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# Poland between the West and East.

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### 1. To the west from the East and to the east from the West

Between the Latin West and the Orthodox East, between Rome and Byzantium, there emerged, a millennium ago, a line of religious cultural division sometimes recognized as “the most enduring cultural boundary of the European continent.”<sup>1</sup> What views reveal themselves in the Polish perspective on this pregnant division? Poland has found itself in an east-western position, or, as Sławomir Mrożek ironically observed, located to the west from the East and to the east from the West. However, it has mostly sought, with the thought of its intellectuals, to outweigh the balance in favor of “the West” and to disassociate itself from “the East.”

I will arbitrarily select works composed a century apart, exhibiting nonetheless a certain consistent tendency. Karol Potkański’s “Konstantyn i Metodyusz” [Constantine and Methodius] appeared in 1905. On the conclusions reached by this prematurely deceased historian, Franciszek Bujak comments that they “belong to the

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1 J. Kloczkowski. *Młodsza Europa. Europa Środkowo-Wschodnia w kręgu cywilizacji chrześcijańskiej średniowiecza*. Warszawa 2003. 12. Further references to this edition indicated by K and page number.

most insightful thoughts of general historiosophy to have been formulated in this country.”<sup>2</sup> Potkański believed that the great clash between the West and East that had shaken Christianity at its base as well as Byzantium’s separation from Rome were a “historical necessity, one difficult to remedy.”<sup>3</sup> He does attribute seniority, maturity, and affluence to the culture of Byzantium, but also stresses that they were the reason for its stagnation and ultimate exhaustion. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Byzantium began to fall apart not only as a result of political events but crumbling under the weight of its over-ripeness. It grew stagnant and torpid and so did its Church. It stopped “in its eternal and continuous procession towards a higher form of existence” (P. Vol.6.339).

The West behaved differently, having only just begun to make its way, and “pushed forward. Forward pushed the Western Church, and the Western society itself” (P. Vol.6.338). The idea of eternal progress leads Potkański to believe that between the two powers there began to gape and impassable chasm. “At the core of this antagonism between the East and the West there lied something essential, something that cannot be broken down” (P. Vol.6.331). Arrested civilizational development of the Slavic countries such as Bulgaria and Rus clearly indicates the cause of the disaster: it was born from the stagnancy of the Byzantian culture. “Centuries of separation and the unavoidable reduction of culture took its toll on the Slavic East” (P. Vol.6.344). The only chance for salvation was to be found in the universal Latin culture. And that which was truly great in the Greek culture, was inherited by the West. Potkański questions even the cultural importance of the Bogomilist heresy in Bulgaria, and consequently, both the Cathars and the Albigenses, related, after all, to the Bogomils of Byzantium and the Balkans.<sup>4</sup> Bogomilism was supposed to have originated in “the hazy mysticism brought from the depths of Asia” (P. Vol. 6.392). It was not a road meant to lead the Slavic countries to a “great civilizational achievement” (P. Vol. 6. 342). This criterion of civilization defined through the Western European notions towers above the entirety Potkański’s work.

Conceived in this fashion, the East lacked greatness in all possible sense: it struggled to keep up with the progress of history, even its treasure – the Greek heritage – was better understood by the West, while its radical heresy whiffed

2 F. Bujak „Życie i działalność Karola Potkańskiego (1861-1907).” in K. Potkański *Pisma pośmiertne*, Kraków 1922, 1.1. 45.

3 K. Potkański. „Konstantyn i Metodyszcz.” *Przegląd Powszechny* 1905 Vol. 5. 194. Further references indicated by P, volume and page number.

4 M. Lambert. *Heresje średniowieczne od reformy gregoriańskiej po Reformację*. [Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation] Trans. J. Popowski, Gdańsk-Warszawa 2002. 90.

of Asian mysticism. It is no wonder, then, that in the concluding remarks Potkański observes that it was solely the Western Church that can be said to have raised the Western society. The Slavic nations, including Poles, “have no reason to regret following the West because, ultimately, it is the West that has won the great civilizational procession and it is the West that remained” (P. Vol. 6.345). Such was the triumphant historiosophical conclusion – and the verdict – at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Today, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we obviously have several more published sources at our disposal and the number of commentaries is growing rapidly. Yet, a certain historiosophical tendency remained the same. For instance the already cited work by Jerzy Kłoczowski, over 500 pages long. It concludes 25 years of research whose results were first published in Polish in 1984 as *Europa słowiańska*. [Slavic Europe] Kłoczowski begins by highlighting an essential difference between the Western and the Eastern cultural circles. The West is characterized by “dynamic development” (“dynamic” is the author’s favorite word to describe the Western events) while the Orthodox East can be characterized by “persisting.” As a result, the development of the West leads to its impressive advancement, somewhat pompously referred to by the author as “moving to the forefront of all human civilizations” (K. 12). How about the East? Kłoczowski notes that “despite its cultural religious vitality that we gradually getting to know better, once simply cannot compare the transformations that took place in the areas of Orthodox Christianity with the comprehensive dynamics of the Western cultural circle” (K. 12). In fact, it seems that the West and the East cannot even be measured with the same scale, since what could the impressive “dynamics” of the West have in common with the slow “transformations”?

In Kłoczowski, the Congress of Gniezno in 1000 AD symbolically marks the date of “the birth of civilization of the Christian circle, the birth of Europe within borders set for a millennium” (K. 48). The heyday of Central Europe (the author focuses primarily on Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic) is to be attributed to the “Western model” which ensures the development of those states. In Kłoczowski’s somehow modernist turn of phrase, characteristic features of the Western model include “society, grassroots initiatives and autonomy of human communities” (K. 58). Those are the determinants of “the rapid development of the Western cultural circle,” of the Latin *christianitatis*. Byzantium remains on the sidelines, increasingly removed from the Western Christianity and its creative powers. Poland, according to Kłoczowski, despite numerous vicissitudes, managed to find itself luckily within the Western circle.

Writing about the Three Sisters – the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary, Laszłó C. Szabó stresses that in the 10<sup>th</sup> century the three states chose

to position themselves on the side of Rome and its “political religion.” This, according to Szabó, was a necessary survival measure in the face of Teutonic pressures. “Regardless of their internal conflicts and divisions, the strengthening of those states depended on the extent to which they could resemble other members of the universal Christian republic. Had they not become *modern* in their time, had they not made the attempt to keep up with the West, they would have, probably, been fully absorbed by the *Drang nach Osten* and today we would see the Czech, Moravian, Polish, Hungarian and Serbian heritage only in ethnographic exhibitions.”<sup>5</sup> Only by joining the Christian “political religion” could they save themselves from the terrible fate of the Polabian tribes. Szabó emphatically conveys the dramatic fact of the forced conversion and destruction of the weaker pagan Slavic tribes inhabiting the area between the Elbe and Oder orchestrated by the German bishops. “The bloodiest crusade was waged against the Polabian Slavs, announced, as the Second Crusade to the Holy Land was, by St Bernard of Clairvaux, a fanatical prophet of the Medieval Golden Age. He could not have expected how much blood will stain his hands.”<sup>6</sup> Let us not forget that Szabó’s remarks are a commentary on a book discussing the Christian Middle Ages in Central Europe by two English, two German, one Czech, and one Polish author (F. Graus, K. Bosi, F. Seibt, M. M. Postan, A. Gieysztor, *Eastern and Western Europe in the Middle Ages*, ed. G. Barraclough 1970).

## 2. Slavdom

Both of the mentioned scholars, Potkański and Kloczowski, should devote themselves to the relationship between the church and the language in the “younger Europe”; in particular to the positioning of the native, Slavonic languages and Latin.

Potkański views Cyril and Methodius’s mission to admit the Slavonic language to the Christian liturgy as a “bold innovation” (P. Vol.3.338). But what were the actual chances for success of this experiment in the West? Latin was, after all, the “language of the almighty Roman Empire” (P. Vol.3.391) upon whose ruins the Roman Church raised its imposing structure. Potkański stresses emphatically and several times that the Latin speaking German clergy, the greatest enemy of the Slavic Church, rested itself upon the Roman “organization, the strongest organization the world has come know” (P. Vol.6.328). “The assumption that Latin was the proper language of liturgy

5 L. C. Szabó „Trzy siostry. Europa Środkowa w chrześcijańskim średniowieczu.” Trans. E. Miszevska-Michalewicz *Więź* 1989 Vol. 11-12. 115.

6 *Ibid.* 124.

firmly established itself in the West” (P. Vol.3.393). Latin’s preponderance was well recognized and well constituted. There happened, naturally, certain aberrations described by Potkański as “utterly disproportionate” – for instance, the teaching of Apostles’ Creed in Latin which the folk could not understand (P. Vol.3.394), however, the author is firmly convinced that there was *no middle ground*. The last service in Latin, Greek and Slavonic was held in 885, over Methodius’s body. Later, an uncompromising solution was necessary: “either to abolish completely the Slavic Church and introduce a unified Latin liturgy, or – on the contrary – to admit only the Slavic one. There is no way these two could have coexisted” (P. Vol.6.315). Because of their mutual hatred, among other reasons.

The author of “Konstantyn and Metodyusz” believes the choice of the Latin Rite to have been the right one. It was a choice made by Poland deciding to join the *Latin universalism*, Latin perceived as “the only recognized language of culture and civilization” (P. Vol.6.340). Poland moved away from the disadvantageous “Slavonic church language” seen as the cause of separation from the world and disconnection from cultural exchange with Europe. It is a view shared by numerous Polish scholars. One should also add that Potkański underestimated a certain aspect of the Bogomilist heresy in the 10<sup>th</sup> century Bulgaria. Some view the dissemination of Bogomil dualistic teaching as a religious revolt by the Slavonic Balkan peasants resenting the Byzantine-Greek rulers of Constantinople and their local representatives. The Bogomilist heresy set Slavic peasants against their Bulgarian masters who were of Tatar origin and who themselves were converted at some point by the Byzantine missionaries; it set the Greek-speaking church hierarchy against the Slavonic rural priests.<sup>7</sup> Thus, we can speak of a resistance of the Slavonic language against the Greek of the masters and the church.

“The Bogomilists recognized no authority, neither secular, nor ecclesiastical. As a result, they were a dangerous social element in the age when feudalism was taking shape.”<sup>8</sup> Feudalism was seen as non-Slavic, mostly German. Some speak of the possible influence of Bogomils – Bogomilists on the Polish monks in the 11<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>9</sup> and their impact on the “Bosnian Church.” Kłoczowski mentions Bosnia’s own national religion established in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and surviving until the 15<sup>th</sup>. It might have been a “folk, agrarian syncretism steeped in magic and doctrinally very weak” (K. 312), not

7 See: Ch. S. Clifton, *Encyklopedia herezji i herezyków*. [Encyclopedia of Heresies and Heretics] Trans. R. Bertold, Poznań 1996. 48.

8 F. Kmiotowicz *Kiedy Kraków był “Trzecim Rzymem.”* Białystok 1994.70

9 *ibid.*

a conscious Bogomilist heresy. He also writes about the Slavo-Wallachian folk religiosity different from both the Orthodox and Roman Christianity (K. 313). Similar Slavic folk efforts continued to resurface. In the early 15<sup>th</sup> century also Jan Hus attempted to “bridge the gulf between the clergy and the laity,” demanding for the congregation a Communion in two forms, of both wine and bread, and a liturgy in Czech.<sup>10</sup> One could posit that the Slavonic element in religion had more far-reaching consequences than it had been assumed by Potkański.

Kłoczowski, too, recognizes the Moravian mission of Cyril and Methodius as “extremely bold and innovative,” but at the same time stresses that “it must have raised serious concerns of the Latin-Frankish missions in Moravia, and of Rome itself” (K. 40). In fact, Kłoczowski’s words echo the fears of the German clergy. He joins them in a “strict response” (which, let us not forget, included the imprisonment and torture of Methodius) that, as he continues, was “fully understandable, regardless of the political contexts surrounding the matter” (K. 42). One assumes that Kłoczowski’s explicit judgment stems from the conviction that “while the need for teaching and ministry in the native languages was understandable,” “preserving the deposit of faith in its authentic form remained a special concern” (K. 41). The confusion of tongues and the Tower of Babel can be treated as a biblical warning, the author adds.

This position could be contrasted with a thoroughly different opinion that the apostles of Slavs liberated the Christian faith from the *classical bonds* through a dramatic struggle against the so called “trilingual heresy” that allowed the preaching of the Church to be conducted only in Hebrew, Greek and Latin. “And how is it – Cyril asked his opponents in Venice - that you are not ashamed to recognize only three languages, and to command all the other peoples and tribes to be deaf and dumb?” Apostles acted against the “enclosure within a single experience of faith believed to be self-sufficient and absolute.” They did it in the name of the “virtue of *aggiornamento* (modernization and openness to changing times) seen as one that has always accompanied evangelization and the experience of faith.”<sup>11</sup>

Closing his work, Kłoczowski recalls D. S. Lichaczow’s estimations indicating that in the countries of Byzantine-Slavic Christianity literacy reached much higher levels than in the Western sphere. If one is to measure the culture of a country with the ability to read and write among its residents (excluding clergy) one must recognize much higher achievement of the Byzantine-Slavic circle in this regard. “Clearly,” Kłoczowski explains “the basic study of reading

10 Ch.S. Clifton *Encyklopedia*... 90-91

11 G. Eldarov. “Święci Cyryl i Metody – ojcowie teologii słowiańskiej.” *Cyryl i Metody. Apostołowie i nauczyciele Słowian. Studia i dokumenty*. J. S. Gajek and L. Górka (eds) Vol. 1 Lublin 1991. 53-54.

and writing in the native Slavonic came much easier than the study of Latin in the West” (K. 417). Local literacy resulted from Slavic Christianization. Kłoczowski views the translations of the Greek texts into Church Slavic as astounding work, especially as accuracy of translation – that was a condition of purity of the Orthodoxy – was its prime concern (K. 421). One could therefore assume that authenticity of expression of the deposit of faith constituted the highest purpose also in this case.

Those are the attributes of Slavic nativeness, ones not to be disregarded. In his famous work on orality and literacy, Walter Ong discusses Learned Latin as a language that is sex-linked, a “language written and spoken only by males, learned outside the home in a tribal setting which was in effect a male puberty rite setting, complete with physical punishment and other kinds of deliberately imposed hardships.”<sup>12</sup> It was a language inaccessible to women (with insignificant exceptions). Learned Latin, “devoid of baby-talk, insulated from the earliest life of childhood where language has its deepest psychic roots” was father tongue, or rather, mother tongue, to none of its users, as no mother ever used it raising her children. As a result, Ong continues, Learned Latin “had no direct connection with anyone’s unconscious.”<sup>13</sup> It was a male language fully detached from the mother tongue. Consequences of this state of things had to be extensive, including the relationship to the social and political powers of women.

However, what is of interest to us is right now, is how this type exclusion could have impacted the sense of Slavdom. Clearly, it meant something entirely different to the Old Polish writers who shifted rather harmoniously from Latin to Polish and mimicked Latin literary genres, and to the Romantic writers who were deeply affected by the disconnection from Slavdom and who, with the use of native folk art and its transformations, attempted to restore its forgotten greatness. By being labeled “Slaviphilic,” those attempts were actually often belittled, as at that time they could give rise to the suspicion of a connection to Russia and her imperialist claims to Poland, hidden beyond the slogan of “Slavic unity.”

Slavdom was often repressed into the unconscious of the Polish Romantics and their animosity towards Latin took various forms. Repressed Slavdom returned in the form of a secret rite of communicating with the dead, hidden from the master and the priest (as in Mickiewicz’s *Dziady*), in the form of utopian past – pastoral and cruel at the same time, drawing both on the Piast idyll and Karamzin’s *History of the Russian State* where “cruelties are meant

12 W. J. Ong *Oralność i piśmiennictwo. Słowo poddane technologii*. Trans. J. Japola, Lublin 1992. 155. [Here based on the English edition, Routledge 1982.]

13 *Ibid.* 156, 155.



to signify the charisma” of the ruler<sup>14</sup> (as in Słowacki’s *Król-Duch*); through a tale of imposed Christianity, feudalism and the annihilation of the Slavic freedom in the spirit of Lelewel (Berwiński’s *Bogunka na Gople*), as a sublime figure (in the young Kraszyński where a Slavic female vampire, modeled on the Transylvanian countess, inhabits the native Opinogóra), or through the images of vague disasters, ruin, and destruction in Kraszyński’s novels.

The attitude of Latin missionaries to the pagan mythology and to the religion of the Slavs also warrants a commentary. They were so utterly neglected and so ruthlessly destroyed that many scholars believe they hardly existed in the first place. “Christian missionaries and medieval chroniclers lacked curiosity, interest and will to look into the spiritual life of peoples they were converting.”<sup>15</sup> Hence the erased old days, hence the tabula rasa, hence the opinion, expressed quite recently, that nothing seems to indicate that Slavs actually had tales of divine beings, their lives, deeds and kinship. This would make them, as one of the historians of Slavic religion puts it, “a strange exception among the cultures of the world.”<sup>16</sup> But such is the extent of the (undeserved but very real) contempt for the “primitive” Slavdom.

Things look very different in the remote island of Ireland, converted in the 5<sup>th</sup> century and never belonging to the Roman Empire: Ireland adopted Latin but retained its separateness. Thomas Cahil believes that “the survival of an Irish psychological identity [within Christianity] is one of the marvels of the Irish story.”<sup>17</sup> The Irish did not fight to root out the pagan influences (Halloween survived till this day), their monks mastered Latin and Greek, copied the endangered works of Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian culture, but also preserved in writing all of Ireland’s indigenous literature. “It is thanks to such scribes that we have the rich trove of early Irish literature, the earliest vernacular literature of Europe to survive.”<sup>18</sup> The Slavic Poland was not as fortunate as the Celtic Ireland.

In Romanticism, the uncanny Slavdom was a sign of a torn identity. Unknown disaster from the past explodes in frantic images that dismantle the imposed order and allow for the resurfacing of something alien and familiar at the same time, something both *heimlich* and *unheimlich*.

14 B.A. Uspieński, W.M. Żywow. *Car i bóg. Semiotyczne aspekty sakralizacji monarchy w Rosji*. Trans. H. Paprocki, Warszawa 1992. 22.

15 A. Szyjewski. *Religia Słowian*. Kraków 2003. 9.

16 Ibid. 11.

17 T. Cahil. *Jak Irlandczycy ocalili cywilizację. Nieznana historia heroicznej roli Irlandii w dziejach Europy po upadku Cesarstwa Rzymskiego*. Trans. S. Barańczak, Poznań 1999. 151 [Here after the original]

18 Ibid. 161. [Here after the original]

Awareness of the uncanny Slavdom of Poland may allow for an alternative reflection on our place in Europe. It does not have to be determined by a clear line delineating the East and the West. Poland does not have to boast its “Western” character, it can freely embrace “Eastern” self. The latter will not be detrimental provided that our social leaders perform certain intellectual operations resulting in an understanding of own position and prejudice.

### 3. Europe but not Europe

At this point we need to revisit Edward W. Said’s groundbreaking work from 1978 (published in Poland in 1991). The author adopts in it a particular meaning of “Orientalism.” It does not denote the sum of European prejudice against the so called Orient but is a system of ideological fictions. Those are built upon binary oppositions meant to separate “us” and “them.” The visualization of the East (“them”) is aimed at a self-identification of the West (“us”). The process is governed by the principle of inequality: “the narrative shape, continuity, and figures are constructed by the scholar [or a writer, or traveler] for whom scholarship [literature] consists of circumventing the unruly (un-Occidental) nonhistory of the Orient with orderly chronicle, portraits and plots.”<sup>19</sup> The body of work, messages and observations is ordered in a manner by which “Orient takes on a discursive identity that made it unequal with the West.” Orient is placed within a special epistemological frame so that it can be presented as a “geographical - and a cultural, political, demographical, sociological and historical – entity” traditionally controlled by the true Europeans.<sup>20</sup> Orientalism evokes a sense of absolute superiority of the West over the East, hence the “will to power,” often to imperial power.

What results from setting the West against the East is the following division of qualities: the West is logical, normal, empirical, cultural, rational, realistic. The East is backward, degenerate, uncultured, stagnant, illogical, despotic, and does not contribute creatively to the world progress.

As in Poland’s case we also face religious differences and antagonisms, we should direct attention at essential features of the West and the East in this regard as well. Differences between the Orthodox and Western Churches can be ordered (and *clearly simplified*) as follows:

- customarily unwritten tradition – religion as a philosophical system
- apophatic, negative theology, based on what we cannot know – scholastics, Latin rationalism; tradition of the Eastern Orthodoxy “rejects all strict

19 E.W. Said *Orientalizm*. Trans. W. Kalinowski, Warszawa 1991. [Here after the original]

20 *Ibid.* 234 and 322.

definitions” – the word “God” is a call addressing the Unspeakable<sup>21</sup>; “direct spiritual experience instead of discursive reasoning”<sup>22</sup>; “should the basis for the split of the Eastern thought from the Western one (and the other way round) not be found in the fact that the former, consistently and from the very beginning focused itself on theology of existence, while the latter (until St Thomas Aquinas) on theology of essence?”<sup>23</sup>

- unresolved antinomies – strict dialectical logic
- forgiveness for minor deviations - legalism inherited from scholasticism; “the West had a simpler, stricter and more logistic concept of the proper faith while the East was more tolerant toward the less important doctrinal discrepancies and placed the borders of orthodoxy within the sphere of liturgy.”<sup>24</sup>
- aversion to authority – special position of the bishop of Rome, “when medieval Europe was taking shape, when the unity of the Western Church was founded on the hierarchical center of Rome, Eastern Churches were unified by Mount Athos and its spiritual radiation, with no jurisdiction above them.”<sup>25</sup>
- refraining from seeking external influence (with the exception of Tsarist Russia) – strong authority of the Church in the West; “in the West, the Church was seen as an institution whose operations can be defined in legal terms, in the East it was a sacramental community connecting heaven and earth [...] For the West, the primacy of Rome meant absolute power of the pope above all churches, the East saw it only as a honorary precedence and the right to represent symbolically the *orbis Christianorum*.”<sup>26</sup>

Finally, according to Runciman, Eastern Orthodoxy fears dogmatic definitions that the Roman Church delights in. “The Greek Church did not and could not produce a Thomas Aquinas. It still has no *Summa Fidei*.”<sup>27</sup> Klinger describes the difference in the context of comparisons between Catholicism

21 P. Evdokimowy *Posnanie Boga w Kościele Wschodnim. Patrystyka, liturgia, ikonografia*. Transl. A. Liduchowska, Kraków 1996. 9.

22 J. Klinger „O istocie prawosławia.” *O istocie prawosławia. Wybór pism*. Warszawa 1983. 171.

23 A. Siemianowski *Filozoficzne podłoże rozłam u chrześcijaństwa*. Warszawa 1991, 11.

24 A. Flis *Chrześcijaństwo i Europa. Studia z dziejów cywilizacji Zachodu*. Kraków 2001. 291.

25 O. Clement, after J. Klinger *O istocie...* 165.

26 A. Flis *Chrześcijaństwo...* 283 and 286.

27 S. Runciman *Wielki Kościół w niewoli. Studium historyczne patriarchatu konstantynopolitańskiego od czasów bezpośrednio poprzedzających jego podbój do wybuchu greckiej wojny o niepodległość*. Trans. J. Łoś Warszawa 1973. 13. [Here after the original]

and Protestantism: “in its numerous controversies they are often quite close to each other, as they find themselves on the same plane of constructing an intellectual dogmatic doctrine, while in Orthodoxy there is a predominance of liturgical contemplation.”<sup>28</sup> Clement mentions a confrontation of the intellectual West and the spiritual East.<sup>29</sup>

Naturally, I am not speaking here of any sort of “superiority” of one religion above the other. I am recapitulating only basic differences to highlight the possibility to use them with a purpose of comparing the West and the East. They can be variously interpreted, too. Andrzej Flis writes about the *conservatism of the East*, manifesting itself mainly in the attitude of the Orthodox Church to strictly guarded tradition, and *innovativeness of the West* whose “essence lies in the questioning of the autonomous value of tradition” as well as in “the instrumental attitude toward the past popularized in the Latin culture by the Catholic Church.”<sup>30</sup> Jerzy Klinger presents an entirely different approach, emphasizing that the “timelessness of Orthodoxy” should not be identified with “stagnation.”<sup>31</sup> One can see here how religious differences affect description and assessment of general cultural differences between the West and East.

Let us return to the category of “Orientalism.” It is commonly used, although, perhaps, without sufficient awareness of its character.

In modern Poland, the function of “the East” was assigned mainly to Russia. The “Orientalization” of Russia (in the Saidian sense) emphasizes that Russia is not part of Europe (an idea shared by some of the Russian thinkers, from Chaadayeve to Victor Erofejev). Polish self-identification is carried out by portraying Russia as a less worthy but dangerous Other. Such procedure should come as no surprise in the context of Poland’s persistent struggle against Russia’s military violence and its lasting resistance against the policy of conquest via russification, even more sinister as relying on a kindred, Slavic language. Western civilizational superiority of Poland is supposed to justify immeasurable contempt for the alien “Asians.” Such methods of self-identification, conceived already under the Russian rule in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, intensified in the propaganda of the 1920s, during the Polish-Soviet War. Ewa Pogonowska aptly juxtaposes entire series of common stereotypical beliefs where the European Pole has to fight against the Asian-Muscovite, a barbarian from the savage East. The axis of the enemy portrayal “rests upon a basic

28 J. Klinger *O istocie...* 171.

29 O. Clement. *Byzance et christianisme*, Paris 1964. 122.

30 A. Flis *Chrześcijaństwo...* 316 and 321-322.

31 J. Klinger *O istocie...* 172.

binary opposition projected onto entire world of values and triggering complementary responses: Europe means civilization, Russia – lack of culture, anti-civilization, primitivism, savagery, banditry.” Polish self-stereotype is characterized by a sense of superiority toward the Muscovite resulting from Poland’s inclusion in the Western civilization, into the Western Catholic community.”<sup>32</sup> Abundant anti-Bolshevik poetry offers a model delineation of the opposition of “Europe” and “Asia,” of “East” and “West,” still Romantic in character but ultimately sharpened to the extreme. “Go back to Asia, descendant of Genghis Khan!” is a battle cry that excludes all negotiation.

#### 4. Polish “Orientalism”

Let us take a look at two examples of contemporary “Orientalization.” The first one is the Orientalization of the Byzantine East in the already mentioned *Młodsza Europa* [The Younger Europe] by Kłoczowski. How does the author proceed? First of all, he uses the West as a measuring standard presenting degrees of deviation from it. Kłoczowski emphasizes that only a limited range of Western patterns reached the Slavic-Byzantine circle. On the other hand, full reception of the Western models in the countries of the “new Christianity” only brought benefits. The price for structural assimilation of “our countries” into the Western model was often very high, but it was a necessary condition for their great and comprehensive development. The Roman Church, fulfilling its ideals of unity and centralization, created a dynamic civilizational circle that the Eastern Church could have joined as well, however, Byzantium’s anti-Latinism prevailed. Kłoczowski does mention the conquest of Constantinople by the Western crusaders in 1204, but does not discuss the disastrous plundering of the city. In the chapter titled “The Crusade against Christians.” S. Runciman writes: “The sack of Constantinople is unparalleled in history. ... Even the Saracens would have been more merciful, cried the historian Nicetas, and with truth.”<sup>33</sup> No wonder Byzantium detached even more from Western Christianity.

“There are several traces of activity and development of the [Eastern] Church, as well as progressing Christianization, but one is struck by its shutting itself off, by the lack of openness to others” adds Kłoczowski (K. 82). Admittedly, nearing the end of his work (K. 408-409), the author admits that one should not speak of exceptional stagnation and stillness of Byzantium, but he had already done it himself. Concluding remarks include a reservation

32 E. Pogonowska. *Dzikię biesy. Wizja Rosji sowieckiej w antybolszewickiej poezji polskiej lat 1917-1932*, Lublin 2002. 92-93.

33 S. Runciman *Dzieje Wypraw Krzyżowych. Vol. 3 Królestwo Akki i późniejsze krucjaty*. Trans. J. Szwakopf, Warszawa 1993. 125 [Here after the original]

that the “Byzantine civilization was a European civilization” but to a limited extent, “through its attachment to the ancient tradition, the sense of continuity of the Roman Empire, Hellenistic language and culture” (K. 410). In other words, it was European in the sense of its ancient Greek heritage. But it could not develop this heritage appropriately, as it evaded the spirit of great Western reforms (K. 82). The processes of occidentalization and byzantization take up much of Kłoczowski’s work. As the author admits, his sharp portrayal of differences is used to emphasize and separate [the concept of] Central Europe. Ties to the Western culture are the deciding criterion during this operation (K. 22). They, in fact, constitute Central Europe.

*Imperium* (1993) by our great reporter, Ryszard Kapuściński, will be the second example. Reviewing *In the Shadow of the Sun* and *Emperor* for the *Times Literary Supplement*, John Ryle, anthropologist and co-director of a documentary about a Sudanese tribe, judges both books rather harshly, claiming that Kapuściński – despite his fervently anti-colonialist attitude – nonetheless performs in his writing on Africa a form of literary colonialism, or Orientalism, of an imagined land.

In an analysis of Kapuściński’s *Imperium*,<sup>34</sup> Maxim Waldstein reveals how the book, written after 1989, “Orientalizes” Russia (in the Saidian sense). As usual, the procedure has a historiosophical basis: Egypt, Sumer, Byzantium, exhausted with the extent of created work and unable to develop it, are contrasted with Europe that teems with energy and rapturous desire for life.<sup>35</sup> Kapuściński declares to be interested the most in the “mental and political decolonization of the world”<sup>36</sup> and it is also the case of *Imperium*. But apart from extensively reasoned criticism of Russian–Soviet imperialism and totalitarianism (similarly to Jan Kucharzewski, the author of the famous multi-volume *Odbiałego caratu do czerwonego*, Kapuściński does not differentiate between the tsarist and the Soviet empire), *Imperium* presents a new quality: we are dealing here with a resident of Poland, itself a former Soviet semi-colony, that – as Waldstein notes – subjects the very same empire to an “imperial” Orientalizing “gaze.”

It is a clear reversal of earlier relations (although the Russians did not “Orientalize” Poles, attributing to them an even higher degree of “Westernness” than was probably deserved). By “reversal” I mean a sense of domination, at least an intellectual one, over the Empire. Maria Dąbrowska, who in 1920s

34 M. K. Waldstein „Nowy markiz de Kiustin, ilipolskij trawelog o Rossii w postkolonialnom proczenii.” *Nowoje Literaturnoje Obozrenie* 2003 Vol. 60.

35 Kapuściński *Imperium*, Warszawa 1993. 52–53.

36 *Ibid.* 309 [309] [page numbers in brackets here and further in the essay refer to the English translation by Klara Głowaczewska, Vintage 1995.]

attended literary-philosophical meetings organized in Warsaw by writer Dymitij Filosofov, emigrant from Soviet Russia, could not stand his “persecution mania with regard to Polish attitude to Russia.” But even if – Dąbrowska comments in her *Diaries* – this relationship was, in fact, what Filosofov believed it to be, it would have been justified: “In its relations to Russia Poland was instructed by a bloody and cruel history, a history including Suvorov, Apukhtin, Muravyev, Pashkevich, Hurko, Siberia and the gallows. It is a lesson difficult to erase.”<sup>37</sup> Dąbrowska very poignantly compiles the names of butchers from the period of Russia’s reign in Poland and their basic repertoire of punishment meted out to “Polish rebels.” One should add to her list the not-so-distant reprisals from the day of Soviet domination in Poland after WWII, as well as the invasion of September 17, 1939, and the deportations (a moving description of which opens Kapuściński’s book.)

However, it may be worthwhile to take a closer look at the peculiarities of an “Orientalizing” text written by a resident of Central Europe. While visiting Russia, he assumes the perspective of a traveler who is both a foreigner and a Westerner (resident of the West). He often emphasizes that he belongs to the outlanders who found themselves within the borders of the Empire, that he looks as if “from the outside.” He sometimes mentions things and events “incomprehensible to a European.” That is why Waldstein ironically calls Kapuściński a new “Marquis de Custine” (author of the famous and still reprinted *Russia in 1839*). But what was natural in a Frenchman’s outlook on Russia, cannot be such for a Pole, which is a consequence of the “ambiguous cultural status of Poland and Eastern (Central) Europe in the consciousness of both the Eastern and the Western Europeans.”<sup>38</sup> Was Kapuściński a “real” foreigner? Did Poland find itself on the other, Western side of the Iron Curtain after 1945? Of course not. Naturally, for the peoples of the Empire, for the Ukrainians, Russians, Belarusians – it was a land of freedom “close and inaccessible, almost alien, surrounded by an impassable wall and yet local, of this world, and as such, available.”<sup>39</sup>

Kapuściński, nonetheless, has to portray the traveler as a foreigner, just as – in the process of carving a Central European identity – he has to portray Russia as another, strange civilization. It is a civilization characterized by boundless fatalism, entirely alien to the spirit of European rationalism. Kapuściński notices it everywhere, especially in relation to power (“The thoughtlessness or brutality of the authorities is just one of the cataclysms

37 M. Dąbrowska *Dzienniki* [Diaries] Warszawa 1988, Vol.2. 135.

38 M. K. Waldstein “Nowy...” 129.

39 M. Riabczuk *Od Mabrosji do Ukrainy*, trans. O. Hnatiuk i K. Kotyńska, Kraków 2002. 190.

that nature so liberally dispenses,” after all, no one rebels against a flood or an earthquake.<sup>40</sup>) Fatalism is also reflected by the typical sayings of the Russian folk: “Well, that’s life.”<sup>41</sup>

The strongest expression of fatalism with regard to nature and dictatorship can be found in Siberia. Here, whiteness reigns, “whiteness everywhere, blinding, unfathomable, absolute” [29] and white may be read as a color of death: “whiteness is here the color of acceptance, of a surrender to fate.” [30] It is here, in the vast, monotonous spaces that one loses track of time and the sense of change weakens, “man lives here in something like a state of collapse of numbness, of internal paralysis,” [32] and it becomes clear further in the book that this, in general, is how man lives in Asia. In Kapuściński, paralysis – contrasted with Europe’s dynamic movement – is a feature of non-Europeanism. The Siberian Buryats “look upon white Siberia as a temple inhabited by a god. They bow to its plains, pay homage to its landscapes...” [30] Waldstein reads Kapuściński’s descriptions of Siberia as both echoes of the already existing stereotypes and a more general fetishization the Russian mind that bows to mere symbols and is contrasted with the rationality and humanism of the European mind.<sup>42</sup>

Kapuściński’s assessment of Russian religiousness is performed in similar vein. He treats the idea of Moscow as the Third Rome as a univocal, as if it has not changed at all since it was formulated at the turn of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries and as if it has always been something quite beyond comprehension. The worship of “Moscow” as the “New Jerusalem” seems bizarre to Kapuściński. “Russians were capable of believing in such things profoundly, with conviction, fanatically.”<sup>43</sup> [90] Apart from the fact that several “New Jerusalems” were founded in several other geographical areas, Kapuściński fails to realize the combination of cosmological and historical notions. “In the cosmological [and eschatological] perspective, Moscow was received as New Jerusalem, and later – already in this context – as New Rome.” Cosmological notions were primary to historical ones, timeless cyclicity combined itself with linearity of historical evolution. Without cosmological perspective, the idea would not have been able to affect consciousness with the same strength.<sup>44</sup>

40 Kapuściński *Imperium*...169 [165].

41 *Ibid.* 40, see also 189 [33]

42 M. K. Waldstein *Nowy*... 129-132.

43 Kapuściński *Imperium* 93 [90].

44 B.A. Uspienski “Percepcja historii dawnej Rusi i doktryna ‘Moskwa – Trzeci Rzym!’” *Religia i semiotyka*. Trans. B. Żyłko, Gdańsk 2001. 51-52.



Similarly, Kapuściński views the idea that “Tsar is Almighty” or “His earthly reflection”<sup>45</sup> as a peculiar aberration. Bolshevism attempted to use this faith, transforming itself into a “new God.” [105] Supposedly, the principle of worship is the same in Orthodoxy and Bolshevism and consequently, Kapuściński believes the process of desacralization of power – through television broadcasting in the 90s – to have been “salutary and liberating,” contributing greatly to the collapse of the Empire. As “the belief in the mystical nature of power had been one of the tenets of Russian political culture.”<sup>46</sup>

Kapuściński largely simplifies the issue. As Uspienski and Żywow prove, sacralization of the ruler in itself is not an exceptional phenomenon, one finds it in Byzantium and in the Western Europe, with canonization of monarchs being even more typical of the Western Europe than of Byzantium. Byzantium transferred to Old Rus the ideal of parallelism of Tsar and God, not their identity – and this is what one of the most important debates within Orthodoxy centered upon. The identification of Tsar and God was treated as a blasphemy. There was a “conflict between the sacralization of the monarch and Orthodox theology.”<sup>47</sup> This is very far from the “sacralization of power” in Bolshevism. As presented by Kapuściński, Orthodoxy indeed may seem a religion of national self-worship as opposed to the universalism of Catholicism (oftentimes questioned, one might add).<sup>48</sup>

Kapuściński believes the Russian language to reflect in its essence the characteristics of Russian nature. In the period of *perestroika*, the abundance of produced speech was encouraged by “the Russian language itself, with its broad phrasing, expansive, unending, like the Russian land. No Cartesian discipline, no aphoristic asceticism.”<sup>49</sup> Naturally, all of this sets it apart from the Western styles and languages. In Russia, one has to wade and wade through words before “one arrives at a sentence of value” (*id.*). It is indeed truly amazing that Kapuściński did not read such texts in Polish or French. Perhaps, as a devotee of Cartesianism, he has never encountered them.

Waldstein believes that Kapuściński takes the “self-Orientalizing” discourses of his Soviet informants on faith as they fit his project of de-Orientalizing Central Europe (“Orientalized” by the West). The image of a pathological Other, in other words, of Russia, allows him to present Central Europe as simply “Europe.” By operating with sharp, clear and consistent dichotomies

45 Kapuściński *Imperium*. 109 [105].

46 *Ibid.* 320-321 [321]

47 B.A. Uspiensky, W. M. Żywow *Car i bóg...* 25-26 and 38, 112.

48 M. K. Waldstein *Nawyj...* 137.

49 Kapuściński *Imperium* 315. [315]

he seems to have achieved his goal. “‘Russia’ is methodically pictured as collectivist, authoritarian, nationalistic and immobile, with Europeans as individualist, liberal, patriotic and historical. Moreover, Kapuściński never hides his belief that only the latter is fully ‘human’ and universal.”<sup>50</sup>

To conclude after Waldstein, Europeisation of Central Europe (the latter notion was popularized in 1984 by Milan Kundera) uses a monolithic image of the Other – Russia – setting itself apart from the Great Void to the east and establishes a boundary between “us” and “them”; one could only add, perhaps, that not only Kazimierz Brandys pointed out the dangerous closeness of “us” and “them.”

This image of Russia is disputed by Mariusz Wilk in *Wilczy notes* [Wilk’s notebook] (1998). Taking advantage of the semantics of his name,<sup>51</sup> Wilk sets his own trail whose character is defined among others, with a critical reference to Kapuściński’s *Imperium* that Wilk believes to be “the last foreign report on the Euro-Asian empire, or to be more precise, on its collapse.”<sup>52</sup> Wilk sees Kapuściński as a writer directed by a random choice of visited places and an equally random selection of cited works. “Kapuściński’s method is as simple as a tourist expedition: a couple of days here, a couple of days there, and then a postcard-chapter about each visited place, like a souvenir snapshot. Naturally, a great writer will also take great pictures but for what purpose? To write a comic strip about the Empire?”<sup>53</sup>

It is a method that Wilk radically rejects. Wandering instead of “collecting tourist impressions” becomes his principle of “experiencing Russia.”<sup>54</sup> This is also how the author settled down in the Solovetsky Islands that he understands to be the “essence and anticipation of Russia at the same time” (*id.*). Wilk believes he had to both settle down and wander for several years as he did not want and could not assume the perspective of a Western foreigner. For Kapuściński, it was the only viable position: to remain a foreigner in the Empire, and “with patience (but not superciliousness!) ... maintain distance with a calm, attentive, sober gaze”<sup>55</sup> (26).

Wilk discovered something else. He quotes Fyodor Tyutchev famous verse from 1866 (whose lines found their way also into Kapuściński’s collection of

50 M. K. Waldstein *Nowyj...* 132-133. [Here after the English essay version, from: *Social Identities*, Volume 8, Number 3, 2002. 481-499]

51 [PL “wilk” is equivalent to EN “wolf”, “wilczy” to “lupine, typical of wolves” - AW]

52 M. Wilk *Wilczy notes*, Gdańsk 1998. 58.

53 *ibid.* 60.

54 *ibid.* 14.

55 Kapuściński *Imperium* 33. [26]

quotations, cited as a proof for the Russians' belief in Russia's mysticism and mysteriousness):

Russia is baffling to the mind,  
 Not subject to the common measure  
 Her ways – of a peculiar kind...  
 One only can have faith in Russia<sup>56</sup>  
 (trans. by Avril Pyman)

Wilk was irritated by the verse that his Russian friends used to fend off his questions. (This happened to me as well, in Moscow in 1956, clearly it is a common Russian custom.) He managed to tame it eventually: "I replaced 'faith' in one of Tyutchev's lines with my own word – 'experience.' We need to experience Russia ourselves."<sup>57</sup> This is why Wilk refers to the motto of his book as a "mimicry of Tyutchev":

Russia is baffling to the mind,  
 Not subject to our measure  
 It is a different dimension  
 Russia must be experienced

A significant shift has taken place here: it is not reason and faith that are set against each other, but reason and experience. This is how Wilk strips Tyutchev's words of the possibly anti-rationalist tones and moves their meaning to the plane of understanding through experiencing (Dithley's *Erlebnis*). It is a conscious departure from the distance of a Western foreigner (nonetheless accompanied by a conviction that he will always and everywhere be alone, "on the sideline – a wolf that I am") followed by locating oneself for a long time in the very heart of Russia, as this is how Wilk perceives the Solovetsky Islands ("for centuries in the center of Orthodoxy, a powerful locus of Ruthenian statehood in the North"<sup>58</sup>) This is where we find a broader description of the Islands, where one can "see Russia as one sees the sea in a drop of water" (14).

"One has to leave a piece of one's life here... forever"<sup>59</sup> the author declares, elaborating on his view on the peculiar identification with Russia: "To understand the Russian reality from the inside means to look at Russia through the

56 [Here trans. by Avril Pyman. In Kapuściński: "One cannot comprehend Russia with one's reason ... one can only have faith in Russia." Kapuściński, *Imperium*. Vintage 1995. 309. Trans. Klara Głowaczewska. – AW]

57 M. Wilk *Wilczy...* 12.

58 *Ibid.* 15.

59 M. Wilk „Korespondencja z Sołowek." *Przegląd polityczny* 1999 Vol. 40-41.

eyes of a Russian and only later translate this somehow into own language”<sup>60</sup> – in a different way then, than the Westerners who never made such attempt. And with what result?

Wilk certainly had decided to view himself as a pioneer of the knowledge of Russia in Poland. Hence the *Glossary* of expressions used in Russia and unknown in Poland included in *Wilczy bilet*. Some of the definitions are, in fact, rather unnecessary (for instance, Russian *isichazm*, known in Poland as *hezychazm*, hesychasm). But the dictionary is a testimony to the work of translation the task of which Wilk has set for himself. Often, “experience” resurfaces in translation through a large number of lexical and structural calques from Russian appearing on almost every page, especially where the author attempts to mimic the Russian rhythm. We know that this is dangerous. Miłosz claims that Poles give in too easily to the Russian rhythm and therefore should avoid it even more. But Herling-Grudziński had an entirely different opinion on Wilk’s writing, seeing in it “an amazing, suggestive mixture of Polish and Russian, so ingenious and poignant that sometimes seeming to be an entirely different, new language.”<sup>61</sup> (Recently, having spent a decade in the polar circle, Wilk moved from the Islands to a small village by the Lake Onega, also in the North. Having complained that Poles criticize his Russicisms, he was asked by a Russian journalist: “Have you considered switching to Russian, perhaps? Like your Conrad switched to English?” Wilk replied: “So far, I have not, although more and more often I have the impression of being a Russian writer writing in Polish.”<sup>62</sup> Perhaps this is a reply to Herling-Grudziński’s remark as well.)

The “experience of Russia” is strengthened in *Wilczy notes* by existential undertones of the decision to settle down in and wander the Solovetsky Islands. Wilk recalls his introduction to the island: “Up until now I have always chased something, acted, traveled, I had no time to think, to look at myself from a distance: what are you chasing, wolf? The answer appeared on its own: we’re staying.” In *List z Północy* [Letter from the North] from January 1999, Wilk describes his fascination with the Solovetsky life “on the brink,” “between existence and non-existence.” “And so I have reached the edge. Nothing further ahead, only ice, snow and permafrost. No trace of man, no ruins [...] And the final boundary ... after all, the Sami believe that the Islands lie halfway on the road to the other world – jak cela monacha, jak zona” (*id.*). This sequence

60 M. Wilk *Wilczy...* 55.

61 G. Herling-Grudziński „Dziennik pisany nocą.” *Rzeczpospolita*, „Plus-Minus” 14-15 Dec. 1998.

62 M. Wilk *Dziennik Północy. Dokończone dzieło Lenina*. *Rzeczpospolita*, „Plus-Minus” 4-5 Oct. 2003.

of images shows what existential strangeness – always sensed and further reinforced in Solovki – has come to mean to Wilk.

His experience of Russia is deeply imbued with a feeling of separateness, of being “on the sideline,” and at the same time with a sense of communication with those, who – like the author did – found themselves on the edges. This is the most important narrative feature of *Wilczy notes*. When it comes to revealing truths about Russia, the book hardly contains revelations, as some of the reviewers (P. Huelle, A.S. Kowalczyk) rightly pointed out. “The same topics continue to reappear: poverty and helplessness of the Solovki residents, alcoholism, mud, corruption, incompetence of authorities, civilizational and ecological disaster”<sup>63</sup> Reviewers were also critical about the author’s blunt description of Kapuściński’s *Imperium* as a collection of tourist snapshots. Wilk himself examines in Solovki the encounter of two Russias: the Empire and Mother Russia.<sup>64</sup> He finds the latter more interesting and this is also what sets him apart from Kapuściński.

Jerzy Giedroyc’s statement that among the new Polish prose only Wilk seems to be worth something is only initially puzzling; Giedroyc had published chapters from *Wilczy notes* in *Kultura Paryska* before appeared in print and his “Eastern politics” assumed the change of the image of Russia in the Polish consciousness to be a task of primary importance. The “Orientalization” of Russia, discussed earlier in this essay, certainly was not conducive to such transformations and strengthened, in fact, the rigid stereotypes. The key value of *Wilczy notes* lies in its reformed attitude, in a complete rejection of “Orientalizing” Russia to contrast it with the “better Europe.” This, I believe, is what earned Giedroyc’s respect and lead him to consider Wilk “an exceptional scholar of Russia.”

I cannot fail to note that so far the latest voice in the struggle with the imagined “Russki” belongs to the famous novel by Dorota Masłowska, *Snow White and Russian Red*. In a mature literary creation, Masłowska perfectly captures the stream of language, mostly gibberish, determining contemporary Polish identity, grotesque and usually self-contradictory, where opposing phenomena (such as anarchism and capitalism) mix (to a degree) but “so it goes” – phantasms of ideas blend together and one can live with that. Lumpen-Messianism is something absurd but it exists nonetheless. The narcotic trance talk composed of clusters of languages heard on television, in soap operas, *Big Brother*, school and office reflects what goes on in the minds of Poles. Masłowska recreated – and created – the language of aggression as

63 A.S. Kowalczyk “O Wilku mowa” *Res Publica Nowa* March 1999.

64 M. Wilk *Wilczy* 12-15.

elementary Polish, *basic Polish*. The Polish-Ruski War is also fought through hateful and violent talk.

It is a language that constitutes itself through an opposition to the “Ruski.” As the enemy, “Ruski” fundamentally cement the xenophobic Polish identity. The complex of Polish secondariness to the West finds a relief in the conviction that the Ruski are even more secondary and worse. At the same time, however, they are a sinister force. Ruski need to be hated and traded with. Masłowska reaches the peaks of stingy irony in the following narrative sequence: it is better to buy the national flag for the No Ruski Day from the Ruski, as theirs are cheaper and biodegradable: “I bought from the Rusksis, because it’s cheaper. Boy Scouts also sell them. But they’re more expensive. It’s known. And from artificial materials. Nonbiodegradable.”<sup>65</sup> The narrator and hero of the story, Nails, protects his Polish-national purity (you are either Polish, or you are Ruski) as well as the heterosexual one (in a panic fearing accusations of homosexuality). At some point, in a drug-induced hallucination, a despised “Ruski” merges with the “woman”: the “woman” is a “Ruski spawn.” “Maybe they’re Ruskis and they’re just euphemistically called women. And we men are going to drive them out of here, from this town, where they perpetrate misfortunes, plagues, droughts, bad crops, debauchery. They ruin the upholstery with their blood, which flies out of them like nobody’s business, soiling the whole world with permanent stains. A real River Menstruation. Angelica, a serious disease. The severe penalty for lacking a maidenhead. When her mom finds out, she’ll put it back.” [107-108] In this daring logorrhea, the hatred of Ruski intertwines with a disgust for female physiology and a magical fear of women’s blood. The allusion to Żeromski<sup>66</sup> (and, perhaps, to the famous scene with alleged menstrual blood on Salusia’s bed sheets in *The Faithful River*) reveals, nonetheless, the connection of Poland and the woman; further in the novel, Nails deciphers the meaning of white and red: “On top a Polish pill [methamphetamine], on the bottom Polish menstruation.” [102] But the Ruski and female weakness and inferiority need to be rooted out from our towns.

In the wake of Masłowska’s novel, the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century deconstructs Poland’s Romantic military myth. The sense of Polish – that is European – superiority over Russia was its basic ingredient.

And may it end once and for all.

*Translation: Anna Warsø*

65 D. Masłowska, *Wojna polsko-ruska pod flagą białą-czerwoną*, Warszawa 2003, 86. [114] [This and following quotations after *Snow White and Russian Red*. Trans. Benjamin Paloff. Grove Press, 2005. Page numbers in square brackets]

66 [Masłowska’s “wierna rzeka Menstruacja” translates literally to “faithful River Menstruation” – AW]