

Summary

The monograph *Kultūrišku keliu: Juozas Tumo-Vaižganto laiškai* (In a Cultural Way: The Letters of Juozas Tumas-Vaižgantas) deals with one of the largest epistolary legacies in Lithuanian literature – the letters of Juozas Tumas-Vaižgantas (1869–1933). Vaižgantas's epistolary discourse is a dynamic phenomenon that chronologically encompasses the period of intense formation of modern Lithuanian culture from national revival at the end of the nineteenth century (the first extant letter is dated 1892) to the early 1930s (Vaižgantas died in 1933). The aspects of the correspondence discussed in the monograph are diverse; they substantiate and expand Vytautas Kavolis's conception of Vaižgantas as 'an independent individual', while epistolary discourse opens a broad outlook on the cultural and literary fields of the late nineteenth–early twentieth century. Vaižgantas maintained intensive correspondence with Catholic public figures and writers-priests of his own generation (Aleksandras Dambrauskas-Adomas Jakštas, Antanas Kaupas, Julijonas Lindė-Dobilas and others), younger figures of the cultural field who shared views similar to his (Marija Pečkauskaitė-Šatrijos Ragana, Sofija Kymantaitė-Čiurlionienė, Vincas Mykolaitis-Putinas, Kazimieras Jokantas), writers and journalists that held different opinions (Liudas Gira, Kazys Puida, Ona Pleirytė-Puidienė-Vaidilutė, Juozas Kubilius, Gabrielė Petkevičaitė-Bitė), and modern writers and critics of that time (Matas Grigonis, Antanas Giedraitis-Giedrius, Petronėlė Orintaitė and others). The letters formulate the relationship of the epistolary self with the addressees, build and assume the cultural identity and models of cultural action, contain the circulation of social, symbolical, and cultural capital, and serve as a 'writing practice'.

The main aim of this study is to define epistolary discourse as an original communicative phenomenon relevant to the Lithuanian culture of the late nineteenth–early twentieth century and then examine the nature of Vaižgantas's epistolary discourse, its relation to other discourses, and its functioning in the fields of culture and literature. In the study into this corpus of letters, attention is focused on the agency of epistolary discourse and on the meanings established in the evolving Lithuanian cultural community in general and the history of the writer's works in particular. Since letters have not yet attracted much independent attention in the tradition of Lithuanian literary research, the choice of research methodology was determined by the shortage of studies dealing with this particular subject and the aspiration to approach epistolary discourse as a conceptual textual and communicational whole, taking all aspects of this discursive phenomenon into account. Examination of these letters belongs to the field of sociocultural literary analysis.

Insights of New Historicism that substantiate the reading of literary and non-literary discourses as participants in the overall circulation of cultural meanings is central in defining the relation of a letter with other texts and with the cultural and literary context.

Based on the premises of New Historicism, the letter is seen as an 'interpreting detail' in the course of history, and this approach assists in the analysis of epistolary discourse through the perception of its fragmentary and uneven nature. At the same time, due to their openness and, frequently, more expressive moments of the subject's self-fashioning compared to other texts, letters are important to the history of ideas. Two essential aspects of the performativity of letters, the mediating force and the prescriptive force (based on Konstantin Dierks), enabled a discussion of the agency of epistolary discourse by imparting meaning to the communication of communities and to self-fashioning and self-expression of each epistolary subject.

Analysis of the relations in the emerging network of the cultural and literary fields draw on contemporary sociology of literature, mainly on the works by Pierre Bourdieu. Focus is also placed on the specific textuality of a letter, which is referred to as extravagance (mostly based on Elizabeth J. MacArthur, *Extravagant Narratives: Closure and Dynamics in the Epistolary Form*, 1990). As fragmentary and balancing between private and public spheres and as threshold texts to be read as intersections of history and a narrative, letters are defined by the matching internal oppositions (history vs narrative, documentary nature vs literary nature, publicity vs privacy, creation vs testimony).

The discussion of theoretical and historical aspects in the evolution and genres of letters is followed by the context of epistolary discourse in the Lithuanian cultural field of the late nineteenth–early twentieth century. In different scribal communities of that period (the Philomaths, the Samogitian cultural movement, communication within Antanas Baranauskas's circle, and, later, in the groups of the founders and publishers of the newspapers *Aušra* and *Varpas*, and others), letters often performed the function of their formation and cultivation; they were the 'engines' of the (self)establishment of these communities. In such communities, epistolary communication was essential in outlining the individual and collective identity and behavioural models, in communicating a message, maintaining contacts, and the like. The definition of this peculiar communicative structure facilitates a better understanding of the initial stage of the Lithuanian cultural field: the *we* community formed in the letters evolves before the obvious divide between private and public spheres had taken place; therefore, relationships are often modelled as balancing between work and friendship, and a model of cultural communication and circulation of creative work based on the logic of a gift exchange is established.

Prior to turning to the actual meanings of Vaižgantas's epistolary dialogues, four types of letter expression are singled out, which are often characteristic not of the whole letter but of its fragments: 'chronicle' or zero expression, the reflexive narrative, the confessional narrative, and playful carnivalesque expression of the texts. The textuality of the letters was related to the meaning and the processes of (self)formation of the cultural field conveyed in them. In Vaižgantas's epistolary community, which was united by the value of writing, epistolary texts were also a sort of a writing exercise and fulfilled the function of a writing practice. The textual and communicative specificity of the letters enables verbalisation of feelings and attitudes in the relation to the addressee, and Vaižgantas, an outstanding letter writer himself, was establishing this kind of a mutual relationship – an exchange of texts and ideas as a desirable project of the activity of cul-

tural figures. Analysis of the expression of the letters has revealed that its thickening indicates the intensive nature of relations and the relevance of the developed themes to the epistolary subjects and helps to distinguish the main dominants of the text: activities of the press, issues of literary criticism, and the problems of author self-awareness.

Typologically, chronotope zero is most characteristic of Vaižgantas's letters: these letters should be mostly considered as practical letters with the prevailing function of the dissemination of information. As epistolary connections become more intense, chronotope zero, or neutral speaking, is gradually replaced by confessional speaking that is characterised by greater expression and self-reflection. Having become used to writing and with the literary field gaining autonomy, the manner of speaking of Vaižgantas's epistolary subject gradually moving towards the literary regime and fictitious nature is observed, which is later most expressively fulfilled in his correspondence with his relatives, the Klimas and the Lesauskis families. The earliest manifestation of this type of more literary epistolary texts appears in his letters to Pleiryté: it is based on carnival poetics and an epistolary performance created through 'rough' corporal vocabulary. A carnivalesque letter style is characteristic of the environment instituted by a close empathic connection, yet this carnivalesque nature of the corporal epistolary subject arises as an opposition to social conventions (gender relations, courtesy) and a contraposition to excessive spirituality (idealism, sentimentality, and the like). This kind of stylistics can also be approached as a feature of the author's expression because it is inherent in Vaižgantas's texts of other genres, where the individual's elemental and natural aspect is achieved through corporal imagery. Resorting to corporal and carnivalesque poetics, relations of the epistolary subject to the addressee and to the literary field are modelled.

Up until 1905, Vaižgantas's epistolary communication developed primarily through his letters to the priests active in the cultural field (Kaupas, Jakštas). Egalitarian relations were important to Vaižgantas and his correspondents in formulating specific ways of acting in culture. The model of a priest-writer or a priest-educator is established primarily through the names of Motiejus Valančius and, to some extent, Baranauskas, who stand out as landmarks of identification in epistolary communication. Yet it is not as much the belonging to the Church as such that is the imperative connecting the young generation of the clerics as their work with the press, which sets the theme of newspaper publishing and criticism, which is characteristic of these dialogues. In the early correspondence of the priests-writers, the theme of work in the press develops in the environment of the reciprocity established by the private letter, and a model of text sharing, criticism, dissemination, and sometimes co-authorship, based on the benefit to society, evolves. This model renders the work in the sphere of the illegal Lithuanian press into continuation and transformation of Bishop Valančius's cultural-educational activities.

Due to the active addressee and a private nature of the relationship, the medium of the letter is receptive to the development of relations based on gift exchange and to the regimes of reflective and confessional texts. Resorting to it, Vaižgantas's epistolary subject formulates such programmatic attitudes as freedom, dignity, equality, and individuality, which are interiorised in epistolary practices. In Vaižgantas's letters, these modern definitions of an individual show up as desirable for the functioning of a society. Besides,

they directly correlate with the ideas of modern nationalisms: only a free individual is capable of recognising and defining himself through other members of the community, so the community participates in self-identification of an individual but does not preclude the development of his individuality. In this way, Vaižgantas's early letters prove a bidirectional agency: self-fashioning of a subject and self-fashioning of a community. Both these types of self-fashioning are dependent on the epistolary medium: in the communication of this nature, boundaries between the public and the private disappear and the intersections of private personal and common public interests are clear.

Following the lifting of the ban on the Lithuanian press in Latin characters, there emerged more environments of cultural communication. The cultural field becomes more heterogeneous, but epistolary discourse remains important in outlining the nature of cultural work. In Vaižgantas's letters (to Jakštas, Puidienė, Kubilius) of 1903 to 1913, intermediation is singled out as the central direction of activities. It is established as a mandatory stage for all the participants of the cultural field and is directly implemented through epistolary texts: in planning publications, discussing the issues of creative work, writing criticism, and continuing co-authorship. The earliest occurrence of the mediator's identity is observed in the letters to Jakštas: it is defined through the physical image of the 'conductor' with emphasis placed on the science-based concept of society and culture and perceiving intermediation as stimulation, translation, and dissemination of the turnover of the works by other authors. From 1905, Vaižgantas noticeably prioritises epistolary communication with the intellectual laity of the younger generation. Correspondence of this type transforms the positivist model of intermediation. In his letters to Pleirytė, Vaižgantas chooses future-oriented organic metaphors of the 'earthworm', the 'dung beetle' and the symbols of active 'loosening the soil'. In the milieu of modern lay writers, Vaižgantas unfolds the concept of society as a living organism, giving priority to the naturalness of culture and cultural texts, which is an attitude characteristic of the major part of his fictional and critical texts. The need to impart a sense to the identity of a cultural mediator is also realised through fictional texts the story lines of which include – not incidentally – epistolary discourse, thus confirming its importance (the best examples include *Šventmarė* by Sofija Kymantaitė-Čiurlionienė and *Tėviškė* by Vaidilutė).

From 1912–1913, reflections on the condition of criticism and literature that show how positions in the cultural field are established and occupied (in the dialogues with Gira and Puida) become essential in Vaižgantas's letters; there appears more textual criticism, which retains the central position in later epistolary discourse as well. The criteria for the evaluation of literary and critical discourse raised in the epistolary dialogue with Puida are almost directly echoed in the reviews, annotations, and critical articles published in the press. Conversely, there is almost no criticism of the texts in Vaižgantas's correspondence with Jakštas, but in the public field Vaižgantas actively reviews and comments on the texts of his colleague. This ambiguity should be related to Vaižgantas's self-awareness as an author, which started becoming more active after the lift of the ban on the press in Latin characters, and to the unrealised project of the cultural community of priests-intellectuals: the criticism of Jakštas's texts that Vaižgantas had written late in the nineteenth century and in the first decade of the twentieth century was seen as

an attempt to validate a writer of his circle, but intensive creation of the public opinion discontinued with a change in the attitude of the epistolary subject, with the literary field becoming more autonomous, and aesthetics being increasingly separated from ideology.

During Vaižgantas's late years, epistolary communication is no longer such an important form in the establishment and maintenance of a cultural community because other environments and institutions take over this function; however, communication in the form of letters continues. In the 1920s and the 1930s, Vaižgantas's correspondents often appeal to him as an authority in criticism and a public figure with requests to comment on, evaluate, or criticise their texts; there are numerous letters in which their authors express their gratitude to Vaižgantas or admiration of his activities or fictional texts. Characteristically, these epistolary texts institute a one-directional relationship, and although Vaižgantas frequently responded to them, dialogues did not evolve. Yet even among the letters of the later period there are some instances of more intensive correspondence based on the relations of criticism: this applies to the exchanges of letters with Giedrius, Grigonis, and Orintaitė. In these dialogues, Vaižgantas acts as an authority, as an adviser-facilitator who provides the authors of texts with more thorough criticism.

Along with the projects of agency in the cultural field, a prominent line of the author self-awareness, which is inseparable from the roles of the public 'I', develops in the letters. Author self-awareness intensifies when discussing the plots of publication and publishing of his own texts (starting in 1905 and reaching the peak in 1912–1913), although the assumption of author identity is frequently accompanied by the dual position of the art creator (being a writer and feeling constrained in this position) that is frequently developed in Vaižgantas's other texts. This 'unbearable tension', which Vaižgantas attempts at solving by defining his texts as documentary, not literary enough, and too autobiographical, can to some extent be explained by the author's character, yet it also emerges in the clash between the positions of the author and the mediator. Vaižgantas, who appeared in the cultural field first as a mediator and a critic, gained recognition as a writer only much later (basically, after the publication of *Pragiedruliai*); therefore the internalised and implemented role of the mediator enhances the ambiguity of author self-awareness and his paratopic condition.

Author self-awareness passes through several stages: from the assumption of the author identity (mostly in the correspondence with Gira and Jakštas, 1912–1913) to its internalisation that should be directly linked to *Pragiedruliai* (epistolary relationships with Putinas and Grigonis, 1918–1925), and to retrospective reflection (in the correspondence with Dobilas; also characteristic of Vaižgantas's correspondence with his relatives, 1926–1932). The values formed and assumed in epistolary discourse are not immanent to this discourse: similar trends of self-awareness are observed in literary fiction and criticism. However, the epistolary environment intensifies this form of self-creation due to the addressee's active participation in the process of writing epistolary texts: speaking his mind to the addressee, most frequently in the confessional regime, the epistolary subject finds it easier to reflect on the author identity.

Vaižgantas's personal correspondence with the families of Klimas and Lesauskis is dominated by epistolary performances and we observe the dominance of the letter as a

text of self-expression. Analysis of the textuality of these letters to the relatives revealed different 'masks' of the epistolary subject, which mostly develop in the carnivalesque environment developed through the corporal line. Although family correspondence is private and markers of the real world abound in it, the epistolary subject almost always operates in a distinctive world that reveals itself by cause of distance created through special scenic time-space and corporal images. This distinctive world allows the epistolary subject to reflect on the realities of cultural and public life, to contemplate his self-created 'name' though the logic of irony, humour, and game, and to bring the letter closer to a fictional text. The changed expression of epistolary discourse makes it possible to consider the changed function of letters in the 1920s. It stands out in Vaižgantas's letters to his relatives discussed above, yet in all likelihood it is related to the separation of the public and private spheres, which confirms the situation of the growing autonomy of the cultural and literary field.

The idea formulated in this monograph – that Vaižgantas's epistolary discourse is related to the mobility and growing autonomy of the literary field and metonymically represents its underlying processes – is confirmed, because the models of value and communication formed in the epistolary community (for instance, the transition from cultural communication based on gift exchange to a more professional market, or the intermediation model) are characteristic of Vaižgantas's numerous correspondents who comprised a fairly large part of the cultural field of the time. A relevant argument supporting the proposition is that the cultural field that Vaižgantas and his contemporaries reflected upon in their fictional texts is represented by placing emphasis on the models that prevail in his letters. The analysis of epistolary discourse in this monograph shows which processes of growing autonomy of the Lithuanian cultural field started immediately after the lifting of the ban on the Lithuanian press in Latin characters, while epistolary communication is substantiated as an active participant in the processes of defining literature and criticism, and, in turn, of the growing autonomy of this field.

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