

Literature in the Context of Unification Initiatives to Commemorate the 450th Anniversary of the Union of Lublin

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Abstract: The paper is an introduction to the discussion devoted to literary evidence of “unification initiatives” (unions, alliances, international agreements and other unification projects) as witnessed in the history of Europe over many centuries. Artistic writings have long presented the dialogue between union partners, taking place both in public (international or national) as well as private space. Among these phenomena, particularly noteworthy are unification visions, cultural osmosis, evidence of individual participation in unification processes, acts of building the collective awareness, ways of interpreting both shared and alien cultural or religious symbols, literary expressions of the relations between “I” and “You”, strategies used in constructing the linguistic image of the shared world and alien worlds. The paper attempts to systematize specific issues related to these problems and is an introduction to the discussion carried out in the latest issue of „Tematy i Konteksty”.

Key words: union, alliance, unification, literature

Horodło was empty, just like on the map.

*Only the two stone lions in the park bore testimony to the fact that
a long time ago something significant happened here.*

That a unique union between two nations was signed.¹

¹ *Horodło było puste, jak na mapie.*

*Tylko dwa kamienne lwy w parku świadczyły o tym,
że dawno temu wydarzyło się tu coś ważnego.*

Że zawarto niezwykłą unię między dwoma narodami (Książek, M. 2015. *Droga 816*. Białystok. p. 19.). All the Polish quotations have been translated by Karolina Puchała-Ladzińska.

I

Every single union is unique in itself, as the very word etymologically indicates *the act of uniting states, territories, international organizations, associations*² at a specific moment of history. This act is determined by a variety of factors: political, military, social, economic, religious, etc., as well as various interests of personal, dynastic, state, national or ideological nature (although the latter may sometimes be affected by utilitarian aspects). The extraordinary character of a union encompasses various dimensions, however, they are all subjected to the ideas of peace, agreement, mutual cooperation, creating and developing common values in the atmosphere of trust and working towards the common good. As any other agreement assuming closer relations between its members, a union creates a space for partnership and compromise, at the same time constituting a meeting ground for the interests of all the parties involved. This is because every union stems from a long-lasting dream about the world without borders and divisions, which would be a home to everyone, open and welcoming also for those who are different.

This way of understanding the concept of union is also reflected in the discussion about the main points of the agreement and, most importantly, the resultant consequences for the parties involved: states, nations and citizens. Whether real or purely imaginary, these consequences always determine the potential benefits and losses resulting from signing the agreement, as well as future hopes and fears (whether realistic or imaginary), expectations or suspicions regarding the union partners, and also ideological and economic judgments and calculations.

The union-related discussions and negotiations are also accompanied by identity-focused discourse. This is hardly surprising since the consequences of the related decisions concern the entire communities. Therefore, both the union initiators and voluntary (as well as involuntary) participants in the processes thus initiated, feel, on the one hand, that their own cultural, national or religious identity might be threatened. On the other hand, however, they are hopeful of and looking forward to the new prospects of the development of this identity, or even its expansion. From this perspective a union seems to entail not only a certain risk, but also a unique historical opportunity – it might, therefore, be perceived as both a threat and a chance for the dreams to come true. It gives rise to concerns about the future, or about the potential identity loss, but at the same time it encourages an open integration that allows one to look ahead with optimism and hope.

This state of ideological alert creates a demand for a new type of thought that would define the future model of the united world, as well as shape the

² (...) *zjednoczenie, związek, państw, terytoriów, organizacji międzynarodowych, stowarzyszeń* (Szymczak, M. (ed.). 1990. *Słownik języka polskiego*. Vol. 3. Warszawa. p. 602.).

individual and collective awareness of the parties involved in the agreement. A new way of thinking constitutes a prerequisite (or a natural consequence) of the new situation which requires a more profound (or revised) reflection on the condition of the state, the nation's "soul", or the identity of its individual representatives. However, the directions of this reflection may be manifold: from the enthusiastic marveling at the new opportunities, to their uncompromising rejection, to a radical objection to recalling the former values and lifestyles. Interestingly enough, the dilemmas mentioned may sometimes take the form of ambivalent ideological convictions niggling the subconscious mind of certain individuals, and yet sometimes they may have the character of two very different and supplementary attitudes adopted by individuals or even entire social groups.

II

Europe is a continent whose history has been particularly marked by union-related experiences.³ Various unification initiatives and their implementation concerned either large areas of land (such as the Roman Empire, the medieval Christendom, The Council of Florence, The League of Nations, or the European Union), or were limited to smaller areas (like the Kalmar Union, the Hanseatic League, the Polish-Lithuanian Union, the Union of Brest, the German Catholic League or the Protestant Union). They all united the individual political entities with the federation ideas, the agreements or the person of the ruler (personal unions). They frequently resulted from a universal way of thinking about human life from the perspective of *humanitas* and *christianitas*.⁴ The majority of European states, including Poland, for centuries have been participating in various unification processes. One may even say that the history of Europe (and of Poland), as seen from this very perspective, appears to be extremely repetitive since all these unification processes stemmed from the everlasting hopes for benefits resulting from closer relations between states, nations or religions. Therefore, the fact that similar voices seem to be the loudest when the perspective of union appears almost unattainable, is only seemingly paradoxical. As stated by Adam Mickiewicz, *this striving of people for mutual contact and closeness is one of the signs of our times*.⁵ This thought is extraordinary in that it was formulated

³ See: Davies, N. 2000. *Europa. Rozprawa historyka z historią*, translated by E. Tabakowska. Kraków.

⁴ See: Hanusiewicz-Lavallee, M. (ed.). 2009. *Humanitas i christianitas w kulturze polskiej*. Warszawa. (monograph published in the series: Nowicka-Jeżowa, A. (ed.). *Humanizm. Idee, nurty i paradygmaty humanistyczne w kulturze polskiej. Syntezy*. Vol. IV).

⁵ (...) *jednym ze znamion naszej epoki jest owa dążność ludów do wzajemnego zbliżenia się, zetknięcia* (...) (Mickiewicz, A. 1997. *Literatura słowiańska. Kurs pierwszy*. [In:] Mickiewicz, A. *Dzieła*. Vol. VIII, Wydanie Rocznicowe. Warszawa. p. 15).

in the tragic times of captivity and repressions, and so it expresses much more than solely a hope for the future in the face of the hopeless situation.

One cannot help but think that the history of the European unification initiatives paints a very different picture of our continent, and it could serve as a reverse face of the coin whose obverse is constituted by a narration about European wars and political conflicts, which still dominate the school text books and the collective imagination. In an even broader sense, one may see how the unification initiatives between peoples, nations and states characterize and determine, in a sense, the degree of their civilization, understood as being open to otherness, and willing to engage in a dialogue. This is particularly evident when compared with the previous attitudes of distrust, isolationism and the accompanying civilizational regression.

Nevertheless, it is important to observe that even though historical (as well as sociological and political science) studies are very thorough in this field and offer an impressive collection of books and publications,⁶ the range of papers discussing this topic from the point of view of literature studies is significantly smaller. It is perhaps no coincidence that the vast majority of these publications in the field of the history of ideas (whose carrier is literature), and only few of them concern other perspectives like history, literature, interpretation, geopoetics, etc.⁷ However, the very act

⁶ As an illustration we provide just a few selected publications from the fields of history, history of ideas, sociology and political science, devoted to old and modern unions and unification projects: Halecki, O. 1919. *Dzieje Unii Jagiellońskiej*. Vol. 1: *W wiekach średnich*. Kraków. Ibidem. 1920. Vol. 2: *WXVI wieku*. Kraków.; Halecki, O. 1935. *Dzieje unii kościelnej w Wielkim Księstwie Litewskim (do r. 1596)*. Lwów.; Halecki, O. 1937. "Idea jagiellońska". *Kwartalnik Historyczny*. Vol. 1-2; Davies, N. op. cit.; Halecki, O. 1997. *Od unii florenckiej do unii brzeskiej*, translated by A. Niklewicz. Vol. 1-2. Lublin-Rzym.; Dylągowa, H. 1996. *Dzieje Unii Brzeskiej (1596-1918)*. Warszawa.; Soszyński, R. 1996. *400-lecie Unii Brzeskiej: 1596-1996*. Marki-Struga.; Tazbir, J. 1998. *W pogoni za Europą*. Warszawa.; Krawczyk, R. 2004. *Podstawy cywilizacji europejskiej*. Warszawa.; M. Koźmiński, M. (ed.). 2004. *Cywilizacja europejska. Wykłady i eseje*. Warszawa.; Jucas, M. 2004. *Unia polsko-litewska*, translated by A. Firewicz. Warszawa.; Pomian, K. 2005. *Europa i jej narody*. Gdańsk.; Borzym, A., Sadowski, J. 2007. *Polscy Ojcowie Europy*. Warszawa.; Burzyńska, A. (ed.). 2009. *Od Unii do Unii. Polskie wizje jednoczenia Europy*. Warszawa.; Wierzbicki, A. 2009. *Europa w polskiej myśli historycznej i politycznej XIX i XX wieku*. Warszawa.; Gil, A. (ed.). 2010. *Unia lubelska. Dziedzictwo wielu narodów*. Lublin.; Hofman, I. (ed.). 2010. *Unia Lubelska. Unia Europejska*. Lublin.; Koźmiński, M. (ed.). 2010. *Cywilizacja europejska. Eseje i szkice z dziejów cywilizacji i dyplomacji*. Warszawa. Worthy of mention is also the recent publication by Robert Frost entitled *The Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania, vol. I: The Making of the Polish-Lithuanian Union, 1385–1569*, Oxford University Press, 2015.

⁷ Worth mentioning here are some outstanding works: the "founding" monograph of E.R. Curtius *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* (1948), which has multiple editions and has been translated into other languages (Polish editions: Curtius, E.R. 1997. *Literatura europejska i łacińskie średniowiecze*, translated and adapted by A. Borowski. Kraków.; 2nd edition: 2005). Cf.: Borowski, A. 1999. *Powrót Europy*. Kraków; Fiut, A. 1999. *Być (albo nie być) Środkoeuropejczykiem*. Kraków.; Janion, M. 2000. *Do Europy: tak, ale razem z naszymi umarłymi*. Warszawa.; Benoit-Dusauso, A., Fontaine, G. (eds.). 2009. *History of European Literature*. London.; Fiećko, J. 2011. *Kraśniński przeciw Mickiewiczowi*.

of compiling literature on the subject of unification initiatives could reveal a lot about the magnitude of human dreams and fears related to these projects – although it would definitely be difficult to list all the texts and publications on the very topic.

If one attempted to compile such a catalogue, it would probably be easier to start with essays and journalistic texts, as both big and small ideas are frequently discussed in union-related texts and their clear subject matter allows one to quickly and unequivocally classify them. In this context one may certainly list the treatise of Piotr Skarga – *O jedności Kościoła Bożego pod jednym pasterzem i o greckim i ruskiem od tej jedności odstąpieniu* (1577), the essays of Czesław Miłosz – *Native Realm (Rodzinna Europa, 1959)*, and of Jurij Andruchowycz and Andrzej Stasiuk – *Moja Europa. Dwa eseje o Europie zwanej Środkową (My Europe: Two essays on the Europe called “Central”, 2000)*, as well as the treatise of Saint Augustine – *De Civitate Dei* (427), the treatise of Immanuel Kant – *Perpetual Peace* (1795), and the passionate manifesto written by Denis de Røguemont – *Open Letter to the Europeans* (1970).

However, this by no means concludes the list as there are much more novels and other texts discussing this subject matter. One may mention, for instance, numerous publications on the international relations in the contemporary world and our continent, inspired, for example, by the accession of the Central European states to the European Union.⁸ There are also texts belonging to lyric poetry and drama, as well as occasional literature, particularly old Polish occasional political texts concerning unification problems between the 16th and 18th centuries, which were eagerly discussed especially in the times of crises.⁹

One unquestionable fact is that the power of literature is indisputable and irreplaceable here. It is literature that serves as a background for translating historical macroprocesses (whose reach makes them overly abstract) into the language of individual and private experience, a single life, in short – literature serves as a canvas for presenting mental consequences that certain

Najważniejszy spór romantyków. Poznań.; Graciotti, S. 2016. *Braterstwo myśli i uczuć: Italia, Polska i Słowiańszczyzna w kręgu kultury europejskiej XV-XVIII wieku*. Nowicka-Jeżowa, A., Wierzbicka-Trwoga, K. (eds.). Warszawa. A new perspective on the international dimension of the modern Polish literature is presented by the geopoetics-inspired monograph: Czaplński, P. 2016. *Poruszona mapa. Wyobrażenia geograficzno-kulturowa polskiej literatury przełomu XX i XXI wieku*. Kraków. Closer cultural relations between the literature of Poland and the literatures of its neighbours also owe much to the research of Svetlana F. Musijenko, Algis Kalėda and Rościśław Radyszewski.

⁸ Worth mentioning here are literary series of the Czarne publishing house (featuring the following publications: *Jadąc do Babadag* and *Dojeżdżalnia* by A. Stasiuk, *Gottland* by M. Szczygieł, or *Obwód głowy* by W. Nowak) or the “Meridian” series published by the Pogranicze publishing house.

⁹ Cf. the recent work: G. Trościński, *Okolicznościowa poezja polityczna okresu bezkrólewia po śmierci Jana III Sobieskiego*, Rzeszów 2019, chapter III: *Hannibal ad portas. Czas konfederacji wojskowych w Koronie i na Litwie w zwierciadle poezji okolicznościowej*.

political decisions may lead to. It is literature that lends us its language and plots, offers narration styles and modes of emotional expression, provides a rich repertoire of images, symbols and rhetorical means of representation. Literature goes far beyond formulating political manifestos or expressing relevant ideological dilemmas – it activates geopolitical imagination, confronts individual values with universal ones, sketches the maps of potential new relationships, draws the so far unknown borders, and visualizes new worlds.¹⁰ One should not forget about the union bi- or polylingualism, because it is closely related to the problem of coexistence of languages or the domination of one of them as a manifestation of the union *pro et contra*. Citizens of countries, representatives of nations bound by a union always face the problem of choosing the most adequate (strategic?) language, which would be another “incarnation” of the broadly understood *lingua franca*, which in the times of the European Union is English, earlier it was Koine Greek, Latin or French, and on the lands of the First Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth during the Polish-Lithuanian Union – also Polish.¹¹

III

On the 450th anniversary of the signing the Union of Lublin,¹² which will be celebrated in 2019, the editorial team of “Tematy i Konteksty” invited scholars in various research areas (representing particularly literature and culture studies, varied methodologically and concerning various periods of literature history) to join the debate on the presence in the broadly understood literature of the subject of historical and contemporary unions and the related problems. We wished to draw attention to literary evidence of unification initiatives – both in the past and in the present. We addressed

¹⁰ Cf. i.a.: Rybicka, E. 2014. *Geopoetyka. Przestrzeń i miejsce we współczesnych teoriach i praktykach literackich*. Kraków.; Stanisław, M. 2015. *Europejski wymiar literatury polskiej według Wincentego Pola*. [In:] Łoboz, M. (ed.). *Obrazy natury i kultura. Studia o Wincentym Polu*. Wrocław. pp. 531-549.; Czaplinski, P. op. cit.; Dworak, A. M. 2017. *Europa jako przestrzeń wyobrażona. Studium o świadomości europejskiej w piśmiennictwie polskim doby międzypowstaniowej pod zaborami*. A doctoral thesis written under the supervision of habilitated doctor, professor UR, M. Stanisław. Rzeszów.

¹¹ Evidence of interest in the work of bilingual writers were, for example, international symposia organized by the Polish Language, Culture Study and Didactic Centre of the Philological Faculty of the Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences and the Department of Philological Research “East – West” of the Philological Faculty of the University of Białystok: *Dwujęzyczni pisarze polscy i litewscy. Zagadnienia bilingwizmu w kulturze polskiej i litewskiej. Literatura - kultura – język* (2015), as well as *Dwujęzyczni pisarze litewscy i polscy XIX i XX wieku - perspektywa komparatystyczna. W kręgu inspiracji Mickiewicza i Baranauksa* (2017). The problems of bilingualism are also studied in the Department of Polish Studies at the National University of Taras Shevchenko in Kiev.

¹² The document has recently been entered in the UNESCO Memory of the World Register, as a result of joint efforts of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Belarus and Ukraine.

this issue at a very special moment in time, being fully aware of how current it is now that various aspects of the unified Europe (and Poland's participation in it) are so broadly discussed. Our debate, however, is of a scientific nature, in accordance with the formula of our journal, and its goal is to create a framework for an in-depth and impartial reflection on the role of literature and culture in historical processes.

Both old and modern publications have always presented a dialogue between the Poles and their union partners (the Lithuanians, the Hungarians, the Swedes, the Saxons, the Europeans, etc.) – the dialogue taking place in the international, national and public spheres, but also in the ideological and even personal dimensions. The authors of papers collected here focused on the multitude and the types of mutual relations, but also on unification ideas, specific instances of cultural osmosis, evidence of individual participation in the unification processes, acts of building the collective awareness, ways of interpreting both common and distinct cultural and religious symbols within a union, literary expressions of the attitudes between “I” and “you-partner” and “you-enemy”, strategies used in constructing the linguistic image of the shared and the distinct world.

In the face of various issues and dilemmas entailed by union treatises and projects, literature as well as the public sphere have been, since time immemorial, filled with voices of apologists and critics of a certain historical fact which later turned out to be more or less permanent and more or less fateful (wars, confederations, borders, army, expenses, separate and common policies and laws, Brexit, Euroenthusiasm and Euroscepticism, etc.). Interesting in this context are also political, social, military and dynastic problems experienced by the Republic of Poland and other states, and mental experiences of our compatriots and other representatives of European nations, as well as the mutual relations with foreign partners who, at a specific moment in history, faced the prospect of creating a political, economic, religious or legal union.

The authors of papers published in this issue of “Tematy i Konteksty” have reflected on both the old times, including personal unions (Polish-Bohemian, Polish-Hungarian, Polish-French, Polish-Romanian, Polish-Swedish, Polish-Saxon, Polish-Russian, as well as the longest-lasting Polish-Lithuanian union from the times of the Jagiellonians, lasting until the demise of Poland's liberty, and signed in 1385 in the Union of Krewo, to the Union of Horodło and the Union of Lublin), as well as contemporary unions encompassing the period of time from Poland's accession to the European Union, until the year 2019. They have also addressed the issues of difficult but mutually inspiring osmosis of cultures, not only from Poland's point of view, but also from the perspective of our neighbours, as well as presented board approaches to the issues discussed, allowing one to capture and accurately depict the complex mosaic of cultural, religious or social influences on our continent.

Review of literature depicting union relations (whether in a positive or a negative way) and the related problems, presented in the recent issue of "Tematy i Konteksty", refers to both older and modern publications, discussing the years of freedom, captivity and limited sovereignty. The problems connected with cultural unification are by no means a recent phenomenon. In fact, obsessions and fears produced by the periphery mentality have long been observable, and literature has long been reflecting the feelings of pride and open optimism emerging from the partnership-oriented co-participation in the community of the union states. Both the historical and the contemporary perspectives are indispensable in order to fully capture the attitudes and experiences, ideas and reflections, which comprise the polysemic image of the Polish (and not only Polish) literature in the times of unification initiatives. In the papers collected here the reader will find theoretical perspectives on the problems of literature in the context of union relations, unique ideas of how to problematize them, new terms and categories for their description, as well as comparative studies, syntheses and interpretations of specific literary texts. It is our sincere hope that our reflection on the literary evidence of union relations will result in creating a rich panorama of cultural images of this phenomenon and will become an inspiration for further research.

We are facing a very challenging task: writing the history of the union-related adventures of the Polish literature (as well as other European literatures). This history will, sooner or later, need to be created, for multiple reasons. Some of these fundamental reasons were mentioned by Jan Kochanowski in his narrative poem *Proporzec albo Hold pruski* (*The Banner, or the Prussian Homage*), written in the aftermath of the Union of Lublin:

For what's the worth of parchment and seals
Hanging above the letters, if there is no will?
[.....]
Let us hide the union in the trunks no more,
But let us lock it inside our hearts,
Where it won't be touched by a moth or spoiled by mould,
Or affected by an old age,
But it will be handed over from fathers to sons,
And will survive intact for the years to come.¹³

Translated by Karolina Puchała-Ladzińska

¹³ Bo co waży pergamin i gęste pieczęci
Przy piśmie zawieszzone, jeśli nie ma-ż chęci?
[.....]
A niechaj już uniej w skrzyniach nie chowamy,
Ale ją w pewny zamek do serca podamy,
Gdzie jej ani mól ruszy, ani pleśń dosięże,
Ani wiek wsztykokrotny starością dolęże,
Ale synom od ojców przez ręce podana,
Nieogarnione lata przetrwa niestargana (Kochanowski, J. 2018. *Proporzec albo Hold pruski*. [In:] Kochanowski, J. *Poematy okolicznościowe*, edited by R. Krzywy. Warszawa. p. 236.).

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