polska literatura (e)migracyjna w Berlinie i Sztokholmie po roku 1981*, 330-341.

12 Brygida Helbig-Mischewski, "Penis w opałach. Doświadczenia kastracji i strategie odzyskiwania mocy w literaturze kilku migrantów polskich w Niemczech", *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2009): 160.

and his adopted cultures, and the ironic confrontations of such approaches – a challenge the writer sets for himself),[13] or is subjected to taming and domestication (Helbig's writing employs irony as auto-irony, while the narrator sides with the world of inferior Poles and Germans: those who have failed to make a success of themselves, former East German residents, of late even "the mixed kind.")[14]

Thus Polish-German prose written by authors of the middle generation (born in the 1950s and 60s) becomes a point of reference for the topics hinted at in the title of this essay. They are meant to refer to a relatively unknown section of the most recent literature which takes its cue from experiences of emigration in the second decade of the 21st century. This isn't, however, a stable platform we can base things on, because it also spreads out to encompass subsets, collections of texts which have as yet not been analysed. And so, alongside the prose created by writers of the middle generation, who live and write between Poland and Germany, a new successor is forming. This involves work being created alongside the previous émigré generation, by writers such as Magdalena Felixa, Magdalen Parys, Adam Soboczynski, Paulina Schulz and Alexandra Tobor, who are ten, twenty years younger. Sticking with biographical aspects, we should add that while the middle-generation writers left Poland for Germany in the 1980s, the new generation were taken abroad by their parents or were themselves born abroad. Their works – *Tunnel, Das Eiland, Polski Tango, Die Fremde, Sitzen vier Polen im Auto* – can be considered, in the words of western researchers, as post-migration literature.[15] This category, which highlights the specific fact that its representatives grew up as children of migrants in a migrant context (the post-migration biographical aspect) also influences their works. This context does not expire in the problematics of migration, or the wider globalising confrontation of cultures or their hybridisation. From the start, the works mentioned above contain narratives that do not involve migration, which in no way excludes authors from this post-migration group of writers of a new literature which references Poland.

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13 This is clearly seen in "Życiorysta", a book by Janusz Rudnicki (Warszawa: W.A.B., 2014) (discussed by Cezary Rosiński, "Janusza R. portret przy książce," *Nowe Książki* 3 (2015): 33.)

14 See Brygida Helbig, *Niebko* (Warszawa: W.A.B., 2013) (for an updated discussion see: Paweł Jasnowski, "Zabawa w niebko, czyli opowieść o scalaniu tożsamości", *Twórczość* 3 (2015): 106-108.

15 *Nach der Migration. Postmigrantische Perspektiven jenseits der Parallelgesellschaft*, ed. Erol Yildiz, Marc Hill (Tübingen: Verlag, 2014); Myriam Geiser, "Die Fiktion der Identität. Literatur der Postmigration in Deutschland und Frankreich," in *Text und Wahrheit*, ed. Katja Bär, Kai Berkes, Stefanie Eichler et.al. (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag, 2004), 101-111.

Reading the most recent examples of Polish-German prose,[16] we encounter some interesting shifts (a focus on individual, intimate identities) and a continuation of the themes of migration (émigré places, such as resettlement camps, heterostereotypes) but these and its other aspects (forms and means of publishing, cultural institutions and places of civic action) should be seen in the light of completely different social and cultural conditions, which shaped the socialising processes of our future authors.[17] For when Janusz Rudnicki or Dariusz Muszer did their homework on specifically émigré prose (departures, camps, traumas), so as to eventually benefit from mobility or wider globalisation, Adam Soboczynski (a journalist for the *Die Zeit* weekly) and Magdalena Parys (a graduate of Humboldt University in Berlin, where she attended creative writing courses) were actually raised in such conditions, and found it easier and quicker to take advantage of life in a foreign country. This does not mean that we can create some sort of neat divide, in which traumas related to migration are assigned only to writers who are today in their fifties, while writers in their thirties or forties only concern themselves with themes of overwork and boredom. This is not the case, and yet … it is the case.[18]

That making these sorts of categorisations is not easy, based as they are on objective political aspects such as the opening of borders and job markets, is shown through the prose which is the third element being considered here: the creative output of economic migrants who left for the UK after 2004. This is a peer group of the young generation of Polish-German writing, and they reap the bounties of globalisation, which include geographical mobility and the chance to improve one's social standing, described colourfully as climbing social ladders.

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16 See Brygida Helbig-Mischewski, Małgorzata Zduniak-Wiktorowicz, "Inne doświadczenia, inna wiedza? Metodologie narodowe i ponadnarodowe a uciekający przedmiot badań. Rozważania na przykładzie bilateralnego projektu »Najmłodsza generacja autorów polskiego pochodzenia w Niemczech«", *Rocznik Komparatystyczny* 6 (2015): 381-393.

17 See „Migrantenliteratur im Wandel/ Literatura migracyjna w procesie. Junge Prosa mit (nicht nur) polnischen Wurzeln in Deutschland und Europa/ Młoda proza (nie tylko) polskiego pochodzenia w Niemczech i w Europie", ed. Brigitta Helbig-Mischewski and Małgorzata Zduniak-Wiktorowicz (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2016).

18 Brygida Helbig talks about generational experiences related to leaving Poland: "We left with the intention to stay away, and those who, as children or teenagers, such as Magda Parys or Dorota and Emanuela Danielewicz, left with their parents and also knew that it is terrible, that they are leaving their country, often cried in pain, not wanting to leave and feeling that what was happening right then was awful" – "Mogą mi kiedyś oddać. Rozmowa z Brygidą Helbig", in *Rozmowy na/o granicy*, ed. Ksymena Filipowicz-Tokarska and Małgorzata Zduniak-Wiktorowicz (Słubice: CP i PNIB, 2014), 11.

Since the new century is often discussed in terms of an "age of migration," or "modern nomadism," any consideration of its literary record, also in the context of following the paths trodden by "Polish writing in motion,"[19] must involve creative writing by these new European nomads. It is they, this wave of economic migrants, who are described by Michał Garapich as "another chapter in the history of Polish migration,"[20] as well as being involved in the "reactivation of a uniquely Polish migration, which spreads out to other countries, strengthening the themes of migration while also tearing away from it, collectively or individually."[21]

We should also bring up here a topic of a different nature, yet which now helps form the argument that we must juxtapose literatures produced between Poland and Germany, as well as those written by Poles who have migrated to the UK. It is these two countries – Germany and the UK – that have swapped places in Polish migrants' desires. According to data contained in a book by Krystyna Iglicka, prior to Poland's ascension to the EU, 37.5% of Poles leaving their homeland ended up in Germany, 8% ended up in the UK, and 1.5% ended up in Ireland; after 2004 those proportions reversed and the stats read as follows: 35.5% of Poles left for the UK, 9.5% left for Ireland, while now only 20% left for Germany.[22]

It is of course impossible to compare the living conditions and creative output of those youngsters of Polish origin who went to school in Germany with economic migrants who chose to move to Britain in the second half of the first decade of the 21st century. Nevertheless, the writing produced by both groups has its biographical and thematic points of comparison in terms of mobility. We can consider this in terms of the movement of the writers' heroes through space (leaving Poland, going to Poland and other free changes, in terms of meaning, in place of residence), as well as freedom in formation of one's own identity (e.g., with regard to sexuality),[23] mental freeing from that

19 See Brygida Helbig-Mischewski and Małgorzata Zduniak-Wiktorowicz, "Inne doświadczenia, inna wiedza?"

20 Garapich, 67.

21 Ibid.

22 Krystyna Iglicka, *Poland's migration contrasts* (Warszawa: Scholar, 2008). Ref. Garapich, *Die Nomaden Europas*, 68.

23 Hans-Christian Trepte, "W poszukiwaniu »innej« wolności. Opcja emigracyjna, czyli nowoczesny nomadyzm?", in *Opcja niemiecka. O problemach z tożsamością i historią w literaturze polskiej i niemieckiej po1989 roku*, ed. Wojciech Browarny, Monika Wolting, in collaboration with Markus Joch (Kraków: Universitas, 2014), 179-195. See also Maciej Czarnecki, *Poles on the British Isles swing more often*. http://wyborcza.pl/duzyformat/1,135755,15353529,Polacy_na_Wyspach_swinguja_czesciej.html accessed March 1, 2015.

which limits the self, including various hierarchies and personal, familial and professional dependencies (including unemployment), and so on.

But are the hero we started this article with, the protagonist of *The Polish School of Boxing*, and other characters we will turn to capable of freeing themselves from such limitations? In the very first few scenes of Miklasz's novel we are made aware that our narrator, who emigrated with a number of others, will look upon Poles with a sense of distance, will try to live differently from the rest of his compatriots (though this is the privilege assigned to sylleptical heroes, with whom authors share their sense of distance to the world they present to readers), and in fact tried to free himself from migration while abroad. One has to admit that this narrative model and history are well known from contemporary migrant writing, though one would still like to make the point that this is the same story. The tales told by young writers from England or Ireland are almost identical to the lives depicted by Polish migrants in Germany, with the obvious difference that the displaced persons' camp is later replaced by rooms rented in overcrowded, impoverished apartments or even in homeless shelters.

Perhaps it will take a few decades, maybe less, for their children, born on the British Isles, to tell us a different story. The young in Germany, who have known the life of an immigrant since childhood, have earned their own stories, learning to differentiate them from those of their parents, which helps them form their own identities, and their stories are written with a greater sense of distance and therefore lean towards a picture of migration or even nomadism as seen in the writing of Christian Trepte.[24] In addition, the prose produced by the middle generation lacked any sort of distance from its émigré experience – as is the case with Załuski, who upon his return to Poland published a novel which involved the consolidation of an image of migration as an experience of alienation, of growing wild and of feeling a failure.

Emigration and Migration

Let us now take a closer look at something referred to previously, specifically the issue of classifying this literature in terms of the paradigms current literary studies are using in order to describe it. We have two such paradigms at our disposal: the émigré and migrant paradigms, where the latter is seen by many as a natural replacement for the former, considering that the phenomenon of people settling outside Poland's borders is no longer seen in terms of obligations authors might have in relation to their homeland. If we assume that migration is a way of life which gives birth to a certain type of literature,

24 Trepte, "W poszukiwaniu".

then it would seem true that emigration really no longer exists. The poetics of migration comes to our aid in trying to explain this issue, and especially the concepts and modes of reading proposed by Przemysław Czapliński in the introduction to a book he co-wrote, both titled and concerned with this literature from "inbetween."[25]

And yet the empiricism of literary works, addressed by the migrant discourse element of contemporary Polish literary analysis, is often set against the treatment of the poetics of migration as the only paradigm adequate to modern times and modern writing about the moves writers make abroad. If we try to use the perspectives previously employed to analyse Polish-German links with the latest prose coming out of England or Ireland since Poland's entry into the EU, we will find that the abandoning of old concepts is not always possible; and this in a situation when we are dealing with the first wave of so-called real migrants in the latest history of Poland. The inherent problematics and narrative format (the traditional emigrant three-stage story: leaving the homeland, settling in a new country, not/becoming part of it) of the many stories and novels which make up the body of literature studied as part of the project called "Polish migrant literature in Britain and Ireland since 2004" reminds us that crossing the mental border of Polish insecurities can be very hard. The need to constantly position oneself between one's country of origin and a new homeland, to compare and confront as a defining aspect of characters representing their authors, constantly fuels the "émigré's unease."[26]

In a similarly "negative" way, the prose produced by young writers (born in the 1970s and 80s) in Germany shapes the situation described above. It contains testimonies of a change of paradigm, new forms of expression and varying bio-geographical conditions in which it was created, but there are also examples of emigrant identities inherited from the authors' parents.[27]

Nevertheless, the considerations of the poetics of migration as a collection of "elements and their inherent combinations relating to a certain body of work"[28] which complicate the status of the migrant as a person living in a globalised world show that these migrants are no jolly reincarnation of émigrés from the

25 Przemysław Czapliński, "Kontury mobilności," in *Poetyka migracji*, 9-42.

26 "Wszystkim się wydaje, że śmierć jest zawsze ważniejsza od życia. Rozmowa z Ingą Iwasiów", in *Rozmowy na/o granicy*, ed. Ksymena Filipowicz-Tokarska and Małgorzata Zduniak-Wiktorowicz (Słubice: CP i PNIB, 2014), 40-41.

27 Małgorzata Zduniak-Wiktorowicz, "'Inny to ten, który właśnie siedzi w aucie.' Prozatorski debiut Alexandry Tobor a nowe pokolenie piszących o Polsce w Niemczech", *Studia Germanica Gedanensia* 30 (2014): 80-93.

28 Czapliński, "Kontury," 40.

1980s, who went into exile because they were forced to do so. Polish migrants, seen as a certain literary prototype (the émigré then becomes an archetype) must also often leave, yet – unlike their predecessors – can do so much more easily. The migrants also have their traumas, caused by a ruthless drive towards movement and nomadism. Let us also add that, even though we notice the changes in how people move around a globalised world, necessitating the use of concepts and metaphors about the modern human condition, we will still refer to those who feature in writing from the UK and Ireland as migrants.

Perhaps then, in relation to our own realities, could emigration and migration as literary characteristics be variations of one another? And perhaps, accepting the primacy of global shifts in culture, should one rather say that emigration is an invariant of migration? However many times emigration appears as a collection of characteristic, recognisable qualities in a literary work, it does not in itself change character, while simultaneously retrofitting into migrant literature, remaining its own émigré reflection.

Hence, it is difficult to wholly confirm that in the most recent Polish literature we are no longer dealing with emigration as a form of grand social narration. Though, on the other hand, it is hard not to agree with the researcher who considers "emigrationality" as something very individualistic in nature: "In fact, we no longer know who today feels like an émigré, a migrant or a modern nomad. Such definitions depend on individual points of view, on specific views and experiences of a given writer."[29] Nevertheless, it is worth taking the trouble to name and differentiate, all the more so because in studying this prose, we are also writing the history of "Polish literature in motion," situating it in an ever-widening comparative context. And this is regardless of whether under the focus of individual literary experts we find social processes, decolonising processes, and smaller literatures settling within much wider cultural fields, or whether these experts accentuate mainly questions of literary presentation, its form and attempts at strategies or cultural emancipation.

What Is an E-Migrant Allowed to Do?

In this context, the poetics of migration as a conceptualisation of "mobile perspectives"[30] opens up to comparative processes[31] by analysts of other literatures from the migrating generation. In addition, it relates to the

29 Trepte, "W poszukiwaniu," 180.

30 Czapliński, "Kontury," 40-42.

31 See Ryszard Nycz, "Możliwa historia literatury", in *Na pograniczach literatury*, ed. Jarosław Fazan, Krzysztof Zajas (Kraków: Univeristas, 2012), 13-34.

"auto-creative character of migration itself," which is based on the migrant constantly straining to invent the self: starting with their appearance, then how they sound speaking a different language, as well as the stages of their career or non-career. There is a fixed point of reference for the process of writing about the narrative identity of a character formed in the author's image. Under the circumstances, prose which attempts to shadow migrants in motion can only function as a realistic, fragmented description of that which the migrant lives for, in metaphor and in reality, by which we mean what they eat, drink, how much they earn, where they work, how they recall their moment of leaving, what they think about Poles and Germans or the British. The migrant as a writer, and in this case often a writer only starting out, will make use of strategies which prettify.

In relation to the middle generation of migrating authors, Helbig-Mischewski wrote: "The experience of migration on a poetological plane involves a liking for irony, auto-irony, absurdist humour, the grotesque."[32] Their work is full of various shades of humour which works, for example, by employment of variations on the picaresque novel as a form keenly adapted by the likes of Muszer or Rudnicki.

Meanwhile, we will experience the new, modern migrant, that sylleptical character caught in the lens of many new Polish literary works, in a textual environment that creates the climate of the impossible. "Impossible" here means incredible events (e.g., supernatural, imagined histories, nightmares, etc.), strange, unsettling, emotive characters (such as "evil people," demons, madmen, wise-men who have come to terms with their lot and hiding terrible secrets, dissenters, and those with dual identities, e.g., sexual) and narrative forms which are intended to carry across a well-known tale of self-realisation in a space where anything can happen.

Thanks to such attempts to capture the migrant world, the childhood trauma of moving from Poland to Germany turns into a truly colourful fairy-tale, while a young Polish packer working on a production line in England will make a fortune out of black magic. What is real and obvious is presented in a surreal light. It is interesting that writers from both groups presented here apply similar strategies in their work.

Having already mentioned the works of Magdalena Parys (*Tunnel, Magician*), Paulina Schulz (*Das Eiland*), Sabrina Janesch (*Katzenberge, Ambra*), Jan Krasnowolski (*African Electronics*), Adam Miklasz (*The Polish School of Boxing*), Konrad Jaskolski (*Easy Rider's Calendar*) and Tomasz Kwiatkowski (*Krycha from the Line of David – London. Two Amsterdams*), all of which deal with various formative experiences the authors bring with them (travelling with parents

32 Helbig-Mischewski, "Penis," 162.

to West Germany and independent travel to the UK in search of work), it is worth noting how both groups use the literary convention of the (im)possible, previously not found in this particular genre.

Genres and Forms of the Impossible

In terms of genre, the use of this convention can be observed where authors turn to popular forms. Defined in this way, the choices made by the young generation illuminate their approach to literature; its genre qualities are in this context the first and main signifier of that which is literary and which depends on a game played by the author with their readers.[33] Hence, in such works we will find, among others, a political thriller (*Tunnel* by Magdalena Parys), a crime novel (*Magician*, by the same author), a thriller which merges into horror (stories from the collection *African Electronics* by Jan Krasnowolski) or the contemporary thriller novel (*The Polish School of Boxing* by Adam Miklasz). The migration experiences of these authors and their characters become entangled into these types of narratives, which by their very genre-based nature is intended to engage the reader through a range of affectations connected with the following of a sequence of ordered events. All the numerous plot developments are taken from the realities of migrant lives in Germany and the British Isles, as well as conventions of the impossible utilised in terms of populist literature.

A telling example of the linking of these two planes is the work of Magdalena Parys, who in her two published novels takes for granted the interest readers will have in contemporary Germany. In order to nurture this interest, she concentrates on secrets, which take the form of dark moments and events from the most recent history of this country, which for many post-war years wrote its own, interrelated chapters. What is interesting in this context is that she herself admits to being fascinated by facts which are shrouded in mystery. In an interview she gave to *Wysokie Obcasy* magazine, when asked by Katarzyna Surmiak-Domańska why she chose the title *Magician*, she answered:

> It started with 2008, when I read a *Der Spiegel* report about the death of Michael Weber, a certain boy from the East Germany side. He was nineteen and wanted to be free. He died in July 1989 in Bulgaria, 150 metres from the Greek border[34]

33 Roma Sendyka, "W stronę kulturowej teorii gatunku," in *Kulturowa teoria literatury. Główne pojęcia i problemy*, ed. Michał Paweł Markowski and Ryszard Nycz (Kraków: Universitas, 2006), 256-257.

34 *Wszędzie gdzie jest o przekraczaniu granic, jest też o mnie*, accessed March 1, 2015 http://www.wysokieobcasy.pl/wysokie-obcasy/1,53662,16918762,Magdalena_Parys__Wszedzie_gdzie_jest_o_przekraczaniu.html

and goes on to add:

> This story drew me in so much I started to follow articles and interviews with Appelius [a German political expert, who studied various cases of vanishings and killings of East German escapees travelling down through Bulgaria to the West]. It turned out that in the years 1964-89, over 4,500 Soviet Bloc nationals tried to cross the border there. Most of them from East Germany. The average success rate was three out of every hundred attempts. Those who failed would return home, where they would face criminal charges and jail terms. Over a hundred people were shot, usually the young. Their bodies would often be left where they fell. To rot or to be eaten by wild animals.[35]

Based on this sort of real-life scenario (in *Tunnel,*[36] we are presented with the story of an underground corridor for those trying to escape from East to West Berlin), Parys writes about how in post-War and post-Unification Germany Nazis and Communists nurtured their political careers, often at the expense of people's lives. In her work, she deals with a classic clash of good and evil, the former represented by ordinary Germans, victims of a murderous system, and the actions of Stasi agents (e.g., Burkhard Seidl, who lost his sons during Operation Magician, after which he dedicated his life to pursuing those responsible for the deaths), as well as Poles, such as Magda in *Tunnel*, a German literature student, who comes over to study in East Germany and, through a series of romantic and political entanglements, ends up in the Western part of town. But then again, in *Magician*, tomboyish journalist Dagmara Bosch (a Germanised version of her original name, Boszewska), a fully integrated émigré, is a victim of the former East German legacy of machinations and murders: in the 1980s, she loses her father, and thirty years later, and in connection with the same case, she loses her stepfather, with whom her mother settled in Germany, forced to do so by the mysterious death of her first husband. This grand history in a Polish-German context draws us in and punishes the characters, even when all the grand narratives are seemingly over, communism and the struggle against it in the past:

> Mother was of a slimmer build and not so good at holding her drink. Sadness welled up in her, because it was not she who had printed the illegal newspapers, not she who painted rebellious phrases on public walls, not she who smuggled typewriters and ribbons across the border. … Collective, family guilt, any sort of

35 Ibid.

36 Magdalena Parys, *Tunel* (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 2011).

> guilt in Communist Poland, was guilt in and of itself, and where there is guilt there is punishment. Democracy was a long and hard way off, though the Pope's words "Let Your Holy Spirit step down and renew the face of the earth. This earth!" had been spoken, sowing the seed, but seeds grew ever so slowly back then. When you are waiting, nothing grows, not without distance, not up close.
>
> Mum – I trembled, unable to stop myself crying and despairing – I am not going. I'm staying! Do you hear me? Staying!!![37]

The émigré fate of Dagmara's parents' generation matches the time of Parys's own leaving of Poland, who, as a teenager in 1984, together with her mother, settled in West Berlin. There is information about life in Poland, its socio-economic situation (in *Magician* there is mention of making money from trading with Soviet Bloc folk, and of the endless applications for a passport), as well as the realities of a divided city (via *Tunnel*), which directly relate to the fates of Poles emigrating to escape communism. These are the times and their prototypical characters, known well from work produced earlier by the middle generation, which our post-migrant writer makes use of. Her signature is to work as a poet in a political and crime thriller setting. That was her way of entering the literary establishment (her debut was published in 2011).

Similar in terms of literary strategies is the work of Jan Krasnowolski, a migrant who lives and works in Bournemouth on the British south coast. He also employs genre forms which are unclear and unlikely in narrative contexts, though he takes things a few steps further than Parys, using the poetics of horror. At the heart of his *African Electronics*, as in *Tunnel* and *Magician*, is a battle between good and evil. Kransowolski, however, links this to his own experience of life in the UK, such as working in a perfume factory:

> … not all are ok, and some are total dimwits. Take Grześ, who works the shredding machine. The "shredder" is a huge machine for compressing trash which Grześ operates. Every day, he makes his way round the site, emptying containers, segregating rubbish, and then chucking it into his machine, which mashes it all into smithereens. … Grześ is a red-haired moustachioed con artist, who comes from a god-forsaken village in the Rzeszów region, but oh, doesn't that boy think highly of himself – where hasn't he been, what hasn't he seen![38]

37 Magdalena Parys, *Magik* (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 2014), 325-326.

38 Jan Krasnowolski, *Afrykańska elektronika* (Kraków: Ha!art, 2013) , 70.

The story shows us the reality of migrant life, and perhaps typical migrants who get into all sorts of conflicts with one another. Into this commonplace scenario of Polish back-biting, Krasnowolski introduces a new, culturally alien element. This is the character of Tom Ubijee, a Ghanaian immigrant raised in the UK, "the lad who stands next to me on the factory line."[39] Tom, wanting to help our narrator sort out a problem with Grześ, uses the power of voodoo. His help is both effective and macabre, but soon enough his friends set up a collective which dishes out justice in the name of other "victims." As quickly as they make lots of money they also lose control of the situation. Black magic, unleashed in the name of a cause which is more to do with profit than with justice, shows how quickly it can turn against its user: the ordinary lives of these young migrants quickly go from prosperity to nightmare. The narrator has dreams and daydreams filled with dread, sensing that something very bad is drawing near, while Tom becomes the subject of his ancestors' wrath:

> Too late – Tom says, sadly – The ghosts of my ancestors are angry. I tried to calm them down, beg them, but they are no longer listening … Suddenly, he chokes, coughing horribly, and then spits out a grim-looking blood clot which lands on the floor. Resting on the light-coloured tiling, the congealing blob turns darker, and I can see something pulsating in it, something moving. … He wants to say something else, but his voice gets stuck in his throat. I can see, between his lips, a small, black viper emerges, as thin as a pencil, with a triangular head and a forked tongue. It falls to the ground, where it hisses angrily. Now, more and more vipers escape Tom's mouth, dozens of the little beasts. They swarm around in the puddle of bloody snot, biting all over his body.[40]

The narrator of *African Electronics* has slightly more realistic problems, as he is being pursued by Islamic fanatics. Yet the scene in which he escapes them in a car chase is reminiscent of an action movie.

The impossible and the incredible are shown here in the format of "lad lit,"[41] but also – seen from the angle of migrant literature – in the form of going outside one's own culture, an experience so well known to writers abroad. In a similar vein, Adam Miklasz's *The Polish School of Boxing* has the main character stating: "Me, a simple migrant, knew the biggest secret about the local king

39 Ibid., 69.

40 Ibid., 108-109.

41 The publisher states on the cover that "Krasnowolski's stories represent *lad lit*, popular literature aimed mainly at male readers".

of the underworld and was sure that I had to be on guard."[42] The criminal element arises when the Polish migrants in the town of Buckby come into accidental contact with territory ruled by an Albanian gang, the elder Mustafa in charge; hence the novel contains scenes of physical threat, street fighting and spectacular escape. It is worth adding, however, that the underlying cause of this conflict is truly to do with migration, and is thus pointed in nature: Poles cross over into foreign territory while out hunting for *wystawki*, undamaged equipment found in wealthy areas which can then be sold on. In both books, although they differ in terms of the intensity of their incredible aspects (horror in Krasnowolski, action in Miklasz), the authors address the same problem, namely, the breaching of culturally ordained rules, be it killing, stealing or reporting to the authorities. In both cases, it appears that the experience of migration may involve a suspension of these rules.

The breaking of other taboos, including those related to the family unit, can be found in the prose produced by female writers of Polish-German origin. In the first few scenes of the story by Paulina Schulz,[43] *Das Eiland*, as well as the novel *Katzenberge* by Sabrina Janesch,[44] we encounter news of death in the family (a father and a grandfather), which means that the narrative that follows, in which protagonists must cope alone, involves their discovering certain taboo family secrets. John in *Das Eiland* keeps on repeating something which is symptomatic for the pervasive mood of this piece: "Just how wrong I was back then became clear in the following few weeks,"[45] which is followed with a detailed account of his recollection of those few hot weeks he spent on the island which gives the story its name, in the company of his unusual twin siblings. Milan and Milena become his guides around a grand old house and night-time cemetery, but also teach him how to taste delight, desire and to enter into adulthood. Then we have Nelle Leibert from *Katzenberge*, who goes on a journey filled with various secrets (involving a Cain-like murder) towards the East, to reach Ukraine, where she learns the truth about her Polish grandfather, displaced from Wolyn and resettled on the so-called Reclaimed Lands.

Both authors introduce a migrant background, although Schulz left for Germany in 1989, while Janesch was born there in 1985, after her mother refused to return from a holiday in West Germany during the period of Martial Law in Poland (1981-83). In line with their varying experiences of migration,

42 Adam Miklasz, *Szkoła*, 255.

43 Paulina Schulz, *Das Eiland* (Greifswald: freiraum-verlag, 2014).

44 Sabrina Janesch, *Katzenberge* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 2010).

45 Schulz, *Das Eiland*, 35.

the narratives also take differing approaches to the subject. In the novel by the younger Janesch, we can see the author in, for example, the way she explores problems relating to the twin-nationality of the narrator, setting off alone to discover the truth about her geographical roots: for Germans she is a Pole and for Poles a German. This émigré trip doesn't yet guarantee the writer any sort of way out in *Katzenberge*, as noted by Aleksandra Burdziej, beyond the clearly schematic presentation of her fellow Poles, which also applies to her fellow Germans, and even to the Ukrainians.[46] Then we come to the brutal process of gaining independence, crossing various erotic and family taboos, as well as an unusual sexual initiation – hence the world created by Schulz in *Das Eiland* can be seen, according to Christian Trepte, as proof of a "parting from Poland." This is how researchers label the perceived tendency for post-émigré prose to develop, in individual works which are based on a non-Polish, universally human context, being evidence of the complete integration of their authors with German culture.[47]

Nevertheless, the aura of the incredible is interwoven into both narratives, in terms of the protagonists and the extraordinary places they go. Which is why it comes as no surprise that nature is given a voice here, too, serving the function of strengthening that which is hard to express (unease, tension, fear, the curiosity of John and Nelle). When Sabrina Janesch, in accordance with the linear composition of her novel, shows us, among other things, the river Bug and then a dense Ukrainian woodland, Schulz, in a certain "bullet point" way, builds the aura of incredibleness which surrounds the titular island: the fifteen-year-old hero looks at the sea, the sand and the shoreline trees, which, thanks to the author's pen, allow him a very sensual experience of the world.

Both female writers also employ elements of cultures alien to their protagonists, which amplifies the sense of incredibleness in the places and events John and Nelle find themselves in. The Slav peoples, destructive gossip, local legends, beliefs and magic fill the pages of *Katzenberge*:

> After Janeczko left the house in the morning, Maria made the mixture, and then poured it around the house and in the courtyard. Only a drop, though, she would explain to Janeczko, for if too much of the liquid is spilled, nothing more would ever

46 Aleksandra Burdziej, "Z perspektywy niemieckich wnuków. Przełamanie tabu w pamięci rodzinnej jako droga do odnalezienia własnej tożsamości w powieści *Katzenberge* Sabriny Janesch", in *Opcja niemiecka*, 158-159.

47 Hans-Christian Trepte, "Centra i peryferie w literaturze polskiej XX i XXI wieku – uwagi polonisty niemieckiego", in *Centra i peryferie w literaturze polskiej XX i XXI wieku*, ed. Wojciech Browarny, Elżbieta Rybicka and Dobrawa Lisak-Gębala (Kraków: Universitas, 2015), 73-76.

> grow on the ground there. Then she had to burn her own hair, to make ash which she then added to the extract from sweet woodruff.[48]

Meanwhile, in Schulz's *Das Eiland*, separated from the direct migrant context, this function is served by the hyper-ethnic, multicultural symbolism of identical twins and the element of voodoo:

> The cult of twins is to be found in various parts of the world, in many cultures. And yet, in voodoo there is the cult of male and female twins. She is called Mawu, and he Lisa. Both symbolise opposing energies: male activity and female passivity, the Sun and the Moon, aggression and delicateness, that which is light and that which is dark. Together, they represent androgynous divinity, a hermaphrodite, cosmic oneness.[49]

In such a heightened taboo environment the main narrative axis of both works is something akin to a factotum, which weighs upon the characters and which they want to dismantle in their own ways. Here, it is worth mentioning the short story *All the Unholy*, by Karolina Kuszyk,[50] another Berlin writer of Polish origin. This story, which – through a literary setting involving a meeting at a mysterious station – deals with the death of close relations, is different from the previously discussed books due to its mood of lyrical metaphysics. Kuszyk creates a very personal tale, while the station in it is a place that has gone through an incredible shift in time, and these factors make the story a classic piece in migration genre.

The private character of experiences of personal migration are also unearthed by Alexandra Tobor and Tomasz Kwiatkowski. Here, the exhaustion of conventions of the impossible finally becomes the form for expressing experiences of a powerfully personal character. Formally, their works differ in all manner of ways: Tobor's book, *Sitzen vier Polen im Auto. Teutonische Abenteuer,* is a novel in the convention of an ironically tuned fairytale,[51] while *Krycha from the Line of David – London. Two Amsterdams*[52] represents an autobiographical, if

48 Janesch, *Katzenberge*, 142.

49 Schulz, *Eiland*, 61.

50 Karolina Kuszyk, "Wszystkich nieświętych", *OderÜbersetzen Deutsch-Polnisches Übersetzungsjahrbuch – Karl Dedecius Archiv* 5 (2015) [in print].

51 Alexandra Tobor, *Sitzen vier Polen im Auto. Teutonische Abenteuer* (Berlin: Ullstein Buchverlage, 2012).

52 Tomasz Kwiatkowski, *Krycha z rodu Dawida – Londyn. Dwa Amsterdamy* [*Krycha from the Line of David – London. Two Amsterdams*] (Łódź: Piktor 2007).

in places fictionalised, and popular sort of writing: I was there – I survived – I will tell the tale. But regardless of these profound genre differences, we can see in both books how the personal experience of their characters is put to the fore, emphasised through the use of conventions of the impossible.

And we have Alexandra Tabor's autobiographical experiences – the first, difficult moments of migrating with her parents and brothers, spent in a resettlement camp, along with attempts at finding oneself in a completely alien world, and how these experiences echo for many years – which are converted by the debut writer into a specific fairytale. The eight-year-old Ola, our narrator, does not experience the specific nightmare of life in the Unna-Massen Camp, which featured certain young male protagonists in the books by Muszer and Niewrzeda, but her own grand childhood adventure – everything is new to her, and much of it is enchanting. In confronting the realities of life inside a camp, she creates her own world, and that is why, in everyday situations, she sees magical elements, while casting spells and charms on actual reality. These are the methods our heroine uses to become used to the realities of migration, and that is also the way Tobor enlightens her readers about the world she has created. *Sitzen vier Polen im Auto …* is not, however, a naïve tale told by a child, but a creation filled with irony, in which readers can hear echoes of the adult writer.[53] This is evident when, for example, we are shown a grotesque scene in a supermarket (the father takes photos of the children against a shelf filled with Haribo sweets, while the mother faints from delighted shock) which is then diluted by fairytale elements: the shop Aldi turns here into Aladdin, while the gates to a cave holding a treasure trove open by themselves:

> That is when something magical happened: the glass doors, which led inside the supermarket, opened as if at the touch of a magic wand. How was this possible? I hadn't yet gone inside, already I was running out. The doors shut. I approached them again, slowly. "Open, Sesame," I ordered, but Sesame was quicker. I rushed inside.[54]

Witchcraft and the subversion of the hardships of starting a life abroad do not appear at all in the second narrative presented here, the book by Tomasz Kwiatkowski. The writer takes a factual approach, sharing the exact details of his first few weeks as a migrant in London. A veristic approach does not mean

53 I write about this in more detail in: "'Inny to ten, który właśnie siedzi w aucie'. Prozatorski debiut Alexandry Tobor a nowe pokolenie piszących o Polsce w Niemczech", *Studia Germanica Gedanensia* (30) 2014.

54 Tobor, *Sitzen*, 101.

the abandonment of fantasy elements, because it turns out that in the lives of migrants it is easy to find weirdos, "excesses" and hyperboles, especially when one is among one's own kind, in émigré ghettos of the British Isles. The embodiment of terror, das Unheimliche, is the titular Krycha, an elderly, grey-haired Polish woman who looks like a homeless hobo yet who owns the hotel where the migrants reside.

Every new chapter gives us more information about her character, but the narrator keeps on repeating that there is more to come and thus prepares the reader for some kind of substantial "more": "Oh well, things had taken an unfortunate turn, that's true, but if it wasn't for that I wouldn't have the chance to explain fully what the deal is with this 'hotel' and with Krycha."[55] Krycha is a lens-like device, a prism which focuses in herself all sorts of extreme vices: avarice, deception, sloppiness, deceit, wickedness, malice, hypocrisy and callousness (her husband, suffering with Alzheimer's, is often left hungry, dirty and defenceless). All this, according to the narrator, is connected to the woman's aggressive form of religious faith, linking her to Jesus, who apparently calls her to serve in this London "mission." In subsequent chapters, with telling titles (*God in the House, A Good Samaritan, Krystianism, Judas*), we learn to see her as a devoted miser:

> "I got you," she roared like a lion. "You wanted to run for it, in secret, like a thief! Give me back the money you owe me, right now!" she screamed, tugging at his shirt sleeve, waving a piece of paper, with a list of unsettled charges for hotel services, in his face. She had everyone written up like that, day after day, how much everyone owed, in terms of her very attractive price list.
>
> "Jesus told me that you want to escape! I received a sign from him, that it will be today, this very minute!" she pressed.[56]

The workings of the hotel on Elms Road, which, according to its owner, was meant to serve as a sort of Ark to help migrants in need of support, breaks all the rules of what we would consider to be normal. Life there is so awful as to be almost incredible. To corroborate his recording of Krycha's conniving and to anticipate any possible disbelief from the reader, the author asserts: "It is a pity I didn't take a look at that letter, because I would have taken it from her, photocopied it, and exposed her lies, while a copy would be attached to this book."[57]

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55 Kwiatkowski, *Krycha*, 92-93.

56 Ibid., 59-60. Ibid.143.

57 Ibid., 143.

This juxtaposing of the works by Kwiatkowski and Tobor show how easy it is when living abroad to come across the impossible, and that this can be utilised in a number of genre fashions, such as novels and non-fiction reportage. Telling in this context is that meta-genre observation the author of Krycha adds to the afterword:

> Perhaps this book is not a work of literary art. I was more interested in its informative usefulness. It is in some way a report of certain events which took place in London in 2004. I saw it all with my own eyes, then remembered and recorded it here. I will leave the reader to make further comments.[58]

Regardless of the differences between the narrations by Kwiatkowski and Tobor, in the situations they found themselves in they both saw a strong aspect of the incredible. Focusing on that which is "almost impossible," they collect testimonies of weirdness in order to manage a world that is novel and surprising. Ola's rich imagination allows her to fulfil the role of a childhood queen, while Kruk (the nicknames given to characters in Polish prose produced in England is something which deserves special attention), in describing the terrible Krycha through the retelling of the many terrible things she takes part in, tries to rise above it, to overcome the horrible adventure of staying in her hotel.

Does the convention, described here in terms of an introductory report, have transformative qualities in terms of e-migration literature? Prose writings from this genre always were rich in facts relating to the movement of authors and their heroes, and always sought ways of presenting this reality in an engaging manner. However, the tendency to present this reality to readers in fantastic formats, their texture arising directly out of the experience of migration, is here very clear, and so the aspects strictly relating to migration itself seem in these works to be of greater importance. Genre examples of popular writing serve the function of making the above books accessible and structured, so helping to create a reservoir of certain items which describe specific cultural phenomena,[59] including that which is so characteristic of popular literature, and no less of migration literature – the dividing of the world into those who are like us and those who are alien. The means of articulating experiences of an author-narrator nature, sometimes impossible in conventional terms, seems to be subject to the migration sphere. Invasions by a fantasy world and flights of fancy into this reality do not undermine its

58 Ibid., 157.

59 Sendyka, "W stronę kulturowej teorii," 276.

substance, and things left unsaid and the structure of incompleteness do not weaken the meanings connected with the leaving of one place for another. Even a marginal narration by Paulina Schulz – freed from its Polish roots and obligations, as a Germanic Slav researcher argues[60] - could in this context be a clear gesture of resistance by a writer against that which we have been made accustomed to by previous works in this genre, though it could also indicate she lives in Germany.

The overall effect upon all these texts could be summed up by the term "e-migrating" as a genrefying adjunct. In this way we would gain an émigré fairytale, a migrant tale of being chased away, an émigré thriller and a migrant crime novel. In the example of Adam Miklasz's effort, with which I began this article, the author himself makes things easier for us and gives *The Polish Boxing School* the subtitle *An Emigration Novel*.

Translation: Marek Kazmierski

60 Trepte, "Centra i peryferie," 48.

Cristina Şandru

Watching the New "Subaltern" in Britain: East-Central European Migrants and Their Filmic Avatars

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In Thomas Neil's timely study,[1] the migrant is defined as the quintessential political figure of our time (see "Introduction"). Symbolic of the fissures and ruptures – but also opportunities – brought about by the accelerated processes of global mobility, of population transfers and movements unfolding on a scale larger than ever before, the migrant is, to quote a by now famous Rushdian phrase, a "creature of selected discontinuities,"[2] the cipher of an age characterized by flux, instability and rapid economic and technological change. In the context of post-Cold War Europe, this mobility has translated into successive waves of "nomadism," occasioned by a mix of economic pressures and the mirage of a hitherto unattainable West. From merely a trickle in the early 1990s, when hopes for a rapid transition to prosperity were still high in East Central Europe, to the post-Accession "tides" and "invasions" (or, if we adopt the perspective of the countries of emigration, "brain-drain" and siphoning

1 Thomas Neil, *The Figure of the Migrant* (Stanford: Stanford UP), 2015.

2 Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (London: Vintage, 1998), 427.

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off of skilled labour), the movement of people from East-Central Europe to the West has been a constant demographic reality in Europe. In Britain, as in other countries receiving these "new," non-postcolonial, migrants, their presence has had a considerable impact on recent debates on integration, human rights, citizenship, cultural diversity and national identity.

In this article I look at an array of contemporary cinematic and television productions that problematize the impact of "New European" immigration to Britain. Whether shot as documentary reportages (e.g., Tim Samuels's *The Poles Are Coming* (2008) and *The Great Big Romanian Invasion* (2014); Channel 4's three-part series *The Romanians Are Coming* (2015)), straightforward fiction (Dominic Lee's *Outlanders* (2007)), or hybrid docu-dramas (Ken Loach's *It's a Free World* (2007)), the above appear to share several narrative assumptions. To begin with, the stories they choose to tell are those of the "Third World here in London,"[3] to quote Karel's succinct description in Loach's *It's a Free World*; the migrants are portrayed as exploited by and exploitative of a system of global Capital that is based on cheap labour but tempered by a welfare state still in place; and, almost universally, the lands they come from (in the films above, mainly Poland and Romania) are portrayed as poverty-ridden hell-holes (or, at the very least, depressingly grim spaces), poised precariously between post-communist post-industrial dereliction and urban slum. While making occasional reference to all the titles mentioned above, here I will focus my analysis primarily on Channel 4's *The Romanians Are Coming* and Ken Loach's *It's a Free World*.

My main interest in what follows is to explore the filmmakers' choice of narrative focus, which is, without exception, that of the "new subaltern" as seen through the lenses of a largely sympathetic, but often patronising and reductive, directorial gaze. If global migration is a coin with two faces, to echo Zygmunt Bauman, these films show very little of "tourism" (in the broadest sense in which a traveling academic, business professional or vacationer can be seen as a "tourist") and quite a significant proportion of "vagrancy" or "vagabondage" (particularly in the form of undocumented labour).[4] The fluid migration spectrum, at once porous and permeable, has solidified here into a fixed locus from which the new subaltern migrants cannot, metaphorically, "speak," because no one can hear them beyond the unscrupulous sharks who collect them at break of dawn and cart them off to do the invisible work on

3 "And all these people, where are they coming from?" "All over. Brazil, Afghanistan, Poland, Ukraine, Iraq. They were promised work and told lies to. Third World here in London." (0.30'.20")

4 See Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), ch. 4.

which the capitalist system depends, but which remains in most cases unacknowledged. What these films illustrate is that the migrant is not only the central political embodiment of our age, but also the quintessential figure of de-localised Capital, in which a whole range of "3D (dirty, dangerous and dull) jobs"[5] – or, to quote Alex, one of the protagonists in *The Romanians Are Coming*, "shit jobs"[6] – are best filled with people who are likely to be temporary rather than permanent, whose transient status and lack of cultural affiliation to the host nation renders them voiceless to an even greater extent than traditional postcolonial migrants.

As I have argued elsewhere,[7] unlike the larger diasporic congregations formed in the Western metropolis in the course of post-decolonization decades, and which have created micro-communities whose culture, religion, mores and customs have seeped through and influenced the dominant culture, the East-Central European migrants are still dispersed, unsettled, provisional, reluctant to integrate – even though individually they may be integrated to the point of assimilation (as is the case, for instance, of high-achieving professionals). One reason for this is because immigration and integration assume a different dimension in the context of circular patterns of migration, where temporary, short or medium-term settlement are replacing naturalization. This is certainly the case with most migrants from East-Central Europe, whose peripheral status – common to all recent incomers – is enhanced by their inability, or unwillingness, to make a settled home in the new country. Instead, their lives are characterized by transitory habitations and multiple lines of affiliation, many of which lead back to the countries they have left – hence the "little Polands" emerging on many a British street in towns such as Peterborough, a new type of spatial "colonisation" prompting elderly locals like eighty-four-year old Marge in Tim Samuels's docu-reportage *The Poles Are Coming* to declare: "I really do feel a foreigner in my own country."[8] Very often

5 Adrian Favell, "The New Face of East-West Migration in Europe." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 34:5 (2008): 701-716; 704.

6 "In a sense, we are taking jobs from people...but shit jobs – like streetcleaners, and carwashers, and like...working with asbestos." *The Romanians Are Coming*, directed by James Bluemel, narrated by Alex Fechete Petru (City: Keo Films and Channel 4, 2015), television documentary series. (episode 1, 0.14'.54'')

7 See "Joined at the Hip? About Post-Communism in a (Revised) Postcolonial Mode," in *Postcolonial Europe: Essays on Post-Communist Literatures and Cultures* (Amsterdam: Brill, 2015).

8 This aspect alone, and its sociological, economic and political implications, deserves a more in-depth discussion than I can offer here. The new Eastern European immigrants' positioning in metropolitan geography, which forces them to share their proximate *leb-*

the new East-European migrants, with broken English and limited skills, constrained by the precarious conditions of their more or less "shit jobs," inhabit a universe of their own, which only intersects with the host's social world at work. Outside work, they live within their own micro-communities, locked in their "Eastern-European-ness" (in its various national versions because, more often than not, houses are shared by co-nationals, for the same reason of lacking a shared language).

This, of course, is only one side of the coin, the one most frequently rehearsed in political debates featuring in the media, and crucial for the creation of a unified public discourse grounded in variants of the old-age fear of "contamination" and "dispossession."[9] Yet what is less apparent here is the sharp opposite of this trend among East-Central European migrants, namely, a sense of the tenuousness of national connections coupled with the desire to leave the past firmly behind. For the highly-skilled East-Central European immigrant, whose choice of working and living in Britain was not conditioned by post-2004 EU accession terms, class and education often play a far more important role than national or ethnic affiliation; this particular migrant is neither disempowered nor in any perceivable way marginal[10] – he or she has joined the ranks of second and third generation successful Indian and Pakistani doctors, computer engineers, or financial analysts, neatly filling the space of what Balibar terms the "otherness-within-the-limits-of-citizenship,"[11] i.e.,

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ensraum with the older immigrant communities who, in their turn, had displaced the white working classes, is often a source of tension. On the one hand, it provokes irritation, dismay and foreboding in the remaining natives, whose choice of vocabulary to describe the phenomenon warrants little additional commentary: "This area has been completely and utterly swamped." *The Poles Are Coming*. Written and presented by Tim Samuels (London: BBC2, 11 March 2008). Television; they have been "invaded" and "inundated." *The Great Big Romanian Invasion*. Directed by Arron Fellows, written and presented by Tim Samuels (London: BBC1, 17 July 2014). Television special documentary. On the other, it showcases the way successive layers of migration have been accommodated and "naturalized," to the extent that Indian and Chinese shops and restaurants that "we've had for generations" are now "normal" (Fellows, *The Great Big*), but the plethora of East-European food outlets continues to inspire mistrust, if only because of the unintelligible language on the food packaging.

9 See Tim Samuels's take on the matter in *The Great Big Romanian Invasion*, when he researches his own family past and discovers a similar range of reactions in the press and public discourse of the time – the late 1890s Britain – to the "wave" of Jewish economic and political refugees from Romania and elsewhere in Eastern Europe.

10 Even though, as Tom Neil's study argues, every migration involves a certain degree of rupture or "expulsion."

11 Etienne Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene* (New York: Verso, 2002), 159.

of that which is tameable, assimilable, regimentable. Hence a sense of non-belonging with their compatriots doing menial jobs in the hotels, strawberry fields and construction sites of the UK. Unlike these latter, however, theirs is a space of what might be termed "discursive invisibility" (often cherished among these highly-educated professionals): since they do not wear their difference on their sleeve (or their face and bodies, for that matter), they tend to merge into the readily accepted cosmopolitan niches of large British cities. This particular migrant category almost never features in documentary productions, leading to the rather unusual situation in which those who are most empowered economically and socially are the most muted and the least heard at one and the same time.

The end result of this disjunctive character of migration from East-Central Europe is that diasporic groups from former communist countries have not yet cohered into distinct cultural communities – unlike other instances of minoritization (racial, sexual, gender-related), they lack a political function in Western public consciousness, unless it is one of vilification and scapegoating; most of them are not even citizens of the countries where they currently reside. On the one hand, they are highly visible objects of political contention; on the other, they are a tiny fraction of the cosmopolitan, multicultural urban multitude. Having said that, both groups are nonetheless defined by the same condition of "voicelessness" – the former, because it can hardly "speak" (or render itself intelligible to the natives), or because its voice is heavily mediated; the latter because, while its members are individually articulate, and for the larger part highly proficient in English, they are betrayed by an accent inevitably spotted as "foreign" (but not immediately, or sufficiently, "East-European" to become objects of docu-dramas).

In the following, I will examine the premises sketched above by extrapolating the title question of a seminal article by Rostek and Uffelmann,[12] "Can the Eastern-European Migrant Speak?" Further: if they do have a voice, where is it heard and who listens? Is it mediated – and, if yes, by whom and for what purposes? These are some of the questions that I will pose in the following discussion, with a view to challenging the comfortable (and to an extent justified) reading of these visual texts as merely stereotypical and/or biased narrative representations of the Eastern-European migrant figure. Instead, I attempt to tease out spaces from where they can be viewed "against the grain," by focusing on those visual clues and narrative techniques that unveil more

12 Joanna Rostek and Dirk Uffelmann, "Can the Polish Migrant Speak? The Representation of 'Subaltern' Polish Migrants in Film, Literature and Music from Britain and Poland," in *Facing the East in the West: Images of Eastern Europe in British Literature, Film and Culture,* ed. Barbara Korte, Eva Ulrike Pirker and Sissy Helff (Amsterdam, NY: Rodopi, 2010), 311-334.

complex and contradictory human stories than the surface narrative makes apparent. In terms of representational strategies, I identify two crucial aspects of the medium which allow such interstices to emerge: (1) the making of the image itself (including here the point of view occupied by the camera lens; the dominant focal length throughout filming; choice of background; close-ups and panning; etc.); and (2) the question of "voice," both in the concrete sense of who is doing the speaking in these films, who is listening, and whose voice gets heard, and from the larger philosophical and theoretical perspective which lies at the heart of all politically-inflected fictions, namely, the question of the "burden of representation."

The major focus of these films rests squarely on the figure of the economic migrant – your average Polish, Ukrainian, Romanian, Moldovan, Czech, etc., strawberry picker, construction worker, home carer, or their counterparts, the scheming "mobilfon men," as they are generically called in Ukrainian-British Marina Lewycka's 2008 novel *Two Caravans*[13] – an all-encompassing descriptive term for the new sharks of post-communist savage capitalism. These latter deal in people, their hopes, dreams and aspirations, taking full advantage of their naivety and credulity to procure for them rotten, ill-paid jobs on the black market, masked as huge opportunities. In some cases, the dark side of economic exploitation veers into outright criminality – in Dominic Lees's *Outlanders*,[14] the status of workers on the building sites of East London is, in effect, a contemporary form of slave-labour, very similar to that practised on a large scale in various wealthy Arab countries, where Filipinos and Pakistanis often have their passports taken away (as Jan does in the film with all new incomers) and compelled to work with little, if any, protection. Dominic Lees's film is illustrative in other ways as well: the metaphorical title places these people in a no-man's-land of shady dealings and underground accommodations, in which they not only lose their passports, and, with them, symbolically, their belonging to a specific homeland, but also any measure of control over their lives: they are literally herded like cattle, and, when they fall off the shoddy scaffolding, the grim affair – like their bodies – is rapidly buried and made to disappear. It is equally significant, particularly in the current context of refugees and asylum-seekers risking their lives to cross the turbulent waters of the Mediterranean on overcrowded or makeshift dinghies, that these people – Ukrainians and Russians in particular, those from the most underprivileged parts of East Central Europe – make it into Britain via the seas of the north, and are quickly swallowed into the illegal underbelly of London.

13 Marina Lewycka, *Two Caravans* (London: Penguin, 2008). E-Book.

14 *Outlanders*, directed by Dominic Lees (London: Sterling Pictures/ Storm Entertainment, 2008), DVD.

It is very easy, and very tempting, to interpret such films from within a Marxist grid – it is clear that the only freedom apparently gained by the new migrants to the metropolis is the freedom to be more efficiently exploited; this is a more subtle form of imperialism, which simply reinforces the international division of labour and appropriation benefiting First World countries at the expense of Third World, and, now, former Second World postcommunist societies. Indeed, as Favell argues,

> many of these migrants accept sharp downward mobility in terms of status and qualifications in order to fill some low end niche in the labour market, that is grimly justified in terms of its payoff for family back home.[15]

Notwithstanding the populist and xenophobic reactions triggered by the perceived increase in the competition over jobs and resources that their coming entails, such migrants often slip into the background as an invisible but functional "secondary" part of the economy, taking on the "dirty" or inconvenient jobs the natives no longer want to do (such as, for instance, serving at the till of a W. H. Smith shop in a motorway service station at 3am; cleaning and ironing in many middle class homes; or picking butternut squash in the fields of eastern England, something the unemployed British youth wouldn't even dream about – the look of disgust and consternation on their faces when Tim Samuels suggests some of the jobs the Poles are quite happy to do speaks volumes). Even Angie's father in Ken Loach's film, worried though he is about his grandson's future prospects when competing against these "Kosovans and Romanians," is appalled at his daughter's lack of scruples in dealing with desperate people: "Giving them a chance? What about their own countries? Schoolteachers, nurses, doctors. Coming over here, working as waiters on starvation money. What good's that?"[16] In the same vein, Alex, the Rroma-Romanian narrator in Channel 4's *The Romanians Are Coming*, justifies the incomers' acceptance of downward mobility and dirty jobs as the inevitable cost of poverty: "the English countryside is full of Romanian teachers and engineers who earn more picking raspberries than they could ever do back home."[17]

Yet there is a blatancy in these kinds of cultural texts, the uneasy posturing of the militant left-wing Western intellectual speaking for and on behalf of the

15 Favell, "The New Face," 712.

16 *It's a Free World!*, directed by Ken Loach (Filmcoopi Zürich, BIM Distribuzione, EMC Produktion, 2007). Film. (0.46'.20").

17 Bluemel, *The Romanians*, 19'56".

dispossessed – naturally, through the very mouths of credible spokespeople: a working-class British pensioner who understands want and precarity; or a multiply-marginalised and dispossessed Romanian Rroma. In statistical terms, of course, there are very few doctors and nurses working in low-paid "shit jobs" – instead, they are filling the many spaces available in the over-subscribed NHS, which, as many political commentators and pundits admit, would collapse instantly if foreign medical staff were to stop coming. And engineers, if they are any good, are much more likely to be found working in multinational corporations than on the raspberry fields of Britain.

This is one of the main lines of critique that has been brought to the three-part documentary series *The Romanians Are Coming*. Aired just before the UK general election in May, it has generated a great deal of controversy and was seen by many, particularly in the Romanian community in Britain, to have provided convenient fodder to already hyped-up populist fears and xenophobic tendencies associated with EU migration from Eastern Europe. Indeed, the film walks a very fine line between presenting powerful and legitimate human interest stories and choosing to conveniently edit these in order to present only a certain facet of Romanian immigration to Britain. The key questions to ask with respect to this particular film, it seems to me, have very much to do with the two cornerstones of all motion-pictures – intended audience and (narrative and visual) perspective. Clearly, a vast swathe of UK citizens who regularly tune in to the major channels around 9pm in the evening when the film was aired would have watched it, and, depending on class, education, race, geography and many other sociological determinants (including whether or not they have personally met any Romanian), would have formed very different opinions about it. Equally, the many Romanians living in the UK will have most certainly watched it, many with a dark foreboding of the kind of stories it will tell (a foreboding which was, for many of them, fully justified by the content). The most cursory analysis of the websites which hosted forms of public engagement with the film reveals a large hermeneutic chasm between those critical of what they deem to be a stereotypical portrayal of Romanian immigrants, and those (much fewer in number) more attuned to the ironic undertones perceivable under the dominant visual and narrative framework. In many respects, the chasm is indicative as much of the schizophrenic self-perception of Romanians[18] (shared, as I have shown elsewhere, by many of

18 One the one hand, they are aggressively anti-Gypsy, a sentiment that comes out in other films which feature Romanian migrants, such as Tim Samuels's *The Great Big Romanian Invasion*, and critical of what they see as a universal 'conspiracy' against Romanians; on the other, they are filled with self-loathing at the shabby, 'uncivilised' nature of their mother-country.

the smaller nations in East-Central Europe), as it is of the ambiguity inherent in the medium of representation.

To start with the title itself, the definite article "the" is a key bone of contention: a marker of both homogeneity and exhaustiveness (it is these, "*the*" Romanians who are coming into Britain, the kinds of people portrayed in the film, the poor or very poor, the gypsies, the "scum"), it is also highly ironical, although the irony is less evident than the more obvious mocking tone of Tim Samuels's BBC production entitled *The Great Big Romanian Invasion.*[19] "What about the software designers, programmers, financial analysts, telecoms engineers and doctors who grow the UK economy with their skills, innovation and hard work? Why do they never feature in these documentaries?" was the oft-repeated question on numerous blogs and public platforms immediately after the film was aired. "Why is a gypsy, Alex Fechete, the chosen narrator of this story of coming Romanians?" So, head on, we are confronted with the very postcolonial issue of the "burden of representation." Who is this film speaking about – but also, crucially, who is it speaking for? In the case of films produced with a documentary intention, this question is doubly relevant: unlike "artistic" productions, the aim of the documentarist is to allow his subjects to be heard in as unmediated a manner as possible, to create for them a space of articulation that is otherwise lacking in the public media – in short, to give various subaltern groups a form of discursive agency. Naturally, there are limitations of time and editing; the voices of the chosen subjects have already undergone a process of selection, translation, and elimination by the time they make it into the final version of the film. In addition, in the case I am surveying, precisely which "immigrants" are deemed to possess sufficient representativity to feature in a documentary is a highly contentious issue, and the choices made by the filmmakers can equally be read as an index of the desired audience response rather than a picture of some sort of "objective reality." And it is here that the major cause of public outrage against the film among the larger Romanian community, both in the UK and back in Romania, reveals itself: it rests precisely in its choice of narrative perspective, which brings to the centre, through the clever, compassionate, and highly articulate voice of

19 The contrast here is that between the "invasion" postulated in the title and vociferously predicted by both politicians and pundits, and the actual arrival, on 1 January 2007 – the first post-Accession day for Romanians and Bulgarians – of precisely *one* "new Romanian," Victor Spirescu, the pig-farmer, who, slightly dazed and confused, is completely overwhelmed by the swarm of cameras and journalists present to record the "big invasion"; he subsequently becomes a minor television celebrity and, soon after, an object of public debate and loathing – the common fate of all manner of pseudo-stars.

the self-declared "proud to be Gypsy-Romanian"[20] Alex, perhaps the most peripheral and marginalized of ethnic groups in contemporary Europe – and Romania in particular, where they happen to live in large numbers.

On close inspection, there seems to be an almost direct correlation between the degree of subalternity/voicelessness/lack of agency of a particular human group and the frequency of its representation in both critical discourse and creative work – the more a social category is unable or unwilling to make itself heard, the more it is taken up as "object" of a narrative drive foisted on it from the outside (the producer and the director are, in most cases, part of the hegemonic culture). We might call this phenomenon "discursive over-representation": in nearly all the films, images and texts about Eastern Europe one can discern the highly representative value of the Gypsy figure, ubiquitous not only, or even primarily, because of their spatial density, but precisely on account of their subaltern invisibility. As the quintessential "alien" within, at the very bottom of the economic ladder, with no qualifications or skills to speak of, "the gypsy" is an elusive figure of constantly shifting borders and existential un-settlement, the repository of many of the repressed fears and anxieties of "civilized" Europe – and perhaps the most potent symbol of migratory vagrancy. In *The Romanians Are Coming*, they are shown as multiply-marginalized subalterns fleeing a country which does not want them, and which has relegated them to the peripheries of the social order, both spatially and discursively.

The opening images of the trailer present the gypsy ghetto at the margins of Cluj, Pata Rât, which looks very much like the favelas and slums in many a developing country; the first episode then starts on images of what are clearly groups of Rroma[21] people living in makeshift abodes and cardboard boxes in various London parks and public squares – the eye of the camera insists on dirt, squalor, rotten teeth, sunken eyes, in short, those attributes which, as Alex the narrator puts it very crudely, addressing the British audience directly, "scare the shit out of you."[22] The ironic narrative voice even agrees with Nigel Farage that "those gypsies," the ones shown begging in the streets, should be sent home; later, we are shown a non-Rroma Romanian "benefit scrounger"

20 This is how Alex, the narrator, introduces himself at the very start of the film.

21 I am using the double "r" spelling for the "Rroma" people to indicate the sub-group of the larger Romani ethnicity living in Central and South-Eastern Europe. "Gypsy" is used when (1) the intention is to highlight its pejorative character (I also use single inverted comas in this case); (2) when it is a self-designation (i.e. "Gypsy-Romanian"); and (3) when it coincides with the common public designation of a space or group (a "gypsy ghetto" rather than a "Rroma" ghetto)

22 Bluemel, *The Romanians*, 0.2'.26".

taking advantage of the "largesse" of the British state that gives Jobseekers' Allowance and free access to the NHS to any EU incomer, thus apparently confirming the worst British fears and stereotypes.

But the images – poor, run-down, prejudiced Romania vs. plentiful, generous Britain – belie the more complex human stories that follow, in which the apparently unmediated truth of the image is revealed to be simultaneously reductive and partial by the individual voices whose stories are interweaving. By turns witty, ironical, self-mocking, sad and tragic, they present a real challenge to a film audience accustomed to watching to the detriment of listening. So, the often invisible narrator interjects after showing Stefan's glee at being handed taxpayers' money by the impersonal cash-point, "before you start hating the benefits tourists, remember this – migrants create one in seven jobs in Britain."[23] Stefan may not be the "representative migrant" here – he seems to be fairly unsuccessful at getting a job, whereas most Eastern European migrants are quick to fill the many available slots of the "3D" economy – but it is not for lack of trying. In fact, he is shown ready and willing to do almost any work anybody would care to give him in order to make enough money to pay for his daughter's hospital treatment back in Romania, where doctors have made a shoddy business of repairing her broken leg. But, in more ways than one, he is one of the "voiceless" – his inability to use even basic conversational English bars him from the most mundane of potential work positions and leaves him stuck in a kind of limbo existence in which he cannot go home (because the family would consider him a failure, and he will feel guilty), but cannot enter the proper economic circuits either. Even when some sort of work does materialize, it is often so badly paid that Adrian, who ends up washing cars all day for £180 a week (most of which he sends home to his family to keep the children from starvation) cannot really afford to pay rent anywhere. The quick juxtaposition of images – on the one hand the squalid former mining town of Lupeni in Romania, on the other the elegant skyline of Burton-on-Trent – only serves to heighten the irony of his situation: in Lupeni, he at least lived under a roof, surrounded by his family; now, washing the cars of the natives in that prettiest of English towns, he lives on a used bed under a bridge, sharing his abode with the rats. In another story, Sandu, the sentimental and toothless father of a large family living in the gypsy ghetto on the outskirts of Baia Mare in Northern Romania, is confronted with the same "wall of language": having left to find work on what he trusts to be more welcoming shores, he is touchingly innocent in his naïve belief that "the English will throw us a rope," that he will be able to build a life "surrounded by people

23 Ibid., 0.33'15".

who want us there"[24] – but, of course, since he speaks no English, there is no job, and no place awaiting him "there."

The irony of his pronouncements cannot escape the viewer – one need not be a gypsy in order to be forced to live on the streets, or to return home empty-handed and with broken dreams. The likes of Stefan, Adrian or Sandu – whether in the cauldron of East-European ethnic prejudice and savage capitalism, or chasing the mirage of a welcoming but often equally ruthless and prejudiced West – are among the dispossessed and the marginal, their voices usually unheard. While they may have displaced the traditional British working classes in many former industrial towns, they share with them a similar status of subalternity. Indeed, as other commentators have remarked, much of the imagery associated with East-European immigrants is similar to that bestowed on poor working-class whites, Britain's new "underclass":[25] their dress code is poor, their taste unrefined, their speech rough and uncouth, their manners uncivilised. Even their faces bear the mark of their low social status, and they are, almost always, the ones most likely to voice their unease at the "swarms" of migrants who are competing with them for jobs and resources. This resemblance, or mirroring, is fully exploited in Ken Loach's feature film *It's A Free World*, which successfully straddles the border between fiction and docudrama.

Like many of the workers who make an appearance in Tim Samuels's *The Poles Are Coming*, Karol, the Polish protagonist of the film, is hard-working, honest and presented in an overwhelmingly sympathetic light; he is also smart, sensitive, and capable of a degree of social and emotional empathy which Angie, the English working-class single mother turned immigrant recruiter, seems to be lacking. But while he is thus placed on a morally superior rung of the ladder, his character-construction lacks the complexity and ambivalence that define Angie's actions. Rostek and Uffelmann see Karol's function as circumscribed by the message that the director wishes to convey, and critique the film precisely for failing to make his voice – and, by extension, the voice of the immigrant labourers on whose behalf he is often found speaking – heard. Indeed, in some respects, Karol's voice, while strongly present in the film, is rarely listened to: when he expresses his discontent at the way he and the other forty-nine people recruited from Poland by Angie's agency were

24 Ibid., 12.24.

25 Vedrana Veličković, "Balkanisms Old and New: The Discourse of Balkanism and Self-Othering in Vesna Goldsworthy's *Chernobyl Strawberries* and *Inventing Ruritania*," in *Facing the East in the West: Images of Eastern Europe in British Literature, Film and Culture,* ed. Barbara Korte, Eva Ulrike Pirker and Sissy Helff (Amsterdam, NY: Rodopi, 2010), 185-204; 198.

treated, and directly confronts her with the fraud her company has committed against the migrant labourers, she apologises and temporarily "pacifies" him by sleeping with him. His articulacy does not translate into concrete agency, for he raises no claims and thus does not, in fact, disturb the functioning of a system based on precisely the repetition of such frauds committed against people who, unlike Karol, may lack the same assertiveness or fluency.

Even his final choice of returning to Poland to his fiancée and dog, which reaffirms the primacy of affective and emotional ties over economic need, can be – and has been – read from within the particular ideological agenda of the film, dominated by the perspective of the liberal-leftist Western intellectual, whose mouthpiece the highly articulate, but otherwise disempowered, Karol is.[26] He feels excluded and foreign in British society, and does not want to be "a servant." Much as the audience can admire his dignified and noble deportment, however, he does not really speak the language of the many other migrants whose desperate economic circumstances force them to trade their emotional well-being for the modicum of security provided by their "shitty jobs": he, unlike them, can speak good English (he even translates on their behalf, thus setting himself apart as a mediator); and, crucially, he chooses to decline payment for his services, thus calling into question his "representativity" for the masses of disenfranchised migrants.

Rostek and Uffelmann argue that Karol

> is not as much voicing a Polish position, but that of his English creator … he is functionalised as a clichéd bearer of morality and idealistic values. The voice of the Polish migrant is stifled by that of an English director with a well-defined social agenda.[27]

Yet the critics' argument is somewhat skewed by their own agenda here. When they see in Karol nothing more than the mouthpiece of the anti-capitalist discourse of a director known for his leftist sensibilities, they, too, overwrite Karol's intra-textual agency with the expectations of representativity I have talked about earlier – the need for him to function as some kind of symbolic embodiment of a rather abstract entity which we might call "the exploited Polish (or East-European) migrant." In my view, it is precisely by allowing him a voice and an option distinct from that of his peers that the film rises above mere stereotype: in the person of Karol we see not only an economic migrant, not only a Pole, not only an Eastern European, but, more importantly, a human

26 See Rostek and Uffelmann, "Polish Migrant."

27 Ibid., 313-314.

being who chooses to rise above the pre-determined economic factors that seem to dictate everybody else's actions in the film.

There are other ways in which the film eschews easy moral judgment and offers, instead, a more even-handed appraisal of murky situations. Thus, any clear-cut considerations of subalternity are complicated by the main protagonists' own marginal, underprivileged status within the British social hierarchy: Angie comes from a working-class background (which her voice clearly betrays), is a single mother, and has a debt to settle, a situation that puts a heavy burden on her son, Jamie, who develops a proclivity for fighting and bullying in school; it would not be a great leap of the imagination to see how the change in her behaviour, and her willingness to get her hands dirty, are direct results of her own difficult situation. Her choices are fairly circumscribed, and her ruthlessness is that of a mother for whom her child's interests trump other moral considerations. She may be flawed and naïve, but she is more than simply an ideological prop; one can sometimes sense her unease at treating the migrants like disposable pawns (which she keeps rationalizing to herself in terms of economic necessity, as the only way to operate in a world of *homo homini lupus*), and there are instances when she acts compassionately, for example when supporting an Iranian refugee who is desperately looking for work. In other ways, however, the film's otherwise complicated lines of subalternity follow a rather predictable pattern – it is Angie who acts as a cold-hearted "white exploiter" (even though it is doubtful that there are many white working-class English women becoming immigrant gang-masters overnight), while Rose, her partner, whom we are presumably supposed to perceive as even more "subaltern" on account of her skin colour, decides to withdraw her support when Angie turns a caravan of illegal immigrants in to the police. It feels almost as if her status as a "racial subaltern" makes her more prone to sympathize with this contemporary form of near-economic slavery. Her moral stature – like Karol's – is thus higher than Angie's, despite their similarly underprivileged social position.

It is in such episodes that the voice of the director clearly trumps that of the characters he is portraying. The episode in which a group of angry and frustrated (but strangely articulate) immigrants kidnap Angie's son, and then ask her whether she thinks her son is worth more than theirs, wears its critical agenda on the sleeve. Their representation as non-violent, moral mouthpieces in direct opposition with the exploitative Angie is clearly ideological, and belongs wholly in the narrative space of "moral supremacy" described by van Heuckelom and Rostek and Uffelmann[28] – they lack credibility because

28 Kris Van Heuckelom, "Polish (Im)Potence: Shifting Representations of Polish Labour Migration in Contemporary European Cinema," in *Contemporary Polish Migrant Culture in*

their actions, speech patterns and the issues they raise are not those of either realistic migrants or hard-core thugs.

This particular episode further highlights questions of voicelessness and intelligibility. Throughout the action the kidnappers speak some unidentified East-European tongue, which in the subtitled DVD version is described as "Polish" but which is, in fact, a South-Slavic tongue, possibly Serbo-Croat.[29] For the English-speaking viewer, however, it all comes down to the same incomprehensible babble (it is doubtful many English viewers will have picked up on the differences between the Polish used in the film, and this other East-European sounding idiom), which needs to be translated in order to be listened to. Furthermore, it raises the larger issue of who exactly is "listening" to these films. It is worth noting that, of all Ken Loach's feature films, *It's a Free World* has probably had the least impact – it only had a one-day UK opening in cinemas (so very little public exposure), and then a direct-to-DVD treatment. Is it entirely speculative to assume that this was also because of its subject matter? Not many in the larger public are interested in the voice of the East-European immigrant, unless that voice emerges already "translated" and "interpreted" by public media in a fashion that reassures or otherwise confirms the audience's own views on the matter – and I will show a little later how this also applies to the different genre of documentary reportage, and to Channel 4's *The Romanians Are Coming* in particular.

As I trust has become clear from my brief discussion, where Ken Loach's film excels is in highlighting the central role of voice and articulation in the representation of subaltern categories, including migrants – voice not only in terms of "who can speak" and "who is listening," but also in terms of what markers of difference the actual voice carries within. In Britain, as is widely known, "accent" is not only a badge revealing geographical origin or ethnicity, but also, crucially, a token of class and education. This is one of the reasons why East European migrants are seen both in contrast with the white *lumpen-proletariat*, composed mainly of disaffected male youth (unlike them, the migrants are almost invariably portrayed as exceedingly hard working, diligent and uncomplaining), but also as part of the same subaltern periphery – they are white, but their speech is broken and heavily accented. Both categories are therefore perceived as alien by the respectable, educated, well-spoken middle

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Germany, Ireland, and the UK, ed. Joanna Rostek and Dirk Uffelmann (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011), 277-298; Rostek and Uffelmann, "Polish Migrant."

29 In its almost unconscious association with violence and thuggery, the figure of the Serb is, in the perilous hierarchy of subalternity, on an even lower rung than that of Polish EU citizens.

classes, which are united across national and ethnic boundaries in their discomfort towards these people with rough voices and questionable behaviour. The distinction drawn here is not between British/foreign (migrant), but in terms of class: the same awkwardness the British middle-classes feel when unwittingly coming into contact with young "chavs" who would rather stay on the dole and drink their cans of cheap beer than dirty their hands in agricultural work[30] is also felt by the middle-class professional East European migrant towards his fellow labourer countrymen[31] – "they" are not like "us" (civilized, clean, educated); "we" are more like "you" (the white British middle-classes), not like "them," even if we happen to share a passport.

The considerations above explain to a large extent the angry and vociferous reactions with which the documentary *The Romanians Are Coming* was received both in Romania and within the Romanian immigrant community in Britain. Its revolt at being represented by the pathetic voices of the likes of Stefan or Sandu only betrays its unwillingness – the result of a combustible mixture of self-consciousness, cultural anxiety, and historical inadequacy – to contemplate such people, and their stories, as coeval with theirs. Some of the images the film insists on, of derelict, run-down, post-apocalyptic looking spaces, filled with garbage heaps through which little boys forage for scrap metal and, instead of food, are content to breathe in paint solvent from a bag, are at the furthest remove from (though, spatially, often in close vicinity of) the big shiny malls that have crowded the outskirts of Romanian cities, populated by the kids of the new middle classes, holding expensive mobile phones and eating at various fast-food outlets. They are both equally representative of Romania, and yet the former are never claimed as the nation's "own" – indeed, the likes of Alex, and Stefan and Sandu are desperate to leave not only in order to escape crushing poverty, but chiefly because, in the shiny quarters of post-communist Romania, they are socially and culturally unwanted, and politically invisible.

Yet, of course, very few want them "over here" either, unless they come to care for the mums and dads sent away to be looked after by strangers in

30 See Samuels, *The Poles*, 0.45'.15"-46'.18".

31 There are of course shades and degrees here as well; while the successful East-European professionals might respect – and often use the services of – the skilled workers with whom they share nationality, they do so up to the limit where they are forced to come into contact with some of their "cultural manifestations" (the music they listen to, the noises in their overcrowded flats, the way they educate their children, their questionable tastes in fashion, their preference for cheap – if wholesome – foods, their penchant, in the case of young single males especially, for expensive gadgets and flashy clothes (many of these shared, of course, with their counterparts, the "chavs").

Britain's numerous – yet permanently understaffed – care homes.[32] The second episode is built less on a polyphony of voices than on visual contrast: between the online images of the Grange Sands care home, suggesting manorial grandeur, and the reality of the grey, grim, and completely unspectacular Northern English city of Sheffield where Mihaela, the Romanian nurse, arrives expectantly; between an England of the imagination, of lush green parks and the Beatles, in which the homes for the elderly look like "castles," and in which people are nice, smiling and happy, and the reality on the ground – the smallness and drabness of the apartments, the empty tired faces, the rain and the cold. The superposition of images speaks millions: the tiny flat on the outskirts of Sheffield and the family home she has left behind, a large well-lit and well-kept house, with vine leaves hanging in a pretty garden, and the sparkle of family life and neighbourliness; the nurse with her husband and mother and daughter – warm, beautiful, perhaps a little vain, slightly naïve, but enthusiastic and sympathetic – and the faces of the English people asked to give their opinions on immigrants, which present us with the British version of the tired, uneducated Romanian gypsies we see at the beginning of the film. A similarly successful juxtaposition occurs in *The Great Big Romanian Invasion*, where the modestly-dressed, decent-looking, middle-aged Romanian cab driver[33] stands in stark contrast with the rowdy behaviour of the inebriated British youths out on the town on a Friday night – all that the quiet man can declare in front of the camera, in his rather basic English, is that "it is not normal," echoing a sentiment shared by many East-Europeans whose previous acquaintance with the values of British civilisation may have included Jane Austen, but not the delights of Britain's drinking culture.

It is time to return to the mutated form of Spivak's original question "Can the Subaltern Speak" and see to what extent her assumptions – not only that the subaltern cannot speak in their own voice and are almost always "spoken for," but, more importantly, that even when they do make themselves heard in their own voices, their discourse incorporates or otherwise reflects the analytical categories of the hegemonic culture – apply in the case of reportage films such as *The Romanians Are Coming*. In many ways the film offers a typical example of the old adage "damned if you do, damned if you don't" – however

32 Mihaela's remark is worth quoting in full: "where I come from nobody sends their mums and dads away to be looked after by strangers... But I guess it makes sense if you have so much money and so little time." Bluemel, *The Romanias*, 23'05".

33 He is one of a cohort of Romanians recruited by a British agency trying to source taxi drivers for lower league English towns, who has passed his initial training in Bucharest and has come to the town of Maidstone, in Kent, at the prompting of his Jane Austen-loving wife.

you look at it, there will always be voices which are not heard and stories that are not told. On the one hand, the film confirms (even amplifies) the stereotypical image of the Romanian (often conflated with Rroma) migrant;[34] on the other hand, by giving voice to some of the most marginalized social categories, in terms of both class and ethnicity, and allowing their stories to be heard by a larger audience, the film not only upset the sensibilities of Romanians, but also projected an outsider's perspective on the values and assumptions of the receiving British culture. The most illustrative case here is Alex, the Canadian-Romanian middle-class immigrant turned homeless bum, who, throughout the film, provides the most subversive take on the verities held dear both by mainstream British and Romanian culture. He is gleeful when he shows the audience how he and his mates manage to make a "home" of sorts in London's parking lots, using only their wits and well-honed survival skills, right under the nose of the London Metropolitan Police. The contrast between his obvious intelligence, articulacy and humour and the rather appalling conditions in which he is forced to lead his life (not least because, in one of the most often discussed aspects of the systemic failure of the welfare state, if you are homeless, so without a stable address, you cannot get a job; if you cannot get a job, you can never afford a home, however tiny and dingy) does not provoke pity, however, for two reasons: one, he is taking it all in his stride rather gracefully (and one wonders how many of us, knocked out of our comfortable lives either by our own misdemeanours, or other infelicitous circumstances, could accept it all as a kind of "life-lesson," as Alex seems to be doing) and, two, because his voice is powerful and compelling and throws into question many of the assumptions held by the audience – among others that if you are hard-working and law-abiding you will get by and eventually climb the social ladder; that the British state hands out benefits to the whole motley crew of immigrants who come in (and while Stefan does have his teeth fixed on the NHS and is happy to get his benefit money, all the others we are shown get absolutely nothing).

34 The comment posted on one of the forums by a Romanian viewer expresses rather well the perils of this delicate positioning: "As a Romanian living in London, I felt the first episode of the show was sad and cheap, but heartfelt. I watched it with George, an English friend of mine who weirdly said that he sympathizes with the main character, Sandu … George says he realizes that not all Romanians are like Sandu, but 'if I had watched the show without previously having met any Romanians, I would have thought that Romania is a ghetto country and that everyone lives with ten other people, all crammed up in one room'." Anamaria Sandra, "The British TV Show 'The Romanians Are Coming' Has Made Real Romanians Very Angry," *Vice*, February 26, 2015, accessed September 29, 2015 (http://www.vice.com/read/the-romanians-are-coming-documentary-channel-4-protest-876)

In many other respects, however, and in spite of its social revelations, the documentary clearly speaks from within the framework of the "receiving culture" – the choice of "representative" migrants, and the imagery that accompanies their narrative voices partakes of the same discourse that figures Eastern Europe as a dark space of underdevelopment, chaos, post-communist dereliction, and insufficient modernity. This viewing angle is present even in the more sophisticated representatives of the genre, such as Tim Samuels's two BBC films: from the reflections of otherwise balanced and liberal public people like the councillor in Peterborough, who highlights one of the frequently encountered problems with East-European newcomers, namely, their utter disregard for basic civic notions of rubbish collection and neighbourhood cleanliness (*The Poles Are Coming*), to the typical middle-class English car salesman who is put off by the swarming hordes of gypsies driving his customers away with their offensive smell: "they create a noise, they create a smell."[35] And, of course, dirt, squalor and the confirmation of one's own prejudices makes for much better prime-time TV than a story about the big bright brains seeping out of Eastern Europe and pumping up the British economy. In one of the most pertinent public comments I have read about the film, a Cuban lady neatly sums up both the commercial considerations and the voyeuristic pleasure that lie at the basis of such documentary productions:

> It is the same with documentaries on Cuba, whether done by the BBC or by Cubans themselves who want to distribute their material internationally. Both want to sell and average does not sell; only extremes do. Broken streets, collapsing houses, loud people (yet gay and hospitable), filth, prostitution, heightened sensuality, childish happiness, complete absence of birth control; that you can put on a show with. The fact that the documentary was narrated by a Romanian makes it twice as pathetically biased. First, the Romanian was getting paid by the producers; second, people from impoverished countries tend to have a cynical, self-defeating image of their countries and themselves … and third, are perfectly aware that their poverty is good show material and willingly perpetuate cliches and let themselves be petted and pitied by the "superior" documentary-producing culture.[36]

The commercial considerations are evident to anyone; as for the voyeuristic pleasure, it is derived in large measure from the distance created between the viewer and the objects of representation by the mediating eye

35 Fellows, *The Great Big*.

36 A comment posted on the Guardian website, under the review of the film, accessed June 1, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/culture/tvandradioblog/2008/mar/12/lastnightstvthepolesarec

of the camera. While images are usually deemed to be more immediate and impactful than written narrative, they also shrink the space of post-narrative reflection – the audience is inevitably drawn in by the moving images, while the complex nature of the human stories is often overlooked, and soon forgotten. The retinal impression stays longer, even while the voices face away. In addition, the contemporary filmic medium, which has perfected the techniques of the original "moving pictures," shares many of the representational mechanisms of still photography, with its immediacy and actuality, but also its interested, sometimes politically motivated, framing: like photography, film can (and often does) have an ethical-documentary value (think *Shoah*, 1985, *In the Year of the Pig*, 1968, *The Battle of Chile*, 1975-1979, even *The Corporation*, 2003); yet its apparently unmediated "showing" which proclaims its transparency – and implicit association with the truth of the case – can also become a means of manipulation infinitely more effective than textual inscription. As simultaneously record and distortion (or, rather, partial representation) of reality, film aptly illustrates the over-determination of signs, their slippery nature and unreliability. But whereas narrative incorporates its own signifying instability in the telling, the moving picture, like its older still cousin, pretends to offer an unmediated version of reality, even as it wears the disguise of its technical and artistic code – its carefully controlled handling of space, point of view, movement and colour. It thus enacts the tension between capturing observable reality and the filmic conventions that codify this reality. The journalistic nature of the reportage-cum-documentary genre further obscures the ambiguity inherent in the medium.

To conclude, the figure of the Eastern European migrant as it emerges in these films is, in many respects, as controversial and ambivalent as its presence in the general public discourse mediated by print and online publications. Nonetheless, what the human stories at the heart of these films do, in the end, succeed in conveying – often against the limitations of the medium and the sometimes uni-directional narrative thrust – is a depth of character and complexity of circumstance that public media is overwhelmingly lacking. Their protagonists tell compelling, subtly-affecting stories, and, to the extent to which these upset commonly-held biases and stereotypes, the films can be seen as providing a substantial measure of discursive agency to underrepresented migrants from Eastern Europe. While the question of precisely which voices are seen as normative continues to raise legitimate issues of "representativity," the film productions surveyed above have the merit of raising critical awareness of the problems faced by the most marginal among subaltern groups, those whose social (in)visibility is almost always coupled with political and cultural disempowerment. They clearly indicate that not all movement is inherently positive, or desirable, and thus confront widely held

notions of the benefits of global mobility. Like the circulation of goods, the circulation of people is shown to have its own problematic facet, usually associated with the exploitative practices of global capital. They may not speak for or on behalf of all – or even most – East-European immigrants (certainly not the most successful, integrated and cosmopolitan ones); and they may, on occasion, collude in presenting an image of East-European migration that confirms existent public prejudice. At the same time, however, they compel their audiences – whether the majority British or the mainstream Polish or Romanian immigrant communities – to revisit and perhaps revise their own assumptions about precisely whose voices we need to hear more of. Because, by and large, we like the global circulation of capital and goods, but we (and by "we" here I mean both the host nations mainly of Western Europe and, paradoxically, the European – including East-European – immigrant communities in their midst) are much more suspicious of the global circulation of people. We have nothing against using the latest gadget sweated out in Third World workshops, or we admire the most recent high-rise building in the City of London, but we don't want to see the faces of those working to make these happen, for fear we might be confronted too abruptly with the image and reality of the global iniquity upon which we thrive. If a film takes the audience, even momentarily, out of its comfort zone, then, I daresay, it deserves to be seen and heard.

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