

JAKUB JANKOWSKI

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8805-9282>

University of Warsaw

jakub.s.jankowski@uw.edu.pl

TERRA SONÂMBULA MEANS *LUNATYCZNA KRAINA*: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE RECEPTION OF TRANSLATED LUSO-AFRICAN PROSE IN POLAND*

Abstract

The aim of this article is to take a closer look at Polish press reviews of *Sleepwalking Land* by Mia Couto, in order to study the novel's reception. The reviews provide information not only about the assessment of translation quality, but also about the attitude of the target culture towards translated literature. In this case, a novel from a former Portuguese colony, Mozambique, enters the Polish literary system via the ex-metropole, Portugal. The literary systems involved in the transfer are seen as peripheral, which makes the case interesting in the world of postcolonial order. To legitimise the conclusions, a wider context of Mozambican literature will be taken into consideration, as well as the Polish context. Couto's novel is accepted by the Polish audience as an example of exotic writing. The novel's paratexts, its translator's explanations, and the position of Mia Couto in the Polish literary system before the publication of *Lunatyczna kraina* will be considered as factors informing its reception.

Keywords: translation reception, Mia Couto, *Sleepwalking Land*, *Terra sonâmbula*, *Lunatyczna kraina*, Luso-African prose

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Literature from the former Portuguese colonies is not popular on the Polish market. It does not enjoy a wide readership nor does it often get translated, and its distant historical and cultural context makes it appear exotic, potentially posing a challenge to its reception. The present article seeks to describe and evaluate the reception of Luso-African prose in Poland by looking at the reviews of Mia Couto's novel *Terra sonâmbula*, translated into Polish by Michał Lipszyc. The corpus comprises texts identified based on two Polish National Library catalogues of articles from Polish periodicals and newspapers.¹ The analysis will be accompanied by an extensive discussion of the novel's context, presenting its position in the Mozambican literary system, as well as the translation difficulties posed by the source text, and the language of the book in general. Addressing these characteristics, I will offer insight into Couto's novel as a text which functions between three literary systems (former colony ↔ former metropole ↔ third country).

The broad contextualization employed in the present article is based on Małgorzata Gaszyńska-Magiera's methodology, adopted in her research on the Polish reception of Ibero-American fiction. Drawing on the Polish school of literary communication, this methodology takes into account intra- and extratextual signals, i.e. it looks at the communicative situation encompassing the text itself, as well as its sender and receiver (Gaszyńska-Magiera 2011: 14). This communicative structure, in turn, can be extrapolated into the theory of literary systems, applied in both cultural theory and translation studies; here, literatures are envisaged as central or peripheral systems existing in various types of relations with one another (Casanova 2004; Even-Zohar 1990, Heilbron 1999, 2010; Toury 1995). In these terms, both Polish and Portuguese literature are considered as peripheral systems.

In my analysis of the reception of *Lunaticzna kraina* I will seek to identify traces of the readers' response to elements which I regard as essential for the interpretation of this novel: the author's linguistic creativity; themes exotic from the Polish perspective; signals of cultural and historical foreignness, which make the source text appear unapproachable. I will also address the position of the translator as co-author of the target text, as well as problems of translation adequacy.

¹ Retrieved from <https://alpha.bn.org.pl/> on 2 March 2016.

From peripheries through peripheries to peripheries, or, going round in circles

The literature of *Países Africanos da Língua Oficial Portuguesa* (“African Countries of Portuguese Official Language” aka PALOPs) is under-represented in Poland. Renata Díaz-Szmidt (2010: 44) only lists the following publications: two of Bernardo Honwana’s short stories, “Tata, waż i ja” (1978; *Papa, Cobra, Eu*) and “Zabiliśmy parszywego psa” (1983; *Nós Matámos o Cão-Tinroso*); Mia Couto’s fiction, *Ostatni lot flaminga* (2005; *O Último Voo do Flamingo* 2000 [*The Last Flight of the Flamingo*]), *Naszyjnik z opowiadań* (2008 [A Necklace of Stories]), *Taras z uroczynem* (2009; *A Varanda do Frangipani* 1996; [*Under the Frangipani*]), *Lunatyczna kraina* (2010; *Terra Sonâmbula* 1992; [*Sleepwalking Land*]), and the translations of his short stories which appeared in *?*, a student journal published by the Institute of Iberian and Ibero-American Studies, University of Warsaw; Rui Knopfli’s poetry, published in a special issue of *Literatura na Świecie* literary magazine, devoted to Luso-African and post-colonial literature (vol. 1–2/2008: *Luzaofrykanie. Postkolonializm*). To this short list we should add the translations of six Mozambican fairy tales that appeared in the collected volume *26 bajek z Afryki* (26 African Tales) in 2007, and two post-2010 publications: an anthology of Portuguese African writing in a special issue of *Dekada Literacka* bimonthly magazine (3[246]/2011: *Kalejdoskopisanie. Antologia opowiadań portugalskojęzycznych autorów afrykańskich*), and another “Luso-African” issue of *Literatura na Świecie* (5–6/2012: *Luzaofryka*). In her attempt at a critical contextualisation of this fact, Díaz-Szmidt argues that the exotic world presented in these works should encourage readers to get to know “the new”, rather than serving as an excuse for marginalising Luso-African prose. She adds that it is not due to the small number of texts by Mozambican authors that only so few translations exist (cf. Díaz-Szmidt 2010: 44–45). One reason for the limited number of translations of Luso-African literature may be that this area was subject to colonisation longer than Latin America, and subsequently fell prey to decades of civil wars (this was the case in Angola and Mozambique). This was not conducive to the development of national literatures (in Mozambique, more significant literary production did not begin until the 1940s) or its exportation abroad; thus, it is no wonder that these literatures remain unknown and hence peripheral.

In her article “A periferia da periferia” (“Peripheries of peripheries”), Inocência Mata from São Tomé and Príncipe argues that both Luso-African authors and critics are well aware of the peripherality of their literature. Nevertheless, according to the researcher, “the limits and the status of literary peripherality (...) have more to do with the links between the production and reception of a literary text than with its aesthetic quality” (Mata 1995: 28); although the African continent is regarded as the world’s periphery, and the PALOPs – together with their whole cultural production – as a periphery of this periphery, this does not entail peripherality in terms of quality. Indeed, Portuguese African literature is usually transferred to the European literary polysystem via the former metropole, although Portugal is often also joined by Brazil in the role of an intermediary. If recognised in these national literary polysystems, Luso-African works stand a bigger chance of being translated into other languages. Mata describes this phenomenon in the following terms: “In fact, dependence on European legitimising instances is still there. It seems that in the perspective of globalisation also the hegemonic societies themselves need this kind of relationship: it is out there [i.e. in the peripheries – J.J.] that they seek the other, the different, the exotic” (Mata 1995: 31).

What is striking in the case of Luso-African fiction is that legitimisation begins with the transfer from periphery to another periphery. An example of how complicated this transfer can be is the reception of the Mozambican author Paulina Chiziane, whose novels were first published in Portugal, i.e. the former oppressive metropole, and only later in her homeland. Consequently, she was with distrust and accused of a lack of “native” authenticity, which in turn later lead to attempts at discrediting the quality of her writing (Díaz-Szmidt 2010: 17). This also has to do with the status and position of a particular literature in the postcolonial balance of forces: “Ana Margarida Dias Martins points out that whenever the works of a post-colonial author are published first in the former metropole, and only then in the former colony, the discussion of their literary value turns into a discussion about peripherality, anthropological authenticity, and the interdependence of the Portuguese Prospero and African Caliban” (Díaz-Szmidt 2010: 17). Moreover, as Mata’s research indicates, there is a tendency to evaluate publications regardless of their literary merit, based on the status of their culture of origin. In order to change this situation, publishers need to present “new” cultural values, and critics need to describe these values in such a way as to objectively assess the quality of a particular work and its relevance for the new system. The publisher, the translator and the critic become the ambassadors of peripheral

literatures; the function that Jerzy Jarniewicz once assigned to translators (Jarniewicz 2012: 23) extends to other participants in the cultural transfer.

What, then, can we find in Luso-African literature that should draw the attention of critics, reviewers or researchers analysing the translations of these works? Ana Margarida Dias Martins indicates linguistic innovations, which she believes to be distinct from their European models, but also the “local and universal dimension of the literary message, as well as «stylistic-thematic virtuosity»” (Díaz-Szmidt 2010: 17). In the particular case of Mozambique, a cultural melting pot, there is also the phenomenon of transculturation. Literature was initially created only by the elite, whose activity led to the transition from the traditional form of communication, i.e. oral accounts in indigenous languages, to written literature imitating European models and created in the language of the coloniser. Since the 1940s, attempts were made to break away from these European models, and the turning point of the year 1975, when Mozambique proclaimed independence, initiated efforts to create a new national and cultural identity. As postulated in the beginning, this new identity was to entail a complete dissociation from everything Portuguese, and this approach was reflected in the ideologically engaged literature created in the independent Mozambican state.

With his 1983 volume of poems *Raiz de orvalho* (Root of Dew), Mia Couto breaks away from such political and ideological writing: new literature is not to reject the Portuguese legacy, but rather to try to understand and assimilate it. In 1986, Couto published a collection of short stories *Vozes anoitecidas* (*Voices Made Night*, 2010), which already in the title (“Voices ennightened”) exhibits a neologisation of language, characteristic of such authors as James Joyce, Guimarães Rosa or Luandino Vieira (cf. Díaz-Szmidt 2010: 31–43). As Díaz-Szmidt writes,

Mia Couto decides to experiment with Portuguese language to make it more Mozambican. That is why in all his prose [up until a certain moment – J.J.] we get puns and neologisms, syntactic structures imitating those of African languages, and Portuguese grammar being bent to fit the Mozambican norm. (Díaz-Szmidt 2010: 37)

Many other Mozambican authors also weave words from local languages into the narrative (often compiling them into glossaries included at the end of the book), as well as reaching for folk wisdom, proverbs, and descriptions of local traditions and customs. What is important, in this writing the word not only reflects reality, but also creates a world.

Into the *Terra sonâmbula*

According to Díaz-Szmidt, *Terra sonâmbula* remains Mia Couto's best-known novel. Published in 1992, it was his novelistic debut. In 1995, it received an award from the Association of Mozambican Authors (*Associação dos Escritores Moçambicanos*), and in 2001, the jury of the Zimbabwe International Bookfair selected it from 1,500 long-listed titles as one of the twelve best African books of the 20th century (the final list of winners was announced in 2002 in Accra). In 1996, Patrick Chabal deemed its publication as a turning point (not the only one for which Couto was responsible) in the development of Mozambican literature: "*Terra sonâmbula* is not only Mozambique's first novel, but also introduces a new theme and presents it in an innovative way. The discussion about Couto's novel has provided insight into the origins of Mozambican prose and contributed to the understanding of its current trends" (qtd. in Díaz-Szmidt 2010: 41–42). Díaz-Szmidt points out that the plot takes place on two planes: one is the story of the wartime journey of the wise old man Tuahir and the young Muidinga, who has lost his memory and is looking for his parents, and the other is the events described in the notebooks they find (see Díaz-Szmidt 2010: 42). The notebooks were authored by a certain Kindzu, a boy abandoned by his mother and orphaned by his father. Trying to survive in the time of the civil war and understand the conflict dividing the young Mozambican nation, Kindzu is a figure embodying the identity dilemmas of the Mozambicans, a people who had been subject to colonisation for a long time and who are only now creating their independent existence. The boy still only dreams in Portuguese and does not understand the ghosts who address him in the local language. Thus, *Terra sonâmbula* is a story about a journey that the main protagonists take in time (the retrospective story in Kindzu's notebooks) and space (Muidinga's search for his parents) in order to understand the country's past and find a path leading to a new identity. The present time, however, is a kind of a sleep trap: a coma that the Mozambicans have fallen into, unable to break free from the suspension between the colonial legacy and the challenges of the future.

At the time of publication of the Polish translation of *Terra sonâmbula*, Couto was already known in Poland as an author of two novels and an anthology of short stories. The publisher of *Lunatyczna kraina*, Karakter, made sure that the readers of this exotic text are not left without additional information,

providing it on the cover flaps and in an afterword written by the novel's translator, Michał Lipszyc. Following the example of the Portuguese edition, the Polish one also included a glossary. In the description of the plot exposition, we read on the flap that the stories of Kindzu and Muidinga (two of three main characters in the story; Tuahir is not mentioned) are linked, and we learn about the two intertwining narrative planes. Interestingly, also on the flap (i.e. in a prominent place, which the reader usually consults first), we find an attempt to make the (exotic) content of the book more familiar by means of references to well-known writers: "It begins like Beckett" and "Then it is like Márquez". This is a telling attempt at localising an author "new" to the Polish market by referring to authors who belong to the literary canon in Poland.

Couto's specific language, a protagonist of the novel in its own right, is also mentioned in the paratexts:

Realities merge, and so do words: people are meandering and sleepwalking, and the ocean is full of undersights. The language sleepwalks, levitates, hallucinates. Perhaps this is the only way to describe a world which has fallen apart and which is trying to find its order anew. Perhaps this is the only way to write down myth. (Couto 2010: flap)

In his afterword, Michał Lipszyc explicitly calls Couto's Portuguese "a protagonist and constantly transformed artistic raw material" (Lipszyc 2010: 288). He emphasises that these transformations concern syntax, style (e.g. internal rhymes), as well as semantics (neologisation). According to the translator, these devices perform an artistic function, because they build the world of the novel: a reality that is created rather than reflected. Moreover, they also serve a propaganda purpose, showing the liberated postcolonial variety of Portuguese in its nascent stage (Lipszyc 2010: 288–291). As regards the combined propagandistic and artistic function of language, Couto himself made the matter very clear:

My Portuguese, I reiterate: **my** Portuguese, is the homeland that I invent myself. I don't want to lose this nomadic language, I don't want to be expelled from that time without time (...) Writing is a home which I sometimes visit, although I do not want to live there permanently. I am excited by other tongues and languages, by a wisdom that is achieved only when we are able to get rid of ourselves. In my mother tongue, I strive to reach a point where the language dislanguages itself, turning into a body liberated from the fetters of structures and principles. What I want is a grammatical swoon in which the Portuguese language loses consciousness. (Couto 2008 [2004]: 132–133)

The Polish translator points out the orality present in Couto's texts, as well the fact that the author has raised folklore to the rank of high culture. What is important from the perspective of translation and reception, Lipszyc also writes about the strategies of rendering a text so rich in meanings into a foreign language. In his view, there are two ways: the translator may totally or partly forego reproducing the linguistic magic (a strategy which in the case of Couto's works can be observed in Elżbieta Milewska's translation of *O Último Voo do Flamingo* and *A Varanda do Frangipani*), or else try to render the text's linguistic tissue with all its complexities. Lipszyc opts for the latter solution.

A meticulous comparative analysis of Couto's original novel and its Polish translation was carried out by Aleksandra Józiak in her masters thesis (2012). Based on selected markers of Couto's style in Portuguese, the author sought traces of foreignising translation. At the level of grammar, she analysed the rendering of the following features: short and simple sentences, ellipses, modifications of verb reflexivity, pleonastic negation, the use of articles, dual number, the position of clitic pronouns, replacing direct object pronouns with indirect object pronouns and *vice versa*, case government that deviates from the Portuguese norm for verbs. On the level of style, Józiak identified changes in syntax and punctuation, diminutives, neologisation, onomatopoeia, borrowings from native Mozambican languages, telling names, reworked proverbs, playful coinages, puns, metaphors. As Józiak rightly notes, Couto's language is foreignised in itself, and also his Polish translator successfully applies the strategy of foreignisation, although there are instances where he could have gone further, especially on the grammatical level. Of course, a reviewer does not make such detailed comparisons, but there are many points where scholarly analysis and review can meet. But did the abovementioned characteristic features manifest themselves in the translation strongly enough to draw the attention of reviewers?

A valuable point of reference for reviewers is translation paratexts. For example, in the collection *Naszyjnik z opowiadań* (containing stories on which the author in a sense practiced his style, later transferring it to *Terra sonâmbula*), there is a foreword by Eugeniusz Rzewuski, as well as an afterword written by the editors and translators of this collection. Rzewuski refers to Couto's language as "Coutolect", considering it to be the author's original idea, and goes on to describe it as follows: "but this is an Afro-Latin discourse, its metaphors and symbols are both idiomatic and universal at the

same time. And his coinages – tropically Leśmianesque.² Adrenaline and agony for translators!” (Rzewuski 2008: 6). The editors of the volume, in turn, point out that Couto’s Portuguese is a completely new variety of the language, outside the norm, a linguistic miscegenation (Dias, Jankowski, Kwinta 2008: 114). It is this kind of language that should appear in translation; it should reflect a non-standard.

The Polish guide to *Lunatyczna kraina*

In what follows, I am going to look at four reviews of *Lunatyczna kraina*. All appeared some time after the publication of the novel (from six months to a year), so they should be read as interpretations rather than endorsements aimed at encouraging readers to buy the book. Each of the four reviewers mentions the translator and his work,³ and three of them, as though spell-bound by the language of the novel, even use neologisation in their texts.

Paweł Rutkiewicz’s article “Jutro, kiedy umarłem” (“Tomorrow, when I died...”), published in *Odra* socio-cultural monthly, already in the title refers to the words of one of Couto’s protagonists: “Yesterday, when I die,” whose grammatical inconsistency “perfectly captures the nature of the state of non-existence in *Lunatyczna Kraina*” (Rutkiewicz 2010: 126). Despite grammar being so significant for Couto’s text, this is the only direct mention of it that I managed to find in the analysed reviews.

The characteristic feature of Rutkiewicz’s text is that the reviewer reaches for quotations from the novel and enters into a dialogue with Couto, so that the reader has an opportunity to get to know the Mozambican author’s style and see whether *Lunatyczna kraina* appeals to him or her, as well as getting some idea about the quality of the translation. Based on the quotations, Rutkiewicz develops his interpretation of the novel:

“Know this: the ground of this world is the roof of another world that lies below. And so on, down to the very centre, where the first dead one lives”. I know this now. The white Mozambican author Mia Couto, a candidate for the Nobel Prize in Literature, wrote a book about people who are asleep. Without waking

² Bolesław Leśmian (1877–1937) – Polish-Jewish poet known for his predilection for neologisms, a highly idiosyncratic style, and references to folk motifs.

³ Albeit Konrad Walewski makes a serious mistake, attributing the Polish translation of *Terra sonâmbula* to Paweł Lipszyc (who indeed is a translator, too, but not from Portuguese).

them up, he made them exist in a sleepwalking trance, in a world created from their dreams fused into one. Sleep is death's brother, which is all the more terrifying when one only dreams nightmares. (Rutkiewicz 2010: 126)

The reviewer includes information about the author as well as offering his own response to the call contained in Couto's text. Rutkiewicz briefly describes the subject matter of the novel and points the reader's attention to the phenomenon of interweaving spaces.

Further on, the reviewer surrenders to the vividness of Couto's imagery, and, in spite of the logic of sleep, lethargy and sleepwalking, which organize the plot, he says with conviction that he "imagines" or "sees" the unreal (Rutkiewicz 2010: 126).

He defines Couto's work as a road novel, but with a road "that nobody travels" (Rutkiewicz 2010: 126), and evokes the recurring refrain ("the roads were killed") as a confirmation of the lethargy prevailing in the world presented. He emphasises the unreal dimension of the story by describing Couto's idea of a novel within a novel (the narrative time of Kindzu's notebooks versus the "real" time of the world presented, respectively). Rutkiewicz points out the relative irrelevance of time planes and chronology (for the narrator, who later turns out to be dead, these categories are insignificant) to an existence in suspension between life and death, in a dangerous motionlessness. According to the reviewer, the main topic of the novel is looking at life or reminiscing about life from the perspective of death: "Couto's novel is in fact an affirmation of individualised life (even if only dreamed about" (Rutkiewicz 2010: 126).

Although only one paragraph of the review is devoted to the novel's language, it is extensive and backed up by quotations from both the book itself and the translator's afterword. Lipszyc's paratext guides the reviewer in a reflection on Couto's reworking of Portuguese ("integrating the post-colonial heritage with indigenous folk culture") and allows him to accurately describe language as a fully-fledged character in the story (Rutkiewicz 2010: 127). Rutkiewicz notes that Mozambican literature aspires to define its own, new, different identity not through subject matter alone, but also through the language, which for Luso-African authors is a creative and creating material. Rutkiewicz's review is extensive and shows a strong identification with Couto's novel, as well as a good understanding of its premises.

Published in the magazine *Fantasy & Science Fiction*, Konrad Walewski's review, titled "Język(ol)śnienie"⁴, takes as its starting point the assertion that "it's all been done before": "In the middle of a gloomy, war-torn land on the verge dream and reality, a road extends – been there! On the road: a man and a boy – been there! It's all been done before (...) But what's the harm in that?" (Walewski 2010: 197). According to the reviewer, who, like Rutkiewicz, notices in Couto's novel the motif of the road, the key to understanding the book is to recognise its "poetics of the road trapped in the logic of dream – or perhaps the other way round?" (Walewski 2010: 197). The reviewer's compelling question aptly reflects Couto's intended construction of mutually permeating narrative planes. Walewski uses the slogan "been there/all's been done" as a rhetorical device in 2010, when the book appeared in Poland, but one needs to bear in mind that *Terra sonâmbula* was originally published in 1992. A lapse of eighteen years is not insignificant if one wants to describe Couto's prose as somewhat secondary, although the reviewer does not see this as a flaw anyway. Walewski also notes the existence of two planes of the world presented. Like Rutkiewicz, however, he does not associate the war described in the narrative to any specific historical events; we do not know whether this is the Mozambican war for independence or the subsequent civil war.

Walewski refers to Couto's prose by applying the category of magic realism,⁵ which he considers useful in talking about experiences distant from the European readers' perspective (Walewski 2010: 197, 199). In fact, however, the style represented by Couto is a combination of objective and marvellous reality, which functions as both a valorisation of ancestral tradition and a *modus vivendi* of the African, plagued by individual and collective tragedies. This is why, although aimed at making the exotic content more familiar by means of a concept known to the Polish reader, using the term "magical realism" with reference to fiction originating from a different colonial experience and cultural system does invite certain reservations.

⁴ "Language dreaming/brilliance/bedazzlement" – a pun based on the similarity of the Polish words *śnienie*, "dreaming," *Isnienie*, "brilliance" and *olśnienie*, "bedazzlement".

⁵ Petar Petrov has a whole chapter on this issue in his book *O projecto literário de Mia Couto*. The Bulgarian scholar argues that the fantastic element in Couto's prose only shows its affinity and not identification with magical realism. Admitting that the question which realism – fantastic, magic or marvellous – better fits Couto's writing remains open, Petrov himself seems to favour the category of marvellous realism (*realismo maravilhoso*), as a combination of Alejo Carpentier's concept with magic realism (Petrov 2014: 95–116).

Walewski domesticates and universalises Couto's novel also by evoking "road heroes" from the literary canon: Chaucer's pilgrims going to Canterbury or Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. He is clearly looking for support from authorities, and finds in Ryszard Kapuściński's description of the vastness of African landscape: "Whichever direction he turns, there is distance, emptiness wilderness, boundlessness" (Kapuściński 2001:19, qtd. in Walewski 2010: 198). These words from the famous Polish reporter, a translator of cultures (cf. Horodecka 2012: 283–301), aptly summarise the motif of the road novel.

The reviewer also discusses the interpenetration of two planes, linking them to language; this is an accurate interpretation of Couto's strategy. He describes Lipszyc's translation as brilliant; although the accumulation of neologisms wears the reader out, it must be admitted that they have been superbly rendered into Polish (Walewski 2010: 198–199). The language itself – melodiously twisted and frivolous, as the reviewer writes – is a land through which the reader travels. It seems that this effect of a "wild ride" is what Mia Couto had in mind when he wrote about turning "Portuguese Portuguese" upside down, about knocking it unconscious in a grammatical swoon. Of course, Walewski writes about the language of the translation, separating Couto's extraordinary original language from what it owes to the translator.

Concluding his review with a reference to the postcolonial context, Walewski compares Couto's novel to non-stereotypical fantasy books: *The Mulatta and Mr. Fly* and *The Mirror of Lida Sal* by Miguel Ángel Asturias, Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and John Crowley's *Little, Big* (Walewski 2010: 199). In so doing, he creates a diverse comparative platform, which domesticates the exotic by means of references to literature at large and genre-specifics.

A very interesting review of *Lunatyczna kraina*, written by Anna Wolny and titled "Błądząc po ziemiach niczyich" ("Wandering through no man's lands"), was published in a special issue of the bimonthly cultural magazine *Dekada Literacka*. The author offers an extensive presentation of the novel's context, thus emphasising its translational aspect, and suggests that, respecting the difference of Couto's text, one should not impose a strong Eurocentric filter on its reading. She brings into her argument a context new to the Polish readers, including her own translations from Couto's essays (from the collection *Pensatempos: textos de opinião*). She also warns against "unfair" comparisons of *Terra sonâmbula* to European literatures (Wolny 2011: 104–105).

Rutkiewicz and Walewski do indeed use Eurocentric references in their reviews, but on the other hand they also succumb to the charm of Couto's "exoticism". The references to western literature do not necessarily need to be seen as unfair, but rather as the implementation of the strategy of introducing a new work into the (Polish) literary system, or perhaps even into the canon. Thanks to their subjective form of expression, these reviewers avoid the simplifications that Anna Wolny warns against: a non-stereotypical approach to Africa requires a non-stereotypical description.

According to Wolny, reading *Lunatyczna kraina*, "we walk a mysterious and obscure territory", just as the protagonists themselves (Wolny 2011: 105). Thus, reading means discovering (the motif of the road novel again). Wolny turns to describing the novel's structure only in the third paragraph, not unlike Walewski. It is clear that, faced with something new, exotic, both reviewers first decided to create a frame which would introduce the reader to an unknown world. Wolny contests the label of magic realism attached to the novel, arguing that "magic realism assumes irrationality, while Couto's technique is an attempt to rationalise the world through the absurd" (Wolny 2011: 106). Showing professionalism and competence in discussing the author's style, Wolny addresses, among other elements, the shifts of the narrator, discontinuity of action, or leaps in time and space. She also comments on the quality of the translation, in which the neologisms "translated in an interesting way (...) at a certain stage of reading become a natural means of describing the new hybrid reality" (Wolny 2011: 106). Wolny suggests that the translator achieved a satisfactory effect in reconstructing the language – a protagonist of the novel.

A completely different, though equally reliable approach to *Lunatyczna kraina* was offered by Grzegorz Wysocki in *Tygodnik Powszechny*, a socio-cultural weekly. His review entitled "Iść, żyć, opowiadać" (To walk, to live, to tell stories) begins with information about the book's success in Zimbabwe (which shows that the value of *Terra sonâmbula* was recognised). Then Wysocki skilfully summarises the traps of peripherality, writing that Couto's prose "thanks to the newly published *Lunatyczna kraina* might finally receive due appreciation from Polish literary critics and readers" (Wysocki 2010: 33). The reviewer makes it clear that this appreciation has yet to come, even though we are dealing here with valuable literature. Due to the peripheral system in which it functions, this literature has passed almost unnoticed: in 2010 Couto should not be unknown to the Polish reader, since his books had already been published in Poland. "Thanks to *Lunatyczna kraina*, brilliantly

translated by Michał Lipszyc and edited with care – as usual in the case of Karakter publishers – Couto will undoubtedly become recognised in Poland”, he adds (Wysocki 2010: 33). The above-quoted reviews show that the quality of Couto’s writing has indeed been appreciated, although it would be difficult not to notice that its reception remains limited.

Wysocki “domesticates” Couto’s exoticism in a non-Eurocentric way, placing the writer in a literary system alongside other African authors (Chinua Achebe, John Maxwell Coetzee, Nadine Gordimer, Nadjib Mahfuz, Wole Soyinka and Tahar Ben Jelloun), and not western writers, as in the reviews by Rutkiewicz and Walewski. Wysocki also addressed the question of the war described in the novel, suggesting that it is not an imaginary one, but a concrete war that took place in Mozambique. Like other reviewers, he notes the motif of the dead road leading to nowhere; he also suggests an oneiric explanation of events. Enchanted by Couto’s language, he weaves neologisms into his review; he characterizes the author’s linguistic project, describing Coutolekt on all levels. Following the suggestions of the translation paratexts, Wysocki sees the novel’s language as a protagonist: to him, Couto is a magic wordsmith, who not only has created a language to use in his texts, but also thinks in this language on a daily basis. The first attempt to recreate his language appeared in *Naszyjnik z opowiadań* (an anthology of short stories in collective translation), “but it is only thanks to Michał Lipszyc’s exemplary, very thorough and compelling translation that we can fully appreciate the originality and class of Couto’s writing” (Wysocki 2010: 33).

Out of the four texts presented above, Wysocki’s most comprehensively addresses issues which in reviews of exotic writing are of the utmost importance for a multidimensional analysis of translation reception: the context of the author’s publications in the target country, the historical context, the translator’s contribution, and a reference to relevant paratexts already available to reviewers.

The reviews discussed above positively assess Couto’s novel and aptly bring the exotic closer to Polish readers. They confirm Inocência Mata’s remark about the peripherality of Luso-African literature having more to do with disregard and ignorance than with qualitative peripherality. This final conclusion is also supported by the fact that before the publication of *Lunaticzna kraina*, the Polish readers or reviewers were virtually unaware of Couto’s fiction, despite three previously available titles. The total number of reviews of this book probably also results from its better promotion as an award-winning novel.

A peripheral conclusion

The reviews of *Lunaticzna kraina* discussed above show a specific way of speaking about Luso-African prose. First of all, we can see that reviewers were influenced by the paratexts available in the Polish edition. It can be assumed that without the paratexts (descriptions on the cover flaps and the translator's afterword), they would rather have focused on the exotic nature of the world presented; even though the reviewers would certainly have noticed the unusual language anyway, it is hard to tell whether they would have associated it with the content of the novel strongly enough to discuss it as a separate protagonist.

The Polish literary system, which occupies a peripheral position in the world system, initially treated Couto's work as relatively unimportant, since it came from an equally peripheral area. It was only after the publication of another book in Polish translation that Couto was noticed as an extraordinary and worthwhile writer, and his earlier publications were discovered only with hindsight. The excerpts presented above clearly show that a periphery is capable of understanding another periphery, describing a new author respectfully and reliably, and integrating his work into its own system; however, it needs time to do so. Interestingly, critical acclaim does not exactly go hand in hand with the appreciation of the general public; this is confirmed by the lack of further Polish translations of Couto's books, perhaps due to unsatisfactory sales results of the previous titles.

There are only a few translations of Luso-African works in Poland, and the study of their reception, which would shed light on the process of incorporating this literature into a new literary system, is made difficult due to the limited number of reviews. Thus, this literature functions on the margin – in terms of quantity, but not quality. In the interpretations presented above, it appears as elite literature, addressed to a rather narrow readership – challenging due to its exoticism, language and references to history hardly known to the Polish reader.

Lunaticzna kraina was published in Poland with financial support from the Portuguese programme of the Chief Directorate for Books and Libraries / Ministry of Culture (Direcção-Geral do Livro e das Bibliotecas / Ministério da Cultura); in other words, its publication was possible thanks to a special fund for the promotion of Portuguese-language culture abroad. This culture is understood as a whole united under the ideals of "Lusophony" (although

the DGLB/MC programme does not support Brazilian authors). The idea is that “Lusophony” is to serve the interests of all parties belonging to it, and in this case also the Polish side, which functions within the structure of peripheral cultures (Mozambique–Portugal – Poland), accepting into its literary system something new and exotic, which, with time, may enrich it. On the other hand, according to Ewa Łukaszyk, the Lusophone project is an appropriation of creative space – a formulation which has a rather negative overtone. The scholar argues that “post-colonial literature created in Africa was intended for consumption outside the African continent” (Łukaszyk 2015: 117), but had to follow the patterns imposed by the metropole. However, this stage in the development of Luso-African literature seems to be over. Mia Couto’s example shows that this literature is treated as an equal partner by all intermediaries in the transfer process, and books are being published almost simultaneously both in the metropole and in the former colony. When such works get translated into the third space, i.e. into the system of the target culture, its quality is verified in a complex system:

the symbolic relations after decolonization can also be viewed from a slightly less idealistic perspective. The post-colonial situation can be read as a new way of normalising the relations of production, by which the African space (and other parts of the world) functions as a source of new material. It is no longer about typical colonial raw materials, but about “fresh stories” that feed a specific kind of circulation and production: the book market, determined not only by the direct consumption of books, but also by their further processing, e.g. in the form of literary theory and criticism. (Łukaszyk 2015: 116)

The reception of Luso-African literature depends on creating a suitable context for the reader. The Portuguese cultural system, despite its peripheral character, functions in this structure as a legitimising intermediary. The Polish system also serves as a legitimising element. However, given the quality and freshness of this literature, as values welcomed by hegemonic cultures, the works of Luso-African authors cannot be said to adopt a servant role, because they bring something new to the systems through which they travel.

Łukaszyk notes that the participants of the “Lusophone project” are subject to manipulation, but also themselves turn out to be “skilful manipulators, who turn to their own advantage the possibilities offered to them, developing them not always in the direction that was originally planned” (Łukaszyk 2015: 118). This process can also be seen idealistically as an attempt to promote works of which the Portuguese language community can be proud,

without trying to detect signs of exploitation of one side by the other. Couto does not reject the general idea, but believes that it is necessary to rework its assumptions. The writer's involvement in this system is not the same as paying a tribute, since Couto keeps developing his original literary project, and he imposes its attractive otherness on readerships in cultural systems other than the Mozambican one. The Polish periphery is enriched thanks to the results of former relations of dependence, which are now culturally redefined. Within the framework of the Lusophone project, these relations might not indicate a full and complete equality; however, Inocência Mata's question, "What does the Mozambican audience know from current Angolan literature?" (qtd in Łukaszyk 2015: 126) can be answered with a different question: What are organisations such as CPLP and PALOP doing to stimulate a literary circulation omitting Portugal? Lusophony should be regarded as a space enabling the circulation of texts, but it is up to all the participants in the community to take responsibility for what these particular texts represent. If CPLP and PALOP continue to look to Portugal as a contributor, they will never get rid of their complex of former colonies.

If post-colonialism in one of its dimensions is also a critique of the centre-periphery relationship, then in the superstructure of literary systems discussed here we are dealing with relative equality. The colonial order appears not as a cursed inheritance, but as an opportunity for a qualitative dialogue that is not characterised by hierarchical relations. The European (Portuguese-Polish) discourse does not construct the image of non-European communities and cultures as inferior, but rather acts as an intermediary.

In the process of assimilating the new, proper understanding is contingent on critical texts which would create a relatively full context for reception. In the case of Luso-African literature, such a context has indeed emerged, but the ultimate success of the project of implanting Luso-African writing in Poland depends on market principles, as an extratextual sphere of the centre-periphery system which concerns the prosaic dimension of sales. Studying reception allows us to find out – in the spirit of Clifford Geertz's philosophy – what a given target culture considers itself to be and what place it occupies in relation to the source culture. Thus, reception research creates a solid base in the communication process. As Andriy Savenets writes, "it is clear that the domination of culture A over culture B can be accompanied by its subordinate status with respect to culture C; cultures A and B, in turn, can change their status with respect to each other over the long term" (Savenets 2013: 231). For Savenets, it is not about where an utterance comes from

(where a particular text has originated), but how one looks at the Other. Investigating the reception of *Lunatyczna kraina* allowed us to establish that the Polish system looks at the Other with respect and curiosity, trying to rationally explain an unknown context.

Translated from Polish by Zofia Ziemann

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