



Originally published in "Porównania" 9/2011, p. 13-43.

CANON, ANTI-CANON AND POST-CANON IN THE DISCOURSE ON IDENTITY OF CULTURES IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE (1991-2011)¹

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Keywords: canon, anti-canon, post-canon, transformation identity, Central Europe, East Europe

Slowa kluczowe: kanon, antykanon, postkanon, transformacja, tożsamość, Europa Środkowa, Europa Wschodnia

Abstrakt: Bogusław Bakuła, CANON, ANTI-CANON AND POST-CANON IN THE DISCOURSE ON IDENTITY OF CULTURES IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE (1991-2011). "Comparisons" 9, 2011, p. 13-43, ISSN 1733-165X. The article discusses the issues of canon and anti-canon in the debate on identity, tradition and contemporaneity on the basis of chosen examples from literature and arts in Poland, the Czech Republic, Ukraine and Russia. The author distinguishes two basic forms of anti-canonical: official (anti-canonical which takes part in the culture game) and situational (anti-canonical which is a form of stigmatisation) and three basic attitudes towards the canon: illustrative, essentialist, antiessentialist. The chosen discussion in the four cultural areas provide material for the analysis of the contemporary discourse on identity based on the issue of canon. The last form of canonicity distinguished in the article is the post-canonical which functions outside of hitherto undertaken debates on value and identity perceived as ideological. It is a new form of relationship between art and axiology, hierarchy and power, represented by the canon. It is included in the widely understood concept of fluctuating reality, in which the most important aspect is the presence, creativity and experience, whereas the demonstration of position is less valued.

Abstrakt: Bogusław Bakuła, KANON, ANTYKANON I POSTKANON W DYSKURSIE O TOŻSAMOŚCI KULTUR W EUROPIE ŚRODKOWEJ I WSCHODNIEJ (1991-2011). „PORÓWNANIA” 9, 2011, s. 13-43, ISSN 1733-165X. Artykuł podejmuje zagadnienie kanonu i antykanonu w debacie o tożsamości, tradycji i współczesności na wybranych przykładach z literatury i sztuki w Polsce, Czechach, Ukrainie i Rosji. Autor wyodrębnia dwie zasadnicze formy antykanonu: oficjalny (antykanon, który bierze udział w grze kulturowej) i sytuacyjny (anykanon jako forma piętnowania) oraz trzy zasadnicze postawy wobec kanonu: lustracyjną, esencjalistyczną, antyesencjalistyczną. Wybrane dyskusje w czterech obszarach kulturowych dostarczają materiału do analizy współczesnego dyskursu o tożsamości w oparciu o problem kanonu. Ostatnią formą kanoniczności wyodrębnioną w artykule jest postkanon, który funkcjonuje poza dotychczasowymi sporami o wartość i tożsamość pojmovanymi ideologicznie. Jest nową formą stosunku sztuki do aksjologii, hierarchii i władzy, reprezentowanej przez kanon. Mieści się w szeroko rozumianej koncepcji płynnej rzeczywistości, w której liczy się przede wszystkim obecność, twórczość i przeżycie, a demonstracja pozycji ma zdecydowanie mniejsze znaczenie.

¹ Przekład pracy naukowej sfinansowany w ramach programu Ministra Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego pod nazwą „Narodowy Program Rozwoju Humanistyki” w latach 2012-2013.

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Transformation and canons

In December 2011 we celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the definite fall of communism associated with the peaceful termination of the Soviet Union³. This was the time of creating and augmenting the different culture base of the former dominium, separately for each country and almost each nation. We witnessed numerous and heated internal debates on world outlook in and between some of the countries of the post-communist region. We also observed crises that extended over vast areas of their cultures, particularly the sensitive areas of arts and education that have a significant impact on the shaping of canons. We saw the rise and fall of new authorities, the destruction, the reinterpretation of both texts and the achievements of particular people, including those still alive. The art of those times, though in all sorts of crises, managed not to get pushed aside and remained in the area of public debate. According to the Poznań-based researcher Piotr Piotrowski, it is characterised by a sensitive agoraphilia⁴. It conveys the particular interest in the existence of artistic symbolism in the public domain. It deals with important issues that refer to the national and religious domains, group identity, tradition and the role of the individual in relation with the above mentioned phenomena. All these processes and proofs coincide and diverge if observed from the perspective of culture which, although having its roots in the basic sources of group identity, is also sociologically and politically conditioned. It is a question of culture and awareness shaped in such a way that they introduce a certain hierarchy of events and values, impose themselves and are imposed by the historical pattern and its particular social, political, intellectual or even religious forces. Doubtlessly the canon of culture is one of such conditionings. In Central and Eastern Europe it is formulated most fully in literature (and contemporarily in its film adaptation) and in historiography, but also updated by the fine arts and a wide range of visual culture. This topic has been analysed on a number of occasions in each country in Central and Eastern Europe; however, they are in want of a broadened synthesis. The aim of my own ideas presented here is far less modest and boils down to

³ The decision on the termination of the Soviet Union that was signed on the 8th of December 1991 released social and political energy hitherto suppressed in Eastern Europe. It initiated emancipatory movements and the process of nation creation to an extent not commonly found in history. Eventually it became a trigger for faster change in Central Europe. It is worth mentioning that the termination took place within the borders of Belarus, the last stronghold of sovietism in Europe.

⁴ Cf. P. Piotrowski, *Agorafilia. Sztuka i demokracja w postkomunistycznej Europie*. Dom Wydawniczy Rebis, Poznań 2010, pp. 297.

referring to particular phenomena and formulating on their basis some conclusions that point not only to the special significance of the debate on canons in the culture of the post-communist area, but also to the value of the notion of canon today, despite its seeming research “obsolescence”.

The transformation processes in the years 1991-2011 released, once more, the force of political and cultural thought on the status and significance of their own traditions, the place of the nation, the role of the society and the possibilities for dialogue between Central and Eastern Europe and the world of Western Europe. Of utmost importance seemed the possibilities for combining these traditions with a simultaneous modernisation of their own culture and social life.

The reason for the initiation of discussions on the canon is the formation of a new shape of culture, in which literature and other traditionally understood arts lose their current central artistic and moral position. They have to cope with their past, face new style configurations and the media that continuously diminish the importance of the artistic word for the benefit of information and advertising. In the Central European debates on canon, the issues of style and text competition seem a background for moral and ideological disputes that are set in the recent past. The dispute on the canon goes beyond texts and becomes a war of individuals and groups as it pertains to the conflict of attitudes towards life and the position taken up by many contemporary institutions and authorities.

It ought to be remembered that the discussion on the content and value of the canon of culture during the times of crisis of the communist regime and then during its fall that is important for our times already took place in the 1970s and 1980s in the Samizdat press and circles of opposition against the Soviet Union, in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia (and also many times before in previous eras). Among the most important journalistic voices on the canon of culture, the rules of group life, group identity and the moral aspects of the discussion that is lead outside the censorship, in conditions of repression, the following works should be mentioned: the Ukrainian intellectual, Ivan Dziuba's *Internatsionalism chy rusifikatsiya? [Internationalism or Rusification?]* (1965), Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Archipelag Gulag [The Gulag Archipelago, 1973]*, Václav Černý's, *On the character of our culture [O povaze náší kultury, 1975]*, Jan Patočka's *Who are the Czechs? [Co jsou Češi?, 1977]*, Václav Havel's *The Power of the Powerless [Moc bezmocných, 1978]*, essays of the Slovak intellectualists Milan Šimečka and Pavol Strauss, Adam Michnik's *From the history of honour in Poland [Z dziejów honoru w Polsce, 1985]*, Györgi Konrád's *Anti-politics [Antipolitik, 1985]*, Bohdan

Cywiński's book on the situation of the church in Eastern Europe, *Trials with fire [Ogniem próbowane]*, 1982], widely commented on statements about Central Europe by Milan Kundera, Emil Cioran, Adam Zagajewski and other intellectuals, writers and artists. These texts quickly became the literary canon for, at least, the anticommunist opposition in different countries of real socialism, but its existence among a wider readership began after 1989. In other words, the contemporary discussion on canons has been carried on continuously though in different degrees of intensity. The thesis of its discontinuity during the times of communism and its replacement by a legitimate debate inspired by the regime is not confirmed. This means that the discussion in Central and Eastern Europe on this topic is not merely a result of a reception of trendy Western debates (Harold Bloom⁵, Samuel Huntington, Francis Fukuyama) but also possesses its own deep sources and traditions rooted mainly in the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries.

The discussions on the canon of culture have been accompanied by disputes of a historical, political and ethical nature since 1991. They show far-reaching differentiation in the assessment of what should constitute the basis for a group, national and social identity in the new post-communist reality. Even greater disputes and emotions have been raised by the assessment of canonical texts and their contemporary interpretations, in which canonicity clashes with the outlook and the philosophical postulate of the unobviousness of each interpretation and the understanding of the world in terms of Baumann's idea of a flexible image of the world. The central issue is then the discussion on the functioning and interpretation of the canon as a phenomenon that, on the one hand, guarantees coherence of the collective memory and identity in the world that does away with hitherto applied rules, and, on the other hand, limits to a degree the liberty of thinking and creating by enforcing particular axiological hierarchies and duties.

It should be noted that Central and Eastern Europe is a world that is relatively conservative and sensitive to the status and reception of own national, cultural and religious symbolism. In Central and Eastern European cultures the position of the texts and collective ideas of the past deemed canonical are unwillingly disputed. Many countries and societies of this region react nervously towards critical presentations of their image in the international

⁵ In Poland the discussion on canons took place in the context of H. Bloom's work, still untranslated, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (1994) and previous translated work *The Anxiety of Influence* (2002). Bloom's work was translated in 2000 in the Czech Republic and in 2006 in Ukraine. It was also widely commented on in Hungary as well as in Russia.

press, but this type of emotions are not new to mature democracies, where freedom of speech and respect for different opinions have a more established tradition. The nations of Central and Eastern Europe have come a long way from a social and political defensive autism that included painful silence, rejection of criticism, traumatic awareness of enslavement and internal aggression, towards nomadic openness and dialogue. However, over half a century (since 1939) of isolation and antagonisms that condemn a country to historical loneliness and deep dependence on external empires and a downgraded political and economical system still have consequences in the uncertainty of assessment of their own situation. This also leads to an emotional approach to self-image, including its core matter, that is the canon, both internally as well as in international and intercultural relations⁶.

Decentralisation and later significant limitation or total rejection of imperialistic Soviet narration in Central and Eastern Europe enabled the development of anti- or post-colonialist narrations. It also meant a return of the debate on the reappearance of a particular form of self-greatness, importance, authority, both of the nation as well as the country. It usually boils down to a sudden increase of the rank of national tradition and its location outside the context of enslavement and colonisation. Hence, we see that, simultaneously to decentralising post-colonial narratives, there appear or are recreated narrations that are strongly centralising and that express national “dreams of power”. This is the reason for returns to founding myths, rhetoric and historical symbolism. It changed the assessment of hitherto functioning historical or literary canons that create the main plain of cultural identity of almost all Central and Eastern European nation. A weakening of the imperial narration intensified the pressure to, on the one hand, foster national narratives, even in Russia, and on the other hand, to create narratives in order to transform the current cultural system. In this way there crystallises a dispute between the revitalised canon and an energy of critical narratives that disturb its form. It could be said that the dispute between the canon and the anti-canonical, though this opposition is, as any, a great simplification of a current situation that does not allow us to boil it down to a binary system of phenomena and values. Skepticism on the part of historians towards

⁶ The extent of the irritation that this issue inspires can be seen in the reaction stirred by the provocative work of David Černý in January 2008 under the title of “Entropa”, exhibited in the building of the Council of the European Union in Brussels. “Entropa” evoked a reaction by many governments and societies that protested against the images which were said to be offensive to their national feelings.

traditional national narratives⁷ of the past is not common, nor is their unconditional acceptance. Literary historians have a similar attitude towards categories of the so-called development, destructive innovations, and landmark, treated as basic criteria that distinguish a literary epoch or national literature. The debate on the canon proves that these criteria can be viewed differently⁸.

The years 1989-2009 mark a special period for the history of the canon in Central and Eastern Europe for two reasons. Traditional values and hierarchies of the culture ruined by communism were being rebuilt and remnants of the previous era were being removed – quite a laborious de-communisation⁹ – but simultaneously a change of interpretation of different elements of the canon that are in the process of reinstitution, since many fixed, innate and national interpretations ceased to reflect the changing historical conditions. The monumental figures from the personal canon that were ardently defended from the communist propaganda have been noticeably scratched. The “sacred” texts undergo reinterpretation because it turned out that unambiguity turned out to be impossible to maintain in the democratic world. It does not mean a radical change of their position, especially for the national canon, but frequently means an enrichment, a supplement of that which was previously prohibited, not written about, not publicly known, which public opinion treated with silence, as harmful to the coherence of the national image in the communist conditions. E.g. the monumental figure of Józef Piłsudski, the creator of reborn Poland, whose face in the 1980s was put onto the countenance of Lech Wałęsa on underground posters and stamps. However, during 1991-2011 it went out of the limelight and the socialist views of the creator of the country, his inclinations towards the concept of terror during the times of the partitions (though anti-tsar, yet still terror), and finally the Evangelical relation and conversion after the Catholic marriage with his first wife, were remembered. During the times of the atmosphere for the correctness

⁷ It is described by M. van Hagen in the article *Empires, Borderlands, and Diasporas: Eurasia as Anti Paradigm for the Post-Soviet Era*. “The American Historical Review”, Vol. 109, Issue 2, p. 5-6. <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/109.2/hagen.html>; 4.07.2009.15.33.

⁸ Poza kanon romantyczny wychodzi Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz, poeta, historyk literatury. The discussion is led by Cezary Michalski and Maciej Nowicki. “Dziennik Europa”, 3/08/2005. ”The Canon of the Polish literature is defined by two great figures – one of them is at the beginning, the other one at the end of the canon. The Polish literature begins with Kochanowski and ends with Leśmian. All the other works in the Polish literature are measured against the works of these great authors. They are the touchstone. What follows, is that all that has been written in Polish is slightly worse than what they wrote.”

⁹ The famous Budapest Moscow Square (Moszkvá tér) was one of the last symbolic victims of the de-communisation process. Its name was changed in 2011. Today the square is called after one of the Hungarian finance ministers from the interwar period – Szél Kalman Square. The proposal to call the square after John Paul II was rejected by the national right-wing.

of the Polish-Catholic canon, these became a pretext for less apologetic opinions on Józef Piłsudski. Czech publicists have noticed scratches on the monumentalised figure of T. G. Masaryk, who is being reproached for his pettiness, officious mentality, narrow-minded bourgeois morals, geopolitical limitations, e.g. aversion towards neighbours, particularly Poland and Germany¹⁰ and naïve russophilia. However, none of these great political movements in both countries hang any names or political views connected with those names on their banners. Their canonicity and popularity is not subject to discussion, but the content of the canonised “capsule” has become the subject matter of interpretative processing that goes beyond the hitherto sacralised image.

In the years 1989-2009 post-communist Europe oscillates between a closed and an open form of canon which is visible in the configuration of political power, social divisions and extremely different attitudes towards tradition and never-ending debates on who represents the nation and who cannot do it. Simultaneously, new geopolitical conditions (partnership and later on membership in the European Union) made it obvious that discussions on the canon, particularly the political and national ones, are attentively observed by “old Europe”. They are translated into decisions of greater importance, thus their frequency and magnitude are not merely an internal matter of each country or group of nations (regarding nationality) but also pertain to the world of European opinion. Especially the explicit reactions of “old Europe” when phenomena such as nationalism, xenophobia, homophobia, and religious extremism are incorporated into the canon of culture, which proves that the canonical traditions of the new member states derived from the 19th century and based on patriarchal relations and values mixed with practices of intolerance developed during the times of communism, and definitely require a new formation which will link their culture and social sensitivity in a much stronger way with European output.

In Central and Eastern Europe the most important part of the canon of culture is the so-called national literature that was usually created in the 19th century after a historical cataclysm such as the first and second world wars, after the emigration of 1945-1989 and, of course, partly, during the reign of communism. This canon is not only subject to changes of political origin. It is also influenced by different transformations of culture and civilisation including technological processes that widen and deepen the area of national culture on the

¹⁰ Cf. E.g. M. Bednář, *České myšlení*. Filosofia, Praha 1996.

one hand, and on the other hand, result in a change in sensitivity and expectations of the greatest observance of the given culture. In the times of a slow comedown of logocentrism, the place of literary works, less and less understood by the young generations, is taken up by the icons that visualise the world of culture and force a hypertextual approach. This process leads to a disappearance of the canon in its 19th century form on which the whole debate in the 1990s started. It also results in the appearance of new questions on the functioning of the identity discourse.

In the 1990s many discussions on canons initially included a widely understood contemporaneity, particularly the times of communism, then went on to the not so much less difficult area of the second world war in order to go even deeper into the history, reach the roots of the national awareness, national myths derived not so much from history but literature or folklore. A deep pre-Christian past turned out to be important for Slovaks and Ukrainians. They derived their founding myths, individuality and national identity from this past (proto-Slavic, Great Moravia, Scyths) but also the 19th century that was crucial for the rebirth of these nations. The rebuilding of founding myths in these cases means not only a construction of their own continuity but also a forceful act of negating views that blur the national identity (Ukrainians as “smaller” Russians; Slovaks as a slavicised Hungarian minority). The discussion on communism in these countries does not fade away. Although apart from some particular examples and problems it still does not constitute a significant topic for discussion. Similarly in the whole post-Soviet region in which de-communisation is rather a result of a natural change of generations than political decisions. Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary seem to be different in this respect. Here the certainty of the essence of the “old” canon after 1989 results in a change of focus of the intellectual elites and opinion-creating centres that build the collective identity on spiritual and moral issues, and the aspect of the real leadership which is or is not legitimised depending on the extent of intimacy with the communist regime. In other words, these countries experience with different luck in terms of legislation, e.g. the lustration debate that leads to changes with respect to historical assessment or interpretation of texts that are still deemed important for the collective awareness, particularly from the last half a century (the lustration canon). What is more, there is other significant and equally important thought on the functioning of collectivity and individuals during the times of the second world war, which leads to a verification of propaganda opinions spurred in the years 1945-1989 or simply filling out “white spots”. This

changes the image of the past and must undoubtedly result in certain movements in the fundamental sphere that is created by the attachment of the collectivity to chosen attitudes, events or texts. The debate around the deep canon and the canon of contemporaneity do not exhaust the entirety of the issue. The third plain of discussion that is common for all Central and Eastern European countries is the debate on how to write history, so on language, material and argumentation that has been carried for years due to the changes that have been taking place in the hard canons (history) and soft canons (contemporaneity) in the state of historical knowledge and its methodology.

Theoretical opinions on the canon

Alastair Fowler distinguished six categories of the literary canon: potential, contemporary, official, individual, classics of culture, and critical¹¹. The number of distinguishing criteria and possibilities of the existence of canons make one realise that fighting them in the name of the one and only ideological version cannot be short or simple. Another Anglo-Saxon author, Wendel V. Harris, distinguishes between two figures of canon: diachronic and synchronic¹². It is understandable that the greatest changes always take part in the contemporary and synchronic canons. It is here that the dispute on who should administer the canon takes place. It also includes a kind of political, religious, pedagogical, moral, etc. power. Valentine Cunningham and Michel Foucault greatly link the existence of canon with power, or even a kind of violence. Canonicity, according to the former, means hegemony, elitism, centre, adequacy, light, orthodoxy, distance from the Others. Hence, it can be a function of a given institution of power: “Canons have served the prevalent ideologies: nationalistic, patriarchal, capitalist, the power of the white people, colonial, Stalinist, feminist (...) that supported the stories and histories of those who currently have power...”¹³ Due to pressure from those who rule there appear canons that are “ideologically forced”¹⁴ – adds the Czech researcher of this issue, Šárka Bubíková. Wendel V. Harris, on the other hand, writes that: “there is no uniform process of canon formation but rather there is a constant choice of texts”¹⁵, towards given needs, that control the creation of canons. A canon is a list for reciting, an instrument of social and national pedagogy, some kind of essential extract of the national

¹¹ A. Fowler, *Genre and the Literary Canon*. “New Literary History” 1979, No. 11, pp. 97-119.

¹² W. V. Harris, *Canonicity*. PMLA [Publications of the Modern Language Association] 1991, No 106, p. 110-121.

¹³ V. Cunningham, *Canons*, in: Red. D. Barratt, R. Pooley, L. Ryken, “The Discerning Reader”, Baker Books 1995, p. 42.

¹⁴ Š. Bubíková, *Literatura v Ameryce, Ameryka v literatuře. Proměny amerického literárního kánonu*. Pavel Mervart, Univerzita Pardubice, Pardubice 2007, p. 28.

¹⁵ W. V. Harris, *Canonicity*, ibidem, p. 118.

autostereotype that partly functions beyond aesthetics because it answers more than the artistic needs of the group. Opinions on this topic are equally varied as the recipient's substantiations that result from an infinite number of needs that are raised towards the authority. Undoubtedly, apart from all the differences in the understanding, each concept of canon is based on the idea of a unifying and demanding Authority.

Retrieving the lost canon in Central and Eastern Europe together with the process of reconanisation that is moving texts, images and figures, putting them in places they were taken from, mostly have a political origin. The reason is politically understood identity that was created after the axiological emptiness. There appears revindication and reconanisation that refers to previous exclusion of such events as prohibited links with the church and religion, the existence and activity of emigration, taking part in oppositional activity or sentencing for manifesting an independent political attitude. Revindication and reconanisation that evoke previously rejected or omitted phenomena of an aesthetical, philosophical or religious character are rare. Nevertheless, they also took place in Central Europe, e.g. the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche that was previously perceived as wrong, the return of previously eliminated literary catholic modernism in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the return of the works of Imre Kertész and Sándor Márai in Hungary, the restitution of Czesław Miłosz, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Josif Brodski, the renaissance of the position and thought of the Ukrainian philosopher of the 18th century Grygoriy Skovoroda that is essential in the process of identity isolation in Ukrainian culture and science. We do not think about occasional canons that are created for emergency use, of a transitory nature, but of a stable structure of images and values that serve as a mirror of the group that has shaped it. As Yuri Lotman would have said, each canon is an auto-model of its culture. The changes to a canon are an effect of the changes in the hierarchy of culture, genres and most respected narrations. Due to the fact that there is a possibility in which different canons exist, it also has to be assumed that culture is a composition of many different symbolic and ideological structures that pressure each other. It also means a coexistence of different auto-models, i.e. essentialist images of culture, between which there is a significant competition. Essentiality determines the debate on truth, hierarchy, domination. Then, the canon as an auto-model is an opposition to the anti-canonical image that is shoved from or included in the main domain of essentiality, in which case it competes with the canon, deconstructing it in the dispute on its own position in culture.

Anti-canons

In the atmosphere of a disordering of rules and a noticeable expectation of new attitudes and phenomena when contemporarily many canons are appearing and competing with one another, the public focus is drawn not only by decanonisations or reconanonisation, but also by such proposals that can be called anti-canonicals. Even more so, because they have a much greater media coverage than the discussions on the traditional image of culture in which there takes place an exchange of the particular elements though the structure and the internal coherence is maintained. I omit versions of anti-canonical which are judged to be illegal or are a proposal from extremist groups or subcultures (e.g. satanism, neopaganism, neonazism, racism). It boils down to such an understanding of the anti-canonical which takes the form of open polemics with official canons but respect the ground rules of culture and law. In the years 1945-1989 the anti-canonical opposed the official communist doctrine and had a conservative and preservative character. Its anti-canonicality was merely essentialist. This anti-canonical has presently taken the place of one of the canons and its spot has been filled by new phenomena also of situational character. These are attitudes and texts that are essentially against the official canon but also those that have been shoved away to the anti-canonical as a result of rejection and stigmatisation. The works of the Polish historian Jan Tomasz Gross, the works of the Russian author Victor Erofeev, the prose by Manuela Gretkowska, the installations by David Černy, the poetry of the Bu-Ba-Bu group and the poetry of the Polish brutalists from the 1990s., are examples of anti-canonical in the first essentialist understanding, whereas polemic plastic works such as *Female bath [Łaźnia żeńska, 1997]* and *Male bath [Łaźnia męska, 1999]* by Katarzyna Kozyra and *Passion [Pasja,* exhibited in 2001] by Dorota Nieznalska, have been stigmatised and have become the anti-canonical not because of ideological opposition towards the centre (maintaining the structure), but on the basis of exclusion from the public debate (anti-canonical as stigmatisation) This allows them to use repression towards such actions in the form of censorship, or even acts of aggression towards the works and authors shoved into this category. This means that other criteria are used in reference to these texts and the effect is that they are shoved into a closed category of ghettoised anti-canonical scandal. Two categories of anti-canonical scandal can be distinguished. Scandal that promotes and constitutes the first stage on the path towards the contemporary canon or scandal that closes this path because it deviates too greatly from the recognised moral and social norms. The work by Piotr Uklański *Nazis [Naziści, 2000]* exhibited in “Zachęta” in Warsaw depicts 163 images of well-known actors that are represented as Nazis. It has been unanimously

stigmatised by public opinion and condemned to a sort of anti-canonical ghetto. Daniel Olbrychski's reaction, who as a form of protest ruined his own image with a sabre in the exhibition on 17 October 2000, became part of the essentialist anti-canon that refers to cultural and moral norms that are in force in the world of the canon. It could be better understood and forgiven by the Polish viewership as an act of defending values hitherto protected rather than a more sophisticated form of provocation by Ukiński¹⁶. An example of shoving a piece of art into situational and stigmatised anti-canonicity is the event related with the sculpture by Maurizio Cattelan *The Ninth Hour* (1999) that took place in December 2000. The sculpture represented John Paul II weighed down by a meteorite exhibited at Wystawa Jubileuszowa on the hundredth anniversary of "Zachęta". First, Wojciech Cejrowski, the rightist publicist, tried to cover the sculpture with white linen, then on the 21st of December, the MP Witold Tomczak, took away the rock from the pope's figure. The exhibition of *Passion* by Dorota Nieznalska ended with the artist's arrest, a trial, a guilty verdict, and finally acquittal. It spawned a 10-year long debate during which the work itself was hidden due to the situation that arose around it. The discussion on many known works from Polish and European critical art (by Maurizio Cattelan, Dorota Nieznalska, Katarzyna Kozyra, Piotr Ukiński, Rafał Jakubowicz, Peter Fuss, and others) that oscillates between essentialist and situational anti-canonicity has been carried on until today. Its core matter is the discrepancy in the understanding of the area of public debate and the aim and sense of debating. Some think that we should assume explicitly stated rules of aesthetic and ethical boundaries beyond which the debate cannot be taken, thus leading to the protection of the canon. These are the proponents of an unambiguous relation of canon – anti-canon in which the second element of the system is equally strongly determined as the first one and respects the rules of the game of symbols, the generally accepted axiology. Such a character can be seen in the discussion between the followers of the ingrained and illustrative concept of the history of literature from the second half of the 20th century. Today's literature lacks explicit examples of the existence of the stigmatised anti-canon that provokes a physical or juridical response in the participants of the debate. In fact, the other type of canon is critically aimed at the official essentialist anti-canon. Referring the critical relations directly to the canon, instead of the essentialist anti-canon, is an effect of wrong understanding and brings about social repression. *Neighbours* [Sąsiedzi 2000] by Jan T. Gross, which is a work on the crime committed by the Poles and

¹⁶ Up till the point of its purchase by Roman Opalka in August 2011, P. Ukiński's work reached the highest price for a work by a living Polish artist.

Germans on the Jewish inhabitants of Jedwabne, was situated on the border of the two canons. The laborious upping of this statement from the area of the stigmatised anti-canonical to the rank of the official oppositional discourse, anti-canonical towards the dominant narration on the times of war and the occupation of the Polish land by two totalitarian regimes, is proof of the changes in the Polish awareness and culture that have been taking place in the recent years. There has been a partial discharge of traumatic reactions, a change in the defensive and isolationist attitudes, to the benefit of greater openness and voice for oppositional narrations. The existence of the anti-canonical and the game between anti-canons is of great importance because it pressures the cultural centre, and transforms in one way or another the identity connected with it. The transformation is not a value in itself, but if it is included in the modernist discourse, it does not refer entirely to the symbolic sphere but exerts a particular influence on the functioning of the society, and its ability to take on other challenges, also the civilisational ones.

The amount of texts shoved outside the area of official acceptance due to social or religious norm violation shows the great internal differentiation of attitudes towards the canon, and not only in Poland. The Polish reactions towards desacralising art, and particularly religious symbols and the sanctified historical layer, points to a strong attachment of the Polish viewership to traditional interpretations of the national and religious model of culture.

The imminent changes in the Central and Eastern European canons, i.a., by means of the existence of the two anti-canonicities, have many different directions. They refer to:

1/ the position of important texts and events, e.g, the reinterpretation of the national classics: *Mr Tadeuš* [*Pan Tadeusz*] by Adam Mickiewicz, *May* [*Máj*] by Karel Hynek Mácha, *Kobzar* [*Kobzar*] by Taras Shevchenko, *Eugene Onegin* [*Jevgeniy Onegin*] by Alexandre Pushkin; other than traditionally sanctioned readings of the national uprisings, historical and artistic turning points that are viewed by future generations as points of reference;

2/ evaluation of historical figures: a/ revisions of the activity of politicians Józef Piłsudski, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, Roman Dmowski, Edvard Beneš, Miklós Horthy, Stepan Bandera, Andriy Vlasov; b/ revisions of assessment of well-known figures from the literary world, starting with romanticists Mickiewicz, Shevchenko, Pushkin, Mácha, including a whole array of controversial figures such as Stanisław Brzozowski, Karel Sabina, finishing with the loud, contemporary illustrative cases of Milan Kundera, Ryszard Kapuściński, and Günter Grass. Such revision is effective when it comes to politicians; however, with artists it

seems to have no particular ordering effect. Even extremist habits, a usually exuberant erotic life, alcoholism or even homosexuality and its derivatives, deviations, craziness, hidden and then exhibited for public view, cannot change the evaluation of the figures if the figure has been included in the canon for services to the nation. It can be said that popularising a given figure strengthens their place in the canon which is calculated on the basis of popularity;

3/ the significance of symbols: a/ national, b/ religious, c/ customs (Katarzyna Kozyra, Dorota Nieznalska, David Černý and other representatives of critical art and literature of provocation);

4/ the content and hierarchy in the realm of collective memory: a/ nostalgia and resentment after historical changes, particularly the memory of territories lost, nations murdered and generations missing, b/ tabooing and ousting from collective memory their own violations of moral and ethical norms, symbols for which there are names that stand for genocide such as Jedwabne, Volyń, Katyń, Dobronin, Lověšice and many others. Violating the tabooed collective memory provokes general emotional reactions and rejection: the Czechs only recently have become aware of the crimes committed by Germans after the second world war; the Poles react emotionally towards studies on Jews during the second world war; the Ukrainians do not want to discuss the tragedy in Volyń; the Russians reject information on Katyń; the Hungarians who, to a certain extent, pass over in silence crimes committed on Jews by the Arrow Cross Party... the second world war continues to be an issue.

5/ the place of texts that canonise the canon and stir a commotion within the metacanon; these are historical texts that include a particular form of the history of the nation, literature, or art but also constitute a starting point for discussion: works by František Palacký, Adam Mickiewicz, L'udovit Štrú, Mykhailo Grushevskyi, Tomáš G. Masaryk, national histories of literature, scientific or political arrangements in terms of national schools in painting, music and architecture.

6/ the place of minority cultures in the dominating national discourse which in a sense has to limit itself and make place for Others (e.g. the Romany in Central Europe, disappearing nations and nationalities such as Sorbs or Lemkos).

There is no doubt that in each post-communist country the debate on canons and its consequences looks slightly different. In order to illustrate this variety I have chosen four versions of the debate on the literary and historical canon – in Poland, the Czech Republic, Ukraine and Russia. These are not complete reconstructions of the debates that are carried on constantly, because this would require a separate comparative work which I have not written

yet. I merely attempt to describe examples that illustrate the changes that have been taking place in basic interpretations. Avoiding the temptation to describe the whole issue, certain dominant aspects of the discussion that constitute characteristic components of the historical and cultural awareness are still worth stressing.

“Domestic disgrace” and “memory of the borderland” as vocalisations of canonicity in Poland.

Thus far sociology has reluctantly described collective autism as an aggressive and defensive reaction mechanism towards activities that violate the coherence of the world outlook employed¹⁷. Autism is a metaphor of behaviour that is a consequence of war, oppression of the nation, terror, and political suppression. Behaviour born in social communication resembles autism: the silenced majority communicate by means of a code only known to them. Forced to defend the state, their memory buries deep down what seems important and proves their identity. There is sometimes an unforeseen outbreak of aggression after which the apparent lethargy swoops down again. A part of Polish culture after 1989, as well as any other Central or Eastern European culture, is in this sense autistic, not prone to open discussion on “basic” topics. Its proponents formulate claims on moral rebirth, rejection of post-communism and liberalism that threaten national coherence. They are not understood, they are loose with other opinions, they seal their own truth off from others, thus deepening the lack of understanding in the world. The state of collective autism is probably more difficult to treat than individual therapy. It is also at greater risk of conflict. Great “autistic” groups – Polish society can be deemed as one since it bears the memory of two centuries worth of oppression – treats projects of quick culture and the modernisation of awareness cautiously. They change their attitudes slowly and not necessarily in the direction determined by Brussels or any other main European capital. Today they are criticised for that.

These attitudes strengthened in Poland after 2005, when a rightist party won the parliamentary elections and began updating the issue of lustration in all possible manners, which led to an interest in the settlement of the accounts for the past and the “domestic disgrace”. The last notion, taken from the title of the second circulation book by Jacek Trznadel which was comprised of interviews with authors that had taken part in the creation

¹⁷ I wrote about this in the book *Historia i komparatystyka. Szkice o kulturze i literaturze Europy Środkowej i Wschodniej w XX wieku*. Wyd. Poznańskich „Studiów Polonistycznych”, Poznań 2000.

and propagation of Stalinist culture, is used to denote the entirety of issues connected with the active participation of figures from the intellectual and artistic establishment in that past¹⁸. The notion stretches beyond the 50s and today functions as a synonym of collaboration and servility also during the times of occupation and the behaviour of intellectuals and artists after 1956. The lustrative aspect of the systemic transformation in the realm of culture is not only pertinent to Poland as can be exemplified by the great names of Central European culture: Milan Kundera, István Szábo and Günter Grass.

It seems that there are two dominating orders of canonising in the Polish discussion on the contemporary canon. The first canon is the one set by the society and is aimed at renewing the topic of the so called “domestic disgrace”. In the 1990s this topic was heavily influenced by the journalistic work of Jacek Trznadel, Jan Prokop, Wiesław Paweł Szymański, Andrzej Nowak and others¹⁹. According to Michał Głowiński, it can be called an attempt at establishing a “lustrative canon” in the Polish culture after 1989²⁰. The other order, also autistic, is based on the significance of the recurring discourse on borderland in the Polish culture after 1989. It became a canonical, though not official, discourse in the years 1945-1989 and then was enthroned as a symbol of patriotism and national sacrifice. Thus, it joins the historical discourse on the culture of the borderland and constitutes an important component of contemporary Polish culture.

Within the first lustrative discussion all the Polish Nobel prize winners including Lech, Wałęsa, Czesław Miłosz and Wisława Szymborska, became the objects of discussion. Miłosz and Szymborska were the easiest “prey” as they belong to the elite of the contemporary personal canon of the Polish culture, alongside writers such as Witold Gombrowicz, Zbigniew Herbert, Tadeusz Różewicz, Sławomir Mrożek, the film director Andrzej Wajda and the composer Krzysztof Penderecki. This form of canon is closely linked to a broadly understood school education. The discussion boils down to who has the right to decide in this area. It is connected to memory, moral criteria and ethical norms and the assessment of the artist’s role in transforming the authoritarian rule. It is also associated, according to M. Foucault, with a certain type of power, which sometimes seems to be the core of the dispute. Indeed, the debate on the contemporary canon has transformed to a certain extent into a debate on the national pantheon and, *de facto*, turned out to address artistic values only slightly. Case in point is the attempt at removing the works of C. Miłosz and W. Szymborska from the

¹⁸ J. Trznadel, *Hańba domowa*. Nowa, Warszawa 1986.

¹⁹ W. P. Szymański, *Uroki dworu (rzecz o zniewalaniu)*. Wyd. ARCANA, Kraków 1994.

²⁰ M. Głowiński, *Kanony literackie: od socrealizmu do pluralizmu*. „Odra” 1998, no 10, p. 44.

contemporary canon by a group of lustrators as well as political disputes after Czesław Miłosz's death, though not about his literary output but on the place of his final rest. It is also an important feature of the discussion on the canon in Eastern and Central Europe. They transform into heated nearly fundamentalist debates on outlook and politics in which coffins and funeral marches play an important role. The coffins are carried and presented to the public as symbols of the new and regained reality or the damned world. National funerals are clear stops on the road to and from the canon. E.g. the repeated funerals of the Hungarian prime ministers, Imre Nagy, the Polish émigré head of army and prime minister Władysław Sikorski, the Ukrainian poet Vasyl Stus, symbolic funerals of the victims of the Katyń massacre and other victims of the totalitarian regime. Jerzy Święch rightly observes that: "Discussions on the canon are led – [...] within the categories developed by the political discourse"²¹. Michał Głowiński, while writing on canons in literature after 1989, pessimistically claims that: "The issue of canon has become – apart from one exception – a construct that enables assessment and division formulation, as well as delimiting the right paths"²². According to the author, the exception turned out to be the works of Zbigniew Herbert, treated by some as a canon that verifies other artistic proposals, a canon which, according to Głowiński is lustrative in the rightist politics of 1990s. The debate was not merely on the works but more so on the names and their past, on the assignment of blame and alleged merits. In Poland, as well as in all Central Europe, communist writers were thrown off their pedestals and accused of ties with communists. Their biographies were delved into in search of proof for premature canonisation. The hierarchy was changed time and again. The logic of the lustrative canon also reached Milan Kundera, István Szábo, Günter Grass, Christa Wolf, Ryszard Kapuściński and many other artists and intellectuals from Central Europe.

The discussion on the most important topical phenomena regained for the collective identity could not be narrowed down to the lustrative canon. Nevertheless, an important issue is the increased interest in the so called borderland memory that is generally linked to the memory of eastern Poland before 1939 with national myths preserved in the romantic works of the Ukrainian school by Henryk Sienkiewicz, especially the *Poloniae antemurale christianitatis* myth, which in the 20th century translated into the myth of anti-Soviet, heroic and martyr Poland, but also the myth of the multinational paradise in the east, the so called borderland. This was a means of canonising the feeling of loss and nostalgia and the anti-

²¹ J. Święch, *Nowoczesność. Szkice o literaturze polskiej XX wieku*. Warszawa 2006, p. 69.

²² M. Głowiński, *Kanony literackie: od socrealizmu do pluralizmu*, op. cit., p. 45.

Jalta, the anti-Soviet, the national and the Polish. It would be difficult to name even the most important literary works devoted to the borderland after 1989. It was one of the most important aspects of the transformation process of culture in Poland and simultaneously an outbreak of a topic which was additionally propelled by émigré literature and criticism. It is far easier to determine the canonisation, decanonisation and recanonisation phenomena that took place in those times on the basis of the rather short history of the borderland discourse criticism. The criticism of the borderland discourse, on the one hand, means that the national taboo is violated, and on the other hand, it introduces pragmatic elements that relativise the Polish experience. However, the borderland, will remain an important component of the national memory, similarly so in Hungary, Germany and the Czech Republic (though each community thinks that their memory is the one and only, unique and unparalleled with anything else in history).

The Czech variety of illustration in literature and the canonical image of history

The Czech discussion on the topic of canon, similarly to that in Poland, began in the 1970s, in the second circulation, just to mention the polemics between Václav Havel and Milan Kundera. However, they only gained momentum in the 1990s when the Czech culture intensified the exchange of thoughts within the identity discourse²³. In order to illustrate the problem, I will use three texts that are characteristic of the discussion trends similar to the Polish ones, yet leading to slightly different conclusions. I chose the work of Michal Bauer *Ideologie a paměť* (2005)²⁴, Pavel Janoušek's article *On the new historical and literary paradigm of history, canon and culture and investigators of literature* [*O novém literárněhistorickém paradigmatu, dějinách, kánonu a literárních vědcích*²⁵] and Petr A. Bílek's, *Canon, canonicity and canonisation as historical and literary constructs* [*Kánon, kanoničnost a kanonizace jako literárněhistorické konstrukty*²⁶].

²³ V. Macura, *Český sen*. Praha 1998, pp. 213. Tegož: *Znamení zrodu. České obrození jako kulturní typ*. Praha 1983; S. Fedrová (ed.), *Otázky českého kánonu*. Sborník příspěvků z III. kongresu světové literárnovědné bohemistyky „Hodnoty a hranice. Svět v české literatuře, česká literatura ve světě” . Praha 28.6.-3.7.2005.[Svazek 1], UČL AV ČR, Praha 2006, pp. 691.

²⁴ M. Bauer, *Ideologia a paměť*. Literatura a instituce na přelomu 40. a 50. let 20. století. Jihlava 2003.

²⁵ P. Janoušek, *O novém literárněhistorickém paradigmatu, dějinach, kánonu a literárních vědcích aneb generálové se vždy připravují na minulou bitvu „Host” 2006, no 6, pp. 20-24. Cyt. Za: P. Janoušek, *O nowym historycznoliterackim paradymacie, historii, kanonie i badaczach literatury*. Transl. by B. Kozdęba. Consult. L. Vítová, M. Lemańczyk. „Porównania” 4, 2007, pp. 161-193.*

²⁶ P. A. Bílek, *Kánon, kanoničnost a kanonizace jako literárněhistorické konstrukty*. In: Red. J. Wiendl, *Literatura a kánon*. Univerzita Karlova, Praha 2007, p. 9-18.

These works constitute three outlooks on the canon: extremely essentialist or lustrative (Bauer), moderately essentialist, showing the incompleteness and limitation of the contemporary Czech literary canon (Janoušek) and antiessentialist (Bílek).

Bauer's text is typical for the publicist output of the younger generation which has been sharpened during the "Velvet Revolution", and learned the history of communism from books and restricted entry archives. The striking aspect of Bauer's work is the attack on Milan Kundera, signalled a couple of years earlier in the journal "Tvar"²⁷. It is typical of the lustration debate on the canon and it brings to mind the Polish attacks on Wisława Szymborska. Bauer attacks Kundera for his works from the 1950s. For him it is an argument that undermines the present position of the author and suggests that this could be a reason for reluctance towards accepting Kundera in literary circles. The essence of the debate is, firstly, the attempt to establish whether Kundera deserves his place in the contemporary canon and, secondly, whether he is a Czech writer at all. As is known, for some time Kundera did not even want to print his novels written in other languages in Czech. This is the reason why for many young critics there was no basis on which he should be included in the contemporary canonical national literature. It is an exceptional case which does not include other representatives but certifies that in Europe the debate on canon is of ideological and moral but not artistic nature, which leads to expanding the topic beyond literature. It is indeed in the area of the personal "pantheon" where the possibilities of the disqualification of a well-known figure are much greater than in the literary realm. Kundera's lustrative case is continued with Adam Hradilek's and Petr Třešňák's article *Milan Kundera's report [Udání Milana Kundery]* published in the Prague weekly "Respekt" on 12th November 2008²⁸. In this famous case, the well-known writer was accused of denouncing a secret courier from Austria in 1950. As a result, on the one hand, the writer was pushed aside from the Czech artistic circles and, on the other hand, there arose a debate on him and his work's place in the Czech culture. The lustrative exclusion of Kundera from the contemporary canon is so detrimental to his publishing presence in the Czech Republic that he has turned towards other readerships, e.g. Poland, for some time now. However, it does not take away his still important place and function in general overviews and syntheses of Czech literature.

²⁷ M. Bauer, *Mistyfikator Milan Kundera*. "Tvar" 1998, no 14, p. 12.

²⁸ The materials from "Respekt" and other Czech opinions together with the opinions of Polish journalists and experts on the works of this author were published in the journal "Res Publica Nowa" Winter 2008, no 4 (210).

Pavel Janoušek sets aside the Czech disputes on the older and newer national pantheon and dwells upon the issue of writing the history of literature, its narrativity and also what such history should include. Hence, he asks about the literary canon written in Czech and dwells on its functionality with respect to the history of the Czech Republic. He points to its 19th century model and limitations, especially in the face of the readership who are not necessarily Czech yet live in the Czech Republic. According to Janoušek the Czech history of literature that is based merely on a language project of the Czech (national) rebirth is far too insufficient. He says that history cannot be written nor the canon built against the Germans (or the Austrians or Prussians) or, implicitly, German speaking Czech Jews. The new history has to be disassociated from the approach to national history of literature that excludes Others. But then what should the new literature be like? How should it be isolated, understood – he asks. Should it be inscribed in the German project of expansion? Or maybe it should be treated as Central European. Janoušek opts for Solomon's choice. He proposes the so-called *areálová studia* based on the construction of Central European culture. It involves a change of the content of canon connected with the multicultural space, and in practical terms, with the inclusion of literature written in German but also Jewish and German literature (e.g. the so called Prague school of German and Jewish literature) in the history of the Czech Republic, Moravia and Silesia. He is convinced that the history of the nation, including the history of literature, constitutes a memory of a functioning society and since the society is multicultural and multilingual, then so should be the history of literature in the Czech Republic, which is located in the intercultural realm of Central Europe. Janoušek's approach is not merely one man's lone voice in the Czech Republic; however, it is not particularly popular. A practical solution was given by the Polish bohemist Zofia Tarajło-Lipowska, who writes the history of Czech literature from a perspective that is close to that of Janoušek²⁹. Many Czech researchers point to the necessity of constructing a canon not only for one nation within literature understood spatially and not ethnically. It is a step towards Central European literature and then, at sometime in the future, a single European literature. This step is, of course, as is rightly pointed out by the Slovaks, of a colonialising nature because this is how Slovak, Jewish and German literatures can become types of Czech literature before they become Central European literatures. A case in point is Franz Kafka's work, which is coming back to

²⁹ Cf. Z. Tarajło-Lipowska, *Historia literatury czeskiej*. Zarys. Ossolineum, Wrocław 2010. The author explains her theory in "Porównania". Cf. by the same author, *Nieodparta pokusa syntezы literatury czeskiej czy „neodeprený pokus o syntézu české literatury”?* „Porównania” 2010, nr 7, p. 71-86.

the books on Czech literature as a representative of the Prague school of German literature, as he cannot be a Czech writer. Thus, the canon of Czechhood is enriched by masterpieces from the Czech, Prague local tradition. The author is skeptical towards radical contemporary decanonisation of domestic literature. It could be so that we will have to write *Harry Potter*, instead of *Grandmother* [Babička] by Božena Němcová (which also means *Mr Tadeusz, Kobzar, Eugene Onegin*, etc.) into the canon – he writes. Will there come times in the Czech literature devoid of the classical, ancestral and traditional models? – he goes on asking. It is possible – he answers – and it will be the strongest decanonisation in the history of the nation which rebuilt its identity 200 years ago and now could face its slow loss. In Janoušek's approach there is no despair. There are many means of rebuilding the collective identity apart from ideologically and nationally constructed canons. The most important aspect is to maintain the basic components of the values that distinguish the Czech literature.

Petr A. Bílek goes in the footsteps of those researchers who do not ascribe fundamental ethical or metaphysical values to the canon. They see it as an artificial and pragmatic construct connected with the functioning of a specific institution or social and national force in the culture. Bílek looks skeptically at the canon as one of many auto-models of culture. He emphasises the importance of the map as a multilayered pattern that involves different phenomena that can belong to the canon. These phenomena are rather representative of than actually representing the unique quality. The map is thus comprised of phenomena that confirm the desired landscape. The map constitutes an actual image of the intentions, a kind of selective filter that is the basic mechanism in the creation of each canon. The filter assumes the existence of works distinguished both by its uniqueness and representativeness. However, both requirements can be fulfilled by different types of works. According to Bílek, they can be classified into three categories: 1/ reliefs – works with an explicit aesthetic function; 2/ substrata – texts that embody the new; 3/ climates and microclimates – works that are representative of different discourses where literary material is used. Bílek's antiessentialist approach towards the canon eradicates emotions connected with position and authority, and points towards the sociotechnical aspects of canon creation as types of cultural pacts associated with a particular social option, ideology or dominant point of view. The researcher writes:

The canon explicitly plays a technical role. It is not a manifestation of essence or valuable heritage from the ancestors; it is clearly a pragmatic and communicative area which can serve declarative experimenting and authoritarian restrictions but in the regular normal chain of events it is nothing more than a list of titles which the members of a particular community accept as part of the cultural encyclopaedia. Thus the canon is a more or less respected approval of what can be seen when looking at

the literary realm and what we perceive as important enough to introduce the given entity to the assumptions of the map. (...). Contemporary canonising processes more than the essentialist character of memory or cultural development are supposed to reflect the pragmatic and communicative task for which each institution needs its canonical list. (...) the canon should not be perceived in an authoritarian perspective as a demarcating of literary heritage but as a draft version of the map that is constructed for certain scientific and pedagogical tasks”³⁰.

The variety of methodological stands towards the canon and the temperature of the discussion do not have any lasting impact on its shaping in the foreseeable short time to come. However, with the passing of years there take place changes that influence the very significance of this category in culture. The lustrative approach to the modern canon means that the followers of this approach engage in the purity of the auto-model and its ethical value. The antiessentialist stand emphasises the pragmatics and the decisive role of the readers who create their own map of cultural education on the basis of level of education and their own choices.

Ukraine: in search of a complete national canon

In Eastern Europe returns to the canon of the exiles such as Alexander Solzhenitsyn or gulag victims such as the Ukrainian poet Vasyl Stus are forms that substitute lustration in the Polish or Czech versions. This caution did not prevent a lively discussion, e.g. in Ukraine, where the emphasis was put on the national and non-national character of literary work, canonising the national, which is an expression of the anticolonial protest. George Grabowicz says that “the Ukrainian history of literature does not have a clear understanding of its canon [...] The very notion of literary canon assumes a certain theoretical level of awareness which in this situation has been complicated by a lack of ideological and internal consensus on the function of literature. [...] There was differentiation but no clear canon to determine it theoretically”³¹. The negative thesis is also a postulate. If there is no canon, then it should be built. This results from aforementioned historical but also religious divisions whose existence is still an ailment, though probably the least problematic in the realm of literature.

Ukraine is a multinational country without an explicitly stated cultural policy. It is an evolvement with roots in the Soviet past heading in the direction of national and state culture though not accepted by everybody. The dispute about the canon can refer to certain oppositions: Soviet – non-Soviet, Ukrainian – Russian, Eastern Ukrainian – Western

³⁰ P. A. Bilek, *Kánon, kanoničnosť a kanonizácia ako literárnehistorické konštrukty*, ibidem, p. 17-18 (translated by B.B.)

³¹ See: *Jest Chrystus i jest Judasz — i to całkiem realnie... Rozmowy o literaturze ukraińskiej "Kresy"* 1994, no 19, p. 68.

Ukrainian, the most important of which is the central opposition of Ukrainian and Russian literatures in the light of general relations between the countries. The Ukrainian debate is a classical one that is aimed at basic landmarks in history or generally in the distant past. The discussion on the canon is aimed not only at filling out the blanks from the 20th century but also at developing a complete set of texts and figures in the so called complete historical and literary process that is fully representative of the Ukrainian culture from the Middle Ages till today. On the whole, the Ukrainian canon is reconstructed and described in opposition to Russian, or alternatively Polish, texts. It is post-colonial which involves a more acute awareness of ethnic identity, cultural, historical and mental autonomy. It could be said that we deal with the external aspect of the Ukrainian identity discourse. The internal side is built on the basis of personal rebuilding both by means of changing the existing images but also by means of introducing new iconic figures such as Vasyl Stus or previously unknown émigré literature. The dual character of the attempts at constructing the Ukrainian canon is visible in the works of contemporary researchers. On the one hand, they postulate unity and completeness of the historical and literary process which in its makeup is the new canon. On the other hand, they point to its post-colonial interpretation aimed in the main at the contemporary era. Marko Pavlyshyn, the author of *Canon and ikonostas* (1997), Mykola Riabchuk in *From little Russia to Ukraine* (2000), George Grabowycz in *Texts and masques* (2005)³² build an image of the post-colonial canon that is brought back to their own culture but to a certain extent interspersed by postmodernism (in the realm of interpretation it is less fundamentally essentialist). These points to a disassociation of the canon built on anti-Russian bases and the canon that was reinterpreted on the neoliberal grounds that apart from national values also include universal ones. The greatest Ukrainian poet, the central figure and most dominant in literary output of the national canon, Taras Shevchenko will thus be subject to conservative interpretation (that is national and class) and post-modernist interpretation that is based on post-colonial ideology. In general terms, it should be stated that, whereas the Czech and Polish debaters on the issue of canon would mostly prefer cultural and linguistic variety and a heterogenous canon (bringing back the memory of diversity), then in Ukraine the battle for one canon extracted from the great game of state, national, cultural and mental differences is on. The Ukrainian canon is not a spiritual possession of the entire society of Ukraine but of

³² Cf. M. Pavlyšyn, *Kanon ta ikonostas*. Čas, Kyiv 1997, ss. 448; M. Riabcuk, *Vid Malorosii do Ukrayny: paradoksy zapiznilogo nacietyvorennia*. Krytyka, Kyiv 1999, p. 303. The Polish translation: *Od Malorosji do Ukrainy*. Transl. by O. Hnatiuk, K. Kotyńska. Warszawa 2000; G. Grabowicz, *Teksty i masky*. Krytyka, Kyiv 2005.

its educated elite, which, though not as small as in the 1990s, is still a minority. It still has not become the identity backbone of the entire society because it is multinational and accustomed to Russian literature or literature in Russian. This surely is a paradox whose solution depends on state policy. Building a canon of national culture that unites the particular traditions is one means of developing a uniform identity. The question that is posed by many researchers of this issue boils down to two options: a Ukrainian canon (national in a traditional sense) or a canon of a multinational country (that takes into consideration other, non-Ukrainian options). Each of these options has its followers and opponents. In a realm spiked with diversity, the Ukrainian researchers would most likely want to see a unified canonized structure of text and ideas that would allow them to reach the great masses of people without a deeper sense of identity by means of symbols. The opponents of a uniform Ukrainian canon are not able to present an equally strong oppositional value. The chances for building a homogeneous Ukrainian canon of the majority are closely linked to the success of building a nation state. Indeed it is so officially: the Ukrainian canon would include all that is national. Nevertheless, the dependence of the Ukrainian canon on the political situation is greater and greater in the Ukraine.

The Ukrainian canon is being acquired by a society that is at least bilingual. Violent anti-canonical reactions are not visible. However, there are attempts at changing the internal perspective including those undertaken by G. Grabowicz towards T. Shevchenko, Tamara Gundorova towards Ivan Franko or Solomiia Pavlychko towards Lesya Ukrainska. There exists an interesting trend in feminist thought based on the work by Nila Zborovs'ka *Ukrainian Literature Code*³³ (2006), which is an attempt at determining the new Ukrainian canon based on a critique of the patriarchal social and cultural model. In the article *The canon of the Ukrainian culture – the feminist interpretation*³⁴ Zborovs'ka views this issue beyond the well known oppositions or political dilemmas. She introduces the feminist perspective in which she emphasizes the critical trend in Ukrainian thought started by the critics from the beginning of the 20th century such as Mykola Khvylovij and Mykola Jevshan criticising most of all the so called model of national culture. She also addresses canonization as a form of “intellectual reduction” focused on the choice of authors, works, artistic language based on the “patriarchal discourse of power”. According to Zborovs'ka the modernist canon is also a

³³ N. Zborovs'ka, *Kod ukrajins'koji literatury*. Akademvydav, Kyiv 2006.

³⁴ N. Zborovs'ka, *Ukrajins'kyi kulturnyi kanon: feministychna interpretacia*. „Ji” 1998, no 13. Obtained from: <http://www.ji.lviv.ua/n13texts/zborovs.htm>

form of repression³⁵. The canon as a basis for the modernist thought to her mind strengthens the unequal relations in culture because it stems from the hierarchical principles that govern culture. Feminism with its defiance of a unidimensional totalistic thinking and bringing back pluralistic types of discourse on the contrary recognize the existence of a different canon. It thus revives the reductionist strategies for a canon which in fact is opposed by the practice of culture itself – writes Zborovs'ka. Different understandings of canon and various sources in discourse contribute to the turmoil in the Ukrainian culture whose function is incredibly inspiring. On the other hand, it provokes anti-canonical actions of which there are relatively few in Ukraine. The poetry of Bu-ba-bu was a form of creating an atmosphere of parody around the canonical sanctity in the 1990s³⁶. At the end of first decade of the 21st century there appeared a voice that was rarely heard – an attempt at presenting the biography of Taras Shevchenko from a non-sacred common perspective. If one claims that the canon is built not only by the researchers but also by the readership, then these rare but sensational perceptions should also be taken into consideration. The book by Oles' Buzyna, *Shevchenko the Ghost* (2000)³⁷ should definitely be treated as one of such perceptions. Even determinedly pro-Russian imperialists have never attacked the father of the nation nor have they tried to discredit him. The stories by Buzyna are aimed at showing Shevchenko as a carouser who frequents brothels, writes in Russian for the money and is a gambler. This image is totally against the serious, revered portrait that has been functioning for over 150 years and has actually never been verified from the biographical side. The Ukrainian elite tries to totally disregard this provocation towards the most important figure of the Ukrainian canon; however, the successive editions point to the fact that the wider Ukrainian readership is more susceptible to the journalistic scoop-like desacralisation than known scientific texts from recent years by Ivan Dziuba and Oksana Zabuzhko.

Canonicity as vivisection of canons

³⁵ N. Zborovs'ka, *Ukrainins'kyi kulturnyi kanon*, op. cit.: "Literary canonisation is an intellectual reductionist strategy aimed at choosing a certain group of authors, ideas, topics and artistic language. It stems from the patriarchal discourse of power because, as a rule, it is a form of repression of the other, a focus at the expense of the margins".

³⁶ Cf. my own work *Skrzydło Dedala. Szkice, rozmowy o poezji i kulturze ukraińskiej lat 50-90 XX wieku*. Poznań, WiS 1999.

³⁷ O. Buzyna, *Vurdalak Taras Shevchenko*. Kyiv 2000.

An interesting analogy of Maria Janion's thesis from 1991 about the fall of the romantic and symbolic paradigm in the Polish literary life³⁸ is the fall of the "Soviet literature" declared in 1990 by Victor Erofeev in the text by the telling title of *The Wake after the Soviet Literature*³⁹. Erofeev not only renounced the traditional Soviet socialist realist literature but mainly the tradition of "hypermoralism" of the entire Russian literature. According to another writer, Vladimir Sharov, "the 150-years-old faith in literature as wisdom, honour and conscience of our era has gone"⁴⁰. The Russian writer has thus ceased to perform the function of prophet, moralist and teacher and has become an artist-clown, a professional, a worker and a producer of entertainment – depending on the strategy chosen. The thesis about the current roles of writers and the literary output repeated by many writers found favourable conditions in the circles of creators-provokers and illustrators of the past. Victor Erofeev in his well-known work *The Encyclopedia of the Russian Soul* (1999⁴¹, Polish edition 2003) referred to the Russian nihilist tradition and purification by means of public pain infliction. The *Encyclopaedia* dethrones all Russian sanctities because the author claims that the atonement should be carried out as radically as possible. Literature, state, morality, religion, the Russian soul and the Russians have disappointed, they are worthless myths devoid of any kind of truth. In 2009 Nikolai Gubenko, the leader of the Moscow communists, filed a complaint to the prosecutor's office on Erofeev, insisting on investigating whether he abused the right of freedom of speech. The many editions of this book in Russia and other countries cause the essentialist anti-canonicity to become a type of canon. The Internet is home to many statements of critics that the *Encyclopaedia* is the best Russian book written in the second half of the 20th century exactly towards the end of the century. Erofeev's radicalism was not detrimental to him. The anti-canonicity of his texts, owing to his great popularity among his readership has not weakened, and proves the importance of this strategy in the transforming of Russian culture.

Alternatively to Erofeyev's harsh polemics with the Russian canons of culture, style, thought and literature there exists the cold analysis of Mikhail Berg presented in *Literacracy* (*Literaturokracia*, 2000), in which the critic attempts to enthroned certain figures and works

³⁸ M. Janion, *Szanse kultur alternatywnych*. "Res Publica" 1991, nr 3, see: Red. P. Śpiewak, *Spór o Polskę 1989-99. Wybór tekstów prasowych*. PWN, Warszawa 2000.

³⁹ V. Erofeev, *Pominki po sovetskoy literatury*. „Literaturnaja Gazeta” 1990, № 27.

⁴⁰ V. Sharov, «ja lublu bumagu....»: <http://www.bigbook.ru/articles/detail.php?ID=8707>

⁴¹ V. Erofeev, *Enciklopedia russkoj dusy*. Moskwa 1999.

that are deemed canonical in the contemporary Russian culture. The tradition of Russian modernism and avant-gardism from the early years of the 20th century have become a point of reference for Russian literature of the 1980s and 1990s but also an object of increased interest for researchers and historians. These include the poetry of the Silver Age but also the artistic prose of the 1920s, the poetry of the Oberiu and the renewed readings of the tradition of Russian futurism. This is literature whose natural development was disrupted by historical events, nevertheless it has never been totally abandoned by the Russian artists. Thus, the canon is composed of these elements and, of course, of the literature of the 19th century. There are no disputes here. Another face of the canon is given by the renewed value ascribed to the rural prose (still important Valentin Rasputin and a return of Mikhail Sholokhov). The avant-garde survived in the Soviet Union owing to the second circulation. It is a poetic and pictorial conceptualism, socialist realist circle of artists in Lianozovo. These phenomena gained momentum when their clear links with post-modernism were noticed: Venedict Erofeev, Timur Kibirov, Dmitrij Prigov, Vladimir Krivulin and others. It was, among others, Vladislav Kulakov and Mikhail Berg who put forward the thesis that emphasized the origin of the contemporary Russian canon in the second circulation⁴². In fact, there are two main paths that nowadays lead towards the canon: the first “homeland” one that stems from Sholohov’s tradition later identified with the canonical figure of Alexander Solzhenitsyn; and the second one under the auspices of the avant-garde and Vladimir Nabokov that strives towards post-modernism. The former is both post and neo-imperialist and refers to the glory and greatness of Russia. The latter is post-modern and anti-imperialist. The former is embodied by the works of Valentin Rasputin, the latter by Andrej Bitov. If there is no one tendency in creating texts arranged in a canonical order, there can be no one canon. The work on the canon will not be an effect of long-term agreements and compromises. It will be decided by the political and cultural context, the driving force that shapes masterpieces and canons in the media and, finally, the readership⁴³.

⁴² V. Kulakov, *Poezia kak fakt*. Moskwa 1999; M. Berg, *Literaturokratija. Problema prisvoienija i perepaspredelennja vlasti v literature*. NLO, Moskwa 2000.

⁴³ On the issue of canon cf. i.a.: *Novyi kanon russkoj literatury*. Avtor programa A. Genis. Vedushchyi I. Tolstoi, <http://archive.svoboda.org/programs/OTB/2001/OBT.111701.asp>; B. Dubin, *Miezhdu kanonom a aktualnostiu, skandalom i modoj: literatura i izdatelskoe delo v Rosii v izmenivshemsia socialnom prostranstve*, <http://magazines.russ.ru>; B. Dubin, *Popolnenie poeticheskogo panteona. Slovo – pismo – literatura. Ocherki po socjologii sovremennoj kultury*. Moskva, NLO 2001. ss. 324-328; A. Ju. Bolshakova, *Literaturnyj proces segodnia: pro et contra (statia piervaja)*. Informacionnyi gumanitarnyi portal „Znanie. Ponimanie. Umenie”, № 5, 2010 – Filologia; *Formirovanie literaturnogo kanona*, <http://nevmena.ndr.net/seminarium/canon.pdf>; M. Iampolskij, *Literaturnyi kanon i teoria silnogo avtora*, <http://magazines.russ.ru/inostran/1998/12/iamp.html>.

Both trends present a strong national and linguistic accent and unwillingly masked distance from multiculturalism, of which Russians sometimes seem to be tired, which makes the Russian culture open to universalist components of post-modernism, on the one hand, and towards themselves on the other hand. It is visible that canon updates can be a function of the current social and political situation also in the sense that the work on the canon has not finished. It basically means that it is still unknown which works of the contemporary authors should belong to the canon (e.g. problems with putting the masterpiece of Russian early post-modern art *Pushkin House* (*Пушкинский дом*, 1978 by Andrej Bitov, an artist deemed to be the continuator of Jorge-Louis Borges and Vladimir Nabokov) on the generally accepted list. There is no place in the Russian literature, or wider, culture, for building a line that I called here the moralist canon constructed against the world of “domestic disgrace”. A similar situation takes place in the Ukrainian literature. No post-Soviet literature is ready to carry out such settling of accounts. It seems that the only serious criteria will be biology and the verdicts of the generations to come.

I have presented, in the form of a draft, four different attitudes towards the canon and an understanding of the history of literature based on it. The Polish and Czech versions of a lustrative and national borderland canon, the Czech concept of building canonicity on the basis of a wider territorial and cultural community, the Ukrainian and Russian concepts of the national canon which are different, and the Russian and Ukrainian versions of canons based on universal post-modernist values that could support and permeate each other without resorting to dominance. It is worth noticing the non-existence of the lustrative discourse undertaken by particular groups or institutions in defence of the canon in Ukraine and Russia.

Post-canonical

There is also another variety of canonicity that can be called the post-canonical. It is difficult to insert into the stiff ramifications of national and ethical agreements but it also drifts apart from the ideological discussions of a political, religious and moralizing character.

The post-canonical is present in the realm that is devoid of an unambiguous axiological character, i.e. hierarchy and dogmatics or one that demonstrates distance that allows it to function beyond the alternative of apology and critique, beyond the ideological dispute.

The post-canonical constitutes an answer to the manipulation in the realm of tradition in order to reach an ideological, moral, etc., advantage. It is here where Baumann's flexible image of reality that functions in the dominating audiovisual realm allows for discussions on the canon according to different principles, though in such case it loses its traditional features. It is then characterized by dehierarchisation, deinstrumentalisation, desublimation and relativism. A violent attack on the canon and its destruction are not needed. All that is necessary is a change of the interpretative directive from an executive to a directive characterized by freedom of choice and flexibility. The post-canonical does not mean an alienation from the national tradition but from patriotic blackmail. It does not discriminate against the weaker but offers them attitudes and values from beyond the principled realm. On no account is this being repressive or caused by a superior need for ordering. The actions of the Prague artist David Černý give shape to a particular version of the post-canonical. Another version is presented in the works by Roman Opałka and yet another one by Paweł Althamer. Černý totally loosens the ideological messages of the objects to which his installations and sculptures refer. He positions them beyond the dispute on importance. He does not fight against anything but nevertheless connects with time and place. His *Horse* (1999) or *Piss* (2004) are possible in the world of tolerant viewership which is not irritated by artistic allusions but drawn by the new quality of symbol. The post-canonical is not created for or against tradition but alongside it. However, it is able to use tradition. *Common Task* (2009) by Althamer – the journey of 150 people wearing gold suits aboard a Boeing 737 to Brussels on the 20th anniversary of elections on the 4th of June 1989 that were won by Solidarity – creates the new canon of collective action without ideological polemics – “the poetic sculpture that arises from the march of 150 people”⁴⁴. Černý and Althamer as artists remain on the border of anti-canonical and post-canonical. They achieve this mainly owing to going beyond the system that governs the relationship between canon and anti-canonical. However, the works of Roman

⁴⁴ “The old, the young, the disabled, one Australian, kids from primary school or even newborns in golden prams fell from the sky straight on Grand Place. They blew their trumpets and cheered arousing interest of the bystanders. What did they want? Well, they wanted to be together no matter what age or social background. They enjoyed their freedom, happily ate their “goląbki” in the royal garden, saw the enormous model of the iron atom, played ball on the Expo 58 ground, visited the Euro officers, let a slew of golden balloons on Flagey Square. And then they came back. They showed that the poetic sculpture, created from the parade of 50 people is viable in reality.” <http://polskieradioeuro.pl/Audycja.aspx?id=16048>

Opałka (*Opalka 1965/1-∞*) seem to be pure post-canonical. The duration, the significance in the world of art, internal dynamics alongside apparent statics, flexibility of the internal effect, philosophy instead of reality, total indifference towards acute dominants, unprovoked and non-marketed fame surrounding the work allow us to see the work of Opalka as the essence of the post-canonical.

A clash of canonical realities, the hard canon and anti-canonical with the flexible post-canonical can in itself be a challenge and topic for art. The post-canonical is a question of future rather than current artistic and cultural practice, which still focuses significantly on the canon-anti-canonical continuum and various interpretations of this system. The canons remain the basic aspect of the issue.

What is also worth mentioning is the discrepancy between the functioning of this entity in the awareness of the wider participants of culture and the awareness of experts. The wider groups of participants always show an inclination towards essentialising the canon, which simply means that they see it as an articulation of an important truth in identity. On the other hand, the expert groups rather perceive the canon antiessentialistically as a type of technique to build awareness and identity. It is connected with the basic difference of the relation towards the canon. For the experts it is frequently a matter of technique or even sociotechnique in which there take part inspirers, negotiators, etc. The closer to contemporary times, the stronger the role of the experts and the techniques they use to manage the canonical resource. It also applies to the weakly studied issue of relations between multicultural canons such as Polish and Ukrainian, or Polish and Russian, Slovak and Hungarian, and Ukrainian and Russian. There are no “agreements” between the canons. The canons are the most solipsistical part of national culture. They usually develop in opposition to Other canons. In this realm there is no community of canons, which means that they do not permeate one another. It is taken care of by proper institutions. Particularly the national canon, no matter how it is perceived by any group of its users, cannot belong to two ethnoses. In such a case its functionality decreases or even disappears, thus, it becomes useless in its duality. There is a certain gap with respect to this situation in Eastern and Central Europe. It is created by writers and artists of Jewish origin that function in two or more cultures. Nevertheless this duality does not function on the basis of an “agreement” but is an outcome of a situation which becomes an object of conveyancing on the part of the experts. E.g. Bruno Schulz is a Polish and Jewish writer and recently there has appeared a great Ukrainian writer of Jewish origin. It is all about property rights and the right to pride from having a great writer in one's

pantheon. On this basis Franz Kafka is seen more and more as a writer immersed in Czech culture, surrounded and indeed shaped by it. It is certainly a step to a future takeover of this figure. Kafka is perfectly suitable because as a representative of the cosmopolitan part of Austro-Hungarian culture he can exist in parallel to the Jewish, Czech and German cultures. Also the naïve painter Nikifor is attributed to a number of “proprietors”. It could be ventured to claim that the canon is still a relatively attractive object of processing. For the expert it is a form of ennobling task. However, the activities connected with it are burdened with a high risk.

On the other hand, it seems that together with artists' migration and a more frequent change of language of expression, which mainly holds true for writers, the specific gravity of the national canon is going to dwindle. The artists-migrants represent a more commonly encountered type of a cultural “townsman”, with hybrid identity and behaviours. Their otherness increases the significance of the post-canonical shaped not as an essentialist, hierarchic structure that orders the text resource in a specific way, but a wealth of texts, figures, and phenomena, that deserve praise, honours and prizes, of which there also are more and more. The future seems to depend on the post-canonical and the “hybrids” whose hybrid identity is perfectly positioned in the notion of post-canonicity.

Transl. Jolanta Sypiańska