

The phenomenon of the Belarusian-Polish literary borderland

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1.04 Strokovni članek – 1.04 Professional article

Članek obravnava belorusko-poljsko literarno mejo, prepoznava njene zgodovinske in sociokulturne sestavine ter razkriva nacionalne posebnosti. Obravnavana je vloga etničnega dejavnika, folklornih elementov in avtobiografske razprave v obmejni literaturi. Aktualizirano je vprašanje nacionalne identitete domorodnih pisateljev obmejne regije. Razkrita je stopnja poznavanja tega vprašanja v sodobni literarni kritiki Poljske in Belorusije.

The article discusses the phenomenon of the Belarusian-Polish literary borderland and reveals its historical, social and cultural components, unveiling its national characteristics. The role of the ethnic factor, folklore elements and autobiographical discourse in the borderland literature is described. The national identity problem of writers born in the borderland receives special attention. The extent to which the problem has been researched is analysed within the scope of the literature studies of Poland and Belarus.

Ključne besede: literarna meja, analiza razprave, imagologija, literarni proces, identiteta, poljsko-beloruske povezave

Key words: literary borderland, discourse analysis, imagology, literary process, identity, Polish Belarusian connections

The Belarusian-Polish literary borderland is a result of the dialogue of two Slavonic cultures. That dialogue shaped a unique ethnic *cosmo-psycho-logos* (Gachev) of the region. The borderland region produced a unique artistic imagery which appeared in the works of numerous writers, composers and artists. A specific type of creative imagery appeared here and was featured in the creativity of numerous writers, composers and artists. Literature became an essential source of reflection of Belarusian and Polish cultural interactions. The aesthetics of the borderland was the impulse behind the works of art which reflect the spiritual values and represent the most prolific pages of Polish and Belarusian literature.

The notion *kresy* has been used in Polish history and literature studies for a long time to refer to the Polish-Belarusian borderland topics. Nevertheless, new terms that are more neutral and predominantly spatial in semantics – such as *borderlands*, *limology*, *cross-border regions* – have received wide scientific acclaim (Bachanovich 2012, Białokozowicz 1995, Bujnicki 2014, Hadaczek 1993,

Czaplejewicz 1992, Chrzanowski 2002, Jacek Kolbuszewski 2002). Belarusian-Polish borderland topics as well as historical and cultural phenomena of interaction of national literary traditions need to be researched within a wider context of the 'common culture discourse'. It includes national, social and ideological, geopolitical, ethnic-folklore and other factors. The discourse approach allows a multi-dimensional perspective, while a fiction text is studied as a unity of narrative (event-driven) and extratextual structures. Other factors are also considered: the plot and its structure, space and time, the narrator's position and role, and genre stylistics of discourse zones (national, ethnocultural and country studies). They give a more profound understanding of the writer's creative personality affected by social and cultural characteristics of the borderland.

Imagology is a modern strategy which is particularly effective in researching literary borderland topics. It offers new perspectives and opportunities of reviewing a seemingly known material. An imagological approach in analysing texts of the Belarusian and Polish literatures promotes the interdisciplinary research vector and requires studying the cultural heritage of a nation by applying such categories as *thinking models, ethnical stereotypes, reception*, etc. The holistic approach to studying the evolution of Belarusian and Polish literatures in their interaction and mutual influence based on historical methods allows us to trace the establishment and development of the social and cultural phenomenon of the Belarusian-Polish borderland.

The creative and cultural identity of many Belarusian and Polish writers has formed within the ethnic and cultural space of Belarusian-Polish borderland primarily among Belarusians, Poles and Jews. The traditions, folklore, language and lifestyle of the latter were, therefore, readily internalised. In their autobiographical and fiction narratives, the writers created their own coordinate system of ideas and values providing a context for processing individual experience of the ethnic and cultural borderland. This is reflected at different stages in various literary genres capturing unique characteristics of the existence of a particular nation together with the historical, cultural, social and political circumstances of a particular era.

Culture is commonly referred to as a system of symbols distinguishing a certain society and codified in its institutions. It is the concrete imagery that establishes a specific cultural and national space and at the same time is a sign of being a part of it. Historical knowledge about the surrounding world, traditions, and culture of a particular ethnic group are preserved once they are captured by literary and cultural artefacts. The very fact of being born in the Belarusian-Polish cultural borderland has affected the spiritual development of a lot of writers and predetermined the way of perceiving the world and characters populating their works. The discrete character of the author's mind incorporating two cultural traditions has become the leading impulse of inspiration for many writers representing the Belarusian and Polish literary borderland.

The reception model involving recognising and exposing foreign-nation components at different levels of a literary work is becoming increasingly popular among modern scholars. The model comprises the reaction to the unknown, new aesthetics and various methods of creative presentation of national components.

“The archaeology of metaphorical space helps us to reproduce/see the diachrony of that phenomenon and understand its complicated ways of functioning. The synchrony of borderland appears here and now. Both diachronous and synchronous borderland parameters are equally important for the humanities research because they create an image of the past for that space and shape the structure of present time and future perspectives” (*The phenomenon of borderland* 2008: 3).

The spiritual heritage of Belarusian and Polish borderland writers has come into existence as a fundamental paradox, “[The borderland] is situated within the highest tension between seclusion and openness, solitude and publicity, home and the outside world, intimate privacy and universality” (Czaplewicz 1996: 49). The presence of the national (Polish or Belarusian) component becomes evident at different levels of borderland literature. The Belarusian context can be found between the lines of the Polish text even in the works of the most well-known 19th century Polish writer, Adam Mickiewicz, who was born in the borderland area. Solid research exposes Belarusian language interference and modulation in the Polish language paradigm of texts written by Adam Mickiewicz, especially his poetry. The same tendency can be observed in the works of modern borderland writers. Therefore, we can regard this tendency as an original phenomenon of the Belarusian-Polish borderland spiritual and cultural interaction.

Autobiographism is an important characteristic of borderland literature. Creatively processed, autobiographism has retained the main traits, tendencies and distinctive nature of borderland literature and creative image of the writer from that area. A holistic image of the person who was born in the Belarusian-Polish borderland is constructed from autobiographical sources, memories and ‘local home’ sentiments. Complex-minded and searching for the national identity, the narrator and his characters were influenced to a large extent by those notions. The autobiographical discourse has produced different layers within works – the concepts of the world and individual, plot, *chronotopos* (space-time dimension), imagery, etc. The determination to idealise borderland landscapes and material life has profound psychological roots.

The aesthetic revaluation of folklore is characteristic of the European Romanticism movement. That affected Belarusian-Polish borderland literature, which paid closer attention to folk culture. Polish and Belarusian writers incorporated pieces of spoken folk texts in different parts of their works. That was specifically common for the works written in Polish. The avid interest of the writers in folklore resulted in the Romantic component contracting unique regional features. Moreover, if we accept the fact that Slavonic nations approached their national *Renaissance* in the 19th century (which happened at the same time as national literatures started to form), we can conclude that both processes were observed in the interaction with folklore.

The influence of Belarusian folklore on the works of Belarusian-Polish Romantic writers can be observed not only in the ideas, motives, imagery and genres applied. The writers’ common perception and mindset in combination with the folk philosophy is what distinguished the impact of national cultures and traditions on borderland literature. “The works of Polish writers living in the borderland zone and inspired by the traditional regional culture and craving for self-cognition are

distinguishable through ethnography” (Konan 2000: 35). One can even claim that it was mainly the folklore that formed the writers of Belarusian-Polish borderland.

Plots of numerous works written by Polish writers of the 17th to 20th centuries unfold in the Belarusian-Polish borderland, thus forming a particular *chronotope*. In many cases, the geographic locations where the action took place are real and are represented by numerous villages and towns situated in today’s Belarus (Nieświż, Grodno, Lida, Nowogródek and others). The places represent a particular fiction code serving as an equivalent of the affection to the native land. They have epitomised the historic and cultural experience of the nations which live on that territory.

The multi- and bilingualism of authors and readers was a characteristic feature of the Polish and Belarusian literatures for many centuries due to social and cultural factors. That adds to what we know about borderland writers and allows us to describe systematically the phenomenon of the Belarusian-Polish borderland. The spiritual foundations of individuality when the writer is immersed into the linguistic, ethnic and cultural space without any doubt contributed not only to better understanding of life of another ethnicity, but also to spiritual and emotional perception of their mentality.

The interaction and mutual penetration of two national cultures, languages and aesthetic traditions produced and developed a specific imagery realm. That brings us to recognising the phenomenon of the literary borderland space which was formed within the presence of Belarusian-Polish bilingualism. The Polish literature of the 20th century descended from traditional Belarusian topics. It witnesses diverse approaches to rethinking the present material given the new social and cultural situation.

At the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries the contacts between the scientists in Belarus, Poland and the Ukraine who studied the borderland area in its broad sense become more regular. Not only the comparative and receptive methodology, but also practical aspects are investigated. Works of well-known and less popular authors are studied as well as the interaction between folklore of different nations and literatures, the reflection of ethnic and cultural processes in the mind and languages of Belarusians and Poles. Modern papers demonstrate that scientists pay more and more attention to such questions such as cultural and ethnographic borderland while the national identity of Slavonic nations becomes stronger, with their folklore and literatures, specifics of national culture and authors’ consciousness becoming more important.

Polish and Belarusian humanity studies actively research historical, literary, biographical and cultural impulses as well as the codes of literary works born in the borderland space as foreign-nation components in cultural space of two countries, typological similarities (analogies) and creative contacts, various aspects of topic coverage, motives and art forms inspired by common space. Together with methodological and theoretical questions, the works of a certain Belarusian-Polish writer are regarded through the prism of national traditions. The authors of literary research of Belarusian-Polish borderland space actualise other meanings of that concept and define its axiological parameters (*borderland space as exotics, borderland space as the school of bravery and tolerance, borderland space as Arcadia, borderland space as lost paradise, etc.*) (Czapplewicz 1996: 15–16).

The analysis of Poland-based research demonstrates that the majority of Polish researchers concentrate on revealing key parameters of the borderland phenomenology. They also expose the semantics, heterogeneity, ethnical and cultural characteristics of the notion: “Borderland space (*kresy*) has created a specific philosophy, aesthetics and traditions which have pushed the borders of the Polish culture letting other nations enrich us” (Fras 1995: 6).

The common origin of two Slavonic peoples, similarity of their historical fate could not help but affect their literatures. The rich history of Poland and Belarus has both heroic and dramatic pages. The nations went through wars, national dramas, years of occupation and totalitarianism so that the 21st century could feature a mutually enriching cultural dialogue for both Belarus and Poland.

The analysis of the empirics and literary works brought us to the following conclusions: 1) Polish and Belarusian researchers have introduced a wide range of works tackling the notion of “borderland” in the national and universal frameworks; 2) literature studies pays increasingly more attention to the phenomena of the literary borderland and less attention to the circumstances of the Belarusian-Polish discourse observed in the works of Polish and Belarusian writers.

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Феномен пагранічча: польская, украінская і беларуская літаратура – уплывы і ўзаемаўзбагачэнне (The phenomenon of borderland: Polish, Ukrainian and Belarusian literature - influence and mutual enrichment). Minsk: Knigazbor.

FENOMEN BELORUSKO-POLJSKE LITERARNE MEJE

Belorusko-poljska literarna meja predstavlja izvirno poglavje v zgodovini obstoja dveh sosednjih narodov. Posebnost literarnega dogajanja v tej regiji in dela obmejnih pisateljev so v veliki meri določale sociokulturne danosti. Interakcija nacionalnih dejavnikov in tradicije je v literarnem sistemu Belorusije in Poljske spodbudila poseben način ustvarjanja, ki v času in prostoru aktualizira določene arhetipe, motive in simbole (*reka, gozd, jezero, močvirje*). Obmejna literatura je nastajala v razmerah belorusko-poljske dvojezičnosti, v nenehnem stiku dveh nacionalnih modelov percepcije sveta. Raziskava, izvedena na obsežnem vzhodnoslovenskem ozadju, je razkrila povezanost in vlogo nacionalnih (regionalnih) in univerzalnih elementov v literaturi Poljske in Belorusije 19. in 20. stoletja. Zahvaljujoč beloruski realnosti, podobam, folklori, naravi in jeziku so dela poljskih pisateljev, domorodcev etnokulturnega zamejstva, poosebljala zgodovinski spomin in značilnosti medsebojnega sodelovanja narodov v tem delu Evrope.
