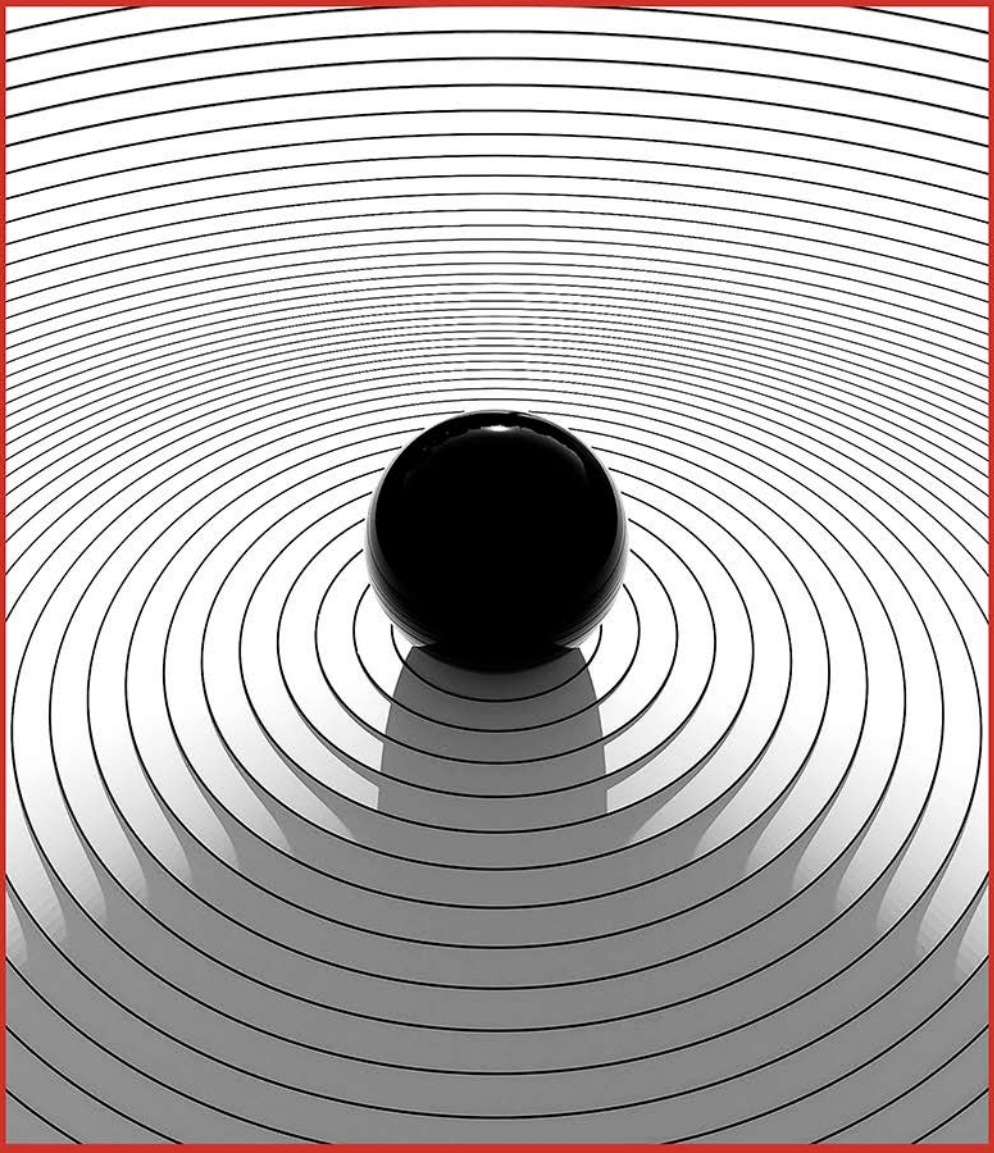
51 / 2023

LETONICA



Izdevējs / Publisher
Latvijas Universitātes Literatūras, folkloras un mākslas institūts /
The Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art of the University of Latvia

Izdevniecības vadītāja / Publishing director
Dace Krecere-Vule

Žurnāls Letonica ir iekļauts *Scopus*, *ERIH* un *EBSCO* datubāzēs /
Journal Letonica is included in the *Scopus*, *ERIH* and *EBSCO* databases

Žurnālā ievietotie zinātniskie raksti ir anonīmi recenzēti /
Articles appearing in this journal are peer-reviewed

51 Humanitāro zinātņu žurnāls
Journal of Humanities
2023

Content (Saturs)

Eva Eglāja-Kristsone, Jānis Oga

Introduction: Shifting Literary Culture since Stagnation in the Brezhnev Era: The Baltic Paradigm

DOI: 10.35539/LTNC.2023.0051.01

The term 'the Stagnation period' (denoting the years 1964–1982 in the history of the Soviet Union) offers an encapsulation of the era that began during the leadership of Leonid Brezhnev and extended until the advent of Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985. Daina Bleiere, a noted Latvian historian, has underscored the imperative for contemporary historians and scholars in humanities and social sciences to delve deeper into the controversial issues of that period. She calls for a rigorous exploration of themes like the transformation of the societal value system under Soviet influence, the intricate dynamics between specific societal factions and the Soviet administration, and the extent to which the general populace could influence the Soviet regime (Bleiere 2015: 33).

Adding a further nuance to this discourse, Lithuanian scholar Vilius Ivanauskas highlights the significant role Soviet intellectuals played in endorsing the regime through indoctrination practices – in the post-Stalin era, the impact of destalinization allowed Soviet intellectuals to engage in a more vibrant exchange of ideas and expressions. Exploring the Soviet peripheries, crucial in the decline of the USSR, and identifying comparable occurrences in those regions is essential (Ivanauskas 2018: 1).

This perspective aligns with the insights of historian Dina Fainberg and political scientist Artemy M. Kalinovsky, who have observed that discussions about this historical juncture often revolve around themes of being either "pre-crisis" or on the cusp of "pre-renewal" (Fainberg, Kalinovsky 2016: xiv). In the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which happened despite Gorbachev's genuine efforts at reform and modernisation, the narrative of "stagnation" emerged as the predominant explanation why the Soviet socialist project eventually came to a downfall. Such inquiries and explanations are pivotal in order to understand the era, and can shed light on the complexities of human experience during the Stagnation period.

This era, characterised by its political and cultural nuances, has been the subject of various academic studies. Estonian scholar Epp Annus has posited that national rituals, such as music festivals, established an emotional connection between

individuals and the concept of nationhood, yet they alone did not instigate change. Meanwhile, literary works played a role in providing a basis for dissenting ideas, offering tangible concepts and exemplary models. Annus refers to the passionate response given to the historical dramas of the Lithuanian writer Justinas Marcinkevičius, with verses chanted by the chorus and by theatre audiences simultaneously (Annus 2019: 159). It may suggest that, throughout the Soviet epoch, the significance of the text often overshadowed the individual author's identity. Yet, the Stagnation period saw a transformative shift whereby the author's individuality, personal decisions, and distinctiveness began to shine through more prominently.

The Baltic nations, renowned for their complex history and rich cultural legacy, have demonstrated an intense scholarly interest in the period spanning from the 1940s to the 1980s. This scholarly pursuit is prominently reflected in biennial international symposiums convened by Baltic literary scholars. A notable event in this sequence was its 7th conference held in Riga in 2007, entitled *Back to Baltic Memory: Lost and Found in Literature 1940–1968*. Organized by the Institute of Literature, Folklore, and Art of the University of Latvia (ILFA), this conference provided an in-depth exploration of the multifarious dimensions of Socialist Realism, with a particular focus on the transformative dynamics of the Thaw period. The insights and scholarly dialogues arisen at this conference were subsequently accumulated into a meticulously compiled anthology *Back to Baltic Memory: Lost and Found in Literature 1940–1968* (2008), under the editorship of Eva Eglāja-Kristsone and Benedikts Kalnačs.

Furthering this academic dialogue, the 13th conference which was held in 2021 in Riga again, was aptly titled *Shifting Literary Culture since Stagnation in the Brezhnev Era: The Baltic Paradigm*. This conference was seen as an academic sequel to the 2007 event, illuminating various nuances of the Stagnation period and setting it apart as a unique chapter within the overarching narrative of Soviet history. This symposium welcomed diverse academic papers, fostering a holistic exploration of the intricate relationship between literary culture, societal dynamics, and the changing narratives from and beyond the Stagnation period. The profound cultural and societal impacts of the Brezhnev Era have left indelible marks on the contemporary Baltic literary and artistic scene. This lingering influence is hardly a surprise, considering that many present-day writers, irrespective of whether they were adults, teens, or mere children during that period, underwent the cultural metamorphoses of the era. Even the younger generation, though not direct witnesses, have engaged with this era through the tales and experiences of their predecessors.

The scope of discussions was broad, touching upon such topics as the ideological shifts in literature, visual and performing arts after the Khrushchev's Thaw. The researchers also delved into the complex relationship between Baltic societies and

the occupying powers, examining collaboration and passive resistance. Other themes included the evolution and reinterpretation of literary history and the landscape of literary translations and publishing, with an emphasis on cultural journals. Additionally, the scholars analyzed mobility, tourism, and the creation of cultural bridges, along with discussing collaborative cultural and political initiatives within the Baltic context. One of the standout discussions revolved around the modern 'cancel culture', investigating its possible antecedents in Baltic history. All these rigorous academic pursuits deepened our comprehension and admiration of the Baltic cultural chronicles and the distinct literary and artistic trajectory of this region.

In the upcoming issues No. 51 and No. 52 of *Letonica*, readers can expect an intellectually stimulating treat. While the above-mentioned conference already set the stage for a comprehensive dialogue on the Baltic literary and cultural evolution, both issues containing the proceedings of the conference promise to delve even deeper into this field. The authors have taken this opportunity to elucidate further the themes discussed, providing a more detailed insight.

These extended articles by both esteemed and early-career researchers not only build upon the foundational discussions initiated at the conference but also venture into uncharted territories. They present fresh perspectives and thematic directions, looking into previously unexplored facets. By doing so, they contribute to the existing narrative and add new layers of depth and nuance to our understanding of the Baltic literary culture and history.

The current issue, *Letonica* No. 51, presents articles on such topics as history of literature, poetry, prose, translation, performative arts, artwriting, and libraries. Each section delves into specific aspects of the cultural and intellectual landscape of the Baltic region during the Soviet era, providing insights into literature, arts, and societal influences.

Māra Grudule and Benedikts Kalnačs (Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art of the University of Latvia) discuss the challenges and compromises of writing the history of Latvian literature during the Soviet period, with a focus on the political and ideological influences (Grudule, Kalnačs 2023, this issue). Aušra Jurgutienė (Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore) explores the impact of the Cold War on national literary histories, particularly in Lithuania, examining internal hostilities and the preservation of national memory (Jurgutienė 2023, this issue).

Gintarė Bernotienė (Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore) analyzes the metaphysical treatment of flora in the poetry of Sigitas Geda, Leonardas Gutauskas, and Jonas Juškaitis during the Stagnation period (Bernotienė 2023, this issue). Donata Mitaitė (Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore) examines the concept of space in Soviet Lithuanian poetry, considering the works of Alfonsas

Maldonis, Judita Vaičiūnaite, and Antanas A. Jonynas (Mitaitė 2023, this issue). Akvilė Rėklaitytė (Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore) investigates changes of poetic meanings in late Soviet Lithuania, particularly focusing on the significance of national poetic images and their response to Soviet ideology (Rėklaitytė 2023, this issue).

Deniss Hanovs (Art Academy of Latvia) reflects on the portrayal of Baltic nations in Sergei Dovlatov's novel *The Compromise*, analyzing the narrator's in-between status and the "orientalization" of Estonians and Latvians (Hanovs 2023, this issue). Zanda Gūtmane and Sigita Ignatjeva (Liepāja University) explore the reception and translations of Western modernist literature in Latvia during the Brezhnev Era, emphasizing the hybrid nature of culture (Gūtmane, Ignatjeva 2023, this issue).

Heili Einasto (Baltic Film, Communication, and Arts Institute, Tallinn University; Tallinn Music and Ballet School) discusses censorship in ballet, using the case study of Mai Murdmaa's ballet adaptation of Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* in the Estonia Theater Ballet Company during the late Soviet era (Einasto 2023, this issue). Stella Pelše (Art Academy of Latvia Institute of Art History) examines the "open" phase of Socialist Realism in Latvian artwriting during the Stagnation period, analyzing the ways it combined Soviet viewpoints with Latvian cultural examples (Pelše 2023, this issue). Sandra Cīrule (Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Latvia) focuses on the link between books, libraries, and readers in the Soviet Union during the 1970s, highlighting the deliberate strengthening of this connection and the diverse content available in public libraries at that time (Cīrule 2023, this issue).

The approach exemplified by these researchers and their work proves that *Letonica* is dedicated to nurturing a vibrant academic milieu, characterized by the presentation, elaboration, critique, and re-conceptualization of ideas. Readers will encounter a collection of intellectually stimulating articles that foster introspection and discourse, thereby deepening our understanding of the distinctive literary terrain of the Baltic region.

Bibliography

Annus, Epp (2018). *Soviet Postcolonial Studies: A View from the Western Borderlands*. London, New York: Routledge.

Bernotienė, Gintarė (2023, this issue). "You Were There, Oh Soul": Color Manifestation of the Sacred and Metaphysical Treatment of Flora in the Poetry by Sigitas Geda, Leonardas Gutauskas, and Jonas Juškaitis in the 1970–1980s. *Letonica*, No. 51, pp. 40–58. DOI: 10.35539/LTNC.2023.0051.04.

Bleiere, Daina (2015). *Eiropa ārpus Eiropas... Dzīve Latvijas PSR*. Rīga: LU Akadēmiskais apgāds.

Cīrule, Sandra (2023, this issue). Literature, Libraries, Society: Memories of the 1970s. *Letonica*, No. 51, pp. 178–189. DOI: 10.35539/LTNC.2023.0051.11.

Einasto, Heili (2023, this issue). Censorship in Ballet: the Case Study of *The Master and Margarita* by Mai Murdmaa in the Estonia Theater Ballet Company. *Letonica*, No. 51, pp. 144–157. DOI: 10.35539/LTNC.2023.0051.09.

Fainberg, Dina; Kalinovsky, Artemy M. (2016). Introduction: Stagnation and Its Discontents: The Creation of a Political and Historical Paradigm. Fainberg, Dina; Kalinovsky, Artemy M. (eds.). *Reconsidering Stagnation in the Brezhnev Era: Ideology and Exchange*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, vii–xxii.

Grudule, Māra; Kalnačs, Benedikts (2023, this issue). Writing the History of Latvian Literature in the Soviet Period: Problems and Perspectives. *Letonica*, No. 51, pp. 10–24. DOI: 10.35539/LTNC.2023.0051.02.

Gūtmane, Zanda; Ignatjeva, Sigita (2023, this issue). Reception and Translations of Western Modernist Literature in Latvia in the Brezhnev Era. *Letonica*, No. 51, pp. 120–143. DOI: 10.35539/LTNC.2023.0051.08.

Hanovs, Deniss (2023, this issue). Baltic Nations in Soviet Dissident Literature: *The Compromise* by Sergei Dovlatov. Letonica, No. 51, pp. 96–119. DOI: 10.35539/LTNC.2023.0051.07.

Ivanauskas, Vilius (2018). From Establishment to Dissent: The Cases of the Litterateurs Tomas Venclova and Zviad Gamsakhurdia in Soviet Lithuania and Soviet Georgia. *Histoire Politique*, No. 35, pp. 1–20. DOI: 10.4000/histoirepolitique.6377.

Jurgutienė, Aušra (2023, this issue). The Cold War in the History of Literature. *Letonica*, No. 51, pp. 26–38. DOI: 10.35539/LTNC.2023.0051.03.

Mitaitė, Donata (2023, this issue). Examining the Concept of Space in Soviet Lithuanian Poetry. *Letonica*, No. 51, pp. 60–71. DOI: 10.35539/LTNC.2023.0051.05.

Pelše, Stella (2023, this issue). Towards Humanism and Stylistic Diversity: The "Open System" of Socialist Realism in Latvian Artwriting of the Stagnation Era. *Letonica*, No. 51, pp. 158–176. DOI: 10.35539/LTNC.2023.0051.10.

Rėklaitytė, Akvilė (2023, this issue). Meaning Twist: National Images in Lithuanian Poetry of the Late Soviet Period. *Letonica*, No. 51, pp. 72–95. DOI: 10.35539/LTNC.2023.0051.06.

Māra Grudule
Dr. philol., literary scholar
Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art, University of Latvia
E-mail: mara.grudule@latnet.lv

Benedikts Kalnačs
Dr. habil. philol., literary scholar
Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art, University of Latvia
E-mail: benedikts.kalnacs@lulfmi.lv
DOI: 10.35539/LTNC.2023.0051.02

Writing the History of Latvian Literature in the Soviet Period: Problems and Perspectives

Latviešu literatūras vēstures rakstīšana padomju periodā: problēmas un perspektīvas

Keywords:
literary scholarship
in Soviet Latvia and in exile,
writing the history of literature,
translation of the Bible,
the reception of early Latvian texts,
the novel *Mērnieku laiki*,
Reinis Kaudzīte and
Matīss Kaudzīte

Atslēgvārdi:
literatūrpētniecība
padomju Latvijā un trimdā,
literatūras vēstures tapšana,
Bībeles tulkojums,
agro jauno laiku latviešu tekstu recepcija,
Mērnieku laiki,
Reinis un Matīss Kaudzītes

Summary The article focuses on the political and ideological conditions that shaped the dominant trends in writing the history of Latvian literature in the second half of the 20th century. The main focus is on the situation in Soviet Latvia in comparison to that in exile. The limited possibilities that existed in the interpretation of literary history under Soviet rule as well as the researchers' compromises with the official requirements are considered. The article also scrutinizes the literary research in exile, paying special attention to archival studies in the Western world. Two thematic aspects are discussed here in greater detail. Firstly, we analyze the Soviet-time reception of the novel *Mērnieku laiki* (The Surveyors' Times, 1879) by Reinis and Matīss Kaudzīte – its evaluation in official publications on literary history and in an anthology of literary criticism, as well as in studies by literary scholars Ingrīda Kiršentāle, Elza Knope and Oto Čakars. Secondly, we discuss the reception and interpretation of Latvian texts of the early modern period, concentrating on the discoveries of new facts of literary history that have significantly expanded the awareness of the links between Latvian culture and that of other European literatures. In the Soviet context, these discoveries are particularly related to the publications of Aleksejs Apīnis. This article also follows the process whereby the interests of researchers in exile and of those in Soviet Latvia gradually converged, as they reflected on two important sources of Latvian literature – folklore tradition and translation of the Bible – as they shaped both the national and European identity.

Kopsavilkums Rakstā pievērsta uzmanība tiem politiskajiem un ideoloģiskajiem apstākļiem, kas noteica latviešu literatūras vēstures dominējošās nostādnes 20. gs. otrajā pusē. Galvenā vērība pievērsta situācijai padomju Latvijā salīdzinājumā ar trimdu. Aplūkotas ierobežotās iespējas, kādas pastāvēja literatūras vēstures interpretācijās, kā arī pētnieku kompromisi ar oficiālajām prasībām; salīdzinājumā aplūkotas arī tendences literatūras pētniecībā trimdā, it īpaši pievēršanās arhīvu studijām Rietumu pasaulē. Detalizēta vērība veltīta diviem tematiskajiem aspektiem. Pirmkārt, aplūkota Reiņa un Matīsa Kaudzītes romāna *Mērnieku laiki* recepcija padomju periodā, analizējot gan romāna vērtējumus oficiālajos literatūras vēstures izdevumos un literatūras kritikas antoloģijā, gan pētījumus, kas veltīti literatūras kritikas attīstībai, tāpat kā atsevišķas romānam veltītas publikācijas. Salīdzināta padomju perioda literatūrzinātnieku Ingrīdas Kiršentāles, Elzas Knopes un Oto Čakara pieeja aplūkotajiem jautājumiem. Otrkārt, iztirzāta latviešu rakstniecības sākotnējo tekstu uztvere un interpretācija, pievēršoties arī jaunu literatūras vēstures faktu atklājumiem, kas palīdzēja ievērojami paplašināt priekšstatus par latviešu kultūras saikni ar Eiropas rakstniecību. Šie atklājumi padomju periodā it īpaši saistāmi ar Alekseja Apīņa publikācijām. Izsekots arī tam, kā pakāpeniski tuvinājās pētnieku intereses trimdā un padomju Latvijā, tajā skaitā atspoguļojot divus svarīgus latviešu literatūras avotus, folkloras tradīciju un Bībeles tulkojumu kā nacionālas un eiropeiskas identitātes veidotāju.

Introduction

In this paper, we trace the impact of the 20th century political transformations and especially the effect of Soviet ideology on Latvian literary criticism and the writing of literary history.[1] The first ideological restrictions imposed by the Soviet state were already noticeable in 1940 and 1941 during the first Soviet occupation, but a more systematic suppression of cultural diversity began when the territories of the three Baltic States were reincorporated into the Soviet Union in late 1944. The transformations caused by the occupations and the Second World War had a major impact on the fate of the Latvian intellectual community; it completely changed the conditions of daily life and made strong ideological demands omnipresent. It is generally agreed that the most suppressive years were those between 1946 and 1956, followed by a gradual easing of the strict Stalinist constraints. While there was obviously no clear-cut road to freedom of thought in the decades to come, in this paper we try to show to what extent this is or is not true.

During the post-war period, contemporary literature was the main ideological stronghold of the power structures, being strictly constrained in order to correspond to the moral principles of the self-declared communist society. However, similar rules were also applied to the interpretation of literary history. Characteristically, the choice of authors included in school curricula was restricted to those directly or indirectly displaying their loyalty to the regime and to those who retrospectively fit such ideological purposes. In his book, *Latvian Literature under the Soviets, 1940–1975* (1978), the exile scholar Rolfs Ekmanis reflects on the main principle of Soviet ideology, namely the concept of two cultures in bourgeois society – one progressive and the other reactionary: "We take from each national culture only its democratic and socialist elements, we take them solely and unconditionally as a counterbalance to bourgeois culture, to the bourgeois nationalism of each nation" (Ekmanis 1978: 16). Providing a complete reversal of the principle of the freedom of thought, these opinions critically assessed by Ekmanis became indisputable truths under Soviet rule.

Toward the late 1950s, the majority of the population in the Baltic countries had come to the painful realization that the existing conditions would last much longer than initially expected. They had started to cope with the situation, even though below the surface there was a deep disagreement with the Soviet regime – as Estonian researcher Epp Annus called it, paraphrasing Homi Bhabha, "consent but not quite"

---

1 This article continues the authors' research previously presented in the publication *Latviešu literatūras vēstures recepcija no 1945. līdz 2015. gadam* (The Reception of Latvian Literary History between 1945 and 2015) (Grudule, Kalnačs 2019).

(Annus 2018: 39). All principal Soviet-time publications on the research of literature in Latvia bear signs of this contradictory situation, as they were subject to censorship. In our paper, we examine some of the main sources of literary history written during that time, such as the six volume history of Latvian literature (published between 1956 and 1963); the six edited volumes of Latvian literary criticism that appeared between 1956 and 1964; the analysis of Latvian literary criticism of the second half of the 19th century by Elza Knope in 1962; a history of Latvian literature in Russian in two volumes in 1971; a monograph on the history of the Latvian novel by Ingrīda Kiršentāle in 1979; and the history of Latvian literature from its beginnings until the 1880s by Arvīds Grigulis, Milda Losberga, and Oto Čakars, published in 1987. In all these projects, largely based on serious research and displaying the competent knowledge of the contributors, the scenery of Latvian literature was consciously deformed both on a large scale, concealing or completely omitting important authors from the literary process, and in the minor details as well. In order to trace these attempts in more detail, our two case studies focus on one of the first Latvian novels, *Mērnieku laiki* (The Surveyors' Times, 1879) by Reinis and Matīss Kaudzīte, as well as on the Soviet-era reception of early Latvian-language texts.

Mērnieku laiki (1879) by Reinis and Matīss Kaudzīte in Soviet literary criticism

The official theorists of the Soviet regime promoted an extremely narrow understanding of the concepts first established in the 19th century Marxist philosophy. The main task of a literary historian was to evaluate the ideological position of each author. The ideas expressed in literary texts, not their aesthetic features, were of primary importance. Writers' compliance with the ideological rules was explicitly stated as more important than literary talent. 19th century authors who contributed to the rise of national consciousness were interpreted from the point of view of the ideology of class struggle, and historical links to Baltic German literature were mostly ignored. The ties with Russian culture were foregrounded, while almost all connections to other European literature passed over in silence.

The novel by Reinis and Matīss Kaudzīte, *Mērnieku laiki*, has been fortunate enough to escape the fate of many other literary texts, as it was never fully expelled from cultural memory. Met with some reservations by the first reviewers, it was nevertheless almost immediately recognized as an important contribution to Latvian literature. The novel enjoyed public attention and was printed in several new editions. The 1913 edition contained about 60 visual images of the main characters, drawn by

the artist Eduards Brencēns, and this contributed to the popularity of the novel (Ābele 2022: 204–205). Already in 1909, a concise essay by Roberts Klaustiņš delving into the poetics of *Mērnieku laiki* was published; its expanded version in the form of a monograph appeared in 1926 (Klaustiņš 1926).

In 1911, the novel was adapted for the stage by Pāvils Gruzna and performed at the New Riga Theatre. During the interwar period there were, among others, three productions by the modernist director Eduards Smiļģis at the Daile Theatre in 1924, 1929, and 1942. Later, this important novel was again staged in a new version in the Drama (formerly the Latvian National) Theatre in 1950. In the late 1970s, the dramatist Pauls Putniņš, coming from the same Piebalga region as the brothers Kaudzīte, created a new stage adaptation. This version became a huge success in the open-air performances of the Drama Theatre in the mid-1980s (Struka 2009, 194). In 1968, a movie was based on the plot of the novel, featuring many of the most popular Latvian actors of that time.

There were several factors that contributed to the official recognition of the novel. Firstly, *Mērnieku laiki* arguably embodied one of the first instances of realism in Latvian literature, and its reception was thus tailored according to the idea that pre-Soviet literature was already paving the way for the upcoming revolutionary transformations in society. Secondly, the authors were local schoolteachers from a modest social background, and thus were well-suited for the ideological claims of the regime. An important detail constantly emphasized in the Soviet period was that Matīss had attended a Russian-language rural school (Kiršentāle 1963: 637). He was even forgiven for writing a sequel called *Jaunie mērnieku laiki* (The New Surveyors' Times, 1924–1927) later in his life, where the events unfold during the period of the socialist takeover in 1919.

Still, some features of the reception clearly display certain trends in the literary histories that we are going to discuss now. The first edited anthology of Latvian literary criticism in 1956 includes a section on the early reviews of Kaudzītes' novel. Interestingly, not all of them were reprinted; the article by Aleksandrs Vēbers, a member of the Riga Latvian Society, was omitted. Paradoxically, Vēbers in fact provided the most balanced evaluation of the novel, especially with regard to it as an important achievement in Latvian literature. Nevertheless as a representative of the Riga Latvian Society and meanwhile also a Baltic German, he was subjected to ideological exclusion from the Soviet-time publication of 1956.

Elza Knope in her history of Latvian literary criticism, *Latviešu literatūras kritika 19. gs. otrajā pusē* (Latvian Literary Criticism in the Second Half of the 19th Century, 1962), devotes a subchapter to a brief evaluation of the importance of *Mērnieku laiki*, where she also comments on these early reviews. Knope especially stresses the close ties of

the brothers Kaudzīte with Russian realist literature (Knope 1962: 65). The two authors' worldview is characterized as idealist and partly "reactionary" due to their religious beliefs and conservative social position (66). However, she claims that the realist method allowed them to present a truthful picture of life despite their own opinions, a possibility that had been "rightly" raised by the classics of Marxism-Leninism (65–66). This statement is made with reference to Jānis Niedre, an orthodox Soviet Latvian literary critic who in his *Latviešu literatūras vēsture* (History of Latvian Literature), published ten years earlier in 1952, used the word "aims" (*nodomi*) instead of "opinions" (*uzskati*), explicitly directing attention toward the serious limitations of Kaudzītes' approach; to a certain extent, Knope minimizes the ideological threat potentially caused by the novel. The word *pareizi* ('rightly' or 'correctly') remains one of the most often employed words in Knope's book, as if it provided a safe haven for her thoughts, giving them the strength of collective authority. Her topic being 19th century literary criticism, she mentions all the early reviews of the novel, including that of Vēbers, and thus takes a step toward reinstating a more reliable overall picture of the novel's importance.

An interesting case is presented by Haralds (a pseudonym of the poet Vensku Edvarts), who in his review deals with two Latvian novels published in the same year – the other text, alongside Kaudzītes' work, being *Sadzīves viļņi* (The Waves of Everyday Life) by Māteru Juris. The latter novel was constantly pushed out of the literary reception of the Soviet period as one belonging to popular literature. The early reviewer is thus, in the eyes of Knope and many others, "right" to condemn it, while also denouncing the influence of popular German literature, especially novels by Eugenie Marlitt. However, Knope does not accept reviewers' remarks that Māteru Juris has a good understanding of the novel genre, and states instead that the reactionary ideological stance of the author makes it virtually impossible for him to create realistic characters (Knope 1962: 71). Knope also criticizes the Kaudzītes for their use of some elements of popular literature that add picaresque features to *Mērnieku laiki.* She does not specifically address the shortage of positive characters in the Kaudzītes' novel (a problem for some reviewers) and states that the satirical tradition that goes back to Nikolai Gogol is most important.

The exclusion of the critique written by Vēbers from the above anthology and the direct juxtaposition of the first two Latvian novels on aesthetic and ideological grounds clearly espouse the principle of two cultures in one national culture. Overall, the major flaw of the socialist and leftist ideology and literary criticism was that artistic phenomena were principally explained through the prism of class struggle.

One of the most contradictory cases in the writing of Latvian literary history is provided by the six-volume *Latviešu literatūras vēsture* (History of Latvian Literature, 1956–1962), supervised by Ēvalds Sokols, former head of the Press Bureau of the Propaganda Department of the Latvian Communist Party (1946–1948) and director of

the Institute of Language and Literature of the Academy of Sciences (1951–1963). Conceived as an attempt to overthrow the narrative of literary history published in the 1930s, this official Soviet history of Latvian literature divided authors according to their political sympathies. The analysis of *Mērnieku laiki* for this publication was written by the literary scholar Ingrīda Kiršentāle. It is interesting to compare how her opinions first appear here and how they have changed in the 1970s. In this paper, we take a closer look at three publications of Kiršentāle: her articles in the *History of Latvian Literature* in 1963; in the Russian-language version of *Latvian Literary History* in 1971; and her monograph on the history of the Latvian novel in 1979.

In 1963, Kiršentāle places emphasis on the strong impact of Russian culture in the build-up of the authors' personalities, and, among other aspects, she comments on the formative role of the stagings of Nikolai Gogol's *The Inspector General* and Alexander Ostrovsky's plays in Vecpiebalga. She mentions early translations from the Russian language made by Matīss Kaudzīte (Kiršentāle 1963: 641–642); she even implants the ideologically charged context of "people of the future" in the 19th century Latvian countryside (670) and speaks about "the common sense of the masses" (676). Another detail important for her is the conscious choice of realism in the novel despite the authors' close ties to the Herrnhuter religious community (643); this means that, despite their controversial relation to religion (658), the Kaudzītes are "in the progressive camp" (659) and able to trace the ideological conflict between feudalism and capitalism. At the same time, however, Kiršentāle strongly condemns the authors' inability to provide a positive ideal. (654). Thus, she remains orthodox in comparison to the more nuanced version provided by Knope. According to Kiršentāle, Prātnieks, one of the main characters of the novel, displays typical features of the new type of capitalist who exploits other people (656). In some cases, the analysis points toward important issues mainly addressed in later criticism – for example, the aspect of theatricality in the novel (656, cf. Brooks 1995; Čakare 2011), as well as the thoughtful use of language that allows to depict individual characteristics (Kiršentāle 1963: 664). At the same time, the connection of this novel with popular literature is denounced by stating that most reviewers, contrary to the opinion of Roberts Klaustiņš in the 1920s, "rightly" consider the overall quality of this literary text to be diminished by the picaresque aspects of the novel.

The 1971 edition of the Russian-language *History of Latvian Literature* does not mention whether the contributions had been translated into Russian by someone else or prepared by the authors themselves. In any case, the overall impression is that of a considerable simplification. Kiršentāle maintains that the only books in the Kaudzītes' childhood home were religious (Kiršentāle 1971: 206), even though already in 1963 she had spoken about the collective reading of popular sentimental

stories that took place there (Kiršentāle 1963: 636). The authors of the novel thus "undertake a conscious effort to make themselves free from the ties of the religious worldview" (Kiršentāle 1971: 209). The speech of the character Pietuks, an ironically represented figure of the national awakening period, is described as merely "nonsense"; however, the philosopher Vilnis Zariņš later convincingly demonstrated that the poem recited by Pietuks on a festive occasion should rather be called "eclectic," as it contains elements of various cultural traditions which he attempts to understand but is not fully able to grasp (Zariņš 2011: 150–151). The observations given by Kiršentāle, which fail to be conceived in terms of literary history, are close to "street language" – this refers not only to Pietuks but also to another character of the novel, Švauksts, who tries to mimic everyday habits of the Baltic Germans (Kiršentāle 1971: 215).

The background of Kiršentāle's *Latviešu romāns* (History of the Latvian Novel, 1979) is more theoretical. There she introduces the concept of a "panorama" novel (Kiršentāle 1979: 22); invokes a comparison to Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (27–28); broadens the theoretical contexts; and, alongside the traditional Soviet-era references to the 19th century Russian critic Vissarion Belinsky, German theorists Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Friedrich Schlegel, and Friedrich Spielhagen are also noted. The theoretical approaches of Mikhail Bakhtin are contextualized as well, with a special emphasis on the novel as "the art of the present" (30–31). However, she does not succeed in developing a more nuanced approach, since some of the evaluations paradoxically become even more ideologically charged. This is most clearly visible with regard to the character of the somewhat naïve peasant Ķencis. He is described as silly, superstitious, talkative, and trendy (Kiršentāle 1979: 25, cf. the more nuanced description of his activities in Kiršentāle 1963: 663). It is interesting to juxtapose these characteristics with the ones given to Ķencis by another expert of the Kaudzītes' novel, Oto Čakars, who speaks of him as a "simple-minded" person while at the same time as being full of "initiative" and "self-confidence" (Čakars 1987: 355).

This last quote refers to the 1987 edition of *Literary History*; nevertheless, some of the main points analyzed by Čakars had already been developed in his articles, published in the late 1950s. In 1964, Čakars defended his thesis on the topic of *Mērnieku laiki* as the first realist novel in Latvian literature. In his review of this thesis, Arturs Ozols acknowledges the quality of the research, noting the detailed analysis of language use in the novel, while typically placing the approach of Čakars in the context of Soviet literary debates (Ozols 1968). In 1968, Čakars published a monograph of the same title; contrary to literary histories printed at that time, the author is astonishingly confident in his judgements and concentrates on specific poetic details. He pays tribute to the artistic complexity of the main characters and disapproves of some of the traditional aspects of the novel's reception, such as the criticism of

wealthy peasants. In 1980, Čakars supplied detailed commentaries to a new edition of *Mērnieku laiki* (Čakars 1980). This publication, like many others of that period, shows the researcher delving carefully into the details of literary texts. In the portrayal of peasants in the Kaudzītes' novel, Čakars sees contradictory characters with many sympathetic features; these attentive observations are still present in the *Literary History* published in 1987.

Two years later the literary scholar and prose writer Jānis Kalniņš, in his book *Kalna Kaibēni, brāļu Kaudzīšu dzīves romāns* (Kalna Kaibēni, the Life Novel of the Brothers Kaudzīte, 1989), included the authors of *Mērnieku laiki* into the gallery of the main contributors to Latvian literature and culture – alongside others to whom Kalniņš had already devoted some of his assiduous biographic studies. This lengthy book summarizes the intellectual efforts occurring in the Latvian scholarly community of that time, even though such efforts were often beneath the surface and despite the unfavorable conditions of the decades of Soviet rule. We should not, however, ignore the fact that Kalniņš, in his capacity as director of the Institute of Language and Literature of the Latvian Academy of Sciences in the 1970s, was also the main editor of the Russian-language *History of Latvian Literature* mentioned above. Unfortunately and highly regrettably, not on all occasions and not everyone in the generations of scholars working under the conditions of censorship found the opportunity and courage to express their true sentiments and opinions.

The reception of early Latvian texts in Soviet Latvia and in exile

The ideological doctrines adopted in Soviet Latvia had a major impact on literary history writing. In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, they prescribed an almost complete omission of the comparative approach to literary phenomena (an approach which would extend comparison beyond the ties with the Russian culture) and determined an extremely limited list of authors allowed to be included in literary history. This had severe consequences, especially because the authors of the early Latvian literature had been Baltic Germans. Accordingly, most of the texts were translations from European, mainly German, literary sources. Many 19th and 20th century Latvian writers could not be linked to proletarian or the so-called progressive literature and thus were omitted from surveys of Latvian texts (see Andersone 1949). Under the rule of communist ideology, Latvian culture initially lost almost all connections to Western European traditions and an awareness of the inner logic of aesthetic transformations in literature as an art form.

In his *Latviešu literatūra* (History of Latvian Literature), published in 1952, Jānis Niedre located the starting point of a self-aware Latvian literature in the middle of the 19th century and almost completely disregarded early written texts in Latvian. Looking at literature from the perspective of the class struggle and emphasizing Baltic Germans as oppressors, Niedre stated that "the German pastors in Latvia did not even try to understand the Latvians and their language properly, and therefore their efforts are not in any way comparable to the creative achievements of the [Latvian] people" (Niedre 1952: 3–4; here and elsewhere our translation). The first Latvian books, according to him, were extremely unsatisfactory in their use of the Latvian language (267). Earlier literary histories, according to Niedre, "shamefully make Latvian poetry, prose, drama, and criticism a disciple of the literary tradition established by the oppressors and enemies of the people" (9). The history of Latvian literature published in 1959 noted the same ideas, e.g. the Bible was regarded as "a strong weapon of ideological pressure and blind conformity" (Upītis 1959: 383).

Similar ideology prevailed in the collection *Latviešu literatūras kritika* (Latvian Literary Criticism; 1956–1964, 5 volumes), compiled and edited by the writer and literary scholar Arvīds Grigulis and his colleague Vilis Austrums (Vilis Ambainis). The inclusion and exclusion of particular authors and texts here closely followed the ideologically prescribed strategy. The edition begins with texts from the latter half of the 19th century, when "literary criticism [became] an active weapon of social struggle [..]. Baltic German pastors created literature which was hostile to the Latvians and provided primitive and cynical examples of literary criticism. These trends had a reactionary and impeding role in the development of Latvian culture" (Grigulis, Austrums 1956: 3). All publications prepared by the local Germans are strongly condemned here.

The 1960s were, however, already marked by several important discoveries that helped to broaden the contexts of Latvian literary history. A document proving the existence of the first book in Latvian printed in Germany in 1525 (instead of 1585, as was earlier believed) allowed to connect the beginnings of Latvian letters to the Reformation in Europe (Apīnis, Zemzaris 1966). In 1965 it was also proved that the first theatre performance in Latvian took place as early as 1818, half a century before the official beginnings of Latvian theatre in Riga in 1868. On this earlier occasion, Latvian peasants staged a German drama – Friedrich Schiller's tragedy *Die Räuber* (The Robbers, 1781) (Apīnis 1965; Apīnis 1974). The first volume of the *Latviešu teātra vēsture* (History of Latvian Theatre) by Kārlis Kundziņš, published in 1968, also included a brief discussion of the history of German theatre in Latvia. The links with Western European culture were thus carefully reinstated alongside Russian influences.

Some of the main discoveries were made by the bibliographer and cultural

historian Aleksejs Apīnis. His investigations clearly demonstrated the role of an individual researcher in the evaluation of literary history. Apīnis revealed the fundamental importance of archive studies that even in the given circumstances could provide clues for the readers and thus at least implicitly counter some of the sweeping generalizations often used in the ideological rhetoric of the regime. Still working under the conditions of Soviet censorship, Apīnis managed to publish a history of book printing and distribution in Latvia, in which about two-thirds of the text was devoted to the contribution of Baltic Germans from the 16th to mid-19th century. The subchapter "The reactionary role of German pastors in the publication of Latvian books" is the lone striking example of obedience to Soviet ideology (Apīnis 1977: 167–170). The discoveries made by Apīnis were subsequently incorporated into the literary history co-authored by Oto Čakars, Arvīds Grigulis, and Milda Losberga in 1987. The impact of Baltic German literary culture was restored and early Latvian texts put in their historical contexts. This re-evaluation was even extended to an inclusion of religious texts in literary history.

There was a different situation in exile where, despite an enormous lack of sources, serious efforts were constantly put into preserving cultural memory. European libraries and archives opened new opportunities in material-gathering for the research of Latvian literary history. The rich collections of materials dating back to the 17th century, the time of so-called Swedish Livonia, in the archives and libraries of Stockholm and Uppsala stimulated interest in the history of the translation of the Bible into Latvian. The translation and publication of the Latvian Bible (1694) had been supported by the King of Sweden, and the 20th century reception of the Bible translation became an important factor in the European identity construction of Latvian exiles.

The 1970s can be singled out here. The two roots of Latvian culture – folklore and the Bible translation – were emphasized once again in the context of a productive interplay between the national tradition and European culture. In 1974, a facsimile of the first Latvian edition of the Bible was published in the United States. It was supplemented by an analysis of the personality of the first translator, German pastor Ernst Glück, as well as by a monograph on the translation of the Bible published in Minneapolis by historian Edgars Dunsdorfs (Dunsdorfs 1979). The facsimile publication of a manuscript by Glück's contemporary Jānis Reiters, discovered in the University library of Uppsala (Reiters 1975), stimulated further interest in the history of Swedish Livonia. Thus, in 1986 a book by the Latvian linguist Konstantīns Karulis, *Jānis Reiters un viņa tulkojums* (Jānis Reiters and His Translation) was published in Riga. It was the first monograph on Jānis Reiters, based on the research of Latvian historians in exile as well as on the case studies in the archives of Latvia. This book

was followed by another monograph on the Latvian Bible, *Bībeles pirmais izdevums latviešu valodā: 1685–1694* (The First Edition of the Bible in Latvian: 1685–1694), written by the same author (Karulis 1989). From the sixteen sources mentioned by Karulis, eleven had been published either in exile or in Latvia before the Second World War. Thus, since the late 1980s, the two separated discourses of literary scholarship in exile and in Latvia were gradually brought together.

The personality of Ernst Glück was the subject of study for scholars in Latvia and Germany. In 1703, Glück and his family were captured and taken to Moscow where he died two years later, already having left an important impact on the Russian educational system. Studies of Glück's documentary heritage in Russian archives began in the 1980s; Glück's manuscript of the Russian grammar was published in cooperation with German colleagues (Glück 1994). In 1998, the Russian historian Vera Kovrigina published an outstanding monograph on German schools in Moscow at the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries, devoting a whole chapter to the school established by Ernst Glück (Kovrigina 1998). Historians and literary scholars from Russia, Sweden, Latvia, and Germany, doing research on Glück and his contribution to education, linguistics, literature, and theology in the German, Russian, and Latvian-speaking world, met for the first time on his 300th anniversary in Halle in 2004. The event was followed by a joint collection of articles (Grudule, Schiller 2010). In 2005, a monograph on Ernst Glück was published in Wiesbaden; the monograph included an anthology of his letters and reports based on German, Latvian, Russian, and Swedish sources (Glück, Polanska 2005). Thus the investigations of the early period of Latvian literature strengthened the place of Baltic culture in the intricate developments of European history.

Conclusion

In this paper we followed the setbacks that Latvian literary criticism of the Soviet era had to experience, and also discussed its gradual improvements such as a more nuanced interest in cultural history, the heightened acceptance of careful analysis of literary texts, and the gradually diminishing level of ideological rhetoric. Only during the post-Soviet era, however, it became possible to connect the interest in Latvian cultural history with the methodology of European humanities.

Since the 1990s, publications in the literary monthly *Karogs* examined new methods of literary scholarship, and books on literary theory followed. Viktors Ivbulis published translated fragments of some literary theorists from the West, supplied with his own comments and an evaluation of different approaches (Ivbulis 1998).

Several books on prose theory were written and published, among them *Prozas žanri* (Prose Genres, 1991) by Ingrīda Kiršentāle, Dzidra Vārdaune, and Benita Smilktiņa – an important contribution to the field. This work testifies to their considerable knowledge of literary history and theory, acquired during decades of scholarly activity. An important re-evaluation of Latvian literature was provided by Guntis Berelis in his monograph *Latviešu literatūra* (Latvian Literature, 1999). The international context of Latvian literature had also been strengthened by new translations into other languages. Importantly, among these translations is also a German-language version of *Mērnieku laiki* by Valdis Bisenieks, one of the most instrumental figures in promoting the close ties between Latvian and German literature (Kaudzīte 2012).

Clearly, a discussion of the 21st century literary criticism in Latvia is beyond the scope of the present paper. We want to point to the possibilities now open to scholars in the humanities, especially important for those who themselves experienced the ideological pressures of the Soviet rule. The presence of ideology in literature has a long history. In the early years of the 20th century, the leftist literary critic Jānis Asars, writing about the German dramatist Friedrich Hebbel in the context of 19th century literature, condemned the movement of Young Germany (*Junges Deutschland*) for prioritizing the political views of authors above their artistic ability (Asars 1910: 60). Unfortunately, it was exactly this slippery path that Asars himself undertook some years later alongside some of his contemporaries. Much more dramatically, however, similar views became the basis of an official state ideology during the Soviet era, stretching over several decades of the so-called proletarian dictatorship that significantly changed the cultural scene in Latvia.

Bibliography

Ābele, Kristiāna (2022). From the Basics of Visual Literacy to the First Momentum of National Art: Aesthetic Effects of Image Circulation in Latvian Society. Daija, Pauls; Kalnačs, Benedikts (eds.). *A New History of Latvian Literature: The Long Nineteenth Century*. Berlin: Peter Lang, pp. 173–213.

Andersone, Emma (1949). *Pirmie raksti latviešu valodā. XIX gs. pirmā puse. XIX gs. 60.–80. gadi.* Rīga: Latvijas Valsts izdevniecība.

Annus, Epp (2018). *Soviet Postcolonial Studies: A View from the Western Borderlands*. London, New York: Routledge.

Apīnis, Aleksejs (1974). Gājiens pa pirmās latviešu teātra izrādes dalībnieku pēdām turpinās. *Literatūra un Māksla*, 20.04., pp. 15–16.

Apīnis, Aleksejs; Zemzaris, Jānis (1966). Kultūras mantojums. Pirms 440 gadiem. *Karogs*, No. 9, pp. 154–156.

Apīnis, Aleksejs (1977). *Latviešu grāmatniecība*. Rīga: Liesma.

Apīnis, Aleksejs (1965). Pa pirmās teātra izrādes dalībnieku pēdām. *Zvaigzne*, No. 3, pp. 4–5.

Asars, Jānis (1910). *Kopoti raksti*, vol. 3, book 3. Rīga: A. Raņķis.

Brooks, Peter (1995). *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Čakare, Valda (2011). Melodrāma kā teatralizācijas veids brāļu Kaudzīšu romānā "Mērnieku laiki". Cimdiņa, Ausma; Lāms, Ojārs (eds.). *Piebalgas teksts. Brāļu Kaudzīšu romāns "Mērnieku laiki".* Rīga: Zinātne, pp. 223–233.

Čakars, Oto (1980). Komentāri. Kaudzīte, Reinis, Kaudzīte, Matīss. *Mērnieku laiki*. Rīga: Liesma, pp. 465–534.

Čakars, Oto; Grigulis, Arvīds; Losberga, Milda (1987). *Latviešu literatūras vēsture no pirmsākumiem līdz XIX gadsimta 80. gadiem*. Rīga: Zvaigzne.

Dunsdorfs, Edgars (1979). *Pirmās latviešu Bībeles vēsture.* Mineapole: Latviešu ev.-lut. baznīca Amerikā.

Ekmanis, Rolfs (1978). *Latvian Literature under the Soviets, 1940–1975*. Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing Company.

Glück, Helmut; Polanska, Ineta (2005). *Johann Ernst Glück (1654–1705). Pastor, Philologe, Volksaufklärer im Baltikum und Russland.* Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.

Glück, Johann Ernst (1994). *Grammatik der russischen Sprache.* Herausgegeben und mit einer Einleitung versehen von Helmut Keipert, Boris Uspenskij und Viktor Živov. Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau.

Grigulis, Arvīds; Austrums, Vilis (eds.) (1956). *Latviešu literatūras kritika*, vol. 1. Rīga: Latvijas Valsts izdevniecība.

Grudule, Māra; Kalnačs, Benedikts (2019). Latviešu literatūras vēstures recepcija no 1945. līdz 2015. gadam. *Letonica*, No. 40, pp. 44–60.

Grudule, Māra; Schiller, Christiane (Hrsg.) (2010). *"Mach dich auf und werde licht – Celies nu un topi gaišs". Zu Leben und Werk Ernst Glücks (1654–1705). Akten der Tagung anlässlich seines 300. Todestages vom 10. bis 13. Mai 2005 in Halle (Saale).* Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

Ivbulis, Viktors (1998). *Ceļā uz literatūras teoriju: no Platona līdz Diltejam*. Rīga: Zinātne, 1998.

Karulis, Konstantīns (1989). *Bībeles pirmais izdevums latviešu valodā: 1685–1694.* Rīga: Raiņa literatūras un mākslas vēstures muzejs.

Kaudzīte, Reinis; Kaudzīte, Matīss (2012). *Landvermesserzeiten.* Aus dem lettischen übersetzt von Valdis Bisenieks. Salzburg: Verlag Kaspars Kļaviņš.

Kiršentāle, Ingrīda (1963). Brāļi Kaudzītes. Sokols, Ēvalds (ed.). *Latviešu literatūras vēsture,* vol. 2. Rīga: Latvijas PSR Zinātņu Akadēmijas izdevniecība, pp. 632–701.

Kiršentāle, Ingrīda (1971). Bratja Kaudzite. Vavere, Vera, Kalnins, Janis (eds.). *Istorija latyshskoj literatury*, vol. 1. Rīga: Zinātne, 1971, pp. 204–224.

Kiršentāle, Ingrīda (1979). *Latviešu romāns. Žanra tapšana un attīstība līdz 1940. gadam.* Rīga: Zinātne.

Klaustiņš, Roberts (1926). *"Mērnieku laiki" kā sadzīves romāns.* Estētisks un kultūrvēsturisks apcerējums. Otrais izdevums. Rīga: RLB Derīgu grāmatu nodaļa.

Knope, Elza (1962). *Latviešu literatūras kritika 19. gs. otrajā pusē*. Rīga: Latvijas PSR Zinātņu Akadēmijas izdevniecība.

Kovrigina, Vera (1998). *Nemeckaja sloboda Moskvy i ejo zhiteli v konce XVVII–pervoj chetverti XVIII vv.* Moskva: Arheograficheskij centr, pp. 296–332.

Niedre, Jānis (1952). *Latviešu literatūra*, vol. 1. Rīga: Latvijas Valsts izdevniecība, pp. 3–4.

Ozols, Arturs (1968). *Raksti folkloristikā*. Rīga: Zinātne.

Reiters, Jānis (1975). *Tulkojuma paraugs. Eine Übersetzungsprobe: 1675. gada Rīgā iznākušo latviešu Bībeles tekstu faksmiliespiedums. Ar B[enjamiņa] Jēgera apceri*. Stokholma: Daugava.

Struka, Ieva (2009). *Latvijas Nacionālais teātris. Aiz priekškara.* Rīga: Latvijas Nacionālais teātris.

Upītis, Jānis (1959). Literatūra 17. gadsimtā. Sokols, Ēvalds (ed.). *Latviešu literatūras vēsture*, vol. 1. Rīga: Latvijas PSR Zinātņu Akadēmijas izdevniecība, pp. 347–418.

Zariņš, Vilnis (2011). Pietuka Krustiņa "Augstās dziesmas" vadošās idejas un izteiksmes līdzekļi. Cimdiņa, Ausma ; Lāms, Ojārs (eds.). *Piebalgas teksts. Brāļu Kaudzīšu romāns "Mērnieku laiki".* Rīga: Zinātne, pp. 144–160.

Aušra Jurgutienė
Dr. philol., literary scholar
Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore
E-mail: ausra.jurgutiene@gmail.com
DOI: 10.35539/LTNC.2023.0051.03

The Cold War in the History of Literature

Aukstais karš literatūras vēsturē

Keywords:
Lithuanian literary history,
Soviet occupation,
national disintegration and integration,
comparative historical research

Atslēgvārdi:
Lietuvas literatūras vēsture,
padomju okupācija,
nacionālā disintegrācija un integrācija,
salīdzinošie vēstures pētījumi

Summary John Neubauer's suggestion to re-evaluate national histories (which he expresses in *History of Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (since 2004) and *The Exile and Return of Writers from East-Central Europe: A Compendium* (2009)) encouraged me to take another look at the new, more-complicated processes of integration and disintegration in histories of national literature during the Cold War (1946–1991).

For this reason, the focus of my paper will be dual: on the internal hostility of national literary history and the splitting of national self-images caused by the Cold War, and on the need to preserve national memory and self-awareness. I will discuss the ambivalent identity of the Lithuanian literature: how it was disintegrated during the Cold War with the Bolshevik thesis about the existence of two cultures in each national culture, and how it preserved the basic features of integration. Although my research will be mostly based on examples from the history of Lithuanian literature, I believe it can also be relevant for other cultures that survived the Soviet period and ideological censorship. The goal of this article is to discuss how complicated the processes of "junctures and disjunctures" were in Lithuanian literary history during the Soviet occupation, and how they remain relevant in contemporary historiography.

Kopsavilkums Džona Neibauera (*John Neubauer*) ieteikums pārvērtēt nacionālās vēstures (ko viņš pauž izdevumos *History of Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (2004) un *The Exile and Return of Writers from East-Central Europe: A Compendium* (2009)) mani ierosināja no jauna paskatīties uz sarežģītajiem integrācijas un disintegrācijas procesiem nacionālo literatūru vēsturēs Aukstā kara laikā (1946–1991). Tādēļ manam rakstam būs divējāds fokuss: uz Aukstā kara izraisīto nacionālās literatūras vēstures iekšējo konfliktu un sašķelto nacionālo paštēlu, kā arī uz nepieciešamību saglabāt tautas atmiņu un pašapzināšanos. Es aplūkošu Lietuvas literatūras vēstures pretrunīgo identitāti: kā tā tika disintegrēta Aukstā kara laikā, sekojot boļševiku tēzei par to, ka katrā nacionālā kultūrā pastāv divas kultūras, un kā tā tomēr saglabāja integrācijas pazīmes. Kaut arī mans pētījums pamatā balstās uz piemēriem no Lietuvas literatūras vēstures, domāju, ka tas var būt aktuāls arī citās kultūrās, kas pārdzīvojušas padomju laikus un ideoloģisko cenzūru. Šī raksta mērķis ir analizēt sarežģītos "savienošanās un atvienošanās" procesus lietuviešu literatūras vēsturē padomju okupācijas laikā un to aktualitāti mūsdienu historiogrāfijā.

After the Cold War (1947–1991), during which the world was divided into two opposing military blocs of the capitalist West and the socialist East, John Neubauer's suggestion to re-evaluate national histories (which he expresses in *History of Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (since 2004) and *The Exile and Return of Writers from East-Central Europe: A Compendium* (2009)) encouraged me to take another look at the new, more-complicated processes of integration and disintegration in histories of national literature during the Cold War (1946–1991). In the Introduction to *History of Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries, Volume 3* (2007) Neubauer highlighted the positive, nation-integrating impact of European national literary histories, but also their negative, isolating effect that triggered hostility towards national minorities and neighbors:

> The national self-images of the last two centuries must be revised today, not only because of globalization and European integration, but above all because they continue to foment alienation, hostility, and aggression against minorities and against neighboring states (Neubauer 2007: 345).

These processes took place somewhat differently in Lithuania during the Cold War, so it is important to analyze their features. It is obvious that the literary history of the occupied Lithuanian nation after its inclusion in the Eastern Bloc lost the purpose of uniting all its citizens and the entirety of Lithuanian culture, as it was split into two separate parts (the communist East and the bourgeois émigré West), and, accordingly, into two opposing literatures (in simple terms, that of Socialist Realism and of decadence). Soviet colonization caused, first of all, internal hostility and aggression in the nation against itself (rather than against minorities and against neighboring states), as the latter were divided into "rotting capitalist countries" and "friendly union of Soviet republics". Standing with the colonizer was called "being in the family of Soviet writers" (Korsakas 1968: 9); such loyalty was very useful for many writers and for Soviet literary historians. Calling themselves progressive anti-fascists, they criticized bourgeois decadents and pushed them to the margins of history: "Having introduced some formal innovations that diversified and expanded the means of artistic expression, the decadent direction of 'pure art' essentially turned the development of Lithuanian poetry on the wrong path of ideological and artistic decline" (Korsakas 1961: 199). The best works written by the émigré writers and poets after 1944 were not mentioned at all in Soviet literary histories.

This internal ideological and aesthetic confrontation, based on the Bolshevik thesis about the existence of two cultures in each national culture, was best illustrated

by the four-volume academic history of Lithuanian literature (*Lietuvių literatūros istorija*, edited by Kostas Korsakas) in Soviet Lithuania. It covers literature from the earliest writings (the 14th century annals of Lithuania) to the latest literary publications in 1967. It was written and published between 1957 and 1968 and encompassed the periods of both Khrushchev's Thaw (1953–1964) and Brezhnev's Stagnation (1964–1985). Ten years later, a typically stagnant and somewhat more concise *Lietuvių literatūros istorija* (History of Lithuanian Literature) in two volumes (edited by Jonas Lankutis) was published between 1979 and 1982. The ideological and methodological structure of its narrative remained the same as that of the history edited by Korsakas. These histories clearly show that during the Cold War there was no fundamental break in the historiography of the literature of the Thaw and the Stagnation period: both were written and edited according to the same principle of loyalty to the Communist Party.

The Soviet histories of Lithuanian literature used identic rhetoric of literary interpretation which softened into ambiguous phrases, both praising the artistry of classical works and criticizing it for its ideological limitations, which Yurchak attributed to "mimetic resistance" (Yurchak 2005: 130). He explained that a "normal" Soviet person was not an ideological fighter, prisoner, or an exile. He did not identify himself with either the ideas of the Communist Party or the opposing ideas of the dissidents. His choice was of a public posture that was neither Soviet nor anti-Soviet, but a-Soviet. This style of "mimetic resistance" was particularly characteristic in the interpretations of the most famous national classics, giving them Sovietic, "historically objective" evaluations. In the Soviet histories of Lithuanian literature, the artistic value of literary classics was praised; at the same time, the necessary ideological criticism was expressed. For example, the poem *Metai* (The Seasons, written 1765–1775 and published 1818) by the first Lithuanian writer and pastor Kristijonas Donelaitis was evaluated positively for being realistic by the standards of Engels ("Donelaitis's realism meets F. Engels's requirement that a realistic work, in addition to the certainty of details, should depict typical characters in typical circumstances" (Korsakas 1957: 297)) and negatively for its religious idealism: "In the poem "The Seasons" Donelaitis depicts the 18th century life of the East Prussian peasants. The poet portrays that life realistically [..]. However, in pursuit of a didactic goal in his work, the poet sometimes moves away from the realistic depiction of the actual life [..] Didactic, idealistic elements are related to Donelaitis's profession as a clergyman and his Christian worldview. This is where the deep inner contradiction arises between realistic depictions of life and idealistic coverage of some phenomena in Donelaitis's work" (Korsakas 1957: 263). (Here and elsewhere – translations by the author of the article.)

The same "deep inner contradictions" were found in the books of almost all Lithuanian writers who were not Marxists and Communists. In the second Soviet history

of Lithuanian literature (ed. by Lankutis) the boundaries between Socialist Realism and modernist art were blurred as the latter became increasingly widespread in Soviet Lithuanian culture. Dominated by author-centered positivism and vulgar Marxism, the later methodology of historical research made more room for text-oriented literary descriptions, which converged with Russian formalism and new criticism as objective literary theory. In summary, it can be said that the ambiguity and aesopism of the style grew stronger in the second Soviet history of literature (ed. Lankutis); it even became unclear how much ideological criticism was sincere and true and how much was formal and played out. For example, speaking about the connection of Soviet Lithuanian poetry with world literature, the author could not help but pay homage to other Soviet literatures, stating that "today, Lithuanian Soviet poetry has crossed its national borders [..] by adopting the artistic experience of other Soviet peoples [..]. Its relationship with world culture is broad and meaningful" (Lankutis 1982: 299).

After more than half of Lithuanian writers had left the Soviet-occupied Lithuania for the USA in 1944, the imperative of writing a parallel history of literature was obvious. As a counterpoint to the ideologically engaged history of literature that Korsakas edited, the exile critic Pranas Naujokaitis published his version of *Lietuvių literatūros istorija* (History of Lithuanian Literature; four volumes, 1972–1975, Chicago), but since he did not have adequate access to sources, his history was quite encyclopedic and did not attract much attention. The émigré writers and critics chose a different and much more successful path: to write a partial history of émigré literature, which was banned in Soviet Lithuania. This was how *Lietuvių literatūra svetur: Antologija 1945–1967* (Lithuanian Literature Abroad: Anthology 1945–1967; 1968) edited by Kazys Bradūnas, and *Lietuvių egzodo literatūra, 1945–1990* (Literature of the Lithuanian Exodus, 1945–1990; 1992) appeared. The latter, edited by Rimvydas Šilbajoris and Bradūnas, took a long time to prepare and was comprehensive and expertly written. Earlier Šilbajoris had also written a short history of Lithuanian émigré literature in English, *Perfection of Exile: Fourteen Contemporary Lithuanian Writers* (1970).

Although the ideological attitudes towards literature dominant in the Soviet literary history were criticized by the émigré scholars and separate émigré histories were written, the latter did not barricade themselves in anti-communism and in a war against a red Lithuania, but discussed and created an overall projection of the national literature which had lived to its historical fulfillment. In his article "A Comprehensive Look at the Literature of Our Exodus," Juozas Girnius formulated the most important perspective for the future of Lithuanian literature, cherished by numerous émigrés: in the future, the fragmented parts of Lithuanian literature will have to be brought together into a unified national literature, because a common tradition, a common language, and a common Lithuanian reality ensured their internal link:

> Lithuanian literature was split into two branches – that of an enslaved land and the free world. Because of entirely different circumstances, they both developed in different directions. But equally integrally, they both belong to our nation and ultimately form a single whole, even though there is a deep internal tension within this whole. [..] Yet basically, both at home and abroad, we are not 'they' and 'they,' but the same 'we,' the children of the same nation fused by centuries (Girnius 1968: 524).

This was also the idea behind the subsequent *Lietuvių egzodo literatūra, 1945–1990* (Literature of the Lithuanian Exodus, 1945–1990) which was started in 1983 and published at the beginning of independence in 1992 as a supposedly supplementary third volume to the Soviet literary history edited by Lankutis:

> This work now appears as the third volume of the two-volume *Lietuvių literatūros istorija* published in Vilnius. [..] However, the structural plans of those volumes have not been followed here. The aim was to make the work not monophonic, but polyphonic, to keep it from being boring; it is diverse in its insights and conclusions (Bradūnas, Šilbajoris 1992: 5).

Criticizing the censored and disciplined evaluation of writers in the Soviet literary history, the diaspora openly expressed their goal to integrate that part of national literature which could not be made public in Soviet historiography:

> Let this book not create pretentious divisions but rather do what could not be done in Lithuania for a long time – bearing in mind, above all, that just as there is only one Lithuanian language, so is there only one Lithuanian literature (Bradūnas 1992: 20).

The histories of émigré literature were written in a similar spirit to the one that prevailed in the Santara-Šviesa organization founded in the USA in 1953 and in a journal published by it, *Metmenys* (eds. Vytautas Kavolis, Violeta Kelertienė, Rimvydas Šilbajoris, since 1959). "Having realized that the vital centre of Lithuanian literature and the opportunities for its development remained in Lithuania, that in emigration the energy of Lithuanian artistic world is becoming exhausted and sooner or later it will go out, *Metmenys*, *Akiračiai*, *Aidai*, and *Draugas* started reviewing the books of Lithuanian Soviet writers" (Kubilius 1997: 479). It set the task for the Lithuanian diaspora to "turn its face towards Lithuania." Of course, the Lithuanian diaspora was not united: there were many who preferred to deepen the confrontation with Soviet Lithuania, and they were free to express their different opinions.

In Soviet Lithuania it was impossible to publicly express such expectations for a national integration under the conditions of occupation and totalitarianism, but writers and scholars secretly read and circulated the works of the diaspora among their trusted friends. They took a secret interest in exile fiction, poetry, and criticism, finding content that was close to their hearts, fostering the same idea of integration,

seeing authorities of their profession in it and grasping at each word of Greimas, Kavolis, Šilbajoris, Bradūnas, and others.[1]

Due to the geopolitical impact of the Cold War, Lithuanian national literature was separated into very different narratives and became alienated from itself. A united national literary history existed only in the vision of writers as a future projection. The opposing geopolitical forces also had a strong impact on all Soviet comparative historical research and comparative literary studies. As opposed to the diaspora, a yet-unseen confrontation of Eastern and Western orientations emerged in Soviet comparative literary studies which refuted all the theories about the synthesis of these orientations in the national culture that had existed from Adam Mickiewicz to Stasys Šalkauskis. Criticism of bourgeois cosmopolitanism fostered militant proletarian internationalism and Russian imperialism throughout Soviet literature and created an ideological propaganda of friendship between the peoples of the USSR. It was supported by programs of literary exchanges, translations, publishing, and communication studies: "An international culture common to all Soviet nations is evolving. The cultural treasury of each nation is increasingly enriched with works of an international character" (Korsakas 1962: 9). It must be acknowledged that Korsakas was partly right, because Russian literature played the roles of mediator and censor in the contact of Lithuanian literature with world literature.

Studies of the so-called great Russian literary influences on Lithuanian literature prevailed: *Tautų draugystė lietuvių ir rusų literatūrose* (The Friendship of Nations in Lithuanian and Russian Literature, 1963), *Majakovskis ir lietuvių literatūra* (Mayakovsky and Lithuanian Literature, 1955) by Petras Užkalnis, *M. Gorkis ir lietuvių literatūra* (M. Gorky and Lithuanian Literature, 1956) by Kazys Umbrasas, etc. All these comparative interpretations, based on the same positive story about the influence of a Russian writer on Lithuanian literature, aimed to disintegrate Lithuanian literature from the inside, integrating it into Russian and Soviet literature and legitimizing the occupation of the country. In this way, the broken ties with Lithuanian emigration were compensated by new ties of friendship with the other Soviet peoples. Later, more substantial works about Russian writers were published: *Levas Tolstojus ir Lietuva* (Leo Tolstoy and Lithuania, 1978) and *Fiodoras Dostojevskis ir Lietuva* (Fyodor Dostoevsky and Lithuania, 1982) by Birutė Baltrušaitytė-Masionienė, *Levo Tolstojaus meno pasaulyje* (In the World of Leo Tolstoy's Art, 1978) by Elena Červinskienė, *Aleksandras Puškinas ir Lietuva* (Aleksandr Pushkin and Lithuania, 1976) by Rimantas Sidaravičius. Kostas Korsakas, director of the Institute of the Lithuanian Language and Literature, was the most

1 I remember Prof. Donatas Sauka (more about him below), who was the supervisor of my coursework at Vilnius University, lending me his copy of the book *Lietuvių literatūra svetur: 1945–1967* (Lithuanian Literature Abroad: 1945–1967; 1968) with a self-made jacket from the *Tiesa* newspaper.

active propagandist of these ideological comparative studies. He came well prepared from the socialist group "The Third Front", alongside his friends Petras Cvirka, Jonas Šimkus, Antanas Venclova, and others. As early as 1932, Antanas Vaičiulaitis wrote about Korsakas and his literary criticism: "His sympathies are primarily determined not by the artistic aspect of the literary work, but by its ideological side, in this case Marxist-communist. And he does not spare negative epithets of all sorts for writers of a different line – such as outdated, with feet of clay, obsolete, reactionary" (Vaičiulaitis 1992: 547). In his books *Literatūrų draugystė* (The Friendship of Literatures, 1962) and *Literatūriniai kontaktai* (Literary Contacts, 1987), Korsakas demonstrated to all literary scholars how the newly-emerged innovative direction in Lithuanian literature – the phenomenon of Soviet literary friendship – should be researched by subordinating it to central Russian literature and literary studies and to the idea of building communism. After the collapse of the USSR, Vytautas Kubilius voiced his negative view on this tradition of comparative literature formed by Russian imperialism:

> Comparative studies were dominated by research of the impact of Russian literature in order to demonstrate loyalty and gratitude to the conquerors. [..] Soviet culture, resulting from the concepts of Slavophilism and Bolshevik Marxism, aggressively performed the colonization function on the vast territory of Central-Eastern Europe. However, they did not manage to disperse the autochthonous culture of these nations nor to kill their national languages (Kubilius 1999: 8).

But we should also see some of the most striking examples of resistance to it. Not only Lithuanian literature and Russian literature, but also the history of Western literature (accompanied by ideological interpretation) occupied a very significant place in Soviet educational practices and comparative studies. The contacts of Lithuanian literature with and between Western and Russian literatures often became ideologically ambiguous by mixing Soviet and world literature in one whole:

> Lithuanian literature developed not as an isolated and separate phenomenon but as a part of the entire multinational Soviet literature, subordinated to its common laws which were determined by the same socialist order of life, Marxist ideology, and the Communist Party's uninterrupted line of cultural policy, as it brings all the literatures of the peoples of the USSR in the same direction, atmosphere, and rhythm. [..] During this period, Lithuanian literature was particularly active in trying to perceive itself in the context of world culture, to lean on it, and to establish itself in it (Kubilius 1982: 299).

Since the International Comparative Literature Association (ICLA) conference in Budapest in 1962, the Iron Curtain between East and West had been torn down with a series of studies of common historical styles in European literature: *Expressionism as an International Literary Phenomenon* (ed. Ulrich Weisstein, 1973); *The Symbolist Movement in the Literature of European Languages* (ed. Anna Balakian, 1982); *Les Genres en vers des lumières au romantisme* (ed. Gyorgy M Vajda, 1982); *Les avant-gardes littéraires*

au XXe siècle: Histoire (ed. Jean Weisgerber, 1984); *Les avant-gardes littéraires au XXe siècle: Théorie* (ed. Jean Weisgerber, 1984); *European-Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa* (v. 2, ed. Albert Gerard, 1986); *L'époque de la renaissance (1400–1600); L'avènement de l'esprit nouveau (1400–1480)* (eds. Tibor Klaniczay, Eva Kushner, Andre Stegmann, 1987); *Romantic Irony* (ed. Frederick Garber, 1988); etc. This process inevitably affected the openness of comparative research in Soviet Lithuanian.

During the period of Stagnation, two of the most important books in comparative literary studies appeared; they brought Lithuanian literature back from the communist camp to where it had belonged originally. In his book *Lietuvių literatūra ir pasaulinės literatūros procesas* (Lithuanian Literature and the Process of World Literature, 1983), Vytautas Kubilius returned to the traditional Eurocentric comparativism. He expanded and updated it with the latest methodological works by French comparativists A. Guérard, M. F. Guyard, and R. Étiemble, German scholars F. Baldensperger and U. Rukser, Polish comparitivist M. Glowiński, and American scholars R. Wellek, F. Jost, I. Söter, and H. M. Block. From René Wellek, who impressed him the most, Kubilius borrowed the idea that the function of the receiver, rather than the sender, is more important in literary communication: "[W]orks of art are not the sum of sources and influences: they are whole entities where things taken from elsewhere enter a new structure" (Kubilius 1983: 15). For Kubilius, one of the most important goals of this book was geopolitical. He directed the research of the history of Lithuanian literature away from the ideological theme of the friendship between Soviet peoples and towards the history of Western literature: "[T]he more mature a national literature becomes, the more clearly it perceives itself as a part of world literature" (Kubilius a 1983).

Another famous literary scholar, Donatas Sauka, wrote a book *Fausto amžiaus epilogas* (The Epilogue of the Age of Faust, 1998) which was based on discussions with students of Vilnius University at seminars during the final two decades of Stagnation. The book oscillates between research on literary connection and intellectual biography, and shows the explosive energy with which the Soviet philologist, physically locked in an ideological cage, resisted the regime's East-oriented literary studies. Sauka showed that there were no iron curtains that could separate Lithuanian literature and literary criticism from European and global literary contexts. He sought to stop the contempt for the West that had been ideologically instilled in several generations, and to show that Lithuanians were fully adequate and resembled other nations whose literatures belonged to the field of classical European culture.

It is important to mention that during the occupation of the Baltic States, as they shared the concern that their nations and languages might be disappearing, literary ties among these states were greatly strengthened. As émigré Estonian

poet Ivar Ivask explained: "We can rest assured about the truth of our claim that since Polish exile literature of the 19th century and since Russian émigré literature of the first half of the 20th century there has never been such a wonderful flourishing of exile literature as the one that took place from 1945 to 1970 among the Baltic emigrants in the West" (Ivask 1973: 2). A similar integration process developed between Soviet Latvian, Estonian, and Lithuanian literatures: "They follow our literary discussions [..] and we all, poets and prose writers, go to Riga and there we are already called by [our] first names, rather than surnames" (Martinaitis 1980: 8).

I have come to a conclusion about the paradox of the Cold War in the history of Lithuanian literature: it existed, separating writers of the same language and literature ideologically, and yet at the same time it did not exist. The passage of time highlights the great merit of the histories of émigré literature: they were written not only as a confrontation, but also as a compensation and as a complement to the Soviet history of national literature. The incitement of class warfare between the writers of Socialist Realism and those who at that time in the Soviet Union were publicly labelled as bourgeois nationalists, fascist collaborators, and decadents, was much more intense in Soviet literary histories, which were influenced by totalitarianism and censorship. However, the idea of national independence and the related national integration processes were secretly cherished in the occupied Lithuania by many writers and critics. There were books published by émigré writers such as Jonas Mekas, Marius Katiliškis, Henrikas Radauskas, and also Vytautas Mačernis who, although he had never left Lithuania, was grouped with the émigré movement, a poet of "earth". After the Soviet censorship was abolished, a wave of émigré literature flooded Lithuanian magazines and publishing houses:

> The émigré literature, which suddenly found itself in the center of universal attention as the expression of the nation's interests and unsovietized humanism, pushed into a state of inferiority the country's literary forces, driven by the historic upheaval off the routes of habitual creative thinking and, to a greater or lesser extent, from privileged social status (Kubilius 1997: 480).

After the re-establishment of Lithuanian independence, Kubilius wrote *XX amžiaus literatūra: Lietuvių literatūros istorija* (20th Century Literature: History of Lithuanian Literature, 1995). He did it by himself after he did not succeed in bringing together colleagues from both sides of the Iron Curtain for this substantial work. It was the first history of Lithuanian literature of the 20th century where the two opposing sides that had been divided by the Cold War now met again in a joint narrative.[2]

2 Even in the English-language edition *Lithuanian Literature*, published in 1997, Soviet and emigration literature were described by separate authors and presented in separate narratives. What is important to us is that the book ends with an article "The Integration of Split Literature" by Kubilius, which discusses the problem of dismantling national literature and re-creating it as a whole.

The beginning of an integrated history of national literature initially sparked a great deal of debate. Within two months after its release, it received more than ten reviews written by writers (Romualdas Lankauskas, Jonas Juškaitis, Sigitas Geda, Judita Vaičiūnaitė, Juozas Aputis, Sigitas Parulskis, Anielius Markevičius) and scholars (Vanda Zaborskaitė, Leonardas Sauka, Albertas Zalatorius, Viktorija Daujotytė, Algis Kalėda, Elena Baliutytė, Donata Mitaitė, Giedrius Viliūnas, Audinga Pelurytė, Marijus Šidlauskas). It was discussed at the Vilnius conference of the World Lithuanian Community in 1997 and by many school teachers across the country. The most heated debates were about the aesthetic and social evaluation of literature, as well as about the rewriting of history, its methodological updating, and whether it can be objective: "A historian must understand that everyone has their own perspective, that stories can be different" (Bumblauskas 1997: 135).

The history of Lithuanian literature of the 20th century written by Kubilius, accompanied by the heated debates, shows that the integration of the literary histories written on both sides of the Iron Curtain during the Cold War still awaits more analytical research. Thus the John Neubauer quote at the beginning of this article should be deconstructed and supplemented as follows: not only the national self-images of the last two centuries must be revised today during our time of globalization and European integration, but so must their ideological destruction during the Cold War as well, when the imperial superiority of Russia over the occupied nations (mixed with proletarian internationalism and the Marxist idea of class struggle) internally divided and endangered the national cultures but still did not achieve its goal. Although this research was based on examples from the history of Lithuanian literature, I hope that it can also be relevant for other cultures that survived the Soviet period and ideological censorship, because "cultures that coexist for a long time in the same state or political system will obviously develop common features" (Bojtár 2007: 425). The main goal was to discuss how an internal aggression (rather than aggression against minorities or neighbours) can be formed in the history of the national literature of a colonized nation – and also how important it is for such national literature to find its own junctions.

Bibliography

Bojtár, Endre (2007). Pitfalls in Writing a Regional Literary History of East-Central Europe. Marcel Cornis-Pope, John Neubauer (eds.). *History of Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries, volume 3: The Making and Remaking of Literary Institutions*. John Benjamins Publishing Company, pp. 419–429.

Bradūnas, Kazys (ed.) (1968). *Lietuvių literatūra svetur: Antologija 1945–1967*. Chicago: Draugo spaustuvė.

Bradūnas, Kazys (1992). Įvadiniai žvilgsniai (Introductory glimpses). *Lietuvių egzodo literatūra: 1945–1990*. Chicago: Lituanistikos institutas, pp. 7–21.

Bradūnas,Kazys; Šilbajoris, Rimvydas (1992). Redaktorių žodis (Editors' Preface). *Lietuvių egzodo literatūra: 1945–1990*. Chicago: Lituanistikos institutas, pp. 5–6.

Bumblauskas, Alfredas (1997). Lituanistikos tyrinėjimo būdai: Naujos temos ir metodai: II diskusijų stalas. *Lituanistika XXI amžiaus išvakarėse: Tyrinėjimų prioritetai, metodai ir naujovės.* Vilnius: Pasaulio lituanistų bendrija, pp. 131–143.

Girnius, Juozas (1968). Visumos žvilgsnis į mūsų egzodo literatūrą. *Lietuvių literatūra svetur, Antologija 1945–1967*. Chicago: Į laisvę fondas, pp. 512–606.

Ivar, Ivask (1973). Baltų egzilio literatūra. *Aidai,* Nr. 1, pp. 2–10.

Yurchak, Alexei (2005). *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Jakonytė, Loreta (2006). Vytauto Kubiliaus XX amžiaus literatūros recepcija: ginčas dėl literatūros, istorijos ir kritikos, *Colloquia*, Nr. 17, pp. 81–95.

Korsakas, Kostas (ed.) (1957). *Lietuvių literatūros istorija. Vol. 1*. Vilnius: Valstybinė politinės ir mokslinės literatūros leidykla.

Korsakas, Kostas (ed.) (1961). *Lietuvių literatūros istorija. Vol. 3*. Vilnius: Valstybinė politinės ir mokslinės literatūros leidykla.

Korsakas, Kostas (ed.) (1968). *Lietuvių literatūros istorija. Vol. 4*. Vilnius: Mintis.

Korsakas, Kostas (1962). *Literatūrų draugystė.* Vilnius: Valstybinė grožinės literatūros leidykla.

Korsakas, Kostas (1987). *Literatūriniai kontaktai*. Vilnius: Vaga.

Kubilius, Vytautas (1982). Šiuolaikinė lietuvių literatūra (bendrieji raidos bruožai 1956–1980). *Lietuvių literatūros istorija. Vol. 2.* Vilnius: Vaga, pp. 287–307.

Kubilius, Vytautas (1983). *Lietuvių literatūra ir pasaulinės literatūros procesas*. Vilnius: Vaga.

Kubilius, Vytautas (1995). *XX amžiaus literatūra:Lietuvių literatūros istorija*. Vilnius: Alma littera.

Kubilius, Vytautas (1997). The Integration of Split Literature. *Lithuanian Literature*. Vilnius: Vaga, pp. 477–508.

Kubilius, Vytautas (1999). Komparatyvistika atvirame pasaulyje. *Darbai ir dienos*, Nr. 8 (17), pp. 7–15.

Kulbokas, Vladas (1982). *Lietuvių literatūrinė kritika tremtyje. Vol. 1–2.* Roma: Lietuvių katalikų mokslo akademija.

Lankutis, Jonas (ed.) (1979). *Lietuvių literatūros istorija. Vol. 1*. Vilnius: Vaga.

Lankutis, Jonas (ed.) 1982). *Lietuvių literatūros istorija. Vol. 2.* Vilnius: Vaga.

Martinaitis, Marcelijus (1980). Braukiam į Rygą. *Literatūra ir menas*, 19.04., p. 8.

Naujokaitis, Pranas (1973–1976). *Lietuvių literatūros istorija*. Vol. 1–4. Chicago: JAV.

LB Kultūros taryba [Published by Foundation for Advancement of Lithuanian Culture].

Neubauer, John (2007). Introduction. Marcel Cornis-Pope, John Neubauer (eds.). *History of Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries, Vol. 3: The Making and Remaking of Literary Institutions.* John Benjamins Publishing Company, pp. 345–355.

Neubauer, John, Török, Borbála Zsuzsanna (Hrsg.) (2009). *The Exile and Return of Writers from East-Central Europe: A Compendium.* Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Sauka, Donatas (1998). *Fausto amžiaus epilogas.* Vilnius: Tyto alba.

Speičytė, Brigita (2020). Donato Saukos lyginamosios literatūros mokslo projektas: "programa maximum". *Literatūra*, Nr. 62(1), pp. 34–44.

Šilbajoris, Rimvydas (1970). *Perfection of Exile: Fourteen Contemporary Lithuanian Writers.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Vaičiulaitis, Antanas (1992). *Knygos ir žmonės*. Vilnius: Vaga.

Gintarė Bernotienė
Dr. philol., literary scholar
Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore
E-mail: gintare.bernotiene@gmail.com
DOI: 10.35539/LTNC.2023.0051.04

"You Were There, Oh Soul"*: Color Manifestation of the Sacred and Metaphysical Treatment of Flora in the Poetry by Sigitas Geda, Leonardas Gutauskas, and Jonas Juškaitis in the 1970–1980s

"Biji, ak dvēsele": svētuma manifestācija ar krāsu starpniecību un floras metafiziskais traktējums 20. gadsimta 80.–90. gadu Sigita Gedas, Leonarda Gutauska un Jona Juškaiša dzejā

Keywords:
Lithuanian poetry,
Soviet period,
Stagnation,
metaphysics,
sacredness,
soul,
metaphysical treatment
of the landscape

Atslēgvārdi:
lietuviešu dzeja,
padomju laiks,
stagnācijas laiks,
metafizika,
svētums,
dvēsele,
ainavas metafizisks traktējums

* The citation is from Sigitas Geda's cycle of poems "*Delčia rudenė deivė*" (The Waning Moon, the Autumnal Goddess) (Geda 1972: 7).

The philological translation of all fragments of the poems cited in this study is by Aleksandra Fominaitė.

Summary During the period of Stagnation the works by Sigitas Geda, Leonardas Gutauskas, and Jonas Juškaitis, with their inclination towards the poetics of visions and a theocentric worldview, notably differed from the prevailing themes in Lithuanian poetry. Due to this shared apperception, plants in their poetry were treated as having an essential characteristic of Being, which grounds metaphysically the related notions of the place and the transcendentality. An address taken from Geda's poem, "*Buvai, o siela*" ("You Were There, Oh Soul"), reveals an approach (common to all three poets) that sees the landscape of the homeland as a repository of past and future lives. Concluding my earlier research, this article aims to analyze how a) a spiritualized manifestation of Being, seen in plants and perceived as sacredness expressed by certain colors, b) an apprehension of the world as a perpetual metamorphosis, and, c) the images of harmonious existence, which draw their specific character from the archetypes of ancient Baltic culture, reveal the specific experiences of divinity and sacredness of the native landscape in the poetry of Geda, Gutauskas, and Juškaitis in the 1970–1980s, as well as to disclose the philosophical and theosophical ideas that influenced their thought.

Kopsavilkums Stagnācijas laikā lietuviešu lirikas kopējā tematu kontekstā izceļas Sigita Gedas, Leonarda Gutauska un Jona Juškaiša vīziju poētika un teocentriskie pasaules priekšstati, kuros augiem tika piedēvēts būtisks esamības raksturojums, kas metafiziski skaidro savstarpēji saistītās vietas un transcendentalitātes izjūtas. Raksta nosaukumā iekļautā Gedas uzruna augam "*Buvai, o siela*" ("Biji, ak dvēsele") atklāj visiem trim dzejniekiem kopīgo ainavas traktējumu kā bijušo un nākamo dzīvju krātuvi. Noslēdzot manus iepriekšējos pētījumus, šajā rakstā tiek detalizētāk aplūkots, kā minētie dzejnieki savā daiļradē dievišķīguma un Tēvijas sakralitātes pārdzīvojumu atklāj ar augos un svētuma izjūtu krāsās saskatītajām apgarotās esamības izpausmēm, pasaules kā mūžīgās metamorfozes izpratni un harmoniskās esamības priekšstatiem, kuriem savdabību piešķīruši senās baltu kultūras arhetipi.

Introduction During the first decade of the Brezhnev Era and Stagnation, the potential of Lithuanian literature was increasing. The poet Kornelijus Platelis has called the period 1971–1972 the threshold when "socialist realism was dealt a fatal blow" and the modernization of literature, especially poetry, gained momentum (Platelis 1997: 32). The poets who carried out this breakthrough – Judita Vaičiūnaitė, Leonardas Gutauskas, Jonas Juškaitis, Marcelijus Martinaitis, and Sigitas Geda – had debuted in the 1960s and, insted of writing about social progress or other ideological themes, sought aesthetic novelty. The second poetry collections of Vaičiūnaite, Gutauskas and Juškaitis (and the first collection of Geda) were characterized by an intense perception of the world through colors, while in the oeuvre of the authors discussed in this paper, the ecstatic experience of being in color linked to the poetics of visions and the religious treatment of the landscape. I have already written about the sacralization of the landscape of the homeland as a counter-cultural gesture and the recurrence of metaphysics in the poetry by Geda, Gutauskas, and Juškaitis in the 1960s and 1970s (Bernotienė 2018: 260–271). Using the method of comparative analysis of coinciding imagery, in this study I will investigate the ways in which color conglomerates of images participate in the experience of the sacred in the poetry of Geda, Juškaitis, and Gutauskas. My previous research highlighted the representation of plants related to colors and to the issues of reincarnation, embodiment, or guessing one of God's names. In this paper, I will explore the metaphysical treatment of flora and the association of plants with the soul. I will concentrate on the philosophical and theosophical concepts of existence and soul that underpin these poets' reflection of the sacred in the landscape during the period of Stagnation, when the landscape in literature was considered to be "a bourgeois relic, a manifestation of nationalism and aestheticism" (Baliutytė 2019: 447). In keeping with the consistency of ideas, this study is not structured according to the work of a particular author, but with the aim of uncovering the nature of this single contemporary phenomenon. It therefore focuses on the reconstruction of the worldview and the identification of the ideas that have inspired the metaphysical treatment of the world structure and the idealistic sense of a place. Lithuanian scholar Jonas Šlekys asserted that the religious aspect of Romanticism is still undiscovered by Lithuanian researchers (Šlekys 2001: 132). Scholar Aušra Jurgutienė states that in the studies of Lithuanian Romanticism and its lasting influence on contemporary literature we still lack a systematic examination of and "the reflections on the transcendentality in Romanticism, the Platonic worldview, and Christian mystics" (as quoted by Šlekys 2001: 132),

i.e., we still have not explored the substance which in the theocentric medieval thought grounded the considerations "about God, the human, and the Being, the unity of which was a main prerequisite of the mystics" (Žilionis 2007: 69). In this study I shall try to approach this issue at least partially.

The emergence of these categories is the most important object of this research, especially in view of the fact that during the Soviet period, the ideas that underpinned the uniqueness of the poetry of Geda, Gutauskas, and Juškaitis could only be discussed in narrow circles of like-minded people, not in public (or literary) discourse, and were distributed in a latent rather than explicitly articulated and thematized form.

I will refer to the following collections: *26 rudens ir vasaros giesmės* (26 Songs of Autumn and Summer, 1972), *Mėnulio žiedai* (Moon Blossoms, 1977), and *Žydinti slyva Snaigyno ežere* (Blossoming Plum-tree in the Lake of Snaigynas, 1981) by Sigitas Geda, *Vartai po diemedžiu* (Gate under the Southernwood, 1976), *Svetingumo namai* (The House of Hospitality, 1980), and *Krantas* (The Shore, 1982) by Leonardas Gutauskas, and *Mėlyna žibutė apšvietė likimą* (Blue Hepatica Lit up the Destiny, 1972), *Tolimos dainos* (Far-away Songs, 1981) and *Dešimt žodžių jazmino žiedui* (Ten Words to the Jasmine Flower, 1984) by Jonas Juškaitis.

The soul and philosophical definitions of place

In the cycles of poems *"Ledynas baltas kaukaspenis"* (Glacier the White Thunderstone, with the subtitle *Summer Psalms. 14 Stations. In memoriam Hieronymus Bosch*) and "*Delčia rudenė deivė*" (The Waning Moon, the Autumnal Goddess), Geda treats plants as forms that embody different experiences of the divine (e. g, he associates the torment of Jesus Christ with that of the flax or the rye and the nettle with the mystery of love), the transmigration of souls, and an otherworldly existence that he imagines only in color rather than in a particular image: "Return for a moment to the nettle overgrowth by the fence, / to the distant Azure Purple, / to the clayey rose, to the voice of oriole / The mouth made of snow forever forbids me…" (Geda 1972b: 30). His poems mention many plants (lilies, lilacs, wormwood, burdock, rose, caltha, willow, pear-tree, hackberry, spruce, cherry-tree, nettle, rhododendron, cornflower, hepatica, calamus, thistle, flax, etc.), which we can relate to some form of the divine either directly as symbols (e.g., the rose, the lily), or merely by association (i.e., the violet reminds of the Holy Trinity with its three-lobed leaf). The poet speaks of plants as companions to the human existence, as beings related to humans by kinship ("In the land not that one / You were my sister, / Burdock. // The vegetal soul of the plant, / Which / Plato did not

recognize" (Geda 1981: 28). Here Geda refers to an important element in his perception of the world: Aristotle's concept of the soul which influenced the mysticism of early medieval Christianity. According to that, the soul has a nutritive level (characteristic of plants, which are capable of dying, growing and reproducing), a sensitive level (characteristic of animals) and a rational level (characteristic of human beings) (Aristotelis 1959: 89). Another element is Aristotle's summary of the idealistic Greek pre-Christian philosophy on the "transcendent nature of prime mover, that supreme form of all forms, to the world" (Sezemanas 1959: 23). The idea of God's transcendence to the world was based on the negative theology of the Neoplatonist Dionysius the Areopagite, and particularly relevant to the depiction of landscape was his assertion that it is not God who can be comprehended, but only the Place where it dwells.[1]

Not every peer reader or critic would have been able to trace the origins of the metaphysical thinking that stirred the imagination of these poets during the Stagnation years (the evidence of which was the reception of Geda's poems in Lithuania[2] (Kmita 2009: 109–114)). Actually, a public discussion of the existence of God and its reflection in the philosophical tradition, or any other theological question could have turned into an accusation for the authors and the reason for a ban on their works in general. Although censored, the collections were nevertheless published; their partial incomprehensibility, resulting from the authors' idealistic outlook, was "dismissed" as their tendency towards the esoteric and their idealistic sense of place. Therefore, it makes sense to look into the development of metaphysical ideas and to see what concepts and authors influenced these poets' worldview at that time.

Another aspect of Aristotle's reflections on the soul that must have entered

---

1 "[T]he beneficent Cause of all is most eloquent, yet utters few words, or rather is altogether silent, as having neither (human) speech nor (human) understanding, because it is super-essentially exalted above created things, and reveals itself in Its naked Truth to those who pass beyond all that is pure or impure, and ascend above the topmost altitudes of holy things, and who, leaving behind them all divine light and sound and heavenly utterances, plunge into the Darkness where truly dwells, as the Oracles declare, that ONE who is beyond all. [..] Nevertheless, he did not attain to the Presence of God itself; he saw not it (for it cannot be looked upon), but the Place where it dwells" (Dionysius the Areopagite [s. a.]: 205).

2 Many readers did not fully grasp the esoteric references in Geda's poems "The Waning Moon, the Autumnal Goddess" and "Glacier the White Thunderstone," but the censors of the literature clearly sensed the "radical otherness" of these poems, their absolute opposition to the socialist realist paradigm, and their anti-ideological direction. As Rimantas Kmita has summed it up, "Geda's *26 Songs of Autumn and Summer* were the most radical challenge to the canon of socialist realism, which met with great ideological resistance [..]" (Kmita 2009: 111, 112, 114). Geda believed that even at that time "[t]here [were] still men and women alive who understood that it [the poem "Glacier the White Thunderstone" – GB] was a poem about the Northern Christ [..]. With this only key, by the way, it can be unlocked" (Geda 2002: 96).

Geda's field of vision was the purposefulness of action (entelechy) attributed to the soul, and its connection to form, rejecting the earlier Pythagorean idea of the separation of the soul from the body (transmigration and immortality of the soul). This idea goes back to the beliefs of ancient civilizations (Ancient Egypt and India) about the existence of the soul after death, i.e., reincarnation. Geda did not abandon the controversial treatments of the immortality of the soul that inspired the theologians of early Christianity, while he apparently was partly influenced by the native religion of the ancient Balts. Without departing from the issue of the soul, it is useful to recall Plato's adoption and rationalization of the Orphic-Pythagorean esoteric perspective, based on Egyptian soteriology where

> [T]he soul (*psyche*) is no longer considered a ghost (*phasma*) or a ghostly double (*eidolon*), as Homer depicted it, but is thought to be immortal (like the Egyptian *ba*, destined to be transformed into a pure intellectual light, *akh*), which is the authentic existence, an immaterial and divine essence, transferred out of the illusionary prison-like body and reintegrated into the divine sphere of eternal archetypes (Uždavinys 2016: 30).

In the autumn of 1972, after the esoteric poems by Geda had already come out, he was filling out a questionnaire compiled by poet Nijolė Miliauskaitė and listed the early medieval Christian metaphysicians that had influenced him and his circle of friends, including Gutauskas. Geda also described his own profound experience, which reflected metaphysicians' viewpoint, as follows:

> "Sometimes I'm sure that once upon a time, somewhere [*emphasis by Geda* – GB], I have seen and experienced another reality where the forms of all plants and animals and people were different. This has to be said with human Melancholy, and Longing. Then I want to depart from here with my soul for an infinite and strange Journey. [..] The Grasshopper, the Lamb, the Cow, the Rooster, the Hen are beautiful to me. Of the herbs – Nettle, Stellaria, Equisetum (as reincarnated souls – how beautiful the people who turned into them must have been!)" (Geda 1972a: 3–4).

Landscape animation: visions of endless journeys and time

Geda's cycle of poems "The Waning Moon, the Autumnal Goddess" is a vision of such an infinite journey, beginning with an exclamation after an address to the death: "Oh golden gleam, / who played with our souls! Heaven / without end... Oh, the lure / of the distance!" (Geda 1972b: 7). In the first poem of this cycle Geda discloses the perspective of the universe, and the speaker of the poem names the reincarnated souls as we should understand them – [the gods'] grasshopper, [the friend] pigeon, nettle overgrowth, calamus, [sister] sedge, bindweeds, southernwood, and roses. What unites the speaker with

them is a passion for togetherness, and Geda describes the natural forms in terms of color and light that has the characteristics of both the light of the sensual reality and mystical light (Uždavinys, 2016: 29). The speaker conveys the greatest intensity of existence by the flowering state of the plant, which Geda imagines as the crown of a deity ("A diadem in bloom and a voice / you promise to the gods, / oh land!" (Geda 1972b: 8), while the voice indicates the origin of the soul at a higher level. Following Aristotle, the criterion of voice as transmission is another manifestation of the soul's inherent purposefulness: "[T]he transmitter of sound [is] a being with a soul, and, moreover, one whose activity [is] accompanied by certain images, since the voice is a sound which has a certain meaning" (Aristotelis 1959: 108). The phrase "a voice you promise to the gods" refers to the eloquence of multiple forms, which are spoken by that which transcends them and which, through them, is linked to a place (cf. Gutauskas's lines: "Oh voice that molders in a reedpipe of alder" (Gutauskas 1982: 21)). In the mysterious pilgrimage of Geda's poem, the recognizable landscape is characterized by longing ("You Were There, Oh Soul"), while the former connection to the place as a form of remembrance is evidenced by the spirit of a deceased embodying the affection for the inhabited place. The expression of the relation between soul-spirit and place is revealed by the disembodied spirit. Geda's attribution of plant forms to it provides the preconditions for animating the landscape ("What else are you saying / at the well, you surly spirit?... / From wild southernwood, from bird cherries / her neck, / her eyes are turned, / awake she looks, her head / tilting... She knows everything" (Geda 1972b: 8)). By depicting this spirit (the ghost of a deceased person) as a dryadic being, Geda not only anthropomorphizes it, but also exaggerates it, achieving the impression of a huge being floating above the ground. This change of scale helps him to depict a spirit enveloping the world, for them the earth is merely a flowering diadem, promising to reveal the knowledge – to transmit it through the voice. It has been mentioned that in the Ancient Egyptian religion the recognition of the immortality of the soul led to the rejection of those interpretations that associated the soul with external appearances such as *phasma* and *eidolon*, which we also see in Geda's poem as a shadow-like figure (a disembodied shape) and a bloom in the darkness ("Rivers, / their shadows do not die and fall, / in the night, they're rustling summer, that oversubtle bloom / of the bindweeds..." (Geda 1972b: 7–8)). In addition to the intense experience of place and the experience of a great being (spirit) enveloping the place, Geda in his cycle of poems also reveals visions of time through the place, appearing in the conventional symbolism of the seasons, but also as abandoned landscapes (Geda 1972b: 12), fire abysses (Geda 1972b: 11), sandy outcroppings (Geda 1972b: 13), or bones that the silver seas have washed ashore (Geda 1972b: 24) – the latter image containing a hint of a transformative alchemical process.

Rhythms of the Universe The sequence of deaths and rebirths depicted in these autumn songs, or as Geda puts it, the manifestation of beings (Geda 2002: 98), is a part of the great mysterious rhythm of the Universe in which the outlines of timelessness (eternity) and time cover each other up. In obedience to a mysterious rhythm, existence renews itself ("The frosty shell / is already splitting; / the landscapes, they / have been abandoned / but in the Distant Waning Moon, / in the fire, awakens / Speechless of the Plants [..] It is / the humming mystery of sands…" Geda 1972b: 11–12). Still, there is a certain threshold beyond which the interconnectedness of the emanations[3] is only confirmed by recognition[4]: the imagery in those Geda's poems that refer to snow, frost and ice, as well as shininess, embodies the experience of the irreversibility of time. On this occasion, we can recall the lines that conclude the first poem of the cycle "The Waning Moon, the Autumnal Goddess": "The white shadow of a rose / could be enveloped by the mystery of the soul…" (Geda 1972b: 8), where the oxymoronic epithet "white shadow" does not refer to the characteristic of the shadow of the rose, but speaks of the rose as a state of a possibly reincarnated soul whose previous existence has sunk into oblivion and transformed into shadow. The color white is the closest to the impression of luminosity, i.e. the radiance that is the manifestation of holiness. Geda's depiction of time involves the whole spectrum of colors, but Geda (and also Gutauskas) expresses the aforementioned experience of irreversibility and the associated experience of oblivion as extinction in the metaphor of snow – which already marks another cycle of existence (that of a plant). An example of this can be found in the following lines of Geda's later poem "The Lamentations of the Koehne Mountain Ash" from 1981 – "the speechless silence / of my leaves / you summon it / with snowy names…" (Geda 1981: 98). Similarly, Gutauskas in his poems conveys one of the signs of the singularity of existence by using the metaphor of snow and of the highest manifestation of vegetation – the blossoming: "On the blade of darkness, / Between snow and fire, / How briefly our hearts blossomed." This three-line miniature from the collection "The House of

3 This, as Geda puts it, "procession of beings" (Geda 2002: 98), in the light of the idea of the One which was deepened by early Christianity and which influenced his worldview, is most accurately described as emanations. According to Rasius Makselis, "[e]manation explains the relation between the transcendent source of being and the changing, emerging and disappearing beings" (Makselis 2010:381).

4 It was about this recognition that Geda wrote: "I don't like pantheism, I have never adored nature. If I recognize in it [in nature] a grasshopper, an ant, a squirrel, a tree, that is recognition. My meeting with them is fatal, as with that little Lamb in the unforgettable soil of my childhood. In such cases, the light bursts forth at the very top of the brain… I hope that they too will recognize me somewhere" (Geda 2002:99).

Hospitality" (Gutauskas 1980: 88) has a commonality with the duration of being in the presence of God ("on the blade of darkness"), which he perceives in terms of eternity, as highlighted in the analysis of the aforementioned poem by Gutauskas, *"Tėvyne, šiaurės augale"* ("Homeland, you northern plant" (Gutauskas 1976: 57–59)). Meanwhile, the equation of the plant and the animal through the metaphor of a blossoming of the hearts or of the heart as a blossom suggests that the Aristotelian invariant of the treatment of the soul (the life of a human being is represented as a synthesis of animal existence (heart) and plantal existence (blossom)) has taken hold in Gutauskas's imagination as not contradicting the Romantics' organology, towards which the further analysis of the images related to the color blue leads.

Geda and also, as we shall see, Gutauskas relied more on the Neoplatonists, while Romanticism – the last epoch of metaphysical European culture when the authors imagined that the real world was not the visible, audible, and perceptible one, but rather the eternal and infinite world of the soul – also had an impact on all three poets' worldviews. I could give a number of quotations in which they use the broad spectrum of the color blue – the key to Romanticism – to represent indescribable mysteries. Geda writes: "All the peaks of the world are light blue, all that you cannot reach" (Geda 1981: 54), Gutauskas: "The threatening wholeness of time will be continued by a glassy light blue shore" (Gutauskas 1980: 77), and the more earthly Juškaitis: "Love, a blue angel, flying out of our eyes" (Juškaitis 1972: 34). In the context of the soul and the development and influence of metaphysical ideas, it is important that the idea of the One, which the Neoplatonists and their followers developed, was most impressively conveyed by Novalis in his novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* as a vision and symbol of the Romanticist longing for the blue flower, the celestial bloom in which "the world's spirit" and the "noble prototype of woman" (Novalis, 2004: 247) unite.

A terminological excursus

I offer this terminological digression to discuss the complexities and genesis of Romanticist ideas as revealed and developed in the prominent work of Leif Weatherby *Transplanting the Metaphysical Organ: German Romanticism between Leibniz and Marx*. Although the Romanticists were a throwback to the cultural imagination of the Middle Ages, they drew heavily on the Greek author Plotinus who argued that all the stages of reality are emanations of the One, and who developed the theory of divine reality as one of the levels of the soul. In the theoretical considerations of the Romanticists, the soul was overshadowed by the questions of the relationship between life and the divine (i.e. the debate about preformation or epigenesis). Gottfried Leibniz in his ouevre *The New System* stated that "true substances have always existed," and this doctrine forced him "to confront the

problem of the transmigration of souls". As he raised the question: "[I]f the soul always exists, could it be that it is attached to different bodies at different times?", he rejected this possibility and developed "the notion of a substantial unity which he called an 'organic' machine: the preformed and always-existing animal" (Weatherby 2016: 56).

Admitting that the soul and the body are linked, Leibniz agreed to discuss not the transmigration of souls (i.e., metempsychosis), but a kind of transformation of the always-present essence, a passage from one state to another. As Weatherby states,

> "[the] problem of the emergence of organic beings from seemingly 'dead' matter thus drove scientific debate squarely into a philosophical register, one in which Leibniz participated from the 1690s onward, arguing that vital force was a metaphysical principle that had to be included, although only partially, in physics for its results to sync up with that of philosophical investigation [..]. The borrowings of the terms 'preformation,' 'epigenesis,' and 'organ' in Leibniz, Kant, and Herder all center around questions of force and our knowledge of it" (Weatherby 2016: 66).

Romanticism reformulated the question of the soul as the part that cognizes the existence into the question of the organ which is also characterized by cognition. Romanticist organology developed a number of concepts related to the problem of the mediator: it took from Aristotle's treatise *On the Soul* the concept of the senses as instruments of perception, the treatment of the body as an instrument of the soul and the treatment of the soul as an organ. The human being was called by Friedrich Schelling the organ of God – and poetry was praised by the romanticists as the organ of cognition (Weatherby 2016: 216). Friedrich Schleiermacher said the following: "[W]here imagination reigns, there you have a God. Exactly right: imagination is the organ of the human for the divine" (Weatherby 2016: 216 quoting Schlegel 1958: 257). Therefore, when Novalis refers to the ecstatic fusion with the One, we have to imagine the difference between his discourse and that of Plotinus. The Romanticists' image of the cosmos has changed; it is no longer a solid universe, but an incomplete, emerging entity; a schematic diagram of a universe with a kind of a hole in it: "[A]nd because the human is in the world, but has a sense (a religious sense) for the universe, the world is incomplete. It is a discrete totality, or a nontotal entirety" (Weatherby 2016: 219). This hole in the scheme of the universe presented by Novalis, i.e. the attempt to spatialize the continuity of knowledge about the world, was justified by "Schleiermacher's revisionist anthropological theology" (Weatherby 2016: 213), which exalted the powers of human perception and made the question of God dependent on the type of imagination. Various authors of the time sought to describe its various forms by offering original definitions of the "tool" or organ of that cognition. Thus "the nature of knowing became a methodological problem, indeed, a metaphysical problem" (Weatherby 2016: 67).

Cycles of returns and disappearances Not all of those changes in thought influenced the poetry in question, even though they belonged to the same tradition of metaphysical thinking that acknowledged the interconnectedness of the world. Going further only into plant-related imagery, I will at least mention Gutauskas's conglomeration of constant, related metaphysical images (light blue time, light, wind, shore, flower, blossom, bird, garden) that convey, through visions of time, a belonging to the infinite rhythm of the Universe and the great cycles of disappearances and returns. In this perspective, plants embody a more universal form of existence than human beings. When Gutauskas writes: "Beyond the boundary of believing that our home is / Eternal like time, wandering on the seas, / Given over to the blooming of white gardens, / Beyond the boundary rimmed with the charred tracery / Of the shores of the hours that have flamed before our eyes" (Gutauskas 1976: 108), the vegetal vision of white gardens in bloom emerges as an image of timeless transcendence. The shortness of existence that the speaker mentions here – the shores of hours that have flamed before our eyes – contrasts eternity and the ephemeral, passing existence as the negative of each other, or the shadow of each other – the charred tracery – which implicitly suggests that one can see the extinguishing existence and its changing forms on the other shore as eternity. In his poem "But life is restless: it visits in flames" in the collection *The House of Hospitality*, Gutauskas does not focus only on human existence, but speaks of the rhythmic eternity of life which, irrespective of its specific forms (plant, animal, or human), is also characterized by a passive phase, that of the deadening that he imagines indefinitely as something with a barely tangible reality, like an old memory: "You, azure in the face, joining the shores, / For the cry of the soul we'll turn gray in the mouth of heaven, / Like an old memory, like rain, / reigning over the seas" (Gutauskas 1980: 124). The enigmatic reference to "azure in the face" prompts us to question whether the face, as an anthropomorphic detail, may refer to the Creator himself (let us recall the second painting of the cycle "The Creation of the World" (1905–1906) by the famous Lithuanian painter, composer, and visionist Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis (Čiurlionis, il. Nr. 63)). Yet, more likely, it is the identification of the face with the element of sea[5],

5 In 2008, Gutauskas published a collection *Švytintys kūnai* (Shining Bodies), a new set of poems created from fragments of his poems from different periods of time. In this work his poetic motifs – objects, phenomena, and reflections upon the landscape – radiate with the secret connections between things, and their proximity to the sphere of the sacred is the subject of the poem's title. The author of illustrations of this book was his son Tadas Gutauskas. The treatment of color, brought to light by the creative dialogue between the two Gutauskas, is worthy of special consideration. Here I will only point out that one of the images in the poem "*Šiaurės pašvaistė*" (Northern Lights) refers to an invariant rewriting of the quoted lines from the collection *The House of Hospitality*: "But life is restless, it visits those who are sheltered at the Earth's boundary by its flames. You, the

which embodies the infinity of time (and the non-finite disappearance). Its semantic field in Gutauskas's poetry is characterized by this and similar images: "That we'll return here as the bark of the rough seas – / The brightest light above our heads – / Like the salty grasses of the tide / Or the fearful traces of the gods" (Gutauskas 1976: 33). Likewise, the incarnate forms, the reincarnated souls or, as Geda described them, "the manifestation of beings", one way or another were included in his poems as having something in common with the narrative of the passion of Christ or the sorrows of Mary.

Gutauskas's poetic visions are not bound by any character or story, but are based on the very anticipation of such an unrecognized existence that spiritualizes the visual forms and greatly expands the field of the sacred. Here, the entities are no longer united by a kinship that is common in Geda's poetry ("We are two, we are brother and sister, / You are where I am not now, / Tomorrow I will be where you are not, / Sister, daughter, and mother in light blue" (Geda 1981: 87)), but have a much more distant, impersonal and indirect relationship, which the Romanticists (in their problematization of the relationship between life and the divine, the question of the form and potentiality of life which Aristotle referred to as entelechy) have also dealt with. Gutauskas is sensitive to this potentiality of the appearance of existence – not to the occasion, but only to the opportunity that one form of existence can offer to another ("Is it not true / That a mysterious coolness is close to you, / Which foreshadows the paths to seeds?" (Gutauskas 1980: 123)). We can find the same entelechal sense of participation in the nameless flow of life in the lines by the poet Gediminas Jokimaitis, who was a deportee (Gutauskas's father was also exiled): "Even if all the seedlings burst into leaf, / I will only be the wind that has brought them [the seeds of the tree]" (Jokimaitis 1988: 246). Important to note that the future tense that appears here suggests a suspended existence in the present and highlights situations of postponement and non-participation. From a historical rather than

---

Azure Voice, connecting the shores, your power comes from old memory, like the refreshing rain that reigns over the seas." (poem "Northern Lights" in: Gutauskas, Gutauskas 2008: 84). Having juxtaposed these images denoted by azure (Azure in the Face; You, the Azure Voice), I would see the interpretive shift from face to voice as a more precise formulation of the image of the creative being hovering over the Earth. It highlights the connection of the voice with meaning, emphasized already by Aristotle that "the voice is a sound which is the sign of something", with the implication that "that which causes the impact must have a soul, and accompany it with some phantasm (mental image)" (Aristotle [s. a.]). Gutauskas's collection *The House of Hospitality* also includes the poem "Isn't the flame from the poet's mouth..." (Gutauskas 1980:122), which also became a part of the poem "Northern Lights". Interestingly, his lines "Oh, you, muffled and dusky voice" in the new version invoke: "You Lord." This change only confirms that the phrases "azure in the face", "azure voice", and "muffled and dusky voice" are substitutes, and that their constituents (the color azure, the face and the voice) are employed by Gutauskas to represent holiness.

a supra-temporal perspective, Gutauskas incorporates these situations into esoteric reflections on the human condition (i.e., the fall out of allotted possibilities), e.g.: "Calm down, my heart, we are full of desire, we will sink into the crystal wind, we will remain / Unnamed, silent, and in the fire of the past / Indistinguishable from the flaming blossoms of a southernwood" (Gutauskas 1976: 23). They equate human and plantal existence ("indistinguishable from the [..] blossoms of a southernwood"), with the plants in blossom elevated as the state of highest fulfillment. The projection onto the plantal state contrasts it with the unfulfilledness of human existence ("unnamed," "silent") and refers to the experience of generational loss.

Being yourself: the apotheosis of sedentariness

Compared to Geda or Gutauskas, the poetry of Juškaitis – especially his landscape verse – is rather down-to-earth. It is derived from real impressions: the places around the village of Kuturiai where Juškaitis was born and where he returned in order to escape persecution shortly after his studies in Vilnius and before his first book was published. In his poetry, the images of the land are expressive and colorfully striking, and they also serve as witnesses to history, as he uses them to speak boldly about the recent past – the war and resistance. Even today, it is hard to imagine how the Soviet censors passed over a poem that captures this kind of experience. In the landscapes of Juškaitis, the human states of being dissolve and merge into the vast picture of the surrounding nature and of the earth under the Sun, which has its own intense rhythm and its own life, and gives the appropriate scale to human activity: "Lay down – // Happy around the head / The rye in the green great / Rhythm of joy was lingering / Under the swirls of the stars / In the elegiac light" (Juškaitis 1984: 84).

In his landscape poetry, the problematics of the soul lack the element of reincarnation. Juškaitis was the most consistent of the three poets analyzed here in adhering to the Christian doctrine. He did not express any pantheistic feelings about being reborn in another body, or about an existence that keeps changing its forms. However, even without transgressing the canon, Juškaitis, when depicting the land or seeing it in his memories, often catches in these visions the glimpse of a being, a spirit or emanation, hovering above the earth ("The wind blows in nobody's whistle / Blowing the jingliness off the jingles" (Juškaitis 1984: 98)), which he has explained in words that are highly rational, but at the same time deeply faithful:

> "[..] On quiet evenings in September, I used to watch the sown and ploughed fields, where suddenly a column of swirling dust would rise up and run like a human

through the fields until it disappeared into the twilight distance. It seemed that the spirit, who breathed wherever it wanted, would catch the dust of the ground for the human body who was passing through life with his soul" (Juškaitis 2002: 146)[6].

What is most important in this memoir is how closely the Christian imagery (the breathing spirit moving the dust of the earth, the human form emerging from that dust, moving not only in place – across a field, but also in time – through life with the soul) merges with reality in Juškaitis's imagination.

It was this kind of imagery that was similar to the poetics of the visions by Geda and Gutauskas: in the proximity of the land they observe an animated, usually vegetal form. The Christian worldview restrains Juškaitis from claiming that he sees the plant as a separate being with a soul. Compared to the work of Geda or Gutauskas, the sense of divine presence pervades every substance of Juškaitis poetry. In his landscapes, the connection with the depicted reality is so close that we can recognize the sacred elements in the realistic (and sometimes aestheticized) picture of reality only by the intense accents of color or light that permeate it and which Juškaitis uses, as if he were painting, to create an impression of radiance ("Like in the fields that will get cracking / To spread the silver on to the sun" (Juškaitis 1984: 103). The experience of the sacred has its roots in his mindful awareness that the creation exists thanks to the Creator, which colors his every line.

In my previous research (Bernotienė 2018) I discussed in more detail a short poem by Juškaitis, *"Auksinė giesmė"* (Golden Chant), in which he conveys the difficult situation of post-war survivors' endurance by a concise image in quite a short sentence: *"Dilgėlė žydėjo"* (Nettle was blooming). I mentioned that the stoic survival in the place where one lives and the focus on the highest purpose of being (blossoming) that Juškaitis chooses as a characteristic of a plant for his trope, echoes the idea of the famous sermon *The Lily of the Fields and the Birds of the Air*[7] by the pioneer of existentialism Søren Kierkegaard: about the situation of enduring whatever God has allotted for you, i.e., the situation of being yourself. Through plants, Juškaitis repeatedly reveals the human condition of someone who can not choose their position and

---

6 Juškaitis rewrote this in poetic language in his poem "*Arimuose*" (In the Ploughed Fields): "The pale purple fields of September / Are harrowed in the glow / Before the wind that runs by them into the distance, / Who is weaving a thick rope out of the dust" (Juškaitis 1984: 88). This kind of a blending and even repetition of images is typical of Juškaitis.

7 In my previous study (Bernotienė, 2019) I have paid some attention to the parallelism between the lily figures in this poem by Juškaitis and in the sermon *The Lilies of the Field and the Birds of the Air* by Kierkegaard. With the image of the lily, Juškaitis conveys an existential experience of being in one's own place, – that is, of fulfillment of one's fate given by God. This kind of experience, in his poetry, is also characteristic to other plants (the corncockle, the nettle).

fate, and who patiently endure what they are destined to. Thus, in the poem *"Kaimo kapinaitės"* (The Small Countryside Graveyard), he likens the song of the landless beggars to the blooming of thistles ("In the same way that thistles blossom, / The beggars were chanting there" (Juškaitis 1984: 85)). In his poem "*Vasaros kaitros*" (Summer Heat), the "happy corncockle blooms, pink and sweet, / standing in its own hump" (Juškaitis 1972: 18). The semantic similarity of nettle, thistle and common corncockle as weeds or plants that choose to seclude or marginalize themselves allows Juškaitis, through the parallel between a human being and plant, to thematize and to put forward as a value the very presence of an entity in its place, and its remaining settled, even if it suffers from a miserable, painful existence. Through the juxtaposition of blossoming and chanting, he transfers to the thistle the ability to express oneself with the voice which, let us remember, was used by Aristotle as a feature to distinguish beings with a soul.

Juškaitis does not base his treatment of soul-bearing plants on direct analogy and identification like Geda and Gutauskas do in their poetry, but rather mediates it culturally. Thus, in his poem "*Eglė vasaros naktį*" (Spruce on a Summer Night), the spruce tree which serves as a matricentric prototype of Baltic culture ("in the mound, a spruce – / Queen of the Serpents[8]"), in the lightning appears to be a saint. He supports this connection phonologically by the rhyme ("Beautiful, before the lightnings burn out, / In the mound a spruce – / Queen of the Serpents. The mists were fogging / For her and the day was changing / For night. Like a miracle one / Star. Serenity lightnings!... As an almond // The time when the water is white / And the herbs are blooming beneath her. / In the hour of the owl's eyes / It's in the old country of the north – / Darker than dark" (Juškaitis 1984: 74). He visually supports it by the similarity between the dark shape of the tree shrouded in lightning and fog and the mandorla ("It was the time of the almond"). In Christian art, the mandorla has been used as a means of focusing and framing the sacred, and mandorlas often depict the saints Jesus and Mary. In depicting the saint spruce tree, Juškaitis repeats the same pattern as in his poem "*Vasaros kaitros*" (Summer Heat) where he depicts the lily ("the herbs are blooming beneath her": "beneath the shrine pillar / That's wrapped in grass like a tongue of flame, / The lily of the fields with purple hair" (Juškaitis 1972: 16)) and even the mother ("The herbs have surrounded your shoulders, / And their shadows are at your feet" (Juškaitis 1984: 48)). The epithet "darker than darkness" that Juškaitis gives to the spruce tree is, on the one hand, an indication of its mysteriousness and

8 Etymological connections: Lithuanian word for spruce, *eglė*, relates to the Lithuanian mythological tale *Eglė the Queen of Serpents* (*Eglė žalčių karalienė*). The tale features not only human-reptile shapeshifting, but also an irreversible human-tree shapeshifting.

similarity to the iconographic type of the Black Mother of God – namely, Hodegetria – the one who shows the way. On the other hand, the context of the old Baltic theogonic myth featuring the Queen of Serpents (especially one of its aspects, the transformation into a tree) is also relevant here, which justifies the rise of this conglomerate of images (mother-tree-saint) and the related phenomenon of a "northern country" – the ability to represent the sacredness manifested by a plant.

There are not many such examples of sanctity in plants. However, Juškaitis also expresses feelings of rebirth in a plant similar to those that Gutauskas or Geda developed, though without touching upon the question of the soul ("Existence beyond beings. In it, the threads of destiny / Intersect to renew the old. The grassland / Is rustling gently / Daily life in winding each other…" (Juškaitis 1984: 150)). He conveys the continuity of existence through the image of the land weaving a wreath – an object with no beginning or end – while at the same time emphasizing the temporality of beings through the similarity between grass and humans. In the title of his poem "*Prieš amžiną žemės rytojų*" (Before the Eternal Tomorrow of the Land), Juškaitis seems to be simulating the optimistic tomorrow of the Soviet rhetoric, but the emphasis here is on the eternity that he mentions. As he develops the images of the poem, he presents the blooming wreath of the land and the image of mankind bending down for working the land as a bowing down to something greater and definitely unnameable. Also, by shifting his perspective to a cosmic one, he sees the wreath of the land as if it were woven by the hand of the unnameable one which we can read, with a reference to the poem "Harvest (Autumn)"[9] by Rainer Maria Rilke which Juškaitis has translated, as God's hand[10]. This image of the strands of life woven into an infinite form suggests that Juškaitis based it not on the transmigration of the soul but, to recall Leibniz, on a certain notion of the transformation of an always present entity.

9 "We all are falling. This hand falls, as it extends. /And take a look at others. It's in them all. / And yet there's One, holding this fall / With endless gentleness in both his hands" (Rilke [s. a.]).

10 Later, when Gediminas Mikelaitis asked him about faith, Juškaitis gave a parable of a meadow in bloom to understand the closeness of God: "Once during a sermon I heard a priest explaining this Gospel passage with difficulty – whoever keeps my commandments abides in me, and I abide in him. When I looked at the flowers in the meadow, how they mingled together – pink, yellow, purple, blue, white, in complex blossoms, blooming and not disturbing each other, and the light staying in them, unlocking the blossoms – they are different, but all in the same light, which is really white. It seemed to me to be so fitting for that place and people in the Gospel that I used it in my poem "*Prieš amžiną žemės rytojų*" (Before the Eternal Tomorrow of Land)" (Juškaitis 2002: 146).

Conclusions The texts that Sigitas Geda, Leonardas Gutauskas, and Jonas Juškaitis created during the Brezhnev Era were a bold and conscious step in the opposite direction to the Socialist Realism in terms of themes and ideas. In this study I have tried to shed light on the philosophical and theosophical concepts of existence and soul that underpinned these poets' reflection of the sacred in the landscape – at a time when landscape in literature was considered to be a bourgeois relic and a manifestation of nationalism and aestheticism. The rich layers of world culture, esotericism, and Christian faith, which were subject to exploration when small groups of like-minded people discussed pre-war publications or art albums successfully brought from other countries, formed a specific perception of the world as an eternal metamorphosis – a picture of harmonious existence based on the poetics of vision, the genesis of which took on a distinctive quality from the archetypes of the ancient Baltic culture. In the poetry by Geda, Gutauskas, and Juškaitis in the 1970s and 1980s, the metaphysical treatment of flora was a counter-cultural gesture against the atheistic and impoverished world-view of the Soviet era. This was an unexpected continuation of the metaphysical thought that had characterized Lithuanian poetry between the two world wars and in the diaspora, and brought back to poetry the dimension of the sacredness of the landscape of the homeland, the sense of the great cycles of the Universe, and the connection of the individual with their native place, which was strengthened by the reiterations of extinction and rebirth. It must be admitted that during the 1970s spiritual practices, mysticism, Oriental religions, and meanwhile also the revival of native ethnic traditions was characteristic not only of Lithuanian, but also of Latvian and Estonian cultures – as a sign of those times.

For the title of this paper, I have chosen Geda's line "You Were There, Oh Soul" which reveals the common treatment of the landscape as a repository of past and future lives shared by these three poets. The sense of the sacredness of the landscape in the poetry by Geda and Gutauskas, and possibly in the poetry by Juškaitis as well, was supported by the statement by Dionysius the Areopagite that it is not God who can be known, but only the Place where God dwells. The theocentric rather than anthropocentric images of the world that Geda, Gutauskas and Juškaitis created in their poetry during the Brezhnev Era were distinguished by the essential characteristic of existence attributed to plants, which underpinned the metaphysical senses of place and transcendence.

Translated by Aleksandra Fominaitė

Bibliography

Aristotelis (1959). *Apie sielą*. Vilnius: Politinės ir mokslinės literatūros leidykla.

Aristotle [s. a.] *[De anima]*. Available: https://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~duchan/new_history/ancient_history/aristotle_on_voice.html [Accessed 15.09.2021.].

Baliutytė, Elena (2019). 1920-ųjų karta. *Sovietmečio lietuvių literatūra: Reiškiniai ir sąvokos.* Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas, pp. 33–51.

Bernotienė, Gintarė (2018). 'Dilgėlė vėjo rankoj': Tėvynės kraštovaizdžio sakralizavimas Sigito Gedos, Leonardo Gutausko ir Jono Juškaičio poezijoje. *Vakarykščio pasaulio atgarsiai:* mokslinių straipsnių rinkinys. Vilnius: Lietuvos dailės muziejus, Lietuvos kultūros tyrimų institutas, pp. 260–271.

Bernotienė, Gintarė (2019). Theonymia: A Dotted Line of Metaphysics in Lithuanian Poetry of the 1960s. *Aktuālas problēmas literatūras un kultūras pētniecībā / Current Issues in Research of Literature and Culture*, No. 24. Liepāja: LiePA, pp. 72–89.

Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis (1977). Vilnius: Vaga.

Dionysius the Areopagite [s.a.]. *What is the Divine Darkness?.* Available: http://esoteric.msu.edu//VolumeII/MysticalTheology.html [Accessed 15.09.2021.].

Geda, Sigitas (1972a). [Apie kūrybą: atsakymai į Nijolės Miliauskaitės anketos klausimus]. Archive of the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, fund of Nijolė Miliauskaitė, Nr. 103, 1972, b. 1287, l. 3–4.

Geda, Sigitas (1972b). *26 rudens ir vasaros giesmės*. Vilnius, Vaga.

Geda, Sigitas (1977). *Mėnulio žiedai*. Vilnius: Vaga.

Geda, Sigitas (1981). *Žydinti slyva Snaigyno ežere*. Vilnius: Vaga.

Geda, Sigitas (2002). Būna šviesos, kuri prilygsta auksui. *Tikėti ir rašyti: 21 šiuolaikinis lietuvių rašytojas apie tikėjimą, kūrybą ir save.* Sudarė Gediminas Mikelaitis. Vilnius: Aidai, pp. 92–102.

Gutauskas, Leonardas (1976). *Vartai po diemedžiu*. Vilnius: Vaga.

Gutauskas, Leonardas (1980). *Svetingumo namai*. Vilnius: Vaga.

Gutauskas, Leonardas (1982). *Krantas*. Vilnius: Vaga.

Gutauskas, Leonardas; Gutauskas, Tadas (2008). *Švytintys kūnai*. Vilnius: Alma littera.

Jokimaitis, Gediminas (1988). *Žiemos bijūnai*. Vilnius: Vaga.

Juškaitis, Jonas (1972). *Mėlyna žibutė apšvietė likimą*. Vilnius: Vaga.

Juškaitis, Jonas (1981). *Tolimos dainos*. Vilnius: Vaga.

Juškaitis, Jonas (1984). *Dešimt žodžių jazmino žiedui*. Vilnius: Vaga.

Juškaitis, Jonas (2002). Tikėjimas ir netikėjimas. *Tikėti ir rašyti: 21 šiuolaikinis lietuvių rašytojas apie tikėjimą, kūrybą ir save.* Sudarė Gediminas Mikelaitis. Vilnius: Aidai, pp. 138–152.

Kierkegaard, Søren Aabye (1974). *Christian Discourses and The Lilies of the Field and the Birds of the Air and Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*. Transl. with an Introduction by Walter Lowrie, D.D. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey.

Kmita, Rimantas (2009). *Ištrūkimas iš fabriko: Modernėjanti lietuvių poezija XX a. 7–9 dešimtmečiais*. Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos instituto leidykla.

Makselis, Rasius (2010). Plotino emanacija kaip 'ilgas gyvenimas' lyginamosios analizės perspektyvoje. *Sigitas Geda: pasaulinės kultūros lietuvinimas.* Sudarytojas Antanas Andrijauskas. Vilnius: Lietuvos kultūros tyrimų institutas, pp. 380–390.

Ne laikas eina: iš pasaulio poezijos (2004). Vertė Jonas Juškaitis. Vilnius: Aidai.

Novalis (2004). *Heinrichas fon Ofterdingenas.* Vertė Leonas Petravičius. Vokiečių romantikų proza. Vilnius: Vaga.

Platelis, Kornelijus (1997). About Modern Lithuanian poetry. *Lithuania: In Her Own Words: An anthology of contemporary Lithuanian writing.* Ed. Laima Sruoginytė. Vilnius: Tyto alba.

Rilke, Rainer Maria. Translation by A.W. Tüting. Available http://www.thebeckoning.com/poetry/rilke/rilke8.html. [Accessed 04.03.2022.].

Sezemanas, Vosylius (1959). Substancijos sąvoka. Pirminis judintojas. Kosmologija. Aristotelis. *Apie sielą.* Vilnius: Politinės ir mokslinės literatūros leidykla, pp. 3–60.

Schlegel, Friedrich von (1958). *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe.* Edited by Ernst Behler, Jean Jacques Anstett, and Hans Eichner. Munich: Schöningh, abteilung 2.

Šlekys, Jonas (2001). Maironis ir religinio romantizmo problema. *Lietuvos kultūra: romantizmo variantai.* Vilnius, Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas.

Uždavinys, Algis (2016). Egipto filosofijos uždavinys – sujungti pabaigą su pradžia. *Filosofija ir teurgija vėlyvojoje Antikoje.* Vilnius, Sophia, pp. 28–31.

Žilionis, Juozas (2007). Meisteris Johannas Eckhartas: būties kilnumas ir didžiadvasiškas nusižeminimas. *Logos*, No. 53.

Weatherby, Leif (2016). *Transplanting the Metaphysical Organ: German Romanticism beween Leibnic and Marx.* New York: Fordham University Press.

Donata Mitaitė
Doctor of Humanities, literary scholar
Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore
E-mail: donata.mitaite@gmail.com
DOI: 10.35539/LTNC.2023.0051.05

Examining the Concept of Space in Soviet Lithuanian Poetry

Izpētot telpas jēdzienu padomju laika lietuviešu dzejā

Keywords:
openness,
isolation,
Socialist Realism,
official poetry,
prison,
madhouse

Atslēgvārdi:
atvērtība,
izolētība/noslēgtība,
sociālistiskais reālisms,
oficiālā dzeja,
cietums,
trakonams

Summary The article analyzes an aspect of the conception of space – its openness or isolation. This aspect is analyzed as it appears in the works of three Lithuanian poets that belong to different generations and who were involved differently in Soviet life: Alfonsas Maldonis, Judita Vaičiūnaite, and Antanas A. Jonynas. The analyzed poetry was written when the dogmatic censorship in Soviet literature was already less strict and its protectors less vigilant. In the poems by Maldonis the isolation of a space can save lives, which corresponds to the views of a poet who has agreed to collaborate with Soviet authorities. He sympathizes with people that seek freedom, but he wishes that they safely survive in their currently hopeless situation (referring to the 1968 Prague events). Vaičiūnaitė perfectly expresses the oppressive isolation and lies of the Soviet world in her poem "*Atsisveikinimas*" (Farewell) of 1977: it is only possible to be honest and to remain faithful to oneself in a madhouse. In the poetry of Jonynas, resignation and despair stop a musical phrase; he expresses the closeness of the world with the image of a cage, a directionless railway, and a break-up in human relations. This article also refers to poems that were important for these Lithuanian poets and were written by Russian poets Osip Mandelstam and Anna Akhmatova who never attuned themselves to the totalitarian regime. It is possible to assume that the conception of space in the analyzed poems is not always related to the structure of the society in which the poets lived; however, that relation is quite essential.

Kopsavilkums Raksts analizē vienu no telpas jēdziena aspektiem – atvērtību vai izolētību/noslēgtību. Tiek pētītas šī aspekta izpausmes trīs lietuviešu dzejnieku darbos – šie dzejnieki ir Alfonss Maldonis, Judita Vaičūnaite un Antans A. Jonīns, kuri pieder trim dažādām paaudzēm un dažādā mērā bija iesaistīti padomju dzīvē. Šeit analizētā dzeja tika sarakstīta laikā, kad padomju literatūras dogmatiskā cenzūra jau bija atslābusi un tās uzturētāji bija mazāk modri. Maldoņa dzejā telpas noslēgtība spēj glābt dzīvības – kas saskan ar autora uzskatiem, kurš bija piekritis sadarboties ar padomju varas pārstāvjiem. Viņš jūt līdzi cilvēkiem, kas tiecas pēc brīvības, taču vēlas, lai tie labāk paliktu drošībā un izdzīvotu arī tālaika bezcerīgajos apstākļos (atsaucoties uz 1968. gada Prāgas notikumiem). Vaičūnaite savukārt precīzi attēlo padomju pasaules nomācošo izolētību/noslēgtību un melus savā 1977. gada dzejolī "*Atsisveikinimas*" (Atvadīšanās), kur palikt godīgam un patiesam pret sevi iespējams vienīgi trakonamā. Jonīna dzejā rezignācija un izmisums apklusina mūziku; pasaules nomācošo izolētību/noslēgtību viņš izsaka ar tādām metaforām kā būris, dzelzceļš bez virziena vai izjukušas attiecības. Šajā rakstā arī pieminēti arī daži šiem lietuviešu dzejniekiem svarīgi dzejoļi, kurus sarakstījuši Osips Mandelštams un Anna Ahmatova – krievu dzejnieki, kas nekad nepieskaņojās totalitārajam režīmam. Iespējams, ka telpas jēdziens šeit analizētajos dzejoļos ne vienmēr ir saistīts ar tās sabiedrības struktūru, kurā to autori dzīvoja, taču šī saistība ir diezgan būtiska.

Introduction

In literature, space is studied in various ways: some researchers write about a specific geographical space reflected in a text, while others focus on the aesthetics of space or do a literary mapping. I will only mention a relatively recent Ian Davidson's work, *Ideas of Space in Contemporary Poetry*, which is dedicated to the analysis of contemporary poetry from Great Britain, Ireland, the USA, and Canada and which discusses the relations between poetry, ideas of globalization, identity, language, and geography. My article focuses on one spatial feature relevant to the totalitarian society that was Soviet Lithuania – lack of openness. Similar to other captive countries, many of its inhabitants (especially artists), compared the life in the Soviet Union to living in a cramped prison with not enough air. In his last public speech in 1921, Alexander Blok had said that Alexander Pushkin was killed by lack of air rather than by the bullet of d'Anthès (Blok 1989: 387). Lack of air was later named as the reason for Blok's own death. This lack of air is especially evident in Russian literature – after all, Russia has never been democratic, except for maybe a few months after the 1991 attempted coup. In 1969 Gennadij Aigi wrote to Tomas Venclova: "I am like everyone else. It is stifling and airless here" (Aigi 1969: 1). Vladimir Voinovich, a Russian writer who disagreed with the Soviet policies, spoke of Khrushchev's Thaw as follows: "There was a thawing, a feeling I compare to a prison cell – as if someone had opened a vent and let in some fresh air. [..]. But that time was very short" (Rykovceva 2018). In her article about the "mature" Soviet time, the philologist and theologian Olga Sedakova writes that at that time more and more people searched in culture for something that "would connect [them] with the world, with history, with the most serious topics of human thought. The official populist culture with its trimmed branches and cut roots was seen as a sort of a prison" (Sedakova 2021). Different variations of this metaphor also appeared in Lithuanian poetry, because the writers (like all Lithuanian society) lived in isolation from the world and its various cultural layers.

Hans Gunther, who has studied the development of Socialist Realism, states that in 1953 a "progressive erosion of socialist realism" started, and during 1960–1970 the literary critique stopped trying to force literary developments to conform with the dogmas of Socialist Realism and instead expanded its conception to simply "socialist literature," a conception which allowed that Soviet literature also contained other directions: romanticism, satire, etc. (Gunther 2000: 283). The poetry analyzed in this article was written at a time when the dogmatism inherent to Soviet literature had lost much of its rigor and its guardians had lost their ideological vigilance.

Although the theme of space in Soviet poetry seems rather clear – a prison –, it is still interesting and broad. In this article, I will draw attention to some aspects of the isolation and openness of space in the works of a few poets. Only someone like Tomas Venclova could then afford to write openly, e.g.: "Inside the empire by the locked-up seas" (Venclova 1997: 41). He wrote the poem "As in a Photograph, Unsafe and Vast" in 1974 while still in Soviet Lithuania; however, it was only published in 1977 after he had emigrated. Those who stayed had, in the words of Venclova, to play the "game with a censor" (Venclova 1991: 418).

The poets that will receive the most attention in this article belong to different generations and have engaged with the Soviet reality differently. Alfonsas Maldonis (1929–2007), who was a close friend to Justinas Marcinkevičius and Algimantas Baltakis, held important positions for many years – a member of the Communist Party, he was the editor-in-chief of the publishing house *Vaga* (the only publisher of fiction in Lithuania at that time), and later the chairman of the Writers' Union; he also served as a deputy at the Supreme Councils of the Soviet Union and Soviet Lithuania.

Judita Vaičiūnaitė (1937–2001) made a living off her literary work (poems and translations), though she did not perform any state service and was not a communist. The youngest of the three, Antanas A. Jonynas (born in 1953), was an editor in a publishing house, and in his youth lived a bohemian life along with many of his friends.

Maldonis's first books contained many Soviet topics (war, collectivization, optimistic cities that were rebuilt after the war, Soviet atheism, etc.) and a vocabulary close to the official phraseology. However, archives contain a copy of an unpublished poem that starts with a rhetorical question: "Little poets of a little nation, what do you / Still believe after choosing this path?" and ends with another: "Without feeling space [these words are written above the crossed out "And without flying anywhere"], will you feel / That you are made for the greatest flight" (Maldonis 1960). So how did the lack of space and inability to fly away manifest in the works of different poets?

Almost all of the most essential and interesting of Maldonis's poems related to the theme of space have two dates: the poet started writing them still in the "mature" Soviet time and finished already after the Awakening. Of course, the poet's position offered him certain privileges: several times he was allowed to leave the Soviet Union, though we know that such journeys were well-supervised by the KGB. In 1968, when the Prague Spring was suppressed, Maldonis wrote several poems that were only published in 1996. Regarding our analysis of space, the most interesting of these poems is "*Pečialinda*" (Chiffchaff) (Maldonis 2009: 304). The poem's connection to the events in Prague can be guessed not only from the date of writing but through allusions: "[..] In these sad days there live / Hopes, hearts, voices and relentless heads"; "Day after day / Every time more eyes turn towards the sun." The title of

the poem refers to the common chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*), a small bird of indistinct colors that builds enclosed nests. The poem emphasizes the parallels between nature and human society. The poet wishes that people who "turn towards the sun" and over whom a great danger looms were able to cover and hide, just like the chiffchaff. The poem ends with a contradiction between suggesting to live in secret and worrying that no one will notice the death of those in hiding. Nevertheless, in this case the poet considers isolation to be positive – while there is no way to resist the state (or the occupant army, if we consider the Prague Spring), it helps to survive and gather strength. Such a view is today considered conformist.

However, the confined space in Maldonis's works is not always positive. The cycle of poems *Rugpjūčio šviesią švelnią naktį* (On a Bright August Night, 1981) is about a self-made world that will "strangle and suffocate" (Maldonis 2009: 278). The lyrical subject considers this stuffy world to be "made by oneself" rather than imposed by any external force. This is characteristic of Maldonis's overall position. He did not want to assume and did not assume the role of a Soviet-era victim, and has repeatedly declared that no matter how difficult the circumstances, he chose his own way of life. It is also interesting that that stuffy world or dwelling is described as a night "Framed by / Ceilings / And centuries-old walls" (Maldonis 2009: 277). When poets of Maldonis's generation write about centuries-old walls, they usually refer to their village homeland. The lyrical subject created my Maldonis needs to get out of the stuffy dwelling, to raise his head to the stars, and to find the river flowing at night. Sometimes the traditions you inherit from your parents or ancestors also limit you.

In the collection *Mūs baltas ratas* (Our White Circle), published in 1996, Maldonis included the poem "*Stiklo karstas*" (Glass Coffin). It is dated 1980–1992 and sums up the experience of a lifetime: "Oh surely all colors were glimmering, / While the sun of our life was shining, rising, curling on the ground, / But the spirit stiffened there, and a glass coffin / Was the sky. And all our life in it" (Maldonis 1996: 77). Here we may remember his official duties, the illusions Maldonis had for some time (during Khrushchev's Thaw and until the suppression of the Prague Spring) that the Soviet system could be improved. For all this, you got a life in a cramped glass coffin. Similarly to the poem "*Pečialinda*", there is a different, dramatic side of isolation: you have to seek reality yourself, feeling your way in the dark. In addition to the well-known literary images of "sister death" (Saint Francis of Assisi), "sister life" (Boris Pasternak), and "sister every day" (Jonas Aistis, a classic of Lithuanian literature who emigrated after World War II and also wrote a poem called "*Stiklo karstas*" (Glass Coffin)), Maldonis added another – "sister space" –, without which he was forced to live. It is meaningless to repent for such a life or to wait for punishment: "Like bread for one that died of hunger / At the end of the bed forgiveness and punishment stand."

Of course, Maldonis had read the tragic Osip Mandelstam's lines: "Living in Petersburg is the same as sleeping in a coffin" ("*V Peterburge zhit', slovno spat' v grobu*") (Mandelshtam 1990: 165). They were written in 1931, but for him – someone who was part of the Soviet fabric – life in a "coffin" constrained the soul but was externally comfortable. Another function of space that was important for Maldonis, as well as for other introverts, is worth mentioning: it helps to hide. A quotation from one autumn poem: "And the further, the bigger the space / You surround and hide yourself in" (Maldonis 2009: 181).

In the poems of Judita Vaičiūnaitė's youth, the space of the world is intuitive ("I tripped / in the white summit of dunes / and opened my mouth for the sun's kisses [..] / and I will never never forget / the heady breath of spaces far away" (Vaičiūnaitė 2017: 12)). However, for a long time the open world was only desired, known through culture, or imagined. The Soviet Union's borders opened rarely, reluctantly, and not to everyone. Most often, only a longing for faraway cities remained. "And the rare names of cities far away sound to me like living droplets in the dark"; "A wet whirlwind cools down a smoky, dusty attic" – such contrast between a dream and reality is noted in the 1965 poem "*Fontanai*" (Fountains) (Vaičiūnaitė 2017: 85). Before Paris became real, this city of artists' dreams had to be longed for: "[A] flash of the sun / in waters of the Seine, / with the smell of rain and shadows of closed blinds in the boulevards / you may never touch the pavement that you walk in dreams…" (Vaičiūnaitė 2017: 31). In Vaičiūnaitė's poetry, the ability to freely leave and return to your homeland that is characteristic of the free world is modified probably by both the history of Lithuania and the times in which the poet lived. The characters of her poems only return to Lithuania after death (Barbora Radvilaitė in the cycle *Kanonas Barborai Radvilaitei* (Canon for Barbora Radvilaitė) or the philomaths in the cycle *Vitražas Vilniaus universitetui* (Stained Glass for Vilnius University)). Since independence, the poet has said on various occasions that in a free world her works would have been different.

In 1977, Vaičiūnaitė wrote the poem "*Atsisveikinimas*" (Farewell), which was included in the collection *Šaligatvio pienės* (Sidewalk Dandelions, 1984). After deeper consideration, the fact that it was published in 1984 surprises and shows that the Soviet censors were bad readers. The whole poem reads:

> Can you hear the Old Believer nun praying
> In the white madhouse ward?
> Rose, your rose,
> Red rose is still blooming in my memory.
> All Souls' Day has long passed, but there is no snow.
> Can you hear the Old Believer nun praying,
> You, who move beyond time,
> As the railway gleams at night,

As the planes roar over grave-laden –
Northern field?
Can you still hear the dreary homeland speech?
Can you still see the children swaying to the cold autumn silence
On the muddy hills of Antakalnis (Vaičiūnaitė 2017: 150)

The poem becomes easier to understand if we remember that on January 25th of 1977, Venclova left Moscow for Washington with a short stop in Paris. Both poets were childhood friends, and both have called Vilnius "the only city" in their poems. Of course, this is only one of the poem's possible contexts, but it can also be read without association to specific fates – as a story of how a person that has seen others off to emigration perceives Soviet Vilnius. The prayer of the Old Believer nun in the madhouse from the beginning of the poem is a meaningful introduction to the poem's world. During the Soviet era, monasteries were dispersed, their buildings and property were nationalized, and the monks themselves had to dress in secular clothes, working at various jobs – though most did not renounce their vocation. Among other punishments for disobedient citizens, the Soviet authorities actively used the so-called criminal psychiatry. Many people that were inconvenient to the state were called insane, forcibly put into psychiatric hospitals, and mutilated for life with unnecessary doses of dangerous drugs. Only two lines give the poem some light (the only colorful spots in the gray fabric of the poem): "Rose, your rose, / Red rose is still blooming in my memory." Its relation with the topic of romance makes the red rose a possible reference to a love story or at least to a happy moment from the past. However, that is only one rather superficial interpretation of the "rose". Both Vaičiūnaitė and Venclova have translated the poems of Anna Akhmatova, the Russian poet; her work is important to both of them. Neither of the poets has translated her poem "*Posledniaja roza*" (Last Rose) (Ahmatova 1987: 251–252); however, the poem is important regarding the analyzed Vaičiūnaitė's poem. At the beginning of the "Last Rose", Akhmatova mentions some women that are known from cultural history and mythology: Feodosia Morozova; Salome, the step-daughter of King Herod; Dido, and Joan of Arc. Akhmatova's poem suggests that the tragic fates of these women repeat; the poem's lyrical subject tells God about her fatigue of the repeating "reviving, dying, and living" ("*ja ustala / Voskresat' I umirat', i zhit'*") cycle and asks God to take all that away and just let her feel the freshness of the last red rose. This way, the fate of the "Old Believer nun" (Feodosia Morozova was one of the most famous Russian Old Believers who has been represented in works of art – this religious community in Russia were persecuted for ages, yet retained their faith), the lyrical subject of the poem and maybe even the poet herself, is inscribed along with these strong women. Also, in a letter to Natalia Trauberg in 1985, Venclova paraphrased the previously mentioned Akhmatova's poem: "If you just knew how tired

I am of dying and reviving, and living, I don't even want any red roses – I am tired of it" (Venclova 2017: 187). It shows that just like other literary works noted in his letter, the author recalled this poem and easily adapted it to his own situation.

Other than the red rose, everything else in the poem is depressing: madhouse ward, autumn, north, cold, mud. The whiteness of the snow would bring at least some of that lacking light into the landscape and the human soul, but it seems that even nature has changed and become unjust: "All Souls' Day has long passed, but there is no snow." Only children could give some light and hope, but that is also not the case. The topic of children seems to frame the poem: It starts with the Old Believer nun (choice of childlessness), and ends with a hopeless image of children "swaying to the cold autumn silence, / on the muddy hills of Antakalnis". Antakalnis was the district of Vilnius in which the psychoneurological hospital stood during Soviet times.

The topic of children is interrelated with the topic of language, which develops in the following manner: the prayer of the Old Believer nun (prayer is spoken in a sacral language), "the dreary homeland's speech" (probably that is how the poem denotes the new Soviet language), and at the end of the poem, the silence to which the children sway. Sacral speech is only possible when you are locked in a madhouse, and children, who could be the hope of the future, remain silent in their everyday gloom. The closed madhouse space usually contains negative connotations, but in Vaičiūnaitė's poem, only here is prayer – a meaningful speech unaffected by the new language (the Soviet *novoyaz*) – still possible. Otherwise, one must move radically beyond the Soviet space – according to the poet, "beyond time". Back then, emigration from the Soviet Union reminded its citizens of death, since there was no hope of coming back and the Soviet government tried to erase every memory of those that emigrated – their names could not be mentioned, books they had published were removed from libraries. As Venclova writes in his essay *On Vilnius as a Form of Spiritual Life*, "[..] we must grow accustomed to this other life in the West. In a way, it is life after death. We meet people whom we had no hope of meeting on this earth, and we may be separated from our old friends forever. Contact with them has a sort of spiritualistic quality, and as the old landscapes grow remote, we begin to see clearly what was once only a haze" (Venclova, 1999: 19).

Ever since his youth, Antanas A. Jonynas (born in 1953) had no illusions about the political system in which he lived, but still felt inner peace. Writing about his early works, the literary critic Vytautas Kubilius noted that Jonynas "develops a poem as a musical improvisation, playing with the consonances of sounds and melodic repetitions [..], easily moving into varying the rhythms of jazz and blues, creating the magic of a continuous deep swell that melts the traces of a priori attitudes" (Kubilius 1995: 565). Still, the musicality of his poetic phrase did not manage to hide the poet's

attitude towards the world and society in which he had to live every day and to write poetry. According to the literary critic Elena Baliutytė, the poetry of Jonynas "ignored the Soviet reality, even if it was associated with it by a relation of indirect denial" (Baliutytė 2017: 8). Quotations from his first collection of poems *Metai kaip strazdas* (Year Like the Thrush, 1977) create the following view of the world: "the world becomes small" (Jonynas 1977: 9), "a year goes by like a thrush [..] knocking about in empty room" (Jonynas 1977: 10), "grey locomotives sleep on their rails" (Jonynas 1977: 10), "very little sky above land / which is only an imaginary play" (Jonynas 1977: 14). The world of his Soviet era poetry is closed: locomotives and trains stand still, even streams run nowhere, and there are many dead ends. Another poem talks about letters sent to oneself – constrained human contact. Even the last resort is restricted: "forged church windows / and there is no way to jump off the bell tower" (Jonynas 1991: 314). Soviet censors were suspicious of his poem which included the lines: "The old gloomy railway / turns west" (Jonynas 1991: 41). The censors mainly saw the word "west" as the suspicious, prohibited space of Western Europe – the Western World. Jonynas managed to defend both the word and the poem, but as we read the poem today, it seems that the censors were right – that the poet's railway turned west for a reason. This poem portrays the railway as "old, gloomy" also for a reason – it is settled, and hardly any trains use it. "West" is a space that should no longer exist. It is also possible to travel in another direction, but such a journey often reminds the poet of the dramatic 20th-century history: "[A] pregnant sister will shout and go crazy / in a car like a coffin" (Jonynas 1991: 324). Being sent into exile in train cars which otherwise transported cattle are still alive in the Lithuanian people's memories (even if the exiled are no longer around, their stories are well known by their children and grandchildren) and are well-established in cultural texts; in a poem, it is enough to give one or another detail of this phenomenon to actualize it in the readers' consciousness.

However, as the Soviet time was approaching an end, it seems that even the censors grew tired. The collection *Tiltas ir kiti* (The Bridge and the Others) that was published in 1987 included a cycle of poems *Šešios R. M. Rilkės eilutės* (Six Lines from R. M. Rilke), which contains six stories about a 'Resort' which like a "madhouse or prison of its own kind has clear allusions to the Soviet reality" (Baliutytė, 2017: 14). Moreover, Venclova in one of his essays in the collection *Vilties formos* (Forms of Hope) has emphasized that a homeland that does not guarantee a person the right to leave and return upon his or her own wish becomes a prison rather than a homeland (Venclova 1991: 24). These allusions are clear in the sixth part of the poem cycle by Jonynas: "I saw a pregnant woman. She was hardly moving along / a school's wall: what did our children learn // the youth of the world, the current generation that will

live in these conditions // in cozy pools stuffed swans are floating / and heroes are born from our villainy / and you are still surprised that betraying the father makes heroes // the art of fear is so deep in us / that we even forget that we live only once" (Jonynas 1991: 210). The language of the poem includes the clichés of Soviet propaganda ("betraying the father makes heroes"). Similarly to Vaičiūnaitė in her poem "Farewell", in one of the works written near the end (or soon after the end) of the Soviet era Jonynas directly mentions a madhouse, noting that only there thoughts are not punished (Jonynas 1991: 314).

One of the images repeated in his Soviet-time poetry is that of a cage. This image appears in the previously mentioned cycle, *Six lines from R. M. Rilke*, as a "lost key to a bird's cage". Continuing the poet's thought, it is obvious that the bird remains caged forever. The narrator of the poem "*Paukštis narvelyje*" (Bird in a Cage) is someone who sees the world through the bars of a cage.

I am locked
Among the bars of four walls
What do my walls see
They – my walls – see each other
And I have no other spaces

No watch shows my time
No mirror shows my face
But why do I get the hints
From the glances of a child

I am locked, my morning locked
And my locked evening plays
And the droplet that flows down my face
Repeats that same melody

That I knew
How I don't wish for something else
That I knew
How not wishing for something else
Is a beautiful dream
Of the locked (Jonynas 1991: 163)

The space of the poem is limited by four barred walls. Essentially, the other world might not even exist; the inhabitant of the cage does not know anything about it or himself: "What do my walls see / they – my walls – see each other / and I have no other spaces // no watch shows my time / no mirror shows my face." Only hints of a child's glances (probably he still does not know the reality of life in a cage) remain. Tears flow, repeating the simple melody of the evening. The final strophe shows that some desires persist: "[N]ot wishing for something else / is a beautiful dream / of the

locked". Such is the subtle irony of Jonynas, hidden under nice words. A different world, a different life is desired; however, that desire is so desperate and tormenting that one wishes for it to disappear. Also, this poem is an especially relevant Soviet era variation of Rilke's *Panther* (see Jasaitytė 2023 68).

One of the possible parallels for the "Bird in a Cage" by Jonynas is the poem "*Solovej spasajushchij*" (Saving Nightingale) by Elena Shvarts (1948–2010), a Russian poet who was a few years older than Jonynas and whose poems were not published during Soviet times. As Sedakova characterizes "Saving Nightingale": "The poet chose a bird – a symbol of poetry that persistently tries to break the ball of a night's darkness with its voice and to get to another space where it is possible to breathe without pain, where freedom is" (Sedakova 2021). Of course, the differences between the two poems (the resignation depicted by Jonynas and the persistent action of the nightingale described by Shvarts) are mostly due to the differences between the characters of the poets and their talents – and perhaps the fact that one of them was officially publishing and the other was not. According to Kubilius, "[t]he late books by Jonynas contain an intensifying spirit of internal fatigue and impossibility ('I learned not to scream in the darkness / where I lived for many years') that noticeably reduced the volatility of the musical stream" (Kubilius 1995: 566). This is understandable – music requires freedom.

In conclusion, I suggest that an analysis of even a single aspect of space (its openness and isolation) relays many essentials regarding poetics, but also testifies to the feelings of the poet while writing the poem, their attitude towards society and the political regime of their country at that time. In a canonical work of Lithuanian Socialist Realism, the poem "*Žmogus*" (Man, 1961) by Eduardas Mieželaitis – which won the Lenin award – the human stands "between the earth and sun", as if not feeling any the limits to his own power or the insistent restrictions proscribed by authorities. As the poems of poets from later years show, their authors felt those restrictions, and as the Socialist Realism slowly eroded they began to talk about them – the poetry created in a closed society reflected that isolation. The confined space, commonly related to living in a totalitarian country, is evaluated negatively. This is reflected by images of a coffin, cage, madhouse, or prison; by the poems' intertexts, intonations of resignation, and a prevalent despair that obstructs the poetic musicality. Of course, sometimes the general connotation of space remains relevant – small, enclosed spaces cannot be cozy, and large spaces help people hide. Still, a totalitarian regime essentially distorts one's conception of space, and the prison or madhouse sometimes remains the only place where the poet finds real life and words possible.

The article and the quotations translated by Aurimas Pumputis

Bibliography

Aigi, Gennadij (1969). A letter to Tomas Venclova, 24 December 1969. F 95/1, p. 1. Manuscript Department of the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore.

Ahmatova, Anna (1987). *Sochinenija v dvuh tomah*. Tom pervyj: Stihotvorenija i poemy. Moskva: Hudozhestvennaja literatura.

Baliutytė, Elena (2017). Bandymas įminti A. Jonyno poezijos kodą. Jonynas, Antanas A. *Šermukšnis. Pylimo gatvė*. Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas, pp. 6–18.

Blok, Aleksandr (1989). *O literature*. Moskva: Hudozhestvennaja literatura.

Gunther, Hans (2000). Zhiznennyje fazy sotsrealisticheskogo kanona. Gunter, Hans; Dobrenko, Yevgenij (eds). *Sotsrealistichesky kanon: sbornik statej*. St. Peterburg: Akademichesky projekt, pp. 283–297.

Jasaitytė, Jūratė, (2023) *Rainerio Marijos Rilkės kūrybos recepcija lietuvių literatūroje.* Doctoral dissertation. Manuscript.

Jonynas Antanas A. (1997). *Metai kaip strazdas*. Vilnius: Vaga.

Jonynas, Antanas A. (1991). *Nakties traukinys*. Vilnius: Vaga.

Kubilius, Vytautas (1995). *XX amžiaus literatūra*. Vilnius: Alma littera.

Mandelstam, Osip (1990). *Stihotvorenija, perevody, ocherki, statji*. Tbilisi: Merani.

Maldonis (1960). Eilėraštis "Vienas iš klausimų" (F111-389, p. 7). Manuscript Department of the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore.

Maldonis, Alfonsas (1996). *Mūs baltas ratas*. Vilnius: Lietuvos rašytojų sąjungos leidykla.

Maldonis, Alfonsas (2009). *Šviesa pro lapus*. Vilnius: Lietuvos rašytojų sąjungos leidykla.

Rykovceva, Elena (2018). Poslednij razgovor s Vladimirom Vojnovichem (1932–2018). Available: https://www.svoboda.org/a/29395183.html [Accessed 24.09.2022.]

Sedakova, Olga (2021). V nyneshnih dvadcatiletnih jest' vozmozhnost' novoj serjoznosti. *Uchiteljskaja gazeta* (ug.ru) [Accessed 06.04.2021.]

Sedakova, Olga (2014). Lekcija o Elene Shvarc. Available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CAINL6c1sXM [Accessed 05.06.2021.]

Vaičiūnaitė, Judita (2017). *Po ūkanotu atminties dangumi.* Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas.

Venclova, Tomas (1997). *Winter Dialogue*. Translated by Diana Senechal. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.

Venclova, Tomas (1991). *Vilties formos*. Vilnius: Lietuvos rašytojų sąjungos leidykla.

Venclova, Tomas (1999). *Forms of Hope: Essays*. Riverdale-on-Hudson, New York: The Sheep Meadow Press, 1999.

Venclova, Tomas (2017). *Metelinga*. Moskva: Probel-2000; Umka-Press.

Akvilė Rėklaitytė
PhD, literary scholar
Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore
E-mail: akvile.reklaityte@llti.lt
DOI: 10.35539/LTNC.2023.0051.06

Meaning Twist: National Images in Lithuanian Poetry of the Late Soviet Period

Nozīmes pavērsiens: nacionālie tēli lietuviešu dzejā padomju laiku beigās

Keywords:
nationalism,
Soviet patriotism,
Lithuanian poetry,
poetic images,
Juri Lotman,
Brezhnev Era

Atslēgvārdi:
nacionālisms,
padomju patriotisms,
lietuviešu dzeja
poētiskie tēli,
Jurijs Lotmans,
Brežņeva laikmets

The article is a part of a postdoctoral project co-funded by the European Social Fund under a grant agreement with the Research Council of Lithuania (No. 09.3.3-LMT-K-712-19-0168).

Summary This article analyzes the changes in poetic meanings in the late Soviet period in Lithuania. The author is looking at the homeland (*tėvynė*) images which were created by poets and which had become a popular content of the so-called "mass culture" (radio and television broadcasts, newspapers, choral music, poetry readings). There is widespread agreement that, although nationalism and Marxism were ideologically incompatible, Soviet ideology used certain aspects of nationalism to assert Soviet era patriotism. This article considers the significance of poetic images in the context of the political and sociocultural changes in the last decades of the Soviet occupation in Lithuania, raising the question of how national poetic images responded to and opposed Soviet ideology. It is argued, through the application of Juri Lotman's insights on culture, that poetry during the Soviet era was able to simultaneously address two audiences: one corresponding to the Soviet ideology, the other cherishing the memory of independent Lithuania and the hope of freedom.

Kopsavilkums Šajā rakstā analizētas poētisko nozīmju pārmaiņas Lietuvā padomju laiku beigās. Autore aplūko dzejnieku radītos tēvzemes tēlus, kas bija kļuvuši par iecienītu saturu tā saucamajā "masu kultūrā" (radio un televīzijas pārraidēs, avīzēs, kormūzikā, dzejas lasījumos). Pastāv viedoklis, ka, lai gan nacionālisms un marksisms bija ideoloģiski nesavienojami, padomju ideoloģija tomēr izmantoja dažus nacionālisma aspektus, lai stiprinātu padomju patriotismu. Šis raksts aplūko poētisko tēlu nozīmi to politisko un sociokulturālo pārmaiņu kontekstā, kuras norisinājās Lietuvā padomju okupācijas pēdējās desmitgadēs. Tiek meklēta atbilde uz jautājumu, kā nacionālie poētiskie tēli reaģēja uz padomju ideoloģiju un kā pretojās tai. Atsaucoties uz Jurija Lotmana vērojumiem par kultūru, tiek piedāvāts viedoklis, ka padomju laiku dzeja spēja vienlaikus uzrunāt divas auditorijas - vienu, kas pieņēma padomju ideoloģiju, un otru, kas loloja atmiņas par neatkarīgo Lietuvu un cerības atgūt brīvību.

> "As a matter of self-criticism," Iakovlev told Hedrick Smith in 1990, "one has to admit that we underestimated the forces of nationalism and separatism that were hidden deep within our system." (Senn 1995: xv)

Introduction

According to the common opinion, "Lithuania," "the land," and "homeland" were among the most important themes in Lithuanian poetry in the second half of the 20th century. This is true for the works of each of the two predominant types of poets – those supported by the Communist Party and those who, with their choices and creations, remained in the opposition. The authorities' attitudes towards nationalism and national images were ambiguous. According to historian Vilius Ivanauskas (1979–2018), the issue of nationality in the Soviet system became one of the most important part of politics and was promoted primarily through rhetorical means. Newspapers and radio broadcasts during the occupation were flooded with pseudo-patriotic propaganda discourse that was intended to motivate socialist citizens to be loyal to the state; as an editorial in the newspaper *Pravda* put it in 1941, "many poets, though far from all, have found words and images needed by our people" (Ivanauskas 2013: 132). This is where discussion about the Lithuanian poetry (as well as Latvian, Estonian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, and other Soviet countries' poetry) of the second half of the 20th century begins, bearing in mind the duality of creative imagination under the totalitarian conditions of the Soviet regime.

In this article, I review the images of Lithuania and the homeland that circulated in Lithuanian poetic discourse – including choral music, pop songs, and poems broadcast on radio and television – during the periods of the so-called Stagnation (1964–1985) and *perestroika* (1985–1990). It is important to understand that in the Soviet state "mass culture" operated differently than in the commercialized world of the free market – because, under the conditions of the Soviet regime, the content of officially published works of art (poetry books, for example) had to correspond with the one and only official ideology. According to philosopher Nerija Putinaitė (b. 1971), in the Soviet state an addressee or audience member theoretically had to receive ideologically unified content from both poetry and mass media: "[T]he same slogans and stereotypical images had to be engraved in the memory of recipients and to displace the[ir] ability to judge reality independently" (Putinaitė 2007: 45). (The epithet

"engineers of the soul," coined by Stalin to denote writers and poets, is adequate for this specific capability of literature to convey ideology in a suggestive way.) However, literature and art cannot work precisely as planned by the propagators of ideology: according to Juri Lotman, art is another level of reality, characterized by the exceptional ability to transgress the limits of ordinary perception. Therefore, "from the point of view of reality, art is the territory of freedom" (Lotman 2009: 150). This means that, even under the conditions of the totalitarianism, art and poetry (if they are genuinely artistically valuable texts and not a straight propaganda) inevitably offer more diverse interpretations of the reality than official ideology can predict.

The period of the late Soviet era has been chosen for this study because, starting from around 1965, one can now perceive a peculiar interplay between two mutually hostile trends: on the one hand, society was still affected by the drive for a relatively more liberal intellectual life by virtue of the Thaw (Sandle 2002: 137–138); on the other hand, at that time the conservative communist policy and ideological control intensified sharply in different fields of life. As for the liberal drive associated with the Thaw, the young generation of Lithuanian poets who debuted in the 1970s (e.g. Gintaras Patackas, Almis Grybauskas, Antanas A. Jonynas) greatly expanded aesthetic boundaries. The 1970s and 1980s in Lithuania, in terms of literary and artistic creativity, are sometimes compared to the cultural bloom time of the young, emerging Lithuanian state of the pre-war 1930s (Platelis 1991: 261). However, Brezhnev's ambitions to restore real communism, to strengthen the society's international and patriotic indoctrination, and to create a "Soviet nation" by not as much uniting as uniforming all peoples in the Soviet Union, partly revived the spirit of Stalinism and meant the beginning of a new Russification campaign (Ivanauskas 2007: 107). During the implementation of this policy, artists were encouraged to thematize Soviet internationalism and the "friendship of nations" by applying principles of Socialist Realism; the development of a patriotic motif in artistic creation resulted in the ambiguity of the poetic meaning of the "homeland" ("homeland" could seem to refer both to the USSR and to the local/ Lithuanian nation).

According to Juri Lotman, any text, and a literary text especially, contains a "picture of the audience" that affects the real audience and becomes a particular "normative code" for that audience: "This is imposed on the consciousness of the audience and becomes the norm for its own image of itself, being transferred from the text into the sphere of the real behavior of the cultural collective" (Lotman 2009: 150). Lotman's insights make it possible to explain one effect of text, i.e., when the identity of an audience is formed with the help of the images reproduced in that text. On the other hand, Lotman argues that the relationship between a text and its audience is not one-sided, but an active, dialogic process. A prerequisite for such a dialogue is the

"common memory" of a speaker and their addressee: the less common memory (cultural, national) they share, the less adequately the text will be decoded. (With this in mind, the efforts of the Soviet authorities to destroy certain places of national memory and to form a new historical memory are understandable.) Thus, in this article, on the basis of Juri Lotman's cultural semiotics I articulate the sources for popular poetic images of the homeland during the Soviet era, demonstrating when and under what sociopolitical circumstances their poetic meanings changed, and indicating how the exact words may have acquired new content and thus possibly created a specific social effect.

Images of Lithuania and the "homeland" abound in the poetic discourse of the Stagnation and the later *perestroika*. Nerija Putinaitė claims that almost all manifestations of nationalism in those times were simply products of Soviet indoctrination: the word "Lithuania," widely used in artistic creations, did not refer to any specific thing that existed in reality, but was instead based on a meaning confirmed throughout the Soviet era, filled with a content favorable to the regime's ideology (Putinaitė 2007: 136). Putinaitė identifies the sly strategy of the Soviets to weave fragments of Lithuanian history or certain nationalistic and religious sentiments into Soviet ideology, thus leading to the internalization of Soviet values by the society. From this point of view, she deconstructs the creative works by one of the most famous Lithuanian poets of the 20th century: Justinas Marcinkevičius (1930–2011).[1] The metaphors of homeland, land, mother, and native language developed in his texts – which in turn awakened national feelings in the society and inspired many creative followers – are, according to Putinaitė, simply the tools of a sentimentality and sensuality necessary for the Soviet ideology to deepen its society's faith in the communist vision (Putinaitė 2007: 132).

In contrast, Viktorija Daujotytė suggests that, starting from the 1970s and especially at the time of independence, a phenomenological-essentialist interpretation of Lithuanian literature is needed. Indeed, in the works of some Lithuanian writers of the Soviet era she sees the continuation of an "authentic ethnocentric tradition" – "essential images of the nation's worldview," as she puts it, which are much more important than temporary historical-political conditions (Daujotytė 1990). It can be said that what Daujotytė considers the "deep moral supports of the Lithuanian nation" (sentiments such as respect for the national history and the romanticization of its archaic worldview and agricultural lifestyle), Putinaitė identifies as "decorations

1 Marcinkevičius was awarded many significant prizes by both communist authorities and later those of independent Lithuania. His work and life is analyzed in various monographs (Pakalniškis 1984; Daujotytė-Pakerienė 2003; Daujotytė 2012; Daujotytė-Pakerienė 2016; Putinaitė 2019).

of communist ideology" – an artificial Soviet nationalism. According to Putinaitė, the exploitation of feelings in Soviet-era poetry only "distanced people from the categorical logic, entangling them in the snares of compromise considerations" (Putinaitė 2007: 139) in favor of the Soviet system.

Thus, prompted by this debate about the implicit content of the poetic images of Lithuania and the homeland in the late Soviet era – namely, whether they constitute implied regime ideology or authentic Lithuanian cultural traditions – I analyze the meanings of the concepts of Lithuania and the homeland within the popular Lithuanian poetic discourse of the 1970–1990s. Based on textual analysis as well as on previously conducted historical and literary investigations, this article aims to determine the meanings of national poetic images in the late Soviet period within the frame of changing socio-political circumstances. The research problem arises from the complications of the concept of nationalism in the context of Soviet ideology, since the very idea of "nationalism" was considered the greatest threat to the Soviet regime (the term "bourgeois nationalism", associated with the pre-war independent state of Lithuania, was used disparagingly). Nevertheless, Soviet patriotism, i.e., the loyalty of individual nations to the Soviet state, was actively promoted (Grybkauskas 2013: 205–224). It may be said that the theme of Soviet patriotism in poetry (and art more generally) encouraged and partially legitimized national feelings – in other words, fostering intimate discourse about the native land, love for the homeland, and freedom. Therefore, a significant question arises: what was the content of the poetic image of "homeland" as created in the late Soviet period, and how did its meaning change?

Several profiles of the image of the homeland

Today, readers may be surprised by the abundance of patriotic (in a certain sense) content in the artworks of the Soviet era. In the Soviet Union, the term "patriotic" was widespread since the "patriotic war" (World War II) and essentially meant loyalty to the regime (Dobrenko 2011: 165–169, 174). The annual anthology *Poezijos pavasaris* (Poetry Spring), published in Lithuania since 1965 and presenting a panorama of each year's poetry, printed poems evoking "patriotic" feelings in almost every issue – especially when commemorating various anniversaries (e.g., the founding of the Soviet Union, the October Revolution, the anniversary of Lenin's birth, etc.) (Geda 1976: 169). The theme of the homeland is deeply rooted in Soviet poetry because of its relation to one of the principles of Socialist Realism – *narodnost*, which, as Hans Günther puts it, among many other connotations (such as comprehensibility, simplicity, anti-elitism, traditionalism, folklore-based creativity) also meant loyalty to "great and powerful

Soviet Motherland" (Günther 2011: 104). In 1934 at the All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, a new conception of "Motherland" was presented: "Motherland! Only seventeen years ago, this was just a false etymological concept, a tool for deceiving and dulling the working people. Today this word represents all that the working class and the working peasantry attained in the revolution. It is her, our Motherland, that unites the multinational assembly of writers in one family" (Günther 2011: 104). During Word War II, the popular ideological discourse was enriched with new "humanized" vocabulary (e. g. brothers, sisters, fatherland) (Dobrenko 2011: 163). The artistic image of the motherland/homeland was elaborated throughout the whole Soviet era with different mutations of it in national literatures. In the Lithuanian poetic discourse from the 1970s to the 1990s, different developments of the poetic image of the homeland and Lithuania emerged.

Divine authority Among the many poems in the Soviet period that reproduced images of the homeland corresponding to Soviet ideology which had become clichés, one of the most popular stands out: the notion of the homeland as a state of bliss or a patronizing, supreme authority. Such conception straightforwardly corresponds to the early poetics of Socialist Realism, particularly of the Stalinist era, when "revolutionary romanticism" became mandatory (Günther 2011: 103). According to Hans Günther, in the 1930s "[r]evolutionary romanticism was promoted simultaneously with the rehabilitation of mythology and mythological thinking", which served as "the unrealized and unattainable revolutionary utopia" (Günther 2011: 103). Throughout the Soviet era, symbolic exaggeration was a preferred stylistic tool to create the poetic myth of the socialist ideal. For example, in one characteristic poem of 1965, the speaker professes complete loyalty and subordination to the homeland, to which he must eventually show his deeds. However, such accountability does not cause negative feelings for the speaker in question; on the contrary, he, clinging to his homeland, listens to her tales of happiness (notably, he does not experience prosperity, but only receives narratives about a better life): "It seems I knew everything about you, Homeland. / [..] / When must I show my works, / And when, clinging to you, / Listen to tales about happiness"[2] (Graibus 1976: 138). In some poems, the homeland is considered an omnipresent absolute, thus constituting an alternative to ideologically unacceptable religious experiences, as in the following lines: "You are in the blossoming of flowers / And in the frost, / In the waving of the rye / And in the baby's

2 Literal translation of: "*Atrodo, viską žinojau apie tave, Tėvyne. / [..] / Kada savo darbus parodyt privalau / Ir kada, prie tavęs prigludus, / Klausytis apie laimę sakmės.*"

cry, / In the reflection of the lakes / And in the eyes of a friend, / In the first kiss / And in the clattering of the storks, / You are in every hour / And in the last one / that I never wait for"[3] (Jakubauskas 1976a: 158). In this poem, the homeland takes on the form of a monotheistic God and appears as the only pillar of human existence. It is not by chance that the homeland is marked by a capital letter in such exalted confessions: "Every day / From the sun / From the day / And because of the great love / The only one / I lean on **You** only / With my shoulders / With my heart / Every day"[4] (emphasis mine) (Jakubauskas 1976b: 160). Compared to the pre-Soviet (e.g., Maironis) or post-Soviet (e.g., Brazdžionis) poetry of Lithuanian patriotic romanticism, Soviet romanticism features the speaker's absolute loyalty to authority. In the lyrical tradition of national patriotic romanticism, the speaker is more individual and exposes a variety of different feelings, including grief, longing, sadness, which were considered "degeneration" (Günther 2011: 103) in the doctrine of Socialist Realism.

A Large, Unbreakable Country In popular culture, a generalized image of the homeland as a great and powerful country, which corresponded to Soviet ideology, was actively developed (obviously referring to the Soviet Union). Motherland Lithuania and the Soviet homeland in such texts become synonymous concepts, indicating a large, unified country of the Soviets. For example, in one popular choral song of the early 1980s (its lyrics written by Juozas Nekrošius, a poet loyal to the regime) it is said:

[..]	[..]
Ošia vėl qžuolai ant gimtinės kalnelių,	The oaks are rustling again on the hills of their homeland,
Nepalaužt qžuolų, mūs Tėvynės sūnelių.	Do not break the oaks, our sons of the homeland.
Nuo Nemuno, Volgos, nuo Dubysos krantų	From the Nemunas, the Volga, from the banks of the Dubysa
Mes – Tarybiniai žmonės, visada mes kartu.	We are Soviet people; we are always together.
(Nekrošius 1980: 28)	(Literal translation)

In this stanza, traditional symbols from Lithuanian folklore are connected with the greatness of the Soviet Union: unbreakable "Sons of the Motherland" are identified

3 Literal translation of: "*Tu – gėlių žydėjime / Ir šerkšne, / Rugių bangavime / Ir kūdikio riksme, / Ežerų atspindy / Ir draugo akyse, / Pirmam bučiny / Ir gandrų kleketavime, / Tu – kiekvienoj valandoj / Ir paskutinėje/ Kurios niekada nelaukiu.*"

4 Literal translation of: "*Kasdien / Iš saulės / Iš dienos / Ir meilės didelės / Vienos / Aš į Tave tiktai remiuos / Pečiais / Širdim / Kasdien.*"

with "Soviet people," and the geography of the homeland is expanded by inserting the name of the main river of Russia (the Volga) between the rivers of Lithuania (the Nemunas and the Dubysa), thus creating a poetic image of a large and united ("we are always together") homeland. Meanwhile, in the more romantic Lithuanian poetry of the 1960s–1980s, the image of the homeland is stylistically minimized and fragile.

Bright landscapes Enjoying the landscape is a popular motif in texts about Lithuania, characteristic of both the romantic and neo-romantic poetry of independent Lithuania and of Soviet texts. Perhaps that is why the late 19th century poem "*Lietuva brangi*" ("Dear Lithuania"), written by Maironis (1862–1932), a poet of the Lithuanian national revival, was not banned during the Soviet era and was even considered the unofficial anthem of the occupied Lithuania. From the very first lines of the poem, a contemporary landscape is linked with Lithuania's glorious past ("You are beautiful, my dear homeland, / the country where heroes sleep in their graves"[5]).

By comparison, the poetics of Soviet landscapes is characterized by an emphasis on optimism and an orientation towards the future. In socialist realist paintings and poems, landscapes are bright and sunny, as in the following example:

Mano tėviškė – mėlyno Nemuno vingis, *Gintariniai krantai ir sena Palanga.* *Supa vilnį ramiai drungnas vėjas aptingęs,* *Smėly plakas pavargusi marių banga.* *[..]*	My homeland is the bend of the blue Nemunas [river], Amber banks and old Palanga [seaside town]. A calm, lukewarm wind sways the billow, A tired wave of the lagoon beats on the sand. [..]
Bet labiausiai ilgiuosi tavęs, mano liaudie! *Skamba tavo kalba nuostabi ausyse,* *Ilgesinga daina gaudžia vėl man kaip gaudė,-* *Vėl išvargusi kyla lyg žiedas dvasia.* *[..]*	But most of all I long for you, my people! Your speech sounds wonderful to my ears, The longing song catches me again like it used to catch me, Again, the tired spirit rises like a flower. [..]
(Venclova (1942) 1969: 14)	(Literal translation)

In texts such as this one, the speaking subject rejoices in Lithuania, experiencing harmony by admiring the landscape and the present moment, and thereby encourages patriotic feelings while implying complete satisfaction with the existing order. The poem just quoted was written in 1942 by Antanas Venclova (1906–1971), also known as the author of the anthem of the Socialist Soviet Republic of Lithuania; the

5 Literal translation of: "*Graži tu mano, brangi tėvyne, / šalis, kur miega kapuos didvyriai.*"

speaker's feelings, as befits the Stalin era, are directed towards Stalin, the party, the homeland and/or the working people. The poem ends with the speaker confessing his true identity to the people (the word used is not "nation," but the ideologically charged concept of "people"): "I was born in you [my people]. / I have grown in you. / One flesh and blood. You are me; I am you. / I grew up with you as roots and branches,– / We will fight together and win together."[6] (Venclova (1942) 1969: 14). This small twist in the poetic plot – the speaker's attention and feelings turning from the landscape dear to the Lithuanian heart directly to its people, and the poem's ecstatic identification with the ideological structure (as he puts it: "One flesh and blood. You are me; I am you.") – corresponded to the desire of the regime to develop public loyalty to the state order as if this were the natural identity of every Lithuanian. Although the poem is sentimentally entitled "Motherland," the text exemplifies a condition of loyalty and that of attachment to the great homeland.

For comparison and contrast, one can remember the meaning of a complete (even physical) identification with the homeland in Marcelijus Martinaitis' (1936–2013) poem *"Sutartinė*" (this term denotes a folk polyphonic song), written around 1989. In Martinaitis's poem we read: "[W]here my blood will drip – / there the stone will sprout. / [..] / Into your blood / I will sink / as if being poured out / from my only heart. / [..] / I will expose every wound to you / while falling next to the horse / in the morning light. / I will absorb you / with the air"[7] (Martinaitis 1990: 33). The poetic plot is almost identical to what we read in the aforementioned text of Venclova (the speaker's total confluence with the poetic interlocutor). However, the object of such interiorization is different: Venclova's verse refers to a notion of "people" (*liaudis*), motivated by the Soviet ideology; whereas in Martinaitis's poem, the reader may sense that the most desirable object of the speaker's identification is the precious homeland, the very land that the speaker promises to defend with his own blood.

Homeland as Mother The culturally universal metaphor of the homeland as mother is also filled with Lithuanian national cultural memory. At the end of the 19th century, for example, the poem by the priest-poet Antanas Baranauskas (1835–1902)

---

6 Literal translation of: "*Bet labiausiai ilgiuos tavęs, mano liaudie! / [..] / Aš gimiau tavyje. Tavyje aš išaugau. / Vienas kūnas ir kraujas. Tu – aš, aš – tai tu. / Su tavim šaknimis, šakomis aš suaugau,– / Mes kovosim drauge ir laimėsim kartu.*"

7 Literal translation of: "*Kur lašės man kraujas – / ten akmuo išdygs. / ... / Aš krauju į tavo / kraują susigersiu, / visas išsiliejęs iš savos širdies. / [..] / Ir žaizda kiekviena / tau aš atsiversiu, / šalia žirgo kritęs / rytmečio šviesoj. / Aš tave su oru / į save sugersiu.*"

entitled "*Tu Lietuva, tu mieliausia mūsų motinėlė*" ("You, Lithuania, You Are Our Dearest Mother") was offered as the Lithuanian national anthem. In Vincas Kudirka's (1858–1899) 1889 poem "*Tautiška giesmė*" (The National Song), later (in 1919) chosen as the national anthem of the Republic of Lithuania, the sense of Lithuania as a mother to its children is also implied ("From the past your sons / here draw strength. // Let your children go / on the paths of virtue only"[8]).

The culturally "thick" image of the homeland as mother was also exploited by Soviet ideology. In Staliniana, for example, the Russian people are the older brothers of the other peoples of socialist countries; Stalin is their father, and the homeland their mother (Dobrenko 2019: 10). Of course, in the years of the Thaw the ideological schemes of artistic images became less straightforward. Creative principles such as "the multisidedness of artistic form", "the creative individuality of the writer" became legal within Socialist Realism after the Third Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers in April 1959 (Dobrenko, Kalinin 2011: 189). According to Putinaitė, artistic images that seemed "authentic" and closer to personal human experience but did not fundamentally violate the ideological structure, were intended to create a more attractive version of socialism and to promote a more sincere public belief in the communist vision. However, artistically suggestive images, due to the tendency of art to create polysemy, could establish alternative meanings besides those officially sanctioned. It is important to note that it is those texts about the homeland that were open to ethnonationalistic interpretations, became the most popular in society during the Stagnation and *perestroika* era and have remained relevant until today.

In the images of the homeland found in the works of the aforementioned Justinas Marcinkevičius (considered the "poet of the Lithuanian nation"), it is possible to see both the layer of nationalist sentiments and that of ideological schemes – which is why his poems of the Soviet era were suitable for both loyal communists and that part of society that cherished hopes for Lithuanian independence. According to literary scholar Paulius V. Subačius, who analyzes the ambivalence of Marcinkevičius's work, the latter's success was determined by the fact that he, like no other Lithuanian writer, dared to use all the possible symbolic resources made available by traditions alien to the Soviets (i.e., religion, nationality) in order to exalt the new order and to "trigger" in a moderate way Lithuanians' degraded patriotic feelings (Subačius 2011: 381–382). For example, in the poem "*Tai gražiai mane augino…*" (I was kindly raised…, 1974), which quickly became a popular song that is being sung to this day, the speaker names the objects and details of the landscape that raised him as a child:

---

8 Literal translation of: "*Iš praeities tavo sūnūs / te stiprybę semia. // Tegul tavo vaikai eina / vien takais dorybių*".

Tai gražiai mane augino
Laukas, pieva, kelias, upė,
Tai gražiai už rankos vedė
Vasaros diena ilga.

Tai gražiai lingavo girios,
Uogų ir gegučių pilnos,
Tai gražiai saulutė leidos,
Atilsėlį nešdama.

Tai gražiai skambėjo žodžiai:
Laukas, pieva, kelias, upė.
Tai gražiai iš jų išaugo
Vienas žodis – LIETUVA!

(Marcinkevičius 1975: 270)

I was kindly raised by
A field, a meadow, a road, a stream,
I was kindly lead by hand
By a long summer's day.

Forests kindly beckoned
Full of berries and cuckoos,
Sunset kindly lowered
Bringing a repose.

Those were kindest ringing words:
a field, a pasture, a road, a stream.
They were kindly growing
To a single word: LITHUANIA

(Literal translation quoted from:
Brūzgienė 2020).

As can be seen, the poem hews closely to the previously discussed trope of the homeland as a serene landscape. Here, the things named are perceived as beautiful and idyllic: a field, a meadow, a road, and swaying woods full of birds and berries. (Interestingly, this poem is an almost direct replica of the poem "*Peizažas*" (Paysage, 1929) written in the independent Lithuania by the poet Jonas Aistis (1904–1973); only the cross is missing from the poetic landscape by Marcinkevičius[9].) In his text, the motherland is depicted through personification of the landscape: "A long summer day" patronizingly leads the speaker by the hand. And words themselves, those of the mother tongue, likewise contribute to the speaker's upbringing. At the end of the poem, however, the images of the mothering birthplace (homeland) and the speaker-as-child seem to be reversed: the speaker, having been raised by the homeland, then raises Lithuania itself – it grows out of his spoken words.

The poem's ideological message is twofold. On the one hand, the image system corresponds to the principles of Socialist Realism: the mood of the poem is serene, the environment is bright, and the homeland is depicted as being nurturing and reliable as a mother; on the other hand, the nationalistic sentiments of the reading community could have been triggered by the poem's emphasis on the native language and its naming of Lithuania without the epithet "Soviet", which was mandatory in the official discourse of that era ("Those were kindest ringing **words** / [..] / [The native words] were kindly growing / To a single word: **LITHUANIA**." – [emphasis mine]).

9 The first line of the poem by Jonas Aistis: "A field, a road, a meadow, a cross."

Significantly, at that time (i.e., since the beginning of the 1970s), the use of the Russian language was expanded in Lithuania by the decision of the Central Committee of the USSR (On the further situation of Russian language... 1978). Thus, while Marcinkevičius's poem corresponded to the principles of Socialist Realism and could seem, to an addressee who did not share with him a "common memory", like a pure expression of socialist ideology, it could equally, to an audience possessing a "common memory" (cultural and national), activate meanings hostile to the regime and thereby promote nationalistic self-awareness.

Homeland on a reduced scale During the period of the Thaw, which saw the popularization of the "humanized" version of socialism, the trope of the "great homeland" seems to "shrink" to the scale of the "little man." Through the logic of metonymy, it can be assumed that the poeticization of a personal subject's relationship with their individually native (i.e., local) places could imply an analogically intimate, personally significant, and essentially positive relationship with the entire homeland and its order. For example, in Marcinkevičius's poem "*O tėviške*" (Oh Native Land, 1974), which would become a popular song, we can see the stylistic reduction of the homeland: the speaker addresses a motherland that no longer exists beyond memory, but is metonymically invoked through various household items of a poor farmer:

O tėviške, laukų drugeli margas! *jau tavo pieva – mano atmintis,* *kur tu skraidai skambi, lengva, spalvinga,* *kaip atlaidų skarelė parugėm.*	Oh motherland, you the motley butterfly of the fields! Your meadow is just memory, Where you are flying resounding, being light, colorful, As a scarf of the saints' feast days above the rye field.
O tėviške, nuvirtęs vartų stulpe. *[..]*	Oh motherland, you the fallen goal post, [..]
O tėviške, suskilus tėvo klumpe, *[..]*	Oh motherland, the father's split clog, [..]
O tėviške, sudžiūvus duonos rieke, *ligonio kosuly nakties tamsoj,* *nutrūkęs panti, šiltas karvės snuki,* *komunija, prilipus gomury.*	Oh motherland, the dried slice of bread, The sick cough in the dark of night, The broken leash, the warm muzzle of a cow, The communion wafer, sticking to the palate.
O tėviške, aprūkęs lempos stikle. *[..]*	Oh motherland, the smoky glass of a lamp, [..]
O tėviške, drugeli mano margas! *Po tavo sutrūnijusiu slenksčiu* *lig šiol dar guli stebuklingi žodžiai,* *kurių, turbūt, jau niekam neprireiks.*	Oh motherland, my motley butterfly! Beneath your rotten threshold, Your magical words still lie, But, probably, no one will need them anymore.
(Marcinkevičius 1974: 310–311)	(Literal translation)

This poem's emotional tone (that of nostalgia and pity) could elicit the emotional solidarity of its readers, since most of the Lithuanian population in the 1980s were of agricultural origin and had been moved to the cities from homesteads that the government destroyed as part of its land amelioration and collectivization program (due to Soviet reforms in Lithuanian rural areas, between 1951 and 1990 almost a million people moved out from their homesteads (Stanaitis 2010; Stanaitis 2004). In addition, the nationalistic sentiments of the interpretative community could be incited by the specified childhood memories, such as the elementorium (an alphabet book), the prayer book, and "the communion wafer, sticking to the palate" – signs of a religious piety (Subačius 2011: 386) that was forbidden in the Soviet era. The mention of the mother tongue in the last stanza ("Your magical words still rest, / But, probably, no one will need them anymore") could have activated a collective memory of the 19th century – namely, the banning of the Lithuanian press by Russian Tsarist rule, an event that echoed in the pro-Russian language policies of the mid-1970s, opposed even by those Lithuanian poets who were at the top of the Soviet prestige hierarchy, such as Eduardas Mieželaitis (Baliutytė 2019: 216).

Another example of the homeland on a reduced scale can be found in Janina Degutytė's (1928–1990) poem "*Lietuva*" (Lithuania, 1965), very famous at the time and, to this day, memorized by many at school. In this text, Lithuania is alternately depicted as a piece of amber small enough to fit in the palm of a hand, a small patch on the globe, and a slice of daily bread:

Tu mažutė, tu telpi visa	You are so tiny, you fit
Į Čiurlionio karalių delnus.	Into the palms of the kings painted by Čiurlionis.
Tu – riekelė duonos kasdieninės	You are a slice of daily bread
Ant pasaulio vaišių pilno stalo...	On one of the tables of the world's feasts...
[..]	[..]
Žalias rytas ant pilkų arimų,	Green morning on the gray ploughed field,
Spindulių lietus aikštės erdvėj.	Rain of rays in the space of the square.
Tu – ant gaublio – padūmavęs gintaras	You are – on the globe – a smoky amber
Su pušies kvapu ir kraujo atšvaitu...	With the smell of pine and the reflection of blood...
Tiktai mūsų meilėj – tu didžiulė.	Only in our love, you are huge.
Mūsų delnuose – tu nesudeginama.	In our hands, you are unburnable.
Mūsų ilgesy – brangiausia pasaka.	In our longing, you are the most precious fairy tale.
Mūsų akyse tu – saulės kraštas.	In our eyes, you are the land of the sun.
(Degutyte (1964) 1965: 7)	(Literal translation)

Here, the speaker's relationship with the homeland is based on care and empathy for the weaker beings ("You are so tiny, you fit / Into the palms [..]"). The poem

ends with an exalted expression of the speaker's feelings – a declaration of love for the Lithuanian homeland as for the "most precious fairy tale" and the "land of the sun". The sun was a popular symbol of the (Soviet) homeland in socialist realist imagery. Nevertheless, as the scholar Jurgita Raškevičiūtė (b. 1983) observes, Janina Degutyte's poetry creates an emblematic picture of Lithuania that consists of elements from the ethno-national poetic tradition rather than that of the Soviets (Raškevičiūtė 2011: 107). The image of Lithuania in Degutyte's poem is marked by signs of national culture (e.g., the work of the famous Lithuanian symbolist Čiurlionis (1875–1911), who was ideologically banned up until the Thaw). Thus, while the poem partly contains a rhetoric typical of Soviet ideology (i.e., the bright and sunny image of the homeland), the speaker's solidarity with small objects and related signs of national culture suggest an anti-imperialist concept of Lithuania as a country that is small, overshadowed, rejected, oppressed, and silenced by its bigger neighbors ("You are – on the globe – the smoky amber / With the smell of pine and the reflection of blood…"). Such stylistics of a reduced scale was a significant novelty in the discourse of Soviet-imperialistic gigantism and optimism.

Alternative meanings During the Thaw, the accelerated modernization of art and poetry encouraged polysemous interpretations of reality – meanings in many cases hostile to the official ideological system. Brezhnev's cultural policy was tightened again in response to public outcry against the Soviet regime (e.g., the Prague Spring, the riots after Lithuanian Romas Kalanta's protest by public self-immolation[10]). Literary functionaries made efforts to restore the standard of Socialist Realism so that creative works would not contain any moods hostile to Soviet ideology. In one plenum of the Communist Party, the following "dangerous characteristics" of Lithuanian literary activity were identified:

> "In the works of some writers published by "Vaga" publishing house, there is a tendency to idealize the patriarchal village, an effort to contrast old moral norms to modern civilization. In addition, the works that appeared in [other media, e.g.,] in the periodicals, feature [the] subjective moods of disappointment, pessimism, disbelief in human social and moral progress. In these works, absurd and senseless situations and collisions usually prevail."[11] (Streikus, Bagušauskas 2005: 384)

---

10 On May 14, 1972, a 19-year-old Lithuanian high school student Romas Kalanta self-immolated publicly, protesting against Soviet regime in Lithuania. This event provoked the largest post-war riots in the country, when thousands of people took to the streets shouting: "Freedom for Lithuania!"

11 Excerpt from the speech of Lithuanian Communist Party (LCP) Central Committee secretary A. Barkauskas at the LCP Central Committee plenum about dangerous characteristics in cultural life, July 3, 1972.

Here, the secretary of the Central Committee of the LCP (Lithuanian Communist Party) speaks of the works of famous modernist poets (i.e., those who debuted in the 1960s and 1970s – Sigitas Geda, Marcelijus Martinaitis, Judita Vaičiūnaitė, Vladas Šimkus, Vytautas Bložė) which contained a melancholic, tragic, and sometimes even grotesque image of reality. In the poetry of Sigitas Geda (1943–2008), one of the era's most original authors and an opponent of lyrical and harmonious aesthetics, the image of Lithuania is not monumental, as was the standard of the socialist realist art, but constructed in an apparently spontaneous, surrealistic way, involving objects uncharacteristic of the canonical representation of the homeland. Examples of homeland-related images in Geda's poetry include singing fish, a crab, and unhappy landscapes:

Ištiško geltona Šviesa danguje, Ir plaukia giedodamos Žuvys į ją.	The yellow light has splashed In the sky, And the singing fish Swim into it.
Raudonas ir žalias, Kuprotas kaip krabas Pašoka į viršų Lietuviškas kraštas.	Red and green, And humpbacked like a crab, The Lithuanian land Jumps up.
Kol rūstūs peizažai Apanka erdve, Kol medžiai žalia Apsitraukia žieve,	While harsh landscapes Are blinded by the space, While the trees get wrapped In green bark,
Žemelė po šviesuliu Šildo pečius Iš išveda šviečiančius Jūrų paukščius.	The earth under the light Warms its shoulders up And leads out The shining sea birds.
(Geda (1962) 1966: 6)	(Literal translation)

As literary scholar Paulius Jevsejevas (b. 1985) points out, it is possible in this poem to decode the signs of the flag of independent Lithuania – through the play of the colors yellow, green, and red which continues throughout (Jevsejevas 2015: 39) – which was banned during the Soviet occupation. In view of Soviet pressures, poets and painters who sought creative freedom and searched for an aesthetic language adequate to their experience, mastered an Aesopian language. This, as literary scholar Dalia Satkauskytė (b. 1966) describes it, was a complex phenomenon conditioned by the interfering of political power with the field of literature, whereby poetics is rendered inseparable from the possible receptions, whereas aesthetics as such is

rooted in historically established communicative situations (Satkauskytė 2019: 20). This means that a poem as if creates a double meaning: one meaning of a poetic plot is literal and formal; the other can be like a secret message, understandable only to an addressee with specific knowledge who knows the nuances of the poem's historical and political context. For example, the modernist poet Marcelijus Martinaitis (1936–2013) created the poetic character Kukutis (the first poems of the "*Kukučio baladės*" (Kukutis Ballads) cycle appeared in 1974), which seemed to correspond to the principles of Socialist Realism but was able (due to the apparently peasant origin, frivolous manner, and "folk" humor of Kukutis) to feature grotesque content that implicitly criticized the socio-political order of the time[12] – e.g., "And when they hanged me, / I immediately sobered up" (Martinaitis 1974: 210).

These are just a few examples of anti-Soviet modernist poetics, which was popularized by the bard and actor Vytautas Kernagis (1951–2008) who wrote music for and performed many poems by Martinaitis, Geda, the ironic poet Vladas Šimkus (1936–2004), and Juozas Erlickas (b. 1953), progenitor of postmodern Lithuanian poetics. It may be argued that these popular performances by Kernagis, in conjunction with modern poetry in general, shaped, as in Lotman's framework, the anti-Soviet audience which was related by the complementary "social energy", in Stephen Greenblatt's words (Greenblatt 1988: 6–7). Greenblatt uses the term to describe the power of text, words, and images to cause and control collective physical and mental experiences – in other words, to stimulate the audience's ability to respond to suggestions and to understand the irony of the texts, to see the absurdity of reality, and to enjoy a parody. It might be said that "social energy" which circulated between the text and the audience under the conditions of the Soviet regime, contributed a lot to the development of the alternative discourse and the mentality of independence.

The meaning twist

According to Nerija Putinaitė, "in the sunset of the Soviet era, it was enough to utter the word 'Lithuania' at artistic events to induce an ecstatic experience in the audience" (Putinaitė 2007: 136). Crowds in the rallies sung songs about Lithuania and recited poems, and when Bernardas Brazdžionis (1907–2002), the independent Lithuanian poet who emigrated to the USA in 1944 during the Soviet occupation, visited Lithuania in 1989 for the first time after

12 More on grotesque as a political and social critique in the "Kukutis Ballads" by Martinaitis see: Kmita 2009: 139–156.

45 years, crowds literally carried him on their hands as a spiritual leader of Lithuanians, the "herald" of the nation's freedom (*Poetas Bernardas Brazdžionis grįžta...* 2002: 17). Both facts – that there was a sudden popularization of texts about Lithuania in the late 1980s and that they received such an emotional a reception – can be explained by Lotman's theory about the dynamism of meaning depending on the circumstances of the actualization of the text. In 1988, after *Sąjūdis* (the organized public movement for independence) started, probably the two most popular poetic texts were turned into songs: "*Šaukiu aš tautą*" (I Call the Nation, 1941), written by the above mentioned Bernardas Brazdžionis; and the enigmatic poem "*Kaip laisvė*" (Like Freedom, 1974) by Justinas Marcinkevičius.

The popularity of Brazdžionis's poems in Lithuania can be explained, firstly, by the fact that his works, newly accessible in the *glastnost* era, had been strictly prohibited throughout the Soviet occupation (their history of being censored obviously provided the texts with additional value), and, secondly, by their poetical content (Brazdžionis's poetic language corresponded to the mass desire to hear straightforward words about Lithuania and its freedom). In the context of the *Sąjūdis*, where Lithuanians timidly cherished the hope of breaking away from the Soviet Union, the lines from the famous poem by Brazdžionis sounded especially relevant: "I am calling out to the nation, / oppressed by the GPU" (Brazdžionis 1989: 195). Here, the speaker is the spirit of the ancestors (*protėvių dvasia*) which protects the nation's memory and remembers the nation's "true" identity – its freedom. In the poem, the spirit of the ancestors appeals to the occupied and oppressed Lithuanian citizens and urges them to gather, unite, assemble, to quit slavery, and start a new life in freedom ("Come out of darkness, out of the twilight, / Light a new fire in your hearts, / Leave the eerie night of misery for the slaves! – / I call you out, I'm the spirit of your ancestors."[13]). A poem written during the first Soviet occupation in 1941 sounded all the more evocative in 1989 because both text and audience drew on a "common memory" (the occupation) that was still very much present.

By the end of the 1980s, some texts that had seemed ambivalent some 5–10 years earlier – certain poems by Justinas Marcinkevičius, in particular were now sung and recited with an unambiguous, nationalistic pathos. Such transformations in perception and reception can be characterized as "meaning twists." One illustration can be found in the poem "Like Freedom", written by Marcinkevičius in 1974 and published in the collection *Eilėraščiai. Mažosios poemos* (Strophes and Poems, 1975). Before the year of the *Sąjūdis*, this text was in no way prominent, nor did the actor

13 Literal translation of: "*Iš sutemų, iš prieblandų išeikit, / Uždekit naują ugnį širdyse, / Vergams palikit vargo naktį klaikią! – / Šaukiu aš, jūsų protėvių dvasia.*" (Ibid.)

Laimonas Noreika (1927–2007) who organized Lithuanian poetry evenings since the late 1960s and appeared on Lithuanian stages with different programs of poems, include it in his reading repertoire of Marcinkevičius. In fact, the poem was "discovered" and unexpectedly given life in 1988 by Eureka Masytė, a young employee at the Radio Factory and a student who also sang in its music band. Masytė tells how she was flipping through a poetry collection by Marcinkevičius and how the text of "Like Freedom" stuck, so she adapted the melody and the song was performed publicly for the first time in 1989 in the hall of the Radio Factory (Skučaitė 2006). There might be several reasons why Masytė's "Freedom" rendition soon became almost unimaginably popular. For one, the song was featured in a song contest held on Lithuanian Radio in 1990. Ironically, according to the singer, "the victory in the decisive stage of the competition was determined by a letter signed by 70 prisoners who voted for 'Freedom.' After this success, the song went on television" (Skučaitė 2006). For the audience of prisoners, the song was apparently significant because of the various meanings of freedom, but its lyrics which articulates a determined need to persevere and not to give up, was especially relevant to the political context of the 1990s (on March 11, 1990, the restoration of the country's independence was proclaimed).

In the poetic plot of "Like Freedom," the speaker addresses the homeland, admits to her that he is tired, that his hands are weak and that he no longer has strength and hope. In response, the homeland keeps repeating to him: "Stand as freedom stands," "go as freedom goes":

Aš jau nepakeliu	I can't stop
minčių apie tave!	thinking about you!
Kaip obelis,	Like an apple tree,
Apsunkusi nuo vaisių,	heavy with fruit,
užlaužiu tragiškai	I sharply spread my tragically
nusvirusias rankas.	drooping hands.
O tu sakai:	And you say:
– Stovėk,	– Stand,
Kaip stovi laisvė.	As freedom stands.
[..]	[..]
(Marcinkevičius (1974) 1975: 124)	(Literal translation)

In the last stanza the speaker, having lost hope and strength to persevere, appeals to the homeland, asking her to finish him off once and for all ("So shut me, / homeland, / inside yourself, / as death / shuts / a song in the throat, / as the night / shuts /

the evening"[14]), and the homeland responds that the speaker's freedom is nothing else but the very homeland itself ("And you answer me: / – I am your freedom"[15]). In other words, the homeland is a burden for the speaker, but that burden is paradoxically his freedom. Considered in the context of the time when it was written (the 1970s), when Marcinkevičius, one of the most productive Lithuanian poets, was working on his dramatic trilogy on the theme of Lithuanian cultural history (Marcinkevičius 1978), this text in question would seem to depict a citizen who does his best to work for the homeland (whether the Soviet homeland or that of ethnonational Lithuania remains uncertain; both meanings are possible); the citizen feels disappointed, depleted, and begins to doubt the meaning of his activity. Nevertheless, in the poem the homeland urges the exhausted speaker to persevere. The homeland serves as an apparently satisfactory answer to all doubts or questions about a person's activity, the meaning of life, and all of the speaker's goals and aspirations. This reading would correspond to the trope of the homeland as the highest deity, as discussed at the beginning of this article. On the other hand, as literary critic Donata Mitaitė (b. 1960) puts it, this poem does not give the final answer to what freedom is: is it the closure of oneself in the homeland, is it a departure or returning, a commitment to the homeland or creativity (Mitaitė 2021). The perceivers have to decide for themselves. However, Marcinkevičius's poem became popular only after Lithuania regained its freedom, and especially at the most critical moment – just after January 13, 1991 when the armed Soviet troops tried to re-occupy Lithuania by force. At that time, the poem-song "Like Freedom" sounded like a spiritual reinforcement for Lithuanians who fought for the restoration of their country's independence.

Thus, during the *Sąjūdis* period the audience, excited by political changes, re-actualized specific texts, giving them unambiguously relevant content that resonated with contemporary social experience – the ambiguity of their meaning was gone. Although not long before, of course, the image of the homeland offered by the very same texts could imply Soviet ideology.

Conclusions The regime sought to develop loyalty to the Soviet state by appropriating ethnonational imagery. Soviet ideology, in order to attain this goal, promoted those poetic images of the homeland which, based partly on nationalist sentiments, could form an identity loyal to the Soviet Union.

---

14 Literal translation of: "*Tai uždaryk mane, / tėvyne, / savyje, / kaip giesmę / gerklėje / mirtis uždaro, / taip, kaip uždaro / vakarą / naktis.*" (Ibid.)

15 Literal translation of: "*O tu man atsakai: / – Aš – tavo laisvė.*" (Ibid.)

The official discourse was dominated by a hybrid image of the homeland, merging symbolic images of the Soviet Union with those of the local motherland. After reviewing the poetry and popular songs of the Brezhnev Era and *perestroika* concerning the homeland, it is possible to identify several types of dominant poetic images of the homeland: a) the homeland as a divine authority; b) the homeland as a powerful, unbreakable country; c) the homeland as a sunny landscape; d) the homeland as a mother; (e) a reduced-scale homeland. Such imagery portrays the homeland as a friendly, cozy, familiar, and patronizing entity. Although these images, in some aspects, corresponded with the poetic clichés of any nationalistic/patriotic poetry created in line with the Romanticism approach, the Soviet poetics through subtle nuances (e. g. the superior position of Russian culture; the epithet "Soviet" used with the word "people"; poeticization of household items of a poor farmer as a reference to the working class; optimistic imagery of strength and unbreakability) implied the Soviet imperialistic ideology. Alternative depictions of the homeland (the modernists' fragmented, surreal, grotesque images) were developed mostly in the poetry of the younger generation.

The texts whose meanings were also open to patriotic interpretation became the most popular. The most popular texts and those that resonated best with the public moods were those that offered at least several codes of reading and which, according to Lotman's idea, inspired and formed at least two different audiences: one corresponding to the Soviet ideological scheme, and one fostering ethnonational identity and a hope for Lithuania's freedom. In other words, a poem of the late Soviet era, suggesting an image of the homeland in line with Soviet ideology, could also contain hints or cultural codes that were contradictory to that ideology (for example, references to forbidden religious piety, or sentiments for the native language). These hints did not fundamentally destroy the ideological structure of the work, but the "shared memory" (Lotman) of the audience could encourage interpretations opposed to those expected by the regime. In this way, depending on the capacity of "common memory," the audience might be theoretically divided into those for whom the meanings corresponding to the Soviet ideology were important, and those who were able to find additional arguments in the text to strengthen their national self-concept.

The regime underestimated the power of an artistic text to encourage the emancipation of the society's mentality. Although Soviet cultural policy sought to tame its audiences through the use of national symbols and sentiments, the regime did not foresee that an artistic text can help audiences remember what they did not know (Lotman 2013: 374). At least some aspects of a poetic text (e.g., images of national culture, the coded messages of Aesopian language) could have stimulated the

sensitivity of its audience to the issue of a national self-concept, even in the absence of a "common memory".

The ambivalent meaning of "homeland" in poetry and other arts could have partially prepared the soil for the breakout of national liberation. Creativity and art, as a form of "soft power," could have deepened the national self-concept of a part of the society. This national identity, latently matured through songs, poetry, and art, was fully exposed in the years of *Sąjūdis*, the independence movement, at the end of the 1980s.

Bibliography

Baliutytė, Elena (2019). *Eduardas Mieželaitis tarp Rytų ir Vakarų: pasivaikščiojimas su Waltu Whitmanu ir staugsmas su Allenu Ginsbergu.* Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas.

Brazdžionis, Bernardas (1989). *Poezijos pilnatis.* Vilnius: Vaga.

Brūzgienė, Rūta (2020). Poetic Rethoric of Justinas Marcinkevičius as an Expression of Archetypal Musicality. *XIV International Symposium Contemporary Issues of Literary Studies: The Silk Road Countries' Folklore,* Vol. 14. Available: https://openjournals.ge/index.php/cils/issue/view/656 [Accessed 06.06.2022.].

Daujotytė, Viktorija (1990). *Tautos žodžio lemtys.* Vilnius: Vaga.

Daujotytė, Viktorija (2012). *Justino Marcinkevičiaus žemė, arba Žmogaus šiapus.* Vilnius: Alma littera.

Daujotytė-Pakerienė, Viktorija (2003). *Raštai ir paraštės: Apie Justino Marcinkevičiaus kūrybą.* Vilnius: Lietuvos rašytojų sąjungos leidykla.

Daujotytė-Pakerienė, Viktorija (2016). *Justinas Marcinkevičius, Salomėja Nėris, Alfonsas Nyka-Niliūnas.* Vilnius: Nacionalinis muziejus Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės valdovų rūmai.

Degutytė, Janina (1965). Poem "Lietuva". *Poezijos pavasaris '65*, collected by Vacys Reimeris. Vilnius: Vaga, p. 7.

Dobrenko, Evgeny (2011). Literary criticism and the Institution of Literature in the Era of War and Late Stalinism, 1941–1953. Dobrenko, Evgeny, Tihanov Galin (eds.). *A History of Russian Literary Theory and Criticism, The Soviet Age and Beyond.* University of Pittsburgh Press, pp. 163–183.

Dobrenko, Evgeny (2019). Soviet Multinational Literature: Approaches, Problems, and Perspectives of Study. Jurgutienė, Aušra; Satkauskytė, Dalia (eds.). *The Literary Field under Communict Rule.* Boston: Academic Studies Press, pp. 3–17.

Dobrenko, Evgeny; Kalinin, Ilya (2011). Literary Criticism during the Thaw. Dobrenko, Evgeny; Tihanov Galin (eds.). *A History of Russian Literary Theory and Criticism, The Soviet Age and Beyond.* University of Pittsburgh Press, pp. 184–206.

Geda, Sigitas (1966). *Pėdos.* Vilnius: Vaga.

Geda, Sigitas (1976). Kuo alsuoja poezija. *Pergalė*, No. 8, pp. 169–171.

Graibus, Rimgaudas (1976). Poem "Atrodo, viską žinojau apie tave, Tėvyne...". *Poezijos pavasaris'76*, collected by Antanas Drilinga. Vilnius: Vaga, p. 138.

Greenblatt, Stephen (1988). *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England.* Berkeley, Los Angelos: University of California Press.

Grybkauskas, Saulius (2013). Internacionalizmas, tautų draugystė ir patriotizmas sovietinėje nacionalinėje politikoje. Laurinavičius, Česlovas (ed.). *Epochas jungiantis nacionalizmas: Tautos (de)konstravimas tarpukario, sovietmečio ir posovietmečio Lietuvoje.* Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos institutas.

Günther, Hans (2011). Soviet Literary Criticism and the Formulation of the Aesthetics of Socialist Realism, 1932–1940. Dobrenko, Evgeny, Tihanov Galin (eds.). *A History of Russian Literary Theory and Criticism, The Soviet Age and Beyond*, pp. 90–108.

Ivanauskas, Vilius (2007). Rusų kalbos vaidmuo stiprinant sovietinį tapatumą ir nacionalinė politika sovietinėje sistemoje 8–9 dešimtmetyje. *Lietuvos istorijos metraštis*, 2007/2. Vilnius, pp. 103–121.

Ivanauskas, Vilius (2013). Nacionalinis klausimas internacionaliniame sovietų idėjiniame lauke. Laurinavičius, Česlovas (ed.). *Epochas jungiantis nacionalizmas: Tautos (de)konstravimas tarpukario, sovietmečio ir posovietmečio Lietuvoje.* Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos institutas, pp. 131–168.

Jakubauskas, Feliksas (1976a). Poem "Tu – gėlių žydėjime...". *Poezijos pavasaris '76*, collected by Antanas Drilinga. Vilnius: Vaga, p. 158.

Jakubauskas, Feliksas (1976b). Poem "Kasdien...". *Poezijos pavasaris '76*, collected by Antanas Drilinga. Vilnius: Vaga, p. 160.

Jevsejevas, Paulius (2015). Ezopo kalba kaip semiotinis mechanizmas. Satkauskytė, Dalia (ed.). *Tarp estetikos ir politikos: lietuvių literatūra sovietmečiu.* Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas, pp. 289–311.

Kmita, Rimantas (2009). *Ištrūkimas iš fabriko.* Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas.

Lotman, Juri (2009). *Culture and Explosion.* Grishakova, Marina (ed.). Transl. by Wilma Clark. Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

Lotman, Juri (2013). Canonical art as informational paradox. Transl. by M. Salvoni, O. Sobchuk. *Sign System Studies*, No. 41(2/3), pp. 371–377.

Marcinkevičius, Justinas (1975). *Eilėraščiai. Mažosios poemos.* Vilnius: Vaga.

Marcinkevičius, Justinas (1978). *Mindaugas. Mažvydas. Katedra, draminė trilogija.* Vilnius: Vaga.

Martinaitis, Marcelijus (1974). Poem "Kaip Kukutis protą atgavo". *Poezijos pavasaris '74*, collected by Albinas Bernotas. Vilnius: Vaga, p. 210.

Martinaitis, Marcelijus (1990). Poem "Sutartinė". *Gailile raso.* Vilnius: Vaga, pp. 33–34.

Mitaitė, Donata (2021). Poezijai reikia drąsos. *Literatūra ir menas,* 10.09. Available: https://literaturairmenas.lt/literatura/donata-mitaite-poezijai-reikia-drasos [Accessed 20.07.2020.].

Nekrošius, Juozas (1981). Song "Ąžuolai" (muzika R. Žigaičio). Zubrickas, Boleslovas (ed.). *Į šiandie*ną*, kūriniai chorams.* Vilnius: Vaga.

Pakalniškis, Ričardas (1984). *Justinas Marcinkevičius: gyvenimas ir kūryba.* Kaunas: Šviesa.

Platelis, Kornelijus (1991). Apie moderniąją lietuvių poeziją. *Poezijos pavasaris '91*, collected by Judita Vaičiūnaitė. Vilnius: Vaga, pp. 260–264.

Poetas Bernardas Brazdžionis grįžta į Lietuvą: fotografijos, eilėraščiai, straipsniai (2002). Vilnius: Lietuvos rašytojų sąjungos leidykla.

Putinaitė, Nerija (2007). *Nenutrūkusi styga: Prisitaikymas ir pasipriešinimas sovietų Lietuvoje*. Vilnius: Aidai.

Putinaitė, Nerija (2019). *Skambantis molis: Dainų šventės ir Justino Marcinkevičiaus trilogija kaip sovietinio lietuviškumo ramsčiai*. Vilnius: Naujasis židinys-Aidai.

Raškevičiūtė, Jurgita Žana, (2011). Janinos Degutytės ankstyvosios poezijos embleminis kraštovaizdis. *Literatūra*, No. 53(1), pp. 102–121. DOI: 10.15388/Litera.2011.1.2685.

Sandle, Mark (2002). A Triumph of Ideological Hairdressing? Intellectual Life in the Brezhnev Era Reconsidered. Bacon, Edwin, Sandle, Mark (eds.) *Brezhnev Reconsidered*. London: Palgrave Mcmillan, pp. 135–164.

Satkauskytė, Dalia (2019). The Role of Aesopian Language in the Literary Field, Autonomy in Question. Jurgutienė, Aušra; Satkauskytė, Dalia (eds.). *The Literary Field under Communict Rule*. Boston: Academic Studies Press, pp. 18–36.

Secretariat of the Central Committee of the USSR (1978). "On the further situation of Russian language teaching and learning in the union republics". Issued in August 29, 1978, RVNIA, f. 89, ap. 23, b. 31, l. 1–3. Ivanauskas, Vilius (2008). Rusų kalbos vaidmuo stiprinant sovietinį tapatumą ir nacionalinė politika sovietinėje sistemoje 8–9 dešimtmetyje. Lietuvos istorijos metraštis, 2007/2. Vilnius, pp. 103–121.

Senn, Alfred Erich (1995). *Gorbachev's Failure in Lithuania*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Skučaitė, Virginija (2006). Palietusieji sausį širdimi. *Kauno diena*, 12.01. Available: https://kauno.diena.lt/dienrastis/kita/palietusieji-sausi-sirdimi-34232 [Accessed 20.07.2020.].

Stanaitis, Saulius (2004). *Social, economic and demographic changes of rural areas in Lithuania*. DOI: 10.22004/ag.econ.157830.

Stanaitis, Saulius. (2010). *Lietuvos žmoniškieji ištekliai: visuomeninės teritorinės transformacijos.* Vilnius: Vilniaus pedagoginio universiteto leidykla.

Streikus, Arūnas; Bagušauskas, Juozapas Romualdas (eds.) (2005). *Lietuvos kultūra sovietinės ideologijos nelaisvėje, 1940–1990*. Vilnius: Lietuvos gyventojų genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimų centras.

Subačius, Paulius V. (2011). Liminalios tapatybės Justino Marcinkevičiaus sovietmečio lyrikoje. Jurgutienė, Aušra (ed.). *XX amžiaus literatūros teorijos: Konceptualioji kritika*. Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas, pp. 370–390.

Venclova, Antanas (1969). *Mėlyno Nemuno vingis*. Vilnius: Vaga, p. 14.

Zubrickas, Boleslovas (ed.) (1980). *Į šiandieną: kūriniai chorams.* Vilnius: Vaga.

Deniss Hanovs
Dr. art., cultural historian
Art Academy of Latvia
E-mail: hanovs@inbox.lv
DOI: 10.35539/LTNC.2023.0051.07

Baltic Nations in Soviet Dissident Literature: *The Compromise* by Sergei Dovlatov

Baltijas nācijas padomju disidentu literatūrā: Sergeja Dovlatova romāns *Kompromiss*

Keywords:
anti-semitism,
dissidents,
memory politics,
Soviet colonialism,
subaltern,
reverse orientalism

Atslēgvārdi:
antisemītisms,
disidenti,
atmiņas politika,
padomju koloniālisms,
subalterns/pakļauts,
apgrieztais orientālisms

This research is funded by the Ministry of Culture, Republic of Latvia,
project *Cultural and creative ecosystem of Latvia as a resource for resilience and sustainability/CERS*,
project No. VPP-MM-LKRVA-2023/1-0001.

Summary The article reflects on the images of the Baltic nations in the novel *The Compromise* (1981) by Soviet dissident author Sergei Dovlatov. The novel is analyzed within the framework of Baltic post-colonial studies, which are supplemented by the history of Soviet dissident literature of the early 1980s. The narrator, a Soviet journalist, acts in two roles: he is a Soviet subaltern and a dissident author, yet a staff member of a Soviet newspaper, and therefore a colonial tool. The narrator discovers his in-between status when he discovers his colonized status while at the same time his revelation does not produce any change in his image of the Baltic cultures. They, the Baltic nations, remain unknown to the narrator. His fragmented discovery of Estonian and Latvian history and culture leads to no real contact with the groups. Selected chapters of the novel analyzed in this paper suggest that the orientalized Estonians and Latvians remain as silenced groups with stories unknown to the narrator, as the language tools necessary for a dialogue are missing. The narrator also participates in the process of orientalizing the Baltic cultures, as the case of a milkmaid shows.

Kopsavilkums Raksts analizē Sergeja Dovlatova romānu *Kompromiss* (publicēts 1981. gadā). Izmantojot Baltijas koloniālo studiju atzinumus, raksta autors secina, ka romāna varonis – padomju avīzes žurnālists – cenšas ieturēt distanci no padomju ideoloģijas ar mērķi dekolonizēt sevi. Šim nolūkam žurnālists izmanto Citādo (Baltijas nāciju pārstāvjus) kā līdzekli sevis atbrīvošanai un disidentisma prakšu īstenošanai. Izmantojot apvērsto koloniālo skatienu, žurnālists kā kultūras kolonizācijas nesējs medijos veido kultūru hierarhiju, definējot igauņus un latviešus kā kultūras ziņā augstāku sociāli etnisko grupu. Igauņi un latvieši ir vēsturiski kultūras prakšu un dzimtes identitāšu ziņā kā atšķirīgie, vienlaicīgi veicot klusu vai publiski aktīvu pretošanos padomju ideoloģijai. Redakcijas darbā žurnālists pieredz padomju rasismu un antisemītismu, ko pieņem bez publiska protesta, toties izmantojot vairākas neredzamas pretošanas prakses. To vidū ir intensīva un regulāra alkohola lietošana kā iespēja īslaicīgi atbrīvoties no varas kontroles. Alkohols kā viena no centrālajām pretošanās praksēm veido īpašu situāciju, kurā žurnālists atklāj savas patiesās domas un ļaujas pašanalīzei.

A theoretical framework for reading Dovlatov's novel

In the fifth chapter of the novel *The Compromise* by Sergei Dovlatov (1941–1990), a Soviet journalist is busy writing an article on Estonian-Russian friendship in the early 1970s. A baby resulting from an Estonian- Russian interethnic marriage is the central hero of the article. The selection procedure of an eligible baby takes place in the office of Mikhel Teppe, the chief doctor of a maternity hospital. While waiting for a baby to be born, the journalist, Dovlatov-narrator, scrutinizes the Estonian doctor. The narrator admits that he can recognize Estonians at once. He describes Estonians as quiet – a precise depiction of subalterns in Soviet republics. A tie and well-ironed trousers are always worn, and the answers the doctor gives to the questions of the Russian journalist are extremely cautious. None of the Russians he knows would ever do gymnastics near an open window (Dovlatov 2019: 36). After a selection procedure over the phone, various babies and their parents are not included in the festive article dedicated to the "annual celebration of liberation" of Tallinn by the Soviet troops because of the babies' race or ethnic origin – one is Black, another is a Jew. None of them are acceptable for a Soviet newspaper which officially celebrates internationalism.

The Compromise was first published in 1981 in New York. Three years prior to the publication of the novel, its author was forced to leave the USSR, in order to avoid political persecution. The text to be analyzed in this article reflects on several issues of Soviet cultural politics in the Baltic states.

How to read the novel? Among various options, a post-colonial reading of the novel can add a new dimension to Baltic post-colonial studies. Soviet dissident literature can serve as a new, rather unexpected source of Soviet construction of the Baltics and their position as colonized nations – Dovlatov's, Solzhenitsyn's, and Brodsky's works include various characters and locations from the occupied Baltic republics. How are Estonians and Latvians imagined in *The Compromise*? Does the plot and characters bear colonial hierarchies introduced by the Soviet power, or is the dissident content able to alter or even deconstruct colonial structures in the literary space? Let us examine *The Compromise* as a case study of the construction of Baltic nations in Soviet dissident literature.

The reading will be undertaken within the studies of Soviet colonialism in the Baltics. Researchers such as Violeta Kelertas (Kelertas 2006), Epp Annus (Annus 2016), Kārlis Račevskis (Račevskis 2006), and Benedikts Kalnačs (Kalnačs 2011)

have for years analyzed the strategies of Soviet colonialism in cultural politics and literature. According to Annus:

> Strategies of Soviet colonialism are formed and expressed by colonial discourse – that is, by a network of interconnected statements, ideas, beliefs, and subject positions that are institutionally grounded and find expression in different colonial practices. Modern colonial discourse enunciates and continuously (re)creates the colonial situation through the pathos of progress and civilization, whereas the latter are (re)defined through value systems of the colonizing culture. In Soviet colonial discourse, the pathos of progress was presented in terms of a communist value system, which included not only a modification of the Marxist rejection of capitalism but also selected principles of the European Enlightenment embedded in Marxist values and rearticulated by Soviet ideologists (Annus 2016: 2).

Račevskis, in his analysis of the colonized Baltic states, stresses that Soviet colonization can be defined through language, history, and education politics aimed at forcing the consent of the colonized nations (Račevskis, 2006:168). Such definition includes the concept of colonialism as a set of hierarchical cultural practices which follow territorial inclusion into the colonizer state and refer to the establishment and acceptance of new networks of cultural meanings, which in a colonial framework bear the idea of hierarchy, even if not stated publicly in the politics of the colonial power.

Culturally legitimized hierarchy among Russians and the Baltic nations developed by the Soviet ideology is one of the key elements of *The Compromise* and is a part of the narrator's gaze towards the Baltic nations. As will be elaborated below, the very essence of Otherness of the Baltic nations was their history during the pre-occupation period and the period of Nazi occupation. Independent statehood was deemed capitalist and nationalistic, added by the concept of the Legion as Nazi collaboration during World War II, which indirectly is applied to all Estonians in the novel. These elements of Otherness cemented the subaltern status of the Baltic nations which thus came under control of their Soviet/Russian "older brother," who muted the cultural heritage of these nations and depraved the subalterns of their voices in literature. Various Latvian authors of the Soviet time, even those who were loyal to the system, suffered from stigmatisation, too, as Jānis Oga states in his research on Ēvalds Vilks memory and legacy (Oga 2022).

Twelve chapters of the novel allow to define the narrator's gaze as a gaze of a Soviet subaltern towards other subaltern groups – a Jewish dissident, the writer Dovlatov, looks at the silenced Baltic nations and discovers his own subaltern status through the eyes of a Soviet journalist. According to Spivak, subalterns are members of silenced groups for whom representatives of colonialism act and decide how and what to desire and what patterns of cultural habits to follow or to abandon. This muting is defined and legitimized in terms of enlightened culture and administration, which uses various instruments of power to force the cultural hierarchy upon the

silenced groups (Spivak 2010: 50, 51). One of the ways to establish subaltern status is to force the group to exit the production of cultural meanings, including a change of space and the revision of cultural memory. All these elements characterized the Soviet Baltic cultures. Collective memories were deleted and forbidden, while traditional cultures and habitats were forcefully altered – collectivization, censured historiography, and forbidden, exiled authors are some examples of the transformation of the Baltic societies into subaltern groups.

In the novel, Estonians and Latvians are subaltern groups. Throughout the book Dovlatov shows how cultural space and the meanings, memories, and traumas of Estonians have been interrupted and replaced. The groups were silenced within the framework of Soviet enlightenment, which for Annus is the basis of Soviet coloniality (Annus 2016: 4). The novel's narrator assumes an ambiguous role – he himself is a subaltern, yet at the same time he is a journalist participating in developing the subaltern status of Estonians and Latvians by producing Soviet media content.

On the one hand, the journalist is a representative of a Soviet newspaper – one of the tools of Soviet cultural colonialism aimed at creating a new political community of Soviet people by mandatory consumption of Soviet ideology. On the other hand, his other activities, views, and opinions in private space allow one to interpret his gaze as a deconstruction of his own colonial function. He tries to delegitimize the Soviet colonial discourse by using what can be described as a reversed gaze – a "returned" gaze of one of the actors in the colonial process who challenges the established hierarchy and discovers his own status of a subaltern but does not abolish the process of "looking down" (Tlostanova 2017: 143).

As culture is never a stable set of meanings and practices and is produced in contradictions, alternatives, and oppositions, as William H. Sewell Jr. states (Sewell 1999: 53), the concept of the colonial gaze of the narrator should be understood as the cultural practice of a bearer of colonial power who wants to escape his own condition of a subaltern partly colonized by the Soviet rule – a dissident himself. In each chapter, Soviet colonial politics is deconstructed through a Soviet dissident's gazing at Estonians and Latvians, thus changing the perspective, the hierarchy, and the direction of the colonial gaze. The journalist's gaze allows one to understand what subalterns think and speak or keep silent about Baltic history, everyday Soviet antisemitism, economics, politics, and sexual life. All these discussed and hidden issues are available to the narrator by executing a subaltern or a "deconstructed" gaze, which changes the hierarchy of those who participate in the colonization process: colonizing Soviet officials are looked down upon and colonized Baltic nations and dissident Russians take a higher symbolical position. This specific gaze will be addressed in the present study and conceptualized as a reverse gaze in three case studies. Only when

distancing from his own colonial function by rejecting Soviet colonialism towards himself, can the narrator become aware of his subaltern status, which remains a silenced position till the end of the novel but helps him discover the stories of other subalterns.

As one of the basic elements of post-colonial studies, a colonial gaze was a key notion in Edward Said's work *Orientalism* and was a term to describe multiple ways of making the Orient an exotic territory for the West in text and arts by looking at the East from the perspective of Western cultural space and meanings. The Orient was "orientalized" (Said 2003: 6) through culturally shaped projections of Western literary fantasies about the Orient. By viewing the Other of Europe as exotic, the notion of a potentially under-developed and silenced Other legitimized Western dominance towards the colonized territories. Thus colonies became "a victim of discoursive power and colonial dominance of Western countries [..]" (Turoma 2021: 179). Colonies were imagined as visually, sexually, and politically different from European culture, but colonial imagination is cultural process. Thus "[..] Orientalism is a cultural and a political fact [..]" states Said (Said 2003, 13). The difference between the West and the East was hierarchical in meaning and in cultural performance and was applied in terms of 18th century European Enlightenment debates on civilization as a process for the rest of the world to reach the level of the developed Europe. Later on, in the volume *Culture and Imperialism*, Said elaborated on specific areas and periods where the colonial gaze could be reversed in various ways. The colonized local elites, as in the case of Cairo Opera House and the opera *Aida* by Giuseppe Verdi, can view themselves through the accepted colonial gaze from without (Said 1994: 187). They also reverse the colonial gaze and look at the colonizers as exotic but dominant, and discover and accept Western music and architecture as exotic but as a tool for their own development. Thus a reversed gaze is still a continuation of a colonial condition, though the colonized one is aware of the condition and accepts it as a better condition.

The concept of a reversed colonial gaze can be applied to *The Compromise*, as the narrator is a part of colonial media. Though the narrator discovers subaltern contents and some Estonians reveal to him silenced meanings, the journalist still produces colonial meanings in his articles and helps to replace the silenced content produced by the ethnic majority of the Baltic republics before the occupation. Thus, the journalist is both a subaltern and an actor of colonial culture. At the same time Dovlatov and his characters can be also seen as colonized, as Jews in the Soviet Union were discriminated against in various ways and deprived of their autonomy, their theatre, their education, and the development of their language. The colonized status of a Jew is repeatedly stated and experienced in the book, in acknowledging that there is anti-semitism in the Soviet Union. The status of a Jew is the status of a colonized ethnic and religious group.

Said saw the task of post-colonial studies as giving silenced groups an opportunity to speak in their own name in the history of ideas and arts, and as providing opportunities to narrate their colonized condition and encounter with Western military and cultural dominance (Said 1994: 112). In this case, in a new reading of the colonial experience, the colonial gaze changes its direction and is turned at the colonizer as the Other. However, the meaning is different from that in the colonized Cairo Opera House project. This gaze acquires a new meaning and becomes reversed by establishing a different distance now initiated and constructed by the colonized. A reversed gaze can include a new, reversed hierarchy in which the colonized can develop, invent, or remember their cultural superiority to challenge colonial power. Foreign cultural, military, administrative, and economic powers become politically exotic, namely "foreign," and their legitimacy diminishes. The awareness of a colonized condition is of critical importance for understanding the reversed gaze. It is *The Tempest* retold by Caliban who is aware of the fact that he was silenced by Prospero's magical or technological dominance and is about to start speaking in his own name. For Dovlatov's novel, a reversed colonial gaze – awareness of being colonized by the Soviet regime even while being its tool, a Soviet journalist – needs to be placed in the context of the reception of Western cultures in Russia and its politics of colonization.

In the case of Russia, since the beginning of the 18th century when Peter I presented the results of his rapid Westernization program to the world of European Enlightenment, Western debates on Russian society took place within a discourse of civilizing the uncivilized. Larry Wolff shows how European philosophers and travelers of the 18th century invented Russia by applying Western European mythology, literature, and drama to paint Russia as a rapidly changing but still uncivilized place, a brutal or morally deprived society far from European Enlightenment (Wolff 1994). These images were also sustained after the revolution of 1789 and in the early 19th century, as the latest research shows (Mitrofanov 2020), reaching a new intensity in the travelogue by Astolphe de Custine, *La Russie en 1839*, which provoked a negative reaction from the Russian imperial government. Russia's colonialism, boosted by the so-called Greek project of Catharine II after the annexation of Crimea, had its internal dimension as well, which was analyzed by Alexander Etkind who showed how literature and visual arts in the 19th century were used to discover and colonize peasants as the image of Russian folk (Etkind 2011: 86). Other studies on Russia's colonization politics show a link between empire and nation.

Since the early 1820s, after the Napoleonic Wars, Russia's growing cultural nationalism provoked imperial mental mapping and the geopolitical and cultural construction of occupied territories and remote Western neighbors, such as Germany, France, and Italy. Eugene Ponomarev clearly shows a new tendency of the period –

to change the discourse from the cultural inferiority of Russia to the West by constructing a spiritual dominance over the West (Ponomarev 2017: 39). It was a kind of reversed gaze which helped to change the cultural hierarchy that had existed in Russian literary discourse for the duration of the 18th century, forced upon public space by the rapid Westernization politics of Russian rulers. For most of the Slavophiles of the 19th century, Europe had been in cultural and spiritual decline since the liberal revolutions of 1830 and 1848, established the dominance of technologies shaped by middle-class culture, seen as inferior and even dangerous for the development of arts and education. The Russian alternative to this technologically based cultural decline was, according to Slavophile Konstantin Leontjew: aristocracy, army, and the Orthodox Church, with roots in the absolutist culture of Byzantium (Leontjew 1993: 157).

Russification politics, started in the 1860s, aimed to establish the Russian language, culture, and Russian Orthodoxy as the universal framework for the multiethnic society of the empire (Miller 2015: 309, 321, 327). Russian imperialism, as defined in another work by Alexey Miller, was shaped by the intense diversity of ethnic and religious groups which experienced hierarchies in the administrative, political, and judicial structures offered by the metropolis to the so-called okraini (ethnic periphery). These elements of the imperial rule provoked collective fears of assimilation in form of Russification (Miller 2006: 10–11). In the case of Russian colonial expansion and the politics of Russification, a part of its colonized Orient were Western territories of the expanded empire. Russian language was dominant in education process and became a tool of colonial practices during the administrative and cultural Russification of Western territories of the empire under Alexander III. The Russification of the education process and media space was also a part of the Soviet colonial rule in the Baltics after 1944, carried out by the Soviet print media in which Dovlatov's narrator also worked.

A Soviet journalist discovers the Baltic nations

A reversed colonial gaze in this article is understood as a set of practices performed by the narrator which leads to a discovery of a colonial hierarchy in Soviet Baltic societies. The discovery is not institutional or publicly announced. It is intimate and takes place in a private space, which is the space where Soviet ideology can be escaped – home parties, drinking in restaurants, and business trips away from the main office of the newspaper provided distance from ideological control. The discovery of the Baltic cultures is carried out as an observation of the narrator's moral transformation, not as a way of letting the subalterns speak their own language. The lack of knowledge of national languages as well as history makes the gap deep. As a result of the reversed gaze, used for his own transformation, the cultures of the Baltics become superior to

the narrator's "own" and "foreign" cultures (Russian and Soviet), but are not decolonized or made equal to the culture of the narrator in any public form.

Dovlatov allows the gaze of a Soviet journalist to be reversed by two tools. The first tool is the combination of two stories: the official article in the *Soviet Estonia* and the development of the story "behind the scenes" to show the discrepancy between the official interpretation of reality and the true story of certain people. This discrepancy is the space where scrutiny of the colonized Other occurs and is the basic and repetitive structure of the work – an Estonian doctor or a young Estonian girl from a provincial *kolkhoz*, a peasant or an emancipated urban scientist are scrutinized without any further political action. Dovlatov's narrator is a passive dissident, the one whose protest against Soviet rule is limited to talking, watching, and drinking in the kitchen or during parties in his friends and colleagues' flats. In these areas of reversed gaze, the narrator discovers Soviet people of various ethnic origins, among them also Russians, who are at the same time representatives of the colonizing culture. This status of in-between may seem schizophrenic, but the reader is put into the position of normalizing the abnormal when most persons in the novel accept the fact that Russian culture, too, is colonized by ethnically "us" but ideologically "them" Soviets, represented by the editor-in-chief Turonok. Silenced representatives of a colonial culture may be defined as a type of subaltern who are close to elite culture but are unable to articulate their meanings in public discourse. What remains are everyday gaps in totalitarian culture, where people like narrator can hide in private opposition without any real change.

The process of normalizing such a gap is a tool to create the reversed gaze. During the whole story the narrator aggravates his feeling of split reality by collecting experiences and opinions of his colleagues and friends who largely accept the parallel structures of society and carry out this duplicity by means of applying parallel levels of language, social practices, and thus also thinking. Dovlatov enhances the schizophrenic effect of the "true" reality by inventing most of the articles at the beginning of each compromise, with rare exceptions, and using the optimistic language of the Soviet press, reporting on success in all areas of economy and culture. His articles seem real in their semiotics of Soviet optimism, and the texts show no borders between fantasy and reality in the Soviet regime; both spaces are spaces of manipulation used also by the author to show the absurdity of the Soviet ideology (Yang 2012: 222).

The colonial gaze is redirected in discovering one's own subaltern status; the gaze then is diverted onto oneself and the Baltic nations as victims of the Soviet rule. The narrator and the Baltic nations sharing their status as victims allows the narrator to discover changes in his idea of the Baltic colonized nations – there is compassion mixed with admiration and jealousy. At the same time, as further examples will show, this is a partial action which does not culminate in a discoursive decolonization

of the local Baltic societies. Reversed hierarchy, in which the colonized Estonians and Latvians are seen as a more developed and sophisticated group, is a tool to oppose the regime as it exists in the self.

By means of deep mistrust and opposition to Soviet ideology, the narrator distances himself from the regime; the colonized Baltic cultures are treated as a means to install and practice individual opposition of the journalist to the regime. In this condition the narrator is situated outside of both cultural spaces, and only in this condition does he discover himself as an intellectual opposed to the regime. His participation in the Soviet regime is a formal, ritualized, empty participation aimed at receiving a salary. He does not enter the space of the colonized either, as their history and current situation remain unknown. But there is another, third space, imagined and sustained by alcoholic escape, which he shares with the both colonized communities – the Baltic societies and the Russians opposed to the Soviet ideology. In the following case studies, the concept of the reversed colonial gaze will be analyzed in detail.

Case Study I. How Soviet colonialism produced "normal" babies (5th Compromise)

Let us return to the Estonian doctor in the fifth compromise. The journalist named Dovlatov publishes an article with the title *A Human is Born* about the 400,000th inhabitant of Tallinn –he is named Lembit and is the first son of Maya and Grigory Kuzins. This is the official part of the story, the one which describes the Soviet ideology which acclaims the working class as the bearers of the futuristic, industrial development of the Baltic republics. As Epp Annus stresses, the topos of industrialization was an inherent element of the Soviet modernization and can be applied as a tool of the colonial supremacy of the Soviet regime framed in a civilizing discourse (Annus 2016: 4). Other researchers define European modernity as a set of colonizing practices which should become a part of the discourse on deconstructing European hegemony. This implies a reversed gaze and imaginative processes, too. Dipesh Chakrabarty, in his attempt to provincialize Europe, stated that the West is "an imaginary entity" which still preserves its appeal or power (Chakrabarty 2000: 43).

The new civilization established under Soviet ideology in Estonia is shaped by factories, collective farms, and machine stations which "report to the state of their high productivity" (Dovlatov 2019: 29). The article in the *Soviet Estonia* ends with a hidden, sarcastic note that a human being is born who is "doomed to be happy." This anti-utopian tune of mandatory happiness is developed further in the plot. The editor-in-chief Turonok constructs the happiness of a child without consulting even

the parents. The early stage of the child's life resembles Huxley's factory of genetically modified babies who are to acquire certain qualities before they are born. Another tool of a colonial power is to decide what name to give to a baby. Even the birth itself is planned by Turonok who acquires the features of a divine being, bringing people to life according to the jubilee schedule (Dovlatov 2019: 31). Before the name is given, various children participate in the competition organized by Turonok. The narrator, like in a fairy tale, attempts three times to solve Turonok's riddle of what constitutes a suitable child. He is instructed by the editor how to choose a correct baby:

> – And remember – Turonok rose to end the conversation – the baby should be eligible for publication.
>
> – Meaning?
>
> – Meaning a full-fledged child. Nothing inferior, gloomy. No Caesarean section. No single mothers. Full set of parents. Healthy, socially full-fledged boy. (Dovlatov 2019: 31)

The first baby is the result of an international relationship and seems to be eligible. But soon the narrator discovers that there is racism in the Soviet press. The journalist reports to Turonok that the boy is large, healthy and that his father comes from Ethiopia and studies in Soviet Estonia. "'He is a Marxist,' I added, not knowing why." (Dovlatov 2019: 39). The rejection of the African baby develops rapidly but in various stages. First Turonok asks whether the journalist is drunk. When this option is denied by the offended journalist, the editor goes further to collect information on the father of the newly born baby and, after having confirmed his fears that the father was a "black," or *negr* in Soviet Russian language of the time, the editor claims he will fire the journalist for "discrediting all the best" and asks him to "leave in peace your shitty Ethiopian! Wait for a normal baby, a normal human baby!" (Dovlatov 2019: 39). The last quotation suggests the most severe form of verbal racism directed at the baby, whose parents are alleged not to be humans. Another baby is nominated by a team at the newspaper, but is rejected due to a "wrong" ethnic and religious identity, being a son of journalist Boris Stein, who is of a Jewish origin. When Boris reaches the maternity hospital, the narrator already knows that his son has been disqualified because, as he has been told by the staff photographer: "Each Jew is to be agreed upon" by party officials. This case stimulates a short dialogue between two representatives of the Soviet media on the fact that anti-semitism exists in the Soviet state. When this discovery is made by the Jewish journalist, the narrator calls the USSR a lie. The totality of the lie is presented by three facts – the unburied Lenin, the abbreviation of the USSR, and the Soviet journalism and Soviet poetry which produce a lie "which has dozens of nicknames" (Dovlatov 2019: 43).

Finally, the third baby is deemed worth writing about. The boy is a representative of the socialist elite in many ways: he is born of parents who both are workers, she

an Estonian driver, he a Russian turner, a member of the Communist Party. Turonok is finally satisfied and sends another request to the journalist: "Make sure that they call the baby Lembit." After the journalist begs not to call the baby Lembit, as the name is old-fashioned and comes from folklore, the editor becomes impatient and suggests to offer money to the parents to force them to call the baby by the name which would signify Estonian-Russian friendship. 25 rubles is the price of Soviet control over baby's very basic identity, offered to the father Kuzin who converts the sum immediately to two half litre bottles of vodka and some snacks. The father of the colonized baby is himself colonized already for decades by consuming party slogans; at the beginning of the conversation with the narrator, he immediately produces a sentence consisting solely of Soviet slogans: "We work hard, as it suits, we widen our horizon, we enjoy authority among [..]" (Dovlatov 2019: 43). The story ends with the predominant tool used by Dovlatov as a *deus ex machina* to resolve unresolvable conflicts, namely the split between the emptiness of the Soviet ideology and everyday life – an extensive consumption of alcohol. Only when drunk, both men reveal what they really think of the Soviet reality and themselves. Kuzin calls himself a drunkard and his son a piece of shit. The scene leads into a militia office, where Kuzin and the notes on the future article about the happy baby are lost after a drunken fight with the restaurant staff. In the next chapter I will analyze the motive of drinking as a unifying frame for most chapters of "The Compromise" and will clarify what role alcohol plays in practicing a reversed gaze.

Case Study II: Subaltern speak when drunk. Alcoholic oblivion as a decolonial tool (8th Compromise)

The eighth compromise reveals how the narrator first got to Tallinn – after an intense drinking party which resulted in his landing in Estonia with no job, flat, or money. This is how the professional career of the narrator started in Tallinn. And this is how it ends in the 12th compromise, after attending a meeting of former prisoners of Nazi camps in Tartu. The whole text is shaped by the social drinking of the narrator and his colleagues. One of the basic functions of alcohol lies in the attempt of the narrator as a subaltern to acquire a new language, which is opposed to the Soviet language. Alcohol helps him overcome the bitter aftertaste of each compromise and to free himself for a short moment from the omnipresence of Soviet ideology. Intoxication offers a new political grammar which allows the subaltern journalist to speak, though not very clearly, after many shots of vodka. It also helps him discover alternative stories presented by the colonized Baltic cultures, as some taboos vanish while drinking.

This type of decolonization can be described as a fake decolonization, as no real freedom is achieved. The narrator and various of his colleagues are constantly intoxicated. This condition does not prevent them from fulfilling their duties, even in a state of severe hangover. The chief editor Turonok is aware of this habit and accepts it as the natural condition of the narrator, saying: "When did it [drunkenness] prevent you [from working]," mentioning a past scandal of vomiting on the premises of a party office (Dovlatov 2019: 39). When work is done, in the form of quick and often made-up articles in order to earn money for a drink, the escape to the alcoholic oblivion may begin. In some cases, drinking in the early hours of the day helps the day pass quickly: "I knew well that three more glasses and work will be over. In that sense drinking in the morning makes sense. Have a drink and you are free for the rest of the day." (Dovlatov 2019: 47)

Drinking is a topos in other Dovlatov's works, too, such as *Zona* (The Zone, 1982) and *Zapovednik* (in English translation: *Pushkin Hills*, 1983). Alcoholism is treated as an individual escape policy which takes place in public and unites various persons. As Galina Dobrozrakova stats, the long-lasting period of drinking, called *zapoy* in Russian, which is experienced by various characters of the novel, is a practice which links Dovlatov's texts to Nikolai Gogol's play *Revizor* (Inspector), in which high officials are heavy drinkers. Gogol depicts alcohol consumption as a vice with no social reasons or individual conflicts behind it, but Dovlatov's narrator drinks to escape the absurdity of the reality around him (Dobrozrakova 2019: 169). Mikhail Okun' analyzes the theme of drinking in Dovlatov's other works and states that alcoholism represents a combination of art (in its practical aspects of consuming and enjoying alcohol when one is short of money or, on the contrary, suddenly "rich") and a frame for the philosophical reflections of drunken heroes (Okun' 2012: 81–82). In *The Compromise*, drinking means performing an alternative social networking. It often functions as a substitute for non-existing civic society, in the small kitchen of a flat. A colleague of the narrator, Vera Chlopina, enjoys organizing parties, buying wine, and preparing snacks. All these activities are aimed to compensate for her loneliness.

The first transformation undertaken by the alcoholic is the illusion of temporarily giving up lying to oneself and telling "the drunken truth" to others about others – such is the condition of Vera some hours after the beginning of a party. Alcohol plays an important role in internal rediscovery of a person who participates in regular ignorance as part of the Soviet regime; this only underlines the dominance of lying as a long-lasting social practice. Alcohol helps reveal the true thoughts, intentions, and secrets of the staff members of the newspaper, but after the drunkenness has abated they find themselves in the same colonized condition which aggravates them and leads to another drinking session, thus producing a *circulus vitiosus* of alcoholism.

Another effect of drunkenness is entering an imagined identity – the narrator and those who drink with him are transferred to the land of *might have been*, which is shaped by unfulfilled dreams, former achievements, that are now forgotten, and an intense feeling of senseless existence. Thus Zhbankov, the photographer of the newspaper, cries out each time he is drunk that he is an artist, compares himself to the famous 19th-century Russian artist Aivazovsky, and complains that he is forced to take pictures of veterans, cows, and other worthless objects for miserable honoraria of six rubles. Vera kisses the portrait of the 19th-century Russian writer Dobrolyubov, stating that this was a great man, but Alla, another tipsy lady present, starts boasting that Audrey Hepburn sent her a new type of hair shampoo (Dovlatov 2019: 21). Others, like the drunken Kuzin, become more political and reflect on the sad condition of Russia, shouting that "Russia had been sold out".

The narrator does not produce such megalomaniacal images of himself; he just longs to end another senseless day by passing out after another large portion of vodka. In Dovlatov's books drinking is an ambiguous issue – it grants a short relief but also releases deeper levels of sadness, which in turn aggravate the hangover both physically and emotionally, as the return to reality proves that no escape is possible. In this case the only tool to survive is to give up thinking. This is what Zhbankov suggests: "Do not think – that is it. I haven't thought for the last fifteen years. If you start thinking, you will not want to carry on any longer. All who think are unhappy." When both have drunk another shot of vodka, which Zhbankov suggested to be a universal tool against thinking, the narrator feels that the "drunken oblivion was about to come and the shape of life became less obvious and less sharp" (Dovlatov 2019: 105).

How is the condition of drunkenness related to the reception of the Baltic societies? To answer this question, it is necessary to examine one of the most sad and hilarious chapters of the novel – the eighth compromise. It deals with the staging of a feedback session from the Secretary General of the Communist Party, Brezhnev, to local peasant Linda Peips, who is the leading milkmaid of the Paide district. She has just been elected a member of the Communist Party. This fact gives Turonok the idea to stage a direct contact of the leader of the state with peasants. In this scenario, two drunken journalists are to play the role of storytellers. In the chapter, the transformations fostered by intoxication are most closely linked to the encounter with colonized Baltic societies. Both Dovlatov and Zhbankov leave Tallinn and go to the rural area, where one of the most important tools of colonization, the Russian language, is almost non-existent – the local peasants, including Peips, are not fluent in it. This brings two young women, who welcome both journalists and accompany them during their stay, into the role of interpreters between the Soviet journalists and local peasants. Both sides are ignorant of the other, and both are the Other in cultural terms.

Linda Peips is seen as an exotic creature in various ways: because of her lack of knowledge of Russian, she keeps silent both linguistically and symbolically, as a representative of a subaltern nation in whose name Soviet newspapers speak. The interpreter Bella, a young Komsomol member, turns out to be a false interpreter, transforming the short answers given by the nervous Peips into standard, pathetic answers for the journalist to use as clichés about the role of the Communist Party. This makes the narrator stop the questioning, as he is now free to participate in the invention of the story of a freshly elected communist. Zhbankov is mocking the milkmaid by asking her an irrelevant question: "What time is it?" This mockery is translated in the correct way and turned into a question on how she reached such high productivity with her cow. Thus Peips is a kind of ritualized doll, covered with orders and signs of her professional achievements, but these achievements are imposed on her by the colonizing powers. Even the symbol of her records, the cow, is not needed, as Zhbankov has a large collection of pictures of cows back in Tallinn to insert into the report. The political ritual of a direct communication between Brezhnev and Peips is staged in order to represent of the successful and efficient work of Brezhnev, but in fact it is sarcastically turned into a complete failure of the whole social drama of the communist society – while the narrator is still trying to finish the letter by Peips to Brezhnev, his answer comes before the initial letter is even sent. Such unbelievable efficiency shocks all the *dramatis personae* but most of all the local party leader, who is now busy contemplating whether the office of the leader of the state would accept the letter of the milkmaid with the date after the answer of Brezhnev. The subaltern becomes a speaking doll whose real speech is not necessary.

The session with a milkmaid is quick, and both journalists are glad to resume intense drinking in the company of the two beautiful escort women sent to please the representatives of the leading Soviet newspaper in Estonia. At the cottage where they both stay during the visit to Paide district, the encounter with the colonized Other takes on a changing role. The narrator accepts the higher intellectual and practical position of a young Estonian girl, Evi. The photographer follows this pattern, but alcohol directs him to act as a sensual man, choosing which girl is the prettiest. This choice dehumanizes both female counterparts as objects of lust. The narrator does not follow that pattern of intoxicated masculinity, but enjoys the sudden comfort provided by the cottage. The structure of the encounter with the two young Estonians reveals a pattern of critiques of Soviet Orientalism by Dovlatov, who uses a fairy-tale structure to uncover the colonialist practices of the fraudulent Soviet media. First, the remote area becomes exotic through the intensity of the Estonian language and the sudden, reversed exoticism of the Russian language. Another element of exoticism is the comfortable cottage and good drinks and food served by the two beautiful

females – Zhbankov is worried that this luxury and sensual encounter might be a provocation. Dovlatov places his heroes into a prototype of an enchanted castle, a widely used topos in fairy tales and epic poems of European chivalry. Bella and Evi resemble the sorceresses Alcina and her younger sister Morgana, seducing Christian knights in order to prevent them from fighting in Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, canto VI. Seduction is another form of lying, both in the 16th-century epic story and in *The Compromise*: The journalist becomes passive, does not move, enjoys close physical contact, although a sexual experience with the sorceress does not take place because of alcohol intoxication. The divergence from the basic pattern of the epic story, in which the knight is unaware of the seduction until it is over (Astolfo, rejected by Alcina, turns into a tree), is the fact that the journalist is still aware of the illusion that occurs at the cottage.

Alcohol here turns into the substance which, instead of deepening the illusion, restores the hero from the enchanted condition by providing an alternative type of oblivion. Instead of increasing sensuality, chemical intoxication brings an end to the seduction story, and the narrator once again passes out thanks to alcohol. While still relatively sober and capable of following the story told by Evi, the narrator is fascinated by the practical approach of the young girl whose aim is to obtain a more comfortable life and move to Tallinn. He calls Evi's generation "something fantastic" (Dovlatov 2019: 108). He admires her for her knowledge of what was considered to be Western life, a chaotic collection of fragmented pictures of the capitalist consumerism. The closeness of Estonia to Western media space, especially to Finland, has transformed Evi into a being superior to the narrator. She is a westernized Other in many ways and dominates the grown male colonial representative through how she follows the rules of sexual health, avoiding contact with men who ignore hygiene, and trying to stop the Russian journalist from heavy drinking, as it would harm his sexual function and would not give her the pleasure she desires. Despite the narrator's self-pity and poor economic condition, he is still attractive to Evi because of his spatial dominance – living in the capital of Estonia. Though admired, Evi remains for the narrator the Other who is not consumed. The colonial gaze, which disappears in the enchanted cottage, is restored by the intense consumption of alcohol which makes the Other a stranger, remote person, unattainable because the narrator is himself colonized by various actors. It is the Soviet editor who sends the journalist to the enchanted place, and the journalist is forced to experience his internal colonization as he remains part of the Soviet ideology, constantly dependent on the power in his material lack of prosperity – six rubles and the vague promise of a flat bind him to the regime. Thus, drinking remains the only short-term escape from the status of subaltern, allowing everyday life shortages to blur and hidden thoughts to be articulated.

A sexual encounter would, on the contrary, clearly show his deficiency: lack of finances, material goods, private space and many other things, including a clean pair of socks, a rare object in the wardrobe of the narrator.

When not exposed to the exceptional conditions of a cottage, the narrator experiences other forms of changed hierarchies in his contact with the representatives of the Baltic societies. This happens in different states of drunkenness, though sometimes also in a sober condition, and thus allows self-reflection to occur in form of admiration, jealousy, or discovery of the silenced history of the colonized nations. These reflections are present in almost all twelve chapters.

Case Study III: Spatial, cultural, and mnemonic hierarchy reversed

The Compromise can be described as a diary of encountering the Other on the way to one's new condition. The Otherness as a category of culturally based meanings and identities is present in various semiotic units, such as the physical body, material goods, views, and various performative practices which create a sense of difference between the Russian journalist and the Estonians and Latvians. To summarize the wide range of such differences, I will concentrate on 1) spatial, 2) physical, and 3) mnemonic issues, which are not neutral. The ethnically Other, experienced by a Russian, is not stripped of political, gender, and memory controversies and hidden history traumas. This produces in the narrator a sense of hierarchy in which the colonized Estonians and Latvians are superior to the journalist's ethnic group. As ethnicity is a political issue in the Soviet regime, producing hierarchies and forms of exclusion, superiority of the colonized is experienced in connection with their belonging to Western culture. In the early 1970s, it is a past belonging, but it is still present for a Russian journalist in the spaces and social practices of the locals. As he has never been and most probably would never be in the West, the imagined West is situated in Tallinn. A friend of Dovlatov, the writer Valery Popov, remembers his own impressions when visiting Tallinn:

> To get on the train [..] and wake up in the morning to see that city. Whole institutes travelled over the weekend, coming to the Rathaus Square, covered with Belgian blocks (already something exotic!), we stepped down into cosy half dark cafes (this semi-darkness, not allowed at our place, was intimate, promising, and forbidden). There was no other city as appealing as this. It seemed all of life is like this and can be only like this: polite, rational, and cosy! And we all had a joyous idea: What if there is no real Soviet power here? It cannot be so good under the Soviet power, can it? (Popov 2018:202)

Unfortunately for the narrator, the Soviet ideology is in constant battle against that fragmented and imagined Western culture and political history of the Baltic

societies occupied a quarter-century ago. This presupposes an existence of a generation which remembers the period of pre-war independence. The editor-in-chief, whom Dovlatov depicts as "unctuous, made of marzipan. A type of a shy, mischievous guy" (Dovlatov 2019: 9), is able to change the political geography, creating a new communist spatiality where countries are ranged not according to alphabet, which is proclaimed to be a politically wrong approach, but following a new geography aligning to a place's Cold War situation, in which the GDR is the new West and Japan is an almost non-existent country (Dovlatov 2019: 10, 28).

The narrator's Tallinn is small and cosy. There is an atmosphere of a *Biedermeier* city of the previous century, which makes the West an antiquity rather than a contemporary experience. Additional characteristics are produced by heroes of the articles which precede each story. Thus Alla from the third compromise describes the city as "cosy and solemn" and proud, and as one where antiquity and modernity are well-balanced. The topos of a small city or town is repetitive: the narrator describes Tallinn as intimate, but provincial town which is welcoming and even somewhat painted, unreal (Dovlatov 2019: 30, 85). The West, represented by the small Estonia, is opposed to Russia which is an abstract territory represented by Russians in Estonia – they drink, fight in restaurants, are not clean, are constantly hung-over, and are poor even by Soviet standards. This image is not the reflection of the locals (with the exception of Evi), but the self-portrait of the narrator who is well aware of his sad condition. Anthropological cleanliness and fashionable looks (Doctor Teppe, Evi) is the continuation of the Western Otherness of the space and takes the shape of a pragmatic sexual education and competence. Evi is not the only character to take care of her sexual life – Tallinn-based young researcher Tina Karu from the ninth compromise also represents a superior Other in sexual terms.

Tina represents the successful inclusion of an Other into the Soviet system – she comes from a loyal Estonian family and is a Secretary of Komsomol. Sexual education for her is a proof of the existence of sex in Soviet culture, and the crisis in the sexual life of the family is another scientific challenge. She is admired by the narrator for this practical attitude when, after having read and summarized *The Technology* – a guidebook for a successful sexual life – she asks for practical training, but not with her husband. This suggestion, which bewilders the narrator, is for Tina a further step in the project of improving her quality of life and is articulated in an "Estonian manner – down-to-earth and businesslike" (Dovlatov 2019: 114). Another sexual exoticism experienced by the narrator is homosexuality, criminalized during the Soviet regime. The tradition of excluding homosexuality in Soviet society has been so long that the narrator is unaware of the term *queer* (*goluboj*), and Turonok must explain its meaning to the narrator. The narrator, not having encountered a homosexual, is even

proud of the fact that homosexuality is a criminal offense. The sexuality of the narrator is heterosexual and is accompanied by regular intoxication as a kind of stimulus, which is seen by the narrator himself as inferior to the advanced sexuality of Estonian women or to the forbidden and exotic queer sexuality, but also as a part of Western culture, as he can talk about culturally divergent sexuality only with a French guy (Dovlatov 2019: 72–73).

Another dimension of Otherness is mnemonic and is linked to the experience of independent statehood in the 1930s, the participation of some Estonians on the side of Nazi troops against the Red Army during World War II, and national resistance after 1944. All these events were forbidden to be recollected in the Soviet Baltic republics. Thus, colonization was extended to the realm of collective memory. In the compromises, the concept of unstable cultural communities and the alternative reading of culture by Sewell Jr. can be identified in various cases: the narrator imagines that the son of Teppe, who is sentenced to prison, must be a member of an Estonian secret resistance organization and linked to the Russian Estonian dissident Sergei Soldatov, the founder of the Democratic movement in the USSR. Upon hearing that none of these heroic deeds were carried out by the son of the doctor, who is just a drunkard, the narrator is disappointed.

The forbidden past comes back in the form of two elderly men, a tailor and a director of a theatre. One of them is described by Turonok as a former *palach* (Soviet term describing locals who collaborated with the Nazi regime during 1941–1944 occupation), the other as former member of an SS Legion. Their biographies during the war are known, but are forbidden, and it is alcohol again which for a short time makes available forbidden memories and even sustains a short dialogue of memories and traumatic experience of former prisoners. In the 12th compromise, the image of the Soviet regime as a total prison is sketched: during the gathering of the former prisoners of Nazi concentration camps, Zhbankov encounters various elderly men who turn out to represent victims of both totalitarian regimes. Some men were imprisoned in Nazi camps, some in the Soviet camps – being Soviet soldiers who were captured by German troops. Individual stories reveal to the narrator the plurality of the history of World War II, which was suppressed by the Soviet ideology of victory. In the banned plurality, the head of the Nazi camp gives a prize to the Russian prisoner who won in chess, while another Russian soldier imprisoned in a Nazi camp is liberated by the French, but then arrested in Paris at the Soviet embassy and sent to Siberia by the representatives of his own state. Upon hearing the story of an Estonian named Walton about his arrest by the Nazis, which he thought was illegal as he was innocent, Zhbankov articulates one of the stereotypes depicting Estonians as admirers of Hitler. The ancient term *chuhonci* (Chucknas) is used to describe Estonians in pejorative manner:

> – "All Chucknas are like this," said Zhbankov. "Adolf is their best friend. But they look down on Russians."
>
> – "But what should they love us for?" interrupted Gurchenko. "For all that mess which we made in Estonia?" (Dovlatov 2019: 188)

No further comments follow on what kind of mess it is. Hitler, as a monster from the past, is also linked to the story of Kuzin's baby – in order to succeed in getting 25 rubles out of Turonok, the journalist uses the image of Hitler to state that if no money comes, Kuzin will call his son Adolf and not Lembit. The theatrical monstrosity of Hitler is efficient and the money follows. The alternative history offers a different story and shows the violence of Soviets towards their own nation within Stalinist repressions. The superiority of the Baltic societies is formulated through the idea of Soviets as intruders bringing chaos, arrests, and economic depravity, which is experienced in the early 1970s also in other regions of the Soviet state (in the village near Pskov where Kuzin's wife comes from, there has been no margarine for half a year). Another dimension of superiority is the position of the silent victim Teppe, who has survived repressions and got used to keeping silent until it is safe to speak. He exercises this strategy twice in the novel, even with a young Soviet journalist.

Another example of a superior colonized is a journalist of Latvian origin, Eric Bush, who was born in Riga and whose parents, like Teppe, have made a successful Soviet career. Bush is an example of the Other who is a tragicomic figure and is both pitied and admired by the narrator. Bush is a passionate anti-Soviet person, but his bravery depends on the amount of alcohol he has consumed prior to the ideological debates. During the debates, when intoxicated, he dismisses the whole Soviet system, its interpretation of the past, its contemporary situation, and all official narratives: there has been no victory over Nazi Germany, no free medicine, no Gagarin flight. He is a combination of radical non-conformity and the absence of principles, as the narrator describes him. But another feature makes him very appealing to elderly women. His sexuality, affected by drunkenness, is not appalling like that of the narrator. Bush then becomes even more charming for elderly ladies, as he starts to cite Silver Age poetry or criticize the regime. He is depicted as a trickster: he changes faces, identities and women, constantly declares his opposition to Soviet politics, and is a source of quotations from classical literature. This allows him to get through life by inventing stories and ignoring his journalist duties. Although the narrator follows the same pattern in order to quickly finish the detested duties, Bush acts as if he were constantly on stage. Even the perspective of being trapped by the KGB gives him an additional thrill to perform in a chivalric manner and to stage himself as a victim.

The most active Baltic opponent of the Soviet reality fails to achieve anything, because of advancing alcoholism and love for theatrical effects. His last deed – breaking a plate of glasses during an office party of *Soviet Estonia* – is described and explained later by Bush in terms of the absurdity of both reality and resistance against it: "Now it is to be decided: who am I? A knight, as Galka thinks, or a piece of shit, as others state?" (Dovlatov 2019: 149). The Latvian knight acquires features of a drunken Don Quixote who is in fact ignorant of the health problems of his mistress and is interested solely in sustaining his public image of the radical Other who is pitied by the narrator: "Where is he now – this dissident, beau, schizophrenic, poet and hero, the disturber of the peace?" A theatrical image, Bush vanishes in the oppressive era of Brezhnev.

Conclusion. No real encounter?

To sum up the major findings after reading *The Compromise*, I suggest the interpretation of the text in terms of Baltic post-colonial studies: as the story of colonized Baltic societies described by a dissident representative of the Soviet press who himself is a subaltern. To return to the suggestion of Said that a post-colonial reading of a novel would imply speaking to the suppressed and numb in the text and around it, in wider cultural context, I recapitulate the following. Dovlatov the author and Dovlatov the narrator, though different persons, are united in their non-reading of the story of the Baltic subalterns. It is not reading but rather scrolling through the history and contemporaneity of the other communities, which remain largely undiscovered. Partly the gaps are filled with easy-to-explain ethnic stereotypes, partly through comic encounters with non-responsive Other who remain strangers. Their cultural and political difference, to apply Bhabha's concept of mimicry as perpetual ambiguity of colonial rule (Bhabha 1994: 122), is never overcome by the narrator, but only partly disabled for the internal aims of the journalist – his discovery of himself as the Other of the Soviet regime. The Baltic societies and their past are presented as fragmented notions of the discrepancy of realities in the totalitarian Soviet regime, and as such are valuable experience for the narrator who intends to find ways to escape the totality of Soviet ideological frame. This frame is one of the side effects of his position – as a Soviet journalist, Dovlatov the narrator is faced with a duty to not only passively consume the ideological paradigm, but to actively reproduce it in his articles. The narrator accepts twelve compromises in which he produces new lies and sustains the Soviet ideology, though he discovers alternative history, memory, and everyday life (including different gender performances and concepts of sexuality) through Estonians and Latvians.

In this condition, to borrow Tlostanova's expression, a Russian journalist as a substitution for a white colonialist is "not so white" (Tlostanova 2017: 142). He is a nonconforming part of the colonial power and its internal opposition, and in such blurred condition he interacts with other subalterns. Various urban and rural characters do not really speak in their own name to the journalist – the Baltic nations remain subalterns in whose name Dovlatov's narrator speaks, as he cannot speak to them in many ways, including linguistically and politically. As a result, he is forced to invent their language, as he is unable to speak their real language and none of them are allowed to present their thoughts, anyway. He perceives their narrative through various gatekeepers, such as the Russian language stuffed with political clichés, and the Estonian language which remains an enigma to the narrator and a tool for hiding the past of the colonized (tailor, theatre director, the silent doctor). In such forms and quality, the subaltern status of the Baltic nations is hidden and not conveyed to the narrator by the locals. The only sources are hints, anecdotes, and memories of those who are allowed to speak because of the limited effect of their narrative (Russians, veterans, former camp prisoners, and fellow drunkards). The narrator approaches Baltic subalterns as far as they help reveal his own transformations; thus, their "true" message is to a large extent invented by the narrator who perpetuates speaking for subalterns without their participation.

The condition of drunkenness opens for a short time some of the memory spaces of the Other, but this does not lead the narrator closer to the cultural content of the colonized. This is partly because in such a condition he is not able to recollect stories. Baltic nations remain exotic, and as such are admired by the representative of the colonizing culture as bearers of more sophisticated cultures. The narrator, who has lost any conviction in the meaningfulness of the Soviet reality, is mostly preoccupied with intimate process of scrutinizing his emotional and physical decline. The repetitive statement "How stupid is my life!" is the notion of a senseless existence. Although the narrator is aware of no changes to come, he becomes a passive dissident in order to regain some sense in life. He participates in a harmless ritual of dissident language at work and among friends during drinking parties, but there is no radical breach of the system of ideological control, simply because the system is omnipotent in its social control – salary, business trips, and a flat are the symbols of dependency and silence bestowed upon both colonizers and colonized. To apply the concept of an *imperial travelogue* as a product of imperial consciousness which grants the West its cultural superiority later to be taken over by the Russian empire, (Ponomarev 2017: 34), these twelve compromises may be defined as a Soviet dissident travelogue, which deconstructs Soviet imperial space by granting the colonized a higher cultural status both in performative issues (social practices of the body)

and in terms of space, which consists of architecture and consumer and cultural places. Dovlatov creates the superiority of the Other in order to liberate himself from another Other – the Soviet ideology.

The narrator, defined by the following question, undergoes a deep emotional transformation: how to go on being a journalist if this profession is compromised by the ideology? Not being able to resolve this internal conflict, he develops a system of silent resistance when discovering his subaltern status. One of the tools of the resistance is to consume fragmented alternative cultural meanings of the Other. The Baltic past becomes a part of personal, intimate liberation, a re-discovery even if the liberation turns out to be a fake one. The Soviet journalist does not break from the system, because the system is too omnipresent to be shed. The narrator is aware that he is a part of the system and that his soft, internal decolonization is the space allowed and controlled by the system itself. Soon various repressions would end the imagined Western atmosphere of Tallinn and the narrator would return to Leningrad.

Bibliography

Annus Epp (2016). Between Arts and Politics. A Postcolonial View on Baltic Cultures of the Soviet Era. *Journal of Baltic Studies*, No. 47(1), pp. 1–13. DOI: 10.1080/01629778.2015.1103509.

Bhabha, Homi K. (2010). *The Location of Culture*. 8th ed. New York: Routledge.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh (2000). *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Dobrozrakova, Galina (2019). *Poetika Dovlatova*. Sankt-Peterburg: Aletejja.

Dovlatov, Sergei (2019). *Kompromiss*. Sobranie sochinenij v pjati tomah. Tom 2. Sankt-Peterburg: Azbuka. All quotations from the novel are translated into English by the author of the article.

Jang, Ekaterina (2012). Jestonskij cikl. Ar'ev, Aleksandr (red.). *Sergei Dovlatov:lico, slovesnost', jepoha.* Sankt-Peterburg: Zhurnal Zvezda.

Jetkind, Aleksandr (2013). *Vnutrennjaja kolonizacija. Imperskij opit Rossii.* Moskva: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie.

Kalnačs, Benedikts (2011). *Baltijas postkoloniālā drāma.* Riga: LU LFMI.

Kelertas, Violeta (2006). Baltic Postcolonialism and its Critics. Kelertas, Violeta (ed.). *Baltic Postcolonialism*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Leont'ev, Konstantin (1993). *Izbrannoe*. Moskva: Rarog.

Miller, Aleksei (2006). *Imperija Romanovyh i nacionalizm.* Moskva: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie.

Miller, Aleksei (2015). The Romanov Empire and the Russian Nation. Bergert, Stefan; Miller, Alexei (eds.). *Nationalizing Empires.* Budapest-New York: CEU Press.

Mitrofanov, Andrej (2020). *Francuzskaja politicheskaja jelita perioda Revoljucii XVIII veka o Rossii.* Moskva: ROSSPJeN.

Oga, Jānis (2022). Memorial Discourse and (Literary) Legacy of an Uncomfortable Writer for the Occupation Regime. The case of Ēvalds Vilks (1976–1978). *Letonica*, No. 45, 2022, pp. 78–111. DOI: 10.35539/LTNC.2022.0045.J.O.78.111.

Okun', Mihail (2012). Sergei Dovlatov i kul'tura pit'ja. Ar'ev, Aleksandr (red.) *Sergei Dovlatov: lico, slovesnost', jepoha.* Sankt-Peterburg: Zhurnal Zvezda.

Ponomarev, Evgenij (2017). Russkij imperskij travelog. *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, No. 144, pp. 33–44.

Popov, Valerij (2018). *Dovlatov. Biografija.* Moskva: Molodaja gvardija.

Račevskis, Kārlis (2006). Toward a Postcolonial Perspective on the Baltic States. Kelertas, Violeta (ed.). *Baltic Postcolonialism.* Amsterdam: Rodopi. pp. 165–186.

Said, Edward W. (1994). *Kultur und Imperialismus. Einbildungskraft und Politik im Zeitalter der Macht.* Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer.

Said, Edward W. (2003). *Orientalism.* New York: Penguin Books.

Sewell William H., Jr. (1999). The Concepts of Culture. Bonnell, Victoria; Hunt Lynn (eds.). *Beyond the Cultural Turn.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Spivak Gayatri Ch. (2010). *Can the Subaltern Speak?.* Revised edition. Columbia University Press.

Tlostanova, Madina (2017). *Postcolonialism & Postsocialism in Fiction and Art. Resistance and Re-existence*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Turoma, Sanna (2021). *Brodskij za granicej: imperija, turizm, nostal'gija.* Moskva: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie.

Wolff Larry (1994). *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment:* Stanford University Press.

Zanda Gūtmane
Dr. philol., literary scholar
Liepāja University
E-mail: zanda.gutmane@liepu.lv

Sigita Ignatjeva
PhD, literary scholar
Liepāja University
E-mail: sigita.ignatjeva@liepu.lv
DOI: 10.35539/LTNC.2023.0051.08

Reception and Translations of Western Modernist Literature in Latvia in the Brezhnev Era

Rietumu modernisma literatūras recepcija un tulkojumi Latvijā Brežņeva laikā

Keywords:
postcolonialism,
hybridity,
stagnation,
modernism,
periodicals,
literary scholars

Atslēgvārdi:
postkoloniālisms,
hibriditāte,
stagnācija,
modernisms,
periodika,
literatūrzinātnieki

This research has been carried out within the framework of the project *Landscapes of Identities: History, Culture, and Environment* of the National Research Program *Letonika – Fostering Latvian and European Society* (No VPP-LETONIKA-2021/1-0008).

Summary This study was motivated by the aspiration to understand the entry process of Western modernist literature and its results during the period of Stagnation in Soviet Latvia. The article aims to disclose what works of Western modernism were known and translated and to identify the official ways of their reception. Since this familiarization process was influenced by the specificity of the Soviet colonization model, this study uses the approach of postcolonialism and cultural studies and a collection of data that reveals the appearance of the first modernist translations in this period. The main focus is on the situation in Latvia. However, it is viewed in the context of the literature translated into Russian, with a brief outline of the situation in the other Baltic republics which, together with Latvia, from the positions of the center of the USSR were treated as the so-called Soviet West. In order to reveal how the public perception of modernism was formed, this study analyzes the contribution of Latvian Soviet literary scholars and the influence of the central literary periodicals of the USSR on their works. In conclusion, the landscape of translation and reception of Western modernism in Soviet Latvia during the Stagnation shows the hybrid nature of culture and the parallel existence of colonial and decolonial discourses. It confirms that the focus on Western modernism, which intensified in the USSR during the period of political Thaw and Stagnation, paradoxically returned Western modernism to the literary space of Soviet Latvia and changed its cultural orientation from the East to the West.

Kopsavilkums Šo pētījumu rosināja vēlme izprast, kāds ir Rietumu modernisma literatūras ienākšanas process un tā rezultāti Padomju Latvijā stagnācijas periodā. Raksta mērķis: noskaidrot, kādi Rietumu modernisma darbi bija zināmi un tulkoti, un apzināt to oficiālos recepcijas ceļus. Tā kā šo iepazīšanas procesu ietekmēja padomju kolonizācijas modeļa specifika, pētījumā izmantota postkoloniālisma un kultūras studiju pieeja, kā arī veidots datu apkopojums, kas atklāj pirmo modernisma tulkojumu parādīšanos šajā periodā. Galvenā uzmanība pievērsta situācijai Latvijā, taču tā tiek aplūkota krievu valodā tulkotās literatūras kontekstā, nedaudz ieskicējot situāciju arī pārējās Baltijas republikās, kas kopā ar Latviju no PSRS centra pozīcijām tika traktētas kā t. s. padomju Rietumi. Lai atklātu izpratnes veidošanos par modernismu, pētīts latviešu padomju literatūrzinātnieku ieguldījums un viņu ietekmēšanās no PSRS centrālajiem literārajiem periodiskajiem izdevumiem. Kopumā Rietumu modernisma tulkošanas un recepcijas ainava Padomju Latvijā stagnācijas laikā parāda kultūras hibrīdo raksturu un koloniālā un dekoloniālā diskursa paralēlo esamību. Tā apliecina, ka uzmanības pievērsums Rietumu modernismam, kas PSRS pastiprinājās politiskā atkušņa un stagnācijas laikā, paradoksālā kārtā atgrieza Rietumu modernismu Padomju Latvijas literārajā telpā un mainīja kultūras orientāciju no Austrumiem uz Rietumiem.

Introduction

This research was initiated by the desire to understand how the change of cultural orientation from East to West took place in Soviet Latvia during the Stagnation period, and how translations or only information about Western modernist literature opened the worldview of the people of Soviet Latvia. The article aims to find out what works of Western modernist literature were known and translated, and to investigate the official reception routes of Western literature.

The term *modernism* here is used in the traditional sense: Western literature that contradicts the conventional narrative, referring to the period approximately from 1890 to 1941 (Tew, Murray 2009). In the modernist paradigm, it is possible to separate early modernism (for example, the decadence movement, Marcel Proust, Knut Hamsun[1]), the so-called high modernism that marks the most radical and experimental expression in the first two decades of the 20th century (for example, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Franz Kafka, T. S. Eliot, as well as the several sub-trends of modernism such as expressionism, dadaism, surrealism, etc.), and the so-called late modernism. It is a mode of modernism where the radical opposition to the traditional type of narrative is reduced (Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, etc.) (see, for example, Lewis 2007; Tew, Murray 2009).

Research of translations potentially helps to analyze the complex relationship between Soviet and Western modernity in the literary landscape of the Soviet Latvia. Information about Western modernist literature, its availability in translations, and its reception are the indicators that show the desire of the Soviet cultural space to distance itself from the process of Western cultural development and the simultaneous attraction to this culture. This process is characterized by the peculiar and paradoxical modernization efforts of Soviet culture.

In addition to the postcolonial and cultural approaches which shape the methodological basis, this study uses a data collection method to capture the first years of translation and to compare the translation landscapes in the heart of the USSR (Russia, especially Moscow and Leningrad) and in Soviet Latvia during Stagnation. The focus is mainly on the situation in Latvia, but facts and insights that characterize the comparative view of the reception of Western literature, especially modernist literature, have also been sought. Particular attention has been paid to the

---

1 Knut Hamsun is a modern Norwegian novelist; his contribution to the development of the European modernist novel was uniquely significant. His novel *Sult* (1890) was translated into English already in 1899 (*The Hunger*, translator George Egerton).

developments in Russian culture, but the background of other Baltic republics has also been highlighted. The broader Baltic context of modernist literature reception is beyond the scope of this article.

The article also pays attention to the research of modernist works by Latvian literary scholars during Stagnation. To reveal the formation of an understanding of Western modernism in Soviet Latvia, the contribution of Latvian literary scholars to the interpretation of modernist literature has also been studied. Literary periodicals in Latvia and Russia have been used as the primary sources in this article.

The tradition of translation and the understanding of modernism literature practiced in the center of the Soviet state (Russia) during the years of Stagnation naturally determined the rules for translation and the understanding of modernism in Soviet Latvia. However, the article hypothesizes that the Soviet regime, which almost completely closed the window to the West at the beginning of the occupation, opened that window during later periods of thaw and Stagnation.

Using postcolonial criticism in translation analysis

Cultural policy, including literary publishing and translation policy, is just one of the many ways how a totalitarian power can control and change the minds and identities of people. In Soviet Latvia, like in the whole Soviet Union, the literary publishing and translation policies were applied to strengthen the ideology and power of the state, especially during the so-called High Stalinism (till the end of the Second World War in 1945) and Late Stalinism (from1945 till Stalin's death in 1953).

The Soviet nation's collective identity manifested itself for the first time after 1945 when the end of the war transformed into the triumph of victory, and the Soviet nation started to recognize itself collectively. According to the investigations of Evgeny Dobrenko, a professor of Russian Studies, during Late Stalinism a myth was created about the war and Soviet greatness, about an all-conquering leader and a supreme state, about the Russian national exceptionalism and messianism (Dobrenko 2020). In the years of Late Stalinism, modernized conservatism and patriarchalism, anti- Americanism and anti-Westernism, as well as isolationism and xenophobia developed. As the Lithuanian publicist and writer Tomas Venclova has described the situation of the Lithuanian nation since the period of Stalinism, "the Sovietization and Russification process was carried out in brutal, obvious forms. An attempt was made in a brief time to totally change the cultural orientation of the nation" (Venclova 1979). The same can be said about the situation in Soviet Latvia and Soviet Estonia because cultural orientation changed throughout the Baltics. If before the Second

World War the cultural orientation of the Baltic States was multicultural and European, after the war it was oriented towards the East and Russia. In the first decades after the occupation, there was an almost complete shift of attention to Russian literature in the field of translation. Andrejs Veisbergs, in his research of translations into Latvian during 16th–20th centuries, concludes that extreme isolation from Western culture was practiced throughout the Baltics during the beginning of the re-occupation (Veisbergs 2022: 176). Until the Thaw, the translations of foreign publications were practically only the works of Western classics; 95% of all translations were from Russian (Veisbergs 2022: 176). Since the end of the war, an intensive acculturation process was carried out based on immigration from other Soviet republics, especially Russia. The acculturation process was determined not only by immigration but also by political decisions and propaganda.

"The term acculturation refers to the changes that may occur when individuals from different cultures come into contact, with possible changes in both immigrants and members of the receiving society" (Esses 2018). Psychological research suggests that acculturation is always bidimensional, even in an situation of occupation, despite power dominance "changes potentially taking place along two dimensions – one representing the maintenance or loss of the original culture and the other representing the adoption or rejection of the new culture" (Esses 2018). If we view the Soviet occupation as a kind of colonization model, it is helpful to use a postcolonial approach that can clearly show the changes in identity and worldview in the host society. David Chioni Moore was one of the first who suggested breaking the tradition of continuing the already superannuated centrality of the Western or Anglo-Franco coloniality. He turned to a postcolonial designation for another zone: "[T]he term "post-colonial" and everything that goes with it [..] might reasonably be applied to the formerly Russo- and Soviet-controlled region" (Moore 2001:114). The collective monograph *Baltic Postcolonialism*, edited by Violeta Kelertas, was the first comprehensive study of Baltic postcolonialism (Kelertas 2006). It was followed by investigations by Baltic scholars: Latvian literary researcher Benedikts Kalnačs's monographs *Baltijas postkoloniālā drāma* (Baltic Postcolonial Drama) (Kalnačs 2011) and *20th Century Baltic Drama: Postcolonial Narratives, Decolonial Options* (Kalnačs 2016) and Estonian researcher Epp Annus's monograph *Soviet Postcolonial Studies: A View from the Western Borderlands* (Annus 2019). Kalnačs focuses only on the Baltic states; Annus in her book deals with postcolonial studies of Eastern and East Central Europe areas. By employing the conceptual apparatus of postcolonial studies, Annus uses the notion of Soviet occupation, demarcating it chronologically: the Soviet presence in the Baltics commenced as a foreign occupation and evolved into a colonial rule: "Postwar Soviet colonialism was thus a product of the era of late colonialism, which differed significantly from

the classical era of colonialism, when the dominant postcolonial imaginaries were shaped around the model of the then-flourishing British Empire [..]. Soviet colonialism was a colonialism in camouflage: the Soviet regime never publicly articulated its strategic aims as explicitly colonial" (Annus 2019: 14).

Annus analyzes the simultaneous discourse of Soviet colonialism and decolonization and concludes that here can be seen "how colonial and decolonial discourses can unfold side by side, as in the late 1950s and in the 1960s, when decolonial processes became dominant in several East Central European states and emerged forcefully also in the Baltics [..]. Here, colonial subject positions are produced by a set of implicit and explicit rules, systems and practices that define the sphere of the possible (to be a writer in the Soviet era, one must follow such and such rules)" (Annus 2019: 7). To characterize the fusion of colonial and decolonial discourses, which is visible in all areas of Soviet life, postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity can be used. It helps us characterize new transcultural forms in occupied/colonized territories from the cross-cultural exchange viewpoint. Bhabha, in the essay collection *The Location of Culture*, speaks about the *Third Space of enunciation* (Bhabha 1994: 37) that may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture not on the basis of the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures but of the inscription and articulation of a culture's hybridity (Bhabha 1994: 38). Bhabha's research attempts to address the ambivalent space of colonial discourse with a hybrid space that gives the colonized the potential to find legitimacy outside the colonial condition. Annus reminds us that "colonial power always insinuates hybridity" (Annus 2019: 127) and "hybridization and merging of national and Soviet modernities took place over some decades" in the so-called Western Borderland (Annus 2019: 128).

The paradoxical influence of Soviet colonial ideology and the development of cultural hybridity was apparent after the end of high totalitarianism during the reign of Nikita Khrushchev, also known as the period of political Thaw or liberalization of the communist regime (1953–1964), and the reign of Leonid Brezhnev, also known as the period of Stagnation (1964–1982). Both periods saw a more liberal attitude towards all forms of culture, and a relative openness to Western culture; however, even then the ruling elite of the Soviet Union tried, with varying success, to further assert their dominance.

From the beginning of the political Thaw, literary publishing and translation policy also became more liberal, but the supervision of publications and translations remained tight. Political and cultural freedom was relative, and people had to adapt to an illusion of freedom that did not turn out to be real freedom. This period can be characterized as the previously mentioned mixture of Soviet colonialism and decolonization. Referring to Gayatri Spivak's essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988), Annus

admits that unlike the classical regime of colonization, the oppressed in the later stages of Soviet colonization were not pushed into complete silence. The voices of subalterns in the Soviet world were never fully silenced: "These were all voices that were supposed to be inaudible and yet were nevertheless heard sometimes, somewhere, under certain conditions, and thus participated in [..] small acts which in the end contributed to the breakup of the Soviet Union and real social change in its former Western borderlands" (Annus 2019: 17–18).

During the periods of Thaw and Stagnation, literature became this hybrid third space of conversation in Soviet colonization. Free-thinking expressions alternated with the fight against free-thinking. Society, especially the intelligentsia, had mastered the official form of expression and used it to achieve goals contrary to Soviet ideology. The principles of double morality were visible in all areas of life: "Intellectuals learned to work within the framework of Socialist Realism in art, music, and literature, and scholars utilized teachings from the Marxist–Leninist canon to legitimize their fields of inquiry" (Risch 2015:64).

As the cultural orientation towards the West had a strong tradition in the period of independence of Latvia and other Baltic states, the lost Western culture was not forgotten in Soviet times. It must be considered that in the Soviet republics, not only a discursive mixture of Soviet coloniality and modernity but also of local and national discourses and influences from the West coexisted (Annus 2019: 14). The image of Western culture continued to be a suggestive and essential part of the minds of the Soviet people. For the society behind the Iron Curtain, there existed two worlds: the real, closed Soviet space and the idealized, imaginary Western world. The influence of the partly banned Western culture and literature was also an element of the cultural hybridity of Soviet Latvia and other republics. As Sergei I. Zhuk points out, "the obsession with Western cultural products became the most important feature of cultural consumption in the closed socialist society of the post-Stalin era" (Zhuk 2009: 9).

Due to their historical experience and territorial location, the three Baltic republics were categorized as the Soviet West, "a space where new ideas of Sovietness developed, shaped by compromises between local inhabitants and state and Party institutions" (Risch 2015: 70). In her study, Annus also uses the concept of the West to denote the region, calling the area under consideration the Western borderland.

As the inhabitants of the Soviet West created a more Western sense of being Soviet through pre-Soviet publications and connections with the Western neighbors and their fellow nationals abroad, they were subject to larger control. Of course, that was why the interest in everything Western only intensified. Vitaly Pidgaetsky, a student and later a professor of History at the University of Dnipropetrovsk during the time of Brezhnev, gave an interview to the historian Sergei I. Zhuk in 1996.

He also confirmed the inclusion of Western Ukraine in the concept of the Soviet West and explained the consequences of stricter bans: "That is why we worshiped any cultural product that came from the magical West. For us, the West was a kind of symbolic mirror. Looking into this mirror, we tried to invent our own identity and understand what we were living for. To some extent, we constructed ourselves looking into this magic mirror of the forbidden and censored capitalist West. Sounds of Western popular music or images from Western films and stories from Western adventure novels intertwined with our Ukrainian, Russian, and Jewish cultural forms and produced a strange mental mixture in our heads, which was cemented by our dominant Soviet cultural stereotypes" (Zhuk 2009: 2). The presence of Western and Russian culture and literature in the Soviet West caused the acculturation and hybridization processes of identity.

Western literature in Latvian and Russian translations

The liberalization of Khrushchev's time and the mood of freedom created a real "book hunger", or "word hunger". The cultivation of reading was especially encouraged by the authorities of Soviet power: "In the communist regimes of the Eastern Bloc, literature as a field was expected to adopt the official aesthetic values promoted by the Party. Furthermore, the Party promoted high-brow literature among the masses (see the *World Literature Series* in the Soviet Union, for example), convinced of its beneficial impact as it expressed the moral values [..]" (Rundle 2022: 5). An intensive wave of publishing of original books, periodicals, and translated literature occurred throughout the USSR, especially in its center – Russia. Foreign literature was published with the highest average print run – even in Soviet publishing, it was necessary to manage profitably, and the revenues from foreign belles-lettres were necessary to cover the losses from political publications, textbooks, etc. (Möldre 2010).

The phenomenon of the increasing amount of translated literature in the Thaw period has received much attention from researchers of Soviet Studies. An in-depth analysis of the history of translated literature in the USSR is provided in the book *Made Under Pressure: Literary Translation in the Soviet Union, 1960–1991* by Natalia Kamovnikova. It examines such issues as practices of translation policy in the context of the political and social situation; the history of censorship and publishing control in Russia; the workings of *Glavlit*, the leading Soviet censorship institution, and the role of the Union of Soviet Writers (Kamovnikova 2019). Another comprehensive source is a collective monograph *Translation Under Communism*, which examines the history of translation under European communism and deals with issues of censorship,

translation and ideology, as well as public policy. This monograph includes Nataliia Rudnytska's paper which analyzes the formation of and changes to the Soviet canon of world literature from the Revolution of 1917 to the collapse of the USSR in 1991 (Rundle 2022).

Rudnytska highlights the significant increase in translated literature since the political Thaw. She clarifies the attempt of Soviet ideology to internationalize the Soviet canon of world literature through state-supported translations of foreign literature (Rudnytska 2022: 39–73). Latvian researcher Veisbergs also emphasizes the remarkable quantitative growth of literature as a whole and translated literature since the Thaw and the return to translations from different languages, not only from Russian (Veisbergs 2022: 201–202).

Compared to the period of totalitarianism, translations from the languages of the Western world were returning to the literary landscape. Veisbergs concludes that the proportions of source languages changed quite rapidly in Latvia in the period of Thaw: the percentage of Russian translations dropped from 90% to 70% (Veisbergs 2022: 202). However, as can be seen, translations of Russian literature remained dominant. Kamovnikova, in her article devoted to translations of national literatures in the Soviet Union, marks the subordinate position of the national languages and of translations into them in comparison with Russian on the grounds of statistical data and officially published lists of recommended works in the national literature. The total number of translations into Russian exceeded the total number of translations made into all other languages of the Soviet Union, thus demonstrating its status and prestige.

Despite the dominance of Russian literature in the post-totalitarian period, the decolonization trends continued to develop in the literature landscape because the benefits of the Thaw period had long-lasting effects that continued during the Stagnation. Also, researchers call the Brezhnev Era the same as the Thaw period: a "book boom" (Zhuk 2009: 14). The lack of alternative entertainment sources and social or material status symbols encouraged the literary interests of the society. Reading books and periodicals in libraries, creating private book collections, and subscribing to periodicals had become a sign of prestige and intelligence.

Compared with the Thaw period, attitudes towards America and the West became cooler during the Stagnation, and translators and publishers had to adapt to the Iron Curtain and Cold War policies. The Communist Party still considered translation a symbol of internationalism and friendship between all Soviet republics and socialist block partners, but editors and translators took the chance to publish artistically diverse and challenging works. They used different strategies to present the texts in such a way that they would not be banned by censorship. Rudnytska, in the article *Translation and the Formation of the Soviet Canon of World Literature*, analyzes

the simultaneous existence of canon and decanonization, colonial and decolonial discourse. In her opinion, thanks to the alternative vision, translators sometimes managed to make use of the relaxation of ideological control and censorship and to promote the translation and reception of Western modernist authors who were far removed from the Soviet ideological model. This is how Franz Kafka, J. D. Salinger, Hermann Hesse, Albert Camus, and William Faulkner got published in Russia. Rudnytska pointed out that, of course, it strongly influenced the new generations of all Soviet writers, artists, and intellectuals (Rudnytska 2022: 39–73).

Analysis of the literature of Soviet Latvia also proves that during the Thaw and Stagnation, a distinct coexistence of colonial and decolonial discourse, as well as cultural hybridization processes can be observed. The Baltic republics, especially Estonia, productively used the policies of liberalism to their advantage. Estonia had more liberal cultural policies than the rest of the USSR. "It led other republics when it came to translating and producing musicals and plays from abroad. In 1965, Estonian theaters began staging the American musical *West Side Story*, presumably the first American musical staged in the USSR" (Risch 2015: 76). In Estonia, the plays by Bertolt Brecht and Samuel Beckett were performed for the first time in the USSR. Estonians were also ahead of other republics in terms of translating modernist prose. "Modern Western writers appeared in translation first in Estonia, then in Lithuania, and generally ahead of other republics. Thus, Camus's works were published in Estonia in 1963 and 1966, while Lithuanians published a translation of Camus's *The Stranger* in 1968" (Risch 2015: 76). It was published in Russia the same year; in Latvia, *The Stranger* was published (translated by Milda Grīnfelde) only in 1989.

Unfortunately, the relative freedom was used to a much lesser extent in Latvia than in Estonia. The lag in the pace of translation of Western literature in comparison with the neighboring country was due to caution in all areas of Latvian life, determined mainly by the ruling circles. From 1959 to 1966, the first secretary of the Communist Party of the Latvian SSR was Arvīds Pelše; his successor was Augusts Voss, who held the position until 1984. Both pursued a policy of obedience to Moscow; therefore cultural expression, including publishing and translation policy, was cautious. However, even in Latvia during the Stagnation an intensive arrival of translated literature and the acquaintance with modernist literature could be observed.

During Brezhnev's regime, in the Baltic republics like in the whole USSR, there were some illegal ways of obtaining foreign literature with the help of dissidents, *samizdat* publications, and the smuggling of literature which progressed under the influence of the double standards culture. The purpose of this article is to look at the official entry routes for translated literature. There were two primary sources in the Baltic republics from which it was officially possible to learn something about Western

literature, including early modernist, high-modernist, late-modernist, and even post-modernist literature. The first source was translations into Latvian, Estonian, and Lithuanian; the second source, the presence of the Russian literary space in the Baltics, was of particular importance.

It was already mentioned that in the first three decades after the Soviet occupation, a paradoxical trend in translation and evaluation of Western modernist literature existed. In 1940, the Soviet power forcibly separated the Baltic states from Western culture and turned them eastwards, but since the late 1950s and the 1960s, the center of the Soviet world became the gateway to the West for the Baltic states. Venclova characterizes this tendency as "the desire by the rulers to demonstrate a fake liberalism," but he admits that "the doors to world literature opened somewhat wider in Moscow" (Venclova 1979). So Russian literary periodicals became one of the main channels of information about developments in the free world. The legendary magazine *Noviy mir*, published in Russia since January 1925, was the source of particularly free-spirited publications during the periods of Thaw and Stagnation. Translations were also published in *Noviy mir*, but the most influential periodical was *Inostrannaya literatura*, published since 1955. This periodical was dedicated especially to translations of foreign literature and played a significant role in the change of cultural orientation. The previous Soviet Russian magazine dedicated to translated literature was *Internatsionalnaya literatura* (1933–1943). As Veisbergs indicates, ""internationalism" was the mantra in politics while the reality was greater isolation from the rest of the world than the relatively liberal approach of German or Italian fascism" (Veisbergs 2018: 78). Brian Baer, a researcher of Soviet Literature, has noted that "[t]he choice of *inostrannaya* for the title of the journal *Foreign Literature* marked a shift in emphasis from the solidarity implied by internationality to the concept of cultural difference, which is more evident in Russian than in English, as the Russian word formed from the roots *inoi*, meaning 'other,' and *strana*, 'country'" (Baer 2016: 59). This means that the publishers' goal has been to highlight this *otherness*, difference from the Soviet literature.

Inostrannaya Literatura or *Inostranka*, as it was called in everyday life, quickly became one of the biggest promoters of the art of translation in the Soviet tradition. According to Birgit Menzel, researcher of the history of *Inostrannaya literatura*, the magazine had 250,000 to 300,000 subscriptions in 1960 and up to 590,000 in 1970 (Menzel 2011: 154). Of course, most of the translated authors were ideologically acceptable writers from the socialist bloc, but there were many surprising publications of modernist and contemporary literature.

In Latvia, the magazine *Inostrannaya literatura* was in great demand; it could be found in libraries and received via subscription. Because the magazine was so popular, library readers sometimes even had to wait in line for six months to be able to read it.

Information that the number of orders was limited was repeatedly published in Latvian periodicals ([Anon] (2003). The fantastic popularity suggests that the magazine had a substantial influence on the Soviet intelligentsia's worldview.

From the beginning of the Thaw period, Latvian literary periodicals *Karogs* and *Literatūra un Māksla* contain many references to *Inostrannaya literatura* publications, mostly dedicated to foreign literature. The following examples show that Latvian magazines themselves were much more careful about ideological violations. Although the policy of literary translation was somewhat facilitated, and the Western classics and some works by contemporary foreign writers were translated if they complied with the principles of progressivity, there were almost no Latvian translations of all those examples of Western modernism and postmodernism literature that could be read in Russian. The years of publication of the most important high modernist prose texts and some important prose texts of late modernism properly show the consequences of different translation policies in Soviet Latvia and in the center of the USSR. The basis of comparison is, firstly, the translations into the Russian language published in *Inostrannaya literatura* (in some cases in other periodicals; their titles are not mentioned) and book editions; secondly, the translations into Latvian (see Table 1)[2].

The path of learning about the most outstanding representatives of high modernism prose (Proust, Joyce, Kafka, and others) was gradual and fragmentary in the Soviet Russian literary space, but these coryphaei of modernism were not entirely unknown. Some episodes from Joyce's *Ulysses* were translated and published in Russian already in 1935–1936 in the journal *Internatsionalnaya literatura*, but the entire translation appeared only during *perestroika*, in 1989 (Menzel 2011: 155; Clark 2011: 133). Latvian writer Dzintars Sodums translated the novel entirely while living in exile. Fragments of *Ulysses* in Latvian appeared in the journal *Jaunā Gaita* in 1959, and the first publication of the entire book in Latvian came out in 1960 in Sweden. In Soviet Latvia, fragments of *Ulysses* were published in 1968 in the article by Dzidra Kalniņa *Par romānu un antiromānu* (On Novel and Anti-Novel; the beginning of Episode 1 and fragments of Episode 2). However, the novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* was published in Russian in 1933 (Clark 2011: 133) and also in the *Inostrannaya Literatura* in 1976. The Latvian translation of the novel was published only in the 21st century.

Proust's series of novels *In Search of Lost Time* was also translated into Russian in the 1930s, but since 1973 all seven parts have been translated. During Stagnation,

---

2 Names of the translators into Russian are not mentioned in this comparison. Since translators were often "invisible" during the Soviet era (their names were not published), a separate study should be devoted to this issue. Also, the productions of Western modernist drama in Latvia and the translations created for these productions is a separate research topic. This topic has not been addressed in this study.

Table 1.
Comparison of published translations into Russian and Latvian in the period of Stagnation

Author and title of the novel	**Publication of original**	**Translation into Russian**	**The first translation into Latvian**
James Joyce *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*	1916	*Inostrannaya literatura:* 1976, No. 10; 1976, No. 11; 1976, No. 12	2013
Marcel Proust *In Search of Lost Time*	1913–1927	Since 1973 (1976, 1980, 1987, 1990, 1992, 1999)	Since 1996
Franz Kafka *The Metamorphosis* a.o.	1915	*Inostrannaya literatura:* 1964	2001
Franz Kafka *The Trial* a.o.	1925	The book: 1965	1999
Franz Kafka *Diaries, Letter to father*	1919	The book: 1968	2005
William Faulkner *The Sound and the Fury*	1929	*Inostrannaya literatura:* 1973, No. 1–2; the book: 1985	–
F. Scott Fitzgerald *The Great Gatsby*	1925	The book: 1965	1971
Ernest Hemingway *A Farewell to Arms*	1929	1936	1958
Ernest Hemingway *(selected works)*		*Complete Works* (I, II) 1966 *Selected Works* (I–IV) 1968, 1982	Since 1964 *Complete Works* (I–V) 1971
Albert Camus *The Stranger*	1942	*Inostrannaya literatura:* 1968, No. 9	1989
Albert Camus *Plaque*	1947	Selection: 1969	1969; 1989
J. D. Salinger *The Catcher in the Rye*	1951	*Inostrannaya literatura:* 1960, No. 11; the book: 1965	1969
Kurt Vonnegut *Cat's Cradle*	1963	–	1973
Kurt Vonnegut *Breakfast of Champions*	1973	*Inostrannaya literatura:* 1975, No. 1–2	1987
Kurt Vonnegut *Slaughterhouse-Five*	1969	Selection: 1978	1987
Gabriel García Márquez *One Hundred Years of Solitude*	1967	*Inostrannaya literatura:* 1970, No. 6–7; the book: 1971	1981

there were no Latvian translations of Proust's work. Skaidrīte Jaunarāja started translating this series of novels in the 1990s, but it is still not finished. Very intensive acquaintance with Kafka's works in the USSR began at the end of Khrushchev's reign; many works were published in the mid-1960s, mainly due to the awakening movement in Czechoslovakia and the approaching Prague Spring. The reason for Kafka's popularity could be that at that time Czechoslovakians themselves searched for their multicultural roots and began to consider the Austro-Hungarian writer as belonging to their culture. In 1963, Czech translations of Kafka's works were published (Nekula 2016, 13). Already in *Inostrannaya literatura's* first issue of 1964, translations of Kafka's stories were published and information about the author was included. Kafka's works were not available in Latvian during the period of Stagnation; the Latvian translations of his works were done at the turn of the millenniums (translators – Amanda Aizpuriete, Silvija Brice, Līga Kalniņa). There were some earlier publications in the Awakening time literary magazine *Avots*.

Faulkner's modernist novel *The Sound and the Fury* in the Soviet Union was published for the first time in 1973, after what was reportedly a considerable behind-the-scenes argument. One of the recently cited arguments against printing this novel in *Inostrannaya literatura* was "that it is devoted to contemporary literature whereas Faulkner's work is already 44 years old. But its techniques are much more modern than virtually anything to appear in the Soviet Union since *The Sound and The Fury* first appeared in America in 1929" (Smith 1973). The novels *The Hamlet*, *The Town*, *The Mansion*, *Soldier's Pay*, and a play based on *Requiem for a Nun* were translated in 1958. Other works by Faulkner were translated later. Unfortunately, *The Sound and The Fury* has not been translated into Latvian yet.

The writers of the Lost Generation were more recognizable than American modernist Faulkner because the mood of a lost generation was understandable to the Soviet people. The most frequently translated Western writer in the USSR was Hemingway. After the Spanish Civil war, Hemingway met with Soviet communist leaders and journalists. His anti-fascist fervor increased, and he became a more attractive figure to the communists. Although his works contain elements of modernism, in Soviet literary studies he was positioned as a realist. Hemingway was first published in Russia in the 1930s. "*The Sun Also Rises* was published in 1935, and in the first of four editions of *A Farewell to Arms* came out" (Brown 1953: 143). During the Stagnation, a selection of his works (1968; 1982) and *Complete Works* (1966) were published in Russian. Despite the eventual compliance, as Veisbergs reminds us, the translation of Hemingway's novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls* in Moscow took 30 years since it was adjusted to the ideological point of view (Veisbergs 2022: 211). Hemingway's novels and stories have also been translated into the Latvian language

since 1958, when the novel *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) was published by the Latvian State Publishing House (Badina 2021: 137). *Complete Works* in five volumes were published in Latvia between 1971 and 1974. In the Latvian translation of Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* by Džesija Dzērve, many politically motivated omissions have been detected, following the pattern of the Russian translation (Rauda 1977).

This comparison shows that Western high-modernist literature of the 1910s and 1920s was little known or completely unknown in Latvia during Brezhnev's time, although Latvian readers could read it in Russian translations. The situation with the translations of contemporary literature of that time was much better. At the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, some works of late modernist and even postmodernist writers were translated into Latvian. For example, Camus's *The Plague* and Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* were translated into Latvian shortly after their publications in Russian in 1969. Existentialism was popular in the Soviet Union, probably due to the left-wing orientation of Jean-Paul Sartre and some other thinkers. This was one of the reasons why Camus's works were intensively translated during the Stagnation in Latvia as well. Maija Silmale translated the novel *The Plague* into Latvian the same year it was published in Russian.

The appearance of Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* is, to some extent, a phenomenon. But its cause can be explained by Veisbergs's conclusion: "Translations of foreign literature were required to serve as a distorting mirror on the Western world: rather than being a window to the West, translations were to portray the West according to the Kremlin's skewed image" (Veisbergs 2018: 79). Ironically, it can be concluded that Salinger's novel was translated because it could show the dark sides of capitalist society and how they affect young people. Although the Latvian translation of *Catcher in the Rye* by Anna Bauga was praised after its publication (Zālīte 1969), later it was criticized for one of the typical features of Soviet-era translations – avoidance of low colloquial style and expletives (see Sīle, Veckrācis 2021: 188–196; Veckrācis 2023).

American postmodern writer Kurt Vonnegut and his ironic novels became familiar to Russian readers in the early 1970s, but only one novel, *Cat's Cradle*, also translated by Bauga, appeared in Latvia during the Stagnation period. Vonnegut's other works have been translated into Latvian since the late 1980s.

The novel that fascinated the West in 1967, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Marquez, was able to surprise the Russian-speaking audience in the early 1970s. According to Katerina Clark, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was one of the publications that had a major impact on Soviet literature because it "influenced several writers, including Chingiz Aitmatov whose *The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years* (1980) became a trendsetter of the early 1980s" (Clark 2011: 141). After its translation into Latvian in 1981 (10 years after the Russian translation) by translator Voldemārs

Meļinovskis, Marquez's influences on Latvian literature are also noticeable. The search for roots, family history, and magic realism are evident in the prose by Alberts Bels and Zigmunds Skujiņš (see Oga 2023).

A special event in the Brezhnev Era was the publication of modernist poetry books. The publication of Western poetry during the Stagnation also took place in Lithuania, where an anthology *XX a. Vakarų poetai* (The Twentieth Century Western Poets, 1969) was published and helped to introduce such poets as T. S. Eliot, Dylan Thomas, Paul Valery, Guillaume Apollinaire, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Paul Celan to Lithuanian readers. The selection of French poetry *Es tevi turpinu* (I Continue You, 1970), arranged by Silmale, introduced the Latvian reader to the development of French poetry during the last hundred years. Along with the poetry of Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, and other outstanding authors, an extensive preface by Silmale was included in the book. Silmale was repressed after this publication.

Rarely the poetry of Western modernists was also published in Latvian literary periodicals. For example, in 1975, the magazine *Liesma* published a poem *East Coker* from Eliot's *Four Quartets*, translated by Igors Jakaitis, the newspaper *Literatūra un Māksla* published two other poems in Vizma Belševica's translation. Later, the three poems were included in the collection of American poetry *Visiem, visiem jums Amerikas vārdā* (Toward you All, in America's Name), along with some other modernists' (e. e. Cummings, Allen Ginsberg) works. The collection has an introduction by Tamāra Zālīte providing information on the trends in American 20th-century poetry and characterizing each poet's work practically without bowing down to Soviet ideology. The poetry of the high-modernist poet Ezra Pound was not allowed to be included in this anthology, but the translator and poet Uldis Bērziņš managed to include the translation in the selection *Dzejas diena* (Poetry Day, 1981) (Veisbergs 2022: 212).

The translation and publication of Hamsun's works during the Stagnation period are particularly noteworthy, as he was one of the most translated and beloved authors in the independent Latvia. In the period of Latvia's first independence, Hamsun's collected writings were published in 15 volumes (1936). After a long time, in 1976, another Hamsun's selection was finally published in two volumes (translator Elija Kliene) which duplicated the Moscow edition (Veisbergs 2022: 212).

During the years of Stagnation, many other excellent examples of Western modernist and postmodernist prose have been translated into Latvian, such as the German writer Hesse's *The Glass Bead Game* (1976), Thomas Mann's novel *Magic Mountain* (1976), and several American works, for example, F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* (1971) and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1975). This list of translated literature proves that in the years of Stagnation there was no stagnation in literary translation. There was a slow but gradual process of becoming adept in

Western modernism and postmodernism, and the role of the Soviet center in this process is undeniable. The period of Stagnation in Soviet Latvia, as in the whole Soviet world, opened gates to a flood of literary translations of Western authors who had previously been banned. It contributed to the creation of alternative modernity in opposition to Socialist Realism. The translations became the intermediate space, or Third Space of enunciation, for "new voices, new cultural models and new visions of the world", bridging the gap between the East and the West (see Rundle 2022: 11).

Reception of modernist literature in Latvia. The contribution of Latvian literary scholars to the interpretation of modernist literature

Latvian literary periodicals reveal a wider perspective on Western modernism in Soviet Latvia. As the so-called Socialist Realism dominated the literary scene and was considered the only proper form of literature, modernism was not at the center of interest during the Soviet period, but the attitude towards this influential literary phenomenon was not unambiguous.

A large part of analytical publications on modernism in Latvian periodicals were translations of articles and books published in Russian or reactions to Russian publications. Nevertheless, there were also original publications written by Latvian authors, the most important being those written by the literary scholars and translators Tamāra Zālīte (1918–1990) and Dzidra Kalniņa (1927–1984).

In the translated publications, the attitude towards modernism is mostly negative – it is considered the opposite of realism, of critical realism, or even of proletarian literature. In such publications, modernists are called decadents and formalists with pronounced negative connotations; modernism is associated with imperialism, the crisis of bourgeoisie culture, and pathology; the development of literature in the 20th century is viewed as a battle between realism and modernism, metaphors of war and fighting are the most popular characterizations in the descriptions of contemporary literature ([Anon] 1966a; Karabanova 1964; [Anon] 1963, Surovcevs 1967; [Anon] 1967). The evaluations of modernist works are very politicized, and the language describing them mostly conforms to the general rhetoric of the Soviet political discourse. As modernism itself is not the central issue, literary scholars' opinions are expressed mostly in articles on (Socialist) realism.

The Latvian audience of that the time gets informed that modernist representation of a human is based on the human's loneliness in the world, and that this approach is "dangerous firstly to art in general and specifically to the art of novel"; that the structure of the modernist human consciousness is "to be rejected on principle,"

and that modernist aesthetics is "corrupting" (Surovcevs 1967). The same writing techniques are negatively evaluated in the case of modernism but positively – in the realism paradigm: "[Sean] O'Casey's inner monologue is something completely opposite to Joyce's inner monologue" ([Anon] 1963).

Nevertheless, sometimes the published information is of a broader scope, neutral and analytical, and even includes a positive evaluation of modernism or its aspects. One of the most substantial sources about modernism for Latvian readers is the book in Russian *Zarubezhnyj roman segodnja* (Foreign Novel Today) by literature researcher Tamara Motyleva (1966). A part of her book was published as a series in Latvian translation in *Literatūra un Māksla* (including the chapters dedicated to modernists). These fragments provide analytical information on Proust, Kafka, Joyce, and other writers and their role in the development of the novel as a genre – although the superiority of realism is also mentioned. Motyleva has also given lectures at the State University of Latvia and the Latvian Writer's Union. The magazine *Karogs* published a review of Motyleva's book by Kalniņa, *Ārzemju romāns šodien* (Foreign Novel Today) (Kalniņa 1967). Kalniņa emphasizes Motyleva's impressive knowledge and international experience but also reveals contradictions, discrepancies, and shortcomings in the book, including those regarding modernism, as well as the groundlessness of some statements in the broader context of the development of Western literature.

Sometimes the Latvian press publishes translated articles from Russian periodicals other than *Inostrannaja literatura* or *Voprosi literaturi*, which tend to be more ideologically biased and, consequently, contain extremely critical views on modernist aesthetics, poetics, and subject matter. The titles speak for themselves: for example, *Politics and Art of the Reactionary Bourgeoisie* (Penkins 1962a; Penkins 1962b) from the Russian newspaper *Kommunist*. Latvian periodicals regularly publish retellings of articles by foreign (often Russian) authors and reports on discussions in foreign periodicals or conferences. The characteristic of these genres is anonymity – their authors are not mentioned. Some of the retellings and reports are dedicated to the discussions of modernism, and usually reflect the same politicized views and binary oppositions (progressive realism vs. primitive, vulgar, decadent modernism) ([Anon] 1965; [Anon] 1966b). Rarely do Latvian authors follow this ideological approach to modernism, for example, Mira Jansone in her voluminous article *On English and American Modernist Poetry* describes modernist poetry as self-serving, reactionary, and lacking ideas (Jansone 1960). There are instances where it is impossible to tell whether the article is an original publication or a translation (for example, Zasurskis 1969).

As mentioned before, few Western modernist and early postmodernist works were published in Latvia during the Brezhnev Era. The reactions in the Latvian cultural periodicals to these translations were very different. For example, information about

the publication of *The Great Gatsby* by Fitzgerald can be found only in the lists of published books; there are no reviews by critics or literary scholars. Only in honor of Fitzgerald's 80th anniversary was a short anonymous article published, highlighting those aspects in Fitzgerald's works that comply with the ideological position of the USSR: Fitzgerald "outlines the tragic side-scenes of American lifestyle [..] emphasizes the idea that the post-war generation has no perspective in America," etc. ([Anon] 1976). The reception of the Latvian translation of *Catcher in the Rye* by Salinger was different. Although only one review by Zālīte analyzing the novel and its translation was published (Zālīte 1969), the popularity of Salinger's book in Latvia at that time can be observed in interviews with various personalities, the information about the book in regional periodicals, the high appreciation of Holden's monologue performed by Varis Vētra in Daile Theatre group's graduation performance, a recommendation for future teachers to read the book, and the use of the phrase "*uz kraujas rudzu laukā*" (as the title of the book was translated) even without mentioning Salinger or literature.

While during the Brezhnev Era, philosophical and aesthetic principles of modernism were mostly regarded negatively, some authors advocated for a deeper, non-polarized understanding of the phenomenon. Thus, philosopher Pēteris Zeile argued that while in Latvian aesthetic thought the word *modernism* has been used mostly as an expletive and complete rejection has dominated, such an approach is wrong because of the complicated nature and differences in modernist works. He called for analysis via a scientific approach (Zeile 1967).

Two Latvian literary scholars, Zālīte and Kalniņa, have contributed the most to bringing Western modernist literature to the Latvian audience. Zālīte has published several articles on modernism and modernist works. For example, she introduced Latvian readers to Eliot (Zālīte 1974). In her publications, Zālīte analyzes 20th-century Western literature, and its main features and the importance of modernism. She introduces Latvians to *Ulysses* (Zālīte 1972a, Zālīte 1983a), Kafka (Zālīte 1983b), Proust (Zālīte 1968), and other modernist and early postmodernist writers. Kalniņa's publications were mainly devoted to German modernist and postmodernist writings, and Kalniņa was the one who published the first fragments of *Ulysses* in Soviet Latvia in 1968 (Kalniņa 1968a, Kalniņa 1968b). Zālīte and Kalniņa also published overviews of Western literature, usually concentrating on one literary phenomenon (Kalniņa 1968c, Zālīte 1970) or genre (Kalniņa 1965, Kalniņa 1966, Zālīte 1960, Zālīte 1972b) and including analysis of early and contemporary modernist and postmodernist works. Zālīte's early publications (Zālīte 1960, Zālīte 1962) show much higher political engagement and, consequently, a more negative attitude towards modernism than her later works. The telling title of Kalniņa's publication, *Attālumi tuvinās*

(Distances Are Getting Closer), exposes her attempts to acquaint Latvian readers with Western literary processes. Although both Zālīte and Kalniņa pay their dues to the demands of the Soviet regime by mentioning Lenin and Marxist criticism and by delivering some clichéd lines and phrases (otherwise the publication would not be possible), their approach is relatively objective and analytical, revealing comprehensive knowledge of Western 20th-century literature.

Conclusions

In the research of modernist literature translated into Latvian during the period of Stagnation, the opinions of postcolonial criticism about the specifics of Soviet colonization are potentially significant. The notion of the hybrid nature of Soviet colonial culture helps to understand the controversial literary processes where, on the one hand, a critical attitude towards Western modernism was evident, and on the other hand, there were investigations of several aspects of modernism and sporadic translation of literary works. The complexity of the literary landscape reveals that we cannot draw a clear line between the colonial and decolonial course in Soviet culture.

Studying the translation landscape shows that for the Latvian audience, the main sources of knowledge about modernist literature during the Stagnation were the translations into Russian, especially publications in the periodical *Inostrannaya literatura*. Besides, during the years of Stagnation the number of significant translations of modernist works into Russian increased. This progress is much less significant in Latvia, where the volume of translated literature at that time lags far behind Russia. Due to the centralized cultural policy implemented in the Soviet Union, different attitudes towards the center and the periphery were also manifested in the field of translated literature. As Latvia and the other Baltic republics and the West of Ukraine maintained and strengthened their pre-war Western orientation and contacts with the West, the control over their culture, including translated literature, was greater during the Thaw and Stagnation.

High modernist literature was rarely translated in Latvian during the period; there were more translations of contemporary Western late modernist and postmodernist literature. However, there were a few particularly important publications during the Stagnation: some examples of Western modernist poetry and prose publications. Translations from Russian periodicals and original articles by Latvian literary scholars provided analysis and characterization of modernist literature. Most original articles on modernism were published in the late 1960s, early 1970s, and the 1980s (mainly by two Latvian authors, Tamāra Zālīte and Dzidra Kalniņa).

For the most part, Latvian literary periodicals introduced their readers to modernist and early postmodernist writers and analysis of their works. Attitudes towards modernist texts ranged from negative to neutral to even positive, but the reception of modernist books in the press and amongst the readers varied greatly. Most likely, during the Stagnation the real reception of Western literature and culture occurred in the informal talks among the Soviet intelligentsia.

It can be concluded that translations of Western literature illustrate how the Soviet power balanced between colonialism and decolonization. Translated literature (like other cultural developments) in the Stagnation period in Soviet Latvia reflected the hybrid nature of its culture and literature. The basis of hybridity was the influence of Soviet ideology and Russian culture; the past national, historical, and cultural experiences, and Western charm.

The situation surrounding translations of Western modernist works reveals that the Soviet cultural center was an essential battery of Western orientation during the period of Stagnation in Latvian literature, as it was throughout the whole Western borderland. The processes of translation and reception of modernist literature in Russia initiated the return of the Western world to Latvian literature. It proves the hybrid nature not only of the colonized Soviet West or Western borderland territory, but of the entire Soviet culture.

Bibliography

[Anon] (1963). Strīdi par mūsdienu reālismu. *Karogs*, Nr. 9, 150.–152. lpp.

[Anon] (1965). Reālisms un modernisms. *Karogs*, Nr. 6, 157.–158. lpp.

[Anon] (1966a). Angļu 20. gadsimta romāns. *Karogs*, Nr. 6, 188. lpp.

[Anon] (1966b). Par mūsdienu reālismu un modernismu. Karogs, Nr. 7, 188. lpp.

[Anon] (1967). Svarīgi sociālistiskā reālisma teorijas jautājumi. *Karogs*, Nr. 1, 164.–166. lpp.

[Anon] (1976). Frensisam Skotam Ficdžeraldam – 80. *Karogs*, Nr. 10, 204.–205. lpp.

[Anon] (2003) Gaismas svētki Līvānos. *Bibliotēku Pasaule*, Nr. 26, 4.–5. lpp.

Annus, Epp (2019). *Soviet Postcolonial Studies: A View from the Western Borderlands*. London: Routledge.

Badina, Evita (2021). Translating Anglophone Literature in Soviet Latvia: Ernest Hemingway's Example. *Language, Individual & Society*, No. 15, pp. 136–144. Available: https://www.scientific-publications.net/en/article/1002277/1000050-1632947859650519.pdf [Accessed 05.08.2021.]

Baer, Brian (2016). From International to Foreign: Packaging Translated Literature in Soviet Russia. *The Slavic and East European Journal*, No. 60(1), 49–67. Available: http://www.jstor.org/stable/26633217 [Accessed 05.08.2021.]

Bhabha, Homi (1994). *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge.

Brown, Deming (1953). Hemingway in Russia. *American Quarterly*, No. 5(2), pp. 143–156.

Clark, Katerina. The Role of Translation in the Foundation of National Culture.
Engel, Christine; Menzel, Birgit. *Kultur und/als Übersetzung. Russisch-deutsche Beziehungen im 20. und 21. Jahrhundert*. Berlin: Frank&Timme, pp. 121–141.

Čakravorti-Spivaka, Gajatri (2014). *Vai pakļautie spēj runāt?* Tulk. Sandra Meškova. Rīga: Mansards.

Dobrenko, Evgeny (2020). *Late Stalinism*. Transl. by Jesse M. Savage. Yale University Press.

Eliots, Tomass Sterns (1975). Īst Koukera. *Liesma*, Nr. 9, 14. lpp.

Eliots, Tomass Sterns (1979). Pelnu diena. Nīlzirgs. *Literatūra un Māksla*, 15.06., 11. lpp.

Esses, Victoria M. Immigration, Migration, and Culture. *Oxford Research Encyclopedias. Psychology.* DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190236557.013.287

Jansone, Mira (1960). Par angļu un amerikāņu modernisma dzeju. *Karogs*, Nr. 10, 151.–157. lpp.

Kalniņa, Dzidra (1965). Ceļi, krustceļi, strupceļi: literārās tendences Rietumvācijas prozā. *Karogs*, Nr. 10, 122.–131. lpp.

Kalniņa, Dzidra (1966). Attālumi tuvinās: dažas piezīmes par mūsdienu Rietumu dzejas principiem. *Karogs*, Nr. 5, 146.–153. lpp.

Kalniņa, Dzidra (1967). Ārzemju romāns šodien. *Karogs*, Nr. 7, 162.–164. lpp.

Kalniņa, Dzidra (1968a). Par romānu un antiromānu. *Literatūra un Māksla*, 30.11., 10.–11. lpp.

Kalniņa, Dzidra (1968b). Par romānu un antiromānu. *Literatūra un Māksla*, 05.12., 12.–13. lpp.

Kalniņa, Dzidra (1968c). Dažas piezīmes par grotesku mūsdienu Rietumu literatūrā. *Karogs*, Nr. 4, 134.–141. lpp.

Kamovnikova, Natalia (2019). *Made under Pressure: Literary Translation in the Soviet Union, 1960–1991*. Amherst and Boston, University of Massachusetts Press.

Kamovnikova, Natalia (2017). The Consciousness of Necessity: Translation of National Literatures in the Soviet Union. Pild, Lea (ed.). *Translation Strategies and State Control: Acta Slavica Estonica IX.* Tartu: Tartu University Press, pp. 52–68.

Karabanova, Inese (1964). Dažas "proletāriskās" literatūras problēmas angļu mūsdienu kritikā. *Karogs*, Nr. 8, 127.–130. lpp.

Kalnačs, Benedikts (2011). *Baltijas postkoloniālā drāma*. Rīga: LU LFMI.

Kalnačs, Benedikts (2016). *20th Century Baltic Drama: Postcolonial Narratives, Decolonial Option*s. Bielefeld: Aisthesis.

Kelertas, Violeta (ed.) (2006). *Baltic Postcolonialism*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Kelli, Katriona; Bajburin, Al'bert (2018). Ot sostavitelej. *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, No. 4. Available: https://magazines.gorky.media/nlo/2018/4/ot-sostavitelej-14.html [Accessed 08.03.2022.]

Lewis, Pericles (2007). *The Cambridge Introduction to Modernism*. Cambridge University Press.

Menzel, Birgit (2011). Die Zeitschrift "Inostrannaja literatura" als Medium kultureller Übersetzung. Engel, Christine; Menzel, Birgit. *Kultur und/als Übersetzung. Russisch-deutsche Beziehungen im 20. und 21. Jahrhundert*. Berlin: Frank&Timme, pp. 143–175.

Moore, David Chioni (2001). Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique. *PMLA*, No. 116(1), pp. 111–128.

Möldre, Aile (2019). Translations of Non-Russian Soviet Literature in Estonian Book Production (1940s–1980s). *Knygotyra*, No. 73, pp. 264–288.

Motyleva, Tamara (1966). *Zarubezhnyj roman segodnja*. Moskva: Sovetskij pisatel'.

Nekula, Marek (2016). *Franz Kafka and His Prague Contexts: Studies on Language and Literature.* Prague: Karolinum Press, Charles University.

Oga, Jānis (2023). Magical Realism under the Soviet Occupation: The Case of Zigmunds Skujiņš. *Colloquia*, 2023, No. 51, pp. 65–86.

Penkins, M. (1962a). Reakcionārās buržuāzijas politika un māksla. *Literatūra un Māksla*, 10.02., 3. lpp.

Penkins, M. (1962b). Reakcionārās buržuāzijas politika un māksla. *Literatūra un Māksla*, 17.02., 3. lpp.

Rauda, Māris [Ekmanis, Rolfs] (1977). Kā Padomju Savienībā cenzē Hemingveju. *Brīvība*, Nr. 5, 5.–7. lpp.

Risch, William (2015). A Soviet West: Nationhood, Regionalism, and Empire in the Annexed Western Borderlands. *Nationalities Papers*, No. 43(1), pp. 63–81. DOI: 10.1080/00905992.2014.956072.

Rundle, Christopher; Lange, Anne, Monticelli, Daniele (2022). Introduction. Rundle, Christopher; Lange, Anne, Monticelli, Daniele (eds.) *Translation Under Communism*. Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 3–16. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-030-79664-8_l.

Rudnytska, Nataliia (2022). Translation and the Formation of the Soviet Canon of World Literature. Rundle, Christopher; Lange, Anne, Monticelli, Daniele (eds.) *Translation Under Communism*. Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 39–73. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-030-79664-8_3.

Sīle, Aija; Veckrācis, Jānis (2021). *Tulkojumu redakcionālā pilnveide*. Ventspils: Ventspils Augstskola.

Smith, Hendrick (1973). Faulkner's "Fury" Issued in Soviet. *The New York Times*, 14.02., p. 38.

Surovcevs, I. (1967). Romāns un laiks. (Nobeigums.) *Literatūra un Māksla*, 18.03., 2. lpp.

Tew, Philip; Murray Alex (eds.) (2009). *The Modernism Handbook*. London and New York: Continuum.

Veckrācis, J. Various planes of retranslation: J. D. Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye in Russian and Latvian. *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 2023, DOI: 10.1080/01629778.2023.2224296

Veisbergs, Andrejs (2018). The Translation Scene in Latvia (Latvian SSR) during the Stalinist Years. *Vertimo studijos*, No. 11, pp. 76–99

Veisbergs, Andrejs (2022). *Tulkojumi latviešu valodā. 16.–20. gadsimta ainava.* Rīga: LU Akadēmiskais apgāds.

Venclova, Tomas (1979). Translations of World Literature and Political Censorship in Contemporary Lithuania. *Lituanus*, No. 25(2). Available: https://www.lituanus.org/1979/79_2_01.htm [Accessed 14.03.2022.]

Zālīte, Tamāra (1960). Mazo cilvēku aizstāvot. *Karogs*, Nr. 3, 117.–122. lpp.

Zālīte, Tamāra (1962). Angļu modernais kritizētāja reālisma romāns. *Karogs*, Nr. 1, 125.–133. lpp.

Zālīte, Tamāra (1968). Marsels Prusts. *Literatūra un Māksla*, 19.10., 10.–12. lpp.

Zālīte, Tamāra (1969). Meistarīgs darbs meistarīgā atveidojumā. *Literatūra un Māksla*, 12.07., 4. lpp.

Zālīte, Tamāra (1970). Zem XX gadsimta Rietumu romāna varoņa komiskās maskas. *Karogs*, Nr. 3, 139.–146. lpp.

Zālīte, Tamāra (1972a). Džeimsa Džoisa "Ulisam" 50 gadu. *Literatūra un Māksla*, 29.01., 13. lpp.

Zālīte, Tamāra (1972b). Plašā pasaule zvirgzdā (par īso prozu Rietumu literatūrā). *Karogs*, Nr. 8, 135.–139. lpp.

Zālīte, Tamāra (1974). Dzejas sociālā funkcija. *Literatūra un Māksla*, 28.09., 14. lpp.

Zālīte, Tamāra (1980). Es dzirdu Ameriku dziedam. Zālīte, Tamāra (sast.). *Visiem, visiem jums Amerikas vārdā: amerikāņu dzeja*. Rīga: Liesma.

Zālīte, Tamāra (1983a). Džeims Džoiss. *Karogs*, Nr. 3, 151.–155. lpp.

Zālīte, Tamāra (1983b). Francis Kafka. *Karogs*, Nr. 7, 198.–202. lpp.

Zasurskis, R. (1969). Modernisma pravieši. *Literatūra un Māksla*, 04.01., 12.–13. lpp.

Zeile, Pēteris (1967). Modernā un modernistiskā māksla. *Karogs*, Nr. 10, 139.–145. lpp.

Zhuk, Sergei (2009). Book Consumption and Reading Practices in Soviet Dniepropetrovsk During the Brezhnev Era. *Ab Imperio*, No. 3, pp. 207– 243.

Heili Einasto
PhD, scholar of cultural studies
Baltic Film, Communication, and Arts Institute, Tallinn University;
Tallinn Music and Ballet School
E-mail: heiein@tlu.ee
DOI: 10.35539/LTNC.2023.0051.09

Censorship in Ballet: the Case Study of *The Master and Margarita* by Mai Murdmaa in the Estonia Theater Ballet Company

Cenzūra baletā: Mai Murdmā iestudējums *Meistars un Margarita* Igaunijas teātra baleta trupā un šī gadījuma izpēte

Keywords:
censorship in the Soviet Union,
Estonian ballet,
censorship in theatre,
Mai Murdmaa,
the Estonia Theater Ballet Company

Atslēgvārdi:
cenzūra Padomju Savienībā,
igauņu balets,
cenzūra teātrī,
Mai Murdmā,
Igaunijas teātra baleta trupa

Summary In 1985, Mai Murdmaa choreographed a ballet based on Mikhail Bulgakov's novel *The Master and Margarita*, set to music by Eduard Lazarev. This ballet offers a good example of late-Soviet-era censorship in ballet, as the Communist Party's ideological functionaries interfered in the production of this ballet before and after its premiere. Censorship in the Soviet Union is difficult to research because it was a forbidden subject and there are few official references to it – most suggestions were made orally, and thus information about them is largely based on people's memories. In the case of the ballet *The Master and Margarita* there are, in addition to oral sources based on memories, also a written record of an eyewitness about of the alterations made in the ballet in its first season of production. This article presents an overview of what happened and when, and analyzes the reasoning behind the changes.

Kopsavilkums 1985. gadā Mai Murdmā (*Mai Murdmaa*) veidoja horeogrāfiju Eduarda Lazareva komponētajam baletam *Meistars un Margarita* pēc Mihaila Bulgakova romāna motīviem. Šis baleta iestudējums ir spilgts piemērs vēlīno padomju laiku baleta cenzūrai – Komunistiskās partijas funkcionāri iejaucās iestudējuma tapšanā gan pirms, gan pēc tā pirmizrādes. Cenzūru Padomju savienībā ir grūti pētīt, jo tas bija aizliegts temats un par to ir ļoti maz oficiālu liecību. Lielākā daļa ieteikumu tika izteikti mutiski, tāpēc informācija par tiem balstās galvenokārt uz cilvēku atmiņām. Taču baleta *Meistars un Margarita* gadījumā papildus mutiskajiem avotiem ir pieejama arī aculiecinieka rakstiska liecība par iestudējumā veiktajām izmaiņām pirmās sezonas laikā. Šis raksts sniedz pārskatu par šo notikumu gaitu un analizē izmaiņu iemeslus.

Introduction

Arts censorship has been an issue throughout history, and an example of this kind of censorship in ballet is the case of *The Master and Margarita*, a ballet production that was staged in the Estonia Theater on November 3rd, 1985. It was based on Mikhail Bulgakov's novel, with music by Eduard Lazarev and choreography by Mai Murdmaa. Before and after the premiere, alterations were made in the production, most of them suggested by the ideological department of the Estonian Communist Party. Suggestions were made orally, as was the custom in the Soviet Union; any reference to censorship was strictly forbidden, and thus there is no record of them. Even though the artistic council of the theater through which censors worked (see more below) made minutes of their meetings, they were very formal, mentioning only the themes that were discussed, but without any details. Moreover, these records have been lost. Thus the only evidence of the events are the memories of people working in the theater at that time. When Mai Murdmaa and myself were working on our book and collecting stories of the dancers who had worked with her, I was using loosely structured interviews, in order to ask questions about the making of *The Master and Margarita*. The former dancers volunteered a great deal of information. In addition to these reports, I have my own testimonies, written down at the time of the production. As a young ballet *aficionada*, I worked at that time in the theater decoration unit – a circumstance which enabled me to see rehearsals on stage and as many performances as I wanted to. I used that opportunity to the fullest, and wrote in my diary of what I observed. These double records offer a unique opportunity to discuss arts censorship during the late-Soviet period: in addition to oral history, there is also written testimony made at the time of the production. The ballet was recorded by an Estonian television company in 1987 and is now available for public viewing.

Notes on censorship in the Soviet Union

Censorship in the Soviet Union and its republics, including Estonia, was an intricate system of control and manipulation designed to ensure the dominance of official ideology. This system was not officially acknowledged, and instead euphemisms like "leadership by the communist party" were used to replace it (Kurvits 2019: 169). Soviet censorship extended beyond just the cultural and educational realms, impacting all aspects of everyday life. Orders, bans, and instructions were often issued orally and not documented, making it difficult to study the full scope of their influence (Lauk 2005: 20–21).

The Constitution of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic stipulated that citizens have the right to freedom of speech and freedom of the press, but only on the

condition that these freedoms be used for "the consolidation and development of the socialist order" (Põhiseadus 1988: 15). People found guilty of abusing these rights to spread ideas or materials deemed detrimental to the Soviet system could face imprisonment of up to seven years, or deportation for a period of two to five years (Kriminaalkoodeks 1990: 77).

The censorship structure of the USSR and Estonia was similar, with the Secretary General of the respective Communist Party at the apex, followed by the Politburo of the Central Committee of the respective Parties and the Agitation and Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the respective Parties. Memoirs of editors, journalists, and authors provide a rare and valuable insight into the workings of the total censorship machinery, as documents alone do not depict its full influence (Lauk 1999: 23).

The KGB structures and its Fifth Department had the power to determine which topics were to be banned in publications, as well as lists of names, roads, factories, and educational establishments that could not be mentioned publicly (Veskimägi 1996: 329). The Chief Administration for the Protection of State Secrets in Print (*Glavlit*) was responsible for censoring print media and other material from 1940 onwards, and was supervised by the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the KGB (Lauk 1999: 23).

In Estonia, the List of Forbidden Topics was a document containing facts and data that were prohibited from being discussed or printed in Soviet Estonia. This list was regularly updated and included topics such as the presence of the Soviet Army, anything that could remind people of Estonian independence, and the Soviet annexation of 1940 (Lauk 1999: 23). Prohibited topics included religion and Jewish-themed topics, ethnic relations, and Christmas; non-mentionable groups of people included former defense league members, women guards, those who had served in the Nazi Army, those who had been deported, and Estonians who had fled abroad. Additionally, individual words and symbols referring to prohibited topics were also forbidden, such as the cross, flower with six petals, and the colors of the flag of independent Estonia – blue together with black and white (Kurvits 2019: 159). Copies of the list were destroyed when a new version was brought into use, and were kept secret to conceal any inefficiency and misdeeds during the Soviet occupation (Lauk 1999: 23). Research on censorship is hampered by the fact that it was predominately oral and based on phone or face-to-face conversations, and corresponding documentation has been systematically destroyed (Saro 2018).

The KGB utilized a system of curators, appointed to institutions across the Soviet Union, whose role it was to collect information and to ensure the institutions' compliance with Soviet ideology (Karjahärm, Sirk 2007: 283). In the Estonian

Communist Party, censorship was an institutionalized system that was highly specific and nearly impossible to argue against. Through the Glavlit institution, the Central Committee of the Estonian Communist Party would make corrections and edits to any artistic works in the name of the publishing house or editor, never mentioning *Glavlit* (Lauk 1999: 22). Institutionalized censorship was a powerful tool for the Estonian Communist Party until the late 1980s, allowing it to maintain ideological taboos and to control the spread of information (Priidel 2010: 645).

In the Soviet Union, ballet was an essential tool in constructing a positive impression of Soviet cultural variety; it served as a means of expressing the country's artistic, nationalistic, and identity-related ideals, as well as its sense of cultural superiority (Ross 2015). In addition to content, Soviet censorship also controlled the way works of art were presented, i.e. their form and style. Socialist Realism tended to be the main creative method in the Soviet Union, while modernist currents were stigmatized as formalism (Saro 2018: 301) – in ballet, this translated into an avoidance of abstract dance, Western dance styles (such as jazz and modern dance), and acrobatics. When used, they were frowned upon or downright forbidden with charges like "deviant technique" and inappropriate "eroticism" (Nikulina 2019: 194).

In different places, the amount of censorship varied depending on the location or significance of the theater or publication. For example, the regulations for ballets were stricter in Moscow than in smaller or peripheral cities, and the Bolshoi had stricter rules than the Nemirovitch-Danchenko Musical Theater (according to personal testimony from dancers of that time). Therefore experiments that would have been impossible in major ballet companies of Moscow and Leningrad could be practiced in Estonia, in terms of both the content and the form of the ballet. Texts that were unprintable in big Russian-language publications could be published in small languages like Estonian, Latvian, or Lithuanian, in particular when the publishers were small academic journals with limited circulation (Venclova 1978).

Estonia Theater Ballet Company and Mai Murdmaa The permanent dance company in the Estonia Theater was founded in 1926 to support opera and operetta productions, but its artistic director, Rahel Olbrei (1898–1974), envisioned far more for the company: She wanted to create full length dance productions, and in 1928 she succeeded with the production of *The Green Flute*. Though Olbrei had studied classical ballet, she felt the style was too limited as a means of expressing the wide variety of human experience; therefore, she built her first productions on a German expressionist dance technique, and later devised a synthetic

dance form that combined ballet with modern dance and character dance. She was convinced that the subject matter of a production dictated the movement style, and she believed in creating pieces that were not solely aesthetically pleasing, but also meaningful and left a lasting impression on the audience. To ensure that her company fulfilled this goal, she trained her dancers to be her collaborators (Einasto 2018: 215–220). Although Olbrei was forced to flee Estonia for Sweden in 1944 and later went to Canada, her ideals lived on in the dancers she had trained. And even though Mai Murdmaa (born 1938), choreographer of *The Master and Margarita*, had never met her, she claimed to have been influenced by Olbrei's ideas via the older colleagues with whom she shared a dressing room.

Mai Murdmaa, trained in Tallinn Choreographic School, sustained a major injury during her second year as a dancer which ended her dancing career in the Estonia Theater Ballet Company. As a result, she went to study at the Moscow State Institute of Theatrical Art, commonly known as GITIS, graduating as choreographer. The late 1950s and early 1960s was a time when the Soviet Union was visited by many Western artists and dance companies, and during her studies in Moscow Murdmaa had a chance to see dance forms and styles other than the Soviet drama ballet. Upon her return to Estonia in 1963, she began working in her home theater as a choreographer, becoming its Artistic Director (Ballet Master-in-Chief) in 1974. Her vision of ballet was similar to that of Olbrei: the dance form should be shaped by the content of the ballet and express the themes and characters instead of being merely aesthetically appealing. Murdmaa's choreographic language and ideas were also impacted by different dance styles that became known in the Soviet Union via Western dance companies (Murdmaa, Einasto 2018). At the time of the production of *The Master and Margarita*, she had achieved fame and acclaim throughout the Soviet Union, having worked with celebrities such as Mikhail Baryshnikov and Natalia Makarova before they fled to the West. In the Soviet Union, the Estonia Theater Ballet Company was seen as an avant-garde company full of creative potential and bold choreographic ideas, staging ballets that were often considered too risky for other venues (Murdmaa, Einasto 2018).

Making of *The Master and Margarita*

Mikhail Bulgakov's novel *The Master and Margarita* was written in 1940, but it had to wait over twenty years to be published (in 1966 and 1967) in a censored form and with a limited number of copies; its translation into Estonian was published in 1968. It was only in the mid-1980s that it reached the awareness of the Soviet intelligentsia as well as that of the Soviet

ballet community. Eduard Lazarev (1935–2008), a composer from Moldova, had written ballet music based on the novel to the libretto by Boris Eifman, an experimental choreographer working in Leningrad (Gromov 1985). How the score and libretto reached the Estonia Theater Ballet Company is not reported, but Lazarev's *Anthony and Cleopatra* had been staged in the Estonia Theater in 1976 and Murdmaa certainly knew both Lazarev and Eifman, so it must have been via direct contact. The Estonia Theater Ballet Company production of *The Master and Margarita* was Lazarev's ballet's world premiere – Eifman's version premiered in 1987 (Eifman Wikipedia 2022). About that time (in 1986), *Mosfilm* released a musical feature film *Fouetté*, which centered on making a ballet version of *The Master and Margarita* with Vladimir Vassiliev and Ekaterina Maximova in leading roles.

The fact that the ballet premiered in Tallinn and not in Leningrad can be attributed to the tendency of Soviet censorship to be less stringent at the periphery, providing chances to criticize society in ways that would have been impossible in the cultural hubs of the USSR. By the late spring of 1985, the newly elected Communist Party leader Mikhail Gorbachev had begun his reform initiatives of *perestroika* (rebuilding) and *glasnost* (openness), which enabled gradual discourse on formerly taboo topics, thus encouraging the Estonia Theater to take a risk with this ambitious venture.

Mai Murdmaa recalled that she was not very enthusiastic about the score, but the theme offered an outlet to her for "purging my system of all my hatred of the Soviet life, internal negativism and disharmony" (Murdmaa, Einasto 2018: 180). She claimed she was not deeply interested in the characters of Margarita or Woland, but was triggered by "the Master and the nameless mob antagonizing him". So for Murdmaa this was "a political pamphlet," not a psychological drama (Murdmaa, Einasto 2018: 180).

The process for the creation of the ballet was far from smooth. Murdmaa, who was used to work with high-quality musical scores, considered Lazarev's to be too primitive; the dancers struggled with creating the required characters, and scenographer Kustav-Agu Püüman had difficulties in perceiving Murdmaa's vision due to technical issues with the stage. The red-and-black costumes for the mob referred back to Soviet New Economic Policy (NEP) era of the 1920s; this created controversy (Murdmaa, Einasto 2018: 180-193) which will be discussed below.

Part of the "Censorship Body" deciding the fate of theater productions were the theater arts councils, which were responsible for repertory development and the acceptance or denial of new productions. This body was comprised of the theater management (director, chief artistic director, head of the literary department), representatives of the actors and theater departments, and outside Tallinn also members of the Arts/Theaters Government (a subsivision of the Ministry of Culture). Additionally, public

figures were invited by the theater, such as representatives of the press or the working class. The last word was exercised by the functionaries of the Cultural Department of the Communist Party, who visited all the control performances and sometimes also the re-enactments, but the influence of this institution on directing and its control of the theater work had to be kept secret by both the theater management and the Ministry of Culture (Saro 2018: 287). If something of "dubious content" was found, it had to be altered or removed, otherwise the production risked being banned.

The protocols of the Estonia Theater artistic council meetings have not been preserved, thus any information about the debates and discussions over Murdmaa's *The Master and Margarita* are retrieved through later memories of some of the participants – often slightly inaccurate[1] –, or some indirect references published in newspapers, photos taken at dress rehearsals and later performances, and my personal recollections and recordings in my diaries.

The question of whether to allow this ballet to have its premiere arose already before the dress rehearsal, as recounted Tiiu Randviir, an Estonia Theater prima ballerina and coach at the time, who was also a Communist Party member. Randviir told me that having heard the rumors of a possible ban, she and Arne Mikk, the general artistic director, and Eri Klas, the chief conductor of the theater, went to discuss the issue in the Politburo. The greatest concerns of the Communist Party were religious references. According to Randviir, "they said there that you have Jesus on stage. I said: yes, but he is also in the book. 'And his hair is too long' [,was the complaint by the party functionary]. I said that we can cut the hair, no problem! [..] All these were minor issues" (Randviir in Murdmaa, Einasto 2018: 184). So for the premiere, Jeshua's dark, long-haired wig was replaced by a reddish, shorter-haired wig, while his make-up no longer included a beard.

Randviir also remembered that one of the scenes that caused complaint was the depiction of a drunken mob, but that scene could be explained away with references to the novel (Randviir in Murdmaa, Einasto 2018: 184).

Kustav-Agu Püüman remembered that someone from the theater had invited a party functionary from Moscow to the dress rehearsal, who "was shocked and claimed that the production offended her as a Russian" (Püüman in Murdmaa, Einasto 2018: 193). It turned out that the red color in the costumes was deemed unsuitable and had to be changed, so the costumes were dyed black and only red stripes on the sleeves referred to the original idea of the costume designer. "The general image,

1 When I conducted interviews in connection with the book on Mai Murdmaa, I noticed that some separate, but similar events connected with alterations made in the ballet had merged into one event in the memories of the people.

therefore, was much poorer, and the movements lost part of their sharpness because of this," regretted the artist later (Püüman in Murdmaa, Einasto 2018: 193). However, the ballet's premiere went ahead. That was common at the time: the Arts Council did not ban productions, but made prescriptions for lines and required cuts of scenes or imagery (Saro 2018: 293).

***The Master and Margarita* ballet** This ballet was a metaphorical representation of Soviet society and, on a deeper level, a reflection of spiritual struggles and the complexity of human relationships. The ballet, like the novel, is composed of three intertwining plot lines which represent mundane social life, the love story of the Master and Margarita, and the spiritual journey of Jeshua and Pilate. The social line which, as mentioned before, was closest to the choreographer's heart, sharply satirizes Soviet reality, as the dances contained caricatured gestures and movements from everyday life. The spiritual line of Jeshua and Pilate is less worked out, featuring a lexicon of modern ballet movements full of rhetorical, but often somewhat empty pathos. Finally, the love line is composed with a sure choreographic hand but using well-known Murdmaaesque tropes.

As the curtain rolls back for Act One, the audience is presented with a chaotic and dark world full of fear and anxiety. This feeling is expressed by the percussionist soundtrack that frames the first act (added later, in the spring of 1986), and in the frantic bustle and haste of the mob, who are desperately trying to overcome it. They are eager to follow the satanic powers (that enter the scene) – any power – that can subjugate and control them. We see the mob bowing, following the gestures of Woland, eager to please. The Master, in contrast, is shown as a solitary figure, trying to express his existential anxiety and to escape the faceless mob. In a scene when the two stand before each other, the Master in his inner struggle and the mob in its drunken excitement unable to consider anything except its own physical comfort, Jeshua approaches the Master, offering solace and an invitation to follow him and to bear his suffering. Fears and anxieties are banished, and the Master is given blessing as he kneels in the spotlight reminiscent of a baptism ceremony. Afterwards, the scene shifts to an orgy of the mob, a frenzied attempt to escape from the emptiness of life. The choreographer emphasizes the mob's robotic existence by their jerky movements, deprived of any recognition of higher authority. The mob creates a wall that the Master and Margarita must break through to reach each other. The duet of searching and finding each other begins as the two lean towards one another. Margarita makes a hesitant, exploratory stretch of the leg, expressing a mixture of questions, fear of

disappointment, and potential hurt. Despite apprehension, they still opt to take the risk. The duet of the two individuals gradually grows in intensity until it transforms into one being.

When Woland arrives, the mob is quickly transformed into human logs that are used as building blocks for Woland's desires. However, when Jeshua appears, Woland retreats, leaving the mob in the Savior's hands. Jeshua lifts up his arms and the human stacks disintegrate, allowing the people to stretch and breathe freely. The previously tight and tense movements of the mob gradually become more fluid and expansive. It is Jeshua who is now seen as a leader, one that is to be followed as blindly as Woland was. But rather than demanding slaves and obedient servants, Jeshua wants independent thinkers, friends, and collaborators. Pilate's entrance into the scene brings in the critics, introducing a sense of threat that can be interpreted as: "We will destroy you, Jeshua! And you, Master!"

Jeshua stands in the middle of the stage, his back to the audience, when the critics begin to approach. They evaluate him with a mix of ironic contempt, beginning the process of debasement by targeting Jeshua first and then fueling a derogatory public opinion in the form of the mob. To underline the role of critics as ideological functionaries of the Party and thus either directly or indirectly as agents of the KGB, they wear militia hats (forbidden after the premiere), and have ropes in hand which are used to harness the mob in front of invisible carriages and to whip them to move. The Master watches in despair as the destruction of Jeshua (here representing both his work and Christianity as a religion) unfolds before him, but that is not enough. In the Soviet system the creator has to be crushed as well – first the critics throw invisible mud (or stones) at the Master, befouling him, then push him between their legs (referring to a punishing squad), and afterwards kick him. To ensure his total destruction, they place a straightjacket over the Master and triumphantly carry him away, afterwards leading onward the robotic mob that seems to shout: "Down with the Master, down with religion!" The space opens up: a black circular back curtain is lowered, emphasizing the cosmic dimension of the event. This is not just a moment in the Master's life – it is the destruction of all independently thinking people and their creative work. This scene was transformed on January 12th, 1986: in the original version it was the critics who on their own initiative beat the Master and Jeshua (the obedient servants of the Party do not need any external instigation); it is they who carry the Master to a lunatic asylum (a direct reference to the KGB's practice of sending dissidents to psychiatric wards where they were "treated" to become obedient servants of the state). After January 12th, the ropes were removed, and Woland and his minions enter the scene; now it was the satanic forces that drove the mob into a feverish frenzy of destruction, with the Master reacting to it by putting on the

straightjacket himself and staggering away. Over the destructive and dumb mob, Satan tramples victorious and gleeful. The curtain closes, and the last thing the audience sees is Satan enthroned on human backs, arms exultantly raised.

In Act Two the focus is on Margarita's story: her transformation into a witch and her reunion with the Master. The internal tensions of the first act now give way to despair and then a bittersweet reconciliation with the Master. However, the climax of the act is the crucifixion scene, which serves as a powerful reminder of the consequences of the mob's choices. Pilate, representing the Power, attempts to break Christ the Spirit (jumping onto Jeshua's back and trying to mold him to his wishes), but is unsuccessful, and therefore hands Jeshua over to the crazed mob. It is the same people whom Jeshua had previously liberated from fear and freed from Satan's clutches (in Act One) who now crush Him, and He dies for their redemption. At the end of the scene the space opens again as in the end of the Act One (the backdrop is lowered); this imbues the show with a cosmic dimension. The cross with Jeshua rises above the mob, symbolizing resurrection and eternal hope. (The cross, being a too-strong religious reference point, was replaced by letter X after January 12th, which was later – at the beginning of December 1987 – reverted back to the cross.)

The final scene of the ballet featured Jeshua standing on one side of the stage, Pilate on one knee on the other side, with the Master and Margarita in the middle, swaying hand in hand – all in a light-blue light. This conveyed a sense of peace and underscored Bulgakov's belief that manuscripts (the Master's novel about Jeshua and Pilate) cannot be destroyed. However, from January 12th, 1986 the scene was altered to exclude Jeshua and Pilate, leaving only the Master and Margarita in the forefront. Though the scene still conveys the idea that love is powerful and can conquer even a great deal of evil, the idea of indestructible ideas – "manuscripts don't burn" (Bulgakov 1968) – is lost.

Post-premiere alterations in *The Master and Margarita*

Records of *The Master and Margarita* indicate that alterations in the ballet did not end with the premiere but were also done during the first season, reminding one of the fact that in addition to pre-performance censorship there existed also a post-performance one. The latter was necessary to correct mistakes in case the political climate outside the theater had changed, or the censors had been too careless, lenient, or sneaky, or if the actors' performance had started to amplify the implicit meanings of the production (Saro 2018: 288). In the case of *The Master and Margarita* both forms were practiced, though in the memories

of dancers these have merged into one. The first alterations, done already before the so-called artistic council dress-rehearsal, consisted of coloring the costumes: formerly red-black costumes were "put into the dying vat" (Püüman in Murdmaa, Einasto 2018: 193). After that dress rehearsal the modifications targeted religious references to Christ, and thus Jeshua's make-up and wig were changed to make his appearance more neutral. After the premiere on November 3rd, 1985, militia hats and the ropes carried by the critics were removed, but the scene remained the same. However, from December 5th, 1985 the scene was modified. Tiiu Randviir remembers the ideological secretary of the Communist Party claiming at a meeting concerning the ballet: "And then there's one terrible thing: the Master is carried to a madhouse. Why is he taken? He should go there himself. I said: 'Let him go himself! Sure, let him go himself!' [..] When I told Mai of this after the meeting [..], she was so angry! I said that these are minor issues [..] 'You can modify the scene so that the Master himself starts going to the madhouse and is arrested in the end. The performances are taking place, Mai!' And [they] did" (Randviir in Murdmaa, Einasto 2018, 184). Thus it was not the critics but the Master himself who pulled the straightjacket on, and he was not carried away but staggered offstage himself. The cross in the crucification scene was replaced by a letter X, to weaken the religious reference.

The subsequent set of changes were made before the January 12th performance: the critics' scene was further revised, so that now Woland and his assistants were brought in as forces driving the critics' actions, and in Act Two, again because of the religious content, Jeshua and Pilate were removed from the final scene. These modifications might have emerged from the knowledge that on this date the performance was watched by Yuri Grigorovich, the Bolshoi Ballet's artistic director, invited there by one of the dancers in the theater who opposed Mai Murdmaa and who wanted a "second opinion" on the ballet. Although it remains unknown what Grigorovich thought of the production, it went on without any ideological changes, suggesting that he found the ballet both artistically and ideologically sound.

The final round of changes was made by Mai Murdmaa herself in the spring of 1986, and those consisted of adding some soundscape to the existing music. As mentioned before, she considered Lazarev's music mediocre and not fully expressive of the ballet's thematic richness. As she had befriended composer Kuldar Sink, she asked him to write additional percussion music; that music was recorded, and the recording was added to certain scenes with Woland (the beginning of the ballet, the end of Act One, plus the end of Act Two where a recording of seagulls was used) to add a touch of different emotions and feelings she felt were missing from Lazarev's score.

Afterlife of the ballet and conclusive thoughts

The ballet was popular with the audience (almost a full house every time) and praised by Estonian critics. It was restaged in 2015 in Joshkar-Ola, Russian Federation. Mai Murdmaa herself was sure that it was the final version because the ballet had lost its actuality, and that this kind of political comment was unnecessary: "It is the child of its time. [..] I replaced all Woland's theme with electronic music by Rainer Jancis that added a new dimension to the ballet by lifting Woland and his court out of reality. [..] The production was sharply political. Political was also the fact that my Russian visa ended three days before the premiere and no power could extend it," said Mai Murdmaa in 2018 (Murdmaa, Einasto 2018, 193).

When looking at the events taking place in the theater and outside in the society during the 1980s, it is clear that staging Mikhail Bulgakov's novel *The Master and Margarita* would not have been possible earlier, and that it was only Mikhail Gorbachev's attempts to reform the USSR with *glasnost* and *perestroika* that made it feasible to produce the ballet and to display the corrupt nature of the Soviet mob. Despite this, censorship was still a point of concern, as the censors in the Communist Party's ideological offices became increasingly apprehensive about what to permit and what to suppress. References to Christianity were among those censored, and Jeshua had to be less Christlike than the way he is depicted in Western art. The clothes of the mob, as they were partly red, a color that in the Soviet Union alluded to the socialist revolution and communist ideals, were changed (to black). Such alterations were made prior to the premiere; however, as was usual, post-premiere censorship was required to attend to matters that had evaded the vigilance of the censors.

The second round of alterations addressed references to Soviet authorities – references to the militia and KGB in the hats of the critics, as well as their oppressive and violent actions such as locking people in mental institutions and exploiting public opinion and the press to tarnish dissidents or anyone unfavorable to the Soviet power. All of these were made to placate the state officials in the local Politburo.

However, not all grievances concerning the ideological nature of artistic works stemmed from official censors or even members of the theater's artistic councils. They could also originate from jealous colleagues who could launch anonymous complaints – in the case of *The Master and Margarita*, from a dancer who invited trustworthy party servants (Yuri Grigorovitch) to view the performance and give their opinions. Therefore, a third round of modifications was made, this time to the entire critics' scene, as well as to the ending of the ballet, further reducing religious and political allusions.

Gorbachev's reforms opened a new avenue to discuss, albeit mildly, the crimes of the Soviet power. Hence the ballet's criticism of the system, via the portrayal of

the mob's nature and the allusion to the critics as ideological servants of the repressive state, was feasible. After a few years in the repertory, it was even praised by the authorities and awarded a theater prize for best ballet. In 2018, Mai Murdmaa was confident that the ballet was outdated in its criticism of the system; however, the invasion and bombing of Ukraine along with the ideological war in the media demonstrate that the old Soviet mentality of the mindless, mute mob easily manipulated by evil powers is still very much alive. This ballet, which might have been considered outdated in 2021, has become relevant again – not only in Estonia and former Soviet republics and their satellites, but potentially across the world. Again we are witnessing Woland and his servants playing their games, seeing Masters imprisoned and destroyed, the power of critics in the media (the Moscow propaganda machine), and the need for love and the Savior helping us to stay free and independent as individuals and as nations.

Bibliography

Bulgakov, Mihhail (1968). *Meister ja Margarita*. Transl. M. Varik, J. Ojamaa. Tallinn: Eesti Raamat.

Eifman Wikipedia page https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boris_Eifman [Accessed 15.03.2022.]

Einasto, Heili (2018). *Rahel Olbrei – Eesti tantsuteatri rajaja*. Tallinn: Eesti Teatriliit.

Gromov, Igor (1985). Master I Margarita v balete. *Molodyosh Estonii*, 05.11.

Karjahärm, Toomas; Sirk, Väino (2007). *Kohanemine ja vastupanu. Eesti haritlaskond 1940–1987.* Tallinn: Argo.

Kriminaalkoodeks 1990. *Eesti NSV Kriminaalkoodeks* [*The Criminal Code of the Estonian SSR*] (1990). Tallinnn: Olion.

Kurvits, Roosmarii (2019). Kakskümmend viis aastat hiljem. Ajakirjanike meenutused nõukogude tsensuurist. *Kirjandus ja tehnika*, No. 18(23). DOI: 10.7592/methis.v18i23.14804.

Lauk, Epp (1999). Practice of Soviet Censorship in the Press. The Case of Estonia. *Nordicom Review*, No. 20(2), pp. 19–33.

Murdmaa, Mai; Einasto, Heili (2018). *Mai Murdmaa – teekond tantsus*. Tallinn: Eesti Teatriliit.

Nikulina, Ania (2019). Maya Plisetskaya's The Carmen-Suite: Recovering a Hidden Repertoire. *Theater Journal*, No. 71(2), pp. 191–209. DOI: 10.1353/tj.2019.0032.

Priidel, Eino (2010). *Vägikaikavedu ehk Vaim ja Võim 1940–1990*. Tallinn: Eesti Keele Sihtasutus.

Põhiseadus 1988. *Eesti Nõukogude Sotsialistliku Vabariigi konstitutsioon (põhiseadus)*. Tallinn.

Ross, Janice (2015). *Like a Bomb Going Off. Leonid Yakobson and Ballet as Resistance in Soviet Russia.* Yale University Press.

Saro, Anneli (2018). Nõukogude tsensuuri mehhanismid, strateegiad ja tabuteemad Eesti teatris. *Ajalooline Ajakiri*, No. 4(166), pp. 283–304.

Venclova, Thomas (1978). USSR: Stages of censorship. *Index on Censorshi*p, No. 7(4), pp. 61–62. DOI: 10.1080/03064227808532817.

Veskimägi, Kalju-Olev (1996). *Nõukogude unelaadne elu: tsensuur Eesti NSV-s ja tema peremehed.* Tallinn: Tallinna Raamtutrükikoda.

Stella Pelše
Dr. art., art historian
Art Academy of Latvia Institute of Art History
E-mail: stella_pelse@hotmail.com
DOI: 10.35539/LTNC.2023.0051.10

Towards Humanism and Stylistic Diversity: The "Open System" of Socialist Realism in Latvian Artwriting of the Stagnation Era

Humānisms un stilistiskā daudzveidība: sociālistiskais reālisms kā "atklāta sistēma" mākslas interpretācijās stagnācijas posma Latvijā

Keywords:
Socialist Realism,
"open system",
humanism,
stylistic diversity,
art theory,
art criticism,
aesthetics

Atslēgvārdi:
sociālistiskais reālisms,
"atklāta sistēma",
humānisms,
stilistiskā daudzveidība,
mākslas teorija,
mākslas kritika,
estētika

Summary The aim of the article is to analyze the "open" phase of Socialist Realism in Latvian artwriting. This phase largely originated from the Russian literary scholar Dmitrij Markov's mid-1970s statements about the "historically open system of the truthful representation of life". The opposition between "open" and "closed" systems is possibly related to Austrian biologist Karl Ludwig von Bertalanffy's general systems theory. Historian of aesthetics Pēteris Zeile was the most prolific writer who Latvianized this "open" phase, combining topical Soviet viewpoints with Latvian cultural examples. Other authors (art historians Rasma Lāce and Skaidrīte Cielava, painter Pēteris Postažs) also reflected on the diversity of this doctrine along with the preservation of Marxist worldview and foundations of fine arts. Anthropologist Alexei Yurchak's version of Soviet official rituals focuses on performative reproduction rather than literal meanings, thus emphasizing that unpredictable meanings lead to a system's disintegration. Soviet art theory too can be likened to such ritualized acts. Modernized thinking on art, launched by the Thaw, was tamed and integrated into the official discourse in the 1970s; the progressing openness, however, fell into ever sharper contradiction to its obligatory status, finally removed only by the collapse of the political system and its associated ideology in 1991.

Kopsavilkums Raksta mērķis ir analizēt sociālistiskā reālisma doktrīnas "atklāto" fāzi publikācijās par vizuālo mākslu Latvijā. Šo fāzi izšķiroši ietekmēja krievu literatūrzinātnieka Dmitrija Markova formulējumi 20. gadsimta 70. gadu vidū par "vēsturiski atklātu estētisko sistēmu patiesai dzīves atspoguļošanai". "Atklātu" un "slēgtu" sistēmu opozīcijas avoti, iespējams, saistīti ar austriešu biologa Karla Ludviga fon Bertalanfi vispārējo sistēmu teoriju. Estētikas vēsturnieks Pēteris Zeile bija ražīgākais šīs "atklātās" fāzes latviskotājs, sastatot PSRS aktuālos viedokļus ar latviešu kultūras piemēriem. Arī citi autori (mākslas vēsturnieces Rasma Lāce un Skaidrīte Cielava, gleznotājs Pēteris Postažs) apcerēja doktrīnas daudzveidību vienlaikus ar marksistiskā pasaules uzskata un tēlotājas mākslas pamatu saglabāšanu. Antropologa Alekseja Jurčaka versija par padomju oficiālajiem rituāliem piedāvā aizvietot to literārās nozīmes ar performatīvu atkārtojamību, ļaujot rasties jaunām, sistēmu iznīcinošām nozīmēm. Par šādiem ritualizētiem aktiem var uzskatīt arī padomju mākslas teorijas tēzes. Secināms, ka atkušņa aizsāktā mākslas izpratnes modernizācija tika 70. gados pieklusināta, to integrējot oficiālajā diskursā, bet atklātuma progresējošās pretrunas ar doktrīnas obligāto raksturu tika atceltas tikai ar politiskās sistēmas un attiecīgās ideoloģijas sabrukumu 1991. gadā.

A number of previous publications dealing with theoretical mutations of Socialist Realism in Latvia during the Soviet occupation[1] largely coincided with a gradual acceptance of mainstream Soviet artistic phenomena as legitimate research topics in the first decade of the 21st century[2]. This turn complemented the earlier rush since the 1990s to uncover primarily modernist or otherwise dissident trends and artists marginalized by the former regime.[3] The author of this article has been working on the subject of the Socialist Realist doctrine for the upcoming 6th volume of the *Art History of Latvia*[4] that will include a survey of art-theoretical developments. The present essay is based on an inquiry of local publications involved with art theory and criticism during a specific period in the process of these permutations, namely, the time of the "opening" of Socialist Realism. Who were the Latvian authors involved with propagating such ideas? What sources were they drawing upon? These are the two questions considered here. To interpret these statements from today's viewpoint, discourse analysis as provided by the USA-based Russian anthropologist Alexei Yurchak has proved useful to a certain degree. The structure of the article is chronological, first outlining the early phase of Socialist Realism, then the period of Thaw in the USSR and Latvia, and afterwards discussing the main local authors – from the most prolific to the episodic writers – who took up discussions about an "open" Socialist Realism.

---

1 See: Pelše 2003; 2009; etc.

2 One of the groundbreaking events that began to re-evaluate the legacy of the "darkest" Soviet period without avoiding ideologically charged works was the exhibition and the subsequent conference and bilingual collection of articles *Padomjzemes mitoloģija* (Mythology of the Soviet Land, 2008); the project was carried out by the Latvian National Museum of Art.

3 See: Lamberga 2004 (English version: Lamberga 2018); Pestova 2004; Kulakova 2012; Auziņa 2018; etc.

4 The project *Art History of Latvia for the Centenary of Latvia* was launched by the Art Academy of Latvia Institute of Art History in 2013 and supported by the State Culture Capital Foundation. Already published volumes include: *Art History of Latvia IV: Period of Neo-Romanticist Modernism. 1890–1915* (2014); *Art History of Latvia V: Period of Classical Modernism and Traditionalism. 1915–1940* (2016), *Art History of Latvia III: Period of Classicism and Romanticism. 1780–1840* (Book I), and *Period of Realism and Historicism. 1840–1890* (Book II, 2019).

Origins of Socialist Realism

Socialist Realism that was forcibly introduced in Latvia since mid-1940 when the country was occupied had emerged in the USSR during the 1930s. The new aesthetic program that crystalized in artists' and critics' statements roughly at the same time, can be interpreted as a version of the European-wide "return to order" (*rappel à l'ordre*), namely, neo-realisms and neo-classicisms that followed the turmoil of the World War I and related flourishing of avant-garde trends. Alongside the return to order, a parallel "return to nature" was equally important, signifying that art as imitation was again becoming topical. While there are certain parallels between changes in the values and functions of art in Europe and the USSR of the time, Socialist Realism and its obligatory nature is rather specific. According to Stalin's cultural commissar Andrej Zhdanov's keynote address to the Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, Socialist Realism needed to "depict reality in its revolutionary development" and "the mastery of the technique of writing, the critical assimilation of the literary heritage of all epochs, represents a task which you must fulfill without fail, if you wish to become engineers of human souls"[5] (Zhdanov 1992: 411–412). The doctrine was a selective synthesis of seeing art as both imitation and expression, encompassing the 19th century Realist tenets, reflection theory as articulated by the Russian revolutionary Vladimir Lenin, and Romanticism in its revolutionary vein alongside skillful imitation of nature preserved by European art academies that actually strived to imitate not so much real nature as classical examples. Which segments of that heritage (not just in literature but in other artistic fields too) became acceptable and which became refutable remained a shifting and increasingly ambiguous issue over decades to come, with choices of creative paths also determining their practitioners' real-life destinies. There is reason to argue that "on both the structural and institutional level the method disintegrated much earlier than is commonly assumed, and the very moment of the canon's crystallization coincided with its opening to dislocation and decay, well before Socialist Realism was defined as a 'historically open system'" (Lahusen 1997: 6).

The very idea of Socialist Realism as a somewhat "open" concept, even if expressed in a different terminology, can be found in local Latvian press as early as 1941. "Openness" emerges here as a lack of specific details what kind of art could or could not be acceptable in stylistic terms. For example, artist and art critic Arturs Jūrasteters, quoting the Soviet cultural official Vjacheslav Shkvarikov's praises of

---

5 Joseph Stalin took over the phrase about engineers of human souls from the writer Jurij Olesha (1899–1960) who used a similar formulation in his story *Chelovecheskij material* (The Human Material) published in 1929. But the primary source of the phrase that later underwent transformations of meaning has been localized in the French decadent writer Joris-Karl Huysmans's (1848–1907) novel *À rebours* (Against the Grain). See: Fajbyshenko 2018.

artistic "mastery" and "perfect forms" needed to express grand ideas, concluded that various creative credos will coexist under the banner of Socialist Realism. This type of official art was said not to stifle artists' individualities (Jūrasteteris 1941). This, however, turned out to be wishful thinking quite common among Latvian art-writers during the first Soviet year[6]. The darkest Stalinist period, with its fiercest campaigns against formalism, was still ahead.

However, such an imprecise or, in more positive terms, broad and inclusive version of Socialist Realism was likely not specific to the Soviet regime's newly occupied territories like Latvia. For example, Estonian literary scholar Jaan Undusk has claimed that Socialist Realism has actually never been precisely defined in terms of either motifs or stylistic choices. He stated that the "party kitsch" was not invented by party ideologues but by artists themselves, looking for secure work conditions and themes suitable for exhibitions and sales (Undusks 2016: 82–83). Even if the proportion of ideologues' and artists' (who sometimes were the same people) contributions to the doctrine remains unclear and its definitions fuzzy at best, its Stalinist phase can be described as a certain synthesis of earlier traditions, like those of academic art, Romanticism and Realism, utilized for a meticulous portrayal of imagined socialist dream-worlds and their idealized heroes.

The Thaw and its end

The late 1950s, known as the Khrushchev's Thaw, definitely brought partial liberalization and exoneration of modernism into Latvian thinking on art. After Stalin's death, the first recognitions of the artist's individuality and subjectivity as well as the diversity of styles and genres within Socialist Realism began to appear in such all-Union periodicals as *Pravda*, *Novyj Mir*, *Iskusstvo*, etc. (Kruks 2011: 79–80). Officially endorsed by the Soviet Communist Party's ideological secretary Dmitrij Shepilov at the First All-Union Artists' Congress in 1957, terms such as the "variety" of Socialist Realism and its "richness of means, handwritings and styles" (Šepilovs 1957) were used by Latvian art critics like Herberts Dubins (Dubins 1956) and Jānis Pujāts (Pujāts 1956), painters Leo Svemps (Svemps 1960) and Ojārs Ābols (Ābols 1958), and other authors. Of course, the necessity to follow realism was not challenged by anybody. However, realism was already weakly defined, starting to shift emphasis towards such elusive terms like "inner activity" as a criterion of "true" Socialist Realism.

---

6 For more on this topic see: Pelše 2021.

These developments were clearly not of local Latvian origin, reflecting a wider tendency in the Soviet cultural space. For instance, in a book about Pablo Picasso published in Moscow (1960), Russian authors Igor Golomstock and Andrej Sinjavskij "claimed an 'intrinsic realism' for him, based not on the reproduction of the realistic forms, but on the inner substance of the ideal values he was depicting [..]. According to their analysis, the artist did not understand the world sensually, but intellectually" (Dmitrieva 2019: 147–148). Modernist tendencies were allowed to sneak in also by the opening up to international cultural exchanges that was an important aspect of de-Stalinisation of the USSR.[7] In broader art-theoretical terms, the Thaw-time opposition to the aforementioned "reproduction of realistic forms" can be genetically linked to numerous early 20th century Western art developments from Symbolism to Cubism whose propagators tried to find other aims for visual arts after photography had seemingly taken over the centuries-old task of representing reality. Therefore, the theory of art as representation, an important component of the Socialist Realist doctrine, had become "over-extended in a way that unhelpfully conceals what would be better seen as distinct and different (even at times conflicting) aims of art" (Hepburn 1992: 422).

However, the early 1960s came with a new tidal wave of ideological supervision and backtracking both in the centre of the Soviet empire and its peripheries. The aforementioned book on Picasso caused uproar as an attack against Socialist Realism and attempts were made to remove it from circulation, but it nevertheless "managed to reach its readership and immediately began to acquire cult status" (Dmitrieva 2019: 149). Conservative circles in the USSR were obviously scared by the widely resurgent interest in Western art. The so-called Manege Affair with the Communist Party's First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev's scandalous rant, invoking sexual deviance against modernists at the 30 Years of the Moscow Artists' Union exhibition in Moscow Manege exhibition hall (1962), began a campaign denouncing formalism that reverberated through all Soviet republics. Khrushchev's next tirade at the 8 March 1963 meeting of party officials with representatives of literature and art, musing about filthy daubing that could be created by any donkey's tail, was published in Latvian, too (Hruščovs 1963), just like the Communist Party's Secretary Leonid Ilichev's later report, criticizing the formalism, abstractionism, and decadence supported by the Soviet people's ideological enemies (Iļjičovs 1963).

The message was eagerly taken up by some local ideologues and artists too. Stage designer Arturs Lapiņš was among the most active and criticized, for example, "block-like people" with eyeless and noseless faces, lacking the qualities of alive and

7 For more information see: Reid 2012.

inspiring heroes, ideal examples of the new people (Lapiņš 1961: 3). The emergence of such criticisms even before the Manege Affair indicates that the scandal was actually an episode of a much broader tendency. Actively looking for "formalism" in the works of their colleagues were also, for example, painter Vladimirs Kozins (Kozins 1963) and graphic artist Voldemārs Valdmanis (Valdmanis 1963), who denounced the lack of ideas and professionalism leading to an abandoning of realism and emergence of the elements of abstractionism in the early 1960s. Such elements could be linked to the so-called "harsh" or "severe" style in art that has today been already conceptualized as a version of Socialist Modernism: "Cubist corners, Fauvist colors, and Expressionist deformations became integral elements of Socialist Modernism forms" (Kļaviņš 2009: 106). Regarded in the 1960s as a trend of monumentality and decorativeness, it retained ideologically charged themes but allowed to explore color, texture, rhythm, and other elements of picture form.

Realism without shores Another widely debated but more theoretical topic that served as a negative example from which Socialist Realism had to be distinguished was the French Communist author Roger Garaudy's book *Realism without Shores* (1963)[8]. Criticism of it was part of the reaction against what many interpreted as the Thaw-time excesses. The book's main tenets, especially from today's viewpoint, do not look very radical at all. Garaudy largely stated that the art of today should not be assessed according to criteria derived from older art, holding that "being a realist does not mean imitating the images of reality but its activity; it means not to convey casts or exact copies of things, events and people but to participate in the act of the creation of a world that is in the process of becoming, to find its inner rhythm" (Garodi 1966: 197). As has been observed, "for Garaudy, searching for the essence defines realism at its core. Indeed, the French philosopher refrains from defining realism in terms of aesthetics, searching instead for images, aspirations and processes that capture the spirit of an era in art and literature. Unfortunately, Garaudy does not specify what this spirit of the epoch is supposed to be; he only observes that it should correspond to the Marxist understanding of progress and change" (Ronge 2019: 84). This stance seems to largely match the general tendency in the Soviet space to overcome the earlier Stalinist phase of the Socialist Realist doctrine during the Thaw, even if the "process of becoming" strangely resonates with Andrei Zhdanov's statement about depicting "reality in its revolutionary

8 The book was even placed on the blacklist by the Communist Party (more on this see: Reid 2012: 261). This work by Roger Garaudy (1913–2012) has been most discussed in the context of visual arts. His other books (over 70 in total) dealt mainly with Marxism and religions, while his conversion to Islam and denial of Holocaust turned the author into a very controversial figure.

development". However, Garaudy's embracing of paradigmatic modernist phenomena, like Pablo Picasso or Franz Kafka, probably was going too far for many.

As the Russian edition was published only in 1966, it remains an open question how many local commentators had read the book itself or just relied on authoritative remarks from the ideological "center."[9] Opinions were largely critical; for example, according to literary critic Kārlis Krauliņš, Garaudy had gone into "extremes" and made an error by removing any aesthetic "shores" from realism, allowing it to merge with modernism. At the same time, Socialist Realism was said to allow stylization and symbols but one condition had to be observed: "Everything has to serve the revelation of the truth of life" (Krauliņš 1965: 115). How exactly this "truth" could be detected apart from purely subjective[10] judgments remains unclear. Mentions of Garaudy's "revisionism" in a negative sense continued to crop up in various Latvian authors' texts in art theory and criticism during the next decades as well, with the aforementioned "aesthetic" component as a potentially significant aspect distinguishing the "true" Socialist Realism from its distortions.

However, in the following era with Leonid Brezhnev at the helm of the USSR (1964–1982), neither art nor artwriting could be returned to the earlier, largely neo-academic Stalinist phase. Acceptance of a broader spectrum of formal means and at least some pre-Soviet traditions of Latvian art had already taken root, and the task to subsume an ever wider selection of phenomena under the obligatory "umbrella" of realism remained topical. Art critics tried to maneuver between objections against the bygone naturalism and against formal innovations potentially too radical. Interest in the issues of "spiritual depth" and "inner activity" (Dubins 1966), allowing for a formally varied good art, carried on the processes launched by the Thaw, which also deemed "associative imagery" suitable for the expression of Communist ideals.

Last definition of Socialist Realism Theoretically more elaborated ideas about Socialist Realism as an "open" and "dynamic" system emerged in the USSR during the early 1970s, codified in the Soviet literary scholar Dmitrij Markov's publication *Theoretical Problems of Socialist Realism* (1975)[11]. The author proposed

9 Discussions going on in the USSR about Garaudy's book were reported many times in local periodicals: [Anon] 1965; [Anon] 1967; u. c.

10 "Subjective" is used here in the sense of existing only for a subject as opposed to anything having real existence while subject means someone who is conscious of something, that something being the object. (See: Vesey and Foulkes 1990: 209, 277.)

11 See: Markov 1975. Dmitrij Markov (1913–1990) authored several books about Bulgarian literature as well as numerous articles and books about Socialist Realism.

"a double dissociation" from the proletarian revolutionary currents and the bourgeois aesthetics, attempting to "stand aloof from both the 'dogmatic' heritage and foreign contamination", and Markov's famous formulation of the "historically open aesthetic system of the truthful representation of life" became the last official definition of the term in Soviet history (Lahusen 1997: 6). It has also been noticed that the humanist conception of man, namely, "socialist humanism" as clearly distinct from bourgeois trends like existentialism or structuralism can be seen, according to Markov, as a boundary that "determines the limits of the artistic cognition of the world" (Lahusen 1997: 7). "Closedness" would therefore point towards strict normativity and schematic approach, while "openness" would allow for more contemporary trends. This roughly corresponds to the definition by the founder of general systems theory, Austrian biologist Karl Ludwig von Bertalanffy. He stated that closed systems are "isolated from their environment" while "an open system is defined as a system in exchange of matter with its environment, presenting import and export; building up and breaking down of its material components" (Bertalanffy 1968: 39; 141). As Bertalanffy's ideas were translated in Russian in the late 1960s, they could have influenced the emergence of the concept of "open" Socialist Realism.[12]

Although there were objections towards the theory of the "open system," for example, claiming that this stance shows "a fundamental lack of faith in the realist method" (Lahusen 1997: 8), the tendency of openness was officially supported by Leonid Brezhnev's speech at the conference of European Communist parties (1976) where he stated that "socialist states are not 'closed societies.' Our doors are open to everything that is truthful and honest, and we are ready to widen contacts as far as possible, using the favorable conditions provided by reduced tensions" (Brežņevs 1976). After claiming that much more English or French authors' books are published or Western films shown in the USSR than Soviet books or films distributed correspondingly in the West, Brezhnev, however, emphasized that this openness did not include opening up to propagandists of war or any kind of anti-Soviet agenda. Defining what exactly constitutes such agenda remained as elusive, obscure, and open to subjective interpretations as in other cases dealing with Socialist Realism.

Humanist synthesis In Latvian artwriting of the 1970s, most publications similarly tended to embrace constant development, diversity, and change in socialist art, claiming that the principles of Socialist Realism should not be seen as a

12 See: Bertalanfi 1969a; 1969b.

restrictive code of regulations. Especially prolific in dealing with the topic was writer, literary critic, and historian of aesthetics **Pēteris Zeile** (1928–2020) with his book *Socialist Realism* (Zeile 1981) and numerous other publications in various periodicals. As one of the leading promoters of the Soviet ideology, he nevertheless managed to leave that chapter behind and to take up meticulous cultural and historical research of his native region of Latgale (Eastern Latvia) after 1991.[13] This shift in outlook may seem puzzling at first, but it may also indicate the dependence of authors' views on the official doctrine, discarded quickly as soon as it was gone, together with the regime that maintained it.

The diversity, openness, and dynamism of the doctrine were particularly emphasized. For example: "The principles of the Socialist Realist method aim at creating artworks whose artistic value results from a synthesis, is diverse and able to perform multi-functional tasks" (Zeile 1981: 25). Zeile criticized the interpretation of Socialist Realism typical of the 1940s and 1950s as one-sided, mechanical and schematic, calling art "a dynamic system that exists in transformation and development" (Zeile 1981: 27). Trying to distinguish his "system approach" from structuralism, Zeile claimed that the latter was static and formal while the dialectic systemic method treated its elements "in mutual relations, interactions, subordination and dynamics" (Zeile 1981: 28). The fact that he mentions the Soviet philosopher and culturologist Moisej Kagan's works[14] points towards one of the sources of Zeile's thought.

In the chapter most related to the local Latvian context, he was largely positive about the realistic directness, monumentality, romanticism of youth of the "severe style." At the same time, Socialist Realism was said to be not content with the predominance of some particular style or trend. Therefore, the 1970s had brought "differentiation and branching": "Intellectual and analytic, associatively symbolic, metaphorically poetic, romanticist, monumentally decorative, journalistic and other trends and stylistic turns complement each other, intersect, and often get synthesized" (Zeile 1981: 215).

The topic of this article is most directly interpreted in the chapter titled "Socialist Realism – Historically Open, Dynamic System." One of the publications Zeile discusses in detail here is the book *Socialist Realism* by the Soviet literary scholar Sergej Petrov (Petrov 1977). The method of Socialist Realism, according to Petrov, has gone through

13 See: Zeile 2006; 2009; 2010; etc.

14 Moisej Kagan's (1921–2006) research once focused on art history and theory, but since the 1980s has focused on history and theory of culture. He was particularly interested in systems analysis, a loosely defined problem-solving technique related to systems theory. See, for example: Kagan 1974; etc.

three developmental stages, transforming along with the reality itself, the third stage being that of "developed socialism" (Zeile 1981: 226). Each period has enriched the aesthetic, cognitive, and educational functions of art. Petrov, according to Zeile, does not use the term "open system," apparently fearing its expansion to the aforementioned "realism without shores" and, subsequently, modernism. However, Zeile insists that these are somehow essentially different trends and, therefore, the "openness" can be accepted – with certain caveats. Proceeding to Dmitrij Markov's views in an attempt to define the "shores" of Socialist Realism and to avoid the merge of its openness with the still despicable modernism, Zeile quotes Markov who clearly referenced Garaudy's *Realism without Shores*: "Therefore, not openness to all the winds, not ideological and aesthetic diffuseness without shores but precisely the exact outlines of the socialist worldview and socialist humanism secure the new method's inexhaustible resources" (Zeile 1981: 229). Once again, is there any further explanation how exactly these "exact outlines of the socialist worldview and socialist humanism" had to be detected? In another chapter dedicated to "socialist humanism", Zeile states that "human being is the highest value in the society" (Zeile 1981: 111); "the essence of Socialist humanism is expressed in the growing ability of socialism to secure individual's active participation in all main fields of human activity" (Zeile 1981: 117); "a truly humanist artwork cannot be imagined without that inner excitement that can only be created by real artistic value and truthfulness" (Zeile 1981: 123). Contemporary readers may find it hard to see these passages as anything but obscure musings. The best clue seems to emerge from the opposition between the "socialist humanism" and existentialism, the former extolling the necessity of "intellectually, spiritually intense contacts among people" while the latter propagating alienation and isolation (Zeile 1981: 123).

In general, the author extolled Socialist Realism as an unprecedented project of synthesis that has absorbed "sublime ideas, emotions and thoughts" from stylistically diverse historical heritage, overcoming "one-sidedness and isolation in terms of stylistics and forms of artistic generalization" (Zeile 1981: 129). Specifically in visual arts, Zeile emphasizes "metaphysical one-sidedness" in the way various trends, such as Impressionism, Symbolism, Expressionism, Fauvism and Cubism, supplanted each other: "[O]ften rather relative artistic discoveries were followed by concrete artistic losses [..] [P]revious artistic achievements were dismissed in the name of new gains." Socialist Realism, on the contrary, was said not to refute anything, including Classicism, Romanticism, Critical Realism, Impressionism, or Expressionism, but only "to approach them with a selective measure, based on the principle of intentional historicity" (Zeile 1981: 239) and to utilize all "rational" elements accumulated by art in the forms of its particular trends. Zeile's cumulative attitude aimed at some ideal

of humanist stylistic diversity emerging from his statements can be still seen as a distant derivate of Andrej Zhdanov's formulation back in 1934. At the same time, the aforementioned "selective measure" retains its indeterminate character that can be weaponized against any artistic manifestations exceeding the limit of "rationality" in someone's view.

Zeile deserves to be seen as the main figure who Latvianized the late phase of the doctrine of Socialist Realism, namely, translated and retold its main tenets with added examples from Latvian literature, music, theatre and visual arts as well. He deftly compiled ideas of various Soviet authors, not just those voiced by the aforementioned Dmitrij Markov but those by many others too[15]. For example, he agreed with German Nedoshivin's statement about the complexity of the method of Socialist Realism, not confined to either formal, stylistic terms or a particular work of a painter or sculptor, as each work was said to acquire its historical artistic sense only in the context of the artist's entire oeuvre (Zeile 1981: 161). But Markov's conception can be seen as most significant in shaping Zeile's views, elucidated in numerous quotes, for example, that style is "unity, a certain conception. A lack of such conception essentially means the lack of a style. Each element of a style is linked to other elements – here relationships among elements, their functional interaction are important" (Zeile 1981: 140). Zeile can be seen as an original contributor to the doctrine as far as he has applied it to Latvian phenomena, stating that conclusions of numerous Soviet authors have been useful as "reference points" in attempts to "link general regularities with the developmental issues of Latvian progressive and socialist culture" (Zeile 1981: 34).

Diversity with moderate experiments While Zeile was probably the most productive author who speculated about the openness of Socialist Realism, others deserve mention as well. One of the most prominent art critics and art historians of Soviet Latvia was **Rasma Lāce** (1923–2008) who also used rather similar language in her exhibition reviews and more theoretical essays. In the early 1960s, she criticized the "severe style" modernization as often threatening "the freshness in the perception of life," inhibiting the psychological expression of images, introducing "dismissal of individuality" and "ideological passivity" (Lāce 1962: 29; 40; 42). Even as the increasing openness and diversity of Socialist Realism became more and more accepted, it still should not be confused with modernism and their similarities were said to be only superficial: "[E]lements reduced to absurdity are taken over

15 See, for example: Petrov 1970; Sidorov, Jakimenko 1977; etc.

from modernism but they are purified of the modernism's reactionary structure and end-in-itself status, now revealed as means of expression rooted in the earlier realist system of fine arts" (Lāce 1972). Nature and the ever-changing life were declared to liberate the artist from slavish subservience to any canon of a narrow manner, style, or trend. Lāce continued in another article that "style is not only unity but also diversity. Several stylistic systems (which are not antagonistic) can develop on the same ideological basis. The art of Socialist Realism is an example of such a variety of styles or stylistic diversity" (Lāce 1979). The 1970s, on the one hand, were characterized by the "polyphonic synthesis-type painting," also deemed "associative style" that had abandoned the boundaries between genres and become more abstracted, speaking about great ideological values. On the other hand, there was the "analytical"[16] trend that focused on in-depth studies of some particular phenomena. The high quality of style, according to Lāce, is secured by "significant social and ideological satiation" threatened by the "passivity of thought" and "reluctance to give up one's favorite manner and coloring to benefit the work's content" (Lāce 1979).

Lāce continued to defend the creative method of Socialist Realism as late as in the 1980s, describing it as an open and constantly developing system, able "to actively shape the evolution of life and reveal harsh truths in the name of improved ethical ideals" (Lāce 1988: 19). Young artists were said to be enthused by protest, experiments, and modernist trends which could be useful to a degree but, according to Lāce, one should not "destroy the foundations" (Lāce 1988: 19). The boundary separating fine arts from the world of objects, installations, actions, and performances that surged in Latvia in the course of the 1980s was apparently the last bastion beyond which no more appropriate "heritage of all epochs" could be found for the critical assimilation propagated by Andrej Zhdanov back in 1934.

Another acclaimed art historian of the time, **Skaidrīte Cielava** (1920–2005), used to speculate about the unhealthy prevalence of "associative," "metaphoric" expression in the fine arts, bordering on the specificity of decorative arts. Agreeing that Socialist Realism is "a system of artistic forms and it is constantly enriched," she too mentioned Roger Garaudy's *Realism without Shores*, objecting to the author's claim that "today art does not develop in the direct forms of reality but only with the help of metaphor" (Cielava 1974). Cielava asserted that the practices of socialist art and Soviet art history have proven the opposite, namely, that the object-centered or "analytical" expression and metaphorical, associative, or symbolic depiction were equally valid and necessary to keep the diversity of art from sliding into some

16 Local, time-specific term for scrupulous mimetic realism, especially echoes of Hyperrealist tendencies.

narrow, one-sided, repetitive version of contemporariness. In an essay about transformations of genres in Soviet Latvian painting, Cielava interpreted them as inevitable and acceptable to a degree, at the same time attempting to delineate some "shores" of Socialist Realism as well. First of all, art should not become too "decorative" or otherwise experimental. Although the artist has to be given the right of experiment, "it is important to preserve the harmonious type of finished easel painting, expressing the wholeness of the human worldview, his union with nature and society, his moral integrity, as the human being is and remains the shaper and guardian of the worldview" (Cielava 1978: 116). Wondering what was actually meant by this "harmonious type" of painting, one can turn to more recent studies – for example, the notion of "harmonious formalism" in interwar Latvian art, defined by art historian Eduards Kļaviņš as "an element which was not artificially searched for but naturally accepted on some, perhaps, deeper psychological grounds" (Kļaviņš 2000: 121). Possibly Cielava's prescriptive model of what art should look like was to a great extent derived from existing art – namely, from what it had become in the 1970s, holding on to moderate formal values that somewhat continued the avoidance of the most extreme trends in the 1920s and 1930s.

Artists commonly did not engage much in such theoretical speculations, but some exceptions can be found. One example was the painter **Pēteris Postažs**, an adherent of largely realistic motifs laced with certain modernist influences who presented a paper at the Second Soviet Latvian Culture Seminar in Turku, Finland (1976). It was published in the newspaper *Dzimtenes Balss*, formally issued by the Committee "For Return to One's Homeland" but actually supervised by the KGB and addressed to Latvians in exile. According to the memoirs of Imants Lešinskis, editor of *Dzimtenes Balss* and a double agent for the Latvian KGB and the CIA who defected to the USA in 1978, Postažs was among the most active members of the Art Section at the Latvian Committee for Compatriots Abroad (Lešinskis 2017: 174, 187, 255). Although Lešinskis's statements are now difficult or even impossible to verify, this task of presenting theoretical problems of Latvian art in Finland seems to corroborate this description. Postažs apparently borrowed, paraphrased and quoted ideas from the aforementioned Pēteris Zeile's publications, stating that narrow requirements in terms of either content or form would stifle Socialist Realism and hamper new artistic discoveries: "Creative principles of Socialist Realism are not a code of regulations but the most effective means of mastering and revealing the dynamics of the objective historical reality as well as the beauty and contradictions of life [..]. The criterion of the artwork's value is not the formal adequacy to this or that norm, but the truth of life and art embodied in it" (Postažs 1977). This criterion was described as being "socialistically true," mentioning the "depth and originality of the ideological and aesthetic

generalizations" (Postažs 1977) and adding that a great artist never simply uses once-acquired principles but always complements them with something new. However, deformations in modernism and realism were said not to be the same. To be acceptable, deformation could be even "daring" and "striking," but it needed to be internally connected with the Marxist worldview (Postažs 1977). However, the contemporary reader is left puzzled how exactly to substantiate the presence or absence of this socialist truth or Marxist worldview. Perhaps one should simply rely on feeling or intuition, which does not comply very well with the propagated scientific, objective nature of the doctrine in general.

These and similar questions pile up in attempts to interpret the legacy of these bygone ideological constructs, in terms of how they once functioned and what was their role in the development of art and its theory under the Soviet rule. Russian scholar Ljudmila Budagova, in her article dedicated to the 100th birthday of Dmitrij Markov, emphasized that his "open" conception did not save Socialist Realism but only literature itself or, more broadly, the creative arts, allowing them to develop ever more freely, maybe even against the will of those who promoted this conception (Budagova 2013). There could be indeed this element of "helping" the arts to some degree; at the same time, one can notice that by the 1970s and even the 1980s the idea of "open" Socialist Realism was largely upheld by authors with a high, secure status in the Soviet system and in no way willing to doubt or challenge it too far. Shortly, the "open" conception thus can be largely seen as the adaptation of a theory to a transformed practice.

Even trickier is the question of whether authors themselves could have believed it was practically possible to distinguish between "true" Socialist Realism and seemingly similar but ideologically alien works. Some clues can be glimpsed from Alexei Yurchak's well-known study *Everything was Forever until it Was no More*, in which he interprets the late Soviet period from the viewpoint of discourse analysis. According to him, the literal meaning of what was said in Soviet-period votes, speeches, reports, slogans, meetings, parades, elections, etc. did not matter much: "It became increasingly more important to participate in the reproduction of the form of these ritualized acts of authoritative discourse than to engage with their constative meanings." At the same time, "the performative reproduction of the form of rituals and speech acts actually *enabled* the emergence of diverse, multiple, and unpredictable meanings" (Yurchak 2005) that ultimately led to the system's disintegration. What was declared by Soviet art theory could also be just a ritualized act to be interpreted in ways that had little in common with its literal meanings.

This progressing vagueness of the "shores" of Socialist Realism fell into ever sharper contradiction to its obligatory status, finally removed only by the *perestroika*

years, the national awakening and, finally, the collapse of the political system and its associated ideology, concluding with the restoration of Latvia's independence in 1991.

Conclusions

Latvian authors who wrote about the late phase of Socialist Realism did not develop any completely original concepts or theories, largely applying statements from Soviet Russian art historians', critics' and theoreticians' works to the Latvian cultural scene. Pēteris Zeile, heavily influenced by the Russian scholar Dmitrij Markov, was the leading figure among Latvian authors in theorizing about the "open" Socialist Realism. The idea of the doctrine's "openness," in opposition to "closedness," could have been influenced by the general systems theory as formulated by Karl Ludvig von Bertalanffy.

In attempts to define the "shores" of Socialist Realism within French author Roger Garaudy's conception, an important criterion, apart from those most elusive terms of either "socialist truth" or "Marxist worldview," was a certain restraint and moderation regarding artistic experiments, especially for writers examining the visual arts. Preservation of some harmonious, aesthetic qualities of traditional fine arts, whatever the authors' specific conceptions of them might be, emerge as a significant agenda in the Latvian context.

It is also possible to conclude that the 1970s were a period during which the modernization of thinking on art, launched by the Thaw, was tamed and suppressed to a certain extent in Latvia. At the same time, these inevitable transformations that deviated from the Stalinist epoch were also institutionalized as an official discourse in the form of "open" Socialist Realism. Literal meanings of its explanations, however, could be less significant than their function as purely ritualized acts.

Bibliography

[Anon] (1965). Diskusija ar Rožē Garodī. *Karogs*, Nr. 8, 152.–153. lpp.

[Anon] (1967). Svarīgi sociālistiskā reālisma teorijas jautājumi. *Karogs*, Nr. 1, 164.–166. lpp.

Ābols, Ojārs (1958). Divas paaudzes. *Literatūra un Māksla*, 01.03.

Auziņa, Daina (2018). *Vladimirs Glušenkovs*. Rīga: Neputns.

Bertalanffy, Karl Ludwig von (1968). *General System Theory: Foundations, Development, Applications*. New York: George Braziller.

Bertalanfi, Ljudvig fon (1969a). Obshhaja teorija sistem – obzor problem i rezul'tatov. *Sistemnye issledovanija. Ezhegodnik.* Moskva: Nauka.

Bertalanfi, Ljudvig fon (1969b). Obshhaja teorija sistem – Kriticheskij obzor. *Issledovanija po obshhej teorii sistem.* Moskva: Progress.

[Brežņevs, Leonīds] (1976). PSKP delegācijas vadītāja biedra L. Brežņeva runa. *Cīņa*, 30.06.

Budagova, Ljudmila (2013). Ipostasi i varianty samogo progressivnogo metoda epohi. K stoletiy so dnya rozhdeniya Dmitriya Fedorovicha Markova. *CyberLeninka*. Available: https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/ipostasi-i-varianty-samogo-progressivnogo-metoda-epohi-k-stoletiyu-so-dnya-rozhdeniya-dmitriya-fedorovicha-markova [Accessed 17.01.2022.]

Cielava, Skaidrīte (1974). Jaunu spirāles loku liecot. *Literatūra un Māksla*, 07.11.

Cielava, Skaidrīte (1978). Žanru dinamika latviešu padomju gleznie cībā. Skurbe, Astrīda (sast.). *Vienotā daudzveidība*. Rīga: Zinātne, 106.–123. lpp.

Dmitrieva, Marina (2019). The Riddle of Modernism in the Art Historical Discourse of the Thaw. Kodres, Krista; Jõekalda, Kristina; Marek, Michaela (eds.). *A Socialist Realist History? Writing Art History in the Post-War Decades*. Wien; Köln; Weimar: Böhlau, pp. 143–169.

Dubins, Herberts (1956). Par polemiku atsauksmju grāmatā. *Literatūra un Māksla*, 27.10.

Dubins, Herberts (1966). Iekšējā aktivitāte. *Literatūra un Māksla*, 10.12.

Fajbyshenko, Viktorija (2018). Ot inzhenera dushi k inzheneram dush: istorija odnogo proizvodstva. *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, No. 152. Available: https://www.nlobooks.ru/magazines/novoe_literaturnoe_obozrenie/152/article/20026/ [Accessed 26.11.2022.]

Garaudy, Roger (1963). *D'un réalisme sans rivages: Picasso, Saint-John Perse, Kafka.* Paris: Plon.

Garodi, Rozhe (1966). *O realizme bez beregov. Pikasso, Sen-Dzhon Pers, Kafka.* Moskva: Progress.

Hepburn, Ronald W. (1992). Theories of Art. Cooper David (ed.). *A Companion to Aesthetics.* Oxford; Malden: Blackwell Publishers, pp. 421–429.

Hruščovs, Ņikita (1963). Augsts idejiskums un mākslinieciskā meistarība – padomju literatūras un mākslas lielais spēks. *Literatūra un Māksla*, 16.03.

Iļjičovs, Leonīds (1963). Partijas ideoloģiskā darba kārtējie uzdevumi. *Cīņa*, 19.06.

Jūrasteteris [Jūrasteters], Arturs (1941). I Latvijas PSR tēlotājas mākslas izstāde. *Brīvais Zemnieks*, 05.02.

Kagan, Moisej (1974). *Chelovecheskaja dejatel'nost'(opyt sistemnogo analiza).* Moskva: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoj literatury.

Kļaviņš, Eduards (2000). Harmonious Formalism as an Unconceived Element of National Identity: Latvian Visual Arts in the 1920s and 1930s. Modernity and Identity: Art in 1918–1940. Ed. by Jolita Mulevičiūtė. Vilnius: Vilnius Academy of Fine Arts Press.

Kļaviņš, Eduards (2009). Socreālisma mutācijas: socmodernisms un socpostmodernisms Latvijā = Mutations of Socialist Realism in Latvia: Socialist Modernism and Socialist Post-Modernism. Ansone, Elita (sast.). *Padomjzemes mitoloģija = Mythology of the Soviet Land.* Rīga: Latvijas Nacionālais mākslas muzejs, 102.–113. lpp.

Kozins, Vladimirs (1963). Profesionālo zināšanu un idejiskā brieduma vienotība. *Literatūra un Māksla*, 30.03.

Krauliņš, Kārlis (1965). Jaunas idejas estētikā. *Karogs*, Nr. 4, 110.–115. lpp.

Kruks, Sergejs (2011) *Ārtelpas skulptūras semiotika, ekonomika un politika: Pieminekļu celtniecība un demontāža Latvijā 1945–2010*. Rīga: Neputns.

Kulakova, Ieva (2012). *Movement. Visvaldis Ziediņš*. Riga: Gallery 21.

Lāce, Rasma (1962). Dažas latviešu padomju gleznie cības attīstības problēmas. Bēms, Romis (sast.). Latviešu tēlotāja māksla. Rīga: Latvijas Valsts izdevniecība, 27.–47. lpp.

Lāce, Rasma (1972). Reālisma bagātība. *Dzimtenes Balss*, 20.04.

Lāce, Rasma (1979). Ne tikai daudzveidība... *Literatūra un Māksla*, 17.08.

Lāce, Rasma (1988). No desmitā līdz vienpadsmitajam. Cielava, Skaidrīte (sast.). *Latviešu tēlotāja māksla.* Rīga: Liesma, 7.–21. lpp.

Lahusen, Thomas (1997). Socialist Realism in Search of Its Shores: Some Historical Remarks on the "Historically Open Aesthetic System of the Truthful Representation of Life". Lahusen, Thomas; Dobrenko, Evgenij. *Socialist Realism without Shores.* Durham and London: Duke University Press, pp. 5–26.

Lamberga, Dace (2004). *Klasiskais modernisms: Latvijas gleznie cība 20. gadsimta sākumā.* Rīga: Neputns.

Lamberga, Dace (2018). *Classical Modernism: Early 20th Century Latvian Painting.* Rīga: Neputns.

Lapiņš, Arturs (1961). Mākslas ceļš uz cildeno nākotni. *Māksla*, Nr. 3, 3. lpp.

Lešinskis, Imants (2017). *Starp divām pasaulēm. Kalpības gadi un citi raksti.* [Rīga]: Domas spēks.

Markov, Dmitrij (1975). *Problemy teorii sotsialisticheskogo realizma.* Moskva: Nauka.

Nedoshivin, German (1972). *Teoreticheskie problemy sovremennogo izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva.* Moskva: Sovetskij hudozhnik.

Pelše, Stella (2003). Socialist "Literature and Art" – Art Criticism under Soviet Rule. Köll, Anu Mai (ed.). *The Baltic Countries under Occupation – Soviet and Nazi Rule 1939–1991.* Stockholm: Stockholm University, pp. 251–260.

Pelše, Stella (2009). Mākslas kritika padomju Latvijā: dvēseļu inženierijas metamorfozes = Art Criticism in Soviet Latvia: Metamorphoses in the Engineering of Souls. Ansone, Elita (sast.) *Padomjzemes mitoloģija = Mythology of the Soviet Land.* Rīga: Latvijas Nacionālais mākslas muzejs, 114.–131. lpp.

Pelše, Stella (2021). Socreālisma klasiskā modeļa adaptācijas Latvijā pirmajā padomju varas gadā (1940–1941). *Mākslas Vēsture un Teorija*, Nr. 25, 55.–69. lpp.

Pestova, Ludmila (2004). *Ādolfs Zārdiņš.* Rīga: Neputns.

Petrov, Sergej (1970). *Vozniknovenie i formirovanie sotsialisticheskogo realizma.* Moskva: Hudozhestvennaja literatura.

Petrov, Sergej (1977). *Sotsialisticheskij realizm.* Moskva: Prosveshhenie.

Postažs, Pēteris (1977). Daži metodes un mākslas specifikas jautājumi. *Dzimtenes Balss*, 10.02.

Pujāts, Jānis (1956). Novatorisms mākslā. *Literatūra un Māksla*, 02.06.

Reid, Susan E. (2012). (Socialist) Realism Unbound: The Effects of International Encounters on Soviet Art Practice and Discourse in the Khrushchev Thaw. Bown, Matthew; Lafranconi, Matteo (eds.). *Socialist Realisms: Soviet Painting 1920–1970.* Milano: Skira, pp. 261–275.

Ronge, Gerard (2019). Realism Lives On: On Roger Garaudy's *D'un Réalisme Sans Rivages. Forum of Poetics,* No. 15–16, pp. 76–89.

Sidorov, Evgenij; Jakimenko, Lev (eds.) (1977). *Sotsialisticheskij realizm segodnja.* Moskva: Hudozhestvennaja literatura.

Svemps, Leo (1960). Latviešu tēlotājas mākslas sasniegumi un tās turpmākie uzdevumi. Kreituse, Ilga (sast.). *Latviešu tēlotāja māksla. 1958. gada materiāli.* Rīga: Latvijas Valsts izdevniecība, 7.–30. lpp.

Šepilovs, Dmitrijs (1957). Par Padomju mākslinieciskās daiļrades tālāku uzplaukumu. *Literatūra un Māksla*, 09.03.

Undusks, Jāns [Undusk, Jaan] (2016). *Boļševisms un kultūra.* Transl. by Maima Grīnberga. Rīga: Neputns.

Valdmanis, Voldemārs (1963). Nemitīgi pilnveidoties. *Literatūra un Māksla*, 23.03.

Vesey, Godfrey; Foulkes, Paul (1990). *Collins Dictionary of Philosophy.* London & Glasgow: Collins.

Zeile, Pēteris (1981). *Sociālistiskais reālisms*. Rīga: Liesma.

Zeile, Pēteris (2006). *Latgales kultūras vēsture: no akmens laikmeta līdz mūsdienām.* Rēzekne: Latgales kultūras centra izdevniecība.

Zeile, Pēteris (2009). *Latgales glezniecība: no Vilhelma Purvīša Rēzeknē līdz Latgales gleznie cībai Mākslas namā.* Rēzekne: Latgales kultūras centra izdevniecība.

Zeile, Pēteris (2010). *Latgale un tās ļaudis.* Rēzekne: Latgales kultūras centra izdevniecība.

Zhdanov, Andrej (1992). Speech to the Congress of Soviet Writers. Harrison, Charles; Wood, Paul (eds.). *Art in Theory 1900–1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas.* Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, pp. 409–412.

Yurchak, Alexei (2005). *Everything was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation.* Kindle ed. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Sandra Cīrule
Dr. philol., information and library science specialist
Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Latvia
E-mail: sandra.cirule@edu.lu.lv
DOI: 10.35539/LTNC.2023.0051.11

Literature, Libraries, Society: Memories of the 1970s

Literatūra, bibliotēkas, sabiedrība: atmiņas par 20. gadsimta 70. gadiem

Keywords:
Soviet ideology,
Latvian SSR,
library statistics,
library collections,
reading preferences,
readers' services

Atslēgvārdi:
padomju ideoloģija,
Latvijas PSR,
bibliotēku statistika,
bibliotēku krājumi,
lasīšanas intereses,
darbs ar lasītājiem

Summary In the 1970s the link "book–library–reader" was deliberately strengthened in the Soviet Union, because of the opinion that the ideal Soviet person must have a broad view and diverse interests. The library was an active agent in these processes. Both methodological materials and library statistics show active, targeted work with literature and readers.

The collections of public libraries at that time were diverse in terms of content. The collections contained many translations of classical and popular literature from Russian and other languages, original Latvian literature, professional and sectoral literature, books of popular series, periodicals.

Social political literature competed for readers' attention with fiction, as well as literature on arts and sports, natural sciences, history and geography. The research of reading practises and interviews with former librarians confirm that readers were interested in topics such as love, ancient times, history and world travel.

Formally, libraries were one of the institutions supporting Soviet ideology, but interviews with former librarians show that the atmosphere in each particular library depended on the local government and the librarian's own personality.

Kopsavilkums 20. gadsimta 70. gados Padomju Savienībā tika apzināti nostiprināta saikne "grāmata–bibliotēka–lasītājs", uzskatot, ka ideālajam padomju cilvēkam jābūt ar plašu skatījumu un daudzveidīgām interesēm. Bibliotēka bija aktīva aģente šajos procesos. Gan metodiskie materiāli, gan bibliotēku statistika liecina par aktīvu, mērķtiecīgu darbu ar literatūru un lasītājiem.

Publisko bibliotēku krājumi tolaik bija saturiski daudzveidīgi. Krājumos bija daudz klasiskās un populārās literatūras tulkojumu no krievu un citām valodām, latviešu oriģinālliteratūra, profesionālā un nozaru literatūra, populāru sēriju grāmatas, preses izdevumi.

Sabiedriski politiskā literatūra par lasītāju uzmanību sacentās ar daiļliteratūru, mākslas, sporta, dabaszinātņu, vēstures un ģeogrāfijas literatūru. Lasīšanas pētījumu rezultāti un intervijas ar bijušajiem bibliotekāriem apliecina, ka lasītājus interesēja tādas tēmas kā mīlestība, senie laiki, vēsture un pasaules ceļojumi.

Formāli bibliotēkas bija viena no padomju ideoloģiju atbalstošajām institūcijām, taču intervijas ar bijušajiem bibliotekāriem liecina, ka atmosfēra katrā konkrētajā bibliotēkā bija atkarīga no pašvaldības un paša bibliotekāra personības.

Introduction

The library as an official institution, as well as the work carried out in it, are subject to the requirements of the period, and influenced by governments and ideologies. This study discusses the public libraries of the Latvian SSR – or, as they were then called, mass libraries – their work with readers, whether and how the activity of libraries and librarians was influenced by the ideological atmosphere of that time, and whether this influence was reflected in readers' literary interests or their demand for literature. The author of the study chose the 1970s as the conditional middle point and peak time of the Brezhnev Era.

At all times there has been an ongoing link "book–library–reader," and the 1970s are no exception. On the contrary, this link was then deliberately strengthened, because the ideal Soviet person had to have a broad view, diverse interests, and a desire to learn, and the library was considered to be an active agent in these processes. Almost any book officially issued in the Latvian SSR at that time went to a library that was one of the connections between society and literature, and it should be noted that in the early 1970s, 24.6% of the population regularly visited public libraries (Grāmata 1978: 41).

Aim, methodology and sources of the study

The aim of the study was to find out what the content of library collections and the collection-use statistics were, what kind of literature was popular among readers at that time, and how former librarians now intepret the activities of public libraries of that time. Data obtained in this study particularly illustrate the accents of the practical activity of public libraries in the 1970s.

Two methods were chosen for obtaining the data used in the study: document analysis and semi-structured interviews, as it allows to look at the research question from the perspective of both quantitative and qualitative data.

This study uses compilations of official library statistics, methodological materials of public library work, articles devoted to library work, and results of reading studies carried out at the time. Eight librarians and library managers who worked in public libraries in the 1970s in different places around Latvia were interviewed.

Among the respondents were four employees of district central libraries, one of whom is a former central library manager; two were heads of the acquisition department, and one was a librarian (a specialist of local studies). Two respondents represent small-town libraries, while two were heads of rural libraries.

Four respondents were still working at their workplaces at the time of the interview, reaching 46 to 51 years of work experience. One respondent had retired shortly before the interview. Therefore, their opinion is based not only on memories, but also on comparable work experience gained in different time periods and contexts.

The public library and ideology

People have always used texts that provide information about things that are important to them, so the content of reading shows the interests of a particular society or an era. As the functioning of libraries has been documented, this is one of the ways to study public sentiment and informative needs over a certain period of time.

In the post-Soviet library science, articles and studies often show that libraries during the Soviet period were one of the most important active agents in the propaganda and indoctrination of Soviet ideologies: for example, "libraries were given absurd and unethical tasks, transforming them into essential components of the Soviet propaganda system" (Kreicbergs 2010: 163), and "[..] in spite of the small funding, high-quality 'librarian techniques' [..]" expanded and convincing literature propaganda [in libraries – SC] had to encourage the acceptance of Soviet ideology in the minds of the population [..]" (Dreimane 2004: 21).

On the other hand, interviews with former library staff show that there were two levels of activity, the official level and the informal, daily level of work. The first of these levels ensured that job planning, reporting, and testing activities were appropriate, while the other depended on the personality and understanding of the librarian and was aimed at providing the reader with the best and most interesting literature from what was available, which was also confirmed by the interviews, for example:

> "I didn't feel it [ideology – SC], but maybe it was somewhere in another library [..]. We needed those files and communist education ingredients, had plans, but the paper endures everything, why not write it? Sit and write. We suggested what he [the reader – SC] wanted. We imposed nothing on anyone. That was their choice" (Respondent MC).
>
> "[E]verything depended on what the State Library, the Ministry of Culture, the party committee and the district executive committee [..] required, but readers probably weren't affected by that, [..] they took what they were interested in" (Respondent AL).

The same idea is expressed by other former employees who have been interviewed:

> "[M]aybe it was different in the city [..] but it [ideology – SC] was not such a thing in the countryside. When we suggested something to the reader, we didn't think

about that ideology. It must have been a little here in the day, but imposed [..] no" (Respondent RD).

"They tried to make it [library – SC] into such [ideology instrument – SC], but in fact it was not" (Respondent MK).

The term "propaganda" is often used in the methodological materials and reports of Soviet time libraries, which, in a historical context, leads to negative associations about the intrusive presence of an ideology. Looking at the collection of methodological materials and articles of that time, it appears that this concept in the library sector (and not only there) is used freely in a narrower sense without a particular ideological hue, labelling what is today known as the promotion of resources of literature and library or even advertising, such as "Literature propaganda is closely associated with the use of information sources, a variety of informative resources. Radio, TV, newspapers and magazines have gained more popularity in this area than libraries" (Eglīte 1974: 49), or "Library employees have paid a great deal of attention to improving reader service and literature propaganda" (Latvijas 1982: 14).

Statistical review of the work of public libraries in the 1970s

What literature came to the public in libraries and what was the intensity of its use? What can the total statistics of Latvian SSR libraries tell us about the topics of the literature offered and about the interests of readers? We cannot be entirely convinced of the truth of statistics, but the trends are visible.

Figures summarized in the tables (see Tables 1, 2) show the activity of readers, the average annual number of document loan and the average number of books per reader in both district central libraries (cities) and rural libraries, comparing the statistics of the beginning, middle and end of the 1970s.

Table 1, 2. Basic mass (public) library indicators (Latvijas 1972–1981)

		1971	1975	1980
Average library readership (thousands)	District central libraries	1868	1982	2431
	Rural libraries	255	256	279
Average number of visits per year for a reader	District central libraries	8,8	8,7	7,7
	Rural libraries	6,5	6,8	7,3

		1971	1975	1980
Average loan per library (thousands)	District central libraries	60804	68928	82146
	Rural libraries	4768	5213	6169
Average readability (how many books loan per year per reader)	District central libraries	32,5	34,8	33,8
	Rural libraries	18,6	20,4	22,1
Books per reader	District central libraries	21,2	20,7	20,9
	Rural libraries	25,5	27,5	30,6

Interestingly, in district libraries in the 1970s, the number of readers and loan are rising while the average number of reader visits and the number of books per reader is falling. On the other hand, in rural (village) libraries at the same time, all indicators show a steady rise.

Next statistical compilation (see Table 3) shows the composition of public or mass library collections of the time by sector, showing the five genres most represented in percentage terms. The bulk of the collections – about half – consisted of fiction. Social political literature ranks second or third, but does not exceed 21% and peaks in 1980. They represent on average only 15% of the collections during the period of research. Arts, sports, medicine, geography, and natural sciences literature also played an important part in the collections. In the late 1970s, children's literature appeared separately on this list.

Table 3. Breakdown of collections by genre (Latvijas 1972–1981)

	1971	1975	1980
Library collections by genre (%)	1. Fiction 56%	1. Fiction 56,3%	1. Fiction 48%
	2. Social political literature 15,4%	2. Other literature 15, 5%	2. Social political literature 20,9%
	3. Other literature 9,5%	3. Social political literature 12,3%	3. Children's literature 7,6%
	4. Art, sports 5%	4. Art, sports 5,7%	4. Science, medicine, geography 6,8%
	5. Natural sciences 5,4%	5. Natural sciences 5,1%	5. Art, sports 6,6%

Next (see Table 4) statistics show which genres of literature were most loaned to readers. Social political literature takes second and third places, mostly in the 1970s, not exceeding 12% of the total, but here we need to take into account some nuances. Quite a large part of the books of readers' favorite series and topics were classified so that in library statistics they belong to social political literature – history, social events, biographies of distinguished people, philosophy, history of religion and national traditions, as well as travel and similar topics. Consequently, the borrowing of this literature also raised the percentage of the borrowing of social political literature in statistics. Children's literature, arts, sports, natural sciences, and technical literature were also requested by readers.

Table 4. Loan of literature by genre (Latvijas 1972–1981)

	1971	1975	1980
Loan of literature by genre (%)	1. Fiction 54,2%	1. Fiction 53,5%	1. Fiction 45,3%
	2. Other literature 15,4%	2. Other literature 15,5%	2. Social political literature 21,1%
	3. Social political literature 11,9%	3. Social political literature 12,3%	3. Children's literature 7,9%
	4. Art, sports 5,8%	4. Art, sports 5,7%	4. Natural sciences, medicine, geography 7,6%
	5. Technology 5,4%	5. Technology 5,6%	5. Art, sports 6,6%

The following table (see Table 5) shows the intensity of usage of the literature from the collections within individual subjects, expressed by a specific factor. The higher the ratio, the more intense the "movement" of publications in these genres. It is interesting that here the genres are sorted in a different order – those that have had the largest part of collection and the largest loan are at the bottom of the list. Fiction is only in the fourth or fifth place, but social political literature has even fallen out of the top five in the mid-1970s. The most used are the collections of literature on technology, arts, sports, and other industries. These figures could indicate not only dissonance in statistics, but also too large and inactive collections in fiction and social political sciences, as well as the practical interests of society. But the ratio for any of the genres listed in the table appears to be above "1," which is considered to be a good enough indicator of collection movement.

Table 5. Circulation of collections of public libraries (Latvijas 1972–1981)

	1971	1975	1980
Average circulation of collections by genre (coef.)	1. Other literature 2,1 2. Technology 1,5 3. Art, sports 1,4 4. Fiction and natural sciences 1,2 5. Social political literature 1,0	1. Other literature 2,1 2. Engineering 1,8 3. Art, sports 1,5 4. Natural sciences 1,4 5. Fiction 1,3 * * 6. Social political literature 1,1	1. Technical literature 1,9 2. Art, sports 1,6 3. Nature sciences, medicine, geography 1,5 4. Social political and children's literature 1,4 5. Fiction 1,3

Contents of library collections and the interests of readers

In 1974, Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union issued the decision on increasing the role of libraries in the Communist encouragement of workers' scientific and technical progress. This led to the centralization of the library system; the collections of libraries from that time was limited to centralized advice (one of the respondents who at that time led the acquisition department of a library mentioned the type plan and thematic publishers' plans (Respondent ZT)).

The content of library collections was rather diverse in the 1970s. Fiction dominated and allowed widespread choices: there was Latvian original literature available, Russian classics, both Russian Soviet authors and authors from other Soviet republics, and the works of the best writers from abroad.

One of the studies carried out in the field of Latvian SSR libraries is "Building Readers' Demand in Libraries" ("*Lasītāju pieprasījums un tā veidošana bibliotēkā*") conducted between 1978 and 1980. An introduction to this study shows that "readers' requests are extremely diverse" (Lasītāju 1982: 3). Here is also an indication of the factors that influenced readers' demand and choice at the time: 1. people working with readers (librarians, booksellers, teachers); 2. relatives, friends, acquaintances, colleagues at work; 3. library literature propaganda tools (e.g. free-access collection, bibliography, literature exhibitions and other literature-related events); 4. mass media and book ads and 5. the book itself and its presentation (Lasītāju 1982: 3).

Respondents in the interviews recall that the tendency to create private libraries had also been ongoing in the 1970s (in this regard, the Latvian SSR was in second

place in the Soviet Union (Grāmata 1978: 42)) and that the greatest trust in reading-material choices was placed in people familiar to the readers, as readers were somewhat cautious about librarians' recommendations. When interviewees were asked which books were most popular among library readers in the 1970s, the books and other reading materials named by respondents, especially those written by Latvian and foreign authors, were not entirely compliant with the expectations of Soviet ideology.

It is surprising that the most frequently mentioned popular periodicals in respondents' memories are in Russian, but these periodicals told the reader about the world, life and art beyond the borders of the USSR and also provided entertainment. These are: *Vokrug sveta* (Around the World), *Zarubeznij detektiv* (Foreign Detective), *Novij mir* (The New World), and *Inostrannaja literatura* (Foreign Literature). Regarding the last two, the scholar Zanda Gūtmane writes: "These magazines were in great demand in Latvia – they could be found in libraries and subscribed to. Because the publications were so popular, readers even had to wait their turn for half a year" (Gūtmane 2021: 142). The only periodical in Latvian highlighted in interviews was the literary magazine *Karogs* (The Flag).

Books with popular scientific content were also popular. During the interviews, the most often mentioned book series titles were *Apvārsnis* (Horizon), *Stāsti par vēsturi* (Stories of History), *Stāsti par dabu* (Stories of Nature), and *Ievērojamu cilvēku dzīve* (The Lives of Famous People). In addition, these reading materials were popular with both men and women of a wide variety of age and socio-occupational groups.

In interviews, respondents were asked which authors and which fiction books they remember as being particularly popular. Many authors and works were named. The list of Latvian authors and their works was plentiful, among them there were both pre-Soviet and Soviet Latvian authors. The most frequently named: Jaunsudrabiņš, Lācis, Indrāne, Ezera, Zigmonte, Skujiņš, Dripe, Bels. Many poets were also named, for example: Vācietis, Ziedonis, Čaklais, Zālīte, Ļūdēns, Lisovska, Elksne. It is not surprising, because libraries were actively involved in promoting Latvian literature – this occurred not only in the advising of readers, but also in compiling materials on local writers and artists and inviting Latvian writers to participate in library events, which they gladly did. One of the respondents highlighted the poet Imants Ziedonis in particular, calling the 1970s the "Ziedonis Era" (Respondent LO). The poetry of Latvian authors (and poetry in general) was most popular among women.

The naming of authors of Russian and Soviet fiction caused difficulties for respondents, as well as the most inaccuracies in the names of authors and works; sometimes respondents apologized for not remembering. It is surprising that only one Russian classic, Dostoyevsky, was named. Bulgakov, Zadornov, and a couple of

lesser-known authors today were also mentioned. Authors from Lithuania, Estonia, Belarus, and Ukraine were also popular, for example, Rannamaa, Avyžius, Baltušis, Žemaite, Shamjakin.

The authors of the other nations of the USSR, particularly from the republics of the southern part of the country, were not popular, with a few exceptions such as Aitmatov and Gamzatov. One of the respondents used the term "sleeping part of the collection" (Respondent ZT), which refers to the works of authors of the peoples of the USSR not requested but issued and stored, thus forming a massive, inactive part of the fiction collection in libraries that influenced its circulation performance in statistics.

Translations of foreign authors' books were very popular, from classical works to entertaining literature. During the 1970s, a lot of foreign authors' works were issued in good translation, offering a valuable choice to the readers. There were many authors from different countries and nations in the respondents' memory: Zola, Rolland, Scott, Dumas, Cronin, Bronte, Dickens, Hemingway, Undset, Sand, Hugo, Verne, Dreiser, Hamsun, Remarque, du Maurier and others. Regarding the named foreign authors, respondents said that "they were never on the shelf" (Respondent LO).

At that time, readers' favorite reading topics, such as travel, current events in the world, nature and animals, as well as household and horticulture, was mentioned by a researcher already in 1974, adding that science and technology were most commonly sought by men and fiction was most often chosen by women (Aišpure 1974). Research of the reading practices of that time highlighted that humor and satire, as well as works of historical content, and domestic topics were the topics closest to men, while for women, domestic topics came first, then humor and poetry (Grāmata 1978: 77). Respondents mentioned the same topics in interviews, but in addition they also mentioned military topics, theater and actors, crime novels and adventure novels, hobby literature (artwork, fishing, etc.) and, of course, the "eternal subject" (as defined Respondent LO) – love. The most frequently required for study purposes was medical, psychological, literary criticism, agricultural and technical literature.

Final reflections and conclusions

When drawing conclusions on the choice and interests of readers of that time, we can ask: where and when were they reading the social political literature? Respondents replied that printed materials on topics such as Marxism-Leninism, Lenin and the Communist Party, stories of the heroism in World War II, and similar literature were often posted at exhibitions for special public events, delivered to schools, collective farms, workshops and other

manufacturing units, meetings, polling stations, and the like (Respondent VT), including artistic groups. Literature of other topics was also delivered within the framework of out-of-library services (Respondent RD). Respondents remembered that rural topics (i.e. regarding collective farms) were read quite frequently, as well as books written by Leonid Brezhnev, the leader of the USSR at that time (*The Minor Land* and *Rebirth*, e.g.). Witty methods helped to keep up the loaning of social political literature, such as providing requested fiction only together with unsolicited books. This technique, among librarians themselves, was called "love with a tractor" (Respondent LO).

The work of promoting fiction or propaganda was highly focused. The 1970s were also the era of the boom of the library's working aspect, such as "reading management," understood as "[T]he deliberate actions of reading leaders in cleaning up reading content and reading culture, using different forms and methods of literature propaganda [..] taking into account both the personal subjective and unbiased reading interests and the needs of society as a whole" (Lasītāju 1982: 4).

Even though this method is seen in the post-Soviet period as a violation of readers' privacy and a limitation of their choices – for example, "[r]eading management was transformed into an active aggresive library operation in which a certain range of books was imposed on the reader [..]" (Kreicbergs 2010: 164) –, respondents denied it and claimed that they used this reading management method to take care of the quality of the service of readers on a personal level: to provide them with information about the latest literature and to recommend reading materials according to the interests of each reader. As regards the reading management method as a breach of reader privacy, one of the respondents commented it briefly but subtly: "The same privacy violation as Google now" (Respondent MK).

Almost all respondents note that "there were things that simply needed to be done" (Respondent MK) – e. g. atheism propaganda, reports in Russian, family file index, Marxist–Leninism literature propaganda, etc. –, pointing out that "at that time, we [librarians – SC] had to be more diplomatic than today" (Respondent LP). Several respondents pointed out various absurd duties and working situations both then and now, because the absurdity appears in context.

If it is assumed that the ideology of libraries was provided by an appropriately [i.e. in accordance with the cultural policy at the time – SC] completed collection in tandem with active propaganda work (Kreicbergs 2010: 165), then statistics and memory stories show a situation where both of these components have actually been used to create libraries as cultural, literary, and local study centers, as well as to promote reading and to improve the quality of reader service using all resources available at the time. This is also evidenced by the considerable amount of press

publications of that time (on the website *www.periodika.lv*, describing the operation of public libraries in district centers, cities, and rural areas).

Despite the use of statistics, this study has a subjective background, since the mechanism for statistical production and the work with readers and literature in each particular location depended on the personal attitudes, views, and actions of the people - librarians and managers of libraries in the municipality.

Bibliography

Interviews by Sandra Cīrule [Interview records]:

Respondent AL (2021). Memories of working in a public library in the 1970s.
Respondent LO (2021). Memories of working in a public library in the 1970s.
Respondent LP (2021). Memories of working in a public library in the 1970s.
Respondent MC (2021). Memories of working in a public library in the 1970s.
Respondent MK (2021). Memories of working in a public library in the 1970s.
Respondent RD (2021). Memories of working in a public library in the 1970s.
Respondent VT (2021). Memories of working in a public library in the 1970s.
Respondent ZT (2021). Memories of working in a public library in the 1970s.

Aišpure, Ausma (1974). Dažādu nozaru lasāmviela un lasītājs. *Grāmata un lasīšana laukos. Zinātniska konference. Referātu tēzes.* Latvijas PSR Kultūras ministrija. V. Lāča Latvijas PSR Valsts bibliotēka, 21.–24. lpp.

Dreimane, Jana (2004). *Latvijas bibliotēkas otrās padomju okupācijas gados.* Promocijas darbs. Latvijas Universitāte.

Eglīte, Zina (1974). Lasīšana un literatūras propagandas uzlabošanas iespējas bibliotēku centralizētajās sistēmās. *Grāmata un lasīšana laukos. Zinātniska konference. Referāta tēzes.* LPSR Kultūras ministrija. V. Lāča Latvijas PSR Valsts bibliotēka, 47.–50. lpp.

Grāmata un lasītājs: socioloģisks pētījums lauku rajonā (1978) / V. Lāča Latvijas PSR Valsts bibliotēka. Rīga: Zinātne.

Gūtmane, Zanda (2021). Žurnāla "Inostrannaja Literatura" rezonanse Latvijas literārajā telpā politiskā atkušņa laikā. *Aktuālas problēmas literatūras un kultūras pētniecībā*, Nr. 26(1), 137.–147. lpp. Pieejams: https://dom.lndb.lv/data/obj/898034.html. DOI: 10.37384/APLKP.2021.26-1.137.

Kreicbergs, Jānis (2010) Padomju bibliotēka kā jauniešu ideoloģiskās iespaidošanas līdzeklis. *Laiku atšalkas: žurnālistika, kino, politika.* [Elektroniskais resurss.] Latvijas Universitātes Sociālo un politisko pētījumu institūts, 163.–171. lpp.

Latvijas PSR Valsts masu bibliotēkas desmitajā piecgadē (1982). Latvijas PSR V. Lāča Valsts bibliotēka.

Lasītāju pieprasījums un tā veidošana bibliotēkā (1982). Zinātniski metodisku rakstu krājums. Latvijas PSR Kultūras ministrija.

Latvijas PSR masu bibliotēku darba rādītāji (1972–1981). V. Lāča Latvijas PRS Valsts bibliotēka. Zinātniskās metodikas un bibliogrāfijas nodaļa.

L

LETONICA

Redakcijas adrese / Address of the editorial office
Mūkusalas iela 3, Rīga, LV-1423, Latvija
Tālrunis / Phone: +371 67229017
E-pasts / E-mail: letonica@lulfmi.lv

Galvenais redaktors / Editor-in-chief
Jānis Oga
janis.oga@lulfmi.lv

Redakcijas asistents / Assistant
Ivars Šteinbergs

Numura redaktori / Issue editors
Eva Eglāja-Kristsone,
Jānis Oga

Dizains / Design
Tatjana Raičiņeca

Literārā redakcija / Language editors
Patriks Berrs (Patrick Burr),
Dace Strelēvica-Ošiņa

Numurs izdots ar Latvijas Universitātes un
Valsts kultūrkapitāla fonda atbalstu.

ISSN 1407-3110 ISSN 2592-9453 (digitālā versija)

ISSN 1407-3110
9 771407 311006

51
2023