

## Borders in literature

In a globalised world with more open and seemingly more easily crossed borders of countries, ethnic groups, languages, cultures, disciplines, ideologies, poetics, genders, political programmes, economic orders, what is familiar and what is foreign, aesthetics and politics – there is an increasing need for lasting meanings, values and protected space for thought and action. In other words, in our *fluid modernity*, under the alleged threat of an impending wave of instability, mutation and suppression of the last forms of *authenticity*, there is a call for rehabilitation of stable boundaries. Ironically, re-fixing them would give us back the freedom to separate and the opportunity to free ourselves from so-called trans-ideologies, which force us to accept the precariat and temporariness, with all forms of impermanence resulting from abandoning clear and permanent divisions. Bearing in mind the controversies that arise in our complex world in relation to borders, and assuming that borders limit and discipline us, at the same time allowing free, creative and even oppositional thinking and acting in separate zones and beyond them, two issues of this year's 'Poznań Slavic Studies' revolve around the emergence and role of borders in a historical and contemporary perspective. What is a border, where is it formed, how and when does it work, under what conditions can it be crossed, undermined or removed, what power is then defeated and unleashed, and what aesthetic, ethical, political, and ideological values are associated with forming borders and transgression thereof?

For issue number 28, we have selected articles that analyse the idea of boundaries, transgression, overcoming or creating divisions

in literary material, allowing for reflection on intra-literary issues like the boundaries between genres (or removing them) or, on the contrary, non-fictional issues and, say, national borders. Between these two examples are sandwiched various phenomena related to liminality, concerning cultural taboo, the Holocaust, totalitarianism, the boundaries between the human and non-human world, as well as boundaries of national literature. We have been exploring the issue of boundaries together with our partners from the University of Zagreb, and we present brief summaries of their work in the order in which they appear in the issue.

At the centre of her article *Lado Kralj and Nikola Petković: Opposite Approaches to Humor and the Abject*, Natka Badurina places two novels dealing with the Italian-Yugoslav border during World War II, the Italian occupation of Yugoslavian territories and the creation of two occupation zones: the Provinces of Ljubljana and Rijeka. She analyses the Slovenian novel *Ne bom se več drsal na bajerju* by Lada Kralja from 2022 and Nikola Petković's Croatian novel *Put u Gonars* from 2018. Badurina is concerned with the relationship between the dominant memory of World War II in Croatia and Slovenia, and the image of history presented in these novels. Methodologically, in her work she draws on research on memory, the borderland, and the psychological and philosophical understanding of the uncanny, disgust, and the curse. In both novels, the topic of borders is also taken up in relation to the body/object (secretions, disgust, separating the clean from the unclean, life and death), ideology and politics, collective identities and ethics. Natka Badurina concludes that the memory of the Slovenian resistance movement remained an important part of the public sphere even after the 1990s, while in Croatia it was marginalised and accompanied with discomfort.

*The Limits of Men's Identity and the Transgressions of the Patriarchal Order in the Novels Alkar by Dinko Šimunović and Đuka Begović by Ivan Kozarac* is the title of an article by Marijana Bijelić. The author reflects on the boundaries of male identity and the transgression of the patriarchal order using the example of two Croatian prose works from the early 20th century: Dinka Šimunović's novella *Alkar*, set in the Sinj area (Dalmatia), and *Đuka Begović* by Ivan Kozar, a short novel set in Slavonia. Both works revolve around a rural community and a conflict between

father and son. However, the local context makes a significant difference to the development of this conflict. The author argues against the Freudian-Lacanian interpretation of the texts and suggests the perspective of René Girard. The plot of both works is constructed around the mythological conflict over the same woman, with the mother (a privileged object of Oedipus) absent in both texts. In Ivan Kožarč's play, the transgression of the patriarchal order results in the protagonist's complete acceptance of operating outside the law, while the conflict between father and son in Dinko Šimuniović's novella ends with the son's ambivalent acceptance of his father's authority and leads to a compensatory shift of transgression into the realm of imagination.

In his article *Framing and Narrativising of Borders around the Post-Habsburg Rijeka: Giovanni Comisso's Il porto dell'amore, and Viktor Car Emin's Danuncijada*, Marijan Bobinac discusses the example of post-imperial border conflicts, such as the occupation of Rijeka (from September 1919 to the end of 1920) by the Italian poet and paramilitary leader Gabriele D'Annunzio's, which paved the way for the Italian annexation of the city in 1924. The dispute over the status of Rijeka had been going on for decades between the Croats and the Hungarians, and after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in the new geopolitical reality, it became even more pronounced. Bobinac compares two very different works that address the topic of the *impresa di Fiume: Il porto dell'amore* (1924) by Giovanni Comisso, a collection of Italian short stories where D'Annunzio's Rijeka is a city of unlimited freedom and licentiousness, and the Croatian novel *Danuncijada* (1946) by Viktor Cara Emin, which deals with the political and social consequences of the occupation of Rijeka, the polarisation of political and ethnic groups, and the violent excesses of Italian paramilitary units. According to the researcher, Car Emin offers a much more diverse picture of the then Rijeka, at the same time drawing attention to the pro-fascist practices of the poet-soldier and the tragicomic nature of this 'poetic action'.

Milka Car, author of the article *Transgression in the novels of Esther Kinsky River and Rombo*, focuses on the transgressions, transfiguration and border crossings in the travel prose of Germany's Esther Kinsky. She is a Slavic studies scholar and translator, also of Polish texts. She is interested in the transfiguration of factography and fiction in the

representation of space, the course of a river and travel, the crossing of narrative and genre boundaries, and the intertwined traditional forms of travel writing and fiction, reminiscence and reflection. Kinsky the researcher associates the constant pushing of boundaries in the texts with the specific nature of German writing practised in a 'rhythm of steps', unhurriedly and therefore carefully observing borderline places such as forgotten post-industrial landscapes in East London or mountainous Alpine landscapes on the Italian-Slovenian border. The author analyses the multiple crossings as a modus of writing about nature in the context of cultural geography and eco-criticism. The border is interpreted in terms of a process, as transgression, a dynamic and variable category, linked to constant change as a result of complex cultural and social processes. The scholar states that the border as transgression does not divide but connects the cultural with the natural.

The multiple boundaries in the poem *The Pit* (1944) by Croatia's Ivan Goran Kovačić are explored by Ivana Drenjančević in her article 'Over the naked skin, the vale of ice' – drawing boundaries in *The Pit* by Ivan Goran Kovačić. The poem consists of ten songs that describe in an almost naturalistic way the torture and mass murder that took place during the Second World War. According to the author, the issue of boundaries in Kovačić's work concerns the question of genre, verses, boundaries between songs, between the tormentor and the victims, the individual confession of the blinded narrator and the silent, dying collective. The author focuses on the relationship between the speaker and the other victims, demonstrating that the narrator focuses much more on defining the boundary between himself and the other victims than on the conflict between himself and the perpetrator. While the narrator describes the suffering with real empathy, the need to stand out from the collective seems to be of special importance. According to the scholar, *The Pit's* narrator draws boundaries between himself and others to avoid the brutal collectivisation of death.

Magdalena Dyra focuses on the boundaries between the human and non-human worlds using *Moj Dren. Roman o psima i ljudima* (1939), a little-known Croatian autobiographical novel by Danka Anđelinović which she considers to be an early example of animal narratives in Croatian literature. The author also reviews theoretical works produced in

the field of animal studies in Croatia, recalling the relevant achievements of Nikola Visković, Suzana Marjanić, Antonija Zaradić Kiš, and Ana Batinić. The Polish scholar of Croatian literature considers the analysed novel an innovative attempt to penetrate the psyche of an animal and to show the world around it from a non-human perspective. Interestingly, a year before Angelinović's work was published, Vjekoslav Majer's novel *Život puža* saw the light of day, showing the city from the perspective of the eponymous snail. It is questionable if this turn towards an animalistic perspective in Croatian literature is related to the 'realistic' and social trend prevailing since the 1930s.

*Boundaries of Samudaripen: Representations of the Romani Holocaust in Croatian and Serbian literature* by Sabina Giergiel and Katarzyna Taczyńska discuss Croatian and Serbian literary testimonies (autobiographical and fictional) about the Romani Holocaust during World War II. In both national literatures, the issue is marginal, an accompaniment to other stories, most often in the context of the Holocaust of the Jews. While the authors found novels in Serbian literature where the extermination of the Roma is at the forefront or plays an important role, they rated their artistic value as poor which they believed was the reason for their limited reception. Acknowledging the scarcity of material for analysis, the authors call for commemoration, recognition of the suffering of the Roma, remembrance and proper research. In the conclusion, the authors write that these actions are taken in a non-literary reality. The term *Samudaripen* – as they explain – comes from the Romani language and means 'mass murder', considered unambiguous and neutral by the Roma themselves.

Lucija Ljubić's article *The Boundaries in Boris Senker's Istarska prikazanja* analyses the dramatic trilogy *Istarska prikazanja* (2023) by the well-known Croatian theatre scholar Boris Senker. The trilogy consists of the mystery play *Istarske priče*, the miracle play *Sanjari budućnosti*, and the morality play *Sanjarova priča*. Senker presents the past of his family in Istria, but through flippancy he questions its irrefutability, suggesting that 'lost opportunities are played out and historical untruths are compensated for' on stage. Drawing on Michel de Certeau's findings, the author discusses Senker's adoption of the role of historian, thus presenting the issues of the boundaries between historiography and

fiction, but also intra-Istrian dividing lines, the boundaries of homeland, national boundaries and genre boundaries.

Leszek Małczak suggests research into translation study by asking: *Are there reasons to be sad?* Wisława Szymborska's translation of *Vesna Parun's poem* *Balada prevarenog cvijeća*. The author has analysed Wisława Szymborska's translation (probably based on a philological translation) of the Croat's poem. It is also the only Croatian work translated by the Polish Nobel Prize winner. According to Małczak, the translation was made in connection with plans to publish an anthology of poetry from the Yugoslavia nations, entitled *Liryka jugosłowskańska*, and was published in 1960 in the anthology and in 'Życie Literackie' journal. The poem comes from Parun's first volume *Zore i wihori* (1947) and deals with the absurdity of war. The scholar, well-versed in translation theory and the non-literary realities that determine the publishing market, has placed the translation analysis in a broader context. He draws attention to several major changes in which he recognises semantic and stylistic elements characteristic of Szymborska's own work, especially those which, in his opinion, do not objectively stem from linguistic or cultural differences and represent an added element.

Tetjana Mykhailova focuses on two works that are a part of the so-called unofficial literature: *The totalitarian worlds of Merry Cemetery by Vasyl Stus and Little Apocalypse by Tadeusz Konwicki: differences and similarities*. By analysing the Ukrainian poet's volume *Веселий цвинтар* (*Merry Cemetery*) (1970) and the Polish writer's novel *Mała Apokalipsa* (1979), the author recognises a similar way of describing the totalitarian space. While Stus' works remained completely unknown and their author was sentenced to many years in a labour camp, Konwicki was the most frequently published Polish underground author. Therefore, their biographies and personal experiences differed significantly but the scholar has found many commonalities in the literature, resulting from political circumstances and a fascination with existentialism. The article contains detailed comparative analyses of works created on both sides of the national border, but also provides insight into the cultural realities of Soviet Ukraine.

Rhetorical toasts (*retoričke zdravice*) and lyrical praise (*lirske počasnice*) are oral literary genres and the focus of Davor Nikolić's *Boundaries of*

oral genres: strange case of rhetorical toast and lyrical praise poem. The author reminds that examples of these forms of oral creativity were recorded in Croatian literature as early as in 1556 in Petar Hektorović's fishing eclogue *Ribanje i ribarsko prigovanje*. Other Croatian Renaissance and Baroque artists also documented the *Počasnice*, while the term *zdravica* was probably perpetuated by 19th-century questionnaires. The author compares both genre forms and points out their basic rhetorical determinants. *Zdravica* is derived from a form of blessings (basic genre form), but also shares some elements with the laudatory poem.

In her article *Cultural taboo and the limits of the mind in the novel Jedan razoren um (A certain degraded mind) by Lazar Komarčić. The medicalisation of madness and the changes in Serbian literature at the end of the 19th century*, Sylwia Nowak-Bajcar analyses the first Serbian novel to address the topic of mental illness in a medical context, and to introduce the 'house of the insane' into literature, thus breaking the boundaries of cultural taboo. The author proves the groundbreaking significance of Lazar Komarčić's *Jedan razoren um* from 1893, both in terms of the cultural view of mental illness in Serbia, and the transformation of Serbian modernism. An excellent introduction to this innovative research is the historical context of the development of institutional medical care in Serbia since its liberation from the Ottoman Empire. The novel is set during the decisive period of expelling the Turks from Belgrade in the 1860s. The analysed work attracts attention for several reasons; according to the scholar, 'it captures the realities of the era in detail, both at the level of historical events and the description of the patriarchal idyll of small-town family life. Against this background, the drama of one of the protagonists' developing a mental illness unfolds. It is the main theme of the novel'. The author places the problem in the context of the Romantic tradition, referring, among other things, to the phenomena of transgression, the uncanny, taboo, and the *locus horridus*.

In *Liminal and Limioid in Dubravka Ugrešić's Writing*, Aneta Ryznar suggests a new way of reading Dubravka Ugrešić's work, especially its last phase and the novel *Lisica*, focusing on the categories of liminality and liminoidity. The author shows that liminality – a topic addressed in most of the Croatian writer's works (and covered in literature) most often resulted from a close connection with the situation

of emigration/exile – has ultimately transformed into a writing strategy. The Zagreb-based scholar convincingly presents her theses, keeping in mind the itinerant nature of liminality and referring to the works of Arnold van Gennep, Victor Turner, Arpad Szaklóczy, and Eva Eglāja-Kristsone. In the novel *Lisica*, Ryznar recognises the characteristics of an ambivalent trickster discourse, play on the avant-garde, especially Russian and the OBERIU group. This means a specific return to the beginnings of Ugrešić's writing (and scholarly) activity, but in an in-depth form – a sense of belonging to artistic 'hooligans', life/biographical identity.

In the title of his article, Petr Stehlík – a Czech researcher into Croatian literature – poses the question of national literature as an inviolable and self-evident category of literary history: *National Border in the Classification of Literature: A Relevant or Outdated Category?* The article offers a concise overview of the positions and outlines potential alternatives. The topic remains relevant and unresolved/unresolvable (?), especially with regard to the Croatian / Serbian/ Bosnian/ Montenegrin languages. The author strongly advocates the need to create transnational or a-national classifications and analytical categories that would cover the literature of authors from the countries formed after the break-up of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and a large diaspora. In this respect, the author finds

transnational reflections on the concept of Bosnian and Herzegovinian literature, provided in the 1970s and 1980s by Midhat Begić, Ivan Lovrenović, Slobodan Blagojević and others, particularly inspiring, defining the literature of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a dynamic system of multiple affiliations of authors and works, accompanied by a constant tension between simultaneous compositeness and integrity.

The question is whether historians of national literatures are up to such a challenge.

In a comparative study, *Reports from behind the 'Red Curtain'. Experiencing the Border in Soviet Russia: Antoni Słonimski My Journey to Russia (1932) and Ante Ciliga In the Land of the Big Lie (1938)*, Ewa Szperlik conducts a comparative analysis of descriptions of trips to Soviet Russia in the



interwar period, the Polish poet Antoni Słonimski's *Moja podróż do Rosji* (1932) and the Croatian writer, communist renegade and later dissident Ante Ciliga, first published in France in 1938 under the title *Au Pays du Grand Mensonge*, and in Croatia as late as in 2007 as *U zemlji velike laži*. The Polish and Croatian authors experienced similar disappointments and said goodbye to their left-wing Soviet sympathies. The article contains convincing interpretations of the descriptions of the collective material and psychological misery of the citizens of the USSR. The experience of the border is analysed, among other things, using concepts from geo-poetics and autobiography, and is used aptly.

The latest geopolitical situation, realigning the spheres of mutual influence and domination established in the world as we know it, makes the issue of borders all the more relevant, emphasising the need for an academic reflection.

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