In her postscriptum to *Imagining the Balkans*, Maria Todorova sketched possible tasks for historians of Eastern Europe and critics of the notion of the Balkans such as her: rather than “provincializing Europe” (as the title of Dipesh Chakrabarty’s book had it) she proposed the goal of “de-provincializing” Western Europe, “which has heretofore expropriated the category of Europe with concrete political and moral consequences.” She saw this work with many dimensions—cultural, scientific, political—and centered her attention on the field of academic historiography. If they wanted to “de-provincialize” Western Europe, East Europeanists had to continue to keep up with the knowledge advanced in the West European fields, but also to continuously “challenge the sanctioned ignorance of West Europeanists about developments in the eastern half of the continent.”

Todorova’s proposed aim was a long-term process, an intellectual and cultural change that could happen only as a result of joint ventures of many historians, those working within national historiographies and those combining the mosaics of archival research with available secondary literature into a broader, more balanced, and evenly constructed historical picture. Todorova concluded that if “[...] this project comes to fruition, we will actually succeed in ‘provincializing’ Europe effectively for the rest of the world, insofar as the European paradigm will have broadened to include not only a cleansed, abstract, and

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idealized version of power, but also one of dependency, subordination, and messy struggles."2

The notion of asymmetry can help us observe phenomena connected to power differences, those cultural and political relations that occur in various regions of the world in very different contexts and scales, yet bear many resemblances. As a geometrical metaphor, asymmetry has been invoked to describe interdependencies of uneven stakes, when one partner’s commitments, costs, or risks do not mirror the other’s but outbalance them, whether in romantic love or political alliances, marital bonds, or economic relations. One party may be far more affected by the breaking of a commitment (as in marriage when society vests more power in men than women). This impacts on their relations and actions in significant ways.3 This chapter will explore some cultural and political asymmetries emerging from the reconstruction of the struggles with European identity manifest in the history of a group of Polish writers who after World War II contributed to an émigré monthly review Kultura, published on the outskirts of Paris. The focus is twofold: the exiled writers’ transnational intellectual relations and the notion of power that transpires in their letters and autobiographical works.4

Gathering exiled authors who lived scattered across the world but still wanted to reach readers in communist Poland through smuggled, prohibited, or restricted copies of an émigré review, Kultura had a significant impact on the development of a dissident political movement as well as Polish literary culture after the war.5 Its network of intellectuals contributed to the discussions


4 Some letters and arguments analyzed in this chapter are presented and commented in greater detail in Łukasz Mikołajewski, Disenchanted Europeans: Polish Émigré Writers from Kultura and Postwar Reformulations of the West (scheduled to appear in 2018 in the Peter Lang series “Exile Studies”). This monograph is based on my PhD (European University Institute) on Jerzy Stempowski and Andrzej Bobkowski, both associated with Kultura, and their changing understanding of Europe.