



LITANIC VERSE

IN THE CULTURE OF EUROPEAN REGIONS

THE PROJECT FINANCIALLY SUPPORTED BY THE NATIONAL SCIENCE CENTRE OF POLAND

Why are we investigating European litanic verse?

Litanic verse has very distant roots. It has also preserved traces of the original ontology: a picture of the world in which certain entities always remain constant and thus their repetitiveness can easily be observed.

Within European poetry, however, litanic verse has acquired new meanings and roles, which may be of interest to scholars specialising in areas such as the comparative history of European literatures, the semantic theory of literary genres and verse forms, the emergence of European identity, as well as the identities of individual nations, nationalities and religious minorities, the crossover between literature and religion, the Bible, liturgy, spirituality and poetry, the cultural exchanges between various European nations.

What can be learned from an investigation of European litanic verse?

On the one hand, litanic verse is based on syntactic rather than phonological repetition. Therefore, since its earliest days, this has allowed an easy transfer between European literatures regardless of the language barriers. Litanic verse can thus be seen as a common European tradition with regard to both form and versification.

On the other hand, litanic verse emerged from religious poetry and its development owed much to the development of religion and religious thought. Litanic verse figures prominently in the *Akathist Hymn* and litanies became very popular in the Catholic church, but in other western denominations this type of prayer played a less significant role.

Accordingly, litanic verse is marked by religious semantics, but it also bears the mark of inter-European divisions, such as those experienced between and within various denominations, countries and nations, as well as the original folk cultures, which were receptive to litanic verse to different degrees.

Thus, our research may yield an interesting result – a cultural and literary map of European regions that traces the level of their participation in and contribution to the litanic tradition.

How many litanic verses are there?

Of all the European literatures, it is French literature that boasts the greatest litanic verse. There is somewhat less litanic verse within Italian literature, whereas within the British Isles litanic verse is seemingly an expression of national, religious, and political turmoil. In the Balkans, the variety of litanic forms results from the clash between western and eastern religions. In Polish literature litanic verse manifests its affinity with the culture of Western Europe; in Russia – it echoes it. Very little litanic verse was composed in countries which embraced the religious views of Luther, yet although it does not encompass pietistic poetry, in fact such poetry used the form. Similarly, litanic verse was not popular on the Iberian Peninsula. This may be connected with the significantly different origins of popular culture in the area.

Who composed litanic verses in Europe?

Théodore Agrippa d'Aubigné, Angelus Silesius, Charles Baudelaire, Joachim du Bellay, Gonzalo de Berceo, Alexander Blok, Giovanni Boccaccio, Hristo Botev, Peire Cardenal, Geoffrey Chaucer, Paul Claudel, Gabrielle de Coignard, Gautier de Coinci, Columba of Iona, John Donne, T.S. Eliot, Paul Éluard, George Herbert, Jefimija, Clement of Ohrid, Friedrich Klopstock, Maria Konopnicka, Laza Kostić, Jules Laforgue, John Lydgate, Marius Victorinus, Adam Mickiewicz, Cyprian Kamil Norwid, Francesco Petrarca, Christine de Pisan, Georges Rodenbach, Romanos Melodos, Pierre de Ronsard, Philip Sidney, Bianco da Siena, Christopher Smart, Robert Southwell, Edmund Spenser, Gaspara Stampa, Wisława Szymborska, Jacopone da Todi, Jan Twardowski, Venantius Fortunatus, Gavril Stefanović Venclović, Charles Wesley, Thomas Wyatt, among others.

Has litanic verse been examined before?

With the exception of some of its aspects, such as parallelism, it has not, at least not from the perspective of the present project. The time frame covered by our research is from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century, and our main purpose is to distinguish various forms of litanic verse in European literatures and contextualise them. The first publications summarizing our research will appear in 2016, and at the end of the project a monograph on the poetics and comparative history of European litanic verse will be issued.

Who are we?

The project was launched at the University of Warsaw, joining together 23 researchers: literary, cultural and theological scholars. Two persons have Ph.D. with habilitation and there are also 17 persons with Ph.D. as well as four Ph.D. students.

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