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Identity-Formative Aspects of Polish Postdependency Studies.

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After 1989, it was quickly observed that political and socioeconomic transformations that took place in Poland introduced significant changes to the individual and collective identities of Poles, making both more open to impulses flowing from in Western Europe and thus increasing their ambiguity on the one hand, and on the other hand, closing them off within the hardest stereotypes forged by the martyrologic and messianistic version of history of a country scarred by nearly 130 years of partitions, destruction wreaked by two world wars, psychosocial consequences of Nazi and Soviet occupation between 1939 and 1945, and a long period of curtailed sovereignty after the war.

The duality, or rather, the multinominality of reactions to sweeping change is reflected to a degree in the literature produced within the last 20 years, which deftly portrays the polar differences in world view within the Polish national community, viewed before 1989 through the prism of the relationship between the authorities and the opposition, with both struggling to function as forces representing the silent majority. The former opposition splintered into multiple factions (to simplify the issue, the factions either followed secular-liberal principles or

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aligned themselves with nationalist-Catholic precepts); representatives of erstwhile authorities found themselves in the position of the Other, ethically and morally unfit to function within the reborn and fragile, as it quickly turned out, community.

If we take a closer look at the Polish literary output of the last two decades, we will quickly see books that either contest the new economic and political realities of the Polish landscape (like *The Fourth Sky* by Mariusz Sieniewicz, 2004, Sławomir Shuty's *Zwał*, 2004, and Dawid Bieńkowski's *Nothing*, 2005) or point out the old/new victims of exclusion (*We Don't Serve Jewish Women*, Sieniewicz, 2005, Ignary Karpowicz's *Niechalo*, 2006, Jarosław Maślaneł's *Haszyszopenki*, 2008, and many more). Some authors have tried, directly or indirectly, to reflect on the mechanisms behind situations facilitating the creation of specific excluded or oppressed identities. I'm thinking about Dorota Masłowska's *Snow White and Russian Red* (2002), Izabela Filipiak's *Absolute Amnesia* (1995), *Italian High Heels* (2011) by Magdalena Tulli, Bożena Umińska-Keff's *On Mother and Motherland* (2008), and Sylwia Chutnik's *Baby* (2010). The mentioned works are part of the debate launched by the publication of Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988).¹ It turned out that recently published Polish writing touching upon that subject carries traces of the official discourse on domestic realities (i.e. its description using the dominant final vocabulary) that survived, in different varieties, and functioned for much of the partition period, the occupation, the period of incomplete sovereignty, and ... is still more or less intact.

In Masłowska's novel, it surfaces when revealing the disdainful attitude, shaped by long-term subjugation, towards an oppressor perceived as vicious and primitive.² Russians or "Russkies" are the embodiment of all evil for the characters in the novel – teenagers from the projects, educated in Polish schools, watching Polish television, and brought up in Polish families. The teens apply the derogatory term "Russki" to whatever they consider to be repulsive, worse even than they are, and to all authorities and institutions trying to exert control over the individual and arbitrarily determine who is good and who is bad. Whatever took power and their rightful place in the world away from their characters is, according to them, "Russian." Thus, they intuitively end up constructing the image of a "Russki" according to the norms

1 G. Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

2 I wrote about it in a previous article: "Growing Up in Times of Crisis in Nothing Pleasant: Postdependency Aspects of Recently Published Polish Novels" in *New Two Decades 1989-2009. Diagnoses – Hierarchies – Perspectives*, ed. H. Gosk (Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, 2010), 93-114.

of colonial discourse, a discourse of violence whose goal, as Homi Bhabha writes, is to create such a depiction of the colonized (here: inferior) to extract their degeneracy, which in turn would justify their submission to the forces that subjugated them.³

The characters in the novel have only second-hand knowledge of the realities of the People's Republic of Poland. Their familiarity with the methods employed by the Communist authorities, as well as their knowledge of the contemporary world, stems only from what they were able to absorb from mass culture, meaning stereotypical platitudes that still remain in circulation, in communication between family members, neighbors, communities, all of it mixed with the precepts we learn in school and the content we absorb via mass media. In their perception of the world, everything is mixed with everything else, creating an untenable signal to noise ratio that, in turn, produces nodes that accrue content around various images of the past detached from the proper context and placed in different ones depending on immediate needs. Their only common denominator is the fact that elements of the depiction of the world are saturated with negative emotions, rage of someone who was refused a place at the table occupied by people who benefited from the transition from Communism to democracy, which entailed a spectacular liberation from the yoke imposed on Poles by their neighbor to the east (some turned out to be weaker in these trying times, and thus they're inferior, more susceptible to being postponed) and the selection of another hegemon - the Western-style free market. The latter also introduced new criteria to determine who's inferior and who's not. The protagonist of the novel, nicknamed Nails, and his cohorts can't really find their bearings in this new reality. Their inability to outgrow the subaltern identity is best evidenced by their language, clearly marred by a dependent structure which immediately sets up their tale about forming identities to fail. Analyzing this phenomenon, Katarzyna Barańska and Claudia Snochowska-Gonzales write: "The protagonist's speech is like scorched earth – trampled by [...] violent discourses: nationalist, capitalist, martyrologic, sexist, racist [...] the language of the subaltern, if it's permitted at all, has to be a gruesome and violent tangle of ideologies attempting to replace its subjectivity."⁴ In a world devoid of unquestionable authorities, with bundled discourses of violence offered in their place, the disciples of the art of enduring transformative times establish,

3 cf. H.K. Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" in *Location and Culture* (London-New York: Routledge, 1994), 121.

4 K. Barańska, K. Snochowska-Gonzales, "Wojna chamsko-pańska," *Recykling Idei. Pismo Społecznie Zaangażowane*, no. 10 (2008), 129.

for their own purposes, including survival, paradigms of quasi-values that are supposed to prevent their identities from disintegrating.

Institutional violence perpetrated by foreign powers is a thing of the past, but their mentalities still readily make use of cognitive structures developed back when Poland was partitioned, reinforced under Nazi and Soviet occupation, and used extensively during the postwar non-sovereignty period. These are matrices of political domination; the detested subordination to representatives of any sort of authority aspiring to superior status; matrices of circumstances relieving individuals from any responsibility for actions dictated by conscious identity-forming choices – so, patterns of diverse psychosocial forms of long-term subjugation that are hard to process.

In 1995, with her *Absolute Amnesia*,⁵ Izabela Filipiak deftly portrayed not only trouble with identity, but identity itself as a matrix filled with literary and real content, and in this particular case, interchangeable as both function in specific Polish realities as stereotypes. She focused on the condition of a woman and a child – characters who the Romantic literary tradition was especially fond of portraying as sublime, ethereal – and depicted them as peculiarly incapacitated, as victims, pariahs, reified entities, that image further reinforced by the constitutive power of cultural stereotypes and representations fixed in the collective *imaginarium* of the Polish national community. The protagonist-narrator of *Absolute Amnesia* has internalized the notions of home as shelter and family as a tight-knit unit and source of mutual support but she is talking about the life of her own household in terms resembling a tale of concentration camp survivor, replete with victims and hangmen.

Filipiak considers the process of shaping the identity of the character crucial, given how much space she dedicates to home and school, both of them places where fundamental values are embedded into the consciousness of individuals; places where real life experiences first shape the human cognitive apparatus. The school in Filipiak's novel, however, is "not a place of learning [...] from the first grade to the last, all you ever do is forget." (50); the school purges your consciousness of anything original, individual, associated with freedom and vulnerability. Therefore, it should not be surprising that in the subplot revolving around reports that the students were supposed to write on the subject of "How I imagine my future?", the overwhelming majority of students "handed in the same, pre-ordained biography of their lives." (149)

The infantile immaturity of the protagonist, combined with the gravity of the threat to the individual's identity posed by being trapped in clichés

5 I. Filipiak, *Absolute Amnesia*, (Poznań: Wydawnictwo "OBSERWATOR", 1995). From here onwards, the location of the quoted passages in the novel will be indicated in the main body of the article.

and stereotypes is an indicator of the excellent construction of this literary character, whose identity is founded on the lack of permanent signifiers, functions as a matrix ready to be filled with content. The character exhibits traits of a storyteller recounting tales from human lives, perfectly aware of the importance of the code which clarifies their meanings and places them within a specific axiological aura.

The identity of the protagonist of *Absolute Amnesia* is decided by the grasp of problems revolving around the definition of said identity, and the protagonist considers her own situation rife with contradictions. She does not attempt to purge her memory of that fact in order to maintain the integrity of her own identity; instead, she constructs a cohesive framework of the story that searches for an ethical explanation of the described state of affairs. The constructive aspect of her identity seems to reveal itself only at the meta-level, as the awareness of emptiness and inauthenticity; the knowledge that human identity is a condition, not a process, a challenge rather than settlement; that the we might decrease the discomfort associated with its traumatic and non-autonomous characteristics by trying to gain knowledge about the rules governing the code that allows us to speak about it, as the pattern, the figure of the code is the foundation of the meaning that emerges from the affective relationship between a person, a place, and the events that transpire therein.⁶

The works of Bożena Umińska-Keff and Sylwia Chutnik contain hybrid represented worlds that draw its “implements” both from the dominant narrative of Poland-Homeland and the counter-narratives that destabilize the dominant ones, derived from Romantic paradigms and exposing the selective character of its structure (items evoking images of the others, the excluded, the inferior, Jews, feminists, atheists, communists, etc.), which, in turn, makes them (the represented worlds) hard to internalize in terms of traditional linear reading. This is a result of the fact that they were shaped by various violence-bearing discourses created at consecutive stages of historical transformations, which were perceived by the Polish community as oppressive, and by the process of establishing forms of activities that compensate for legitimate grievances. Many of them are linked with the victim-martyr narrative, which, paradoxically, makes them warrior narratives, requiring absolute subordination and ... absolute dismissal of the opponent (such discourse pronounces the adversary traitor and alien, places an anathema upon him).

6 I wrote about it in the chapter “Problem tożsamości” [“The Identity Problem”] of my book *Bohater swoich czasów. Postać literacka w powojennej prozie polskiej o tematyce współczesnej. Wybrane zagadnienia* [A Hero of His Time: The Literary Character in Polish Postwar Literature Depicting Contemporary Themes: Selected Issues] (Izabelin: Świat Literacki, 2002)

In Sylwia Chutnik's novel, which goes against discourses emphasizing patriotism, martyrology, and duty, the author writes: "Add 'Poland' to your social network, to your newsletter. Give her a chance and you might participate in a raffle with amazing prizes, including: getting out of Fucksville and never coming back (...)"⁷

In the literary works mentioned above, the excluded and marginalized by the violence of dominant discourse of selfless duty translate them into local languages of others, those who shy away from heroism and who do nothing engage in patriotic rituals – all of whom are indirectly defined by the traditional interpretation of the narrative of homeland.

Investigating the aforementioned writing leaves us with one crucial finding: when it comes to the power the dominant discourse exerts over the shaping of national identity, the new social and political circumstances that took hold after 1989 either changed nothing or the changes were very minute, especially given the fact that it now turned out to be a zone of not only control but also exclusion, not only memory but also oblivion, not only exclusion but also voluntary participation in its contents. Danuta Mutter, one of the characters in *Baby*, shouts the following statement: "I accuse history of making me this useless doormat. (...) I create vortices that are supposed to assimilate us, just as I was assimilated by the past of this country, with its wars, uprisings, expulsions, returns, and the new system that changed precisely nothing."⁸

The works of literature mentioned above, touching on the process of shaping the identity of the contemporary Polish citizen, seem to require investigative faculties adequate to the challenges they pose.



Here, I would like to take a break in the historical and literary argument and detour into discussing the importance of the well-known changes that took place at that time, also in Poland, in how we think about the theory of literature and literary studies in general. New methods of inquiry appeared, including the distancing approach that stressed the position of the scholar in relation to the investigated object, and the reflexive approach that focused on observing the instruments of inquiry and their state. The aforementioned fields of study revealed the face of narrative formations, results of using language to communicate knowledge about reality and its literary

7 S. Chutnik, *Dzidzia [Baby]* (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 2010), 44-45.

8 *ibid.*, 144-145.

representations; formations open to influence from other fields, fascinated with inspirations flowing from anthropologizing and cultural approaches to literary work, viewed in rich historical, civilizational, socio-political, biological, and physiological contexts.

There might also be merit in concentrating on the positive elements in the situation of literary studies as a whole, along with all their ambiguity, interminability, and heterogeneity; elements which impart it with a certain degree of liberty in drawing inspiration from diagnoses of scholars with diverse specialties in order to formulate interpretations of literary works depicting contemporary themes, including those touching on the collective *imaginarium* of society, the canon of values that enables the building of a social consensus or, conversely, hindering or precluding it.

Intuitions drawn from the anthropologizing approach direct us to beware of treating norms, rules governing societies, and other patterns we assimilate to the point where we consider them natural (like the patriarchal and Catholic influences on perception of reality in Poland) as obvious. Diagnoses utilizing instruments of inquiry developed by deconstructionists allow us to ask question about the mechanisms behind the “normalcy/naturalness effect,” due to which answering questions like “Who am I?” does not require deliberation, does not give rise to doubt, and sometimes happens without prior reflection, although its constructive character – were we to closely analyze it – makes the obviousness of such answer problematic.

Proponents of utilizing anthropologizing and cultural approaches in contemporary Polish literature studies, which often take account of the feedback loop between literary and extraliterary (social, political, historical, moral, etc.) inputs in their investigations, are interested in interpreting literature touching on subjects and processes also explored by sociologists, historians, journalists; literature that establishes narratives out of events populating the everyday lives of contemporary Polish society.

Literary scholars, employing approaches created by academics from various branches of cultural studies (from gender, through postcolonial, subaltern, up to eco studies) in their diagnoses and analyzing literary testimonies of the working living tissue of social consciousness which determines the horizons of individual and collective expectations, are taking on interpretative activities which denaturalize circumstances and conditions making up the “framework of events” that define active subjects and activities they perform. They’re interested in the answer to the question of: “Who makes history? And how does that influence them?”; it is a question about the human experience of change over time and the degree of influence it exerts over individual and collective identity; and we know that the relationship goes both ways. Their work might be related to the discursivization of the

reality effect contained in the analyzed literary works, according to Roland Barthes,⁹ who claimed that in modern history, and I would venture to say that also in anthropologizing investigations of literary statements on the subject of reality, legibility is paramount; in this case, legibility means establishing rules governing the code which allows individuals/cultural communities functioning in a certain time and place to express certain things about their existence in a certain and legible way, the latter trait facilitated by the fact that the communication took account of the widely accepted models of communicability/normalcy in the ontological, epistemological, and axiological sense. Grasping the sense of such communications seems easier when we make use of an interpretation guided by the belief in the ambiguity of the sense of reality and the meanings of literary text exploring that reality, which tend to impose themselves on us as natural. Performing such an interpretation requires a close reading and sticking to the letter of the work during the analysis process. A scholar employing this type of approach should demonstrate suspicion towards what seems natural and familiar. Especially given the fact that the norm not only constitutes, but also excludes, functions as both prescription and proscription.

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Going back to historical and literary themes occupying Polish literature studies in this context, one subject especially merits a wider approach; although it's fairly ungrateful in practice, it is promising in the long-term. The subject portrays the multinominal effects repercussions of long-term survival in a state of either complete subordination or incomplete sovereignty that ravaged the identities of contemporary Poles (and the literary characters that represent them) and their understanding of normalcy/naturalness, correlated with a specifically "constructed" geopolitical location: eastwards of the West and westwards of the East, so where, exactly? Certainly not at the center which, in the minds of Europeans, automatically confers a certain distinction on the matters to which it is related.

The field I call postdependency studies¹⁰ has a lot of potential to unearth and investigate issues that rarely appear in social communication; they're transparent and as such are barely perceptible, despite the fact that they are heavy with diverse contents; they're the latent constituent of the

9 R. Barthes, "The Discourse of History," *Comparative Criticism* 3 (1981): 7-20

10 I wrote about it extensively in my book *Tales of the 'Colonized/Colonizer': In the Circle of Postcolonial Studies on Polish Literature of the 20th and 21st Century*, (Kraków: Universitas, 2010). This article will reference the assumptions put forth in that book.

individual and collective identity of Poles, while in literature, they fed unwelcome narratives for a long time. These unwelcome, to a different degree, narratives appeared in Polish 20th century literature not only between 1945 and 1989, but also before and after that period, depending on whether we decide to consider two factors that facilitated its “production.” These factors are: the functioning of a dominant emancipatory discourse during the interwar period and after the collapse of the People’s Republic of Poland (i.e. one aiming to sever any sort of relationship with the unwanted results of past dependencies, remnants of either the partitioning of Poland or the postwar subordination to the Soviet Union); the second factor is a palimpsest-like presence of discourses that were dominant in the past in literature published between 1918 and 1939 and then later after 1989, discourses that were violently imposed by unwanted governments (that were functioning on Polish territory prior to 1918 and between 1945 and 1989).

The narratives that were misplaced in the dominant discourse of its own historical times include, *inter alia*, the interwar Borderlands discourse, not, however, when it talks about the “bulwark” or the “Polish civilizing mission in the East”, but when it involuntarily exposes its feelings of superiority and patronizing attitude towards non-Polish inhabitants of the eastern fringes of the Second Polish Republic. The postwar *émigré* discourse, and its counter-discourse fostered by the authorities of the People’s Republic of Poland, polemicalizing with narratives praising acceptance of the socio-political version of Polish postwar reality, and finally – narratives created after 1989, very reluctant to admit to their connection to processes rooted in socialist Poland, and deeply internalized which makes them even more persistent.

Both postdependency discourse as well as the counter-discourse established in times of oppression are strongly linked with the dominant discourse, imposed by the unwanted government, which they rejected and struggled against. Enduring prolonged subordination pushes the subjugated society to reach for the dominant structure, to adapt to them to survive; simultaneously, the vanquished society adapts these structures (insofar as it is feasible) to fit its needs, regardless of whether it considered them foreign or not. All of it exerted significant influence over the process of shaping individual and collective identities of entities involved in the process described above.

One of the methods of adapting to incomplete political sovereignty in the People’s Republic of Poland era was described by Jan Kieniewicz in his article “Inteligent i sytuacja: Polska 1978” [“The Intellectual and the Situation: Poland 1978”]. The historian defined the situation in relation to the satirical song written by Wojciech Młynarski in 1976 entitled *Situation*. He described it as “a state wherein one ascribed one’s own conformist conduct

to external circumstances out of one's control."¹¹ He also called attention to the fact that we share the "situation" with representatives of the authorities. He reminded us that

the phrase "That's the situation, you see" was popular nationwide and was utilized in a wide variety of situations. These external circumstances might have included the regime and the Polish-Soviet alliance, the awareness of the roles played by the *nomenklatura* and the censors, or connections in local party cliques (...) But it was mostly fear, as a matter of fact. The situation precluded dissent, did not allow free expression of arguments or positions. Simultaneously, however, it provided everyone with an alibi. It allowed people to keep their fear under wraps.¹²

The narrative of fear and humiliation associated with the situation understood that way would be an example of an unwelcome narrative in the repertoire of Polish identity-forming accounts created with either manifest or inadvertent consideration of background relations between superior or subordinate.

Postdependency studies sensitize us to the dialogical nature of the relationship. In this particular case, each reaction of the subordinate to subjugation translates into coming into contact with the subjugator which, in turn, leaves its traces. That is where a variety of issues comes in, including the matter of "autocolonization" of peoples oppressed by the Soviet Union; the description of the latter phenomenon would require utilizing terms belonging to masochist vocabularies: blame and self-blame perpetrated by entities associated with the situation wherein "autocolonization" is linked with the responsibility for one's own "colonization."¹³ Comprehending the way this mechanism operates might be traumatizing, it requires readiness to confess,

11 J. Kieniewicz, "Inteligent i sytuacja: Polska 1978" ["The Intelligentsia and the Situation: Poland 1978"] in *Zwyczajny człowiek w niezwykłej sytuacji. Próba przekazania doświadczenia nieposiadającego wzoru opisywalności* (*Ordinary People in Extraordinary Situations. An Attempt at Communicating Experiences Devoid of Description Patterns*), ed. H. Gosk (Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, 2009), 199-200.

12 *ibid.*, 200.

13 This issue was explored by Vytautas Rubavičius in his article "A Soviet Experience of Our Own: Comprehension and the Surrounding Silence" in *Baltic Postcolonialism*, ed. V. Kelertas (Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2006), 82-104. He writes, e.g. about the specific interpretative construction of "silent resistance," which all of a sudden became the default attitude allegedly exhibited by all inhabitants of post-Soviet Lithuania when they were still living under the thrall of the Soviet Union (even the people who belonged to the erstwhile *nomenklatura* of the now-defunct Party). The essay also includes the author's plea to stop blurring the line between adaptation and assimilation and silent resistance.

to change views and opinions following understanding of the situation, and an ability to forgive those who were guilty and those who were wrong.

The difficulty of the task is the reason why scholars are silent about various aspects (including collaborating with the enemy) of life under subjugation,¹⁴ even though thorough examination and diagnoses of said aspects would beget appreciation of the fact that the unwanted world defined by dependence on Russia/the Soviet Union, now a relic of the past, and, to some degree, the increased fascination with the West that it drove, are the Others that constitute a part of the collective identity of Poles – ex-subjects of a peculiar type of Eastern-Western domination.

It is worth nothing that the specific character of Polish postdependent¹⁵ condition is based on the fact that it is made up by a plethora of dominant and dependent situations, as well as different combinations of the two, so to speak, that worked out their own discourses. These include:

- firstly, the pre-partition situation, wherein the Noble's republic temporarily played the imperial role, subordinating adjacent territories and making them into its periphery;
- secondly, the partition situation, wherein the Polish Republic became the oppressed subordinate;
- thirdly, the mixed variant of the interwar period: the post-partition situation and the return (although in a much narrower scope) of imperialist policies aimed at non-Polish inhabitants of the so-called Eastern Borderlands;
- fourthly, returning to the position of the oppressed subordinate 20 years later, first during the Nazi and Soviet invasion and later during the incomplete sovereignty era between 1945 and 1989.

Finally, after 1989 – the postdependency situation, wherein the memory of prior roles (both superior and subordinate) is invoked in literature (and many other places) with varied results. Discourses created in the aforementioned situations, animated by the positions assumed by Poles in different

14 Teresa Walas explored these aspects in the context of the People's Republic of Poland in her book *Understanding Our Era* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2003).

15 I'll be using the hyphenless spelling of the term "postdependent," keeping in line with the widely accepted spelling of the term "postcolonial," following the definition brought forth by John Thieme in *The Arnold Anthology of Post-Colonial Literatures in English* (New York: Arnold, 1996), XV. For Thieme, the term "postcolonialism" means "a description of a unique and «historically»-embedded aggregation of cultural strategies," whereas "postcolonial" (here: "postdependent") refers to discourses. Quoted from P. Zajas, *Postkolonialne imaginarium południowoafrykańskie literatury polskiej i niderlandzkiej* [A South African Postcolonial Imaginarium in Polish and Dutch Literature] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza, 2008), 21 (ref. 2)

stages of the oppressor-oppressed relationship, as well as (in each case) by memory of the past, have made their mark to a greater or lesser degree on literary narratives produced in each individual stage.

The postdependent perspective is especially useful in diagnosing cognitive structures, the character of which was formed by the subject's experience of long-term dependence/non-sovereignty, and later by their desire to change that state of affairs and abreact. Both stages/processes, in their historically-motivated contexts, have been functioning in Poland as natural, primary, i.e. ones that become the subject's faculties during the culturalization process thanks to Important Others in their immediate vicinity. Both have also been reflected in literary works produced not only in the 20th and 21st centuries. Considering the post-dependent perspective in their reading and interpretation allows us to point out a few problems that decide the specifics of Polish, and partially the Central European, view of reality.

Taking a closer look at any of these problems will allow us to see that similar issues plague other cultures, even ones that are geographically distant from ours, their only common denominator is that all of them endured long-term relationships of dependency. For example, the proclivity for looking to the past, to the era of sovereignty, a past which holds moments of glory and triumph which the present clearly lacks. Or the incredible interpretative effort that was put, from the 19th century onwards, into the reevaluation of numerous defeats: military, political, economic, and civilizational; the self-esteem bolstering effort to rewrite narratives exploring these defeats in a way that portrays them as sublime, pompous, exalted, in line with the motto of "victory after death." This heroization of such defeats carries a wide variety of consequences. On the one hand, it ennobles the vanquished, limits the possibility of criticizing their actions, and concentrates social efforts on commemorating martyrology, instead of revising attitudes and actions that might have led to defeat. On the other hand, it redefines the status of the victim, transforming it almost imperceptibly into the hegemon of the dominant narrative, someone who imposes the terms, dictates the value, decides what is good, honorable, proper, and what's not. In this narrative, being the victim is a value in itself. Therefore, it is recommended to strive for victim status and to hold on to it once attained, to compete with one another in terms of the amount of endured harms that predestine us for the top spot in the imaginary victim ranks (such a theme often appears in Polish-Jewish relations).

Victims cannot exist without those who made them this way – oppressors, tormentors, persecutors, victors employing violence to eliminate any potential resistance of the vanquished. But postdependency studies call attention to the fact that the coercion-retaliation binary minimizes the role of

the dependent's consent to being placed in a position of dependency¹⁶ and avoids thorough exploration of the mechanisms behind the consent. The post-dependent condition implies participation, or even complicity in the errors of the past. And one more thing: Polish identity, suspended between the East and the West, insistently emphasizes its own peculiarities as if afraid that someone will subvert and diminish its belief in its exceptionality. Such an identity, more than any other prone to aspiring to patterns established by the West¹⁷ (despite the West rarely treating it as an equal) should inspire us to take a closer look at it and consider it a special variant of the modernist identity that came about as a direct result of the interaction between superior and subordinate.¹⁸ Overt and covert domination/subjugation and the results of this interactive process comprise an important experience of the 20th century, and not only in the European cultural sphere. It would seem that reflecting on these issues is essential for contemporary Polish literature, however, historical and literary investigations have heretofore ignored the subject.¹⁹

To reiterate, the historical and sociopolitical context of modernization processes taking place on Polish territory from the 19th century onwards prompted a situation, wherein liberation from different forms of oppression, both in life and in literature, was followed by a surge of repercussions of enduring long-term dependency from external powers. These repercussions left their mark on emancipatory processes, deciding their specificity and shaping particular traits of identities of subjects involved in these processes. This particular aspect of the phenomenon becomes possible to grasp and diagnose thanks to the investigative tools provided to us by postdependency studies.

Translation: Jan Szelaǳiewicz

16 Leela Gandhi writes about it in the colonial context, invoking notions laid forth by Simon During in her book *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 173.

17 I am using the term "the West" in full awareness of its constructionist character. That construct might be analyzed in the same way that Edward Said did with the term "the East." cf. E.W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

18 Simon During wrote about identities constructed in such way in his essay "Waiting for the Post: Some Relations Between Modernity, Colonization, and Writing" in *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism*, ed. I Adam, H. Tiffin, (New York, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 34.

19 Włodzimirz Bolecki more or less confirmed that state of affairs in his essay "Various Thoughts on Post-Colonialism. An Introduction to Unwritten Texts," *Second Texts* no. 4 (2007), 13.