

## Да 140-годдзя з дня нараджэння ВАЦЛАВА ЛАСТОЎСКАГА і 100-годдзя аповесці *Лабірынты*

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### Once Again about Vlast's *Labyrinths* as a Historical Precedent in the Formation of National Artistic Prose<sup>1</sup>

*Jeszcze raz o Labiryntach Vlasta jako historycznym precedensie w kształtowaniu się narodowej prozy artystycznej*

*Яшчэ раз пра Лабірынты Влуста як гістарычны прэцэдэнт у станаўленні нацыянальнай мастацкай прозы*

**ABSTRACT:** The article investigates the specificity of narrative solutions in *Labyrinths* – the most surprising among Vaclau Lastousky's works, which has no analogues in the Belarusian literature of that time. A number of significant examples are analyzed (the first encounter's event, invisible publisher's existence, the play by paratext etc.), which are the direct evidence of attempts of conscious "implementation" of internal dialogic possibilities of artistic expression as well as of author's idea of polysubject narration creating. Among the author's active use of polyphonic statement dialogized text constructions in a continuous discourse of an I-narrator are studied, as well as the change of observation focus on different narration sections and relatively developed characters nomination system. Thus, the "Labyrinths" should be attributed as the story, in which for the first time for Belarusian literature a completely new author's strategy of a literary work composing is revealed.

**KEYWORDS:** author, narration, narrator, discourse, focalization, actor, character's nomination.

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<sup>1</sup> The article has been translated into English by Anatol Bahdzevich, Associate Professor of the English Philology Chair of Yanka Kupala State University of Hrodna, PhD in Philology.

The 1920<sup>s</sup> are considered as a period of national revival in the cultural and literary life of Belarus. This is the time of emergence of a great constellation of writers and public figures who consider themselves as representatives of one of the oldest nations with its own history and tradition, once forcibly interrupted. Vaclav Lastousky (1883–1937), a well-known Belarusian writer and poet, politician, historian, publicist, literary critic, ethnographer, one of the most erudite intellectuals of his time, became a devoted companion of the revivalist surge of Belarusian culture in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The fantasy story *Labyrinths* (1923), written in line with a completely new, and, most importantly, unexpected in the conditions of the Belarusian literary process modernist aesthetics, is the most intriguing against the general background of Vaclav Lastousky's – Vlast's literary and artistic work<sup>2</sup>. The story tells about an incredible journey to the otherworldly super-civilization. At the invitation of an amateur archaeologist Ivan Ivanavich, the story's protagonist leaves for the ancient city of Polatsk. There he meets several members of the local society of connoisseurs of antiquity – the "Archaeological Free Confraternity" – among whom a silent old man nicknamed "Underground Man" was introduced as an expert-connoisseur of ancient Polatsk architecture. After dinner, a new acquaintance invites the main character to visit the mysterious labyrinth, where, according to him, the famous Polatsk library is hidden. But before accompanying him to the hidden treasury, the venerable man takes from him a promise to keep everything he sees further in secret. When the exciting words of the oath sound in the echoing vaults of the dungeon, the Underground Man "dies," accidentally stumbling. After a short search for a way out of the trap, the character unexpectedly meets Ivan Ivanavich. It turns out that even now the glorious ancestors of the Belarusians-Kryviches live and work on scientific discoveries deep underground, waiting for the time when "they will have to go out to their people again". Finally, Ivan Ivanavich leads the character to the rarest library in the world... Waking up in the morning in a hotel room, the character is somewhat confused: was everything that happened to him a reality or a fantastic dream? The hotel servant gives the guest an urgent telegram received in his absence; the character is forced to return back to Vilna.

Many Belarusian literary critics spoke about a decisively different approach, not similar to the established approaches to recreating reality, presented by the author in *Labyrinths* (Dzmitry Buhayou [Бураеў 2003: 31–48], Alaksiej Kauka [Каўка 1998: 53–57], Yuraś Patsyupa [Пацюпа 1994,

<sup>2</sup> Vlast is one of the numerous pseudonyms (Yu. Verashchaka, Yury Verashchaka, Last., V. Last., Ulast, Artsyom Muzyka, Svyak, Veritatis, Miles, Wlast, Peregrinus). Under this pseudonym, the story *Labyrinths* was published in the journal "Kryvich".

8: 14–23], Ludmila Sinkova [Сінькова 2010, 2: 153–157], Uladzimir Konan [Конан 1994, 8: 23–26], Volha Barysenka [Барысенка 2000, 1: 116–119; Барысенка 2006, 2: 63–72] etc.). Indeed, young Belarusian literature did not know domestic analogues of the story, unexpectedly performed in the style of a Gothic novel. But Vlast's work is also notable for the fact that it implements the possibilities of a "many-voiced" statement, when the intentions and horizons of many characters "break into" the general discourse of the narrator. The story within the framework of a single narrative discourse reveals the presence of several independent subdiscourses. The number of voices that we have identified in the text of the work (undoubtedly bigger than the number of subjects of the utterance) eloquently indicates that the chronicler's speech is not monologue. V. Lastousky organizes the story in such a way that for the first time in Belarusian literature, "silent" characters in one way or another receive the status of a "speaking" instance.

Let us consider some particular examples that directly point to the author's initiative to create a polysubject narrative.

So, the whole story of *Labyrinths* is told on behalf of a nameless character – the main participant in the events depicted. At the "voice" level, the story is often structured in such a way that episodes with a monologue type of presentation are intertwined with text inclusions, within which a "speech hybrid" is highlighted. Such dialogized constructions in the general discourse of the narrator can be recognized without much difficulty. For example, in the scene where the character-narrator meets the members of the Polatsk Archaeological Society:

The second was a former local landowner who had abandoned his farm, had sold the land and now lived in Polatsk, in his own house with a garden, from his capital. His father had some kind of close relation to the Basilians, and he himself was mainly interested in demonology, cabalistics etc. He possessed, as Ivan Ivanavich mentioned while introducing him to me, a "warlock library", which he did not show to anyone and did not let anyone read. He knew the Hebrew language and liked to go to the synagogue to the Jews from time to time to have a discussion [Ласроўскі 1997: 48].

In the very opening phrase of the above fragment ("The second one was a former local landowner..."), two voices sound simultaneously: the voice of the character-narrator, who observes and depicts the event of the first meeting with the landowner, and the voice of the as yet unnamed "intermediary" who is present at the first meeting of the two characters. This someone indeed has much more information about the members of the Confraternity than each of the members of the group would have time to tell about himself to an outside lover of antiquity. Even the first sentence of the paragraph summarizes all the key points in the biography of the former landowner.

We read: *He was a former local landowner, but he abandoned farming and now lived in his own house with a garden, from his own capital.* It is quite obvious that such facts as the abandonment of the farm, the sale of farmland, moving to the city the narrator “voices” as though from the words of a third person. And this person could well be the one who directly introduces those present to the guest, or the implicit narrator himself, but in the subsequent phrase (“His father had some close relation to the Basilians...”), the focus is slightly narrowed. Somewhat a casually uttered word “some” stylistically indicates some narrowing of the visual perspective, the narrator here clearly imitates the direct speech of the character-intermediary. Finally, everything becomes absolutely clear in the third remark (“He possessed, as Ivan Ivanavich introduced him to me, a “warlock library”), in which the main “source” of additional information about the object of narration appears to be Ivan Ivanavich. It is his, Ivan Ivanavich’s, voice that we clearly hear in this piece of the text as a quotation within the actual narrative discourse of the character.

Talking about the configuration of the voices of the story as a whole, we, of course, should point out a certain discontinuity of the main storyline, regularly interrupted by additional episodes, internal monologues, encyclopedic reviews of Belarusian history and culture, and, accordingly, the alternation of at least two subdiscourses: authorial (auctorial) and personal (actorial). However, there is one more interesting fact that in the system of voices that carry out the narration, we can identify an invisibly present independent voice – the voice of the “publisher”, completely rendered by Vlast in the so-called zone of paratext notes-comments. This has absolutely nothing to do with paratext though; the invisible “publisher” is a character as the others, placed by the author inside the depicted world of characters. The “publisher’s” voice sounds in the author’s explanatory remarks, as though confirming from the outside the veracity of what is being said. At the same time, the voice carrier (subject) is distinguished graphically and grammatically: the “non-authorial” footnote begins with the words “*From the publisher*”, and the explicit subject of the narrative speaks in the first person, designating himself with the pronoun “we”.

Let’s take two examples for comparison: one is a fragment of the so-called “publisher’s” note that supplements the main text, the other is the author’s footnote:

1. \*From the publisher. We entrusted the head of our publishing house to verify what was stated here about Ziamelchytsa, who gave us the following information: <...> [Лacroўcki 1997: 60];
2. \*\*\*Kronos (Greek) – time. Kon – circle, annual circle; as in German *Gott* – year (Belarusian – hod) [Лacroўcki 1997: 60].

Both comments, as a source of additional information, are performed by the author in the text in different ways. The first, referring directly to the voice of a real-life publisher, is designed to enhance the reader's sense of the authenticity of the events described by the narrator. On the other hand, compositionally this footnote is an example of the writer's conscious orientation towards the instance of the implicit reader. In this particular case, to an active, inquisitive person, an "ideal" recipient who has declared his increased interest in the subject of the story. The second note is a "classic" one, explaining the meaning of the description "The Eternal *Kon*, who gave the laws (Belarusian – *zakon*) of life to all living things, appointed the "kon" – destiny, fate and determined the end (Belarusian – *kanets*), death (Belarusian – *skon*)" (italics ours. – *N. Ch.*), emphasizes the play on words and their linguistic meanings, marked by the author as keywords in the proposed context.

The polysubject type of narration in *Labyrinths* is also clearly visible at the focalization level, i.e., the level of interaction between voice and consciousness (who speaks and who sees). V. Tyupa in his work *The Analytics of the Artistic* uses the term "focalization" in a slightly different meaning from that of Genette's. He argues that this term is applicable rather "to each specific phrase, because throughout the narrative, the focus of inner vision constantly changes from sentence to sentence" [Тюпа 2001: 63–64] than diegesis in general (as "the focus of narration"). A change in the observational focus on one or another segment of the diegesis, as a rule, means a change in the dominant subject of perception, and such an alternation of "points of view" within the narration provides a dialogue of consciousnesses and worldview angles. The artistic reality depicted by V. Lastousky is refracted through the perception of not one, but several "narrators".

Let us consider a fragment of the text, in which the character-narrator describes an evening discussion between the participants of the "Confraternity":

The conversation stopped for a moment, but then it gradually switched to the famous Polatsk library, which, having conquered Polatsk in 1572, Ivan the Terrible was looking for and did not find. It was entrusted by Pope Gregory XII<sup>3</sup> to Possevino<sup>4</sup> to be found and transported to Rome. Everyone unanimously asserted that this library was then well hidden and today remains somewhere

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<sup>3</sup> Apparently, this does not mean Pope Gregory XII (Angelo Correr; papacy years: 1406–1415), but Pope Gregory XIII (Ugo Boncompagni; papacy years: 1572–1585).

<sup>4</sup> Antonio Possevino (1534–1611) was one of the most enterprising and influential members of the "Society of Jesus", who established himself as an experienced diplomat and preacher. The first Jesuit who visited Moscow. The purpose of his visit was to mediate in the negotiations between the Russian Tsar Ivan IV the Terrible and the Polish King Stefan Batory on a truce in the Livonian War. At the same time, on behalf of the Roman curia, Possevino tried to use the status of "vicar" (vice-regent) in order to persuade Ivan IV to union with Catholicism in public disputes about faith.

in the underground vaults of Polatsk. Ivan Ivanavich said that he had read with his own eyes in the old metrics, in the archive of the Vitebsk Lutheran church, a marginal entry that the abbot of the Belchitsky monastery, before the siege of the city by Muscovy, having laid down all the monastery treasures and books, sailed down the Dvina to keep it all in dungeons of the Upper Castle. The old official listed which books are in the surviving library [Лacroŷcki 1997: 52].

We see that the conversation of the characters is “retold” by means of free indirect speech, and this method of rendering a long conversation in time is the most economical, since it allows focusing on the character’s “remarks” that are especially important for the development of the plot. The choice of these event “fragments” belongs, of course, to the narrator. The author as though entrusts him, as an agent, with his story. The task of the narrator is to lay a common “sense line” (G. Simmel) through a multitude of events and incidents and to coordinate these events on the basis of their relevance to the story being told. So, the facts about how the richest Polatsk library was miraculously hidden from the Russian tsar and the Jesuits become significant for the narrator in the evening conversation of the members of the archaeological society. The selection of plot elements (1572, the siege of Polatsk by Ivan the Terrible, the vain search for a library, the order of the Pope of Rome regarding the book depository, the transfer of books and treasures to the dungeon of the monastery, the entry on the margins of the old metric, etc.) opens up a certain point of view for us – the focus of the vision of the character who is interested in the history of ancient Polatsk (“Our gray-humped Polatsk has long attracted me to itself with its romantic past, starting from legendary times...” [Лacroŷcki 1997: 47]). The initial situation of the dialogue largely corresponds to the observational position of the character-witness telling about the events. But still, the filtered elements that predetermine the further course of the story, and their combination in a given situation, the conversation of archaeologists are carried out not by the character, but by the narrator. In other words, at the present moment of narration in the mind of the character the situation of the evening conversation of the members of the Confraternity does not exist, it emerges in the mind of the narrator, who lays his “sense line” in this particular case through the thinking and observational position of the character, i.e. guided by the personal point of view. But if we look at the quoted passage from an internal focalization perspective, we will find the very heterogeneity of the diegesis which is meant by V. Tyupa. “Everyone unanimously” asserts about the secret existence of a unique library to this day, Ivan Ivanavich talks about what he read “*with his own eyes*” in the archive, an old bibliophile official shares his experience of collecting materials on the history of the region “*with his own*” word (i.e., through direct speech). All these “voices” are organized and framed by the

“voice” of the narrator, who combines the events described by the interlocutors as facts of consciousness in accordance with the focus of the vision of the character-witness.

An important indicator of the author's use of the polysubjective type of storytelling is a relatively developed system of nominations, through which a direct or indirect assessment of any character is expressed in narrative discourse. Behind the name assigned to an actor is another (“alien”) way of evaluating this actor. The choice and introduction by the author into the literary text of each instance of “someone else's” nomination depends on the observational position of the primary subject of speech (B. Korman). In this case, the character's nomination appears in the general narrative discourse in the form of a kind of “inclusion”-citation, which highlights the modal assessment of the character.

For example, one of the central characters of *Labyrinths* is “Hryhor N., a local Polatsk tradesman”. In the original source published in the journal “Kryvich” (1923), Hryhor's surname is given by the Latin letter N, and in the text of the edition cited by us from the series “Belaruski knihazbor” (1997) – by the Cyrillic H (which is equivalent to the Latin N). Such editorial “pranks”, of course, are unacceptable in regard of character nominations, since the Latin N is not just an empty initial letter, but the so-called alleged name (I. Famenka), which means the author's setting for intrigue. “Alleged” character names, having no independent lexical meaning, make the hero, in fact, nameless. Behind the Cyrillic H the real name is meant and not a claim to it, as behind the Latin N.

It is with such a nomination – “the local Polatsk tradesman Hryhor N.” – in the short discourse of the objectified narrator, for the first time (and only once!) the Underground Man is mentioned in the work – “a silent, gray-whiskered old man who stubbornly spoke only in Belarusian, and sometimes pretended that he did not understand some words in Russian...” [Ластоўскі 1997: 48–49]. According to the statement of a Belarusian literary scientist and critic Anton Adamovich, “this trait of the real personality of one of the «Nashanivets's» is <...> Yanka Stankevich<sup>5</sup> [Адамовіч 1983: 23]. We should emphasize that the character is not called Hryhor N. by the character-narrator, to whom “he was introduced under the name of the Underground Man”. The subject of speech in this case is the omniscient author-narrator, although graphically the text seems to continue the actor's discourse of the self-narrator. Just in one fragment, the voice of the author-narrator and the vision of the character-narrator are combined: Hryhor N. will become

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<sup>5</sup> Yanka Stankevich (1891–1976) – Belarusian linguist, historian, politician, associate of V. Lastousky.

a “silent gray-whiskered old man” already from the height of the character’s observational position.

Then is the additional name “Hryhor N.” necessary at all as part of a nominative description, if the author could “do” with the “local Polatsk tradesman” the same thing as with the rest of the participants of the Confraternity: “a Russified German official”, “a former district landowner”, “a middle-aged teacher of a city school”? Throughout the entire further narrative, the character is never called Hryhor N. This means that the nomination does not perform the function of the character identification, although such a function seems to be inherent in a personal noun. Hypothetically, the name-requisite “Hryhor” could also act as an identifying feature of the actant. In the preface to the “Kryvian-Belarusian name-list” [Власт 1923, 6: 34–43] Lastousky notes that in a Belarusian family, the forms of names (both male and female) were confined to the corresponding family status of a person: for a child – Antsik, Petryk, Hrys, for a teenager – Antuk, Pyatruk, (H)Ryhuk, for a guy – Antos (I), Petrus, (H)Ryhas, for a husband – Anton, Pyatro, (H)Ryhor, for an elderly man – Antukh, Pyatrash, Hryn. In this case, the name Hryhor, according to the old-fashioned custom, would not be used for a “gray-whiskered old man”, but for a family man who had not yet managed to marry any of his sons. The author’s nomination is opposed by an estranged substantive metaphor “Underground Man”. Of course, the oxymoron character’s name, which combines concepts of different meanings, “grew” from a certain opinion about the character and its conceptualization with the help of another subject or other subjects: “He was introduced to me as the Underground Man, whose specialization was knowledge of different mysterious legends about underground passes and marvels, hidden there, which stories he could tell in a wonderfully realistic manner” [Ластоўскі 1997: 49]. An unusual nickname reveals the main purpose of the actant: the Underground Man is a medium between the world of people and the underground country. In this regard, the character-narrator repeatedly calls him “my guide”. But in the discourse of a hotel servant, the nominative modification “Undergrounder” (obviously different from the nomination “Underground Man”) becomes a synonym for his personal name, such as Hryhor N., completely losing its original metaphorical meaning.

Noteworthy in terms of evaluation is the nominative row of the character Ivan Ivanavich. Modern researchers consider Ivan Lutskevich, Ivan Ivanavich, by the way, a Belarusian public and political figure, an outstanding connoisseur of the history and culture of the region, an archaeologist and a collector, to be the prototype of the character. The same A. Adamovich testifies: “in his [character’s. – *N. Ch.*] mouth [Lastousky. – *N. Ch.*] put in many statements on the topics of the prehistory of the Slavs and Belarusians in particular, which he remembered from conversations with the real “Ivan Ivanavich”



(that's the way the editors of "Nasha Niva" usually called Ivan Lutskevich) [Адамовіч 1983: 22–23]. In the work, however, the character's surname is never mentioned. The actors respectfully refer to him only as "Ivan Ivanavich", and he himself signs in short notes exactly like this: "Your Ivan Ivanavich". There is though a single moment in the discourse of the self-narrator, when the character appears in the form of a ghost figure: "I saw <...> a human silhouette in a white robe and a white miter-like hood on his head. <...> In the meantime, a white figure respectfully began to approach me" [Ластоўскі 1997: 58]. The nomination is motivated by the internal perception of the character-narrator and includes his (actant) view of this character. Further, in a restricted character's perspective, the mysterious person suddenly turns out to be Ivan Ivanavich in disguise: "Peering with widened eyes at it [white figure. – *N. Ch.*], I with considerable surprise recognized the appearance of Ivan Ivanavich" [Ластоўскі 1997: 58]. The character is again given his own name. The minimal variance of the nominations of the character of Ivan Ivanavich with the obvious change of focalizations included in the continuous narrator's discourse allows us to judge not only and not so much about the coincidence of "alien" modal assessments of the character, but about the repetition of the same interpretation of these assessments by the author. Such "mono-nominativeness" in relation to the character, perhaps, is a direct reflection of an assessment, which with some degree of probability can be attributed to the real author of the story.

The nomination as a sign of the "alien" for the observational position cited by the narrator, of course, plays an important role in understanding the image and essence of the character. The system of nominations for the two main characters of *Labyrinths* is represented by anthroponyms, primarily identifying (for example, *an old man, a gray-whiskered old man*) – i. e., those that indicate certain "identifying" features and properties of the character. On the other hand, an additional means of the author's characterization and evaluation of a literary character is a kind of non-expansion of the nominative series, when the variance of repeated nominations of a character with the change of narrative instances is reduced to a minimum (for example, *Ivan Ivanavich*). In addition, modified nominations (for example, *Underground Man*) can be considered as a separate type of re-nomination in the author's arsenal of character names. In the conditions of the formation of young Belarusian literature, all this is a manifestation of a new author's strategy for building intersubjective relations in a work of art, based on the technique of opposing a monophonic nomination and an internally dialogic, oriented to another subject, "alien" name.

Thus, based on the observations of the three "sections" of narration (voice, focalization, and the so-called "nominative"), one should speak about

the exceptional degree of the author's activity of V. Lastousky in using the internal dialogicity of the literary word. On the other hand, with all the bold desire to embody in diegesis a dialogue of different consciousnesses and worldviews, due to the lack of literary samples of a multi-subject narration, there is some immaturity of the artistic technique adopted by the author of the story from other authors' traditions of text construction (fuzziness of the contours of the author's and non-author's statements, insufficient development of indirect forms of transferring someone else's speech). And yet, the first "precedent" with the artistic word in line with the Belarusian literature that was just beginning its life can be considered essentially aesthetically successful.

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**STRESZCZENIE:** Artykuł analizuje specyfikę rozwiązań narracyjnych w "Labiryntach" – najbardziej nieoczekiwanej opowieści w twórczości Wacława Łastowskiego, nie mającej odpowiednika w ówczesnej literaturze białoruskiej. Analizie poddano szereg przykładów ilustracyjnych (wydarzenie pierwszego spotkania z bohaterem, istnienie niewidzialnego "wydawcy", zabawa z paratekstem itp.), które bezpośrednio świadczą o próbie świadomego "wdrożenia" możliwości wewnętrznej dialogiczności słowa artystycznego i autorskiej inicjatywy stworzenia wielosubiektywnej narracji. Do wyznaczników aktywnego posługiwania się przez autora mową polifoniczną zaliczają się dialogizowane konstrukcje tekstowe w ciągłym dyskursie narratora, zmiana skupienia obserwacyjnego na tym czy innym segmencie narracji oraz stosunkowo rozwinięty system nominacji postaci. Tym samym "Labirynty" należy przypisać opowieści, w której po raz pierwszy w warunkach białoruskiego procesu literackiego objawia się zasadniczo nowa autorska strategia konstruowania dzieła sztuki.

**СЛОВА КЛУЧОВЫЕ:** autor, opowiadanie, narrator, dyskurs, focalizacja, aktor, nominacja postaci.

**АНАТАЦЫЯ:** У артыкуле даследуецца спецыфіка апавядальных рашэнняў у *Лабірынтах* – самай нечаканай аповесці ў творчасці Вацлава Ластоўскага, якая не мае аналагаў у беларускай літаратуры свайго часу. Аналізуецца шэраг паказальных прыкладаў (падзея першай сустрэчы з персанажам, існаванне нябачнага "выдаўца", гульня паратэкстам і інш.), якія наўпрост сведчаць пра спробу свядомага "ўкаранення" магчымасцяў унутранай дыялагічнасці мастацкага слова і пра аўтарскую ініцыятыву стварэння полісуб'ектнага апаведу. Сярод маркераў актыўнага выкарыстання аўтарам шматгалосага выказвання разглядаюцца дыялагізаваныя тэкставыя канструкцыі ў суцэльным дыскурсе я-апавядальніка, змена назіральнага фокусу на тым ці іншым адрэзку нарацыі і адносна развітая сістэма персанажных намінацый. Такім чынам, *Лабірынты* варта атрыбутаваць як аповесць, дзе ўпершыню праяўляе сябе прынцыпова новая ва ўмовах беларускага літаратурнага працэсу аўтарская стратэгія пабудовы мастацкага твора.

**КЛЮЧАВЫЯ СЛОВЫ:** аўтар, апавед, наратар, дыскурс, факалізацыя, актар, персанажная намінацыя.

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