

# Rewriting Europe: The Central Europe of Yuri Andrukhovych and Andrzej Stasiuk

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## Introduction

When it joined the European Union in 2004, Poland's eastern border, which it shared with Ukraine and Belarus, became the easternmost border of the EU. In 2007, Poland was admitted to the Schengen Convention. The Polish border then became the line that effectively divided the EU identified with Europe from the "others" of Europe.

In 2000, on the eve of the eastern expansion of the EU, Polish writer Andrzej Stasiuk (1960) and Ukrainian writer Yuri Andrukhovych (1960) co-authored a book titled *My Europe: Two Essays on So-called Central Europe* (*Moja Europa: Dwa eseje o Europie zwanej Środkową*). The book includes two essays on Central Europe, each written by one of the authors. Unlike Milan Kundera, who discusses Central Europe as "a kidnapped West" which is "situated geographically in the center—culturally in the West and politically in the East"<sup>1</sup> in his well-known essay "A Kidnapped West, or the Tragedy of Central Europe" ("Un Occident kidnappé ou la tragédie de l'Europe centrale") (1983),<sup>2</sup> written in the Cold War period, they describe Central Europe neither as a corrective concept nor in terms of the binary opposition of West and East. First, as the subtitle of this book suggests, they discuss Central Europe as "my

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1 Milan Kundera, "A Kidnapped West or Culture Bows Out," *Granta* 11 (1984), p. 96.

2 The essay was originally published in French magazine *Le Débat* 27 (1983).

Europe,” drawing from their individual perspectives. Actually, as one review properly points out, the book is not about the concept of Central Europe, but about the Europe of Andrukhovych and Stasiuk, which has been called “Central.”<sup>3</sup>

Second, their Europe is described from a viewpoint set in the borderland between Poland and Ukraine, where both writers have chosen to live, even after becoming widely renowned. The area, far from either nation’s capitals, is historically known as Galicia, the ownership of which has changed several times, but which has always been a borderland regarded as a periphery. During the partition of Poland in 1772, the current western borderland of Ukraine, including Ivano-Frankivsk (known as Stanisławów in Polish), where Andrukhovych was born and lives, was annexed by the Austrian Empire and it was renamed “Galicia.” During the third partition in 1795, the current southeastern borderland of Poland, where Stasiuk lives, was annexed by Austria, and was named “New” or “Western” Galicia to distinguish it from the former Galicia. During the interwar period, the whole of Galicia became Polish territory. During World War II, it was occupied by both the Soviets and Nazi Germans. After the war, the eastern border of Poland moved west, and Galicia was divided into Poland and the Soviet Ukraine. Eastern Galicia, including Lviv, became a part of Ukraine, and Western Galicia, centering on Kraków, became Poland. In 1991, Ukraine became independent from Soviet Russia. After 2004, the former Galicia became the eastern borderland of the EU. Stasiuk and Andrukhovych’s book on Europe, therefore, rewrites Europe from inside former Galicia, or the geopolitical margins.

In the early 2000s, when *My Europe* was published, Poland was awash in a festive atmosphere, celebrating its entrance into the EU as a “return to Europe.” The name “Central Europe” has been preferred as a self-description over “Eastern,” which is reminiscent of the country’s past as part of the Soviet bloc. In these discourses, “Europe” is used uncritically as a synonym for the EU. Amidst this situation, their book itself

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3 Aleksander Kaczorowski, “Moja Europa. Dwa eseje o Europie zwanej Środkową, Andruchowycz, Jurij; Stasiuk, Andrzej,” *Gazeta wyborcza*, January 19, 2001. [<http://wyborcza.pl/1,75517,108397.html>] Accessed January 30, 2015.

was a counterargument to the aforementioned social atmosphere. Since the publication of *My Europe*, Stasiuk's writings have shifted to travel essays on eastern and southern Europe, especially on non-EU countries. These writings were at the forefront of a surge in interest in Ukraine and the East among young Polish intellectuals, while there was a boom in travel to Western Europe and the United States to work and study in the 2000s.

Today, more than ten years have passed since the publication of the book and the entrance of Poland into the EU. In this paper, firstly, I would like to reread the book as Galician literature, that is, as continuing a line of literature written in Galicia regardless of language, and through this reconsider their concept of Central Europe, or Europe, as an attempt to deconstruct strong ideological thought based on the opposition of East/West. Finally, I would like to examine the actuality of their concept of Europe today, wherein geopolitical discourse based on the opposition between the West and the East, Europe and Russia, has seen a revival since the beginning of the Euro-Maidan in November 2013.

## 1. Map of a Colony: Bruno Schulz's "The Street of Crocodiles"

Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* (1978) revealed how modern European nations invented the Orient as its Other, characterized by backwardness and ahistorical views, building its self-image as the opposite of the Orient. Europe, thus, defined itself as absolutely superior to others and obtained hegemony. The relationship between Europe and the Orient, the Orientalist and the Oriental, is actually "a matter of power":<sup>4</sup>

(...) the Orientalist as against the Oriental is that the former *writes* about, whereas the latter is *written* about. For the latter, passivity is the presumed role; for the former, the power to observe, study, and so forth; as Roland Barthes has said, a myth (and its perpetuators) can invent itself (themselves) ceaselessly. The Oriental is given as fixed, stable, in need of investigation, in need even of knowledge about himself. No dialectic is either desired or allowed. There is a source of information (the Orien-

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4 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 308.

tal) and a source of knowledge (the Orientalist), in short, a writer and a subject matter otherwise inert.<sup>5</sup>

American historian Larry Wolff, adapting Said's general concept of Orientalism, discusses how Galicia was discovered and invented as a testing ground for the Enlightenment politics of the Austrian despot Joseph II, who participated in the 1772 partition of Poland, and how German literature had created and disseminated exotic and backwards images of Galicia—where Polish noblemen, Ukrainian serfs, and Jews all lived. Through these images, German-speaking readers became convinced that the newly acquired Galicia was in need of being civilized by Austria.<sup>6</sup> Wolff discusses how hegemonic Austria regarded this New World, Galicia, as a tabula rasa awaiting enlightenment from above. Said's scheme of Occident/Orient is found in miniaturized version in the framework of the Austrian Empire.

The Jewish-Polish writer Bruno Schulz, who was born in the Galicia of the Austrian era in 1892, and who wrote Polish-language prose during the interwar period, has a striking insight into the arbitrariness of maps drawn by colonists. In the famous short story “Street of Crocodiles” (“Ulica Krokodyli”), published in 1933 in his first collection of short stories, *Cinnamon Shops* (*Sklepy cynamonowe*), we find a description of a dubious place called the Street of Crocodiles, as follows:

On that map, made in the style of baroque panoramas, the area of the Street of Crocodiles shone with the empty whiteness that usually marks polar regions or unexplored countries which almost nothing is known. The lines of only a few streets were marked in black and their names given in simple, unadorned lettering, different from the noble script of the other captions. The cartographer must have been loath to include that district in the city and his reservations found expression in the typographical treatment.<sup>7</sup>

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5 Said, *Orientalism*, p. 308.

6 Larry Wolff, *The Idea of Galicia: History and Fantasy in Habsburg Political Culture* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2010), pp. 20–36.

7 Bruno Schulz, *The Street of Crocodiles and Other Stories*, trans. Celina Wieniewska (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), pp. 63–64.

On maps drawn in a baroque style, the closer the objects are to the cartographer's viewpoint, the more detailed they are depicted. If the objects are at a distance, their lines become vague and are finally replaced by a blank territory, on which only the name of the area is written. In other words, a newly obtained territory may be included on a map, but it is visualized as a literal blank slate, and is given a new name by the current ruler-cartographer. The periphery is created by the cartographer, whose standing point becomes the viewpoint of the world. Thus, Schulz's description of the Street of Crocodiles overlaps with the politics of Austria, which had cast Galicia as a *tabula rasa*. Generally, Schulz's prose has been regarded as non-political, but as this example proves, we cannot miss his political sensibility.

## 2. A Cartographer with Compasses: Andrzej Stasiuk's Map

Andrzej Stasiuk, as if developing Schulz's insight, draws a map in his essay titled "Logbook" ("Dziennik okrętowy"), included in *My Europe* in 2000. He was born in Warsaw in 1960, and moved to the foot of the Beskid Mountains in southeast Poland near the border of Slovakia in the 1980s. Since then, he has lived in villages in former Galicia (first in Czarne, then in Wołowiec), where he runs the independent publishing house Czarne with his wife. Czarne focuses on literature of so-called Central Europe, and published *My Europe*. The essay starts as follows:

I use compasses as ancient geographers, discoverers and commanders of old battles. I measure a distance with compasses. The fundamental, that is, geometrical, function of compasses is the same. So I stub its needle at the place where I am now, and then everything indicates that I would stay here. I put its leg there, where I was born and had spent most of my life. At last this is the basic size of our own biography when we try to harmonize it with space. From my Wołowiec to Warsaw it is about 300 kilometers in a straight line. Of course, I cannot resist the temptation to draw a circle of 300 kilometers, centering on Wołowiec, to set my central Europe. Overall the line runs via Brest, Równe, Czernovtsy, Kluz-Napoka, Arad, Szeged, Budapest, Zylina, Katowice, Częstochowa, and finally ends there, where it starts, namely Warsaw. Within the circle a part of Belarus, the quite large Ukraine, the fairly large space

of Romania and Hungary, both of which do not yield an inch, almost the whole of Slovakia and a fragment of Czech are included. And almost one third of my Homeland. There is neither Germany nor Russia—I take this with a certain surprise, but with an unobtrusive and atavistic relief.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, Stasiuk draws a Central Europe measured against his biography, using two places—his birthplace in Warsaw and his home in Wołowiec—as his reference points.

It is not a coincidence that the above description features a map and compasses, while in the Middle Ages, the concept of “Deus Artifex” (God as a craftsman) was visualized as an image of a man drawing a world with compasses.<sup>9</sup> Stasiuk’s self-portrait of himself looking at a map with compasses, therefore, functions as an ironic metaphor for the Creator. Echoing Said, it implies that a space or a world represented on a map is an image captured from the eyes of the cartographer, or the hegemon. Stasiuk, or the narrator of his first-person essay, or a resident in Galicia, who—like the Orient—has been represented by others, clearly begins by reclaiming the right to draw a map, to independently represent oneself and the world.

As if emphasizing “my” Europe, Stasiuk frequently uses such phrases as “X kilometers from my house” or “Y kilometers from here.” His so-called Central Europe is not one drawn and fixed from the outside, but one described by a person on the inside. The possessive adjective “my” is used to declare that current so-called Central Europe, which had been defined as Eastern Europe or the periphery by those in the West, should reclaim its voice in order to dictate itself on its own terms.

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8 Andrzej Stasiuk, “Dziennik okrętowy,” in Jurij Andruchowycz and Andrzej Stasiuk, *Moja Europa: Dwa eseje o Europie zwanej Środkową* (Wołowiec: Czarne, 2001 [second edition]), pp. 77–78. The translation is mine.

9 Cf. Akira Akiyama, “From *deus artifex* to *divino artista*: on the Self-Formation of the Artist in the Renaissance,” *Studies in Western Art* 3 (2000), pp. 75–92. (In Japanese).

### 3. History as a Palimpsest: Andrukhovych's Mythologization of Reality

In contrast to Stasiuk, who concentrates on space rather than time (“My obsession was always geography, and never history”<sup>10</sup>), Andrukhovych describes his Europe on the basis of history. He was born and lives in Ivano-Frankivsk, a small city in Western Ukraine and former Galicia. In the essay “Central-East Revision” (“Środkowowschodnie rewizje”), included in *My Europe*, he overlays the map of his Central Europe onto the traces of his ancestors. In other words, his Europe is written on his genealogy, which is inseparably connected with the history of Galicia.

I also like all the family mythologies, sometimes intolerably tangled, and contradicting each other, takes on wandering, wedding, birth, disappearance. I like to see in them unknown figures and unexpected events. Here, I see one morning about a hundred years ago, a Sudeten German named Karl gets off at the station *Stanislau* for the first time in his life—here is Galicia, where he has never been, he knows only that the biggest hole in the whole country is here, a dirty province, frankly speaking, an ass, but for unknown reasons Karl has decided to start a new life exactly here (...)<sup>11</sup>

Andrukhovych returns to the beginning of his genealogy, to the level where it merges with mythology. This way of writing corresponds again with Bruno Schulz's views on poesy, which he called “The Mythologization of Reality” (“Mityzacja rzeczywistości”) in his 1936 essay of the same name. In this manner, Andrukhovych depicts how Galician Ukraine and its identity came to be. In the beginning is Karl, a pioneer from Sudeten who came to Galicia, then a newly acquired territory of Austria. A great-grandfather was the first to go to the United States. His wife also went there, where she learned of his death in a tram accident, but after 30 years, returned to Ukraine to buy land for their children. Then, two

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10 Stasiuk, “Dziennik okrętowy,” p. 120.

11 Jurij Andruchowycz, “Środkowowschodnie rewizje,” trans. Lidia Stefanowska, in Jurij Andruchowycz and Andrzej Stasiuk, *Moja Europa: Dwa eseje o Europie zwanej Środkową* (Wołowiec: Czarne, 2001 [second edition]), p. 18. The translation is mine.

World Wars happened. In the time of Andrukhovych's grandfather, the national identity had already formed. He thought "Ukraine is one, and its enemies are Poland and Soviet Russia."<sup>12</sup> Andrukhovych's grandmother and father attempted to escape Soviet territory before the end of WWII, but were deported back to Ukraine, where Andrukhovych would be born. Thus, in contrast to Stasiuk who represents his biography ahistorically as a circle on a map, Andrukhovych traces his roots in the past, linking various historical episodes together into a story. His genealogy is tied closely to Galicia, which he observes as a palimpsest of the history that has occurred there.

Fortunately, I live in the part of the world where the past means very much. Some call it roots and the others call it entanglements. And some cannot name it. In this part of the world, in short, there are too many ruins, too many skeletons under our feet. Fortunately, I cannot be freed from it. (...) Without my memory, I am worth nothing at all.<sup>13</sup>

He presents his Europe historically as a genealogy of a typical Galicia-born Ukrainian, while Stasiuk presents his as a circle drawn on a map which in its nature reflects only the present. The map does not reflect further generations of his lineage, neither in the past nor in the future. The two essays included in the book *My Europe*, thus, present "my Europe" from two perspectives, respectively—space and time. These two different perspectives on Central Europe from former Galicia, complementary to each other, present Central Europe not as a singular entity. It stretches beyond the borders of nations, the EU, power blocs, language, or religion on a desktop map. Andrukhovych's history simply presents the idea that the genealogy of its people cannot be purely categorized by ethnicity or nationality, while Stasiuk shows that lives in so-called Central Europe today stretch beyond national borders and the border of the EU, and only that their Central Europe stretches neither into Germany nor Russia.

We should remember another depiction of Central Europe from Stasiuk's essay in *My Europe*:

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12 Andruchowycz, "Środkowowschodnie rewizje," p. 35.

13 Andruchowycz, "Środkowowschodnie rewizje," p. 71.

So, what does it mean to be a Central European, to live between the East which did not exist and the West which existed too much? So, what does it mean to live “in the center” when the “center” is truly the only real land? Only that this land is not stable. Rather, it reminds one of an island, or a floating island. Yes, or a ship in east-west currents and winds, and in reverse.<sup>14</sup>

A community floating between the imagined East and the imagined West, not tied to definite territory, languages, nations—this is the Europe or Central Europe Stasiuk depicts. In an atmosphere welcoming of a “return to Europe” in Poland, Andrukhovych and Stasiuk’s concept of Europe played an important role in fostering alternative visions of “Europe.” They proposed a concept based on being “between,” on being absorbed into neither Western Europe, nor the East, nor Russia. Their concepts also corresponded well with postcolonial theories that attempt to listen to the voices of those represented by hegemonic powers.

#### **4. Ukrainian Crisis and European Values**

Finally, I would like to examine the importance of their concept of Central Europe today. Ever since the Euro-Maidan began in Kiev in November 2013 and the outbreak of succeeding events in East Ukraine (the annexation of Crimea by Russia, the War in the eastern borderland of Ukraine), Andrukhovych has frequently commented on these events in the Western media. When various speculations on the situation in Ukraine have run rife, Andrukhovych, a Ukrainian writer whose works are translated into Polish, English, German, and so on, has commented and informed on what was happening at the Euro-Maidan and in Ukraine for the Western media as a representative of Ukrainian intellectuals.

It is interesting for our discussion that Andrukhovych uses the words “European values” to explain the characteristics of the protests against the Yanukovych regime. In the open letter released in January 2014, when the collision between the military and the protestors in Ukraine was at its peak, he made the appeal that “the Ukrainian people, without exaggeration, now defend the European values of a free and just

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14 Stasiuk, “Dziennik okrętowy,” p. 136.

society with their own blood.”<sup>15</sup> It was the refusal of Janukovych to sign the Association Agreement with the EU that triggered the Euro-Maidan. “European values” as it is used here should relate to the values of the EU proposed and spread widely by the Treaty of Lisbon, which was ratified by the member nations of the EU in 2009. The official website for the Treaty briefly explains the concept. “Human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and the respect for human rights: these are the core values of the EU which are set out at the beginning of the Treaty of Lisbon. They are common to all Member States, and any European country wishing to become a member of the Union must respect them.”<sup>16</sup>

Stasiuk also uses this expression. A few days after Andrukhovych’s open letter he contributed an article on the crisis in Ukraine to the German paper *Die Welt*, which was also translated into Polish. Responding to Andrukhovych, he explained the idea of the protests being about “European values”:

They [protesters at the Euro-Maidan—A. K.] fight for us. If you think that so-called “European values” are given permanently or are something you can buy and possess, you are wrong. (...) It is impossible to surround the values with bricks and guards. It is impossible to fortify them like the Mediterranean coasts fortified against refugees from Africa. It is impossible to keep them at the Eastern border of my country.<sup>17</sup>

Amidst Ukraine’s critical situation, both writers’ messages turned to the general public returned to discourse based on the hierarchical relationship between Europe and its others, which they attempted to avoid in the 2000s.

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15 Jurij Andrukhovych, “Open Letter from Ukrainian Writer Jurij Andrukhovych,” January 24, 2014. [<http://www.neweasterneurope.eu/interviews/1061-open-letter-from-ukrainian-writer-yuri-andrukhovych>] Accessed January 30, 2015.

16 “Taking Europe into the 21st Century,” [[http://ec.europa.eu/archives/lisbon\\_treaty/take/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/archives/lisbon_treaty/take/index_en.htm)] Accessed January 30, 2015.

17 Andrzej Stasiuk, “Andrzej Stasiuk o Europie: ‘Gdy leje się krew i torturuje się ludzi, nad kijowskim Majdanem zalega cisza’,” *Tygodnik Powszechny*, January 27, 2014. [<http://tygodnik.onet.pl/swiat/andrzej-stasiuk-o-europie-gdy-leje-sie-krew-i-torturuje-sie-ludzi-nad-kijowskim/7z6ly>] Accessed January 30, 2015. The translation is mine.

In the above mentioned article Stasiuk criticizes Poland which—unlike during the Orange Revolution of 2004—passively observed what happened at the Euro-Maidan in Kiev.

As if these few years since joining the EU and Schengen Convention have taught this country self-interest and cautiousness. (...) It looks behind itself and waiting for what the other Europe says.<sup>18</sup>

Stasiuk observes that Poland has identified itself with Western Europe as if it had been absorbed into it, throwing away its “floating” status as Central Europe. Since the Euro-Maidan, the general discourse on Ukraine has been driven by the Europe/Russia binary opposition between the West (pro-EU) and the East (pro-Russia), wherein Europe is identified with the EU or the members of NATO. Stasiuk and Andrukhovych’s concept of Europe proposed around 2000, on the eve of the division of former Galicia into the EU and the non-EU, faces a new dimension today. Their concept, proposing a mode of identification “between” and the deconstruction of the binary opposition West/East, seems, therefore, still actual.

## Conclusion

Today, over ten years have passed since the book’s publication and the eastern expansion of the EU. Since the latter half of the 2000s, Polish literature and criticism has begun to revive discussion stemming from Edward W. Said’s *Orientalism*, from the power relationship between Europe and the Orient, in context of the relationship between the EU and its Other, between Poland and the East. Stasiuk’s travel essays on Eastern and Southern Europe have also been taken up in this context.<sup>19</sup>

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18 Stasiuk, “Andrzej Stasiuk o Europie.”

19 Tomasz Ewertowski, “Demitologizacja czy remitologizacja Europy Środkowej? Stasiuk i Andruchowycz na prowincji,” *Podteksty* 4 (18) (2009). [<https://repozytorium.amu.edu.pl/jspui/bitstream/10593/1426/1/Ewertowski%20T.pdf>] Accessed January 30, 2015. Agata Lewandowska, “Europa Środkowa postkolonialna w prozie podróżnej Stasiuka,” *Podteksty* 1–2 (2011). [<http://podteksty.amu.edu.pl/content/europa-srodkowa-postkolonialna-w-prozie-podroznej-an>

The younger writers who traveled to Ukraine in the 2000s have started to write on their experiences. For example, in the collection of travel essays *Mordor's Coming to Eat us Up, or a Secret History of the Slavs (Przyjdzie Mordor i nas zje, czyli tajna historia Słowian)* (2013),<sup>20</sup> Ziemowit Szczerek (1975) analyzes the mentality of the Poles who went to Ukraine and the East to confirm the mythologized images of the East. He recalls that he contributed to a Polish internet portal reporting on Ukraine, in which he presented dirty and backward stereotyped images of the country, just because that was exactly what the readers expected.<sup>21</sup> In this way, the author reminds himself of the Orientalists mentioned in Said's *Orientalism*, who wrote and invented the Orient.

Thus, postcolonial examinations of the relationship between Poland and its Eastern neighbors are being taken up. As the Orientalist examples ironically testify, literature can affect reality, altering or creating it, offering an image of a possible world. The concept proposed by Andruk-howych and Stasiuk in their essays can also affect how people think of these issues.

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drzeja-stasi.html] Accessed January 30, 2015. For a recent study on Stasiuk's writings and the academic response to his works, see Elżbieta Rybicka, *Geopolityka: Przestrzeń i miejsce we współczesnych teoriach i praktykach literackich* (Kraków: Universitas, 2014).

<sup>20</sup> Ziemowit Szczerek, *Przyjdzie Mordor i nas zje, czyli tajna historia Słowian* (Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2013).

<sup>21</sup> Szczerek, *Przyjdzie Mordor i nas zje*, pp. 99–100.