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## "In the Pleats of Great Languages": Minor Romance Literatures in Europe<sup>1</sup>



The reality of European Romance literatures is richer and far more complex than just the simplified map of "great languages" (French, Spanish, Italian). The volume compiled at the Institute of Romance Philology of the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań includes 18 essays presenting the minor literatures that develop, as the editors say in their introduction, "in the pleats" ("w fałdach") of these dominant languages and literary systems. This metaphor is far from haphazard. It evokes at the same time the aspect of being hidden, being dependent, and to some degree paradoxically preserved and incubated by the enveloping systems.

The main methodological inspiration of this volume is the Deleuzian essay on Kafka, and the Kafkian definition of minor literature. This is why Kafka, not exactly a Romance language writer, becomes nevertheless the main orientation point in the volume, serving as a gauge for other minor writers, such as a Swiss, Charles-Ferdinand Ramuz, in the remarkable essay by Józef Kwaterko, and a Polish-French Jew, Piotr Rawicz, whose biographical and literary case is analyzed by Piotr Sadkowski. The choice of minority seems to be motivated by the paradoxical will of escaping from a peripheral milieu, conjugated with unwillingness of asking for admittance into the dominant context. The unsuccessful search for a third way might

<sup>1</sup> „Literatury mniejsze” Europy romańskiej, Mirosław Loba, Barbara Łuczak, Alfons Gregori (eds), Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, Poznań 2012, 236 pp.

have led Rawicz to suicide; it also led a Swiss writer Nicolas Bouvier to try an option that might be seen as second to suicide: an exhausting travel across the world, seen as a devastation of the self. The meaning of this immersion in the depths of human life as it is lived in the most remote corners of the globe was pertinently read by Anna Loba.

Being minor is a received condition, but also, at least to a certain degree, a cultural and artistic choice. Minor authors entice into a game with their public and themselves, at the frontier of the incommunicable, in-editable, improper for sale. Such is for example the case of the Catalan and Valencian aphorists, writing for a public that does not exist, as stated by Guillem Calaforra. To a certain degree, a similar case is analyzed by Anna Osmolska-Mętrak: Tonino Guerra, Fellini's famous scriptwriter, who decided to compose his verses in his native dialect, Romagnolo.

But the great writers of minor literatures and their literary and vital choices are not the only topic that appears in the volume. On the contrary, its character is quite interdisciplinary, due to the studies situated between philology and sociology. Being minor, as it was clear to Kafka, is not, or not only, an individual condition. Minority is a group immersed in a society and a state, carrying on a constant renegotiation of its status. Minor literatures cannot thus be fully understood without the background of historical, political and sociological, as well as sociolinguistic situations. Especially Catalonia draws the attention of many of the authors who contributed to this volume. Diverse aspects of its complex situation are analyzed by the leading Polish hispanists, as well as by their Catalan collaborators. The problem of stereotyping, pinpointed through the analysis of journalistic discourse concerning Catalonia in Polish newspapers, appears in the essay by Anna Sawicka. On the other hand, such aspects as the composition of the book market in Catalonia and the ideologically determined views on language and identity are analyzed by Alfons Gregori and Sebastià Moranta Mas.

Spain is perhaps the best known example of a country facing not only a multilingual situation, but also promoting, over the last decades, a politically and ideologically defined project of "linguistic normalization". Normalization that comes, as it should be understood, after long periods of despisal, persecution, forced unification, and other forms of action directed against the minor languages. Ideologies, policies and practices that have been essayed on the Spanish ground, both by the "normalizers" coming from the dominant center and by the representatives of the "peripheral" linguistic and cultural communities, are manifold. Alongside the literature written in what we currently call "Spanish" – that should be rather called Castilian – there exist also centuries long traditions of Catalan and Galician literatures. The literary system of Spain is divided into several linguistic

spheres. The unsolved question of languages and dialects forms a nebulous landscape of different forms of expression. The Catalan zone, for example, suffers a further division: the Valencian region does not agree completely with the Barcelonian center of the Catalan culture, some Mallorcan writers, such as Lorrenç Villalonga, openly claim their separatism in relation to the continental Catalonia. The situation in Galicia is analyzed by Maria Boguszewicz and Marta Kobiela-Kwaśniewska.

The literature written in French, often seen as a monolith from the strictly linguistic point of view, is nonetheless divided between several countries: not only France, but also part of Switzerland and part of Belgium should be taken into account (without even mentioning the whole question of francophone literature outside Europe, which has not found its place in this collection). Though, on the other hand, the question of the Occitan, the contemporary descendent of the medieval *langue d'oc*, breaks up the supposed uniformity of the French literary landscape, as Katarzyna Wójtowicz shows. Another apparently monolithic country, Italy, also cultivates some of the dialectal forms of expression as well as the cultural particularities, as shown by Anna Tylusińska-Kowalska on the Sicilian example.

Sciacia, Rodoreda, Belgian feminists... The choice of the minor writers, representing diverse ideological orientations, forms a vast spectrum. All of them have nonetheless something in common. Placing them together under the topic of minor writing is far from an artificial endeavor. Their works are marked by a double impulse of escape. On one hand, from the provincialism of a native island, countryside, peripheral region; on the other, from a dominating center in which they also do not feel at ease. The utmost value of this double game consists in generating a virtual space of independence, a world of their own. It may become the space of the traveler, who accepts his marginal position in relation to all the places and communities he visits during his nomadic quest, like in the case of Nicolas Bouvier studied by Anna Loba; it may also become a garden of fantastic flowers dreamed by Mercè Rodoreda and presented by Barbara Łuczak. In more dramatic terms, it may also be a space of liberation from the parental figures, father and mother (and the image of God that haunts beyond the image of father), as Mirosław Loba explains, exploring the examples taken from the Swiss novels by Charles-Ferdinand Ramuz, Jacques Chessex and Fleur Jaeggy; and as explains Judyta Zbierska-Mościcka, reading the Belgian feminists revisiting the issue of family relationships.

These 18 essays do not form an exhaustive presentation of the minor Romance literatures. It was not the aim of the editors, and the collaborating authors. The studies collected in this volume offer tantalizing glimpses of the complex reality that still remains partially out of the scope of the general

public, improperly informed by the existing manuals and encyclopedias, as Piotr Sawicki complains, or misled by tendentious journalism, a problem to which Anna Sawicka rightly calls attention. Nonetheless, the situation in the studies of minor Romance literatures in Poland is good, and this miscellanea is a proof that the interest in these marginal areas is growing.