

Summary

After the restoration of the independent state of Lithuania in 1990, investigations into the Soviet period were not a sphere attracting intellectual forces in Lithuania. In recent years studies into Soviet-era literature have been gathering full speed, though there is still a shortage of important academic works. The present book is an attempt to record what has not been entered into any document – relationships between the men of letters, assessments of the events that have been preserved only in memory. Due to political reasons stories and reminiscences about that period might be even more important than those about other periods, and the equations of behaviour and choices contain more unknown quantities than a more ‘usual’ context might have. Official discourse, an institutional network, the positions held, literary awards and other kind of public and official life were at variance with the naturally formed relationships between people, which most likely were even more significant and influential in the cultural processes of that time than the official ones. Furthermore, according to Pierre Bourdieu, ‘One of the major difficulties in the social history of philosophy, art or literature is that it has to reconstruct these spaces of original possibles which, because they were part of the self-evident givens of the situation, remain unremarked and are therefore unlikely to be mentioned in contemporary accounts, chronicles, or memoirs. It is difficult to conceive of the vast amount of information which is linked to membership of a field and which all contemporaries immediately invest in their reading of works: information about institutions – e.g. academies, journals, magazines, galleries, publishers, etc. – and about persons, their relationships, liaisons and quarrels, information about the ideas and problems which are “in the air” and circulate orally in gossip and rumour.[...] Ignorance of everything which goes to make up the “mood

of the age” produces a derealisation of works: stripped of everything which attached them to the most concrete debates of their time (I am thinking in particular of the connotations of words), they are impoverished and transformed in the direction of intellectualism or an empty humanism’.¹ Therefore such sources are especially important to the younger generation of scholars who find it ever more difficult to understand the games of the literary field of the Soviet period and former spaces of possibilities, and to reconstruct specific situations. Moreover, taking a retrospective look at the past and recording subjective experiences of the participants in the field, it becomes clear what was known at that time, what possibilities were available, and what panorama of the cultural field was constructed looking at that period from a different epoch.

Of course, it would be naïve to expect that it is possible to collect information that would enable the phenomena and persons to be seen through the eyes of the contemporaries; however, conversations with the participants in the literary field should encourage the heterogeneity of the Soviet period to be reconsidered. The publishing policy, the principles of creative work, censorship, and the privileges granted to the writers could change depending not only on the prevailing political winds but also on a specific cultural, political, and even personal situation of a particular individual (his/her biography, a change in the relations with the ideology and the authorities, the circle of acquaintances, relatives, recognition of creative work, etc.). Hence, it is important to see those options which were rather individual and to avoid studying cultural phenomena according to preconceived schemes and established categories, and a simplification of historical past.

This book was born during the project *Literary Field in Lithuania during the Soviet Period* funded by the Research Council of Lithuania. The aim of the participants in the project – Solveiga Daugirdaitė, Virginijus Gasiliūnas, Loreta Jakonytė, Rimantas Kmita, Neringa Lašaitė-Markevičienė, Taisija Laukkonen, and Do-

¹ Pierre Bourdieu, ‘The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed’, in: *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, Cambridge: Polity Press, p 31–32.

nata Mitaitė – was to accumulate unique memoir material for future research into the literary field and to take a fresh look at the structure of the literary field of that time. This is the largest cycle of interviews of this type prepared by literary critics on the basis of a general semi-structured questionnaire. During the two years of the project, 65 respondents were interviewed, over 44 hours of recordings and 37 author's quires of text were transcribed.

A semi-structured questionnaire was prepared for the respondent groups, which were to represent the variety of the literary field: writers, translators, critics, employees of publishing houses and book trade networks, editors, teachers of schools of different levels, librarians and readers. The aim was to interview not only the people who are well-known in the literary field but also the people who are not so widely known, the people who organised literary events, were in close contact with the writers and other participants in the literary field or were 'ordinary' employees of institutions. Also, the project respondents included Latvian, Estonian, Russian literateurs (Leonid Bakhtov, Lev Anninsky, Vladimir Volodin, Jānis Elsbergs, Janīna Kursīte, Jānis Rokpelnis, Knuts Skujenieks, Mats Traat, Aivars Eipurs, Māra Svīre, Māra Grudule, Eva Mārtuža, Iveta Brūvere), and the Russian politician Viktor Kogan-Yasny. They were interviewed in order to verify what the field of Lithuanian literature looked like from aside and what relations were being established with other republics of the Soviet Union.

The questionnaire of the project was aimed at finding out how people were inter-related in the literary field, how the mechanisms of power operated, what feeling of hierarchy amongst the participants in the literary field was, and how those hierarchies were perceived from the private unofficial point of view. The respondents were asked about how they had entered the literary field, who the people were that helped them to enter it and supervised their first steps (editors, reviewers, intercessors and the like), how the circles of their own people were formed and how the conflicts arose, how the community of writers of the Soviet period was formed from the point of view of creative principles, cultural/political behaviour, career conceptions, etc. The respondents were also asked about the possibilities and limits of cultural activities, their experience

of internal and institutional censorship. A section of the questions were related to the empirics of cultural and everyday life: where and when the writers used to gather (cafes, editorial offices, public places, private flats and 'salons' etc.), what system of royalties existed and what privileges were granted to the members of the Writers' Union (allocation of flats, special medical institutions etc.), or if any exceptional dress code for writers was established. The questionnaire devoted much attention to differences in official (Party resolutions, writers' congresses) and unofficial literary life; the respondents were asked if any underground or sub-cultural movements were known. Attempts were made to elucidate some reading practices: where the rare books of low print runs and accessible only in the so-called 'special stocks' (Russian, *spetskhran*) were obtained from, how they were shared, whether reading 'salons' existed and discussions of books were conducted among the like-minded people; when and in what way émigré literature reached them, if there were any direct contacts with émigré writers, whether any thought was given to the Aesopian language.

The book contains only a small part of the material collected. The interviews were selected with an aim to represent as diverse positions of the literary field as possible, different jobs and professions, generations, cases of relationship with the political system and, finally, people of different biographical (as well as social or political) trajectory: Vytautas Martinkus – a prose writer and the Chairman of the Writers' Union; Henrikas Algis Čigriejus – a poet who prefers staying in the background, and a teacher at an insignificant vocational school; Kęstutis Nastopka – a literary scholar, critic, and a translator; Jūratė Sprindytė – a literary critic and scholar, the daughter of the writer and professor Adolfas Sprindis; Vilija Dailidienė (Vilė Vėl) – a teacher and a writer, also, a daughter of the dissident Antanas Terleckas; Feliksas Mačianskas – a journalist, editor, and an employee of the Atheism and Religion Research Institute); Ramutė Skučaitė – a poet, an employee of different editorial offices, a deportee; Laimantas Jonušys – an employee of the Foreign Language Bookshop, a translator; Reda Jėčiūtė – a teacher of the Lithuanian language, organiser of literary events in the region; Aušra Kalinauskienė – Head of the Publishing Department of

the Book Lovers' Society (Lith., *Knygos bičiulių draugija*); Vytautas Skuodis – a distributor and publisher of the anti-Soviet press, a dissident; Jānis Elsbergs – a Latvian poet, translator; Leonid Bakhtinov – a prose writer, literary critic, Head of the Prose Division of the magazine *Družba narodov* (Friendship of Nations). The book also includes an interview with the librarian Alma Braziūnienė and the poet Vladas Braziūnas which shows the workings of memory and how people who live together remember the same things and complement each other's memories.

In these interviews literature emerges as an organic part of social processes: we read unique stories about how writers, editors, and translators enter the field of literature, how literature is related to, say, physics or philosophy (Vytautas Martinkus' case), how political and public views matured and changed (brimming with youthful zeal, Kęstutis Nastopka was determined to go to Cuba to help Fidel Castro, while later he became one of the central members of the group alternative to social realism, together with Martynas Martinaitis, Sigitas Geda, Juozas Aputis and others). The road to literature for each of them seems to have been insecure: they could never know whether it would be crowned with recognition and the status of an established litterateur (Čigriejus, Nastopka, Martinkus, Braziūnas), or lapse into silence (Dalia Dubickaitė's case). A large part of the interviews touches upon study years, acquisition of literary knowledge, sharing and dissemination of information, and cultural communication. In this way the interviews interrelate, and the text of a cultural narrative emerges.

In summing up the collected material, the participants in the project wrote papers based on the interviews conducted. In her paper *Looking for the Unwritten: Oral History in Literary Research* Loreta Jakonytė gives a brief overview of the main peculiarities of oral history, and, in the context of recent foreign research and projects of source collection, she discusses the specificity of oral history in the sphere of literature. The author ponders on what oral history can be useful to Lithuanian literary criticism, especially in dealing with the literary field of the Soviet period. She holds the view that the need for oral literary history in Lithuania as a source and research method is strengthened by the problematic nature of the

surviving Soviet written sources (published texts were censored, the archives are fragmented). The advantages of the interview method (unique historical data that have not been recorded in the sources of other types; testimonies of the contemporaries that have not been regarded as important thus far; new facts and their interpretation by the people who experienced them etc.). The author does not bypass problem aspects (reliability and representativeness of the material collected, the narrators' subjectivity, memory gaps and manipulation; the interviewer's impact on the answers etc.). The author draws the conclusion that individual interviews are an effective means to perceive a contradictory polyphony of the Soviet era.

On the basis of the conducted interviews, other participants in the project publish academic papers in which they reinterpret the literary life of the Soviet period, analyse the ambivalent relations between public, private, and unofficial literary life. This is what the starting position in the paper *Relationships between the Litterateurs in the Soviet Era* by Donata Mitaitė is. Official and semi-official literary relationships, which were established as a part of the cultural policy of the Soviet Union, used to become the beginning of private friendships. Since the time when literary relationships stopped being a political theme they have hardly been analysed. On the whole, at the present time Lithuanian literature of the Soviet period is most often studied as a self-sufficient whole, and only one aspect or another of the context of the Soviet Union is revealed. On the basis of the material of the interviews with the litterateurs from four post-Soviet countries (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Russia), the paper attempts to disclose what was hidden behind the semi-official literary relationships between the litterateurs in Soviet republics. The interlocutors (Leonid Bakhnov, Kęstutis Nastopka, Valentinas Sveticas) emphasised that, like many things in the Soviet Union, literary life had two sides. Alongside the official side there was an unofficial one: writers became acquainted, struck friendships, there appeared translations. Ramutė Skučaitė spoke about her friendship with the Russian poetess Svetlana Kuznetsova, the Estonian writer Mats Traat was a friend of Gediminas Jokimaitis, Albinas Bernotas and Marcelijus Martinaitis. Speaking about communication at that time it is important to note that mutual trust was very important.

Here the opinions differ: Leonid Bakhnov, Jānis Rokpelnis, and Knuts Skujenieks say that it was necessary to identify the colleagues recruited by the KGB and to beware of them; Mats Traat says that since the 1960s he had felt no fear at all. Many interlocutors singled out the colleagues who were as though anti-Soviet. Not only Joseph Brodsky, but also Hrant Matevosian, Jaan Kross, Chiabua Amiredzhibi, and Marcelijus Martinaitis belonged to this group; in the opinion of Janīna Kursīte, Vytautas Kubilius should also be attributed to this group as well. The litterateurs of Moscow (Leonid Bakhnov, Lev Anninskii) state that in Moscow the Lithuanian writers were not looked upon as 'younger brothers' because the Baltic States were 'the only permitted Europe' (Lev Anninsky) in Soviet times. According to Leonid Bakhnov, Lithuanian literature created during the Soviet years could not equal Western European literature, but, nonetheless, it was of a high level. Literature of the nations which had no tradition of written literature (the Caucasus and Central Asia) presented more problems as during the Soviet era that tradition had to be formed artificially on the basis of guidelines. The comparison of the written sources and recordings of the interviews yields some information about how literary prizes were awarded (for example, the Lenin Prize to Jonas Avyžius), how some inflated reputations were formed (novels by Chinghiz Aitmatov written in Russian were actually rewritten by editors). One of the important topics of the interviews, especially with the Latvian writers, is the bohemian lifestyle. It was of different types: relaxed, protesting, and tragic. Unfortunately, as the number of interviews with the litterateurs who resided in other countries is very limited, it is impossible to draw any detailed conclusions. They bring to light some trends and mark the relevant field of investigation, which, unfortunately, is shrinking as there are fewer and fewer people left who lived and worked in the Soviet period for a long time.

Solveiga Daugirdaitė's paper *Comrade Editor* reveals invisible relationships between the writer, editor, the administration of a publishing house, and the censorship authorities that have not been sufficiently studied but were highly influential. In explaining the editor's situation, the author tries to reinterpret the editor's function and to deny the role of a mere ideological censor assigned to the edi-

tor during the years of Independence. Solveiga Daugirdaitė remembers the thought expressed by the critic Albertas Zalatorius in one of his book reviews of 1985: 'It seems to me that the time has come to speak more about the merits of the editor (and sometimes about damage done, if there was any) in book reviews, because the work they have done is never compensated for by the surname written in small print in the metric of the book'. In Daugirdaitė's opinion, however, the situation was reversed during the years of the reform movement (*Sąjūdis*) and in later years: the role of the writer as a tool of censorship dominates in the utterances of writers and editors themselves in important collections of reminiscences and documents (for example, *Rašytojas ir cenzūra* (Writer and Censorship) compiled by Stasys Sabonis and Arvydas Sabonis, 1992). Resorting to published documents and the interviews she has conducted herself, the author of the article attributes the causes that had brought about this negative attitude to the significance of editors in publishing houses after 1990, reconstructs the editor's functions, as well as his real possibilities and limits.

In the author's opinion, although censors (a special institution engaged in this activity is often referred to as *Glavit* in reminiscences; in 1966 it was officially named Main Administration for Safeguarding State Secrets in the Press at the Council of Minister of the Lithuanian SSR) had to limit their activities to crossing out the state secrets only, they actually sanitized any ideologically ambiguous things. Knowing the ideological book publishing supervision system (a manuscript might find itself not only in the censorship institution, as was obligatory, but also in the offices of the Communist Party officials of different rank, and the publishing houses had the assigned KGB employees to supervise them) it is not difficult to understand why it was the editor who the majority of writers thought to be afraid of free thought and try to take out any ideologically inappropriate places from works or to replace them with more neutral ones. The 'unwritten rules' of work at a publishing house forbade the author to be informed of the places in his/her book sanitized by censorship: the editor had to present the opinion of any 'higher instance' as his/her own. The editors whose books received a rebuke from censorship after they had been edited were facing penalties.

Daugirdaitė makes a supposition that insufficient appreciation of the editors' contribution now, when it is possible to study the Soviet era more objectively, has been determined by a lack of research. She writes in her paper: 'Thus far we have not had a sufficient number of works on text linguistics, which would fully reveal the editors' contribution to the final form of particular works, therefore one has to rely on more general knowledge (e.g., Eduardas Mieželaitis appreciated the contribution of the editor Stasė Budrytė to the preparation of his books, while Juozas Baltušis would, in the end, agree with Donata Linčiuvienė's opinion).

The 'book famine' that was the result of ideological control of the public discourse, shortage of books, low print runs, and specific functions of literature is the theme of Rimantas Kmita's paper *Reading as Unofficial Literary Life in the Soviet Period*. The paper attempts to put together a picture of the sources of acquiring books, in which official and unofficial ways are distinguished. The conditional nature of such a division is determined by the fact that quite often the status of the reader was of importance even at official institutions (libraries, their reading-rooms, bookshops). Also, there were different 'systemic gaps' (books in special stocks, sold in second-hand bookshops, unlisted stocks of libraries, acquaintance with the library employees, bookshop staff, heads of second-hand bookshops and the like).

The article mostly focuses on the possibilities of writers, literary critics and scholars to obtain the desired books. The mosaic of book sources that evolved from the respondents' answers turned out to be quiet varied. First of all, the interviews showed that it was possible to obtain fairly new humanitarian literature even through official channels. Mention should be made of the interlibrary loan and the largest libraries of the Soviet Union where young scholars in humanities went on study visits; members of the Writers' Union could subscribe to the books by the Western authors that had a small print run in Russian, cultural history studies were conducted through the bookshop 'Versmė', those who read in English could look for works of fiction at the Foreign Languages Bookshop, and those who were interested in books in Polish, German, or Czech could find them at the bookshop 'Draugystė'. Some books reached the readers by mail. Depending on their needs, the respondents created their channels

and used them. The above-mentioned channels were an alternative to the 'special stocks' of the libraries which were not accessible to every reader, and some readers avoided them because they were afraid that information about them might be collected there. In summing up, however, it should be said that accessibility to the book depended on social capital (acquaintances or an institutional or academic status).

Older literature that was first published in Lithuania during the interwar period could be found in the libraries that had special storage departments, in the Lithuanian philology reading-rooms of the libraries, in antique shops, in the libraries of the intellectuals of the older generation that were not torn apart, or the attics of village houses.

The American Lithuanians who visited Lithuania brought émigré literature, and some books reached Lithuania by mail (they were sent by Algirdas Julien Greimas, Ona Šimaitė). The name of Juozas Tumelis, who was one of the people distributing this kind of literature, recurs in the interviews. The library of the History Institute of the Lithuanian Communist Party accumulated the largest amount of émigré literature. The books confiscated at the customs or detained in any other way were sent to the Institute; however, getting access to those books was a complicated task, and obtaining permits to use them was even more difficult than gaining access to literature of the interwar period.

The conversations provide the least information about the dissident writers and underground literature. The respondents of the project were primarily people who studied Lithuanian philology, people who created Lithuanian literature, and people into whose hands such literature fell quite accidentally. It should be admitted that the litterateurs who became directly politically engaged were an exception rather than a rule. Romas Daugirdas directly participated in the dissemination of this type of literature. The interesting fact is that the stories about sharing books in small circles feature a peculiar paradox of memory. Although the books circulated only among the people who knew and trusted one another very well, the respondents found it difficult to recall the actual names of the people from whom they received the books.

In his paper, Kmita mentions certain topoi of the history of reading which recur in the respondents' stories: books in rural attics, learning Polish to read modern Western literature, queues at bookshops, and perceiving a book as a valuable thing (a gift or a thing, which can be exchanged for another commodity), books obtained for one night, attempts of lecturers to direct their students' attention towards more valuable books (recommendations to acquire some of them or wording a theme in a way which would grant the right to look through the publications stored in 'special stocks').

Though further research is necessary, one can argue that reading was an important and constructive form of the unofficial literary life during the Soviet period. Sharing books, looking for them on the basis of trust rallied small communities, nurtured forms of cultural communication, cherished cultural memory, and made it possible to find one's way among the trends in foreign culture. Keeping of books alien to the Soviet ideology in the second half of the Soviet period in particular was dangerous only potentially; the distribution and reproduction of books entailed more serious risks. The respondents' assessment of the former risks, which were different during different periods, varies considerably. In summing up, the conclusion is drawn that each reader's history of reading and the ways books were acquired were much more diverse than it had been expected before embarking on this theme.

These are some of the themes that the participants in the project bring to light in their papers. The interviews handed over to the Archive of the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore will, without doubt, be of use for studies into the social and political context of the Soviet period, which in these interviews might appear much more diverse, vivid, and not as monotonous as it looks in documents and public texts.