

ĮSIKLAUSYMAI (LISTENING WITH INTENT)

Summary

This book is a collection of articles that appeared in various publications, but which, however, were not reprinted in my earlier books. The oldest of these articles, an afterword to Uldis Bērziņš's poetry collection, appeared in 1997, and the latest, a semiotic analysis of the first part of Donelaitis' narrative poem *Metai (The Seasons)* co-authored with Heidi Toelle, was published in 2020.

The book consists of three parts. The first part (Literary Horizons) presents authors who were my companions in the march of the renewal of literature: Marcelijus Martinaitis, Juozas Apuhtis, Judita Vaičiūnaitė, Jonas Juškaitis, Alfonsas Andriuškevičius, and Albinas Žukauskas. While writing about these authors, I have tried to listen to what their texts are saying. I adhered to the semiotic viewpoint that the analysis of a text is at the same time a construction of its meaning. According to the French semiotician Eric Landowski, 'A reading subject becomes fulfilled only through the fulfilment of the text being read.' Construction of meaning thus perceived is a never-ending process.

This part of the book opens with a semiotic analysis of Albinas Žukauskas' poem 'Padravos totoriukė' (A Young Tatar Girl from the Banks of the Drava). The first part of the poem recounts a story of erotic seduction. The speaker is an ageing *dzūkas*, a resident of the southeast ethnographic region of Lithuania. He aims to entrap a slender Tatar girl. The ternary isotopy of /drink/ - /fire/ - /sweetness/ prevails. In the second part, /sacrality/ obscures the fiery drink. Two kinds of values clash here: thymic, which are directly related to the perception of one's own body, and cultic, or *duliques* (< Gr. δουλεία 'slave dependence'). In theology, this term defines the worship of

angels and saints. Thymic values can be related to the natural needs of living creatures, and cultic values are linked to culture. Thymic values are exhausted and depleted, cultic values are fetishised.

Two narrative programmes are developed on the dzūkas' figurative path. One of them has spring intoxication as a value object, while the lives of the saints are the value of the other programme. The young Tatar girl is the object that the dzūkas seeks, and attains, at least in his imagination. At the same time, she is an independent narrative subject. The dzūkas tempts the young girl to abandon a practical activity and find bliss in thymic values perceived through touch and smell.

In the closing sestet, the lies of the actor dzūkas are judged by the speaker as an addresser-adjudicator. The double status of 'I' makes the value of telling the truth relative. What the ageing dzūkas has presented as genuine is assessed as undisguised lies. Thus, the speaker's final stance is a lie, which transforms into the truth. This can be seen as the realisation of sacred writing, which was interrupted by spring intoxication. However, now it is the young Tatar girl from the banks of the Drava, and not sacred animals, that is the object of worship.

Tomas Venclova's poetry is discussed from an intertextual point of view. I review Venclova's relationship with the poetry of Boris Pasternak and Osip Mandelstam, describe his poetic dialogue with Joseph Brodsky, and point to traces of European poetry (Antiquity, Dante, Baroque and nineteenth-twentieth-century poetry, and the Bible). As for the Lithuanian authors, connections with the poetry of Maironis, Henrikas Radauskas, and Bernardas Brazdžionis are discussed. The Estonian writer and philosopher Rein Raud called Venclova a Russian poet writing in Lithuanian. I refute this thesis and arrive at the conclusion that Tomas Venclova is a European poet writing in Lithuanian.

The article 'In the Footsteps of a Journey to Kythira' explores the intertextual relationship between Nyka-Niliūnas' poem 'L'embarquement pour Cythère' and the motif of Kythira in the

painting by Jean-Antoine Watteau. In Nyka's poem, hints at Watteau's painting intertwine with carnival and circus figures. The poem, which consists of signs of the cultural tradition, conveys the poet's sadness over vanished time.

The article 'Gytis Norvilas' Poetic Semiotics' addresses the relationship between verbal poetic texts and parallel graphic elements in Norvilas' book *Išlydžių zonos* (Discharge Zones). 'An X-Ray', the introductory poem in the book, presents a verbal self-portrait consisting of figures describing the speaker. They are linked by oppositions of life and death, static and dynamic, and top and bottom. The graphic form of the poem echoes the symmetry of the visible photograph. The typesetting of the poem enables it to be read both horizontally and vertically. The book is united by personal mythology. A child's gaze takes us back to the mythical beginning of beginnings. In one episode, it underlies the view of an inverted modern world, while in another, the figure of a child signifies the break between mundane and mythical time. Having encountered death, the child bids farewell to childhood. Modern myths of sports are invoked as an illusionary alternative to life.

The article 'On Artists' Poetry' was written as an afterword to an anthology of poetry by Lithuanian artists. I discuss the equivalents of the artists' visual language in their poetic work by taking a closer look at the poetry by Antanas Martinaitis, Algis Skačkauskas, Vytautas Šerys and Ričardas Vaitiekūnas.

In the article 'I Am Reading Čigriejus', a metonymic form of speaking imparting value to small things is seen as a distinctive quality of Henrikas Čigriejus' poetics, which is supported by the epic tradition of Lithuanian poetry that was born in Donelaitis' *Metai* and found its way into Jonas Mekas' *Semeniškių idilės* and Žukauskas' *Atabradai* and *Poringės*. A specific material word fuses with a ritual. Poetic mythology is created from mundane realities. Here, tradition and modernity, lyrical poetry and the grotesque are not opposites, but just different ways of saying 'what is not exactly good in the Kingdom of Denmark'.

The title of the poem 'On the Rehabilitation of the God of Hares' by Vladas Braziūnas was chosen as the title for an article on his poetry. The mysterious god of hares is mentioned among Lithuanian mythical creatures. Some mythologists suggest that hares are linked to Medeina, the goddess of hunting, and consider them to be mythical beings whose purpose was to excite and scare hunters. In his poem, Braziūnas presents a poetic version of this hypothesis.

Braziūnas' poetry unfolds simultaneously on several planes: the past intervenes in the present, and the myth in daily life. The poet creatively applies archaic layers of the Lithuanian language, recorded rituals, riddles, and toponyms. He mythologises the landscape of northern Lithuania, where the phenomenon of karstic cavities opening up in the surface of the earth upends the rising vertical axis. In his poetry, they trigger associations with the melodic pattern of *sutartinės*, polyphonic songs from that region, and with beer, the blood-stirring sacral beverage of northern Lithuania.

In this book, I appreciate Antanas Kalanavičius as a back-dated representative of the innovation of Lithuanian poetry. I discuss ethical and aesthetic principles of the Latvian poet Knuts Skujenieks, who was imprisoned for seven years in the Mordovian gulag. The book includes an afterword to Uldis Berzinš's bilingual (Latvian and Lithuanian) collection *Vabzdžiu žingsniai* (Insect Steps).

Juozas Aputis, the only prose writer in this book, is introduced through a structural analysis of the triptych of novellas *Žalias laiko vingis* (The Green Twist of Time). I discuss the figure of the traveler-narrator, collective and individual actors, and spatial and temporal configurations. The space and time of childhood memories in the first novella are replaced by a remote house in the second, and the narrator's impressions by a story told by a strange woman. In the third novella, the twist of time connects a traumatic wartime experience with the monotony of daily life and the visible figure of the present, with their equivalents in the utopian space of childhood. In the first novella, the desired object of value is time lost, and in the second it is the wish to unburden oneself. The narrator's jour-

ney to his childhood home, and from there into the world, unfolds like a cognitive journey that facilitates the burden of cognizance.

The chapter closes with an obituary of Jonas Juškaitis, 'A Life in the Word'. Juškaitis' poetry grows out of the interaction of reality and the human perceiving it. Objects are relevant to the poet in what they say to the soul and what memories they stir. In his essays, Juškaitis voiced thoughts that did not agree with official criticism, for which he was attacked by the highest bodies of the communist authorities. A passionate bibliophile, he read the poetry of pre-war and émigré poets through inquisitive eyes.

The second part of the book, 'From Cultural Archives', opens with two articles on Kristijonas Donelaitis. In the first, 'The Actantial Structure of Kristijonas Donelaitis' Entries in the Records of Baptism', Donelaitis' records are discussed from the point of view of enunciation and expression. The actant roles of the speaker and actors are indicated, and the spatial and temporal shifting-out is examined. The enunciator's references to the Holy Scripture are interpreted as the voice of a transcendental Addresser. Knowledge of the parish of Tolminkiemis is considered an object of value in the narrative, which the speaker seeks to pass on to his successor.

In the article 'A Semiotic Analysis of "The Joys of Spring"', co-authored with the French semiotician Heidi Toelle, the role of the transcendental Addresser is attributed to God. It is God who commits the Sun to 'awaken the world'. Four elements – fire, air, water, and earth – are involved in the process of rebirth. Fire and air elicit changes, while water and earth are revived by the 'sun' and 'cool weather'. Flora and fauna revive together with water and earth. Birds occupy a special place among fauna. The storks fix their 'damaged' homes and call on people 'not to forget their God'. The nightingale is called the queen of birds not because it rules them in some way, but due to its regal song.

Initially, the speaker in the poem, talking on behalf of the transcendental Addresser, arises as an extradiegetic narrator, but he becomes intradiegetic when he starts speaking on behalf of the

collective 'we', that is, the boors. Sometimes he gives the floor to other performers, usually to the village elder Pričkus. The latter also speaks as a representative of the transcendental Addresser.

Two classes of boor are distinguished in 'The Joys of Spring', the virtuous and the sinful. Of the Seven Deadly Sins, four are acknowledged here: pride, anger, greed, and laziness. And of the Seven Most Beautiful Virtues, there are three: humility, moderation, and zeal. The characters in *The Seasons* do not have a personal biography: rather, they are symbolic personages repeating the same gestures since the beginning of time. This corresponds to Yuri Lotman's theory on the ambivalent nature of cultural texts based on a mythical or plot model. Unlike the plot model that talks about isolated events and news, the mythical model defines the structure of the world based on a synchronic repetition of cyclical natural processes.

Based on the model of cultural communication suggested by Yuri Lotman, in the article 'Communication and Auto-communication in Maironis' Lyrical Poetry' I analyse auto-communication in Maironis' meditational poetry. A question addressed to a silent interlocutor comes back to the equally silent questioner. What is not said in words is expressed in rhythmic and plastic equivalents of language. Ecstatic rhythms performing an auto-communicative function create an impression of unusual speaking.

In another article, I address the figurative language in Balys Sruoga' memoir *The Forest of the Gods*. The Stutthof camp described by the author in the memoir resembles 'concentrated hell'. A demonic imagination is in charge of the sensual reality here. Wardens and guards of every hue appear as half-animals and half-people. The victims of the camp coalesce into a grotesque body.

As in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the narrative in *The Forest of the Gods* is mustered by the dual figure of the author-narrator. In their works, Dante and Sruoga speak as witnesses of atrocities, and as poets, participants in the journey in another world. For Lotman, Ulysses in the *Divine Comedy* is the double of Dante the person-

age: both are heroes-exiles, and both, driven by desire, cross all the boundaries of the partitions of the universe. The trajectories of their paths differ significantly, though. Dante pushes up the vertical axis of moral values. Ulysses moves on a horizontal plane. Continuing with Lotman, we could say that the stance of Sruoga, who looks at inhuman reality through the eyes of a poet-creator, is close to that of Dante's. The sensation of ideality, trampled over in reality and yet preserved in the poet and verified in history, remains.

The article 'In the Shadows' looks back at the literary debut of Kostas Snarskis-Žvaigždulis, a poet from Biržai. While still at school, he became close to an underground Komsomol organisation and started sending his poems to a communist magazine published in Smolensk. He then became a student at Kaunas University and published his poetry and prose in leftist periodicals. In 1926, he published the poetry collection *Akmenys* (Stones). He was imprisoned in Varniai concentration camp for disseminating communist literature, and was later sent to Biržai and placed under police supervision. Encouraged by friends, he translated some works, but the literary community saw less and less of him.

The small sheaf of Snarskis' original work and translations was overshadowed by more resolute and determined writers of his generation. Aesthetic attitudes were changing, and the literary phenomena he had analysed attracted a more complex interpretation. Some of his translations were outdone by more refined ones. However, the writer's creative legacy, or maybe the predicted powers of unfulfilled talent, give us a better understanding of the ideological and aesthetic outlook of leftist Lithuanian literature.

The article 'From the Literary Offside' is devoted to the somewhat forgotten poet Vaidotas Spudas (1935–1961) from Biržai, who wrote his most mature poetry in the last years of his life. Having painfully felt the inevitable flow of time, he speaks lovingly of everything that exists. The more obvious the threat of extinction, the stronger the control of the vigilant thought and the conscious rejection of death.

In the article 'The Critic Who Did Not Prevail', I discuss the methodological attitudes of Adomas Jakštas, who represented the conservative right wing, and the leftist progressive Kostas Korsakas-Radžvilas. Jakštas and Korsakas were linked by their belief in the social effectiveness of literature. Despite their ideological differences, the criticism by both belonged to the same methodological epistémé based on a belief in the objective meanings of literature.

'A Philosopher amid Semioticians' is the title of an article in which Arūnas Sverdiolas wrote about Paul Ricoeur's discussions with semioticians. This book returns to the polemic between Sverdiolas, a hermeneutics scholar, and semioticians in a multidisciplinary seminar at the A.J. Greimas Centre of Semiotics of Vilnius University. As a representative of hermeneutics, Sverdiolas sought to place an emphasis on the philosophical content of semiotic models hidden under concepts of technical methodologies. During this discussion with semioticians, he seldom received symmetrical answers to the methodological questions he raised. Still, the philosophical germ left a trace in the minds of the participants in the seminar.

The third part of the book, 'Hommage à Greimas', contains articles on Algirdas Julien Greimas.

Greimas' methodological attitudes to mythology are discussed in the article 'Greimas' Mythological Studies'. In his study *Apie dievus ir žmones* (1979, *Of Gods and Men*), he used ethnographic material from the sixteenth to the twentieth century, and reconstructed customs and rituals typical of a closed village community. He modified Georges Dumézil's trifunctional scheme and singled out three central gods of the Balts. In his later work, he revealed the layer of Lithuanian mythology recorded in thirteenth-to-sixteenth-century written sources representing the religion which the united community of Lithuanians practised before Christianisation. He analysed three myths verified in historical sources: the myth of Sovijus, the guide of souls, the myth of the founding of

Vilnius, and the myth of the Roman origins of the Lithuanians. Dumézil and Emil Benveniste hoped that the results of the study of Lithuanian mythology would be accessible to scholars in other Indo-European regions, and Greimas' mythological studies fulfilled their expectations. However, they have not yet resonated far beyond Lithuania.

The title of the article 'A Dialogue of Stars' was borrowed from Greimas' dedication to the outstanding Lithuanian theatre director Juozas Miltinis, 'A star to a star'. Miltinis developed the principles of his theatre during his studies in Paris, which he later put into practice in Lithuania. While expanding his horizons in the humanities, he encountered authors whom Greimas quoted in his work. This common theoretical outlook was a solid foundation for the epistolary dialogue between Miltinis and Greimas.

Traces of Greimas' semiotics in his Lithuanian essays are discussed in the article 'A Semiotician before Semiotics'. In his review of Algimantas Mackus' poetry, Greimas formulates the central principle of semiotic poetry, the isomorphism of expression and content. This principle is discussed in the review of Tomas Venclova's poetry as one of the criteria of poetic language. Objective methods of the semiotic reading of a text are addressed in the analysis of Marcelijus Martinaitis' poem 'Ašara, dar tau anksti' (Tear, You Are Too Early). Greimas once said that there was a yawning gap between his semiotic writing in French and his Lithuanian writings, which had more didactic aims. These two different paths intersect in the analyses of the poems by Mackus, Venclova, and Martinaitis.

The article 'The Risk of Meaning in the Semiotic School of Lotman and Greimas' addresses the relationship between freedom and dependence in the semiotic studies of Lotman, Greimas, and Eric Landowski and discusses the strategy of programming, manipulation, risk, and adjustment in language and history.

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Translated from the Lithuanian by Diana Barnard