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Where Do Literary Authors Belong?
A Post-postmodern Answer

When I received Marta Skwara's kind invitation to the September 2014 conference in Pobierowo, one of the things that attracted me was the overall theme to be discussed: "National, Regional, Continental, Global". This was something I thought I could deal with in terms of a post-postmodern view of literary activity as one among other modes of communication (cf. Sell, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014). I thought, too, that I would be able to illustrate my ideas with examples from Anglophone literature. What I could not know in advance was exactly how other participants would respond to the conference theme, and in particular the many participants with interests in Polish literature. Having now enjoyed the four days in Pobierowo to the full, I am not much less of an ignoramus about Polish literature than I was before. But at least I have some idea of the issues it raises for Polish scholars and critics.

There is one thing that puzzles me. Polish authors win the Nobel Prize for Literature four times a century, a claim I would support with reference the Laureates of 1905, 1924, 1980 and 1996: Henryk Sienkiewicz, Władysław Reymont, Czesław Miłosz and Wisława Szymborska. If the receipt of the Nobel Prize is a sign that a writer has become, or is about to become, a global phenomenon, Polish literature has definitely had a high global presence. And Joseph Conrad, though not a Nobel Laureate, is a fifth Polish writer of indisputably global significance, who hailed from, described, and wrote for, an already globalizing world some thirty years before "globalization" became an English word. Given this formidable record, what I found utterly mystifying

in the attitudes of some Polish colleagues in Pobierowo was that they evidently felt that Polish literature has had a raw deal. Unless I am mistaken, they were concerned that Polish writers are too often relegated to merely national status or, if granted a measure of wider, regional significance, are so tightly bracketed together with writers in other Slavic languages that their affiliations within the still wider sphere of continental Europe are effectively obscured. I could not help wondering whether these apparent grudges were a reflection, less on Polish literature than on Poland's troubled political history, as a country for centuries downtrodden, cheated and partitioned by powerful neighbours and others. But in that case, I asked myself, why does Finland, also a country with a most unenviable history, the traditional battleground of Sweden and Russia, and a country, to boot, which has produced only one Nobel Laureate, have no comparable literary chip-on-the-shoulder? Is it just "natural" for the merely five million Finns to have lower expectations and to be less disappointed?

I cannot possibly have picked up all the nuances in the papers delivered in Polish and only summarized in English, and much of the subsequent discussions were mainly in Polish as well. But even so, the Polish sense of literary grievance came across, it seemed to me, unmistakably. Bożena Zaboklicka delivered a fine paper on Catalonian versions of Sienkiewicz's *Quo Vadis*, her point being that in the Catalonian context the work was turned into a model for true religion and patriotism, in ways which to its Polish admirers could only seem to overlook the writing's rich sensuality. During the discussion of Zaboklicka's findings, I gathered that some conference participants, instead of rejoicing in the human and cultural variety which made a Catalonian *Quo Vadis* no less different from the Polish one than, say, Verdi's *Otello* from Shakespeare's *Othello,* or Shakespeare's *Othello* from the seventh story in the third decade of Giraldi Cinthio's *Hecatommithi*, were almost indignant that the Polish original had been changed – or violated, as I think they might even have expressed this. Further unfair treatment, according to some participants, was dealt out to the Polish writers who, as Agnieszka Moroz's fascinating paper explained, joined the Iowa Writing Programme in the hope of becoming truly global writers. Here it seemed to me a great pity that nobody had explained to these writers that you cannot win the Nobel Prize by *trying* to win it. If you aim at universality, you miss the local and have no natural audience of your own. As Keats said,

"if Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all" (Keats, 1954: 84). Great writers do not force themselves upon the whole world. They do what comes naturally to them, and do so for the benefit of the community of readers – sometimes very large, but sometimes very small – with whom they most naturally want to be in contact, until eventually the whole world finds its way to their sheer quality and humanity. Then again, the conference also included excellent discussions of contemporary Polish writers who write in German. But some commentators, instead of recognizing that such writers may merely be addressing the audience with whom they feel most naturally at home (like Conrad when he started his writing career in English after many years' acclimatization to Anglophone working and domestic environments), seemed almost to accuse them of adding to Polish literature's trials and tribulations (just as early Polish reviewers of Conrad accused him of betrayal). In other exchanges, too, I thought I again detected a certain slowness to welcome some language other than Polish as a channel for Polish literature, almost as if Klemens Janicki, Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski, Mathias Casimirus Sarbievius and Jan Kochanowski had never achieved European – which in those days meant global – recognition by writing in Latin. And some commentators seemed reluctant to accept the opportunities opened up by translations, or by helpful accounts of Polish literature by Polish scholars or critics writing in, above all, English.

To repeat, I still know very little about Polish literature. Nor can I or anyone else be in a position to patronize Polish literature. Yet to my mind, there is not the slightest doubt that, if (a.) Polish writers go on doing what comes naturally to them, taking up topics and forms which genuinely interest them, and addressing, in whatever language, the smaller or larger communities to which they feel they belong, if (b.) Polish literary texts continue to be well – by which I mean both faithfully and understandably – translated into many other languages, and if (c.) Polish literary critics and scholars continue to write helpful presentations and critiques not only in Polish but in other languages as well, then Polish literature will continue to win international recognition, even though literature is not a competition, and certainly not a war, and even though international recognition is not something to be aimed at. From many papers in Pobierowo I got a strong sense that Polish literature, no matter how

it is categorized in terms of "National, Regional, Continental, Global", is so full of life that it is bound to have real staying-power and breadth of appeal.

So far so good. Now, however, I must question some of the terminology I have been using here. Expressions such as "international", "global" and "the whole world" need, as it were, to be put in inverted commas. In my own contribution to the conference, I suggested that the very notion of "universal" writers of "global" reach is both unfortunate and dated. Granted, most people would probably still agree with Dr Johnson that literary authors are writers who have been widely admired for a long time. And perhaps some of my new colleagues from the Pobierowo conference would claim that there should be nothing to stop literary authors, not least Polish literary authors, from belonging, so to speak, everywhere and always. Here the idea would be that the many who admire their works could be everybody all over the world, and that the lengthy admiration could stretch out to the end of human history. But as I say, the aspirations to which this line of thought can lead are deceptive. Indeed, the fact is that such thinking has always been potentially dangerous, involving a utopistic vision which, to borrow phrasing from Tadeusz Sławek's paper in Pobierowo, has had no mechanism by which to prevent itself from coming true. The entire notion of global writers really belonged to the era of modernity, an era during which its ominous consequences already became quite plain for all to see. By which I do not mean that literature or literary discussion in either Poland or anywhere else would now benefit from a concentration on *post*modern concerns and themes. A much more profitable move, it seems to me, would be whole-heartedly to embrace the era of *post-post*modernity.

By modernity, I mean that phase of western history which, beginning roughly around the turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth century, included the decline of feudalism, the beginnings of parliamentarianism, the rise of the bourgeoisie, the invention of the printing press, the Reformation, the birth of empirical science, and Renaissance Humanism. One Humanist assumption was precisely that major writing could achieve universality, albeit at the cost of some homogenizing exclusions: universality was not open to women writers, to uneducated writers, or to writers using contemporary vernacular languages such as English unless they carefully modelled their ideas, genres, styles and careers on examples from ancient Greece and Rome. So when Sir Thomas

Hawkins, who ticked all the right boxes, published his verse translations of Horace into English in 1625, John Beaumont praised him for making possible a new mutuality – an unprecedented giving-and-taking – between contemporary English readers and ancient classic writers.

> What shall I first commend? your happy choice
> Of this most usefull *Poet*? or your skill
> To make the *Eccho* equall with the voice,
> And trace the Lines drawne by the *Authors* quill?
> The *Latine* Writers by unlearned hands,
> In forraine Robes unwillingly are drest,
> But thus invited into other Lands,
> Are glad to change their tongue at such request.
> The good, which in our minds their labours breed,
> Layes open to their Fame a larger way.
> These strangers *England* with rich plentie feed,
> Which with our Countreys freedome we repay:
> When sitting in pure Language like a Throne,
> They prove as great with us, as with their owne.
>
> (Beaumont, 1974: 177)

Horace and his ancient colleagues could now feed England "with rich plentie", and English people could "repay" them by granting them the freedom of the country and enthroning them in the new language. In effect Beaumont was saying, "The classic writers become one of us, and our writers one of them. They belong here and now. We all belong together." To Beaumont's perception, an early modern vernacular writer could indeed bring about an enlargement of literary community which eliminated the historical and geographical boundaries of different times and places. And with the Thirty Years War already well under way, this kind of harmonious vision was clearly very attractive to him as a poet at the court of King James, the peace-maker monarch. On the other hand, however, when English writers themselves were thought of as graduating to canonical status, an element of competition could easily come into the picture, competition not only with the ancient Greeks and Romans but also with much more recent Italian writers. With the wisdom of hindsight, we may even wonder whether Beaumont's poem to James "Concerning the True Forme of English Poetry" is not one of the first anticipations of British cultural imperialism:

> [...] I never will despaire,
> But that our heads which sucke the freezing aire,
> As well as hotter braines, may verse adorne,
> And be their wonder, as we were their scorne.
>
> <div align="center">(Beaumont, 1974: 124)</div>

During the post-Humanist phase of late modernity, which coincided with another tempestuous period in European history, the hopes entertained of literature's harmonious universalizations were, if anything, even stronger, though now there was something of a tension, not least in Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, between revolutionary egalitarianism and philosophical Idealism – between a view of poets as just human beings speaking to other human beings and a view of them as individuals of exceptional imaginative and emotional powers. Wordsworth's eloquence on such matters is unforgettable:

> In spite of difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs: in spite of things silently gone out of mind, and things violently destroyed, the Poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time (Wordsworth, 1974: I, 141).

On the other hand, here, too, we can nowadays have an uneasy reservation. Given what we know of the nineteenth- and early twentieth century history, the word "empire" can have an ominous ring.

Psychologists tell us that people who have no incentives to hope may in the long run actually be unable to live. And certainly, it is difficult to believe that, in the absence of some vision of how things might work in a better world, human beings would ever be encouraged to try and bring about reforms. Yet a utopianism which loses all touch with practical or ethical reality can be counterproductive, at worst giving birth to a regime that ends up as nothing short of dystopian. The risk that this would happen with the modern notion of literary authors' irenic universality was always strong, in that the notion's own grounding was so flimsy. Not to mince words, the many human beings who admire literary authors can never be all the human beings who will ever have existed, and the long period of time through which they have been admired can never be the whole of human history. So in literary discussions, expressions like

"universal", "global" and "the whole world" have never been used literally, but hyperbolically. Shakespeare, who would probably be most people's candidate for the title "Universal Author *par excellence*", might not have been admired by the countless generations of human beings who died before he was born, is not in fact admired in every corner of the world even today, has always been more open to people who are proficient in English than to others, and at some time in the future may for all we know be totally forgotten, or be admired merely with the same kind of lip-service that is now so often paid to Homer, when Homer is remembered at all. In short, the only way in which an author could ever be presented as of universal reach and significance was by a more or less violent and untruthful imposition.

During the 1820s, Goethe was not immune to utopian longings after all the chaos of the Napoleonic wars, and consequently hit upon his own notion of *Weltliteratur*, the influence of which was to be baneful. Admittedly, Goethe himself was realistic enough to say that the texts so far written in German-speaking regions were unlikely to become part of *Weltliteratur*. German speakers, he observed, could not yet muster the kind of sociopolitical unity and sheer clout that would be needed to project books within a world forum. But German literature was not long without its champions – its admirers of Goethe himself in particular – and as the fire of nationalism swept across the entire continent, Wordsworth's delusional talk of a single "vast empire of human society" soon enough took on its sinister overtone, as literature after literature became ideological weapons in that great contest of competing empires which resulted in the First World War, at which point there appeared *The Spirit of Man: An Anthology in English & French From the Philosophers & Poets made by the Poet Laureate* [Robert Bridges] *& Dedicated by Gracious Permission to His Majesty The King* [George V] – not the slightest suggestion here that anything was to be gleaned about the spirit of man from *German* philosophers and poets! Nor was the Great War the end of it. During the interwar years literary nationalism continued to spread, not least through universities, and not only in their departments for national literatures but in departments of comparative literature as well, for which a perception of the "greatest" books of, in effect, the "greatest" nations as belonging to so-called World Literature was foundational. With the onset of the Cold War, scholars such as Auerbach

began to warn that *Weltliteratur* was all too easily becoming a euphemism for a ubiquitous standardization.

> All human activity is being concentrated either into European-American or into Russian-Bolshevist patterns; no matter how great they seem to us, the differences between the two patterns are comparatively minimal when they are contrasted with the basic patterns underlying the Islamic, Indian or Chinese traditions (Auerbach, 1969 [1952]: 2–3).

Such was the cultural rivalry of empires, all of them insisting that the modern notion of great authors' universality be taken more literally than was really truthful, or trying to make it just a tiny bit less untruthful by imposing their own authors not only on each other but on the colonized peoples they had in effect come to see as their subalterns.

"Subaltern" was to become a postmodern buzzword. Postmodernity was the next phase of western history, and set in at some point between 1800 and 1950, the exact date depending on whom you ask. As Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984 [1979]) helpfully described it, postmodernity was a phase of western history involving a far-reaching crisis of knowledge, politics and culture, which threw in doubt, not only modernity's grand narratives of scientific explanation, but its concomitant political teleologies, with their associated assumptions about identity, legitimation and power. In particular, philosophers such as Stuart Hampshire (1992) and Charles Taylor (1994), together with sociologists and political theoreticians such as Jürgen Habermas (1994), began to call for a politics of recognition which would acknowledge, respect and empower the identity of human beings from every possible kind of background. Small wonder, then, that in postmodern literary and literary-critical discourse the major theme was modernity's counterfactual assumption that great authors belong, or can be made to belong, everywhere and always, and can be more or less forced upon, and can even speak for, all and sundry. J.G. Farrell's novel *The Siege of Krishnapur*, for instance, published in 1973, purports to describe one of the side-shows of the Indian Mutiny of 1857 and has as its high-point what amounts to a black-humour allegory of British cultural imperialism. As the army of native sepoys advances on East India Company's Krishnapur station, the man responsible for defending it runs out of cannon balls. So he starts to load his cannon gun with electrometallic busts of the greatest English authors.

And of all the poets' heads loaded into his cannon gun, the only one to be really effective was Shakespeare's, which, thanks to "the ballistic properties stemming from his baldness", "scythed its way through a whole astonished platoon of sepoys advancing in single file through the jungle" (Farrell, 1975 [1973]: 335).

By the last three or four decades of the twentieth century empires were writing back. Drawing on their own and their ancestors' experience, postmodern writers with roots in peoples that had been colonized and even enslaved were exploring and renegotiating the relationship between imperial power and those it had sought to rule. And during this same period, the postmodern crisis of identity, legitimation and power was also becoming especially acute in some of the world's multicultural urban societies, where communities and interest groupings which had hitherto been marginalized were at last finding their voice. Seen from this point of view, the postmodern climax can be located in the so-called culture wars of the mid-1990s, during which all forms of cultural production, including literature and literary criticism, became a site for the contestation of communal differences. Literary critics of several descriptions – Marxist, post-Marxist, cultural materialist, feminist, gay or queer, ethnic, religious, postcolonial – were now tending to champion particular groupings and to speak, not of a modern-style universal literary canon, but of many different canons for many different readerships. In bookshops, books were actually marketed this way (with shelves for Jewish books, for black women's books, for gay men's books and so on), and in 1995 J. Hillis Miller described what he called the University of Dissensus. For Miller, a postmodern university was not a place where people from many different backgrounds came together in order to negotiate a body of knowledge and wisdom which could be generally accepted. To his mind, the difference between a person from one background and a person from another background was absolute. Difference was, as he put it, all the way down, and the function of a postmodern university was, he said, to make visible and preserve that state of affairs. This, he thought, was the best way to resist what he saw as modernity's sinister commodifying hegemony.

A commodifying hegemony is certainly sinister enough. But even at the height of the culture wars, there were those who would have found Miller's endorsement of all-the-way-down difference just as sinister in its own way. Not least, this could have been the reaction of people belonging to precisely

the categories which the postmodern politics of recognition most sought to benefit. K. Anthony Appiah, speaking from his own experience and feelings as a gay, black male in the United States, seriously questioned the identity which postmodern politics seemed to be scripting for people such as himself.

> If I had to choose between the world of the closet and the world of gay liberation, or between the world of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Black Power, I would, of course, choose in each case the latter. But I would like not to have to choose (Appiah, 1994: 163).

So here again, a utopian aspiration could give rise to a problematic reality. Postmodern intellectuals' and politicians' admirable efforts to guarantee a common dignity for all the identifiable different types of human being could result in a coercive narrowing of the scope for human identity, also throwing radical doubt on the chances for empathetic dialogue between people belonging to different identity groupings. If modernity had been a period of hegemonic universalizations, the postmodern reaction sometimes went to the opposite extreme. It could be very divisive indeed, undermining the communicational foundations for any kind of peaceful coexistence. Such, too, would be the risk taken by commentators on Polish literature if, rejecting the modern aspiration to global reach, they were now to lodge postmodern claims to the effect that Polish writers are quintessentially national, quintessentially regional, or quintessentially continental: that they quintessentially belong to some grouping smaller than a global one, in other words, a grouping which has hitherto been unfairly neglected in discussions world-wide but now deserves full recognition. This could turn out to be the quickest way, not only to circumscribe the freedom of Polish writers, but also to undermine Polish literature's natural outreach as a human product.

Central to the unbeneficial kind of postmodern thinking I have in mind was a reductive ethnic, social, cultural and religious structuralism. Saussure, often credited as structuralism's founding father, would have disapproved. Although he had argued that "language [the structures of *langue*] is not a function of the speaker; it is a product that is passively assimilated by the individual", he had also very clearly seen that "speech [each actual *parole*] ... is an individual act. It is wilful and intellectual" (de Saussure, 1978 [1916]: 14). Some of the leading postmodern thinkers, by contrast, positively downgraded

human individuality, will and intellect, and tended to attribute agency to animated theoretical abstractions such as society, culture, ideology, language. This was the move through which Barthes and Foucault, in alleging the death of the author, reacted against Modernity's elevation of authors to pedestals from which they exercised universal sway. On the extreme postmodern view, writers were simply workers whose production was entirely dictated by the norms of the particular grouping to which they belonged and to whose other members they gave a voice, a history, an identity.

By no means all novelists, poets and dramatists writing during the late twentieth century accepted this historically important but rather limiting role. Perhaps *Roots* (1977 [1976]), Alex Haley's novel about North American slavery, was mainly intended for the Black American canon. But even *Roots* remains a gripping narrative and has been very widely popular, not only as a book but in a television adaptation as well. Still more to the point, Toni Morrison, Caryll Phillips and Fred D'Aguiar, partly dealing with the same kind of material as Haley, and no less insistent of the facts of difference, were unquestionably broad in their addressivity, so encouraging empathy across traditional lines of ethnic and sociocultural division. They were, we could perhaps say, post-postmodern *avant le lettre.* Similarly, K. Anthony Appiah was by no means the only intellectual who, at the very height of the culture wars, had the feeling that postmodernity's reaction to modernity was going too far. Worried about the narrow addressivity of some postmodern writing, Jan Lederveen Pieterse argued that this drawback could be readily counteracted if only writers were to see more of the scope for hybrid identities and rainbow coalitions (Pieterse, 1995). Homi Bhabha even began to revisit the notion of World Literature, his suggestion being that it could perhaps be viewed as

> an emergent, prefigurative category that is concerned with a form of cultural dissensus and alterity, where non-consensual terms of affiliation may be established on the grounds of historical trauma (Bhabha, 1994: 12).

In our post-postmodern third millennium, this vision of World Literature as an affiliation of the historically different was to be borne out not only in books themselves, not only in the way books are now actually being circulated, but also in academic discussion.

The changes thrown up by the postmodern maelstrom were so radical as to propel us into the new era of post-postmodernity. Postmodernity really did help to empower previously underprivileged groupings, so making many large societies a lot more democratic. This brought important long term benefits to the lives of countless individuals, and some very exciting developments in the field of cultural production as well. True, the world is still riven by systematic violence and injustice on an appalling scale, even though political, economic, environmental, and communication-technological developments now constantly remind us that we are all denizens of just a single planet. True, too, conflicts such as those we have recently been witnessing in Syria, Ukraine and Gaza cannot be brushed aside, and the new century's horrendous terrorist attacks against societies trying to make a go of multiculturalism have been especially disheartening from a post-postmodern point of view. Yet even so, the new millenium's post-postmodern mood does include a sense that living side by side with human othernesses not only calls for responsible and decent kinds of behaviour, but should, and could, be rewarding and enjoyable.

Post-postmodern literary intellectuals are working towards a new, non-hegemonic sense of *Weltliteratur*, as a body of texts which are valued, not universally, but within communities (plural) that are indefinitely large and indefinitely heterogeneous. Pieterse's emphasis on hybrid identities and rainbow coalitions has been widely taken up by subsequent commentators, with John Pizer already pointing out in 2000 that

> literature is becoming *immanently* global [...]. [I]ndividual works are increasingly informed and constituted by social, political, and even linguistic trends that are not limited to a single state or region (Pizer, 2000: 213, his italics).

And in applying the notion of *Weltliteratur* to this new situation, post-postmodern scholars' general stance has been one of optimism, tempered with a sharp awareness of possible dangers. No longer falling into postmodernity's narrow determinism, post-postmodern intellectuals rather credit human beings with a certain relative autonomy, as I have tried to explain in much of my own writing (e.g. Sell, 2000, 2011). Seen this way, human beings are paradoxically social individuals who, even though they have no choice but to adapt to social, cultural and linguistic norms of every possible kind, often do so in what proves

to be a successful attempt to get society, culture, language or, in short, other people to adapt to their own projects. All human interaction, all communication, including the writing and reading of so-called literary texts, is in this sense co-adaptational, and the relative human autonomy on which it is predicated is more than enough to rehabilitate the notion of authorship, even if post-postmoderns stop far short of worshipfully placing authors' busts on pedestals. By the same token, while post-postmodern thinkers affirm that a social individual belonging to one grouping has sufficient autonomy of reason, imagination and will to be able to empathize and commune with a social individual belonging to some other grouping, they are also careful not to forget postmodernity's most important lesson: that differences are most certainly real, and can indeed *make* a difference, as we might put it; that one and the same literary text will not be interpreted and valued in one and the same way by all groupings of readers; that sometimes agreement really is to be had only from agreeing to disagree; and that the desire and means to dominate the human other are all too difficult to eradicate. Some post-postmodern commentators have pointed out that, even today, the old canonical classics may continue to attract a disproportionate amount of attention, becoming a kind of "hypercanon" against which the new authors belonging to previously "small" literatures are mustered into a "countercanon" that is merely the hypercanon's shadow (Damrosch, 2004). Others have argued that, in order to remain factually accurate and politically just, literary scholarship does need to uphold some insistence on national and regional distinctions (Chandra, 2008; Lopéz, 2004). Others emphasize that distinctivenesses also need to be maintained in the face of present-day communications technology. As channels for literary texts world-wide, the new digital media clearly have a huge potential. But their formats, and the culture of reading they encourage, could perhaps be too homogenizing (Miller, 2007; Grabovsky, 2004) – too neo-modern, as we could perhaps express this.

In parallel with these literary-theoretical developments, novelists, poets and dramatists are harnessing a utopian impulse towards a renewed politics of recognition. Although, ideally speaking, this would overcome the narrow divisiveness of recognition in some of its postmodern manifestations, here, too, post-postmodernity involves some very realistic qualifications, as in, for instance, Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* of 2005.

On one level, this seems to be a novel about exclusively personal histories, loves, and adulteries. A central character is India, the illegitimate daughter of Maximilian Ophuls, a former United States ambassador to – yes! – India. Both his daughter India and Max himself now live in California, but the story goes back to the period prior to, and during Max's efforts as a diplomat in Kashmir. In the small Kashmiri village of Pachigam, young Shalimar, the actor and clown, had fallen in love with the beautiful young dancer Boonyi, and in due course the couple got married. But Boonyi hankered for a life in a wider world, and had an affair with the exciting Max, who positively doted on her. When she gave birth to his baby, Max had to return to America under something of a cloud and the child was seized by his barren wife to be brought up in England. Shalimar, meanwhile, smarting from Boonyi's betrayal, devoted himself to various Jihadi organizations and in time became a renowned assassin, all in the hope of eventually getting his revenge on the man who had made him so unhappy. After training with insurgent groups in Afghanistan and the Philippines, Shalimar finally left for the USA, though Rushdie also tells us a good deal about several other periods in the life of Max, who, following the death of his parents in a Nazi concentration camp, had been raised in France and became a hero of the French resistance. It was after the war that he married his aristocratic British wife, and after his time in India he ended up as an extremely powerful and mysterious figure at the head of the US counter-terrorism organization. Shalimar, turning up in Los Angeles, gets himself a job as the great man's official chauffeur, takes the opportunity to assassinate him, and at the very end of the novel intends to kill India as well. All of which makes for a very compelling triangle drama, culminating in a crime, and an intended crime, of long-drawn-out passion.

What I have not yet mentioned, however, is that whereas Shalimar was a Muslim, Boonyi was a Hindu, and that their mixed marriage was something that the small Kashmiri village managed to negotiate. Here Rushdie is at his comic best. One of the thorniest issues, for instance, had been to do with the bride's clothes.

> "Obviously," said the groom's side, "when the *yenvool*, the wedding procession, comes to the bride's house, we will expect to be welcomed by a girl in a red *lehenga*, and later, after she is bathed by her family women, she will don a *shalwar-kameez*."
> "Absurd," retorted the Kauls. "She will wear a phiran just like all our brides, embroidered at the neck and cuffs. On her head will be the starched and papery

tarang headgear, and the *haligandun* belt will be round her waist." This standoff lasted three days until Abdullah and Pyarelal decreed that the bride would indeed wear her traditional garb, but so too would Shalimar the clown. No tweed *phiran* for him! No peacock-feathered turban! He would wear an elegant *sherwani* and a *karakuli topi* on his head and that was that (Rushdie, 2005: 113).

But the comedy comes very close to a nostalgia for a centuries-long golden age which had preceded the Partition of India and Pakistan. From that historic turning-point onwards, religious differences began to be ever more violently politicized, and the novel mourns the passing of a multicultural paradise in which successful negotiations and pragmatic goodwill had been commonplace. Between the different groupings there had been, as Rushdie sees things, a down-to-earth harmony within a single, rainbow culture of manifold hybridities.

> The pandits of Kashmir, unlike Brahmins anywhere else in India, happily ate meat. Kashmiri Muslims, perhaps envying the pandits their choice of gods, blurred their faith's austere monotheism by worshipping at the shrines of the valley's many local saints, its pirs. To be a Kashmiri, to have received so incomparable a divine gift, was to value what was shared far more highly than what divided (Rushdie, 2005: 83).

There, then, we have Rushdie's post-postmodern utopia, but he is anything but starry-eyed about it. To the extent that it corresponds with reality at all, he is bitterly aware that its chronotope no longer holds. Yes, he is certainly writing about a globalized world in which, as author, he moves with effortless ease from Kashmir's several legendary and historical phases, to Afghanistan, to the Philippines, to Nazi Germany and wartime France, to post-war England, to present-day California, a world in which he can readily see that "[e]veryone's story ... [is] a part of everyone else's" (p. 269). Yet what humankind as a whole seems to valorize is, not the things which everyone could share, but the things that will divide them, and with inevitably violent consequences. So although everywhere is now "a mirror of everywhere else", this often applies in the grimmest possible sense: "Executions, police brutality, explosions, riots: Los Angeles was beginning to look like wartime Strasbourg; like Kashmir" (p. 356).

Post-postmodernity, in other words, can involve both utopia and tragic realism, as each other's foil. In fact they are dialogue with each other, and not only within the mind of post-postmodern writers, but also within the

co-adaptational give-and-take that develops between such writers and their readers. The paradox is, that when a writer like Rushdie compares notes with readers about human relationships as seen through spectacles of his realistically qualified utopianism, the relationship that blossoms between him and his readers is far closer to the utopian end of the spectrum than any of the relationships bodied forth within his fiction. His own literary community-making is itself melioristic within the real world.

But is post-postmodernity truly as distinctive as I have been suggesting? Well, in some respects it is, but in other respects it is not. If we compare literary-theoretical pronouncements from the post-postmodern new millennium with theoretical pronouncements from the modern and postmodern phases of history, there are very clear differences. Modern theoreticians saw literary authors as enjoying an unlimited autonomy which meant that they could belong universally. Postmodern theory was profoundly suspicious of that claim, and in its most extreme forms saw writers deterministically, as belonging only or mainly to their own particular groupings. Post-postmodern theory sees both writers and members of their audiences as social individuals, inevitably influenced by the configurations of their own historicity, but with relative powers of thought, imagination and empathy which allow writing to cross geographical and historical boundaries and bring about literary communities which are rainbow, hybrid, non-consensual. So much for theoreticians. When it comes to creative writers, however, the differences between the three eras are much less clear. In particular, post-postmodern modes of creativity actually help to highlight two aspects of modern creativity which modern theory tended to overlook.

First, as soon as a novel like *Shalimar the Clown* sets us on the lookout for it, we begin to see that modern writers were no less interested than post-postmodern writers in human individuals as members or potential members of groupings, both smaller groupings and larger. When modern writers portrayed characters in action, they were offering examples of people who somehow or other managed to "make community", to communicate, or who, for whatever reason, did not make community, did not communicate, and modern texts could be just as torn between utopia and reality as post-postmodern writing today.

Secondly, a writer like Rushdie, whose communication with his readers about communicational breakdown is paradoxically so humanly rewarding, can

help us see that modern writers, too, presented themselves, not as the universal dictators we might have expected from late-modern theoretical manifestos such as Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, but as flexible fellow-humans, often positively friendly, sometimes cosmopolitan-minded, mobile even, eclectic, quite possibly sure about some things, but altogether more open-minded about some of the most important issues they touched on, sometimes challenging, sometimes downright difficult, but thereby empowering their addressees to use their own brains (Sell, Borch and Lindgren, 2013).

As an illustration of both these points, take the passage from Wordsworth's *The Prelude* where he has lost sight of the man who is supposed to be guiding him on his walk through a dreary stretch of countryside:

> [...] I saw
> A naked pool that lay beneath the hills,
> The beacon on the summit, and more near
> A girl who bore a pitcher on her head
> And seemed with difficult steps to force her way
> Against the blowing wind. It was in truth
> An ordinary sight, but I should need
> Colours and words that are unknown to man
> To paint the visionary dreariness
> Which, while I looked all round for my lost guide,
> Did at that time invest the naked pool,
> The beacon on the lonely eminence,
> The woman and her garments vexed and tossed
> By the strong wind.
> (Wordsworth, 1970: 9 [1799, I 314–327])

Wordsworth, and a girl with a pitcher on her head! Each in what seems to be their own universe of desolate solipsism, Wordsworth has lost his guide, and the girl seems to have her defining relationship merely with the wind. It is as if Wordsworth and the girl could never belong to a shared human experience except of endless and total solitude. Yet if there is no communication going on within the poem's world of mimesis, and if the mimesis here is all too representative of human life in the real world, Wordsworth's utopian impulse will not accept a total defeat. As author, he tries to bring about a very different state of affairs in his relationship with readers. In his thinking about himself

there certainly is that trace of philosophical idealism; he truly does believe that, as a poet, he has superior powers of imagination; and in face of a passage like this, we would be both churlish and self-impoverishing to deny his assumption some justice. Twice over, both at the beginning and the end of the passage, his eye takes in the ordinary scene, but without imposing ordinary preconceptions or conclusions. Instead, at these two points his writing is epiphanic, instinctual, symbolic, almost apophatic – visionary, to use his own word. Yet as I began to hint earlier, this awesome level of insight could be in tension, creative tension, I can now add, with his egalitarian instincts. One of his most characteristic traits as a poet is that he can bring about a shift into the mundane that is warmly companionable and interesting, channelling a discussion with his readers which is neither trite nor pompous. There in the middle of this passage is his little comment about his rhetorical and linguistic problem, and it is surrounded on either side by the imagistic impersonality of those two amazing sets of lines in which the problem is actually solved, as his eye and his wording each do their work. In the passage as a whole, then, the primitive power of the nearly inarticulate has not been prosified away, yet has nevertheless become a topic of discussion between the gifted, intelligent and cultivated writer and readers who are also credited with some sophistication and human dignity. The net result is a poetry which at once pierces to the marrow and takes us into the poet's friendly confidence, considerably mitigating the starkness of that human disjunction between Wordsworth and the girl "in the story".

Keats (1954: 72) complained that Wordsworth did not understand how much we hate a poem that has a palpable design on us. This, I think, is not entirely fair on Wordsworth. Some postmodern writing – Hayley's *Roots*, for instance – may have had a palpable design on some grouping of readers; it may have tried to persuade them of something. And to come full circle, for all I know there may be contemporary Polish writers who are trying to prove something as well – like those misguided participants in the Iowa Writers Programme, who wanted to prove their own claim on universal attention. But at their best, Wordsworth, Shakespeare and many other writers, including, I have no doubt, many Polish writers, do not fall into the persuasive mode, for the simple reason that they have far too much respect for each and every likely reader. This respect is not something they ingratiatingly wear upon their sleeve. On the contrary, to

the extent that they do end up belonging in several different times and places, it is partly because their human touch is so beautifully inconspicuous. Needless to say, in different cultural milieus many different features will be perceived as intrinsically literary. Fashions do vary from place to place and from time to time, so that literary taste is something of a whirligig. But a respect for readers, even if seldom explicitly recognized, and even if obviously not a *sufficient* precondition, is certainly a *necessary* precondition, if a writer is going to become a literary author long admired by people of different backgrounds and identities (Sell, 2011, 2012, 2013). Respect for other human beings, a frame of mind which the postmoderns deserve the fullest credit for advocating, even if they did not always manage to embody it in their own writing – respect for other human beings does travel well, because what it attracts to itself is respectful responses.

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Where do Literary Authors belong? A Post-postmodern Answer

Summary

Over the past 600 years or so, perceptions of the relationship between literary authors and human communities have undergone considerable change. We can speak of a modern perception, which prevailed from the Renaissance through to the mid-nineteenth century, of a postmodern perception, which reached its zenith during the last decades of the twentieth century, and of a post-postmodern perception, which is gaining ground in the early third millennium. The modern perception was that a great writer could belong to the entire human race, a view which sometimes had strongly utopian overtones, but which also lent itself to imperialistic agendas. The postmodern perception was that writers represented their own narrower communities, a view which, though it respected the autonomy of political, social and cultural groupings that had hitherto been marginalized, could also reinforce communicationally problematic

divisions between one grouping and another. The post-postmodern perception, which the present paper strongly endorses, is that literary writing can be fuelled by both utopian aspirations and a sober realism, in practice helping to bring about communities that are indefinitely large but also non-hegemonic and indefinitely heterogeneous. Perhaps the most important qualification that needs to be added to this three-fold historical schema is that modern writers were no less interested than post-postmodern writers in the isolating disharmonies which can set in between one human being and another, and that they fulfilled a similarly melioristic social function by inviting their addressees to join them in a genuinely human relationship. In the paper, all these matters are explored by reference to Polish literature as seen by Polish literary scholars, and to Anglophone literary texts by, among others, John Beaumont (d. 1627), Wordsworth, and Salman Rushdie.