

**The 14th International Conference of Baltic Literary Scholars**  
**“Literature and Empire”**

**ABSTRACTS**

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**RUSSIAN PHANTASMS OF WAR: POPADANETS LITERATURE AND RETRO-UTOPIA**

The presentation would analyze a branch of fantasy literature very popular in post-Soviet Russia - the so-called popadanets. Popadanets novels, as a form of alternative history, reflect the imperial, revanchist and resentimentalist attitudes of the Putin regime. This rubbish literature would be juxtaposed with the politics of Russian history, particularly in relation to the commemorative practices of WWII, and with the various forms of Soviet nostalgia that characterize contemporary Russian culture. The popular reconstruction and reenactments of the past reflect a deeper phenomenon, that of retro-utopia, and Putin's war against Ukraine stated in 2014 can be seen as a kind of real-life popadanets.

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**KAZYS BORUTA'S WORK IN THE EYES OF THE SOVIET SECURITY**

Totalitarianism is based on distrust and mass control, which was carried out by the security services in the Soviet Union. The myth of the omnipresent KGB has its echo even today, therefore, this study aims to research to what extent and in what ways the security was interested in the Lithuanian writer Kazys Boruta. During the Soviet era, the writer was imprisoned and expelled from the Writers' Union. After being released, Boruta put a huge effort to return to his literary life, however, his works were rejected from publishing for a long time. The writer had to adapt to the writing model established by the authorities, to the Socialist Realism style, and the corresponding depiction of history. For the last 20 years of his life, Boruta was under close surveillance of Soviet security. His surveillance file has survived and is stored at the Lithuanian Special Archives. Analyzing specific security documents gives a deeper understanding of how much this institution knew and how it affected people's lives. Based on the analysis of Boruta's file, this presentation discusses which part of his literary activity attracted the security's attention, what related tasks the security services formulated for its employees and agents, as well as how it influenced Boruta's writing and publishing.

The main processes are related to his poetry collection "Suversti arimai", the novel "Mediniai stebuklai" and "Baltaragio malūnas".

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### **„DEAR COMRADE BELLA": LETTERS FROM LITHUANIAN WRITERS TO TRANSLATOR BELLA ZALESSKAYA**

The creation of a unified Soviet literature through translations into Russian was part of the USSR's official literary policy. For authors who wrote in national languages, translations into Russian were not only a way of consolidating their status in their republic but also an opportunity to attract the interest of publishers from other countries, especially from the socialist bloc, as some of the translations into foreign languages were done through Russian. The material aspect was less publicized but no less important: the large print runs of Russian press and books guaranteed solid earnings.

Although personal relationships with translators were also influential, most translations were organized institutionally. Bella Zaleskaya (1928-2005), a Germanist, translator of Lithuanian literature and coordinator of translations, and consultant on Lithuanian literature for the USSR Writers' Union, played a significant role in this system. Her daughter Anna Gerasimova (nickname: Umka), also a philologist, poet, literary translator, and literature researcher, gave a part of her mother's manuscript archive (more than 1,000 letters, greeting cards, and postcards written by Lithuanian writers in the years 1959-1992 (?)) to the manuscript library of the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore. The collection consists of letters from approximately 80 recipients and represents the relationship of different literary generations with the patroness of Lithuanian writers in Moscow.

The presentation aims to show what matters Lithuanian writers brought to Bella Zaleskaya's attention, how they took care of their publications in Russian, what realities of literary and artistic life they recorded in their letters, and what personal relations were reflected in the letters.

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### **EMPIRES AND IMPERIALISM IN JOSEF BRODSKY'S POETRY**

The concept of the Empire is one of the most important in Brodsky's poetry which, of course, does not mean that he should be immediately labeled as an imperialist himself. Empire may be a point of reference: he repeatedly calls both USSR and USA "empires" (a term which both countries would

use) while likening them to the Roman Empire as a place where a poet finds himself at home. That half-fictional Empire may be uncomfortable to live in, but it serves as a store of cultural treasures, so the poet feels his unbreakable ties with it.

To answer the question if his poetry is really imperialistic in the same way as, say, R. Kipling's, we must look at the ways he addresses the challenges to the Empire. In my presentation, we will take a closer look at three very different samples of Brodsky's poetry devoted to such challenges, i.e. "Lithuanian divertissement" (1971), "To the Talks in Kabul" (1992) and the abhorrible text which recently became so popular, "On Ukraine's Independence" (1991). The contrast is striking, one can hardly believe that all these lines were written by the same person. How can we explain such a difference: did the poet's views change as time went on, or rather it was a question of "good" and "bad" nationalisms, or he felt very unsafe in the early 1990s as his first Empire collapsed?

The presentation aims to explain this difference and discuss whether Brodsky's poetry can be "de-imperialized", i.e., read and commented without accepting or supporting the imperialistic ideas and feelings explicitly expressed. To say it in different words, can we enjoy Brodsky's poetry after Bucha and Mariupol, and if yes, how can we do it?

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## **THE LATVIAN SOVIET WRITERS AS PART OF THE "GREAT EMPIRE" LITERARY PROCESS DURING THE LATE STALINISM PERIOD**

In the late Stalinism period, there was an analogy between literary and political discourse. Owing to the victory in the World War II, late Stalinism became the culmination of the historical triumph of the Soviet Union and the period of strengthening the imperialist consciousness. This way of thinking was also propagated in the territories occupied by the Soviet Union. However, in the minds of the people of the Baltic States, it was more applicable to supporters of the Soviet government and individuals loyal to the Communist Party than to the whole society. It also influenced the Latvian literary process. Writers who had fought on the front of the Red Army were ranked higher than the rest. Participation in World War II was often protected from too sharp ideological campaigns and repressions. In addition, The Latvian Soviet Writers' Union also maintained the discourse of Empire, strengthening the directives and positions of the Communist Party in the field of Latvian Soviet literature. However, the process of Latvian literature was not completely homogeneous. The dominance of aesthetic criteria over ideological requirements can be seen in the works of particular writers, which shows a specific resistance to the regime and attempts to maneuver between the aesthetic principles of power and art.

In my presentation, I will discuss how the Soviet regime after World War II changed the Latvian literary process, the status and expression of writers, and the significance and functions of the Latvian Soviet Writers' Union. Moreover, were there any possible forms of opposition to the Soviet regime? My presentation also reveals the relationship between power and the Board of the Latvian Soviet Writers' Union.

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## **MAKING THEATRE AT THE BORDER OF THE EMPIRE: VABA LAVA NARVA IN 2022**

Narva is a city in north-eastern Estonia, located on the bank of the river Narva which forms the border between Estonia and the Russian Federation. This third-largest city of Estonia is largely Russian-speaking, as Estonians make up only about 5% of Narva's population. The cultural and linguistic ties to Russia have made Narva a target of Russian propaganda.

In 2018, a performing arts center called Vaba Lava (Open Space) launched its second venue in Narva. From the outset, Vaba Lava focused on documentary theatre projects that dealt with topical local problems, including relations between the Russian and the Estonian populations. Russia's attack on Ukraine in February 2022 was reacted to with a highly emotional documentary production *F\*\*\* the war. Ukraine. Letters from the Front*, directed by the renowned Russian actress of Estonian origin Yuliya Aug. Due to her condemnation of the Russian invasion, Aug eventually had to leave Russia, and in July, she took the position of artistic director of Vaba Lava Narva. Her second documentary production, *Narva – the City We Lost*, explored the city's destruction in German and Russian bombing raids during World War II, and the attitudes of contemporary Narva residents towards the city's past and future. In addition to Aug's work, *100% Narva*, produced by German company Rimini Protokoll, stands out. It was part of a series of productions that portray cities from all over the world in the same format: 100 residents, selected on the basis of demographic statistics, answer a series of questions, thus creating a picture of their lives and mentalities.

The paper will analyze the afore mentioned productions and their quite controversial reception in more detail. How do they represent traumatic experiences? What are the strengths and risks of documentary strategies in mapping mentalities? Can theatre oppose imperial propaganda and change people's attitudes?

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## **EMPIRE AS BAROQUE DRAMA: RESTORATION PLOT AND FEMALE RULER IN RUSSIAN COURT LITERATURE 1741-1761**

The coup of 1741 led by Princess Elizabeth in St. Petersburg was also the first massive attempt of the Russian court to create a fake interpretation of the 18th-century Russian monarchy. Most of the tools and narratives presented to the public in Russia and abroad were defined in terms of a baroque drama with elements of Metastasian libretti of *opera seria*, which placed a (sometimes hidden) ruler at the center of the power universe, leading the monarch through many perils and

temptations only to uncover his/her absolute right to govern over the rescued nation. The legitimacy of the new rule was presented in the multimedia communication space of the 18th-century society of the spectacle, in which drama and opera, ode, and pupils' texts were printed media of absolutism.

The paper will analyze the basic plot of the coup of Elizabeth, who presented her illegitimate military actions as the salvation of the nation and the end of turbulent history. The paper will reflect on the main hero's image and the plot's development - nocturnal actions, recognition, and social order restored (*lieto fine* -happy end in operatic terms). The connection of the Russian Empire to ancient Greek civilization was applied in Elizabeth's image as a hidden heroine to appear in order to save the crown and the country. The paper will present a global overview of the reception of the coup in Russian and foreign media (French, German speaking press of the period). Another section of the literary sources analyzed are festive odes of Russian court poets and court and aristocratic historians. Dictionaries of law and European absolutism images will be sources to deconstruct the image of the Russian Empire, its history, and its staged savior - a humble heiress of the late emperor Peter, a new Astrea of the Russian court.

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### **CRITIQUE OF NATIONALISM IN THE CONTEXT OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR: THE CASE OF A. H. TAMMSAARE AND J. SEMPER**

As is well known, the ideological background of the ongoing war in Ukraine has roots in history. The mix of ideas and emotions, which in the context of nationalism were characteristic of the First World War, do not extensively differ from today's situation. On the contrary, the rhetoric common in over a hundred-year-old texts critical of war is often curiously similar to the points made by the proponents and adversaries of the current war.

Our paper studies the oeuvre of two Estonian male writers – the vigorously canonized A. H. Tammsaare (1878–1940) and J. Semper (1892–1970), whose prose has received less attention in literary histories. Above all, we are interested in the dialogue between their oeuvre and imperialism, conservative nationalism, and militarism. As decadent-modernist writers, both were simultaneously skeptical nationalists and cosmopolites, i.e., clearly critical of various forms of chauvinism. Semper was mobilized into the Czarist army during WWI, in which Tammsaare did not take part due to his poor health. Nevertheless, Tammsaare was a passionate observer of the events: since the 1920s, he often addressed creatively the public madness initiated by the war. Furthermore, he also wrote journalistic pieces published in the book *Sõjamõtted* (Thoughts on War, 1919). Semper similarly wrote about war in journalism (since 1917 in the newspaper *Eesti Sõjamees*) and creative work.

Thus, we tackle the negative impacts of war (incl. shell shock) through the lenses of (often Nietzschean) critical nationalism. We scrutinize the violence and underlying ideologies through selected works' motifs, characters, and ironical-grotesque ambiance. Finding support from both writers' essays, we analyze passages from Tammsaare's play *Juudit* (1921) and his collection of

stories *Pöialpoiss* (Gnome, 1923). In Semper's oeuvre, a talkative example of war criticism is his story collection *Ellinor* (1927).

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## **THE TENDENCY OF SELF-COLONIZATION IN SOVIET COMPARATIVE LITERATURE**

After the Second World War, Russia, with its central institutions in Moscow, continued the inherited imperial policy in the Soviet Union, adjusting and disguising it according to Bolshevik programs and replacing its previous tsarist title of „prison of nations“ with brighter images of „great family of nations“ or „friendship of literature.“ The old goals of colonizing neighboring countries have not disappeared but have been linked to the Marxist internationalist goal of uniting the world's proletariat, destroying the bourgeoisie that exploits it, and thus achieving worldwide peace and communist prosperity. Since it was too difficult to do this on a global scale, it was done by drawing the red lines on neighboring countries, which remained important to the Russian rulers until now, calling all this in the propaganda name of the friendship of Soviet peoples.

In the paper, on the examples of Kostas Korsakas' as an editor of representative collections of articles *Pushkin and Lithuanian Literature* (1950) and *Friendship of Nations in Lithuanian and Russian Literatures* (1963) and his collection of articles *Literature Friendship* (1962, transferred under another title *Literature Contacts* 1987), will be analyzed how the studies of literary influences were adopted and vulgarized in the Soviet literature comparative studies and how the process of self-colonization took place in them. Also will be discussed the political, literary, and stylistic means by which the paternalistic image of Russia as a strict but generous father or elder brother was established in Lithuanian literature and criticism describing the „friendship of nations“.

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## **ETHNOGRAPHIC IDENTITY: THE REPRESENTATION OF THE RUSSIAN MINORITY CULTURES IN ALEKSEI FEDORCHENKO'S FILMS**

Aleksei Fedorchenko's films, which blur the boundaries between what is defined as fiction and reality, polemicize with the dominant imperial and nationalist model of identity in Russian cinema.

Therefore, one of the aims of Fedorchenko's films can be seen as a construction of an alternative – politically and historically contested – identity. The director uses ethnography and fiction to realize his cinematic vision: the gaze is directed towards the situation of national and ethnic minorities and their cultures, whether real or fictitious, living in the Russian periphery, which becomes the center's prosthesis in Fedorchenko's films. By making films about Russia's cultural minorities, the director shows that, on the one hand, these people exist, on the other, they have a unique cultural identity and voice and, in addition, he is trying to preserve cultural, albeit fictionalized, traditions that are dying out. In my paper, I argue that despite the contradictions inherent in Fedorchenko's oeuvre in terms of the representation of the Russian minority cultures, these films challenge the relationship between fiction and ethnography in cinema, enable a new look at the process of culture-making, and encourage the reflection of the nationalistic and imperial Russian identity.

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### **IMPERIAL SUBALTERNS, NATIONAL POETS: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE ON RŪDOLFS BLAUMANIS, IVAN FRANKO, AND VYDŪNAS**

The three authors discussed in this paper did not have any direct contacts but the contexts in which their personalities developed and literary careers unfolded nevertheless display many similarities. The lives of Franko, Vydūnas, and Blaumanis were deeply influenced by the policies of three different Empires – Austria-Hungary, Prussia/Germany, and Russia – that imposed considerable restrictions on their possibilities of self-expression. While remaining imperial subalterns, they were also in a constant search of agency. Franko was born in Galicia and studied in Vienna; Vydūnas took advantage of the situation in Lithuania Minor, where the restrictions applied to writing in Lithuanian were not applied in the same way as in imperial Russia (even if he still had difficulties in addressing as large an audience as he desired), while Blaumanis had to cope with both Tsarist imperial administration and Baltic German confidence of cultural superiority in the territory of present-day Latvia (which nevertheless also provided valuable impulses). Even if facing considerable difficulties, all three authors sought inspiration in swiftly developing trends in European literatures, especially German. Thus they found themselves at the crossroads between imperial pressures and new creative impulses and displayed both an ability to sound critical evaluation of their immediate social and cultural surroundings, as well as an interest in developing their skills as artists and mouthpieces of the rising trends of national romanticism. This paper focuses on the parallels and differences among the three authors, tracing their texts written in both German and in their respective native languages and delving into their transformation from imperial subalterns into highly recognized representatives of national literatures – the Ukrainian, Latvian, and Lithuanian, respectively.

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### **CONSTRUCTING THE NEW CONCEPT OF HISTORY IN THE FIRST SOVIET HISTORICAL NOVELS OF LATVIA AND ESTONIA (1945-1954)**

The paper is devoted to the construction of the ideology of Stalin's time and the new conception of history in the novel "The Storm" by Latvian writer Vilis Lācis and the novel "The Storm Coast" by Estonian writer Aadu Hint, which are examples of the ideological literature of the time.

The culture of the Soviet Union was totalitarian, unthinkable without its myth of grandeur, which writers close to the regime under the dictator Joseph Stalin propagated in their literary works. The literature of the Stalin era could not be published if it did not have an ideological position or a clear message to show its importance in terms of the mass culture of Soviet society. Equally important was the writer's loyalty to the regime, which was demonstrated not only by his literary output but also by his political activity.

Ideologues realized that propaganda had to become entrenched in the public consciousness and needed to eradicate or alter the evidence of the era to justify the legitimacy of the Soviet regime. To this end, prose written in the canon of socialist realism provided a convenient platform for revealing ideological motifs through the prism of history. The novels of Stalin's time show an attempt to create images of the superiority of the new order over the liquidated political systems, as well as to hyperbolize popular discontent with it. The spirit of struggle against the unfair social conditions created by the bourgeoisie and the moral decay of the class system dominated the prose. In such novels, a particularly popular historical background was the revolution of 1905, the Second World War, or even older events that took place, for example, in the 12th -13th century, in the battles of the Baltic and Estonian tribes against the German crusaders.

The novels honored the regime's ideology, glorifying the revolution, militarism, and justifying violence against the enemies of the Soviet people and cultivating hatred against them.

In the context of the Ukrainian war, the study of Stalin's totalitarian prose is particularly significant as it reminds us of the manipulation of the collective public consciousness that was deftly woven into the cultural field during the Soviet Union's existence in an attempt to destroy the Latvian and Estonian intellectual core and historical memory.

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### **TRAVELING GOVERNESSES IN THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE: MINNA FREIMANE'S "FROM THE CAUCASUS" (1878) AND PILIŅU KATRĪNA'S "A VOYAGE ROUND THE ASIAN PART OF THE WORLD" (1892)**

The paper will focus on nineteenth-century travel writings by Latvian women, examining how the authors construct their identities and struggle with self-representation by narrating their travel experiences. Reading Minna Freimane's travelog *Iz Kaukāzijas* (From the Caucasus, 1878) and Piliņu

Katrīna's travelog *Brauciens ap Āzijas pasaules daļu* (A Voyage Round the Asian Part of the World, 1891) particular attention will be paid to women's travels in the Russian Empire. Both authors were governesses whose travels and travel writings were directly linked to the expansion of the Empire. Minna Freimane's travelog begins with the description of the Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878), while Piliņu Katrīna's voyage is closely connected to the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway (begun in 1892). Being a governess in the family of the chief engineer, she travels by steamship from Odessa to Vladivostok. The paper will also address how travel writers represent Empire in their texts.

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### **ESTONIAN WORKING-CLASS AND (SOVIET) PROLETARIAN LITERATURE**

The terms working-class and proletarian literature have been used synonymously in literary studies throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century to refer to the kind of literature that serves as artistic resistance to imperial politics and supports the working-class movement. However, in Bolshevik phrasing, these two modes of literature are separated. Furthermore, proletarian literature gained a new layer of meaning in Soviet propaganda, carrying additional ideological meanings. I propose that when discussing Estonian literature at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, working-class and (Soviet) proletarian literature should be seen as distinct but accompanying literary genres. Even though some similar viewpoints – for example, the necessity of a proletarian revolution or the destroying qualities of private ownership (motives that were mostly absent from realist and naturalist works) – can be noticed, the Soviet proletarian authors who operated during the 1920s-1940s in the Soviet Union, mainly around the Kūlvaja publishing house, exhibited significantly different motives in their fiction than Estonian working-class authors did. Drawing examples from the fictional works of Otto Münther, Juhan Lilienbach, Jaan Anvelt, Hans Pöögemann, and others, I will explain the problems surrounding the definitions as well as show the differences in the realms of aesthetic and thematic in both genres. This presentation hopes to ignite interest in employing the same concept to other Baltic literatures.

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### **ENTHUSIASTIC PROMOTERS OF CULTURAL RELATIONS WITH THE SOVIET EMPIRE: THE CASE OF GERMAN LATVIAN YOUTH IN THE 1970S**

The research explores previously unavailable and unpublished material from private archives and new interviews. It reveals the hot-blooded conviction of the participants of the youth organizations, such as Eiropas latviešu jaunatnes apvienība (European Latvian Youth Association) and Kultūras sakaru biedrība (Society for Cultural Relations), about subverting the Soviet Union under the slogans of friendship mirroring the Soviet efforts to promote "cultural relations." Based on documents and correspondence, tracking the course of the events reveals the strategies of the third generation of exiles born in the democratic West, their choice of collaborators, as well as rather undisguised leftism in their view of the world. In our paper, we will trace how to expand our understanding of the attitudes of power and the individual and the characteristics of national cultural relations in connection with the literary environment on both sides of the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain.

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## **REFLECTIONS OF CULTURAL IMPERIALISM IN ANTANAS SABALIAUSKAS' BOOK "1000 PASLAPČIŲ ŠALY"**

The history of Catholic missions of the first half of the 20th century is often limited to the narrative about pastoral experiences and establishing churches, schools, and hospitals in Asia and Africa. In recent decades, history science started to ask new questions, for example, how the activities of missionaries were related to the practices of imperialism typical to Europeans in the first half of the 20th century. The imperial attitude, especially at the thought level, was characteristic not only to the missionaries of the great European states, but also of countries such as Lithuania. Missionaries' perception of the East and the cultural imperialist narrative unfolding in it can be traced from their travelogues and memoirs. The aim of this paper is to discuss the relationship between Lithuanian missions and imperial thinking based on Salesian Fr. Antanas Sabaliauskas's book "1000 paslapčių šalys", in which the author describes his missionary experience in South India in 1933-1934. The analyzed chapters of the book reflect the fundamental models of the cultural imperial discourse, which shows the relationship between Christian-Westerner and the surrounding environment - the desire to transform the Indian social structure, changing the position of women in society, creating a system of private-public spaces understandable to the West. The approach to Hinduism, Buddhism revealed in the book is also questioned - how the presentation of local beliefs and the criticism directed at them can demonstrate the characteristics of cultural imperialism.

Based on the theory of Catholic self-realization through the evangelization of local societies, it is attempted to answer the question of whether the Christianization process in India, which is extolled in the book, could be primarily related to the desire of Lithuanians to show the moral advantages of their own culture in relation to others.

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## **TITLE OF THE PRESENTATION HUMOR AND SATIRE IN SOVIET LATVIA: THE EXAMPLE OF THE MAGAZINE "DADZIS" (1957 - 1991)**

In this presentation, the authors will look at humor and satire in "Dadzis" magazine which was published from 1957 to 1991. The time period selected for the analysis is from 1957-1960.

More than 10 years in the conditions of Soviet occupation in the republics of Baltia passed without a publication of humor and satire. Only at the beginning of the so-called "thaw" (from 1953) was allowed to publish humorous, satirical magazines. In Lithuania, the magazine "Šluota" was published since 1956, in Estonia "Pikker" since 1957, in Latvia "Dadzis" - also since 1957. The main focus of satire, following the example of the satirical magazine "Krokodil" published in Moscow, had to be and was directed at the Western world.

At the same time, until the end of 1959, when Latvia repressed the so-called national communists, the editorial policy of the magazine "Dadzis" also showed some features of independence: a) it printed illustrations and apolitical humorous poetry of talented artists who had returned from Soviet exile and detention, which attracted a wider readership; b) addressed the Russification of Latvia employing satire. After 1960, the former repressed were excluded from the magazine's composition of authors or allowed a minimal number of publications. Any verbal or visual texts that the censors could interpret as targeting Russians or the Russian language disappeared from the magazine's pages. In the 1960s and 1970s, the most attractive thing in the magazine's issues was the small "window" to the world - reprints of cartoons from the communist humor and satire publications of the socialist bloc countries and Western countries. Only at the end of the 1980s satire and humor in "Dadzis" regained a freer breath, when writers and artists were allowed to ironize the "achievements" of socialism. Although the thematic range of "Dadzis" magazine was narrow due to censorship restrictions, it gave an opportunity, albeit incomplete, to maintain an idea of the possibilities of humor and satire to maintain the reader's inner sense of freedom.

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## **METAL AND BLOOD AS POWER MARKERS IN CONTEMPORARY LITHUANIAN AND LATVIAN FICTION**

The taste of metal is linked to various forms of death and is an integral component in the perception and narrativization of war and war-caused trauma. Images of metal and blood often appear in pairs in the Baltic literary accounts, marking the intersection of different power structures. In my

presentation, I aim to discuss four trauma narratives in which taste does not perform an alimentary function but metaphorically summarizes and significantly expands the traditionally perceived spectrum of tastes. Alvydas Šlepikas's *Mano vardas Marytė* (My Name is Marytė, 2012), Sigitas Parulskis's *Tamsa ir partneriai* (Darkness and Company, 2012) and Māris Bērziņš's *Svina garša* (The Taste of Lead, 2015) express the historical experiences of war, violence, terror and murder through the sense of taste, while Rimantas Kmita in his novel *Remyga* (2020) employs a character who has passed the Afghanistan war and finds himself in the transformation of regaining the independence. Using different connotations of metal, Kmita bears witness to the long-term "trauma memory" and its constant repetition in the face of conflicting regimes.

Physically experienced taste of blood and metal in the mouth of war victims acquires a more abstract metaphorical dimension as a messenger of impending death (the main characters of Bērziņš, Parulskis, and Kmita novels finally die). Through the taste of metal and blood, an unequal distribution of power is shown, since those characters who get to "taste" metal or blood are practically always on the losing side. On the other hand, blood is perversely enjoyed by the killers, and the executors of the Holocaust, who, using the terminology of books about vampires, could be called *bloodoholics*. The so-called heroes can be thus debunked and decrowned, disrupting the usual perception of heroism.

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## **ESTONIAN LITERATURE AND EMPIRE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY: WAR, CULTURAL TURN AND EXILE**

Estonia and the other Baltic countries were the borderlands or periphery of the Russian Empire, and that situation was a determinant beginning in the 18th century and also appears in our literatures. Historian Jüri Kivimäe has written in the article „War and Cultural Turn“ that „the Estonian „cultural turn“ to modernity was already occurring prior to World War I and during the cultural turn a paradigm shift took place in Estonia: an agrarian society where most communication was oral was replaced by a modern society founded on the written word.“ (Kivimäe 2015: 75)

Gustav Suits was the poet who wrote the manifesto of the Young Estonia movement in 1905; however, after the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the First World War, the situation was totally changed till 1944 when Estonian exile literature came into being after the Soviet Union occupied Estonia for the second time—the political terror imposed restrictions on literature in the homeland. Emigration generated a new paradigm in culture and literature. The most important phenomena at this time were memory or memories, which emigrants carried with them to the new homelands. The act of remembering became crucial in the exile culture, and literature has played a major role in the construction of cultural memory.

Estonian exile literature was both experimental and imitative after World War II: Ilmar Laaban (1921-2000) developed his original style, which used European avant-garde, but at the same time

gave freedom to poetic language in Estonian literature at all. Estonian surrealism developed from the political fight for freedom in a broad sense.

August Gailit (1891-1960) is a prose writer who unites the beautiful and ugly, nature and art, which makes Gailit's novel more artistic. Some of Gailit's novels were forbidden in the Soviet time, including the novel „Do you remember, Dearest?”.

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### **LATVIAN EXPERIENCE OF THE LATE SOVIET EMPIRE: THE PROSE OF AIVARS TARVIDS IN THE 1980S**

Experience of everyday life in the Latvian SSR during the 1980s is fixed in several Latvian prose publications, among them works of writer and essayist Aivars Tarvids (1957) are of particular value, marked by sharply ironic self-reflection, expressed in his novel „The Trespasser/Robežpārkāpējs“ as well as in several short stories published since 1984. Contrary to most of the other Latvian writers of the age, Tarvids provides severe insight into self-stereotypes and preconceptions shared by the contemporaries and contrasts them with the realities of the late Soviet period. „The Trespasser“ was first published as a sequel in 1989–1990 along with the ongoing decomposition of the USSR. The novel comprises a panoramic view of Latvian society of this period, reflecting the impact of Soviet/Russian imperialism in various everyday life situations described; thus it can be received as a kind of ‚literary source‘ suitable for research of the Soviet history in Latvia. The novel's protagonist is a surgeon trying to escape the USSR legally while reflecting on his life experience from childhood in the 1960s to the current political events around 1989. Social context, human relationships, and a political frame produced by the Soviet reality are described in this novel in a far more detailed and particular manner than in any other literary narrative of this period. Methodologically „The Trespasser“ raises the question of the role a literary text/narrative has in contemporary history writing since it comprises the treats of diary, literary fiction, and episodes of direct personal experience. Nevertheless, the very description of ‚usual‘ everyday experience in this novel helps to recognize both the manifestations and the impact of the ‚Soviet imperialism with a Russian face‘, a common practice in the period in question.

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## **TOMAS VENCLOVA „IN THE EMPIRE AT THE LOCKED SEA“**

The report will analyze the survival strategy of Tomas Venclova as a poet in the Soviet era. It was formed by gymnasium, university, and independent education (in a library, home library), which introduced him to history, and the national literary tradition and fostered an understanding that culture contains many spheres forbidden to explore. For the poet, an escape to the large centers of the Empire (Moscow, Leningrad) meant conditional safety, especially when feeling too much KGB attention in Lithuania and a more diverse environment of friends and colleagues. Of course, it was easier to find Sovietized writers and socialistic realism that was forcefully instilled across the Soviet Union. However, Venclova's environment was different. For him, the most influential Russian literature was the one in which poetic and civic liberty could be felt. The global literature that the poet received read, translated, and discussed both in Vilnius and Moscow or Leningrad was oriented towards diversity of the literature and arts of the free world. The only book of poems T. Venclova published in soviet Lithuania *Kalbos Ženklas* (Eng. *The Sign of Speech*) impressed the readers with its difference from the majority of other poetry that was published at that time in Lithuania. Although, some (including Cz. Miłosz, who loved Venclova) perceived a prominent trace of Russian poetry in it. T. Venclova looked for islands of at least conditional freedom in the Soviet Empire, and found them, but finally, he still had to leave for the West.

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## **PARODIES OF SOVIET AND COMMUNIST SOCIETY IN THE NOVELS OF R. GAVELIS AND M. KUNDERA**

Literature is not isolated from social life, so it is natural that it reflects social moods and trends of thought and shows support or opposition to them. The conquering nations try to spread the imperial mentality from public life to all spheres of life in various ways. It is, therefore, natural that one can observe one or another response to this action, ranging from approval to opposition.

In the works of Ričardas Gavelis and Milan Kundera, humor becomes a weapon, a form of resistance to imperial discourse and dictatorship. R. Gavelis and M. Kundera speak in their works about the realities of their time. An ironic look at the society of the second half of the 20th century characterizes both writers' work. However, each expresses this differently. The Czech writer uses irony, with light mockery, to depict the actions of the people of the time and the public opinion that shaped them.

In Gavelis' works, irony often evolves into grotesque, which is not always easy to recognize, and in some cases, it is even possible to see a complete caricature (e.g. in the novel *Vilnius Jazz*). The paper intends to present specific ways of parodying, to discuss what led them to adopt this way of representation, what was intended by this conducting, and what it represents to the reader.

The chosen tool for this research is Bakhtin's method of carnivalesque poetics, which is a starting point for rethinking the role of parody in the composition of prose works. When discussing the work of these authors, it is necessary to draw attention to the signs of aesthetics of ugliness, which sometimes appear as the motifs of vulgarity. The parodied reality of Soviet and communist society creates a distinctive world of the work, adds playfulness to the intellectual novel's text, and helps reveal the ambiguity of the novel's behavior.

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## **EXPERIENCES OF THE WORKERS' EMPIRE: IN SEARCH OF A GEOGRAPHICAL AGENCY**

In the last decades of Tsarist Russia, the working class became particularly numerous and active in the political and economic life of the Empire. It was also a highly mobile stratum: people from provincial villages usually moved to the nearest big city, and even when living and working in the same town, they were often forced to change jobs in search of better pay and work, and they did not escape migrations nearer and further afield.

In this presentation, I will take up a topic that has not been explored much in the historiography so far, namely how the working class in Lithuania (and, since it was a highly migratory class in the region as well) perceived its mobility the Eastern European region and its place in it. Did they think about the historical agency of these places when they worked in Vilnius, Kaunas, Šiauliai (and in other cities, from Riga to Odessa, or from Lodz to St Petersburg)? If so, what aspects were important to them, and if not, what image of Eastern Europe, its cities and provinces, emerges in the texts attributed to the workers' pen? The main sources for the research will be the memoirs of the workers of the time kept in the Lithuanian Special Archive, the workers' press of the early 20th century, and other complementary texts.

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## **LITHUANIAN VOICES OF THE SOCIAL MELODRAMA OF THE 1900S**

The dramaturgy of the melodrama, its unbelievable situations, symbols, and scenic effects, according to scholars, offering a contemporary interpretation of the genre, seek to empower a moral

system in a post-sacral era. Social melodrama was one of the less visible thematic strands of Lithuanian theatre in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, still lacking attention today. Although usually referred to as dramas, these texts by Konstantinas Jasiukaitis, Bronius Laucevičius-Vargšas, and other authors, also adaptations of Polish literary works for Lithuanian viewer (*Dumblynė*, 1906), can provide relevant questions for understanding how melodramatic mode functions in the framework of imperial structures. Revolutionary calls for social justice in these plays meet unresolved national issues. Is it possible to formulate a vision of social transformation addressing only one form of oppression?

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### **HOW RUSSIAN IMPERIALISM WAS HIDDEN BEHIND ESTONIAN NATIONALISM. THE CASE OF WAR POETRY BY JOHANNES BARBARUS AND JOHANNES SEMPER**

Johannes Barbarus (Vares) (1890-1946) and Johannes Semper (1892-1970) were close friends who started in the 1910s as aestheticist poets and became in 1920s leftist cosmopolitan intellectuals who were interested in modernist and avant-garde currents in arts and literature; they were not involved directly in the political sphere but found themselves in 1940 as Prime Minister and Minister of Education in the new Soviet Estonian puppet government. During World War II they wrote propagandist poetry against Nazi Germany. From today's perspective, they were in the service of one (Soviet) Empire against another (German) Empire, but in their self-perception and poetics, it seems otherwise. The paper tries to outline two peculiarities – how the background of intellectual and aestheticist cosmopolitanism allowed them to deceive the poets themselves into believing that they were not in the service of the imperial interests of Moscow, and how their anti-fascist propaganda poetry takes surprisingly not the stance of internationalism (which would be logical in Soviet discourse) but rather that of Estonian nationalism (which was missing in their pre-war works). There seem to be several denials or complicated, multilayered hide-and-seek plays in their position, and the paper tries to outline these. The problems reflect the peculiarities of Soviet propaganda in general. Although the Soviet Union was one version of the Russian Empire (in the broad sense of the word), it hid its imperial ambitions behind several rhetorical veils that nowadays allow Russian chauvinism to show itself as something other.

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### **THE THEORY OF SUBALTERN IN TRANSLATIONS FROM UKRANIAN?**

Since the outbreak of the war, there has been a significant increase in translations from Ukrainian in most European countries. The talk aims to analyze this tendency in the selected countries (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, as opposed to the rest of Europe with a particular focus on Western and Southern Europe) from different perspectives and give a possible explanation for issues associated with the topic. How can war and exceptional historical events change the perception of literature? What are the voices that are featured in the translated works? Who do they advocate for? What principles should be applied in the ethical analysis of the literature of such a state? The talk revolves around the theory of the subaltern as promoted by Gayatri Spivak, one of the most prominent literary theorists specializing in post-colonial literary theories. In her subaltern theory, she criticizes the hypocrisy of post-colonial discourses, which give the possibility to the marginalized voices to present themselves, although by doing so the promoters of these discourses paradoxically consolidate the traditionally marginalized position of the subaltern even more. Are we ready to critically acknowledge that we may put Ukrainian literature and its representatives in a similar position?

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### **GASTRONOMIC OTHERING OF LATVIANS BY THE REGIME IN THE NOVEL SERIES "WE. LATVIA. THE 20TH CENTURY"**

The given paper addresses the process of Othering that a nation – in this case, the Latvians – endures under the regime enforced by another country and culture. In addition, this Othering is examined through a particular prism: food.

What, how and where an individual eats can be viewed as a clear indication of their cultural belonging. By enforcing one gastronomic culture upon another, a particular nation or ethnic group is defined as undesirable or Other. Historically this can be illustrated by the enforcement of German, Russian, and Soviet gastronomic cultures in the Baltic region.

In this case, the topic is addressed through the acclaimed historical novel series "We, Latvia. The 20th Century", in which 13 well-known Latvian writers have attempted to depict and redefine the tumultuous and traumatic 20<sup>th</sup> century and its impact on the Latvian identity.

Authors repeatedly describe the disheartening and infuriating process when an expansionist foreign culture's "new normal" repeatedly renders Latvians as strangers at their homes and tables. Peas and beer forcefully give way to *ponchiki* and vodka, and what one eats can even become the reason for persecution and arrest.

The theoretical basis of the paper consists of a combination of semiotics, imagology, and gastropoetics.

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## **POETRY IN SERVICE OF THE SOVIET HERO-MAKING: THE CASE OF "MARIJA MELNIKAITĖ" BY S. NĒRIS**

The cult of war hero Marija Melnikaitė, shaped by the Soviet press, literature, opera, and visual arts, served the purpose of Sovietizing postwar Lithuanian society. Lithuanian poet Salomėja Nėris, who left for Russia after the beginning of World War II, was the first to shape the narrative of partisan heroism in her poems "Marytė" (1943) and "Marija Melnikaitė" (1944). This paper analyzes the latter verse in comparison to the canonical text of the Soviet partisan heroic epic *Zoya* (1942) by Margarita Aliger, which is about Soviet Russian partisan Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya executed by the Nazis. Both poets use similar tools for shaping the heroic narrative: the stress of the very young age of the heroes, their stamina to withstand torture, and a promise to continue their fight until victory and preserve the memory of their feat forever.

There are also distinct differences in both poets' texts. First, in Nėris's verse, there are no links to Bolshevik leaders, the duty of a Komsomol member to serve the Soviet homeland and communist ideals. There is also a lack of the central Stalinist dogma to explain the war as an ongoing class struggle.

Nėris's heroine Marytė does not protect the whole USSR. Instead, she fights for her beloved land of lakes, which was not only Melnikaitės's native Zarasai region but Lithuania as a whole. With her heavy sacrifice for the freedom of her homeland, Marytė perfectly fit in the pleiad of women warriors Grażyna and Żywiła, famous literary characters by the prominent Polish-Lithuanian Romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz. On the other hand, Nėris's heroine reminds us of innocent virgin martyrs in Catholic hagiography. Nėris stresses this analogy in the last stanza of the verse where she calls Marytė *mergelė*, which means both *virgin* and *maiden* in Lithuanian.

After some unsuccessful attempts to create a heroic poem following the Stalinist canon in 1940 ("Poema apie Staliną", "Bolševiko kelias", "Keturi"), Nėris finally came back to her well-mastered neo-romantic style. Marytė is not a majestic genius like Stalin or Lenin from Nėris's earlier poems. She is close to the reader, recognizable, and easy to identify with, especially for a young reader. The youth was the implied audience of heroic poems about Soviet partisans. "Marija Melnikaitė" was included in the list of obligatory readings of the Soviet Lithuanian school curriculum since 1948.

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## **“WORLD” LITERATURE? NOTES ON COLONIALITY AND BOOKS OF TRANSLATED POETRY IN LATE SOVIET LATVIA**

The paper builds on previous work about the connection between translation and colonial endeavours (Tymoczko 1999; Robinson 2014 et al.), well as the research done in the field of Baltic post-colonialism (Annus 2018), and focuses on the ideas surrounding translation in the Soviet sphere (Baer 2011; Kamovnikova, 2019; Rudnytska 2022; Witt 2022), mainly focusing on cases in Soviet Latvia during the time after de-Stalinization and later periods. Surveying data related to the publication of books of poetry in Latvia after 1956 (when Stalin's terror started to become known publicly), it becomes evident that the translation tools were used to strengthen Soviet power in the occupied territories. For example, the "world" that was being represented through translation, was carefully controlled, i.e., it was largely Eurocentric and Russocentric. The paper will strive to demonstrate the inner paradoxicality of Soviet coloniality, namely – that, on the one hand, translated poetry, in essence, leans towards diversity by introducing other cultures to the local discourse. On the other hand, all otherness that threatens the non-inclusive matrix of power is suppressed through censorship or other means. James Baer describes this as a tension between xenophobia and internationalism. As the data will show, the official agenda created a cultural climate that was not only Russocentric but also androcentric, typologically uniform, and formally conservative, privileging individuals that, in their representation of epistemologies, erase or conceal what is undesirable for the hegemon. Despite this, several Latvian translators, starting in the 1960s, resisted and created important translations that survive both as essential documents of cultural others and as documents of noncompliance.

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## **FROM EMPIRE TO DEMOCRACY: THE LIMITS AND THE POTENTIAL OF VERBAL CREATIVITY**

Since the end of the 1960s, ecology has increasingly meant an active defense of nature, as well as a radical condemnation of all such human activities that have led to the contamination of nature and the destruction of the world's biodiversity. It has become a cultural and sociopolitical phenomenon, impacting the world's ideological and moral climate ever stronger.

In contrast with mass culture and (non-humanistic) sciences whose relation with political-economic and military power has been rather neutral, if not of compromises and mutual dependence, creative literature, with poetry as its uncorrupt nucleus, has been the part of culture that from the most remote times to the present day has embodied a radical and critical opposition to the abuses of power and its propaganda mechanisms. It has not only represented the existential yearnings of individual

liberties but of entire ethnic communities, nationalities, and nations. It has voiced the rights of all human communities to use freely their native language, to live and work, grow, and educate their children in that language.

The modern history has provided abundant evidence of how nationalities enslaved in the past have not at all been culturally or intellectually, or in their scientific capacity inferior to bigger nations. In the present paper, the role of two major "progenitors" of Estonian poetry and verbal cultural creativity, Kristian Jaak Peterson (1801-1822) and Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald (1803-1882), Lydia Koidula (1843-1886) and Juhan Liiv (1864-1913) has been featured, as the background to the transition from empire /dictatorship to the present day democracy.

Finally, I intend to dwell on my own experiences as an academic, intellectual, and writer under the Soviet dictatorship and the transition to democracy in the newly independent Estonian Republic.

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## **THE IMAGE OF SOVIET LITHUANIAN LITERATURE IN SOVIET-ERA LITHUANIA SCHOOL AND ITS DEVELOPMENT**

The Soviet Union used literature as one of the most important tools for disseminating communist ideology and the indoctrination of society. An essential stage in this process was the school, which had to teach pupils to read and to do it "correctly". By selecting texts, it established and shaped the literary canon, which was intended to influence pupils' views and attitudes. Although some of the authors in the Soviet Lithuanian canon were transplanted from the inter-war period (only the ways in which their biographies were represented and their works interpreted changed), curricula and textbooks creators had to present an image of the newest Soviet Lithuanian literature. This part was quite complicated: the textbook presenting Soviet Lithuanian literature appeared only in 1960 (by L. Šepkus) and was criticized and frequently revised.

The presentation considers how the image of Soviet Lithuanian literature was created and how it changed in Lithuanian schools during the Soviet period, which writers were included and which were marginalized. Drawing on a wide range of material (archives, interviews, publications in periodicals, etc.), it will discuss how creators of school literature curricula have tried to give attention to more aesthetically valuable texts while slowly pushing out literary insignificant pro-Soviet authors.

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## **THE TRANSNATIONAL CORPORATION AS AGENT OF IMPERIALISM IN CONTEMPORARY SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN FICTION**

More powerful and influential than some smaller nations, multinational corporations exert a tremendous influence on the functioning of contemporary global society. From as far back as the dawn of capitalist modernity, proto-corporations such as the British East India Company and Royal Africa Company furthered the ends of the Empire, bringing massive populations and swathes of territory under economic and political control. This paper analyzes how recent works of Sub-Saharan African fiction have conceptualized the corporation as fundamentally imperialistic within the global system of neoliberal capitalism.

In analyzing Cameroonian American novelist Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were* and Congolese author In Koli Jean Bofane's novel *Congo Inc.*, this paper considers to what extent these authors see the operations of corporations within Africa as part of a long line of imperialistic exploitation of labor and resources stretching back to the days of the large European colonial empires and to what extent these works see the machinations of the corporation as a novel socio-economic phenomenon of our age of frenetic transnational flows of capital and information. In doing so it also asks to what extent these novels envision possibilities of local-level resistance to these forms of corporate economic predation that threaten to stir up military conflict and despoil local ecosystems.