

Title: Writing the Other: Images from “the Projects” in Polish 21st Century Literature -The Peasant Past in Poland’s Present

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About a decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall, alongside the new Polish realities, arose a literary wave whose main focus became the “concrete suburbs” (in Polish *blokowisko*) that are to be found in basically every Polish town, a residue of the socialist housing “projects” of the 1960s and 70s. This paper examines, from a postcolonial perspective, the images of these margins in Dorota Masłowska’s *Wojna polsko ruska pod flagą bialo-czerwoną* (2002) and Krzysztof Bizio’s *Zresztą latem wszystkie kwiaty są takie piękne* (2004). The former is the first Polish novel to portray the subculture of “dresiarze” (in English “tracksuiters”) referring to young men, usually criminal and drug addicted, residing in “the projects”. The latter, in contrast, depicts the realities of the residents within “the projects” but outside the “dresiarze” subculture.

I show that these novels have similarities with the Polish Positivist and Modernist novels’ way of portraying peasants at the turn of the last century. Following that, I argue that Masłowska, despite giving a stereotypical image of a drug abusing, hallucinating “dresiarz” in her novel – thus epitomizing a depraved society – does not morally condemn her characters. Bizio, however, telling short stories of the lonely, consumer and status driven residents of one of “the projects”, clearly does pass a moral judgment on his characters’ life styles, indicating that love, or at least the individual, is the solution to their problems.

These images, I argue, are both a result of 19th and 20th century urbanization with massive peasant immigration to the cities, and, with the “the projects” being a left-over from the former system, of today’s Polish resentment towards its communist past.