

Foreword

Between textocentrism and sociocriticism – this is how the gravitational field of the texts appearing in *Colloquia 31* could be described. The publications in this issue all propel themselves toward the dynamic arena of literary research and critical process – in the penetrating methodology applied in the articles, in the polemical intensity and well-founded praise expressed in the reviews, and in various assessments of texts that lie beyond the borders of Lithuanian literature and literary studies in general. Live conversations between scholars are captured in two discussions published here: one on the interaction between contemporary Lithuanian literature and our cultural canon, the other about how the particularities of the Stalinist literary canon might appear in the eyes of foreign readers.

Dalia Satkauskytė begins the collection of articles with a theoretical overview of the latest international examples of sociocritical analysis; she sees the central methodological axis of sociocriticism as the question of how to “reconcile” text and context so that this renewed attention to the work as an aesthetic object would leave room for the reader’s reactions to different representations of the text as sociolect. Kristina Sakalavičiūtė presents the clergyman Mykolas Vaitkus’ 1923 drama *Amazoniada*, which was recently discovered in Kaunas – it is an antifeminist dystopia (a genre symptomatic of European literature of that time but was still new in Lithuania) which calls for adjustments to Vaitkus’ reputation as a dramaturge and at the same time illuminates current and broader issues related to the women’s movement and to Catholic and liberal feminism in Lithuania. Drawing on Jonas Mekas’ early creative documents (stories and journals), Rita Tūtlytė offers a new look at the artist: she discusses the textual strategies of Mekas’ contemporaries and how Mekas rebelled against them, his playful aesthetics of life and cultural equilibrium. Akvilė Šimėnienė’s review article introduces the reader to the Lithuanian émigré and Spanish literature scholar Birutė Ciplijauskaitė’s critical studies; the article’s author highlights the influence of Idealist Spanish Stylistics on that critic’s literary investigations, and this connects the article to the different explorations of sociocriticism in this issue. The objects of Mindaugas Grigaitis’ and Ginta Čingaitė’s articles are two striking works of the late Soviet period

(Bronius Radzevičius' *Priešaušrio vieškeliai* / Highroads Before Dawn and Kazys Saja's drama-parable *Mamutų medžioklė* / Mammoth Hunting) which both successfully depart from the orbit of socialist realism and provide an opportunity to discuss how Radzevičius distanced himself from collective consciousness and developed a style of writing which individualized language, and how Saja stirred collective political consciousness and sought ways of intensifying the collision between values and reality. In other words, these articles explore not only texts, but also significant shifts in Lithuanian culture.

In this issue literature scholars who regularly confront the challenges of shaping a national literary canon debate questions related to changing representations within Lithuanian culture and changes in worldviews and identity, and carefully observed paradigm shifts in the depiction of individuals and events in history and literature textbooks. They conclude that it is impossible to reveal the nation's cultural history through the narrow lens of the aesthetic impact of literary works. On the other hand, leading Soviet cultural studies scholar Evgeny Dobrenko, who was interviewed on the topic of Stalinism during his second visit to the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, proposes an analysis of the socialist realist canon as an aesthetic project – an aestheticization of reality practiced at the state level – and argues against its moral evaluation.

In the Reviews section Vytautas Martinkus deftly and subtly examines Petras Palilionis' book of biographical études on Bernardas Brazdžionis; presenting Kęstutis Nastopka's work *Literatūros semiotika* (Literary Semiotics), Dainius Vaitiekūnas makes a point of recalling that author's contributions to Lithuanian semiotics; in the spirit of heated debate Nerijus Brazauskas assesses Imelda Vedrickaitė's monograph *Kelionė. Keliautojas. Literatūra* (Journey. Traveler. Literature) in the light of his own, as a reader's, qualitative challenges; finally, Dalia Jakaitė applies her literary theologian's eye to Gediminas Mikelaitis' monograph on Šatrijos Ragana.

At least several publications of this issue introduce a moral dimension into the dialogue between textocentrism and sociocriticism, bearing witness to the fact that without it, just as without the researcher's talent, methodological engagement and aesthetic sensibility, the human element risks remaining on the textual margins.

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