

S U M M A R Y

NOTES ON DECONSTRUCTIVE READINGS

The book *Dekonstrucinių skaitymų užrašai* (Notes on Deconstructive Readings) introduces deconstruction as a discipline of text interpretation and describes it in three parts, in its historical, theoretical, and practical aspects. The first part of the book, 'The Impact of Deconstruction on Literary Criticism,' is a historical survey and comprises five chapters. Chapter 1, 'Literary criticism in Jacques Derrida's theory of writing,' discusses how Derrida's philosophy of writing established the basis for interpreting the text, one controversial to tradition, and this secured the 'slippery' nature of linguistic meanings as contradictions and ambiguities. In Chapter 2 'Reconsiderations of literary criticism by Yale theorists,' and in Chapter 3, 'The death and ghostly resurrection of deconstruction,' I describe the move of Derrida's theory from France to Yale University in the United States, and analyse its incorporation into active dissemination in literary criticism and its further fate. I devoted the last two chapters of this part of the book to the historical development of Lithuanian literary criticism, exploring the trends of deconstruction that have evolved in it. In the text 'Vytautas Kubilius and Rimvydas Šilbajoris's criticism and the ghost of deconstruction,' I analyse some typological similarities and suggest that, like some invisible ghost or parasite, deconstruction influenced the pre-deconstructionist criticism of Lithuanian literature at the end of the twentieth century. In the chapter 'The dispersion of deconstruction in Lithuanian literary criticism,' I explicate how

deconstruction as a discipline of textual interpretation took root in Lithuanian literary criticism and scholarship during the period of independent Lithuania (1990–2020), and how the Lithuanian context of deconstructionist philosophy and post-modernist literature influenced it.

In the second theoretical part of the book, '(Non)Manifest convictions of deconstructive literary criticism', I do not focus on the general terms of deconstruction, which many authors have already discussed at length in their books, but, rather, I attempt to distinguish and reflect on the most important attitudes in deconstructive literary criticism: emphasis on the rhetoric and infinity of the text, the change of writing from the one who transmits the message to the one who plays with it showing contradiction of meaning and nothingness, principle of double commentary and moment of blindness, the complication of (non)autobiography and (non)historicity. Works by Jacques Derrida and such American and English theorists as Paul de Man, J. Hillis Miller, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Christopher Norris, Jonathan Culler, Richard Rorty, and others were encouraging, and set the direction for the formation of deconstruction as a discipline for interpreting texts. I try to present the attitudes of deconstructive reading and writing not as a closed system, but as the shifting actualities of contemporary humanities and culture.

The third, the practical part of the book, 'Deconstructive readings', covers five of my interpretations of individual works of Lithuanian literature, and the translation of Shakespeare's *King Lear* into Lithuanian, published in the academic press during the first two decades of the twenty-first century. Three interpretations: 'Apoloniškoji apgaulė: kitoks Maironio "Pavasario" perskaitymas' (Apollonian deception: a different reading of Maironis's 'Spring'), 'Naratyvinio tapatumo nesatis: Jono Aisčio 'Man tave' (The absence of narrative identity: Jonas Aistis's 'He sent you to me'), and 'Tekstinė kurtuazija: Marcelijaus

Martinaičio “Ašara, tau dar anksti” (Textual flirting: Marcellus Martinaitis’s ‘Tear, it’s too early for you’) stand out for their programmatic and methodological polemic against Vanda Zaborskaitė’s phenomenological one, and Algirdas Julius Greimas and Kęstutis Nastopka’s semiotic analyses of poetry. Applying the principle of double commentary, I wanted to show the contextual shifts and the limitlessness of the meaning of the text read, and to highlight the difference between deconstructive reading and the reading practised in the past. Three other interpretations, ‘Modernybės diskurso įskilimai: Jono Aisčio “Dievai ir smūtkeliai”’ (Cracks in the discourse of modernity: Jonas Aistis’s ‘Gods and wayside shrines’), ‘Tautinės tapatybės dekonstrukcija Mariaus Ivaškevičiaus pjesėse’ (Deconstruction of national identity in Marius Ivaškevičius’ plays), and ‘Tiesosakos ir melo drama pasaulio kvailių teatre: Williamo Shakespeare’o *Karalius Lyras*’ (The Drama of truth and lies in the theatre of the world’s fools: William Shakespeare’s *King Lear*), are also based on the technique of double commentary, but here it is aimed at exposing the contradictions inherent in the language of literary works as such and at deconstructing the expectations or normative meanings shaped by the tradition. In my final interpretation, devoted to Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, I linked the conflict between the characters of the play and the conflict of the inaccurate translation of its ending to the conflict between true and false language, which is not only demonstrated and reflected upon in the play but also enables entering a deconstructive discussion of its unresolvable nature.

After the collapse of the totalitarian communist regime and the restoration of Lithuania’s independence in 1990, deconstructive reading was like an invitation to move toward renewal, rebellion, and the promise of democracy. Great changes were taking place not only in Lithuanian society but also in literature, which saw the rise of the essay, and in the humanities, which were freeing themselves from stagnation and opening up to new scholar-

ship in cultural studies, post-colonialism, and postmodernism. Liberated from Soviet ideology, humanities scholars were first attracted to deconstruction because of its most unusual and radical critique of essentialist metaphysical thought, and the new terminology: writing instead of language, trace instead of sign, play with ambiguities instead of structure, crises or paraliterature instead of literature, the infinite change of differences (*différance*) instead of identity-defining binary oppositions (text/context, fiction/fact, romanticism/realism, voice/writing, high/low literature, guest/enemy, medicine/poison), rhetoric instead of logic, comic instead of tragic, paradoxes and irony instead of serious intonation, labyrinthine time and narrative with a shot plot instead of linear, weak, featureless misfits instead of vivid characters – in other words, the magnification of the uncertainty and complications of writing and reading, as also of life.

Deconstruction seemed interesting to me because it taught seeing language in general and the language of the chosen work in particular not only as an instrument of expression of human nature and imagination that have long dominated literature (and is the aim of idealist and phenomenological criticism) and not only as an immanent structure of modelling of meanings (the aim of formalist and structuralist criticism), but as inseparable functioning of the two in tandem and as the most important source of the complications of our life (thought) that provide us with unexpected interpretative possibilities. Perhaps this is the reason why the most relevance was attached to the notions of boundary and margin, so, influenced by the play of repetition and difference, any meanings of the texts we discuss are unstable and indiscernible identities.

Pre-deconstructive literary criticism sought and searched for the greatest possible identity with the work. Humanist criticism motivated it by empathy with the work and the idea of the aesthetic 'unity of diversity', while formalist and structuralist criticism based its interpretation of the text on linguistic and

logical arguments and on the requirement for the reduction of the subject. However, they were both consumed by the passion of asserting their own unquestionable truth. According to Derrida, that was because we are ruled by the (metaphysical) language inherited from Plato, which awakened the greatest (metaphysical) desire, the power to know and control the world. That is why we want to identify, to the greatest extent possible, the definitions we have and have learnt in advance with what they define, and our interpretation with what is being interpreted. Resisting this power of metaphysical cognition and the logic of identity, Derrida invites the interpreter of texts to turn to a different (an aporetic) logic of the irresolvable that embraces the modes of paradoxical thinking and of playful writing. Borrowed from Martin Heidegger, the concept of being in the world (*Dasein*), which opposed dualistic forms of thinking that separated the subject from the object, supported his critique of metaphysics. Following Heidegger, Derrida invites us to question metaphysics as a misleading narrative of a dualistic world, and humanism, one of its most important historical expressions, portraying the human as the master and centre of the world, and everything else as mere instruments and outcomes of his rational activity. It was from Heidegger that he gained the habit of interrogating a text up to the point of extinction of its borderlines when the dispersion or dissemination of its meaning is achieved. Derrida invites us to relearn how to use language and question each instance when it begins to demonstrate its 'self-evident' legibility. According to Derrida, the best critique of metaphysics was changing the rationalist style of writing, in which the text starts speaking several languages at once and becomes a space of emptiness and nothingness of meanings. In his own fashion, Derrida adapted the existentialist idea that human life is a failed march against death to the writing and interpretation of texts. In his theory of writing (*De la grammatologie*), I would single out the call to deconstruct the simplicity

of being by rejecting all unambiguous answers and emphasising the complexity of the lived world and the playfulness of writing.

While Derrida raised the philosophical question of how to break out of the circle of logocentric and metaphysical thinking and what unknowns await the one who succeeds in this, I was more interested in describing the actions of literary criticism of this trend, based on identified deconstructive references and in investigating the unexpected play of presence and absence of meaning in a creative text that makes it possible to destroy clichés and schemes of reading, to plunge into the adventure of literary interpretation by provoking normative, conventional, or formalist modes of reading without stopping to see them as examples of professional competence. The biggest challenge was reflection on the experience of the intricacy and opacity of the text and of the life it narrates. I did not expand the key anti-metaphysical concepts of Derrida and de Man, nor did I deepen the philosophical well of language. As they do, I do not predict a new future for deconstructive writing, because, in my opinion, a play of constructive and deconstructive writings in our texts is the best expression of human life. I shared an affinity with Culler's concept of deconstruction: it is not the application to literary studies of lessons learned from philosophy, but a study of textual logic in literary texts. Therefore, despite the dominant programmatic effort to oppose metaphysics, deconstruction, unlike other thematic critiques (Marxist, psychoanalytical, feminist), encourages the interpreter much more to enter the language of the text itself. That was namely why Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak called deconstructive interpretation "the intimacy of criticism" in an interview with Steve Paulson. In his book *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*, Culler identifies some of the key features of deconstructive research: spotting the most declared opposition of meanings or phenomena in the text and inverting its hierarchical structure in such a way as to bring out their irresolvable complications and thus

losing the possibility of unambiguous answers. Usually, the first elements of a binary opposition, which express the rational and positive value orientations of Western culture, are disrupted by deconstruction (inverting the opposition), by emphasising the significance of the second supplementary elements (*supplément*) (for example, Derrida did so by opposing the phonetic and written forms of language and by demonstrating how they could not be separated, because they are mutually interrelated as the forms of the same arche-writing). The deconstructive activity of text interpretation that creates paradoxes out of the doxa in the text or turning the seriousness of its logic into irony is perceived not only as a quality the critic brings, but it is also implied by the language of the text as such, which is incapable of not succumbing to the changing time. The aim of deconstructive reading is to reveal the conflicting nature of language, which does not lead to any synthesis, harmony, or (hermeneutic) unity of the part with the whole. It is necessary to point to the inaccuracy (blindness) of existing text interpretations and the need to create new ones that will also be subject to blindness or criticism. I liked another of Culler's ideas, that 'theory' itself should not be seen as a set of complex doctrines, but as an infinite series of ever-changing questions and attitudes, since this is the only way to guarantee its value. That is how I see it: as an opportunity to create series of new questions.

After all, it is impossible to invent anything totally new; one can only rewrite something during the process of a discussion. These inscriptions on my deconstructive reading, too, are just traces of my study and practice of a chosen theoretical perspective; it is its repetition, which did not escape the difference as a translation. I have been interested in post-structuralism without demonising or adoring it, but, rather, seeking a personal relationship with it. Probably that was why J. Hillis Miller's article 'The Critic as Host' on the ethics of deconstructive criticism, which he linked to fidelity to the language of the inter-

preted text, turned out to be so important. Yet if we interpret language in the deconstructive way, it cannot be in binary opposition to physical reality, because language is the only way for the meaning of reality to appear, delineating the limit of itself and of reality. Perhaps this is why deconstruction is also closest to ethics, as many of its commenters suggest. For example, deconstruction of ethics in Derrida's book *Donner le temps* (1991) does not destroy it with its own questions, but, on the contrary, facilitates a better understanding of the irresolvable contradictions inherent in it. They arise from the coercion of the universal moral law (the obligation to perform a moral act because of duty) and from the difference of individual moral acts. In my opinion, the expanding variety of interpretations of a particular text, which points to the difficulty in explaining the complexity of the (literary) world, which encourages a stronger need for asking questions, and which fosters tolerance for *the other* and *the different* that comes through the text is a manifestation of yet another important ethical principle of deconstructive reading.

In brazen imitation of Geoffrey Hartman, I am tempted to call myself, as modestly as I can, a fake deconstructionist. I am most attracted by texts saturated with paradoxes and irony as they are most open to complications, changes, and losses of their meaning. When amazed by the beauty of spring the subject of the poem 'Kaštanas pradeda žydėti' (The Chestnut is Coming into Bloom) by the Lithuanian poet Henrikas Radauskas sends high art to hell, and you realise it is the other way around: he does not send it anywhere, because it is only such art that enables the human to genuinely experience the beauty of the chestnut tree in bloom and the beauty of the entire world. Moving along that path, I boldly hoped to push all the traffic of Lithuanian literary criticism in its direction. I am publishing this book as an experiment that declares the unpredictable enigma of a work, and with it of the entire world, thus awakening our eternal desire for interpretations.