

LITHUANIAN LITERATURE TODAY



This publication was financed by
the Ministry of Culture of the Republic
of Lithuania

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The Newest Lithuanian Prose

BY LAIMANTAS JONUŠYS

In recent years in Lithuania the most impressive and innovative work has been produced by the new writer Andrius Jakučiūnas (b. 1976). He had previously published a collection of short stories, which, although initially interesting, did not leave a mark on Lithuanian literature. Now this writer has published two absolutely original novels, each one completely different than the other.

The Notes of Servius Galus (*Servijaus Galo užrašai*, 2005) is a lively, intriguing, playful novel set in first century Rome. This is the first novel in Lithuanian literature set in Roman antiquity. The author was well prepared to write this novel because he had studied the Latin language and Latin literature as a student in the university. The novel is partially written in the style of the antiquity and makes use of many authentic instances of daily life and culture from first century Rome. The plot twists unexpectedly and contains surprising revelations. The end of the book is made up in part of short paradoxical stories and consciously quasi-philosophical parables, some of which are delivered according to the Socratic principle. These texts are tied to a cult of the author's invention. The spiritual leader of the cult is one of the main characters from the novel.

The comic young hero of the novel loses the gift of speech and can only crow like a rooster. Because of this inconvenience, he finds himself in comic situations. At the same time, as a result of his loss of speech he develops another side effect: his actions inadvertently cause the deaths of people around him. He despises this cruel twist of fate, but is not above sometimes using it to his own advantage.

Andrius Jakučiūnas's second novel *Homeland* (*Tėvynė*, 2007) is completely different. The novel is essentially a monologue by a lonely alcoholic, whose "homeland" is his bed. However, drinking and alcoholism is not the main theme of the novel. The novel is first and foremost about a lonely man's musings on his surroundings, mainly, his physical surroundings.

The narrator is deeply tied to a relationship with certain objects in his apartment and objects further away. The prose is reminiscent of the work of Alain Robbe-Grillet. At the same time, the bed-ridden man's stream-of-consciousness musings are reminiscent of Samuel Beckett.

Moments of the hope of spiritual awakening occasionally break through the deep dark depressing existentialism of the setting. The old broken television in the room takes on mystical qualities and a symbolism of the beyond. However, all of this is subtly presented by author almost in an off-hand manner.

Herkus Kunčius's (b. 1965) novel *Don't Spare Dushansky* (*Nepasigailėti Dušanškio*, 2006) could be considered a mockery of the Soviet Union's government and all of its ideology, party hierarchies, and so on. By the same token, it's difficult to believe that Herkus Kunčius had some sort of pre-ordered aim in mind. Most likely, the Soviet farce serves as a background that allows him to play with absurd humor. In this novel two plots are developed in parallel. The first plot is the story of the rise and grotesque fall of the party apparatchik Nachman Dushansky. The second, more abstract plot, is dominated by Nachman from the Center and among his friends – the party activists. They are depicted according to the prototype of Christ and his apostles.

The fragments themselves are written in the style of the Gospels. Humor is used in the novel in the traditional way – mostly it is about alcohol and sex, but also about violence. The humor takes on the form of crude jokes. A comic effect is often achieved when the author blends official Communist Party rhetoric with a series of obscenities.

Herkus Kunčius's book *To Betray, to Deceive, To Slander* (*Išduoti, išsižadėti, apšmeižti*, 2007) is made up of stories that in a drastic and grotesque manner illuminate historical key moments in various Communist countries. Not only is Lithuania depicted, but the greater Communist world: the Balkans, Vietnam, Cuba, Prague, and so on. Ideological rhetoric is blended with extreme forms of sex, excessive amounts of alcohol, and sadism.

For example, let's take one of the longer stories, *Aurora. Life in God's Light* (*Aurora. Gyvenimas Dievo šviesoje*). This story, among other episodes, is set during the October Revolution in Saint Petersburg in 1917. A boy who is wandering around the city at night is arrested by a band of revolutionaries as an alleged spy and is brought to the Revolution's Headquarters and left with a "professional revolutionary," who while fighting for "the correct way of life," had "seen a lot and had been imprisoned, had been forced to emigrate to work, had secretly

returned to Russia, and who was ill with a variety of venereal diseases. She becomes well known as a prolific agitator, a publicist." This scene is followed by a scene in which the boy is raped. The scene is absurd, intensely comic, and is typical of many of the scenes in this book.

Concrete time and place are of no importance in Jaroslav Melnik's (b. 1959 Ukraine) stories. His stories could be called metaphysical fantasy or philosophical tales. His work can be compared to that of Jorges Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar. Melnik's stories are particularly powerful in the instances in which magical moments from his constructed absurdist world break into the realm of the everyday and the commonplace.

His second collection of stories *The End of the World* (*Pasaulio pabaiga*, 2006) is made up of stories that are much shorter, have clear and simple plots that can be easily retold. However, by summarizing Melnik's plots, one loses the sense of how his stories operate on two levels at once – one fantastic and philosophical and the other grounded and psychological.

Even the grounded and psychological level of Melnik's work is not that easily interpreted and can be analyzed in many different ways. For example, in the story *It's Impossible to Catch the Real God* (*Neįmanoma sučiupti tikrojo Dievo*) the main character only imagines that he has supernatural powers – perhaps his imagined powers are simply the psychological compensation of a harried individual. In this manner, in his work Melnik opens up a multi-dimensional world to the reader.

Laura Sintija Černiauskaitė (b. 1976) has made her mark both as a novelist and as a playwright. Work from both these genres have been collected into her collected works *The Feeling of Intimacy* (*Artumo jausmas*, 2005). Most of the work in this collection is intensely personal. The work depicts psychological dramas, and the clash between passion and loss, confusion and conformity. The characters' actions are dictated by a deep loneliness that the protagonists themselves experience as hopeless, although this is never stated out in the open. The reader gets this sense from the characters' desperate actions. Černiauskaitė's plays are known for their clear structure and for a range of social and psychological topics that they explore. The author's earlier play, *Lucy Skates* (*Liučė čiuožia*) was well received in Lithuania and abroad. Among other things, in Černiauskaitė's prose, children are depicted in an interesting manner. These children often interact mystically with the dead, who gently help the children explore and accept everyday problems.

Černiauskaitė's novel *Breathing on Marble* (*Kvėpavimas į marmurą*, 2006) depicts the protagonist's complicated relationship with a hyperactive child she has adopted from an orphanage.

When Donaldas Kajokas (b. 1953) came on the literary scene with his novel *Kazašas* (*Kazašas*, 2007) nobody doubted that this novel would be stylistically subtle because this writer had already made his mark in Lithuanian literature with his quiet, intimate poetry, a poetry that combines the traditional Lithuanian lyric with classic Chinese and Japanese poetic sensibilities.

He also has written poetic prose and essays that make obvious use of motives from Eastern philosophy and wisdom. When his first novel appeared, Kajokas showed himself to not only be a master of the poetic form, but also capable of writing a mature and complicated work of prose.

The beginning of the novel weaves story lines that can be read as realism, although here and there subtle hints of magic and magic realism weave their way into the plot. The main character is an artist, a former business man, who in Sweden, on the island of Gotland, becomes acquainted with a young racially mixed Swede and two more Lithuanians: an older man, a writer, and his very young girlfriend. This girlfriend later becomes the protagonist's wife, or may not. Here the novel enters a new realm in which reality falls apart, dissipating into alternative variations. The familiar world falls apart like colored glass in a kaleidoscope. Later, these shards of colored glass come back together into a colorful combination that once again is transformed.

From one perspective, the novel can be imagined as a beautiful and horrific story both at the same time. It can be read as a fantasmagoric carnival, as a mystical fantastical game with absurdist elements, like a dream labyrinth, or like the hallucinations of a sick mind. Critics compare the novel to *Alice in Wonderland*, to Herman Hesse's *Steppenwolf* and to Mikael Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*. In some places the novel is reminiscent of Milorad Pavičius's division of perception.

The poet and writer Gasparas Aleksa's (b. 1946) novel *Fabricius Explodes Horses* (*Fabricijus sprogdina arklius*, 2006) unlike most novels by Lithuanian writers, is known for its energetic realistic stories and for its variety of depicted events. Fabricius is born in jail during the post-war period because his mother has been imprisoned for anti-Soviet activities. The novel tells the story of his path through his difficult life, beginning with his tormented childhood in an orphanage to his life as a street bum. The story moves from Stalinism to

Breznevism, depicting a variety of tragic and comic episodes, in a clear realistic literary style. Throughout this "macabre absurdist theatre" (in the words of one critic) a fragile love story unfolds.

A poet, essayist, and now acknowledged novelist, this writer from northwestern Lithuania, lives in Mažeikiai and writes under the pen name Sara Poisson (b. 1964). In her collection of novella's *Šmogus* (*Šmogus*, 2006) Poisson plays with subtle interrelationships between people. She plays with their moods, with the details of their physical world and the marks left on their consciousnesses. Stylistically her work ranges from psychological fiction to magic realism or even surrealism. Sometimes her work is completely stylistically original. Critics especially praised her strange and complicated story *Child* (*Vaikelis*). The narrator of this story in the beginning is a cow in love, who tells her tale with absolute sincerity and in a dream-state.

Poisson's collection of essays *The Pleasure of Touch* (*Čiupinėjimo malonumas*, 2007) possesses the same stylistic qualities.

During the last decade the personal essay has become an important genre in Lithuania. The literary critic Regimantas Tamošaitis's (b. 1956) book *The Vitamin Vendor* (*Vitaminų pardavėjas*, 2007) is presented as a collection of essays although almost every text in the book could be called a novella. At the same time, these pieces are similar to the essays published over the last decade in Lithuania. These essays often explore daily life, impressions, emotions, subjectively or consciously limited experience, and also self-analysis and reflection.

One of the themes of the collection is the principle of city culture, the city's post-industrial, half virtual, consumer space. The author depicts this space with irony. For example, the narrator is pleased that television commercials are always personally addressed to him, as though "other people did not exist or did not have any money to spend." The author writes: "I like observing all of this. I like how the television is trying to convince me of something. <...> You don't even need to lift a finger and the television set loves you, smiles at you, shows you all sorts of things."

The recognized poet, Kęstutis Navakas's (b. 1964) collection of essays *Chronicle of a Good Life* (*Gero gyvenimo kronikos*, 2005) is partially made up from the genre of humor and many of the texts are lifted directly out of the poet's life. Through a playful prism, the reader is privy to exploits of the poet's bohemian life in Kaunas, the poet's travels, and so on. The work is especially attractive because of the poet's ability to write subtly and playfully about the most

commonplace things. For example, he writes about the zoo in his essay *In the Animal Jail (Žvėrių areštine)* “In his secure cage the lion opens his mouth and roars in low-register organ tones, watching how fresh meat wanders around his cage, licking ice-cream.”

A few young writers have come on the literary scene that critics believe have promise and are showing the first signs of talent. Meanwhile, publishing houses praise these young writers as geniuses. Aistė Vilkaitė (b. 1988) has created a light and pleasant short novel *Noah and Emma (Nojus ir Ema, 2007)*. At first the novel seems to be about a young Lithuanian woman’s relationship with a young Latvian man from Riga. However, the plot soon evolves when another young Latvian named Noah comes on the scene and the book takes a turn into the realm of the mystical, where fate dictates and danger hovers along the edges. In the early pages of the novel the protagonist, Emma, notices a mysterious tattoo of hieroglyphs on Noah’s back. Later it turns out that the tattoo is a curse that only Emma can life. A dramatic battle between demonic forces begins.

Vaida Blažytė (b. 1985) has written a novel that is somewhat more strange and dramatic. Her novel, *Searching (Ieškojimai, 2007)*, is the young writer’s second novel. An infant is born prematurely and dies immediately. The midwife attending to the birth is deeply affected by the infant’s death and experiences psychological problems. She becomes a different person. Her husband leaves her. She becomes her passionate son’s lover and no longer his mother. But the topic of incest is not the only shocking feature of this novel. The protagonist has an argument with her neighbors that results in her murdering her neighbors and running away to another country together with her son.

The novel is slow-paced, but intense, and is wrapped in dreams and visions. The protagonist’s environment becomes so foreign to her, that it becomes impossible for her to maintain any outside contacts. Social interaction becomes out of the question. The novel convincingly depicts a state of being as an alternative to contemporary life, a state of being that is difficult to even imagine. The novel shows life outside of society, in a sense, beyond good and evil.

The Highways and Footpaths of Lithuanian Poetry

BY DONATA MITAITĖ

The two fundamental roots of Lithuanian poetry appear lively and vital in the first decade of the 21st century – the rough prose narrative of Kristijonas Donelaitis (1714–1780), founder of Lithuanian artistic literature, continues its rebirth, and the national Lithuanian poetic style fostered by Maironis (1862–1932), the lyricism of which was honed by the poets of the 20th century, continues often to reflect a practically canonical form of poetic speech. The roots of lyric and epic poetry are being modified and integrated with one another, giving birth to new forms. Accordingly, the panorama of Lithuanian poetry between 2005 and 2008 is varied, multi-vocal, and sensitive to internal currents.

Traditional metered verse and even such canonical forms as the sonnet and sonnet cycles are thriving in Lithuanian poetry, although no poets are confining themselves to such forms. In recent years sonnets have been written by Antanas A. Jonynas (b. 1953) and Aidas Marčėnas (b. 1960). Jonynas’ *Last Days in Ithaca (Paskutinės dienos Itakėje, 2007)* is practically exemplary of the sonnet cycle, while the book itself, which was published with illustrations by one of the most famous contemporary Lithuanian artists – Mikalojus Vilutis (b. 1944) – itself became a unique and recognised work of book art. Marčėnas’ collections of poetry, *Worlds (Pasauliai, 2006)* and *Dances (Šokiai, 2008)*, are not entirely of the canonical sonnet style. The poetry in these collections employs an elevated lexicon and words defining the detritus of modernism – that is, slang. The poet ever more actively reflects on the years he has lived and his various experiences, often coding them in the signs of global culture and classical Lithuanian poetry. Marčėnas is also one of the few Lithuanian poets to have written lengthy commentaries on his poems, explaining the situation of his poetry, its difficult realities, and personal experiences hidden beneath them. The commentaries are both serious and a bit flirtatious with the imagined reader. Less canonical are “From the Diary of an Unknown Poet” („Iš nežinomo poeto dienoraščio“), the sonnets of Kęstutis Navakas (b. 1964) published in the collection *Solved Flutes (Atspėtos*

fleitos, 2006). Each sonnet is given an unconventional prose introduction, the style of which could be called poetic prose. The poet's reflection on his poetry, and himself is as important to Jonynas and Marčėnas as it is to Tomas Venclovas, Rimvydas Stankevičius, and other poets as they write their verse.

Vladas Braziūnas (b. 1952), who belongs to Jonynas' generation of poets, likewise orients his work toward rhythmic meter – but Braziūnas is very much his own poet. His poems, which can be found in the collections *Home-Spun Songs (Iš naminio audimo dainos, 2005)* and *Yesterday is Tomorrow (Vakar yra rytoj, 2007)*, demonstrate that the heritage of agrarian culture in poetry is more vibrant than critics had given it credit. Its imprint is not lost in Braziūnas' poetry; rather, it is modified, giving his work a regional colour that reflects the language and mentality of northern Lithuania. Poetic meanings are actively created by the sound of words, giving them historical distance – and sometimes proximity. The poet considers himself a product of the poetry both of his region in Lithuania and of central and eastern Europe. He has already presented to his publisher a collection of poetry written in his native dialect, and phrases in his native dialect appear in poetry he has already published. From this perspective, Braziūnas' poetry continues an honoured tradition. Recently in Lithuania, books have been published or poetry written in native dialect by Vytautas Rudokas (1928–2006) and Justinas Kubilius (b. 1954); Anna Rancāne (b. 1959) writes in Latvia in her native dialect; in Estonia there are Nikolaj Baturin (b. 1936), Mats Traat (b. 1936), and many others, especially those writing in the Võru dialect as they seek to make it an independent language. Together with the Swiss translator Markus Roduner, Braziūnas himself has translated the book *There Goes a Person (Da geht ein Mensch, 2004)* by the Swiss poet Kurti Marti, a proponent of dialect poetry in contemporary Europe.

Donaldas Kajokas (b. 1953), who became popular in Lithuania as an essayist and novelist, and Lidija Šimkutė (b. 1943), who lives in Australia and writes poems in English and Lithuanian, both feel the influence of Eastern culture and express poetic thought in a unique and refined miniature form. In truth, Kajokas, author of *The Commander Tired of Victory (Karvedys pavargo nugalėti, 2006)*, is returning to the sphere of Western culture. Šimkutė's poetry (*Mintys ir uola / Thought and Rock, 2008*), is especially oriented toward miniature expression, characterised by silent Eastern pauses and the form of minimalist details of truth, although the realities of Western social life sometimes break into her poetry. Gintaras Dabrišius (b. 1950) is somewhat close to them with his minimal-

ist style, although he is fonder of childlike surprise, with which he views simple domestic concrete objects, as in his *To Light a Pebble (Sviest akmenuką, 2005)* and *Long Fish (Ilga žuvis, 2007)*. He does not imitate Eastern culture in his poems; rather, the Lithuanian environment is important to him – Lithuanian animals and plants are easily recognisable, although the poet notices paradoxes in their familiar surroundings. Independently of this, more than one of the poet's verses is shortened almost to the point of miniature. Liūnė Sutema (b. 1927), who along with her family was made an emigrant by the Second World War and currently lives in the United States, writes compact free verse, as in *Let It Be (Tebūnie, 2006)*, her collection of poetry. Over the past few decades, she has buried all those closest to her: her husband, the famous Lithuanian prose writer Marius Katališkis (1914–1980), her brother, the famous Lithuanian poet Henrikas Nagys (1920–1996), her son, and her daughter. The poet, who previously preferred paraphrases of fairy tales and myths, currently restricts herself to the words of her dead loved ones, feeling not only her loneliness, but their silent support from the other side: "How good it is to address those who are no longer... / their smiles are calming and they keep you safe." Sutema's poetry is as brief as possible, her words are simple and truly unornamented (critics have attributed the "generation of unornamented language" to her), while the cycles of poems she previously favoured have apparently disappeared. Although perhaps *Let It Be* as a collection could be considered a kind of expanded cycle of farewell. It reiterates earlier motives and images from the poet's previous collection, which here take on the colouring of restrained tragedy. No single poem could be a manifestation of endless loneliness. In spite of this, their essential connections – with the living, with the dead, and with homeland – are alive. The world in *Let It Be* is economical, stoic, forgetful of nothing, and gazes without fear into the absence of being.

The cover of Dalia Jazukevičiūtė's (b. 1952) collection, *Imperial Woman (Imperijos moteris, 2006)*, declares that her poems "will be pleasing to those don't try to deceive themselves or others that life is painful, and who know that they really are temporary." There truly is much open and emotional speech in her poetry about the pains of the spirit of a woman. Jazukevičiūtė points to Marina Tsvetaeva, one of the most famous Russian poets of the twentieth century, as one of her most important poetic authorities, an influence that is heard in the poetry. Like Jazukevičiūtė, Danutė Paulauskaitė (1945–2004) offers her authentic life experience in her poems. In addition to her posthumous collection, *At the Southwest Wall (Prie pietvakarų sienos, 2007)* are many works written late in her

career that remain unpublished. In her poems, which have the jumpiness of ellipses, the poet searches for the home of spirit and body. She died, overcome by disease, shut up alone in her parents' empty house, isolated by her own will from the colleagues and loved ones who sincerely attempted to help her.

The Yale University professor, poet, essay writer, and translator Tomas Venclova (b. 1937) is often called a hermit – a title that was used to describe him especially in Soviet Lithuania but can still at times be heard. Nonetheless, he was and remains a remarkably civically engaged poet, albeit one who is always hearing eternal music – or more specifically the best voices of world poetry, which he uses like a tuning fork to verify each line, each sound (as in the collection *Intersection* (*Sankirta*, 2005)). Venclova's poems employ narrative or poetic reflection to become an historical personage (for example, the Spanish Conquistador Orellana), works of art and music, the destinies of friends and loved ones, or personal recollections. He senses the breathing of the entire modern world, reflecting on its pain (wars, terrorism, and, in general, the "dirt of history").

Tomas Venclova is one of the main poetic influences on Arnas Ališauskas (b. 1970), who in 2007 published his second book of poetry, *X-Ray Album* (*Rentgeno nuotraukų albumas*), after a ten-year hiatus. Ališauskas is at times called neoclassical (for his attention to form and well-crafted meter) and at others neo-sentimental, because, as he himself has said, the most important thing while writing is "sincerity. Not the sentimental, but the conscientious, honest, and open sense of relationship with the world."* The book's title demonstrates one of the essential qualities of his poetics. "Photo Album" would be simple, but banal and sentimental. "X-Ray Album" is unexpected – no one puts those types of images in their albums. The same can be found in his poetry. Extinguishing banal speech with irony and skeptical commentary, Ališauskas at times constructs an entire poem in this same way:

The first, awaited by everyone
 Literary, heavily diluted by sentiment
 According to words, always unexpected
 In truth – expected, known
 Learned by heart from childhood
 The first – still clean, all painted white
 But not as sterile as a hospital...

* Arnas Ališauskas. "Per pusmetrį nuo realybės," www.bernardinai.lt/index.php?url=articles/64862

His poems often mention scenes, film, filming, Fellini, Bergman, Antonioni, Tarkovsky. Even critics in reviewing *X-Ray Album* have at times taken up the vocabulary connected with the cinematic world. In truth, there is something between Ališauskas' poems and the language of classic cinema: images from memories, from the depths of visions, that are further changing, changed, and changeable by dreams – with the speed and mutability of dreams. The book contains much narrative and various plots that are at times spoken from a prison, a boat, or a feeding trough, although the condition and twists of fate of the people who find themselves for some reason in these places comes to light. There are also small poetic portraits of individuals. Rimvydas Stankevičius (b. 1973) imagines an even stranger world – one between reality and vision (or between life and death). Stankevičius has published two collections of poetry in recent years: *Units of Measuring Silence* (*Tylos matavimo vienetai*, 2006) and *Breaking the Seal* (*Laužiu antspaudą*, 2008).

Viktoras Rudžianskas (b. 1957), laureate of the 2008 Poetry Spring, appears in his collection *FROM do TO do* (*NUO do IKI do*, 2007) as a sensual wanderer, constantly somewhere between Montmartre, Tokyo, and the tundra, evaluating life through sensory organs (fingertips, skin, and taste and scent receptors). Exotic reality loses a part of its exoticism in his poems, becoming more common – simply one of many places visited by the lyrical subject:

the wanderer had a bear pelt and a deerskin
 made from soft bread
 he had some sheep tallow he used to flavour tea
 when we sat down to talk about the times
 when we lost our milk teeth
 we both didn't know that language
 we almost didn't know those times
 he started to cry out in a throaty voice and stomp
 he moved the deerskins made from soft bread
 he pulled the shade like a covered sleigh
 where we drank tea
 the north wind blew and my teeth chattered
 the wanderer covered me with the bear pelt

The recollection of love, present and future love – in short, the riddle that remains between a man and a woman – is one of the constant themes of *FROM*

do to do, to date Rudžianskas' best book of poetry. According to the critic Nida Gaidauskienė, the very title of the book "places a musical key in the hand of the reader;" "there are exactly seventy poems in the book and eight octaves. According to physics, human hearing encompasses this entire range."* Gaidauskienė finds many correlations grounded in the octave. Thus in talking about Rudžianskas' *FROM do to do* it can be said that it is not poetry collections but poetry books that in recent years have appeared more often in Lithuanian poetry. These books are written as a single work undivided into sections (Rudžianskas does not divide his poems into sections; even if he had done so, the book still would remain a unified whole) or even into separate poems.

Gasparas Aleksa (b. 1946) – a doctor, poet, prose writer, and playwright – weaves together the splintered fates of people from Lithuania's recent past and present with images of a surrealistically run down, unhappy, and suffering world. The lines of the lengthy and austere-sounding poems in his collection, *Singing Toad (Giedantis rupūžys, 2007)*, are at times narrated in a language almost like prose ("I accidentally hit the car turn signal, I saw a hawk in a wild pear / but a black-spotted cat was crusted with snow / Bronelė's only daughter, feeble and helmeted / there is no public road to the farm, just illegible writings left by rabbits, deer, and crows"). His poems are full of associations and literary allusions ("let's dance! the musician from who-knows-where is playing, his eyes are the colour of red filth-- / Margarita wandered between the wheels, between multi-coloured stockings and shoes / sparkling advertisements in the medley, fastened with a belt of grenades // her face was extinguished, just the Lamb in a stony embrace / I sing with bleating").

When Liudvikas Jakimavičius (b. 1959), an active essayist and social critic, was asked about the place of the writer in today's world, he said that "it is left to poetry to witness to the human soul and values and ultimately to the situation in which a person finds himself with his values. Keep and defend them, give them up or sell them? For how much, and what is their price? The abode of true values is most often silence, in which the meanings and riddles of poetic images are submerged."** He characterises the genre of his book, *Elis's (Elio, 2007)*, as a short story of poems, although the genre – as clearly conditional as it may be – itself points to the tendency of this poetry toward prose. The title of the book

is the possessive form of the main character's name. The registers of style in the book frequently alternate. For example, Elis decides to enter the army after experiencing a failure in love even though he knows that there is a war in Afghanistan. He "wanted to be / the hero of an absurd war / he wanted to be splattered / on mountain caves / by a Muslim's grenade". Unfortunately, after this "heroic plot" (the clearly ironic title of the poem quoted here) comes "the grotesque smile of God": "it was written in the commissar's hand / *godien k nie strojevoj*", which means that Elis "in the boundlessness of the Uzbek steppe / mixes swill for swine in vats / two hundred buckets / five times a day for two years". At times the poem condenses into a painful miniature: "silently silently / weeping in the corner of the room / and it seems the silence itself is weeping". Many things enter Jakimavičius' poem even though they are not directly connected to Elis' story. For example, the hysteria over bird flu a few years ago is considered ironically to be the wisdom of idiocy, and stories of helplessly dying villages are summarised in a few meaningful details ("Lionė was left alone in her hut / on her plot of land / from spring until autumn / begging that the arthritis / would stop tying her in knots / that lady was a tough one / but she couldn't hold back the tears / when she carried her dog to bury him under the birch tree / the last animal in the village"), a form of statement depicting human fate. Although it is not clear what brings his life to an end, as the hero's life (the entirety of which is included in the book) approaches its final hour, he forebodingly recalls that a person can end his life himself. This depth of social commentary is characteristic not only of Jakimavičius, but of the greater portion of today's Lithuanian poetry.

Gintaras Grajauskas (b. 1966), a native of Klaipėda, has experimented with many literary genres. His poetry book, *Poems in Their Own Skin (Eilėraščiai savo kailiu, 2008)* follows the contours of narrative, but not quite as forcefully. Grajauskas claims in an interview that "there are no ultimate discoveries, no ultimate truths; nothing guarantees that you will not be thrown back into the oceans of chaos after a few moments. And when the faded smile is unmasked, the only thing left is the snout of a drowning cat, twisted in horror." The "snout" of the poet's new book is just as ironic and melancholy. He reflects not on cultural or historical plots or authoritative quotations, but on the banality of the average city-dweller, most often insulting the everyday. Construed as quasi-dialogues in which the speaker allows for replicas of his assumed conversational partner (for example, in the poem "And It Rains and Rains and Rains" ("Kai lyja

* Nida Gaidauskienė. *Ištekėti savo išskaidytą buvimą tarp...*, [http://test.svs.lt/?Nemunas;Number\(218\);Articles\(5316\)](http://test.svs.lt/?Nemunas;Number(218);Articles(5316));

** Liudvikas Jakimavičius. *Nekelti triukšmo, nedaugini tuštumos ir sumaišties*, www.rasyk.lt/index.php/fuseaction,articlesView.view;id,1647;pn,cats

ir lyja ir lyja”)), the poems appear to be monologues of solitude, although they could also be halves of banal conversations hiding loneliness:

Well, hi. What are you doing that you haven't
gotten back to me in so long. Aha. Well, is it interesting?
Good for you. Me?... Nothing much
and that's about it. And you? Great
to hear it...

All of the poets mentioned above have found their unique voices and poetic styles long ago. They no longer need to provoke, shock, or surprise the reader in order to bring attention to themselves or get recognised. However, just as in every literature, modern Lithuanian poetry has its trouble makers. Aušra Kaziliūnaitė's (b. 1987) poetry collection, *The First Lithuanian Book (Pirmoji lietuviška knyga, 2007)*, is perhaps the most impressive poetic debut in recent years. The title of the book, obviously, witnesses to the natural impudence of the author's youth and her desire to provoke. However, her fresh viewpoint, language containing hidden opportunities for feeling and emotion, courage, and sense of humour are all obvious in the book. Exactly what this sense of humour is like is expressed in the final section of Kaziliūnaitė's book, "A Supplement for the Dear Reader – the Telephone Book" ("Priedas Maloniajam skaitytojui – telefonų knyga"), in which a string of numbers are written in stanzas, sometimes rhymed (according to the last number of a line) and sometimes not. The titles of these "number" poems are witty: "Everything about Love" ("Viskas apie meilę"), "A Story about Chipmunks" ("Pasakojimas apie burundukus"), etc.

Dainius Gintalas (b. 1973), whose *Boa (Boa, 2007)* is an unexpectedly dark collection, belongs to a group of conditional provocateurs different from Kaziliūnaitė. Gintalas says in an interview published in the cultural weekly *Literatūra ir menas* that he is more interested in the dark half of the human being. Aside from this, the poet has organised four exhibitions of conceptual photography called "Philosophy Booths: WC" ("Filosofinės būdelės: išvietės"). The booths make it possible to look both at the person and at the "facilities". Where Kaziliūnaitė's poems are more playful, Gintalas' are darkly subconscious.

Mantas Gimžauskas' book *Shaman™ (Šamanas™, 2007)* is destined to take up a unique place in Lithuanian poetry. Gimžauskas, along with Remigijus Audiejaitis (1972–2007), a blind singer, flutist, and photographer who found temporary shelter in Gimžauskas' flat, was popular and beloved within the Vilnius artistic

community. Both men died when they jumped from the sixth storey of a Vilnius high-rise building as they attempted to rescue themselves from a fire. Their fate has been memorialised in poems found in Marčėnas' *Dances* and Stankevičius' *Breaking the Seal*. Gimžauskas was marked by death, which is perhaps why many of his poems, which are critical of the general direction of consumer society, appear more dramatic than the author most likely intended. *Shaman™* was released after the poet's death; it was compiled by Tomas S. Butkus (b. 1975), a poet and publisher of original books – he is the creator of the book's visual half, which is impressive. The book is eclectic: it contains finished poems, computer games, computer graphics, and documentary texts, among other things.

Benediktas Januševičius (b. 1973) is able to play in an inspired way with unique poem-object forms in his collection, *o+6 (2006)*, which he created using computer graphics and his own poetic texts. Yet he was also able to write *Pickled in Blood (Raugintu krauju, 2007)* a collection of more or less traditional poems. The literary critic Virginijus Gasiliūnas situates *o+6* within the avant garde of Lithuanian literature, which for historical reasons is lacking in breadth. Januševičius' poems are sometimes written by a form (for example, a television tower), sometimes – and in some places more interestingly than the figurative poems – an authentic matchbox label, packet of salt, or mass transit coupon are recreated by means of computer graphics; fragments of his poetry are written on these objects in place of standard texts. And voila: both the artworks and the texts are suffused with a completely new and novel meaning. Gytis Norvilas (b. 1976), whose second collection of poetry, *Locust Breakfast (Skėrių pusryčiai)*, was published in 2006, has a slightly different take on the avant garde. Norvilas also draws and writes, but he pays more attention to the word, which is vital, often eroticised, and sheds light on the experiences of exotic and archaic cultures.

Such are the main highways of Lithuanian poetry in the past several years, along with its smaller, albeit colourful, footpaths.

Literature Worth Noting

BY KĘSTUTIS URBA

The evolution of Lithuanian children's literature is about as complicated as Lithuania's cultural and social history. The very first works of literature intended for children appeared in the first half of the nineteenth century. However, today they are appreciated only for their historic value. During the Russian Tsarist repressions of 1864–1904 the Lithuanian language was banned in Lithuania along with the publication of Lithuanian books. Meanwhile, at that time in the rest of Europe, and most especially in England, children's literature was entering its "golden age"! One need not explain how such obstacles got in the way of the development of Lithuania's literature. Only after 1904, when the ban on Lithuanian publishing was lifted, were Lithuanian schools established and educational texts written in Lithuania. These texts were used to teach children how to read. For this reason, the children's literature of the early twentieth century is closely linked to school textbooks and to pedagogy. In other words, many childhood themes appeared in educational literature. Later, many of those themes found their way into children's literature.

In a sense, Lithuania's "golden age of culture" was 1918–1940. We now consider those years to be the *first* years of Lithuania's independence, because during that time Lithuania became an independent nation. Professional arts developed. Among other genres, Lithuanian literature matured. Around the middle of the thirties children's literature made it out of educators' hands and moved into the hands of professional writers.

Therefore, 1933–1939 are considered the first years of a new wave of Lithuanian children's literature. During this period a large body of Lithuanian stories, poetry, plays, and even realistic prose with the aim of teaching children morals, was produced. In general, during this period Lithuanian children's literature of the time period had a lively and important educational goal – to educate, to train, and to moralize. Much of the children's literature from that time period has enough artistic value to be republished and valued today.

With the onslaught of World War II, Lithuania lost its independence once more. Lithuania became one of the "brotherly" Soviet republics. During the early years of the Soviet occupation, Lithuanian children's literature was especially carefully controlled by Soviet ideologues. However, when the Soviet regime loosened up in the middle of the 1960s, writers again became concerned not just with a child's moral education and upbringing, but also with his psychology and the effects of esthetics on his development.

Literature for children became more natural. It began to "play" and interact with a child, to imitate a child's nature, his way of thinking, and in this way came closer to a child's inner world. Metaphorically speaking, children's literature was no longer written from the position of the schools, but became more of a "friend" to the child. During this period original literature in the fantasy genre and poetry became more and more popular.

Children's literature again flourished during the middle of the eighties. During this time children's writing began to speak to the child in metaphors and in allegories. Existential rhetorical questions were raised for young readers. Questions that addressed: happiness, love, loyalty, resistance, freedom, and so on.

This literature was not directed only at children; it was directed towards adults as well. During this time Lithuanian writers took on the challenge of *crosswriting*, writing for adults and children at the same time. Several fantasy authors, whose work was based on philosophy, came on the horizon: Vytautė Žilinskaitė (b. 1930), Kazys Saja (b. 1932), Vytautas Petkevičius (b. 1930). These writers' books became twentieth century classics in Lithuania.

The genre of the problem novel was developed. The work of writers Algimantas Zurba (b. 1942), Kazys Saja, and Vytautas Račickas (b. 1952) fall into this category.

Poetry played an important role in Lithuanian children's literature throughout all ages. Among others, some of the important classic writers of children's poetry are: Martynas Vainilaitis (1933–2006), Janina Degutytė (1928–1990), Sigita Geda (b. 1943), Ramutė Skučaitė (b. 1931). Despite the lack of political freedom in Lithuania, in the second half of the twentieth century many books for children were written that still have artistic and pedagogical value.

In 1990 Lithuania fought to regain its independence. At this time many important changes took place. How did children's literature change in this situation? First of all, it is important to note that children's literature itself did not change – the publishing market changed.

At first many children's books written in Lithuania before 1940 were republished along with books written by Lithuanian émigrés living abroad in Germany and in America after 1940. These books had been banned during the Soviet occupation for political reasons. Very quickly many new publishers of children's books began publishing. For this reason, a larger variety of books for children came onto the market. It's understandable that the market became commercial. Many writers came onto the children's literature scene who were not professional writers, but hobbyists.

When speaking about professional, mature, literature, one needs to recognize that at the end of the twentieth century a generation gap between writers appeared. At the same time, some of the older, formerly popular writers for children, stopped writing.

The children's writers who kept on writing for children – Vytautė Žilinskaitė, Martynas Vainilaitis, Ramutė Skučaitė – brought into practice the basic foundations of children's literature. Namely, that children's literature should not be purely for entertainment value, that it should address questions that are essential to children, while not moralizing children in a heavy-handed manner. Children's literature should be aesthetic and should make use of metaphor and allegory. The younger generation of children's writers were determined to make children's literature more fun. They embraced the stylistic of the absurd. Their goal was to make writing for children interesting for both children and adults.

Nonsense literature, beyond any doubt, is the newest characteristic of Lithuanian children's literature. In this genre, the most popular books among young readers are: Vytautas V. Landsbergis's (b. 1962) collection of stories *The Apple's Tales* (Obuolių pasakos, 1999, 2005), *The Story of Dominic, a Horse in Love* (Arklio Dominyko meilė), (2004), and other books. The writers Sigitas Poškus (b. 1957), Renata Šerelytė (b. 1970), Nijolė Kepenienė (b. 1957), Rimantas Černiauskas (b. 1950) write in a similar style.

Also, at the end of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the twenty-first century, there was a revival of historical fiction written for children. During the Soviet period it was impossible to write books on Lithuanian historical themes. It was forbidden to encourage children and teenagers to be proud of their nation's historical past.

A very important phenomenon was a series of historical novels about life in Lithuania during the 13th century. These novels were published under the pen name Skomantas. (In reality, these novels were written by several different wri-

ters or groups of writers working together.) At the same time, novels appeared that described the more recent historical past – the early years of Soviet occupation. These novels dealt with the horrors and absurdity of the Stalin period. These books were written by Aleksandras Guobis (b. 1932), Jurgis Kunčinas (1947–2002), Rimantas Juodvalkis (b. 1940).

What are the themes, problems, and stylistics of the last three years in Lithuanian children's literature presented in this catalogue?

All of the themes previously mentioned – Lithuania's historical past, nonsense, paradox – all of these themes are still being explored. However, at the same time even Lithuania's younger writers are making an effort to discuss difficult subjects with children, to show real life problems in their work, and to not just play literary games with their readers.

These changes are evident in Vytautas V. Landsbergis's most recent books: *The Boy and the Seagulls* (*Berniukas ir žuvėdros*, 2005); *Zita, the Little Mouse* (*Pelytė Zita*, 2005), *Gediminas and his four Grandparents* (*Gediminas ir keturi seneliai*, 2007) and others.

Without a doubt, realistic prose written for teens has become much stronger. Some of these works have been labelled as "new realism". These books examine painful social problems in today's post-Soviet Lithuania. Like in other post-Soviet countries, Lithuania is overwhelmed with the following social issues: homeless begging children, drug addiction, mafia activity, blackmail, horrific and cruel crimes, immigration.

Work by the writers Kazys Saja, Algimantas Zurba, Emilija Liegutė (b. 1930), Bronius Bušma (b. 1946), Daiva Vaitkevičiūtė (b. 1970) show how the fate of teens in such a problematic society is particularly dramatic.

Of course, a very important topic in literature for children and teens is family life: divorce, psychological problems at home or in school, and so on. These themes are explored in prose by one of Lithuania's most important children's authors, Vytautas Račickas. The writer Vytautė Žilinskaitė in her novel *Kintas* (2006) creates a multi-faceted portrait of a contemporary teen.

The reading public was surprised when a PhD in Physics, Dr. Gendrutis Morūnas (b. 1960), entered the realm of children's literature. It would be difficult to label his prose as purely realistic. In his novel, *Summer with Katšunis* (*Vasara su Katšuniu*, 2005), which has elements of the essay genre to it, the qualities of paradox and nonsense taken on an important role. His story *The Story of Return* (*Grįžimo istorija*, 2007) has elements of magic realism woven into the text.

It is interesting that Lithuanian children's literature is still being influenced by folklore and mythology. The Professor of Mythology, Gintaras Beresnevičius (1961–2006), in his book *Kaukutis and the Tin Boar* (*Kaukučiai ir Varinis šernas*, 2007) makes use of characters who bear a lot of resemblance to mythological beings.

The young author, Justinas Žilinskas (b. 1974), made his debut in children's literature with the original fantasy *Gugis – Spirit of the Forest and Friend of the People* (*Gugis – girių kaukas ir žmonių draugas*, 2006). This book creatively weaves together elements from Lithuanian history, from stories, from myth, and from reality.

The writer Daiva Vaitkevičiūtė has created a series of fantasy stories about Marius Pietaris, which consciously and openly imitate the *Harry Potter* concept. Most interestingly, however, is that this series in its secondary world makes use of Lithuanian folklore and elements of Lithuanian classical literature.

The writer Selemonas Paltanavičius (b. 1956) interpretes certain characters from the Lithuanian mythological world in an interesting manner. His book, *The Devil and the Skylark* (*Velniukas ir vieversiuokas*, 2006, 2007), was recognized not just by specialists in the field, but also by Lithuania's children. The writer Laimonas Inis and a few others make use of stylized folklore.

The progress of picture books has been recognized in recent years. Lithuania has always had talented artists who also illustrated children's books. The picture book genre (not only Lithuanian picture books, but also translated picture books by foreign authors) take a strong position in children's literature today. This process has developed slowly, but today the results are quite clear. The younger generation of artists not only illustrate books, but write the texts themselves. The illustrators Ieva Babilaitė (b. 1973), Pauliaus Juodišius (b. 1969), Rasa Joni (b. 1984) and others have caught the attention of the public. The artist Laisvydė Šalčiūtė (b. 1964) has already received international acclaim for her artwork. The artist Sigutė Ach (born 1968) is extremely popular in Lithuania. She designs postcards, illustrates other writers books, and writes and illustrates her own books. The pride of today's children's writers is the writer and illustrator Kęstutis Kasparavičius (b. 1954). This artist illustrated many children's books for a variety of foreign publishers. Now he has begun illustrating and publishing in Lithuania. A few years ago Kasparavičius began writing his own books. He has now published five original books that he has written and illustrated. This author has made the transition from shorter stories to longer, more complicated

plots. In 2008 Kęstutis Kasparavičius received international recognition when he was recommended for the Hans Christian Anderson medal.

It is a pleasant thought that there is no chance that the evolution of Lithuanian children's literature will stop developing or that it will run out of creative steam. Every year we are pleasantly surprised by new additions to the field of children's literature. One of this year's new debuts is still in high school. The high school student Urtė Uliūnė (b. 1990) published her book *Sleeping Ladybugs* (*Miegančios boružės*, 2007) this year. Another debut is a university student, while another has just defended her PhD in Physics. Of course, new debuts make for stylistic and thematic variety.

One of the most important functions of children's literature is to demonstrate how interesting and how varied the world is. This function is realized through translation. Many children's books in translation are published in Lithuania. About 600 books for children and teens in translation are published each year in Lithuania.

The variety of Lithuanian children's literature is encouraged by the attention it receives.

The Lithuanian sector of IBBY analyzes the production of children's literature each year and celebrates International Children's Day on April 2nd by recognizing that year's best writers for children.

Since 1994 in Lithuania a specialized professional journal of Lithuanian literature is published. This journal, *Rubinaitis*, evaluates the newest trends in children's literature and professionally presents foreign and Lithuanian classics for children. The journal encourages reading.

Lithuanian children's literature is now well known outside Lithuania's borders. However, that is not because the literature is not interesting or because we lack interesting books. Reading new works of children's literature from abroad, we often are convinced that Lithuania's children's writers and artists are producing work of equal calibre. The work of these Lithuanian children's writers could be of interest to children in other countries. All it would take would be to catch the attention of foreign publishers and translators.

On the World, Personally and Publicly: Lithuanian Essay Writing, 2005–2007

BY ELENA BALIUTYTĖ

“Lithuanians still love the intellectual and democratic genre, and the one that best opens up a person’s relationship with the truth is the essay,” writes Dalia Staponkutė in *Raining against the Sun* (*Lietu-mi prieš saulę*, 2007), her collection of essay writing. It is true that the essay is currently enjoying respect in Lithuania; it has been included in school programmes – children are taught to appreciate it, and textbooks on essay writing are being published. The popularity of essay writing is perhaps explained by the fact that an equalising historical force is at work: a tradition halted in the Soviet period and a subjectivity suppressed for half of a century is now coming into its own. A few years ago it appeared that the striking books of essays written by Sigitas Parulskis, Rolandas Rastauskas, Gintaras Beresnevičius, Giedra Radvilavičiūtė, Sigitas Geda, Alfonsas Andriuškevičius, and Donaldas Kajokas between 2000 and 2004 would relegate the genre to a neglected position for a time. But this did not happen. In this article, we will attempt to survey the crop of Lithuanian essay writing of the past three years (2005–2007, keeping in mind that this applies to the time of publication), presenting the more important books in detail.

Let us begin with the question of what Lithuanian critics call an “essay”. Describing his impressions from one international literary festival, Kęstutis Navakas jokingly observed, “the young Estonian star Elo Viding came to read three poems. Good ones, interesting ones – in Lithuania they would be called short essays, because in Lithuania, everything that’s good is an essay.”* The genre of essay does not have specific themes or problems; essays can be about anything and can belong to any sphere of intellectual activity – philosophy, literature, art, and social criticism, among others. The centre of the author’s subjectivity contains the genre’s meaning, which is specifically formulated in the text and determines the internal connectivity of the text. The uniqueness of the genre is composed of

* Kęstutis Navakas. “Anabergo atsiskyreliai”, *Šiaurės Atėnai*, 16 May 2008.

the systematic connection of several particularities; these particularities include prose narrative, limited length, the identity of the author/narrator, subjectivity, and a free improvisational structure. Lithuanian criticism is inclined to separate the genre of essay from texts that have the characteristics of the novel, that is, those that have elements of plot and fiction.

The books of essay writing that have appeared in Lithuania in the past several years can be divided into two groups. To one group belong texts written without any concrete pragmatic intention – they do not exist to comment on, interpret, or evaluate something. According to theme, these would be texts “about nothing,” held together only by themselves, their style, and their form; they are like that form of literature we are accustomed to calling artistic. “What is for me truly beautiful and what I would like to create is a book about nothing, a book without the support of history, which is fortified within itself, which is sustained by virtue of its style.”* These words by Gustave Flaubert, quoted in an essay by Laimantas Jonušys, potentially negate the idea of a “pure” form of essay. The limit of such a text would be reached in the novella. Right at this novelistic limit are several texts by Sigitas Parulskis and Regimantas Tamošaitis. Kęstutis Navakas’ *Chronicles of the Good Life* (*Gero gyvenimo kronikos*, 2005), Alius Balbierius’ *Cabin on a Cloud* (*Trobelė ant debesies*, 2006), Dalia Staponkutė’s *Raining against the Sun*, and Sara Poisson’s *The Pleasure of Messing Around* (*Čiupinėjimo malonumas*, 2007) all divide “pure” from “artistic” essay writing.

The second group would be composed of essays written with some sort of special intention that holds a clear objective. These can be reviews, such as Jūratė Baranova’s *Meditations: Texts and Views* (*Meditacijos: tekstai ir vaizdai*, 2005), evangelical reflections, meditations, sermons (Julius Sasnauskas’ *Acrobatics of Grace* (*Malonės akrobatika*, 2006), or cultural, social, or critical commentary, such as Laimantas Jonušys’ *Workday of Freedom* (*Laisvės šiokiadienis*, 2007). The texts from this group often resemble journalistic writing. They are divided from the first type by emphasis on content, not form – ideas, values... Of course, it is necessary to keep in mind that this distinction is conditional in both cases, as both “pure” and critical essays can be found in the same book by a single author; the classification of a book to one or the other group is determined by which group of texts dominates. Critical essays, which are often congruous with journalistic writing, receive wide publication in dailies and Internet media. They have recently been accepted for publication in books as well; the series *civitas*

* See Laimantas Jonušys. *Laisvės šiokiadienis*. Vilnius: Aidai, 2007, p. 115.

essay (*civitas esė*), which presents texts that raise questions requiring general attention and discussion important to Lithuanian civil society, went into publication in 2006.

Arūnas Sverdiolas' *Little Saucer, Little Saucer* (*Lėkštutėlė lėkštėlė*, 2006), Leonidas Donskis' *Without Malice* (*Be pykčio*, 2006), and Gintaras Bersenevičius' *Not about That My Little One* (*Ne apie tą, mano dzūgelė*, 2007) have already appeared as part of the series. "The attitude of today's intellectual is defined above all as critical of "the system" with respect to the foundations of culture and society," writes Arūnas Sverdiolas, a professor of philosophy. Such an attitude is embodied in his short book *Little Saucer, Little Saucer*, which speaks argumentatively about the paradoxes of democratic living in post-Soviet Lithuanian society – about its difference from the societies of present-day Western civilization, about the lack of a free and responsible citizenship, and about the processes of mimicry leading the current "return to Europe." The author, supported by data from sociological studies (and, more specifically, critical of the questions posed by these studies), commentaries from Internet discussion pages, and media images, ascertains the phenomenon of the shallowness of the current Lithuanian cultural space. More importantly, he uses historical philosophical arguments to analyze the reasons and preconditions for this situation while suggesting the necessity of action supported by responsibility, an active civic attitude, and self-control. The inevitable alternative is "an order proven by means of historical force."

From a broader perspective, the most "pure" essays circulate in the wheel of civic concerns alongside the critical type. In this case, the problems common to both types most often arise from the author's personal experience, while the pragmatic rhetoric of the text is a "disinterested" poetics. So it is that over a decade after the cultural weekly *Šiaurės Atėnai* began publishing "pure" essays, their intellectual style integrated with biographical, often self-ironic narration has captured the attention of the reader. It is interesting and perhaps not coincidental that most of the authors of the books reviewed here are poets and philosophers.

Dalia Staponkutė, *Raining against the Sun* (*Lietumi prieš saulę*)

Vilnius: Apostrofa, 2007, 200 pp

Dalia Staponkutė (b. 1964) studied philosophy and has lived since 1989 in Cyprus, where she teaches literary theory. She translates from Greek, English,

Russian, and Lithuanian. Her collection contains texts written between 2002 and 2006 that were published earlier in the Lithuanian cultural press. These essays evolved out of the author's life experience abroad and the necessity to take root in oneself while in a foreign world; they contain the kernel of identity and the price of fate and are therefore trustworthy, expressive, and suggestive. Staponkutė metaphorically calls her emigrant status a "permanent translation." Having found oneself encircled by a different language and culture, a full existence is only possible after becoming a medium between two cultures, a translator in the broadest sense.

It would seem that the author expertly displays these "theoretical" problems in the concrete conditions of life. In her essay "Silence of the Mothers" ("Motinų tylėjimas"), the author speaks about one of the most dramatic phenomena of new emigration – a mother's distancing from her children as they grow up in a foreign-language environment. Mothers, unable to speak the new language well or "translate" another culture, build a wall between themselves and their children; but even in cases when the new environment becomes more comfortable, when it is possible to "translate" it, a mother's relationship with her children remains existentially complicated, as the mother's native tongue is no longer the first and strongest bridge connecting her to her children. The children also must become "translators" – of their mothers' language and culture, which is other to them. "Homelands are, as much as they live within oneself personally, a mystical world. Like an island. But you will never understand this clearly unless that world becomes your fate and residence, if your children are not born and raised on this island, and in their heads is the cartography of a different – not your – Homeland."

The mother tongue is the true homeland of one living abroad; her essays were born, with difficulty, of a longing for it, the author states. Reflecting on her ambivalent relationship to her "acquired homeland," with a different language, history, and culture, she analyses the subject's changing identity and the problems of tolerance. Moreover, in visiting her true homeland, Lithuania, the author finds herself viewing it also through "other" eyes, and that which is seen in more detail is evaluated more critically.

The author "verifies" her experience with contemporary theories from the humanities – post-colonialism, for example – and weighs possible attitudes of the subject in a changing world, analyzing the relationship between difference and assimilation and the phenomenon of cosmopolitanism, among other things.

Her existential reflections occur in the orbit of relations between Greek and Turkish Cyprus, the situation in neighbouring Near Eastern countries, and the past and present of these nations.

These essays are important not just because the especially poignant problems of the conditions of globalization are reflected in them, but also because the author is an excellent narrator, a master of comparison and metaphor who is gifted at according the form of eternity to historical time.

Regimantas Tamošaitis, *The Vendor of the Vitamins (Vitaminų pardavėjas)*

Vilnius: Lithuanian Writers' Union Publishers, 2007, 197 pp

The Vendor of the Vitamins is a new collection of essays by Regimantas Tamošaitis (b. 1956), a professor at Vilnius University and author of the monograph *A Journey to the Beginning of Time: Hindu Idealism, Vydūnas, and Krėvė (Kelionė į laiko pradžių: Indų idealizmas, Vydūnas, Krėvė, 1998)*. The author's academic status is important in these texts, but in a negative and not a direct sense, as he confronts the professional occupation of the intellectual Regimantas Tamošaitis, a fosterer of Western culture.

The narrator of these texts, who can be only partially identified with the author, is driven by the anarchistic desire to free himself from anything that holds him in its grip, to destroy accepted logic, to rise up against any determinism – the dictate of language and schemes of culture, whether Eastern or Western – to effect an inertia of thought and comprehension – in essence, to see the world differently. “There is a time to create, but there is also a time to destroy. Or just to play,” he writes on the book's cover. In these texts, “thought turns on itself, tries to comprehend itself, apprehend itself, while the intellect begins to unravel itself – like the mystics' snake that bit its own tail.” This pathos for deconstruction in the book takes the form of irony, humour, paradox, the grotesque, and the absurd. The reader finds himself in strange situations, as the narrator is in no hurry to reveal his opinions. In spite of this – and especially taking into account the book in its totality – it is possible to determine the values defended by the author: life, living, an authentic existence, individualism, and the secret – the essential component of being.

The author rebels against the othering of identity, inauthentic forms of life, and an unreal, illusory being, which is most often embodied in these texts by cybernetic spaces, subjects of virtual realities, and images connected with Eastern metaphysics. The liberation at work in these texts is pleasing, since the author is

free in the space of language; he subtly parodies deadened scholastic discourse, pseudo-poetic style, and stereotypes of behaviour. In doing so, he creates an intriguing and intellectual text informed by existence that examines human beings and a world with a remnant of irrationality.

Sigitas Parulskis, *Sleep and Other Women (Miegas ir kitos moterys)*

Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2005, 144 pp

Sigitas Parulskis (b. 1965) is currently one of the Lithuanian authors most translated into other languages. He is considered by critics to be one of the most important figures of renewal in today's artistic world and received the National Prize for Culture and Art, Lithuania's highest honour, in 2004.

In addition to three collections of poetry, two novels, a collection of short prose, and a book of plays, he has recently published two books of essay writing: *Naked Clothes (Nuogi drabužiai, 2002)* and *Sleep and Other Women*. Existential-metaphysical problematics characterise the texts of both books. The author is concerned with the essence of the human being, which, according to him, cannot be explained by social, psychological, or any other circumstances. According to the rules of essay writing, the place for this search for the essence of humanity becomes the author himself, who drastically undresses himself and magnifies his corporeal nature and instincts on a screen of metaphysical symbols.

The “biographical” aspect of essay writing does not prevent him from creating imagined plots, at times approaching the limits of the novella. It is characteristic of the narrator of Parulskis' texts to observe everything from the sidelines with irony, which is how the comic effect of most situations is achieved. The reader (and critic) who has not understood this essential narrative situation of Parulskis' texts will often be tempted to accuse him of “spiritual deficiency”: in the author's words, it appears to them that “sarcasm, chasm, and orgasm – this is all my *reliquarium*.” In fact, this is not true; only Parulskis himself offers a more personal form adequate for the experiences of his generation to this same “spirituality”, the same feelings and insights. “In the Eyes of the Bird” (“Paukščio akimis”), the most novelistic text of the book, is precisely such a hidden polemic with the earlier “spiritual” form of Lithuanian prose.

This text beckons attention because of its flat, monotonous, and soporific narrative style uncharacteristic of the author. Detail upon detail later (a romantic narrator who does not fit his environment, a portrait of Stalin that gives away

the time of the setting), we understand that the author is expertly stylising and gently parodying the style of Juozas Aputis (b. 1936), a writer recognised as a master of lyric narrative by Lithuanian critics who was especially popular in the Soviet era for his themes of “resistance.” Aputis is still considered the standard of spiritual writing by the older generation. In his texts, Parulskis declares his right (and the right of his generation) to a new form of “spirituality” – an ironic, drastically open, low style sometimes confined by cynicism. Julius Sasnauskas, a Franciscan priest of Parulskis’ generation and author of *Acrobatics of Grace*, his recently-published collection of essay writing, writes, “I keep thinking that every paradox of life, every oddity and abnormality, smells a bit of heaven. God does not record and does not want to record the smoothness of our days and the flow of events.”

Commenting on his narrator, Parulskis writes, “He wants to talk about a human being, but about the human being itself, the volume of his existence, his constantly-changing forms that are at complete odds against the background of internal and superficial phenomena.”

“Rubbish” (“Šiukšlės”), one of the book’s best texts, speaks about the “being of refuse” through a domesticated plot and with biting irony: “I would like to speak with him, with the Schliemann of today, who rummages each day through our Trojan ruins.” The text begins in the rubbish heaps of the unconscious and ends with abortion, “one of the essential pieces of refuse made by human beings,” from the perspective of which, according to the author, it is entirely meaningless to ask about the meaning of human life. In other essays, the author likewise raises existential questions and once again catches God in an uncomfortable position.

It is paradoxical, but reading Sasnauskas’ commentaries on the apostle Thomas, it occurred to me that Parulskis, in his existential doubt, reminds one of the apostle: “You give us courage to run far from general spirituality, from faith turned into obligation, fashion, the mark of good tone. You thirst to meet the wounded Christ – the true, unsweetened, ‘undisembodied’ God... And your nonsense talking, your missing the mark suddenly becomes more valuable than Peter’s smooth sermons.”*

Parulskis’ book also contains travel essays, texts about objects (“Objects” (“Daiktai”), and even plays on the detective genre (“Disastrous Passions” (“Pražūtingos aistros”), “The Burning Bush” (“Liepsnojantis krūmas”). But the book is centered

* Julius Sasnauskas. *Malonės akrobatika: iš gatvių ir skverelių teologijos*. Vilnius: Alma littera, 2006, p. 110.

on texts in which the author masterfully weaves way of life with character of life (“Rubbish”, “Hangover” (“Pagirios”), “April Epiphany” (“Balandžio epifanija”).

Alius Balbierius, *Cabin on a Cloud (Trobelė ant debesies)*

Vilnius: Gimtasis žodis, 2006, 104 pp

Alius Balbierius’ (b. 1954) – a poets and photographers collection of essays is dominated by the theme of ecology. The author critically evaluates contemporary consumer society and the threat it poses to nature, culture, and human beings. He avoids direct self-reflection, choosing instead to meditate on the common problems of civilisation in decline and their destructive effect on the human spirit. Nonetheless, the most suggestive texts are those in which he writes about his own melancholic character and his phobias. The tone of harmonious being in these essays matches their romantically elevated style.

Kęstutis Navakas, *Chronicles of the Good Life (Gero gyvenimo kronikos)*

Vilnius: Lithuanian Writers’ Union Publishers, 2005, 200 pp

Kęstutis Navakas (b. 1964) is the author of five collections of poetry and is a literary critic and translator. *Chronicles of the Good Life*, a collection of essays, is composed of surveys of cultural events written weekly for newspapers between 1994 and 1996. Nonetheless, the title of the collection is somewhat untrue, as this is not a “chronicle” in the strict meaning of the word; although the author does “summarise” presentations of new books, art openings, poetry events, festivals, and international cultural projects in the second section of the book, he does this unconventionally, paying all his attention to that which is out of public view.

In the author’s words, “I don’t just write about what is happening. I write about what happens on the side, behind, or even in place of what’s happening.” In the book, the gay spirit of wine rules; the three sections that comprise it are called the white, red, and green wine pages.

“Red wine,” obvious from the colour of its pages, encourages concrete, critical thinking and goes best with various functions; white wine is abstract and philosophical, for example, inspiring the contemplation of a table, a box, or an empty pocket, but it best complements the character of the wine glass – the meditation of solitude, friendship, love, or longing. As the texts of “green wine” attest, this type of wine, it appears, best awakens the state of creativity, gives the consumer mythic powers, for example, to stop rain, to imbue the telephone book with

poetic life, and to effect other linguistic miracles in the everyday existence of the social elite of Kaunas – the author’s native city and former Lithuanian capital. It is impossible not to find a word of praise for the author’s elegant style, sense of humour, and gentle irony, which grants to this sinful world the spirit of easy forgiveness and to many of his other texts virtues by which everyday minute are transformed into “chronicles of the good life.”

Nonetheless, Navakas’ “good life” is, above all, engaging, a life containing internal freedom, adventure, and intrigue. It is therefore not surprising that he has received three prizes for this book in addition to Lithuania’s highest honour, the National Prize for Culture and Art, which he was awarded in 2007.

Liutauras Degėsys, *Journey There and Back (Kelionė ten ir atgal)*

Vlinius: Kronta, 2007, 144 pp

Liutauras Degėsys (b. 1953) is a poet and professor of philosophy. The title of his collection, *Journey There and Back*, already informs us that these are travel essays. But the title “silences” the second section of the book, which is composed of the author’s cultural summaries read on Lithuanian Radio. In the first section, Degėsys describes his impressions from the city of Visby on the island of Gotland, where it was his fortune to be on a creative exchange at the Baltic Centre for Writers, and from his three months spent in academic residence at the University of Iowa in Iowa City, U.S.A.

This travel book is divided into 23 parts. After finishing his required academic programme, the author drove 5,125 miles (over 8,000 kilometres), visiting fourteen states over two weeks in a hired car. The route of the trip serves as the structure of the plot, the culminating events of which become metaphysical fault lines that overcome Degėsys in various places: the Grand Canyon (“If on earth there is a gate to hell, surely it must be somewhere here”), Saguaro National Park, and Death Valley. These are places where the author senses that eternity is nearby, where one can touch a thousand-year-old cactus that stands fifteen metres high, or observe how the relief of Death Valley resembles a moonscape. These points on the trip are its highest spiritual events and the densest parts of the text, places where poetic metaphysics accompanies the rarefaction of reality. The sensations of civilisation likewise move the author toward the transcendent: four-storey motorway overpasses on which Degėsys feels he is flying, and, in general, the impression that he is driving in an un-reality, as when a summer scene turns into a blizzard, or his car belches from thinning mountain air and almost leaves

the ground when tossed by gusts of wind. Following his academic experience, the author meets the “real America” in taverns while traveling and comes away, it seems, satisfied.

The author claims that he returns from this trip full of physical and metaphysical impressions and charmed by the nature and culture of the place, by its dimensions, space, and extension of time: “Come back in love with this country and forget your provincial criticism of it – especially of the so-called American pragmatism, the cult of material things, the disinterest in culture, and the slavery to the dollar. Discover things of internal interest: even your unsubstantiated criticism and provincial self-righteousness.” On Gotland, the author is drawn by Northern nature: “You may think that after the images of the Grand Canyon nothing will be able to stir you, but you feel the intensity of impressions return. The nature here reveals such purity, such concentrated form, that the head easily spins from it. You can practically eat the frozen air, lit by the sun as it melts in your mouth. The clear, transparent green glass of the sea. The rocks that take on the form of ancient Greek marble, and the absolutely, ideally giant breathing junipers and cypresses. This is not the spoiled, run down, or over-decorated nature of the southern latitudes, where one wants to drown, melt, disappear.” The author looks at himself and his reactions a bit from the outside, slightly self-ironically, and narrating while paying attention to himself as another, second person. These texts are distinguished for their analytical, rational, and critical thought and for the small narrative clouds that occasional appear with poeticism and romanticism.

Travel essays are not outside the category of critical essays; they are to be found in books, already mentioned, by Jūrātė Baranova, Laimantas Jonušys, Leonidas Donskis, and Gintaras Bersenevičius. Travel texts are informative, analytical, and meaningful, since they contain “comparativistic” elements. For example, Bersenevičius, on his trips to Bonn for academic affairs, observed the changes in the German mentality and sought parallels with processes at work in Lithuania, comparing, prognosticating, and warning: “We are now being urged to declare, ‘God is dead.’ And we are opening our mouths together with ‘Europe.’ That’s fine, but look how God is dead to *Europe*. Put another way, *Europe* is dead to God. To love, patience, a taste for life, authenticity... We – because of our collapsed economy – still have a few years. If the prosperity of society catches us the way we are now, we will disappear straightaway.” Suggestively reporting on his “discovery of Poland” from another trip, Bersenevičius invites more

active participation with the Czechs and Hungarians, as “the people of Central Europe have a common historical and cultural heritage and background, a sort of common collective unconscious.” Donskis, weighing the cultural potential of Lithuanian cities, invokes the history of small European cities; having traveled to Cordoba, Bruges, Delft, and Haarlem, he presents them as multicultural and tolerant examples of art and science. The location of Jonušys’ essayistic thoughts and impressions is Prague, where he worked for Radio Free Europe. In this case, a foreign place prompts the author to take up the theme of solitude, diving into melancholy while decadently enjoying a vanishing type of space “where everything is meaningless.” The author appears here to be a completely “asocial” individual, coherent only for his moods, feelings, and thoughts and existing solely in an aesthetic dimension. The portrayal of the ephemeral world in these essays subtly gives shape to their language.

The texts of the other section of Jonušys’ book are clearly journalistic; it is frankly difficult to believe that they are written by the same author of essayistic impressions, who here is the rational critic of culture and society. He unmasks the Soviet-era remnants of free Lithuanian civil consciousness and defends Western values: democracy, freedom, and individualism. He portrays the current reality of independent Lithuania positively while not shying away from criticism when it is warranted, and, ultimately, he believes in its future. These journalistic texts are “documents of time,” and they will remain meaningful as long as the problems they raise remain meaningful. This is true as well of the journalistic texts in collections of essays by other authors who have been mentioned but about whom we have not spoken here.

Essay writing has a chance to vie for eternal metaphor...

The Latest Lithuanian Drama, 2005–2008

BY AUŠRA MARTIŠIŪTĖ

In recent years more plays have been published in Lithuania than ever before. The Lithuanian Writers’ Union Publishers has published two new plays by Laura Sintija Černiauskaitė: *The Feeling of Intimacy* (*Artumo jausmas*, 2005) and *A View Under Summer’s Water* (*Blyksnis po vasaros vandeniui*, 2005). The avant-garde American playwright Kostas Ostrauskas’s collected works *Mardi Gras Masks* (*Užgavėnių kaukės*, 2006) were also published by the Lithuanian Writers’ Union Publishers. The earliest play in this collection, *Pipe* (*Pypkė*), was first published in 1951. The play *Quartet* (*Kvartetas*) dates back to 1969. The poet Mindaugas Valiukas (b. 1976) has published his first collection of plays *The Death of Creativity* (*Kreatyvo mirtis*, 2006). The poet Gintaras Grajauskas was recognized this year as the nation’s best playwright for his collection of plays *The Girl Who God Feared* (*Mergaitė, kurios bijojo Dievas*, 2007).

The Theater and Film Information and Education Center has begun publishing a new series of Lithuanian plays. The first play to appear was Marius Ivaškevičius’s *Madagascar* (*Madagaskaras*, 2004). This series has produced two important books. Marius Ivaškevičius’s play *A Neighboring City* (*Artimas miestas*, 2005) was published in Lithuanian with an English translation. The early plays of Sigitas Parulskis *From the Lives of the Dead* (*Iš gyvenimo vėlių*), *P.S. The Case is Okay* (*P.S. Byla O.K.*) and *Unending Loneliness for Two* (*Nesibaigianti vienatvė dviem*) along with conversations with Sigitas Parulskis and the director Oskaras Koršunovas were published in the collection *Three Plays* (*Trys pjesės*, 2006).

At present, in Lithuania new traditions and tendencies in drama are beginning to take shape. Theaters have begun to organize drama contests in order to support new work. Since 2005 the Lithuanian National Drama Theater has organized the drama contest and drama festival *Versmė*. In 2006 The Kaunas State Theater organized the annual contemporary drama review *Panorama*.

More and more theaters are beginning to experiment with new plays written by the actors themselves. Some examples are the Theater Laboratory *Open Circle* (*Atviras ratas*), OKT, and the city theaters of Vilnius.

Drama contests have become a popular cultural phenomenon. Each contest receives around 100 entries of varying quality. One of the most popular events of the contest cycle is the Raspberry Contest, in which readings of the worst plays take place. This event takes place annually in the Kaunas Panorama Theater. The public is very interested in participating in listening to readings of new plays by new playwrights and seeing sketches of the plays performed.

These contests have become an integral part of the life of the theater. They encourage well-known writers of the older generation – writers who were famous during the Soviet period, but have now distanced themselves from theater – to return and to begin writing plays again. Kazys Saja contributed a new play, *Suffering Jovas* (*Kenčiantis Jovas*). Juozas Glinskis has written two new plays: *One Father's Children* (*Vieno tėvo vaikai*) and *A Trap to Catch Unruly Spirits* (*Spąstai nelabosioms dvasioms gaudyti*). Also, playwrights from the younger generation have been acknowledged. Sigitas Parulskis participated in one of the contests with his play *The Ferry Man* (*Keltininkas*). The following writers produced these plays for contests: Marius Ivaškevičius with *To Cover* (*Apgaubti*); Laura Sintija Černiauskaitė with *A View Under Summer's Water* (*Blyksnis po vasaros vandeniui*); Herkus Kunčius with *Matas* (*Matas*); Vytautas V. Landsbergis with *The Bunker* (*Bunkeris*), *Willy* (*Vilis*), and a play for children, *Zita, the Little Mouse* (*Pelytė Zita*). The famous writer, Jurga Ivanauskaitė, made her debut in drama with the play *Hole* (*Skylė*), when she participated in the first Kaunas Panorama contest. One of the best plays recognized at the Vilnius Versmė contest in 2008 was the poet Julius Keleras's *A-B*. Work by the young playwrights Marius Macevičius and Gabrielė Labanauskaitė was well received in both these contests.

The greatest value of these contests is the discovery of new talent and the opportunity for writers to become well-known as playwrights and to participate in theater life. These contests encouraged the following writers to write their first plays: Marius Ivaškevičius's *The Neighbor* (*Kaimynas*), Laura Sintija Černiauskaitė's *Free the Golden Ball* (*Išlaisvinkit auksinį kumeliuką*). In recent years, the following playwrights made their debuts through contests: Marius Macevičius with *Antoška kartoška's "Sing when you're winning"* (*Antoškos kartoškos, "Sing when you're winning"*) and Aneta Raževaitė with *Career* (*Karjera*). It is paradoxical that the readings of the plays that have won these contests

and which draw huge crowds of spectators, do not necessarily become the best staged plays. Criticism ranges from severe to regrets that the possibilities of what theater has to offer have not been fully exploited.

For example, the play that was produced using a text by Juozas Glinskis *One Father's Children* (*Vieno tėvo vaikai*, 2006, directed by Gytis Padegimas, LNDT), a play that depicts the effects of the Soviet regime on one family, has been criticized as a work that opens up “the absurd face of the theater” and is similar to a “long funeral lunch.” According to the theater critic Gražina Mareckaitė, it is not clear what purpose the play serves. Mareckaitė writes: “Is this play intended for Lithuania's past, present, or future? Perhaps the National Drama Theater has ambitions of developing a nationalist drama?” To be honest, the older Glinskis, who writes so prolifically about the tragedy of his generation's lives under the Soviet regime, doesn't hide the fact that contemporary theater is foreign to him. However, the playwright, while speaking about how lost the playwright writing for the theater feels by not knowing what contemporary theater needs, sizes up the general situation. His thoughts are confirmed by other plays by a younger generation of playwrights. Critics of Marius Macevičius's play *Antoška's kartoškas* (2006, directed by Ramunė Kudzmanaitė, Kaunas Drama Theater) stress that the play does not take advantage of the possibilities of theater. It were as though the theaters did not know how to make use of new drama. The winner of the *Versmė* contest and the best national playwright of 2007–2008, Gintaras Grajauskas's, unfortunately did not see his play *The Girl Who God Feared*, (*Mergaitė, kurios bijojo Dievas*) become the kind of play directors fight to lay their hands on.

Therefore, contemporary Lithuanian drama is ridden with complicated problems: most playwrights lack professionalism, lack of solid knowledge of the vocabulary of the theater, lack appropriate interpretation by directors, and so on.

It seems as though today's Lithuanian theater personnel do not need dramatic plays, but rather texts that evolve out of the creative process.

This is typical of actors early in their careers, actors who are still students of the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theater. It is also typical of recognized artist's plays. In this manner theater people seek to fill the actual drama niche for contemporary society and for talented actors.

The following plays were written for young people: *The Star's Frost* (*Žvaigždžių kruša*), *The Open Circle* (*Atviras ratas*), the actress Birutė Mar's *The Make-Up Opera* (*Grimo opera*), Dainius Gavenonis's and set designer Jūratė Paulėkaitė's creative projects *Together* (*Kartu*), and *A Closed Evening* (*Uždaras vakaras*).

Gintaras Varnas, director of the theatrical text *The Star's Frost*, co-wrote the text together with his students and the young playwright Gabrielė Labanauskaitė. This experimental play is based on the principles of the “reality show.” The play explores the illusion and the poverty of today’s reality, that of the fate and experiences of quickly created “stars.”

The Theater Laboratory *The Open Circle* concerns itself with the problems of today’s youth. The actors in *The Open Circle* graduated from the Master program at LMTA this year. They studied under the director Aidas Giniotis.

Most of the plays staged by *The Open Circle* were developed from the actors’ texts. The actors’ drew from their actual lives to create the texts. However, some of the plays in the theater’s repertoire are adapted from classic Lithuanian literature. For example, the play *Winged Mathew (Sparnuotasis Matas)* is a satiric propaganda piece based on a poem by Kazys Binkis.

The word, the text itself, is one of the most important forms of expression in the plays created by *The Open Circle*. Therefore, the pieces created by the actors do not stray far from traditional forms. This close link between the text and the ideology of creative expression in the theater is what makes *The Open Circle* successful in drama contests. In 2008 *Versmė* recognized Justas Tertelis’s *A One Act Monologue for the Beginning Actor (Vienaveiksmė monopjesė pradedančiam aktoriui)* and Marija Korenkaitė’s and Laurynas Jukna’s *Escape to Acropolis (Pabėgimas į Akropolį)* as among the best plays written that year.

The theater group *The Ceasar Group* created an original political play *Lithuania’s Day (Lietuvos diena, 2007)*. This play was written by the director Cezaris Graužinis. The director attributes the creation of this play to the actors’ civic position in the colorful world of Lithuanian theater today. Not a single play existed that addressed the playwright’s relationship with contemporary Lithuania. The plays did not address what Lithuanians see on television, read in the newspapers, read on the Internet, or hear in the streets. In this manner, a new contemporary Lithuanian theater has been born, one which is unusual in both form and originality. According to the theater critic Rasa Vasinauskaitė, “You can’t shove the Lithuanian daily into any concrete time or space and you cannot describe it in any terms that work in our contemporary theater. What this foursome of blond, blue-eyed actors, wearing impeccably white shirts, staring out at the blue skies from theater posters cannot be called theater. Speaking with the audience during the plays? Perhaps. Juggling contemporary political and news topics back and forth with the audience? Perhaps.

Only, these are not plays. They are not plays in the traditional understanding of a play in which one experiences a work of literature in the traditional sense.”

The actors working under the director Oskaras Koršunovas experiment even more bravely and consistently in the plays staged by the Vilnius City Theater. The actors Birutė Mar, Dainius Gavenonis, and the set designer Jūratė Paulėkaitė initiated three original plays in this theater’s repertoire: *The Make-up Opera (Grimo opera, 2006)*, *Together (Kartu, 2007)*, *A Closed Evening (Uždaras vakaras, 2008)*.

Birutė Mar based *The Make-up Opera* on cosmetics hand books and a number of interviews taken from women’s magazines. Birutė Mar created a collage text out a number of unrelated texts. *The Make-up Opera* has no plot. The play is based on a clear chronological progression in a woman’s life. Three characters – a ballerina, an actress, and a singer – are shown at various stages of their lives. Their characters are revealed through interviews given for television in which they are joyful over discoveries they’ve made during their lives, mourn losses and the end of their happiness. Their make-up is constantly changed, changing their moods and outlook. As they age inner transformations take place. They experience sadness and bitterness towards life, although these emotions are never expressed directly in words.

The actor Dainius Gavenonis and the set-designer Jūratė Paulėkaitė in 2007 created the parable *Together (Kartu)* based on Daiva Čepauskaitė’s play for radio theater *Beans (Pupos)*. This play analyzes the relationship between a couple who have lived together for many years. This play, which is about two elderly people from the village trapped in their cottage in a lift of their own construction with sacks of beans, resonates with the popular Lithuanian folk story about “the old man and the old woman” who grow a bean stalk inside their house that reaches up to heaven itself. By climbing this beanstalk the old man and the old woman travel up to God. In the end, God chases them out of heaven. These two texts – one written by the playwright and the other a folk tale – are separated in the play by their different genres. The actors’ comic performance of Čepauskaitė’s play is in stark contrast with a multi-faceted and dance-style interpretation of the ending. This ending is meant to engender in the viewer a number of reactions ranging from shock of the grotesque to an appreciation of the lyric, of comedy and tragedy, of horror and fascination, and so on.

The play *A Closed Evening (Uždaras vakaras)* improvises the archaic theme of the story “The Wife God.” The story was inspired by the musical score cre-

ated by the actor and singer Brigita Bublytė. The actor Dainius Gavononis and set designer Jūratė Paulėkaitė were inspired to find an adequate form to bring this story, which delves into the depths of myth, onto the stage. This is how “live music” theater came into existence. In this music theater, however, music and singing are performed live. The story that is printed in the program serves its purpose for those who cannot imagine a play without a text. A spectacle that imitates dream-logic is played out on stage. This musical performance invites the spectator for at least the duration of the one-hour long play to forget all his former preconceptions about theater and to try to move together with the creators into a journey.

Another new tendency in Lithuanian theater is staging plays that had been written earlier. This gives one the hope that plays that are valued as literary works of art are still important to contemporary theater. The play *Together (Kartu)* (2007) was staged according to a play written in 2002 (this play influenced the fact that Daiva Čepauskaitė won the Golden Cross of the Stage award as best playwright in 2007 for her play *Beans (Pupos)*). The American director Yana Ross directed Laura Sintija Černiauskaitė's play *Liučė is Skating (Liučė čiuožia)*, a 2007 co-production between Oskaras Koršunovas's Vilnius City Theater and Domino Theater). The director describes the play as a work of art that was born out of the playwright's rich imagination and which is unique for its special language – language in which simple, everyday conversation is turned into poetic language, into the language of a fairy tale. The play allows one to see other people's lives as though through a window. The play allows one to observe how fates are interwoven and how questions of the past are left unanswered, giving way to new questions for the future. Sigita Parulskis's play *The Ferry Man (Keltininkas)*, written in 2006, reached the theater scene in 2008 when it was directed by Paul Eugene Budraitis and performed by the Oskaras Koršunovas Vilnius City Theater.

The work of Lithuanian playwrights is being performed more often for audiences abroad. In London in 2008 three plays by young Lithuanian playwrights were performed in the Lithuanian Festival. These plays were: Gabrielė Labanauskaitė's play *The Most Painful – 2 (Skaudžiausia – 2)*, which takes a look at the problems gay people face in small Lithuanian provincial towns; Dovilė Katiliūtė's *Doll (Lėlė)*, which dramatically depicts a controlled world in which all the rules are broken by a little boy; Marius Macevičius's *Antoškos kartoškos*, which depicts the problems Lithuanians face when they emigrate abroad (the play was performed with a different title in English, *Goodbye My Love*). The plays performed at The

Lithuanian Festival completed a project that was started by the workshop The Art Print House, intended to foster the work of young playwrights.

The director and drama specialist, Svetlana Dimcovič, who performs her work in a variety of London theaters, selected the three Lithuanian plays and directed them at London's *Southwark Playhouse*, using a troupe of actors selected for these particular plays. Marius Ivaškevičius's play *The Neighbor (Kaimynas)* has a special place in Lithuanian theater history. In 1998 this play won the Theater and Film Information and Education Center's organized contest for the newest young Lithuanian playwrights and was performed at the State Youth Theater (directed by Cezaris Graužinis). In 2000 *The Neighbor* was read at the international Avignon Festival. In 2005 the play was staged in Helsinki. In 2008 two of Ivaškevičius's plays made their debut in Italy and in Latvia. In Trieste the Slovenian Repertoire Theater performed *A Neighboring City* (directed by Aleksandras Popovskis), and in Riga, Latvia, the Latvian National Theater staged *The Neighbor* (directed by Pēteris Krilovas).

Laura Sintija Černiauskaitė's play *Liučė Skates (Liučė čiuožia)* was popularly recognized in the international arena as well. The play was performed for the first time in 2003 at the State Youth Theater (directed by Algirdas Latėnas). A year later it was staged in Moscow at the Kazancevo and Roshchin Youth Theater Center (directed by Vladimir Skvorcov). In 2004 this play one first place at the Berlin Theater Festival Theatertreffen. In 2005 Oskaras Koršunovas staged this play in the United States. In 2008 the American directed Yana Ross staged the play in Lithuania. In Southern Italy, in Napoli, during the contemporary East European theater festival A EST, the Italians staged two plays written by Lithuanian playwrights. The first was Laura Sintija Černiauskaitė's *Liučė Skates (Liučė čiuožia)*, directed by Sebastian Deva) and the second was Marius Ivaškevičius's *Malish (Malviš)*, directed by Vincenzo Pirrotto).

Sigita Parulskis's one-act play *Wild Woman (Laukinė moteris)*, 2006, directed by Kostas Smoriginas) was an original reply to Rob Becker's comedy *Cave Man (Urvinis žmogus)*. This play was performed in 2006 in Latvia and in 2007 in Estonia. In 2008 it was performed in Poland.

THE NEWEST TRENDS IN LITHUANIAN DRAMA

Lithuanian theater made a come back during the Soviet era by using metaphor to hide easily recognizable political topics and moral dilemmas. This was especially evident throughout the Soviet period and is reflected in the plays

of a variety of playwrights: Juozas Glinskis's *One Father's Children* (*Vieno tėvo vaikai*), *Traps to Catch Unruly Spirits* (*Spąstai nelabosioms dvasioms gaudyti*), Herkus Kunčius's *Matas* (*Matas*), Vytautas V. Landsbergis's *The Bunker* (*Bunkeris*), Marius Ivaškevičius's *To Cover* (*Apgaubti*). A new topic for Lithuanian theater has become emigration, as reflected in Marius Macevičius's *Antoškos kartoškos*, and Aneta Raževaitė's *Career* (*Karjera*). Lithuanian theater, which was once the hearth of the intellectual elite, now is turning towards popular culture. Plays are staged in clubs, as was the case with Sigitas Parulskis's *Wild Woman*. The Domino Theater took up residence in a movie theater. New themes have become important in theater. Macevičius's play "Sing when you're winning" shows fans of the singer Robbe Williams. Sigitas Parulskis's *Wild Woman* was written in response to the "top" play *Cave Man*. The more serious plays, the ones more popular with theater critics, are the ones offered by the creators of *The Star's Frost* (*Žvaigždžių krušos*) and Birutė Mar's initiated *The Make-Up Opera*.

Over the last few years the form of Lithuanian drama has changed. Playwrights have abandoned refined dramatic structures and linguistic experiments. These changes in drama became evident in 2006 with the release of Sigitas Parulskis's collection of plays, *Three Plays* (*Trys pjesės*, Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2006.) This collection was the first jewel in contemporary Lithuanian theater's crown and contained: *From the Lives of the Dead* (*Iš gyvenimo vėlių*, staged in 1995), *P.S. The Case is O.K.* (*P.S. Byla O.K.*, staged in 1997), *Unending Loneliness for Two* (*Nesibaigianti vienatvė dviem*, staged in 2001). These plays encouraged new ways of thinking in Lithuanian theater and inspired a search for new forms of expression.

In recent years playwrights have been striving for simplicity, for a "recognizable" effect, and therefore their work is moving closer towards reflecting the every day. The characters in these plays are involved in conflicts of an every day nature that reflect society's contemporary issues. Many of these plays are created out of episodes that are linked by the chronology of different epochs in time. Childhood, youth, middle-age, old age provide the contrasts needed for this nature of play. These topics appeal not only to the viewers intellect, but also to his or her emotions.

Sigitas Parulskis's play *The Ferry Man* (*Keltininkas*) offers serious reflection on a superficial life. This play was staged in 2008 at Oskaras Koršunovas's Vilnius City Theater and directed by Paul Eugene Budraitis. The play was written on consignment in 2006 by the New Drama organization.

The play is written as realism, but uses the internal logic of the detective novel. On one level the play's action takes place in the space of the every day realm – at home, in the hospital, in a taxi, at a bar, and so on. The characters communicate in the rough language of the every day. The playwright, however, concerns himself with "deepening" the transcendental experience. To this end, the action revolves around the main character, 43-year-old Henrikas, a middle manager at a small firm, who unexpectedly finds himself face to face with death. He is thrown out of his every day routine, is out of balance with himself, and is confused. The embodiment of death takes the form of illusions from the Bible and from Greek mythology. A Catholic priest plays an important role. A taxi driver who goes by the nick name, the Ferry Man, is reminiscent of Charon.

Marius Ivaškevičius's dramatic style has changed as well. The lyric comedies *Neighbor* (*Kaimynas*), *Malish* (*Malbiš*) and especially *Madagascar* (*Madagaskar*) have given way to a new style a set of plays with realistic settings, situations, and characters. These plays are *A Neighboring City* (*Artimas miestas*), *To Cover* (*Apgaubti*).

POETIC DRAMA HOLDS A FIRM POSITION

The work of Laura Sintija Černiauskaitė and Gintaras Grajauskas are unique within the context of contemporary Lithuanian drama. Both writers' dramatic style is strongly influenced by the language of poetry. This influence is evident in Černiauskaitė's third book *The Feeling of Intimacy* (*Artumo jausmas*, 2005) in which two new plays were published: *A View Under Summer Water* (*Blyksnis po vasaros vandeniu*) and *The Feeling of Intimacy* (*Artumo jausmas*).

The literary critic Elena Bukelienė has called Černiauskaitė's work "the anatomy of loneliness." The experience of loneliness makes the characters dramatic, frees their imagination, their intuition, their sense of language. In Černiauskaitė's plays the traditional dramatic conflict is replaced with relationships in which people representing various social groups come into dramatic conflict with each other: children come in conflict with adults, women with men, socially acceptable groups with socially unacceptable groups and so on.

According to the literary critic Jūratė Sprindytė the strength and originality of Černiauskaitė's work lies in her colorful feminine expressionism. Černiauskaitė's work concerns itself with the relationship between girls and women; with the hidden secrets within a mother's psyche; the parallel of eroticism and the lack of eroticism. The playwright's ability to originally tell the story of the present mo-

ment is no less attractive than that quality in her work that could easily be mislabeled as “an expression of temporary literary fashion,” meaning her visions, mysticism, dreams, bisexuality and themes of incest. The language of sensory touch is prevalent in her work.

As a playwright Černiauskaitė possesses the unique quality of being able to maintain a balance between her characters’ realistic and poetic qualities. She creates convincing psychological portraits of rather Chechovian relationships between characters who are at the same time seen as poetic embodiments. These plays poeticism is strengthened by poetic monologues that metamorphose themselves within the action or within objects in the setting (water, fish, the city, fire, etc.). Černiauskaitė’s dramas exchange the traditional understanding of stage set for an imagined one. The main characters see their surroundings differently than the plays’ viewers or even the other characters in the play. What they see is more laden with meaning, more symbolic, more poetic.

During this period Gintaras Grajauskas’s play *The Girl Who God Feared* (*Mergaitė, kurios bijojo Dievas*) stands out for its originality. Grajauskas continues the Lithuanian poetic dramatic tradition tied to the work of Balys Sruoga, Antanas Škėma, Juozas Glinskis, Saulius Šaltenis, Sigitas Parulskis, Marius Ivaškevičius, and Laura Sintija Černiauskaitė. According to the theater critic Šarūnė Trinkūnaitė, Grajauskas’s play “bears lovely witness to the fact that poetic Lithuanian drama is ever more willing to enlarge its imagination with the inscrupulations of concrete realistic detail – in this case moments from the lives of the “new Lithuanians” – and by this means uses drama to move closer to analyzing contemporary social problems.”

An anthology of Gintaras Grajauskas’s dramatic works published in 2008 shows that his work is becoming more mature. This anthology included the following plays: *A Comic, or the Man with the Steal Teeth* (*Komiksas, arba Žmogus su geležiniu dančiu*), *Reserved* (*Rezervatas*), *Lithuanians* (*Lietuviai*) and *The Girl Who God Feared* (*Mergaitė, kurios bijojo Dievas*).

The very first plays by Grajauskas that evolved out of the absurdist theater tradition raised doubts because of their bluntness and their superficial handling of the every day and physical world. It seemed as though the playwright was having a hard time balancing the quest for meaning with a hooligan-like passion for playfulness. His first three plays were formed in a type of “creative laboratory” and chrysalized into *The Girl Who God Feared* (*Mergaitė, kurios bijojo Dievas*). This play, written in an original format, allows the playwright to talk about

unique historical drama, a genre that has deep roots in the Lithuanian dramatic tradition. This play renews this old traditional type of play.

The play tells the life story of a girl named Maria. The first act shows Maria’s childhood. She grows up with her grandmother, who was a tank driver during World War II, and her grandfather, who built airplanes. The second act shows Maria’s married life with the “new businessman” Vincas, whom she shoots and kills at the end of the play. This act also shows Maria’s dream about the brave pilot Antanas Gustaitis, who returns from the land of the dead to visit with Maria. Maria’s passion for Antanas Gustaitis is engendered by her grandfather’s constant stories about him. The final act reveals that Maria’s story was the product of her imagination. The real Maria is a patient in a psychiatric hospital.

With this play Grajauskas creates the appropriate format to allow him to integrate several historical epochs in Lithuanian history. He flexibly balances the play between episodes that reveal Lithuania’s past: the period of the first Lithuanian independence; the Soviet occupation; World War II, and today’s realities. He maintains a balance between realism and the unexpected both in reality and in Maria’s fantasy life. The backbone of the play is the main character, Maria’s, imagination. She is gifted with an especially rich and creative imagination. The stories that she tells in the form of monologues are in direct contrast with the expectations of traditional Lithuanian drama. However, the playwright possesses the ability to move seamlessly from monologue to dialogue, to move from metaphor into a dramatic situation. For these reasons, the play is creative in terms of scene and allows actors and set designers a wide range of creative interpretive license.

Grajauskas embraces the experimentation of the younger generation of contemporary Lithuanian playwrights, borrowing from Marius Ivaškevičius’s *Madagascar* (*Madagaskaras*) and Sigitas Parulskis’s *P.S. The Case is O.K.* (*P.S. Byla O.K.*). The way in which Grajauskas uses biographical facts from the life of the founder of Lithuanian aviation, Antanas Gustaitis (1898–1941) in his play reflects this generation of young Lithuanian playwrights’ efforts to reinvent Lithuania’s heroes from the past in a new embodiment. They search Lithuania’s cultural past in order to reinvent these heroes with a new sense of the noble and the unique. Marius Ivaškevičius’s play *Madagascar* (*Madagaskaras*) brings to life a forgotten, but accomplished, politician Kazimieras Pakštas from the inter-war period. Through Pakštas, Ivaškevičius reveals the dramatic fate of Lithuania’s intellectuals from the interwar period. Through a type of lyric irony he shows their eccentricity, their sincere naivité, and their utopian ideals.

Graujuskas bestows on this historic figure, Gustaitis, a romantic nobility. However, only from first glance does this idealism of history seem like the playwright's having taken a step back in time. In the past Graujuskas discovers moments of reckoning and moral discoveries (the interwar Lithuanian aviator Antanas Gustaitis, the grandmother who made her mark during World War II as a brave tank driver) and within the background of these moments he reveals grotesquely altered manifestations of the world, the duplicity of various individuals and their moral contradictions. These tone of the play ranges from a gentle and lyric irony that shows Maria's childhood, her patriotic atheist grandfather and religious tank driver grandmother, to a rough rendition of present-day values in the form of her marriage to modern-day business man and the treachery of the contemporary business world.

Criticism of the Soviet period, which is mythologized in a dreary manner in Parulskis's play *P.S. The Case is O.K. (P.S. Byla O.K.)*, is incompatible with any type of reflection or evaluation of today's world. Graujuskas links the Soviet period and the period of independence with a dark tie – both periods could not free themselves of the typical nihilistic view of the spiritual and free individual. Soviet ideology is replaced after independence by the dictates of consumerism. At the finale of Graujuskas's play, Maria takes a stand against the reality that is so unacceptable to her. However, the shots she fires at her husband and his business partners does not turn her into the courageous or even brutal heroine of the present day. More accurately, Graujuskas sees the goal of contemporary drama not in terms of a neat evolutionary strategy. The dramatic action in his plays do not move forwards, but rather walk around the object in question, with the goal of showing that object from all sides. The epilogue, which takes places in the psychiatric hospital, reveals that this act of resistance took place only within Maria's imagination. The play emphasizes the power of the imagination and the power of creativity. The veracity of Maria's imagined history is accepted not only by the narrator, Maria, but also by her listener, The Student, and by us, the readers or the viewers. Graujuskas's play *The Girl Who God Feared (Mergaitė, kurios bijojo Dievas)* satisfies even the most demanding readers. The committee of the Lithuanian National Drama Theater contest *Versmė '07* recognized the play as one of the best ten finalists. On the occasion of the International Theater Day Graujuskas was awarded the Golden Cross as the best Lithuanian playwright of 2007.

Hits of Popular Literature

BY JŪRATĖ SPRINDYTĖ

Lithuanians are considered to be a particularly despondent people who work and complain more than they relax and recreate. Gintaras Beresnevičius, a social and civic essayist and expert in mythology, takes up this theme with irony in one of his essays, characterising the “Lithuanian condition” as the permanent condition of a *Rūpintojėlis*, the uniquely Lithuanian figure of a pensive Jesus expressed wooden sculpture:

He ponders, sits and ponders. The pondering can be wordless and without thought. It is a mental state. Perhaps in truth it is a type of Lithuanian meditation. Martin Heidegger summarises the condition of the human being in the world as “concern.” Nonetheless, it does not appear that this concern can be objectified – a concern over concrete things. It is a condition into which the Lithuanian enters from time to time and ponders.*

The grimace of eternal concern is more likely to be seen on the typical Lithuanian face than a smile. This is in part why the narrative of Lithuanian prose reads slowly and slightly boringly, deprived of action and adventure. Lithuania has neither a strong nor a long-standing tradition of popular literature, as there have not been the conditions for such a tradition to arise (the late development of prose writing, the literature's constant obligation to social and national ideals, the self-defence of culture from occupying regimes, etc.). Lithuanian prose was short on art, variety of genre, agility of expression – everything that can be found in abundance in recent years. It is interesting to note that the flourishing of popular literature in Lithuania is most connected with the two periods of independence – the first, between 1918 and 1940, and the second, which was reestablished during the days of the “Singing Revolution” in 1990. It is natural that works lighter in form and more playful in content are to be found under the conditions of a normal state and a lively society, when works can cease being one-sidedly serious and the writer has the opportunity to make choices freely,

* Gintaras Beresnevičius, *Ant laiko ašmenų*, Vilnius: Aidai, 2002, p. 109.

and, beyond that, when many non-professional “scribblers” who want to tell interesting stories can join in the process of literature. The current abundance of popular prose has been encouraged especially by the strengthening of the mechanisms of the free market, directing the work of the publishers and issuing their unwritten rule – “the reader is always right.” This occurred not at the beginning of independence, but later, roughly in the year 2000. The philosopher Arūnas Sverdiolas, in characterising the triviality of the current culture and critical discourse and the lack of a vertical dimension in Lithuanian public life, declares, “everything is in the hands of the public, everything depends on the decision of a sovereign perceiver, and there is a mass public, but it cannot be presented with any requirements.”* The transformation of books into a unit commodity (not as much an object of knowledge as an object of use) changed its content and meaning even more than the fact of the restoration of independence or the elimination of Soviet censorship. The majority of books written now are immediately formed according to a market strategy, and it is therefore unsurprising that the Lithuanian detective novel has come back, that the production of thrillers has come into its own right, and former teachers and actors are abundantly creating romance novels, most often using the same Cinderella story.

The phenomenon most worthy of attention in the field of recent Lithuanian popular literature is the formation of the journalistic novel, considered to be a specific variety of novel genre and ambiguously suggestive of valuable examples of prose. Let us turn to the journalistic novel and look at it more closely.

According to the sociologist Zygmunt Baumanas, “The fluid modern rationalism recommends light vestment and condemns iron coverings;”** we therefore live in constant change, and journalism just so happens to reflect the changeable reality of the present-day. The term “journalistic novel” took root in Lithuania after the visit of the French novelist Frédéric Beigbeder to the Vilnius Book Fair in 2004; immediately after this followed translations of several of his novels into Lithuanian. The philosopher Dalia Zabelaitė soon discussed the Frenchman’s work in her monograph, *From Proust to Beigbeder: Existence in the Web of the Novel (Nuo Prousto iki Beigbederio: egzistencija romano tinkluose*, 2006), which comprehensively demonstrated that the phenomenon of the journalistic novel is an occurrence fully characteristic of the Western literary world. Such novels are not necessarily written by journalists, but most often this is the case. The

* Arūnas Sverdiolas, *Lekštutėlė lekštėlė*, Vilnius: Versus aureus, 2006, p. 33.

** Zygmunt Bauman, *Likvidi meilė: apie žmonių ryšių trapumą*, Vilnius: Apostrofa, 2007, p. 91.

journalistic novel draws on current events, and it necessarily requires the element of scandal, vivid contrasts, and, often, marginal characters. Other typical characteristics include an intriguing plot, untraditional eroticism, dynamic narrative, and expression through short sentences. Media professionals freely create texts framed by a good understanding of market forces, and such a model of writing has noticeably taken root in Lithuania. This is above all connected with literature created by women, the scale of whose representations of feminine values is truly wide and controversial – from schemes of true love and the joy of happy motherhood formed by a traditionally patriarchal mentality to images of the lives of female prisoners, prostitutes, striptease dancers, and orphans. The role of the narrator and/or main character is communicated as a journalist. Exotic motives multiply when action is wrapped up with a foreign country, while the dream of the “average” post-Soviet woman just happens to be marriage to a rich man and life abroad (Eglė Černiauskaitė’s *All the Dust in Italy (Visos Italijos dulkės*, 2005.) The courage to bare oneself naked in literary forms and to form one’s own system of feminine values is characteristic of contemporary Lithuanian women’s prose. Feminist criticism has inspired literature, which according to received moral standards easily projects a new type of “liberated femininity” and has already created a wide audience of women readers that has been cultivated by the leisure industry and its magazines.

The journalistic novel recreates the world that becomes known when working at a radio or television station, a newspaper, a magazine, in public relations, or something similar. The professional experience gained here is used in the novels. More and more books are being published that relate events experienced by the authors themselves, when the autobiographical dimension and revelation of true identity correlate to fictional elements. In their public comments, the authors themselves do not deny that some of their characters are created as self-projections of women’s problems and internal characteristics. Such books describe exceptional life situations: Ugnė Barauskaitė’s *Ten (Dešimt*, 2005) – pregnancy and birth, Audronė Urbonaitė’s *Don’t Cut the Turn Too Tight (Posūkyje – neišlėk*, 2005) – cancer, Zita Čepaitė’s *An Unlit Stretch of the Road (Neapšviestas kelio ruožas*, 2005) – the fate of imprisoned mothers, Jurga Ivanauskaitė’s *The Fortress of Dormant Butterflies (Miegančių drugelių tvirtovė*, 2005) – the fiasco of the “reform” of prostitutes and the mid-life crisis of a well-off woman, Dalia Jazukevičiūtė’s *Confession of an Anarchist (Anarchistės išpažintis*, 2007) – the turbulent life story of a rebellious woman, and the same author’s *Two-Moon Bar*

(*Dviejų mėnulių baras*, 2008) – the experiences of a striptease dancer living in London. The novels mentioned here are sometimes called “public diaries” because readers think they recognise prototypes of the characters or concrete realities, although it is undeniable that these women writers transform reality according to the canons characteristic of fiction. In another sense, the autobiographical nature of the work is often used intentionally as an advertisement for the novels.

Specialists thus far do not want to discuss questions related to popular literature, although this void is successfully filled by the philosopher Loreta Anilionytė (b. 1961) in her artistic novel, *And What after That? (O kas po to?, 2006)*, which is interested in raising the problem of the inconsistency/cohesiveness of popular culture. She calls popular culture the “culture of the everyday,” including the media, popular music, food, and fashion. According to her, high culture envies the popularity of pop culture and therefore denounces and ignores it, relegating it to a low rank. All contemporary people use the products of popular culture in one form or another for recreation and relaxation, the author claims, and it is important that they be of good quality:

I want to be a consumer of both cultures – both high and popular: according to my mood, and both of them be quality [...] I want the everyday. I want banality: just to rejoice in this world. Without essences, meanings, transcendences, Amalgams or Fluids. I want superficiality. For the sake of it. For fun. Just that. Although I understand that if there isn't the echo of the Great Spirit and the history of the People in every song, if every song doesn't struggle with something, protest against something, or if there isn't a search for Form and Deep Thoughts about Meaning in it, such songs are indecent for the Elite to listen to.*

The main character and narrator, a professional philosopher disillusioned with the sterility of abstract knowledge, rises to this struggle for quality and becomes enchanted with the velveteen voice of a popular musician. The ironic philosopher and the thoroughly caricatured “starlet” each represent their sphere and their addressee – she the “Elite,” and he the “Beets” (this derogatory term is borrowed from the rhetoric of Lithuanian poetry.) The two characters find no points of contact aside from flirtation, which increases through the novel and ends up in bed. Aside from slaps in the face to the conceits of both parties and its healthy irony, the novel is quite long – the text continues for 450 pages. But the problem of the confrontation between elite and popular culture is confronted, named, and characterised this boldly for the first time – the “pop subculture”

* Loreta Anilionytė, *O kas po to?*, Vilnius: Alma littera, 2006, p. 113.

must nonetheless be considered a part of culture in general and professionally analysed in the hope of elevating its status as much as possible. Anilionytė's novel received a nomination for “best newcomer” in 2007.

It is fitting here to recall a statement by the poet and cultural critic Tomas Venclova: “It is said that there are two cultures – the old culture of memory and the new culture of forgetfulness [...] One is inclined to call the culture of forgetfulness the culture of Hollywood or the Internet; I do not want to surrender to the temptation of market exultation or extreme liberalism, which to me, as it is to many others, is obvious. Although neither do I want to fall into panic.”* While not falling into panic over the questioning by elite critics of the status of pop literature, let us look further at the most popular novels of the past several years by Lithuanian women, in which women are increasingly freed of the canons cast over gender, boldly expounding the themes of gender identity, the body, eroticism, and sexuality.

Ten, a novel by journalist Ugnė Barauskaitė (b. 1975,) has a genetic bond with Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary*, but in its own way surpasses this novel, as it encompasses a broader social and ethical spectrum (pregnancy, responsibility for children, the poverty of post-Soviet medicine, changes in the role of men, the crumbling of institution of the family – the hero of the novel is twice-divorced.) Barauskaitė states that Bridget Jones is held to be a common name symbolising a particular type of socially contemporary woman. The pregnant main character of Barauskaitė's novel is noteworthy for her biting introspection, and detailed description of the physical and psychological characteristics of pregnancy. Most importantly, although she does not curse, she boldly accepts the biologically-determined difference of womanhood. The book is open, witty, and dynamic.

Zita Čepaitė's (b. 1957) novel, *An Unlit Stretch of the Road*, is this author's best work and a provocatively social text, not so much a novel as a documentary piece. The writer narrates and attempts to comprehend the life stories of women who have found themselves in prison. All of the prisoners endured childhood traumas, and most of the women come from broken families of origin lacking care and warmth. The discourses of freedom and imprisonment are boldly compared in the book, and the author-narrator's private drama of failed love supplements the text. The prisoners' stories are not made literary, but related in documentary style (most likely from tape recordings.) The novel's plot is not

* Günter Grass, Czesław Miłosz, Wisława Szymborska, Tomas Venclova, *Pokalbiai apie atminties ateitį / Gespräche über die Zukunft der Erinnerung / Rozmowy o przyszłości Pamięci*, Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2001, p. 104.

compositionally innovative, but operates on facts. The authentic stories sound at times like reporting, at times like a complaint, but most often like an attack. A dose of social criticism strengthens the writer's ethical position standing on the side of the prisoners. Her insights are focused on the isolated, illegal class, which nonetheless functions as a part of society (hidden, closed, restricted, and eliminated.) This look at the Dregs (Valerie Solanas' concept of the feminist revolutionary depicted in her *Society for Cutting Up Men Manifesto*) reveals the fault of the social system that allows such stories and such tragic fates. *An Unlit Stretch of the Road* demonstrates that each person tries to leave a footprint, to be noticed – if one cannot express oneself by legitimate means, that same person will take up destruction. One of the novel's important sentences reads, "the human being claims an inherent right." Solanas's characterisation fits the majority of Čepaitė's prisoners: "She was run-down, abused, and constantly underestimated."

The appearance of Jurga Ivanauskaitė's (1961–2007) best-seller, *The Fortress of Dormant Butterflies*, occurred at the same time as the escalation of human trafficking scandals in Lithuania, which became a problem throughout all of Eastern Europe. Monika, who is supported by her wealthy middle-aged husband, takes it upon herself to take care of young prostitutes who were liberated from international sexual slavery and deported to their homeland. It is resolved to cure and socialise them – this undertaking proves impossible to implement, although her encounter with the real problems of others compels Monika, the main character, to see things clearly and to mature. The prostitutes' intriguing plot unfolds against an apocalyptic background (there are constant natural disasters – hurricanes, floods, and typhoons destroying countries and continents as punishment for the insult against the spiritual dimension,) while the sex industry surges like one single apocalyptic trend. The novel contains journalistic asides – social and factual information and statistics, such as this:

There are about 10,000 prostitutes in Lithuania. There are roughly 130 of them circulating in the Vilnius train station district alone, while 300–550 men search for love on sale in this hunting range each day. [...] About 20 well-organised agencies thrive on the trafficking of women in Vilnius, making a yearly profit approaching five million dollars!!!*

The creative feat of Dalia Jazukevičiūtė (b. 1952) – three novels written and published in two years and a fourth being written – surprised the reading public as well as critics. For the author, who quit journalism after 17 years of experience

* Jurga Ivanauskaitė, *Miegančių drugelių tvirtovė*, Vilnius: Tyto alba, 2005, p. 112.

to pursue writing, as well as her heroes – the poet Katerina (*Confessions of an Anarchist*), the artist Stella (*The Black Box (Juodas kvadratas, 2007)*) and the dancer Marija (*Two-Moon Bar*), writing is a means to the strengthening of independence and self-discovery. Love is honoured next to her work's pathetic intonations. The narrative in all the novels is related in the first person, accenting emotion, passion, patience, unfulfilled love as a sign of personal tragedy, and resurrection through creative work.

Confessions of an Anarchist is the most like a manifesto of Jazukevičiūtė's novels. In it, the main character – Katerina, a journalist – often speaks the grammar of upheaval: rebellion, revolution, anarchy, holding on with her inspirations to the early Christians, Che Guevarra, Stenka Razin, and "all such revolutionaries." Having dreamt with her friends over a bottle about the creation of an anarchist party, the hero remains an independent anarchist characterised by eccentric struggles against a pragmatic way of life, and in moments alone, depression or the reading of idolised Russian classics. She needs medicine and her own psychoanalyst. The novel sheds light on the everyday life of investigative journalism (an interview with a death row inmate, friendship with the orphan of a murdered businessman,) the exhausting work of constantly writing articles. Katerina declares herself a "brave journalist" whose goal is "to save someone or to finish someone off."

A journalist's talent is his courage. And a grain of earnest self-starting. Working at the newspaper, I had more than a grain of self-starting – I had a pound of it. It's my blood now. Romantic. The brakes aren't to be found. If they want a fight, I'll fight until the end. Just like Stenka Razin*.

Jazukevičiūtė's hero attests in all her gestures and her words that she truly does not long for "a comfortable and safe life;" she prefers hotels, instinctive behaviour, and dynamism. Katerina enjoys showing off her unique temperament and existential heights, when she wants to scoop out both pain and joy "to the end," while her addiction to alcohol becomes one of her forms of rebellion. As is the norm for novels by women, "anarchistic" speaks to many characteristic experiences specific to women, while the main argument against the misogyny of some men is that the act of birth makes women equal to God the Creator. Katerina wanders in her desire for equality with men and manifests the uniqueness of woman until, finally having gone to the altar with Lošėjas Vadimas and

** Dalia Jazukevičiūtė, *Anarchistės išpažintis*, Vilnius: Tyto alba, 2007, p. 90.

having left to live in Moscow, she experiences a sobering blow – this man was married long ago and has two children. She herself becomes a player, gambling with the passion to live.

Jazukevičiūtė's other novels likewise do not lack rebellious spirit or healing endings, although they are limited by melodramatic effects (the loss of a daughter, an alcoholic mother, the suicide of her father and her beloved, etc.) The hero of *The Black Box* shuts herself up in a hut on the sea because of a disaster, takes up painting, and becomes a famous artist who participates in exhibitions even in Venice, while the strip tease dancer from the novel *Two-Moon Bar* drifts between two men – the free-spirited Russian Andriusha and the balanced Scot Paul (who has already bought property on the Moon,) finally creating a lavish lifestyle through her own work. Jazukevičiūtė's texts are appealing for their attention to the psycho-somatic problems of women, longing for an authentic life, search for support for Christian values, and individualistic style.

Night at the Shopping Mall: A Hostage Novel (Naktis prekybos centre: Įkaitų romanas, 2008,) the first work by debut author Andrė Eivaitė (b. 1971,) can be considered an unexpected surprise. An important component connecting the addressee and the author is found in the annotation of the novel – the “statistical” Lithuanian. These average city-dwellers, rushing to the shopping mall in the evening on average errands (some for nappies, others for beer,) become participants in an extraordinary event – hostages of a man and woman who are robbing a bank. The quick-witted plot of the novel (the hostages at first confront and then negotiate with the robbers, deceive the police, and everyone becomes wealthy in one night) maintain a reading interest that does not let up. The novel's narrator pretends to be an average “statistical” writer, while in truth she is not lacking imagination, humour, or feminine attention to interesting details. Most impressive is her gift for convincing us of a situation that is psychologically difficult to substantiate. In the epilogue we learn that after six months, the former hostages wisely (or perhaps not) invest the fortune that fell into their laps.

Stereotypes are always simpler than reality – they are conveyed rather than created (and are therefore not individualised.) Stereotypes are extremely tenacious and allow the addressee to feel comfortable, which is why it is not entirely surprising that they are the alpha and omega of pop literature. It is a pleasure to stress that popular novels by Lithuanian women break free of the frames of stereotypes and are full of the symbols of individualism.

Translations of Lithuanian Literature, 2005–2008

BY AUŠRINĖ JONIKAITĖ

Summarising the past few years of translations of Lithuanian literature into other languages is not as simple of a task as it may seem at first. This is for a simple reason – a lack of sources of information. For this article, I use Books from Lithuania's data base of Lithuanian literature translations, which is neither complete nor finished, but hopefully I will not be mistaken when I claim that it is currently the most comprehensive source of this type of information (it can also be accessed at www.booksfromlithuania.lt). One of the primary tasks of the agency, which celebrates its tenth anniversary in 2008, is the continuous compilation and updating of information about translations of Lithuanian literature. The main suppliers of this information are translators and the writers themselves. In response to our request to be informed continuously about new translations and publications, writers and translators supply us with information for the building up and updating of the data base. I would nonetheless like to apologise at the outset to all those whose translations, for various reasons, remain unknown to us. Similarly, the statistics used in this article are possibly incorrect; nonetheless, they indicate the trends of Lithuanian literature translation over the past several years and allow for the construction of a clear general picture, which is most important to our purposes.

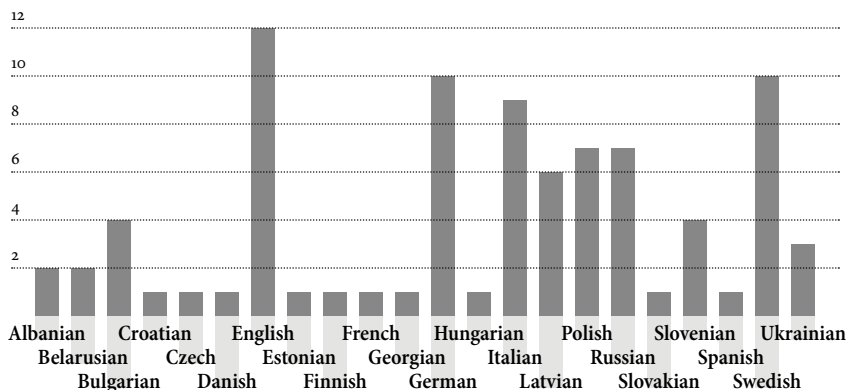
Between 2005 and August 2008, 83 translations of Lithuanian literature have been published in 22 languages. To our knowledge, there are currently nine books being prepared for publication that should see the light of day by the end of 2008, but they are not included here, with the result that all data for 2008 in this article are incomplete. These statistics are perhaps not overwhelming, but they do prove wrong any grumblings that Lithuanian literature is of no interest to anyone or that it is not translated. There are even more translations of various types of Lithuanian literature in periodicals. In the past few years, more than a few prestigious literary publications have brought Lithuanian literature to their readers' attention, given extensive presentations of contemporary Lithuanian literature,

and included it in anthologies, sometimes even dedicating entire issues solely to a Lithuanian theme. These journals include *Družhba narodov* in Russia, *Dekada literacka* and *Literatura na świecie* in Poland, *Poetry Review* in England, *Krachkultur* in Germany, *Post Scriptum* in Sweden, *Forum* in Croatia, and *Kargos* in Latvia, among others. Nonetheless, in this article I will not discuss periodicals, but will concentrate on books. Prose translations surpass poetry twofold: of 83 books, 53 are prose works, 25 translations of poetry, two are plays, and three more are mixed anthologies. Several anthologies of Lithuanian literature have been published (seven in 2005 and eight in 2006 and 2007 each). Anthologies of works by prose writers and poets have recently appeared in Bulgarian, Croatian, Danish, English, Finnish, Georgian, German, Italian, Polish, Russian, and Swedish.

The great majority of these books have been published in Europe, although it must be noted that a translation of Balys Sruoga's *Forest of the Gods* (*Dievy miškas*) into Spanish was published in Argentina, three books translated into English were published in the United States, and one prose anthology appeared in Canada. Although this geographical scope should soon expand (translations are being prepared for publication in Azerbaijan, Japan, and Iran), there is no doubt that the primary market for translations of Lithuanian literature is and will remain in Europe. The products of Lithuanian writers are topical and understandable to Europeans; 90 percent of the translators of our literature live in Europe. The relative activity of literary translators is the deciding factor in popularising Lithuanian literature. This is directly visible in statistics: the countries where several translators of Lithuanian literature live and actively work are the ones where the most books are published.

Translations of Lithuanian literature by language (2005–2008*)

* Data for 2008 are incomplete



Between 2005 and 2008, twelve works of Lithuanian literature appeared in English, ten in German and Swedish each, nine in Italian, seven were released in Polish and Russian each, six appeared in Latvian, Slovenian and Bulgarian each had four, and one or two books were published in each of the remaining languages. It is not coincidental that among the most active countries, aside from our closest neighbours, are Sweden and Italy. Because a publisher still needs to sell a book after having published it, any advertising of a country and its literature encourages publishers to seize the opportunity. Such opportunities occurred in 2005 in Sweden and in 2007 in Italy, when Lithuania was the guest of honour at the Gothenburg and Turin book fairs. The attention from the media and visitors on Lithuania and Lithuanian writers allowed Swedish and Italian publishers to reduce their risk and use this free advertising to sell translations of Lithuanian authors. I am sure that no publisher became wealthy as a result of this, but perhaps neither did they incur debts, and this alone is an accomplishment.

Translations into English deserve separate consideration. Of the twelve books of Lithuanian literature in English, five were published in Lithuania. The domestic publication of Lithuanian literature can be evaluated in various ways, but above all, books in English serve an important intermediary mission, and it is for this reason that it is being promoted and is a truly necessary occurrence – it disseminates Lithuanian literature. When we have an English translation, we can use it to present the work to the entire world. Publishers from Albania to Greece, from Norway to Japan all read in English, and this is the only opportunity to acquaint them with Lithuanian literature. On the other hand, the amount of artistic literature in languages other than Lithuanian published in Lithuania is declining. Non-touristic literature in English and other languages is seldom purchased in Lithuania, and it is not feasible for Lithuanian publishers to publish artistic literature in languages other than Lithuanian. The U.S. and U.K. publishing markets, which provide the entire world with an unending stream of English-language literature whose popularity far surpasses that of literature written in any other language, themselves remain completely closed and practically do not permit the entrance of any translations. The number of translations into English that are published in the United States and the United Kingdom is so weak that this situation, which is already being called “threatening” by the British and Americans themselves, has become a popular object of examination and study – are the British and the Americans really uninterested in anything that isn’t written in English, and if so, why? Here are the official statistics from the European

Union: of the 441 books subsidised in 2008 by the EU's "Culture" competition for the support of literary translation, 108 were translated from English into another language, while the number of books translated into English was – exactly zero. In terms of translations of Lithuanian literature into English, it must be noted that translations of Lithuanian authors in the U.S.A. are published exclusively by university publishing houses, as is the case with most authors from small countries.

An important, albeit predicted and awaited, reversal of trend has taken place during the time period I am surveying – the number of translations of writers working in Lithuania has surpassed that of Lithuanian emigrant writers. If previous years were dominated by translations of works by Tomas Venclova, Icchokas Meras, Saulius Tomas Kondrotas, Jonas Mekas, and Grigorijus Kanovičius, between 2005 and 2008 it was Sigitas Parulskis who was on top, with eight books published in foreign languages (Albanian, Italian, Polish, Slovenian, and two books in English and Swedish each). Jurga Ivanauskaitė's work has been translated into four languages (Czech, German, Latvian, and Swedish). Eugenijus Ališanka and Vidas Brazūnas have published three books each in foreign languages, and Balys Sruoga's *Forest of the Gods* has been published in three languages, as has Jurgis Kunčinas' work. Analysing the entire period of independence (since 1990), the most popular Lithuanian writer remains the poet and essayist Tomas Venclova – 23 of his books have been published in foreign languages over the past eighteen years. Sigitas Parulskis, Jurga Ivanauskaitė, and Icchokas Meras each have had fourteen books published in translation; Saulius Tomas Kondrotas – thirteen; Grigorijus Kanovičius – 11; Jonas Mekas and Justinas Marcinkevičius have had nine each; eight works in translation have been published Marcelijus Martinaitis and Sigitas Geda each; Romualdas Granauskas and Eugenijus Ališanka have had seven translations each. Presently, the most popular Lithuanian novel for translation is Sigitas Parulskis' *Three Seconds of Heaven* (*Trys sekundės dangaus*), which has already been translated into six languages (Albanian, Italian, Latvian, Polish, Slovenian, and Swedish, with a translation into German in preparation), although this book has yet to surpass Jurga Ivanauskaitė's *The Witch and the Rain* (*Ragana ir lietus*), translated into seven languages, Saulius Tomas Kondrotas' *A Glance of the Serpent* (*Žalčio žvilgsnis*), translated into thirteen languages, or Icchokas Meras' unforgettable novel, *Stalemate* (*Lygiosios trunka akimirka*), which has been translated into 20 languages, is currently in translation, and old translations of which are being published again

(most recent reprintings: 2005 in English and 2007 in Italian). The best-known Lithuanian playwrights are Marius Ivaškevičius, Laura Sintija Černiauskaitė, Sigitas Parulskis, and Daiva Čepauskaitė – translations of their plays are being included in anthologies of international new drama, read at international drama festivals and new drama events, and produced in foreign theatres.

We can bravely call the profession of Lithuanian literary translation "exotic," since it is not a common occupation, but it is debatable whether we can actually call this occupation a "profession" – no one puts food on the table by translating Lithuanian literature. It may be creative work, a hobby, recreation, or something else, but translators make a living doing something else. All that is left is to be happy that there is still such enthusiasm for translating. On the other hand, a situation that appeared threatening just a few years ago is changing. Five years ago, we counted with anxiety the people who knew Lithuanian and were able to translate literature and were worried that there were hardly any young people among them. The situation is now getting better, because the world is getting closer to Lithuania – more and more young people willing and able to translate are coming to live in Lithuania; they learn Lithuanian voluntarily and find their way into our office asking how and where to begin. All that is left is to encourage them. Perhaps not all of them will be successful, but I believe that among them will be those whose hearts will be warmed by this work. We just recently found a new Dutch translator. Students come to Lithuanian universities for six months or a year on student exchanges to learn Lithuanian, and among them are those for whom translation is an interesting occupation. We made contact in this way with a Japanese young woman who now has something to be proud of in translation circles. A decent-sized group of Lithuanian literature translators of an older generation are tirelessly raising up a new generation: current professors of Baltic studies are trying to interest their students in translation. Ushering in this changing of the guard are Dmytry Cherdnycheno in Ukraine, Pietro U. Dinis in Italy, Alena Vlčková in the Czech Republic, Endre Bojtáras and Ričardas Petkevičius in Hungary, and others. For several years, Books from Lithuania has been inviting translators to spend time in residence in Vilnius in order to refresh their knowledge of Lithuanian and finish up translations they have already begun. The seminar for translators of Lithuanian literature held in Nida every two years has also become a pleasant tradition. Translators arrive in Nida from all over the world to hear reports on developments and trends in Lithuanian literature, socialise in Lithuanian, and share their experience.

That experience is not always optimistic, since translators not only translate, but look for publishers for works by Lithuanian writers in their own countries as well. This is not easy. Publishers world-wide are enduring difficult times, and literatures from minor languages – including Lithuanian – find their way to the printers with difficulty. The largest publishers make the excuse that they are not reducing their translation programmes and eliminating poetry series due to their own good times. The current market fluctuates so quickly that a book must be profitable here and now – there is no longer time to invest in the reader, introduce new authors, or wait until the best-sellers make up for the losses of unprofitable books. Nonetheless, the odd Lithuanian book does manage to make it into the programmes of the larger publishers, although they must compete with all of Central and Eastern Europe, since publishers most often allot this region one or two positions per year. Smaller publishers are more flexible and take risks more often, as there is no large or complex apparatus at work in the publishing house and the decision is made by the publisher or editor him- or herself. If the publisher likes the book, he or she takes it and publishes it. Ninety-five percent of all translations of Lithuanian literature is published by small or medium-sized publishing houses, and the question of budget is of immediate concern to these publishers. Even though the anthology of contemporary Lithuanian literature costs 25 euros in Slovenian bookstores, do not think that the publisher or the retailer are hoping to make a fortune off of it; such a price in this country of two million people – and even fewer readers – is dictated by necessity. It is therefore not coincidental that publishers look for subsidies for the published book from funds in their own countries as well as those in the writer's homeland. There are active translation subsidy programmes in the vast majority of European countries. The opportunity to receive support for the publication of the translation of a book has existed in Lithuania since 2001. The translation subsidy programme coordinated by Books from Lithuania is going at full speed, and we can now claim 116 subsidised books. While the proportion of subsidised to unsubsidised translations of Lithuanian literature until 2004 was more or less equal, of the 83 books published in the last four years, 54 of them – two-thirds – were subsidised by Lithuania. This proportion influences the publishers' opinions; translation subsidy has become the norm in Europe, and translation subsidy mechanisms operate in practically every "new" European nation (not to speak of the "old" ones) – publishers now most often expect that the translation of a book will not cost them anything. If Lithuania does not subsidise,

they will publish a Latvian or Slovakian novel that will be subsidised. Sixteen books were left unsubsidised between 2005 and 2008, and not one of them saw the light of day. This demonstrates that this support is truly very important to publishers. Perhaps these were not the best of books, as the experts appropriating the subsidies are guided by criteria of artistic value and meaningfulness, but sixteen opportunities to present Lithuania were lost. A book read is not a postcard about Lithuania. A book read opens completely different horizons. And we are not talking about millions. The sum allocated for the subsidy has been about 100,000 litas (29,000 euros) for the past several years; this sum is not increasing, even though it is obvious that translator honorariums are inadequate and we are receiving more applications for support. The translation subsidy programme's influence on the growth in the number of translations is obvious: since 2001, when the programme began, the number of translations has grown by a factor of 2.4. Whereas roughly ten translations of books by Lithuanian authors appeared each year until 2001, this figure has now reached 24 books yearly if we exclude 2002, when Lithuania's participation in the Frankfurt Book Fair – the world's largest – motivated many and 52 books by Lithuanian authors were published in foreign languages. For the sake of fairness it must be noted that twice the amount was spent on subsidies for the translation (and publishing) of books by Lithuanian authors in that year than is spent now.

The dissemination of Lithuanian literature in the world is a complex task. Writers' increased mobility and participation in international literary festivals, conferences, and projects, the more active work of Lithuanian publishers in selling rights to works by Lithuanian writers, and the growing number of cultural attachés all have a positive influence. The writers' confidence in themselves has also increased, as writers pay more attention to questions of authors' rights and contracts, no longer signing just any contract and inquiring about the qualifications of the translator and the publishing house. The weakest link continues to be the cultivating of new translators of Lithuanian literature and the raising of the professional qualifications of translators already at work. Universities do not offer translation courses or programmes to foreign students, and the state does not grant stipends to foreigners – potential translators – to come to Lithuania and learn Lithuanian. There is still something to be done in this area, and it will take the combined effort and cohesion of everyone to make Lithuanian literature known, translated, and read in the world.



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Translated into English by Ada Valaitis and Steven Paulikas

Edited by Julius Keleras

Design and layout by Jokūbas Jacovskis | Inter Se | www.interse.lt

Printed by Logotipas | www.logotipas.lt