



## THE PUBLISHING ROLE OF KSIĄŻNICA PODLASKA IN BIAŁYSTOK IN POPULARISING THE KNOWLEDGE ON „A LITTLE HOMELAND”.

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Książnica Podlaska's publishing activity, broadened in scope ten years ago, is responsible for over 100 print publications: from science centred books through bibliographic and library science publications to prose originating in the region. In the context of the library's activities, publishing efforts were not in the forefront of its statutory duties, they were limited to regional bibliography and the occasional instructive bulletins sent over to the Podlaskie Voivodeship's public libraries where they were given proper care. Several years ago the city of Białystok had professional publishing firms that gave prose a chance to exist in the form of more compact prints. However, the new economy pushed it away in their plans. Publishing activities that did not produce high income were halted. The last Polish periodicals, on literature, literary critique and that of essays which shaped the image of Polish literature created and functioning in the region, disappeared from the publishing industry. Filling the hole using the amateur skills (which hopefully through the years became more professional activities in the case of Książnica Podlaska) was an important element becoming part of Książnica Podlaska's statutory duties. Considering the region's multicultural nature and the occasional inability to fairly distribute effort in acquiring and assigning donations, unhappiness was often the case. Książnica Podlaska's publications attempted to fill this glaring hole in presenting Polish literature and at the same time, through translation, popularise the works of authors whose heritage lied in national minorities found throughout our region<sup>16</sup>.

The anthologies of Belarusian literature written in the region of Białystok and Grodno, located just beyond the border with Belarus, were published in print<sup>17</sup>, as well as a poetry anthology of Ukrainians living in Podlasie<sup>18</sup>, while the poetry anthology of Lithuanians living in the north of the Podlasie Voivodeship is being prepared for print. As part of future publishing plans Książnica Podlaska has poetry anthologies, in Polish-German, Polish-English and Polish-French editions, presenting authors from Podlasie. It

<sup>16</sup> Cezariusz Papiernik, *Moja mała ojczyzna: (wybór tekstów z lat 1991-2003)*, Rypin 2003

<sup>17</sup> red.: Jan Leończuk, *Gniazda słów słowa gniazd*, Białystok 2006; red.: Jan Leończuk, Daniel Znamierowski, *Materiały Konferencyjne. Literacko-kulturowe więzi Białostoczczyzny i Grodzieńszczyzny*, Białystok 2006; red.: Jan Leończuk, *Wiersze znad Narwii i Niemna*, Białystok 2006.

<sup>18</sup> red.: Jan Leończuk, *Wolanie serca antologia poezji ukraińskiej Podlasia*, Białystok 2008.



will be a showing of our region, with its highest in value „spiritual works”, and poetic hopes that sensitivity to beauty and good will not be forgotten in the „business marathon”.

In a way publishing activities, due to their spiritual values, calms down rising tension. In a multicultural community – the element of calming down negative emotions is invaluable.

In our publishing plans we also accept that many of our authors due to the “new economic reality” had to move out for a time from our country. Being Polish authors they suffer a crisis as writers due to using a „dead language” in context of the community they live in. Such was the case with the poet Agnieszka Krotke, who since a few years resides in Greece – her next book is published by Książnica Podlaska in a Polish-Greek edition<sup>19</sup>. Part of the edition are distributed in Poland, the rest was given to the author in Athens. Considering the special situation of these authors – we believe this type of publishing activity is the best way to promote our region, especially since these are not occasional activities.

Literary ties with other regions of the world are highly useful not just for the authors and publisher, in this case Książnica Podlaska, but first and foremost to show the strength of bonds between people. More books of authors from our region who currently live outside its borders are being prepared for print: Mirosława Niewińska<sup>20</sup> from Paris (Polish – French edition), Zbigniew Patryk from New York (Polish – English edition), Krzysztof Dąbrowski from Brighton in Polish – English.

To celebrate an anniversary there will be a presentation of Podlasie’s authors in Esperanto. The creator of Esperanto Ludwik Zamenhoff (1859 – 1917) was born in our city. This year in Białystok there will be a celebration of the 150th anniversary of the language creator’s birth.<sup>21</sup>

A different kind of problem that remains unsolved although Książnica Podlaska’s efforts, as a publisher of literature written in the region, is its marketing. Without sufficient financial funds, published books are presented outside and all efforts are directed in supplying libraries and science institutions in the printed book in hopes that someday they will find their way into the hands of a curious readers and reviewer. This glaring hole is filled by authors, literary critics and kind readers.

Literary creativity coming to life in the region requires constant attention and care. It is Książnica Podlaska’s duty to uphold and we are trying to do so by reactivating among others Literary Wednesdays, the continuation of traditions carried over from Wilno, located today in the neighbouring country of Lithuania, strongly tied to our city

<sup>19</sup> Agnieszka Krotke, *Żółte kwiaty*, Białystok 2008.

<sup>20</sup> Mirosława Niewińska, *Tymi drogami wędrowało słońce*, Białystok 2008.

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.bialystok.pl/site.php?s=MDAzMTAy&a=MDA1Mzc5>



in the past<sup>22</sup>. We should add that the publishing, together with informational, activity springs from a need to fill both the hole and the broken „historic timeline”. To some extent that is also the goal of Literary Wednesdays, during which books and their authors are presented, the meetings take place in the library’s hall, gathering many readers and listeners. The place of presentation is symbolic, although there is hoping that those who never were in Książnica or never looked into its library, after spending their time in the hall for a literary gathering would go deeper into the library to familiarise themselves with it once and for all.

The numerous – as of today – meetings are caused most likely by a lack, in a city with 300 inhabitants, any Polish literary periodical or one dealing with culture in general. That is why in 1999 the need arose to create “Epea”, a yearly literally periodical documenting literary endeavours (prose and poetry, its translation, essays, etc.) of authors, fore mostly, from our region. 7 volumes were published to present day. New ideas are made, which will help fill the hole as quickly as possible. We hold the opinion that what is known in the peripheries can attain the status of an extraordinary work. There are many factors to this, as such it is important to look at the elements which allow literature to exist. The role of literary critique is not to be overestimated, although there is a university with humanities departments, it does not fill the hole.

Once more I would like to note that a library is a place of storing and making available the various books, presenting varying ideologies and aesthetics, it is the most appropriate place to discuss and present different points of view. In the Polish path to democracy, the place of “free thought” where repressive forces had no access to were to some extent libraries where among stored volumes people hid literature with a peculiar „death sentence”. People protected themselves in university buildings, libraries and temples. In the second half of the XX century the functioning of a „second circulation” started (not counting censorship propagating politically restricted knowledge, literature functioning outside Poland’s borders etc.

Książnica Podlaska since 2000 published a half-yearly periodical “Podlasie’s Librarian”, on average 200 pages which goals are not only library duties presenting modernity and the history of public, university, school and private libraries but the subject of local literary creativity is also touched upon. We still believe that by taking these efforts we can reach the most sensitive areas of a reader through literature. After a few years of break „The Library Voice” returns as a quarterly publication, the editors hope it will soon come out every month. It helps everyday library work by including articles on current topics, information etc. The electronic version allows our newspaper to easily reach libraries.

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<sup>22</sup> Jagoda Hernik-Spalińska, *Wileńskie Środy Literackie (1927-1939)*, Warszawa 1998.



The team editing literary and library magazines, taking part in presenting local literary works, as well as in current discussions, helps create hope that it is not wasted time. The advancement of “putting literary life into journalism”, antipoetic, overuse of saying that everything is poetry and literature, leads onto an especially dangerous territory where the only fact will be that is everything is literature – then nothing is literature. Rating criterions would disappear while a confused reader would fear to look for anything other than the classics in Książnica’s collection. A library should remain a place where censorship has no say nor the so called “correctness” of today’s fashion.

A library – is a place where freedom to one’s opinion will not be taken away by a ban. A special role should be played by libraries on borders of culture, ideology, religious tectonic plates, so that madness will not be responsible for the tragic „earthquake” during which the past, its memories, tradition, libraries and its archives perish. How can one create the future without the past?

Thus Książnica Podlaska takes responsibility in not only proper collecting, storing and providing availability of the written cultural work of our region to its inhabitant, often representing themselves varying national, aesthetic feelings and world views but a common feeling of belonging to the same country. Podlasie is a multicultural region, inhabited by a multilingual community (other than Poles, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Lithuanians and Tartars live here). They write in many languages and Książnica Podlaska’s duty is to save those works. Literary works and all other activities that lead to partnership connects, integrates and allows people to believe that it is possible to build a united future in diversity. Książnica Podlaska’s publishing projects’ main purpose is to uphold the region’s multicultural nature. Our geographic location in a way forces us to aid through our activities any signs of artistic creativity, until they lead to disintegration process in „little homelands”.

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