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Cultural Studies and Literature: The Case of Anthropology.

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Cultural Studies and Literature: The Case of Anthropology¹

Relations of literary and cultural studies can be viewed from two basic perspectives. Firstly, we could speak of an attempt to disclose similarities, or even analogies, between the construction of literary worlds and the intellectual activity that consists of, speaking very broadly, description, explanation, or interpretation of culture understood as a signifying activity. Those relations will look different, however, once we shift our interest to the potential contribution of selected branches of cultural studies to literary studies, asking how cultural studies can broaden the interpretative field of phenomena classified as literary *per se*.

The first type of relations will involve mostly similarities of genres. A. Owen Aldridge notes:

Both literature and anthropology record the activities of the human race as do history and philosophy. Man himself is the subject of anthropology, whereas literature is a body of writing about man and is the subject of literary history and literary criticism. Anthropology attempts a scientific portrayal of the human species, whereas literature presents human character and activities through the subjective perspective of other men. Literature exists as a residue of cultural activity, whereas anthropology is a methodology or process of investigation.²

Roland Barthes took this a step further, believing anthropology to be a paradigmatic branch of knowledge, kindred to literature in the highest degree. He emphasized

¹ First draft of this paper was delivered at Zjazd Polonistów in Cracow (22-25 Sept. 2004)

² Owen Aldridge, A. "Literature and the Study of Man." *Literature and Anthropology*, Dennis P.A., Aycock W. (eds.), Texas University Press, Lubbock: 1989. 41

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that among all historical discourses, anthropological discourse seems to be closest to fiction, and pointed out the illusory character of the opposition between science and writing. Science cannot be unequivocally defined as a form of human activity that has a monopoly on content (there is no scientific issue that has not been at some point discussed by universal literature), method (literature has it too), morality and a way of communicating results of its queries (both literature and scientific work take the form of books).³ Language and the process of writing are literature's *raison d'être*, its entire world, whereas science treats language more instrumentally, as a medium and a tool used in a possibly neutral manner grounded in the assumption that it always refers to reality that precedes it. Science is not simply contained in the language because there also exists the object of scientifically-linguistic discourse. From the meta-linguistic perspective, however, it turns out that the process of writing remains a necessary condition for science, just as it undoubtedly is for literature. In the scientific discourse, the act of formulating statements happens through writing. And while the statement has an objective status, the process of arriving at it exposes the position of the subject and its energy, both of which are located in the sphere of language. Shortly: "Writing makes knowledge festive."⁴

Following Barthes, Peter Mason says that the world of discourse in cultural studies should first and foremost be placed within the world of those disciplines that are a part and function of what the discourse itself portrays. Here culminates the convergence of, for instance, anthropology and literature, as at this level discourse is not a re-presentation of a preceding objective reality, it is not secondary to the reality that precedes, but it is precisely a presentation, a performance and thus, creation.⁵ Consequently, the "world" that the discourse refers to acquires characteristics of the imaginary world whose features are the result of the symbolic construction. "Reality" is therefore tied to discourse to the same degree that scientific theory is dependent on it. And so it is not really very clear how the pre-discursive *factum* is to avoid connections to the anthropological discourse. In the result, the latter can be viewed as an autonomous object of reflection, since anthropology (as well as other branches of cultural studies) is also a type of narrative, a story of our imaginations of the world that we investigate and whose structure is encoded in the written text.

Anthropology as a process of writing or constructing texts follows the rules of fiction in the sense of the original, Latin *factio* meaning: a process of creating or shaping something that is not necessarily made up or untrue. Just as literature,

³ Barthes, R. "From Science to Literature." *The Rustle of Language*. University of California Press, Berkeley: 1986. 3-5. For a more detailed discussion see: I. Brady, "Harmony and Argument: Bringing Forth the Artful Science." *Anthropological Poetics*. Brady, I. (ed.) Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Savage: 1991. 16-19.

⁴ Barthes, R. "Inaugural Lecture, College de France." *A Barthes Reader*. Sontag, S. (ed.) Hill and Wang, New York: 1982. 1464.

⁵ Mason, P. *Deconstructing America: Representations of the Other*. Routledge, London and New York: 1990. 14.

anthropology may be seen as a genre of storytelling about the human entanglement in culture.⁶ Alternatively, following Iser's phenomenological perspective, it is about revealing the anthropological equipment of human beings who live because of their imagination.⁷

Being-in-the-world and life within culture, regulated by cultural norms, are synonymous notions. Following Heidegger, Milan Kundera says:

Man does not relate to the world as subject to object, as eye to painting; not even as actor to stage set. Man and the world are bound together like the snail to its shell: the world is part of man, it is his dimension, and as the world changes, existence (*in-der-Welt-sein*) changes as well.⁸

If we substitute "world" with "culture," Kundera's observation is equally valid. Hence, on a deeper level, both cultural studies (anthropology in particular) and literary studies face an analogous existential situation that they attempt to make festive as a kind of knowledge with the help of various strategies. This happens always through writing, as Barthes rightly observed, which can also be proven within a theoretical and methodological frame thoroughly different from his own.⁹

The first dimension of the issue, outlined in the preceding paragraphs, will not be the focus of my further attention, although it will not disappear entirely from the following argument. But I would like to turn now to the second perspective signaled in the introductory remarks, that is, to the relation of the broadly defined cultural studies (i.e., studies that provide knowledge of culture) and literature. The question remains: what do cultural studies have to offer to traditional literary studies? New insights into the world of literary representation? A perspective that generalizes upon that which literary studies capture mostly in the context of aesthetic criticism? These are highly pertinent questions, considering the rapidly growing popularity of cultural studies and their appropriation of an increasing number of branches in humanities. We should perhaps, therefore, focus our attention first on the connections between literature and culture viewed from the

⁶ See Bruner, E.M. "Ethnography as Narrative." *The Anthropology of Experience*. Turner V.W., Bruner E. M. (eds.) University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago: 1986. 143-145.

⁷ Iser, W. *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology*. Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore and London: xi. I discussed genre similarities between anthropology and literature in *Czytanie Kultury*. HEiAK, Łódź: 1996 and *Różnorodność i tożsamość. Antropologia jako kulturowa refleksyjność*. Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, Poznań: 2004; see also: Burszta W. J., Kuligowski W (eds.) *Ojczyzny słowa. Narracyjne wymiary kultury*. Telgte, Poznań: 2002.

⁸ Kundera, M. *The Art of the Novel*. [based on the English translation from French by Linda Asher, Grove Press: 1988 – A.W.] 19.

⁹ See: Kmita, J. *Kultura i poznanie*. PWN, Warszawa: 1985 and Burszta W. J. *Jezyk a kultura w mysli etnologicznej*. Polskie Towarzystwo Ludoznawcze, Wroclaw: 1986. I am speaking of the postulate of the so called subjective reconstruction of culture which always in the end boils down to linguistic-cultural presentations.

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very particular perspective enabled by ideologically motivated cultural studies.¹⁰ This will create (or so I hope) an appropriate background for further discussion of chosen aspects of anthropological reflection on literature that both complement and oppose the totalizing demands of cultural studies.

Literary studies today witness a rivalry of diverse approaches and interests, from cultural studies, poststructuralism and deconstruction to feminism, ethnic studies and postcolonial criticism, as noted by Krzysztof Ziarek and Seamus Deane.¹¹ But even within the listed approaches there are differences regarding basic issues, resulting in their hybridity, and therefore, fluidity and heterogeneity. Cultural studies, in its attempt to “incorporate,” or rather, include within their scope both feminism and the postcolonial reflection have “dictated” for some time now the rules of the game in the field of literary research. It remains, however, fundamentally opposed to literary theory, especially in its poststructural variety that has dominated the field over the last two decades. Instead of considerations on the universality of the mind, the decentralization of the subject, debates on meaning, and the referentiality of narrative, cultural studies proposes a diametrically different perspective. Its representatives argue that the theory of literature is tainted with elitism and dominated by aesthetic ideology while completely ignoring cultural reality and social practice. Meanwhile, in order to understand the role of literature, one should begin with an explanation of the mechanisms of culture, especially in the contemporary world. Literature and literary theory are not autonomous entities, they participate in the symbolic play happening in all areas of cultural production and involving the relations of power, gender, race, class, and nationalism. Creating literature is not as much a matter of artistic creation as it is one of the possible ways of articulating the existing social and discursive relations. In such a broadened context offered by cultural studies, art – and literature first and foremost – becomes one of the institutions of everyday life, being also one of the “less” crucial elements of everyday life, secondary to more fundamental issues of politics, labor, and other social questions claiming a much wider audience.¹²

The demystification of aesthetic ideology of literary studies in their academic incarnation has been taking place in three main areas. The first one involves a nul-

¹⁰ I am consciously using the term “studia kulturowe” referring to cultural studies, even though they are usually identified in Poland with the broadly defined “kulturoznawstwo” or even “kulturologia.” The Polish variety of research classified as “kulturoznawstwo” is only very loosely connected to British, American, and Australian cultural studies; moreover, scholars representing Polish “kulturoznawstwo” are often little aware of the genesis and trajectory of the developments in the reflection on culture that includes such basic notions as power, gender, race, state, nation, ideology, etc. To my knowledge, in Poland the premise of Western cultural studies has resonated the most in the area of gender and women studies.

¹¹ Ziarek, K., Deane, S. “Introduction.” *Future Crossings. Literature between Philosophy and Cultural Studies*. Ziarek K., Deane S. (eds.) Northwestern University Press, Evanston: 2000. 1.

¹² *Ibid.* 5-6.

lification of the hidden assumptions supporting the hierarchization of “high” versus popular, mass, or “low” culture. The second area focuses on the question of literature’s supposed autonomy and lack of engagement. The third studies the universality of aesthetic judgments. In an attempt to approach cultural studies without prejudice that often accompanies the writing on (or silence on) the model of research they propose, Jonathan Culler asks directly: what is it, then, that literary and cultural studies may have in common? He narrows down the question asking:

how cultural productions work and how cultural identities are constructed and organized for individuals and groups in a world of diverse and intermingled communities, state power, media industries, and multinational corporations. (...) Is cultural studies a capacious project within which literary studies gains new power and insight? Or will cultural studies swallow up literary studies and destroy literature?¹³

Culler rightly observes that contemporary cultural studies, growing from the model suggested by Hoggart and Williams, are torn between two poles of interpretation. On the one hand, they aim to assign value to popular culture and all marginalized groups, “giving” voice to those who were excluded from the interpretative horizon of the elitist notion of knowledge (including literary theory). Thus, their research focuses on the question of the diverse ways of shaping, experiencing, and conveying identity, especially in transient communities and minorities – ethnic, immigrant, female, and gay. Here the aim of the analysis is “to get in touch with what is important for the lives of ordinary people – their culture – as opposed to that of aesthetes or professors.”¹⁴ In the background there is the supposition of a fundamental conflict between Culture and cultures (plural). And so we have Culture owned by aesthetes and professors, an aesthetic blueprint and an ethnocentric source of judgments on art: whoever has Culture, is an equal member of the community of meanings deemed to be valuable and contributing to the Tradition and Canon. However, there also exist communities that *are* cultures and the identity of their members is shaped outside the zone legitimized by Culture. Minority and transient communities have their own literary canons, ignored by the representatives of Culture, even though it is a record of experience and a source of other, different identities that compete with the main trend within Culture.

Cultural studies’ call for literary theory to include not only diverse literary forms, but also diverse cultural experiences. By doing so, however, they perform the operation of equaling the cultured with the cultural. Each literary creation, regardless of how it is judged against the aesthetic criteria of Culture, is an expression of “cultures” that it appears and functions within. Culler observes astutely: “Such writings, though, bring to the fore questions about how far literature creates the culture it is said to express or represent. Is culture the effect of representations

¹³ Culler, Jonathan. *A Very Short Introduction to Literary Theory*. [here] Oxford University Press, Reissue edition: 2000. 44.

¹⁴ Ibid. 46.

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rather than their source or cause?”¹⁵ The answer remains unclear and the work by representatives of cultural studies gives arguments for both options. I will return to this particular problem in the second part of my essay.

On the other hand, representatives of cultural studies – who, with almost no exception, rely on a variously defined Marxist tradition – are persistent in tracing the mechanisms through which people are shaped and manipulated by ideologies of culture.¹⁶ (Instead of discussing this aspect of the problem in greater detail, let me point out several sources that do so.¹⁷) Here we are no longer concerned with high culture (Culture) but with popular culture, defined with the help of an only slightly modified Adornian tradition. Importantly, cultural studies is constantly torn between its propensity to analyze culture as a set of codes and practices aimed at steering people away from what they are really interested in, and the desire to find authentic expression in popular culture. This fully concerns research in literary studies. As a result of this research, we have witnessed a broadening of literary canon which from the perspective of cultural studies – as I have said before – is to represent first and foremost diverse cultural experiences. In fact, there are voices suggesting that the broadening of literary canon aims to undermine the imperialistic claim of great European and American literature and, thus, to relativize the aesthetic criteria with regard to specific cultures that produce literature outside the mainstream of Culture.

At first glance, a similar attitude should be supported by cultural anthropology whose main imperative includes contextualization of phenomena and self-reflexivity – tendencies typical of the adepts of cultural studies. However, despite certain similarities, anthropological reflection on literature differs from the heavily ideologized and heterogenous analyses performed by cultural studies. The difference is not a result of any kind of fratricidal war for influence and popularity between the anthropologists and their main academic rival,¹⁸ it has deeper reasons.

As Clifford Geertz notes in *Local Knowledge*, anthropology eagerly contributes to the discussion on art inasmuch as its notions and ideas are tied to those cultural issues that art can be in service of, mirror, probe, or describe but does not create itself. The uniqueness of the anthropological discourse on art results from the relation between the energy of art and the general dynamics of human experience.¹⁹ What anthropol-

¹⁵ Ibid. 49.

¹⁶ See: Inglis, F. *Culture*. Polity Press, Cambridge: 2004.

¹⁷ Strinati, D. *Wprowadzenie do kultury popularnej*. [Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture] transl. W. J. Burszta. Zysk i S-ka, Poznań: 1998; Mulhern, F. *Culture / Metaculture*. Routledge, London and New York: 2000; Pels, D. “Privileged Nomads: On the Strangeness of Intellectuals and the Intellectuality of Strangeness.” “Theory, Culture & Society” 1999 Vol 1. 63-86.

¹⁸ See: an interesting exchange between anthropologists and representatives of cultural studies in *Anthropology and Cultural Studies*. Nugent S., Shore C. (eds), Pluto, London: 1997.

¹⁹ Geertz, C. *Local Knowledge. Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*. Basic Books, New York: 1983; especially in “Found in Translation: On the Social History of the Moral Imagination” and “Art as a Cultural System.”

ogy has to offer to literature and literary studies, is the social history of imagination, also including moral imagination. Moreover, it is a history of imagination marked by a never-ending confrontation of diverse forms of life and, consequently, diverse forms of aesthetic sensibility. Contrary to cultural studies, anthropology offers what I would call a meta-cultural perspective on literature. It is useful, and dare I say revelatory, with regard to hidden aspects of literary creation, especially when the writing in question touches directly upon the issue of the shaping of identity in the world that emerged from the demographical transformations of postcolonialism, and today – existence in the multicultural world.

Postcolonial literature is, in a very obvious manner, one of the main tools to articulate problems of a mostly cultural nature,²⁰ it is self reflexive and focuses on issues that are also at the center of deep anthropological reflection. Thus, Dorota Kołodziejczyk is right to observe that: “In this postcolonial spirit, anthropology reveals itself as a somewhat wily partner of the literary imagination” while contemporary literature “engages questions seemingly typical of anthropology, such as the question of cultural identity and authenticity of culture, the question of difference between exoticism and otherness, of what binds and cements social constructions, finally, the question of who speaks and who has the right to speak for the other, to represent otherness, to chose otherness as the subject of study.”²¹ In general, I would posit that postcolonial writing is always accompanied by the following three notions: culture – language – identity. This is also true for what I would refer to as “multicultural” literature, grown out of postcolonialism, but more on this later. I should also add that my discussion will only focus on literature written in English; it is the most robust, widely known and – despite what Fredric Jameson wrote in the 80s of the 20th century – it brings pleasure.

The opposition between the center and the peripheries has always been one of the matrices that organized thinking about the cultural image of the world. European culture has always been that of traveling and appropriating the periphery. Marlow confesses in *Heart of Darkness*:

The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea – something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to.²²

What kind of idea would that be? We must not forget that Conrad wrote *Heart of Darkness* at the end of the 19th century, when imperialism and colonialism blossomed

²⁰ See: Ashcroft, B. “The Rhizome of Post-colonial Discourse.” *Literature and the Contemporary: Fictions and Theories of the Present*. Luckhurst R., Marks, P. (eds.) Longman, London: 1999. 113.

²¹ Kołodziejczyk, D. “Antopologiczne fabulacje – hybryda, tłumaczenie, przynależność we współczesnej powieści anglojęzycznej.” *O języku i słowie. Narracyjne wymiary kultury*. Burszta W.J., Kuligowski W. (eds.) Telgte, Poznań: 2002. 68.

²² Conrad, J. *Heart of Darkness*. Wordsworth Classics, 1995. 34.

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and the civilized West had no doubt that it brought science and true faith to its peripheries as part of its historical mission: the idea of subjugating new territories was almost a calling. When Marlow recalls blank spaces on the maps remembered from childhood, he articulates nothing other than the fact that they were areas yet untouched by the white conqueror's foot, and that the West was not yet aware of the benefits derived from discovering a new piece of land – which from the moment of discovery will remain on the map “forever” as it will remain within the orbit of influence of the universal civilization. Although Marlow knows very well that the blank areas on the map are not really blank at all, as they are inhabited by “savages” and “cannibals” immersed in their dark custom, incomprehensible and inscrutable in their almost animalistic otherness, those areas are not yet part of the British Empire and they can only begin to exist in contact with the center and its power. For now, it is a “place of darkness” whose only points of reference were “rivers and lakes, and names.”²³ It is a place without culture, culture will be brought later and its introduction will be marked by blood and suffering of the pilgrims from the center of the world of light, reason, and rational knowledge. The suffering of the “savages” will only result from their own superstition, ignorance and resistance against civilization, that is, resistance against becoming part of real historicity.

The imperial center brings all means necessary for the world of darkness to become nothing more than a periphery to our world, a sphere of influence, shaped step by step in the image of the center. This process whose beginning is marked by the symbolic year of 1492, first relies on giving names to newly conquered territories: “In order to take possession of something one needs to name it.”²⁴ As a result of this signifying activity, one “takes away” the language of people native to the peripheries. One takes away identity and language capable of shaping it into a harmonious whole, which is what for the entire 20th century cultural anthropology argued.

In 1800, the West “owned” about 30-35 percent of the globe, and in 1878, the proportion was already 67 percent, “gaining” annually 83 thousand square miles. This escalated, too. When WWI broke out, the annual rate had risen to 240 thousand square miles. Colonies, commonwealths, and dependent territories covered almost 85 percent of the world and everywhere the rules were clear: white Europeans govern and everyone else remains subordinate, or, in the rare instances of partnership, is assigned the role of a “lesser brother.”²⁵

While the theory of imperialism as domination exercised by a metropolitan center over its peripheral territories found its practical expression in the process of colonization and “conversion” to the European order, another phenomenon, that of intellectual imperialism, took far more subtle forms and had its own history, one not always parallel to the developments of imperial legislation. Political, historical, and technological-scientific domination of the West over the “rest” of the world required

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ [here based on the Polish transl. from French – A.W.] Attali, J. 1942. Transl. E. Bąkowska, M. Pilot, H. Igalson-Tygielska. Czytelnik, Warszawa: 1992. 247.

²⁵ See: Said, E. T. *Culture and Imperialism*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York: 1993. 8.

something that could legitimize and support it. Here enter theory of knowledge and epistemology, the kingdoms of cognition, accompanied by literature as an artistic testimony of the confrontation between the center and the peripheries, as well as the main medium for the building of the Western identity in an encounter with otherness.

After the colonial system ultimately fell apart, a hybrid picture emerged from what had been up to that point viewed as peripheral from the cultural perspective. To construct one's own state is one thing, to reference one's own tradition – one that would be untouched by Britishness and capable of filling or bridging the gap between the past and the future of the peripheries, is a different matter. A matter which did, nonetheless, become the center of literary reflection of those writers who remained aware that colonialism forever branded the consciousness of the colonized. Transgression, liminality, the sense of being caught (anthropologically speaking) between and betwixt, double loyalties, worldview choices and racism are thus main themes in the writing of Naipaul or Rushdie. It is a stream of literature that rejects, as the scientifically-ideological postcolonial reflection does, a vision of the world based on the binary opposition of “us” and “them,” center and periphery, good and evil, etc. Multicultural literature, too, stemming from postcolonial roots, but already representing the next generation of native-immigrants in England and America, returns to the fundamental search for more complex and ambiguous indicators of cultural identity.

The status of postcolonial literature²⁶ is paradoxical inasmuch as it is, both by choice and out of necessity, written in English. By choice, as due to the status of English as an international language, texts in English reach a wide audience – consisting of both “us” and “them.” Out of necessity, since postcolonial writing found its home in the language of the empire, the only universal language, one that can integrate the dispersed, hybrid identities of the inhabitants of peripheries. Identities of both those who have stayed and attempt to define themselves anew and those who left with their families on the journey towards the center to start the life “on the edge” of the old and the new. Jacques Derrida observes astutely:

I only have one language, it is not mine (...) You at once appreciate the source of my sufferings, the place of my passions, my desires, my prayers, the vocation of my hopes, since the this language runs right across them. But I am wrong, wrong to speak of a crossing and a place. For it is “on the shores” of the French language, uniquely, and neither inside nor outside it, on the unplaceable like of its coast that, since forever and lastingly, I wonder if one can love, enjoy oneself, pray, die from pain, or just die, play and simple, in another language without telling anyone about it, without even speaking at all.²⁷

²⁶ One should rather speak of “postcolonial literatures” considering the fact that they are written in several languages of former empires: English, French, Dutch, Spanish, and Portuguese. However, as I have mentioned before, my essay focuses on the fundamental characteristics of English postcolonial prose.

²⁷ Derrida, J. *Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin*. transl. by Patrick Mensah. Stanford University Press, Stanford CA: 1998.1-2.

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Prose by writers such as Naipaul and Rushdie reflects the experiences of uprooted individuals who struggle with the unavailability of the past and cannot use it to build a cohesive narration, of individuals suffering from the absence of a stable model of identification for an ego in all its dimensions: linguistic and cultural.²⁸ As early as 1965, Naipaul commented on the West Indians' search for identity and their sense of alienation from themselves, seen mostly in writers such as, for instance, R. K. Narayan.²⁹ It is Naipaul, however, who has made identity the central issue of his novels and essay collections, revealing to the fullest the spectrum of how hopelessly entangled and insolvable an issue it is for the inhabitants of the former British colonies. His writing precedes by two decades a debate that opened in the cultural studies over the question of "who needs identity" and of what kind.³⁰ Identity is a recurrent theme in Naipaul's writing, re-emerging anew from several perspectives and in several genres, most comprehensively discussed in *An Area of Darkness* and *The Arrival*, and re-defined once again in one of his newer books – *Reading and Writing*.³¹ All three create a kind of meta-narrative about "Britishness," language, identity, sense of territorial belonging, and the borders of imagination faced by the writer, a Trinidad Hindu Indian. In *The Enigma of Arrival*, the narrator searching for his roots looks first at the tradition of great English prose but neither Forster, Ackerley, or Kipling are of help, as: "To get anywhere in the writing, I had first of all to define myself very clearly to myself."³² But how to do that after one has made the real journey from the periphery of a godforsaken island to the center of the Old World, to mythical London? The narrator makes an attempt to "put down roots" in the English landscape while working on a book – *The Enigma of Arrival* – a separate story whose author defines himself, thus shaping his subjective identity, through literary experimentation instead of personal events. While at the beginning of the novel, the narrator and the writer are two separate entities, both struggling with

²⁸ Ibid. 60.

²⁹ See: Naipaul, B.S. "Images." *Critical Perspectives on V.S. Naipaul*. Hammer, R. D. (ed.) Heinemann, London:1979. 26-27.

³⁰ See: Hall, S. "Introduction: Who Needs Identity?" *Questions of Cultural Identity*. Hall S. and du Gay, P. (eds.) Sage, London: 1996. 1. See also: Waldner, D. "How Is it Going, Mr Naipaul? Identity, Memory, and the Ethics of Post Colonial Literatures." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. Vol. 3:2000. 5-18. Waldner posits that the reflection on the de-centered subject appeared first in the writing by postcolonial authors and only later in the writings by critics and theoreticians of culture. I agree fully with his diagnosis which also includes cultural anthropology, "sensitized" directly to the problem of identity under erasure by the postcolonial writing and novels.

³¹ Naipaul, V.S. *An Area of Darkness*. Penguin Books, London: 1968. Also: *The Enigma of Arrival: A Novel in Five Sections*. Penguin: Harmondsworth: 1987; *Reading and Writing: A Personal Account*. New York Review of Books, New York 2000. One of Naipaul's latest novels, *Magic Seeds*. Knopf, New York: 2004, a continuation of *Half a Life* was translated to Polish by M. Fedyszak. Naipaul, V.S. *Pół życia*. Noir sur Blanc, Warszawa: 2004.

³² Naipaul, V.S. *The Enigma...* 140-141.

the dilemma of belonging, at the end of the book and at the end of their lives, both characters accept the fact that each of them will forever have to live in two worlds. What binds both realities – the one that was lost, the source of melancholia, and the other one that will never feel like home – is language and sensitivity that was shaped by it and that has to be expressed in the imposed symbolic order.

The theme of house as a material sign of the already mentioned roots in locality and a *residuum* for memory, is another obsession of postcolonial literature. Jerzy Jarniewicz observes:

Naipaul is clearly fascinated with the theme of house, spinning tales of the search for and the construction of one but also tales of leaving home and family (...) With no trace of nostalgia or sentimentality, Naipaul presents his characters in their attempts to find own identity and to escape one that has been imposed on them, viewing the fate of the Hindu Indian as that of a wanderer, forced into eternal exile.³³

One of the earlier novels, *A House for Mr Biswas*,³⁴ a fairly simple story of several “houses” built by the main protagonist, is often read metaphorically as a paradigmatic and trans-historical representation of Home. The reader is to interpret Biswas’s several initiatives as a realization of a universal, all-human need to own even the smallest *orbis interior* allowing us to feel at home, *chez sui* as the French put it, surrounded by the people we know and walled off from the external, always dangerous world “beyond the walls.” There is, however, as Homi K. Bhabha suggests,³⁵ a fundamental difference between the house of Mr Biswas and the idea of house as such that the reader can refer to. This particular house is not a metaphor, it is not a representation of all real and potential houses, instead, it should be read metonymically, as part of a complex sequence of houses that define the entire novel. Following the trope of metonymy, one discovers the significance not of the idea of House but of the new houses built in the rural and newly urbanized Trinidad. A metonymical reading directs the reader’s attention to the differences between the island houses and those built elsewhere, furthermore, and perhaps more interestingly, it emphasizes a difference in attitude and relations people have with their houses in other parts of the globe. Naipaul returns to a similar theme – that of “several domestications” of the protagonist, a Hindu Indian in one of the African countries – also in *A Bend in the River*.³⁶

Homi Bhabha and other authors of the important *The Empire Writes Back*³⁷ believe that due to the metonymical inscription of local differences, postcolonial prose

³³ Jarniewicz, J. “Nieustająca wędrówka Naipaula.” *Pół życia...* 16.

³⁴ From 1961. Transl. by K. Orłowski. *Dom pana Biswasa*. Noir sur Blanc, Warszawa: 2008.

³⁵ Bhabha, H.K. “Representation and the Colonial Text: A Critical Exploration of some Forms of Mimeticism.” *The Theory of Reading*. Gloversmith F. (ed.) Harvester, Brighton: 1984. 114-116.

³⁶ Transl. by M. Zborowska. *Zakręci Reki*. Noir sur Blanc, Warszawa: 2002.

³⁷ *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. Ashcroft B., Griffith G. and Tiffin H. (eds.) Routledge, London: 1989.

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evades universal metaphorical literary interpretations. Thus, postcolonial novels should rather be read within the context of the real world that the created literary constructs reference. It is an undoubtedly valid strategy, which does not mean that the metaphor always has an “imperial” character for the discussed writers. In an astute analysis of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*,³⁸ Mac Fenwick proves that the dichotomy of metaphor and metonymy does not always work.³⁹ The novel is built on a series of metaphors and the narrator presents himself as metaphor for India and its newest history. It does encourage the metonymical trope, too, but metaphor and metonymy interweave ceaselessly in the novel almost as they do in structural theory. In Book One of *Midnight Children* we read about a sheet with a hole in it through which narrator’s grandfather, Dr. Aadam Sinai “examines” his patient, Naseem, a daughter of a respected Indian house, who later becomes his wife. Linen sheet, stretched by two servants, covers the patient, and during his several visits caused by her ailments, Aadam “meets” other fragments of Naseem’s body, never seeing the entire person. Regardless, he falls in love with the “whole,” encountered in metonymical fragments, and it is only before the wedding, upon seeing Naseem in her entirety, that he realizes how deceived he was by the idealized image of his beloved that he himself created.

The “segmented” love affair of Aadam and Naseem is, several critics claim, a metaphor for the creation of national identity of the Hindu Indians in the first half of the 20th century.⁴⁰ Naseem is “Mother India” and Aadam an Anglo-Indian seduced metonymically by Bharat Mata; their marriage is a metaphor of regained independence while Aadam’s dissatisfaction in his decision reflects India after the period of initial euphoria and the dissatisfaction with what has just been reborn – the tediously built national identity.

Two currents can be clearly distinguished in the stream of postcolonial literature. For some writers, the issue of relations between culture, language and identity is a problem of former peripheries, left to their own devices. But postcolonialism also stands for an unprecedented movement of masses of people from the peripheries to the center, a metropolitan center one might add. It is here that the next generation of immigrants grew up, it is also here that the new prose, inspired by the European and American multiculturalism was born. As a result, British literary scene welcomed authors such as Hanifa Kureishi, Monica Ali, Zadie Smith, Hari Kunzru,⁴¹ and the

³⁸ Transl. by A. Kołyszko *Dzieci Północy*. Czytelnik, Warszawa: 1989.

³⁹ Fenwick, M. “Crossing the Figurative Gap: Metaphor and Metonymy in *Midnight’s Children*.” *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. Vol. 3 2004. 45-68.

⁴⁰ See: Kane, J. M. “The Migrant Intellectual and the Body of History: Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*.” *Contemporary Literature*. 1996 (1). 109 and elsewhere.

⁴¹ See: Kureishi, H. *Budda z przedmieścia*. Transl. by M. Olejniczak-Skarsgard. Zysk i S-ka, Poznań: 1998; Smith, Z. *Białe zęby*. Transl. Z. Batko. Znak, Kraków: 2002; Smith, Z. *Łowca autografów*. Transl. Z. Batko. Znak, Kraków: 2004; Kunzru, H. *Impresjonista*. Transl. D. Stadnik. Muza, Warszawa: 2002; Kunzru, H. *Transmisja*. Transl. D. Stadnik. Muza, Warszawa: 2004. Ali, M. *Brick Lane*. Transl. T. Biedroń. Zysk i S-ka, Poznań: 2003.

American – Bharati Mukherjee, Meeny Alexander, Ginu Kamani, Anita Rau Badami, and many others.⁴² A majority of these writing men and women are people of double identity, children of mixed marriages of the “center and peripheries.” Hence, the main theme of their novels, written in the spirit of multiculturalism, is the triad of: culture – language – identity, except when compared to classical postcolonial literature, it is a theme discussed only in the context of life in the immigrant environment of Europe and America. The homeland of grandparents is as exotic for the contemporary generation as the metropolitan reality was to its ancestors. The main problem today revolves around the question of the borders of assimilations and the borders allowing for separateness in the world of competing value systems, barely hidden racism and the great struggle of tradition (as well as language) with the reality of postindustrial societies.

Zadie Smith’s debut novel, *White Teeth*, presents a world where both the fears of immigrants afraid of losing their identity in the new environment and the fears of “natives,” afraid that the new citizens from the former British colonies will cause ultimate destruction of the “good old England,” slowly disappear. While Salman Rushdie, Ben Okri, Timothy Mo, or Hanif Kureishi described the Pakistani, African, Chinese or Jamaican immigrant communities as closed social groups, in Smith’s writing they all melt into single multicultural community. Smith argues convincingly that “we are all of mixed origin” and contemporary man does not need to be rooted in tradition, because he has legs instead of roots and uses them to travel the world – both physically and in the imagination, wandering across traditions. We need to know our history but we cannot be slaves to it – only when this is true, can we achieve two goals: remain a part of the multicultural mosaic while becoming integrated with a democratic society. Paweł Goźliński astutely observes that *White Teeth* presents a simple formula against xenophobia:

One of the characters became a popular author of horticulture books. In one of them she discusses the dangers of autogamy - reliance on self-pollination resulting in plants prone to disease and extinction. Instead, she advocates xenogamy, or cross-pollination, the mixing of different plants. In Zadie Smith’s novels, xenogamy – constant cross-pollination - is a cure for xenophobia, a process where fear and violence disappear.⁴³

An anthropological approach to postcolonial and multicultural literature does not involve a realistic reading but rather “inscribes” it in the cultural image of contemporary world. It is a literature – as Geertz said about art in general – tied to cultural issues that it reflects, tests, and describes. Anthropologists can point to interpretative tropes they believe to be important, whether it is the binary of center and peripheries, the hybrid character of contemporariness, or, finally, the image of culture as a “vanity fair.” We must not forget that man and the world are tied together like the snail and its shell, and literature, so very briefly discussed in my essay, confirms this truth,

⁴² See: Grice, H. “Who Speaks for Us? Bharati Mukherjee’s Fiction and the Politics of Immigration.” *Comparative American Studies*. 2003 (1). 81-96.

⁴³ *Białe zęby*. Zadie Smith, <http://serwisy.gazeta.pl/ksiazki/2029020,29970,1124610.html>

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which is probably the source of its vitality and attractiveness. But anthropology also helps to see in the constant changes of the world (culture) a constant presence of fundamental existential issues, obsessions and fears that always converge around the notions of language and identity – the forces behind the rhythms of cultural life and literary creation.

Translation: Anna Warso