

for all the noble things with which Polish history is so generously loaded. Before and after Solidarity, she is among those who print and distribute illegal literature, and intercede for those unjustly imprisoned. When she herself is locked up and briefly experiences the macabre conditions of a communist political prison, her husband's party connections are put to work and she is freed. She does not know that she owes her freedom to the fact that her husband reports on her.

The ancient tragedy is a contemplation of a calamity that was not caused by purposeful action of the subject. Oedipus did not know that he was marrying his mother. Similarly, Benedict did not ask to be born at the time and place fate assigned to him. *Whoever is without sin, let him throw the first stone.* One of the book's most fascinating motifs is the diary of Benedict's uncle, the one who "chose the bolsheviks." These notes outline for us, one more time, the October Revolution and its aftermath. They have an aura of authenticity that might have come from the author's access to a firsthand account of the events described in the diary.

This sketch does not give full justice to the novel, but it creates a framework within which some of the problems raised in it—and there are many—can be discussed. The novel situates itself at the very heart of what can be described as the problems of postcommunism, not only in Poland and Russia but also in America, which means everywhere. It has the breadth and scale of Solzhenitsyn's panoramas of communism, but surpasses the Russian writer in that Bronisław Wildstein does not throw rationality overboard and offers instead a vision of the world akin to that which the rational ancient Greeks created in the genre of the tragedy. By comparison to the run-of-the-mill novels reviewed weekly in America's popular periodicals, *Unfinished Time* astounds by the weight and scale of issues it probes, including the delicately but decisively posed question of universal morality. Where is its English publisher?



Teoria-literatura-dyskurs. Pejzaż postkolonialny Theory—Literature—Discourse Postcolonial Landscape

By **Dariusz Skórczewski**. Lublin: KUL, 2013. 508 pages. ISBN 978-83-7702-615-1. In Polish.

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Dariusz Skórczewski's *Teoria-literatura-dyskurs. Pejzaż postkolonialny* (Theory—Literature—Discourse. Postcolonial Landscape) gathers the fruit of his intellectual engagement with postcolonial studies that began over a decade ago during a three year stay at Rice University in Houston, Texas. Since then, Skórczewski has published extensively on the subject, with many of these essays, often in revised form, finding their rightful place in this 500-page long book, which also includes new texts written specifically for the volume. A shared goal of conceptualizing a broad spectrum of potentialities and challenges of postcolonialism for Polish as well as Central and East European Studies brings cohesion to the project, which paints the postcolonial landscape in all of its complexity while proposing concrete perspective for its ongoing and future exploration. The reiteration of certain conceptualizations and examples that stems from the previously independent existence of some of its component parts is put to good use in this context, providing readers with a map of the author's journey through postcolonial theory that includes both its general trajectory and specific sites of in-depth exploration.

As the title indicates, the study is divided into three parts. In the first section, Skórczewski formulates and explains the theoretical and conceptual framework of his work; in the second, he demonstrates the analytical possibilities of such a framework through a range of case studies of Polish literature from nineteenth century through to the present; in the third part, in turn, he problematizes this framework within both Polish and Anglo-American discursive contexts. The breadth of Skórczewski's theoretical readings, the depth of

his understanding of the challenges they present, and his convincing argumentation for the epistemological, as well as practical, social and cultural benefits of postcolonial theory in the study of Polish culture, culminate in a mature and impressive intellectual endeavor. The work systematizes a vast and diverse material, offering an original interpretation of it as well as concrete suggestions for further research, and contextualizing the theoretical landscape thus drawn with examples of the author's sophisticated analytical practice. Skórczewski's scholarly temperament and ethics strike a balance that is rare in Polish discourse, academic or otherwise, and only more admirable for it, as the author's clearly announced theoretical and methodological preferences are paired with a genuine respect, on the one hand, for the different and sometimes oppositional critical positions and—on the other—for the reader. His critical and considerate (at times perhaps even too considerate) engagement with the work of others should serve readers as a helpful guide in their own encounter with the subject and the discourse.

Skórczewski's exploration of postcolonialism in both Polish and regional contexts centers on issues of collective identity, and regards literature as one of the most sophisticated discursive systems for the re-assessment of these issues. Not surprisingly, his focus finds a fitting patron in Edward Said. Moving with ease and confidence among texts of post- and anti-Saidian postcolonial scholarship, Skórczewski finds extensive support for the prominence and complexity of identity discourse in the forefather of postcolonial studies. He also welcomes the caution of Said's attitude to the pervasive nominalism and the axiomatic death of a subject in postmodernism and poststructuralism, and his countering respect for the referentiality of language, historicity and the realness of human experience and cognition. Said's ironic stance, aware of its limitations and not easily prone to ideological and epistemological dogmatism, as so many emancipative discourses are, thus proves a rich source of inspiration for Skórczewski's project.

The book is openly ambitious in its goals, scope, and impact. On a fundamental level,

Skórczewski argues for the usefulness and effectiveness of postcolonial theory for the study of collective identity in Polish literature and culture. He does not equate this proposal with an easy application of a hegemonic Western discourse to new cultural materials, however, for this only reinforces their unequal relationship. Instead, he aims to broaden and shift postcolonial theory in its encounter with a new context. Skórczewski is able to set such demanding goals by distinguishing between the main descriptive characteristics of the postcolonial project and its constitutive aspects. He is thus able to envision the process of further decentralization of postcolonial reflection on two levels: geographical, through the engagement of Central and Eastern European discourse in an equal epistemological exchange with its Western counterpart, and philosophical, through its dislocation from Western Marxism, nominalism, and constructivism. This philosophical dislocation is achieved with the help of post secularism, personalism, and ethnosymbolism, although it raises important questions about its possible extent.

Besides providing a valuable overview of the state and status of postcolonial studies in Poland, Skórczewski's book proposes a whole gamut of carefully weighted arguments—historical, cultural, thematic, and ethical—for the application of postcolonial theories within a Polish context. Situating his arguments vis-à-vis recent (often heated and highly politicized) debates about the usefulness of such an approach, to mention only the post-dependency option, he foregoes direct polemics with other optics in favor of forming an original and viable framework for Polish postcolonial studies within a comparative East and Central European context. As a well-equipped cultural theorist and critic, Skórczewski is able to enrich postcolonial reflection with elements that have been underestimated by it until now, and which the Polish case makes particularly apparent. These include such often overlooked issues as white colonialism, colonization of neighboring countries, reverse-cultural colonization, and the possible double status of the colonized as a former colonizer. As a well-trained philologist, in turn, he ensures that literature is treated not

only as material for deciphering postcolonial dynamics, but also as an aesthetic object.

This is most evident in the second part of the book, where the meeting of a postcolonial theorist and a philologist infuses Skórczewski's case studies with an inspirational air. His illuminating reinterpretation of Polish Romantic literature, which is in urgent need of critical rethinking due to its paradigmatic status in the development of Polish national identity, provides one perfect example. Such timely re-readings can be found in his subtle and insightful analysis of Mickiewicz's *Crimean Sonnets*, with their ambiguous colonizing perspective and an internal incongruity that exists alongside a masterfully exercised unity of literary form, as well as in his excellent essays on the conciliatory identity politics of Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz* (Master Thaddeus), and the antagonistic identity project of Słowacki's *Sen Srebrny Salomei* (Salomea's Silver Dream). In the context of Tadeusz Konwicki's debut novel *Rojsty*, in turn, Skórczewski's analysis of authorial discursive strategies (with careful attention paid to his narrative and linguistic choices) leads to convincing conclusions about the position and role of colonized intellectual elites within the colonial encounter.

This critical rethinking of the most important identity issues in Polish discourse offered by Skórczewski's case studies is accompanied by an identification of an array of thematic interests that are specific to Polish colonial encounter, including attitudes to the Sarmatian identity, hybrid relationships of ethnicities within the liminal space of the borderlands, the exilic syndrome along with its experience of inferiority (transgressed in Joanna Clark's *W cichym lesie Vermontu*/In the Quiet Forest of Vermont), and the resentments of a postcolonial, Central European subject (reinforced in Andrzej Stasiuk's *On the Road to Babadag and Fado*). To his double—situational and immanent—interpretive act, Skórczewski also adds an ethical perspective, arriving at a unique model of potential partnership and exchange with Western postcolonial studies.

Such exchange is of prime importance to

Skórczewski's project, informing both its theoretical part and interpretations of individual works. This is perhaps most apparent in his analysis of Paweł Huelle's 2004 novel *Castorp*, where he reads the book as an instance of Polish contemporary literature "writing back" to dominant Western discursive practices. Skórczewski is undoubtedly at his best when he probes, with great subtlety and care, not only foreign, but also Polish orientalizing discourses. In his critique of Maria Janion's *Niesamowita Słowiańszczyzna* (Uncanny Slavdom), he meets this highly respected scholar on a shared, if differently understood ground of postcolonial theory, and argues against her theses of the initial traumatic colonization of pagan (Polish) Slavic culture by Christianity with the help of historical, rather than solely theoretical arguments. Skórczewski also dissects such influential books as Tony Judt's *A Grand Illusion? An Essay on Europe* and *Postwar: a History of Europe since 1945*, convincingly exposing some of the orientalizing practices towards Eastern Europe present therein. The precision of his method is on full display in his reading of Larry Wolff's very useful book *Inventing Eastern Europe: the Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, which traces and illuminates its underlying constructivist practice of dismissing the reality of Eastern Europe's subjectivity.

There is much to be learned from Skórczewski's study of postcolonialism and he makes the task thoroughly engaging. His excellent textual and contextual interpretations fully validate his theoretical suggestions, although in doing so they also arouse a disquieting thought that the more level partnership sought by their author may be coming too late. For the interests of Western academia are steadily moving away from postcolonialism, and even as original and balanced a new model of postcolonial reflection as that offered by Skórczewski, especially if it remains available solely in a "minor" language, is at risk of getting lost in the changeable currents of contemporary literary theory and criticism. It remains to be seen whether the ongoing potential of postcolonialism articulated in and exemplified by Skórczewski's vibrant study is more fully realized.