

## *Introduction*

This issue of *Interlitteraria* offers to readers' attention the papers from the most recent, the 11<sup>th</sup> conference of Baltic Literary Scholars, "Global Contexts, National Literatures", held in Vilnius in 2017. First launched in 1995, conferences of Baltic literary scholars have been organized in Tallinn, Riga, or Vilnius every two years. Usually they have focused on two main issues: the memory of the Soviet period that is common to all three Baltic countries, and national identity and its reception in the Baltic and in multicultural European literature. The papers from the 10<sup>th</sup> Baltic Literary Scholars' conference held in Riga in 2014 have already been published in *Interlitteraria: Changing Baltics* (20/1–20/2, 2015) and had a positive academic resonance.

For the 2017 conference scholars were invited to conceptualize twenty-first-century Baltic literatures through the juxtaposition of the local and the global, and to unify historical, cultural, social, and literary strategies of text analysis. The conference also targeted two fields of issues at the same time: it undertook the task to examine changing relations between national literatures in the contemporary mobile world and to demonstrate the effectiveness of comparative studies as an interdisciplinary approach. The themes of the articles in this *Interlitteraria* issue mostly concentrate on aspects of cultural ambivalence and identity conflict in literature, which has become especially relevant in the current socio-political and ideological context of the Baltic region. The scholars critically reflect on what sort of values are gaining prominence in recent literatures of the Baltic region: is it the diversity of cultural traditions and their universal meanings, or regional idiosyncrasies, singularity, and authenticity of the tradition of a national culture? The junctions of multiculturalism and different ethnicities are particularly obvious in the latest émigré prose. How does rising multiculturalism change the literature of the Baltic countries: is it becoming closer to the world or is it still a rather isolated sub-culture that is interesting only to ourselves? In the articles in this issue, these and many other questions are proposed for academic discussion.

The first article, "Small Literature as a Problem. Could it be Solved?", by Dalia Satkauskytė addresses problems raised already in the section "Speaking About Small Literatures in Their Own Language" of the last *Interlitteraria* issue (24/1, 2019). The article considers the following issues: how is it possible to avoid the destiny of small literatures staying on the periphery of world literature, what role do the writers, culture and research politics and literary

scholars play in this situation? The author is looking for answers as to what the alternatives for a one-centered world literary system could be.

The next five articles examine emigrant literature. In “‘Black Balts’ abroad: White Racism, Homosexuality and (Non-)Tolerance in the Narratives of Lithuanian and Latvian Emigration”, Laura Laurušaitė, using Lithuanian and Latvian contemporary emigration literature as her basis, declares that émigrés in the host communities are a minority with counter-negative images, but, that on the other hand, intolerance and an inability to admit and accept the *Other* remain an important part of Lithuanian and Latvian identity. In “Crossroads of Global and Local Identity in Contemporary Latvian Migrant Literature: Reflections on the Novel *Stroika with a London View* by W. B. Foreignerski (V. Lācītis)” Ojārs Lāms maintains that the start of the quest for a new life at the beginning of W. B. Foreignerski’s novel to a certain extent is traumatic as characteristically happens in traditional emigrant literature, but multicultural London gives the protagonist a chance not only to break away from the economic limitations at home but also to escape the ideological narrow-mindedness of his homeland, depicted in the novel. Aušra Jurgutienė’s article, “Taking Back Europe in Valdas Papiėvis’s Novels”, discusses the novels of contemporary Lithuanian writer Valdas Papiėvis, *Eiti* (To Go) and *Odile, arba oro uostų vienatvė* (Odile, or the Solitude of Airports). Since 1995 the author has lived and written in Paris, but due to the fact that his novels are written in Lithuanian and describe contemporary Paris and Provence, they create topical and artistically mature narratives about the newest transformations of the European identity into an intermediate state. The novels erase the Cold War boundaries between Eastern and Western European stereotypes and find strong historical links between the two cultures; therefore, their French and Lithuanian origins are not noticeably in conflict, rather they merge into a common European memory. Loreta Mačianskaitė’s contribution, “French-Lithuanian Universe of Literary Critique by Greimas” disputes the thesis about the famous French semiotician and emigrant from Lithuania, Algirdas Julius Greimas – that there is an unbridgeable gap between his Lithuanian essays and his French semiotics. On the contrary, she describes those cases of Greimas’s literary criticism that reveal the integrity between his thinking and personality. In “Mapping the Estonian Literature of the Selfie-era” Anneli Kõvamees notes that we live in an era where making photos of oneself and sharing these in social media has become extremely popular. This is also valid in the field of literature, which has been democratized since anyone can now write a book, as seen by the boom of biographies of all kinds. The My-series published by the Estonian publishing company Petrone Print founded in 2007

by Epp Petrone, who moved back to Estonia from the United States, illustrates these tendencies. Her *Minu Ameerika* (My America) was the first book in the series. Kõvamees defines the My-series books as “literary selfies” and discusses them in connection with the migration over the last decade, a large number of Estonians having left their homeland and settled in other countries.

The following two articles are devoted to the topic of literary relations and reception. In “Lithuanian Literature and Shakespeare: Several Cases of Reception” Eglė Keturakienė describes how Shakespeare’s works were read, evaluated and interpreted in Lithuanian literature from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In conclusion she summarizes that the most frequently interpreted dramas were *Hamlet*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth*, and Lithuanian exodus writers Kostas Ostrauskas and Algirdas Landsbergis inscribed them most successfully into their existentialist and absurd plays. In “Reception of Finnish Drama in Estonian Theatre in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” Luule Epner analyses Finnish dramas which have been staged in Estonian theatres since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (the plays by Leea Kiemola, Sirkku Peltola, Juha Jokela, Mika Myllyaho, Pipsa Lonka, and others were very popular among Estonian audiences) and searches for an answer to the question of how stage productions of Finnish plays contribute to the construction of a shared Nordic identity.

The next two articles discuss how past traditions are involved or how history participates in today’s literary life. In “Folk Tradition and Multimedia in Contemporary Estonian Culture”, Anneli Mihkelev analyses how different multimedial texts about the *kratt* or the treasure-bearer and Old Barny use and combine multimedia to create and convey the social meaning of the *kratt*, and how multimedia uses audio-visual poetics to convey a greater number of emotions and aesthetic values. In “Soviet Colonial Modernity and the Everyday in Twenty-First Century Latvian Literature” Benedikts Kalnačs discusses the case of Latvia in comparison with other European postcolonial situations and focuses his investigation on the series of novels which deal with twentieth-century history and memory in Latvia. He analyses the attempts of contemporary authors to discover and define themselves as part of today’s global community as they try to position themselves within world literature. He insists that in this perspective, the contemporary as well as the historical experience of the Baltic nations testifies to the common roots of European society, helping to build bridges between different ethnic and social groups and their members.

The last two articles are devoted to different phenomena in national literature. The article “In the Eye of the Beholder – A Short History of Latvian Visual Poetry” by Mārtiņš Laizāns examines visual poetry as an extraordinary

phenomenon in Latvian literature. At first considered to belong only on the margins of serious literature, since Apollinaire it has evolved into a serious genre of poetry. As the author claims, it is quite a peculiar situation that Latvian literature and literary criticism still keep visual poetry an outsider genre up to this day. The task of this article was to change “a peculiar situation”, give a historical account of Latvian visual poetry, and discuss the possible reasons why it was being mostly neglected and disregarded both by poets and critics. In “Ethnolinguistic Nationalism and Other Political Contexts of Maironis” Manfredas Žvirgždas provides a critical reception of ideological views of the most famous Lithuanian national romantic poet Maironis. The author insists that Maironis was impressed by the diligence and activism of Western nations, but did not support ideas of social equality and individual liberties. Sceptically regarding parliamentary democracy, he emphasized the principles of Classical-Christian law and justice, being an orthodox Catholic thinker and an opponent of any revolutionary upheavals. This article deals with the same problems, which were discussed in the panel, “The Romantic (Be)Longing and National poets: Imagining a Nation in European 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Literatures” (ENCLS conference, 2015) and in the latest issue of *Interlitteraria*.

The *Miscellanea* section pursues similar avenues of study and thought: contacts and conflicts of cultures, complex identities and forms of self reflection. Bridging the two sections with continuing focus on Baltic literatures, Bārbala Simšone’s paper explores aspects of Latvian science fiction, while Dominika Oramus links the problematics of science fiction to the broader issue of viewing the world from the often conflicted perspectives of science and humanities in her article focusing on Stanislaw Lem’s *His Master’s Voice*. Three following papers – Mauro Cavaliere’s comparison of José Eduardo Agualusa and Javier Cercas, Simon Radchenko’s reading of Thomas Pynchon and Julio Uribe Ugalde’s study of Pedro Lemebel – explore the poetics of late 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>-century novels and their search for ways of expressing or constructing the past, the experience, memory and identity. The problematics of memory continue to be explored in Kujtim Rrahmani’s “In the Shadow of Mnemosyne: The Poetics of Debt in Fiction and Testimony”, whereas Pilvi Rajamäe’s study of John Buchan as well as Paul Rüsse’ and Anastassia Krasnova’s analysis of Khaled Hosseini’s *A Thousand Splendid Suns* tackle the identity issues related to changing social norms, roles and values in different historical and cultural contexts.

*Aušra Jurgutiene*  
*Katre Talviste*