

WOMEN'S WRITING AS IMMATERIAL LABOUR IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY BELARUSIAN LITERATURE

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Abstract: The goal of this article is to analyse women's writing as immaterial labour, focusing on the case of contemporary Belarusian literature as the contribution to the de-Westernizing of creative labour studies. First, the paper focuses on language choice specific for contemporary Belarusian literature and educational opportunities as the prerequisites to begin a writing career set in the 1990–2000s. Second, the paper outlines the environment providing publishing and showcase opportunities, emphasising the mid-2010s as the period of increased diversity. And third, the paper assesses the conditions that influence creative expression sustaining the labour of creating writing in 2020–2023. Within this argumentation, the paper investigates the state of specifically women's writing in Belarus, considering the problematics of equal opportunities. Thus, in the 1990–2000s women's writing wasn't on the agenda aimed at the preservation of the field and relating it to the Belarusian language. In the 2010s educative and showcase opportunities supporting the efforts of young writers provided an equally beneficial environment for men and women writing in Belarusian or Russian. The representation of women writers increased, including more women writers awarded with book prizes by both state and independent organizations although still not equal with men writers. During 2020–2023 it is mostly recognized women writers over 40 years old, especially currently in emigration, who produce literary works that are successfully published in Belarusian or Russian. Younger women writers have less opportunities for publication and showcase, switching to autofiction of shorter formats barely sustaining their efforts as labour. Interestingly, in both cases the most common themes are ancestry and corporality, making women representation in contemporary Belarusian



literature less diverse. This affects the demand in literary works by women writers among diverse groups of women as the reading audience, making the labour of women writers in Belarus more precarious.

Keywords: Belarusian literature, creative labour studies, creative writing, immaterial labour, women's writing.

Introduction: Women's writing in the framework of immaterial labour

Women's writing, if not only considered as an academic discipline within literary studies, is also a productive field for the analysis from the perspective of immaterial labour as, tracing back to Maurizio Lazzarato (1996, p. 132) who initiated the conceptualization of the framework, "the labor that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity". According to Lazzarato (*ibid.*), the informational content of the commodity refers to the changing environment of labour processes due to developing information technologies, while the cultural content involves the kinds of activities related to cultural and artistic standards not normally recognized as work, as of the 1990s. Further debate on immaterial labour during the 2000s as the period establishing new professions in the cultural sphere and emphasizing specifically cultural labour introduced the notion of the author as "any figure whose thinking being is exploited by capital, and also, quite simply, capital itself" (Brouillette, 2009). In the 2010s, it was the book "Creative Labour: Media Work in Three Cultural Industries" by Sarah Baker and David Hesmondhalgh (2011), carving out creative industries of television, music, and journalism as the main realm of the labour for cultural reproduction, that emerged as an academic reason determined by the increased interest in media professions and demand for related education to set up creative labour studies as a new trend within cultural studies. As feminist critique earlier posed a question on the invisibility of gender and ethnicity within the framework of immaterial or rather precarious labour (McRobbie, 2011), creative labour studies as primarily producing academic works investigating capitalist societies resulted in declaration of the necessity for de-Westernizing in the situation when "the creative industries policies in the West have already been severely criticised for their contribution to labour precarity mainly because under the guise of passionate and informal work such policies perpetuate gender, race and ethnic inequalities, as well as lead to workplace abuse, exploitation and self-commodification" (Alacovska and Gill, 2019, p. 12). De-Westernizing of creative labour studies, in its turn, tends to consistently engage with and think through concepts developed "elsewhere" and ... perhaps also written in local languages" (*ibid.*, p. 14), rethinking the problematics of creative

labour as precarious labour beyond economically driven issues within capitalist framework and focusing instead on political, social, and economic setting outside the West. In this vein, it is of interest to address women's writing in Belarus during the 1990–2020s as the non-Western case of immaterial labour illustrating the non-capitalist logic of reproduction within the changing socio-cultural environment affected by political crises in the region.

Interestingly, women's writing, as well as creative writing in general focusing on production of fiction, poetry, drama, and non-fiction beyond the academic field, has not been yet a popular topic for academic research in the framework of immaterial labour. But the existing world of published literary works sold for money not only to the millions of readers but also to creative industries for screening and game production leaves no doubt that literature has long been considered as commodity the same way as any other product of creative labour. Before the emergence of the framework for immaterial labour, Pierre Bourdieu investigated the field of literature from the sociological perspective in his "The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field" (1995), applying his theory focused on the structures of social relations to literary circles, which allowed him to assess author's habitus and symbolic capital but barely pay attention to writer's labour, especially in the changing technological environment, not to mention women's writing. In the 2010s' Scott Brook attempted to develop Bourdieu's sociology of literature connecting it with the framework of immaterial labour to highlight the controversy of creative writing education within the crisis of labour market in Australia (Brook, 2012) and to further expand his argument in relation to neoliberalism narratives in the context of precarity in humanities (Brook, 2015), but these works are also missing the notions of women's writing. Finally, the launch of ChatGPT on November 30, 2022, and its extraordinary popularity over the past year, resulting in 2023 Writers Guild of America strike, as well as the global academic discussion on intellectual damage that ChatGPT might lead to, has ultimately withdrawn the question of women's writing from the research agenda of immaterial labour. Academic reflections on ChatGPT related to creative writing vary from descriptive experiences of literally chatting over its capacities to generate narratives in the structuralist framework of myth transformation, as in the working paper by William L. Benzon (2023), to the expertise in defining the role of artificial intelligence (AI) and large language models (LLM) as ChatGPT in the system of relationships between humans and technologies in terms of language and thinking, which poses a question on ethics and politics of processing AI and LLM, as in the article by Mark Coeckelbergh and David J. Gunkel (2023). But the fascination with the debate around ChatGPT generating human-like texts as a threat to the entire humanity seems to be a new turn in the Western splendour of capitalist societies distracting scholars from the issues of further transformations of immaterial labour and most importantly this way

overlooking again – if not cancelling at all – the diversity of the labour-centred humanity in academic conceptualization.

So, the goal of this article is to analyse women's writing as immaterial and specifically creative labour, focusing on the case of contemporary Belarusian literature as the contribution to the de-Westernizing trend in creative labour studies. But as for the comment on local languages in Alacovska and Gill's project (2019) cited above, it is of importance to note that local academic conceptualization of women's writing is still emerging and have been mostly related to literary studies although some works further noted here are of considerable help in outlining the specifics of women's writing in the framework of immaterial labour. At the same time local languages used for writing literary texts ironically play the most crucial role in conceptualizing creative writing as labour in Belarus, an intellectual dilemma when beginning a writing career that further develops into ethical polarization while choosing a theme for one's literary text under the pressure of current political environment in the country splitting the society, and consequently the reading audience, as well as the writers and their publishers, into the groups sharing strictly opposed ideological beliefs. To further outline these implications, I will explain the conditions of creative writing as labour in the context of contemporary Belarusian literature, dividing my arguments in three parts. First, I will focus on the problem of language choice specific for contemporary Belarusian literature, as well as on educational opportunities for Belarusian writers, both the prerequisites to begin the career of a writer in Belarus set in the 1990–2000s. Second, I will outline the environment providing publishing and showcase opportunities for Belarusian writers important for continuing one's career, emphasising the mid-2010s as the period of increased diversity in contemporary Belarusian literature. And third, I will assess the conditions that influence creative expression sustaining the labour of Belarusian writers in 2020–2023 as the years of the ongoing political crisis affecting the cultural sphere. Within each part, I will be figuring out the state of specifically women's writing as labour in Belarus, considering the problematics of equal opportunities to enter the field of literature for young writers and to stay within it for the writers willing to further develop their careers. As for the methods, I will provide my argumentation on publishing opportunities based on the research I conducted during my own writing career to define the specifics of creative writing in Belarus from the perspective of remuneration for one's labour. I will be using open data on educational opportunities and literary contests available for Belarusian writers to evaluate the representation of women writers in both cases before 2020, also comparing the information on publications of literary works by Belarusian women writers in 2020–2023 to show the change in themes that women writers choose for their literary works.

1. Language choice and professional education as the prerequisites in the 1990–2000s

To better understand the conditions for creative writing as labour in contemporary Belarus before 2020, it is of importance to define the relationships between career opportunities available for Belarusian writers and Belarusian tradition in literature within this context. Interestingly, the main factor of both is the Belarusian language, which would be obvious as any nation requires literary language to create a community (Hobsbawm, 1990, p. 59), if only contemporary Belarus wasn't a bi-lingual country with Belarusian and Russian as state languages, the latter as the dominant one while the former maintained as the language of national culture, including literature. First literary works in modern Belarusian, compelled to contend with historical hegemony of either Polish or Russian languages on the territories that are now part of Belarus, were written in the early 1800s during the development of Belarusian national revival as a contribution to the national foundation of the Belarusian statehood. Belarusian became the state language in the Belarusian National Republic (BNR)¹ that was established in 1918 and ceased to exist in 1919, as well as in the Socialist Soviet Republic of Belorussia (SSRB) and the Lithuanian-Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (LitBel), both only shortly remaining one after another in 1919 during the Polish-Soviet war, and also in the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) re-established in 1920 and remaining under this name until 1991. There were four other state languages in the LitBel, including Lithuanian, Russian, Polish, and Yiddish, while the BSSR supported Belarusization as the policy of protection and advancement of the Belarusian language in 1920–1936, having also legitimized Russian, Polish, and Yiddish as state languages. In 1936, Belarusization was reversed due to political reasons, followed by a series of repressions in 1937–1938 aimed at national elites, including writers, from then on only Belarusian and Russian recognized as state languages. Although Russian eventually was taking over in everyday life during the next periods in the history of Soviet Belarus, most writers as the successors of Belarusian classics of the 19th and early 20th centuries were still writing their literary works in Belarusian with the opportunity to get publishing and promotional support from the Union of the Writers of BSSR founded in 1933 as a professional organization mediating party and state control over the field of literature in BSSR, as well as facilitating remuneration for writers' labour and translations of their literary works outside BSSR into other languages of the Soviet

1 Hereinafter English translation or transliteration of names referring to states, organizations, editions, awards or authors are provided according to the name versions that are publicly available in English. Those names that don't have such versions are provided according to general rules of translation from Belarusian and Russian into English, or transliteration from the Cyrillic to Roman alphabet.

Union, Russian in the first place, making the most notable — both classical and contemporary — works by Belarusian writers available to the reading audience not only in Belarusian but also in Russian even in Belarus.

In 1991 when the Republic of Belarus was declared independent, Belarusian was legitimized as the only state language, which initiated a new wave of Belarusization, but after the 1995 Referendum it was decided that Russian should gain the status of the equal state language again. The tradition to publish literary works mainly in Belarusian was continued but contemporary Belarusian literature was facing new challenges. First, the system of state publishing was still prevailing over emerging private publishing houses, which made it difficult to commercialize the field in a recently independent country recovering after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. But former economic relationships related to creative writing as labour were almost broken since literature could not be a priority for governmental policies while severe economic conditions in general could not foster mass interest in consuming literary works among the people. Second, contemporary Belarusian literature had to survive in the struggle against numerous imported bestsellers from Russia, either originally written in or translated into Russian and distributed in Belarus by Russian publishing houses having successfully adapted commercial principles of production and promotion in those former Soviet republics where Russian was — and still is — a widely spoken language while translations into Belarusian became common only by the 2010s. In these circumstances, contemporary Belarusian literature, scarcely exported outside Belarus, tended to become more and more marginalized in Belarus as well due to economic reasons, and the Belarusian language seemed to be the only efficient tool to confront the literature widely available in the Russian language from abroad, isolating the field for the sake of its intellectual preservation and advocacy. Both state and independent organizations could provide some publishing and promotional support for literary works written in Belarusian, although it couldn't be compared with the scale of institutional and community support during the Soviet period. So, to choose the work of a writer in contemporary Belarus traditionally meant to choose the Belarusian language, making creative writing a precarious labour in the sense that publishing literary works in Belarusian could not bring honoraria sufficient to live on without seeking for another regular job because of limited circulation of published editions, sometimes even requiring investments from the writers themselves, but it could bring recognition in the intellectual circles, although with quite opposite ideological grounding. Thus, writing in Belarusian gave the intellectual flair to the contemporary published literary works in different genres, either funded by state or independent organizations, but anyway contributing to the development of contemporary Belarusian literature, although popular only among the narrow reading audience in both cases. In these

terms, it is also important to note that the course in the Belarusian literature available at schools could not improve the positions of the contemporary literature to win younger audience as potentially dedicated readers in the future as it was only selectively represented on the curriculum approved by the Ministry of Education, usually falling into the section suggested for further reading and covered according to the decision and choice, as well as the literary interest and taste of a particular teacher. Those literary works that were published with the support of independent organizations critical of the government had almost no chance to be included on the reading list. But precarity wasn't only an economic problem for Belarusian writers before 2020 because contemporary Belarusian literature existing as a rather segregated Belarusian-speaking community of writers, publishers, and readers determined the problem for the writers coming out of the Russian-speaking everyday environment and naturally tending to work in Russian, putting at stake their creative expression.

Although Russian is the dominant state language in Belarus, there were few opportunities for those who were interested in writing literary works in the Russian language to build a career as a writer before 2020. Judging by the state of education, the situation is less evident and seems to be equally disadvantageous for writers choosing either language. Both Belarusian and Russian literatures are taught along with the courses in both languages at schools in Belarus, and the programs in both Belarusian and Russian philology are available for higher education, which is the most popular choice for those interested in working as writers due to the opportunity to learn the tradition in literature, both national and foreign. Another popular choice is the programmes in journalism mostly focused on writing skills, and sometimes it is also linguistics as the way to expand language skills, usually combining the courses in Belarusian and Russian, as well as required foreign languages within one curriculum. But there are no programs in specifically creative writing offered at educational institutions in Belarus that would be training not a philologist, journalist, or translator, but a professional writer producing literary texts and not necessarily combining it with the work in other text-related fields, also including editing and copywriting, or beyond, quite often among women writers in Belarus as creative writing cannot insure sustainable financial income. Younger generations of contemporary writers in the late 1980s and during the 1990s initiated their own communities like the Tuteyshyia, the Society of Free Writers (TVL), and Bum-Bam-Lit, as well as periodicals like "ZNO", "Krynitsa", and "Kalossye" to jointly promote their literary efforts in the new socio-cultural reality (Akudovich, 1999). As the Gorky Literature Institute in Moscow, founded in 1933 and considered as the main educational institute for writers in the Soviet Union including those from Belarus, became a less attractive destination to begin a career, the first educative opportunity to get training in creative writing available as informal adult education

was introduced within a free three-year program in philosophy and literature by Belarusian Collegium as a non-governmental educational organization founded in Minsk in 1997. In 2012, the Union of Belarusian Writers as a professional voluntary non-governmental public organization succeeding the Union of the Writers of BSSR in the contemporary Belarus with a liberal mission launched the School of a Young Writer as another informal adult training in creative writing in the format of the free annual course in prose provided for the writers under 35 years old. Interestingly, most supervisors at the School of a Young Writer were Belarusian women writers establishing a new educational trend within contemporary Belarusian literature when previously it was traditionally men writers as the most authoritative group mediating the recognition, as well as symbolic initiation of younger writers entering the field.

Both organizations provided theoretical and practical education mostly in Belarusian, although inviting the students to write in both Belarusian and Russian and facilitating publications in periodicals. The Union of Belarusian Writers also used to publish yearly anthologies of the best literary texts by the students at the School of a Young Writer, as well as the books of fiction and poetry by debutant writers within the 2012–2020 book series “Punkt Adliku” in Belarusian and Russian, the graduates of the School of a Young Writer also among them. Among 33 editions published within the “Punkt Adliku” series’ 19 were written by women writers (≈58% out of total), including seven books of poetry and 12 books of fiction, 14 of them published in Belarusian and five in Russian. Interestingly, over the eight years of publishing history the focus of women writing within the series switched from prevailing poetry in 2012–2016 to prevailing fiction in 2017–2020. More educational opportunities were also initiated by individual writers, as well as at educational and cultural organizations, both state and independent, providing training in fiction and poetry in Belarusian and Russian, often for younger audience of either children or adolescents like the School of Creative Writing “Litara” led by Belarusian writer and artist Adam Hlobus as a project by the Belarusian PEN Centre. The Residency of a Young Writer as another important project jointly initiated in 2014 by the Belarusian PEN Centre, the Union of Belarusian Writers, the Belarusian House of Human Rights in Vilnius, and the Embassy of the Republic of Lithuania in Belarus, temporarily suspended in 2019, provided the applicants under 35 years old with the opportunity to work on a piece of literary work during two weeks in Vilnius, also supporting further publishing in Belarus and showcase outside Belarus, 45 women writers out of 71 writers (≈63% out of total) welcomed with the frequency of women applicants visiting the Residency increasing in 2016–2019. But what was created specifically by Belarusian Collegium and the School of a Young Writer supported by the Union of Belarusian Writers was the atmosphere of the shared continuity in Belarusian literature as a sustainable and expanding autonomous contemporary

community, available to engage in via the contact with the living contemporary writers as supervisors and open on a competitive basis to anyone willing to dedicate oneself to creative writing as labour, regardless of previous education and career. And young women writers could get equal opportunities to enter the field, confirmed by the data on publications issued by the informal education initiatives that were described above' outlining their high engagement.

2. Changing environment of publishing and showcase opportunities in mid-2010s

By the mid-2010s, the popularity of literary works published in Belarusian had increased but the language environment in the field became more inclusive with the new generations of writers working in both Belarusian and Russian, the latter also actively using Belarusian words in their texts written in Russian as a sign of authenticity to confront contemporary Russian of the writers from Russia but building a new tradition of urban language over the marginalized Trasiianka phenomenon of rural areas. But the question of whether the literary works published in Russian should – or rather could dare to – be included in the field of contemporary Belarusian literature was still rigorous. In this sense, the problematics of contemporary Belarusian literature during this period could be considered as the legacy of the opposition between “the idea of Belarus” and “the discourse of Belarus”, introduced by Valiantsin Akudovich (2000) in his “To Destroy Paris: Two Unrealized Essays”². In Akudovich’s perspective (*ibid.*), the former is a Platonic simulacrum that cannot signify anything real, making sense only within some logocentric a-reality, while the latter is a certain dimension of the eternally moving existence embracing anything that can be embodied and sustained as the idea of Belarus, only denying the very notion of the idea as a fixed concept. And contemporary Belarusian literature of the 2010s, still tending to be logocentric in terms of relating the concept of the Belarusian to the texts written and published in the Belarusian language only, experienced the crisis of its inner philosophy at the intersection of the risks to be either further marginalized preserving Belarusian as the core of the national tradition in literature or finally blur within the Russian-speaking environment in a fear of losing the identity of contemporary Belarusian literature at all. But as the institutionalization of contemporary Belarusian literature was transforming into what can be denoted not as new communities but rather as multiple cross border get-togethers free from previous prejudice due to the influence of a new global wave of cos-

2 Belarusian: Разбурыць Парыж. Два няспраўджаныя эсэ. Hereinafter text titles and quotations originally written in Belarusian and Russian are provided as my translation into English.

mopolitanism and feminism, the relationships within the field became more horizontal, boosting the discovery of new names and successful projects expanding the variety of genres in the contemporary Belarusian literature of the 2010s. At the same time, the economic grounding of creative writing as labour during this seemingly refreshing period still wasn't beneficial for Belarusian writers using either language for writing.

If considering publishing opportunities, state publishing houses mostly used honoraria-based contracts, meaning that the writer should be paid for the published literary work according to the system of state standards (GOSTs), setting fixed payment rates for different kinds of creative labour based on the number of accounting units, specifically author's sheet equal to 40.000 characters for published literary works. But frequently the honorarium could be only paid after 80% of printed copies had been sold while the printing of the edition funded by the publishing house could be postponed due to the long-term planned system of scheduling, the royalties for sold printed copies barely paid to the writers, who should have wait for the honorarium at least for one year after the edition had been published. As for private publishing houses, the first option that they usually provided was publishing with external funding when the grant received by the writer or the publishing house was used to cover the expenses for printing of the edition, but the writer wasn't paid with honorarium although possibly could receive royalties. Another option was royalties-based contracts without external funding, also paying no honoraria but deducting royalties as a defined percentage of the book's price for the sold printed copies and, during the late 2010s, electronic copies of the edition. As mentioned above, self-funding of publishing one's own literary work was also possible, quite effective in terms of avoiding planned systems of state publishing houses and unsuccessful granting but barely mentioned by writers during the promotion of their published edition to insure it against jeopardizing as potentially labelled in this regard graphomaniac. As a judgement-safe alternative, some writers announced crowdfunding to collect the money to publish their literary works on the investments of the dedicated audience of readers as sponsors, which also could imply some merchandized production associated with the edition release to be sold as exclusive bonuses. This also could include honoraria for the book designer and editor but not for the writer, although further contracting with a publishing house could provide royalties. Most publishing houses also provided the support in promotion and distribution of what they have published, the state ones reaching out to the state network of bookshops and its online version "Belkniga" and commercial online bookstores, "OZ" as the largest one in Belarus also having its own network of physical bookshops. State publishing houses could also distribute the editions in state libraries, including the libraries at educational institutions of all levels across the country. Private publishing houses

could reach out to private and some state bookshops mostly in bigger cities, as well as to commercial online bookstores as mentioned above, also covering a range of foreign online platforms to distribute electronic copies of published editions.

As for the total remuneration available via creative writing as labour, the most impactful point was that the number of copies published for circulation per edition usually included 100–500 printed copies at private publishing houses defining the amount of royalties and up to 1000–5000 printed copies at state publishing houses mostly affecting the timeline of the honorarium pay-out based on how soon the copies would be sold out. This is relatively low if compared to the overall population in Belarus varying from ≈10.2 millions of people in 1991 to ≈9.4 millions of people in 2020 (National Statistics Committee of the Republic of Belarus, 2023), even taking into consideration several cases of overly successful re-editions while the average price for the books of fiction by Belarusian writers in Belarus varies from 10 to 50 BYN after 2016 Redenomination. If one chose to publish one's literary work avoiding the economic relationships suggested by the state or private publishing houses to control one's profits, the distribution and promotion of the published edition became the writer's own responsibility requiring self-entrepreneurship skills, often falling out of the existent field both commercially and intellectually as some bookstores refused to accept the editions from the writers directly while it also required even more efforts to gain recognition within literary circles if navigating through them individually. But most problematically, selling one's own books meant making writing labour even more precarious as it took away quite many physical and mental efforts from the process of writing as creating new literary works. The control over the printed copies had the material assessment grounded within more or less predictable boundaries of time and space while the control over electronic copies was a more difficult task as most of the literary works sold as electronic editions via online bookstores were also often available on pirate websites soon after their release, one more factor making the creative writing as labour in Belarus precarious with state legislation barely protecting intellectual property in digital environment in the late 2010s, encouraging some writers to release their electronic editions for free in collaboration with the Belarusian “34mag” online magazine. Although the Union of Belarusian Writers published the information on copyright on their website with the opportunity to contact the lawyer, advocacy of one's rights among Belarusian writers was a rather rare practice, most writers self-represented with no institute of literary agency having so far emerged in Belarus.

Although commercial grounding of creative writing as labour in Belarus, equally related to the writers publishing – if publishing – their literary works in both Belarusian and Russian, those who were stubborn to write in Russian as their primary language, could find only limited opportunities for showcase beyond selling in the bookstores.

Most periodicals in Belarus available to reach out in the 2010s were still issued in Belarusian with rare exceptions like the state “Neman” journal accepting the works only in Russian or independent “Makulatura” and “Minkult” journals published by Belarusian writer Siarhei Kalenda accepting the works in both languages. The only literary journal for adolescents “Byarozka” accepting both the works for the young audience by famous writers, as well as the works by the writers under 18 years old, published its issues only in Belarusian, making it impossible to make the publication in Russian for those who were only considering creative writing as a possible future career. Furthermore, while writing contests, especially for young writers under 35 years old, accepted the manuscripts in both Belarusian and Russian, most independent book contests considered publications only in Belarusian. State contests, limited in number in comparison to independent contests, also accepted publications in Russian, still making it difficult to make creative writing in the Russian language a sustainable career in Belarus. Thus, writing literary works in Russian meant to become a cultural outlaw within contemporary Belarusian literature, causing the effect of “cultural aphasia” as inability to express oneself in a certain language within the sociocultural reality identifying this language as existing out of the official discourse, as noted by Tatsiana Zamirouskaya (2017). This resulted either in forced writing in Belarusian as a less convenient language for one’s expression as a way to be legitimized within the field, possibly with time excelled via continuous writing, or in the attempts to find new opportunities for publishing outside Belarus, most frequently in Russia, pushing oneself in the even larger competitive field but with some really successful careers as by Sasha Filipenko or Tatsiana Zamirouskaya, recognized as Russian-speaking writers from Belarus publishing in Russia and gaining popularity in Belarus due to the distribution of their works by Russian publishing houses initially as imported literature but also due to the liberal position of both writers.

In this regard, a parallel can be traced with women’s writing, as even the books by the most famous Belarusian writer Svetlana Alexievich were existing outside the contemporary Belarusian literature until winning the 2015 Noble Prize in Literature, the first writer from Belarus honoured with the award. Interestingly, the media announcing the news about Alexievich’s international kudos mostly represented the comments from authoritative men writers making critical remarks on the occasion, symptomatic to the general situation with low women representation within the field of literature in both state and independent media in Belarus of the 2010s as stated by Anka Upala (2016). Svetlana Alexievich as a woman writer publishing her books in Russian faced double suspension based on language and gender, although later redeemed and legitimized back within contemporary Belarusian literature after the release of five-volume edition collecting her books with uncensored texts translated into the Belarusian language in 2018. As for women’s writing in contemporary Belarus at

large, in the mid-2010s there was still a lack of women writers narrating about women's experiences both in the historical perspective and as a reflection on contemporary life while female objectification in men's writing was still a commonplace, which could not be considered as a stimulating environment for women writers facing gender stereotypes, as stated by Hanna Yankuta (2016). Except problematic issues in the field of contemporary Belarusian literature, there was also scarce representation of women writers on the high school curriculum in Belarus, according to Maryia Kazlouskaya's review (2016) dedicating only one class to Ciotka (Alaiza Pashkevich), mostly known as a children poet of the 1900–1910s, and two classes to Yauheniya Yanishchyts, an award-winning poet of the 1970–1980s. At the same time women representation in the literary works by Belarusian men classics included to the curriculum showed the transformation from the woman as a wordless servant to the woman as a frequently unrecognized life driver, but never evolving into a successful woman represented by either men or women writers (*ibid.*), another disadvantage for women's writing contending within contemporary Belarusian literature, not only as based on Belarusian language logocentrism but also a traditionally men's field of creative labour. As Volha Hapeyeva (2007) ironically noted, reflecting on the socio-cultural determinism of women's writing in Belarus, to prove oneself as a worthy writer, a woman shouldn't write as a woman to remain within contemporary Belarusian literature represented by men writers. Anyway, by the end of the 2010s the diversity of women writing in Belarus significantly increased, both introducing new names and maintaining the efforts of earlier debuted writers, who covered the genres and themes expanding the Belarusian tradition in literature, previously associated mostly with motherland, nature, and war as a leitmotif, to the contemporary agenda, including realist, historical, fantasy, detective and romance narratives emphasizing psychological drama, often for children, adolescents and young adults.

Among the initiatives providing institutional support for women writers, the most notable was the Madeleine Radziwill Stipend founded by the Union of Belarusian Writers in 2017 and awarded to women writers in support of their literary efforts, and the "Pflaumbaum" publishing house named in honour of Belarusian poet and translator of the 1920–1980s Yauheniya Pflaumbaum, founded in 2020 to facilitate the publishing of the literary works by Belarusian women writers. As for showcase opportunities for Belarusian women writers, their representation within state and independent awards having monetary prize that can be regarded as another form of labour remuneration also increased by the end of the 2010s. The Zalaty Kupidon as the largest literary award that was established by the Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Information, and the Union of the Writers of Belarus founded in 2006 as a pro-governmental organization opposing the independent Union of Belarusian Writers, praised

11 women writers in seven nominations in 2006–2014 (≈12% out of total) although no women writers were awarded for fiction. The National Literary Award as a successor of the Gold Cupid praised 13 women writers in six nominations in 2015–2020 (≈31% out of total), including four books by women writers in the debut nomination, two books of poetry and two books of prose among them. As for independent literary prizes, the Francišak Bahuševič Award for the best book of history, both fiction and nonfiction, praised only four women writers in 1995–2020 (≈15% out of total). The Jerzy Giedroyc Literary Award for the best book of fiction or nonfiction recommended two books written by women writers for the second place, and two for the third place, never awarding women writers as winners in 2012–2020, the first woman writer praised in 2015 (≈19% out of total). The Natalia Arsenneva Award for the best book of poetry praised only one book of poetry written by a woman writer in 2019 while the prize was awarded during 2017–2020 (≈25% out of total). The Zalaty Apostraf literary award for the best publication in the “Dziejaslou” journal praised 19 women writers in three nominations 2003–2020 (≈35% out of total), including 11 debuted women writers. The Ciotka Award for the best book for children or young adults praised four books written by women writers in 2016–2021 (≈67% out of total). And the Maksim Bahdanovich Literary Debut Award praised five books of prose, three from the “Punkt Adliku” book series mentioned above among them, and two books of poetry written by women writers in 2011–2019 (≈26% out of total). Although the representation of women writers within most contests available for Belarusian writers in general increased during this period, their opportunities could still be barely considered as equal with men as the former were still dependent on the men writers dominating the jury boards, as well as by men publishers dominating the publishing system, making women’s writing still a precarious labour.

3. Sustaining the labour of creative writing in 2020–2023 as the years of crisis

As for the conditions of creative writing in 2020–2023 in Belarus, the precarity of labour, a natural consequence of the turmoil in the region affecting the variety of professions, transformed into the precarity of the very creative expression in the field of literature. Although 2020, first the year of the Covid-19 pandemic and after 2020 Presidential Elections in August also the year of the swiftly ascending civic awareness, initiated the dissemination of solidarity and community engagement, the following three years resulted in a deep disruption among Belarusians following the political crisis articulated both geographically and intellectually, also setting up new issues within contemporary Belarusian literature. In the spring of 2020 Belarusian writers participated in online flash mobs, reading their literary works to support people

during the lockdown, although officially undeclared by the authorities, which sustained the community of Belarusian writers and connected their efforts to social activism mostly focused on encouraging people to maintain their mental condition in the situation of global fear and uncertainty, as well as financial instability, also contributing to the expanding global open access to literature. But the opportunity to read one's own literary work to the audience present online was also a way for the writers to maintain their own mental condition in the situation of the inability to write new texts beyond the Covid-19 related topics as the first reaction to the new reality, quite common among the writers during this period in general although encouraging a day-to-day noting of reflections often published on social media, which could not sustain creative writing as labour but rather sustain writing as a professional skill that needs daily practice to be still at hand. Nevertheless 2020 became a fruitful year in terms of new literary publications by Belarusian writers, who either finalized the works begun during previous years or considered the time of the lockdown as a retreat to concentrate on a new work. The third season of the "Pradmoŭa" Intellectual Book Festival, initially launched in 2018 with the support of the Belarusian PEN Centre, having the intense program of events became one of the most representative results in the literary life of Belarus in the autumn of 2020, equally crucial for writers, publishers and readers engaging as a cultural community and sharing the same interest in the development of contemporary Belarusian literature as still an immaterial value during a really hard year both in socioeconomic and political sense.

At the same time, the peaceful protest movement following 2020 Presidential Elections, obscuring recent relevance of the Covid-19 reflections, highlighted the political power of Belarusian literature, especially contemporary Belarusian poetry, to consolidate people, also a reason to persecute the writers engaging in the protests or suspected of being critical of the government with some editions even withdrawn from sale and confiscated for the investigation by the authorities as extremist. In this regard, the next 2021 year proved to be even more traumatic with the Union of Belarusian Writers and Belarusian PEN Centre managing most of independent literary initiatives, including writing and book contests, both closed out by the authorities making the pro-governmental Union of the Writers of Belarus the only professional public organization for writers recognized in the country, as well as with a number of writers relocating outside Belarus for security reasons and to retain one's right for freedom of expression. In 2022, the relocations continued because of the increased security risks making Belarus a potentially unsafe place to live in during the war in Ukraine while most of private publishing houses in the country were also closed out, a new challenge for those who stayed but did not feel the cooperation with the Union of the Writers of Belarus and state publishing houses as appropriate while a range of previously published

literary works by Belarusian writers were labelled as extremist. But most problematically, the shock caused by the awareness of the ongoing war in the region affected the ability to write, making it even more impossible if compared with the period of the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak. In this situation, the Belarusian language, more popular among Belarusians with the increased civic awareness during 2020–2021 as a way to determine one's ideological beliefs based on liberal values, for some time became also a way to distance oneself in everyday life away from anything associated with the Russian in the context of the global cancel culture campaign. But this turned out to be barely a way to inspire writing in the situation of the inability to express oneself within the field of cultural labour due to politically driven reasons, as well as a mental side effect of the sociocultural reality in general, the “cultural aphasia” according to Tatsiana Zamirouskaya's definition (2017) gaining its new turn with Belarusian later also recognized as the painful mother tongue (Aliashkevich, 2023).

Initially a local intellectual dilemma based on the choice of the language to write in, determining one's chances to be either recognized within contemporary Belarusian literature or be considered as a cultural outlaw, the problematics of creative writing as labour in Belarus has transcended the boundaries of the country not in terms of the opposition between pro-governmental and liberal parties, previously establishing emigrant literature with a number of Belarusian writers in exile, but now fitting in the global geopolitical context raising new questions on how to proceed working, including both pragmatic and ethical aspects. Currently split geographically with ≈400–500 thousands of Belarusians on relocation after 2020 according to the estimation of the Institute for Development and Social Market in Belarus and Eastern Europe (Lavrukhin, 2023) and ≈3.5 millions of Belarusians of the first, second and third generations living outside Belarus preceding 2020 (Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, 2023), while the current population of Belarus is estimated as ≈9,2 million people, as of January 1, 2023 (National Statistics Committee of the Republic of Belarus, 2023), the community of writers, publishers and readers related to contemporary Belarusian literature lost its integrity. The more Belarusians on relocation, both forced and voluntary, the more opportunities to publish one's literary work with new Belarusian publishing houses established and relocated publishing houses re-established abroad create a delusion that now the writers outside Belarus have more chances for the worldwide showcase, while those staying in Belarus are completely isolated due to the limited publishing opportunities in the country and the security issues that might occur if publishing abroad, publishing with state support in Belarus or in any publishing house in Russia jeopardizing one's reputation as of the one supporting the regimes. This new dilemma reached its climax in March 2023, when Belarusian publisher Andrej Januskevich wrote a publication on Facebook citing on Belarusian

writer Alhierd Bacharevič's interview, the latter noting that he cannot imagine the writer who could work and live as earlier while he regards "state literature hangers-on"³ as pro-governmental collaborationists and criminals (Bacharevič, 2023). Januskevic, in his turn, interpreted this in the context of his own reflection on 2023 Minsk International Book Fair stating that all those who participated in that "Satan's book ball"⁴ should be regarded as collaborationists as well while the income earned during the book fair wouldn't improve one's financial state (Januskevic, 2023). This caused an intense debate over the publication with mutual accusations of those who have relocated and those who stay of either collaborationism or hypocritical nostalgia, finally ended with a Facebook publication by Tatsiana Niadbay (2023), the president of the Belarusian PEN Centre, in support of the publishers and all those staying in Belarus and participating in its cultural life, stating that accusing the publishers who took part in the book fair of collaborationism is equal to accusing all Belarusians staying in the country of collaborationism and it is "co-participation in repressions [that] is unacceptable and deserves condemnation"⁵.

But the question of where to publish also implies the question of whom to publish for, both considering the potential reading audience and the language of the edition as except the problem of the access to contemporary Belarusian literature both in and outside Belarus, it is also the problem of the Belarusian language now contending not only with Russian but also with the languages of those countries that Belarusians are relocating to as this concerns the success of newly published editions by Belarusian writers, including their remuneration. Belarusian writers on relocation have begun writing in other languages, English as the most popular language globally, but it is of further debate whether these works will be later recognized within contemporary Belarusian literature as they unequivocally outline the Belarusian perspective as narratives but are barely read by Belarusians. And in this vein, it is of importance to see another problem making the question of whom to publish for imply the question of what to publish in the situation of the ongoing political crisis, as this is exactly the realm where the legality of choosing a theme for one's literary work becomes the most crucial factor causing "cultural aphasia" in ethical terms. In spring 2022, almost a year before the debate over the publication by Andrej Januskevic, there was another Facebook publication worthy of noting in terms of "cultural aphasia", especially in the context of women's writing. Posted by the renowned contemporary Belarusian woman poet, although later deleted, the publication posed a question whether one has the right for personal happiness during the war. Of

3 Belarusian: дзяржаўныя прыпявалы ад літаратуры.

4 Belarusian: кніжны баль Сатаны.

5 Belarusian: саўдзел у рэпрэсіях — непрымальны і варты асуджэння.

course, this might be considered as a pathetic remark in response to the despair of the reality quite impossible to imagine before, but this is also a touchstone for writers tending to produce new literary works for publication. Setting aside the problematics of defining the concept of personal happiness but rather focusing on personal efforts within the field, it makes sense to see the twofold question left behind this remark if considered as related to creative writing as labour. First, whether it is morally acceptable to keep on writing, especially for the public, while others might be suffering, including the suffering caused by “cultural aphasia” as inability to write texts in the circumstances of the ongoing political crisis, not to mention the remuneration for one’s creative writing. And second, whether it is morally acceptable to keep on writing about anything beyond the context of the ongoing political crisis, impossible to overlook and at the same time quite impossible to refer to in the existing system of publishing opportunities available in Belarus or Russia. Over-represented abroad, it also poses the question how long contemporary Belarusian literature will be of interest to capitalist audience, mostly curious — if curious at all as currently it is 2023 Israel–Palestine war that is the main topic of cultural reflection on the ongoing political crisis pushing even the war in Ukraine off the agenda — to learn what it is like to live under the regime, adding some post-colonial flair to the literary works by Belarusian writers published abroad in foreign languages.

If getting back from the attempts to conceptualize this problem as a new intellectual dilemma with high ethical polarization to a more pragmatic perspective, what is really at stake is the relationships between contemporary Belarusian literature and its reading audience. With the amount of new literary publications decreasing and re-editions of earlier successful projects currently rare due to the radical changes in publishing environment, contemporary Belarusian literature is still lacking the diversity of genres and themes winning over the reading audience both in and outside Belarus not in its integrity but regarded as multiple diverse groups sharing different literary demands although united by the interest in Belarusian literature at large. Another important point here is that creative writing as labour requires some time, and often a rather long time, to produce a high-quality text, which means that creative writing requires specific conditions maintaining physical and mental sustainability of a writer producing a literary work, also including remuneration to live on while working. But the instability of 2020–2023 could not provide beneficial environment for producing literary works in a longer perspective due to both swiftly changing sociocultural agenda making the texts inspired by the day-to-day reflections irrelevant, as well as to financial precarity of creative writing as labour. Although the representation of women writers within contemporary Belarusian literature, if judging by the ongoing contests, stayed sustainable in 2020–2023 compared to 2015–2019, there are only three considerable editions widely available for reading

audience in and outside Belarus that were written by women writers, outlining the women perspective of narration. The first one is the Belarusian-language novel for young adults “Mischievous Kiss”⁶ by Eva Vaytouskaya published in Belarus by the “Januskevic” publishing house in 2020 but reaching a new wave of popularity in 2022. This edition is an interesting example as this is a Belarusian adaptation of the manga under the same title by Kaoru Tada published as a series edition during 1991–1999 and telling a romantic comedy story about the unpopular high school girl falling in love with the boy who is considered a star of the class. The novel by Eva Vaytouskaya re-designs the original story, setting it within Belarusian context but its main success is that it outlines a realist fiction, uncommon for young adult literature in Belarus usually written in the genre of fantasy or sci-fi. As for two other editions, one is the Belarusian-language novel “What Are You Looking for, Wolf?”⁷ by Ewa Wieżnawiec published in Belarus by the “Pflaumbaum” publishing house in 2020, the re-edition also published in Belarus in 2022, and another is the Russian-language novel “Death.net”⁸ by Tatsiana Zamirouskaya published in Russia by the “AST” publishing house in 2021 and distributed in Belarus as imported literature although recognized as the novel written by the Belarusian writer. Interestingly, both novels are written in emigration, their themes connected to death and family background in the framework of magic realism as in the novel by Ewa Wieżnawiec, and sci-fi as in the novel by Tatsiana Zamirouskaya. Another considerable edition, although barely available for Belarusian readers is the book “Minsk Diary”⁹ by Julia Cimafiejeva, originally written in English and published as a translated edition in Swedish, German, Dutch, Lithuanian, and Norwegian languages during 2021–2022, Belarusian-language edition prepared for publication by the Belarusian “Skaryna Press” publishing house in London in 2023. This is a documentary book sharing the story of the events taking place in Minsk during the 2020 Presidential Elections from the personal perspective of Julia Cimafiejeva as a Belarusian poet, who became an evident of the peaceful protest movement having later emigrated abroad.

But all four authors mentioned above are already recognized and widely praised writers over 40 years old while younger women writers are currently switching to shorter formats both in Belarusian and Russian and are mostly published in digital zines with narrow reading audience, their texts mostly defined as autofiction focusing on sexuality, maternity, and disability, often outlining political repressions in Belarus after 2020 and the war in Ukraine as a subtheme after 2022. The only exception here is the collection of short stories “The Last Bus departs

6 Belarusian: Гарэзлівы пацалунак.

7 Belarusian: Па што ідзеш, воўча?

8 Russian: Смерти.net

9 Belarusian: Мінскі дзённік.

at 8 o'clock”¹⁰ by a young writer Toni Lashden, who is recognized for their queer-feminist activism. The book was published in 2021 by the “Halijafy” publishing house in Belarus and investigates the relationships among women, focusing on the themes of depression, violence, loneliness, and death. But if talking about the autofiction trend in the literary works by younger Belarusian women writers, it is of interest to note that autofiction, especially associated with women’s writing, is currently one of the main trends in the Russian-language “new drama”, the plays written by Belarusian playwrights having carved out its niche within the field since the 2000s (Vasilevich, 2022). Related to the framework of creative writing as labour, autofiction writing as quite close to playwriting becomes a truly immaterial labour as if compared to other literary genres having its material embodiment as published editions, especially if they are printed but also concerning electronic editions that are circulated among the readers, plays are not necessarily staged at theatres and published in periodicals or as separate editions. In this situation creative writing is transforming from labour into the format of symbolic self-performativity allowing the writers to create an imaginary space for expression within their text that continues its existence as the text only, most commonly beyond the reach of the reader who might not be even aware of this existence if having never heard it within an occasional stage reading. So, women’s writing within contemporary Belarusian literature becomes symptomatically precarious in 2020–2023 as most genres seem to have disappeared from the writing agenda, making women writers mostly concentrate around ancestry and corporality, limiting the diversity of identities in women representation within these texts, which in its turn affects the potential of women’s writing to attract the reading audience as the communities emerging due to the opportunity to relate oneself to a literary text as a shared experience. And while some women writing communities, also providing educational opportunities to younger Belarusian women writers like the “Rasciajenne” feminist initiative and the literature studio of the “Sztuka” queer-feminist cultural initiative, sustain creative writing as labour, most women reading communities are detached from the former, barely even aware of the literary works that are produced there and focusing on the available editions mostly published before 2020, which creates a gap between the two groups affecting the cultural reproduction both in terms of contemporary Belarusian literature at large, and women’s writing as labour within this context.

And this is also a good point to get back to the threat that ChatGPT might have for women’s writing as labour in Belarus as possibly a further challenge in the future. The main problem that might make creative writing precarious because of ChatGPT is that it can generate

10 Russian: Последний автобус уходит в восемь.

human-like texts literally in seconds, making the manual text production seemingly irrelevant, while the generated text cannot be detected as plagiarism, putting at stake the very idea of authorship. That means that technically any person interested in producing a text with the intention to further use it as a literary work and most likely gain recognition, as well as remuneration for it, can use originally written but unpolished drafts or even shamelessly use anyone else's text, both classic and contemporary, also including unpublished texts by unknown writers, and ask ChatGPT to re-write it according to the framework which is of interest to the person making the input. From one hand, this practice requires certain intellectual efforts in order to make ChatGPT generate the desirable text, as it has already been noted that AI and LLM will most likely change the way that people write and think as what they intend to get as the output is not the very process of writing producing the text but a coherent text, meaning that they need to design the right prompt for the input (Coeckelbergh and Gunkel, 2023). On the other hand, it might also cause malpractice among writers, who were previously unable to produce coherent texts on their own and could not contend with other writers accomplishing their literary works, as well as among publishers and the representatives of other creative industries, who can now generate the texts using the working drafts by the writers even without hiring ghost-writers and never paying any human writers for their labour. But can ChatGPT really make the text better? It is indeed a question of ethics and policies (ibid.) making the labour of writers precarious because what ChatGPT can in reality do is deprive the text of the human occasionality that is usually associated with the style of narration specific for a certain writer just the same way as the worst editing performed by a human is tending to destroy the lively nature of the human-written text, which actually is another aspect of precarity associated with creative writing as labour dependent on the power relationships within the field of literature.

In this vein, ChatGPT is barely threatening women's writing because it cannot easily outline the woman perspective of social experience in all its diversity although it can be an effective companion in discussing one's perspective to further conceptualize it for one's future literary work. At the same time, ChatGPT has been reported as gender biased (Aligned AI, 2023) due to its processing results reproducing and sometimes even amplifying old and non-inclusive understandings of gender although AI might be also potentially used to mitigate biases (Gross, 2023). And in this regard, there are two factors that might be considered as an implied contribution to the precarity of women's writing as labour because of ChatGPT. First, it is potentially anyone who can use ChatGPT as such a companion, meaning that even men can use ChatGPT to outline women's perspective if there is the demand for a certain kind of stories articulated by publishing houses that might bring commercial profit to the writer although generated

text might be gender biased. But what ChatGPT can generate is always limited to what it has learnt, its latest available version having the information on what has happened only by September 2021 but never avoiding the risk for so-called hallucinations when it outputs factually false information although it might sound plausible. At the same time, the knowledge of ChatGPT is seemingly limitless while it can learn new information extraordinary fast, but it cannot know every detail of the real life as this might be scarcely represented on the Internet, meaning that it cannot outline the women's perspective of unique socio-cultural experiences, often considered as marginalized. What is more, ChatGPT is unavailable in a range of countries, including Belarus, so it cannot know about many experiences taking place as the users do not have access to it and make an input of related information. But the second factor is that those women writers who are currently outside Belarus might use ChatGPT for their work while women writers staying in Belarus are dependent on the access to VPN and foreign mobile phone numbers to use it, which might be considered as a possible field for symbolic struggle among Belarusian women writers although never reported yet. With the uncertain future of publishing opportunities affecting the sustainability of creative writing as labour for Belarusian writers in general ChatGPT can barely threaten women's writing. But this uncertainty is surely threatening contemporary Belarusian literature, including Belarusian women writing. If writers' labour is not sufficiently sustained making fewer literary works published and widely available, fewer readers will be interested in Belarusian literature as a relevant and abundant variety of texts, affecting back publishing and remuneration opportunities as a vicious circle. And the less of these opportunities Belarusian women writers have today, the less opportunities women writing in Belarus has in order to be maintained in the future, making as immaterial the very women's writing as a field, not as labour.

Conclusions: The sustainability of creative writing as labour at stake

Thus, during the 1990–2000s women's writing wasn't the main agenda within contemporary Belarusian literature, aimed at the preservation of the field in general and mostly relating it to the Belarusian language as the crucial point of identifying national literature in the context of contention with imported literature either originally written or translated into Russian in the situation with Russian as the dominant state language. This often made Belarusian writers tending to write in Russian to be considered as cultural outlaws, while the existing publishing system in the country could not provide sustainable conditions for the remuneration of writers' labour producing literary works in any language, making creative writing in Belarus quite precarious and

requiring self-entrepreneurship skills. At the same time, by the end of the 2010s educative opportunities and some showcase opportunities supporting the efforts of young writers under 35 years old provided equally beneficial environment for both men and women intending to begin a writing career and writing in either Belarusian or Russian, while the representation of women writers within contemporary Belarusian literature in general increased, also including more women writers awarded with book prizes by both state and independent organizations although still not equal with men writers. But the authoritativeness of men writers within contemporary Belarusian literature still relevant before 2020 was the most important factor influencing the opportunities for recognition and further promotion of women writers, making their labour the most precarious creative writing in Belarus, and still maintaining Belarusian as the prevailing language of newly published literary works.

As for 2020–2023, the ongoing political crisis, first initiated by the 2020 Presidential Elections following the inception of the Covid-19 pandemic and later reinforced by the war in Ukraine escalated in 2022, set up new challenges for contemporary Belarusian literature, as well as for women's writing as labour. With most independent organizations, including the Union of Belarusian Writers and private publishing houses, closed out by the authorities and up to 400–500 thousands of Belarusians having relocated abroad, including a number of writers and publishers, the community maintaining contemporary Belarusian writers became split both geographically and intellectually. Successful careers of Belarusian writers finding new opportunities to be published abroad are dependent on the current curiosity of capitalist societies to the Belarusian context after 2020, which is already at stake due to the changed agenda with the war in Ukraine and more recently the Israel–Palestine war as the priority topic within the cultural sphere reflecting on political crises. And for those who stay in Belarus creative writing becomes an almost impossible labour to sustain both pragmatically and ethically as in the situation with scarce opportunities to publish one's literary work, not to mention the remuneration for it, it is also the problem of “cultural aphasia” as inability to write not only in the language considered as existing outside the official discourse but also fitting one's writing in the current sociocultural reality with traumatic experience as impossible to overlook but ineligible to refer to because of security issues. In these circumstances it is mostly recognized women writers over 40 years old, especially those who are currently in emigration, who produce literary works that are successfully published and distributed, either in Belarusian or Russian, while younger women writers having less opportunities for publication and showcase switch to writing autofiction texts of shorter formats barely sustaining their efforts as labour but rather providing the space for their creative expression. Interestingly, in both cases the most common themes that women writers refer to are ancestry and corporeality, making women

representation in the perspective of women's writing in Belarus less diverse, which affects the demand in literary works written by women writers among diverse groups of women as the reading audience interested in contemporary Belarusian literature, another contribution to precarity. No matter how talented the woman writer is or how many efforts are implied in promotion of her books, they won't be successfully sold out if the reader cannot relate herself to the text that she is reading, which influences the remuneration and sustainability of one's creative writing as labour.

While I was writing this article, the news about the books of 2023 by three more recognized and widely praised Belarusian women writers, all three written and published in the Belarusian language, were announced as a mild counterargument to my pessimistic conclusion. These are the historical novel "Adventures of Prentis Vyrvich, the marshal of Minsk"¹¹ by Liudmila Rubleuskaya finishing the book series about Prentis Vyrvich and published by the "Zviazda" publishing house in Belarus; magic realism novel "On the Other Side. Old Dolls, New Games"¹² by Zaslava Kaminskaya published by the "Tsymberau" publishing house in Belarus; as well as the book "The Weed Time"¹³ by Hanna Yankuta defining its genre on the edge of the fiction, autofiction and nonfiction, which will be published this year by the "Januskevic" publishing house re-established outside Belarus but now having arranged shipping of its editions to Belarus. But still' a question on sustaining the labour of Belarusian women writers both in and outside Belarus remains open.

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11 Belarusian: Авантуры Пранціша Вырвіча, маршалка Менскага.

12 Belarusian: Па той бок. Старыя лялькі, новыя гульні.

13 Belarusian: Час пуштазеля.

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