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On the Reverse Side of Europe: Images of Poland in Michael Moran, Edward Enfield and Tom Fort's Reportages from the East

Abstract

The article aims at presenting the image of Poland that emerges from reportages written by three journalists strongly influenced by the British culture: Michael Moran, Edward Enfield and Tom Fort. As many historical sources and the analysed texts confirm, from the perspective of a traveller from the Western part of Europe, Poland belongs to the group of Eastern-European countries. Moreover, the selected reportages of the aforementioned authors illustrate that, despite the significant influences of the Western culture, which may be observed in various spheres of the Polish inhabitants' lives, the perspective of a Western traveller has remained unchanged, and to him/her, a journey to the Eastern part of Europe still constitutes a promise of a fabulous, or even unreal experience.

The most important aspect which was subjected to analysis in the presented article, and which the discussed reportages vividly depict, is the image of Poland that allows one to regard it as a country existing on the other – reverse – side of Western Europe. The theoretical studies in the field, referred to in the present study, illustrate that, while drawing on the Western philosophical thought, and attempting to imitate the political and economic development of other European countries, the Poles simultaneously cherish their memories connected with the past. This visible dichotomy impairs the image of Poland as a European country that the inhabitants of Western Europe might have created otherwise. Additionally, since some of the reportages discussed in the article are accounts of journeys of British reportage writers to Poland during the communist regime, the Western-European ideas of development and freedom inevitably find their reverse reflection in the Polish country. Simultaneously, the presented article illustrates the Poles' participation in the process of creating the image of their country, which they tend to adjust to foreigners' expectations, this way creating only an imitation of the Western-European country and contributing to the sustainment of the distorted image of Poland that apparently has already been formed in the Western reporters' minds.

Keywords: reportage, travel, Poland, reflection, reverse, East, unreality.

The Polish East

British reportage writing taking Poland as its main subject might be rather rare,¹ yet, the items that travel literature provides us with are sufficient to determine certain optics that a British explorer adopts before and during his Polish venture. The fact that most British historical books and travel journals alike recognise Poland as a part of the Eastern Bloc² becomes evident after browsing through the titles of such books as, i.e. *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1999*³ by Timothy Snyder or Tom Fort's *Against the Flow: Wading Through Eastern Europe*⁴ which extensively recounts the author's journey around Poland. This should not be surprising, however, because geographical position of these countries and their political systems subjected to the Soviet power for a considerable period of time, enabled one to perceive these areas through a unified category.⁵ Yet, as the analysed travel reportages will show, the contemporary approach of British travelers apparently has not changed much, despite notable changes that have emerged in Poland. Setting out for this country, they are still making their way to the East, not only in the literal, but also in the figurative sense, with all the connotations such a journey evokes.⁶ Though East encompasses an extremely vast and culturally diversified area, and thus, the associations that may be evoked with regard to it are bound to differ depending on the particular geographical location of the place under analysis,⁷ the East which the discussed reportages describe and which Poland appears to represent, refers to the territories that had been influenced by the former Soviet rule.⁸

As a country geographically occupying the Middle Eastern area of Europe, and thus constituting the peripheries of the British "centre", Poland has automatically become an involuntary, though perhaps not immediate, subject to the marginalizing process directed from Great Britain eastwards, the initiation of which may be dated back to colonial conquests.⁹ Yet, it is not the country itself that will

¹ The research I have conducted resulted in finding a considerable amount of guidebooks concerning Polish cities, i.e. *The Lonely Planet Series* (which one of the writers – Edward Enfield – uses during his travel and refers to in *Dawdling by the Danube*, Chichester, Summersdale Publishers Ltd, 2008, p. 95), yet only few travel reportages presenting their authors' accounts of travel to Poland were to be found.

² A. Teichova, H. Matis, *Nation, State and the Economy in History*, Cambridge 2003, p. 150.

³ T. Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1999*, New Haven–London 2004.

⁴ T. Fort, *Against the Flow: Wading through Eastern Europe*, London 2011.

⁵ See: E.M., Thompson, *Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism*, Westport 2000.

⁶ Among others see: L. Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*, New York–Chichester–West Sussex 1998.

⁷ G. Peteri, *Imagining the West in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*, Pittsburgh 2010, p. 2–3.

⁸ See: T. Fort, op. cit., p. 1–3; M. Moran, *A Country in the Moon. Travels in Search of the Heart of Poland*, London 2008, p. 21.

⁹ For details on the centre-periphery relation between Great Britain and the areas located to the east of it, which has been substantial to this article, see: S. Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World*, Oxford 1988; In Barbara Korte's *Facing the East of Europe in Its Western Isles*, the process of construction of "Easts" – a category that, among other countries, encompasses Poland

be the subject of the present analysis, but rather its image derived from British reportages. Presenting a few travel accounts of British authorship, which describe travels to Poland, I would like to illustrate that, as other countries placed to the east of Britain, Poland is not only regarded as substantially divergent from the Western idea of civilization and prosperity, but it is often recognized as a reverse side of the West.¹⁰ This inverted picture bears traits of underdevelopment and, strikingly, it is wreathed in a certain fabulous shroud that may provoke associations with a dreamworld.¹¹

Although the sense of unreality may certainly accompany any individual determined to explore some new, unknown territories, the Western travellers' natural inclination to instantaneously locate the Eastern expanse within the category of a dream appears to be the aftermath of the prolonged political practices aimed at placing the broadly understood East in opposition to the Western reality.¹² As the writers' accounts illustrate, Poland is considered to be located precisely on this other side of the British real – apparently the only real that the British seem to ascribe this concept to. Moreover, the incapability to comprehend Polish ways of conduct which, to the British understanding, often appear to be entirely incompatible with the Western logic, as well as the inability to use or understand Polish language, escalate the feeling of unreality that the British travellers experience in that country.¹³ The tendency to dwell upon the past, manifested by many Polish inhabitants whom the travellers meet along the way, in turn, only consolidates the British visitors' conviction about the illusory character of the Polish present.¹⁴

On the other hand, Poland is not an Eastern country in its entirety – an aspect apparently overlooked by the British explorers. Though being admittedly inhabitants of a country to the east of Great Britain, Poles visibly identify themselves with philosophy, ideology and perception of the world inherited from the West.¹⁵

– is subjected to in-depth analysis. B. Korte, *Facing the East of Europe in Its Western Isles: Charting Backgrounds, Questions and Perspectives*, [in:] *Facing the East in the West: Images of Eastern Europe in British Literature, Film and Culture*, eds. B. Korte, E.U. Pirker, S. Helff, Amsterdam–New York 2010, p. 1–24.

¹⁰ Gyan Prakash aptly presents the peculiar Eastern “backwardness” that Western explorers often seem to discern, in Leela Gandhi's *Postcolonial Theory*, p. 15; the “inverted image” of the East in the eyes of Western colonisers, in turn, is elaborated on in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, eds. B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin, London–New York 1995, p. 20; the idea of the East as a distorted mirror image of the West, which is the main assumption of the present article, yet with regard to the Polish image in British travel accounts, has also been described by Elisabeth Cheaurè in “Infinite Mirrorings: Russia and Eastern Europe as the West's ‘Other’” in *Facing the East in the West*, op. cit., p. 25–42.

¹¹ Many travellers who embark on a journey to the East describe their experience in terms of a dream. One interesting example of the use of such a linguistic device is a Polish account from the countries located to the east of Poland, written by Andrzej Stasiuk in J. Andruchowycz, A. Stasiuk, *My Europe*, Wołowiec 2007, p. 117, 133–134.

¹² J.J. Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounter Between Asian and Western Thought*, London–New York 2002, p. 19.

¹³ E. Enfield, *Dawdling by the Danube. With Journeys in Bavaria and Poland*, Chichester 2008, p. 110.

¹⁴ See i.e. T. Fort, *Against the Flow...*, op. cit., p. 28–29, 267.

¹⁵ W. Tatarkiewicz, *Outline of the History of Philosophy in Poland to World War II*, trans. Ch. Kasperek, Oakland 1975.

Moreover, as one of the reporters observes, willing to prove their Western cultural legacy, they tend to assume a Western-European look, absorbing the most desirable components of the cultures and economies of other European countries.¹⁶ Yet, taking on these imitative appearances they seem to achieve an effect reverse to the one intended, as they refuse to reveal their true image.¹⁷ Thus, as the following analyses will show, regardless of the evident impact the Western thought has exerted upon various spheres of Polish life, the country will always be regarded as the Eastern reverse of Europe by the travellers from the British “centre”. Aiming to illustrate its “inverted” characteristics most accurately, I chose the depictions of Poland from Tom Fort, Michael Moran and Edward Enfield’s reports as subjects to scrutiny.

An imaginary land

A reportage of the last of the aforementioned authors, Edward Enfield’s *Dawdling by the Danube*¹⁸, in which the English journalist describes a tour covering three phases: the German “Romantic Road”¹⁹, a course between Warsaw and Cracow along the Vistula River and the route that connects Passau to Vienna,²⁰ includes an image of Poland which exposes its allegedly inverse qualities. Before, however, the readers of Enfield’s reportage stand a chance to “see” the country the way the traveller did, they may learn from his account about the picture of the area created by his precursors in travel writing, which apparently contributed to the traveller’s idea about Poland. These images are derived from various sources, ranging from history books through travelogues and oral accounts of visitors to the area, to the musings of those who have heard some echoes about the place.²¹ Yet, though in the reportage the author provides his readers with the whole selection of sources that inspired him to visit Poland, a particularly intriguing one seems to be the report from 1778 written by William Coxe, which may evoke associations with some distant reality, or rather “unreality” that, in turn, may arouse one’s interest in its obsolescence and inaccessibility.²² In the following excerpt, Enfield presents the 18th century travel account.

As for my original idea, I have since come across a man who did what I had proposed, but not by bicycle and in 1778. This was the Reverend William Coxe, rector of Bemerton who seems, from the dedication of his book, to have accompanied the Right Honourable Lord Herbert when travelling in Poland. ‘I never saw,’ he says, ‘a road so barren of interesting scenes as that from Cracow to Warsaw. Without having actually traversed it, I could hardly have conceived so comfortless a region: a forlorn stillness and solitude prevailed almost through the whole extent, with few symptoms of an inhabited, and still less of a civilized

¹⁶ M. Moran, *A Country in the Moon*, op. cit., p. 29.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁸ E. Enfield, *Dawdling by the Danube*, Chichester 2008.

¹⁹ *The Romantic Road. Description of the Route*, <http://www.romanticroad.com> [access 1.12.2014].

²⁰ E. Enfield, *Dawdling by the Danube*, op. cit., p. 19, 94.

²¹ Ibid., p. 91–92.

²² Ibid., p. 94–95.

country. Though we were travelling in the high road, which unites Cracow with Warsaw, in the course of about 258 English miles we met in our progress only two carriages and about a dozen carts. The country was equally thin of human habitations: a few straggling villages, all built of wood, succeeded one another at long intervals, whose miserable appearance corresponded to the wretchedness of the country around them. In these assemblages of huts, the only places of reception for travellers were hovels, belonging to Jews, totally destitute of furniture and every species of accommodation. We could seldom procure any other room but that in which the family lived; in the article of provision, eggs and milk were our greatest luxuries, and could not always be obtained; our only bed was straw thrown upon the ground, and we thought ourselves happy when we could procure it clean.²³

Though hardly could one find a more biased report regarding a foreign country, it apparently helped Enfield to create a general image of the unknown Polish land that he intended to visit and, more significantly, made him determined to see the particular areas of Poland described in Coxe's report.²⁴ For being so divergent from the traveller's Western conception of Europe, the country appears to be its upturned reflection and thus, it gains the features of an imaginary world. More curiously still, it seems that it is the alleged ugliness and obsolescence presented in Coxe's account that adds to the country's attraction. "Had I read that before"²⁵, Enfield writes, "I might have been stiffened in my original resolve in order to see how much things had changed, if changed they had, which possibly they hadn't."²⁶

Nonetheless, in the case of the traveller who is "sufficiently old" to have seen a lot,²⁷ as Enfield describes himself, apparently acknowledging the fact as an asset preventing him from hasty judgements,²⁸ the presumption that the description of Poland from two centuries earlier may still be applicable and valid is the first evident example of perceiving a distant Eastern country through the reverse prism. On the one hand, the distance separating the two parts of Europe – the writer's and the Poles' – might be held responsible for Enfield's unfamiliarity with the area. On the other hand, it is not the actual geographical space that constitutes the gulf, but the deeply ingrained conviction that the West is the "centre" and the East is its margin.²⁹ To the British reporter Great Britain has become the abode of facts, whereas everything happening on the margins appears as a vague mirage.³⁰

This tendency may also be observed in another British account from Poland – *Against the Flow*³¹ – written by Tom Fort. Here, as in the case of Enfield's reportage, one may find various sources of information which had apparently shaped the traveller's idea of Polish "unreality", and provoked him to visit Poland and other countries in the East. This unreality becomes evident as one reads Fort's account of the news on the situation in Eastern Europe, the writer had acquired before his

²³ Ibid., p. 94–95.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 95.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ E. Enfield, *About the Author*, [in:] idem, *Dawdling by the Danube*, op. cit., p. 9.

²⁸ E. Enfield, *Dawdling by the Danube*, op. cit., p. 88–92.

²⁹ M.L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, New York 2008, p. 4.

³⁰ E. Enfield, *Dawdling by the Danube*, op. cit., p. 88–92.

³¹ T. Fort, op. cit., 2011.

journey to the East in 1990. Although information reaching him from afar bore the evident status of facts, Eastern reality still seemed to the journalist like an implausible dream or, more accurately, a nightmare set in some imaginary realm.³² Moreover, analogously to Enfield's attraction to the prospected ugly, subverted image of Poland, Fort seems to consider the danger and the almost inconceivable atmosphere of anxiety as an incentive to make a journey to the East of Europe.³³ For it is due to that inconceivability of the Eastern image presented in the media that the subverted reflection of Europe, apparently represented by Poland and the countries surrounding it, is being shaped, simultaneously providing the Western-European traveller with an alluring prospect of a direct encounter with an imaginary land.³⁴ In *Against the Flow*, Fort describes his reaction to the aforementioned events taking place in the Eastern Europe in these words:

May 1990, a gorgeous early summer's day, the sun sparkling on the smooth blue sea. [...] One great high-pressure system covered northern Europe, giving blue skies and blissful sunshine across the continent. But although we happened to have the same weather, eastern Europe was still a faraway place. [...] From within familiar, unshakeable Broadcasting House I watched and listened to the great events unfolding in Gdańsk, Prague and Berlin. [...] Like the listeners, I was stirred by the extraordinary spectacle of Europe coming apart at the seams; like them I was ineluctably detached as well. [...] I watched and marvelled. We all watched and marvelled. [...] I used occasionally to wonder in between bursts of word-churning for news bulletins and summaries, about the story we never heard. [...] I had an idea that nagged me until it drove me into the office of my BBC manager with a request for five months' unpaid leave. The idea was simple. The borders were now open. What if I crossed them? [...] What if I had a way to reach some of those onlookers and find out what they made of it all and how they were managing? I thought I had a way.³⁵

The detachment Fort describes in his report suggests that the cultural, political and historical gap which has long existed between the two parts of Europe,³⁶ has operated to the extent that made the Western writer's identification with the Eastern European area difficult. Yet, as the distance only enhances the idea about the imaginary land of the East, an opportunity to touch upon the other side of Europe, notably makes the traveller's journey to this area desirable.³⁷ Especially that, as a reader may conclude from the above-cited excerpt, it is the undescribed story that Fort seems to have been particularly interested in. Aware of the fact that the broadcasts of news presumably omit the peripheral areas of Eastern Europe, he intends to examine them, apparently searching for those places on the European reverse side, that would provide him with the most "unreal" experience.

³² Ibid., p. 2.

³³ Ibid., p. 3.

³⁴ This tradition of distant expeditions, originating in the Western travellers' inclination towards visiting "imaginary realms", is well described in S. Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World*, Oxford 1988.

³⁵ T. Fort, op. cit., p. 1–3.

³⁶ P.K. Nayar, *Colonial Voices: The Discourses of Empire*, Malden–Oxford–Chichester 2012, p. 37.

³⁷ T. Fort, op. cit., p. 3.

Lost among distorted images

This “unreality” is not difficult to experience in a foreign country, as feelings of maladjustment and alienation are among the most common sensations accompanying travellers during their first encounter with an unknown area.³⁸ From among the discussed reportages, the greatest resource of unreal and reverse experiences that apparently Poland may provide one with is Michael Moran’s *A Country in the Moon*.³⁹ The reportage is of particular interest to the present analysis, as the author’s Australian origin should make him familiar with the process of being pushed to the margins by Western European culture.⁴⁰ Yet, from his reportages one may infer that his extended stay in England, where he was working as a teacher of British art and culture and a pianist improving his musical skills,⁴¹ has apparently left its stamp upon the writer’s perception of the Eastern country, which Poland has geographically and ideologically become to him.

His account is simultaneously “a memoir and residence book chronicling his adventures in Poland immediately following the fall of communism.”⁴² Since the abolition of the regime not only brought a sense of freedom to the country, but also evoked confusion among the Polish citizens, the latter resulting from the urgent need for adjustment to the new order,⁴³ Moran’s inability to jettison the feelings of incomprehensibility and estrangement during his stay in Poland is hardly surprising. These sensations are additionally intensified by him recurrently “getting lost,”⁴⁴ which contact with local people and his use of “fractured Polish”⁴⁵ not only fail to eliminate, but even tend to increase. His confusion is particularly visible when he ponders upon the repetitive acts of renaming Polish streets. The only explanation that Moran is able to find for this baffling engagement of Polish authorities is that “Poles seem to love change for its own sake.”⁴⁶ His conclusion seems all the more apt as “the cost and inconvenience [the changes in question might have brought] to residents and businesses could be enormous.”⁴⁷ Hence, the apparent lack of cause and effect logic in the behaviour of the Poles may be perceived by a Western traveller precisely as the reverse domain of the East, for the country perfectly inscribes itself into the array of territories able to provide a visitor from the West with an unreal experience.⁴⁸

³⁸ M.L. Pratt, op. cit., p. 234.

³⁹ M. Moran, *A Country in the Moon. Travels in Search of the Heart of Poland*, London 2008.

⁴⁰ See among others: R. White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity, 1688–1980*, Crows Nest, North Sydney 1981; L. Jensen *Unsettling Australia: Readings in Australian Cultural History*, New Delhi 2005.

⁴¹ M. Moran, *Brief Biography*, [in:] *Michael Moran – Travel Writer and Explorer – homepage*, <http://www.michael-moran.net> [access: 9.09. 2011].

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ See: M. Castle, *Triggering Communism’s Collapse: Perceptions and Power in Poland’s Transition*, Harvard Cold War studies book series, Lanham 2005, p. 160–167, 208.

⁴⁴ M. Moran, *A Country in the Moon*, op. cit., p. 6.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 21.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 21–22.

⁴⁸ *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, op. cit., p. 20.

Another example of being lost among inverted, incomprehensible surroundings is presented in the book once the reader gets a chance to accompany Moran to the 10th Anniversary Stadium. As the author reports, “a faint air of criminality [...] haunted the largest street market in Europe. Russians, Africans, Vietnamese, Tatars, Belarusians, Ukrainians and Poles sold counterfeit perfume, furs, cigars, and caviar from kiosks and rickety tables.”⁴⁹ The fact that the stadium does not fulfil the function it is generally expected to, as it has been converted into an international place of trade,⁵⁰ is only one element that provides the foreign visitor with a reverse image of reality. The confusion the traveller experiences additionally results from the rich mix of Eastern cultures Moran has a chance to encounter, and from the slightly criminal character of the whole undertaking, which, as the quotation above suggests, he has been unfamiliar with so far.

The crucial factor in creating Moran’s inverted image of Poland, however, is his feeling of stepping into an imaginary world, once he enters his place of work and accommodation situated in a building with the easily recognisable communist architectural style, where everything seems to be an upside down reflection of the real.⁵¹ The general appearance of the place and the living conditions it provides evidently confirm the writer’s presentiments about the country’s “inversion”, as he provides his readers with the following description:

The building must have been one of the last conference centres in Warsaw untouched since communist days. Two architecturally sterile blocks were linked by a covered walkway. [...] The reception area was dim, with unsmiling women behind a glass panel furnished with a tiny speech aperture that forced one to bend double to communicate. Anyone hoping to use the telephone needed to grasp the single red handset pushed through the gap on a short cord. Disconnection seemed inevitable and usually irreversible. [...] A faint aroma of urine and boiled fish mixed with the kerosene used to wash the stairs. [...] Light switches were reversed in function, where ‘on’ was ‘off’, hot water taps produced cold water and *vice versa* [...] windows would spontaneously fall out of their frames, lavatory paper shredded half-way through the roll. [...] I realised with a start one day that the tropical curtains in my room had been hung upside down. I began to believe I had stepped through the looking glass hand in hand with Alice.⁵²

This strongly ironic depiction of the Polish building is both a figurative and a literal example of the country’s ‘inversion’ in the eyes of the traveller conditioned by the British culture. Though it is the “Land Down Under” that is facetiously considered as being reverse to the rest of the world⁵³, it appears that to Moran, the Eastern part of Europe possesses features opposite to the ones that are commonly accepted. Moreover, since the quoted excerpt emphasises an asso-

⁴⁹ M. Moran, *A Country in the Moon*, op. cit., p. 21.

⁵⁰ See: Tadeusz Rolke’s “10th-Anniversary Stadium (also bazaar in Warsaw)” and Eustachy Kossakowski’s “Sunday at the 10th-Anniversary Stadium in Warsaw, 1959”, Archives on the website of “Museum of Contemporary Art in Warsaw” www.artmuseum.pl/en/archiwum [access: 25.05.2014].

⁵¹ M. Moran, *A Country in the Moon*, op. cit., p. 7.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 7–9.

⁵³ See: *Interpreting the Land Down Under: Australian Heritage Interpretation and Tour Guiding (Book Review)*, eds. B. Weiler, R. Black, “Historic Environment” 2005, vol. 19, issue 1.

ciation with *Through the Looking Glass*⁵⁴, which automatically came to Moran's mind with reference to the described interior design, the image of Poland depicted by him acquires fabulous, surreal features, becoming a world of incomprehensibility with an abundance of reverse qualities. Therefore having had little or no Eastern European experience, Western readers of Moran's report will presumably be inclined to acclaim the image of the dreamy, quasi-realistic East, of which Poland would now become a representative.

The dream-like accounts featured in Enfield's travelogue are likely to exert a comparable influence on the readers. Presumably unable to depict the surrounding landscape as reverse to the English one by any other means, Enfield resorts to a no longer existent, imaginary view, thence, evoking in his, and ultimately in his readers' imagination, the fabulous, unreal picture which may only be found in the sketches from some outdated history book.⁵⁵ The image is provided to the readers in the description of one of the Polish countrysides.

You probably need to be as old as I am to have seen the sort of farming that was going on, with hay set up in haystacks, horses pulling carts full of potatoes and a great profusion of weeds. You do not see, in England, old ladies in long black dresses and white headscarves armed with pitchforks attending to the hay, but you do between Deblin and Kazimierz-Dolny. [...] The villages were not pretty and the houses had a sort of ex-totalitarian hopelessness about them, as if there were a national shortage of paint. [...] A lot of the farming had an almost feudal look to it and reminded me of the sort of picture you get in schoolboy history books. Strip farming was, they told us, a main feature of medieval agriculture and so that we might understand what this means, the books had pictures of large fields laid out in small strips of different crops. The pictures are often embellished with a pair of oxen pulling a cart and a peasant or two, wearing jerkins and carrying flails. I saw no oxen nor flail-bearing peasants, but the big fields were laid out in strips in just the medieval manner. Some of the strips were strips of weeds, and I could tell from my schoolboy learning that they were being left to lie fallow, which is quite the correct thing if you are going to farm in the medieval way. [...] There were old style haystacks and the milk was going to the dairy in old-fashioned churns rather than the bulk tankers which congest the roads of England.⁵⁶

The comparison of the Polish roadside scenes to the corresponding sights Enfield knows from England, allows the writer to represent the Eastern area as a reverse image of the West and thus, the reverse side of Europe. The reference to the obsolete medieval forms of cultivation offers the reader of Enfield's reportage an opportunity to look at the Eastern-European country as at a "non-existent" reality. Despite the discernible inclination for being recognised as representatives of Europe that the Polish evidently evince⁵⁷, in Enfield's report Poland is ranked among surreal incomprehensible spaces, apparently providing the writer with fabulous and imaginary experiences. Its surrealism is confirmed with repeated incidents of miscommunication between the traveler and the Polish inhabitants whom he has an opportunity to meet during his journey.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ L. Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*, UK 1871.

⁵⁵ E. Enfield, *Dawdling by the Danube*, op. cit., p. 103.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 99–107.

⁵⁷ M. Moran, *A Country in the Moon*, op. cit., p. 29.

⁵⁸ E. Enfield, *Dawdling by the Danube*, op. cit., p. 103, 109.

Incomprehensive encounters

Enfield's inability to share the same language with the Polish appears to be almost entirely incapacitating for him. As he encounters another cyclist along the road, the inability to share the same verbal code expectedly forces him to resort either to bodily communication, as a substitute for reciprocal understanding, or to silence which only highlights the breach between the two representatives of different European cultures.⁵⁹ Since the Polish traveler does not seem to be discouraged by being misunderstood and is talking to Enfield incessantly in his own language, the writer has to rely upon his assumptions with regard to the content of this monologue, though they are frequently incongruent with what his interlocutor really attempts to convey.⁶⁰ The need for conversation on Enfield's part, however, does not disappear entirely, as at the final point of their common journey, he feels obliged to say at least a few words that would be understood by both parties.

I showed my map to a policeman and managed to convey the idea that I wanted to go to Kazimierz-Dolny, so he set me on the right road. I showed it again to another man, and he put me in charge of yet another man who was going that way on his bicycle. We rode along side by side in a state of brisk conversation, he talking volubly in Polish and I nodding and smiling. [...] He was not at all put off by the fact that he had all the talk to himself, but the moment came when he was to turn off and I to go straight on. We then shook hands in midair, as it were, without stopping cycling, and I drew on my scant linguistic resources to say "Thank you. Goodbye", in Polish.⁶¹

Though the language barrier is the most conspicuous and onerous hindrance in communication with the local resident, it may be worth noticing that the visual image the author provides us with in this scene is even more significant. A person from another reality, riding a bicycle "side by side"⁶² with the author, yet displaying a converse way of conduct, may easily provoke the readers' associations with a mirror reflection.⁶³ Therefore, Enfield's experience may be parallel to the one described by Moran in his reportage: he is stepping in to the other side of the looking glass, which provides him with an opportunity to meet his own reverse image. Peculiar and disturbing as the experience appears to be, it may enhance a feeling of immersing in some unreal world of fables or an alternative dimension of reality.

After one of Enfield's conversations with a man who provides him with accommodation during his stay in Poland, the feeling of unreality and estrangement becomes even more evident, as an entirely different way of looking at the world by the Polish and the British is being exposed. Getting to know the story of this man's life, the writer observes that having "spent twelve years in Canada [...] he

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 99.

⁶⁰ There are also other examples of this process in Enfield's reportage; one of these examples may be found in *ibid.*, p. 103.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 99.

⁶² Ibid., p. 99.

⁶³ E. Cheaurè, *Infinite Mirrorings: Russia and Eastern Europe as the West's "Other"*, [in:] *Facing the East in the West*, op. cit., p. 25–42.

had just come back to Poland to see his first proper ‘fall’ in twelve years.”⁶⁴ As Enfield writes, “[a]pparently the autumn colours in Ojkow are superior to those anywhere in Canada, but you may need to see them through Polish eyes to get to such a pitch of enthusiasm.”⁶⁵ Thence, it becomes clear that certain experiences are available either exclusively to the Polish or to the British eyes, as even the mode of looking at the same landscape necessarily has a different effect depending on whether one is looking at one’s own or some other country.⁶⁶ The different historical background and the unique experiences of a local person, unavailable to a foreign tourist, will always determine the perspective through which one perceives reality and, as a consequence, the shape this reality will assume in his/her eyes.⁶⁷

That the cognitive gap between cultures is not bridgeable becomes equally evident in Fort’s account of his contacts with the Polish. The writer’s reportage provides evidence to the fact that, apart from verbal miscommunication, different modes of perceiving the world around might also manifest themselves in the withdrawal from establishing any closer relation with the individuals from a culturally different area. Though the feeling of unreality apparently imposes itself on the traveller in the Polish surroundings, he also senses his own reluctance and anxiety to breach the barrier between the real and the imaginary realms.⁶⁸ In his description of a bus trip to Cracow, the bus being the means of transport Fort chooses for his second journey to Poland⁶⁹, the barrier and the sense of confusion the traveller experiences in the reverse reality become prominent:

Behind me was a dumpy, middle-aged Polish woman, and across the aisle from her another, older Polish woman, grey and faded. They quickly struck up an acquaintance, leaning towards one another to exchange chat in low tones. What could they be talking about? Going home? Children, grandchildren, husbands? The English weather? The impenetrable mysteries of England and its customs? I had absolutely no means of knowing. The coach was less than a third full, and the remaining passengers – one couple, the rest single males, presumably workers returning home – were scattered about the back half of the coach. It was strange, but as the journey went on I felt more and more separated from them, more and more inhibited from getting up, turning to face them, approaching them, asking them anything. Some kind of psychic chasm had opened between us when we took our seats.⁷⁰

The author’s inability or unwillingness to plunge in the Polish individuals’ world may derive from the prospective danger of becoming a part of this “unreal” space and thus, of becoming unreal himself; for observing one’s own distorted image may be amusing and exciting, yet, as long as the other side of the mirror does

⁶⁴ E. Enfield, *Dawdling by the Danube*, op. cit., p. 122.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁶⁶ B.J. Craige, *Literary Relativity: An Essay on Twentieth-century Narrative*, East Brunswick–London–Toronto 1982, p. 19.

⁶⁷ B.J. Craige, op. cit., p. 19.

⁶⁸ T. Fort, *Against the Flow*, op. cit., p. 5.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5–6.

not incept one to its “unreal” dimension.⁷¹ Therefore despite his “journalist’s impudent assumption of the right to accost anyone and ask anything”,⁷² which stems from a reporter’s profession, Fort becomes gradually “forfeited or mislaid”⁷³ and, as the above-quoted passage illustrates, the only relation he is willing to establish with the inhabitants from the other side of Europe is observational, impersonal and clearly detached.

A Polish “made-up face”⁷⁴

Apart from confirming British travellers’ tendency to regard Poland as reverse to Europe, Enfield’s and Fort’s reportages seem to acknowledge the contribution that Polish inhabitants have made to the construction of this upturn image of their country.⁷⁵ Reading Michael Moran’s reportage, in turn, one is likely to realise that Poland “makes up” two different faces for the foreigners’ eyes. On the one hand, “straining to become fashionable [...], [it] exhibits a Western made-up face to the world hoping for acceptance.”⁷⁶ On the other hand, as the author claims, most of the general charm around the places often visited by tourists derives from those places’ historical aspect, extolled by the Poles to entice the British with “the intimations of a glorious past; [...] [s]igns, indications, ruins and reconstructions [which] exercise [...] imagination.”⁷⁷

Proud of their country’s history and treating their past with sentiment and nostalgia, Poles seem to ignite their Western visitors’ interest, purposefully drawing their attention to the image of their country derived from Polish national memory and imagination.⁷⁸ As Moran observes, the political situation, which had indeed exerted a great influence upon Poland and its citizens, has completely and irreversibly shaped the image of the country. His claim only proves that, despite being eager to accentuate Western European influences upon their culture, Polish people present a considerably non-Western image of Poland to the outside observ-

⁷¹ As Mary Pratt observes, the anxiety of Western European travellers evoked by a possibility of being unable to differentiate between the “self” and the “other” is a subject broadly discussed in post-colonial writing. M.L. Pratt, op. cit., p. 248.

⁷² T. Fort, *Against the Flow*, op. cit., p. 6.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ M. Moran, *A Country in the Moon*, op. cit., p. 29; henceforth, I use the phrase repeatedly after Moran, acknowledging his recognition of an artificial but, at the same time, mythical image that the Polish people created of themselves for the foreigners to see.

⁷⁵ Radio Free Europe, Audience and Public Opinion Research Department, *The Polish Self-image and the Polish Image of Americans, Russians, Chinese, Germans, and Czechs*, Radio Free Europe, 1969, p. 6.

⁷⁶ M. Moran, *A Country in the Moon*, op. cit., p. 29.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ The Polish sentimental attitude towards the past is well described in Radio Free Europe, *The Polish Self-image*, p. 12–13; According to Benedict Anderson, the tendency to create an image of one’s nation that would be acceptable by its members and by the external observers is a feature inherent in all communities. B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London–New York 1991.

ers, preventing them from sharing their experience and thus, making recognition of Poland as part of Western Europe hardly possible. This peculiar historically conditioned image of the country, as well as the general ideas about Polish national characteristics that Moran forms on the basis of that image, are presented in the following passage.

The historical shortcomings of the Polish nation have long been obvious: the myths, mistrustfulness, patrician splendour and peasant shabbiness, xenophobia and impulsiveness, the fumbled victories [...] A man who favours the rational, pragmatic and imperial temperament of the conqueror will not find much to sustain him in Polish history. But the rhapsodic temperament, the lover of charm and hospitality, the brave and reckless in life, the imaginative observer, the advocate of freedom will surely be satisfied. [...] the romantic who favours the heroic gesture over the consequence, the burning emotion over the achievement, sincerity of intention over regularity of thought – such as these will mine a rich seam.⁷⁹

This description may admittedly be reckoned by a Pole as a prejudiced one, since the features Moran ascribes to Polish people are presented as opposite to those in which the foundations of Western culture and civilisation have been grounded.⁸⁰ Such attributes as rationalism, consistency, “achievement, [...] [and] regularity of thought”⁸¹ are not only the essential elements that have enabled people from the West to create their culture and form individual societies, but, to the Western-European understanding, they are still the qualities distinctive of an enlightened and advanced mind.⁸² Cause and effect logic being the basic tool used by the inhabitants of the West to elucidate reality, determines romanticism, “burning emotion”⁸³ and the recklessness of a “rhapsodic temperament”⁸⁴ as contrary to those manifested by the European society members, and thus, again, facilitates the sustainment of the reverse, Eastern image of Poland.⁸⁵

Furthermore, since the country allegedly constitutes an inverse reality, it may easily be reckoned as a representative of any Eastern area, and this way be inscribed among the dreamlike, imaginary realms.⁸⁶ It may also be perceived as “a country in the moon” – the name given to Poland by Edmund Burke⁸⁷, and em-

⁷⁹ M. Moran, *A Country in the Moon*, op. cit., p. 20.

⁸⁰ L. Gandhi, op. cit., p. 32.

⁸¹ M. Moran, *A Country in the Moon*, op. cit., p. 20.

⁸² L. Gandhi, op. cit., p. 37.

⁸³ M. Moran, *A Country in the Moon*, op. cit., p. 20.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Analysing the image of Poland presented by the British media, Przemysław Wilk observes that the country becomes interchangeably accepted and rejected as part of the West, depending on the political situation in Europe. p. Wilk, *Images of Poles and Poland in The Guardian, 2003–2005*, [in:] *Facing the East in the West...*, p. 335–348; The attributes regarded by the Western Europeans as characteristic of an enlightened mind are broadly discussed in L. Gandhi, op. cit., p. 32.

⁸⁶ K. Kassabova, *From Bulgaria with Love and Hate: The Anxiety of the Distorting Mirror (A Writer's Perspective)*, [in:] *Facing the East in the West*, op. cit., p. 67–78.

⁸⁷ “Interestingly, the title refers to a remark made by the great eighteenth century English statesman Edmund Burke sadly reflecting on the shameful First Partition of Poland in 1772. Ministry of Foreign Affairs Copyright, 2008–2011, *A Country in the Moon: Travels in Search of the Heart of Poland* by Michael Moran, [in:] *Official Promotional Website of The Republic of Poland*, <http://en.poland.gov.pl> [access: 1.12.2014].

ployed by Moran as the title and motto of his book – as it is a reflection of Western Europe, and reflections are rather “unearthly.” “[They] are kind of magic, [...] as if [one] was floating into another world. [They are] very similar to the one we live in [...] apart from being still. When the wind blows [a reflection] goes away [...] like a dream.”⁸⁸

Hence, the discussed reportages allow one to draw conclusions that, irrespective of the number of countenances Poland presents to the British traveler, striving for being acknowledged as a part of European culture and thus, inventing itself ever anew, its semblance of a reverse reflection will only be solidified. As the analysed excerpts of the journals illustrate, though Poland sees itself as a rightful member of Western culture, unable to distance itself from the past it is concurrently marginalised by the West. It seems, however, that it is not its geographical, economic, political or even cultural status that determines its marginality, as to the British travellers Poland is a country located between the real and the non-existent, between the comprehensible and inconceivable, between similarity and incomparability.⁸⁹ Hence, as the Polish example illustrates, apart from the evident political consequences, consisting in the establishment of power relations between the Western and Eastern parts of the world, and the cultural repercussions visible in the recurrent acts of discrimination and marginalisation of the East, the conceptual division into the Western reality and its Eastern upturned counterpart appears to have also more rudimentary – ontological implications.⁹⁰ For denied the right to exist within the Western dimension of real, Poland is reduced to the status of a reflection of Europe, with all the reverse qualities a reflection possesses – with dreamlike, distorted, magical qualities of a parallel world.⁹¹ It is “a country in the moon,”⁹² into which the travellers from the West may “step hand in hand with Alice,”⁹³ apparently certain to be provided with a unique opportunity to look at their own reverse mirror image.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Kaspar Saxena’s comment on his photographic work created upon the waters of The Big East River, Ontario in “You Put a Spell on Me: Land, Language and Looking Glass Photography on The Big East River” – a lecture given in the University of Silesia during the Days of Canadian Culture on 15.05.2014.

⁸⁹ In her analysis of the British perception of Bulgaria, based on the stereotypes ingrained in the Western cultural consciousness, Kapka Kassabova refers to the general “Western stereotypes of the Eastern Bloc” which are grounded in unreality and the world of fables. K. Kassabova, *op. cit.*, p. 67–78.

⁹⁰ J.J. Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 206, 213.

⁹¹ K. Saxena, *You Put a Spell on Me*, *op. cit.*

⁹² E. Burke, quoted in “*A Country in the Moon: Travels in Search of the Heart of Poland* by Michael Moran”. Cf. <http://en.poland.gov.pl> [access: 1.12.2014].

⁹³ M. Moran, *A Country in the Moon*, *op. cit.*, p. 7–9.

⁹⁴ *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.