

Russian invasion, including organizing a special Senate investigative commission on Chechnya that took him to the war-torn region; advocated for Crimean Tatars who were fighting Russian chauvinism in their homeland in Ukraine after returning from Soviet exile after forty-five years; carried out human rights investigations of crimes in former Yugoslavia; stood up to the new authoritarian regimes in the Caucasus and Central Asia; joined with his human rights brethren in Russia against the rise of Putinism and Putin's reassertion of Russian domination of the former Soviet empire; sponsored and supported the creation of Belsat to offer Belarusians independent news under the dictatorship of Aleksander Lukashenka; and traveled with Zofia to Cuba in 2006 to share with dissidents the experience of Solidarity. In retirement from the Senate, he and Zofia undertook new human rights campaigns, among them helping the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe, the successor organization to the Committee in Support of Solidarity, to monitor elections in Georgia in 2012 that led to the first peaceful and democratic transfer of power in that country. A month before his death, he traveled to Ukraine to register his personal support for the civic Euromaidan movement.

I first came to know the Romaszewskis by editing accounts of Radio Solidarność and informing the American public of their daring resistance to martial law. After their arrest, I reported on Zbigniew Romaszewski's calm and certain declaration of future victory in court—even as he, Zofia, and his colleagues faced several years' imprisonment. Despite not sharing a common language—I never learned Polish well enough to converse—I came to know both Zosia and Zbyszek closely after their release from prison. After Zofia's trip to the United States I raised funds from trade unions, human rights groups, individuals, and the NED to support their campaigns of social solidarity and lawfulness. I also assisted their organization of the Nowa Huta and Leningrad International Human Rights Conferences and several of their post-1989 efforts, including the third conference in Warsaw to keep the spirit of Solidarity and human and worker rights alive in the region. Throughout, I knew I was in the presence of true

makers of history. The Romaszewskis' contributions to the struggle for Poland's and Eastern Europe's freedom are immense, but what struck me most about both of them was how their sympathy for and commitment to others mirrored their personal devotion to and love for each other. It is rare to know individuals whose private and public actions are a consistent reflection of principled values and human morals. The Romaszewskis were such individuals.

In 2014 Zofia Romaszewska lost her partner of more than forty-five years; their daughter Agnieszka, who continued in her parents' footsteps and currently directs Belsat, has lost a devoted father and teacher. Poland has lost a great hero. I, along with many others in dozens of countries, have lost a true friend, someone whose values and commitment helped guide us for thirty years. Zbigniew Romaszewski never viewed any issue as complicated and was never tied up by any ideology. He always stood on the right side, the side of human rights and freedom, wherever and whenever it was needed. I hope his legacy continues to guide me and others as well.

Editor's Note: In 2014, Zofia Romaszewska was awarded the Lech Kaczyński Medal for her lifetime work on behalf of human rights.



Between clichés and erasure Eastern and Central non-Germanic Europe as an “empty syntagm” in contemporary public discourse

Dariusz Skórczewski

ABSTRACT

Drawing on the ancient rhetoric tradition, this paper employs the notions of “figure of thought” and “figure of speech” to address the issue of the ambivalent “soft” status of Eastern and Central non-Germanic Europe in various contemporary public discourses in the Western world, such as discourses

in the humanities, political discourse, journalism, media, and popular culture. While special attention is given to post-2004 discourses (after the acceptance of ten East Central and Southern European countries into the European Union), earlier discourses are not left out since it is in them that major patterns of articulations concerning East Central Europe have been established. While the figures of thought, among them “*figurae ad docendum*” (figures of instruction) and “*figurae ad delectandum*” (figures of delight) supplemented with “*figurae ad taedium*” (figures of contempt) can be deemed as general categories delineating the major attitudes of the “Western” public towards Eastern and Central European non-Germanic countries, societies, and cultures, the figures of speech (e.g. ellipsis, hyperbole, *aprosdoketon*, and others) play the role of rhetorical agents – amounting to ideological clichés – to fulfill the goals defined by the former. Drawing from the theoretical and conceptual framework of Saidean Orientalism, the analysis of submitted examples suggests that East Central Europe as a tangible and vulnerable geographical and sociohistorical reality has been erased from the discourse of the West. It has been effectively replaced, by means of rhetoric measures, with a large collection of its discursive substitutes, thus turning the toponym “Eastern and Central non-Germanic Europe” and its synonyms into that which can be termed “empty syntagm,” a ready-made structure for achieving whatever goals are defined and pronounced outside East Central Europe.

Motto:

*Language is savage flesh, which grows in a wound,
in the open wound of the mouth,
nurtured on deceptive truth*

As is generally known at least since Hayden White, history is a narrative rather than a sequence of fixed, objective, and interrelated events. The way we speak about things affects them greatly. According to the constructivist view, things are produced by discourse. Although I do not fully subscribe to this view, believing in that things do exist independently from discourse, I do believe that our opinions about things are, to large extent, determined by rhetorical practices engaged in discourses that concern those things. The implications of rhetoric in historiography and in the humanities in general can be powerful in the shaping of the image(s) of whole populations and go far beyond mere academic

knowledge, extending into popular perceptions of whole nations and ethnicities, and thus contributing to the (re)production and dissemination of national and ethnic, usually negative, stereotypes. Once we enter the field of stereotypes, we realize how dreadful they can be vis-à-vis *real* lives of *real* peoples, who may have *real* psychological wounds inflicted simply through the circulation of scholarship-generated and/or scholarship-upheld stereotypes.

As a departure point, I take the following thought from Clifford Geertz: “Not only ideas, but emotions too, are cultural artifacts in man.”² Emotions spoken of in this paper are the emotions of Eastern and Central Europeans who continue to find themselves troubled and disappointed, or even exasperated, with the “dual framing of East-Central Europe as simultaneously in Europe and not yet European,”³ even now, ten years after the acceptance of their countries into the European Union. These emotions are products of culture and, more precisely, of various cultural discourses, the discourse of Western scholarship in general and Slavic studies in particular not excluded. The disappointment and exasperation of Eastern Europeans grows even larger when they encounter in Western (American and/or West European) writing the discourse of omission, silencing, and patronizing. Eastern Europeans, particularly those who take the West as the primary point of cultural orientation as is the case with Poles and other Central European non-Germanic countries, find the attitudes fueling such discourse difficult to come to terms with.⁴ In this paper I draw on examples of such discourses related primarily to Poland and the Poles; however, I do my best to render my formulations applicable to the majority of postcommunist societies of East Central and Eastern Europe. In the typology offered in the following parts of the article, I arrange these examples so as to demonstrate how, by means of some distinctive rhetorical figures, East European subjects are cogently rendered as not-yet-mature and converted into vulnerable objects of silencing (mis)representation, thus suffering from discursive appropriation and from being deprived of their own agency. In order to achieve my goal, I take as a departure point the traditional ancient distinction of rhetorical

figures into the “figures of thought” and the “figures of speech,” considering the former as the major patterns of reasoning to provide grounds for rhetorical operations performed by means of the latter. The survey that follows demonstrates that the more philologically alert era in which we now live offers productive insights into the complex author-text-context-readership relationship with regard to contemporary discourses on East and Central non-Germanic Europe. Drawing conclusions by all parties whom these discourses concern from the analysis of these discourses seems essential for the subjectivity, cultural visibility, and political agency of East and Central European societies. These conclusions are also fundamental for those engaged in studying such discourses, given the purpose of the humanities understood as a concern for the historically grounded and historically embraceable, or intelligible, “truth.”

“FIGURES OF THOUGHT” IN WESTERN CULTURAL DISCOURSES ON EASTERN AND CENTRAL NON-GERMANIC EUROPE

Ernest Gellner spoke of the “major bifurcation” of the European continent.⁵ Many repeat this concept and rehearse the notion of some alleged fundamental divide between the two halves of the continent. Such a position can be considered a post-cold-war residue, although its origin can be traced back to as early as the Enlightenment whose role in engineering Europe’s division was so convincingly demonstrated by Larry Wolff.⁶ Interestingly, even those among social and cultural critics who hold constructivist views stick to this essentializing concept, as if the “Otherness” of Eastern and Central non-Germanic Europe was a given and unquestionable axiom. As a result, Edward Said’s comment on the logic of British epistemological domination over Egypt (“England knows Egypt; Egypt is what England knows”⁷) when applied to Eastern and Central non-Germanic Europe under the epistemological domination of the West still obtains.

Despite the process of enlargement of European political structures, the framework in which Western Europe is being contrasted, or clashed, with Eastern Europe still pervades in public discourses both in the West, including

North America, and in Eastern Europe. This framework engages relevant rhetoric since it is, among other reasons, due to the power of rhetoric that the duality of the continent is maintained. This rhetoric employs three major types of figures of thought distinguished by the ancients: figures of instruction (*figurae ad docendum*), figures of contempt (*figurae ad taedium*), and figures of delight (*figurae ad delectandum*). Each of these types opens room for a pertinent rhetoric strategy and, by implication, points to a relevant attitude or approach of the “Western” subject to the “Eastern” object. I briefly discuss these types, supplying examples for each. I subsequently offer a concise presentation of the main figures of speech deployed in Western discourses on Eastern and Central non-Germanic Europe, followed by a conclusion.

FIGURES OF INSTRUCTION (*FIGURAE AD DOCENDUM*)

Figures of instruction imply the notion of Eastern Europe as immature and not yet ready to be treated as a full-fledged political and cultural partner of the West. They translate into a number of rhetorical strategies used as a camouflage or alibi for the following notions:

1. “Keeping up” or “making up,” based on the philosophy of “admittance into the global capitalistic system of Western liberal democracy.”⁸

As cultural critic of Slovenian origin Boris Buden pointed out in his book *Zone of Transition: On the End of Post-Communism*, the “concept of transition has almost exclusively been applied to the so-called post-communist societies and refers to their transition to democracy.” Accordingly, Eastern Europe in itself is perceived as incomplete, living in a transient condition, and never fully mature, and Eastern European societies are all rendered in discourse as victimized, as if Eastern Europe exists only to highlight the West as the object of the East’s desire.

2. The need of advice from (Western) Europe or, in yet another version, the imperative of coming under Western tutelage.

Eastern Europe is portrayed as a pupil and the West as the educator. Western discourses abound in more-or-less overt accusations that

the unruly Eastern Europe does not comply with European standards and norms. Such indictments take for granted the assumption of a single-directional adjustment that should be carried out by East Europeans, and their alleged inferiority: “Diplomats do not hold back in harshly criticizing Eastern European states that, in their opinion, do not know how to adjust to the culture and norms that are commonly acknowledged as the right ones.”⁹

3. The expectation in Western discourse(s) that Eastern Europe follow (or emulate) the West.

This expectation is usually accompanied by or juxtaposed with the threat that Eastern Europe will be judged for failing to comply with the imperative implied in this expectation. The patronizing and condescending tone of Jacques Chirac, who in 2003 with a burst of outrage criticized then-candidate countries of Eastern Europe for their independent stance concerning the war in Iraq, will forever remain in the annals of west European Orientalism:

Concerning, after all, the candidate countries. . . I honestly think that they have behaved with a certain lightness. Because entering the European Union still requires a minimum of consideration for others, a minimum of consultation. If, on the first difficult subject, you begin to express your point of view independently of any consultation with the body that you incidentally want to join, then it is not very responsible behavior. In any case, it is not well brought-up behavior. So I believe that they [Eastern European countries – D.S.] missed a good opportunity to keep quiet.¹⁰

4. Seeking the authority, looking up for approval. During her visit to Poland in January 2014, the American actress Meryl Streep thus contributed to the discussion on gender ideology as a threat to social relations in Poland, addressing Polish deputies via Poland’s liberal daily *Gazeta Wyborcza*: “Gentlemen, you are about to lose power. . . . I thought you had already caught up with the West.”¹¹ She continued her address, teaching her Polish audiences by pretending to speak to the deputies: “Gentlemen, you are fooling yourselves in the same way as talibs do. . . Look at the world and the direction it takes to evolve. Do you really think you can stop it? The past is dying in pains, but the old order will not give up without fight. I understand, but it is my

joy to announce to you: you represent the lost case.”

Thus Streep placed herself in the discourse in the position of a “wise woman,” a contemporary civilized sage endowed with the highest authority that allowed her to compare Polish parliament and Polish males to the Taliban.

Meryl Streep’s comment laid bare some elements of Western discourse on Eastern Europe, but even more interesting is to see the interaction between a representative of Western opinionated cultural circles and East European receptive journalist circles, the latter assuming the position of the power-wielding delegate of the uninformed local indigenous people. The journalist Magdalena Żakowska of *Gazeta Wyborcza* informs the American actress in an ostensibly unbiased way: “Currently in Poland, a crusade is being waged by the Catholic church and the right-wing milieu against gender. Even a parliamentary group was created ‘Stop gender ideology.’” Streep responds: “What? I thought that after communism you had already caught up with the West in the social and cultural sense.” The last sentence explicitly demonstrates the patronizing attitude of a Western subject who points to yet another rhetorical approach to Eastern and Central non-Germanic Europe in cultural discourses of the West, expressed through figures of contempt.

FIGURES OF CONTEMPT (*FIGURAE AD TAEDIUM*)

Various attitudes of Western subject toward East Central Europe are expressed through figures of contempt, from erasure and omission to overt disapproval, derision, or disdain. A classic example of such a mindset has been quoted by Hugh Seton Watson who years ago pointed to the popular image of East Europeans in Western discourse since Voltaire: “They have unpronounceable names, and live in plains and forests, on mountains and rivers which might be in another world.”¹²

1. Homogenization, unification, and conflation.

Under a Western gaze all East and Central European non-Germanic countries and peoples are represented or discussed as a coherent unity falling under the same category, and are thus homogenized, unified, and conflated. Such homogenization, unification, and conflation in

Western discourses have taken place primarily due to the abused usage of the term “Soviet bloc” since the early 1950s to describe the diverse countries and nations that found themselves on the eastern side of the European divide. However, there are other reasons as well, among them the dominance of Russia/Soviet Union as the imperial center in public discourse, overshadowing all other non-Russian Slavic and/or post-Soviet states.

2. Blame for allegedly inferior quality.

A contemptuous attitude is not spared in scholarly discourse; rather, it subtly penetrates this discourse, demonstrating the troubling discrepancy between the work ethic of scholarship and the practice of some Western scholars in the humanities. For example, according to British anthropologist Chris Hann, the domination of Western scholarship results from its allegedly superior quality: “If . . . ‘local scholars’ wish to be as widely read as some of the outsiders who write about Central and Eastern Europe, then they need to put in the field time and write monographs of equivalent depth and sophistication.”¹³ Hann’s opinion clearly demonstrates a patronizing attitude toward East Central European scholars who are advised to “arrange for [English language] editing by a native speaker”¹⁴ or “take advantage of postsocialist freedoms to embark on anthropological projects outside their home countries.”¹⁵ The British anthropologist refuses to acknowledge that in the humanities Eastern European scholarship is in fact of equivalent depth and sophistication as its Western counterpart. Regrettably, and contrary to the facts, the fault of provincialism or even parochialism of Eastern European scholarship still holds in Western academia, as the above example demonstrates.

FIGURES OF DELIGHT (*FIGURAE AD DELECTANDUM*)

Figures of contempt applied as rhetorical strategies to discursively label East Central Europe neither preclude nor contradict figures of delight. The latter have been traditionally affiliated with Orientalizing discourses on Eastern and Central non-Germanic Europe that have proliferated in philosophy, literature, political writings, and scholarship in Western

Europe since the Enlightenment. A domain of exciting exoticism—this is how Europe’s eastern lands have been perceived for two centuries by travelers, writers, and even crowned heads.

Figures of delight are also characteristic of a new overtone that can be heard in recent scholarship and public discourses, one that eschews the simplifications and overgeneralizations concerning Eastern Europe that were so commonplace in Western scholarship and culture even ten years ago. This new overtone reverberates in utterances that admit that “while Central and Eastern European countries tend to get lumped together, they vary considerably.”¹⁶ And indeed, they do vary, and noting differences is becoming common practice more often than not in the British, French, and German media. In this respect too a rhetoric is engaged that at times makes the apparent “delight” in East Central Europe equivocal and problematic. A recent example in the *New York Times* demonstrates how Poland is placed against the backdrop of other East Central European countries: “To the east, Russian aggression has paralyzed Ukraine’s hope for faster economic development. To the south, Hungary flirts with authoritarianism and still struggles to climb out of the last recession. To the north, Lithuania and the other Baltic States are being squeezed by the cycle of escalating trade sanctions between Moscow and the European Union.”¹⁷

Against such a dark background containing diverse images of the unpredictable and unstable Eastern Europe all of which restage the ancient topoi of *locus horridus*, Poland happens to be portrayed as its opposite, *locus amoenus*, the idyllic place of economic safety and political comfort. As the quoted example demonstrates, the figure of delight is selective, never allowing the whole of Eastern and Central non-Germanic Europe to become a valuable object of delight, comparable with the values and attainments/achievements shared by the West. Eastern and Central non-Germanic Europe thus remains dubious and problematic, a place where even if good things occur they are inevitably accompanied by things going bad.

A similar strategy laid the groundwork for Vice President Joseph Biden’s pushing forward Eastern European countries as examples to

follow: “In Eastern Europe, countries still struggle to fulfill the promise of a strong democracy, or a vibrant market economy. Who to look to better than you? Who to look to better than Central European countries that 20 years ago acted with such courage and resolve, and over the last 20 years, have made such sustainable progress? You can help guide Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine along the path of lasting stability and prosperity. It's your time to lead. Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus can benefit from your personal experiences.”¹⁸

The three types of figures of thought described above may or may not exist separately in single texts. Interestingly, they not infrequently coincide. For instance, figures of instruction may surface next to figures of contempt. It all depends on the complexity and the modality of discourses engaged in a given text. Second and more importantly, these figures of thought have the potential to employ various figures of speech. Thus the same figure of speech may be deployed to render different meanings that serve different purposes overtly expressed by or implicit in a given figure of thought. The next part of the paper covers ten of the figures of speech concerning Eastern and Central non-Germanic Europe that are likely to be encountered most frequently across various discourses in the English-speaking world.

FIGURES OF SPEECH IN WESTERN CULTURAL DISCOURSES ON EASTERN AND CENTRAL NON-GERMANIC EUROPE

The figures of speech discussed below refer to formal patterns of word arrangement for the purpose of a transformation of meaning, as defined by Greek and Latin rhetoric. While originally denoting “local” transformative operations, usually within syntax, these patterns can also be attributed with a broader generic meaning: they can be understood as logical principles of organizing the discourse and whole bodies of texts belonging to that discourse. The following discussion briefly analyzes the way of advancing the argument in each figure in order to identify the semiotic strategy behind these figures. Particular attention is paid to conceivable ethical and epistemological implications of the use of these figures in

Western discourses on Eastern and Central non-Germanic Europe. Since particular political goals can be accomplished by means of rhetoric, it is necessary to realize that when dealing with language we are dealing with sensitive realities of actual groups of peoples.

1. ANTITHESIS

Antithesis has traditionally been the elementary rhetorical operation at the very foundation of Western discourse on Eastern and Central non-Germanic Europe. At least since the cold war it has become commonplace that “Western Europe and Eastern Europe are portrayed as opposing spaces, which together embody a series of dichotomous relationships.”¹⁹ Consequently, knowledge production and other discourses on the East developed by the West have become dominated by the rather simplistic formula of “us” (signifying Western populations) versus “them” (standing for peoples inhabiting Europe’s eastern part).

Among the spectacular examples are Hans Kohn’s theory of Eastern versus Western nationalisms and its numerous applications and mutations, such as Peter F. Sugar’s *Roots of Central European Nationalism* (1969) or, more recently, Brian Porter-Szücs’ *When Nationalism Began to Hate* (2000). The rhetoric of antithesis in these and other books in the same or similar vein points to the major problem of the discursive location of East Central Europe. They take for granted and essentialize the difference between the West and East European paths for social and economical development, taking the Western way as a default or yardstick with which to measure any and all other populations and places. For example, when quoting from Kohn, Sugar speaks of him with much reverence, elevating him to the position of absolute authority while at the same time using a patronizing tone regarding the countries and nations of Eastern Europe:

Professor Hans Kohn recognized the basic problem of Eastern European nationalism when he stated: “So strong was the influence of ideas that, while the new nationalism in Western Europe corresponded to changing social, economic, and political realities, it spread to Central and Eastern Europe long before a corresponding social and

economic transformation.... Nationalism in the West arose in an effort to build a nation in the political reality and struggle of the present without too much sentimental regard for the past; nationalists in Central and Eastern Europe created, often out of myths of the past and the dreams of the future, an ideal fatherland, closely linked with the past, devoid of any immediate connection with the present, and expected to become sometime a political reality.²⁰

Here we can recognize other rhetorical devices as well: we find out that East Central European space is “devoid” (pointing to a lack, deficiency, *figura per detractio*) of reality, based on unreal myths, legends, and fables. With such assumptions, Sugar concludes—again quoting Kohn—that it is “no wonder that eastern European nationalism did not tend towards a ‘consummation in a democratic world society,’ but was ‘tending toward exclusiveness.’”²¹ According to Kohn’s and his adherents’ ideas the structure of antithesis is subservient to figures of contempt and instruction, while in other cases it is the dominant instrument of figures of delight. For instance, it is antithesis that has given rise to the title of the Penguin series “Writers of the Other Europe.”

2. ELLIPSIS

Among the most frequent rhetorical modes of the presence of East Central Europe in Western discourse(s) is that of East Central Europe’s absence, that is, omission, oversight, silencing, or erasure. The figure of ellipsis renders Eastern and Central non-Germanic Europe discursively nonexistent, as if that part of the world were a void on the cultural or scholarly map(s) of the world.

This ellipsis takes on various forms depending on the context. In the discourse on modernization and nationalism, this ellipsis may be made manifest by the following:

a. The rhetoric of discursive erasure, consisting of neglecting Eastern and Central non-Germanic Europe by passing it over in the texts where the mention of East Central European countries seems by all means justified. For example, in the twenty-three-minute documentary film on the December 7, 1941 attack of the Japanese army, screened in the Museum in Pearl Harbor Memorial Theater, the narrative leaves the

viewers unaware that World War II was started by Hitler’s attack on Poland. In a similar vein, it is a commonplace practice that popular audiovisual documentaries on World War II do not inform viewers of the number of Poles who perished between 1939 and 1945 while, for example, the film on German history screened in the Deutsche Historische Museum in Berlin does not spare the audiences details concerning the number of Sinti, Roma, and Jews murdered by some de-ethnicized “Nazis.” Countless examples of this practice can be easily furnished. To avoid a wrong impression, the erasure is not merely related to the problem of the legitimacy of claiming the status of a victim of the totalitarian regimes before, during, and after World War II. Rather, the existence of “white spots” in the discourse(s) on Eastern and Central non-Germanic Europe makes it clear that the knowledge production concerning that part of the world has been effectively appropriated, arranged, and distributed according to a set of undeclared premises, most of which were set up without consulting with those whom these premises directly concern. This points to the long-lasting absence of East Europeans in the construction of Western discourses on Eastern Europe.

b. The rhetoric of lack, or deficiency, attributed to the region. This rhetoric is dominant in theorizing about Central and Eastern European nationalism. One hears that the Central European variant of nationhood bore the marks of the incomplete journey to modernity made by these nations.²² “Whereas many individual researchers do not view East-Central Europe as irrational or un-European, discussing political complexities in East-Central Europe in terms of Europeanness still fuels the othering of East-Central Europe. The more Europe is eulogized as a site of values, the more Eastern Europe is tacitly marked as lacking these values.”²³ Thus Jacques Rupnik maintains that “the populist backlash in Central and Eastern Europe reveals, first and foremost, the absence in the new democracies of *corps intermédiaires*, of checks and balances, of truly independent media to serve as a counterweight to creeping authoritarianism.”²⁴ The concept of East Central Europe’s deficiency is conducive to the feeling of East Central European resentment, so well

known to East Europeans and so well described by the Hungarian scholar and politician György Schöpflin. According to him, “the region is haunted by its own sense of indeterminacy and incompleteness, of not having a voice, of being disregarded and that completeness, and with completeness the good life, is elsewhere.”²⁵

c. The rhetoric of *désintéressement*, demonstrated, for example, by “the absence of any curiosity in Western states about the other half of Europe. Only a few scholars believe that the other part of Europe could be useful in the debate about the role of the state in the globalized world and about social redistribution in a new economic context.”²⁶

3. ANTONOMASIA

Substitution with a usually degrading epithet is yet another form of rhetorical existence of East Central Europe in Western discourses. Under this category falls the antonomasia-type of term “balkanization” whose critical discussion went into the agenda of Maria Todorova’s book *Imagining the Balkans*. Here also belong the infamous names used, auspiciously less and less frequently these days, by uninformed journalists in the Western press to describe German concentration camps on Polish lands, such as “Polish death camps” and other similar practices that no amount of individual corrections seems able to change.

4. AMPHIBOLIA

Ambiguity and the lack of clarity in using terms related to East Central Europe, particularly to East Central European history, may result from placing them in a wrong “syntagmatic” context. Such ambiguity, constitutive of amphibolia, is not merely a coincidence or a linguistic error; instead, it is the outcome of East Central Europe’s long absence as the speaking agent in the discourse of humanities. One of the most common rhetorical ambiguities related to Poland’s history is the confusing use of the term “Warsaw uprising.” While in the native Polish historical discourse this term has been reserved for the general uprising from August through October 1944 during the German occupation with over two hundred thousand Polish civilians and Home Army soldiers killed, in the English-language circulation of knowledge it has

traditionally been reserved for the Jewish uprising in the Warsaw ghetto from April through May 1943, leaving the general uprising out of historical discourse. This peculiar shift in terminology has created a great deal of misunderstanding among users of the term, who remain unaware of its ambiguity. Through the decades of Soviet rule and henceforth for other reasons, knowledge production in the countries of Eastern and Central non-Germanic Europe, such as Poland, has not been powerful enough to persuade American and West European audiences about the need to revise some Western concepts and terms by means of which the experience of Eastern and Central Europeans has been described. This experience has been bent to fit the dominating grand narrative on Eastern and Central non-Germanic Europe promoted in American history and political science textbooks.

5. HYPERBOLE

Hyperbole is frequently deployed as an instrument of rhetorical downgrading. The images of East Central Europe delivered through cultural discourses of the West appear to be intentional caricatures of East Central Europe, full of grotesque exaggerations and inaccuracies. Such images have proliferated since the Enlightenment both in literature (as demonstrated by Larry Wolff) and in other cultural practices, including jokes and motion pictures. Concerning the latter, it was a hyperbole that constituted the main creative device in Steven Spielberg’s acclaimed *The Terminal*, in which some features of an ordinary citizen of an Eastern European state have been grotesquely distorted.²⁷

6. GRADATION

Whenever judgments are formulated in Western discourses concerning the “Europeanness” of Eastern and Central non-Germanic Europe versus the par excellence “European” West Europe, gradation is applied as the instrument of value attribution, according to “the representational pattern that privileges the fully European ‘Europe’ over the not-yet-fully European ‘Eastern Europe.’”²⁸ Consequently, the decolonized populations of the East European subcontinent are relegated to a secondary role,

and their claims to Europeanness are presented as naïve and ludicrous. Tony Judt, that great supplier of distorted perspectives on Eastern Europe, has opined that “whatever we would say concerning the former splendor of Prague or Vilnius, these cities were never capitals in European sense, such as Florence, Madrid, London, or Vienna.”²⁹ In a similar vein: “Warsaw is not, and for most of European history never was, the center of very much at all.”³⁰ Or: “The developments in Poland were a stirring prologue to the narrative of Communism's collapse, but they remained a sideshow. The real story was elsewhere.”³¹ This is how, in the subtly distorting perspective of the late Tony Judt, a smoothed and coherent version of history written from the top down to the bottom emerges, privileging the narrative developed and authorized by the Western metropolis. The monophonic structure of that narrative would be easily disrupted by the uncontrolled polyphony of voices from the local populations of East Central Europe, were these populations allowed to speak for themselves. The true history of these populations – as can be inferred from Judt's writings – lies in somebody else's hands, outside the reach of East Europeans.

7. ENUMERATION

Innocent as it may seem, enumeration as deployed in Western cultural discourses on East Central Europe often discloses a powerful yet concealed premise. According to that premise, East Central European political entities are presented as deprived of agency and ontologically frail, whereby the position of the epistemologically as well as politically dominating Western subject is reinforced. Enumeration not only conflates and homogenizes the diverse East Central European peoples and cultures but at the same time denies their right to be rendered in their own terms, either as proposed by them or coined by paying close attention to their historical experience. Even in scholarly publications assertions such as the following can be encountered in which, by means of enumeration, “the cultural hegemony of [West] European knowledges”³² over the territories and peoples subject to scholarly descriptions is being maintained. Consider the

following: “The states of Eastern Europe either did not exist until recently, or else had to be reconstructed in the modern era following their obliteration by greater powers in earlier times. From a Western perspective (though not necessarily in the eyes of the locals), Czechs, Slovaks, Croats, and Bosnians — to cite only the best known — are all invented nations. Poland, Serbia, Ukraine, the Baltic states, even Greece, whatever the real or imagined glories of their distant past, have all been constituted and reconstituted out of lands and peoples whose history was once submerged in someone else's story.”³³ The problem with such discourse is not merely the absence of reciprocity but the scantiness of spaces for the possibility of such reciprocity and for the reassertion by East Europeans themselves of “the epistemological value and agency of the non-[West-]European world.”³⁴ Thus the East European indigenous “subalterns” (locals) remain speechless, as if silenced by the rhetorically powerful and speaking Western center. The writing of the hegemonic West thus becomes the “textual standard that enforces the marginality and inferiority of colonised cultures and their books.”³⁵

8. SYNECDOCHE

In various fields of scholarship and public discourses on East Central Europe, a part of the region, e.g., a single country or people, is used to represent the whole of the post-Soviet sphere. This strategy of synecdoche functions in two ways, both of which are standard discursive practices in Western media and elsewhere. First, referring to geographical distinctions, a single entity is taken as illustrative of the whole region. Second, a single occurrence of social behavior or attitude is interpreted as commonplace and standard in postcommunist societies. “As is often true, Poland can be seen either as an exception to, or a magnifier of, trends present elsewhere in the region”³⁶ – such statements are representative of this strategy.

9. RHETORICAL QUESTION

Rhetorical questions serve the purpose of amplifying or even enforcing the anticipated response of the audience without their explicit answer. In the context of things East Central

European, rhetorical questions posed in Western cultural discourses usually undermine, subvert, or demean the significance of East Central Europe. For instance, referring to her said-to-be “peripheral status” as a writer, Dubravka Ugrešić mentions: “After my novel had been published in England in 1991, the critic finished his review with the question: ‘Anyway, is it this, what we need?’”³⁷ As with the other figures listed above, rhetorical questions like the one just quoted reinforce the perspective of the more powerful and authoritative Western epistemological center where the framework of discourse on East Central Europe is defined and where this discourse is originally pushed into motion.

10. APROSDOKETON

The nature of this figure consists of introducing a word or idea that has not been anticipated, given the syntax and the expected semantic effect. I consider this figure to be the most sophisticated strategy of dismissal and textual appropriation of Eastern and Central non-Germanic Europe in Western cultural discourses.

In his review of Anne Applebaum’s *Iron Curtain*, Max Frankel states the following about Ms. Applebaum’s meticulous study of Stalin’s tyranny in East Central Europe: “Along the way, millions of Germans, Poles, Ukrainians and Hungarians were ruthlessly driven from their historic homes to satisfy Soviet territorial ambitions. Millions more were deemed opponents and beaten, imprisoned or hauled off to hard labor in Siberia. . . . It is good to be reminded of these sordid events, now that more archives are accessible and some witnesses remain alive to recall the horror. Still, why should we be consuming such a mass of detail more than half a century later?”³⁸

The question posed is a rhetorical one, and it can be counted as an example of the preceding figure. There is more to it, however. It appears unexpectedly, according to the logic of *aprosdoketon*. The way it is asked demonstrates the gap between the disengaged attitude of the Western author and the impossible-to-disengage attitude of the East Central European participant in the events. These two subjects meet across

space and time in the texture of Frankel’s review, in its very discursive tissue, the former being in power, while the latter is disempowered. In fact, Frankel’s question reverberates with the tone known to the readers of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* whose last chapter “Orientalism Now” concludes with this poignant remark: “I consider Orientalism’s failure to have been a human as much as an intellectual one; for in having to take up a position of irreducible opposition to a region of the world it considered alien to its own, Orientalism failed to identify with human experience, failed also to see it as a human experience.”³⁹

CONCLUSION

Conclusions can be drawn on three levels. First, as the cited examples clearly demonstrate, it is impossible to speak on any topic without engaging rhetorical devices. East Central Europe is one such topic. Second, the above analysis is part of the return to philology in literary studies. It posits that studies of the discourse on Eastern and Central Europe can easily be accommodated within the studies of contemporary rhetoric. Third, this analysis demonstrates that Eastern and Central non-Germanic Europe continues to occupy an uncertain position in contemporary discourse, just as it has done over decades. It is extremely rare that politicians, scholars or other authors who speak or write about that part of Europe admit the need for a self-critical attitude in their approach, such as the one expressed in this passage: “The authors of this report, although coming from the Western periphery of these regions, nevertheless share in many ways the traditional hegemonic Western discourse on East Central and to a greater extent, Eastern Europe. The vision of a united Europe is also very often a di-Vision of Europe.”⁴⁰

Instead, Eastern and Central non-Germanic European societies continue to be patronizingly maneuvered into a position subordinate to the Western hegemon, looking up to the West for approval, and thus turning the West into their “surrogate hegemon,” as Ewa Thompson once proposed.⁴¹ While such historians as Timothy Garton Ash and György Schöpflin describe East Central Europe as the Sleeping Beauty, coming to life after decades of silence,⁴² based on the preceding analyses I believe that more often

Eastern and Central non-Germanic Europe is viewed as an empty syntagm waiting to be filled with content provided by Western Europeans. This situates Eastern and Central non-Germanic Europe in a position where it is tossed between discursive non-existence (being appropriated by others) and hardcore existence painfully perceived, experienced, and realized by East Europeans themselves, yet not shared—and frequently misunderstood—by others. As Gottfried Schramm notes, “East Central Europe is in no way just. . . a mere construct of historians and cultural morphologists but. . . a ‘reality.’”⁴³

Given the above analysis of rhetoric used in Western discourses on East Central Europe, Czesław Miłosz’s comment on the divided Europe remains valid: “Undoubtedly I could call Europe my home, but it was a home that refused to acknowledge itself as a whole. . . it classified its population into two categories: members of the family (quarrelsome but respectable) and poor relations.”⁴⁴ It remains valid in a way similar to that highlighted by Said’s notion of Orientalism expressed in his illustrious book from which, paradoxically, Eastern and Central non-Germanic Europe is absent yet seems relevant in its conclusions to Eastern Europeans as well.

Why then do I consider *aprosdoketon* the most sophisticated figure on the list of rhetorical figures deployed to describe Eastern and Central non-Germanic Europe? Not only so, but even the most perverse among all the figures employed in Western cultural discourse in order to depict that part of Europe? Because it implies disappointment on the part of the reader, as if yet again restaging East Central Europe’s uninvited and involuntary subservience. This disappointment is caused by the unfulfilled promise contained in the early part of the figure. In this sense, *aprosdoketon* can be deemed a metaphor of the majority, if not of totality, of Western discourse on Eastern and Central non-Germanic Europe. Even if not disregarded or silenced, that part of Europe in the *aprosdoketon* discursive approach to it is eventually rendered as failed, disappointing, and troublesome to the Western subject, just as it has been to the reviewer of Applebaum’s most recent book. The reader of that review may be at

first flattered that his region has become a valuable object of study for Western writers and journalists, only to later become disillusioned as he discovers yet again that the Western subject appears to be organically incapable of expressing solidarity with his Eastern counterpart, thus reinforcing the ever-existing chasm between the Western world and Eastern and Central non-Germanic Europe, still perhaps the most Orientalized part of the world.

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NOTES

¹ *Język to dzikie mięso, które rośnie w ranie, / w otwartej ranie ust, żywiących się skłamaną prawdą.* From “Language,” a poem by Ryszard Krynicki translated from the Polish by Kevin Hannan. Dariusz Suska, “Bicie mojego serca,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 30 June, 2003:15.

² Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 81.

³ Merje Kuus, “Europe’s Eastern Expansion and the Reinscription of Otherness in East-Central Europe,” *Progress in Human Geography* 28 (2004) 4:473.

⁴ Lonnie R. Johnson, *Central Europe Enemies, Neighbors, Friends* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 4.

⁵ Ernest Gellner, “Introduction” in *Socialism: Ideals, Ideologies and Local Practice*, edited by C. Hann (London: Routledge, 1993), x.

⁶ Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

⁷ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 34.

⁸ Boris Buden, *Zone des Übergangs. Vom Ende des Postkommunismus* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2009); qtd. after Polish translation *Strefa przejścia. O końcu postkomunizmu*, trans. by M. Sutowski (Warszawa: Krytyka Polityczna, 2012), 35.

⁹ Grzegorz Lewicki, ‘The image of Poland abroad from the constructivist perspective of international relations’ in Dominik Skorupa et al. (eds.) *Solidarni wczoraj i dziś*, edited by Dominik Skorupa et al. (2007), 89. Cf.: Mark Mardell, “Polish Spirit”, Mark Mardell’s Euroblog, online: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/thereporters/markmardell/2007/07/p_olish_spirit_1.html>.

¹⁰ “Concernant en tous les cas les pays candidats. . . honnêtement, je trouve qu’ils se sont comportés avec une certaine légèreté. Car entrer dans l’Union

européenne, cela suppose tout de même un minimum de considération pour les autres, un minimum de concertation. Si, sur le premier sujet difficile, on se met à donner son point de vue indépendamment de toute concertation avec l'ensemble dans lequel, par ailleurs, on veut entrer, alors, ce n'est pas un comportement bien responsable. En tous les cas, ce n'est pas très bien élevé. Donc, je crois qu'ils ont manqué une bonne occasion de se taire" (Jacques Chirac at a press conference in Brussels on 17 February 2003, following a European Council emergency summit on Iraq).

¹¹ Magdalena Żakowska, "Ja sexy?! Nigdy!," interview with Meryl Streep, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 22 January 2014 <http://wyborcza.pl/duzyformat/1,127823,15318901,Meryl_Streep_do_poslow_polskich_Panowie_tracicie.html>

¹² Hugh Seton-Watson, *Eastern Europe Between the Wars, 1918—1941* [1945] (Hamden: Archon Books, 1962, xv. Voltaire's mocking of Slavic names in his letter to Catherine II the Great dated 1772 established the pattern for subsequent prejudice (cf. Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

¹³ Chris Hann, "Correspondence: Reply to Michał Buchowski," *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 23.1 (2005):195. For more about the debate between Hann and Buchowski, see Hana Červinková, "Postcolonialism, postsocialism and the anthropology of east-central Europe," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 48(2):155–63.

¹⁴ Hann, "Correspondence: Reply to Michał Buchowski," 194.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 196.

¹⁶ "Worry in the West as Eastern and Central European Economies Head South,"

<http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/worry-in-the-west-as-eastern-and-central-european-economies-head-south/>

¹⁷ Rick Lyman, "With Robust Economy, Poland Navigates Around Eastern Europe's Strains," *The New York Times*, 4 October 2014.

¹⁸ Joseph Biden speaking on 22 October 2009 at the Central University Library in Bucharest, Romania.

¹⁹ Jason Dittmer, "Dracula and the Cultural Construction of Europe," *Connotations*, 12 (2002/2003), 2–3:241.

²⁰ Peter F. Sugar, "External and Domestic Roots of Eastern European Nationalism," *Roots of Central European Nationalism*, edited by Peter F. Sugar and Ivo J. Lederer. Seattle and London: Univ. of Washington Press, 1969, 9–10.

²¹ Sugar, "External and Domestic Roots," 11.

²² George Schöpflin, "Central Europe: Defining A Thought-Style," *Acta Collegii Humaniorum Estoniensis* 4 (2004):26.

²³ Kuus, "Europe's Eastern Expansion," 484.

²⁴ Jacques Rupnik, "From Democracy Fatigue to Populist Backlash," *Journal of Democracy*, 18 (2007) 4:24.

²⁵ Schöpflin, "Central Europe," 31.

²⁶ Nadège Ragaru, "Démocratisation et démocraties est-européennes: le miroir brisé," *Revue internationale et stratégique*, 41 (2001):146. Qtd after Karen Denni, "Central Europe As a Transition Zone," 67.

²⁷ In Spielberg's movie an alien arrives in the United States from the fictitious country named "Krkosia" (phonetically alluding to Poland's Kraków), a place bearing the clear traits of an Eastern European political entity and cinematically imagined as the contemporary "Orient." A collection of hardcore stereotypes of a citizen of an Eastern European state, he brings with him all the material and mental equipage of a typical Eastern European, becoming a figure partly pathetic, partly ridiculous, and although presented as charming and human (played by the always-excellent Tom Hanks), he is positioned in the film's narrative as essentially deplorable in the structure of modern American society.

²⁸ Kuus, "Europe's Eastern Expansion," 484.

²⁹ Tony Judt, *A Grand Illusion? An Essay on Europe* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1996); quoted from the Polish translation: *Wielkie złudzenie? Esej o Europie*, trans. R. Włodek (Warszawa: PWN, 1998), 40.

³⁰ Tony Judt, with Timothy Snyder, *Thinking the Twentieth Century* (London: Penguin Press, 2012), Kindle location 521.

³¹ Tony Judt, *Postwar. A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 590.

³² Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory. A Critical Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 44.

³³ Tony Judt, 'The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History', *The New Republic*, 1998, 7 September 2000. *Emphasis mine. D.S.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory*, 144.

³⁶ Rupnik, "From Democracy Fatigue," 18.

³⁷ Dubravka Ugrešić, 'Ich und mein Gepäck: die europäische Literatur als Wettbewerb um den Eurosong' [Me and my luggage: European literature as competition around the Eurosong], *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 12 April 2003. Quoted after Andrea Ellmeier and Béla Rásky, *Differing Diversities. Eastern European Perspective: Transversal Study on the Theme of Cultural Policy and Cultural Diversity*, Council of Europe Publications, Phase 2, Part 569

(2006) [pdf], 13.

³⁸ Max Frankel, "Stalin's Shadow," *Sunday Book Review*, November 25, 2012:16. *Emphasis mine. D.S.*

³⁹ Said, *Orientalism*, 328.

⁴⁰ Ellmeier and Rásky, *Differing Diversities*, 13.

⁴¹ "Whose Discourse? Telling the Story in Post-Communist Poland," *The Other Shore: Slavic and East European Cultures Abroad, Past and Present*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2010), 1–15.

⁴² Attila Meleg, *On the East–West Slope: Globalization, Nationalism, Racism and Discourses on Eastern Europe* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2006) 41. Accessed through "Transformation of Self-Identity in Central Europe Under State Socialism and After," <https://wiki.leeds.ac.uk/index.php/Transformation_of_Self-Identity_in_Central_Europe_Under_State_Socialism_and_After#cite_ref-52>.

⁴³ Gottfried Schramm, "Ein Rundgespräch über 'Ostmitteleuropa': Vom sinnvollen Umgang mit einem Konzept für unsere Zukunft," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 48 (2000):122.

⁴⁴ Czesław Miłosz, *Native Realm: A Search for Self-Definition*, trans. Catherine Leach (London: Sidgwick, 1981), 2.

MORE BOOKS

Romaszewscy: Autobiografia. Ze Zbigniewem, Zofią i Agnieszką Romaszewskimi rozmawia **Piotr Skwieciński**. Warsaw: Trzecia Strona (trzeciastrona.pl), 2014. 512 pages. Numerous photographs. ISBN 978-83-64526-04-6. 49.90 zł from the publisher. Hardcover. In Polish.

One of Poland's top journalists talks to the Romaszewski family and constructs their autobiography thereby. Zbigniew and Zofia Romaszewski are model Polish citizens—active in the Solidarity and post-Solidarity movements, not as armchair theorizers but as people who actively helped hundreds, perhaps thousands, of their fellow Poles who had neither the education nor the material resources to win in their self-sacrificial opposition to the communist state. The Romaszewskis were not part of the "licenced" opposition that often hailed from the homes of Party members whose connections provided shelter from police brutality and confiscation of livelihood. The Romaszewskis and those they helped gambled with their own survival and well being. The sacrifices they bore

for their fellow citizens are enormous, yet they have not sought recognition or remuneration. Unlike a large number of the present political class in Poland, the Romaszewskis did it because it was the right thing to do. In this book, they narrate their childhood and youth, and the growth of understanding that Soviet-occupied Poland was not Poland at all but rather a territory where brutality of the rulers was covered up by diplomatic and media deceit.

Just as Aleksander Kaminski's *Kamienie na szaniec* is a symbol of the generation preceding the Romaszewskis', so is this book iconic of the generation that sacrificed so much to make the social movement called Solidarity possible. Would that all Poles were like the Romaszewskis; barring that, this couple and their daughter remain models of behavior for today's Polish youth.

***Slicing the Bread: Children's Survival Manual in 25 Poems*, by Maja Trochimczyk.** Georgetown, KY: Finishing Line Press (www.finishinglinepress.com), 2014. 30 pages. ISBN 978-1-62229-687-3. \$14.00 from the publisher.

In a recent interview, historian Andrzej Nowak described the situation in East Central Europe as follows: its people live between two huge millstones, Germany and Russia, that constantly grind against each other and repeatedly threaten the existence of the people in between. Poles have to exert an extraordinary amount of energy in order to not be ground to dust by these neighbors. Maja Trochimczyk's twenty-five powerful poems describe the pain, hunger, and humiliation to which the surviving children and adults were subjected by these millstones—the German one in particular. The time of action is World War II and its aftermath. The first poem sets the tone: there was no bread to slice, just soup made of weeds and a tablespoon of flour, lunch for twenty people squeezed into a two-room house (this reminds me of Soweto in South Africa where huge families were housed in similarly small houses—but, unlike in East Central Europe, not as a result of the neighbor's aggression). Then come poems about hiding the