

Collapse of Latvian National Identity and Construction of Soviet Latvian Identity: Literary Journal “Soviet Latvia” (1940-1941)

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Abstract The present article considers the first years of the literary process in Latvia after the occupation and joining the USSR in the summer of 1940. The object of research is the journal “Soviet Latvia” published in 1940-1941. This journal brought together writers who were members of the newly formed Latvian Writers’ Union and was the official mouthpiece of the new authorities. The subject of analysis is the policy of the journal, selection of authors and texts. The propaganda of the achievements of Soviet culture as well as literature have become one of the most important strategies for the incorporation of the Baltic republics into the USSR. The content of the journal clearly gives evidence of the breakdown of Latvian identity and of one of the first attempts to construct a new Soviet identity. Particular attention was paid to two main requirements for literature — ‘partiinost’ (party spirit) and nationality. Literature, influencing the minds and feelings of the readership, was called upon to create a ‘new world’ for the inhabitants of Latvia who had escaped executions and deportations. The connection of the Latvian people with the Russians who had carried out the Great October Revolution, as well as with other ‘fraternal’ peoples living in the USSR, was especially emphasized. By analysing literary texts specially selected for publication in the first Russian-language journal in Latvia, an attempt was made to study the context of the formation and changing of the identity of Latvian inhabitants.

Key words Latvia, occupation, identity, Russian literature, Latvian literature.

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Introduction

In the contemporary, erratically developing and fast transforming world appears the necessity to explore dynamics of identity, its transformations. Research on the dynamics of the Latvian society identity has in recent times become not only scientific, but also societal demand. Due to the non-linear development of the Latvian history, the changes taking place in the development of the society have become the reason for uneven social development that is fraught with particular risks. Intrinsic historical processes have led to the situation when the identity of the inhabitants of Latvia appeared caught in the dynamics of non-linear development.

Events of the summer 1940 are one of the most hectic subjects in the contemporary history of Latvia. The theme of occupations and deportations in the literature written in the Latvian language became of relevance as soon as there appeared the possibility to publish such works, after regaining independence in 1991. One of the best-known contemporary Latvian film directors V. Kairišs has spoken on this subject:

Deportation is one of the principal factors of the Latvian history, and we can build our collective consciousness on it. I believe, we should speak here more not about victims, but about the strength that allowed to survive. We need to build our spiritual gene pool in particular for those people for whom it was important to return, for those people who returned and did not break. (“Za ...”)²

After Latvia officially became part of the USSR, already in August 1940, literary descent is sent to Latvia at the instruction of the USSR Union of Writers — the well-known novelist and playwright Nikolai Virta, satirist Evgeny Petrov, poets Vladimir Lugovskoy and Evgeny Dolmatovsky, author of the popular science fiction Mikhail Ilyin, as well as other authors from Moscow and Leningrad. The writers’ arrival was duly and exhaustively covered on the pages of the newspaper “Literatūras avīze” [Literary Newspaper]. N.Virta noted that “creation of a literary newspaper would help Latvian writers to get organized, united not only among themselves, but

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2 All the quotations from Latvian or Russian into English are translated by this article's author.

also with writers living in Moscow, Leningrad and other places” (Vavere, Mackov 268). V.Lugovskoy wrote about Latvia in enthusiastic manner:

The Latvian people, its history and literature captured my attention as soon as I arrived to Riga. I would be happy if I could get even closer introduction to everything, I would eagerly work hard to help the Latvian literature that “vigorously flows in the socialist culture.” (Vavere, Mackov 268)

M.Ilyin’s words “If the Latvian people have created so much while in chains, then how much they could create when freed!” (Vavere, Mackov 268) sound like a particular closure of this trip and parting request for future. It is obvious that as the result of this trip literary texts were also created that are still to be discovered. One of such texts is Evgeny Dolmatovsky’s poem *Moscow-Riga*, dated August 1940 (Dolmatovskij 118).

This text is the first Russian variant of the “Latvian” text of the new historical period — “Soviet Latvia”. Already in this poem, one can notice trends that will be characteristic for creating the new model of the Russian literature’s “Latvian text”. The first step in the new strategy: Latvia is no more the enemy of the Soviet state, Soviet system. It is not the country of “bourgeois” and “run-away nepmen” anymore (Badins 32). The Red Army returns power to the working people in the republic, thus reconstructing the historical justice. Poems by E. Dolmatovsky and many other similar texts actualize the temporal paradigm Past — Present. In this regard, the removal of the spatial category of borders being of supreme significance for the era of the 1920s-1930s — “the former border fall” (Dolmatovskij 118) — becomes momentous. Consequently Daugavpils — the first Latvian city on the way from Moscow to Riga — fits into the new spatial paradigm corresponding to the well-known and own Russian space. The description of Daugavpils — “As though between Tula and Ryazan” (Dolmatovskij 118) — withdraws any manifestation of exotics characteristic to texts created during trips to new lands. The context of the habitual, readily recognizable, own, native includes not only the space, but also people. Latvians welcoming the persona in Daugavpils region¹ are endowed by the Soviet poet with “blue Russian eyes” (Dolmatovskij 118).

In this case Dolmatovsky is interested not in the truth of the fact, but in a kind of higher historical truth, turning into reunification of Latvia and Latvians with the

1 Though in 1940, the city’s Latvian population did not exceed 18%, Daugavpils was mainly inhabited by Jews and Russians, it is unlikely that there were Latvians among people greeting writers from Moscow.

Soviet Russia. This point of contact is the category of memory and arising figure of the fallen Soviet diplomatic courier Theodor Nette whose name was already eternalized in the Soviet revolutionary pantheon through V.Mayakovsky's poem "To Comrade Nette, the Man and the Ship" (Majakovskij 162-164). The version of the attack on Theodor Nette and Johann Mahmastal being the most popular among the contemporary Latvian historians is linked to the fact that the Soviet diplomatic couriers transported a huge amount of counterfeit pounds sterling that had to be used against Great Britain (Ekabson). Dolmatovsky was literally replying to a request — dream expressed in V.Mayakovsky's poem "To live in a unified world, made happier / By the absence of divisions like Russia and Latvia" (Majakovskij 164). The situation of the summer 1940 actually establishes the world without Latvia and, to some extent, also without Russia.

Methodology

In an era when the concept of national identity is experiencing a certain crisis, it becomes extremely important to comprehend the historical and cultural processes that disrupted the linear development of the dynamics of the identity of a particular social group. It is necessary to designate the contexts that form identity, assert the functioning norms of self-identification of an individual, small groups, social formations - ethnic groups, nations, countries.

The identity studies are associated with diverse scientific schools, trends and approaches. Within the framework of the present article, the emphasis is on the issue of changing national identity due to socio-cultural transformations. In this regard, the works of Anthony Giddens and Zygmunt Bauman, which reflect changes in identity as consequences of social dynamics, become relevant.

The world of high modernity certainly stretches out well beyond the milieu of individual activities and personal engagements. It is one replete with risks and dangers, to which the term 'crisis', not merely as an interruption, but as a more or less continuous state of affairs, has particular application. Yet it also intrudes deeply into the heart of self-identity and personal feelings. The 'new sense of identity' [...] is an acute version of a process of 'finding oneself' which the social conditions of modernity enforce on all of us. This process is one of active intervention and transformation. (Giddens 12)

According to the concept of the British scientist John Urry a changing society requires new concepts, new methods and categories: "New rules of sociological method are necessitated by the apparently declining powers of national

societies [...]” (Urry 1-2).

Literary texts, as well as art in general, reproduce both for the individual and for the society, semantic, ideological, social models that form their worldview and attitudes. The artistic world view of a particular era reflects a segment of reality, refracted through the prism of the perception of a particular individual and received an emotional assessment, passing into the sphere of subjective experience. Each era makes its own selection of literary texts, as a rule, a new epoch begins with harsh criticism and rejection of the values of the previous epoch, destroying the existing hierarchy of texts, introducing bans on certain works.

As Yuri Lotman noted: “a new name corresponds to a new state. From a mythological point of view, the transition from one state to another is thought of in the formula “and I saw a new heaven and a new earth” (Apoc. 21.1) and simultaneously as an act of complete change of all proper names.” (Lotman 70) An analysis of the main themes and motives of the works can clearly demonstrate both a change in the worldview, and, in this case, the collapse of national identity and an attempt to replace it with an international social identity.

Literary Life in the First Years after Latvia’s Occupation

After Latvia was occupied in the summer 1940, vast propaganda of accomplishments of the Soviet culture was started in the republic, and literature became one of the most significant strategies for including new republics into the “family of friendly nations”. The old publishing system was destroyed almost immediately, numerous periodicals were closed, writers’ organizations were eliminated, yet the very writers were clearly divided into two camps — the ‘right ones’ and the ‘wrong ones’. The first lists of forbidden books and authors were compiled and updated regularly (Strods 35).

The ‘old’ publications had to be replaced by new ones. If we speak about literary journals, then in 1940 two journals appeared: “Karogs” [Flag] in the Latvian language, while “Soviet Latvia” [Sovetskaya Latviya] was published in Russian. While the former journal is quite well-known and continued to exist after the end of the World War II and was issued right up to 2010, the second journal passed to certain oblivion. Thus, in some contemporary publications “Karogs” is named as the only literary journal in the Latvian SSR in the early 1940s. The first issue of “Karogs” was published already in September 1940, while the first issue of the journal “Soviet Latvia” was passed for press on September 29, 1940, and it was published in December with a circulation of 10 thousand copies. If “Karogs” positioned itself as ‘a periodical of Latvia SSR Writers’ Union’, the journal “Soviet Latvia” was ‘a literary

artistic and socially political journal'. The editor of "Karogs" was Andrejs Upīts; apart from him, the journal's editorial board included: Vilis Lācis, Jūlijs Lācis, Arvīds Grigulis, Jānis Niedre, apparently the role of the political curator was undertaken by Žanis Spure.

Attempts to establish scientifically founded concept of social realism in the Latvian literature began only in the 1960s. Furthermore, incomprehension did not prevent writers from intuitive detection and moving along the path of creating social realistic texts, this is especially true about the period of the 1940-1941. As the consequence, the journal pages turned out to be filled with texts full of never-ending flow of rhetoric, propaganda, ideological clichés and slogans. Texts from both journals present magnificent material for understanding historical, cultural and literary processes of that period, this material allows to understand why the then literature was exactly as it was, or — I would express a categorical position — why there was no literature at all. Actually, we are dealing with almost industrial flow production of texts, right up to exact exposure of approaches. The contemporary researcher can reconstruct the whole literary process, fitting a particular matrix. As a rule, directives were prepared in Moscow or, at least, always had to be approved in Moscow, they had to pass through party committees, and then were sent down to Riga. The local executives (editorial boards) ensured strict observation of these directions, without allowing any liberty.

"Soviet Latvia": People and Texts

The journal "Soviet Latvia" has become the first literary artistic and socio-political journal published in the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic in the late 1940 - early 1941 in the Russian language. The journal was regarded as the official publication of the Latvia's Union of Soviet Writers. During this period of time, in total 5 volumes of the journal were published — the first one in December 1940 and two double volumes of the January-February and March-April issues in 1941. Apparently, the following expected double volume of the May-June issue was not published due to Germany's attack on the Soviet Union.

The layout and content of the journal "Soviet Latvia" repeats some details characteristic for "Karogs" and for other Soviet literary journals. Title pages of the first issues of "Karogs" and "Soviet Latvia" are decorated with the canonical portrait of J. Stalin. Other publications present portraits of V.Lenin, editors of literary journals V.Lācis, J.Niedre, and, what is interesting, the Ukrainian poet I.Franko.

The first text opening the first issue of the journal "Soviet Latvia" is the Declaration of the Latvian SSR Writers' Union (it was published in "Karogs" a month

earlier). It comprises the formulation of the main objectives faced by the new Latvian Soviet literature:

the Latvian SSR Writers' Union guards the interests of the working class and is vigilant against penetration of the enemies of the people and supporters of the overturned Ulmanis' regime among them. ("Deklarācija..." 4)

The editor-in-chief of all the issues of the "Soviet Latvia" was Jānis Niedre, apart from him, the journal's editorial board consisted of Andrejs Upīts, Pēteris Valeškalns, Žanis Spure, Lev Zaks and Hiršs Rapoport. The position of the editorial secretary at first was taken by Grigory Krupnikov, later — by Lev Zaks. As it can be seen, three people (A.Upīts, J.Niedre and Ž.Spure) participated in the editorial work of both journals. It is obvious that a more responsible approach was taken to form the editorial board in case of the "Soviet Latvia" as one of the members of the "Karogs" editorial board, Jūlijs Lācis, who was the Minister of national welfare in the Republic of Latvia, was arrested in January 1941. He was accused of anti-Soviet activity due to his cooperation with the bourgeois publications "Jaunākās Ziņas" [The Latest News] and "Atpūta" [Rest].

A writer's bond with public environment was declared as the main artistic principle of the new era —

The writer of the Soviet Latvia cannot stand aside of the everyday people's work. <...> Heroes of the working people and working class must also become heroes of literary works. Creating the image of a person from socialist society is one of the problems of literature in Latvia, ("Deklarācija..." 4)

as well as loyalty to social realism; in addition to this, one of the main principles of the Soviet ideology in the Baltic countries is stated — "These works must be socialist in their content and national in their form" ("Deklarācija..." 3).

Eventually, one must write so as to fully comply with the new criteria. Critics and theoreticians have carefully quoted each other, not forgetting to refer to the main authority and 'Soviet writers' friend' comrade Stalin. The "Declaration..." directly specifies five iconic names destined to become guides for the new Latvian authors. Those are Marx and Engels, Lenin and Stalin, as well as Rainis, whose 'inspirational poetry' becomes the example for the emerging Latvian Soviet artistic canon. Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin as figures embodying immortality appear in the cliff-hanger of Mira Krupnikova's poem "Lines on Glory and Immortality"

(Krupnikova “Stihi...”).

Just the five journal issues present around half a hundred of authors, some of them have become classic authors of the Latvian Soviet literature, others have with time become translators, while others became forgotten by both literary scholars and readers.

Just few authors were able to overcome the ideological selection: prosaists Vilis Lācis, Indriķis Lēmanis, Ernests Birznieks-Upītis, Arvīds Bērzs and Žanis Spure. The Latvian poetry is represented by Jānis Plaudis, Valdis Lukss, Meinharis Rudzītis, Leons Paegle, Andrejs Balodis. It is possible to find Aleksandrs Čaks' sketch *He Saw Lenin* in one of the issues (Čaks). All the journal's issues include texts by two main authors — Andrejs Upīts and Jānis Niedre, as well as *Town and Countryside*, a historical and economical work by doctor B.Shur published in series.

The March-April 1941 journal issue presents the only dramatic piece — play *They Opened the Way* by Jūlijs Vanags and Fricis Rokpelnis, highlighting the continuity of times. The play's action begins on the eve of the 1905 Revolution, then smoothly passes to the events of October 1917 and finally ends with events of the summer 1940. Particular semantic load in this play is given to the image of Latvian riflemen that in the 1950s - 1960s becomes one of the dominating lines of the “Latvian text” in the Soviet literature, being it Latvian or Russian (Vanags, Rokpelnis).

A significant place in the journal is devoted to literary criticism. Once again the central spot here is taken by A.Upīts who publishes the policy article *On the Latvian Novel* in the first issue. J.Niedre publishes one more policy article — *Short Overview of the Latvian Literature*. In the March-April issue, J.Sudrabkalns publishes his critical article about V.Lācis, Edgars Damburs — about Jānis Niedre, Ādolfs Talcis — about Ernests Birznieks-Upītis. The section Bibliography includes reviews on the journal “Karogs”, newspaper “Literatūras avīze” [Literary Newspaper], as well as on some books by contemporary Latvian authors.

The main difference of the “Soviet Latvia” from “Karogs”, apart from the very language of publication, is active contribution to the creation of texts by Latvian authors writing in Russian. It is worth mentioning that their number is negligible taking into account the stormy literary publishing life of Russian-speaking Latvia in the 1920s-1930s. Practically none of the authors having cooperated with one or another issue, published in the Republic of Latvia are invited for cooperation. The only exception is Lev Zaks who has published a poem in the journal “Nord-Ost”.

The main part of the journal's editors' Russian-speaking part consists of Grigory Krupnikov, Mira Krupnikova, Lev Zaks, Nikolay Yanin, Pavel Vasilyev and some other authors venturing in prose and poetry. I have to note that only one of

them — Nikolay Yanin — is featured in *Russian Poetry in Latvia (XIX-XX cent.)*, the book-anthology published in 2014 under the editorship of Sergejs Žuravļovs and being a compilation of works by more than a hundred authors published in the “Soviet Latvia”.

Emergence of literature out of nothing, refusal of years-long experience of the existing literary tradition — it was the deliberate position for constructing a new world, set in the text of *The Internationale*:

Let's make a clean slate of the past,
Enslaved mass, arise, arise!
The world's foundation will change,
We are nothing, now let's be all! (Pottier)

This excerpt suits extremely well to characterize some authors who represent the Russian diaspora of Latvia on the journal's pages. One of them is Makar Yakovlev who has published two stories on the journal's pages — *Accordion and Funeral* — and he has never been a writer before 1940. Even more, when studying the then Latvian press, it is possible to learn that he was a candidate for deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the LSSR. And we learn from the questionnaire presented to the newspaper “Cīņa” [Fight] about the candidate's mere three-year primary education, yet it is sufficient to have a seven-year imprisonment period to become a Soviet Latvian writer.

The best-known and remarkable figure among the Russian-speaking authors of the journal was Grigory Krupnikov. He was born in Saratov, in a prosperous Jewish family. He was of extreme left political orientation as opposed to his parents who did not admit the October Revolution and left Petrograd in 1918. In his autobiography he noted that “being just sixteen years since birth, without informing parents, he appeared in the representative office of the Soviet Russia in Berlin and asked to grant him the Russian citizenship” (Stranga “Yevrei...” 72). In 1924, the Krupnikov family settled in Latvia. In 1930 he made stable connections with Latvian communists. He became a prominent organizer of the publishing of illegal party press and individual publications (known by nicknames Viktor, Anton), as well as underground press. The whole press of CPL (Communist Party of Latvia) was Stalinist, it advocated hatred towards independent Latvia and favoured collapse of its sovereignty. Krupnikov was arrested in April 1940, released after the arrival of the Soviet Army. In 1941, he died in battles near Leningrad.

G.Krupnikov's wife Mira Krupnikova (née Kisina) graduated from Landau's

private girls' high school in 1926. For four years she then studied at Economical and commercial institute in Naples. After returning to Latvia, she took active part in the activities of CPL. Till 1940, she regularly published her works in underground publications. After occupation she worked as a reporter for the newspaper "Moscow News". From 1941 till 1944 she was an instructor at the Red Army Political department, her works are published in various military issues. Since 1954 she was known as a translator of Latvian literature to the Russian language. In 1983 she published an autobiography *Memory Box*.

One of the main tasks when creating ideology of the new world is establishment of a new history line. June 17, 1940, becomes one of the new sacral dates. On this date Soviet tanks entered the territory of the Republic of Latvia; this set the stage for the Latvia's occupation and collapse of Latvia's sovereignty. This event is described in Mira Krupnikova's sketch *June 17, 1940*, Petr Vasilyev's poem *June 17*, N.Yanin's poems *The Freed Nation and Lines on Great Friendship*, Lev Zaks' *We Swear*. It is worth noting that Petr Vasilyev's name is mentioned on the list of 26 troublemakers (it is not clear if they were arrested or just identified) that was compiled by Riga's prefect K.Jaunarājs after disorders in the streets of Riga (Stranga "Okkupacija..." 92).

Oddly enough, yet in the post-war period, Soviet ideologists will choose and highlight another date — August 5, 1940 — the day when Latvian SSR officially became part of the Soviet Union.

In texts by authors from the journal "Soviet Latvia", events taking place on June 17 in Latvia become logical continuation of the events of the Great October Revolution on October 25 (November 7 N.S.): "Golden June — Joy of our October" (Krupnikov 112). The era of the independent Republic of Latvia is viewed as an era of troubled times. This is time of "tearful nights" and "days crushed with a malign stone". "We lived in times of sorrow and grief" (Janin "Osvobozhdennyj..."). The poem by Lev Zaks particularly highlights the theme of suffering of "the best sons of the Latvian people" — shooting of nine communists in the yard of the Riga Central prison, Jaunzems-Šilfs, secretary of the CC (Central Committee), and A.Arājs-Bērce, member of the CC and Bolshevik poet, among them (Zaks).

In her sketch, Mira Krupnikova mythologizes events of June 17. For instance, it is not said that June 17 in 1940 was Monday (workday), it was also the Feast of Pentecost for the Orthodox and Old Believers. The sketch describes real Riga's topoi — building of the police prefecture, alleys alongside the city channel, boulevard in front of the opera house, Marijas Street, the post office building. The central event of the sketch is the encounter of forces of the old and new Latvia. Representa-

tives of the new Latvia — these are unarmed workers from city outskirts, men and women, youngsters and old men who stand against armed police officers as well as the bourgeoisie representatives. In this collision opponents of the new world lose their human appearance. A police officer is compared to a “malignant, cowardly rat”. The climax — it is the scene of reprisal against a person who refused to greet the Soviet tankman. In the sketch text, he is described as “someone in brownish outfit”: “Tens of arms are stretching towards him. Just a moment — and he disappears in the thick crowd. No-one sees him anymore. Feet — many feet — squash and trample something, busily and silently. [...] When breaking apart, the crowd throws out something brownish, barely resembling a person.” (Krupnikova “17-oe...” 92). Mira Krupnikova intentionally says nothing about the nationality of people welcoming the Soviet Army since the main accent of the opposition, as seen by the authors, carries social, not national character.

In literary works of that time, search for ideological and artistic guides was carried out. If Rainis was proclaimed as such a guide for Latvian authors, then Mayakovsky becomes a peculiar example for authors writing in Russian. Oddly enough, yet in G. Krupnikov’s poem *Victory* [Победа] Mayakovsky is perceived as a direct successor of Pushkin: “Next to Pushkin Mayakovsky/And Mayakovsky can only figure Pushkin out” (Krupnikov 113) — despite the fact that at the time futurists offered to throw Pushkin and Gogol down the modernity ship. Just like T.Nette in Y.Dolmatovsky’s poem, V.Mayakovsky in G.Krupnikov’s poem is invited as a living witness to evaluate the state of the art in the modern Soviet Latvia. Mayakovsky’s image highlights not only the image of the main proletarian poet, but also the image of an older comrade ready to come to the rescue in the hour of need.

In the first days of deportations, on June 14-15, 1941, Riga welcomed the first Congress of the Latvian SSR Soviet writers that showed how many writers or so called writers had become active collaborators; a report at the Congress was made by Arvīds Pelše, ideology secretary of the CPL CC, who was the first to announce that in July 1940 the “socialist July revolution” took place — the greatest “historical event” in the lives of the Latvian people, with the main lesson: “Be vigilant. Ready to fight. Throw away your nationalist skin.” (Stranga “Okkupacija...”129).

Conclusion

It is possible to observe collapse of the Latvian national identity in all the texts of the journal “Soviet Latvia” dealing with events of the summer 1940-1941. It was improper to remember or write about the Republic of Latvia of the time period 1918 — 1940. Instead of this, both ideological and artistic texts started to propagate con-

nection of the historical fate of Soviet Latvia and Soviet Russia. The first printed issues of Soviet Latvia advocated hatred towards independent Latvia, calling Latvia a country of plutocrats, extreme chauvinism. It is noteworthy that not only occupants arrived, but they also brought the language — the language of political labels and clichés, aimed at influencing new generations.

Change in identity impacted the condition of culture, morals, politics, and attitude of people to each other. Yet these changes were not only consequences of the processes of social development, but also the result of the governmental and other identity policies shaping it in this or that direction. Soviet literature as well as art in general was designed to replace the functioning standards of an individual's self-identification in the Baltic countries.

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