

Database of Belarusian Literary Periodicals

Introduction

The project

addresses the area of Belarusian literature from a field theoretical perspective (Bourdieu, 2011) in combination with a quantitative approach to Literary History (Moretti, 2005). The database of Belarusian Literary Periodicals of the 1920-30s compiles and generates material for historiographical evaluation of the literary process in Belarus and provides new insights into processes of value assignment and hierarchization in the Belarusian literary field.

Belarusian Literature

constitutes a highly unstable literary field: Its emergence since 1905 was soon disrupted by WWI, Revolution, Civil War and Polish-Soviet War. From the beginning of the 1920s the establishment of proletarian society in Soviet Belarus entailed the promotion of Belarusian literature and its institutional consolidation. But already from the second half of the 1920s, cultural politics changed again; literary life came under increasing ideological control ending in the 'cleansings' of the 1930s.

Literary Periodicals

are considered crucial in the formation of literary markets and fields (Bourdieu, 2002; van Rees, 2012). Indeed, in 1920s Belarus they are important organizational platforms and one of the core institutions of literary life of the time. As organs of competing literary groups they shape authors' literary and ideological profile. Publishing in a certain periodical thus must be understood as position-taking, and authors' movements between periodicals as indicators of ideological and/or poetological disruptions within or between groups. Analyzing literary periodicals allows us to reconstruct the structure and internal development of the Belarusian literary field by tracing configurations of authors within periodicals (and groups), trajectories of single authors and literary groups in the field, the differentiation of the literary genre system, the formation of literary criticism and more.

The Database

includes the four most important Belarusian literary periodicals between 1922 and 1939: *Maladnjak*, *Polymja*, *Uzvišša* and *Kalos'se* (cf. Kohler, 2016). We focus on capturing these periodicals' tables of contents as 'paratexts' (cf. Genette, 1989) that allow the analysis of literary periodicals from the perspective of 'distant reading' (Moretti, 2013).

Pilot study: corpus, questions and method

The pilot study focuses on changes in hierarchization between 1922 and 1932 (the establishment of the 'one' Writers' Association in 1932 puts an end to literary diversity), and in particular on the interplay between authors' trajectories (fluctuations between *Maladnjak*, *Uzvišša* and *Polymja*) and hierarchization of authors (quantitative development of publications in a period of time in a specific periodical).

Questions to be answered are, **a)** whether an author's movement from one periodical to another sparks an increase of his/her publication frequency, **b)** how the constellation and hierarchization of authors in periodicals changed, and **c)** how this is interlinked with official and ideological hierarchization of periodicals (groups).

Database and Corpus

The database currently comprises the tables of contents of 182 issues that were transcribed manually and transformed to TEI-XML.

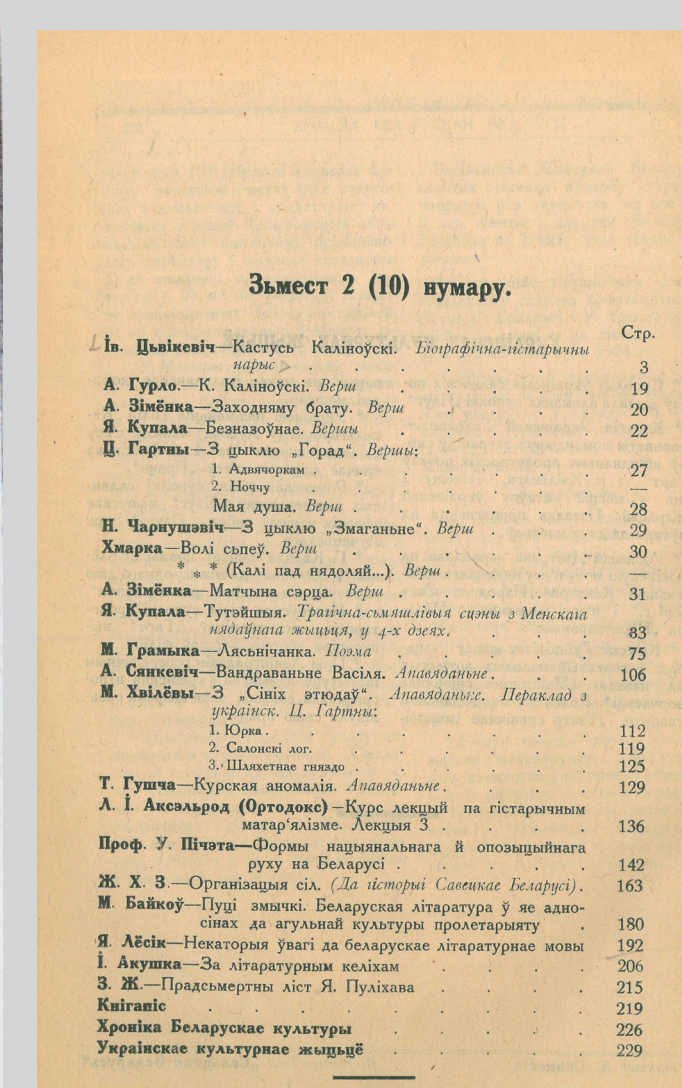
The database itself is set up as an application for the open-source XML database eXistdb. An extensive range of search queries can be performed on the corpus, which enables users to identify quantitative characteristics of the periodicals and their contributing authors.

Step 1: To identify individual authors, we encoded them as `<author>`. Problems we had to overcome in this respect were variations in spelling (Belarusian orthography was not yet standardized) and the frequent use of acronyms and pseudonyms.

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, GND), but as the coverage of Belarusian authors in these authority files is highly incomplete, all authors were linked to the corresponding Wikidata entries. The problem we had to resolve is the high percentage of unidentifiable authors (due to the large number of artificially promoted non-professional proletarian authors, who did not succeed in the field and are thus unknown).



▲ Cover of Maladnjak 1924 (4)



▲ Table of Content Polymja 1924 (2)

Total rankings of authors

The total rankings of authors (measured in publication items p.a.) provide general information on the periodicals' hierarchization-politics. Systematically, we observe 1) a distinction between relatively high stability (*Polymja*) vs. high precarity (*Maladnjak*) of positions, 2) the high level of differentiation of positions characterizing *Uzvišša*. Historically, we observe 3) some authors' rupture with *Maladnjak* (1926/1927), and the hierarchization-crisis both in *Maladnjak* and in *Polymja* provoked by the foundation of *Uzvišša*.



Trajectories of individual authors



Visualizing authors' trajectories between the periodicals (one graph shows three authors of the elder generation, the other one three former *Maladnjak* authors, who moved over to *Uzvišša*) allows to identify and compare configurations of trajectories and periodicals. We observe 1) the complete incompatibility between *Uzvišša* and *Maladnjak* (excepted Bjadulja), 2) the high incompatibility between *Uzvišša* and *Polymja*, and 3) elder generation's authors' high affinity to *Polymja*.

References

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Links

<http://www.uni-oldenburg.de/slavistik/forschung/literaturwissenschaft/>