

David Österle, Paulina Czwordon-Lis,
Cezary Rosiński, Tomasz Umerle

Central European Tilt. The Analysis of Cultural-Political Functions and Effects of Polish Europe-related Literary Prizes

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DOI:10.18318/td.2023.en.2.12 | ORCID: David Österle 0000-0002-6295-318
Paulina Czwordon-Lis 0000-0001-5136-4590
Cezary Rosiński 0000-0002-6136-7186
Tomasz Umerle 0000-0002-7335-0568

ELPs Definition and Scope of the Paper

What was achieved in 2007 with the Treaty of Lisbon, namely the establishment of “Europe” as a political and legal entity capable of action, is still far less developed on a cultural level. The lack of a collective cultural identity is supposed to be remedied by art and culture following the model of the formation of nation-states in the nineteenth century.¹ The European flag and the European anthem developed in 1985 and 1986 can be interpreted as smaller pieces of a larger endeavor towards European unity. The goal is quite clear: Europe should be perceived more positively by its citizens.² What fundamentally distinguishes

1 Alessandra Goggio, “Alter Kontinent, Auszeichnungen: Literaturpreise im Zeitalter der Europäisierung,” in *Literaturpreise. Geschichte und Kontexte*, ed. Christoph Von Jürgensen and Antonius Weixler (Berlin: Metzler 2021), 321.

2 Anna Schoon, “Europäische Integration, Legitimation und Literaturpreise – Grenzen und Potenziale ‘europäischer’ Literaturpreise,” in *Literaturpreise. Geschichte, Theorie und Praxis*, ed. Dennis

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David Österle – PhD, Department of German Studies of the University of Vienna. Email: david.oesterle@univie.ac.at.

Paulina Czwordon-Lis – PhD, Department of Current Bibliography in the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Email: paulina.czwordon-lis@ibl.waw.pl.

Cezary Rosiński – PhD, Assistant Professor, Department of Current Bibliography in the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Email: cezary.rosinski@ibl.waw.pl.

Tomasz Umerle – PhD, Assistant Professor, Deputy Head of Department of Current Bibliography in the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Email: tomasz.umerle@ibl.waw.pl.

“Europeanisation” from the processes of nation-state building, however, is the diversity of Europe in cultural and linguistic terms, hence the difficulty of establishing clear and systematic forms of cultural representation.

Literary prizes can also be identified as a part of such a cultural legitimization process that accompanies legal and political initiatives. In this paper, we focus on what we call Europe-related literary prizes (ELPs), that is, prizes which are referring in their official documents to European culture, history, and values and are sponsored either by European Union institutions, EU’s member states and their organizations, or cultural institutions, foundations, associations, companies, publishers or private individuals. ELPs are awarded preferably to the authors from the whole of Europe, alternatively to a subset of European nationalities. Finally, ELPs are to be defined here by the fact that they are awarded (even if not exclusively) to writers. To sum up, ELPs have four dimensions: 1) topical: they are awarding a relation between literary creation and European culture, values, and so on; 2) disciplinary: they are awarding literary creation, including writers; 3) geocultural: they are recognizing European writers; 4) organizational: they are funded and organized by European institutions.

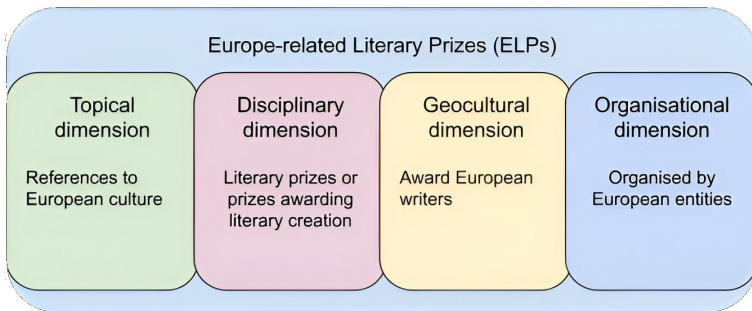


Figure 1. Dimensions of ELPs.

ELPs are awarded throughout Europe, and their nuanced analysis provides a good indication of the contributions made by national cultural institutions to the intensification of transnational cultural exchange relations and the structural development of a European literary field.³ The analysis also contributes

von Borghardt, Sarah Maaß and Alexandra Pontzen (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2020), 26.

3 As an example, in the German-speaking world alone, more than 40 Europe-related literary prizes can be identified (cf. Schoon, “Europäische Integration,” 188), among them prestigious prizes such as the Würth Prize for European Literature, the Leipzig Book Prize for Eu-

to the assessment of how much the member states are concerned with raising European awareness among creative artists and the general public.

Research Review and Research Question

In this paper, we will examine the ELPs landscape in Poland. This topic has hardly been discussed so far, which does not seem surprising, since this specific type of prize is still relatively young on the Polish literary prize scene. Since Polish ELPs respond to two different cultural environments – Polish and European – at the same time with their specific orientation, the connection to two different fields of research is correspondingly necessary for this study.

On the one hand, newly founded literary prizes with a European program have an impact on the European cultural landscape and literary prize scene. Since the European Union as well as the member states and their cultural institutions use literary prizes to promote their own visions of Europe, their valorization practices are often in competition with each other. Depending on the image of Europe that these prizes convey aesthetically and politically through their practices of consecration, they also intervene in the long term in institutional processes about what a future Europe should look like.

In addition to the numerous studies that examine the literary prize scene of individual countries from literary-aesthetic, cultural-political, gender-specific, and economic perspectives, mostly drawing on the conceptual vocabulary of Pierre Bourdieu's⁴ sociology of culture, his field and capital theory,⁵ the recent years have shown an awakening of interest in the growing

European Understanding, or the Austrian State Prize for European Literature. However, only about half of the German ELPs are awarded to people from all European states, because numerous prizes – as will be discussed here later – are aimed at authors from one's own country, language area, or at individual transculturally connected regions within Europe. In addition to the prizes with a European dimension, there are about another 140 prizes in Germany with an international, i.e. in this case: trans-European orientation, which, however, do not necessarily exclusively award prizes for literature. Whether European or trans-European in orientation, a substantial proportion of internationally oriented literary prizes in Germany can also be assigned to the category of translation prizes. Cf. Sarah Maaß and Dennis Borghardt, *Der Wert der Preise: Valorisierungsdynamik in der deutschen Literaturpreislandschaft 1990–2019* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2022), 24.

4 Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993).

5 One exception is the DFG-funded project "Literary Prizes in the German-Speaking World since 1990: Functions and Effects," led by Alexandra Pontzen, which has developed the praxeological concept of valorization developed in Valuation Studies (Michael Hutter, "Infinite Surprises. On the Stabilization of Value in the Creative Industries," in *The Worth*

field of transnationally oriented literary and cultural prizes.⁶ This includes the comprehensive volume edited by Susan Leckey, *The Europa Directory of Literary Awards and Prizes*,⁷ a rich collection of literary prizes in Europe (both European and non-European), which is, however, already out of date and, moreover, only available in an expensive print edition. Scholarly comparative studies of exemplary ELPs as well as individual studies, for example of the European Union Prize for Literature (EUPL), have recently been published by Anna Schoon and Alexandra Goggio.⁸ Schoon examines the literary prizes according to their functions and effects and comes to the conclusion that literary prizes play a major role in the context of the Europeanization of the literary field, but that they are less suitable as an instrument for the production of a supranational European identity.⁹

of Goods. Valuation and Pricing in the Economy, ed. Jens Beckert and Patrik Aspers [Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2011], 201–220) into a method for literary prize research (cf. Dennis Borghardt, Sarah Maaß and Alexandra Pontzen, eds., *Literaturpreise. Geschichte, Theorie und Praxis* [Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 2020]; Borghardt and Maaß, *Der Wert der Preise*, 2022).

- 6 Studies of the Spanish, English, German and French markets for literary prizes include Sally Ann Perret, *The National Award in Narrative Literature and the Role of Art in Democratic Spain (1977–2011)* (Urbana, Illinois, 2012); Sharon Norris, "The Booker Prize: A Bourdieusian Perspective," *Journal for Cultural Research* 10 (2) (2006): 139–158; Claire Squires, "Fiction and Literary Prizes in Great Britain," in *Fiction and Literary Prizes in Great Britain*, ed. Wolfgang Gortschacher, Holger Klein and Claire Squires (Vienna: Praesens Verlag, 2006), accessed June 3, 2024, <http://www.praesens.at/praesens2013/?p=1790>; Stevie L. Marsden, "Why Women Don't Win Literary Awards: The Saltire Society Literary Awards and Implicit Stereotyping," *Women: A Cultural Review* 30 (1) (2019): 43–65, accessed June 2, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09574042.2018.1561047>; Borghardt, Maaß and Pontzen, *Literaturpreise. Geschichte*; Borghardt and Maaß, *Der Wert der Preise*; Christoph Jürgensen and Antonius Weixler, eds., *Literaturpreise. Geschichte und Kontext* (Stuttgart, 2021); Burckhard Dücker, "Literaturpreise als Forschungsgegenstand der Literaturwissenschaft," in *Literaturpreise. Geschichte und Kontexte*, ed. Christoph von Jürgensen and Antonius Weixler (Berlin: Metzler, 2021), 31–52; Sylvie Ducas, *La littérature à quel(s) prix? Histoire des prix littéraires* (La Découverte, 2013); Nikol Dziub and Augustin Voegele, *Le prix Nobel de littérature et l'Europe / The Nobel Prize for Literature and Europe* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2021).
- 7 Susan Leckey, ed., *The Europa Directory of Literary Awards and Prizes* (London: Europa Publ., 2002).
- 8 Schoon, "Europäische Integration"; Anna Schoon, "Wie 'europäisch' ist der Literaturpreis der Europäischen Union?," in *Literaturpreise. Geschichte und Kontexte*, ed. Christoph von Jürgensen and Antonius Weixler (Berlin: Metzler, 2021) and Alexandra Goggio, "Alter Kontinent."
- 9 Schoon, "Europäische Integration," 195; 199–202.

Drawing on Bourdieu's *The Field of Cultural Production*,¹⁰ sociology of literature, book market research, and translation studies have dealt with transnational literary prize events from the perspective of global translation flows,¹¹ and from the standpoint of linguistic diversity.¹² Desiderium, however, remains a comparative study of ELPs based on large-scale, systematic, Europe-wide data collection.

ELPs on the other hand have an impact on the (in many cases) tradition-rich national literary prize scene by strengthening new (mostly Europhile) values and value patterns. Put simply, they add a transnational component to the national literary scene and thus sometimes provoke contentious controversies over political identity in the context of one's own national or cultural self-image. For example, they trigger discussion on the extent to which international actors both economically and symbolically should also be favored by the national funding system.

The fact that these discussions have been less intense in Poland is perhaps also due to the low prestige and low resonance that Polish ELPs have experienced so far. According to Grzegorz Jankowicz (who selected the ten most important Polish literary prizes for the purpose of his study), none of the three international literary prizes awarded in Poland – neither the “Angelus”¹³ and “European Poet of Freedom” nor the “Herbert Award” – has so far equaled the prestige of prizes established for Polish literature (Nike, Gdynia, Paszport *Polityki*). Following James F. English, Jankowicz emphasizes that establish-

10 Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*.

11 Johan Heilbron, “Towards A Sociology of Translation,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 2 (4) (1999): 429–444; Pascale Casanova, “European Literature. Simply a Higher Degree of Universality?,” *European Review* 17 (2009); Marc Verboord, Giseline Kuipers and Susanne Janssen, “Institutional Recognition in the Transnational Literary Field, 1955–2005,” *Cultural Sociology*, online first April 6, 2015; Gisèle Sapiro, “The Metamorphosis of Modes of Consecration in the Literary Field: Academies, Literary Prizes, Festivals,” *Poetics* 59 (2016): 121–132, accessed March 3, 2024, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0304422X160001032016>.

12 Franca Sinopoli, “Literature for Europe?,” *Orbis Litterarum* 66 (2) (2011); Barbara Siller and Sandra Vlasta, eds., *Literarische (Mehr)Sprachreflexionen* (Wien: Praesens Verlag, 2020).

13 The prestige of “Angelus” is the highest among the Polish transnational literary prizes, as noted by both Grzegorz Jankowicz, “Piękni wygrani. Wpływ nagród na strukturę pola literackiego” [Beautiful winners. The influence of awards on the structure of the literary field], in *Literatura polska po 1989 roku w świetle teorii Pierre’a Bourdieu. Podręcznik*, ed. Grzegorz Jankowicz (Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2015), 137 and Przemysław Czaplinski, “A gdyby nagród literackich nie było?” [What if there were no literary awards?], in *Festiwal Fabuły, 17–21.11.2020, Poznań [Książka festiwalowa]* (Poznań: Centrum Kultury Zamek, 2020), 72.

ing a prize with a transnational character is “hard and risky but extremely profitable.”¹⁴ Of course, such prizes would open up “new possibilities of conferring prestige”¹⁵; on the other hand, prize donors who want to ensure the sustainable success of their international literary prizes have considerable hurdles to overcome (in this context, Jankowicz analyses the case of the limited scope of the European Prize for Literature awarded by the EU and its corresponding ineffectiveness).¹⁶

When looking at opinions on the reception of literary prizes awarded in Poland, one can notice a certain ambivalence. On the one hand, there is the conviction that prizes (while noting the various flaws in the system of awarding them) are an important phenomenon on which much depends: the popularity of the author, the resonance of the readership, the sales of the book, and finally the historical-literary discourse,¹⁷ as well as the possibility of translating or filming the awarded works. As Agnieszka Budnik writes: “they [prizes – PCL’s note] function as an institution that manages the flow of authorial prestige, the activities of publishing houses, the tastes of readers (including critics and jurors), and even the shape of the community (thanks to their influence on the creation of the literary canon).”¹⁸ An important ambition of – at least some – literary prizes is precisely to create movement, to break down existing hierarchies, to intensify discussion, because “conversation complicates and undermines simple relations of dependence, sows ferment [...]”¹⁹ On the other hand, however, there is also a conviction among some critics and researchers that the impact of awards is limited or surface-

14 Jankowicz, “Piękni wygrani,” 137.

15 Ibid., 137.

16 Ibid., 137–140.

17 See Adrian Gleń, *Do-prawdy? Studia i szkice o literaturze najnowszej* [To the truth. Studies and sketches on modern literature] (Opole: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 2012), 21–22.

18 Agnieszka Budnik, “Tomasz Bąk. Jego nagrody” [Tomasz Bąk. His rewards], *Śląskie Studia Polonistyczne* 2 (2021): 1, accessed June 3, 2024, <https://www.journals.us.edu.pl/index.php/SSP/article/view/12208/9548>.

19 Piotr Śliwiński, “Cztery ryzyka i bankiet” [Four Risks and a Banquet], in Piotr Śliwiński, *Horror poeticus* (Biuro Literackie: Wrocław, 2012), 63. Piotr Śliwiński, then a jury member of the award, wrote the following about the goals of the Gdynia Prize: “to raise the level of risk in dealing with literature, [...] to stand on the side of open perspectives, of discussion rather than conclusion, of uncertainty rather than proclamation, [...] to amplify voices that are interesting but suppressed, mainly by routine and indifference.” (Śliwiński, “Cztery ryzyka i bankiet,” 63).

level: they produce only short-lived consequences (mainly amplified by the media²⁰), often “consecrate” existing hierarchies, and, moreover, the reception of the awarded books is limited to dispersed voices, notes or reports – with no increase in deep (close) readings.²¹ Czapliński sums up this ambivalence remarkably well: “we are not a society that is capable of valuing literature without awards, and we are not a society that gets particularly emotional about literature because of awards.”²²

The same is true of academic research on literary prizes. Almost every one of the few scholars exploring this topic notes that it is (not only in Poland) extremely under-researched²³ – both from the side of contemporary literary history and from the theoretical side. Budnik observes that “the vast majority of the writing on literary prizes, however, consists mainly of reviews and critical and journalistic texts that appear on the occasion of successive announcements of lists of winners of competitions and plebiscites. These articles are mainly maintained in an emotional tone or in the form of rankings of works based on unclear criteria. To an even lesser extent, the small number of critical studies captures the aspect of cultural economics and social transformation.”²⁴

Based on previous research on the topic, the study attempts to provide answers to the following questions: how has the Polish literary prize scene changed since Poland joined the EU? How many prizes, which are in the wider European context (including so-called “Euregios,” i.e. bilateral literary prizes), have been launched since 2004? What values and value patterns in the context of European integration are these prizes trying to popularize? What kind of Europe do these prizes represent and which self-image of Poland (its function and role within the EU) can be deduced from the political and aesthetic orientation of the prizes (looking at statutes and programs of the prizes, laudations, and acceptance speeches as well as the lineup of the laureates)?

20 Adela Kobelska, “Co media masowe robią z nagrodą literacką? Nagroda Nike w odbiorze prasowym (1997–2005)” [What do the mass media do with the literary prize? Nike Award in press reception (1997–2005)], *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 3 (2009) and followed by Głęń, *Do-prawdy?* do not include the online environment, which would be an interesting research challenge.

21 Kobelska, “Co media masowe robią z nagrodą literacką?,” 102–103; Głęń, *Do-prawdy?*, 24.

22 Czapliński, “A gdyby nagród literackich nie było?,” 9.

23 Jankowicz, “Piękni wygrani”; Budnik, “Tomasz Bąk. Jego nagrody”; James F. English, *The Economy of Prestige. Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

24 Budnik, “Tomasz Bąk. Jego nagrody,” 40.

List of Polish Europe-Related Literary Prizes

Based on our understanding of what constitutes ELPs, we identify thirteen such prizes in Poland. In the following table we present them through four dimensions:

1. topical – this indicates how important is the reference to European culture in relation to the ELP's overall message,
2. disciplinary – this indicates whether a prize is strictly literary or has a broader range,
3. geocultural – this indicates the geographic and cultural scope of the prize, especially whether it is open for participation for all European nationalities or is somehow limited (e.g. can only be obtained by writers representing a European region),
4. organizational – this defines the organizational entity behind a prize.

	Prize name	Topical dimension (importance of reference to Europe)	Disciplinary dimension	Geocultural scope (awardees criteria)	Organizational dimension
1	European Poet of Freedom	primary reference (awarding creation which embodies a new vision to European community)	literary (poetry)	whole Europe	public (city; Gdansk)
2	Central European Literary Award Angelus [Angelus]	primary reference (awarding literary creation which reflects on Central Europe)	literary (prose)	23 countries from Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe	public (city; Wrocław)
3	Krakow City Council Award Stanislaw Vincenz (previously: New Culture of New Europe) [Vincenz award]	strong reference (awarding contributions which reflect on Central-Eastern Europe)	political (awarding among others personalities of political and cultural life)	Central and Eastern Europe	public (city; Krakow)
4	International Bridge Award (der Internationale Brückepreis) / Nagroda Mostu Europa-Miasta [Bridge award]	strong reference: recognizes contributions that reflect on Europe as a place of intercultural dialogue, cultural exchange	political (awarding among others personalities of political and cultural life)	international (so far, the majority of winners have been European)	association (Society for the Award of the International Bridge Prize of Europe Cities Zgorzelec/ Görlitz)

5	Jerzy Giedroyc Literary Award [Giedroyc award]	weak reference: awards Belarussian writers whose work contributes towards neighborly relations amongst Central-European nations	literary (any work)	Belarusians	public (state: Embassy of Poland in Belarus; Polish Institute in Minsk) and associations (Belarusian PEN Centre, and the Union of Belarussian Writers)
6	Joseph Conrad-Korzeniowski Literary Award [Conrad-Korzeniowski award]	weak reference: awards Ukrainian writers whose work resembles Conrad's work (Conrad-Korzeniowski as a "paneuropean" symbol)	literary (prose)	Ukrainians	public (state: Polish Institute in Kiev)
7	Identitas Award	strong reference: awards creation which contributes to understanding of community embedded in Western, European values	award for contributions to culture: literary (any work), scientific, and popular publications (i. a. historical monographs and works in the field of humanities)	Poles	association (Identitas Foundation)
8	Man of Borderland (title, program, no award)	weak reference: awards contributions that reflect on Europe as a source of values; award for creators of culture from Central Europe, which popularize an idea and ethos of borderland	political (awarding among others personalities of political and cultural life)	Europe (with clear focus on Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltic States)	association (Center Borderland - of arts, cultures, nations)
9	<i>Rzeczpospolita</i> Award	strong reference: awarded to authors who see themselves ideologically in the tradition of Jerzy Giedroyc. One of the author's concerns was "strengthening	political (awarding among others personalities of political and cultural life)	international (so far, the majority of winners have been Poles)	newspaper (<i>Rzeczpospolita</i>)

		Poland's position in Europe and maintaining good relations with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe."			
10	Leopold Staff Literary Award [Staff award]	weak reference to European cultural memory; the award recognizes the engagement with Italian art	award for contributions to culture: entire spectrum of literary production and practices (translators, publishers, literary critics; rarely: literature), scientific and popular publications (i. a. historical monographs and works in the field of humanities)	Poles	newspaper (Lente magazine) and private/company (Antich' Caffè)
11	Zbigniew Herbert International Literary Award [Herbert Award]	weak reference: awards contributions that reflect on Europe as a source of values (values such as freedom are explicitly described here as universal)	literary (poetry)	international (so far, the majority of winners have been European)	association (Herbert Foundation)
12	Trakl competition	weak reference: The prize awards literary works that relate to the atmosphere of the Georg Trakl's poetry, an Austrian author whose literary works are strongly influenced by the First World War	literary (poetry); since 2015 a competition for amateurs	Poles	public (state: Consulate General of the Republic of Austria in Krakow) and association (Foundation for the Promotion of Culture "Urwany Film")
13	New Europe Ambassador	primary reference: awards "books that boldly and uncompromisingly	award for contributions to culture: entire spectrum of literary production	international (so far, the majority of winners have been European; clear focus on	association (European Solidarity Center in Gdansk, Jan Nowak-Jeziorański

		destroy existing stereotypes and clichés that define Europe and its inhabitants and seek answers to what Europe is today.”	and practices (translators, publishers, literary critics), scientific and popular publications (i.a. historical monographs and works in the field of humanities), literary (multiple genres, i.a. comics)	Central and Eastern Europe)	College of Eastern Europe in Wrocław)
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Table 1. List of Polish ELPs.

Topical Dimension of ELPs

A look at the prizes’ documentation (their agendas and respective epi- and peritexts such as jury decisions, lists of prizewinners, laudations, acceptance speeches) makes it clear that the prizes differ not only in terms of the values they seek to convey, but also in how strongly the respective reference to Europe is expressed. The fact that Europe is the central point of reference is clearly evident in all those ELPs that leave no doubt from the title alone that they pursue a political program, such as the European Poet of Freedom, the Central European Literary Award Angelus or the Ambassador of New Europe (we call this a “primary reference” to Europe). A strong reference, on the other hand, can be established for those prizes that inform in their statutes that the prize is located in the context of the discussion about Europe, European values, the European literary canon, and the cultural heritage of Europe (Vincenz Award, Bridge Award, Identitas Award, Rzeczpospolita Award). On the other hand, the reference is described as weak if Europe is mentioned neither in the title nor in the epi- and peritexts of the prize, but the self-description reveals references to a transnational (sometimes European) debate about values, identity, politics, and aesthetics (Trakl Competition, Man of Borderland, Herbert Award, Giedroyc Award and Conrad-Korzeniowski Award).

In many cases, prizes affirm a certain heteronomy and functionalize literature for the sake of non-literary values. In order to be able to analyze the specific role that prizes play in the process of European identity formation and integration, it is necessary to clarify which axiological values prize donors adopt in order to develop their own vision of Europe.²⁵ In order to

25 According to Jankowicz, this constitutes a major motivation for prize donors: “the establishment of a prize is sought by institutions (private as well as state) in order to increase their dominance in the process of cultural value production, i.e. to somehow bring an area of the social field under control.” (Jankowicz, “Piękni wygrani,” 122).

better understand Polish ELPs' topical dimension (as we call it in this paper), we identified – in the prizes' agendas and their documentation – the following four categories of values and value patterns: 1) Europe as a pan-European community; 2) Europe as a source of values (inter alia peace, freedom and tolerance); 3) as a place of intercultural dialogue, transnational understanding and the preservation of cultural diversity; 4) as a place with a rich cultural heritage. Admittedly, a classification according to such criteria is not quite easy to accomplish, as the categories overlap in some aspects and the self-descriptions of the awards are sometimes very general.

1) The only award that can be assigned to this category (in the strictest sense) is the European Poet of Freedom. The prize donors remain very vague in their definition of Europe, but at the same time, make it clear that they see the cultural-political function of the prize in European community building, cultural-political integration, and European identity building, as can be seen from the prize's self-description published online: "the adjective [European – authors' note] obviously refers to geography, which, however, can prove to be complex, especially in the present day. Europe, to which the Poet of Freedom refers, is not just a territory [sic – authors' note]; it is a project of community. The community, particularly in the context of modern-day Europe, cannot be discussed in isolation from politics, although not the politics understood as local tentative interests of one group or another. The politics of the 'European Poet of Freedom' is aimed at creating and shaping new ways of coexistence for millions of people"²⁶ (PP/EPF). By pointing out that authors are honored for their courage to "oppose existing forms in language and politics,"²⁷ the prize committee makes it clear, on the one hand, that the community – according to its conception – should not only be preserved, but actively shaped with the means of art. Interestingly, this perspective makes it necessary for the prize to bring into play not only ideological but also aesthetic criteria of valorization.

2) Regardless of whether the reference to Europe is primary, strong or weak, the awards often paint a picture of Europe as the source and preserver of core values (such as peace, human rights, democracy, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for other cultures and religions, respect for nature and the environment). The evaluation criteria for the Herbert Award are also undoubtedly ideological in nature, when the prize committee highlights the namesake

26 The abbreviations of the names of the awards given in parentheses refer to the official websites of the literary awards from which the quoted fragments come. The list of websites together with the list of abbreviations can be found in the appendix to the article "Appendix: Prize Profiles (online)."

27 Ibid.

(Polish poet, essayist, and moralist Zbigniew Herbert) above all as a mediator of moral values such as “tolerance.” With emphatic undertones and an unmistakably time- and culture-critical perspective on today’s world – “seemingly sinking ever deeper into a marasmic state of ethical and metaphysical chaos” – the founders of the Herbert Award invoke literature as a place of healing that facilitates the “exchange of ideas, values, and contemporary experiences.” Literature – understood here in its broadest sense as “artistic creation” – is seen as a “tool of compassion” that should open readers’ eyes to “other people, other languages, other sufferings...” (PP/HA).

3) One of the central values which the prizes’ agendas refer to or imply is Europe as a place of intercultural dialogue, cultural exchange, and intellectual networking (such as the Angelus, the Vincenz Prize, and the Conrad-Korzeniowski Award). Angelus, according to the statutes, “is directly connected with the centuries-long tradition of Breslau as a city of encounter and dialogue. Because of its history and location, Wrocław has always been a place where different nations, cultures, and intellectual currents have intersected.” The award, therefore, honors authors “whose works address current issues, provoke thought, and expand knowledge about other cultures” (PP/A).

As is evident in some cases, the ideological orientation is also realized in concrete initiatives. In the case of the Identitas Award, winning the prize is also linked to participation in a workshop on the Arctic island of Uloya. The Man of Borderland provides the winner with the prospect of popularizing his or her work and thus also contributes to the transcultural transmission of literature and values.²⁸ Consequently, intercultural dialogue is in many cases not only a value to be defended, but it is linked to concrete cultural-political and literary initiatives and measures, as shown, for example, by the Giedroyc Award and the Conrad-Korzeniowski Award,²⁹ which contribute to the popularization of Belarusian and Ukrainian literature. In the longer term,

28 On the award website it says: “the awarding of such a title does not constitute a reward in any material form. It means an effort to popularize his work by publishing books, organizing exhibitions, meetings with authors and other artistic presentations. The culminating event of this project during the year will be a three-day international meeting dedicated to a selected artist, with the participation of people who will come to present various aspects of the life and work of the ‘Man of Borderland,’ or present their own artistic works dedicated to him” (PP/MOB).

29 With regard to the Conrad-Korzeniowski Prize, it is also interesting to see how prizes try to generate attention for themselves and their laureates by choosing a namesake with European appeal. The prize’s homepage says: “we also want to draw attention to Polish artists who, like Józef Conrad-Korzeniowski, were born in what is now Ukraine and who, although they have an impact on world culture, are not associated with either Poland or Ukraine” (PP/CKA).

these initiatives contribute to a dynamisation of the development of a more integrated European literary field – they can also be understood as part of that process which Anna Schoon subsumes under “Europeanization.”³⁰

4) Some awards conceptualize Europe as a high culture of artistic creation (Staff, Trakl) and as a place of rich cultural heritage to be preserved and productively expanded with new, innovative literature and art. One example is the Staff Award, which is given under the patronage of Leopold Staff, a Polish poet and translator whose work is strongly influenced by Mediterranean culture, for “outstanding academic, translational and popularizing achievements related to Italian culture.” Especially the prizes that bear a namesake in the title can be assigned to this category (see PP/SA), such as the Trakl Competition, which refers by name to the Austrian expressionist Georg Trakl, whose work is permeated by the topoi of death and decay, destruction and the experience of the First World War.

Disciplinary Dimension of ELPs

One of ELPs’ core characteristics is their 1) disciplinary focus on awarding literature, which means in the most common sense the author’s lifetime achievements (such as the Herbert Award) or one specific work (such as Angelus or European Poet of Freedom, etc.). Polish ELPs are awarded for literary works of a certain genre (Angelus awards prizes for prose), and in some cases the prize program even goes hand in hand with a re-evaluation of certain literary forms and subgenres that were previously considered only marginally literary. For example, the winners of the New Europe Ambassador include comic book authors. It seems significant, however, that the prizes with the widest reach – the “Poet of Freedom” and the Herbert Prize (see geocultural dimension) – both focus on the genre of poetry. This is interesting in that literary prizes that overtly bring extra-literary value criteria into play (see topical dimension) often award prose and generally tend to qualify literature according to social relevance and socio-critical seriousness, thus narrowing it to a “leading medium of the discourse on social values.”³¹ The two prizes illustrate that this rule cannot be claimed

30 Anna Schoon subsumes under “Europeanization” (Schoon, “Europäische Integration,” 350).

31 Christoph Jürgensen, “Würdige Popularität? Überlegungen zur Konsekrationsinstanz ‘Literaturpreis’ im gegenwärtigen literarischen Feld,” in *Poetiken der Gegenwart. Deutschsprachige Romane nach 2000*, ed. Silke Horstkotte and Leonhard Herrmann (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 297; Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 228–249; Heribert Tommek, “Die internationale Ökonomie der ‘besten Romane des Jahres’: Der Deutsche Buchpreis im Beziehungsgeflecht mit dem Prix Goncourt und dem

for the Polish ELP scene. Topical and disciplinary dimensions are closely linked here, when the Poet of Freedom connects the marginalized role of poetry³² – at least between the lines – with the call for more diversity.³³

2) Awards for contributions to culture: even a quick glance at the Polish ELPs shows that the umbrella term “literature” refers to the entire spectrum of literary production and practices, as prizes are also awarded to other key players in the literary world, as can be seen from the Staff Award, which also honors publishers (such as Tatarak Publishing House in 2022), scientists and scientific organizations (ItaliAMO in 2021), and literary institutions (Dramatic Theater of the Capital City of Warsaw in 2020).³⁴

Booker Prize,” in *Literaturpreise. Geschichte und Kontexte*, ed. Christoph von Jürgensen and Antonius Weixler (Berlin: Metzler, 2021), 159–161.

- 32 Poetry in Poland is marginal in the sense that after 1989 it became a more niche, low-circulation phenomenon, overwhelmed as much by prose as by mass culture in general. Despite this, it is possible to speak of a belief in the high rank of poetry and its irreplaceability by other discourses. This is reinforced both by the prestigious prizes for poetry awarded in Poland (apart from the EPW – Silesius, Gdynia) and the important literary initiatives promoting it. As the curator of the Poznań of the Poets Festival puts it, the essence of this contradictory status: “poetry thus already seems completely unnecessary, and yet it remains important because it digs into that delightful hammock [the cult of pleasure – authors’ note] of ours in which we happily recline.” “*Wiersze wywracają grilla*. Rozmowa z Piotrem Słowińskim,” Sebastian Gabryel, *Kultura u Podstaw. Wielkopolska*, accessed March 2, 2024, <https://kulturaupodstaw.pl/piotr-slowinski-wiersze-wywracaja-grilla/>.
- 33 “At the very foundation of the European Poet of Freedom Literary Award lies the idea of connecting and popularizing various communities, languages and literary visions of our world” (see PP/EPF).
- 34 Significant in this context is that translators have lately been awarded with literary prizes, which have led in recent years to a greater public awareness of translators’ work as part of an artistic-aesthetic practice. The work of translators is, as the organizers of the European Poet of Freedom state, “of great significance since we tend to forget about those without whom we would be locked within the restricting borders of our mother tongues” (PP/EPF). Accordingly, the prize sponsors distribute PLN 20,000 to the translators of the main prize-winning work, which corresponds to about twenty percent of the total sum. Translator prizes not only promote the re-evaluation of an art form that is often marginalized in the context of the evaluation of literariness, they also draw attention to the often overlooked agents of a highly transculturally oriented literary practice, and thus incidentally create awareness of formal asymmetries within the European literary and literary prize landscape (Sapiro, “The Metamorphosis of Modes,” 139–140; Tommek, “Die internationale Ökonomie,” 198f.). We have decided not to include prizes intended exclusively for literary translators in the group analyzed here, for several reasons. Firstly, they are not, in the strict sense of the word, literary prizes and they are, as it were, international by definition, and not including the criterion of Europeaness in any of them would be a kind of

In the context of this article prizes which are awarded not (only) to authors, but for achievements in the field of literature, are referred to as “awards for contributions to culture.” This category shall also include (for the sake of simplicity) those prizes that honor artists and scholars in the fields of visual and performing arts, music, architecture, design, film, and photography, as well as authors of historical monographs and works in the field of the humanities. Of the thirteen prizes examined, three (the aforementioned Staff Award, Identitas and the New Europe Ambassador³⁵) fall into this category, which (to reiterate) is distinguished by the fact that it not only honors literary works, but also rewards artistic and cultural achievements and contributions that go beyond them.

3) Even more fundamental for the area of Polish ELPs seems to be the mechanism, characteristic of valorization processes, whereby literary or aesthetic and extra-literary (e.g. moral) value regimes mix with each other, e.g. literary works are evaluated according to criteria that have extra-literary – that is, social or socio-cultural – significance and “place literature in the context of cultural values and goals.”³⁶ These valorization practices are reflected precisely in the prizes awarded to public figures (Politicians and political activists, diplomats, journalists, etc.) for their political and social achievements like the Bridge Award, whose winners include, for example, the Luxembourgian EU politician Jean-Claude Juncker (2014) or the Ukrainian professional boxer and politician Vitali Kliczko (2014). Often, however, they are awarded to writers³⁷ – for the importance of themes addressed in literature, but also for extra-literary statements, ideological or political commitment – or at least: to people associated with literature. Next to the Bridge Award, the Vincenz Award, Man of Borderland and the Rzeczpospolita Award can be assigned to this category.

narrowing down. However, it is worth noting that such translation prizes as the *Literatura na Świecie* Prize (1973–2023) or the Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński Translation Prize (2013–2023, every 2 years) enjoy considerable prestige. Sometimes the prizes for translators are also parts of “bigger” prizes (including European ones): in the case of the Gdynia Prize (as well as the Staff Prize), translation is one of the categories honored; in the case of Angelus and EPW, a prize is also given to the translator of an awarded non-Polish book.

35 Launched in 2011, the Ambassador of New Europe awards a publisher and author (mostly in the field of cultural history or biography) at the same time.

36 Alexandra Pontzen, Dennis Borghardt and Sarah Maaß, “Zu viel des Guten? Ein neuer Forschungsansatz zu Vielzahl und Vielfalt deutscher Literaturpreise,” in *Literaturpreise. Geschichte und Kontexte*, 70.

37 On the question of the contemporary significance of the author as a political-public persona, see Śliwiński, “Cztery ryzyka i bankiet,” 64.

Geocultural Dimensions of ELPs

Polish ELPs differ significantly in their geocultural understanding of Europe. Ideally, Europe-related literary prizes engage in a trans-national consecration practice, that is they are usually addressed to authors from the whole of Europe, although of course the interpretation of which entity is meant by “Europe” varies greatly. Do the prizes refer to Europe in its institutional-bureaucratic form, or does it mean a geographically conceived continental Europe or, for instance, a European “cultural area?”

1) In the context of the Polish ELP scene, only the European Poet of Freedom has a pan-European scope. If one were to apply the criteria of the European Union Prize for Literature (EUPL), the only literary prize sponsored and fully financed by the European Commission (with high authority in the question of what can be seen as Europe), then since the conception of the European Poet of Freedom in 2010, the prize has been awarded four times to writers from one of the member states of the European Union (Germany, Croatia, Romania, Northern Ireland³⁸), once to a writer from an EEA country (Iceland), twice to writers from (potential) candidate countries for accession (Albania and Ukraine), and to a writer from Belarus, a country excluded by the EUPL on the basis of its political conception of Europe – but which belongs to Europe culturally, geographically or geologically, according to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN/DESA). The perspective on Europe as a “community project” also gives the prize donors of the European Poet of Freedom the corresponding scope to define this European community itself territorially and to constitute it through their specific prize practice.

What is true to a much greater extent for the prizes in the next category, but can be observed in the line-up of prize winners of the European Poet of Freedom, is that despite its pan-European orientation, the prize has a strong Central and Eastern European tilt.

2) An important geocultural limitation of the European dimension of Polish prizes is the functionalization of literary prizes to deepen Poland’s intercultural relations with a neighboring country. This category includes the Giedroyc Prize and the Conrad-Korzeniowski Prize, which are aimed only at authors in Belarus and Ukraine, respectively. In addition, there are prizes that have a clear focus on authors from a – in each case differently defined and scaled – larger cluster of Central and Eastern European countries. Besides, the Angelus which explicitly labels this in its title, this applies above all to

³⁸ In 2020, when the prize was awarded to the Northern Irish poet Sinéad Morrissey, Northern Ireland was still part of the European Union. In 2014, when the prize was awarded to Croatian author Dorta Jagić, Croatia had been part of the European Union for one year.

Vincenz Award. In connection with these geocultural restrictions, a pattern can be discerned which we call Central Eastern European tilt and which we will discuss later.

3) The definition of ELPs also allows to consider prizes with a broader geocultural range as European, but still even for these theoretically broader prizes most of the winners have been from Europe (or, as can be seen in the example of the Man of Borderland and the New Europe Ambassador, authors mainly from Central and Eastern Europe). This pertains to the Bridge Award as well as to the Herbert Award, which in its ten-year history has been awarded six times to European authors, three times to US authors and once to a South African-French author (2017 – Breyten Breytenbach). By stating that the award is intended to “promote Poland’s cultural contribution – especially in the field of poetry – to the development of world literature, manifested in the exchange of ideas, values, and contemporary experiences” (PP/HA), the statutes make it clear that the award sees itself as an instrument to elevate Polish literature and literary scene to an international stage.

4) In some cases ELPs exclusively honor authors from the country of the awarding institution, which of course only partially does justice to the European idea. In these cases, prizes, donors, and juries award authors who, in their “own” country or in the territory of the national language, have contributed to the dissemination of ideological or aesthetic discourses that are situated in a European frame of reference. In Poland, this applies to the Trakd Competition, Staff Award and Identitas Award. The latter honors authors who – according to the statutes – “critically address the issues of the persistence, preservation, construction or dismantling of collective identities in the modern world,” which have developed “primarily thanks to the foundation of European culture, that is, Western culture in the broadest sense of the word” (PP/IA). However, the prize is aimed exclusively at Polish authors.

Organizational Dimensions of ELPs

Patterns can also be discerned with regard to the institutional anchoring of the prizes, which are significant in terms of their content and geocultural references to Europe. Basically, literary prizes with a European program can be roughly divided into the following three categories: 1) prizes donated by EU institutions (including, in the narrowest sense, only the European Union Prize for Literature, which was launched by the European Commission in 2009 as part of the European cultural funding program Creative Europe); 2) prizes sponsored by European (member) states and their (state and city) organizations, and 3) those that are donated by various cultural institutions, foundations, associations, companies, publishers or private individuals.

As for the Polish literary award landscape, six prizes with a European focus are awarded by the public sector, including three prizes that are donated by state institutions and three by City Council organizations. What is striking with regard to the prizes sponsored by state institutions is that all can be seen as a cultural policy activity seeking an impact on the cultural and literary landscapes of neighboring states. This is particularly evident in the case of the Giedroyc Award and Conrad-Korzeniowski Award, which are (co-)financed and (co-)organized by significant state institutions of Poland (the Embassy of Poland in Belarus along with the Polish Institute in Minsk, and the Polish Institute in Kyiv, respectively). With the Trakl Competition, founded in 1992 and discontinued five years later, it was the Austrian state, more precisely the Austrian Consul General in Krakow under Emil Brix, that became culturally involved in Poland's cultural scene and founded the country's first European Literature Prize there. In 2015, the prize, endowed with 1200 Zloty, was revived and awarded for three years in cooperation with the Polish "Urwany Film" Foundation as part of the Austria Days in Krakow. The reasons for seeking cooperation with explicitly non-governmental cultural institutions for the Trakl Competition – similar to the Giedroyc Award, in which the Belarusian PEN Centre and the Union of Belarusian Writers are involved – can be found in the fact that the organization of the literary prizes (the actual handling, appointment of the jury, press work, etc.) is dependent on the help of organizations that are better anchored in the literary and cultural field and operate far more effectively. Furthermore, they might have intended to cushion the accusation that they were interfering in the cultural affairs of foreign states in the case of Polish-Belarusian relations.

The founders of the other awards examined in this study are mainly foundations with a cultural-political impetus (such as the Society for the Award of the International Bridge Prize of the European Cities of Zgorzelec/Görlitz and Identitas Foundation, both of which were founded specifically to establish a literary award, Center Borderland – of Arts, Cultures, Nations, Foundation for Zbigniew Herbert, Europejskie Centrum Solidarności Gdańsk, Kolegium Europy Wschodniej im. Jana Nowaka Jeziorańskiego, Wrocław), newspapers (such as *Rzeczpospolita* and *Lente magazine*) and a coffee house (Café Lente).

Diachronic Development of European-Related Prizes in Poland

Did Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004 accelerate the unfolding of the ELP landscape? A diachronic view of the development of the prize landscape discussed here shows how strongly the institutional and cultural measures for Poland's integration into the EU intertwine. The fact that nine out of thirteen of the prizes examined were launched after Poland's accession

to the EU can be read as a clear indication that Poland's membership has brought about an intensification of the debate on the literary space of Europe at the level of cultural policy.

The development of Polish ELPs can be divided into three main periods: first, the period before Poland's accession to the EU (1989–2003); second, the immediate years after accession (2004–2009); and third, the period from 2010 to 2015.

First phase: out of the thirteen prizes that are the subject of this analysis, only four were established before Poland's accession to the European Union, namely the Trakl Competition in 1992 and the Bridge Prize in 1993, and a few years later the Man of Borderland (1999) and the Rzeczpospolita Award. Regarding the first two prize foundations, it is striking that the initiative did not come (or did not come alone) from Polish institutions, but rather from political actors and associations of the surrounding countries, Austria (the Austrian Consul General in Krakow Emil Brix) and Germany (Society for the Award of the International Bridge Prize of the European Cities of Zgorzelec/Görlitz).

Award	1993	1994	1996	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Angelus (L)																												
European Poet of Freedom (L)																												
Vincenz Award																												
Bridge Award																												
Głodyc Award (L)																												
Conrad-Korzeniowski Award (L)																												
Herbert Award (L)																												
Staff Award																												
Trakl Competition																												
Man of Borderland																												
Rzeczpospolita Award																												
Identitas Award (L)																												
New Europe Ambassador																												

Table 2. Diachronic distribution of Polish literary prizes.

Second phase: in each of the three years following Poland's accession to the EU, an ELP was launched in Poland – the Vincenz Prize in 2005, the Angelus in 2006, and the Conrad Korzeniowski Prize in 2007. In the first two cases, the cities of Wrocław and Krakow (and a few years later, with the European Poet of Freedom, Gdansk) used the literature prize as an instrument to propagate Europe as a cultural-political value. The cities also have in common their proximity to the border and their historically strong roots in Central and Western European (especially Prussian and Austrian) culture. In terms of their topical dimension (Europe as a place of intercultural exchange and peacekeeping) and their geocultural transnational orientation (albeit with an unmistakable focus on Eastern Europe), the ELPs donated by municipal institutions share a comparatively strong references to Europe.

It should not be forgotten that not only Europe benefits from the cultural-political popularization measures of the cities by means of literary prizes, but conversely also the cities from the label Europe – it is not for nothing that the city prizes presented here already bear or bore the label Europe in

their names,³⁹ in contrast to all other prizes, with the exception of the Bridge Award. The establishment of prizes of this format can also be justified by the fact that transnational cultural practices represent an essential part of a city's self-presentation as a cosmopolitan metropolis, which can also be exploited for tourism.⁴⁰

Third phase: in the period from 2010 to 2015, when there was a literary award foundation almost every year except for 2012, it was mainly cultural foundations that became active: Vincenz Award (2010), Giedroyc Award and New Europe Ambassador (2011), Herbert Award (2013), Identitas Award (2014), Leopold Staff Award (2015). In addition, the Trakl Award was re-established in 2015 after an interruption of almost nineteen years.

The reason why after 2015 no more awards were given, can only be speculated. Given the growth dynamics of Polish literary prizes with an EU focus, the increase in prizes of this format since EU accession may have given the impression that the market is saturated. From the perspective that the literary prize scene should also be thought of as a network in which the literary prizes are also in a competitive relationship for attention, it should not be disregarded that ELPs also have to assert their uniqueness first and thus their "raison d'être."⁴¹

However, we could argue that the market is far from saturation in terms of pan-European prizes as only European Poet of Freedom (a prize limited to poetry) occupies this space. If this hypothesis were to hold ground, it would mean that the Polish literary market is incredibly shallow.

The fact that no prizes with a pan-European appeal were established by the state may not be surprising, since the right-wing conservative party PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) [Law and justice], which won the elections in 2015 and 2019, does not hide its skepticism about Europe and European Union. It is not surprising that the Polish state does not aim to increase awareness about the EU or does not prioritize cultural relations with Western Europe. The lack of prizes is still noteworthy as a cultural policy, as we could imagine other policies being implemented (e.g. pan-European prizes with a conservative spin, etc.). However, PiS foreign policy was far more oriented toward exchanges with Eastern European countries, and since – as will be shown below – the Polish landscape of ELPs seemed saturated with awards focused on Eastern Europe, hence the establishment of new ones with similar agenda did not seem necessary.

39 European Poet of Freedom, Central European Literary Award Angelus, Award of the Krakow City Council Stanisława Vincenz (previously: New Culture of New Europe).

40 Borghardt and Maaß, *Der Wert der Preise*.

41 Borghardt, Maaß and Pontzen, *Literaturpreise. Geschichte, Theorie und Praxis*, 74.

Understanding the Central-Eastern European Tilt

The geocultural limitation of the European dimension of prizes exhibits a pattern that we call the Central-Eastern European tilt. The data collection carried out as part of this work has shown that all the prizes considered here are situated (to varying extents) in a Central and/or Eastern European context, whether in terms of their topical, geocultural or organizational dimension.

Both the bilaterally oriented prizes (Bridge Award, Trakl Competition, Giedroyc Award and Conrad-Korzeniowski Award) and the prizes that are not radically pan-European but have a scope encompassing several European countries (Angelus, Vincenz Award, Man of Borderland Award and New Europe Ambassador Award) show a conspicuous centering on Central and Eastern Europe in their award practice, and that, regardless of how strong their European reference is on a topical level.

The picture thickens when we look at the percentage distribution of countries from which the winners of Polish ELPs come. If all literary prizes within the scope of analysis are taken together, then a total of 37,3 percent of the laureates are from Poland itself. The majority of laureates come from the neighboring country Ukraine (20,3 percent), 18,3 percent from Belarus, and 2,0 percent from three countries: Germany, Czechia and Austria, the first two of which are Poland's neighbors. Noteworthy is the presence of the USA (1,3 percent), as the only country outside Europe.

Nationality of winners of Polish ELPs

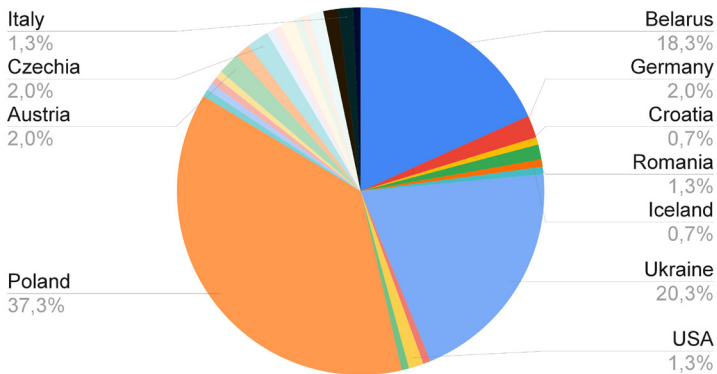


Figure 3. Nationality of winners of Polish ELPs.

In order to test the thesis stating that even the prizes that have a trans-national (in a sense European) orientation ultimately have a strong Central or Eastern European orientation, it seems useful to disregard for a moment the five prizes that are aimed exclusively at authors from a single country such as Conrad-Korzeniowski Award (Ukraine), Giedroyc Award (Belarus), Trakl Award, Identitas Award, and the Staff Prize (all Poland). In this case, the picture is as follows.

Nationality of winners of selected Polish ELPs

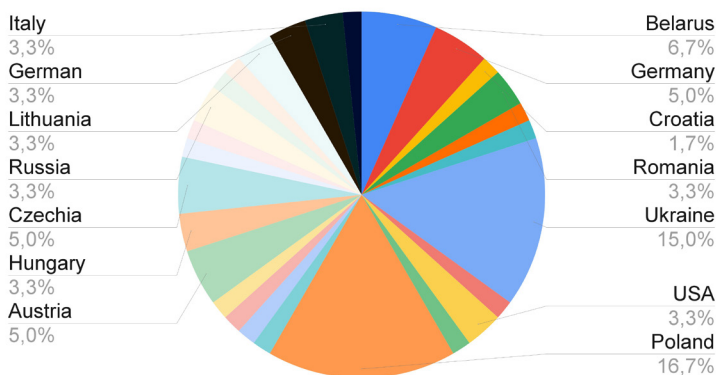


Figure 4. Nationality of winners of selected Polish ELPs.

The strong focus primarily on Eastern European awards correlates with the almost complete absence of award winners from Western, Southwestern, and Northern Europe. In the history of Polish ELPs since 1994, there are no prize winners from Spain, Portugal, France, Ireland, Norway, Finland, the Netherlands, and Belgium; only one author each was awarded a prize from Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, and Sweden; there are four prize winners from Austria (three times Martin Pollack), three from Great Britain (once Northern Ireland), and nine from Germany (twice Durs Grünbein).⁴²

However, if one asks how Central and Eastern Europe (culturally or territorially) is defined in the prize profiles, a partly unclear picture emerges, as can be seen for example in the context of the Angelus. If one follows the

⁴² Apart from the Staff Award, which is dedicated to the cultural heritage of the Mediterranean, Italian culture, there are no other awards dedicated to the intercultural exploration of the countries, cultures, languages and traditions of Western, Southwestern and Northern Europe.

proposal of the Standing Committee for Geographical Names (StAGN), a Frankfurt-based expert body responsible for the standardization of geographical names in German-speaking countries, whose proposals are not legally binding, only eleven of the twenty-two countries nominated for the Angelus Award would be assigned to Central Europe: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Macedonia, the Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Ukraine, and Belarus would be assigned to Eastern and Southern Europe. The geopolitical definition of Central Europe that the prize donors make here might aim at anchoring Poland's eastern and southern neighbors even more firmly as a "central" part of Europe, its identity, and its culture of memory. Moreover, the Angelus Award donors accentuate a self-image of Poland as a mediating authority within Central Europe as well as in the more eastern regions of the then constituent republics of the USSR.⁴³

The chronology of the Angelus Award winners shows how ELPs function as a political instrument, this is evident when ethical criteria in the jury's decision-making process take precedence over aesthetic ones. Only one country besides Hungary (the prize went to Hungarian authors twice) has produced several laureates, namely Ukraine with no less than four laureates. The awards given to Ukrainian authors are to be read as direct reflections on events in the country's recent history: on the Orange Revolution of 2004, on the Euromaidan, that is the protests that lasted from November 2013 to February 2014 following the announcement by the Ukrainian government that it did not want to sign the planned association agreement with the European Union, or on the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and finally a reflection on Putin's incipient provocations in the run-up to the Russian invasion of February 2022. With Yuri Andrukhovych (first edition in 2006), Oksana Stefanivna Zabuzhko (2013) and Kharkiv-based Serhiy Zhadan (2015), Angelus has been awarded not only to renowned Ukrainian writers who have repeatedly addressed Russia's cultural chauvinist attitude towards the emancipation movements of the former Soviet republics in their works. It is worth noting that these aforementioned writers were intensively involved in the events of 2004 and 2013/2014 both as activists and reporters (for international media).

43 The valorisation of literary works according to the criterion of how they illustrate or strengthen Poland's importance in Europe and its diplomatic position in Central and Eastern Europe is also evident in the Rzeczpospolita Prize, when the statutes state: "the award is given to people or institutions who follow Jerzy Giedroyc's principles, show selfless concern for public affairs, strengthen Poland's position in Europe and cultivate good relations with the nations of Central and Eastern Europe" (PP/RA).

Categories of Europeanness and Central Europeanness are not only relevant in the context of ELPs, but are also vigorously discussed in Polish literature and in the humanities as a whole. Current discussions on the specificity of Central and Eastern Europe are preceded by a long history, which includes, among other things, an intensified interest in this subject in the post-war period⁴⁴ (in Poland, this is particularly the case of Czesław Miłosz's essays⁴⁵) and reflections already in the twenty-first century supported by the tools of postcolonial studies with roots going back to Enlightenment.⁴⁶ It is also impossible not to see the connection of this discussion and Poland's location as a borderland area, belonging to Central and Eastern Europe, but right on the border with the West, or perhaps: between the West and the East. As such, Poland combines the experience of the poor, grey decades behind the Iron Curtain, the heritage of Enlightenment universalism, and the homeliness and richness of the imagination of the 'uncanny Slavs'⁴⁷ (Maria Janion's term). Such a dual valorization of the East (Middle East) of Europe as, on the one hand, inferior (underdeveloped, poorer, dragging behind it the baggage of political enslavement) and, on the other hand,

44 As Magdalena Brodacka reports: "there were many years of lively discussions about Central and Eastern European identity in émigré Polish periodicals." See Magdalena Brodacka, "W lustrze literatury – czesko-polski mit środkowoeuropejski i jego przeobrażenia" [In the mirror of literature – Czech-Polish Central European myth and its transformations], *Konteksty Kultury* 6 (2019).

45 For Czesław Miłosz European identity was such an acute subject, that it is often already found in the title of a work: the essays *Rodzina Europa* (Paryż: Instytut Literacki, 1959) (the title's literal translation is "Family Europe", but English and German translations are non-literal: *Native Realm, West und Östliches Gelände*) and *O naszej Europie* [On our Europe] (1986), or the well-known poem *Dziecię Europy* [Child of Europe] (1946). And already in the first of these texts the non-obvious relations between the European and Central (Eastern) European identity of the Polish resident and the issues of inferiority and privilege of Central and Eastern Europe come to the fore. See Małgorzata Zemła, "Jedność Europy. Kilka uwag o relacjach Wschód–Zachód w *Rodzinnej Europie* Czesława Miłosza" [Unity of Europe. A few remarks on East-West relations in Czesław Miłosz's *Family Europe*], *Konteksty Kultury* 6 (2019).

46 As Kostkiewiczowa notes, referring to L. Wolff's thesis: "it was the Enlightenment that introduced the concept of Eastern Europe opposed to the West, deepening – paradoxically – the idea of division and differentiation." See Teresa Kostkiewiczowa, *Polski wiek światła. Obszary swoistości* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2002), 30; Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe. The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 5.

47 Maria Janion, *Niesamowita Słowiańszczyzna. Fantazmaty literatury* [Uncanny Slavdom. Phantasms] of literature (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2007).

better (undiscovered, therefore more interesting, richer,⁴⁸ more authentic, less unified and globalized than the West), impacts the “direction” of transnational awards and the flow of ideas.

The relevance of this discussion is demonstrated by Krzysztof Czyżewski – creator of the Man of the Borderland project and currently head juror of the European Poet of Freedom award: “on the one hand, I understand Central Europeanism as an attempt to enter places and spaces that we still do not fully cultivate. This is for various reasons, not least because the history of these places has been largely silent, hypocritical or peripheral. One that was a little ashamed, one that was easy to escape and leave. It is about developing a place that encompasses everything that has been rejected, misrepresented, everything that hurts, that is not the same as elsewhere, does not shine like pop culture, or does not look like it does in the West. It’s about seeing the treasure in that, which has spiritual potential and mystery.”⁴⁹

The dominance of topics related to Central- and Eastern Europe should not be conceived as an oppositional stance towards the vision of a common and united Europe, it is rather a reflection of the creative tension between those two visions which has a rich tradition in Polish literary and humanities intellectual history. There are numerous examples of this tradition, from Miłosz’s *Family Europe*, to important essays from the last two decades, such as Maria Janion: *Do Europy tak, ale razem z naszymi umarłymi* (2000),⁵⁰ Aleksander Fiut: *Być (albo nie być) Środkowoeuropejczykiem* (1999),⁵¹ Yuri Andrukowych and Andrzej Stasiuk: *Moja Europa. Dwa eseje o Europie zwanej Środkową* (2018).⁵² This also brings to mind other non-obviousness, for instance: the

48 In Miłosz’s statements, the sense of backwardness is outweighed by “the privilege of coming from improbable lands, where it is difficult to escape history, but where supernatural forces, devilish and angelic, are also present in a way that my Western colleagues find difficult to comprehend.” See Czesław Miłosz, “Z poezją polską przeciw światu” [With Polish poetry against the world], in *Życie na wyspach* (Kraków: Znak, 1998), 129.

49 “Środkowoeuropejskość mierzy się z jądrem ciemności. Z Krzysztofem Czyżewskim rozmawia Magdalena Brodacka,” *Konteksty Kultury* 16 (2) (2019): 261.

50 Maria Janion, *Do Europy tak, ale razem z naszymi umarłymi* [To Europe - yes, but together with our dead] (Warszawa: Sic!, 2000).

51 Aleksander Fiut, *Być (albo nie być) Środkowoeuropejczykiem* [To be (or not to be) a Central European] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1999).

52 Jurij Andrukowych and Andrzej Stasiuk, *Moja Europa. Dwa eseje o Europie zwanej Środkową* [My Europe. Two essays on a Europe called Central] (Wołowiec: Czarne, 2000).

multiplicity of attempts to delimit the midpoint of Europe,⁵³ the fuzziness of the borders of Central Europe – for example the question of whether Austria⁵⁴ belongs to it according to the creators of the Angelus award, as well as the diversity of identities of individual nations.

In addition to demonstrating the potential of (Central) European literatures, the literary prizes awarded in Poland sometimes bring out unexpectedly important considerations of their own, referred to by Czyżewski as “security considerations,” related to the need to discuss painful matters, to unmask history, and to protect against nationalism.⁵⁵ This ethical dimension of Polish ELPs has become apparent during the last two years due to the war in Ukraine and the dissolution of Belarusian institutions which impacted both the Conrad-Korzeniowski and Giedroyc prizes. Victoria Amelina, the last winner of the Conrad-Korzeniowski Prize, died due to wounds sustained during the Russian attack on Kramatorsk and the organizing body of the Giedroyc Award on the Belarusian side has been dismantled. And, unexpectedly, these events also confirm the vision of Central European identity postulated by the patron of the Polish-Belarusian award with the need to “widen the middle to include the East – specifically Ukraine, Lithuania, and Belarus” and the need to renew “the gesture of support for the emancipation efforts of our neighbors.”⁵⁶

Central-Eastern European Tilt and the Polish Book Market?

Unsurprisingly, the geocultural focus of Polish ELPs on the Central and Eastern European region coincides with the focus of scholarly research in the field of literature. As far as secondary publications appearing on the Polish book market are concerned, the focus is on the study of Austrian, Belarusian, and Ukrainian literature, as the graph shows (see Figure 5). Interestingly, the Central-Eastern European tilt of the Polish ELP scene is clearly at odds with the disposition of the Polish book market as far as fiction literature is concerned, and thus one might conclude, with the reading interests and habits of Poles. The Polish book market has been dominated

53 On the multiplicity of geographical midpoints of Europe on the basis of their monuments, as well as the different variants of Central Europe (Habsburg, anti-Soviet) as an imagined community – see Brodacka, “W lustrze literatury.”

54 On the post-war change in the status of Prague in relation to Vienna (located further east of Prague, but more western by being outside the Soviet sphere of influence), see *ibid.*

55 Brodacka, “W lustrze literatury,” 261.

56 *Ibid.*

– since the beginning of the study period in 1989 – by American book publications by a wide margin, with French and German literature fighting for second place.

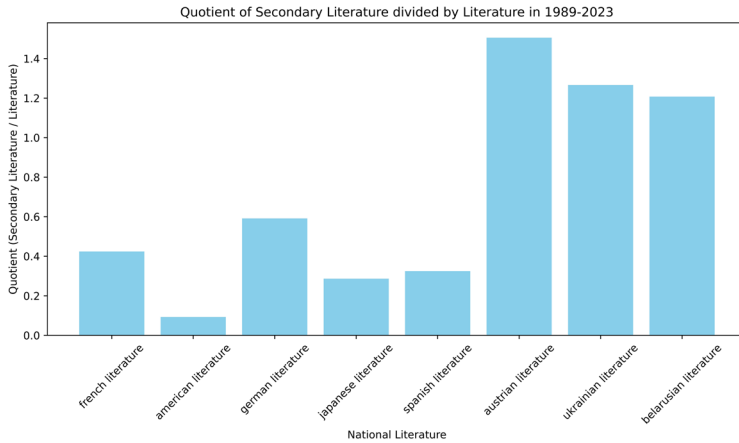


Figure 5. Quotient indicates the relation between primary literature from certain countries vs. secondary literature (publication on certain literature), i.e. the higher the quotient, the more secondary literature there is on certain literature in relation to creative works published in Poland.

According to Pascale Casanova, this can be explained by the fact that the international exchange of books is determined by the logic of the symbolic economy of markets, which determines the transnational success or failure of literary works. The power that decides whether a work is included in worldwide translation flows and thus succeeds in other markets is attributed to those language and cultural areas whose literatures have a high prestige.⁵⁷ In Europe, besides German and French, this is first and foremost the English language, which accounts for 80–90% of the translations available in Europe (European Commission / Culture and Creativity) and now – in a post-Brexit paradox – seems to be stabilizing as a *lingua franca* in the field of literature as well.⁵⁸ In many cases, moreover, a translation into English has proven to be a door opener for translations into other literary languages.⁵⁹

57 Pascale Casanova, "European Literature. Simply a Higher Degree of Universality?," *European Review* 17 (2009): 240.

58 Schoon, "Europäische Integration," 198f.

59 Sapiro, "The Metamorphosis of Modes," 139–140.

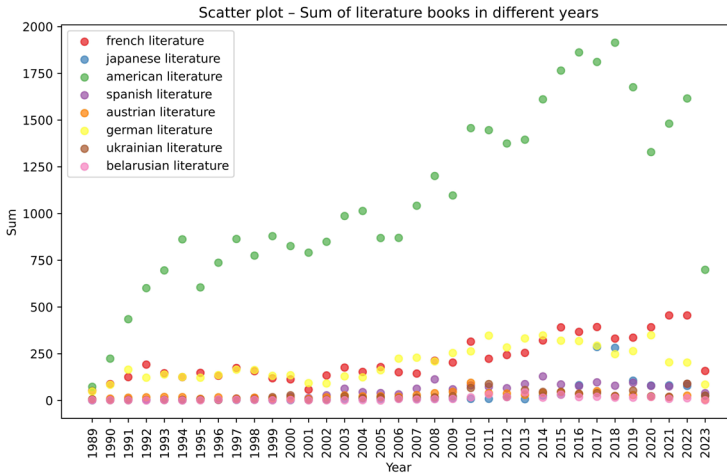


Figure 6. Number of creative works (primary literature) published in Poland.

Ukrainian book publications (to give just one example) play a marginal role on the Polish book market – with the exception of the politically precarious year 2022, when Poland’s neighboring country became the focus of international reporting due to Russia’s invasion. The focus on Central and Eastern Europe is, to repeat, a deliberate (cultural) political decision by decision-makers, on the one hand, to promote those literary fields that are not already the focus of international attention, and, on the other hand, to draw an alternative vision of the community – to the traditional image of Europe – via the instrument of the “literary prize.”

Conclusion

Although Poland’s accession to the European Union in 2004 gave a decisive impulse to the development of the Europe-related prize landscape in the country, the literary prizes show that the cultural-political concept of Europe in Poland remains limited to the neighboring Central and Eastern European states, quite independently of the European Commission’s efforts to create a pan-European cultural identity. This makes clear, first, that culturally grown neighborly relations undermine those concepts of identity that are brought in from the outside – for example, through integration initiatives of the European Commission (i.a. through Europe-wide funding measures such as the Creative Europe program, which ultimately also has a community-building function). Moreover, the case of Polish ELPs shows that the label “Europe” proves to be extremely flexible and autonomous in geocultural terms.

The Polish Literary Awards contribute to the literary popularization of Central and Eastern European literature, develop economic capital for Eastern European authors, and contribute to the strengthening of European awareness in Eastern European countries. Since literary prizes prove to be a literary instrument for challenging or expanding the established literary canon, the establishment of literary prizes in Poland with the label “Europe” can be seen as a central measure for anchoring Polish literature, as well as the Eastern European literary figures who are given priority in the prizes, more firmly in a “European canon” à la longue.⁶⁰ Since the literary prizes endow authors not only with symbolic and cultural capital, but in eleven out of thirteen cases also with economic one, the Polish ELPs also play a role as economic “insecurity absorbers,”⁶¹ especially for authors from Central and Eastern Europe.⁶² Therefore, they have a stabilizing effect – at least to a certain extent – on the cultural life of the respective countries. The fact that the award winners (and also the nominated authors) see their literary work placed more strongly in a European promotion and marketing context and in the framework of a European community of values can also have a retrospective identity-forming effect for them and their interested reading public. Although they generally affect only an educational class with an affinity for literature, literary prizes with a European program have an integrative and identity-forming significance in Eastern European countries.

Appendix: Prize Profiles (online)

Angelus [PP/A] – Literacka Nagroda Europy Środkowej Angelus, <http://angelus.com.pl/english/>.

Bridge Award [PP/BA] – Międzynarodowa Nagroda Mostu, <https://zgorzelec.eu/zgorzelec-2/miasto/laureaci-nagrody-mostu/>.

60 The extent to which the Polish literary awards landscape (and the Polish literary and translation market in general) plays a role in the placement of Eastern European authors in Western European markets and in the United States would require a separate study.

61 Carolin Amlinger, “Schreiben. Eine Soziologie literarischer Arbeit,” *Soziopolis* (2016): 27, accessed March 3, 2024, <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-82230-8>.

62 For the German-language literary prize sector, Maaß and Boghardt have worked out that the endowment of the international prizes – compared to the national prizes – is at a higher level. The share of ELP in literary prizes in the segment between more than 10,000 and 20,000 euros is above average (Maaß and Boghardt, *Der Wert der Preise*, 218). A respective study for the Polish literary prize landscape is still pending.

- Conrad-Korzeniowski Award [PP/CKA] – Nagroda Literacka imienia Josepha Conrada-Korzeniowskiego, http://www.polinst.kyiv.ua/storage/regulamin_nagrody_konrada_2019-2.pdf.
- Europe Poet of Freedom [PP/EPF] – Nagroda Literacka Miasta Gdańska Europejski Poeta Wolności, <https://europejskipoetawolnosci.pl/o-nagrodzie/?lang=en>.
- Giedroyc Award [PP/GA] – Nagrodę im. Jerzego Giedroycia, <https://www.nck.pl/projekty-kulturalne/projekty/nagroda-im-herzego-giedroycia/o-nagrodzie-im-herzego-giedroycia>.
- Herbert Award [PP/HA] – Nagrodzie im. Zbigniewa Herberta, <https://fundacjaherberta.com/en/the-herbert-prize/about-the-zbigniew-herbert-prize/>.
- Identitas Award [PP/IA] – Nagroda Identitas, <https://identitas.pl/bez-maski-warsztaty-w-arktyce/>.
- Man of Borderland [PP/MOF] – Człowiek Pogranicza, <https://www.pogranicze.sejny.pl/programy-wyspa/czowiek-pogranicza/>.
- New Europe Ambassador [PP/NEA] – Ambasador Nowej Europy, https://ecs.gda.pl/ambasador-nowej-europy/?fbclid=IwAR2GSeRzS39iix8U3ptzsuOAXlopcCMAx_Zj9nRZb56kQR7NoNDWizahUY.
- Rzeczpospolita Award [PP/RA] – Nagroda „Rzeczpospolitej” im. Jerzego Giedroycia, <https://kulturaparyska.com/pl/article/history/innenagrody/nagroda-rzeczpospolitej-im-herzego-giedroycia>.
- Staff Award [PP/SA] – Nagroda Literacka im. Leopolda Staffa, <http://nagrodaliterackastaffa.pl/o-nagrodzie/>.
- Trakl Competition [PP/TC] – Ogólnopolski Konkurs Poetycki im. Geoga Trakla, <http://fundacjaurwanyfilm.pl/dzialamy/trakl-tat/>.
- Vincenz Award [PP/VA] – Nagroda Rady Miasta Krakowa im. Stanisława Vincenza, https://www.bip.krakow.pl/?dok_id=132926.

Abstract

David Österle

DEPARTMENT OF GERMAN STUDIES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF VIENNA

Paulina Czwordon-Lis

INSTITUTE OF LITERARY RESEARCH OF THE POLISH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

Cezary Rosiński

INSTITUTE OF LITERARY RESEARCH OF THE POLISH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

Tomasz Umerle

INSTITUTE OF LITERARY RESEARCH OF THE POLISH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

Central European Tilt. The Analysis of Cultural-Political Functions and Effects of Polish Europe-related Literary Prizes

The aim of this paper is to examine Europe-related literary prizes (ELPs) in Poland through empirical analysis. Polish ELPs are those prizes which are organized by Polish entities or addressed to Polish society and have a European agenda. A list of 13 such prizes has been created and analyzed along four axes: 1) the importance of its reference to Europe and European culture, 2) the role of literature in its scope, 3) its geocultural reach, and 4) its organizational setting. The analysis revealed that 1) the growth of the ELPs scene in Poland increased significantly with the country's accession to the European Union in 2004, 2) the prizes – although following a European program – are primarily aimed at authors from Central and Eastern Europe and that this geocultural tilt 3) does not correspond with the orientation of the Polish book market (and thus with the reading preferences of Poles).

Keywords

literary prizes, Central and Eastern Europe, digital humanities, book market, literature