

Confluences: On the possibility of describing a transcultural history of (micro)literature – the Upper Silesian perspective

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I feel that literary histories are impossibly alluring, and alluringly impossible, undertakings. They are certainly not everything they seem. If literary histories are shimmering expanses, then transcultural literary histories are a Sargasso Sea.
Leon de Kock (2006, 12)

Any attempt to write a history of literature – any literature, in any language – is inevitably fraught with certain shortcomings, omissions, and understatements, as it is impossible to include all publications, to recall all authors, to save all minor texts from oblivion. We are not Borges's cartographers; we cannot draw a map that would encompass the entirety of the kingdom. We cannot, but we try. We engage in debates with existing, well-established literary histories. With great scholars, as we feel at least a hint of Bloom's anxiety of influence. We argue with global and national canons, seeking new paths for literary history and for the voices which thus far have been little heard or not heard at all. One such voice is that of Upper Silesia, which will be the focus of my deliberations. However, before I proceed to outline the key issues of the transcultural history of Upper Silesian microliterature, I would like to consider whether – and why – such an attempt is necessary, what microliterature is, and why defining the scope is, in my view, essential. My article will refer primarily to literary matter, but also to cultural and historical matter, as it is no longer possible to consider literary texts in isolation, divorced from the broadly understood cultural and historical context in which they were created.

THE TRANSCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

In the age of increased globalization, and, simultaneously, a certain devaluation of postcolonial studies (cf. Frank Schulze-Engler's discussion on postcolonialism as a mega-concept, 2007), attempts to approach the history of literatures from a transcultural perspective seem to present a scientifically prolific avenue for re-

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search and interpretation. What I refer to here are, mainly, the proposals of Frank Schulze-Engler (2007) and Anders Pettersson (2006a, 2006b, 2008), which demonstrate that transcultural studies, while they may draw from the achievements of postcolonial studies (such as diverting the attention of literary studies towards small and minor literatures and developing a partially non-Eurocentric view), go much further, as they do not rely on the relatively simplistic hegemon-subaltern divide, but instead prove that a broader perspective can be taken – one which includes transnational and transcultural relations, connections, and influences. In fact, cultures are not separate, defined entities, as Herder would have us believe, and it is often difficult to even speak of easily identifiable centers (cf. Welsch 1999). We are now, and in many regions of the world have been for a very long time, experiencing cultural polycentricity, hybridization, and a major expansion of the field of “third space” (Bhabha 2006). Transcultural studies, and especially transcultural literary history (or rather, transcultural histories of literatures), help to overcome not only the ignorance that, according to Pettersson, informs the Eurocentric understanding of world literature, but also the limitations which, in part, stem from assuming a specific national or temporal perspective (2006a, 436). Pettersson proposes to establish not a history of world literature, but a world history of literature; my proposal is somewhat different: to create multiple transcultural histories of literatures, which one day might constitute a grand, polyphonic, likely endless (impossible to finish)¹ transcultural history of world literatures (cf. Petrbock et al. 2019). The organic movement from the bottom up is what is crucial here – the creation of that great, encompassing history through the study of that which is smaller. Such an approach could be exemplified by the project I am currently involved in: a study of histories of literatures of the Polish lands, which is based on (usually hybrid, multilingual, and not necessarily written in literary Polish) “non-obvious” texts, including regional microliteratures. As Pettersson noted, transcultural studies should not be limited to the 19th century and beyond – and thus, here, too, the research should be designed to reach as deep as possible, revealing the polyphony, multiculturalism and multilingualism of the texts which form what I tentatively call “the literatures of the Polish lands”. There would be room, then, to include “canonical”, firmly established works of Polish literature, such as those written by Jan Kochanowski, Mikołaj Rej, Adam Mickiewicz and other prominent authors, but also works of the writers who have gone unnoticed and overlooked, whose contributions were often marginalized and labelled “folklore”, including those writing in Kashubian, Masurian, Silesian, regional variants of Polish, and regional and minority languages. Texts created in borderlands or in emigration, which are now attributed to different cultures and languages, would also be of interest (works of authors such as Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski, Jan Potocki, Stanisław Przybyszewski, Józef Korzeniowski/Joseph Conrad – see, for example, Skwara 2016; Ligara 2011). This type of “rhizomatic” or “mosaic” history, by its very nature, cannot be “finite”, because the premise of such research renders its “finitude” utopian. Of course, this type of research endeavor also entails certain necessary simplifications and generalizations in regards to, for instance:

– delineation of the borders of what can be considered as the Polish lands (borders of Polish statehood, borders of cultural influences or of Polish cultural dominance – and if so, then in what historical period);

– issues of creator identity (and of changes in the sense of belonging to a particular culture, of the development of national thought, national rebirths, self-determination, etc.);

– identification and selection of texts for study, finding them in archives;

– access to oral literature and selection of appropriate analytical tools.

Nonetheless, I believe it is an attempt worth making, although – perhaps – it might be destined to fail. Addressing literary output which thus far has been rather overlooked, placing it in the center of research interests, and thus, in a sense, officially sanctioning its existence, also sanctions the culture and community that gave birth to it. This is, of course, not a necessary condition for the existence of such a community, but it is an important factor in the so-called “struggle for recognition” (see Smith 1991; Dołowy-Rybińska 2011; Michna 2014), which strengthens said community. However, the attempt to incorporate a number of microliteratures, local or minority literatures in the account of the “literatures of the Polish lands” carries the risk of provoking accusations of yet another “appropriation” of the discourse, which is why in such studies it would be advisable to maintain the culture-sensitive approach (Nünning 2006). On the other hand, the reversal of the conventional perspective (great, renowned works, often written in a majority language or considered canonical as the center of literary history) invites new interpretations, raises awareness of voices and narratives different from “canonical” and “national” ones, and helps to describe the rhizomatic, transcultural, and often even transnational character of what we commonly consider “national literature” (cf. Schulze-Engler 2007, 28–29).

THE QUESTION OF SCOPE: MICROLITERATURE

The aforementioned transcultural history of the “literatures of the Polish lands” would concern literatures now often referred to as regional, including the literature of Upper Silesia, which could also serve as an important part of studies on the literatures of the “German lands” and the “Czech lands”. After all, Upper Silesia is a region currently situated within the borders of Poland and the Czech Republic, but also one that formerly belonged to Germany and Austria, and which in the course of its history as a borderland area has been the subject of political and military conflicts.² The complicated, multiethnic and multilingual past of that region and its borderland character, noticeable not only in its history and shifts in national affiliation, but also in its culture, constitute exceptionally interesting research material. The culture of Upper Silesia, whose development was affected by confluences of Germanic (mainly German) and Slavic cultures (Czech, Polish, as well as local ones, which disassociate themselves from the Czech and Polish national cultures), has relatively recently started to be recognized as distinct from the dominant cultures; the same is true of its language, the status of which remains controversial (see, for instance, Czesak 2015; Geisler 2015; Michna 2008; Hofmański 2019; Hentschel,

Tambor, and Fekete 2022). Terminology concerning Upper Silesian literature also poses a problem: should we use the established vocabulary of literary studies and label it minor literature (*littérature mineure*, a term coined by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, see 1986), small literature (a term suggested by Pascale Casanova, see 2004) or perhaps microliterature (in reference to literary microlanguages, as discussed by Ivan Dorovský and Aleksandr Dulichenko, see, respectively 1997 and 1981). I consider the last term, a less popular one, but nonetheless present in the discourse of literary studies, to be the most appropriate (see the “Microliterature” issue of *Litteraria Copernicana* 2/2019). Microliterature, as I understand it, can be defined as a body of literary works, of small range (geographically and in number of readers/recipients), usually associated with the cultural activity of minority groups. The term minor literature, far more frequently used in literary studies, even outside the intended context, initially referred to minority literature written in a dominant, non-minority language (the works of Franz Kafka or Leopold von Sacher-Masoch were to serve as an example). Meanwhile, microliterature, in the sense that I am advocating for, is written in both minority and majority/dominant languages, and the “micro” prefix relates to, as previously mentioned, the range of its influence/the number of its recipients, its placement within the majority polysystems (cf. Even-Zohar 1979, 2005), and the *majority culture*/*“national”* (*macro*) – *minority culture*/*“local”*, *“regional”* or *“borderland”* (*micro*) relationship. The question of scope is crucial, as it concerns, among other things, the survivability of a given culture, its presence on the publishing market (low demand translates to a low number of publications) and the local market’s quality (small publishing houses, the quite often poor quality of printed publications, minimal interest in translations into other languages, low recognizability). If one adds to that the lack of institutional support for communities which are not recognized by national law, as exemplified by Poland and its attitude towards the ethnic minorities of Silesia and Wilamowice (see, for instance, Skóra 2021), it becomes apparent that such micro-cultures and -literatures are in danger of extinction, and that they rely on revitalization efforts (a good example of which is Vilamovian culture; see Majerska-Sznajder 2019).

Some of the qualities which Deleuze and Guattari assign to minor literatures, such as deterritorialization of language, politicization or collectivism (1986, 16–18), can be found in microliteratures as well; however, here, they are not dominant (as, for example, the issues of deterritorialization of language in German-language literature written by Prague Jews). Similarly, one can ascribe a political or collective dimension to microliteratures, but commitment to the social and political needs of the community does not have to be the *sine qua non* of such creative endeavors. It seems impossible to miss the subversive character of a significant portion of microliteratures (cf. Pospiszil 2019b), but viewing them primarily in that context is, in my opinion, an overreach (cf. remarks by Kadłubek, who considers as part of Upper Silesian literature only those texts which thematize Upper Silesian issues; 2019, 223), and it may obscure the aesthetic qualities of literary works.

UPPER SILESIAN MICROLITERATURE – PARS PRO TOTO?

Upper Silesian microliterature, treated here as an example of microliteratures in general, can be viewed as borderland literature, literature of a contact zone (see Pratt 1991), and – as already stated – a part of national literatures: Polish, Czech, German, or Silesian (considering the efforts of some activists to recognize Silesians as an ethnic/national minority; see Kamusella 2003). This multiplicity of affiliations and classifications of literary works causes methodological problems, but it also presents opportunities for new readings, for “organizing” disorder (de Kock 2006, 21) and for describing a rhizomatic, hypertextual history. I propose an approach to Upper Silesian literature that would include texts and traditions of several languages; however, I would also like to emphasize that this approach will primarily adopt a bird’s-eye view, inspired by the work of Arianna Dagnino (2015). I will identify “nodal” areas in the transcultural history of Upper Silesian microliterature and present what I consider the most important works and figures, but avoid a close reading of chosen texts due to the formal limitations of this article.

My suggestion is to view microliteratures through the lens of Itamar Even-Zohar’s polysystem theory (1979, 2005). Firstly, the Upper Silesian literature which I am interested in can be regarded as a part (one system of many) of the larger/dominant polysystems in the region (Polish, Czech, German). Secondly, it may itself be treated as a separate polysystem, which would encompass works written in several languages and their local variants (reflecting the multilingual character of the community of their origin), in various stylistic registers and for various purposes (children’s literature, literature for adult audiences, satires, journalistic texts, so-called literary fiction, popular literature), as well as translations. In short, the study of the history of a given polysystem should include both masterpieces and literature of lesser artistic value in the eyes of scholars and critics, including works not necessarily written in the so-called literary language. A polysystem – in this case a microliterary one – is not a closed network of interconnections; rather, it is constantly changing, in motion. Not only are the centers and peripheries shifting, but the relationships and influences between neighboring systems are changing as well. Drawing attention to the heterogeneity and changeability of a system does not contradict the attempt to describe the history of a given literature, since, as Even-Zohar argues,

[polysystem as a term] emphasizes the multiplicity of intersections and hence the greater complexity of structuredness involved. Also, it stresses that in order for a system to function, uniformity need not be postulated. Once the historical nature of a system is recognized [...], the transformation of historical objects into a series of uncorrelated a-historical occurrences is prevented. (2005)

THE MOST CRUCIAL AREAS FOR THE TRANSCULTURAL HISTORY OF UPPER SILESIAN MICROLITERATURE

An overview of the entire polysystem of Upper Silesian literature, of the tensions between what has been considered “canon” and what has not been recognized as such, between (changing) peripheries and centers, and, finally, between the Upper Silesian polysystem and the dominant polysystems is, however, a topic for a different

study. Here, I will only present the four most crucial areas for the postulated transcultural history of that literature: 1) works written *po naszymu/po našimu* (roughly translating to “in our way” or “in our speech”), i.e. in variations of the local language (or: *ślōnskō gödka*)³; 2) works written in other languages (such as Latin, German, Polish, and Czech), as well as multilingual texts; 3) translations, mainly into *ślōnskō gödka*, but also into the dominant languages of the region; and 4) attempts to establish a canon of Upper Silesian literature.

Most works in Silesian have been published in the last 20 years (I will return to them in a moment). Silesian-language literature in fact has a much richer history – yet, the oldest texts are regarded as curiosities rather than examples of recognized, “legitimate” literature. One of these texts is an anonymous satire from (probably) 1654, *Placc a Narzykani Predykantuw ze Slonska wygnanych w Namyslowskim kragu* (The cries and lamentations of the predicates exiled from Silesia from the Namysłów district), written in Silesian, with strong Czech influences, in quite artful thirteen-syllable verse. The text was discovered in 1973 by Jan Zaremba (1974) and briefly analyzed many years later by Izabela Kaczmarzyk (1993), but to this day it has not been published, is only available in manuscript and its digitalized version, and has received little attention. The research area encompassing texts written *po naszymu* before the 21st century should also be expanded to include other, although not numerous, works published in book form (e.g., Koelling 1887; Steuer 1934a, 1934b; Łysohorsky 1934, 1958) or in the press (e.g., “Gwiazdka Cieszyńska”, “Zaranie Śląskie”, “Kocynder”). Also noteworthy is the native oral literature, with visible influences from neighboring cultures, collected at the turn of the century (Malinowski 1899, 1901) and in the 20th century (Steuer 1934a; Bąk 1939; Sobierajski 1960); although, the preserved texts primarily originate from the rural, farmland part of the region, and research to date has not focused enough on the oral literature of residents of industrial areas (see Czesak 2015, 242).

Before I proceed to discuss recent works in Silesian, I would like to remark on Óndra Łysohorsky, or Erwin Goj, the creator of the Lachian literary microlanguage and the only relatively widely known user of this language. In his writings, he extensively drew from European literature (e.g., the apparent influences of Rainer Maria Rilke), also taking inspiration from local writers (Silesian poetry by Petr Bezruč, Jiří Wolker’s works in Czech; see Martinek 2016). Łysohorsky’s status is variously defined – his works are sometimes classified as Silesian literature, and they were even published in the contemporary Upper Silesian script (2009), but the writer himself claimed to belong to the nation of Lachia, inhabiting the territory of present-day north-eastern Czech Republic. He repeatedly spoke of the creation of a literary language based on Lachian dialects, with elements of Polish and Czech, which would serve as the foundation for the revitalization of the Lachian ethnic community, for centuries denationalized by the dominant groups, namely Germans, Czechs and Poles. In order to acknowledge Łysohorsky’s work, even though the culture-sensitive approach does not allow me to classify him with any degree of certainty as a Silesian or Silesian-language writer, I would rather describe him as a borderland writer, transnational and transcultural, partly present in the Silesian, Polish, Czech and German literary traditions, while at the same time building a new Lachian literature.

Works written in Silesian ethnolect/language

The rise of literature written in Silesian dates back to the period of post-communist transformation, that is, after 1989, but in particular after 2000, when the development of the local publishing industry became more prominent. Particularly noteworthy are the works originating from the Hlučín Region (a fragment of the region within the administrative borders of the Czech Republic) by authors such as Jana Schlossarková (1998) or Anna Malcharková (2004, 2006). One should also mention children's literature (e.g., Szoltysek 2006) and the rich publishing oeuvre of Alojzy Lysko. Particularly interesting is the cycle *Duchy wojny* (The Ghosts of War; published 2008–2021), in which Lysko explores a taboo subject for Polish authorities for many years – the experiences of Upper Silesians during the World War II, their vacillating cultural identity and their strong regional sense of belonging. Zbigniew Kadłubek's essays *Listy z Rzymu* (Letters from Rome; 2008) proved to be a monumentally important work from the perspective of both the development of Upper Silesian microliterature and the standardization of language; they touched upon issues which had not been previously addressed in Silesian, such as philosophy, literature, world culture, and the problem of writing in a language that does not exist (2012, 37), as Silesian is not recognized institutionally as a language by any of the countries which Upper Silesia belonged or belongs to. The first edition of the essays, published at the time in a non-standardized script, brought to attention the polyvalency of Silesian, its capacity to express more than was usually assumed (*gōdka* was considered to be a language of the lower classes, a “kitchen” language, cf. fn. 3), while at the same time inspiring awe as a literary work. It not only thematized the experience of “Silesianness” and of longing for *Heimat* (“homeland”), but also addressed the issue of a community developing in a contact zone. This includes Kadłubek openly writing about the loss of much of the local culture associated with the expulsion of people identified (though not always identifying themselves) as Germans. *Listy z Rzymu* has become one of the foundations of the reconstituting Upper Silesian community, no less important than the Silesian translation of the Bible (of which excerpts have been translated to date, see Pospiszil 2019a). The essays' use of Silesian outside of the context then ascribed to it constituted, in a sense, an act of subversion against the dominant Polish culture and against the failure to recognize the Silesian minority, despite many years of efforts (cf. Michna 2014; Geisler 2015; Kamusella 2013, 2020). In turn, the second edition of this by-then canonical book, in standardized script, sanctioned the choice of one of the two most commonly considered transcript forms, namely *ślabikōrzowy szrajbōnek* (Adamus 2010; Syniawa 2010; cf. Siuciak 2012; Czesak 2015), which now holds a dominant position in the Upper Silesian publishing scene. After 2008, many texts in Silesian have been published, representing various literary genres and types: drama (e.g., “Jednoaktówki po śląsku” – One-act plays in Silesian – project), several poetic genres (e.g., Karol Gwóźdź, Bronisław Wątroba, Mirosław Syniawa), prose (novels, including crime fiction, e.g., Marcin Melon, Marcin Szewczyk, Rafał Szyma), as well as journalistic texts (published mainly online, most notably on the Wachtyrz website⁴). *Ślōnskō gōdka* has become more broadly recognized by readers as a val-

id form of literary matter due to Marcin Melon's bestselling (at least by the standards of the local publishing market) detective stories about Inspector Hanusik (e.g., Melon 2014, 2015). The leading publisher in the Silesian-language market is Silesia Progress, a publishing house which releases most original works in Silesian (for example, those of Marcin Melon, Monika Neumann, Mirosław Syniawa, Stanisław Neblik, Rafał Szyma, and Marcin Szewczyk) as well as most translations into Silesian; it is, however, impossible to omit the artists and publishers associated with the Silesian National Publishing House (Andrzej Rocznioł, Eugeniusz Kosmala, Anna Gorczek, and Jerzy Buczyński) and the Upper Silesian creators club KTG "Karasol" (e.g., Aleksander Lubina, Ginter Pierończyk) – although the quality of their print at times resembles the samizdat days (photocopied editions, lacking editorial or graphic design work). Online creative activity in *ślōnskŏ gŏdka* is also quite widespread (e.g., Marcin Musiał, Jadwiga Sebesta).

Works written in other languages, and multilingual works

Another category of works involves texts written in dominant languages and multilingual texts functioning in two or more literary systems. When examining works published in dominant languages (previously in Latin, more recently in German, Czech or Polish, sometimes with elements of Silesian), one needs to consider the issue of the deterritorialization of language, typical for minoritized communities, which can be traced to varying degrees in the works of for instance Petr Bezruč, Helena Buchner, Eva Tvrdá and Anna Malcharková. Authors whose works fit, at least partly, into this category are multicultural and sometimes even multilingual writers – whether by birth (e.g., Piotr/Peter Lachmann) or by choice (Ota Filip, who writes in Czech, and who after his emigration in 1974 published largely in German). Textual multilingualism (cf. Makarska 2016), interjecting words or even entire phrases in *gŏdka*, German, Czech or Polish (sometimes in phonetic transcription), serves as one of the ways to tackle the deterritorialization of language. Some writers, such as Szczepan Twardoch, deliberately choose not to explain borrowings from other languages in their works, as they want the reader to feel at least a small degree of the multilingualism of the contact zone and the resulting communication issues (Steciąg 2015; Makarska 2016, 89–95), which I will discuss in the later part of the article. Others, such as Kazimierz Kutz, translate the interpolations into the dominant language (2010), perhaps intending to “ease” the audience into the reception of the work – or to appease the publisher.

Some of the texts written in dominant languages are present in Upper Silesian microliterature in two forms: in the original, accessible to a decreasing number of recipients, and in translation. However, administrative boundaries and the resulting varying influences of the dominant languages have informed a clear division of this literature and the knowledge of the authors “canonical” for parts of the region. Horst Bienek, the author of a Silesian tetralogy written in German, is known to Polish readers through translations, but Czech-speaking Upper Silesians know little of his works and can access them only in the original; they are similarly unfamiliar with Janosch (Horst Eckert), who is popular in the Polish part of the region. The same is true for

works in Czech by Petr Čichoň, Jan Vrak and Jindřich Zogata, which have not been translated into Polish or Silesian. These inequalities in accessibility constitute clear gaps in both parts of the region.

The literature in Polish, Czech and German is exceptionally rich, and it is impossible to mention all the authors who identify as Silesians and write in their dominant languages or create multilingual works. Yet it is worth remembering that in the 20th and 21st centuries more works were written in Polish (e.g., Gustaw Morcinek, Wilhelm Szewczyk, Szczepan Twardoch, Anna Dziewit-Meller, Kazimierz Kutz, and Jacek Durski) than in Czech (e.g., Petr Bezruč, Eva Tvrdá, Anna Malcharková, Jan Vrak, and Jan Balabán) or German (e.g., August Scholtis, Irma Erben-Sedlaczek, Max Niedurny, Horst Bienek, and Janosch). There are, however, authors who write in dominant languages, who are known throughout the entire region, and who have become symbols of the multicultural and heterogeneous nature of Upper Silesia, of the complexity of its history and identity. Joseph von Eichendorff, a German-language writer (albeit familiar with Silesian – see, for example, Kłosek 2015), and one of the most prominent writers associated with the region⁵, can be cited as an example. In Eichendorff's works, Silesian motifs appear on many occasions, including numerous toponyms (which is also common for other works written in the region, especially in the 20th century), while his autobiographical texts thematize the issue of fluctuating identity, including certain difficulties in finding himself in his chosen German culture (Kłosek 2015; Wojda 2018; Zarycki 2014; Korzeniewicz 2021). Much of Eichendorff's work is marked by homesickness, i.e., the longing for his lost small homeland (Adorno 2019, 78). His works, including *Aus dem Leben eines Taugenichts* (Memoirs of a Good-for-Nothing; 1826), were translated into Polish, Czech and Silesian (see Skop 2020; Munzar 2018; Syniawa 2014), which made them widely accessible to Upper Silesian readers. Today, the important (but non-dominant) regional aspects of his work, the ties to the cultures of the region, are emphasized in many ways. In Łubowice (Lubowitz), Eichendorff's birthplace, the Eichendorff Upper Silesian Culture and Meeting Center was established and still operates, publishing bilingual (Polish-German) "Zeszyty Eichendorffa – Eichendorff-Hefte" (Eichendorff's poetry notebooks) and nurturing the legacy of not just Eichendorff, but also other Upper Silesian German-language writers (as it publishes Polish-German editions of works important to Upper Silesian culture). In Sedlnice in the Czech Republic, a place also associated with the writer, the Josef von Eichendorff Library is located, along with a monument to Eichendorff as a poet; a large conference devoted to his works, "Joseph von Eichendorff (1788–1857) and the Czech-Polish Cultural and Artistic Borderlands", was organized in 2018 at the Silesian University in Opava. In addition, he is occasionally mentioned in regional media, which contributes to building a fairly consistent image of Eichendorff as a writer of the Silesian borderland (see, for example, Anonymous 2021; Szymik 2014; Klich 2006).

Contemporary authors are also important, among them Szczepan Twardoch and Petr Čichoň, whose "Silesian" works (concerning Silesianness, regional identity, and borderland) are written as multilingual, with one dominant majority language (for Twardoch – Polish, for Čichoň – Czech and German). From the perspective

of the solidifying Upper Silesian culture, their most important writings include novels about the “Silesian plight”, which are distinctly set in the region and weave together languages and cultures of the Upper Silesian borderland in their narratives – *Slezský román* (Silesian novel; 2012) by Čichoň and *Drach* (2014) by Twardoch. Notably, these books were published not by small, local publishing houses, but by large, respected ones, in both Poland and the Czech Republic: Wydawnictwo Literackie in Kraków (Twardoch), and Host in Brno (Čichoň). Both writers openly declare their affiliation to the Silesian national/ethnic minority (Čichoň 2021; Twardoch 2021a) and incorporate lines *po naszymu* in their prose, without translating them. In doing so, they aim to expose the reader to the typical multilingualism of the contact zone and the resulting communication issues (Steciąg 2015; Makarska 2016, 89–95). The act of “alienating” a reader who does not know *gōdka* is especially meaningful, as – in addition to documenting within the textual layer the heterogeneity of the described space – it establishes (and limits) the community of “comprehension”.⁶

Other important events for Upper Silesian microliterature include external (non-Silesian) awards for authors who identify or are identified with Silesia, but who write in dominant languages and participate in Polish or Czech literary life – such as the Magnesia Littera⁷ awarded posthumously in 2011 to the Ostrava-based⁸ author Jan Balabán for *Zeptej se táty* (Go ask dad; 2010) or Nike 2021⁹ for Zbigniew Rokita for *Kajś* (Somewhere; 2020).

Translation and its importance to Upper Silesian microliterature

The next research area that needs to be factored into the transcultural history of Upper Silesian microliterature is translation. This includes both translations into *ślōnskō gōdka* and its variants, as well as translations into dominant languages (Polish, Czech, also German). Translations, especially those into Silesian, fill in gaps and deficiencies in the literary field, while also allowing the language to grow (Even-Zohar 1990) through translational choices, “recovering” older vocabulary, or creating neologisms. While discussing *Listy z Rzymu*, I mentioned how that text brings to light the polyvalency of the Silesian language; translations of works considered to be masterpieces of European literature play a similar role (apart from excerpts of the Bible, works of Aeschylus, Homer, Dante, Boccaccio, Schiller, Eichendorff, Goethe, Cavafy, Yeats, Burns, Yesenin, and Saint-Exupéry, have been translated among others). A gesture of great significance for both the language and the cultural community was the publication of the Silesian translation of the aforementioned *Drach* by Szczepan Twardoch (trans. by Grzegorz Kulik, 2018), which for most Silesian-speaking readers was already understandable in its original Polish version.

Most translations into Silesian are published in a standardized script (*ślabikōr-zowy szrajbōnek*), which accounts for certain differences in the pronunciation of Silesian, reinforcing the readers’ sense of polycentricity.¹⁰ In turn, translations between the dominant languages of the region allow Silesian readers to access the literature of places or communities unfamiliar to them. A larger number of such

publications might also stem from the calculations of publishers (larger reader market), qualifications of translators (a small number of translators into Silesian), and the desire to relate Upper Silesian identity and history in a way that would be comprehensible to the dominant cultures (which may further relate to the struggle for recognition). The selection of Silesian texts translated into dominant languages also seems to be significant; namely, the chosen works usually have a community-building or subversive character (e.g., Bienek 1991; Janosch 1974, 2011; Tvrďa 2016; Malcharkova 2021).

The research areas outlined thus far feature recurring themes and subjects, which should not elude a historian of this literature, even should they choose the traditional, diachronic and biographical approach. It seems impossible to miss the *us–them* juxtapositions, characteristic of ethno-genetic processes, the repetitive descriptions of the region’s spaces (both the agricultural and the industrial), similarities in descriptions of significant historical events (especially the time of the plebiscites and the World War II), a certain type of self-colonization (cf. Kiossev 2011), a virtual lack of any formal experiments, and only a few texts reaching beyond “Silesia-centric” discourse.

Attempts to establish a canon of Upper Silesian literature

Also worth mentioning are the meta-literary attempts made by a given reading community – critical reception of texts, studies in literary history, literary theory, cultural studies, sociolinguistics and linguistics, as well as attempts to systemize literary output, especially by proposing literary canons. Several such proposals have been made to date, of which I would like to discuss three, each to some extent trans-cultural, as dictated by the borderland character of the region and the multilingualism of the local culture’s prominent authors, who are sometimes associated with other national cultures as well (such as Bezruč or Eichendorff). It should be noted, however, that these attempts were made in the Polish part of Upper Silesia, while in the part that belongs to the Czech Republic no significant interest in canon-forming endeavors has been observed (cf. Martinek 2015, 285–290). The need to establish a literary canon in the “postcanonical age” (Damrosch 2006, 43–52) might be a result not only of the “struggle for recognition,” already mentioned here several times, or of the aspirations of Upper Silesian culture, but also of the “gaps, omissions and underrepresentation of cultures other than the Western European and Northern American in the so-called canon of world literature” (Pospiszil 2018; cf. Said 1993; 66; Seyhan 2001, 14; Wilczek 2004–2005); that dominance can be translated into the dominance of one language and one identity in national canons (cf. Marnersdottir 2015). To avoid repeating the issues with establishing Upper Silesian canons as I have previously discussed (2018), I will only summarize the most crucial facts here. In 2011, *99 ksiazek, czyli mały kanon gornoślaski* (99 books, or the small Upper Silesian canon) by Zbigniew Kadłubek was published. It encompassed not only works commonly recognized as Upper Silesian (by Angelus Silesius, Petr Bezruč, Horst Bienek, Joseph von Eichendorff, Max Herrmann-Neisse, Gustaw Morcinek, Kazimierz Kutz, Zygmunt Haupt), but also texts included in the global hypercanon

(Aeschylus, Ivo Andrić, Elias Canetti, Elizabeth Gaskell, Claudio Magris, Sándor Márai, Herta Müller, Amos Oz, et al.) and not strictly associated with Upper Silesia. This proposal is not so much transcultural as it is pancultural and transnational, since it features ancient Greek, American, British, Italian, and other writers, while the thread that connects all these works is supposed to stem from a specific experience of locality, closely related to the idea of “regiology” (*regiologia*), once promoted by Kadłubek. Yet, it is difficult to understand the key according to which the works included in the canon were selected. The “regiological” spirit seems to foster all borderland microliteratures/literatures, not only that of Upper Silesia, and as such would rather form a “small borderland canon”. This proposition, however, started a debate on Upper Silesian literature that extended outside the walls of academia (e.g., Kuźnik 2011).

A more traditionally constructed canon, based on a survey carried out among 40 people from cultural, literary, and scientific backgrounds, was published in the journal “Fabryka Silesia” in 2012. In this case, too, the multicultural and multilingual character of the region was factored in (Lewandowski 2012), which influenced the choice of authors. This canon included primarily Polish and German-speaking writers, the vast majority of whom were creatively active in the 20th century (Horst Bienek, August Scholtis, Hans Lipinsky-Gottersdorf, Janosch, Henryk Waniek, Kazimierz Kutz, and Stefan Szymutko), which gave rise to some of the objections to the proposal (e.g., Malicki and Kuźnik 2012).

There are also two publishing series which can be considered canonical: “Perły Literatry Śląskiej” or “Juwelen schlesischer Literatur” (Pearls of Silesian literature) published by the Eichendorff Upper Silesian Culture and Meeting Center, and “Canon Silesiae” published by Silesia Progress. The former series is devoted to bilingual (German-Polish) editions of works by established German-language Silesian writers (associated with both Lower and Upper Silesia); the latter is wider in range and comprised of original works in *ślōnskō gödka*, translations of international masterpieces into this language, as well as fiction, science, and popular science books on the topic of Upper Silesian history and identity, written in Polish or translated into Polish (often those publications concern the dominance of other cultures, war and post-war traumas, and the minoritization and silencing of the Upper Silesian community; see Pospiszil 2018, 2019b).

These canon-forming efforts are significant because they originated within the Upper Silesian community, and constituted an internal attempt to structure literary matter. A number of the authors listed above did not appear in these canons, due to temporal limitations (i.e., post-dating the canons) or formal limitations (e.g., copyright issues), although at present such authors would probably also qualify as “canonical” (e.g., Szczepan Twardoch, Mirosław Syniawa, Petr Čichoň). One might question the sense of such efforts, of struggles to “capture” liquid matter in fixed hierarchies and tables. However, adopting a transcultural perspective – which has been done by the authors of the said canons – allows to locate one’s own culture and literature in an array of other cultures and literatures, to identify connections which elude simple “national” classifications.

CONCLUSION

The nodal areas outlined above are, in my view, pivotal for writing the transcultural history of Upper Silesian microliterature. While they do not encompass the entirety of literary production contained within this polysystem, they do allow for insight into that literature that is both deep and as broad as possible. Such a project is obviously bound to suffer from certain simplifications and from the need to make difficult choices, especially with regard to selecting texts to be studied. I imagine that such a transcultural literary history would assume the form of a hypertext rather than of a traditional publication, and as such it could be developed by multiple researchers who would focus on various systems within the Upper Silesian polysystem and its neighboring polysystems. Additional information regarding the cultural, historical and linguistic context would also be necessary, as without such clarifications, many texts, discussions and even writing scripts could be incomprehensible. The nature of the hypertext form means that such a project would be infinite – never ending, impossible to fully complete. However, the aim here is not to create an encyclopedia of this literature (de Kock 2006, 21–22), but a study of an ever-changing polysystem – a study, which by necessity would be expandable, changeable and multi-authored, in accordance with the polycentricity and heterogeneity of the literature studied.

NOTES

- ¹ The impossibility of finishing such a project, even on a smaller geographical scale, was addressed by Leon de Kock, who referred among other things to the attempts to compile a history of African literature (2006).
- ² For more on the history of Upper Silesia and related issues of cultural and national identity see, for example, Czaplinski et al. 2002; Kamusella 2013; Bjork et al. 2016.
- ³ For terminology issues concerning Silesian language, see, for example, Michna 2014; Siuciak 2012; Czesak 2015; Wyderka 2004; Myśliwiec 2013. In the present article, I will use the term “language”, following ISO 639-3, code: SZL.
- ⁴ See <https://wachttyrz.eu>.
- ⁵ That being said, Eichendorff’s ties to both Lower and Upper Silesia are often accentuated, which renders him a connecting factor of a sort between the two parts of one large region – Silesia – the histories of which unfolded differently, and which now culturally significantly differ; see, for example, Kłosek 2015; Lam 2004.
- ⁶ It is also worth mentioning that both authors were accused of separatist or even Nazi sympathies (Klíčová 2011; Saulski 2013; Stachowiak 2022), which only strengthened the subversive undertones of their journalistic and literary writings, interviews and public statements (see Čichoň 2020; Čichoň and Lenartová 2020; Čichoň and Zdenko 2012; Mottýl 2015; Nagy 2020; Twardoch 2020, 2021b, 2022a, 2022b).
- ⁷ The most important Czech literary award, held since 2002, see <https://magnesia-litera.cz/>.
- ⁸ Ostrava is a city in the Moravian-Silesian region.
- ⁹ The most important Polish literary award, held since 1997, see <https://culture.pl/pl/tag/nagroda-literacka-nike>.
- ¹⁰ For a study of translations and their community-building role, as well as for a bibliography of translations into Silesian up to 2018, see Pospiszil 2019a, 2019b.

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Confluences: On the possibility of describing a transcultural history of (micro)literature – the Upper Silesian perspective

Upper Silesia. Borderland. Microliterature. Minor literature. Transculturalism.
History of literature.

Any attempt to fully describe the history of a particular literature is doomed to fail. Such a description requires simplifications and generalizations, and necessitates selection. The same is true for literatures of contact zones, which are transcultural in their nature. The history of such literatures should reflect their character and accommodate their transcultural dimension. By using the example of Upper Silesian microliterature, the author presents the challenges a researcher would be confronted with even while approaching literatures of small range, both geographically and in number of recipients (microliteratures), referring to the theory of polysystems and transcultural studies. She discusses the nodal points of the postulated transcultural history of Upper Silesian microliterature, namely: 1) works in the Silesian language, 2) works in dominant languages, 3) translations, and 4) proposals for its literary canon. Concurrently, she argues that Upper Silesian literature cannot be examined in isolation from its transcultural context, the confluences of German and Slavic cultures, as well as the history of the cultural melting pot in which it was developed and the character of which is still noticeable today.

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