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Russian-Language Writers in the Transnational Literary Space of Belarus in the 1920s–early 1930s: Paradoxes and the Inevitability of the Collective Project's Failure

Rosyjskojęzyczni pisarze w transnarodowej literackiej przestrzeni Białorusi w latach 20. i na początku lat 30. XX wieku: paradoksy i nieuchronność niepowodzenia kolektywnego projektu

Рускамоўныя пісьменнікі ў транснацыянальнай літаратурнай прасторы Беларусі 1920-х – пачатку 1930-х: парадоксы і непазбежнасць няпоспеху калектыўнага праекта

Abstract

In the years 1922–1936 in the Belarusian Soviet republic there were four official languages: Belarusian, Yiddish, Polish and Russian. There were educational institutions, theatres, print publishing houses and literary organizations of national minorities, including Latvian and Lithuanian. Russian-speaking authors who started in the circles of workers' correspondents (*rabkors*) and literary studios, by 1926 formed the group "Zvenya" ("Links"), from which in 1927 the group "Minsky Pereval" ("Minsk Pass") was separated. In the studies devoted to the Belarusian-Russian literary interrelations and the history of Russian-language literature in Belarus, the activities of this group are not presented. The article fills this gap and offers new aspects for considering the problem of Belarusian-Russian relations and non-Belarusian-language literature in Belarus. Despite a significant number of studies, both problems remain relevant. The material of the article controverts the ideologically biased position that considers Belarus as an indigenous part of the "Russian world", and at the same time proposes a popular one in literary studies in relation to the period of the 16th–19th centuries (sometimes also the 20th century) the concept of "multilingual literature of Belarus". The article traces the stages of the institutionalized existence of Russian-speaking group in the Belarusian literary space, from contradictory relations with the influential association "Maladniak" ("Saplings") to the establishment of the Union of Soviet Writers (1934). It was used the archival documents, publications of Russian-language authors of the 1920s and early 1930s, and the verbatim report of the First Congress of Soviet Writers. The group was not realized as a collective project

because in the "multinational Soviet literature" built since the mid-1920s there was no place for extraterritorial Russian-language literature as national minority literature.

Keywords: Literature of Belarus in the 1920s–early 1930s, „Zvenya", „Minsky Pereval"

Abstrakt

W latach 1922–1936 w Białoruskiej Republice Radzieckiej funkcjonowały cztery języki urzędowe: białoruski, jidysz, polski i rosyjski. Istniały instytucje edukacyjne, teatry, wydawnictwa drukowane i organizacje literackie mniejszości narodowych, w tym łotewskiej i litewskiej. Rosyjskojęzyczni autorzy, którzy zaczynali w kółkach korespondentów robotniczych i pracowniach literackich, do 1926 r. utworzyli grupę „Zwienia" („Ogniwa"), z której w 1927 r. wyodrębniła się grupa „Minskij Pereval" („Mińska Przełęcz"). W opracowaniach poświęconych białorusko-rosyjskim związkom literackim i historii literatury rosyjskojęzycznej na Białorusi działalność tej grupy nie jest prezentowana. Artykuł wypełnia tę lukę. Autorka omawia nowe aspekty stosunków białorusko-rosyjskich i literatury niebiałoruskojęzycznej na Białorusi. Obydwa zagadnienia, pomimo znacznej liczby dostępnych badań, pozostają aktualne. Autorka artykułu podważa pogląd uznający Białoruś za rdzenną część „rosyjskiego świata", proponuje jednocześnie popularną w literaturoznawstwie w odniesieniu do okresu XVI-XIX w. (niekiedy także – XX wieku) koncepcję „wielojęzycznej literatury Białorusi". W artykule prześledzono etapy zinstytucjonalizowanego istnienia grupy rosyjskojęzycznej w białoruskiej przestrzeni literackiej, od sprzecznych relacji z wpływowym stowarzyszeniem „Maladniak" („Młodniak") po powstanie Związku Pisarzy Radzieckich (1934). Wykorzystano dokumenty archiwalne, publikacje rosyjskojęzycznych autorów z lat 20. i wczesnych 30. XX wieku oraz dosłowne sprawozdanie z Pierwszego Zjazdu Pisarzy Radzieckich. Grupa nie została zrealizowana jako projekt grupowy, gdyż w budowanej od połowy lat dwudziestych XX wieku „wielonarodowej literaturze sowieckiej" nie było miejsca dla ekstraterytorialnej literatury rosyjskojęzycznej jako literatury mniejszości narodowej.

Słowa kluczowe: Literatura Białorusi w latach 20. i na początku lat 30. XX wieku, „Zwienia", „Minskij Pereval"

Анатацыя

У Беларускай савецкай рэспубліцы 1922–1936 гг. было чатыры афіцыйныя мовы – беларуская, ідыш, польская, руская. Існавалі навучальныя ўстановы, тэатры, друкаваныя выданні, а таксама літаратурныя арганізацыі нацыянальных меншасцяў, у тым ліку латышскія і літоўскія. Рускамоўныя аўтары, якія пачыналі ў гуртках рабкораў, літаратурных студыях у 1926 г. стварылі групу „Звенья", з якой у 1927 г. вылучылася група „Минский перевал". У даследаваннях, прысвечаных беларуска-рускім літаратурным узаемасувязям, а таксама гісторыі рускамоўнай літаратуры Беларусі, дзейнасць групы „Минский перевал" не прадстаўлена. Артыкул запаўняе гэты прабел і прапануе новыя аспекты для разгляду праблемы беларуска-рускіх узаемасувязяў і небеларускамоўнай літаратуры Беларусі. Абедзве праблемы, нягледзячы на значны корпус наяўных даследаванняў, захоўваюць сваю актуальнасць. Матэрыял артыкула аспрэчвае ідэалагічна ангажаваную пазіцыю,

што разглядае Беларусь як спрадвечную частку „рускага свету"; прапануе паняцце „шматмоўнай літаратуры Беларусі", што зацвердзілася ў літаратуразнаўстве ў дачыненні да перыядаў XVI-XX ст.ст., пашырыць на феномены XX ст. Артыкул прасочвае этапы інстытуалізаванага існавання рускамоўных груп у беларускай літаратурнай прасторы, ад супярэчлівых узаемаадносін з уплывовым аб'яднаннем „Маладняк" да стварэння Саюза савецкіх пісьменнікаў (1934). Выкарыстоўваюцца архіўныя дакументы, публікацыі рускамоўных аўтараў 1920-х – пачатку 1930-х, стэнаграфічная справаздача Першага з'езду савецкіх пісьменнікаў. Як калектыўны праект рускамоўныя групы не рэалізаваліся, бо ў „шматнацыянальнай савецкай літаратуры", якая выбудоўвалася з сярэдзіны 1920-х гадоў, не было пазіцыі для экстратэрытарыяльнай рускамоўнай літаратуры як літаратуры нацыянальнай меншасці.

Ключавыя словы: літаратура Беларусі 1920-х – пачатку 1930-х, „Звенья", „Минский перевал"

The issue of the relationship between Russian and Belarusian languages and literatures stands apart in the long history of cultural interactions in Belarus, because the strong Russian influence has been going on since the middle of the 19th century and has not stopped until now. It took place within the boundaries of different administrative-territorial units[1], with different degrees of political and cultural autonomy, and was the result of mutual struggle of larger and stronger neighbours, mainly Russia and Poland. And if after the appearance of works on multilingual literature of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the notions of the Latin-language and Polish-language literature of Belarus, and the phenomenon of a cultural border zone, were formulated and discussed[2], the 20th century, which began with the process of national revival around the newspaper 'Nasha Niva' (1906–1915), remained predominantly monocultural in the Belarusian literary studies until the early 2000s, although this period is divided into several segments, none of which was exclusive for Belarusian literature. These were the difficult 1920s; then the 'Soviet multinational literature', where all literatures except Russian existed within the framework of the policy of 'positive discrimination' (Martin, 2001); a short period of official monolingualism of 1991–1994, not free from Russian influence but oriented towards fighting it; and the restoration of the Soviet model (Bekus, 2019)

[1] Let us list, starting with the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917 and not mentioning the short-lived entities that emerged during the numerous redistributions of territories between Poland, Lithuania, Germany and Russia: Belarusian People's Republic 1918, Soviet Socialist Republic of Belarus (SSRB) 1919, Lithuanian-Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic 1919, SSRB 1920, then BSSR; as part of the USSR 1922; annexation of Vitebsk, Smolensk, and Gomel provinces 1921–1926; annexation of Western Belorussia after the Soviet invasion of Poland; establishment of the border with Lithuania with the transfer of part of the territory 1940; Reichskommissariat Ostland 1941–1944; as part of the USSR until 1991, at present–the Republic of Belarus. Belarusian was the only state language in 1918 and 1991–1994. Official quadrilingualism (Belarusian, Yiddish, Polish, Russian) 1922–1936; Belarusian-Russian bilingualism from 1996 to present.

[2] See review of studies (Kazakova, 2006).

with a gradual return to the unbalanced position of Russian and Belarusian languages (Hentšel′ and Kittel′, 2011), and literatures–in the early 21st century (Aleška, 2013).

The period of the 1920s and early 1930s is attractive for research in the directions suggested and grounded by Gun-Britt Kohler (2021b, p. 12–74) as a 'disconnection' of those parameters whose unification constituted the resulting concept of national literature – space, language, ethnicity, state, and literature (2021b, p. 27). The changeability of space and the uncertainty of chronology do not allow for a full reliance on these categories, while attention to the institutional method (2021b, p. 39–50; 2021a) and transnational perspective (Kohler and Navumenka, 2019) reveal the particularity of the Belarusian situation of the 1920s–1930s.

The article examines one fragment of this situation–the activities of Russian-language writers, and only one aspect–the reasons for their non-realization as a group, within literary organizations. 'Failure' will be understood as an unstable position in the institutional literary hierarchy and disappearance by the 1930s, an absence in 'multinational Soviet literature'. It is impossible to explain it by a lack of talent in young authors, because many of them (Mikhail Goldberg (Zlatogorov), Ilya Dukor, Ryhor Kobets, Yefim Sadovsky, Semyon Pilitovich) had individual achievements in the form of notable publications, theatrical productions, awards, positions, and others. One can see the reasons in strong anti-Russian sentiments and large-scale Belarusization (Martin, 2001, p. 260–269; Puryševa, 2015), but this in no way explains the actual disappearance of Russian-language authors from the literary space of Belarus after 1928, when the national policy shifted from the fight against 'Russian great-power chauvinism' to the fight against 'natsdemovshchina' (national democratic tendencies) and 'bourgeois nationalism'[3]. Russian-language writers received communist-party support, including financial support, from 1926 (Puryševa, 2016, p. 150–151), while the tendencies of centralization and attempts to create 'multinational proletarian literature' could be traced earlier, from 1925, and were based on imperial methods (Dobrenko, 2023, p. 875).

What makes the Soviet project of multinational literature imperial is 'the modus of partly violent application as well as the programmatic dominance of the Russian language' (Frank, 2019, p. 241), and Russian literature was included in this project on special grounds, not as one of the other national literatures. It was given the role of model and canon, i.e. Russian literature was 'never considered simply national' (2019, p. 242). This perspective sharpens the issue of the non-realization of the Russian-language project in the transnational literary space of Belarus and its reduction rather than development in the 1930s.

[3] It is worth adding that there is no clear boundary between these seemingly opposite lines. It cannot be said that one policy was consistently implemented, which was then replaced by another. The paradoxical coexistence of opposite lines, as well as their purely declarative existence and divergence from the real situation–all this is characteristic of the 1920s and 1930s, as well as of the later periods of the Soviet system.

Attempts to Describe the History of Russian-language Literature in Belarus and the Period of 1920s–early 1930s

The term 'Russian-language literature of Belarus' was coined in the 1980s by linguist Anatoly Girutsky and began to count the influence of the Russian language on Belarusian from the second half of the 19th century, noting the 'redistribution of forms of artistic and literary bilingualism',

> when authors who wrote in Polish and Belarusian were replaced by writers who wrote in Belarusian and Russian – Janka Lučyna, Maksim Bahdanovič, Jakub Kolas, Adam Hurynovič, publicists Danila Baravik, Ščyry Bielarus, as well as a number of other writers, poets, and translators (Giruckij, 1985, p. 181).

In his historical line from the beginning of the 20th century, Girutsky goes straight to the names of authors who debuted in the 1960s and continued to publish in the 1980s: these are Mikhail Gerchik, Naum Kislik, Nikolai Krugovykh, Bronislav Sprinchan, Eduard Skobelev, and others (1985, p. 184).

Without using the term 'Russian-language', Adam Malzdis wrote about the beginning of the formation of 'Russian literary environment' in Belarus by the 70s of the 18th century, when, in his opinion, 'Russian literature of Belarus' emerged (1980, p. 271–272). In this connection, he mentioned the names of memoirists Gavriil Dobrynin, Lev Engelhardt, classicist poet Ivan Sokolsky and others. Anatol´ Žakaŭ and Mikalaj Miščančuk adopted the same point of reference when characterizing Russian-Belarusian literary interrelations of the 20th century in accordance with the circle of issues accepted in Belarusian literary studies, including influences, translations, participation of Belarusian and Russian writers in each other's literary life[4]. In one sentence they list 'Russian Soviet writers' who 'lived and worked' in Belarus (Žakaŭ and Miščančuk, 1987, p. 538): these are authors who came to literature around the 1940s and were realized in the 1960s, and among them only the name of Ivan Shapovalov is related to the 1930s.

Among numerous publications of the 2000s devoted to the Russian-language literature of Belarus, one focused on the problem of periodization and singled out three stages. The first, according to the Maldzis' concept, from the late 18th century; the second, called 'the stage of formation of scientific Belarusian studies' of the mid-19th–early 20th century, included the names of scholars who wrote about Belarus (Adam Kirkor, Mitrofan Dovnar-Zapolski, Yefim Karski, etc.); the third one went from the

[4] This is the main perspective of Valentina Gapova's monograph *Belorussko-russkoe poeticheskoe vzaimodejstvie* (*Belarusian-Russian Poetic Interaction*) (1979), the collective work *Yedinstvo i vzaimoobogashchenie. Voprosy vzaimosvyazei sovetskikh literatur* (*Unity and Mutual Enrichment. Questions of Interrelations of Soviet Literatures*) (1980), as well as *Ocherki po istorii belorussko-russkikh literaturnykh svyazei* (*Essays on the History of Belarusian-Russian Literary Relations*) in 4 volumes, 1993–1995.

appearance of the Russian-language magazine 'Nyoman' in 1960 to the beginning of the 21st century (Serdûkova, 2014).

It can be seen that a large period of 'Soviet literature' remains outside the experiments of creating a history of Russian-language literature in Belarus.

The phrase 'Soviet writer' emerged during the discussions of 1922–1925[5] and preceded the resolution of the Central Committee of the RCP(b) of June 18, 1925 'On the Party's policy in the field of Literature', which proclaimed 'free competition between different groupings and movements', tolerance of poputchiki ('fellow travellers') and 'proletarian-peasant writers' (Âkovlev, 1999, p. 57), which at the same time meant the subordination of all literary organizations to the Moscow party leadership, culminating in 1932 in the decree 'On the Reorganization of Literary and Artistic Organizations' with a clear mandate to unite 'all writers who support the platform of the Soviet [standing for the policy of Soviet] power and aspire to participate in socialist construction into a single union of Soviet writers with a communist faction in it' (Âkovlev, 1999, p. 173). This meant 'a thoroughgoing rehabilitation of Russian culture and the right of Russians to national self-expression':

> The status of the Russian nationality was raised dramatically in the period from 1933 to 1938, along with the status of the RSFSR. <…> …The reemergence of the Russians involved three main processes: first, the formation of a Russian national space through the Russification of the RSFSR; second, the elevation of the status and unifying role of Russian culture within the entire USSR; third, the integration of the newly central Russians into the preexisting Soviet national constitution through the metaphor of the Friendship of the Peoples (Martin, 2001, p. 394).

The first Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934 was not the beginning of 'Soviet multinational literature', but a symbolic confirmation of the fact of its 'existence', a necessary demonstration of the subordination of literature to the state and its national policy. At the second congress, held 20 years later, in 1954, i.e. after Stalin's death, it was no longer necessary to demonstrate 'multinationality', and 'Soviet literature was seen as a whole' (Kormilov, 2010, p. 50). Institutionally, Russian literature emerged only in 1958, with the emergence of its own writers' union, which led to the need to create corresponding publications in the Union republics (the literary magazine 'Nyoman' in Belarus, 'Prostor' in Kazakhstan, both from 1960, 'Literaturnaya Armenia' from 1958, 'Literaturnaya Gruziya' from 1957). The absence of Russian-language literature of the period of 1920–30s in numerous works devoted to Russian-Belarusian literary relations and Russian-language literature of Belarus can be explained by the same reasons that Vyacheslav Molotov used to explain the absence of the Communist Party

[5] Originally it had a meaning opposite to that of a writer of emigration, i.e. a writer of a new generation, a 'new Soviet raznochinets ('commoner') (see Kišinskaâ, 1966).

of the RSFSR: it was not 'forgotten', but 'there was just no place for it' (as cited in Martin, 2001, p. 395).

Nevertheless (and maybe even more so), it makes sense to look at the institutionalized existence of Russian-language literature in Belarus in the 1920s–early 1930s, at the attempts to find its 'place' in the literary space of Belarus.

In the Succession of Literary Institutions of the 1920s: Studio, Section, Group

In the early 1920s, many young people, fascinated by revolutionary ideals, aspired to literature. Literary circles were established in clubs, schools, and factories; they transformed into associations that could last only a few months. Many literary associations sought to include representatives of the four official languages of the Belarusian republic, which had equal status from 1922 to 1936–Belarusian, Yiddish, Polish, and Russian. It is impossible to cover the whole of this rapid and diverse process, and, speaking further about the Russian-language branch of literature, the article concentrates on the authors who started in the literary studio of the Trade Unions Club, in early 1925 joined the Russian section of 'Maladniak'[6], at the end of the same year they left it and formed the group 'Zvenya', from which the group 'Minsky pereval' split off on April 1, 1927. This was the core of Russian-language literature, which participated in the literary life of the central writers' organizations.

Pavel Navumienka characterizes the 1920s as a period of 'superconcentration' of literary forces, uniting around several 'centers of consolidation' that

> were not frozen–on the contrary, the process was fast-paced and lively, it changed depending on the internal processes taking place in literature (aesthetic discussions and disputes, formation of literary schools within the community), or was rigidly modeled by heteronomous factors... Writers' communities, different in their tasks–from the realization of aesthetic principles common to this 'school' to the promotion of the national liberation struggle, different in the strength of the 'inner bonding' of its members–from unity in their views on promising ways of literary development (poetics, style manner, etc.), which left the friends of the community almost complete freedom of creative behavior, to strict party discipline and economic dependence, nevertheless demonstrated an interesting phenomenon: to remain outside their boundaries at this time automatically meant to remain outside the boundaries of literature in general (Navumienka, 2012, p. 225).

[6] All-Belarusian Association of Poets and Writers 'Maladniak', the most mass literary organization. It existed since 1923, in 1928 it was transformed into the Belarusian Association of Proletarian Writers (BelAPP).

This opinion once again reinforces the issue raised in the article about the paradox or naturalness of the failure of the Russian-language writers' group against the success of individuals.

The conditions of existence of writers' communities changed throughout the 1920s, and especially dynamically in the second half of the decade. This is the period of the end of 'collective creativity', which 'comes with the end of the revolutionary era and the establishment of Soviet culture based on the 'ascent' from 'beginners' to 'masters', when previous writers either adapted in Soviet literature or left it' (Dobrenko, 1999, p.14). Adaptation in Soviet culture provides for the author's 'embeddedness' in institutions, the hierarchical structure of which had regional specifics.

The relations of Russian-language writers with the influential 'Maladniak', which claimed supremacy in the Belarusian literary process, were important. The group at the club 'Profintern' was enrolled in 'Maladniak' as a section of national minorities, along with the group of Jewish writers 'Junger Arbeiter' ('The young worker') (February 25, 1925, BDAMLM[7], 225, 1, 3). The minutes recorded that 'the section enjoys all the rights' of 'Maladniak'. However, their membership was short-lived, and already in October of the same year Russian-language authors left 'Maladniak' due to 'sharp disagreements on organizational issues' (Puryševa, 2016, p. 147).The disagreement concerned the status of the Russian-language section as belonging not to the 'All-Belarusian Association' but to the Minsk affiliate. In the minutes of 'Maladniak' meeting there are clarifications that refer to the affiliation and an explanation that 'there is no Russian studio on the All-Belarusian scale' (early May 1925, BDAMLM, 225, 1, 3).

These 'organizational disagreements' can be traced in the headlines of publications of Russian-language authors in the magazine 'Professional Movement of Belarus' ('Profrukh'), where the literary studio had its own page in 1925. At first, the headline was as follows: 'From the almanac of the literary studio of the Central Trade Union Club 'Krasny Profintern' – Minsk'; in No. 4, 1925 the publication of poems by Grisha Lokhmaty (Kobets), Ilya Dukor, Mark Goldshtein, Semyon Pilitovich was entitled 'To Lenin–the literary studio of the Central Trade Union Club 'Krasny Profintern' – Russian section of the all-Belarusian association of poets and writers 'Maladniak'. After explanations with the bureau of 'Maladniak', in No. 6, May 15, 1925, the title is clarified to 'Russian section of the Minsk Branch'. This variant was maintained almost consistently until No.15, October 1, 1925, and from that date the mention of the belonging to 'Maladniak' disappeared. For several issues the heading 'From the work of the literary group at the Culture Department of the Central Council of Trade Unions of Belarus' remains; in No.20, December 1925, there is no subheading, and from No.1 for 1926 the integral literary heading no longer exists in the trade-union magazine. By the end of 1925 the group 'Zvenya' appeared[8].

[7] Belarusian State Archive-Museum of Literature and Art.

[8] Sadovsky wrote that the group took its name from the name of an almanac in which Russian-language authors from Minsk were published (1965, p. 134). Unfortunately, no traces of this al-

These facts add up to a consistent picture. They can be supplemented by a quotation from Pilitovich's report at the meeting of the Literary Commission of the Central Committee of the CP(b)B, September 8, 1926: 'Six members of the group were members of 'Maladniak', but then it was decided to leave 'Maladniak'. At present the group stands on the point of uniting with 'Maladniak'' (NARB, 4p, 1, 2350, p. 29). This sounds more like an admission of error rather than an accusation that they were unfairly excluded. The Literary Commission did not oppose it, but noted that 'no specific organizational forms need be specified with regard to association with 'Maladniak' (NARB, 4p, 1, 2350, p. 29).

Collective and Individual Publications

In the 1920s, a collective publication–a magazine or an almanac–acquired the meaning of 'literary work', 'literary fact' (Yuri Tynyanov). In the turbulent literary life of the 1920s, such publications played the role of accumulation and expression of a certain ideological and artistic position, demonstration of this position opposed to another group. 'Maladniak' and 'Uzvyšša' ('Heights') published magazines of the same name, while the 'Junger Arbeiter' group published a newspaper of the same name, then the magazine 'Shtern'. The Russian-language group initially published in the magazine 'Profrukh', and the 1925 publications fully represented the 'face' of the literary studio, as they were not only poems, but also special columns presenting individual authors personally, with photographs and autobiographical information, with a selection of poems, not just one or two texts. Dukor's critical notes devoted to analyzing the poems sent for publication, responses to criticism, and notes on the activities of the literary studio were also published there.

The literary group 'Zvenya' was to operate under the party newspaper 'Zvezda' (Chromčanka, 1985, p. 514). On January 7, 1926, the newspaper announced the publication of the new almanac 'Zvenya', published the composition of the new bureau of the literary group (Anton Sapelka (Dmitry Kurdin), Pilitovich, Semyon Yezersky), and gave information about 'connections with the literary organizations of the USSR' (*Zvezda*, 1926, 5, p. 8). This publication can be considered the official beginning of a new stage of the group's existence. It differed significantly from the previous one, first of all, by the fact that 'Zvezda' did not have a permanent literary page like 'Profrukh', but issued a literary supplement (Chromčanka notes the similarity to the library of the magazine 'Ogonyok', 1985, p. 514). It is difficult to judge how consolidated these

manac could be found. There are also mentions that 'Zvenya' was created from groups of Russian-language writers from Vitebsk, Minsk, Polotsk and Mogilev (Puryševa, 2016, p. 147). The status and composition of these groups are not quite clear, only the numerical strength of 'Zvenya' is known, and the names are unknown (18 persons, NARB, 4p, 1, 2350, p. 29, September 1926; 19 persons, NARB, 4p, 1, 2895, p. 27, November 1926). NARB – National Archives of the Republic of Belarus.

supplements were in the sense of belonging to the group and reflecting its creative principles, because, unfortunately, the issues for 1926 require additional research, but it can be assumed that even if there were collective publications, they were irregular and it lasted not for long because in September 1926 'Zvenya' were promised a literary page in the newspaper 'Belorussky Rabochy' (NARB, 4p, 1, 2350, p. 29), in November they asked the Press Department of the Central Committee of the CP(b)B to allocate them a literary supplement to a Russian-language newspaper (NARB, 4p, 1, 2895, p. 27), i.e. they still needed it. Besides, it was in 1926 that the editions, previously multilingual, switched to the Belarusian language. One of the reasons for the decrease in publications of Russian-language poets in 'Profrukh' might be criticism from the Moscow trade union leadership ('The course for a mass magazine–in the native language', *Profrukh*, 1926, 5, p. 2); 'Zvezda' became Belarusian-language from 1927. Individual works by members of the group appeared in the newspaper 'Čyrvonaja Zmena', on the literary page of the magazine 'Belaruskaja Rabotnica i Sialianka', where in 1926 N. Sergeeva (full name unknown), Goldshtein, Grigory Buntar, Anton Sapelka, and others were published.

The only comprehensive collective publication of the group was the almanac '*Zvenya'*, which was published in the State Publishing House of Belarus in 1926, had the subtitle 'Almanac of Minsk Literary Group' and included the works of 10 poets. The almanac was not a success ('hardly sold out', NARB, 4p, 1, 2350, p.29). The language of the works was criticized, with an abundance of Belarusisms and Yiddish words. The Literary Commission of the Central Committee of the CP(b)B expressed the opinion that it was not enough for the authors to read only, 'it is necessary to hear live Russian speech' (NARB, 4p, 1, 2350, p. 29). The continuation of the almanac under a common title apparently never came, but 'Zvenya' published their poetry books outside publishing houses, like the collective book *Polustanok* (*Whistle-stop*) by Grigory Ladny (12 poems) and Yefim Sadovsky (6 poems) (1927), and Mark Goldshtein's book of poems *Pritsel* (*Aiming sight*) (1927). Perhaps this type of publication fulfilled the role of an intended almanac.

'Minsky Pereval' as a Failed Escape from Proletarian Art

The dissolution of the group into 'Zvenya' and 'Minsky Pereval' was announced on April 1, 1927 (Chromčanka, 1986, p. 625). An important, but the shortest period of the group's existence began, which indicates that the writers came out of the period of 'literary apprenticeship' and acquired certain incompatible views. The separated authors[9] announced that they accepted the declaration of the Russian association 'Pereval' as their aesthetic program, and this is an extremely important moment. The

[9] Maskim Zalyotny, Grigory Buntar, Grishka Lohmaty (Kobets), Ivan Nikiforov, A. Kazlas, S. Guśkov (Chromčanka, 1986, p. 625).

declaration of 'Pereval', published in February 1927, meant not the emergence of a new organization, since 'Pereval' had existed from 1923–24, but the transition to an open polemic with the VAPP[10], which sought complete subordination of all literary communities and pursued a particularly aggressive policy in this direction. 'If in 1924 'Pereval' did not intend to actively interfere in a completely unnecessary polemic … now 'Pereval' openly opposed the 'hegemony' of the VAPP' (Ovčarenko, 2008, p.10), with which even before it had 'never solidarized' (Deklaraciâ, 1927, p. 235). The Declaration gave a sharply negative assessment of the activities of proletarian writers:

> Waging the most brutal and inconsistent struggle against the artistic individualities of individual writers from all literary groups and formations, the VAPP tried to contrast its achievements with theirs. As a result of the demonstration of weak and primitive works, the VAPP has now discredited the very notion of 'proletarian writer', which has become synonymous with wingless napravlenchestvo, archaic agitation and artistic helplessness. Schematism, bare description of everyday life, lack of skill and profound content, consistent in its inner burning with the great ideas of the age, a step backward in language, form and style from the point of view of literary progress–this is what our literature has in its VAPP branch (Deklaraciâ, 1927, p. 235).

The ideological and aesthetic position of the Russian 'Pereval' was close to that of the Belarusian 'Uzvyšša', which left 'Maladniak' in May 1926, i.e. before the publication of this polemical Declaration. The position of 'Uzvyšša' (as well as the Ukrainian VAPLITE)[11] opposed the strong 'centripetal tendencies' of proletarian (nascent Soviet) literature, which was seen by Dobrenko as a confrontation between imperial and national-oriented positions, in which 'the recklessly internationalist position of the Belarusian Association of Proletarian Writers' was 'a knowingly losing one' (2023, p. 881).

Before the formation of the BelAPP, the project of the All-Belarusian Federation of Writers, which aimed to unite all groups, existed for a short time. In the questionnaire of the Press Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus, November 1926, only 'Zvenya' were in favor of the federation ('Maladniak' replied evasively, 'Uzvyšša' and 'Junger Arbeiter' were against) (NARB, 4p, 1, 2895, p. 16–17, 24, 27–29). Goldberg was included in the commission formed in March 1927 from 'Zvenya' (Chromčanka, 1987, p. 369), and it can be assumed that 'Minsky Pereval' was created by authors who did not agree with joining the federation, because they saw in this project not so much a chance to finally become a full member of a large writer's organization as a threat to creative unification. The rapid next institutional change,

[10] VAPP (Vsesoiuznaia assotsiatsiia proletarskikh pisatelei), changed its status, subordinating to the Moscow association and claiming all-union scale, accordingly changing its names (MAPP, RAPP, VOAPP).

[11] VAPLITE, the Free Academy of Proletarian Literature, a Ukrainian literary association 1925–1928. The leader of the organization Mykola Khvylyovy was a consistent opponent of the presence of Russian culture in Ukraine.

the emergence of the BelAPP (November 1928), makes this episode insignificant, but it shows that resistance to centralization may have had reasons not only for national but also for creative independence–emancipation from the principles of proletarian literature. The precedent of the short existence of 'Minsky Pereval' demonstrates this, as does the creation of 'Uzvyšša', and other groups that began to appear at that time[12].

'Minsky Pereval' managed to publish only one collective book – *Samoye rodnoye* (*The Most Native*) (1927) with poems by Maxim Zalyotny, Grigory Buntar and Ivan Nikiforov. The collection differed considerably from the almanac 'Zvenya' by the complete absence of proletarian motifs. It was an attempt to rehabilitate the peasant, landscape theme in poetry, similar to the work of the 'Problisk' group (Aleś Hurlo, Todar Kliaštorny, Aleś Zvonak, etc.). In the poems of Zalyotny and Buntar, the city and the countryside were contrasted as artificial, alien value and what remains cherished, the most native–this is how the title can be understood.

Zalyotny was immediately excluded from 'Maladniak' as a Russophone, with the wording 'who are not included in the association in accordance with the Regulation' (BDAML, 225, 1, 3, p. 39). In 1925–26 Zalyotny was published in the magazines 'Profrukh', 'Bielaruskaja Rabotnica i Sialianka' together with Russian-language authors, but in Belarusian. It is impossible to say with certainty whether he announced his transition to Russian, and, most importantly, whether this was the real reason for his exclusion from 'Maladniak', because in 1927 writers left 'Maladniak' and were excluded from it for various reasons[13].

Obviously, by 1928, Russian-language authors were not even considered by 'Maladniak' as national minorities. The provisional bureau of 'Maladniak', which was supposed to unite the national sections, gathered representatives of Jewish, Polish and Lithuanian writers, while there was no representative from the Russian section (Savieckaja Bielaruś, 1928, 28 April, 99(2287), p. 4)[14]. Again, it must be emphasized that this cannot be evidence of the *Maladniak*'s 'nationalist' position alone[15]. By 1928,

[12] In 1927 'Problisk' ('Proletarian-Peasant Belarusian Literary Association'), 'Polymia' ('Flame') and 'The Belarusian Literary and Artistic Commune' appeared.

[13] Aleś Dudar's confessions during interrogations by the OGPU in 1930–31 that he liquidated the Russian section of 'Maladniak' in 1925 on the basis of the 'nationalist antipathy towards all things Russian' demonstrated by Duboŭka and Vol´ny (Michniuk, 1996, p. 49) should not be considered as a source. It shows the demand for this kind of confessions in 1930–31. Besides, Anatol´ Vol´ny wrote in Russian as early as in 1923, and in 1925 and later–in Belarusian with a lot of Russisms (see, for example, the criticism of him by Duboŭka, 1928, p. 168–170), i.e. he was least suitable for the role of a 'bourgeois nationalist'.

[14] The inconsistency in the institutionalization of Russian culture as a culture of a national minority was traced earlier. Kohler and Navumienka noted the absence of relevant departments in the Institute of Belarusian Culture with the presence of Jewish and Polish since 1925, Latvian and Lithuanian since 1926 (2019, p. 138).

[15] Rory Finnin noted acts of 'transnational solidarity among non-Russian nations in the early Soviet Union' (2022, p. 79). According to him, such 'projects' deserve more study, and one cannot but agree with this.

Russian-language authors had actually ceased to act as a group and sought their own paths in literature. Some of them tried to write in Belarusian, bilingually, or published in translations[16], tried their hand at prose and drama, published in Moscow, and moved away. Goldberg in 1928–30 wrote stories in Belarusian, published two books, then continued as a Russian-language prose writer under the pseudonym of Zlatogorov in Moscow. Kobets published his famous play *Huta* (*Factory*) first in Moscow in Russian (1931), then in Belarusian in Minsk (1932), and this play was successfully staged in the Belarusian Drama Theater. Dukor published articles in Moscow magazines and wrote the preface to the three-volume collection of poems by Nikolai Aseev (1928). Pilitovich published the individual book *Pochva* (*Soil*) in 1927 and *Kontrasty* (*Contrasts*) in 1929, with a foreword by Aseev. These and other achievements of the former members of the group *Zvenya* are almost in no way related to each other.

Absence or Predominance? The First Congress of Soviet Writers and the New Frontiers of Russian-Language Literature

At the First Congress of Soviet Writers, the RSFSR did not have a separate delegation, while quantitatively those who defined their nationality as 'Russian' or wrote in Russian were the majority[17], and Gorky in his keynote speech said 'we', meaning 'we Russians', from the position not only of the majority but also of superiority, since the demonstration and affirmation of this superiority constituted the leitmotif of the whole event[18]. At the same time, Russians were in the minority in the delegations of the republics, which is certainly something that should be emphasized and which in no way allows us to agree that 'extra-territorial national literatures had healthy sections in the republics where they were a minority–Russian writers in Ukraine, Russian and Polish writers in Belorussia, Russian and Armenians in Azerbaijan…' (Schild, 2010, p. 112). If this were so, Russian-language literature would find itself in a situation of equality rather than superiority, and in the republics–not only in quantitative, but

[16] The editions of the 1920s and 1930s did not always indicate that the work was published in translation. In the case of Russian-Belarusian and back-translations, this was quite common.

[17] 201 Russians by nationality, 322 wrote in Russian. For comparison: the second place is occupied by Jews – 113, 24 wrote in the Jewish language; the third place is occupied by Georgians – 28 and 26 respectively; the fourth place is occupied by Ukrainians – 25 and 29 (Pervyj vsesoûznyj s″ezd, 1934, p. 697). The largest were the Moscow and Leningrad delegations (180 and 46 people). The Moscow delegation included writers of 13 nationalities, with a significant predominance of Russians.

[18] 'If we have a giant Pushkin in the past, it does not mean that Armenians, Georgians, Tatars, Ukrainians and other tribes are not capable of producing the greatest masters of literature, music, painting, architecture'. And then Gorky quoted an anonymous letter from a writer 'from oppressed and backward peoples', from among the 'nationally oriented writers who publish in Russian', in which it was stated that 'Soviet-proletarian literature in Russian is no longer the literature of exclusively Russian-speaking people of Russian origin, but is gradually acquiring an international character in its form' (*Pervyj vsesoûznyj s″ezd*, 1934, p. 15).

perhaps also in qualitative defeat in comparison with 'domestic' literatures, many of which were not only not 'backward', as Gorky claimed, but emerged much earlier than Russian literature and possessed considerable richness and originality of national traditions.

The presence of extra-territorial Russian-language authors had nothing to do with the activities of the literary sections of the national minorities. At least the example of the Belarusian delegation demonstrates exactly this. The result of the activity of the Russian-language writers of the BSSR was that none of them was included in the delegation. One person was Russian by nationality and Russian-language, and probably it was Alexander Kropachev, who lived in Gomel, in 1930 in Moscow he published the story *V Fergane* (*In Fergana*) in the series *Library of the Red Army Man* (Publishing House of Military Literature)[19]. The non-existence of a special delegation, as well as the symbolic presence of Russian-language authors in delegations of other nations, are indicators of the new national policy in the field of literature. Excluding all previous experience of collective activity of a group of Russian-language writers meant a new level of control over literature and new permissible areas for Russian-language literature–institutional, local and thematic.

The Russian section of the Union of Soviet Writers of the BSSR in the 1930s published mainly works with military themes, in which a special place belonged to works about border service. 'Defense literature'[20] of the early 1930s developed as a special direction and served the purpose of legitimizing the new ideology of the USSR, convinced the reader of the inevitability of a new war because of the imperialist aspirations of foreign countries (Burceva, 2021), was a 'late' and favorite child of socialist realism, as it 'with amazing purity' expressed 'the main–militaristic–potencies of Stalinist culture' (Dobrenko, 2005, p. 225).

Mentioned above Ivan Shapovalov (1907–1941), a military man who served in Belarus for some time and began to publish poetry and prose in Belarusian publications, became a notable figure in the Russian-language literature of Belarus in the 1930s. He was a member of the editorial board of the bilingual magazine 'Napahatovie' ('In alert') ('military-defense literary and artistic magazine'); under Shapovalov's

[19] Three more delegates wrote in Russian and were Jewish by nationality. Semyon Levman published short stories in the magazine 'Novy Mir'; Dmitry Konik headed the propaganda department of the Central Committee of the CP(b)B and made a report *Belarusian Soviet Literature on the Rise* at the First All-Belarusian Congress of Writers (June 1934); whether he wrote his own literary works is unknown. The third Russian-language member of the BSSR delegation, Mikhail Golodny (Epshtein) (Pervyj vsesoûznyj s″ezd, 1934, p. 688), a member of the Russian group 'Pereval', translated extensively into Russian the poetry of Janka Kupala, Jakub Kolas, Andrej Aleksandrovič, Michaś Čarot, and others in the late 1920s and early 1930s. His translations were included in the *Anthology of Belarusian Literature* (1934). It can be assumed that he was in the Belarusian delegation as a translator, and Levman as a compiler of this anthology.

[20] The concept was introduced by the writers themselves, members of the Literary Association of the Red Army and Navy (LOKAF) in 1930.

editorship, the Russian-language almanac 'Ataka' ('Attack') was published from 1934, in which his novel *Bol'sheviki granitsy* (*Bolsheviks of the Border*) and works by other authors on the military theme were published in parts. The range of works was so limited that some were published several times. The same circle of authors with the same works went to the *Almanac of the Russian Section of the Union of Soviet Writers of the BSSR*. Vladimir Glazyrin's (1901–1961) stories, Konstantin Titov's (1905–1972) poems, and other authors – participants of wars or professional military men – were published there. The stories by Sadovsky, a former member of 'Zvenya', who in the 1930s turned to prose and journalism, stood out against this background.

Results

The absence of a 'place' for Russian-language literature in the transnational literary space of Belarus already by 1928 led the authors to the only way–individual realization. As a collective project, this literature could not be embedded in the extra-territorial literary life, first of all, because it did not have appropriate institutional forms in its language metropolis–in the RSFSR, the most disputable and 'awkward', as Martin puts it, republic (2001, p. 394). In other words, this literature could have been a 'branch' if the main institution had existed.

It had no potential for independent development as a literature of the national minority in Belarus in the early 1920s. Young authors, at first rabkors, students of a literary studio, took a course of 'the newest Russian literature', from symbolism, futurism and proletarian poetry, to constructivism and the 'new-peasant' line in a few years. They did not succeed in establishing themselves in 'Maladniak', because even the party leadership of the press department left aside the issue of 'concrete organizational forms,' and besides, many authors had already outgrown proletarian literature by the second half of the 1920s, and left poetry at the end of the 1920s. Until 1927, when the split occurred in 'Zvenya', the community had no unifying program except for the language of the works. They had nothing to present within the framework of a collective publication, and the language, as it was in the almanac of 1926, could hardly be called Russian. Of the signs of 'national' Russian poetry, there were only cliched folkloric expressions, while the main feature was the manifestations of interference–evidence of the authors' existence in a transnational environment and their own 'non-Russianness'. Furthermore, such a small group could not have a regular collective publication because they simply could not provide content to fill the issues[21].

The struggle for centralization that unfolded in the second half of the 1920s also left Russian-language authors no chance to occupy any place between the two forces

[21] The members of 'Zvenya' were 7 Russians, 1 Latvian, 10 Jews (NARB, 4p, 2350, p. 29); in the questionnaire of 1926 they answered that they do not think about their publishing house or magazine yet (NARB, 4p, 1, 2895, p. 24, 27).

of attraction–proletarian literature and Russian-language literature as centralizing. This new 'Russian-centric' internationalism, which was resisted by both 'Maladniak' and similar organizations in other republics, also did not imply that any form of existence of a Russian-language literary minority was possible.

Already established individuals, these authors were not in demand as representatives of the community called 'Russian writers of the BSSR'. There should not have been such a community in the early 1930s, as all national literatures were given second roles in comparison with Russian literature, and extra-territorial literature as something third again had no place in the bipolar model, where 'on one pole is Russian culture, on the other is the culture of one of the peoples of the empire' (Lejderman, 2015, p. 19).

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