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Preliminary Remarks

There is something other, different, which lies between empire and nations.¹ Some new non-uniform quality constituted by the region, the borderland – a living space common to people of different ethnic backgrounds, of different nationalities, people who are subject to the influence (through various means) of the powers that in general reside in distant centers. It is in those centers where national self-portraits are forged; it is where enlightened representatives of the nation create its awaited (and idealized) images in the areas of science, art, morality, and politics. The production of symbols, of self-knowledge, that which is ours – proper, beneficial, right, and true – is also aimed at the identification of the Other, the one who is our doppelganger *a rebours*. What and how he thinks, how he looks, and how he behaves contradicts our ideals; what is more, this constitutes a permanent threat to our values. This state of emergency will be lifted only once the Other transforms into our own likeness. This process, if it ever occurs at all, can never be absolute,

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¹ This text was prepared for the international conference *Chełmszczyzna – między imperium a narodami*, dedicated to the centenary of the foundation of a separate Chełm voivodship (Lublin-Chełm-Łuck, December 2012).

at most it can result in some form of inept mimicry that at any moment could revert to the primal stage, revealing its true (evil) side and threatening us anew. The center is therefore tasked with keeping its borderland inhabitants in a state of constant alertness; an awareness of the fact that the Other, that is the enemy, does not sleep.

Chełm Land – in terms of its representation in various genres of literacy such as institutional documents, political journalism, reportage, novels, and historical works – is a territory far less prosperous, and therefore in some respects less interesting than Eastern Galicia. The reason seems obvious: the latter saw the historical development of a strong cultural hub emanating to faraway centers of political power and capable of creating its own symbolic representations – Lviv. I am not quite sure whether I will be able to say anything original about Chełm Land given the copious amounts of studies done in Poland on the borderlands. Did Chełm Land possess any special significance within this discursive framework? Probably not. Nevertheless I will attempt to show different varieties of such discourse by referring to texts (to a large extent also in the footnotes) that prominently feature this land. For me literary works, including reportage, are the most important, although, from the point of view of contemporary literary studies, we would view many of them as second or even third-rate works. A novel by Kajetan Kraszewski, Józef Ignacy's younger brother, which will be mentioned here, does not belong to the nation's literary canon. Moreover, it is hard to find any mention of this author in such revered handbooks as Julian Krzyżanowski's *Dzieje Literatury Polskiej* [*History of Polish Literature*]. A reportage work on Chełm Land by Władysław Reymont, one of our Nobel laureates, is rarely mentioned in his biographies – Krzyżanowski also overlooks it. Nevertheless, both these texts are at present readily available in their unabridged form on the internet. This is the paradox of contemporary media – one can find almost “anything” as there are no criteria for selection: those works which comprise the canon are confronted on the web by those which were discarded by the same tradition. It is obvious that nothing in culture is ever lost, and nothing in it is ever final, or rather, nothing is semantically closed (adequate to its own self), or semantically neutral; all enunciations, freed from the voice of their “author,” enter previously unanticipated contexts and become endowed with new meanings. Accepting this cultural mechanism, I seek out in the “Chełm texts” (of course not only in those available on the web) answers to the question of how the inhabitants of that land are perceived by the authors who usually write about it either from a distance or visit it personally, but in both cases approach it equipped with a certain knowledge or worldview that shapes and frames their understanding of the Chełm borderlands and its people. Or is it possible that the reading of these texts will

only unveil another instance of the Polish discourse on power, entitlement, and resentment?²

This question expresses my greatest fears. It is easier for me to speak of “my own” borderlands: Upper Silesia. I console myself that this should not hinder me from discussing another borderland region, the one which has gained the exclusive right to be categorized as “Kresy” in the Polish language, describing the country’s “eastern territories.”³ I come from the south-western part of the country, which – this might seem a bit ironic – did not have the same luck as its eastern counterpart for at least one reason: the former’s populace have not produced so many great writers as the “Kresy” have since the 19th century. The point is that since that time, works of literature have become for the Polish public the most important source of knowledge about “Kresy” – knowledge that mythologizes reality.⁴ The power of literary fiction, its ability to construe the perception of the world, becomes evident to me when I think about one short work that epitomizes this mechanism. I have in mind a kind of reporter’s itinerary from the land of my childhood, that is Silesia, from the 1930s by a writer who was born and raised on a Polish estate in Kresy. Let us examine the perceptual schemata he uses, I cannot say to comprehend, but rather to familiarize himself with that landscape and its inhabitants. And so, in the chimney smoke flowing above factories he sees “a symphony of mist, sapphires, grey velvets and tactile motions”; in the shape of a factory building, the Opera de Paris; in the figure of chimneys, the heroes of *Turandot*; in the Katowice voivodship building, “a Petersburg character,” “The Winter Palace”; in an old woman, “a faint spot,” which “as in [...] a canvas of a great painter... ends the whole composition and constitutes the subject of the painting”; in a carousel, “the Prater star” from postcards once sent to him from

2 See and compare views on the borderland discourse: Edward Kasperski, “Dyskurs kresowy. Kryteria, własności, funkcje,” in *Kresy. Dekonstrukcja*, ed. Krzysztof Trybuś, Jerzy Kałużny and Radosław Okulicz-Kozaryn (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskiego Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk, 2007), 98–99 and Leszek Szaruga, *Palimpsest Międzyzmorza (zarys problematyki)*, accessed October 21, 2012, <http://www.tekstualia.pl/index.php?DZIAL=teksty&ID=258>

3 The notion „kresy” entered the language after the borders of the Second Polish Republic were formed, especially its eastern border, with the Soviet Union, delineated by the Treaty of Riga of 1921. That is when “it became «politically unadvisable» to use the historical names «Lithuania and Russia» to designate that land [that is the eastern part of the country – J.P.H.]” Stefan Kieniewicz, „Kresy. Przemiany terminologiczne w perspektywie dziejowej,” *Przegląd Wschodni* 1 (1991), quoted after: Marek Wedemann, „Gdzie leży Beresteczko? Kresy na mapie,” in *Kresy. Dekonstrukcja*, 33.

4 Bogusław Bakula, „Kolonialne i postkolonialne aspekty polskiego dyskursu kresoznawczego (zarys problematyki),” *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2006): 13.

Vienna by his parents; and in the rough sounding Silesian surnames (“Pyzik,” “Warcok,” “Opolony” ...), he is disappointed not to find the suffixes “ski,” or even “icz.”⁵

Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz entitles his reportage *Fotografie ze Śląska* [*Photographs from Silesia*], because he does not experience Silesia in any way that is not mediated by the intellectual-ionic clichés (if I may call it that) of the dominant culture which he, who was brought up among the landscape of Ukraine and Mazovia and educated on the ideals of western art and architecture, takes with him wherever he goes. Clichés used to describe Silesia symbolically subjugate it and render it voiceless, therefore allowing the writer only to perform a monologue of Polishness associated and equated with the western tradition (this is accompanied by his political correctness, which compels him to utilize the banalities of the “sanacja” propaganda such as “here, where Polish princess brought German colonizers...”).⁶ In consequence he himself does not really know where he is. He does not understand that world, and he encounters within it only what he is already well acquainted with. The rhetorical category “photography” is just a convenient excuse he makes up for himself, an alibi for his inability to come into contact with the reality of the world he is supposed to observe.

Of course my aim here is not literary criticism. I am much more interested in a certain cultural mechanism that is inherent in the question of what happens to a subject under the “influence” of a certain text which imposes upon him foreign content (in the aforementioned case, it was Silesia). Clearly as a result of such a clash (with self-ascribed descriptions of that land, which are in themselves multilayered), what emerges are hybrid semiotic forms.

In turn, a hybrid language predetermines (i.e. formats, frames, however one may call it) its users’ perception of the world, which as a language-object or factual-fictional mixture must acquire hybrid properties. This process is all the more effective the more the text penetrates into the center of semiosis – or, in other words, into the collective imagination – of a particular culture, which occurs for example through its inclusion in school textbooks. *Fotografie ze Śląska* is indeed a textbook example.

The reading of a literary text presented above utilizes, as can be seen, the tools of semiotic analysis and partially of postcolonial theory. Similarly, I would like to approach the texts – not only from literature, or those that are

5 Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, „Fotografie ze Śląska,” (1936) in Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, *Podróże do Polski* (Warszawa: PIW, 1977), 101-109.

6 Ibid., 108.

memoirs or reportages, but also scientific ones – focused on Chełm Land and written by Polish authors foreign to this region. I will focus on the descriptions of its inhabitants; I will attempt to determine to what extent they become an embodiment or a mask of national ideologies, of the political and religious discourse which, alongside providing a sense of identity to their own, determines the Other. There is a question of the degree to which the described behavior of the Others is a realization of the intellectual content of texts of culture? A question the answer to which can merely possess a hermeneutical dimension, and a corresponding value.

I understand “discourse” from the title as a system of cultural practices which are a realization of a particular worldview, and the knowledge contained therein which defines the criteria of a true – and analogously false – understanding/perception of that world; it defines good/right/correct and bad/wrong/incorrect beliefs, as well as ways of talking about it and behaving in it. Discourse understood this way is a system of knowledge which rules reality, produces texts as well as institutions (literary, scientific, political) which do “violence” to things – as Michel Foucault put it.⁷ It is, as a matter of fact, a mechanism of exclusion: forbidden words, evil (other or foreign) people, false beliefs, and undignified behavior.

I am therefore primarily interested in language used as a weapon in the struggle for dominance between the nation states and nationalist movements, a weapon used for manipulating public opinion and producing ideological representations of the Other, who inhabits the borderlands – regions such as Chełm Land, which is the center of my focus here, but also Silesia and Galicia – and breaks in upon the (previously linear) history of nations.⁸ From this point of view, the problem of dominance turns into an experience with a “fundamental cultural dimension”⁹ in the borderlands, territories woven together from multiple histories and languages. This experience allows one to recognize otherness. How is the Other spoken of? The language of description, its semantics and pragmatics reveal in detail the relations between the dominant culture and the subordinate culture, between the inhabitants of the center and the inhabitants of the peripheries.

7 Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language*, trans. Alan Mark Sheridan-Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 229.

8 See Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1994), Maria Delaperrière, “Gdzie są moje granice? O postkolonializmie w literaturze,” *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2008): 13.

9 Said, *Culture*.

The Other in the Field and in the Tavern

I will start with probably the oldest motif in the borderland discourse, which can be found in the novel *Chełmianie: opowiadania z lat 1792-1796* [*Inhabitants of Chełm: Stories from 1792-1796*] (1878), written with a truly Sarmatian flamboyance by Kajetan Kraszewski. This is how he describes the dwellers of Chełm Land:

Here I am bound to name the Kunicki's, the chamberlain's wife nee Węgleńska, Konstancya the daughter of Wojciech, the Castellan of Chełm; her sisters married in *sociam vitae*: Katarzyna – Swirski Mateusz the Chamberlain of Sanok, Róża – Gałęzowski, Wiktorya – Staniszewski the Sword-bearer; they all settled in nearby lands and kept notable households, so have Konstancya's brothers: Antoni Węgleński, the Mayor of Chełm, and Onufry, Standard-bearer, both noble men. Therefore, a family bloomed with so many members, living in harmony, ruled over all of Chełm Land.¹⁰

It is the pantheon of Polish nobility, the names of interconnected families accompanied by the titles of held land offices. Nobility is, as is well known, a class that cares little about education, sparsely utilizes writing, listens rather than reads, and therefore primarily creates a so-called oral culture (with a primacy given to such genres of speech as tales, jokes, and proverbs), where historical truth merges with fiction. Tedious, on the face of it, enumerations, catalogues of proper names and titles, serve in this case as a system of information, allowing people to put their world in order by revealing before them the mystery of its origin. The history of that world exhibits a genealogical, not a chronological, structure and stratification. Lists, enumerations – read hermeneutically – are a kind of sacred ritual, a way of introducing an absolute order into the world, of establishing a firm foundation of its present

¹⁰ Kajetan Kraszewski, *Chełmianie: opowiadania z lat 1792-1796* (Warszawa: Nakładem Gustawa Sennewalda Księgarza, 1878), 36. Similar lists of names appear in writings about nobility. For example, here is a list provided by Henryk Rzewuski in his argument for the superiority of Polish over western nobility: "In our land the magnates did not form a separate state; they were the nobility, they were the nation, they picked the wives for their sons from a vast field; therefore they did not lose reason. And which French or German magnate wrote law or at least a decent book? Show him to us! Haberdasheries and grocers produce lawmakers, politicians, poets, and historians. Not so in our land, where men like Lew Sapiecha, Piotr Herburt, Maksymilian Fredro, Wacław Rzewuski, Ignacy Krasicki, Ignacy Potocki, Tadeusz Czacki, Rejs from Nagłowice, were all nobles and inherited the offices they held." Henryk Rzewuski, *Pamiętki Soplicy*, ed. Zofia Lewinówna (Warszawa: PIW, 1978), 170.

form.¹¹ There is no one especially noteworthy in the quoted passage, besides “noble men” who were given lands to rule over. These are anonymous lands: they have no proper names besides those referring to places where power is exercised (Chełm, Sanok). A typical colonial discourse in which encounters with the Other do not occur. Granted, he can appear within its framework, but strictly in power relations of a paternalistic or even patriarchal character.¹² The Other can therefore acquire only the form of a servant or child. In any case, he is some lesser image of the master, worse than the latter, often a distorted version (though sincere and not intended to ridicule) of the genuine, masculine, fatherly ways of talking and behaving. We read in Kraszewski’s novel:

The fields, as far as one could see, were filled with workers; though toiling and grinding, they sang and chatted happily. Stanisław Olędzki, in spite of his indiscretions, was much liked by the local and neighboring people, mostly because he knew how to talk to them and often treated them to some vodka, himself drinking to their health; and when he started telling his tales and ideas they laughed their heads off, and he could do with them as he pleased.¹³

It is an idyllic image of the land and its inhabitants living in harmony, accord, and cordiality. Heart-warming scenes of a father (sometimes strict, but capable of “indiscretions”) playing with the children, who drink with him the heavenly nectar (in mythology it was ambrosia or wine, in the Chełm variant, it is vodka), they chat, sing, and laugh – all this allows Chełm Land to be perceived ahistorically, as a place suspended in an eternal present.¹⁴ It is as if God almighty had just established his covenant with “me and you and every living creature of all flesh”

11 Jean Pierre Vernant, „Mityczne aspekty pamięci,” trans. Aleksander Wolicki, *Konteksty* 3-4 (2003): 202, 203. See also on this subject: Umberto Eco, *The Infinity of Lists*, trans. Alastair McEwan (London: MacLehose, 2009).

12 In this respect the patriarchal discourse is close to the „symbiotic discourse” as defined by Aleksander Fiut. Aleksander Fiut, *Spotkanie z Innym* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2006), 47-48.

13 Kraszewski, *Chełmianie: opowiadania z lat 1792-1796*, 137.

14 Edward Said will call this phenomenon the „ethnographic present.” In relation to descriptions of nature in the borderland discourse this category is used by, i. a., Hanna Gosk, “Polski dyskurs kresowy w niefikcjonalnych zapisach międzywojennych. Próba lektury w perspektywie postcolonial studies,” *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2008): 25-26.

(Gen. 9:15¹⁵), promised that there shall never again be flood, then blessed them and ordered: "And you, be ye fruitful, and multiply; bring forth abundantly in the earth, and multiply therein" (Gen. 9:7). One of the sons of the Ark's builder was Shem – the progenitor of Sarmatians, whose "eternal present" was supposed to last six hundred years, and laying the story of his life also required a list – a record of generations: "The sons of Shem: Elam, and Asshur, and Arpachshad, and Lud, and Aram. And the sons of Aram: Uz, and Hul, and Gether, and Mash. And Arpachshad begat Shelah; and Shelah begat Eber" (Gen 10:22-24) and so on. By creating lists, the inspired author, just as the aristocratic storyteller, attempts to grasp eternity, a detailed memory of old times allows him to uncover the divine (eternal, invariable) order of the universe.

The common people, in Kraszewski's work, require paternal care. They reveal their immaturity by scarring the Polish language, or rather its version which the author considers "standard." But there are also other signs of this. In their infantilism, the people are unified, depersonalized; power that is individually and ritually exercised rules over a society that is formed not by private persons with proper names but rather by an anonymous collective, designated through metonymic names such as Ivan, Vasyli, or Prokop.¹⁶ In the novel's plot, these are exotic figures, usually mute elements of scenography – innocent, natural, worshipping their master, and having no other "gods" before him. If some candidate for a new "master" appears (in the novel, they are visited by an emissary of the Emperor of Austria, who introduces himself as their protector from presumed oppressors), then he only provokes their laughter. In a description of this episode, Kraszewski allows himself to briefly introduce the language of his folk hero, with the sole purpose, as it turns out, of procuring a pointed joke. In an enclosed field of stabilized meanings, firmly contained

15 This and all subsequent references to the Bible are to The King James Version. *The Bible: Authorized King James Version* (Oxford: OUP, 1997).

16 An estate coachman from Sławatycze introduced himself to Reymont when he visited Chełm this way: "Their Lordships call me Ivan – he explained, grasping the reins in his hand. I sat in the britzka, the whip cracked and the horses moved on. – In truth my name is Nikon, but such is the way of the estate to call the postilions of the drawing horses either John or Mathew. Here, on the Bug, they make you an Ivan – he laughed, cracking the whip furiously, turning into a broad, muddy road." Władysław Stanisław Reymont, *Ziemi chełmskiej: wrażenia i notatki* (Gdańsk: Tower Press, 2000), 4. Cf.: "The landowners of Hrubieszów Land formed a rather close-knit society, which, despite considerable changes in the structure of the Kingdom of Poland, remained impenetrable to elements from other classes or layers of society [...]."*Spółeczeństwo Królestwa Polskiego*, ed. Witold Kula, (Warszawa: PWN, 1965), quoted after: Irena Kowalska and Ida Merżan, *Rottenbergowie znad Buga* (Warszawa: LSW, 1989), 17.

within the triangle formed by the country estate, church, and peasantry, there is no place for any external elements. The people devoted to their Polish master cannot simply acknowledge some miserable “Unterhaus advocate” who “in his oratory fervor exclaimed: I am a humane man, economist, democrat!! – I understand all this quite well, this is why the emperor sent me.” We subsequently read:

The peasants listened to this lofty rhetoric in silence, huffing and scratching their heads [...] and when this last argument was heard, Ivan nudged Prokop with his elbow.

“What did the German say?” he asked.

“Devil only knows,” Prokop replied indifferently, spitting through his teeth; as the aroma coming from the bar was causing him some discomfort.

“Don’t you understand?” asked Vasyli, once a menial, who was more cunning than the others.

“Man!! I don’t understand,” guileless Ivan replied.

“He says,” Vasyli explained, “that at first he was a foreman, later a manager, and then a thief and that is why he was sent here.

“Oh! The German scoundrel,” Ivan muttered.¹⁷

Notice: the scene takes place in a tavern, and this is not without reason. This is a place which enjoys exterritorial status to a certain degree and is governed (as far as it is possible) in accordance with the rules of democracy. It is where people of different class, nationality, and faith looking for food and shelter encounter each other. A tavern, inn, taproom, pub, and saloon carry with them, in their semantic content, a promise of reconciliation, unity in disparity – in the haze over hot meals, in the heads of guests heated by drinks, in the racket of multiple languages spoken by the nobleman in the company of the poor and insignificant; travelers, vagrants, pilgrims, and tourists immersed in stories, (democratic) dialogues, exchanging news from all over the world; there is an atmosphere of an enclave, a promise of new land, of deterritorialization (as some contemporary humanists might say), and the surpassing of everyday drudgery with all its problems and tragic conflicts. The essence of the described phenomenon has been given a paradigmatic formulation by the narrator of *Don Quixote*, a work that gave rise to the modern literary genre that is the novel. This is how he speaks of one of his heroes, who “arrived at that inn, which he looked upon as the heavenly goal where all

17 Kraszewski, *Chełmianie: opowiadania z lat 1792-1796*, 150-151.

earthly misfortunes are happily terminated.”¹⁸ This statement can be considered an exemplary reading of the inn motif, an antidote to the curse of the tower of Babel; the inn which becomes a place where the sons and daughters of various tribes, languages, countries, and nations scattered “abroad upon the face of all the earth” (Gen. 11: 9) return from their exile. Only there does the initial trustfulness arise in them anew, a trust in that we all share the same tongue and whatever we attempt will be possible.

Polish literature frequently explored the inn motif,¹⁹ though often overlooking the multilingualism of the depicted community. The quoted passage seems (based on my knowledge which is quite limited, I admit, as I am not a literary historian) to be one of the few instances in all of Polish literature, when we hear a foreign language, and in particular Ruthenian/Old Ukrainian. Another such example is a record (two short passages to be exact) from the 1840s. Henryk Rzewuski, in his description of Zaporozhian Sich, situates his hero, among other places, inside an inn where he encounters a “numerous mix of various nationalities,” he hears the language of peasants and Ukrainian gentry, the Crimean and the Lithuanian language, he hears and puts down in the original a fragment of a blind storyteller’s folksong: “Krywda krywdoju, a otczyzna otczyzną [...] szczo maty persze [...] pobyje, a potom pomyłuje.” He also notes in the Ukrainian language, the answer of a Jewish innkeeper to his question, “[W]ho are those Cossacks so splendidly dressed and so generous?” The latter answers, “A wy czużyi, szczo ne znajete zaporoskich Kozaków? [...] Oni z ryboj w desiat’ podwod byli w Humaniu [...] Nym słonko zajde, to wy ich obaczyte, jak oni u sebe chodzą.”²⁰

This is not heteroglossia yet as we do not find a clash of different viewpoints or beliefs of the actors in the presented world here. Rather, it is only (?) multilingualism, and a spectacular multilingualism, I would say, at that: in a public setting (an inn), we see and hear the Others, which rarely happens in Kresy literature. Local Others usually speak Polish,²¹ sometimes it is Pol-

18 Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *The History and Adventures of the Renowned Don Quixote*, trans. Tobias Smollett (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1998), 315.

19 This is a completely different topic. Some of the works that use this motif belong to the canon of Polish literature, among them: *Sir Thaddeus*, *The Peasants*, *Ashes and Diamonds*, *Mother Joan of the Angels* [*Matka Joanna od Aniołów*], or *Austeria*. It seems that the idea of a wedding used by Wyspiański (the action takes place in a farmhouse) is just another iteration of the inn motif.

20 Rzewuski, *Pamiętki Soplicy*, 105, 107, 108.

21 This is also pointed out in Aleksander Fiut, *Spotkanie z innym* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2006), 49.

ish more or less subjected to some stylistic operations, such as archaizing or adding some local color through dialect. This pattern seems to be confirmed by the last statement of the Jew – the author of the commentary to the PIW edition of *Pamiętki*, which I refer to in this text, notes that in their published edition, even he speaks Polish!²²

Let us return to Chełm Land. The nobleman's tale [*gawęda szlachecka*] is a genre rather lacking in depictions of local Others. When the greatest master of this genre in the twentieth century (and he well may have been the last), Melchior Wańkowicz, dedicates a whole chapter of his autobiographical novel to Chełm Land, he still meticulously omits the fact that the village of Besko in Sanok County, where the novel takes place, was inhabited until 1945 by both Poles and Ukrainians in equal numbers. All his heroes are friends and family: daddy, mommy, granny, miss Michasia, auntie Mania...²³ Therefore, the story has the structure of a monologue, it offers a one-sided account of the world – there is no place for ambiguity within its confines. There are good reasons to presume that polysemy of the story could be damaging to its author, who otherwise in his other autobiographical novel, *Szczenięce Lata* [*Puppy Years*] (1934), gave voice, in its original form, to the Belarusian dwellers of Kałużyce. After the war, Besko remained in Poland, and in 1945, nearly all the inhabitants of Ukrainian nationality were forced by the Poles to flee to the Ukrainian SSR – it is therefore possible that mentioning them in *Ziele na kraterze* [*Herbs in the Crater*] (written in 1951, published in 1957) would provoke the intervention of censorship. No matter what were Wańkowicz's particular reasons for the concealment of the Others in his retrospective of the journey to Chełm Land, this fact can be explained by a much more basic factor, which is, broadly speaking, the ideology of the noble nation. It belonged to a specific social class whose self-knowledge historically shaped the discourse of Polish identity in its entirety (by the way: mostly illiterate peasants and the weak bourgeoisie could add very little to this discourse) – therefore texts produced within the sphere of its influence represent only our expectations, beliefs, hopes, and fears...

It is the same with Kajetan Kraszewski, who also fails to endow his novel with a fully developed dialogical structure. The presence of Others is based on their pageantry. They serve, above all, as decoration; the architecture of the inn or the village landscape allows for the appearance of sovereigns: the good master as well as the foreign invader. Relations of power culminate in this

22 See Zofia Lewinówna, *Komentarz*, in Rzewuski, *Pamiętki Soplicy*, 383-384.

23 See Melchior Wańkowicz, *Ziele na kraterze* (Warszawa: IW PAX, 1973), 48-64. On the topic of Besko village see Apokryf Ruski. Otwarte Ukraińskie Zasoby Naukowe, accessed December 19, 2012, <http://www.apokryfruski.org/?s=besko>

spectacle with the main characters calling upon irony, which serves them as a weapon against all other actors, and in general against anything that is different. Here irony conveys paternalism: it is more of a monologue, a game and play with the twisted self-portraits of the dominant culture, than dialogue. This results in the creation of closed semiotic forms that circulate within a single culture – this communication practice brings about the threat of potential social antagonisms. Multilingualism (as we shall see) will turn into the nightmare of Babel. Thus, the theatricality of multilingualism depicted through the medium of a single language, considered universal and natural, makes it possible to “properly” express such western words like “humane,” “economist,” or “democrat.” Moreover, it is also the language of virtuous people, courageous and just, who the simpleminded and (in their naivety) docile can only imitate through mimicry, with an unintentionally comic effect. As research on gendered cultural identity suggests, nationalisms, just like colonialisms, are self-depicted as being male; and the minorities – the subjected, the colonized – are female.²⁴

The Intertextual Other

Chełm Land comes into prominence only as a “sacred land,” a “Polish Calvary,” and becomes enriched through proper names previously absent in its literary depictions.²⁵ It gains importance in light of the goals defined by the national center, in light of interests of a strictly political nature. The periods of that center’s most prolific activity of producing texts focused on this region are concerned with two major events: the dissolution of the Uniate Eparchy and

²⁴ See Maria Janion, *Niesamowita Słowiańszczyzna. Fantazmaty literatury* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2007), 325-327. Symptoms of the patriarchal discourse, especially in relation to the Ukrainian populace, have appeared – evidently on many levels – in the main currents of Polish politics of the interwar period. Józef Piłsudski said in reference to Volhynia in 1926: “the government [...] should be strong and strict, but also just.” Nationalists spoke of Ukrainians in a similar way. We read in an article in *Gazeta Polska* (Jan 15, 1936): “The attributes of proper national politics, besides its main goals, are manhood and determination. Such politics cannot allow itself to be derailed by some unpredictable, tragic mischief. It cannot, even for a moment, forget the need to show relentlessness and strength in those cases, where its success can be hindered.” Both quotes in the appropriate order after Waldemar Paruch, *Od konsolidacji państwowej do konsolidacji narodowej. Mniejszości narodowe w myśli politycznej obozu piłsudczykowskiego (1926-1939)* (Lublin Wydawnictwo UMCS, 1997), 200, 330.

²⁵ „At dawn I continued my journey. As if in a pious pilgrimage through such stations of Polish Calvary as Łomazy, Piszcząc, Biata, Horbów, Pratulín, Janów, and many other places, made famous by the miracles of folk people faith and martyrdom.” Reymont, *Z ziemi chełmskiej: wrazenia i notatki*, 24.

its incorporation into the Russian Orthodox Church (1875), and the process of administrative separation of the governorate from the Kingdom of Poland, or to be more precise, from the Siedlce and the Lublin Governorates (1912). The Land itself seems to be of little importance. Its inhabitants are valued by the center only as long as they resemble us, the people of the center, and it is best if they become an idealized and favorably retouched self-portrait of us. By the center's decree, a martyrological, national, and religious perspective is to define the whole Chełm Land; to constitute the cultural code that will frame both the self-knowledge of the local recipients of this communication, as well as the expectations of the center's emissaries who visit the land from faraway Warsaw or Krakow. This is one of the reportages, written in the autumn of 1915, just after the battlefield had swept through this land:

Chełm Land always inspired much interest and talk all throughout Poland, and in previous years it was mentioned by everyone with an accompanying painful sigh, as it was well known what hideous moral torture, what difficulties and sorrows, were a part of Polish life there. News of the quiet but fierce fight that was waged over there for the very existence of the Polish soul and language reached Krakow incessantly; the names "Chełm" and "Chełm Land" were synonymous with the names of martyrs.²⁶

Historical sources tell us that most of the Uniate clergy in that region was Polonized;²⁷ that sermons were preached in the Polish language; that the Uniate resistance to the Russian religious oppression intensified the activity of the Polish church and civil organizations in the Chełm Land; that from 1877 onward, Jesuits conducted secret missions there from the lands of Galicia, organizing Uniate worshippers into Confraternities of the Rosary, "whose members guided the religious life of a community devoid of priests"; that the

26 Michał Siedlecki, *Z ziemi lubelskiej. Jesień 1915 r.* (Kraków: Druk W.L. Anczyca i Spółki, 1916), 47.

27 „[...] The Polishness, if not of the whole than at least of a vast majority, of the Uniates was unequivocally attested to in an excerpt of the address directed to the imperial throne through the Governor-General of Warsaw on December 18, 1867, signed by three canons who remained in the Chełm cathedral chapter [...] in paragraph nine, requesting parochial schools, the Uniate clergy writes «Let education be conducted only in the Polish language, as this is the wish of the whole Uniate population, and these schools would be also readily frequented by children of parents belonging to the Latin Church»." Henryk Wierciński, *Ziemia Chełmska i Podlasie. Rys historyczny i obraz stanu dzisiejszego* (Warszawa: Gebethner i Spółka), 20.

national and religious awareness of the “obstinate” “was influenced by Polish language publications that were shipped to the Bug River Counties since the end of the 1870s”; written sources point to the “considerable influence on the attitudes of the local “obstinate” population” of the Towarzystwo Opieki nad Unitami (Society for the Care of Uniates), founded in 1903, which handled the distribution of press concerned with national issues with titles such as “Polak” [“The Pole”], “Katolik” [“The Catholic”] or “Przegląd Wszecpolski” [“All-Polish Review”], where “the persecuted were persuaded to renounce Orthodoxy and convert to Catholicism.”²⁸

The struggle for dominance between churches and civilizations – eastern and western – sets the tone and shapes the meaning of the Chełm borderland discourse. It reinforces the production of ideological representations of the Other – simplified, clear-cut, and ready for political use. Previous categories of identity and difference have changed their semantics: the ethnic identity of Poles is complicated by the religious difference that is manifested by the Uniate population. For those Poles who wrote on Chełm Land, either during the time of the Kingdom of Poland or the Second Polish Republic, the Uniates became the other us – a kind of our idealized self-portrait – saints martyred for the faith. This image therefore bears the characteristics of a discursive construct. Creating it required using narrative templates, which can be traced to religious writing, literature, historical works, and political writing in their mutual translocations.

In an attempt to preserve the chronological order of the source material, I will first refer to a fragment of romantic poetry, which although not dealing directly with the events that took place in Chełm Land, will nevertheless be used later in one of the historical accounts that focus on it. What is important in this case is the poetic theatricality, pathos and sublimity in

²⁸ Jarosław Cabaj, „Postawy ludności Chełmszczyzny i Podlasia wobec kwestii przynależności państwowej swych ziem (1912, 1918–1919),” *Kwartalnik Historyczny* 4 (1992): 65–67. Of course Polish historical scholarship informs of the Russian propaganda counter-offensive, which conducted a massive publicity campaign with special focus on the plans of establishing the Chełm Governorate. “The dispute between Russian and Polish authors – was of greatest importance – we read. The third interested party – the Ukrainians – had less opportunities to present its opinions.” Andrzej Wrzyszc, *Gubernia chełmska. Zarys ustrojowy* (Lublin Wydawnictwo UMCS, 1997), 38.

Besides books, press articles, and brochures, Russian propaganda also used pamphlets – published by the Chełm Prawosławne Bractwo Bogurodzicy (The Orthodox Brotherhood of the Mother of God) – to mobilize the Orthodox faithful. Some also point out that all this was accompanied by the illegal “Poczajów leaflets” (circulated between 1905 and 1907) that were addressed to the Orthodox peasantry, and were “characterized by low literary level and primitivism of their argumentation,” they debased Polish Catholic priests, and called Catholicism a heresy. *Ibid.*, 40.

depicting the tragedy of characters and events, equating them with paradigmatic images of human suffering found in the Bible or the hagiographies of the first martyrs of Christianity. The events depicted usually take place on a stage where a sacrifice in the name of faith takes place before the public's eyes. These are two fragments of a reportage-poem by Juliusz Słowacki – written in 1846 – devoted to the repressions of the Uniate population:

Our torment, starvation, and drowning, moved
 The priests, and Jews, and peasants:
 Loud cursing and shouts were heard,
 And a Jewess runs to the shore,
 Shining with her golden locks,
 Like a mother, charges, pulls the soldiers back
 [...]
 She raised her hands – and like a harvester,
 Covered me with a bale of those locks...
 I look – by the pump the bishop himself with a branch,
 Though clearly fearful, as white as paper
 The priests by his side: blood dripping down their arms
 Red staffs – clearly they beat someone –
 Restless they mutter, sometimes they bark.
 They walk as if they have lost their mind.
 I approach silently – till I see the Uniates
 Priests – by the pump, blood on their beards.
 Naked – they lay, like cadavers on ice...²⁹

Scenes of torment and martyrdom, universal in their cruelty – they could as well be carried out, in the eyes of present-day readers, by ancient Romans as well as SS squadrons. Contemporary, nineteenth-century readers could be reminded by such scenes of analogous circumstances that befell Polish saints, based on the knowledge formed under the influence of popular hagiographies, undoubtedly also widely circulated by Jesuit priests in Chełm Land. When, for example, Saint Adalbert sets out on a missionary journey to Lithuania, he expects (as Piotr Skarga writes) a “martyr’s crown” and indeed that is what he finds, being killed upon his arrival in that land at the hands of Baltic Prussians who “drowned seven spears in his flesh, and mutilated, hanged him

²⁹ *Rozmowa z matką Makryną Mieczysławską*, after Wasilewski Leon, *Chełmszczyzna i sprawa jej oderwania/ Leon Płochocki* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo „Życie,” 1911), 92-93, 94-95.

from a tree.”³⁰ Such scenes of cruelty were therefore something “normal” not only for readers of poetry, but also for the faithful, though illiterate, churchgoers who were familiarized with them through sermons. As a result, they had to enter the realm of human experience. Therefore, they also played a part in identifying the Other as an enemy – deadly and devoid of any individual traits. Good becomes hostage to evil, the cruelty of Orthodox Russians and Ukrainians becomes a counterpoint to the great sacrifice of the Poles, both Catholic and Uniate; the barbarity of the East, a counterpoint to the civilization of the West.

I am not interested in single-mindedly pursuing historical truth. However, it is impossible not to mention the fact that the work of our national bard is based on a fraud, of which he himself was also a victim. The poet met Makryna Mieczysławska, the hero of this work, in Paris among the emigrants who eagerly awaited any news from the faraway country. Especially the type of news, as one would expect, which confirmed the common presuppositions about the hardship endured by compatriots in the partitioned homeland under occupational rule. The revelations of the nun, a simple woman, were so suggestive and electrifying that they moved the leading figures of the community such as Mickiewicz and Prince Adam Czartoryski; her account was not only reported by Polish, but also French newspapers at that time. Her story even precipitated diplomatic intervention by the Vatican before the Russian government. However, the woman named Makryna had essentially made up the story of the beaten, raped, and drowned nuns, and the massacred Uniate priests, entirely from start to finish. In the end, this is of no great importance for my argument. What counts are the images that have penetrated into the tissue of collective imagination, images “whose significance, in the opinion of a literary historian, is as independent of their historical source, as the significance of Dante’s infernal visions, and he obviously did not journey to hell and back.”³¹

In Słowacki’s retelling of the story, a Uniate bishop (it was supposed to be the apostate Józef Siemaszko), in converting to Orthodoxy, betrays his faithful and becomes their oppressor. The peasants and Jews take the side of the victims: the Catholic nuns and Uniate priests. The Orthodox “priests” are nearly vampires (“sometimes they bark”); creatures otherwise straight from the

30 Piotr Skarga, *Żywoty świętych pańskich narodu polskiego* (Sanok: nakład i druk Karola Polłaka, 1855), 11. On the cult of Skarga in Poland, see Ignacy Chrzanowski, *Wśród zagadnień ksiązek i ludzi* (Lwów: Wydawnictwo Zakładu Narodowego im. Ossolińskich, 1922), 178–214.

31 Julian Krzyżanowski, *Dzieje literatury polskiej* (Warszawa: PWN, 1979), 288.

Romantic imagination, possessed by a craving for blood.³² Literature speaks through the power of imagination, using for that purpose brutal, often naturalistic, images and motifs that are well-known from hagiographies, sermons, and legends. Their overabundance can be catastrophic on the artistic level, threatening with theatrical artificiality. This is evident in *Rozmowa...* [*The Conversation...*]. Although, on the (let us call it so) performative level, things are very different. The pictorial power of representations can facilitate their agency in dangerous and uncontrollable ways, strengthening their ability to interfere with social practices. Images and historical representations do not vanish in culture: they begin a life of their own independent of the past *itself*; between them and facts, there is continuity – they proliferate, multiply, and interfere with the latter. In some of his reportages in the volume *Ziemi chełmskiej: wrażenia i notatki* [*From the Land of Chełm: Impressions and Notes*] (1909), Reymont, a neo-romantic, relates stories that justify moral wrongdoing in its pure form, and he seems not to give a second thought to what he writes, completely enthralled by the logic of martyrological discourse. A Polish mother answers those who, after kidnapping her son Fieduszka with the aim of baptizing him into the Orthodox Church, attempt to return the child to her: “I no longer have a son! [...] And if you put this strange pup in my house, I will beat it like a dog!”³³ Other parents in their attempt to shelter their children from a similar fate – according to second-hand accounts noted down by Reymont about the so-called “obstinate” (concerning events of 1784) – are subjected to persecution, which gradually pushes them towards the brink of human endurance, their fate reminiscent of the biblical Job. Just two excerpts: Koniuszewski “with more fervor and zest [than others – J.P.H.] defended his faith, and losing consciousness under the lash, he still shouted: ‘I am a Pole, and a Catholic! Kill me, I still won’t convert!’”; “He worked his

32 I will just note that the „Ukrainian folk” has its model representative in Polish literature in the Cossack, who is an embodiment of a warlord, and who, by the way, possesses an enviable command of the Polish language. This is exemplified, i. a., in *Zamek kaniowski* (1828) by Seweryn Goszczyński, who is a representative of the so-called Ukrainian school of Polish Romanticism. Let us take a look at some images preserving the stereotype of “Ukrainian folk” as barbarians and haters of Poles, from this romantic tale (depicting the events of 1678, known in historiography as the Massacre of Uman): “Just a few Poles, one mansion to rob;/ Then I could enjoy my drink!”; “«Hey children, sack the lord’s chambers!»/ – The Ataman’s lungs roared with fury”; “«Knife, my knife! You shine to no avail/ And I sharpened you in vain; [...] and sooner you rust, sooner I turn to dust./ Than in a manly strife with fate/ My spirit in joy, you in blood will bathe!»/ Thus the Cossack spoke, shaking his head.” Seweryn Goszczyński, *Zamek kaniowski*, ed. Maria Janion and Maria Grabowska (Warszawa: PIW, 1958), 58.

33 Reymont, *Ziemi chełmskiej: wrażenia i notatki*, 40.

fingers to the bone, and deprived himself and his children of everything, but paid, and did not bring the boy to the Orthodox church. It did not take long, though, before the day came when he no longer had money to buy even salt.³⁴ Finally, the whole family commits mass suicide, dying in a burning barn, and all this in a religious frenzy like that of early Christians in Roman amphitheatres: "But the singing persisted, steady, sublime, celestial, it seemed a happy greeting of paradise, a hymn of the resurrected, an ecstatic song of faith..."³⁵

One can presume that this is how the writer from Warsaw imagined us - Others in the borderlands before he even arrived. Obviously, he also read Słowacki - and even used his phrases directly, when, for example, he compared Uniates - those martyred saints - to "stones thrown by God at the ramparts."³⁶ This is how a powerful literary depiction takes over the Polish collective imagination, creating coherent narratives of the past, where fiction meets reality, where narrative - a mythological, ideological, and literary

34 Ibid., 26. Examples of Job-like suffering in the name of faith can easily be found in Polish hagiography, see Piotr Skarga on Saint John of Dukla: "And most fervently, while he was a preacher in Lvov, revealing the apostasy killing their souls to the schismatics and Armenians, he guided them to the unity of the Church. And God generously bestowed upon him great sickness, finally blindness, so that he could, as a second Job or Tobit, serve him with even greater will, and by having solely Him before his eyes, to be able to contemplate Him more fully" (Skarga, *Żywoty Świętych pańskich narodu polskiego*, 71). Answer of a "Uniate" peasant to imperial officials menacing him to convert to Orthodoxy: "I swear upon my grey hair [...] I will not relinquish my faith in the least, and none of my neighbors should do so. Holy martyrs have endured so much torture in the name of faith, our brothers have shed so much blood, and so we should follow their example." A.P.L., *Schyzma i jej apostołowie z okoliczności ostatnich prześladowań Unitów w Dyecezyi Chełmskiej* (Kraków: W drukarni W. Korneckiego, 1875), 47.

35 Reymont, *Z ziemi chełmskiej: wrażenia i notatki*, 31.

36 "Each day I listened to mortifying stories about the past, each day someone exposed his wounds before my eyes, barely healed, and whispered through pale lips the stories of his kinfolk; and each day the living, still bleeding, memory conjured the figures of saintly martyrs, terrifying scenes of «conversion», unspeakable suffering, and superhuman sacrifice. The pitiful echoes of cries and the wild, scattered noise of whips, shots, and lamentations have sounded in my heart long and painfully. And every time, at each place, I was haunted by innumerable pale shadows of the fallen, which «like stones thrown by God at the ramparts» have plunged into burial pits, offering their whole lives as evidence of the steadfastness of their faith, and of their nation." Ibid. 24.

And the corresponding fragment of Słowacki's poem *Testament mój* [*My Testament*]: "I beseech you - let the living not lose faith/ And carry the flame of knowledge before the nation/ And if need be - go to their death one by one/ like stones thrown by God at the ramparts!..."

attempt at framing events – meets description.³⁷ History has been cruel to the inhabitants of Kresy, this is beyond doubt, but this does not change the fact that their behavior and the representation of that behavior through language were both culturally modeled by literary, religious, and political sources, undoubtedly in varying proportions that cannot be precisely determined. That is why symbolic representations, or self-portraits, of a nation (even more so in the case of cultural and not national states) are the proper objects of intertextual studies. In ritualistic spectacles, where blood flows and prayers sung by dying innocents suffering for their faith ascend to the heavens, we observe the pinnacle of life as defined by a community that is under siege, a community of proselytes in a diaspora manning a bastion, a watchtower at the ends of the earth surrounded by hostile elements.³⁸ That is where one plays with life and death, that is where one toils each day for survival and for the preservation of identity – that is where the nation regains its vital strength, there it once again becomes a single body, and that is where the cultural center is finally relocated. Now the periphery becomes the center as it is where ritual experiences occur, where initiation is performed, where

37 I am well aware that most texts available today, at least on the internet, on the subject of (say) the Uniate Koniszewski family, directly repeat Reymont's account – see and compare for example Tadeusz Czernik's blog, accessed November 19, 2012, <http://tadeuszczyrnik.wordpress.com/2011/05/19/unici/>; Tadeo, *Bohaterstwo unickiej rodziny Koniszewskich* (Salon 24, Niezależne forum publicystów), accessed November 19, 2012, <http://lubczasopismo.salon24.pl/2rp.pl/post/310758,bohaterstwo-unickiej-rodziny-koniszewskich>. The same accounts are also referenced by historian Ryszard Bender in his introduction to Józef Sebastian Pelczar, *Prześladowanie Unitów w Chełmszczyźnie i na Podlasiu* (Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Świętego Biskupa Józefa Sebastiana Pelczara, 2011).

38 An exemplary description of such a community looks like the following: "In Podlasie and Chełm Land, the Union was defended only by Poles, not Uniate, but Roman Catholic. Their tormentors were thugs from the Ruthenian Uniate population in Galicia. One should conclude that the people were predominantly Polish, although belonging to the Greek Catholic order. We have proof of that in their letters. One writes, for example, to his former neighbors, "«My beloved brothers, you know no hardship, as there is no hardship in Poland, but among us there is hardship». Another writes: «Oh, brothers and sisters remaining in Poland!» A third sends his best wishes: «We pray for you to the Sacred Heart, that God allows us to see you in our Polish homeland». In another case we read: «Oh, we are the wretched exiles from Polish lands». [...] Therefore one cannot necessarily be an adherent to the Latin order, but also of the Uniate order with the liturgy in Old Slavonic, and nevertheless be a Pole! [...] This explains the existence of Polish Uniates. This also explains the differences in character. Ruthenian people did not defend Catholic faith in martyrdom! Poles alone held their head high defending the faith against Russian guns." Feliks Koneczny, *Święci w dziejach narodu polskiego, part Podlasie i Chełmszczyzna* (1937), accessed October 19, 2012, http://www.nonpossumus.pl/biblioteka/feliks_koneczny/swieci/260.php

the passage from childhood to national maturity occurs; finally it is the place where Polishness comes into its own, and what is more: it becomes grander, more virtuous and genuine. But beware; this whole narrative is just social engineering, a mere illusion. The borderlands, represented in this way, are nothing more than a construct manufactured by a geographically distant center which administers the production of an ethnic group's portraits of itself, wielding symbolic power over even the furthest peripheries of its inhabited lands.

In consequence of what was said previously, the intertwining of description and narrative, of the chronicling of events with preconceived narrative plots which endow them with meaning, is the property of not only literary, but also scientific texts. An awareness of the artificial structure of historical facts is exhibited by professional historian and politician Leon Wasilewski (pseudonym Płochocki), when at the end of his work *Chełmszczyzna i sprawa jej oderwania* [*Chełm Land and Its Annexation*] (1911), he attaches, as an appendix to what he calls "factual material," "three most beautiful works of literature, based on the bloody history of the "obstinate."³⁹ The first is... *Rozmowa z Matką Makryną* [*A Conversation with Mother Makryna*]. Of course, the author fails to mention the hoax. And by giving his book a two part structure – "factual" material with the addition of fictional material – he only confirms the general rule at the center of our discussion: a historian is incapable of fully freeing himself from the collective imagination that is permeated by literary narrative plots.

Imagination that is rooted in a romantic vision of a messianic nation dominated linguistic representations of this region which were conceived by authors regardless of their political orientation. Wasilewski himself, a socialist, explains the appeal and ascendancy of Polish culture in the land of the (future) Chełm Governorate through "the ideal Polishness of former Uniates," a Polishness acquired "by way of heroic fighting and long-suffering martyrdom,"⁴⁰ which for the people of that land, even those speaking Ukrainian (this is what Ukrainian nationalists supposedly cannot comprehend according to the author), was to become "more precious than natural Polishness of a multi-generational Polish-peasant."⁴¹ In this short excerpt we are

39 Leon Wasilewski, *Chełmszczyzna i sprawa jej oderwania/ Leon Płochocki* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo „Życie,” 1911), 68. Beside *Rozmowa...* there are also two stories by Żeromski (pen name Maurycy Zych) *Poganiń* and *Do swego Boga*.

40 *Ibid.*, 34.

41 *Ibid.* To paint a complete picture, I should add that the Polishness of Chełm Land was obvious to our politicians at the beginning of the twentieth century – the so-called liberals do not express themselves as emphatically as Wasilewski, their language is more, as we

presented with two abstract, unverifiable, and literary-esque categories of Polishness: “ideal” and “natural.” Utilized in propaganda as persuasive arguments, these notions perform a kind of regulative role: the phrases in which they occur do not possess a concrete meaning as they cannot be either confirmed or denied. However, that is not their point. What is important is that these notions create a conceptual framework for human experience by giving it meaning, referencing some transcendental reality which shines a light onto everyday experience and emanates with such force that it warms the heart. “Laws of history,” as Henryk Wierciński argues, confirm that the counties on the left banks of the Bug River and “a substantial strip of land on the right bank of the Bug River” belong to Poland, as these lands have “for ages shared in the fate of Poland, good and bad. Through the whole course of history, they have fervently exhibited Polish sentiments and an attachment to Poland,”⁴² and so on. The Polish perspective hijacks the cultural difference in such descriptions as it is the only perspective that is supposed to be universal, explaining everything, exposing the roots of conflict, pointing out the perpetrators as well as the victims, ultimately showing the cruelty of barbarians and the heroism of saints.⁴³

would now say, politically correct – they speak of “Ruthenian land” (Chełm Ruthenia) – not Russian land – where “undoubtedly Polish culture dominates.” Mieczysław Biernacki, *Wczorajsze walki* (Lublin, 1916), after Tadeusz Stegner, “Ukraina widziana z Warszawy na początku XX wieku,” in *Polska – Ukraina. Osadczuk*, ed. Bogumiła Berdychowska i Ola Hnatiuk (Lublin Kolegium Polskich i Ukraińskich Uniwersytetów: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2007), 75.

42 Wierciński, *Ziemia Chełmska i Podlasie*, 20. The same author in numerous studies of a strictly propagandist nature, cf. *Zew krwi polskich męczenników z ziemi chełmskiej i podlaskiej* (Lublin, 1939). Here, i. a., a fragment of Reymont’s reportage. The book was published by Lubelski Wojewódzki Komitet Popierania Misji Katolickich na Chełmszczyźnie. The committee was founded in 1939.

43 See Bakuła, “Kolonialne i postkolonialne aspekty polskiego dyskursu kresoznawczego,” 25. From a presumed right to rule over these lands and people comes Piłsudski’s political stance towards them. These are excerpts from his appearance in Rivne in Volhynia on January 22, 1920: “We, the Poles, were the object of various borderland politics. We were familiar with that kind of politics, as it has been practiced by others in relation to us. All over the world, politics of the borderlands is similar to the one we were subjected to. I know no other borderland politics than that of humiliation and oppression, which has as its motto: «Woe to the vanquished!» We, the Poles, know full well, what results it brings, how little it offers, what meagre fruit it bears. [...] If throughout the world there is dishonesty in borderland politics, I would like for our borderland politics to be honest.” *Pisma zbiorowe*, vol. 5 (Warszawa, 1937), 103, after Wedemann, “Gdzie leży Beresteczko? Kresy na mapie,” 32. What the author probably meant by “borderland politics” is “annexation politics” or, otherwise, “colonial politics.”

The Stranger

The Other is someone, or rather something, radically (ontologically) different, eluding our categories of perception and knowledge which are considered natural, and as a result becoming an embodiment of evil, unconceivable and incomprehensible, devoid of meaning; something that can only be labeled as a “force which brings destruction”⁴⁴ – a potential source of threat to the familiar world order. After separating Chełm Land from Poland, Orthodoxy will not hold back: it will also change “all holidays,” therefore upsetting the eternal, natural order of the world, or the history of salvation, where – to once again give voice to one of Reymont’s interlocutors – “our Polish Christ was born on the 24th of December!”⁴⁵ “Two worlds observe each other through silent eyes, two cultures and two voids, impossible to cross,” thus the writer registers his impressions after a visit to a Chełm museum (on one side of the chamber hang the portraits of Uniate metropolitan bishops, “the architects of the union, its benefactors, defenders, and martyrs”; on the other side hang “the fanatic heads of contemporary shepherds, with the notorious Eulogius at the far edge”⁴⁶). The “obstinate” relinquished “all relationships” with the “church and parish,” “as it was taken over by a different language, different faith and strange people; nobody set foot even in the church graveyard.”⁴⁷ At the time of their persecution, the Ukrainian nationalists (Wasilewski accuses) did not defend them, but “their complete absence in Chełm Land was clearly visible.” “Instead,” he goes on to write, “among the people who have become the ‘scourge of God’ for the Uniate population of Podlasie and Chełm Land, there was never a shortage of Ukrainians, both from Galicia and Russia.”⁴⁸ “Ruthenian Uniates” from Galicia, according to Feliks Koneczny, supplied “thugs and tormentors” menacing the Poles living in these territories. Why did they do so? This can only be explained by “a difference in character” between these two nationalities.⁴⁹

This is a vision of the tower of Babel, where one does not simply encounter the Other, but clashes with the Stranger, an alien being “with unknown motives and propensities, intentions, and customs.”⁵⁰ They are so different

44 Gosk, *Polski dyskurs kresowy w niefikcyjnych zapisach międzywojennych*, 31.

45 Reymont, *Ziemi chełmskiej: wrażenia i notatki*, 23.

46 Ibid., 55.

47 Ibid., 34.

48 Płochocki, *Chełmszczyzna i sprawa jej oderwania*, 49.

49 See Koneczny, *Święci w dziejach narodu polskiego*.

50 Zygmunt Bauman, *Między chwilą a pięknem: o sztuce w rozpędzonym świecie* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Oficyna, 2010), 111.

than our (natural) intentions and reactions, that they elicit within us fear and terror, even disgust, and aversion to something that cannot be associated with ordinary people. Something monstrous, undefined and ungraspable in its outlines; a viscous, grey, overwhelming mass. Such an Other is not another human being, but some mute creature; it rarely, if ever, speaks in its own tongue; rarely, if ever, has a name, or it hides behind “an impenetrable wall of laws, prohibitions, fines, and prisons,”⁵¹ or takes on a form of an undifferentiated “numerous, dark mass,” or “a mass of people, without a defined name,”⁵² terrifying in its incomprehensibility, spewing anarchy, or the “Shabbos public” which crowds the streets of Chełm, “flowing in a black, clamorous and incessantly expanding river,” in the background of which we notice our kin: “somewhere a clerk’s hat passed, an officer’s sword rattled, and a panicked ordinary civil Aryan slid by the gutter.”⁵³ If the Chełm Governorate is created, then, as the newspaper *Ziemia Lubelska* [*The Land of Lublin*] warned at the time, “the russification of the city will be limited to offices,” “and the Jews will become the true rulers of the city.”⁵⁴ Such Others cannot be trusted. We should be wary of such Others, and keep them at a distance. The wisest thing that can be done is to be constantly suspicious of them, and remain alert at all

51 Reymont, *Ziemi chełmskiej; wrażenia i notatki*, 34.

52 “Jews, who constitute a numerous, dark crowd stand in the streets [of Chełm] where they take care of their small-time business.” Siedlecki, *Ziemia lubelskiej*, 48. The same metaphor of an anonymous “crowd” or “mass” can be found in relation to Ukrainians in propaganda brochures created at the time of the creation of the Chełm Governorate. See and compare: “Aside from the «Bloyalist-Russian» claims to this piece of land, there are also new claims – Ruthenian, Little-Russian, and Ukrainian, according to Hruszewski’s new nomenclature – being made. When we refer to them we will always use the Polish historic name and call by the name of Ruthenians only that, strictly folk, ethnographic mass which suddenly – only in Galicia, of course – comes forward with unprecedented political and national grievance held against the whole world, directed with unprecedented fervor against Russia and the Poles.” “This folk mass, of indeterminate name, with some claims of statehood, without any determined borders, which were put into its head by leaders brought up with the ideas of “Cossack freedom,” a mass that barely has any signs of its own literature [...] has exhibited extraordinary inferiority in all areas of thought and knowledge. Having found themselves in the midst of Galicia’s prosperity, their leaders have directed their feeble intellectual powers not to bringing that people to the level of a nation, not to drawing clear lines in accordance with reason, that would lead some future, but to reviving the ideal of Cossack anarchism and using it as a guide to all aspects of public life.” Franciszek Rawita Gawroński, *Oderwanie Chełmszczyzny i Rusini* (Lwów: Skład główny w księgarni H. Altenberga, 1909), 12–13, 18.

53 Reymont, *Ziemi chełmskiej; wrażenia i notatki*, 56.

54 Article from 1910 (no 241) reprinted in Henryk Wierciński, *W sprawie wydzielenia Chełmszczyzny* (Warszawa: Druk Piotra Laskauera, 1910), 163–164.

times; we must follow each move they make, and not allow them to transform into our kin as such a metamorphosis would necessarily be faked or false. There is no other possibility.

Suspicious, distrust, alertness, fear even; these are all manifestations of mixophobia – a typical response to life among strangers, people who are different from us, who choose different lifestyles, who are different in their everyday behaviors and responses. Suffering from mixophobia we strive to be among our kin, to create “a community of similitude,” “islands of unity and sameness among the sea of heterogeneity and difference.”⁵⁵ The human world is broken in half: we, on the side of light, in the rays of the sun, individuals rooted in time and space, with determined roles in the social order, civilized citizens (of an ideal, stipulated) *polis*, steady and obvious in our clear and virtuous intentions; encounter them, a mass that is uprooted, itinerant, undefined by either law or tradition, living beyond the *polis*, somewhere in the lines of shadow, a semantic hollow devoid of articulate cultural transmission. The preservation of identity, the belonging to (Polishness in this case), must be counterbalanced by a separation and disavowal of Others. This is the simplest and yet most dangerous method of integrating a community. It is the source of intercommunal antagonisms, which needs to find release, unavoidably leading to a bloody confrontation. We will witness it in the Second World War. But for now, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the mills of symbolic violence are in full swing, reshaping the Other into our nightmare – the “«loyalist» careerists of Chełm,” who spit with hateful venom, cunning and treacherous beings, with a fluid, declarative identity.⁵⁶

55 Bauman, *Między chwilą a pięknem: o sztuce w rozpędzonym świecie*, 15, 116.

56 „Polish identity and Catholicism are the source continuous irritation, a mere mention of them causes «loyalist» careerists of Chełm to erupt in a paroxysm of rage so strong that they burst with lies, denunciations, slander, and threats. They babble beyond reason, as if sick with their own venom of hatred. In truth, they elicit involuntary pity. Reymont, *Ziemi chełmskiej: wrażenia i notatki*, 55-56. “In the end the Jews will take care of it, and this place will change beyond recognition, I am certain, that when they sense it is in their interest then they will start wearing red kosovorotka’s and Russian kaftans, they will change their language, repaint their signs, subscribe to proper magazines, and begin to shout each time an opportunity arises: «we Russian people», and they will hunt us with more zest and fury than even the «loyalists» themselves (ibid. 56). “The Ruthenians of Chełm, which are now called Ukrainians by the government, have fully merged with the Russians; they were Orthodox, and when the Austro-German offensive arrived at the gates of Chełm, they went to Russia of their own accord just as the Russians did. An Orthodox Ukrainian considered himself Russian, shared the same fear with Russians and the same hate towards Western empires, and a feeling of solidarity only with Russia” (Siedlecki, *Ziemi lubelskiej*, 49). And just one more later snapshot from the Soviet-occupied city,

The social landscape of Chełm borderlands, preserved within literary accounts, is reminiscent of an archipelago: scattered islands which lie close to each other yet remain completely distant despite their common origin and history. The discourse that relates to them, similar to the whole discourse on the borderlands, is, recalling the words of Bronisław Bakuła, “the product of Polish culture and of Polish thinking on the subject of «community»,”⁵⁷ which means that if Others figure in it, then it is only as a manifestation of the center’s ideological requirements, with the sole aim of excluding them from the community equated with Western civilization, or including them in it. In either case, the cultural difference is subject to being annihilated: assigned on one occasion, rejected on another. It is asserted that such a course of action is grounded either in God’s grand plan, or in the “laws of history,” which confirm the legitimacy of the center’s claims to land and peoples, supporting the feeling of being in possession of intellectual and moral superiority over the Others. That is why the multinational and multicultural territory of Chełm Land failed to produce any form of regional community. That is why its symbolic representations lack any signs expressing the need for mutual understanding between separate universes of meaning, or any attempts at creating some means of coexistence which could turn into a life shared with others in a neighborly way, more harmonious and bearable. Today, we can hypothetically imagine some version of history involving the communities inhabiting those lands, according to which such signals emerge, focusing the gaze of its recipients enough to permit them to penetrate that shadow-line, beyond the darkness which conceals the Other. Such messages (we could go even further in our thinking) would also enhance their imagination and their ability to empathize with strangers, facilitating their trust in them. If it were the case that the language of social communication concerned itself with building bridges between cultural differences (while taking into account the thesis that social reality is ultimately artificial), then maybe to some extent (however small, but nonetheless meaningful in a situation in which the lives of particular people are at stake) it would be able to lower the level of fear of o t h e r n e s s and... the fate of the ethnic groups which are the subject of this paper would have been entirely different during the 1940s.

But, the very notion of “borderlands” itself seems to preclude any kind of identity – “borderland identity” is almost an oxymoronic expression, as it

from 1939: “In rotting Chełm, in a dirty sweep, among happy Jewish cheers, the bodies of Polish defenders were decomposing” (Wańkowicz, *Ziele na kraterze*, 284).

57 Bakuła, *Kolonialne i postkolonialne aspekty polskiego dyskursu kresoznawczego*, 28.

concerns a form of presence in lands distant from the homeland, in peripheries inhabited by Others, which require us to play the part of proselytes performing a historical mission that is legitimized by nature (i.e. laws of history) or transcendence, depending on the worldview of the respective discourse. It is, in any case, a land where Polish, Russian, Ruthenian/Ukrainian, and Jewish elements clashed, shaping Polish collective imagination at the turn of the twentieth century both as the subject and the object of colonialism, as the colonizing and the colonized.

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