

Balys Sruoga, Raštai, t. 17, kn. 1: Laiškai Vandai Daugirdaitei (1919–1924), parengė Neringa Markevičienė, Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas, 2021, 542 p. ISBN 978-609-425-327-0

SUMMARY

The seventeenth volume of critical *Writings* by Balys Sruoga includes a collection of the writer's letters addressed to his wife, historian Vanda Daugirdaitė-Sruogienė, (a total of 295 extracts from letters). The first book published Sruoga's letters written in 1919–1924 (171 documents). A considerable part of this collection consists of letters between Sruoga and Daugirdaitė written before the marriage. The letters written by Sruoga in 1925–1947 (124 pieces) were published in the second book.

The history of Sruoga's collection of letters to Daugirdaitė-Sruogienė is unique, and the reconstruction is complicated. The letters written by Sruoga in 1938–1940 were stored in one place – in the writer's house in Kaunas. When the Sruoga's family moved to Vilnius in 1940, they decided to leave the letters in Kaunas, where it was thought that they would be safer. After Sruoga and his wife left, tenants settled in their home in Kaunas; later, the writer's relatives stayed there and found the letters stored in the attic. Sruoga's relatives began sending photos of the letters to Chicago, where the writer's wife lived, sparking the opportunity for correspondence. The originals of Sruoga's letters were then handed over to several memory institutions in Lithuania. Most of Sruoga's manuscripts are stored in the Library Manuscript of the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore in Vilnius. Some of the writer's letters are kept in Kaunas – in Balys and Vanda Sruogos House-Museum, Maironis Museum of Lithuanian Literature.

Sruoga's wife, who began to examine the images of her husband's letters sent to her more closely, noticed that the letters were mixed, not all of them remained, and the photographs of the originals were of poor quality. Sruogienė tried to restore the damaged whole of the set of letters. She, looking at the images of the originals, rewrote the letters, dated them, repaired the individual fragments and supplemented the letters with her memories and

remarks. Sruogienė's transcripts (typescripts) are now also stored in several US archives: Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture, the Lithuanian Research and Studies Center in Chicago and Philadelphia, the University of Pennsylvania Library, the Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts.

The totality of the collection of Sruoga's letters to Daugirdaitė-Sruogienė becomes clear only by chronologically and semantically linking all the surviving letters by Sruoga stored in Lithuanian institutions with the help of extra-textual material of Sruogienė's archives deposited in the USA. The individual letters of Sruoga, their parts, fragments in different manuscript sets, have not been interconnected so far, therefore the whole collection of letters has not been restored. Once the links between the letters and their individual fragments have been analyzed, there will be no more issues with providing the metadata of the letters, specifying the number of letters in the collection, establishing more accurate dating and localization of letters with the incomplete date or place or specifying the links between the addressee and recipient.

Readers now have access to the restored collection of Sruoga's letters. Sruogienė started the restoration in the 1960s in the USA. In Lithuania, Algis Samulionis, a researcher of Sruoga's life and work, continued these works until his death. After researching Sruogienė's collections in the US archives in 2014–2019, linking them with the material stored in Lithuania, the restoration of the letter collection was completed.

At the age of sixty-seven, while living in Chicago, Sruogienė considered publishing a collection of letters, to reinforce its importance. The writer's wife, re-reading the letters her husband wrote to her, first hoped to interest her loved ones in the project – to pass on to them a unique insight into the family's past personal life. Sruogienė hoped that after her death, her daughter and grandchildren would become familiar with the love story along with the letters that reflect the real Sruoga – as he was in the family, with his closest companions. The writer's wife said that Sruoga's letters, when read in their entirety, a rare novel in letters in world literature is formed, although they were written by one person. A different Sruoga emerges from them – a family man, open, sincere, with changing moods, but always deeply sensitive to his loved ones... Sruogienė testified that it is the most authentic material, showing the author himself, his character, fluctuating moods and attitudes. She regarded the letters as documents that reflected the reality of

the time, allowing the writer's personality to be seen up close and the past experienced more realistically.

Sruogienė also had the interesting experience of observing how the letters approached fiction. Perhaps it is no coincidence that she saw concepts demonstrating the connection between letters and epistolary literature – “love story”, “novel by letters”, “a rare literary publication”. Sruogienė was not only the recipient of the letters, but also the first editor who deliberately combined the individual epistolary texts into a whole, by creating the conditions for the letters to become a narrative, a story with a plot.

The book publishes 171 letters from Sruoga to Daugirdaitė-Sruogienė, written from the autumn of 1919 to the spring of 1924 (the duration of their marriage). The letters reveal the most important events of Sruoga's life: the beginning of his friendship with Daugirdaitė in 1919, his work in the editorial office of the daily newspaper *Lietuva* (*Lithuania*) in 1920–1923, his studies in Germany at the University of Munich in 1921–1924, his marriage to Daugirdaitė in 1924, and the beginning of work in the editorial office of the newspaper *Klaipėdos žinios* (*Klaipėda news*).

Sruoga's letters to Daugirdaitė-Sruogienė supplement her material which includes new facts about the writer's life in interwar Lithuania (1919–1924), studying abroad (1921–1924), and returning to Lithuania after his studies.

The letters reveal the writer's moods, interests and literary views. In addition to intimate details, they contain a great deal of information about literary work, works and articles written or translated, performances he had seen and books he had read, his hobbies and leisure activities. Through the letters, the reader can trace the change of the writer's aesthetic views, to understand the breadth of his interests, the complexity of his personality. The letters are similar to a diary in that they reveal the impulsive, environmentally sensitive, poetic nature of Sruoga.

Sruoga's letters to Daugirdaitė-Sruogienė are literary. Many of the letters resemble lyrical etudes written in a free improvisational manner, full of immediate warmth and poetic temperament. Only the letters reflect Sruoga's creative laboratory: early versions of the works, their corrections, consultations on the content and form, the search for their unity.

The collection of Sruoga's letters to Daugirdaitė-Sruogienė is unique also due to the efforts to restore the dialogue between the sender and the recipient. Few letters of Daugirdaitė-Sruogienė and their fragments sent to Sruoga in 1920–1924 have survived (more than 20 letters). These letters

belong to the collection of Sruoga letters discussed, so as an integral part of it, therefore they are displayed together with Sruoga letters, as a supplement and explanation.

Sruoga wrote most of his letters before his marriage to Daugirdaitė, so first of all, these are love letters – the most important story in the relationship between two people, describing the states and the emotions they experienced. This part of the collection is distinguished by both style (artistic actualization) and variety of genres (letters-poems, poems prose, impressions, miniatures are inserted into the traditional narrative). The letters are characterized by a synthesis of the expression of feelings and poetic creation.

In Sruoga's letters, the descriptions of everyday life are expanded with the addressee's creative inserts, visions, dreams, travel impressions, adventures, therefore the letters are emotional, expressive, and rich in tropes, especially metaphors, symbols and leitmotifs.

The letters also include descriptions of daily life in simpler letters. The realities of Kaunas and Munich were conveyed in a manner typical of messages, reviews, and editorial articles (laconic information, subjective assessment, persuasive explanation, commenting on relevant events and phenomena of personal and social political life).

Sruoga's letters do not describe the lesser-known facts of the writer's biography (mobilization of intellectuals in the army, studies at the aviation school, teaching at the Lithuanian girls' gymnasium), but only mention activities to which he paid much attention – the *Vilkolakis (Werewolf)* Theater of Humor and Satire, the Lithuanian artists' organization. These episodes of Sruoga's biography are more pronounced in letters addressed to other persons, in the writer's publicist texts.

This traditional edition of Sruoga's letters is special because it appears for the first time along with the digital version. The writer's letters to Daugirdaitė-Sruogienė are published electronically in the *Balys Sruoga Archive* – <http://www.sruoga.flf.vu.lt>.