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Natalia Gendaj
Uniwersytet Szczeciński

Life after Postmodernism

***Reconsidering the Postmodern. European Literature Beyond Relativism* (ed. Thomas Vaessens, Yra van Dijk), Amsterdam University Press, 2011**

While I was visiting my Italian friend, a young poet and a person who seems very postmodern in his behavior, I was just about to finish reading *Reconsidering the Postmodern*. On the front cover of the book one word catches the reader's eye—"Postmodern"—while the other part of the title is almost invisible. When my friend glanced at what I was reading—he is always curious about that—he asked with some concern: "*Post mortem*?" It had never occurred to me that there was any similarity between these two phrases, just as it had never occurred to my friend that someone might read eschatologically oriented literature on their vacation.

In fact, there is something more to this spontaneous association: postmodernism seems to have found itself with one foot in its grave. Is it still here or has it already gone? Can we consider our times as postmodern? And if not, what literary period are we living in now? The answer is not as simple for the authors of the compilation as it might seem. Although the title of the introduction—"European Writers Reconsidering the Postmodern Heritage"—suggests that we have already dealt with this period (evaluating the "heritage" means that a new generation has come), there is no evident proof that we have really closed this era. The authors, along with some other critics, regard the 9/11 terrorist attacks as the logical end of postmodernism as there is no place for relativistic thinking in public discourse or in literature any more. In further chapters of

the book we can see that this date serves as a kind of lighthouse that guides us through the public discourse and helps us organize the numerous groups of authors by dividing them into "before 9/11" and "after 9/11." Still, it is difficult to include some of them in only one of these groups for their literary activity started just before the WTC attacks and has continued afterwards (as is the case of Philip Roth). As it is shown in the discussed book and as I will try to explain later, the postmodern is not really dead or at least there has been no dramatic end of it.

Reconsidering the Postmodern is structurally very ordered. Every chapter—which means every description of a national literature—begins with a short introduction giving brief insight into how postmodernism (both literature and criticism) fits into the national context. What follows is a presentation of one significant postmodern writer whose works can be considered highly postmodern, in order to show later how more contemporary authors (usually three of them) argue with their "maestro" or discuss his ideas. Van Dijk and Vaessens write:

> Two different attitudes are possible in this criticism that stem from postmodernism itself. It may be self-criticism from within on the one hand, or a criticism so fundamental as to take us outside of postmodern discourse on the other. In the first case, we are dealing with late-postmodern concerns about some offshoots of postmodernism such as rampant irony turning into cynicism; in the second, we could speak of a post-postmodernism. (14)

It is the individual decision of the authors of each chapter to point out whether it is the first option or the second; nevertheless, we usually do not get an unambiguous answer. The purpose of the chapters is rather to show how contemporary authors deal with some postmodern problems, which I will name in the later part of this presentation. Before that I would like to focus on the compositional aspects of this book.

Two centers and tight borders

One of the most problematic issues is the way the chapters are organized. Synthetic works seem always to suffer from this affliction: the decision of what

to include and what to leave out and how to distribute the material can never be absolutely satisfying. Every chapter presents one national literature and there are Russian, British, Dutch, Italian, French, Post-Yugoslav, Norwegian, Flemish, Polish, and German literatures. Then there are two chapters that show the transatlantic impact of American literature (these two constitute a separate part): the influence of Latin American authors on Spanish literature and the influence of the authors from the United States on European postmodernism in general.

It is easy to notice that certain European literatures have been omitted, for example Portuguese, Greek or Czech (with an influential postmodern writer Milan Kundera). Evidently it is impossible to embrace all the literatures but still, there is no clear explanation why exactly those particular countries and their literatures were chosen (beside the obvious reason of the authors' interests) to represent European literature in general. It does not seem to be obvious—nor is it justified in any way—that the isolated Norwegian literature or the quite unknown Flemish literature are more adequate than others.

Yra van Dijk and Thomas Vaessens in their "Introduction" assure that there is no such thing as one European postmodernism—there are only its numerous variations. Some of these variations (like Polish, Russian or Spanish) are more politically compromised than others (for instance French). Some of them have—as the authors continue—a more critical and philosophical background (like Italian or Flemish). In other countries one can detect the constant rejection of postmodern philosophy and theory with its peculiar jargon but meanwhile they do have great postmodern literature (for example British). That is why the aim of the book is not to attempt at finding one simple pattern of how postmodernism in European literature looks but to show the many paths it has followed. As van Dijk and Vaessens write:

> We are not in the first instance interested in "kernel" of postmodernism (if one could find such a thing), but rather in the borders of a large and varied territory that we could call postmodern. (9)

In another passage the authors express their fear of being accused of conservatism because they criticize some postmodern features. Which shows very clearly that they themselves are deeply submerged in postmodern thinking. The serious

doubt, suggested by the parenthesis, that there is really no such thing as a seed or "kernel" of postmodernism (or any other concept), makes it obvious that we will not get any synthesis, but only the enumeration of several possibilities.

What is outstanding, is the concern to examine the peripheries and not the center. This perfectly embodies the idea of reconstructing the map of European postmodernism(s): we are looking for the borders just as if we were cartographers. Although the authors want to mark the differences between various European postmodernisms, it seems that these borders do not allow for any mutual influences: they are absolutely tight. Thus we will not find any signs of interaction between German and Polish literature or Italian and Spanish. Besides the last two chapters, which show a very different strategy, the only referential point for the rest of the chapters are the American literature in the 9/11 context and—quite obviously—French avant-garde. We could ask what is more important for the national literature of a small European country: the 9/11 or what is happening just around the corner? Although it is obvious that the immediate period that followed the terrorist attacks might have had a substantial impact on the social atmosphere, could it be still so influential 10 years later?

The late coming of late-postmodernism

What is extremely interesting is the question of the calendar of postmodernism. As successive chapters show, it is difficult to give an opening or a closing date. Only German critics pinpoint the exact year of the end of postmodernism which is 1998 and the proclamation of the influential literary magazine *Merkur*. The order-loving Germans have even—also as the only country—introduced the precise date of the beginning of postmodernism into the national literature: 1968. We should consider this case as exceptional: in other chapters (countries) we can find only decades that are considered postmodern. At any rate, it is clear that postmodernism did not come everywhere at the same time.

France is without a doubt the leader. The first postmodern tendencies in narratives, like minimalistic approach to depicting reality and characters as well as the lack of psychologizing, appeared at the beginning of the 1960s. What in other countries, for example in Poland, was still considered French *nouveau*

roman (with its culmination in the 1950s), was already postmodernism, and some postmodern authors (like Alain Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Sarraute or Margarite Duras) were well-known to be postmodern.

Postmodernism in Germany started quite early as well—in 1968—with the Parisian revolution, whereas it was introduced into Flemish literature in the 1980s, when the new tendencies in France could already be found in the narrative. The further from center (which was still Paris at that time), the later postmodernism set in. In consequence, in some countries postmodernism appeared at the same time as the critique of postmodernism and both had simultaneous impact on country's national literature. That is what happened in Russia. Postmodernism reached Russian literature in the early 1990s, just after *perestroika*. However, Lyotard and Derrida, the two founding fathers of the postmodern philosophy, were barely known in Russia; also, in such a strongly politicized environment there could be no real critique of postmodernism's lack of both ideology and sincerity. We can assume that postmodernism never came to Russian literature, or that it did come but only in its late, self-conscious state.

The delayed arrival of postmodernism was noted also in Post-Yugoslav literature. This case is special for many reasons. The best representative of Yugoslav postmodernism, Danilo Kiš, was also the last one. Not because he did not have any successors—he did in some way—but because his country was no more. Can national postmodern literature last without its physical ground or is there some post-postmodernism in the Post-Yugoslav territory? Not only was the later existence of postmodernism in the Balkans quite unclear, the beginnings of it had been complicated as well. Danilo Kiš's masterpiece *The Tomb of Boris Davidovič* (*Grobnica za Borisa Davidoviča*) published in 1975 (when postmodernism in France was already well developed) caused a scandal. The critics accused him of plagiarism as the major part of his book was copied, but with the source indicated and some subtle changes made (which the angry critics did not even notice). It was obvious that the accusations were more political than critical, but it also meant that the postmodern theory had not even been heard of at that time. Kiš's trial lasted several years and inspired him to write a critical essay on postmodernism, prolonging its life in this part of Europe, while in other parts it was already becoming obsolete.

Is it then possible to find a definition of postmodern heritage in European literature when we take into consideration not only that it was complex but also that it was happening in different periods? In spite of all doubts whether postmodern times are over or not, the authors of the compilation need to consider postmodernism as past (even if only some of its variations). This rhetorical move allows them to show the attitude of contemporary—mostly young—writers towards their postmodern ancestors, postmodern criticism and postmodernism in general.

Postmodern side effects

Whether it is only self-conscious criticism of late postmodernism or total rejection brought by the post-postmodernism, the problems remain the same; Thomas Vaessens, the editor and the author of the chapter about Dutch literature, calls them "unpleasant side effects" of postmodernism. What had primarily been treated as a medicine to the liberal humanist concept proved to be more of a mixed blessing. There are a few constant allegations made against postmodern literature (or more generally—postmodern way of thinking) which appear in various chapters: omnipresent irony, relativism, playfulness, lack of engagement, and too complicated critical jargon.

The last issue is probably the least important. Widely accepted in France, almost unknown in Russia, postmodern language of philosophy was adopted with varying degrees of enthusiasm. A significant example is Great Britain. According to Sebastian Groes, an Anglo-Saxon critic, Great Britain was never fond of the "great tradition" of philosophy and hence immune to the French import: "British intellectuals are equally distrustful of cleverly clever philosophers" (43). The post-structural theory settled in the British territory, but in fact it was familiar only to a small group of scholars and was never well-known outside the academic ground. Therefore, when Derrida visited the University of Cambridge in the 1980s, he was booed by the audience (ibid.). But was it the jargon the real problem for the "after-high-postmodern" (without deciding whether we refer to post-postmodernism or late-postmodernism) writers and critics?

Still, there were far more serious charges against postmodernism: the playfulness and the lack of engagement. But was it after all really the case of European literature? Monica Jansen, summarizing the Italian postmodern literature, notes:

> . . . [W]here contemporary American literature has been able to reach the depth of truly critical postmodernism, after a phase of "anything goes," Italian writers—playing around with horror, SF and pulp—are stuck on the surface of comic, of auto-irony at best, and unable to interpret the tragic dimension of existence. (82)

Despite the great contribution of Italian intellectuals (Umberto Eco, Ganni Vattimo) to postmodern criticism and philosophy, literature did not gain any depth. Maybe that is why Vattimo's concept of "weak thought" was much more appreciated outside the country. But Italian televised culture is shown in this book as almost the only country that had really suffered from this kind of side effects. As was said before, Eastern block countries and Spain had never produced typically postmodern, purely playful and non-political literature. Moreover, it seems that postmodern thinking helped over-politicized nations to find the required balance. Andrei Pleşu (quoted by Guido Snel) writes:

> During communism there was no such a thing as an innocent reading . . . When Hamlet said: "Something is rotten in Denmark" the audience would applaud. After 1989, I hoped that the possibility of an innocent reading would return. To enjoy reading for reading's sake, without political agendas. (116)

The most representative postmodern Yugoslavian writer, Danilo Kiš, shared the same concept of reality as garbage (*đubrište*) or storehouse (*skladište*) as many postmodern writers, but he never totally agreed with Borges's and *nouveau roman's* lack of engagement. To Kiš the task of a 20th-century's writer was the constant re-telling of the past.

But not only politically oppressed writers under non-democratic regimes rejected the superficial narratives. In the 1970s, before the introduction of postmodernism to its national literature, Norwegian writing was dominated by socio-politically oriented realism and when postmodernism finally arrived there—in its late phase—it could not erase the natural engagement of literature. What occurred was a departure from grand narratives in favor of small narratives focused on individual stories.

The next problem, closely related to the political and social engagement, is the postmodern specialty: omnipresent irony. The ironical attitude was a "reaction to authoritarian certainties from the past" but to the authors of the introduction it went as far as becoming an imperative. "Irony becomes our environment," says the British writer David Foster Wallace quoted by van Dijk and Vaessens (15). For the authors of the compilation, the omnipresent irony inevitably led to relativism and it is exactly what cannot be accepted anymore after the 9/11 attacks. Relativism as the gravest side effect of postmodernism is also the major concern of the book. It is expressed in the full version of the title: *Reconsidering the Postmodern. European Literature Beyond Relativism.* It is also some kind of a self-disruptive gene of postmodern literature. As van Dijk and Vaessens say: "relativism makes postmodernist theory practically incapable of furnishing either an ethics or a politics" (18). So this particular quality would be then the final argument that there is no possibility to prolong postmodernism in the contemporary post-9/11 narrative.

Nevertheless, we do not get many examples of real relativism in European literatures. It has not developed in German literature. According to Ewout van der Knaap:

> This review outlines the expectations of many German literature readers: novels should contribute to morality with a bearable lightness . . . The ethical turn in German literature has had a clear impact on discussions related to matters of representation. (186)

Nor in the Flemish one, presented by Sven Vitse:

> Postmodern fiction in Flanders has never been an ultra-relativist, nihilistic affair, weighed down by the crushing load irony. (150)

British literature not only did not accept the jargon but also rejected postmodern ideas in general: Baudrillard "was dismissed as an amoral relativist," as Sebastian Groes claims (43). Moral thought was always present in British narratives:

> Especially the Leaviste tradition of English fiction, with rootedness in liberal humanist values and its staunch convictions about reality and morality, pre-empted the unalloyed success of postmodernist fiction in Britain (ibid.).

According to the author of the "British" chapter, Sebastian Groes, great writers, such as Joseph Conrad, Henry James and Jane Austen set a moralist outlook in British literature and planted protective skepticism towards European thought. So the successors of these great novelists, educated on the highly moral narratives, did not forget their heritage and therefore rejected the postmodern "weak thought." It seems that they repudiate the theory of Harold Bloom and they are indifferent to the anxiety of influence. Although the idea to tear down the statues of the good and the great usually seems tempting, this time it was not the case.

To provide an example, Zadie Smith and Tom McCarthy assure that they keep their distance to postmodern philosophy, but in spite of their constant struggle with postmodern literary tendencies (both in narrative techniques and themes) they cannot be considered post-postmodern authors. Their work is under the influence of high-postmodern Salman Rushdie[1] and Julian Barnes—but it also corresponds with the tradition of Joseph Conrad and the rest of the "strong thought" writers.

Post-postmodern opposition

As I have already said, because of the political situation in some countries, postmodernism could not have significantly influenced their literature. Despite this, there are many examples of post-postmodern writers who opposed post-modern ideas in very radical ways.

Post-Soviet literature was quite politically engaged; there was no place for playfulness and relativism: "After all we need ideology," said one of contemporary Russian authors, quoted by Ellen Rutten (35). The society that had suffered such a big change of their national identity needed common values, needed to defend itself not only against the trauma of Soviet experience but also against the trauma of the radical change of socio-political context. The post-postmodern writer Dmitrii Prigov postulated New Sincerity as the new demand for Russian literature, thus totally rejecting postmodern irony. This new tendency has been

[1] Salman Rushdie introduced the concept of a nomad to the postmodern thinking, which has inspired many of the writers and philosophers.

adopted by Prigov's successors who have changed the intimate and somewhat private discourse into a more public and political one. Kirill Medvedev (quoted by Rutten)—who also translated very sincere and naive novels by Charles Bukowski—wrote about New Sincerity:

> It is President Putin and contemporary poetry and the broadcasters on television. It is Alexander Lukashenko admitting that his party falsified the elections—lowered Lukashenko's number from 93 percent to 80 percent—because, Lukashenko very sincerely confessed, "the European Union wouldn't have accepted the result otherwise." This is simultaneously unbelievable and symptomatic. The new sincerity is the blogosphere, with its absolutely sincere poets in one corner and its equally sincere Nazis in the other. (37)

As one may notice, there is a wide spectrum of what can be considered "sincere." The lack of any strict definition provokes creating multiple examples of new sincere representations. New Sincerity started to be the main slogan of Russian bloggers, which led to unexpected "side effects" on the other side of the Atlantic. Californian writer Alexander Blagg posted on his blog his own list of New Sincerity examples and invited his blog readers to continue the enumeration and to submit new proposals. It would be impossible to find any key to this selection among the new-sincere things we can find: best friends, lemonade stands, camping trips and high-fives. What primarily was a reaction to and dismissal of irony, games and playfulness, became a parody, a postmodern author-reader interaction. Although this time the direction of the influence was opposite: from Russia to the United States.

Another peculiar post-postmodern reaction can be noticed in Polish literature. According to Arent Van Nieukerken, the author of the "Polish" chapter, some of the writers reacted strongly to postmodern tendencies by rejecting irony. Nieukerken presents the works of Zbigniew Herbert as an example of the simplification of poetics. Herbert's lyrical persona, Mister Cogito, can be seen—to some extent—as the alter ego of the author, which reduces the unnecessary complications between the author and the reader: Herbert wanted to speak clearly, sincerely and directly. Created in the 1970s and developed in the complicated decade of the 1980s, Mister Cogito was supposed to be an "accomplice" to the nation. The authenticity and the direct form—admired by Western critics—were only partly accepted in Poland. Some critics expected

that after the democratic transition Herbert would return to irony but that never happened; the astonished Polish critics noticed that Herbert even started to rhyme! To the author of the chapter this is a post-postmodern attitude and it expresses the need for New Sincerity in poetry after the sociopolitical reconstruction. Nevertheless, Herbert's radical reaction could not have been caused by the superficiality of Polish postmodern literature as it had never played an important role in Poland. The non-ironic poetry would be in this case a slightly unnecessary prevention.

The most interesting issue in these two examples is that a strong post-postmodern attitude was present only in the countries that had never really experienced postmodern vogue—Herbert's and Prigov's work were more of a response to what could have happened than to what had really occurred.

Postmodernism—a soft critique

If there had been no real menace of postmodern "side effects" and there had only been a few writers who had felt a strong need to oppose common values and to commit to postmodern "weak thought" and omnipresent irony, how would one describe recent mainstream literature? The authors of the compilation have identified some common qualities that are shared by the latest novels, among them: in-depth irony, turning towards reality, commitment, return to conventional forms, self-reflexivity and reconciliation with the reader. None of the writers of the last generation presented in the book rejects the postmodern heritage. Zadie Smith does not turn away from Salman Rushdie's narratives and the Bosnian Semezdin Mehmedinovic (quoted by Snel) continues the work of rewriting history started by Kiš, although he rectifies Kiš's concept of borders:

> Right now for instance, east and west
> Invented so a body could orient itself
> By the stars in the desolate expanse
> Mean more than maps
> Where Mecca's on the east side and
> Los Angeles on the west. (126-127)

The Bosnian poet stands on the border between two worlds: West (Roman Catholic) and East (Orthodox Catholic, or even Islam) which implies the existence of a deeper meaning of his narratives and multiplies the perspective by combining stories from different times and places, which Kiš, who was more concentrated on his ground, had never done.

In fact, late-postmodernism is just as varied as postmodernism was. If there had been many postmodernisms (or many variations of it), there would also be many late-postmodernisms: every country has its own particular incarnation.

One can notice a big return to the story and the *sujet* in French literature. But New Realism—as this movement is called—is not a return to the 19th-century narrative. The French writer Michel Houellebecq, considered a late-postmodern novelist, has been frequently compared to Emil Zola and his theories to Zola's social determinism. He has also been called a modern Balzac, yet his description of society is much more detailed. Although he still uses some of the postmodern tools and techniques, like quotations from real and invented books, the postmodern erudition is not necessary anymore. His narration, traditional in its form, is combined with postmodern thoughts and topics. Michel Houellebecq's characters are anti-heroes, they do not suffer from the lack of identity—they aim at losing it. One of the *Plateforme* protagonists (quoted by Sabine van Wesemael) says:

> It is wrong to pretend that human beings are unique, that they carry within them an irreplaceable individuality; as far as I was concerned, at any rate, I could not distinguish any trace of such an individuality. (98)

The character loses his sense of reality and plays in his own fiction, but the reader still gets the principles of the traditional novel: the narrated story.

Italian post-realism has gone an altogether different way. Roberto Saviano, the author of non-fiction about Neapolitan mafia, is in favor of minimalist narration. There is no trace of emotional or moralistic discourse—one could say that it has been written in cold blood. This phrase is also the title of one of the first non-fiction stories written by Truman Capote. In spite of this clear connection between those two writers (which is not mentioned in the chapter), the minimalism of *Gomorrah* is different to *In Cold Blood*. It can be said that the non-fiction stories have gone the full circle: what had been at first a way to

shock the reader, to cross the limits of literature, in the end became the only mode to write engaged literature.

Other example of the new *vogue* in literature is Tomek Tryzna's novel *Panna Nikt* (*Miss Nobody*) which—as the Nobel Prize laureate Czesław Miłosz claims—is the first novel of the postmodernism *alla polacca* (that can be called late-postmodernism). The narration of the novel is sincere and quite naïve—the distance between the reader and the main character, a girl called Marysia, is minimized: there is no irony. Nevertheless, it cannot be compared with the non-ironical and sincere writing of the post-postmodern (or anti-postmodern) Zbigniew Herbert. The realistic description of the last phase of communism in Poland has no theoretical or philosophical background—as the author of the chapter, Arent van Nieukerken, says (recalling Rorty's words) there are some books that just help us be less cruel (181). In spite of that, Tomek Tryzna—criticized for the lack of intellectual ambitions—managed to include almost all late-postmodern features in his book: turning towards reality, commitment, return to conventional forms and reconciliation with the reader.

Conclusions

The reading of *Reconsidering the Postmodern* brings positive conclusions: there is life after postmodernism. Despite the self-disruptive gene in postmodern literature one can see that postmodern tendencies have not disappeared from contemporary narratives—they have been dissolved in the newest narratives or even partly washed out, but there was no radical departure from them.

Although in the "Introduction" the authors assure that there was a radical change after 9/11 attacks in the world literature, it is not really visible in the successive chapters. Some authors of the compilation still have in mind this date and show how writers use it in its literature—like the Bosnian novelist, Semezdin Mehmedinovic, who compares ethnic conflicts of the Yugoslav war with xenophobia that flared in the United States after the WTC attacks. Some authors only mention this date in the introductory part (the chapter on Italian literature), in the conclusions (Polish), or in both of them (Russian). A lot of them do not even refer to it (Flemish, British, French).

The main concern of the authors of *Reconsidering . . .*—relativism in the postmodern literature and its consequences—transpired not to be so crucial to the post-9/11 literature, especially in Europe. It seems then that the authors of the chapters have not satisfied the assumptions set in the "Introduction." This different perspective can be only read as an advantage.

What the book certainly does is present the overview of European literatures (not literature) of the last few decades. Not only does it show the recent works and narrative tendencies in Europe—on which the book is mainly focused—but it also shows them in a wider context. The parallel structure gives always the same background: the political situation of the country, social ambient, the well known writers and their ancestors. All in all, the book is a perfect guide to contemporary European literatures, tendencies, writers and movements. But only if one has 3 bookmarks.[2]

Summary

The article presents the book *Reconsidering Postmodern. European Writers Reconsidering the Postmodern Heritage* published by Amsterdam University Press in 2011. The presented work is a collection of many voices discussing new tendencies in European literatures (and not a single literature) after the 9/11 attacks; every chapter is dedicated to one European nation (among them: French, Belgian, German, Italian and Polish).

For the editors of the book, this date has significant impact on the European writers and readers, who could not longer accept such postmodern qualities as: relativism, playfulness, omnipresent irony, the lack of commitment and specific jargon. The word "heritage" suggests that there is something after postmodern times and in the introduction two options are presented: late postmodern and post-postmodern. But has the postmodern really ended? After all it seems that the tragedy of 9/11 did not have such an influence on the European literatures. The local socio-political context seems to be more relevant.

Key words: comparative literature, European literature, postmodernism, literature after 9/11

[2] The big inconvenience of this book is the references arrangement. Notes do not appear at the bottom of the page but at the end of the book. To make things worse, to read the note entirely we must refer to the next part of the book which is the "Bibliography." It requires not only three bookmarks but also constant page turning.

Życie po postmodernizmie. Recenzja książki *Reconsidering the Postmodern. European Literature Beyond Relativism*, red. Thomas Vaessens, Yra van Dijk, Amsterdam University Press, 2011

Streszczenie

Prezentowana książka *Reconsidering Postmodern. European Writers Reconsidering the Postmodern Heritage* to wielogłosowa dyskusja na temat współczesnych tendencji w literaturze europejskiej. Redaktorzy tomu stawiają pytanie, co się stało z postmodernizmem po ataku na World Trade Center 11 września 2001 roku. Czy dotychczasowe kategorie, charakteryzujące literaturę poszczególnych europejskich krajów – ironia, brak zaangażowania, relatywizm, niezrozumiały język – mają rację bytu wobec traumy i poczucia niepewności, będących skutkiem zamachów terrorystycznych?

Zawarte w tytule „dziedzictwo" (*heritage*) nasuwa myśl, że postmodernizm rzeczywiście musiał się skończyć. A jednak wstęp dostarcza nam dwóch możliwości, z których tylko jedna może oznaczać rzeczywisty koniec literackiej epoki. Według redaktorów tomu współczesna literatura może być postrzegana albo jako późny postmodernizm, albo, zdecydowanie bardziej krytyczny wobec poprzednika, post-postmodernizm. Autorzy poszczególnych rozdziałów składających się na mapę literatur europejskich (angielskiej, niemieckiej, francuskiej, włoskiej, polskiej i wielu innych) prezentują różne podejścia współczesnych twórców do zagadnienia postmodernizmu. W większości przypadków, nie przełomowa data – a lokalna sytuacja społeczno-polityczna – miała zdecydowanie większy wpływ na twórczość literacką.

Słowa kluczowe: komparatystyka literacka, literatura europejska, postmodernizm, literatura po 9/11