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„New Marquise de Custine”, or, About a Certain Manipulation.

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**"New Marquise de Custine,"
or, About a Certain Manipulation**

International-level events that have infused the life of the European continent with a lot of dynamic in recent years also force us to once again ponder the question of what does it mean to be a Pole or a European in the early years of the 21st century and how should the Europe we inhabit look like. Ways to answer that question, as revealed to some extent during the fateful weeks when Poland was fervently supporting the "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine, are important not only for people living between the Oder and the Bug, choices that Poland makes may have a significant impact on the shape and evolution of the wider European consciousness.

One assertion, whose author undertook to reconstruct Polish self-awareness from outside and following the rules of scientific discourse, is presented in the article of Maxim K. Waldstein published in the English journal *Social Identities* (2002, Vol. 8, No. 3) and later revised and reprinted in one of the most important Russian literary criticism magazines.¹ The significance of this assertion

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1 M. Вальдштейн "Новый Маркиз де Кюстин, или Польский тревелог о России в постколониальном прочтении", новое литературное обозрение, 2003, N 60, с. 125-144. From here on-

in the context of the trouble with defining Polish identity as either eastern or western was already pointed out by Maria Janion,² who followed Waldstein's lead and invoked the "cardinal sins" of Polish self-identification. Waldstein's article, however, is not only important because it contains a plethora of generalizations about Poles, Poland, and Eastern Europe. It is also a text that reveals the mechanisms of rhetorical "appropriation" of described realities³ while simultaneously succumbing to said mechanisms.

The discussed study belongs to an extensive host of postcolonial analyses that investigate the "system of theory and practice" which has over the years shaped "the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures."⁴ The author, while declaring himself an explorer of "ways in which to revise the Russian historical experience" (N, 125), does not really investigate the geopolitical and cultural awareness of the Russian people and instead undertakes to become "familiar with the perspective of erstwhile subjects or satellites of the empire" (N, 125), which is related, as the article seems to indicate, to revealing their "peculiarities," as well as contradictions and distortions that keep appearing.

This "expository" piece is focused on Ryszard Kapuściński's *Imperium*,⁵ one of the more important works of Polish literature dealing with our neighbor to the East. The researcher's interest in the book is not derived purely from its aspect of "representing" Russian culture in Western travel literature (N, 125). By revealing these representations as negative points of reference for Central European identity ("the 'orientalization' and 'ethnicization' of Russia

wards, the locations of all the quotes from this article will be placed in the main body of the article and marked with the letter N. [Translated into English from Polish quotes.]

- 2 M. Janion, "Poland Between East and West," *Second Texts* 6 (2003): 131-149
- 3 Works written in Polish that deal with the mythologized and emotionally-charged collection of images, representations, and concepts related to Russia as the "other" and "alien" include: A. Kępiński, *Lach i Moskal. Z dziejów stereotypu* (Warszawa-Kraków: PWN, 1990); W. Dzwonkowski, *Rosja a Polska* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Interim, 1991); A. Giza, *Połączkowie i Moskale: wzajemny ogląd w krzywym zwierciadle (1800-1917)* (Szczecin: Polskie Pismo i Książka, 1993); W. Karpiński, *Polska a Rosja. Z dziejów słowiańskiego sporu* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1994); J. Maciejewski, "Stereotyp Rosji i Rosjanina w polskiej literaturze i świadomości społecznej," *Więź* 2 (1988): 183-197; E. Pogonowska, *Dzikie biesy. Wizja Rosji sowieckiej w antybolszewickiej poezji polskiej lat 1917-1932* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2002).
- 4 E.W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 7.
- 5 The first Polish edition was published in 1993. This article will use the English edition published by Knopf in 1994. From here onwards, all quotes will be taken from the latter edition, will be located in the main body of the text, and marked with the letter I and a page number.

is directly related to the imposition of certain attributes traditionally and stubbornly [...] ascribed to Eastern Europe, including nationalism, fetishism, ahistoricity, and backwardness"; N, 140) Waldstein questions the permanence of the self-identification of Central European peoples as one created to be a safeguard against the East.⁶ At the moment when, as the author mockingly writes, "the West is ready to embrace the chosen trio: Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary," the only significant border is the one "between 'civic' societies of Central Europe and the 'not-fully-European' [...] nations of Europe's southern and eastern fringes." (N, 141-142) For Waldstein, such a reading of Kapuściński's book becomes a "symptom of incorporating 'Central Europe' with its intellectuals into the sphere of basic Western discourses and institutions." (N, 142) Waldstein's interesting study, however, one that reveals the mechanisms of "cultural translations" present in Kapuściński's book and exposes the ambiguity of the relationship between traveller and the reality he describes, on which he forces a somewhat "orientalizing" perspective, is tainted with bias and the surrender of the most basic loyalty towards the analyzed text. The author's intent to unmark the "stereotypic image of Russia" (N, 126) results in a very specific reading of *Imperium*, characterized by selective recapitulations and quotes that omit not only the literary aspect, with its ambiguity or symbolism,⁷ but also the more inconvenient passages (The only "appreciated" characteristic of the book is its suggestiveness; however, even that particular trait is considered by the author to be an element of propagandistic influence of the text).

How, then, does Waldstein's attempt to replace the Polish writer in representing himself, committed to the benefit of the West and the Russians (especially significant in the context of the author lamenting the fact that no publishing house is releasing Kapuściński's books in Russia), look, an attempt that basically makes Kapuściński's text unnecessary? The reading's starting point is the exceptionless (in any case, there's no mention of any exceptions) assumption as to the inevitability of the "orientalizing" perspective in European travel writing. By effortlessly equating the author of *The Emperor* with "numerous generations of travellers from the dominant (imperial) Europe

6 Milan Kundera's essay about "two Europes," published in the early 1980s, protesting the customary inclusion of countries like Czechoslovakia, Hungary, or Poland into Eastern Europe, generally recognized as a declaration of Eastern European and Western identity is an obvious polemic context for Waldstein's article, and one which the author invokes himself. The Polish version was published under the title "Zachód porwany albo tragedia Europy środkowej (A Kidnapped West, or the Tragedy of Eastern Europe)" in *Zeszyty Literackie* 5 (1984): 14-31.

7 Treated herein unambiguously as "fetishization" of the described reality, its obfuscation at the level of words and signs. (cf. N, 131)

journeying to the subordinate, colonized East" (N, 126), already in the introduction does Waldstein paint *Imperium* as an "'Orientalist' text, emphasizing self-identification through the depiction of an inferior yet threatening Other" (N, 126) and accuse the author of perpetuating the tradition of portraying 'Them' as a certain subordinate, measurable, calculable, and predictable entity in order to, indirectly, separate oneself as an individual." (N, 127) On the other hand, the investigator deprives the Polish writer, due to him being an inhabitant of Eastern Europe, of the ability to "effectively express opinions on Russia from the perspective of West-East," an ability bestowed only on "true" Europeans.⁸

It is really baffling to see Waldstein internalize the assumptions typical of postcolonial discourse, understood as the exploration of the connections between the system of ideas explaining an object inscribed into that object and "structures of imperious domination,"⁹ political and/or cultural, in order to defend against the "illegitimate appropriation" of this "orientalizing" perspective by the Polish writer. This "illegitimacy" of the point of view assumed by Kapuściński is rooted, at least according to Waldstein, in the distorted communication between the subject of the imperial "orientalizing" gaze – inhabitants of former colonies (Poland) and its object – the empire itself (Russia and the Soviet Union, cf. N, 126), as well as the inability to justify it by using the need to enact retaliatory measures ("In the last two centuries, neither Russian nor Soviet bureaucrats and intellectuals created or tried to created an 'orientalized' image of Poland," cf. N, 127; never employed the image of the 'White Negro,' cf. N, 128). This idealized picture of our relationship with our neighbor to the East is also connected to veiled doubts as to whether Poland really was a victim of imperial aggression¹⁰ and the insistence on highlighting the differences (curiously unexplained in the article) between Russian and Western empires, differences that, as we might surmise, would include primarily Russia's lesser effectiveness in implementing the more invasive of

8 Therefore, the matter of who is writing the "orientalizing" description becomes a significant problem for the researcher. It's not a Frenchman, actually not a "true" Westerner at all, he is a Pole, and thus a representative of a nation whose cultural association is unclear. As Waldstein writes: "The word 'Frenchman' is synonymous with 'European' in nearly all possible context, but the matter is not so straightforward in the case of the word Pole." (N, 139) Later, he adds: "only 'foreigners' and 'Europeans' have a right to call Russia an empire and alien civilization in their writing." (N, 141)

9 E.M. Thompson, *Trubadurzy Imperium. Literatura rosyjska i kolonializm*, trans. A. Sierszulska (Kraków: Universitas: 2000), VI.

10 "Constructive criticism cannot be based solely on the complaints of the oppressed (or those aspiring to that particular mantle)" (N, 143)

policies. By oversimplifying Polish-Russian relations, as well as the relations between Russia and the Soviet Union and the peoples and nations it annexed, such judgments do much more than just lead to the omission of a plethora of issues revolving around the fact that at least in some of these nations, the awareness of political subordination was compensated by the feeling of civilizational and moral superiority. They also expose the researcher's lack of knowledge or his willful ignorance, which would lead him to disregard an important aspect of Russian 'orientalizing' thinking about Poland,¹¹ one that clearly demonstrates that we are not talking about impatient reactions related to our "inability to govern [our] country," (N, 128) but about a consistent imperial strategy of "evaluating judgements" that portray Poles as "other" and "inferior"¹² whose goal is to justify annexation of their territory through military means.¹³

11 Here are a couple of examples of Russians assuming said "orientalizing" perspective: "Poland belongs to us, we fought for it with blade and blood and that is our claim to it." (M. Karamzin as quoted in A. Giza, *Polaczkowie i moskale*, 21. "With Poles, your manner and countenance must be gentle while your wrath must be fearful. [...] Don't try and do them any good, but emphatically convince them of your kindness. [...] You can beat them in the privacy of your home, treat them respectfully only when you have guests. (From the notes of Prince Pyotr Vyazemsky, as quoted in A. Giza, *Polaczkowie i moskale*, 16. "Intellectual achievement, propensity for the arts – people born of this land have none of these faculties. There is nothing to see, nothing to learn. [...] Poles are neither happy nor grateful – they can only gloat and demonstrate effusive enthusiasm." (From the notes..., *ibid.*, 17) "Steeped in religion and mysticism, the Poles are not fond of our inquisitive, analytical, skeptical, positive minds, filled to the brim with bitter irony. (A Hercen, as quoted in A. Kępiński, *Lach i Moskal*, 172).

These opinions resemble judgements bestowed, in other times and places, upon "peoples not mature enough to be free": "One sees that in all things the Semitic race appears to us to be an incomplete race, by virtue of its simplicity." (E. Renan as quoted in E. Said, *Orientalism*, 149). The difference, it seems, lies primarily in the fact that Western disguised their political and economic expansion as an attempt by the European nations to civilize the Eastern peoples and spread Christian values among them (cf. *ibid.*, 166), while Russian declarations contained naked assertions as to the right of a stronger state to employ all means at its disposal to subordinate a conquered nation to its will.

12 E.M. Thompson, *Trubadurzy imperium*, 54.

13 We should pause to add that a sizable number of Russians consider Poland to be an aggressive, imperialist-minded country, a tradition that goes back a nearly 300 years and is directly related to the dynastic plans of Sigismund III Vasa and the Polish intervention in Russia that started in 1610 and lasted for two years, as well as Poland's post-WWI foreign policy towards its eastern neighbors. The first of these events was extremely traumatic for Russians, as evidenced today by the Day of National Unity which celebrates the anniversary of reclaiming Moscow from the hands of "Polish interventionists." Such a take on these events provided the Russians with rationale for military action, including the 1794 Massacre of Praga by Suvorov's forces or the Soviet invasion of Poland launched on September 17, 1939.

Depreciating the cognitive value of *Imperium* appears to be another element of Waldstein's strategy. Let's take a closer look at a passage that contains this ambiguous assessment of the text's referential value:

Neither the images nor facts in Kapuściński's book are false – on the contrary, they're absolutely plausible; however, this plausibility seems to be a product of a particular “power play” between the author, the narrator (traveller), the object of the reportage, and the anticipated audience. (N, 126)

Then, this “power play”-based plausibility turns out to be a manipulation on the part of the writer, one related to both, as Waldstein attempts to prove, the substance of the book as well as the narrator's own person.

Among the most effective instruments of said manipulation, Waldstein includes the way Kapuściński portrays Siberian nature in the account of his 1958 journey on the Trans-Siberian Railway. He accuses the Polish writer of using the snowy, desolate landscape as nothing but a backdrop for reflections on “terrifying images of slavery and humiliation,” (N, 129) of obscuring the relationship between the image of this “primeval and inhuman nature” (N, 130) and his own prejudice, and finally, of failing to see the connection between creating an environment that would be conducive to “representing” said world and prior civilizing efforts on the part of those who, by building the notorious railway, have made that representation possible. By charging that he equates despotism with Siberia and Siberia with Russia, Waldstein claims that Kapuściński judges this system of images to be “classically Eurocentric and Orientalist.” (N, 130) Without denying the obvious fact that the depiction of Siberia (and Russia) as a prison is an element of the “national and cultural self-identification” of Russians, (N, 141) Waldstein criticizes the Polish writer for adopting “on faith alone the ‘self-orientalizing’ discourse of its Soviet informers,” by virtue of its usefulness in furthering his own goals. (N, 141) Clearly, we can admit that Waldstein's right in claiming that such a take on Siberia was more prevalent West of the river Bug, but that's only because in the empire itself it was either considered a state secret or purged thanks to the efforts of numerous authors that were supposed to propagate another image of the country in the minds of the masses, one that portrayed it as the “New Russian World,” “the future of Russia,” or “the land of freedom.”¹⁴ (N, 130) Waldstein's decision to omit another image of Russia, one close to the latter slogan, is rather striking. In the book, Kapuściński recounts a conversation he had with an elderly inhabitant of Siberia traveling to attend her son's wedding. The

14 cf. also E.M. Thompson, *Trubadurzy imperium*, 201-231.

woman painted a picture of Siberia as a "sanctuary" and an "island of liberty" that allowed its people to survive both the tsar and the Bolsheviks. (I, 268) Waldstein's analysis also ignores the fact that the Trans-Siberian Railways is not a "triumph of human effort" (N, 130) (the default assumption being that this effort also carried the torch of civilization into the Northern wilderness) but an undertaking built upon a foundation of murderous slave labor performed by gulag prisoners, one which required the sacrifice of innumerable human lives. Ambiguous undertones also run through charges of "racist conclusions" that Waldstein levels at Kapuściński, in which the latter supposedly reveals "'seemingly-white' Russians to be 'black.'" (N, 132) The scholar's argument ascribes the beliefs of the indigenous Siberians, linking the color white with death, that Kapuściński alludes to in passing, to contemporary "white inhabitants of Siberia" (i.e. Russians). Thus, the latter, as "accustomed to death" and "dwellers of a realm governed by nature," "undergo a transformation, like their 'wild' subjects, into 'non-whites.'" (N, 132) The question of where in *Imperium* did Waldstein find the term "wild" (дикий, дикарь) he uses throughout his article is directly linked with the ease with which the scholar separates "indigenous inhabitants of Siberia" (N, 132) from civilized Russians. Even Kapuściński himself does not employ the term "indigenous inhabitants" to describe either Buryats or Yakuts. And yet, both peoples still dwell in those lands despite being decimated in the course of Russian efforts at colonization, and their bond with their homeland is rooted in the law of perpetual ownership, a charter older than any usurpations put forth by Russian colonists settling these lands since the 17th century.

The attack on Kapuściński's work is connected with the denial of the author's right to serve as a representative of Europe in his contacts with Russia. By accusing the Polish writer of projecting his own fetishistic opinions of the Other and believing in the real power of symbols, Waldstein disputes Kapuściński's "Western" rationalism. While emphasizing that even if it's true that an "overabundance of speech" and lack of disciplined thought are common traits of Russians, the author cannot deny himself the remark contemplating similarities between Russian and Polish languages, that is to say they're both "overly loquacious" and thus lacking "Cartesian" transparency. (N, 133)

On the other hand, the Polish author is accused of harboring "typically Western" inclinations, that is an aversion to hybridity and a predilection for perceiving the world from the perspective of an "us" (Occidentals) vs. "them" (Orientals) dichotomy. From that charge stems another intellectual construct formed by the scholar, one that reads the reporter's story about crossing the Soviet-Chinese border as a "consecration" and "fetishization" all "cultural and material borders." (N, 133) Careful reading of appropriate passages in

Imperium leaves no doubt that such interpretations of the book result from misunderstanding it. Kapuściński himself approaches this issue, which humanity treats in a very obsessive manner, with a healthy dose of irony: "There is no end to the cemeteries of those who have been killed the world over in the defense of borders. Equally boundless are the cemeteries of the audacious who attempted to expand their borders." (I, 20) Meanwhile, in generalized meanings ascribed to images of barbed wire, fences, and ruthless sentries, we will not observe approval for imposed divisions or pronouncements "declaring attempts to overcome them futile and even dangerous," but rather a warning of their subjugating function.

Fear of mixing cultures that Waldstein attributes to Kapuściński reappears in the context of the different attitudes displayed by those condemned to labor camps by the Stalinist regime, represented in the book by two men: the Austrian Weisler (called Weissberg in *Imperium*) and the Russian Shalakov. Is this truly great example of differences between Eastern and Western cultures, further emphasized in the Polish edition by references to the Russian philosopher Vladimir Solovyov, supposed to be a warning against the "overcoming of boundaries between civilizations," (N, 134) therefore a warning against applying "Western" thinking to evaluate "Oriental" realities? It would seem that *Imperium* is about something else entirely. At its heart lies a message that "Western thinking" leads us "astray" only when it appears as an aberration and exception among widespread acceptance of present realities, like, for example, in Ufa, where "people [...] accept all misfortunes, even those caused by the soullessness and stupidity of those in power, as the excesses of an omnipotent and capricious nature." (I, 165) It is not a coincidence that the name of Herling-Grudziński, a man who managed to retain an attitude characterized by an indomitable sense of inner independence even in the depths of the gulag, is used to provide the context for the portrayal of "a world apart." Surely, this juxtaposition of attitudes features a very clear valuation element, yet it does not express a desire to reinforce and consolidate the frontiers of civilization. It is more about the crossing of boundaries, commonly associated with the spreading and fostering of highly appreciated values.

Waldstein depreciates those of Kapuściński's declarations that could possibly subvert the image of the Polish traveller that he constructed. For example, he labels Kapuściński's deliberations on the multitude of coexisting cultures "cultural relativism," while explaining the concept of a "universal culture of tolerance" as something "infringing" upon the borders of 'others,' that simultaneously enables the "West" to erect "external barriers" to separate itself from the same 'others.' (N, 135) Nothing Kapuściński writes seems neutral to Waldstein. For the scholar, even invoking the name of Bronisław Malinowski while exploring the theory of multicultural societies smacks of

the efforts of Stalinist ideologues, who managed to attribute all of the major scientific breakthroughs to Russian scientists.

It is not surprising, then, that Waldstein's interpretation one of the book's most important themes, the issue of the Russian empire's colonialist aspiration, follows to his previously discussed tactic of refusing to acknowledge uncomfortable truths, even going as far as alleging their inauthenticity. Waldstein connects the "guilty conscience" of colonizers, mentioned by Kapuściński in the context of the mass exodus of Russians from Central Asian republics in the early 1990s, with the question about whether Russians have any right "to call Siberia their home," (N, 136) ignoring the glaringly obvious problem of Russian claims to the territories of modern Azerbaijan or Georgia. He misconstrues the story of the Polish reporter's journey to Baku, introducing the theme of the Russian woman who took care of the illness-stricken Kapuściński; curiously enough, her nationality was never addressed in *Imperium*.¹⁵ Quoting research asserting that "Soviet authorities bolstered the 'titular' nationalities of the republics, often at the expense of local Russian populations,"¹⁶ Waldstein decides that the colonial and tyrannical "subtexts" of Russian presence in Central Asia is "more than questionable." (N, 136) Thus, in his diagnosis of Soviet imperialism, he wishes to replace the metropolis—colonies relationship with the bond between the center and the peripheries. Kapuściński is also accused of opportunism, because although the writer "lauded the efforts of Russians, whom he called masters of immense overhaul projects, as European in nature" in 1967 – by "efforts" Kapuściński meant Soviet involvement in the Central Asian republics – in 1991 he was hard at work condemning the effects of Russian endeavors. (N, 138) However, even in that last case, the harsh appraisal seems hardly deserved. Aside from the fact that fragments of *Imperium* describing the journey to Central Asia,¹⁷ reprinted from an earlier collection of reportages, were created in a very different intellectual climate, during an era marked by belief in the rectifying power of modernity and civilization and a much lesser awareness of the environmental tolls of technological progress, and given the political mood of the late 1960s, we would be hard-pressed to find any sort of unambiguous

15 The goal, of course, is to discredit the attitude of the Polish writer who was to express his "gratitude" for the way he was looked after by treating the woman as a "case study" illustrating the terror of the "guilty conscience." Actually, the person who took care of Kapuściński certainly was not a "Russian from 17 Pouchin Street"; notice that when she gives the writer her keys to her Baku apartment while they're still in Moscow, she tells him: "I will never go back there again." (I, 132)

16 Waldstein himself admits that the empirical value of this data is questionable at best. (N, 137)

17 They were taken from Kapuściński's *The Kirghiz Dismounts* published in Warsaw in 1968.

praise heaped upon Russia's civilizing mission in Kapuściński's portrayal of the Central Asian republics.¹⁸

All of these observations lead us to the principal assumption of the article, one which shifts the focus of the polemic from arguing over this or another portrayal of Russia to attacking Ryszard Kapuściński, a denizen of Eastern Europe, who "usurps the right" to serve as the representative of the West in the eyes of the Russians, and not, as Waldstein suggests, into discussing the literary construct of the "traveller" as the protagonist of his story."¹⁹ (N, 138-139) Such a reading of *Imperium* implies that it is not a literary text but a work of propaganda that was supposed to "influence Western public opinion in hopes of being granted a voice and a seat at the table" when Poland is institutionally incorporated into Western European institutions.²⁰ (N, 142) The self-aggrandizing efforts of the writer are supposedly connected with his demonstrative endeavors to purge his past of any links to the imperium.²¹ Depriving the writer of his biography is very important in Waldstein's argumentation. By facilitating the negation of Kapuściński's right to evaluate the reality of which he is a part of, it shifts the struggle for his own identity and the reckoning with the empire as a real threat to the world onto a plane populated with abstract (and theoretical) deliberations and temporary political interests. This denial of the writer's self-identification as Polish serves to "remove any trace of historicity" from his work;²² a "foreigner" and a "Westerner" who

18 cf. also A. Chomiuk, "Dekonstruowanie imperium. Rosyjskie reportaże Ryszarda Kapuścińskiego," *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 6 (2003): 148-149.

19 After all, he has already been revealed to be a usurper by the Russians he meets in his travels, as they "did not consider Poland to be 'abroad,' while Kapuściński was not a 'true' foreigner." (N, 139)

20 Take note that Waldstein's article was published right before Poland was admitted into the European Union.

21 I decided against bringing up arguments indicating the personal and autobiographical nature of Kapuściński's story, extensively explored by Polish scholars in their efforts to interpret the book. (cf. *inter alia*, Z. Ziątek, "Wymiary uczestnictwa (Ryszard Kapuściński)" in: *Sporne postaci polskiej literatury współczesnej. Kontynuacje*, ed. A. Grodzka and L. Burska (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 1996), 157-178;

J. Jarzębski, "Wędrówka po Imperium" in: J. Jarzębski, *Apetyt na Przemianę. Notatki o prozie współczesnej*, (Kraków: Znak, 1997), 82-89; J. Jarzębski, "Kapuściński: od reportażu do literatury" in: *Maski współczesności. O literaturze i kulturze XX wieku*, eds. L. Burska and M. Zaleski (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2001), 209-210; A. Chomiuk, "Dekonstruowanie imperium".

22 Just as Kapuściński, according to Waldstein, ostensibly purges Russia of its historicity by not seeing the "vast political, ideological, and human gulf between the tsarist and Soviet periods" in its history (N, 134) and exposing the continuity of oppression under both systems instead.

could easily pass for a US citizen has no other identity aside from the one marked by "anti-Eastern leanings," which apparently "justifies" the scholar's reluctance to bring up any passages from *Imperium* that discuss Russian and Soviet persecution of Poles. (Mentioning these passages is unnecessary, given that "in the last two hundred years, Polish-Russian relations resembled more the relationship between Germany and France rather than the one between France and Algiers," N, 128). Putting the narrator in this ambiguous position, simultaneously internal and external, would subvert the thesis claiming that Kapuściński fostered an aversion towards liminality and hybridity. However, in light of the above, another Polish writer and author of *A Warsaw Diary*, Kazimierz Brandys, becomes a positive character in Waldstein's investigative discourse. Brandys' hypothesis about the dangerous proximity of "us" and "them" leads to author of the article to claim that the inhabitants of Eastern Europe are spiritually "tainted," which prevents them from fully becoming Westerners. (cf. N, 140) Therefore, according to Waldstein, Brandys discloses what Kapuściński will not, the latter emphasizing his position by "generalizing, throwing wild blows, erecting insurmountable barriers." (N, 142)



Let us conclude the article by pointing out the main findings we can glean from a close and careful reading of Waldstein's work, whose novelty and innovative nature are unfortunately obscured by more important objectives. Disguising a valuating generalization as a postcolonial study offers multiple advantages and benefits to the author, the majority of them going significantly beyond describing mechanisms behind cultural "appropriation" of the world portrayed in one of many travelogues about Russia. The practicality of such actions reveals itself on multiple levels. Firstly, they are an attempt at forestalling or at least neutralizing scholarly efforts that would unveil the tendency of Russia to inscribe its subordinate nations into its own sphere of political and cultural categories,²³ an argument asserting that Russia is the first victim of "orientalizing" efforts. Additionally, it once again charges that a reflection on the complex relationship between Russia and the West, if written by a Pole, has to be biased, and that "unmasking" the obsessions reigning over any such analysis, fixations that preclude any possibility of an objective approach, leads to the inevitable disclosure of its low artistic value and its worthlessness in the eyes of the West. Finally, employing postcolonial methodologies becomes

23 cf. e.g. E. Thompson, *Trubadurzy imperium*; C. Cavanagh, "Postcolonial Poland: A Blank Space on the Map of Contemporary Theory," *Second Texts* 2-3 (2003): 60-71, A. Fiut, "Polonization? Colonization?," *Second Texts* 6 (2003): 150-156

a way for Waldstein to discredit the idea of Western European identities springing up in countries that were only just liberated from the Soviet yoke. Let us once again expose the paradox underlying Waldstein's article. Disputing Poland's right to manifest its pro-Western propinquity, justified therein by the presumed existence of a Central European "anomaly," (N, 140) reveals a basic contradiction between the author's declarative aversion towards any kind of ideological schematizations and his own "orientalizing" proclivities, which manifest themselves in his attempts to expose the "oriental" nature of the author of *Imperium*.

Translation: Jan Szelągiewicz