

Problems of contemporary poetry publisher and editor — the case of the House of Literature in Łódź

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Less and less publishing houses take into consideration publishing volumes of poetry. On the websites of many publishers in tabs titled ‘Publish your book’ or ‘Publish in our house’ we can read multiple variants of the reservation ‘Please, do not send volumes of poetry’. Meanwhile, Dom Literatary w Łodzi (established in 2103, formerly Śródmiejskie Forum Kultury) expands its publishing activities on the area of poetry. Despite trends, fashions and more and more deep niches. Below I would like to present some points made about this hard work done by a handful of enthusiasts including myself.

The beginning

There are two publishing houses focused on publishing volumes of poetry on the so called ‘poetic’ market: Biuro Literackie (later in the text: BL), formerly from Legnica, lately from Wrocław, now from Stronie Śląskie and Wydawnictwo Wojewódzkiej Biblioteki Publicznej i Centrum Animacji Kultury w Poznaniu (later in the text: WBPiCAK).

BL publishes also translations of poetry, mostly from English and Ukrainian, however it also ‘remembers’ of authors writing in German, Czech, Russian and Spanish (anthology series). Surprisingly, BL is ‘flirting’ with prose (and it’s failing in this area), while it has some significant successes in the poetry area: Nike Award for Eugeniusz Tkacyszyn-Dycki, Gdynia Award for Marta Podgórnik or Szyborska Award for Roman Honet. Lately, this publisher has started, in the way, to close itself off from Polish authors (but honestly, they have started to move to another publishing houses).

They move mainly to WBPiCAK where the series edited by Mariusz Grzebalski has successfully replaced the iconic series ‘Biblioteka STUDIUM’. These new series includes mainly Polish authors of various generations. It

consists of premieres, volumes of poems of the one author selected by the major critics and (to a lesser extent) prose and post academic conferences volumes.

Moreover, a strong position on the 'poetic' publishing market belongs to Instytut Mikołowski (later in the text: IM). Condition of EMG from Wrocław, the heartland of Marcin Świetlicki, is also not bad. Karpowicz's Foundation (later in the text: FK) or "Rita Baum" (later in the text: RB) do not publish often but their work is of high quality. Because of some financial problems venerable A5 (later in the text A5) publishes less volumes than it used to and it focuses mainly on anthologies and reissues. On the market we have got also Znak and Literackie which, basing on the model charted by Czarne (later in the text: WC) and Prószyński i S-ka (later in the text: PiS), publish two or three volumes of poetry per year. There are also: moving to the right-wing Sic! a classical series published by 'Zeszyty Literackie' and 'Biblioteka TOPOSU' (later in the text: BT), more extensive than Sic! but usually deservedly ignored by the serious critics. We also cannot forget about: basing on self publishing Mamiko, lately reactivated Kwadratura from Łódź (later in the text WK), Staromiejski Dom Kultury (and its latest series: Wspólny Pokój), Stowarzyszenie Literackie im. K.K. Baczyńskiego (later in the text: SLKKB) and the Faktoria series, a new project of Radosław Wiśniewski, who also runs (off and on) another series, Zagniazdowniki. Also debuting Lokator and some of post literary contests volumes (such as Europejski Poeta Wolności, Tyska Zima Poetycka, Ratoń, Janusz Różewicz) are worth mentioning here.

The rest of publishing activities on the Polish 'poetry' market have a rather marginal, local meaning. Because of that fact I cannot include them in this volume limited paper. I hope this selection would not offend any of my colleagues, if it does, please, accept my sincere apologies.

In the Polish publishing reality described above, in 2010 Dom Literatury in Łódź (yet called Śródmiejskie Forum Kultury but later in the text: DL) in collaboration with Stowarzyszenie Pisarzy Polskich Oddział w Łodzi (later in the text: SPP OŁ) appeared. It had the classic series 'Biblioteka laureatów konkursu im. Jacka Bierezina' (which is still being published) and fledgling 'Biblioteka ARTERII' (later in the text: BA). Then DL has started to publish: 'Białe kruki, czarne owce' (later in the text: BKCO), 'Forum Młodej Literatury' (from 2013, later in the text: FML), 'Szumy, zlepy, ciągi' (from 2016, later in the text: SZC) and thereby it has become one of the biggest publishers of poetry in Poland. It has also, unwittingly, filled the market's gap left by experienced publishing houses which gave up publishing poetry. And, despite of the many problems, it is still filling this gap.

Problem no 1: obtaining financial resources for publishing

Initially, DL has a budget at 0 (literally: zero) PLN level. Each PLN Has to be obtain from external sources. Every form of financial support, from subventions through festival publications to scholarships and donations, works fine here.

On the local area, printing process can be financed by Komisja Wydawnicza Urzędu Miasta Łodzi, which budget is constantly decreasing. The open competition is announced once a year (usually in the spring) and one of its requirements is to provide 40% of the own contribution. What is interesting, only SLKKB and DL request resources for publishing volumes of poetry. So far DL in collaboration with SPP OŁ has published most of its publications this way.

This (DL and SPP OŁ) collaboration benefits also from parallel competitions in other cities. It has obtained resources for publishing, for instance, *Abrakadabra* by Marcin Jurzysta (Toruń, the BA series) and *Cały w słońcu* by Marcin Zegadło (Częstochowa, the BA series). In the nearest future it is also going to publish *Weno wej!* by Marcin Tomczak (Kadzidło, the FML series).

In practical terms, there is no possibility to obtain financial support for publishing poetry on the provincial area. Is such possibility even occurs, it has to be festival or post literary competition book published as a part of other, bigger literary or cultural project. But even then only a cost of printing is supported.

When it comes to a state area, The Ministry of Culture and National Heritage (later in the text: the MCNH) announces contests in the Literature priority. There are two contests each year. Having 30% of the own contribution (in justified cases the contribution could be lower) you can request at most 20 000 PLN for one volume of poetry. This financial support includes every step of publishing activities: emoluments for the author, editor, proof-reader, graphics designer as well as cost of marketing and distribution. What is important, from a couple of years, the MCNH evaluates requests only basing on two reviews of each book, without reading books itself. As the beneficiary of this program DL published *Rozmowy z głuchym psem* by Darek Foks, the first volume of the BKCO series.

MCNH also supports publishing volumes of poems when they are festival publication, in case of DL they are a result of Puls Literary Festival.

Also National Centre for Culture Poland was financially supporting publishing volumes of poetry within the limits of Ojczysty — dodaj do ulubionych programme. There were no restrictions regarding exact activities

for which the money could be spent. Thanks to NCC's *Kolaże kolarzy* by Samantha Kitsch and hybrid *Namiestnik* by Grzegorz Wróblewski were published (both as a part of BKCO series).

Some of scholarships for artists force their beneficiaries to spend a part of received financial support for publishing the book which was the subject of the scholarship. The pool of money which has to be spent on publishing is not restrictive about fields of publishing process it covers. *Tanzen, tanzen* by Urszula Kulbacka (the BA series) and *Google Translator* by Jakub Sajkowski (the BA series) were financed basing on scholarship's rules described above.

Donations are other vital source of financial support. The Foundation of Tislowitz helped to publish *Obstrukcja Instugi* by Piotr Sobolczyk. Thanks to donations from private individuals DL published some volumes of the BKCO series: *Majtki w górę, majtki w dół* by Paweł Marcinkiewicz and *Wiersze organiczne* by Kacper Bartczak. It is also about to publish *Suplement* by Leszek Engelking and *Konfiskata Konfetti* by Samantha Kitsch (the SZC series).

As it can be seen, even at the stage of considering publication of a volume of poetry a publisher faces many problems. Although one can learn how to fill in application documents fast (usually they are similar to one another and logical), there is no certainty that the request would be efficient. It's effectiveness depends on many factors related to, for instance, the quality of publication and a reputation of its author.

Problem no 2: preparing a book for printing — people

How can one obtain financial sources for publishing high-quality publication prepared by the well-qualified specialists, if most of the institutions donating books understand publication as a printing process only? With the help of enthusiasts and community-workers.

In DL there are two full-time editors: Przemysław Owczarek and me. I am also a proof-reader of every DL's publication. Two of the books published by DL were edited by our another employee, Maciej Robert. In other cases the authors pointed editors who agreed to work with them (probably with no financial reward). This is how DL had an opportunity to work with: Roman Honet (on books of Marcin Jurzysta and Marin Zegadło), Dawid Mateusz (on *Pamięć zewnętrzna* by Radosław Jurzak, the book should appear soon) and Karol Samsel (on the book of Marcin Tomczak).

When it comes to DTP, only in recent years DL has managed to obtain money for emoluments. After Michał Murowaniecki has left, DL coope-

rates with creative trio: Zuzanna Czechowicz, Magda Ebert and Joanna Jasińska. DTP projects of Darek's Foks books, *Kolaże Kolarze* by Samantha Kitsch and the anthology *Dzikię dzieci* were designed by Krzysztof Miniak. As I cannot tell trade secrets, I cannot share any more details here.

And the last but not least, every publications needs a person who watches over the whole publishing process and the communication between each creator of the book's success. I am such person. Of course, not the only one. In DL we have or had also: Andrzej Strąk, Marcin Balczewski (the former manager), Przemysław Owczarek (the present manager). It is a synergy.

Problem no 3: preparing a book for printing — technical issues

Each of DL's editors presents different attitude to poem's matter. Przemysław Owczarek focuses on direct help, he suggests particular solutions, it can be said that his work completes the author's work. Maciej Robert tampers with texts a bit but he mostly pays attention to their grammatical and stylistic correctness. If he is about to really interfere with the matter of a book, he deletes whole poems. I prefer to suggest that the author could make some changes but I do not point any particular solution. I draw a lot of attention to consequence and initial assumptions of the project. Experience shows that well established authors are not repetitive, their repetition and discipline are the resolute of editor's work.

When I work as a proof-reader I am trying to keep the discipline and this is when I allow myself to tamper more, including (but rarely) deleting whole poems. I am very strict when it comes to the punctuation and using capitals or minuscules. This last issue is often a field of inconsequence, what is more, some of editors do not pay attention to that matter for two reason: firstly, this not the exact area of their work, secondly, they trust proof-readers.

In DL typesetters have a good work experience. They usually work on their own typography projects, which can be modified depending on needs. Changes usually are about the width of margin or the size of fonts. The only one exception is the BKCO series, originally designed by Krzysztof Miniak and currently used by other typesetters. But BKCO has also its one exception, *rezonans* by Krzysztof Gryka, in which the meaning of the poems depends solely on the font size or on the amount of the text put on the page. As the result this volume looks like a collection of advertising slogans or a text for people with a distinctive vision defect.

Cover designers also have a free hand, excluding situations when authors, themselves, suggest design. Excluding the BKCO and FML series, we are very flexible about cover designs. Due to that fact, you would face some inconvenience if you try to find any pattern in the design DL's latest covers. DL, however, has a one, strict rule which is the result of some quality problems encountered in the past — each cover has to a high-quality project. Therefore, it happens that only umpteenth project is accepted.

In general, DL bets on creativity but, at the same time, it prefers to have a full control of the every step of publishing process. It slowly manages to find the stable standards of quality but it still remains open for the new.

Problem no 4: marketing and distribution

Due to the market reasons hardly any warehouse agrees to distribute a low-edition book of poetry (usually 300-600 copies) which is probably hard to sell. Some of the monopoly holders, like Empik or Matras, make exceptions but, at the same time, they require impact of a half of the price put on the cover and they pay with several months delay. What is more, the book which is supposedly being sale may not even go outside the storage or supply base (it is said that, especially in the case of the first above-mentioned monopoly holder, such situation might affect even more than a half of its range).

Distributing volumes of poetry in other, usually smaller bookshops is much easier as they are forthcoming and they do not require high mark-ups. However, such kind of sale is not profitable when you take into consideration costs of shipping. What is left? Online sales, including DL's online library as well as the Allegro auction service and direct sales: online, based on e-mail contact or Facebook message and offline, so called 'backup sale' which takes place whenever I am visiting a literature festival with a suitcase full of books for sale.

There is also a light in the tunnel: Świadomi Wydawcy association (later in the text: the ŚW). This group yet consists of twenty institutions which want to expand distribution of books they are publishing. During the Warsaw Book FAIR the ŚW presented its common exhibition, now they are planning to reach, as a collective, about one hundred bookshops in Poland and, using those libraries internal shipping system, save on postage costs. DL is about to join the ŚW.

Furthermore, parts of the BA series are being attached to 'Arterie', our journal distributed by Empik (it is available off-the-shelf in about twenty

Empik stores but you can also order it to any Empik store with no additional charges). In spite of that, afterwards volumes come back to be sale individually, especially when their stock is lasting.

Absence of problem no 1: obtaining authors

The market of reasonable publishing houses focused on publishing volumes of poetry is so little that more and more well known authors have no place to publish their work. Moreover, Jacek Bierezin Competition has discovered many talents and those are not only its winners but also other competitors. Thanks to those two facts, the number of potential authors for DL and SPP OŁ poetry series has rapidly increased.

We can make a statement that we publish less than a half of reasonable materials we receive. The current line of volumes which are about to be published in 2016 and 2017 counts a dozen or so positions.

Absence of problem no 2: all books published by Dom Literatury in Łódź

Below list includes all volumes of poetry published so far by Dom Literatury and, in the case of BA series, also by the former publisher of 'Arterie' journal — Poleski Ośrodek Sztuki.

While listing the co-authors of each book, I included only editors, translators and coordinators, those last are also the last link of the publishing chain. This choice is also a contribution to discussion of the role of respective people in the publishing process.

1. 'Biblioteka ARTERII' series

The series initiated in 2008. It was founded as a part of 'Arterie' journal, and it consisted of books of poetry attached to each issue of the journal. Initially, this series included books of Jacek Bierezin Competition series as well as volumes of the FML series, which were not a part of the BA series but sometimes were attached to the journal.

Yet published:

- Piotr Gajda, *Hostel*; ed. Przemysław Owczarek, 2008
- *Na granি. Antologia wierszy łódzkieich debiutantów o doświadczeniach między językiem a światem*; ed. Przemysław Owczarek, afterword by Kacper Bartczak, 2008

- Marcin Moroń, *Pali żalewa burzy*; ed. Piotr Kuśmirek, 2009
- Magdalena Nowicka, *Przewieszka*; ed. Przemysław Owczarek, 2009
- Joanna Lech, *Zapaś*; ed. Roman Honet, 2009
- Piotr Gajda, *Zwłoka*; ed. Przemysław Owczarek, 2010
- Konrad Ciok, *Mamałyga*; ed. Przemysław Owczarek, 2010
- Andrzej Babaryko, *80 wierszy*; ed. Przemysław Owczarek, selection by Zdzisław Jaskuła, 2010
- Michał Murowaniecki, *Spieć*; ed. Przemysław Owczarek, 2010
- Marcin Nowak, *Historie pomszechne*; ed. Przemysław Owczarek, 2010
- Marcin Orliński, *Parada drezyn*; ed. Roman Honet, 2010
- Justyna Krawiec, *Chlód*; ed. Mariusz Grzebalski, Piotr Kuśmirek, 2011
- Marcin Jurzysta, *Cincubabka*; ed. Roman Honet, 2011
- Urszula Kulbacka, *Rdżenni mieszkańcy*; ed. Maciej Robert, 2012
- Justyna Fruzińska, *Jest czarna*; ed. Przemysław Owczarek, 2012
- Tomasz Jamroziński, *Mężczyźni są z Warsa*; ed. Przemysław Owczarek, 2012
- Grzegorz Jędrak, *Badland*; ed. Roman Honet, 2012
- Marcin Jurzysta, *Abrakadabra*; ed. Roman Honet, 2014
- Marcin Orliński, *Tętno*; ed. Przemysław Owczarek, 2014
- Agata Ludwikowska, *Sezon w sobie*; ed. Rafał Gawin, 2014
- Marcin Badura, *Niemcy*; ed. Przemysław Owczarek, 2014
- Marcin Zegadło, *Cały w słońcu*; ed. Przemysław Owczarek, 2014
- Urszula Kulbacka, *Tanzen, tanzen*; ed. Przemysław Owczarek, 2014
- Jakub Sajkowski, *Google Translator*; ed. Rafał Gawin, 2015
- Renata Senktas, *Clarity*; ed. Rafał Gawin, 2016
- Tytus Żalgirdas, *MITYfikacje*; ed. Rafał Gawin, 2016
- Przemysław Owczarek, *Stojąc na jednej nodze*; ed. Kacper Bartczak, 2016

In progress:

- Ewa Chruściel, *Tobolek*; ed. Przemysław Owczarek, 2016

2. 'Białe kruki, czarne owce' series

In line with its title, the aim of the 'Białe kruki, czarne owce' (in English: 'Rare books, black sheeps') series is to present the valuable literature — the brave, innovative and subversive works.

This series includes books written by authors who do not want to follow the mainstream — by choice or because they do not value an easy, light literature which is promoted by media.

The originator and the editor of the 'Białe kruki, czarne owce' series is Andrzej Strąk. I am happy to be the coordinator of the publishing process

of all books of this series, excluding *Wiersze organiczne* by Kacper Bartczak, which was coordinated by Przemysław Owczarek.

Yet published:

- Darek Foks, *Rozmowy z głuchym psem*, 2013
- Samantha Kitsch, *Kolaże kolarzy*, 2014
- Paweł Marcinkiewicz, *Majtki w górę, majtki w dół*, 2015
- Grzegorz Wróblewski, *Namiestnik*, 2015
- Kacper Bartczak, *Wiersze organiczne*, 2015
- Krzysztof Gryko, *Rezonans*, 2016
- Piotr Gajda, *Śruba Archimedes*, 2016

3. “Forum Młodej Literatury” series

The series is connected to the small festival which aim is to present works of young (less than 35 years old) authors. It includes poetic debuts of those young writers. So far, each of our authors was nominated to the main prize in Jacek Bierezin Competition but it is not the condition of being published within this series.

Yet published:

- Szymon Jakuć, *Hotel Jahwe*; ed. Przemysław Owczarek, 2013
- Rafał Krause, *Pamiętnik z powstania*; ed. Przemysław Owczarek, 2013
- Paweł Tomanek, *Sam tu, piesku*; ed. Przemysław Owczarek, 2014
- Michał Pranke, *b*; ed. Rafał Gawin, 2015

In progress:

- Marcin Tomczak, *Weno wej!*; ed. Karol Samsel, 2016
- Damian Kowal, *Najmniejsze przeboje z Tristan la Cunba*; ed. Rafał Gawin, 2016

4. “Biblioteka laureatów konkursu im. Jacka Bierezina” series

This is our oldest series, originated in 1995 with publication of *Dźwięki dzieci* by Krzysztof Siwczyk. Presently, it is nearly impossible to complete the whole series, its individual parts were published in various publishing houses, sometimes, like in case of Janusz Walek, as a one-volume initiative. The series design has never been consistent, its only mark, excluding four volumes — three of them published by Biblioteka from **Łódź** and one as a part of the BL series — is a square format.

Books of the BL series were formerly published as a part of another series: the BA (Joanna Lech, Justyna Krawiec, Urszula Kulbacka), the FML

(Paweł Tomanek) and Kwadratura (Magdalena Galkowska). Just several of the latest volumes were published as a part of the separate series.

Lately published:

- Tomasz Mielcarek, *Obecność / Presence*, ed. Maciej Robert, translation by David Malcolm, 2014
 - Piotr Przybyła, *Apokalipsa. After party*; ed. Przemysław Owczarek, 2015
- In progress:
- Radosław Jurczak, *Pamięć zewnętrzna*; ed. Dawid Mateusz, 2016

5. 'Szumy, zły, ciągi' series

The new series targeted on presenting unconventional works, not necessarily poetry. It includes all artistic experiments remaining on the borderland of arts. The originator of the series title is Magdalena Beszterda. The title itself refers to the theme of the one of editions of Puls Literary Festival. Obviously, it also refers to Miron Białoszewski but we would like to focus more on its meaning than on its references. So let it be the pretext for further literary experiments.

In progress:

- Samatha Kitsch, *Konfiskata konfetti*; ed. Rafał Gawin, 2016

6. The series which is still waiting for its title

Dear readers, giving the title to this series may stay up to you. It includes works of the important authors from Łódź and Łódź voivodship and the poems of laureates of contest organised by DL and SPPOŁ. Collected poems of Andrzej Babryko and Jacek Bierezin might be published as a part of this series in next several years. The series is also going to include poetic prose of the laureates of Witold Sułkowski Competition and short stories of the laureates of Krystyna Kwiatkowska Competition.

Yet published:

- *Dziki dzieci. Antologia laureatów konkursu im. Jacka Bierezina*; ed. Zdzisław Jaskuła, Andrzej Strąk, coordination: Rafał Gawin, 2014
- Witold Sułkowski, *Eksperyment wolność. Utwory wybrane*; ed. Zdzisław Jaskuła, Ewa Sułkowska-Bierezin, coordination: Rafał Gawin, 2015

7. *Outside the series*

Yet published:

- Julian Tuwim, *Słowem do krwi! / Till the Words Draw Blood!*; selected by David Malcolm, translated by David Malcolm and Agata Miksa, ed. Rafał Gawin, 2013
- Piotr Sobolczyk, *Obstrukcja insługi*; ed. Rafał Gawin, 2014

Instead of summary

Conclusion are, as I believe, rather obvious and that is why I am going to leave them for your own consideration while I will focus on technical, but emotional at the same time, summary.

Running a publishing house focused on publishing volumes of poetry is a kind of enjoyable Don Quixote's struggle with windmills. This is a satisfying work which gives you an opportunity to fully participate in cultural life and to shape (in a distant perspective) Polish literature. You can also contribute to publishing books which would probably never be published otherwise. Such activity, however, also shows the weakness of Polish publishing market and the fall of reading in Poland. It forces to collect money for each publication. It also forces to make use of familiarity with good editors and graphics designers, who work for no salary or for very little one.

With favourable conditions, Dom Literaury in Łódź will not only remain on its path but will make it wider. Our nearest plans are: running the series of translations, mostly of English poetry, and publishing more of hybrid-books. Wish us luck!

Instead of notes and bibliography

During working on this paper I have been using following sources:

- 'Arterie' journal, no. 1–23
- books published by DL and SPP OŁ between 2008 and 2016 (details above)
- not existing anymore web site of 'Arterie' journal
- Google.pl
- <http://www.bn.org.pl>

- <http://dom-literatury.pl>
- <http://www.spplodz.eu>
- Gawin.liberte.pl
- Gazeta.pl
- Onet.pl
- Wp.pl