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illustrated by Vytautas K. Jonynas. *See page 57.*

Communist Propaganda, Artistic Opposition, and Laughter in the Lithuanian Satire and Humor Journal *Šluota*, 1964–1985

NERINGA KLUMBYTĖ

Šluota, a Lithuanian journal of humor and satire, is still positively remembered by many who lived in Soviet times. Why did readers like it? Wasn't it one of the journals that contained Communist propaganda? Were people able to read between the lines, ignoring the propaganda and searching for something they could laugh at? What was Soviet humor like in Lithuania? Goda Ferensienė, who worked in the literary division of *Šluota* in the 1960s, commented that my extensive use of "socialist" in a 2011 article about *Šluota* was out of place: "We were free," Ferensienė argued. But the Communist Party members, who constituted half of *Šluota*'s employees and had the leading positions, claimed at their Primary Party Organization (PPO) meetings that "Every word of a satire has to be devoted to the cause of the Communist Party and its ideals"[1] or that "Laughter is also politics. If people laugh [when they read *Šluota*], it means they are happy with our life and the system"[2] or "Our

[1] Open editorial party meeting, October 23, 1970, Lithuanian Special Archives (LSA), 1969–1971, fondas (archive) 15020 (1), byla (case) 9, p. 67.

[2] Open editorial party meeting, April 19, 1973, LSA, f. 15020 (1), b. 10, p. 77.

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journal is political. We all do political work."[3] Ferensienė's comment about *Šluota* indicates the apparent paradox this article addresses – to be a Soviet citizen did not necessarily mean identifying with Soviet state agendas and perceiving oneself as "Soviet" or "socialist." In this article, I address the above questions and argue that *Šluota's* humor contributed to the Soviet state agenda to create a Soviet society and educate its citizens; but at the same time, its artists opposed the Soviet state's authority and renegotiated Soviet ideologies.

This article is based on my research on political culture in late Soviet Lithuania carried out in the summers of 2008–2013. It relies on interviews with several *Šluota* artists, journalists, and writers, *Šluota*'s readers and contributors, as well as the reports and minutes of *Šluota*'s PPO meetings in 1960–1979.[4] This article focuses on artists' roles and contributions to the journal, as well as the meaning and social significance of their work, which includes cartoons, illustrations for literary pieces, and cover art.[5]

The History of Šluota

Šluota was first published illegally in 1934 by artists and revolutionaries from the Lithuanian Communist Party in the Kaunas region. At that time, Lithuania was an independent

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3 LSA, 1972–1974, f. 15020 (1), b. 10, pp. 29, 50.

4 At these meetings, Communist Party members who worked at *Šluota* assembled to discuss USSR and LSSR Communist Party Congress materials, other important Communist Party documents, and Brezhnev's speeches, as well as important Soviet anniversaries, such as the 100th anniversary of Lenin's birth or the anniversary of Lithuania's incorporation into the USSR. They also discussed how *Šluota* meets USSR and Lithuanian Communist Party agendas, various issues concerning the PPO, such as political education, work discipline, or annual plans. *Šluota's* PPO included the editor-in-chief (during the period of discussion it was Juozas Bulota), the executive secretary (Jonas Sadaunykas was in this position for many years), a PPO secretary and a deputy secretary, as well as a few other editors, journalists, writers, or artists.

5 Parts of this article were published in 2011 and 2012 (see Klumbytė 2011, 2012).

presidential republic, with Kaunas as its provisional capital. The title of the journal and the images on its covers defined its Communist agenda: to sweep unwanted bourgeois elements and values out and to purify society from the ills of militarism, capitalism, and clericalism.[6] The first illegal issue had sixteen pages, as would issues published legally in Soviet Lithuania. Seven issues of *Šluota* were published between 1934 and 1936, when publication was discontinued, most likely due to the persecution or relocation of the journal's major contributors.[7]

Figure 1. "Under the guardianship of Stalin's constitution, peaceful work continues," by Stasys Ušinskis, issue No. 20, 1940, 309.

6 On the artists' agendas, see Bulota, "Šluotos kelias."
7 Bulota, "Šluotos kelias," 6.

Figure 2. "Let socialist Soviet Lithuania live! Full speed towards a brighter tomorrow," by Stepas Žukas, issue No. 2, 1940, 17.

The first legal edition was published on July 12, 1940, nine days before Lithuania officially became a new member of the USSR. *Šluota* published twenty-three issues in 1940 and twenty-five in 1941. These issues celebrated the freedom of the working people and peasants. They lampooned former and current enemies of the people, including speculators, imperialists, capitalists, clerics, landlords, the rich, intellectuals, and bureaucrats. *Šluota* critiqued various problems of everyday life, such as laziness, procrastination at work, wastefulness, irresponsibility, selfishness, and alcoholism. Work, specifically socialist work in a collective, and commitment to the public good and a socialist future, were celebrated and contrasted

with prior labor relations based on class differences. The issues published in 1940 and 1941 critiqued Smetona's bourgeois regime, used Communist rhetoric, and actively promoted political agendas geared toward building a new socialist society (Figs. 1 and 2). The journal shut down in 1941, when editor-in-chief Stepas Žukas fled Nazi-occupied Lithuania.

In 1956, the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party resurrected *Šluota* and moved its headquarters to Vilnius. Juozas Bulota became the first editor-in-chief and remained in this position for almost thirty years, until 1985. The post-Stalin era *Šluota* was very different from its predecessors. The fight against imperialism was restricted to some assigned pages or special issues celebrating important events, such as the thirtieth anniversary of World War II. The main characters in earlier editions, such as landlords, the rich, the clergy, and kulaks, disappeared from the issues of 1956 and later. While in 1940 and 1941, blame for social ills had been directed predominantly outside one's imagined socialist community (i.e., towards the capitalists, imperialists, enemies of the new socialist state, and the bourgeois class), now the journal turned its focus inward (i.e., we, the workers, are the ones who procrastinate, pilfer from the workplace, drink, and are selfish). Moreover, a new socialist class of bureaucrats, managers, factory, state, and collective farm directors, and other new elites (but not Party or government authorities) was also lampooned in the pages of *Šluota*. The journal also continued to criticize social disorders addressed in the 1940 and 1941 issues, such as lying to officials, abusing the public sphere for private interest, or procrastinating at work. By now, however, the laughter was much lighter and lacked its former revolutionary seriousness.

Although the topics covered in 1956 and later issues share many similarities with earlier editions of the journal, there is a noticeable shift, not only in the target of criticism, but also in their tone – *Šluota*'s motif of purifying and cleansing society disappeared from its pages, but not from *Šluota*'s PPO discussions. It is likely that in the 1970s and 1980s few readers even knew the origin of the journal's name. By that time, many readers, journalists, and writers would likely smirk at

descriptions of *Šluota*'s former revolutionary spirit, since few of them could identify with its former revolutionary agenda. For *Šluota*'s artists in the late 1960s and 1970s, a new elite group of professionals, the journal was an outlet for art, not revolution. Gone was the revolutionary critique of social vices and the firm belief in a bright future and the perfection of society.

The popularity of *Šluota* was reflected in its circulation, which rose from twenty thousand copies in 1956 to over one hundred thousand in the 1980s.[8] Thus, at its peak, there was approximately one copy per thirty inhabitants. Although the actual number of copies sold is unknown, this journal was widely known and read in the 1970s and 1980s. It was the only journal of humor and satire in Lithuanian and, in Lithuania, much more popular than the pan-Soviet and Russian *Krokodil*. Moreover, *Šluota* was profitable, unlike many other newspapers and journals, such as *Tiesa* (Truth) and *Komjaunimo Tiesa* (Komsomol Truth). It did achieve recognition in the USSR and eastern Socialist Bloc countries (see below).

Readers' memories indicate the overwhelmingly positive reception of *Šluota*. During my interviews, just mentioning *Šluota* elicited a warm smile followed by pleasant memories of reading, collecting, purchasing, and sharing it with others. Some of *Šluota*'s folklore was still alive in the late 2000s, and I heard several people quoting *Šluota*'s jokes during my summer research in 2009.[9] Indeed, not everything in *Šluota* was

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[8] According to the official publication records, in 1971 there were 120,082 copies published. High numbers persisted throughout the 1980s; in 1986, publication rates were still as high as 112,053. The numbers decreased in the early 1990s.

[9] Specifically, I heard people quoting jokes about Kindziulis, a popular joke cycle in Soviet times, but less so in post-Soviet times. Kindziulis, a fictional cartoon character, is a wise and funny man, an outside observer and a commentator. Kindziulis's jokes usually end with a humorous short statement: "Kindziulis joined us and said..." (Kindziulis priėjo ir tarė...). For example:
"Why did you leave your job?" asks a neighbor.
"Because... because..."
Kindziulis joined them and finished:
"Because he had to work." (*Šluota*, July 31, 1986, 3)

equally liked, but the content was diverse enough to satisfy most readers.[10]

Figure 3. The building on the corner is the former editorial headquarters of Šluota. *Bernardinų Street 8, Vilnius. Photo by the author.*

In 2008, the writer and satirist Jurgis Gimberis expressed regret that *Šluota*'s laughter did not survive post-Soviet times.[11] After independence, "Big hopes. Sacred things. Sacred slogans. There was no place for laughter, critique, satire. How can you cut the limb you're sitting on?" According to Gimberis, *Šluota* in Soviet times was very balanced:

> There was serious and simple, vulgar and intellectual humor. Anything you wanted. Now, it is hardly possible to revive it. Maybe that's why I am not interested in humor anymore. I almost don't write. I earn money translating foreign literature.[12]

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[10] Interviewees liked cartoons, short satirical commentaries, foreign humor, jokes, and anecdotes. Some readers preferred certain cartoonists over others. Satires and reports on various social ills were not so popular.

[11] Kauzonas interview with Jurgis Gimberis. *Šluota,* albeit with short breaks, has been published in post-Soviet times. The format was much smaller and the quality of publication inferior to Soviet times. *Šluota* has been published online since 2014; its editor-in-chief is Jonas Lenkutis.

[12] Kauzonas interview with Jurgis Gimberis.

Kęstutis Šiaulytis, a *Šluota* artist and editor, argued that *Šluota* was "a publication of a sophisticated humor culture. Now if people laugh, they most often laugh at all kinds of nonsense."[13] Pleasant smiles and memories of the readers', as well as artists' and writers' commentaries, indicate that certain forms of Soviet-era laughter, even if they were a means of Communist propaganda, were also their own.

Šluota – *A Weapon of Class Struggle*

Humor can be very powerful. Lenny Bruce's performances in the 1950s and 1960s liberated nightclubs by turning them into "America's freest free-speech zones."[14] Twelve cartoons on the prophet Mohammed, published in 2005 by *Jyllands-Posten*, a Copenhagen newspaper, provoked a harsh response from the governments of Muslim countries, a boycott of Danish goods, and death threats against the cartoonists.[15] In early Soviet Russia, laughter was "a weapon of class struggle, a mechanism of social control, an instrument of social cohesion, a means of distinction, or a tool of self-improvement."[16] Lenin and Stalin, like Mao and Hitler, allowed no laughter at the expense of themselves or their regimes.[17]

Post-Stalin Soviet leaders were well aware of the political and ethical functions of humor and satire. Nikita Khrushchev claimed, "Satire is like a sharp scalpel; it reveals human tumors and quickly, like a good surgeon, takes them out."[18] Lithuanian journalist, educator, and satirist Jonas Bulota, a brother of *Šluota*'s chief editor Juozas Bulota, stressed when he wrote

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[13] Šileika interview with Kazys Kęstutis Šiaulytis. Similar attitudes about the decline of humor are expressed by other writers and artists who contributed to *Šluota* in Soviet times. See Petronytė's interview with Valdimaras Kalninis.

[14] Collins, "Comedy and Liberty," 77.

[15] See Freedman, "Wit as a Political Weapon."

[16] Oushakine, "Red Laughter," 204.

[17] Freedman, "Wit as a Political Weapon."

[18] From a speech during a meeting between the party and government and literature and art specialists, March 8, 1963. Cited in *"Šluota" karikatūros.*

in 1964, "*Šluota* has to speak about serious things in a cheerful way. It has to laugh at various ills that hinder our march to the bright Communist future. Healthy laughter is the best medicine against all kinds of ills and imperfections."[19] *Šluota*'s Communist editors reinforced this agenda at their meetings, pointing out that *Šluota* is a journal of Communist propaganda and its role is to fight for the working class, the moral standards of Soviet society, and the shortcomings "still emerging" in agriculture, industry, and everyday life.[20] *Šluota* aimed to cover the majority of aspects of socialist life, from the construction of cattle barns to the negative treatment of retired collective farm workers, from corruption and theft to work hygiene and order. In designing action plans and in their engagements, *Šluota*'s editors had to respond to pan-Soviet Party Congresses, local Lithuanian Communist Party directives, or Communist leaders' speeches.

Šluota also provided a platform for grassroots involvement in building society, that is, for criticizing, complaining, reporting on authorities or neighbors, and condemning collectively and individually disapproved actions.[21] Numerous letters came from people from all over Lithuania, some of them from the so-called *aktyvai* who collaborated with *Šluota* periodically. Although yearly data do not exist, available information provides a sense of readers' very active involvement. In 1963, the office of correspondence received 2,234 letters, 230 of which were published.[22] In 1964, this office received 1,950 letters,[23] and in 1977, 2,217. (1977 data for Jan. 1 through Dec. 1).[24] In 1977, every issue of *Šluota* used about ten letters from readers, either publishing them or using them indirectly in satires or jokes.[25]

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19 Bulota, "Juoko ginklu," 2.
20 See, for example LSA, f. 15020 (1), b. 9 and 10.
21 See also Klumbytė, "Soviet Ethical Citizenship."
22 LSA, 1965, f. 15020 (1), b. 6, p. 1.
23 Ibid.
24 LSA, 1977, f. 15020 (1), b. 13, p. 46.
25 Ibid. These numbers do not include letters used by the literature office, which received letters separately.

The journal employed several full-time editors and journalists to work exclusively on reader's letters. For many years, the office of correspondence was successfully headed by Albertas Lukša, who also served several terms as *Šluota*'s PPO Secretary. Every letter had to be answered or transferred to another institution. Moreover, before covering it in the journal, Lukša and others were responsible for checking the accuracy of the complaint, including visiting the site. Not all letters were published in the journal or checked by *Šluota*'s employees. Some were redirected to other institutions, others were unsuited for *Šluota*, and there were letters that were never answered, despite *Šluota*'s guidelines, which required that all letters be answered.[26] Lukša complained about the heavy workload, the problems of accuracy, and the ineffectiveness of the office of correspondence in solving the problem, and argued for the need to check every letter rather than forward it to other institutions.[27]

By defining its role as a Communist propaganda journal, responding to the Congresses of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and other Communist agendas, and by directly engaging people in building and educating Soviet society, *Šluota* contributed to the Soviet leaders' aims to build and govern society through nonviolent means. On the other hand, as Ferensienės's comment cited above illustrates, readers and contributors, as well as some of *Šluota*'s employees, did not think they were building a *socialist* society when they wrote for *Šluota* or when they read it. Dissociations from "socialist" and "Soviet" indicate the presence of opposition, which coexisted with the journal's Communist agendas. In *Šluota*, as one of its artists argued in 2013, it was popular to "be against." This opposition, discussed below, reproduced the official Communist values as well as renegotiated and undermined them.[28]

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[26] See, for example, LSA, 1975, f. 15020 (1), b. 11, p. 7.

[27] There are also reports of letters with no value, focused on minor issues, containing libelous remarks, etc. See, for example, LSA, 1977, f. 15020 (1), b. 13, pp. 32–37.

[28] C.f. Avižienis, "Learning to Curse in Russian"; Oushakine, "The Terrifying Mimicry of Samizdat," 2001.

Laughter and Art

Šluota's artists made a significant contribution to the journal: various cartoons and illustrations constituted around one-third to a half of the content of each issue, and the work of skillful artists contributed a lot to *Šluota*'s success in Lithuania and outside the republic. *Šluota* employed several full-time artists, but many contributions to *Šluota* were made by other artists who did not work for the journal full time, like Vladimiras Beresniovas, Andrius Deltuva, Jonas Varnas, Algirdas Radvilavičius, Fridrikas Samukas, Vitalijus Suchockis, Leonidas Vorobjovas, and Vytautas Veblauskas, among many others. According to Šiaulytis, in the 1970s and 1980s there were around sixty artists who more or less regularly contributed to *Šluota.*[29]

Although *Šluota*'s archives present very sketchy data on the role of the artists and their contribution to the journal, it is evident that something changed in the late 1960s, a trend that continued into the 1970s and 1980s. Since the late 1960s, *Šluota*'s PPO meeting reports increasingly engage with issues related to *Šluota*'s art and criticize the artists' work. During the late 1960s and 1970s, Algirdas Šiekštelė, Andrius Cvirka, Arvydas Pakalnis, and Kęstutis Šiaulytis worked for *Šluota.* They constituted a new generation who brought in new artistic ideas, which raised *Šluota*'s PPO's concerns. Many of these new, young artists who contributed to *Šluota* in the 1970s were graduates of the Vilnius Art Academy, which encouraged experimentation and independence.[30] They searched for new aesthetic languages and "felt under the influence of new trends they admired."[31] Many of these artists followed Western authors, such as Herluf Bidstrup, a Danish socialist caricaturist, and Western styles, such as the styles of French authors publishing in the Communist newspaper *L'Humanité,* which was available in kiosks in Vilnius.[32]

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[29] Personal communication, January 21, 2014.

[30] LSA, 1969–1971, f. 15020 (1), b. 9, p. 5.

[31] Ibid., pp. 5–7.

[32] Personal communication with Kęstutis Šiaulytis, Vilnius, summer, 2013.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, Communists at *Šluota*'s PPO meetings complained about "aestheticism," "mannerism," the "modernism" of the artists, and their lack of attention to facts and important everyday issues.[33] They noted the absence of strong political cartoons or anti-imperialist and antireligious themes in *Šluota*'s art.[34] They addressed these issues in a variety of ways: artists were expected to go to rural areas together with writers to get a better sense of the real life covered in their work;[35] artists were also obliged to attend various seminars for political education (low participation was common among both Communists and non-Communists);[36] and artists were to receive higher honorariums for anti-imperialist or antireligious themes.[37] In the late 1960s and 1970s, a recurrent comment in *Šluota*'s PPO annual reports was how unfortunate it was that none of the artists belonged to the Communist Party.[38] *Šluota*'s Communists most likely expected Party membership to encourage artists to take more responsibility for representing Soviet agendas in their artwork. In 1979, Bulota impatiently claimed at one of *Šluota*'s PPO meetings:

> We must revive contra propaganda. We have to revive political cartoons in *Šluota*. We have to increase the honorarium for political cartoons and decrease the honorarium for simplistic jokes. Let the authors feel it in their pockets. Internal affairs [of the Soviet state] are also politics. Ultramodernity and attempts to outcompete the West will take us in the wrong direction. We have to denounce the bourgeois lifestyle.[39]

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[33] See, e.g., LSA, 1972–1974, f. 15020 (1), b. 10, pp. 32, 52, 94, 96, 119; LSA, 1979, f. 15020 (1), b. 15, p. 12; LSA, 1969–1971, f. 15020 (1), b. 9, pp. 5, 34–35.

[34] See, e.g., LSA, 1969–1971, f. 15020 (1), b. 9, pp. 8–9.

[35] See ibid., pp. 35, 102, 115, 125; LSA, 1964, f. 15020 (1), b. 5, p. 2; LSA, 1972–1974, f. 15020 (1), b. 10, pp. 85–86, 96–97.

[36] LSA, 1972–1974, f. 15020 (1), b. 10, pp. 48, 59; LSA, 1978, f. 15020 (1), b. 14, pp. 13–14.

[37] LSA, 1979, f. 15020 (1), b. 15, p. 12.

[38] LSA, 1975, f. 15020 (1), b. 11, pp. 29; LSA, 1972–1974, f. 15020 (1), b. 10, pp. 30, 52, 117–119, 130; LSA, 1978, f. 15020 (1), b. 14, pp. 36–37. Pakalnis joined the CP in the 1980s.

[39] LSA, 1979, f. 15020 (1), b. 15, p. 12.

In the 1970s, I would argue, the artists' successes strongly influenced the future of *Šluota*'s art and departures from PPO's agendas. At that time, *Šluota*'s artists achieved pan-Soviet and Eastern European recognition: their cartoons were republished in different journals of humor and satire;[40] they participated in Soviet Union and socialist Eastern European art exhibitions and won prizes;[41] in 1974, *Šluota* won second-place recognition in the USSR for the illustration and graphic design of the journal;[42] and *Šluota*'s artists initiated some new aesthetic experiments, such as comic strips.[43]

Cartoonish Society

In their cartoons, artists addressed a variety of Communist Party agendas and contributed to Soviet state aims to educate citizens, whether through work or family life. As Daphne Berdahl noted, in socialism, productive labor was a key aspect of state ideology and the workplace was a central site for social life.[44] Productive labor was also a key aspect of Communist morality. "The Moral Code of the Builder of Communism," the single most authoritative and enduring statement on the nature and content of Soviet morality,[45] emphasized hard work

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[40] LSA, 1969–1971, f. 15020 (1), b. 9, p. 35.

[41] For example, in 1977, the fourteen most active artists who contributed to *Šluota* participated in the international exhibit "Satire in the Fight for Peace" in Moscow. Two artists received prizes, while *Šluota* received a certificate of honor from the Soviet Peace Defense Committee. LSA, 1977, f. 15020 (1), b. 13, p. 25. According to Kęstutis Šiaulytis, *Šluota*'s successes continued in the 1980s. (Personal communication in Vilnius, summer, 2013.)

[42] LSA, 1972–1974, f. 15020 (1), b. 10, pp. 117–118.

[43] The publication of comic strips, which were considered a capitalist genre, was discontinued and later revived. Comic strips were a modern artistic form liked by the readers, and *Šluota*'s Communists themselves encouraged the revival of comic strips. J. Sadaunykas argued in 1974 that *Šluota* lost many readers when Palčiauskas's comic strips were discontinued. LSA, 1972–1974, f. 15020 (1), b. 10, p. 118.

[44] Berdahl, *Where the World Ended*, 198–199.

[45] Feldman, "New Thinking about the 'New Man,'" 153.

and collectivism, among many other moral dispositions.[46] *Šluota*'s PPO meetings also emphasized the importance of work: following Communist Party agendas, *Šluota* was to fight against procrastination, absenteeism, abuse of work discipline, immoral leaders, favoritism, and other work-related issues.[47] Poor work ethics, such as dawdling, drinking, and pilfering at work, received considerable attention in the pages of *Šluota*. Artists criticized and ridiculed workers who called in sick just to stay home, go fishing or take a vacation, or those who used the work place for personal gain. In Rimantas Baldišius's cartoon, a man with a suitcase is walking through a corridor. He says: "I smell coffee; that means everyone is at work."[48] Readers got the inside joke, since coffee signified taking a break and socializing instead of working.

Shortages and favoritism, as well as salesclerks with their hand in the till, poor service, and low-quality goods, defined the Soviet-era culture of consumption and service covered by *Šluota*. Jokes circulated about the ineffectiveness of complaining about public services. A cartoon by Andrius Cvirka (Fig. 4) shows a way of getting a complaint noticed. Some wary consumers brought calculators to stores and counted everything along with the salesclerks.[49] In Valdimaras Kalninis's cartoon there are two sales counters with scales; the bigger counter has a big

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[46] See XXII S"ezd KPSS, 3:317–318. In 1961, the Twenty-second Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union issued the landmark "Moral Code of the Builder of Communism." The 1961 code consisted of twelve tenets, eleven of which addressed human relations: devotion to the Communist cause, love toward the Socialist Motherland and to Socialist countries, friendship and respect for other socialist societies and among the peoples of the USSR, hard work, collectivism, humane relations and mutual respect between people, honesty, truthfulness, moral purity, simplicity, and modesty in social and personal life, mutual respect within the family and concern for the upbringing of children.

[47] See the work related themes listed in the May 26, 1978 report. LSA, 1978, f. 15020 (1), b. 14, pp. 15–17.

[48] Rimantas Baldišius cartoon, *Šluota*, No. 5, 1985, 2.

[49] "... Pačių skęstančiųjų reikalas" [...responsibility of the drowning]. *Šluota*, No. 5, 1980, 11.

scale that obscures the smaller counter, so the customer cannot see the small scale. This cartoon invokes the widespread practice of salesclerks giving short change or overcharging. Readers recognized the culture of double standards, where salesclerks adjusted their scales to show more weight than there actually was, while other consumers, usually acquaintances and friends of store staff, were surreptitiously provided with better cuts of meat, cheese, or vegetables at lower rates and weights.

Figure 4. "Hey, look, that fella left our "signature" steak (šnicelis) in the book of complaints," by Andrius Cvirka (Aloyzas Krizas), issue No. 3, 1975, 10.

As with work and service, by criticizing marital relations and family and gender issues, *Šluota*'s artists recirculated official social and moral values. Both the Khrushchev-era 1961 moral code and Brezhnev-era moral theories called for the conscientious fulfillment of familial obligations. Writing about the Khrushchev era, Field argued that everyday life seemed dangerously resistant to Communist reconstruction. Various "bourgeois habits" remained, including domestic violence and alcoholism, but also religious practices and the problem of *meshchanstvo* (snobbishness), which included materialism,

small-mindedness, an exclusive concern with family and personal life, and a corresponding lack of social involvement. Soviet moralists condemned individuals who refused to sacrifice personal comfort for the greater good as Communist morality demanded.[50]

Šluota portrays men as incurable drunks, while women are devoted fighters on behalf of the family.[51] Some women gossip and crave material goods, but these vices seem minor when compared to the moral degradation of men. According to one joke, the best way to get a drunken husband home from a party is to tell him there is another bottle at home.[52] A cartoon by Andrius Deltuva shows two drivers whose trucks have crashed into each other. They have a bottle in front of them and appear drunk. Both men tell the policeman writing up the report that they just had a few shots to celebrate the fact that they survived the accident.[53] Another example:

> *From an explanation given to the factory's comrades court:* Comrades, these facts are slanderous. I did not swear. I was drunk and I was going back home to my wife. I stopped at the fence and tried to talk to myself in order to understand how well I would be able to explain myself at home.[54]

Preoccupations with alcoholism did reflect a larger social context where drunkenness was widespread. Mikhail Gorbachev, who became CPSU general secretary in 1985, was famous for his anti-alcoholism campaign, which sparked new jokes, cartoons, and anecdotes about drinking and going teetotal. But even before Gorbachev, the bottle and a tipsy father, worker, or lover were frequent characters in *Šluota* (Fig. 5). The popularity of this theme might also relate to the fact that the majority of *Šluota*'s artists and editors were men who were exposed to the predominantly male culture of heavy drinking.

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[50] Field, *Private Life and Communist Morality*, 13, 16; see also "Irreconcilable Differences."

[51] In general, men were lampooned in *Šluota* far more than female characters. Directors, bureaucrats, fishermen, alcoholics, and assorted clerks, lovers, and cheaters are uniformly men.

[52] *Šluotos kalendorius*, 1971, 19.

[53] A cartoon by Andrius Deltuva. *Šluota*, No. 18, 1967, 10.

[54] *Šluota*, No. 1, 1966, 5.

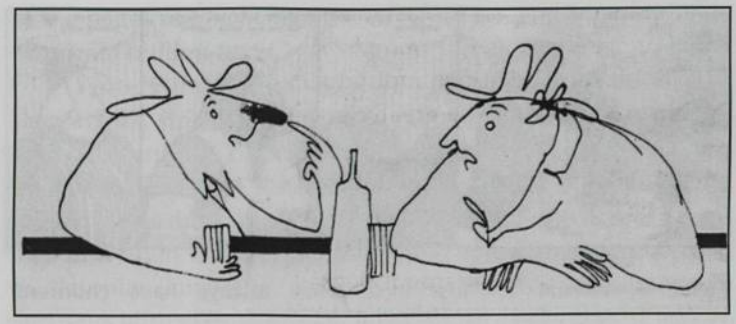

Figure 5. "It's red because all of life's blows land right on my nose," by Andrius Cvirka, issue No. 8, 1975, 6.

Cartoons advocated warm and caring public relationships, mutual understanding and respect, and openness and sensitivity to others' concerns. Most people did not understand them as "Soviet" or "socialist," even if these themes were propagated from the tribunes of the Communist Party in Moscow. One cartoon, for example, shows a woman carrying a small child in one arm and a bag in another approaching a long line of other female shoppers (Fig. 6). The other women all size her up. This cartoon mocks the women shoppers' inattentiveness and insensitivity to a woman with a child. While the cartoon may be read as a critique of the Soviet economy of shortages, it also instructs people to preserve moral values despite stressful shopping experiences.

Artistic Opposition

As the following discussion will show, *Šluota* generally, and *Šluota*'s artists specifically, did not follow Soviet ideological prescriptions at all times. *Šluota,* an active agent of the Soviet state and a platform for socialist education and moral upbringing, was infused with various transgressions that shaped official social and moral orders. The socialist universe in the pages of *Šluota* was neither an outcome of artists' engaged collaboration with the Soviet state nor their open resistance. It was the outcome of ongoing negotiations, experimentation, and dialogue.

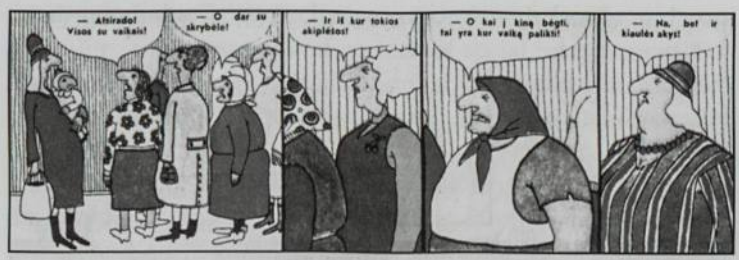

Figure 6. Woman 1: "Just look! They always have children!" *Woman 2:* "And what a hat she's got!" *Woman 3:* "Where do these rude women come from?!" *Woman 4:* "When they go to the movies, they know where to leave the children!" *Woman 5:* "She's shameless!"

Woman 6: "You can see right off she's a speculator!" *Woman 7:* "That's probably not her child!" *A woman with a child:* "I don't need oranges, I just want a trolleybus ticket." *Woman 7:* "Oh, then, please, go ahead," *by Vitalijus Suchockis, issue No. 5, 1975, 8–9.*

Among artists, there were multiple creative means of contributing to the renegotiation of the official social and moral universe. These included several forms of artistic opposition: secret intentional opposition targeting the Communist system and its leaders; unintentional violations of Communist communication codes, such as publishing the ambiguous cover for Lenin's 100th anniversary that caused the edition to be destroyed;[55] and routinized renegotiation of official norms

[55] LSA, 1969–1971, f. 15020 (1), b. 9, pp. 69–70.

in the pages of *Šluota*, like use of Aesopian language[56] to communicate hidden texts.

Writers and journalists were relatively more constrained than artists, since visual art was more difficult for the censors and the Central Committee to understand. Goda Ferensienė and Laima Zurbienė, who were on the editorial board of *Šluota*, related it was much more difficult to hide some plots and meanings in written works.[57] Epigrams and aphorisms were written in Aesopian language, unlike feuilletons. Writers sometimes came up with generalizations such as "those in power can do anything." You had to be careful, remembered Zurbienė, not to make explicit commentaries about the state. A clear allusion to the *local* government was necessary if you spoke about government. For Ferensienė and Zurbienė, *Šluota* was a space of creativity, freedom, and self-fulfillment. The state and the Party were somehow outside their lively everyday work culture, which was mediated by warm interpersonal relations in the publishing house. Officialdom was embodied by outsiders like the Central Committee members who inspected issues of *Šluota*. The "state" also existed in the form of rules, regulations, and an irrational bureaucracy, which had to be publicly acknowledged, and behind which *Šluota*'s writers carved out a space of normalcy and relative freedom.

There were a number of different techniques of reinterpretation that contributed significantly to the rearticulations of the Soviet ethical and social universe and constituted a culture of opposition, including: 1) Aesopian language; 2) national recontextualization; 3) aesthetic rearticulation; 4) silence; and 5) participation in officially disapproved actions, such as drinking at work.

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[56] In Soviet Lithuania, Aesopian language was a special type of cryptic or allegorical writing used in literature, criticism, and journalism to circumvent censorship, since direct writing was denied freedom of expression. I use this term to speak about the artistic language of cartoons since they had texts hidden behind what was evident.

[57] Goda Ferensienė worked in the literary division of *Šluota* and left the journal in the 1960s. Laima Zurbienė was hired in the 1970s and, like others cited in this article, worked at *Šluota* until the 1990s.

First, Aesopian language consisted of text hidden behind the evident text. The critique of bureaucrats and factory, collective, and state farm directors was consistent with official rhetoric about the prevalence of some shortcomings in socialist society. *Šluota* was allowed to speak about these topics, as it followed the state agenda to monitor citizens' behavior through popular and moral means. However, there were other hidden texts – texts that extended the critique to Soviet socialism and the Soviet state. Cartoons and stories depicting bad *khoziaieva* (masters, owners) in many cases built a narrative about the Soviet economic regime being ridden by inefficiency, shortages, and corruption. Various Aesopian presentations violated *Šluota*'s PPO meetings' exhortations to avoid ambiguity, to make sure that the text and subtext were clear to the reader.

Second, national rearticulation, which was also often narrated in Aesopian language, displaced responsibility from "us" to "them," to the Soviet Union or the Soviet regime. Censors, editors, artists, writers, and readers were united in nationalist laughter at the "Soviet" other.[58] For example, cartoons and stories about pollution in the 1970s, and especially in the 1980s, coded a negative commentary about Soviet industrialism and pollution. Men dressed in Western-style clothing could indicate the author's critique of the West. However, a reader could see other hidden texts behind the obvious: the Soviet "bourgeoisie," rather than the Western, behaves this way; the pollution is *Soviet* as well, polluting *our* country.

The third form of opposition was aesthetic rearticulation, which challenged official artistic styles and the Soviet art canon. In 1969, Executive Secretary Jonas Sadaunykas encouraged artists to follow a direction that is "realistic, simple, and understandable to every reader," which was *Šluota*'s traditional direction. According to Sadaunykas, artists in 1940–1941 created realistic and simple cartoons that were understandable to every reader. He condemned other styles as technically inept:

> All our art has developed in a realistic direction until now. [...] We cannot draw *išsižiojusių snukių* (open snouts), *žmonių kvadratų*

[58] Klumbytė, "Soviet Ethical Citizenship."

(people-squares), *baidyklių* (frightful creatures). Drawing this way shows that you are trying to hide your inability to draw well.[59]

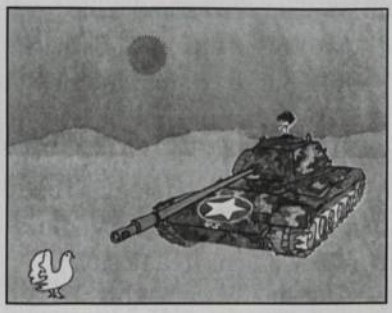

Figure 7. By Kęstutis Šiaulytis, issue No. 7, 1982, 16. Courtesy Kęstutis Šiaulytis.

Figure 8. "Gentlemen, don't tell me we're going to die without fulfilling our dream: World War III?" By Kęstutis Šiaulytis, issue No. 2, 1982, 16.

Nevertheless, artistic experiments with form and style persisted: Kęstutis Šiaulytis's long noses, Jonas Varnas's knots on cartoon frames, or an abstract drawing style subverted Soviet Realism. Writing "US" on a cartoon could mean "Union Soviet" rather than "United States" (Fig. 7). Despite the dollar signs on the money bags, the corpulent, sluggish bodies of the bureaucrats may have pointed to Brezhnev and his cronies rather than Western capitalists (Fig. 8).[60]

Fourth, silence was also a means to renegotiate Soviet official platforms. The recurrent complaining by *Šluota*'s Communists about the lack of political cartoons illustrates a deliberate disengagement from Communist Party agendas. For example,

[59] LSA, 1969–1971, f. 15020 (1), b. 9, pp. 6–7.
[60] I thank Kęstutis Šiaulytis for these points.

there were very little antinationalist or antireligious critiques, despite *Šluota*'s PPO requests and material incentives to promote such criticism.[61] *Šluota*'s Communist editors took a moderate position themselves and asked artists not to offend the religious beliefs of people, but to critique priests.[62] A cartoon by A. Radvilavičius (Fig. 9), published in 1965, negatively portrays the priest, whose sluggish body and open purse show his greediness and undermine his religiosity.[63]

Figure 9. "No comment," by A. Radvilavičius, issue No. 7, 1965, 8.

And finally, coffee breaks and shots of vodka. Absenteeism, poor work ethics, and alcoholism were ridiculed in the pages of *Šluota*, but all were as much part of the work culture of *Šluota*'s artists, journalists, and writers as they were for many other people. Their recollections were punctuated by phrases such as "We didn't show up in the mornings," "We went out for coffee," "We gathered in bars and restaurants to discuss everything," "We had a good time," "It was a wonderful time, full of celebrations," "We worked a little and then went out for drinks," and "Artists from other Soviet republics took a taxi to Vilnius to drink with us."[64] *Šluota*'s editorial PPO

[61] LSA, 1972–1974, f. 15020 (1), b. 10, pp. 85, 107.

[62] LSA, 1978, f. 15020 (1), b. 14, p. 6. See also LSA, 1972–1974, f. 15020 (1), b. 10, pp. 105–107.

[63] *Šluota*, No. 7, 1965, 8.

[64] The note about taking a taxi to Vilnius most likely refers to the 1960s, since, according to Kęstutis Šiaulytis, because of later editorial board changes in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, these gatherings were discontinued, even though close relationships continued between some people.

meetings routinely complain about the absenteeism, drinking, and lack of discipline of *Šluota*'s artists, writers, and journalists.[65] Alcohol and, much less so, coffee were a means to bridge the gap between "official" and "private," as well as to reshape the official moral universe of work ethics, moral purity, and discipline. Kęstutis Šiaulytis echoed others in his recollections about the editorial board: it consisted of wonderful people, and even Jonas Sadaunykas, the Executive Secretary, who pretended to be serious and used to tell others that he was a Stalinist to some extent, was actually a warm person who liked to drink. Laima Zurbienė recalled that her colleagues, when they got drunk, used to point at each other good-naturedly: "You're an informant." "No, you are, how else could you get a position at *Šluota* with your background?" Informants were present in every work collective, but, according to Zurbienė, nobody knew who informed for *Šluota*. It was a very good and beautiful collective, Zurbienė asserted, and the unknown informant contributed to its spirit by not reporting on the collective. Indeed, it is this personalized work culture that ultimately describes socialism in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, rather than the official codes of conduct anticipated in "The Moral Code of the Builder of Communism" or the goals of the Congresses of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. It is this culture of togetherness, along with the journal's own social values and moral universe, that *Šluota*'s artists, journalists, and writers long for today. This culture neither was, nor is perceived as "socialist" or "Soviet," relegating its most Soviet aspects, like *Šluota*'s PPO meetings, to a footnote of history.

Another important question arises regarding how complicit *Šluota*'s Communists were in artistic opposition and renegotiation of the official culture. Weren't they unable, for the almost twenty years for which archival data exist, to ensure that anti-imperialist and antireligious cartoons were part of every issue? Why would they tolerate drinking at work, and even drink together, at the same time they made *Šluota* a venue for

[65] Lithuanian Communist Party archives, f. 15020 (1), b. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10.

the Soviet state's anti-alcoholism propaganda and argued for the importance of work discipline at most meetings? Or argue that the specificity of the journal didn't allow them to celebrate Lenin's anniversary or other great Soviet events as other journals did?[66] Lenin, though, liked to laugh himself, as Albertas Lukša, the secretary of the PPO, stated at a meeting on November 24, 1969.[67] Why did *Šluota* not run a story about Lenin's laughter?

In Lithuania in 1964–1985, *Šluota*'s artists reproduced Soviet social and moral values, such as hard work and respect for the collective, but at the same time renegotiated official platforms through various means of opposition, such as hidden texts or silence about certain issues. Readers liked *Šluota* because humor engaged everyday issues that were relevant and made them laugh. Moreover, some were able to read between the lines and uncover hidden texts. They appreciated silence about some issues and were skillful in navigating *Šluota* and finding the most funny and admirable parts, such as Kindziulis's jokes, the cartoons, or foreign humor.[68] Like *Šluota*'s artists, readers participated in shaping and renegotiating Soviet values and ideologies. Their engagements were neither an example of clear collaboration, nor of open resistance, but rather a close interaction with power through dialogue, negotiation, acceptance, and rejection.

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[66] For example, see LSA, 1969–1971, f. 15020 (1), b. 9, p. 26.
[67] LSA, 1969–1971, f. 15020 (1), b. 9, p. 33.
[68] On Kindziulis, see footnote 9.

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Letter Writing as a Social Practice: Self-reference to Writing in Lithuanian Correspondence

AURELIJA TAMOŠIŪNAITĖ

Introduction

The development of the New Literacy Studies (NLS) since the 1980s has reshaped the understanding and the very notion of literacy. The "social turn" in literacy studies shifted the focus from "the consequences of literacy for society to the study of its uses by individuals and its functions in particular groups."[1] Hence, literacy is no longer viewed as only the ability to read and to write; rather it is perceived as a social practice, i.e., reading and writing (and other) practices are strongly linked with social structures "in which they are embedded and which they help to shape."[2]

By focusing on social aspects of literacy practices and events, NLS draws a distinction between vernacular and institutional literacy practices. Vernacular literacy practices are voluntary and learned informally, whereas dominant literacy practices are formal and "defined in terms of the needs of institutions."[3] In other words, vernacular literacy practices

1 Collins and Blot, *Literacy and Literacies*, 36.
2 Barton and Hamilton, *Local literacies*, 6.
3 Barton, "Vernacular Writing," 110.

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(such as diary writing or recipe writing) are related to our everyday lives, while institutional (such as filling out tax forms or writing a report) are related to formal settings, e.g., workplace, educational or government institutions. Although vernacular literacy is often associated with ordinary writing, which in turn is perceived as the writing of uneducated people,[4] vernacular or everyday writing should rather be defined as the informal writing of all people independently of their education level,[5] since people of any educational background are involved in vernacular writing activities. Vernacular or ordinary forms of writing, such as notes, diaries, letters, life histories and others,[6] are strongly linked to everyday life: they help to organize life, personal communication, and leisure activities, as well as document life and regulate social participation.[7] Therefore, the analysis of such forms of writing enables us to explore how people make sense of and incorporate literacy practices in their everyday lives, what role these practices play and how they shape everyday interactions between people.

Following these premises, the current study takes a closer look at one particular form of ordinary writing, namely, letter writing, to shed more light on twentieth-century literacy practices among ordinary Lithuanians. The main aim of this article is to approach letter writing as vernacular literacy practice and to analyze how, during the twentieth century, ordinary Lithuanians organized their letter-writing practices and how these practices were embedded in their everyday lives.

First, I briefly present the sociohistorical context of Lithuania during the twentieth century, with a special emphasis on literacy rates and the development of the educational system (the establishment of institutional literacy practices); then, I introduce the corpus, the approach and method of analysis; finally, I provide a detailed analysis of the corpus data.

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4 Papen and Barton, "What is the Anthropology of Writing," 10.
5 Gillen and Hall, "Edwardian Postcards," 170.
6 Barton, "Vernacular Writing," 110.
7 Ibid.

Sociohistorical Context

For many ordinary Lithuanians, writing was not an everyday activity until the very end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. At the turn of the twentieth century, compared to Western Europe and neighboring countries, the literacy rate of Lithuanians was quite low. According to the census of 1897, only half the population, i.e., 48 percent of Lithuanians were able to read.[8] Low literacy numbers were related to the sociopolitical and educational circumstances of the time. From 1864 to 1904, the Russian Imperial government banned the use of the Latin alphabet for Lithuanian publications and implemented the use of Cyrillic. The Russian language was introduced in official schools as the language of instruction, while the use of Lithuanian in schools and the public domain was suspended. Thus, education in Lithuanian was limited to illegal schools established in people's homes, where children were taught the basic skills of reading (and sometimes writing) in Lithuanian in the Latin script.

The first half of the twentieth century saw many sociopolitical changes in the region. The ban on Latin letters for Lithuanian was lifted in 1904; in 1906, the Lithuanian language was introduced as a subject in the curriculum of some schools.[9] The declaration of independence in 1918 and the establishment of a new government allowed the nation to build its own nationally oriented educational system. In 1922, the Lithuanian language was declared the official language of the state and, with the exception of minority schools, it became the language of instruction in all schools.[10] An important benchmark in the development of the Lithuanian educational system was the implementation of a law for obligatory primary education in 1928 (the law was passed in 1922). These educational changes had an impact on increasing literacy practices among ordinary

[8] Merkys, *Knygnešių laikai*, 306. This census, however, did not gather any information on writing skills.

[9] Karčiauskienė, *Pradinio švietimo*, 126–130; Karčiauskienė, "Pradinio mokymo," 34.

[10] Zinkevičius, *Bendrinės kalbos iškilimas*, 213.

Lithuanians. The Lithuanian census of 1923 indicates that 39.3 percent of Lithuanians over ten years of age were able to read and write, while 28.3 percent were able to read and sign their name.[11] Thus, at least 67.7 percent of Lithuanians at that time had acquired some literacy skills; however, literacy rates among men were higher than among women. During the interwar period, the government devoted special attention to adult education. The number of adult students and adult courses in the schools peaked during 1928–1929 and decreased slowly by the year 1939, indicating the decreasing need of this type of instruction.[12] The data from a 1941 census indicates that only 5.9 percent of the inhabitants of Lithuania at that time were illiterate.[13]

World War II and its aftermath posed new challenges to the Lithuanian nation and state. In 1944, Lithuania was occupied by the Soviet Union and became the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic. Many Lithuanians fled the country to the West in order to avoid deportations and Soviet repression, while some did not escape this destiny. Therefore, in the aftermath of the war, part of the nation was dispersed to different parts of the world. Due to these separations, letter writing (especially after 1953 and later) became an important communication practice that helped to maintain family ties among Lithuanians. In Soviet Lithuania, the educational system, as well as all other sectors, was reorganized following Soviet norms. The schools were supposed to serve the needs of the totalitarian regime; therefore, pedagogical thought was impregnated with Marxist-communist ideology. During the Soviet period, the network of schools grew rapidly. In 1949, a law was passed that implemented a compulsory seven-year middle-school education, which was increased to eight years in 1959.[14] On the one hand, general education during the Soviet period was free and accessible to anyone, while on the other hand, it was strongly

[11] *Lietuvos gyventojai*, 104.
[12] Tamošiūnaitė, *Lietuvių bendrinės kalbos*, 66.
[13] "Baigtas," 8.
[14] Matthews, *Education in the Soviet Union*, 25.

affected by communist ideology. Official statistics indicate that in 1959, 98.5 percent of Lithuanians from nine to forty-nine years of age were literate, while 61 percent of the population over ten years of age had an elementary education or higher.[15] Thus, throughout the twentieth century, Lithuanian literacy rates (the ability to read and write) constantly increased. Toward the second half of the twentieth century, writing as a skill was acquired by majority of ordinary Lithuanians.

Data and Approach

Data for the current study come from the *Asmeninės lietuvių rašomosios kalbos duomenų bazė* (Database of Private Written Lithuanian Language), which was compiled from 2008 to 2013 by a team of researchers working at the University of Illinois at Chicago and at the Institute of the Lithuanian Language, the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania, and other institutions in Lithuania. From 2011 to 2013, the development of the Database was funded by the Research Council of Lithuania (Grant No. LIT-4-23). Since the end of 2013, the Database is freely accessible for scholarly use on-line at www.musulaiskai.lt.[16]

The development of the Database aimed at collecting, digitizing, and making accessible an electronic database of private written Lithuanian as found in different types of egodocuments.[17] The first edition of the Database, however, includes only letters. Currently, the Database provides access to 1,322

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[15] *1959 metų visasąjunginio gyventojų surašymo duomenys*, 28–29, 39.

[16] The author would like to express her gratitude to the many people involved in the development of the project, especially the donors who contributed their letters to the Database. This is a long-term project, therefore, we urge anyone who would like to share their materials with us to not hesitate and contact us by e-mail at aurelijat@yahoo.com.

[17] The term *egodocument* refers to a text "in which an author writes about his or her own acts, thoughts and feelings," see Dekker, "Jacques Presser's Heritage," 14. *Egodocument* is an umbrella term for a variety of texts written in first-person narrative, for instance, autobiographies, diaries, memoirs, and personal letters.

letters written by 195 authors: 89 females and 106 males. The time span of the letters covers the period from 1907 to 2010. The majority were written during the Soviet period, namely from 1945 to 1990. These letters comprise 78 percent of all letters in the Database.

The letters published in the Database have been obtained from private collections. This provides a unique opportunity to present data written by different layers of society, i.e., people of different social backgrounds, education, occupation, and exposure to writing. The Database includes letters written by both the barely literate and the highly educated and skilled to whom writing was a common everyday activity. Of the letters comprising the Database, 88 percent are of a personal nature, addressed to family members, friends and other close acquaintances in order to communicate, share information, maintain close ties with family or loved ones abroad (in emigration or back home). Therefore, the letters of the Database provide us with useful data for analyzing the vernacular literacy practices of Lithuanians during the twentieth century.

For the purpose of the current study, I decided to look at one aspect of letter writing, namely, self-reflections on letter writing practices. It is very common to find references within the letters to the writing itself, the author and the addressee, the time and place of the writing act, i.e., when, why, how, to whom, and by whom the letter was composed. Thus, on the one hand, a letter is a product of a literacy event; while, on the other hand, it is also a source that documents the writing. This two-fold nature of a letter is especially valuable when applied in historical research when there are no opportunities to conduct interviews, make observations or apply other techniques usually employed in ethnographic studies on literacy.[18] The limitations of a data-driven approach must be acknowledged, since it provides only a partial and limited view of literacy practices; but it is believed references found in the letters may nevertheless serve as a starting point when uncovering how, when,

[18] Cf. Barton and Hamilton, *Local Literacies*, Markelis, "Every person like a letter."

and why letters were produced and used, the role letter writing occupied in ordinary people's lives, and how it helped to shape their vernacular literacy practices. This study intends to contribute to previous ethnographic research on letter-writing practices among Lithuanians conducted by Daiva Markelis.[19]

Method

A corpus of 1,322 letters has been compiled and an automatic search for the lexemes[20] referring to "writing" has been processed using the corpus analysis toolkit *AntConc*. The search resulted in 8,073 concordance lines that were then manually checked to eliminate instances that did not refer to letter writing or to delete repetitions. Manual sorting resulted in 655 instances of references to writing in 458 letters. These concordance lines were then classified and analyzed according to several categories, relevant to literacy events.

Earlier studies on literacy distinguished several elements that are visible in literacy events, namely, participants, settings, artifacts, and activities.[21] Participants refer to people involved in the production, interpretation or circulation of a particular text. Considering the formal features of a letter, the role of participant is assumed by the author or authors, the scribe, and one or several addressees (the intended readers). Settings refer to the "physical circumstances in which the interaction takes place,"[22] e.g., the place or the surroundings in which the text is produced or where it circulates. Artifacts refer to "material tools and accessories"[23] that are involved in the production and circulation of the text. In letter writing, these would include pen, paper, envelope, postmark, and other material tools. Activities refer to "actions performed by participants in the literacy

[19] See Markelis, *Jurgis Acquires*, "Talking Through Letters," "Every person like a letter."

[20] In linguistics, the term *lexeme* refers to a vocabulary item, e.g., a word.

[21] Hamilton, "Expanding the New Literacy Studies," 16; cf. Barton and Hall, "Introduction," 6–8.

[22] Hamilton, "Expanding the New Literacy Studies," 16.

[23] Ibid.

events."[24] In letter writing, these can involve writing, reading, dictating, reciting, discussing, reporting, and other activities.

Of these four elements employed by other researchers, in the current study I chose to focus in more detail only on certain aspects of the participants, settings, and artifacts. To be more precise, I was interested in looking at when, where, by whom, how, in what state, using what tools, and in what manner the letters were written and how these aspects are reflected within the selected letters. Therefore, the current analysis grasps only the following aspects of the aforementioned elements: time, place, and frequency of writing (settings); agency and mood (participants); tools employed and visual aspects of writing (artifacts).

Self-reference to Writing in Lithuanian Correspondence

Setting: Time and Place

Time and place constitute an important part of the letter-writing act. The very existence of the letter is mainly due to the "spatial distance" between the writer and the addressee.[25] Reference to time (the date of composition) is a part of the genre's conventions, and almost every letter (with a few exceptions) has a specific reference to the time (usually, day, month and year) when the letter was composed inserted at either the beginning or the end. Reference to time is important in written communication, since "there is a time lag between the writing and reading."[26] Thus, a specific date helps establish a chronological and linear pattern of communication:

> (1) *Gavom nuo tavęs laišką 8 gruodžio ir tuojau rašom atgal* (E. B. 1981-12-10)[27];
> We received a letter from you on December 8th and are writing back immediately;

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Barton and Hall, "Introduction," 6.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Here and further references to the letters include the following information: the initials of the authors and the date the letter was written (or sent) in the following format: YYYY-MM-DD. Quotations from the letters are provided in normalized (Standard Lithuanian) spelling; all linguistic features (with the exception of phonetic features), however, have been retained as they appear in the original.

(2) *1935 metų 11 gruodžio rašytas laiškas nuo tėvelio ir mamytės* (V. R. 1935-12-11);
This letter was written on December 11th in the year 1935 from Father and Mother.

References to time often point to a specific day (as in 3 and 4) or even a specific time of day (as in 5 and 6) when the letter was written, for instance:

(3) *Šiandien sekmadienis, tai rašau laišką vėl* (Eg. B. 1986-07-20);
Today is Sunday, therefore, I'm writing a letter again;

(4) *Didysis Penktadienis, nedirbu, tai ir laiko turiu parašyti keletą žodžių* (Z. D. 1987-04-17);
It is Good Friday, I am not working, so I have time to write a few words;

(5) *susiruošiau šį gražų prasidedančios vasaros rytą parašyti Jums* (J. B. 2003-06-07);
On this beautiful morning of the beginning of summer I got myself ready to write to you;

(6) *beveik 12 val. vakaro, nutariau aš Tau parašyti kelis žodžius* (Z. B-M. 1983-02-17);
At almost 12 o'clock in the evening, I decided to write you a few words.

Most letters include information on when the previous letter was received and when the reply was composed. Such information on the frequency of the flow of the letters helps to establish the circularity of communication, as well as serves as a point of reference for the content of both the initial letter and the reply:

(7) *Dalyte, kai rašai man laišką, parašyk, kad gavau, o jeigu negavai, parašyk, kad negavau, nes aš nežinau, apie ką vėl rašyti. Šito jūsų laiško negalėjau suprasti, ar gavot, ar negavot* (I. D. 1973-05-01);
Dalyte, when you write me a letter, [please] indicate that you have gotten [mine], and if you haven't, indicate that you haven't gotten it, because I do not know what to write about again. I could not understand from this letter of yours whether you have gotten [mine] or not.

Some writers choose to write an immediate answer, so as not to interfere with the regularity of the letter writing:

(8) *Šiandien ką tik atnešė laišką, tat rašau atsakymą, kad ilgai neužsitęstų* (E. D. 1967-07-05);
The letter just came today; therefore, I write a reply so that it would not take too long [to answer];

(9) *radau nuo jūsų laišką ir perskaitęs sėdau, sakau, parašysiu, nes kaip atidedi, tai ir lieka* (I. D. 1975-05-09);
I found your letter and, after reading it, I sat down and said [to myself] "I'll write back," because once you put it aside, so it remains.

Others complain about a long silence or apologize for not writing due to illness, emotional stance, lack of time, or simply laziness. For some, the lack of writing skills affects the frequency of written communication, i.e., it is easier to do any other household activity than write a letter:

(10) *Mamai įprasta ilgai neparašyti, nes ji sakė: verčiau malkas skaldyti* (D. Š. 1961-10-11);
It's typical for mother to not write for a long time, for she has said: it's better to chop firewood.

Letter writing is often embedded within a variety of other everyday activities related to household, work, studies or military service. Some writers devote a special time for letter writing and prefer solitude, while others embed this activity within their everyday routine. Solitude and silence are frequently mentioned in soldiers' letters, for instance:

(11) *Visi išėjo į filmą klube, o aš kažkaip pasilikau rašyti laiškus* (J. Bl. 1982-03-02); Everyone left to watch a film at the club, and I somehow stayed to write letters;

(12) *Visa rota miega, o aš sėdžiu už stalo ir užrašinėju, kas išeina* (Eg. B. 1986-11-06); The whole platoon is sleeping, while I'm sitting at the desk and writing whatever comes out.

Letter writing is performed (although prohibited) in the midst of army duties, and the latter often affect the manner in which the letter is written and how it looks (as in 13). Additional duties or punishment follows if a soldier is caught writing a letter when on duty (as in 14):

(13) *Tik sėdėt negalima, tai rašau stovėdamas, todėl gal neįskaitysi. Rašyt taip pat negalima, bet načalnykai miega* (V. Ž. 1967-01-26);

Since sitting isn't allowed, I'm writing standing up; that's why you might not be able to read it. Writing isn't allowed, either, but the commanders are sleeping;

(14) *Na, bet baigsiu rašyt, nes jau ir trečiadienis. Pirmadienį gavau nariadą, kaip tik rašydamas laišką. Atėjo į kazarmę koma[n]dyrius po časti, tai paduoda komandą „[v]stat", o aš nestojau, bet rašiau toliau, na, tai mūs komandyrius ra[z] ir man nariaduką į kuknią, tai reikėjo visą parą dirbt.* (Č. P. 1955-11-06);
Well, I'll finish writing, since it's already Wednesday. On Monday I got put on KP for doing just that, writing a letter. A chief of the military unit came to the quarters and gave the order "stand up," and since I didn't stand, but kept on writing, well, [to punish me] our chief sent me to work in the kitchen, and I had to work there for an entire twenty-four hours.

Corpus data reveal that for many ordinary people letter writing is often embedded within their everyday routine activities, i.e., letters can be written while cooking (as in 15), attending classes (as in 16), watching TV (as in 17), listening to music or simply working:

(15) *ir aš, bekepdama vaflius, rašau Tau. Dabar yra 10 val. vakaro, mama sūrį raugia ir skalbia kartu; Bronė prie stalo sėdi; o močiutė, neseniai ranką nusilaužė – vienas rankos kaulas nulūžo. Ji siunčia Tau geradienių. [...] Ir taip, smulkiai žinai, ką mes dabar veikiame.* (B. 1983-03-07);
and, while making waffles, I'm writing to you. It's 10 o'clock at night at the moment, mother is making cheese and doing laundry at the same time; Bronė is sitting at the table; and grandmother recently broke an arm, one bone in her arm snapped. She sends you greetings. And so now you know in detail what we are doing at the moment.

(16) *Pirma paskaita – revizija. Tai – laiškų rašymo, dažymosi paskaita.* (A. M. 1981-06-10);
The first class is on auditing. It is a class for letter writing and putting on makeup;

(17) *Dirbu du darbus: rašau Tau ir žiūriu televizorių* (O. K. 2004-02-06);
I'm working two jobs – writing to you and watching TV.

When letter writing is embedded in other everyday activities, it is sometimes interrupted and therefore becomes a

continuous activity that can stretch from several hours to even several days:

(18) *Dabar gyvenimas neblogas, tik kad visur komandos. Ir šį laiškutį rašau jau antra diena. Parašei keletą žodžių ir jau girdi „[v]zvod, strojtsia", na, tai ir meti, kad ir žodis nebaigtas, tik kepurę ant galvos ir jau rikiuotėj.* (Č. P. 1955-10-13);
Life is not bad now, just that there are so many commands around. I've been writing this letter for two days now, too. You write a couple of words and then hear "platoon, stand up," so, you drop it, even if you haven't finished the word, the hat goes on [your] head and [you're] already standing in line.

Letter writing, on the one hand, can be a one-time solitary sit-down activity; on the other hand, when embedded in home, school or work life, it can be a continuous process unbounded by time. The practice can also occur in a variety of different places: as evident from previous quotes, soldiers sometimes write letters at their posts; students compose their letters in classrooms (19); patients in a hospital bed (20); workers in factories or other workplaces (21); women while cooking in the kitchen; and others while traveling (22):

(19) *Tą laišką rašau Skirsnemunėje, mokykloje, vyksta lietuvių kalba* (A. V. B. 1981-12-07);
I am writing this letter in Skirsnemunė, in school, during Lithuanian language class;

(20) *Šis mano laiškas yra rašytas iš ligoninės, kurioje jau trečias mėnuo kaip randuosi.* (L. Bu. [no date]);
This letter of mine was written in a hospital, where I have found myself for three months now;

(21) *Mielasis Danučiuk, štai sėdžiu fabrike ir rašau Tau. Baisiai nuobodu, nes nėra ką veikti.* (J. R-J. 1954-06-02);
Dearest Danučiuk, here I am sitting in a factory and writing to you. It's really boring, because there is nothing to do;

(22) *atleisk už blogą raštą, nes rašau autobuse, važiuojant, užtai nelabai suskaitysi.* (Ef. U. [no date 5]);
Pardon the bad handwriting, I'm writing on a bus, while riding, that's why you won't be able to read it very well.

Thus, even though letter writing is often perceived as a solitary activity with a time and place devoted to its performance, the data of the current letter corpus supports the claim that literacy practices fit into a much broader sphere in people's everyday lives. Letter writing is not restricted just to home or the private domain[28]; rather, it overlaps and intersects with other domains, such as work, school or service.

Participants: Agency and Emotions

Letter writing involves not only the writer (scribe) or the author of the letter,[29] but also an intended or several intended readers (addressees). The author (who signs the letter) and the reader (who is addressed at the beginning of the letter) are always indicated within the letter either by name or by relationship:

> (23) *Aš, Simonas ir Agata Mažeikai, rašau kelis žodelius 1961 sausio mėnesio 13 dieną.[…] [S]udiev, Stasyte.* (S. M. 1961-01-13);
> I, Simonas and Agata Mažeikai, write a few words on the 13th of January, 1961. [...] Goodbye, Stasytė;

> (24) *Sveikas, mūsų Mylimiausias Jonai, ir mes visi esam sveiki. […] Su Dievu, mūsų mylimas Jonai, bučiuojam tave mes visi. K. – tavo tėvas* (K. Al. 1940-01-02);
> Best of health to you, our beloved Jonas, and we all are healthy. […] Goodbye, our beloved Jonas, we all send kisses. K. – your father.

Although first person ("I") narration prevails in the letters written after World War II by highly-schooled writers, collaborative letter writing practices (the collective "we") are evident in the letter corpus up until the end of the 1980s. Markelis has pointed out that, throughout the first half of the twentieth century, Lithuanian writing and reading practices "were collaborative activities and not the individual, solitary acts that we often assume them naturally to be."[30] Lack of writing skills

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28 Cf. Barton and Hamilton, *Local literacies*, 9–10.

29 If the letter is dictated, the writer (the scribe) and the author (or several authors) are different persons.

30 Markelis, "Every person like a letter," 108.

posed the necessity for many Lithuanians to turn for help to more literate neighbors, children or other family members.[31] Therefore, among authors with less or no schooling, letter dictation was a common practice:

> (25) *Tik viena bėda, kad nemoku rašyti. Turiu klausti Anelės parašyti laiškus, ba Albinukas mažai lietuviškai rašo.* (I. Dau. 1960-07-14);
> The only problem is that I don't know how to write. I have to ask Anelė to write letters, because Albinukas doesn't write in Lithuanian much;

> (26) *O Teresė, mano jauniausia duktė, gyvena su tėvais ir šį laišką ji rašo.* (S. M. 1961-07-31);
> And Teresė, my youngest daughter, lives with her parents and writes this letter.

Eleven authors of the analyzed letters dictated their letters to others. Family involvement in letter writing is a common feature in the current letter corpus; thus, letters often contain not only the writer's "voice," but also the "voices" of other family members:

> (27) *Vincelis, sėdėdamas šalia dabar, prašo jums perduoti geriausius linkėjimus* (A. K. 1986-04-12);
> Vincas, who is sitting nearby at the moment, asks to send you [his] best wishes;

> (28) *Dabar rašo Kęstutis. Sveikina Tave su gimimo diena.* (B. 1982-05-26);
> Kęstutis is writing at the moment. He wishes you a happy birthday;

> (29) *Sveik[i]nu vienu žodžiu ab[u]du: Stanislovą, savo mylim[ą] Brolį, ir Antaną, dėd[ę]. [...] Sveik[i]na Zos[ė] Stanislov[ą] ir Antaną, Viešpaties Dievo [prašo] sveikatos. Sve[i]kina gim[i]nės, pažįstami ir susiedai prašydam[i] geros sve[i]k[a]tos, pasiv[e]dimo.* (J. P. 1910-05-10);
> I greet you both – my beloved brother Stanislovas and uncle Antanas – with one word. [...] Zosė also greets Stanislovas and Antanas, and asks the Lord for [good] health. All the relatives, acquaintances, and neighbors greet you, wishing you good health and luck.

[31] Cf. Ibid.

Sometimes, the presence of another writer or author is also mentioned:

(30) *Aš atėjau pas Juzę ir rašom abidvi* (J. E. 1960-03-13);
I went to see Juzė, and we are writing together.

The collaborative nature of letters emphasizes the bonds that written communication intends to maintain between family members separated by large distances. Therefore, most collective letters are found among those written by and to emigrants or by and to soldiers serving in the army. Intended readers of such letters are also often not just one individual, but all the members of the family:

(31) *Miela Alfa, Adolfina, vyras ir vaikučiai! Šeštadienis, rugsėjo 29-toji diena. Rudens ryto saulė pakilo iš debesų... Pušys lingavo, ūžė nuo vėjo... Alyvų krūmo lapeliai, įsikibę į šakeles, taip pat drebėjo nuo vėjo... Prie lango stovėjo mano Pranas ir klausė radijo, o aš tuo metu triūsiau virtuvėje, skubėjau į darbą. Staiga sušuko jis: „Myle, eik čia! Jau atneša laišką." Greitai nubėgau pas jį ir žiūriu taip pat. Laiškininkas eina tiesiai į mūsų namus. Mano sūnus Jonelis pirmutinis išbėgo pro duris ir gavo du laišku; pagaliau iškėlęs juos rankutėje bėgo aplink namą kelis kartus ir šaukė: „Abu laiškai iš Amerikos. Mamyte, kantrybės, duok man atplėšti?" Vieną laišką plėšė vaikas, o kitą vyras. Aš gi stovėjau patenkinta ir kramčiau nudažytas lūpas. Vienas laiškas buvo iš Jūsų, o kitas iš Albertinos. Visi trys susiglaudę skaitėme garsiai...* (E. J. 1956-10-07);
Dear Alfa, Adolfina, husband and children! Saturday, the 29th of September. Autumn's morning sun rose from the clouds... Pine trees were swaying, murmuring from the wind... The leaves of the lilac tree, hanging on the branches, were also trembling from the wind... My Pranas was standing by the window and listening to the radio, and I was working in the kitchen at that moment; I was in a hurry to get to work. Suddenly, he shouted: "Myle, come here! [He] is bringing the letter." I ran quickly to him and looked too. The postman was coming straight to our house. My son Jonas was the first to run through the door, and he got two letters; finally, holding them up in his little hand he ran around the house several times shouting: "Both letters are from America. Mummy, patience, let me open them?" The child opened one letter, while [my] husband opened the other. I stood satisfied and chewed on my painted lips. One letter was from you, while the other was from Albertina. All three of us side-by-side read it aloud...

The need to maintain family and friendship bonds allows letters to be read (often out loud) and shared with others:

> (32) *Aš suprantu jūsų jausmus ir anaiptol nepykstu, kad jūs perskaitot vieni kitiems rašytus laiškus. Juk, taip pagalvojus, laiškai yra vienintelis būdas palaikyti ryšius.* (N. J. 1982-04-06);
> I understand your feelings, and I am not at all angry that you read the letters to each other. When you think of it, letters are the only way to keep in touch, aren't they?

Thus, the circulation of the letter, especially the reading, is extended to the whole family circle. According to Markelis, collaborative letter-writing practices had several important meanings: they provided important information about the well-being of the authors, they "reaffirmed family solidarity,"[32] and the very occasion of letter writing had a special place in people's lives.[33]

However, the act of writing or not writing a letter is often the result of a specific emotion, feeling, mood or state of mind. Emotions that inspire or guide letter writing are especially emphasized in love letters or letters exchanged between very close friends. The intimate nature of this kind of letter highlights the individual voice of the writer; letter writing becomes a solitary, personal, individual experience, and a practice that is shared between only two people:

> (33) *Štai šio vakaro valandų bėgy aš kažkaip įsileidau į praeities gilųjį šaltinį, kuris iš pradžių sudarė man kažkaip blogą nuotaiką, norėjosi kažkur eiti, eiti... Bet staiga man bevartant knygą papuolė Tavo vakarykščias laiškelis, aš nieko nelaukdamas jį perskaičiau dar kartą ir ėmiausi rašyti Tau atsakymą.* (R. K. 1957-10-29);
> So there you have it, as the evening hours ran by, I somehow sank into the deep well of the past, which at first somehow put me in a bad mood, I wanted to go, to go somewhere... But suddenly, while looking over a book, I came across your letter of yesterday. Without waiting, I read it once more and started to write you an answer;

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[32] Ibid., 112.
[33] Ibid., 114.

(34) *Laiško pradžia beveik visada parodo supančią aplinką rašančiojo, išimtis tiktai tada, kai šitoji aplinka, žinoma, tarp jų. Tu gerai prisimeni pirmuosius mano laiškus; juose visada būdavo pasikeitimai, nes tada niekada nestovėjau vietoje ir supančioji aplinka nuolat keitėsi. Tiesa, kai kada ji pasikeisdavo ir pagal nuotaiką, o nuotaika – irgi supančioji aplinka. Ji gali būti gera ir bloga; tai turi reikšmės aprašymui, pasėkoje to galima aprašyti daugiau, tiksliau ir mažiau, paviršutiniškiau.* (A. D. 1956-08-30);

The beginning of a letter almost always indicates the writer's surroundings; the only exception, of course, is when the surroundings are shared. You remember my first letters very well; they were full of changes, because at that time I never stayed in one place, and the surroundings were changing constantly. It is true that sometimes it would change according to mood, but the mood is also part of the surroundings. It can be good or bad, and this has an effect on the writing: as a result, one can write more and in greater detail, or less and superficially.

A particular emotion is often mentioned as the main reason to finish (or not write) a letter; it also affects its content and style:

(35) *Tuo ir baigsiu, nes kai pradėjau skaudžiai rašyti, visai sugedo nuotaika* (B. J. R. 1972-06-02);
I will end with this, because when I started writing about painful things, my mood was completely ruined;

(36) *Nepyk, kad nesklandžiai rašau, aš labai išsiblaškiusi, pasimetusi* (L. Bl. 1981-06-23);
Please, don't be angry at my sloppy writing, I am very absent-minded and distracted.

Thus, letter writing as a social practice is both a collaborative and an individual experience. The voice of the individual "I" is shaped by his or her inner feelings, which affect (inspire or not inspire) letter writing in different ways, while collaborative writing does not highlight the emotional experiences of an individual writer as much as it emphasizes the importance of communication. Therefore, the very fact of writing and receiving a letter is far more significant than who actually writes it down on paper:

(37) *Jeigu negali pati parašyti, tai tegul sūnus katras parašo keletą žodelių.* (V. Kaz. 1977-10-01);
If you can't write yourself, let one of your sons write a few words;

(38) *Aš pat[s] sergu, tai mano žmona rašo jums kelis žodelius* (S. M. 1959-08-10);
I'm ill, so my wife is writing you a few words.

In non-collaborative writing, the importance is shifted to the specific person from whom the letter is expected:

(39) *Atleisk, Irute, jei ką ne taip parašiau. Laukiu. Rašyk, viską viską.* (E. U. 1964-08-15);
Forgive me, Irutė, if I have written something poorly. I am waiting. Write everything, everything;

(40) *Danučiuk, rašyk, kur žadi praleisti atostogas, rašyk daug daug apie save, apie namiškius; Niliuką, Tėvelį, Mamytę, Tetą ir apie visus pažįstamus.* (V. G-J. 1956-03-02);
Danučiuk, write about where you plan to spend your holidays, write a lot, a lot about yourself, your family, Niliukas, Father, Mother, Aunt, and about all our acquaintances.

Family letters dominate the corpus (they comprise 59 percent of all letters). This dominance could be accidental (the corpus does not aim for a balanced number of different letter genres), but it more likely reflects the importance family letters occupied in Lithuanian lives throughout the twentieth century. Letter writing emerged among ordinary Lithuanians at the turn of the twentieth century as a practice that helped to maintain family bonds with those members who were separated by distance due to increasing emigration,[34] and this practice was maintained throughout the twentieth century due to the sociopolitical changes in post-World War II Lithuania discussed above. This allows us to claim carefully that twentieth century Lithuanian letter writing practices evolved and were shaped largely by maintaining written communication between family members, i.e., by writing family letters.

[34] Cf. Tamošiūnaitė, "Raštingumo link," 59.

Artifacts: Tools and "Poor" Writing

Artifacts, such as pen and paper, are often mentioned in the letters, especially when there is a need to apologize for poor or unclear handwriting. Such apologies are very common throughout the corpus. They often appear as formulaic or stable expressions, repeated from one letter to another, somewhat as a necessary composition element, and are usually expressed at the end of the letter. Most often, the pen, the nib, or the paper are blamed for unclear and unaesthetic handwriting:

(41) *Rašau tušinuku. Braižas baisus. Norisi suplėšyti laišką* (N. An. 1986-11-17);

I am writing with a ballpoint pen. The handwriting is terrible. I want to tear the letter up;

(42) *Dovanokite, kad neaiškiai parašiau. Mat, mano parkeris netikęs* (M. J. 1960-04-03);

Forgive me for the unclear writing. It is because my fountain pen is worthless;

(43) *aš baigiu rašyti, nesupykte ant munęs, blogas rašymas muno ir prasta plunksna ir popieris.* (A. P. 1930-05-25);

I'm finishing writing, please don't be angry with me, my handwriting is poor, and the nib and the paper too.

These apologies indicate that aesthetic value of the letter is important, especially for clarity and mutual understanding. Writing is an act of identity[35]; handwriting visually reflects the personality of the scribe and shapes his or her "written" identity. Remarks about untidy and illegible handwriting indicate the quality of handwriting is important for the addressee as well:

(44) *Atsiminiau. Viena pastaba. Pradėjai bjauriai rašyti, atvirai sakau. Kol laikas, tvarkykis.* (J. Bl. 1981-11-07);

I've remembered. One remark. You've started writing abominably, I'm telling you this frankly. Do something about it while there is still time.

[35] Blommaert, *Grassroots literacy*, 85.

Markelis indicates that for many Lithuanian immigrants and their children in the first half of the twentieth century good writing was first and foremost related to beautiful and neat handwriting.[36] At the end of the nineteenth century, penmanship was an obligatory subject taught in the so-called "people's schools"[37]; it was kept in primary (and upper level) school programs throughout the first half of the twentieth century in Lithuania.[38] In Soviet primary schools, attention was also given to neat handwriting (teaching a class on penmanship or integrating penmanship into Lithuanian language classes), as pupils learned how to write with a nib pen.[39] Relying on their school practices, letter writers associated "good writing" with a certain type of tool: a nib (fountain) pen, rather than a ballpoint pen, which, according to them, ruined their handwriting:

> (45) *Rašau su nauju parkeriu, pirktu Puškine. Jau su tuo tušiniu, matai, visai pagadinau raštą. Nuo dabar vėl nusprendžiau rašyti su parkeriu, bet jau sunku bus ištaisyti raštą.* (L. Bl. 1981-08-22);
>
> I am writing with a new nib pen that I bought in Puškinas. As you can see, with that ballpoint pen I've already completely ruined my handwriting. From now on, I've decided to write only with a nib pen, but now it will be difficult to correct [my] handwriting.

Clearly, even though letter writing was more or less limited to the private domain of Lithuanian lives and was an informal form of written communication, frequent apologies for "poor" handwriting and references to inappropriate pens indicate that scribes' vernacular literacy practices were to some extent shaped by institutional literacies: the understanding of "good" and "proper" writing and the use of the "right" pen was instilled by formal education. References to the norms, i.e., formally acquired literacy practices, are evident in apologies for language mistakes:

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[36] Markelis, "Every person like a letter," 115.
[37] Karčiauskienė, *Pradinio švietimo*, 68–69.
[38] Ibid., 29, 37.
[39] Personal communication with a primary school teacher, Ona Sprainaitienė.

(46) *atleisk už rašymą ir klaidas. Taip išėjo – pilnai rašybos neišmokau.* (J. Me. 2004-06-25);
Forgive me for the handwriting and the mistakes. That's how it is – I haven't fully learned how to spell;

(47) *tai ir baigsiu rašyti, atsiprašysi[u] už bjaurų raštą ir klaidas, ba labai jau šlykščiai rašau.* (Z. B-M. 1982-12-01);
So I'll finish writing and apologize for the ugly handwriting and the mistakes, since my writing is very disgusting;

(48) *Nežinau, kaip Tu ir „išslebizavosi" mano „raštus". Jau klaidų, tai ir pats nebenusituokiu, kiek čia pasitaikys visokių: ir loginių, ir „morfologinių", ir visokių kitų, bet aš norėčiau, kad Tu jas pastebėtum ir pasakytum, kur silpniausia mano vieta, nes aš savąją, gimtąją kalbą vertinu ir kiek sugebėdamas nenoriu jos dergti.* (V. G. 1954-11-13);
I don't know how you will "sound out" my "writings." And mistakes, even I don't realize myself how many of them are going to end up here: logical, "morphological," and all kinds of others, but I want you to note them and tell me what my weakest point is, because I appreciate my own mother tongue and, as much as I can, I don't want to corrupt it.

It is important to note that apologies for language mistakes are not as frequent as apologies for poor or unclear handwriting (the former comprise only 15 percent of all apologies). They usually appear in the letters written by highly schooled and literate scribes who had the most exposure to formal education and who were the most familiar with spelling and punctuation norms. These apologies, on the one hand, point to the lack of confidence in the scribes' normative writing skills. On the other hand, the very nature of the private letter does not oblige these scribes to write in perfect language, so they might not feel the pressure and obligation to follow formal spelling, punctuation or grammar rules in their vernacular writing, as if it was not "real" writing.[40]

In the letters written by Lithuanian emigrants, especially those who were born outside of Lithuania, apologies for writing mistakes are related to weaker Lithuanian language skills:

[40] Cf. Barton and Hamilton, *Local literacies*, 255.

(49) *Atleisk man, jei esu padaręs klaidų. Aš dar nelabai pripratęs lietuviškai rašyti.* (K. L. 1947-08-03);
Forgive me if I've made mistakes. I am still not used to writing in Lithuanian;

(50) *Atsiprašau už mano raštą. Aš lietuviškai negirdžiu, tai yra man labai sunku atsiminti, kaip rašyti, sakinius gerai negaliu sudėti. Ar tu, Broleli, gali mano laiškus suskaityti?* (Z. S. 1989-02-22);
Forgive me for my writing. I don't hear any Lithuanian, so it's hard to remember how to write, and I can't put sentences together well. Are you, brother, able to understand my letters?;

(51) *Dovanokit, jeigu nelabai gerai lietuviškai rašau, bet aš galvoju, kad galėsit išskaityti, ką aš parašiau.* (R. B. 1993-09-07);
Forgive me if I don't write very well in Lithuanian, but I think you'll be able to understand what I wrote.

It is important to note that these apologies don't emphasize language norms (spelling, punctuation rules), as much as the importance of understanding, i.e., they apologize for their language only because it might be difficult to understand the content of the message, and not because the language does not comply with written standards and norms.

However, poor writing is not always a result of using unsuitable tools or the lack of knowledge of spelling and grammar rules. Some writers blame their health or old age for unclear or chaotic writing:

(52) *Sudie, dovanok, kad gal nevykusiai parašiau, nes jau jaučiasi metų našta* (J. Ban. 2002-02-11);
Goodbye, and forgive me if I didn't write well, for I am feeling the burden of the years;

(53) *Sirgau labai ir dabar menka sveikata: akis labai silpnėj[a], jau sunku rašyti* (E. I. 1965-08-05);
I was very sick, and now my health is poor: one eye has gotten very weak, it is difficult to write now.

Others do not perceive themselves as good or skilled writers, and this affects, in their opinion, the content, style, penmanship, and the clarity of the letter:

(54) *Atsiprašau, kad tiek visokių niekų primalevojau, kad mokėčiau rašyti gerai, tai daugiau parašyčiau.* (S. P. 1922-05-27);

I apologize that I have blathered so much nonsense, if I knew how to write well, I would write more;

(55) *Tamstos raštą labai gerai galiu suprasti ir paskaityti. [...] Dovanok, kad aš prastai rašau, nes geriau nemoku, jeigu negali paskaityti, tai duok man žinoti.* (E. K. 1939-04-18);
I can understand and read your handwriting very well. [...] Forgive me that I write poorly, I don't know how to write better. If you can't read [it], please let me know.

Hamilton and Barton emphasize that vernacular literacies are "subject to the social pressures of the family and other social groups and are regulated by them."[41] In other words, even though letter writing (as any other vernacular writing) is informal, self-generated, and voluntary, it is still restricted, regulated, and bound by certain family or pen-pal expectations and norms. Apologies or remarks regarding "poor" or "unclear" handwriting in our data corpus emphasize that this social pressure is felt on both ends of the communication channel. References to writing norms and mistakes, the use of proper writing tools, understandable, neat, and "clear" writing, on the one hand, point to the pressure that institutional literacies have on letter writing, on the other hand, they also emphasize the pressure exerted by the "letter community," i.e., the letter has to meet the expectations of both the author and the reader.

Concluding Remarks

A closer look at self-references to writing in a corpus of Lithuanian letters highlights how letter writing functioned during the twentieth century as vernacular literacy practice. The analysis of certain aspects of the settings, participants, and artifacts involved in letter writing reveals that for many ordinary people, letter writing was often embedded within their everyday activities in terms of time, place, domain (home, work or school), participants, tools, and style.

References to time and place within the letters show how letter writing was incorporated into other household, school, work, and leisure activities, such as cooking, attending classes, watching TV or traveling. Information on the exchange dates

[41] Barton and Hamilton, *Local Literacies*, 253.

of letters helps to establish a chronological and cyclical pattern of communication that enabled an efficient and successful exchange of information. Letter writing was not only a one-time solitary activity, but often a continuous and time-unbounded practice that took place in variety of different settings beyond the home domain.

Lithuanian letter writing during the twentieth century evolved as both a collaborative and an individual literacy practice. The individual voice of the writer, as shaped by his or her inner emotions, prevailed in love letters or letters exchanged between very close friends, while collaborative writing was prominent in written communication among family members. Letter writing practices emerged among Lithuanians first and foremost as a collaborative activity that involved several family members in the writing and reading of a letter. These letters were often *heteroglossic*, since they contained the voices of several family members who participated in the letter-writing event. The intended readership of these letters also often extended beyond an individual reader. The dominance of family letters in the corpus reflects the sociohistorical and political circumstances of the twentieth century that resulted in family separations in terms of space. Among ordinary Lithuanians, letter writing as a vernacular literacy practice evolved and was shaped by these family letters.

References to poor writing in the current letter corpus highlighted the importance of the aesthetic value of writing, i.e., its visual aspect. The visual aspect's importance is tied to its ability to send the intended message to the addressee and to assure that the message is understood properly. This "norm" shared by letter writers helps to explain the frequent apologies for bad handwriting, whether it was caused by using improper tools (pen or paper), by health issues or by insufficient language skills. These apologies highlighted the overlap between vernacular and institutional literacy practices. Even though letter writing as such was not perceived by many as "real" writing (it was intended only for private use), it was nevertheless subject to written language norms; references to "bad" pens blamed for ruining the handwriting point to the overlap between ver-

nacular and institutional literacies, since it was formal education that imposed the understanding of proper (hand)writing for Lithuanian letter writers.

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"We Must Toil Because God Bade Men Eat": A Paradigm of Values on Food and Eating in *Metai* [*The Seasons*] by Kristijonas Donelaitis

DAINORA POCIŪTĖ

Not only *The Seasons*, but all the other surviving writings by Kristijonas Donelaitis, as well as all the facts known about his life, attest he was an earnest Lutheran by worldview and education. He studied theology at the University of Königsberg as Pietism spread throughout Lutheran churches in Germany and Prussia, and signs of Pietism are noticeable in *The Seasons*.[1] It must be emphasized that Pietism was a type of movement that did not question Lutheran dogma, but fostered forms of communal and individual forms of prayer more closely tied to ethics. Pietism had no intention of changing doctrine; therefore, the fundamental truths and values inherent in the teachings and worldview of Lutheranism were the same in the sixteenth century as in the eighteenth.

Fundamentally, the teaching that salvation came through faith, rather than by one's works, which the Protestant patriarchs formed and disseminated in detail during the sixteenth century on the basis of the Apostle Paul's writings, radically

[1] Numerous authors who have examined Donelaitis's creative work noticed the influence of Pietism. This aspect was widely discussed in Gineitis, *Kristijono Donelaičio aplinka*.

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modified the social profile and ethics of Europe during early modern times. The idea of salvation was liberated from the concept of a covenant and understood as a purely religious value, part of a divine order that does not depend on personal merit. A human being is a divine instrument enacting his or her own vocation. Max Weber's classic study in this area, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, demonstrated that Protestantism paradoxically encouraged the comprehension of work as a religious value by refuting the idea of salvation as compensation for the performance of work. Work or profession was the earthly testimony of a chosen one, not some tiresome duty, but a vocation.

The division of the protagonists in *The Seasons* into the good and the wicked is traditional in the Lutheran world, in which some people execute their vocations perfectly, while others are doomed to perish and end up in hell. *The Seasons* attests that nature is an intelligent and ideal creation of God and that every iota of it, which is devoted to Him, performs its own designated function. The seasons occurring during the year supply various blessings; birds and other creatures glorify the Creator, while humans, who were created in the image of God but experienced original sin, demonstrate their vocation through their work and activities, and await their judgment. A person's mode of life testifies to that person's righteousness or wickedness. Nevertheless, Lutheran theology does not teach or encourage the community to judge others. The very first translator of the Bible into Lithuanian, Jonas Bretkūnas, who was a proponent of Lutheran Orthodoxy in Lithuania Minor during the sixteenth century, asserted, in his 1595 collection of sermons entitled *Postilė* (Postilla), that the Christian community on this earth will never be and could not possibly be ideal (an aim that radical Protestants, like the Antitrinitarians and Anabaptists, were pursuing). He further asserted that Satan's actions in the world were his daily work. Therefore, good and evil exist jointly and alongside one another in the lives of people, and society itself is divided into the righteous and the wicked:

> Cathars, Novatians and Anabaptists, as if they were heretics or blasphemers, might proclaim that all Christian people should be good and holy and that there shouldn't be a single wicked person, as if there shouldn't be a thief, a drunkard, a philanderer or any other engaged in a life of sin amongst Christians. Oh, Lord God, wouldn't that be a good thing; it would even greatly suit God himself if there were no sinners anywhere around. But in this Evangel, our Lord Jesus Christ shows by comparison that there are the good and the wicked in Christianity, all the way to the end of the world.[2]

Donelaitis remains a representative of that same, traditional Lutheran worldview reflecting the unavoidable end of the world. He writes, "Do not we daily see the devil rough/The hair of wicked people in his power."[3] It is the duty of a Christian to know how to recognize signs of evil and to disassociate from them, but not to destroy or to judge them. Donelaitis presents images of the everyday life of the sinner and the righteous, not judging, but teaching, showing, and urging them, reminding us that humans are weak and far from omnipotent. The expression Donelaitis uses: "Every man's a fool in his own way,"[4] indicates his conviction that every creation has its own designated destiny and an order organizing its life, which a person would be wise to recognize, understand, and carry out without attempting to overcome it. In this way, the details of a person's everyday life become expressive of that "way" and signs of the designated order. All aspects of daily life acquire valuable, ethical dimensions in Donelaitis's anthropology: speech, behavior, apparel, and even daily eating habits are used to label Christians as both righteous and wicked, as decent and indecent.

The Paradigm of Food and Eating

Delving into the poetic context of the Age of Enlightenment reminds us that *The Seasons* by Donelaitis appears amidst such creative works of eighteenth-century Europe as

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2 Bretkūnas, 211; this citation is translated by Vijolė Arbas.

3 Donelaitis, *The Seasons*, "Autumn Boons," 867-868. References throughout are to the line numbers in each canto.

4 Ibid., "Winter Cares," 543.

The Seasons (1726-1730) by the English poet James Thomson, *Les saisons* (1769) by the French poet Jean François de Saint-Lambert, and others. Nonetheless, none of these others employ peasants, folk culture, and nature as the constructive principle for an artistic worldview. The immortalization of rural culture and the cycle of nature – along with the unexpected and exceptionally poetic Lithuanian language, for which the sentimentality, aestheticism, and decorativeness predominate in Western literature of those times is entirely uncharacteristic – constitute the integrity of the contents and form of Donelaitis's *The Seasons*. In eighteenth century Western culture, peasants were visualized as stylized landscape details; *The Seasons*, however, is exceptional in its conviviality and colorfully represented characterizations.

The Seasons became a unique creative piece in the context of eighteenth-century Europe specifically because the underlying poetic principle of this poem (the cycle of four cantos) is the daily farm life in a village and its attributes, all of which depend upon the rhythm of nature. *The Seasons* is a classical, poetic interconnection of natural philosophy and Protestant values represented by depictions of everyday life in the countryside. Until then, the rhythm of a farmer's daily life was not considered important enough to represent values and ideas worthy of poetic attention. Donelaitis visualizes a working person who is dependent on the pulse of nature testifying to Christian values by his or her daily activities. In *The Seasons*, one of the clearest forms attesting to these values, the one that receives the most attention is the paradigm of food and eating.[5] This is a particularly important paradigm in the life of the country folk: the farmer is the producer of food, and the provision of food relates to this person's earthly vocation's personal and communal obligations. The paradigm of food and eating is an integral part

[5] Saulius Žukas has written an article about the food and eating code (referred to with the archaic word *alimentarinis*) found in *The Seasons* in "Donelaičio *Metų* rišlumo klausimu," 92-109. There, food and eating are judged differently, as epistemic my-another's values.

of the creative work of Donelaitis, reflecting his philosophy of nature in *The Seasons*.

"Polite" Dining

Donelaitis provided numerous poetic testimonies associated with the paradigm of eating as part of his eloquent visualizations of the peasants' day-to-day surroundings. Only two table utensils were known in rural areas during his time: a spoon and a knife. Both are mentioned several times in *The Seasons*. Without a doubt, these are the oldest customary table utensils in the history of civilization. The fork appeared in European culture around the fourteenth century in Italy. Nevertheless, this table utensil remained exceptional for a long time and was rarely used until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is known in Italian monasteries in the Middle Ages, but even during the Renaissance, use of the fork was more an exception than the norm, even in the manors of kings and the nobility of France and Italy. A great many townspeople and members of the upper classes, not just the peasants found in *The Seasons*, were still eating without forks in the eighteenth century. Pieces of meat would be cut off with a knife and put in the mouth with one's hand. In "Pričkus's Tale of a Lithuanian Wedding," Donelaitis describes this manner of grappling for large chunks of meat by hand as rude:

> *Štai Enskys tuojaus ištraukęs didelį peilį,*
> *Virtas ir keptas mėsas jau pradeda pjaustyt*
> *Ir ant luobų ar lentelių pameta stukiais;*
> *Nės apsirijęs jau nežino mandagiai elgtis.*
> *O kitsai jau taip be peilio ėda iš rankų,*
> *Kad lašinių taukai per barzdą varva nuo zūbų.*
>
> Swiftly Enskys pulls out a knife so huge,
> And tosses chunks on top the basts and planks,
> Another with no knife wolfs down by hand,
> Starting to chop up boiled and baked meats
> Since in gluttony he's forgotten good manners.
> So bacon grease is drooling down his beard.[6]

[6] Donelaitis, *Raštai*, "Pričkaus pasaka apie lietuvišką svodbą," 47–50. Translations from this work are by Vijolė Arbas.

Donelaitis notes that not all the peasants know how to carve skillfully. Noblemen, who are accustomed to it, are more suited to this undertaking:

Štai tuojaus Enskys, išsitraukęs didelį peilį,
Virtas ir kepta mėsas padalyt pasisiūlė.
Bet, kaip ponai daro, tranšieruot nemokėdams,
Tuo su nagais kaip būrs lašinių šmotus nusitvėrė
Ir skvarbydams ant torielių sumetė stukiais;
Nės, prisirijęs jau, nenumanė mandagiai elgtis.

Enskys, producing an enormous knife,
Offered to cut the boiled meat and the roast.
Unable though to carve as gentry do,
He took a lump of bacon in his hands,
Tore it up and threw pieces onto plates;
The glutton soon forgot how to behave.[7]

Generally, one might think the use of a knife when eating meat was already commonplace among Prussian peasants. As Donelaitis points out, however, this was still considered a gentlemanly custom. Thus, whenever a big group of peasants got together, especially since they would have already imbibed too much ("gorged with brandy wine"), they would forget their table manners and eat the meat by tearing it apart with their hands. Donelaitis denounces such behavior:

O kiti, taip jau girti, neturėdami peilių
Ir su rankomis apgniaužę, lašinius ėdė,
Taip kad jų taukai per barzdą jau nulašėjo,
Nės jie mislyjo, kad būrs, pas Krizą sėdėdams,
Kloniotis ir poniškai pasielgt neprivalo.

While others, also drunk, who had no knife,
Held a lump in their fingers as they chewed
With fat already dribbling down their chins,
For peasants were not bound at Krizas' place,
They thought, to bow and ape the gentry's ways.[8]

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7 Donelaitis, *The Seasons*, "Autumn Boons," 163-168.
8 Ibid., 171-175.

Good Food – the Product of Labor

The Seasons is a creative piece that validates the values of everyday Christian life. In this work, the defining of these values is served by all human behaviors and actions, including food, its preparation, and its consumption – a basic pleasure of human life described with exceptional vitality:

O po tam abu tiesiog už stalo nukvietęs
Su Ilzbe, savo kukarka, pasenusia boba,
Daug skaniai keptų ir šutytų atnešė valgių:
Jautienos riebios, kiaulienos irgi žąsienos,
Plaučių ir kepenų, ir blėkų didelį puodą.
Tuos valgius visus, svečiams į bliūdą supiltus,
Krizas su pačia meilingai ragina valgyt.

After inviting both right behind the table
With Ilzbe his kitchen helpmate, an old lady,
He brings in many delicious roasts and stews:
Fatty beef, pork as well as goose,
Lungs and livers and a big pot of tripe.
All that food poured in a bowl for the guests,
Krizas and his spouse lovingly encourage eating.[9]

There is considerable delight taken in naming different vegetables and grains in *The Seasons:* parsnips, carrots, turnips and swedes (rutabagas), kohlrabi, red beetroot, sauerkraut, leafy vegetable soup, beans, potatoes, and various grain dishes, as well as baked goods. The different meats of domesticated birds and animals are much appreciated: pork, beef, mutton, poultry (stewed chicken, goose and duck), internal organs (lungs, liver, intestines and tripe, a stew made of cut pieces of intestine) and fermented beverages (beer and wines).

The scenes in *The Seasons* describing the preparation of food raised and processed, along with the delight taken in doing so, are noticeably high-spirited and cheery. Eating and relishing food constitute a main source of joy in life:

[9] Donelaitis, *Raštai*, "Pričkaus pasaka apie lietuvišką svodbą," 40-46.

„Ak, – tarė, – liksminkitės, jau vėl čėsnis pasidaro.
Tikt girdėkit, kad Bendiksas žąsiną pjauja
Ir kaip Paikžentis pasiritęs aviną smaugia.
Vauškus savo namams vienragį bulių stekena,
O Miklos darže taip smarkiai svilina kuilį,
Kad per mylią dūmai, nei debesiai pasikėlę,
Saulę su žvaigždėms ir šaltą mėnesį tamsin.
Taigi dabar dešrų visokių bus prisivalgyt,
Nės lašinių bei kumpių jau rūkyt pakabintų
Žiemai pas būrus daugybė didelė kaba."

And said: "Good news! There'll be a new feast soon.
Bendiksas is slitting a gander's throat,
And Paikzentis throttling a ram he's thrown.
Vauskus is slaughtering a one-horned bull,
And Mykolas singeing a hog so hard.
There's black smoke spreading for a mile around,
And clouding all the stars, the sun and moon.
So now we'll eat our fill of sausages,
Because in peasant homes there's so much flitch,
And gammon hung to smoke for winter use."[10]

The smoking, baking and stewing of meats from domestic animals and birds are especially appreciated in *The Seasons*. The dishes prepared from them are frequently named "tasty" and given special attention amidst other foods. Donelaitis does not propagate asceticism. The food produced by toil is a primary source of joy in everyday life; it is how a person is compensated for daily toil:

Darbo reik, nės taip kožnam Dievs paliepė valgyt,
Valgio reik, kad dirbančius syla nepamestų.
Taigi nečėdykim mušt, pjaut ir skerst savo valgį.
Vaike! Numušk drąsa jautuką sau nupenėjęs;
Pjauk avių kelias, nečėdyk aviną luiną;
Kišk žąsis, pyles, vištas į didelį puodą;
Skersk daglus paršus, pasiskersk nutukusią kiaulę;
Valgyk sveiks dešras, iš kruopo sau pasidaręs.
Imk raumens stukius, sukapojęs kimšk smageninę;
O kad dar negana, nusitvėręs didelę žarną,

[10] Donelaitis, *The Seasons*, "Autumn Boons," 341-350.

Kimšk drąsa plaučius, n'atbok, kad plyšdama driksters,
Ir kepenų n'užmiršk, kad storą pridrebi dešrą.
Nės tokie daiktai, tau gal didei susigadyt.

We must toil hard because God bade men eat
And we must eat so we have strength to work.
So without stint let's slaughter, carve and chop.
Slaughter the young bull, boy, you fattened up,
Slay sheep and do not spare the hornless ram,
Shove geese, ducks, hens into a good-sized pot,
Kill motley piglets and the fattened pig,
Relish the sausages well-stuffed with grits
And cut lean meat to fill pig stomachs with.
If that be not enough, go stuff chopped lung
Into a bigger gut. No, it won't burst!
Add liver too to make thick sausages,
Because such things can stand you in good stead.[11]

The grown food must be wisely managed ("And also think well what you keep in store"). Donelaitis criticizes immoderation and any sudden consumption of all the food raised during autumn or indulging too much on a daily basis ("cheering the guts"), and then, upon the arrival of spring, eating "your fare unspiced."

Therefore, *The Seasons* is not the glorification of delighting in food, but a lesson about the virtue of moderation. Donelaitis notes that neither such satiation and pleasurable eating, nor enjoying the fruits of one's labor, are everyday reimbursements. Taking delight in eating to one's content often switches to a modest intake of food during the time of daily work:

Mes besidovydami daugsyk kruopas nedarytas
Ir plutas menkas blogai kramtydami valgėm.
Tankiai mes tvanke, prastai maišydami skinkį
Ir vandens malkus iš klano semdami, gėrėm.

How many times we've ate unseasoned groats
And chewed with difficulty tiny crusts!
Often in heat waves nothing but thin beer
And water from a puddle we have drunk. [12]

[11] Ibid., 376-388.
[12] Ibid., 364-367.

Wholesome and Unwholesome Foods

The episode about table utensils and aesthetics at the table has shown that the paradigm of eating in *The Seasons* by Donelaitis can be polite or animal-like, as evidenced by the two verbs used in Lithuanian to denote eating: *valgyti*, to eat like a human being, and *ėsti*, to eat like an animal, i.e., with or without good manners. Food and the manner of eating have a dual nature; they can be signs of goodness, decency, and Christianity, or negativity, sinful, and a life removed from normal customs.

The Seasons ascribes positive meanings to food that is produced, cultivated, and raised by the people themselves: the meat of farm animals, grain culture, and vegetables, the typical and traditional foods in a village. They signify the decent, righteous, and Christian lives of people, whereby *labor* is what earns the food. These are the foods Lithuanians eat in *The Seasons*. Donelaitis measures ethical and Christian values by the life style of the local people, those who have been toiling on this land for ages. The newly-arrived, immigrants, and squires are associated with a different paradigm, an improper manner of eating and indecent food: oysters and wild beasts and birds; i.e., what can be "taken" from nature without actually raising it, making it undeserved. This food involves no toil in laboring; instead, it entails shooting, trapping or overtaking the animals and birds in some other way:

Viens nešvankėlis mėsinėjo vanagą juodą,
O kitsai, su nagais draskydamas ištisą zuikį,
Kirmėlių gyvų lizdus iš vėdaro krapštė;
Ale trečiasis, du bjauriu ryku nusitvėręs,
Rupuižes baisias į bliūdą tarškino platų;
Nės tas rupuižes mūsų ponai garbino skaudžiai.

One godless rogue was dressing a black hawk,
Another tearing a whole hare apart,
Scraping a nest of live worms from its guts,
The third man, grabbing hold of two foul pots,
Was throwing oysters into a wide bowl
Because our squires hold them in high regard.[13]

[13] Ibid., 280-285.

Wild foods taken from nature, those not requiring human labor to raise, are given a negative connotation in *The Seasons*. Such food causes nausea and vomiting in honest, decent people:

Taipgi bežiūrint man jau dūšiai pikta pastojo,
Ir aš, pro duris iššokęs, vemti pradėjau.

Just as I stood there watching I felt sick,
I dashed outside and started throwing up.[14]

Delighting in unearned food taken from nature (that is meant to glorify God) is considered an ungodly thing in *The Seasons*. Farming peasants do not avail themselves of it; only the landlords or the Germans do. It follows that the way the gentry eats, when "gorging" or "pouring into the paunch" without working, "not thinking of God or heaven" ("Autumn Boons," 319), is condemned as sinful, and even invokes dangers. The squires dining on caviar (*kabiar*) are warned:

Ar nesibijotės užspringt, kad kabiar ėdat?
Ar kad jūsų namus perkūns į plentą supleškys?

Aren't you afraid you'll choke with caviar
Or lightning strike your house and burn it down?[15]

Following the description of a scene of sinful eating by the gentry, Selmas pronounces his observation about the end times: "Master and servant hurry down to hell" ("Autumn Boons," 327).

Different values are ascribed to wild and domestic animals and birds in *The Seasons*. Wildlife is not designed for people to eat, because these beings are for worshiping God; their function is representative, involving the glorification of the Creator. The function of these creatures is especially clearly represented by the birds described in the beginning of the "Birdsongs of Spring." People are only meant to consume the results of their own labor, the birds and animals they've raised on their farms.

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[14] Ibid., 288-289.
[15] Ibid., 320-322.

As Donelaitis notes, only these animals, the ones raised by the work of people, have a utilitarian purpose, earmarked for feeding humankind. People love and care for domestic birds, as Donelaitis observes, not for their voices (unlike nightingales and storks), but for their meat:

Ale nedingokit, kad mes dėl alaso mielo
Ar dėl jūs dainų šventų jus šeriame tvartuos;
Ne! mes dėl mėsos tiktai jūsų giriame balsą.

But don't think it's for your good cheer or for
Your rousing songs we feed you in our byres!
It's for your flesh, naught else, your voice we prize.[16]

For an Ending – It's All About Dung

Food earned by one's labor, not taken from nature for one's own benefit, is righteous and due compensation in the Christian sense. A positive meaning is achieved specifically in this context of values, not only by the pleasurable results of one's work (tasty and fatty food derived from domestic animals and a garden), but by all that relates to food production by constant labor. This is clearly indicated by illiterate rhetoric of the basest kind – "dung," "midden," "shit" – which serve here not as obscene rhetoric, but as emblems of the righteous life of a farmer earning his or her food. Donelaitis names it briefly and succinctly: "And Christian blessings come from stinking dung":

Ar nežinau, kad būrs nor grečną grūdą sulaukti,
Tai pirm to jisai tur grečną šūdą pakrėsti?
Puodui juk kasdien, kad kokį viralą verdi,
Druskos ne tiktai, bet dar ir uždaro reikia.
Kam nesisūdęs ir n'užsidaręs nesrebi sriubą;
O tu dar juokies, kad klapai mėžinį rauso
Ir pardovytoms dirvelėms uždarą taiso?
Taigi nutverk rykus, kurie tam yr padaryti,
O mėžk greitai ir linksmai pakvipusį skarbą!
Iš menkų daiktų daugsyk dyvai pasidaro,
O iš mėšlo smirdinčio žegnonė pareina.

[16] Ibid., 66-68.

Don't say you don't know that to get good grain
A peasant first has got to spread good shit?
Does not the cooking pot, when you make soup,
Need more substantial flavoring than salt?
That's why, if it is lacking, you'll not sup.
Yet you mock peasants rummaging in dung,
Preparing seasoning for hungry fields.
So grasp the implements made for the job
And gladly gather up the pungent wealth.
Many a wonder has from base things sprung
And Christian blessings come from stinking dung.[17]

Paradoxically, dung and pies belong to the same paradigm in *The Seasons* as the lower and the upper vertical components. In the value system of *The Seasons*, the person who eats unearned food ("without that dung enjoy those oven pies") is an exploiter of nature and other people:

Tūls nusvilęs ponpalaikis rods juokiasi būrams
Ir besišypsodams jų darbus niekina bloznas,
Lygiai kad toksai be būrų gal įsiremti
Irgi be mėšlo jų pyragais gal pasivalgyt.

He is a fool, the shabby squire who mocks
The peasant farmers and derides their toil.
As if without them he could strut around,
Without that dung enjoy those oven pies.[18]

Eating and food are the codes of values Donelaitis formulated in *The Seasons* regarding the philosophy of nature and Protestant traditions: they are life's indicators of good (gained through working) and sinful (exploiting God's creations). The barn and the dung are signs of decency, whereas caviar and oysters, as well as clearly signs of foreign manners and tastes, are signs of indecency. People living moral lives eat only the food they earn by their own labor. Immoral people use the fruits they never earned by toil, and thereby harm the divine order in the world and Christian ethics.

Translated by Vijolė Arbas

[17] Ibid., "Summer Toil," 267-277.
[18] Ibid., 278-281.

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Autumn Comes Through the Woods

Chapter Three

MARIUS KATILIŠKIS

The road and the wooden bridge that crossed the stream were still a novelty in these parts. The road cut such a sharp and straight notch through the boggy woods, as if a taut rope had been used to plot its course, that on a clear day you could see the blades of a windmill set on a hilltop in the next county some six or seven kilometers away. The bridge was hewn and built from the very woods in which it stood. Sap continued to ooze from its timbers, floorboards, and guardrails.

The master builders who constructed the bridge were outsiders and came with a boss whose beard was so full and long that he cinched it with his belt. The road work was done by the farmers themselves. No matter that their elders had summoned them for labor that would benefit them collectively, they cursed as hardily as the bearded fellows as they cut the trees and lay them down side by side. Not just across the width of the road, but an additional few meters for the shoulders, sinking the timber into the underlying base. Afterwards they brought in clay, coarse gravel, rocks, whatever they could find

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MARIUS KATILIŠKIS (Albinas Marius Vaitkus, 1915–1980), over the course of his life, worked on the farm, logged in the forests, built roads, was a librarian in the town of Pasvalys and, after World War II, labored in the steel mills of Chicago. And he wrote. He published his first collection of short stories after emigrating to Germany. His novels *Užuovėja, Išėjusiems negrįžti,* and other notable works came out in the U.S. An unfinished novel, *Pirmadienis Emeraldo gatvėje,* was published posthumously. This extract is the first English translation from his best-known work, *Miškais atėjo ruduo.*

in the nearby hills. And yet, for a long time to come, the road still swayed and shook whenever a heavier load drove over it. The porous earth's hunger was not so easily assuaged.

The forest ranger's homestead was also a new phenomenon. It was rebuilt soon after the road and the bridge appeared, so that very little remained of the former property with its spacious structures, except for a few aged trees that grew in the yard and around the perimeter. What had not changed and what was the oldest relic was the linden tree. It spread so wide and its branches were so dense that you couldn't see the sky from below, and not a drop of rain could penetrate from above. An overgrown and deeply rutted trail intersected the road right next to the linden. It marked the crossroads. In the green canopy of its branches hung a weathered wooden shrine with figures of saints. Hiding higher still was a hive much like those made of hollowed-out trees that was there to attract the bees during the honey season, when their swarms rolled, as though balls of fire, along the edges of the forest. The voices of mounted chasers seldom reached it. The bees were more successful in getting through the bogs and reaching the edge of the swamp than were the riders, with their brooms and cowbells, who quickly got lost. The swarms, just as all of the bountiful gifts of the forest, were harvested and tended by the old ranger, the father of the current holder of the post. He couldn't tell you how many hives he had in tree trunks. And the honey he took to town before Christmas was not in basswood kegs lined up in rows two by two. Even though the hive in the linden tree had been carefully smeared with a mixture of boiled honey, raspberries, and swampland herbs, the bees were just as partial to the shrine of saints. No matter how gently he swept his little bees into his net, old Baikštys had broken off more than a few wooden noses, shriveled hands, or pointed swords going through a saint's heart. As was proper for a decent beekeeper, he chanted sacred hymns and litanies as he worked, which filled his heart to overflowing and gave him a sour throat. To find relief, he would rush off into the woods to shout curses at the women who picked berries there.

A year or two after the government began to redistribute the holdings of the landed estates, some surveyors came bumping down the pocked footpath that ran through the woods and stopped at the ranger's homestead. They spread their papers across the table, marked them up, and asked that he come along to show them the forest boundaries. Baikštys, once it dawned on him that they were not there to buy honey, that they did not bring baskets for mushrooms, and, what's more, they did not even ask for a drink for the men in charge, threw them out and let the dogs off their chains. The crew had to drink the dark water of the stream and subsist on wild strawberries and on fish they caught right there, but still they doggedly waded through the fields, pressed through the tangled thickets of willows and hops, slogged through the bogs, dragging a chain and digging boundary mounds. The ranger's homestead, as was required by law, was allotted six hectares of not particularly good land – this was the surveyors' payback for the unfriendly welcome.

Old man Baikštys responded with a torrent of the most vile profanities and, to demonstrate his contempt for the authorities, in full view of the surveyors he pulled down his pants next to a new mound where they had staked a white fir post with the blackened brand of a mounted knight – the official emblem of the government. What does this symbol, this new government have to do with him? Neither Cossacks nor the Black Hundreds had ever touched his blessed corner of the earth, so why now should he give a hoot about some surveyors, some sort of police? Once every year, somehow or other, he made his way to the city, where his eyes could get their fill of all manner of showoffs and characters. Whoever had business with him could find him. He didn't go looking for anybody. He could do without them. And that was the way it was. But to have some uninvited interlopers insinuate themselves into his neck of the woods, no sir. The entire huge open space that was squeezed in the tight grasp of the forest and the swamp, that was watered by the stream and hemmed in by the rippling swampland lake, belonged to him alone. There, like the lichen and the moss, he could live undisturbed. He plowed for as

long as he could, mowed hay until he grew weary, and herded his animals wherever he saw fit. He continued to do the same from old habit for quite some time to come after the surveyors had left. Young folks who had been granted parcels from the ranger's holdings only had to look around and then, on top of that, face intimidation from the old man, before they waved off their land with a left-handed sign of the cross. Heaping curses on any and all land commissions and declaring they weren't guilty of patricide that they should be sentenced to hard labor, they took off apprehensively, anxious to make it back out without getting lost.

Regardless, the road was laid and the bridge was built right under the windows of the ranger's place. It was then, too, that they replaced the homestead's buildings, exchanging the largest stables, the estate-size barn, and the sixty-foot-long house for structures that were compact and cozy, as was appropriate for a six-hectare farm. The old man could do nothing about it. His spells no longer worked, his homemade old-fashioned musket no longer scared anyone. He neglected the hives – his little bees had all but perished. Only from time to time, when he could restrain himself no longer, would he go out to quarrel with the berry-picking crones. He saw wagons, loaded with all sorts of household goods, rolling down the dusty road, he saw them stopping by the linden tree and farther on, at nicer spots up on hilltops. Later, he looked on as they constructed houses, built mud-walled stables, nailed boards together for their barns. He watched as the new settlers tore up the uncultivated fields, aiming the plow, as if intentionally, right through the middle of where the threshing barn had once stood.

On the other side of the stream, at the Basiuliškiai farmstead, things were not right, either. Ever since the old Striūnas couple had died, something suspicious had been going on there. Every year some new roof would poke out through the branches, new voices would drift over to the ranger's place. Baikštys was always getting ready to go over there and give those Basiuliškiai people a piece of his mind, but he never got farther than the bridge. Though the biggest change of all came

with the store sign that was hung by the entrance to one of the nearby houses. Soon afterwards it was followed by a smithy and a creamery. The dairy prospered in the summer and the store in the winter, when the logging work began.

It was then that the county put up a sign that this was now the village of Virsnės, as the old ranger's place had been called.

The plowed mounds of the higher ground had started to stick their dark backs out of the snow. The sharp edges of the drifts crumbled, softened, and the lithe willow branches that had been flattened under their oppressive weight began to free themselves. The snow slipped off the roofs, roaring as it piled into doorways and under windows. The west wind swept over roof ridges, jiggled the loose boards of gables, and rustled through the treetops all night long, as it devoured the snow in insatiable gulps. Murky and dark, swollen with vapor, saturated with the reek of the awakening earth, the gusts pushed the clouds along, shoving them close to the ground, entangling them among the trees, and farther on melding them into a solid wall of mist. Cattle let out into farmyards bellowed restlessly. They rubbed their numb sides and scratched their horns against fences. Dogs bayed, tomcats leapt onto gates to sharpen their claws. And geese bobbed up and down as they gracefully bent their long necks and preened, which was a sure sign that the spring thaw was near.

The runners of the sleds did not glide easily over winter roads sodden with horse manure. First one, then another sled emerged out of the thick woods and, passing the ranger's place, headed toward the house that, beneath its gable, under the dripping eaves, above its front door, prominently displayed a sign: V. GUŽIENĖ. SELLER OF SUNDRY GOODS. Alongside, another board tacked onto the end of the larger one advertised, in different letters and a different hand, that the store also sold liquor.

Just like the sign, the house, too, was of two parts. The addition, stuck on considerably later, was not a match in either style or in materials. It rose up in great haste, as a necessity, just after the sale of liquor was announced. That news was of no import whatsoever to the inhabitants of the forest villages. They

themselves were resourceful enough to concoct beverages of a more potent sort. If not beer, then a beet liquid so sweet that you couldn't get anything sweeter if you used pure sugar itself, or they had their own method of processing potatoes, straining out the scummy mash. But the loggers, who earned next to nothing, could not have found a more convenient spot. The wagon drivers were satisfied customers, too, often taking a detour of up to three miles, by the old measure, on their way home. During the winter, the horses gnawed away the garden fence beneath the window, rowdy youths tore off the pickets for fights and altercations. In the springtime, old man Gužas would put up a new fence and his daughters would crouch down to see if the peony shoots had poked through and if the rue had survived being trampled under the shod feet of the hellions.

The interior of the house also differed in its function and arrangement. The old main section, built before these supposed golden times, had a spacious entryway with a storage room, typical of all rural houses. On one side, there were the kitchen and the family's living area, with a wide table and sturdily constructed benches along the wall; on the other side, was the store with its rooms. The addition was bright with new wallpaper, painted floors and ceilings, whose finely planed and masterfully milled boards were nailed into the bottom of the joists, unlike the old style. In one of those rooms sat Melamedas's agent counting out money.

Inside was a wide bed with lace-trimmed pillows and a handsome patterned bedspread. The small table with flowers and the photographs on the walls gave evidence that the Gužas daughters came here to rest and to sigh after days filled with hard work and myriad impressions. Špicas felt comfortable in the girlish surroundings. He had turned the charming table, where the girls mugged in front of the oval mirror, combing their hair and beautifying themselves, into a desk, and the room itself into his work place, practically a real office. The knot of his necktie loosened, his shirt undone, his feet up, he was doing as he pleased, according to personal habit and preference. This cozy room already had absorbed an odor, an odor peculiar and

strong, comprised of cologne, garlic, and perhaps herring with onions soaked in vinegar. A briefcase of brown leather with gleaming hardware gaped, its top unclasped, propped against a flower pot. He himself sat in the corner, and the door, as it opened, almost concealed him. A person had to walk around it to get into his range of vision.

"How much?"

"Well, sir, it's written here. Seven cubic meters..."

"Cut or hauled?"

"Cut. What am I supposed to haul it with? And here's the extra, what was done last night and today," he stuck out a second slip of paper.

"A lot of money." The red and white beads clattered beneath the cashier's fingers. They sped along the wires, colliding with a dull thud, and only the devil knew what sum they came up with. He used his other hand to pull money out of the valise. In hefty bundles of fives and tens held by paper bands. The bills even crackled – apparently fresh from the bank – they were so new. The men standing farther back were poking each other in the side.

"What if we just snatched that rawhide bag off the table and then out the door. You think they'd catch us? The forest's right here."

"Go ahead and try. You'll find out."

"Oh, there's a lot of them all stuck together in there. They're rustling like wood shavings. And the little Jew's not afraid to be right next to the woods with a satchel like that..."

"Who's going to grab him? People in these parts just talk big. There's no one with the guts to do it."

"Hey, you, Čepulis, go ahead and take a chance. You could buy a threshing machine with a tractor and you'd go around, all you could drink, happy as that bull grazing in the pasture," Každaila teased the fellow who was admiring the money.

"Listen, he's saying you should stick to being a tractor driver."

"Thank you, sir," the man's grubby fingernails dug into his wages.

"Count it."

"What's there to count? You wouldn't cheat me, sir, now would you?"

"Hey, don't be a smart aleck. Next." The abacus on the small table slammed assertively. What a lizard. Not only can he count and pay out at the same time, but he also hears what's being said at the far end of the entryway.

Lunging forward eagerly, the next one in line would run into the one who was about to leave with a wad of money in his grasp, and the two sheepskin-clad men would bob back and forth, obstructing each other's path.

"Watch where you're going. Something up your tail?"

"Where's the fire? You've still got time to get drunk..."

"Oh, money, money." Krivickas the Pauper, muttering in a prayerful tone, was growing emotional. "If only I could get this much every Saturday, I'd toss back a glass or two myself."

"You're not going to wriggle your way out of it today. You'll have to stand a few rounds yourself. After all, we seriously need to give Petras his due," those around him were putting the fear into him.

"For good old Pete, who's taken care of us, we really should. It's only right. But me, I'm completely done for," sniveled Krivickas, who was beset by a cold and sinking ever more into dejection. His bloodshot and nearsighted eyes, stinging from smoke, wind, and lack of sleep, were watery with tears. Leaning forward and craning his neck, he listened to what was being said and nodded his head, always in agreement, even if he himself was the object of ridicule. Streams of muddy sweat, leaving trails on his face and scruff, and actual deposits of dirt along his mustache and behind his ears, showed how hard he had worked in the forest. He was from an impoverished village of subsistence farmers, where half of the inhabitants had the same surname, so that quite a few of them bore an added moniker to differentiate them.

The line snaked toward the office door. One fellow sat on a barrel of herring, another on a keg of kerosene, their noses sinking toward the floor. They couldn't fight off the drowsiness

that weighed down their heads and pressed on their eyelids. Some leaned up against walls that had been freshly hung with sheets of newspaper, leaving dirty stains on them from their wet sheepskins or soaked woolen coats. At the front of the line, the abacus clattered, the tens being counted out made a rustling sound, while at the back, crisp female voices drifted out of the store, making the men restless. That's where they were settling up, where the two-man teams were splitting their wages and clinking their glasses as they raised their first toast. There were all sorts of pictures: pretty girls half-naked or shamelessly spread-legged, scenes of big cities, gentlemen with pipes and cigars, dogs, horses, ships, some sideways, others upside down, mingled together glued to the walls. Someone, out of boredom, tried to read the words set in the boldest type, and that task was no more successful than a first-grader's attempts to trace a goose-quill pen over a primer's lines – dagens nihyter, svenska dagbladet, stokholms tidningen...

"What's this language that sounds like thunder? What kingdom is it from?" a sleepy-eyed logger pondered.

"Ask Gužienė."

"Like she'd know. She's just a hen with no schooling, like us."

"It'll be Swedish. They buy it to wrap the herring," a slight man, apparently fresh out of school, offered timidly.

"So why do they put all kinds of writing on it and with pictures, too? You can bundle up a thing in plain paper, can't you?" The man who had been able to sound out the words, though not understand them, was dubious.

"Their newspapers are like that."

"If they're newspapers, you'd know right off. They'd have greasy fingerprints and fly spots all over."

"Maybe they don't have flies over there and they eat bacon with gloves," surmised Tugaudis, the former policeman.

Some men dove out, others crowded in. A whole band of drivers came in at the same time. They were from the surrounding area, mostly small farmers with little land and only a horse or two, who derived a considerable portion of their

living from this work. But there were a few substantial farmers, too, with three or four well-fed horses. Good wages attracted Doveika and his type as well. Two of his men and his herdsman hauled logs with three of his two-horse wagons. With gear and animals like that you can get half a cubic meter at one time. Not like these goats of ours, the lesser farmers muttered resentfully among themselves. In their soggy footgear, soaked to their armpits, stepping on each other's shoelaces, they shoved into Gužienė's entryway, converging from all directions.

"Why do you have that whip with you, Butkus? There's no dogs inside," Každaila, carrying his loot, spoke up.

"And what am I gonna prune your shins with?" The fellow, grimacing like a skunk, was bedraggled and dripping wet, as though he had just been pulled out of the flax pond. Actually, he always carried his whip whenever he went to the county seat or to the store. Though it was of poor quality, made of juniper, the rope end all tangled, you never knew when some thief might stick his fingers into your sled.

"No serf's gonna hack away at my shins." Každaila was from the city and regarded all country folk with contempt. Just like Petras the Red, he had plenty of stories to tell of his rich past. He had been in real cities like Klaipėda and had earned his living practically from the sea. He had known factories, too. Like Frenkelis's leather processing plant in Šiauliai, where the stench was so bad that the horses, though they were still some distance away, would go into a mad frenzy and plunge into the water, wagon and all, to swim across the lake. He worked in government construction jobs – building roads, excavating drainage canals through hilly ground, erecting bridges over rivers and causeways across swamps. He had business and run-ins with the wagoners from Utena, who descended like a pestilence on every public works project, even if it was three hundred kilometers from their village. With bearded Orthodox believers and Russkies, street pavers and ditch diggers from Zarasai. With gypsies from Šėduva, with vagrants in Žagarė, who worked summers in Kuršas and spent winters hanging out in the streets, marketplaces, and pubs. With the

sugar refinery workers in Pavenčiai, who were brawlers, hard and bullheaded, typical of the Samogitians. As evidence of his strong opinions and how staunchly he defended them, he had a broken nose, missing teeth, and various kinds of scars. When he threw off his shirt, he could point out twice as many, among all sorts of tattoos on his chest and arms. He needled the rustics every opportunity he got and acknowledged only one form of socializing with them, which was to drink their liquor unabashedly on market days, when they stood packed in the pub and offered drinks all around, to friend and foe alike.

Každaila sprawled across the store counter, the entire length of his body folded over it, as if it had been snapped in two. He considered Gužienė, even though she was pure country folk, his equal, holding her in high regard for her business acumen. And so he addressed her very politely:

"Do you think you might find some small corner where I might set myself down?"

"But of course. Please come into the house. Please, come in."

"Ooh, what a fine woman! Like a wild strawberry – gulp, you swallow it whole and then you turn around and want some more," Každaila murmured under his breath, savoring the thought, as he gripped his purchases.

Petras and Tilius, like two oxen yoked together, sat shoulder to shoulder, jouncing on the low couch, which had at one time looked better and served a better purpose. The heat and oppressive air forced them to throw off their outer clothing and unbutton their shirt collars, which were black as the cloths on their feet. Sweat streamed from Petras's wide forehead and flowed down along his ears and neck into the red thatch of his chest. He had already downed a few glasses and eaten everything within reach. The hostess kept loading up the table and didn't hold back. In place of an empty bottle a full one suddenly appeared, and he didn't care who had put it there. So many buying today, you could drink yourself to death and still not get to finish it all. The loggers pressed around him, as if they had come to the confessional to fulfill their Easter duty,

and the heart of each and every one overflowed with gratitude. They expressed it in the form of vodka and beer and all that Veronika's store could provide.

"Petras, you're our brother and father. Have a drop or two with us. What would we have gotten, if not for that good head of yours?" The brothers Jurėnas swayed and spilled liquor over the floor. Though of slight build, they were long-suffering and diligent workers who spent winters toiling in the forests.

Krivickas the Pauper, staying for a moment just to cool off, twisted and turned his neck:

"We need to drink in the worst way. To celebrate, dear brothers, that we simple folk have a protector and advocate like him. I'm going to run home now to bring my wife a little bit of sugar for her tea. She's in a bad way, the poor thing, with that arthritic back of hers..."

Doveika's herdsman, Laurynas, who earned but little for his own pocket because the horses he led around were his employer's, boldly kept among the loggers and drank no less than they. He enjoyed company, enjoyed people and get-togethers. Constantly yanking cows around the Basiuliškiai stables was more than he could stand. He pulled a crumpled bill out of his pocket and slapped it on the table. He could afford it and could do as he pleased. No wife, no kids on his back. He was generous in his praise of Petras, too:

"They wouldn't know a darn thing, those bums. I saw how Melamedas scowled, when Petras called out: two and a half! It's like someone had whacked him with the butt of an axe."

"Your employer's gonna grab your scruff and shake you good. He will." They were trying to put some fear into him.

"I care about him like I care about your scrawny mare. I don't give a hoot. And you can go shove it. I drink my own," the cripple stuck out his black fist.

The beds and couch creaked. Most of the loggers, however, stood around shoulder to shoulder, because in the large living area there was no room on the benches that sagged under the weight of men crammed together and slumped over each other. Then the songs rang out. Veronika couldn't quell

them fast enough, no matter how she admonished the men that proper Catholics don't bellow like cattle in the weeks leading up to Easter.

"If they let us guzzle their booze, they can't stop us from singing," sputtered a farmhand with a wide mouth and cheeks sprouting stubble that looked like the black patches on a lark's face. His sweater was worn down to the threads and his bare knees protruded from his torn trousers.

The stench of smoke, soaked footgear, and wet sheepskins rolled down from the ceiling in waves and, whenever the door opened, escaped outside in balls of blue steam. Those who had stepped out for a walk slunk along the buildings, holding onto the fences. It was raining and icing. The ground glistened as though covered with a pane of glass. The black wall of the forest seemed to recede, expanding the stretch of clear ground marked by some river alders and a pair of telephone poles, whose wires hissed and howled eerily.

Stubble-face with the torn sweater began to howl louder and louder, and occasionally stuck in a word or two so the other room would hear:

"You're fools for plying that red-haired bull with drink. Don't let it go to his head. We could've gotten a good wage even without him."

"Yeah, you could've, you could've. What was stopping you?" Petras murmured unperturbed.

"Don't you worry, I saw the ranger switched their hours for cutting during the day to night hours. How else did they get that much money..."

"For that, you're gonna get it in the snout." Každaila rose up and, standing like a cross with his head brushing the ceiling, set to rolling up his sleeves.

The loudmouth leaned back. Veined arms with terrible blue pictures on them flashed before everyone's eyes. Gužienė jumped in between them.

"For goodness sake, don't start. You're just like little kids."

Každaila had not stood up just to sit back down again without accomplishing anything. He stuck his crooked thumb

into the kid's gullet and then wiped the palm of one outstretched hand against the other, as if he had just finished a dirty job.

"You open your muzzle again and I'll blow you away like a mosquito. Understand?"

The fellow, apparently, had understood, because he growled under his breath and felt under his jaw. Gužienė stroked Každaila's shoulder and pushed him bit by bit back into the room.

"You, mister, should show them you're the one with the brain. There's no point. He'll collapse and fall asleep."

"Where'd that snot come from?"

"I don't know. He was working at Doveika's. I heard they threw him out."

Tilius felt his temples throb, his exhausted joints relax, the unpleasant sensation of wet clothing against his skin dissipate, and a nice warmth descend from above. And he was surprised that after every glass Petras grew more morose and quiet. You had to treasure a friend like that. They had spent the winter together, but this chapter was over and they would be parting ways. Even if he didn't land something in the civil service, he'd still find something. Where? Maybe spring itself would tell. Spring was breaking through now, roaring powerfully through the woods, racing along the swamp from the south. It flowed in streams from the trees, its cold rain clattered on the window-panes. Spring was around the corner, and something new must begin. Something different. Something – doesn't matter what.

He'll be leaving with the spring. It had first occurred to him over the fall that this experience had meant something to him, it had not become just long winter evenings and nights spent to no purpose. It was not something he had felt before. His eyes followed the hostess, and he realized that he had never seen her angry or cross. Her smile turned into something that was soft and brought joy when, on a Saturday evening, she stroked Petras's thinning hair.

"Enough, my dear Petras, you've had plenty. You're tired..."

And Petras obediently pulled back his hand. Oh, that

lovely woman, the young man squirmed. Who would say that she's just the owner of this store stuck between the woods and the swamps. If it weren't for her daughters, you'd say she was a striking young woman, late to marry, but without any signs of being an old maid. Her ample bosom rolled and shook with every step and turn. Her crisp movements spoke of her vibrant health. And her hair shone with that charming sheen that is possessed only by leaves in spring and women's hair when they're young. Her eyes were impish and the cut of her neckline was like a bright clearing in the middle of the woods, where you'd like to stop for a moment to rest. But she was so different talking to Petras.

The Gužas house was jumping from the noise, smoke, and stifling heat. The lame herdsman teetered around, wiping the tables with his nose, the impudent farmhand with a ripped crotch in his pants, as if in retaliation, was braying out couplets, coming up with the filthiest words. Krivickas the Pauper snored away, his head lying in a pool of spilled beer. Others were dozing, too. For some, working through the night had cut the legs out from under them, but the majority still stood, unmindful of the toil they had endured, and that's why bottles large and small noticeably vanished from the shelves. The Gužas girls took turns standing behind the store counter, even when there were no buyers in sight.

Tilius's heart was melting as though it were a tallow candle. It was drip dripping away. The way she managed the store and dealt with the drinkers. No matter it was supposed to be a carryout store only. The police were far away. They didn't go into the woods and swamps unless they had to. And if they did pay a visit, they'd make fools of themselves. Is it against the law to offer something to your guests in your own home? Since when is this the law, tell us? Aha... But it would be interesting to see a policeman who could resist her – if she asked him nicely to sit for a while. Just to sit and warm up a bit. Hell almighty! That would be a good laugh, Tilius pondered, overcome with aching desire and envy. She's not so nice to everyone, you must admit. She doesn't waste any smiles on her husband. The little

guy just sits in the kitchen and stokes the fire, worn down to a rag, as though he's been beaten with a sauna broom out in the woods. What do you want from Gužas – he's tired. She needs a different kind of husband.

Over there, her daughters are fidgeting about. Yes, there's the three of them, and which of them is superior to the others in any way? Tilius lowered his head, touching his forehead to the table, and pressed his clenched fists between his knees. He was tormented by weird thoughts that took him to the far reaches of the night, as if to a dark forest, where there is nothing visible, nothing palpable in that blackness. Except in the middle there's a glowing white apparition. Who does it belong to? Those hands and arched neck?

He gripped a topped-off glass and gulped it down, like sulphuric acid that burned his throat, chest, heart. He felt an icy chill on his back. It was Agnė standing there, Veronika's seventeen-year-old youngest daughter. She was waving to him and calling, through barely parted lips. Her loose hair turned into mist, his eyes became veiled in a spider web reddened from the morning rays, and he babbled words with no connection to his surroundings. And in no particular order. He himself couldn't understand what they were for, how many there were around him and so many more inside.

"I like Agnė, Veronika's daughter. Pete, old boy..."

"A lovely girl... Why aren't you drinking? Let's drink, Tilius. Let's drink, have a good time. Let's drink 'til we drop. At least this once let's drink our fill..."

"We'll give it an honest try. Pass it here! You just give it to me, and I'll down the glass. Isn't it all the same to me? These hiccups are killing me. I have to pour something on them, or I'll dislocate my jaw."

"Well, well..."

"The liquor has a kerosene taste... But that's what you drink, if you don't have anything better. So you drink kerosene, so what. And those bitters, squeezed out of aspen bark. But don't believe a word I said to you yesterday. I don't believe a word of it myself. What are you gonna do, when things turn

out that way. But you know..." he put his mouth right next to Petras's ear and whispered as though he were saying confession to a priest. "I'm gonna ask the mother for Agnė's hand. What do you think she'll say, no? Well, who knows... That's the way it always is with anything I try. I piss on it and throw a match on it. That's how it's gonna be, if that's your fate, so don't set your sights too high, because nothing will come of it. Right? They say I'm not serious enough. And where am I gonna get some of that?"

He then stood up briskly and proceeded to walk a straight line so precise he could have gone the entire length of a floorboard with assurance. And he made it clear through the door, nicely avoiding the splayed legs and feet shod in badly soaked moccasins a sleeping logger had thrown across his path. He banged into the counter in front of the girl and bowed his head in submission. His hair fell over his eyes.

"Don't you feel well, Tilius?" he heard her voice. "I'll bring you some seltzer."

"I really don't feel well. I couldn't feel any worse..." He could hear her in front of him, three steps away. The sounds made by her hands, by her movements. The glass clinking, the cork being undone, the whoosh of the liquid. He could hear the seltzer fizzing in the glass, its tiny bubbles so close to him that they felt like pinpricks on his face..

"Drink it. It'll pick you up," the girl pleaded.

"I'm better now... In a minute I'll be okay...I'll be okay..."

He waited a moment, hunched over and with his eyes closed, scratching the palms of his hands with his fingernails and cracking his knuckles. There, imprinted under the layer of sap and dirt, he could still feel the powerful memory of her erect breasts brushing against him, as though gently tickling him. He wiped the back of his hand against his mouth, trying to erase the kiss of her soft lips. And bit by bit he succeeded. A gulp of the seltzer that had stopped fizzing washed away the sour dregs in the back of his throat.

"You're very tired."

"I'm back on my feet now," the youth, even though he was as pale as the whitewashed walls, regained his composure. "Now we'll drink like crazy!"

"What'll we drink, if there's nothing left?" laughed the second daughter. She was chatting with Tugaudis, whose head bobbled as though it were not stuck permanently to his neck.

"There's grain alcohol," the former policeman pointed at the wire net door of the cupboard, where several small bottles with red labels could be seen.

"Just the grain alcohol, that's all. But you can't afford it."

"Oh, if only I could get a sip."

She explained that not only had everything been drunk, but also eaten. Bacon, sausages, lard. All that remained of the pig that had just been slaughtered were its bare bones. She had run over to the neighbors to borrow some bread and a few things. There wasn't a crumb left in the entire house. Only raw potatoes, beets, and flour. And nothing to drink but water, kerosene, and the brine from the herring barrel.

"We drink kerosene, too. What do we care?" Tilius boasted.

"That's right," Tugaudis, swaying like a birch, agreed with him.

Agnė had her own ideas.

"We could do some dancing. The blacksmith could bring his instrument. All of the old people out of the room. And we'd dance and dance..."

"It's Lent. We can't," her sister quashed the idea.

"It's good that we can't. How could I dance in these awful moccasins?"

"You'll put on your shoes. And you can shave your beard right now. I'll get my father's razor."

Tilius brushed his hand over his chin.

"Who's gonna bother to shave... But you know something, Agnė? When the roads dry out, I'll buy a bicycle and come see you. Without a bicycle, it's like you're a dog without a tail."

"That'll be wonderful!" the girl expressed childlike delight. Her eyes lit up like a bright summer day. And then a

shadow passed over her face and a gloomy note sounded in her voice as she said: "Summer is so boring here that you want to die. It's just bogs and woods. Just mosquitoes and frogs. Just women sometimes walking by with baskets of berries. Nothing else. God, how depressing it is around here..."

"That's why I'll buy a bicycle, so you won't have to be sad. But maybe not... Who the heck knows what I'll be doing..."

"Why? You promised."

Tilius looked down, as if he had just remembered something unpleasant.

"Well, you see...how can I put it? I'm getting a job. And I have to leave for the city. And how will I get here from so far away? Not unless I get a motorcycle."

"A job? And when are you getting it?"

"I've gotten it already. But I'm in no hurry. They can wait, if they want me. What a bunch of big shots. To hell with them."

"Oh!.. And what'll you be doing?"

"I'll have a job. Nothing more to it. A job is a job. You hold a job and you don't do any work. Let's say – the railway. Some supervisor. Do you like to ride the train? I'll let you ride for free."

"Hmm.." the girl squirmed sadly. "I haven't even seen a train yet, never mind ride on one. Just the bus."

"A bus, is that all... So that's the story with you," the man was amused. "True, besides the horse, there's no other machines here. Except maybe a sewing machine. But I might go and pick something else. Like, for instance, the post of police chief. The uniform is all shiny and gold. So what, if Petras ridicules uniforms, what do we care? What's important is that it's a good job and you get piles of money. It's a great life, I tell you. I get to go to the barbershop every day for a shave...

Agnė sighed. True, besides the horse, there's no other machines. And, with a downcast look, she turned away. But the young fellow continued to amuse himself:

"It's really not very much work. But it's enough for me – I've done my share. Take a look at these hands, my little Agnė! Like a dog's paws. It's time I began to do something. You know,

everyone's inviting me over to their home; they want to get in good with me; they lay out a spread. You hardly have time to drink the vodka. And then you don't drink that anymore – you're holding out for the cognac. The ladies in the city are always out with their pet dogs. They're bored, too. And you can see all sorts of good-looking men strolling along the sidewalks. Hey, what's he doing?"

The farmhand with lark down on his cheeks, who seemed to have forgotten the imprint of Každaila's thumb under his chin, was boldly pressing the older daughter against the wall. She struggled vigorously:

"Let me go, you pig's butt! Get away!"

"I'm not letting you go. You know how to act with the little Jew, don't you, but not with me."

"Smack him on the snout for talking like that," Agnė heatedly jumped to her sister's aid.

"Hold on. Milė will take care of him herself. And Tugaudis, that blockhead, is off dozing somewhere while some vagrant assaults his girl," Tilius voiced his disgust.

The scoundrel released his grip to grab his eyes. Several lines of blood suddenly coursed down his cheek, flowing from his forehead to beneath his throat.

"That's right. Give him some more, Milė."

"And what's it to you, you no-good bum?" the ladies' man, bloody as a rooster and stunned from pain and surprise, lurched when he saw Tilius's happy smile. But the broomstick was already in Milė's hands and she swung it, not looking where it landed. There were thwacks on the skull, bones rattled.

"Get out, you repulsive thing! And take your stench with you!" Shielding himself with his arms, hunched over, having lost his fighting spirit, he dove toward the door.

"I'll give you a hand, even if Tugaudis, the swine, isn't about to step up," Tilius raised his leg, aiming it at the lout's rear end.

The powerful shove sent him crashing into the door. Luckily it opened by itself and, with nothing to grab onto, he flew out headlong, his entire body propelled into the sodden yard.

"That's a fine girl for you! You won't get a cheap feel from her," the men in the large room marveled, having managed to get a glimpse of the brief tussle through the smoke and steam.

"I'll give him some..." Milė arranged her blouse.

There were a few more words, a few more questions, no lack of praise for the formidable young woman. And then the kitchen window clattered, and a rock the size of a sheep's head hit the cupboard on the wall and rolled under a chair.

Translated by Birutė Vaičjurgis Šležas

A Note From the Translator

I discovered Marius Katiliškis in my early twenties, some decades ago. I was born in the U.S. to parents who had arrived after World War II with the wave of displaced persons. Lithuanian books were a natural part of my life growing up – my father had compiled a list of over a hundred children's books I had read by the time I was six. My interest in Lithuanian literature waned a bit during my teen years, though I recall my pleasure in reading Romualdas Spalis's classic *Gatvės berniuko nuotykiai* at that time. But when I happened upon Katiliškis's *Miškais ateina ruduo*, I was stunned. It was as if I had entered an exotic land, where things were somehow strange and yet familiar. The novel opens with descriptive paragraphs that shook my senses with their lyricism and imagery. Though I was a generation removed from the land, through his words I felt genuinely connected to the fields and the forests of my ancestors. At the same time, the plot excited me with its characters and its themes. This was not the world of folk songs, where love was chaste and where the trampled rue plant signified lost virginity. Here I had found a Lithuanian novel that probed human nature, the psyche, sexual attraction, and passion, using language both earthy and sublime. It continued to hold me in its spell over the years. As the centenary of Marius Katiliškis's birth approached, I began my translation of *Miškais ateina ruduo*, hoping to convey to the English reader Katiliškis's artistry, at least in small part.

BOOK REVIEWS

The Cucumber King of Kėdainai. Wendell Mayo. Boulder, Colorado: Subito Press, 2013. Paperback, 110 pages. ISBN 978-0-9831150-6-9

Wendell Mayo is an American writer who regularly writes fiction set in contemporary Lithuania or involving Lithuanian characters. *The Cucumber King of Kėdainai,* a collection of short stories, is his fourth book and his second set in Lithuania. Many of his stories explore the strange interstices of relationships between Americans and Lithuanians. To an American-Lithuanian accustomed to reading very questionable, uninformed portraits of Lithuanians in contemporary American fiction (and sometimes, unfortunately, nonfiction), it is truly refreshing to come across an American who paints such an intimate, thoughtful, imaginative, and sometimes riotously funny portrait of modern Lithuania. The combination of his skill at prose and his wild imagination make for a refreshingly different vantage point, one that I think is just as accessible to American readers as it would be to Lithuanians – well, those in possession of the ability to laugh at themselves.

Take, for example, the title story, "The Cucumber King of Kėdainiai," which involves two Americans going to visit a mafioso (of sorts) who has made a fortune in pickles. The premise is hilarious; the tone nearly gothic; the ending existential. You can't help enjoying the exuberance of the description of the limousine trip to the Cucumber King's wonderfully tasteless castle: "We began to penetrate a forest of hollyhocks, bled of most color by the pale third-moon. Blossoms studded monstrous stalks, pressed urgently against the glass" (p. 3), or the nutty way the narrator's love breaks into operatic arias, or the strange arrangement of rooms in the King's castle.

"Brezhnev's Eyebrows" takes another tack, this time dealing with a struggling painter whose love for his wife Asta, who is leaving him, is inexplicably tied to Brezhnev's bristling

eyebrows. As a metaphor, the story deals with the entire spectrum of feelings regarding the former reign of the Soviets and the "benefits" brought by independence. The painter's masterpiece is ignored, while an American tourist pays him an outrageous sum for a tacky portrait of Brezhnev. With the money, he purchases a huge sack of fruit, hoping it will win back his wife. He finds it "hard for him to imagine that so many varieties of fruit had come so far to his country," (p. 39) but his wife rejects the starfruit, and he himself finds it "only slightly sugary, relatively tasteless." (p. 44) He realizes that in this new world he could easily make a good living selling portraits of Brezhnev rather than struggling to capture the blue-pink light he loves.

Conflicted feelings about the new times become a theme as well in "Gōda," which takes the form of a woman's replies to an interrogation by police searching for a missing American. Here the humor lies in her manner, a mixture of defiance, such as "Could any of you *nouveau* cops swear that Lenin walked on two legs?" (p. 63) and weirdly colorful ways of expressing herself: "I swear my flat was so quiet that I could hear the dead in Antakalnis Cemetery snoring." (p. 65) And then there's the very premise that she could describe such intimate details about a person she has never laid eyes on. We've all run into people like this – of all nationalities – and it's a pleasure every time.

But this isn't to say that Mayo's writing is all fun and games. There's a deep sympathy here, but at the same time, a vivid awareness of the gulf between the cultures. Like the best writers, Mayo knows not just how to say it, but what to leave unsaid. A good example of this is the story "Cold Fried Pike," which mixes horror, humor, and sadness in equal parts. The characters in the story are unnamed, labeled only by their family roles ("The Mother," "The Daughter"), giving them distance, almost an iconic quality. "The American," on a quest to find out more about his family history, listens to the Grandmother's horrific narration of her experiences during the war, while the cold fried pike and a spoon "irretrievably lost" in The American's bowl of borscht take on the comedic role. When he

wanders out into the grim landscape of modern Vilnius and finds himself senselessly arousing a pack of fenced-in dogs by banging a stick against the metal fence, Mayo lets us feel that gulf too:

> He pressed his hands to his red cap covering his ears but they rang so loudly he could think of nothing else but stopping the sound. He shuddered once and it started snowing, not a driven snow, but straight down, a windless, silent, heavy fall. (p. 100)

Mayo is able to present Lithuania in a way that contributes to our understanding of the specifics of the Lithuanian experience, without ignoring what is human in us all. Lithuania (and America) are lucky to have him.

Elizabeth Novickas

The Dedalus Book of Lithuanian Literature. Edited by Almantas Samalavičius. Sawtry, Cambridgeshire: Dedalus, 2013. 249 pages. ISBN: 978-1-9092-3242-6

Nineteen texts comprise *The Dedalus Book of Lithuanian Literature.* Between its covers, we find the work of Soviet-era émigrés, post-Soviet and Soviet-era writers, Jewish Lithuanians, and Ukrainian Lithuanians. Amongst the chosen authors and their texts, displacement appears repeatedly as a theme. Indeed, exile, loss, and invasion are central themes of Lithuanian contemporary (and not-so-contemporary) life.

As far as I can tell, the collection's primary organizing principle is chronology: the anthology begins with what was written first and ends with those texts penned last. We start in independent Lithuania of the 1920s with Vincas Krėvė, pass through the Holocaust (very briefly via Icchokas Meras), Nazi concentration camp experiences (Balys Sruoga), mass Siberian deportation (Sigitas Parulskis), late-Soviet gloom (Ričardas Gavelis), and end with the current generation of writers of the reestablished Lithuanian state (Birutė Jonuškaitė and Danutė Kalinauskaitė).

Given that no expert in Lithuanian literature (i.e., anyone who could read the collected texts in the original) is likely to pick this book up for any reason other than to teach from it, we must assume that the collection hopes to serve as a snapshot of Lithuanian culture and writing for the unacquainted. If this is indeed the case, I suggest that the collection is in need of some framing. A reader will undoubtedly be left wondering, as I was, why this or that particular text was chosen; why this or that author? Are these the "best" pieces that the Lithuanian language has to offer? Are they the most "representative"? And if so, what or whom do they represent? Does the order signify a sort of progression? If so, where to?

After an initial read through the anthology, and with these questions in mind, I returned to its introduction to see if there were any clues that I'd missed regarding its frame, philosophy, and architecture. In short, I was looking for a moment when the editor might state plainly what he was trying to do when constructing this book by pulling these particular pieces and arranging them in this particular order. I found the following:

> This anthology attempts, admittedly fragmentally and without laying claim to any panoramic vision, to convey the more essential developments in Lithuanian literature over the last few centuries, a period that was closely connected to the evolution of statehood – its creation and loss – and the quest for freedom and independence. (19)

The concerns here therefore appear to be sociopolitical (i.e., how literature reflects the societal changes amidst which it is created) rather than aesthetic or even literary.

But for me, questions of form and genre remain. Little attention is given here to artistic development or difference. Indeed, it seems to me that this anthology may have been more aptly titled "The Dedalus Book of Lithuanian Prose," rather than "of Lithuanian Literature," for amongst its texts we find no poetry, no drama, no folklore or song. What we find is prose: mostly short fiction, with a few pieces of nonfiction slipped in almost without comment. In fact, a reader unacquainted with Lithuanian history and culture would likely have difficulty

distinguishing the fictional from the nonfictional texts presented. It matters (at least to me), for example, that the two excerpts of Balys Sruoga's *Forest of the Gods* come from a memoir, since a reader must consider testimony differently than a novel. It would have been helpful to know before diving in that Giedra Radvilačiūtė's "Obituary" was an essay, since essays work according to a particular set of ethics and have different concerns than do short stories.

Of course, English-language literary communities are far more genre-conscious than those of Eastern Europe. In North America, we writers of creative nonfiction have been engaged over the past fifteen years or so in a debate surrounding the genre's limits, rules, and defining principles. From a Lithuanian perspective, I imagine these conversations may seem absurd (literature is literature, after all), but it seems to me that in translating texts, we must also think about who our intended readers are and how those readers will understand what we present. Texts, whether fictional or nonfictional, may indeed record the sociopolitical development of a culture, but they can also do other things: they play with language, ask questions about memory and the nature of reality, stage internal dramas, have conversations with other writers across time and space, experiment with and invent new forms, and so on. Readers might be curious to know what concerns Lithuanian literary culture might have besides the loss and reestablishment of statehood.

Finally, there is another question regarding who is gathered between the covers of the anthology. Since 2009, an American organization called VIDA (www.vidaweb.org), whose mandate is to "address the need for female writers of literature to engage in conversations regarding the critical reception of women's creative writing" in the United States, has produced what it calls "The Count." VIDA's Count Director Jen Fitzgerald describes the process thus:

> Women from across the country dedicate thousands of combined hours to perform an arduous task: we manually, painstakingly tally the gender disparity in major literary publications

> and book reviews. We do this to offer up concrete data and assure women authors (and wayward editors) that the sloped playing field is not going unnoticed.

The results, presented as pie charts and circulated widely via social media, have been sobering, and a number of prestigious magazines and journals have begun to adjust their editorial practices as a direct result. So, after five annual VIDA Counts coming across my Facebook feed, I couldn't help but notice the huge gender disparity in this collection (fifteen male writers vs. four female). On this imbalance, editor Almantas Samalavičius writes:

> An important characteristic of late Soviet-era literature was the marked increase of women writers in a literary domain traditionally belonging to men, and along with them new themes pushed their way into the literary sphere. Women writers paid more attention to relationships, revealed the dominance of male philosophies and stereotypes, and wrote about the fate of women and other Soviet-era realities with a more subtle hand that sparkled with new colour. (17)

That Lithuanian women's writing has been traditionally overshadowed by that of men should, of course, come as no surprise. And while I appreciate Samalavičius addressing the paucity of female voices in his collection and in Lithuanian literary history so directly, I wonder if he may have been too quick in deciding that no pre-late-Soviet-era women (the first female-penned text we encounter is Jurga Ivanauskaitė's 1985 "Year of the Lily of the Valley") deserved a place here. I was struck, for example, by the omission of canonical pre-Soviet and Soviet-era female writers like Salomėja Nėris, Žemaitė, Šatrijos Ragana, Janina Degutytė, Ieva Simonaitytė, and Dalia Grinkevičiūtė. Samalavičius, a scholar far more well versed in Lithuanian literature than I am, could doubtless come up with even more feminine names. Interestingly, six of the seven translators presented in this anthology are women. Whether this fact says something about contemporary Lithuanian culture, I don't know.

Still, the guts of this book are good. All the translations are competent and readable. I will admit to a personal preference for late-Soviet and post-Soviet texts, so the second half of the collection picked up considerably for me. Standouts included: "A Cry in the Full Moon," Juozas Aputis (translated by Medeinė Tribinevičius); "Tūla," Jurgis Kunčinas (Elizabeth Novickas); and "The Murmuring Wall," Sigitas Parulskis (Jayde Will). The text is clean and well edited. It was a pleasure to read such high-quality English translations.

Julija Šukys

MOVIE REVIEW

Ekskursantė [The Excursionist]. Directed by Audrius Juzėnas. With Anastasija Marčenkaitė, Raisa Ryazanova, and Sergei Garmash. CineMark, 2013. Russian and Lithuanian with English subtitles.

Ekskursantė is a historical drama and a road movie. It depicts the unexpected return of an eleven-year-old deportee to Siberia, Marija (Anastasija Marčenkaitė), who escapes from a transport train and travels nearly four thousand miles back to Lithuania. The film opens with Marija dropping rye seeds through the floor of a cattle car en route to Siberia. These will guide her back home, as in the fairy tale. When her pregnant mother dies, a woman sneaks Marija off the train. She tells her to head west, where the sun sets, back to Lithuania. The rest of the movie traces her adventures home.

In Altai, a sympathetic Orthodox grandmother, Nadia (international Russian film star Raisa Ryazanova), saves the young traveler with her boundless motherly love. Marija's Roman Catholic rosary becomes her compass and also the threat of her undoing. Marija becomes Masha, with a Russian head scarf. Along the way, she learns a crucial life lesson, given the times: lie to save yourself. Marija tells people that she was left behind on an excursion, hence the title of the movie.

On her journey, Marija encounters criminals, soldiers, police, conductors, and ordinary people. At one point, she ends up in an indoctrination boarding school for children of Soviet state enemies.[1] There she befriends a Volga German boy who, like Marija, is taunted for being a "fascist." Marija seeks a common bond of friendship with him, but he wants to be "like the others." They plan an escape, but the boy betrays Marija... and rapes her. Her first age-appropriate friendship and, perhaps, infatuation backfires on her.

A smiling pilot flies Marija on the next leg of her journey to Orsha, Byelorussia, to his sister Polina (Alyona Ivchenko). Marija tries very hard to befriend Polina's handicapped and unsociable daughter, Lena, and eventually succeeds. The girls develop a genuine, almost sisterly friendship (note that Marija's mother died pregnant with her second child). Lena's father is an NKVD major, Doncov (Russian film star Sergei Garmash). He discovers her secret, yet hides it as long as he can.

In the last segment of her trip, a Soviet army truck filled with soldiers returns Marija to Lithuania. A Lithuanian bell tower with a folkloric solar cross symbolizes her return, but her greatest dangers are yet to come. An exile on the train had asked Marija to contact his sister. The encounter is suspicious: the sister had betrayed her brother and is ready to betray Marija as well.

Marija next finds herself in a village market. A red placard with an ideological Soviet slogan hangs from the belfry; an accordion plays the Soviet anthem – Lithuania does not seem like home. Yet Marija is blissfully ignorant of her surroundings: she smiles as she eats a sweet roll she has purchased. The pale luminescence makes the sequence dream-like, but it is real. Suddenly, Lithuanian KGB collaborators dump the corpses of several partisans in the square; everyone disperses, except

[1] The Russian children wear red kerchiefs with their Pioneer uniforms. Their motto is "In the name of Lenin and Stalin, be prepared!" with the response "Always prepared!"

Marija, who cries out. The agents arrest and interrogate her to find out whom she recognizes. She pretends to be Masha, a lost excursionist, speaking only Russian. Doncov saves her one last time via a phone call.

Finally, Marija returns to her parent's abandoned farmhouse. She is home, but not for long. Soon enough, collaborators with machine guns arrive. She prepares to be deported again. She collects handfuls of rye grain for her long trip.

Ekskursantė is the first Lithuanian non-documentary film about Soviet deportations. The plot is loosely based on a 1989 report from *Komjaunimo tiesa* – the Lithuanian version of *Komsomolskaya Pravda* (Komsomol Truth) – about a nine-year-old deportee who escaped from a train in the Ural Mountains and walked home to Lithuania over the course of several years. The story is nearly unimaginable; it is reminiscent of Sławomir Rawicz's 1956 allegedly historical novel *The Long Walk* (and 2010 movie *The Way Back* with Lithuanian associate producer Marius Markevičius), describing prisoners who escape the Gulag and their 4,000-mile walk across Siberia and Mongolia to India.

A Lithuanian film director, Gytis Lukšas, started to work on a movie version of the Lithuanian story when it was first published in 1989. However, deportees, historians, politicians, and the Lithuanian public were still steeped in making sense of this emotionally charged historic period, and the times were not favorable for a dramatic movie on the topic. After two decades, screenplay author Pranas Morkus returned to the subject. He brought director Audrius Juzėnas (*Vilnius Ghetto*, 2006) on board. By then, the elder generation that had experienced deportations had largely passed away. The youngest generation had grown up and matured in a free and independent Lithuania. This painful period of Lithuanian history had moved from individual consciousness to national memory. The passage of time provided the emotional distance needed for a dramatic approach to the events. The film was produced over the last four years; filming took just forty days.

Nature scenes, classical music and Marija's dreams frame the individual narrative scenes of the movie. The exceptional camera work (Ramūnas Greičius's cinematography, editing by Paulius Zavadskis) reflects the Lithuanian tradition of nature cinematography. The camera guides the viewers from natural panoramas into the scenarios. Due to budgetary constraints, the Siberian, Russian, and Belarusian scenes were all shot in Vilnius and environs, especially the Green Lakes region. Film technique and computer graphics transformed Lithuanian landscapes into Siberian winters and taigas.

The various J. S. Bach musical selections bring a tranquil sense to the transitions of scene. In contrast, the Soviet national anthem is played three times. It is hardly noticeable at first, except that Marija pays attention to it at a train station. The second time, it becomes a conspicuous ideological tool at the children's school. The third time, it is ironically played on an accordion in a Lithuanian village, where it calls attention to the estrangement that has transpired in Lithuania under Soviet rule, together with other incongruent elements in the same scene.

Lithuanian media have critiqued the movie for its montage: it builds conflicts and develops rising tension, but then releases them too quickly. There is a Russian expression, regarding iconography, *sladki*, "sweet." The movie does sometimes verge on the saccharine. On the other hand, Russian media have praised the film for its moderation in portraying this most sorrowful period of the recent past. Russians are still struggling to come to terms with the Stalinist period.

The characters are neither scoundrels nor heroes. People are ethical, trying to navigate through challenging, mind-boggling circumstances. They seek to help others, but also need to protect themselves. Many Russians are friendly and try to help Marija/Masha, while others suspect her. But Marija manages to find human compassion and help almost anywhere she turns. This occasionally seems fantastic, beyond what can normally be expected. Back home, Lithuanians more often than not threaten Marija. Her fellow countrymen are suspect, untrustworthy, and Soviet agents.

Marija matures psychologically throughout the movie. Her character unites all the scenes in the cinematic narration. She starts as a mama's child in need of adult comfort and guidance. As a preteen, she matures quickly. She moves from pure trust to a burgeoning adolescent relationship with a suspect adult world. Whom can she trust? Marija's optimistic character displays a down-to-earth faith in the goodness of human nature.

As Marija is a child-hero, the film is marketed for children and young adolescents (rated N-7, above 7 years of age, by the Lithuanian film ratings board). The 110-minute film is beautiful, interesting and well worth seeing. The cooperative efforts of director Audrius Juzėnas, screenplay author Pranas Morkus, and actress Anastasija Marčenkaitė have created an intriguing work of cinematographic art. The film premiered in Lithuania and Russia with favorable reviews. Warner Brothers are the Western distributors. The North American premiere took place at the 2014 European Union Film Festival in Chicago, with support from the Consulate General of the Republic of Lithuania. The movie examines the bleakest period of the Soviet Lithuanian era from an artistic perspective, without the burden of textbook histories. It portrays lush scenery and a psychologically grounded humanity. Look for the movie at local art houses in United States, Canadian and European cities.

Vilius Rudra Dundzila

ABSTRACTS

Communist Propaganda, Artistic Opposition, and Laughter in the Lithuanian Satire and Humor Journal *Šluota*, 1964–1985

Neringa Klumbytė

Šluota (The Broom), a popular Lithuanian journal of humor and satire in late Soviet Lithuania, was a journal of Communist propaganda intended to follow Soviet agendas and contribute to the building of Soviet society. The journal, however, also housed forms of artistic opposition and renegotiation of official values and ideologies. Through the exploration of ethnographic and archival data, my article discusses the contributions artists made to the journal, as well as the meaning and social significance of their work. I argue that *Šluota* artists' humor contributed to the Soviet state agenda to create a Soviet society and educate its citizens. At the same time, however, many artists opposed Soviet state authority and renegotiated Soviet ideologies through the use of Aesopian language; silence about politically relevant topics like religion; artistic style, which challenged the Soviet art canon; nationalist recontextualization, which placed responsibility for various problems on the Soviet state; and participation in officially disapproved actions, such as drinking at work. Like *Šluota*'s artists, readers participated in shaping and renegotiating Soviet values and ideologies. Their engagements were neither an example of clear collaboration, nor of open resistance, but rather a close interaction with power through dialogue, negotiation, acceptance, and rejection.

"We Must Toil Because God Bade Men Eat": A Paradigm of Values on Food and Eating in Metai [The Seasons] by Kristijonas Donelaitis

Dainora Pociūtė

In his famous poem The Seasons, the depiction of everyday life in the countryside is the constructive principle for Kristijonas Donelaitis's artistic worldview. In The Seasons, all aspects of daily life, such as language, appearance, food, and

eating achieve an ethical dimension reflecting the author's philosophy of nature and Protestant values. The paradigm of food, the main focus of this article, plays an important part in the poem, since the provision of food relates to a countryman's personal and communal obligations and his earthly vocation. What a person eats and the way it is eaten testifies to either decency or indecency, dividing the righteous Christians from the sinners.

Letter Writing as a Social Practice: Self-reference to Writing in Lithuanian Correspondence

Aurelija Tamošiūnaitė

By approaching letter writing as vernacular literacy practice, this paper examines how twentieth-century ordinary Lithuanians organized their letter-writing practices and how these practices were embedded in their everyday lives. The analysis is based on the data that comes from the Database of Private Written Lithuanian Language, developed jointly by a team of researchers working in Lithuania and the U.S.A. The analysis reveals that for many ordinary Lithuanians, letter writing was often embedded within their everyday activities in terms of time, place, domain, participants, tools, and style. Even though letter writing was perceived by many writers as informal writing, references to "poor" handwriting point to the complex interrelationship between vernacular and institutional literacies: informal (vernacular) writing was affected by a formally imposed understanding of "good" and "proper" writing.

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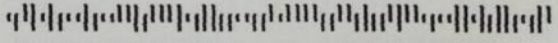

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