
Database of Belarusian Literary Periodicals

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Introduction

This paper presents the prototype of a “Database of Belarusian Literary Periodicals” developed at the University of Oldenburg, Germany. The project addresses the hitherto under-researched area of Belarusian literature from a field theoretical perspective (Bourdieu, 2002) in combination with a quantitative approach to Literary History (Moretti, 2005).

Belarusian Literature

The case of Belarusian literature is interesting in particular because it constitutes a highly unstable literary field. Due to historical reasons the formation of the literary field and the rise of a literary market dates back only to the beginning of the 20th century. During the first half of the 1920s the establishment of proletarian society in Soviet Belarus entailed the promotion of Belarusian language and literature, which were then consolidated by specific institutions. But already from the second half of the 1920s, cultural politics changed and literary life came under increasing ideological control ending in the infamous ‘cleansings’ (“čistki”) of the 1930s.

Literary Periodicals

Research on the formation of literary markets and fields has illustrated the crucial role of literary periodicals (Bourdieu, 2002; van Rees, 2012). We consider these magazines media that allows us to reconstruct and to analyze the specific structure and internal development of the Belarusian literary field. They allow us to trace the configurations of authors within groups

and magazines, the trajectories of single authors and/or literary groups in the field, the differentiation of the literary genre system, the formation of literary criticism and so forth.

The Database

The prototype of the database includes the four most important Belarusian literary periodicals published between 1922 and 1939: *Maladnjak*, *Polymja*, *Uzvišša* and *Kalos'se* (cf. Kohler, 2016). For the time being, we focus on capturing these periodicals' tables of contents, assuming that a systematic analysis of literary periodicals does not necessarily require the literary texts themselves but that the corresponding ‘paratexts’ suffice (cf. Genette, 1989).

The database currently comprises the tables of contents of 252 issues that were transcribed manually and were encoded according to the TEI-Guidelines. The database itself is set up as an application for the open-source XML database eXistdb. An extensive range of search queries can be performed on the corpus, which enables users to identify quantitative characteristics of the periodicals and its contributing authors. It allows for the export of the data as a dynamic network graph in the gephi-format (Gephi).

Pilot study: corpus, questions, and method

For the pilot study we specifically focus a) on the period 1922–1932 (the year 1932 marks the end of literary diversity: groups and magazines dissolved and fused into the ‘one’ Writers’ Association with its official periodical *Polymja*), and b) on the three periodicals in Soviet Belarus (*Kalos'se* was established only in 1934 and was published in the Polish part of the country). Taking into account this focus, the pilot study deals with a complete corpus of 189 issues.

We focused on the analysis of c) authors’ trajectories (fluctuations between periodicals), including the question of “splinter groups’ trajectories” and of d) hierarchization of authors. These questions are interlinked with the questions, e) whether an author’s movement from one periodical to another brings an increase of his/her publication frequency, and how the constellation of authors changed in relation to such movements.

Step 1: Identification of authors: Problems we had to overcome in this respect were variations in spelling and the frequent use of acronyms and pseudonyms. The use of pseudonyms is in some cases not only linked to the periodical (some authors published in one magazine

using their real name and under pseudonyms in the others) but also to the author's role (e.g. writer vs. critic/reviewer).

Step 2: Identified authors were linked to a <person> record, where additional information on each identified author is stored. If available, these entries were linked to authority files (VIAF). As the coverage of Belarusian authors in the relevant authority files is rather incomplete, the authors were also linked to the corresponding Wikidata entries, to provide for an external unique identifier.

Step 3 (question 'd'): We identified frequently published authors and compared their rankings in the periodicals at several points in time but also focused on literary reviews and translations.

Step 4 (questions 'c', 'e', 'f'): We observed a relatively high fluctuation of authors and splinter groups between the periodicals, including also the authors that published most frequently. In analyzing the movements of authors, it was possible to complement hitherto lacking insights and background knowledge about the journals' interconnect-edness.

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